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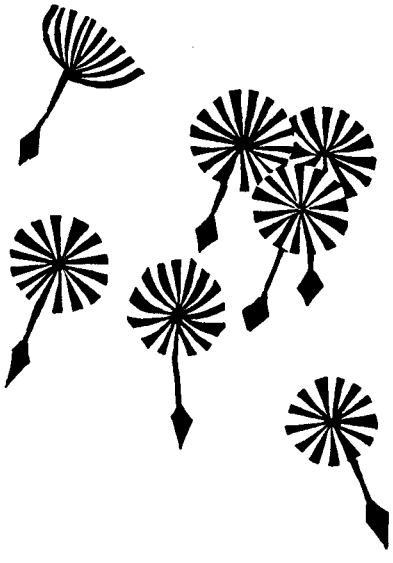

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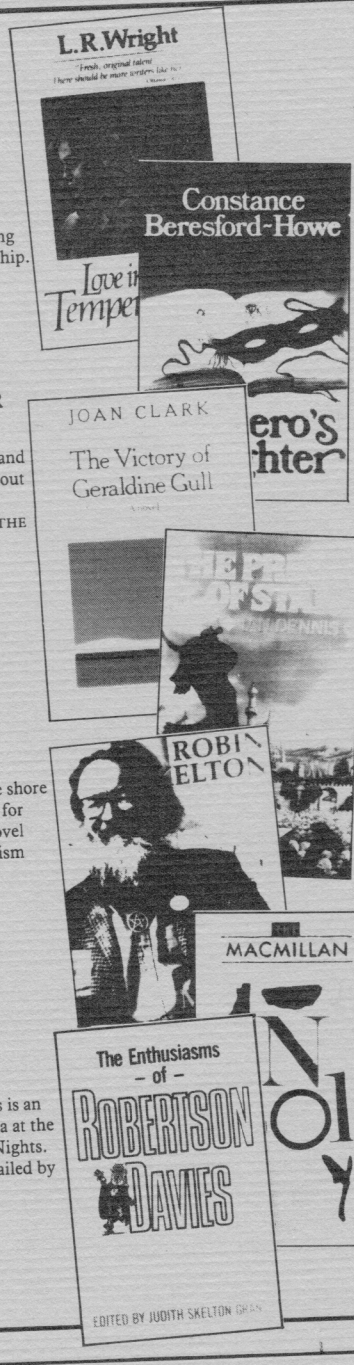

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editorial

INFORMATION UNDERLOAD

WE HEAR ON ALL SIDES that we suffer today from Information Overload. Yet from trends in the 1980's — affecting journalism, criticism, political economy, and the communications industries — it would seem that the reverse is more likely to be true: we get more comment, but less information; more statistics, but fewer facts. Perhaps facts have gone out of fashion. In their place, however, has come not the informed commentary that might be expected from such freedom (if, indeed, it is that) — the pursuit of differing perspectives for the sake of the illumination that they might cast on individuals and events — but a greater desire, in the face of clear uncertainties, to have existing preconceptions reconfirmed. People *can* create order by refusing to recognize that their version of the world ignores the realities of other people's lives. Such "order" is meaningless, fundamentally, but there's no argument with faith, even when the faith is placed in something that history and experience repeatedly deny. At any time when the mirror seems to be more attractive than the lamp, we are in danger. We are in danger all the more when the mirror is marketed to us as a lamp and we do not use our minds to question why.

We get into such situations when the journalist, instead of investigating the reasons why some stories are made public (to divert attention from the stories kept covert, perhaps?), merely interviews other journalists, in the name of in-depth commentary. Or when the politician, more keen to be leader of lemmings than to be leader, period, dismisses those who disagree as disloyal. Or when the economist, keen for neatness and consistency, ignores the values that differing cultural systems were designed to serve. Or when the critic, more mindful of ego than of text, savages others' reputations in the name of scholarship but does so in the greater desire to hold some perceived dimension of power alone. Such persons create the illusion of authority, market themselves as authorities, but are really authoritarians in disguise, limiting options — often in the name of democracy. "*In the name of*": we are repeatedly asked to respond to the format, but not to listen for the likelihood. Thus we make ourselves susceptible to big lies. Whenever there seem to be more things to read and listen to, the sheer bulk of

information leads most people to grab onto any easy, comprehensible guide through it. But the bulk, like the easy guide, is frequently misleading; the increase in mass does not always mean an increase in data or in different perspectives, and the absence of difference leads to further complications still. In an age of statistics, we are rhetorically convinced by numbers — hence if "everyone" says the same thing, it "must" be true. Too often, however, everyone "says the same thing" because of information underload, because instead of analyzing data, people exchange and repeat it, until the illusion comes to seem factual and any challenge to the illusion is dismissed as the voice of a crank.

Sometimes such active marketing of mass opinion — the selling of bigotry and racism, for example — is patently vicious. Sometimes it appears innocent enough, and takes an apparently passive form, as in most news broadcasts, but is nonetheless *not neutral.* Sometimes it is based upon — and so actively perpetuates — a distortion of terminology. Sometimes it misrepresents history, partly because Canadians do not understand their history adequately enough to know that it is something (strengths and biases included) which for all their differences they actually share.

Consider first the small (though by no means trivial) presumptions that direct the shape of the nightly television news. We might note to start with that television news differs from radio news in substance as well as method, but if we do not attend to both, we won't know that: television news, clearly, is marketed as visual spectacle — so much so that any opportunity to *replay* a scene of riot or private disaster has lately been sufficient invitation to do so, even if this means that "news" is being manufactured more than reported. There is, moreover, a standard pattern to Canadian evening news programmes that expresses a set of presumptive priorities about "Canadian" culture, but these are priorities that have more to do with the particular origin of the news programming than with the nation as a whole. Distinctions between English- and French-language news priorities offer the most immediate demonstration of local differences (why was René Lévesque's death headlined in the English news as "QUEBECKERS MOURN . . ." — why not ALL CANADIANS?); there are others. The basic format on the English-language CBC seems to consist of three initial steps: the Ottawa story, the Washington story, the Toronto story — but each of these often seems less like a "story" than a *news release*, a report of a briefing session rather than a report of an investigation. I am not saying that the CBC does not investigate, but it often reserves its investigative journalism for programmes other than the evening summary, and so (rhetorically) separates the two functions. By personalizing the news, too — by taking the time to tell TV watchers whether the news-reader will be with us tomorrow (or is not with us today!) — the news-writers make the personality of the news-reader seem as newsworthy as the events chosen for summary (or vice-versa: the events are made to seem as inconsequential as the presence on the

screen of any particular "star" reader). Some handouts are thus marketed as news; some news is marketed through the star system; the economics of audience attraction governs how things are said, and therefore governs what *is* said and what is present to *be* interpreted, accepted, or received.

By extension, the visual rhetoric of cultural presumptions extends to the national reports that follow the lead stories. Here the reiteration of conventional tropes serves curiously covert political ends: if a human-interest story is wanted for a particular night's "news package," then the camera shifts to the Maritimes; if the show needs comic relief, it turns to British Columbia. The Prairies, the North, and Northern Ontario occupy similar rhetorical niches. Some cultural status quo is thus reconfirmed. B.C. does not have to be taken seriously, even though what happens there might be having extraordinarily serious impact not only on the people in B.C. but also on the character of the culture at large; and the Maritimes are kept at bay, preserved as "down home," therefore consigned (as Leacock once consigned Orillia/Mariposa) to a past which "sophisticates" can be confident they have outgrown. Such presumptive categories feed regional resentments; they are also symptomatic of the kinds of easy exchange of existing attitudes, the mirror-imaging of the world, that masquerades as each night's new information.

With politics itself, the consequences are even more acute. When the boardroom desire for reflective reconfirmation (yes-man; yes, Minister) affects government, then larger securities are involved. When political rhetoric in Canada confuses the Canadian system with the American, and when news commentators do not repeatedly challenge this confusion, then a whole cultural history is in danger of disappearing. People do not, it seems, differentiate adequately between parliamentary and congressional systems of governance. In Canada, in the parliamentary system, "government" has a very special meaning, but it is not one that is reflected in current speech. By tradition and design, "H.M. Loyal Opposition" (the oxymoron of the title is important) *is part of government*; it is an intrinsic element in a system of governance which ostensibly takes serious consideration of alternatives and options before embarking on any course of action. In practice, that isn't true. "Government" increasingly refers, in the rhetoric especially of governing parties, to the governing parties alone, with serious ramifications. Not the least of these is that opposition, in the form of any notion of alternative policy or possibility, is rejected summarily, and "government" is deemed to be responsible only to those in the electorate who support the party in power. Here, the desire for the reconfirming mirror actually affects legislation *and the procedures of disagreement.* We live in a time when one of the governing bodies in Canada seriously attempted to introduce legislation that would have imposed the terms of the federal sedition act to prevent the expression of "opposition to government policy." That such legislation was thrown out by the courts before

being enacted is some comfort, but not a resolution to the presumptiveness that led to the desire for the legislation in the first place.

Inherently, such authoritarian attitudes derive simultaneously from a commitment to a restrictive definition of what constitutes value and from an undeclared uncertainty about that very value system. If something is good, says the believer, then any opposition must (absolutely) be bad — hence it is easy to reject opposition and easy to construct a binary rhetoric that dismisses its potential value. The need to dismiss potential value, however, declares a fundamental insecurity. For the so-called "good" performs for the "believer" a second function: it reconfirms *position*, especially in a world beset with changes and uncertainties and apparent masses of information. The committed authoritarian resolves contradictions by denying them, attacks all "liberal" positions (the term has in ten years' time turned from being an epithet of approval to being an epithet of abuse) because these positions explicitly encourage the expression of alternative ideas (and hence intrinsically challenge the order of the fixed universe in which the authoritarian rules). The authoritarian defines "education" as a training programme in the social status quo rather than in terms of questioning, and *in the name of facts* markets his or her own answers to insecurity as the only guide through uncertain times. Authoritarianism depends, in other words, on insecurity, and thus can make easy use of the illusion of information overload.

Because numbers and articulate speech alike make many people feel insecure, control over both becomes part of any authoritarian system. Populist forms of authoritarianism repeatedly invoke the "real" values of vernacular speech; economic forms of authoritarianism surrender reflective thought to numeric pattern. The October 1987 upheavals in the stock market, aggravated as they were by programmed computer reactions, exemplify this process clearly. Many stocks went on the market because computer programmes had been designed to sell stocks automatically, as a fail-safe, if prices fell in any given day beyond a pre-set margin; the effect of the mass sales caused further selling, engendered this time by simple panic, which continued to encourage a spiral downward. The point here is that people surrendered to the numerical accuracy of the computer, as though they could respond better to uncertainty by not thinking than they could if they engaged their minds.

Engaging the mind — and this is one of the challenges involved in thinking — requires us not to respond automatically, not to presume that we know all the facts already — or, indeed, that we know enough facts for the occasion, or that facts exist to be known at all. Gradgrindism is no more a solution to social uncertainty now than it was in the days of Dickens' *Hard Times*. Closed systems repeatedly insist that the world behave in accordance with pre-determined data; they do not take people's active, imaginative, inventive, flexible, and often contrary lives into account. Within closed systems, plan supersedes possibility. That's

why they can promise order. Yet for all their appeal, closed systems are only an artificial defence against uncertainty. One of the points that Evelyn Cobley makes, in her striking essay on Foucault and Formalism in the Spring 1987 issue of *Mosaic*, addresses this very question. In Foucault's terms,

> . . . the explanation of a system is in turn a system in need of explanation, so that all systems are open, unstable, and unknowable in their totality. The hierarchical arrangement of a system is the result of interpretive acts rather than of naturally-given properties. Conflicts of interpretation . . . are . . . ideologically interested. Interpretations are sanctioned not only because they are adequate for their object but also because they have been appropriated by a power structure. All interpretation is implicated in an ideologically-nurtured power struggle and can never be innocent or neutral.

It's a process that encourages more interpretation, not less. Order is not free.

Satire and polemic are, of course, two open forms of declaring an ideological disagreement. They are rhetorical forms resistant to the mirror-wishes of closed worlds. They call for more information, and for the rethinking of available data. They reject passive acceptance. "Comedy is the best exorcist," writes Donald Jack. But it is more than that, potentially. Thomas Chandler Haliburton announced his blunt purpose in one of his Sam Slick sketches more than a century ago, in a way that specifies why people need to resist authoritarian command: "When reason fails to convince, there's nothin' left but ridicule." It is a comment that bears thinking about. For not only does it deal with issues of hierarchical power, it also clearly rests on some basic suppositions about the reformative effects of language. These suppositions also make presumptions. And B. W. Powe, writing about Wyndham Lewis in 1987 in *The Solitary Outlaw*, makes a remark that underlines how much the public culture no longer necessarily shares in them. "Laughter," he writes, "cannot overthrow the tyranny of inarticulacy." The implications here are not comforting. When the structures of power in any society are deaf to language and blind to all images of possibility except those that reflect themselves, then the authoritarians have taken over the ordinary avenues of change.

W.N.

POSTAGE-STAMP SURVIVAL

Mona Elaine Adilman

Some marriages survive
on skulduggery.
A sleight-of-hand mystique
keeps the relationship going.

He plays the field
with the zeal
of a religious fanatic
burning passion at the stake.

She could win an Oscar
for her performance
as the apotheosis
of the charming, caring wife.

Some governments survive
on the same principle.
Corruption of the heart,
like formaldehyde,

preserves a country,
a flag,
or a dying marriage
with equanimity.

THE PIECES

A. F. Moritz

Here we have the pieces of that hour, of our two mothers
and our two fathers. When we were in it,
we swore: "You at least will not end."

Just now, over the pieces, yet again, we swore the same.
Pieces: it was a small thing, like a dish or a vase.
Yet ruins, because it was our city and our country.

The dead sister and dead brother are waiting to come back,
to eat there, to walk there: nowhere,
for here in this house we keep pieces of that hour.
Not all the pieces, a few that stay with us
on a dark shelf, a thought we share.

Their waiting has not been long yet.
But it is growing longer.

MAGIC REALISM AS POST-COLONIAL DISCOURSE

Stephen Slemon

THE CONCEPT OF MAGIC REALISM is a troubled one for literary theory.[1] Since Franz Roh first coined the term in 1925 in connection with Post-Expressionist art, it has been most closely associated, at least in terms of literary practice, with two major periods in Latin-American and Caribbean culture, the first being that of the 1940's and 1950's, in which the concept was closely aligned with that of the "marvellous" as something ontologically necessary to the regional population's "vision of everyday reality";[2] and the second being that of the "boom" period of the Latin-American novel in the late 1950's and 1960's, where the term was applied to works varying widely in genre and discursive strategy. In none of its applications to literature has the concept of magic realism ever successfully differentiated between itself and neighbouring genres such as fabulation, metafiction, the baroque, the fantastic, the uncanny, or the marvellous,[3] and consequently it is not surprising that some critics have chosen to abandon the term altogether.

But the term retains enough of what Fredric Jameson calls a "strange seductiveness"[4] to keep it in critical currency, despite the "theoretical vacuum"[5] in which it lies. In Latin America, the badge of magic realism has signified a kind of uniqueness or difference from mainstream culture — what in another context Alejo Carpentier has called *lo real maravailloso* or "marvellous American reality"[6] — and this gives the concept the stamp of cultural authority if not theoretical soundness. And recently, the locus for critical studies on magic realism has been broadened outward from Latin America and the Caribbean to include speculations on its place in the literatures of India, Nigeria, and English Canada,[7] this last being perhaps the most startling development for magic realism in recent years, since Canada, unlike these other regions, is not part of the third world, a condition long thought necessary to the currency of the term in regard to literature, though not to art. Further, critics until very recently have been singularly uninterested in applying the concept of magic realism to texts written in English.[8]

The incompatibility of magic realism with the more established genre systems becomes itself interesting, itself a focus for critical attention, when one considers

the fact that it seems, in a literary context, to be most obviously operative in cultures situated at the fringes of mainstream literary traditions. As Robert Kroetsch and Linda Kenyon observe, magic realism as a literary practice seems to be closely linked with a perception of "living on the margins,"[9] encoding within it, perhaps, a concept of resistance to the massive imperial centre and its totalizing systems. The established systems of generic classification are themselves, in my view, examples of these centralized totalizing systems, for they have been constructed through readings of texts almost exclusively of European or United States provenance. The use of the concept of magic realism, then, can itself signify resistance to central assimilation by more stable generic systems and more monumental theories of literary practice, a way of suggesting that there is something in the nature of the literature it identifies that confounds the capacities of the major genre systems to come to terms with it.

What I want to do in this paper is employ a little of the liberty provided by magic realism's lack of theoretical specificity and, rather than attempt to define the concept in terms of genre, attempt instead to place the concept within the context of post-colonial cultures as a distinct and recognizable kind of literary discourse. To this end, I plan to focus on two magic realist texts from within a single post-colonial culture — English Canada — and attempt to show the ways in which these texts recapitulate, in both their narrative discourse and their thematic content, the real social and historical relations that obtain within the post-colonial culture in which they are set. I have chosen to work with Jack Hodgins' *The Invention of the World* and Robert Kroetsch's *What the Crow Said*, but I should add that other texts set in English Canada could also carry the argument, Susan Kerslake's *Middlewatch*, for example, or Keith Maillard's *Two-Strand River*. My focus will be on elements in these texts that help us work toward a clearer concept of magic realism in a post-colonial context, and so I will be concentrating on aspects of these two novels that share characteristics with prevalent concerns in other post-colonial literatures. Behind this project is the belief that, in the first place, the concept of magic realism can provide us with a way of effecting important comparative analyses between separate post-colonial cultures, and secondly, that it can enable us to recognize continuities within individual cultures that the established genre systems might blind us to: continuities, that is, between present-day magic realist texts and apparently very different texts written at earlier stages of a culture's literary history.

THE TERM "MAGIC REALISM" is an oxymoron, one that suggests a binary opposition between the representational code of realism and that, roughly, of fantasy. In the language of narration in a magic realist text, a battle

between two oppositional systems takes place, each working toward the creation of a different kind of fictional world from the other. Since the ground rules of these two worlds are incompatible, neither one can fully come into being, and each remains suspended, locked in a continuous dialectic with the "other," a situation which creates disjunction within each of the separate discursive systems, rending them with gaps, absences, and silences.[10]

In *The Invention of the World*, Hodgins achieves this effect through a process of undercutting. His formal beginning to the novel (following a brief prologue) declares the work to be clearly within the conventions of realism:

> On the day of the Loggers' Sports, on that day in July, a mighty uproar broke out in the beer parlour of the Coal-Tyee Hotel, which is an old but respectable five-story building directly above the harbour and only a block or two from the main shopping area of town.[11]

But soon a fantastic element enters the text, appearing first in the second-degree or intradiegetic level of narration told by Strabo Becker, the historian/taleteller figure, and soon beginning to appear in the extradiegetic narration — Horseman's miraculous escape from Wade's fort, for example (162). As the novel progresses toward the status of a twice-told tale, the motif with which it ends, the reader is pulled away from a tendency to neutralize the fantastic elements of the story within the general code of narrative realism and begins to read the work as being more closely aligned with the fantastic. Yet a complete transference from one mode to the other never takes place, and the novel remains suspended between the two.

The progress of narration in *What the Crow Said* is the opposite of that in Hodgins' book. Kroetsch's novel opens in pure fantasy or myth: a description of the impregnation of Vera Lang on a spring afternoon by a swarm of bees. But at the close of the novel, the past-tense narration that has prevailed throughout the work is replaced by a present-tense realism describing Tiddy Lang and Liebhaber rising from their bed into a new morning; and here, for the first time in the novel, the crow will caw, not speak. The fantastic element in the novel never quite manages to dominate an undercurrent of realism; as Kroetsch says elsewhere, we are "always in the world,"[12] despite the lighthouse made of ice, the war with the sky, and the ghostly image of dead Martin Lang perpetually present, ploughing the snow.

Although most works of fiction are generically mixed in mode,[13] the characteristic manoeuvre of magic realist fiction is that its two separate narrative modes never manage to arrange themselves into any kind of hierarchy. In Mikhail Bakhtin's formulation, the novel is the site of a "diversity of social speech types"[14] in which a battle takes place "in discourse and among discourses to become 'the language of truth,' a battle for what Foucault has called power knowledge."[15]

In magic realism this battle is represented in the language of narration by the foregrounding of two opposing discursive systems, with neither managing to subordinate or contain the other. This sustained opposition forestalls the possibility of interpretive closure through any act of naturalizing the text to an established system of representation.

This use of language has important consequences in the context of post-colonial cultures. One of the most common assumptions operating in the small, but rapidly growing, body of theory that undertakes comparative analysis across post-colonial cultures is that the act of colonization, whatever its precise form, initiates a kind of double vision or "metaphysical clash"[16] within the colonial culture, a binary opposition within language that has its roots in the process of either transporting a language to a new land or imposing a foreign language on an indigenous population. "Our way of seeing," as Coral Ann Howells puts it, "is structured by the forms in which our language enables us to 'see',"[17] and only through a long process of transmutation through time can this language, and the cognitive system it carries, express local reality. In a post-colonial context, then, the magic realist narrative recapitulates a dialectical struggle within the culture's language, a dialectic between "codes of recognition"[18] inherent within the inherited language and those imagined codes — perhaps utopian or future-oriented — that characterize a culture's "original relations"[19] with the world. In other words, the magic realist text reflects in its language of narration real conditions of speech and cognition within the actual social relations of a post-colonial culture, a reflection García Márquez thematizes in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* as a "speaking mirror."[20]

THE "SPEAKING MIRROR" of the language of narration in magic realist texts, however, does not only reflect in an outward direction toward post-colonial cultural relations. It also sustains an inward reflection into the work's thematic content, initiating a fascinating interplay between language and thematic network similar to that which Michael Holquist, in another context, describes as a "templating of what is enunciated with the act of enunciation."[21] In other words, the real social relations of post-colonial cultures appear, through the mediation of the text's language of narration, in the thematic dimension of the post-colonial magic realist work. These social relations tend to be expressed thematically in three separate but related ways. The first involves the representation of a kind of transcendent or transformational regionalism[22] so that the site of the text, though described in familiar and local terms, becomes a metonymy of the post-colonial culture as a whole. The second is the foreshortening of history so that the time scheme of the novel metaphorically contains the long process of

colonization and its aftermath. And the third involves the thematic foregrounding of those gaps, absences, and silences produced by the colonial encounter and reflected in the text's disjunctive language of narration. On this third level, the magic realist texts tend to display a preoccupation with images of both borders and centres, and to work toward destabilizing their fixity.[23]

In *The Invention of the World*, Hodgins' portrayal of the Vancouver Island community, and especially the Revelations Colony of Truth, now renamed the Revelations Trailer Park, always remains grounded in the real world of known and familiar space. The realism of the site is destabilized, however, by the condensed historical re-enactment that transpires within it,[24] a metaphorical representation of the process of colonization which serves to transform the novel's regional setting into a metonymic focal point for English-Canadian culture, and finally for post-colonial culture as a whole.[25] This historical re-enactment reaches back from the present-tense setting to the near-mythic, and now vanished, Irish village of Carrigdhoun, the point of origin for the Revelation colonists' flight from history[26] to the New World. Even before Donal Keneally arrives in Carrigdhoun and brings to the isolated villagers their first experience of fear, the village is already the emblem of colonized space. An English bailiff owns all property, and his dogs are the agents of his administration of law. Keneally delivers the villagers from the first phase of colonialism only to initiate a second phase in which he employs the authority of Celtic legend and Prospero magic to establish a system of absolute patriarchal domination over them. Still "slaves to history" (99), the villagers are brought to the New World and another kind of isolation in the Revelations Colony of Truth where, in what Cecilia Coulas Fink calls a "replay of history,"[27] Keneally becomes the figure who releases his dogs on them. As the agent of a neo-colonial domination, Keneally "represents what most of the world believed anyhow" (257), and when he dies, he never quite disappears: he is buried underground in a collapsed tunnel whose entrance is never found, and his ghost appears at the close of the novel at Maggie and Wade's carnivalesque wedding celebration. The legacy he leaves is a paralysis in regard to history and a preference for fabricated historical monuments such as Wade's phony Hudson's Bay Company fort, a dysfunctional "umbilical chord to the past" (223) except to the American tourists who can't tell the difference between it and the real thing, anyway. Given the very unappealing nature of real history, this preference for fabrication is entirely understandable. But it is an evasion, not a creative response, and at the end of the novel, Maggie, the symbolic heiress of the process of colonization, achieves her longed-for liberation from colonialism's foreclosure of the imagination precisely by going back into history to where the Keneally legend and the process of New World domination began: a mountain top in Ireland upon which a circle of standing stones exercises "dominion" (315) over the landscape.

The novel recapitulates a process, then, of psychic liberation from Old World domination and its cognitive codes. But a fascinating aspect of Hodgins' treatment of this theme is that this re-enactment process seems to energize a release from historical domination that those who do not undergo do not achieve. Nowhere in the novel is the colonial encounter depicted more violently than in the Revelations Colony of Truth, and those characters who come later to inhabit its site eventually attain new conditions of liberation and community. But those not in or heir to this community, those who have historically opposed its presence among them, remain caught in inherited ways of seeing that blind them to new imaginative possibilities and seal them off from significant communal participation. The statement of Coleman Steele, one of the excluded, and now living on Hospital Road, makes this clear:

> This is an English town, mister. Or was. The people who settled here knew what kind of life they were building, they had fine models at Home they could follow. But do you think that bunch paid any attention? The Indians went along with it. Why shouldn't they? And all those Chinamen they brought over to work in the mines went with it, some of them turned into the best Englishmen of all. And there were other Irishmen who came over and weren't afraid to fit in with the scheme of things, doing the things that Irishmen are meant to do. But not old Whozzit, Keneally! He comes over here with his pack of sheep-people and sets up his own world like the rest of us don't exist, see, like the world stopped and started at the edge of his property. He was a King in there, like something out of the Dark Ages, and the fact that the rest of us out here were busy building a modern civilized society with decent values never occurred to him. And you may not agree with me on this, but I'm entitled to my opinion as they say, I think that's when everything started to go wrong. First thing we knew you have people pouring in from all over the world, your Belgiums and your Italians and your Ukrainians, pouring in from all over the place, which is just fine with me, but when they get here do they fit themselves in? No sir. They look around and they see this one bunch that isn't paying any attention to the rest of us and so they think it's all right for them to do what they want, too. So I blame him for that, mister, and it's no small matter. I blame that Keneally for throwing it all off the track. Just look around at what's happened to this town and blame him for that. Drugs and sex and socialism. None of it would've happened. You can't tell me they have things like that in England. (174-75)

What we have at the thematic level of Hodgins' magic realist text, then, is a fairly direct portrayal of the process of colonization, one that recapitulates problems of historical consciousness in post-colonial cultures. This focus on the problem of history is shared by the body of theoretical criticism in post-colonial cultural studies which argues that people in post-colonial cultures engage in a special "dialogue with history."[28] Here, the double vision or metaphysical clash takes place between inherited notions of imperial history as "the few privileged monuments"[29] of achievement, and a cluster of opposing views that tend to see history

more as a kind of alchemical process, somewhat analogous to a way of seeing, in which the silenced, marginalized, or dispossessed voices within the colonial encounter themselves form the record of "true" history. The "re-visioning" of history, then, takes place when the voices or visions — what J. Michael Dash calls "the counter-culture of the imagination"[30] — come into dialectical play with the inherited, dominant modes of discourse and cognition in colonialism's "phenomenal legacy"[31] and work towards transmuting perception into new "codes of recognition."

It is this framework that provides a way of observing how *What the Crow Said* functions on its thematic level as a "speaking mirror" of post-colonial culture. Kroetsch's novel is set in a region lying "ambiguously on the border between the provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan,"[32] and in it people enjoy absolute control over the horizontal dimension. The "vertical world" is "all a mystery" (158) to them, however, and in a series of motifs such as the stranding of the dying Martin Lang "between sky and earth" (26), JG's fatal fall from the tree, Jerry Lapanne's, or Joe Lightning's, fall from the sky, or the townsfolk's war against the sky, Kroetsch establishes that human control in this second dimension represents an impossible goal. This constriction within distorted binary oppositions such as that between horizontal control and vertical incompetence is a constraining one, as is shown by Isadore Heck's transference, in pure either/or fashion, from the relative security of believing in nothing that can't be seen, to the opposite position of believing that everything that can be imagined exists. This second position eventually kills him, for it lies behind his decision to shoot himself out of a cannon into the air in a futile attempt to end the war with the sky.

The text also presents a range of similar binary constrictions in parallel to this spatial one — two conflicting time schemes, for example, so that the passage of only a few seasons contains several years of calendar time, and all of colonial history from the horse-and-buggy period to the appearance of oil derricks on the Canadian prairies. Binary constriction, in fact, represents a key principle in the book, and it provides the vehicle for reading the site of the novel as a metonym for post-colonial space. In *What the Crow Said*, the binary opposition between control in one dimension and incompetence or bewilderment in the other reflects the dialectic operative in post-colonial cultures between inherited, sure, and constraining codes of imperial order and the imagined, precarious, and liberating codes of post-colonial "original relations." At the close of his novel, Kroetsch employs the image of Tiddy and Liebhaber coming together in the "naked circle of everything" (215) to posit a point beyond binary constriction. In post-colonial terms, this represents an imaginative projection into the future, where the fractures of colonialism heal in the "re-visioning" process that produces a "positive imaginative reconstruction of reality."[33]

THIS IMAGINATIVE RECONSTRUCTION in post-colonial cultures requires the recuperation of lost voices and discarded fragments, those elements pushed to the margins of consciousness by imperialism's centralizing cognitive structures, and both Hodgins and Kroetsch share an interest in thematically decentring images of fixity while at the same time foregrounding the gaps and absences those fixed and monumental structures produce.[34] In *The Invention of the World*, Hodgins raises images of fixity and centre in "a certain piece of this world" (viii) — "certain" here carrying a dual meaning — only to work toward undermining them. The central house of Keneally's Revelations Colony conceals a subterranean tunnel whose entrance is never found, an absence in the monolith of his legend evocative of his mother's loss of all memory at the time of his conception and of the Carrigdhoun villagers' absence of fear. In Keneally's death, absences become ghostly presences, as Strabo Becker begins to sift through the "shreds and fragments" (69) of events, and to comb the beaches for "the debris of history" (viii), that will form the base elements for his story. Through the agency of Becker's tape recorder, a plurality of voices joins in the narration; and through the ruminations of the characters, history's dispossessed "voices" are drawn into the novel. Julius Champney's reflections on landscape, for example, conjure the presence of two Indians from the early colonial period who were tried and subsequently hanged for a murder they did not commit:

> *The trial is in English. Though an attempt is made to provide an adequate translation, the long exchange of foreign mouth-sounds could be the yattering of squirrels to the ears of Siam-a-sit. . . .*
>
> *On the platform, beneath the nooses, the flat chocolate eyes shift to the hangman, whose hands could be made of old rope. Throats, dry with fear, can only whisper. Cannot refuse to whisper.*
>
> *You could tell us, first, what we done.*
>
> There was no record, anywhere that he had seen, which ever hinted that the two condemned men, or one of them, said those words before the ropes snapped their necks. Nor was there anything in official records or in the newspaper reports to indicate that they said anything at all, or if they did, anything that could be understood by the white men who were witnesses. . . .
>
> And the voices existed out of time, anyway . . ." (240-41)

These official records, like all monuments to fixity, omit what they cannot hear. Hodgins likens them to maps, projections of line and order that do not correspond to the "real island," which defies geometry (229) and whose landscape is "ungovernable" (223). Keneally's life, symbol of high colonialism, is planned at birth like a "map of roads" (90); but for Maggie, his symbolic heir, maps only block the guiding capacities of her instinct and memory, and they can't help her find her way home. But for her to realize this, to finally discard them, she has

to encounter directly the fixed spaces of alien order, and this process is an important one in *The Invention of the World*. Seen from within new "codes of recognition," fixed systems betray the presence of their own "otherness" hidden within them, as is symbolized by Donal Keneally's brief fragmentation into identical twins, one of them the opposite of the tyrannical self that will finally own him. The absense of this missing self in the New World is his legacy to Wade, who sees himself mirrored in Horseman only to be told that he has buried his own hidden twin within him (307). Through images such as these, Hodgins' text conveys that the silencing of otherness is inscribed into the colonial encounter. But it also suggests that awareness of this can provoke the imagination into recovering lost aspects of self, habitual absences in the post-colonial consciousness.

It is obsession with fixity that betrays, then, and Hodgins' most sustained approach to undermining it is his destabilization of the fixity of origins. Critics of the novel have noted the astonishing number of mythic and historical origins upon which the imagery of the text seems to be based.[35] These range through classical origins (Taurus-Europa, Lycaon, Charon), Celtic origins (the *Táin bó Cúailnge*, the war between the Fomorians and the Tuatha de Dannan), Christian origins (Genesis, Exodus), and historical origins (the Aquarian Foundation of Brother XII). This wide pluralizing of origins annihilates the privileging or monumentalizing of any one of them and suggests that the "shreds and fragments" that come down from them in distorted form are our real historical legacy. Madmother Thomas, a direct victim of colonialism's violence through her childhood trauma under Keneally's patriarchal order, must learn this. For most of the novel, she wanders in the margins of the text, searching obsessively for her birthplace, but finally, she relinquishes her need for fixed and known origins and returns to the uncertain centre of the Revelations Trailer Park, thus becoming at last a sustaining presence in the community. The operative process of cognition here is one of *imaginative*, not factual, recovery and at the novel's close Hodgins releases it into full play on the metafictional level in the parodic carnivalization of the wedding ceremony, where he summons into presence all those figures made absent from the text by the formal system of writing itself:

> The mayors of several towns on the island, with their wives, and more than one elected MLA and several judges, lawyers, doctors, and businessmen had come. . . . Mainlanders had come across, and sat silently along the wall benches, wondering what to expect. Victoria people had driven up, and sat together near the punch bowl, with their backs to everyone else. The premier of the province, who was unable to attend, sent a representative, a little freckle-faced man who shook hands, before the evening was through, with every person in the hall, including the lieutenant-governor of an eastern province who had flown in at the last minute and had to leave for his plane as soon as the cake was cut. The Prime Minister of Canada was rumoured to be in the crowd somewhere, but the Queen of England had disappointed everyone by accepting an invitation elsewhere. (346)

Kroetsch's technique for foregrounding the gaps and silences of the dispossessed in *What the Crow Said* differs from Hodgins' in that Kroetsch works less with the material of history in this thematic level and more with the portrayal of constricting binaries, a thematic equivalent to the dialectic operative in the language of narration. From a post-colonial critical perspective, these binaries can be seen as legacies of the colonial encounter: a condition of being both tyrannized by history yet paradoxically cut off from it, caught between absolute systems of blind cognition and projected realms of imaginative revision in which people have no control. In Kroetsch's handling, these binary constrictions undergo a process of dialectical interplay between opposing terms which undermines the fixity of borders between them. Each term invades the other, eroding its absolute nature and addressing the gaps or absences, the distanced elements of "otherness," that fixed systems inevitably create.

Liebhaber, for example, editor and printer of the local newspaper in the town of Big Indian, has forgotten the past but three times in the course of the novel remembers the future. At the root of this loss of memory is an obsession with print: Gutenberg, he feels, has "made all memory of the past irrelevant" and "only the future" is free from his "vast design" (116). Print, in obliterating the need for memory, inevitably contains and fixes the past as dead record of the monuments of achievement, but it also creates marginal spaces in which the silenced voices of totalizing system can speak. The prisoner Jerry Lapanne, an emblem of incarcerated desire, is one of Kroetsch's images of such a voice. He repeatedly tries to escape *into* the site of the text toward Rita Lang, sender of erotic love notes to prisoners all over the country. It is print, then, that motivates him, and his movement is always toward it, his action one of struggle to inhabit the locus of textuality. But the police are always there on the borders of municipality to stop him; and his one breakthrough results in his death. Through this image, Kroetsch foregrounds the absence on the other side of writing, a human equivalent to suppressed memory that Gutenberg's print seemingly makes obsolete. A corresponding image is that of the cattle-buyer who makes a brief appearance in the text to court Tiddy Lang and then vanishes "like a character gently removed from the vast novel that all the printers in the world were gallantly writing for Gutenberg's ghost" (73). In thematizing print in this manner, Kroetsch portrays the process by which a totalizing system can initiate its own dialectic with its "other." Print excludes, but it also energizes. It is like the "phenomenal legacy" of post-colonial history: it silences, but within it lies the possibility of voice, a dialectic that can produce a "positive imaginative reconstruction of reality."

Binary constriction is also thematized in the novel's representation of race and gender. Both are seriously imbalanced, dominated by one pole of the binary in such a way as to produce a paralyzing separation between terms. For example, the

name of the town of Big Indian resonates against the almost complete absence of native peoples from its site. The only exception is Joe Lightning, and he lives in a car, not a house. The "Indian list" (115), a racist term for the list of those proscribed from being served alcohol, contains the complete register of "every white male over the age of twenty in the Municipality of Bigknife" (114), but no Indian names appear on it. These patterns of exclusion seem to be intricately tied to the process of language, where "Gutenberg's curse" (163) links the presence of print to the condition of becoming "anonymous, almost not invented in [one's] own story" (73). Being caught between presence and absence, however, is also a way of mediating between binary terms, of crossing the borders between them and thus beginning the process of breaking them down. Except for Liebhaber, Joe is the only adult male in the district who is *not* at war with the sky, and thus his ambiguous status in one binary constriction enables him to mediate in another: that of the division of male and female modes of activity.

An interesting thematization of the way in which binary terms themselves energize a crossing over between poles, and the creation of gaps within each of them, lies in Kroetsch's presentation of the black crow and the character JG. The crow, whose gender is ambiguous (97) and who thus mediates in another context the polarization in male and female power relations, speaks on JG's behalf in the human world. JG, on the other hand, is for most of the novel silent, "forever innocent" (62), and able to walk only in a figure-eight, the symbol of infinity. John Thieme writes of the way animals in some Canadian texts stand for

> a world which may exist before Western rationalist thought imposes dualistic modes of description. They represent life before discourse, before history, and before gender stereotyping.[36]

Something of the same process of signification is operative in this text, but it requires both terms of the JG-black crow binary to produce it. The crow's ambiguous gender combines with JG's silence, innocence, and association with infinity to suggest all that is opposed to Liebhaber's word-centred rationality. But at the same time, the JG-black crow binary works toward deconstruction of this pre-rational signification when JG begins to speak pig-Latin and we recognize that what the crow usually says are judgmental, arbitrary pronouncements on human behaviour that seem to issue from the parodic mask of an omniscient, patriarchal God.

The novel closes on an image of resolution in binary separation, a symbolic drawing together of the oppositions of male and female, past and present, absence and presence, and silence and voice in a suspended moment that requires both terms of the text's narrational mode — realism and fantasy — to sustain it. Throughout the novel, Liebhaber and Tiddy Lang, opposite poles in a binary system, have been held apart, the dead Martin Lang, who represents absence to

Liebhaber but pesence to Tiddy, throwing up an uncrossable barrier between them. But at the novel's close, Liebhaber, whose obsession with words has been at the root of his loss of memory, and Tiddy, who had "meant to make a few notes, but hadn't," and who now "remember[s] everything" (214), are brought together, he "the first and final male" and she the world-dreamer, "dreaming the world" and unable to "tell her memory from the moment" (214, 216). As each of them embraces otherness, the crows, outside, "are cawing" (218) in the infinitely suspended moment that fuses the real with the numinous in the actuating imagination.

BOTH *The Invention of the World* and *What the Crow Said*, then, thematize a kind of post-colonial discourse involving the recuperation of silenced voices as axial to a "positive imagined reconstruction of reality." Both texts foreground plurality and gaps — those produced by the colonial encounter and those produced by the system of writing itself; and in both texts, marginalized presences press in toward the centre. The site of each text is a localized region that is metonymic of the post-colonial culture as a whole. And in each text, history is foreshortened so that the forces operating in the real social relations of the culture are brought metaphorically into play. The metaphysical clash or double vision inherent in colonial history and language is recapitulated in transmuted form in the text's oppositional language of narration and mirrored in its thematic level. This mode of narration requires the reader to read the novel in a dialectical manner, forestalling the collapse of either one of the two narrational modes into the other, but recognizing the erosion in massive and totalizing system that the dialectic effects in each. The texts thus demand a kind of reading process in which the imagination becomes stimulated into summoning into being new and liberating "codes of recognition." These elements, I argue, are characteristic of post-colonial magic realist texts.

If magic realism is read as a post-colonial discourse in this way, a framework for reading texts across post-colonial cultures can be established not merely on the basis of shared conditions of marginality in relation to metropolitan cultures, but also on the basis of shared literary response to post-colonial conditions. This may correspond to what E. D. Blodgett has in mind when he speculates on the possibility that Spanish-American literature provides a matrix for "dialogue between deaf Canadians,"[37] English and French — García Márquez mediating, as it were, between Aquin and Miron, on the one hand, and Hodgins, Kroetsch, and Ondaatje on the other. Such a matrix can provide a basis for comparing works differing widely in genre, and against it a comparative reading of Salman Rushdie and Rodney Hall, for example, might prove fruitful, though at first sight odd. Radical modes of reading post-colonial texts are constantly coming into

being, challenging the fixed certainty of traditional generic systems, so that when Wilson Harris, in his groundbreaking critical work *The Womb of Space*, notes that within the "so-called realism" of Patrick White's *Voss* there exists a "curiously subversive fantasy," he proposes not just a new strategy of interpretation for the text itself, but also a way of reading the text back into the cross-cultural imagination that post-colonial studies, at their best, promote. The text of *Voss*, he argues, can allow us

> to perceive *realism and fantasy* as a threshold into *evolution and alchemy*. That threshold is a component of the "mental bridge" within and across cultures. . . .[38]

Within the separate post-colonial cultures themselves, this approach to magic realism can operate in such a way that this seemingly new mode of fiction can be recognized as continuous with apparently dissimilar works of fiction in which an oppositional style, and a consequent privileging of pluralism, also echoes against the post-colonial legacy: Ethel Wilson's *Swamp Angel* is one example; Sheila Watson's *The Double Hook* is another. As W. H. New notes in *Articulating West*, an opposition between a need to formalize experience and a realization that the Canadian wilderness is "formless" creates "a tension at the heart of the Canadian experience,"[39] one which lies at the centre of the language of narration in present-day magic realist texts. This suggests that the critical position that would see the Canadian, or for that matter any post-colonial culture's, literary tradition as "discontinuous," one in which writers find no "usable past"[40] in the apparently colonized literary productions of earlier times, may itself be blind to modes of continuity that can prevail beneath the surface of established generic classifications.

Read as post-colonial discourse, then, magic realism can be seen to provide a positive and liberating response to the codes of imperial history and its legacy of fragmentation and discontinuity. By conveying the binary, and often dominating, oppositions of real social conditions through the "speaking mirror" of their literary language, magic realist texts implicitly suggest that enabling strategies for the future require revisioning the seemingly tyrannical units of the past in a complex and imaginative double-think of "remembering the future." This process, they tell us, can transmute the "shreds and fragments" of colonial violence and otherness into new "codes of recognition" in which the dispossessed, the silenced, and the marginalized of our own dominating systems can again find voice, and enter into the dialectic continuity of on-going community and place that is our "real" cultural heritage.

NOTES

[1] Surveys of the critical use of the term appear in Amaryll Chanady, "The Origins and Development of Magic Realism in Latin American Fiction," in *Magic Realism and Canadian Literature*, ed. Peter Hinchcliffe and Ed Jewinski (Waterloo: Univ.

of Waterloo Press, 1986), 49-60; Roberto Gonzáles Echevarría, *Alejo Carpentier: The Pilgrim at Home* (Ithaca and London: Cornell Univ. Press, 1977), pp. 108-29; Fredric Jameson, "On Magic Realism in Film," *Critical Inquiry*, 12 (1986), 301-03; Jean Weisgerber, "Le Realism Magique: la locution et la concept," *Rivista di letterature moderne e comparate*, 35, Fasc. 1 (1982), 27-53; and Robert Wilson, Review of Geoff Hancock, ed. *Magic Realism* in *Quarry*, 32, No. 2 (Spring 1983), 84-91. Important distinctions in the term's use are also pointed out by Susan Beckmann, "The Place of Experiment," *Canadian Literature*, 89 (Summer 1981), 152-55; Enrique Anderson Imbert, "'Magical Realism' in Spanish-American Fiction," *International Fiction Review*, 2, No. 1 (Jan. 1975), 1-8; James Irish, "Magical Realism: A Search for Caribbean and Latin-American Roots," *Literary Half-Yearly*, 11, No. 2 (July 1970), 127-39; and Seymour Menton, "Jorge Luis Borges, Magic Realism," *Hispanic Review*, 50 (1982), 411-26.

[2] Jacques Stéphen Aléxis, "Of the Marvellous Realism of the Haitians," *Présence Africaine*, Nos. 8-10 (June-Nov. 1956), 269. For discussions of the "marvellous," see also M. Ian Adams, *Three Authors of Alienation: Bomba, Onetti, Carpentier* (Austin and London: Univ. of Texas Press, 1975), p. 82; and J. Michael Dash, "Marvellous Realism — The Way Out of Negritude," *Caribbean Studies*, 13, No. 4 (1973), 57-70 and *Literature and Ideology in Haiti: 1915-1961* (London: Macmillan, 1981), 190-202.

[3] The term, writes Echevarría, pp. 111-12, 116, has "neither the specificity nor the theoretical foundation to be convincing or useful," since "... the relationship between the three moments when magical realism appears are not continuous enough for it to be considered a literary or even a critical concept with historical validity." In regards to the novels of the Latin-American "boom," critical use of the concept has "rarely gone beyond 'discovering' the most salient characteristics of avant-garde literature in general."

[4] Jameson, p. 302.

[5] Echevarría, p. 108.

[6] *Ibid.*, p. 110.

[7] Jean-Pierre Durix, in "Magic Realism in *Midnight's Children*," *Commonwealth*, 8, No. 1 (Autumn 1985), 57-63, applies the concept to Salman Rushdie's work, while Jameson, p. 302, mentions it in reference to Amos Tutuola. The discussion of magic realism in the context of English-Canadian fiction was initiated by Geoff Hancock in "Magic Realism, or, the Future of Fiction," *Canadian Fiction Magazine*, 24-25 (Spring/Summer 1977), 4-6 and followed up in his introduction to his anthology *Magic Realism* (Toronto: Aya Press, 1980), 7-15. Since then, numerous critical works have continued this trend. See, for example, Beckmann, pp. 152-55; Cecelia Coulas Fink, "'If Words Won't Do, and Symbols Fail': Hodgins' Magic Reality," *Journal of Canadian Studies*, 20, No. 2 (Summer 1985), 118-31; Geoff Hancock, "Magic or Realism: The Marvellous in Canadian Fiction," *The Canadian Forum* (March 1986), 23-35; Keith Maillard, "'Middlewatch' as Magic Realism," *Canadian Literature*, 92 (Spring 1982), 10-21; Shirley Neuman and Robert Wilson, *Labyrinths of Voice: Conversations with Robert Kroetsch* (Edmonton: NeWest Press, 1982); Uma Parameswaran and G. Sekhar, "Canadian Gothic," *CRNLE Reviews Journal* (May 1982), 65-67; and Robert Wilson, Review of Hancock, ed., *Magic Realism*, pp. 84-91, and "On the Boundary of The Magic and The Real: Notes on Inter-American Fiction," *The Compass*, 6 (1979), 37-53.

[8] See Weisgerber, p. 45.

[9] Linda Kenyon, "A Conversation with Robert Kroetsch," *The New Quarterly*, V, No. 1 (Spring 1985), 15. See also Stanley McMullin, "'Adams Mad in Eden': Magic Realism as Hinterland Experience" (in Hinchcliffe, pp. 13-22), who reads magic realism as implicitly "ex-centric."

[10] This reading of magic realism's mode of narration takes issue with those approaches that suggest a seamless interweaving of, or synthesis between, the magic and the real: see, for example, Maillard, p. 12, and Fink, p. 119.

[11] Jack Hodgins, *The Invention of the World* (1977; rpt. Scarborough: Signet, 1978), p. 3. Further references are to this edition and appear in the text.

[12] Robert Kroetsch, *The Crow Journals* (Edmonton: NeWest Press, 1980), p. 23.

[13] See Alastair Fowler, *Kinds of Literature: An Introduction to the Theory of Genres and Modes* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), p. 108.

[14] M. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, ed. Michael Holquist (Austin and London: Univ. of Texas Press, 1981), 263.

[15] David Carroll, "The Alterity of Discourse: Form, History, and the Question of the Political in M. M. Bakhtin," *Diacritics*, 13, No. 2 (Summer 1983), 77.

[16] Helen Tiffin, "Commonwealth Literature: Comparison and Judgement," in *The History and Historiography of Commonwealth Literature*, ed. Dieter Riemenschneider (Tübingen: Gunter Narr, 1983), p. 32.

[17] Coral Ann Howells, "Re-visions of Prairie Indian History in Rudy Wiebe's *The Temptations of Big Bear* and *My Lovely Enemy*," in *Revisions of Canadian Literature*, ed. Shirley Chew (Leeds: Univ. of Leeds, Institute of Bibliography and Textual Criticism, 1984), p. 61. For detailed discussions of this process within the languages of post-colonial cultures, see David T. Haberly, "The Search for a National Language: A Problem in the Comparative History of Post-Colonial Literatures," *Studies in Comparative Literature*, 11, No. 1 (1974), 85-97; D. E. S. Maxwell, "Landscape and Theme," *Commonwealth Literature*, ed. John Press (London: Heinemann, 1965), 82-89; W. H. New, "New Language, New World," in *Awakened Conscience: Studies in Commonwealth Literature*, ed. C. D. Narasimhaiah (New Delhi: Sterling, 1978), 360-77; Uma Parameswaran, "Amid the Alien Corn: Biculturalism and the Challenge of Commonwealth Literary Criticism," *WLWE* 21, No. 1 (Spring 1982), 240-53; and Helen Tiffin, "Commonwealth Literature: Comparison and Judgement," pp. 19-35 and "Commonwealth Literature and Comparative Methodology," *WLWE* 23, No. 1 (Winter 1984), 26-30.

[18] Howells, p. 62.

[19] See R. E. Watters, "Original Relations," *Canadian Literature*, 7 (Winter 1961), 6-17.

[20] Gabriel García Márquez, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, trans. Gregory Rabassa (1967; rpt. New York: Avon, 1971), p. 383.

[21] Michael Holquist, Introduction to Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, p. xxviii.

[22] John S. Brushwood, *The Spanish American Novel: A Twentieth-Century Survey* (Austin and London: Univ. of Texas Press, 1975), 282-84, notes a link between a "telescoping of time" and the use of "transcendent regionalism" in novels that employ abstract narrative techniques in depicting seemingly "real" people attached to a familiar world. W. H. New's observation in "Beyond Nationalism: On Regionalism," *WLWE* 23, No. 1 (Winter 1984), 17, that the region in post-colonial

cultures can stand for the "social variations within the society" suggests that this approach to regionalism is not restricted to works of magic realism in the "new" literatures.

[23] Robert R. Wilson, in "The Metamorphoses of Space: Magic Realism" (in Hinchcliffe, pp. 61-74), conceives of magic realism as a "fictional space created by the dual inscription of incompatible geometries." Wilson's "principle of spatial folding" could provide yet another means of envisioning magic realism's thematic level as a "template" of what I read as the oppositional system of incompatible discursive modes in magic realism's language of narration.

[24] See David L. Jeffrey, "Jack Hodgins and the Island Mind," *Book Forum*, 4, No. 1 (1978), 72.

[25] In an interview with Alan Twigg in *For Openers* (Madeira Park: Harbour Publishing, 1981), p. 192, Hodgins notes: "It's possible to see the history of Vancouver Island as the history of failed colonies. So I chose [the title] *The Invention of the World* because it implies that the different levels of the novel are allegorical. . . ."

[26] See Jeffrey, p. 75.

[27] Fink, p. 125.

[28] Dash, "Marvellous Realism — The Way Out of Negritude," p. 65.

[29] Echevarría, p. 259.

[30] Dash, "Marvellous Realism — The Way Out of Negritude," p. 66.

[31] See Wilson Harris, "The Phenomenal Legacy," *The Literary Half-Yearly*, 11, No. 2 (July 1970), 1-6.

[32] Robert Kroetsch, *What the Crow Said* (Don Mills: General Publishing, 1978), p. 36. Further references are to this edition and appear in the text.

[33] Dash, "Marvellous Realism — The Way Out of Negritude," p. 66.

[34] Jameson, pp. 303, 311, notes that Latin-American magic realist films depict history as "history with holes, perforated history," and he advances ". . . the very provisional hypothesis that the possibility of magic realism as a formal mode is constitutively dependent on a type of historical raw material in which disjunction is structurally present. . . ." This observation helps explain why magic realism may be especially viable as a mode of discourse in post-colonial cultures.

[35] See Fink, p. 122; Jan C. Horner, "Irish and Biblical Myth in Jack Hodgins' 'The Invention of the World'," *Canadian Literature*, 99 (Winter 1983), 11; Jeffrey, p. 75; Robert Lecker, "Haunted by a Glut of Ghosts: Jack Hodgins' *The Invention of the World*," *Essays in Canadian Writing*, 20 (Winter 1980-81), 85, 95; and Joann McCaig, "Brother XII and *The Invention of the World*," *Essays in Canadian Writing*, 28 (Spring 1984), 128-40.

[36] John Thieme, "Beyond History: Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing* and Robert Kroetsch's *Badlands*," in *Re-visions of Canadian Literature*, p. 74.

[37] E. D. Blodgett, *Configuration: Essays on the Canadian Literatures* (Downsview: ECW Press, 1982), p. 34.

[38] Wilson Harris, *The Womb of Space* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1983), pp. 69-70.

[39] W. H. New, *Articulating West* (Toronto: New Press, 1972), p. xxv.

[40] Diane Bessai, "Counterfeiting Hindsight," *WLWE*, 23, No. 2 (Spring 1984), 359.

YOU ARE WATERMARKS ON GLASS

Gillian Harding-Russell

(Ultra-sound at 21 weeks)

Like watermarks on glass, a silhouette
of head, ghostly — the delicate
bones of femur and tibula, waving
gently, independent of me.
I watch the fist of heart, pounding
sturdy four-chambered sending out blood
at 150 beats a minute (twice my own
heart's beat, I'm told). I can see
you are determined to live — if
I don't interfere — to become
what you will, without my help.
I cannot see your sex, though
I look, half-curious.

What are you dreaming in the depths of me?
You are attached to me, undulating
on the chemical waters of love and hate,
distress and content half my own.
You are part of myself and another,
the sides, perhaps, least known
to ourselves. Will you dive
headfirst, jubilant into the world
or, in breech position, slither
down afraid? Then will you
watch the whirling world, begrudging
one-eyed set on
its overthrow? Or
simply ride with the tide
outside as inside?

You are watermarks on glass, a first draft
of a manuscript I cannot polish.
I cannot see the intricacy of blood
vessels articulating the feeling flesh
yet

You are the brilliant bones.

Still

my heart leaps
at a flickering light
in the four-roomed cage
of filigreed bones.

IRON SHIRT MOVES

Gay Allison

I

I watch you doing Tai Chi
and Kung Fu moves on the back lawn gathering
energy from the earth. You have risen early
to meet the sun, changed the baby and fed the cats
who brush your bare legs.

You take Meagan for a walk
to the cornerstore for papers, honey and
a quart of milk.
Over tea we discuss
apartheid in Africa
how Canadians aren't that interested
in freedom or racism at home
or the rising cost of bread and pears
and how we accept violence and
its influence over our lives.

In the afternoon I watch you
reading under a tree, singing to our daughter
in the park. She swings her legs, babbles
when dogs race by, barking their wisdoms.
An older boy approaches, offers her
a handful of stones, how easily she accepts
a smooth round one that darkens
in her mouth.

II

In the evening you prepare
ginger and chicken, bowls of rice, watch the news
and fill the sink for Meagan's bath. We argue
over the temperature of water, feel its warmth
with our elbows. When the action dies down you begin
your *iron shirt moves*: a man grasping a tree
a phoenix washing its feathers
a farmer spreading grain.

In the quiet of birds beginning
to sleep, our lovemaking easy and gentle
we hear the neighbour's music:
a surprised tiger leaps from a cave
and the praying mantis folds
its wings for the world.

While we drift into touching
you toss the golden bowl into the darkness
of night the coolness of sheets
and the turtle emerges from the sea.

BREATHING

M. Macfarlane

Listen to the island
breathe. it sighs

Like a lung in its liquid body

deer stretch silently
in its soft pulse,
grass quivering with nerves beneath them

We wear the island's skin
as a balm, a benediction

adjusting our footsteps
to its softer boundaries

The island
shivers in its sleep

the women are pregnant,
words are chlorophyll
and earth

Cut wood
burns like an offering tonight,

the island
breathes us in.

(Hornby Island)

DEDICATION

John Baglow

a fallow ground.
lovers and friends
are scattered like landmarks.

i make a few words
bear the brunt of this living: a
dream of converse, a

prayer to a graven image, and so
risk your answer,
all of your voices.

a labour of love? more
a sentry's qui vive,
aware you could chill to sheer stone, or

vanish at first
light — which breaks at all hours in this
uncertain weather.

"THE DOUBLE HOOK'S" DOUBLE HOOKS

Arnold E. Davidson

THE OSTENSIBLE FUNCTION OF THE MODERNIST EPIGRAPH is to point a way into the work (presumably difficult and thus requiring some avenue of entry) that follows. But the epigraph to Sheila Watson's *The Double Hook*, by implicitly posing a series of questions, points mostly to its own problematic status as statement:

> He doesn't know
> you can't catch
> the glory on a hook
> and hold on to it.
> That when you
> fish for glory
> you catch the
> darkness too.
> That if you hook
> twice the glory
> you hook
> twice the fear.[1]

Just who are "he" and "you"? What does he know? What can you catch? Does catching "the darkness too" mean that you can, after all, also catch the glory that earlier you could not? Furthermore, how do you hook, even conditionally ("if"), both "twice the glory" and "twice the fear"? From no catch to a catch to a dubiously doubled catch and all in the same brief passage which is beginning to sound rather like a tale told by a fisherman — full of sound signifying exaggeration. Somehow metaphor has merged into mysticism or hyperbole but without ever making clear its terms, its tenor, and its transformation, all of which "he doesn't know." Perhaps Coyote does, for the entire novel, we are early told, unfolds "under Coyote's eye" (19). At the outset, however, Coyote is not talking, and could we believe that traditional trickster if he did? The same passage from the novel that provides the epigraph explicitly notes "that Coyote . . . himself is fooled and every day fools others" (61), which means, as Stephen Scobie has recently observed, that "Coyote . . . is a master of lies."[2]

Furthermore, the origin of the opening voice is also problematic. The epigraph to the novel, Douglas Barbour has pointed out, "was the result of an editorial

decision which McClelland & Stewart made without consulting Mrs. Watson. Because Professor Salter's Preface did not quite fill all the pages set aside for it . . . , Kip's statement . . . was inserted as a prefatory quotation."[3] That prominent placing, unsanctioned by the author, has made the passage "appear far more important to critics of the novel than might have been the case had it existed only as the thoughts of a single character at a certain point in the narrative."[4] Consequently, for Barbour (and for Scobie too), the intrusive epigraph can only misdirect the too-attentive critic or reader.

Yet I would suggest that the epigraph unauthorized fits the novel far better than it ever could authorized. A promised preface a little too short along with the exigencies of publishing give us a separate page and a "prefatory quotation." This is contingency, accident, and misdirection at work, or, in a word, Coyote. Since the narration unfolds "under Coyote's" vision, how appropriate that its transmission into text, into the artifact of the book, takes place at least in part under his supervision too.

The novel unfolds under the watchful eye of Coyote and, up to a certain point, it just as much unfolds under the watchful eye of Kip, who is, after all, designated by Coyote himself as "my servant Kip" (35) and who also intends to profit personally from his watching. More specifically, Kip plays a kind of Pandarus to the unfolding affair between James Potter and Lenchen Wagner but a Pandarus with a program of his own. He will not only vicariously take part in the action, he will also presently take James's part. Thus the lovers, even at their most secret meeting, could not elude his keen vigilance, and that attention, as intended, casts a certain shadow over their love-making, a shadow under which James's personal crisis grows marvellously to include even matricide. James is, in effect, being cast as Kip's servant — and as Coyote's. Through the agency of James, Coyote can have the old woman and carry her away, as Kip sees or foresees, "like a rabbit in his mouth" (57), and through the agency of James, Kip will have the young woman. That at least is his plan, and as he watches it unfolding and finds it good, we encounter the passage that appropriately — it sits in the middle of the mischief of the text — provides the epigraph:

> Kip's mind was on James. James's strength. James's weakness. James's old mother. James and Greta. James and the girl Wagner. The messages he'd taken for James.
>
> He's like his old lady, Kip thought. There's a thing he doesn't know. He doesn't know you can't catch the glory on a hook and hold onto it. That when you fish for the glory you catch the darkness too. That if you hook twice the glory you hook twice the fear. That Coyote plotting to catch the glory for himself is fooled and every day fools others. He doesn't know, Kip thought, how much mischief Coyote can make. (61)

Some of the earlier questions prompted by the epigraph can now be resolved.

"He" is no doubt James. The "glory" and the "darkness" reflect those dualities in which James, his baby about to be born and his mother recently killed, is at this point seemingly inextricably entangled: family (either one) as refuge and trap; love as gain and loss; life as birth and death. James, as fisher and as fished for, is himself doubly and thoroughly caught. But so, too, is the reader in a passage that seems to be both Kip's and Coyote's and that, with Coyote's epigraph juxtaposed against Kip's anticipation, suggests another juxtaposition, Kip's anticipation against Coyote's resolution. And rereading this passage again in the context of the whole text still more becomes clearer, for what Kip said about James, we now see, can also be applied to Kip. He has been fishing, too, and it is he who especially catches the darkness. He is, indeed, literally blinded in the text precisely because of what he did not see even as he prided himself — "these eyes seen plenty" (56) — on missing nothing. He certainly misperceives just "how much mischief Coyote can make" for his own servant as much as for anyone else.

Blinded, Kip does begin to see better. He can, for example, finally admit just what he was trying to do and recognize the justice of the consequences: "I keep thinking about James, Kip said. I kept at him like a dog till he beat around the way a porcupine beats with his tail" (133). Defeated in his attempt to claim a place in the secret affair, Kip is at last given a place in the community. In the first half of the novel he is ever apart, the distanced observer of the activities of others who, when he does try to play a larger role, is characteristically shown the door. In the second half he is taken in, tended. At the end with Felix as Felix fishes, he answers the other's question as to how he would "pick up a living now": "There's no telling at all, Kip said. There's no way of telling what will walk into a man's hand" (133). Compared to what Kip earlier thought he knew, the uncertainty and ignorance here acknowledged constitute a kind of wisdom.

Is JAMES EXONERATED for the blinding when Kip takes the blame on himself, and even more to the point, can a matricide, too, be laid mostly at the "dog's" door (attributed to Kip as a would-be Coyote making mischief badly) or be seen as a kind of innocent "porcupine" reaction to Kip's (or Coyote's) badgering? Those are questions that the novel neither specifically answers nor, for that matter, specifically poses. Indeed, one of the more idiosyncratic features of this idiosyncratic text is the resolute indirection with which it never faces the crucial killing on which so much of the action turns. Do we have grounds for a charge of murder or of manslaughter? Was the death mostly an unfortunate accident, a misplaced push on the stairway that got out of hand? When James much later "asked himself now for the first time what he'd really intended to do when he'd defied his mother at the head of the stairs" (98), he

does not himself have an answer and declines to accept the one that Coyote at once conveniently provides. Was there even any "death" at all or do we have merely a transformation from one continuation to another, for the post-push mother gone fishing, grimly endures her death in much the same manner that she apparently endured her life.

There is something coy in the presentation of the killing from the very start. Corresponding to the epigraph is another passage set apart from the text to follow. The novel proper begins with a poetically cast troupe of characters, with a list of those who "*lived*" "in the folds of the hills / under Coyote's eye" (19; emphasis added). Heading the list is "the old lady, mother of William / of James and of Greta." In short, the *dramatis personae* is provided only to be at once rendered inaccurate. We can notice, too, how it trails off into an appended, qualifying, textually isolated phrase — "until one morning in July" — that serves to call the information just presented into question, whereupon, with another break in the text but no break in punctuation, the action of the novel commences:

> Greta was at the stove. Turning hotcakes. Reaching for the coffee beans. Grinding away James's voice.
>
> James was at the top of the stairs. His hand half-raised. His voice in the rafters.
>
> James walking away. The old lady falling. There under the jaw of the roof. In the vault of the bed loft. Into the shadow of death. Pushed by James's will. By James's hand. By James's words: This is my day. You'll not fish today. (19)

Baking hotcakes, making coffee, and killing mother: those actions make an odd mixture with which to begin the morning and the novel. The dead-pan conjunction of the three evokes the grim humour of the theatre of the absurd. More specifically, the equation of the mundane ("Greta was at . . .") and the matricide ("James was at . . .") denies any particular special meaning to either side of the equation even as it also hints at the ineffable meaning of meaninglessness as set forth by, on the one hand, the hotcakes and the coffee and, on the other, the crime.[5] The double hook is already being set. Or considering the "crime" and, by extension, the "criminal," we might notice that James himself has already "walked away" and left responsibility to "James's will," "James's hand," "James's words." Does will defer to hand and hand to words (which are, of course, also Coyote's words — the text taking place under his vision — and the author's words too)? Furthermore, does not an excess of agents call them all into question, with each cast as at most an accomplice reluctantly implicated through the agency of the other two? In short, James's action, broken down into constituent parts, does not give us a human calculus whereby that action can be reconstituted and fully explained. It might also here be noticed that the desire for explanation is itself mocked in the text from the very beginning by being comically embodied in James's prolix elder brother. As the authorial voice early observes, even before this character is encountered, "William would try to explain,

but he couldn't. He only felt, but he always felt he knew. He could give half a dozen reasons for anything" (20-21). The test case is "a spool of thread" William was asked, as postman, to fetch "from the town below" for a woman on his route. "He'd explain that thread has a hundred uses. When it comes down to it, he'd say, there's no telling what thread is for" (21). As with agents, an excess of explanations cancels explanation out, and the account devolves from assessment into anecdote: "I knew a woman once, he'd say, who used it to sew up her man after he was throwed on a barbed-wire fence" (21). But we notice, too, that the narration explains William even as it calls explanation into question and then cagily verifies its own explanation with the anecdote into which his devolves. Characteristically, he does not see how close to home his story metaphorically comes and that his own family is largely beyond mending. What the text takes away with one hand, it gives with the other.

It gives, however, no full explanation for the crucial killing, so a number of critics have laboured to remedy that lack. The simplest explanation is to blame the victim, which has led to a good deal of critical Ma-bashing, starting with the early reviewers who described Mrs. Potter as the "sinister force which has held [James and Greta] since childhood in a net of fear and sterility"; as James's "tyrannous, possessive mother"; as "the old lady whose tyranny had held [James] and his sister in thrall."[6] In much this same vein, Margaret Morriss in 1964 described the mother as a woman "whose concentrated ferocity brought fear, darkness and death" to the community.[7] Or Nancy Corbett in 1974 sees her as embodying destruction and domination, as a woman who has "given life only to strangle it."[8] Or still more recently, Stephen Putzel, writing in 1984, argues that even if the mother does not obviously deserve to die, it is still somehow right that she does: "James had to kill the old woman, to descend into the 'valley of adversity,' to confront his fear, before he can be redeemed."[9]

In its more modest form that last quotation still gives this whole explanatory enterprise away. It is James whose fate matters, whose actions must somehow be redeemed, rendered reasonable and just. Such literal and figurative privileging of the male protagonist constitutes what could well be termed a cowboy reading of the text — the hero claiming his home on the range and establishing himself in that inhospitable territory. This privileging of the male protagonist, however, strangely domesticates him at the cost of whatever radical innocence may have inhered in his original action as portrayed in the novel. A fable seemingly, in the Nietzschean sense, beyond good and evil is mythologized in the most mundane Barthesian sense into the simplistic virtue and vice of the conventional western, as if James wore a white hat and was never the first to draw, while Ma twirled her black moustache and cheated at poker.

The critics' charges are grounded more in a reading of James's "rebellion" than in any description of Mrs. Potter's pre-textual tyrannical reign. The mother is

written into the novel after her death, and the problem of interpretation that centres in Mrs. Potter is not what she, living, might have done but what she, dead, still does or, we are told, might do:

> Still the old lady fished. If the reeds had dried up and the banks folded and crumbled down she would have fished still. If God had come into the valley, come holding out the long finger of salvation, moaning in the darkness, thundering down the gap at the lake head, skimming across the water, drying up the blue signature like blotting-paper, asking where, asking why, defying an answer, she would have thrown her line against the rebuke; she would have caught a piece of mud and looked it over; she would have drawn a line with the barb when the fire of righteousness baked the bottom. (20)

Action beyond apocalypse; the dead woman's design defying God's; this is still fishing with a vengeance, all of which poses the question of just what does she fish for with such implacable determination. Is it the very salvation that in this same passage concerns her so little?

One is tempted to conflate the numerous biblical references in the text: the possible Christian implications of Mrs. Potter's living search; her subsequent fishing ("the fish is, of course, a conventional symbol of Christ"[10]); and the way in which the dead Mrs. Potter apparently at last finds peace, "just standing [by a "pool"] like a tree with its roots reaching out to water" (118). Put them all together and they do seem to spell out a Christian parable of life lost in life but all resolved in salvation after death, a parable that is doubly tempting in that it can also be seen as underlying the living fate of the other characters, who are also finally allowed to work out a more earthly model of redemption as they, too, make their way through a sterile wasteland world to the symbolic waters of rebirth and regeneration.

A number of critics have argued this essentially Christian interpretation. Thus Margot Northey asserts that "the message of *The Double Hook* is religious. It is a story about redemption written from a Christian vantage point."[11] Or Beverly Mitchell maintains that through "the process of identifying the biblical associations one makes in reading *The Double Hook*," even "Coyote's identity is revealed."[12] Coyote turns out to be God, or at least to have "his prototype in the Jehovah-figure of the Old Testament,"[13] Mrs. Potter, carried off by Coyote, "is 'redeemed' like the other characters," and the whole novel becomes "a re-telling of the universal, supra-regional, and timeless story of God's love for mankind."[14]

The problem here, however, is that Mrs. Potter's proclaimed salvation, like her proposed sinful life, is a postulation largely extraneous to the text. "By the process of association, then," Mitchell argues, "Mrs. Potter appears to have her prototype

in those figures of the Old Testament whose actions brought suffering to others."[15] But Mitchell has provided the associations that "define" the character. "Like the cunning and crafty men described in Job, Mrs. Potter is one of those who 'meet with darkness in the daytime, and at noonday . . . grope as though it were night' (Jb. 5:14)."[16] Why these fumblers from the Book of Job? Why not a female Diogenes with her lantern looking for an honest man or even perhaps an honest son? Essentially, the critic tells us what the crucial blanks in the text are and then bridges them over. Those bridges give us not what the character searches for (for that is still missing in the text) but what the critic elsewhere has found, not the character's quest but the critic's certainties.

Furthermore, once masquerade is admitted, the possibilities are myriad. What is essential visage and what is superficial mask? Mitchell, for example, slides over some of Coyote's more dubious counsel to concentrate on his final claim that it is he who has provided the redeeming baby, and Coyote thereby almost becomes Jehovah. In contrast, Northey notes Coyote's frequent advocacy of seduction and suicide to view him, in Leslie Monkman's terms, as a figure "who functions in satanic opposition to the Old Testament Jehovah."[17] Would the real Coyote please stand up.

Coyote does frequently speak with a biblical cast, but by borrowing the diction of the Christian God, does he become a stand-in, even an agent for that God, or a mock, a parody? Does the double demonstrate identity or difference, and, even more to the point, what does identity or difference itself prove? Mitchell, as noted, equates Coyote with God to make Coyote God. But why could not the same equation have the opposite resolution and make God Coyote? Similarly, Putzel argues that "Coyote's biblical echoes transform the dry rocks of British Columbia into a Palestine, a holy land," and never stops to consider the possibility that the echoes might reverberate quite the other way to translate even a Palestine, a holy land, into more dry rocks and just another British Columbia.[18] And neither does difference necessarily define. Disputing Mitchell's interpretation of Coyote, Scobie insists that "these parallels do not establish an identification. Rather, they establish the fraudulent nature of Coyote's claim; for Coyote to assume the language of Jehovah is presumptuous parody, seen at its most blasphemous when he welcomes Greta's pitiful suicide."[19] Yet the very privileging of God implicit in blasphemy is hardly sanctioned in a text in which Coyote has all of the best lines (not always biblical) and gets the last word too. No defining differences between God and Coyote are specified in the novel. On the contrary, functioning as both God (ubiquitous, controlling, beyond human ken) and not-God (contingency, accident, a trickster often tricked himself), Coyote delights in calling the very possibility of definitive difference into question. Indeed, from the Coyote point of view, God is just another Coyote who wildly, comically overstates his claims.

SO FOR WHAT, METAPHORICALLY SPEAKING, might the old woman have gone fishing? One possibility is for Coyote himself. With his sign — tracks, voice, spittle in the form of prickly pear — everywhere and he himself nowhere, Coyote is, after all, one feature most obviously missing in the text. And appropriately so. Coyote as an Indian trickster god given to Christian claims and phrasings is a supernatural figure half in one cosmos and half in another, with each calling the other into question. Consider, too, that the little community of the novel is indistinctly placed in a roughly analogous fashion. It is set apart from both the residual world of the surviving Indians and the larger world of white civilization with its local outpost of the town below. Presided over by Coyote, there is a conjunction between the broken present (the state of the town) and the broken past (the state of the reservation) enacted in and on the broken landscape — "as if it had been dropped carelessly wrinkled on the bare floor of the world" (22) — in which the novel is appropriately grounded. Caught in that conjunction are all of the characters. Mrs. Potter, "fishing upstream to the source" (21), might therefore be seen as finally attempting to resolve after her death one of the ambiguities of her life. Searching for Coyote, she could at last ground her being in its Indian source, a source that well may be itself in process of disappearing or at least becoming something else as indicated by Coyote's propensity (protecting disguise?) to pass himself off as the Christian God. But the reader can hardly rest comfortably with this inconclusive postulation either. Perhaps Mrs. Potter fishes to evade Coyote, merely to be (after death as before), to just go fishing. Or perhaps she fishes to become Coyote, which is a possibility also broached in the novel when her appearance after death is also evidenced by the signature of Coyote's paw print left where she had cast her line.

The fate of the dead mother never becomes clear, and neither do we fare much better with the surviving son who, late in the novel, claims for himself a new freedom (freedom from freedom) and then attempts, with the full complicity of the text, to put that limiting freedom into definitive practice. It is a freedom founded, first, on the almost preordained failure of his attempt to flee from both the death of his mother and the affair with Lenchen but a freedom also founded on his own and the text's duplicity in claiming it. As such, it cannot be taken even at its own paradoxical and oxymoronic face value.

Arriving in the town knowing nothing as to how he might proceed farther — "He had no idea what a railway ticket would cost. He'd no idea where to buy a ticket to. He knew nothing about the train except that it went to the packing house, no way of boarding it except through the loading-pens" (99) — James withdraws from the town bank all his family's money, flaunts it, and consequently soon loses it. He is taken in hand, taken to the bar, taken to the whorehouse, and

then simply taken. After he has already paid for food and company but enjoying neither, one of the girls follows him out into the night. Pretending a special attraction, she lifts his wallet with all his remaining cash and then leaves him for Traff, the same "friend" who had been showing James the town. Peering in through the whorehouse window, James sees Traff counting the money, knows he has been robbed, and accedes to that fact with the realization that carries him through to the end of the novel:

> The flick of a girl's hand had freed James from freedom. He'd kissed away escape in the mud by the river. He thought now of Lenchen and the child who would wear his face. Alone on the edge of the town where men clung together for protection, he saw clearly for a moment his simple hope. (121)

We might notice, first, that the paradox of James being freed "from freedom" by a fortunate theft highlights a problematics of freedom characteristically ignored in typical westerns. The freedom to abjure the constraints of civilization and, in Huck Finn's terms, light out for the territories is a freedom not so much of radical possibility but of evasive action. It is a freedom rigorously patterned into the very form of the standard western and consists of little more than the hero's perpetual potentiality for dislocations in space and action (particularly romantic action). In other words, the western hero's requisite refusal to be bound in one place, to be claimed by domicile and domesticity, leaves him bound by movement, bound in and for many places instead of one. Thus, in the old-fashioned westerns, the hero at most kissed the girl and rode away. In modern versions he might sleep with her first, but he still moves on. To wait almost nine months and then to ride frantically away a day or so before the baby arrives spoils the whole effect. The call to further adventure ("a man's gotta do what a man's gotta do") begins to look suspiciously like a desperate shedding of responsibility. Yet what fundamental difference can a few months make? So James's hasty and belated flight compromises departures more judiciously timed. Neither does the immediate end of that flight — to be willingly robbed by a prostitute — counterbalance the support he was not prepared to provide for Lenchen.

James claims to be saved by his fortuitous fleecing; by accident and hazard; by, if one will, Coyote. Yet the duplicity of freedom that this character exposes is countered by the duplicity through which he achieves his own different freedom, and that second duplicity is, of course, James's complicity in his own victimization. His first purchase in town, for example, is a wallet for which he pays cash because then "you've got ownership rights on it and can smash it up if you so choose" (95-96). In his fashion he so chooses. It requires no great perspicacity to see what trash Traff is and what he is after. It requires no particular subterfuge to part James from his money either. Even the parrot in the bar, conveniently trained to proclaim "drinks all around" and "drinks on you," was plucking the young man clean, which is one of the reasons Traff hustles James off to better

things. As he observes, "it might as well be me as someone else" (102), especially a parrot. Furthermore, even after Traff has the cash, the town knows that he is a thief, so any kind of outcry could have brought action and James well might have recovered most of his money. The obvious fact is that James desires the resolution he achieves but he also wants it to seem as if that resolution is quite out of his own hands. Consequently, the forced non-freedom (contingency) that frees him from the false freedom of opportunity and escape is itself a fraud.

The novel participates in the protagonist's strategy of claiming a deserved punishment and disclaiming it, too. We can notice, for example, how James at one point acknowledges his unconvincing rationale for being "drawn to Traff. It was the cap of hair, straight and thick and yellow as Lenchen's" (106). The author and the character here contrive not just for James's desired victimization but for a victimization that somehow reverses and thereby cancels out his victimization of Lenchen. This time he will be the one seduced and abandoned and by a Lenchen at that. We might notice also how "the slanted edge of the bank" (107) and "her hands pressed against his chest" (108) as the wallet is taken evoke the stairway and the killing of James's mother. Again he suffers a parodic diminuendo of what he has already done, and the text writes his coming restitution every bit as duplicitously as he sought it in a dubious theft.

THE TEXT LABOURS IN ANOTHER WAY, too, to return the reader and the protagonist to the impending resolution. As Morriss early observed, the "nature [of the town] is basically that of the wilderness," and "in effect, James has merely escaped to another wasteland." The two are "parellel" to such a degree that the second can even give James versions of what is concomitantly happening in the first. Thus "the brothel smells of 'bodies and kerosene burning away'" evoke "Greta's self-destruction of which James is unaware."[20] Similarly, Lenchen is briefly replaced in James's fumbling and ambivalent embrace by Lilly ("Go away, he said. His arm pulled her close" [108]), and neither Lenchen nor Lilly is, at this point, the pure flower of the latter's name. Angel, up above, also has, in name anyway, an analogue down below. The other prostitute at Felicia's is named Christine. She is onomastically closer to Christ but in action somewhat further away. Although Angel has also gone from man to man, she has done so essentially for the sake of her children and on a much more limited scale than Christine. And Felicia is, of course, the feminine form of Felix, and, like Felix, offers (admittedly, for a price) food and other comforts to those who come to her door.

The smallest and most dubious of communities, the prostitutes and their patrons, mirrors, especially in its imperfections, the very mess from which James fled, and thus the limit of his escape, the farthest that he can go (experientially,

psychologically, financially), returns him to his origins and the reasons for his flight. Lilly, moreover, tells him as much. "We all mean all right, Lilly said. It's just there's no future in it. Drinking and crying, and everything being washed up the next day" (106). It is precisely that "no future" that the novel arranges for James in the town which allows him a future back in the folds of the hills. So the fourth section is forced, contrived, something less than the textual free play of the other parts.[21]

The Double Hook forces itself into plot and pattern, into regionalism and psychological realism in order to force a resolution. With that resolution coming, the novel too can come home again, can return to the mythic play of its first parts, a turn which comes at the very conclusion of Part Four:

> The life which Traff and Lilly led behind Felicia's dull glass belonged under Felicia's narrow roof. In the distance across the flats James could see the lights of the station and across from them the lights of the hotel where the parrot who lived between two worlds was probably asleep now, stupid with beer and age.
>
> James stood for a moment in the moonlight among the clumps of stiff sage which shoved through the seams and pockets of the earth. (109)

Opposed to life as narrowly constrained, as dull and stupid, we have the potentiality of the man in the moonlight with life burgeoning around him even through the cracked and broken earth. Whatever the message or meaning that might be abstracted from those moon-illumined clumps of sage thrusting through a desert landscape, it is qualitatively different from whatever the significance of the drunk parrot at last silently asleep.

The same suggestive scene of contemplating the finally indeterminant poetry of things which ends Part Four is then repeated in a slightly different key as the first sentence of the final section of the novel. "William stood looking into the charred roots of the honeysuckle" (113). How does one read those "charred roots of the honeysuckle," the smoke that "rose from the charred logs," the "bones [that might] come together bone to bone" for one to "prophesy upon" (113-14)? Ara's answer is a vision of welling water and leaping fish. Coyote's is a bark from a dry rock ledge: "Happy are the dead / for their eyes see no more" (115). Although the rock is definitely there whereas the water is not, the novel does not particularly privilege one answer over the other. Life goes on, as marked by the birth of the baby, which gives a focus to the end of the novel. And so does death, as indicated by the continuing passing of Mrs. Potter whose active dying has been a focus from the start. The end of that process — the end of her fishing — seems in sight when she is last seen "standing by [Felix's] brown pool . . . Just standing like a tree with its roots reaching out to water" (117-18).

The married couple reunited, the young lovers together again, the baby born, the house of Potter to be rebuilt — the end of the novel does tempt with the promise of a new beginning and the possibility of an affirmation of life. It is a

temptation easily acceded to. As George Bowering notes, "all readers of the text agree that we have a more-or-less happy ending, a kind of transformation, or resurrection, a new testament. A revelation (I, Coyote, saw this) under the seer's eye." But Bowering also rightly warns against going "too far" in positing "James as redeemer and renewer," for he did kill his mother, blind Kip, and abandon Lenchen.[22] We can remember what he has previously done and have also seen how much his return is premised on his continued misreading of who and what he is. Ara, near the conclusion, maintains that James "never in all his life had strength enough to set himself against things" (123), an observation that seems as true then as earlier. James let himself be carried away and he let himself be carried back. So any proclaimed regeneration of this character at the novel's end is doubly dubious in that it, first, premises a capability not previously observed in James and, second, remains conveniently untested.

Particularly germane here is James's first reaction to the "seared and smouldering earth, the bare hot cinder" of what had previously been his home. "He felt as he stood with his eyes closed on the destruction of what his heart had wished destroyed that by some generous gesture he had been turned once more into the first pasture of things" (131). The gesture, however, is only his own still self-deceived desire. At the end of the disastrous process he dreams origins again. Despite the different evidence all around him, he posits some green Eden in which, by definition, there will be no trace of what he has already done. Yet that Eden cuts two ways, for any restored paradise can only await a fall.

The same point is even more implicit in James's immediate promise to rebuild the family house. His decision to locate the new dwelling "further down the creek" can well represent a wise move from the previous disastrous site but his decision to build "all on one floor" (131) is strangely suspect. Does he really believe that without the requisite stairway henceforth no Potter can be pushed to premature death? Coyote, in the last words of the novel, set the feet of James's and Lenchen's baby "on the soft ground / . . . on the sloping shoulders / of the world" (134). As has been amply demonstrated, those same shoulders slope for parents too.

Narration here slides out of text as ambiguously and unclearly as it slid into it. In the conjunction of set feet and soft ground, set feet and the sloping shoulders of the world, the novel demonstrates again its ability to unsay what it says even in the act of saying it. In other words — and this book both perpetually demands and precludes "other words" — the reader is caught on the double hooks of the text (living/dying, articulation/silence, God/Coyote, meaning/meaninglessness, even, if one wishes, construction/deconstruction) as firmly at the end as at the beginning. Or as the epigraph in retrospect suggests, you can't catch the glory of this text on the hook of a final definitive interpretation, for when you fish for story you catch the darkness too.

NOTES

[1] Sheila Watson, *The Double Hook* (1959; rpt. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1966), p. 15. Subsequent references to this New Canadian Library edition of the novel will be made parenthetically in the text.

[2] Stephen Scobie, *Sheila Watson and Her Works* (Toronto: ECW Press, n.d.), p. 35.

[3] Douglas Barbour, "Editors and Typesetters," *Open Letter*, 3rd series, no. 1 (1974-75), reprinted in *Sheila Watson and 'The Double Hook'*, ed. George Bowering (Ottawa: Golden Dog, 1985), p. 9.

[4] Barbour, p. 9.

[5] Angela Bowering, in "Figures Cut in Sacred Ground: *Illuminati* in *The Double Hook*," *Line*, 2 (1983), 47, effectively points out how, in this opening scene, "narrative and imagery marry domesticity and death, doubling back on themselves."

[6] Hugo McPherson, "An Important New Voice," *Tamarack Review*, 12 (1959); Don Summerhayes, "Glory and Fear," *Alphabet*, 3 (1961); Philip Child, "A Canadian Prose-Poem," *Dalhousie Review*, 39 (1959); all reprinted in *Sheila Watson and 'The Double Hook'*, pp. 24, 29, 32.

[7] Margaret Morriss, "The Elements Transcended," *Canadian Literature*, 42 (1964), reprinted in *Sheila Watson and 'The Double Hook'*, p. 87.

[8] Nancy J. Corbett, "Closed Circle," *Canadian Literature*, 61 (1974), reprinted in *Sheila Watson and 'The Double Hook'*, p. 117.

[9] Steven Putzel, "Under Coyote's Eye: Indian tales in Sheila Watson's 'The Double Hook'," *Canadian Literature*, 102 (1984), 14.

[10] Margot Northey, *The Haunted Wilderness* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1976), p. 90.

[11] Northey, p. 88.

[12] Beverley Mitchell, "Association and Allusion in *The Double Hook*," *Journal of Canadian Fiction*, 2 (1973), reprinted in *Sheila Watson and 'The Double Hook'*, p. 102.

[13] Mitchell, p. 111.

[14] Mitchell, pp. 105, 113.

[15] Mitchell, p. 104.

[16] Mitchell, p. 104, ellipsis in the original.

[17] Northey, p. 89; see also Leslie Monkman, "Coyote as Trickster in *The Double Hook*," *Canadian Literature*, 52 (1972), 71.

[18] Putzel, p. 13.

[19] Scobie, p. 33.

[20] Morriss, p. 93.

[21] In "Sheila Watson, Trickster," from *The Canadian Novel, Volume III: Modern Times*, ed. John Moss (Toronto: NC Press, 1981), reprinted in *Sheila Watson and 'The Double Hook'*, George Bowering more fully argues this point. See especially pp. 196-98.

[22] Bowering, p. 197.

FAITH IN THE WEATHER

Rhea Tregebov

I have to travel through so much weather to get to you,
your distant death:
my suitcases stuffed full as your mother's grief
or your father's wordlessness.
A whole, big country between us, as always.
As always, I'm travelling at 30,000 feet, at 600 miles an hour,
flying into sadness, my body tame to the machine, my faith.
Flying over Manitoba all I can see is
marks on the absolute snow. The weather.
The curlicues of the big, fancy river.
What I know of your life the nothing I know;
this gut pain, for you, for anyone I can imagine dead at 38.
The words for loss — *orphan*, *widow* —
do not include your undaughtered parents,
unsistered brothers, me. I think of your faith,
your body tame to the machine that killed you. The weather
your husband in the driver's seat, wandering.
I think how we each stood by a window, a country between us,
examining the story of our hands, thinking
about next Wednesday, the spring.
All our fine, our beautiful wandering certainty, our faith.
Your life run head on, run through too fast.
How long these moments can last —
between now and your last Sunday.
You perhaps seeing it come towards you forever;
your heartbeat, like an athlete's, infinitely slowed
to catch that last sweet second forever,
to breathe it all in.

NARRATIVE, CARNIVAL, AND PARODY

Intertextuality in Antonine Maillet's Pélagie-la-Charrette

Michèle Lacombe

> Au dire du vieux Louis à Bélonie lui-même, ce rejeton des Bélonie né comme moi de la charrette, seuls ont survécu au massacre des saints innocents, les innocents qui ont su se taire.
>
> — Et c'est comme ça que je sons encore en vie, nous autres les exilés, par rapport que j'ons consenti à sortir d'exil et rentrer au pays par le cul d'une baleine![1]

ACCORDING TO LINDA HUTCHEON, the intertext is generated by a reader who recognizes, responds to, and activates the textual referents brought into alignment by the author in a contract with the reader.[2] As with any self-reflexive text, Antonine Maillet's epic novel *Pélagie-la-Charrette* (1979) is brought into being, in the reader's mind or experience, by the interplay of three factors: text (in this case the unique combination of story and narrative that is signalled by the hyphenated title); context (historical referents, here specifically pertaining to the survival of the Acadians); and intertext (the sum total of allusions, influences, parallels, and comparisons, both implicit and explicit, with other texts).[3] The foregoing quotations from the novel suggest that the relation of identity to fiction is a central paradox explored by *Pélagie*; according to Maillet, in a comment which echoes both Jacques Ferron and Gilles Vigneault, "mon pays c'est un conte."[4] Into this known equation she introduces a new element: if Acadie survives primarily through its storytellers, and if Maillet literally finds herself situated at the transition point between orality and writing, then her text enacts or translates for the reader the simultaneous birth and death of history, culture, and language.[5]

Acadians have survived, rather paradoxically, through their silence, that is to say through the growth of a strong oral tradition in the face of ever-present threats — illiteracy, expropriation, assimilation: "Apres ça, venez me dire à moi, qui fourbis chaque matin mes seize quartiers de charrette, qu'un peuple qui ne sait pas lire ne saurait avoir d'Histoire" (12). *Pélagie*'s reader must therefore confront

the presence in the intertext of a considerable body of Acadian legend, myth, and folklore in addition to echoes of the Bible (specifically Exodus), the *Odyssey*, Rabelais' *Gargantua*, and Longfellow's *Evangeline*, among other texts.[6] Simple folk elements include songs ("Et j'ai du grain de mil"), proverbs ("N'éveille pas l'ours qui dort"), and oaths ("Et merde au roi d'Angleterre"), leit-motifs that illustrate the billingsgate aspect of popular speech located by Bakhtin at the heart of Rabelais' work and of the linguistic marketplace.[7] These tags are also used to punctuate folk narratives based on Acadian legend, narratives which begin by interrupting the action only to merge with major episodes in the story: Bélonie's traditional tale of the white whale, for example, is significantly altered by the exiles' escape from Charlestown prison, "the belly of the beast," while an Acadian variant of the Flying Dutchman legend is radically revised by Beausoleil's capture and rechristening of an English ship used to deport the Acadians. In both cases the oral tradition rescues the action but is irrevocably changed in the process. For Maillet, this complex, shape-shifting relation between signifier and signified is further complicated by the added movement from oral to written forms of discourse. The oral tradition becomes part of the canon questioned by subsequent generations of chronicler-storytellers, and joins the classical texts (all epics traditionally situated at the margins of the oral and the written) parodied by the author through her primary narrator.

This playful treatment of the oral tradition situates *Pélagie* within the domain of fantasy rather than historical realism as a more appropriate genre for exploring the relation of myth to history. The model for this fabulous blurring of story and narrative, the real and the imaginary, writing and the oral tradition, does not come from Latin American fiction so much as from Mikhail Bakhtin's work on the carnivalesque in Rabelais and popular culture. For Bakhtin, Rabelais is of consequence precisely because he bridges the gap between medieval and Renaissance world-views:

> The primitive and naive coexistence of languages and dialects had come to an end [with the Renaissance]; the new consciousness was born not in a perfected and fixed linguistic system but at the intersection of many languages and at the point of their most intense interorientation and struggle. . . . In these exceptional conditions, linguistic dogmatism or naivety became impossible. The language of the sixteenth century, and especially the language of Rabelais, are sometimes described as naive even today. In reality the history of European literature presents no language less naive.[8]

Creating the illusion of orality, Maillet is in fact writing at a stage of Acadian culture which reproduces these conditions: ". . . au dire du vieux Louis, cette Acadie-là qui sortait du bois en riant des yeux et en roulant les rrr . . . ne se serait point marié en blanc" (349). Maillet's approach to narrative, carnival, and especially parody, a term which Linda Hutcheon has recently expanded to dis-

place the notion of plagiarism,[9] are the three aspects of *Pélagie*'s language that I will address as part of its self-reflexive strategy for subverting the lapses of history.

NARRATIVE VOICE AND THE MULTIPLICATION of narrators through a combination of framing and Chinese box effects are those aspects of the novel which, despite their complexity, have received the most critical attention to date.[10] René LeBlanc has recognized that the novel's action, constituting the return of the heroine and her people to their devastated homeland and encompassing a fifteen-year journey by oxcart from Georgia to Grand Pré, is relatively simple, while the narration of that journey, filtered through many generations of conflicting storytellers, is extremely complex.[11] Kathryn Crecelius, focusing on doubling motifs and patterns of repetition, argues that these serve to underline "une narration en abyme," and describes the novel as "le récit de la (re)création d'un passé à la fois vrai et imaginaire."[12] James Quinlan, addressing the novel as poetry, identifies the dual function served by the title's personification — Pélagie-the-Cart is both "object and subject, vehicle and sign."[13] In this context I am reminded of Craig Tapping's reading of George Lamming's *In the Castle of My Skin* as a post-colonial text — citing Kristeva, his comments could easily apply to *Pélagie*: "the novel *is* the truth about which it writes, embodies and unfolds the process it describes."[14]

If Maillet's response to the injustices of history seems to substitute poetry for politics, it is because she recognizes the strong links between language and freedom. The breastcloth/handkerchief which Pélagie opens to the winds and folds into her apron pocket is a dominant symbol for the relation between what Naim Kattan terms "desire and power."[15] At once empty and full, it is a female emblem of potentiality, a "country of the heart" or realm of possibility never finally denied/fulfilled. This "uncertain country" is nonetheless *linguistically* embedded in a world that is fully realized and fully Acadian:

> Et dans sa poche de devanteau, elle enfouit aussi des mots, des mots anciens aveindus à cru de la goule de ses pères et qu'elle ne voulait point laisser en hairage à des gots étrangers; elle y enfouit des légendes et des contes merveilleux, horrifiques ou facétieux, comme se les passait son lignage depuis le début des temps; elle y enfouit des croyances et coutumes enfilées à son cou comme un bijou de famille qu'elle laisserait à son tour en héritage à ses descendants; elle enfouit l'histoire de son peuple commencée deux siècles plus tôt, puis ballottée aux quatre vents, et laissée moribonde dans le ruisseau . . . jusqu'au jour où un passant la ramasserait, et la ravigoterait, et la rentrerait de force au pays . . . (340)

This passage follows the climactic moment when Pélagie faces the double realization that she is dying and that home no longer exists in Grand Pré, and as such it locates Acadia within the ever-renewable world of fiction. The narrator's iden-

tity finally merges totally with that of her ancestor and namesake; this dual Pélagie in turn is closely identified with Maillet herself, in keeping with Hutcheon's recognition of the author's role in the reader/text interface, and clarifying this author's insistence that "je suis parole."[16] In the breakdown of subject-object distinctions that accompanies the verb made flesh, history is personified, feminized, and appropriated. Rather than quietly containing her tears, Pélagie's hankie amplifies sentiment, making room for the deluge: it is large enough to accommodate the white whale metamorphosed into the sleeping giantess. Because the tale is never ended, the quest can go on.

At this juncture a double diagram might clarify *Pélagie*'s form: the first represents the two conflicting story lines, and focuses on narrative; the second represents the triple odyssey, focusing on story.

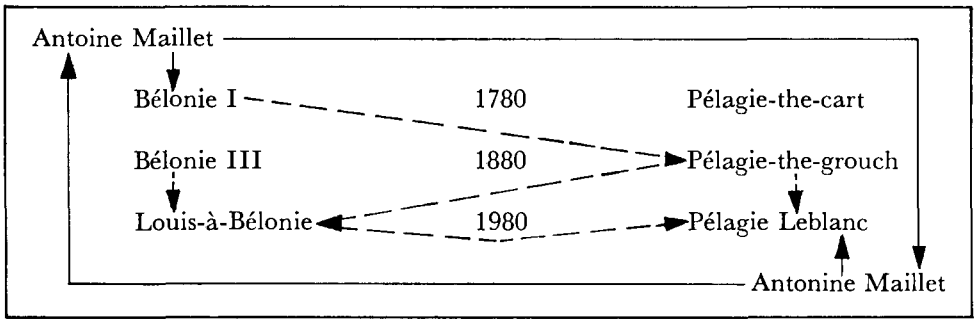


DIAGRAM I

Phantom Cart	*Pélagie's Cart*	*Phantom Ship*
1. Death — Bélonie	Life — Pélagie	Rebirth — Broussard
2. Exodus — Christian	Great Disruption — Acadian	Odyssey — Classical
3. Myth — "Légende" (Whale)	History — Genealogy (American Revolution)	Literature — "Conte" (Rabelais)

DIAGRAM II

It should be noted that in Diagram I, Pélagie Leblanc is the name of the novel's primary narrator. The multiplication of narrators is now seen to be marked by

circularity as well. The fact that Bélonie I descends from a Parisian immigrant named Antoine Maillet, really the author's ancestor, like the dedication of the novel to the memory of Virginie Cormier, the name of Maillet's mother but also of the character who becomes the cart of life's mascot, underscores the interpenetration of real and imaginary observed by Crecelius. The use of repetition with difference in the prologue and epilogue which frame the novel marks the distance which the *reader* has travelled in the interim: with the ritual chanting of family names at the end, a form of greeting in the imperative mode, we are now informed and prepared to enter the narrator's carnivalesque world. The playful recognition and celebration of identity is complete as soon as the reader acquires the knowledge for bringing it to life, a context which only the novel and its reading can provide:

> — Grouillez-vous, bande de flancs mous! Personne viendra vous nourrir à la louche ni vous border au lit. Aveindez-vous de vos trous et venez prendre votre place au soleil. (351)

Our entry into the text is facilitated, for example, once we are familiar with the events signalled and assumed by Diagram I: 1880 is the date of the first Acadian national conference in Memramcook, when the people literally and metaphorically emerged from the woods and entered recorded history/writing. This was an occasion for Rabelaisian feasts of storytelling, and for Maillet every reading of the chronicling tradition, however contentious, becomes another such occasion. As the first to *write* the feast, however, she has had to invent a new, "nonexistent" language, one which I have already indicated convinces us that it is not writing at all but true Acadian speech. The power of this illusion is such that my first complete reading of the novel, on December 25, 1979, was while seated at my mother's feet: for the first time since my childhood, she quite naturally adopted the highly formal role of storyteller, decoding the text by uncritically breaking into song in a way that I, the would-be bearer of gifts, could not. Maillet at once suspends an endless number of layers between the reader and the truth/past, and recreates "original" events by conferring upon them the immediacy of an archetypal fairytale endlessly repeated. Citing Bakhtin, Linda Hutcheon reminds us that parody (here directed to the oral tradition) can celebrate as well as satirize: "through the paradox of its authorized transgression, the parodic appropriation of the past reaches out beyond textual introversion and aesthetic narcissism to address the 'text's situation in the world.'"[17]

THE MULTIPLICATION OF NARRATORS evident in Diagram I is matched by the multiplication of carts in Diagram II, first and foremost by the hyperbolic growth of the original cart into a caravan and ultimately an entire

people. The circularity emphasized by my diagram of the narrative structure, however, is not reproduced here, but rather is replaced by the parallel lines of the three principal players' movements. These intersect at several crucial moments and in one crucial locale, Salem marsh, to explode the illusion sustained throughout that their journeys progress independently. Pélagie's quest is at once threatened and renewed by her predilection for the wily captain, as it is by the haunting presence of Bélonie, the chinwagger who at first appears to embody the dead past. The point of intersection, when the Cart of Life is rescued from the "slough of despond," occurs when Broussard's phantom ship defeats Bélonie's phantom cart by bringing with him into battle Bélonie II, the centenarian's last living relative, long presumed dead. However, Broussard wins only because Bélonie agrees to stave off the Grim Reaper, and because Pélagie offers up her life in exchange for that of her lover. It is at this point that my two diagrams also come into alignment: "car sans ces conteux de Bélonie, fils de Bélonie, l'Histoire aurait trépassé à chaque tournant de siècle" (11).

In addition to summarizing the broad outlines of the story, Diagram II serves to introduce the topic of intertextuality as yet another layer of the novel's action, leading us to the related issues of carnival and parody. The diagram provides the main textual points of reference for the three protagonists, referents in all cases supplemented by historical and legendary material, real or imagined, attributed to the oral tradition. Bélonie is repeatedly compared to an Old Testament prophet leading the chosen people into the promised land, or recording that quest for their descendants. Broussard Beausoleil, whose name associates him with pagan sun-worship and fertility gods, blends the characteristics of king and outlaw, earning him the nickname "Robin Hood of the Seas" and creating a parallel with Homer's Ulysses, while his crew, particularly the giant P'tite Goule and the dwarf fool Pierre à Pitre, belong to the world of Rabelais' *Gargantua*. Finally Pélagie, accompanied by the ghost of Evangeline in the form of the silent, war-scarred orphan Catoune, is of course contrasted with the heroine of Longfellow's epic.

The parallels with biblical events are fairly straightforward; these provide epic analogues that situate *Pélagie* within an old and honourable tradition. Even when the allusions possess ironic overtones, "repetition with difference" serves to recontextualize and demystify both scriptural and Acadian episodes in a parodic enterprise that Linda Hutcheon sees as clearly distinct from mere "ridiculing imitation."[18] Maillet plays with the limits of her text's relation to its precursors, even occasionally mocking intertextuality itself in order to privilege "pure" story — for example, when the narrator informs us that if the twins Charlécoco had been literate "ils se seraient pris eux-mêmes pour de petits Pharaons" (31) but that their ignorance of any history other than their own fortunately saved them from such a fate, tradition and education would seem to be a burden. The insertion of "eux-mêmes," however, implies the presence of an other/observer; here

the reader is in collusion with the narrator in recognizing the relative merits of textual innocence and experience. The original Pélagie, like Charlécoco, is confined to story (the myth of action), while the latest one is restricted to narrative (the myth of signification).

The allusions to Homer are also fairly straightforward. References to the double odyssey of "l'Acadie du Nord" and "l'Acadie du Sud," like that of Pélagie and Broussard, captains on land and on sea, emphasize general similarities and specific differences in order to confer legitimacy upon the Acadian inheritance without deprecating the parodied text. The connection between Pélagie and Longfellow's heroine, however, is more complex and more central than the foregoing; it comes closer to what Hutcheon terms parodic satire, marked by a contesting rather than a respectful or playful (neutral) ethos.[19] According to Renate Usmiani, virtually all of Maillet's plays create anti-types of Evangeline,[20] and the author has repeatedly indicated that such a reversal also takes place in the novel:

> Pour moi, les femmes de *Pélagie-la-Charrette* sont justement plus près de ce qu'a été l'Acadienne que la fameuse Evangéline de Longfellow. J'ai donc pris une petite revanche sur cette Evangéline qu'on a toujours trouvée plutôt mièvre. Il y a un paragraphe dans "Fanie" qui explique tout ça: "La voilà, votre véritable Evangéline! une courageuse, astucieuse gueuleuse, mère de onze garçons. Lâchez-là au milieu d'un poème, et elle saura bien en faire une épopée. Une épopée étoffée non plus de vierges-symboles et de femmes éternelles, mais de tante Zélica, de maraine Maude, de Mariaagélas, de Fanie."[21]

As early as 1971, when Maillet seems to have been at work on a new play combining the eventual approaches to *Evangéline Deusse* and *Pélagie-la-Charrette*, she articulated her concept of the relation betwen Longfellow and Acadian writing:

> Ma prochaine pièce ... tentera de faire *la parodie historique* [emphasis mine] d'Evangéline première, l'héroine de Longfellow. Cette nouvelle Evangéline qui se présentera comme la seule authentique femme acadienne offrira à son homologue le contraste amusant d'une femme d'un certain âge, mère de dix-sept enfants, à l'allure d'une Mère Courage ou d'une Dulle Griet beaucoup plus que la virginale héroine figée sur un certain socle. Et c'est cette nouvelle Evangéline qui, supplantant l'autre, devra faire face à l'armée anglaise, à la Déportation et à l'Histoire.... C'est un genre de pièce qui tentera de forcer le temps, l'Histoire et le théâtre à se démêler dans les lois nouvelles.[22]

Longfellow is not easily exorcised, however, and Maillet's feminist discourse, embodied in a matriarchal story and matrilinear narrative structure, pays its grudging respects to the old man. Even the redoubtable Pélagie-la-Gribouille joins the narrator in silencing the "conteurs-chroniqueurs de la mauvaise lignée" (26) who would query the heroine's intentions in admitting certain passengers to her cart. The reader might doubt the narrator's claim that Pélagie "ne pouvait

pas se prêter, dans les circonstances, à une telle gymnastique de mauvaises intentions" (27), but it cannot be denied that if the cart shelters the midwife Célina because she possesses no other family, it must accommodate the patriarch Bélonie for the same reasons. We are clearly confronted with what Hutcheon, in her chapter on Bakhtin, terms "the paradox of parody" when dealing with the question of origins and Longfellow as fictive father.

Maillet's solution, if any solution to such a paradox can be found, lies in the substitution of Rabelais for Longfellow in her quest for origins. As her "true" father, he emerges in the personification of Acadian legend in the form of the ship which Broussard has reappropriated from the English and named the Grand' Goule in a personal attempt to rescue history. The importance of Rabelais to *Pélagie* is manifold. First, Maillet's reading of his books and her Ph.D. dissertation on their direct links with Acadian speech and folk culture[23] prepared her for the eventual benign imitation which Hutcheon locates at the centre of parody. The novel's many allusions to the *Gargantua*, combined with the generation of new giants' tales, are a "riposte" to the foreign vision and language of Longfellow, who cannot help but be belittled in the process. As we have noted, Diagram II associates Bélonie with death and the past, Broussard with rebirth; in the end it is Broussard who saves Bélonie by restoring to him his true heir. Yet it would not do to establish too close a liaison between Bélonie and Longfellow; rather, Broussard and his crew embody and emphasize by contrast that Rabelaisian/Acadian "joie-de-vivre," resilience and generous capacity for lying which contribute their share to survival and the success of the epic:

> Car telle restera jusqu'au bout la différence entre les deux plus grands conteurs de l'Acadie du retour: alors que Bélonie, durant près de cent ans, devait transmettre fidèlement à son lignage un répertoire de contes et légendes sorti du temps des Grandes Pluies, Pierre à Pitre, le Fou du peuple, allait verser dans ce répertoire des versions, variantes, improvisations, élucubrations de son cru qu'il est bien malaisé aujourd'hui de distinguer de l'authentique ancien. (100)

If Longfellow dramatized the Deportation, together Bélonie and Pierre address "l'Acadie du retour" — the former preserves the facts of the return, the latter provides the artful touches which transform it from tragedy to epic romance.

The inventiveness and occasional foolhardiness of Broussard and his crew bring us to our second major point: beyond specific debts to Rabelais, *Pélagie* is marked by a more general use of and dependence on the carnivalesque. The narrator, in the first of many such comments, poses the following key rhetorical question about the nature of the enterprise: "Les Basques étaient-ils en quête d'un pays ou d'une promenade par les terres d'Amérique entre une fête et un carnaval?" (68). It would seem that the very episodes which confer interest upon the action are interludes that as entertainment threaten to imperil as well as to prolong the quest. Thus "la Gribouille" would dearly love to relive the Charleston escape/

party interlude, described by the primary narrator as "une nuit de carnaval en prison" (81) but is repeatedly forced back to the main story line: "la seule histoire qui compte, dans tout ça, c'est celle de la charrette qui ramenait un peuple à son pays" (100-01).

Yet the pauses which punctuate the journey are an integral part of the story; like the tale of the white whale with which Bélonie entertains the carts, the Baltimore striptease and the celebrations surrounding Madeleine's wedding serve more than just a decorative purpose. The cart only stops to accommodate life, whether in the form of the birth of Virginie Cormier or the arrival of new pilgrims from the bayous. Speaking of the women in her fiction, Maillet has stated that "si Longfellow avait dressé l'une de ces femmes en face des troupes anglaises, je ne dis pas qu'il aurait sauvé l'Acadie de l'exil, mais il aurait donné au Grand Dérangement un certain ton de vérité qui nous l'aurait rendu plus réel et, qui sait? moins tragique."[24] Carnival thus marks the difference between the perspectives of Longfellow and of Maillet on the response of Acadians to official history. Although the love of Pélagie and Broussard, like that between Evangeline and Gabriel, is denied permanence, the narrator uses their first meeting to emphasize that Acadians recognize each other through the quality of their *laughter* (90). Speaking of Rabelais as both scientist and humanist, Maillet approves of his philosophy that if you can't cure the patient, you can make him laugh long enough to forget/accept his ills.[25] Such is the function of carnivalesque interludes during the pilgrimage, and of Rabelaisian allusions "during" the narration, as my two final examples will try to make clear.

BAKHTIN VIEWS CARNIVAL as the popular or literary expression of laughter which parodies or inverts official culture, which flaunts the religious and political rules of the waking, everyday world. It is marked by ritual spectacles, comic verbal compositions, billingsgate, and an absence of distinctions between actor and spectator. For him, carnival is a second, festive life, based on laughter:

> ... as opposed to the official feast, one might say that carnival celebrated temporary liberation from the prevailing truths and from the established order; it marked the suspension of all hierarchies, rank, privileges, norms and prohibitions. Carnival was the true feast of the time, the feast of becoming, change and renewal. It was hostile to all that was immortalized and complete.[26]

In the struggle for survival, the carts do not stop for law, convention, or propriety, whether finding food for orphans or husbands for widows, although they continue to hold dear their traditions and to preserve folk wisdom. Thus the Bourgeois' chest (a parody of the ark of the covenant), the Basques' violin, and the

Allains' crucifix paradoxically emerge as emblems of identity and symbols of what must, despite sentimental attachments, be abandoned in order for the journey to continue and the quest to succeed. Speaking of grotesque realism, Bakhtin reminds us that "degradation digs a bodily grave for a new birth; it has not only a destructive, negative aspect, but also a regenerating one," and that by "breaking up false seriousness, false historic pathos, [Rabelais] prepared the soil for a new seriousness and for a new historic pathos."[27]

Madeleine's wedding and the celebrations, poetic and bodily, which accompany it, set against the violent backdrop of the American revolution, illustrate Maillet's attitude to carnival as the expression of temporary liberation and a form of change, becoming, and renewal. In the "unfortunate" absence of priests and patriarchs following the deportation, the women must evolve new traditions to replace the old ways "before the fall":

> Sa fille Madeleine n'avait point connu les moeurs anciennes d'avant le Dérangement. La plupart des chefs de familles avaient péri dans la tourmente, emportant au fond des bois ou des mers leur bâton d'autorité reçu au paradis terrestre. Les femmes avaient dû par la suite se dresser seules face à l'ennemi et à l'adversité, et ramasser elles-mêmes le sceptre de chef de famille. Madeleine en avait été témoin, enfant posthume de son père et de ses aieux. Pélagie pouvait compter sur sa fille pour continuer sa lignée. (241-42)

In the absence of the Basques' violin, Célina invents the "reel dit de la boiteuse," and although "toutes les mélodies ne sont pas sorties de la lyre d'Orphée," the primary narrator claims that this wedding alone must have enriched the oral tradition with half of its refrains and a quarter of its "ravestans" (247). Maillet's characterizations and choice of incidents thus serve at once to reproduce and to deconstruct Acadian folklore; the fictive fabrication of origins for such folklore is joined by pointed alterations and inversions of established custom. This example illustrates what Hutcheon means by "the authorized transgression of norms": parody cannot help but posit the order which it transgresses. At the same time, Madeleine's wedding also underlines the difference between Rabelaisian and modern parody; Maillet is much closer to the former than to the existential art examined in Hutcheon's study of postmodernism:

> We must stress, however, that the carnival is far distant from the negative and formal parody of modern times. Folk humour denies, but it revives and renews at the same time. Base negation is completely alien to folk culture.[28]

Maillet's unique perspective as an Acadian and a woman enables her to narrow the gap between Rabelaisian carnivalesque and postmodern parody; the myth of the fortunate fall acquires new meaning and poetic resonance in her iconoclastic treatment of "le grand dérangement."

The novel's multiplication of amorous encounters, both legitimate and determined by circumstance, includes Célina's with the fool-poet, Jeanne Girouard's

with her brother-in-law, Jean's with his Indian princess, and of course Pélagie's with Broussard as well as Madeleine's wedding. They all serve to contrast with the tragic tale of Gabriel and Evangeline; clearly the official order superseded for Maillet by Rabelais is the static Acadia/Arcadia pastoral vision "immortalized" by Longfellow. Maillet does not object to the poem itself so much as to the institutionalization of Longfellow's vision by a conservatively nationalistic clerical élite out of touch with the people and their traditions:

> Mais, entendons-nous bien, le but de l'élite qui propose une nouvelle idéologie faite d'un mélange d'assomption, de tricolore étoilé, de loyalisme envers la langue, la religion et la terre des aieux, idéologie que nous qualifierions d'évangélisme, si nous osions, n'a rien à voir avec la conservation des véritables traditions populaires d'Acadie.[29]

It is through art, that is to say through the politics of parody, that this "evangelism" can best be exploded: the spokesman's loyalty to the Acadian flag, language, and religion is replaced, for Maillet, by an allegiance to the Rabelaisian trinity of "conte, roman, épopée."[30]

Two passages from the novel emphasize the relation between writing and freedom mentioned in my introduction: Ti-Jean Fourteen's quest for the three magic words that will allow him to marry and to live happily ever after; and Captain Beausoleil's second, exaggerated account of his ship's miraculous rebirth and rechristening. The first involves Bélonie's tale of the white whale transformed, on the eve of the storyteller's death, into that of the sleeping giantess. At first this never-ending tale seems to be the literal embodiment of Bakhtin's "unfinished and open body (dying, bringing forth and being born) . . . not separated from the world by clearly defined boundaries."[31] When the Acadian everyman Jean Leblanc ("John Smith") half-emerges from the bowels of his ancestor clutching the three magic words which constitute the legendary buried treasure of his clan, he joins his latest creator Bélonie in partaking of the grotesque body which, according to Bakhtin, swallows the world and is swallowed by the world.[32] Maillet's contribution consists of the emphasis on language as the jewel buried in the dungheap: culture and identity emerge from the rediscovery of the word and its elusive, un/limited powers of renewal.

Just as the secretion of language in the grotesque body's nether regions mockingly celebrates Acadian dialects at the expense of codified French, Captain Beausoleil's involvement in the "Charleston Whiskey Carnival," explicitly contrasted with the Boston Tea Party, elevates Acadian history at the expense of American experiments and the high seriousness of their chroniclers. As Broussard repeats to the carts the tale he told the crew of his ship's twin, an English vessel taken over by American rebels, he simultaneously defers to and deflates his American host's exploits. Foreign ears are opened and Broussard's tongue unfrozen by the contraband Irish whiskey; his English gradually improves during the course of

his tale about how the Pembroke/Grand' Goule came to speak only French. This process of translation invertedly mirrors the story itself, in which his crew is frozen alive when chased to northern climes by talking whales, only to return to life a quarter of a century later upon drifting south. When a melting hail of French words finally assaults the decks, we are once more confronted with a carnivalesque celebration that blurrs distinctions between subject and object, signifier and signified, story and narrative.

The reader joins an ever-expanding audience composed of the Virginian's crew, the caravan of carts, and the Acadians seated around the hearth a century later. Even in Philip Stratford's English translation,[33] a version that the text seems to anticipate, we run the risk of becoming Acadian under the influence. The text's seduction of the reader, followed by a rude awakening from the illusion of freely flowing speech, is in this instance accompanied by one of several literal explosions. The tower of Babel vies with a keg of gunpowder in a verbal revolution or artifice of fireworks:

> La réserve de whisky d'Irlande fit un tel effet sur l'équipage de la Grand' Goule, que bientôt l'arsenal de Charleston se mit à résonner de mots sortis de tous les pays jalonnant l'Atlantique. On était en pleine Pentecôte. Ou à mardi gras. Un véritable carnaval des mers qui vidait les tonneaux et striait le ciel de feux d'artifice.
>
> . . . Un feu trop proche des poudres, à vrai dire: une partie de l'arsenal sauta.
>
> On a accusé à tort la Grand' Goule: elle n'avait fait que fêter ses retrouvailles avec le temps des mortels. (203-04)

The return to the land of the living, correctly translated by Stratford as "the land of *mortal* men,"[34] is signalled by the breaking of a very long silence. "Frozen words" suggest the sterile canonization of Acadian life by Longfellow; the melting torrent of words in Broussard's tale and in the telling of it suggests not a return to pure primordial speech so much as the birth of Acadian writing and the acknowledgement of its debt to Rabelais' *Gargantua* as well as to the popular tradition. Maillet's repeated emphasis upon narrative, carnival, and parody adds poignancy to her text, because these are not techniques so much as conscious strategies for denying the ravages of time in the eternal struggle between the phantom cart and the Cart of Life.

NOTES

[1] Antonine Maillet, *Pélagie-la-Charrette* (Ottawa: Leméac, 1979), pp. 9, 84. All subsequent quotations are taken from this edition.

[2] Linda Hutcheon, "Literary Borrowing . . . and Stealing: Plagiarism, Sources, Influences, and Intertexts," *English Studies in Canada*, 12, 2 (June 1986), 231, 234, 236-37.

[3] *Ibid.*

[4] Antonine Maillet, "Mon Pays c'est un conte," *Etudes françaises*, 12, 1-2 (April 1976), 79-83.

[5] *Ibid.*; see also Donald Smith, "L'Acadie, pays de la ruse et du conte: entrevue avec Antonine Maillet," *Lettres québécoises*, 19 (Fall 1980), 45-53, reprinted in his *Voices of Deliverance: Interviews with Acadian and Quebec Writers*, trans. Larry Shouldice (Toronto: Anansi, 1986).

[6] Allusions to biblical, Homeric, and Rabelaisian tales are fairly obvious. "Mon pays, c'est un conte" is one of several sources which list the *Gilgamesh*, *Iliad*, *Odyssey*, and *Don Quixote* as influential epics, and Rabelais as "mon maitre," p. 81. The importance of Longfellow's *Evangeline* to Maillet's text is documented and discussed below; in "Antonine Maillet: un entrevue de Jean Sarrazin," *Forces*, 44 (1978), 30, the author reveals that she has also read *Moby Dick* in English, and Bélonie's tale of the white whale may owe as much to Melville as to Rabelais, parodically speaking. The author's repeated references to affinities with Ferron suggest that she may also have had in mind a benign parody of his rather nightmarish allegorical novel *La Charrette* (1968).

[7] Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*, trans. Helene Iswolsky (Boston: The M.I.T. Press, 1968), pp. 5, 187-88, 352, 422.

[8] *Ibid.*, pp. 470-71.

[9] See note 2 above.

[10] Marjorie A. Fitzpatrick, "Antonine Maillet: the Search for a Narrative Voice," *Journal of Popular Culture*, 15, 3 (Winter 1981) and especially Kathryn Crecelius, "L'Histoire et son double dans *Pélagie-la-Charrette*," *Studies in Canadian Literature*, 6, 2 (1981).

[11] René LeBlanc, "Structures et techniques du récit," *Derrière la charrette de Pélagie: lecture analytique du roman d'Antonine Maillet "Pélagie-la-Charrette"* (Church Point, N.S.: Presses de l'Université Saint-Anne, 1984), pp. 15-16.

[12] Crecelius, p. 211.

[13] James Quinlan, "'Pélagie-la-Charrette': Spoken History in the Lyrical Novel," *Revue de l'Université Saint-Anne* (1984-85), p. 29.

[14] Craig Tapping, "Witnessing the Lies of History: Archeologies of Truth in George Lamming's *In the Castle of My Skin* and Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*."

[15] Naim Kattan, *Le Désir et le pouvoir: essai* (Montreal: Editions Hurtubise HMH, 1983).

[16] "Antonine Maillet: un entrevue de Jean Sarrazin," p. 34.

[17] Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody: the Teachings of Twentieth-Century Art Forms* (New York: Methuen, 1985), p. 116.

[18] *Ibid.*, pp. 5, 55.

[19] *Ibid.*, pp. 62-63.

[20] Renate Usmiani, "Recycling an Archetype: the anti-Evangelines," *Canadian Theatre Review*, 46 (Spring 1986).

[21] Smith, p. 50.

[22] Antonine Maillet, "Témoignages sur le théâtre québécois," *Archives des lettres canadiennes*, 4 (Montreal: Fides, 1976), 812.

[23] Antonine Maillet, *Rabelais et les traditions populaires en Acadie* (Quebec: Presses de l'Université Laval, 1971).

[24] Smith, p. 50.

[25] *Rabelais*, p. 22.

[26] Bakhtin, pp. 8-10.

[27] *Ibid.*, p. 439.

[28] *Ibid.*, p. 11.

[29] *Rabelais*, p. 13.

[30] *Ibid.*, p. 21.

[31] Bakhtin, pp. 26-27.

[32] *Ibid.*, p. 317.

[33] Philip Stratford, trans., *Pélagie* (Toronto: General Publishing, 1983).

[34] *Ibid.*, p. 142. Stratford's translation is both literal and lyrical; within the limits of translation, I recommend it highly to readers who experience difficulty with Maillet's Acadian French.

ZONE

Erin Mouré

The freezing zone.
Topical cartography.
The chicken's neck, thawed & peeled to pinkness,
broken off, stuck in the cavity where the lungs have been ruined,
those soft organs with their wiring & bubbles,
softer than the words "I love you."

O small chicken with your window into the body, into which
my hand.
The ribs touched by, my fingers. Your aureole
I adopt, I am adopting.
Your skin a covering not like
our skin, but so torn & wet & pale
that when we say "skin" & touch it, we think of nothing, least of all
ourselves.

The cells of grief by which we know you.
The cells of pleasure when we place you on our tongue.
The same, finally.
Topical.
What separates us from the not-us, from the air.

Bags of water & membrane magnified a million times, feeding blind
nuclei.
It is why we love our children, finally, because
water craves water to live,
that, & our eyesight, & their small arms calling us,
their long eyelashes,
& the blue of their eyelids. The chicken's wet chest on the table.
The stutter of the child's body,
its watery cells held against the mother, surely,
& against the dreamer, against the friend.

STILL

Stan Rogal

(to Jack Spicer)

A retired sailor is a seagull
with one leg balanced at the end of a pier.
Waiting.
The sailor waits for his ship to come in.
The seagull waits for what is offered.
In the attitude of a child.
Between them, the forgotten bait.
Beyond is the ocean.
Each side conceals its emptiness.
Its danger. Its fear.
Still. The bait is real &
the gull leans from one eye.
No poison can deter this craving.
Still. The cast of a ship
hooks a second eye.
No ghost can deter this longing.

At the edge of the ocean
a child wanders unaffected.
Still.

(January 20, 1987)

LANGUAGE AND LONGING IN JOY KOGAWA'S "OBASAN"

A. Lynne Magnusson

> There is a silence that cannot speak.
>
> There is a silence that will not speak.
>
> Beneath the grass the speaking dreams and beneath the dreams is a sensate sea. The speech that frees comes forth from that amniotic deep. To attend its voice, I can hear it say, is to embrace its absence. But I fail the task. The word is stone.[1]

WHAT DOES IT MEAN to attend a voice by embracing its absence? And why does a novel that finds such adequate language for a story of suffering persistently question the adequacy of words? Joy Kogawa's *Obasan* has rightly been celebrated for its power as a political speech act, as a strong protest against the treatment of Japanese Canadians in the years of and following the Second World War. What has received less attention is Kogawa's pervasive concern with the act of speech itself. Naomi's individual drama is closely caught up in her linguistic anxiety, which comes to serve as a synecdoche for her estrangement — from others, from her cultural origins, from the absent mother who preoccupies her thoughts, from her past.

Reasons for Naomi's distrust of words are not hard to find — some commonplace, others particular to the circumstances of Naomi's upbringing. Revelations of the kind the novel builds toward — the private aftermaths of the Nagasaki bombing — we are accustomed to think of as "unspeakable." And the printed words — newspaper clippings — in Aunt Emily's file about the working conditions of the Japanese Canadians in the beet fields of southern Alberta — "Grinning and happy" — are far removed from the child Naomi's ordeal on the Barkers' farm. Not only do the official accounts in print — all that were available to Aunt Emily, removed in Toronto from the actuality of the suffering in Granton — misrepresent Naomi's experience, but Naomi herself cannot find words to tell Emily: "I cannot tell about this time, Aunt Emily. The body will not tell" (196). It is not just that to find words is to retrace the pain; language seems to yield only a shallow evocation of intense experience. Furthermore, these commonplaces about what language cannot adequately express are characteristically the rhetorical servants of the writer's adequate expression. Speaking of something as in-

expressible has the effect of intensifying what is expressed. For the skilful writer, deprecating the adequacy of words is more often a strategy for expression than an admission of failed expression.

Direct references to inexpressibility are by no means Kogawa's sole resource for emphasizing this pervasive concern. The struggle to hear and the struggle to speak are not merely the *content* of the proem whose opening lines I have quoted above. The *style* of the proem and — equally — the style of many sequences of the novel itself bespeak an effort at speech. The characteristic style is poetic and imagist rather than novelistic or discursive. The images of the proem progress with a dreamlike fluidity through association, with the linkages not fully articulated for the reader. Neither is the connection between the first and second sentences made explicit:

> There is a silence that cannot speak.
> There is a silence that will not speak.

The reiterative structure of the short sentences places emphasis on the difference between "cannot" and "will not"; but the reader, without the guidance of logical indicators, is left to determine whether two silences are being distinguished or whether an initial formulation of an elusive proposition is being reformulated. Also notable are the universalizing use of the definite article ("the dreams," "the speech," "the word," "the stone," "the sealed vault," "the seed flowers"), "the speech" and "voice" attributed to no specified speaker, the disembodied "I" (Naomi? Kogawa?): the language of the proem is indeterminate and, perhaps, for the reader, indeterminable. The writer's words, as tracks of the writer's meaning, are almost as elusive as the voice and words pursued in the writing: "The sound I hear is only sound. White sound. Words, when they fall, are pock marks on the earth. They are hailstones seeking an underground stream." Some might attribute the pictorial and disjunctive qualities noted here to Kogawa's poetic vocation, or to her Japanese cultural and linguistic heritage, and consider that a sufficient explanation. But Kogawa can and does vary her style, easily managing — for example — a direct and colloquial style in the diary entries of Aunt Emily. This suggests that variations in style within the novel are motivated by the desire to achieve particular rhetorical effects. In the proem Kogawa creates for the reader a model of reading analogous to the experience with words that is being described; that is, the style acts out the content.

Kogawa's use of Japanese in the novel further dramatizes her protagonist's sense of language as isolating and alienating. Early in the novel, Naomi's discomfort with a new school year at Cecil Consolidated and her estrangement from her students are expressed through linguistic difference:

> "Miss Nah Canny," he [Sigmund] says.
> "Not Nah Canny," I tell him, printing my name on the blackboard. NAKANE.

"The a's are short as in 'among' — Na Ka Neh — and not as in 'apron' or 'hat'." Some of the children say "Nah Cane." (5-6)

The macaronic quality of much of the dialogue — mixing English and Japanese phrases — portrays Naomi as a linguistic amphibian, living in two verbal worlds, comfortable in neither. Naomi's movement between the two languages renders both languages opaque to her, distracting her attention in many instances from any immediate sense communicated by words to their pronunciation or phraseology:

In love? Why do you suppose we use the preposition "in" when we talk about love? . . . What does it mean to be "in" something? (6)

In the "Japanese English" which Stephen and Naomi spoke as children the relationship between words and objects was complicated and confused: Stephen "called margarine 'Alberta', since Uncle pronounced Alberta 'aru bata', which in our Japanese English means 'the butter that there is'" (13). This confusion of tongues motivates, in part, Naomi's longing for a "living" or "freeing" or "wordless word," a purer language in which the broken mosaic of speech is repaired, just as the diversity and transience of human languages — the argument of Babel — have led most civilizations to imagine a primal and perfect language. In Christian tradition, it is the language spoken at the beginning of time when Adam named all living creatures and the language to be spoken at the end of time when, as the passage from Revelation which Kogawa quotes as her epigraph announces, the saved will be given "a white stone / and in the stone / a new name written. . . ." It is the language which bodies forth the original Logos, the Word of which human words are the broken shards.

BUT THERE ARE MORE SPECIFIC REASONS for Naomi's privileging of what is known without words over what is made known by words, reasons pertaining not to the universal quest for lost origins but to her private quest for lost origins. Naomi's thoughts recur persistently to the mother she has so little information about. The remembered quality most cherished in the lost mother is her knowing without words, her accepting without words. Naomi's memories are of unmediated communication. What has been lost with the loss of the mother is the silent knowing, which shields

what is hidden most deeply in the heart of the child. She makes safe the small stirrings underfoot and in the shadows. Physically, the sensation is not in the region of the heart, but in the belly. This that is in the belly is honoured when it is allowed to be, without fanfare, without reproach, without words. (59)

Words signify reproach and separation; but the child that Naomi remembers is inseparable from the mother Naomi remembers:

> I am clinging to my mother's leg, a flesh shaft that grows from the ground, a tree trunk of which I am an offshoot — a young branch attached by right of flesh and blood. . . . The shaft of her leg is the shaft of my body and I am her thoughts. (64)

Naomi longs to recover the sensation of her mother's immediate presence; and it is as a falling off from this original and fundamental security of her childhood that she measures and defines the qualities of her world after her mother's disappearance.

One can understand Naomi's reconstructed version of her early childhood security in a wordless world from two perspectives, one culturally specific, the other universal. Naomi remembers her mother as the epitome of "Japanese motherhood," the embodiment of an ethical and social code of behaviour that is part of the heritage lost in the dispersal of the Japanese Canadians. This code is characterized by a precedence of deeds over words, or by a decorum of appropriate gesture. The needs of the child are honoured and supplied before they are spoken, so that in Naomi's recollection of her early home: "When I am hungry, and before I can ask, there is food. If I am weary, every place is a bed" (56). Not only are deeds of service performed without the stimulus of words, but whatever deeds are performed pass without words or signs of praise or blame. This ethic is most fully illustrated in the episode where Naomi endangers the new chicks by placing them in the cage with the hen. When, to the child's alarm, the hen attacks the chicks, Naomi's mother reacts to save them "without a word and without alarm":

> All the while that she acts, there is calm efficiency in her face and she does not speak. Her eyes are steady and matter of fact — the eyes of Japanese motherhood. They do not invade and betray. (59)

By contrast, Mrs. Sugimoto's "glance is too long"; in the language of eyes she passes judgment, holding a mirror before the child of her shame. Within this value system, language impugns the integrity of action.

Yet while this myth of loss is embedded within a specific cultural and historical context, we can also see it as a depiction of a universal psychological drama. Naomi's memory of a direct wordless possession of her mother — articulated in the image of the flourishing tree — resembles the Freudian myth of a pre-Oedipal world of plenitude, before the child is conscious of the differences that are to define its subjectivity and individuality. In its general outlines, Kogawa's representation of the myth of separation from the mother perhaps approximates most closely to Jacques Lacan's reinterpretation of Freud via Saussure and structural linguistics. Lacan rewrites Freud's account of the Oedipus complex in terms of a structuralist

or post-structuralist conception of language. In this version the crisis of separation from the mother's body coincides with entry into the symbolic order of language. Language, in this view, is conceived as an unending process of differentiation and deferral, in which each term has only a relative and negative value. One precondition of the sign is that it is not what it represents, that it presupposes the absence of the object it signifies. Hence to enter into a world of relationships mediated by language is to enter into a world of endless yearning, where words and substitute objects always register a lack.[2]

To recover knowledge of her mother, the adult Naomi has only words, pictures, and other substitutes. These substitutes are devalued in the novel as signs of the lost presence that, like the "icebreaker questions that create an awareness of ice" (225), themselves create an awareness of absence. Of the oppositions that provide the structure of the novel, that between the wordiness of Aunt Emily and the silences of mother and Obasan is as prominent as the opposition between the absence and presence of the mother. (Naomi studies the family picture taken in 1933, searching for resemblances between the two Kato sisters, Aunt Emily and mother, and finds none.) Emily, the "word-warrior," regards written language as the political means of restoring the property and dignity that were stripped from the Japanese Canadians in the Second World War; moreover, her lumpy parcel contains in a grey cardboard folder the private letters in a language Naomi cannot read that provide her only means to answer the persistent question, "Why did my mother not return?" (26). Yet Emily's naïve claims that words can render the truth about the past are always attended by the writer's irony and Naomi's skepticism. Emily exhorts Naomi to "Write the vision and make it plain. Habakkuk 2:2," yet her bold imperative is rendered in handwriting "as wispy and hard to decipher as the marks of a speed skater on ice" (31). Repeatedly, as Emily avouches the transparent truths of her words, the writer emphasizes the evident opacity of the signifiers. For Naomi, Emily's words are, like the words of the proem, only

> White sound. Words, when they fall, are pock marks on the earth. They are hailstones seeking an underground stream. (Proem)

The more fervently Aunt Emily presses Naomi into the wordy world, the stronger becomes her sense of alienation from it: the "words are not made flesh" (189).

OBASAN'S POSTURE OF SILENCE supplies the alternative in Naomi's adult world to Emily's loquaciousness: "How different my two aunts are. One lives in sound, the other in stone" (32). Yet the novel presents an antithesis not only between the distortions of words and the inviolability of silence but also

between two kinds of silence. Whereas the mother's silence was understanding, Obasan's silence is inscrutable: "Obasan gave me no answers. I did not have, I have never had, the key to the vault of her thoughts" (26). Obasan's place within the patterned set of relationships articulated by the novel is more complex and ambiguous than Emily's. Measured against the wordless communion with the mother, Obasan's silences and her oblique, indirect, evasive responses to questions frustrate Naomi. They construct an impenetrable barrier against communication. Furthermore, set against the remembered warmth of the mother's body, Obasan's affection is undemonstrative: a "hug would startle her" (27). For the most part, Naomi feels Obasan's silence and demeanour as lack or absence, a measure of what she has lost with her mother's silent presence. Yet this strict opposition is not consistently operative within the novel, for Naomi seems to honour Obasan's silences above Emily's words. She works more diligently to decipher Obasan's silences — though she never succeeds — than she does to decipher Emily's words. At times, Naomi's imagery articulates her confidence that Obasan's stony silence shields a more authentic language: "Obasan's language remains deeply underground" (32). The imagery here is reminiscent of that which represents the narrator's quest for the "living word": "If I could follow the stream down and down to the hidden voice, would I come at last to the freeing word?" (Proem).

Yet if Obasan's silence is found to be as empty as Emily's words, it is not because her silence is different in kind from the mother's, but because of the relationship Obasan herself occupies in Naomi's psychic language to the mother. Strangely enough, even while Obasan's qualities are usually cast in a negative light when set against the mother's, one cannot fail to recognize in Obasan qualities that are virtually identical to those attributed to the flesh-and-blood mother. Obasan, in fact, embodies the ethics of "Japanese motherhood" as fully as Naomi's mother. One of the many illustrations one can point to occurs during the train trip to Slocan, when Obasan, seeing the solitary young woman with a "tiny red-faced baby" recognizes "hurt and a need for tenderness" (112-13). Obasan supplies her need, proffering a gift of fruit — without a word — and delivering to her the old woman's makeshift gift of a diaper. Naomi remains aloof from the gift-giving, unwilling to deliver the gifts herself. Obasan tries to impart this system of value to the children by her own example, but as Naomi comes to understand what is expected of her, she registers impatience and feels constricted:

> We must always honour the wishes of others before our own. We will make the way smooth by restraining emotion. Though we might wish Grandma and Grandpa to stay, we must watch them go. To try to meet one's own needs in spite of the wishes of others is to be "wagamama" — selfish and inconsiderate. Obasan teaches me not to be wagamama by always heeding everyone's needs. That is why she is waiting patiently beside me at this bridge. That is why, when I am

> offered gifts, I must first refuse politely. It is such a tangle trying to decipher the needs and intents of others. (128)

This expression of frustration is accompanied by nostalgic thoughts about the child's lost home. One can perhaps explain why the child's reactions to two manifestations of the identical code — in the mother's actions and in Obasan's actions — are discontinuous. First, the code was ideal while it served the narcissism of the child, before any differentiation of the self and the other emerged to constitute the required behaviour as self-denial. Second, it becomes apparent that this code does not, as was first supposed, bypass the complications and ambiguities that beset language: "to decipher the needs and intents of others" requires the mediation of language, even if the signs to be deciphered are physical gestures or signals other than spoken words. What seemed perfect in the mother comes to seem curious in Obasan. Obasan's self-denial and her refusal to join in Emily's words of accusation and blame ("gratitude only" is her response to every suffering inflicted by the arbitrary government decrees) win our admiration for her nobility and dignity; and yet we see these same qualities, reflected through Stephen's eyes and, to a lesser extent, through Naomi's eyes, as diminishing and victimizing her, making her seem a fond and foolish old woman.

Only because Obasan stands in as a substitute for the mother in Naomi's psychic language do her qualities have a negative value: "even with Obasan's warmth and constant presence, there is an ominous sense of cold and absence" (68-69). The disturbing realization to which Naomi comes in the novel is that whatever lack there is in Obasan's silence is a lack that was always already there: "Gentle Mother, we were lost together in our silences. Our wordlessness was our mutual destruction" (243). This realization emerges when the "wordless word" (241) of her mother's martyrdom — "Do not tell" (242) — finally reaches Naomi through the long-delayed mediation of the Grandmother's letters from Nagasaki. Her mother's "Do not tell" is juxtaposed in the adult Naomi's mind with her suppressed memory of what the child "forever unable to speak . . . forever fears to tell" (243) — the ugly story of her sexual violation by Old Man Gower and the still more horrifying awareness of her own pleasure and complicity in that violation ("I clamber unbidden onto his lap. His hands are frightening and pleasurable" [65]). This juxtaposition leads the reader to recall how even the initial account of her mother's silent knowing had to be supplemented:

> There is nothing about me that my mother does not know, nothing that is not safe to tell.
>
> Except . . . Old Man Gower. (60-61)

The Gower episode is carefully placed in the narrative sequence of events, immediately before the account of the physical separation of the mother and child when the mother's ship leaves the Vancouver harbour bound for Japan. Hence

when we go back to the apparently definitive point of loss in the novel — the mother's leave-taking — it turns out not to be the point of loss. The point of loss appears instead to be the problematic episode of the child's seduction by Gower.

AT THIS POINT, the narrative sequence of those crucial episodes delineating the child's initial relation to and separation from the mother demands attention. The interposition of the Gower episode between the representations of wordless possession and of physical dispossession suggests a chronology of events which might lead one to identify Gower's interference as the cause of the child's loss. Before Gower: knowledge between mother and child is antecedent to words. After Gower: the silence hides a secret betrayal. But this formulation presupposes that Naomi's memory delivers an objective version of the early childhood events, unfolding in chronological order, while Kogawa instead invites the reader to regard the adult Naomi's search for lost beginnings as a highly subjective reconstruction: "All our ordinary stories are changed in time, altered as much by the present as the present is shaped by the past" (25). Naomi's effort in Chapters Nine through Eleven to recreate her origins, to shape through memory and imagination the story of her home life with her mother, is stimulated by an old photograph: "In the picture I am clinging to my mother's leg on a street corner in Vancouver" (47). Concluding Chapter Eleven and immediately preceding the account of Naomi's physical abandonment by her mother are two contradictory versions of the tree image I have mentioned earlier, the one interpreting the physical adherence of child to mother represented in the photograph as ideal unity, the other interpreting it as clinging parasitism:

> I am clinging to my mother's leg, a flesh shaft that grows from the ground, a tree trunk of which I am an offshoot — a young branch attached by right of flesh and blood. Where she is rooted, I am rooted. If she walks, I will walk. Her blood is whispering through my veins. The shaft of her leg is the shaft of my body and I am her thoughts.
>
> But here in Mr. Gower's hands I become other — a parasite on her body, no longer of her mind. My arms are vines that strangle the limb to which I cling. . . . But the secret has already separated us. . . . My legs are being sawn in half. (64-65)

What Kogawa's use here of the present tense and her immediate juxtaposition of conflicting versions of the mother-child relation signal is not temporal and causal sequence — before and after Gower — but the adult Naomi's competing interpretations of that one old photograph that provides such a tenuous link to her early life.

What we find in Chapter Eleven then is a story and a counter-story, or a preferred myth of origins and unassimilated story elements that pull against it:

the consoling story of a pre-linguistic paradise in tension with a supplement that threatens the consolation of the story. The violence which the Gower supplement threatens to the preferred story seems to be played out obliquely in some of Naomi's nightmares, as in the dream of Chapter Six where an idyllic scene peopled by those with "no language" (28) or with a "language [which] has been forgotten" (30) is disrupted by violent images of dismemberment.

The action of *Obasan* is Naomi's rewriting of her past:

> The past, as Augustine said, does not exist, but our editing of the past, our imaging, our violence upon it — these are the most powerful of our activities, and our destinies turn on the strength, the direction, the anguish, and the wisdom we draw from or against those versions of reality.[3]

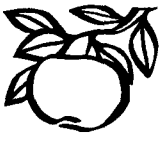
In Kogawa's words, the present alters the past: specifically, the mother's silence after Nagasaki alters the quality of her silence in Naomi's childhood: "Gentle Mother, we were lost together in our silences. Our wordlessness was our mutual destruction" (243). After the long-delayed "telling" of Nagasaki, after Naomi has absorbed the hurtful betrayal of the "no telling" (232), Naomi relinquishes the original myth of a pre-linguistic paradise. This revision of the past privileges speech over silence, language — with all its inadequacy — over a delusory wordless security. Furthermore, this new version of the past must alter Naomi's present. At the end of the novel Naomi leaves Obasan in the silence of her grief to revisit the spot she had come to year after year with Uncle. As she leaves, she slips on Aunt Emily's coat, perhaps a sign that she will enter Emily's (and Kogawa's) wordy world, that the new story of her past enables a new and richer story of her present.

NOTES

[1] Joy Kogawa, *Obasan* (Toronto: Lester and Orpen Dennys, 1981), Proem. All further references to this work appear in the text.

[2] See Jacques Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1977). For Lacan's discussion of Ferdinand de Saussure's *Cours de linguistique générale*, see especially "The Agency of the Letter in the Unconscious or Reason since Freud," pp. 146-78. Anika Lemaire, in *Jacques Lacan*, trans. David Macey (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977), pp. 1-64, reviews some of the developments in structural linguistics and theory since Saussure that bear on Lacan's views.

[3] Thomas M. Greene, *The Light in Troy: Imitation and Discovery in Renaissance Poetry* (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 1982), p. 19.



INFLUENCES

Wm. B. Robertson

My father reached out and poked people
with his words
my grandmother's brogue
giving them the thistle's jab
as his voice rose,
and it rose,
to nudge his congregation
to attention
in the pews

ranted, whispered, or calm
every word
wanted listening.

I still stare at the floor
through the twenty minutes
that isn't singing, reading,
or praying
maybe still afraid
of that much conviction
bowed by that much power

remember his questions
about my life of writing
how he pared away my reasons
till he got to his
and he asked me if I thought I had
something to say.

Talking over coffee
about influences and style
I bandy big names
with my friends
hear beneath it all
the voice
still answering my father
yes, yes
nearly every day I answer
Yes.

FRAMED VOICES

The Polyphonic Elegies of Hébert and Kogawa

P. Merivale

CANADIAN WRITING IN THE 1980's — by Ondaatje, Munro, Bowering, Findley — seems to be characterized by an elegiac tone and structure and a genealogical compulsion, which sets up not only "the writer as elegist," but the "reader as family historian." Books by Anne Hébert and Joy Kogawa, *Les fous de Bassan* and *Obasan*, while forming part of this larger group, resemble each other thematically and structurally in even more specific ways.

The phonetic similarity of their titles, *Obasan* and *Les fous de Bassan*, is an agreeable coincidence which only a deconstructionist could love; more significantly, both were published by women Canadians within a year of each other at the beginning of the 1980's (1981-1982)[1]; the key events of Hébert's novel occur in 1936, the very year in which the heroine-narrator of Kogawa's novel was born, and the stories continue up to 1972 and 1982 respectively; yet it is the many framed voices of their elegiac telling that bring them most significantly together.

Two minority Christian communities, mythicizing themselves in biblical terms,[2] two chosen peoples being wiped from the earth by, in *Les fous de Bassan*, their collective and individual guilt, by, in *Obasan*, their collective and individual suffering: these communities are, in a sense, the central characters of these novels. Biblical allusions in each book, especially to the Books of the Prophets, speak of loss, guilt, suffering, redemption, or the punishments of the Apocalypse. Exile, dispersal of families, bereavement, breaking of communal links, are recorded in both books by survivors, who are themselves at a dead end of barrenness and able to foresee only, and quite soon, the entire extinction of these chosen peoples. Miscegenation is the unspoken danger for one of these extended families, while incest is the all-but-explicit terror of the other. Both books start and end — are framed — with cemeteries, church services, "pierres tombales," specific deaths. These books are both individual and communal elegies.

In *Obasan*, of the two families (Nakane and Kato) whose genealogy and close interweaving make their extended family into a synecdoche for the Japanese-Canadian community, we are repeatedly reminded that none of the three main characters, Naomi (the narrator), or her two aunts, Emily and Obasan, will bear

children. Only Naomi's brother, Stephen, who has long since opted out of the community, might still carry on the heritage: yet he may not even be *Canadian* any longer, but cosmopolitan (he is last seen keeping company with a French divorcée); at best his heirs will be Canadian — without a hyphen. A sombre parable for the Canadian mosaic.

In Hébert, the survivor who opens the book with his framing "livre" in present time (1982), the pastor Nicolas Jones, must, paradoxically, move backward to find his progeny,[8] back to the very beginning of the community, two centuries earlier, in 1782; he must become, by a reversal of generation, the begetter of his own ancestors:

> Moi qui n'ai pas eu de fils j'engendre mes pères jusqu'à la dixième génération. Moi qui suis sans descendance j'ai plaisir à remettre au monde mes ascendants jusqu'à la face première originelle de Henry Jones, né à Montpelier, Vermont. (15)

He "frames" Hébert's book with the many little, literal, frames he places around his ancestors, who are caricatured in his strange self-painted gallery, somewhat as Naomi's genealogical reflections are set off by the framed family photographs from the time of her early childhood in the coastal paradise of Vancouver, from the time before her mother's leaving ends her personal paradise, before the persecution and expulsion of the Japanese community in 1941 ends their communal paradise.

As in that time of childhoods remembered in Hébert's book — all that apparently halcyon yet menacing experience which precedes the fatal summer of 1936 — early paradise is followed by collective dispersal or death for most of the characters: "we disappear into the future" (O. 112); "résidu d'une tribu en voie de disparition" (FB 15), but by a kind of emotional paralysis or living death for the frame narrator. Kogawa's Naomi resembles Hébert's two survivors of that early time, Nicolas, "living in the frame" for forty-six years, caught in his pattern of old habits, waiting to die, and Stevens Brown who, like Naomi, exiled from the coast, is like Nicolas, living only to complete his confession, his last letter, the framing narrative which concludes the book, at which point he will kill himself. Only these doubtfully redemptive frames remain, in Hébert, as fractured elegies for the time before the fall, ambiguous confessions of guilt and complicity and markers for the forty-six-year-long borderline that stretches out between Fall and Extinction. Naomi, likewise (indeed more explicitly), writes an elegy for the dead and the almost-dead of her fractured community. She, too, has been "living in the frame" of three decades of non-life, of emotional sterility and non-stop grief. She is "tired of living between deaths and funerals, weighted with decorum" (183), with endless absence, like "snow . . . burying me beneath a growing monochromatic weight" (200). But she is perhaps more hopeful of the healing powers of art than Hébert's narrators are: it seems that her elegy (the novel) may at

last free her for a life of her own, by means of this adequate memorial, this speaking history of her lost community. Her emotional stunting has been a negative, unflowering silence, "the silence that cannot speak" (Prologue); restored to speech, and perhaps also to feeling, by the slow findings-out which constitute the chief patterns given to the events of the novel, she makes her book self-reflexively out of her account of its own making, out of the dialectic between the noise, the facts, the history, the political polemics of Aunt Emily, the hyphenated Canadian, and the silence, the feeling, the sheltering, the unspeaking lyricism ("the silence that will not speak," as it turns out) of Obasan, Japanese still, to the very end, and although in Canada, not yet Canadian. This book, once made, can at last redeem, perhaps, the time of suffering.

In Hébert, we are told at once that the community founded by the Loyalists in 1782 is being taken over — both the land *and* its history[4] — by the Papists, the Francophone majority in Quebec. Conversely, in Kogawa, it is the Anglophone majority which brutally expropriates the Japanese-Canadian community of British Columbia. Aunt Emily quotes the Prophet Habbakuk, "Write the vision and make it plain. Habbakuk 2:2" (31), in an exhortation to Naomi, not at that point understood by either her or the reader. But if we seek the context of the passage we find, among other relevant things, that "the wicked doth compass about the righteous . . . to possess the dwelling places that are not theirs" (Hab. 1:4, 6).

Kogawa's extended opening frame is made up of eighty pages in which Naomi's shifting lyric voice interweaves past and present to narrate the loss of early paradise from the perspective of her remembered childhood. In present time (1972), she wrestles, both within and outside herself, with the voices of Emily and Obasan, her two aunts. Although she puts up considerable inner resistance to the demands of the Emily voice, continually undermining with nervous humour its patent resemblance to a large part of herself, it is the apparently more congenial voice of Obasan which in fact puts off her questions, makes no acknowledgement of her need for answers, and tells her nothing. Neither Obasan nor Emily at this stage i.e., September 1972, when Obasan's husband, Naomi's Uncle Isamu, dies, and Naomi, now in her middle thirties, starts to write this novel) can give any workable answer to Naomi's psychic entrapment in her perpetually thwarted search for her lost mother: "we're trapped . . . by our memories of the dead — all our dead — those who refuse to bury themselves" (26). But both of these seemingly incompatible voices are essential to her eventual synthesis of her self, which is also her novel. Naomi is "living in the frame" until the novel releases her; in political terms, she is living in the hyphen of non-identity, until the recovered knowledge of her mother can make possible some accepting synthesis of her two origins, Japanese *and* (hyphen) Canadian (the key oxymoron of this fundamentally

oxymoronic book); at the end of her narrative she puts on "Aunt Emily's coat" (246) to return to the coulee where she had last seen Uncle Isamu (1-4).

But that synthesis is only achieved in the other framing section, also in present time, which concludes the book. In the second narrative section of the book (80-110), the voice of Emily, in letters and diaries from the war (closely modelled on actual archival materials[5]), gives a chronological historical account of the facts and feelings of persecution and exile, of which Naomi had only her partial child's view. These letters, written for Naomi's mother but never sent — a narrative strategy with analogies in Hébert — are first read by Naomi herself, thirty years later. Thus, obliquely, these letters reach their true recipient. The middle and longest section of the book (110-210) is Naomi's extended chronological narrative of the family's first exile in the B.C. interior, which is, for all its hardship, another version of childhood pastoral. The essential patterns of exile are established by key symbolic episodes, connected by lyric bridges (often painful and complex dreams) which remind us of Naomi's ceaseless though largely subliminal search for reunion with her lost mother. Then follows the emotionally concentrated, deliberately abridged account of the second exile, the "exile from our place of exile" (197), the physical and psychological horrors of Alberta, a time of sufferings which complete the destruction of the family.

The last forty pages, the concluding frame, unfold the revelation of the loss-and-gain implicit in the opening frame section, in a way that reshapes into full significance the narrative content of the first three sections: Naomi's Vancouver childhood, Emily's own version of that time, and Naomi's exile years. Shortly thereafter she at last hears the letters about her mother which fill the gap in her heart, answer the haunting question "What happened to my mother?" and solve, as far as possible, the mystery which the reader, following Naomi in her reluctant interpretation, has also been trying to work out. A second document, only understandable in terms of Emily's whole package, has thus by multiple oblique indirection also finally reached its true recipient. Naomi's subjective experience can at last be understood in terms of Emily's wider, more "factual" political and historical context, as Naomi in the end undermines her own uneasy irony about Emily's exhortation to her to seek the "vision" predicted by Habbakuk. Emily, cryptically, had quoted only "Write the vision and make it plain," but the biblical verses continue:

> For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak. . . . *For the stone shall cry out of the wall.* (Hab. 2:2, 3, 11; italics mine)

Naomi does indeed, in the novel, achieve such a vision, on behalf of Emily and all the others. But without Emily's package of documentary information, including the key letters in Japanese (which language, significantly, Naomi is unable to read), this elegy for the lost, barren community, this history of the

chosen, suffering people, could not have yielded Naomi's visionary novel of the recovered self. Its slim outer frame deliberately concentrates the separate effects of the two main "voices," the Emily-voice and the Obasan-voice. The single (unnumbered) page of the opening prologue is a complex prose lyric from which emerge most of the image patterns of the book:

> Beneath the grass the speaking dreams and beneath the dreams is a sensate sea. The speech that frees comes forth from that amniotic deep. To attend its voice, I can hear it say, is to embrace its absence. But I fail the task. The word is stone. . . . Unless the stone bursts with telling, unless the seed flowers with speech, there is in my life no living word. . . .

This hymn to stones, to silence, and to the freezing of poetic speech contrasts starkly with the prosaic eloquence of the document which Emily has been thrusting upon an unwilling Naomi at intervals through the book (Memorandum . . . to the House and Senate of Canada, April 1946), which constitutes the last three pages of the book, and makes up the corresponding outermost frame, in these bare and historical words of protest:

> . . . now that hostilities have ceased for some time, it cannot possibly be suggested that the safety of Canada requires the injustice of treating Canadian citizens in the manner proposed. . . . (249)

The very last voice heard is thus an Emily-voice, a citational, documentary one, as the first voice, the lyric prologue, is Naomi's *giving* of a voice to the silence of Obasan.

THESE NOVELS BOTH FOCUS on relatively small and anomalous corners of the Canadian mosaic: one the Japanese-Canadians, in a sea of appropriative Anglophones, the other an Anglophone Protestant community in a Francophone Catholic sea. Their collective historical life is seen in the apocalyptic perspective of an explicitly theological image of the end of the world in Hébert, while Kogawa images a secular apocalypse, in the form in which, inevitably, we all imagine it in our time, the dropping of the atomic bomb. Yet that fieriest of all furnaces is carefully anticipated by allusions to the biblical fiery furnace with its angel protecting the believers, and to the smaller funeral pyre lit in the mountains for their Buddhist grandmother (131).

Although both books are strongly structured by biblical patterns, images, and citations, Christianity itself provides only ambiguous answers in either. To be sure, its rituals and services provide an unironic basis for community in Kogawa, a consolation for victims, a binding together of his people by the good shepherd, Nakayama-sensei, through his arduous journeys — on foot, by bicycle, finally by jalopy — to bring messages of love and unity to his scattered flock.

But if Christianity is the one major force of social cohesion left to them, it is also, in its great commandment to "turn the other cheek," a pattern for victimization. It is ironic that the Japanese-Canadians are more truly Christian in their behaviour than the Canadians: it is with real bitterness that Emily notes the charity with which the exiles donated money to the victims of floods in British Columbia, floods on those very lands which had been taken from them without recompense (188). The other cheek has been turned with (or rather without) a vengeance, and what might come to be seen as a moral triumph Emily senses only as an ultimate self-victimization. Yet Christianity binds together on levels other than the political or social: it binds together *the book*, rather as the "long thread knotted to Obasan's twine," by making up part of a Japanese ideogram for love (228), also binds up that package of documents which will in the end generate Naomi's book of revelation. They "are piled as neatly as the thin white wafers in Sensei's silver box" (182), for communication *is* communion; they are "white paper bread," like the biblically oxymoronic "stone bread" by which Isamu showed a love as true as the bread was, paradoxically, inedible. For before the poem-prologue there is an epigraph, which, in context (Rev. 2:10, 17), proleptically supplies an answer to the cry of cold silence from the Prologue: "I will give him . . . in the stone / A new name written" is a message from St. John to the Churches to "fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer . . . prison . . . [nor] tribulation." Is this citational voice Naomi's or Kogawa's? In any case, Christianity "binds" the book explicitly in this epigraph as well as implicitly, in the mere justice (yet a justice, in that historical context, which it took charity to demand) demanded in the epilogue. Within these frames, the rhetoric and imagery of Christianity bind together the text rather as Nakayama-sensei binds together his flock, particularly when we note that it is he, functioning both in meta-text and story, who persuades the elders that the time has come to tell the now-grown children of their mother's fate, and whose mediating "voice" transmits the "voice" of Naomi's mother in the final, crucial revelation of his reading out loud the letters (233); those letters, we remember, that Naomi could not read for herself, which have thus been a present absence throughout most of the book as we read it.[6] It is a very "Japanese" literary touch, perhaps an undeliberate one on Kogawa's part, to make documents so obliquely received so crucial to eventual awareness.

But Nicolas Jones, Hébert's shepherd over an equally aging and dispersed flock, is far more ironically observed than Nakayama-sensei is. "*Honore tes père et mère*" (54; italics Hébert's) he says, to his aging and entirely orphaned congregation, in a public expression of his own private reversing of generations; his congregation is, collectively, as barren as he is himself. The double sex-murder which is the main plot-element of the book suggests an absolute and general guilt, ample grounds for an apocalyptic punishment, as powerfully as the atomic bomb

can suggest an absolute and general suffering. (Kogawa does not emphasize, but most of Kogawa's readers are likely to remember, that the bomb was dropped by "us.")

Of course "guilt" and "suffering" are by no means mutually exclusive concepts: there are victims in Hébert (almost always women),[7] while a sense of guilt, of complicity in their own oppression, suffuses the entire Japanese community. Although the Japanese are destroyed from the outside, by relatively impersonal (or at least, within the book, depersonalized) forces, their sense of being punished for some (objectively non-existent) guilt is one of the major inner obstacles to their recovery of a sense of self-worth. Naomi's experience of child abuse (at the hands, so to speak, of a white male serpent in the Vancouver Eden) is an encapsulated example of a guilt which is a *part* of suffering. Her sense of complicity with her abuser separates her from her mother even before the latter's departure, and this is one of the cruelest effects of the abuse itself. The males of this community are, in turn, feminized, deprived of the power to defend their families or to make choices for them: there is, in exile, a certain equality between the sexes — an equality of victimization, at any rate. If Hébert's is an explicit feminism of the psychology of male domination and sexual power politics, Kogawa's is largely an oblique feminism of marginality, of a silence finding a voice.

THE FRAMING VOICES IN THESE TWO BOOKS are those of these three compulsive narrators, Kogawa's Naomi and Hébert's Nicolas Jones and Stevens Brown; the framed voices in these highly polyphonic texts are voices of intertextuality, especially in Hébert, voices of divided selves, voices of dialectical principles embodied in actual characters. But they are chiefly voices of memory (or remembered voices) tortuously recollected, chewed over, re-experienced ("Everything we have ever done we do again and again in my mind" [O. 68]), as the narrators — Kogawa's paralyzed by loss and suffering, Hébert's paralyzed by guilt — stop developing morally or emotionally, stop relating to other people (if they ever did), stop *living*, in short, in order to live in the past, among the living dead:

> Dernier jour du monde peut-être. Et si on vivait depuis ce temps-là, nous tous de Griffin Creek, assommés comme des vieux chevaux, sans savoir qu'on est morts? (FB 162; "stunned, like old horses, not knowing we're dead?" H. 119)

They are living, not *in* the picture, but on its edge, in its frame.

"Il fallait oublier pour vivre" (FB 52): neither Nicolas nor Stevens can forget, so neither can live. They are delivered over to the judgments of their projected selves (like some of the victim-selves in Naomi's dreams, or the two parts of her "self" as seen in Emily and Obasan). In Nicolas Jones' case these

are his self-begotten ancestors, who "watch" from the walls without seeing, and the childlike old spinster twins, Nicolas's principal but quite impervious audience (like the listeners to his sermons), who "listen" without hearing. In their excess of doubling they pathetically replace the twinlike cousins who are endlessly being remembered. Likewise Stevens writes to Mic, his American "brother" (Hébert uses the English word, which becomes in the translation, for no good reason, "buddy"), who is unlikely ever to receive the letters, indeed who may already be dead himself, or to whom, like Naomi's mother, the non-receiving recipient of Aunt Emily's letters, they may never even be sent. This American "brother" stands in for the other true affection of Stevens' unloving life, his idiot brother Percival, who is, of course (like the twins), also incapable of understanding. Nicolas sees Percival, the idiot, as an angel announcing apocalypse; Stevens ironically hopes that Percival, the one innocent being in the story, will love him and welcome him to heaven as if he too were innocent. The idiot stands for Stevens' hope of an uncritical forgiveness, and for Nicolas's fear of apocalyptic judgment. All these non-comprehending characters are in a sense implied readers, whose imperviousness only adds to the narrators' compulsiveness: to *make* them listen; to *make* us read. Similarly Naomi's grandmother writes, apologetically, to "extricate herself from the grip of the past" (236); her writing the letter is thus an inner duplication of Naomi's writing the book, while Naomi herself perhaps achieves the acknowledgement and forgiveness only ironically hypothesized of Percival.

Nicolas's will to evil, his lustful desire, are morally equivalent to Stevens' fully enacted sexual violence. Nicolas circles around his guilt, evasively but obsessively, while Stevens manifests a Byronic egotism in his attempts at self-justification, but for both of them Percival is (like Faulkner's Benjy, on whom he is almost too evidently modelled[8]) a visible conscience. As narrators they could both say, as Stevens actually does, "les mots . . . me délivrent de ma mémoire" (FB 233), i.e., writing frees one *from* memory, but only, it turns out, *to* death. Stevens will (Nicolas will too) die when his memory is emptied out onto the page; their lives are co-equal to their memories. Although Nicolas's text is explicitly his "livre," he seems to be ruminating rather than writing; Stevens, on the other hand, reminds us continually that he is *writing* this account of himself for Mic,[9] that "reader in the text" who stands for us and who *must* (like us) read to the very end. Stevens' last words are a quasi-documentary postscript telling why he was not convicted of the murders: his involuntary, forced confession was ruled inadmissible. We must read to the very end, that is, in response to Stevens' need to reveal that he was released from the bar of justice to the bar of his own self-judgment, which has now, forty-six years later, at last convicted him.

Nicolas and Stevens, one at each end of the synchronous frames (autumn 1982) of the present-time narration, are thus linked to each other by innumerable

internal echoes: Stevens thinks, for instance, of painting and graffiti (albeit "invisible," thus metaphorical, ones [233]) at perhaps the same moment that Nicolas does. Thus their narratives are linked across the body of the framed texts of the past: two confessions of guilt framing the central, absent mystery. These narrators are always on the edge of some absolute impassable to consciousness ("Après moi le gouffre abrupte. Le vide." [20]), the last day of self or world, or in some state *between* definable states, with "aucun présent ni avenir" (235), purgatorial heroes without hope of redemption.[10]

HÉBERT AND KOGAWA are both well known as lyric poets, nal, Grandmother Kato's letters, and various other inserted documents. Both as well as novelists, and much of the tightly packed, interwoven image patterning of their novels reinforces and indeed weaves the texture of their "framed voices." It is more obvious in Hébert, whose multiple narrative voices are disjunct in a way that forces the reader to attempt to join them, but Kogawa, too, juxtaposes voices in a kind of dialogism: substantial portions of text consist of Emily's jour- authors use epigraphs, indeed Hébert uses half a dozen: St. Matthew, Jean-Pierre Jouve, Hélène Cixous, Shakespeare (those lines from *Macbeth* which of course suggest the Faulkner text to which she is so clearly indebted, *The Sound and the Fury*), Hans Christian Andersen (from "La petite Sirène," which is echoed throughout the "Olivia" section), and finally, and rather inscrutably, Rimbaud ("Parade," *Illuminations* 4:29); I have not been able to locate the quotations from Jouve and Cixous. Both authors use two languages; Hébert has noted[11] her desire to make *Les fous de Bassan* seem like a translation from the English by, among other things, employing English words embedded in her French text; Kogawa uses a great deal of Japanese, likewise, for exoticism, to emphasize differences, for lyric effect, and indeed for realistic effect, as in the speech of Obasan herself, or Isamu, whose Japanese is routinely translated for us by Naomi, or in the macaronic church services in which Japanese and English are employed alternately. Another "language" thematically significant in *Obasan* is of course music; it permits Stephen's slippage from his national (i.e., linguistic) identity, which he rejects in so many ways from the very beginning, into cosmopolitanism, yet it binds Stephen to his father as the language of silence binds Naomi to her mother. Among many silences, there is also the silence of Japanese words and culture to an ear — Naomi's — which cannot entirely hear them. All three of the frame narrators internalize silences and voices from the past, words and cries, the voice (or the Word) of the preacher, and of course the extended echoes of the Bible, all of which they share, although Hébert would otherwise seem to be far more caught up in the intertextual "voices" of other authors (Gide, Camus,

Baudelaire, Robbe-Grillet, to mention a few of the more obvious ones, in addition, of course, to those pointed to in the epigraphs, and the omnipresent Faulkner) than Kogawa is. As the abridged reference to Habbakuk serves as the kernel of Kogawa's meta-text, so the buried reference to the Book of the minor prophet Malachi expands into a key account of Nicolas's motives for tramping his own endless round of self-justification. Is it significant that he is said to be reading "Malachie, son préféré parmi les douze petits prophètes" (165) at the time of the murder, and that it is Percival who asserts this fact? In any case the Book of Malachi enunciates a curse upon priests who mislead their flock, who speak falsely, who protect sinners and oppress "the hireling . . . the widow, and the fatherless," but particularly addresses one such priest who has "dealt treacherously" with "the wife of thy youth . . . yet is she thy companion, and the wife of thy covenant . . . and a book of remembrance was written . . . the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven" (Mal. 2:14, 3:5, 16, 4:1). There is much food here for Nicolas's endless ruminations. But Malachi is, even more interestingly, a book on the *edge*, where Hébert's characters obsessively position themselves; as the last book of the Old Testament (three very slim books further than Habbakuk), it is placed on the textual edge between the Old and the New Testament, without ever reaching, of course, the "newer," and more merciful, commandments of the New.

The "edges" of the book serve many thematic and structural functions: the several overlapping narrations approach closer and closer to the edge of the event, unspoken because unspeakable as well as unknown, the edge of the novel's absent centre, fully revealed only at the very end of Stevens' confession. When the characters themselves reach, are stopped at, fall over that edge, it is in two ways: Nora and Olivia reach the time-stopping moment of their deaths. "*Ah ça! l'horloge de la vie s'est arrêtée tout à l'heure, je ne suis plus au monde,*" says Olivia (200; italics Hébert's) as she crosses over into the life-in-death of her ghostly wave-tossed afterlife. But Stevens and Nicolas are, at that same edge-moment, pinned into the time-stopped frame of their death-in-life.

The edges manifested in the details of the imagery are diurnal and seasonal (up to the very end of the very last day of summer, the point at which "time," in both senses, stops), topographical ("au bord de la mer" [14 and elsewhere]; "la lisière du ciel et de l'eau" [51]), spatial (the last house in the town, the threshold), and, repeatedly, the tideline on the beach, marked by the seaweed crushed by the feet of Nicolas or Stevens or Percival, following in each other's tracks along the margin between the (male) land-realm and the (female) sea-realm, those border territories of beach and beach house on which the acts of male erotic aggression take place.[12] As in Keats or Rilke, images of getting closer and closer to the edge suggest the unspeakable which is beyond, that which consciousness cannot reach. But this mystery is also put (surprisingly, by Stevens)

in the homely terms of "une femme qui a pris sa couture trop au bord et qui voit son tissu s'effilocher, entre ses doigts" (FB 80; "a woman who's sewn a seam too close to the edge" [H. 58]), which will inevitably deconstruct itself, ravelling out into non-existence, or at least non-seamness. Stevens sees himself as the Pied Piper, who will of course lead the children of the town away, beyond, over the edge, to their unravelling, linking up with the many fairy-tale motifs of children seeking parents, or parents abandoning children, found in Kogawa and Hébert.

The motif of voyeurism permeates the book; there are numerous reminiscences of *Le voyeur*, Robbe-Grillet's postmodernist porno-Gothic "absent-centred" novel whose narrative gap, repeatedly approached, but never filled in during the course of the story, also contains a sexual murder, whose victim, like Hébert's Nora, nibbled by fishes, returns from the sea. Percival, whose act of voyeurism betrays Nicolas to Irène, thus causing her suicide, narrates a whole section based on what he has "seen." There is something almost Japanese in this eroticism of the look,[13] in these different "languages" of the look: Naomi's shame and sense of complicity at perhaps being "seen" in the garage corresponds to Nora's at being doubly "seen" (Percival seeing Nicolas seeing her) in the bathhouse, as does the repeated advice to the girls not to "look up" at Stevens, for as with the Japanese, to look is to invite victimization. Stevens, who constantly sees others (the girls, the congregation) seeing him, is, himself, often seen darkly, *framed* in the "encadrement" of doorways (a point blurred in the English translation).

In Kogawa the structuring "frames" of imagery which open and close the book are photographs, framed in a quite literal sense, ironically contrasted family portraits: the united family of peacetime (17) is balanced against the cruelly deceptive publicity photograph of "one family, all smiles, standing around a pile of beets" (193); "the small black and white snapshot of a graveyard scene" (of her father [211]) balances the photograph of father, uncle, and the beautiful about-to-be-confiscated boat (21); the photograph of the infant Naomi clutching her mother's leg recurs (46-47, 242). The emotional point of pages of political comment is compacted into the depiction of Obasan going up into the attic to look for . . . we don't yet know what, but finding a photograph of the dead Isamu: his deportee's ID card, which makes a mockery of his "identity," by framing the picture, his face, in the frame of another culture's number for him, another man's white RCMP signature permitting his existence (24, 244).

In fact Isamu, seemingly not as important a character in the story as the three present women and the one present-yet-absent one, is nevertheless central to its imagery. It is he whose saying "It is like the sea" frames the story with his palimpsestic vision of irretrievably inland Alberta somehow containing the waves of the lost Pacific, on one shore or the other of which Isamu, the fisherman, can have his only true being. It is Isamu who finds shellfish fossils there, leading Naomi, the "family historian," to wonder about "some genealogist of the future"

(225), who will similarly marvel at finding the bones of so many fishermen buried on the prairies, in a kind of "cimetière marin," as Hébert, echoing Valéry, would say (FB 224). Olivia has the same palimpsestic view of sea and land: "L'avoine se couche au soleil, se relève et moutonne *comme un mer* peu profonde et verte" and the same sense of the seepage of memory into dreams (FB 214-15; italics mine; cf. 199), and Lethbridge, like Cap Sauvagine, is "a city of wind . . . flat as the ocean . . . the edge of the world" (O. 190-91). Naomi postulates of Isamu's dying moments an almost metaphysical image of man as an inverted tree, as Isamu moves downward toward the subterranean ocean of his earliest memories, seeking a dream or vision by a process proleptically enacting Naomi's own search for vision through memory, which makes up the book:

> Perhaps everything was reversing rapidly and he was tunnelling backwards top to bottom, his feet in an upstairs attic of humus and memory, his hands groping down through the cracks and walls to the damp cellar, to the water, down to the underground sea. Or back to his fishing boats in B.C. . . . In the end did he manage to swim full circle back to that other shore *and his mother's arms* . . . ? (14; italics mine)

His search, used as an emblem for hers, culminates in the almost verbatim repetition, at the end of the book, of the imagery of the sea/prairie with which it began. Naomi, on her own behalf, also tends to see palimpsestically: "Our attics and living-rooms encroach on each other" (25), as she images her own regressions back to her remembered origins, her return to her father's arms (170) or to her mother's (241).

Isamu's or Naomi's memory, going in reverse, operates much as Stevens' does when he images the process of his painful recollections as fishing up drowned cities (FB 238). However, within Hébert's *text* that image operates to link his confessional procedures with Olivia's narrative of the ghostly mermaid kingdom under the sea. And Olivia's account has been, as text, somehow generated by Percival's vision of her oceanic afterlife: three disjunct narrative voices are thus linked by the textual voice, as we have already seen occurring in Stevens' and Nicolas's frame narrations.

It is in Olivia's mermaid kingdom, suffused with reminiscences of the Hans Christian Andersen fairy tale "La petite sirène," that Hébert's subplot of a female identity quest comes to the fore. Not only Andersen's but also Hébert's heroine has a grandmother who was especially fond of her granddaughters, serving as the matriarchal governing principle, like a less passive, more dominating Obasan. Stevens, a demonic version of Andersen's handsome prince, is responsible for Olivia's loss of the earthly version of this realm. If we look back at Andersen's baleful parable of female sexual awakening, we find that the mermaid, seeking to go on land as a human girl to seek out the handsome prince, must sacrifice her loveliest quality, her voice, in order to woo him, silently. By a mere coincidence,

of the sort which conceals an underlying shared significance (perhaps a Philomela motif of woman muted), one of Naomi's nightmares comes from the tale of the King bird, who takes out the tongues of children who tell lies. When Olivia recollects her relationship with her dying mother, their poverty, their digging potatoes, the female bonding of their society over against the patriarchal one, and asserts that "ma mémoire ressemblent à ces longues guirlandes d'algues . . ." (200) and that "Le mystère de la vie et de la mort de ma mère n'aura plus de secret pour moi" (211), we are reminded not only of Andersen's companionship of women under the sea, and of the "feminized" Japanese community in the Alberta beet fields, but also, above all, of Naomi's oceanic imagery in her dream of her mother, whose "flailing arms . . . beckon *like seaweed*" (O. 241; italics mine), because, of course, the imagery of the "amniotic deep" is a constant for the female realm.[14] There is nearly as much simile and metaphor from the sea in *Obasan*, where the sea is only a *recollected* setting, as there is in *Les fous de Bassan*, almost entirely set "au bord de la mer."

Naomi, like Nicolas or Stevens "skirt[ing] the edges" of the "whirlpool" of memory (O. 53) with uninterpretable dreams in tandem with unreadable letters (30), whose nightmares are of male violence, death, gruesome injury, and female suffering, is firmly sucked down into that whirlpool by new knowledge, indeed by the "facts" which she has evaded or been deprived of for so long. Her questioning gets ever closer to the long-sought answer as the frames of the story close up on each other toward the end. Her last dreams unite Aunt Emily's string to Obasan's twine (the long thread of the heart), and both to the maypole image of her mother, departing, yet at last returning. And one of the finest elegies in Canadian literature, of the 1980's or of any other decade, seems to complete the elegiac form in the traditional way by (albeit cautiously) reaffirming life: "The song of mourning is not a lifelong song" (246).

Evidently the male characters of Hébert's story are to be seen as a fragmented consciousness, whose various narrative voices (Nicolas, Stevens, Percival, the anonymous plural inhabitants of Griffin Creek)[15] are to be pulled together by the reader into the total of its fragmented narrative perspectives. While Naomi finally succeeds in joining the divergent voices of Emily and Obasan, history and poetry, document and lyric, into the unified elegiac voice of her mother found again in herself, Hébert's reader is left to make an elegy for Griffin Creek from the fragmented confessions of its ghosts and its living dead. Framed voices haunt us from both these books.

NOTES

[1] A much briefer version of this paper was read at "Canadian Writing in the Eighties," MLA, 1985. The phrase "reader as family historian" is from Magdalene Redekop's paper on Alice Munro, and my opening paragraph is an *ex post facto* comment on that panel.

Quotations are taken from *Obasan* (Toronto: Lester & Orpen Dennys, 1981), from *Les fous de Bassan* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1982), and from *In the Shadow of the Wind*, trans. Sheila Fischman (Toronto: New Press Canadian Classics, 1983), using the abbreviations O., FB, and H. respectively, wherever the reference is not self-explanatory.

[2] Antoine Sirois, "Bible, Mythes et Fous de Bassan," *Canadian Literature*, 104 (Spring 1985), 178-82, gives an admirable discussion of biblical references in Hébert, but he confines himself largely to those related to Creation and the Fall (i.e., Genesis) rather than developing those related to themes from Revelation and the prophetic books.

[3] See John T. Irwin, *Doubling and Incest/Repetition and Revenge* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1975), pp. 64-67, on the fantasy of the reversal of generations, with special reference to Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*.

[4] Ronald Ewing, in "Griffin Creek: The English World of Anne Hébert," *Canadian Literature*, 105 (Summer 1985), 100-10, defines this component of the story as a historically accurate view of population decline in rural English Quebec (p. 101).

[5] Joy Kogawa, "The Japanese-Canadian Dilemma," *Toronto Life* (December 1985), p. 32. By this account, Muriel Kitagawa seems to have served as a partial model for Aunt Emily; Kogawa's admiration for her is palpable. See Roy Miki, ed., *This Is My Own: Letters to Wes and Other Writings on Japanese Canadians 1941-1948* (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1985), for a selection of sources.

For Kogawa's own deeply serious Christianity — the power of prayer, the importance of love and forgiveness of enemies, and the characteristically oxymoronic conceit of "limp[ing] triumphantly" — see her essay "Is There a Just Cause?," *Canadian Forum*, 63 (March 1984), 20-21, 24. See also an interview "A Matter of Trust," *University of Toronto Review* (Spring 1985), pp. 28-31, for further evidence of her complexly ambivalent relationship (that of "a closet Christian") to traditional Christianity, contrasted to the "arrogance" of institutional Christianity. But Erika Gottlieb's "The Riddle of Concentric Worlds in *Obasan*," *Canadian Literature*, 109 (Summer 1986), 34-53, brilliantly accounts for both time scheme and narrative structure by demonstrating that it is the three days of the Buddhist wake, between Isamu's death and burial, that determines the 'present time' of the narrative, and the recurrent ritual of Buddhist mourning for Naomi's mother that structures, over eighteen years, the 'secret' that three days of meditation on the past must unravel. The article is, further, a fine account of the significance of Naomi's dreams.

[6] I owe this and other points to stimulating discussions with Dr. Richard Cavell, whose "Dialogic Form in Klein, Kroetsch, and Kogawa" (*Canada Ieri e Oggi* [Fasano: Schena, 1986], 45-53) opens up these questions of absence and presence. Note also that the key letters are written by Grandma Kato to Grandpa Kato, then handed on to Emily, who makes two attempts to bring them to Naomi before Sensei, ventriloquising, finally transmits the mother's voice to her. Ila Goody ("The Stone Goddess and the Frozen Mother: Accomplices of Desire and Death in Tanizaki, *Tay John* and *Obasan*," forthcoming in *Nature and the Search for Identity in Canadian and Japanese Literature*, ed. Tsuruta and Goossen) makes useful comparisons between *Obasan* and several works by the modern Japanese author Junichiro Tanizaki (particularly his "The Bridge of Dreams") in respect to various kinds of narrative obliquity, maskings, and the cruel keeping of secrets, and especially to the obsessive search for and memorialization of the lost, inaccessible mother, a matter highly eroticized in Tanizaki, however.

[7] Neil B. Bishop, "Energie textuelle et production de sens: images de l'énergie dans

Les fous de Bassan d'Anne Hébert," *UTQ*, 54:2 (Winter 1984/5), 178-99, esp. pp. 179, 186-87.

[8] See Ewing, pp. 102-05, for a cogent account of parallels with *The Sound and the Fury*, in addition to similar but less obvious parallels with Faulkner's *Light in August* (Nicolas resembling Gail Hightower, who sits by his window for years, effectively one of the living dead, until he comes to some understanding of his guilt toward his dead wife; Stevens resembling Joe Christmas, the wanderer and cruel lover of an older woman, perpetrator of the key violence of the book).

[9] See Janet Paterson on the slipping over of "les cris des fous" into "l'écrits des fous" in the self-reflexivity of both Stevens and Nicolas, *Anne Hébert: Architexture Romanesque* (Ottawa: Éditions de l'Université d'Ottawa, 1985), pp. 159-77. She also suggests that *Les fous de Bassan* is fundamentally "anaphoric" in theme and structure in much the same spirit in which I suggest that *Obasan* is fundamentally oxymoronic.

[10] See my paper on the "purgatorial heroes" of Joseph Heller, William Golding, and Albert Camus, among others, "'One Endless Round': *Something Happened* as Purgatorial Novel," *English Studies in Canada*, 11:4 (December 1985), 438-49, for a fuller discussion of this concept, into which both Stevens and Nicolas fit closely.

[11] Interview, *Châtelaine*, February 1983.

[12] See an unpublished paper read by Kathryn Slott at "Anne Hébert: A *Table Ronde*," MLA, 1985, for fuller development of Hébert's gender-linked topographies.

[13] Gayle K. Fujita ("'to attend the sound of stone': The Sensibility of Silence in *Obasan*" [*MELUS*, 1987, forthcoming]) discusses the peculiarly Japanese sensibility of the look, and of a certain way of paying attention, finding that the Canadian-Japanese is sufficiently similar to the American-Japanese sensibility to make her sense of ethnic background usable in accounting for *Obasan* in culturally Japanese terms (see also her discussion of the key Japanese children's story "Momotaro"), much as Goody accounts for it in literary Japanese terms. Together they, along with Gottlieb, provide a necessary supplement to my reading in "Canadian" terms.

[14] There is another community of women alluded to in Naomi's very name; almost the only book of the Old Testament to provide an affirmative paradigm of female bonding (and even that one has to be read rather selectively) is of course the Book of Ruth. That Naomi is probably the *only* woman's name to be usable in English, Hebrew (in which it means "sweetness," "blessed," or "my joy"), *and* Japanese (Tanizaki has a novel, recently translated, called *Naomi*, but the name means, in Japanese, "direct, beautiful") probably dictated its choice, and thus Kogawa's chiasmic reversal of the roles of Ruth (the biblical daughter-in-law) and Naomi, but resonances of Keats' Ruth who, in tears, "sighed for home amidst the alien corn" are likely also. See Fujita and Goody for a fuller discussion of the parallels with the Book of Ruth.

[15] Neil B. Bishop, "Distance, point de vue, voix et idéologie dans *Les fous de Bassan* d'Anne Hébert," *Voix et images*, 9:2 (Winter 1984), 113-29, comments on the balancing of the collective masculine voice of the town against the collective feminine voice of Olivia's mothers and grandmothers.

N.B.: A translation into French of *Obasan* is underway; there has been for some time a Japanese translation, under the somewhat misleading title of *Ushinawareta sokoku* (i.e., *The Lost Native* [or *Ancestral*] *Land*).

SANTIAGO FISHERMAN & SULTRY AFTERNOON

M. Macfarlane

Ashwan listens for the fish
he wants to take
still easy in the reeds,
mud song and minnows

his boat, a carved trunk
rotting at one end
leans sideways into the water
unable to help it

turning the blurred sky dark
for all that's beneath —

fish eyes, histories of fins
enticing Ashwan innocently in

A sunfilled day. Crumbs
wash in from my plates
as I scrape sand over them
at the water's edge

watching the women spread cut reeds
on rocks to dry, to weave them into mats
that will still smell of water weed
and fish eggs

They call out to Ashwan in tsutuhil,
language of little birds, giggling

Don't fall in
as he leans out farther than ever
watching, cupping an ear
to listen to his fish.

POEM: 40

John Baglow

(for rgb)

i.

so all of it strange,
high and dry,
i leave myself
whatever this body and mind,
get out of the tower
window. get out,
where the sun is the same,
walk down the air stairs
to some piece of a continent.

this is real, takes
a long time though, believe.

and you, first at the
point (i guess) of no
return, this day
still ours,
all its odd shadows.

ii.

hell, why's he always around here,
bush car
and his skull decal ? drives you nuts,
i know, all this talk,
must be some
teenage hero the way
i do go on, yeah,
go on. all the time.

iii.

you. me. i, that is,
and you. one pair
of ol' blue jeans
gone in the knees.

csny, clapton, all that
good stuff. ungodly
surface we walk on
these days,
and don't
look down.

BETTY

Erin Mouré

O darkness & the empty moons, women
speaking light words into the cups of each other's fingers.
Or the mouth that fills a whole room, whispering
black air, not saliva, & not im/
pertinence.
We are here forever, unspoken, our undershirts stick in the room's heat,
stick between the breasts, in the flat place over the bone
that holds the chest
from tearing open, like the metal traps' cold tensity
where we laid them rusted in the city river,
drown-set for muskrat
Our small hands frozen, without fingers, claws of ice holding stiff snouts of fur,
strange sprung words leaking

into our sentences.
"*A-girls*," the 2-year-old girl called out at the supper table.
Let's not say "Grace" again, she said, let's say "Betty."
In the second public grade of school there were
5 Johns & 3 Debbies, 3 Darlenes, 2 Tims,
most of them grew up called Didi or Evan, & I stared out the window
at the racks of bicycles, tipped any way over, flat prairie line-scape,
the one consistent image I have of school.

Why are so many women lonely, empty as the inside of bicycles, as
the mouths using all the room,

the boys in their tight jeans &
slimness that will leave them in their 22nd year,
the boys & their hard laugh who is tougher,
boys getting at each other's love, thru the inside
of women, their intermediary, their confessional.

I want to speak sexually of one thing — not male love
but physical knowing: the distance
between the breastbone & the palm, the two
important parts of the body.
Where the water runs in the long veins, curving thru space.
The palm where you can dive in & drink & never come up again,
& forgive no one, & feel, as you break the surface —
your head wet, streaming, smelling faintly of milk or oranges.

NOCTURNE

C. M. Donald

first there were the satisfactions of loving,
late at night, falling asleep round-edged;

then there was the release of sex
grudging and perfunctory perhaps but effective;

for awhile the mock resolution of rows
dissolving into tears, tiredness and rest;

but now the futility, no ends, not
trust enough to give up control and sleep;

reading and not reading in the small hours;

will not cry.

A SPACE TO PLAY IN; OR, TELLING THE (W)HOLE STORY

*The Recent Poetry of Robert Gibbs**

Susan Rudy Dorscht

"What's your dad do?" I asked him.
"Oh, I don't call him that," Tibby said.
"What do you call him? Isn't he your dad?"
"He's Mr. Coghill. That's what I call him. That's what we all call him. That's what you'll have to call him. Flowers Coghill, that's his name, but we just call him Mr."
"But what is he?"
"He's the father."
"But what does he do?"
"He doesn't do anything. He's a poet."
"Oh," I said. "Does he make up lots of it?"
"Lots and lots, all the time."
(Gibbs, *A Mouth Organ for Angels* 40)

And I must make do
again with words. (Gibbs, *All This Night Long* 11)

across such gaps as I leave in the score
you singing must throw your own bridges.
(Gibbs, *The Tongue Still Dances* 81)

IN A 1986 REVIEW ARTICLE for *Canadian Literature* Maritime writer, poet, editor, critic, teacher (and gourmet cook) Robert Gibbs reminds us of an aesthetics his poems have always suggested, that

> poetry is language. Language is physical and metaphysical, opaque and transparent, static and dynamic, discrete and continuous. . . . There is the guise of transparency — the poet says, "Look, I'm telling you straight." There is the guise of opacity — the poet says, "Look, I'm not *telling* you anything." ("Chinese Jars" 180)

In his most recent work, Gibbs adopts this "guise of transparency." He writes a poetry that draws attention to its own constructedness. He says, with the speaker

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in a very early poem, "In the Valley of the Sixth Patriarch," "See how every poem / in the end / turns into an alphabet song" (*The Road From Here* 23).

The "alphabet song" has often been an underlying, if not an obvious, subject in Robert Gibbs' poetry and his prose. Lines in the poem "All this night long," for example,

> All this night long and longer
> I've been . . . slogging . . . to
> make connections more connected to say
> Hey you there insisting you are
> there Hey I have you here (*All This Night Long* 8),

or in "For Ralph Gustafson Writing on Pierre Laporte" — "somewhere a man taps at a poem / too faint almost to hear / yet in his silences / I can half discern the shapes / he has found no words for" (*A Kind of Wakefulness* 13) — indicate what has always been Gibbs' interest in language as a material process.

In writing of this kind, it is the absence (what he calls, in the following as yet unpublished poem, "word-holes") rather than the presence (the "whole" story) which is articulated:

> Telling the Whole Story
>
> She's at it again with her scissors
> the storyteller shearing out words
> Look I say as I gather them up
> a whole lovely lexicon Yes
>
> she says But they have to go Look
> here's curd and belly and whistle fringe
> and scuttle lovely words But they won't
> do she says They won't do
> Brine and slew and spinning watchword and
> jumpsuit cringe and strangle They
> won't do They won't do The way you're going
> you won't have anything left
>
> So why this snowstorm on the carpet?
> To make it true she says To make
> the story true Now her pages catch
> into each other word-holes
>
> join and unstarch her paper unsign
> its signs But it's just a story you're writing
> after all isn't it? All the more reason
> she says All the more reason.

Even the form of this poem points out the holes in the whole story (the wholes in the hole story)? Much of Gibbs' work offers the openness of the gap or break in

the line rather than the closed certainty of the comma or period. The lack of punctuation in fact signifies the open-endedness of story. It is the absence signified by these open spaces which allows the presence of the black marks on the page to approach meaning.

Like the title of his 1980 League of Canadian Poets pamphlet, *A Space to Play In*, "Telling the Whole Story" suggests that the storyteller (a woman, significantly) is one who participates in "shearing out words," making a space, literally, to play in, where signs may be "unsigned." This open space of unsigned signs, of un/author/ized writing, may be interpreted as a feminine space, in opposition to the starched-closed structures available in masculine discourse. Where the patriarchal, author/itative voice of the poet would impose unity, coherence, singularity — "Look I say as I gather them up / a whole lovely lexicon" — the space of this woman's story is the place of the lexicon of holes, the place of the gap, the tear — "She's at it again with her scissors . . . shearing out words."

Similarly, the central and yet continually decentred "figure" in *A Mouth Organ for Angels* is, as "she" is in "Telling the Whole Story," a woman, or rather, a young girl. In an extremely feminist gesture, the protagonist Madelaine is renamed "Iris" by her grandmother, and thereby given an "eye-dentity" and a voice with which to speak. The spaces of both "Telling the Whole Story" and *A Mouth Organ for Angels* become open spaces of word play, of semantic process, of narrative possibility. As the storyteller in "Telling the Whole Story" punningly answers the poet's pleas to look at the lovely lexicon of words, "Yes . . . But they have to *go*. . . . They won't *do* / she says They won't *do*" (my italics).

The "true" story in this poem, as in much of Gibbs' work, is "true" only in the sense that it is aware of words as material things: "Brine and slew and spinning watchword and / jumpsuit / cringe and strangle . . . so why this snowstorm on the carpet?" Because the poem works by undoing story, by demonstrating that the "whole" story is made up, not of "true" events or experiences, but of pieces of language which are like "word-holes" that "join and unstarch" the paper, we are made aware of the similarly constructed nature of the poem in which this story of "cutting-up" stories appears.

The Tongue Still Dances (1985), Gibbs' collection of new and selected poems, takes its title and epigraph from R. Murray Schafer's *The Tuning of the World*:

> But that the tongue danced and still continues to dance with the sound-scape, there can be no doubt. Poets and musicians have kept the memory alive, even if modern man has acquiesced into bespectacled muttering.

As this epigraph indicates, there is, in the collection, a distrust of the authority of the written word which leads to "bespectacled muttering" and a desire that the poet like the musician "dance," make a gesture, not a referential utterance. The poet should be one who says, with the title of a poem in *All This Night Long*,

"'Mr. Speaker, Sir, May I At Least Be Permitted to Complete My Gesture' (an unfound poem from the Klein Symposium, Ottawa 1974)."

Both the first section and the first poem of the collection are entitled "Figures in a Wind," a phrase which signifies a paradox: the poet wants both "figures" (metaphors? dancers? women? reference?) and the "wind" (air[s] with [out of?] which to speak? nothingness?). The poem "figures" in an aesthetics of wind ("nothing" but words) in the sense that it asks the question, what is the relation between poet and audience, poem and reader?

> Your audience girl halflights that
> glimmer across your hall and deepen
>
> its pit Is it that you hold them
> or let them go?
>
> . . . Or are they
> the animators? (9)

The poem is "figured" as a female space (a "girl") and the reader becomes the audience before "her." But does the "you" as poem hold "them" as readers, or does the reader make the meaning in the poem — "are they the animators?" — the poem asks. The question raised by the poem seems to be answered in the words, "It's an interchange / then something passed from them to you / and you to them"; meaning arises out of the interaction between text and reader. But with the final self-conscious realization that the poet too becomes both a writer and a reader of his or her own poems — "something passed . . . to . . . us I mean for I'm sitting here with them" — the question becomes reproblematized and can only "end" with the narrator as poet as reader "sitting here" listening for "what's you in this music and what's not . . . an unlullibying rocking that rocks / you both and rocks this curtain / wall of light and night." The curtain which is a wall of both (paradoxically) light and night is, for the poet, the words themselves, the figures that both keep the real girl (/poem) from him and yet offer her to us.

Another poem in the collection, "Who asked me to be a reader of entrails," parodies the questions the serious reader of poems asks the writer:

> He asked me what the signs were of a late
> spring, a hot summer dearth
> I said I could not tell though they
> were all around I was sure
>
> He asked me where I'd look Was there
> an almanac of sorts or did we have our own
>
> old Indian I said there must be one of each
> from what I'd heard. (11)

In order to interpret the signs, we have traditionally looked to the Word/words (of men, God[s]), living authorities (our own old Indians), speech, or to dictionaries (almanacs of sorts), which are simply other signs, other words. But the poet in this poem is uncertain of the authority of speech (he can *not* tell) and of writing (he cannot *tell* what the signs mean).

"Why be a poet in a needy time" is a three-part poem which, while seeking alternatives to the writing of poetry, finds words with which to write the poem:

> I could as easily be drawing on this sun-lit
> page stroking short strokes lines one line
>
> maybe sinuous enough to bring to so much light
> that blind girl with her cup her tray her book. (13)

As in so many of the poems in this collection, the speaker is self-consciously present as poet before the sun-lit page which signifies both blankness, emptiness, absence and the fullness, presence and light which his lines create. But this is a poem which insists on speaking the illusion of its own presence:

> Her
> transmitting fingers take from her page what
> may be as strange to her as she to me Would
> such a figure raised by dark marks
>
> as sunlight call out to her as I do now
> call out to this room this darkness? (13)

"The Pines of Route 7" is another poem which insists that we recognize the illusion of the referential and instead delight in the material qualities of language, that words be the things of poems:

> They're building a new bypass
> from the cutoff a road
> back of all roads back of
> the river and riverside places
> Martinon Ingleside Ononette Nerepis. (18)

The road back of all roads, the new bypass, is the other, or alternative route we can travel when we read a poem. It is a road which bypasses the centre of town, the referential, and seeks new names (the signifier, not the signified) to fix onto:

> I know the road I go over and over
> house to home and back again Riding
> its rises and falls I'm finding
> new names to fix onto where I am
> in spaces where I am in time. (18)

The road we know we go, over and over, is the old road, on which poetry is the naming of experience. But here the poem moves, not from real place to real place

(like a travel brochure) but from "house to home and back again," from word to word, each connoting (ostensibly) a similar place, and yet present, linguistically, as difference. The poem that is written out of such a journey is a poem of new names that seek to re/place the old poetic ones:

> For the white pines that loom over scrub
> and scour the old poetic ones *Noble*
> *Sentinel* and *Lofty* And for this last
> I love red and soft-shouldered
> *Lonesome.* (19)

The previous authority of the old poetic words is suggested by the fact that they are capitalized and italicized. But these poems are poems that "scrub and scour" the old poetic words so that they become simply other words.

"A Morning's Service" is a five-part poem that insists on the tentativeness, the partialness, and the incompleteness of story. The poem "begins" with a line that suggests a continuation, another telling: "that's the start of it again" (50). Each of the five sections ends with a line that qualifies, and undermines, the apparent narrative certainty of the previous lines: "this is how the story will be for now" (50). Another poem entitled (ambiguously) "March past" begins with a line that articulates, in another way, the outward, disseminating movement of story: "There are these departures" (58). Following a fairly straightforward narrative, the poem again qualifies itself, and self-reflexively comments on the nature of poetry in the final lines:

> These departures
> These breaks in the rhythm
> that are the rhythm. (58)

Both of these poems suggest that it is the unexpected, startling, incomplete aspects of story, the "breaks" in the rhythm, that are the story, that are the rhythm.

The last poem I would like to look at is entitled "The Song I Have for You Is One Befitting Your Gravity." This is a poem about the gaps, slippages, and silences which occur in poetry, in "song":

> and when you singer sing this song
> I am making for you you must foot
> your own way down a half-runged shifty
> ladder. (81)

The metaphor of the foot suggests both a careful stepping and the kind of feet which occur in lines of poetry. The reader must in fact be prepared to (re)write ("foot") his or her own poem ("half-runged shifty ladder"). The reader is offered a space of inconsistency or of (w)holeness where any transcendence is of his or her own making:

> across such gaps as I leave in the score
> you singing must throw your own bridges. (81)

The poet writing, like the composer creating, cannot secure the meaning of the poem/song; the writer cannot remain present to/in his or her "own" words for they are no longer (never were?) his or her own:

> my pitching skittering notations at you
> or reaching back a hand as now I would
> may not keep you from slipping on
> slippery edges. (81)

In these lines the poet warns the reader, or rather, warns the overly serious reader ("This Song I Have for You is One Befitting Your Gravity") of the "slippery edges" of language, and of the inevitable play of meaning which occurs in any discourse.

Many of Gibbs' poems work hard to remind us that poetry, being made of language, is always playful and material. They offer reader and/as writer a space to play in which is very like the field in Robert Kroetsch's work, a place "where (how) it grows," an open field of unexplored/unexplained possibilities (Mandel 7). As "A Dog In A Dream" Part II suggests, the poem should be the place of "a squeak and its echo / with nothing between," the poet, "a mouse in the works of the grandfather clock / whistling hickory dickory / arranging and deranging / his spring-filled nest" (31). Many of the poems in *The Tongue Still Dances* and in Gibbs' work generally teach us to arrange and derange, to construct and deconstruct, that nothing between. We may also reconstruct the bridges between the squeak and its echo, climb up or down the half-runged shifty ladder of language and construct our own "foot"holds, if we will.

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LOOKING FOR LEACOCK

Raymond Souster

for Richard Woollatt

As it happens we've picked a hot July day
to track down the elusive Peter Sibbald Brown
and his equally elusive Paget Press
in the countryside north of Toronto.
But looking has to be at least half the fun,
and as it turns out we have plenty before driving our car
up an endless lane and parking
in front of his farmhouse. The welcome's cordial,
and we leave an hour later clutching manuscripts, final-
page-proofs
as if we'd almost won a victory.
So, Duncan Campbell Scott, you'll have to wait
another year or two or three to get decently published,
and you, Bliss Carman, will have to wait even longer,
it seems there's no respect or little or it left,
when it has to compete with the god of the dollar bill.

Back in town we eat on Sutton West's main street,
then wonder what to do for an hour.
I know, Dick says, there's the church up here
where Leacock's buried,
I'm teaching *Sunshine Sketches* this fall and it would be
useful
to have a picture of his gravestone if only to show the
class
he's a real person who lived and died, the students think
these authors
are unreal, almost inhuman. So before we know it
we've glided to the top end of town, cross a bridge,
go up a country road, and at the top of a rise
see the tower of a small church, St. George's, Sibbald
Point
(the sign says outside the gates), and I'm surprised
how small
and delicately-structured it sits in park-like surround-
ings,
noting as well it's only thirty yards from Lake Simcoe

at the top of a slight rise of land. As the tombstone of
Leacock
is what we're looking for, we spread out to our left
through the finely-cut grass of the very large church-yard,
but go all the way to the end without finding what we're after.
Then, doubling back, we find several Leacocks buried,
but no Stephen, even see that *Jalna*'s Mazo de la Roche
is laid to rest here, an unexpected surprise.

Still hoping to get a clue,
and not too unhappy to escape the white-hot glare
of the early afternoon sun, we stroll into the church's
narthex,
then into the sanctuary itself, childhood-tiny,
finely decorated with wood-carvings, and I fall in love
with it
right away, could sit here till Sunday service
begins in another three days.
But there's nothing anywhere to help us find Stephen's
gravestone
except a leaflet which tells us he's definitely buried
out there in the church-yard, and gives us the interesting
picture
of Captain Thomas Sibbald, R.N., who while supervising
the building of the present stone church (c. 1876),
observed the old Royal Navy custom at eight bells each day
of issuing a rum ration to the workmen,
who in turn drank Queen Victoria's health
to complete the scenario. But there's no rum for us today
to ease the heat or anything else, and we make a second,
last attempt to find our evasive tombstone.

Finally, when about to give up for good,
discover it's on the back of another relative's stone,
unusual to say the least, but perhaps a final irony
from our one great humourist. Dick now gets busy,
takes three or four photos, just to make sure after all
our work;
then we leave the quiet of this country afternoon
to the ghosts of the ladies and gentlemen
who only wait our leaving to take leisurely strolls
with top hats and silk parasols up and down between the rows
of their friends and neighbours of long-forgotten Bourchier's
Mills, now Sutton West:

who finally gather around the chained-about plot
of Susan Sibbald and her seven sons, exchange a few pleasantries
before moving on among the trees where they seem to vanish
ghost-like,
or perhaps are only swallowed up
in the magic shimmer of a sheltering heat haze.

ARKS

Russell Thornton

A river runs chasing its stillness

A leaf flying away in a postage stamp
sending itself back to itself

The grass is searching through the grass

The cresting sea waves are a crazed construction —
gulls rise out of it crying ruin, ruin

And the travelling eye of light
is focusing through the rain
floating vast transparent arks in the shoreless air.

THE ELEPHANT IN THE NEXT ROOM

*Anatomy of a Long Work**

Hugh Hood

I HAVE OFTEN REPLIED in humorous terms to inquiries about how it feels to live with a literary conception of great magnitude lodged in my head for thirty years, perhaps forty years. The metaphor usually developed is that of dwelling in a smallish apartment consisting of drawing room, study, hall, bedroom and bath, and kitchen, with the looming presence of some enormous living creature, woolly mammoth or whale, persistently suggested by noises and ever-present shadows in rooms adjacent to the one that I happen to be occupying.

While I juggle happily with my rubber duckling in the tub, sounds of heavy footfalls echo around the steamy bathroom tiles, an occasional trumpeting call making itself heard. Over solitary breakfast taken in the nook next the refrigerator, I hear snufflings and the wheezes of great lungs. Perhaps the strongest statement of this metaphor comes with intimations of evening when I find myself seated comfortably in the softly lighted drawing room, reading or listening to Haydn or just relaxing, eyes half-shut, as the digital clock on the record player shows later and later times. I am separated from the study by a pair of inadequately latched, glass-panelled doors, and I am certain that the big fellow is in there moving restlessly about. I hear the swish of one tail-like appendage, then of two, and I realize what sort of beast this is. Besides the caudal appendage it possesses a forward or nasal pendant. It isn't a woolly mammoth; it isn't a whale; it's an elephant, and it's in the darkened study, all of it there in the next room. I never feel fear at this realization; what I feel is the urgent need to persuade the creature into the light so that I can see all of it. I get up and throw open the connecting doors, and there stands the enormous being in the dark, backing and filling, turning massive head with hesitation towards the soft light, reflecting ivory. I see what I am to become, the mahout, the little guy naked to the waist except for a floppy straw hat, who feeds and waters the great animal and leads it to and fro, infinitely more the possession of the great animal whom he leads than the enormous breathing dreaming creature is his.

* This paper was first read at an interdisciplinary symposium on Hugh Hood called "Entering the New Age" (London, Ontario, 21-22 November 1986); symposium proceedings will appear *in toto* in *WLWE*.

I wasn't sure at the start but I am now in a position to reveal that we are in the presence of an Indian elephant, not an African, the ears, the stance of the forefeet now fully illuminated. I believe too that so far as I can judge through the shadows which still envelop the body this elephant is male.

I should perhaps ask myself how far this metaphor is tenable, how far indeed any metaphor delivers useful truth. Imagine if you will a body of literature from which all metaphor has been excluded. What would that be like? Let us take metaphor in the broadest sense to mean the detection and formal expression of similarities between different things such that one can be called by the name of another: the Fifth Column, the elephant in the next room. Does the device confer any sort of truth? No names may be predicated of God, declare Aquinas and the greatest of the mystics, except analogically. God isn't a Father but is like a Father, like a Mother too in many senses. How do we assure ourselves that these analogies are apt, that they promote our understanding of the Being signified? When I tell you that my long work is like an elephant in a darkened room next to this, what am I conveying? A partial and ambiguous view? A misleading poeticism?

It might be thought that since *The New Age/Le nouveau siècle* seems to be formed in twelve parts of which the first was published about September 27, 1975, the work as a whole belongs to the middle and later parts of my life as a writer. I had after all been publishing my work since 1958, seventeen years earlier. *The Swing in the Garden* was my tenth book. Certainly the books which immediately preceded it seemed at that date to bear no relation to it, particularly the novel *You Cant Get There From Here.* Such an assumption, it now seems to me, would be exactly wrong. I was getting hints and flashes and intuitions of the presence in my darkened study, or down the hall at the other end of the apartment, of an enormous work, for many years previously.

I am totally and unalterably convinced that the *whole* thing, trunk, tusks, tail, was present from the very beginning. I think that *The New Age/Le nouveau siècle* began to rise in my person, my nature, from the earliest moments I addressed the typewriter keys, that suggestions of the work will be detected in most of the stories written around 1960 which appeared in my first book, the story collection *Flying a Red Kite* of 1962.

I find there the profuse and fundamentally comic view of Toronto as the city displayed itself historically from the 1920's through the late 1950's, in the semi-fictional memoir narratives, "Recollections of the Works Department" and "Silver Bugles, Cymbals, Golden Silks." I find there the place name "Stoverville" which denotes an imaginary pole of my experience of which an equally imaginary Toronto or Montreal may form another pole from time to time. When I first, idly and casually, chose the name Stoverville for my town of pastoral idyll and country peace, at the time of writing the story "Three Halves of a House" in

1960, I had no idea that Stoverville would underpin *A New Athens* (1977), *The Scenic Art* (1984), and *The Motor Boys in Ottawa* (1986).

When I took a second glance in the direction of Stoverville in the story "Bicultural Angela" written in February 1966 as part of the interrelated collection of stories *Around the Mountain: Scenes From Montréal Life*, I gave the title character an education at Trinity College in the University of Toronto, made her a Stoverville native, showed her in transit to Montreal, where I had already settled another Stovervillian, Maura Boston. This same range of movement, Toronto-Stoverville-Montreal, has remained a constant property of my work, with occasional excursions to London or Winnipeg or Zurich or Venice permitted, until the present day, as *The Motor Boys in Ottawa* demonstrates. There we see Matthew Goderich and his Edie in transit, in the same pilgrimage endured earlier by Angela Mary Robinson and Maura Boston, both of whom seem now to have accomplished some sort of return to Stoverville.

Preoccupation with Stoverville goings-on naturally led me to display them on a larger canvas in my next examination of the place and its meanings, in the novel *A Game of Touch*, in which Jake Price attempts to fly from Stoverville and all that it implies, especially the manners and morals of Robinson Court and environs, only to find them disguised and then transformed in the person of Marie-Ange, anti-heroine of the novel. This brilliant lady rises miraculously like Aphrodite from a Montreal bathtub in which Jake, like an enchanted acolyte, administers a much-needed shower, directing the cleansing waters all over the body of the goddess as day breaks and extraordinary recognition occurs. You can't get away from Stoverville, Jake discovers.

I suspect that we haven't seen the last of Jake Price, just as we now realize that we hadn't seen the last of Duncan McCallum or "the elegant bond salesman," earlier satellites of Angela Mary Robinson. It seems appropriate that another key element in this growing anatomy should reveal itself in *A Game of Touch*, the city of Ottawa which together with Toronto, Stoverville, and Montreal — the empire of the St. Lawrence — forms the golden triangle of central Canada.

THE CITY, THE PEOPLE, and the federal presence in Ottawa seem to have situated themselves at an apex of this golden triangle sometime in 1966, a time which proved an extraordinarily fruitful one for me and for my dream-elephant. I'm an unreconstructed and unashamed federalist and centralist. I believe in Canada as a great and united country with a rich and generous and complex people. The preparations for Centennial Year and for Expo 67 impressed me very much and seem to have unloosed special imaginative powers directed towards preserving in art what Canada felt like in 1966, 1967, 1968. It was a

totally different feeling — this is worth noting — than the nightmarish sequence of emotions which overcame our neighbours to the south at the same historical moment. Bliss was it in that 1966 dawn to be alive in Canada; it was a time when it became clear to me that this is the best country in the world to live in. I've never seen any reason to change my mind, despite the tumult and turmoil which overtook us in the later 1960's.

In a lot of ways *The Motor Boys in Ottawa* treats the years from 1966 to 1970 as the pivot, the turning point, in Canadian life. Let's see what I can show to support this notion.

On October 15, 1966, Peter Martin accepted my story sequence *Around the Mountain* for publication in June 1967, precisely when I wanted it to come out, in the middle of both Expo and the Centennial festivities. Less than a week later, on October 21, Harcourt Brace, Jovanovitch, of New York, accepted my novel *The Camera Always Lies* for publication in September 1967. These two books complement each other in an almost ideal way, a collection of stories and a novel, a book about the most minute details of life in Montreal and a book about Hollywood where I had never been. A publisher just getting started in Toronto on the smallest scale, and the enormous, world-famous New York publisher of writers like T. S. Eliot and Sinclair Lewis.

My whole artistic enterprise was starting to come into the light in my own mind. I saw with accelerating excitement how the thing hung together. I began to understand that what I was doing somehow existed as *representative* of the whole of Canadian life. I began to have a sense of mission. I began to see my work in Wordsworth's superb phrase as "a leading from above, a something given." I came to see that I was being proffered what seems to me a providential lead through those "fallings from us, vanishings; / blank misgivings of a creature / moving about in worlds not realised," whose obscure misleadings I had celebrated in the first story in my first published book. This sense of vocation grew upon me in the closing months of 1966. Ideas crowded in on me so thick and fast (as John Dryden said) that I could scarcely find time to deal justly with them. And besides, whoever gets two of his cherished darlings of the imagination accepted — and by such publishers — within a single week?

Stimulated by this sense of acceptance and mission, I conceived the idea for *A Game of Touch*, which I started to write on December 1, 1967. I completed a draft on my birthday the following year, April 30, which also happens to be Matt Goderich's birthday. The book was meant to put forward in as many modes as possible a group of images of reconciliation, merging of opposed forces, most publicly perhaps in the scenes depicting the working out of medicare legislation in a series of federal/provincial negotiations. A dull subject for a novel? It's only dull if Canadians are dull, because it is as Canadian a subject as there is. The federal/provincial negotiation issuing in a compromise settlement at an important

conference — that's our unique contribution to political theory and practice. It may be dull but by God it's us!

While I was getting the ideas for *A Game of Touch* and writing the first draft, I was reading the middle volumes of Anthony Powell's twelve-volume series of novels, *A Dance to the Music of Time*. Powell had reached the mid-point of his narrative with *The Kindly Ones*, 1962. It was by then clear that with this loosing of the Eumenides upon the world the action of Powell's series would pivot around the events of World War II. The immediately following books showed me that Mr. Powell was developing his series as in effect a quartet of trilogies, with the books devoted to World War II carrying the action away in a descending downhill rush towards the final trilogy which was to appear in the early 1970's.

This arrangement suggested a number of fundamental principles which might be embodied in the parts of a long work. It must have been during Centennial Year that I saw at last where my proper direction lay. The extraordinary euphoria and sense of achievement which the celebrations of that year yielded to a writer living in Montreal, summering in pastoral eastern Ontario, publishing in Toronto and New York, teaching at *l'université de Montréal*, began to urge me to attempt something really big. A testament, a witness, a celebration, a leading from above, a something given.

Apart from my wife Noreen, the first person I ever said anything about this to was my friend Dennis Duffy, sometime in 1968 or 1969. I remember saying to Dennis that I was starting to get strong signals in my imagination about some very large thing existing in its murky recesses. This was just when Dennis was working on his essay "Grace: the Novels of Hugh Hood" which appeared in *Canadian Literature*, 47, Winter 1971.

Then on February 23, 1969, at 1:00 P.M., I stuck a sheet of bond paper in my typewriter and typed out this:

> NB: THIS IS THE FIRST THING I'VE PUT ON PAPER ABOUT THIS PROJECT, WHICH MAY TURN OUT TO BE THE GRAND OVERRIDING WORK OF MY LIFE FROM THE TIME I'M 46 YEARS OLD TO THE TIME I'M 69 OR THEREABOUTS, AS FOLLOWS:
>
> Possible enormous twelve-volume *roman-fleuve*. A combination twelve-volume novel-book of annals-memoir. My reason for conceiving it is that I'm so much at the center of life in Canada now, seem to know everybody or know somebody who knows everybody, without being at the center of power myself. This would be the first time such a book (Saint-Simon, Proust, Powell) has ever been done in Canada.

I felt like God, you see. No doubt about it. I felt like God overseeing the doings of the Leviathan or the Elephant, the giant animal, the body politic. A crazed ambition, really loony, the act of an egomaniac? Here's a man who thinks he's Almighty God? No. I hadn't got myself mixed up with God. I thought God was moving in me and I still do.

I went back and looked harder at what Mr. Powell was doing. He had written five novels in the 1930's. World War II had interrupted his career and he didn't get back to the novel for a decade. Sometime about 1949 he must have begun work on his series; the first volume appeared in 1951 when its author was forty-five years old. He lived to complete his series in 1975 at the age of seventy, in the same publishing season in which *The Swing in the Garden* came out. Twenty-five years, I told myself. It takes twenty-five years. Time I bestirred myself.

THE SWING IN THE GARDEN swam into consciousness in the most remarkable way. In early 1969 my notes describe the opening book in some detail.

Composed 1974/75. I: Depression, 1925-1935. Narrator is 0-10 years old.

I'd got the time span approximately correct, and the age of the Narrator, to whom I hadn't yet given a name. I knew just about when the book should be published, on a twenty-five-year timetable, but one very peculiar circumstance intervened to keep the book from surfacing in my imagination. I had a marvellous idea for quite a different novel, which I knew that I would have to write before I attempted the first book in the series. *You Cant Get There From Here* seemed so vivid in the foreground of my thinking, and took on flesh so quickly as I thought about it, that it simply had to be written.

I was now composing two novels in my head at the same time. A close reader of *You Cant Get There From Here* (1972) and *The Swing in the Garden* (1975) will spot how intimately the two books are connected as opposite poles of the same consciousness. I could not have written either book if I hadn't been thinking of the other one at the same time. A wholly imaginary, non-factual community somewhere in the world but not necessarily anywhere versus Summerhill Avenue in Toronto in the early 1930's. A bitterly tragic action of betrayal and intrigue versus a child's discovery of sweet and ever-widening freedom. Chaos versus safety, tragedy versus beatitude in the garden.

Both books issue in the end of something. "It made for a long fall." I conceived *You Cant Get There From Here* as an apocalyptic work. *The Swing in the Garden* begins in the garden of Eden and the swing is a growing inclination towards the long fall of the closing line. I had in mind the poles of Genesis and Apocalypse, according to Northrop Frye the termini of departure and return in all literature, of which the Holy Scriptures are the divinely ordained model. I wrote my apocalypse first, then swung around to the beginnings of things. "In those days we used to have a red-and-white garden swing set up in the backyard beside the garage . . ."

I wrote *You Cant Get There From Here* between February 1 and June 18, 1970. The book flowed out of my mind like maple syrup from a ten-gallon can. The whole book was right there, almost on the end of my tongue. I wrote twenty pages a week, four pages daily in a five-day working week, and never missed a day for the first ten weeks. Never had to pause and think out the next sentence or the next turn of the action. It is tremendously exciting to compose a book at that pace with never a detail to search for, never any pause in the outpouring of ideas. It is now, sixteen years later, perfectly obvious to me that *The Swing in the Garden* was as it were standing in line behind the other novel, pushing it out into the light, like the second child of twins kicking in the birth canal. These novels should always be read as nearly simultaneously as possible.

You Cant Get There From Here was published by Oberon Press of Ottawa, with whom I issued ten books through the 1970's, in September 1972 to uniformly favourable reviews, better notices than any of my other early novels. By this time I was talking to Michael Macklem of Oberon about a proposal for a long series. I have always felt enormously encouraged by something Mr. Macklem said to me during these talks. "You write them, and we'll publish them." Very few publishers would dare to give a blanket commitment like that without having seen so much as a page of the proposed work. As late as the publication date of *You Cant Get There From Here* I had nothing on paper, barring a few pages of notes, not even an opening paragraph, yet Michael Macklem made that commitment before I had anything to go on except a terrible ferment in my head. By May 13, 1972, I knew the titles of the first three novels in the series and had some notion of their structural implications. I wasn't sure about the fourth book but even at that date I knew that Number Five was to be called *The Scenic Art* and that Number Six would have something to do with cars. I thought that it might even be called *Cars, Cars, Cars.*

Now for some heavy drama. I can't for the life of me recover the precise date when this took place, but I know it must have been quite awhile before May 1972 and I know that it was on an afternoon of extremely good weather in spring or summer, dry, sunny, breezy, windows of the car well open, perhaps in mid-1971 at about 4:00 P.M. Noreen and I were driving along Queen Mary Road in Montreal towards the borders of Hampstead in our comfortable old Chevy Nova sedan. There are a lot of traffic lights and stop signs in that district so we were going very slowly. We came to the stop sign at the corner of Queen Mary and Stratford Road. I could feel the breeze ruffling my hair, at that time worn very short. I turned to Noreen and said, "You remember that old garden swing we had when we moved to Hampton Avenue, the one John liked so much? We had it up till last fall, didn't we?"

She said, "We got rid of it in November. It was coming apart."

"It just struck me. That swing would make a terrific image to open my series

with. The colours are good, red and white, and besides we used to have one in our backyard in Toronto when I was just a baby."

"So?"

"Well, you see how it all links up. I could show how father and son enjoyed the same motions thirty years apart, no, forty years. It makes a nice point about ordinary life. You can go forwards or backwards but you always come to rest in the same spot."

"I think you might do something with that," she said.

As soon as I had that picture in my visual imagination, I was off and running. The title came immediately afterwards. I have to have a title right at the beginning or I can't fill in the blanks. That's why I've chosen the titles for the six books in the series that are still to come.

I was beginning to feel unable to concentrate on anything else but the vessel which was coming over the horizon. I passed the summer of 1972 — the wettest and nastiest summer of recent memory until this year's — with my wife and family at our summer cottage. One midsummer afternoon, instead of taking advantage of momentary good weather, I found myself pacing up and down in the cottage living room, gibbering excitedly to Noreen.

"It has to be an immediately recognizable familiar name, not trendy and not old-fashioned. I couldn't call him Sacheverell, or Dwayne. He isn't an Ambrose or a Bertram. Has to be something which will seem acceptable but not too ordinary or too bizarre, available for current usage for a long while to come."

I think it was Noreen who suggested that we try over the names of the apostles.

"Peter?" I said. "Too common. Andrew? I might be able to use Andrew but not for the Narrator. He isn't Scottish and I don't want reviewers making jokes about canny wee Scots and haggis. Let's see, Bartholomew? Too far out and besides there's already Bartholomew Bandy. That's a name for farce."

"Jude?"

"I don't want a one-syllable name. I might use Philip, but not for the Narrator. What about Matthew?"

"Matthew's an Evangelist."

"Right, but he's also one of the apostles. It's important that he's one of the Evangelists. The name turns up in all the other European languages. Mathieu. Matteo. Matthias. Mathis. Sober but not out-of-date, in fact rather a fashionable name right now. . . . I think I'll call him Matthew . . . hello, Matthew, welcome to the club."

The surname arrived soon afterwards, out of a picture I'd seen as a child in one of our old high school textbooks, an aerial photograph of the town centre of Goderich, Ontario, which was in the form of a great big wheel. This fused the prophet and the evangelist in my Narrator's name. I kept Andrew and Philip as the names for the Narrator's father, who immediately turned into a personage

equal in importance to his son, and for Uncle Philip, not quite as important but longer-lived. The death of Andrew Goderich is the absolute centre of *The New Age/Le nouveau siècle*, and I observe that Uncle Philip is present at his funeral lending a proprietary hand to assist his brother's wife at the graveside.

I chose the name of the Narrator's mother largely as a matter of literary convention, "Is-a-belle" in the precise spelling which simply states that this personage is a great beauty. I had James Joyce's *Ici la belle* of *Finnegans Wake* in mind, as well as the delightful and ill-fated heroine of Henry James' *The Portrait of a Lady*. Now the characters were springing to life in my head. Andrew and Isabelle, Matthew, his brother and sister, Tony and Amanda Louise, Uncle Philip, and the harassed troubled figure of the infant Adam Sinclair (whose name makes a lot of sense to me) who pops up on the second page of *The Swing in the Garden* and has grown like Andrew Goderich into a figure of absolute importance in my story because of what he has meant to the Narrator.

Every year towards the beginning of autumn I type out a short autobiographical summary of what I've been up to in the past year and what I'm about to tackle. At the end of my note for Thursday, October 5, 1972, I find this remark:

> On Tuesday next, the day after Thanksgiving, I will put the outline on paper of the first novel of THE NEW AGE, and I hope to write the opening lines a day or two after that.

I almost always do what I tell myself I'm going to do, but I have to confess that in this case I was out in my prediction by a couple of days. I drew up my scenario a few days later than predicted, on Friday, October 13, probably to defy superstition. I find this little sketch among my notes:

> Draft Scenario: THE SWING IN THE GARDEN. 400 first draft pages. Covers period 1930-1939, and main theme is narrator's become aware of himself as a person. He is called Matthew Goderich, or Matt Goderich.
>
> Five main sections, around eighty pages to a section, as follows:

Then follow the very briefest of remarks about each section, with some pencilled-in additions inserted during the writing of the book, and at the bottom of the page in my scribbled handwriting: "Sketched out Friday, Oct. 13/72." One of the most important details of this plan is the note that I should take two months to write each of the first three sections, finishing up the fourth and fifth sections much more quickly. I would write about forty pages in October, forty in November, to complete the opening section, proceed in December and January to write the second, "going to the movies" section. The same rhythm would apply to the third, "Cornish Road, Moore Park," section.

By the end of March I would, I hoped, be sufficiently in possession of my means that I could finish the book with a rush, doing the "Lazy Bay Grill" part in April, finishing up with the "Toronto Island" conclusion in May 1973. I

followed this plan exactly, and found it a very wise decision to write the opening parts very slowly, at half my accustomed rate of output. For many years I had made it a habit to write four typed, double-spaced pages a day, five days a week. I have sometimes written even faster. *Strength Down Centre* was produced against a tight deadline at a rate of five pages daily, which I found exhausting. I deliberately chose to approach the opening pages of *The Swing in the Garden* very gingerly. I didn't want to put a foot wrong anywhere. I wanted to take my time and allow what was in my head to come out in its own form and rhythm. It was almost the middle of October. Without forcing the pace I could produce an easy forty pages before Hallowe'en; then I could take things even more slowly and carefully for the next five months, a delightful, luxurious, treat for me. By the end of March 1973 I'd be all pumped up and ready for the sprint to the finish line. And I was certain that once I got the first book down on paper its successors would come along naturally and easily in their turn.

On Sunday afternoon, October 15, 1972, at 1:00 P.M., I sat down and typed out the opening lines of *The Swing in the Garden*, beginning with the words "In those days" as a conscious echo of the beginnings of the Gospel readings that I'd heard every Sunday from the pulpit since I was a baby. "*In ilio tempore.*" The next day was Noreen's birthday, and I could show her the opening four pages of typed manuscript as a kind of birthday present. The whole twelve-volume sequence will in the end be dedicated to her. The first four individual books were dedicated each in turn to our children, the fifth to my sister and her husband, the sixth and most recent to my brother and his wife. I don't claim that I've smuggled Amanda Louise and Tony into those later dedications, but I wouldn't deny it either. The first novel in the series was completed in rough draft on May 28, 1973; the final draft was ready a year later.

My mother had been in failing health for some time in the early seventies. In June of 1974 I went to Toronto and read the whole text of *The Swing in the Garden* to her, one section each afternoon for the inside of a week. I asked a high official at CBC Radio if he could lend me a broadcast quality tape recorder so that I could tape this reading, the only complete reading of a novel I've ever done. He refused on the grounds that the occasion was not sufficiently interesting or important to Canadian literary history or culture. Anybody could come along and make the same request. He couldn't allow CBC equipment to fall into unqualified hands. This seems a pity. Anyway I went ahead, and my mother seemed to take great pleasure in hearing the book evolve from one part to the next. When I had finished on the Friday afternoon she exclaimed, "Well you certainly didn't use me as a character, did you?"

"No," I said. "Isabelle is a lot nicer than you, and Matthew isn't as smart as I am."

We both laughed a lot over that. I got up to leave my mother's room, and after kissing her good-bye I strolled along to the end of the corridor, then turned and called to her, "I'll be back in eighteen months to read the next one to you."

She blew me a kiss. "I'll be waiting," she said.

But I never got to read *A New Athens* to my mother. She died four weeks later in early June 1974. "I'll be waiting," were her final words to me. I could have recited *A New Athens* to her at that point — a work of almost wholly religious conception and execution — or at least I could have given her a lively sketch of its dimensions, but I wouldn't have wanted to tire her and it never occurred to me to do it. I wish I had.

A New Athens was complete in its first draft before *The Swing in the Garden* was published in the fall of 1975. It was with *A New Athens* that I initiated the habit of composing each new novel in the series from January to June, then writing a final draft in the same months of the following year. I see from my annual autobiographical notes of August 30, 1975, that:

> Then between Sunday, January 5th, 1975, and Friday, April 25th, 1975, I wrote the first draft of A NEW ATHENS, the second volume in my series. This is simply a great book, and a gift from heaven.

Imagine how I felt, with *A New Athens* complete in its first draft (my first drafts are always very polished and usually quite publishable) before *The Swing in the Garden* appeared. I felt mighty smug, I can tell you. All through that fall, whenever people asked me what guarantees I could offer of completing such a foolhardy, even presumptuous undertaking, I could respond by saying that I had the next volume drafted and about ready to go. This has almost always been true. I have the seventh book in the series completely drafted at this moment; it could be published as it stands so that if I break my neck tomorrow there will be at least one more book in the series available to its readers. *Tony's Book* will appear in the fall publishing season of 1988, and that's all I'll say about it at this point.

I think I should record, writing on September 26, 1986, that besides a complete version of my seventh volume I have a very full conception of what my eighth book will do. I have the basic idea for the ninth, which makes a giant leap backwards in time and unfolds in a somewhat surprising place. I have a very clear intimation of the long opening section of the eleventh book — where it will take place and what it will lead to — and I have a strong, clear, vigorous conception of the final book, which I could sit down and start to write at this moment.

There is an area of vagueness about Book Ten, though why this should be so I can't even guess. It might turn out to be the best novel of the whole series. It's certainly going to be a novel in which Matt and Edie Goderich's children will take a prominent part.

On the whole, I'd be prepared to claim that the remainder of *The New Age/ Le nouveau siècle* already exists in varying intensities of realization. More than

that, I have to disclose that as the mahout shoves the big fellow's hindquarters into the light, ropy tail lashing him across the face, he notes that the creature's right hind leg is fastened to a stout length of rope, itself fastened to a heavy stake, well secured in the earth. The rope, the stake, the earth supply the forms for the seven or eight books I plan to write after the elephant is safely seated in his own comfortable armchair in my big front room. I give you fair warning.

UNTITLED

C. M. Donald

For my christening, my parents
gave me a pot, sealed, containing
a formless terror.
Then they gave me clothes,
manners, rules and a style
to make me acceptable
as best they could.

Later I discovered that the shape
of the terror was theirs
and the core of it, me.

THE LENGTH OF THIS LAND

Allan Ennist

they pursued reflections
(on water)

they pulled shadows along
blending theirs with *chinook*
osprey
and *grizzly* among others

they invented a time
measured by shadows
(perpetual
rise and fall of empires)

books in review

GRADUALISM

BRYAN D. PALMER, ed., *The Character of Class Struggle: Essays in Canadian Working-Class History*. McClelland & Stewart, $12.95.

JUDY M. TORRANCE, *Public Violence in Canada, 1867-1982*. McGill-Queen's Univ. Press, $32.50.

ROY MACLAREN, *Consensus: A Liberal Looks at his Party*. Mosaic, $5.95.

THE ASSUMPTION THAT CONSENSUS and compromise represent the Canadian way remains pervasive. By turns we have been proud and ashamed of this legacy, sometimes regarding it as seemly moderation, at other times suspecting that it may reflect an essentially dull and unimaginative national character. Within the last two decades, a number of Canadian scholars have maintained that this traditional interpretation, with its emphasis on gradualism and moderation, is misleading and inaccurate. In fact, they argue, our history contains many incidents of violence, confrontation, and suppression; our society has been shaped by profound divisions of race, class, and gender.

One result of this re-examination of Canadian history has been the publication of a number of books devoted to revisionism. The field of working-class history has become particularly rich, producing numerous monographs and collected essays, as well as a journal now entering its second decade. Bryan Palmer is among the pioneers of this new work in Canada, and the collection of articles he has edited is a good example of the wider interests and more sophisticated scholarship emerging in Canadian historiography. The book's eight essays range over time and distance, from nineteenth-century dock workers in Atlantic Canada to the meaning of the recent Solidarity confrontation in British Columbia. They deal with class and gender divisions, the nature and meaning of changing industrial organization and the role of the government in underwriting the status quo. The central theme, however, is true to the book's title: the changing nature and variety of class struggle in Canada.

One hopes that this volume will find an audience beyond the universities, for it certainly deserves to be widely read. Few people are familiar with the remarkable popularity of the Knights of Labour in late nineteenth-century Canada, or the widespread national support for "The Canadian Labour Revolt" in 1919, just two of the topics explored in detail in the book. Nor are contemporary issues neglected: Heather Maroney contributes a thoughtful piece on "Feminism at Work," a more wide-ranging essay than the title suggests, while Bryan Palmer's treatment of B.C.'s 1983 Solidarity strike provides plenty of ammunition to those who wish to argue about the nature of modern trade union leadership.

Judy Torrance's book on *Public Violence in Canada* is a more sustained treatment of a single topic than the Palmer volume, and as concerned with theory and explanation as with historical example. Canadians continue to reflect smugly about our allegedly low level of public violence, particularly when compared to events south of the border. Torrance shows that our society *is* comparatively less violent than the United States, but points out that if we examine Canada in *true* international perspective, comparing our level of violence with that in other western democracies, the Canadian performance is middling at best. Violence has played a role in Canadian society, despite the rhetoric of "the peaceable kingdom." For example, how-

ever rare political assassination has been in Canada, it is certainly not unknown. Within living memory, one can cite the FLQ's murder of Pierre Laporte, in the midst of the 1970 October crisis. Torrance's book explores Canadian violence in much detail, from the seemingly gratuitous excesses of a contemporary teenager to the FLQ campaigns, and from the "On to Ottawa" trek during the 1930's to the Riel uprisings of last century. This is not simply a historical catalogue, but rather an attempt to explain Canadian violence. Torrence reviews the theoretical literature on violence and places Canadian violence within a variety of contexts. One of the strongest chapters concerns "Culture and Ideology": how violence is perceived (and discouraged) by our society. Torrance argues that "There is a conservative cast to the culture that emphasizes restraint, acceptance of a less than perfect existence, the rejection of sweeping ideological changes in favour of incremental, evolutionary development within the traditional framework, indeed a general suspicion of novel ideas as potentially too disruptive in a fragile society." More succinctly, she quotes Frank Underhill: "In Canada we have no revolutionary tradition; and our historians, political scientists, and philosophers have assiduously tried to educate us to be proud of this fact."

Rather than having us "bask in a sense of ineffable moral superiority," Torrance would rather we appreciate our good fortune, and recognize that we have managed to benefit from "a unique and non-exportable combination of societal, economic, and historical circumstances." Her book argues convincingly that it is this combination, rather than a particularly virtuous national character, which constrains the resort to force within our society.

If the books by Torrance and Palmer reflect contemporary revisionism, Roy MacLaren's *Consensus* is a reminder that traditional views are still alive, though perhaps not as dynamic nor as persuasive as once they were. Written in the summer of 1984, a tract for the times composed with both eyes on an imminent federal election, the book attempts to persuade the reader of the wisdom, beneficence, and central importance of Liberal policies throughout Canadian history. Beginning with the Reformers in the 1830's and concluding with John Turner's assumption of the Party's leadership in Ottawa on June 16, 1984, MacLaren argues that there is a discernible consistency to Liberal policy and practice ("like a watermark on fine paper"), and that this reflects a particular concept of (wo)man. The first five of the book's eight chapters develop this theme, concentrating especially on the post-war years. The last three chapters are more concerned with the Trudeau legacy, the leadership campaign which culminated in Turner's victory, and Canada's political future.

It is doubtful whether MacLaren's argument about "the powers of compromise, flexibility, creativity and innovation that the Liberal Party has brought to federal politics over the years" will convince any but the partisan and the very uncritical. The book mis-reads the contemporary electorate. In a brief description of his own political career, MacLaren recounts the willingness of one of his constituents to do campaign work for him. She had first worked for the party in 1911. That type of unswerving loyalty is on the wane, and indeed it is unlikely that party loyalists still elect governments. The crucial voters now are the fickle "undecideds." This volatile group is not won over by reason or held by loyalty: its members have to be persuaded each election by appropriate advertising, packaged candidates,

and appealing promises. Such strategies have had a corrosive effect on the integrity of contemporary political parties, whose ideology rarely rises above the banal pulse-reading of the poll watcher. It seems unlikely that the Canadian electorate will be convinced by books such as MacLaren's, representatives of that most old-fashioned device, the political pamphlet.

The book, however, is more than a historical curiosity to be stored in some archives along with other memorabilia of the 1984 election. MacLaren attempts to state clearly what Liberal ideology is, how it relates to past actions and how it may be assumed to function in the future. Three decades ago, Frank Underhill argued that one of the most noteworthy aspects of the liberal tradition in Canada was the lack of debate or even informed discussion about its advent, meaning, or importance. Whether or not MacLaren proves Underhill wrong probably depends upon one's own place on the political spectrum. And unbelievers will note that his title, *Consensus*, reflects the rhetoric of a Mulroney as accurately as it does that of a Turner. Nevertheless, MacLaren is to be congratulated for at least making the effort to understand and articulate precisely what his Party stands for and why.

JEREMY MOUAT

A VOIX MULTIPLES

CLAUDE BEAUSOLEIL, *Il y a des nuits que nous habitons tous*. Editions du Noroît, n.p.

JEAN CHARLEBOIS, *Tâche de naissance*. Editions du Noroît, n.p.

CELYNE FORTIN, *Au coeur de l'instant*. Editions du Noroît, n.p.

JEAN CHAPDELEINE GAGNON, *Le tant-à-coeur*. Editions du Noroît, n.p.

ECRIVAIN ET CRITIQUE LITTERAIRE, Claude Beausoleil a publié une vingtaine d'ouvrages — poésie et prose — dont *Au milieu du corps l'attraction s'insinue* lui a valu le prix Emile-Nelligan en 1980. Collaborateur à la revue montréalaise, *Lèvres*, il se fait connaître également dans l'Hexagone, et notamment à travers ses écrits qui paraissent dans la revue, *Jungle*. Divisé en huit "failles," *Il y a des nuits que nous habitons tous* est un monologue sur la nuit, à savoir sur ce qu'appelle le poéte "une sorte de vertige où des réels s'infiltrent dans la haute-tension sous le regard ailé des circonstances écrites et de la solitude." Première faille, "la nuit s'invente," fait état de la nuit d'amour:

> les frôlements
> quand le geste
> sur la peau
> comme un rythme
> et des caresses
> aussi lentement
> un délire
> le jeu du désir

La fragilité du moment inspire chez Beausoleil le souhait, voire l'obsession, d'écrire, car c'est cette dernière qui oriente la direction des mots qu'il couche par écrit sans savoir échapper pour autant à la force du noir. Force est de noter que la noirceur n'est pas que ténèbres, elle est également lumière: "il y a des nuits pour tous les oublis comme il y a des nuits pour toutes les lumières." La nuit qui s'invente est ultimement une force qui "nous précède / socle incertain / sur la route à déchiffrer." Faisant allusion à Hubert Aquin qui, dans *Trou de mémoire*, parle du temps qui instaure majestueusement le narrateur "dans sa propre immobilité," cette même partie de l'ouvrage suscite chez le lecteur une appréciation singulière du temps qui s'écoule. Exaltation mais tout aussi bien angoisse: autant de réactions devant l'impossibilité de fuir sa puissance imprévue.

Le lyrisme que l'on trouve dans chacune des "failles" de ce bel ouvrage se manifeste grâce à la sensibilité à la fois raffinée et contradictoire de Beausoleil; le poète semble être dominé par la pesanteur des mots. Celui-ci constate effectivement dans la "faille cinq" des moments où "la peau est trop tirée sous les mots." Ainsi, la nuit guide l'homme "vers la réponse / aussi le vide infini." Elle s'avère de cette façon moment actuel et avenir, source d'espoir surtout, puisque — comme il le dit dans la "faille huit" — Beausoliel "renonce à ce temps sourd qui nous précède." En somme, *Il y a des nuits que nous habitons tous* est une méditation sur le lien entre passage du temps et écriture, inspiration et réalité quotidienne. Rêveuse mais non irréelle, la voix du poète exprime avec éloquence un phénomène que nous devons tous affronter un jour: ombre du passé qui s'avère lumière de l'avenir.

Cités en épigraphe, les mots de Paul Eluard, "Mon amour ton amour ton amour ton amour ton amour," servent d'ouverture et de clôture à *Tâche de naissance* de Jean Charlebois. Auteur de plusieurs recueils de poésie, Charlebois offre des poèmes dépouillés, qui évoquent l'amour, le mystère de la vie, ou encore l'étouffement de l'élément vital chez l'homme. Non sans similaritiés avec la poésie de Saint-Denys Garneau, les textes de la première partie, "Le Grand Grand [sic] manque d'air," dépeignent celui qui "court sur l'air / mais n'atteint rien / enfle rouge," mais aussi les yeux qui voient grand "parmi les plaisirs / en savourant muets les choses." Dans "Ne me touchez pas," deuxième partie du recueil, et émission de Radio-Québec qui a remporté le concours des émissions de poésie de la Communauté des télévisions francophones en 1985, il est question du monologue, du "son sans bruit," d'un homme condamné à mort:

> Ne me touchez pas
>
> Je vous défends de prendre ma vie
> elle est à moi de toutes mes forces
> paralysées, tremblantes
>
> Je ne serai jamais votre mort à tout prix
> je ne serai jamais votre mort de circonstance

Cri déchirant, la voix du poète exprime son grand amour pour les siens, et son mépris pour la justice qui "s'attribue le droit de tuer et tue / De plein gré, de sang-froid, sans scrupule."

"L'Immense," dernière partie de l'ouvrage sert à contrebalancer "Ne me touchez pas," car on y est sensible à l'individu en mesure de suivre ses instincts d'amant et d'apprécier pleinement les menus plaisirs qu'offre l'existence. Il faut noter que ceux-ci s'inscrivent souvent chez Charlebois dans le domaine de l'amour charnel, et rejoignent ainsi la voix éluardienne:

> sur les dalles d'un jeune temple que la mer
> allaite
> deux corps inaudibles à lèvres découvertes
> à consommer dans le grand verdoiement

Symétrie, images somptueuses, violence et douceur: autant d'aspects qui font de *Tâche de naissance* un ouvrage à voix multiples.

Célyne Fortin nous offre une oeuvre bien singulière qu'est *Au coeur de l'instant*. Practicienne du haïku, Fortin y livre plus de trois cents de ces petits joyaux qui communiquent sous forme d'aphorisme son désir de capter l'effervescence de la vie, de l'insoler à l'aide d'une formule concise et sans artifice. Sagesse japonaise? Il faudrait trouver une autre manière de décrire le contenu de ces vers, car ils naissent tous de la même inspiration, à savoir de pénétrer le mystère qu'est la fuite du temps afin de mieux en saisir le mouvement. Transposer en images les grains du sablier: voilà en gros le but que Fortyn se donne dans *Au coeur de l'instant*. Qu'il s'agisse d'un dire universel:

la grange bien pleine
champs et prairies moissonnées
l'hiver peut venir

ou encore d'un niveau plus personnel:

je suis attachée
à cette terre à ce monde
son souffle me brise

l'on s'aperçoit que le lyrisme sans ambages qui émane des vers cadre particulièrement bien avec la simplicité et de la langue et de la forme utilisées par Fortyn. *Au coeur de l'instant* est un ouvrage bien réussi, unique en lettres québécoises et tout à fait susceptible d'enchanter le lecteur.

Auteur d'un mémoire de maîtrise et d'une thèse de doctorat sur Saint-Denys Garneau à qui il dédie *Le tant-à-coeur*, qui comprend une partition de Jean Philippe Beaudin, Jean Chapdeleine Gagnon a écrit quatre recueils de poésie et de nouvelles poétiques avant de faire paraître l'ouvrage en question. A l'instar de son "maître à penser," Gagnon recrée "l'espace impondérable" que l'on trouve chez celui-là et renchérit sur ce thème en évoquent la difficulté d'écrire:

> Il y a tant de fois qu'il se répète: il faudrait que j'écrive. Pourtant il reste là, badaud, tout penaud, à regarder ses feuilles, grises à force d'y poser les yeux. Il a du mal à s'attacher à sa chaise, à s'asseoir à sa table, à prendre le crayon, à se mettre au travail. Peur de perdre son temps. Mais comme il en gaspille à remâcher ses mots, ses envies, ses désirs.

"[S]'agiter autour du vide," "plonger pour s'écraser": Gagnon est enclin à peindre l'individu qui gravite vers l'abîme, vers un état figé. *Le tant-à-coeur* se caractérise par une parole acerbe, une sensibilité dominée par un pessimisme qui suggère l'impuissance de l'homme pensant:

> Tourner la page — et pour quoi faire? On n'a plus rien à apprendre, rien d'autre à attendre.
> .....
> On désapprend à vivre. Et l'on sourcille à peine quand l'autre, devant soi, tel un caillou se noie.

Silence, parole muette: autant de manifestations de la difficulté d'être écrivain. Et pourtant, force est de noter que Gagnon se détourne de la thématique de Saint-Denys Garneau en vue de mettre en relief ce qui semble une préoccupation fondamentale, à savoir l'inefficacité ou même l'échec de l'acte d'écrire. On est donc loin de l'enfant chez Saint-Denys Garneau pour qui les regards et les jeux se traduisaient éminemment bien par l'intermédiaire de la parole.

Les Editions du Noroît continuent de faire paraître des oeuvres soignées, accompagnées très souvent d'illustrations bien faites et d'une qualité indéniable. Que le Noroît ne manque jamais de souffle!

KENNETH W. MEADWELL

UNE BOUTEILLE A LA MER

VICTOR-LEVY BEAULIEU, *Chroniques polissonnes d'un téléphage enragé*. Alain Stanké, $11.95.

Chroniques polissonnes d'un téléphage enragé est un recueil de textes écrits par Victor-Lévy Beaulieu et publiés hebdomadairement dans *Le Devoir* entre avril 1984 et juillet 1985. Ces textes, ou comme les appelle l'auteur "billets," se rapportent tous à l'univers de la radio et de la télévision québécoises. Une très belle introduction par Victor-Lévy Beaulieu les précède; il y raconte son premier contact magique en tant qu'enfant avec la télévision, contact qui constituait une ouverture sur le monde réel ainsi que sur le dépassement de celui-ci. Une "forclusion" écrite une année après le dernier billet suit le recueil des chroniques. Curieux texte, car non seulement Victor-Lévy n'y conclut point mais encore,

comme le titre "forclusion" l'indiquerait, il croit avoir perdu tout droit sur lui. Curieux d'autant plus que dans cette forclusion Victor-Lévy Beaulieu parle non plus en tant que le téléphage qu'il était dans les *Chroniques* mais plutôt en tant que le feuilletoniste qu'il est devenu par la suite. Bref, son point de vue dans la forclusion est entièrement changé, et s'il ne renie pas les textes qui précèdent c'est que dit-il "[il] ne saurai[t] rien renier." Avant d'aborder les articles mêmes, notons l'illustration de la couverture exécutée avec intelligence et humour par Suzanne Brind'Amour. Il s'agit de comparer les deux volets de la couverture pour en apprécier toute l'habileté.

Dans les *Chroniques polissonnes*, Victor-Lévy Beaulieu se propose d'amuser et d'instruire à la fois: Rabelais québécois, il nous invite à rompe l'os pour arriver à "la substantifique moelle" afin de pouvoir "s'en régaler et en retirer quelque profitable enseignement." Sans avoir la moindre prétention d'épuiser le sujet, Beaulieu parle du téléroman et de la radio du matin, des réclames publicitaires et du bulletin de nouvelles. Il réfléchit à la vidéo-cassette, au quizz, au téléthéâtre pour ne donner que quelques exemples. Il examine la question de la télévision et de la radio régionales, celle des sports. Sans avoir toujours une réponse, Beaulieu ne recule jamais devant les questions qui s'imposent à lui tant au niveau de la programmation des émissions qu'au niveau de leur réalisation. C'est en ceci que consiste d'après nous le plus grand intérêt des *Chroniques*: elles dénoncent le grand silence de la critique au sujet de la télévision et de la radio, et ébauchent le début d'une réflexion à leur sujet. Elles nous secouent dans notre indifférence de téléphages assoupis et de consommateurs inconscients. En démystifiant la télévision et en révélant la toute-puissance des cotes d'écoute et donc du public, Victor-Lévy Beaulieu nous fait prendre conscience du fait que juger ce que nous voyons et écoutons n'est pas un simple privilège, mais une responsabilité et une obligation. Les *Chroniques* proposent à leur lecteur certains critères tant positifs que négatifs et qui pourraient lui servir de guide. Beaulieu dénonce avec rage (ce n'est pas pour rien qu'il est chroniqueur polisson et enragé à la fois) l'ennui profond de certaines émissions: "cette débilité . . . dans toute la bêtise de son uniformité." Il accuse certains réalisateurs d'une "incuriosité fondamentale," de prétention, ainsi que d'une "fâcheuse tendance à la facilité." Les mauvaises émissions sont celles qui recherchent le profit avant tout et à tout prix et qui afin de se constituer un grand public visent bien bas. La pauvreté tant langagière qu'intellectuelle, les stéréotypes et les clichés faciles sont dénoncés. Enfin, il relève "une absence absolue de commentaire véritable du côté québécois où le mâchemâlo et le lieu commun n'ont d'égal que la niaiserie." Quant aux valeurs positives qui constituent une bonne émission, Beaulieu recherche avant tout la vérité exprimée en un langage qui "dit le fond des choses, délesté de toute hypocrisie." Aussi veut-il un langage qui ne soit ni affecté ni pointilleux. Tout en reflétant à la fois la curiosité et l'honnêteté de ceux qui les réalisent, les émissions télévisées ou radiodiffusées devraient renvoyer à leur public leur rêve mais élargi, leurs mythes fondateurs mais dans ce qu'ils ont de singulièrement québécois, rendant par là possible une véritable découverte de l'imaginaire. Ainsi donc Victor-Lévy Beaulieu désire que plus de programmes soient consacrés au télé-théâtre, à la littérature québécoise, à la musique québécoise dans sa modernité, afin de pouvoir atteindre à "la reconnaissance de ce que nous sommes dans le meilleur de nous-mêmes" plutôt

qu'au quotidien dans la corruption et la violence banalisées.

Tout ceci et bien davantage, Beaulieu réussit à le dire mine de rien, et sans tomber dans le style prêcheur! Bien au contraire, son style irréverencieux est plein de verve et d'humour. Pourtant soixante billets au rythme d'un par semaine, soit deux cents pages se lisent mal d'un seul coup, et Beaulieu est le premier à l'admettre: "lorsqu'on relit tout d'une traite une flopée de textes qu'on a écrit à la petite semaine, j'imagine que c'est normal que la face de tombe comme cela vient de m'arriver." En effet, les *Chroniques* se lisent mal d'un trait. Il y a là un certain désordre qui fatique: les textes se déroulent sans suite ni liaison. L'ordre chronologique, bien que fidèle reflet de l'ordre de parution des billets dans *Le Devoir* est presque sans intérêt pour le lecteur. Un certain regroupement, le numérotage des "billets," ainsi qu'on bon index auraient été bien utiles. D'ailleurs l'honnêteté qui ne renie rien, tout en étant absolument admirable, ne devrait point justifier la paresse! Or, nous aurions préféré des textes quelque peu remainés et où certains mots-tics répétés jusqu'à l'écoeurement auraient été éliminés ou remplacés par d'autres. Les termes "épais" et "épaisseur" contrastés avec "mince" et "minceur" sont ainsi répétés jusqu'au point de devenir complètement dépourvus de sens, surtout lorsque deux textes se suivant immédiatement emploient le même terme "épaisseur," l'un dans le sens de "manque de finesse," l'autre diamétralement opposé de "riche." Une telle maladresse n'en est pas une lorsque les textes appraissent dan deux numéros séparés du *Devoir*, mais devient irritante dans un livre. De même la vieille prédilection de Beaulieu, surtout lorsqu'il s'emporte (souvent avec raison!) pour un langage vulgaire est parfois agaçante. Et comme les chauffeurs de taxis au gros rire et qui se taperont sur les cuisses en lisant les *Chroniques* seront plutôt rares, autant laisser tomber certains passages tels ". . . des midinettes . . . s'imaginent que branler de la cuisse quand on est fardé comme des vieilles cocottes, il y a là tout ce qu'il faut pour que le téléphage s'escoue dans ses couettes." Et tant que nous y sommes, laisser tomber aussi quelques phrases de longueur proustienne mais sans en avoir la saveur. Peut-être même quelques passages où se fait sentir la fatique du chroniqueur hebdomadaire: le livre y gagnerait en densité. Car *Chroniques polissonnes d'un téléphage enragé* est un livre qui répond à un vrai besoin longtemps non satisfait, et dont les nombreuses questions, remarques et observations s'insèrent dans le contexte plus large d'un dépassement possible. C'est que Victor-Lévy Beaulieu aime le Québec "notre pays-toujours-pas-pays" et qu'il veut le sortir de son indigence! Dans son introduction, Victor-Lévy Beaulieu dit qu'il publie ces chroniques "comme une bouteille à la mer." A nous de recueillir la bouteille de ce naufragé et de lire son message!

IRENE OORE

MACMILLAN

BRUCE WHITEMAN, CHARLOTTE STEWART, & CATHERINE FUNNELL, *A Bibliography of Macmillan of Canada Imprints 1906-1980.* Dundurn Press, $49.95.

IF A PUBLISHER'S REAL MERIT — after we've forgotten the seasonal ballyhoo — is in his titles, then Macmillan of Canada can be proud that its imprints are part of the cultural identity of three generations of Canadians. These titles range from Kipling to Callaghan, from Creighton to Davies, from Livesay and Pratt to Kroetsch and Trudeau. Not a bad record for one of the more enlightened branch publishers, which, ironically, had its tri-

umphs as a branch, and its decline as a Canadian-owned firm. Although it has survived two traumatic ownership changes since 1973, its achievement appears to be in its backlists because, sad to say, this book is the epitaph for a distinguished house.

When a change in the Canadian Copyright Act in 1900 ensured that subsidiary publishing would be the best way to protect foreign copyrights here, Macmillan of London established its Toronto branch in 1905; its purpose was to market the trade and school books of the other Macmillan houses. The firm's two exciting periods coincided with creative explosions, first in the 1920's and 1930's under the dynamic Hugh Eayrs, who initiated the policy of publishing Canadian books, and under the astute John Gray in the 1950's and 1960's. In 1973, as financial troubles plagued the whole book trade, the English directors sold Macmillan of Canada to Maclean-Hunter, which cut back the literary titles; but unable to improve the Macmillan finances, in 1980 Maclean-Hunter sold the firm to Gage Educational Publishing, which moved the Macmillan operations to its suburban plant.

In 1979 McMaster University acquired the archives of Macmillan of Canada and its library of printed books. In 1984 Bruce Whiteman published *The Archive of the Macmillan Company of Canada Ltd. Part I, 1901-1965*; now he and his colleagues, Charlotte Stewart and Catherine Funnell, have compiled this enumerative bibliography, alphabetically arranged within each year, of more than 2700 imprints that were issued between 1906 and July 1980. They include almost every publication (excluding agency titles) with the Macmillan of Canada imprint. Each entry contains the author's name, the title as it appears on the title page, pseudonyms where appropriate, the publisher's imprint, the pagination, and the book's size. We also learn if the book appears in paperback, if it is part of a series, and if there are revised editions.

The editors do not itemize frequent reprintings of a book, a principle that may cause misunderstanding about the total number of titles issued annually, as distinct from new titles. For instance, George Stanley's *Canada's Soldiers* (1954) appears as three separate items because it was substantially revised in 1960 and 1970. On the other hand, MacLennan's *Two Solitudes*, originally published by Collins in 1945, first appears as a 1951 school edition and again as a trade edition in 1957, while the new typeset paperback "edition" in the 1967 Laurentian Library series is merely noted within the 1957 item. Therefore, since the figure of 77 titles issued in 1967 is only a minimum, it is debatable whether the minimum number of titles issued in any year explains much about the firm's prosperity, especially without information about sales. Nor does the bibliography include the foreign editions published simultaneously with these local ones; presumably such information would emerge in studies of individual authors or of Macmillan of Canada. Nevertheless, the Introduction provides a succinct survey of the firm's activities.

This handsomely produced bibliography, with its easy to read entries and Index, is an invaluable resource for tracking down Canadian editions or tracing the directions of Canadian writing and society in this century. While literary scholarship in Canada has been woefully hampered by the absence of archival materials on which to base letters, biographies, and textual editions, McMaster's acquisition of both the McClelland and Stewart and the Macmillan archives will facilitate our study of publishing and writing.

GEORGE L. PARKER

DEPAYSEMENT

JANET M. PATERSON, *Anne Hébert: Architexture romanesque*. Editions de l'Université d'Ottawa, $15.95.

JANET PATERSON'S STUDY of Anne Hébert's novels consists primarily of a detailed analysis of Hébert's first full-length work of fiction, *Les Chambres de bois* (1958). This initial analysis serves as a basis for conclusions which are subsequently seen to apply in varying degrees to the later novels: *Kamouraska* (1970), *Les Enfants du Sabbat* (1975), *Héloise* (1980), and *Les Fous de Bassan* (1982). Short chapters are devoted to the first three of these, and a longer, concluding one to the last. Anne Hébert's poetry is referred to peripherally, as one of several elements of intertextuality evident in the novels.

The methodology is primarily based on Iouri Lotman's approach to textual semiotics, with reference to other related theories (Eco, Barthes, Ricardou). *Les Chambres de bois* is examined under several headings: first, the "production du sens," which is seen to stem from the word "pays" (introduced in the opening sentence), with all its denotations and connotations, both within the text and in a (problematic) Québécois context. The "pays" of the novel is seen to shift, as does the universe evoked, from the "real," to the dreamlike, to what is termed the "irréel." Paterson's detailed analysis of each of these aspects is exemplary in its thoroughness and lucidity. She also manages to overcome the dryness typical of this kind of systematic semiotic study. The distinction between "dream" and "unreal" as categories has been criticized by Alain Piette, but seems to me to be adequately justified. It is shown to be particularly telling in relation to Todorov's theory of the "fantastic," the "marvelous" and the "strange." Paterson's conclusions illuminate the eerie effect produced by this novel — an effect, as she points out, of "depaysement," connected to the "pays" as theme and structural component of the novel.

The title *Les Chambres de bois* already includes two spaces: the enclosed one of Hébert's early poem "La Chambre de bois," and the open one represented in Québec by the "bois" and associated in the novel with the hunters' forest of the fairy tale. The shift from "l'irréel" to the world of the "conte" (also initiated in the opening sentence by the formula "C'était au pays de Catherine . . .") is convincingly demonstrated. As Neil Bishop has remarked, there is a chapter in Jennifer Waelti-Walters's *Fairy Tales and the Female Imagination* which is relevant here. The presence of the tale provides a bridge to the second part of Paterson's study, which deals with the "inscription du sens" in *Les Chambres de bois*. Several aspects of the narration are reviewed as different ways of incorporating self-conscious commentary into the fiction. These include various types of "mise en abyme" (of stories within the story), recurring images of embroidery and needlework (associated with writing and narration) and references within the text to other texts. The epigraph from Supervielle, which heads the last section of the novel and is echoed at the end, is shown to be particularly significant in relation to the interplay of representation and narcissistic reflection of the process of telling.

The symbiotic relationship of these two elements in *Les Chambres de bois* is shown to be present, though modified, in the other novels. In *Kamouraska* it is affected by the historical dimension of the story and conveyed by images of theatricality. In *Les Enfants du Sabbat* the real becomes unrealistic, the fantastic more believable. In *Héloise* it is less de-

veloped, but complicated by a web of allusions to the author's poems. In all these novels, as in the first, mirror images recur. In *Les Fous de Bassan* the preoccupation with representation and narration becomes even more prevalent, as the same story is told by several narrators, and the birds' cries ("les cris des fous de Bassan") become "l'écrit des fous." This complex account of the process of creation is dominated by allusions to "L'Ecriture" (Scripture) and "la Parole" (the Word). In this last chapter the methodology gives way to a more eclectic interpretation, with excellent results.

Les Fous de Bassan serves to justify Paterson's conclusion, that Anne Hébert's novels belong in the "postmodern" category of Québécois fiction, to which she assigns also those of Aquin, Ducharme, and Brossard. No distinction is drawn between those novels produced in the 1960's and those which are much more recent, yet Paterson's study demonstrates that there is an evolution in Hébert's fiction between 1958 and 1982. *Les Fous de Bassan* is in fact the first in which she depicts writing as an activity, as opposed to other types of narration. There may be a need, on aesthetic as well as chronological grounds, to refine the categories of the postmodern, but Paterson's work in this area will no doubt clarify this aspect.

Janet Paterson's study will serve as an excellent basis for further work on the aspects of Hébert's novels which it deliberately leaves untouched. In particular, the application of psychoanalytic theory would illuminate many elements that remain tantalizingly marginal in this semiotic analysis. A Brazilian doctoral thesis has compared Anne Hébert's work with that of Clarice Lispector: the feminist implications of Hébert's novels certainly deserve to be explored further.

VALERIE RAOUL

POETIC TRAVELLERS

CHRISTOPHER LEVENSON, *Arriving at Night.* Mosaic, $8.95.

F. W. WATT, *It's Over It's Beginning.* Porcupine's Quill, $7.95.

BERNICE LEVER, *Sometimes the Distance.* Mosaic, $7.95.

PHILIP RESNICK & RON WALKEY, *The Centaur's Mountain.* Pelion, $9.95.

IT MAY SOUND FACILE to say that each of these books represents a journey through a poetic universe, for that is to describe all books of poetry. But travel metaphors immediately spring to mind, because what these four collections have in common is a preoccupation with geography and mobility in space. A trip through a poetic landscape is always more satisfying when you travel economy, and Christopher Levenson is by far the most frugal of these four travellers. His language is economical and his images tightly packed. *Arriving at Night* takes us from the England of his birth through several Canadian towns and cities, with stopovers in Cuba, Greece, and the United States. A seasoned traveller, Levenson knows how to get the best mileage out of experience as well as language. Here are a few lines inspired by Maple Creek, Saskatchewan:

> . . . this place, the merest knot
> in a single tenuous line across a landscape
> of silos and elevators, is shaved clean
> as if for an operation. There is nothing here
> for the mind to hold to unless it be
> its own power to invent; the sheer skill
> of the surgical early light
> exposes every wrinkle in the tar-paper, every dent
> in the corrugated asbestos roof. In such a landscape
> we are required to be honest, nothing can hide.

This may be taken as a statement of poetics, for honesty, sheer skill, and the power to invent are what characterize Levenson's work. His destinations are

often the junction where civilization and the natural world meet:

> Outside, conditioned night: I gaze
> on galaxies of refineries, airfields,
> light-plasma pulsating
> over deeply-scored tablelands,
> where lakes of departing birds
> coalesce in flight patterns.

Nature departs as culture encroaches, but "What shocks is the waste between" the two, "the landfill / of anonymity / [that] crushes the bird-hung marsh" ("Near New Mills"). But Levenson also has humour: for example, "From A Romanian Phrase Book" is a hilarious found poem, and "In The Ideal World" satirizes the trendy language used to describe the architecture of a modern university complex.

F. W. Watt prefers to travel first class, and so does his publisher, the Porcupine's Quill, which uses the services of Coach House. Consequently, *It's Over It's Beginning* is, like all books influenced by Coach House, a beautiful artifact. But in terms of poetry, first-class travel sometimes means excess baggage, and Watt's language often lacks compression. His travels are through time and space, from the rural experience of his youth to the urban space of adulthood. The rural reminiscences, by far his best poems, move along a tightrope of positive tension between two archetypal emblems, horse and tree. The horse represents speed, freedom, and unlimited mobility in space, while the tree is emblematic of rootedness and belonging. Here is Watt at his best:

> New sounds breaking (not
> the silence but)
> the low humming
> of millions of biographies
> a new rhythm
> the muffled thud of hoof-beats
> saddle-leather creaking
> bit-rings jangling
> horse shaking his long head
> in a storm-cloud of crazed flies
> a few birds overhead overheard echoing
> across the hollow stream-bed
> tall trees crowded together
> arms sharing the motionless air
> with vegetable calm
> caught in the lens of the human eye
> with bright sunlight slanting
> between their dark trunks.

Although it's not clear why the text takes this shape on the page, the diction is careful, and there is some sensitivity to the way language moves. Absent in these particular lines is Watt's irritating weakness for adverbs: "resolutely," "disconsolately," "freely," "aloofly," "desperately," "distantly," or the like appear elsewhere with tedious frequency. A series of moving love poems vacillates between sexual ecstasy and a state of despondent voyeurism into which the poet retreats after a brutally honest evaluation of his assumptions about women. For example, tempted to offer male protection — a commodity once in great demand — "I suddenly realize / you're safer as you are, safe / from my will to keep you safe" ("Portrait of a Victorian lady").

In *Sometimes the Distance*, Bernice Lever's journeys are internal and consistently emphasize the universal female frustration with restricted mobility in space. Part One of the book deals largely with entrapment in violent sexual relationships in which death often presents itself as the only escape. Lever sometimes likes to pack her psychic travel gear in elaborate conceits. The most interesting of these are drawn from sport and recreation. A baseball metaphor structures "On Having Lovers"; "Hands Off" and "Concessions" utilize images from boxing; and "Man Overboard" equates the balancing act of love with the tricky balance necessary to canoeing. The opening lines of "Divorce is Like a Hockey Game" are typical of the way these metaphors work:

Divorce proceeds like a hockey game,
but seldom is there time out
just lots of body checks
a rush of wingers
about to be benched
for high sticking is common
as is scoring from the end zone —

Part Two of the volume is a journey in search of alternatives to the life-scripts of violence featured in Part One. The alternatives are between brutal self-analysis on the one hand and booze or suicide on the other. There are no attractive role models among the "Literary Lunch Ladies Preening"; nor is "The New Woman" an appealing alternative: "she drives — whatever man steers the silver porsche, and leases the penthouse with the 4 bathrooms," and "she loves — when it's not too much commitment, it suits her career, and it pleases her analyst." The book ends with a bitterly ironic search for peace through a degraded landscape of polluted air, tainted water, and the threat of nuclear annihilation.

The Centaur's Mountain, text by Philip Resnick and pencil drawings by Ron Walkey, is a loving tribute to the Mount Pelion area of Greece. It is the least poetic of the four volumes. Despite its shape on the page, the text, although elegantly phrased, is linear and descriptive. Some of the poems, which attempt to universalize the poet's experience through the use of the second person "you," sound more like excerpts from a Victorian tourist brochure:

You can count white surges in the sea
like stripes on a blue flag,
crashing wave after wave against the shores
where bathers only yesterday
swam with the octopi.
You can feel the sun at the high point of
day,
a cloud or two to dispel the glare
wind buffeting the chestnut trees.

Despite these weaknesses, the book is not without charm. Enriched by Resnick's knowledge and love of classical literature, the picturesque depictions of local inhabitants, landscapes, tourists, seascapes, and villages are the harmonious complements of Walkey's impressionistic sketches. The book is handsomely printed on high quality, textured paper, which shows off the sketches to advantage.

DIANA M. A. RELKE

YUKON HISTORY

ROBERT G. MCCANDLESS, *Yukon Wildlife: A Social History*. Univ. of Alberta Press, $14.95.

IN THE YUKON, we are quite familiar with the many volumes of popular history — some excellent, some not — written by Yukoners, which are prominently displayed by local bookstores and eagerly purchased by visitors. Florence Whyard's recent biography of Ernie Boffa and the late Al Wright's now classic *Prelude to Bonanza* are two excellent examples of this genre. A few Yukoners are also aware of the many scholarly studies that litter the dusty shelves of university libraries and northern institutes, works written by "northern experts" who periodically visit the north but write in the comfort of their homes and offices in the south.

There is a growing group of people in the Yukon for whom neither type of work is entirely satisfactory. In the former we see a genuine commitment to the north but an often naïve understanding of scholarship. In the latter we see the cherished values of critical inquiry but, more often than not, we wish for a more sensitive, more personal commitment to the north. Alternately frustrated as northerners then as academics, we continue to search for indigenous forms of scholarship, returning always for models to the works of anthropologists like Julie Cruikshank and Hugh Brody who, unlike

most, have imaginatively and responsibly struggled to balance the objective and subjective in a manner which is acceptable to both scholar and northerner alike.

Robert McCandless's book is one of the few in a discipline outside anthropology to address this problem satisfactorily. Using the development of game laws to measure social change between the historical "earthquakes" of the Klondike Goldrush and the building of the Alaska Highway, McCandless demonstrates both a firm understanding of scholarly research and a genuine "feeling" for the Yukon. His many years spent in the Yukon may explain why, after concluding the study which forms the body of the book, McCandless supplements his analysis with the "stories" of a number of long-time Yukoners who hunted and trapped in the territory during the first half of this century. In his introduction to the verbatim transcriptions of his interviews with John Joe, Frank Goulter, and Johnny Taku Jack, McCandless writes:

> These interviews took place after a draft of this manuscript had been completed. Consequently I knew, or thought I knew, the events and personalities described previously. I suppose I was looking for some anecdotal material, yet it soon became clear that each man's story should have a place of its own in this book. Although they had little knowledge of most of the events I have described, they could talk for hours about the people involved. Many other stories like these could — and should — be recorded. They can be woven in and around more conventional historical themes and bind the whole into an enduring fabric. What follows does confirm the archival record, but also shows how limited that record is in giving us a glimpse of the Yukon's past.

Such a statement, and the accounts that follow it, not only acknowledge the limitations imposed by traditional historiographical techniques but sharpen the desire for a history of the Yukon that goes "behind" men seeking gold or building a wartime highway to a studied portrait of a Yukon of everyday acts and simple lives.

Such a Yukon lies at the centre of the book. Not only is this history carefully substantiated, but McCandless contradicts many contemporary imaginings of the Yukon, whether by writers seeking the last frontier or bemoaning its passing, or by scientists eager to work in North America's largest natural laboratory, or by politicians seeking a northern solution to southern Canada's economic woes. Thus, the picture that emerges is a surprisingly novel one that shows little regard for contemporary "urban" notions of nature, exploitation, and relations between the sexes:

> In the twenty years between 1921 and 1941 the population increased by merely ten percent. A continuous labor shortage allowed Indians to participate as much or as little as they liked in the wage economy, and they had the alternatives of trapping, big game guiding, or even market hunting and fishing to earn cash. While in practice there may have been some discrimination between Indians and non-Indians, there were no incidents to foster ill-will; in fact, both halves of the Yukon community depended upon each other in a sort of cultural symbiosis — separate, distinct, and interdependent.

> They show that the hunter was not an intruder, but a guest who paid his way.

> . . . they had difficulty in explaining that confidence about animal populations to outsiders, who continued to see the matter in their own, continental perspective.

> The Yukon's attraction lay in its image as a northern Shangri-La, with game and fish in abundance. Whatever their motives, the newcomers had a profound and lasting effect on the Yukon's wildlife, not because they shot everything in sight but because they imported a different perception of wilderness and wild animals.

> A full history of this firm [the merchants, Taylor and Drury] needs to be written, for it seems to depart from the usual models of mercantile exploitation. . . .

> Before 1947-48 families suffered through financial or economic hardships as a unit; afterwards it was the men, the trappers, who lost the most. Recalling those years, one man said, "the government became my wife's old man. She don't need me anymore."

Such statements force us to rethink the traditional views of the north which characterize much of the northern literature and scholarship of southern Canada and show their inadequacy in explaining life in this unique corner of the continent.

ARON SENKPIEL

CODES OF KNOWING

UMBERTO ECO, *Travels in Hyperreality*, trans. William Weaver. Helen & Kurt Wolff, $US 15.95.

RIKKI DUCORNET, *Entering Fire*. Chatto & Windus, £3.95.

FRANZ K. STANZEL & WALDEMAR ZACHARASIEWICZ, eds., *Encounters and Explorations: Canadian Writers and European Critics*. Königshausen + Neumann, DM 32.

IN THE TITLE ESSAY of *Travels in Hyperreality*, Umberto Eco describes his journey through that part of America from which intellectuals such as himself usually recoil in horror: the America of furious and frenetic fantasy as enshrined in such monuments of bad taste as Las Vegas, Disneyland, Oral Roberts University, Randolph Hearst's Castle, the Forest Lawn Cemetery, the Lyndon B. Johnson Memorial in Austin, Texas, a Marine World, a Ripley's "Believe It Or Not!" display, and innumerable wax museums. What fascinates him about such places is, of course, their semiotic value, the way in which they reveal an America so obsessed with the Real Thing that it must compulsively, frantically, construct imitative structures so believable, so much "more real than reality," that they can be taken for the objects they represent. This is hyperreality, Eco tells us: a state of being in which everything, absolutely everything, is made to signify. Here, the only valid knowledge is iconic knowledge. Signs aspire to the condition of the real, and reality is forced to aspire to the sign. The experience of pleasure demands that something be faked, and faked so persuasively, and with such technological competence, that thereafter reality must always seem a pale imitation of it. In hyperreality, there must always be the promise of something *more*.

Why is it that this kind of hyperreality should be so distinctively American? The answer, Eco suggests, is simply that America lacks *history* and so must attempt to construct it from the fragments of Old World culture which it imports, embellishes, attempts to improve. Thus the polychrome Venus de Milo in the Palace of Living Arts in Buena Park, Los Angeles overwhelms the original (and in the process recuperates from history the inevitable losses brought on by the march of time) by virtue of having her arms restored to her. All it takes is money. Lots of it. And complicity in the process of reading the signs.

What Eco is really saying is that the kinds of interpretations we make, the semiotics we practice, are inextricably bound to questions of liberation and authority. In all of the essays in this collection of Eco's journalism, wherever the author's cosmopolitan gaze settles — clothes, movies, sport, religion, exposition (including Expo 67) — the process of "reading things" is always intertwined with basic questions of ideology: who constructs the semiotic field? whose interests does it serve? what kinds of understanding does it want us to arrive at? what possibilities for conceptual resistance does it provide? These are important questions, and in the case of "Travels in Hyperreality" they under-

write a striking, devastating critique of American society — it's compulsive bricolage, its magic need to assemble the shards from what it discursively constructs as an "authentic" past into hyperreal monuments to its own astonishing presence. Nonetheless, semiotics is not an exact science, and what disturbs me, faintly, is the utter confidence with which Eco's Old World, post-Saussurian sensibility constructs units of knowledge out of the popular practices of a culture whose underriding sensibilities are so far removed from his own. For as Eco well knows, "real" history — that sense of depth to the present which guards Europe, somehow, from the temptations of hyperreality — is also a rhetorical construction, a signifying system that enables specific beliefs and energizes specific actions in the areas of culture and politics: in no way is it proof against the kind of self-deceit that Eco sees America practicing on itself. And the conditions of interpretation are never free from the mediating influence of cultural relativity — a fact which Eco acknowledges in his essay entitled "De Interpretatione," where he questions why it is that *China*, a film made in admiration and respect by the antifascist director Antonioni, could be seen as "an inconceivable act of hostility, an insult" by Chinese viewers. It would appear that such safeguards to the process of interpretation apply only when the other is *really* Other: Chinese, for example, and not North American. When it comes to "reading" the New World, Eurocentric assumptions seem to suffice.

In Rikki Ducornet's *Entering Fire*, however, the responsibilities of interpretation *are* integrated with a recognition of cross-cultural difference. The two, in fact, are central themes in this energetic, political, and at times grotesque, novel, and the author — who was born in the U.S., resided in Canada during the mid-1960's and early 1970's, and now lives in France — makes the juxtaposition between them the site of an inquisition into the nature of historical inheritance and cognitive transmission. The novel presents us with what at first seems to be a simple binary opposition between the two protagonists, who share the narration of the book. Lamprias de Bergerac, a direct descendant of Cyrano de Bergerac, reveres his ancestor, and employs Cyrano's wisdom in carrying out experiments in alchemical botany in the Amazonian jungles of South America, experiments which lead him to inhabit, at least temporarily, a new paradise free from the constraints of civilization and to develop the exotic, hybrid orchids that will make him famous. Lamprias is exuberantly, erotically, in love with Otherness, as is evident in the mistresses he acquires throughout the course of the novel: Cûcla, a Japura River Indian, for example, or Dust, a Chinese woman whose feet are bound, and with whom he has a son named True Man. His "legitimate" son Septimus, however, is marked by an insane hatred for everything his father loves. One of his first acts is to burn the books in Cyrano's library, and he grows up to be a fanatic racist and misogynist, a vocal supporter of fascism and an active worker in the business of sending Jews and Gypsies into the ovens of Nazi concentration camps.

Lamprias's questing and questioning spirit, his dedication to hybridization, provides a resounding contrast to Septimus's syphilitic rages and misogynous violence, but Ducornet will not allow her readers to stop too soon in the complex process of interpreting this novel. Quite late in the book, we realize that the chapters Septimus has written are, in fact, letters to his father, letters Lamprias has stopped reading because they cause him too much pain. And it is only at this point, when the cloud of fascism

has followed Septimus from war-time Europe to McCarthy's America, that Lamprias begins to suspect his own complicity in his son's activities and beliefs, only then that he resolves to read these "potent and poisoned" letters which can no longer be ignored.

In alchemical terms, the fusion of opposities in the *vas Hermeticum* of history leads not to the vegetal philosopher's stone that Lamprias wants to concoct, but rather to the explosion of genocidal will that reverberates throughout Nazi Europe and colonial South America. And at the root of this process stands the ancestral force of Cyrano de Bergerac, whose *Voyages* provide the sub-text to this work. As Timothy J. Reiss explains, Cyrano's works, imbued as they are with a fascination with experimentation as the means of knowledge, help promulgate the analytico-referential episteme that will dominate Western culture for the next three hundred years. In fashioning a line of descent from Cyrano through Lamprias to Septimus, Ducornet suggests that this discursive system, and especially the part which Lamprias's nineteenth-century brand of humanistic imperialism plays in it, is invested in the genesis of some of the most truly hateful social movements in twentieth-century Western culture. And thus Ducornet converts the narrative of this cryptic and thoughtful novel into a powerful allegory of historic causality, suggesting, in the process, that the possibility of breaking free of such patterns of transmission lies in the interpretive strategies her readers construct in their own encounters with the phenomenal, inherited world.

But if concern for the ideological implications of interpretation informs both Eco's and Ducornet's book, the collection of creative and critical writing from the International Symposium of Contemporary Anglo-Canadian Literature in Austria, 1984, *Encounters and Explorations*, employs cross-cultural criticism for far safer, and finally less interesting, purposes. As editors Stanzel and Zacharasiewicz explain, the volume is aimed at a European audience, and its imbroglio of offerings — two stories, two poems, one eulogy, five critical articles, three writerly meditations, one discussion, one editorial, and a postscript — attempts to come to terms with that admittedly problematic question thought to be inevitable to this group of readers: what comprises "the Canadianness of Canadian literature"? In answering that question, the contributors divide, roughly, into two camps. On the one hand, Jack Hodgins, Graeme Gibson, and Fred Cogswell seem to argue for cultural differences that work against larger generalizations such as "nation," "modern," "universal" — ones that constitute their own behavioural mores and codes of knowing. As Hodgins points out, "the symbol of the country, a maple leaf, was of a colour no one west of the Rockies had ever seen on a tree." On the other hand, Helmut Bonheim, Waldemar Zacharasiewicz, and Walter Pache seem to seek specific examples of what they take to be universal narrative structures, their project being the placing of contemporary Canadian fiction within the context of international writing practice.

Many readers, I suspect, will conclude that to pose the question of the "distinctively Canadian" in such a context is wrong-headed, for to ask it raises first and foremost the question of critical methodology and the assumptions that underlie it. "Climate and the feel of the land," asserts Robertson Davies; "these are the Canadian factors present in our writing. . . ." Perhaps so, but only within an essentialist view of literature that sees writing as narrowly reflective of experience and that privileges literary content

over form, narrative pattern, or rhetorical construction. In contrast, Walter Pache, in examining the modernist/postmodernist debate centring on volumes of short stories collected by John Metcalfe and George Bowering, concludes that "the escape routes from the safe garrison of 'CanLit' into the realm of international English literature clearly lead into different directions." What remains unexamined here is the assumption that the transmission of ideas, literary modes, and narrative techniques is solely a matter of influence, an assumption that leaves unasked many pressing questions about this particular moment in Canadian literary practice. Why, for example, do these writers not only *adopt*, but also *adapt*, specific writing practices? What discourses do they engage? What cultural work does this kind of writing perform? For the possibility remains that what constructs the "distinctively Canadian" in Canadian writing may have less to do with the themes, motifs, and narrative structures that proliferate in the content of fictional and poetic works than with the cultural codes of recognition against which they resonate, codes which cannot be so simply adumbrated, enumerated, known.

The bulk of the criticism in *Encounters and Explorations* seeks empirically derived data against which to apply generally structuralist or formalist methods of inquiry, and as such the volume is unlikely to contribute greatly to the general fields of Canadian or cross-cultural studies. It will, however, play an important role in encouraging the development of Canadian studies in European schools, colleges, and universities — an issue which the collection's closing discussion and postscript tackle head-on. In this regard the volume has a valuable contribution to make, and provides welcome evidence of the growing interests by European critics in what one hopes will not always be a "territory of experience off the beaten track of English studies" in general.

STEPHEN SLEMON

KURELEK

PATRICIA MORLEY, *Kurelek: A Biography*. Macmillan, $34.95.

OVER MANY YEARS Patricia Morley developed her interest in William Kurelek and his work. In 1973 she read his autobiography, *Someone With Me*, and in 1980, as she says, "Fate turned her attention to me." By chance attending a Kurelek exhibition at Toronto's Isaacs Gallery, she learned that Avrom Isaacs's long patronage and support of Kurelek had resulted in a mass of letters and documents from the artist to the dealer. Another treasure-trove of manuscript material was held by Mrs. Jean Kurelek, the artist's widow. For six years, out of these archives, as well as scores of taped interviews and correspondence with family, friends, and acquaintances, this biography evolved, authorized in that Jean Kurelek gave its author permission to use and quote freely from her late husband's writings and definitive in the author's page-by-page effort to assemble all the facts and finally to present the man, Kurelek, to us, immensely and obsessively gifted and just as immensely troubled.

"My quest for the man behind the artist and his personal myth has been both satisfying and aggravating," says Morley. The "myth" most Canadians know, if only vaguely, because Kurelek's output was enormous and he was famous for upwards of twenty years of his short lifetime (1927-77). His association with May Cutler of Tundra Books in the last years of his life, which led to the publication of the illustrated children's books *A Prairie Boy's Winter* and *A Prairie*

Boy's Summer, extended his name and fame to a far broader audience than his art alone would ever have done. The basic "myth" that Morley speaks of is, of course, that of the prototypical misunderstood artist, romantic style. The superstructure gives the myth its specific Canadian content: the story of the gifted immigrant child of Ukrainian background, hounded by his hard-working father, Dmytro, and reviled by his incapacities as a Manitoba farm-child; the development of serious mental difficulties; the conversion to Roman Catholicism; and, finally, fame and contentment in marriage and family. Kurelek lived that myth, rightly enough, and he also wrote it down, but until now we have missed layer upon layer of the complexities and ambiguities of the man.

I have never before read a biography whose subject's strength of will was so fiercely Nietzschean in its power and so unremittingly ruthless in the service of his inner sense of vocation, both artistic and religious. He absolutely *had* to have a hard childhood — his obsessive drive to do what he wanted to do, what he felt impelled to do, demanded an equally strong adversary. The first one was his father, with whom in later years he professed to have come to terms, though Morley points out repeatedly the continuing ambiguities and resentments in Kurelek's attitudes to Dmytro. She is particularly and objectively fair to both his parents — immigrants, struggling Manitoba farmers through the Depression, trying to do their best for their family of seven and gradually succeeding. In terms of what they could possibly have given him in shelter and education, Bill Kurelek was not deprived. He graduated from the University of Manitoba in 1949. Loving nurture was another thing — what Bill required in this area was not in their power, particularly in his father's power, to give. Furthermore, Morley shows us over and over again that Bill Kurelek clashed with Dmytro so disastrously because they were, at base, so very much alike.

Kurelek's second lifelong adversary, particularly potent after his conversion to Roman Catholicism in 1927, was the Devil, whose footprints he saw all around him in the materialism and self-destructiveness of contemporary society. To his constant wrestlings with the Devil, we owe many of his strongest paintings — as an adversary, the Devil had another great advantage: he aroused in Bill none of the debilitating guilt that his relationship with his father had left festering in him.

Early in life Kurelek developed agonizing problems of insecurity and depression; but he also had, and developed, a fierce determination, a strong vein of shrewdness, and a serendipitous ability to find, or make, situations that would foster his growth as an individual and as an artist. Morley is good at showing us both sides of the coin. In 1952 he went to England, presenting himself, four days after arrival in London, at the Maudsley hospital, to whose head, Dr. Davies, he had written from Canada. Davies was in the forefront among pioneers in art therapy for mental patients. At Maudsley and, later, at Netherne Hospital, Kurelek received both medical treatment (including electric shock) and massive doses of encouragement for his painting.

Before he came back to Canada for good in 1957 he also began the inveterate travelling that was to be a major part of the rest of his life. Then and always his many trips had a double goal of purpose and pilgrimage — Vienna, to see the great collection of Breughel's paintings, where "he spent three entire days 'feasting' his eyes on details"; Lourdes and the Holy Land, stages in his journey to faith; a search for family

roots and artistic inspiration in his father's home village in the Ukraine. The Arctic, India, Hong Kong, South Africa, Mexico — he travelled avidly, with a minimum of comfort and a maximum of both personal involvement and painter's curiosity.

Kurelek always, ultimately, got what he wanted and needed. He was always willing to pay, with his work, his writing and, later, his speeches, all the debts of friendship, shelter, encouragement, and support that he accumulated. They were many — this biography has more "subheroes" than any work I can remember, from his English doctors through a host of long-suffering but devoted friends, there and here, to his two major Canadian patrons, Avrom Isaacs and May Cutler, and finally, I would say heroically, to his wife Jean and their four children.

In many ways Kurelek was light years away from being the gifted "son of the prairie soil" that his myth suggests; in some ways he was very close to it. Morley lets us see it all — her tapestry is immensely complex in its detail. Herein lies one of the two reservations I have about this biography: the narrative line is sometimes swamped by the weight of its load of data. Also, though she wisely resists moving into the field of art criticism, she does at times weigh down the text with her descriptions of Kurelek's paintings. Her work already has excellent reproductions, ten of them in colour. Any one of them is worth a dozen paragraphs of the description that breaks up the narartive line.

The mythic Kurelek satisfies a simplistic need for an heroic tale of struggle and success. This biography supplants it with a portrait of the man, Kurelek, both tragic and triumphant. I am grateful for it.

CLARA THOMAS

WAR & SEALORE

J. A. FOSTER, *Heart of Oak: A Pictorial History of the Royal Canadian Navy*. Methuen, $12.95.

HAL LAWRENCE, *Tales of the North Atlantic*. McClelland & Stewart, $19.95.

URSULA JUPP, ed., *Home Port: Victoria*. Sono Nis, $9.95.

URSULA JUPP, ed., *Deep Sea Stories from the Thermopylae Club*. Sono Nis, n.p.

True Canadian War Stories, comp., Jane Dewar. Lester & Orpen Dennys, $14.95.

CORNEL LUMIERE, *Kalavrita: A Greek Tragedy, A Strange Love*. Simon & Pierre, $10.95.

SOME REDOUBTABLE CANADIAN institutions — the CPR, the CBC, and Air Canada among them — have observed important milestones in their corporate histories in the mid-1980's. Nineteen eighty-five, for instance, marked the 75th anniversary of the Royal Canadian Navy. Of books celebrating the event, two are under review here. Two other works in this group celebrate the Thermopylae Club of Victoria, B.C., a select organization of retired seamen which began its meetings more than fifty years ago. A collection of war reminiscences from the pages of *Legion Magazine*, and a novel of revenge based on a tragic event of World War II, complete a group mixing nostalgia, grit, and humour commemorating deeds great and small, and nefarious.

Heart of Oak and *Tales of the North Atlantic* recall in photographs and anecdote the ships and personnel of Canada's naval service. In presenting the RCN's history in pictorial form, making use of dozens of black-and-white pictures of vessels of all sizes and types, J. A. Foster wears his heart on his sleeve. He and retired Rear Admiral W. M. Landymore, who writes the book's preface, are staunch defenders of the "old" Navy and of its traditions inherited from Britain's senior service. Not for them the

"modern" Navy, the "Sea Component of the Canadian Armed Forces." Students of naval ship design and specifications will require more detailed information than this photo album provides; still, *Heart of Oak* is an attractive coffee-table item.

Hal Lawrence's compilation of "salty dips" is an appropriate companion volume. *A Bloody War* (1979) established Lawrence's reputation as one of the livelier anecdotal historians of the Corvette navy in World War II, and here he offers a wide-ranging set of yarns about the exploits of some of the famous captains — Budge, Pullen, De Wolf, and Hibbard — of RCN annals. (One caveat: Lawrence is too partial to the officer class, for there are not many lower-deck reminiscences in *Tales*.) For him, as for most of his Royal Navy-trained comrades, the Navy was as much a "religion as a profession," but while he writes with pride about the "band of brothers" there is none of the "pusser" rigidity one associates with the older days of naval discipline. Naturally enough, most of the incidents recalled are from the Battle of the Atlantic period — tales of stormy passages, anti-submarine manoeuvres, sinking ships, sleepless watches, and miraculous survivals. The wrenching experience of having to leave shipwrecked men adrift, so as to vacate dangerous waters, is noted. And there is respect shown for the tactics of former enemies like U-boat Captains Kretschmer, Prien, and Schepke. But not all the narrative is grim. There is, for example, the gallows humour of crews who used to shout "Refit! Refit!" whenever their ships shuddered through high-speed turns in sub-hunting operations, thereby anticipating an early return to port for repairs and welcome furloughs. And further, where else but in the wartime Navy could a university student be appointed "Acting Probationary Temporary Sub-Lieutenant" — which happened to publisher-to-be Jack McClelland when he joined the RCN Volunteer Reserve.

Another kind of sealore is found in *Home Port: Victoria* and *Deep Sea Stories*, reissues of collections which appeared in 1967 and 1971 respectively. Ursula Jupp, the editor of both books, was the first woman accorded membership in a club which was originally reserved for merchant captains and other old salts. The club was named in memory of the tall ship *Thermopylae*, a tea clipper on the China-England run in the 1860's and 1870's whose only reputed rival for the honour of being the fastest ship afloat was the *Cutty Sark*. Eventually she was bought by Canadian interests and registered in Victoria during her final days in the 1890's. Since the club began to meet in the 1930's, its president has always been called "Master"; in like style, the members are known as "Bosun," "Shipmate," and "Carpenter." Meetings have regularly featured talks by members about the beginnings of shipping along the northwest coast or about months-long voyages to distant ports around the globe. As the club historian, Jupp retrieved from her own records, as well as from B.C. provincial archives and other sources, an entertaining blend of fact and legend. Hence the casual reader of these volumes can sample tales of sealers and gold-seekers, tramp steamers and mail boats, the perils of riding through typhoons and hurricanes, and the glorious memory of square-riggers in full reach of the wind.

Tales of army experiences are the subject of *True Canadian War Stories*, perhaps the best of all these books in content and narrative skills. In preparing this anthology, Jane Dewar, editor of *Legion Magazine*, made a selection of non-fiction memoirs which have ap-

peared in the magazine over its sixty-year history. (Beginning life as *The Veteran* in 1917, the official voice of the Great War Veterans Association became *The Legionary* in 1926 and *Legion Magazine* in 1969.) The book is divided into sections, recalling the three major conflicts Canadian soldiers participated in during this century. The short World War I section contains authentic accounts by two of the better-known soldier-writers of the Canadian Expeditionary Force, Greg Clark and Will R. Bird. Clark's is of trench raiders during the battle for Vimy Ridge, while Bird's "What Price Liberty?" is a suspenseful tale of a prisoner-of-war who manages his escape after many tries. Among memoirs appearing in the lengthy World War II section are those by a number of natural writers: Ben Malkin, Dave McIntosh, Rosemary Hutchinson, Doug Smith, and Kingsley Brown especially. Ben Malkin, a reporter for the Winnipeg *Free Press*, had been a pacifist in the 1930's; but after the Munich crisis, his views began to change. He enlisted in an artillery unit when war broke out, saw service in Italy, and then put his skills to work as a war correspondent during the final phase of the conflict. He writes of the necessity of "numbed emotions" among battle-hardened soldiers: "A soldier would have one or two intimate friends, but even with them, he exorcises emotion. If they die, too bad. Otherwise, his heart would be torn too often." On the other hand, Kingsley Brown, an airman who spent part of his war as a prisoner in Germany, recalls how necessary it was for one's morale to plan escape attempts, play pranks on the guards, and to gossip endlessly about food and women, while enduring the tedium of incarceration. McIntosh, Hutchinson, and Smith all tell anecdotes that shed light on the daily routine of life in war theatres. Whether in Newfyjohn, Derry, or London Town, the peculiar atmosphere of the "hurry-up-and-wait" war gave birth to many amusing incidents which left indelible memories. The section on the Korean War expresses a contrasting note, however; few veterans of the "forgotten war" recalled that harsh, stalemated campaign with any fondness.

The final book is very different from the foregoing. It is a work of fiction, set chiefly in Greece, by Holland-born, sometime Canadian author, Cornel Lumière. The plot concerns the efforts of Stavros Milionis to revenge the deaths of his family and hundreds of others who were massacred by Nazi occupation forces in the town of Kalavrita in December 1943. Returning to his native land from Canada — where he has grown up and become a successful lawyer — Stavros ostensibly plans to erect a monument near the town in honour of his father and kinsmen. Then his revenge takes shape as he murders a pair of Germans he meets by accident. But this only whets his appetite; soon he becomes a one-man terrorist squad as he systematically wipes out whole busloads of German tourists. Quite obviously Stavros is psychotic, his retribution made ridiculous by a perverse sense of patriotism and an almost incredible passion for the mysterious woman, I-Vuvi, a symbol of his country's honour. At the end we must conclude that Lumière's own anti-Nazi feelings have got the best of him as an author, since his story turns into an anti-German tirade. What began as an act of remembrance, fizzles into small, meaningless acts of butchery.

ERIC THOMPSON

COMIC STRIPS

JACQUES POULIN, *Spring Tides*, trans. Sheila Fischman. Anansi, $7.95.

THE CENTRAL CHARACTER in the works of Quebec's Jacques Poulin is often an

introverted loner; in his latest novel, *Spring Tides*, this tendency is taken to an extreme as the book's protagonist inhabits a desert island in the St. Lawrence River where dictionaries replace the friends he never had. Through Teddy's life on the island, first with only his dictionaries, his cat, and a tennis-playing machine called the Prince, and then with a growing cast of strange visitors, Poulin examines the nature of happiness and the constraints placed on happiness by society. The book's simple story, spare prose, and gentle humour disguise a myriad of deeper ideas.

Christianity is evoked in the first three words of *Spring Tides* — the same three that open the Bible: "In the beginning he was alone on the island." Teddy is employed by a newspaper publisher to translate comic strips. In an effort to make Teddy happy, his employer (known only as the Boss) allows him to live and work on the island. The Boss descends (God-like) from the sky in a helicopter to bring Teddy his food and his copy and to inquire after his happiness — which seems to be the Boss's major concern. It is the Boss, also, who decides to send the visitors that change and complicate Teddy's life. Teddy seems content, but the Boss senses (he is not told) otherwise, and sends a young girl to comfort him. First Teddy alone, then Teddy and Marie inhabit the island.

The presence of Marie is at first welcome, but Teddy's translation work begins to suffer. Subsequent arrivals further confound him. First the Boss's libidinous wife, then an ancient French academic and a surly, idealistic author arrive, soon followed by even more disruptive guests. Soon Teddy's world is turned upside down. The Boss has brought each of these others in an effort to make each of them happy, but their needs overlap, making individual happiness, for Teddy at least, out of the question. At one point the Boss asks Teddy: "'Are you *really* happy?' 'Look,' said Teddy, 'that's a difficult question. How can anyone know if he's happy or not?'" After consulting a dictionary and being led from definition to definition, they discover that happiness is "Granting or obliging in what is desired." Happiness seems to be as difficult to measure as it is to achieve.

Poulin also presents other ideas along with much ironic humour. Teddy is a translator obsessed with getting the exact sense of each cartoon balloon that he is trying to render. He treats the words of Hagar the Horrible and Charlie Brown with the seriousness of a true language zealot. Teddy also recoils at the sound of English expressions. It is not clear how far to take this. However, the protection of the French language would seem an important duty of the Francophone writer. At the same time Poulin puts the Author on the island to write a novel, intending to wed the idea-based French novel with the action-based American novel to form the great novel of America. Significantly, Poulin has him blocked without having finished his first sentence. Even more playfully, he has the Ordinary Man call an encounter group a "group dynamite session. 'Dynamics,' the Organizer corrected him." When the Author mutters an obscenity, the slightly deaf Professor thinks he has said the French word *Phoques* and launches into a story about seals. This type of wordplay keeps the tone light, and keeps the stronger medicine tasting sweet.

Poulin examines the psyches of loners who do not quite fit into their immediate surroundings. He seems to conclude that if happiness is fitting in — or granting or obliging what is desired — then, for some, happiness is not possible. Perhaps a new definition is required, or at least a new method of measuring. Or perhaps, as *Spring Tides* suggests, happiness is

not something that can be pursued in and of itself, but is tied up in the varied aspects of a person's life, and cannot be separated from them.

JOHN URQUHART

INADEQUATE RESPONSE

R. GAIR, ed., *A Literary and Linguistic History of New Brunswick*. Goose Lane, $14.95.

AS A GENERAL assessment, one would like to be able to say, "This is an uneven book," or "This is a disappointing book," but conscience forbids such gentle admonitions. The truth is: this is an embarrassingly awful book, badly written, ill-conceived, and at times simplistic and pedantic. As a New Brunswicker, I am ashamed and angered to see the substantial intellectual and literary achievements of the province haphazardly filtered through minds that do not appreciate their import.

The book's problems begin with the uneven editing. You only have to look at a work like William Toye's *Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature* to see the coherence and consistency that a skilful editor can bring to a volume composed through the efforts of diverse authors. Here, the work has all the readability of a bureaucratic report or "catalogue" (to use the editor's unfortunate choice of words).

The first quarter of the book consists of five articles dealing with New Brunswick languages (Micmac, Maliseet, English, and Acadian). This is probably the worst part of the volume. It soon becomes clear that linguists cannot write. They seem to have no feel for language as a living thing and certainly no sense of how to use it to communicate effectively with non-specialist readers. At their worst, they blindly crank out reams of pretentious jargon; at their best, they are awkwardly pedantic. What is most disturbing is that they evince no love of language; rather, they seem obsessively caught up in rigid patterns of categorical organization and pass these off as intellectual accomplishments. By turning means to ends, they appear to be industrious while really telling us not much at all.

The literary history part of the book begins with Yves Bolduc's article on Acadian poetry. It is a good start: the piece is informative, has an analytical as well as descriptive thrust, and supports its observations with a generous serving of quoted passages. In the end, however, it appears tentative, even inconclusive. Its focus on what makes Acadian poetry "Acadian" blurs and slips away. Bolduc at least tries to come to terms with something (however elusive); Fred Cogswell pontificates from a vacuum. The first quarter of his essay dealing with English poetry before 1880 is taken up with an appallingly simplistic and pedantic discussion of the universal development of poetry and society. What is worse, in the absence of a more discerning critical frame of reference, this preamble is used as the basic analytical tool to evaluate the verse of the period in question. The results are predictable: "garbage in, garbage out." With Barrie Davies's article on English poetry between 1880 and 1940, we move to firmer ground. While workmanlike, his critical perspective is surer and has the intellectual complexity to allow him to reveal something of the subtlety and conceptual integrity of the materials he is dealing with. It is, however, an area that has been well tilled by others, and Davies's article adds nothing new. The most interesting article in the book is Bob Gibbs's essay on English

poetry since 1940. It amounts to a modest memoir, a reminiscence, and just watching the author cope with the delightful ironies that invade his discussion of himself and his own work makes the piece worth reading. After Gibbs, the articles are generally competent if somewhat pedestrian. Granted, it is difficult to stimulate the reader's intellectual curiosity when your first concern must be simply to chronicle literary activity, but too often these essays slip into a form of prose-catalogue. The most readable are Mary Smith's piece on English theatre, Don Conway's essay on early English fiction, and Fred Cogswell's article on twentieth-century English fiction. Smith is thorough, especially on early theatre, but Conway seems at times to be struggling in unfamiliar territory. Like Gibbs's essay, Cogswell's approaches a memoir, but is marred by a shaky critical apparatus and occasional indulgences in declamatory rhetoric. The pieces on Acadian theatre, folklore, novel, and essay are very prone to cataloguing, but suffer most at the hands of their translators. None of these translators appears to write English well enough to represent the original at an acceptable level of fluency. Their limitation has the insidious effect of creating an apparent qualitative difference between the work of English and Acadian scholars. Ironically, many of the problems H.-D. Paratte points to in his essay on efforts to translate Acadian and English literary works across the language barrier are demonstrated in this volume itself.

At best, this kind of volume raises the question: is traditional literary history an adequate critical tool to deal effectively with the kind of intellectual and aesthetic understanding of our literature that we now have and/or want? There is no doubt it fails in this case.

THOMAS B. VINCENT

SAISONS D'AMOUR

LOUISE WARREN, *Madeleine de janvier à septembre*. Edns Triptyque, n.p.

HELENE DORION, *Hors champ*. Noroît, n.p.

PAUL CHANEL MALENFANT, *Les noms du père*. Noroît, n.p.

DEDIE A LA MEMOIRE de Michel Beaulieu, *Hors champ* se compose en fait de textes intitulés: "Filatures," "Hors-champ" et "ce qui remue sous la chair" et "Comme une prise sur l'éphémère." L'exergue qui ouvre le recueil "Je fais mourir de faim l'amour pour qu'il dévore ce qu'il trouve" d'Octave Paz, pourrait bien s'intituler "Elle portait avec elle l'irrévocable miroir d'aimer."

Car il s'agit bien de souvenirs et de cet "irrévocable miroir d'aimer" qu'il s'agit de retrouver depuis la rencontre "il y a eu ta venue Chaque cellule appelant l'émeute / Cette façon de souvenir," jusqu'au moment privilégié de cette "perspective d'éblouissement":

Il n'y aurait que ce jour
Cette façon de regarder
Poindre la lumière à l'horizon
Pressentant cette levée
Au bout d'elle-même.

Ces reliefs d'une musique
Comme ce qui alignera
Ces regards portés
Sur l'ombre alors devenue
perspective d'éblouissement
Qui transforme tes chamins
Cette façon dis-je d'articuler
Tes phrases tes peaux aussi
Déplacera les espaces tu
Ne seras plus que ce geste
De glisser vers toi-même vers
Toi-même ne te retenant plus.

Ce qui constitue la beauté poignante de ces images, c'est entre autres, le fait qu'elles contiennent toujours leur propre mort — et l'acceptation de l'oubli. Comme ce moment de sincérité absolue où l'amour affleure avec des mots très simples:

Je t'aime ne veux plus
Rien dire
Des nuits que je passe
A te chercher je m'épuise
Et pourtant sachant bien
Quelque part consentir
A l'oubli.

J'ai beaucoup aimé ce recueil, qui nous fait entrendre une voix pure, "authentique," comme Michel Beaulieu lui-même nous avait habitués, par sa poésie intimiste. Par contraste, *Madeleine de janvier à septembre* qui porte sur les relations entre un homme et une femme, l'espace d'une saison d'amour, paraît fade, bien qu'elle ne manque pas d'un certain charme: "Par une histoire des gens qui s'aiment — Non malgré l'essoufflement des mots d'amour — Ils ne sont rien d'autre que l'exaspération de leur sensibilité." On peut mesurer la profondeur qui sépare ce livre de celui d'Hélène Dorion — et le sentiment de vide que nous laissent ces minces ces pages — même si le projet du livre, nous dit l'exergue est de faire de notre chair le joyau d'une "invraisemblance."

Les noms du Père s'ouvre comme un triptyque, aux volets solennels, portant (1) les noms du père, (2) d'ailleurs toute musique, et (3) et tels, des indices. Le sujet, à prime abord surprend un peu, car on n'est pas habitué, en poésie, à écrire sur son père, ses parents, à leur consacrer en tout cas, un livre. La démarche est lente, d'une beauté grave et ciselée, car il s'agit du "fragment d'origine" d'un grand poète en qui l'amour des mots, du language, se révèle ici:

Tout mot, tu le prends à la lettre;
à la loupe les ailes brûlés
d'un papillon de papier.

Le poème demande une lecture attentive et ne se livre pas facilement. L'émotion est contenue et ne sourd que par moment:

Si je persiste à ton histoire
entre les mots désaccordés
pêle-mêle entre les lignes,
tout sens suspendu
quand je pense à tes hanches
quand le fleur de l'âge
et l'âge de raison,
mon père si mort:
c'est que je te porte,
fils et folie,
regards décimés dans la mémoires
et la passion, femelle.

Dans les *lieu dits: Italiques*, sorte de notes d'un voyage en italie, rédigées en prose, Chanel Malenfant arrive à condenser, d'une manière saisissante, des cliches pris sur le vif, et des descriptions de chef-d'oeuvre:

Des mains coupées sur un mur
et dans l'écho de lointaines prières:
pour le rouge d'une tunique le bleu
d'un voile sur la vierge sans visage, on
se souvient des roses dans le cloître et
du cèdre millénaire. De l'or couve
sous le noir. Le temps est saisi, un rapt
dans le regard. Fra Angelico gît, frappé
par la lumière sous l'ogive d'un
corridor, tandis que tout se tait, et que
je lis les majuscules hallucinées dans
la salle si bien écrite des antiphonaires.

Il s'agit d'instantanés, de ralentis, de zoom, pris par un photographe qui est aussi poète (la disposition de certaines phrases et de certains textes annule la différence qu'il y a avec les textes en vers), amoureux de littérature et d'art.

THUONG VUONG-RIDDICK

DEUX VISIONS

ESTHER ROCHON, *Coquillage*. Edns La Pleine hune, n.p.

JEAN-PIERRE APRIL, *Nord électrique*. Edns Préambule, n.p.

SOUS LA METAPHORE d'un coquillage monstrueux, le nautile multimillénaire venu du fond de l'océan, Esther Rochon nous décrit les dédales de la passion amoureuse, sa force d'attraction et de dégout, ses laideurs, mais aussi ses incomparables somptuosités. A travers les récits entremêlés de François (fils de

Thrassl), qui se rappelle de son enfance et de ses amours interrompus avec le nautile, ainsi que des souvenirs de Xunmil (qui jadis a été la maîtresse de Thrassl et maintenant aime François sans espoir de retour), nous voyons évoquer le portrait de Thrassl, sa rencontre avec le monstre et la terrible fascination que ce dernier exerce sur lui, puis la longue dépendance jusqu'à la déchéance finale. A ses côtés nous voyons aussi Irène (la maîtresse de Thrassl et la mère de François), ainsi que son amant Vincent qui deviendra par la suite un ami de Thrassl. Mais nous avons surtout le point de vue du Nautile lui-même, sa lente formation à travers le temps, ses tentatives pour entrer en communication avec les hommes, ses erreurs et ses réussites c'est à dire le récit de ses amours avec une jeune fille, puis finalement avec Thrassl qu'il rendra enceint en déposant ses oeufs.

Esther Rochon, avec le goût des relations que lui donne sa formation en mathématiques et aussi, peut-être, son initiation boudhique, nous brosse, avec grand raffinement, le jeu subtil de différentes sujets, les uns envers les autres, et vis à vis d'un centre de gravité unique, le monstre. Elle nous donne avec une grande force, cette ambiguité centrale qui a pour nous la passion, dans une langue juste et étrangement poétique.

Dans le Nouveau Québec imaginaire de J.-P. April, une armée de supercamions, exploitent le minerai de fer, sous la conduite de leur vedette le super Multi-Motor 23. A l'inauguration du prototype, sous l'oeil des caméramen, un accident survient: le Capitaine Lucien Ménord est électrocuté. Les administrateurs de la télévision chargent Jean, le narrateur, d'enquêter sur l'accident, tandis qu'ils essaient de le camouffler en remplaçant Lucien par son fils Serge Ménord. C'est ainsi que débute cette fresque du futur dans le grand-Nord quand la haute technologie est mélangée à la vodka et à la drogue, le voyagel, et qu'à tout ceci se joignent les incantations du sorcier Naskapi, le tout, orchestré par les tenants du théâtre total. Nous aurons une explication *in intremis* comme dans un roman policier classique. J.-P. April ne manque pas d'imagination et ses descriptions du grand Nord dégagent un sens épique. Ses visions futuristes sont assez impressionnantes. J'avoue m'être ennuyée mais c'est peut-être par goût personnel.

THUONG VUONG-RIDDICK

TENSIONS IN TIME

DAVID WATMOUGH, *Vibrations in Time*. Mosaic, n.p.

THERE IS MUCH in this collection of stories that would justify its having been called *Tensions in Time*, but David Watmough's accomplishment is that a balance is struck between conditions of restraint or pressure that are unrelieved and those that give way to release, however tentative. I am not just speaking here of the fictional world that Watmough creates, but also of the way in which he presents that world through the vision and voice of his protagonist Davey Bryant. Tension arises because Davey tells *his* stories with remarkable authority, but is not a wholly reliable narrator. Watmough's ironic vision and voice are always behind Davey's articulation of experience, compelling the reader toward a larger consideration of events and people than Davey himself is willing, for the most part, to provide.

There can be no doubt that Davey Bryant's homosexuality governs his view of himself and of others, but Watmough makes it plain that if Davey is sometimes trapped by his sexual nature, he is more often victim of a world bias about homosexuality that ranges from the sanctimonious to the vicious. Thus in "The Way

It Was" Davey follows his American lover from Paris to California, calling Ken, among other things, his "muscle-shaped adonis" who brings only "Bliss!" and dramatically insisting on their coupling as "an ecstasy that could know no topography — celestial or otherwise!" In "The Savage Gardner" an older Davey ("Hungry, horny me!") almost faints in his physical admiration of a teenager in shorts who reminds him of the "honey-hued torso" of the young man who "got away" years before. But in each of these stories Davey does not stay locked in his carnal perceptions very long, nor without paying a great price. When Ken leaves to continue his army career he and Davey must say good-bye publically and in a painfully formal fashion:

> we enacted our farewells. Eyes met and hung in soft glances, but Ken's warm breath remained remote from my face. And the permitted handshake was a blasphemy of what we felt and what our arms strained to do as we submitted to the dictates of the straight world as to what constituted a legitimate goodbye between grown men: a soldier and a civilian. . . .

Davey rails against a heterosexual world that bullies him and Ken "into falsely echoing *their* sentiments and acting in *their* fashion," and he fires off a telling riposte to an Anglican bishop who preaches to him about St. Paul's admonition in I Corinthians to those involved in the "perversions and abominations of the Cities of the Plains"; in the same book of the Bible, Davey points out, St. Paul also insists that women belong to their husbands and should keep their mouths shut in public places. But Watmough makes his reader well aware that such point-scoring does not alter the outcome of the game and that the rules remain inexorably fixed. The teenager in shorts reveals the violence behind the rules when he takes all the money in Davey's wallet, confident that having to hit Davey would simply be condoned as justifiable fairy-stomping. One senses the psychic violence that has been inflicted, as Davey wonders about the explanation he will have to invent for his friends of many years' standing (with whom he is staying) and how he will ever be able to share with them "the whole truth."

When Davey is not advocating his sexual rights or foolishly betraying his preferences, the world still comes at him with its prejudice. Watmough pulls no punches in his condemnation not only of the sanctimonious clergy, but also of those who in other times and positions of power might have happily closed the oven doors on those they feared and loathed. In trying to interview a "distinguished west-coast photographer," Davey encounters a boulder spray-painted with "I HATE QUEERS" and an explanation from an obviously articulate individual that is frightening in its close-mindedness and its closure. It seems that when he was just starting out in New York the photographer discovered "'You guys had everything sewn up'" and that "'Later it was the same in all the arts. . . . Look at the CBC for Chrissakes!'" Now that he is successful, his message is as loud and clear as that on the boulder; the photographer can overcome his liberal inclinations and "'try the truth.'" What unites the bishop, the savage teenager, and the photographer is their fundamental refusal to deal with projections of their own insecurities and with beliefs that are part and parcel of a larger world gone awry. That it is the *spirit* of this world that is malevolent is emphasized by "The Vancouver Spectre" in which Davey is haunted by a ghost/man whose identity is uncertain but who represents the prevailing hostility in a city whose cultural richness and diversity appear to provide security.

Watmough chronicles the limitations of the world with which Davey Bryant can only ineffectively deal when he faces

it with the physical side of his homosexual nature; but several of the best stories in the collection reveal Davey's strength and insight that come from his tolerance of and essential openness to the complexities of individuals who are worthy of attention, above all, because they are *human*. "Inside Out" has Davey struggle beyond the call of duty to aid an ex-convict who takes endless advantage of him. In "When the Fathers Went Away" Davey meets a "reckless young girl peeling away her protections," and sticks with her against his usual physical predilections because he senses her need while trying to comprehend his own. In "An Immigrant's Tale" he befriends a Polish painter/writer, fascinated by his crude energy, "the whole gamut of his extravagant emotions and comic gestures." But in none of these stories is Davey portrayed by Watmough as a martyr to the sensitive life who cannot discern the parameters of the reality he shares with others. Davey challenges the ex-con about his dishonesty, but does not try to convert him to the "straight" life (Watmough's implicit irony here is inescapable); he backs away from the girl who would, for her own psychological reasons, take him over; and he accepts the "strange heritage of ills" that bedevil the Pole and result in his confinement in a mental institution.

The most memorable story about Davey Bryant is "The Wounded Christmas Choirboy" in which Watmough's portrait of a Cornish village is redolent of Dylan Thomas's prose-poems of Wales. Davey recalls his boyhood envy of a fellow singer in the parish church choir. Such envy results in his oxymoronic image of the other boy's singing, an image simultaneously hilarious and disturbing, given the context: "the sweet stream of sound spewed forth." But young Davey's reading of the village's sub-text of repression beneath a healthy surface life is nowhere better captured than in his view of a carping woman whose "thin mouth . . . slammed shut with the same moist slap mother made when putting up pounds of fresh butter on the cold shelves of the dairy."

Watmough may write, through Davey Bryant, of a world gone awry and hint, at times, of apocalypse rather than salvation through personal experience, but whatever the limitations of Davey's experience, Watmough's vision is ultimately compassionate and his voice is one that transcends the babble of antipathy that surrounds.

J. A. WAINWRIGHT

WITHOUT A HEART

HELENE HOLDEN, *After the Fact*. Oberon, $12.95.

CAP DES VENTS IS a remote French-Canadian village whose inhabitants struggle for survival in a post-apocalyptic world. Something terrible has happened — whether revolution or war is never specified, although there are references to bombs, Blacklists, and Rebels — and society is in a state of shock. Food and jobs are scarce and frustration lingers close to the surface in everyone. *After the Fact* starts with this unsettling premise in order to depict what happens when the old rules and assumptions no longer apply.

Catherine opens the narrative with her own present-tense, first-person account of how she comes to be in a place like Cap des Vents. Having just fled husband Stéphane Dubé, Catherine arrives in the village with one of her two daughters and her lover in tow. All have assumed names: Catherine and Lawrence pretend to be married and the parents of young Natalie. They rent a house on the beach and try to blend in with life around them: Catherine paints, Lawrence writes, and Natalie attends school.

But from the first the Lemoynes arouse distrust and suspicion: Catherine because she is beautiful and Lawrence because he is so energetic and self-sufficient. The populace of Cap des Vents resents the trio for their apparent wealth and talent, especially after Dubé shows up in town and proves them to be liars.

No one despises the intruders more than the novel's other narrator, ironically named Marie-Ange. Her first-person, past-tense account of the growing tension between villagers and the Lemoynes provides a French-Canadian point-of-view which alternates with Catherine's. Under different circumstances the two women might even have been friends, for they share similar artistic interests. But Marie-Ange resents Catherine because her long-term fiancé Justin falls madly in love with the newcomer, siding with her finally against the rest of the inhabitants of Cap des Vents.

The tension in this short novel is almost palpable. It is clear from the beginning that something dreadful is bound to happen, and eventually it does. But along the way both Marie-Ange and Catherine document appalling acts of violence and brutality amongst the villagers themselves. Unemployed and impoverished, the men drink all day long while the women gossip and complain. And everyone always has at least one eye on the Lemoynes: Natalie is picked on by school-mates and teacher Marie-Ange alike, Catherine is sexually harassed by the village men, and Lawrence — otherwise known as *Le grand barbu* because of his size and hirsute appearance — is distrusted and feared. All are scapegoats, although it is never clear exactly why. The certainty remains that one act of violence breeds others; whatever the original cataclysm, it spawns a series of lesser, although equally grotesque disasters. The book's ending is implicit in its beginning.

Despite the carefully cultivated tone of hostility, though, there never seems to be any logic to the villagers' relentless malice against the strangers in their midst. Perhaps the point is, simply, that such antipathy is always illogical and irrational. Still, it makes for gruesome reading when all but two inhabitants of Cap des Vents obsessively pursue their neighbours. Even Marie-Ange, who is otherwise so articulate, seems unable to offer any more compelling reason than jealousy for her own mistreatment of Natalie and her cruel complicity in the eventual violence. The reader must accept a good deal on faith in order to make sense of the events depicted.

More disturbing still are the numerous grammatical and spelling errors. On one page alone there are six examples of such carelessness: "mod" instead of 'mob,' "us" should be 'up,' and "Course they would found you" might benefit from 'have.' Errors such as "hour" instead of 'our' and misspellings such as "momentoes" make for slow and frustrating reading, as do occasional lapses in the relation of pronouns to their referents. Nor can such mistakes be attributed to the fact that this is an English version of what occurs amongst French-speaking people — the errors are too inconsistent. Dialogue is Holden's weak point: exchanges between characters are mostly banal and awkward. And the author has an annoying habit of punctuating lines of conversation with exclamation marks. Style is not the author's strength, although there are some instances of arresting images: "The riverbed of caked sand shows like a dirty slip beyond the pebbled beaches," and "his pretence of optimism comes between us, unreal as the moon in the pond."

After the Fact invites comparison with Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, also published in 1986. Both novels portray civilization in shock: each is writ-

ten by a woman about violence against women, and both point to increasingly conservative, even fascist trends in thinking as catalysts for the upheaval. Whereas Atwood evokes an entire, complex world from the meticulous, detailed chronicle of her heroine, Holden succeeds only in relating a series of external events. Her use of dual narrators could have been so much more convincing had each spoken in her own voice or had the author used the convention of the diary. It is never made clear whether Catherine's and Marie-Ange's narratives are culled from journal entries, but it would make sense for that to be the case. How is it, for example, that Catherine's last entry, written in the present tense as always, ends in the middle of the attack on her by the village men? Marie-Ange's last entry, which closes the novel, picks up where Catherine's leaves off; however, it makes no sense for Catherine's narrative to end where it does in the light of what eventually happens to her. *After the Fact* is greatly flawed, yet it is more than a little compelling in its depiction of a world gone awry. SUSAN WHALEY

ON HER OWN

KAREN LAWRENCE, *The Life of Helen Alone.* Villard Books, $15.95.

ELEGANTLY WRITTEN, carefully structured, *The Life of Helen Alone* is a considerable first novel by Canadian-born Karen Lawrence. The work describes one woman's coming to terms with herself by focusing on her relation to her lover, to his children, and to the land they farm. Along the way, Lawrence manages to bring a whole rural community to life. Helen works as a psychotherapist and lives, contentedly, alone in the city. That is, until Daniel strides into one of her groups and then into her life. He reawakens her to her body, to herself as a whole woman, and to a more demanding life than that of the mind alone. Helen joins Daniel on his farm in the north country and struggles against severe odds in the form of Daniel's resentful children, the spectre of their absent mother, and her own unfamiliarity with life on the land. For three years Helen fights, changes, and grows; she becomes intensely committed to her adopted way of life and to her new family, only to have it eventually swept from beneath her. Alone at the end, as at the beginning, Helen is, however, a more complete person because she has learned that being rooted, connected, and loved are what life is all about.

The novel is divided into four parts which follow the seasons of one year, beginning in the spring. Italicized prologues introduce each section; all are moving, beautifully written odes to their respective time of year. Spring, for example, is "The river's voice awakening: it is a sustained, faint hissing, a mystery noise — the sound of a heart breaking." The narrative proceeds in its third-person, mostly past-tense voice to relate the events of that year from Helen's perspective, and ends where it begins, with spring.

Each section is subdivided into shorter, titled parts recreating various people and events which shape Helen's life in the country. Slowly these anecdotes or vignettes add up to a comprehensive picture of rural existence. Some portray Daniel's three children and their eventual acceptance of Helen; others introduce community fixtures such as Potter (a nice chap but an abysmal failure as a farmer), or Homer and Maddy (an old, long-married couple still madly in love with each other), and Hannah ("a deep river of a woman" used to fending for herself). Other chapters delve into Eddie's, Helen's, and Daniel's respective pasts or relate episodes such as the

slaughtering of a calf or the subduing of bats in the loft.

One pivotal event is the arrival of Eddie, Helen's brother. He is an inscrutable, confused young man who drifts through life, settling finally on the farm in order to feel rooted and connected to the rest of humanity. Despite his lack of practical skills, Eddie proves himself a willing worker and carves himself a place in the lives of Daniel's family. Eddie turns his hand to all kinds of humorous, harebrained schemes such as making his own beer and selling light bulbs in order to feel as though he belongs. His tenuous hold on life illuminates for Helen some of her own doubts about her place in the world. Even after his sister moves on, Eddie stays at the farm because there is nowhere else for him to go.

Helen is an altogether engaging character, as is Jenny, Daniel's young daughter (Lawrence portrays teenage girls surpassingly well). The male characters, however, are less deftly drawn. Daniel wavers between the extremes of brute masculinity and crippling vulnerability. He is good at carpentry and farming, marvellous in bed, and also a talented musician and teacher. Yet part-way through the novel he abandons home and Helen for a job as a construction worker. He decides to give up everything to continue that career; when Helen opposes his plans, Daniel strikes her out of sheer, inarticulate frustration. Hurt, she backs off and he seeks sexual comfort elsewhere. The two lovers seem to share little in common; their relationship is bewildering and never really springs to life. For example, Daniel is much older than Helen, yet his jealous, possessive actions are those of a juvenile. Helen is aware that violence bubbles dangerously close to the surface in Daniel, yet even when it explodes she does nothing. In this, Helen disappoints: she should be smarter than that. Lawrence never manages to arouse much sympathy for Daniel although she does try to attribute some of his problems to his upbringing by dour, strict parents. Eddie is an equally vague, although more sympathetic, character, but Daniel's sons Travis and Hawk are doomed, like their father, to two-dimensional life.

Still, Lawrence's writing is graceful and engaging throughout. The narrative proceeds at a slow, measured pace that keeps the action going and interest alive. Lawrence's style easily complements the novel's subject matter; her diction and syntax are good and varied, but it is her metaphors that are particularly striking. About Eddie she writes: "his interior was something so soft and raw and blind, like a chick pecking its way out of an egg, with such excruciating slowness you weren't sure if it would live through the ordeal." Certain breathtaking images, memorable because so precise and fitting, linger on long after the novel is finished: death is "a white whirling vortex of energy, a moment, a tornado of light which swept the spirit from the body. There was wind, and a pure scent of rose, voices whispering, wings vibrating, and at the center a flower in full bloom reversing its opening . . . the whole flowery green germ of life moving down through the stem into the roots, and finally releasing itself, back into the earth." Many of Lawrence's best images are derived, appropriately enough, from nature.

The Life of Helen Alone brims with strong, complete women who grapple competently with each other, with men, and with nature. The male principle is the one found lacking. Lawrence writes crisp, poetic, meticulous prose that ranges confidently in tone from the humorous to the poignant. Here is a strong, commanding first performance as novelist.

SUSAN WHALEY

SCIENCE & FICTION

RICHARD ROHMER, *Starmageddon*. Irwin, $19.95.

MICHAEL DEAN, *In Search of the Perfect Lawn*. Black Moss, $9.95.

DAVID PORUSH, *The Soft Machine: Cybernetic Fiction*. Methuen, $12.95.

SCIENCE FICTION HAS BEEN with us for more than half a century. It is a well-established genre now, with its own conventions, even its own critical vocabulary. Some science fiction works and writers are gaining the attention of the critical establishment at large and for good reason: as the genre grows older and becomes more secure in its conventions, so it both attracts and produces better writers. Because it is still a relatively new genre, it also attracts writers who wish to experiment with form, technique, and style. And sometimes experimental writers are classified as science fiction writers simply because no one knows where else to place their experiments.

Unfortunately, despite the much higher quality work now being produced in the genre by many writers, there are still those who remain loyal to science fiction's more primitive beginnings. Like those who still churn out "Conan the Barbarian" books with admirable regularity, or constantly find new and more exotic adventures for heroes such as the Stainless Steel Rat, Richard Rohmer in *Starmageddon* relies heavily on the stock situations and characters that made science fiction so popular in the Gernsback era of the 1930's. From the macho captain of the CIA spyship (whose effortless killing of a spy "from the other side" with his bare hands occupies most of the second page of the book), so the futuristic president of the United States (who seems to be a winning combination of Ronald Reagan and Richard Nixon with a small quantity of Kennedy charm, Kissinger tough-mindedness, and Robert Redford manliness), the good guys all share the stock characteristics of the virile, strong, forceful, handsome, foul-mouthed, and semi-rational macho types who populated early science fiction. The two women who appear in the book are so stereotyped that I initially assumed that the whole novel must be a parody of old-style science fiction. The women are weak-minded and vulnerable, needing reassurance and persuasion from the men at every turn before they are capable of action:

> He glanced at Ann Ross, who was still at the wheel. She was steering a steady course. Her eyes nervously darted side to side; her face was white with fear. No one at Annapolis had been able to tell her about this part of a man's world, about what fear was really like. Steen stood behind her for a moment.

The bad guys (referred to throughout the novel as "Commie bastards") are equally stereotypical. Totally irrational, demoralized and vodka-soaked, the constantly arguing and inefficient Soviets would make one wonder what the Americans were so worried about, if it were not for their unrelieved viciousness to their own people and, especially, to the rest of the world.

The plot is equally predictable. The entire book is devoted to a heavily propagandistic support of the U.S. Star Wars defence system, which shows some degree of bad taste as the writer is a Canadian writing for a primarily Canadian audience. In the novel, the Soviets are struggling desperately to put their own Star Wars system into space to neutralize the danger, to them, of the U.S. system, which is already up and about to become functional. They do not win the race, of course. But they do foolishly shoot down a passenger plane carrying the U.S. vice-president, which, through an unbelievable series of unfortunate coincidences,

is flying *directly* over the Soviet secret Star Wars testing site at *exactly* the moment the testing begins. The United States retaliates, logically, by dropping a nuclear bomb on the base, destroying all the top Soviet scientists along with it. The Soviets, with typical crude violence, declare war on Europe and mobilize forces to take over, unless the European nations join with them against the U.S. Turning the tables neatly, the U.S. president, again quite logically, threatens to destroy all of the U.S.S.R. with nuclear weapons unless peace is restored. The Soviets, knowing the U.S. is completely protected by a now-functional Star Wars system, cannot threaten retaliation, and back down. The good guys win again, and Star Wars is shown to be the real hero of the story, along with the men who have the courage to use it.

There is nothing new, different, or even interesting about this novel. It supports its pro-Star Wars arguments with charts and diagrams, which simply confirm that the book is a major piece of propaganda. Furthermore, the novel is badly written, with holes in the plot and in the rationale behind it. It has a repetitive, dull style that is simultaneously incompetent and condescending. Also the "virtuous" actions of the Americans are so similar to the damnable viciousness of the Soviets that any reader with even a slightly open mind would have difficulty keeping straight who is supposed to be good and who bad. Like the close nuclear catastrophe it is about, this novel is well worth avoiding.

Unlike *Starmageddon*, which fits firmly into the science fiction genre, Michael Dean's experimental book *In Search of the Perfect Lawn* is classified as science fiction by default. That is, the work defies classification and therefore fits into the peripheral area of experimental fiction accredited so often to the science fiction genre. It is not a novel. *Perfect Lawn* is a collage of different approaches to and descriptions of the North American lawn and its owner. It attempts psychological, literary, mystical, historical, sexual, and transcendental descriptions of lawns. What it achieves is undefinable. If it is meant to be a parody, it fails to inform the reader what it is a parody of. Possibly it is a genuine attempt to deify the lawn, or force the reader to recognize the lawn as a central part of our North American cultural consciousness, but it is far too silly to be convincing. In short, this book is irrelevant and trite, without being amusing in any way.

The Soft Machine: Cybernetic Fiction by David Porush is the only book worthy of serious attention in this group. It is a brief history of the development of cybernetics in science, and both a history and analysis of cybernetics as it appears in philosophy and literature. The two chapters devoted largely to the scientific development of cybernetics could have been left out of the book altogether. The discussion is highly technical and therefore likely to lose or bore the literary reader very quickly. These chapters are also not necessary for the reader's understanding of the literary concern with cybernetics. On the other hand, the chapter devoted to the philosophic response to cybernetics is most interesting and is relevant to the literary analysis which follows. Porush has described clearly some of the leading ideas on the subject and has shown their influence on the literary response to cybernetics.

The central concern of the book is the application of the subject of cybernetics to both the content and techniques used by various postmodernist novelists in their writings. An interesting and generally competent analysis of works by Vonnegut, Burroughs, Pynchon, Barth, Beckett, McElroy, and Bartheme consti-

tutes the bulk of the book. Porush writes best when working directly with the texts. When he begins to theorize, he frequently becomes abstract and sometimes irrelevant. The only criticism that can be levelled against his concrete studies of the texts is his constant tendency to accuse both the authors and their characters of cybernetic paranoia, an accusation which becomes suspiciously repetive when attributed to almost every one of the eight authors he primarily deals with throughout the book. Generally, however, the book is competent in its analysis and intersting in its presentation. It is also a book which once again encourages us to believe that writers of this kind of fiction can indeed create innovative, well-written, and meaningful works of literature.

J. R. WYTENBROEK

TROIS POETES

JEAN-MARC FRECHETTE, *Le Corps de l'infini.* Éditions Triptyque, n.p.

DANIEL GUENETTE, *L'Irrésolue.* Éditions du Noroît, n.p.

MARCELLE ROY, *L'Hydre à deux coeurs.* Éditions du Noroît, n.p.

LE QUEBEC EST un pays riches en poètes. Chaque année, des maisons d'édition publient en nombre assez considérable des recueils de poésie ce qui laisse penser que le Québec est aussi un lieu où ce genre se lit avec intérêt et bonheur. Ces recueils sont généralement mis en pages avec finesse et grand soin du détail. De fait, ce sont quelquefois de véritables petits chefs-d'oeuvre.

Les sept dessins de l'auteure, inclus dans *L'Hydre à deux coeurs* de Marcelle Roy, illustrent en même temps que le livre cette tendance des poètes québécois à vouloir accompagner leurs textes de dessins, de photos, bref, d'images souvent créées par le/la poète même. On dirait qu'il y a là soit l'aveu d'une certaine impuissance de croire dans le pouvoir du mot, soit l'expression du plaisir de pouvoir s'exprimer par plus d'une forme d'art. Le domaine de l'imaginaire se révèle indivisible. L'hydra de Marcelle Roy a non pas sept têtes, mais deux coeurs ou consciences, ce qui fait d'elle une "déconcentrée chronique," consciente de "tout le désespoir" du monde moderne, mais en même temps désireuse "de pouvoir renifler en toute quiétude le chant des fleurs et l'odeur des oiseaux." C'est un déchirement qui mène nécessairement au divertissement dans le sens pascalien. "J'ai lu six simenon cette semaine," avoue Roy, désemparée. La langue lui paraît "paralysée et traître," d'où probablement la fuite dans le dessin.

Roy tente de confondre enfer et paradis, peur et joie, le négatif et le positif. Sa métaphore est canadienne: "Gel et dégel confondus, donnant naissance aux roses: poème en acte, au sein de la paralysie." En même temps, Roy se place dans l'univers, celui de l'âge nucléaire où rien n'est certain. C'est peut-être cette appartenance qui explique certaines fausses notes qui semblent exemplifier les dissonances du monde moderne. Des mots comme "foutre" et "idiotie" dans des poèmes doux et musicaux surprennent, choquent et, en fin de compte, y sont de trop.

Rien de tel dans *L'Irrésolue* de Daniel Guénette. C'est un livre sensible et intelligent, d'une lecture tant soit peu laborieuse, où chaque mot doit être saisi, compris avec beaucoup d'attention. Ce "soliloque racontant / l'égarement de son promeneur" exige une grande persévérance de la part du lecteur désireux d'attraper au vol les images furtives et tendres qui habitent "les grandes ailes déployées du discours" de ce poète québécois. Regret, désenchantemment. Le recueil montre un paradis bien perdu et un monde qui se révèle d'un "calme plat":

En sortant de l'école toujours
les mains dans les poches les enfants
caressent des projets et montent aux arbres
avec des livres d'astrologie
en guise de révolte
puis le pays finit par se faire
très plat et le monde entier
tombe dans un long sommeil

Guénette propose deux remèdes à ce mal du siècle: la nature qui a le pouvoir de faire reverdir "le paysage d'ennui" et le travail des mots qui permet au poète de faire son auto-portrait que la table des matières, ici appelée "table des poèmes," évoque:

Étrangeté même / qu'il conviendra de garder / n'ayant
jamais eu lieu / comment donc narrer / de tout temps /
ce cordon coupé / socialement / Histoire consommée /
présent / désirs / impressions / ravissements / Désenliser /
L'Histoire ne ce raconte pas / malgré l'écran / les bons
sentiments / farouchement / s'étant jeté d'un peu trop haut /
de l'expérience toujours commune / travaux et jeux de
gravité / Aujourd'hui.

Une table des matières qui constitue à mon avis une sorte de poème trouvé et qui mène, à travers le jeu de miroirs de la poésie, à une pensée profonde.

Avec *Le Corps de l'infini*, les Éditions Triptyque publient une rétrospective de l'oeuvre de Jean-Marc Fréchette (1968 à 1985), un des plus doués des poètes de sa génération. Ici aussi, l'enfance est le paradis. En exergue, le poète place cette phrase d'Héraclite: "Le royaume est de l'enfant." Chez Fréchette, l'enfance "n'est jamais tarie" et "l'écolier gracile embaume la Nuit." Fréchette emploie une écriture du corps et des sens. L'aurait-il apprise chez les femmes de notre époque? En tout cas, c'est grâce à cette écriture du corps que ses vers resplendissent de lumière, de couleurs, de sons, de parfums et de textures. Des fruits "roucoulent," "les maïs lèvent des bras extatiques." Devant la beauté et la richesse de la nature, le poète se demande "qui nous a enivrés de ce nectar du nombre pur / et de la proportion?" Est-ce Dieu? Mais c'est aussi Meera, figure mythique, créatrice d'un monde aux montagnes "tendrement amoureuses," aux feuilles d'automne "rubis et topaze" et même "hostie de braise."

Fête des sens, fête de l'émotion, fête d'une foi célébratoire, la poésie de Jean-Marc Fréchette nous enchante et remonte à la Source. Sa voix rend visibles la Beauté, la Lumière, la Douceur dans un monde qui amasse les horreurs, l'injustice et les tortures. Sans prêcher, sans moraliser, Fréchette lance un appel à la bonne volonté, à la raison, à la sensibilité humaines. La lecture de son oeuvre provoque en nous des questions auxquelles il est urgent de trouver des réponses.

MARGUERITE ANDERSEN

REAL ISSUES

MONICA HUGHES, *Blaine's Way*, Irwin, $9.95.
CAROL MATAS, *The Fusion Factor*, Fifth House, $3.95.

ALTHOUGH CAROL MATAS'S *The Fusion Factor* and Monica Hughes's *Blaine's Way* are very different kinds of adolescent fiction, both focus on the harsh realities of life. Matas brings attention to the causes and consequences of nuclear war, even while delivering the hopeful message that humankind's extinction is not inevitable. Hughes's novel is a retrospective journey through the childhood and teenage years of her protagonist, Blaine Williams, and centres on the need to temper youthful dreams with the difficult lessons of experience.

The Fusion Factor begins with Rebecca partnered with Lonny for a school

project. Lonny, she learns, is trouble, but when she sees him kidnapped and no one believes her, Rebecca feels she has a responsibility to investigate. What Rebecca discovers is beyond her wildest dreams: a time machine which is used to kidnap children to an underground shelter, where in the year 2040 a few survivors of nuclear war continue to live. The reason for the kidnappings is one of monumental proportions, and in large measure seems to justify what would otherwise be an unacceptable action. As most of the children born after the bombing are retarded, young, healthy children are needed to allow for the continuation of the underground community and, it is hinted, of the human race itself.

As well as recounting Rebecca's efforts to get herself and the other kidnapped children back to their own time so that somehow the nuclear holocaust can be avoided, Matas's novel is a depiction of life after nuclear war. While there is mention of the obvious things — fallout, radiation sickness, nuclear winter — these do not make the greatest impression on Rebecca or on the reader. Rather it is the greyness of life underground, the lack of spontaneity in children who have known nothing else, the awareness that the world Rebecca so much takes for granted is gone. It is a frightening reality made even more horrifying when Rebecca and Lonny encounter mutants from the surface who are neither animal nor human. The point is that the people living in the underground shelter are no more human than the mutants, in that they are denied the opportunity to grow in the world.

Blaine's Way also focuses on how growth demands experience in the world. Presented with a tape recorder and a set of empty tapes, an elderly Blaine Williams is asked to provide an account of his boyhood for his first great-grandchild. As a young boy, Blaine is mesmerized by the trains that rush by the northern boundary of his parents' southern Ontario farm: they represent an escape to a world of excitement and riches far removed from the threadbare existence of his parents. At the outset of the novel, Blaine promises himself that he will eventually leave to "find the real world, the world where dreams come true." What Blaine learns is that the real world of dreams is not necessarily better than what he already has.

This lesson is a difficult one to learn, and most certainly Blaine experiences his share of adversity. First, Blaine's mother flees to the big city to pursue her own dreams, and then his father leaves to work in town, no longer able to face constant reminders of his failure as a farmer and a husband. Blaine must come to grips with these losses, although it is not a matter of him having to struggle alone. Throughout, Blaine is supported and comforted by his loving grandparents and good friends, one of whom he discovers means far more to him than just being a friend. Always, however, Blaine retains his insatiable appetite for the beyond, which romantic novels and trips to the Canadian National Exhibition will not satisfy.

When war comes, it presents the opportunity for which Blaine has long been waiting. Lying about his age, Blaine enlists in the Canadian Army, which, he discovers, is drearier in many ways than anything he has yet known. He also experiences the deaths of friends, and, when his own day of glory finally comes at Dieppe, the romance of dreams is shattered by the pain and ugliness of war. Home becomes the place of dreams, and, as one of the few survivors, Blaine is fortunate to have his dream become a reality.

A strength of both novels is that they teach without moralizing. The need for literature that focuses young readers' at-

tention on the nuclear threat is obvious, especially if one is mindful that the future really belongs to these young readers. Matas understands that social awareness is not achieved overnight; rather it is always evolving, and must therefore be part of the educational process. Too often, young people see themselves as having little influence; *The Fusion Factor* makes clear that young people can matter, as Rebecca and her friends return to their own time intent on working for peace. Hughes's book is not so focused, although her message is still unmistakable: the bigger and better things in life are not necessarily the goals for which one should strive, and too often we fail to realize what is valuable until we are in danger of losing it. Commonplace though these ideals might be, they have particular significance for a generation of young people enjoying a standard of living which Hughes's young protagonist would never dream possible.

A further feature of both novels comes from each writer's ability to evoke mood and atmosphere. The sense of oppressiveness is unmistakable in Matas's novel, and is especially heightened when Catherine and Lewis, two children from the future, finally see the sky and are overwhelmed by a world they had only viewed on videos. In Hughes's novel, the summer heat, the back-breaking work of picking tobacco, and the carnage of Dieppe are equally real. Both novels are written in a language that, while to the point, does not simplify matters. And both novels, while possessing considerable action, are sufficiently reflective to force young readers to think about what they are reading. When, in *The Fusion Factor*, the physician dying of leukemia talks of the bombing, the horror he describes has a profound effect on Rebecca that is also experienced by the reader. Equally effective is the quiet conversation between Blaine and his father before Blaine goes overseas. In finally coming to understand his father, who, Blaine finds, is not without feeling and dreams, Blaine demonstrates how easy it is to misjudge others.

There are, needless to say, a few things with which one might quibble. That in *The Fusion Factor* Catherine and Lewis are so easily accepted into Rebecca's family stretches believability, although Matas does allow that the adjustment is not going to be an easy one. Arguments at the breakfast table start the second day. Matas overlooks, too, an inevitable problem encountered in time travel. If the children are to make a difference because of their experiences in the future, then the future which they experienced will never actually occur. While Matas might be wise to avoid the problem of tampering with history, it is certainly an issue for any regular reader of science fiction. As for *Blaine's Way*, it sometimes suffers from a sentimentality incongruous with its realism, although this sentimentality might be forgiven in that the narrator is an elderly man looking back over his life. And the final page of the novel is just too obtrusive, as Blaine talks of the "Grim Reaper," and provides some last-minute preaching for his great-grandson.

DAVID W. ATKINSON

COMIC RAGE

JOHN METCALF, *Adult Entertainment*. Macmillan, $19.95.

IN *Adult Entertainment*, John Metcalf once again proves, to anyone who might still be demanding such proof, that he is a master of the contemporary short story, classic division. As a writer who has long announced his love of such comic geniuses as Evelyn Waugh, P. G. Wodehouse, Beryl Bainbridge, and Anthony Powell, he takes his place in their

company, a writer of wit and style, determinedly set against readers who appear to be only interested in theme.

Metcalf has written at great length and with great power against those critics who, as he sees it, miss the writing for the theme, and he is, alas, right to see that they still rule the roost in Canadian studies. A few years ago, he published a collection of essays, *Kicking Against the Pricks*, in which he both set forth his ideals and attacked all those who failed to measure up. They were essays, so they asked for agreement or disagreement, but what struck me was that even when I violently disagreed with his assessments, I could not help but laugh delightedly at the manner in which he made them. With stories, the demand for agreement is not really part of what is being offered. Indeed, Metcalf insists that "the only way of judging a collection of stories is by asking if each story, individually, succeeds in creating a real world, if each one, individually, is an entrancing performance. And if it does and if it is, in God's name, what more could you ask for?" Well, some readers will ask for more, I guess, but I must say that by his own criteria, Metcalf has scored very high marks, indeed, with *Adult Entertainment*.

In the sometimes liberating art of comic rage, John Metcalf has few peers. Comic rage is not his only tone, and there are moments of muted compassion, of deeply felt love, of painful self-awareness, and of youthful idealism, which glow in these stories; but a wild, comically overdone, rhetoric of rage is one of Metcalf's finest stylistic accomplishments. In those moments when his characters give in to righteous anger, the writing achieves an edge, a brilliant sharpness, that has me both clutching my sides with laughter and feeling very unsettled indeed.

The greatest rage of *Adult Entertainment* overwhelms Paul Denton, the protagonist of "Polly Ongle," especially when he has to confront his teenage punkish son. Paul's anger erupts into lengthy perorations (of which this passage is only an excerpt) which brilliantly reveal a character at war with himself, discovered for us in the movement of the language by which he thunders through his growing anger:

> Paul was enraged by his son's appearance, manners, attitudes, reflex hostility, hobbies, and habits. He was reduced to incoherent anger by the boy's having mutilated all his clothes by inserting zippers in legs and sleeves, zippers which were secured by bicycle padlocks, so that he looked like an emaciated scarecrow constructed by a sexual deviant, by his smelly old draped jackets which he purchased from what he called "vintage clothes stores," by his bleached hair which he coloured weekends with purple food-dye, by his ruminant of a girl-friend whose mousy hair was bleached in two stripes intersecting at right angles so that she looked like a hot cross bun, by his wearing loathsome plastic shoes because he didn't want to be party to the death of an animal, by his advocacy of the execution of all "oppressors," which seemed to mean, roughly, everyone over twenty-five who could read, by his intense ignorance of everything that had happened prior to 1970, by his inexplicable and seemingly inexhaustible supply of ready cash, by his recent espousal of self-righteous vegetarianism, which was pure and total except for a dispensation in the case of pepperoni red-hots, by his abandoning in the fridge plastic containers of degenerating tofu, by his rotten music, by his membership in an alleged band called The Virgin Exterminators, by his loutish buddies, by the *names* of his loutish buddies, names which reminded Paul of science fiction about the primitive descendants of those who'd survived the final nuclear holocaust, names like Deet, Wiggo, Munchy, *etc.* . . .

One of the many joys to be discovered in this passage is the unerringly accurate presentation of a particular voice. Although it is all about Paul's son, it is Paul we come to know here. Certainly one of the aspects which caught me was

the power of the "adult" anger directed against the threatened "anger" of the young. And that anger is tied in somehow with the anger the middle-aged Paul once directed against his parents. And it is especially connected to his not-so-very-secure sense of self. Finally, however, the passage is "about" the comma and the dependent clause; and it is a wonderful exhibition of their use.

Paul is not, obviously, without blemishes himself, and a good portion of "Polly Ongle" is given over to letting him display them. Indeed, although it is sometimes difficult to discuss "character" these days, one of the joys of Metcalf's writing is its presentation of "voice" if not of character in the old sense. The figures of his text all perform their turns, each speaks and presents a unique shape of language to us. For example, Norma, the "Polly Ongle" figure of Paul's daydreams, finally loses his interest through not only what she says but how she says it. The various members of the North Portage Thursday Evening who invite writer Robert Forde to read to them are caught in the amber of prose, each in a telling gesture of speech. And the same can be said of almost all the figures who parade through these pages. It is Metcalf's gift to hear the nuances of individual speech and capture them for us, *on the page*, using all the technical means at his disposal to do so. That he takes extreme care in capturing nuance, he makes clear in his fine essay, "Punctuation as Score."

If I have seemed to wander away from saying what the stories in *Adult Entertainment* are about, it is because I agree with Metcalf that what counts is the performance of a story. There are five fine performances in this collection, two novellas, and three shorter pieces. "Polly Ongle" is one of the novellas; the other, "Travelling Northward," does a marvellously comic job of showing us the worst side of public readings from the author's point of view and, in the middle of all this awful comedy, presents a deeply felt image of married fidelity and love. In "Single Gents Only," Metcalf returns to his native England to tell a tale of a young man's introduction to the big city. "The Eastmill Reception Centre," also set in England, appears at first glance to be a typical story of the abuse of power by the educational establishment, but it opens up to a larger visionary darkness which not only interrogates "the system," but also questions the very act of writing stories. In "The Nipples of Venus," Metcalf offers another version of the traveller's tale, full of the kind of carefully observed detail which he is so good at and leading to a daring anti-epiphany of raw power.

Metcalf's writing has been called elegant, witty, mischievous, full of surprises, and painfully comic. It is all of these and more. One need only look at the lunchtime conversation among a crowd of sightseers in "The Nipples of Venus" to discover how well Metcalf can inscribe a dramatic situation. It is at textual "moments" like this that we can see how important the tiny details of craft like the use of punctuation and paragraphing really are. But all this craft is only there to serve the performance which is the story we are reading with such interest and delight. The story means to catch us in its spell, and in Metcalf's able hands it does.

Throughout *Adult Entertainment,* Metcalf creates fictions which live up to his highly ambiguous title: they are demanding and continually doubled in their presentation. They can make us laugh but they can also make us cry. In every one of these five stories, Metcalf demonstrates a concern for and command of his craft which I can only admire; the sheer bravura of the style elicits my continual delight. But if all I

did was admire, they would not be worthy of the praise I feel they have earned; these stories are never simply exercises, and the obvious craft which went into their making always leads to the creation of fictions which insist upon emotional engagement. The reader may not "like" all of these stories, but he (or she) will not be able to remain aloof, and I cannot think of higher praise than that. *Adult Entertainment* belongs on that fabled five-foot bookshelf of necessary story collections, right alongside the books of such writers as Alice Munro, Ray Smith, and Mavis Gallant, to name just some of the writers Metcalf and I both admire.

DOUGLAS BARBOUR

FIRE & ICE

MAVIS GALLANT, *Paris Notebooks: Essays & Reviews*. Macmillan, $24.95.

READERS OF MAVIS GALLANT'S short stories may feel as if they are coming unbearably close to both the fire and the ice of a passion at once warmly engaged with and coolly detached from recent history. The imagination at work in this stunning collection often reports its perceptions of a related sensation: in the opening, two-part diary of the May 1968 "events" in Paris (the word does not fully render the shadings of les "événements," as they were referred to in France), Gallant describes her reaction to an exchange between a French mother and daughter:

> Talk with young Barbara. "The German students are being deported," she tells me. "But we need them here — they are organized, they can tell us what to do. *Oui, nous avons besoin des allemands.*" Her mother, who spent the war years in a concentration camp, says nothing. I feel as if I were watching two screens simultaneously.

The figure of the split-screen in this passage embodies many of the strengths of Gallant's account: its precisely fragmented discourse, its eerie immediacy (demonstrating once again the paradoxical effects of the simple present tense — suspension and engagement at once, because on the page there can be no present tense, and yet there is only the present tense), its fluid migrations from English to French and back again, its sudden reflection on the recent past, already a blurred film at best, at worst nothing at all to the students — and, above all, the contradiction Gallant describes in her "Introduction": that the month-long convulsions were both signals of "a noble desire" *and* of a "collective hallucination" that "life can change, quite suddenly, and for the better."

Always keenly aware of her position as participant in and reporter on the experience and the spectacle of French culture, Gallant opens the second essay, on the Gabrielle Russier tragedy, by translating the French social system into American terms, institution by institution. Then she dismisses this translation as an impossibility and proceeds with her report, in which the drama of the principal characters — Russier, Christian Rossi, and his parents — is set out within a comprehensive analysis of French codes of conduct for parents and children, teachers and students, and lovers. In turn, these codes are explained within an analysis of the French educational and legal systems. And all of these networks are explained with reference to the pervasive, complex influence of media very different from their North American counterparts: Gallant's descriptions of the television, radio, and print reportage provide ample evidence of her long-standing familiarity with contemporary manifestations of the "news" on both sides of the Atlantic.

As announced in the subtitle, the book is divided into two sections, essays and

reviews respectively. Five other essays complete the first section: a portrait of Paul Léautaud, quirky and brilliant diarist, misanthrope, and lover; Gallant's introduction to Joyce Hibbert's 1978 book, *The War Brides*; "Paris: The Taste of a New Age," a pungent survey of selected highs and lows of Parisian architecture, recent and remote; "What Is Style?," Gallant's much-quoted 1982 essay; and her tribute, "Limpid Pessimist, Marguerite Yourcenar," which, like all of Gallant's nonfiction, is replete with passages which make the striking, precise observation seem natural but never casual, reflexive but never self-conscious:

> Writers who choose domicile in a foreign place, for whatever reason, usually treat their native language like a delicate timepiece, making certain it runs exactly and that no dust gets inside. Mme. Yourcenar's distinctive and unplaceable voice carries the precise movement of her finest prose, the well-tended watch.

The reviews — there are eleven of them here, out of some fifteen Gallant has written since 1972 — are principally on books by or on French writers, although there are also reviews of works by Grass and Nabokov and on Elizabeth Bowen. All of the reviews are instructive and, in the best sense of the word, opinionated. Gallant is exasperated with de Beauvoir's exhaustive and exhausting *All Said and Done*, annoyed with the pastiche of Grass's *From the Diary of a Snail*, and fascinated with the shifts in French perceptions of the work, the figures, and the images of Céline, Malraux, Colette, and Giraudoux. That Gallant is well and widely read in French literature is no surprise, but her range works to particularly effective ends in these reviews, which are, quite simply, exemplary in their acuity, their breadth, and, at points, their angry clarity. Predictably, and justifiably, Gallant is irritated with poor translations from French to English, and several of the writers and translators under review come in for scathing commentary on this count.

For those unfamiliar with Gallant's nonfiction, this collection provides a well-rounded introduction to her formidable talents as a writer who by profession rejects those professionals — be they historians, literary critics, or social analysts — who by fiddling with jargon tamper with reality, particularly the reality Gallant begins and ends with, language itself. For those who have read some of these essays and reviews where they originally appeared — most of them in *The New Yorker*, *The Atlantic*, *The New York Review of Books*, *The Canadian Forum*, and *The New York Times Book Review* — this handsome book provides welcome access, in one place, to an imagination equally and intimately at home in fiction and in the world.

NEIL BESNER

OUT OF LOVE

MICHAEL PETERMAN, *Robertson Davies*. Twayne/ECW, n.p.

I HAVE A STRAIGHTFORWARD two-part question to ask concerning any work which purports — as does Michael Peterman's *Robertson Davies* — to discuss Davies as a man of letters: How well does it help me to unravel the secret of Davies's impact upon those to whom the continuing drama of Canadian literary identity is of little consequence, those who read our writers out of love, rather than out of a sense of national duty? The reasons for this question arise directly from my experience in diverse universities, experience which illustrates the effect of Davies's work upon the unprepared.

When I taught first-year English at the University of British Columbia, "our" novel was *Fifth Business*. The class included a forestry student who claimed never to have read a book, and to have

concealed this fact from previous teachers. Somehow, he realized that old tricks would no longer work; in a fine rage he applied himself to Davies, whereupon a transformation occurred. The determined semiliterate was converted into a humble Davies champion, a devourer of the (unassigned) remainder of the Deptford trilogy and the albatross of my student conference hours, wherein he regaled me with criticism, appreciation, and, when other words failed him, a tape-loop paraphrase of each story. Time passed. A few years ago an American colleague at a Japanese university where I taught English accosted me one morning, *The Rebel Angels* in hand. Why, she demanded, had I never told her that there were *real writers* in Canada, people who *said* things, people who could *read*, for heaven's sake? In all cowardice I admit I would not have expected her to listen. But there are captive audiences. Last year, at a Canadian Literature seminar at the Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, one of my brightest students, pressed to justify her preference for Davies above all other English- and French-Canadian authors on my agonized-over list, sighed: Davies was different, and, "for we Japanese, such a relief from all those gloomy agricultural stories."

Indeed. So my question regarding Davies's appeal is understandable. And not, I think, unimportant. And, yes, Peterman does satisfy me by suggesting the answer to it. Davies's success with varied audiences comes, he indirectly tells me, from his writing about one topic which is of obsessive interest to everybody: How may I survive the circumstances of my life, how best may I know myself, and to what use shall I put that hard-won knowledge? That *Robertson Davies* helps me deal with my own question is in keeping with the book's stated purposes, the most important its investigation into what Peterman calls "Davies's sustaining theme, the importance of self in modern life." Details of Davies's personal life are presented briefly, and then only to flesh out our understanding of Davies the writer. Whatever questions concerning the works are brought to this book, material for answers probably is here, because Peterman's pursuit of theme requires that he discuss all Davies's published writings, from the Marchbanks days to *The Rebel Angels*. Those who come to the study without questions may find that some occur after they read Peterman.

On the gossipy level, for example, we may find here no controversy suggested, no reasons spelled out for Davies's receiving the Governor General's Award for *The Manticore* rather than for *Fifth Business*, an arguably superior book which preceded it by two years, but after reading Peterman's perceptive assessment of each novel we know we would not mind sleuthing them out. Neither would we mind investigating Davies's sometimes considerable disdain for some of the very characters he has made symbolize ideas important to his works, a line of inquiry suggested by Peterman's observations. In raising this and several other points concerning Davies's literary strength, Peterman hints at the topic for an interesting paper on the interplay of authors' and characters' personalities.

In fact, background material for many interesting papers is offered. If we suspect that, critically speaking, Deptford has been done to death, a short scanning of Peterman's useful bibilography will only confirm it. But we can also learn from Peterman that fertile fields await the drama student. To date, only one major work appears to have been written on his drama, Davies's first and perhaps most persistent literary love, its quirks of character portrayal and its structural threads clearly discernible in the fabric of his novels.

Peterman does well by the body of plays, drawing attention to little-known works, offering synopses, suggesting questions: Will *General Confession* ever be produced? Is it stretching the point to see in *King Phoenix* the elements of the theme of individuation years before (Peterman claims) Davies found Jung? Were Davies's feelings of disillusionment with the drama as vehicle for his ideas warranted, or was he simply too heavy-handed a dramatist to survive scrutiny? But twice as much space is given to the novels, and this is probably as it should be, for there is no doubt that it is through his prose fiction that Davies has reached us most readily.

If there are reasons other than the obvious logistical ones for this popular preference they may lie, as Peterman appears to suggest, in the superior conviction with which Davies has managed to make his novels' rather than his plays' characters vehicles for his most important ideas — those concerning individuation. In this connection, Peterman identifies *Leaven of Malice* as a 1950's signpost to Davies's directions of the 1970's and 1980's.

The relationship of authors to their recurrent predominating ideas always fascinates. In Davies's case, given the nature of the theme, this fascination has been tinged sometimes (as Peterman reminds us) with the attribution to author and character alike to overweening vanity, selfishness, didacticism, and even lack of commitment to democratic ideals. However, given — again — the nature of the theme, there is in Peterman's work sufficient material to build a case for these accusations constituting an irrelevancy, if only on the grounds that Davies has spoken consistently to the need for both individual and national self-assessment. I, for one, will find Peterman's work an invaluable teaching and study tool.

SHIRLEY BUSWELL

MAZE & FIELD

MATT COHEN, *Nadine*. Viking, $19.95.

THE PLOT OF *Nadine* is ingenious. Nadine, born in Paris in 1941, should have been exterminated along with her mother and her Jewish father. However, thanks to a ruse perpetrated before her birth by her aunt, she does not exist officially; unofficially, she appears to be the child of this aunt and a resistance fighter who poses as her father. Thus, Nadine's life is saved, and, in 1948, her aunt sends her to Toronto to be adopted by pitying strangers. Nadine grows up to emulate her father's brother, a world-famous astronomy professor who teaches at the University of Toronto. Eventually she has affairs with this uncle; with Miller, her Toronto neighbour, who is also an astronomer; and with Yaakov, an Israeli soldier. Finally, on vacation in Jerusalem, she is injured by a grenade. *Nadine* is her memoir, written as a catharsis during her recuperation in her aunt's Paris apartment.

Nadine begins at the end and, like memory, jumps back and forth in time until the whole story has unfolded. Editorial slips mar this plan — paragraphs are repeated or left out, people are introduced long after their entrances, Nadine's uncle expresses a wish to hire an assistant whom he has already hired. These and other *faux pas* induce a sense of disorganization, whereas actually Cohen has built *Nadine* carefully to create emotional depth, psychological verisimilitude, and resonance of incident.

The narrative sequences set in Vichy France are exciting. Cohen understands the characters and establishes their plight clearly enough to evoke the reader's empathy, and he makes impressive use of the situation, constructing his fictional plot in the midst of a dreadful historical epoch. He also creates a brilliant scene in which Nadine is caught up with Lang-

ston Hughes in a Committee for Nuclear Disarmament demonstration. But Nadine's childhood in Toronto, her experiences as a student, her life as an astronomy professor, and her accident in Jerusalem fall flat. The reason for this seems to be that in two areas crucial to the book — astronomy and femaleness — Cohen doesn't know what he's talking about.

Nadine, her uncle, and Miller are professors of astronomy, but Cohen's knowledge of that science appears to be minimal. Miller discovers a comet by looking in the right direction at the right time; this is all we are told, even though Miller is a major character in the book and this is the central event in his life. Nadine reflects that a speech made by her uncle "began with Einstein's statement that mathematical constructs arise independent of observed reality — which is a fancy way of saying scientists, like everyone else, just make things up." That a respected scientist would thus misconstrue Einstein's remark is not believable. When Nadine's affair with Miller hits a rough patch, she muses about her concept of the night sky:

> When I was a child I saw those maps — with their angry gods, their animal constellations, their annotated borders — and I felt I was being invited to join a mythic heaven of victories and defeats. But when future children see the maze of numbers to which the sky has been reduced, what will they think of the gods of science, of the conquests science has made? Will they feel invited to join in a universe where men and women are shadows of gigantic gods with a destiny large enough to fill a whole sky? Or will they see, in the numbered stars, the numbered blobs of matter, a clue to their own reduced destinies?

On the contrary, people attracted to science and mathematics may feel themselves "reduced" by "gigantic gods" but expanded in mind, spirit, and imagination by the comprehensibility of a field (not a "maze") of numbers. Nadine's reflections would be more suitable to an ignorant and prejudiced humanities professor. Cohen wanted characters who would reach for the stars. If they were to do so not only metaphorically but literally, as professional astronomers, he should have learned more about astronomy, mathematics, and the world-view of scientists.

Evidently the symbolic content of the novel also called for a female narrator/protagonist, and therefore Cohen chose to tell Nadine's story in the first person. However, Nadine is more a laundered male than a female — her perceptions and feelings have had "maleness" removed and, here and there, the author's idea of "femaleness" inserted. This is obtrusive only rarely, as when Nadine, aged 41, feels embarrassed while her doctor examines the breasts he has surgically repaired, or when Cohen tries to describe sexual encounters from a woman's point of view. But throughout the novel, the vigour of character generated by the plot seeps away in the absence of the continuous subtle gender identification that would make Nadine a life-like woman.

In Jerusalem, Nadine throws herself on a defective grenade tossed by chance in her direction. "I don't know if I've acted by accident or design," she thinks at the time, and later, "Perhaps only my heroic gesture had caused it to explode." This incident epitomizes the book's main problem. Nadine's uncertainty directs the reader's attention to the question of whether we have control over our lives or only the illusion of control. Cohen seems to want to say that our destinies are "written in the stars," and the structure and plot of the book reinforce this analysis. However, by setting up an imitation woman and scientists conceived in ignorance as his main characters, he muddies the question rather than offering answers, insights, or clarifications.

LAUREL BOONE

MYTHIC & SURREAL

RONA MURRAY, *Adam and Eve in Middle Age.* Sono Nis, $7.95.

FRASER SUTHERLAND, *Whitefaces.* Black Moss, $9.95.

LIBBY SCHEIER, *Second Nature.* Coach House, $8.50.

IN THE 1950's A POPULAR science and mechanics magazine featured a speculative article on robotics of the future. In the fanciful cover illustration a worker, strapped into a steel exoskeleton of servomotors and mechanical joints which supposedly multiplies his normal strength, lifts a car engine single-handed. Since then our factories, like our poetics, have become less and less anthropocentric. In this context, Rona Murray's slim allegory of aging domesticity succeeds in holding our attention less by its occasionally overbuilt and creaky structure than by the elemental fascination of its subject. The form is a dialogue between husband and wife, a long night of two souls bound in bitterness, habit, regret, resignation, and, finally, acceptance. The biblical machinery with which Murray envelops her angst-ridden personae is intermittently effective: although its mythic resonances occasionally amplify our sympathetic responses, it seems at times merely strained and cumbersome. Yet even in the society run by machine logic, these fragments shored against our ruins still retain some of their magical powers. They generate tension as the reader switches orbits around the poem's characters, now seeing them as particular individuals in empty-nest vignettes, now as actors in a drama of universal significance.

One quotation perhaps inadequately conveys the relatively unmodulated general tone of existential weariness and frustration filtered through a considerate and civilized restraint. The following illustrates the book's grave, decorous diction, carried by a limited yet skilfully handled repertoire of prosodic devices:

> The machine of me still functions,
> worn at the joints perhaps,
> not so well oiled
> as once perhaps.
>
> . . .
>
> Consuming its fuel,
> the machine of me drives pistons
> back and forth,
> back and forth,
> time is short
> time is short,
>
> its song.

Fraser Sutherland's *Whitefaces* is often a poetry of surfaces, of elusive meanings which shift and change. The collection also includes more precise and direct presentations of events and characters. This sophisticated and intelligent poet aims at effects which will stir the less-travelled corners of the heart. His tone ranges through the cool irony of "Her sons' choice of wives / has not always been as she wished — / nonetheless a challenge to statecraft"; the frank self-loathing of "some mornings I cannot bear to look / at the whiteface in the mirror"; and the unabashedly lyrical "we savour each other's lovely weather."

The book's opening poem, "The Piazza," refers to

> this de Chirico flesh
> the ruined king's last plaything
> this something studied
> an effect, an overture
> these sand-roads
> eternally made

The brief, tentative phrasing, like brushstrokes painting a complex of images, is reminiscent of early Poundian "Amygism," although discarding that school's emphasis on photographic clarity. De Chirico's metaphysical paintings illustrate the mystery behind everyday reality by depicting dreamlike illusions, and several poems adopt this proto-

Surrealist style, as in "The Train Moving":

their hands flutter
bending at the wrists farewell
farewell legs planted
goodbye leaves growing
in their hair

Yet other poems are bald narrative, almost empty of authorial comment:

She is 82. Her shaking hand
applies lipstick every day.
...
What beautiful hair she has!
Grey now;
once red.

Here stressed line-endings reinforce the flat factuality of the content, while the looser unstressed endings of the preceding two poems suit their more indirect presentation of meaning.

Technically accomplished, shunning the obvious and the trivial, Sutherland's deft understatement slips novel conjunctions of idea and attitude into the reader's sensibility like viruses.

Libby Scheier approaches the highly charged subjects of sex, love, family, and gender with a stripped-down vocabulary and colloquial style, as in "The Housewife's Poem to Her Sick Husband":

When you're sick it's the only
time I'm allowed to be strong.
Stones fall from my shoulders
and I become airborne,
light as a moonwoman.
...
Some day you'll come home early
without warning
and find me hovering over flowers
sucking nectar and dizzy against the sky.

Here the simple language carries the situation's spiritual content complemented by vivid metaphor. Without this imaginative power she lapses into the cliché of "Cotton Bowl, New Year's Day":

Football is beyond me.
Entire groups of heavily padded men
men who are large to begin with
collide with each other.

Or the *faux-naif* banality of

Red and spongy, pumping blood, very
physical, the heart.
The heart is not like the brain.
Scientists and doctors and so on know a lot
about the heart.

Her from-the-mouths-of-babes manner is hilariously successful in "Penises, 1", reminiscent of Lily Tomlin's scandalously confessional little character, Edith Ann:

Penises are funny.
Sylvia said they look like chicken gizzards.
I said sausage and eggs
old monkey skin
and hairs of an elephant's head.
Let's face it.
Penises are not goodlooking.
They can be fun, but they're never pretty.

This deadpan directness gives some poems the unpremeditated casualness of journal musings. Others are amplified by dreamlike images of violence: a woman slices off her breast, which becomes a flowered scarf, which she ties to her lover's wrist as she says good-bye; two women, one of them close to suicide, strangle and drown two seagulls; a man forces a woman to fire a gun at strangers, she magically escapes injury when he shoots her, and he falls to the ground as the gun becomes a bird. Much of the book's violence is transformed into such Symbolist nightmares of men damaging women, women damaging themselves or smaller creatures. Perhaps this is the patriarchal Second Nature which has contaminated the primal innocence Scheier mourns in "Fishing," the childhood excursion of which she remembers "with a sad astonishment the ease and pleasure of my comradeship with the men and boys. What has happened since then? Why has everything changed?"

JOHN DONLAN

ART ET REGARD

JEAN MORENCY, *Un Roman du regard: La Montagne secrète de Gabrielle Roy*. Centre de recherche en littérature québécoise, Université de Laval, $5.00.

IF WE NEED TO BE REMINDED that the most original and incisive critical work being done these days on Gabrielle Roy is coming largely from francophone critics, this rich volume of 99 pages brings the point home once again. Even though the book deals with only one of Roy's novels, it easily takes its place alongside the numerous noteworthy studies of this author in French that we currently possess. By way of comparison, three recent books on Roy in English are quite limited. Allison Mitcham, *The Literary Achievement of Gabrielle Roy* (1983), Marta Gudrun Hesse, *Gabrielle Roy* (1984), and Paula Gilbert Lewis, *The Literary Vision of Gabrielle Roy: An Analysis of Her Works* (1984) do little more than provide a reiteration of the clichés of Roy criticism, seasoned with interminable plot summaries and catalogues of themes. Even the French translation of the second of these three books (*Gabrielle Roy par elle-même*, 1985) is of greater interest than the original, in part because the French text is of superior quality to the English, but especially because of Alain Stanké's own preface and portfolio of illustrative materials.

Morency's study deserves particularly careful attention because it establishes more forcefully than heretofore the resonances between *La Montagne secrète* and a fruitful blending of critical traditions and approaches that Morency is not alone in exploiting. His point of view has obviously been greatly influenced by that of Maurice Émond, who was his thesis supervisor at Laval. The methods of both commentators hark back in a similar fashion to the work of their masters, Gaston Bachelard, Jean-Pierre Richard, Jean Rousset, Gilbert Durand, and Mircéa Éliade. Readers who have not already read Bachelard *et al.*, or Émond's own *La Femme à la fenêtre: l'univers symbolique d'Anne Hébert* (1984), ought perhaps first to peruse the concise description of Émond's method provided in his article "Les Approches thématique et mythocritique" (*Québec français*, March 1987). They will then be better prepared to savour the best in Morency and to understand the evolution of his argument.

La Montagne secrète (first published in 1961 and available in English translation under the title *The Hidden Mountain*) deals with the career of Pierre Cadorai, an artist who travels and paints his way across northern Canada from the Mackenzie River region to northern Québec, where he discovers a wondrous mountain that becomes his obsession. Later he travels to Europe in order to drink deeply at the well of the mother culture, but unfortunately dies of a heart attack (as Roy did) just as he is about to embark upon his envisioned masterpiece: an all-encompassing tableau of the mountain.

In best French dissertation style, Morency's introductory chapter sets out his method, definitions, and plan of attack. There we learn that the thrust of his study will be guided by his perception of one of the dominant themes of the novel, neatly summarized with a Cartesian twist in the formula *Je regarde, donc je suis* with which the study begins. According to Morency, the novel is thus preoccupied with the *activity* of the eye, with *how* it perceives and *how* it transforms what it perceives. *Regard* is an active outbursting of perception, so to speak, akin to the emission of light itself. In concentrating his attentions upon "la fonction imaginante," and in showing that man is "un être qui rêve devant le

mystère et l'inexplicable," whose reverie gravitates about certain themes expressed by means of images, symbols, and myths (all these terms are very carefully defined), Morency hints already in his first pages that this study will transcend the commonplace interpretation of the Roy novel in question as a somewhat rambling, thinly disguised allegory on the old theme of artistic creation. Morency is quite right to insist that *La Montagne secrète* is far more than just that.

The book's first chapter, entitled "L'Omniprésence du regard," demonstrates that "le regard" (the French word connotes an element of serene loftiness that the English word "vision" seems to overshoot) is in fact an obsessive, all-pervasive theme of the novel, characterizing not only the vision of Roy the novelist herself, but also that of her hero and of the whole universe she portrays. Vision, light, sky, and divinity are isomorphically linked, affirms Morency, and perception of the vastness of the northern firmament, on the part of the artist, reaches out to the fringes of mystical experience. But *regard* touches more than just the celestial. A more active form of vision than contemplation (one recalls the passive/active dimorphism apparent in the verb pair *voir/regarder*), *regard* interacts as well with an entire terrestrial universe: water, rock, elementary fire (the mountain gleams with a singular incandescence when Pierre first looks upon it), as well as with living forms such as trees (an obsessive anthropomorphic image in the novel), animals, and the rare human beings who populate the boreal landscape.

In his second chapter, entitled "Art et regard," Morency investigates the ways in which the artist's particular form of *regard* is linked to his productions. This chapter, the longest of the three making up the body of the book, seems to come closest to achieving its stated purpose, and thus constitutes a robust central core to the study. Artistic *regard* is an aggressive business, linked to a drive for power over man and landscape, in order to seize and fix their essence. Just as many of Roy's characters, in all her works, are obsessed with creating for themselves cozy, protective enclosed spaces of refuge, in remembrance of other paradises now lost, so the artist seeks to perceive and dominate the immensity of existence, with the ultimate aim of fixing it in his creation: "L'Art se dresse contre le temps." This artistic quest, which presents a means to revolt against mortal destiny, time, and decay, is reinforced in the novel by networks of spatial symbols as Pierre wanders vaguely eastward across the Canadian north, questing for light. Eventually he even crosses the Atlantic and ends up in Paris. At the same time, both in Canada and in France, the south exercises a similar luminous attraction. Other symbols, of a similar spatial nature, oppose the horizontality of decay through time, and the verticality of transcendence. (Most Roy characters are, like cats, fond of high places.) The strength of Morency's analysis in this chapter lies in the fusion he demonstrates between the idea of art as a transcendent presence in our midst, and the particular nature of Pierre Cadorai's interaction with his harsh environment.

The third central chapter of the study ("Regard humain et regard divin") attempts to establish links between the fundamental elements of Pierre's artistic endeavours, and basic human characteristics which have, across the ages, found universalizing expression in myth. In particular, Morency is concerned not only with the Prometheus story, which combines a revolt against divinely established order and a quest for light, but also with the theme of initiation, since

Pierre's wanderings approximate, after all, an initiating search of mystical proportions. The artist is in perpetual conflict with the divine, and is in fact attempting in his *oeuvre* to complete an otherwise imperfect creation process. The artist fuses with the divine, *becomes* the divine, as a result of the realization of his particular propensities. In illustrating these ideas, Morency explores the text for evidence of similarity between the symbols of Pierre's creative energies and efforts, and those of the correspondent mythical accounts. And once again, with commendable thoroughness, the critic elucidates the tight correspondence between the novel's plot and its various symbolic frameworks.

Perhaps, as Morency himself states in his conclusion, a reading such as this one in which an omnipresent and transforming *regard* is stressed, is possible only when the critic seeks to impose upon the work his own interpretative *regard*:

> En tant que regard étudiant le regard, nous avons pu saisir les symboles, les images et les mythes à leur source profonde, dans le jaillissement même du langage de l'écrivain, et c'est ce qui confère finalement à notre thèse son caractère de nouveauté et d'originalité.

Morency's text is not the only good study of this novel to appear recently in French. One's thoughts turn especially, in this regard, to Alexandre L. Amprimoz, "L'Homme-arbre de *La Montagne secrète*" (*Canadian Literature*, Spring 1981); André Brochu, "*La Montagne secrète*: le schème organisateur" (*Études littéraires*, Winter 1984); and Marie Grenier-Francoeur, "Étude de la structure anaphorique dans *La Montagne secrète* de Gabrielle Roy" (*Voix et images*, April 1976). However, Morency's approach to the novel is original, and his elucidation of some important elements of both this novel's fabric and Gabrielle Roy's preoccupations, will no doubt be applied to other works by the novelist with similarly praiseworthy results.

Jean Morency and his publishers at the Centre de recherche en littérature québécoise realize that a low price on a worthwhile commodity is still likely to assist in generating demand. The book is excellent value for the money. Informative and persuasive, Morency's book is also attractively presented and bound. However, a less displeasing typeface should have been used, and a bibliography of critical works other than those dealing specifically with Gabrielle Roy and *La Montagne secrète* included.

DENNIS ESSAR

DRAMATIC MEMORY

CAROLINE HEATH, ed., *The Land Called Morning: Three Plays*. Fifth House, n.p.

PAT SMITH, *The Oldest-Living*. Lazara Publications, n.p.

SHARON POLLOCK, *Doc*. Playwrights Canada, $6.95.

WHATEVER ONE MIGHT think of Salvadore Dali's "The Persistence of Memory," as a phrase, it pinpoints the central theme common to these five Canadian plays, all published in 1986. Each addresses the importance of recollecting the past for members of a social minority: in *The Land Called Morning*, for native Indians; in *The Oldest-Living*, for an old woman; and in *Doc*, for an unmarried woman writer. In each, memory is both persistent and allows characters to persist: it impinges upon the consciousness of protagonists in the form of dreams and recollections; and it allows the main characters to endure, to overcome forces that seek either to assimilate them, as in the native plays, or to control their sense of identity, as in the two plays about women.

The Land Called Morning is an anthology of short plays about native Indians. The first two plays, *Teach Me the Ways of the Sacred Circle*, by native writer Valerie Dudoward, and *Gabrielle*, a high school collective work performed in Cree and English from Ile-à-la-Crosse, Saskatchewan, use familial and historical characters to represent dramatically the forces of memory. In *Teach Me*, a young native dreams about his grandparents' Indian folk tales and ancestral home. These experiences free him from his inner conflicts, allowing him to embrace his Indian heritage while pursuing a career within the larger, non-native community. Similarly in *Gabrielle*, a young native woman communes with her cultural past: this time, in the form of a ghost — Louis Riel — who teaches her how to defy the federal government by establishing a local native government, as he did, with its own Bill of Rights. From their respective playing areas on stage, Gabrielle and Riel bridge a century to prove how a historical figure can inspire a minority group to fight for cultural and political issues. Though both *Teach Me* and *Gabrielle* employ native music, song, and masks, neither translates these into the characterization and action of the play: the characters never transcend their role as mouthpieces, and the plays, their overt didacticism.

The Land Called Morning, written by John Selkirk (with Gordon Selkirk) for the 1985 Edmonton Fringe Theatre Event, fares better. As Selkirk says, the play is "a story about two [native] teenage couples trying to make their way in, and some sense of, the world around them." Four times from individually lighted areas on stage, the characters pause to reminisce about deeply felt, idiosyncratic experiences. These memories are more fully integrated into action and character than the first two plays, showing us why, for instance, Robin succeeds as a boxer; why Patsy finds fulfilment in marriage; why Anne commits suicide; and why Peter must change.

Better yet is *The Oldest-Living*. Written by Pat Smith, a founder of the feminist Press Gang Publishers of Vancouver, *The Oldest-Living* was performed in Seattle in June 1984, as one in a series of plays by Northwest women playwrights. The plot is simple: two elderly women, who have lived together for thirty-five years, come into $10,000 when the older woman, Muriel, becomes the town's oldest-living citizen. These women both share memories and remember what they share: in the first case, when they discuss such things as steamship travel and the community's fledgling years; and in the second, when Muriel, as the "Oldest-Living," pronounces her "Two-Cents' Worth," publicly crediting Meredith as the source of her happiness and longevity. This play is about very modest people, with modest desires, who seem to know that contentment arises from gratitude and a sense of one's identity, reinforced by memory and companionship. As such, the play makes rather modest demands upon the audience — there are no scenes of gripping action nor deep psychological insight — but succeeds well enough given its carefully circumscribed goals.

Best by far is *Doc*. Many of Sharon Pollock's earlier plays such as *Walsh* and *The Komagata Maru Incident* deal with Canada's past, especially its suppressed, if not convenient, memory of itself. Since *Blood Relations* and *Generation*, however, Pollock's plays have focused on the family, on the psychological drama between and within family members. *Doc* pushes this trend to its limit: Pollock gives us an autobiographical play which examines the lives of her father, a work-obsessed Fredericton doctor, her alcoholic mother, Bob, and younger self, Katie. Most of the play, as Pollock notes,

consists of "the sometimes shared, sometimes singular memories of the past," as relived by Doc and the older self, Catherine. Indeed, the act of remembering is the play's action: an unopened letter to Doc from Catherine's grandmother provides the catalyst for the memories which chronicle the family history — from Doc's courtship of Bob to Katie's leaving home. Memory, too, expresses character: Catherine and Doc remember or forget different events, comment on the past, and even speak with the characters from the past, especially Catherine who interacts with her younger self, Katie, played on stage by a different actress. Memory, then, is a source of catharsis for Catherine, who is now free to forge a new identity, one which avoids both the passivity of her mother and grandmother and the obsessiveness of her father. In the play's closing frame, Catherine and Doc burn the grandmother's letter, setting themselves free from the past, and presumably, free for the future. The persistence of memory is not only the theme but the effect of *Doc*: audiences will long remember the playwright's emotionally charged and gripping confrontation with herself, her family, her past.

JILL TOMASSON GOODWIN

DEEP IN HIMSELF

RUSSELL BROWN, ed., *The Collected Poems of Al Purdy*. McClelland & Stewart, $29.95.

AL PURDY IS ONE of those rare poets who leave their hallmark stamped on every page they write:

> I'm so glad to be here
> with the chance that comes but once
> to any man in his lifetime
> to travel deep in himself
> to meet himself as a stranger
> at the northern end of the world.

This, for example, and a hundred other near-random quotes, could take the place of the most eloquent review ("And damn well ought to!" I can hear the poet say). Fortunately for the reviewer, any discussion of a collected poems — the garnering and winnowing of a lifetime's effort — can be no ordinary review. Like the work itself, it is to be a summing up (for now), a celebration of excellence, and a cause for wonder and explanation.

It is easy to praise the poems of Al Purdy. He's been admired and lionized since *The Cariboo Horses* came "battering thru the wind" into our startled consciousness in 1965. And reading this oeuvre from beginning to end confirms our intermittent responses since then. Here are the dazzling anthology pieces arranged tamely in their original, chronological glory: "The Cariboo Horses," "Mountain Lions in Stanley Park," "The Country North of Belleville," "Postscript," "The Country of the Young," "Lament For the Dorsets," and two dozen more. Like Layton before him, Purdy has established his credentials as one of the fine practitioners of the modern craft.

What more need be said? At least two things, both of which are addressed by Dennis Lee in his insightful, synoptic "Afterword" (Lee alas doesn't leave much for anyone else to say). Purdy is without question the premier poet of our brief literary history and one of the giants of poetry writing in English during the twentieth century. While such claims may seem extravagant, low-cost, and even meretricious (why bother "ranking" poets as if they were dogs in a show?), they are for Canadians important considerations. This collection itself admits to no other conclusion. For among the acknowledged masterpieces herein we find, reading straight through, the strength of *all* the poems and coincidentally the source of Purdy's power as a contemporary *maker*. Indeed, as Lee

implies, questing for gems and applying touchstones (a bit of Whitman, a little Beat, a dash of Black Mountain) as we do out of habit is itself a sign of our unexorcized colonialism. Reviewing Purdy's twenty-eight books one by one we have dutifully ferreted out the polished pieces and forgiven the unavoidable dross ("if only he'd quit writing those beery anecdotes!"). Well, here the dross has been trimmed and what is left is surprisingly large — 300 from an output well over 700. What's more, we are able at last to see what has been missed so far: these are 300 superbly crafted poems, almost all of them written in the first person, in a style that is unique, polyphonic, open-ended, and yet essentially unchanged during its mature phase of twenty-five years. These are the dimensions we use in discussing any major poet. Purdy fits them all; Lee has given us a learned description of the prosody (and M.A. students will be kept busy for a century glossing Lee's script while Al guffaws with the gods at such splendid foolishness); but the evidence is in the book itself.

The Purdy voice and style is singular among modern poets. Attempts to determine its locus and fix the nature of its magic have been many and various. But Purdy is no mere apostle of North American vernacular (a favoured view), even though he's spectacularly vernacular. What he has achieved, and Lee explains nicely, is a multi-voiced persona, a loveable doppleganger who can shift in a single poem or stanza up and down the register, across a dozen "voices," so that hieratic and demotic contend, confound, blend, and illuminate. To achieve this, Purdy has had to deploy an astonishing range of vocabularies, dialects, and idiolects; he has had to integrate these into the particular voice of his speaking character, a voice that in all its multiple guises and inflections remains the "same" for twenty-five years; and he has had to have full control over line, stanza structure, and harmonics. All of which he has made look easy — until you try to imitate or explicate. We have too long thought of Purdy as a "natural," a sort of miraculous bumpkin.

The technical achievement, then, is swiftly documented. But a persona needs to have human qualities, and extrasensory ones at that, especially if he inhabits 300 poems. What we find, among others, is a blending of Chaplin, Oliver Hardy, and the early Socrates with the mid-century, middle-of-the-road, bifocal *homo canadensis*, the guy we all know as Al Purdy (or is it A.W. or Alfred W.?). As Lee indicates, Purdy has done for colonial English what the Latin Americans have done for Spanish. He has taken the tongue of Shakespeare and Dickens and reinvented it in the service of poetry — which is itself the business of pulling experience (conscious and unconscious) inside-out through language, and vice versa. And we needed to see the whole *corpus* of this collection to realize the stature of Purdy's lifelong work. He has done for Canada — and for the development of English poetry in general — what Whitman did for America, what Yeats and Joyce did for Ireland: in explicating his own country's unconscious through its blazing particulars and the new-forged *langue* necessitated by such an undertaking, Purdy has expanded the possibilities of poetry-writing itself. Moreover, in doing so, he has rendered visible an image of Canada to be read backwards by Canadians and sideways by outsiders. Like those other great poets (I would include Eliot, too, that subverting colonial pulling off his English disguise for forty years), Purdy's generosity of spirit, his erudition, the catholicity of his interests exempt him from charges of narrow nationalism or regional obsession (i.e., you don't have to be Irish to like

Ulysses). Colonials have always had an advantage over native British writers: they have fresh territory to map with an outdated cartography; something must give, and it is usually the language itself. However, only the greatest talent can reconfigure the common tongue of poetry to fit perfectly the concerns immediately in front of him.

Purdy has done so. His lack of formal education, his inexhaustible curiosity, his laser-like innocence, and his stubborn refusal to be anything but himself — a Canuck from Prince Edward County, living the precarious stranger's existence on the periphery of empire and history — all these factors have no doubt contributed to his achievement, and help in a small way to explain why a poet from a marginal nation by the world's standards has not only forged a unique language for modern poetry in English, but has used it to establish one of the voices and forms of conscience which none of us can afford to ignore. That the material, matrix, and vernacular for such a triumph should have sprung from humble Canadian sources is both a surprise (aren't we always?) and a cause for celebration. Because of Purdy's work, minor Canadian poets have a standard set for them in their own house, not to intimidate or incite but to enlarge the rooms, freshen the air, and allow all of us to feel more at home. That outsiders might come to recognize the master's achievement and to learn more about us through him, might be a faint hope. But it really will not matter much. The loss will be theirs.

Most of the foregoing would embarrass the great poet, prompting horse-laughter of gargantuan delicacy. Let me say it all another way, then, more in the Purdyesque manner we've come to take for granted: *P.S.: Thanks, Al. You make good poems.*

DON GUTTERIDGE

FEAR & FORM

NADINE MCINNIS, *Shaking the Dreamland Tree*. Coteau Books, $7.00.

ROBERT FINCH, *For the Back of a Likeness*. The Porcupine's Quill, $7.95.

Shaking the Dreamland Tree is a deceptive title for Nadine McInnis's first collection of poetry for there is nothing dreamlike about these poems. Most, in fact, are painfully aware that human relationships, especially family relationships, are frequently complicated webs of ambivalent love and pain. Even the title poem, "The Dreamland Tree," a mother's reflection upon her young daughter and her *own* mother, yokes irreconcilable phrases in uneasy tension: "I offer my daughter stories of innocence / and bitter exile / old rhymes / no one believes anymore." McInnis's speakers never seem to transcend these tensions, although this appears to be less a weakness on the speakers' part than a fact of life in a world threatened by nuclear destruction. Hence, in one poem, the speaker tries to deny her daughter's inevitable confrontation with the unpleasant: "I teach her only words / I think she will enjoy / *cat, hug, frog*"; a few lines later, however, the narrator's fear crowds in on this denial: "Not long now / before she learns / *missile murderer.*" Occasionally the ambivalence of adult pain versus unconsciously powerful infant innocence is too glib, as in "Flights," where the birthing mother, viewing her just-born daughter, lies "in ruins / as she rises." Somehow the images throughout this poem do not sustain these concluding lines, fail to communicate the mother's experience of giving birth.

McInnis does not restrict herself to family relationships, although those poems about the mother-daughter relationship are among the most moving. But these intimate relationships are haunted by apprehensions beyond the reach of

family influence, especially the ominous threat of nuclear holocaust. "1964" and "1965" look back to "our side's" military airshows, the purpose of which was "to convince us we are safe"; "40 days," written at Cold Lake, Alberta, in March 1984, notes ironically the testing of the Cruise Missile on Ash Wednesday. Here too, however, the resignation to defeat overwhelms the effort to protest: "*ashes to ashes* / our signs are frozen / obsolete as prayers." Perhaps such resignation is the collection's limitation. The tone of these poems is so unrelentingly serious, their effect so grim, that one feels a little assaulted by the end. The reader occasionally suspects there may be a sense of humour lurking behind the dark images, as in "a feminist doll," but it never quite surfaces, remains too reined in, too restrained. Of course uniformity of tone is not necessarily a weakness, but the collection might have benefited from a little greater variety. There is power here but one might wish for a suggestion of hope amidst the all-too-justified gravity.

If readers can get past the cryptic, apparently arcane, description of Robert Finch's poems on the back cover of *For the Back of a Likeness*, they will certainly be rewarded for their patience. For the cover blurb, poetic phrases have been lifted out of the context of a variety of poems and strung together to give the impression of a poetry much more esoteric than is, in fact, the case. Indeed, this new collection of poems from the 1946 Governor General's Award winner conveys intelligence, wit, and wisdom. Here is poetry the elegance and artistry of which charms the reader both with its musical lyricism and its lively sensibility.

The first section of this five-part volume contains a number of sonnets (and a sonnet sequence) in both English and Italian style, with more or less adherence to the rigidity of the form. The sequence "Day," for example, is a happy illustration of Finch's belief that "Form Follows Function," that "idea engenders form." In the second sonnet of the sequence, the poet weaves the rhythmic revolution of day and night through the equally formal *abba* exactness of the quatrain:

> Day is creation's natural dialectic
> Mornings, the formless veers to formal sights,
> Evenings, form veers to formlessness, the light's
> Polarity grows dim with night's climactic.

Others among Finch's sonnets, like "Transcendence," resist the restriction of form by combining the Italian octave/sestet structure with an English alternate line rhyme scheme for a more playful tonal effect. It is a tone echoed in the closing two lines: "Some physicists at saint and poet glower / Like tone-deaf men deriding music's power."

The second section, less philosophical, more intimate than section one, contains a number of poems lamenting the intense but fragile nature of transient or never-born love. Probably the most personal section, the poems here still express the cultivated sensitivity of a poet whose task is not only to express but also to shift emphasis from the poet's voice to the economy and artistry of pattern. Section five, at first perhaps surprisingly religiously confessional in the context of the whole volume, in fact only focuses and articulates more explicitly the framework for all the other poems. Sometimes in the poems of this section the carefully constructed sonnet frame with its *abba* and concluding rhyming couplets threatens to upstage idea (something Finch pointedly denies in the earlier "Form Follows Function") with too great attention to form. On the other hand, it may be that the assurance and confidence of the religious sensibility here is suited to such a normative structure. It is occasionally a little on the calculated side, but the dependence on aesthetic

form seems to work in the context of Finch's faithful trust in the creative potential of form.

LESLIE-ANN HALES

SECRET TENSIONS

GILLES ARCHAMBAULT, *Standing Flight*, trans. David Lobdell. Oberon, $12.95.

LEONA GOM, *Housebroken*. NeWest, $8.95.

KEN LEDBETTER, *Not Enough Women*. Mosaic, $8.95.

ONE OF THESE TITLES is a major new first novel; one is a welcome translation of a Québécois work not previously available in English; and one is an attempt at working-class authenticity that quickly degenerates into a series of tall (and offensive) stories. In *Housebroken*, Leona Gom moves between the two nightmares, domestic isolation and the hell that is other people, depicting both with wit and a poet's eye for detail. The two women whose relationship is the subject of the book are both facing the problem of redefining themselves. The older, Ellen, is recently widowed, lonely, but resisting the expected widow's role that Chilliwack society has forced on her; the younger, Susan, has recently moved to Chilliwack because the bank her husband works for wants to see if he can make his wife get used to living where the bank wants them to live. Widowhood forces Ellen to see how cruelly restrictive are the choices permitted to women in this society. Yet Susan's feminist views disconcert her. She is dubious and even somewhat alarmed at Susan's angry pronouncement "for women *this* is an occupied country," but she also wonders whether it may not be partly true. Susan's frequent jokes about the banalities of consumer society, though genuinely witty, seem more and more like the expression of an anger that slips into despair. For all her rebellious humour, Susan lives dangerously near the edge.

If this seems a predictable device for setting up a consciousness-raising debate, I have given a false impression of the book. *Housebroken* is not a staged argument between a doctrinaire feminist and her reluctant convert, but the story of a developing friendship that has subtle strengths, secret tensions, and even the sort of mutual exploitation of weaknesses that is present in most friendships. Gom relies on two familiar literary devices: indeterminacy, and shifts in narrative point of view. As the book begins, we learn that Susan is dead; her husband, Whitman, brings Ellen a box of Susan's possessions — photographs, diaries, and drafts of poems, a play, some short stories. The cause of Susan's death is kept from us until later. Even then, the circumstances remain ambiguous, so that Ellen's motive for recalling these events is in part that of self-examination. Did Susan guess that Ellen was having an affair with Whitman? If so, did it matter to her?

Susan's voice is heard through her diaries and her literary drafts — another fairly well-worn narrative technique, but one that Gom puts to good use, making Susan's pain and anger more transparent to us. The Susan of the diaries is rebellious, cheeky, but finally rather irritating. More interesting in the end is what Gom does with the "literary" papers in Susan's box, showing how even a woman of Susan's political alertness, her discontent with Canadian smugness, is compelled to romanticize some things in her own life. Behind Susan's screen memories of an idyllic teenage romance, as documented in Susan's radio play, is a dark sexual horror that may or may not explain her behaviour in the last few weeks of her life.

Housebroken is many things: an exploration of the roles forced onto women, a story of a developing friendship, a study of the madness that lies in wait

behind the drip-dry shirts and cat food, an analysis of the defence mechanisms and other fictions that enable people to cheat their way into and out of relationships. The novel surprises us as the supposedly "normal" Ellen, "a person of whom there were no expectations," actually becomes a more interesting figure than the lively, rebellious Susan. And in the way that she uses the fiction-within-a-fiction of Susan's radio play, Gom shows that not far from her mind is the question of where fictions begin. Without parading the fact, Gom makes *Housebroken* a finely crafted piece of metafiction, a story about the psychological origins of stories, and one that can stand comparison with Atwood and Kogawa.

Oberon Press has now made four of Gilles Archambault's novels available in English. *Standing Flight* very definitely belongs to the category of metafiction, with its sudden jumps from third-person to first-person narrative, its near obsessive reiteration of the search for personal identity, and its unexpected conclusion, with the simple disappearance of the main character, Julien, as if he were an invisible character in a dream-narrative of Borges. The story is delicately, skilfully handled. Julien is a journalist on a Montreal newspaper, the kind of leftist intellectual who is sought out for interviews on radio and TV (Quebec being perhaps the only province where the professional journalist is widely treated with respect, and credited with a certain authority). Yet Julien finds himself losing his sense of purpose, even his sense of identity, and neither his career as a public person nor his liaison with an intelligent younger woman seems to be able to help him. As he thinks of turning his relationship with the woman, Laurence, into a story, he finds himself asking "suppose she had left her mark so profoundly upon you that you could no longer write without speaking of her?" In reaction against this unknown thing he has become, Julien is compelled to go back to Côte St-Jean, the working-class district where he grew up, and, as he puts it, "wander a little in the streets of my childhood."

Like Leona Gom, Archambault uses the uneven course of a relationship between the main character and an outwardly less stable, more tormented friend to precipitate the main character's crisis of identity and awarenes of having betrayed another. Here the unstable friend is Louis, Julien's uncle, who is, however, only a little older than Julien himself. Punishing himself with drink and a quarrelsome relationship with the wrong woman, alternately resentful of Julien and impressed by Julien's newly won bourgeois status, Louis is nevertheless Julien's ticket back to his working-class roots. Yet he has betrayed Louis already, by quitting Côte St-Jean for an education and a middle-class job. "You're not meant to be alone, Julien, you'll end up going mad," Julien is told, and madness is so close by the end of the book that it suggests itself as one explanation for Julien's final disappearance during the funeral of his uncle and friend. But this explanation would not be in tune with the undecidability that faces us at the end of the book. Julien is there while he is needed, a persona created by those around him — Louis, his mother, his mistress Laurence, his sister Nicole. Perhaps Julien was all along a non-entity; he vanishes as soon as others no longer need him, so shifting and indeterminate is reality in Archambault's book.

Ken Ledbetter's *Not Enough Women* is an attempt at a raucous, gutsy tale of life among country people in Missouri. From the purely technical point of view, it is well crafted, and thickly populated with unlikely, legendary backwoods characters. However, the central premise of the story is repellent and the humour is

offensive. A three-times-married woman, who as a child was sexually abused by her father, makes it her life's mission to teach every pubescent boy in the neighbourhood the joys of true sexual pleasure, so that the daughters of these young men will not suffer incestuous advances the way she had to. The recurrent sexual and scatological episodes quickly grow tiresome, and the "tall tale" style is unconvincing as a vehicle of working-class truth. The publisher's blurb for *Not Enough Women* claims that the book is "in the tradition of William Faulkner and Mark Twain." If only it were.

ANTHONY JOHN HARDING

FUTURE VOLUMES

HUGH HOOD, *The Motor Boys in Ottawa.* Stoddart, $14.95.

The Motor Boys is another volume of Hugh Hood's New Age series, a massive project which, if his claims are only partly realized, will place others, such as Dos Passos's *U.S.A.*, in the shade. However, as *The Motor Boys* is only the sixth of a promised ten, the series cannot yet be assessed; moreover, as it is styled a novel, the present work should have its own integrity. It must not, for example, simply recall names, events, even thematic material, from previous volumes, as if assuming that the reader will remember them from at least three years ago (*The Scenic Art*) or be sufficiently intrigued to return to still earlier volumes. As well, it must not contain material which has little relevance to the present volume, but may provide continuity for future volumes. Both these prohibitions are neglected in *The Motor Boys*, and the book suffers for it.

Hood's references to material from the earlier books are, admittedly, often merely annoying. What precisely May-Beth Codrington's visionary portraits were like is less important than knowing that Philip Horsbaugh presents him as Judas. Yet the many vague references to the whole group of portraits are irritants. References to people now dead are tantalizing but equally unfulfilled and issues involving them left obscure. More important, however, is that reference with implied substantial relevance, such as Matt Goderich's statement — "What happened around the reservoir and down the ravine may proffer some explanation of [my] inheritance" — in the midst of a gratuitous self-portrait. Unless the reader can remember the events that affected Matt's character in *Reservoir Ravine* (1979), the comment is meaningless.

There is neither great harm, of course, in occasional small violations of the second prohibition, and Hood manages a few of these quite deftly, as when Angela Robinson picks confidential papers off her father's desk and immediately sees their significance. But absolutely no *current* use is made of the incident. Much more damaging is the record of Tony Goderich's love affair in London, spread through the book. That Linnet Olcott uses him to further her career and then discards him may be intended as a parallel to the use of his father by George Robinson and the government party, but the parallel is quite loose and throws no greater light on the more significant action, Andrew Goderich's successful delicate negotiations and death in China, suggesting martyrdom. In fact, Tony's lengthy affair seems simply to anticipate his appearance, probably as protagonist, in a future volume.

On the positive side, Hood does employ a clear, if minimal, main plot line to unify the work. George Robinson, M.P., uses privileged information about the forthcoming Auto Trade Pact, diversifying his pharmaceutical firm's holdings

into auto parts plants on both sides of the border. After a brief defeat, he also regains his seat and becomes a parliamentary secretary to the new Prime Minister. He now has great wealth and power. Afraid of Andrew, he suggests that the NDP Nobel Prize winner be sent to reopen trade relations with China, pre-empting the U.S. Belatedly he realizes that Goderich saw the pact in an international perspective, as good for Canada. For subplot lines we have Tony's affair, and Matt's self-revelations together with his family relations and his father's story. But plot-line linkage is tenuous.

Hood's narrative technique does less to unify the work. Matt's commentary is provided in first-person narration, and the rest, over half the book is omniscient. There is no edict against mixing narrative modes, provided a strong reason exists. Here there seems no obvious reason, unless first-person is to provide deeper insight into Matt's rather shallow character. If this is indeed the intention, then the resulting revelations should be greater.

Hood seems content to allow Matt simply to tell the reader what he is like. He emerges as self-aware but not terribly introspective. His comments on art, architecture, politics, religion, and society are apt but not particularly acute, yet ultimately they acquire significance greater than that of the character himself, as milieu. Of George Robinson, little more is revealed than that he has considerable innate cunning, an instinct for the opportunistic move, and sheer good luck. The contrast of his character and high achievement makes George ironically amusing; Matt is too often colourless. Actually, the most interesting character in the book is George's enigmatic daughter, Angela. Her intelligence, self-possession, and animal vitality are glimpsed but rarely; however, she will certainly be another major figure in the series.

The greatest strength of *The Motor Boys* is, as perhaps expected, its descriptive richness. With real artistry, Hood captures the decade of the 1960's in peculiarly Canadian colours. Issues and events unroll, intricately bound with George's ventures in the auto parts trade and the Prime Minister's office, provided in pages of minute detail down to verbatim parliamentary news releases. Though with attenuating narration, Matt does reveal many standard preoccupations and prejudices of the period. The resulting verisimilitude is both convincing and impressive: satisfying enough that Hood may be forgiven when he expands to irrelevant detail. Still, with such abundance at his command, he could afford to be always selective and restrained, ever mindful of subordination to some significant thematic statement.

If such a statement is not prominent in the book, inevitably the reader turns to Hood's huge project and the way he has chosen to present it. The exalted claims he himself has made for the New Age series may be set aside; whether they are sincere, calculated, or both is not an issue. That the six volumes which have appeared are not mere mechanically chronological sequels is so obvious a virtue as to go without elaboration. Nevertheless, as the large canvas fills, the reader is still left wondering what the factors of coherence will be, what major themes will emerge, what perspective will encompass the minutiae and reduce them to a comprehensive whole. Must the last volume appear before all can be judged, or is the reader justified in requiring that each individual work also have its own integrity as a novel? In this respect, *The Motor Boys in Ottawa* is barely adequate.

H. A. HARGREAVES

DIFFERENT DRAGONS

JEAN LITTLE, *Different Dragons*. Viking Kestrel, $12.95.

MARTYN GODFREY, *Plan B Is Total Panic*. James Lorimer, $6.95.

PAUL YEE, *The Curses of the Third Uncle*. James Lorimer, $12.95.

FEAR IS COMMON in childhood. Many children fear monsters, the dark, abandonment, loss of parental love, or death. For them, childhood is a time of humiliation, of incompetence, of constant questioning of their own worth. Fear is thus closely tied to a sense of identity. The struggle with fear and the consequent development of a secure identity is the theme of three recent novels for children. Although they differ in plot and genre, each develops the theme through the circular pattern of the heroic journey to adventure. In each novel, that is, a child leaves home and heroically faces fears. Having thus defined his or her identity, the child returns a more mature and competent individual.

In Jean Little's *Different Dragons*, the pattern shapes a gentle piece of domestic realism. Timid Ben Tucker, sent to spend the weekend with his aunt, a famous writer of children's fantasy, fearfully protests that he is not like her dragon-slaying heroes. His father suggests that Ben is on a heroic journey: "You have different dragons to fight, that's all. I think you might even slay one or two this weekend."

Different Dragons is predictable. Ben overcomes in turn each of his fears while simultaneously discovering that everyone at some time fears something. His major victory comes with a Labrador retriever his parents plan to give him. Ben will have nothing to do with the "monster" until he discovers that the big dog is even more terrified of lightning than he is. Calming the dog by talking in the way adults have always talked to him, he slays his greatest dragon. At the end of his adventurous weekend, Ben is ready to return home with a new sense of worth, and a new friend. Although too contrived in its pursuit of a happy ending, the novel avoids the pitfalls of sentimentality and didacticism. At the same time, it maintains interest without resorting to melodrama.

Martyn Godfrey's *Plan B Is Total Panic* is melodramatic, and the didacticism is intrusive at the end, but Godfrey's flair for capturing the essence of teenage self-doubts in crisp, authentic dialogue compensates for many of his story's limitations. The narrator, Nicholas Clark, a self-confessed "wimp" who has suffered an ignominious beating at the hands of the school bully, undertakes his heroic journey when he is invited on a hunting trip by a native friend. Encountering a bear, he does not, like his friend, freeze in terror. In fact, when the bear comes back later, Nicholas survives its attack by playing dead and then chases it away, thus saving the life of a downed pilot.

Designed to show multicultural harmony, the novel explores the living habits and some of the beliefs of native Canadians through the natives' mild mockery of the greenhorn Nicholas. Unfortunately, the book does not maintain the high level of this entertaining social commentary. Godfrey tends to let the theme control the plot mechanically: Nicholas's native companion freezes at the sight of the very bear he has been stalking, Nicholas's neglectful father suddenly becomes an understanding, sympathetic parent, and the school bully expresses interest in having Nicholas come to a party. Still, the blend of the traditional outdoor adventure tale and adolescent problem novel will make the book appealing to both the reluctant readers who form Godfrey's usual audience and some willing readers looking for

an occasionally witty and fast-paced entertainment.

More ambitious than either of the previous novels is Paul Yee's *The Curses of the Third Uncle,* which combines romantic suspense and gritty historical realism. Set in British Columbia in 1909, the tale traces the efforts of a young Chinese girl, Lillian (Ah-Lai) Ho, to find her father, who has been trying to gather funds for the revolutionaries in China. Lillian's circular journey takes her to the wilderness outside Revelstoke, where she discovers her inner strengths. Returning to Vancouver, she is able to stop a counter-revolutionary plot and to accept that her father has been murdered. She displays such courage in overcoming her fear of being sent to China that her mother overcomes her own fear of Canada and decides that the family can stay in their new land.

Although part of a publisher's series designed to make Canadian history interesting for children, Yee's novel avoids the cloying didacticism and boring pedagogy of a series book. Yee's glimpses into Chinese-Canadian life are as relevant as they are fascinating. They create an exciting, exotic atmosphere, and they intensify respect for Lillian's courage when she proves that Chinese girls are not, as her "third uncle" declares, "garbage." Like the female warriors in the traditional tales, Lillian proves they can be heroes. Yee falters when he tries to connect the girl's personal struggle with her people's similar struggle with fear of the Chinese emperor. The connection is neither as smooth nor as coherent as it should be, but it does suggest that a people's courage begins with courageous individuals like Lillian and her father.

None of these novels is destined to be a classic, but all are products of competent craftsmanship. Yee's book, however, stands apart, adding to the promise he displayed in his earlier collection, *Teach Me To Fly, Skyfighter!* (1983).

RAYMOND E. JONES

CAJUN/ACADIEN

MARGUERITE MAILLET, *Histoire de la Littérature Acadienne: De rêve en rêve.* Editions d'acadie, $16.95.

WILLIAM FAULKNER RUSHTON, *The Cajuns.* Collins, $13.95.

MARGUERITE MAILLET'S *De rêve en rêve* reminds me of William Keith's recent study of Canadian literature in Longman's "World Literature" series, in that it is a brief history of a national literature rather than a comprehensive literary history, meant to be read for pleasure as well as consulted for profit. Unlike weightier tomes compiled by distinguished committees, it places the emphasis on a contextual analysis of key movements and figures, rather than on the ample prose bibliographies which can deter even the most enthusiastic of students. For those in quest of comprehensiveness as well as authority, it should be treated as a companion volume to Maillet's 1979 multi-volume anthology of Acadian texts, which represents the canon established by the author in conjunction with the University of Moncton's Centre for Acadian Studies.

Here, Maillet traces the growth of a tradition and a voice which have only recently broken free from the twin dilemmas of anonymous "folklorization" on the one hand and domination by one very articulate mainstream writer on the other hand. The subtitle refers to the dream of paradise regained promoted by well-intentioned conservative clergymen and educators during the two centuries between the dispersion of 1755 and the cultural explosion of the 1960's. The author traces four stages in the movement from para-literature buried

on the margins of a rich oral tradition to the emergence of more writerly texts in the last few decades. The period 1604 to 1866 encompasses enthusiastic exploration, exile, and isolation. As quickly as missionaries and colonizers rhetorically addressed Acadia in ultramontane terms as the promised land, the settlers' struggle for survival, even before expulsion, countered such assumptions without directly challenging them in writing. However, the events of 1755, rather than denoting the end of the dream, represent its consolidation as reflected in the next two stages. The period 1867 to 1928 is marked by a reawakening of nationalist orators, essayists, and historians paying allegiance to the new trinity of language, tradition, and religion — a necessary, even beneficial, development after generations of insecurity, but also a problematic inheritance for later writers. The third stage, 1929 to 1957, first gives rise to the "proper" genres of theatre, poetry, and fiction, but these were subordinated to the official ideology or "cult of Evangeline" for which they served as vehicles.

These two intermediate stages reflect those also identified by one of Maillet's models, the Quebec critic Georges-Andre Vachon — literary development in Acadia reflects that in "la belle province" despite differences in voice and experience, with the additional burden of a fifty-year time lag. It is only in the fourth stage, 1958 to the present, that difference is confidently asserted: the new regionalism replaces the official culture of the Catholic "belles-lettristes" by rediscovering oral history and popular culture. The myth of Evangeline is rejected as a national icon of fear, inferiority, and colonization, and a new writing, verbally and politically aware, comes to terms with orality and a long-standing silence. Unfortunately, a wider readership for this new writing has yet to emerge. It is interesting to note that while numerous readers were aware of Acadia only through Longfellow's poem, Acadians did not read his epic, even after Pamphile Lemay's early translation, but rather "translated" his fictional heroine into a historical figure and model for the future. The "dream" of Maillet's subtitle is not without irony, for while the community and its writers still struggle to survive, it is only with the slow death of the visionary state that their true voice has begun to emerge. Meanwhile, the milder, implicitly populist myth of abundance, naming Acadie "pays de cocagne," has achieved a modest success — the sea, that secret garden which provides her being's dominant poetic expression, is the source of dispersal but also of sustenance according to Maillet.

William Faulkner Rushton's *The Cajuns,* a very different type of book and one which fails to achieve all its goals, nevertheless addresses similar issues with some insight in the domain of folklore and popular culture. Rushton is a journalist fascinated by the Cajuns and concerned about their marginal status in American history and increasing marginalization in contemporary American society. His capsule history of Acadia, "Trouble in the Sweet Promised Land," is well informed, as is his critique of the oil industry's impact on the bayou, entitled "Texas and the Oiligarchs." In his sections documenting the Cajuns' shift from inland fishing to coastal rice-farming and large-scale cattle ranching, however, Rushton reveals a liberal romantic bias and a less forgivable tendency to share some of his countrymen's attitudes about financial success and the melting pot. That these descendants of deported Acadians are losing their French heritage does not preoccupy him much, nor does he really address the fact that as a description of an American ethnic category the term "Cajun" is broad enough

to encompass groups with conflicting economic interests, political loyalties, and cultural identities.

The culprit is not Rushton's sympathies so much as his training: his study, admittedly directed to a general readership, lacks the academic's questioning of his own values and assumptions and the ethnologist's meticulous attention to detail. The chapters on material history — focusing on architecture and textiles — are both intriguing and convincing, but those on culture are weaker. Rushton's analysis of French accordion music opens with a promising description of "fais-dodo" music halls, and accounts for the distinctive flavour of the music by examining the availability of different types of instruments over time. However, he does not distinguish between the folk and popular categories in music, lumping black Cajun "Zydeco" and electrified country with traditional songs, and ignoring such major figures as Zachary Richard. The chapter on Mardi Gras lacks both an understanding of carnival and an awareness of foreign influences on the desire to "laissez les bon temps rouler." The long section on cockfights foregrounds masculine culture and overemphasizes its place within the larger picture. By contrast, CODOFIL, the government agency for the preservation of the French language and heritage, merits a scant few pages, and the section on Cajun cooking, complete with recipes, hardly makes up for the loss. What should have been a core chapter is relegated to the Appendix, and subtly disparages the dialect as "patois." Part of the problem with Rushton's book is that he has restricted himself to a few townships and individuals encountered in his research. To his credit, he does supplement his discovery of Mamou, a fascinating community, with ample secondary sources, and the book certainly is satisfactory as a general popular study.

Both Maillet and Rushton have unearthed the work of previously ignored individuals, and this alone makes their studies valuable source books for students of Acadian culture. As an accessible, scholarly study by an insider, however, Maillet's project is the more useful and successful overview. Perhaps it will some day be expanded into an institutional literary history. In the meantime, both books fill a gap.

MICHELE LACOMBE

FAMILY STORIES

GERTRUDE STORY, *Black Swan*. Thistledown, $10.95.

RONA MURRAY, *The Indigo Dress*. Sono Nis, $9.95.

THESE TWO COLLECTIONS of short stories by western Canadian women reveal that the locale need not be only local. As William Carlos Williams put it: "The local is the only universal, upon that all art builds." Certainly Gertrude Story and, to a lesser extent, Rona Murray brew and distil local materials to create a heady universal substance. Their art grows from the ground of their communities to elude the merely provincial and sectarian. As well, these women dance deftly around the political conundrum, for though their perspectives and voices are female and though they refuse to shy away from women's social and psychological repression, they do not use their books for feminist grandstanding or, less pejoratively, for dissecting female victimization. The feminist touches are implicit and subtle.

Gertrude Story's *Black Swan* is unequivocally a fine, impressive book, although I have reservations about its last two sections. Akin in structure to Alice Munro's *Lives of Girls and Women*, the book can be read as a novel or a group

of contextually related stories. It records the life, times, and death of a central protagonist, Gerda Schroeder Beckmann, as she at fifty, crazed by a life of stymied creativity and repressed emotion — both can be chalked up to her Papa's ruthless tyranny — breaks forth in a mad kind of song. Gerda writes to heal her wounded spirit, to tell her family stories, to love with words those she has not loved in the flesh. Like the proverbial black swan, she tells some disturbing tales. In the superb "Das Engelein Kommt," Gerda speaks of Elsa, who against the normal rules of fairytale devolves from an "Engelein" to an ugly duckling. Papa's behind it all; just as he is the reason for the ten-year-old Elsa's suicide. A need for paternal attention drives Elsa to the stall of her father's *verboten* white stallion, but all he does is scrape his daughter's body from the hooves of the stallion and keep riding — his horse and his family.

Elsa's tale is the most dramatic; still, there are others. Story's intuitive grasp of body metaphor houses the family inside Gerda. Elsa is a voice haunting her sister, and demanding the liberation which depends on Gerda's speaking, well, really writing. Poor Mama — who "knew how to work around trouble" — is an ache in Gerda's throat. Murray, the son who "was always too good" and "loved too much," another victim of Papa's callous egocentricity, insists his tale be told. Gerda has survived because she has always looked the "sonofabitch, straight in the eye" and later willed his heart to burst — and it did. But the price of survival is a steep one, imposing on Gerda a life of silence and loneliness, a mania for order — she begins breakfast between 6:00 and 6:05 A.M., because that was "the time." Finally, at fifty she must learn to love — and, though Gerda fights them all the way, the stories she writes (the book itself) are the love which redeems her family and herself.

Story's elaborate use of metaphor and symbol implies that Gerda's circumstances are not significantly different from those of all creators. True, Papa's Prussian temperament drives his daughter's potential inward until it explodes as "voices" from the communal past and a set of "fantastic" images, a winged, silver horse transmuted to an elegant unicorn. True, Gerda's isolation is complete and her craziness no joke, but how different is this from any writer who finally has to face blank pages and a typewriter, and to hear the "voices"? Creativity is painful, Story intimates, but she also believes process and product give a measure of redemption.

All this ignores Story's fine craftsmanship. Her elaborate imagery and her play with "swan" and "singing" reverberate through *Black Swan,* delineating her concept of the artist and his inability to escape the life to which many are called but few chosen. The tightness and economy of her writing are impressive; it is filled with understatement and nuance; her use of rural German-Saskatchewan idiom is flawless. Point of view is wonderfully controlled. For example, all World War II, the time "that the Hitler war got into full swing," means to Gerda is the end of "German" Church — thank God. The last two sections where Gerda, having run out of stories and slit her wrists, meets her *doppelgänger* and enters a kind of female heaven, trouble me. Maybe we are not to take this literally? But D. M. Thomas got away with something similar in *The White Hotel,* so why not Gertrude Story? Perhaps this reader is being too "writerly."

Gertrude Story combines the rigour of inspired story-telling with polished, clever writing. Rona Murray's qualities are different — her strengths are sensitivity to images and a mythopoeic consciousness. Her writing is quicker, yet more leisurely, and the best stories in *The Indigo Dress*

unfold slowly, gracefully, compelling the reader to read if only to savour the beauty of phrasing and the freshness of the images. Not surprisingly, considering her myth-making qualities and her home in Victoria, Murray's stories abound in images of growth, flowers, and gardens. In "Marina Island," a young girl accompanies her great-grandmother on a pilgrimage to Marina Island where the old lady remembers her passionate, Edenic affair of sixty years earlier — a love which has indelibly shaped her life. Sadly, Marina Island is a ruined Eden, and the knowing old woman cries in the spoiled Garden as she gazes at a beautiful emerald — a gift from her dead lover. The tragic reality escapes the grandmother, but not the reader. Murray's compassion and respect for the grandmother invoke reader sympathy and understanding, some of which spills over to the granddaughter who has confronted death and human eccentricity, and who will soon suffer, one suspects, the pain of lost love.

Sympathy and respect for human infirmity, even downright weakness, typify Murray's response to her people: especially the elderly (Emily in "Nana" who creates dreams of things past and dresses them up); especially the young and fragile (the narrator of "The Indigo Dress" who falls in love with the archetypal older woman, his mother's friend); especially the dispossessed (the woman in "Blessed" whose married lover has left her to weep with her classical favourite, Queen Dido). Unfortunately, charming as Murray's writing is, her characters are relentlessly middle-class with the limited capacities and petty problems of the middle-class. Her myths attempt redemption, but these characters do not deserve it.

DIANE MCGIFFORD

EXPECTED DEATH

SEYMOUR MAYNE, *Children of Abel.* Mosaic, $8.95.

LUDWIG ZELLER, *The Marble Head and Other Poems.* Mosaic, $9.95.

JANICE KULYK KEEFER, *White of the Lesser Angels.* Ragweed, $9.95.

TWO OF THESE BOOKS are firecrackers while one is a dud. The dud is *Children of Abel* by Seymour Mayne. Mayne is, as everyone knows, a disciple of Irving Layton. But choosing a great master does not a great poet make. If Layton is old nippy cheddar, then Mayne (in this book at least) is the blandest of processed products. Examples of this blandness are numerous. "Hiroshima: Drawing of a Survivor" turns the nightmare of the Bomb into a yawn: "How is it these flies survived / the enormous flashing sunlight that burst / pod of skin, bone, and speech?" (that is the whole poem). It is a shallow, commonplace observation masquerading as profundity. The same failure can be observed in "Caretakers":

> Such men take good care of cemeteries,
> keep the plots neat at the edges —
> not running with sticky leaves, debris.
>
> Drain the troughs and keep them clear
> of oily water and rotting stems.
> The dead, too, need a modicum of order.

It just does not work. The power is missing. Better luck next time.

We have all had one of these nightmares in which a monster is chasing us. We run away at full speed, watching over our shoulders as the monster fades into the dark, only to find, when we turn to look ahead, that it is there just a few yards down the path, waiting for us. Ludwig Zeller left Chile because of the political turmoil, and came to Toronto where he is a writer, artist, and publisher. His poems are not directly about Chile, or any other place in the world. They are surrealist, nightmare visions filled

with images of birds that peck at women's nipples; bodies that are torn, wracked, and pulled apart; and torturers who take erotic delight in their work. By plunging into the unreality of nightmare, Zeller may, in fact, be drawing nearer to the truth of Chile and other fascist-ruled dictatorships. Mere descriptions, facts, and statistics do not have the power of these poems to capture the mad logic of a nightmare. Zeller reaches into the reader and draws out a twofold terror: the fear of being a victim and, more subtly, the fear that one may have just the faintest urge to be the torturer.

This book is actually a collaboration between Zeller and illustrator Susana Wald. The drawings are just as important to *The Marble Head* as the poems, and it is an injustice that Wald's name is relegated to the small print on the back of the title page. The drawings are not mere illustrations. The poems are not about the drawings, nor vice versa. Imagine a mirror in which one could look and see not oneself, but an entirely different image which, however, is still that person. This is the relationship between the pictures and poems here. They make the same statement in two media. Both are disturbing. The drawings present faces distorted in pain and torn bodies with torsos that are disturbingly erotic. They attack the eye immediately: the horror and dismemberment are there at once. The poems move more slowly toward the same end. By going through the horror at a reduced pace the reader is forced to think about the meaning, the implications of the nightmare. Canada does not have a strong tradition of surrealism in its poetry and only a minor tradition of political poetry. Perhaps Zeller will change that.

Zeller is an exotic; Janice Kulyk Keefer is back to basics. I do not mean this in any pejorative sense. Her poetry is not an attempt to deal with modern problems through a simple-minded return to old values, but it does focus on the basics of human existence: family, love, death, art. Her love for and use of figurative language is basic too. It skips back over the Bowering/Nichol generation to the Layton/Page/Souster group. Thankfully her images are not as convoluted as theirs can be, and they are a nice change from the wordplay and line ending trickery of the last decade or so. Her poetry also shows a firmer commitment to life, as opposed to language, as the motivator of poetry. Here is a bit from "Lookout: Evening":

> . . . Grave
> is ephemeral tonight, though mountains
> bland and compassing as an expected death
> hunch around us. Even the moon,
> climbing night's stairs to pull tide-blankets
> up the shore, is our good mother,
> sings white lullabies.

She knows how to pick out the significant moment and how to make it significant without heavy-handedness:

> . . . we move to kiss
> and see the apple over us, frozen
> between rot and wither,
> perfect fossil of that fruit
>
> which put a swordpoint upon innocence.

Such excellent phrasing and imagery and maturity in a first book of poems is cause for joy and hope. Janice Kulyk Keefer has the potential to become one of our major voices.

DON PRECOSKY

DIARIES

PETER GAY. *The Bourgeois Experience. Victoria to Freud. Vol. I. The Education of the Senses.* Oxford Univ. Press, $13.95.

Hopes and Dreams: The Diary of Henriette Dessaulles, 1874-1881. Trans. Liedewy Hawke. Hounslow Press, $15.95.

FOR ITS LENGTH and breadth, scholarly research and readability, the first volume of Peter Gay's all-encompassing study of

nineteenth-century life must be the best value on the market. It provides a wealth of information, often of the most surprising variety, on the relationships between the sexes and of people and institutions to love and sex, during a period generally labelled by stereotypes which are convincingly challenged here. Much of the material is based on private diaries, published and unpublished, and the book includes an intelligent discussion of the function of diary-writing in nineteenth-century society, particularly for women, as well as an analysis of the ambivalent ideology which these journals reveal. Social and technical change is related throughout to individual psychology, in a manner which makes one eager to read the second volume. The illustrations and extensive bibliographical appendix are two further assets of this remarkable work.

One chapter deals in particular with the private diary of Mabel Loomis Todd, the first editor of Emily Dickinson's poems and mistress of Dickinson's respectably married brother, Austin. She began her diary in Washington, D.C., in 1871, and the first two books cover the period up to 1879, when she married at the age of 22. She continued it after this, largely to record the intensity of her physical relationship with her husband, her reaction to pregnancy and childbirth, and her later involvements with other men.

This diary is striking for its resemblances to and differences from Henriette Dessaulles's journal, written in Saint-Hyacinthe, Québec, from 1874-1881. First published in French in 1971 under the title *Fadette*, it has been translated by Liedewy Hawke as *Hopes and Dreams*. The translation follows the 1971 edition exactly and includes the original introduction. It is regrettable that new information is not incorporated, which will soon be available in the new critical edition being prepared by Jean-Louis Major (Corpus des Editions Critiques, University of Ottawa). Nevertheless, the availability of the diary in English is certainly welcome. It is one of the most interesting examples of a nineteenth-century young girl's journal published in any language.

Henriette Dessaulles's record has important documentary value for its depiction of life in the upper-class circles of a small town. Saint-Hyacinthe was at that time a bastion of free thought, under the influence of Casimir Dessaulles, Henriette's father (the mayor), and his brother, Louis-Antoine, a founder of the Institut Canadien. Henriette herself was caught between her father's skeptical humanism and her stepmother's involvement with the rival, burgeoning Catholic revival. Her reactions to education at a convent school, illness, deaths in the family, and day-to-day life are rendered poignant by the intensity of her personality and her talent for writing. The diary covers the period (Henriette is aged 14 to 20) during which she rebels against the rôle assigned to her because of her sex, faces the (real) possibility of early death, decides against a religious vocation, and finally overcomes her initial reluctance to fall in love, in order to leave home (and the hated stepmother) and become Madame Maurice Saint-Jacques.

Maurice, her neighbour and best friend's brother, becomes the focus of the journal and eventually its narratee and actual reader. The diary reads almost like a novel, as suspense builds up regarding the outcome: will she marry him in spite of all opposition? Like the fairy-stories to which Henriette alludes, the book ends with a wedding. Her last remarks, concerning her curiosity about contraception, would have provided good material for Peter Gay's study. In fact, Henriette soon became the mother

of several children (with, presumably, no time to keep a diary) and was left a widow at the age of 34. Henriette Saint-Jacques then turned once more to writing, becoming one of the first and most prominent women journalists in Québec, responsible for a regular column in *Le Devoir* from 1910 until 1945, a year before her death, which bore the title "Lettre de Fadette." It is a pity that the term "fadette," used by George Sand to mean magical, mischievous, as well as wise (in *La Petite Fadette*), which suits the Henriette of the diary, should have become a different model of moralizing femininity in "Fadette's" later writings. These are unfortunately closer to the modern French meaning of "fade" (colourless).

However, Henriette retained her initial fascination with writing (she was also a graphologist), and her diary remains one of the liveliest accounts of the choices forced on girls, as they were turned into women, illustrating Simone de Beauvoir's axiom that "on ne naît pas femme, on le devient." Some aspects of the diary do suffer from translation, particularly the occasional essentially québécois idioms. For example, "Je ne veux pas pentoute" becomes simply "I *don't* want to be." But on the whole, the translator has managed to convey the tone and savour of Henriette's style. The English version also contains a useful family tree and some additional photographs.

VALERIE RAOUL

SCHERZO CAPRICCIOSO

JOSEF SKVORECKY, *Dvorak in Love*. Lester & Orpen Dennys, $22.95.

IN HIS "Author's Acknowledgements," Josef Skvorecky points out that *Dvorak in Love* is his "first attempt at writing a historical and biographical novel." The statement is accurate enough, although he could have added that he has written historical novels before. Both *The Cowards* (1958) and *Mirakl* (1972) deal with critical periods in Czechoslovak history: the action of the first occurs during the final days of the Second World War; the second, using historical figures as characters, focuses alternately on the Prague Spring and the Stalinist 1950's. Another generic pointer for the reader occurs in the subtitle which calls the novel "a light-hearted dream." The modifier creates the expectation of a comic novel while the noun alerts us to the fact that in this book about Dvorak the demands of fiction will predominate over those of history.

The "dream's" focus is the novel's central love story, a triangle involving the young composer, his eventual wife Anna, and his first, if brief and unrequited love, Anna's actress sister Josephine who eventually marries a count. This story is Skvorecky's point of departure for a novel dealing with Dvorak's entire life — only his childhood is omitted — and through that life with the social history of the better part of a century. Receiving particular emphasis are the nearly three years Dvorak spent in New York in the early 1890's (the novel could have been titled "Dvorak in America"). If the novel is a "light-hearted dream" in the sense that the novelist assumes the imaginative freedom to invent conversations and to imagine the thoughts of historical characters, it's also a dream carrying the residue of history gathered from Skvorecky's impressive research in archives, musical scores, memoirs, biographies, and social histories. The bibliography appended to the Czech edition runs to several pages. In many instances Skvorecky reproduces letters, comments, and anecdotes directly from his sources. A particularly important one

is *Steeplejack*, the lively autobiography of the now neglected turn-of-the-century music and literary critic James J. Huneker.

The effect of this use of archival material, as of Skvorecky's use of historical characters, is to ground the novel in history even as its purely fictive aspects turn it toward "dream." Probably the most immediately obvious of these latter is the form. Avoiding the standard linear narrative of traditional biography, Skvorecky tells the story of Dvorak's life and times in a chronologically non-sequential manner and from a dozen or so points of view. A careless reading would produce a charge of formlessness but that can be countered easily by pointing to the nearly countless small and large connections among characters and scenes established by the various image clusters. Thus, the love stories are all triangles with the complications of the first one being repeated in episodes involving Dvorak's daughter Otylia and his acquaintance Adele Margulies; images of flight — butterflies, birds, souls, clouds — link key scenes one to another; even something as symbolically insignificant as Dvorak's cigar can be seen in retrospect as joining him not only to two black students but also to Sigmund Freud who, in a scene with no basis in fact, enters the novel to comment on what he takes to be "some subconscious obsession" in Dvorak's music which indicates to him that the Czech composer isn't "quite the happy man" all take him to be. (It is worth noting in passing that Skvorecky is also a cigar smoker.)

Those of Skvorecky's readers who know his works only in translation may be interested in learning that, with two exceptions, the order of chapters in the English edition is completely different from what it is in the Czech. While it is tempting to say that this makes for a substantially new or different novel, the only really substantive change, I would suggest, occurs in the ending where Skvorecky has replaced an elegiac chapter mellow in mood with a darker one dealing with failure and death. There is a noticeable darkening of the palette but it is not inconsistent with some of the more sombre themes raised earlier. Also worth mention is the fact that, as usual, Skvorecky and his superb translator Paul Wilson have purged the original text of any Czech allusions and references potentially unintelligible to the English reader.

What *Dvorak in Love* offers then is a biographical novel with a variety of points of view on its subject. And although Skvorecky enters the novel on occasion as a novelist-researcher, no authoritative view of Dvorak's life and career is offered. If *Dvorak in Love* doesn't quite meet the demands of Barthian *scriptibilité*, it nevertheless leaves the reader as the only one with access to all the points of view — in the position, in other words, of being able to judge the novel's characters and events.

Yet if the reader's primary engagement, both emotional and intellectual, is with the great Czech composer, I want to end this review by suggesting that standing somewhere in Dvorak's shadow is Skvorecky, and that another way of reading this "light-hearted dream" is as a species of complex wish-fulfilment. From this point of view the novel can be seen both as a biography and a displaced autobiography in which Skvorecky re-imagines his own life and career through Dvorak's. Limitations of space prevent me from developing this point but I will end with five out of nearly a dozen details which explain, to me at any rate, why a major Czech novelist chose to write a historical and biographical novel about a composer whom he had never previously mentioned in his work. (1) Although Dvorak

achieved international success he was always conscious of his position as a Czech composer within the much larger Germanic tradition and empire (if we substitute "Russian" or "English" for "Germanic" we have a rough approximation of Skvorecky's situation before and after 1969). (2) Dvorak, like Skvorecky, came to North America in middle age but, unlike the novelist, was able to travel freely between his homeland and the United States. (3) Skvorecky's life-long interest in jazz is roughly analogous to Dvorak's fascination with negro spirituals and his implicit connection to jazz through Will Mercer Cook. (4) The tendency of some music critics to dismiss Dvorak as little more than a fine melodist is echoed in the occasional criticism directed at Skvorecky that he is simply a good entertainer and storyteller. (5) Both had to become accustomed to having their names not only mispronounced but misspelled by readers, critics, and even publishers (Dvorak is not the same as Dvorak with the *hachek*, or inverted circumflex, over the "r" and the acute accent over the "a," just as Mallarme is different from Mallarmé).

In other words, Skvorecky's entertaining new novel may seem at first glance to be "a light-hearted dream," but like most dreams it has several layers of meaning and an autobiographical core.

SAM SOLECKI

ROHMER'S GAFFE

RICHARD ROHMER, *Rommel & Patton.* Irwin, $22.95.

Rommel & Patton is a novel about two of the most fascinating personalities of the Second World War, and what could have happened had they been able to meet in Normandy in the summer of 1944. According to Rohmer's imaginative reconstruction of events, postwar history would have been considerably different if the Desert Fox and Old Blood and Guts had negotiated an armistice on the western front.

Rohmer clearly belongs to the "what if?" school of history, and he is not the first to have questioned the motives and tactics of the generals and politicians who fought the Normandy campaign. Nor is he at all modest in asserting his credentials as a second-guesser. During August 1944 he flew a P-51 Mustang on reconnaissance missions above the battlefields. Below he could see the steadily narrowing "gap" near Falaise through which the remnants of the German Seventh Army struggled to escape envelopment by British and Canadian forces to the north, and American ones to the south. He was, of course, not alone in observing and reporting on what he saw. In recalling his experiences in *Patton's Gap* (1981), he charged that the gap should have, and could have, been closed *sooner*, so as to prevent an estimated 200,000 enemy soldiers escaping to fight another day and, thereby, prolong the war. The responsibility for this tactical — nay, strategic — error, concluded Rohmer, was none other than Field Marshal Montgomery, then the Allied ground force commander, who spitefully refused to allow his rival Patton to wheel northward in time to effect the decisive manoeuvre.

Rohmer may be right, of course, but there is no excuse for the mean-spirited, galling manner in which he argues his case. However, his memoir is little more than a footnote in the vast, continuing literature about the war in Northwest Europe, a literature which is notoriously replete with controversies about the actions of major figures — all of whom had their say, and all of whom are dead. But Rohmer is a brash, opinionated man who isn't cowed by superior authorities, be they military leaders or professional

historians. My point in referring to his non-fiction *Patton's Gap* in this context is, therefore, to underline the author's highly personal approach to history.

It is helpful to be aware, too, of his flamboyant reputation as the author of ten earlier novels. These works — which one reviewer classified as "poli-fi" thrillers — are inspired by various political or economic crises of contemporary history, and they each offer the reader both an adventure story and a dose of Rohmerian polemics. An added feature are references to the author's own accomplishments — a sort of Norman Mailer advertisements-for-myself touch.

In writing *Rommel & Patton* he obviously found a subject congenial to his own interests and wartime experience; further, he seems to have done his research well, for the plot rests on a plausible chronology of fact, or, at least, deduction. The action covers two months, from mid-June to mid-August 1944, as the growing success of Operation Overlord threatens to topple Rommel's command. Attention is thus focused on the harassed field marshal as he tries desperately to shore up his defences and launch counterattacks. But the war itself seems remote. We are never given any sense of what it is like for the humble infantryman on either side. For Rohmer, war is rather more like a battle between corporation executives than a bitter struggle for daily existence.

Certainly, the characterization of Rommel is not without skill. The reader is shown how the real Rommel might well have seriously considered an armistice as the only way to preserve the honour of the army and the integrity of his country. His disagreements with Hitler on the prosecution of the war after the D-Day landings are well known. Besides, there is evidence that he was privy to some of the planning of the Schwarze Kapelle plot to overthrow the Führer. Rohmer is at his best in exploring this mixture of motivations, even if he is not quite able to achieve a coherent portrait of his central character. Only rarely, as when the tough, austere Swabian argues furiously with his eventual successor, the aristocratic Prussian Von Kluge, does the narrative come dramatically alive. By contrast, Rohmer's characterizations of the Allied generals remain wooden caricatures. His Patton, surprisingly, is an inert, shadowy figure.

There is, finally, a grand irony implicit in this whole story, real and imagined. For, if the author is to be believed, he was in part responsible for Rommel being rendered *hors de combat* before he could put his plan to the test! Briefly, the facts are these: on July 17, British Spitfires strafed Rommel's staff car on a road east of Caen, inflicting severe head injuries on its famous passenger. A month later, in the wake of the failed assassination attempt on Hitler, Rommel was curtly dismissed as head of Army Group B. By October, Germany's most illustrious soldier was dead, a suicide. Now, according to Rohmer, it can be revealed that it was he himself who began the great man's downfall; while flying a routine recce mission, he spotted the car and radioed for fighter planes to attack it. As proof, he cites a notation for July 17 from his squadron's operations record book. Hence, Rohmer's gaffe. We are supposed to assume that a junior R.C.A.F. officer was responsible for the failure of a possibly history-changing venture.

Vintage Rohmer. In the event, of course, Stalin would never have agreed to an armistice in the West, since he would have feared that a coalition of his former allies and a Nazi-purged Germany would turn against Russian imperialism. So, in all probability, the plan was doomed from the start. No wonder, then, that the novel falls flat in its final

scenes. Anticlimactically, the hapless Von Kluge meets a strutting Patton — the Allies' designated negotiator — at a secret rendezvous, somewhere in Normandy. They talk, the plan is nixed by the politicians, the war continues. End of story.

ERIC THOMPSON

LIVESAY ARCHIVE

The Papers of Dorothy Livesay. Univ. of Manitoba, $6.30.

THIRTY-NINE ARCHIVAL crates faced me, stuffed to overflowing with manila folders, envelopes, and expanding files. It was 1979 and I was introducing myself to the recently acquired Dorothy Livesay Collection at the University of Manitoba. So much, I realized, for my tidy research schedule, which had allowed for a modest two-week visit to Manitoba to stroll through the Collection.

Some of the papers had been roughly sorted before their arrival at the university, but family correspondence mingled with business; diary notes and hastily jotted inspirations bobbed to the surface at random intervals; teaching materials and photographs, newsclippings and prose drafts, bank statements and conference programmes were scattered throughout the boxes. Archival head Richard Bennett reminisces in the Preface about "literally scooping papers and files haphazardly out of trunks and filing cabinets in the vague hope that someone, sometime, would bring the necessary order to what amounted to paper chaos." Overawed by the sheer quantity, I took heart in the existence of a lengthy preliminary inventory; prepared by an intelligent, anonymous person who had apparently lacked extensive familiarity with Livesay's life or work, the listing could not do much more than record (occasionally very impressionistically and imperfectly) crude details of this sublime disorder. As the only guide available in those early days, however, the inventory was a constant comfort, then and over the next few years.

From oxcarts to Audis: such is the leap from that first listing to the fine new Register compiled by the staff of the University of Manitoba Department of Archives and Special Collections and published in 1986. As Dr. Bennett explains, the groundwork was accomplished by Kathryn Dean in 1982-84, and an SSHRCC grant in 1984 permitted Pamela Banting, Kristjana Gunnars, and Susan Letkemann to settle into the massive task of reorganizing the Collection, incorporating the eighteen supplementary acquisitions (the Collection refuses to stop growing, as is usually the case with the papers of a living author), and producing an effective finding aid. The 419-page result not only handsomely meets the needs of current Livesay scholars, but will certainly stimulate considerable new interest in this major Canadian poet.

The Papers of Dorothy Livesay is, to this non-archivist's eye, a model of convenient organization. A preliminary section offers a foreword by Livesay's literary executor, the preface, an introduction (unsigned, perhaps a collaborative staff effort), statements of provenance, regulations and restrictions, sundry other technical information, and a reasonably comprehensive Livesay chronology. Four sections follow. Section One, approximately sixty percent of the guide, divides Livesay's manuscripts and papers into 108 boxes, detailed in seventeen subsections. One begins with a "Personal and Professional Profile Essay" in which Gunnars describes and discusses the Container List it precedes, in the contexts of autobiography, biography, bibliography, and business papers connected with Livesay's writing or her personal life. Each of seven subsections — Correspondence,

Poems, Short Stories, Autobiographical Fiction, Plays, Reviews, and Essays — has its own essay prefatory to the Container List. Then there are five subcategories not needing introduction: Research and Isabella Valancy Crawford Notes, Talks and Addresses, Journalism, Memoirs, and miscellaneous Other Works.

The other forty percent of the guide documents, among other things, the visual and aural acquisitions. Section Two is a roughly chronological (1870-1984) photograph collection, grouped as much as possible by geographical location, family (Livesay, Randal, Macnair), friends, and Livesay photographed by herself. Tape recordings of lectures, interviews, music, and conversations comprise Section Three. And Section Four itemizes those parts of her personal library (books, magazines, journals, etc.) now lodged at the University of Manitoba.

In a commendable approach to completeness, there are three very sensible appendices. The first generously provides a list of libraries and other institutions categorized according to their possession of much, some, or no Livesay material; the second bespeaks the expanding nature of the Collection in being a listing of late (1980's) acquisitions; the third suggests relevant U. of M. Canadian literature holdings of the papers of other prairie writers. *The Papers of Dorothy Livesay* concludes with an index to the names, places, titles, and other proper nouns in the Register, computer-generated by the look of it, which shone in a spot-check of its accuracy that I conducted.

The format is attractive. An earth-brown cover features three faces of Livesay: photos as winsome child, as ethereal young poetess, and as elderly sybil caught in a smiling remark. Six other interesting black-and-white portraits appear in pairs: her father and her mother, near the beginning of the Register; baby Dorothy with parents (1913) and Dorothy with husband (1937), about one-third of the way through; Dorothy in Africa (1962) and in Ottawa (1977), at the two-thirds point. The double-spaced photo-offset type is easy on the eyes; typographical and grammatical errors are comparatively few; and despite its bulk, the Register handles comfortably, a matter of some consequence in a reference book.

What moves the Register out of the category of mechanical compilation (useful as that is) into a more interesting — and problematic — category is the editorial apparatus. I have no bone to pick with David Arnason's brief introduction: while it gives the effect of a premature literary epitaph composed at least five years ago, it is a competent summary of Livesay's career, and his declaration of her importance is entirely suitable. Ditto Richard Bennett's preface and his essay on the poetry holdings. The serious problem lies in the intention, declared in the introduction, to avoid judging merit or imposing interpretations. Yet most of the Gunnars and Banting essays do both.

The "Personal and Professional Profile" is particularly freewheeling and subjective, suggesting, for example, that Livesay in her autobiographical statements has been "unable to decide what kind of self-portrait to draw, what emphasis to place on events in her life, and what opinions she should have of what has transpired." Of Livesay's writings about her father we are told that "much of what she reveals is contrary to what she would like her reader, and herself, to believe." Her travel-sketch journals are declared to have "an odd lack of conviction." And the researcher is warned to expect an "absence of unflinching honesty," a scarcity of "direct statement" in the Livesay papers, a

caveat that many people who know Livesay well would find astonishing.

Of Livesay's letters to her mother: "Hostility usually lurks below the surface"; then, by comparison, of sister Sophie's letters to her parents: "She is emotionally more distant from them. That is to say, for her they are parents, not titans to be wrestled with." One story is declared "not very successful" while another is evaluated as "marvellous." Of one unpublished novel it is said that certain "interesting devices . . . fail because the work as a whole is flat"; another novel manuscript is singled out as "the most successful" in that it "avoids many of the flaws which weaken the rest of Livesay's autobiographical fiction." In the essay on plays we are offered peculiar causality: "For the most part, Livesay writes with a moral or a point of ethics to convey. As plays, therefore [*sic*], many of these works are flawed, lacking as they do dramatic build-up and aesthetic resolution." As a writer of reviews, Livesay is pronounced "far less creative and consistent" and possessed of "far less vitality" than she is in other genres. Such are only a few of the many dozens of instances in which the commentators violate their intention to avoid judgment or interpretation.

This is not to say that the essays are badly done or even necessarily wrongheaded in their assessments. The analysis of Livesay's relations with her parents, for example, seems to me extremely astute. The prose is lively, the evaluations often courageous. As an extended evaluative essay in a literary journal, they would make fascinating and provocative reading. Mine is a criticism of their appropriateness in this place, in the Register of the Livesay Collection at the University of Manitoba. The editors' enthusiasm and intelligence, their willingness to point out untouched areas of investigation, to raise productive questions, to demonstrate the importance of the Collection to students of any part of twentieth-century feminist writings or Canadian literature are theoretically all worthwhile and welcome features of the Register. The parts of the essays which simply describe and those other parts which neutrally suggest arenas of inquiry for prospective researchers are excellent supplements to a straight inventory. But in a reference tool, researchers should be told only what material is lodged in the Collection, not *how to view or whether/ in what way to value* that material. So one must approach the Register with a measure of the same alertness and ambivalence needed, for example, in consulting Margaret Atwood's *Survival* (also catalogued in the Reference section of libraries): useful it certainly it; objective it is not.

LEE BRISCOE THOMPSON

FLESHLESS

DONALD MARTIN, *One Out of Four*. Coach House, $12.50.

DONALD MARTIN'S FIRST novel tells an intense, though narratively fleshless, story about human flesh. The four young men of the title, Daniel, Chuck, Benjamin, and Brad, arrive in Detroit from different directions (Daniel is from Montreal) and quickly stumble together within a shadowy domain of gay prostitution. The section of this domain in which they meet and become friends is ruled over by an unlovely Sicilian overlord, Tony Pilanzo. Gay prostitution is the basis of his wealth and power but he also runs drugs across the border. He is also murderous. The final point provides Martin with the plot-springs of his narrative. *One Out of Four* concerns friendship, male bonding in a gay halfworld, even (though not significantly) the cartography of desire, but its narrative impact depends upon a number of intelligently

handled movements in the plot: innocent hope, frustration, murder, fear, and revenge.

The novel begins with Daniel flying back to Detroit from Montreal to attend Benjamin's funeral. At the graveside, he remembers his three friends:

> He could feel an oversized lump in his throat as he looked down.
>
> Benny was right beside Chuck, just where he had always wanted to be. Chuck and he had made the oddest of the odd couples, Daniel remembered.
>
> And there was Bart, back in Cleveland. Daniel was the only one left now. One out of four.

The inference is clear that the three friends are not only dead but that they have been killed. Shortly after this thought, squinting his eyes through the rain, Daniel sees a man in a dark suit. "His heart stopped for a second. That man. It was a man he hadn't seen in a long time." The subsequent narrative retrospectively brings into focus what has taken place prior to Benjamin's funeral: The four friends are introduced, brought together, their careers as prostitutes followed, the deaths of three explained, the mysterious man in the dark suit given his identity. A charge of suspense drives the novel forward. The reader looks for the answers, receives them slowly, and reaches the conclusion, with uncertainties and a sense of ambiguity, knowing that a plot has been spun out, a story told.

Martin's command of swift, paracinematic narration supports his skills in plotting. The characters in *One Out of Four* are depthless, no fundamental issues are raised, psychological motivation is minimal, and language jerks ahead, with the splattering intensity of orgasm, in fragments and single-line paragraphing. Here is the whoremaster, Pilanzo, explaining to his stable the rules of their world:

> When I say spread 'em, you just better spread 'em. The rules of this game are tough, kiddies. It's the big league here. Too much is at stake to allow your sensitive egos to take hold of the reins. You are whores. Meat. All nice packaged, of course, but meat none the less. And don't you ever forget that. You fuck an' you suck on command. You shove it in or you get it shoved in. No more fantasies here. This is reality.

The novel's depthless language suits the world it evokes. The young men are presented as typical. Motivations, if they can be said to exist at all, are generic (three of the young men have negative mothers; two have had early sexual experience with a male member of the family; only Chuck, the butch with the "dick of death," seems to emerge from an easy-going bi-sexuality), ambitions are equivalently abstract. Nothing is examined much. Introspection, reflection, meditation are alien. Everything moves like the downsuck of a drain: bubbles, flow, fleeting sounds and smells, increasingly narrow swirls, flushed, dead.

Martin's control of plot and pacing is undermined by his lapses in the use of commonplace detail. If details (the giant's fingers, Updike observes) are what give the solidity of specification to narrative, then *One Out of Four* tends to quiver, like ghostly ectoplasm, from time to time. This insouciance concerning the commonplace is particularly jarring in a novel that must make its claims partly as a comment upon, even perhaps an insight into, an actual, more-or-less contemporary non-fictional world. In the opening funeral scene, Daniel observes, through the rain, an ant crawling within Benjamin's grave. This seems to ingore both human optics and the behaviour of ants. Later in the narrative, what must be supposed to be a nun's wimple is described as a veil. Other curiosities stand out even more strikingly. The transvestite, Benjamin, yearns for a sex-

change operation and his dyke lesbian lover (survivor of the Holocaust, drama professor, high priestess of Method — in a word, no necessary dumb bunny) gives him, in anticipation, a year's supply of sanitary napkins. It is difficult to know how one should interpret this bizarre gesture. If it is the lesbian lover who fails to understand the physiology of sex-change, then it is a massively symbolic (belonging to the novel's entrenched misogyny throughout), though anti-realistic, move. If it is a failure in the narrative voice (or the author's behind it), then one can only shake one's head in bemusement. However, it is clearly the narrative voice that assumes that sanitary napkins are normally flushed down toilets. Disease plays a marginal role in the narrative (AIDS does not appear), with cases of clap and one of hepatitis occurring late in the novel, more like narrative afterthoughts than solid specification. Disease is never conceived of as a danger or a threat. No one practises safe sex. There are other misperceived details that tend to compromise the novel's claims to realistic accuracy.

One Out of Four marks a strong beginning for a young novelist. It moves intelligently on the levels of plot and style. Its depiction of grotesque scenes, at their best genuinely kaleidoscopic (even, occasionally, justifying the comparisons that Scott Symons makes in his "Foreword" with Genet and Burroughs), can be striking. Its power lies in its swift fleshlessness.

ROBERT R. WILSON

SHORT SUBJECTS

DAVE MARGOSHES, *Small Regrets.* Thistledown, $10.95.

KENT THOMPSON, *Leaping Up Sliding Away.* Goose Lane, $8.95.

HERE ARE TWO collections of short fiction by American writers living in Canada — or should that be by Canadian writers born and raised in the United States? Whichever way we put it, the national origin of these authors is probably what Frank Davey would describe as irrelevant, if not downright subversive information. But at the risk of not surviving the paraphrase, I cannot resist making a few observations about what has become a remarkable phenomenon in recent decades. Since about 1960, the ranks of literary authorship in English Canada have been swollen with emigrants from the United States, as a part of the influx of academics and other middle-class educated Americans during the expansion of Canadian universities, and during the Vietnam War. Northrop Frye says that we read Canadian literature not necessarily because it is on a par with the greatest achievements of western culture, but because it tells us something about ourselves that nothing else can. What do these two collections of stories tell us about communal or individual identities?

Most of this fiction seems to have been written at least partly to present people interacting in a distinctive social and cultural context. Some of Margoshes' stories are, in fact, set in the United States, and feature only American characters. Thompson, on the other hand, is relentlessly Canadian in his allusions. His characters say "Eh?," shop at Eaton's and Canadian Tire, drive to Fredericton or Regina, and sometimes, to add a little fillip of biculturalism, turn out to be French Canadian. These touches strike me as the 1980's version of Mounties, lumberjacks, and snow, a shorthand system to invoke superficial impressions of place, rather than three-dimensional images of a culture. In fact, the social context of both Thompson's and Margoshes' fiction is that urban anonymity that Frye has dubbed the "international modern": a cultural complex that emanates from the United States and is gradually en-

gulfing the whole world in a blandness of thought, custom, and emotional experience. As chroniclers of this phenomenon, Thompson and Margoshes are effective enough, I suppose. But their subject matter, as well as their notions of form and style, lead to a kind of fiction which is simply not very interesting.

In form, Thompson's *Leaping Up* is not the conventional short story collection. It is actually a series of very brief prose sketches, with an average length of 500 words: little dramatic, cryptic episodes beginning in medias res, involving some suggestive dialogue or description which breaks off abruptly and inconsequentially. Thompson explains in a preface that some of these vignettes were written on postcards to friends, and that he hoped not only to arouse the addressee's curiosity, but to "make the postman walk from my friend's address in wonder." Maybe the posties are different in New Brunswick, but I've heard our mailman say that one of the first things to be learned in his job is to read nothing but the address: the day is long enough without prolonging it by peeking into the dull and semi-legible lives of strangers.

So who is this book addressed to, besides the mailman who won't read it, and the friends of the author, who will probably save the postcards to sell to the University of Calgary archives? With its implied invitation to fill in the blanks, it may appeal to academics interested in readers' response theories of art. Or perhaps it is addressed to people who enjoy studying interviews, writers' notebooks, and photographic reproductions of first drafts. These are the finger exercises of a writer at work, little showpieces of style and characterization intended to give hints of what the writer could really do if he rolled up his sleeves and went to work at it. As such, they invite comparison with the work of another American author who lived in Canada for awhile, and published some of the finger exercises he wrote while working for a Canadian newspaper. Ernest Hemingway's *In Our Time*, in its first published version, was a collection of brief prose sketches, many of which were adapted from news stories originally written for the *Toronto Star*. They also were experiments in style, mood, and impression related to the imagist movement. Hemingway's purpose, however, was not to make his reader "wonder," but to force an almost hypnotic focus on a central experience and to recreate the emotional ambience of this experience, by means of a near-perfect decorum of language. With a newsman's sense of what is interesting, he recognized that it was not the detached commonplaces of ordinary experience that have the power to fascinate, but certain moments of high drama, pathos, or tragedy. Such moments, of course, can be both internal and external. Thompson attempts to work exclusively with inward intensity, by invoking moments of domestic conflict and individual anxiety, sometimes elaborated with mild suggestions of irony or absurdity. The following is the entire text of one of his stories, "Working Both Sides":

> If I got off the train at this place, right here, right now, at this place I refuse to name, how would I live — considering my clothes, my hat, my accent? I'd have to turn to crime. Could I do that? Last night I killed two men without the least difficulty or remorse, but that was in a dream, and it remains to be seen if I can smash a hand with a baseball bat when it protects the till and I'm hungry.

The ultimate effect, however, is neither dramatic nor ironic; there is, perhaps, a sense of absurdity in the inconsequential mutterings of Thompson's characters, but the real absurdity is unintentional. This is unconscious parody, of a kind that has been done better, consciously, by another American writer. As I read these pieces, I was frequently reminded of

Woody Allen's hilarious versions of Russian existentialism in the "Selections from the Allen Notebooks":

> Last night, I burned all my plays and poetry. Ironically, as I was burning my masterpiece, *Dark Penguin*, the room caught fire, and I am now the object of a lawsuit by some men named Pinchunk and Schlosser. Kierkegaard was right.

Margoshes' stories are more conventional in form and length. As in a lot of modern fiction, his plots are sometimes cryptic, bizarre, or ludicrous, and frequently hinge on some kind of sexual encounter. There are intimations of Freudian symbolism in "Trespassers Will Be Violated," where a woman drowns after reluctantly accepting a man's sexual advances, and again in the destructive impulses of a middle-aged American in "A Change of Life." In the age of Stephen King, there is also an obligatory Gothic piece, "The Caller," which exploits the hoary convention of the mysterious phone call.

All of these stories were evidently written for various literary magazines, and most of them deserve that kind of publication. It is difficult to conclude, however, in this day of proliferating little presses and volumes of poetry and fiction, that we really need this whole collection under one set of covers. Margoshes is, on the whole, a competent writer, although his figurative language sometimes made me wince: "depression took hold of Skinner . . . like deep snow around a spinning tire"; "she liked to watch the countryside roll by, unfolding like one of those Chinese diaramas she had seen at the Royal Ontario." For readers with standards based, for instance, on Emily Dickinson's definition of poetry, there is nothing very scalp-tingling in any of these stories. In fact, the opening specimen indicates the main weaknesses of the whole collection. "The Same Thing" is an attempted tour de force about sexual cruelty, male chauvinism, female vanity, human indifference, and meaninglessness. But the title neatly and ironically sums up what Margoshes has to say about these and most other subjects he turns his attention to.

There is, perhaps, more justification for Margoshes' book than for Thompson's. But neither volume is likely to make you wonder. Neither volume will tell you anything new about the Canadian experience, or the international modern experience, or about anything else.

JAMES DOYLE

FLUENT SHADOWS

MARGARET ATWOOD, *Selected Poems II: Poems Selected and New 1976-1986.* Oxford, $12.95.

SUNITI NAMJOSHI & GILLIAN HANSCOMBE, *Flesh and Paper.* Ragweed, $9.95.

ANNE SZUMIGALSKI, *Dogstones: Selected and New Poems.* Fifth House, n.p.

READING THESE THREE recent works by women poets should do more than convince the reader that an exuberant, formally inventive women's poetry is thriving in Canada. This is hardly news to most of us. But what works like these may begin to do is to explain the reasons for this exuberance. Most of these reasons have to do with the new positive awareness in women poets of an audience, a "non-resisting reader," to alter Judith Fetterley's phrase. In spite of the heterogeneity of poets like Szumigalski, Namjoshi, Hanscombe, and Atwood, these works all seem to speak to each other, to share a language. One keeps confronting in these poets' personal landscapes remarkably similar figures and notions: grandmothers, daughters, women's stories, language both as liberator and oppressor, ageing or dying female poets.

If the purpose of a selected volume is to highlight change and development,

then Anne Szumigalski's *Dogstones* certainly does that. Szumigalski, along with Lorna Crozier, has been an important voice in Saskatchewan women's poetry. This selection includes poems from her first important collection, *Woman Reading in Bath* (1974) as well as from *A Game of Angels* (1980), *Doctrine of Signatures* (1983), and *Instar* (1985). (There are also a dozen new poems.) But the development highlighted here is that of a consciously female artist. Her early poem "A Celebration" concerns the grandmother whose knuckles, crippled by chalk deposits, are mysteriously transformed after her death into life-bringing twigs, sprouting upwards from her grave. In later poems, though, Szumigalski turns from celebration to analysis and theory, much as feminist literary critics have turned from an emphasis on writers providing "positive images" of women to an analysis of the theory and politics of language. "The Disc," a prose poem from *Doctrine of Signatures*, reveals not explicitly this shift to metaphysical and theoretical questionings. A woman tries to resist what she has been told many times — that she is "not what she seems to be" (an echo of Dorothy Livesay's "The Woman I Am"):

> *I'm not what I seem to be* she confesses at last then a
> warm subservience floods through her and she
> becomes the fluent shadow of any names we may
> choose to throw at her.

Language truly becomes, for many of these poets, a particularly nasty ballistic missile launched at us by the patriarchy. As Suniti Namjoshi and Gillian Hanscombe write in the Introduction to *Flesh and Paper*, "the worlds we inherit have been drawn and painted by the way words are used in the minds and mouths of heterosexual men." Here, then, is a theoretical crux which feminist poets have always faced and will probably always have to face: how does a woman write empowering, liberating verse if the very words she must use are those of the oppressor? Poets and theorists have suggested various strategies for overcoming this dilemma: deconstruct the language, break it up, "steal" it (to use Cynthia Oszick's term), subvert it. But for Namjoshi and Hanscombe, the linguistic stalemate is broken not as much by the author as by the reader: "It is lesbians who write and hear and overhear and understand. We have the awareness of a lesbian context and a lesbian audience."

In addition, there are strategies which Namjoshi and Hanscombe adopt that challenge our very notions of authorship. By writing together — for each other, to each other — they break the conventional idea of an author's possession of his or her work; he or she usually signs poems, just as a painter often signs his or her name on a finished canvas. Even in the most celebrated poetic collaborations (Wordsworth's and Coleridge's *Lyrical Ballads* is the prototype), the principle of individual authorship remains sacrosanct. But here, language becomes a co-operative venture, naming an act of liberation:

> you oh you
> have
> discovered me
> unsealed my longing
> appointed me mighty
>
> named me.

Language and power do not part company in a wildly utopian dream-world; power still inheres in the word, but shared words manifest shared power. The lover is *appointed*, but *mighty*. Elsewhere in *Flesh and Paper*, by contrast, one senses the authors grasping at transcendence, at a surmounting of divisions and conflicts. Parts Three and Four consist of poetic debates — often witty, but all too often suggesting that such de-

bates, with a certain amount of spirited negotiation, can be resolved, tidied up: "If you agree not to play pedant, I'll agree not to play poet. So we can begin in the middle," begins the last poem in Part Three.

In the poetic world of Margaret Atwood, however, not always can one agree; one cannot even be sure of "beginning," in the middle or elsewhere, for that matter. Conflicts are often *not* transcended, wounds are healed; as one of Margaret Laurence's women declared, "things" are not there to be "gotten through." Rather, one is condemned to sight: "Witness," writes Atwood, "is what you must bear." Language is problematic; it is both boon and burden: "Your language hangs around your neck, / a noose, a heavy necklace." Silence looms in every word, in every "true story," and history remains, for Atwood, the nightmare from which we are trying — and failing — to awake: "History cannot be erased, although we can soothe ourselves by speculating about it." Those who wish to be soothed should look elsewhere.

The concern with female lineage is present in Atwood as in Szumigalski, but this *Selected Poems* tells a slightly different story about an evolving female poet. Whereas Szumigalski moved from celebration to a concern with the medium, both are present in Atwood — and they make a powerful combination indeed: "You will flicker in these words," she writes in "Five Poems for Grandmothers"

> and in the words of others
> for a while and then go out
>
> Even if I send them,
> You will never get these letters.
> Even if I see you again,
>
> I will never see you again.

These *Selected Poems II* — drawing on the collections *Two-Headed Poems* (1978), *True Stories* (1981), *Murder in the Dark* (1983), *Interlunar* (1984), and including twenty-one new poems — invite the reader to form his or her own "story" about Atwood the poet. My own story would feature a crucial turning point — the collection *True Stories* from 1981. Political urgency and technical finesse unite in the poems gathered together from this collection, poems such as "Notes Towards a Poem That Can Never Be Written" and "Train Ride Vienna-Bonn." Rarely in contemporary Canadian poetry have free verse, simple yet emphatic statement, and repetition created such moving effects. *Selected Poems II* shows us a mature artist bearing witness to joy, atrocity, language, and silence; it shows us, in short, the path which led to *The Handmaid's Tale.*

LORRAINE YORK

SPEARS & ARROWS

E. BRIAN TITLEY, *A Narrow Vision: Duncan Campbell Scott and the Administration of Indian Affairs.* Univ. of British Columbia Press, $24.95.

> The minds of men grow numb, their vision narrows,
> The clogs of Empire and the dust of ages,
> The lust of power that fogs the fairest pages,
> Of the romance that eager life would write,
> These war on Beauty with their spears and arrows.

THESE LINES FROM Scott's "Ode for the Keats Centenary" (1921) bear seeds for *civil disobedience* and *life in the woods*; they seem startlingly uncivil for a civil servant in Ottawa at a time when Canadian politicians and administrators were still trying for the finest accounting, so to speak, in the book of the British Empire. The liberal arts, however, transmuted Scott's administrative work into forms of elegiac romance as well as disillusionment in response to the narrow vision of both the collective mind of the commu-

nity and the mind of an individual like Scott himself who, in poems of solitude and self-reliance, had used his own spears and arrows in vain, trying to pierce "the Secret, golden and inappellable" from heights of land, to conquer those "unrecorded deeps" where the Piper of Arll lies "Empearled within the purple heart / Of the great sea for aye and aye," and to fend off the spell of Powassan's drum in the woods.

While the metaphysical and self-reflective noble savagery of Scott's poet-self may have been awakened by his encounters with Indians, his seemingly intransigent civil servant persona calmed the storm of his inner world by dealing with Indians from the surface security of the Anglo-Canadian's turn-of-the-century belief in the manifest destiny of the *True North* as the culmination of Western civilization. It was understandably difficult for the Indians to defend themselves against the white man's verbal weapons which tricked them with unfamiliar preunderstandings of social order, individual rights, and authority. The spears and arrows the administrators of Indian Affairs put into their monologues or treaties with Indians have by no means all been pulled. Even today, despite civil rights legislation and multiculturalism, native rights tend to give rise to government speeches rather than action.

A Narrow Vision sketches the colonization of Indians from the days before the American Revolution to Confederation and then focuses on the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when Scott was "the leading official of the department [of Indian Affairs] and the principal arbiter of policy." Relying on the dramatic power of historical information, Titley combines documentary sources with personal commentary so that history becomes transformed into narrative. Scott, his main character, works himself up the bureaucratic ladder to Deputy Superintendent General of Indian Affairs and dominates over native leaders as well as rivals within the civil service, all the while maintaining the status quo in white-Indian relations. His eventual "retirement was a long and pleasant affair" — a new marriage, extensive travel abroad, creative writing, and indulgence in the arts.

Titley's spears and arrows, of course, are pointing toward Scott's public career as a long and *un*pleasant affair for the Indians and for contemporary Canadians with a historical conscience. By the end of the book, Titley's Scott has become the irksome stereotype of an honourable Canadian *accountant*. His public life, in effect, serves as an exemplary mock-story of Canada's pride in its growing gross national product — commerce. Playing with poetic justice, Titley ends his own account with brief data entries of Scott's death, his wife's departure for Ceylon and Eastern transcendentalism, and the demolition of Scott's long-time Ottawa residence which had "to make way for commercial development."

Titley's contribution to the demolition of white Canadians' hedges, fences, and defences in their commerce with native peoples reveals a heart of greyness in the country's public history for which Scott, as the representative civil servant, becomes a convenient scapegoat. Since a Canadian scapegoat may be hard to see in the greyness of Indian Affairs (no blatant finalist solutions as for the conquistadors in Mexico, no significant problems with Indian militancy as in parts of the United States), Titley begins his story with a loud overture — a biographical digest of Scott from the *National Lampoon* of June 1983. The satiric opening helps Titley to direct the reader's own interpretive commerce with the book's documentation of civil servants' and politicians' conquests of the Indians' lands, the near-conquest of their culture, and

the attempted *liberation* of Canada from its Indian *burden*.

As a well-focused history of Indian Affairs, Titley's study is informative and timely, given the federal and provincial governments' persistent lack of will to accommodate native demands for rights and self-government. As a narrative of Scott's central role in Indian Affairs, however, the book succeeds only in part since Titley does not, as he puts it, "attempt here to perform the biographer's delicate balancing act between psychology and literature or to fathom the inner soul of D. C. Scott." A practical decision, no doubt, because Scott's private self would likely get in the way of his public self as both a civil servant and a literary figure in the standard anthologies of Canadian literature. There is no question today that, as a poet, Scott deserves better than the satire in the *National Lampoon* implies; and similarly, as a civil servant, he cannot be lampooned without significant reservations. He was, Titley concedes, "by no means the most inflexible or authoritarian official of his day," and he "was certainly a capable and efficient administrator." Even if one seeks to criticize him for merely following convention, one should not forget that his orders came from the political and cultural authority of the British Empire, that Scott was born before Confederation, that he was no anthropologist, and that his philosophy of life favoured Emersonian concepts of fate and self-reliance.

Unfortunately, it seems, the Indians he dealt with were neither sufficiently self-reliant nor sufficiently militant. Despite the significance Titley assigns to their leaders, such as F. O. Loft and Andrew Paull, they lacked the romantic stature and influence of earlier pan-Amerindian leaders like Tecumseh and added little pragmatic power to "the triumphant . . . / Throbbing of Powassan's Drum"; in short, they did not spellbind the civil servant in Scott as much as Powassan did the poet in him. In this respect, it is a pity that Titley sees little except racial and elitist overtones in Scott's poems. Such disregard for their often intensely personal and archetypal psychology does not, however, diminish Titley's exegetical accounting of the heart of greyness in the administration of Indian Affairs. His provocative findings corroborate John Flood's *The Land They Occupied* (1976), a sensitive collection of poems lamenting the wrecking of native culture in northern Ontario through Scott's misguided treaty negotiations.

While civil servants tend to make convenient scapegoats, Scott's own poetry sends at least signals of a not-so-narrow heart and mind behind his civil servant persona. Unlike Titley, an interpretive biographer will have to read these signals for a broader vision of Scott's entanglement in "the clogs of Empire."

K. P. STICH

FÉMINISME QUÉBÉCOIS

DIANE LAMOUREUX, *Fragments et Collages*. Editions du Remue-Ménage, n.p.

LISE PAYETTE, *La Bonne Aventure*. Editions Québec/Amérique, n.p.

L'ESSAI DE DIANE Lamoureux se veut une réflexion sur le féminisme québécois des années 70 et un point de départ pour relancer un débat sur son avenir. Le mot réflexion est très juste, car tout au long du livre, elle oscille entre la position de témoin-participante, d'historienne et de théoricienne. Il me semble toutefois que l'aspect théorique domine et, même si l'auteure a une attitude négative face au "processus d'académisation du féminisme," elle y participe un peu dans son analyse.

C'est par une préface de Françoise Collin qu'on aborde la problématique du féminisme. Cette dernière rejette l'analogie avec le modèle marxiste et affirme que le mouvement féministe ne peut appuyer ses revendications sur aucun autre modèle préalable, même s'il est vrai que les femmes — les exilées — ont parfois "pensé leur lutte comme nationalisation." Ainsi "la femme est à elle-même son propre avenir." L'ambiguïté que présente la définition de la catégorie "femme" et la désignation de l'adversaire — l'ami, le partenaire, le collègue, l'amant — se retrouve aussi dans le domaine historique, car le féminisme appartient à la crise du moderne par son souci de réappropriation et du post-moderne par son refus de l'opposition binaire des sexes, en faveur de la notion de différence et d'hétérogénéité. Compte tenu de la nature du féminisme, son articulation à la politique est complexe, mais Françoise Collin ne peut se prononcer sur la situation québécoise qui ne lui est pas familière. On se demande pourquoi Diane Lamoureux a choisi une Française pour la préface de son essai. L'auteure ne nous éclaire d'ailleurs pas sur ce point.

Dans son avant-propos, elle nous dit qu'elle fait partie de ces Québécoises qui ont cru pouvoir provoquer des changements importants en luttant pour le féminisme, le socialisme et l'indépendantisme. Des espoirs sans lendemain!

A la question "Où en est le féminisme?" elle répond qu'il a été récupéré par l'état, les syndicats et qu'il y a eu un déclin du militantisme collectif. Elle aborde alors l'histoire récente du féminisme, qu'elle divise en trois courants: émancipateur, institutionnel et radical. Cette typologie cependant ne lui paraît pas satisfaisante à cause des divisions entre le discours et les pratiques. Elle décide donc d'en analyser le courant égalitaire, celui de la différence et celui de la problématisation politique, d'abord du point de vue théorique et ensuite de son articulation pratique. Cette grille va lui permettre d'être extrêmement synthétique, sans toutefois la rendre prisonnière de sa structure, car elle ajoute des pages intéressantes sur ce qu'elle entend par mouvement et luttes des femmes.

La partie sur "l'égalité" me semble contenir tous les éléments essentiels à une telle analyse, en passant de la distinction entre production des valeurs d'échange et production des valeurs d'usage au contrôle de la procréation, de la double journée de travail à l'attitude ambiguë du mouvement syndical devant la disparité salariale entre hommes et femmes. Sa conclusion: "à la femme fragile à protéger a succédé l'image sociale de la femme bionique . . . égalité veut dire assimilation dans un contexte où les femmes sont systématiquement désavantagées" est une réponse à la question qu'elle venait de nous poser dans le chapitre "Quelle égalité?"

Ayant ainsi rejeté la notion d'assimilation à l'univers masculin, elle questionne le concept de "la différence." Se servant d'exemples concrets, elle cherche à nuancer en quoi consiste l'identité commune des femmes qui vivent dans "des sociétés fragmentées et soumises à des logiques diverses de domination sans que l'on puisse faire de l'une d'entre elles la quintessence de toutes les autres." Le statut de victimes a servi à rallier les femmes, mais elles ont continué à laisser les hommes organiser leur vie politique et sociale. Selon l'auteure, vu que les féministes ont craint de "s'aventurer hors du féminin tel que construit par la société patriarcale," elles ont pratiquement consenti à la séparation entre les domaines masculin et féminin. Cette partie du livre se termine par une analyse du rôle théorique joué par les lesbiennes dans le féminisme québécois.

Son dernier chapitre, "A la recherche du politique," soutient que l'autonomie

organisationnelle amène à une autonomie politique. C'est en diminuant l'intervention de l'Etat dans la vie quotidienne qu'on pourra poursuivre cette lutte contre l'inégalité pour une transformation radicale de la société, surtout en ce qui concerne les répartitions budgétaires et le concept du travail. Selon elle, cette transformation radicale n'a rien à faire avec la pensée marxiste car "il ne s'agit donc plus d'affronter l'Etat sur son propre terrain, celui des institutions, mais d'en rétrécir les champs d'intervention au moyen de l'investissement de la société civile par les mouvements sociaux en lutte." Un exemple de ces interventions sont les centres d'avortement gérés par les femmes à Montréal et à Québec. De telles pratiques auraient pu et dû se multiplier dans d'autres domaines, selon l'auteure.

Elle retrace ensuite l'histoire du FLF (Front de libération des femmes), du MWLM (Montreal Women's Liberation Movement) et du Centre des femmes; elle examine l'importance des journaux féministes et mentionne brièvement l'explosion de la parole libérée et libératrice qui marque la deuxième moitié des années 70. Ici j'aurais souhaité trouver le nom de quelques auteures et oeuvres pour rendre plus concrètes ces quelques pages où l'on célèbre l'irruption du verbe féminin dans la sphère publique.

Même si l'essai se termine sur une note inquiétante, puisque les années 80 nous amènent dans une nouvelle phase de conservatisme, Diane Lamoureux croit à la capacité de renouvellement du féminisme québécois qui devra incorporer l'apport du lesbianisme "pour rendre possible la progression de l'ensemble du mouvement."

S'il y a un fil conducteur entre cet essai et *La Bonne Aventure* de Lise Payette, c'est que pour que les choses changent il faut transformer les "Yvettes." Ce n'est plus Ariane qui détient le secret du labyrinthe. *La Bonne Aventure*, la version romancée du téléroman, sert de catalyseur à une prise de conscience qui doit faire tache d'huile: il s'agit de déculpabiliser et de moderniser les femmes qui sont encore prisonnières de leur rôle de mère, fille, soeur, épouse et collaboratrice de l'entreprise familiale. Lise Payette met au premier plan les "gestes" des femmes, viennent ensuite celles des hommes et enfin des enfants. Cette transgression des codes habituels va permettre aux téléspectatrices/lectrices de se comparer à ces personnages qui vivent dans une atmosphère où règne la solidarité entre les femmes. Le livre retrace l'histoire de quatre amies qui vivent à Montréal entre les années 1982 et 1986: Martine — la femme bionique, Michèle — victime métamorphosée en femme libérée, Anne — mère poule et veuve choyée, Me Hélène Savoie — la Belle au bois dormant brusquement réveillée et aussitôt rendormie après un mariage éclair, mais à qui sa profession d'avocate conserve son statut de princesse. Auprès de ces femmes de trente ans, il y a un petit nombre d'hommes assez sympathiques, capables d'évoluer et tout compte fait admirablement généreux. Les autres générations sont plus effacées, à part une merveilleuse grand-mère qui semble sortie des contes de fées.

Lors d'une entrevue avec *La Vie en Rose*, en mai 1985, Lise Payette nous disait que les protagonistes de son téléroman sont engagées dans le féminisme dans leurs actions quotidiennes. Mais même Martine, qui exprime le mieux les revendications des femmes par son refus du mariage, son expérience de l'avortement et son succès dans le monde des affaires, ne mentionne jamais le mot féminisme, car selon Lise Payette: "Si j'en fais plus que cela, je perds le public. J'aime mieux qu'il m'entende; le message n'entre pas comme une tonne de briques, mais sur quatre ans, il rentre." On peut

lui faire confiance, car c'est bien elle qui a payé un lourd prix lors de l'affaire des Yvettes.

J'insiste sur cet aspect pédagogique, puisque j'ai du mal à justifier l'existence de cette version romancée: 542 pages, dix-huit chapitres, quatre parties, mais sans table des matières. Les dialogues, une fois transcrits sur la page, perdent de leur vivacité et les compte-rendus événemetiels qui leur servent de toile de fond se libèrent mal d'un style journalistique où la lectrice reste à l'extérieur. Les personnages eux-mêmes semblent encore mal libérés des poncifs. Il est vrai que je ne regarde pas souvent la télévision, mais je lis des oeuvres de romancières avec des personnages féminins auxquels je peux plus aisément m'identifier. Je reconnais la généreuse contribution de Lise Payette dans d'autres domaines — radio, télévision, politique, féminisme — mais, dans *La Bonne Aventure*, je reste sceptique face au réalisme des situations et je me sens mal à l'aise devant une langue envahie par les clichés.

Le roman de Lise Payette se lit très facilement et s'adresse à un public qui veut retrouver ses héroïnes du petit écran. Le livre de Diane Lamoureux demande une connaissance détaillée des événements de l'histoire récente du féminisme québécois: le titre *Fragments et Collages* est une déscription appropriée de cet essai.

SILVIA A. BERGERSEN

SEEKING THE MIDDLE GROUND

Canada and the Arab World, ed. Tareq Y. Ismael. Univ. of Alberta Press, n.p.

GWENDOLYN MACEWEN, *The Honey Drum*. Mosaic, n.p.

"THERE'S NO MIDDLE ground in the Middle East," say the old hands. "If you think you understand the Middle East," declares a sign behind the desk of a U.N. official in Lebanon, "obviously you don't." The nine contributors to *Canada and the Arab World* (which grew out of the 1981 University of Calgary Canadian-Arab Relations Conference) do their best to transcend such defeatist bromides via scholarly objectivity and humane concern. If the volume does not finally come across as objective, that is partly a function of the pro-Israeli climate we inhabit, partly of its own failure to include even one Zionist perspective for the sake of balance. It has an air of preaching to the converted.

Canada and the Arab World begins and ends with a Canadian politician calling for closer relations with the Arabs and a more evenhanded Mideast policy. A hurried reader could gain some sense of the book's arguments from Senator Heath McQuarrie's sympathetic introduction, with its summary of the papers, while Robert Stanfield's appended Report on Mideast policy (1980) and his 1981 "Reflections" thereon offer as fair and readable an assessment of the region's problems as the volume contains. In between, academics from Carleton, McGill, McMaster and Calgary provide an array of data and conclusions. If they are sometimes dull and repetitious, they are generally useful.

The Palestinian-Israeli dispute preoccupies the writers — all agree that it is central — though not to the exclusion of other concerns. Host and editor Tareq Ismael's "Overview" does chronicle External Affairs Ministers' statements on behalf of a Palestinian homeland from 1981 to 1985, but also exposes Canada's self-proclaimed "neutrality" in the Mideast as a self-delusion, and notes that increasing trade with the Arab world has given Canada a new interest there: two of the volume's principal themes. Peyton Lyon's short piece argues that Canada's

"national interest" requires close relations with Arabs as well as with Israelis, wonders why our actual policy is different, and provides his own answer: "public opinion polls have from the start revealed a consistently pro-Israeli bias." It is not only the media, the Zionist lobby, and short-sighted politicians these gentlemen are taking on, but also Canadian public opinion.

Dr. Atif Kubursi takes up the question of self-interest in Canada's economic relations with Middle Eastern countries. His useful tables make the point that our import-export trade with the Arab world has increased significantly since the 1960's and could increase more; he need not have exaggerated Israel's relative decline in his discussion. The leading Middle Eastern importer from Canada in 1968, Israel by 1978 ranked third, behind Saudi Arabia and Algeria, and slipped from second to fifth (behind those two countries plus Iraq and Egypt) in exports to Canada. Unfortunately his statistics cut off in 1980.

The book's flawed centrepiece is Paul Noble's two reports on Canada and the Palestinians, which plod rather slowly and mechanically through the years 1967-1983. The first (1967-73) announces the motif: a Canadian policy (usually "static" or "timid") deferential to American wishes, responsive to Zionist pressures, and distracted by parallels between Québecois and Palestinian nationalism. A longer sequel (1973-83) chronicles the growth of Canadian business interests in the Arab Mideast, the transient influence of EEC policies, and the hopes briefly aroused by Carter and Camp David. Grasping at some straws, Noble manages to see a dawning recognition by Canada of Palestinian political rights, but his reliance on newspaper reports and interviews with unnamed "high-ranking" officials in External Affairs softens the edge of his argument.

Alan Bones' analysis of "Zionist interest groups" is balanced and useful in its more limited sphere; he depicts the various groups as superbly organized and effective but sometimes fractious and overzealous. After examining three samples of their tactics (1975-79), he concludes that the Zionist lobby has *not* crossed the "fine line" between influencing government policy and imposing "a minority's demands." Along the way, Bones exposes the rift between External Affairs, which would prefer "a more balanced policy," and the Cabinet, which is more sensitive to political pressures.

Unexpectedly, Robert Stanfield emerges as the hero of the conference and the book. He is cited respectfully by several writers who wonder pertinently why his Report has not been revived in these Conservative years. It is a good question. Though marred by some naïveté, such as a pathetic reliance on the defunct Camp David accords, it is a sensible and respectable piece of work, which might well serve as the starting point for a new initiative or policy review.

I suppose that *The Honey Drum* ("Seven Tales from Arab Lands") could be seen as responding to Stanfield's call for greater "cultural understanding" between Canadians and Arabs; although two of the tales are original, five are adapted from Arabic sources (who translated them we are not told). They range in mode from the pious tale and Aesopian exemplum to dramatic irony. The most interesting and substantial is "Four Ways to Fortune," yet it is queerly bifurcated and finally bland. This slight volume, which could be read in an hour, will not add to the literary reputation of Arab authors or of MacEwen, whose image of the Middle East comes out of *The Thousand and One Nights.* (One might as well read *Uncle Tom's Cabin* for an understanding of race relations in

modern America.) She might more pertinently have told how the scorpion met the camel on the banks of the Nile and asked for a ride across. "Do you think I'm crazy?" scoffed the camel. "You'd sting me and I'd drown." "You must think *I'm* crazy," retorted the scorpion. "Then I'd drown too." Convinced, the camel took him aboard, but halfway across the scorpion stung him. "Why did you do that?" asked the camel, starting to sink. "Now we're both dead." "Welcome to the Middle East," said the scorpion as he too slipped under the waves.

RICHARD BEVIS

SPEECH ACTS

TOM WAYMAN, *The Face of Jack Munro*. Harbour Publishing, $7.95.

ANDREW SUKNASKI, *Silk Trail*. Nightwood Editions, $7.95.

STEPHEN CHAN, *Songs of the Maori King*. Sono Nis, $7.95.

MARGINAL VOICES DO NOT usually reach the top of the pops amongst literate members of the ruling class. Especially when those voices preach social revolution, threatening to transform sound into political action. Admittedly English Canada is rarely pestered by such intrusions; here, revolutionary voice is usually either silenced or ignored by our universally acclaimed apolitical national character. (As Robert Kroetsch once mused, it seemed just as natural for South American writers to be Marxists as it is for Canadian writers not to be.) One obvious exception to this opiate condition is Rick Salutin; his astringent theatrical voices originate within a politicized consciousness which is itself situated on the margins of the Canadian mainstream. In 1981 Salutin addressed a conference devoted to "the writer and human rights" and what he had to say is germane not only to the critical issues raised by such a theme, but more specifically to the three books here under review. Speaking on "North American revolutionary writing," he observed:

> Today I'm always struck, in listening to writers from such countries as El Salvador, by the naturalness with which they discuss revolution in all its aspects. Here in Canada I find that one feels a certain pressure to apologize and be embarrassed at discussing topics in a revolutionary vein, and even at using the language. In polite literary company, one doesn't use the term[s] "revolution" . . . "class" [or] "struggle." . . . Simultaneously, you have the problem that art is usually assumed in our society to deal primarily with personal or private issues, as though, for example, the conflict of workers with a company, or of any collective body with whoever has authority over it, is somehow not fit material for artistic treatment; that there's something impersonal about the struggles of a union or a political movement, whereas the conflict over "Do I divorce?" or "Who do I sleep with?" is considered personal.

Obviously each of these collections has its own distinctive voice; they are *not* all of a piece. Nor are they Marxist tracts attempting to incite the bogey of revolution amongst their readers. But each, in its own way, shares with Salutin a repulsion from and fascination with Canadian (or at least, orthodox) "politeness"; each probes just how political is the personal. Whether it be Wayman's brash confrontations, Suknaski's delicately modulated "*haiku*," or Chan's awkward historicizations, each collection tries unabashedly "to use the language" to engage History — to explore how and why we got to where we are. And just how *on earth* we can make amends.

Although apparently the most angrily outspoken of the three, it is a mistake to see Tom Wayman's *The Face of Jack Munro* solely (and simple-mindedly) as a collection of "political satires." Certainly familiar readers will get what they expect: the verbal flair, the hilarious humour, oral texture, the breath unit metrics, the parodist as subversive, as well as

the allegories devoted to social situations and demanded political change. Consider, for example, these lines from "The Hammer" (a poem which gains much of its power from the quiet incorporation of some classic Pete Seeger):

> A hammer is rising. A hammer
> thrown up at the end of the day by a carpenter
> with blood on the handle where his blisters have been.
> A hammer. It lifts as well on the wave of steam
> pouring up from the pots of a kitchen — a tiny kitchen
> of an apartment, and that of a restaurant
> serving a hundred customers at once.

In this sense, poems like "Dream of the Generals," "Surplus Value Poem," "Bosses," and "Job Security" are all vintage Wayman; all retrospectively fulfil Salutin's desires for a poetic that redefines exactly what *is* proper literary material, a poetic that teases out the personal lineaments entwined within the collective social whole.

But the collection is not simply a poeticized version of *Kapital*; nor is it a series of mere squibs directed outward toward topical "problems." Wayman offers a variety of beautifully handled emotional situations — pastoral fantasies, meditative moments (reminiscent of Suknaski's *haiku*), comic farces, poems about "relationships," eulogies, odes — yet not one operates unconsciously within its theoretical framework. In every case the poetic voice springs from within a political awareness, one razor-sharp in its attention to nuance, detail, and effect. Here politics are not something separable from the "other" parts of one's life; in Wayman they are the matrix in which all thought, all action is engendered. Sure, there *are* lapses; for example, when the speaking voice allows the intensity of outrage to interfere with poetic control. "Dream of the Generals," to cite one instance, although an astonishing *tour de force*, is quite simply too long, and sags mid-way. "Sleep" and "Your clothes have experiences you know nothing about" border on the glibly inane; going for the pub laugh has distorted the speaking voice.

But these are quibbles. Most important in this collection is the fact that Wayman seeks no less than to politicize our perception and consumption of language. He develops a written poetry suffused with oral power and it is the power of the committed activist, the speaker who believes in the active potential of the word. Appropriately enough, the poems return again and again to the polarities of speech and silence (including the eulogistic "Forrie, O'Rourke, Penner, Sorestad," and the self-reflective meditation, "Giving Another Reading: Jasper Park"). In doing so, Wayman manifests his considerable power as a self-conscious *writer* of language. He scrutinizes not only modes of production or surplus value, but the possibility of meaning in his own writerly activities. A poem like "Paper" brings together many of Wayman's concerns in *Munro*, especially in its submerged comic reflections on the speaker's playful exchange with the reading consumer:

> Paper usually presents the world
> as black and white. Where it suggests colour,
> most people conclude the shades are not accurate.
> Paper edits, omits,
> compresses complexity into a rectangle.
> Around it, the universe swirls with other forms,
> hues, emotions, movement
> and sound.
> Anything on paper
> is a lie.

The poet as meditator/mediator/mentor; the poet as speech actor. Or, as Wayman himself would probably have it, the poet as r/evolutionist. Re-visionist.

It is precisely this sense of the poet's

"job" that informs Andrew Suknaski's difficult, exasperating, and brilliant collection of minimalist poems, *Silk Trail*. Ostensibly the *haiku*-like verse traces the geography of the "silk trail" — the trading route between China and the West — the story of how the secrets of silk manufacture were first revealed, then smuggled out of China into the trading world. It also traces the explorations of the early Chinese explorers to North America; and it entwines these narratives with the spread across Canada of the CPR. A parody extraordinaire of *The Last Spike*? Perhaps, partly; but hardly essentially.

According to Suknaski himself:

> As a Canadian writer, I am mostly concerned with finding a cipher that will decode a fourfold dream: the Anglo Saxon's dream and search for the Northwest Passage to further expand the British Empire (the human toll among many peoples being the price of that dream); the European immigrant's dream of a New Jerusalem in the new life (a second chance) in the New World; the Chinese dream of the "Golden Mountains" in California, or the "Gold Mountain" in Canada's West (the only chance for three hundred dollars and passage back home to be reunited with one's family and find another home elsewhere beyond crowded cities and states); and finally the Amerindian dreaming of homeland, *Manitou's abundance* to keep body and spirit where no boundaries are ever drawn — except by migration of game, and alluring mythical places where the gods impart their secrets.

An ambitious project, no doubt. What interests me is that like Wayman, Suknaski begins to probe the role of the writer *as a writer of language*, the writer as master/mistress of a secret script that will disclose the truth hidden behind the inherited/inherent/inhering distortions of Historical words. The collection is filled with references to naming, working, transforming raw materials into beauty, map-making, surveying, to the act of "telling"; i.e., the speaking/writing poet as the teller of fact, the orienteer who will "place" his or her reader inside a new history and geography. Suknaski incorporates historical photographs, ideograms, transcriptions of official documents and bibliography — all conjoining with his verse to assert, in Barthes' words, "that this has happened." That exploitation of foreign, non-white workers did occur in Canada, that history is not a smooth line of continuity from a mystical origin. But also that imagination can disclose unities (as well as disunities); that the artist can recuperate as well as reveal.

As a series of quasi-*haiku*, *Silk Trail* works extremely hard. Suknaski pressurizes the language to its limits — practically to the point of writerly and readerly exhaustion. As in the very best *haiku*, the individual word or phrase is placed so as to provide apparently limitless possibilities to the reader's imagination. The minimum number of words, in effect, provides the maximum amount of pure readerly participation. One way to achieve this "opening" is by having either a blank or wide amorphous context, separate from the demands of narrative progression. In *Silk Trail* Suknaski continually achieves this sense of endlessly opening possibilities; consider his pinpoint portrayal of flight/immigration/pilgrimage/artistic process:

a telling of they
who flee
with child
in womb
. . . the swallow's wing
a brushstroke/
naming you
god
in water . . .
scant telling
of surveyor
chao-kong
land
kept
through hard work
land
for keeping
silkworm

But *Silk Trail* is not simply a loosely inter-woven series of discrete poems. It purports to be a *narrative* — a *story* told "*after*" three prototypes (an anonymous poem called "mulberry by path," Ezra Pound's cantos LII-XCII, and Ma Huan's fifteenth-century historical log, *The Overall Survey of the Ocean's Shores*). And it is here — in the intersection of historical source, poetic form, and narrative demand — that Suknaski's critical problems begin to arise.

Historical revisionism always places a heavy demand on the reader. By its very nature, the historically revisionist text openly acknowledges its own contingency. The reader *must* read other texts in order to understand this one. But here the reader is faced not only with both a scholarly bibliography (is Suknaski straining after an academic readership?) *and* the progressive demands of narrative, but also with the opposite needs of the minimalist poem — the need for generality, open context, amorphous possibilities. What happens in *Silk Trail*, I think, is that the sequential demands of narrative progression crush the chosen form's integral needs for isololate particles. The result is a tremendously compressed work of poetry that borders on the precious in its attempts to achieve diametrically opposed aims. As a result one is dazzled by its virtuosity, yet irritated at its ponderous fragmentation.

Stephen Chan's *Songs of the Maori King*, although a lyrical prose-poem of considerably different concerns, also functions within a similar politicized/poeticized context. A peculiarly apposite publication for a Canadian press, the collection concentrates on certain key times in New Zealand colonial history (i.e., the establishment of the "King Movement" amongst disparate Maori tribes in the 1850's. The Kingites, as Chan's brief preface mentions, were united on one central issue: no more land for the Europeans). A number of Canadian/Commonwealth analogues come immediately to mind: like Wiebe's *Big Bear*, Such's *riverrun*, Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (or more immediately, *Utu*, Geoff Murphy's film about the New Zealand Land Wars), this text attempts to disclose the meanings of colonization by focusing on the emotional and mental upheavals of one dispossessed leader. Accompanied by (deliberately?) childlike woodcuts, the narrative traces Potatau's ritualistic post-election sojourn in the "forest" (a curiously European term for the Bush). Here he meditates not only upon the effects of colonization on himself, his people, *and* the pakeha colonizers, but also the consequences of having been elected a complex "symbol" of indigenous need and defeat.

I have a number of problems with this collection, as well as a variety of reservations about its literary merit. On one hand the text is pre-eminently admirable as what the jacket blurb terms a "deeply personal synthesis of the struggle of one Maori Chief." Within the mythical structure of the scapegoating ritual, Chan often hits the mark directly, offering a precise and powerful image of colonial dispossession and deracination. Witness this miniature of the European settler-soldier:

> In many new lands whole nations resisted him.
> With fire and great ardour the nations greeted him.
> He only fingered his embroidered coats.
>
> This single gesture was the greatest insolence.
> He would march to his death in resplendent dress.
> He would dirty a gold thread or two.

This, if not superb, is exquisitely acute in the juxtapositioning of gestural "languages" — a juxtaposition all the more poignant given the ignorances on both sides of the linguistic wars. But this kind

of shocking insight arising from a precision of detail is a rarity throughout the book. Too often Chan lapses into mundane or cloying imagery; the colonizers are pale bringers of boundaries and oppression. Or even worse, the Maori emerge as vexing self-parodies, complete with greenstone clubs, tattooed faces, and mystical connections with the land. In his attempt to be "authentic," Chan includes virtually all we have come to expect from post-card histories: marketable detail upon marketable detail. That is, in his search for an authentic voice Chan, as an outsider, has too readily depended on the artificial, colonially proffered image of the native people. Cliché overrides vision and what we get is a mimesis of a mimesis; not the real thing.

But it is also a vision unsustained by the poet's language. Not only do we have Potatau speaking with stilted nobility — à la Chief Dan George to Dustin Hoffman — but we have a prose-poem whose language echoes with predictability:

> I shall become one with this land, he thought, so I shall know why I fight...
> The tattooed whorls on his face and the contours of the land seemed to fuse.

At this point one cannot help but recall Pope's infamous one-liner from *The Essay on Criticism*: "And ten low Words oft creep in one dull Line." Whereas Wayman's intense anger over social oppression can lead to poetic extravagance (which might well crash — but at least with a bang), Chan's earnest sincerity often leads nowhere; it simmers and fizzles within the limitations of his monosyllabic prose. As a result the collection comes across not so much as the communication of a powerfully sensed experience, but as a brittle and tenuous description of what once was read in history books. Which is a shame, really, since the narrative seeks such a worthy aim as Salutin's disclosure of fact within fiction; the voice sounds throughout with the sense shared by each of these books: the need and duty to communicate something of immense significance.

GARY BOIRE

MANDEL'S ESSAYS

ELI MANDEL, *The Family Romance*. Turnstone, $12.95.

SUCH ASSEMBLAGES OF diverse pieces are rarely so appropriately (directly? duplicitously?) titled. The fugitive children of Eli Mandel's seminal intelligence find themselves yet another home. Which raises certain questions about the present collection's paternity. The different occasions for which the essays were originally written? The gregarious impulse whereby a writer's separate pieces take on greater mass simply by clustering together? The way in which they really were one argument all along? A publisher's desire to bring out another volume by such a major critic as Mandel? As with all questions of origin, some quibbling here is possible. But most students of Canadian literature should be grateful that this is a gathering of — after all — Mandel's essays. Clearly, it will be much more convenient to buy (or borrow) this volume than to have the Interlibrary Loan Department try to run down, say, *Zeitschrift der Gesellschaft fur Kanada Studien* (1983), where "History and Literature" first appeared.

The author, in his preface, gives what may well be *The Family Romance*'s family romance. He recalls how, prompted by Grove's *In Search of Myself*, a childish musing on his own other possible origins allowed him to be "born anew," freer and a future poet. This "innocent" misreading is presently modified into a Bloomian "primal struggle" of "literary" father and son whereby the poet names his ancestors, his estate, and that "much sterner" map of misreading is itself applied to mostly contemporary Canadian

literature to see how "strong writers misread and rewrite their precursors." In short, Mandel "seeks primal scenes . . . of nomination, identification, origins." The humanistic and male biases of this enterprise are both openly acknowledged and so, less directly, is the egotistical — the privileging of one's own misreadings.

Mandel deploys those "misreadings" under three headings. The first of these, Origins, begins with "Auschwitz and Poetry," his "account of the writing of a poem." The first section also contains other major essays such as "History and Literature" or "The Border League: American 'West' and Canadian 'Region'" as well as "Strange Loops" and "Academic and Popular," all in different ways and to different degrees concerned with questions of origin. The second section, Writers, the longest, names, in twelve separate titles, thirteen writers. These range from George Grant (the first considered) to Leonard Cohen (the last) or, differently put, from Hugh MacLennan, Saint-Denys Garneau, and Irving Layton to Christopher Dewdney and Jon Whyte. The final section, Writing, consists of three essays, two on the long poem, and "Modernism and Impossibility," mostly about the making and unmaking of modern painting.

As even this crude catalogue suggests, the design promised in the title, the preface, and even the division into parts is not so obvious either in many of the separate essays or in the volume as a whole. Why, for example, is "The Long Poem: Journal and Origin" included in the third section instead of the first? Or conversely, is not "Academic and Popular," with its careful delineation of the confusion between these two terms, more a matter of Writing than of Origins? One notices, too, that essays such as "Introducing Irving Layton" or "Selecting P.K." better fit their titles than the larger argument of the book. Or sometimes larger arguments do not seem to be quite the argument we have been promised, as with the apt and extended consideration of problems of translation in "Saint-Denys Garneau: Transcending Nationality" or the way in which a number of the essays in Writers set forth an analysis of different poetics: MacLennan's "poetics of disaster"; Atwood's poetics of perception, particularly the perception "of all that *isn't* there"; Kroetsch's and Dewdney's poetics of "linguistic" and "neurological" process; Layton's surface poetics of clowning behind which the serious business of his poetry is conducted.

There are two possible answers to this implicit criticism. The first is to stress the quality of the separate essays. Thus, if Mandel does not place Layton in some Bloomian/Canadian field, he still places Layton as one of our most problematic poets by defining the nature of the problem. And that place itself can then be subsumed into the more magisterial placement set forth in one of the most impressive essays, "The New Phrenologists: Developments in Contemporary Canadian Writing." Which brings us to the second and more central answer. As Mandel, summarizing Bloom, observes in the penultimate essay: "Critics in their secret heart of hearts . . . love continuities, but he who lives with continuity alone cannot be poet." Can we, then, fairly criticize the volume for a lack of continuity, coherence, when one of its purposes is to show such interpretive icons as critical fictions?

Mandel frequently praises Bloom and Kroetsch for their effective use of paradox, but in that department he is a master too. He can, for example, cogently assess the contradictions at the heart of Grove's literary enterprise: "Grove became involved in a search for the true America, but [for Grove] the true America is, in fact, Canada, and Canada is the place we have failed to create." Or he

can just as cogently, in "The Post-Structural Scene in Poetry," the last essay in Origins, unwrite the very entity of poet and of poem and thereby unwrite also the first essay in that section, the poem he wrote and the way he, as the poet who wrote it, could also write about it. In short, here is (and especially in the more recent essays) a postmodern consciousness at play, seeing what it can make out of and unmake of the literary materials at hand.

Yet the volume still seems (for this reviewer at least) to be more criticism as collage than as bricolage and to be rather less than the sum of its parts. The quality of the parts, of course, remains. Every essay rewards rereading. Eli Mandel is one of Canada's most perspective, sophisticated, wide ranging, and widely read social and literary critics. And for that reason alone we can wish he had given us two books instead of one. Had the present volume been published under the more modest title of "Collected Essays," Mandel might have gone on to write a different Family Romance of contemporary Canadian literature. Our gain is convenient access to the previously published essays. Our loss is the study we do not have — what Mandel might have done with the conceptual apparatus that does not quite hold this volume together.

ARNOLD E. DAVIDSON

STRATFORD

JOHN PETTIGREW & JAMIE PORTMAN, *Stratford: The First Thirty Years*. 2 vols. Macmillan, n.p.

TOM PATTERSON with ALLAN GOULD, *First Stage: The Making of the Stratford Festival*. McClelland and Stewart, n.p.

THE FIRST OF THESE books is much bigger and much more important, but the second is more fun to read. The first is a comprehensive history of the genesis and checkered growth of the Stratford Festival, covering the people responsible for its success, the various conflicts and crises that have marked its first thirty years, and the 200 or so theatrical productions that it mounted during that period. The second book, Tom Patterson's personal account of the beginnings of the Festival (he was its unlikely founder and first general manager), tells the story of how the naïve and inexperienced but astonishingly confident Patterson, through sheer persistence and buoyant optimism, managed to get the Festival rolling. He was, of course, not alone, and his book gives full credit to the many other people whose "aggregate faith" (in the words of the contractor who built stage and auditorium) kept the project going; but he doesn't downplay his own contribution either. One of the keynotes of his style, in fact, is a kind of confident modesty, a wide-eyed surprise at his own success mixed with an unshakable assurance that he would succeed. Pettigrew's history (finished by Portman after his colleague's untimely death) is breezy and fluent, but is necessarily more detached and comprehensive. It lacks the personal voice that makes Patterson's story so winning. Reading Patterson, one senses how people like Tyrone Guthrie, Alec Guinness, or the Masseys must have responded to him back in 1952 — his self-delight makes him almost irresistible.

The Festival is of course a national institution and has been so for many years. It was recognized as such from the very beginning, by Patterson and others trying to put rich but unsophisticated Canada on the cultural map, and by Guthrie himself, who wrote to Guinness that the Festival "should demonstrably be a Canadian scheme carried through by Canadians, but with help (indispensable and important help) from Great Britain." He felt that Canada was

likely soon to become the "richest and most powerful country in the world" and wanted to do his part to meet the "great sentimental urge . . . to be influenced by Britain" and to offset the "great practical urge to be influenced by the U.S.A." that he sensed in those innocent years.

What Guthrie could not have foreseen was that almost thirty years later, in the fall of 1980, the issue of the Canadianness of the Festival would erupt with great bitterness (as it also had five years earlier upon Robin Phillips' arrival), when British director John Dexter was offered the job of artistic director over the heads and behind the backs of the so-called Gang of Four, a group of Canadian artists (so they were perceived, though one was a recent British emigrant) who had assumed the task of running the Festival upon Phillips' resignation. The nationalism issue was underlined, and the hostilities that ensued almost destroyed the Festival. Although most of the artists involved would insist that the crucial issue was not nationalism but the high-handedness, weakness, and vacillation of the Stratford Board, the public perception of the problem, furthered by the response of Actor's Equity, highlighted the nationalist question. In the end, Dexter's work permit was denied by Lloyd Axworthy and Canadian John Hirsch was soon hired to take over. Hirsch, while unhappy with the "send for the colonial governor" mentality and its continuing hold on Canadian arts boards, nevertheless believed in Stratford and went quickly to work trying to fulfil what he saw as the Festival's "continental mandate" (moved perhaps by the "practical urge" Guthrie had spoken of 29 years earlier).

There have, of course, been others through the years who have *not* believed in Stratford, who have in fact seen it as a detrimental force in Canadian theatre — people such as Nathan Cohen, longtime theatre critic for the *Toronto Star*. Stratford, in this view, has shifted the course of Canadian acting toward the classical, mostly British, repertoire, has played up the star system and its attendant ballyhoo (and foreign influence), has done little or nothing to encourage Canadian play-writing, and has in general diverted energy away from the development of an indigenous Canadian theatrical tradition. Cultural nationalism, then, has always been an issue at Stratford and it is no surprise that it contributed so powerfully to the crisis of 1980. Jamie Portman, in his fair and balanced account of the crisis, tends to downplay the nationalist issue, as most of the Stratford artists also did, but its eruption was consistent with the entire history of the Festival.

That history is told simply and fully by the Pettigrew-Portman book. It is most interesting in its treatment of the Festival's beginnings — especially the spirit and commitment that led to the impossible excitement of the first night. Of that evening, even Nathan Cohen could write many years later: "That first night at Stratford was the single most memorable experience I ever had in the theatre." How the idea was spun, the theatrical personalities lined up, the land acquired, the stage designed, an architect found to create a theatre around the stage, the whole complex built, a tent ordered, made, and, after much difficulty, raised — all this makes fine reading in Pettigrew's account. In Patterson's book, which is devoted entirely to this period, the same story takes on comic and mythic dimensions, anecdotes abound, and personalities emerge with gusto.

Throughout the whole period, money problems are paramount (Pettigrew carefully traces these but Patterson, characteristically, slides over them). Stratford citizens are remarkably generous but the

rest of Canada is indifferent. The Chicago tent firm, doubtful it will ever see its money, refuses to release the tent; Oliver Gaffney's Stratford construction company works all night on the theatre *without* being paid; Tom Patterson goes blithely on like a modern-day St. Francis confident of a miracle; and at the last minute anonymous donations save the day, the tent is released, a tent-master is found to supervise its raising and maintenance, and finally everything is ready. The ironic thing is that if the original board and especially Patterson had been "realistic" about money, they would never have gone on — a point that Patterson makes more than once. Caution, such as that displayed by the new manager of the Royal Bank, would have killed it — and so, through a casual conversation at a party and the faith of a *local* bank manager, the Bank of Montreal got and kept the Stratford account.

The story is a lively one and can hardly fail to please. But it takes up less than half of the first volume of the Pettigrew-Portman history. What follows makes less fascinating reading, but is valuable as a reference tool and interesting as a record of theatrical tastes and fashions: a year-by-year account of the various Festival productions, interspersed with occasional discussions of financial problems, personality conflicts, and the contributions made to the style and development of the Festival by its different artistic directors. The book also contains worthwhile sections on the thrust stage, its uses, and later modifications, on the building of the permanent theatre, and on the 1980 crisis already mentioned. It has two useful appendices; one lists by year all theatrical productions and members of the company, plus any musical performances, workshops, exhibitions, and the like; the other describes all out-of-season activities, such as tours and TV performances. So, both as a reference work and simply as a good read, this set is definitely worth having.

Tom Patterson's book is more personal, with a more distinctive voice — amusing and engrossing as much for the character it depicts as for the story it tells. It is a bit sloppy as to dates (at least twice 1951 appears when he means 1952) and is none too reliable in other spots as well. But one should hardly read such a book for scholarly precision or accurate reference. Better to enjoy the anecdotes: feeling that the original office address, 139 Downie St., wasn't classy enough, Patterson simply changed it to One Market Place and naturally "our local post office accepted it happily." Not knowing what to charge for tickets, Patterson and production manager Cecil Clarke bought a *New York Times*, looked through the entertainment ads for the theatre that charged the highest prices and "those became our prices." He comments, "This is known as scientific entrepreneurship." (Incidentally, ticket prices that first year ranged from one to six dollars.) A more extended anecdote concerns Patterson's abortive trip to New York in early 1952 to try to line up Olivier as artistic director. Unable even to get near the great actor, Patterson tried the manager of the Algonquin Hotel where he had gone to stay, hoping to bump into Olivier in the elevator. The manager kindly introduced Patterson to a sleazy agent who promised him "Laughton or Hardwick"; Patterson was unimpressed, so he tried visiting various foundations, introducing himself as "Tom Patterson from Stratford Canada." But the best he could get was a friendly pat from the Rockefeller Foundation. All of this he parlayed upon his return into interest and blessings from Olivier and an almost-promise from the Rockefellers. Written up in the local paper, the news eventually got back to the Foundation (despite Patterson's conviction that "no one in N.Y. reads the

Beacon-Herald"). But their people said nothing about it till years later, by which time they were in fact supporting the Festival.

Even Patterson's conversational, self-interrupting style, at times outrageous, full of bad jokes, folk "wisdom," and clichés ("little did I know that we were being hoisted on our own petard, to coin a phrase"), contributes to our sense of the disarming straightforwardness of the man. There seems nothing hidden about him, though he is clearly shrewd as well as confident. It is not clear what the role of secondary writer Allan Gould actually was, but he seems wisely to have let Patterson speak for himself. Most of the book was in fact recorded during conversations he had with Jack Darcus in the Hop & Grape pub in Toronto.

Aside from Patterson himself, the most memorable character we meet in the two books is, for my money, Skip Manley, tent-master extraordinaire who, for the first four years of the Festival, handled the raising and, even more important, the managing and maintaining of the huge tent that covered the stage and auditorium. Skip's bejewelled fingers, his love for the tent and the intimacy he felt with "her," his weakness for chocolate pies, and his straw hat in which he kept a bunch of huge needles, "yanking one out whenever he needed to repair the tent," all these became legendary. The opening summer there were terrific storms throughout the rehearsal period, and as water gathered in enormous pools on parts of the roof, Manley would dash about underneath with a knife attached to a long pole to slash the burgeoning pools. Guthrie describes the aftermath of this:

> The storms passed. But, till half an hour before the public assembled for the opening night, a tiny figure might be seen clambering about on the enormous sagging expanse of terra-cotta-colored canvas; rubies and diamonds flashed in the sunlight, and in the moonlight too, drawing together with exquisite, tiny surgical stitches the wounds he had himself inflicted to save her from destruction.

Perhaps there is no better image for the ambiguous history of the Stratford Festival than this dedicated circus- and revival-tent master repairing the wounds he himself had caused.

ANTHONY DAWSON

ARCHIVES

The Alice Munro Papers: First Accession, eds. J. Moore, J. Tener, A. Steele. Univ. of Calgary Press, $15.00.

The Robert Kroetsch Papers: First Accession, eds. J. Tener, *et al.* Univ. of Calgary Press, $20.75.

The Joanna M. Glass Papers, ed. J. Moore, J. Tener, A. Steele. Univ. of Calgary Press, $18.00.

Literary Manuscripts at the National Library of Canada, ed. Linda Hoad. National Library of Canada, n.p.

CRITICISM OF CANADIAN LITERATURE is beginning to get serious about archival research, looking behind as well as at the texts. The University of Calgary has been a major contributor to this process, through its collecting of authors' papers and, more recently, its preparation and publication of descriptive inventories. The inventories themselves are essential to the efficient, consistent, and intelligent use of the manuscript collections. Their publication, while less essential, will suggest lines of investigation and reduce unnecessary preliminary research trips to the archives for new researchers, while providing a convenient, available, reference tool to scholars working in detail on particular papers.

The Alice Munro Papers: First Accession describes the 2.5 metres of Munro's papers (2073 items) received in 1980, documenting the period from the early 1950's — Munro's first short story sub-

missions — through 1979, ending with *Who Do You Think You Are?* and *The Moons of Jupiter*. Munro's personal correspondence is currently closed to researchers and so not listed here, and the collection contains no outgoing Munro letters. *The Robert Kroetsch Papers: First Accession* describes 3.5 metres of Kroetsch's papers (1873 items) received in 1975 and 1976, documenting the period from 1945 and his earliest writings to 1976 with *Badlands* and *The Stone Hammer Poems*. It includes his unpublished novel *When Sick for Home*, his doctoral dissertation at the State University of Iowa in 1961. The *Joanna M. Glass Papers* describes one metre of Glass's papers (1273 items) received in 1978, documenting the period from 1967 — and her stage play *Santacqua* — to 1977 and the play *The Last Chalice*. Correspondence, promotional and production material, and final drafts, rather than early drafts and rough work, dominate this collection. The University of Calgary Libraries have received subsequent consignments of literary papers — two thus far from Munro and one from Kroetsch — which will be described in later inventories. All three inventories reviewed here include biocritical essays, by Thomas E. Tausky, Aritha van Herk, and Diane Bessai respectively, as well as introductions detailing general archival principles and describing the particular collections, and invaluable indexes (excluding third-party and topical indexes). In addition, they supply welcome facsimiles of representative manuscript pages from the collections, providing useful evidence, for example, about authors' legibility.

The University of Calgary archivists have maintained an admirable balance between preserving the integrity of authorial arrangement and providing helpful groupings of related material. Papers are divided, generally, into correspondence and manuscripts, the latter subdivided by genre. (The collections, incidentally, may also include scrapbooks, photographs, newsclippings, published reviews and critical articles, and audio tapes.) Authorial arrangement of items into files or packages is respected, as well as, where applicable, order within files or between a sequence of files. At the same time, fragments from various drafts, say, of a Munro manuscript have been rough-sorted chronologically, with explicit warnings to researchers that this is tentative. The manuscript collection itself, in my experience, is similarly scrupulous in spelling out the archivists' assumptions and any removal or consolidation of items. Inconsistencies, and difficulties for researchers, may be imposed by an author's own organization, as in the Kroetsch papers where correspondence is generally grouped separately according to the published titles of books discussed therein (with some inevitable arbitrariness) but where correspondence relating to individual poems and short stories is interfiled with the related manscripts. The editors have compensated with both chronological and alphabetical indexes of outgoing Kroetsch letters, as well as the usual alphabetical index of Kroetsch's titles and index of personal and corporate names. The method of notation by collection, box, folder, and item (e.g., MsC 37.12.26.2) will, as the archival introduction maintains, allow unambiguous scholarly citations. An inevitable discrepancy exists in the importance of individual entries in the inventories, with a bread-and-butter letter receiving the same attention as a 221-page typescript with holograph revisions. Here the annotations accompanying each entry are time-saving.

The biocritical essays introducing each inventory are all sophisticated rather than superficial, drawing on archival evidence and personal contact with the

author, and displaying a high level of literary analysis. Aritha van Herk's introduction to Kroetsch, in particular — elliptical (cryptically circling around the double foci of life and works), fragmented, and playful as perhaps all criticism on this postmodernist writer must be — presupposes considerable prior familiarity with Kroetsch's writing. It thus raises the question of whether a chronology of the author's life, works, and publication history might be all that is required, a simple context in which the researcher could situate individual manuscripts. Since literary criticism of the authors is available in abundance elsewhere, original scholarship here might more appropriately focus on the composition and publication history of the material in the collection. Diane Bessai's two-part introduction to Joanna Glass, with its separation of biography and performance and publishing history from critical analysis, provides an alternate model to the one I propose, particularly for less well-known authors. In any case, the inventories are the product of thoughtful and painstaking work, and will be immensely useful to researchers.

The bilingual *Literary Manuscripts at the National Library of Canada* provides dates and place of residence of the author, description of the collection (titles, dates, number of metres or pages, brief note on contents), and information on finding aids, preliminary inventories, or restrictions on access, for seventy-three manuscript collections. It also includes both nominal and chronological indexes. The collections range in extent from a single page or two (a letter say, from T. S. Eliot or Sir Walter Scott) to 29.5 metres (the papers of Bernard Amtmann, Montreal antiquarian bookseller). Among the entries of interest to students of Canadian literature are those for Alfred Goldsworthy Bailey, Arthur Stanley Bourinot, Robertson Davies, Gratien Gélinas, John Glassco, Markoosie, Félix-Antoine Savard, and Elizabeth Smart, and the more extensive collections of Philip Child, Gary Geddes, Jack Hodgins, Roger Lemelin, Claire Martin, Gabrielle Roy, Laura Salverson, Elizabeth Spencer, Phyllis Webb, and J. Michael Yates. This is the first published description of the National Library's Literary Manuscript Collection, and, like the *Union List of Manuscripts in Canadian Repositories* but with a more specifically literary focus, it provides a crucial introduction to archival resources. The University of Calgary's Canadian Archival Inventory Series, of which the Munro, Kroetsch, and Glass inventories are but three examples, takes the next giant step making effective use of such resources possible and attractive.

HELEN HOY

LIVESAY

DOROTHY LIVESAY, *Selected Poems: The Self-Completing Tree*. Porcepic, $12.95.

A Private and Public Voice: Essays on the Life and Work of Dorothy Livesay, eds. Lindsay Dorney, Gerald Noonan, Paul Tiessen. Univ. of Waterloo Press, n.p.

IN HER RECENT selection of poems, Dorothy Livesay gives critical shape to her own career by setting down poems she wants to "be remembered by." Divided into seven sections by photographs of Livesay and by her own brief commentaries, the volume shares in the documentary elements of her memoir of the 1930's, *Right Hand Left Hand*, and in the spirit of her *Collected Poems: The Two Seasons* (1972), a self-proclaimed "psychic . . . autobiography." But it is also different from these books and from all but her feminist work of the past fifteen years in the way it seeks to marry private and public worlds.

Here Livesay has arranged her poetry so that it moves outwards from the per-

sonal statement to become a powerful evocation of the universal worlds of women, those seven spheres of feminine experience that parallel Shakespeare's seven ages of man: the world of the eternal feminine, the private haunts of girlhood, the world of love and marriage, the sanctuary of the lover and beloved, the world of social activism and the common worker, the privileged place of artistic creation, and, finally, that world at the end of the world from which no traveller returns. But unlike Shakespeare's schema, this one does not follow a chronological progression. "Wrapped around certain themes," the poems avoid the chronological arrangement that might be expected in the summing up of a life and work. Instead, experiences are set free from the constraints of time and place. Childhood's innocence is conferred upon the old woman and the joy of union and reunion with the "other" — alternatively, man, woman, "the struggle," art, or the land itself — is constantly rediscovered. That most sections contain poems which span the decades suggests Livesay's intention to generate a lively transgenerational dialogue and underlines her belief in the cyclical character of woman's experience.

Section one maps Livesay's world of women, a world dominated by an unequivocally feminine nature. To everything there is a season and a purpose in mother nature: "clouds stars in their legions / swing . . . into / their ordained stations." In her reside the moral values which a spiritually bankrupt humanity has lost: even the heron's wings are "weighted with wisdom." A recurrent image in this section, the tree is the quintessential symbol of the beneficent feminine principle that animates the world of creation. The tree "taps with her roots" earth's secrets, drawing intuitively upon her ancient wisdom that "To die is to create renewal." In this predominantly "yin" world (the title poem proclaims) immersion of the self in the eternal cycles of life is the secret of wholeness and happiness: "Happy the self-completing tree that brews in secret, / its own seasons."

In section two, "The Childhoods," Livesay explores the cyclical pattern of woman's experience through her presentation of childhood as a rhythm forever repeating itself in the lives of women. Only a few of these poems deal with Livesay's own childhood; for example, "Green Rain," a lyric of the 1920's about growing up. Others describe childhood from the perspective of mother and grandmother. Most notable in the first category are "Serenade for Strings," probably the first poem on childbirth ever written in Canada, and a sober yet tender meditation on motherhood entitled "The Mother": ". . . When evening's seal is set she must / Have chosen here to stay. . . ." But perhaps most satisfying are the poems written by Livesay as grandmother. In these poems she takes a broader, philosophical view of childhood, interpreting it in lyrics like "Five Months Young" as a symbol of that state of primal innocence to which a fallen humanity aspires. Though he cannot speak, the cradled baby's blue eyes "illume / every text" and his smile "invites the universe / to be plain human."

Though in Livesay's vision women's lives do not follow a linear progression, they do chart a pattern of psychic growth. The stages of life may be constantly relived, but always from more mature perspectives. In the same way, the "phases of love" are accompanied not just by shifts but by deepenings of consciousness. The third section, "Rites of Passage," documents these shifts and, in the process, the evolution of Livesay's feminism. The "stages of ritual passage" which, as Livesay writes in her prefatory remarks, "characterize the search for

relationship between a man and woman" are fraught with struggle, but it is one which issues finally in a happy balance between self and other: "We must celebrate / how to be one / with everyone / yet forever alone."

The shift from imprisonment to liberation, from silence to voice, marks the way on the road toward psychic integration, a long, shadowy road haunted by the ghosts of mother, father, and a husband-lover, a road which begins at the "prisoned place" of adolescent infatuation and ends at last with the poet's descent into "that darker cave," the womb, in search of rebirth. She emerges whole, healed, and renewed, with a blessing for mother in particular ("F.R.L.") and parents in general: "If I have come out of it / shining / calm clear as glass / it is because / you each one kissed me goodnight / without reprisals / sent me to sleep / on earth's pillow." A special aspect of the poet's growing self-awareness is presented in poems like "The Three Emily's [*sic*]," "Other," and "Disasters of the Sun." As explorations of woman's struggle to reconcile the "pull between community and private identity," these three poems are seminal to an understanding of Livesay's feminism.

Section four, "The Unquiet Bed: Fire and Frost," picks up where the third section leaves off, with a more in-depth exploration of the love relationship between man and woman. But unlike the other sections of the book, this one deals with only one phase of Livesay's emotional life and poetic development. These poems are from the 1960's, a decade of rejuvenation for Livesay as a result of her experiences in Africa and a love affair with a younger man. But the strong imprint here of the "breath" techniques pioneered by the American-influenced TISH group reminds us that there are more reasons than pure passion for the opening up of poetic form that occurs in Livesay's poetry at this time. Certainly, poems like "The Touching" are amongst Livesay's finest and compare favourably with the best love poetry in any language. But why not include love poems from other decades? Why the sudden silencing of the cross-generational dialogue that makes this book so interesting and so unusual as a work of selected poems? A condensed version of Livesay's recent collection of love poems from across the decades, *The Phases of Love* (1983), would have been more in keeping with the spirit of this volume.

Choosing a representative selection of Livesay's social poems must have been a difficult task given the length of her documentaries. But still, Livesay does manage to give in this short space a strong sense of her evolving political commitments over that critical decade of her work, the 1930's. A poem for performance, "Montreal, 1933: Mass Chant," vividly evokes the turbulence of the time: "In Cuba the masses have not blundered! / In Cuba the masses know their foe!" Good poetry it may not be, but the point is that it was written and chanted and answered the needs of the day. Together with "Day and Night," "West Coast: 1943" (both of which are milestone experiments in the documentary genre), and "Spain," "Montreal 1933: Mass Chant" provides an accurate and fascinating record of an era. But again, this section seems incomplete. Perhaps there was not room for more recent poems on the environment and peace. Why leave us dangling with the postwar years when Livesay has written so much good social poetry since then? The contrast between early and later manifestations of "the struggle" would have added even more interest here.

In a sixth section entitled "The Poetry," Livesay self-consciously plays critic, giving us the poems which in her view embody her poetics over the years. Some

of these poems are period pieces; for example, "Making the Poem," a commentary on Jack Spicer's popular 1960's technique of serial composition. Others such as "Two Lives," a somewhat strident apologia for feminist verse, will also, one suspects, be dated twenty years from now. But most of the poems point to an underlying consistency in Livesay's approach to the making of poetry. Following Shelley, she believes that the poet is an "unacknowledged legislator" and following Neruda, that "*Poetry is like bread. . . . It should be shared* by everyone," not only academics and intellectuals. It is "a message / for survival," a "signpost and banner' crying out against social injustice: "NO MORE WAR."

The subject of aging and death does not lend itself easily to lyric affirmation, but with a searing intensity that is reminiscent of the later Yeats, the poems in "At the Finish," the final section of this book, celebrate life, love, and the only moment that we have: now. Of approaching death, Livesay is unafraid: "The wall is death. / My death. Not to be climbed / yet. / I have no fear." And for the past, she has no regrets: "Would you have lived otherwise? / Speech with another voice? / The question never arose / there was never a choice." As for the present, even an aging body can become consumed with desire "until all yesterdays are gulfed / in freezing fire."

Sitting at the feet of grandmother-poet-sage, we are privy to rare bits of poetic wisdom and witness to an equally rare (in these days of nuclear pessimism) soaring of the human spirit. Livesay has always been a romantic, a poet who sees human life as a "divine comedy," not a tragedy. Nowhere is this spirit more evident than in this concluding section of a book which is distilled from almost seven decades of poetry making. Even in growing old, she tells us here, "Lies the possibility of affirmation: seeing younger." For in the end, the human journey leads back to the paradisical garden: "This is not paradise / dear adam dear eve / but it is a rung on the ladder / upwards / towards a possible / breathtaking landscape." That landscape is the province of Livesay's new world of women, but it is accessible to all who will respond to her invitation: "Lover brother sister friend / enter here / impel me forward / without fear."

It is perhaps appropriate that concurrent with the publication of Livesay's summing-up volume have appeared two publications which also attest to her enduring importance as a Canadian poet. A recent issue of *ellipse* (1986), devoted to Medjé Vézina and Dorothy Livesay, includes some French translations from Livesay's love poems and a short essay also in French by Madeline Gagnon, the French-Canadian poet to whom Livesay dedicates *The Self-Completing Tree*. It is obvious from the sensitive tone of her essay and her sparkling insights that she truly is Livesay's "âme-soeur," just as it is evident from Jean Antonin Billard's lucid and musical translations — witness the following "Aubade" — that Livesay, in turn, is highly attuned to the passionate lyricism that is a part of Gagnon's own tradition: "C'est toi qui, / lorsque, d'un bond, je te quitte / à l'appel du soleil / peux me ramener au lit: / Femme, Femme, *viens*."

The other publication, *A Private and Public Voice: Essays on the Life and Work of Dorothy Livesay*, also signals a burgeoning of Livesay's reputation. In this collection of nine papers from the Livesay conference which was held at St. Jerome's College, the University of Waterloo, in 1983, Livesay's multifaceted achievement and her eventful life are subjected to close analysis. The emphasis in this "blending of biographical data with poetic construct," the introduction tells us, "is upon criticism's roots in real

life." This is legitimate enough, but one regrets the "cult of personality" to which this approach lends itself, especially when many of the essays have been written by those who have known Livesay and to varying degrees fallen under the spell of her compelling personality. This flaw shows itself most obviously perhaps in the stated intention of the volume as "an ongoing tribute" to Livesay's life and work. Tribute and criticism — a contradiction in terms — is just such a spirit of uncritical admiration that has contributed to the ghettoization of Canadian literature on the world scene.

Nevertheless, each of the nine essays has valuable insights to offer. David Arnason's revisioning of the history of modern poetry places Livesay's early work in a new and more important position, while Johnathan Pierce's essay does the same job for the 1930's by pointing out the distinctive social concern of the political poets of Livesay's generation. Wayne and Mackinnon take Pierce's literary evaluation back to the poet's life and draw a more personal portrait of Livesay's activities during the 1930's while at the same time analyzing reasons for her exclusion from the literary establishment of the day.

The essays by Rota Herzberg Lister, Lee Thompson, and the Tiessens, however, inject the freshest voices and most original research into the lively discussion presented in this book. Their papers on, respectively, Livesay's political drama, her journalism, and her radio plays, are the first, to my knowledge, on these subjects and point the way toward full-length studies on these important aspects of Livesay's literary contribution. Paul Denham's paper, on the other hand, is valuable for its summing up of the themes of the conference and the general concerns of Livesay criticism. Papers by Dennis Cooley and Ed Jewinski round out this volume and highlight the wide diversity of critical approaches featured in it. Cooley's sensitive and exuberant analysis of the changing images of women in Livesay's poetry is true to the spirit of her work, while Jewinski's analysis of the ways in which linguistic structures communicate poetic identity is in the tradition of "academic" criticism which Livesay rejects and which is so at odds with her populism. These essays may not be equal in value and interest, but all are signposts on the road to a fully mature Livesay criticism. Editors Lindsay Dorney, Gerald Noonan, and Paul Tiessen are to be commended for this addition to a still relatively slight body of criticism on Livesay.

SANDRA HUTCHISON

ISLAND & ROAD

W. D. BARCUS, *Squatter's Island*. Oberon, $9.95.

PAULETTE JILES, *The Late Great Human Road Show*. Talonbooks, $9.95.

CANADIAN NOVELS ARE too often casually consigned to the backwater of "regional fiction," a label that begs the question of literary topography by reducing the importance of local setting to a matter of relative accuracy. Although both of these first novels deal with universal themes — growing up, in one, and the end of civilization in the other — each is founded on a richly specific perception of place that informs every nuance of style and attitude and gives imaginative body to the enterprise.

Squatter's Island is both a chartable hump of land and the dream that sustains Andrew MacDonald as he gropes his way toward adulthood through the narrow channels of life in a post-war Nova Scotia fishing village. Dangerous to approach in tricky weather but lush with the promise of solitary refuge, this offshore *locus amoenus* draws Andrew into

a quasi-mystical communion with nature, lending him a sense of identity he finds nowhere else in his bleak, unyielding world. The island holds another kind of promise as the legacy of Andrew's father, who years earlier had built a cabin, hunted, and kept sheep there. Once a fisherman, now the village shopkeeper, Mr. MacDonald has abandoned the island long ago, crushed by the violence of the sea and by the desertion of Andrew's mother, who is known to her son only as a pressing absence.

Although Andrew is clearly a homegrown product, cut off from the material and cultural resources of "mainstream" Canada, his reflective, dreamy bent puts him at odds with his father and schoolmates and links him with the island's other resident alien, a Portuguese lobsterman who hunts on and fishes around the island, and who shows Andrew the choicest spots for lobster, hoping that his young friend will someday take over his traps. Apart from this unlikely sage, Andrew receives little useful guidance, either from a callow young priest or from the schoolmistress, barely senior to her pupils, who has no idea what to do with her exceptional student. Andrew's modestly questing nature takes him as far as Newfoundland, whence he returns with a bride who is indifferent to his dreams and hostile toward his island. Maturity for the young husband is the result of a process of slow spiritual suffocation that culminates in Andrew's taking over the store from his ailing father and relinquishing his dream place.

The soul-flattening poverty of this world is, however, partly redeemed by the spirit it denies — a paradox that creates almost as many aesthetic problems as it solves. By plausibly limiting narration to the scope of his protagonist's circumstances, Barcus produces a Maritimes version of that durable Romantic archetype, the original genius uncorrupted by artificially acquired culture. Andrew's stream of consciousness flows characteristically in the twin beds of metaphor, simulating a "naturally" poetic cast of perception that is sometimes surprisingly fresh and moving, but at other times proves cloyingly precious. The contrived minimalism of a narrative style stripped down to suggest an almost preverbal understanding, ultimately defeats its purpose by drawing attention to its art with occasional logjams of incompatible analogies and with distracting echoes of earlier interior monologuists, especially Joyce.

A constant threat of death by water is the common anchor of local identity among Barcus's villagers, qualifying every aspect of their lives and shaping Andrew's fate. The grim irony of a nuclear age in which life everywhere has become equally conditional seems to favour post-apocalyptic fantasy displacing the coming-of-age novel as the dominant fictional genre for the late twentieth century. Paulette Jiles's contribution to the growing catalogue of speculative nightmare is more prophetic than most, having been written some ten years ago, well before the current spate of such fiction. Although similarly derived from a particular *genius loci*, *The Late Great Human Road Show* is contrary to Barcus's work in tone and scope as well as in kind — an urbane conspectus of folly in our time as witnessed by a range of inner voices refracted through a deadpan third-person overview. Like most worthwhile fantasy, Jiles's jeremiad is concerned less with the possible future that it projects than with the impossible present that it mocks, laments, and celebrates.

In such works, premise generally precedes plot and character is often dictated by concept. A mélange of some seventeen Torontonians has slept through a general evacuation of the city following

an indefinite, presumably nuclear, catastrophe. Overnight one of the world's safest, most comfortable places is deserted and shorn of all civil amenities, its sky ominously streaked with greasy smoke, its unearthly silence punctuated by the alarming noise of windows as they pop out of downtown office towers and smash to powder in the street. Toronto's Cabbagetown makes an apt latter-day boneyard in which to reflect on the demons of gross selfishness, frenzied consumerism, and paranoid aggressiveness that in Jiles's view of history are driving us toward self-extinction. Her detailed rendering of the desolate neighbourhood provides an additionally eerie shock of recognition for readers familiar with the territory, a ready-made microcosm of urban North America in socioeconomic flux, its long-resident underclass either abandoned or shunted into warrenlike housing projects by the juggernaut of gentrification.

Jiles's gamut of characters is calculated to sound the basic intervals of the social scale. Most of them remain cartoonlike abstractions representing typical problems endemic to their respective situations, problems that emerge with dramatic definition as small groups of socially compatible survivors band together for mutual protection and consolation. Like Barcus, Jiles is most sympathetic toward, and most convincing in, her handling of the marginal and powerless, such as the aging street busker and the squad of singing orphaned street kids who adopt her as den-grandmother and artistic director. Conversely, characters who seem to have had their destinies well in hand before the disaster — right-wing survivalists who garrison a stronghold in the Riverdale zoo and the yuppie high-rise dwellers whom they seek out with predictable results — are observed with a mixture of amused detachment and manifest disgust.

Within and among these various groups (and a few individuals who fall between the cracks) the noble and sordid history of the race is re-enacted, even as the shadow of a common death, heralded by the proliferation of mysterious, unhealing bruises, promises to overtake the lot. For some readers, the cynicism of this sardonic farce will be counteracted by recurring evidence of an undefeated will to survive, to connect, to preserve our collective wits, however perverse or doomed the attempt. A pregnant cow who ambles through the novel attracting different characters toward their mutually conflicting ends, is a whimsical symbol of this tenacious life force. But unless we regard the story of universal destruction as a kind of existential allegory — after all humankind has always lived under the threat of imminent death — the novel's teasing leaven of hope simply blackens the jest with a more brutal irony. Either way, Jiles's satire is usually too broad to be very instructive; but her imaginative empathy with her underdogs — especially the children — and her memorable evocation of an urban paradise after the nuclear fall animate what might otherwise have remained an amusing but inert anatomy of 1980's angst x-rayed in the flash of a generic apocalypse.

PAUL JACOB

SHORT STORIES

LESLEY CHOYCE, *Conventional Emotions.* Thistledown, $20.00/8.95.

JAKE MACDONALD, *The Bridge Out of Town.* Oberon, $12.95.

JANICE KULYK KEEFER, *The Paris-Napoli Express,* Oberon, $21.95/11.95.

INCLUDING *Conventional Emotions* in a review entitled "Short Stories" is a bit misleading, for the items in this volume seem more like sketches, quickly jotted down and then published without re-

vision. One problem with these tales of adolescent angst is that the author rarely is able to maintain a consistent narrative voice in the first person, resulting in prose which lurches back and forth between teenage street talk and adult sophistication. "Sophistication" hardly seems appropriate, however, given this collection's pervasive banality. Consider, for example, the following climactic insight expressed by the teenage narrator of "The Trouble With Charlene": "I had finally learned what it meant to be free in the world and it appeared to be the equivalent of shit." The trouble with *Conventional Emotions* is that there is no reason for it to have been published. Like most vanity press books, it will briefly increase the prestige of the author among his friends and relatives, and then sink into a well-deserved oblivion.

In contrast, the interrelated stories in *The Bridge Out of Town* provide a thoughtful account of the fictional community of Keewuttunnee, located on the north shore of Lake Superior. Jake MacDonald obviously is intimately familiar with the real-life model for his "weary little northern Ontario town," and he dramatizes the stunted lives of its inhabitants with sympathy and understanding. But although this volume contains isolated highlights, such as one wonderful paragraph written as if from the perspective of a newly hatched dragonfly, these stories are rather workmanlike and plodding in their final effect. Like the unrewarding job of Keewuttunnee's police constable, who is constantly reminded of "what a complete non-event his life [is]," the stories themselves are generally dull and uneventful, emphasizing more often than is necessary the dark irony of the volume's title: "You'll never cross that gaw-damned bridge till they carry you out in a box!" Yes, the characters *are* all buried, maimed, or trapped somehow, but MacDonald's purely functional style rarely allows him to bring them vividly to life, or to achieve more than yet another routine portrait of small-town ennui and inertia.

There is nothing routine about the stories of Janice Kulyk Keefer, whose *The Paris-Napoli Express* may signal the appearance of a major new author. Little external action occurs in Kulyk Keefer's fictional world, for the main focus is on the inner lives of the characters, as they stumble through their often hallucinatory mental landscapes. In "Mrs. Putnam at the Planetarium," the seventy-year-old Mrs. Putnam sings to the stars, and the stars sing back. "They were not crystal splinters as children imagined them," the narrator explains, "but round, fragrant as waterlilies you might pick off the mirror of a lake and hold up to your face, breathing in the succulence and fragrance." As this quotation indicates, Kulyk Keefer's style is sensuous and haunting, well suited for expressing the vivid conceits of an imagination which, like that of Mrs. Putnam, seems to wander freely, "climbing steep, black spaces in between the stars." All nine of these stories are remarkably poised and assured for a first collection; eight of them are written in the third person, suggesting a sensibility which is sympathetic but detached, perhaps more prone to study people than to interact with them, and (one feels) somewhat inclined toward melancholy. Certainly, a strong sense of melancholy and even dread infuses the dreams and reveries of the characters, as in "A Dream of Eve," in which, after visiting a blissfully contented housewife, the protagonist dreams not of happy families, but of "children with matchstick arms and legs and their mothers beating them, beating until the children caught fire and were consumed in a pitiful, rancid flame of suffering."

A similar nightmare occurs in what may be Kulyk Keefer's most powerful

story, the immensely disturbing "In A Dream." Narrated in the first person by a young mother who is eight months pregnant with her second child, the story is divided into three parts, with a long central section framed by a brief prologue and epilogue. The prologue's first paragraph refers to a dream so desolate as to make ordinary nightmares seem welcome. It is a dream where "sleeping is an inching belly-crawl across split glass, shattered metal; where waking is to find yourself washed after shipwreck on a welcome, opalescent emptiness of shore." The story's middle section describes the dream: during the stillest hour of the night, two strange men awaken the narrator from "soft, dark sleep" and silently take her to a dank prison, where she and other captured women are beaten, starved, and tortured. Just before the dream ends, the narrator is forced to confront her daughter, who cannot recognize "the skeleton bandaged in flesh" as her mother: "It is so sweet for me to stand and look and neither remember nor forget but only see her — such sweet atrocity." "Such sweet atrocity"! The story continues, ending with an epilogue which begins with the same paragraph which began the prologue, except that now two words in the final sentence of this paragraph are reversed: "Where *waking* is a belly-crawl over split metal, shattered glass; where *sleeping* is to find yourself washed after shipwreck to a welcome, opalescent emptiness of shore [my emphasis]."

The story ends with the description of a *second* dream, diametrically opposed to the first one:

> From our bed I can see the moon disentangling itself from the mazy branches of a tree. Slowly it floats upward, lucent, buoyant in its liberty. I put my hands over my own fullness and feel the baby, turning over in its blood-rich, blood-safe sleep. In a month it will be born, will sail on the flood of its ruined shelter, washing up on this shore outside, to light and air and cradling touch. In this dream, I turn heavily on my side and press into the empty space against my husband's chest. Perfectly we fit together, gently we touch each other. The house, the street, the city and the earth on which they crouch, all hold us carefully. We fit so perfectly, in our sleep.

Kulyk Keefer's narrator escapes from her savage nightmare into her beautiful dream, leaving the reader with the image of a unique fictional world dangling precariously over a dark abyss. Against all odds, this world hangs by a thread, but it hangs by its thread in a shimmering light, still offering its anxious inhabitants the dream that it holds them gently and carefully. "We fit so perfectly," the narrator concludes, "in our sleep."

PETER KLOVAN

INHIBITIONS

AL PITTMAN, *The Boughwolfen and Other Stories.* Breakwater, $9.95.

KEVIN ROBERTS, *Picking the Morning Colour.* Oolichan, $8.95.

THESE TWO VOLUMES of short fiction show how the obtrusion of sexual concerns can be as restrictive for literature as their suppression. Overt in *The Boughwolfen and Other Stories,* covert in *Picking the Morning Colour,* a preoccupation with sexuality inhibits the full consummation of both Al Pittman's and Kevin Roberts's artistic impulses.

In his prefatory note, Pittman quotes a definition of *bough house* from the *Dictionary of Newfoundland English,* adding that it includes such synonyms as *bough tilt, bough whiffen,* and *bough whiffet* for any "small temporary shelter in the woods, constructed of conifer branches woven into a frame." From his childhood, however, Pittman recalls using the term *boughwolfen.* For his present literary purposes, his memory serves him well. The vaguely threatening and

female connotations of the suffix *wolfen* are entirely appropriate to this collection of stories, where the protagonist is usually a boy for whom Catholic dogma, parental authority, male desires, and female bodies combine to inspire "guilt, confusion, and fear." The boughwolfen is the place where a less-inhibited boy induces him to drink stolen homebrew; where a "Sign of the Cross" formed by the boughs prompts him to flee from a girl who wants to "do dirt"; where he trades his "beloved Dodgers" baseball cards for a chance, finally, to "do it." Such boys build boughwolfens, one narrator observes,

> because they have discovered the one thing in the world more compelling than their desire to do nothing.
>
> They have discovered all at once, the wonder of womanhood in girls of all ages.
>
> They have learned the craft of the boughwolfen well. They know the better it is built and the better it is concealed, the better are their chances of making their adolescent wishes come true.

The shortcomings of this collection stem not only from Pittman's use of such stock issues, but also from his attempts to rejuvenate them. He strives to invest the forms of stories for young people with content of abiding interest for adults. Even the book's layout and design reflect his paradoxical goal. The front-cover drawing shows a boy with a crucifix on a chain about his neck; his abstract look suggests a dilemma about whether to watch the smiling and ostensibly naked girl standing by a waterfall. Her body is hidden by a large conifer bough that also veils a pastoral white house and grey barn on a dirt road flanked by white picket fences. Each story then begins and ends with a smaller insignia of a conifer bough. Although the simple and innocent appearance suggests that this is a young person's book, the publisher's blurb identifies it as "adult prose fiction," and the back-cover photograph shows a serious, almost scowling Al Pittman.

In like manner, his stories are predominantly concerned with young people, and his uncomplicated narratives reflect both their ingenuous views of experience and their straightforward interpretations of it. Pittman has stripped their childhood, however, of almost all its innocence and simplicity, almost all its fun. The result is a book as claustrophobic as a boughwolfen from which the stories yearn to escape. Two-thirds of the way into the volume, Pittman finally allows traces of his natural sense of humour to emerge. Told by a priest during confession to avoid Protestant girls as "occasions of sin," a boy later prays instead for their "conversion to Catholicism." Pittman then permits two boys miraculously to escape "hell" at the hands of their fathers. It is the almost certain punishment for pissing into empty bottles to replace the stolen homebrew they drink, but the fathers drunkenly laugh that it "tastes like piss" to them.

One way for Pittman to relieve the claustrophobia of this collection, therefore, would be to give freer rein to his sense of humour. The most intriguing story in the book, "The Thing in Rideout's Woods," suggests a second way. Here, Pittman relegates to significant background the restrictive concern for sexuality that pervades almost all the other stories. He then lets the confines of realistic representation make way for the possibilities of otherworldly fabulation. The "thing" in the woods seems to be the ghost of the protagonist's father, who drowned before he was born. The boy now believes he has persuaded it to kill his mother and then return "to stay forever on the bottom of Deadman's Pond." His hatred of his mother seems to arise both from an idealization of his "handsome, heroic" father and from his outright denial of a past relationship be-

tween them — to which his mother's photographs still testify. The only picture in which the boy will acknowledge a resemblance between his father's wife and his own mother is one in which he perceives her to be "fat" and "ugly" — because she is pregnant — and both of them to be sad. The reader's knowledge that the boy's very existence originates in their sexual union thus implicates intercourse as a subconscious source of his hatred. The story is unresolved and haunting. It suggests, finally, that in order to fuse subject-matter for adults with the form of stories for young people, both aspects must be released from their traditional bonds. Al Pittman has yet to realize fully and consistently his ideal paradox.

In contrast to *The Boughwolfen and Other Stories, Picking the Morning Colour* is the opposite of claustrophobic. It includes sequences of surrealistic prose-poems as well as realistic short fiction in prose. Its settings range from British Columbian fishing grounds to South Australian orchards, from surreal beaches to mythological deserts. Here, there is no overt preoccupation with any one issue, as there is with sexuality in *The Boughwolfen and Other Stories*. Topics that fall under Kevin Roberts's imaginative scrutiny include the ethics of union organizing and the proper loyalties of expatriates. His themes range from discrimination through the exercise of political power to the continuous cycle of procreation. As such breadth of interest may perhaps suggest, however, there is little of original depth in *Picking the Morning Colour*. Furthermore, sexual concerns also inhibit the fulfilment of Roberts's artistic aims, though in more covert ways than they do Al Pittman's.

It would seem to be no coincidence that in "Carcharhinidae," this collection's best story, sexuality is noteworthy only in its absence. Attractive but badly scarred by the sharks that attack him on his first skin-diving trip, an unnamed young man avoids any potentially sexual encounters with women, because "He cannot stand the thought of them touching him, of undressing and revealing what has become for him the great insult of his body, the great guilt of what has happened to him." This guilt leads the protagonist to identify his sufferings with those of Christ and to conceive of sharks "as a modern manifestation of the anti-Christ." Coldly and noncommitally tracing his attempts at revenge, the narrator also reveals the young man's growing spiritual corruption, both of which are rooted in his physical disfigurement. More chilling and taciturn than Peter Shaffer's *Equus*, with which it bears comparison, "Carcharhinidae" is exceptional and memorable short fiction.

"Hunting Trip," the volume's lead story, has the potential to be nearly as good. Here, however, the obtrusion of sexuality is a reductive flaw. The story is concerned with the cultural contrast enacted by an unstable young Vietnam veteran, Robert, and a peaceful old Indian shaman, Joe; with the reconciliation between Joe and Henry, an Indian who abandoned traditional ways and, now that he is dying of cancer, wants to be re-initiated into them; with the ethical questions that arise from Joe's decision to have Henry die with dignity. Yet Roberts cannot refrain from introducing a love-sex interest between Robert and Becky, Henry's daughter. Because it detracts from the richness of the central issues, it has no place in this story, especially when it leads to such sentimental lines as: "He felt Becky's hand on his shoulder. He looked into her concerned brown eyes."

One of the ironies of this collection, finally, is that Roberts fails to explore fully the implications of sexuality when it should and does figure prominently in

his concluding story, "The Junkman." The title figure seems to be a "Yank" Vietnam veteran, who now wanders through Australia operating an itinerant repairs shop. In the dying town of Goldbreak, his ability to fix broken appliances inspires the admiration of the women and the jealousy of the men. The gift of an opal pendant he has made, as well as his remarkable skills with his hands, also inspires the boy narrator almost to idolize him. But when his presence excites sexual advances that he then fulfils from the town's two most eligible young women, the boy turns against him, saying: "Maybe that was when I began to hate the junkman. He was messing things up. Changing things. People were acting differently. I didn't like it." When the men then take their revenge, Roberts turns away from its sexual origins, suggesting that the physical abuse he now suffers has its source instead in the "curse" of his Vietnam experience. Ostensibly brought on by vague apprehensions of sexual intercourse, this boy narrator's hatred of the junkman is similar to the boy protagonist's hatred of his mother in "The Thing in Rideout's Woods." Yet neither Kevin Roberts nor Al Pittman accounts for this hatred either explicitly or implicitly. In postmodern no less than Victorian times, sexual concerns can be enigmas for a writer as well as inhibitions for literature.

PHILIP KOKOTAILO

COUNTER TRADITIONS

Traditionalism, Nationalism, and Feminism: Women Writers of Quebec, ed. Paula Gilbert Lewis. Greenwood Press, n.p.

THIS COLLECTION OF seventeen essays presents a retrospective of women's writing in Quebec from 1884 to the early 1980's. The presentation follows a general chronological movement and in the introduction Gilbert Lewis explains her choice of the three categories of the title. Traditionalism, nationalism, and feminism describe, for her, three essential historical and literary periods. Women's writing before the 1960's was informed above all by traditionalism; the period of the 1960's by nationalist concerns; and the 1970's and 1980's by feminism. Gilbert Lewis does, however, acknowledge the artificiality of these divisions by stating that there are no distinct boundaries among the three and that very few of these writers fall solely within one category.

The collection hopes to introduce those readers who are unfamiliar with writing by women in Quebec to an exciting new literature and to "aid in a deeper understanding of the vibrant and distinctive *québécois* culture." This volume is intended for general readers and not for specialists in the field. Generally speaking, the essays give thematic overviews of the particular author's works and sometimes fall into mere plot summaries. This is particularly evident in the first part of the book which deals mainly with the writers who belong to the more-or-less "traditional" category such as Gabrielle Roy, Germaine Guèvremont, and Rina Lasnier.

Among the notable exceptions is the first essay of the collection in which François Gallays examines the subtext of Laure Conan's *Angéline de Montbrun*. Using a psychoanalytic approach, Gallays convincingly shows the incestuous nature of the sentiments uniting father and daughter which are obscured by the double narrative. More interesting still is Gallays's interpretation of the third part of the novel as a re-enactment of the myth of Narcissus. Also worthy of note is Susan Rosenstreich's essay entitled "Counter-Traditions: The Marginal Poetics of Anne Hébert." In her study, Rosenstreich

intends to give a reading of Anne Hébert's poetry that will challenge the usual critical interpretations of Hébert as a poet who has withdrawn from the outside world into a private, defensive one, thus escaping from real problems. Rosenstreich rejects the Sartrean theory that minority literatures are most useful when they are political, an attitude that has informed much of the criticism devoted to Hébert. Rosenstreich bases her analysis on Michel Benamou's theory of ethnopoetics which "attempts to abolish the divisive thinking about literature that casts it into categories of central or marginal according to its power base." A distinction is made between minority writers who are participants in a political struggle and marginal writers who are engaged in a literary struggle. Marginal poets can "transcend the limits of representational art, and . . . exploit the ability of language to transform our limited, quotidian view of the present into an expanded, extraordinary vision of the future." The so-called verbal distance between Hébert the poet and her readers is not therefore a withdrawal from the world and a refusal to acknowledge present political problems, but rather an attempt to alter and expand the significance of words, her "mystery of words," in order to broaden our perceptions. Rosenstreich states that in fact "Hébert's words change our world" just as effectively as political propaganda.

The second half of this volume is decidedly more interesting than the first. The essays here which deal with women writers of the 1970's and 1980's examine the writing of these authors in the light of their nationalist and feminist views. Louise Forsyth's excellent essay on the political in the work of Nicole Brossard traces the emergence of this radical feminist author as one of the leading writers of Quebec today. Brossard has moved beyond the political and social nationalism of the 1960's to an affirmation of her solidarity with women. Although sympathetic to the separatist cause, she believes that women's struggle is always against a patriarchal society. Her political and social commitment, inseparable from her writing, has led Brossard to develop a synthesis of poetry, novel, and theory which she calls "theoretical fiction" in order to achieve political goals through her writing. Her works "release the energy of woman's suppressed imagination in order to cause her awareness of reality to explode in dynamic form as an aggressive denunciation of the destructive fictions which control our world."

Karen Gould examines the evolution of poet Madelaine Gagnon from a Marxist/political orientation to a more overtly feminist position. The political turmoil of the late 1960's is evident in the early texts of Gagnon where political subjugation and linguistic colonization combined with Marxist concerns predominate. It soon became apparent to feminist writers in general that the political projects of the Parti Québécois elected in 1976 would do little to change the status quo of a patriarchal society. Since then a new feminist current has been evident in Quebec. Gould examines the ideological and political dimensions of the poetry of this writer who argues with other women writers for "an approach to women's writing that would put female sexuality and desire back at the very center of discourse."

Other essays in the second half of the book deal with various aspects of women's writing. Micheline Herz examines the use of myths in the writings of Jovette Marchessault and Antonine Maillet, feminist intertextuality or "dialogisms" in the works of Louky Bersianik are studied by Maroussia Majdukowski-Ahmed and Marthe Rosenfeld explores lesbian sensibility in the texts of Jovette Marchessault and Nicole Brossard. In

the last essay, "Women's Theater in Quebec," Jane Moss provides a brief overview of the development of the "spectacles de femmes," collective works written and produced by groups of women, from the early 1970's to the 1980's. She discusses the political and artistic orientation of such groups as the Théâtre des Cuisines, the Théâtre Expérimental des Femmes and the Commune à Marie as well as the two well-known productions *La Nef des sorcières* in 1976 and *Les Fées ont soif* in 1978. Moss also acknowledges the contributions of particular women playwrights such as Cécile Cloutier, Elizabeth Bourget, Janette Bertrand, Michèle Lalonde, Marie Laberge, and Jovette Marchessault.

One of the main flaws of this collection lies in the choice of writers for analysis. It is regrettable that five of the thirteen authors presented here are the subject of more than one article. Gabrielle Roy is treated in two studies (both by editor Gilbert Lewis), as is Anne Hébert. Antonine Maillet, Nicole Brossard, and Jovette Marchessault also appear twice, usually in a comparative study the second time around. This situation might lead one to believe that there are not enough women writers of note in Quebec to fill even one volume. Editor Gilbert Lewis explains that the omission of many other writers (she lists seventeen) is caused by an inability to find scholars who are currently engaged in research in this area. Such an assertion is certainly open to question.

Although the quality of the analyses varies greatly, this collection of essays does precisely what it sets out to do, to provide a good introduction for the uninitiated to the writing of women in Quebec, and as such is a valuable addition to the growing body of critical literature in this field.

RAIJA H. KOSKI

DAUGHTERS & DEMONS

CONNIE GAULT, *Some of Eve's Daughters.* Coteau Books, $8.95.

ERIC MCCORMACK, *Inspecting the Vaults.* Penguin, $8.95.

CONNIE GAULT'S FIRST collection of short stories is an even mixture of the bland and the bizarre: her portrayals of women's lives through domestic realism and the remembrance of paradisical childhood and awkward adolescence are offset by forays into the mythical-allegorical-fantastic and by varying degrees of magic-realism. Her ambitiousness is to be applauded, although the reader may be disappointed by a discrepancy between the expectations set up by Gault's choice of a Miltonic or Blakean title and the less-than-deathless prose which follows. Some of these stories work well: "This Bright Night," for example, about a woman's need to fantasize familial disaster as a means of keeping it at bay, or the succinct and startling "Providence," which successfully marries the tender and the grotesque in a fable intertwining birth and death, loyalty and betrayal. Yet in Gault's most ambitious fabulations there is a distinct element of overreaching: she has not yet the technical skill, the intricacy of imagination, and the felicity with or command of language to carry off, for example, the metamorphosis of humans into birds, the apparition of a Medusa head in a department store, or the evocation of a Beckettian limbo. In short: the cover of her book is lovely, the epigraph portentous, but for the most part the stories fall short of the mark intended. Yet to use that most useful of clichés, this début can be called promising in that we can anticipate more interesting and rewarding fictions from a writer whose work is as varied, and so little complacent as is Connie Gault's.

Going from *Some of Eve's Daughters* to *Inspecting the Vaults* is a little like turning from a game of Crazy Eights to a round of Russian Roulette. If Connie Gault dabbles in the fabulous and magical, Eric McCormack plunges into the murkiest and strangest of fictive seas: a mobius strip of a murder story ("The Fugue"), a vitriolic account of John Knox's sojourn in the New World ("Knox Abroad"), campfire tales of ritual torture and dismemberment ("Sad Stories in Patagonia"), and a host of equally grotesque etceteras. McCormack is a ferociously accomplished writer whose work combines echoes of Kafka, Borges, and (less felicitously) *The Twilight Zone*. What distinguishes McCormack's fiction is an explicit element of sexual violence deriving from neither the Austrian nor the Argentinian master, and which puts one in mind of the British writer Ian McEwan (*First Love, Last Rites*) or the American Robert Coover (*Pricksongs & Descants*). Murder, mutilation, flagellation, necrophilia; sexual fantasies involving stabbings, impalings, harpoonings and other ingenious forms of penetration; erotica, arcana, *bizarrerie* — such is the stuff of McCormack's fabulations, and he pulls off the most outrageous narrative stunts thanks to a combination of serene narratorial assurance and an arresting use of language. Thus the "propositional" style of "One Picture of Trotsky": "Start with a morning black and cold. . . . Let there be women, thirteen of them, in hooded cloaks . . ." renders the fiction's grotesque *données* as incontestable as the axioms of Euclid. The metaphors sprinkled throughout *Vaults* ("his balding skull pimpled with rain" or "dead leaves, the discreet vomit of the trees") often succeed in giving McCormack's prose those qualities and functions ascribed to that earth-splitting phenomenon "The Swath": "It contradicts physics and the basic laws of nature. It defies scientific understanding. It is completely convincing."

Yet because of the resolutely fantastic nature of McCormack's vision and the singlemindedness of his narrative techniques his stories may become predictable to the assiduous reader: once we have learned the iron laws and limitations according to which this uncanny fictive world is structured we may find that tales such as "Edward and Georgina" or "The Hobby" fail in that reversal or perversion of expectation on which their *succès d'éclat* depends. There is a (deliberately) repetitious quality to some of the fictions — "The Swath" or part II of "The Train of Gardens" — which, for this reader at least, diminishes the power of the imagery and ideas involved. McCormack's fictive practice is a risky business: occasionally he crosses the line at which the fantastic becomes the coyly whimsical, the erotic, puerilely penile. (The question of gender must surely enter into any critique of McCormack's work — a woman reader may find the near-uninterrupted succession of male fantasies involving big-breasted, thewy-thighed, eminently penetrable Fata Morganas tiresome rather than titillating.)

Finally, for all their intellectual energy and imaginative contortions, McCormack's fictions rarely succeed in creating that inextricable mix of the ordinary and the unthinkable, that mood of quietly reasonable *angst* which distinguish Kafka's work; the reader of *Inspecting the Vaults* will be disturbed, distracted but not, finally, haunted by this text. Yet fiction which entertains as provocatively as McCormack's does, deserves to be read; a sequel to *Inspecting the Vaults* is to be welcomed.

JANICE KULYK KEEFER

GRAZIE

VINCENZO ALBANESE, *Slow Mist*. Cormorant, $7.00.

DORINA MICHELUTTI, *Loyalty to the Hunt*. Guernica, n.p.

PIER GIORGIO DI CICCO, *Virgin Science*. McClelland and Stewart, $9.95.

VINCENZO ALBANESE'S FIRST full-length publication, *Slow Mist*, is best characterized by its exuberance. The poems can be seen from one perspective as a series of "cavalier lyrics" that celebrate wine, women, and "womansong." The sensual impulse allows the poet not only to imagine himself a "knight in August" and to enjoy, like Byron, the night as a beautiful woman, but also to experience "eros among the meatballs" before a spread of his favourite spaghetti, homemade sausages and olives. Voices of women laughing "at the secrets of wine" stir him to the point that "the ancient ferment begins." These voices are not always joyful, however, since they also spur him to lament the ephemerality of lovers' pleasure. Reminders of mortality, such as the priest's message "dust to dust," are haunting. So are the yellow dying leaves that shiver in their old age, but the poet proposes in that case to punningly "play the rake." Despite this surface playfulness, the poet utters a deeper wish to transcend time and "trivial things" as expressed through recurrent bird imagery, especially ravens, eagles, sparrows, and swallows. Throughout the book Albanese metaphorically exhorts "sunward souls" to "rise up like birds," and he captures their flight in a delicate lyricism.

The imagery of flight also dominates the first section of Dorina Michelutti's *Loyalty to the Hunt*, a collection of what can perhaps best be described as prose poems. Instead of winged eagles or sparrows, however, the reader is here introduced to images of dead bees with worn-out wings and to an Icarus mysteriously compared to a "shoebox filled with sand," all lying helpless on this acutely personal landscape. This shocking opening reaches its climax with a vision of bodies, "pew upon pew," who rise for the Judgment Day and who are questioned about their fidelity to the golden rule: "Have you undone in others what others have undone in you? Have you killed your child for me recently? Indicate the scars with crosses." Hopefully, these are forgiven their trespasses and are urged to "levitate."

One of the features of *Loyalty to the Hunt* is the bilingual section of the poem entitled "Double Bind," consisting of texts written in Italian dialect and then translated into English by way of indicating the two cultures within which the poet lives. The final section consists of letters, sometimes poignant yet often bitter, written to members of the poet's family. Two pieces, "Hunter" and "She," conclude the collection. In the former the hunter and the hunted includes not only the familiar polarity of male/female but also the poet/reader, whose roles are somehow reversed: "Hunt me. . . . The call binds us. I seek you in the undergrowth. You trap the words. I stalk the opening of your eyes." The anonymous and elusive "She" is the dominant figure in these pages and it is her own rising that seems most in doubt. Various images of "She" repel the narrator, including a Michelangelo woman who is described as a "failed Venus." At the end the poet confesses, "It takes me years to spit her out and feel lonely." Isolation is indeed the keynote of this successful hunt rendered deftly in images of pain.

Pier Giorgio Di Cicco's *Virgin Science* is an ambitious work with a broad philosophical, theological, and scientific canvas. In the opening section entitled "Dying to Myself" the poet adopts a confessional mode, much like one of his

authorities, St. Augustine, in shedding past selves. A recurring complaint is that a "Protestant" country has no "talent for metaphysics." The poet seeks to redress the balance by turning at one point to his Italian-Canadian friends who "got their metaphysics from / transubstantiation and their poetry from a happy / Christ." Accordingly, in the centre of the book a sequence of meditative pieces reflect on the relevance of science as a unique tool with which to unravel the ultimate mysteries of the universe. In adducing what he calls these "virgin fictions," Di Cicco relishes in intellectual and verbal playfulness. Thus, contemporary science which speaks "ex cathedra" is infused with the "dogma of immaculate perception" and the glorification of "matter dolorosa," and refashions its own parable of the "prodigal" sun. Newton is a constant target ("Before Newton / infants were / reported not to have fallen out of bed. Parents are / Newtonian fabulists") as is Descartes and his scientific progeny, the "quantum solipsist." As opposed to the "material, mater, umbilical to itself," Di Cicco, in one epigraph, recalls T. S. Eliot's paradoxical prayer in *Ash Wednesday* to the virgin Mother: "Teach us to care and not to care." Di Cicco also invokes Eliot's master, Dante, in *Lux Aeterna* and re-words the well-known ending of the *Divine Comedy* as "Love happens at the speed of light." After dealing with uncertainty principles based in large part on seemingly irreconcilable antinomies, Di Cicco concludes "You cannot be in two places at once: only God can." The quantum leap leads to the proverbial leap of faith in the final section entitled "Hearing the Bridegroom's Voice." Here Di Cicco composes "Rosa Nova: A Modern Prayer," a nuclear version of Dante's multifoliate rose, and ends his spiritual odyssey with a *grazie*, a note of thanks. It is impossible to do justice to the richness and complexity of this fascinating work in a brief review. The reader is invited to explore its mazes on his own, but he must be acquainted with quantum physics and holography to appreciate the poem fully.

DOMINIC MANGANIELLO

VOIX INEGALES

ANDRE BELLEAU, *Surprendre les voix*. Boréal Express, n.p.

CLAUDE JASMIN, *Alice vous fait dire bonsoir*. Leméac, n.p.

EN DEPIT DE LA VOGUE grandissante des théories dites "déconstructionistes," l'observation et l'analyse des systèmes de signes qui parsèment notre vie quotidienne, demeurent une contribution inestimable à la compréhension et à l'interprétation de notre monde. Comme d'innombrables Monsieur Jourdain, nous faisons tous de la sémiologie sans le savoir. Mais de même qu'être en mesure de commander un bifteck-frites ne fait pas de M. Toulmonde un poète, combien sont à même soit de réfléchir sur les systèmes de signes soit d'en tirer des applications sur le plan littéraire. Avec brio et un rien d'arrogance, Umberto Eco a su jouer sur les deux tableaux. A des titres différents, *Surprendre les voix* d'André Belleau et *Alice vous fait dire bonsoir* de Claude Jasmin représentent deux de ces tentatives de déchiffrement. Quant à la différence entre ces deux textes, elle tient autant an fait que le premier est un recueil d'essais et le second un roman, qu'au fait que le premier, par la justesse et la finesse de ses analyses permet de mieux comprendre les limites du second.

A lire *Surprendre les voix* on se surprend — qu'on me pardonne le jeu de mots — à entendre une autre voix, éteinte elle aussi: celle de Roland Barthes. Cette comparaison eût-elle plu à

André Belleau? Car, au fond, l'on a beaucoup écrit et beaucoup dit sur Roland Barthes et pas toujours en bien. Un commentaire de Barthes paru il y a déjà bien des années dans *Le Nouvel Observateur* me revient en mémoire: Barthes y discourait de l'incongruïté de pouvoir se procurer des cerises à Paris en plein mois de février. Cela aurait pu donner lieu à une réflexion sur la transgression que représentait ce phénomène dans le déroulement perçu comme immuable des saisons et donc du temps. Au lieu de cela, le tout était d'une banalité parfaitement insipide. D'un autre côté, les observations de Barthes en matière de sémiologie sociale ou littéraire demeurent irremplaçables et ses *Mythologies*, si décriées furent-elles, représentent qu'on le veuille ou non, un tournant décisif dans la pensée de la deuxième moitié du vingtième siècle.

Le lecteur de *Surprendre les voix* est tenté d'en arriver rapidement à une conclusion similaire et tout aussi ambivalente. Les essais du recueil, qui sont regroupés en quatre catégories ("Paysages," "Voix," "Débats" et "Codes") oscillent en effet des douces gentillesses (au sens classique du terme) de "Mon coeur est une ville" ou de "La feuille de tremble," à la perspicacité et à la force de "Littérature et polique" ou de "L'effet Derome" pour se terminer sur le clin d'oeil pétillant d'intelligence de "Lorsqu'il m'arrive de surprendre les voix." Mais qu'on ne s'y trompe pas, cette division des essais en quatre parties est loin d'être gratuite et sert un autre objectif que celui, évident de prime abord, d'une simple classification.

Prenons les essais de "Paysage." Ils surprennent par leur caractère quasi-impressioniste mais aussi en ce qu'ils sont parsemés de métaphores et de comparaisons déroutantes qui tantôt confinent au cliché ("Montréal porte au front les cicatrices hideuses de l'aube comme un visage vieilli de femme," tantôt laissent le lecteur pantois et le cerveau en ébullition ("La France est le seul pays du monde assujetti à ce qu'on pourrait appeler l'obligation du saucisson maximum," tantôt frisent le mauvais jeu de mots ("Une écriture moderne doit renoncer aux noms propres [. . .] Cette nomination propre est malpropre").

Toutefois, au-delà de ces surprises rencontrées au coin des phrases, il devient évident que les essais de "Paysages" préparent le lecteur au caractère anti-conformiste de la réflexion d'André Belleau et au tour, sommes-nous tenté de dire, sensuel, de son style. Derrière le "genre de rêverie auquel on se laisse aller dans le torpeur de juillet" se profile en effet une pensée pénétrante, lucide et rigoureuse, fondée sur une connaissance approfondie et synthétisée des discours critiques de son temps avec une affection marquée pour les théories de Mikhaïl Bakhtine qui affinent et focalisent le regard d'A. Belleau.

Dès l'évocation de Marrakech dans "Maroc sans noms propres" Bakhtine est là présent aux côtés de Belleau:

> Au risque de paraître livresque, je prétends que Bakhtine aurait considéré les bateleurs de la grande place [de Marrakech] comme des émules de ceux de la place de grève de l'époque de François 1er.

Cette présence ne fera que se renforcer au fur et à mesure que l'on progresse dans le recueil jusqu'à pénétrer le discours même de Belleau. Dans les trois essais qui forment l'ossature de la quatrième partie "Codes" et qui sont sans doute les plus brillants du recueil, André Belleau nous livre ses observations sur la littérature québécoise. La langue de Belleau, dans ces trois essais, est dépourvue du jargon qui trop souvent masque une mauvaise assimilation des théories en vogue. C'est une langue riche, aux registres variés, une langue puissante quasi-rabelaisienne, d'apparence plus charnelle

que cérébrale et qui ainsi évite le piège de l'ésotérisme.

Dans "Culture populaire et culture sérieuse dans le roman québécois" André Belleau aborde en termes clairs la question trop longtemps taboue au Québec du "conflit jamais résolu entre la nature et la culture" conflit qui "continue de déchirer les textes et de dissocier les esprits." Et quand A. Belleau écrit: "On dirait que dans notre littérature romanesque, l'écriture, se sentant à la fois obscurément redevable à la nature et honteuse envers la culture, se censure comme culture et mutile le signifiant," il révèle en fait au grand jour le fantôme qui hante depuis toujours la littérature québécoise. Or ce conflit n'existe qu'en raison même du refus par la société québécoise de ce qui fait sa spécificité: son caractère populaire au sens bakhtinien du terme, autrement dit une société "profondément marquée par la culture carnavalesque" et qui conserve donc, vertu inestimable, unique en Occident, "une vision totalisante du monde." Et A. Belleau de citer pêle-mêle Laberge, Godbout, Aquin, Ducharme, Carrier.

Dans "Le conflit des codes dans l'institution littéraire québécoise," A. Belleau poursuit et amplifie la réflexion entamée dans l'essai précédent et, dans "Code social et code littéraire dans le roman québécois," il précise et illustre sa pensée par une analyse de *Poussière sur la ville* d'André Langevin et d'*Au pied de la pente douce* de Roger Lemelin. Au sein de l'institution littéraire, A. Belleau distingue deux fonctions: "la fonction organisatrice (la base matérielle, les appareils)," qu'il nomme "l'Appareil" et "la fonction régulatrice (les normes du dire littéraire [. . .])" qu'il nomme "la Norme":

> au Québec, l'Appareil et la Norme n'ont pas nécessairement la même origine, la société n'ayant pu produire les deux. Dans plusieurs secteurs majeurs de *la sphère littéraire*, si l'Appareil est québécois, la Norme demeure française.

Bien entendu la conséquence nécessaire de cette analyse en forme de constatation est:

> qu'on ne peut comprendre un peu en profondeur la littérature romanesque d'ici [. . .] sans tenir compte des tensions et distorsions produites par la rencontre dans un même texte des codes socio-culturels québécois et des codes littéraires français.

En mettant ainsi en évidence ce conflit des codes, A. Belleau permet en fait la résolution du paradoxe qui domine la littérature québécoise et contribue ainsi à lui donner son identité et sa spécificité.

Si ces trois essais sont les plus denses du recueil, d'autres méritent tout autant d'attention. Ne serait-ce que pour rendre hommage au sens inné que Belleau possédait pour la formule bien sentie nous citerons les suivantes:

> Le fantastique est [. . .] moins une forme qu'une attitude sur les formes.

> Ce n'est pas parce que Bakhtine a construit la théorie d'une vision carnavalesque pour rendre compte de certains textes qu'un poète peut espérer "carnavaliser" ses pensées!

Si les observations d'A. Belleau frappent par leur justesse, par leur franchise et par leur simplicité d'un côté et par à la fois leur diversité et leur cohérencce de l'autre, c'est parce que deux principes gouvernent la réflexion de l'auteur: la recherche de la limpidité et la conscience aigüe de la pluralité des voix qui nous habitent. La citation suivante tirée de "Petite essayistique" en dit long sur la manière dont A. Belleau percevait son propre rôle:

> L'essayiste aime parfois prendre des questions en apparence compliquées et leur donner une autre sorte de confusion que la confusion reçue. Mais inversement, il peut lui arriver d'être possédé par le démon de la clarté, de la logique, du démontrable.

Quant au dialogue à trois voix qui clôt le recueil, il en représente non seulement la conclusion mais aussi la synthèse. Car cette "conversation intérieure" (dos de la couverture) où "l'Intellectuel Besogneux Insomniaque" et porte-voix laisse la parole à ses trois voix intimes, est un véritable précis des théories littéraires qui sous-tendent la pensée d'A. Belleau et qui guident son écriture et sa réflexion: pluralité mais aussi fusion et communion incessantes des énoncés; ambiguïté, multiplicité et hétérogénéïté du "je" énonciateur qui n'en finit plus de se faire avaler par l'Autre; unité du discours produit qui jaillit de la diversité des discours reçus; et puis la question éternelle, la question fondamentale, la seule peut-être, celle que se posait sans doute Aquin un certain jour de mars 1977 après l'avoir posée dans ses oeuvres: "Dieu comme Sujet dernier, comme signifié transcendantal" existe-t-il?

Par contraste, *Alice vous fait dire bonsoir* de Claude Jasmin paraît bien léger. Mais peut-être aussi ne prétend-il pas à être davantage! C'est le quatrième roman de Claude Jasmin dans la série des enquêtes menées par l'inspecteur Asselin. Celui-ci a été engagé par une certaine Marlène pour surveiller les agissements des habitants d'un pavillon situé au 328 rue Querbes à Montréal. La difficulté majeure qu'affronte l'inspecteur est qu'il ne sait pas pourquoi il doit surveiller cette maison. Surtout que les allées et venues des divers habitants du pavillon (6 en tout) n'ont rien de particulièrement suspect! Asselin se prend même d'affection pour la grand-mère et sa petite-fille, toutes deux nommées Alice jusqu'au jour où les deux Alice sont empoisonnées et où il apparaît qu'Alice était une rescapée du camp de concentration de Ravensbrück, que sa famille avait loué le pavillon afin de mieux préparer sa vengeance contre "la Garde maniaque du camp" qui venait d'emménager juste à côté, que Marlène était la fille de la garde en question, et qu'un néo-nazi trop zélé avait provoqué la mort de la grand-mère et de la petite fille.

Enigme policière donc, de prime abord séduisante, surtout par la facture du roman qui est une série de rapports de police fonctionnant en écho avec un hors-texte (les réponses de Marlène) dont on ne connaît que des bribes, mais énigme qui laisse le lecteur sur sa faim. Alors que la présentation du roman fait miroiter au lecteur "un tourbillon de faits bizarres qui conduiront tous les personnages de ce polar à un formidable et cinglant dénouement" (dos de la couverture) l'enquête de Charles Asselin qu'on ne connaît que par les rapports que l'inspecteur fait à son commanditaire, donne davantage dans le statisme et l'avachissement. Charles Asselin enquêteur n'est point William de Baskerville et les rapports du même Asselin pâlissent en comparaison des récits d'Adso.

En fait le reproche majeur que l'on puisse faire à *Alice vous fait dire bonsoir* est de refuser d'avouer ce qu'il est et de chercher à être autre chose que ce qu'il est en réalité. Après tout, il s'agit d'un roman policier, pas mal ficelé au demeurant mais qui cherche à se donner des airs. En somme, un roman qui serait à l'opposé du *Prochain Episode* d'Hubert Aquin qui, dès la deuxième page prétend s'"insérer dans le sens majeur de la tradition du roman d'espionnage" et se retrouve à être surtout autre chose qu'un roman d'espionnage. *Alice* est agréable à lire mais n'est pas de ces "polars" que l'on lit avidement, haletant d'énervement jusqu'à ce qu'on en ait tourné la dernière page au petit matin.

En parodiant A. Belleau, on pourrait dire que Claude Jasmin mélange les codes. Plutôt que de puiser à grandes brassées dans le fond culturel universel et de fusionner ces traditions avec celles de la culture québécoise, le roman de

Jasmin semble être une parodie. Mais malheureusement, une parodie involontaire où la culture, sous les traits du professeur Maynar Miller, se trouve constamment plaquée au lieu d'être intégrée pour être finalement évacuée et disparaître comme c'est le cas dans *La Sablière.* Au bout du compte que reste-t-il sinon un large vide que l'écriture elle-même ne peut combler?

Avec A. Belleau, la littérature et la pensée au Québec ont atteint l'âge de la maturité et de l'assurance. Avec Jasmin, elles balbutient encore. Oui "la mort d'André Belleau [. . .] avait quelque chose de catastrophique" mais cette voix si juste continue de résonner et d'indiquer le chemin.

PIERRE-YVES MOCQUAIS

SURPRISED BY JOY

Necessary Secrets: The Journals of Elizabeth Smart, ed. Alice Van Wart. Deneau, $24.95.

IN THE SUMMER of 1979 I found my way to Elizabeth Smart's hideaway in Suffolk, England. She lived in an old brick house set in a tiny rounded valley. The house sat in its wooded glen like a cherry in a teacup, with only the chimney visible as one approached on foot (of necessity) across the pasture. The secrecy, the beauty, the quality of surprise were all typical of Smart's work. Memories of my stay include the red sheets on my bed, the miniature posy of flowers on my breakfast tray. I felt the warmth of a genuine welcome and of a strong personality.

A book of poems and Smart's second novel, *The Assumption of the Rogues and Rascals*, had been published the previous fall. She was in the process of being rescued from over thirty years of oblivion. Her first novel, which tells in exquisitely lyrical language of her love affair with British poet George Barker, had been banned from Canada in 1945 on first publication after Smart's socialite mother had sought Mackenzie King's intervention. *By Grand Central Station I Sat Down and Wept*, republished in 1977, was hailed in superlatives by many critics. Brigid Brophy called it a rare masterpiece of poetic prose.

Smart (b. 1913) died of a heart attack in March 1986. The previous six or seven years had seen her literary reputation solidly established, like that of Mavis Gallant, another Canadian expatriate. Critics and readers finally, if belatedly, acknowledged Smart's excellence and the unique quality of her writing. Earlier recognition might have made a very difficult life a little easier along the way.

Necessary Secrets is meticulously edited by Alice Van Wart of the University of Alberta, whom Smart met in 1982 during a term there as Writer-in-Residence. The journals form a tiresome and fascinating work of considerable beauty and depth. The tiresome bits belong largely to the early pages and the very young Elizabeth, who is turning twenty at the time of the first entries. Some rapturous passages written in 1940 in the throes of love might also tire the less romantic. As for the beauty and wisdom of this prose, however, they shine from every page. The journals disclose an exceptional spirit and sensibility, a rare talent. Mercifully it need no longer be secretive, since most of the great and not-so-great named in its pages are now dead.

Smart's father was a prominent Ottawa lawyer. As Van Wart observes in the Introduction, the journal offers glimpses into the lives of the political and cultural élite who travelled frequently between Ottawa and London in the 1930's. The Smarts socialized with diplomats, painters, and writers such as Lester B. Pearson, Charles Ritchie, Graham Spry, Frank Scott, Marius Barbeau.

Abroad, Elizabeth's friends included Sir Stafford Cripps and his family, concert pianist Katherine Goodson, painter Jean Varda. In Van Wart's words, "the insight into Smart's extraordinary background reveals the extremity of her final abandonment of it. Yet, at the same time, the journals show that her eventual defiance was not so much rebellion against social conventions as the imperative of a highly romantic sensibility."

Most students of Smart's work will agree with Van Wart that too much has been written about the affair with the poet who remained married to his original wife, and that her first novel is "not so much about the love affair between two people as it is about Smart's lifelong love affair with language." The journals support this view.

They cover eight years (1933-41), a critical period for the Western world and for Smart, serving her apprenticeship as a writer. Part One (1933-35) is the weakest, not surprisingly, yet it offers intriguing insights into the budding sensuality and spirituality which co-exist at the heart of Smart's literary vision. That spirituality includes an almost mystical feeling for nature, and a concern for what Patrick White calls "lovingkindness."

"Around the World with Mrs. Watt, 1936-37" covers a trip through Canada and the U.S., Hawaii, Fiji, New Zealand, Australia, Ceylon, and Palestine as personal secretary and companion to a woman speaker. Smart calls it "a detour," and seems to have embarked on it to avoid immediate confrontations with questions of marriage and career. The last section covers two love affairs and the start of what became the grand liaison of her life.

In Mexico in 1939 Smart stayed with Wolfgang and Alice Paalen, both writers. The relationship that developed with the beautiful Alice must have been liberating for Elizabeth, whose sexuality had been constrained by a conventional background and highly strung mother. It would be celebrated later in a tender novella entitled "Dig a Grave and Let Us Bury Our Mother," the story of a love affair between two women which acts as a means of confronting and breaking away from the mother/womb. The journal records reflections and conversations such as this: "all the time her smiling dream mouth, smiling, smiling.... 'It seems natural to you to be like this with me?' 'Yes.' 'Most women like men, some women like women, but it's rare to like both.' 'I like *being*,' I said." Smart seems very aware of her amateur status in the relationship and calls herself "a blunderer here, heavy-handed, an American tourist in the Buddhist temple."

She soon moved on to Hollywood where she lived briefly with a French painter, Jean Varda. The diaries are purposely ambiguous; from the wording it seems possible that the two were never lovers. Throughout this period Smart's thoughts were on Barker, whose poetry had won her heart long before their first meeting. She had originally obtained his address from Lawrence Durrell in correspondence, and Barker had appealed to Smart for financial aid before they met. Initially she did not know that he was married. Later, he told her that he would leave his wife, an intention that seems to have never been genuine.

Smart agonizes over the pain they are causing Barker's wife, but guilt had no power to quench the fires. After the birth of their first child she made a serious effort to break off the relationship by sailing for England in 1941, leaving no address. This was a dangerous action in wartime, and her ship was actually damaged but not sunk. Barker followed and traced her, and the two eventually had four children. Smart brought them up by herself, earning a living as a journalist in

London. Small wonder that "labour" becomes the central pun in her brilliant second novel.

The journals sparkle with vitality and wit. The span of eight years allows us to see the developing style of the woman who was always a poet, one whose writing abolishes the barriers between prose and poetry. The complexity of the style matches and reflects the complexity of Smart's personality, which stands revealed as vain, selfish, selfless, kind, generous, humorous, cruel, voluptuous, and deeply loving. Smart felt herself cursed with "a New England conscience." Cursed or blessed, her life is one to confound the moralists and edify the forgiving.

PATRICIA MORLEY

GOING BACK

A. F. MORITZ, *The Tradition*. Princeton Univ. Press, n.p.

HAROLD RHENISCH, *Eleusis*. Sono Nis, $6.95.

PETER STEVENS, *Out of the Willow Trees*. Thistledown, n.p.

BOTH A. F. MORITZ and Peter Stevens attempt to come to some sort of understanding of their pasts in their respective books of poetry. While Stevens writes straightforward prose poems examining his own childhood experiences and memories, Moritz multiplies his experiences by his cultural history and learning. Both start with similar aims, proceed with vastly different approaches, and produce books successful in their own terms.

Stevens's work consists of a prose narrative surrounding individual poems, which often focus on a specific image. The transitions are smooth, the last line of the prose section often providing the image. For instance, the first prose section concludes, "At home we had this big cat . . ." and is followed by the poem titled "Tim," the first line of which reads "was a great lazy tomcat." In Stevens's capable hands the twentieth-century pop topic of "roots" becomes vital and compelling, and it is not by capitalizing on the exciting parts that Stevens achieves this. He balances the intimate and the universal, the familiar and the foreign, as he traces his working-class childhood in England through the Depression and Second World War from the perspective of both the youngster and the grownup. *Out of the Willow Trees* is divided into four sections: the first focuses on Stevens's earliest years, describing family and immediate surroundings; the second moves out into the wider community of friends and neighbours; the third, titled "War Games," contrasts the games of the boy Stevens and his chums on the home-front with those of soldiers and would-be soldiers; and the fourth, titled "Going Home," is really "everything else."

Stevens's father is the major figure in the collection, while his mother remains shadowy and indistinct. The war is the major event, but it is played out opposite the on-going struggle against poverty, against being "skint." Stevens's earliest memories are of terraced houses, cobbled streets, paved backyards, in the centre of Manchester. The first happenings he records are injury, terror, hardship. Nature is vicious rather than a delight, and it is a "hard dark world" he inhabits. Despite this oppressive beginning, there are many rays of light in the book. On the advice of a doctor and because of Stevens's health, the family moved to a housing estate on the outskirts of the city when he was four. The irony of the earlier misnamed "April Street" is replaced by the now appropriate "Wythenshawe," the group of willows of the title. Stevens's childhood of discovery now really begins.

In the first section some poems become pictures from the family portrait album brought to life: Uncle Charlie, Cousin

Betty, Cousin Winifred, Uncle Tom, Uncle Fred, Grandfather. There is much poignancy to the portraits, and some are disturbing. There is a dark side to the personalized class struggle; in "Cry Uncle," for instance, where friends drift apart because of changed socioeconomic situations. But particular memories of Stevens's father are clearest: hands doing tricks and games to enchant a boy, retrieving the world's discards to restore them to some magical use, bicycling off to his job on the railways. Always Stevens looks for some remaining link: a remembered physical trait now manifesting itself in his own body, the constancy of a night sky arching above them both though now an ocean separates them. The tone Stevens achieves is warm and not sticky or sentimental.

The portraits in the second section include those of neighbours and chums: Mr. Bowden who became a jovial, motorcycle-riding disgrace after his wife died; Ivy Simpson who gave Stevens his first, ten-years'-old kiss; and Sid

> On his tricycle
> fitted with a chest he filled with
> knick-knacks: buttons
> fastened on a card, laces, ribbons, and shoe
> polish,
> he travelled round the district selling door
> to door,
> collecting his small money, giving it to his
> mum
> who'd taught him patiently to talk, to
> count —

We have here the castoffs and heroes, the late-bloomers and unseasonably uprooted. The language is colloquial and recreates the sensibility of the times. Neighbours and events from the larger world are included to set the scene: the Oxford-Cambridge boat races, Larry Adler, Mrs. Simpson, Charlie Chaplin, Hitler, and "fat man Benito." The war, always in the background, becomes foreground in the third section:

> Our sleep was striped with blood,
> disturbed by rumblings louder
> than the childish cries of play.

Stevens's war consisted of sipping tea in shelters during air raids, listening to Lord HawHaw broadcasting "*Gairmany calling*," playing games on the L.D.V. (Local Defence Volunteers), which Stevens and his mates dub the "Look, Duck, and Vanish." But there is also the harsher reality of seven boys investigating "the strange shape . . . they had found" in the schoolyard: "and in the last second as they opened it up / they discovered what made a bomb tick." One particularly moving poem, "Grenade with Fireworks," demonstrates Stevens's method of taking a remembered image, here a hand grenade polished each week and set "squat on the hearth" at home, and expanding it metaphorically to reach out and touch his father:

> Somewhere that grenade is waiting in cold
> ash.
> I want to lob these words across that
> no man's
> land between us, but they remain here,
> pinned
> in my teeth, I cannot make a vast umbrella
> of falling earth to shower over us where we
> crouch
> in separate lines, huddled alone, in the
> corners
> of our lives, each standing silent, waiting
> to go over the top, not knowing what will
> be there.

In the final section, the precise focus is lost somewhat, as Stevens tries to knit up the loose threads: his mother's illness, his own first Canadian year, his return to England, and the changes of time:

> The roll call closes after the quick
> beginning
> *whatever happened to . . .* ?
> pauses lengthen
> *do you still see . . .* ?
> names
> *what on earth was her . . .* ?
> dropping
> into silence.

Stevens concludes with the important question which is the subject of much contemporary Canadian poetry (that of poets as diverse as Robert Kroetsch, Douglas Lochhead, Eli Mandel, Daphne Marlatt, Fred Wah, Phyllis Webb): the nature of home and being "at home." The answers supplied by his poetry are many and marvellous. Small incidents and little people make compelling reading for all their seeming ordinariness.

The book Stevens wrote is similar to the one Moritz apparently set out to write. The dust jacket of *The Tradition* tells us that Moritz "wanted to write a book about my childhood home, Niles, Ohio."

> In going back there and trying to do so, I found it necessary first to write another book, about my growing up, in order to weigh my perceptions of the place. I didn't find there only the citizens of Niles, their lives, their works and the landscape, but also most of the ideas, stories and figures that people my thought and that were transmitted to me through that place from other places and times.

So Stevens's blood relatives and neighbours are replaced here by characters from books, myth, literature, and history. Manchester, England, or Niles, Ohio, are multiplied by Petra and Poland, Circe's island in the Aegean or one in the South China Sea, the Egyptian desert or the Red Deer River badlands. Moritz is not as straightforward as Stevens, but complexity suits his task. The multiple play of meanings reflects the multiple traditions he wishes to stress. As did Stevens, Moritz includes memories of his father — feeding pigeons and squirrels "under horse chestnut trees." But Moritz includes memories of other fathers as well: Lucretius, Virgil, Dante, Rilke. His poems are peopled by Oedipus, Orpheus, Aeneas, Prometheus, Caesar, Jonah, Don Juan, and Faust. He is on a quest himself and recalls others, for grail or golden fleece. There are also references to films (*King Kong* or *Pandora's Box*) and music (Mahler or melodies in cafés). Nor is this world the only one; the underworld too is explored. From this territory, the overwhelming images that emerge are of explorers or questers (those of the classics, Homer or Malory, already mentioned and those of more recent times, searching in North America for fur routes or bone and fossil hoards) and of soothsayers (Tiresias or the Sphinx as well as those of today prophesying the threat of "the Bomb" and "the coming dissolution").

Some answers, Moritz seems to say, can be found in examining source and origin, of the individual, the natural world, and culture. They are inextricably involved each with each. The interpenetration of myth and the natural world, for instance, works particularly well in "Orpheus in Ontario," while the mythic origins of art are demonstrated in a poem that presents Prometheus as a poetic model: "And so I hang here, slowly eaten away, / ever renewed in anguish and in joy."

Literally reaching beneath all surfaces, Moritz reviews the development of earth and man from prehistory and the first settlements through the roots of history and myth to today. For Moritz our ancestors, the dead of the past, look down through the ages:

> Still loved for our blood,
> still hated for every failure, we
> remain to trouble the living.

In his poems Moritz assumes the persona of some of those dead from his heritage and travels through time and across continents. He outlines the impossibility for him of doing otherwise:

> Sometimes I think of starting again, of slowly building
> a small monument out of the things of my own life.
> But in fact there are none, and no human desire can secure a work,

> however modest: say, a circle of six pebbles
> on the ground.

As here, Moritz demonstrates throughout his book his command of images and language. There is often an awe-ful beauty to his lines: "Rarely, briefly, Ulysses, / do the gods permit / that outward and inward of a man should join." This seems to be Moritz's aim. His final poem, about sacrifice and resurrection, suggests that cultural awareness provides a form of immortality. Moritz thus gives meaning to the dead and the past that few poets can.

So far I have not mentioned Harold Rhenisch's *Eleusis*, not because it does not fit the comparison of Stevens's and Moritz's works outlined here, although it does not, but because it does not fit the calibre of their writing either. Unfortunately, beside their work, Rhenisch's appears pretentious and unfocused.

I enjoy difficult poetry; I like the complex way of meaning and image that challenges the reader, but first the poet must make you care enough about the lines to spend the necessary time. Unfortunately, *Eleusis* did not make me care. And even when I did spend the time, I still did not appreciate the meaning or the persona of the poems. They still remained elusive. . . . Hey, is that the homonymous reference of the title? — I clutch at straws. (In actual fact, Eleusis was the town which gave its name to the great festival and mysteries of Eleusinia. Unfortunately, Rhenisch's book also gives its name to mysteries, and not the kind to be celebrated.)

The unfortunate image of the dead speaking through the poet is repeated without Moritz's elaboration. At one point Rhenisch says, "something remains beyond our speech," and the reader must sadly agree that in this case, it is much. Rhenisch mixes recognized aesthetic ideas and practices: the balance of speech and silence, light and dark, dream and reality, the reflection of love in the natural world, and art in life, the use of paradox, and mythic allusions. Too often, however, the poem is "muddy," as is the persona at beginning and end: with "muddy arms" and "muddy face." The images and language do not seem natural to the speaker; they seemed borrowed, and not in a consciously and artful intertextual way. The framework of classical references seems artificial, and the introduction of Ezra Pound needs relating more clearly to what Rhenisch has to say. "I reach to tear off my mask, but there is no mask." The fear of readers is the same, that there is nothing behind all this poetic façade once it is torn away.

Rhenisch's style is too often sententious and pretentious: "faith is the exploration of limitation, / necessary"; "the great experiments have failed"; "Never a womb without a grave"; "In truth, light may be darkness; / in song it is never light." Suggesting what Stevens and Mortiz attempt and achieve, Rhenisch asks "What is memory / and what is forgetting?" but he provides few answers. "I don't live in memory," he claims, and the proof is that Stevens and Moritz produce better poetry because they at least revere memory. Rhenisch continually contradicts himself in the long sequence "Songs for the Moon." On one page he claims, "Of light I know nothing," while on the next, "Only in the light are we men." What conclusion are we to draw from this? "Of clarity I know nothing," he admits, and here conclusion is obvious. Later Rhenisch addresses "Whatever voice of yours / can make it through to me" and says: "pull yourself together / and ask me in a language we can share or keep." Again, the nod of agreement is unfortunate and misplaced. When Rhenisch does "come clear," as in the simple lyrics exploring single images, his art is well maintained. I wish the

writing exhibited by the natural descriptions in "March Apples," "Spring Wood," and "Windbreak" was sustained throughout the book.

Stevens and Moritz, however, prove that clarity does not have to be clouded, that simplicity does not have to be simplistic. Neither "lives" in memory, but both shape memory to successful poetic ends and make it live for us.

ANN MUNTON

POETRY & WHISPERS

With Other Words, ed. Maria Jacobs. Netherlandic Press, $9.95.

Origins, ed. J. R. (Tim) Struthers. Red Kite Press, n.p.

HELEN HUMPHREYS, *Gods and Other Mortals*. Brick Books, $7.50.

LOLA SNEYD, *The Concrete Giraffe*. Simon & Pierre, n.p.

THESE FOUR BOOKS of poetry are very different books indeed, and no amount of patting and coaxing is going to make them sit comfortably in a comparative review. *With Other Words* is a bilingual anthology of contemporary Dutch poetry by women. *Origins* is an anthology of poetry by a diverse group, all of whom have or have had some connection with the University of Western Ontario. The remaining two books are single authored, but while *The Concrete Giraffe* is a book of poetry for children, *Gods and Other Mortals* is aimed at adults. I will, therefore, not attempt to stand you or myself on our heads in order to make these books seem like the cozy quartet they are not.

With Other Words is a doubly marginalized work, first by language and second by sex. I cannot comment on the original poems, presented here on the left-hand pages in Dutch, but the translations on the right are of varying quality. This is not the place to engage in a discussion of the theories of translation and the distancing from the original a translation implies, but the inclusion of the original is a positive step for those who wish to pursue this work. *With Other Words* is an extremely handsome work, the best looking of the group. It is illustrated with the detailed paintings of tropical flowers and insects by the seventeenth-century artist Maria Sibylla Merian. This is a book with a definite purpose, and its success must be judged by its own standards. It intends to introduce Dutch women poets to the English-speaking world. In my case it has done just that, and I cannot comment on the appropriateness of the selection of the eight poets. It would appear that they are all established writers, as they all have several publications to their credit. Perhaps the inclusion of at least one new poet would have been an addition. Although edited by Maria Jacobs (whose own book, *Precautions Against Death*, is a moving account of her experiences in the Netherlands during the Nazi occupation), this anthology is the work of five translators, all members of the Canadian Association for the Advancement of Netherlandic Studies, and the Foreword speaks of their missionary zeal in bringing these Dutch female poets to the notice of an English-speaking audience.

The work of the eight poets selected here is intentionally different. We are to be introduced to variety as well as excellence. The space devoted to each varies as well. While Judith Herzberg is awarded twenty-four pages, Hanny Michaelis receives only two. The others range between these amounts of space. Subjects vary as well, from the settling of body fat to nuclear war, while styles are generally simple and straightforward, with little experimentation. To generalize, these poets seem to use irony and particular details to propel their work. There is little evidence in the lines that

they are women, even less that they are Dutch, but there is much evidence that they are poets. Andreas Burnier addresses poems to Gertrude Stein, while Fritzi Harmsen Van Beek addresses an ironic one to her "downhearted cat, to console her / at the passing away of her brood." The tone is conspiratorial and coaxing, as she tries to interest her cat in the world of appetizing birds out in the garden. That the cat should not trust such sympathy is made clear by the admission midway through that "the undertaker" is none other than "the familiar pourer of lukewarm milk" herself. My particular favourites here are a longer sequence by Herzberg entitled "Late Couple II," about the differences in perspective in a relationship:

> The way the sun goes down
> the way he sees it
> as a copper serving tray
> she as a redhot
> circular saw that
> at the far end spins down
> into the water, hissing.

And poems by the newest of the contributors, Ellen Warmond. Concerned about poetic language, she says:

> Contemporary names for contemporary
> objects don't make poetry any more
> modern . . .
> but to write a well-worn word like
> *silver*
> for instance in a way
> that makes you taste
> the well-worn silver in your fillings.

To choose a poem that calls attention to word choice in an edition of translations is a gamble, but one that pays off here. Even more chancy and still successful is a second actually entitled "Untranslatable," which deals with the inability to find true words to express some of our deepest feelings, "I can repeat / myself again: / . . . / love dearest you you / . . . / but the best cannot be translated." It would seem that at least some of the best have been translated here.

Six poets are represented in *Origins*. Either at present or in the recent past, all have been affiliated with the University of Western Ontario. There is little other point of connection evident in their poetry. As in *With Other Words*, equal space is not allotted to each writer. In fact, nearly half the space is devoted to two of the six, and in the case of Marianne Micros this is richly deserved. The selection of her writing consists of one long sequence about her origins in time and place, the most obvious association with the title of the collection that is apparent. Micros writes of her childhood and adolescence in Cuba, New York, locating herself first as a dot on the map. She writes, reflecting in language the thought patterns of the age recalled, of events in her youth, real or imagined — the soothing cold from her father's ice-cream factory on a hot day, the hall door that hid terrors for a youngster, a wooden bridge, link to a special girl friend and spot for a rendezvous with a first boy friend, and the trains in and out. She also recalls how, returning from college, she found the place and people changed. Summing up, as a Margaret Laurence character might, Micros says:

> The town shuts me out
> because I dared to climb out,
>
> but you won't forget me,
> it whispers,
> you will always want me,
> my ice cream,
> my creek, my bridge,
> my hills,
> my train whistles . . .

The form that is most often repeated by the other poets in this collection is the elegy: to a dead brother, to the students killed at Kent State University in 1970, to a past acquaintance, to a child. This last is a series by John Tyndall, "Red Sidewalks," which avoids being sentimental by concentrating on memories of the child alive with other children,

and their petty struggles and quick exuberances when at play "on the sidewalk." Steve Higgins also deserves mention for the oriental simplicity and cleanness of his poems which capture single images or emotions:

On a wet morning
birds circle high overhead
winging through my thoughts.

So soft, the moist air
against my cheek; under mist
trees loom green and pale.

Gods and Other Mortals is a very eclectic book with evidence of the present novice as well as the future adept. Divided into four sections, the book is not consistently successful. The first section is a series of poems generally centred on concrete scenes, like a railway trestle bridge, or working settings, like an office, factory, or gas station. Helen Humphreys has a habit of overdoing poetic devices and sometimes mixes her metaphors: "I crawl along the land's furrowed brow. / The hills beside me a platoon of spoons / sleeping on their stomachs." The best poetry in this section is a series of five short poems, titled "Scar Stories." These are more direct, and the shock value of some is well handled. The second section consists of five poems for voices, reminiscent of Dorothy Livesay's formal concerns. Humphreys has a keen ear for dialogue, which is well focused in "The Dinner." Here conversation is telescoped, and inane comments blend into larger questions like the meaning of life and the purpose of the future. There is even a hint of humour:

Of course I have patience.
Who doesn't? It's easy
to be patient when there's
nothing else you can be.
Anger. I've tried it.
One gets tired being angry.
One gets patient when tired.
Happy I've been; once
or twice. Content?
Never.

One criticism is that Humphreys seems to have read T. S. Eliot too recently and too closely: "Evening has waddled / breathless across / the table, / leaving a path / stamped with goodbyes." And again:

I have polished my lifetime
for this. . . .
I have
rehearsed defection on subways
in the morning, among elbows
and an air thick with the
stink of business.

The third section seems to consist of poems that did not fit into any other part, while the fourth section is composed of poems with classical subjects. At first I had misgivings about these last poems, but Humphreys manages to bring the best of her abilities at capturing voices to her lines, and they provide a strong finish for her collection. My favourites are a dialogue between Epimetheus and Prometheus, a moving poem by Thetis addressed to her dead son Achilles, and a poem which captures the agony of being Cassandra, foreteller of the future, doomed to be believed by none.

"After," they said,
"it will be as before."
But she knew,
Cassandra knew,
that death was the
foundation of every world.
That man would
only ever live
beak against shell.

Now I turn this review over to my eight-year-old daughter, Sarah, who agreed to read and comment upon the book of children's poetry by Lola Sneyd. I must just interject that her enjoyment of the book is coloured by the fact that although she has spent the last two years in Vancouver, she still has fond memories of her previous four years in Toronto. Therefore, the many Toronto places on which this poetry is based are

old, familiar friends to her (the CN Tower, Casa Loma, High Park, etc.). If this was not so, I hazard the guess that the book would not be so appealing. *The Concrete Giraffe* is a very centrally located book. The laughter I heard, however, while Sarah was carrying out her task, was very real indeed.

Sarah's categories are more direct and less inhibited than some found on the pages of this journal. She affixed sticky yellow tags to each poem with such labels as "silly," "funny," "good," "dumb," and even one "sick" (this for a poem about slugs). Her only "bad" was awarded to the title poem, whose form reflects the CN Tower. It seems that Sarah has not yet received a taste for concrete poetry. Questioned about this, she agreed that the shape was clever, but stuck to her opinion that the words did not work.

Sarah really liked the humour in the poems and the illustrations. A good many of the ones she wanted mentioned had a yellow sticker seal-of-approval saying "funny." Sneyd capitalizes on the pleasure children take in language and the natural world:

> The butterfly holds no butter,
> The sea-shell holds no sea,
> But nature's greatest miracle is:
> An acorn holds a tree!

She also knows that children like to laugh at themselves:

> I'd change the world
> If I could be parted
> From my toughest job
> Getting me started!

Sarah particularly liked a short poem called "Main Switch":

> Computer gadgets
> Make my world perk,
> But I'm still needed
> To make them all work!

This last one emphasizes that children find enjoyable what is familiar to them. For computer-adept Sarah, this is a special poem, as are the ones that remind her of Toronto and her times there. Those with stars, signifying worthy of mention, included a poem about the magic of going on school outings and listing many of Toronto's special sights, a poem describing the Toronto City Hall ("The Mushroom in the Clam"), another describing Casa Loma, and one telling of the fun of subway rides. The rhythm of "Eaton Centre" caught Sarah's fancy:

> 1 Below 2 Below
> 3 Below Stop
> I press the button
> And zoom to the top

And the magic of the Ontario Science Centre is also captured:

> No matter where I wander
> I touch and hear and see
> And best of all there's no one yelling
> "Don't touch, Kid!" at me.

The final, serious poem received a double star award. "Portrait of Toronto" sums up the multiple appeals of the city.

The balance of the familiar and the funny is also reflected in Sarah's choices of her favourite illustrations, done by Doug Sneyd. She particularly liked the ones which were recognizably Toronto: the skyline with a prominent CN Tower, the Science Centre, and the interior of the Eaton Centre with soaring Canada Geese. Also starred was a humorous picture of "Grampa," which goes along with a poem about Grampa's wonderful memories of "when I was a lad." Both Sneyds seem to know well what appeals to children, but I would like them next to tackle a book that would have more appeal coast to coast.

ANN MUNTON / SARAH MUNTON

POUVOIR DES MOTS

JEAN JONASSAINT, *Le pouvoir des mots, les maux du pouvoir: Des romanciers haitiens de l'exil.* Presses de l'Univ. de Montréal, $22.00.

> When the axe came into the forest, the trees said the handle is one of us.
>
> — Turkish proverb

JEAN JONASSAINT'S *Le pouvoir des mots, les maux du pouvoir* compiles short samples of works by Haitian authors living outside Haiti, some living in political exile. Also, Jonaissaint's investigative labour consists of working out, in extensive interviews with all the featured novelists, a unified theoretical approach for an understanding of novelists with umbilical memories connecting them to their original site of inspiration: Haiti. This is the geo-literary political construction of the book.

The most compelling writers are those whose works and interviews contain the greatest degree of narrative complexity and methodological and linguistic conflict. Conflict is the event which produces exile, and exile is what provides the detachment needed to lick wounds and/or to establish a method of surviving the hostility of the receiving empires: France, Canada, and the U.S.A. Exile, to some authors, has become an opportunity for reflection and archival research in the libraries of the West. Indeed without exile, and without the massive archives in the colonial world, some writers claim that they would not have become authors.

The interview with Gérard Etienne proves without doubt to be the most fruitful regarding this understanding and disjuncture between the subject imperialized (the authors) and the colonizing host country, Canada in this case. Canada, it is appropriate to note, has been dogmatically silent on the Haitian government's torture of political prisoners, and, moreover, through CIDA (Canadian International Development Agency) has been an important contributor to some economic ravaging of Haiti. Gérard Etienne's *Un Ambassadeur macoute à Montréal* (1979) could well be considered a significant indictment/allegorization of the Haitian body politic in Canada. Etienne pinpoints the problematic of oppositional writing: "Je voulais FAIRE COMME, comme un Luc B. Innocent, par exemple, dénoncer avec la poésie l'injustice sociale, l'exploitation, l'oppression de peuple. . . ." And, "Mais derrière chaque oeuvre littéraire il y a un projet."

This is clearly very different from René Despestre: "L'écrivain est un peu le croniqueur des passions de son temps. On ne peut par faire une littérature seulement d'idées mais de passions, de conflits, de contradictions." The apparent tactic in the interview with Gérard Etienne is to reason out the particular postulates in the game plan of being a stranger in the home of the master, singing in the master's language, about the master's colonial adventures. Jonassaint questions the use of languages: why Creole, French colonial/proper or French conjugated in such a way as to pronounce class linkages, class betrayals. Also an attempt is made to trace the individual histories of the authors in relation to their particular use of past landmark Haitian writers, oral narrative traditions, and the overriding demarcations of politics to literature.

Some of the other interviews stray dangerously into the arena of discourse for discourse's sake. For example, the conversation with Jean Métellus does not in any particular way deepen our understanding of mimic men and radicals flung into the post-colonial world. But the fundamental raw material of the questions can be illustrated by the following recurrent examples:

1. Ton publique, c'est le publique haitien, celui du dehors ou de dedans?
2. Vous dites vous privilegiez l'outil français. En privilegiant outil français, est-ce que vous ne privilégiez pas aussi un publique qui serait français?
3. Vous vous etes donc nourris à la littérature orale haitienne?

And finally the question of residual cultural belonging to two world views: "et pour vous, c'est important une 'place' dans la littérature française ou haitienne? Du mois, vous espérez la reconnaissance de pairs?" These questions, totally relevant though they may be to an understanding of the relationship of literary production to exile literature as attached/detached cultural objects, do little to advance a more serious stating of why these authors actually left Haiti or were forced to flee.

It goes without saying that a book devoted to literature can not and ought not to contain just political and economic explanations, but that a book about the literary creed of exile might have framed a comprehension of Canada's role in the colonization of Haiti. *Le pouvoir des mots* in fact pushes away from that important kind of framework when it, in conclusion, uses a theory and grounds of knowing the exile through the mimic-man objectivist grid of structuralism. And this process of simply measuring up a literary project illustrates the limits of Jonassaint's effort: everything in the beginning, in the interviews, in the staged debates, seems engaged, political, and investigative. But all that changes when we learn that those analytical and often dramatic skills were used, finally, to create a topology of exile without the requisite political balancing. With Jonassaint's literature we are not engaged in an activist reading of the work of Haitian exiles but a statistical-critical construction which seeks, in the end (in his après-propos), to manufacture an interpretation in perfect alignment with bourgeois critical traditions of the occident.

JULIAN SAMUEL

GROWN-UP CHILDREN

SARAH ELLIS, *The Baby Project*. Douglas & McIntyre/Groundwood, $6.95.

BILL FREEMAN, *Danger on the Tracks*. James Lorimer, $12.95.

WELWYN WILTON KATZ, *Sun God, Moon Witch*. Douglas & McIntyre/Groundwood, $7.95.

How does one review recent children's books for a journal devoted to serious adult literature? I know of only one way: to suspend any distinction between the way one reads "children's literature" and "literature." Bill Freeman's story of two children who become involved in a conflict between a stagecoach company and the Great Western Railway Company thus requires little discussion, not because it is written for classroom use but rather because Freeman writes notably better about trains and horses than he does about characters, and draws repeatedly on clichés for narrative and dialogue: twice there is a "smoking gun," many times "sweat on the brow," "watched like a hawk," and "brute strength" — the latter always used to describe the railway labourers (suggesting that they are brutes?).

Reading the first few pages of *The Baby Project* just after finishing *Danger on the Tracks*, I was struck by Sarah Ellis's attention to language, her wit, and her imaginative portrayal of characters in what may seem a story with a mundane subject: the unexpected pregnancy of the mother in an already established family with three more or less grown-up children. (The title refers to a school project undertaken by the protagonist and a friend when they learn of the pregnancy.) Writing from the viewpoint of

the youngest of the Robertson family, eleven-year-old Jessica, allows Ellis to avoid idealizing the "advanced" values of this family, in which the mother is an engineer and the father primarily a househusband. And Jessica feels that her mother has a tendency to speak "in capital letters," and to depend upon articles such as "Fostering self-confidence in your children" instead of relying on her own experience.

It is in connection with her noticing this article lying open in the bathroom that Jennifer's thoughts take a form which foreshadows the novel's crisis:

> [Her mother] was an engineer and knew all about math and computers. She knew all about everything.
>
> Suddenly Jessica felt tired. She didn't want to be a kid anymore. She wanted to be a grown-up right away. Grown-ups just got to be what they were — jokey or serious or obnoxious or weird. But kids had to be what someone expected. It was like being a piece of play-dough.

Although Ellis does not make the point directly, one of the things Jennifer learns through the crib-death of the new baby, Lucie, is that adults neither "know everything," nor do they, in contrast to children, have complete control over their own lives. Her mother becomes depressed and disoriented, while Jessica and her brother Simon develop a new closeness and strength in their shared sadness.

Simon's and Jessica's cycling in the rain until 5:32 A.M. feels like the genuine reaction of children trying to deal with what seems to them an impossible situation. Although the book's conclusion brings some hope in the mother's amusement at her children's night adventure, we get no sense that everything is back to normal. The instances of inventive humour — not least in the character of Charlene, who lives downstairs, composes hilarious country-and-western lyrics, and has her head shaved because she wants to see what it will look like — and unsentimental poignancy in this novel are more numerous than I have space to discuss. I have no reservation about saying that whether intended for children or not, it is literature of great originality.

Resembling some of the fantasies of Alan Garner (in mirroring actual human relationships in legendary events which recur in the present) and of Susan Cooper (in presenting a universe in which the forces of good and evil are balanced evenly, and embodied in supernatural figures or in humans with special powers), Welwyn Katz's *Sun God, Moon Witch* does not match those authors' novels in quality of narrative or structure. I do not find the Manichean approach to fantasy very rewarding (even when done by such a talented writer as Cooper), but the greatest problem with Katz's book is that with all its trappings of myth and legend it lacks mystery. The uncanny — and implicitly sexual — power of the villain, Mr. Belman, is spelled out by chapter 3, so that the reader can easily deduce in succeeding chapters that he is the evil one (the "Sun god") of the two opposing forces.

By chapter 5, the "Moon witch" makes her appearance to Thorny, the child protagonist, telling her that she is destined by her name (Hawthorn) to save the world from chaos by saving the stone circle that Mr. Belman in his guise as a developer has been given permission to destroy. Although there is some interesting material about theories as to the original purpose of stone circles in Europe, the story itself is not, as the blurb has it, a "riveting tale of good and evil," but rather one of arbitrarily opposed forces that have little relation to the earthly experiences of the human characters, even though the author creates such connections — Mr. Belman's resemblance to Thorny's father is made clear, but too early and too mechanically. The problem

is partly one of structure and emphasis: what could be effective as truly mysterious forces becomes banal when presented so baldly, and sometimes in language that is supposed to be dignified but is actually flat and awkward — as when the Moon witch tells Thorny, "Thou art hawthorn in more than name. Like it, thou are strongest when thou strugglest."

I don't think it is the result of any genre bias on my part to say that of these three novels, the domestic and "realistic" one turns out to be more imaginative, more gripping, and more skilfully written than either the historical or fantastic.

MICHAEL STEIG

LOCATIONS & DISLOCATIONS

EDNA ALFORD, *The Garden of Eloise Loon.* Oolichan, $9.95.

JANETTE TURNER HOSPITAL, *Dislocations.* McClelland and Stewart, $12.95.

BOTH OF THESE BOOKS deal with dislocation. Janette Turner Hospital locates her stories in a variety of settings, including her native Australia, India, New York City, and central Canada. Some of her characters face dislocation because as new immigrants they confront the old; other characters confront the new and unfamiliar. Edna Alford's fiction is less widely known than Hospital's, but clearly deserves a wider audience. Set mostly in Saskatchewan or Alberta, her stories evoke a strong sense of place as her characters try to deal with growing up, growing old, or going mad. Most of the impetus in both sets of stories comes from what one of Hospital's narrators calls "disequilibrium" or what another refers to as a "lack of adaptability."

Hospital sets her opening story, "Happy Diwali," at a Hindu festival in eastern Ontario, which has attracted all the local emigrants from India — Gujartis, Tamils, and Sikhs — including the daughter of an Indian Parsee and a Goan Catholic who has a liaison with an emigrée Muslim prince (an Indian remittance man to whom nearly all still defer). She finally decides that "Only exile and isolation unite us." In a similar way, most of her characters are both exiled and isolated, even in their native land. Dislocation usually occurs as smug and successful people encounter unfamiliar circumstances. A formerly beautiful young woman has to deal with severe burn scars; a comfortable young mother has to deal with the sudden death of her best friend, a self-absorbed mathematician overhears others pitying him, or a successful businessman confronts the emptiness of his own success and that of his family traditions.

Different characters deal with their dislocations differently: some try escape or evasion; some discover that their habitual evasions no longer serve; and some are granted a broader, even spiritual, acceptance. The mathematician takes solace in the elegance of abstract form in art, and a printmaker evades her loneliness by trying to capture in her art the dying stages of a Christmas plant. A grief-counsellor finds that she cannot maintain intimate relationships while she assures the dying that death is not so hard, and a repressed teacher finds that it is she who must learn from one of her working-class students.

A more positive reaction occurs for the young mother whose best friend has been killed by a drunk driver. Her anger turns to a muted but optimistic acceptance by a consoling dream. Or a young Indian engineer is able to put aside his dream of Western technological success as he decides to keep his word to a dying young American friend who has embraced Indian spirituality. And a disillusioned businessman learns that he cannot escape

his human responsibilities by escaping into languageless, signless nature.

The locations (as well as the dislocations) that occur in Alford's stories are largely internal, though they find an outward, mythic form in Trestle, Saskatchewan, a town to which the CNR no longer runs. Even the rails have been torn up, as the retired railroad worker of the final story, "Lineman," admits, but that does not keep him from consulting his retirement watch to see that the train will be on time. He muses: "I seen it on TV. I seen it on the news. There's no place that's not screwed up somehow as far as I can see. The whole thing's crazy as a bag of hammers."

Madness is not far from the centre of most of Alford's stories. In her title story, "The Garden of Eloise Loon," an ex-prostitute, abandoned on a desperately poor reserve without food by her battering common-law husband, is driven to the brink of madness by near-starvation and the pains of childbirth; an orderly initiates a young woman into sex in a mental hospital where she has found summer work; a social worker fantasizes that she is being followed by one of her patients and spends the whole day on the Calgary buses trying to escape; a doctor slips into madness and suicide because it is so absurd to try to heal patients in a world bent on its own destruction.

In one of the most powerful stories, a professor — perhaps disoriented by the first effects of radiation poisoning after the madness of a nuclear exchange — experiences a wonderfully surrealistic series of images and events as she strives to get back to her family home in Trestle, knowing that it will provide no refuge. The prospect of this final act of human insanity breaks through even the conventions of fiction as one character refuses the assigned role and addresses the reader directly.

Alford avoids romanticizing the small-town values of Trestle, but some of her characters try. Trestle does not represent a lost paradise, and its native people seem far from noble, like the deserting Indian husband on the reserve near Trestle who leaves his white common-law wife pregnant and without food or money. And the nature around her and around that of her neighbour Eloise Loon is being devoured for the second summer in a row by a plague of tent-caterpillars. Even so, Eloise Loon is somehow able to laugh and coax a few scrawny chickens into survival. Or a widow returns to the family farm in Trestle with a metal detector to find a lost silver brooch that had belonged to her Norwegian mother. All that she can find, though, are iron axe-heads, files, or machine parts that her husband had made when there was still work for a blacksmith in Trestle.

Lest all this sound like only another ordeal of prairie pessimism, though, a concern for the failed or the misguided sifts through Alford's prose, sometimes revealing itself in broad humour. In one story, a man at a funeral tries to return his brother-in-law's severed fingers to the casket without upsetting the widow. In another, a family ne'er-do-well recounts a story that is funny despite its macabre consequences, a story which leaves his niece puzzled about how truth relates to art. Hospital's humour is somewhat more brittle, depending more on irony, though the two stories set in India reveal a warmer sense of humour and compassion. One of her best stories, "Moise," achieves its power and its humour from the language and point of view of a black woman, a widow who has for years scrubbed the floors of faculty apartments near Columbia University. But it is the surviving faculty widows who are dislocated as black culture and its underclass values begin to dominate a location that has been one of privilege and gentility. A frightened widow of an English

professor wants Moise to get her a pistol for protection — or for suicide. The humour comes largely from the contrasting languages of the black underclass who deal with immediate realities and the fussy, allusive idiom of the English professor's widow. It is almost as if Hospital is unsure of the efficacy of her own allusion-rich prose. Still, as Moise asks ruefully at the end, "And guess who going to have to clean up?"

The prominence of widows in both books reveals how often women are left to clean up the mess. The final story of Hospital's book has the widow of a "self-absorbed pedant" leaving Montreal on a freighter to go around the world, against the advice of her daughters. Alford is more openly political and feminist. The widow who returns with the metal detector to Trestle wears a T-shirt emblazoned with "Foxy Grandma," while her niece wears one whose message reads, "The Place for a Woman is in the House of Commons." And when the actor refuses her character in the story of the nuclear war, she observes: "I suspect that it will emerge that most women have had it up to here with the quiet fatalistic weeping over the systematic mutilation of human beings, their literal handiwork thus far."

PETER A. TAYLOR

POUR LA JEUNESSE

RAYMOND PLANTE, *Le Dernier des raisins*. Québec/Amérique, n.p.

BERNADETTE RENAUD, *Bach et Bottine*. Québec/Amérique, n.p.

GABRIELLE ROY, *L'Espagnole et la Pékinoise*. Boréal Jeunesse, n.p.

LA LITTERATURE QUEBECOISE pour la jeunesse, malgré son envergure et ses succès, est considérée par certains critiques au parler ex cathedra comme de la sous-littérature simpliste et enfantine (au sens péjoratif du mot). Pourtant ceux qui croient que les romans pour la jeunesse ne sont pas de "vrais livres" oublient qu'une telle forme d'écriture n'est pas facile. On n'écrit pas un roman pour la jeunesse sur le coin de la table tandis que la soupe mijote. Comme dans toute autre forme d'écriture, il y a les inévitables tâtonnements, ratures et recollages, mail il y a en plus la recherche d'un code stylistique précis afin que l'écriture soit de qualité tout en ayant l'air d'un jeu d'enfant. Ce travail porte fruit car depuis quelques années la littérature québécoise pour la jeunesse fait des bonds prodigieux et prend de l'ampleur. La qualité de la production s'est grandement améliorée et la quantité de contes et de romans a considérablement augmenté. Par ailleurs, on reconnaît de plus en plus que la littérature québécoise pour la jeunesse est un genre littéraire particulier, "respectable" (avec prix littéraires, revues spécialisées, cours universitaires, thèses) et qu'il nécessite des habilités particulières comparables aux autres formes d'écriture. La littérature pour la jeunesse crée un univers qui a prise sur l'imagination et elle existera tant qu'il y aura des enfants (et des adultes) qui veulent se faire conter une histoire. Trois courts récits parus récemment ont capté notre intérêt car ils donnent un échantillon du talent des auteurs et de la polyvalence du genre.

Barrès a écrit dans un de ses meilleurs romans: "Il est des lieux ou souffle l'esprit." Bien que nous ayons des doutes au sujet de l'esprit qui souffle sur les cégeps et les polyvalentes, ces lieux ont néanmoins inspiré maints auteurs tels Jean-Eudes Rioux, *Où est passé Monsieur Murphy?* (1983), et François Gravel, *La Note de passage* (1985). A son tour, Raymond Plante situe son roman *Le Dernier des raisins* dans le petit monde d'une polyvalente québécoise. En revanche, l'auteur ne s'intéresse guère au sort des professeurs surchargés de travail

ni aux "voyages" qu'entraîne la consommation de champignons hallucinogènes par des professeurs et leurs élèves (comme c'est le cas dans les romans susmentionnés), mais aux amours quichottiques d'un étudiant de Secondaire V. Dans son onzième roman, Raymond Plante pose la question suivante: comment un "intellectuel-à-lunettes," un "raisin," peut-il séduire une jeune fille athlétique et aguichante, la "blonde" d'un irrésistible don Juan et champion d'à peu près tout ce qui existe dans la polyvalente?

En ce premier jour d'école, François Gougeon juché sur une moto qui file à toute allure avale une mouche et devient amoureux d'Anik Vincent. Cause à effet ou coq-à-l'âne? Quoi qu'il en soit, depuis ce jour, François a le coeur en ascenseur.

> Tout d'un coup, j'avais le coeur dans les genoux . . . comme s'il avait pris l'ascenseur pour me laisser sans voix, le regard glauque, l'esprit comme des mains qui s'acharnent à saisir un savon de bande dessinée.

Pourtant, François connaît Anik depuis toujours, mais elle a tellement changé, tellement grandi au cours de l'été. Et lui, c'est l'amour qui le change, c'est l'amour qui le grandit et lui fait imaginer tous les moyens pour séduire cette fille qui ne le regarde pas. Et c'est l'humour, "l'humour dans la honte," qui l'empêche de se décourager.

François réussira pourtant, à force de patience et de bons sentiments. Il conquerra Anik, bien sûr, mais ce faisant, il démontrera que les qualités d'esprit et de coeur valent mieux que la compétence sportive et la voiture de son rival. En cet âge de Rambo, *Le Dernier des raisins* est une oeuvre rafraîchissante. Un roman tout simple, rempli d'humour et d'optimisme, qui démontre que même le dernier des raisins peut devenir un héros.

Qui ne connaît pas *Bach et Bottine*, ce film d'André Melançon qui a connu tant de succès? Bernadette Renaud, la scénariste du film, est avant tout une romancière; elle a tiré de son scénario un roman passionnant, la quintessence de ce film merveilleux. Jean-Claude est un vieux garçon passionné de musique classique. Quelques jours avant Noël, on sonne à sa porte. C'est une vague petite cousine, Fanny, qui demande l'hospitalité. L'orpheline n'a plus personne pour s'occuper d'elle. Elle apporte avec elle sa mouffette Bottine à laquelle s'ajoutera toute une ménagerie. Fanny et Jean-Claude doivent s'apprivoiser, "créer des liens" comme disait le petit prince de Saint-Exupéry, mais il est plus difficile d'apprivoiser un oncle mélomane qu'un renard. Jaloux de ses habitudes, Jean-Claude ne songe qu'à recaser l'enfant ailleurs. Mais avec Fanny, c'est aussi la tendresse qui fait irruption dans sa vie et l'espoir d'une famille recréée.

Ce roman plein d'humour et de bons sentiments, légèrement mélodramatique, à la fois amuse et interpelle le lecteur. Il rappelle des choses simples mais trop souvent oubliées: le besoin de créer des liens, la patience nécessaire pour apprivoiser l'autre et le connaître. En ce monde d'ulcéreux solitaires, Jean-Claude découvre que c'est le temps qu'il a "perdu" pour Fanny qui la rend si importante:

> Ça fait drole à Jean-Claude de penser que ce sera son tour de l'accueillir dans sa maison. De penser aussi que, pour compenser la famille qu'il n'a jamais eue, il suffisait d'en rassembler une, aujourd'hui [. . .] au fond de son coeur, il est bien content que Fanny ait bousculé sa vie.

L'Espagnole et la Pékinoise de même que *Ma vache Bossie* (1976) et *Courte-Queue* (1979) sont de brefs récrits animaliers publiés séparément et illustrés afin de plaire à de jeunes lecteurs. Sous la plume de l'auteur, Gabrielle Roy, nous retrouvons la qualité franciscaine de l'amour des animaux, de la nature et de la vie; nous retrouvons cette tonalité par-

ticulière déjà entrevue dans *Cet été qui chantait* (1972).

L'Espagnole et la Pékinoise s'entendent comme . . . chien et chat. Coups de griffes, morsures, jamais deux animaux vivant dans la même maison ne se sont tant détestés, jusqu'au jour où trois chatons naissants viennent bouleverser l'ordre des choses. Au début, les sentiments de la Pékinoise sont bien mélangés mais dans l'univers familier de Gabrielle Roy, il est rare que l'amour ne réponde pas à l'amour. Dès lors, un nouveau pacte lie l'Espagnole et la Pékinoise, un pacte d'amour ou mère et seconde mère élèvent les "enfants."

Nous redécouvrons dans ce récit cette grande tendresse de l'auteur devant les plus simples et les plus humbles. Nous voyons s'affirmer son besoin de composer un univers serein, un monde accordé où la haine tend a disparaître pour faire place à l'échange et à la réconciliation, et ce, grâce à l'amour maternel et à l'innocence désarmante de l'enfant:

> Ce sont les enfants qui ont fait la paix. Un jour peut-être tous les enfants du monde se donneront la main. Et il n'y aura plus jamais de chicane.

Si nous cherchions à désigner *L'Espagnole et la Pékinoise* par un mot, ce serait par un mot empreint de sérénité, celui de réconciliation. Réconciliation avec l'enfance, avec la mère, avec la famille et avec soi-même; instauration d'un univers édénique où l'homme dialogue avec les animaux et retrouve le temps perdu de l'innocence. Dans ce dernier conte, Gabrielle Roy déploie une riche sensibilité et montre une foi inébranlable en l'homme et en son avenir.

Le Dernier des raisins, Bach et Bottine, L'Espagnole et la Pékinoise, trois courts récits bien écrits. De beaux livres de qualité. Des textes où on refuse de niveler par le bas pour parler aux enfants. Des textes amusants et intelligents. Ce sont aussi trois récrits rassurants en ce sens que s'il y avait une morale, elle se résumerait à ceci: tous peuvent réussir à aimer, à être aimé et à créer des liens.

Ces récits donnent à l'enfant le moyen de projeter sur le plan de l'imaginaire ses besoins les plus constants, les plus tenaces, mais aussi les plus menacés, ceux de l'amour, de la sécurité et du bien vivre. Son angoisse, incarnée dans des personnages sympathiques, transmuée en action dont l'issue est favorable, n'est plus si intimement la sienne; elle se dilue et se tempère dans les événements représentés. L'adulte, à son tour, découvrira l'humour, la fraîcheur, la simplicité du langage, la force sonore des textes, en un mot: la qualité de ces récits qui, à première vue, ne l'intéressaient peut-être pas. Et dès lors il sera subjugué par la littérature québécoise pour la jeunesse.

ROBERT VIAU

** FRANK R. SCOTT, *A New Endeavour: Selected Political Essays, Letters, and Addresses*, ed. Michiel Horn. Univ. of Toronto Press, $12.95. For our studies of a writer as historically and intrinsically important as F. R. Scott, it is perhaps necessary that we should have a good range of his nonpoetic as well as poetic works available. But it is as well to remember that good poetry does not always mean good prose, and F. R. Scott's political fragments, contained in *A New Endeavour*, really belong in the same areas of achievement as the more ephemerally polemical of his poems. They are the occasional writings of a long political avocation, and what they tell us most clearly is that Scott was a good soldier for socialism. But the kind of socialism he supported was of a rather unimaginative centralist variety, Fabian in inspiration, to which he added no fresh theoretical insights, since his imaginative life found expression only in his poetry. Northrop Frye has remarked how near Scott's radicalism was to Toryism, and enough political rigidities emerge in the brief essays and letters included here to remind one of that unexpected impulse of authoritarianism that led the civil libertarian Scott into his inconsistent support of Trudeau's invocation of the War Measures Act in 1970. G.W.

opinions and notes

WEAVERS' HALLS

THERE HAVE ALWAYS been strong narrative connections between the human world and the other world. Greek mythology is full of stories attesting to the sexual relations between their gods and human beings. In many pagan cultures the divine potency of the other world has been drawn into ours through rulers whose right living and symbolic coupling ensured the fertility of the land and the society. In some cultures, the gods have been thought to need occasional human help in solving their problems. Both Celtic Ireland and Wales offer tales of a hero who strikes a bargain to fight for supernatural beings in their world. In modern times, with the incorporation of mythic and heroic patterns and characters into high fantasy fiction, the insights of modern psychology allow for a more reciprocal relation between the two worlds. The other world still needs mortal aid, but the characters who cross into it often find there the answers to their own psychological problems. Such characters are usually at an impasse in our world: adolescents who feel they do not belong (as in O. R. Melling's *The Singing Stone*) or young adults who have guilt or an unused talent (as in the first two novels in Guy Gavriel Kay's trilogy, of which *The Darkest Road* is the concluding volume). Such fantasy fiction can offer an appealing pattern of trials and tests met with success in the other world, followed by change and growth on returning to ours.

A parallel therapeutic pattern in fairy tales has in recent years been valued by followers of both Freud and Jung. Psychoanalysis has also studied myths and legends. Jungian investigators have found there not just models of emotional pathology but of spiritual transformation. Since many serious fantasy writers are aiming to create a world more meaningful than our everyday secular society, it is not surprising that some of these writers are influenced by Jung's emphasis on the importance of an archetypal realm, a psychic model that emphasizes unconscious mythic figures functioning within each individual.

Since medieval times, authors and the reading public have shown a continuing interest in the Arthurian cycle and its Celtic roots: a world of druids and gods, of high kings and magicians, of knights and damsels, of fairies and magic objects. With the modern evolution of romance into fantasy, the novel has become the favourite vehicle for either retelling the tales, or embellishing them as heroic romance, or simply using their ambiance to develop new fantasies. In a survey covering the last hundred years, *The Return from Avalon: A Study of the Arthurian Legend in Modern Fiction* (1985), Raymond Thompson notes that recently there has been a noticeable growth in Arthurian fantasy fiction — at least three books a year have appeared for the last ten years. In a related area not covered by his study, the present decade has seen the addition of another two titles a year of fantasy or science fiction dealing with Ireland in Celtic times. Kay's three volumes are in addition to Thompson's count, while two Celtic books by Melling are included in mine. In my discussion of *The Darkest Road* (1986) and *The Singing Stone* (1986) I shall try to provide some indication not only of the richness that myth-based tales make available to modern writers, but also of some of the broader narrative psychological and philosophical issues that fantasies often raise.

Fantasy novelists whose literary

strength is imagination as invention do best in creating another world that can absorb their whole attention and the reader's. But in modern children's literature there is a popular convention, especially in novels with teen-age protagonists, of beginning and ending the story in our world. This option has the structural advantage of framing the otherworld adventure which is its main focus, and the thematic requirement that that adventure be made relevant to a problem the protagonist has in our world. When it works, this pattern can produce satisfying fiction, as in the Canadian *Marrow of the World*, the Australian *Playing Beattie Bow*, or the American *Saturday, the Twelfth of October*. But this option places a strain on the fantasy author whose interest or strength does not lie in realistic portrayal of our world.

The Singing Stone is Melling's second children's fantasy. Like the first, *The Druid's Tune*, it transports its protagonist into the far past of Ireland, this time to 2500 B.C., the period when the Celts probably invaded that island. Melling wisely moves her heroine and her reader back there quickly, after only two short introductory chapters. The first begins in an unidentified country which is only later revealed as the United States. (Since the author is Canadian, I presume this location and even its deemphasis are gestures to the ethnocentric U.S. market.) The author is obviously not interested in the mundanities of our world (questions such as how an eighteen-year-old orphan and school dropout can teach herself Gaelic or afford to fly to Ireland for a month's holiday). Safely landed, Kay, the heroine, benefits from the author's descriptive ability and familiarity with Ireland, as she moves from Dublin to Bray, a nearby summer resort. Her climbing in the Wicklow hills is also effectively rendered, as is her passing through a dolmen arch into the Celtic past. There she meets her companion-to-be, the lost amnesiac, Aherne. The two young women seek out Fintan (of Celtic myth, labelled a "wise old man"), and he sets them on their quest to bring together "the four ancient treasures of the Tuatha De Danaan" (i.e., of the people of the Goddess Danu).

First the two travel to New Grange, where Kay begins to discover her power; thence they are taken by a stag man to the north of Ireland (in one night; distances are quickly travelled throughout the novel, but as the two maps make clear, Ireland is not a large island). On an island off the coast they recover the first treasure, the spear. They are then captured at sea by the Celtic invaders (who, in *The Book of Invasions* — the author's source — are shown replacing the Tuatha De Danaan). Taken by ship to the Aran Islands off the west coast of Ireland, both heroines fall in love, Aherne with Amergin, the Celtic leader, and Kay with his ally, Cahal, leader of the Firbolg (earlier subjected by the Tuatha). With Cahal's aid, Kay recovers the second treasure, the bowl. The third, the sword, is gained by Aherne during the games of Tailtiu when she wins the race whose prize is not only the sword but the queenship. Just before the race, Aherne had recovered her memory, realizing she is Eriu, who would have become the rightful queen without any contest had not the druids intervened: They had foreseen that she would betray the country and her people to the Celts. Since she has meanwhile pledged herself to Amergin, leader of the invaders, this prediction will obviously come true.

The author handles well this perennial fantasy problem of the relation between the destiny of events and the free will of the individual. The outlines of a mythic story necessarily determine the outcome of a fantasy based on it. In fact, many fantasies create the problem even when

they are not based on a known source, by introducing into the other world a myth, prophecy, or oracle which lays down in advance what the reader can recognize as the outcome of the main plot. Although we might expect that this device would spoil the enjoyment of the plot-oriented reader, there are two reasons why it does not. First, the oracle is always ambiguous, the myth vague on specifics. Second, any reader who begins a fantasy already knows that a quest hero will be successful. That assurance is one of the main reasons readers turn to such "escape" reading. At a more philosophic level, however, we can appreciate an implication of this convention which justifies the genre as more than escapist.

Destiny is a favourite word or concept in the quest fantasy. In Melling's tale the word appears frequently in the second half, along with the notion of meaningful coincidence. Carl Jung's concept of synchronicity is in fact ubiquitous in fantasies. It suggests a vital connection between outer coincidence and inner need, a connection that is the central premise of fantasy, since the genre insists on the power of mind over matter, the ability of thought (wishes, dreams, will power) to control events. The genre also rests on the contrary premise, the inevitable fulfilment of larger patterns, not however as coercive of individual will, but in harmony with individual psychic development.

Thus Aherne is caught between her love for Amergin the invader and for the people whom she must as queen protect — a conflict that is resolved by her success in the quest laid on her and Kay at the beginning of their adventure. When she brings together the four treasures of the Tuatha, she will provide the fulfilment both of her race's high destiny and of the wish of her own heart to be happily married (to the man who will conquer her people). Near the end the visionary Fintan shows Eriu and Kay the four mythic cities which produced the treasure and tells them, "This *is* reality ... woven on the fabric of space and time. Here the past, present and future are one." The treasures of Celtic myth which became quest objects in Arthurian legend (the Grail, the sword of kingship) are, in this modern fantasy, the means for the people of the Goddess Danu to enter the archetypal realm of their ancestors. After Eriu (through the power of the fourth treasure, the singing stone) opens up this destiny to her subjects, she is tempted to follow them into the realm but is recalled at the brink to be wedded to Amergin and become queen of Celtic Ireland.

This archetypal solution is true in its fashion to Celtic myth, which reports that the Tuatha De Danaan did forsake the physical realm for the supernatural. Such a solution may seem more appropriate to an early medieval document than to a modern text (where it seems a *deus ex machina* or, more accurately, shows gods going into the machine). But Melling handles it well. Her handling of the closure of her novel is adequate though less impressive (as the return to our world is likely to be in fantasy). Kay's love problem is taken care of in a neat though unoriginal manner (which readers of *Playing Beattie Bow* will recognize). The explanation of Kay's origin seemed forced to me.

In general, even discerning readers demand less plausibility and artistry in a novel for children than in one for adults. And, of course, a fantasy novel for either audience invites even more suspension of disbelief. By this relative standard, *The Singing Stone* stands up well (and earns a higher rating than Melling's earlier book). Judged by the slightly more rigorous standards of fantasy for adults, Guy Kay's novel, *The Darkest Road*, merits even more praise.

Despite the author's providing a four-page list of characters and a nine-page résumé of the previous two novels in the trilogy, readers will not want to start *The Darkest Road* without having read *The Summer Tree* and *The Wandering Fire*. Not only will a latecomer find difficulty mastering the intricate plot and large cast of characters, but the series is too good not to be savoured in its entirety. In fact, it is excellent (of its kind, which is the Tolkien type of high or heroic fantasy), replete with mortals and mages, dwarfs and giants, gods and demi-gods, and a cataclysmic confrontation between the forces of light and dark. As narrative, *The Darkest Road* is an exciting tale, full of suspense and enigma, of deft plotting, and insightful characterization.

The main focus of the series is on five young Torontonians who are transported to the world of Fionavar where each plays a key part in the complex story, discovering not only a previously untapped inner potential but also resolving (as suggested earlier) problems that loomed large for each in our world. The psychological orientation of the narrative is manifested in its use of point of view. Kay shifts among a dozen and a half focal characters and their often tense, distraught, or confused responses. (One of his favourite devices is a character's slowly dawning realization of an implication that may be temporarily withheld from the reader.) While the characters are not as intensely self-condemning as Stephen Donaldson's are, Kay has obviously learned from The Chronicles of Thomas Covenant.

The style varies much less than the point of view. Kay manages a few nice contrasts between twentieth-century Canadian and vatic utterance, but opts for a medium-high style most of the time. It becomes pronouncedly romancese in two rare circumstances, when Kay shifts from the point of view of an individual character to the omniscient ("and it came to pass"), and with the scenes involving Guinivere's responses to Lancelot ("Wilt thou who hast been my champion so many times before . . ."). Fortunately such pseudo-biblical cadences and noble sentimentality are not common, though the non-fantasy reader should be warned that a heightened emotional tone is standard in heroic fantasy.

As the reference to Guinivere and Lancelot indicates, Kay is drawing on Arthurian material in the construction of his other world. But it is less the world of Malory's Christian romance than the mythic pagan world of *The Mabinogion*. Several of the character names derive from this Celtic-Welsh manuscript — Pwyll, Teyrnon, Taliesin — but the characters to whom the names are assigned deviate in nature from their originals. Pwyll, for instance, is the name given to Paul (one of the Toronto five) after he has suffered death and rebirth on the Summer Tree and been rewarded by insights from the two ravens Thought and Memory. His experience, in other words, approximates that of Odin on the World Tree of Norse myth rather than to any Celtic parallel.

The problem raised earlier of destiny and individual choice is thoroughly canvassed in *The Darkest Road*. The force of destiny is embodied in a key structuring concept for the other world and our own — "the Weaver at the Loom" who functions as the presumed creator of the gods as well as the mortals in the story. The image of threads in the tapestry is frequently used as a metaphor for a life or an event. Becoming aware of this grand design, the characters from our world begin to question how individual choice can be meaningful. The answer takes several interesting forms.

Before discovering her other-world archetypal identity as Guinivere, Jennifer is raped by Rakoth the Unraveller (the

central antagonist, whose evil purpose is to destroy the fabric of the world); after being rescued, she determines to have his child because Rakoth doesn't want it to live. The child, Darien, matures quickly and is torn between his evil patrimony and his good matrimony. At a point where her companion Kim exhorts Jennifer to try to influence him toward good, the mother coolly tells her son he is on his own. Darien, an emotionally immature demigod, goes off determined to join his father. Upbraided by Kim, Jennifer defends her action: "I meant him to be random, free to choose. . . . If we bind him, or try, he is lost to us!" Her decision turns out to be correct. Darien is left free to fulfil a very high destiny indeed. (Or, to move away from the fantasy language of paradox, Darien becomes aware of his father's desire for destruction and total control, and uses the little free will left him to ensure the conditions which both by logic and through a magic spell bring about the death of Rakoth.)

The principle Jennifer has enunciated is seen to be operating in the Wild Hunt, a random thread introduced by the Weaver into his own design. Even Kim, who had argued against Jennifer, comes to accept and act on the principle. Faced with a situation in which she is intended to use her ring of power to coerce an elemental force to help in the war against evil, Kim chooses not to, instead diverting the power to another (good) purpose. As a result, she loses the power of the ring but helps in the final victory of the light over the dark. Similarly, Arthur knows he is fated to die in the last battle (since he always has in other incarnations). But in the world of Fionavar, Prince Diarmuid steps into his place in an unfair battle against an unnaturally augmented mortal and thus changes the design by his wild (random) action.

By no means are all significant actions random. Just as Kim could have bound through magic a force much stronger than herself, so Pwyll uses the power he has gained to bind the sea god Liranan (also known in Celtic myth as Mananaan Mac Lir). Near the end of the book, he recalls the god to send a tide inland with a ship, in order that Arthur may be borne alive to the promised land. Pwyll invokes Liranan in the name of Mornir, the thunder god with whom he had achieved atonement on the Summer Tree, and in the name of Dana whose moon has risen out of phase. "The waters had reached them now. The world had changed, all the laws of the world. Under a full moon that should never have been riding in the sky, the stony plain . . . lay undersea as far inland as the place where they stood, east of the battlefield. And the silvered waters of Liranan had covered the dead." This estrangement of the by-now-familiar archetypal world is followed by an overt allusion to the source of all archetypes. Arthur, Guinivere, and even Lancelot are to find rest through sailing "by the light of the Loom to the Weaver's Halls."

By the end of the novel, it is evident that a variety of resolutions will be offered the five visitors from our world. Jennifer's chosen destiny as Guinivere we have just seen. Another of the five had died earlier to free the land from the grip of Rakoth's prolonged dark winter. Since one character elects to remain in Fionavar, only two finally return to our world. Clearly the author has made good use of the opportunities he gave himself in opting for five protagonists.

In a CBC radio interview in March 1987, Kay told Peter Gzowski that he waited a year and a half after imagining his other world before he began to create the plot of his series. It thus developed out of a thorough acquaintance with the setting and characters; even after the writing began, Kay claimed he kept open

possibilities for the plot and characters to develop, finding it exciting when his subconscious slipped something in. So the randomness which is important thematically turns out also to have been a key to the conception of the narrative. In its variety and coherence, its surprises and inevitabilities, *The Darkest Road* is an impressive fantasy novel.

ELLIOTT GOSE

"A RUM START"

The Redoubled Baptisms of Francis Chegwidden Cornish

> . . . εν βαπτισμα
> — Eph. 4:5
>
> ego tibi concedo sceleratos esse haereticos: sed haeretici baptisma Christi dederunt . . .
> — Augustine, "In Ioannis Evangelium," Tract. 5, 16.[1]

THROUGHOUT *What's Bred in the Bone*, Robertson Davies alludes to the rite of baptism. The first child of Mary-Jacobine, having been baptized abroad as Francis Chegwidden, presumably by an Anglican chaplain, became ill, and "was baptized for the second time, as a Catholic," by Father Devlin at Blairlogie, Ontario.[2] A few days later, a little coffin was buried at night in the Catholic cemetery, and "Father Devlin read the burial service" (58). Mary-Jacobine was already pregnant again, and her second child, on the very day of birth, was "christened, in the Anglican Church, Francis Chegwidden Cornish" (58). When the second Francis, at the age of thirteen, became very ill with whooping cough, "Aunt got into a panic and sent for Father Devlin, who murmured and sprinkled some drops of water on him. Francis was in delirium, and did not understand what had happened, but Aunt was greatly comforted" (93). Despite the original lack of consciousness, in later years Francis is well aware of his second baptism. In 1933 when Saraceni asks, "Are you a Catholic?" Francis replies, "Well — partly, I suppose" (239). In 1945 he tries to ask his parents about "the Looner," who had in fact lived for another two decades before "another funeral at night, though there was no priest this time" (194). When both parents make evasive answers, and his father pretends to "forget how he came to be buried" in the Catholic cemetery, Francis thinks: "You don't know anything about it. You don't know that I'm a Catholic by strict theological reckoning" (378).

The logic of the book supports Francis's idea of "strict theological reckoning": Aunt Mary-Ben, who declares that Francis is "a Catholic forever" (205), Father Devlin, and Francis himself all perceive the second baptism as effective. Mary-Ben requested, and Father Devlin performed, the two rebaptisms to prevent the disaster of either Francis's dying without valid baptism; indeed it almost seems that Mary-Ben expended considerable energy in having Father Devlin made a Monsignor (127) in order to reward him for saving the soul(s) of her nephews. Even Ruth Nibsmith, who wants the date of baptism "because it supplies a few shades to your central [astrological] chart," accepts the second baptism as "spiritual dandyism" (301).

The second baptism, however, by the standards of the world outside the book, is totally invalid:

> The Roman church . . . as early as the 3rd century . . . decreed that persons already baptized by heretics, but reverting to the church should not be baptized over again, but only have hands laid on them.[3]

Thomas Aquinas, basing his logic on

Ephesians 4:5, explains that, since baptism confers a permanent character, those who have been baptized by heretics, as long as the heretics baptized in the name of the Trinity, are not to be rebaptized.[4] This would have prevented a real-life Father Devlin from rebaptizing either child, except conditionally. Although Mary-Ben would certainly not be familiar with Thomas Aquinas, she must have been subjected to some form of religious instruction at her convent school; at least one text used in Quebec informed the children: ". . . il y a trois Sacremens, le Baptême, la Confirmation et l'Ordre, qu'on ne peut recevoir qu'une fois, parce qu'ils impriment dans l'ame [*sic*] un caractère ineffaçable."[5] A Redemptorist priest taught that ". . . Faith [is] often the fruit of a valid baptism . . . in the souls of many non-Catholics . . .";[6] many Anglicans in Canada, and in other countries, have been received into the Catholic church without rebaptism.[7] The decisive point is their request for further sacraments (reconciliation, confirmation, eucharist) — a request which Francis, apparently, never makes. Davies plays the theological ignorance of his characters against that of his readers, and renders the whole book a vast learned joke.

The rebaptisms, however, are only part of a wider joke in the book. On first arriving in Blairlogie, Major Cornish asks about "the old party in the little cap," and on learning that her name is "Mary-Benedetta, but [he]'d better call her Mary-Ben," comments: "You're all Mary-Something, aren't you? Jolly rum!" (53). In fact, the "Family Catholic custom" extends to both families: Mary-Jacobine is the daughter of Marie-Louise Thibodeau, and she has another aunt called Mary-Basil McRory, as well as a younger sister called Mary-Teresa. In her immediate family she is known as Mary-Jim, and her sister as Mary-Tess, so there are three nicknames beginning with Mary, as well as five proper names. It is, however, rather laughable for Major Francis Chegwidden Cornish to sneer at a family with repeated first names: he insists on giving two successive children his own first and middle names without variation; there are ultimately five baptisms of "Francis Chegwidden," counting the two rebaptisms (the first of which, "after a blazing row," took place with his knowledge). Furthermore, the middle name "Chegwidden," which for a time designates three people, is the chief source of suffering for the youngest Francis when he enters school. When he murmurs "Cheggin," the correct pronunciation of Chegwidden, the kindergarten teacher understands "Chicken," and the other pupils happily yell "Chicken" at the unfortunate child (70-71). He suffers even more when the same misunderstanding follows him to Carlyle Rural School (77-79).

Aside from the jokes about the names, a new joke enters the story when Francis enters his own hell, Carlyle Rural, "one September morning when he was in the third grade" (77). Since he started kindergarten in 1914 (68), and went through the grades at the normal pace, it would then have been September 1917. We are told that Miss McGladdery "was angry with him because he was inattentive" after beatings by other children (78): thus he was in Miss McGladdery's class. We are also told that Miss McGladdery "ruled her three groups — for Carlyle Rural had only two rooms and she took the most advanced classes — . . . with the leather strap": thus she might teach grades three, four, and five, leaving kindergarten and grades one and two to the other teacher. This understanding, however, which seems quite clear at the first introduction of the redoubtable Miss McGladdery, is contradicted by the later information that when Francis sickens with whooping cough at the age of thir-

teen (which would be in the autumn of 1922), Miss McGladdery is still his teacher, and eager to send him "sheets of arithmetic problems" (92). Instead of the originally supposed three years, Francis is now entering the sixth year of "what seemed to him an eternity" (77). Miss McGladdery has set us an insoluble arithmetic problem: if her "three groups" include six grades, what can the other (unnamed) teacher possibly be doing? Miss McGladdery, "soldiering through her teaching career until . . . she [could] retire . . ." (78), is hardly likely to take more than a fair share of the load. Clearly, Davies is laughing not only at members of the teaching profession, and at human ideas of eternity, but also at readers who hope to see mere realistic fiction.

Games with numbers pervade the text, and are particularly effective in the account of Ruth Nibsmith's horoscope of Francis. Whereas the traditional astrological chart is based on knowing the exact date, hour, and place of birth, Ruth, boasting of her "great historical discovery that the real astrologers guarded with their lives" (300), wants to know in addition the time of her subject's conception, and also of his baptism. Francis tells her that he was born "September 12, apparently at seven o'clock in the morning, in 1909" (300), and baptized (the first time) "September 30, actually, at roughly four o'clock in the afternoon" (301). Both statements sound very precise, and certainly plausible, but the word "actually" is a warning flag: the record of the Lesser Zadkiel tells the reader that Francis "was born, and christened" on the same day (58). All calculations on the third chart are, therefore, inaccurate. Again, Francis does not know exactly when he was baptized the second time, or when he was conceived. Ruth estimates that "as [he] seem[s] to be a healthy chap" he must have been "a full-term baby"; she can "count backward" and "get the date fairly near" (301). There are two problems hidden here: Francis has "got a dicky heart" (172), and he was more than a full-term baby, having been conceived, according to the Daimon Maimas, a full nine months before his birth, "on December the tenth, 1908, at 11:37 p.m." (58). When Ruth declares that the night of his conception "seems to have been quite a jolly occasion, if your first chart isn't lying" (310), she is unduly optimistic about the first chart, as even an hour would make considerable difference, and her conjectured date is probably two weeks wrong. Thus her supposed improvements to the traditional system serve only to introduce inaccuracies; her successful observations must come rather from her "psychic gifts" (323) than from her "great historical discovery."

The joke, however, is not only on Ruth. She has given Francis a second date of conception,[8] and he has given himself a second date for his Anglican baptism; both of these new (hypothetical) dates are somewhat later than their originals. And then there was the Catholic baptism, considerably later. But with all the reduplication of dates and charts, Francis was born only once, and has only one name, Francis Chegwidden Cornish. Although Ruth considers the influence of dates (most of them are, as we have seen, incorrect), she never considers the influence of the name, and the book as a whole simultaneously reveals and conceals the meanings. The first hint comes in the account of the first baptism: he "was . . . christened, in the Anglican Church, Francis Chegwidden Cornish." In the Anglican Church, as in other Christian communities, however, people are christened by Christian names only; the family name is not part of the ceremony. "Cornish" is out of place in this sentence, and thereby emphasized. We

realize "that the Cornishes were an old county family of, understandably, Cornwall" (39). We note also "the cuckold's horns, painfully clear" in the astrological chart (311), and the cognate relation of *horn* and the Latin *cornu*. Francis follows his father's pattern of marrying a woman already pregnant by somebody else, but more innocent than his father (for Francis is a Virgo, and has the innocence, though not the virginity, of his sign), he does not learn the fact until much later, and does not understand the advice to "be very careful about all money arrangements" (265). Cornwall and cuckoldry are explicitly connected several times, most notably when Francis, at Tintagel, tells Ismay how, by "a magical spell . . . Uther Pendragon was able to come to [Ygraine] in her husband's guise, and it was here that he begot the marvellous child who grew to be [King] Arthur" (254). Francis means the story to enchant Ismay, and thinks that he has taken the part of Uther, but learns later that he was more like Gorlois — or King Arthur, who also followed a family pattern. . . . Saraceni transforms the family name to "Corniche" (291), the French word for *cornice* (for which *cornish* is an old alternative).

The architectural meaning of *cornice* connects with the family middle name. Major Cornish informs the Senator that "Chegwidden . . . meant, in the old Cornish tongue, the White House" (39). The name, proudly proclaimed in many baptisms, is a deception: the family mansion turns out to be "brownish-grey" (180). Furthermore, although the Major has a connection with the mansion, he is a younger brother, unlikely to inherit it, and therefore incapable of passing it on to his pretentiously named offspring. The Major did in fact build a Chegwidden Lodge in the new world (55), with his father-in-law's money, but he closed it in December 1914 (73) and never lived in it again; it ultimately became a funeral parlour (14), while the Major went on to a new translation of the name, as a Chap who Knew, at Whitehall. Francis, however, is as disappointed with Whitehall as with Chegwidden: he advances only from being an "unpaid . . . snoop and lackey" (312) to performing underpaid "drudgery" and "dangerous misery" (365).

Not only are the middle and family names a complex of jokes, but the so-frequently-given Christian name "Francis" becomes the biggest joke of all. When the Major and Mary-Jim move to Ottawa, in December 1914 (73), Francis remains with his grandparents and Aunt Mary-Ben at Blairlogie. Mary-Ben worries about his "neglected soul" (75), and is advised by the family doctor to introduce the patron saint. But Mary-Ben finds an unexpected problem:

> Because he was born on September 12, Francis's only possible patron was the grubby Guy of Anderlecht, a Belgian who had lost all his money in a bad speculation and turned to God in his bankruptcy. . . . But it was also the day devoted to the Holy Name of Mary. . . . (76)

Davies is deliberately unfair to St. Guy, who was charitable and prayerful "even in his youth."[9] The big joke, however, is that the word "patron" or "patron saint" is normally applied not to the saint whose festival is celebrated on the day of birth, but to the saint after whom one is named in baptism. Mary-Ben is depicted as an ignorant and meddling person, but neither she nor the doctor could miss knowing the meaning of "patron saint"; a school text, which both of them might have used, advised:

> Next to your good [i.e., guardian] angel, honour particularly your patron.
>
> The names of Saints are given us at baptism, that they may be our protectors and intercessors with God, and that by their prayers, and the examples of their virtues, we may acquit ourselves worthily of the

> obligation of a Christian life, whereof we make profession in baptism.[10]

Thus the patron of Francis would be Saint Francis, and the best-known saint of that name is Francis of Assisi. Davies, however, is careful never to mention the saint, who remains an unseen counterbalance to the story. The very name Francis was not a Christian name originally; it was given as a nickname to the lad at Assisi "from the readiness with which he acquired and spoke [the French language] . . . , though the name of John had been given him at his baptism."[11] The nickname, however, was sanctified by actions: Francis of Assisi, the son of wealthy parents, renounced his inheritance and embraced a life of voluntary poverty, preaching repentance and drawing thousands to join him for the love of Christ; after his death, many children were put under his patronage at baptism, and some of them in turn became saints.[12] Such patronage was, however, neither requested nor desired for the hero of the book. Mary-Ben rejected the patronage of the "grubby Guy of Anderlecht," possibly because Guy was the son of poor parents and a devotee of holy poverty; she was unlikely to choose Francis of Assisi. In later years, Francis Cornish found himself increasingly fond of money, valuing it above his human loves. He told Ismay (who had forged a cheque in his name): "I can be awfully serious about a hundred and fifty nicker" (246). After, as he supposed, seducing her, and faced with a hasty marriage, he realized that "the price of Ismay was — one million Canadian dollars, with accrued interest" (266), and "recognized that it was the money that really meant most . . . he wanted Ismay, but he didn't like her price" (267). Francis received the million dollars as inheritance from his grandfather (231); he was not only unwilling to renounce it for a life of holy poverty, but also reluctant to undertake the marriage promise, "with all my worldly goods I thee endow."[13] Even after being warned by Ruth Nibsmith of "the dark things in your chart . . . You're much too fond of money" (312), Francis proclaims to Ismay, "Money is one of the two or three primary loyalties," and refuses to part with any (374). His later meanness causes Aylwin Ross to commit suicide, and almost causes the Daimon Maimas to depart (426-27). Whereas Francis of Assisi preferred poverty to any earthly love, Francis Cornish preferred money.

Twice baptized as Francis, and with a third supposed baptismal date, the hero of the book achieves only the external meaning of his name: "a quick boy . . . he learned not only two kinds of French, but two kinds of English as well" (74). Although he imagines that he has "drifted into a world where religion, but not orthodoxy, is the fountain of everything that makes sense" (378), his ideas of "religion" are vague indeed.[14] St. Paul warns against covetousness as "idolatry" (Col. 3:5), but Francis, who is no Bible reader, ignores that warning as he ignores every other. He condemns all the sectarians of Blairlogie, "None of [whom] ever had a thought that wasn't a disgrace to anything it would be decent to call religion" (378), but has no clear substitute for those thoughts. Through Francis, and the absurdities of the baptisms, the numerologies, and the misconceptions, Davies mocks the religious morons described in the book, and also those among his readers.

NOTES

1 Translation of epigraphs: ". . . one baptism," Eph. 4:5; "I concede heretics to be impious; however, heretics gave the baptism of Christ (i.e. Christian baptism)."

2 Robertson Davies, *What's Bred in the Bone* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1985), p. 58. Further references appear parenthetically in the text.

[3] F[rederick] C[ornwallis] C[onybeare], "Baptism," *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 11th ed., vol. 3, p. 367.

[4] Part 3, question 66, article 9, "utrum baptismus possit iterari," *Summa Theologiae, Latin Text and English Translations, Introductions, Notes, Appendices and Glossaries*, ed. James J. Cunningham, 57 (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode; New York: McGraw-Hill, 1975), 38-43.

[5] Part 2, lesson 6, *Manuel du Chrétien: Où l'on trouve tout ce qui est nécessaire pour s'instruire de sa Religion et se sanctifier* (Toulouse, 1793; repr. Quebec: à la nouvelle imprimerie, 1813), p. 143. Translation: "... there are three Sacraments, Baptism, Confirmation, and Holy Orders, which one may receive only once, because they imprint in the soul an ineffaceable character."

[6] George Thomas Daly, *Catholic Problems in Western Canada* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1921), p. 130. (The book has an Imprimatur.)

[7] See, for example, Robert Hugh Benson, *Confessions of a Convert* (London: Longmans, Green, 1913), p. 134.

[8] Ironically enough, Thomas Aquinas bases his argument on the fact that: "... a person is begotten only once. Therefore baptism cannot be repeated...," *Summa Theologiae*, p. 41.

[9] Alban Butler, "St. Guy, C[onfessor]," *The Lives of the Fathers, Martyrs, and other Principal Saints: compiled from Original Monuments, and other Authentic Records...*, 2d ed. (Dublin: John Morris, 1780), vol. 9, p. 126.

[10] Part 2, ch. 13, *The Catholic School Book, Containing easy and familiar Lessons for the Instruction of Youth of both Sexes, in the English Language and the Paths of True Religion and Virtue*, New Montreal ed. (Montreal: Beauchemin & Valois, [1843]), p. 123.

[11] A. Butler, "St. Francis of Assisium, C. Founder of the Friar Minors," *Lives of the Saints*, vol. 10, p. 72.

[12] Alban Butler lists five Saints Francis and a Frances, "A General Alphabetical Table," *Lives of the Saints*, vol. 12, [sig. 2G6].

[13] "The Form of Solemnization of Matrimony," *The Book of Common Prayer and Administration of the Sacraments and other Rites and Ceremonies of the Church according to the Use of the Church of England*, The Coronation Prayer Book (Oxford: Univ. Press, 1911), p. 279. This is the form which Ismay's parents would have chosen, and the one from which "the local parson ... stressed the admonition that marriage was not to be taken in hand wantonly..." (pp. 269-70; cf. "Form of ... Matrimony," p. 276).

[14] Davies does not create for Francis any religious insights as he does for previous fictional characters; see P. Köster, "'Promptings stronger' than 'strict prohibitions': New Forms of Natural Religion in the Novels of Robertson Davies," *Canadian Literature*, 111 (Winter 1986), 68-82.

PATRICIA KÖSTER

JOSEF SKVORECKY AND CANADIAN CULTURAL CRINGE

FEW CANADIAN WRITERS have received such generous treatment from the press and media as Josef Skvorecky. Since his immigration to Canada in 1968, Skvorecky has been the subject of countless magazine articles and television interviews. This exposure has permitted him to express his political views to an unusually wide audience, including many people who have never read his books. His prestige accrues in part from his accomplished fiction and in part from his romantic status as an exile from a country languishing under Soviet oppression. During the last five years Skvorecky's visibility has increased markedly, his reputation enhanced both by the translation of work previously unavailable in English and by a swing to the right in the public mood. In a climate of reactionary chic, Skvorecky's acid pronouncements on the evils of Eastern communism and the naïve duplicity of Western liberalism, both in interviews and in his often humorous, sometimes bawdy, fiction, have found a receptive audience: he is Solzhenitsyn with sex-appeal, as in

tune with the fashionable wisdom of the 1980's as Allen Ginsberg (whose work Skvorecky has translated into Czech) was with that of the 1960's.

One of the dangers of being a representative of the dominant ideology of one's time is the latitude a writer is allowed to indulge in statements which, seen in perspective, appear ludicrous. Ginsberg has stated that he now regards his pro-communist rhetorical excesses of the 1960's as a public embarrassment. Unfortunately, the Canadian critical milieu appears too tepid to call Skvorecky to account for his excesses. One of the rare attempts to challenge Skvorecky's declarations was "Political Judgments," Terry Goldie's review of Skvorecky's Governor General's Award-winning novel *The Engineer of Human Souls* (*Canadian Literature*, Spring 1985). Prying beneath the protective armour of anti-communism, Goldie found a novel which was sexist, racist, and "also anti-union, anti-Vietnam war draft dodgers and generally anti-anything which smells of leftism." He predicted that most critics would be too seduced by the novel's fashionable commie-bashing to challenge Skvorecky's vision: "I can hear a thousand cheers for the anti-communism but at best a few muted rejections of the anti-feminism, the racism, and the general anti-social character of the novel."

Unfortunately, Goldie's prediction proved correct. This may be the era of "The Decline of the American Empire," but few Canadian critics appear willing to question the U.S. media orthodoxy that while all writers are equal, anti-communist writers are more equal than others. Goldie's review earned him a barbed response from Skvorecky himself (of which, more later) in addition to a singling out for special opprobrium in Marketa Goetz-Stankiewicz's survey of some of Skvorecky's reviews (*Canadian Literature*, Fall 1986). The fact that Goldie's position is such an isolated one serves as a damning comment on the timidity of Canadian criticism, especially when dealing with European-born writers. The Australians refer to this habit of self-abasement before the wisdom of the metropolitan centres as "cultural cringe." Skvorecky, as a European-born writer promoting an ideology made fashionable by the current United States government, evokes the two centres to which Canadians habitually pay obeisance, bringing out a particularly ferocious strain of Canadian cultural cringe.

The British reviews of *The Engineer of Human Souls* provide an instructive contrast to the Canadian reaction. Goetz-Stankiewicz omits the U.K. critics from her survey, noting only that these reviews "have a rather different tenor." Indeed they do! Unlike those by both U.S. and Canadian critics, the British reviews do not reflect an assumption that support for Skvorecky's anti-Sovietism need necessarily translate into *carte blanche* approval of his politics on all fronts. Even the neo-conservative magazine *Encounter*, while granting Skvorecky full marks for anti-communist orthodoxy, worried about "questionable attitudes smuggled through in the diplomatic bag of dissident status" (July/August 1985). Reviewer James Lasdun noted that the novel "casts the dissenting reader into the role of a brainwashed ideologue. . . . despite his affable manner, [Skvorecky] seems fundamentally short on tolerance and magnanimity; one would not relish having him in a position of power." Ironically, this conservative critic echoes many of the concerns of the "leftist" Terry Goldie. Like Goldie, he is disturbed by the narrator's sexism; he remarks that "his gleeful relish of the sexual opportunities his position as teacher affords him . . . becomes somewhat objectionable." And where Goldie, to the apparent consternation of Marketa Goetz-

Stankiewicz, speaks of a "failure of humanity," Lasdun concludes his review by criticizing Skvorecky for "a defect of the soul." One need not be a leftist dupe to be disturbed by Skvorecky's vision in *The Engineer*.

The assumptions underlying this vision have repercussions in the spheres of gender relations, race relations, and international relations. Goldie remarks on Skvorecky's sexism, observing that his female characters tend to conform to stereotyped portrayals of women as either virgins or whores. Skvorecky responds by accusing Goldie of falling into the trap of the "ideological critic," who "asks the writer not to recreate reality, but to create ideals, or to criticize reality if it does not comply with the ideal." He defends his portrait of the virginal Nadia by observing that, "in 1944, in the Czech mountain villages of northeastern Bohemia, there were no feminists." Fair enough — but Skvorecky's fictional alter-ego, Danny Smiricky, continues to portray women according to these stereotypes in the scenes set in 1970's Toronto, where there were feminists in abundance. Three of the four women characters upon whom Goldie bases his remarks appear in the Toronto scenes, yet Skvorecky concentrates his retort on the one who does not. Why does he not attempt to defend his portraits of women in the Toronto sequences? The introductory description of Margitka suggests that his position is well-nigh indefensible: "I usher her in, admiring her . . . well-proportioned little bottom as she slips past. Progress does exist after all. In my parents' generation, forty-year-old women were usually three times that wide."

Both Skvorecky and Goetz-Stankiewicz, in their respective essays, lash out against "ideological" feminism. Goetz-Stankiewicz excoriates *Globe and Mail* reviewer "Claude Corbeil" (by whom I assume she means Carole Corbeil) who, she says, "is too angry to notice that the professor-student seduction scene . . . is purposely couched in the vocabulary of the plastic values of contemporary Western society." The contrast between the language of the seduction and that of the similar scene involving the village girl Nadia is rich and interesting, as Goetz-Stankiewicz suggests. Her next leap, however, defies all logic. "To speak here of anti-feminism," she writes, "is to miss the point." In drawing this conclusion, Goetz-Stankiewicz falls into the same trap (although in this case it may be a ploy) as those reviewers who, beguiled by Skvorecky's anti-communism, turn a blind eye to his sexism, racism, and historical distortions. The fact that Skvorecky counterpoints two sexist descriptions to create an interesting literary effect does not, as Goetz-Stankiewicz contends, make his sexism disappear. The French novelist Céline turned spite, and even anti-semitism, to literary advantage. Yet few, if any, critics would argue that Céline was not an anti-semite simply because he used his anti-semitism creatively. It is intellectually dishonest to try to whitewash Skvorecky's sexism on similar grounds.

Skvorecky attempts to extract himself from the mire of racism by invoking Forster's distinction between flat and round characters. Yet, if the characters belonging to visible minorities are to be "furniture," identified by one or two salient traits, why does the narrator choose traits that conform to racist stereotypes? "Mispronunciation of English, I guess, is part of the Indian stereotype," Skvorecky comments sarcastically. Unfortunately, one of the most common slurs against Canada's East Indian community does consist of mockery of Indian pronunciation; whether or not he is aware of it, Skvorecky is buying into the standard racist line. His response to Goldie also contains some fast backtrack-

ing on the subject of Bellissimo, the Italian student. While the novel predicts for him a future spent "disentangling more than one Mafioso from legal embroilment," Skvorecky's reply to Goldie waxes lyrical on the intelligence of this young man, who "will make a first-class lawyer and become the joy of his working-class father's declining years." The reply hastily revises the language and message of the novel.

Only on the subject of Larry Hakim, the radical Arab and Vietnam draft-dodger, does Skvorecky remain unrepentant. Arabs, he reaffirms, are inseparable from "wild, barbaric actions, hijackings, internecine wars, senseless bloodshed presented as something 'healthy' for the people; to pre-adolescent boys being sent to the front in a senseless, unending medieval war." The final clause of this catalogue of horrors would seem to be a reference to Iran's assault tactics on Iraq. This is puzzling, since most Iranians aren't Arabs: they are Persian — as different from Arabs as Czechs are from Germans. At the beginning of *The Engineer* Skvorecky quotes William Blake on generalizers being idiots. His fictional alter ego admonishes his ideological foes (Hakim among them) for employing generalizations that "cannot stand up to microscopic examination." Yet Skvorecky scores many of his own ideological points by means of broad (and often inaccurate) generalizations.

Skvorecky's other favourite strategy is precisely that which he accuses Goldie and his ilk of using: "that universal malaise of the Western leftist . . . 'selective indignation.'" *The Engineer* contains a discussion of the Angolan civil war of the mid-1970's; Skvorecky returns to this topic in his reply to Goldie. In both instances, he focuses obsessively on Cuba's intervention in the war, portraying the arrival of Cuban troops as analogous to the 1968 Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia. In Skvorecky's Ministry-of-Truth account of the war, crucial details vanish. While the Cuban intervention is condemned, the South African invasion of Angola, which prompted the MPLA to call for Cuban help, is never mentioned. Skvorecky portrays the Cubans as Soviet lackeys, ignoring the Cuban role in crushing the pro-Moscow faction of the MPLA, allowing a more Third World-oriented faction to retain power. And, if Skvorecky really holds the MPLA government entirely responsible for Angola's current misery (absolving UNITA, whose sabotage has destroyed the country's infrastructure, from all blame), why does he focus his anger on Moscow to the exclusion of the U.S. oil companies which, by remaining in Angola, furnish the regime with the hard currency that allows it to survive? Granted, these points are details; but, as Blake reminds us, there is rarely much merit to the writer who flees details for grandiose generalizations such as "the Cubans . . . with their . . . Soviet-supplied war technology . . . subjected the . . . population to foreign supervision."

Perhaps the most ludicrous of Skvorecky's outbursts comes toward the end of his reply to Goldie, where he attempts to fashion a causal chain linking Marx and Engels's recommendations for the liquidation of "reactionary nations" to Stalin's oppression of ethnic minorities. Extending this chain into the present, Skvorecky writes, "The present ruler of Abyssinia follows that recommendation and — in a milder way, because Uncle Sam is dangerously near — the Sandinistas are trying something similar with the Miskito Indians."

The quote on which Skvorecky bases this polemical conceit is not necessarily a definitive statement of the Marx-Engels position. While Marx and Engels shared the racial and rationalist biases of other nineteenth-century Europeans, they were

also capable of transcending these limitations. Witness, for example, Marx's 1850 speculation that defeated European reactionaries fleeing across Asia might reach the Great Wall of China to find "the very stronghold of arch-reaction" transformed into a democratic republic. In any event, it is highly dubious to contend that Soviet imperialism against surrounding nations such as the Tatars and Czechs stems from a direct attempt to implement Marxist principles. As any student of politics knows, institutional momentum often supersedes ideology in determining policy; it was not Karl Marx but the Red Army that marched into Prague and deported the Tatars from their homeland. In one of the British reviews ignored by Marketa Goetz-Stankiewicz, Ernest Gellner distinguishes Skvorecky from an earlier generation of writers on Soviet repression: "Skvorecky, by contrast [to Koestler, Orwell, etc.], belongs to a later generation whose involvement was no longer with a genuine creed, but rather with the doctrinal superstructure of the Red Army" (*Times Literary Supplement*, March 8, 1985). Skvorecky has repeatedly voiced his impatience with those "who have not had my life experience." While respecting his hardships and insights, one should not collapse into cultural cringe and submissively take his experience to be more inclusive than it actually is. Skvorecky is a valuable witness to the imperialism of the Nazis and the Red Army. However, his lifetime does not span the entire stretch from *Das Kapital* to the Gulag; the answer to the question of whether the latter represents the inevitable consequence of trying to systematize the ideals of the former remains outside Skvorecky's "life experience." His views on this subject are not necessarily any more privileged than those of other thoughtful observers.

Moving past Skvorecky's dubious contention that the Ethiopian dictatorship's repression of its minorities stems from its nominal Marxism rather than from longstanding racial animosities, one arrives at the assertion that the Sandinistas' policies regarding the Miskito Indians amount to "something similar" to "liquidation." This, to put it bluntly, is disinformation. In 1981 tensions between Nicaragua's mestizo government and its isolated native minority (aggravated by Sandinista ineptitude on one side and a U.S. propaganda blitz wooing the Miskitos to join the contras on the other) culminated in the Sandinistas' decision to relocate the Miskitos away from their homes facing the contra front along the Coco River. Clashes between Miskito rebels and Sandinista troops during 1982 resulted in the deaths of between thirty and ninety-five Miskitos and the jailing of several hundred others. By 1985, however, despite an intensification of the contra war, the Sandinistas had financed the Miskitos' return to the Coco River, sacked officers who had committed human rights abuses and offered the Miskitos a semi-autonomous homeland — including the right to keep both their language and their guns (see John A. Booth in *Current History*, December 1986; Scott Wallace in *Newsweek*, December 15, 1986; and Dennis Gilbert in Blachman, LeoGrande, and Sharpe [eds.], *Confronting Revolution*). Rather than some sort of ideologically inspired extermination campaign, the details of the case reveal a pattern of ethnic strife and gradual reconciliation. If, as Skvorecky implies, Uncle Sam truly lay awake at night fretting about the destruction of Central American Indian communities, he would turn his attention not to Nicaragua, but to Guatemala, where a genocide is in progress. (But Skvorecky, with his right-winger's selective indignation, never mentions Guatemala.) Guatemala's Indians, who comprise more than half of

the country's population, have suffered a systematic government assault so severe that even a report sympathetic to the Guatemalan regime was forced to concede "a count of over 100,000 Indian children orphaned by the death of at least one parent in the years 1980 to 1984" (see Robert Trudeau and Lars Schoultz in Blachman, LeoGrande, and Sharpe). Meanwhile, the Canadian media, which Skvorecky portrays as a naïve conduit for Soviet propaganda (see his "Are Canadians Politically Naïve?" in *Canadian Literature*, Spring 1984), obediently churns out a dozen articles on the hardships of the Miskitos for every one on the wholesale slaughter of the Quiché and the other peoples of Guatemala. In light of this ordering of priorities, Goldie's judgment that Skvorecky's engineer "perpetuates injustice and inequality in the world," seems not farfetched, but rather mild.

Guatemala also raises the thorny question of Skvorecky's unblinking admiration of Israel. The Israelis built Central America's first munitions plant in Guatemala in 1979; the soldiers who carry out the genocide of the Quiché are trained by Israeli military advisers, armed with Israeli Galil rifles, and wear Israeli uniforms (see Trudeau and Schoultz; also "Forged in Action," *Montreal Gazette*, December 20, 1986). Refusing to criticize a nation responsible for the indiscriminate aerial bombardment of Beirut, massacres of refugees, and the subjugation of a million and a half people in an apartheid-like political limbo requires a selective sense of indignation indeed. Skvorecky is quick to criticize the violent retaliations of the oppressed; but he has only sympathy for their oppressors. He argues that his autobiographical persona, Danny, became "pro-Jewish" because he "happened to be an eye witness of the holocaust." This equation of "pro-Jewish" with "pro-Israeli" is at best outdated and at worst a tired right-wing device. However true the equation may have been in 1948, it can no longer be axiomatic at a time when Israel is increasingly dominated by non-European Jews who do not share the democratic ideals of most of the holocaust survivors and most Jewish North Americans. Surely, condemnation of the European holocaust does not preclude condemnation of the bombardment of Lebanese children and assistance to the holocaust in Guatemala?

All of which leads one irresistibly to ask why Terry Goldie's review is such an anomaly. Why do Canadian critics so seldom challenge Skvorecky's outrageous declarations? It seems we still react with a cringe of inferiority to the statements of writers hailing from more "cosmopolitan" climes — a tendency bolstered in the case of Skvorecky by the current popularity of many of the right-wing clichés he evokes. In such a context, the imperative to distinguish a writer's literary strengths from his or her moral failings becomes doubly compelling. As is so often the case, one may find good counsel in the works of George Orwell. In an essay on Salvador Dali, Orwell lamented that the critical debate over the painter appeared to be divided between those who, impressed by his art, whitewashed his personal life, and others who, finding his personality repellent, insisted that Dali's art was worthless. Why, Orwell asked, could one not recognize that Dali was both a remarkable artist and "a disgusting human being"? Substituting "political extremist" for "disgusting human being," one could easily apply this statement to Céline, Pound, or Knut Hamsun — or to Josef Skvorecky. That is the challenge Skvorecky poses to the Canadian milieu: to recognize the wonders of his writing — especially of the early novels like *The Cowards*, *Miracle in Bohemia*, and *Miss Silver's Past* — while casting a cold, critical eye on the

moral implications of the alien ideology he would try to foist upon us. In retrospect 1984 may be seen as the high-water mark of the right-wing fad in Canada: the year the middle class voted for Brian Mulroney and the literary establishment accorded its highest award to *The Engineer of Human Souls*. But what matters more in the long run is that we learn to value the best of Skvorecky's writing without lumbering ourselves with the worst of his ideological baggage.

STEPHEN HENIGHAN

ON THE VERGE

**** *L'Essai et la prose d'idées au Québec*, sous la direction de Paul Wyczynski, François Gallays, and Sylvain Simard. Fides, $40.00. Following volumes entitled *Mouvement littéraire de Québec 1860*, *L'Ecole littéraire de Montréal*, *Le Roman canadien-français*, *La Poésie canadienne-français*, *Le Théâtre canadien-français*, the "Archives des lettres canadiennes" have now published this 921-page book. Included are surveys of the history of the essay in Québec in the literary, sociological, political, historical, philosophical, and educational domains, and articles on individual authors ranging from Etienne Parent, Henri-Raymond Casgrain, Monsieur Bourget, and Henri Bourassa to Paul-Emile Borduas, Hubert Aquin, Jean Bouthillette, Jacques Ferron, and Pierre Vallières. *L'Essai et la prose d'idées*, a monumental scholarly achievement comparable to the *Dictionnaire des oeuvres littéraires du Québec*, bears witness to the great importance of the essay in Quebec's history. It has been closely associated with conservative indoctrination, but it has also been a battleground for opposing ideologies, as well as assuming the function of a revolutionary manifesto at times of political and social upheaval; for example, the writings of Borduas, Frère Untel, and Pierre Vallières. The contributions to this collection are in themselves demonstrations of the genre's great adaptability, and the editors are to be commended for permitting their authors freedom of form and expression while ensuring scholarly solidity with John Hare and Robert Vigneault's detailed 138-page bibliography. Some of the essays illustrate the fine line between literary essay and literary criticism by presenting themselves as footnoted erudite articles, as does John Hare's piece on Arthur Buies. Others, like Jacques Pelletier's acerbic essay on "Jean Le Moyne: les pièges de l'idéalisme," are polemical. René Juéry presents a careful exegesis of Jean Bouthillette's *Le Canadien-français et son double*, while Pierre Savard's piece on Jules-Paul Tardivel is a personal testimonial to his involvement with this author. Both as a reference work and as a sampling of contemporary essay-writing, this book is indispensable.

E.-M.K.

**** KIM STAFFORD, *Having Everything Right: Essays of Place*. Confluence Press, $14.95. This may be the most evocative, delicately observed collection of essays about Western places since Wallace Stegner's *Wolf Willow*. Poet Stafford lives and teaches in Portland, Oregon, and writes mainly of the Pacific Northwest, but the opening essay, a blend of dream vision and travel journal which sees the world from outer space, establishes the primary perspective: there is only one Earth, and it is "our campsite only." Inspired by studies of Indian myth and language, he sees place not as property or postcard, but as "a way of happening." This approach, like Stegner's, often obliterates both international boundary and medicine line, particularly because Stafford introduces his book with a moving meditation on Kwakiutl place names (via Franz Boas) at the north end of Vancouver Island. The boundary also disappears when, for example, Stafford studies intently the family stories of the Great Depression, or pays tribute to the "outcast eccentric" as each small-town's patron saint (inevitably calling to mind Saint Sammy). "Pine, Fir, Cedar, Yew" is a highlight among the thirteen pieces: each tree tells a story and multiple stories, first in ensemble and then separately, here with poetic compression, then suddenly with the folksy wisdom of the vernacular. Stafford's genre is not essay, not story, but essay aspiring to be story. As essay comments on story, and story animates essay, the book can also be read as a very sensitive work of literary and linguistic criticism.

L.R.

** *The Dalhousie Journals*, Vol. 3 (1825-28), ed. Marjorie Whitelaw. Oberon, $19.95. This is the last volume of the diaries of Lord Dalhousie while he was Governor-General of the Canadas. The present section of the diary is the least interesting, because by now Dal-

housie has become so soured by his dealings with Papineau and with the British Colonial Office that he seems most of his time to be awaiting impatiently the release that will take him to another career in India. Perhaps the volume is most useful for its insights into one side of the struggle for political independence in Canada a century and a half ago.

G.W.

REFERENCE

Recent reference books to cross the editorial desk range from the familiar to the unusual. The most familiar are the several Gale Research series: *Contemporary Authors*, vol. 120 ($90.00), includes an article on and an interview with Antonine Maillet; the new revision series of *Contemporary Authors*, vol. 21 ($92.00), includes the text of 1986 interviews with W. P. Kinsella and Kevin Major. *Contemporary Literary Criticism*, vol. 42 ($90.00), includes summary entries on Davies, Faludy, Hospital, and Hyde; vol. 43 of the same series ($92.00) includes commentary on Kinsella; vol. 6 of an earlier but parallel series, *Literature Criticism from 1400 to 1800* (n.p.), includes an extended section on the various works of Frances Brooke; and *Something about the Author*, vol. 48 ($66.00), a useful guide to children's authors, includes bio-critical entries on Hubert Evans, Bill Freeman, Betty Jane Wylie, Frances Duncan, and Helen Forrester (who writes under the name June Bhatia).

Also published recently is an illustrated dictionary of natural history (Cambridge, n.p.) compiled by R. J. Lincoln and G. A. Boxshall, which lists evertyhing from *loosejaw* to *Loricifera* in such neutral prose that it comes as a surprise to find *Monstrilloida* nevertheless classified as "bizarre . . . copepods." The illustrations are in black-and-white. Facts on File, that useful periodical publisher of contemporary information, has also produced a guidebook, *Dictionary of Classical, Biblical, & Literary Allusions* (US$18.95; Cdn$27.95), which is as useful as its own perimeter. "Literary" includes European, American, and Russian references — Oblomov, Snopes, Rhett Butler — but doesn't extend north (or south) very far, or much beyond rudimentary identification. Of more direct benefit to general research in Canadian literature is a new bibliography of books and periodical publications in poetry, fiction, criticism, and comment. Published by ECW Press (in both quarterly units and annual compilations) and edited by Janet Fraser and others, such a publication is long overdue. Fuller than existing periodical guides (*JCL, Canadian Periodical Index*), it nonetheless still requires pairing with *JCL*, which also attempts to note work *on* Canadian literature published *outside* Canada as well as that published within Canadian borders. Inevitably, too, there is a limit to the number of journals indexed. Janet Fraser notes that her list currently numbers "greater than 150"; this list will continue to expand, and so must the index. It is useful and reliable; we wish it well.

Yet another Canadian reference tool — though in a less usual, if still familiar, format — is the laminated wall chart representing the history of Canada, from Hedgerow House ($19.95), written by Roger Riendeau and edited by J. M. S. Careless. It is a visually clear, sequential representation of events in Canadian history — demonstrating the concurrence of developments in four regions of the country (Atlantic, Central, West, North) set against world events. There are problems with the presumptions here — not in the design of the chart, which every school classroom will find useful, but in the design of history. This remains a Eurocentric view of Canada (start with the explorers, ignore the Indian presence; for a striking contrast, see the brilliant designs and extensive information conveyed by Cole Harris's new *Historical Atlas of Canada*, from the Univ. of Toronto Press, or even the parallel Hedgerow chart, *History of World Civilization*, $19.95, which dates back to 5000 B.C. and acknowledges indigenous ethnography) and one with unstated normative measures. Literary events are few here, but when they appear they are suspiciously conventional; under 1877, Kirby's *The Golden Dog* is mentioned, with this comment: "first important English Canadian novel." Many would take issue both with the noun and with every adjective.

Less limited recipes for Canadian culture appear in two genuine cookbooks: *Anita Stewart's Country Inn Cookbook* ("truly authentic Canadian . . ."; Acadian jambalaya, clams steamed in beer, caribou burgers [Stoddart, n.p.]), and (to my taste more adventurous) the *Canadian Living Cookbook* (Random House, $29.95), complete with guides to regional cooking and ethnic variety. Indeed, present-day cookbooks (like those from the nineteenth century) are remarkably useful guides to social history: they announce not only the availability of ingredients (hence

hint at trade patterns and economics) but also the slow shifts in the character of a "national" cuisine. What is now distinctive about Canadian taste, it seems, is the combination of ethnic choices it takes for granted; in some ways domestic cosmopolitanism seems to have run ahead of social politics.

In literature, a concern for ethnic differentiation shows up in a variety of ways. Worth noting is a new journal edited by W. A. Shaheen, begun in 1986; in issues so far, *Urdu Literature* (P.O. Box 2276, Station D, Ottawa) concerns itself not only with fiction and poetry but also with theory of translation and the nature of the ghazal. Two books from the University of Manitoba Press look at the more familiar sides of Canadian ethnicity which for many people remain no less foreign: Paul Thistle's *Indian-European Trade Relations* . . . ($17.50) extends our understanding of contact history — east from Robin Fisher's work on the Coast, and west from Bruce Trigger's work on the Hurons — to the Saskatchewan basin. Jacqueline Peterson and Jennifer Brown's *The New Peoples* ($30.00; pa. $15.00) is an equally scholarly but in some ways more approachable book, an anthology by divers hands on the character of Métis culture. Essays on religion and art balance those on historical roots and cultural attitudes: this is an important extension of our understanding of Prairie history. On a different front, again repairing a cultural gap, Paul Gay's *La Vitalité littérature de l'Ontario français* (Editions du Vermillon, $11.00), in chronicle and dictionary format, provides bio- and biblio-critical information on franco-Ontarian writers from the eighteenth century to the present day.

The anthology, too, is a recipe book of a sort, a guide to the unfamiliar — though often in familiar terms. Edith Fowke's 1973 *Penguin Book of Canadian Folk Songs* is reprinted, announcing yet again the liveliness of one of several alternatives to received culture. *The Oxford Book of Travel Verse*, ed. Kevin Crossley-Holland (Oxford, $25.95), is an English book that also looks at alternatives — in this case those that are represented by foreign landscapes (Europe, America, Oceania; "here" is England, throughout). The book balances *then* with *now* (Thomas Deloney to Norman Nicholson, Robert Hayman to Laurie Lee), the *mordant* with the *enthusiastic*, and the *enquiring* with the *enclosed*. Behind many a travel poem lies the political bias of a time ("Let dusky Indians whine and kneel, / An English lad must die"). Such a transparent rhetoric from the past may repel readers; it ought also to call attention to the unconscious rhetoric of the present. There remain forms of enclosure in the way we conceive of things.

Sometimes the forms of enclosure are dictated by the very form of enquiry. The survey, the dictionary, the set of conference papers: all impose a kind of order, while inevitably calling attention to gaps and absences. Pat Rogers's visually splendid *The Oxford Illustrated History of English Literature* ($36.95), which turns English literary history into a sequence of entertaining narratives, is a model of condensed judgment, but leaves one gasping for context sometimes: fifteen pages on the 1960's and 1970's take one through the Falkland Islands war, the EEC, liberalized moral legislation, five playwrights, five poets, Muriel Spark and Brian Moore, the influence of Latin America, and what is curiously called the "threat" of Commonwealth writing. Another kind of book entirely, *The Oxford Literary Guide to Australia*, ed. Peter Pierce ($119.95), is a wonderful, illustrated dictionary-guide to who-was-born-where, what-happened-where, and what-was-set-where throughout the country; organized by place name (down to suburban districts, such as Brisbane's Bardon, where Alice Munro's "Bardon Bus" is set), the book also includes a cross-referencing list of authors mentioned in the write-ups. Like Pierce, the editors of *Commonwealth Literature — Mostly Canadian* (Free Univ. Press of Amsterdam, DFL, 25,00), despite the definite indefiniteness of their title, do not see their subject as a "threat" to old literatures so much as an extension of alternatives of creativity and creative standards. The Dutch book — which includes instructive essays on *Alibi* and Kinsella — specifically sees the expansion of the Dutch national curriculum to take account of Commonwealth writings as one way to resist an "unimaginable abyss of literary ignorance," an abyss to which too many traditional critics too easily resign themselves, almost always in the name of standards. It is an old quarrel, but nonetheless necessary to keep making, just because it refuses to die.

The title of Michael Wood's *In Search of the Dark Ages* (BBC, Ariel Books, £4.95 paperback reprint) might therefore seem an ironic comment on the present, but it is, rather, a literate, popular history of post-Roman Britain: an account of the Sutton Hoo, Arthur, Alfred, Athelstan, and Eric Bloodaxe — a reconstruction of a lively historical period that has been too readily consigned to irrele-

vance. The darkness lay in the absence of enquiry more than in the absence of culture. Two recent volumes in Faber & Faber's "History of World Architecture" series — Louis Grodecki's *Gothic Architecture* and Cyril Mango's *Byzantine Architecture* ($29.95 ea.) — more rigorously document their subject: clear texts, probing the cultural contexts of building designs, complement a wealth of detailed, instructive drawings, and photographs taken from a variety of angles illustrate the way social attitudes can sometimes translate into a visual art. Critics and historians, however, sometimes work the other way around. More speculative, but also richly illustrated, is another of Wood's books, *In Search of the Trojan War* (BBC, £8.95), which arranges a narrative out of circumstantial evidence in order to equate the Trojan War with an historical episode in the Bronze Age Mycenaean civilization of the thirteenth century B.C. Wood does not "prove" anything. He provides a model for what-might-have-happened, which is absorbing. For all that Dickens's Mr. Gradgrind insisted on "facts," one of the most forceful of invitations to thoughtful alternatives remains "perhaps."

Farther afield, Cambridge University Press has published R. B. Tully and J. R. Fisher's *Nearby Galaxies Atlas* (n.p.), the result of a project — to map the world beyond the Milky Way — that began in 1972. There is much technical data here for the specialist; for the layman, the stance taken by the mapmakers and commentators is instructive for other reasons, especially for the way a new frontier invites responses not unfamiliar to those who have come to appreciate how the human imagination shaped old frontiers by conventional images. Here, at least, the mapmakers are up front about their difficulties: data is insecure, they say, incomplete, uncertain, and affected by our cartographic assumptions about the representation of three-dimensional structures. For this present task they had to devise diagrammatic techniques for representing not only space, size, and distance, but also time and speed. That said, the names they use tell another story: one about the human will to understand by enclosing in speech. Remember "terra incognita"? Here we start with the "North Galactic Pole" and "The Local Void"; what we move on to, however, is "The Heart of the Local Group" and "The Pegasus Cloud." Still, at the heart of uncertainty, metaphor dwells.

Metaphor also lies at the heart of the most unusual reference book being noted here: *Websters' First New Intergalactic Wickedary of the English Language*, "conjured by Mary Daly in cahoots with Jane Caputi" (Beacon, $35.95; pa. $14.95). It is a feminist dictionary, which takes apart the phallogocentric presumptions of English, and restores women to a "hopping, hoping" role in speech. This serious concern does not hide the compilers' humour; they delight in the "witchery," the "word-webbing," which they take as their privilege. They attack the "necrophilic" "religion" of "patriarchy," define "dick" as one of the "popocratic vulgar trinity" (see: NO ONE), reinvest "spell-ing" with feminist creative power, and generally put the language back together in a new way. Louky Bersianik is one of the writers whom they quote for inventive examples. Neither the book nor the new vocabulary will be to everyone's taste, and even the most devoted readers may find their attention wanders. But it is the process that is important: it is a process of transforming the familiar so that it can come once again to be seen.

W.N.

LAST PAGE

Anthologies are both an industry and the tangible proof of a preoccupation. It is not that they are a mirror on the anthologist's soul exactly; rather, they demonstrate someone's leap of imaginative connection. Anthologies *bring together*. And in so doing, they repossess what they collect, for the sake of the insights that contextual association allows. Even a journal can be read as an anthology, as does the handsome inaugural issue of the *Delhi-London Poetry Quarterly* (50 Penywern Road, London SW5 9SX), interweaving image and word. But anthologies come in many forms. On the one hand is a book like Frank Moorhouse's choice of nineteenth-century Australian anecdotes, *A Steele Rudd Selection* (Univ. of Queensland, A$9.95), which inferentially demonstrates how much Moorhouse (the 1970's fictional deconstructionist) is linked after all with the traditional past — especially with the social deconstruction in which these 1890's anecdote-writers were not so covertly engaged. On the other hand there is a book like Michael Cox and R. A. Gilbert's *The Oxford Book of English Ghost Stories* (Oxford, $26.95) — from Sir Walter Scott and M. R. James (whose ghost stories Cox has separately edited for Oxford, in an edition illustrated by Rosalind Calde-

cott, $25.95) to Simon Raven and T. H. White. This book not only assembles a chronological set of examples, but traces a tradition by means of them. Hence the introductory essay is important to understanding the book's function. It is not a random collection — absurd ghosts are out, the "fun of the shudder" (Edith Wharton's phrase) is in — and it particularly wants to know, though does not directly answer, why women were so influential in the development of the art of haunting. That said, the number of women collected in the book is not great: May Sinclair on the need to dispose of "the seventeen pieces of Mr Greathead's body," Elizabeth Bowen on "All Mrs Varley de Grey's other Indian luggage," E. Nesbit on "how peacefully the marble figures slept on through the ghastly hour," and a few others.

Women are, however, the main focus of Barbara H. Solomon's *American Wives* (New American Library, $6.95) — thirty American writers, Louisa May Alcott to Bobbie Ann Mason, on the art and drama and stereotypes of marriage — and *Women in History* (Allen & Unwin, NZ$24.95), ten essays on the lives of European women in New Zealand, ed. Barbara Brookes *et al.* Solomon's work has an overt social intent: to probe the character of women's commitments to an institution; Brookes's work, while on the surface more engaged with demographic details involving education, medical history, poverty, marriage, and nationality, is perhaps even more direct in its social commitment. For Brookes and the other editors, the information in the book is not simply statistical or anecdotal or interesting, it is fundamentally revisionist, for it retrieves from silence the experience of women in a society whose official histories have inferentially consigned such lives to irrelevance. Some of the essays address issues such as contagion, charitable schemes, and abortion; others take matters like school dress codes and demonstrate the degree to which these apparently incidental features of life, so rapidly consigned to the category "fashion," are in fact clear manifestations of social presumptions about women's freedom (of movement, in society) and about their ostensibly equal status in a society designed by men.

Fay Zwicky's *The Lyre in the Pawnshop*, subtitled "Essays on Literature and Survival 1974-1984" (Univ. of Western Australia, US$17.50), further pursues such issues, but situates them in a context of resilience. Exiles and minority groups and survivors are her overriding topic: where, she asks, does the power to survive come from? Echoing Geoffrey Serle, a central essay — all are lucid and thoughtful — observes about the poetry of Randolph Stow that the desert in Australia is surprisingly productive. *Space* is the abiding gift. But therein lies a paradox, for it is space which isolates as well as space which enfranchises; and it is the idea of space which underlies the definition of what is normal, who is acceptable, where the limits are, and whether or not there is room. Trudie McNaughton's anthology, *Countless Signs* (Reed Methuen, n.p.), samples New Zealand literature (poetry, fiction, diaries, journals, etc.) for descriptions of landscape; what emerges is a contrast between the presumptive "certainty" of European men going out to measure what they see, and the Maori who continue to feel the land as a moral force. Conquest and enlightenment were contrary attractions; for some, the duty of "civilising the landscape" equated with religious conversion, thus serving functionally to erase the apparent contradiction. For subsequent commentators, however, this implicit transformation of human beings into landscapes argues not civilization but conquest — the arbitrary eye of measurement taking precedence over the aspiration for natural good. Peggy Nightingale's edited conference papers, *A Sense of Place in the New Literatures in English* (Univ. of Queensland, US$22.50), reveals several critics in mid-definition of the character of space and place, many concerned with the details of setting, many others with the parameters of critical expectation. The South African critic Stephen Gray, for example, snappily, if familiarly, divides images of Commonwealth place into a four-part history: imperial exotica, colonial quaintness (a stage which co-opts vernacular "lashings of larrikinese" to make political points), national "greatness" (the "norms and values" assumed in any "flamboyant" assertion of national "literary rights"), and a fourth stage he calls "multiculturalism," which lies beyond a "geographical condition or a classificatory principle" and is something approximating a metaphysics. For those with multiculturalism around them, the metaphysics of such a translation may be more difficult to apprehend; in some ways Gray's is as political a statement as the imperial/colonial stages he is at pains to dispute, and as marked by region and the social structures that define one's home.

Dimitri Tsaloumas's *Contemporary Australian Poetry* (Univ. of Queensland, A$24.95) is instructive about Australian society, for ex-

ample, not only by what it chooses to collect but also by what it does with what it chooses: it translates it all into Greek. Les Murray's *The New Oxford Book of Australian Verse* (Oxford, A$30.00) redefines tradition in a quite different way, by underplaying the standard torchbearers of Australian culture (Brennan, Hope, McAuley) and highlighting the previous margins: the oral literature of the several aboriginal tribes, the literature of women, the mourning songs of aboriginal women (reminding the reader that there are ethnic biases in revisionist feminism as well as in male-dominated conventions), and the literature of popular culture — hence allowing the more familiar "literary" poems to acquire a new resonance in a newly perceived context. Yet Susan Johnson and Mary Roberts, editing *Latitudes* (Univ. of Queensland, A$22.50; pa. $8.50), assert "region" still as the resonant sign of a way of life — in this case the tropical feel of Queensland: writers from David Malouf to Janette Turner Hospital find space here. "The vigilant eye of the writer," say the editors, "observes the fragility of human relationships within an emotional and geographic landscape." But it is political as well, as is, broadly speaking, the anthology itself. The act of choice is political.

For example, Berton Roueché, too, finds landscape important, as a measure of human reach and as a sign of human adaptation; his assorted travel essays on "people and places," *Sea to Shining Sea* (Fitzhenry & Whiteside, $28.95), sample the world from Oregon to Alaska, Idaho to New Orleans, and find it varied. But implicitly the world is American to Roueché's sensitive eyes and careful pen. The other world is always made to seem a curious place. And when he declares to his Arctic guide at one point, "There's no place like home," he seems nonplussed when the guide agrees. He also seems to share in the surprise of one of the people he quotes in Long Island, who is vaguely distressed when others are not delighted to welcome visitors as saviours. At the same time, Roueché values isolation himself — it is a place of its own kind, and a context from which to write of place, of what is passing, and of what is past.

W.N.

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REPRINTS

AVAILABLE in paperback reprints by Quinze ($5.95 ea.) are Marie-Claire Blais, *Une Liaison parisienne*, Gratien Gélinas, *Bousille et les justes* and *Tit-coq*, Yves Thériault, *Aaron*, *La Fille laide* and *Agaguk*, Gabrielle Roy, *Fragiles lumières de la terre*, Pierre Turgeon, *Faire sa mort comme faire l'amour* and *La Première personne*, Albert Laberge, *La Scouine*, Marcel Dubé, *Un Simple Soldat*, and Louise Leblanc's *37 ½ AA*. Yves Thériault, *Les Temps du carcajou* and *Le Dernier Havre* have appeared with L'Actuelle (n.p.) and Roch Carrier, *Le Deux-Millième Étage* and *Jolis Deuils* ($5.95 ea.) are again available from Editions du Jour. Stanké has reissued Claude-Henri Grignon, *Un Homme et son péché* and Marie-Claire Blais, *Une Saison dans la vie d'Emmanuel*. In its paperback collection "Québec 10/10," Stanké has published the three volumes of Marie-Claire Blais's Pauline Archange trilogy (*Manuscrits de Pauline Archange*, *Vivre! Vivre!* and *Les Apparences*), as well as her books *David Sterne*, *Le Loup* and *Le Jour est noir suivi de L'Insoumise* ($5.95 ea). Many volumes of Gabrielle Roy's oeuvre have appeared in the same collection: *Alexandre Chenevert*, *Rue Deschambault*, *La Route d'Altamont*, *La Montagne secrète*, *La Petite Poule d'eau*, *La Rivière sans repos* and *Cet été qui chantait*. Also available are André Major, *Le Vent du diable* and *Les Rescapés*, Yves Thériault, *Agoak*, Jacques Benoit, *Patience et Firlipon*, Lionel Groulx, *La Conféderation canadiènne*, and Claude Jasmin, *Ethel et le terroriste*.

E.-M.K.

Recent reprints include Jessica Anderson's mystery, *The Last Man's Head* (Penguin Australia, $9.95); David Foster's comic *Moonlite* (Penguin Australia, $9.95); Bharati Mukherjee's fictional account of a debilitating marriage to America, *Wife* (Penguin, $8.95); Olga Masters's 1984 novel, with its neatly ambivalent title, *Loving Daughters* (Univ. of Queensland, $8.95); and several collections. Among the latter is the University of Queensland Press "Portable" *Robert D. FitzGerald*, ed. Julian Croft ($12.50); a useful (if highly selective) anthology, eds. Laurent Mailhot and Pierre Nepveu, *La poésie québécoise* (Hexagone, n.p.), which samples a range of poets from Lescarbot to Marie Uguay; Ann Oosthuizen's *Sometimes When It Rains* (Pandora/Methuen, $9.95), a collection of works (primarily of fiction) by thirteen South African women; *An Olive Schreiner Reader*, subtitled "Writings on Women and South Africa," including some of the late nineteenth-century feminist allegories, edited by Carol Barash (Pandora/Methuen, $15.95); Hone Tuwhare's collected poems, *MIHI* (Penguin, NZ$17.99); the third edition of *An Anthology of Twentieth Century New Zealand Poetry*, selected by Vincent O'Sullivan (Oxford, $25.00); and the selected short fiction of Ruth Prawer Jhabvala, *Out of India* (Irwin, $29.95), fifteen stories from various collections, with a new, autobiographical introduction.

W.N.

**** STEPHEN LEACOCK, *Un Été à Mariposa*. Québec/Amerique, n.p. Another favourite, Leacock's *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town*, has been translated from the "canadien-anglais" in the translation programme headed by Donald Smith at Québec/Amérique. Élise de Bellefeuille and Michel St.-Germain, however, found themselves confronted with a recalcitrant text, and *Un été à Mariposa* presents itself with explanatory footnotes and original words in italic. In the preface, Leacock introduces himself as having been educated "au Upper Canada College, à Toronto, où je fus *head boy* en 1887," Mr. Smith's "Rats' Cooler" and his "girl room" proved untranslatable, and Bellefeuille and St.-Germain decided against duplicating the onomatopoeic qualities of some of the names (Golgotha Gingham, Peter Pupkin, and the Reverend Drone to mention only a few) in French equivalents. However, "La palpitante passion de M. Pupkin" for "The Extraordinary Entanglement of Mr. Pupkin" is a stroke of genius, as are many other delectable passages.

E.-M.K.