

Canadian Literature

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Summer 1998

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Canadian Literature

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Articles should be submitted in triplicate, with the author's name deleted from 2 copies, and addressed to The Editor, *Canadian Literature*, #167-1855 West Mall, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, B.C., Canada V6T 1Z2. Submissions must be accompanied by a self-addressed return envelope, either with Canadian stamps or accompanied by International Postal Reply Coupons. Submissions without SASE cannot be returned.

Articles should follow MLA guidelines for bibliographic format. All works accepted for publication must also be available on diskette.

Canadian Literature reçoit des soumissions d'articles, d'entrevues et autres portant sur les écrivains du Canada et sur leurs oeuvres, de même que des poèmes inédits d'auteurs canadiens. La revue ne publie aucune fiction narrative.

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Call for Submissions

Proposed Special Issue of *Canadian Literature* on Native Writing in Canada

Native writing in Canada has been undergoing a renaissance since Jeannette Armstrong published *Slash* in 1985. In 1990, we put out a special issue on the topic, *Native Writers and Canadian Writing*, edited by W.H. New; seven years later it seems high time for another such issue. For this issue we welcome criticism on any aspect of this writing, but would be happy to see work on new or neglected authors, on the connections between oral tradition and contemporary writing, on life writing, on comparative topics, or on theoretical issues. All submissions should follow the guidelines (in the journal or on the website) and will be subject to the usual anonymous vetting.

Please direct all queries to Margery Fee (e-mail: margery.fee@ubc.ca).

Poetry Submission for this issue contact: Iain Higgins (poetry@cdn-lit.ubc.ca)

Deadline: October 1, 1998

Canadian Literature?

Eva-Marie Kröller

Eedited by Norah Storey, the original *Oxford Companion to Canadian History and Literature* (published in 1967 and followed by a *Supplement* in 1973) can be seen as arising from the surge of nationalism generated by the Centennial. Any review of the latest edition of the *Companion*, the 1997 *Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature*, edited by Eugene Benson and William Toye, must take these origins into account and consider how the vision of Canadian culture proposed in the sixties has fared in the intervening thirty years. Despite the careful and frequently drawn-out processes that generally preceded the implementation of the numerous national symbols produced during the Centennial decade, all participated in the typically paradoxical nature of the symbol as both “an authoritative summary of faith or doctrine” and “an arbitrary or conventional sign” (*Merriam Webster’s Collegiate* 10th ed., emphases mine), and the *Companion* was (and is) no exception. Before commenting on the book, it may be useful to leaf through the contemporary issues of an influential and progressive magazine like the *Canadian Forum* to obtain a cursory sense of the cultural climate that produced the 1967 *Companion*. The exercise also helps to assess the capaciousness (or, more frequently, lack thereof) of the symbols we have inherited from those heady days.

Storey’s *Companion* was part of the archive-building that typically accompanies the institutionalization of nationalism. Encyclopedias, histories, and publication series were such inventories, as well as collections of archival documents and artifacts, not to mention the museums and libraries built to

house them. Mapping Canada was both a metaphorical and a real process. The *Forum* announced in 1964 that “[f]or the first time, Canada [had] been mapped on a scale of four miles to the inch,” thus producing more detailed mapping of the remote areas, “especially in the north” (itself an important national symbol), than had ever been available before. The magazine reported on the building of the \$12, 000, 000 National Library and Archives, and reviewed Carl Klinck’s *Literary History of Canada*, an undertaking as monumental in its own way as the *Companion*. The *Forum* ran advertisements by the Library of the University of British Columbia, inviting private collections to submit Canadiana (“exceptional collections only”) and by the Centennial Commission Publications Programme, “announc[ing] a programme of grants to authors and associations to encourage the production of publications on the occasion of the Centennial of Confederation.”

Aggressively bilingual, these projects presented themselves as inclusive, but it was clear from the start that some groups of Canadians were considered more equal than others. The *Forum* reported on the activities of Native people with some frequency, but it did so with, at best, dispassionate interest and, at worst, ill-disguised condescension. Contemporary university programmes are a good example of these attitudes. As their contribution to nation-building, universities across the country advertised curricula that reflect the boundary-crossing interdisciplinarity and democratic teaching methods idealized in the sixties. Proposed graduate seminars for 1969-70 at Sir George Williams University in Montreal (“the liveliest most subversive university on the continent” according to *Time*, Canadian ed.) included “Roots of European Revolutions,” “Comparative European Revolutions,” “The Chinese Revolution,” “The African in the Americas,” but only one seminar on Canada (“Metropolitanism in Nineteenth Century Canada”) and none on Aboriginal people. While Sir George Williams boasted programmes “keyed to individual needs with a minimum of bureaucratic specifications,” the University of Saskatchewan (Regina Campus) advertised its unique resources in 1967 by praising its location at the centre of “a natural laboratory for social research,” with access to “the hunting and fishing economy of Northern Indians and Métis [as well as] the urban centres of the South.” University officials clearly assumed that the inhabitants of these economies would be willing and welcoming research subjects, an attitude not too far removed from the one expressed in a brief notice eight years earlier that “[f]or the first time in Saskatchewan’s history, two treaty Indians

[had] been appointed as assistant Indian agents on Saskatchewan reserves.” The *Forum* assured readers that “[b]oth appointees [were] well-educated [and] expert agriculturists.”

Instances when Native people were running out of patience with their role as objectified bystanders in the national process caused barely a ruffle in the pages of the *Forum*. In 1961, one reads with some shock that the “Indians of the Oka Reserve . . . [were] appealing to the Joint Committee on Indian Affairs against the municipality of Oka, which assumed title through a private bill in the Quebec Legislature to the Indians’ common lands, and [planned] to make them into a golf course.” Native people “asked for the abolition of the Department of Indian Affairs, and the establishment of a commission of which some members should be Indian to judge Indian problems.” The famous blockade, approximately three decades later, provides eloquent commentary on just how readily these demands were met.

Related to the “canon” of university courses is that of books and authors. An investigation of the influence of book-reviewing on the establishment of a national literary canon would fill many pages, and some important critical work in that area has already been accomplished. I will briefly focus on two areas here where, once again, the *Forum* supplies excellent evidence. It was not until the publication of *The Cultural Contribution of the Other Ethnic Groups* (in volume four of the B&B Commission’s Report) that the writing of ethnic groups other than the English and the French received any major critical attention. References to authors of Asian origin were particularly scarce, and it is with a jolt of recognition that, in 1961, one happens on a notice about Wayson Choy, author of *The Jade Peony*. The piece reflects the systemic discrimination to which authors of his origin continued to be subjected (even if, in this case, it was possible to shift the blame to the United States) and it bears quoting in full:

Wayson Choy of Vancouver, who was born in Canada of Canadian parents, and whose short story “The Sound of Waves” won the Macmillan Prize, has been offered a permanent job with a U.S. publishing firm, but is unable to take it because the U.S. Immigration law sets a quota of 100 visas a year for aliens whose ancestry is attributable to peoples of the Asian-Pacific triangle. This quota is now filled for several years. Canadians of European origin with U.S. jobs awaiting them generally experience no difficulty in emigrating to the U.S.A.

It is revealing that, apart from mentioning the Macmillan Prize, the passage says nothing about Choy’s accomplishments as an author, that is to say,

he finds himself almost completely objectified as an “ethnic” writer who serves as an exemplar with which to explain certain immigration conundrums. As a result, Choy is rendered doubly invisible: first as a Canadian of Asian origin, second as a writer.

The liberal-minded *Forum* can barely suppress a snicker in its coverage of the trial over *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* (1959-1962) on charges of obscenity. Thus, the magazine has a great deal of fun reporting from Fort William in 1959 where, at the request of the mayor and the chief-of-police, “more than 700 copies [were burnt] in the incinerator of the city dump.” The mayor, it appeared, had “not yet had time to read her own copy of the novel.” But the *Forum* apparently perceived no irony in printing a review, by “H.T.K.”, of Adrienne Clarkson’s *A Lover More Condoling* (1968), in which men and women not adhering to specific normative behaviours were relegated to an invisibility as pronounced as that reserved for a writer of Wayson Choy’s background: “We cannot get much involved in the milieu of Mrs. Rainer, the attractive Canadian widow on a sojourn in France, partly because a world of women with scarcely the shadow of a child and with only one real man among their numerous fairy good friends, is unreal.” (In all fairness, it should also be reported that, in 1964, “H.T.K.” commended Margaret Laurence for “not skirt[ing] daintily around anything, including Hagar’s relations with her virile husband, described for a change from the woman’s point of view. This may be a first occasion for this sort of episode in a Canadian novel.”) One only needs to complement Kirkwood’s review of Clarkson’s book with Kildare Dobbs’ 1960 article, “Shocking Charges,” in which he reports with some scandal on a gay party, to get a sense of the true parameters of liberalism as practised by the *Forum*.

The editors of the most recent *Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature* (an update of the 1983 version, also edited by William Toye) faced the daunting task of producing a reference work which absorbed the extensive cultural and societal changes that Canada had undergone since the last edition and that, as we have seen, were incipient even during the period reflected in the first *Companion*. In a work which extensively relies on updating existing entries, the ghosts of the societal model informing the older book remain strongly present. The main entries on drama, fiction, poetry, criticism and on various sub-categories like essays, folklore, fantastic literature and science fiction, children’s literature, humour and satire all have substantial entries on material in both English and French, whereas others such

as exploration literature, travel literature, and nature writing have the addendum “in English,” presumably implying that it ought to have been followed by an entry on its French counterpart had one been available. The book continues to agonize over the definition of who qualifies as a Canadian writer, supplying lengthy entries on foreign writers on Canada in English and French. There is also much rumination, under the “novel” heading, about what qualifies as *Canadian* writing, given the preponderance of non-Canadian settings in recent publications.

In its efforts to account for the extraordinary diversity of Canadian cultural life that cannot be satisfactorily subsumed under the bicultural model, the very important entry on the novel duplicates, some changes notwithstanding, the extraordinarily complicated and confusing outline of the original. In addition to chronological subheadings, there are supplementary entries on “Other talents, other works: 1960-1982” and “Other novels: 1983-1996.” Each one of these is, in its turn, subdivided into a dizzying array of yet another set of headings, the former featuring 1. Experimental Fiction, 2. Fiction about and by minorities, 3. Satire, 4. the Novel of Childhood, 5. Women and Fiction, 6. Regional Fiction (with three subheadings), 7. Popular Fiction, while the latter relies on subjects like the End of Experimentalism, Eros and Illness, the New Generation and the Media, and Sensation.

Drifting in and out of these only superficially comprehensive headings are conflicting notions of what constitutes mainstream society and what does not, as well as the dawning realization that what was once labelled “minority writing” is now at the top of the heap. Books by Michael Ondaatje, Rohinton Mistry, and M.G. Vassanji show up under “Novels in English, 1983-1996,” accompanied by an assessment in which the words “Canada” and “Canadian” are repeated like a mantra as if to ward off doubts that this is really the category where they belong: “. . . the tendency for novelists born outside Canada—such as Selvadurai, Rohinton MISTRY, and M.G. VASSANJI—to write Canadian novels (which win Canadian prizes) but yet *not* write about Canada, has encouraged us to rethink our understanding of what it means to call something a Canadian text, to interrogate our assumptions about Canadian national identity and its relation to Canadian culture.”

Wayson Choy who, together with Sky Lee and Hiromi Goto, features in “Novels 1983-1996,” makes a re-appearance as a gay writer under “Other novels: 1983-1996.” Neither Goto nor Choy has a separate entry; Sky Lee has a brief one. Ondaatje also shows up again under “Other novels: 1983-1996,”

where he is criticized for abandoning the experimentalism of his earlier works for the commercialism of *The English Patient*. His newly-acquired mainstream status serves him well in the *Companion*, however: in addition to the discussions already mentioned, there are substantial separate entries under Ondaatje's name and the title of *The English Patient*, not to mention Ondaatje's inclusion in the essay on poetry. The most conspicuous absence, considering the extraordinary quality and success of Asian-Canadian writing in recent years, is that of a comprehensive separate entry on the subject. The piece on "South-Asian Canadian literature" is useful but much too limited in scope to do justice to the subject. (The imbalance becomes particularly clear if this entry is compared to the five double-columns on Ukrainian-Canadian literature, one of the very few pieces in the *Companion* to treat a particular type of ethnic writing with some seriousness).

Another example of how the *Companion* struggles with earlier cultural models may be seen in its treatment of Sinclair Ross and his novel *As For Me and My House*, one of the most canonized works in Canadian literature. The entry under the title of the book rehearses the major traditional approaches that have been applied to the book, ranging from social realism to narrativity. The piece on Sinclair Ross (by the same author) refers to the recurrent theme of "psychological strain, especially between husbands and wives" in Ross's oeuvre and alludes to "the provisionality of all truths" in *As For Me and My House*, but fails to incorporate any discussion that might result from a work mentioned in the bibliography, Keath Fraser's 1997 *As For Me and My Body* which "argues for a reconsideration of Ross's work in the light of his homosexuality and personal sexual history." In the entry on "Novels in English 1940 to 1960," *As For Me and My House* also remains firmly entrenched in the tradition of prairie realism while finding itself unfavourably compared to W.O. Mitchell's works for failing to communicate "the ethnic variety of [its] prairie town." One has to go to the entry on "gay literature" for an alternative view on the book. Aware of the mainstream status of Ross's novel, Robert K. Martin applies some caution in reading the book against the traditional grain ("It may seem odd to classify [it] as gay fiction"), but his assured references to international literary models in support of his conclusions here and elsewhere in the essay make Martin's article one of the most persuasive and sophisticated in the *Companion*.

If the presentation of ethnic and gay writing remains riddled with contradictions and loose ends, there is little such hesitancy in the massive coverage

of Native writing (both subject and author headings) throughout the *Companion*. It is true that *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe* receives a separate heading whereas a book as complex as *Green Grass, Running Water* does not, and that Beatrice Culleton is unaccountably not given a separate entry, but in general it becomes overwhelmingly apparent that Native writing has become mainstream academic business. Much of it is steered by Native writers, critics, and publishers, as the *Companion* makes amply clear, but the effect remains ambivalent. Comparing the entries, virtually all by the same (non-Native) author, in the *Companion* with a specialized reference work like the *Encyclopedia of North American Indians*, edited by Frederick E. Hoxie, many of whose contributors were “tribal elders, scholars, and activists” of Aboriginal origin, one wonders if the framework of the *Companion* does not also make for cultural appropriation on a not inconsiderable scale. Thus, the entry on Aboriginal legends and tales explains the incompatibility of European and Aboriginal concepts of time, place, and identity, but itself favours (as an encyclopedic project presumably must) the very methodological framework it also criticizes. The treatment of Native writing in the *Companion* in fact deserves separate commentary which we hope to provide in a future issue of *Canadian Literature*.

The new *Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature* offers enough food for thought to fill several doctoral dissertations. It is an important document precisely because, in its omissions, redundancies, and contradictions, it goes about the exercise of defining Canadian literature with a sense of tentativeness which, if the oxymoron may be forgiven, is positively postmodern.



Antiphony

For Austin Clarke

Those chalk-poisoned black men who saw gypsum
Choke off roses could not, would not, have known
Teacher-chalked glories of Wordsworth or Yeats,
Or how a boy could kneel before Hopkins,
Chanting him and Herrick (heretic cleric),
In a sorry, Baptist-beleaguered field,
All crows and regret, miles and decades late,
Quothin cavalier love where hogs were hacked.

How could wracked miners've moaned the heavy,
Gorgeous hurt of those epics that refused, spurned,
Their shouts, their salvos of pain and rough joy,
Their howls damning bloody Nova Scotia?

So I craved to hear Milton hollared out,
Yelled with handclaps and tin spoons played on thighs,
And the brawl of white, murderous gypsum—
Bawled at last in Luddite language bursting
Ruling lines of spellers, wrecking letters,
Bashing grammar into gravel. Why not?

Our British literature was just dust—
A mob of beetles chewing torn-up books,
Royally churning Chaucer into dung.
Tragedy was our slavery. Look-it:
Shakespeare came down to us as Black Horse beer—
The only good thing Empire ever made.

Absurdio

Words? Bah! They won't work; they never did.
Ils sont comme tous les plaisirs démodés.

Hydro lines decay, spit lies across miles.
Best curl up with *eau de vie*—King Cole tea.

Working out damned Pound like an exorcist,
Sip unkempt liquor, unguent as licorice.

Despite the 'f---ing' cold, poetry oozes
From the heart, foul rag soaked in saltwater.

Africville, an Imagined Community

Theorists of nationalism are divided on the question of nationalism's relationship to racism,¹ but that race can and often does articulate with national identity is clear. Some sense of the complexity of that relationship and of the constitutive contradictions of nationalism itself emerges when one considers that "national traditions turn out to be as much acts of affiliation and establishment as they are moments of disavowal, displacement, exclusion, and cultural contestation" (Bhabha 5). The ambivalence² of nationalism makes a strong case for the need to examine the particular, historical manifestations of nationalist discourse in order to make an evaluation of it. The recognition that literary and cultural studies methods are particularly suited to just such an examination has followed on the acknowledgment by historians and literary critics alike that the rise of nationalism coincides with the development of print technologies and realist narrative forms.³ What this realization also means is that the study of literature itself has had, of late, to become more attuned to the ways literary *corpora* "[belong] to, [gain] coherence from, and in a sense [emanate] out of, the concepts of nation, nationality, and even of race" (Said 169).

In this paper, I undertake to analyze the cultural politics of race and nation in recent African-Nova Scotian writing and artistry. More specifically, I am interested in constructions of Africville and in the ways these acts of representation intervene both in the struggle over this site and in a state-sponsored nationalism that serves as the larger discursive frame through which identity and social difference are produced. My claim is that the construc-

tion of Africville as an imagined community represents a re-mapping of the competing discourses that have historically sought to control this site. In risking an act of affiliation, these artists may be said to engage in cultural contestation in order to resist disavowal, exclusion and displacement.

It may seem odd to be talking about nationalism at a time of increasing emphasis on *transnationalism* or globalization, and one could argue at this historical juncture that in donning nationalist clothing African-Nova Scotian literary resistance is opting for an outmoded fashion. But to the extent that relations of power and technologies of violence continue to be administered through the workings of the nation-state, it is to be expected that resistance continues to adopt a nationalist form, whether sub-national or anti-colonial. The litany of ills associated with nationalist discourse—its coercive, totalizing, and essentializing tendencies—have prompted a number of critics, both Europeanist and postcolonial, to call for an end to nation-states and nationalisms.⁴ Yet such an approach risks providing an alibi for increasing globalization under the leadership of transnational corporations, which as Masao Miyoshi grimly observes, are “obviously not agents of progress for humanity” (746); in fact transnationalism extends the colonial project under a different guise. I do not mean blithely to disregard the essentializing and totalizing impulses in the invention of nationalisms, but I do think it worth pointing to Ernest Gellner’s observation that nationalism is in some sense the inevitable outcome of objective historical conditions, whatever the particularities of the “cultural shreds and patches” arbitrarily selected for the invention of its form (56).

The particularities of the *invention* of nationalism are primarily what I am interested in here. In explaining why he characterizes the nation as an imagined community, Benedict Anderson remarks, “It is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (6). Nationalism, then, is a simulacrum of community where not only geography but social difference effectively precludes that members should know one another or interact face to face. Crucial to Anderson’s formulation, and to my use of it, is his insistence that imagined communities are not to be measured against “true” communities; the imagined status of nations and sub-nations is a product of necessity, not falsehood. Thus, as Anderson puts it, “Communities are to be distinguished not by their falsity/genuineness but by the style in which they are imagined”

(6). It is in large part the *style* of representations of Africville that I am after here, not only because the style of these representations constitutes the distinctiveness of Africadian nationalism, but because style can be seen as the link between the creative works and the conceptions of race and nation from which they emanate and to which they speak.

I am using *style* here to mean both what Anderson refers to (the particularities of a community's image of itself) and something more. Literary-critical discussions of style tend to be concerned at once with formal conventions and with what is distinctive about a particular writer's work—with a stylistic *signature*.⁵ Given that formal conventions (genres, tropes, modes) emerge in determinate historical conditions and comprise a set of regulatory mechanisms within literary works, they may be taken as a marker of the historical and discursive conditions in which a text is produced. The stylistic signature of a given artist, similarly, is an index of her *situation* in determinate historical circumstances, of the ways she comes to inhabit the position of author, and to insert herself into the formal regime of the literary work. In focusing on the *style* of artistic representations of Africville, then, I aim to identify the markers of a nationalist discourse in these works, and to read the textual traces of their conditions of production, of their enunciation, and of their formal instantiation.⁶ What I am attempting, in other words, is an analysis of these texts in relation to nationalist discourse and to contested constructions of blackness in Nova Scotia. I am not asking after the intent of these artists, nor am I making claims for the effect of the nationalist vision in their works on the political scene in the province. There is nonetheless a value in taking the measure of the challenge these texts pose to hegemonic discourses on identity and culture in Nova Scotia.

I am taking as the hegemonic discursive paradigm conditioning cultural production in the province the image of Nova Scotia as a community of traditional, rural folk that Ian McKay analyzes so brilliantly in *The Quest of the Folk*. According to McKay, the invention of the folk in cultural practices and state-sponsored tourism initiatives was undertaken in the context of a broad anti-modernism (31). Anti-modernist discourse, a fairly wide-spread phenomenon in late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century Europe and North America, took many forms.⁷ One of the most pervasive articulations of anti-modernism privileged rural life as a place of moral, psychic, and social regeneration, a refuge from the ills of urban industrial-

ism and modernization.⁸ Particularly significant, for my purposes, is the connection between anti-modernist and nationalist discourses. Both may be seen as responses to constitutive changes in social relations under modernity, where face-to-face relations are increasingly rare as a means of social and political organization.⁹ The nationalist response is to imagine synchronous relations irrespective of spatial location; the anti-modernist response is to idealize the rural community as a repository of face-to-face interaction.

In Nova Scotia, according to McKay, this anti-modernism took the form of a conservative *non*-industrial (rather than anti-industrial) ethos that was anti-labour as well as anti-business, and centred on a romantic anti-urbanism. The embrace of the folk was constructed as a return to a whole, organic way of life (99), marked by traditional gender relations (251), whiteness, and an emphasis on fisherfolk, pre-industrial handicrafts, and the rural, non-industrial folklore collected by Helen Creighton. This construction of a non-industrial rural culture was nonetheless structured by modern capitalism which was busily engaged in commodifying rural lifeways, folklore, and crafts to feed a growing tourism industry. The “quest of the folk,” then, was a decidedly *commercial* anti-modernism (35, 149, 273), that in a climate of socio-economic crisis in Nova Scotia could answer “an urgent need to articulate a workable sense of Nova Scotian, and sometimes Maritime, identity” (264), since it meant that economic and political decline could be recast as “the pursuit of a simpler and more colourful traditional way of life” (265). That “simpler and more *colourful*” [emphasis added] way of life tended, not surprisingly, to be decidedly monochromatic in practice: the folk “could be members of any ethnic group,” McKay argues, “significantly excluding, for the most part, natives and blacks” (230). The quest of the folk was, quite clearly, also a quest for whiteness.

As McKay suggests, the state played a leading role in advancing and shaping this anti-modernism, supporting folklorists and promoting folklore through tourism, and creating a position for Mary Black as director of a newly formed Department of Industry and Publicity in order to facilitate the invention of handicrafts. Anti-modernism was hardly the invention of provincial bureaucrats, however. It was, in fact, a fairly entrenched and pervasive regional idiom in the Maritimes. One finds elements of it in much of the literature of the period as well as in more popular forms like the photography of Wallace MacAskill and the travel writing of Clare Dennis, Dorothy Duncan and Will R. Bird. The work of writers like Thomas Raddall, Hugh

MacLennan, Ernest Buckler, Charles Bruce, and Frank Parker Day, of Andrew Merkel and the Song Fishermen group, emphasizes in different ways the anti-urban, anti-industrial ethos described by McKay, offering as an alternative an often romantic vision of Nova Scotian rural life.¹⁰ An anti-modernist idealization of rural life was and is thus a readily available cultural paradigm in the province, and it is a paradigm with a complex and contradictory relationship to modern capitalist interests and to racial discourse.

Not surprisingly, particularly in view of the specifics of Africville's history, traces of this cultural paradigm emerge in African-Nova Scotian representations of Africville, representations which, I have suggested, articulate an Africadian¹¹ nationalism. Creative treatments of Africville began in the early '70s with Frederick Ward's short novel in *Black English Riverlisp: Black Memories* and have encompassed a wide range of media: poetry (Ward, George Elliott Clarke, Maxine Tynes, David Woods), film (Sylvia Hamilton, Shelagh Mackenzie), drama (Walter Borden, George Boyd, Woods), music (Faith Nolan, Four the Moment, Joe Sealy), painting (Woods), museum exhibits (Henry Bishop, the Africville Genealogical Society), fiction (Charles Saunders) and essays (Clarke, Hamilton). The anti-modernism trope with its emphasis on the rural and the pre-industrial that McKay describes in *The Quest of the Folk* is to be found in these texts as well. African Nova-Scotian artists invent Africville, however, at once in the absence of any broadly-based state sponsorship and in an explicit refutation of state-sponsored constructions of Africville. The embrace of anti-modernism in African-Nova Scotian cultural practices is a reformulation of the state-sponsored discourse, a kind of critical *détournement*, that foregrounds the construction of social difference and its attendant economic and political violence at the core of nation-state (or, in this case, local state) nationalism.¹² The African-Nova Scotian embrace of anti-modernism challenges the exclusion of blacks from "the quest of the folk" by re-scripting Africville, product of urban industrialization, as a rural idyll. Africadian nationalism also exhibits a built-in critique of the dangers of nationalism by placing the processes of exclusion and the social contest of identity construction at the centre of these visions of Africville. If these texts imagine an alternative homogeneity, if they invent a different essentialism, it is nonetheless, to borrow Gayatri Spivak's formulation, a *strategic* essentialism.¹³

Africville has historically been a place on the margin. Situated on the geographic periphery of Halifax, it was "left behind" in the processes of

modernization that transformed urban space over the course of the twentieth century, rendered marginal by virtue of being a black community in a society dominated by white socio-economic interests. The gradual encroachment of commercial and municipal structures in and around Africville sought to order the terrain in a particular direction: CNR tracks, an incinerator, a land-fill site, and the city's refusal to provide sewerage and running water for the residents, defined Africville as industrial space. These markers of the city's imaginary geography competed with the houses, the church, the school, and the community map-making which resolutely proclaimed Africville a residential neighborhood. Without access to institutional power, however, residents had inadequate means of resisting the symbolic violence of the state. By the 1960s, Africville had been defined as a slum, a "deviance service centre" (Clairmont and Magill *passim*), a social problem in which the city was obliged to intervene paternally. Relocation, with its stated aim of improving the living conditions and economic prospects for Africvillers, was the guise under which the expropriation of land was ultimately carried out.

While the former residents lacked the institutional resources to win the struggle over Africville, the middle-class artists and intellectuals who began to produce in ever greater numbers in the late 1970s and the early 1980s were gaining access to cultural institutions that enabled them to take up the task of contesting hegemonic representations of African-Nova Scotians. A key strategy has been their re-mapping of Africville, which draws not only on the geography imagined by former residents, but enlarges it in an effort to encompass the diversity of African-Nova Scotian identity and experience in the province as a whole. The construction of Africville as a lost Eden, a pastoral community independent of the institutions of modernity with their attendant bureaucracies, where the church took the place of "mayor or city council or policeman," of "clubs, youth organizations, ladies' auxiliary" (Saunders, "Visit" 58), and where community members are so close "[i]t's really like a big family" (Saunders 56), transforms Africville into a metaphor for the kinds of social relations not possible under modernity. In claiming, as many of these texts also do, that Africville *is* African-Nova Scotian community, "the consciousness of a people" as Clarke puts it ("Death" 20), the literature about Africville performs the function of unifying diverse actors unknown to one another in a synchronous time and space, that Benedict Anderson identifies as the aim of an imagined community. These texts, in other words, are engaged in the act of narrating a nation.

The appeal of Africville as the founding myth of Africadian nationalism is not difficult to discern. In the narrative of the battle between the city, with its capitalist desire for land for industrial development, and the residents, who want to retain their pastoral community, we have the paradigmatic agon of modernity.¹⁴ At the same time, in the Africadian scripting of this drama, the tragedians are raced: pitted against white industrial capitalists, a rural black populace struggles to survive. Race is not an incidental element; it is at the core of the struggle that gave rise to Africadian nationalism. For Africville provides more than a powerful affective narrative. As an experience of industrialization that not only threatened to but did in fact destroy a community, Africville is the social cataclysm that, in the context of a modern industrial society with an emergent black intellectual class, provides the objective historical conditions for nationalism. The Africadian nationalism that finds its *raison d'être* in the destruction of Africville is of course quite distinct from the nation-state nationalism Gellner has in mind; however, the political consciousness that emerges from the social cataclysm of Africville takes a nationalist form, and does so in the larger context of a state-sponsored discourse that emphasizes an anti-modern return to the rural folk. So as I have suggested, the rhetoric of Africadian nationalism can be seen as effecting a critical reformulation through the creation of a black counterpart to the state-sponsored quest of the folk. The specific interest of the narratives themselves resides in ways they map race in response to hegemonic cartographies and construct a unifying mythos for black political struggles in the province and in Canada.

A key topos in the contestatory mapping of Africville in contemporary African-Nova Scotian writing is the insistence on Africville's natural beauty, its status as a rural idyll. George Elliott Clarke's poem "Campbell Road Church," for instance, opens with the following image:

At Negro Point some forgot sleep
 to spy the fire-and-brimstone sun
 blaze all gold-glory
 over a turquoise harbour
 of half-sunken, rusted ships,
 when it was easy to worship
 Benin bronze dawns,
 to call "hosanna" to archangel gulls . . . (1-8)

The tension between the "turquoise harbour" and the "half-sunken, rusted ships" already hints at the fallen state of this rural idyll, and the "fire-and-

brimstone sun” seems to promise wrath and torment even as it blazes “all gold glory.” The focus on natural beauty in these works is almost defiant; it does not fully occlude the signs of industrial encroachment, or the grim markers of poverty, but holds out a utopian vision of rural community precisely in order to counter the destructive effects of industrial racism.

In David Woods’ poem “The Spirit of Africville” we find an image of pastoral haven once again:

Across the path by Kildare’s Field,
Amidst the poppies that lift gently into the air,
And sunsets that are golden in the sky . . . (1-3)¹⁵

Here natural beauty is made synonymous with the *spirit* of Africville, a deliberately transcendent representation of what Africville has become in the wake of its destruction. Charles Saunders’ narrative, “A Visit to Africville, Summer 1959,” also draws the imaginary visitor’s attention to the community’s rural features: “Water, tracks and bushes—that’s all you can see right now. Kind of reminds you of the country, even though we’re still in Halifax” (54). These rural signposts explicitly connect Africville on the eve of its destruction with an earlier historical moment as Saunders also reminds his visitor about the loss of rural folkways: “Speakin’ of pigs, people out here used to raise `em” (55), and “That’s right. We got our own little forest here. Used to be a lot more woods and bush around, but most of it got cut down for lumber and firewood. Nothin’ but young trees and alder bushes and wildflowers now” (63).

When Africville was first settled in the 1850s, it was situated on the periphery of Halifax and was, in effect, a rural community. Families kept pigs, chickens, goats; fishing in the Bedford Basin supplied individual families and provided salable surpluses. By the 1950s, however, urban expansion had encircled the once remote and rural community; the City of Halifax owned property to the south, east and west which it was interested in selling to industrial developers for container ports, expressways and other harbour-front development. Residents no longer kept animals; to do so contravened a city ordinance. Fishing in the Bedford Basin had declined due to pollution. At the time of relocation, and for several decades leading up to relocation, Africville’s claim to rusticity rested more on its lack of modern amenities and social services like police and fire protection (over which it had struggled unsuccessfully with the City for decades) than on many remaining rural qualities. We can see, then, in the pervasive presentation of

Africville as a rural idyll by contemporary African-Nova Scotian writers a telescoping of the history of modernization in a way that highlights the familiar agon of modern urban industrialists dispossessing the rural dwellers of their land.

This opposition is particularly evident in Clarke's work. The opening image of sun-worshippers gathering on the edge of the Bedford Basin in "Campbell Road Church" is brought to a close with an abrupt, "but none do now." "Now" Africville is a ghost town littered with rubble and haunted by the proponents of urban development, a clear reminder of the struggle between residents and the local state:

. . . an ancient CN porter lusts
for Africville—
beautiful Canaan of stained glass and faith,
now limbo of shattered glass and promises,
rats rustling like a mayor's robe.
He rages to recall
the gutting death of his genealogy,
to protest his home's slaughter
by homicidal bulldozers
and city planners molesting statistics. (10-19)

The loss of Africville is the loss of a promised land, its former residents persecuted people in search of a spiritual home. The anthropomorphic rendering of Africville's destruction graphically juxtaposes a flesh-and-blood community with the cold bureaucratic machinations of "city planners molesting statistics." That the ancient CN porter in these stanzas experiences first nostalgia and then rage suggests that the figuring of Africville as lost Eden and as promised land can be seen as an integral part of the protest of "his home's slaughter" by the agents of industry and urban planning. The utopian reconstruction of Africville, in other words, is directed more at the present and the future than at the past.

The temporal structuring of Clarke's lyric for the song "Africville," composed by Delvina Bernard, clearly illustrates the way that in many of the Africville texts *anti*-modernism takes the form of a utopian *ante*-modernism. The opening stanza constructs a historical Africville as rural seaside utopia:

At Negro Point, down by the blue Bedford Basin
Where catfish jumped and ships went sailing
We lived, we loved, we worked, and we ploughed
And raised our children, Black and proud (1-4)

This is a landscape marked by an explicitly ante-modern social order as the plough can be read as a metonym for pre-capitalist industry. The couplet implicitly links blackness and pride to this earlier social mode. The next stanza, however, juxtaposes this ante-modern history with the modern landscape of poverty associated with Africville at the time it was razed:

We built our Africville, and made it home
Church on Sundays, for a hundred years long
No matter, rats, cops, the dump next door
We could have stayed for a hundred years more!.] (5-8)

The positioning of the subject here is reminiscent of Benjamin's angel of history who is backing into the future while his horrified gaze remains fixed on the wreckage of modernity piling up at his feet (257). An ante-modern Africville can then be seen as a redemptive force leading to an as-yet-unseen future. In this way, the hundred years history of Africville is transformed into a kind of future anterior, what Gayatri Spivak has termed a "ghost dance."¹⁶ A utopian Africville is invoked to haunt those responsible for its destruction, and to inspire African-Nova Scotians both to preserve community and to prevent "another Africville." Relocation is figured as the premature death of a community that "could have stayed for a hundred years more." Had it not been for commercial interests and competing constructions of Africville—"Well maybe they saw bad water in the well / But we could see sunrise, like no where else" (17-18)—the speaker claims, Africville would have weathered "rats, cops, the dump next door" and lived on. The history of Africville is rewritten over the course of the poem, and past conditional becomes future anterior as the speaker insists Africville will live on despite the "lies" that brought about its destruction:

Bulldozers can't break pride
History ain't stopped by lies
Africville will never die
Africville has made us wisel.] (19-22)

Here we have a refusal of the "history" of the destruction of Africville and all it represents. The history of relocation is in effect contained, through the structure of the song, between the utopian construction of Africville's history in the opening stanza, where children were raised "Black and proud," and the closing stanza where, in the narrative present, the effects of relocation are denied—"Bulldozers can't break pride"—for the future of black communities in the province.

This future anterior structuring of the agon of modernity in representations of Africville means that the tale of Africville's destruction may also be framed as a pedagogical experience, as the discerning of truth from deception and the ensuing development of consciousness. This is certainly true of Clarke's song "Africville," where the determination to hold onto the truth in the face of deception leads to a newly found consciousness: "History aint stopped by lies / Africville will never die / Africville has made us wise" (20-22). Similarly, the destruction of Africville is figured as a call to action in David Woods' "Summons," where deception is a tool of modernity ("Truth stands a sceptre of stone / Amidst all the clever deceptions / our modern society posits"), and the process of modernization entails the destruction of innocence, which in turn leads to a newly found wisdom:

Listen—
 Let us disrupt the lie,
 When we see our child-beauty
 parade her naked flesh,
 Or when we see our kingdom of love
 Brought to an ignoble death[.] (14-19)

The innocence suggested by "child-beauty" is undercut by the implicit commodification of a beauty compelled to prostitute itself, a depiction of a fallen state all the more poignant because it is *child*-beauty that has been corrupted. The wisdom that emerges from this destruction is less than pure—it is a "*mad*-wisdom"—but it is a consciousness that arms the collective subject against the forces of deception:

Let us gain mad-wisdom,

 Let us rebel against this lie
 Lift up an intelligent sword
 and assault the new world. (25, 30-32)

In these contestatory constructions of Africville, then, the City is the purveyor of "false consciousness," and the experience of Africville prompts the scales to fall away, and a revolutionary consciousness to develop.

This presentation of Africville's destruction as the founding moment of a racial, political, indeed national consciousness is echoed in Maxine Tynes' Africville poems, where the focus is less on what Africville was than on what it has become. In "Africville is My Name," Tynes emphasizes the extent to which Africville can be seen as constitutive of African-Nova Scotian identity, and that identity is clearly conceived in national terms:

. . . to shout the names of Africville like a map,
like a litany, like a hymn and a battle-cry,
like a flag and a constitution (10-12)

Africville's newly found status, moreover, is a denial of its erasure; if it has on the one hand been destroyed as a "real" community, it has on the other been reborn as the sign of community and thereby lifted out of historical time: "a banner of the Africville that was, that is / that always will be" (13-14). In lifting Africville out of history in this way, Tynes can reinvent its constituent features and make it synonymous with the people of the nation in her poem "Africville": "No house is Africville./No road, no tree, no well. / Africville is man / woman / child"(25-27) and with the experience of racial oppression in the African Diaspora in her poem "Africville Spirit":

To people of colour, oppression is oppression.
.....
and racism is the same everywhere.
. . . Soweto is Chicago is Toronto
is Detroit is Montreal is New York is Halifax and Dartmouth
is Africville. (21-26)

In making the people of the nation and their experience of racism constitutive, Tynes extends the experience of Africville as imagined community over far-flung geographic areas and diverse individuals unified primarily by race.

The relationship between the destruction of Africville and what it subsequently has come to mean is also explored in one of Frederick Ward's poems, "Dialogue # 3 Old Man (to the Squatter)." Like Tynes, the speaker in Ward's poem insists on Africville's significance abstracted from the place itself: "Africville is us" (5); "*we are Africville!*" (7). The complexity of meaning-production around Africville is succinctly conveyed as the poem presents competing constructions of Africville that reflect racialized standpoints, historically distinct moments, and diversity of opinion within the community of former residents. An old man speaks to a squatter, urging the folly of trying to reclaim Africville by squatting on the former site. He impresses on his interlocutor and, by extension, on the reader, that the significance of Africville had less to do with the terrain itself than with racist attitudes toward its inhabitants. This point is effectively made through what initially seems a peculiar shift in the structure of address: "They don't intend to let us get *it* back. *You* / ain't a place. Africville is us" (4-5 emphasis added). In reminding the squatter that he isn't a place, the speaker seems to affirm that Africville can survive demolition since it lives on in the people

who used to inhabit it, but in the lines that follow the speaker suggests that with or without the place, Africville functions to identify in particular ways:

When we go to git
 a job, what they ask us? Where we from . . . and if we say
 we from Africville, *we are Africville!* And we don't git
 no job. It ain't no place son. (5-8, emphasis and ellipses in original)

Africville “ain’t no place” insofar as it becomes synonymous with a particular notion of blackness that leads to racial discrimination. It is surely no accident that employment is the chosen example; the speaker interprets the destruction of Africville in a way that makes the link between economic interests and racism. The power of the city and white economic interests to destroy Africvilles, to control the economic lives of black people is bemoaned even as the limits of state power and systemic racism are affirmed in the counter-claim that nothing has been destroyed after all: “You think they destroyed something. They ain’t. They / took away the place” (10-11), and “cause we Africville. / NOT-NO-SHACK-ON-NO-KNOLL. That ain’t the purpose . . . fer / whilst your edifice is foregone destroyed, its splinters will cry out: *We still here!*” (14-17). Thus, Africville once again lives on in the ways it functions as a sign of community and of resistance.

Resistance to racial oppression is a central element in the constitution of Africvillian national consciousness; the re-mapping of Africville explicitly refutes hegemonic constructions of the community which are marked by the structural racism that has characterized the province’s relations with black communities throughout Nova Scotia. This contestatory community map-making, where topography is made a vehicle for affective ties to people and popular memory, is a pervasive feature of Joe Sealy’s *Africville Suite*, which opens with a reading of the David Woods poem “Mood Indigo” that announces the centrality of music in the lives of Africvillians: “Duke was in our landscape.”¹⁷ Two compositions (“Brown Bomber” and “Duke’s in Town”) pay tribute to the internationally-known black personalities who had some connection to Africville, whether through romantic attachments, like Duke Ellington himself, or whether they came to know it through their own experiences of racism in Nova Scotia, like Joe Louis. Here again Africville is made part of the larger African diaspora, but several compositions draw attention to specific features of Africville’s terrain. “Train’s Comin’” reminds the listener of that dividing line down the community that represented both the encroachment of industrial interests on the small

community as well as employment for some of its residents. “The Caterpillar Tree” and “Kildare’s Field” speak to the pastoral motif marking so many of these texts, as does the David Woods painting commissioned for the cover of the CD. Red flowers dominate the foreground of the painting and reach up across the canvas to meet the red sky at the top. In between, a train on the infamous track does not quite manage to overtake the centrality of the white church building in the middle of the frame. The folk idiom Woods has used in the painting complements the romantic vision of community, but as in so many of the Africville texts, romanticism surfaces in a productive tension with realist elements such as the train. This rich cross-hatching of myth, romance, and realistic historical detail calls our attention to the “socially symbolic act” (Jameson 20) in which these works are engaged: an imaginative resolution of abiding economic contradictions articulated in racial terms.

Charles Saunders’ narrative tour of Africville provides not only a topography of the community, but a history as well of the ways residents have responded to the socio-economic conditions and the attendant symbolic violence imposed by the city; indeed the stops on the tour are largely dictated by the need to counter established stereotypes about Africville, and to critique the city’s treatment of residents. The visitor is invited to admire the ocean view, sign of desirable residential property; to imagine sunrise church services on Easter, fishers hauling in lobster before the Basin became too polluted, Portia White teaching at the school in the 1930s; we are also shown the wells with their cautionary signs, “Water must be boiled before drinking,” sign of the city’s refusal to provide tax-paying Africvillers with standard services. Topography here becomes a means of visiting different moments of the historical past in order to present a counter-memory in the narrative present.

The transmutation of history into topography, of time into space, and the unifying of diverse social actors across far-flung geographical spaces under the banner of race combine to create the apparently homogeneous and synchronous time-space of the nation. Homi Bhabha’s deconstruction of Anderson’s presentation of the time-space of national narratives usefully underscores the manufactured quality of such homogeneity by emphasizing its narrative instability. Referring to Anderson’s location of “the imagined community of the nation in the homogeneous time of realist narrative,” Bhabha contends that the alterity of the sign “alienates the synchronicity of

the imagined community,” and consequently, “From the place of the ‘meanwhile,’ where cultural homogeneity and democratic anonymity articulate the national community, there emerges a more instantaneous and subaltern voice of the people, minority discourses that speak betwixt and between times and places” (158-59). Since Bhabha’s aim in revealing the narrative dissonance of imagined communities is to locate a “place from which to speak both of, and as, the minority, the exilic, the marginal and the emergent” (149), the apparent homogeneity of Africadia in the texts about Africville bears consideration. It is worth repeating that Africadian nationalism is not the kind of state-sponsored nationalism that Bhabha is anxious to deconstruct; rather, Africadian nationalism operates within and in many respects against state-sponsored nationalisms both in Nova Scotia and in Canada. To the extent that the narratives of Africville construct an imagined community, however, they manifest the symbolic structure described by Anderson. More useful than deconstructing the unifying impulse, however, is a consideration of what it unifies in order to discern the strategies for political struggle in these texts, as well as the effort the writers make to create a space for “the minority, the exilic, the marginal and the emergent” in the larger Canadian national narrative.

Two of the most central tropes in these texts, placed side by side, seem to present contradictory claims. In presenting Africville as a lost Eden, these texts claim Africville is a thing of the past. In presenting Africville as African-Nova Scotian community, these texts claim that Africville is eternal, that “Africville will never die.” A number of theorists of nationalism have called attention to its paradoxical temporal structuring, to what Tom Nairn has called the “Janus-face” of nationalism: one face gazes back into archaic mist constructed as the primordial essence of the nation; the other face gazes into the future. In the case of these representations of Africville, this double-orientation is scripted as a death and a rebirth, and is thereby a means not only of reclaiming the Africville that was, but of imagining its significance for future political action; in other words, it also marks a shift in the meaning of Africville. The Africville that serves as the founding myth of an Africadian nationalism emerges from and contributes to the new symbolic significance Africville acquired among African-Nova Scotians *after* relocation.

Africville becomes, in this context, an imaginary resolution of the contradictions constituted by the processes of modernization and the racing of

those processes in the state-sponsored discourses. The racing of competing representations of Africville in recent narratives, where the white socio-economic interests of the state are the purveyors of the “Africville as slum” vision which the black residents counterpoint with a rural idyll, elides the position of African-Nova Scotians who were not residents of Africville, and even masks the diversity of opinion within Africville itself. Douglas Clairmont and Dennis Magill, sociologists commissioned to report on the relocation process, contend that most African-Nova Scotians initially regarded the relocation of Africville “as both inevitable and acceptable” (219); that there was general acceptance in the province of the characterization of Africville as a slum; and that the liberal-welfare rhetoric that accompanied relocation met little resistance in the black community. Instead, black leaders voiced concern for just and equitable compensation of residents (a struggle that is on-going), for re-establishing what was valuable in the Africville community in improved surroundings, and for some kind of guarantee that relocation would represent real opportunities for the long-oppressed residents of Africville (Clairmont and Magill 219-20). It was not, however, until the failure of the relocation to achieve any of these aims that Africville came to mean something quite different for many African-Nova Scotians and representations of it began explicitly to challenge the state-sponsored consensus that Africville was a slum, unfit for human habitation.

That temporal shift in the meaning of Africville for African-Nova Scotians is memorably represented in Shelagh Mackenzie’s film *Remember Africville*. Gus Wedderburn, a lawyer and black community leader in Halifax, asserts a number of times, “I did not see the flowers,” when recalling his impressions of Africville. The flowers he refers to appear in a photograph of Africville on the cover of the catalogue for a commemorative exhibition held at the Art Gallery of Mount Saint Vincent University in 1989, a copy of which Wedderburn held up as he reiterated his failure to see Africville in such romantic terms when he visited it prior to its destruction. Among the most frequently circulated photographs of Africville¹⁸ since its contestatory reconstruction are those that place the red gladioli in Dan Dixon’s yard in the foreground of a long shot of Africville houses leading up to the Bedford Basin in the background. It is this vista of Africville that David Woods refashions in his painting. Wedderburn’s insistence that the flowers were not part of his vision of Africville represents an important contestation of the post-relocation construction of Africville as rural idyll, and hints at another narrative about

the relocation. David Woods' radio play "Part of the Deal" focuses on the complicity of a young, educated black man employed by the city as "Assistant Relocation Officer for the Resettlement and Remuneration of the Negroes from the Unsavory Area," whose attitude toward "Coleville" and many of its inhabitants is one of shame: "It's always your own that drags you down." Yet even this text portrays most sympathetically the character who insists "home was never as bad as the newspapers made it look" and who enthuses, "You should see this place in the fall, man! Just about sunset the whole sky be filled up with colours—red, yellow and orange—just hangin' over the water. It be like lookin' up at heaven!" That more recent constructions of Africville make it possible to see the flowers is testimony to the power of the nationalist narratives to reformulate both hegemonic constructions of Africville and the discourse of the folk.

In effecting this shift within black community visions of Africville, the nationalist narratives reveal a will to suture class and other divisions among African-Nova Scotians in the province, and to recognize the ways those divisions are produced by the workings of industrial society where divisions of labour operate not only along class, but also race and gender lines. In making the enemy modern industrial capitalists and their state sponsors, and in making them white, these narratives strive to identify and resist the structural racism that produces and destroys Africvilles. An analogous and complementary impulse can be seen in the phenomenon of urban black intellectuals and artists creating a nationalism centred on a rural utopia. The political urgency of closing rural and urban divides in a province where significant numbers of African-Nova Scotians are not in the Halifax-Dartmouth metro area, but rather in rural and semi-rural communities scattered throughout the province is not difficult to grasp.

Not only, then, does the nationalist vision in constructions of Africville in these texts attend to the exclusion of African-Nova Scotians from the state-sponsored discourse of "the folk," it transforms a *non*-industrial vision into an *anti*-industrial vision in a way that attends to the racing of socio-economic divisions in the province. In centring this re-scripting of state-sponsored nationalist discourse on Africville, moreover, these artists are able to foreground the power relations and technologies of violence at play in the nationalist imaginings. The Africville texts intervene in nationalist discourse, not only by rewriting particular elements of the anti-modern vision of the quest of the folk, but more generally by disrupting the conven-

tional homogeneity of imagined communities through a foregrounding of the competition over the way a community is imagined. Africville's destruction is at once the condition of necessity that prompts the invention of an imagined community, and the trace of contested discursive terrain that comes to mark these texts. To be sure, in contesting hegemonic representations of Africville, these texts produce an alternative homogeneity that sutures class divides and urban-rural splits, but to the extent that this unity is scripted as a political strategy in response to disenfranchisement, exclusion and dispossession, it simultaneously refuses to become fixed as an identity. The visions of Africville in these texts can serve as a symbolic armature for subjective identification against hegemonic constructions of blackness in the province, and as a distinctive conceptual framework for an emergent literary and cultural corpus.

NOTES

- 1 Benedict Anderson, arguing against Tom Nairn's assertion that racism and nationalism are fundamentally connected, claims they are constitutively distinct and are deployed in different arenas (nationalism is deployed *internationally* and racism *intranationally*). Paul Gilroy in turn challenges Anderson's argument through his study of race and nation in Britain. See also Etienne Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein.
- 2 I have in mind Homi Bhabha's use of the term in his article "DissemiNation."
- 3 The principal study here is once again Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities*, but see also Homi Bhabha's collection of essays *Nation and Narration*, especially the piece by Timothy Brennan, "The National Longing for Form" 44-70.
- 4 Among the scholars who have been very critical of nationalism are Eric Hobsbawm, Tom Nairn, Paul Gilroy, and Arjun Appadurai.
- 5 I am borrowing this concept of "signature" from Jacques Derrida and from Elizabeth Grosz's feminist elaboration in "Sexual Signatures."
- 6 An extended discussion of the conditions of publication and dissemination of contemporary African Nova-Scotian writing is beyond the scope of this paper. The textual traces of hegemonic and, especially, counter-hegemonic discourses on race, identity, community and modernity can nonetheless be discerned in these works in a way that situates the artists and their works in relation to their conditions of production. Hence my attention to the works' formal instantiation, that is, to the ways artistic form itself may be said to represent a concrete instance of the nationalist discourse in question.
- 7 Some sense of the range and diversity of anti-modernism may be gleaned from the study by T. J. Jackson Lears.
- 8 The seminal study of literary manifestations of this discourse remains Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City*. Much has been written on the subject in the field of

social geography. See for example, Michael Bunce, C. Bryant et. al., and J.R. Short.

- 9 See Anthony Giddens.
- 10 The scope of my study precludes any extended discussion of the work of these writers here. The anti-modern tenor of their work has, in any case, been taken up by other scholars. In addition to McKay, Erik Kristiansen has examined the emphasis on anti-modernism in the novels of Bruce and Buckler. See also Gwen Davies' studies of Frank Parker Day and of the Song Fishermen; Davies takes issue with McKay's notion "that much Maritime literature is merely a literature of nostalgia created by middle class writers who idealize a pastoral golden age as part of a 'culture of consolation'"(195), arguing that such a reading fails to take account of the "realism, irony, and economic cynicism permeating much of it"(196). Davies nonetheless confirms the pervasiveness of pastoral motifs and a nostalgic tone. See also Janice Kulyk Keefer and George Elliott Clarke, who has written about the anti-modernism of African Nova-Scotian literature in his introduction to *Fire on the Water*, and in "The Birth and Rebirth of Africadian Literature."
- 11 Africadian is a word coined by George Elliott Clarke as an alternative to African-Nova Scotian, Afro-Nova Scotian or black Nova Scotian, other possible appellations. A fusion of Africa and Acadia, this term is especially evocative of an imagined community. As Clarke himself puts it, "if Africadians constitute a *state*, let it be called *Africadia*"(*Fire on the Water* 9).
- 12 Houston Baker's work on the Harlem Renaissance is an important touchstone for my discussion of the anti-modernist tropes of African Nova-Scotian artistry in that Baker's characterization of African-American modernism as the "mastery of form" and the "deformation of mastery" (15) may be seen to describe a similar *détournement* of a hegemonic discourse.
- 13 Spivak first elaborated the term in her introduction to *Selected Subaltern Studies*, but this frequently invoked argument has been taken up elsewhere by Spivak in essays and in dialogue with other critics. See "Feminism and Critical Theory," "In a Word. Interview," and "Criticism, Feminism and the Institution."
- 14 See Marshall Berman for a more ample discussion of the paradigms of modernity. I use the word *agon* advisedly because it means not only a conflict or contest, but more specifically the dramatic performance of a conflict.
- 15 This poem appears on Joe Sealy's *Africville Suite*. Not previously published. Quoted with permission of the author.
- 16 Spivak offers this definition: "[T]he ghost dance is an attempt to establish the ethical relation with history as such, ancestors real or imagined" ("Ghostwriting" 70), and further, "Thus the 'end' of the ghost dance . . . is to make the past a future, as it were—the future anterior, not a future present, as is the case with the 'end' of most narratives of social justice" (70).
- 17 Not previously published. Quoted with permission of the author.
- 18 See the commemorative book *The Spirit of Africville* published by The Africville Genealogical Society, and the photos by Ted Grant that accompany Charles Saunders' "Back to Africville" in the feature on Africville in *This Country Canada*; the CD cover for Joe Sealy's *Africville Suite* reproduces some of the photographs from *Spirit of Africville*.

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Reading Trudeau's *Cheminements de la politique* in May 1979

Caught in a Billy the Kid slouch, thumbs cocked
In belt, his mouth hawking phlegm at pale-faced,
Provincial *caudillos*, Trudeau tirades
At us from billboards and bored t.v. screens.
Everyone feared he would be defeated—
And he was: we all got tired of dreaming,
And awoke yeasterday to face Joe Clark,
A government of beer-bellied grifters.

I go back to the old book, *Cheminements
de la politique*, nine years after War Measures,
To mourn *le philosophe* we've voted out:
Now, black parades of words end in arrest,
The long, black whips of sentences snap, herd
Masses into mobs always faced by ghastly
Police who, curled in formation—like crab
Lice—snarl and, lead-fisted, splinter windows.

Let Clarke's government tear like newspaper,
Ministers deform like silly putty,
Journalists spit disaster at his crimes:
How can some grad school dropout salve our hurts,
Our multitudinous solitudes, if
That insolent law prof couldn't heal us?

From Marichette to Rosealba and *La Sagouine* A Genealogy *au féminin* for Acadian Theatre¹

As the organizers of the celebrated booklaunch for *La Sagouine*² must have realized, Antonine Maillet's *Sagouine* can appear as a curious anomaly in Acadian theatre history; indeed, it can appear as an embarrassing reminder of the poverty and unremitting labour which once marked the lives of too many Acadian women. It is true that a theatrical tradition described in terms of a highly educated male élite—Marc Lescarbot, Senator Pascal Poirier, Mgr. Marcel-François Richard or Father Camille Lefebvre—cannot account for a *Sagouine* who is working-class, female, and educated strictly in the school of hard knocks. My essay, however, takes issue with Zénon Chiasson's suggestion that, "le théâtre d'Antonine Maillet demeure un cas à part du théâtre acadien. La dimension de cette oeuvre la propulse dans les rangs du répertoire universel et nous oblige à chercher . . . ailleurs les signes de notre identité théâtrale" ("Fragments" 63). On the contrary, the *Sagouine* is the most brilliant representative of a popular Acadian theatrical tradition which has flourished since the late nineteenth century, as Pierre Gérin and Pierre M. Gérin have suggested.³ This essay seeks to contribute to a more complete understanding of this tradition.

Scholars, notably Jean-Claude Marcus and Roger Lacerte, have explored the rapport between Acadian collegial theatre and the popular, oral domain of *le conteur*, but the dynamism and the persistence of Acadian oral culture have yet, perhaps, to be fully appreciated. Academic accounts have also tended to overlook the fact that whereas the literary theatrical tradition is heavily dominated by men, the oral tradition has included women. The

oversight is not surprising, given that oral traditions and women's lives often escape documentation altogether. With respect to theatre history, it must be remembered that popular activities, theatrical in the broadest sense, are only historicized insofar as they encounter literary habits and institutions. As I shall show, it is precisely through such encounters that a vibrant Acadian tradition of Sagouinesque monologists can be discerned. While performances (apart from those of Viola Léger) are local and occasional, and scripts, if they exist, remain unpublished, this tradition is nonetheless a striking feature of contemporary, popular Acadian culture. Rosealba, the Sagouine of the Baie Sainte-Marie, as she has often been called, is of particular interest both because of the passionate following she inspires in her home community and because of the literary quality of her monologues. Other contemporary Sagouines include Lonice and Françoise, "les deux vieilles Sagouines [sic] de Pombcoup [Pubnico-Ouest]" (*Le Petit Courrier*, le 29 avril, 1976, 1), and Sophie-Anne, "la Sagouine de Chéticamp" (*Le Courrier*, le 20 avril, 1979, 10).

We must ask whether the existence of local Sagouines testifies more to the influence of Antonine Maillet than to that of a prior, or parallel, oral tradition. Certainly Maillet's Sagouine has been imitated; we read, for example, that "La Chandeleur se fête avec Gapi et la Sagouine" in Margeree, Çape Breton, with a photo of two local people dressed up and dancing in old-time costume (*Le Courrier*, le 8 février, 1979, 1-2).⁴ Nevertheless, however brilliant her success, Maillet's character cannot have inspired all the Sagouines in Acadie. Rosealba came on the scene before her, in 1962, although the early Rosealba resembled Maillet's Sagouine less closely than the Rosealba of today.⁵ Other, earlier monologists are comparable: Marguerite à Yutte, from L'Anse-des-LeBlanc; Marie-Marthe Dugas, from Station-du-Petit-Ruisseau; and, a generation before, Fannie Thériault, originally from Rivière-aux-Saumons, who lived for many years in Lower Saulnierville. Suzanne Deveau, "la grande Souqui" of Chéticamp, Cape Breton, is remembered by Anselme Boudreau as a "très bonne conteuse" known to him in his youth (193). Already elderly in 1908, Suzanne Deveau would have been a senior contemporary of Emilie Leblanc, the author of a remarkable series of monologues of which we have considerably more evidence, since they were published, under the *nom de plume* of Marichette. Pierre Gérin and Pierre M. Gérin have brought to light the story of how, from 1895 to 1898, Marichette signed a series of letters to Valentin Landry, the editor of

Évangéline, while her creator, Emilie Leblanc, resided in Chéticamp (Sainte-Alphonse), Clare. Marichette's kinship with Maillet's Sagouine is clearly noted by the scholars who rediscovered her:

Ces lettres sont une mine d'or pour le linguiste, pour l'historien, pour le sociologue, car elles exposent les problèmes de l'instruction, de l'assimilation, du chômage, la corruption politique, le rôle de l'Eglise, la misérable condition et les aspirations de la femme. Le style, la truculence de la langue, les thèmes, la rhétorique de la protestation annoncent la Sagouine. (P. Gérin 38)

It may seem paradoxical that an enterprise which seeks to describe an oral theatrical tradition should take as evidence the non-theatrical writing of a highly-educated, middle-class woman such as Emilie Leblanc. Marichette's literary medium, however, does not so much set her apart as confirm the fact that the female monologists of whom we have any knowledge each signify in some way the complex but fruitful encounter between women, the oral traditions in which women played an important part, and the predominantly masculine domain of higher education.

In this context, it is worth recalling that both Antonine Maillet and Viola Léger began their careers as professors at Notre-Dame d'Acadie; both were, therefore, among the first generation of women to have a real impact on the classical theatrical traditions within the colleges.⁶ Antonine Maillet, in *Les Confessions de Jeanne de Valois*, describes the theatre classes held at the first *collège classique* for girls, in Memramcook, New Brunswick, as the professors and students alike immersed themselves in their French heritage and made it their own:

Les images qui me trottent dans la mémoire sont celles d'un François Villon qui bat les pavés de Paris en égrenant les plus beaux vers français; celles de la farce de Maître Pathelin que nos comédiennes montaient comme si la pièce leur avait été dédiée. (184)

Zénon Chiasson points out the accomplishments during the late 1950s of the award-winning theatre company of Notre-Dame d'Acadie, under the direction of Antonine Maillet ("L'Institution" 752-53).

Emilie Leblanc, the creator of Marichette, also studied at Memramcook. "Puis elle était allée à l'École normale de Fredericton, où elle avait eu la chance d'être l'élève du célèbre professeur Alphée Belliveau" (Gérin and Gérin, *Marichette* 39). She must have been impressed with his enlightened views regarding the authenticity of Acadian French, as with the ideas of Pascal Poirier who at that time was publishing his first monographs on the

parler franco-acadien. A writer and an intellectual, Emilie Leblanc lived at a time when women, and perhaps particularly Acadian women, had almost no access to the public world, yet she was a natural leader of the Acadian cultural revival taking place in her generation. She was the only woman to succeed in having her views in support of women's suffrage published in *Évangéline* (Gallant 5). Her upbringing and her education must have given her the sense that a new era was dawning, but a tragic love affair led her abruptly to a brutal encounter with the common lot of women (Gérin 1984). It was after this that she took up her pen to write in the name of Marichette, speaking through the persona, and in the popular idiom of an uneducated woman, as Antonine Maillet would choose to do eighty years later.

As Pierre Gérin remarks, Marichette's use of popular or colloquial language takes on sharp significance in passages treating of politics, myth, or religion, where the subject matter locates her unmistakably in the discursive domain of the educated elite. It is in such passages that her parodic audacity becomes clear: "La belle ordonnance ronflante de la langue classique, dans laquelle se complaisaient les orateurs et les écrivains de cette époque, est brisée, disloquée" (Gérin, "Une Écrivaine" 44). If the violence with which some of Marichette's detractors denounced her writing is thus made more understandable,⁷ we can equally better appreciate from this perspective the contribution Emilie Leblanc made to an Acadian Renaissance which would eventually lead to greater respect both for local varieties of French and for women (Gérin, *Une Écrivaine* 44). Marichette's use of Acadian French is no more folkloric or sentimental than la Sagouine's triple disruption of the classical theatrical traditions which—from the neo-classical masque of Marc Lescarbot to the century of collegial theatre documented by Laurent Lavoie, Roger Lacerte, Jean-Claude Marcus, René LeBlanc and Micheline Laliberté—had elided any representation of women, working-class life, or non-standard French.⁸

Rosealba, too, has evolved through the encounter between popular, oral traditions and those of the colleges and the Church. The first Rosealba performance which I have been able to locate took place around a campfire at the Colonie de la Jeunesse Acadienne (C.J.A.), at the Baie Sainte-Marie in the summer of 1962, the year the camp was first open to girls. On that occasion, Rosealba was played by Sister Thérèse Robichaud, who based her performance on a script written by an unidentified person (Robichaud). Cécile LeBlanc Poirier learned it there, and later performed it herself (Poirier). A

little later, someone, probably a nun, passed the text to Anne-Marie Comeau, who performed it a number of times (Comeau). Michel Thibault heard it as a child, in the spring of 1964, and later, in 1973 or '74, he began to collaborate with Anne-Marie Comeau to recreate Rosealba as an older woman with nineteen children (Thibault, Personal Interview). The Rosealba productions of 1994 and 1995 were collaborations of Anne-Marie Comeau, Michel Thibault, Charlene Déraspe and Marie-Adèle Deveau, and the texts also drew on a series of community interviews. As theatre, Rosealba draws on a wide range of talents and skills, but it is also true to say that the monologues are inspired by an entwining of the oral traditions of Saulnierville Station with the influences of the Church, specifically of *Les Filles de Jésus* in Saulnierville, and with modern educational practices generally. That this influence is characterized in the monologues as both negative and positive—both humiliating and uplifting—underlines the extent to which we are looking not only at instances of influence and education but also at difference and resistance, equally evident in the monologues of Marichette and *La Sagouine*.

The encounter between women, higher education and oral tradition is also evident in the theatre of “les deux vieilles Sagouines [*sic*] de Pombcoup.” Lonice and Françoise are dramatizations of traditional Acadian women. They are played by two modern women, Caroline d’Entremont and Lucile d’Entremont, who see their theatre as a means of educating and entertaining their community while preserving traditional knowledge and skills such as butter-making and weaving (d’Entremont and d’Entremont).

The Chéticamp storyteller known to Anselme Boudreau as “la grande Souqui” was another highly literate participant in oral Acadian traditions. As a young person, Suzanne Deveau read a great deal, and later in her life, although she was visually impaired, she could still recite Molière by heart. Boudreau comments, “Elle ne contait pas seulement des contes; elle racontait presque mot à mot des histoires qu’elle avait lues durant sa jeunesse. Je me rappelle de deux: *Le médecin malgré lui*, de Molière, qu’elle appelait l’histoire de Sganarelle et Martine, et le roman *Un de perdu, deux de retrouvés*, qu’elle appelait l’histoire de Pierre et saint Luc” (193). Insofar as Suzanne Deveau was a storyteller and not, like Rosealba or Maillet’s Sagouine, the dramatization of a storyteller, she seems closer to a predominantly oral tradition. We can only speculate, however, on the paths she might have taken were it not for her disability.

Of the monologists and storytellers whom I am examining in this essay, only Fannie Thériault (b. 3 April 1886) could be said to belong to a truly oral tradition. Curiously, she describes herself not as a *conteuse*, and even less as an actress, but as follows: “moi, je suis une personne qui est intense—je parle beaucoup, je grouille beaucoup, je chante beaucoup” (Thériault). Significantly, Fannie—unlike the others—has no persona but speaks in her own name. In effect, she is closer to the reality which Rosealba and the Sagouine represent, a discovery which suggests that ultimately, one aspect of the oral heritage is this character-type: the poor, old woman who speaks in the idiom of her people. We might say that insofar as Fannie was innocent of this character-type, she was closer to the reality it replaces and recreates. As for Emilie Leblanc, insofar as she animated the character-type, she can be unproblematically placed in proximity to the oral tradition we are tracing.

Antonine Maillet has always described herself as a “conteuse, directement issue d’un lignage de conteurs oraux, j’appartiens à la littérature orale” (1977: 207). She has explained clearly, and René LeBlanc has underlined, the extent to which her work stands at the crossroads of the oral and the written traditions: “je me situe à la jointure de la tradition orale et de l’écriture” (cited in LeBlanc 1985: 58). She has many times insisted on the reality of the Sagouine’s referents. In a 1973 interview with Anne Girard, she delineates the major themes which circulate around the question of her famous character’s origins: first, the question of class (“les gens d’en bas”), and the imperative to give a literary voice to those who have been silenced; second, the reality of the Sagouinian referent which is affirmed on two levels, that of the individual, and that of the type, “parce qu’elle est à multiples exemplaires.” In another interview, Maillet explains that the Sagouine is based on two or possibly three actual women (see Scully). Local tradition at the Baie Sainte-Marie has it that the third model for the Sagouine is none other than Marguerite à Yutte (Belliveau), to whom Antonine Maillet and Rita Scalabrini refer in *Acadie pour quasiment rien* (11). Maillet interviewed Marguerite à Yutte in the late sixties, during the period when she interviewed several other people at the Baie, including Capitain Sullivan, of Meteghan, who was, of course, a model for her character, Sullivan (Muriel Comeau).

Maillet has explained that the Sagouine represents a disinherited class of people, which is clearly the case. In the context of this enquiry into Acadian monologue traditions, however, it is clear that she also re-presents the character-type of the older, working woman who has the vision, energy and

language to articulate reality on behalf of her community, and who therefore enables that community to affirm its Rabelaisian heritage, and laugh. Fannie Thériault, it seems, was in fact that type of woman, suggesting that the type is in one sense an objective referent, and that such women live within the community with a relatively low degree of self-consciousness. Marguerite à Yutte may be another example;⁹ and Antonine Maillet has created several fictional counterparts such as “la veuve à Calixte” in *Mariaagélas*. On another level, however, the type is a consciously-adopted persona which gives permission for some individuals to speak, and to speak freely, about what they know most deeply. Clearly the persona serves as a strategy in this sense for Anne-Marie Comeau, Marie-Adèle Deveau, Michel Thibault and Charlene Déraspe, who become Rosealba; for Caroline and Lucille D’Entremont, who become Lonice and Françoise, and for Emilie Leblanc, who became Marichette. The shared referent and common experience associated with this character-type are responsible for the strong sense of correspondence which unites the monologues of *La Sagouine* with Marichette’s letters and Rosealba’s monologues, and which explains the immediate recognition of connection and similarity experienced, for example, by Anne-Marie Comeau when she was introduced to the letters of Marichette (Anne-Marie Comeau).

It is worth noting, too, that to a significant extent the monologists share the subject matter of Acadian daily life from a woman’s perspective. Maillet’s *Sagouine* and Rosealba, in particular, describe life during the depression, when many people lived on the threshold of subsistence. Rosealba gives a comic description of this period in the following monologue from the 1994 spectacle, “Rosealba nous parle”:

J’avions point de welfare dans mon temps. Si tu pouvais point t’occuper de toi-même t’allais à la Poor House. Nous autres fallait que ça raguernit et rien que tu tires là-bas. C’t’affaire de recycling, là ... ce n’est pas les Anglais qu’ont commencé ça! Ça fait des années que je raccommode, que je rapièce, que je raguerne pour épargner! J’en ai lavé des sacs à scallop pour faire des lavettes ou des caneçons. J’en ai teindu de la cottounade avec du jus de bettes pour faire des rideaux. J’ai même fait des chemises avec des sacs de farine, quand j’pouvais en trouver qui étaient encore faits de butonne. Y avait un des enfants qui était assez gros—je crois que c’était Nastasse—. Pour une chemise pour lui ça prenait deux sacs de 100 livres. Une de ces chemises ça dit PURITY en avant et ROBIN HOOD en arrière. Il était faraud de ça! Y savait point quoi ça disait. Y pouvait point lire. (Thibault and Déraspe)

Rosealba's monologue communicates not only the economies and life-skills of a leaner time, but also the humour that sees her through. She has a sweeter personality than the Sagouine. Maillet has commented that, "la Sagouine est une révolutionnaire sans aigreur contre l'injustice qu'elle reconnaît. Elle est debout mais elle accepte son rôle. C'est ce qui fait à la fois sa grandeur et sa misère" (Royer 47). Rosealba, too, is "sans aigreur," but she is perhaps less revolutionary and certainly not as grand. Indeed, she can seem quite childish, yet her observations are often profound.

Curiously, she is less accepting of injustice. This can be seen in the 1995 monologue which recalls her brother who died in the war (Thibault and Déraspe). Of his induction, she explains, "A c'te temps là on avait besoin de passer des tests pour savoir si t'avais assez de compernure pour aller te battre." When she accompanies him to Halifax on the train, she wonders "pourquoi c'qu'on célébrait de même pour envoyer nos hommes se battre dans les vieux pays . . . se faire estropier." These comments, delivered quite innocently, are initially comic. However, when the letter announcing her brother's death arrives, the monologue ends in searing empathy with "Mamme [qui] pourrait jamais accepter ça." The silence which follows in effect reframes Rosealba's earlier remarks about the war, first seen as slightly ridiculous, but now recognized as an outbreak of unacceptable violence within the social order. Rosealba also expresses anger at other injustices: when her son loses a job as a Bingo caller because he doesn't know English—"there's no E in BINGO!" (English in the original)—or when she herself, as a young girl, misses her confirmation basically because her family was so poor. As Michel Thibault notes, her anger is both astute and comic. "Through the laughter run . . . poverty and tragedy. Her innocent comments convey such a strong social message" (Thibault, Telephone Interview). The Sagouine recognizes herself to be "une citoyenne à part ençère (ce qui est moins gros que la part 'entière')" (Royer 47). Rosealba does not express this class consciousness, although her monologues overflow with details of daily life as a poor member of a minority culture. The world she projects is, for the most part, whole and warm and funny. As the cliché would have it, she is rich in the things that matter most.

Behind the figures of Marichette, the Sagouine and Rosealba, we discern the intelligence, strength and humour of Acadian women. Acadian working- and middle-class women prior to the mid-twentieth century performed a tremendous amount of work daily, as Anselme Boudreau explains

in his chapter on “L’ouvrage des Femmes”: “Autrefois, à Chéticamp, les femmes travaillaient bien plus que les femmes d’aujourd’hui” (130). Among other tasks, such as working for the church and educating their children, they produced wool fabric by hand, beginning with the care of the sheep; and from this they sewed and knitted; they made quilts and carpets for their large families. In addition to helping with the farm labour, harvesting and plowing, for example, they grew large kitchen gardens, and put aside and stored all kinds of food; they took care of pigs, chickens, and cows; they milked, and made cheese and butter, sausage and headcheese; they washed all the clothing and bedding by hand, and they scrubbed their houses, floors and walls; they made soap; and of course they cooked, washed dishes, and bore many children. It is astonishing that in addition to all this, some women found the time and the energy to play the violin or the organ,¹⁰ or to read widely.

Yet they did. Suzanne Deveau, for example, was married to Polite à Marine LeBlanc, a man whom Boudreau describes as “pas très . . . industriel” (193). Susanne raised her four sons in extreme poverty; at the time that Anselme knew her, she did not have a home of her own but lived and eventually died in the homes of others. One of her sons was somewhat lacking in “comper-nure”—to borrow a word from Rosealba, who has the same problem with her son Thaddée—but the other three went on to become well-educated and successful. Unfortunately, all three moved to the United States. In her old age, Anselme would read to her, and Souqui, in exchange, would tell him stories that sometimes went on for days. While some women played music and others made beautiful quilts, many, like Suzanne Deveau, turned to an art which could be practised at the same time as domestic work—talking.

In this context, it is worth noting that the most exuberant exploit mentioned by Fannie Thériault during her interview was performed during a “quiltine” of women working together to clean the Saulnierville Church:

On faisait une quiltine pour laver l’église, et p’is, y avait une chaise pour prêcher, là, vous savez.

[Quelqu’un dit]: “Qui ce qui va laver la chaise?”

Bien, c’est Fannie qui va laver la chaise.

Père Castonguay [s’est dit]: “Je vais aller me cacher dans la sacristie parce qu’elle va faire quelque bassesse.”

J’ai monté dans la chaise, j’ai commencé à décrier les vendeux de grog, p’is, mon ami, j’la contais ça d’long et d’travars . . . Quand j’ai bien fini là, quand j’ai commencé à laver la chaise, il a sorti de là-dedans . . . (Thériault)

This spontaneous celebration of popular theatre reveals several noteworthy characteristics. The first is the fact that it occurs within the context of communal work. As was often the case, the work was gender-specific; here, the women are working together to clean the Saulnierville Church. In the story of Louise à Dan, below, it is the men who are working together in the woods. Second is the fact that the church occupies a central place in the culture. Third, and bearing in mind that Fannie was a well-known bootlegger, we note the presence of parody. It is a very gentle parody, however, since apparently not even the priest was offended.

In Louise à Dan's story, the parodic element is equally delicately posed; in fact, the occasion could just as well be described as a "messe blanche," the sincere celebration of church ritual in the absence of a priest:

J'étions à Darthmouth à logger p'is du temps de la messe tous les dimanches avant-midis, Freddie à William disait le chapelet. Je nous mettions tous de genoux, parce que je pouvions point aller à l'église. Je savions pas où était l'église. Après dîner ils alliont su' un nègre à Preston s'acheter un gallon de bière p'is ils amenions ça à la camp. Y boivions ça et Dan disait à Freddie de nous faire un prône. Freddie allait dehors . . . y avait des buches . . . C'te gars-là pouvait prêcher. Les hoummes alliont dehors demi grogués . . . Ils arrachiont leurs calottes de su' leur tête . . . et ils écoutiont Freddie. (Louise à Dan Comeau)

Parodic imitation of the "gens d'en haut" has always been the prerogative of the "gens d'en bas," and such is the case here. These two parodies, however, have their end not in revolution, but in laughter.

A parodic element is more evident in the monologues of Rosealba than in either Marichette or the Sagouine, perhaps because live theatre lends itself more easily to parody than the written word or the radio monologue. Mime, mimicry and dance are masterfully handled by Anne-Marie Comeau who, as Rosealba, easily slips from one persona to another. For example, during the 1995 monologue on the Festival Acadien, she recalls the visit of Princess Margaret to the Baie Sainte-Marie, and then, simply becomes her:

Croiriez-vous que je me souvonne du Premier Festival en 1955? J'm'en souvonne par rapport que c'était l'année que Princesse Marguerite de l'Angleterre avait venu.

[Rosealba devient Princess Mar.: chapeau-tiara]

"So nice to be here among you loyal Acadian subjects.

"I just adore your purée de râpure.

"Je suis très contente d'être ici en cette occasion de fierté, de festivité, de loyauté, de bonté et de Red Rose thé . . .

Elle n'avait pas vraiment dit ça mais c'est de-même que j'm'en souvonne. (Thibault and Déraspe)

There is also, in Rosealba, a good deal that is not parodic but is simply funny and familial, representing the kind of talking that mothers do with their children. Indeed, Michel Thibault has suggested that for him, his mother is a primary influence in the creation of Rosealba:

Les histoires que je raconte, ce sont des histoires que j'ai entendues de ma mère. . . . Le sens de l'humour de Rosealba, c'est le sens de l'humour de ma mère. Ma mère était très comique. Elle faisait rire tout le monde . . . elle pouvait beaucoup, beaucoup rire. . . . On n'a jamais eu beaucoup d'argent. Ma mère économisait, nourrissait ses enfants, mais en même temps elle réussissait à monter quelque chose de solide; elle voyait l'importance du village, de la famille. . . . C'est ironique, mais ma mère ne saura jamais jusqu'à quel point elle a participé aux monologues. (Thibault, Personal Interview).

The important family context is typical of oral tradition.

Anne-Marie Comeau, too, recalls storytelling as a family activity:

Ma mère me contait des histoires, beaucoup. Mon père itou me contait des histoires de tchômes, du diable qui venait à des *games* de cartes, des *bootleggers*, toute de quoi qui faisait peur. Des histoires, on en avait tout le temps . . . chez nous. Je me souviens de ces *gatherings* icitte, puis je faisons des boules de *fluff* et du *fudge*, puis ça parlait . . . j'avions un poêle à bois et des lampes; j'avions point de lumière . . . ma mère n'avait pas le temps de s'assire et conter des histoires: elle avait onze enfants. . . . ma mère [contait] des affaires qu'ils faisions quand elle était jeune, c'était plus comique; Mamme n'avait point de peur, point de tristesse. (Anne-Marie Comeau)

Anne-Marie Comeau grew up in a family with strong oral traditions. Both parents participated, and it is interesting to note the different styles of each: whereas the father told the stories which are usually classified as "contes," the mother told tales which were more anecdotal and domestic and less highly structured. Her stories would be easier to break off and to pick up again, as the rhythm of the day permitted. Her stories would more resemble monologues, transmitting important but not necessarily breathtaking information about the family and the extended family, the kind of genealogy which is still the bread and butter of conversations at the Baie Sainte-Marie today. Rosealba participates as a matter of course in this community activity, and Antonine Maillet has immortalized it, not so much in the character of the Sagouine, but in that of Pélagie-la-Gribouille. The maintenance of family histories is part and parcel of the work of the *conteuse*.

Maillet's Sagouine and all of her sisters are central to the evolution of a theatrical identity in Acadie. Belonging wholly neither to the collegial nor to

the popular camp, they are able to elicit response from an unusually broad spectrum of society, as James de Finney as shown with respect to *La Sagouine* (26, 27). This response has also, he argues, an important social function, in that “la rencontre du public et de l’oeuvre a permis de réunir et de valoriser esthétiquement des fragments d’une culture populaire sous-estimés jusqu’alors” (41). Bearing these insights in mind, and remembering that the *Sagouine*, *Rosealba* and other *Sagouines* are contemporary, popular phenomena, let us return, in conclusion, to the scholarly accounts of Acadian theatre history. The importance of oral tradition to Acadian theatre history has been noted. Roger Lacerte, in 1978, emphasized that the theatre of the classical colleges was preceded by amateur theatre in the parishes, and in 1980, Jean-Claude Marcus argued that the ancestor of Acadian theatre is the art of storytelling. These discoveries were prompted, at least in part, by the necessity to resolve the apparent contradiction between the assertion—made by René Baudry, Pascal Poirier and others—that the Acadians are a theatre-loving people, and the fact that Acadian theatrical tradition, in the accepted sense of a native dramaturgy and a consistent and professional theatre, begins about 1960. Jean-Claude Marcus suggests a generous interpretation of theatrical activity which takes as its key element an “échange d’émotions entre acteurs et spectateurs” (634). In this light, Acadian theatre can be seen, he argues, as a rich and ongoing tradition. In the same vein, Roger Lacerte suggests that we interpret the expression, “tradition théâtrale” in a broader sense than usual.

Lui qui ne fut par le passé ni jamais assez nombreux ni assez stable ni assez riche pour bénéficier de troupes permanentes de professionnels mais qui a néanmoins toujours eu un goût prononcé pour le spectacle comme pour le conte, la légende, la chanson, enfin, pour toutes les formes de littérature parlée, orale, populaire. (119)

Lacerte distinguishes between the “théâtre de société” and the “théâtre d’école” (127), commenting that the Acadian classical colleges have a solid theatrical tradition which goes back to the 1850s and which is preceded and paralleled by amateur traditions based in the communities. Local theatrical and variety shows held to raise funds for the parishes and schools are too numerous to count (127).

Marcus also distinguishes between theatre in the parishes and theatre in the colleges and convents. Local theatrical events, described as “séances dramatiques et musicales,” or “soirées récréatives,” should be envisioned, he argues, as a somewhat structured and enlarged extension of “‘la veillée,’ qui

dans l'ancien temps, réunissait, au cours des longues soirées d'hiver, les membres d'une famille et leurs voisins" (635).

Citing Père Anselme Chiasson, who writes in his history of Chéticamp of the repression of dancing as an acceptable social pastime, and of its replacement by "des parties de cartes, de jeux de société, des chansons, des contes et des histoires drôles" (210), Marcus makes a critically important formulation:

En Acadie, plus qu'ailleurs, l'ancêtre de l'acteur est le conteur. Pour capter et conserver l'attention de son public, le conteur se devait de rendre son "histoire" . . . dramatique, et déployer pour ce faire certaines techniques qui, sans qu'il en eût conscience, ressortissait à l'art dramatique. (635)

Marcus places this oral tradition in a chronological context: in the 1870s, with the development of Acadian national consciousness and the founding of such important institutions as the *collèges classiques* and *L'Assomption*, domestic traditions declined and were replaced by developing national institutions which reflected the structural transformations of Acadian society.

De familiale qu'elle était, la "veillée" devient paroissiale, et l'on quitte peu à peu la cuisine pour aller s'ébaudir ou pleurer, le plus souvent les deux, à la salle paroissiale, à celle de la C.M.B.A. (Catholic Mutual Benefit Association), de la Société des Artisans Canadiens-français, ou plus tard de l'Assomption, etc. L'époque du conteur décline, celle du théâtre s'amorce . . . (637)

Both collegial and community theatrical traditions, in other words, are indebted to the powerful oral tradition of the conteur, which accounts for the fact that in the newly formed theatrical academies, both the faculty and the students were sufficiently at ease in a theatrical idiom that they were regularly able to supplement the French repertoire with original compositions. Scripts, however, were rarely published and the literary imperative to preserve texts was even more neglected in the domain of community theatre, of which little is known because no texts have survived.

If Marcus is prescient in noting that behind the Acadian taste for the theatre we can discern the presence of *le conteur*, he is hasty in assuming that the storyteller faded away, as he implies, in the 1860s. After all, as Zénon Chiasson has demonstrated, it would be another hundred years before Acadian literary dramaturgy would get off the ground; another one hundred and ten years until *La Sagouine*. Antonine Maillet herself makes the claim—cited by Marcus—that prior to 1960, "la tradition littéraire en Acadie est presque uniquement orale" (636). In fact, when Marcus suggests a chronological movement from the kitchen to the parish hall, he inadver-

tently points to a larger reality: the Acadian elite may have been busy rebuilding Acadie, but the kitchens remained, as they still do, and kitchens are the locus of family life and the traditional domain of women. The *conteur* is still in the kitchen, the *conteur* may be a *conteuse*, and Acadian oral traditions are still in dialogue with the classical theatrical traditions of the educated elite.

The entire matter can finally be related to the predominant and most difficult issue facing Acadian culture today: the question of language. As Pierre Gérin remarks of Marichette, the use of a popular, colloquial language has significant symbolic value: “comme les femmes, le parler franco-acadien a été confiné dans les cuisines et les basses-cours. C’est avec elles qu’il en est sorti” (Gérin 44). Gérin is describing the world of the late nineteenth century, but—with respect to the location of the *parler franco-acadien* if not with respect to that of women—the situation remains virtually unchanged one hundred years later. It is perhaps to the endurance of this popular language that we can attribute the astonishing survival of the oral traditions which are embodied in it. In this sense, from the perspective of theatre history rather than from the perspective of linguistics or of politics, Acadian French can be freshly perceived as the difficult treasure that it is, the irrepressible music of a people.

NOTES

- 1 This paper is based on research carried out within the framework of *Hommage à Rosealba*, an action-research project dedicated to researching and supporting popular theatrical traditions at the Baie Sainte-Marie, and to discovering as much as possible about the Acadian monologue tradition. The research project is described more fully in the *Humanities Research Fiches*, No. 11, 1995, published by the Canadian Federation for the Humanities. Many people have supported this project and its goals; in particular, Marie-Adèle Deveau contributed enormously both to the research and to the 1994 and 1995 *Rosealba* performances. The Explorations Programme of the Canada Council, the Cultural Affairs Department of the Government of Nova Scotia and Université Sainte-Anne all provided funding. Thanks are also due to Anne-Marie Comeau, Michel Thibault, Muriel Comeau, René LeBlanc, Normand Godin, Jean Daigle, Père Anselme Chiasson, Murielle Comeau, Neil Boucher, James Quinlan, Gérald Boudreau, Harley d’Entremont, Martine Jacquot, Edwin Doucet, Marcel Weaver, Raymond Gaudet, Sylvestre Muise, Jean-Louis Belliveau, Chris Meuse, Imelda Amirault, James de Finney, Willemine Mathieu and all of the wonderful people who gave interviews.
- 2 *La Sagouine* was launched at the Université de Moncton, in 1971. Alain Pontaut, in “Les Sortilèges de la Sagouine,” describes how Viola Léger, in the character of the Sagouine, quietly scrubbed the floors, breaking anonymity only when she stood up to deliver the

- opening monologue of Mailliet's text. "Comme surprise, mais pas dérangée, par les invités, une femme de ménage, que sans doute on avait oublié de chasser, frottait le plancher et déplaçait son seau. Elle osait même adresser la parole aux notables ainsi réunis. . . . [I]l avait . . . fallu quelque temps pour que les invités s'aperçoivent qu'il ne s'agissait pas d'une pauvre égarée dans ce lieu distingué parmi l'élite du savoir et de la société, mais qu'ils venaient de rencontrer la vedette de ce brillant lancement" (7-8).
- 3 La Sagouine, "n'était pas tombée du ciel. Toute une tradition la préparait de longue main, discrètement" (*Marichette* 13).
 - 4 The pervasive influence of Antonine Mailliet's *La Sagouine* can be seen, for example, in the fact that during the 1970s, the French-language weekly *Le Petit Courrier de la Nouvelle-Écosse* (a.k.a. *Le Courrier de la Nouvelle-Écosse*) featured some twenty-two articles, interviews and photos of either Viola Léger or Antonine Mailliet in connection with *La Sagouine*.
 - 5 For a more detailed discussion, see Susan Knutson, "The Evolution of a Community Archetype: A Look at the Origins of Rosealba," and "Interview avec Michel Thibault."
 - 6 The acquisition of a Bachelor of Arts Program at the convent Notre-Dame du Sacré-Coeur, in Memramcook, in 1943, followed by the founding of Notre-Dame d'Acadie, in 1949, meant that the classical course of higher education as offered in the French-Canadian institutions of the period became accessible to women for the first time, and after this point it is impossible to speak of an elite theatrical tradition which is exclusively male (Couturier Leblanc 575; Gallant 17-24.)
 - 7 "[L]es fameuses lettres . . . furent si mal reçues par la soi-disant élite que la malheureuse auteure finit par renoncer à écrire" (Pierre Gérin, 39).
 - 8 Acadian theatre had a noble beginning: a neo-classical masque, composed in alexandrines, staged on the waters of the Annapolis Basin on 14 November 1606, to honour the return of Sieur de Poutrincourt to Port Royal. Composed and directed by Marc Lescarbot, a young Parisian lawyer and Acting Governor of the Habitation (in Poutrincourt's absence), "Le Théâtre de Neptune" was staged and performed in an exclusively masculine world and was, of course, written in Parisian French.

This extraordinary initiation was followed by a silence of almost two hundred and fifty years. In the words of Laurent Lavoie, "avant le 'Grand Dérangement' de 1755, les Acadiens vivaient paisiblement, défrichant leurs terres et se rencontrant pour fêter certains anniversaires et événements particuliers; après la déportation et pendant une centaine d'années, c'est le néant" (452).

The documented tradition begins again in the mid-1850s, in Memramcook, N.B., where L'abbé François-Xavier Lafrance opens the Séminaire Saint-Thomas. In 1866 the Seminary is incorporated into the Collège Saint-Joseph, directed by Père Camille Lefebvre; this first Acadian *collège classique* is joined in 1874 by the Collège Saint-Louis at Saint-Louis-de-Kent, N.B.; in 1890 by Collège Sainte-Anne, in Pointe-de-l'Église, N.S., and in 1899 by the Collège du Sacré-Coeur at Caraquet, N.B. As Laurent Lavoie, Roger Lacerte, Jean-Claude Marcus, René LeBlanc and Micheline Laliberté have documented, the colleges, and the theatrical academies they fostered, regularly invited the public to enjoy theatrical performances, tragic and comic, in French and in English—sometimes as often as five times during the academic year. Lacerte celebrates the century-long tradition of collegial theatre while lamenting the failure to survive of many original scripts written by both students and teachers. "Les Acadiens de Philadelphie" (1875) and "Les Accordailles de Gabriel et Évangéline (Saynette Champêtre)" by Senator Pascal Poirier;

“Scène Acadienne à Rogersville,” by Mgr. Marcel-François Richard; “Subercase,” by Père Alexandre Braud (1903), and “Le Drame du Peuple Acadien” (1930), by Père Jean-Baptiste Jégo, have been preserved: these texts are strongly nationalistic and often nostalgic in tone. All of these scripts use exclusively the French of the Academy.

Until the 1940s, in the boys’ colleges, all of the participants in theatrical events were boys or men. Even the female roles were eliminated from plays taken from the standard repertoire, and the creators of a certain “Vercingétorix,” which was performed at the Collège Sacré-Coeur in 1906, reportedly denied permission to a French director who wished to stage their play in Paris, because he wanted to introduce female characters. “[L]es auteurs refusèrent,” comments Laurent Lavoie, “sans doute pour éviter la ‘pollution morale’ causée par la présence maléfique de la femme” (454). The author of “Subercase” manages a misogynist allusion to the feminine sex which contradicts everything that is known about Acadian women:

Forts les corps! Forts les coeurs! et viriles les âmes!
 Purs de toute souillure, allez laissant aux femmes
 Les larmes de faiblesse et jusqu’au dernier jour
 De votre vie, aimez à dire avec amour
 Ce double cri qui doit rester votre devise:
 Vive la France! L’Acadie et l’Eglise!
 (cited in Lavoie, 453)

Pascal Poirier is noteworthy in that his surviving plays include female characters. On the other hand, they were written and performed after he had left Collège Saint-Joseph. “Les Acadiens en Philadelphie” was performed in Ottawa, in 1875.

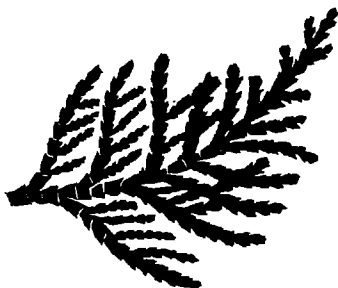
- 9 René LeBlanc refers to Marguerite à Yutte as “la Rosealba de son temps,” noting that she performed at Christmas concerts, picnics and parish halls from one end of Clare to the other, and that her monologues, which were extremely funny, dealt with daily life and were delivered in the French of the region (LeBlanc, 1997). Charelle Saulnier reports that according to her father, Fidèle Thériault, Marguerite à Yutte knew everybody, was a match-maker, and a genealogist (a *défricheteuse de famille*) (Saulnier, 1997). Nadine Belliveau adds that Marguerite was somewhat *moqueuse*, and that the location of her family home, adjacent to the general store and the road leading down to the wharf, allowed her to keep an eye on affairs in her village. Nadine’s impression is that Marguerite did not create a distinct persona for her monologues: “il n’y avait pas de décalage entre le personnage dans la vie quotidienne et le personnage sur l’estrade” (Belliveau, 1997).
- 10 *The Courier*, October 16, 1975, carried two photos of such women: the first page features Madame Lydie Melanson, who at 91, “joue encore son violon avec confiance”; Madame Eva Melanson, an accordion player, is also featured (15). The paper covered another remarkable woman, Mme. Elizabeth Fournier (née Deveau), of Saulnierville Station, photographed at 91 years of age with her axe and the wood she has cut (Robicheau).

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Fox Tongs

What shrewd mind designed this
odd contraption? Whose ingenuity
engineered these smith-forged

rods & pin-linked elbow
hinges, that trigger-driven double
crozier closing like a noose?

An anvil-ringing poet's, I suppose:
how else to hold at more-
than-arm's length safety those

cagey malodorous canine whelps,
priceless yelping pelts?
Black foxes. Silver-tipped pelf.

fovea centralis

I place you in the company of owls
with their meta-human faces

the kingdom of dead suns
behind every immovable eye

and veil my body
with the broken flesh

of pine and juniper, to be
the forest to which you must return

To go with you
in that other flight, as you plummet towards

the thing you most need—
hunter, with one thought

repeating itself endlessly
in the gullet, even in the dark I would be

in your eye's centre.
As it pulls around the light.

The Frontier beyond Empire

East of Everything in Thomas Raddall's
The Nymph and the Lamp

If in Canada the Western genre is one of the favourite resources of the experimental writer, as Arnold E. Davidson has demonstrated, this is not only because of a perennial Canadian obsession with its historical and ideological differences from the United States and its myths. The larger cultural discourse to which the Western belongs, antimodernism, is also indigenous to Canada and its myths, and has been an experimental resource—if not avant-gardist, yet unconventional and problematized—in modern-period Canadian writing. This is not surprising, perhaps, where antimodernism and the modernity it sees as its enemy are coeval with the postcolonial self-fashioning and self-contesting of the new Canadian nation—a nation whose origins in military conquest are repressed rather than nostalgized, and whose memory stares out at the frontier, and beyond, looking for something else. In the novel which here serves as a case study for some reflections on this problem, the Western genre and its antimodernist values are disfigured in such a way as will suggest that this something else belongs not to the originary hostilities of the frontier but to a rather sentimental conquest—which is just as fatal.

In *West of Everything: The Inner Life of Westerns* (1992), Jane Tompkins argues that the generic Western in American popular culture arises at the turn of the twentieth century primarily as the reaction of a disempowered male mass culture to the growth of a commercially and socially powerful women's culture throughout the previous century. To the latter's social-activist and moralistic, sentimental fiction genre, the Western comes as a

resentful, often corrosively nihilistic answer.¹ It expresses the frustration in an individual experience of disempowerment for men created by the capitalist modernization of its own patriarchy.² Ironically, while one might have expected men to identify themselves with modernity, they in fact saw themselves disappearing into it—and blamed this loss of self upon a “feminization” of society which was part and parcel of modernity. The American historian Jackson Lears, in his study of this modernist crisis in masculinity, attributes its masculinist reaction to the feminization of culture to a conservative critique of modernity as “over-civilization.” Lears calls this reaction “antimodernist” because of its nostalgic idealization of worlds characterized by a primitivist and masculine, “martial ideal” of physical action and honour, contrary to the supposedly feminine vanities of commercial profits and pleasures.

The concept of antimodernism can be confusing when translated from historical to literary discourse, in which literary modernism is itself usually understood to be an ambivalent response to historical and cultural modernism, and can thus embody “antimodernist” values.³ The distance between literary modernism and antimodernism is not that of the contrast implicit in the prefix, but that of the position they take as genres with respect to the modernity they view with discontent: the latter remaining powerfully just within its forms and functions, the other venturing without. But the line is a razor’s edge, as we shall see, because literary modernism is a constitutive tendency within a literary aesthetic which is suspicious, as antimodernism is, of established beliefs and conventions which hold society together, and so, suspicious even of words themselves. By also insisting on a renewed simplicity and transparency in signification, purified of the abstractions of metaphysical sentiment and authorized by the violent and fragile life of the thing itself, antimodernism walks a thin line between the conventions of realism and a challenge to conventional form. As such it provides a useful additional term for the understanding of fiction which falls on neither side of the canonical divide between the anticonventional aesthetics of modernism and conventional realism (especially in modern Canadian literature, which tends typically to a dysfunctional form of romance). Antimodernism is that element of literary modernism that would, with a turn of the screw, recontain modern discontent, formal and thematic, in the accessibility of generic and popular forms.

The contradictions of antimodernism are nowhere more starkly revealed than in the Western genre, which American historians Peter Filene and

Lears recognize as the powerful symptom of a self-destructing and self-destructing, masculinist modernity. Tompkins suggests how the genre epitomizes—against a perceived feminization of culture produced by the massive movement of women out of the home and into public life, and their domination of a modern, Christian popular culture—a reactive masculinism: indifferent to homes or churches, to contemporary Christian values, and to the inspiration of the latter by a pastoral experience of nature; and hostile to women’s social or communal values, to womanly words, and to the popular culture and ideals of mass civilization. Some of the definitive motifs of the American Western can also be found translated to the Canadian East, where there have been corresponding historical interactions of modernity and antimodernism—particularly the interaction gendered into “the war of the words” (to use Gilbert and Gubar’s phrase) initiated by a similarly male antimodernist reaction to a supposedly feminized modernity. In her seminal study, Gwendolyn Davies has shown how, just as in the United States, an increasing presence of women’s literature in Canadian Maritime popular culture developed alongside a strong women’s culture of (mainly Christian-based) social activism. From 1880 to 1920, writing was not only a mirror of women’s collective entry into the public sphere, it was a mechanism of collectivization itself which embodied the social ideals of the activists. So it is that for L.M. Montgomery’s Anne, words work to undo alienation in her world—especially her own—and her “story club,” while literally true to the women’s “study clubs” which gradually became vehicles for social action, more generally allegorizes the social culture produced by women’s writing (as opposed to the way words work for Ernest Buckler’s individualistic David Canaan, for whom social community is mute or expressed in a wordless music). By the early twentieth century, there is good reason to believe that men in Eastern Canada might feel threatened by a kind of abstract “story club” permeating public culture, a new and collective power in women’s words.⁴

Men appear to have responded to this alternative, women’s writing culture in Canada much as they did in the States, with a masculinist antimodernism which gendered an “over-civilized” and sentimental modernity as feminine, and erected at its fictional, primitive frontier the lonely figure of an authentic man. In the Maritimes alone, this can be seen in canonical novels as diverse as James DeMille’s *A Strange Manuscript Found in a Copper Cylinder* (1888), Frank Parker Day’s *Rockbound* (1928), Raddall’s *Roger*

Sudden (1945), Buckler's *The Mountain and the Valley* (1952), and Hugh MacLennan's *Barometer Rising* (1941). This Eastern frontier is exemplified in Raddall's 1950 novel about 1920s Maritime life, *The Nymph and the Lamp*, which romanticizes a primitive edge of the continent just as symbolically distant from the mythic, civilized "East" as is the mythic "West." Here, the frontier is the sea, and its primitivist heroes those who work the sea. While "big sky country" thus shifts locations—from the hostile, arid desert to the cruel, expansive ocean—the heroic types and conflicts of this sea adventure genre remain much the same. Strong, silent, cynical, individualistic men devote themselves to an absurd cult of action and work, root themselves in landscapes of isolation, suffering and death, exert a violent mastery over themselves and their natural environment, love and hate other men more profoundly than other women, and reject the illusory social and aesthetic values of an emasculated, modern mass civilization.⁵ But on Raddall's frontier—even more so than for the self-problematizing world of Joseph Conrad, whom he admired—none of this quite works out.

Thomas Raddall, born in England in 1903 and raised in Nova Scotia, was not only a successful popular historical novelist but a regional historian and an influential activist in the preservation of local cultural history.⁶ The historian Ian McKay has argued that Raddall's series of popular historical novels set in different periods of Nova Scotia's colonial and postcolonial development (of which *The Nymph and the Lamp* is the best known) and his activities in cultural preservation belong to two dimensions of an anti-modernist project in the region to construct the discourse of an authentic "Folk" identity prior and alternative to modern civilization. This is not a pastoral Folk belonging to a peaceful countryside, but a more aggressive Folk belonging to a rugged frontier of wilderness and open sea, who represent the "individualism" and "virile dynamism" of a masculine drive at the heart of the business and military activities of empire.⁷ Popular imperialism in the first half of the century shares with the ideology of the Western this antimodernist vision of the twentieth century as a modernity gone wrong, a capitalist culture of the frontier that is degraded by a mass culture of the civilized world which follows on its heels and feeds on its labours. Popular imperialism of the postcolonial period—abstract from simple British patriotism, and with the ethnic and historiographic parallels that unites narrative fiction as otherwise diverse as Ralph Connor's British-centred *The Man from Glengarry* (1901), Laura Goodman Salverson's Scandinavian-centred

The Viking Heart and Pauline Johnson's Native-centred *The Shagganappi* (1913)—is as definitive a mythological discourse of the frontier in modern Canadian culture as is the Western in modern American culture. Where the two antimodernist discourses intersect, as in *The Nymph and the Lamp*, a closer analysis will illuminate the similarities and differences between them.

The first pages of the novel evoke the setting where most of the action will take place, the tiny and desertified “sandy speck” of Marina Island, “in the North Atlantic eighty miles from the nearest land.” Marina is a “lonely outpost” far from life and civilization, dreaded as “a desolate place” by men of the land, and by men of the sea as the “scene of many wrecks,” for it is a legendary ocean graveyard. The motifs of the place—death, desertification, and marginality from social order—suggest that, in the North Atlantic of all places, something like an American Western might play itself out. Its legendary hero is Matthew Carney, who appears, like John Wayne rising out of the desert in the opening sequence of *Stagecoach*, as an extension of the starkly reductive, desertified landscape: “men spoke of [him] as ‘Carney—you know, Carney of Marina’, as if he were a part of the place like one of the wild ponies on the dunes” (11). Unlike the restless, pleasure-seeking young men and women of his modern world to whom he is contrasted, Carney is taciturn and ascetic, a loner whose minimal society is with other loners brought together only transiently by “a kind of cult” of their work. The latter is the spiritually rather than economically defined work of radio operators before the advent of commercial or public radio, when the highly specialized technology and its fragile, global network demanded a monastic asceticism in the form of an exclusively male community. Always working in a room or ship cabin, these “ops” work alone, moving from post to post around the world, drifters devoted to their specialized work and practical knowledge. They are “a band of men, most of them young, set apart from the rest of mankind by a curious knowledge” alien to, and tight-lipped before, the chatter of modern, commercial society (17). In this work and its curiously abstract, global frontier, a masculinized discontent expressing faith only in its existential vitality—as opposed to an ostensibly feminized civilization with faith in moral knowledge—comes to define the protagonists and setting of *The Nymph and the Lamp* just as they define the marginal, stripped-down heroes and deserts of the generic West. There are differences, of course,

which upon closer examination suggest a significant difference between otherwise homologous Canadian and American antimodernist cultures.

The novel involves three main characters: Matthew Carney, Isabel Jardine, and Gregory Skane. Carney and Skane are the two rugged radio-operators who vie for Isabel's love. The two men have many similarities. They are both married to their work, known both for the high speed at which they can bang out the dits and dashes of the wireless key, and for their honourable reluctance to provoke the showdowns between operators which prove it (167-69). They are both taciturn and inward, figured as ascetics withdrawn in body and word from normal social life (21, 25-26, 121, 143). These similarities bind them to the nature and technology of the Marina setting itself. Its nature is figured as a kind of petrification of the desolate infinitude of the sea into waves of desolate sand (72, 107), in which humans wander on the edge of madness or death (11-12, 110, 191-92). Like the un-Romantic nature of the West, this nature is adversarial rather than sympathetic (153), and explicitly contrasts the sentimental domesticity (74, 85) and materialism (32, 56) of modern North American society. This modern society is periodized as post-World-War-One, and as Ian McKay has noticed, it is insistently portrayed in the "feminized" and "over-civilized" terms of antimodernist reaction described by Lears and Filene.⁸ For example, the novel opens with Carney's first trip ashore in Halifax since before the war, and records the way everything in the "world" had changed (14). Though Raddall acknowledges the change in pace and technology of public life, his feminizing imagery is obsessive. He describes women's new clothing and cosmetics in detail, only noting with disapproval men's emasculating lack of beards. He figures the activity and anxiety of the public space as a crowd of women shoppers, saying nothing of men (15-16). Carney's own head office, which used to be an unadorned building full of men in easy camaraderie, is discovered to have been divided up into rooms overseen by secretaries who mediate the men's attention and contact (17). His new, postwar boss is a type of the feminized and modernized man:

His gleaming black hair was neatly brushed and there was a carnation in his buttonhole. There was a touch of the sea about him, faint and remote, as if it has not lasted long and as if a good deal of office air had intervened. He had the look of a man who for years had enjoyed good meals, steam heat, a soft bed, and the embraces of a satisfactory wife. (18)

He is soft, dandified, domesticated and superficial. At the same time he represents a mechanistic and commercialized mass culture, with its destruction

of a more human and masculine one, for he has eradicated men's social interactions from the workplace in order to put the principle of efficiency foremost:

It had taken him some time to clear out the old easygoing atmosphere and put the office on what he called a proper business footing. The old days were gone. There were so many operators now, and so many more important things than personnel. 'Find out what they want,' he had told the girls, 'and get them out as quickly as you can.' (17)

As his name suggests, the feminized and modernized Mr. Hurd is a type, one of the crowd. The two other city characters drawn with any substance, Miss Benson and Mrs. Paradee, are individualists who express the same superficiality of character, emotion, and communication with others (41-42, 46). Echoing for all these characters the transition between the prewar and postwar gender of modernity, the "improved modern" voice of postwar radio technology has changed the "hoarse bass" of Marina's signal to a "shrill treble," which as Skane grumbles, "has made a eunuch of us" (14).

In the extreme symbolic geography of this novel, the city becomes a synecdoche for the whole continent which lies behind it. The city is the gateway to a modernity figured as land itself, as an American or Americanizing element in which all is soluble and nothing remains itself:

the scramble for cash that could not buy security, the frantic pleasures that could not give content, the pulpit-thumpings that could not summon virtue, the Temperance Acts that killed temperance, the syncopated noise that was not music, the imbecile daubs that were not art, the lavatory scrawls that were not literature, the flickering Californications that were not drama . . . (321)

and so on, a mind-revolving homogenization of capitalism, decadence, popular-cultural Americanization (Black and White), Group of Seven modernism and the social gospel and temperance politics associated with women—a whole "dim bulk of land" which slips away, as Isabel takes her final view of it on her way to Marina, "like a shadow, an illusion after all" (321). Those who pass through or remain on the city's continental side, like Skane and Hurd, are the villains of Raddall's romance, while those who pass through to and are able to remain on its other side—the side lacking the terra firma even of the frontier, the side more real, not as a place, but as a nearly metaphysical, marine perspective—the side east of everything—become its heroes.

Nature stands for a clean slate, and the men who choose it do so, like Carney and Skane, because they consciously reject that modern society. They are both men who have lost youthful ideals, have seen through human illusions to a cynical or absurdist truth, have distanced themselves from women as well as the love and morality which women represent, and have embraced only their physical work in relative solitude (12, 22, 25, 28, 32, 49, 103, 113). They choose a world, as Tompkins says of the film *Cowboy*, “without God, without ideas, without institutions, without what is commonly recognized as culture, a world of men and things, where male adults in the prime of life find ultimate meaning in doing their best together on the job” (37). The role of technology is a key to this value in the physical world and its nature. One might be surprised that Raddall’s antimodernist heroes would be figured as radio operators, as men bound to modern technology. But Raddall insistently dates this technology as pre-war, and shows it to be so crude that no special knowledge is required for it, and no belief in progress embodied in it. It is operated by instinct, as an extension of the physical body. Carney cannot understand the technical books about radio (23), and says that “once you’ve got the feel of it, you’re simply part of the machine. The stuff comes in on the aerials and runs right down to your fingertips” (197).

But the thematic significance of Marina’s radio is that it combines the technological primitivism of the Western, in which the only authentic value inheres in the work of a physical world and its mastery, with the ideology of communication of the Western, which Tompkins describes as, “at heart antilanguage,” by which she means that “doing, not talking, is what it values”: “Westerns distrust language. Time and again they set up situations whose message is that words are weak and misleading, only actions count; words are immaterial, only actions are real.” And this opposition to language belongs to the larger paradigm of antimodernism in the Western, in which there are “two choices: either you can remain in a world of illusions, by which is understood religion, culture, and class distinctions, a world of fancy words and pretty actions, of ‘manners for the parlor and the ball room, and . . . womanly tricks for courting’; or you can face life as it really is—blood, death, a cold wind blowing, and a gun in the hand” (48-50). Both Carney and Skane, like Western heroes, are men of few words (26, 121, 191). When called upon to justify their actions—actions violent or sympathetic, whether shooting ducks beyond what can be eaten, collecting human bones from the dunes, swimming in the dangerously cold sea, or playing

Chopin *études* upon the piano—they can only say it is for “something to do” (122, 134, 145, 141; and repeated throughout). But they must communicate with each other, just as the Western must communicate to its audience: the antimodernist Western is paradoxical in positing a language which dislikes itself. Tompkins notes how Western heroes speak a kind of “minimalist” language which uses understatement, epigrams, and ellipses in a “desperate shorthand” which attempts “to communicate without using words” (51). The ultimate truth is always communicated in action, which if it has a language, is the bang-bang of the guns. It is this minimalist language of the Western which Raddall is able to conflate with the primitive technology of the Marina radio operators, who speak in a language (and a purely functional one) of literally explosive dots and dashes. This is figured explicitly in Raddall’s portrait of the young operator “in the barren cell” of his radio room, who begins “to talk in dots and dashes” when Isabel sees the men at work for the first time: “Isabel, standing on the greasy floor, was startled by a terrific sound as sharp, as deafening as rifle shots, and the little engine room was lit by a rapid succession of bright violet flashes that sprang, like the sound, from the revolving brass spark-studs at the end of the generator shaft. Involuntarily she shrank against [Carney’s] stalwart form . . .” (107-08). The violence and abbreviation of the language, and its distance from the degraded languages of modern civilization, make it a kind of transcending anti-language which seems to restore a lost brotherhood: “For a space you were part of another world, the real, actual living world of men and ships and ports. . . . Whistling, growling, squealing, moaning, here were the voices of men transmuted through their finger tips, issuing in dots and dashes, speaking twenty languages in one clear universal code . . .” (193). The dots and dashes have little meaning beyond safe navigation; they represent the mute mastery of a physical world by men. Its least meaningful function is phatic, merely a sign of desire for contact with the signal “CQ” (13), while its most meaningful is “SOS,” a sign whose value is also ultimately physical, rather than significative (194-96). The radio operators use their dots and dashes as the cowboys do their guns, to communicate authentically at the margins of a world whose language is trivialized.

This antimodernist ideal of technology as a minimalist language which bonds men together without their interpellation (the term Louis Althusser has used to describe induction into the ideological discourse of a modern society) by any determining system of goals or beliefs, suggests a correlation

with the art of fiction writing—insofar as this can suppose a technical autonomy from social function or didactic ends.⁹ Fiction writing is a *techne*, or as Raddall often emphasized, a “craft” above all. In a wartime address to the Canadian Authors’ Association, he speaks of the importance of craft above subject matter or saleability, and blames the commercialization of fiction for the surplus of writing “lacking in honest workmanship” (2-3). The ideal reflects the modernist desire for the return of art to the formal values of a pre-modern *techne*, often nostalgically attributed to artisanal guilds, expressed by such influential writers as G.K. Chesterton, F.R. Leavis, Ezra Pound and W.B. Yeats. Raddall articulates this ideal more fully in his essay on “The Literary Art” several years later, in which he defends realism from moralism and censorship by defining it in terms of craft rather than content. Like the guns in the Western or the radio telegraphy in Raddall’s own antimodernist imagination, such writing is a kind of existential technology, for it is a craft that has no fixed method or theory, no idea of “Art in the abstract,” only the fidelity to inclusive reflection exemplified by Stendhal and Joseph Conrad (140). It is a realist ideal that distrusts, just as antimodernist technology and language generally distrust, its own engagement in transparent value and meaning, even as it capitalizes upon it.

The value of this realist ideal to Raddall is evident when we turn from the imagery of *The Nymph and the Lamp* to its narrative structure and style, which disfigure the realist novel’s own generic transparency in two fundamental ways: (1) the narrative structure introduces as the ostensible protagonist and perspective of narrative focalization a character who later recedes into the background, giving way to a protagonist who was initially introduced, from that perspective, as a mere type; and (2) the narrative style encodes a wealth of realist detail with values that initially signify alternatives—good vs. bad, tradition vs. progress, nature vs. city, masculine vs. feminine—but in the end merge together, rendering the closure ambiguous and its narrative realism, ultimately, illegible. The novel is able to do so because it violates the antimodernism of the formulaic Western in ways specific, I will suggest, not to the geography of the Eastern setting, but to the particularity of its Canadian historical experience. Of the instability of the plot, we get an ironic prefiguration at the beginning of the novel when Carney and Isabel first meet in the city, and end up discussing movie Westerns. Carney doesn’t like Westerns because they seem to him like “Marina in a nightmare”—the nightmare being the hero-heroine-villain plot which is ironically to

become his own. "You'd be surprised," he tells Isabel:

When you step off the beach at Marina on a summer's day you might be in the heart of Arizona, or wherever they film those things. The biggest dunes are by the shore and they shut off the view of the sea in good many places. . . . And there you are, riding a half-wild pony amongst the dunes, with nothing in sight but grass and sand, just like those movie chaps. We even use Western saddles and stirrups, brought all the way from the prairie. You can stick on the ponies better in the kind of going you find out there. In fact, all we lack is the fancy clothes and the pistols—and a villain after the girl, of course. (50-51)

But Marina turns out to lack neither the guns nor the villain. It rather confirms Isabel's ironic observation in reply, that in real life, "the man who looks like a hero usually turns out to be the villain"—for this is exactly what happens. The plot is easily summarized. Carney and Isabel meet in the city, fall in love, and return to live at Carney's radio station on Marina. Unexpectedly, Carney gradually and silently estranges himself from Isabel. Meanwhile Isabel falls in love with Carney's friend and colleague, Skane. Her affair with Skane progresses until she and Skane are one day confronted in their dalliance in the dunes by a minor character, a rifle-toting, jealous girl who ends up shooting Isabel. Surviving, Isabel leaves Marina to recuperate in the city; but instead of returning to Marina, she goes back to her hometown in Nova Scotian farm country, where she discovers a businessified and modernized country life to which she brings her city experience, and in which she prospers. At the end of the novel, Skane searches her out and proposes to her, offering to take her to Montreal where he has found work in the new commercial radio industry. At this meeting, Isabel realizes both that Skane has now embraced the modern civilization which he had once rejected—if only for Nietzschean reasons consistent with his skeptical individualism—and that he has betrayed his bond to Carney, for it turns out that Carney has not been losing his love for Isabel, but has been trying to protect her from the disappointment that he has been going steadily blind. Isabel spurns Skane and returns to Carney on Marina, where the lovers happily re-unite.

From this summary three points should be noted. Firstly, the whole narrative episode in the countryside serves to undermine any kind of pastoral ideal of the return to a simpler community or more sympathetic natural order. The critique of modernity and the city is extended to the country which, again since after the war, is only a kind of invisible city in its social problems and changes, and is shown to be dangerously dependent upon a barely understood, capitalist world economy (256-57, 263, 269-70).¹⁰ This

narrative development serves to eradicate any hint of simple nature-romanticism that might have attached to the Marina setting, and rather to strengthen the sense of Marina's authenticity as liminal to geography and cultivation, truly east of everything. Secondly, Skane, at first offered as a double of Carney (21, 121), turns out to be his antagonist.¹¹ He becomes the villain in this antimodernist romance when he attempts to seduce Isabel by becoming citified—abandoning Carney as friend and colleague to bond instead, on a pure business footing, with Mr. Hurd. In leaving Marina for the depths of the continent—that is, for Montreal, the cosmopolitan and financial centre of the nation—Skane betrays both the man and the nature which signify his masculine authenticity at the outer limits of a trivialized, feminized world (287, 296, 303, 308-09). Thirdly, and most importantly, Isabel, rather than either of the two men, is the protagonist of the story. It is her rejection of the city, her encounter with Marina, her rejection of the country, and her return to Marina which structures the plot and the development of its meanings. Her significance at the centre of the novel is marked symbolically too, for Marina shares its name with the Shakespearean heroine recalled in T.S. Eliot's eponymous poem of 1930.¹² Isabel's escape from a depraved city, her wandering and return to Carney and the sea, and her identification in the novel's title with an underwater "nymph" all mark her as a figure of this other Marina, the woman who is born at sea (hence her name) and lost at sea, and who wanders through misfortune until she is united with her father and a husband at the end of *Pericles, Prince of Tyre*.

While in the play, Marina represents the endurance of conventional feminine virtues of chastity, grace and sympathy, in Eliot's "Marina" she represents a metaphysical object of desire beyond such practical values, and beyond even physical place or verbal representation. In the poem, transcendence is sought from the familiar world of pleasure and hostility—one that has, like Raddall's depraved city, "become unsubstantial" from the perspective of the sea—and the transcendence is sought in a fragmentary imagery of elemental nature and the "daughter," Marina, who represents it. Here the feminine figure fuses with a marine imagery to produce the sense of a place beyond place, a place "calling through the fog," which alone is authentic to the lyric angst of the poem's speaker, the lost patriarch, Marina's father (103-04). Eliot's contrast of an actual and mortal being on terra firma with a metaphysical being in Marina—representable only in the broken syntax of

memory and sensory fragments of a nautical ascesis—resonates not only with the antimodernist geography of Raddall's novel, but with the darker symbolism of his title, which figures Isabel as a beautiful spirit at the bottom of the sea who offers drowned sailors a paradisaical, if ambivalently watery, afterlife. Isabel, like the nymph, does not signify men's struggle with modernity but their defeat by it. As Carney explains: "When the ship went down or the fight was lost, when there was no hope left, a man could let himself sink and feel that all would be well" (327). And in his blindness and isolation from modern life and work, relieved only by the invisible presence of the woman working in his place, this is what happens to him.

To be sure, the central figure of Isabel as a modern woman significantly reverses the gender paradigm of antimodernism and its generic Western—especially together with the development of Skane's narrative and symbolic betrayal, for while the heterosexual bond brings closure to the generic romance, the corresponding male bond is never restored. But this reversal also curiously reframes the very same paradigm. Isabel's position within the dichotomized existences delineated in the novel is problematic because unfixed—developing itself but ultimately developing and transforming them as well. She begins as a disillusioned typist in the city. Though she is marked as modern in her business activities and values (18, 20, 35) and her over-civilized softness (36, 111), she is also ironic about these activities, as she is about modern city life, sexuality, and materialism (29, 32, 35, 85). She too, like the men, is characterized as taciturn (38). When she moves to Marina she is a cook to the men—for "something to do"—but she also learns, and for the same apparently arbitrary reasons—to ride horses and to operate the radio until she achieves official proficiency. In the latter accomplishments she discovers a kind of masculinity within—and this is guided by Skane, whose masculinity asserts itself as a pleasure principle indifferent to social forms and conventions. This masculinity, antisocial in Skane, rather conforms in Isabel to her subsequent development as a modern, independent woman. When she leaves Marina, she becomes not a servile typist again, but a considerable businesswoman. Her final return to Marina is based upon her rejection of both modern male and modern female gender roles, for with the blind Carney she plans to share the still conventionally masculine work of the radio at the same time that she plans to begin the still conventionally feminine work of caring for Carney, raising a family, and schoolteaching the Marina children. In this closure, with its new and

happy conflation of domestic and public labours, the gender of modernization is again feminized, and the thematic development of the narrative seems to come full circle, rendering moot rather than vindicating its own antimodernist critique.

The narrative focus upon the woman protagonist, and its closure as romance, decentre the generic Western away from its masculine, individualist or elitist topos and force it to integrate a fuller social space, domestic as well as public, into its abiding concerns and its closure. I think this ambivalent feminism arises in part from a kind of antimodernism which is Canadian rather than American, and which implies a different idealism or nostalgia about the frontier. For in modern Canadian culture, antimodernism is intersected with the still powerful ideology of imperialism—an ideology that in its postcolonial afterlife is abstract from its British centre and has been translated into a more geographically and linguistically flexible form congenial to a new nationalism, and one typically projected in a myth—unified by a broad notion of race if not by ethnicity, language or European political history—of the North. The archetypal literary statement of such abstracted imperialism is Salverson's *The Viking Heart*, in which the archaic, wandering and warring spirit of the Vikings is unified with a Canadian spirit which crosses racial and linguistic boundaries, and expresses itself in the quotidian triumphs of small businessmen and popular artists. It is an abstract imperialism expressed by Raddall himself in historical novels, like *Roger Sudden*, which see the origins of a modern, liberal individualism—one, by the way, available to women—in the racial superiority and imperialist economic structure of the British conquest of North America. He expresses it in the very title of *The Nymph and the Lamp*, which applies a Scandinavian myth (and if Peter Friesen is right, an English intertext) to a Nova Scotian topos, as well as in the novel's discourse—in the Nordic pastiche which characterizes, for example, the central male character, a blond giant who reads nothing but English Romantic poets and Old Norse myths and sagas (109).

But the North is not a new unifying myth for Raddall; it is only another ingredient of the more abstract imperialism his pastiche style implies. It is this abstract imperialism that allows Raddall to valorize British imperialist conquest in the trilogy of which *Roger Sudden* is a part, at the same time that he affirms his vision as “anti-British,” and regarding his literary influences,

is able to claim that he “always admired Kipling . . . but never thought much of his imperialism” (qtd in Austin 123, 118).¹³ The Canadian writer here rejects imperialism as patriotism, that is, as a political allegiance to England, for king and country. It is internalized instead as metaphysical frontier of imperialist values—a paradoxically liberal code for the individual, which promises that conservative and hierarchical social values will spring from the heart, not from history.¹⁴ In this context, Isabel’s activities as a relatively independent businesswoman are not to be devalued for their part in an overcivilized modernity, but valorized just as are the entrepreneurship and industry of the Folk heroes in his other novels—as authentic expressions of an individual autonomy unanswerable to society’s myriad political and ideological demands, be they colonial or modern, but in a moment of crisis and revelation, responsive to its inner, hierarchical and paternalistic nature.¹⁵ From such an autonomous *bildung*, his narratives paradoxically imply, one’s fate to live for others, or for another, must be learned and affirmed.

What I have here called an abstract imperialism contributes to a Canadian difference from the antimodernism of the American Western, because it continues to valorize a conservative and hierarchical notion of individual subjection to a community. This is a subjection easily represented to the individual in the domestic paradigm of a traditional family, and is indeed centrally encoded in the archetypal discourse of empire as a global family comprising a mature and paternal or mother country with immature and subservient daughter colonies abroad—thus mediating social and political values through individual and domestic ones. This is important because imperialism depends upon a subordinate form of modernization which is colonial, and which develops its social space according to more conservative, communal models in tune with economic production for an external and metropolitan centre of power rather than a regional and self-defining one. It is why some form of conservative community is always implied in the imperialist ideal, whose hierarchy is applicable to both colonists and aboriginal peoples. When this form of imperialism is abstracted into the everyday and self-serving modernity which is the fate of the new nation, it must find a new image of the frontier—one which continues to justify modernity as a periphery at which individual freedom finds its meaning and power in ostensible subjection to values transcending individual authority. Hence the paradoxical attempt by Raddall to masculinize for the rugged individualism of his antimodernist genre, the sentimental

and civilizing mission of his novel's closure—an attempt effected on the one hand by generic paradigms which undercut the value of the realist world of the closure, and on the other by a morbid romance allegory attached to the closure itself, which implies a meaningful resolution only beyond history and existential life. Isabel is confirmed in her domesticity, but only once she is removed from the marriage laws and private property which underwrite the degraded escapism of tending the private sphere of one's own garden—the fantasy that initially soothed Isabel's and Carney's needs for “protection from the world,” but which they quickly both rejected (74).¹⁶ Hence, also but conversely, Isabel is allowed to work, but only once she is removed from the defining scene of work—the production and consumption economy of the city and the land she finally leaves behind.

The same can be said for the abstracted affirmation of regionalism, which finds its authentic locus paradoxically bound to, but only in the watery margin of, the land of an authentic, frontier Folk. From the turn of this century forward, the Maritimes had a retarded postcolonial development in Canada, and a more persistent social ideology of traditional community. Uneven development on this postcolonial frontier has meant that community life and its values have not been effectively replaced by modern society—only limited, contested, and increasingly, by Raddall's time, rendered dysfunctional.¹⁷ This may be the reason, as Janice Kulyk Keefer suggests, that Maritime writers, however ironic they may be in expressing the alienations of modern society, have tended to affirm the haunting presence and value of community for the individual seeking meaning, good or bad, in the modern world (34, 36). In this context, the narrative encoded in gender relations might well reflect the anxiety of a larger paradox belonging to the frontiers of Canadian modernity itself, as this modernity is shown to need a regional and historical mythopoesis to reconcile its dependence upon both postcolonial imperialist and national individualist dimensions of its economic and social life.¹⁸

The different kind of postcolonial frontier implied by this regional history is consistent with the different kind of frontier mythologized by anti-modernist imperialism in general. The different masculinist ambivalence that attaches to the latter is determined by an ethos which aims not merely towards a renewal of the self but of community, towards the restoration of strong social order to a degraded civilization. The modern imperialist frontier was understood, symbolically and in practice, to impose good society

not only on others, but—from without—on its own. It is caught in a constitutive tension between the adventurous and escapist rejection of contemporary society, and the moralistic affirmation of its values of domesticity, community and citizenship. This tension is evident, for example, in Pauline Johnson's *The Shagganappi*, a collection of juvenile stories which valorize the rugged, daring, wise otherness of their First Nations or Métis heroes against the relative complacency or softness of their White friends, but which assimilate this otherness to an ideal of masculine youth and liberal-individualist morality consistent with the self-justifying power of the conquering and settling society.¹⁹ The same tension is expressed by Raddall autobiographically, in his remembered distaste for the simple-minded injustice of American Westerns, and fictively, in his ambivalent use of women and Indian characters.²⁰ The latter, like the treacherous *femmes fatales*, wilderness guides and informers in Raddall's *Roger Sudden*, become models of a primitive vitality subjected to a paternalistic reality principle in the work of civilization—assimilated, as imaginary margins, to the symbolic needs of modern development.²¹ Imperialism posits an antimodernist frontier which frees the individual from the determining form and power of his or her modern society, not as the freedom of a manly individualism, but as the freedom of a restored paternalism in individual experience. It is this masculine experience that in *The Nymph and the Lamp* can be projected in the figure of a woman searching for purpose and place—searching both for power over and empowerment by something beyond her.

Raddall's novel constructs a generic American Western world in an Eastern Canadian setting, particularly as it valorizes a masculine frontier against an ostensibly feminine civilization. However, as with the Western Canadian appropriation of this genre surveyed by Davidson, Raddall's appropriation of it is playful, and ultimately transgressive. Raddall's narrative diverges from the generic Western because it sends a female protagonist on an iconoclastic path through both these alternatives, and because it sees both collapse for want of individual self-sacrifice to higher ideals which belong to the values of love and community (e.g. the self-seeking degradations of Mr. Hurd, Miss Benson, Mrs. Paradee, and finally Skane). However, the community beyond the couple, barely noticed by the plot so far, remains an abstract value, and the closure founders upon them. This is partly because the union of lovers in the romance closure, with its resolution in the heterosexual bond as opposed to the homosocial bond of its

generic Western discourse, figures this bond in the symbolic escape from civilization and allegorical escape from life, and so figures love more as an aesthetic than a social value. The return to Marina which closes the romance, with its allegorical death by drowning (Carney entering darkness, purposelessness, and reunion with his “nymph”), affirms rather what Bruce MacDonald has identified as the novel’s nihilistic “rejection of the world,” which is tempered, if at all, more by an indeterminate sense of the value of everyday intimacies in the face of mortality, than by any consistent idealism (168). But such nihilism in the novel’s closure has clear literary antecedents in the genealogy of modernism suggested by Edmund Wilson: the double suicide that marks an aestheticist transcendence of historical life at the end of Villiers de l’Isle-Adam’s *Axël* (1890), which E.D. Blodgett has traced, in the Canadian context, to such modernist fiction as Frederick Philip Grove’s *The Yoke of Life* (1930)—in which a degraded civilization is spurned and an alternative social bond affirmed in a love outside life itself, that is, in a representative death.

The transcendental value of this romance resolution is underscored by the irony of its realist elaboration, in which the heterosexual union signifies not the transformation or transcendence of the historical world but its reproduction, specifically in a family and a larger communal change for Marina, for whose children Isabel intends to provide an elementary education, giving them a chance to read and to learn about life possibilities beyond Marina (317-18). Indeed, her mission is to “civilize” Marina away from its primitive, violent way of life (320). Thus the assimilation of modern feminism to an antimodernist nostalgia for a man’s world, or a man’s modernity, turns out to express a paradoxical desire and produce a paradoxical narrative, for its closure is forced to identify its antimodernist critique with the projection of a softened femininity (in Isabel) and a softened modernity (in Marina) which merely set the clock ticking again toward that over-civilization which was its ostensible antithesis. Hence realism defeats all but the moment of desire implicit in the romance ending; it defeats itself, affirming its abstraction into the nihilistic allegory of death by drowning. Either way, in the bond of love or the reproduction of life, the frontier distinct from modern civilization vanishes, and so does the feminist *bildung* which discovered it.

Thus the novel’s closure circles back to modify its own, antimodernist reaction against women’s words by affirming them, if ambivalently and

paradoxically, as a self-consuming medium through which to express a masculinist critique of a feminized modernity. While such an affirmation is not, obviously, a radically feminist one, it does reflect the dominant feminism of the pre-modern, pre-war period rendered nostalgically by Raddall: the “maternal feminism” described by Davies, which wanted not to transgress the feminine values of the domestic sphere, but transgressively to extend its boundaries into public life (234).²² Michèle Lacombe has discussed the transgressive function of feminine and domestic space in Raddall’s fiction, and noted its powerlessness to effect actual change in its realist worlds (91). For Isabel, the liberal feminist assertion of herself in the public sphere throughout the narrative certainly does change her, but it also negates the possibility or even meaning of change for her society. Hence this discourse of a historical feminism—in which the power and freedom of women is mediated by rather than opposed to patriarchal definitions of femininity and its limits—functions, as does Raddall’s historical realism to the end of romance more generally, as a means rather than an end. This is consistent with what I above called an abstract imperialist value of community, in which the lost paternalistic identity of manhood must rediscover the love inscribed in women and women’s words, not sentimentally for love in itself, but for the patriarchal purpose it imposes on, thereby reinstating the value of, male power.²³

To this end, then, Isabel merely learns what the innocent Carney knew all along. *Something to do* is as meaningless to the solipsist as it is illusory to the sentimentalist. Isabel, in her feminist role as what Helen Buss calls “the Canadian heroine of consciousness,” will give “blind patriarchy” a “guiding hand” (55). But the reader’s hope that this might lead to a “new order” beyond patriarchal discourse is kept in suspense, Buss tells us, by the antithesis which defines the generic heroine of the realist romance: her role in romance as a spiritual absolute, versus her role in the realist novel in the critical inquiry into absolutes (44). And here indeed, it is only by valorizing, not a realistically represented nostalgic past or feminist movement, but a transcending moment of desire at the origin of these, free of history itself—in which Isabel’s industry, public and private, might lead to better things than, under the constraints of historical fiction, we know it can—that this novel can express a fixed value, an ideal. This moment of desire and its realist elaboration is feminized—why? Perhaps one must imagine the feminine part of oneself—as Raddall claims he does, to be able to write with intuition

about others, male and female (Austin 113)—in order to call into being that masculinity which is the object of desire. Unfortunately, we are again reminded of Eliot's "Marina," which conflates the drama of Pericles' reunion with his daughter and the drama of Hercules' separation from his daughter in her death, and leaves the contradictory imagery—with the soul of the man, and with the very existence of the woman—in indeterminate, sensual suspense. It is the psychodrama of a lost father in search of a lost daughter in search of him/herself: where imperialism has ceased to correspond to regional or national identity, but continues to haunt the memory and morality of modernization, it is antimodernism seeking not to escape the world of sentiment, but fatally to master it all, once again.

NOTES

- 1 The discourse of "sentiment" in American culture is illuminated by Ann Douglas. My own application of this term to Raddall's text will not be entirely consistent with the actual historical culture of this discourse to which his antimodernism reacts—but refers to the values of affective community and of religious transcendence by which it is typically recognized.
- 2 This has been illuminated by cultural historians Jackson Lears and Peter Filene (see Filene, 74, 93, 138).
- 3 The antimodernist "feminization" of modern culture in canonical modernism has been the focus of influential feminist reinterpretations of European modernism by Huyssen (44-47) and of Anglo-American modernism by Gilbert and Gubar (3-46).
- 4 Woman writers of the social-problem genre were central to Canadian fiction at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries. By the twenties and thirties, as Carole Gerson has shown, a nation-wide "story club" was evident in women's literary activities, which a male cultural hierarchy wished to devalue and suppress from a canon supposed to transcend sentimental, popular culture. The Maritimes, while contributing fewer woman writers than other national regions, were no exception to this transformation in the gender of cultural production and consumption, and its tensions (see Gerson; Conrad et al).
- 5 Raddall has expressed his belief in this topos as an actual regional identity, outside his fiction. Of Nova Scotia he averred: "Life here is not easy, it is a struggle that demands a man's utmost and will take no less; we live on a rocky shore in the cold embrace of Mother Sea, whose whims are sometimes kind but often cruel; but we Nova Scotians do not take our pleasures sadly for all that" ("The Literary Tradition in Nova Scotia," 6-7).
- 6 Raddall estimated that by 1972 he had sold nearly two and a half million books, of which over six hundred thousand were *The Nymph and the Lamp*, in Canada, Britain and the United States (McKay, "The Tourist Gaze," 116).
- 7 McKay, "The Tourist Gaze," 121. See also his discussion in *The Quest of the Folk*, 223-24.
- 8 See McKay, *The Quest of the Folk*, 255.
- 9 On interpellation, see Althusser, 170ff.

- 10 On Maritime modernization similarly reflected in other writers, see Erik Kristiansen's contribution to *Samson*, 225-56, and Willmott.
- 11 There are hints of this reversal in the generic Western and romance sign that he is dark, as opposed to Carney's blond (103, 12), and in the antimodernist sign that his voice is a more feminine tenor as opposed to Carney's baritone (139).
- 12 Despite the conservatism of Raddall's own literary style, it is not unlikely that he knew Eliot's poetry. His published remarks on modernist writing (see Austin, and "The Literary Art," 142) and the contents of his personal library (Archives, Dalhousie University) testify to a serious interest in the experimental styles of writers such as James Joyce, William Faulkner, Joseph Conrad, and Ernest Hemingway.
- 13 For a persuasive description of the "monologic" discourse of British imperialist history, as against that of its "losers," in Raddall's historical fiction, see Ferns, 65.
- 14 This internalization or abstraction of imperialism from an objective correlative in past or present history is powerfully suggested by David Creelman's reading of the ideological tensions and historical horizons of Raddall's fiction. Creelman sees a "defining tension" in Maritime modernity reflected in *Roger Sudden* by "the celebration of a conservative value system . . . fused with a modernist anxiety about the failure of conventional signifying practises and the instability of traditional social structures" (147). The principle of liberal abstraction which I suggest translates this imperialist discourse into a compromise form with such modern conditions, is so powerful that in 1942, despite Raddall's explicit racial prejudices, Malcolm Ross could see in his historical fiction the "discovery of ourselves as a nation, as a people, as Canadian, British, French, American, Semitic, Nordic, Asian, African, Slavic—we were each of these, and yet more than any one of these. We were—or at least we were becoming—ourselves" (qtd in Young 36).
- 15 On the characteristic tension between loyalist values and self-interested entrepreneurial values in Raddall's historical fiction, see Waterston, 16-19.
- 16 "You thought—we both thought that love in a bungalow by the Arm [in Halifax] or even a flat in Montreal would be nothing less than heaven. But all the time I knew it couldn't work. It simply couldn't. You'd never be happy . . . in what you called a madhouse that day I first talked to you. For it is mad, all of it.' She gave her head a backward toss, a gesture that rejected not merely Halifax but the whole frenzied continent" (85).
- 17 On the continuing and complex relationships between traditionally communal and modernizing capitalist social forms in the Maritime region, see Daniel Samson's Afterword, 257-72.
- 18 A historical account of the Canadian "frontier" as a combination of these elements is given by McRae.
- 19 Significantly, the book is dedicated to the Boy Scouts and prefaced by Ernest Thompson Seton, the Boy Scout schismatic who idealized an Indian rather than a Colonist model hero. The international Boy Scout movement, in its British and Colonial forms, was also defined by the constitutive tension of antimodernist imperialism discussed above (see Robert MacDonald, 6, 17ff).
- 20 Raddall recalls his formative but ambivalent response to movie and magazine Westerns, and his subsequent preference for popular imperialist literature, in "The Literary Tradition in Nova Scotia," 3, and "A Boy's Reading and a Man's Writing," 2-4.
- 21 For descriptions of this symbolic function of the "Indian" in Raddall, see Waterston, 14-15 and Moody, 143-44.
- 22 Perhaps it does so, in part, in the image of the Folk, which I have suggested assumes

- similar values of an abstracted or internalized imperialism in the figure of a postcolonial common man. For as Michèle Lacombe has observed, Raddall's representation of the domestic and private spheres of women can serve a social-critical function consistent with his populist representation of Folk in the public sphere (91).
- 23 Bruce MacDonald has illuminated the absence of the father, and the desire to belong and to be given purpose, as central to Raddall's fiction (172).

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Sage Man

Sage man hurches in the dust.
Sorro'ful worm
Once ferked into the air
Winnowed miles to the crofter's nose,
Now, slime beaten, squelches with the bootless ones.
Grave sage bowed with black rime frost
Remembers days of burning sun
When his leaves blew scent
Firing the hearts of all.
Now, fallen to the rank swell,
Caught in the cold wash across the plain
Slammed by the hungry magpie
Crammed excursus of a ground hog
Sage man left, a shitling of knowledge
Railed by gravel throated, pestilential winds.

Shifting Form

An Interview with Aritha van Herk¹

BEELER You've written quite a variety of texts in terms of subject matter and form. Your publications include novels, short stories and ficto-criticism. Do you feel that your writing has become more experimental over the years?

VAN HERK I think it has for various reasons, one of them being that when you begin as a writer you usually try to emulate form or fit into the parameters of genre more carefully. Once you become comfortable with genre and you recognize the extent to which you can stretch it or the extent to which you can push the envelope, then I think you're willing to play with it more. And you feel more confident about playing with it because you know it as well as you do. So, yes, I would say that I've become quite a bit more experimental, even though I haven't lost sight of the temptation of the traditional narrative, but if you know that temptation is there, you can always subvert it.

BEELER How do you feel about the categorization of works according to specific genres such as the novel, the short story, or poetry? Does this categorization still have a place within the study of "writing" or should one not attempt to make distinctions between forms?

VAN HERK Well, the distinctions will always be there, because people want to be able to fit a text into some kind of category in order to look at it. This is the critical inheritance that we have, that we need a version of apparatus as a definition. But I think that more and more we have to negotiate the question of writing as writing because so many forms are

using different techniques or different models; they are interpolating a narrative, for instance, with autobiography, taking a dramatic moment into poetry . . . there's the prose poem, the long poem . . . and so I'm even more interested in moving beyond literary genres to the whole cross-over of geography with fiction, so that for me the *geografictione* becomes a real temptation to see what you can do when you use that kind of scientific discourse. I think that even as far back as *The Tent Peg*, I'm trying to talk about the language of geology and what an incredibly beautiful language it is, even though that's a very hard core science in a lot of ways based on all of the ages of rock development. So what we have to learn is that writing is itself a vehicle for cross-pollination—or what Derrida calls contamination—and we have to give it an opportunity to do that. One of the temptations of genre is the hierarchization, so that you're now getting to a stage where theory is the highest level of criticism. Then you've got all the critical enterprises, and then you've got the primary text. For a long time the epic poem and tragedy were considered the greatest genres. Now that's shifted and, of course, all we ever pay attention to are novels, which is too bad. So I always feel that I want to work against that.

BEELER Do you believe that there are certain implications for writers who choose not to write exclusively fiction or non-fiction? For example, do funding agencies have limited notions of genre?

VAN HERK Well the funding agencies are often quite flexible, but the readership or the audience gets very annoyed. They decide that you're a novelist or a poet, and they want you to produce your next novel or your next book of poetry, and if you don't do it the way they want, they say just a minute, what are you doing? And, so I think it's a question of the readerly text which insists, or the writerly text, which insists on some participation on the part of the reader which is often more difficult for an audience to access because we have relied so heavily on the definition of genre. Now an average person going into a bookstore can say "I want a mystery novel or a feminist mystery novel, or a local regional mystery novel." At the same time this reliance on that very tight categorization means that any deviation from it makes people uncomfortable.

BEELER So readers have to become more than consumers; they have to become active participants in the reading process, and that requires some adjustment.

VAN HERK I think so, and I think that right now because readers consider themselves to be consumers instead of participants, there's resistance so that you have levels of readers. And we're in danger almost of shifting back to a medieval period where the really good readers have access to the really complex texts, and the average person buys the prefigured, the preset. One of the things that really concerns me is that literature is going to become an enclave of a privileged few. To avoid that, you can, as a writer, interact with the public and persuade people that writing is writing and that if they just fall into it, they can relax and really enjoy it.

BEELER I was wondering about a particular form that you've chosen to follow or generate ficto-criticism. What first encouraged you to head in the direction of combining fiction and criticism in your writing?

VAN HERK Well, it's not actually my term at all. It's an art criticism technique, because I think that art critics and those people who appreciated art grew very, very tired of reading art catalogues that use a particular language which we all know is used, overused, overinscribed . . . they began to write parallel narratives to the art that they were watching. It really began as a New York phenomenon in the 80s. Writing a narrative that was an art catalogue to an art show was a kind of ficto-criticism. I just found some of these intriguing because obviously the desire for narrative was embedded there as a way of escaping the codes of the criticism that was at work, and I found it intriguing. It probably had to do with the fact that criticism is only now starting to talk about itself, and it's becoming very, very insular. For a writer who does both, there's always that sense of uneasiness about anything that talks only about itself, and so I thought, this is a really interesting technique. Maybe we can use this in literary criticism; we can start moving back and forth. So the ficto-criticism that I started with evolved into *crypto-frictions*, which I really see as secret codes and as a desire to get the critic to start reading the story to uncover a kind of critical position. That's been a lot of fun for me, because for me it's play, and I think we need to recognize the gestures of play in our work, or we're going to become deeply boring. (*laughs*)

BEELER Your comment on play is interesting, because I know quite a few of your works are humorous. How do you feel about humour in your own writing?

VAN HERK I write some things that are dead serious, but I think we have to recognize the extent to which humour can cut through a lot of concrete . . . and the fascinating thing is there's a desire for seriousness that I read, particularly in critics who have been schooled in a very heavy theoretical mode (not that I am in any way against that, because I use that mode myself , and I know it , and I enjoy it). I was actually at a conference a little while ago where a young woman was talking about *Places far from Ellesmere*, and she seemed to have no sense of the parody that was going on. So I said to her, "Well what do you do with the parody and the irony?" And she said "Irony?" as if to say, "Oh, my God, you mean you were sometimes actually saying the opposite of what you meant?" And I started to laugh, and I said you have to have a sense of humour about this enterprise, whether you are writing a text that interrogates another text, or whether you are reading that text. You've got to be able to laugh at the moment of your own investigation. And that's what I try to build into it. That doesn't mean I don't think that some literature must and should always be very serious, but I think the line between those two is very permeable.

BEELER Do you think that people sometimes have difficulty seeing the humour and the irony in your work because they confuse the narrator with you, the author? Do you find it irksome when people read your works as heavily autobiographical?

VAN HERK Well, it's not just irksome; it's quite silly, because I've never been an underwear sales rep, for instance. I'm only a very good researcher, and the notion that I would have had a promiscuous life like Arachne in *No Fixed Address* is tempting, but unfortunately not true. (*laughs*) There is that, and I think you're quite right, in many ways, I think that's why critics and theorists frequently don't want to put any elements of narrative into their criticism, because there is a fear that they will then be identified with the narrative. So they maintain the Olympian objective stance, right? (*laughs*) I think it's actually up to the critics and the theorists to say, just a minute, I want to tell a story here too. And criticism is the story of how we read, so there should be more engagement with that. But yes, when people say to me, well you have a pig farm, or you have a sister like this, I always laugh and I say, it's fiction. You've probably heard me having my famous argument with Fred Wah about *No Fixed Address* where he says, "But Aritha, what about

condoms?" And I say, "But Fred, it's fiction." And he says, "But this is the age of AIDS." And I say, "But Fred, you're a poet, you know this is fiction." In fiction, you can drop the necessities of an only too over-regulated and fearsome world.

BEELER I notice that you have tried to move away from this kind of regulation, or this Olympian perspective in your writing by bringing in different types of narrative perspectives. Do you think that you've moved from a more limited form of narration, to a more open-ended narrative perspective in your work?

VAN HERK I think so. I think that now the narrative I'm employing is more like a kind of dialogue. There's a desire to dialogue, to move back and forth within the narration itself. Again, I still have a good deal of respect for straight narrative, and I employ it. The novel I've just finished, which is really big, uses a lot of very straight narrative and many elements of magic realism, so you know you're hearing a story, but you know it's slightly off. And it's also got a lot of historiography in it, which is itself a kind of interrogation of the narrative of history. But I see it more as a dialogue and as an attempt to talk back to the text and to the reader, to the listener. The writer is talking back to herself, engaged in a constant kind of questioning. There isn't this "here is the story, I'll tell you all the facts, and then you lucky reader can be a voyeur to those facts, if you're smart enough to pick them out of the details." There's something condescending about that approach that I resist.

BEELER Does this novel have a title yet?

VAN HERK It has a title, but I'm not sure it will keep it. It's called *The Anatomy Lesson*, which is itself a narrative, a famous painting.

BEELER Can you describe it?

VAN HERK It's Rembrandt's. It's a painting of a doctor in Holland in the 16th century when autopsies were being done on cadavers. And it was in the very early stages of medical analysis.

BEELER Have you included or described the painting in the text?

VAN HERK No I haven't. It's just used as a kind of trope, but I'm not sure that the book will keep that title, or if indeed anybody will want to publish this book, because it is too big for its own breeches. It's very strange because I've done some very short, spare books recently, but this book is 900 pages in manuscript.

BEELER It's been building up over the years?

VAN HERK It's a book I worked on for a long time, because it's an interrogation of the immigrant story which is again another kind of narrative that we have reified and codified, especially in Canadian literature. That was something that I wanted to take apart and ask a lot of questions about and have a dialogue with.

BEELER I'd like to talk about the formal elements in some of your earlier texts. Your first novel, *Judith*, includes a third-person limited omniscient narrator and flashbacks. However, in "Judith and *The Tent Peg*: A Retrospective" (*A Frozen Tongue* 275-83), you indicate that in an early draft of the novel, the sows were vocal narrators, telling the story from their collective first-person point of view. Do you regret not having kept the original narrative perspective? Was it a compromise that you shouldn't have made?

VAN HERK It was probably a necessary compromise; the earlier narrative was a little too cute. I think that the collective voices of the pigs are still the dominant narrative control, and if you look at the novel carefully, even though it is told in third-person limited omniscient, there's very much the sense that the animals are the ones in charge of the story. It's a shift from the Circe myth where you have Circe turning the men into pigs. Then when Ulysses comes and threatens her with his sword (very nice phallic gesture), she says, they did but become what they were, which is a wonderful line becoming what you are. I was playing with that a lot, the whole notion of the pigs speaking as being themselves capable of story because they are what they are. That was a change that was made in my negotiations with the publisher and the editor. They just felt the idea was too odd, and it would have drawn attention to itself. But any good researcher can go and find the original manuscript and see that it's there. So, in a sense, I think it's more subtle now, although it's present . . . and in another sense, I kind of regretted it, but I wasn't as adept at managing the narrative then as I would be if I were writing the novel now. I was also playing with Faulkner's story of "A Rose for Emily" where the plural town tells the story, and where you begin to see that the focus of their attention, who is Emily, is merely a reflection of all of them. So while the novel pretends that the focus of attention is Judith, it's a reflection that comes from what she has surrounded herself with.

BEELER Your second novel, *The Tent Peg* is somewhat different in form. It

includes individual chapters narrated by the central female character J.L. and numerous men, including Mackenzie, Thompson, and Jerome. How were you able to sustain J.L.'s presence in a sea of male voices?

VAN HERK Well, again because she was almost always the focus of their dialogue with one another. That was a tough one, but in many ways I'm happy with how well that novel succeeded. She is there, because she is sort of the centre. In many ways, she's the domestic presence as cook. (*laughs*) You *have* to recognize that I'm being ironic, because I could never do something like that straight. But it's also that sense that a lot of their sections talk about her as well as about what they are doing. It raises the question, how do women maintain any kind of shape or identity in a sea of male voices?

BEELER In *Playing Dead: A Contemplation Concerning the Arctic* (1989) Rudy Wiebe referred to *The Tent Peg* as the only northern novel he knew of written by a woman (113). How do you think *The Tent Peg* and *Places Far from Ellesmere* differ from male authored texts on northern experiences?

VAN HERK Well, that to me is a very sore spot. I think that there's been a kind of gentle consensus in Canada that the North is a male territory. And there's a refusal to read it any other way. Therefore the plethora of books that you see on the North fall very much into the male context of the North as a frontier to be exploited and explored and that it has to just lie—as Annette Kolodny would tell you—to be taken. And I'm very frustrated with that because both *Ellesmere* and *The Tent Peg* are texts about exploitation and what you do with it. It's fascinating to me because after I wrote *Places far from Ellesmere*, I received a letter from a very well-known northern scholar who told me that I had exploited the North by my literary importation of Anna Karenina. (I thought the question of the pot calling the kettle black was really fascinating.) It has become as if those critics and writers feel that there is only one way to look at these texts, and it is that male way, and they cannot see any other way. There is a kind of deliberate "What do we do with these books? They don't fit what we have decided is the metaphorical approach to the North. What are we going to do with them? I think we'll pretend that they're not there."

BEELER I'd like to ask you about the different voices in *Places Far From Ellesmere*. There are four key sections in the book Edberg, Edmonton,

Calgary, and Ellesmere as well as a number of different personae or characters. How would you identify these figures?

VAN HERK Well in using the second person throughout the book, instead of the first person or the third person, I'm doing two things, and this is, I think, the key. I'm accusing the reader, implicating the reader, seducing the reader and suggesting to the reader that the story I'm telling is actually her story. At the same time, of course, the "you" is a veiled first person narrative. Very much veiled. The moment that you use the first person, the "I", there's a pretence of intimacy that I wanted to step away from. I didn't want to use the third person because I think there is again that pretence to an objectivity that doesn't work. So by spilling all of these personae into the second person, which is almost an audiential address, again part of that dialogue, I was trying to show the multiplicity of possibilities for the reader and for the writer, who are the same and different. And so in also using Edberg, Edmonton, Calgary and Ellesmere as personae, there is the notion that a place has a character. And of course that's a very old idea, because we talk frequently about the character of London or the character of Vienna. But we have begun to neglect that recently. It's become old-fashioned to assume that a place has a character or that a place can make a character. The work I have been doing in historiography suggests that people are much more heavily inscribed by place than they think they are now. There's a notion in a postmodern world that we can live in any place, and we aren't at all touched, or scarred or tattooed by it, but I think we are. And we haven't always found a way to talk about that. We have figured out how to talk about it in architecture; I think that we're starting to talk about it in terms of its influence on visual art, but we're not sure about it in terms of narrative, and you can see this in the way, for instance, that television and film will say, ok, we're going to use Toronto, but we're going to pretend it's New York.

BEELER You've reminded me of the maps that are made for various cities in the world; a photograph of Edmonton's cityscape is apparently used to identify other cities around the world. You were also talking about the kind of transformation that goes on in one's sense of place. Perhaps because we are a more mobile society, we now have distinct identities as we move from one location to another location. We start up a new phase of our lives, and I take it this is what you were trying to incorporate into *Places far from Ellesmere* as well.

VAN HERK Let me go back to *Ellesmere*. I have Edberg, Edmonton, Calgary, and then I move to Ellesmere; in a sense there isn't a named city or a place there. It is more a geographical place. I take a woman who is so sternly and firmly rooted in places that we have attributed a literary presence to (St. Petersburg and Moscow) and re-place her in a sense. What I'm trying to do there is interrogate our notion of where things belong and how they should be where they are, and I suspect that one of the resistances to *Ellesmere* was that sense that you can't move Anna Karenina out of Russia, when in fact we do it every time we open the pages in Canada.

BEELEER I see the narrative technique in *No Fixed Address* as a precursor to *Places Far From Ellesmere* in terms of your interest in experimentations with form. There are a few sections that are written in italics, and they also incorporate a kind of narrative "I" or "you." The first part of the novel reads, "You discover in your search that the fashionable woman's shape has always been a state of constant change . . . No art, no novel, no catalogue of infamy has considered the effect of underwear on the lives of petty rogues." How would you describe this narrator? Whose voice were you thinking of here?

VAN HERK In the picaresque novel—and again that is its own genre, and it's fascinating because of course the picaresque novel is what inaugurates the novel per se, the picaresque moment—there is a sense that you are following the adventures of someone, but there's never a recognition that someone is doing the following. What I wanted to do was put the follower of the picaro, or picara in this case, into the text, so that the picaresque novel cannot exist without the one who searches or follows the journey as well, whether that be a combination of reader/ researcher. In *Don Quixote*, you have to have a kind of faithful retainer, which again I'm ironically playing with, and the search for me there is both a narrative device and a genuine kind of longing—to be able to follow. In *Thelma and Louise*, for example, when we are watching those women running, there is also, of course, the cop who is following them, so there's always an intermediary. In other words, you are watching the follower or the cop who is following, but at the same time you are following, and that follower or that watcher or that pursuer almost has to be there as a side trope to the picaresque heroine (and hero, usually) as well. And that's what I wanted to do, at the same time saying to the

reader, don't forget that you're implicit, complicit with this; you are implicated in it.

BEELER You also seem to be making a connection between Arachne, underwear and the kind of knowledge that history can provide, that history is in a sense limited or that historical artefacts (which may even take the form of underwear) are limited in terms of the information that they can convey about certain periods or people.

VAN HERK They are *very* limited because we go to them and we think, well, this will give me a frame. If I go and look at all this, if I go and look at nineteenth-century Russia, I will understand why Anna Karenina is the kind of character she is, is the kind of novel she is. If I go look at Tolstoy's historiography, I will understand. It provides us with a frame, but it can be a very deceptive frame. And we have to be aware of that. In a sense we are those sleuths following the person, the trajectory of the adventurer and the historiography pretends to give us some way of following but doesn't necessarily. I'm just now finishing a piece on Florence Lasandra, the woman who was hanged as an accomplice of the Emperor Pic, a big bootlegger in the Crow's Nest. And you can go to the papers and look at the trial transcripts, and you can think that you have some version of this woman. However, you know nothing about her, in a sense, because she never actually spoke at her own trial in her own defense; all you have are the things that are said about her.

BEELER And those observations are selective as well; they could be comments constructed by a reporter.

VAN HERK Absolutely. And you can read the court transcripts and see forty witnesses, and you can say not one of them knows anything. Although together, maybe they know everything, so there's that constant interrogation, that constant dialogue with the notion that narrative will give you a kind of answer.

BEELER I'd like to consider other forms of expression such as paintings, photographs and technology, and I want to begin with the cover of *Places Far from Ellesmere* which depicts a kind of land mass; in this case it's in the shape of a woman on which writing has been superimposed. How does this visual image intersect with the content of the text?

VAN HERK Well the cover of *Ellesmere* is very important because it's a kind of collage employing map, but as you say, it has words, it has language and it has the figure of a woman, so what you have is the photograph of

what is a kind of ceramic, or plaster cast—the art that was made imposed on top of a map, a palimpsest. You are reminded of the extent to which the map pretends to be a representation of the place, and although it can be very useful for finding out where you are or where you aren't or where you want to be or where you should be and the extent to which we give it metaphorical power— it is really only a two dimensional piece of paper with different lines drawn on it. In that sense it is mere language or mere cipher, so the photograph of the woman which is put on top of that, the plaster, is a much more imagistic or evocative map because it's not a real map at all. This isn't a real island or the shape of any real island, and you can see that there are pieces that are cut out. Suddenly you'll see a grid of Calgary which is up here. It's completely . . .

BEELER Non-referential?

VAN HERK Non-referential, exactly. And yet at the same time for all its non-referentiality it is *more* referential because it suggests to you that the map is an evocation rather than an actual palimpsest of a place. The only way a map can be a real representation is if it is as large as the place that it is mapping. So for me this is a wonderful complement to the text, because it's talking about the extent to which we cannot take literally the notion of place at all and the way that the notion of place is trans-portable.

BEELER And a character like Anna Karenina is not just a Russian heroine, but she's somebody who can be imported to the Canadian landscape; she has been read by Canadian readers.

VAN HERK It would not surprise me at all if someday there would be an island in the shape of a woman and it would be called Anna Karenina up north and I'm sure all the northern scholars would be disgusted with this.

BEELER Well, maybe on your next trip up north, you can go name that island. (*laughs*)

BEELER I'm also interested in the cover of your recent collection *A Frozen Tongue*. It depicts a landscape of ice and snow.

VAN HERK The cover of *A Frozen Tongue* which depicts a painting by Jane Evans called "Crevasse" is a painting that I own and one that I am deeply, deeply attached to although people come in here, come into my home and say, "Oh my God, how can you look at that? You have to look

at winter how many months of the year? Why do you want to have that hanging in your home?" But in effect it's a fascinating diptych, because both sides are different; they're not the same. It depicts a fissure in the landscape, a break, an interrogation; it's a question, it's a dialogue, and one of the things, if you look carefully, you see is that within the crevasse, there are all these little kind of rocks or stones or phallic movements, so that there's a real notion that the landscape is not smooth, uninterrupted . . .

BEELER Pristine?

VAN HERK Pristine . . . But it is there; it is dangerous, it's fraught and at the same time there is the notion that the crevasse is a kind of feminine mysterious. It's very sexual and it's very evocative in that sense. I knew that that was going to be the cover long before the collection was published. In a sense the title article comes straight from the painting instead of the other way around, so I'm writing a narrative for the painting.

BEELER Your description of the painting sounds very much like the Romantic understanding of the sublime, or is it an inversion of this concept?

VAN HERK Well the Romantic understanding of the sublime has influenced the way that we look at landscape to the extent that we probably can't separate our eyes from it. It's completely inscribed the way we look at landscape. At the same time it's a parody; it's an inversion. The collages that are painted into the crevasses suggest what is hidden and what is there. Again, there's that humour, there's that comedy, there's that parody, that irony saying you don't know what you're going to find. And there's slippage. So both of them are present; there's a recognition that you can't escape the way that the Romantics have made us think of landscape. At the same time it's turned on its head.

BEELER There is another painting by Jane Evans in *A Frozen Tongue*. It's a painting of Aritha van Herk, the author, and you're depicted as a laughing woman wearing a mask. Do you see yourself as a trickster figure when you write?

VAN HERK Absolutely. It was very funny when she did that portrait. She drew a series of portraits of strong women that she knew, and she was having so much bloody trouble with me. She did about three of them, and finally, one day, she said "Come over, I've figured it out." And I came over and she had painted this black, sort of Zorro mask on me, and I just

laughed. And of course the artist always wears a mask; it's a necessary thing, you don't unmask yourself to the world, but the recognition that there is a mask and the fact that I was perfectly willing to put the painting in there is a way of saying, okay we are in a certain kind of carnivalesque play. *Be aware of it.*

BEELER Do you think that interviews are also subject to that definition; rather than unmasking the author, they simply serve to introduce more complicated layers, more multiple identities?

VAN HERK Oh, sure. It's a wonderful opportunity to pretend to be something one moment, and then two years later, they can say well in this interview you said . . . and you can reply, did I say that? or I never said that! And you only have to see it when you look at a book of interviews or interviews with someone who does a lot of them. For instance, if you read interviews with Margaret Atwood, you'll see that from one interview to the next, she changes her mind. And why should we not?

BEELER There are several photographs of you in *A Frozen Tongue*. A photograph can be perceived as an artistic medium as well as a form which reflects one's identity. Do you feel that these photographs fix your identity in any way?

VAN HERK No. I think that in many ways photographs are the most parodic of all forms. And you can see it. Just look at books and see how the dustjacket photograph (the face of the writer, presumably) is presented. They're presented in very high seriousness. There's never much play and there's never actually much art in them. They're usually quite awful. And so the inclusion of those family snapshots (except for one formal pose of me graduating with my husband) is presented to you with a lot of playfulness. For instance, you see that there is no wedding picture. I won't comment on that, but what is left out is as important as what is put in. I think of those pictures more as class pictures than as person pictures. For example, the little kid clutching the doll with the chickens scratching in the dirt behind her is very indicative of a lot of things. What you see is a kind of record in pictures of class transformation, but at the same time it is completely parodic. There's the picture of me as bush cook with some of the guys I was cooking with in the tent in the Yukon. You cannot look at those pictures and think that this is an attempt to replicate van Herk's life, or that it will give you an idea of what she looked like in different times and places. Jane Evans' painting

of me in the mask is a sign, and then there's the picture of me and Jane Evans sitting together and laughing in this kind of mutual "she's the artist, I'm the writer" exchange. I think there is a desire on the part of audience to look at a photograph and to see it as being really representative. If you've read for instance, *The Stone Diaries* by Carol Shields, where she's got the photographs embedded in the text and then you go and read the text and it says, for instance, that Mercy Goodwill is taller than her husband; you go and look at the picture. It says Mercy Goodwill and her husband, and he's taller than her, and you say "wait a minute." There's a disjunction between the photograph that we're given, whether it's a real picture of these people or not, and what's described in the text. So you have to begin to ask questions about those things.

BEELER And it's not such a hard concept to accept, in a sense, because people are always *posing* for photographs.

VAN HERK Exactly. Photographs are all in many ways very constructed. I want to do more with that, actually, because I have a lot of photographs of myself and my women friends in different playful modes. One of my Spanish friends who teaches at the University of Oviedo came to the Calgary Stampede, so we went to one of those photo booths. This girl comes up and says, "So what do you want to be, dance hall girls?" And my friend looks at her and says "No, we want to be desperados!" So there's this great picture of us dressed in the chaps and the hats, and we're holding our guns to each other. The playfulness of that is a different kind of narrative text saying we will usurp the extent to which the photograph pretends to exert authority.

BEELER There are quite a few instances of friendships between women, both in your fiction and in your descriptions of your own life. How do you view friendships between women? What kinds of things can they share that may be lacking in relationships between men and women?

VAN HERK Well one of the wonderful things about feminism was the extent to which it valorized female friendship. There have always been friendships between women, but I think that feminists have really dared to say it and to say that women can be for each other all kinds of different things. And it's not just the tea party variety. For me, the complexity of the relationships between women is, if you are heterosexual, unfraught by that whole sexual tension that you get with men. And I think that there is a different negotiation of power. There are still power relationships, of

course, and we're becoming more and more aware of that. As time goes on you realize that that manipulation enters into things as well. But when you have two women who have a mutual interest in asking questions about that, and who also have a mutual interest in laughing at the power relationships of the world, I think you can have something that is just so . . . there's nothing like it. It's almost effervescent, so that you get that wonderful sense of support and nurturing and communication without necessarily having to articulate it. It's not for nothing that there are all of these pop culture books that show the difference between how men and women communicate.

BEELER You've mentioned laughter again as an essential component in these relationships. Do you sometimes feel that within the feminist movement, within feminist critiques of certain social structures, there's too little emphasis placed on this kind of rejuvenation and too much emphasis on the oppressive state of affairs?

VAN HERK Actually, I don't think that's true. I think that the whole feminist enterprise has been based on laughter and that it is only the *analysis* of the feminist enterprise that has attributed to it this high seriousness. It's like the joke: How many feminists does it take to change a light bulb? One, and that's not funny. *They don't have a sense of humour.* I don't think that's true at all. The most raucous humour I have ever seen or been engaged with has been either gangs of women who are very strong feminists or with individual feminists, because if you can not laugh, by God you will die; the oppressiveness has been pretty serious. So I just refuse to buy that, and I'm going to make the wrong kinds of jokes and keep on laughing. I think there's an appreciation of that with these women who are very much survivors of a complex set of privileges and non-privileges. I think it is very hard if you are at the bottom of the oppression domino line to see the humour in things, but if you do, I think you'll have an additional tool that will give you incredible power.

BEELER Much of your work allows for transformative possibilities. How do you feel about the transformations brought on by technology? For example, there are now compact disks available with hypertext stories, stories that have multiple endings so that the reader can choose the ending. Have you thought of becoming involved in that aspect of technology?

VAN HERK I have to a small extent, because I'm fascinated by the way it offers you choices. But it's sort of like a pinball machine; I'm only just starting to learn how to use it, so I'm not quite sure where the rubber bumpers are yet. I like to know the speed reaction of the little metal balls, or ball bearings. I do think that technology is in a kind of pinball state right now; sometimes you hit it really hard and you get this beautiful run and it goes over all these bridges that's totally elegant and other times it just goes up to the top and it shoots right back down into a black hole. I think that you have to be suspicious, and yet at the same time that's its temptation, because it suggests to you that you ought to be suspicious. I feel more seduced by it than if it pretended to a kind of infallibility, and that's the wonderful thing about the potential of all computer applications and hypertext, and so on. At the same time, technology is itself an odd thing—in narrative anyway. I always remember Michael Ondaatje saying, "Oh I got to put a phone in this story! At last my characters get to use a phone!" Of course, maybe if you're writing stories that are set in earlier times, the very notion of using a phone becomes almost anachronistic. But that idea of a space which will write on your behalf . . . I still think you have to remember that the temptation of the computer is that there is a gap. . . .

BEELER There's also the feeling that computers are a global phenomenon; they allow people to access other parts of the world. Do computers allow us to move beyond a preoccupation with the regional?

VAN HERK I suspect that computers are going to make us even more regional because we won't have to move anywhere beyond cyberspace. You can stay in place, and you can pretend whatever you want; you can do it through cyberspace. Even that suggests a kind of sinister temptation. Will we travel anymore? Will we actually talk to people face to face anymore? You can see why it would be the zone where unhappy people would make attempts to meet one another, because they'd never ever have to engage physically.

BEELER Wasn't that one of the attractive features of fiction, though? For many it was a way to escape without making contact with your everyday world. You could escape the mundane aspects of social life. You could go into a completely different world of experiences or characters.

VAN HERK That's true and I think it offered that, but at the same time, there's something slightly more physical about the novel; you don't as in

hypertext have somebody popping out of the pages and saying here I am, I'm the man of your dreams. You do it in your own head. I do find that there is a sinister aspect to it. At the same time, I'm fascinated by it, because it is another person; it's another persona in there in the mix.

BEELER And people forget that. They think of the machine, but don't understand that there is a manipulator.

VAN HERK Yes, there's a ghost in the machine.

NOTE

- 1 This interview took place on August 21, 1995 at Aritha van Herk's home in Calgary, Alberta. The interview is part of my current research projects on Canadian writing and other media, including a bio-bibliographical hypertext resource on Jeannette Armstrong, Joy Kogawa and Aritha van Herk. I would like to thank the University of Northern British Columbia for funding this research.

WORK CITED

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Luck

'Nos visions se confondent avec nos souvenirs. . .'

—JEAN GIRAUDOUX, 'La Guerre de Troie N'Aura Pas Lieu'

So what is it she remembers—this girl
we call Helen, feet planted on the stone threshold
lids almost closed, looking back?
Not the slant sun falling on the fields.

Does she remember how he'd watch her
move around the kitchen getting breakfast
hair still wet from the shower
drops slipping down her neck and breast

or how he couldn't keep his eyes off her legs
when she crossed and uncrossed them
or if she bent to straighten one stocking
an inch or so above her knee?

Does she still feel his gaze singe her lap
that evening the midnight cat
uncurled suddenly and arched its back
tail suspended like a question mark?

Now say if she remembers the ship in which he took her
to the sacked city, its foreign customs
and language, women who distrusted her.
Betrayals. Betrayals. Blissfully she forgets.

Ghazal xxiii

only sometimes is my grief for you
even then it's misplaced

you are alive mocks the wind
harsh against cheek

now you run into walls
one leg shorter than the other

strange gardener please say a prayer
for we walk with the shadow of death

and my hand is too long a fist
to offer honest comfort

Aritha van Herk's *Places Far From Ellesmere* The Wild and Adventurous North?

In *Places Far From Ellesmere*, Aritha van Herk situates her work as a response to the fiction of male writers of Western Canada which is characterized by the search for historic figures, great themes and wide horizons. Referring to Rudy Wiebe's *A Voice in the Land*, Aritha van Herk writes:

"Take War and Peace," suggests Rudy Wiebe. He would, having once insisted that the reason women will never be GREAT writers is because they do not set themselves great subjects. "Like what?" you asked him then, furious, offended. "Like war and peace," he said in his Yahweh voice. "Women write only out of their viscera." The word viscera in his mouth scornful and repellent, plump with blood and bread. Since then you've learned the viscera of men larger and more dangerous, hidden as they are in an inflated sense of themselves centring the subject of greatness. War and peace exactly what you wish to leave behind in lower Canada. But you take Anna Karenin. (*Places* 80)

Van Herk aims to leave behind the "great subjects" of religion, history and myth common to the literature of the "big sky country" and to explore what Wiebe would perhaps consider "viscera." Van Herk is interested in the psychological and sexual frontiers that J.L. has to overcome in *The Tent Peg* (1981), the adventures of Arachne, an eternal *picara*, in *No Fixed Address* (1986) and the reinterpretation of *Anna Karenina* against the backdrop of an Arctic space in *Places Far From Ellesmere* (1990). *Places Far From Ellesmere* is an attempt to reinterpret or, in van Herk's words, to "unread" the narrative options and fictional worlds of male-authored heroines; it is also an attempt to defy generic conventions and classifications. More specifically, van Herk's

text aims to subvert the generic constraints of a northern¹ which has been predominantly construed as a narrative topos ideally suitable for adventure, challenge, escape, survival or death.

The North has provided a narrative space for the realization of manhood, male fantasy and a test of masculinity. According to Lisa Bloom, the North in men's writing represents "the ideal mythic site where men can show themselves as heroes capable of supernatural deeds" (6). Shelagh Grant gives a detailed account of European and Canadian texts about the North. According to her, the fur traders in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries romanticized and mythologized the North as a place for "perilous adventure and boisterous camaraderie" (20); many explorers in the nineteenth century "accentuated the mystery and the grandeur of nature" (21) under the influence of European Romanticism and its fascination with sublime landscape. The disappearance of the Franklin expedition further enhanced the mystery of the North. American transcendentalism, as Grant argues, perpetuated the myth of the North as a desolate and mystical frontier. Canadian nationalism of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries appropriated the rhetoric of valorizing the mysterious North and construed the North as a place of important and strong northern races. As Grant states, "this was indeed a north of the mind, representing challenge, adventure, enchantment, escape, and solitude" (23).

Narratives about the North inevitably parallel American westerns. Both West and North originally reflected European dreams about uncivilized wilderness, adventurous frontier, mysterious virgin land that had to be explored and conquered. However, the West has been tamed, explored and inhabited and "can no longer support the wild fantasies and utopian dreams it had sustained for so long" (Senkpiel 135). Westerns of adventure and escape from civilization have been replaced by expressions of regret about the lost Edenic dream or by parodies, as in George Bowering's *Caprice*. Northerns, however, tend to maintain their adventurous nature as the Far North is still considered largely mysterious, wild and menacing. According to Senkpiel, there is a correlation between the disappearance of the Wild West and the rise of the Far North: "The North is to the twentieth century what the West was to the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries: a place with more future than past, more unexplored reaches than carefully mapped topography" (136).

There is another crucial difference between westerns and northerns. Westerns are often an expression of an "inevitable paradox of colonization"

(Kolodny 7); they embody the tension between the wish to maintain the Edenic dream found in the newly discovered continent on the one hand and the economic necessity to cultivate land on the other. Northerners, however, do not so easily support the imagery of paradise. Though the North can sometimes represent “a last chance to escape the errors and terrors of the ‘civilized’—that is, industrialized, polluted, and overpopulated—south” (Senkpiel 138), it does not lend itself easily to the pastoral imagery characteristic of westerns (see Blodgett). Northerners, then, have been consistently perceived as a genre of adventure, danger and test of masculinity in relentless wilderness.

T.D. MacLulich identifies westerns as a predominantly American genre and northerners as a major Canadian one (127). However, he argues, these terms “do not divide fiction into air-tight compartments. Rather, they are labels that identify tendencies—sets of related motifs and attitudes—they may exist separately or may be combined in any particular novel” (118). Moreover, according to MacLulich, genres like the northern, western, eastern and southern are deeply embedded in socio-historical contexts. Thus, “these forms of fiction are the products of historical circumstances. They cannot be defined in purely aesthetic or formal terms” (118). An American western, according to MacLulich, is a “novel of civilization evaded” (123); it frequently asks the question “How can man escape restrictions imposed by society?” (122). Canadian northerners, however, “have chosen to dwell on the process of settlement, in which European or ‘civilized’ values are imposed on the native landscape” (122). Whereas Leslie Fiedler defines a northern as a “direct confrontation between man and environment” (16), MacLulich perceives it as “the meeting place between a sensitive individual and a puritanical society that inhibits the emotional and intellectual development of its members” (127). Thus, according to MacLulich, novels like *As for Me and My House*, *Fifth Business*, and *St. Urbain’s Horseman* are examples of Canadian northerners, as they focus on the social inhibitions imposed on the intellectual, artistic or emotional development of an individual. Though MacLulich’s insistence on the historical embeddedness of the genre is well taken, his definition of a northern is too broad, since the clash between social and individual values has been the core of many literary texts that do not qualify as northerners. A northern in my view must be preoccupied with the North as frontier, challenge and inspiration. However, a northern reflects only the North of the mind; it is, in other words, both a European

construct and a product of Southern Canadian imagination.

Aritha van Herk's *Places Far From Ellesmere* admits women to Arctic space and aims to rewrite the northern from a feminist perspective. The narrator of the novel travels to Arctic Canada in order to contemplate fiction reading and writing, to think about certain fictional conventions which are often an entrapment to women writers and fiction characters. She sets out to free herself and the heroine of *Anna Karenina* (the book that she takes with her) from the constraints male fiction imposes on women. *Places Far From Ellesmere* subverts and dismantles the tradition established by male writers who envisioned the North as an ideal topos for the masculine fantasy. Van Herk's novel explores, challenges and subverts the limitations of genre, plot and syntax imposed by the conventional male narratives about the North; however, I will argue that it also replicates the mystery and romanticism of these texts because van Herk valorizes the North as an ideal space for women: space which is blank, empty and free from southern civilization and the gender assumptions it imposes.

Is van Herk's novel, *Places Far From Ellesmere*, a feminist northern? In her article "A Gentle Circumcision," van Herk describes the writing of western Canada as a "masculine kingdom of adventure" dominated by the romanticism of the landscape:

Try being female and living in the kingdom of the male virgin; try being female and writing in the kingdom of the male virgin. Women must come to a place in this kingdom themselves but until now it has been dominated by a romantic fiction that is disintegrating like a paper cowboy put into water. The kingdom boasts adventure and chivalry; it proudly displays all the characteristics of romanticism: innovation, spontaneity, sensuous nuance, limitless aspiration. This is big sky country; both the fiction and its criticism have relied on endless landscape as a metaphor. But it is also a kingdom which practices a kind of perverse courtly love: don't touch the lady. She'll sully your purity. (259)

Thus, van Herk characterizes writing about the west and north as masculine. In another article entitled "Women Writers and the Prairie: Spies in an Indifferent Landscape," she delineates the strategies a woman writer can use to deconstruct masculine or conventional forms of writing about the west and the north. According to van Herk, women writers should dismantle the traditional representations of women as "mothers/saints/whores/muses" (18) and independently enter "the kingdom of the male virgin" (259). She considers women writers and the characters they create as "spies" in a masculine landscape who are there to infiltrate and change it:

You may feel that my spies, both writer and character, are violent, unredemptive. Only remember that they are spies, spies in an indifferent landscape up till now defined by other eyes. The male west has to be earth-quaked a little, those black steel lines and the looming giant toppled. Not destroyed, oh no, infiltrated.
("Women Writers" 24)

Van Herk displays a good deal of awareness about the narrative traps awaiting a woman writer who aspires to write in what she calls the "kingdom of the male virgin." She also delineates strategies for defying this kind of masculine writing. How, then, does van Herk "earthquake", "infiltrate" or subvert the masculine northern in *Places Far From Ellesmere*? In a Deleuzian reading² of van Herk's text, Marlene Goldman argues that it aims "to subvert traditional forms of storytelling and continues to emphasize the limitations of traditional representations of Woman" (38). Karin Beeler discusses *Places Far From Ellesmere* as an attempt to "reinterpret characters depicted by male authors" and as a challenge to "the authority of male writers in the literary canon" (277). According to Beeler, *Places Far From Ellesmere* is a feminist alternative to masculine, that is, more traditional forms of expression. Matthew Manera interprets van Herk's text in terms of Wolfgang Iser's receptionist theory.³ According to Manera, the novel removes "the restriction of text as product only" and collapses "the walls between writer, text and reader" (89). The reference point in van Herk's work is "no longer the reader's horizon of expectations and the appearance of the text; it is the asymmetric dualism, the simultaneous difference of fiction and reality: it is the power of reading" (94).

In *Places Far From Ellesmere*, van Herk not only creates new representations of women but, as I will further argue, offers alternative ways of literary representation and identification. Her text interests me, first and foremost, as a feminist challenge to the masculine northern preoccupied with adventure, exploration and romanticism, as in Sir John Franklin's accounts, and as a response to Rudy Wiebe's obsession with great themes and worthy subjects. However, though *Places Far From Ellesmere* successfully subverts the masculine northern, it paradoxically also replicates the traditional portrayal of the North as a blank space ready to be used for one's own purpose and narrative.

Places Far From Ellesmere challenges the masculine northern by its defiance of generic conventions. It refuses generic classifications of fiction, non-fiction and literary criticism. The narrator of *Places Far From Ellesmere* is called Aritha van Herk; thus, the conflation of author and narrator blurs the boundaries of fiction and non-fiction. The lack of plot, characters and other conventional elements of a novel raises doubts whether *Places Far From*

Ellesmere is, in fact, a novel. The narrator's intense focus on Anna Karenina and the fictional world of women heroines created by men and shaped by literary conventions brings *Places Far From Ellesmere* close to literary criticism. The text also obscures the boundaries between prose and poetry as its lyrical intensity evokes associations with prose poems.

Places Far From Ellesmere incorporates a semi-fictive autobiography which gives an account of the narrator's life through the description of places where she lived. The insertion of autobiography into a northern narrative is a subversive move in itself because accounts of the north tend to be caught in the demands of objectivity and science, as in Franklin's *Narrative of a Journey to the Shores of the Polar Sea* or Beattie's *Frozen In Time*. On the one hand, masculine northerners tend to romanticize and mystify the North in order to enhance the heroism and courage of the narrating subject; on the other hand, however, some of these narratives self-consciously aspire to render the text into an objective and scientific account. Therefore, elements of autobiography or exploration of the self in *Places Far From Ellesmere* subvert the demands for objectivity in the masculine narratives.

The approach to autobiography in *Places Far From Ellesmere* is also unusual. The book is narrated through the descriptions of places; thus, the focus is not only on the individual but also on the landscape. If male northerners tend to maintain a distance between landscape and the narrating subject in order to emphasize that the male subject is in control of the menacing landscape, van Herk's text offers a different relationship between a human subject and a landscape. The narrator is interested in "How to unearth the place in the person?" (37), therefore suggesting a mutual relationship between people and landscape: the human mind shapes narrative representations of the landscape but the landscape also influences the human perception.

The narrative moves from the third- and second- persons points of view and therefore implies the conflation of the narrator and the reader. The use of the second-person narrative modifies the conventions of autobiography and destabilizes the relationship of narrator and reader; it also reveals a complex reading process which, for the reader, becomes a simultaneous exploration of fictional characters and the self. This means that by "un/reading" Anna (the heroine of *Anna Karenina*, which the narrator reads in the high Arctic), the fictional van Herk "un/reads" herself and therefore enables the reader to "un/read" herself as well. Van Herk further elaborates on the complexities of such a reading in her article "In Visible Ink":

Reader, this amulet of the first and most final of all crypto-frictions is that one can be disappeared and re-written in a language beyond its own. Herein resides the ultimate illusion of the text: you are not reading me but writing, not me but yourself; you are not reading writing but being read, a live text in a languaging world. (10)

Thus, the second-person narrative enables van Herk to experiment on various levels; it questions the possibilities of reference in a post-modern text and also produces reading as an active and self-exploratory process.

Van Herk subtitles her novel “a geografictione” which implies the conflation of map-making and fiction writing. The fusion of cartography and fiction further dismantles the conventions of the masculine northern and deconstructs the hierarchy of an objective science (cartography) and subjective fiction. Cartography can be construed as a realm of imaginary geography: maps can represent a geography of mind as well as a geography of place. “Mapping,” according to Derek Gregory, “is necessarily situated, embodied, partial like all other practices of representation. Mapping is no longer accurate and objective, but representing perspective from someone’s point of view” (7). Van Herk’s “geografictione” perceives mapping as a practice of representation; it aims to reveal objectivity as an illusion useful to maintain hierarchies.

The cover of the novel shows a map on which Ellesmere Island is shaped as a woman. The cover exposes and mimics the troping of the unexplored land as feminine, unpredictable and menacing. Feminist critics (Kolodny, Rose, McClintock, to name just a few) have theorized the coding of Nature or landscapes in Western culture as feminine. Annette Kolodny in *The Lay of The Land* argues that the feminization of landscape in American literature oscillates between the tropes of welcoming mother and menacing virgin. The description of landscape as friendly and maternal characterized early American literature. The newly found continent was often described as Eden. However, Kolodny further argues that in order to live in a paradise, one has to cultivate the land which inevitably means destruction of the Edenic garden. Thus, the pastoral maternal image of landscape was abandoned in favour of that of a threatening virginal land that had to be tamed. However, late nineteenth-century and twentieth-century literature experienced “a movement back into the realm of the Mother, in order to begin again” (153) and, at least symbolically, regain the paradise lost.

Anne McClintock argues that land as a female “is a traumatic trope, occurring invariably in the aftermath of the male boundary confusion” and

that “feminizing the land is a compensatory gesture, disavowing male loss of boundary by reinscribing a ritual excess of boundary” (24). In other words, caught between known and unknown, faced with the dangerously unfamiliar, male explorers code landscape as feminine. This coding allows them to deal with the fear of the unknown and secures their ego boundaries by reinscribing an excess of gender hierarchy.

Gillian Rose relates the troping of the landscape as feminine to Lacan’s mirror stage, and ideas of power and gaze. Using Laura Mulvey’s theories, Rose describes the gaze as a tension between “narcissism—identification with the image—and voyeurism—a distancing from the image” (103). This tension emanates from the mirror stage, “for the seen unity of the subject is in fact a fantasy” (103). Landscape then is troped as a comforting mother or a castrating dangerous femininity. The first instance suggests narcissistic identification with the image (that is, the landscape), whereas the latter implies voyeuristic distance, mastery and control. According to Rose, “Landscape can then be not the welcoming topography of nurturing mother but terrifying maternal swamps . . .” (106; also see Miller). In Rose’s account, voyeurism implies a threat to identity and fear of losing a unified subjectivity. Rose’s argument echoes McClintock’s reasoning that coding landscape as a threatening feminine force stems from the fear of boundary loss which results in the need for distance from and control over the object.

Thus, the island shaped as a woman on the cover of *Places Far From Ellesmere* mimics the hackneyed tendency to feminize landscape. It aims to expose the fear of the unknown in its commonplace camouflage as an unruly female which has to be domesticated. Moreover, the cover reminds us that while the explorations to map the Canadian North were driven by scientific, economic and political motives, they also drew on the mythologies of place, culture and gender of the day. Thus, the “map” on the cover of *Places Far From Ellesmere* and the fusion of map and fiction making in the text itself prove to be a powerful rhetorical strategy: they undermine the hierarchies and clear distinctions between what has been traditionally perceived as precise and objective science and what has been labelled subjective fiction.⁴

Van Herk’s “geografictione” challenges the conventions of gender representation and plot possibilities of the masculine northern. The narrator is obviously obsessed with visiting graveyards—possibly alluding to the burial of history of the places she describes. However, her obsession with the graveyards may also mock the absence of women in masculine northerners.

Furthermore, the narrator of *Places Far From Ellesmere* plays with narrative options that she thinks are available to her and, perhaps, to women characters on the whole, in a northern narrative. The narrator constructs this play with narrative options as a strategy of escape from the conventional plot:

How to get drunk: behind the school, behind the hall, in the back seats of cars, at the ball diamond, behind the curling rink, behind the elevators, down by the Battle River bridge.

Drink and get laid and get away and quit school.

Quit school and get laid and get drunk.

Reverse all orders: this is as far as you can get from home. This is place, inescapable. This is as far as you can get. The train leaves and does not return.

(*Places* 23)

Places Far From Ellesmere defies different aspects of the masculine northern. It mocks and subverts its gender representations as well as genre, plot and grammatical constraints. The “geografictione” challenges the masculine northern generically, as it blends fiction-making with map-making and inserts elements of autobiography into the text. It also obscures boundaries between fiction, non-fiction and literary criticism. *Places Far From Ellesmere* attempts to reinstate a kind of gender balance in a northern and admit women into the Arctic space. It therefore subverts a controlled and objective masculine northern.

However, is everything in this text revolutionary and subversive? In *Places Far From Ellesmere*, van Herk clearly idealizes the North as utopian space for women which is free from and unmarked by gender assumptions and conventions. Ellesmere becomes a blank space, an absence of civilization and its social and cultural restrictions: “Ellesmere is absence, a hesitation where you can pretend there are no telephones in the world, no newspapers, no banks, no books. You are only a body, here in this Arctic desert, this fecund land” (77). Ellesmere is juxtaposed to Edberg, the place where the narrator grew up. Edberg is described as an unromantic and unadventurous place. The narrator says, “What a place to grow up; no crime, no drugs, no raging hormones” (23). Whereas Edberg is associated with a sense of boredom and imprisonment, Ellesmere (a synecdoche for the Far North) is viewed as a place to escape to; it is considered by the narrator to be “a metaphor for escapation” (39). Ellesmere is not only an escape for the fictional van Herk, but also for Anna Karenina, the heroine of *Anna Karenina*. Anna is a “victim” of Tolstoy, nineteenth-century social norms and literary

conventions. Anna has never been given a chance of a fair reading; however, here in Ellesmere she can finally be freed and “unread”:

Created by a man, written by a man, read by men, revised by men; now, here on Ellesmere, you dare to set her free from the darkness of pages, her horrid shadow. Anna written as victim, trapped by convention's implacable refusals, a woman who gives up everything for love, destroys herself and everyone around her. (*Places* 122)

Anna Karenina becomes a symbol for all literary heroines who are entrapped in conventional plots, readings and interpretations which offer their heroines only the options of marriage, love affairs, children and often death. Ellesmere becomes a place to which all stranded heroines can escape:

You know at least a hundred Annas, stranded in fictional love affairs written by men who do not know that Ellesmere exists. Come to that, women are all Annas, caught or not, Annas sweating their way from one day to the next. They know the wars within their orbits, between children and husbands and lovers, need and desire and the desperate necessities of symmetry, how they will be always and for ever culpable, exiled for their visceras, eviscerated for their exiles. (*Places* 82-83)

Thus, Ellesmere is a space where all Annas, fictional or real, can escape from gender impositions. In Ellesmere, women are free to explore their personal fictions. Ellesmere offers a possibility “of a new story; Anna can invent herself in an undocumented landscape, an undetermined fiction” (125), since “reading is a new act here, not introverted and possessive but exploratory, the text a new body of self, the self a new reading of place” (113). Ellesmere becomes a place where literary heroines can participate in a different fiction, and their readers can explore and liberate themselves from the gender constraints of the society they left behind in the south. Moreover, van Herk is conscious of having fictionalized herself :

You know you are a character in a larger novel, a novel of geography and passion, reading yourself as you are being read by a comprehensive reader. How would this reading read your places, you self written between habitations, the braille of fingers on each locational inflection? (*Places* 118)

Ellesmere becomes a shelter for Tolstoy's Anna and all entrapped literary heroines as well as for the fictional and real van Herk. Because of an effective erasure of the boundaries between fiction and non-fiction, writer and reader, Ellesmere becomes a space of freedom for readers as well. Ellesmere, then, is described in terms of mystery, escape and, to a certain degree, adventure. Ellesmere is viewed in terms of blankness: it is described as an

“undocumented” and “unaltered” desert. It is romanticized, idealized and rendered mysterious as an ideal place for women. So, is van Herk’s supposedly subversive northern so different from a masculine one? Though van Herk’s “geografictione” successfully challenges certain aspects of a masculine northern, it also replicates thinking and attitudes towards the North characteristic of its masculine predecessors. *Places Far From Ellesmere* reproduces the image of the North as a blank space, one available for an escape and a new mythology. Van Herk carelessly erases First Nations’ presence in the North. If male explorers, fur traders, explorers and some twentieth-century writers constructed the North as a topos of blankness suitable for description of adventures, escape, survival or death, then van Herk reinscribes the same attitude camouflaged under a different set of concepts. The North in van Herk’s “geografictione” is also a blank space perfectly suitable for an escape and liberation from civilization. Moreover, in “In Visible Ink” and some of her interviews, van Herk continues to reinscribe the notion of a blank romantic North as an ideal topos for women. She describes the North as a place where she finally is “free from language” and “free of words” (2). In the North or Arctic, she is finally “beyond all writing and its romance” (3), ready to “unread her very reading and her personal geography” (4). The North “effaces her own referentiality” and becomes “a transformation without continuity or chronology” (4). Thus, her article “In Visible Ink” continues to describe the North as blank and empty, free of language, free of reference, free of every invention of civilization. In her interview with Dorothy Jones, van Herk describes Canada as “a naked country, such an unwritten about country” (14):

Canada is a wonderful country to write from because it is so clear and clean of story. Every single mile in Canada has not had a story written about it. Although largely unmythologized, it is rapidly beginning to take shape in story, and that’s exciting. There is a terrific sense of freedom when you are an artist expressing the nature, landscape, sensibility of the place virtually untouched by language. (14)

This quotation replicates the construction of the North or, in this case, Canada, as a blank space, ready to be mythologized. However, it does involve some further contradictions about van Herk’s position. In this interview, the whole of Canada becomes unwritten; Canada is viewed as a country outside the shape of the story. Canada may be clean of a European story, but it is hardly a place “untouched by language” as it has been mythologized in the oral traditions of Indigenous people. I think it is only fair to conclude

from this passage that van Herk ignores both the traditional and the modern writing of Indigenous people. By appropriating the Arctic space for the subversion of literary conventions and textual constraints and the liberation from gender assumptions, van Herk is caught in an emptying practice which often accompanies colonial desire. Thus, in the end both masculine northerners and *Places Far From Ellesmere* construct the North as a blank space ready to be inscribed with southern narratives—in other words, ready to be colonized by the southern Euro-Canadian imagination. Eventually, van Herk falls back into the trap she aspires to avoid.

NOTE

- 1 For a discussion of the term “northern”, see MacLulich and for an overview of differences between northerners and westerners, see Grace.
- 2 Goldman employs Deleuze and Guattari’s terms “deterritorialization,” “nomadology” and their cartographic model of power and desire to interpret van Herk’s alternative or “deterritorialized” identities and representations of women as opposed to fixed female identities in traditional western fictions.
- 3 Reception theory comments on the relationship between reader and writer. *Places* collapses the boundaries between the reader and writer, between the acts of reading and writing. It undermines the reader’s desire to interpret the text correctly; thus, both the reader and writer become active participants in the creation process.
- 4 The other challenge to the masculine northern derives from van Herk’s consistent avoidance of standard punctuation and occasionally of standard syntax. The lack of standard punctuation allows the semiotic energy of language to be unleashed into the text; also, it signifies a punctuation of desire rather than the punctuation of grammar. The abundance of sentence fragments in the novel may be intended to reflect the fractured subjectivity of the female narrator as opposed to a self-controlling and unified male subject in the masculine northern. Van Herk’s text is full of various syntactical puns, sentence fragments and displaced semi-colons:

What you weren’t. Allowed.

:to go uptown at noon. Either to the store, the post office, the cafe, someone’s house.

All potential trouble . . .

:to play ball after school. Base/ball diamonds were suspect, between the catcher’s mitt and the pitcher’s mound anything could flash past/get loose/be taken

(*Places* 24)

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Tribute

A night the way Mandelstam might have composed it:
overpowering and with bells in bell towers:

all the names of God should be fluttering within,
along with bats that cast no shadow—the world, then,

though absence, turns to presence, canvas on which paint
begins to suggest itself, vacuum for the self,

constantly *poor* thing, to try to fill. An ocean
that the silence suggests becomes material,

and with breasts, no less! The impoverished self suckles,
sucks like an infant or bivalve—more generous

trope that renders ego, not all the world, oyster,
to allow pearls to form within the nightly flesh.

What here attaches itself to what? Mandelstam
writes nothing of the necessary abrasions

which begin a process that makes dawn come early,
blue-grey at first, or grey or blue alone, rendering

the complex possibilities of metaphor simpler:
a point of view, a horizon, a sky,

At the track, or Dog chases rabbit

Yesterday I had the most exquisite bridges built,
great looping semantic spans that ran
 all the way from Jaffa
cakes (over a dim maze of indifference
to the infinite systems that collect us all together
in a room where none of us know why
 we were invited
—and yet dress as if expecting the queen)
to the clear, thick juice that runs
 from a pig's head
when the saw blade nicks the tough sac
that encases the brain for the first time,
the awful smell
 that floods the room like a dye,
sits heavy in the lungs like smoke.

Today, most of those same passages are closed, seem
like isolated mountain roads do in winter, just
another part of the steep, mostly
wooded slopes.

All access to this part of the world
has disappeared in a snow so heavy
they could be sawing bone up there
 in the clouds
(though that is the only link I can find
to the lucid trails
 I hunted along yesterday).

Speaking to Colonization

Howard Adams

A Tortured People: The Politics of Colonization.
Theytus \$12.95

Maria Campbell

Paintings by Sherry Farrell Racette
Stories of the Road Allowance People. Theytus
\$12.95

Reviewed by Emma LaRocque

Some 20 years ago when I was a young intellectual in search of fellow Native intellectuals, I came across Adams' first book *Prison of Grass*. I found his ideas on the problems of colonized Native peoples internalizing the 'White Ideal' particularly perceptive and useful. Throughout these years I have directed students to Adams in my university classes. And I looked forward to further developments of these ideas by Adams.

In *A Tortured People: The Politics of Colonization* Adams continues with the theme of colonization but focuses on Native people's failed struggle for self-determination from the 1960s and 70s. He argues that what started out as the Native peoples' movement for liberation in the 1960s has ended up in the 90s as a disjointed collection of corrupt and repressive Native organizations and leadership. He attributes this to government manipulation in the form of unaccountable patronage monies meant to suppress Native resistance. Such neocolonialism he argues, has rendered Native leadership completely unable to fend off continuing corporate

confiscation of Native lands and resources. And behind government and multinational corporate control is capitalism. Adams seems to call for a working-class movement organized by the grassroots. He seems to propose that Native people join forces with other "subproletariat" minority and interest groups if they hope to succeed in their liberation struggles.

Adams's gloves-off 'let's cut the crap' style is as intact as ever. His ability to see through sham, and his courage to call a spade a spade is as refreshing as ever. He shows the disturbing history of Indian slavery in early Canada. He questions government-sanctioned heroification of Riel and points to Riel's pacifism as one cause of the failed Metis resistance of 1885. He challenges eurocentric historiography of "European colonizers who saw themselves as grand organizers." He exposes, among other things, poverty, racism, Native male domination of Native women and constitutional pretensions surrounding Aboriginal self-government. He hammers corporate-controlled governments and Native leadership soaked in capitalist corruption. He is astonished by the extent to which Indian and Metis peoples seem unconscious of their political place in Canadian history. For example, he criticizes a government-funded 'Back to Batoche' "mardi gras" celebration. "The ultimate insult to our ancestors who died fighting for our freedom is the parade of the RCMP—the murderers of our dead heroes. How culturally and historically ignorant can we become?" He also offers a

poignant analysis of caricatured cultural activities “that serve to obscure political awareness and action . . . These are ‘primitive’ cultural creations of the colonizer, and are not appropriate for current Indian and Metis cultural references.”

There is so much in this book that is so ‘right on’—yet, there is much missing. Generosity of spirit is missing. While his rage against the failed Native leadership is understandable, his name-calling is not. His book is littered with ideologically-based accusations (“comprador regimes,” “collaborator elites,” “Aboriginal petty bourgeoisie,” “Aboriginal middle-class types”) which are not only devoid of contemporary meaning but sound simply harsh. If colonization is as profoundly destructive as he argues, is there no room for compassionate comprehension for the no-win situation *all* Native peoples often find themselves in? More importantly, the book is missing hope and vision. While he proposes “a genuine, liberating nationalism” which “must include and promote revolutionary and working class and socialist ideologies,” he does not spell out what exactly liberation for Native people would entail. It is not clear whether he is suggesting that Native people throw themselves into a mass working class movement, or that they maintain “Aboriginal renaissance” in the form of “cultural nationalism.” He describes Native economy as backward, stagnant and underdeveloped but can only refer vaguely to “progressive policies.” He speaks of revolutionary re-organizing yet basically says all efforts will be thwarted by the omnipotent colonizer. There is an overwhelming sense of despair throughout this book which has a paralyzing effect. Even I yearned for a meaningful, vibrant, articulation of hope and vision. At this time in human history is old Marxist ideology all that can be offered?

There is also much inconsistency in style. At times Adams is conversational, falling

into stereotypical phrases (“mocassin row,” “red” “restless”), and in the next paragraph he could be lecturing on class consciousness in a graduate seminar. This in itself could be seen as a new genre within the post-colonial intellectual context but the book’s problems cannot be overlooked merely as post-colonial. Adams constantly repeats his points (and his ideological language) throughout the book. There are grammatical, historical and typographical errors. A major shortcoming is the sloppy usage of references. Most chapters are not only missing footnotes, but some references are mismatched. This is as much a reflection of poor editing by the publisher as it is of carelessness by the author. But the author as a historian and an experienced Native intellectual is responsible for not only placing references in their proper context, but giving credit where credit is due, something Adams fails to do in many instances.

Adams dutifully mentions Maria Campbell. This is as it should be; however, since Adams’ and Campbell’s first books appeared in the mid-70s, numerous Native writers have sprouted and even a number of Native scholars (many of whom are also creative writers) have emerged. Since the vast majority of these scholars/writers continue to confront colonialism, it is puzzling why Adams harps on “a certain number of indigenous intellectuals who are subservient to the imperial master” (not that he ever names or provides examples of such). So is Adams saying that only Marxist Native intellectuals (and he mentions only himself and Ron Bourgeault in this regard) are capable of correctly analyzing colonialism?. While it is despicable and inexcusable the degree to which racist history and literature is extant in Canadian writing, Adams errs in failing to address the growing new, exciting, de-colonial history and literature being provided by both Native and non-Native scholars and writers. Albeit,

much of this new thinking is still ghettoized as "Native Studies" or Native literature. But it is there for anyone who wants to inform or update themselves.

Perhaps Adams tried to cover way too many topics in one book. His unbending Marxist stance, though, raises the question: what would a Native-based liberation platform look like? He is perhaps most clear with respect to the necessity of indigenizing the English language as a source of empowerment for Aboriginal writers who are reflecting the colonial experience. He picks up on points made by Native writers and scholars, among others, that 'Standard English' has served to humiliate and subordinate Indigenous peoples. Accordingly, Native scholars/writers have tackled this quintessentially colonial burden in various ways. Maria Campbell is one such writer.

Maria Campbell loves the language of her ancestors. And language of a people is about subtleties: an inflexion, a wave of the hand, a raise of an eyebrow, the cool stare, the meaningful silence. Then there are the sounds: the rhythms and music of voices, the whispers of *cheepayaak* (night ghosts/spirits), the songs of lost loves, deep rumblings of Pehehsoo and laughter of Wehsakehcha. And what can one say about the words? Amazing, exquisite, cultivated, inventive, hilarious, visceral, powerful, engaging, wonderful words. How can those writers who were fortunate enough to grow up with their peoples' languages ever adequately translate the 'soul' of a people into standard English? Not only does English come from a totally different linguistic family, not only is it a written language, it is also a colonial weapon traditionally used by colonizers to dehumanize indigenous peoples.

It is against this backdrop that Maria Campbell in *Stories of the Road Allowance People* offers "the dialect and rhythm of my village." Knowing full well that standard English cannot adequately express the nuances and the cadences of Metis

mythology and humour, Campbell leaves the stories as intact as possible by phonetically translating into English the accents of Metis storytellers.

I must confess I began reading these stories (of ghosts, legends, priests, pain, pride, humour, human foibles) with some skepticism and I could not help but wonder about the relationship between the language of this work and W.P. Kinsella's *Silas Ermineskin* and Frank Fence Post's broken English. I think part of the answer lies in the cultural knowledge of the reader and audience.

What Campbell offers is not caricature. What Campbell offers is a complex culture which must be experienced beyond print. So I read the stories out loud; I made sure to rise and fall with the landscape of legends and human foibles. And before long I was laughing, crying and muttering to myself "I must pass this along to my siblings." Even though I had not heard of any of these stories specifically, they were familiar and what is more, I could hear the cadences from my childhood hamlet. Each story is illustrated with colorful paintings.

Stories of the Road Allowance People is a unique enjoyable text. For a 'tortured people' we still know how to tell stories, the stuff of living! There are many ways to tell the story of colonization and both Adams and Campbell's styles and contributions are necessary. We can take some hope in the knowledge that dispossessed people do know the long-term consequences for people who steal. Listen:

Hees not just dah stealing dats bad you know.

All dough dats bad enough.

Dah real bad ting is your kids and all your grandchildren.

Dey don got no good stories about you if your a teef.

("Dah Teef")

L'Artiste et la réception

Juan C. Aguirre

Artistes immigrants, société québécoise: un bateau sur le fleuve. CIDIHCA n.p.

Nycole Paquin (dir.)

De l'interprétation en arts visuels. Triptyque 518

Reviewed by Grazia Merler

Au pays du Québec, dans cette dernière décennie du vingtième siècle, deux attitudes se côtoient. Le désir de former bande à part, de reserrer ses rangs et le désir de s'ouvrir et d'accueillir le nouveau venu. Ces deux logiques ne s'opposent pas, elles naissent d'un même vœux d'amélioration et d'affirmation. La contradiction inhérente à cet état titubant, cependant, peut entraver l'éclosion de la créativité et de la vitalité. Les deux textes souffrent quelque peu de ce tâtonnement.

La politique multiculturelle canadienne a bien rompu les deux solitudes canoniques (anglais-français), elle a aussi fait renaître les thèmes de l'exil et de la fidélité/infidélité aux sources ethno-culturelles. En dehors des autochtones, il est évident qu'au Canada tout le monde est immigrant plus ou moins récent. Le leitmotif de l'étranger dans toutes ses modulations (âge, genre, métier, milieu, race, religion) a toujours fait partie du quotidien et a toujours été source d'inspiration au Canada. L'apport le plus positif, cependant, du recueil d'opinions et d'entrevues de Juan Aguirre est que la recherche d'identité est devenue davantage recherche d'altérité.

L'auteur a choisi d'inventorier les attitudes, au sujet du Québec, de vingt-six artistes (neuf femmes et dix-sept hommes) venus d'Amérique latine, d'Afrique et d'Asie. Il explique avoir voulu choisir une immigration plus "visible", plus reconnaissable que les immigrants européens, surtout il présente des adultes venant de pays en voie de développement. Ils sont arrivés au Québec entre 1962 et 1988, ils sont scolarisés

et appartenaient, dans leur pays d'origine, à la classe moyenne. Ce ne sont donc pas des réfugiés politiques, ils ont tout de même quitté leur pays pour des raisons socio-politiques.

Quatre groupes d'artistes s'imposent: cinq (deux femmes et trois hommes) dans les domaines de la musique, de la chanson, de la danse; sept écrivains (une femme et six hommes); neuf (quatre femmes et cinq hommes) dans le domaine des beaux arts y compris la photographie; cinq cinéastes (deux femmes et trois hommes). Il ne s'agit donc pas d'une étude statistiquement rigoureuse, ou même recherchant l'objectivité. Sa valeur réside dans la spontanéité des propos recueillis. Le choix d'artistes est probablement le fruit du hasard, ou bien reflète les amis de l'auteur, ou bien encore il dévoile la réalité de cette catégorie d'immigrants (immigration d'artistes, adultes du tiers monde, survenue durant les trente dernières années).

Dans la première partie du volume la bonne volonté est évidente. Sont discutés l'importance de l'artiste pour forger l'âme d'une société, l'écart entre la vitalité du Québec de la révolution tranquille et le climat d'attente de cette fin de siècle. L'aventure de ces artistes-immigrants, leur intégration à une nouvelle société, l'évolution de leur créativité sont également présentées. Tous sont conscients de leur contribution positive au pays d'accueil. Ces artistes ont choisi le Canada à cause de sa tradition démocratique, sans passé colonialiste et le Québec en particulier à cause de sa "latinité". Aussi ils sont venus parce qu'au Québec "on a besoin d'immigrants", parce que cela paraissait "plus facile" et enfin parce que c'est un bon compromis entre l'Europe et l'Amérique.

L'image qui parcourt le texte est le voyage d'exploration du bateau tout au long du fleuve, un peu à la mémoire des premiers colons d'il y a quatre siècles. L'impression qu'ont ces artistes des québécois est "des

gens simples, généreux, amicaux, ouverts, respectueux des différences et sans préjugés”; les québécoises surtout semblent bien accueillir les artistes immigrants. Là où l'accueil se gâte quelque peu est au niveau de l'inspiration et de la subvention. Les préoccupations des artistes immigrants semblent plus universelles, moins nationalistes que celles de leurs collègues québécois. D'autre part les subventions du Ministère des Affaires Culturelles du Québec ainsi que celles du Conseil des Arts du Canada aident un peu, mais “le soutien n'est pas suffisant pour le plein épanouissement de leurs talents”.

Dans ce tour d'horizon fort impressionniste il est difficile de ne pas succomber aux clichés et aux rancunes personnelles. En fin de recueil, les trois entrevues d'artistes arrivés au Canada depuis vingt/trente ans n'échappent pas à cet écueil. Il s'agit de Carlos Rodriguez, écrivain venu de Bolivie, de Indira Nair, peintre née en Inde et de Emile Ollier, écrivain de Haïti. Comme dans toute entrevue on retrouve la tendance à généraliser une expérience personnelle et à lui attribuer une valeur universelle. Quelques lieux communs au sujet du Canada, du Québec, de l'isolement de l'immigrant apportent peu. La partie la plus intéressante, me semble-t-il, est plutôt leur histoire personnelle, le voyage précisément d'un pays à l'autre. Ce qui est plus significatif, cependant, est qu'ils fréquentent peu ou pas du tout leurs collègues artistes québécois, ils connaissent à peine quelques noms. Il faut espérer que cette ignorance est à l'honneur de l'artiste qui, dans sa créativité, demeure libre et indépendant.

Dans le domaine universitaire, par contre, les chapelles existent et souvent n'aident guère à promouvoir un certain renouvellement intellectuel et l'indépendance dans la recherche. Sous la direction de Nycole Paquin, neuf professeurs de l'UQAM (sept femmes et deux hommes), ont tenu leurs

propos au sujet de l'interprétation en arts visuels. Bertrand Gervais, du département d'études littéraires, situe les orientations théoriques de ses collègues du département d'histoire de l'art. Nycole Paquin, dans la préface où elle résume les autres articles, déclare précisément vouloir éviter de faire chapelle, de ne pas vouloir s'attacher à une école théorique particulière. Pour ce faire les articles sont présentés en ordre alphabétique. Là où le recueil manque d'unité, il gagne en variété.

La fragmentation en pièces détachées est-ce un symptôme de vitalité ou est-ce simplement une autre forme de contrainte au nom de la tolérance? Ce qui est certain, cependant, est d'abord que dans les départements des universités il existe souvent une séparation entre les théoriciens et les praticiens, ensuite il est de rigueur aujourd'hui de se différencier de l'esthétique structuraliste de la signification en se concentrant sur le sujet. Il est certain aussi que tout discours sur l'art doit emprunter son vocabulaire à la linguistique, à la sémiotique, à la critique littéraire et à la psychanalyse. La définition même de l'interprétation demeure problématique: est-ce un acte de cognition ou d'intuition?

Selon Bertrand Gervais l'interprétation fait partie d'un processus davantage symbolique que cognitif. “L'interprétation prend la relève quand la compréhension ne suffit plus.” L'interprétation, en geste créateur de mise en relation, peut se faire indépendamment de l'oeuvre d'art; elle devient alors interprétation de l'interprétation. Le lien entre le visuel et le verbal, l'objet d'art et son exposition sont les préoccupations centrales du recueil qu'il s'agisse de la pertinence ou de l'impertinence de la quête du modèle ou bien des lieux de présentation et des espaces de représentation.

Quatre essais s'élaborent autour d'objets spécifiques: la représentation de la mort dans l'art occidental par Rose-Marie Arbour; la portée autobiographique d'un

tableau de Fra Filippo Lippi par Olga Hazan; la muséologie à Québec par Louise Letocha et la statuaria ancienne au Québec oeuvre sérielle ou invention par Michel Paradis. Ce sont de textes informatifs et clairs. L'article de Jocelyne Lupien élabore une réflexion théorique et méthodologique prenant comme prétexte deux tableaux modernes. L'idée de la transgression par le trompe l'oeil et l'arcimboldesque est développée. L'idée d'écart, de bouleversement, de "catastrophe" est reprise par Nycole Paquin, mais sans modèle pictural. D'autre part, deux autres articles, celui de Jacqueline Mathieu et celui de Fernande Saint-Martin font appel à la fois à la théorie des actes du langage et au concept de l'inconscient en sémiologie psychanalytique. L'interdisciplinarité de ces contributions témoigne non seulement d'un désir d'être à la fine pointe de la recherche dans ce domaine, mais aussi d'une bonne connaissance des chercheurs tant américains qu'euro-péens. L'art, néanmoins, d'exprimer de façon précise et concise des concepts nouveaux et vieux pourrait encore s'améliorer.

Études québécoises

Aurélien Boivin

Pour une lecture du roman québécois. Nuit Blanche \$23.95

Hans-Josef Niederehe

Études québécoises: bilan et perspectives. Niemeyer DM112.00

Reviewed by Guy Poirier

Aurélien Boivin a réuni sous le titre *Pour une lecture du roman québécois*, de Maria Chapdelaine à Volkswagen blues quinze études portant sur les romans québécois suivants: *Maria Chapdelaine*, *Menaud*, *maitre-draveur*, *Le Survenant*, *Bonheur d'occasion*, *Le Temps des hommes*, *Agaguk*, *Le Libraire*, *Une Saison dans la vie d'Emmanuel*, *Salut Galarneau!*, *La Guerre, yes sir!*, *Un Dieu*

chasseur, *L'Emmitouflé*, *Thérèse et Pierrette à l'école des Saints-Anges*, *Les Fous de Bassan* et *Volkswagen blues*. Tout comme l'avant-propos le souligne, cet ouvrage regroupe une série de onze fiches de lecture qui furent publiées par l'auteur de 1993 à 1996 dans la revue *Québec français* et auxquelles on ajouta quatre autres textes, dont l'introduction à l'édition de 1992 de *Menaud*, *maitre-draveur*. Les fiches sont destinées: "(...) aux professeurs et élèves de l'ordre d'enseignement secondaire, aux professeurs et étudiants des ordres collégial et universitaire, tant du Québec que du Canada que partout à travers la francophonie, de même qu'au public en général". Ces quinze fiches de lecture, qui s'inspirent vraisemblablement des dossiers des professeurs publiés par les grandes maisons d'édition françaises, adoptent toujours un même modèle de présentation: de grandes rubriques se succèdent les unes aux autres et sont suivies d'une bibliographie sélective. Contrairement aux publications pédagogiques dont les enseignants ont l'habitude, ces dossiers, à quelques exceptions près, offrent cependant une perspective d'analyse ou, pour reprendre le titre de l'ouvrage, une "lecture" des oeuvres du programme, suggérant à l'occasion des pistes d'interprétation et des activités pédagogiques.

La première rubrique s'intitule "De quoi s'agit-il?": des renseignements de différentes natures y sont colligés. Dans certains cas, on rappelle l'importance d'une oeuvre; à d'autres moments, on effectue un sommaire de l'intrigue ou l'on établit en quelques lignes les enjeux littéraires d'un roman. Suivent habituellement alors, mais non de façon constante, quelques paragraphes sur le titre, la genèse, les états du texte ou même la couverture de certaines éditions!

Sous la rubrique "personnages", le critique brosse des portraits physiques et psychologiques, en imbriquant citations et remarques typées, probablement dans le but de bien faire ressortir les polarités présentes

dans les oeuvres étudiées. Viennent ensuite deux sections consacrées à l'espace (décor) et au temps (durée). Des indications précises sont alors données à propos de la période historique et des lieux géographiques réels décrits dans les romans. Ces commentaires, utiles pour les lecteurs connaissant peu le Québec, sont malheureusement mal distingués de la thématique des lieux et du découpage chronologique des intrigues.

Viennent ensuite des sections portant sur la structure, les thèmes et le sens ou la portée de l'oeuvre; certains commentaires sur la structure se prêteront fort bien à l'enseignement de l'analyse structurale, alors que les différents thèmes identifiés permettront d'élaborer la leçon d'analyse littéraire. Une dernière rubrique porte sur la réception de l'oeuvre; c'est à notre humble avis la plus précieuse. On y fait ainsi le bilan de la réception critique du roman, lors de sa première publication, tout en décrivant de façon perspicace le contexte socio-historique et la vie littéraire de l'époque. On ne distingue cependant pas très bien, dans cette même section, les opinions émises, lors de la publication de l'ouvrage, des études critiques qu'élabora la critique universitaire. On consulera finalement à profit une section ajoutée à la réception critique du roman *Agaguk* et intitulée "Pistes à suivre", de même que les bibliographies sélectives que l'on retrouve à la fin des chapitres et la bibliographie du roman québécois insérée à la fin de l'ouvrage.

Ouvrage hybride, aux confins du dossier pédagogique et de l'essai d'interprétation, on consulera *Pour une lecture du roman québécois* afin d'y trouver des indications pratiques sur l'histoire littéraire et sur la genèse et la réception des quinze romans étudiés. Des remarques fort pertinentes—que l'on souhaiterait plus nombreuses, peut-être, dans le second volume qu'annonce déjà l'auteur—sur l'exploitation pédagogique de certaines oeuvres raviront finalement les enseignants.

C'est à une perspective différente que nous convie Hans-Josef Niederehe dans *Études québécoises: Bilan et perspectives*. On retrouve en fait réunis sous ce titre les actes d'un colloque international et pluridisciplinaire tenu à l'occasion du XVe anniversaire de la création du "Centre d'études québécoises de l'Université de Trèves". On y traite, dans dix-sept articles, des sujets allant d'une étude du nouveau Code civil du Québec à l'état des études québécoises en Belgique et au Canada anglais. En fait, six études abordent des questions liées de près à la littérature—la littérature québécoise et les thèses de Norbert Elias, le problème de la langue et *Maryse*, l'approche historique et culturelle de la littérature québécoise, l'évolution de la poésie québécoise, l'emprise de la critique socio-historique sur les études québécoises et les représentations de l'Irlande—alors que trois font le bilan des études québécoises aux États-Unis, en Belgique et au Canada; quatre articles portent finalement sur des questions de linguistique et de socio-linguistique—bilinguisme canadien et "multilinguisme" européen, survie des langues amérindiennes au Québec, recherches sur le français parlé, politique linguistique et culturelle en matière d'immigration—et quatre articles se penchent sur l'histoire, le domaine légal et la culture politique—L'Église en Nouvelle-France, le code civil et le droit européen, et l'image de "Grande Baleine" véhiculée aux États-Unis et au sein des pays de la CEE.

Malgré la diversité apparente des études et une certaine hétérogénéité dans la facture des articles (certains articles font trois pages alors que d'autres dépassent la vingtaine, un article accumule dangereusement fautes d'orthographe et erreurs syntaxiques), une grande volonté de promouvoir les études québécoises dans un contexte européen se fait constamment sentir au cours du recueil. Une originalité certaine s'affirme cependant dans la plupart des articles, tout

comme une tendance, surtout remarquée dans les travaux en sciences sociales, à l'étude comparative des cultures. Les articles à connotation littéraire ciblent deux groupes de lecteurs. Certains critiques s'attachent surtout à faire ressortir les grandes tendances de l'histoire de la littérature au Québec et s'adressent aux universitaires qui ignorent tout des études québécoises. D'autres, en revanche, abordent des questions de fond, tant dans le domaine de la critique littéraire que de l'évolution des études québécoises à l'étranger. Notons, à titre d'exemple, le trop court article de Michel Erman intitulé: "Une Bibliothèque fermée pour inventaire?" qui relance le débat de la prépondérance de la critique socio-historique en études québécoises, ainsi que celui de Fritz Peter Kirsch ("La Littérature québécoise, la francophonie et les thèses de Norbert Elias") qui, à l'aide de ces théories d'Elias trop souvent oubliées dans le monde francophone, s'attèle à une semblable problématique en parvenant cependant à y discerner l'espoir d'un renouvellement esthétique. De même, l'article de Madeleine Frédéric et de Serge Jaumain du Centre d'Études canadiennes de l'Université Libre de Bruxelles et celui de Richard Beach sur l'expérience américaine des études sur la littérature québécoise soulignent de façon parfois pointue et critique la genèse et le développement des études québécoises dans ces deux pays, tout en démontrant clairement l'autonomie qu'elles ont acquises au cours des ans. Notons finalement que le recueil se termine par un article de Fernand Harvey qui, en plus de nous ramener en territoire bien connu, présente, statistiques à l'appui, un état présent des études québécoises au Canada.

Somme toute, *Études québécoises, bilan et perspective* reflète la vigueur et la rigueur des études québécoises telles qu'elles sont pratiquées à l'étranger tout en interpellant, parfois de façon troublante, les chercheurs d'ici.

Transatlantic Multiculturalisms

Braun, Hans, and Wolfgang Klooss (Eds.)

Multiculturalism in North America and Europe: Social Practices—Literary Visions.

Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier DM 39,50

Jaumain, Serge, and Marc Maufort

The Guses of Canadian Diversity: New European Perspectives—Les masques de la diversité canadienne: Nouvelles perspectives européennes. Rodopi n.p.

Laperrière, Anne, Varpu Lindström, and Tamara Palmer Seiler

Immigration and Ethnicity in Canada—Immigration et Ethnicité au Canada. Spec. Issue *Canadian Issues/Thèmes Canadiennes* 18 (1996). Association for Canadian Studies n.p.

Reviewed by Winfried Siemerling

Multiculturalism, plurality, and ethnicity have become acute priorities in many disciplines as constructions of national cultures are pressured by globalization, migration, and previously repressed cultural connections. Discourses on multiculturalism are multiple like their subject matter. We hear qualified activist approval or less restrained administrative endorsement; multiculturalism is described as civilization's last hope (for instance against fundamentalism or the European extreme right) or condemned as totalitarian or racist practice; it is associated with both negative "othering" and the exuberant commodification and fetishization of otherness. Articulations of these concerns in literary theory and criticism can pose complex problems, as, for example, wholesale lapses into unreflected thematicism have demonstrated. Yet while white Canada's "second-world" status initially produced certain frictions in the postcolonial paradigm, Canadian multiculturalism has been perceived as immediately relevant in current international discussions.

Although Canada's record in this respect is still awarded relatively little attention in the

current United States debates (apart from the reception of Charles Taylor's work or conservative reference to Canada as an example of multiculturalism's threat to strong nationhood), European-based perspectives often identify Canada as a potential model as the problem of the twenty-first century is seen as the problem of ethnic diversity. Canada's pioneer status is thus emphasized by Hans Braun and Wolfgang Klooss in their editorial preface to *Multiculturalism in North America and Europe: Social Practices—Literary Visions*. This collection offers contributions from both sides of the Atlantic on multiculturalism, representing a considerable number of disciplines, geographies, and perspectives. The topics discussed include, for instance, the acquisition of cross-cultural knowledge in the classroom, an analysis of Canadian ethnic census data, and considerations of ethnicity as economic variable. Jurgen Thömmes offers a fascinating account of the encounter between French "laïcisme" and Islamic fundamentalism in the 1989 "Affaire des Foulards," in which group-based religious norms collided with modern models of subjectivity based on the purely procedural politics of universalism. Hans Braun follows with an analysis of the rise of ethnicity in Germany, where immigration has increased steadily since the eighties and unprepared policy makers are trying to come to terms with a de-facto multicultural situation. Yet while North American models might offer solutions, Braun also points to the differently developed cognitive resources that allow traditional immigration societies to adapt more easily to new global realities. Dirk Hoerder's contribution similarly uses the Canadian situation in a comparative perspective, in order to discuss cultural retention and change in immigrant cultures.

The second half of the book features well-known scholars of Canadian literature. Frank Davey's "The Literary Politics of

Canadian Multiculturalism" distinguishes between a largely "white" multiculturalism of the seventies and an activist multiculturalism of the last decade. He portrays the former as western Canada's response to bilingualism, a multiculturalism "in which Canadians of Ukrainian, German, Swedish, Icelandic and similar descent challenged the right of Canadians of French descent to specific claim and statutory privilege, without necessarily wishing to distinguish themselves from general Anglophone-Canadian culture." While he sees merely "an increased consciousness of ancestry" and attempts to "rehabilitate First Nations and Métis historical figures" in the works of writers like Wiebe, Suknaski, Mandel or Laurence, Davey characterizes the later, activist multiculturalism as marked by the claims of a wide variety of groups for special status. In this context, Davey offers his analyses of paraliterary "scandals," such as the controversial Canada Council statements concerning funding priorities, the debates about "appropriation of voice," the disputes about representation at the 1989 PEN International Congress, and the recent equations of multiculturalism with Orwellian coercion.

Moving from political context to literary text, Konrad Gross offers a consideration of memory and language in ethnic literature, discussing texts by the German writer Sten Nadolny and by Turkish-German writer Emine Sevgi Özdamar together with Grove's *A Search for America*, Laurence's *The Diviners*, Kogawa's *Obasan* and Gunnars' *The Prowler*. Gross insists here on ethnic literature and ethnogenesis not as categories of marginality but as prototypical of writing in North America, and thus reinforces similar claims made by Werner Sollors and Enoch Padolsky for American and Canadian literature respectively. In other contributions, Hartmut Lutz discusses Whiteshamanism and the non-Native appropriation of Native artifacts and stories, Simone Vauthier analy-

ses Ondaatje's *In the Skin of a Lion*, and Ron Hatch offers a survey of Chinese-Canadian writing; Janice Kulyk Keefer closes the collection with a discussion of her experience as an author who has come to see herself as Ukrainian-Canadian, and as a reader and teacher engaging with multiculturalism in the Canadian context. The volume as a whole provides valuable comparative perspectives on multiculturalism as an international problematic that appears, however, in constellations entirely specific to local situations. The important essays in the second part mark the book as a significant contribution to literary scholarship in the area of multiculturalism.

In *The Guises of Canadian Diversity: New European Perspectives—Les masques de la diversité: Nouvelles perspectives européennes*, Serge Jaumain and Marc Maufort present selected essays from the "Second European Seminar for Graduate Students in Canadian Studies," held 1993 at the Université Libre de Bruxelles. Documenting the work of the next generation of European Canadianists, this bilingual collection and the conference at its origin also illustrate the extraordinary and exciting interest in Canadian studies in Europe. In an introductory survey of Canadian Studies abroad, Lucette Nobell traces the development from the 1976 Symons Report to the current upsurge of interest in Europe and elsewhere that has led to Canadian Studies Associations in twenty countries. The first of the following three main sections, entitled "Around Postmodernism / Autour du postmodernisme," testifies to the continuing strong interest in Michael Ondaatje's work (3 essays, one of which discusses postmodern autobiography in both Daphne Marlatt and Ondaatje), but also presents contributions on Findley, English Canadian drama, and Native writing and representation in literature. Historiography is examined here in the context of Ondaatje's work by María J. Llerena-Ascanio and in Gianna Stefanutto's

discussion of historiographic plays by Davies, Salutin, Coulter, and Gray, but also with reference to autobiography and its often complex mediations through alterity (for instance in Annette Lönnecke's reading of Ondaatje's *Running in the Family*). Questions of alterity are again central to Carolan-Brozy's discussion of that loaded form of Native autobiography which Arnold Krupat has called "bicultural composite authorship"—the transcription and transmutation of Native oral discourse by non-Natives that has been one of the central theoretical issues in Native American studies (John G. Neihardt's *Black Elk Speaks* is a classical case in point). While Carolan-Brozy cites discussions of detrimental non-Native involvement in this area (for instance Helen Hoy's thoughtful reflections on the *The Book of Jessica*), she reads Wilfred Pelletier and Ted Poole's collaborative *No Foreign Land: The Autobiography of a North American Indian* as a conscious subversion of the genre's historical implications.

The problems of authorship and editorial transmutation of autobiography resurface in the opening essay of the section on Canadian Women Writers, Michela Mengoli-Berti's "La Relation de 1654 de Marie de l'Incarnation—une autobiographie spirituelle." The recomposition of Marie de l'Incarnation's manuscript by her son, Mengoli-Berti argues convincingly, adapts the text to the publicly defined norm and leaves us, in fact, "privés du texte original." In the following contributions, Karyn Huenemann discusses Sara Jeannette Duncan's fictive exploration of colonial women's positionalities in her Anglo-Indian novels and in *The Imperialist*, and Kirstie McAlpine follows the female negotiations of silence in Joy Kogawa's *Obasan* and Marlene Nourbese Philip's *Looking for Livingstone: An Odyssey of Silence*. Autobiography, the fusion of fact and fiction, and the intricacies of memory come to the fore in Eva Darias Beautell's reading of female subjectivity in

Sky Lee's *Disappearing Moon Cafe*, Kristjana Gunnars' *The Substance of Forgetting* and again Kogawa's *Obasan*, and in Kit Stead's consideration of the work of Alice Munro. Gabrielle Heinen-Dimmer's discussion of the indirect, associative, and cumulative narrative techniques in Sandra Birdsell's *Agassiz Stories* concludes this section on "Canadian Women Writers/Ecrivaines canadiennes." Together with the preceding essays, these studies offer an indication of the often excellent work and the interests and perspectives that mark European graduate scholarship on Canadian literatures. In the last section, entitled "Cultural Studies / Civilisation," literary scholars find further interesting material in Sandrine Ferré's account of publishing in Atlantic Canada and its recent multicultural developments, and perhaps also in Lee Rotherham's discussion of André Laurendeau's relationship with the often problematic nationalisms in the thirties and forties in Québec. More catholic tastes can profit from the whole disciplinary range offered here, which includes archaeology, social history, geography, and constitutional law.

The disciplinary diversity typical of area studies also marks the collection edited by Anne Laperrière, Varpu Lindström, and Tamara Palmer Seiler, *Immigration and Ethnicity in Canada—Immigration et Ethnité au Canada*. This special issue of *Canadian Issues/Thèmes canadiens* brings together papers from the 1995 Annual Conference of the Association for Canadian Studies at the Université du Québec à Montréal. Contributions from different disciplines offer in this volume comparative approaches to immigration, focussing thus productively on one specific aspect of ethnicity. This perspective yields comparisons between immigrant groups, and between them and the host society, in such areas as health and life expectancy, professional and economic achievement, retirement, or the "Suburbanization of Portuguese

Communities in Toronto and Montreal." While census-based approaches dominate in many of these discussions, New Oral History for instance is used by Alexander Freund and Laura Quilici in a comparison between the subjective perceptions of women immigrants from Germany and Italy in post-WW II Vancouver in order to account for their changing constructions of femininity. From a literary perspective, the collection's highlight is Marilyn J. Rose's "Translating / Transliterating the Ethnic," a discussion of Florence Livesay's *Songs of Ukraina, with Ruthenian Poems* (1916) and Keibo Oiwa's *Stone Voices: Wartime Writings of Japanese Issei* (1991). Rose shows how the translation of ethnic voices highlights the locality typical of translative acts, which "arise from and respond to their own political moment and hence are intensely culturally nuanced." Translation is seen as necessarily implicated in contextual slippages induced by the target cultural register. The fact that Livesay neither read nor spoke Ukrainian when she transposed rough translations by a Ukrainian immigrant minister into acceptable Canadian literary conventions hardly interfered with the positive reception of her "translations." In the contexts that governed public response to her work, it was not seen in terms of "appropriation" but greeted by both the dominant culture and the Ukrainian community as valuable contribution to inter-ethnic understanding. Yet Rose applies critical pressure also to the concept of "authenticity" when she shows how technical choices, values, and the discursive context of multiculturalism mediate the 1991 translations of wartime Japanese-Canadian texts by a Japanese translator. In both cases, the specific, culturally determined performance of translation is studied not to deny sincerity and justified positionalities in translation, but to demonstrate that translation partakes of the contingencies that mark all discourses

in general, and cross-cultural communication in particular. At the end of this volume, the reader is provided with a complete list of the numerous papers given at the conference from which the papers published here were selected, which further documents the issues at stake in this area of research. The three publications together confirm the sense that Canadian issues constitute a rich and productive site for the study of multiculturalism, cross-cultural communication, and ethnicity. These works demonstrate that the attention now paid to these areas in literary studies and other disciplines is unquestionably deserved.

Giants in the land

André Brochu

Particulièrement la vie change. Éditions du Noroît n.p.

François Charron

Clair gême du vent. Les herbes rouges/Le Dé bleu n.p.

Robert Fortin

Peut-il rêver celui qui s'endort dans la gueule des chiens. Prise de parole \$15.00

Paul Savoie

Danse de l'oeuf. Éditions du Vermillon n.p.
Oasis. Éditions du Noroît n.p.

Reviewed by Cedric May

News from Canada travels slowly in this age of instant communication. As I write (February, 1997), I have just learnt of the death of Gaston Miron. Anything I write will be written in the shadow cast by this enormous literary figure. Quebec gave him a national funeral in his birthplace, the Laurentian town of Sainte-Agathe-des-Monts, the writers of France paid their tribute in a gathering in Paris on 21 January 1997 and a friend tells me of a forthcoming book of essays from Guérin, *Les Adieux du Québec à Gaston Miron*. In Paris, in the sixties, I had heard of this rather wild character who disturbed the Maison

franco-canadienne with his whirling arms and his great guffaws. The event of the year in 1970 in Montreal was the publication of his collected verse and essays, *L'Homme rapaillé*, to accompany the Prix *Études françaises*, and we all rushed to buy it. Miron was one of the founders of the Éditions de l'Hexagone in 1953 which published poems of his alongside those of Olivier Marchand in *Deux sangs* (1954). Subsequently, Miron resisted the temptation to publish, seeing his writing as work-in-progress and preferring to stump the province giving poetry readings in parish halls and taverns with Jean-Guy Pilon, bringing poetry into the market-place and its place in the sun. It was with Pilon that he started the very influential *Rencontres des écrivains* which met in the Laurentians, the proceedings sometimes appearing in the journal *Liberté*. The left-wing publisher François Maspero re-edited *L'Homme rapaillé* in 1981, extended to include the few poems Miron has published since 1970. It is tantalising to surmise how much work by Miron lies unpublished.

The adjective *rapaillé* belongs to a word meaning to glean after harvest, to pick up odds and ends of little or no value. This scrap-heap man sums up the courage and humility of a poet who refuses to give in to agony, dispossession, alienation, Canada's cultural ambiguity or the stranglehold of aphasia. He thought himself lucky to have discovered poetry by reading originals such as Alfred Desrochers, free from the inauthenticity for Quebec of the poets of France (though one of his essays gives as the poets of his ideal bookshelf Rutebeuf, Du Bellay, Éluard and André Frénaud) and he was inordinately proud of his forebears who colonised the 'terre de roches' of the Laurentians.

avec les maigres mots frileux de mes
héritages
avec la pauvreté natale de ma pensée
rocheuse

j'avance en poésie comme un cheval de trait
 (with the skinny, parky words of my inheritance
 with the native poverty of my craggy thinking
 I plod forward in my poetry like some great plough-horse)

Who can count the cost to this man of reinstating the French language in Quebec and making it a national idiom fit for poets? The Prix Duvernay, the Prix Apollinaire and the Prix David were some compensation.

The four poets I present here show little sign of the achievements of Miron but then he was honoured by all, followed by few, yet it is safe to say that, without him, poetry in Quebec would have remained a private, fringe activity. André Brochu was the child prodigy of the Quiet Revolution, publishing poems at 15, teaching university before he was 20, founding with friends in 1963 *parti pris*, the astounding little journal and publishing house, marxist, scatological, breaking taboos with every number, publisher of *Nègres blancs d'Amérique* and other explosive pamphlets. Brochu was also an excellent critic, introducing structuralism and making it an effective tool in patient and enlightening readings of authors such as Gabrielle Roy and Yves Thériault, honoured for the first time by attention of this kind. Brochu's poetry is a vast, rich exercise in words carried off with great brio. A characteristic poem, 'le téléphone', for example, dense, brief, uses puns, learned expressions, sardonic, clipped, elliptical sayings, aptly conveying our amazement at the strangeness and the wonder of what is familiar. Over all broods the inevitability of death, as in Brochu's recent novella *La Croix du Nord* (Éditions XYZ). 'En attente de quoi' reflects this well, now in lyrical regret, now in stoical acceptance, now in frenzy at the waning of desire, using the mocking effect of elegant, precise enunciation to mute his emotion.

Only towards the end of *Particulièrement la vie change*—the title is part of a sentence from André Breton which provides the titles to the sections and the theme of the particularity of the changes and chances of life—does the poet give way to what Gaston Miron called the 'recours à l'explication'.

If anyone questions the importance of François Charron for Quebec poetry in the last quarter century, let them read the introduction to Mailhot and Nepveu's *La Poésie québécoise*. Charron's contribution dominates the closing pages ending with the cautious optimism of his rallying-cry: 'Laissons-nous imaginer l'inachèvement du monde.' This admirably presents his latest collection (his 34th published work) from *Les Herbes rouges* to which he has remained faithful over the years. 'Laissons-nous'—the subdued deference of this dandy (he strikes a distinctly Oscar Wilde-like pose on the back cover), 'imaginer'—the creative image-making of poetry, 'l'inachèvement'—the lack of closure or of any finality to give shape and meaning to this imagining. When we venture into Charron's world, we have to be prepared for a landscape without coordinates. The clarity of his title is the indeterminacy of space and Charron's medium is the wind, that least substantial aspect of concrete reality.

Robert Fortin offers us in *Peut-on rêver . . .* a book of life which helps us to rediscover simple ideas. Fortin was for a good number of years a radio announcer with Radio-Canada. Reading the news has influenced his lapidary, factual style. It has accustomed him to face without emotion the banalisation of horror. Early he states his unwillingness to be a victim of the industrialisation of thought and we think again of the news bulletin. He counters this with the calm enunciation of simple statments, in short and mainly complete sentences, rarely longer than a line of verse. Apart from a page devoted to the fate of the Franco-Ontarians, this collection does not comply

with the description on the cover of 'prose-combat'. Pages 88-108 form a discrete section, a narrative which, however, retains the style of the whole book. It recounts, if that is the word, a trip to New York, reminiscent of the description of his previous collection, 'récit de voyage et poésie'.

What is most striking in the poetry of Paul Savoie is the combination of a high incidence of concrete nouns with an extreme abstraction. The reader longs for some localisation in time or space, some landmarks of personality or experience. 'Tout se construit d'abord en pièces détachées', says the presentation on the cover of *Danse de l'oeuf* and this lack of a will to construct a working model from these spare parts produces a haunting sense of detachment and dissolution. The presence of religious vocabulary reminds us that Savoie, born in Saint-Boniface, Manitoba, published in 1993 his translation of the poems of Louis Riel, more a religious illuminary than a dangerous revolutionary, and Riel is perhaps behind one of the little tragedies of *Danse de l'oeuf*, 'saut dans le vide', an execution poem. The title collection, a set of seven short poems, seven for the creation of the world, is a metamorphosis courtesy of Ovid and Hieronymus Bosch. We should see in this identification with the experience of 'hatching' less a metaphor for the creative act than an enactment of new beginnings. Gaston Miron would have been immensely sympathetic to this dedicated writer struggling to escape from entrapment in an extreme sensation of cultural disincarnation which Miron called 'amnésie de naissance' and 'aliénation délirante' and which he accounted for in an analysis of the effects of a culture which had broken its linguistic links with history and the land, with a 'here' and a 'now'. We need to return again and again to Miron's exemplary courage in rehabilitating a language and making of it the voice of a people of poets.

Le suspense au féminin

Christine Brouillet

C'est pour mieux t'aimer, mon enfant. La courte échelle \$14.95

Anne Legault

Détail de la mort. La courte échelle \$14.95

Compte rendu par Daniela Di Cecco

Ce qui nous frappe en premier dans ces deux textes "pour adultes," c'est leur publication chez un éditeur qui se consacre à la littérature jeunesse: la courte échelle. À l'inverse des grandes maisons d'édition montréalaises, qui ont d'abord bâti leur réputation dans le domaine de la littérature dite générale, avant de créer une "section jeunesse", la courte échelle a lancé il y a deux ans la nouvelle collection "Roman 16/96" dans le but d'offrir "des romans de qualité qui séduiront [...] les lecteurs de seize à quatre-vingt-seize ans." Le désir de grandir avec son public fidèle, une génération d'enfants qui a découvert la lecture en traversant les livres des catégories "Premier Roman," "Roman Jeunesse" et "Roman Plus," est l'idée de base de cette collection, elle aussi définie par la tranche d'âge (quoiqu'illimitée) des lecteurs visés. Cependant, contrairement aux séries pour les plus jeunes, les romans "16/96" échappent aux contraintes éditoriales qui auraient tendance à les standardiser. La spécificité des textes est évidente à la lecture de deux romans de la collection: *C'est pour mieux t'aimer, mon enfant* de Christine Brouillet et *Détail de la mort* d'Anne Legault.

Après *Le collectionneur*, roman qui a inauguré "Roman 16/96", Christine Brouillet nous replonge, avec *C'est pour mieux t'aimer, mon enfant*, dans l'univers policier de Maud Graham. Pour ce dernier roman, Brouillet choisit un sujet délicat, alarmant: la pédophilie. Le meurtre d'un enfant violé déclenche le récit, et même si Brouillet ne met pas à l'épreuve nos capacités déductives (le lecteur connaît dès le début l'identité du

coupable), l'évolution d'un personnage secondaire, témoin du crime, fait durer le suspense, ainsi que l'affection grandissante et inquiétante du criminel pour la petite voisine de huit ans.

La véritable force du livre réside dans l'attention portée à la psychologie des personnages, à commencer par celui de Maud Graham, enquêtrice féministe et humaniste. À travers son héroïne, Brouillet nous offre une perspective féminine du sujet en question, tout en soulignant les dilemmes professionnels et personnels d'une femme célibataire qui choisit une carrière "masculine": "On ne peut pas tout avoir dans la vie: une carrière, des amours heureuses et des enfants. À moins d'avoir beaucoup de chance. Ce n'était pas son cas. Elle n'avait peut-être pas su faire les bons choix. Pourquoi devait-on toujours choisir?" L'histoire d'amour intégrée au récit fait ressortir cette tension, ainsi que les doutes de Maud qui s'inquiète d'avoir été "trop coquette" et donc négligente dans son travail.

Les personnages secondaires sont également bien campés. Mais c'est l'analyse de la psychologie du pédophile qui retient surtout notre attention. Les passages où il justifie son attirance pour les enfants, raconte sa nostalgie des petits Asiatiques "dociles" et planifie sa prochaine séduction, dérangent profondément. Cependant, pour Brouillet, c'est précisément la psychologie du criminel qui constitue l'intérêt principal de l'oeuvre: "Ce qui m'intéresse, c'est comment on en arrive à tuer." En écrivant ce roman, l'auteure a donc adopté la même approche que son enquêtrice: "[...] accepter d'être un peu caméléon, de faire partie de la scène du crime pour comprendre ce qui s'était passé. Elle devait se rapprocher du meurtrier, respirer le même air que lui, devenir cet air, oxygéner le cerveau du bourreau, l'habiter pour le décortiquer." Le mérite du choix d'un sujet aussi sensible se trouve dans la portée sociale du roman. Il se caractérise enfin comme un livre de mise

en garde (en conseillant, par exemple, aux parents d'établir un mot de passe avec leurs enfants). Comme l'a avoué l'auteure: "l'information aide à la prévention."

Comme chez Brouillet, ce sont les idées d'interdit et de transgression de la loi qui constituent le fond de *Détail de la mort*, le premier roman d'Anne Legault. Cependant, son organisation plus complexe distingue ce roman du précédent, ce qui est d'ailleurs l'un des principaux mérites de l'ouvrage. L'auteure mène avec succès une histoire à deux voix intercalées, celle de Jean-Étienne Deslauriers, vingt-trois ans, et celle de sa mère, Marcelle, décédée le 1er octobre 1971, jour de la naissance de Jean-Étienne. Cette dernière perspective nous est livrée dans son journal intime, récupéré par le protagoniste.

La présence menaçante de la mort est signalée dès le départ par le vers de Shelley mis en épigraphe: "How wonderful is Death / Death and his brother Sleep!" Non seulement le protagoniste, tueur à gages, en fait-il son métier, mais la mort devient aussi un véritable personnage du roman. L'auteure explique: "Ce qui est venu en premier, c'est le monstre comme il est dans le roman. Une carte postale portant pour toute description: *Détail de la Mort de saint Étienne*. Le paradoxe involontaire m'avait saisie, la mort étant bien la réalité la plus globale qui soit, la moins propre à se détailler." À travers le récit, on se demande qui est cette bête à l'identité troublante qui vient rompre le sommeil de Marcelle, jeune étudiante en droit, et quel rôle est le sien dans la quête de Jean-Étienne, le protagoniste. La fragmentation du texte crée un effet de rapidité et d'urgence et prolonge le suspense, puisque la lecture du journal intime contient des détails non seulement sur la mort de la mère mais aussi sur la vie du protagoniste.

Il s'agit au fond d'une quête d'identité individuelle que l'auteure juxtapose avec la recherche identitaire du peuple québécois. L'utilisation des événements d'octobre 70, comme toile de fond du journal de

Marcelle, enrichit l'intrigue. L'entrée du journal datée de décembre 1970 nous en fournit d'ailleurs un exemple: "Nous sommes punis par la honte, comme d'habitude, qui nous frappe au point sensible parce qu'elle nous connaît déjà si bien, parce que nous lui avons fait la partie si belle il y a si longtemps, qu'aujourd'hui elle triomphe sans gloire." Les deux récits et les deux époques se chevauchent du début à la fin, et l'auteure parvient à fusionner le passé et le présent de façon efficace, tout en nous réservant quelques surprises. Ce récit bref et séduisant, d'une écriture originale, fascine par son réseau thématique complexe et son intrigue bien conçue.

Les romans de Christine Brouillet et d'Anne Legault invitent les lecteurs adultes à découvrir la production de la courte échelle. Brouillet, qui a déjà publié une quinzaine de romans pour les jeunes et qui a été élue deux fois comme auteur préféré dans le cadre du prix du Signet d'or, a déjà fait ses preuves parmi ce public exigeant. On ne peut que souhaiter le même sort à Anne Legault qui, après *Détail de la mort* se lance, elle aussi, à la conquête des jeunes.

Widening the Margins

John Champagne

The Ethics of Marginality: A New Approach to Gay Studies. U of Minnesota P US\$19.95/\$59.95

James C. Johnstone & Karen X. Tulchinsky, eds.

Queer View Mirror: Lesbian and Gay Short Short Fiction. Arsenal Pulp \$19.95

Sky Gilbert, Courtney McFarlane, Jeffrey Conway, R.M. Vaughan & David Trinidad

Plush: Selected Poems. Eds. Lynn Crosbie & Michael Holmes. Coach House \$17.95

Reviewed by Peter Dickinson

"Where there is power, there is resistance." So wrote Michel Foucault in 1976 in *La volonté de savoir*, the first volume of his

intellectual summa, *The History of Sexuality*. Scholars in postcolonial studies, feminist studies, gay and lesbian studies, and other disciplinary fields on/in/of "the margins" are still sifting through the theoretical implications of this statement. John Champagne is only the latest in a long line of critics to wrestle with Foucault's famous axiom. In *The Ethics of Marginality: A New Approach to Gay Studies*, Champagne argues that "the Other embodies a certain resistance to the normal" by virtue of the Other's deconstructive ability to represent what is both lacking in and supplementary to "normalized" subjectivity. According to Champagne, an oppositional criticism like queer theory must capitalize on this paradoxical gap at the centre of cultural marginality by redirecting its resistant tendencies toward "ethically and politically useful" ends, and by developing "a criticism ethically committed to altering the existing relations of power so that they might become more fluid, more easily reversible." In other words, as critics of subjectivity and alterity, we have a certain responsibility to, not to mention a degree of self-interest in, widening our margins.

Champagne's definition of "ethics" and "ethical criticism" is, as he himself acknowledges, likewise heavily indebted to Foucault. In the latter volumes of *The History of Sexuality*, and especially in some of his final essays and interviews, Foucault encapsulates within the phrase "the care of the self" his rather idiosyncratic take on the concept of ethics, a simultaneous process of self-invention and self-disciplining whereby an individual, through specific techniques or practices of the body (what Foucault calls "technologies of the self"), "fashions" himself or herself "into a subject of ethical conduct." The catch (and there is always a catch with Foucault) is that the practices or technologies by which an ethical subject invents him- or herself are not themselves invented; rather, they are imposed or "gov-

erned" by various cultural institutions and other invisible forms of power. As such, an ethical criticism, at least in Champagne's formulation, must exploit the "impure" position of the marginalized subject, "deploying the Other against both the normalizing practices of modern disciplinary society and the ideology of a universalism that renders subjects useful for capitalist production and consumption."

Champagne's own practice of ethical criticism in this book takes the form of a series of "close readings" of gay pornography and film. An analysis of Chantal Ackerman's *je tu il elle*, Marlon Riggs's *Tongues Untied*, Jennie Livingston's *Paris is Burning*, and John Greyson's *Urinal*, among other "texts," affords Champagne the opportunity not only to resist "transgressively" and "strategically" those "forms of power that subject and subjugate through the practices of subject formation," but also to take issue with such oppositional critics as Richard Dyer, bell hooks, and Jeffrey Weeks, heavyweight authorities on cultural marginality whom Champagne nevertheless characterizes as too unwittingly liberal for their (and presumably our) own good. However, herein lies my main objection with this otherwise fine and timely study. As Donald E. Pease writes in his decidedly polemical foreword, "Insofar as Champagne's choice of adversaries for his oppositional practices always refers him to other marginal academic critics, his ethics of marginality do not disturb but instead reaffirm the power structure discriminating the center from the periphery." In other words, Champagne keeps his resistance firmly confined to the margins. And what precisely is so ethical, or new for that matter, about such a critical practice?

Although Champagne's study is primarily concerned with film, he makes it clear that his argument can apply to any "text-based criticism interested in questions of marginality." Turning, then, to *writing* from the margins, two recent anthologies of queer

literature would seem to suggest that a strategic practice of gay or lesbian self-invention first of all requires a *re-invention* of form. In *Queer View Mirror*, editors James Johnstone and Karen Tulchinsky bring together 101 examples of what they felicitously refer to in their Introduction as "queer quickies," prose pieces of 1000 words or less; these are shorter stories or snapshot fictions that take to heart the camera metaphor deployed by Christopher Isherwood at the beginning of *Goodbye to Berlin*, opening the shutters on lesbian and gay experience, recording its many textures and colours with sharply focused lenses. The novelty of the genre is both the collection's chief asset and its greatest drawback. The brevity of the stories is highly conducive to the literary browsing that often passes for engaged reading these days in our thoroughly mediated culture. Two or three stories can be consumed, savoured, and digested in a matter of minutes. And the delicious juxtapositions between those stories—between, for example, the playful narrative seduction of Beth Brant's frequently anthologized "Coyote Learns a New Trick," the hilarious 12-step confessional parody of Jeff Kirby's "Cockaholic," the deliberately blasphemous eroticism of Lawrence Schimel's "Calvinism," and the daring S/M epiphany of Wickie Stamps's "Fine Lines"—more often than not leave one craving for more. This necessarily abbreviated list of examples points in turn to the fact that Johnstone and Tulchinsky seem to have put their fingers on something with the term "queer quickies." For the pieces that work best in *Queer View Mirror* are—excuse the pun—by and large about sex.

And yet, to reverse an overused cliché (and, in the process, to make another horrible pun), the part is not always the sum of its whole. Several of the stories included in *Queer View Mirror* seem to begin *in medias res*, or else end—because of an imposed word-limit—far too abruptly; in other

words, they often read like excerpts from much longer works-in-progress. And, indeed, if one turns to the "Author Biographies" at the back of the anthology one discovers that Doug Browning's "Helping Hand" is taken from *Drift*, "a stalled novel," that Gabrielle Glancy's "Withholding" forms part of "a memoir she is currently writing," that William John Mann's "Tricking" is excerpted from a novel of the same name, that Felice Picano's "Matthew's Story—1974" has been reprinted from his epic *Like People in History*, and so on.

Such are the risks of exploring uncharted territory. For the most part, however, Johnstone, Tulchinsky, and their contributors have hit upon a winning formula. A follow-up anthology, *Queer View Mirror 2*, has already appeared, and plans are underway to publish separate collections of gay male and lesbian short short erotica. In collaborating on these projects, Johnstone and Tulchinsky have aimed to bring together in productive ways the work of lesbian and gay male writers, to showcase emerging talents alongside more established ones, and "to include voices from as many social, cultural, racial, and class backgrounds as possible." By even the most narrow of yardsticks of cultural difference they have, with this initial collection, succeeded in their goals.

The five Canadian and American men whose work is included in the anthology *Plush* are equally unafraid to take risks in seeking out new poetic modalities for the expression of gay desire. These are millennial poems, a mix of post-AIDS apocalypticism and camp nostalgia, sex and death, where angels bump up against Ken and Barbie dolls, and where assfucking and June Allyson get mentioned in the same breath. Here is scatology as eschatology: the catalogue of explicit sexual imagery that runs throughout the collection attests to the renewed textual energy that Sky

Gilbert, Courtney McFarlane, Jeffrey Conway, R.M. Vaughan, and David Trinidad each bring to the writing of the male body. But the codes of cultural reference have changed irrevocably since the days of Frank O'Hara and Allen Ginsberg. If *Plush* were a drug it would be crystal meth and not amyl nitrate; if it were a couch it would be velour, not vinyl. Pop poetry updated for the *fin-de-siècle* 90s.

In addition to being high on the beauty of men, these poets share an interest in the short lyric line, which, together with a participial and/or conjunctive piling up of descriptive images, the use of embedded dialogue, and a penchant for numbering, contributes to a breathless beat more suited to a packed dance floor than the printed page. This is especially the case with the work of McFarlane, whose trippy rhythms are reminiscent of hip-hop. Composing lists is a favourite device of the other four poets, with Gilbert's "Seven Sillinesses about Opera that Remind Me of You," Conway's "Where the Mood Struck Me," Vaughan's "10 Reasons Why I Fall in Love with Inaccessible Straight Boys Every Damn Time," and Trinidad's "The Ten Best Episodes of *The Patty Duke Show*" standing out as notable examples. While fun to begin with, these lists soon get rather tedious, and just getting past the titles proves a minor trial. Once again I suspect that something is lost on the printed page; for, above all else, the poems in *Plush* are meant to be performed, a fact corroborated by the editors' admission in the Introduction that they "first encountered each of these writers at readings."

The precise role of the editorial couple (for want of a better term) of Lynn Crosbie and Michael Holmes in this collection remains unclear. Gilbert is a well-known and extremely prolific playwright in Canada; Trinidad has published three previous collections of poetry in the United States; Conway, McFarlane, and Vaughan

have all been widely anthologized. Why exactly do these men need the favour of being “introduced” to the reading public by Crosbie and Holmes? Their page-and-a-half Introduction gives no indication that they’ve even read the poems included in *Plush* let alone that they are familiar with the current state of gay poetry in North America. All of which proves that if the centre will not hold—that is, if it no longer sells—then one had best seek out the financial ballast of the margins, something Arsenal Pulp Press seems to have realized much more effectively than the late and much lamented Coach House.

Two Solitudes

Herb Curtis

The Silent Partner. Goose Lane \$16.95

David Eddie

Chump Change. Random House \$19.95

Reviewed by Lawrence Mathews

Two first-person narratives featuring would-be writers, one set in hipper-than-thou Toronto, the other in back-of-beyond New Brunswick: what a set-up for a reviewer to deliver a few bromides about the margin and the centre, the raw and the cooked, etc., etc.

David Eddie is Toronto; Herb Curtis is Silver Rapids, N.B.

Flip open *Chump Change*, and there’s a photograph of Eddie, sitting on what appears to be a storefront window ledge somewhere in the mildly mean streets of T.O. Inevitably, he’s wearing shades (just like John Haslett Cuff!). The copy below the photo tells us about his cosmopolitan background and provides specific facts that prepare us to make connections between author and protagonist: the job at *Newsweek*, the move from the U.S. to Toronto, the stint as newswriter at a national TV network. David Eddie’s protagonist’s name is David . . . Henry.

The Silent Partner features no photograph of Herb Curtis.

The dedication page of *Chump Change* includes a statement of Eddie’s gratitude to the unnamed woman who “became my wife,” followed by a couple of paragraphs in which several figures in the Toronto publishing world are mentioned, the best known of whom is Linda Frum; the author refers affectionately to himself as a “giant, lumbering, 225-lb waif.”

The dedication page of *The Silent Partner* reads “For Stephanie.”

Turn to the back cover of *Chump Change*, and you’ll find blurbs by Paul Quarrington and by Douglas Cooper, who says that Eddie is “in the tradition of Kingsley and Martin Amis.”

Turn to the back cover of *The Silent Partner*, and you’ll find an unidentified reviewer (from *Canadian Book Review Annual*) placing Curtis in “the Stephen Leacock tradition.”

David Eddie was born in Boston; Herb Curtis is from the Miramichi.

Two solitudes. Robin Mathews, thou should’st be living at this hour!

For context, consider the comments of Curtis’s fellow New Brunswicker, David Adams Richards, who in a 1986 interview talked about “what Canadians have come to look upon as being the true meaning of regionalism, which is that you write about a certain place which is interesting in a general way but isn’t real literature.” One of the features of such writing, he adds, is that “the characters are oddities or they’re not people you’re going to be able to empathize with.”

For our purposes, the interesting thing about Richards’s remarks is that they don’t apply to *The Silent Partner*, but they do accurately describe *Chump Change*. Eddie has written a “regional” novel in the pejorative sense: the region happens to be Toronto. Curtis, on the other hand, has made a modest contribution to “real literature.”

Chump Change trades very heavily on the

local colour of Toronto, specifically its literary and broadcasting subcultures—their institutions (a magazine called *This Land of Ours*, a literary pub called “The Burnished Monocle,” the coyly-named “Cosmodemonic Broadcasting Corporation”) and their inhabitants (most of whom are, in Richards’s words, “not people you’re going to be able to empathize with”). No doubt readers plugged into these subcultures will recognize all sorts of arcane references; the rest of us, of course, just don’t care. What satire there is doesn’t rise above the level of office gossip. (Guess what? Some people at the CBC have big egos!)

But the major problem is David Henry, Eddie’s protagonist. Here Douglas Cooper’s blurb-invocation of the Amises is pertinent. Martin Amis’s major comic jerk-figures (such as John Self of *Money* and Keith Talent of *London Fields*) are drawn in such a way that there is no question of authorial approval of, let alone identification with, the character. But Eddie establishes no distance at all between himself and Henry; he seems oddly unaware that Henry is neither amusing nor likeable.

Here, for example, is a tone-setting passage from early in the novel. As Henry, a white-knuckle flyer, waits for a take-off in bad weather, he addresses this imaginary speech to a complacent fellow passenger:

That’s right, Mr. Spreadsheet, I think, clutching my armrests. You just keep adding up your little rows and columns of figures. I’ll see you in Hell in about ten minutes, and as we’re both being fucked up the ass on a bed of nails by a three-headed demon with a red-hot corkscrew for a dick, you can reflect eternally upon how you wasted your life adding and subtracting.

Out of context, it may appear that Henry is being satirized for his dim-witted vulgarity. In context, it is clear that both Henry and Eddie think that the speech exemplifies witty verbal invention. Eddie, at least, should have known better.

And that, in a nutshell, is what’s wrong with *Chump Change*. At its core there is an arrogant naivete akin to that associated with inferior regional writing. The author’s sense of self-importance is allowed to override the requirements of art. Simply to document the existence of Henry and his world is not to make what Richards (and most other readers) would call “real literature.”

For that, we must turn to the self-effacement of *The Silent Partner*. Its narrator, Corry Quinn, is eighteen, lives in rural New Brunswick, and has a major (and metaphorically resonant) physical problem; he can’t speak, at least not intelligibly. Half of his tongue is missing, the result of a childhood accident involving—quintessential Canadian horror story!—a “thirty-below-zero railroad spike.” So he must write to communicate effectively, the premise for this narrative of the crucial years of his adolescence.

It would be easy to call *The Silent Partner* “deceptively simple,” but in fact it’s closer to guileless simplicity—not, one might argue, such a bad thing. Unlike *Chump Change*, Curtis’s novel focuses on emotions and relationships: not in any portentous or sentimental way, but taking for granted their primary importance in people’s lives. *The Silent Partner* takes its place without fanfare among our culture’s myriad coming-of-age stories. From the harshest of academic perspectives, it adds nothing new to this tradition. But it does create a credible world and characters you can “empathize with”—and, thereby, a satisfying reading experience.

Corry lives with his uncle “Kid” Lauder, a forty-five-year-old ponytailed ex-hippie. Uncle Kid appears to be one of life’s losers. He makes a haphazard living in the local sport-fishing industry; he smokes a lot of dope, drinks too much, and has no steady woman—though, in Corry’s loyal opinion, “Women love him. He’s so easy-going, so wise.” It gradually becomes apparent that

his commitment to Corry has become the emotional centre of Uncle Kid's life (Corry's mother is dead, his father in Toronto) and that their relationship has saved him from sinking into the Miramichi equivalent of the Slough of Despond.

Corry's other major relationship is with Alice, his first girl-friend. Having been humiliated by a more attractive girl, he at first regards Alice as a poor consolation prize. But over time he learns not to focus on her physical shortcomings ("about five feet tall . . . about a hundred and forty pounds. . . very long gums and very short teeth") but instead to appreciate the strength and gentleness of her character—as well as her sexuality. It comes as no surprise that he falls in love and she decides to leave (for Alberta, thank God, not Toronto). Corry is saddened but not defeated, having come to understand his own capacity for commitment.

The Silent Partner is not a perfect novel. The pace is too leisurely, there is too much description of the minutiae of fishing, there is a superfluous subplot about a scientist's search for the legendary eastern cougar, and there is an implausible archly symbolic section near the end when Corry encounters a mysterious female painter in an otherwise-deserted community. But Corry tells his tale with a combination of matter-of-factness, observational skill, and delicacy of feeling that makes us care about what happens to him. He and Alice and Uncle Kid are alive, and stay alive after the book has been put aside—whether the reader has ever been to the Miramichi or not.

At one point, worrying about his uncle, Corry asks a question relevant to the issues raised by this review: "Drunk, Uncle Kid sometimes sang 'Jumping Jack Flash is a gas' all night. . . . Who would want to carry 'Jumping Jack Flash' around in his or her heart?" If the answer is that we do, then David Eddie is our man; *Chump Change*, with its combination of hype, in-your-face

narcissism, and lack of real content, is the literary incarnation of that mentality. If the answer is that we don't, the Herb Curtises of this country, whatever their "region," have something more valuable to offer.

Arctic Love and Human Remains

Richard C. Davis, ed.

Lobsticks and Stone Cairns: Human Landmarks in the Arctic U of Calgary P \$44.95/\$29.95

Pat Sandiford Grygier

A Long Way from Home: The Tuberculosis Epidemic among the Inuit McGill-Queen's \$19.95

James Houston

Confessions of an Igloo Dweller M & S \$19.99

Reviewed by Renée Hulan

Lobsticks and Stone Cairns, Richard C. Davis accurately notes in his introduction, is "a book for browsing" which should be leisurely dipped into rather than consumed at one sitting. Davis has assembled a diverse group of expert authors to write on just as diverse a group of subjects because, as he writes, a "multiplicity of voices and cultural backgrounds best reflects our constructed image of the north." Beautifully documented, researched, and presented with a wonderful collection of illustrations and photographs, each entry includes a short, biographical article and a bibliography for the further reading these glimpses will no doubt inspire. There are the explorers who met tragic deaths: Francis Crozier, whose attempt to lead survivors of the Franklin expedition to safety failed; Leonidas Hubbard, left to perish in the wilds of Labrador; the famously ill-fated Franklin and those who searched for his lost expedition. There are the explorers whose names were written on the Arctic landscape: Bering, Mackenzie, Munk, Belcher, Frobisher, and others. There are the anthropologists who documented early

contact with northern Aboriginal peoples: Boas, Jenness, and Downes. The American film-maker Robert Flaherty, the Scottish writer R. M. Ballantyne, and even a few women, Jane Franklin, Mina Hubbard, and Catharine McClellan, each receive attention. Matthew Henson achieves the place in history that Robert Peary denied him as do the supporting casts of other expeditions. A few Aboriginal individuals, such as explorers, Ebierbing and Merquasq, and cartographers, Eenoooloapik and George Weetaltuk, also receive their due.

Although I was disappointed that some of the articles avoid interesting controversies such as the tragic fate of the Inuit Robert Peary displayed in New York or the existence of Vihjalmur Stefansson's "country wife" and Inuit descendants, their articles thoroughly do prod most of the historical debris these heroes left behind. By arranging the stories roughly by geographical region, Davis succeeds in making a map of Arctic history that reflects the way human desire and human frailty shaped that history, and he is to be congratulated on a fine collection of historical vignettes.

James Houston should have given his autobiographical *Confessions of an Igloo Dweller* a different title. For a book that promises "confessions," it is surprisingly short on revelations. Houston may tell his stories in the confessional mode preferred by contemporary ethnographers, building on his reputation as a storyteller, a spinner of Arctic yarn, but his storytelling lacks the self-consciousness that would make it thought-provoking.

Houston sketches the personalities of people he meets vividly, and many of them resemble characters in his novels: the crusty Hudson's Bay Company trader, Calvin Aird, in *Whiteout*, or the tough, daredevil pilot Charlie and his plane "Matilda" from *Frozen Fire*. When Houston turns his attention to the Inuit, however, his storytelling talent ceases to be an asset. Throughout, he

writes for the audience that probably existed at the time of his travels, people for whom northern peoples were strange and exotic, and he generalizes about Inuit history and culture without reference to the vast body of knowledge available in both oral tradition and written documents. Travelling through the Arctic at the point of contact, Houston observes:

It seemed that these people around me possessed a cheerful, fatalistic view of life and death and had armed themselves with an abundance of native ingenuity and skills. But even then, in the late forties, one could sense that the juggernaut of civilization was grinding steadily toward this ancient world of theirs.

In this passage, the tone is confidential yet authoritative and reflects what ethnographers call "naive realism;" indeed, Houston's ethnographic description is anything but "thick." With so many excellent studies of Inuit traditional culture available, it is difficult to understand why Houston devotes so much energy to descriptions and illustrations of commonplace objects—harpoon, ulu, inukshuk—or how he can describe enjoying a hunter's wife as a bond of friendship but not see wife-swapping as an example of the "traffic in women." Houston might have avoided such criticism had he supported his eyewitness accounts with preliminary research on the significant events in northern history. For example, the tuberculosis epidemic described in Grygier's *A Long Way from Home* is alluded to when a friend's wife seeks medical treatment in the south. Grygier's study offers a comprehensive account based on statistical data and interviews with survivors, health workers, and public figures. Houston misses the opportunity to give his audience even the most basic information about the epidemic.

Most of all, Houston's attempt to provide an account of Inuit material culture distracts him from describing the major role

he played in the development of Inuit art. Perhaps he is too modest to acknowledge the impact he had on Inuit art, but that impact is legendary. As the artist Pitseolak recalls in *Pitseolak: Pictures Out of My Life*, Houston encouraged her and directed her work, telling her “to draw the old ways” and to use bright colours. Unfortunately, the history of Inuit carving and the eventual emergence of the co-operative system, which would make interesting reading, receive less attention in his memoir than they deserve. I was left wanting more of the insight into this history that only James Houston could give.

There are a number of anecdotes in the book that might be called confessions, such as the now famous story of the night on which he dumped a load of carvings down a crack in the sea ice and then marked up the prices of others to make up for the loss. Houston had established a practice of buying every piece offered to him: “I believed that the important point was not to make harsh judgments” that would cause the carvers to “lose face by having their work rejected.” At the same time, he did not wish to send the poorer carvings south “to the sterner gaze of art critics and buyers.” Although he performed this act “sadly” and felt “unsure” about what he was doing, it remains unclear, at least to me, why he found it necessary to drop them into the frozen sea. In another instance, he reveals that he once threw the contents of four sacks of mail sent to him by admirers of Inuit art from around the world into a wild, spring blizzard. Again, the need for this dramatic scene remains obscure, and one is left wondering what he could have been thinking.



Imaginary Geographies

Dennis Duffy

A World Under Sentence: John Richardson and the Interior. ECW \$20.00

Jim McDowell

Hamatsa: The Enigma of Cannibalism on the Pacific Northwest Coast. Ronsdale \$17.95

Reviewed by N.E. Currie

In a footnote to the Introduction of *A World Under Sentence*, Dennis Duffy characterises the setting of Richardson’s fiction by quoting Richard White’s *The Middle Ground*: “a complicated world that could be both dreamscape and landscape.” This statement applies equally well to the world explored by Jim McDowell in *Hamatsa*. Both Duffy and McDowell are concerned with mapping a borderland between cultures, more often of an imaginary or emotional than a physical geography. The “enigma of cannibalism” in McDowell’s title refers simultaneously to the European assumption that Northwest Coast natives were cannibals, to the ongoing fascination with the idea of cannibalism, and to the possibility that ritual cannibalism was mistaken for the practice of eating human flesh. The “interior” of Duffy’s title refers to the inner world of John Richardson, to the history and narratives of “Southwesto” and its American neighbours, and to the psyche of the colonial writer straddling British, Canadian, American, and possibly Amerindian cultures.

Jim McDowell begins *Hamatsa* by noting that a series of “vague, often contradictory” footnotes about cannibalism on the Northwest Coast led him to the research that became this book. Divided into two sections, it aims to investigate those footnotes by asking a series of questions: what does the historical record say? How has it been interpreted? What is the connection between “oft-alleged gustatory cannibalism and largely overlooked ritual cannibalism”?

What might ritual cannibalism mean for a society? Part One, "Red Smoke," looks at the record of European contact with the Northwest Coast beginning with the published records of James Cook's third voyage whose editor, Bishop John Douglas, created the perception of cannibalism on the coast. McDowell traces the influence of this perception on later British, Spanish, and American explorers and fur-traders. He examines a variety of sources in detail, concluding that "the documentary evidence has failed to demonstrate that any Northwest Coast Indians actually engaged in acts of gustatory cannibalism." Instead, he argues, Europeans misinterpreted evidence of ritual cannibalism.

McDowell's real interest lies in the book's second section, "White Flames," in which he examines the anthropological record, particularly the work of Franz Boas and George Hunt, to consider the role and purpose of the winter ceremony known as *hamatsa*. McDowell finds in it a cosmology with "themes of ritual death and rebirth, of continuity with the past in the face of social devastation, of ultimate reliance on the power of transformation and resurrection" more and more necessary to manage the disruption caused by colonisation.

McDowell's ultimate purpose in *Hamatsa* is to explore and celebrate cultural self-discovery; he sees an ongoing examination of early encounters between Europeans and First Nations as an "act of cultural renewal" for the descendants of those Europeans. What we often find, of course, is that the impetus for European discovery—the excitement of learning about new cultures—was transformed into "avarice, arrogance, ruthlessness, and brutality," just as a meeting between two cultures was transformed into a "one-way act of discovery." McDowell closes by considering what the *hamatsa* might teach non-Native North American society, a discussion which seems unrelated to and less compelling than the

rest of the book. Nonetheless, the strengths of this book lie in its author's detailed examination of the historical and anthropological records, his attempts to locate the idea of ritual cannibalism within the mores of Native (rather than European) society, and his constant reminders that it is up to those of us of European descent to take responsibility for our past in this continent.

Dennis Duffy's *A World Under Sentence* explores a different set of cultural boundaries: those between the nations struggling for political, economic, and psychic dominance in North America. Duffy's concern is the "interior" of the continent and the ways in which its history and cultures shaped John Richardson and his fiction. In similar fashion, the phrase "under sentence" comes to have two, possibly three, meanings: a group of words making a statement—especially in writing; a judge's decision regarding the punishment of a criminal; and the punishment itself. Thus the title comes to mean both Richardson's shaping of frontier material in his fiction and a sense of foreboding about the consequences of that representation.

By outlining the literary works influencing Richardson's fiction (beginning but not ending with Cooper's *Leatherstocking Tales*), apocryphal tales from both sides of the US-Upper Canada border shaping the two societies' views of themselves, and details of Richardson's own military and family history, Duffy suggests an emotional and narrative geography ultimately more important for Richardson's fiction than the physical characteristics of the region. Thus his study examines the social, economic, and cultural structures that shaped Richardson's world, as well as the different narrative structures that shaped his fiction. Of course, throughout Richardson's lifetime, all these structures were in flux, the fur-trading frontier losing out to the settlement, the oral family history of the region reduced to the formulaic frontier novel.

A World Under Sentence is shaped by metaphor, and so is at its best exploring the imaginative structures of the “interior.” While *border* or *frontier* suggests cultural demarcation and difference, *immersion* suggests a greater fluidity and ease of movement within (rather than between) spaces. The complex mix of genres, tones, and identities we find in Richardson’s fiction was also a feature of his life, in Duffy’s account. Ultimately he argues that Richardson “figur[ed] forth imaginatively the world that he inherited and transcribed as his own. He did so by putting that world into his own words.”

The imaginative spaces explored by McDowell and Duffy are marked as much by time as by space. The Northwest Coast was the last continental coastline to be charted by European explorers; Richardson’s colonial frontier extended “from Pontiac in 1763 to Moraviantown in 1813.” By elaborating European perceptions of the not-so-new world in the last two centuries, these books demonstrate the continuing interest of what Peter Hulme has called “colonial encounters”—and the continuing importance of what they reveal about the cultures that created them, and ours.

Intimations of Grace

Cary Fagan

The Doctor’s House. paperplates books \$10.00

David Bergen

A Year of Lesser. HarperCollins \$16.00

Richard Van Camp

The Lesser Blessed. Douglas & McIntyre \$16.95

Reviewed by Michael Greene

Cary Fagan’s *The Doctor’s House* is a sparse and surprising book set in 1930s Poland. It is the story of Josef, a young Gentile who is taken in by a Jewish doctor and his family. Josef’s first-person narration vividly recounts memories of life with his mother before the terrible night he was orphaned

in a massacre. His leg badly broken, Josef finds himself in Warsaw, and in the house of Dr. Krochmal. The rest of the book details Josef’s uneasy life as a sheltered outsider in the doctor’s home, and his embryonic desire for Chava, the doctor’s teenaged daughter—all of this in an atmosphere of mounting claustrophobia: anti-semitic persecution, uncrossable borders, and the early rumblings of war.

Labelled a “miniature novel” by its author, *The Doctor’s House* comprises only 79 pages, and while many of the chapters are less than a page in length, brevity does not interfere with the luminous intensity of Fagan’s prose. Instead of fragmentation, the book achieves immediacy and sharpness; one senses the significance of the smallest details. Indeed, “miniature” makes a fitting label: As a noun, the word can suggest a kind of portraiture, emphasizing the importance of fine detail. Etymologically, “miniature” derives from the art of illuminated manuscripts, alluding to the processes of story- and book-making, and to language and *illumination* more generally.

These issues are not merely ancillary to Fagan’s miniature; they are foregrounded in a *bildungsroman* that relates Josef’s increasing command of language to the telling of his story. An illiterate in the early chapters, Josef is threatened and fascinated by writing. His education begins when Chava teaches him to read and when he assists in a workshop where books are created. Later, his understanding of writing evolves beyond the technical when he overhears some advice passing from an old writer to a young poet. When asked about one very moving story, the old man replies, “I heard that story in a tiny prayer house outside of Lemberg. . . . Of course I altered it, the perspective is different, one character added and another taken out. And the ending, well that adds something of my own. But it’s from that prayer house that the voice came. It’s where all our inspiration comes,

whether we are able to pray or not." The passage illuminates both story and storyteller, suggesting much about the narrative that contains it. Here, storytelling is an act of prayer, a search for illumination and grace. Also noteworthy is the writer's comment about his original ending, a manifestation of creativity that Josef inherits though language. It provides a clue to the strange ending of this evocative book, where powerful realism gives way to a magical flight of fancy. In all, *The Doctor's House* is a short but enduring read.

David Bergen's debut novel, *A Year of Lesser*, describes a year in the life of Johnny Fehr, a shallow, self-involved salesman. Bergen's language is gripping; grounded in the immediacy of the present tense and in the impressions of his characters, the novel embraces the harshness, passion, and tragedy of life in the Manitoba town of Lesser. Bergen's third-person narrative reveals a writer gifted in his ability to translate inner worlds, corporeal and psychological, into memorable and moving prose.

The story revolves around Johnny and his impact on the lives of his wife Charlene and Loraine, a single mother who has become his lover. As Johnny becomes more closely involved with Loraine, the lives of Chris, Loraine's fourteen-year-old son, and Melody, his girlfriend, weave into Johnny's story. All of the action takes place against the backdrop of Lesser itself, a place of short-lived secrets with its small-town propensity for gossip and communal knowledge. As a central character, Johnny is difficult to identify with. He is selfish and egoistic, preoccupied with sexual conquest and often—through superficial rites and puerile conceptions of faith—with his own capacity for salvation. Johnny vacillates between "fallen" and "born again" postures: prolonged periods of disillusioned excess and self-pity interspersed with weeks of empty Bible-quoting and sterile, *pro forma* compassion. Fancying himself "a

lover of women," he identifies sex as an avenue to holiness. However, Johnny's love is too self-involved to comprehend the souls whose bodies he explores; he is barely able to sustain a fulfilling connection with another individual, much less a nexus with divinity. Johnny cherishes women for the simplicity he attributes to them, falling in and out of love, and liking his partners best when they are asleep: voiceless and pliant. His metaphors reduce women to fertile fields or vegetables ripe for consumption.

Johnny is easily the weakest of Bergen's cast. While the novel explores the possibilities of redemption, that potential seems lost on this rather wooden central figure. At times, in fact, Johnny seems too flat for the book that tells his story. There is no doubt, however, that Bergen can draw compelling and fully realized characters. Charlene, whose consuming sadness leads her to alcoholism and despair; Loraine, who struggles to maintain a loving relationship with her son; even Chris and Melody who struggle to find meaning on the cusp of adulthood: these characters are vividly real and alive. Their most fleeting moments of contact—as in a moving scene where Loraine visits Charlene—exhibit candour and humanity. These moments of connection and affirmation are among the greatest rewards in *A Year of Lesser*.

The Lesser Blessed is Richard Van Camp's powerful first novel: a story that renders the pain and joy of growing up in a northern town with rough and poetic eloquence. The novel spans several months in the life of Larry Sole, a Dogrib Indian who lives alone with his mother, struggling to survive adolescence in Fort Simmer, "the STD capital of the Territories." A sensitive outsider, Larry is brought into the "circle" of fighters and drug users after he befriends Johnny Beck, a rebellious and charismatic Métis. His friendship with Johnny also brings him closer to Juliet Hope, the high school "tramp" who inspires Larry with sordid

desire and pious reverence: for Larry, she is both a gateway to carnal knowledge and an embodiment of all that is holy. In many ways, Larry is a typical teenager, struggling to hold onto a sense of himself in an often uncaring, and sometimes violent context: a life with little to buffer the troubled worlds of child and adult. He listens to heavy metal, endures and resists the oppression of bullies, and sneaks his mother's cigarettes. At the same time, however, Larry has been "kissed by the devil" and "sewn into the belly of an animal"; he bears the physical and emotional scars of past experience: wounds he attempts to hide, and memories he struggles to repress.

The story is told in Larry's voice, related to us through the acute perceptions of a young and shockingly poetic consciousness. Larry doesn't simply "narrate"; he *speaks* to the reader in ways that suggest the intimacy of disclosure. Reality and dream interweave even when he speaks to the other characters, astounding and sometimes alarming them. After Larry tells Johnny the Dogrib creation myth, the listener comments not on the tale, but on its teller: "Lare, that's something. That's really something. You're a storyteller, man. Your voice even changed when you talked." Larry's gift for *telling* defines the entire novel, suffusing it with youthful energy and startling insight. His words curse and celebrate the world and people around him in terms that are profane and poetic. He speaks to us of the beauty of Juliet Hope, the wondrousness of the Northern landscape, the tyrannies of high school, and the uncontrollable visions that draw him into the past. The horrors of his past are seldom confronted directly; rather, they are rendered obliquely, in the fragmentary idiom of nightmare.

The characters of Van Camp's novel are brought vividly to life through his narrator's storytelling; their strengths and imperfections are rendered in a true and generous light. Johnny is no stock hero-

rebel; he has his own capacity for weakness and betrayal. An "expert" in the adult world of sex, Johnny is nevertheless obsessed with the "beautiful" aspects of innocence and childhood for which he secretly grieves. Then there is Johnny's younger brother Donny, a child with a very old soul; he is a vulgar youngster caught on the horns of pre-maturity, an ironic and isolated trickster haunted by visions of apocalypse. And there is Juliet Hope; labelled the school "whore" by those around her, she too owns unacknowledged depths of complexity and pain.

On the whole, *The Lesser Blessed* is a gift to its readers, a warm and affirming story of life in a cold place. Told with rich humour and deep compassion, it fuses the travails of human love and conflict into a vision of salvation and light. Like Fagan and Bergen, Van Camp negotiates the interstices of the earthy and the spiritual, and in the shadows where there are no easy answers, he finds and illuminates humanity's abiding potential for redemption and grace.

Au-delà de l'hommage

Sous la direction de André Fauchon

Actes du colloque international "Gabrielle Roy".
Presses Universitaires de Saint-Boniface n.p.

Reviewed by Dominique Perron

La publication des Actes du colloque soulignant le cinquantième anniversaire de *Bonheur d'occasion* (septembre 1995), colloque qui a eu lieu à Saint-Boniface, ville natale de la romancière, est bien sûr loin de tirer un trait définitif sur les études royennes, malgré les dimensions volumineuses du recueil. Néanmoins, peut-être justement à cause du grand nombre de conférences publiées, l'ensemble constitue une présentation utile et enrichissante de l'état actuel de la recherche sur Gabrielle Roy.

Si les présentations, qui couvrent largement la plupart des perspectives de

recherches en littérature, ne sont pas toutes de qualité égale, le niveau général reste fort appréciable et certaines conférences constituent d'ailleurs des apports majeurs à l'état actuel des études, tout particulièrement en ce qui a trait à *Alexandre Chênevert*, ce grand roman traditionnellement négligé. Mentionnons ici à cet effet l'étude de Vincent Schonberger sur les discours idéologiques dans ce roman. D'autre part, l'atelier portant sur *La Détresse et l'enchantement* prenait une valeur proprement prophétique en ce qu'une année plus tard, François Ricard, d'ailleurs invité d'honneur au colloque, allait publier sa retentissante biographie de Gabrielle Roy: ainsi, les participantes avaient bien mesuré la part de culpabilité et la volonté de déculpabilisation qui sous-tend les textes autobiographiques de Roy. D'autres ateliers proposent des esquisses de ce qui pourrait devenir des thèmes à approfondir chez Roy: les questions d'altérité, d'identité et d'exclusion, et citons d'ailleurs ici les travaux de Yannick Resch et d'Estelle Dansereau. Une section particulière mériterait également d'être soulignée par l'approche qu'elle réserve aux questions de l'imaginaire et de la création, avec les études de Lise Gaboury-Diallo et d'Ingrid Joubert. D'autres textes relatifs à la narration et à la critique pourraient être aussi signalés pour leur intérêt. Mais certaines sections, à mon avis, mettent plus spécialement en relief une dimension que l'on ne doit plus craindre d'associer à l'oeuvre de Gabrielle Roy, c'est-à-dire sa portée universelle: le fait que Gabrielle Roy doit être bel et bien considérée comme un écrivain qui a ajouté au patrimoine littéraire mondial. Ces sections, intitulées *Études thématiques* et *Études comparatives*, dont le contenu est encore de qualité variable, réussissent cependant à susciter chez le lecteur une émotion profonde, qui va au-delà de la perfection de l'application d'une grille analytique. C'est dans ces textes que l'on voit, et souvent de façon inattendue, le

nom de Gabrielle Roy associé à ceux de Selma Lagerlöf, de Han Suyin, de Marguerite Yourcenar ou de Mariamma Bâ, dans un processus d'universalisation qui permet de mieux mesurer la place qu'il ne faut plus hésiter à accorder à celle que François Ricard désigne comme la première écrivaine véritablement canadienne. Ces textes font bien ressortir la puissance d'humanité en Roy qui permet à tout lecteur non-canadien de s'identifier pleinement à ses récits et personnages, comme ils font ressortir l'omniprésente obsession de l'écrivaine à vouloir comprendre et exprimer le mystère profond de la création artistique, l'âpreté et la douleur qu'elle impose à tous ceux et celles qui voudraient s'arracher à l'étroitesse d'un destin ou d'une condition. C'est d'ailleurs cette conscience unique des difficultés liées à la condition d'artiste qui a permis à plusieurs des participants d'établir des rapprochements, qui prennent figure de véritables hommages, entre Roy et des écrivains comme Anne Hébert, Marie-Claire Blais, Yves Thériault et Jacques Poulin. Ces rapprochements convaincants illustrent bien, près d'une quinzaine d'années après sa mort, laquelle a été elle-même précédée d'une certaine éclipse dans l'appréciation de son oeuvre, que l'écrivaine est devenue ce point majeur à la fois de cristallisation et de rayonnement dans l'univers littéraire canadien, transcendant les barrières linguistiques. La publication des Actes du colloque international " Gabrielle Roy ", outre le fait que, techniquement, elle s'avèrera un bon outil d'introduction pour les jeunes chercheurs, va au-delà de la vénération pieuse, toujours tentante dans ce genre de manifestation: elle reste le signe marquant de la place centrale que Gabrielle Roy doit occuper sans conteste dans la littérature au Canada, au-delà aussi des hiérarchies et au-delà des récupérations au profit de l'une ou l'autre des deux solitudes.

Liberté surveillée

Louis Hamelin

Betsi Larousse ou l'ineffable eccécité de la loutre.
XYZ n.p.

Bernard Lévy

Un sourire incertain. Triptyque \$18.95

Reviewed by Mylène Lévesque

Betsi Larousse ou l'ineffable eccécité de la loutre et *Un sourire incertain* diffèrent tant par leur genre que par leur écriture. Le premier ouvrage édité chez XYZ en 1994 est le quatrième roman à naître de la plume de Louis Hamelin. L'auteur acquérait en 1989, avec son premier roman *La Rage*, une notoriété qui ne devait plus le quitter. Le deuxième titre rassemble dix nouvelles de Bernard Lévy, auteur du recueil de dialogues *Comment se comprendre autrement que par erreur?*, dont quelques-unes ont paru dans *Vice versa*, *Liberté* et *Moebius*.

Louis Hamelin se démarque à nouveau avec son dernier roman *Betsi Larousse*. Le récit réunit dans un chalet de la région de La Tuque, Marc Carrière, sculpteur; Yvan Lépine, explorateur excentrique et Betsi Larousse, chanteuse hypermédiatisée. La rencontre des personnages, que rien ne laissait présager, a lieu lors d'un festival western où Betsi doit monter sur scène. Anciens amis qui s'étaient perdus de vue depuis douze ans, les deux hommes font la rencontre de la star de 24 ans qui saura faire palpiter leur coeur avant de retourner au monde du spectacle.

Un mouvement constant anime le roman. Le récit est jalonné des explorations extravagantes de Lépine qui s'étudie dans la mélopée continue de ses pensées; jalonné aussi de bribes de la vie tumultueuse de Betsi. En outre, on retrouve le mouvement dans les sculptures de Carrière: girouettes éveillées par le vent; *appelants* ou totem, qui prendront vie lors de leur descente en rivière; *Le Nageur*, sculpture en tuyaux traversés par la plainte d'Éole. Mais, ces *Leurres*,

nom donné à l'ensemble de l'oeuvre, sont à la merci des éléments qui leur donneront vie. Se révoltant à la fin du roman contre ce qui fait de lui un monument semblable à ses sculptures, Carrière se mesure à lui-même dans un combat l'opposant à ce qu'il a créé. Rampant sur les bas-fonds de la vie, ce n'est qu'en détruisant son oeuvre que la notion de «passage» prendra vraiment son sens: «J'ai tout arrêté. Même *Les appelants*. Transition. C'est à mon tour de me retrouver devant une porte.» Parallèlement au thème du mouvement, la mort est omniprésente. D'abord, il y a l'accident de voiture fatal à l'original qui influencera tout le déroulement de l'histoire, puis l'énigme du bec-scie dont la charogne a été découverte recroquevillée entre le mur et le divan du chalet. Or, si la mort imprègne le récit, c'est pourtant la vie qui l'emporte. La tentative de suicide du sculpteur annoncée, entre autres, par les rêves qui ponctuent le roman, le sauvetage in extremis de Lépine des eaux glacées, la chute brutale de la popularité de Betsi, se soldent tous par une résurrection. «J'ai décidé de vivre» clame le narrateur retenu par *Le Nageur* dans le lit de la rivière.

Reprenant les thèmes de l'espace, du temps et du voyage, puis l'opposition nature/culture, *Betsi Larousse* se classe parmi les romans de l'américanité. La sensualité incarnée par la rousse Betsi, se fond avec une nature révélatrice, échappatoire à un monde préprogrammé. Derrière ce qui peut sembler des banalités quotidiennes se cachent l'amorce d'un pressentiment de vérité. Véritable «forgeron verbal» pour emprunter l'expression de Rémy de Gourmont, Louis Hamelin écrit dans un style captivant, teinté d'humour où les verdeurs du parler québécois assaisonnent avec goût de véritables trouvailles langagières.

Directeur et rédacteur en chef de la revue *Vie des Arts*, Bernard Lévy met en scène dans ses nouvelles une palette de person-

nages, artistes et hommes de sciences, qui entretiennent tous un rapport avec la célébrité. À travers des récits inusités, l'auteur lève le voile sur les arcanes du succès, comme l'avait fait Villiers de L'Isle Adam dans ses *Deux Augures*. Que ce soit en remplissant quantité de formulaires, ou en s'astreignant aux règles de la rhétorique, la gloire chez Lévy est étroitement liée à une procédure. La réussite est aussi assujettie aux médias et à la technologie de pointe qui pourront lancer ou détruire une carrière. Ainsi, dans la nouvelle du même titre, «*le chef-d'oeuvre*» de François Aimé Latreille ne prend vie que lors d'une lecture à haute voix à la télévision. Quant à Palito, artiste incompris de la nouvelle «*Sans-titre*» qui s'évertue à peindre des tableaux entièrement blancs, il trouve le succès en procédant à la chaîne un art transformé par l'ordinateur. Presque peu réjouissante pour l'original qui chérit des rêves de gloire . . .

La nouvelle, éponyme, se démarque étonnamment des autres récits. Opposée aux artistes créateurs qui peuplent les nouvelles, une femme, la seule d'ailleurs à tenir un rôle principal, devient, par l'instantanéité d'un cliché, une oeuvre d'art; une *Joconde* version contemporaine. Un «*sourire incertain*» naît 1/250^e de seconde sur ses lèvres et la voilà proclamée «plus belle femme du siècle.»

L'auteur nous entraîne dans un monde troublant où le moindre élan de spontanéité est surveillé. Sur l'échiquier de la vie, ce sont les mouvements les plus banals en apparence qui changent tout le déroulement du jeu. Dans «*Coups de théâtre*» une gifle portée sans réflexion transforme le cours d'une vie, tout comme dans «*Treize*», des dés pipés détermineront qui, de Dieu ou du Diable, verra ses attentes exaucées.

L'auteur, tant dans la narration qui alterne du «je» au «il» que dans le choix des mots, porte une attention mesurée aux détails notamment lorsqu'il met en scène le personnage d'Antonin Artaud.

L'impression d'instantanéité qui en découle est étonnamment réussie. *Un sourire incertain* ébauche une philosophie de l'existence au moyen d'expressions telles que «Essayez de changer de vie tous les jours de votre vie» ou encore, «Rien de plus nocif que les idées fixes!» Dans un style sobre et agréable à lire, Bernard Lévy captive le lecteur qui ne restera pas insensible à ces nouvelles exceptionnelles.

Betsi Larousse et *Un sourire incertain* nous projettent dans un univers résolument contemporain, là où une prise de conscience est imminente. Tirés hors de l'apathie du quotidien, les lecteurs sont incités à s'engager dans un questionnement qui met en rapport l'individu et le monde.

Dispelling the Shadows

Claire Harris

Dipped in Shadow. Goose Lane. \$12.95

Fables from the Women's Quarters and *The*

Conception of Winter. Rpt. Goose Lane both \$12.95

Reviewed by Susan Gingell

One measure of the quality of the service that Williams-Wallace publishers gave to Canadian literature in providing an outlet for Afro/Caribbean writers before the other literary presses were interested in their work is evidenced in three recent books from Fredericton's Goose Lane Editions. When the New Brunswick publishers brought out the sixth book of poems by Calgary poet Claire Harris, *Dipped in Shadow*, they also chose to reprint two collections earlier issued by the now defunct Ontario house. That one of these reprints, *Fables from the Women's Quarters*, had won the Commonwealth Writers Prize, and that her last book, *Drawing Down a Daughter*, was nominated for the Governor General's Award indicates the kind of acclaim Harris has been garnering from her peers and academics, and yet her work remains little known by most students of

our literature. She deserves better. We'd be the richer.

Reasons for the relegation of her verse to the shadows could justifiably be found in the racism and sexism in Canadian society that her poetry has imaginatively and excruciatingly represented, but her relative obscurity is also a function of the intellectual challenge her work offers to readers. Those who would make sense of "Where the Sky is a Pitiful Tent" from *Fables* must find their own way to relate the translated text of Rigoberta Menchu (the misspelling of her name as *Manchu* persists from the original publication), which appears quite literally as the foundational text at the bottom of the page, to Harris's imaginative building upon and above it as she takes on the personae of the Guatemalan Indigenous activist and her family. Similarly, those readers of *Conception* who would not be lost in the complex summer journeying of the three women friends from Calgary to the Barcelona that is both the architectural triumph wrought in significant part by nineteenth-century architect Antonio Gaudi and the moral horror of the historical slaving port will need to keep their wits about them.

Harris refuses to simplify the complexities of her experience as Black woman artist transplanted to Canada, but very much aware of her historic connections to Africa, her often conflicting cultural connections both to there and Europe, and her political connections to people of colour, especially women, everywhere. She has not been averse, however, to prefatory contextualizing that for most Canadians would facilitate their understanding of places, people, and situations largely alien to them. Her introduction to her portrait of pre-Biafran war Nigeria in "Seen in Stormlight" and her gloss on "Policeman Cleared in Jaywalking Case" (*Fables*) locating it within the tradition of Black "signifying"—"an act of acknowledgement of sharing of identifying with"—are cases in point.

The urgency of her political project may go a good way to explaining this willingness to assist her readers' entry into the various dimensions of her imaginatively realized world. In an untitled postscript poem to *Dipped in Shadow*, Harris declares,

I write
for us all we must change
the fictions before the fictions
play us out their unsubtle denouements
skies without clouds
earth without rivers or smiles

What threatens to play us out are the restrictive scripts that will allow only a narrowly defined elite to occupy the light. Each of the poems in her most recent book addresses subjects usually consigned to the shadows of our inattention. In the lyrical "O What are You Thinking My Sisters," she asks Black, White, South Asian, Chinese, First Nations, and Inuit sisters in turn, about the limits of their political solidarity:

what are you hatching my sister dear
sister what are you
hatching in your milk and cream
skin now that glass has glittered
on Yonge and Spadina when you see our
black brother
do you draw your skirt closer
cross at the corner?
my sister my friend?

In the searing "Nude in an Armchair," Harris assumes the voice of a battered woman whose assault continues in the courtroom where she, rather than her abusive husband, is effectively put on trial for failing to protect her children from their father's pandering of them. The contradictory understandings of husband-wife/parent-child relations in patriarchy are coded in the capitalization in "yOurs," which simultaneously figures the woman's anguish:

on the first saturday of every month
the girl is yOurs
the boy is yOurs

“This Fierce Body” illuminates the dying from AIDS of a 35-year-old Catholic closeted gay male to make clear the multiplied suffering that comes from acute social stigmatizing of homosexuality, while “Sister (Y)our Manchild at the Close of the Twentieth Century,” sheds its light on female as well as male responsibility for ending the various violences of white power that continue as the millennium nears. Part of its calling to account involves the reconfiguring of the white man’s burden as a weight borne “on the backs of Africans Asians / Aboriginal peoples / Women and children” and enforced “by fists and bombs.” Finally from the shadows Harris draws the subject of teenaged pregnancy, but as with the other social ills she forces her reader to confront, her spotlighting of the scared and suffering high school girl in “Woeman Womb Prisoned” acquires its special force from what Harris does with language. She may scatter her letters on the page in a form made familiar to Canadian readers by the typographical experiments of Earle Birney and bp Nichol, but she will elsewhere engage in a blackly humorous feminist etymologizing, and in a tersely ironic re-writing of Shakespeare’s Miranda’s enthusing on the “brave new world”: “o world o / hollow light / that hath such things in it.”

While Harris has often tested her skill on the difficult terrain of the haiku (*Fables* has five and *Conception* two), her most notable achievement is in the long-poem form. Reading these three books together offers readers the opportunity to study the alternate means by which she has structured her in-depth meditations from the early cubist “Nude on a Pale Staircase” from *Fables from the Women’s Quarters* through the texts of her middle period, like the eloquent open-field elegy for her mother, “A Grammar of the Heart,” which concludes *The Conception of Winter*, to the collage of found text, concrete poetry, and open-field in “Sister

(Y)our Manchild” in *Dipped in Shadow* give some sense of the range and of how potentially enlightening this study could be.

De la rêverie au cauchemar

Marie-France Hébert

Un oiseau dans la tête. La courte échelle \$7.95

Guy Lavigne

La Foire aux fauves. La courte échelle \$7.95

Reviewed by Daniel Chouinard

À première vue, rien ne justifie un rapprochement entre ces deux oeuvres: entre le bref récit fantaisiste, si vif et si léger, de Marie-France Hébert et le roman policier, volontiers réaliste et un peu glauque, de Guy Lavigne, on ne saurait déceler de points communs si ce n’est leur appartenance à une pratique courante dans la littérature pour la jeunesse, la “sériation” des aventures, et une nette propension à la rêverie chez les protagonistes.

En effet, *Un oiseau dans la tête* s’intègre dans la série “Méli-Mélo” et en respecte toutes les caractéristiques: l’héroïne, déçue par les obligations de la réalité, tombe dans une rêverie où, sujette à des métamorphoses, elle franchit la frontière entre les mondes humain et animal. Pour ce huitième épisode de ses aventures, la petite Méli-Mélo viendra un oiseau, l’“oiseau rare” dont parle son professeur de dessin, M. Belami. Cette fois-ci, une déception est à la base de la métamorphose. Son cher professeur, absent, est remplacé par une suppléante, Mlle Tigri, féline à faire peur à tout enfant normal. Paralysée, l’héroïne ne peut accomplir l’exercice de dessin, le portrait d’un oiseau, et devra faire une retenue pendant l’heure du midi. L’oiseau qu’elle imagine apparaît sur la feuille, puis disparaît pour se matérialiser sur le rebord de la fenêtre, l’appelle, se frotte à Méli-Mélo qui, ô stupeur! devient

cet oiseau. S'enclenche une série d'expériences euphorisantes—la découverte du paysage, et c'est le cas de le dire, à vol d'oiseau—et d'épreuves terrifiantes—elle échappe à un rapace et au chat mascotte de la classe, Mistigri, qui rappelle étrangement Mlle Tigri ou vice-versa. Ramenée à la réalité par les cris de ses camarades, Méli-Mélo se retrouve, petite fille, devant son dessin où se déploie un magnifique volatile, qui reprend tous les traits de sa récente métamorphose. Même l'inflexible Mlle Tigri est impressionnée par son talent et, à la grande surprise de l'héroïne, et conformément aux épisodes précédents, Méli-Mélo, trouve sur son pupitre une signature du rêve, une preuve tangible de sa fuite dans les airs, en l'occurrence une plume qu'elle avait perdue lors de son retour précipité en classe!

Quant à *la Foire aux fauves*, comme le rappellent les quelques renvois en note disséminés au cours du récit, elle s'inscrit dans le cycle des "Dossiers de Joseph E.", tous marqués au sceau d'une indéniable solidarité sociale: encore une fois, le détective, à la fois zen et blasé, luttera contre ses démons intérieurs, sera le témoin de sombres conspirations et entrevera un nouveau désastre écologique. Tout commence par une sordide et banale histoire de femme battue: nouveau riche arrogant, Luc Tremblay demande au héros de mener une enquête sur le nouvel amant de sa mère, Alain Rondeau, qu'il soupçonne de violence chronique. L'enquête confirmera bientôt la pertinence des soupçons: Rondeau est, en effet, un batteur de femmes—et un accapareur de fonds—particulièrement répugnant. Mais un crime en cache souvent un autre: sympathique employé de banque en apparence, il entraîne des camarades grévistes à saboter l'usine de leur employeur, la multinationale I.T.X. Or, notre enquêteur désabusé découvrira bientôt que ce fauteur de trouble est à la solde de l'employeur même, qui cherche tout

simplement, marché global oblige, à déménager l'usine en Louisiane: par un curieux et bien pratique retour de conscience, le fourbe Rondeau empêchera la multinationale de provoquer un véritable désastre écologique et, ce faisant, négociera avec la Sécurité du Québec un non-lieu dans une autre histoire de femme battue! L'histoire finit comme en queue de poisson: les salauds tirent leur épingle du jeu et même la mère de Luc Tremblay préfère rester avec son impossible amant. Seule l'amitié de sa collègue Ange, "magnifique jeune Noire" sensible à la cause des femmes, sauvera le détective de son dégoût et de... l'alcool.

Malgré les différences inconciliables qu'impose l'appartenance à des genres littéraires si étrangers l'un à l'autre, les deux héros partagent un goût certain pour la rêverie: chez Méli-Mélo, l'évasion dans l'univers du rêve reste sans doute la caractéristique fondamentale du personnage, sans laquelle l'aventure ne pourrait "décoller"; en outre, avoir "la tête dans les nuages et les deux pieds sur la terre" finit par justifier l'existence de la série et explique en grande partie le succès de celle-ci chez les enfants de 8-10 ans, âge auquel la perception ludique des expressions courantes favorise les jeux où triomphe l'imagination. En ce qui concerne le "privé", plongé dans un monde adulte livré à la violence et à la bêtise, il n'a pas complètement perdu ce contact privilégié avec l'imaginaire: féru de poésie et de jazz, pratiquant la cuisine exotique comme une ascèse et pouvant citer Baudelaire quand la bêtise semble l'emporter, Joseph E., malgré son mal de vivre, possède encore une faculté de rêver capable de séduire le lecteur adolescent. À cet égard, la rêverie devant le fleuve, lors de la pose des appareils d'écoute électronique dans le salon aux immenses baies vitrées, se présente comme une page d'anthologie, où se fusionne l'euphorie intérieure du personnage devant l'ampleur du paysage et la menace extérieure que représente le navire

semblant foncer vers le héros-spectateur.

Mais l'analogie entre les deux récits s'arrête là. Après sept épisodes, le talent de Hébert parvient à maintenir l'intérêt des aventures de Méli-Mélo: la prestesse et la vivacité du style, la légèreté et l'acuité de l'ironie font, encore une fois, oublier les "recettes" du genre. Force est d'admettre que nous avons plus de réserves à l'égard du "polar" de Lavigne: la lourdeur de l'humour et la nette volonté de respecter les conventions du roman policier, d'une part, et la soumission, d'autre part, aux impératifs de la littérature pour la jeunesse—par exemple, la nécessaire sensibilisation du lecteur à la problématique de la violence conjugale—enferment *la Foire aux fauves* dans une contradiction indépassable: récit souvent palpitant mais trop moralisateur pour les adultes, récit à la conclusion ambiguë, sans doute trop mûr et trop désabusé pour les pédagogues du secondaire, il nous rappelle que les adolescents auraient peut-être intérêt à s'initier à la Littérature.

Bliss in Never Knowing

Isabel Huggan

You Never Know. Vintage \$14.95

Elise Levine

Driving Men Mad. The Porcupine's Quill \$14.95

Patricia Nolan

Broken Windows. Polestar \$16.95

Reviewed by Andrew Lesk

Before reading Isabel Huggan's second collection of stories, *You Never Know*, I searched bookstores for her first collection, *The Elizabeth Stories* (1984). "Searched" is no understatement—and this is a sad comment on the poor visibility accorded this author not only in academia but in public. *The Elizabeth Stories*, structurally and thematically similar to Alice Munro's *Lives of Girls and Women*—and in many respects a bolder, more fascinating take on a young

girl's coming of age in southern Ontario—enjoyed a brief, well-deserved popularity; perhaps the nine-year hiatus between the two books has contributed, though, to the author's present near-invisibility.

Although Huggan's second book does not quite meet the standard she set for herself with her first, *You Never Know* is nonetheless a distinct pleasure that, I hope, will keep her firmly in the public eye. Huggan mines the cliché that is the collection's title to demonstrate that the certainties we often hold tight to ourselves—mostly about other people—are fragile, and that our accumulation of knowledge about anything is at best capricious and forever incomplete. The stories are, thus, about the "process of life," how we have selectively remembered and forgotten in order to reach a level of comfort, however misguided and tenuous and thin.

Surprisingly, the collection begins with the weakest of the stories, "End of Empire," in which the narrator rehashes her youthful fascination with King George the Sixth. The metaphors of King George (father figure), his passing away (end of the *real* empire and the ignorance of children), and the narrator's ongoing mourning for him (sentimental recall of childhood) are capped at story's end by an embarrassing expression of facile melancholia. Fortunately, the following story, "Violation," is Huggan at her very best.

"Violation" explores how the narrator's "cultural conditioning" leads her to imagine that her visitor, Garnet, an older, neighbouring farmer who clears driveways of winter snows, is a clear sexual threat. He is a man "whose feet planted themselves as if each step meant business," and upon whose features the narrator (whose husband is absent) etches a tableau of anxiety. The psychological and implied violence that the narrator reads into her contact with Garnet recalls that of the narrator of Sinclair Ross's "Spike," a man who constructs a fantasy

out of his anxiety of not knowing the hitchhiker who seems to have picked him up. Huggan's protagonist, though, is more honest with herself than Ross's, since she, physically weaker than Garnet, has the courage to admit that her wild construction of what Garnet may or may not be is, first and foremost, her own creation.

Ironically, the true violation comes at the end of the story, not from Garnet, the man, but from the story he tells the pregnant narrator about the vicious and arbitrary nature of life, a process which left him and his wife unable to have children. Garnet unsettles his hostess, simply saying that he takes his cues from the capricious realm of nature, from the seasons which arbitrarily nurture and destroy. It is this possible violation by nature—a thing she, the urbanite, knows little of and can do nothing about—that is the true assault.

Huggan's following story, "On Fire," an apparently simple story about two young families at a cottage, contains a snap ending, a mere eight word phrase, that recasts the entire narrative and proves the collection's titular maxim, especially as it reveals and dispels the reader's own ignorance. "Throwing and Catching" and "In Training" signal a stylistic return to *The Elizabeth Stories*, especially as Huggan writes what I have termed "spiral stories." In such stories, the author introduces a person or an event and subsequently abandons the established storyline in apparent favour—we think—of what must be the story's natural progression; it is almost a surprise, then, when Huggan effortlessly reintroduces the character or event in the narrative, forcing the reader to revisit the beginning and to continually re-evaluate what then transpires.

The most masterful of these is the collection's finale, the powerful (and ironically titled) "Knowing People." Throughout the story Huggan introduces or reveals bits of crucial information, all culminating in a dizzying spiral of fragments that the reader

tries to piece together as the story progresses. Huggan's narrative here—the story itself—can only be emblematic of how we, as people caught in the process that is life, ultimately come to know anything and how that constitution is necessarily incomplete. The youthful Clare leaves her Canadian home to travel with friends to England and later by herself to Scotland and her "roots." On the boat over, she meets Angus McNay, an officer with whom she has her first affair (and a man whose parents she resides with, sans Angus, that summer in Scotland). Clare finds that she could not, much to her astonishment, share this new experience with her curious friends: "They didn't believe me, but then they probably wouldn't have believed the truth either. . . ." Huggan demonstrates that even "fact" has no objective standing. Even with the "facts" at hand, Clare cannot reveal what she knows, and so her friends will, invariably, construct their own version of what Clare "is."

This everyday knowing is contrasted with historical knowledge, particularly as Clare explores her family's roots in Scotland. Chrissie McNay "could tell I had Highland blood by the set of my head," affirming for Clare the truth of her aunt Jean's earlier vacation on Skye. (Jean had met "a very old man at a *ceilidh* to whom she'd talked in great detail about her quest. 'He knew exactly who I was,' she said, relating this event to us on her return. 'He *knew* me'.") Yet Clare comes to understand that blood does not reveal anything beyond the social construction that is kinship and belonging. The young man who had also resided at the McNay's that summer, Jeremy Kerr, is the enigma Clare cannot penetrate because, she finally realizes, what she ever knew of him was so minute. So, years later, in wondering what may have happened to him, Clare finds that "what saddens me is that knowing people is such a delicate affair, and people so seldom get it right."

The same might be said of writing, that it

is a delicate affair that is seldom rewarding for author or reader. Elise Levine's *Driving Men Mad* and Patricia Nolan's *Broken Windows* are collections without common links, containing stories which have appeared in a variety of publications. That much can be said about them. Levine's stories would seem to provide perfect fodder for critics of contemporary "postmodern" literature which eschews convention. Exemplary are Levine's (much-anthologized) "Boy" and the title story, which contains what seems, to me, an unintentional yet self-evident truism: "I say, I'm making this up as I go along." Really. Levine is much more successful with the risky "Angel" and the more conventional, sepia-toned "Retiring."

Nolan's narratives (complete with an admirable array of promotional blurbs) left me wondering if the noun "workshop" has been turned into a verb, along the lines of "networked." "To Kingdom Come," presumably a story about an abusive father who is somewhat crazy as well, might be a comedy or a tragedy, or both; but Nolan apparently mistakes style for substance, and there is no laughter, no horror here. Other stories, such as "Mary With the Cool Shades," are merely silly. If Nolan is trying to demonstrate like Arendt that evil or shock, as the case may be, is, in the end, banal she has succeeded all too well. Imagine reading Joyce Carol Oates—but without any accompanying intrigue, mystery and unsettling, provoking discomfort. Sometimes not knowing (or not reading) is bliss.



Performer and Audience

Nancy Huston

The Goldberg Variations. Nuage Editions \$15.95

William Aide

Starting from Porcupine. Oberon P \$29.95/\$14.95

Reviewed by Bryan N.S. Gooch

Both Nancy Huston's *The Goldberg Variations* (a translation by the author of her award-winning *Les Variations Goldberg* (1981)) and William Aide's *Starting from Porcupine* take the reader into the world of keyboard performance—its pressures and pleasures—and reactions to the playing. While Aide offers an enlightening, discursive, and lucid autobiography which focuses on his own career and some of his reactions to work by other artists, especially pianists, Huston offers—as a tribute to her late teacher Roland Barthes—a fictional bedchamber/salon harpsichord recital of Bach's *Goldberg Variations* as an opportunity—and also as a framework—for miniature studies of the thoughts and reactions of her performer, Liliane Kulainn, and a thirty-member audience of relatives and friends (including former lovers, students, and so on) of Kulainn and her husband Bernald Thorer, whose academic career has been abruptly cut short by nervous collapse.

Every performer has also been an audience member many times and can recall, sometimes vividly, emotions and reactions stimulated by particular pieces and artists. And every performer has more than once speculated before, during, or after a concert about what might be going on in the minds and hearts of the listeners—about the music's effect, about the emotional impact, and about the degree, indeed, to which the composer's ideas and intentions are successfully being communicated to the hearers, some of whom are probably attending for wrong, un-musical reasons or who, perhaps, have been dragged along by a more enthusiastic companion. Huston's fictional

audience is, to be sure, a widely diverse lot; in attendance out of loyalty, friendship, or even duty, they are portrayed, one for each variation, much as a series of thirty cameos might be offered; the pictures are often stunningly compelling in their incisiveness, deftness, and economy, and while each person is ostensibly in the room to listen to Liliane play, most are depicted as thinking more about themselves and their personal worlds than about Bach or the performance; on the whole what connects them is the occasion and their acquaintance (or relationship) with a few others in the room, and not the kind of artistic experience and communion which a good concert can really produce. Nor do their personalities seem particularly linked to the character of the variations with which they are associated as the recital rolls on. Public performance is a tough, nervy business, and it requires real effort to get some audiences on side, but Huston's crowd appears, for the most part, to be seemingly unreachable, at least during the time when Huston takes the reader inside their heads. Self-interest in midst of perfectly good Bach is hard to imagine and rather difficult to forgive. Yet Huston's own virtuosic performance in producing her set of sketches, in the linkages which she draws between the characters in the brief portrayal of Liliane (who figures subjectively only in terms of the initial aria and its terminal reprise) and others' reactions to her, and the intensity of audience members' interest in her husband Bernald make this a fascinating if, at times, disconcerting narrative.

Aide's *Starting from Porcupine* never hints at the possibility of such an apparently musically detached audience as Huston's *Goldberg Variations* presents. Here, rather, is the work of a fine pianist and poet who is also a good listener (as first-class musicians must be) and a sensitive reader. *Starting from Porcupine* details many of the events—professional and personal—in Aide's

remarkable career from his youth in the Porcupine, Ontario, area through his days as a student in Toronto (with Alberto Guerrero) to his emergence as one of this country's most distinguished soloists, accompanists, and teachers, now head of the keyboard faculty at the University of Toronto. But this is far more than just a graceful, touching, and insightful look at the growth of a prodigious talent; it also offers intriguing glimpses of major figures—friends and colleagues of Aide—in the musical and literary fabric of this nation, including Glenn Gould (and the Bach's *Goldberg* again), Teresa Stratas, Greta Kraus, Margaret Avison, and Jane Coop. Along the way there is a sensitive look at the pressures of piano competitions, technical preparation, public performance, touring, specific works, and teaching. And there are critical views too—for instance, of Claudio Arrau and Vladimir Horowitz—and generous acknowledgement of varying opinions: the discussion of Horowitz's work is a case in point. When does technical display—hell-fire octachordal surges, for example—overtake musicality and a composer's artistic intention? Aide's judgment of Horowitz and his unreserved praise for Arrau's playing of Beethoven reveals a compelling musical sensibility, just as his perceptive reading of Margaret Avison and his own touching poetry confirm his artistic breadth and his fine ear. Of course, not all readers will agree with him about Horowitz and the latter's manner of stunning audiences, just as they will not all share his admiration for Gould's *Goldberg* recordings. But that is the stuff of the arts. We cannot all like the same pictures in the galleries, and it would be a thunderingly boring world if we did, but I, for one, think Aide has got it right. As for Gould's manner of playing—that is just not an issue. As the late Ira Swartz, also a remarkable pianist and teacher, once remarked to me in a lesson focused on some of the Bach *Forty-Eight*,

"I wouldn't care if Gould played with his toes as long as he goes on doing what he's doing." Aide really is a musician's musician. Audience and performer come together seamlessly in author as listener and performer as interpreter and communicator. Woven in to this story as well are elements of family life—of happiness and despair—and the narrative moves with fluency, grounded in love and compassion, and without a hint of self-importance despite the record of achievement and a list of friends which could serve as the basis for a who's who.

There is no question about the importance or artistic effectiveness of either volume, but they are quite different books. Huston's can be read, pondered about, and re-read, in whole or part, much as each variation in the *Goldberg* can be read, though the thematic linkages do not really offer a one-to-one parallel with the structural integrity of Bach's variations. Aide's book can be treated the same way, in a sense—discussions of his relationship with individual artists can be taken again one at a time, out of order, even. However, so compelling is his narrative and so easy is the style that I am prepared to start again with *Porcupine*. Bravo!

Power Works

Glenn Jordan and Chris Weedon

Cultural Politics: Class, Gender, Race and the Postmodern World. Blackwell \$13.99

Christina K. Gilmartin, Gail Hershatter, Lisa Rofel & Tyrene White, eds.

Engendering China: Women, Culture and the State. Harvard UP US\$22.95

Reviewed by Maria Noëlle Ng

Cultural Politics by Glenn Jordan and Chris Weedon could be called a companion to cultural studies and postmodernism. In this weighty book of 624 pages, the authors trace the development of cultural theories within the context of the nineteenth and

the twentieth centuries. The topics covered in the book are wide-ranging, but are organized into the inevitable categories of class, gender, and race, bookended by a historical overview (appropriately titled "Mapping the Terrain") and a brief prognosis.

These first and the last chapters are especially valuable for students and scholars of cultural studies. They provide the reader with the necessary historical contexts as she ploughs through the other chapters on such current topics as art funding in Britain; cultural politics in the former GDR; and the politics of art exhibition in London. As this brief and partial citation indicates, the book is rich in providing case studies, some of which are perhaps somewhat localized for the general readership. The advantage of such specific, personalized examples lies in their immediacy and intimacy. For instance, I read with increasing involvement the history of the Tiger Bay project in Cardiff, Wales. This section begins with a brief introduction to the question of class in cultural politics, aided by a mock interview conducted between the two authors and other historians such as Paul Thompson. Then the purpose, the structuring, the funding and other aspects of the Butetown History and Arts Project in Tiger Bay are laid out. During this investigation, the reader learns that Glenn Jordan was directly involved with the project. This type of personal anecdotal information balances out the occasional 'book with a mission' overtone.

The structure of *Cultural Politics*, albeit neatly partitioned into class, race and gender, is intentionally 'decentred'. Instead of lengthy expositions on Matthew Arnold's germinal text on culture, *Culture and Anarchy*, the writers create a net of definitions, applications and responses around it. Nonetheless, as the authors remind us, "All signifying practices—that is, all practices that have meaning—involve relations of power." Thus, it can be said that a metanarrative of power runs through and ties the

many diverse topics in *Cultural Politics* in a skein. Herein lies both the strength and the weakness of the book: it writes against power and it is structured by the very prevalence of the idea and the power of 'power'. In spite of the 'biased' agenda of *Cultural Politics*, this book is useful for many reasons, such as the thoroughness of its bibliography and the writers' attention to the visual art movements, and it should be on the shelf of all scholars interested in cultural issues.

One of the issues discussed in *Cultural Politics* is the uneasy relationship between western feminism and 'Third World' feminism. In *Engendering China: Women, Culture, and the State*, we have an example of women scholars trained in the West working not only with issues involving women of a non-western culture, but also writing alongside scholars not necessarily trained in the western scholarly tradition. The result is both richly informative and challenging.

The contributors to this volume of essays include sociologists, anthropologists, historians as well as educators in the fields of language, literature and law. Some of the essays have recently been published in book form, such as Gail Hershatter's on prostitution in early twentieth-century Shanghai. With the current media frenzy on Hong Kong and China, with Hong Kong's return to Chinese rule, this book provides a timely background to an area largely ignored by male Asianists: the question of women's rights and women's conditions in China.

The essays are grouped into four sections, each representing a major theme: section one deals with the categories of "Chinese women," as scholar, researcher, daughter and so forth; section two discusses the representations of Chinese women in both Chinese and western writings; section three looks at "the centrality of gender to questions of state formation and state policy-making"; and the last section concentrates

on "[b]ecoming [w]omen in the Post-Mao Era." To overcome "the dichotomy between Europeans and Americans as theory makers and Chinese women as objects of theory," the editors have included essays by both professionals from the People's Republic as well as ethnic Chinese scholars working in the United States.

One of the essays, "Out of the Traditional Halls of Academe" by Chen Yiyun, provides a refreshing look at the methodology of collecting and collating data for research in a country where private problems are seldom discussed in front of strangers, for reasons of conservatism, social shyness, "self-respect, vanity and family reputation." This essay, written in a chatty and personal style, marks a strong contrast to the 'traditional' academic essays by Chen Yiyun's western counterparts. Chen Yiyun conducts research in the area of "family-centered social work and women's issues," and is also a columnist in five women's magazines, a feature speaker on a radio programme called "Life Hotline" and an editor of a series on marriage and family education. This cross-disciplinary 'job-description' is, for this reviewer, as fascinating as the diverse topics tackled in this collection.

Although *Engendering China* seeks to provide a wide spectrum of discussions on women's issues in the People's Republic, the selection of the essays is both a case of too much and not enough. The reader will learn about Chinese women living in the Ming dynasty as well as in contemporary China; about Chinese women living in rural Shaanxi and their counterparts in urban Guangzhou. These are very wide historical and geographical areas, and I think a bit of contextualizing and some illustrative materials would help the non-specialist readers to fully reap the benefit of this otherwise excellent collection. Some of the essays, for instance, Cathy Silber's "From Daughter to Daughter-in-Law in the Women's Script of Southern Hunan,"

employs a number of Chinese words which are transcribed in *pinyin* in the text. I have always found that a glossary of terms in the Chinese characters is very useful for cross-reference in cases like this. But these are minor points which do not essentially detract from an original work of high quality research.

Promoting Canadian Writers

Robert Lecker, Jack David and Ellen Quigley, eds.

Canadian Writers and Their Works: Fiction Series, Volume Twelve, ECW \$50.00

Diana Brydon

Writing on Trial: Timothy Findley's Famous Last Words, ECW, *Canadian Fiction Studies*, no. 32 \$14.95

Barbara Pell

A Portrait of the Artist: Ernest Buckler's The Mountain and the Valley, ECW, *Canadian Fiction Studies*, no. 31 n.p.

Reviewed by Heather Sanderson

The latest volume in the *Canadian Writers and Their Works* series is a mixed collection, bringing Timothy Findley belatedly onto the core list of authors, along with Sandra Birdsell, David Adams Richards, and W.P. Kinsella. In the introduction, George Woodcock applies the unifying adjective "absurd" to characterise the work of these writers, but the articles indicate many differences. The essays follow the series pattern of giving a brief biography, then a placement of each author in the tradition, a summary of the criticism to date, and then an overview of individual works, followed by a comprehensive bibliography. This series, especially as it collates the available sources, is an invaluable resource for students of Canadian literature, and this volume is no exception.

The most significant author examined is Timothy Findley, and Lorraine M. York, the

author of two books and several articles on his work, is an authoritative critic. This essay reads, at times, as a telescoped version of her *Front Lines: The Fiction of Timothy Findley* (1991), but she has also continued to develop her readings; in particular, she discusses at greater length the significance of homosexuality in his "pervasive concern with gender" and the "enforced construction of masculinity" in "the male club," although she does not mention the groundbreaking 1992 article by Richard Dellamora on this subject. She also focuses on the complex use of intertextuality in Findley's work, and continues her almost unique tendency among his critics to accord his short stories weight among discussions of his novels. She further points to his plays and his concept of witnessing as areas for future analysis.

The other three essays are engaged to varying extents in defending their authors from critical judgements or the lack thereof. Dallas Harrison discusses the narrative complexity of Sandra Birdsell's works, and analyses their non-linearity: "The discourses are retrograde: the stories loop along as they curve around." She points to the "puzzling" lack of full-length studies, and takes issue with the only two academic articles, one for identifying Birdsell as a Mennonite writer, and the other for reading her as a feminist. Harrison is at pains to support Birdsell's own denial that she writes with a "feminist agenda," but since she does not clarify what this might be, the essay remains vague and defensive on this point. Lawrence Mathews writes vigorously about David Adams Richards, defending him from critics who read his work through the "myth of natural genius overcoming the odds to flourish in an unpromising environment (that is, not Toronto) while retaining nourishing contact with its roots." He debunks some of the more egregious pronouncements, noting the double bind of such critical biases:

"while considering his work as that of a Canadian regionalist invites one sort of condescension, considering it as that of a writer aspiring to the condition of Faulkner dooms it to another sort." Fortunately, Lawrence devotes the second part of his essay to a penetrating analysis of Richards' style, giving him the interested attention he deserves, and pointing out some serious flaws as well as developments in his style. Don Murray's essay on W.P. Kinsella notes the lack of serious critical studies, but touches only briefly on the charges of appropriation of voice and stereotyping in Kinsella's Hobbema Indian tales, before moving on to discuss his baseball stories with "Another area where Kinsella is clearly at home. . . ." This essay is frustrating at times because Murray discusses many stories briefly but few in depth; perhaps a more extended discussion of representative stories would have given greater scope.

Diana Brydon's *Writing on Trial: Timothy Findley's Famous Last Words* is an excellent contribution to the growing body of criticism on this novel. Her thought-provoking discussion extends from a comprehensive survey of the existing criticism to argue that the book is a "stage on which we may reenact, with the characters, both the fascination and the horror of fascism in order to understand more clearly the choices facing us today." Writing is on trial, and words themselves are the heroes of this text: "in it, every human is necessarily flawed, but human values may prevail through attention to the language in which they take shape."

Brydon's reading responds to the metaphor of a trial, ending by placing the novel itself on trial by examining its complex use of intertexts. Hugh Selwyn Mauberley, fascist collaborator, writes his final novel, a testimonial that both exposes and mythologizes fascist icons such as the Duke and Duchess of Windsor, and which is judged by the internal readers, Freyberg

and Quinn, as well as by external readers. But Mauberley's testament is slippery; while seeming to reveal Nazi secrets, he says nothing specific about crucial facts such as his own initial involvement and rise to power or of Nazi atrocities, focusing instead on the Penelope Cabal: "we learn of Dachau through Freyberg and Quinn, not from Mauberley." Brydon takes her analysis of the complicity in Mauberley's narrative one step further, arguing persuasively for a crucial ambiguity where Findley "seems to invoke a fascist aesthetic in the novel specifically to counter it and to question its cultural authority (while not always remaining immune to what he finds fascinating in it)." Drawing on Sontag's definition of fascist aesthetics as involving "a conjunction of violence, eroticism, creativity and death" applicable to Mauberley's narrative and the text that contains it, Brydon points to Findley's parodic play on various intertextualities, "including the camp signs of fascist aesthetics." Using Hutcheon's analysis of parody as a post-modern technique complicitous with what it parodies, Brydon identifies similarities between fascism and postmodern techniques of problematizing the bases of certainty, of historical knowledge, and of standards of judgement. She also points out that "Findley seems less intellectually rigorous in his adherence to exposing contradictions and maintaining a sceptical stance. Ultimately he appears more of an old-fashioned moralist employing contemporary postmodernist techniques to his own (sometimes ambiguous) ends."

Yet, despite its moral urgency, *Famous Last Words* "flirts" with fascism in problematical ways, partly because it psychologizes the attraction to fascism, while devoting "little attention to political, social, or philosophical explanations of the fascist success in attracting intellectuals to its cause." The novel opposes a universalized fascism with "a universal notion of the human," and

resistance is limited to individual acts and “symbolic gestures” which fail to produce material change: “neither Mauberley nor Findley seems capable of imagining a community-based form of resistance,” except a “communally shared reading [which] may begin to clear a space for dialogue.” The foregrounding of the importance of reading as a collective activity redeems the novel, in Brydon’s view, in that the complex and complicit text engenders further discussion. Her own words on this book will not be the last, but they are a high point in the criticism on it to date.

Barbara Pell’s *A Portrait of the Artist: Ernest Buckler’s The Mountain and the Valley* is partly a defense of the novel against the dominant critical readings that simplify the text either as an autobiographical portrait of the artist heroically struggling against cultural isolation and repression, or as an ironic *Künstlerroman*, a portrait of the failed artist. Pell argues for a more balanced reading of this “subtle, complex novel in which the protagonist, most often the centre of consciousness, engages the reader’s admiration and sympathy from the beginning,” which at the same time recognises that “Buckler has achieved an ironic objectivity toward his semi-autobiographical artist that . . . reveals David’s self delusion and leads the reader to an increasingly critical judgement of his failures.” The body is a close reading organised in sections titled after the novel’s major symbols. She concludes with a brief discussion of Buckler’s “overwrought and intense” style, which is not always clearly distinguished from David’s consciousness, blurring the “ironic parody of David’s mind”: “Therefore, Buckler’s tortuous prose demonstrates the failure not just of his artist but at times of his *art*.” This section of the reading could have been expanded, especially as Pell relies heavily on stylistic analyses by other critics here. It would also have been valuable to have seen

the novel situated in the light of recent discussions of regionalism in Canadian writing. In a lucid analysis of a Canadian classic, Pell makes a strong claim that *The Mountain and the Valley* “is worth our attention.”

Specificity, Métissage

Greta M. K. McCormick Coger, ed.
New Perspectives on Margaret Laurence: Poetic Narrative, Multiculturalism, and Feminism
 Greenwood \$59.95

Mary Jean Green, Karen Gould, Micheline Rice-Maximin, Keith L. Walker, Jack A. Yeager, eds.

Postcolonial Subjects: Francophone Women Writers. U Minnesota P n.p.

Reviewed by Susan Knutson

In *The Post-Colonial Critic* (ed. Sarah Harasym; Routledge 1990), Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak argues that scholars must interrogate the conditions of their own disciplinary production; she explains that an “invisible” production may *wish* to be interpreted as “universal,” but in reality it will always be “contaminated” by the non-recognition of its own specificity. Spivak’s insight resonates uncannily throughout *New Perspectives on Margaret Laurence* and *Postcolonial Subjects*, her cautionary comments reappearing in the guise of theme, methodology, and literary biography, as critic after critic traces a writer’s struggle to articulate the terms, conditions and meanings of her literary production. In the end, Spivak does not allow us to forget the complexities of the academic institutions which have produced these two stimulating essay collections.

In *New Perspectives on Margaret Laurence*, American literary critic and founding President of the Margaret Laurence Society Greta M. K. McCormick Coger brings together eighteen essays, predominantly by American scholars, which address the range

of Laurence's work, from her 1954 translations of oral Somali poetry, in *A Tree for Poverty*, to her final memoir, *Dance on the Earth*, published posthumously in 1989. In the first two sections of this book, eight essays address language, theme, image and narrative structure in the Manawaka novels and *A Bird in the House*, and Neil Besner compares Laurence's fiction to that of John Irving. The third section, "Multiculturalism in Laurence," interprets Laurence's political thinking on questions of national identity, multiculturalism, and post-colonialism. The juxtaposition of her African and North American writings generates a compelling portrait of Laurence as a scholar who keenly appreciated the value of oral traditions around the world. The section on "Feminist Perspectives in Laurence" looks at Laurence's feminist (read, fully human) presentation of her women characters from a variety of perspectives. Rosalie Murphy Baum, for example, analyzes Laurence's Manawaka families in terms of Karen Horney's 1945 description of the "three basic patterns of neurotic behavior (*Our Inner Conflicts*)" all of which are richly represented in Laurence's fiction; she concludes that,

Hagar's discovery at the end of her life—that life's purpose is to rejoice—is ultimately Horney's definition of the goal of therapy—to create 'wholeheartedness: to be without pretense, to be emotionally sincere, to be able to put the whole of oneself into one's feelings, one's work, one's beliefs.' But since it is the neurotic character—especially the grand dame of them all, Hagar—who holds the attention of readers, we cannot help being grateful for such neuroses, at least in fiction if not in life.

The point here, it seems to me, is that Laurence's insightful representation of such neuroses in her fiction is a gift to readers who must deal with them in real life, where, of course, they are much less entertaining.

Postcolonial Subjects: Francophone Women Writers takes us into a more dangerous and heterogeneous world. A team of editors (Mary Jean Green, Karen Gould, Micheline Rice-Maximin, Keith L. Walker, Jack A. Yeager) and fourteen contributors (including Lori Saint-Martin and Christopher L. Miller) address the work of contemporary women writers from francophone communities outside of France, from Cameroon, Vietnam, Algeria, Québec, Haiti, Acadie and elsewhere. The writers—who include Antonine Maillet, Simone Schwarz-Bart, Marie-Claire Blais, Marie Laberge, Aminata Sow Fall, Anne Hébert, Myriam Warner-Vieyra, Véronique Tadjo, Maryse Condé, Madeleine Monette, Nicole Brossard, Monique LaRue, Kim Lefèvre, Marie Chauvet, Mariama Bâ, Werewere Liking, Assia Djedbar, Carol Massé, Niolé Houde, Louise Bouchard, and Monique Proulx—represent radically various realities, some so painful that they are difficult to address. Haitian writer Marie Chauvet, for example, is the author of *Amour Colère Folie*, a work which was found to be so shocking when it was published, in 1968, that the author was forced into exile in New York, while her husband bought up all the copies and concealed them for the next twelve years. "The text does not scandalize the foreign reader," Ronnie Scharfman writes, but "It does worse: it traumatizes ... in the depths of our being." Since this novel was rediscovered, in 1980, "it has become almost a cult object for Haitians of Marie Chauvet's class in exile in the United States.... Written in a pure French, 'le français de France,' by a bourgeoisie who denounces the conventional cowardice of the bourgeoisie, by a mulatto who deconstructs the racism of the mulattoes, by a Haitian who seeks to expose and subvert the oppressive regime under which she lives, by a woman who, as one of the rare female writers in her country, explores female eroticism on the one hand and its violent oppression on the

other, the trilogy demonstrates unusual psychological probity and political courage.”

Themes of women’s marginalization, silence, oppression, racism, exploitation, violence and struggle, are woven throughout the collection; yet another *métissage*, which, alongside “racial” and cultural blending, is theorized throughout, and most directly in the last essay of the book, Françoise Lionnet’s “Logiques Métisses,” which argues that francophone women writers “make visible and set off the processes of adaptation, appropriation, and contestation that govern the construction of identity in colonial and postcolonial contexts. These processes are the ground upon which contemporary global culture can begin to be understood, defined, and represented.” Indeed, the collection speaks clearly to the fact that we are all living in postcolonial contexts; that there is no “pure culture” but there is only *métissage*; and that this is true at every level of our global, cultural experience. And if this fact is made highly visible in the works of francophone women writers, it is not, perhaps, surprising that the collection poses the terms of its own deconstruction, in its specificity as a production of mostly American critics, writing in English, who have fixed their scholarly gaze on writers who will remain, for the most part, very much *other*.

Image and Text

Geoffrey Nunberg, ed.

The Future of the Book. U of California P
US\$14.95

Victor Burgin

In/Different Spaces: Place and Memory in Visual Culture. U of California P US\$17.95

Reviewed by Stephen Guy-Bray

The back cover of *The Future of the Book* informs us that Geoffrey Nunberg is a research scientist at the Xerox Palo Alto Research Center. This is at least potentially

a conflict of interest, as the book is about how new technologies and applications of technologies are transforming the way we acquire information. The other contributors to the volume may well have similar conflicts of interest, but as no information is given on the contributors it is impossible to say. The book, then, is like an exchange on the Internet: the information that circulates is stripped of its context and its material basis.

In fact, with a few exceptions, none of the contributors seems particularly interested in the social or material contexts of that most recent of Western luxury goods, the computer. Carla Hesse and James J. O’Donnell compare the advent of the electronic document to publishing in Revolutionary France and the introduction of movable type, respectively. These essays are interesting, but present these points as analogies only, rather than as a sustained argument. More useful, I think, are the more theoretical pieces, especially those by Nunberg (who is one of the few contributors who addresses some of the relevant social issues), Paul Duguid, and Luca Toschi, and Patrick Bazin’s speculations on what the new technology will mean to libraries and librarians.

Several of the contributors use one or both of two quotations: E. Annie Proulx’s inflammatory statement that “Nobody is going to sit down and read a novel on a twitchy little screen. Ever” and the comment from *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* that “Ceci tuera cela.” Jay David Bolter points out that some people already do read novels on computers (but then some people will do anything). Of all the contributors, only Umberto Eco is able to admit that books are both cheaper and more suitable for careful reading. Despite all their defensive statements about improvements in computer design and decreases in computer cost, the contributors are unable to hide the fact that computers are still vastly

more expensive and vastly less portable and convenient than books.

Given these apparently unpalatable facts, it appears to me that the problem is not with the future of the book but with the future of electronic media or, at least, with the future of electronic media in art or scholarship. George P. Landow lists things you can do only on the World Wide Web and Michael Joyce describes a MOO, but their examples might just as well have been chosen to support the contention that people who spend a lot of time working and playing on computers are nerds. Several of the contributors advise patience, apparently feeling that we will soon be seeing great things on the Web. This is fair enough, but as Eco suggests, books too have their advantages and the idea that new things should drive out old things is not, after all, a particularly profound or helpful philosophy. Perhaps both "ceci" and "cela" will continue to thrive.

In/Different Spaces could be taken to indicate that the debate over how people will do their reading is beside the point. In this book, Victor Burgin analyzes how we see things: ourselves, the places in which we live, history. Burgin points out that our contemporary ways of looking at things—channel surfing, browsing, flipping through texts—tend to detach images from their contexts and narratives and place them in an endlessly recirculating and loosely structured network. He compares this to the logic of dreams and the subconscious by drawing on Freud, Lacan, Rose, Kristeva, Mulvey, and others to make his points. Burgin is both an artist and an art theorist; he is also, as this demanding and rewarding book makes clear, an erudite scholar in a much more general sense.

The book begins with a look at contemporary theories of space (Henri Lefebvre's in particular). While Burgin sees space and time as interconnected because they constitute our identities, both are increasingly

porous and fragmented. Rather than being a grand historical narrative, in other words, our accounts of the external world are now just as symbolical and illogical as a dream. He uses Barthes (among others) to show how the city is increasingly like an image-repertoire and that the distinction between the inside (whether we mean the house or the body) and the outside is ceasing to make much sense.

In/Different Spaces is comprised of several essays with no cohesive argument uniting them, and there is a certain amount of repetition; quotations and comments from one essay turn up in others, usually in a changed context. This means that the book imitates the conditions it describes, so that in order to make sense of the book, we have to draw on our experience of reading the chaotic interplay of images in which we live. While some readers may feel that Burgin has taken a risk which has not worked out, I found that his strategy succeeded brilliantly. As the title suggests, Burgin is in some ways operating in a different space from the one in which most scholarly books operate.

The political implications of Burgin's theories are fascinating. That our lives are constituted spatially and temporally, Burgin suggests, has interesting consequences for identity politics if our experience of both space and time is itself increasingly fragmented. This is only one example, and many of Burgin's points have relevance to our understanding of contemporary politics and society. Burgin's breadth of knowledge and skill in close reading—of both image and text—make *In/Different Spaces* a book which should appeal to readers whatever their area of expertise. For me, Burgin's great virtue is that he shows us the place of reading and writing in our virtual culture.

History Comes Alive

Frank O'Keefe

If It Rains again Tomorrow, Can We Go Home?
Beach Holme \$6.95

Elaine Breault Hammond

The Secret under The Whirlpool Ragweed \$7.95

Marianne Brandis

Rebellion: A Novel of Upper Canada The
Porcupine's Quill \$16.95

Reviewed by J.R. Wytenbroek

A good children's book is enjoyable for children or young people to read, and has something to offer beyond simple enjoyment. A great children's book has something valuable to say to both children and adults, while entertaining both. *If It Rains Tomorrow, Can We Go Home?* is neither entertaining nor meaningful. The story is about a girl and her brother from Toronto staying in a run-down log cabin on her uncle's farm while their mother sorts herself out after her husband has left her. After a series of false starts, the girl, Sheila, makes friends with a cute boy and romance ensues. A book about twelve-year-olds spending their summer courting each other, with all the little misunderstandings that can occur, rapidly becomes tedious. The scene where Bucky almost gives Sheila her first kiss is ludicrous. Her overcoming of her fear of water, a fear acquired when she fell overboard a ferry and almost drowned, could have been interesting, but it happens too fast, and all because of her crush on Bucky. Her fear culminates unbelievably with her and Bucky's sister winning an inner tube race because they travel, without incident, through a stretch of violent white water made worse by an unusually high river. Added to the unbelievability of the plot is the emotional shallowness of the characters, who remain flat and uninteresting despite Sheila's apparent "growth" when she overcomes her fear of water. This novel is not worth the money.

The Secret under The Whirlpool by Elaine Hammond is a very different book. It is also about a watery adventure, undertaken by a lonely child from the city who is spending her summer in rural Prince Edward Island. Her attempts at friendship with her sullen neighbour, Marc, who has lost his legs in an auto accident, seem doomed to failure. Despite these similarities to the O'Keefe book, this story is captivating. While in a canoe, the two twelve-year-olds are capsized in a sudden and violent storm, and find themselves on Prince Edward Island in 1757, during the time when the British were forcibly evicting the French settlers from their lands. The children live for eighteen months with the Acadians before finding their way home just as the deportation begins. By that time, they have "experienced" a lot of history, and also learned a great deal from the families who seem to assume that they are their children, lost for some days in the forest. Although this scenario seems as unlikely as Sheila's miraculous recovery from her life-long terror of water, in fact it is not, because Marc and Maggie have a lot of trouble believing what is happening to them too, which immediately engages the reader. Yet the author presents the experience so logically, for the most part, that it rapidly becomes believable. There is the slight glitch of the two children finding themselves in the bodies of the lost children yet without their memories or knowledge of the time in which they live, but the strength of the rest of the story, and the strength of the characters, overcomes this one weakness in the plot.

While in the past, the self-pitying, self-indulgent Marc and the unloved Maggie learn lessons from the hard lives of the settlers that transform them, a transformation which they maintain when they return to the present time. Unlike the love-sick and shallow Sheila and Bucky of *If It Rains Tomorrow*, Maggie and Marc are developing,

engaging characters to whom the reader can relate, and whose lives the reader comes to care about. The novel is gripping from beginning to end and, aside from a few lapses in the writing style where the dialogue momentarily becomes somewhat stilted and artificial, it is a well-written book. It gives a fascinating glimpse into a sad chapter of Canadian history and a clear look at the harsh lives of the early homesteaders. *The Secret Under The Whirlpool* is a truly excellent book for early teens.

The third book, *Rebellion: A Novel of Upper Canada* by Marianne Brandis, is also a historical novel for teens. However, it does not have the “time travel” component of the Hammond book, but is set completely in the year of Mackenzie’s rebellion, 1837. Like *Secret*, it too is a well-written and well-researched book, revealing much of the lives of new immigrants first arriving in the new world, with all their hopes and dreams, and what happens when they are faced with the harsh reality of an “untamed” world. The story is well told from the point of view of Adam, a 14-year-old, forced to journey to Canada with his shiftless, uncaring uncle and loving aunt. Once in Canada, he tries to make a life for himself, proving to himself his own worth after having been “sold” to his uncle by his father’s new wife. But he is unwittingly caught up in the Mackenzie uprising, refusing to take sides and thereby providing an objective commentary on that moment in Canadian history when government control began to shift away from an autocratic government run only by the wealthy, to a more democratic form of government, where the common folk too could have a say.

The story is well-written, if a little dry in places. Sometimes the historical information overwhelms the narrative, but Adam’s character is strong and engaging enough that it carries the reader through. His soul-searching about his identity and his responsibility to his family, especially once

his uncle deserts his wife and children, is realistic. Also the reality of the life of a fourteen-year-old boy in those days, when boys of that age were expected to work to help support their families, is quite eye-opening. The descriptions of the young Toronto and the wilderness and villages around it is fascinating to any reader who has visited the modern-day city. Like *Secret*, *Rebellion* is a most worthwhile and enjoyable book for young readers, and one that should work well for teachers looking for a different approach to teaching Canadian history.

Graceful Clarities

P.K. Page

Hologram. Brick \$11.95

Reviewed by Kevin McNeilly

The poet asserts in an explanatory foreword that the fourteen lyrics of *Hologram* are tributes, “a way of paying homage to those poets whose work I fell in love with in my formative years.” Her project thus becomes retrospective, informed by a backward glance: these poems, however, are neither the nostalgic reminiscences nor the saccharine memorials we might expect (and even excuse) from a writer in late career taking stock of her position among mentors, peers and influences. The book constructs Page’s personal tradition, a constellation of empathetic voices, but it also refuses the mock deference of imitation or flattery, working instead through an active, formal engagement with the texts and textures of her beloved cohorts.

The form that Page uses—to sample, to embrace, or, in her own terms, to “marry” the work of her predecessors—is the *glosa*, a fairly strict genre she has provisionally recovered from the poets of the Spanish Renaissance; each contains four stanzas of ten lines (metrically various in Page’s practice, depending largely on the shape of the

source), the last line of each stanza borrowed sequentially from a quatrain lifted from another poem. The glosa is literally an interstitial poem, a hybrid written between the lines. One work knits through another, pulling at its fabric to open it up to a kind of proactive reading, as the poet writes herself through the page before her. Page's compositions reweave with words the lacunae she gingerly pries open in the original texts, fitting her own voice into other voices, inhabiting the margins, edges and in-betweens of a given passage, a given fragment of verse—glossing. Page melds with work from Elizabeth Bishop, Wallace Stevens, Dylan Thomas, George Seferis, Rainer Maria Rilke, Leonard Cohen, W. H. Auden, T. S. Eliot, Pablo Neruda, Sappho, D. H. Lawrence, George Woodcock, Robert Graves, and Mark Strand, a various and difficult field. Her writing is responsive, a form of attention; it pays tribute in intricate cross-stitch.

At issue throughout the book is the nature of sensation, and of making sense: she listens, not to replicate the verbal music of her sources, but to participate in a music's recreation in her own ear; distinctive stylists such as Thomas or Stevens are neither parroted nor subsumed, but remain in a tense and delicate interrelationship with Page's own voice; the unmistakable resonances of Thomas's "And Death Shall Have No Dominion," for instance, are set against Page's crafty, matter-of-fact ironies:

What is the hope for those who drown?
Pickled in brine? Stripped to the bone?
Who will they meet in deep sea lanes?

Page picks up the rhythm and the imagistic density of Thomas's original, but the tone modulates as her questions introduce a sceptical standoffishness into the Welsh poet's transcendent fury. What results is not a unified voice, but a tug-of-war, a debate which aims not to resolve itself but to be immersed in the conflictual dynamic

of articulation itself. (I am reminded of English composer Elizabeth Maconchy's definition of the string quartet as "impassioned argument": Page and Maconchy share a penchant for formal elegance and linear clarity.) Learning to disassemble and refashion her voice, what she calls in "Inebriate" a process of remembering "how to un-me myself," is for Page a verbal practice of healing, of positive, active self-remaking. What Page interrogates in this volume, in part, is the process of response, of coming to terms with the drift of another writer, of reading as a means of inquiry into the creative stuff of language, her own means of poetic saying.

Page not only listens, but she looks as well; in keeping with many of the obsessions that have informed her writing and her painting over the course of numerous books, the honing of visual acuity is at stake in all of these poems. The title of the book (and of the first glosa she composes) gestures at light-sculpture, holography: the Greek root *olografos* means "to write the whole," to represent a given object in its entirety. A hologram is the negative image of a holograph, and the image projected through it into space is ostensibly "pure" and immaterial representation. Page's poems work repeatedly, as she says in "Presences," to coalesce and form into "a whole," to return to a clarity (*claritas*, Latin: light) unimpeded by the opaque clumsiness even of words. The lyric, Jan Zwicky has argued (and Page thanks Zwicky for her "accurate eye and musical ear" at the close of the book), emerges from a longing for wordlessness, a desire to immerse oneself completely in the living rhythms of the planet, to touch the world. The poet, in the lines Page re-tools from Elizabeth Bishop, is relentlessly "looking for something, something, something," pushing the formal intelligence of verse toward the unruly matter of the world, of the *something* it wants to contain and to express. "In Memoriam,"

written through Auden's elegy for Yeats, laments a fictional monarch (a poet?), then gradually notes how the verbs and nouns from which he has composed himself "vanish," watching him become "a soundless country": wordless perhaps, but fully joined with, buried in, the earth with which he desired to commune, all of his mirrors and reflections, his representations, having been covered over, left to their own abysses. Mirrors are allegories of representation, allegories of the making of correspondences, of the duplicities and masks of reading. But the "images" in this poem, as they work toward the limits of representation itself, burn through the mirror of language (as she says in "The End") to become "wordless, without music, without sound."

But if Page's lyric sensibility seeks the open void of illumination, to transcend the limits of the word and to see the world whole and unmediated, it also loves language, and cannot let go; its poignancy, its loveliness, in fact depends on a renewed effort to verbalize the unsayable, what the Lithuanian-French philosopher Emmanuel Levinas has called the *se dédire*, the self-unsaying of language itself, or what his contemporary Maurice Blanchot refers to as the "outside" of poetry. Page echoes Blanchot in "Exile," a poem written through and for George Woodcock, when she describes "memory," the seat of all representations, as

a fiction writer offering alternate versions of what you had once imagined written in stone:
 the immutable facts of your life. But now you question
 which of them are true, and truth itself that once appeared an end to be sought and found
 becomes elusive, seems to assume disguises,
 is finally and, heart-breakingly, diminished to a dim discoloured shot. . . .

The looking-glass of language turns back on itself, and the possibility of disclosing

"truth" mutates into endless reflection, a tenuous aestheticism which can, tellingly, only ever even "seem" to assume its disguises, its own seeming. This reflex embodies, verbally, what Blanchot terms the "exile" of the poet, and it is the apparent senselessness of this inward turn that Page finds heartbreaking, as she acknowledges her inability to make direct contact with the outside world, the "immutable facts" a lyric poet craves to touch.

Page nonetheless affirms the capacity of language for opening, and the power of the aesthetic to reshape the sensibility (the voice, the verbal textures of consciousness) in an ongoing effort to "love" both world and word; in her Neruda variation, she expands the Chilean poet's praise of ironing to include all formal labour, all art:

It has to be made bright, the skin of this planet
 till it shines in the sun like gold leaf.
 . . .
 And, newly in love,
 we must draw it and paint it
 our pencils and brushes and loving caresses
smoothing the holy surfaces.

Page's composition here is not an overwriting of the world but a recognition and celebration of the *τέχνη* that inheres in *ποίησις*, the striving for interrelationship, the holiness that Blanchot (through Heidegger) calls the sacredness of poetic work: its capacity for othering itself, for illumination, "shining," in the deliberate smoothing caress of what as representation it can never *be*, of the "something" that remains just beyond its wordy grasp. The simplest object, in this sense, becomes a renewed source of wonder and intricacy, as the verbal energies of Page's "work" undo and rethink the limits of thought, and affirm that process of remaking as an essential imperative, the "must" and "has to" in the excerpt above, of the poetic; voice and self come to consist in the in-betweens of utterance and thing:

"I am become / as intricate and simple as a cell / and all my work goes well."

That sense of betweenness points us to another important feature of these poems; all work here is allusive, intertextual, but a few of the source texts remain problematic for another reason: they are translated. Rilke writes in German, Neruda in Spanish, Seferis in modern Greek and Sappho in fragmentary ancient Greek, but Page uses versions of their poems in English as her "originals." (She even acknowledges in her introduction that the Rilke poem belongs at least partially to Stephen Mitchell.) But rather than understand these "originals," and thus Page's reworkings, as derivative or second-rate, we can mark Page's texts as attempts to inhabit the indeterminate space of translation itself, what Walter Benjamin, in his famous essay on "The Task of the Translator," calls *Ursprache*, the language-ness of language as such. (Glosa derives from the Latin *glossa*, "word," from the Greek γλωσσα, *tongue*, as in *language*, Latin *lingua*, *tongue*, or French, *la langue*: an intricate intertextual web floating behind Page's lyrics.) As in-between poems, work which belongs neither to Page nor to her sources, consisting in no settled voice, these poems call into question the possibility of originality itself, and suggest instead that poetry, that formal language of any kind, is fluctuating, reactive, interlaced: not form but formation, not nominative but transitive, a process of clarifying, of composing in light (as "The End" puts it). This book, Page writes, "contains some—regrettably not all—of the many songs I heard when, falteringly, I was searching for my own voice." But that search, as this book testifies, can never complete itself; its mystery, its poetic value, inheres in the openness of that effort. *Hologram* is a brilliant book that calls into question carefully, gracefully, the nature and practice of writing, and responds with a lyric engagement of world, of text, of life.

Fictions de Québécoises

Gabrielle Pascal, dir.

Le roman québécois au féminin (1980-1995).

Triptyque s.p.

Compte rendu de Louise H. Forsyth

Le roman québécois au féminin (1980-1995), recueil de seize articles sur la fiction féminine ou féministe québécoise, aborde l'oeuvre d'une vingtaine d'écrivaines. Parmi ces articles il y en a qui offrent une étude réfléchie d'ouvrages innovateurs et signifiants, écrits au féminin. Plusieurs de ces ouvrages restent jusqu'ici peu étudiés. Quelques articles du recueil mettent en évidence de nouvelles thématiques et permettent d'apprécier les nouveaux départs formels chez certaines romancières québécoises.

Lucie Lequin interroge le lien entre l'exil et l'écriture dans *Les feux de l'exil* de Dominique Blondeau et *La mémoire de l'eau* de Ying Chen. Chez ces écrivaines immigrées, l'exil est multiforme. Il soulève des questions complexes de l'appartenance à un pays et de l'appropriation de soi. C'est par l'écriture qu'elles créent de nouvelles voix qui circulent dans la réalité, la mémoire, l'imaginaire, les structures et les codes. Elles posent "les mêmes questions sur l'identitaire, le mouvement, la territorialité et le hors lieu" et ouvrent par là de nouvelles voies vers l'avenir qui rejoignent celles de la majorité des écrivaines québécoises. La diversité de mémoires et d'expériences de ces romancières sert à enrichir et à élargir le territoire culturel québécois.

Patricia Smart met en application des notions théoriques sur l'identité et la genericité (*gender*) dans son étude du *Le sexe des étoiles* de Monique Proulx afin d'étudier la thématique des différences sexuelles, l'une des grandes thématiques de la période. La prise de conscience collective de l'éclatement des rôles sexuels est une nouvelle ouverture marquant le passage du singulier au pluriel dans toute notion

identitaire. Ce passage a été signalé discursivement à l'époque par l'emploi de *les femmes* au lieu de *la femme*. L'étude faite par Smart du protagoniste transsexuel et de sa fille aliénée dans une société conformiste met en évidence les nouveaux rapports qu'ont les femmes et les hommes dans la grisaille de la réalité quotidienne. En insistant sur la vigueur du langage de Proulx, Smart fait apprécier la riche ambiguïté de ses visées satiriques.

Lori Saint-Martin souligne pertinemment ce qui est dans *L'obéissance* un renouvellement radical chez Suzanne Jacob, romancière déjà bien connue. Ce renouvellement dans la matière et dans la forme pose la question de la violence insoutenable exercée par certaines femmes envers leurs enfants, surtout envers leurs filles. Il s'agit d'une violence inhérente au rôle dévolu par la collectivité aux mères, qui doivent dompter la révolte des enfants et leur imposer de solides interdits. Les filles sont obligées non seulement de subir cette violence mais aussi de finir à leur tour par l'imposer à leurs propres filles. Saint-Martin fait une excellente étude de l'éclatement des codes et des conventions génériques opéré par Jacob dans ce roman capital. L'étude de Gabrielle Frémont portant sur deux recueils de nouvelles d'Esther Croft jette elle aussi une fraîche perspective sur la problématique des rapports entre parents et enfants, surtout entre mères et filles.

D'autres articles dans ce recueil abordent des thématiques qui caractérisent dans les années 80 les fictions de femmes. Laura Neuville suggère que Madeleine Ouellette-Michalska et Francine Noël inventent une nouvelle façon d'écrire l'histoire basée sur la mémoire corporelle. Catherine Paul étudie chez Michèle Causse des procédés par lesquels elle "*lesbianise*" l'espace textuel et tisse ensemble de multiples voix. Maïr Verthuy analyse chez Régine Robin une politique autre, politique qui prend comme point de départ une commune humanité et

qui "offre une voie d'avenir non seulement au Québec, au Canada, mais aussi à toute autre société en cette veille du XXI siècle". D'autres articles étudient de nouvelles problématisations et de nouvelles représentations du désir des femmes.

Malgré la qualité de certains articles, j'ai trouvé ce recueil plus que décevant. Dans sa "Présentation", Gabrielle Pascal fait espérer que ce volume va rejoindre par sa portée critique la publication des Actes du colloque international organisé à l'Université d'Ottawa en 1978 et les deux volumes de *L'autre lecture* préparés en 1992 et 1994 par Lori Saint-Martin. Hélas, il n'en est rien. J'avoue même que je suis restée sérieusement sur ma faim une fois ma lecture terminée. Le titre, *Le roman québécois au féminin (1980-1995)*, laisse entendre que le volume traite de tout un corpus romanesque. Cependant, celles qui ont publié pendant cette époque des romans au féminin qui sont incontournable, sans qu'aucun doute soit possible à cet égard, n'y sont guère mentionnées. Le recueil ne répond pas à ce qui est promis par le titre. Pourquoi Pascal offre-t-elle un recueil de textes critiques portant ce titre qui inclut deux études d'un roman peu remarqué jusqu'ici, *Neige de mai* de Claire de Lamirande, et qui ne fait pas du tout entendre les voix créatrices et résonnantes de Louky Bersianik, Marie-Claire Blais, Nicole Brossard, Anne Dandurand, Anne Hébert, France Théoret, et Yolande Villemaire? Les romans, les fictions et les textes théoriques de ces écrivaines et d'autres encore ont profondément marqué la littérature québécoise des années 1980. Le recueil contient des articles sur Marie-Claire Blais et France Théoret qui passent complètement à côté des grands romans qu'elles ont écrits pendant la période en question. J'avoue en plus que je trouve troublant, dangereux même, l'article de Marie Desjardins sur l'"Actualité d'Anne Hébert". Desjardins explique l'oeuvre d'Anne

Hébert uniquement à la lumière d'une certaine version douteuse de la biographie de l'auteure et déforme ainsi de grave façon l'oeuvre publiée par Hébert depuis 80. Je me demande aussi si les romans de Gail Scott ne méritent pas au moins une mention dans le contexte du roman québécois au féminin. La justification du choix opéré par Pascal ne saurait être une question de privilégier une nouvelle génération d'écrivaines, puisque la majorité des romancières étudiées dans le recueil ne sont plus au début de leur carrière.

Qui plus est, le recueil n'offre ni bibliographie, ni index, ni notices biographiques, ni chronologie, ni survol historique. La grande majorité des notes à la fin de chaque article ne sont que des *Ibid.* Dans plusieurs cas, il n'y a même pas d'informations complètes sur les ouvrages à l'étude dans l'article. Sans renvois aux articles et aux livres critiques faits au Québec et ailleurs sur les romans en question et sur l'écriture au féminin, la plupart des articles de ce recueil créent malheureusement l'impression que chaque ouvrage de fiction féminin ou féministe existe hors de tout contexte socio-historique dans une sorte de territoire culturel vide, clos et intemporel. Les auteures de ces articles n'ont-elles pas lu d'autres romans québécois au féminin? N'ont-elles pas lu des textes critiques et théoriques sur l'écriture québécoise au féminin? Il n'y que Patricia Smart qui fait dans quelques paragraphes au début de son article un bon état présent et qui injecte ainsi dans la discussion les frontières de race, classe sociale, appartenance ethnique et différences sexuelles. Ces frontières étaient déterminantes dans l'écriture au féminin pendant la période en question.

Il va sans dire qu'on ne peut pas tout faire dans un seul volume et que chaque personne qui prépare un recueil d'articles sur un corpus donné va faire ses propres choix. Je suis néanmoins d'avis que les articles réunis dans ce volume n'offrent pas pour la période choisie une vue d'ensemble

adéquate du *roman québécois au féminin*. Pascal aurait mieux fait de choisir un titre plus modeste et approprié aux études faites. Par contre leurs intentions étaient de présenter des informations et des textes critiques sur le corpus indiqué dans le titre du recueil, elle aurait dû au moins revoir la liste des romancières dont l'oeuvre a marqué l'époque, inclure quelques-uns des instruments de travail mentionnés plus haut, et rédiger un texte introductoire où il s'agit du contexte littéraire, historique, théorique et politique du corpus en question.

La très courte "Présentation" de Pascal insiste surtout sur une thématique et ne permet absolument pas à la lectrice/au lecteur non-averti/e de situer les fictions discutées dans des champs plus larges. A certaines exceptions près déjà signalées, le volume a une tendance à privilégier des approches critiques thématiques, sans mettre suffisamment en évidence les innovations langagières et génériques prises par ces romancières. Cette approche thématique est évidente dès la *Table des matières*, où j'avais du mal à m'expliquer convenablement les principes sous-tendant la mise en sections. La position centrale accordée à l'article de Gilles Marcotte reste à mon avis complètement incompréhensible.

The Trials of Youth

Kerry Rauch

Alphabet Soup: A Novel for Young Adults. Borealis P n.p.

Margaret Taylor

Three Against Time. Orca \$7.95

Don Trembath

A Fly Named Alfred. Orca \$7.95

Reviewed by Gernot Wieland (with the help of Alexandra Wieland)

These three books have very little in common beyond being set in Canada and being written for and about young adults. Kerry Rauch follows the move of a young Nova

Scotia girl named Starla from Sydney to Vancouver, and her struggles to come to terms with her new environment. The title of the book refers to Starla's uncanny ability to (almost always) read the future in the letters of alphabet soup. Margaret Taylor takes her three young heroes away from their summer holiday and transports them back in time to the Barkerville fire in 1868. The frame of the story sees a young girl fall into an old mine shaft in chapter one, and being rescued from it in chapter 21 by the three boys who know of the mine shaft's existence because of their time travel. Finally, Don Trembath creates the figure of a young sleuth, Harper, who has to find out the identity of "Alfred," the writer of satirical pieces in the school newspaper. One of these essays has greatly offended a young buffoon who offers a reward to the person who can identify "Alfred." Upon threat of being turned into a "welding rod," Harper gets commissioned to find "Alfred," a task greatly complicated by the fact that Harper is, well, "Alfred."

All three books are set in Canada, although one would hardly guess it about *A Fly Named Alfred* and *Alphabet Soup*. *A Fly Named Alfred* could take place in any North American school. It does not really matter that "Emville, a town about thirty-five kilometers north of [Edmonton]" is not described, that no local features figure prominently, that we are left ignorant of tree-lined streets and/or flat prairie landscape: the characters are so well drawn, the story moves at such suspenseful speed that any lingering over landscapes or cityscapes would probably be considered disruptive. *Alphabet Soup*, however, has no such excuse. It seems inconceivable that the uprooted Nova Scotian would not react to Vancouver's sea- and mountainscape. Whether she is gradually won over by its natural beauty, or resents its lure, it cannot be ignored. And where in Vancouver does Starla end up? Is it in trendy Kitsilano, in working class East Vancouver, or in snobby

Kerrisdale? All three could be used to good effect to emphasize Starla's feelings of initial alienation and gradual acceptance, but Kerry Rauch ignores the potential of setting. In the end it would not matter much whether Starla moved to Toronto, Winnipeg, or Saskatoon.

Three Against Time, in contrast, gives an excellent sense of setting. The streams, where the boys fish and pan for gold, the ruined cottage, Barkerville, the bush, even the differences between the 1868 and 1995 landscapes—all are skilfully and concisely sketched. As befits a Canadian novel, the three young heroes also encounter a bear, and thus even the fauna contributes to a solid Canadian setting. While Taylor is successful in creating a physical setting, her device of a double temporal setting is not quite as well handled. When the first of the three brothers disappears in time, the two remaining brothers are worried, but when they are all back in 1868, it does not seem to cause them much anxiety. The 1868 adult, at whose cottage they stay, shows no interest in trying to find out how he could send them back to their proper time but is quite concerned about getting them into proper period clothes. No doubt suspension of disbelief is implicit in time travel, but that should not allow the writer to suspend psychological verisimilitude.

Stylistically, *A Fly Named Alfred* is the easiest book to read. The book is incredibly fast-paced; the dialogues are snappy; a dry sense of humour pervades everything. If Harper doesn't find "Alfred," he'll be turned into a "welding rod," and if he does identify him, he'll also be turned into a "welding rod." He decides to fight the irony of life with irony of expression. Of the three books, this one is definitely the best.

The strength of *Three Against Time's* lies in the Barkerville episode. The frame of the young girl falling into the abandoned mine shaft does not contribute much to the actual story; we have almost forgotten her

by the time our heroes return from their time travel. If Taylor's primary purpose was to make history immediate for young readers, she could have achieved that goal better by omitting the frame.

Alphabet Soup is the weakest of the three novels. While its primary purpose of chronicling Starla's gradual acceptance of and by her new environment is laudable, it buries the main story by heaping on top of it an incipient romance, several heartbreaks, clairvoyance, prejudice against young people, racial prejudice, and the contents of an Ethnic Diversity class. At times, the novel sounds preachy, which is not exactly the right tone to reach young adults.

Between the Images

Arthur J. Ray

I Have Lived Here Since the World Began: An Illustrated History of Canada's Native People. Key Porter \$45.00

Reviewed by Peter Geller

This new work by Arthur J. Ray is largely successful in its attempt to present a readable history of Canada's Native Peoples. Building on several decades of new scholarship on Native history—which Ray has made substantial contributions to—I *Have Lived Here Since the World Began* reflects its author's academic interests in the Native past, as well as a sense of the political implications of his task. In fact, as Ray tells us in his "Preface," the origins of this book came while he was acting as an expert witness during the now infamous *Delgamuukw* trial, in which B.C. Supreme Court Chief Justice Allan McEachern based his assessment of the Gitksan and Wet'suwet'en people on outmoded historical views of "primitive" societies while dismissing Native oral traditions as evidence.

Part of Ray's task, then, is to present the Aboriginal past in a way which foregrounds the roles of Native peoples as actors in the

unfolding historical drama. Taking an extremely complex and diverse subject, Ray manages to bring order to the material, all the while conveying a respect for and deep interest in the peoples and societies he writes about. While Ray never strays from the traditional historian's role of teller and interpreter of the story, he does allow his narrative's subjects a space within his recounting of the Aboriginal past. Each of the twenty chapters begin with a passage attributed to a Native speaker; the opening chapter, "The Land as History Book," briefly engages with questions of historical interpretation in addition to presenting the standard recounting of pre-contact societies according to the anthropological "culture area" paradigm; and "Legends of the First Encounters" draws on recorded oral traditions to present Aboriginal perspectives on the contact experience in northern North America.

For the most part however, Ray organizes his account around the economic, and secondarily, the political history of Canada's Native peoples. This has the advantage of allowing Ray to contradict the stereotype of the Indian as victim, as he portrays Aboriginal peoples in a variety of economic roles that change over time and place. The reader is introduced to the consumer and trading practices of Native fur traders, from the earliest contact experiences to the westward advance in the eighteenth century to the modern industrial fur trade in the subarctic. Also highlighted are the pursuits of Aboriginal agriculturalists and fishers (particularly on the Pacific Coast). On the political front the changing fortunes of Native nations during the colonial era in the western interior and on the Atlantic coast are recounted, while the two concluding chapters cover the stories of Native political organization and recent land claims disputes and settlements. A major theme of the book, then, is the continuing struggle of Native Peoples to maintain their

livelihood and economic base in the aftermath of non-Native settlement and population growth and the accompanying imposition of government policies regulating Native peoples.

All this of course, comes across in Ray's written text. In which ways, then, is this an illustrated history? The text is accompanied throughout by numerous images of paintings, maps and photographs, including four sections of full colour reproductions. Although they clearly add another dimension to the book, allowing the reader to further "see" into the varied history of Native Peoples, there is virtually no attempt to contextualize or interpret the images presented. The final section of twelve examples of contemporary art presents an intriguing counterpoint to Ray's discussion of recent political developments, as these artworks display a sense of frustration but also the creative vitality of Aboriginal artistic expression, blending the "traditional" and "modern" into new forms and images. Given that at the top of Ray's agenda is the debunking of historical myths about Native peoples, an attention to the visual elements of this history could prove illuminating. In a sense, this absence is part of Ray's emphasis on the material aspects of the Native past. While this strategy serves an important purpose in lending a sense of coherence to the book's narrative, it is also proof of further stories still to be told and seen.

Past and Present

James Reaney

The Box Social and Other Stories. The Porcupine's Quill \$12.95

Hugh Hood

Dead Men's Watches. Anansi \$25.95

Reviewed by Bryan N.S. Gooch

In many ways Reaney's *The Box Social* . . . and Hugh Hood's *Dead Men's Watches* (the tenth volume in his New Age series) deal

with events and lives past, with suggestions and moments of mortality, set within a largely central Canadian context. If such a regional locus is to be expected from both writers (hardly surprising given their usual contextual predilections), that is far from problematic, both because any good writer ought to have some sense of home area, to look at in a familiar way and from which to see the world, and because both Reaney and Hood offer such universal human issues within their narratives. In the latter sense, both books are, then, also about the present. Hood's new novel and Reaney's nine older stories (from the 1940s and 1950s, now gathered together here) are quite different books both in structure and in voice, yet both challenge and demand much of the reader—to meet each work with the same energy and courage evidently displayed by its writer. These are not comfortable tales for a hammocky escape—without the ubiquitous cellular—on a sunny day, but despite their toughness in many respects, as they offer portraits of elements in our national/human fabric, they are comforting, for what also link them are concerns with imagination (and the way it works), with fear, and, directly and indirectly, with love.

Reaney's stories are magical even if there are some real and scary elements in his more fantastical worlds. The pieces range from the chilling, grim revenge of young Sylvia (at the end of the brief title story), an immensely powerful argument for "no means no," to the triadic rural saga "The Ditch . . .," with its own set of rewards and punishments, to "The Bully," about the beastliness of a dominant school creep (does anyone remember what utter hell kids' lives could be turned into by one insatiably victimising nincompoop?), to a brush with Reaney's fabulous Donnellys in "Sleigh Bells." And as for "The Car"—that is sheer imaginative terror, grounded in local reality, about a vicious, larger-than-life vehicle

specialising in nocturnal mugging—the ultimate in bumps in the night. And Reaney always keeps his reader's feet on the ground—the trees, the ruts of country lanes, the details one would expect of a careful painter are all there, and the effect is highly visual, as usual with Reaney—so it should be, for this is the narrative and the prose of a superb poetic sensibility. And as, for instance, in the dramas *Twelve Letters to a Small Town* and *Colours in the Dark*, when Reaney wants to take a whirl on his magic carpet, or, as he says in *Colours . . .*, to explore his “playbox,” one simply goes along for the ride—the logic of the narrative so often being that of the imaginative journey, of the linking/association of images themselves and not the coffee-induced sobriety of a morning's shopping list. These stories are about moments in the lives of people who are more than real enough and sometimes about their dreams (which have their own reality in the upside-down, quirky mix of daytime events and faces and their revelation of real hates, fears, and loves); they are also about love—even in its absence, when the reader, at least, can offer a plea for compassion and charity.

What, in part, binds the two sections of Hood's *Dead Men's Watches* together is not just the death of two men, each an escapee of sorts, and the acquisition, by the central character, Matthew Goderich, of the wrist-watches of each one of them—time passes, figuratively and literally, seemingly faster or slower (as Shakespeare also notes in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*), depending on how one sees events before one, and the watches are but indicators of progress through life, each a *memento* and, indeed *memento mori*. No, the real glue in this book is the idea of love, unstinting and without demand or material attachment. It is here that Hood touches the human soul and reminds the reader of the gifts of understanding and compassion, of the notion that love freely offered can overwhelm and

outlast the shreds of mortality draped about one in the everyday world. In the first part, which begins by recording responses to the death of Matthew's mother, Hood focuses—largely through Matthew's eyes—on the last period in the life of his Uncle Philip, who escapes (quite literally, he disappears) the confines of Toronto to revisit and to die in the north at Moose Factory; yet some of the story is told reflectively through the quiet, melodic words of his Cree widow Jeanne Three Streams, a woman of sensitivity and understanding, a native of the Moose River area. The differentiation of voices is masterly. Quite apart from the elegant blending of narratives which comprise the Goderich fabric and the concept of love which swirls so often near the surface of this poignant set of tales within tales, in which inner and outer worlds compete for a reader's attention with compelling subtlety, Hood manages to convey a vision of northern space, of that remarkable land which lies just over the Laurentian rim (a saurian hump, Ned Pratt would tell us), through which rivers all drain toward the Arctic, and to which access is, at best, constrained, though made possible by the Ontario Northland railway (Matthew's method of getting to Jeanne and his uncle's grave) and various airlines. The description of that journey, and of a day's excursion down the Moose River by boat, are pure magic, a splendid reminder of that huge heritage which lies at one's back and which ought to be explored, at least out of interest and by way of restoring one's sense of national balance and space. Beautifully paced and markedly detailed (like Reaney, Hood can be a very visual writer), this is good stuff even without the narrative. Taken together? This part of the book can make one late for dinner, a date—anything. Can one almost forget time in the north? One can try, though even Matthew's visit is carefully scheduled—the gift of Philip's watch is discovered on the way

back, as if to strengthen the point. And the second part? Adam Sinclair (mentioned in part one), old friend, actor, and TV idol, moves from the space of screen and North American popular adulation to the confines of Matthew's house, there to hide from the world and, in time, to die of AIDS. Like Uncle Philip, who escapes to the comforting space of the north, Adam finds solace and help not in his estranged wife or in his curious fans (fed, hungered, and re-fed with hints, gossip, and guesses by a marauding pack of media types, hanging about Matthew's front door, whose remorseless, shameless manner of questioning of anyone going in or out resembles the feeding frenzy of starved piranhas). Just as Matthew and his helping team (family and others) are challenged by the fact and the problems of the disease (and the insatiable reporters), especially as HIV moves to fully apparent AIDS, so is the reader. Hood accepts—head on—a particularly difficult task and deals with it—clinical debilitation and terminal consequences—step by step, and does so brilliantly. This, too, is a compelling if not an easy read. Uncle Philip's death occurs at a distance; now the reader has a lingering, painful death close at hand and is forced to examine personal reactions not just to death but to the disease itself. To put the question simply: is one so horrified by the malady, so aware of and concerned with the usual means of transmission, that compassion is constrained? Matthew, to his credit, demonstrates an unconditional love and support for Adam, though clearly he is not a supporter of the manner of behaviour which may have brought about the latter's demise. There is no sense of "I understand because I may be the next to get *that*," and herein lies a demonstration of the strength of Matthew's charity. Adam's days are ticked out by his large Mickey Mouse watch, Mickey's hands moving (faster or slower?) to pat suggestively an unretreating

Minnie. Even that great comic figure of escape from reality cannot stop the spin of the world—"getting off is not on," said one wag—and his slow representation of the promise of passion to come ironically measures out the last of Adam's little span, and, in the end, the watch—with the memory of love—is Matthew's reward. This second part of *Dead Men's Watches* will probably upset a few readers, but that will not be Hood's fault. Difficult, absorbing, brilliant—this second part is not a comfortable read, but it is one for this era, and the next.

Like Reaney's *The Box Social* . . . (vintage Reaney, in the best of several senses), Hood's *Dead Men's Watches* also brings past and present together in a kind of tapestry—a series of linked stories/portraits with narrative import—which asks the reader to examine values, beliefs, ties with family and friends, and even the conception/notion of this country. To know oneself is invaluable, these books would argue, though neither would condone self-absorption. As for the past and present, one is, inevitably, on the edge, moving backwards and forwards a little between the two, and as for escapes, at best, they involve new discoveries and sometimes, perhaps even better, great re-discoveries.

Dreaming of Sport: Memories and Cartoons

David Adams Richards

Hockey Dreams: Memories of a Man Who Couldn't Play. Doubleday \$27.95

Paul Quarrington

Home Game. Vintage Canada \$15.95

Reviewed by Andrew Bartlett

Readers of David Adams Richards' fiction will not be disappointed by *Hockey Dreams*. This work conveys the passion for hockey that Richards shared with other young devotees in his native Newcastle of the early 1960s: "Certain hopes you have as a child

keep you one forever." The youngsters dream they will make the NHL; they dream the NHL will open a franchise in Newcastle. The memories come interlaced with polemics against those who despise hockey, laments at our nation's neglect of the game, and reflections on its Americanization.

Richards remembers the "real" people here with the same fierce precision he always gives to his fictional characters. At the center is Stafford Foley: "that he was growing blind, and wiped his eyes with a handkerchief in order to see who was on a breakaway, did not deter him. That I had only use of one arm and couldn't skate—especially backwards—did not deter me either, in my dreams." Stafford remains as dogged in his dream to make the Peewee team as the young Richards does despite his bad arm. The Stafford episodes are terribly tragicomic.

When kids were coming down the ice on a breakaway, Stafford would haul out his handkerchief to wipe his eyes, stuff his handkerchief in his hockey pants and rush bravely toward them. . . .

"Don't touch him he'll go into a COMA," was the line shouted in unison by his older sisters, as they stood about the edges of the rink, dressed in their convent uniforms, all wearing button-up blouses and huge crosses.

A sleepwalker, Stafford shows up to play road hockey one February night while "sound asleep;" he keeps his promise to boo the school play in splendid iconoclasm. Although the strategy he and the young Richards use as peewee defencemen seems to consist of standing immobile on the blue line, Stafford saves a goal in spectacular fashion by simply being in the way. Episodes like Neddy Brown's rescue of Stafford and Michael on the river, the game between the local Bantam team and a Boston team that ends with a hilariously underthought penalty shot, and Michael's

evasion of the Griffin boys gang have all the power of Richard's fictional prose.

Richards' love of hockey—"to explain hockey as being part of the natural world of my youth, and therefore essential to understanding a love of my country, seemed slightly pretentious. Still does"—is illuminated by the comments worked into a lyrical description of one of their games on the Mirimachi river, a game played on a rink boarded with railway ties, the nets made of fish twine and the sticks "broken and taped."

Yet as always and quite suddenly, for Tobias and Michael, there was, because of hockey, no more *real* cold or pain, or terrified nights alone. There was no more shame. They were free.

And this is what the game was about for Ginette, Michael, Tobias, Stafford and me.

I don't think any of us had ever been free before.

We just held them that was all. It was always about our net . . .

Some might find this sentimental, but the passage is typical in its disciplined conjunction of dream and reality: the play's being "always about our net" bumps the repetitious being "free" against the boards, against the unembarassing truth that Darren and Paul are hard to beat. Richards' voice remains paradoxically self-deprecating and opinionated at once. He peppers his enthusiasm with sly confessions: "I have once again crossed the line from rational human being to something else;" "It has always been part of my nature. Half pathologically shy, and half flippant. Even when I was little;" "I was a psychological menace to everyone in Canada when Canada was playing international hockey." The assertions on the political culture of hockey are suggestive provocations rather than sternly researched conclusions. He does venture generalizations about "Canadians": that pretending the NHL is still "ours" is "always one way to get along;" that our

being "too polite" has "helped sideline our hockey history;" that we resemble "pathological delusionists." The elliptical text makes many casual allusions to players, teams, even specific plays in memorable games; the absence of supporting explanation confirms that *Hockey Dreams* is aimed primarily at hockey fans. But everyone interested in Richards' work should read this fine book, if only to witness what one of our best novelists can do in the form of the personal memoir.

Paul Quarrington's *Home Game*, originally published in 1983, aims to be a good-natured tall tale of a bizarre baseball game. Dr. Sinister is the ringleader of a freak show that has settled in smalltown Michigan in the early years of this century. His troupe includes Violet and Daisy Hisslop, Siamese twins joined only at the hip who must have sex before they sleep; Angus McCallister, a giant, and Major Mite, a belligerent foul-mouthed midget; David Goliath, the tall man; Ally, the alligator man of green skin; a fat lady, a wild man, and a two-headed dog. The House of Jonah, a religious sect headed by Tekel Ambrose, the greatest ballplayer who has ever lived, wants the freaks to remove their home from the town's outskirts; a "home" game will thus decide the question. Nathanael "Crybaby" Isbister, the second greatest player ever, now fallen on black days, stumbles into the freaks' camp and befriends and coaches them.

The quality of this fiction is cartoon-like. Readers may find Quarrington's humour juvenile, adolescent. The text assumes getting drunk, having hangovers, and using foul language are themselves funny. Here, the giant Angus and Major Mite play a joke on one of the book's many nameless "whores"; Angus has informed her his "peter" is unlike that of other men.

"Big, huh?" the girl would ask with a curious mixture of fear and delight.

"Ah no, it's no' that. It's no' so big, really. It's jest that . . . ah, hell, I'll show

ye." And Angus would go to work on his fly-buttons. The girl would watch, spell-bound.

Then Major Mite would poke his head out of Angus's pants with a broad grin and a "Hi!"

Quarrington employs a metafictional frame: a grandfather is forcing his unhappy grandson-typist to write this book. One dispute touches the question of the tale's difference from "great literature." We are given the grandfather's misunderstanding of "realism": "That's what Willy Wodon writes! He had this one part where the girl gets gang-banged by one hundred and three dockworkers."

After being treated to the sorry or sordid history of each freak, the reader senses Quarrington's narrative energy picking up at the game itself. But I must confess (granting that tastes in humour are notoriously subjective), not once did I laugh or smile at *Home Game*. I did laugh aloud reading *Hockey Dreams*.

Through This Glass Eye

Jay Ruzesky, ed.

P.K. Page: A Special Issue. The Malahat Review \$10.00.

Reviewed by Diane Stiles

Nothing is what it seems.
Through this glass eye
each single thing is other—
all-ways joined
to every other thing.
Familiar here is foreign
fresh and fair
as never-seen-before.
("Kaleidoscope," P.K. Page)

P.K. Page is fascinated by kaleidoscopes, and to me the special issue of *The Malahat Review* celebrating her eightieth birthday seems to look at her life and works as if through what she calls "this magic lens." It shifts and recombines subject matter through various genres including biography,

criticism, original works by Page herself, and tributes from other poets.

The first perspective is Page's own, an account of her time in Australia from a work-in-progress based on her journals; the excerpts offer tantalizing glimpses into the sensibility of the visual artist about to come into her own, as in this description of Alice:

A funny flat little town, with squashed-on-the-head houses surrounded by mandarin and orange trees, now heavy with ripe fruit. And startling against the rusty wet earth, the red flower of the sturt pea as bright as neon. In the distance, but shrouded in mist and so almost colourless, the rocky ranges so brilliantly mauve and blue and red and orange that have been made famous by the watercolours of Namatjiri and his tribal brothers.

A slight twist of what Page calls the "conduit optical" and her life is revealed anew through Sandra Djwa's "A Biographical Interview," filled with invaluable insights into her poetry. In it Page clarifies, for example, the somewhat confusing content of such uncharacteristically autobiographical poems as "Cullen," "The First Part," and "Melanie's Nite Book," separating fact from fiction without "explaining away" the effects of these unusual poems. Djwa's questions are simultaneously succinct and evocative, eliciting a lively account of key events in Page's artistic development, such as the *Preview* group's initial response to her poetry, in Montreal, 1942:

They read my poems in total silence and passed them around to each other and nobody said anything at all. And I wished I was dead—I wished I was back in the Maritimes, not letting anybody know I wrote poetry. I didn't know why I was there. I was very unhappy. All of a sudden Frank [Scott] slapped his thigh with great good humour and said, "Bones. My God! Here's a girl who writes about bones—you can't write about bones anymore."

Other perspectives on Page's life include

Anne McDougall's "P.K. Irwin, The Painter," an account of her development as a visual artist beginning in the late fifties when she and her husband Arthur Irwin lived in Brazil. In Ann Pollock's "The White Glass III," drawn from a CBC *Ideas* interview, Page discusses the psychological and spiritual bases of her poetry:

There is a combination of things that affect what stays with me—a combination of the way the thought is expressed; the actual choice of words; their cadence; and the thing I am trying to . . . feel . . . my way towards. It is the poems that I feel are part of that journey of discovery that interest me the most. (Ellipses in original)

Two memoirs provide additional glimpses into Page's life and personality: "My Grandmother's Luggage" by her granddaughter Christine Irwin, and "Memories of Ottawa" by Jay MacPherson.

The criticism of Page's work includes Don Fisher's "Eastern Perspectives in the Work of P.K. Page," which focuses on the short story/stage play *Unless the Eye Catch Fire*, and Sarah Ellis' "Seeing the Sea: The Fairytales of P.K. Page." Rosemary Sullivan contributes an insightful article on Page's most recent poetry collection, *Hologram*, which is a set of four-stanza poems each based on a quatrain from one of Page's favorite poets, an adaptation of the Spanish *glosa*. Sullivan notes that most of the *glosas* are based on lines from male poets, and observes that "Page fills in an absence, offering the authoritative female voice in a dialogue with . . . the great modernists." The *glosa* based on the last four lines of Leonard Cohen's "I Have Not Lingered in European Monasteries" is "generous" to Cohen, says Sullivan, turning what Sullivan sees as his "irony" into a "pure celebration" of writing. The poem to Eliot, says Sullivan, is "a bold gesture" that "return[s] to his words the joy and enthusiasm that often seemed masked by a certain diffidence in his own

work." For Sullivan, the *Hologram* poems are Page "speak[ing] to the loved dead," "without sentimentality or pretentiousness," in order to reach "her own answers."

The *Review* contains a selection of original work by Page that reflects the range of her interests, including the fairy tale *The Sky Tree*, the third in a sequence beginning with *A Flask of Sea Water* (1989) and *The Goat That Flew* (1993). Particularly intriguing are the eight pages of reproductions of her drawings and paintings, including the almost primitive-style *Beach Scene* in felt pen and gouache, the impressionistic *Church Interior* in oil pastel, and the abstract *Dark Globe* in gold-leaf and mixed media. Nine new poems indicate the variety of style and content that characterizes her entire oeuvre. In the modified *terza rima* "The Castle," the structure of a personality is evoked both through the intricate and demanding form, and through a series of physical images: "balance is inner, centred in the keep." "Aurum" is more mystical, apparently describing a woman "gold-leafed" by love: "Sparks spin off from the whirr of her heart./ The shine of her mirror snatches at passing light." "Marmots" is a succinct narrative in which a friend decodes a strange dream, and comes to understand the source of its symbolism. "Hidden Room" is the most personal of the new poems, an expression of one of Page's recurring images, of a "deeply hidden" inner place, "mine and notmine:"

I am showing it to you
fearful you may not
guess its importance

that you will see only
a lumber room
a child's bolt hole

Will not know it is a prism
a magic square
the number nine.

Several people who wrote tributes to Page have borrowed from the concept of

Hologram, using forms which connect the writer's words with those of the poet being honoured. Sandy Shreve, John Barton and Elizabeth Brewster composed *glosas* on Page's work, while Jan Zwicky and Don McKay wrote three "relays" poetically connecting lines from Page to lines from Neruda, Rilke, and Wallace Stevens, all important influences on her. Donald Winkler, George Johnston, Al Purdy, Marilyn Bowering, and Constance Rooke pay tribute through poetry or prose poetry. Margaret Atwood plays on the "white double O, white nothing nothing" of Page's "The Snowman" to commemorate her 80th: "here is one/ surprized O topping another, and/ to complete it, an open-mouthed or whistling zero." In "The Great Tree," Michael Ondaatje celebrates the friendship in 14th-century China between a poet calligrapher and a painter who echo "each other's art:" a "vertical line of Chinese characters" answers the "one branch lifted by wind" in "the best plum-flower painting/ of any period." Ondaatje's poem is a powerful and moving finale in a volume intended, as editor Jay Ruzesky says, to "honour the source of writing." Through Ruzesky's kaleidoscopic vision of her life and works, P.K. Page emerges as "a kind of crystal that focuses [creative] energy."

Crime & Canadian Women

David Skene-Melvin, ed.

Investigating Women: Female Detectives by Canadian Writers. An Eclectic Sampler. Simon & Pierre \$22.99

Veronica Ross

The Anastasia Connection. Mercury \$15.95

Reviewed by Heta Pyrhonen

Investigating Women, an anthology compiled by David Skene-Melvin, is designed to demonstrate what the distinctly Canadian version of the popular figure of the female

detective looks like. The book consists of Skene-Melvin's historical survey of the field, starting from the mid-nineteenth century and extending up to the present day. The scholarship is meticulous and the bibliographical information useful; any student of Canadian crime fiction will find these data indispensable. The survey is followed by thirteen samples of mainly short stories by both male and female writers, for the criterion of choice is the gender of the detective, not that of the writer. Hence the aim of the collection is not so much showing how feminism and crime fiction interlace than illustrating the national flavor of the genre. The opening of the introduction makes interesting, although surely controversial claims about the Canadian instantiations of the genre. Skene-Melvin claims, for example, that "Canadian crime writing is more subtle, more psychological, more caring" than its American counterpart; that "when our villains are brought to justice, we want the government to do it"; that "we don't believe in privatizing justice"; and even that "our fiction reflects life." Such statements provoke the reader's curiosity about his proof for them; unfortunately, what follows is simply a listing of Canadian-born writers who have written about female investigators, brief autobiographical information, and short characterizations of their books. The Canadian aspect goes virtually unexplored, and, with writers such as Katherine V. Forrest who has lived most of her life in the United States and whose books are situated in Los Angeles, it is very difficult to perceive how her books would express this quality. Neither does a careful reading of the short stories themselves make this national focus any clearer. Although hinted at, another unexplored aspect is the link between the investigator's gender and feminism; now the reader only has the editor's occasional remarks about the "didactic feminism" that "spoils" this or that author's work to go by.

The anthologized stories are for the most part contemporary; some are original stories written expressly for this book. The quality of the writing varies greatly, from Josef Skvorecky's delightful, but definitely anti-feminist Eve Adams stories, to Katherine Forrest's, Medora Sale's and Margaret Haffner's well-crafted pieces, to rather dull examples. The various aspects associated with female, if not feminist, detectives are well represented, ranging from self-assertion, independence, compassion, and caring to such typical topics as incest, abuse, and the examination of the social network in which crimes take place. As samplers go, the book gives the reader a fair picture of the Canadian state of the art.

The Anastasia Connection by Veronica Ross goes well together with Skene-Melville's anthology, for it presents a female, although not a feminist, amateur detective, the cookbook and mystery writer Carolyn Archer, who accidentally stumbles on a murder. The case is possibly linked up with the fate of the enigmatic Anastasia, the daughter of Tsar Nicholas II, who allegedly survived the Bolshevik execution of her family. Carolyn Archer ponders whether the querulous owner of a local gardening nursery was murdered because he knew too much about Anastasia's fate and her family as well as the Romanovs' secret cache of money. The book belongs to the whodunit tradition represented, for example, by Josephine Tey's *The Daughter of Time* and Colin Dexter's *The Wench Is Dead*, which dramatizes the inevitable probing of the past that is typical of the detective story by reopening a historical "murder case." Its use of the historical material is ironical, however, as Ross employs the detours into the past for demonstrating the fascination with intrigue and plotting: the possible Anastasia connection feeds the characters' imaginations, breeding more or less improbable explanations. The protagonist's two writerly preoccupations, cooking and

murder, give the investigation its flavor, as the daily chores of running a household, disciplining a brand new puppy, helping relatives and friends move the plot forward, contributing to the solution. In this way, Ross manages to unite the mystery of Anna Anderson, the woman who claimed to be the Grand Duchess Anastasia, with the mysteries of everyday life. The result is an amusing and entertaining exploration of the generic motif of role playing: are the characters who they say they are or are they someone else? Most likely a Polish peasant woman, Anna Anderson's audacious role playing on a grand scale is made to reflect a general hiding behind masks. This link gives the smoothly written book a soberness, as the solution shows that what unites the grand royal sham with more ordinary deceptions is the shame characters feel for what they or those closest to them are.

Approaching Earth

Josef Skvorecky

The Bride of Texas Knopf \$32.00

Steven Heighton

On Earth As It Is Porcupine's Quill \$16.95

Review by Tamas Dobozy

Josef Skvorecky and Steven Heighton write different stories about the same Earth. Skvorecky, a long-time scholar of American literature in general and Hemingway in particular, works concise, plain sentences into a rambling, fragmented story about Czech soldiers in the American Civil War, while Heighton, often referred to (accurately or not) as a kind of contemporary "romantic," employs a highly poetic and lengthy style to tell (with the exception of the novella *Translations of April*) traditional narratives. What Skvorecky and Heighton do have in common is a sense of mystery at the heart of life, and by mystery I do not mean post-modern notions of the inexpressible, of something beyond the limits of

language as it is presently structured, but of an agency that eludes human knowing. For lack of a better term, both Skvorecky and Heighton are *spiritual* (but not religious) writers.

The Bride of Texas records the lives of several Czech characters before and after their immigration to America in the middle of the 19th century. United by their involvement in the "Lincoln Riflemen of Slavonic Origin," Skvorecky's characters work out their complex relationships to the past and their adoptive country against a backdrop of slavery, civil war and a rain of hot ash. One level of the novel deals with the Czech immigrants Cyril, his sister Lida, and Sargeant Kapsa, while another follows Lorraine Henderson Tracy (the true name of the popular novelist Laura Lee) as she struggles with her feelings for General Ambrose Everett Burnside, and with her vocation. The dilemmas of each character reflect the dilemmas of the age. Cyril struggles to find his lover, the slave Dinah, separated from him by the events of the war. Lida, forced to leave the boy she loved in Bohemia, attempts to advance herself socially through marriage. Kapsa, fleeing the murder of his commanding officer in the Hapsburg army, attempts to reconcile himself to a past forever lost. Lorraine tries to justify the compromise of her proto-feminist ideals to the demands of mass market publication. In the case of each, Skvorecky provides a corollary for the civil war. Cyril's situation invokes the crises of miscegenation, with all its attendant ramifications, political and cultural. Lida's story reflects the conflict between the idealist who has never allowed herself to love another, and the capitalist, who views romance strictly from a material perspective, and war as an opportunity for advancing herself (idealism and romance, Skvorecky tells us, abolition and economic dominance respectively, were two reasons the North engaged the South in war).

Kapsa, as the soldier who has fought for both the oppressors and the oppressed, recalls how different uniforms can turn countrymen into mortal enemies. Lorraine's account of self-censorship in light of Burnside's more wide-spread censorship of the media addresses the kind of compromises required by war-time (though her war is fought against an entirely different enemy).

Skvorecky's plot resolves itself in a series of tutelary coincidences that serve to inform the moral life of his characters and counter strictly political readings of the past. Apart from the sudden upsets of war, which his bumbling Czechs survive more by luck than skill, a series of coincidences indicate Skvorecky's attitude towards history. The most important of these are the many "accidents" that allow the "good" side, the union army, to win the war and put an end to slavery. Another is Lida discovering her childhood sweetheart dying in the Confederate infirmary, an experience that shatters her cynical composure. By similar coincidence, Kapsa learns the whereabouts of his former lover, Ursula, and through this meeting comes to terms with his longing for an idealized past in a country that cannot exist. Skvorecky's pattern of coincidence reminds us that history is as much accident as socio-economic inevitability; neither archival records, nor the study of social and moral agendas, nor the novel itself, can fully account for the pattern of human movement across the earth. Skvorecky's coincidences hint at a metaphysical agency (more benevolent than not) behind the historical process.

The blurb on the back of Steven Heighton's collection of short stories promises an "exploration" of "the interlocking worlds of the erotic and religious." The book delivers. Both the ending of the story "Downing's Fast" and *Translations of April* offer a recovery of love through death, a death often paired with the ocean and

drowning, common symbols of spiritual rebirth and fertility. However, nowhere does Heighton's prose give us a clear-cut indication of where the process of spiritual awakening takes the characters. Downing's last thought is "maybe," and the story ends with a crowd gathered around his corpse. Heighton plays it safe, offering spiritual rapture followed by a swift descent back to Earth; the fifth section of *Translations of April*, entitled "The Flower in the Face of God," follows the same pattern as the ending of "Downing's Fast": a sailor experiences an illumination which releases him from all physical needs except to tell at least one person of his experience before dying. Throughout the collection Heighton implies a transcendence through the transmission of story, of "the living word" (story absorbed and made part of life) as a form of solace to both teller and listener. The act of recounting forges a communion that survives time and offers an antidote to earthly desire: in *Translations of April* the "what if" of storytelling allows for the recovery of a lost lover. The book offers case studies in defense of the opening quotation from Chagall: "Everything may change in this demoralized world except the heart, human love, & our striving to know the divine."

On a technical level, both writers struggle with excess. Skvorecky seems to include every anecdote and historical fragment his research uncovered, to the point of exhaustion. The narrative fragmentation suggests that history is indeed unrecoverable in text, that the record contains gaps human evidence cannot account for; however, it also makes for a narrative so disintegrated that the book becomes first painful, then tiring, then impossible to read. Heighton suffers from excess at the level of the sentence (an exacting editor might have fine-tuned this writing to perfection), many of which are overly long and florid (two or three adjectives where one would

have been enough) to offer anything *except* that rapture in storytelling which occupies most of the collection.

Essential Intimacies

Meeka Walsh

The Garden of Earthly Intimacies. Porcupine's Quill \$16.95

Ann Copeland

Season of Apples. Goose Lane \$15.95

Ann Decter

Honour. Press Gang \$16.95

Reviewed by Lisa Salem-Wiseman

In the photograph which appears on the final page of *The Garden of Earthly Intimacies*, Meeka Walsh shares the frame with a dog, her hand holding the dog's face toward the camera, directly beneath her own. This photograph is an appropriate appendix to this collection of stories—Walsh's first book of fiction—as several of the stories take as their central theme an instinctive, earthly intimacy between women and dogs. The canine protagonist of "A Love Story"—the only Walsh story which, unfortunately, verges on that "cuteness" which she so resolutely avoids in the other "animal stories" in this volume—muses on the bond between women, dogs and the earth:

As he thought about it he'd always preferred women, the big ones or the girls, who didn't have the sharp, man's odour and who, while they didn't smell of milk, smelled of something warm that made him think of the fur on his mother's belly and of the pink skin where the fur was sparse and how, even though it was in a close space her belly smelled clear and open like the air over a field after rain.

This bond is most effectively explored in the remarkable "Choker," in which the intimacy between the narrator and her Great Dane is essential to the intimacy between

her and her husband, and in which this woman/dog relationship is privileged over the woman/man relationship. The former is a sensual bond, dependent on scent and touch, as she grows to know and "even like" the smell of the dog's saliva, in contrast with her observation that the odour and wetness which accompany the thrice-weekly washing of her husband's wool work-socks by hand are "just too personal, too close." While the disintegration of the narrator's marriage is accorded merely one terse sentence ("I left him, took the dog and moved out"), her relationship with her canine companion culminates in a touching admission made after the dog's death: "It's not the sort of thing you tell anyone, but later, sitting alone on my bed I slipped the dog's collar over my head and let it rest heavy on my chest, cold against my skin, a few tufts of hair still caught in its loops." This poignant, arresting image is typical of the stories in this collection, in which intimacy—between humans and animals, men and women—is often collapsed into one single evocative phrase or gesture.

In the title story, the image of the train—"focused and singular, like making love"—encapsulates the bond between three individuals travelling together through Germany: "On the move like that we were cheating time and all of us, unavailable to the world, were slippery fish, the sun flecking the colours on our skin, arcing in the light and then gone."

A compartment on a moving train paradoxically manages to both collapse and expand space, and traps people in a suspended intimacy in which friends and strangers alike are captive witnesses to each others' private "night sounds" and movements, yet are forbidden by an unspoken etiquette to speak of such intimacies in the light of morning. This story—one of the strongest in the collection—ends with an exquisite gesture which speaks eloquently yet succinctly of the beauty, complexity and

evanescence of human intimacy: the narrator steps into the bathtub recently used by one of her travelling companions, and revels in the traces of his presence—“fully embodied, palpable, shaped and weighty”—remaining in the room, “filled with his breath and heat.”

Walsh's stories are replete with such gestures. The narrator of “Choker,” reflecting on her father's actions following the death of her dog, says: “He brought me a five-pound bag of frozen jumbo shrimp, something exotic and special and unrelated to my grief. Sometimes my father's gestures were absolutely right.” As are those of all Meeka Walsh's characters, which, like the father's gift, manage to be startling and unexpected yet “absolutely right.” In “Sand,” a woman presses her body into the white sand on a Mexican beach, resulting in a shift in her perception of both herself and the world. In “As for the Chef,” a chef at a hotel woos a married guest through a series of exotic offerings, such as “three goose feathers bound together by a long, unbroken curl of orange peel,” toast “cut out in the shape of a dove, its feathers drawn in a soft white cheese,” and “violets made from butter icing pressed into the glass bottom of an emptied caviar jar.” These gifts, while always created from elements found in the kitchen, speak of enchantment and wonder, of secret offerings to a captive princess. Walsh's language speaks of both the earthly and the otherworldly, the mundane and the magical, and her characters' gestures, transcending the ordinary, and rendered in sensual, elegant prose, are fresh, subtle, and somehow perfect.

A character in one of the stories in Ann Copeland's “Season of Apples” makes the observation that “every generation is another country.” Borders and boundaries—between countries, between generations, between individuals, between realities—characterize many of the stories in this rather uneven collection. Among the

best is the poignant “Another Country,” in which Copeland uses the border between Canada and the United States as a metaphor for the failure of communication which separates parents from their children. The collection is framed by two stories which feature characters crossing borders to enter—albeit fleetingly—a world which transcends the ordinary, mundane concerns which characterize the world which they inhabit. In the first, “Mother Love,” Alma religiously listens to the Saturday afternoon opera broadcasts from the Met, in an attempt to maintain a connection to the potential career of her son, a struggling opera singer in New York City:

She was like a moth fluttering about the distant edges of a world of glamor, a world of passion and color far removed from the softer austerities of Oregon drizzle, benign mountains, and forests. On that great gold-curtained stage, oversized lovers sang of oversized loves. Enough to know it existed.

This story, narrated by Alma's husband Hamp, who prefers banjos and bluegrass to opera, is an affectionate, loving glimpse into the life of a mother who would do anything for her son. Copeland effectively captures the awkward mix of embarrassment and pride which Hamp feels for his “loveable fluffball” of a wife with her dyed hair and aqua velour hat. The world of opera represents the glamour and excitement which are missing from the lives of those who attend the local college's music series, and is replaced in the final story, “Season of Apples,” with the world of television. In this story, Leora May, who leads a predictable life, free of worry, mishap, or “glamour,” secretly tries out for and is chosen to appear in a commercial for “New Brunswick Apples,” and discovers, quite by accident, the honesty and value of her own unglamorous life, of which there is “time yet to savor many a juicy bite.”

When Copeland is at her best, as in

"Mother Love," "Another Country" and "Season of Apples," the comparisons with Alice Munro seem inevitable. The majority of her characters are "ordinary" people, who live "simple" yet profound lives in small towns and cities. She writes honestly and compassionately about human relationships, and the gulfs between individuals which render such relationships difficult at best. "About Billy," "Getting the Picture," "Parting" and "Crossing the Border" all deserve mention for their touching insight into the awkward negotiation of the bond between parents and children, and the gulf between the past and the present.

Unfortunately, weaker stories such as the gratuitously quirky "Why Eat Pot Roast When You Can Sing," the awkwardly predictable "Sin," and the mannered "I Only Teach Comp" fail to live up to the promise of these earlier stories.

After the elegant sensuality of Walsh's language, and the honest humanity of Copeland's characters, Ann Decter's second novel, *Honour*, is somewhat of a disappointment. Decter has pulled together a veritable shopping list of social issues, including but not limited to gay and lesbian rights, holocaust survival, sexual abuse, Zionism, domestic violence, early feminism, racism, poverty, single parenting, sexual freedom, anglophone/francophone relations, Native/non-Native relations, and midwifery. These are all powerful subjects for a work of fiction, but Decter's reluctance to narrow her focus results in a text that reminds one of a syllabus for a woman's studies course, rather than a work of imaginative fiction.

Decter's characters are practically interchangeable: Jane, completing her master's degree in "women's history" and writing the story of her mother's life; Marie, working in a food co-op and writing a series of poems entitled "The Freewomen's Chorale" while she applies to study midwifery; Shulamit, an artist-turned-doctor who, in

the course of the novel, turns artist again in order to "paint glorious women" as an accompaniment to Marie's poems. All are lesbians, all are feminists, all have strong relationships with their mothers, all are concerned with women's history, all are politicized and have strong social consciences. With the possible exception of Shulamit, not one of these characters is convincingly drawn. One senses that they were created, not to engage the reader emotionally with the story, but to serve as mouthpieces and mannequins (or "wom-anikins," to use Decter's term) for Decter's brand of feminist politics. Decter does not allow these women to do or say anything unrelated to the larger social and political context, which results in some very awkward dialogue; her characters have the tendency to muse aloud in stilted, strident monologues. Consider the following response to the news of the closing of a tire plant in St. Catharines:

"Fuckers," Shulamit blurted, "in search of a more desperate workforce. If they can't find one, they'll create one. They'll be back when the unions have been busted and unemployment insurance gutted and environmental protections removed."

Unremarkable, perhaps, until the reader realizes that Shulamit is alone in her car when she utters these words, as is Jane when she says: "For women, undressing has always been the easiest way to get attention." Whether alone or together, these women speak in slogans, catch-phrases, and complaints.

Decter's earnest didacticism is not limited to her characters' dialogue. Every thought, feeling and action of her characters is awkwardly manipulated to resonate with current social and political events which involve and concern women, in an apparent attempt to invest every page with social significance. Decter seems to doubt the sufficiency of well-crafted characters, plot and

dialogue to engage the reader with the issues, and indulges instead in some rather heavy-handed lecturing. This tendency drains the novel of all emotional power. The murder of Gloria, Shulamit's former lover and a counsellor at a women's shelter, is a case in point. The human tragedy of Gloria's death is lost beneath the layers of social significance; the incident is reduced to an example of sexism, racism, and what "the bastards" will do if given the chance, and allows Decter to add to the roster of political issues which fill the pages of this novel. Unfortunately, Decter fails to engage the reader with the lives behind the issues, ultimately reproducing the media's reduction of Gloria to a statistic:

Gloria became a ten-second graphic, a random image on the nightly litany of shot his lover of eight years who had left him a week earlier, shot his wife and three children before turning the gun on himself, shot fourteen female engineering students at l'école Polytechnique, ". . . shot Gloria Johnston, 29, counsellor of a local shelter for women."

Decter merely reinforces the depersonalizing effect of this catalogue of facts. Like all other characters in this novel, Gloria's import lies in her symbolic worth—as a lesbian, as a black woman, as a woman murdered by a man—and not her human strengths and failings.

All of this is held together by a rather flimsy and ultimately disappointing mystery plot which centres on the identity of the seventy-year-old lesbian whose non-fatal roadside stroke is serendipitously witnessed by Shulamit. As the Acknowledgements page tells us, *Honour* "was born of living in a women's [sic] world"; this novel is a mere sketch of that world, with the bare outlines taking precedence over subtleties of character, language or emotion.

Tributes to Friendship

Rachel Wyatt

Crackpot. Playwrights Canada \$11.95

The Day Marlene Dietrich Died. Oolichan \$15.95

Reviewed by Elizabeth Greene

Both these new books from Rachel Wyatt, Director of the Writing Programmes at the Banff Centre, are tributes to friendship. Both tell the stories of people not often accorded centre stage, even in a literature that honours the margins; both are shot through with wit and sorrow; both are elegiac but turn back toward life. That said, these books are very different. *Crackpot* is a dramatic adaptation of Adele Wiseman's intricate, neglected novel, while *The Day Marlene Dietrich Died* is a collection of short fiction linked first by varying reactions to the star's death on May 6, 1992, but also in other, subtler ways.

Rachel Wyatt's short, spare introduction to *Crackpot* weaves together the history of the adaptation (first a radio play broadcast on CBC early in 1993, then rewritten for stage, produced at the PlayRites Festival in Calgary in February 1995) with allusions to her fifteen-year friendship with Adele Wiseman. The introduction is deeply affectionate, sometimes elegiac: "I am standing outside the Centre for Performing Arts [in Calgary] wishing I had a camera. There, on a board, in large letters, it says, *Crackpot* by RW, based on the novel by Adele Wiseman. And then I remember that even if I had a camera there is no way to send the picture to Adele." The introduction suggests that the memory of Adele Wiseman accompanied Rachel Wyatt through every step of the adaptation, with the result that the play is remarkably faithful to the book, and solves the problems of translation from one genre to another in an inspired way.

The introduction draws our attention to some of these problems: "All those characters? That thirty year time span?" There are also

the crucial bed scenes where the heroine Hoda gives birth to her son and then, fifteen years later, sleeps with him without telling him who she is. (Adele Wiseman described this as doing the “worst possible thing for the best possible reason.”) Rachel Wyatt solves the problem of “all those characters” by cutting out some—mainly secondary women characters—and by creating a three-woman chorus who fill us in on action and gossip. Also, the play, unlike the novel, begins with the ending, with Hoda preparing to marry Lazar and flashing back to the rest of her life. These structural changes make the adaptation possible. The play stays true to the novel by carefully preserving the voices of the characters, often using Adele Wiseman’s words. The recorded voices in the Prologue establish some of the novel’s important themes: “You wouldn’t believe our luck. For on the surface aren’t we the unluckiest people on earth” (Danile, Hoda’s father). “We’ll forget the past and live together” (Lazar, whom Hoda marries). “She lived her life backwards” (David, Hoda’s son). The Winnipeg General Strike, the Prince of Wales’ visit, Hoda’s visit to City Hall are all adapted effectively here and preserve the political-historical background, which gives the novel some of its bite. Of course some things are necessarily left out; but the characters and their voices transfer especially well to the dramatic form. All in all, *Crackpot* is an extraordinarily faithful, successful adaptation of a remarkable novel.

The stories in *The Day Marlene Dietrich Died* are also spare and well-turned. Yet the book is complex, partly because some of the characters reappear through three or four stories. For example, as Myra and Peter, who open the book in “Her Voice,” turn out to be the parents of another character, Kim, who appears in “A Wall of Bright Stone” and “Stanley.” Myra and Peter buy a canoe in “The Yellow Canoe” and are at the edges of one of the last sto-

ries, “Time Travel,” and Myra is at the other end of the phone, briefly, in “A Toast to Life”, a story which is also linked, through a non-verbal encounter in a park, with “The Colonel’s Wife.” The stories have a wide range—from before World War II to the 1990s, from Vancouver and Los Angeles to Berlin. Marlene Dietrich hovers through almost all twenty, either as the impossibly beautiful Other Woman who stole the hearts of ordinary men, or as inspiration, to singers Moira in “In Memoriam” and Amber Papadakis in “Time Travel,” or as icon, whose death marks days in lives all over Europe and North America. Most of the stories are about ordinary people and so they catch the relationship between the ordinary and the glamorous which is a part of most of our lives in this end of millennium. The stories are also about marriages—good and bad—about affairs—sexy and barren—about friendships, especially between women. As we read through *The Day Marlene Dietrich Died* we gain a privileged understanding of the way the characters live their lives through the turns of time and history. Many of the stories flash back thirty, forty, fifty years, so that as we read, we hold the characters’ hearts in our hands.

The book closes with some stunning stories. I especially like “Among the Heroes” where a woman, deserted by her lover in Greece, comes home to Toronto and her friend Audrey with a mysterious illness and dies on the same day as Marlene Dietrich. References to Euripides’ play *Alcestis*, about a wife who chose to die in place of her husband, lift the story into myth and remind me of H.D.’s epigraph to her memoir novel *The Gift*: “L’amitié passe même le tombeau.” Another wonderful story, “The Third Wish,” is told by Nora, Marlene Dietrich’s maid, who brings a single red rose to the house where the star (and later, Nora) used to live and lets her memory travel back fifty-three years. “The Third Wish” is at once an elegy for Marlene

Dietrich and for Nora's husband who died in the war—and a consolation, through Nora's son Charlie and through memory itself. Here again, and through the book, friendship lasts beyond the grave, at least as long as the remembrance of the living.

In the final story, Marlene herself plays Scrabble with Vladimir Nabokov, with more persistence than brilliance, reminding us of Nora's tart remark: "I can't sing. You can't clean floors." Appropriately, the collection begins with Peter, who saw Marlene Dietrich

once and found it harder to cross the space between them than to walk through a minefield, and then brings us so close to the star that we hear her speak; we are inside her mind and see through her eyes.

Both *Crackpot* and *The Day Marlene Dietrich Died* are accomplished works by a writer at the height of her powers; both look into the abyss and find not only sorrow, but consolation; both send us, as readers or viewers, back to our own lives with our vision cleared.



Occasional Notes

W.N. New

Martin Duwell and Laurie Hergenhan's *The ALS Guide to Australian Writers: A Bibliography 1963-1990* (UQP, n.p.) covers a wide range of authors, from Mena Abdullah to Fay Zwicky; valuable both for its coverage and its accuracy, this reference guide contains lists of primary works, reviews, and secondary criticism. A different kind of reference book is John A. Murray's anthology of "five centuries of nature writing from the Caribbean," *The Islands and the Sea* (Oxford, \$22.95). This work assembles 48 items, both "from" and "about" the Caribbean; ostensibly these items represent everything from exploration literature (Columbus, de las Casas, Hawkins, Raleigh), through the colonial period (Dampier, *Robinson Crusoe*), to the "Age of Conscience" (Darwin, Stowe, Beebe, Hemingway, Walcott, Naipaul, Kincaid). As the list of selections shows, the editor appears more interested in Euroamerican versions of the Caribbean than in Caribbean Nature; there are several maps and black-and-white illustrations. Bruce King's *Derek Walcott and West Indian Drama* (Oxford, \$67.00) looks far more closely at Caribbean evidence itself, to examine the impact of the Trinidad Theatre Workshop (1959-93) on West Indian drama, and particularly on the theatrical successes of the Nobel Prize-winning writer Derek Walcott. King provides substantial detail on actors and performances—with

extensive illustrations—and traces Walcott's composition history from the Basement Theatre (with its 18'x8' stage, 6" off the floor), through *Ti-Jean*, *Dream on Monkey Mountain*, and other plays, to his debuts on the New York stage and his worldwide reputation. Another Nobel Prize winner, the South African fiction writer Nadine Gordimer, has collected a series of her speeches and essays (on such subjects as Mahfouz, Achebe, Oz, and Revolutionary writing) into a volume called *Writing and Being* (Harvard UP, \$18.95). The premise of these statements appears early on: where once, she says, she thought the "originals" of fiction (Ottoline Morrell in the works of D.H. Lawrence, for example) were worth knowing about, she later came to know the reality of the real world and the fictionality of fiction—and to realize that the way in which fiction *touches on* reality, whatever its impact, must not be confused with reality itself. As much as anything, these essays offer testimony to Gordimer's own sense of *no longer being a colonial*: "I may now speak of 'my people,'" she writes; "That other world that was the world is no longer the world." To distinguish between reality and appearance is also the intent of Henri Lefebvre's *Critique of Everyday Life*, transl. John Moore (Verso/Routledge, \$49.95). "Everyday life," in this configuration, functions as a series of *appearances*, which this theoretician of "Critical Marxism," to use the words of the preface, takes as his task to challenge. Marxism, from this standpoint, constitutes a critique of everyday life: i.e.,

of (1) individuality (and private consumerism), (2) the fetishism of money, (3) mystifications (or what the bourgeois do to the proletariat), (4) needs (related to psychic and moral alienation), and (5) work (and the alienation of the worker). While, for some readers, this reliance on categories might say more about the origins of the critic, and about the will-to-categorize that characterizes so much French thought, Lefebvre's social impulses transcend this list; his desire here seems more to debunk the Church, to romanticize the rural village, and to praise the human. In relying on oppositional categories of discourse as he does, however, he elevates both the vices and the virtues (as he constructs them) of the attributes he wishes to praise and blame. Perhaps it is only being human to do so. W.N.

Imprinting Landscapes

Laurie Ricou

Writing of *paramo*—"the land on top"; the plateau landscape of Columbia, 12,000 feet above sea level—Don Gayton realizes that our "imprinted landscapes" endlessly mutate and travel. Noting that "finding individuals whose imprinted landscape is still their home landscape is a rarity now, due to mobility and the dominance of cities," Gayton reflects on how humans 'make' landscapes, learning "a set of local landscapes," replacing them as they move on, then necessarily re-learning the "place [they] are from" through their bonding with new landscapes. *Landscapes of the Interior* (New Society Publishers, PO Box 189 Gabriola Island, BC V0R 1X0, \$17.95 paper) carries the subtitle *Re-Explorations of Nature and the Human Spirit* to emphasize Gayton's interest in the complexities of experiencing, remembering and imagining landscapes (ranging from the eastern

Washington prairie, San Francisco, and Dungeness Spit, to Winnipeg's Living Prairie Museum, and to narrating landscapes found in films). The central principle of Gayton's re-exploration is "Pay equal attention to love, science and spirituality." A trained and conscientious ecologist, Gayton yet keeps himself open to the possibility that the mystic will see beyond the classifying naturalist, the careful observer will doubt the dominant cowboy mythology—and that any such up-set can itself be upset. Gayton's new book, more confidently self-analytical than his reliable *The Wheatgrass Mechanism* (1990), immediately establishes itself as one of my favourite works of Canadian (and extra-Canadian) nature writing.

Considerably more inclined to the "love" side of Gayton's triangle is journalist-naturalist R.D. Lawrence's biography, *The Green Trees Beyond: A Memoir* (Stoddart, \$16.95). Despite its occasional inclusion of field-notes, and the continual presence of Thoreau, Lawrence's science and spirituality are sidelights to the often melodramatic, and somewhat self-aggrandizing accounts of encounters with Canadian wilderness, and of the "wilderness" of man's violence toward men: the memoir, for example, gets off to a gripping start with an account of a 14-year-old Lawrence in his first battle in the Spanish Civil War. Lawrence is not a finely metaphorical writer, and quite without the subtlety of Gayton, but he does know a great deal about animals: the story of his courtship of and eventual leave-taking from the dog-wolf 'Yukon' is a brisk adventure in close encounters, and in animal-imprinting.

Recent more restrained books which teach us about our landscapes include two ample natural histories: Richard Cannings and Sydney Cannings, *British Columbia: A Natural History* (Douglas & McIntyre, \$45.00) and John R. Tester *Minnesota's Natural Heritage: An Ecological Perspective*

(U Minnesota P, US, \$29.95). These glossies—for desktop not backpack—work hard to make scientific understanding accessible to the layperson, in part by incorporating quotations from non-scientific sources: the Cannings incline to pop songwriters, Tester to “explorers” and “pioneers.” Tester’s work I found particularly valuable, as its title suggests, for its careful and sustained explanations of ecological systems (with informative illustrations), most of them of direct relevance to students of Canadian landscapes: prairie wetlands, for example, or the northern coniferous forest. Tester is less inclined than the Cannings to drift toward mere catalogue, but his editors have not been as successful in saving him from the overly earnest circumlocution. *British Columbia: A Natural History* is attractively designed, with engaging sidebars (for example, on the un-natural anatomical designs found in the fossil record of the Burgess Slate, near Field) and welcome emphasis on the geology that shapes, and is shaping, all natural history.

Graham Osborne’s *Wildflowers: Seasonal Splendours of the North American West* (Douglas & McIntyre, \$19.95) includes many of the affectionately bright photographs of the Tester and Cannings books, but with very little text. Osborne has the good sense to frame his photographs so that they become in themselves somehow studies of ecological relationships: most of them depict several species sharing the foreground, then two or three different eco-zones as the eye moves through mid-ground to backgrounds. Stephen Hume provides a sensitive introduction, reflecting on naming and the cultural significance of flowers, their climatic adaptations, and especially on their uses and significance for First Nations peoples. This aspect of *Sockeye Salmon: A Pictorial Tribute* (Douglas & McIntyre, \$29.95) I found disappointing. Hiromi Naito’s photographs are effective in that so many of them are

taken underwater (“to show a fish’s perspective” he hopes), and diligently trace the sockeye’s life cycle. But Stefani Paine’s “Introduction” is routine, for any but the utter novice, and does little to bring freshness to the subject.

More critical or scholarly studies of humans and landscapes appearing recently include *Reading the West: New Essays on the Literature of the American West*, edited by Michael Kowalewski (Cambridge UP, US\$21.95) intended to embody both a greater inclusiveness of genres, and a greater range of ethnic and cultural perspectives, than is typical in the field. Perhaps of particular interest to students of Canadian writing will be Philip Burnham’s “The Return of the Native: The Politics of Identity in American Indian Fiction of the West”, and Misha Berson’s “Fighting the Religion of the Present: Western Motifs in the First Wave of Asian American Plays.” Kowalewski’s own essay on the literary uses of the vernacular treats a subject which I would like to see much more developed in Canadian literary criticism. Of special merit, however, is the more general opening essay by William Bevis, “Region, Power, Place”, which is essential reading for anyone interested in this triangulation, in whatever literature. Side by side with this important essay on the politics of region, I might also mention another title on western American literature, if one in which imprinting landscape is seldom an explicit subject. Although published in 1993, Forrest G. Robinson’s *Having It Both Ways: Self-Subversions in Western Popular Classics* (U of New Mexico P, US\$12.95) was reissued in paperback in 1996. In an attentively theoretical study, Robinson argues that novels such as *The Virginian*, *The Last of the Mohicans* and *Shame* “are enduringly popular” not because of their naive morality, but precisely because they are “sites for the negotiation of competing perspectives on the issues of race and gender.” Together,

Kowalewski and Robinson remind us of the element which might most productively become a fourth in Gayton's guiding triad: ideology.

Don Gayton is an ecologist who became a writer. Students of literature interested in writing about place (and it seems to be a rapidly growing group) need now to be students of ecology at some level, at the very least to the extent reflected in the Cannings' and Tester's introductions. That is, those of us in literary studies have to reciprocate the movement in John Harte's *The Green Fuse: An Ecological Odyssey* (U California P, \$12.95) in which a Professor of Energy and Resources at Berkeley tries to write to people outside the readership of scientific journals, tries to write, as the title's tribute to Dylan Thomas signals, toward the creative arts. Harte discusses science and values, but I found him particularly informative on lichens, and in his explanation of such terms as "biomagnification" and "keystone organisms." The worldwide topics treated in these essays (for example, Pulau Dua, an island in the Java Sea) are a reminder of global ecology (and a counter to bioregional blinkers, as in an excellent essay on aquatic life in the Everglades, and its likely connections to global warming). A good deal more distant from the 'hard' science of ecology is a work of dramatic criticism whose title *Ecologies of Theatre: Essays at the Century Turning* (Johns Hopkins UP, US \$15.95/38.50) demonstrates how far, and I suppose how trendily, the field of ecocriticism is extending. A collection of Bonnie Marranca's essays, and reviews, reaching back to the mid-1970s, many of the pieces bear only faint traces of the title idea, even at its most metaphorical stretch. But other pieces are well worth attention for what they show of the possibilities of ecocriticism: on Gertrude Stein's biocentrism, on Rachel Rosenthal as "autobiological", and on landscape in Robert Wilson, an essay which goes a considerable length to accom-

plishing successfully what I had thought impossibly difficult (except perhaps, in connection with Brian Friel's *Translations*), that is, to write about landscape in drama in the way critics have written about landscape in poetry and fiction. And while imagining the stage as geography, we might usefully ponder two works from the field of architecture—broadly speaking. *Modern Landscape Architecture: A Critical Review*, edited by Marc Treib (MIT Press, £40.50), a collection of 23 essays by various scholars has much of the feel of textbook about it, with its cramped drawings and black and white photographs. But those interested in the human effect on landscapes can discover how the "built" landscape (which is to say, where most of us live) is and might be influenced, for example, by Modernism, or by levels of sensitivity among landscape architects to their impact on ecosystems. Altogether more readable, and entertainingly anecdotal, is Dolores Hayden's *The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History* (MIT Press, US\$25.00). In a sense, this is a cultural geography of Los Angeles, diversely illustrated in black and white, which examines, among a wide variety of topics, commercial flower fields and truck gardens, as working landscapes of Japanese Americans and Chinese Americans; the campaign to preserve Fire Station 30, centre of African American firefighters' struggle to integrate the city's civil service; and the Embassy Auditorium, a "repository of environmental memory," especially for Latina garment-workers as they struggled to unionize.

On the creative side of landscape imprinting, memories of prairie and small town (especially the complex of associations which adhere to houses), and speculations about how places affect writing, cluster in *Imagining Home: Writing from the Midwest* (U Minnesota P, \$US 19.95) edited by Mark Vinz and Thom Tammaro. Readers of Canadian prairie writing will recognize

many reliable tropes; the dream of flight, the romance of the endless road, the poetry of snow, and the visible invisibility of the topography. *Poetry of the American West: A Columbia Anthology* (Columbia UP, US \$24.95), edited by Alison Hawthorne Deming, might serve as a companion volume, if for no other reason than that its 400 pages range much further in imagining home, from the 15th century to the recent present. Deming's objective is not so much to collect the poems that hum the land, but those that seek to understand "a particularly brutal history of cultural collisions." Deming, accordingly, includes a large number of Native American songs, and Native American writers, along with the canonized, ranging from Whitman through Adrienne Rich to Gary Snyder, and several Asian American, Chicano, and cowboy poets. Given that most poets are represented by only two or three poems, the anthology can seem abrupt in its shifts, but the breadth is impressive, and Deming is alert to avoiding the self-satisfied and overly sentimentalized: "There are names each thing has for itself, / and beneath us the other order already moves" (Linda Hogan). Slightly north of the Columbia anthology's West is Sharon Butala's *Coyote's Morning Cry: Meditations and Dreams from a Life in Nature* (HarperCollins, \$16.00), a collection of micro-essays in a notebook format (14 × 16 cm). The book inclines strongly to the spiritual side of Gayton's triad, so much so that I found the 'mysticism' a little wearing. Not that I doubt Butala's sincerity in reaching for "truth" and "wholeness"—indeed her self-aware "vulnerability" reinforces it—but it is still difficult to communicate the shapeless without shape, the wordless without words. Too much of the book seemed completely adjective and abstraction, while what I treasure in her resonant metaphor—"floating ducks, shattered by light" or "a driving rain of small birds"—is too rare.

Deming's anthology reminds us that in many ways words do not give us much intimacy with place until the writing of place disrupts our expectations. Imprinted landscapes are also travelling landscapes, and as Linda Hogan's line suggests, the most satisfying landscape writing respects the familiar names and reaches for the name a thing might have for itself, but senses another order beneath. The suite of poems *Said the River* by Liz Zetlin (Penumbra P, n.p., illustrations by Janis Hoogstraten) is such a book: in it Isabella Valancy Crawford, her mother, her father, and contemporary women searching after Crawford and canoeing, exchange poems about an artist's life obscured in apology, and measured in the syntax of rivers. This is a fascinating, often wry and poignant book-length poem about the woman who heard the voice of the canoe in place. I was not quite so taken with Sue Wheeler's *Solstice on the Anacortes Ferry* (Kalamalka P, \$12.95), in part because it is a collection of occasional poems—on one page you read of Jerusalem and Banff, on the next of the Oka crisis and pickling beets. Place in this collection is less a matter of topography and landscape than of glimpses of human activity, where Wheeler's method of anecdote/memory half-grasped, half-articulated, not quite located can be fiercely muted. "The Laws of Gravity", for example, questions a dying mother, potent just because each superbly observed item in the hospital room becomes another metaphor for obeying the laws of gravity: "The tissues wait in the blue/box, doubled over in silence."

British Columbia, according to Justine Brown, is less *here* than *nowhere*. *All Possible Worlds: Utopian Experiments in British Columbia* (New Star Books, \$16) surveys, over 90 pages, the province's historical and literary utopias. Despite Brown's welcome emphasis on cynicism, irony, and play as integral components of utopia, her account itself is more efficient

than ironic, and lacks the playful analysis its opening promises. It seldom stops to ask the question "why?", or to propose other than the most immediately accessible hypothesis. Nonetheless, the book provides a helpful overview of a tradition, until now more fancied than identified—and unhides a good deal that was hidden.

Certainly, the most important critical study of place among the titles to hand is *Uncommon Ground: Toward Reinventing Nature* (Norton, \$39.99), edited by William Cronon. These 17 essays, over 550 pages, with extensive notes, an "Eclectic Reading List", "albums" of relevant documents, and four dozen illustrations, is as close to an essential title for ecocriticism as I read this year. Issuing from a semester-long interdisciplinary seminar held at the Humanities Research Institute UC Irvine in the Spring of 1994, the collection proceeds from two premises: that "the natural world is dynamic, changeable," and that "nature" is "a profoundly human construction". The book's implicit claim is that the humanistic disciplines "demonstrate . . . practical relevance for practical problem solving." This ambition requires that the book include broad theoretical challenges, but also essays on "Nature" at the shopping mall, at Sea World, and as justification for "re-meandering" the streams in Denmark.

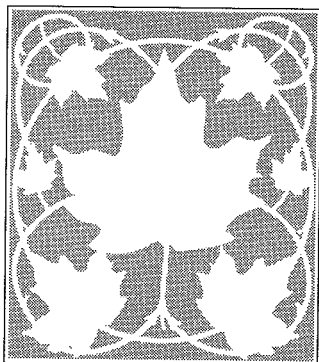
Uncommon Ground only occasionally concerns literature, but it is always about reading. Its writers are mostly passionate without being pompous, and careful to avoid the hectoring simplicities that sometimes pass for environmental concern. In this respect I found two essays especially memorable, in part, no doubt, because they touch on my home place. James D. Proctor's "Whose Nature? The Contested Moral Terrain of Ancient Forests" meticulously examines the ethics of the Pacific Northwest Forest issue, demonstrating how there are "many environmentalisms", in part by contrasting the dominant

metaphors of mainstream environmentalism with corresponding metaphors, of garden and sea, among Caribbean Latinos. Richard White's "Are You an Environmentalist or Do You Work for a Living?: Work and Nature" remind us how work has played such a small part in environmentalism, and argues how crucial work is as a way of knowing nature. This is an essay, as anyone familiar with White's other work, and especially with his superb environmental history of the Columbia River, *The Organic Machine* (1995), will appreciate, is transformative, potent enough to shift, fundamentally, both scholarship and environmental action. All in all, this seems to be a book that Gayton, though his work is more intensely personal, would treasure for the lines it traces through complexity: "The landscape voyeur finds a certain satisfaction in dissatisfaction."

Correction

In CL 156, the opening sentence in Sherry Simon's review of Smaro Kamboureli's *Making a Difference: Canadian Multicultural Literature* should have read "Most observers will have their own version of how and when English-Canadian literature acquired its new public face" (141).

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