

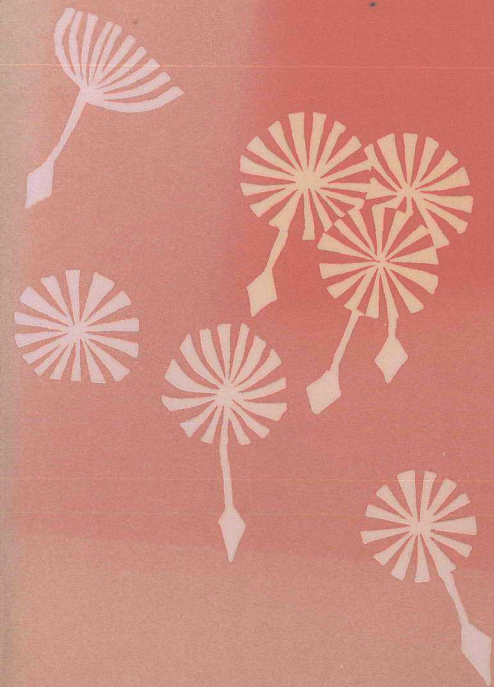
# *Canadian* Literature

A Quarterly of Criticism and Review

Summer 2000

\$15

165





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*The University of British Columbia*

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*Winners of the University of British  
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published by Knopf Canada

and

***Gabrielle Roy: A Life***  
**by François Ricard**  
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# Canadian Literature / Littérature canadienne

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## A Quarterly of Criticism and Review

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## Anne Hébert 1916–2000

*Eva-Marie Kröller*

The death, earlier this year, of Anne Hébert became an occasion of not only paying lavish tribute to her work, but also assessing the enduring significance (or not) of a writer preoccupied with “a world before feminism,” as David Homel put it in the *Montreal Gazette*. Writing in the *Globe and Mail*, Ray Conlogue and Tu Thanh Ha pointed out that, by the age of thirty-eight, Hébert “had declared she would not marry or have children, a monastic vow often made by serious women writers of the time and she never wavered from it.” Hébert’s celibacy and childlessness (both mentioned in virtually every obituary), together with her failure to produce the creative equivalent, namely “followers” or a “school,” motivated eulogizers to inquire somewhat nervously of contemporary women writers what influence, if any, Hébert’s work had on theirs. Monique Proulx (b. 1952) obliged by assuring her interviewers that “the very fact [Hébert] did things no woman had done before set an example for younger women writers.” However, she failed to point out what these things were and mused about a possible shortcoming when she asserted that “[Hébert] created torn characters with dreadful passions, but she [i.e. Proulx] had no way of knowing if that was her case personally.”

The latter presumably meant that Hébert kept her own passions, dreadful or not, to herself and required privacy to an extent that limited her usefulness as a role-model for burgeoning feminists. Proulx’s gentle reproach has an amusing counterpart in a 1999 review of *Am I Disturbing You?* (nominated for a Giller Prize at the time) which was not restrained by the occasion of Hébert’s death and thus vociferously proclaimed its objections to “the

poetic soul-searching, the melodramatic obsessions, the grandiose emotions” in Hébert’s books. Together with the “lyrical meditations” of *The English Patient* and *Fugitive Pieces*, *Am I Disturbing You?* is declared a dated throwback to the “societal self-absorption that went out with the 1980s [sic].”

One can only hope that, in positing this neat historical *découpage*, the reviewer practises the irony that she misses in Hébert’s “self-indulgent” work. But innocent as her remarks are of any knowledge of Canadian literary history, they are worth looking at a little more closely because they echo aspects of Hébert’s reputation among nationalist critics, both the sovereigntist and the federalist kind, some thirty years earlier. Although they were little concerned with the question of women writers and the role-models they provided, the authors of *parti-pris* were sharply critical of Hébert’s introspective work which they paired with her cousin Saint-Denys-Garneau’s writing as insufferably morbid and therefore unsupportive of the separatist cause. Alluding to Hébert’s collection of poetry, *Le Tombeau des rois* (1953), Laurent Girouard sneered that “[l]es écrivains de l’époque Saint-Denys-Garneau à Anne Hébert ont fui dans leurs os jusqu’aux tombeaux qu’ils voulaient royaux.” Interestingly, however, Saint-Denys-Garneau, together with Paul-Emile Borduas, reaps the lion’s share of venom for failing to meet *parti-pris* standards of “social relevance.” In keeping with the misogyny displayed elsewhere in *parti-pris*, it may well be that Hébert was not considered weighty enough to be given as much attention, even if it was attention by way of attack.

Anglo-Canadian nationalist critics, by contrast, found this very introspection fascinating and highly useful in constructing their image of the Québécois “Other.” While *parti-pris* dismissed Saint-Denys-Garneau for submerging himself in the morass of “la ‘vie intérieure,’” Anansi’s *Manual for Draft-Age Immigrants to Canada* (1968) included only one work from Québec in a brief booklist for “Further Reading” submitted by Dave Godfrey, namely Saint-Denys-Garneau’s *Journal*. To Anglo-Canadians, Québec in general and Montreal in particular substituted for sixties France. In this “vibrant and vital city,” the *Manual* says, “the radical students at Université de Montréal” co-exist with the “solid and English” clientele at McGill, lending the city “a verve and panache lacking elsewhere.” On the cover of the McClelland and Stewart edition of the Saint-Denys-Garneau journals, the poet appears as the quintessential French intellectual in a beret. He also resembles a young Fidel Castro, as a bemused reviewer in *Canadian Literature* pointed out, and thus doubled as a romantic version of

Anglo-Canadian press coverage of the Cuban pavilion at Expo '67 where ideological issues are also habitually "sublimated" into issues of fashion, gastronomy, and interior decorating). Anne Hébert lacked the tragic aura that surrounded her cousin after his premature death and she was not given to the kind of histrionics that would have compensated for this shortcoming. However, Anglophone critics seized with alacrity on her funereal imagery, (invariably described as "opulent" in her obituaries) as fashionable expression of Latin melancholia that can be easily absorbed into a metaphor of "the Canadian situation." Writing in *Survival*, Atwood makes this equation quite bluntly, asserting that Hébert's obsession with death "is also an image of ultimate sterility and powerlessness, the final result of being a victim." Two years after the October crisis, Atwood's conflation of the "Québec situation" with the "Canadian situation" is remarkable, as is her failure to define either one of these contextually, but her approach is not atypical. The *University of Toronto Quarterly*, in reviewing *Le Tombeau des rois*, enumerates the "cosmic symbols" that inform Hébert's poems, "the seasons, weather, night, water, desert, black islands," before drawing quasi-mathematical equations between certain symbols and their "meaning": "Spacious desert translates a feeling of vast emptiness, boredom, fertility, 'sand' is dryness, sterility, spiritual death. Parts of the body are used to express her suffering; 'heart' is inner pain; 'dead hands' are signs that movement has departed; massive rings on the fingers are signs of bondage to the ethical world."

This is one review which avoids the words "opulent" or "luscious" in describing Hébert's poetry, calling its art "anatomical," "austere," "the art of dry bones" instead. The brittleness of her metaphors is reflected in the few biographical data publicized after her death which depicted her as growing up in the isolation of sick rooms, "with bouts of scarlet fever, pleurisy and appendicitis." However, as so often in the public assessment of Hébert's work, the contradictions mirror the ambivalences of both her writing and her persona. Repeatedly, reviewers captured the paradoxical combination of passion and death in her work in the image of the gem-stone, hard as bone and bright as fire. Sheila Fischman, translator of many of Hébert's works, eulogized her ability to use "words like jewels, like gemstones, that were sharp, clear and fine." By contrast, the reviewer of *Am I Disturbing You?* cited above damned the book with qualified praise by calling it "a tiny gem," a judgement not unlike Virginia Woolf's infamous quip about Jane Austen's novels.

Anne Hébert described her own work as "playing with fire." In my first graduate course on Canadian fiction, I thought I would die if I had to read

another novel about some tight-lipped pastor or farmer staring at a barren field. Then I read *Kamouraska* and things began to look much, much better. When Anne Hébert died, I re-read the book. No, it is not feminist. This time around, Elisabeth d'Aulnières's self-hatred and her contempt toward other women were painful to read about in ways that did not fully come home to me when I first became intrigued with the relentless irony of her voice. But the book remains an elegant, passionate and unsparing account of human frailty, and it is as vivid an evocation of the place and period it describes as is likely to come our way.





## Keynote Address

Meat, mumble, yellow moon the scar on Picasso's  
skin. Java, jism, Jesus loves your ragged shoes,  
Mohammed thinks our clouds are benign, another kick  
at the can the aspiration of all this ache and awe.  
Midnight knows our number. History recites our hearts.  
Rise in the morning, put on your boots, don your  
toast and torment and enter the gnashing machine.  
Make a mark, make a million, go mad with the murder  
of a thousand purple blossoms. Good for you, good  
for me, hurray for these hammers the hot sun of  
desire, dread and drama the spectacle of clowns  
weeping in the shadows.

# Walking Backwards

There is nothing  
in the lake, but  
the lake. And the sky  
has forgotten  
how to be sea-  
blue. Couples  
were here  
once, and each left  
an unusual innocence  
behind. Love  
is nothing, just  
the vivid, outer skin  
that we shed,  
as we devolve.  
Each day  
walks backwards, begins  
at dusk, with the sunset.  
We return  
to the lake,  
the wilderness,  
of our birth, we look  
in, step  
in, and there  
is nothing,  
not even  
the color  
of our skins.

# “My dear Anton Myrer”: A Late Lowry Letter

Introduced, transcribed, and annotated by Sherrill Grace

## I

When the American writer Anton Myrer (1922-93) wrote to Malcolm Lowry on 29 January 1957, he did so to praise *Under the Volcano* and, “however belatedly,” to thank Lowry for his earlier praise of *Evil Under the Sun* (1951), Myrer’s first novel. Myrer could not have known the desperate state of Lowry’s life between 1954, when he and Margerie left Dollarton, and the winter of 1957, by which time both Lowrys had been in and out of hospital several times and Malcolm had only a few months to live. On 17 March 1957, Malcolm answered Myrer’s letter, but Myrer delayed writing back . . . until it was too late.

Shortly after hearing of Malcolm’s death on 27 June 1957, Myrer wrote to Margerie. In this 30 July 1957 letter he sent much more than respectful condolences; he wrote again about the importance of *Under the Volcano*, and he described his deep regret at not acknowledging Lowry’s letter to him:

I can’t tell you what a delight it was to receive that letter from him this spring, with its gentle exhortation—and the magnificent and generous offer of the use of the cabin, which I was planning to write in thanks for (though unfortunately we couldn’t have availed ourselves of it)—and then procrastinated over, to my immense sorrow. And now of course I wish to God I *had* written—if only so that I were not oppressed with such a sense of dereliction.<sup>1</sup>

Myrer’s procrastination, over writing the first letter, as well as this reply, is reminiscent of Malcolm’s hesitation in 1919 over approaching Conrad Aiken. Indeed, it is perhaps not an exaggeration to suggest that Lowry’s impact on Myrer’s psyche resembled Aiken’s on Lowry. Of course, Lowry had already had just that kind of impact on David Markson, who in so many ways is Lowry’s spiritual son (see Markson, and *Sursum Corda* II, 398 and 974).

The mutual admiration of Myrer and Lowry goes back to 1951, when Lowry read *Evil Under the Sun* (probably in pre-publication copy) for Random House. Shortly after that, Myrer read *Under the Volcano* for the first time and was deeply impressed, even awed, by its quality. However, the two men never met. If they had, I can imagine that they would have forged a friendship carried out (as was Lowry's habit) by letter. According to Patricia Myrer, the writer's widow, the younger man "literally worshipped Lowry's work," and he wrote an article on Lowry for the 1960 Lowry issue of *Les Lettres nouvelles* in which he claimed that *Under the Volcano* was as great and important as *Ulysses*.<sup>2</sup> Certainly Lowry found much to praise in *Evil Under the Sun*, and it is noteworthy that in 1957 he remembered the book so positively.

There are two Lowry letters to Albert Erskine, both written in November 1951 (see *Sursum Corda* II, 480 and 481), in which Lowry speaks about *Evil Under the Sun*. It would seem that Erskine, who was with Random House at this time, must have sent the book to Lowry sometime earlier in 1951 and asked for his opinion of it. Unfortunately, however, I have not located an incoming letter from Erskine with references to Myrer or his book; nor have I found a separate assessment of *Evil Under the Sun* by Lowry.<sup>3</sup> Until the discovery of the letter to Myrer published here, Lowry's only surviving comments are in the two November 1951 letters to Erskine. In the 24 November 1951 letter, Lowry states that he loves the novel, although he finds Myrer "stylistically often Joyced in his own petard." He goes on to describe his reaction as

divided a bit between what I feel you ought to say to *him*, & conviction it deserves wide audience (not much doubt—perhaps all too little—it will get that!)—but make no mistake, it *does* deserve sincere salutations. Indeed it makes me feel like Father Mapple. And it has sent me on several long swims already. (*Sursum Corda* II, 458)

Whether by word of mouth—Erskine reporting directly to Myrer—or by means of a written assessment, Myrer learned about Lowry's comments. In Myrer's 29 January 1957 letter to Lowry (published below), he refers to Lowry's warning that there was too much Joycean stylistics in *Evil Under the Sun*, and he insists that he paid attention to Lowry's "Mapple-esque caveat." In his role as Father Mapple (the sermonizing whaler in *Moby-Dick*), Lowry offered the younger writer precisely the kind of advice he should have had with *Ultramarine*, though in Lowry's case the obvious influences are Conrad Aiken and T.S. Eliot. Despite Lowry's advice, and Myrer's claim to have cut "most . . . of the Joycean hawsers," *Evil Under the Sun* was panned in the *New York Times* (16 December 1951. D17).

Myrer's hero, Paul Kittering, is a would-be artist recently returned to the States after active service during World War II, but he is unable to escape his memories of war or to recover his lost innocence. In a montage style, combining stream-of-consciousness with quotations from newspapers, Myrer creates a hero and a narrative that inevitably recall Joyce and—as Lowry must surely have noticed—Fitzgerald. Moreover, the somewhat heavy-handed use of Freudian concepts fails to anchor or explain Kittering's psychological state. *Evil Under the Sun*, for all its biblical allusiveness, was Myrer's first novel and it is derivative. Nevertheless, Lowry clearly found it a powerful enough treatment of a young man's struggle with the demons of war and social injustice to praise it to Erskine and to remember it in 1957. Myrer's passionate critique of war, waste, and human cruelty, and his belief in individual dignity were, after all, shared by Lowry.

Anton Myrer, who was born in Massachusetts, began his university education at Harvard before enlisting with the American Marines and serving in Guam during World War II. After being wounded, he returned home to complete his degree in 1947. Several of his early novels draw upon his war experiences: for example, *Evil Under the Sun*, *The Big War* (1957), and *The Violent Shore* (1961). *The Big War* was made into the 1996 film *In Love and War*, directed by Richard Attenborough and starring Sandra Bullock and Chris O'Donnell. Although *Evil Under the Sun* was not well-received by critics, *Once an Eagle* (1968) and *The Last Convertible* (1978) were best-sellers. They were widely translated and both were adapted for television.

The two letters that follow were sent to me in the winter of 1998 by Mrs Myrer; in going through her late husband's papers, she had found the 1994 letter to Anton Myrer, in which I inquired about his having any Lowry letters for inclusion in *Sursum Corda*, and she gave me permission to publish her husband's letter with Lowry's reply. Myrer's is a clean typescript carbon copy, unsigned, and Lowry's is a classic autograph letter (see Figure 1) with marginalia, superscriptions, cancellations, and lengthy parentheses.<sup>4</sup> This brief correspondence opens a precious window onto the last months of Lowry's life and reveals his capacity to respond to younger writers with wit, sensitivity, and encouragement. It also demonstrates the nature of Lowry's impact on discerning writers like Myrer, who valued Lowry's serious exploration of human fate, his complex intertextuality, and his eloquent prose. Myrer's praise, together with David Markson's, are reminders that Lowry was in some ways a writer's writer, while at the same time addressing issues that continue to be of urgent importance to general readers.





all, a noble job and you'll not deserve to be disappointed with its reception, attempt (are the  
 These credit, <sup>perhaps</sup> ~~for~~ thinking what she was about, always remembering the art-referency and  
 that success can be wise: in case any case it was a success from the artistic standpoint,  
 & you can always publish it again; albeit I was left with the <sup>strong</sup> suspicion that its author  
 was very much a creature of habit, otherwise I am reminded that Eugene O'Neill ~~had~~ <sup>was</sup> reminded  
 if he'll know how to reach happiness as dramatically as happily he'll have written about  
 it. Which is perhaps something to ponder. I sometimes I shall later know very much to receiving the award  
 both from Appleton & Doubleday, which I hope to announce soon, or I may be much delayed: this coming is heading for Stearns' estate,  
 Meaning, Somebody, under, but actually, <sup>of</sup> <sup>for</sup> intent, has evidently been watching <sup>as usual, only now</sup> <sup>or, that might be</sup> <sup>re-estimated.</sup>  
 he writing this letter, for a little while since, <sup>depending upon a</sup> <sup>little else</sup> <sup>alternately</sup> <sup>not</sup>  
 distanced since 1750, in the attic, & unaware, until this point that you <sup>little</sup> <sup>came</sup> <sup>from</sup>  
 Exclusionist, Exclusionist upon Exclusionist position, with <sup>of</sup> <sup>substitution</sup> <sup>of</sup> <sup>the</sup> <sup>same</sup> <sup>name</sup> <sup>and</sup> <sup>it</sup> <sup>was</sup> <sup>used</sup> <sup>by</sup> <sup>you</sup> <sup>to</sup> <sup>change</sup> <sup>upon</sup> <sup>the</sup> <sup>name</sup>:  
 Exclusionist. <sup>the</sup> <sup>name</sup>. There is an evil which I have seen under the sun, & it is common among

vii There is an evil which I have seen under the sun, & it is common among  
 men  
 To be there is an evil among all things that are done under the sun, that there  
 is one that cometh unto all: yea, also the heart of man is full of  
 evil. & madness is in their heart while they live, and after that  
 they go to the dead  
 viii All that I have seen and applied my heart unto every work that is  
 done under the sun ...  
 To vi Hitherto have they any more a portion for ever in anything that is  
 done under the sun

(By the way, why not?)  
 7 v This wisdom have I seen also under the sun and it seemed  
 great to me. <sup>evil</sup> <sup>which</sup> <sup>I</sup> <sup>have</sup> <sup>seen</sup> <sup>under</sup> <sup>the</sup> <sup>sun</sup> <sup>and</sup> <sup>it</sup> <sup>seemed</sup>  
 7i There is an ~~evil~~ <sup>evil</sup> which I have seen under the sun as an  
 error which proceedeth from the ruler  
 7a viii There was a little city, and few men within it:  
 (HLS is, HLS is - and nihil there, O Ecclesiastes - period too: that's  
 nearly wisdom enough)  
 On the other hand -

To 12 Live joyfully with the wife whom thou lovest all the days of  
 the life of thy vanity which he hath given thee under the sun: for that  
 is the portion of us in this life, & in thy labour which thou hast  
 under the sun  
 Moreover:  
 To 12 - (By the way, can't they be mad with joy and drink the  
 wine (under the sun) with a merry heart for God (and the  
 woman Appleton - Cambridge) has accepted the gift of the  
 wine  
 I thank you with also for his request, & the  
 love back to you both from me & separately  
 sincerely  
 Frank Jones

## II

**Anton Myrer to Malcolm Lowry:**

Hotel Albert  
65 University Place  
New York 3, N.Y.  
29 January 1957

Dear Mr. Lowry:

It has been quite a while since my good friend Weldon Kees sang the praises of *UNDER THE VOLCANO* and urged me in no faltering terms to make its acquaintance.<sup>1</sup> In the interim I have read it four times—and on each occasion have been more overwhelmed than before by its power and eloquence and the dazzling complexity of its thematic structure. It is now my very vehement contention (for better or worse) that *UNDER THE VOLCANO* is one of the half-dozen really important novels of the half-century—a worthy companion to *ULYSSES* and *A LA RECHERCHE* and the Tietjens novels and a few others.<sup>2</sup> My only regret is that I didn't get around to writing you long before this: I was deterred by—what? sense of inadequacy? awe? fear of sounding good and mawkish (a clear and present danger, granted) . . . ? Something of all of them, I suppose. Veneration makes for poor conversing.—Well: I've been on the point of writing times enough. And once in San Francisco four of us, fired up by an animated and eulogistic discussion of Firmin's *Folly*, seriously debated a wild hegira up the coast to Dollarton—a pilgrimage of a sort; but we foundered on the mechanical aspects of the business. The human condition, alas. . .

But since I am writing (however belatedly), I want to thank you for taking the time and trouble to read my first novel [*Evil Under the Sun*]; and for your kind words of encouragement (and warning!—for which I'm immensely grateful—I paid heed to the Mapple-esque caveat and have subsequently severed many (most I should say) of the Joycean hawsers that you extended to me via Albert Erskine, anent the more riotous excesses of *EVIL*

1 Weldon Kees (1914-55) was an American poet, painter, and musician. Kees disappeared in 1955, possibly by committing suicide, but he had wanted to start life anew in Mexico by following the example of Hart Crane and Malcolm Lowry.

2 James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922), Marcel Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu* (1913-32), and Ford Madox Ford's *No More Parades* novels (*Some Do Not*, 1924, *No More Parades*, 1925, *A Man Could Stand Up*, 1926, and *Last Post*, 1928), also known as the Christopher Tietjens tetralogy.

UNDER THE SUN. After much time and numerous vicissitudes (any number can play) Appleton-Century is bringing out another one (with perhaps more enthusiasm than it deserves) this spring; and I have taken the liberty of having them send you a copy.<sup>3</sup> I can truthfully say there is no current writer whose opinion I value more highly. And should you be moved to read it I would be deeply interested in your reaction. (A mighty understatement indeed.)

I think you might be pleased to know how staunch a following (small but vociferous, as it should be) you have here on these shores—where complexity and eloquence are not always honored. (Not ‘arf.) Many of us were consequently keenly disappointed that the collection of short stories was not brought out—especially after they’d been more or less officially announced.<sup>4</sup> Sigbjørn and his confrères deserve a broader and more permanent voice than that provided by the Rexall chain. In fact, while belaboring this subject—and this is in great measure the immediate occasion for this letter—there is an editor here who is extremely interested in your work (largely as a result of my own wildly vehement exhortations) and who would, I know, be very seriously interested in the collection of stories and in the novel on which you are currently embarked. I am aware that you probably have a prior commitment for the latter—but it strikes me that a more enthusiastic editorial response than you enjoyed with the short stories might interest you.<sup>5</sup> Speaking for myself—and in some confidence—my own experience with Random House was an extremely unhappy one, in many spheres; they are, I think, far too concerned with a parade of gag books (fave lingua) and lit’ry lights (1000-watt brilliance, etc.) to care much about vigorously supporting a novelist of—dare I say it?—more purposeful mien...

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3 *The Big War* appeared in 1957 with Appelton, Century, Crofts. No copy exists in Lowry’s library with the Lowry Archive in Special Collections, the University of British Columbia.

4 *Hear us O Lord from heaven thy dwelling place* was prepared for publication by Margerie Lowry and published in 1961. How Myrer knew about the stories is not clear, but Robert Giroux, Editor-in-Chief of Harcourt, Brace, had seen Lowry’s draft manuscript for *Hear us O Lord* as early as 1951, and both Harold Matson and Albert Erskine had seen or read the manuscript. In his 11 December 1951 letter to Harold Matson, Giroux thanked him for letting him read Lowry’s stories, and he praised the manuscript.

5 Whether directly from Albert Erskine, which seems unlikely, or from Harold Matson, or some other source, Myrer seems to have heard about Lowry’s work for his long-term contract with Random House and that, by 1954, the publisher had not been enthusiastic with Lowry’s results; see *Sursum Corda* II, letters 600, 601, and 602.

I earnestly hope you won't see this as an intrusion on your own affairs or concerns. And God knows it is not a promise of anything. It is only that in this barathron of venality and mixed motives that publishing has for the most part become, the state of the serious writer is a parlous one indeed; and I felt you might be interested in knowing you have another sheet to windward—and one you could readily avail yourself of, should events incline you toward the doing.

In any event, there it is. My wife joins me in warm and admiring regards; and in the fervent hope that the new novel will be all that you (and a good many others) desire it to be.

Sincerely,

[Anton Myrer]

**Malcolm Lowry to Anton Myrer:**

The White Cottage*	(*born 1750 & still going wrong)
Ripe Near Lewes +	(+where Tom Payne wrote the
Sussex	Rights of Man & Bloody Mary
	burned six Protestants in the Post
	Office, opposite the Bus Stop) <sup>6</sup>

17 March 1957

My dear Anton Myrer:

How extraordinarily good to hear from you, yourself to write me, and heartwarming your words. I often wondered how you were faring and how it was with your work and inquired after both from Albert Erskine when I was last in New York a couple of years ago.<sup>7</sup> He has a very high opinion of your work still, whether he is still your publisher or not. As for Random House, and likewise in the same confidence, I somewhat share your feelings: they are a bit like Milan Cathedral, very impressive from outside, but when you

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6 Lewes is a picturesque eleventh century county town in East Sussex on the river Ouse. It was a short bus ride from Ripe to Lewes, where the Lowrys borrowed library books and did general shopping. Thomas Paine (1737-1809), although born and raised in England, is also closely associated with the United States, where he lived for many years and where he died. He wrote on economics, political thought and international relations, and was a supporter of the American Revolution. Paine lived in Lewes from 1768-74; he wrote and published *The Case of the Officers of the Excise* (1772) during these years. *Rights of Man*, published in two parts in 1791 and 1792, is Paine's response to the French Revolution. Between 1555 and 1557, seventeen Protestants were burned at the stake in Lewes, near the Town Hall, by Catholic counter-Reformers and supporters of "Bloody Mary" Stuart, the

get inside it's a bit chilly and abstract, I fear, something like losing one's way inside a whale. Not that I have been inside, to tell the truth, that is to say, the publishers' offices themselves or not for twenty years (not counting the numerous times my work has been doubtless wafted both in & out), and I don't think I would be there in any other respect but for Albert Erskine himself, to whom I am devoted, who was with Reynal & Hitchcock, and whom, via a useless process of complicated surrogation, I followed there, after the former's merger with Harcourt, Brace. Nonetheless Random House are technically still my publishers, &, indeed some years ago gave me a very generous contract which freed me from Want, though not finally from Fear, for, finding that I could not deliver the works in the specified time, I took advantage of a clause in the contract by which, if I cared once more to risk Want, I could take as much time as I liked, with the result that I got free of fear too, for the most part, & incidentally from Want too, but also owe them a great deal of work, not to mention money by proxy or in kind, while as for the work, that's beginning to bear some resemblance to Milan cathedral also, in size, if not in beauty.<sup>8</sup> (Meantime Knopf is bringing out *Volcano* in Vintage – sic – books.)<sup>9</sup> {Thank you nonetheless for your mention of a possible publishing sheet to windward, however. Heaven knows I may need one before I'm through but at present—though my loyalty is constrained thither by Albert Erskine—I do have a very real obligation to Random H, though without any clear knowledge what their reaction has been or will be, or even whether their habit is to read books at all, let alone mine, or whether they even can read, with the exception of Albert & Robert Haas.}<sup>10</sup>

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Catholic Queen of Scots (1542-87) and mother of James VI of Scots and later of England. Far from being “bloody” or murderous, Mary tried hard to reach compromises with the obdurate Protestant reformer John Knox; she became a pawn in the religious and political struggles of the period. After her arrival in England from France in 1561, Mary spent much of her time (1570-84) under arrest; she was executed by Elizabeth I in 1587.

- 7 Lowry and Erskine met briefly at a party at David Markson's during Malcolm's last visit to New York in September 1954. The Lowrys stayed with the Marksons for a week before sailing to Italy on September 12<sup>th</sup>. See *Sursum Corda* II, letter 749.
- 8 Lowry's break with Random House and Erskine was not the easy matter he makes it out to be here. For the correspondence between Lowry and Erskine and the background to the break, see *Sursum Corda* II, letters 594, 595, 598, 600, 601, and 603.
- 9 Lowry signed a contract with Knopf for the reprint of *Under the Volcano* in March 1957, and the Vintage paperback appeared in February 1958. See *Sursum Corda* II, letters 698 and 705.
- 10 Robert Haas (1880-1964), a vice-president of Random House, supported the major contract awarded Lowry in 1952; see *Sursum Corda* II, letter 521.

I have extremely vivid and pleasant memories of my first reading of *Evil under the Sun*, poignant too because it brings back memories also of a house in Canada we built ourselves in Dollarton, on pikes, down an inlet (our first one was burned down) where it was extremely difficult to imagine anything but good under the sun, or would have been, were we not constantly threatened with being turned out because we had to pay no rent, & also by an expanding oil-civilization, even so as near Paradise as one could get without being singed: the house is still there, we lent it to a Canadian teacher & his wife,<sup>11</sup> but we don't know when we shall ever+ be going back, though half the time I think of nothing else & the other half write about being there. {+This appears to be written in some North country dialect: I can only hope it's true, what some grammarians say, that literary merit has nothing to do with literacy—is this a common malaise of writers? I have to look words like 'thither' up in the dictionary: sometimes twice, & even then I don't get the idea.} If I knew noone was using it, you could have it yourselves rent free, if you ever planned a holiday up there between now & the summer after next. So let us know if you ever do, & I'll get in touch with its guardians & see what's what. There's a boat too, alas, or do I mean hooray: or was; & you can dive out of the window into deep water at high-tide. And even get clams, though not by diving, & not the very big ones, as in *Evil U.T.S.*. It was there, anyway, I read the latter (& mostly wrote *U.T.V.*) & though we had to leave all our books behind including that, I still retain the most vivid memories of it, the diamond sea, the wonderful clam digging hunt, the excellent skill with which Art wove its way in & out like a Bowerbird, for good & ill, & also the unspeakable sense of evil & spoliation you conjured out of the abuse of the intellect so that I remember distinctly shaking my fist at an oil-refinery going up two miles away on the opposite bank, though this picture may seem a little unrelated unless you should understand it was in fact directed at the rape of a virgin forest. All in all, a noble job and you did not deserve to be disappointed with its reception, although give the Muse credit, perhaps for knowing what she was about, always remembering the oil-refinery and that success can be worse: in any case it was a success from the artistic standpoint, & you can always publish it again; albeit I was left with the strong impression that its author was very

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11 The Burts, who also had a summer cabin at Dollarton, were close friends of the Lowrys. Harvey, in particular, took an active interest in Lowry's work and cared for the Lowrys' cabin after their departure in September 1954. See *Sursum Corda* II, letter 578, and other letters to Harvey listed on page 973.



much a creature of light, wherefore I am reminded that Eugene O'Neill once remarked if he'd known how to render happiness as dramatically as tragedy he'd have written about it. Which is perhaps something to ponder.

Meantime I shall look forward very much to receiving the new book from Appleton-Century, albeit I hope it arrives soon, or it may be much delayed: this country is headed into stormy weather, as usual, only more so, though maybe it won't after all.

Meantime too, Somebody, unseen, but wholly of good intent, has evidently been watching me writing this letter, for a little while since, happening upon an old Bible apparently not disturbed since 1750, in the attic, & unaware, until this point that your title came from Ecclesiastes, practising sortes Shakespearianae, & wondering at the same time what I might usefully say to you, I chanced upon the following:

Ecclesiastes: VI i. There is an Evil which I have seen under the sun, & it is common among men

IX iii There is an Evil among all things that are done under the sun, that there is one event unto all: yea, also the hearts of the sons of men is full of Evil, & madness is in their heart while they live and after that they go to the dead

viii [VIII. ix] All that I have seen and applied my heart unto every work that is done under the sun . . .

IX vi Neither have they any more a portion for ever in anything that is done under the sun  
(By the way, why not?)

X v [IX. xiii] This wisdom have I seen also under the sun and it seemed great to me.

xi There is an evil which I have seen under the sun error which proceedeth from the ruler

IX xiii There was a little city, and few men within it:  
(Hold it, hold it,—cut right there, O Ecclesiastes—  
period too: that's nearly wisdom enough)  
On the other hand—

IX ix Love joyfully with the wife whom thou lovest all the days of the life of thy vanity which he hath given thee under the sun: for that is the portion in this life & in thy labour which thou takest under the sun  
Moreover:

IX vii —Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine (under the sun) with a merry heart for God (not to mention Appleton-Century) now accepteth thy works!<sup>12</sup>

I thank your wife also for her regards & the best luck to you both from me and Margerie

Sincerely

Malcolm Lowry

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- 12 Lowry has transcribed loosely from Ecclesiastes, mis-numbered chapter and verse, and added his own interjections to amuse Myrer.

NOTES TO PART ONE

- 1 Quoted from Anton Myrer's 30 July 1957 letter to Margerie Lowry; a typescript copy is now with the Lowry Archive in the Special Collections Division of the University of British Columbia. Patricia S. Myrer, the author's widow, sent me the correspondence quoted from and reproduced here, and she gave the original Lowry letter to Myrer to the Lowry Archive. It is a great pleasure to thank her, for without her care and generosity, this correspondence would never have come to light. Myrer's 29 January 1957 letter is reproduced here with her permission. Lowry's 17 March 1957 letter is reprinted by permission of Sterling Lord Literistic Inc.; © Malcom Lowry Estate.
- 2 Anton Myrer's article, "Le monde au-dessous du volcan," appeared in *Les lettres nouvelles* (see Myrer).
- 3 A check of both the Lowry Archive in Special Collections at the University of British Columbia and the Albert Erskine papers at the University of Virginia, has not turned up any further information.
- 4 In my transcription of the copy texts, I have followed the editorial principles set forth in *Sursum Corda*: dates and salutations are standardized and marginalia are inserted in brackets {} according to Lowry's indication.

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## Art

He paints my portrait with gifts

The first year:

an iron lantern held a pale candle  
a spark, a flame, this was our new passion  
he said I tasted of peaches  
when he kissed every nook and cranny  
every bend and curve  
the land of my buttocks  
the great plains of my thighs  
a tropical country his tongue travelled to  
again  
again  
and again

The next year:

lavender from his healing garden  
the greatest pleasure, he said  
to be a man who loved a woman who loved a woman  
lavender for his faithfulness  
while I spent the odd weekend in other arms

The third year:

an earthenware teapot  
*memento mori*, I believed at first  
to dust you will return  
but when its empty cavern filled with tea, hot and good  
tea steeped for hours in my pot-bellied mind  
when I poured it out to strangers at four o'clock  
I saw it was my cooking pot  
my casserole of drafts

The last year: cherubim  
my friends said,  
a reproach for the children you never gave him  
but I see the cherubim swelling into seraphim  
birth-messengers who will seek me out, some day soon  
I will not laugh in their face  
nor ask, how can this be?  
No, I will be quick to bear what they bring  
go ahead, pen your sentences on my body  
*ecce ancilla domini*

## Play-Acting

The nose that tickles  
is the power of the hand,  
or a finger's disdain

Stark and bare,  
tremors of a hidden  
self, the heart's

Own pant that won't last  
a life-time now, my quietly  
leaving you alone

With a further pulse,  
you, touching the membrane  
in a cavern of sorts.

A face gone awry, and  
a headache's all I'm left with,  
medicine without imagining,

Another contained act  
in a long night,  
watching you only, my child.

## On the Pastoral Challenge in Lowry's "The Forest Path to the Spring"

**W**hat characterizes the modern pastoral? One argument stresses its self-consciousness, making the reader ambivalent toward any latter-day voice that professes the idyllic (Lindenberger 345). To others, pastoral in its modern guise is by necessity "predicated on the world (of civilization, urbanity, or technology)," and must hence give expression to these forces also *within* its own setting (Peck 76). These views both suggest that the barriers between a pastoral realm and the outside world have been dismantled. At best, the result will be a civil dialectic; at worst, a civil war. The pessimistic appraisal will then find the modern pastoral an aberration that breaks "all traditional patterns" and ends in parody (Poggioli 33).

But is this necessarily so? Does the modern pastoral present a set of obsolete themes and motifs, only to mock and dismantle them? Or does it rather engage contrary forces in an attempt at reconciliation? I shall argue here for the latter position in a reading of Malcolm Lowry's "The Forest Path to the Spring." As I hope to show, the speaker of "Forest Path" employs a variety of pastoral strategies while continually testing their effectiveness. A process of iteration underlies his narrative, whereby a pastoral ideology is alternately confirmed and denied.<sup>1</sup>

"The Forest Path to the Spring" is included in the posthumously published *Hear Us O Lord From Heaven Thy Dwelling Place*, a collection of tales and short novels<sup>2</sup> published after Lowry's death.<sup>3</sup> "Forest Path" has interesting parallels with Thoreau's *Walden*, but also displays a deeper crisis as underlying both landscape and narrator.<sup>4</sup> The struggle to maintain a



retreat—and to receive spiritual salvation from it—makes for a severe test of the pastoral *pharmakon* in Lowry's text.

The narrator of "Forest Path" is a jazz musician, former seaman and alcoholic. In the words of Lowry's biographer Douglas Day, "his equilibrium can be maintained only with the utmost care" (456). The protagonist exemplifies a pastoral speaker as recently characterized by Paul Alpers, that is, a voice modulated by humble and dependent circumstances typical of the traditional shepherd or swain.<sup>5</sup> The speaker may blend into his or her environment, yet remain without power to influence it (13-28; 93; 185). Alpers emphasizes music as an important aspect of the pastoral, as it characteristically concerns itself with "songs and colloquies that express and thereby seek to redress separation, absence, or loss" (81). In "Forest Path," song becomes an integral part of the couple's life, and the narrator's quest evolves into one of writing an opera about their new circumstances. Integration emerges as the essential task of Lowry's narrator: to combine past with present; self with nature; experience with art, while the enterprise remains constantly in peril.<sup>6</sup> The narrative of "Forest Path" can thus be read as a debate on the validity of the pastoral. It explores whether a modern, permeable environment would sustain the life and voice of a pastoral speaker.

Most commentators agree that "Forest Path" is conspicuously autobiographical.<sup>7</sup> To one critic, "it is fiction only to the extent that Lowry selects and alters details of his personal history to fit a design, in much the way that Thoreau telescopes the time he spent at Walden to accord with the cycle of the seasons" (Cross 99).<sup>8</sup> Another commentator stresses that the text is dedicated to "Margerie, my wife" and describes a life at "Eridanus" closely modeled after the Lowrys' years in Dollarton. Further, "the narrator's fear of eviction, his tendency to see projections of his own mind in the external world, his attempt to escape the tyranny of his ego and to transcend his past ... all suggest that the narrator is yet another of Lowry's self-portraits" (McCarthy 204-05; see Dodson 35). The Lowrys arrived in British Columbia in 1940, renting a squatter's shack on the foreshore of Burrard Inlet near the village of Dollarton. Here they found seclusion and a way of life "dying out of the world" (*Selected Letters* 314). As Sheryl Salloum argues, the seafront environment had "a vitalizing impact on Lowry, and its 'conjunction of favoring yet opposing circumstances' [*October Ferry to Gabriola* 197] came to have personal and artistic significance for him" (11-12).

Critics also tend to agree on the character of "Forest Path." One commentator sees it as a "genuine meditation" (Day 456), another sees a "devotional

impulse underlying the novella" (Cross 99), while others argue that it "encapsulates a spiritual struggle that runs through *Hear Us O Lord*" (McCarthy 205; see Epstein 130-44). In my view, the quest for an existence modelled after a pastoral ideology in "Forest Path" parallels its narrator's struggle for spiritual health. I will therefore pay special attention to the interaction between landscape and narrator, and further to the attitudes and struggles he displays toward the world of civilization and its virtues.

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"Forest Path" signals that it involves a pastoral project when the narrator relates the circumstances of the couple's arrival and settling. He first<sup>9</sup> describes Eridanus as a "hamlet" without "any neighbors to speak of" (*FPS* 220). The couple's decision to stay comes, appropriately enough, on the morning after Labour Day, "years ago at the beginning of the war" (*FPS* 226). They arrive from their city on the last day of vacation for the working majority. Eridanus then seems "hidden but noisy," reminding them of "a fifth-rate seaside resort" (*FPS* 226; 227). The couple's hopes of swimming in the inlet the same afternoon are thwarted by a foul stench from an oil spill. After a night's sleep in a rented seafront shack, however, their sentiments change. They now encounter a "scene of absolute emptiness and solitude," where the sunrise brings both mountain pines and power lines into relief, and a foghorn sounds "as if some great symphony had just begun its opening chords" (*FPS* 228). Realizing the promise of their location, the couple also notices the amazing cleansing powers of the returning tide: "down the inlet the oil tanker had vanished, and with it the oil slick; the tide was high and cold and deep and we swam, diving straight off the porch" (*FPS* 228; see also 235). Surrounding their newfound Arcadia is range upon range of mountains ("these peaks ... were ... guardians"; *FPS* 229), with coniferous forest stretching down towards the beach and their seafront home. The narrator accentuates the sheltered nature of their location: "Since we were in a bay *within* the inlet, the city, like the town—by which latter I mean Eridanus Port at the sawmill—the city was invisible to us, *behind* us ... was our feeling" (*FPS* 217-18).

Yet despite its professed seclusion, the Eridanus environment is at best a "middle landscape" in Leo Marx's sense (31). Dotted with factories and infrastructure, it can equally strike one as an outright industrial milieu. Tellingly, the narrator of "Forest Path" describes his local train as a quaint relic, even as an object of nostalgia, among the heavy industrial works sur-

rounding the inlet (*FPS* 281). While *Walden's* protagonist compares his locomotive alternately to a "devilish Iron Horse" or "bloated pest," its whistle sounding like "the wild scream of a hawk," Lowry's narrator hears a clearly domesticated "moo" (*Walden* 192 & 115; *FPS* 281). A pastoral realm is nevertheless defiantly proclaimed in "Forest Path." The narrator evaluates his new circumstances as "poverty stricken and abject in the eyes of the world," and yet "the world outside—so portentous in its prescriptions for man of imaginary needs that were in reality his damnation—was hell" (*FPS* 242-43). The forest spring becomes his rejuvenating nexus and ultimate pastoral marker: "It is a nuisance," he says, "but not insignificant, that I have to use the same word for this as for the season" (*FPS* 254).

Travelling to the city on a brief errand one winter day, the narrator immediately yearns for Eridanus. The contrast between the two environments is stark:

The city ... had begun to render our existence [at Eridanus] an almost impossible fable, so that I seemed to know with sad foresight how even its richest comforts that one day we might in cowardice yearn for, and finally have, would almost suffocate all memory of the reality and wealth of such a life as ours, the city, with its steam heat, its prison bars of Venetian blinds, its frozen static views of roofs and a few small dingy gardens with clipped shrubs that looked, in the winter dusk, like chicken croquettes covered with powdered sugar. (*FPS* 252)

In the face of mightier physical adversaries, Lowry's narrator ultimately posits the Eridanus shacks as defense. They are "shrines of ... integrity and independence," "helpless yet stalwart symbol[s] of man's hunger and need for beauty" (*FPS* 245; 232). Considering them "simple and primitive," he still wonders at their inherent complexity in surviving "the elemental forces [they] had to withstand" (*FPS* 232).

As in Thoreau's *Walden*, the pastoral strategy of "Forest Path" gains much of its definition by the forces that oppose it. These are considerably stronger than those in *Walden*, for several reasons. The landscape is far more industrialized, and also exposed to severe damage by the elements. The revolution of the seasons that structures both works is a harsher process in "Forest Path." As the couple live as squatters, eviction also threatens, whereas *Walden's* Thoreau has pragmatically secured permission from his landowner. Further, as compared to the strong and confident protagonist of *Walden*, the narrator of "Forest Path" speaks from a considerably weaker position: "my health had been ruined by late hours and one-night stands," he confesses, later adding that "I must have stumbled into a thousand alcoholic dawns" (*FPS* 230; 248). Wanting the resolve of *Walden's* pioneer,

Lowry's narrator initially emphasizes the difficulties of staying on at Eridanus. While projecting his doubts on his spouse, he leaves no question about his own uncertainty: "how hard it would be to actually live here, for my wife to cope [without] ordinary comforts of any kind" (*FPS* 231). Ironically, while yearning for a benevolent retreat the narrator finds himself alienated from nature and lacking practical knowledge of survival. He enters into his new life naked, and must (re)learn what a pastoral protagonist like Thoreau's can largely take for granted.

Lowry's narrator continues to see the war as an ominous presence. In Virgilian fashion it looms as an ultimate if tragic symbol of civilization, to which the "Forest Path" speaker feels himself inextricably bound: "while people were dying ... it was hard to be really happy within oneself... what could one do with one's happiness?" (*FPS* 230). His sense of obligation eventually prompts him to apply—without success—to the military. He maintains that "it was a matter of simple honor to attempt to fit myself for the slaughter if humanly possible, and it was as much this as for my marriage that I had given up my old life of night clubs" (*FPS* 231; see also 269).

Yet the narrator eventually comes to fear that he may lose his new life. As the positive effects of staying on take hold of him, he becomes depressed: "One night ... I saw my shadow ... and [it] seemed for a moment the glowing embodiment of all that threatened us; yes, even a projection of that dark chaotic side of myself, my ferocious destructive ignorance" (*FPS* 233). The narrator reminds himself not to let "pride in this humbleness spoil everything" (*FPS* 251). Later, he and Margerie make up their own horror story, in which they both disappear while walking towards the nearby spring. "This story," the narrator says, "was [perhaps] a means of propitiating fate for the miraculous fact that we had not been separated by not assuming it to be a smug certitude, a form of inoculation, since we still might be separated by the war" (*FPS* 269).

Intense hatred also threatens the narrator, enveloping everything but his wife. "I had access to the fearful wrath that was sweeping the world, or ... stood at the mercy of the wild forces of nature ... like the dreadful Wendigo, the avenging, man-hating spirit of the wilderness, the fire-tortured forest, that the Indians feared and believed in still" (*FPS* 243). Mirroring this surging emotion, the forest fire is described as a force that "sometimes suddenly turns back on its tracks and even commits suicide, behaving as if it had an idiot mind of its own" (*FPS* 243). Indeed, the narrator is once shocked at finding a length of rope along his path: "that is the awful end of such

thoughts. Had I actually been tempted to kill myself?" (*FPS* 260). Finally, he gains control of his self-loathing by identifying it as something sprung from his new surroundings. He begins to appreciate his environment while realizing its fragility: "After all it was not human beings I hated but the ugliness they made in the image of their own ignorant contempt for the earth" (*FPS* 246).

All along the couple acknowledge the difficulties of their new condition. Practical problems like obtaining water and fuel are compounded by latent feelings of inferiority and doubt. When a new family arrives at Eridanus whose values consist of "keeping up with the Joneses," the narrator admits of himself and his wife that "even [we] ourselves were not entirely absolved from identifying [our Eridanus] life with 'failure'" (*FPS* 246). Coming to terms with his emotions and gaining bodily strength, however, the narrator realizes that the major threat to their new life will come not from nature or inner hesitation, but from a society at odds with itself:

Civilization, creator of deathscapes, like a dull-witted fire of ugliness and ferocious stupidity—so unimaginative it had even almost managed to spoil the architectural beauty of our oil refinery—had spread all down the opposite bank, ... murdering the trees and taking down the shacks as it went, but it had become baffled by the Indian reserve, and a law that had not been repealed that forbade building too near a lighthouse, so to the south we were miraculously saved by civilization itself ... as if it too had become conscious of the futility of pretending that it was advancing by creating the moribund. (*FPS* 276)

While civilization here ironically parallels but also surpasses the Indian Wendigo, its most acute threat to the couple remains eviction.<sup>10</sup> Although such action must ultimately be sanctioned by the local authorities (and never is, at least not during their described stay), it is prefigured by the city press and intolerant motorboaters, who display an openly mocking and hostile attitude towards the squatters (*FPS* 237; 274).<sup>11</sup> The narrator gives a brilliantly ironic illustration of this sentiment by shifting perspective from his own vantage at the beginning of "Forest Path." Instead of simply describing the nearby geography as seen from the shack, he invites the reader to a cruise both temporal and spatial: "If you can imagine yourself taking a pleasure steamer down the inlet from the city some afternoon" (*FPS* 218), you would eventually

be cutting across our bay with our little cabins under the trees on the beach where we lived at Eridanus, and that was our path going along the bank; but you would be able to see from your steamer what we could not, ... into Eridanus Port—or, if this happens to be today, what was Eridanus Port and is now a real

estate subsection; perhaps you would still see people waving at you before that though, and the man with the megaphone on your steamer who points out the sights would say contemptuously, 'Squatters; the government's been trying to get them off for years,' and that would be ourselves, my wife and me, waving to you gaily. (*FPS* 218-19)

If the reader feels uncomfortable at "being" on this vessel, or at least at the boat guide's derogatory comments, the narrator nevertheless persists, turning his irony into disgust. To him tourism—of which the steamer company of course is part—adulterates the landscape and caters to degenerate popular demand. Describing the "marvelous region of wilderness" that the boat tour traverses, he turns to note its present state: "[here] you may even today, among the advertisements for dyspeptic soft poisons nailed to trees, have ... a cup of chill weak tea with a little bag in it at a place called Ye Olde Totemlande Inne" (*FPS* 219).

Civilization's other major threat to the couple's retreat is a radical alteration of the landscape. They lack defenses against any such development, not owning the strip of land they inhabit: "When they spoke of damming the inlet, when a British brewery interest later talked of turning the whole place into a stagnant fresh water basin ... it was as if for a moment the sources of my own life trembled and agonized and dried up within me," the narrator says (*FPS* 235). Thus he links his former alcoholism with torpidity, while the influences of the sea are rendered as those of a pure, cleansing water.

Given the difficulties facing the couple, it is perhaps tempting to call their retreat an impossible dream. But life at Eridanus, with all its hardships, is also benign. The narrator rises from his guilt and becomes capable of happiness. His wife and their new environment aid his recovery: "Through [Margerie] I became susceptible to these moods and changes and currents of nature, as to its ceaseless rotting into humus of its fallen leaves and buds—nothing in nature suggested you died yourself more than that, I began to think—and burgeoning towards life" (*FPS* 247). Margerie's sensibility influences the narrator to speculate about the cyclic revolutions of nature. He grasps for a philosophy that makes sense of his own experience. What finally reconciles him to his past and present is partly the transitional character of nature. As this cyclic force becomes apparent to him, it also turns into a powerful metaphor for his own recovery. It allows him, as he ultimately sees it, to "die" away from his old life and memories, only to be "reborn" in conjunction with the greater processes of nature (*FPS* 268).

The narrator likens his own shifting thoughts to the motions of the

Eridanus inlet: “though they were in motion they were in order too: an inlet does not overflow its banks, however high the tide, nor does it dry up, the tide goes out, but it comes in again” (*FPS* 265). As his recovery progresses, he identifies completely with the natural: “I dreamed that my being had been transformed into the inlet itself” (*FPS* 269). He finds the religious blueprint for the motions of nature, time, and self in the notion of cyclic revolution. “At such a time of stillness,” he says of a becalmed Eridanus cove, “it was like what I have learned the Chinese call the Tao ... like ‘that which is so still and yet passes on in constant flow, and in passing on, becomes remote, and having become remote, returns’” (*FPS* 234-35). The narrator reinforces this metaphor by recalling the circuit of rain and the pulse of tides in Eridanus bay. Here the Tao is finally linked explicitly to the lives of the couple themselves: “the tides and currents ... returned again as we ourselves had done” (*FPS* 282). The narrator reconsiders the process of aging as he appears fully restored: “I wondered if what really we should see in age is merely the principle of the seasons themselves wearing out, only to renew themselves through another kind of death” (*FPS* 277-78).

One can argue that the narrator experiences a pastoral cure. Given his sentiments towards the “world” (the sorry circumstances of his old life, the ugliness of the city, and the depraved forces of civilization), there are plenty of indications that he would not have survived long in an urban environment. Instead, Eridanus becomes his Arcadia, and his wife, in a sense, his nymph. Healthy surroundings and a faithful companion restore his sense of well-being and physical strength, and lead him toward a philosophy that eventually reconciles him with his past.<sup>12</sup> Crucially, the narrator also strives for an inventive energy: “I would have to do something creative with my life if I did not want somehow to go to pieces,” as he says (*FPS* 249). It is arguably in this light that one should consider his repeated expressions of irritation and unease at the shack names “Dunwoiken” and “Wywurk”: they connote a passive otium, prompting the “permanently catastrophic state[s] of mind” that “Hi-doubt” and “Hangover”—neighbouring shack names—seem to foreshadow (*FPS* 219; 220; 256). These remarks can also be seen as critical of a traditional pastoral indolence; Lowry’s narrator is convinced of “nature’s intolerance of inertia” (*FPS*, 229).

The creation of the narrator’s opera echoes his evolving philosophy, with its false starts and changed objectives along the way. Importantly, the foghorn sounded at dawn of the couple’s first September morning at Eridanus strikes the narrator “as if some great symphony had just begun its

opening chords" (*FPS* 228). Come winter, he confesses that he "had been haunted for months by the idea of writing a symphony," wrested from his earlier experiences of jazz (*FPS* 266). The work is much delayed, however, and its fragments are ominously lost to fire (compare the portrayal of the Wendigo inferno [*FPS* 243], and also the narrator's stated past as a ship's fireman [*FPS* 219; 222], "attached romantically ... to the obsolete days of stokeholds" [*FPS* 249]).

The narrator's impetus then evolves into an idea for an opera, comprising *all* aspects of Eridanus, human as well as natural. This 'real' work (the Latin plural *opera* can mean "personal work" or "effort") succeeds as a more truthful, multifaceted opus, geared to his promising present as well as his troubled past. The narrator notes that in composing he first needs to "put all this into *words*, to see it, to try and see the thoughts even as I [hear] the music" (*FPS* 268). Thus we are left with the written testimony of "Forest Path" as a 'sketch' for an opera of the same name. Indeed, the text could be seen as a draft for a libretto, poised between the narrator's actual Eridanus existence and its tentative music: "Sometimes I felt our life together to be a sort of singing," the narrator says (*FPS* 266), adding elsewhere that they rarely worked without song (*FPS* 248). Troubling aspects remain, however. As the narrator testifies, life at Eridanus involves struggle from the very beginning. His gradually acquired, all-encompassing philosophy does help him cope with, and eventually embrace, his new circumstances (*FPS* 253). Yet it also fosters an ambivalence toward what he sees as the outside world, rather than producing a complete rejection of it.

In the many rhetorical outbursts against civilization in "Forest Path" the narrator's antagonism is clear. His ambivalence becomes evident indirectly, in a confusion over the terms of his new existence. As everything in Eridanus, according to the narrator's understanding, seems "made out of everything else" (*FPS* 246), Eridanus itself necessarily becomes multiform, constantly changing, yet its different aspects are interrelated. At one point he counts to five guises: "And Eridanus too, that was a ship and the name of our hamlet and seaport, and inlet, and also a constellation" (*FPS* 255). Elsewhere he maintains that "we poor folk were also Eridanus, a condemned community, constantly under the shadow of eviction" (*FPS* 225). These interchangeable forms, while fascinating, are also profoundly disquieting: "Were we living a life that was half real, half fable?" the narrator asks (*FPS* 255).<sup>13</sup> The troubling dimension stems from the essentially ambiguous nature of the Eridanus name: "In the heavens at night, as my wife first



taught me, dark and wandering beneath blazing Orion, flowed the starry constellation Eridanus, known both as the River of Death and the River of Life" (*FPS* 225-26). Eridanus is at once a commercial town and pastoral hamlet; a community of poor dwellers and richer summer guests; an inlet cleansed by a vigorous tide but marred by deposits of tar and creosote. The constellation Eridanus soars and shines in the heavens, sanctioned by Jupiter, while the prow of the steamer *S.S. Eridanus*, abandoned by its owners, rusts in an abyss of filthy sediment below.

Thus the differing aspects of Eridanus can be traced to a central opposition between invigorating and degenerative powers. Yet there is also a paradoxical bond merging these various forces, wrought from myth and strengthened by the narrator's experience. While he continually grasps for happiness at Eridanus, he must (following the logic of the paradox) also acknowledge its various 'deaths'—whether consciously or not. As the reader of "Forest Path" quickly realizes, the narrator often indulges in a process of mental iteration and interplay of significance, while his self-awareness seems to operate on several levels at once.<sup>14</sup> While his digressions at times lead him into confusion and moodiness, they also serve to blur the distinctions between the elements that nourish and those that strangle the idyll at Eridanus.

The narrator is startled by the assertion of a neighbour that Eridanus is "out of this world, brother" (*FPS* 255):

It gave me an uneasy feeling for a moment, like seeing one of those grotesque films in which they use animated cartoons with real figures, a mixture of two forms .... And yet did [my] confusion come from pinning the labels of one dimension on another? Or were they inextricable? As when, just about this time, the oil refinery decided to put a great sign over the wharfs, as an advertisement: SHELL. But for weeks they never got around to the S, so that it was left HELL. And yet, my own imagination could not have dreamt anything fairer than the heaven from which we perceived this. (In fact I was even fond of the evil oil refinery itself that at night now, as the war demanded more and more lubrication, was often a blaze of lights like a battleship in harbor on the Admiral's birthday.) But these problems I could never solve.... (*FPS* 255-56)

The narrator's digression on the fragmented sign applies to his present reality and environment. He allows the sign to play over his entire experience, even as he well understands that it *is* incomplete. Also intriguing is how the oil refinery gradually loses its sinister appearance. A damning response to the HELL sign, while perhaps to be expected, does not occur. For the narrator does not, like the motorboaters he once catches grappling with the shack name "Wywurk," fall into "that mood of easy tolerance that

comes only to the superior reader” once the wordplay is understood (*FPS* 220). Nothing would have been easier than to take the sign to denote the factory, to read it as “the oil refinery = HELL,” or at least as a gateway to Styx. Instead, the narrator judges the sign as a tentative description of the whole environment, including his own location. Its message is seen as directed at himself and his own life across the bay.

The oil refinery—or, for that matter, any of the factories at Port Boden—could easily have served as the symbolic arch-enemy of the pastoral enclave at Eridanus. Yet none of these industries entirely serves such a role. The narrator condemns the oil refinery for its environmental damage, but still endows it with redeeming aesthetic qualities. Viewing the plant, he concludes that it “is very fine, with the red votive candle of the burning oil wastes flickering ceaselessly all night” (*FPS* 226). Further on he likens the factory to “a strange and beautiful musical instrument” (*FPS* 229, see also 234), and later yet gathers his visual impressions to recall its “architectural beauty” (*FPS* 276).

A remarkable passage describing aluminum gas tanks further illustrates the complexity of vision presented in “Forest Path.” In the early morning sun, the tanks strike the narrator as “golden pillars . . . to a Greek temple” (*FPS* 258). Many of the area’s technological attributes are then similarly evoked—however briefly—as scenic complements to the panorama as viewed from the couple’s dwelling. The factories, smoke, gas tanks, oil tanker and motorboats all parade on a stage that might recall ancient Piraeus. Certainly these impressions last only a few moments, and the industrial structures in particular reveal their normal “ugliness” (*FPS* 258), but it is important to note the ambivalence that ensues from them. As a previous conversation makes clear, “Part of what makes this sunrise so wonderful isn’t just pure nature. It’s the smoke from those wretched factories at Port Boden” (*FPS* 233).

One may also consider the passage describing the narrator’s encounter with a mountain lion. He recalls the incident: “I must have been afraid—I mean I must have been afraid in some way of the lion—but at the hill on the spring path have been already gripped by the anticipation of a so much greater fear that the concrete fact even of a lion had been unable to displace it” (*FPS* 263). As it turns out, this episode sets in motion thoughts of great therapeutic value. They occur during the night after the encounter, as the narrator lies sleeping in bed:

Half-conscious I told myself that it was as though I had actually been on the look out for something on the path that had seemed ready, on every side, to spring out of our paradise at us, that was nothing so much as the embodiment in some frightful animal form of those nameless somnambulisms, guilts, ghouls of past delirium, wounds to other souls and lives, ... betrayals of self and I know not what, ready to leap out and destroy me, to destroy us, and our happiness, so that when, as if in answer to all this, I saw a mere mountain lion, how could I be afraid? And yet mysteriously the lion was all that too. (*FPS* 263-64)

The passage reveals that the lion the narrator dreads is primarily a 'dantesque' one, embodying his own fears and guilt. The actual lion, by contrast, receives sympathy at the news of its death: "we mourned the animal a bit, in our way" (*FPS* 263). As a result, the collected impression of the Eridanus lion is complex.<sup>15</sup> On the one hand, the animal triggers an important phase of the narrator's recovery, serving him as a warning (and hence propelling him towards a spiritually richer existence); on the other, less willingly acknowledged, it poses a very real threat to the narrator's life at one point. Far from being merely a symbolic predator, the cougar attacks a local before having its own throat slit.

The narrator's "layering"<sup>16</sup> of his experiences reveals an ongoing struggle to maintain the 'life' side of the Eridanus coin. He recovers by analyzing his experiences symbolically, looking for warning or hope. With crucial aid from his wife, the narrator also grasps for a philosophy appropriate to his new and fragile circumstances. With the landscape in its partly damaged and ever threatened state, and the constantly shifting influences of civilization on both environment and people, it is evident that "Forest Path" presents a pastoral more by trustful perception than ready substance. Furthermore, Lowry's narrator continually struggles with perplexity. This recalls William Empson's classic thesis that the pastoral involves a "process of putting the complex into the simple" (Empson 25). In other words, simplicity must increasingly be seen as a deliberate contrast to modern, compound experience, not as a self-sufficient or merely given trait. The modern pastoral will, in this regard, always involve conflict of some sort.

But where Empson often assumes a simple environment for the allegedly complex modern character, the narrator's surroundings in "Forest Path" are anything but simple. Eridanus is a beautiful and often peaceful community, yet equally prone to show its other faces. One recalls, for instance, the sun's striking "platinum disc" suddenly turning into "the back of a skull" (*FPS* 239; 274). The text's "counter-pastoral" forces often seem enhanced by the narrator's disclosures, yet his confused digressions ultimately render many

of these forces ambiguous. For example, he finds the city a detestable place. Yet its library provides him with books, and the same books help him form his new philosophy. Then there is the matter of the couple's third shack, built on the posts of the second. While the structure forms a triumphant image of return, it is tellingly built of driftwood from the Port Boden sawmill—ostensibly an industrial blot on an otherwise idyllic inlet scene. Further, the narrator evokes civilization as a “creator of deathscapes” that yet “miraculously save[s]” portions of the Eridanus enclave, and this by way of both its laws and inconsistencies (*FPS* 276). To the reader, the text dismantles its pastoral tendencies even as it builds them, or vice versa. It becomes increasingly clear that a sustained pastoral life and vision, given the protean nature of the Eridanus environment, must spring from a sedulous faith in recovery on the narrator's part.<sup>17</sup>

Eridanus doesn't offer any firm defense against the allegedly 'anti-pastoral' forces of civilization. It furnishes no effective border to shut them out, as it in a sense embodies these forces itself. The narrator likes to think of the shacks as a final repository of pastoral power. But even here are threats of eviction and bulldozing from the world of civilization, and of fire and storm from the natural world. While the Eridanus landscape constantly risks industrial pollution, the same landscape's natural powers (whether in the form of violent seas, winds, cold spells or mountain lions) at times also threaten the couple's pastoral existence. The enemy, fundamentally, is shown to be both within and without, and prone to metamorphosis. This flexible antagonism in turn creates an uncertainty about borders and 'alignments' in Eridanus, aptly summarized by Margerie's disclosure that the name connotes two divergent waters. Nonetheless, the narrator's recovery necessitates a reconciliation to ambiguity. Such acceptance offers him a form of transcendence from doubt when complete. Instead of suffering a permanent and paralyzing duality, the narrator rises to grasp a vital cyclic force at work. Having returned from a hiatus abroad, he is elated to find the forest spring still running, despite all obstacles:

And the spring? Here it was. It still ran, down through the jack-in-the-pulpits.... It purified itself a bit as it came down from the mountains, but it always carried with it a faint tang of mushrooms, earth, dead leaves, pine needles, mud and snow, on its way down to the inlet and out to the Pacific. In the deeper reaches of the forest, in the somber damp caves, where the dead branches hang bowed down with moss, and death camass and the destroying angel grow, it was haggard and chill and tragic, unsure measurer of its path. Feeling its way underground it must have had its dark moments. But here, in springtime, on its last lap to the sea, it was at its source a happy joyous little stream. (*FPS* 283)

“Forest Path” presents modern pastoral borne by both brave mental quest and considerable physical effort. And its pastoral is thus, in a larger sense, freed from the bond of locality. Virtually any landscape (according to the implied logic) will suffice for a pastoral retreat, and yet none will fulfill its promise. Such an extrapolation also, of course, points to a general predicament of modern landscape, and equally to the pervasiveness of the “world” in the minds of potential Arcadians. Still, “Forest Path” does not descend into the parody of pastoral some would expect. Nor does it harness the merely rhetorical evasion of counter-pastoral forces at times evident in Thoreau’s *Walden*. It remains largely faithful to a pastoral ideology and pedigree in Alpers’ sense, its narrator committed to a modest life of song where outward circumstances are often severe.

If anything, “Forest Path” recognizes a modern ambivalence toward the idyllic moment. Ambivalence importantly does not equal rejection in this context, while it does leave room for doubt and fear (and death) within the pastoral yearning. Very often the narrator himself supplies the hesitations and dreads. The reader seldom has to read “against” the narrative to grasp its range of “favoring yet opposing circumstances.” This is a fundamental quality of the modern pastoral as presented in “Forest Path,” and it poses a strong dialectical challenge to prospective users of the mode.

NOTES

- 1 I here side, albeit provisionally, with Buell’s capacious definition of the pastoral as “all literature—poetry or prose, fiction or nonfiction—that celebrates the ethos of nature/rurality over against the ethos of town or city” (23).
- 2 I borrow this characterization from the dust-jacket and publisher’s preface to the volume. Lowry himself calls his work alternately a “long short story” or “novella” (*Selected Letters*, 245 and 266 respectively).
- 3 Hereafter abridged in the main text to “Forest Path,” and to *FPS* within brackets when directly quoted or first referred to in the notes.
- 4 My reading contrasts with that of Costa, who proposes that both *Walden* and “Forest Path” present quests for transcendence that eschew “all ambiguity of viewpoint” (63).
- 5 Admittedly, there is a latent irony to the narrator’s claim in “Forest Path” that “I am ... naïve in expressing myself” (*FPS*, 267). He proves at best *consciously* naïve in his restrained power of expression and deceptively open literary referencing. Yet this does not invalidate his status as a pastoral speaker. Alpers argues convincingly that there resides a “paradox of poetic strength in modesty,” whereby pastoral poets with “self-awareness and wit ... scale down their verse,” thus “reclaiming a degree of strength relative to their [post-heroic, cosmopolitan] world” (51).
- 6 Ingham has recently argued that the narrator’s quest in *FPS* is a success, contrasting it to

- the “centrifugal” narrative of *Under the Volcano*: “in ‘Forest Path’ [Lowry employs] the *centripetal* force of Neo-Platonism to create a *stable* set of correspondences: to *integrate* cosmos and consciousness” (123).
- 7 By contrast, Grace wishes to differentiate between Lowry and the narrator of “Forest Path.” Upholding this distinction is difficult, however. Grace concedes that the text is an expression of “the Lowry Myth” (113), and her analysis (see especially her passage on the cabin and pier [115]) also incorporates biographical evidence.
  - 8 Compare Lowry’s own words in a letter from Dollarton to his agent Harold Matson of Oct. 2, 1951: “[FPS] is a story of happiness, in fact, roughly of our life here in the forest, exultant side of” (*Selected Letters* 266).
  - 9 That is, in narratological terms, following the chronology of the story, not that of the narrative, which is temporally disjointed (*Genette* 27). In an introductory reminiscence regarding Eridanus, the narrator recalls that “once we were quite alone the whole winter” (*FPS* 216).
  - 10 As Salloum points out, a similar threat drove the Lowrys from their Dollarton shack in 1954 (28-29; 34).
  - 11 In one bizarre instance, a newspaper even suggests renaming Eridanus, presumably seeing “something insulting in the name of our town of a political, even an international nature, or as denoting foreign influences, as a result of which there has been some agitation, on the part of some distant ratepayers, with I know not what motives, to change its name to Shellvue” (*FPS* 226).
  - 12 The narrator’s Taoistic inclination does not preclude an important Christian streak. Indeed, the *leitmotif* of the path is seminally Biblical, while Lowry also proves well acquainted with Pascal, Eckhardt and Swedenborg.
  - 13 O’Kill has argued that Lowry’s associative language “allowed him ‘to express six things at the same time,’ as he put it; to attempt to relate each individual moment to all its circumstances” (185). Conversely, one may argue with Kroetsch that “Lowry always, in writing, negates the naïve existence of what he names” (249). Thus Lowry’s writing would strive to position itself as both an affirmation and denial, as prone to worry any postulations it sees itself as harboring.
  - 14 This effect, of course, is strengthened by the narrative’s layering of past tense and historical present: the “I” of the text is thus constantly able to analyze and criticize itself.
  - 15 Reinforcing the compound meaning of the encounter, the waiting cougar is mirrored by an earlier, positive comment on the villagers: “Like benevolent mountain lions ... our neighbors would wait all day ... to help us in some way, or bring a gift” (*FPS* 244). Indeed, this doubling or ‘recycling’ of images in various contexts is a structural technique throughout “Forest Path,” thus strengthening the thematic resonance of the text.
  - 16 I borrow this term from Markson, who aptly characterizes Lowry’s style in *Hear Us O Lord* as one of “layered resonance” (viii).
  - 17 Compare Peck’s assertion that “all Walden’s various ‘bounds,’ ‘separations,’ and ‘intervals’ are marked off and maintained by the pastoral imagination” (85).

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## The satisfaction of knowing

“Elvis is dead,” the man at the bar says, “John Lennon gunned down and Hemingway blew his brains out fearing cancer, kills himself ‘cause he feared *death*, ain’t that a hoot? What I mean, though, all the giants gone, died not young necessarily but younger than they should have.” He takes a guzzle of beer, wipes foam from his sensual mouth, blows his nose in a napkin embossed with the name of the place, The Empress of China. A comma of suds clings to the corner of his lower lip. “Who the hell,” the fellow next to him asks, “is Hemingway?” For a moment, the bar is silent, the conversations at each table and puddle having run the length of their cycles, the silence blossoming, filling itself with the echo of a shotgun blast, the universe drawing a sharp breath in surprise. “What was that?” the second guy asks, he’s pink-faced as a fresh ham, just as blank. “What was what?” the first guy says, turning back to the bar, to his beer, to the satisfaction of knowing.



## Soil Building

Sometimes you withdraw so far from the world  
you mistrust even the surf of cherry bloom  
crashing overhead—garish, gaudy,  
unbelievable happiness. What is there to say

after the finch's heart-piercing outburst?  
A varied thrush gives a low, buzzing whistle.  
A vee of Canada geese wavers north-west:  
their thrilling cries pull each other up the coast.

Under the laurel, lily shoots barely visible  
against sparrowy ground—the brown of an old photo's  
deepest shadows, a battered board  
kitchen couch where your father lies asleep.

A log house. Filthy towel, razor strop,  
dipper and pail. A mirror darkening  
coppery mica colour, its cheap backing  
fracturing, flaking. Old injuries are over.

## A Will and Two Ways The Ambivalence of Evil in Robertson Davies's *The Deptford Trilogy*

Orthodox Christianity has always had for me the difficulty that it really won't come ... to grips with the problem of evil. It knows an enormous amount about evil, it discusses evil in fascinating terms, but evil is always the other thing: it is something which is apart from perfection, and man's duty is to strive for perfection. I could not reconcile that with such experience of life as I had, and the Jungian feeling that things tend to run into one another, that what looks good can be pushed to the point where it becomes evil, and that evil very frequently bears what can only be regarded as good fruit—this was the first time I'd ever seen that sort of thing given reasonable consideration, and it made enormous sense to me. I feel now that I am a person of strongly religious temperament, but when I say "religious" I mean immensely conscious of powers of which I can have only the dimmest apprehension, which operate by means that I cannot fathom, in directions which I would be a fool to call either good or bad.

Robertson Davies, Interview with Donald Silver Cameron (Davis 82)

**W**hile it might seem something of an exaggeration to ascribe anything so elaborate as a systematic theology to Robertson Davies's *The Deptford Trilogy*, there is such a large component in it of metaphysical speculation as to the role of the sacred in temporal affairs that it would be difficult to think of a more appropriate term. William James defined the religious attitude as comprising "the feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider the divine" (50), using the word "divine" to refer to "such a primal reality as the individual feels impelled to respond to solemnly and gravely" (56). Evaluated in the light of such a formula, which scrupulously avoids partisan representations of the phenomenon it describes in terms of specific creeds or tenets of faith, *The Deptford Trilogy* may reasonably be classified among those works that are essentially

religious in tenor if not in doctrine. The deliberate, and on occasion decidedly contrived, use of Jungian archetypes to impart a universal resonance to the events depicted in the novels is one fairly obvious manifestation of the tendency to interpret individual experience in terms of some sort of transpersonal reality.<sup>1</sup> But no less interesting from this point of view is the fact that the trilogy embodies an extended, and on the whole coherent, meditation on what is frequently referred to as the “problem” of evil and the ambiguous role it plays in human affairs. What the trilogy as a whole articulates is in effect a series of variations on the idea that what appears in the immediate view to partake of evil might paradoxically prove to be beneficial in its ultimate consequences, from which it is only a short step to suggesting that evil might have as necessary and as important a role to play in the cosmic scheme of things as good itself.

On occasion the notion that what appears to be evil on one level might conduce to some variety of good on another expresses itself in terms of the concept of the fortunate fall or *felix culpa*. In one of Davies’s later novels, *The Rebel Angels*, a character whose professional activity as a man of finance might be expected to predispose him to such a view formulates his version of the idea in the following terms:

I’m beginning to wonder if we haven’t got the legend of Eden all wrong.... God threw Adam and Eve out of the Garden because they gained knowledge at the price of their innocence, and I think God was jealous. (*The Cornish Trilogy* 298)

This is not exactly theological speculation of the highest order, and it does not perhaps accord very closely with the spirit of more explicitly Christian versions of the doctrine.<sup>2</sup> Nonetheless it does, in its own way, render an aspect of the conception that is a frequently reiterated theme in literature.<sup>3</sup> The idea is that a comprehensive knowledge of self, and the enlargement of moral perspective that this entails, are benefits that can be attained only through a confrontation with—and even an incorporation of—evil. According to such a view, the loss of Eden is a necessary stage on the road to psychic development,<sup>4</sup> and not to have partaken of the forbidden tree of knowledge would have been to condemn humanity to a condition little superior to that of the bestial. C. G. Jung, with whose thought Davies frequently acknowledged a profound affinity, alludes to the apparent paradox implicit in this situation when he remarks in one of his works that “the legend of the fall ... is the expression of a dim presentiment that the emancipation of ego-consciousness was a Luciferian deed” (108). However negative it might be in its immediate consequences, it would seem what goes by the

name of evil is in fact indispensable to the existence of self-conscious humanity, and that the failure to recognize the indispensable role it plays in life is tantamount to not existing as a moral agent at all.

Very much the same fundamental idea—that what appears to be evil might, insofar as it promotes the expansion of human possibilities, paradoxically lend itself as the instrument of good—is already implicit in Davies's first cycle of novels, *The Salterton Trilogy*. Although there is little suggestion in this case that there might be any sort of metaphysical machinery at work to ensure that good will emerge out of evil, this is what in fact occurs in the long term. The second novel in that trilogy, *The Leaven of Malice*, begins with the publication in a Salterton newspaper of a fictitious wedding announcement, and traces the repercussions that this prank has in the lives of various people. Only at the end of the book does it emerge that the author of the hoax is Bevill Higgin, a fatuous and frustrated little man intent on wreaking vengeance upon individuals he mistakenly believes have slighted him. What ironically ensues from this gratuitous—and as it turns out misdirected—act of mischief is that the two young people named in the engagement notice, though initially divided by personal antipathy as well as by family enmity, grow so fond of one another that they finally decide to marry in good earnest. Thus the impulse of revenge has worked quite unexpectedly to bring about the happiness of those against whom it was directed, in accordance with a principle that a churchman explicates when he remarks on the “quite unforeseen good results” that can follow from an act of malice (*The Salterton Trilogy* 469).<sup>5</sup> Nor does the leaven of malice cease its paradoxically beneficent operations at this point, for everything that occurs in the final novel in *The Salterton Trilogy*, *A Mixture of Frailties*, is also the indirect outcome of the same single precipitating event. It is in pique at the marriage brought about by Higgin's hoax that Solly Bridgetower's mother, herself impelled by the desire for posthumous revenge, leaves instructions in her will that her fortune should not pass immediately to her son but be devoted to financing the artistic education of a young lady of the town. This provision makes it possible for the gifted Monica Gall to escape from her repressive and spiritually claustrophobic background and to complete the education in sentiment and sensibility that comprises the Jamesian subject of the novel, though not before she has participated in a number of events that suggest that the consequences of Higgin's fraudulent engagement notice are not likely to exhaust themselves at any point in the foreseeable future.

This idea that a single event might, though circumscribed and seemingly trivial in itself, generate a maelstrom of infinitely ramifying consequences, and thereby become a catalyzing or even destructive influence in an incalculable number of individual lives, anticipates the dynamics at work in *The Deptford Trilogy*.<sup>6</sup> The originating event in this case, one which fatally conditions the trajectory of those lives that are immediately affected by it and which has repercussions in the lives of succeeding generations as well, is the single act of boyish malice that Percy Staunton commits in the opening pages of *Fifth Business* when he launches a snowball containing a stone at his friend Dunstable Ramsay. The snowball strikes a woman named Mary Dempster, and the resulting shock provokes both the premature birth of her son and the onset of what would appear to be her own mental collapse. Just short of sixty years after the event, Staunton is found dead with the identical stone lodged in his mouth, the precise circumstances of his death being, at least at the time, a matter of conjecture. In *The Manticore* Staunton's son David takes the stone, by now become something of a talisman, with him to Switzerland, where Dunstan Ramsay attempts to exorcize the demons of the past by throwing it over a cliff. And *World of Wonders* chronicles the life of the man whose premature birth was the direct consequence of the snowball-throwing incident, and whose subsequent life has unfolded under the shadow of that event. Thus the trilogy as a whole would seem to constitute an extended illustration of what Dunstan has to say in the penultimate page of *World of Wonders* concerning "the consequences that can follow a single action" (824). Looked at from one point of view, the sequence of material events, and the repercussions they have in the inner lives of those caught up in them, follow with relentless logic from an *acte gratuit* that has no significance in itself and that would therefore appear to represent the irruption of pure contingency into the world. The conventional metaphor of a stone being cast into a pool and generating an endlessly proliferating series of ripples, though never explicitly invoked, has a peculiarly appropriate application to the snowball-throwing incident, and in view of what this particular snowball contains might even have inspired it.

It becomes increasingly apparent, however, that there is nothing straightforward about how either the crucial event itself, or the manifold consequences deriving from it, are to be interpreted. First of all, Dunstan several times expresses the opinion that Staunton's treachery in concealing a stone in the snowball he threw at his friend was symptomatic of a permanent facet of his personality and therefore a presage of how he would continue to

act throughout his entire life. At one point he taxes Staunton with the accusation that “the stone-in-the-snowball has been characteristic of too much you’ve done for you to forget it” (254), although in view of the fact that he makes this charge some sixty years after the event it is perhaps arguable that the perversity of memory is all his own. Examined from the point of view of the doctrine of psychological predestination that Dunstan seems to favour, therefore, the snowball-throwing incident is not a random event devoid of significance but a manifestation of individual character, and in terms of such a perspective it will therefore appear to *be* character and not chance that determines events in *The Deptford Trilogy*. But even this is not the “final” explanation of what occurs in these novels. There is more than a suggestion in the trilogy that what ensues from the incident cannot in the least be regarded as negative in the final analysis, that for a number of different characters the event marks the inauguration of a special destiny and is therefore no more entirely to be attributed to the perverse operations of malice than it is to the vagaries of chance.

It is Paul Dempster, the most innocent and seemingly the most pathetic victim of the snowball-throwing incident, who gives clearest expression to the opinion that the events precipitating his premature birth cannot be viewed as anything but fortunate in the final reckoning. In his case the metaphor of the *felix culpa* would seem to be particularly appropriate, as he himself implies when, at the end of *Fifth Business*, he remarks that Staunton is in his debt “for eighty days in Paradise” (255)—the allusion being to the paradisaical womb from which he was untimely ripped. In *World of Wonders* Paul, now known as Magnus Eisengrim, narrates the story of his extraordinarily varied life, which, though darkened at points by episodes of intense humiliation and suffering, has been fully redeemed at the end by the success and universal esteem that he now enjoys. Reasoning on the basis of his own psychological premises, Dunstan supposes that Magnus must somehow be implicated in Staunton’s mysterious death, and that it is entirely to be expected that he should have wanted to revenge himself upon the man who was responsible for the misery into which he was born. But Magnus points out that it is precisely the anomalous manner of his birth that in the final analysis is responsible for his present success as a celebrated conjuror, and for a life that from almost every conceivable point of view has been more gratifying and fulfilling than would have been the case if he had remained imprisoned in Deptford. Far from harbouring a grievance, Magnus assures Dunstan, he has every reason to regard the person who so decisively altered the course of his life as a benefactor:

The means may have been a little rough, but the result is entirely to my taste. If he hadn't hit my mother on the head with that snowball ... I might now be what my father was.... I have had my ups and downs, and the downs were very far down indeed, but I am now a celebrity in a limited way, and I am a master of a craft, which is a better thing by far.... Who gave me my start? Boy Staunton! (810)

In this respect, Magnus might be compared with Monica Gall in *A Mixture of Frailties*, being like her a person of exceptional gifts who has been rescued from the stultification of small-town life by the saving intervention of malice. From the point of view of such a person, the leaven of malice bears a remarkable resemblance to the operations of grace, so that it is impossible in practice to distinguish the one from the other.

Magnus's interpretation of events is relatively uncomplicated, because however much emphasis he places on the affective life as well as on material success, he is in the final analysis evaluating his experiences chiefly in terms of the things of this world. Whereas *A Mixture of Frailties* is premised on the assumption that an education in art cannot be dissociated from an education in spirit, so that advancement in the one will necessarily imply progress in the other as well, no such assumption is evident in *World of Wonders*. But if Magnus's life cannot seriously be represented as a pilgrim's progress of the spirit—in the sense that he does not seem to have undergone any significant enlargement of his spiritual faculties, or been obliged to explore aspects of himself that were previously unsuspected<sup>7</sup>—the same is not true of other characters in *The Deptford Trilogy*. The patterns of other people's lives have also been shaped by the snowball-throwing incident that gave the former Paul Dempster what he calls his "start," and in their case the dividends have been reaped in quite different worlds from that in which Magnus cuts such a resplendent figure.

In the foreground, of course, we have the case of Dunstan himself, who as narrator of the first and final volumes of *The Deptford Trilogy* obviously has a privileged claim on the attention of the reader, although he effectively relinquishes this in favour of Magnus's autobiographical monologues in *World of Wonders*. Dunstan's lifelong passion is the study of saints, and of the role of the sacred in human affairs generally, subjects about which he becomes uncommonly erudite and which—far from being a bookish pursuit only—impel him to travel all over the world in search of fresh insights. This interest, an unlikely enough one by Deptford standards, evolves directly out of his own participation in the snowball-throwing incident. Because the fatal snowball was intended for himself, and because it was his

own instinctive agility in avoiding it that was responsible for the mishap that befell Mary Dempster, he feels partly to blame for the consequences of what happened. Ironically, however, if it is the sense of guilt quickened in him by the part he played in the episode that draws him into the orbit of Mary Dempster and her son, it is exposure to Mary's vision of life that persuades him of the existence of a sacred dimension to experience that will afterwards constitute the most elevated reality he knows. Thus it is that the sense of guilt at once delivers Dunstan from mindless subjugation to the moral standards of his milieu, embodied most immediately in the provincial outlook of his mother, and paves the way for the spiritual pilgrimage upon which he will subsequently embark.<sup>8</sup> In Dunstan's case as well good and evil, far from being diametrically opposed to one another, are inextricably intertwined, to the point that contact with one cannot be accomplished except through exposure to the other.

This interpenetration of good and evil, which on occasion renders it virtually impossible to distinguish the one from the other, and which in a paradoxical sense makes each necessary to the existence of the other, is even more apparent in the case of Mary herself. Once again matters are precipitated by the snowball-throwing incident, the consequences of which—both for Mary herself and for those immediately associated with her—cannot possibly be seen as anything but evil in the immediate view. In the aftermath of the trauma occasioned by the accident Mary, whose mental equilibrium has always been precarious, becomes progressively less able to cope with reality as other people apprehend it. She grows increasingly vague and desultory in her habits, thus alienating what little sympathy she formerly attracted among the Deptford inhabitants. When she disappears from her home one night, and is subsequently discovered in a sexual embrace with a vagrant in a gravel pit near the town, she arouses ridicule by representing this surrender of herself as a deed of charity on her part, explaining that she had consented to the act because the vagrant “wanted it so badly” (45). After this incident her husband's career as a pastor is ruined, and the entire family is relegated—socially no less than physically—to the outskirts of the town. Mary is physically confined to the premises of her house, and her son becomes an object of derision for all the boys of the town. Impelled by a sense of guilt, and hoping in some way to ameliorate the situation of the family whose ruin he feels he has contributed to bringing about, Dunstan makes clandestine visits to the house where the Dempsters now live. Here he discovers to his astonishment that the woman who has been stigmatized



by the people of the town as mentally and morally degenerate is in fact possessed of “a breadth of outlook and a clarity of vision that were strange and wonderful” (49). From the start, Dunstan recognizes that this attitude is one that does not partake of the world he knows:

It would be false to suggest that there was anything philosophical in her attitude. Rather, it was religious, and it was impossible to talk to her for long without being aware that she was wholly religious.... She lived by a light that arose from within.... It was as though she were an exile from a world that saw things her way, and though she was sorry Deptford did not understand her she was not resentful. (50)

Dunstan remembers afterwards that his own existence assumed another coloration in consequence of his exposure to Mary's reality, and that although there was undoubtedly an admixture of madness in Mary's mental constitution “the best side of her brought comfort and assurance into my life, which badly needed it” (50).

It is at this point that, at least in Dunstan's retrospective reconstruction of events, Mary begins to metamorphosize into a saint. Dunstan's brother Willie, afflicted by a mysterious ailment, appears to die while Dunstan is nursing him in the absence of their parents. Obeying an obscure impulse, Dunstan runs to summon Mary to his house, and under her ministrations Willie revives. Later Dunstan recalls that “for me, Willie's recall from death is, and always will be, Mrs. Dempster's second miracle” (59). What Mary's *first* miracle has been is revealed to Dunstan a number of years later, when he encounters a man named Joel Surgeoner who operates a mission for derelicts and has dedicated his entire life to the succour of those in distress. Dunstan recognizes this man instantly as the vagrant who was surprised with Mary in the gravel pit in Deptford. Surgeoner subsequently tells Dunstan that it was in fact his encounter with Mary that turned him to God (128), describing the experience as being “as if I had gone right down into Hell and through the worst of the fire, and come on a clear, pure pool where I could wash and be clean” (130). It is Surgeoner's belief that God “worked through that woman, and she is a blessed saint, for what she did for me ... was a miracle” (130), and Dunstan is not reluctant to endorse his view of things. Once again, then, the idea is not only that good manifests itself through apparent evil, but that good and evil are at times so intertwined with one another as to be practically indistinguishable.

The third miracle that Dunstan believes to be necessary in order to furnish an unequivocal demonstration of sainthood occurs during the First World War, when Dunstan is wounded at Passchendaele. He collapses near

the shell of a destroyed building, and by the light of a flare “saw there about ten or twelve feet above me on an opposite wall, in a niche, a statue of the Virgin and Child” (74):

I did not know it then but I know now that it was the assembly of elements that represent the Immaculate Conception, for the little Virgin was crowned, stood on a crescent moon, which in its turn rested on a globe, and in the hand that did not hold the Child she carried a sceptre from which lilies sprang. Not knowing what it was meant to be, I thought in a flash it must be the Crowned Woman in Revelation—she who had the moon beneath her feet and was menaced by the Red Dragon. But what hit me worse than the blow of the shrapnel was that the face was Mrs. Dempster’s face. (74)

This event signals Dunstan’s own rebirth, as the title of this section of the novel—“I am Born Again”—makes clear. Several years later he returns to Europe to seek the place near Passchendaele where he remembers having seen the Madonna wearing Mary’s face. Although he does not find the statue, his quest engenders in him an interest in religious iconography, and this in turn leads him to immerse himself in the study of hagiography which becomes the ruling passion of his life. Thus it is that the course of his entire existence is determined, no less than those of Mary and Paul, by the fateful snowball thrown by Staunton.

Having recognized the indispensable role that evil plays in the world, Dunstan’s principal task in life is to accommodate both good and evil within a single perspective, and he encounters a number of mentors on the road to wisdom who specifically exhort him to come to terms with the demonic principle within himself. His first lover, Diana, who offers him the possibility of a normal domestic life and is rejected, wryly confers upon him the name Dunstan in tribute to the scholarly saint who grappled with the Devil and prevailed (89). In fidelity to this pattern, Dunstan eventually encounters his own demon in the person of Liesl, and reenacts Saint Dunstan’s exploit by engaging in a bout of physical combat with her (215-16). Unlike the saint who is his namesake, however, he subsequently makes his peace with this particular demon—who, to give her her due, is a number of other things as well—and the two become occasional lovers. It is Liesl who tells him that he is not living his own life as fully as he might, and that in order to realize his own humanity he will have to establish contact with the devil within himself:

You should take a look at this side of your life you have not lived.... every man has a devil.... You must get to know your personal devil. You must even get to know his father, the Old Devil. (218)

Dunstan later recounts what has happened to a priest named Padre Blazon, and once again the confrontation between Saint Dunstan and the Devil is invoked as a precedent (239-40). Blazon's response to this confession is essentially to endorse Liesl's advice concerning the necessity of establishing contact with one's personal devil, pointing out that in the final analysis demonic wisdom issues from the same source as does the gnosis of religion:

The Devil knows corners of us all of which Christ Himself is ignorant. Indeed, I am sure Christ learned a great deal that was salutary about Himself when He met the Devil in the wilderness. Of course, that was a meeting of brothers; people forget too readily that Satan is Christ's elder brother and has certain advantages in argument that pertain to a senior. On the whole, we treat the Devil shamefully.... (240)

Blazon's judgement is that Dunstan is "fit to be the Devil's friend, without any fear of losing yourself to Him" (240). Evil cannot be exorcized, but it can be harnessed, as Dunstan points out in *World of Wonders* when he expatiates upon the significance of the dragon-killing motif in legend and art, which he says symbolizes the confrontation of the individual with the personal evil lurking within:

In the pictures we see St. George, and ... St. Catherine, triumphing over the horrid beast.... But I am strongly of the opinion that St. George and St. Catherine did not kill those dragons, for then they would have been wholly good, and inhuman, and useless and probably great sources of mischief, as one-sided people always are. No, they kept the dragons as pets. (652)<sup>9</sup>

This is essentially what Dunstan himself learns to do, not only in relation to Liesl, with whom he establishes a bizarre ménage that also includes Magnus, but also in his dealings with Staunton. For however much he condemns Staunton's cavalier business practices, which he believes betray the same cynical opportunism as appeared in the snowball-throwing incident, he himself battens without compunction on his friend's very considerable acumen in such matters. Since it is through investments made on Staunton's advice that he becomes sufficiently affluent as to be able to indulge his interest in hagiography and eventually retire to Liesl's estate in Switzerland, it would seem once again that Staunton's evil energy—if that is how we are to describe it—is not without its redeeming aspects.

What becomes apparent in the course of *Fifth Business*, and of *The Deptford Trilogy* as a whole, then, is that the act committed by Staunton, however vicious in itself, served as a kind of conduit through which the sacred irrupted into the temporal domain, and that his malice was therefore at the service of something suspiciously resembling providence.<sup>10</sup> "Evil"

though it undoubtedly is, both in the motive that prompted it and in the effects it most immediately produced, it is this act that makes it possible for Mary Dempster to metamorphose into a holy woman who brings good into innumerable lives, for Dunstan to embark on his lifelong quest for the grail of wisdom, and for Paul Dempster to achieve his apotheosis as an artist. The problem that inevitably presents itself at this point is how to distinguish that evil which serves as the instrument of a greater good, and that evil which is the autonomous work of a Devil who in the course of history has been accused of almost everything except want of industry. The events chronicled in *The Deptford Trilogy* as a whole would seem to substantiate Dunstan's own conviction, expressed at the conclusion of *World of Wonders*, that there is no easy solution to this enigma:

God wants to intervene in the world, and how is he to do it except through man? I think the Devil is in the same predicament.... It's the moment of decision—of will—when those Two nab us, and as they both speak so compellingly it's tricky work to know who's talking. Where there's a will, there are always two ways. (824-5)

To human ears, God and the Devil often seem to speak in accents so similar to one another, and with so much of the same authority, that it is impossible to distinguish the one from the other. For every will there are always two ways, but as to which of the opposed ways might be operating in any particular instance, there is, *The Deptford Trilogy* seems to imply, quite simply no way of knowing.

## NOTES

- 1 For analyses of such archetypes, and of the Jungian psychology that inspires them, see the discussions by Baltensperger, Brown and Bennett, Chapman, Radford ("The Great Mother and the Boy"), Roper, Bailey, Peterman (esp. chap. 6), and Monk (*The Smaller Infinity*).
- 2 The locus classicus is to be found in a hymn accompanying the blessing of the paschal candle known as the *Praeconium* or *Exultet*, the relevant passage being "O certe necessarium Adae peccatum, quod Christi morte deletum est! O felix culpa, quae talem ac tantum meruit habere redemptorem!" Cited by Lovejoy 169-70.
- 3 I have examined a number of literary versions of this theme in my book *Beyond Innocence*.
- 4 In another novel by Davies, *What's Bred in the Bone*, the Fall of Man is referred to in slightly different terms when the Lesser Zadkiel and the Daimon Maimas discuss Francis Cornish's tribulations as a child. When he leaves home to commence kindergarten, "It was his second experience of the Fall of Man.... The first, of course, is birth, when he is thrust out of the paradise of his mother's body." But here too the notion of the fortunate

fall is implicit, for in answer to the charge of exulting in Francis's unhappiness, Maimas says that "I had a rough idea of the direction in which I was going to push him, and I always like to begin tempering my steel early. A happy childhood has spoiled many a promising life" (*The Cornish Trilogy* 385).

- 5 This is presumably the Dean's "ten cents' worth" which Davies, in response to Silver Donald Cameron's statement that the religious theme had been treated in primarily social terms in his Salterton novels, said had been expressed "in a way I hoped was of some significance" (Davis 81). Another character in the novel interprets the matter in terms that obliquely suggest that some metaphysical agency might be responsible for the fortunate turn that events have taken, asserting that "not only is the hand of Fate discernible in this affair" but that "Fate has been leaving finger-prints all around the place ever since Higgen got his bright idea" (474).
- 6 For a discussion of the manner in which *The Leaven of Malice* anticipates *The Deptford Trilogy* in its depiction of "the small action that widens out to affect the lives of many people," see Radford, "The Apprentice Sorcerer" 15.
- 7 I am aware that this is an assertion that might be debated. It is true that some suggestion is conveyed in *World of Wonders* that Magnus is a man who has confronted the darker aspect of his own personality and, as the name Eisengrim suggests, incorporated this "wolfishness" into his public persona. And it is true also, as Monk, for instance, points out ("Confessions"), that Magnus's life adheres in some of its phases to the mythic archetypes of quest and of death and rebirth that underlie certain crucial moments in the lives of Dunstan and David Staunton as well. It is my own view, however, that in this case the mythic analogy must be regarded as ironic in the final analysis, inasmuch as Magnus emerges from his "quest" not so much with a new or regenerated self as with what might be described as a kind of antipersonality. He himself points out that his being "born again" as a theatrical double had no spiritual implications (692), and that his real self consists in his being a "Phantasmata" or illusion (496). For a discussion of the inconsistencies in the portrayal of Magnus in these novels see Monaghan, esp. 51-55.
- 8 The relevance of Jung's observations concerning the role of guilt in initiating a process of psychic maturation is intermittently touched on by Bligh.
- 9 Dunstan makes a related point in *The Manticore*, when he recounts the anecdote of Saint Gall establishing a working relationship with the bear with which he shares a cave (513-14). The dragon image occurs elsewhere in *The Deptford Trilogy*, notably in Dunstan's interpretation of the statue he sees in Passchendaele as the Crowned Woman in Revelation "menaced by the Red Dragon" (74).
- 10 Terry Goldie suggests that the stone concealed in the snowball might be compared to the Philosopher's Stone of alchemical tradition inasmuch as "it seems a representation of diabolic power but with decisive positive applications" (29).

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## A Lesson In Love

Love was something you made your parents believe  
before you went to bed.

I made a boy chase me,  
pedalling faster and faster  
in the rain.  
Splooshing his thin legs through puddles.  
I laughed  
and later he kissed me.

Love fell from my tongue,  
just a word I had heard.  
I drew heart-shaped lines  
when I was nine. "I love you."  
How his face flushed  
and his eyes gaped  
wide and strained, like dry egg whites.  
I was too big for my body.

I haven't learned love.  
Hands and lips.  
He said love after denting my mattress  
and licking my ear.

What did he love?  
It was just a word that needed to be heard.  
I said it back.  
What was I saying?  
I was too big for my body.

I said it back.

## Rope Husbandry

Lark's Head, Cat's Paw, Monkey's Fist, Constrictor. I've mastered each. I can show you, step by step, a Flemish Eye, a Granny. But if you ever come back I'll start with a True Lover. Its breaking strength (dare I say it?) is very low. Or better yet, the Thief: capable of holding a large load (the fleeing bandit, no doubt) but confuse the wrong end of the rope and its quick release can be disastrous. I think your favorite would be the Wagoner's Hitch, a method that bows down fast on an object but secures a temporary purchase, and can therefore be easily undone. I'd rather offer you a simple, well-made knot, nothing too fancy, one that grips very tightly and stays tied. Hangman, Strangle, Shroud laid.



# Authenticity and its Discontents: *The Mountain and the Valley*

Thus far, most criticism of Ernest Buckler's *The Mountain and the Valley* has focussed on David's progressive isolation and the question of whether or not it is his fault. Most such discussions come down to an analysis of the ending of the novel, where the verdict is based on the critic's determination of whether the ending is pathetic, tragic, or ironic. Eschewing this approach, I propose to re-evaluate the novel from the perspective that it is, in part, the story of its own creation. Specifically, I will argue that *The Mountain and the Valley* reconstructs and explores the aesthetic and cultural conditions of its own genesis.

This clash between representational ideologies is most clearly plotted as an opposition between Ellen Canaan as a storyteller and David Canaan as a (would-be) novelist.<sup>1</sup> Ellen bears the ideological burden of the premodern, characterised chiefly by authentic artisanal production. Conversely, David bears the ideological burden of modernity, characterised by his inability to reconcile the tensions intrinsic to the oxymoron "exact representation" and his quest for currency in a global marketplace. And while these tensions ultimately lead David to his death, *The Mountain and the Valley* itself stands as monument to Buckler's ability to find a way out of them by subordinating the realist imperative of exactness to the anti-modern quest for authenticity, thus achieving a satisfactory resolution to the seemingly irresolvable contradictions facing the modern novelist.<sup>2</sup> As such, *The Mountain and the Valley* takes an anti-modern stance in its self-reflexive exploration of the problems of realistic representation in a world that increasingly reveals such representation to be inadequate and inauthentic.

Ellen Canaan represents the most clearly drawn aspect of these tensions. From her initial appearance as a Fate, weaving destiny into her rug (which

she finishes only when David dies) to her Marlowe-esque role in presiding over the novel's beginning and ending, Ellen is portrayed as a storyteller by virtue of the connection between her narrative and material productivity. The defining feature of the storyteller's narrative production is a capacity to weave together strands of experience to produce a narrative that is both communally and personally significant: "The storyteller takes what he tells from experience—his own or that reported by others . . . and . . . in turn makes it the experience of those who are listening to his tale" (Benjamin, "Storyteller" 87). This narrative function is facilitated by, and embedded in, a setting of premodern material craftsmanship: "[the art of storytelling] is lost because there is no more weaving and spinning to go on while [the stories] are being listened to. . . . When the rhythm of work has seized [the storyteller], he listens to the tales in such a way that the gift of retelling them comes to him all by itself" ("Storyteller" 91). Narrative and material production are thus linked in an almost magical dialectical relationship in which the rhythms of premodern labor spontaneously conjure the secular "gift of tongues" that is storytelling.

This fundamental dialectical relationship is captured ideally in Ellen's activity of rug-making. As she pieces together her rugs from fragments of castoff clothes, Ellen weaves symbolic fragments of experience into useful artefacts, producing both homey floor coverings and authentic repositories of communal experience. As she draws bits of fabric from her bag to add to her rug, she remarks on their associations: "Yes, that was brown. That was the stocking cap Chris had worn the day Joseph tied a bag of straw on the trailsled for a seat and took him back to the woods for the first time" (10).<sup>3</sup> There are numerous other examples of this associative practice in the Prologue alone, but this particular example is striking because Ellen's associations with the stocking cap extend all the way back to its genesis in precisely the kind of setting identified as fundamental to the storytelling tradition: "She had spun that yarn herself, and knit it, and dyed it with alder bark. She could see the stain of brown on the kindling stick she'd stirred the salt into the dye with, to set it" (10). In addition to having a use-history that is simultaneously a fragment of family history, then, each piece of fabric also potentially brings with it the story of its own creation, revealing the originary link between narrative and material production in the storytelling tradition. Ellen's activity is thus archetypally that of the storyteller, simultaneously identifying the garment with the story of its genesis *and* with the later narrative in which it plays a part, all within the context of premodern material production.

That such associations and their significance are not merely the caprice of an elderly woman is illustrated when the Canaans move into a new house: “Martha rearranged the furniture from the old house every day at first. It had to be spaced so thinly to go around that the pieces seemed to lose touch with each other. The walls yawned backward from them. The tables and chairs had a bare and helpless look. . . . But when Ellen’s rugs were laid on the floors they brought a contractual warmth into each room” (114). Ellen’s rugs instantly *communicate* a personal and communal history of lived experience, transforming the Canaans’s new house into their new home. The two uses of the rugs, as floor coverings and as repositories of family history, are indistinguishable from each other in this episode, as they are together indistinguishable from Ellen’s role as storyteller throughout the novel.

Just as Ellen’s rug-making brings together the elements of traditional domestic production of goods and authentic representation, so her encounter with a fugitive sailor when she is still a young woman brings together the two categories into which storytellers fall: “the resident tiller of the soil, and . . . the trading seaman” (Benjamin, “Storyteller” 84-85). Ellen’s discovery of the fugitive sailor while she is planting potatoes brings the two figures together and generates some of the richest material in the novel. When Ellen tells Anna about her encounter with the sailor, she activates its significance in both personal and communal registers, providing a textbook example of how storytelling simultaneously communicates and accretes experience. As the introduction to her story of harboring the fugitive sailor, Ellen relates some of his experiences as though they were her own:

‘I could tell you about places where they’ve never seen snow,’ she said.  
‘Never?’

Ellen seemed to be talking to herself.

‘Or where the sea is blue as—what’s the bluest thing you can think of?—and you can always smell spices.’

‘Where did you see them places?’ Anna said.

Ellen hesitated. ‘Right here,’ she said. (26)

Ellen’s trance-like impressionistic incantation evokes Benjamin’s description of the enchanted nature of the storytelling impulse: “the gift of retelling . . . comes to [her] all by itself.” Anna’s disruptive question, with its presumption of Ellen’s firsthand experience, breaks the isolation of the storytelling trance (“Ellen seemed to be talking to herself”) and broadens its sphere of influence to activate its true function, that of communicating (rather than simply reliving) experience. Ellen’s hesitant response to Anna’s question reveals that what she can pass along is the experience of *being told* of such

wonders, rather than that of actually having experienced them. Her somewhat deflationary answer shifts the emphasis away from the experiences themselves and onto the experience of hearing about them. She never does tell Anna about “places where they’ve never seen the snow . . . or where the sea is as blue as—what’s the bluest thing you can think of?—and you can always smell spices.” Rather, Anna’s question (with its emphasis on “you” rather than “where”) and Ellen’s answer disrupt the storytelling ritual, seemingly threatening the aura of authenticity created by Ellen’s impressionistic preamble.

Yet this shift in emphasis, and the increase in narrative distance it implies, does not argue for the inauthenticity of Ellen’s tale, but for its authenticity. Her retelling of the sailor’s experiences is not meant to duplicate the sailor’s account of such wonders, but to recreate the sense of wonder that those images evoke for Ellen. The point of Ellen’s story has less to do with its specific content than it has to do with the power and significance of authentic communication of experience as she once experienced it. And in this regard it is eminently successful; Ellen’s retelling is a friendly appropriation of the sailor’s stories that allows the images to accrete another layer of personal experience as she incorporates them into her own personal narrative. This appropriative retelling thus produces a sense of wonder in Anna akin to that Ellen feels upon first hearing the sailor’s stories. Anna’s response reveals that the sense of aura is not shattered but deepened when Ellen reveals that she has not seen these sights herself: “Anna giggled. This was a real story after all” (27). Far from being disappointed by Ellen’s revelation, Anna anticipates a more significant, because more personal, narrative to follow. And when Ellen finishes telling her story, its success as an authentic communication of personal experience is registered in Anna’s declaration that she intends to marry a sailor one day (29). Having captured the sense of personal significance conveyed in Ellen’s story, Anna automatically seizes on its content and reconfigures it so that it bears directly on her own personal experience, suggesting that the cycle of retelling and accretion of experience will continue.<sup>4</sup>

The radical difference between Ellen and David is highlighted when Ellen gives David a locket containing the sailor’s picture, simultaneously recognising his storytelling impulse and the insurmountable difficulty he faces in attempting to realise that impulse: “‘But what . . . ?’ he said. It was a tiny locket. ‘Shhhhhh’” (166). This gesture may, in fact, be read as an attempt by a master storyteller to direct David’s attention to the message encoded in the medium, signalling modernity’s degradation of the value of content.

Perhaps because Ellen realises that she cannot effectively speak to David's fundamental conflict between his storytelling heritage and his modern existential condition, she provides not a single word of explanation, even shutting off David's puzzlement with an inarticulate "Shhhhhh." Thus, whereas the content of the story when told to Anna is subordinated to the situation and way in which it is told, the uncaptioned photograph forces David to subordinate context to content, bypassing the latent message encoded in the photographic form and focussing on the picture's manifest content. And in terms of that manifest content, David does indeed appear to have much in common with the sailor, though he is excluded from the implications such an identification could have for his storytelling ambitions. Though he looks like the sailor (a type of "the trading seaman"), he is blind to the relationship between the gift of the locket and himself as "resident tiller of the soil," manifest in his recent inability to leave the valley and subsequent triumph in dislodging the "big rock" from the field (152-66). Without any contextual information from Ellen, the gift of the photograph is not *communication* at all but rather a powerful manifestation of the collapse of authentic storytelling in the ascendancy of modernity.

This implicit commentary is bodied forth in the way the photographic form of David's identification with the sailor undercuts its capacity for authentic communication. For Ellen, the photograph in the locket has "cult value";<sup>5</sup> it is ritually significant to her in its intrinsic connection to the story of the sailor. "The cult value of remembrance of loved ones, absent or dead, offers a last refuge for the cult value of the picture. For the last time the aura emanates from the early photographs in the fleeting expression of a human face" (Benjamin, "Work of Art" 226). When Ellen passes the photograph on to David, it loses its cult value because she offers no explanation with it; it is simply an image with an indeterminate significance. In contrast to the impressionistic preamble and productive interaction of teller and listener that characterises Ellen's telling of the story to Anna, David is given no evocative sense of the special value that the locket bears for Ellen. He is simply handed a formal representation that seemingly has no relation (beyond a surface resemblance) to his specific time, place, or person. When Ellen tells her story to Anna she does not show her the locket, but Anna grasps the aura of the experience; when Ellen gives the locket to David, he has the exact representation, but completely misses its aura. In the interim, "captions have become obligatory" (Benjamin, "Work of Art" 226), but David is denied any such device; the communicative potential of Ellen's gift

is undercut by David's inability to personalise a form with an indeterminate (and indeterminable) content. He is presented with a radically decontextualised mechanically reproduced (and reproducible) object that is seemingly devoid of any intrinsic or connotative meaning. That he identifies himself with such an object ("The face was familiar. He'd seen it somewhere before. And then suddenly he knew where he'd seen a face like that. He was looking at it right in the mirror" [166]) tells a story to which Ellen's narrative power is inadequate.<sup>6</sup> In its decontextualising transference from Ellen to David the photograph simultaneously becomes a metonym for the large-scale loss of cult value in the twentieth-century evolution of the artefact and hints at the problems such a loss poses for identity itself.

This moment is profoundly important to our understanding of David's predicament. Given a signifier which he must make signify, for which he must find or create a story that explains it, David cannot. As soon as he attempts to go beyond the strictly physical resemblance between the sailor in the picture and himself, his attempt to caption the photograph breaks down. As with so many other of his attempts to capture something "exactly," he quickly slides back into ambiguity, explaining Ellen's motivation only by guessing that she had "sensed somehow what had happened" (166). The vagueness of this attribution (we are never told *how* Ellen sensed "what had happened," nor even what exactly *had* happened for that matter) automatically limits David's chances of fitting the picture into his own connotative, symbolic world. In a valiant effort to reciprocate the intuitiveness he ascribes to Ellen, David finally arrives at the phrase Ellen had used earlier, "like everything was somewhere else" (28 [Ellen], 166 [David]), in a vague resolution to an ambiguous struggle prompted by an enigmatic gesture. David recognises a resemblance to himself in the sailor's photograph, but without the context of the story to go with it, the photo can communicate nothing more to David. Thus, while Ellen uses the phrase, "like everything was somewhere else" to capture the authenticity of her lived experience with the sailor, David conceives of the phrase only as "a mocking" (166) of his failure to leave the valley. Later on, when David puts on Toby's cap and stands in front of the mirror he actually *becomes* the picture in the locket, but still has no caption to go with the image; he is so poor in lived experience (both his own and that of others) that he can provide no signified to accompany the signifying image. The photograph and the sense of longing it evokes can be attached to no specific experience, remaining ungrounded, incommunicable, and ultimately unproductive.

The shift in emphasis from Ellen's communication of her experience with Anna to that of her failed communication with David extends to the differences between Ellen's and David's modes of production. In this context, the shift is from face-to-face communication preserving the cult value of the storyteller's 'work of art' to an impersonal exchange of an image that is reproducible and, hence, has exhibition value. Ellen's intuitive connection to her community is countered by David's willful separation from it. And as the storytelling tradition dies in David, a much more modern "novelistic" condition comes into being: "The novelist has isolated himself. The birth-place of the novel is the solitary individual" (Benjamin, "Storyteller" 87). David's self-imposed isolation is the first condition of his role as a novelist; the nature of his response to that condition reveals the deeply modern cultural conditions that contribute to it. As the abstract category of "novelist" is a symptom of the literary artist's response to the cultural conditions of modernity, so David's novelistic ambitions may be read as symptoms of his modern condition. Thus, the loss of community and communicable personal experience that David feels manifests itself in a paradoxical desire for both authentic communication and abstract global recognition. Following the lead given him by Ellen in her gift of the picture (and failing to recognise its inadequacy despite his experience of it), David seeks such authentic connection through a world in which works of art are not only mechanically reproducible, but "designed for reproducibility" (Benjamin, "Work of Art" 224); he longs for global recognition as a writer of books. As such, David inverts Ellen's artistic value system by privileging exhibition value over cult value, fame for achievement over achievement itself; he devotes himself to achieving recognition for the authenticity of his purely imaginary representations, rather than to achieving authentic representation itself.<sup>7</sup>

David's focus on the exhibition value of his work leads him to quest obsessively for the "exact" representation of the people of Entremont "just as they are." This quest for exactness is motivated by his desire to "find their single core of meaning" and to "show that there is more to them than the side that shows" (292, 294). That is, he seeks photographic representation that will somehow also capture aura, maintaining realist mimetic exactness even as it strives for cubist inclusiveness. This confusion of techniques and effects amounts to David's misrecognition of his project; he conflates exactness of description with capturing aura: "David believes that he can find the words that express the thoughts of another, yet, as before, the inner 'tune' [read: "aura"] of this other person goes unnoticed" (Wainwright 87). David's

descriptions are attempts to capture what is being described; they are processes of reification that amount to treating people as things. His descriptions must render the described people into commodities for exchange in the “impersonal marketplace” if they are to be embedded in a novel.<sup>8</sup>

This is not to lay the blame entirely on David, however. In the disjunction between Ellen’s authentic storytelling production and David’s inauthentic (would-be) novelistic production, we find Buckler’s critique of modernity. The need for reproducible representation that can be adapted to any context with an appended caption is a reflection of the changing modes of artistic production arising from the encroachment of capitalism into rural communities. As the face-to-face element of exchange and day-to-day relations is replaced by catalogue mail-order exchange and the impersonal marketplace, so the conditions of possibility for personal face-to-face exchange of experience are reduced. Practically, fewer face-to-face encounters mean fewer opportunities for storytelling. For example, when the American lumber companies buy out the neighboring farms, the Canaans’ neighbours move away to the city (which Buckler saw as the *locus classicus* of modernity), isolating them in the countryside and reducing the frequency of face-to-face contact, reproducing urban conditions of isolation, alienation, and fragmentation in a rural setting. Glenn Willmott, drawing on marxist geographer Neil Smith’s formulation of the relation between the city and the countryside as an ongoing process of differentiation and equalization<sup>9</sup> argues that “the Canadian rural landscape is no Eden of premodern farmers, ready to quit the land for the seductions of the city. Those farmers are already living in an invisible city, with its modern modes of production and class-social structure” (307). Thus David’s tangible but elusive condition of modernity may be ascribed to the possibility that he is living in an “invisible city,” that “although David loathes the *copy*, he himself, a modernist existential hero, can never locate an *original*, for nothing is essential or natural to him” (Willmott 310). As the novel progresses, there is a steady dwindling of the rural population as commercial interests buy up farms and the residents move to the city; the countryside is differentiated by its low population density and designation as the site of agricultural and commercial resources for development, but it is also equalized by the onset of the invisible urban elements of isolation and an economy based on symbolic exchange rather than material barter. This progressive isolation of David and Ellen is a powerful commentary on the ubiquitous influence of capitalism (and its cultural manifestation, modernity) as it draws more and more people to the cities, literally



removing the necessary conditions for storytelling from the rural setting.

This closing isolation of David and Ellen emphasises the two disparate modes of artistic production they embody and powerfully foregrounds David's dilemma, which is characterised by a repeated cycle of insight and deception.<sup>10</sup> His loyalty to the rural setting and way of life is undercut by the irremediable fact of his modernity, characterised as it is by a simultaneous facility and difficulty with language. This cycle of insight and deception reaches its climax in David's lengthy moment of "translation" as he climbs the mountain in the Epilogue. Here David seems to achieve a union between representation and represented as he re-experiences the past events of his life as though they are present: "It is not a *memory* of that time: there is no echo quality to it. It is something that deliberate memory (with the changed perspective of the years between changing the very object it lights) cannot achieve at all. *It is not a returning*: you are there for the first time, *immediately*" (283; my italics). But David's dilemma is modernity, and not so easily remedied. Buckler quickly undercuts the promise of exact coincidence in representation by making the episodes David recollects "authentically" those of his most excessive self-deceptions. The cumulative weight of inauthenticity as the recollections pile up finally challenges the authenticity of his "translation" as a whole when David's sense of immediacy is juxtaposed directly with a characteristically illusionary ambition: "Everything inside his mind was gathered up in one great shiver of unity. He knew he'd be the most famous mathematician there ever was. . ." (284). Of course, David never becomes any kind of mathematician, let alone the most famous one there ever was; his sense of unutterable potential is forever degraded by the inadequate signifiers with which he attempts to represent it to himself. His attempts to force his sense of things into a framework of significance that is clearly influenced by global capitalism (and is, hence, deeply modern) forever defeats the authenticity of his insights. By repeating this movement of insight and deception, Buckler prevents the reader from ever truly believing in David's final vision as anything other than his greatest deception. As Buckler tells us, David dies having "achieve[d] one final transport of self-deception" (quoted in Bissell 71).

Buckler extends this repetition of the cycle of insight and deception by allowing David a glimpse of what authentic representation must capture: "There is an original glow on the faces like on the objects of home" (283). The "original glow" corresponds to Benjaminian "aura," especially as it is bound up with the phrase "like on the objects of home." Yet Buckler also reveals to us why David can never transcend this cycle of insight and deception. David

believes that in order to convey the sense of a thing he must represent it exactly: “And now the fact of exactly the way that *faces* happened to be — exactly that way because of exactly all the *feelings* behind them” (286). Rather than relying on the accumulation of associative meaning, as Ellen does in her rug-making, David seeks to attach the sense to some concrete negotiable representation; he seeks to possess it through naturalistic description (189). David mistakenly assumes that in order to convey the feelings behind the faces, he need only describe them “exactly.” In a curious yet characteristic move, David has forgotten all about the “original glow” that was the primary component of his revelation and he falls back into the futile pursuit of exact representation: “He was almost running now, as if in escape. But the faces pursued him, with the relentless challenge of exactly how each one was” (287).

Despite his growing desperation, though, David is still on relatively authentic ground as his sense of the “glow” of the various faces manages to outshine his desire to describe them feature by feature. In short, they yet retain a glimmer of cult value for him. A subtle shift occurs, however, when David expands his vision to include “All the faces there were everywhere else in the world, at every time” (289). When he extends his purview to include the whole world and all of history, David stretches the possibility of authentic representation past its limit and slips finally from insight into deception. In the absence of some particular event or emotion, some context by which to describe the multitudinous faces, David reverts to naturalistic description of features and implicitly acknowledges his inability ever to capture their “auras”: “There was the listening fact of the presence outside him of every eye, every lash, every smile-wrinkle of every cheek that had ever been; possible to be known, but unattended, *because he had never seen them*” (289-90; my italics). The fact that David has no personal experience of “everyone in the world” removes the possibility of authentic portrayal. Having never seen “everyone in the world,” David is forced to reduce them to objects that can be anatomized; the extension of his attempt to represent the entire world carries with it the necessity of reification and commodification. The empty significance of the photograph in the locket returns to haunt David’s attempt to represent authentically; in the globally capitalist marketplace, there is room only for signifiers to which customers will attach their own significances if they can. David’s failure to be able to do so with the photograph in the locket drives his recognition that no matter how accurate his representation is, it may still be devoid of the significance he wishes it to carry. The authenticity of David’s predicament, of his inauthen-

ticity, is the source of our sympathy for him as his historical situation forces him to return again and again to naturalist modes of representation in his quest for an “exactly” suitable representation that will forever elude him.

David’s final slide into complete self-deception is characterised by a return to his own personal experience and the subsequent breakdown of his representational ambitions and techniques as he attempts to come to terms with his father’s death. He abandons his traditional pattern of narrative avoidance which sees a larger-than-life David performing astounding feats of bravery, strength, and intelligence, compensating for the failure of real life to satisfy the demands of his imagination. Rather, he determines that the significance of his father’s death must be present in its setting, and he pursues a logic of natural determinism that extends even to the way the roots “wandered exactly as they did under the earth” (290). This strategy leads him down an endless trail of deferral in which the cause for any action is never fully present: “And exactly what was his hand, with the chemistry of the hair on the back of it exactly so, and there then, partly because of exactly all the things it had touched” (290). David’s quest for the “exact” explanation behind why events transpired as they did leads him away from discovering the true significance of his father’s death and draws him into the similarly unfathomable workings of language itself:

And ‘hand’ is a word, and what is a word? . . . And ‘n’ is a letter in the word, shaped exactly that way, and sounded by exactly that movement of the tongue, and in exactly how many other words? And behind the tiniest delta in the tiniest line in my father’s cheek, and behind the smallest of the smallest arcs of movement of his arms, were implicit exactly all the thoughts that led him here . . . exactly here . . . exactly then. (290)

This transition marks the beginning of a desperate spiral in pursuit of a single determinable cause and an all-encompassing account, the result of which is an almost pathological self-consciousness: “He screamed, ‘Stop, stop . . .’ Then he thought: Myself screaming ‘Stop.’ Then he thought: Myself thinking of myself screaming ‘Stop,’ thinking of myself thinking of myself thinking of . . .” (291). The graphic portrayal of David’s fragmented self ends with him screaming “Stop” over and over until the word ceases to have any denotative meaning, and becomes a talisman against the deferral of meaning always implied by representation. Yet moments later his mania for narration returns to him, and he decisively re-enters the fray: “I will *tell* it, he thought rushingly: that is the answer. I know how it is with everything. I will put it down and they will see that I know. . . . All he’d have to do . . . oh, it was so

gloriously simple . . . was to find their single core of meaning” (292). The drive to have his genius recognized, to maintain his illusion, to have “them” see that he “knows” forces him into a position of blindness regarding his recent revelation: “He didn’t consider *how* he would find [their single core of meaning]. . . . It would make him the greatest writer in the whole world” (293). The balance of self-deception, disturbed as it was by his remembrance of his father’s death, is now restored and David basks in the culminating glory of his illusive (and perpetually elusive) mastery over the voices that “swarm” around him.

The re-establishment of David’s self-deception also finally defeats his quest for authenticity when he contemplates the alternative pole of representation as embodied by Ellen. Having finally climbed the mountain (by now grown nearly impassable with accumulated symbolism), David’s artistic backwardness in the grip of modernity is registered topographically as he looks back down into the valley rather than cresting the mountain and pushing beyond the confines of the valley to see what is on the other side. Looking down from the top of the mountain, David spies Ellen standing on the porch of their home and condescendingly fails to acknowledge her capacity for authentic representation: “She is old, he thought, and *she* sees everything so dimly” (293). David’s ‘clarity’ of vision blinds him to the living practical example of the “how” of authentic representation that forever eludes him. This blindness is finally driven home in David’s declaration that he will “go over and tell her that’s the prettiest rug yet” when he gets home (293). David’s obsession with exactness keeps him from recognizing the value of Ellen’s artistic production, and he lapses finally into his fantasies of global recognition, this time characterised by the rewarding of his work with a prize (294). The recognition David seeks now takes the overt form of exhibition value and generates a kind of income even as he undervalues the non-economic worth of Ellen’s rugs. While basking in this ‘false consciousness,’ David dies and is buried under a blanket of “absolute white,” as pristine as a (forever) blank page.

As though David’s self-deception were not evident enough, Buckler further undercuts his final “translation” with two ironies.<sup>11</sup> The first, and most obvious, is that David never does actually write any novels at all; he never has to address the question of the “how” of artistic production in any extended way. The only instance of David’s creative output is the short story that he writes when Anna and Toby are visiting. In this story, David writes about war experiences he has never had, precluding any possibility that he can describe them “exactly,” according to his ethos of strictly literal mimesis.

This point is driven home when Toby, who *has* had such experiences reads a stray page. Faced with this litmus test, David utterly repudiates the authenticity of his representation: "War was about as much like that as . . ." (257-58).<sup>12</sup> The fact that David never even completes this simile reveals the extent to which his failure to represent a particular experience threatens all representation. Further, it reveals his utter inability to transcend the realm of the literal for the higher truth of the figural. Yet, as in the more pivotal closing episode of the novel, "the validity" soon creeps "back into it all over again" (258), though David has to get partially drunk before the painful self-awareness brought on by Toby's reading of one of the pages of the story subsides enough for this to happen.

The second and more powerful irony that Buckler uses to undercut David's final revelation comes in the shift from the scene of his death to its inscription as the completion of Ellen's rug.<sup>13</sup> The two last rags she uses represent the alpha and omega of David's deceived life. The penultimate circle is hooked with a scarlet rag that "was the cloak David had worn the night someone laughed at his piece in the school play" (294-5), evoking David's first failure to manipulate reality through language. The last rag that Ellen hooks into her rug is a "scrap of fine white lace" (295). This rag is significant both for its evocation of the blanket of white that covers David after his death, and for its lack of an attendant anecdote. The absence of a story attached to the piece of lace recalls the blank page suggested by the whiteness at David's death, "made of all the other colours but of no colour itself at all" (294); as the rug's centre, the lace is evocative of the unrealised potential of David's life around which the events of the novel revolve. No doubt the fragment of lace will come to symbolise for Ellen the day of David's death;<sup>14</sup> the manner in which she incorporates it into her rug before she comprehends its significance illustrates the intuitive mechanics of the accretion of experience in the storytelling tradition.

Ellen's completion of the rug as a telling of David's story in an authentic mode of artistic production is also a claim to authenticity on Buckler's part. By positioning Ellen as a rug-weaving Fate presiding over the narrative, and crafting his novel in the image of her rugs, Buckler places himself as the happy reconciliation of David's desire to write and Ellen's ability to capture "aura." The semi-autobiographical link between David and Buckler is diluted by Buckler's Ellenesque orientation towards the problem of representation. The storytelling impulse not only to communicate experience but to contribute to it as well leads Buckler to attempt what David fatally defers.

The issue of whether or not Buckler succeeds in his attempt where David failed has elicited critical comment ranging from Barbara Pell's assertion that we have "the novel itself, the book that David could never have written but that Buckler did write" (27)<sup>15</sup> to Janice Kulyk Keefer's "it is manifest that David Canaan could never have written a book that would do justice both to his own tormented sensibility and to the robustly natural life of the villagers of Entremont. Ernest Buckler himself could not manage to do this in *The Mountain and the Valley*" (226).<sup>16</sup> I side with the former position, best articulated by Douglas Barbour: "Buckler successfully does what David conspicuously fails to do while showing us, with precision and clarity, why David fails" (65). As a conditional resolution to the tensions that ultimately keep David from writing, Buckler seeks a middle ground between exact, reproducible representation and radically context-dependent and connotative representation. Thus, David's compulsion towards exactitude and originary causality plays no part in Buckler's simile-laden descriptions of "the way it was":

The 'it' of 'the way it was' is the meanest of terms but on it is placed the burden of conveying the most transcendent experience of unity in the fleeting moment. . . . The 'was' of the phrase thus represents a complex of times in which the moment being lived by the character is contrasted with an ideal might-have-been which in turn is extracted from the recollection of an actual 'was' of the character's past. . . . This is a language of simile—not what *is*, but what it is *like*. (Spettigue 99-100)

Though Buckler admired the "exactness" of Hemingway's writing (Bissell 64), he recognized that exact description is incompatible with an "aesthetic of getting-it-all-in" (Ricou 685): "If there is any purgatory more undiluted than attempting to trap the quicksilver of life with the laggard spring of words, I don't know it. . . . For life is so infinitely tangential. It flees touch like a ball of mercury flees the finger . . . At best, writing is only a shadow" (Buckler, "First Novel" 22-23, 25). The best Buckler can hope for is to accomplish his goal in failing to achieve it, to capture the aura of the people and place despite their reification in language and commodification in the novel.

If the realist novel as a form can be thought of as an exoskeleton that emits a particular kind of ideological message (Jameson 151), then Buckler's project can be described as a re-encoding of the traditional content of that form so as to counteract its formal message. He recognises that the novel can never achieve "logocentric transcendence" (Van Rys 77) in his acknowledgment of the overdetermined nature of representation; where David tries to construct monologic statements that are incompatible with the

polyphony of reality (Van Rys 75), Buckler makes it precisely his point to demonstrate that such containment is impossible and that truly authentic representation conveys the authenticity of this predicament. He “draws and redraws his maps of identity and place, but is never able to settle them, to provide the authoritative moment, mood, or meaning” (Willmott 306).<sup>17</sup> The formally encoded values of exact description and ascertainable meaning are countered by Buckler’s reliance on associative descriptions and his rejection of determinable linear causality. This tension is encoded in his novel as an anti-modernist opposition between Ellen, the storyteller, and David, the modern (would-be) novelist. Buckler explores the tension between the exigency of communicating experience and the impossibility of true realistic representation by focussing on David’s dilemma and positioning his novel as a conditional resolution. As a novelist, he is clearly aligned with David; in his effort to capture the aura of “the way things were,” he attempts to align himself with Ellen. At the novel’s end we have the “sense that David is just beginning the process which Buckler as novelist is just completing” (Chambers 82). David’s death is the death of the artist in chrysalis that becomes Buckler; it blends into a blank page from which Buckler starts out again, writing, achieving all that David found impossible.

#### NOTES

- 1 My use of these terms is drawn from Benjamin’s essays “The Storyteller” and “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction.”
- 2 As Margaret Atwood points out, “The paradox that confronts us is that Ross, Buckler and Gibson have created memorable works of art out of the proposition that such a creation, in their environment, is impossible” (191).
- 3 Throughout this paper otherwise unspecified parenthetical page references refer to *The Mountain and the Valley*.
- 4 Buckler problematizes this episode by using Anna’s eventual marriage to Toby as an ironic counterpoint, marking the end of the communication and accretion of experience that characterises the storytelling tradition rather than its perpetuation; his stories only deepen her sense of isolation and alienation rather than alleviating it (231).
- 5 “Cult value” designates the ritual function that works of art originally served, and carries with it a uniqueness that necessitates a distance from the general mass of humanity; the more “original” a work of art is, the more aura it may be said to have. The opposite of cult value is “exhibition value,” which Benjamin applies to reproducible works of art; he views the mass reproduction of works of art as an attempt to efface the cultic distance of the original work of art by making it present to the masses. Hence, exhibition value displaces cult value as reproducible works of art displace authentic originals.
- 6 Despite this inadequacy, Ellen’s gift may be read as prophetic in its revelation to David that exact representation is inadequate to authentic communication of experience. The

- problem of representation captured in this crucial moment is the very problem Buckler addresses with the novel as a whole, as I shall show shortly.
- 7 This is precisely the condition that dogs David's other utopian aspirations throughout the novel, providing him with a vicarious thrill of recognition without ever requiring real effort; his ambitions always take the shape of "being" rather than "doing": "he'd be the best fiddle player . . . he'd be the most famous mathematician . . . he'd be the most wonderful dancer . . . he'd be the only man who ever went every single place in the world and did everything in the whole world there was to do . . ." (284-85).
  - 8 Janice Kulyk Keefer writes that "this 'phallogocentricity' is the hallmark of Buckler's narrative style. Writing for him was not so much expression as possession" (226), conflating David with Buckler and maintaining that using words to portray feelings and thoughts that are not "word-shaped" is inherently inauthentic. While Keefer has a point about the inauthenticity of linguistic representation, she asserts that "visual and tactile mediums would best express their lives" (227), revealing that she has missed the point of the difference between David and Buckler (and perhaps revealing why she conflates them as she does); the problem of representation and inauthenticity in the novel is with mediation itself, not with different kinds of mediation.
  - 9 "Differentiation" is the process by which the city produces the countryside as a differential, underdeveloped space; "equalization" is the attendant process by which the city also produces the countryside as a potential double of itself, as not only the site of resources, but also an unexploited market.
  - 10 John Van Rys traces a cycle of "sought unity and withdrawal" that roughly corresponds to what I mean by "insight and deception" in each section of the novel (65-79).
  - 11 Douglas Barbour has already pointed out the existence of these two ironies (that Ellen is the artist David fails to be and that Buckler writes the novel we would expect from David), but he does not elaborate on them after identifying them (64-75).
  - 12 This breakdown of language in the face of its own inadequacy is the essence of David's dilemma and reinforces Laurence Ricou's suggestion that "Perhaps he is distressed, too, by the contradiction between the spare, colloquial style of his story and his fronding, million-capillared vision" (693).
  - 13 Gregory M. Cook argues that the rug is in fact a top view of the mountain, with snow on the peak, and the red indicating the blood of the wounded animal David notices before dying (165-66).
  - 14 Robert D. Chambers offers an alternative reading of the symbolism of the fragment of lace, arguing that it symbolizes the wedding of the mountain and the valley and David's acceptance of himself as one of the locals (83). The divergence in our readings stems from a fundamental problem in criticism of *The Mountain and the Valley*; that is, whether or not we are to read David's final "translation" and death as ironic. I do so, and thus do not agree with Chambers' association of redemption with the fragment of lace.
  - 15 See also Ricou 687; Chambers 82; Atwood 189, 191; and Bissell 71-72.
  - 16 See also Fee.
  - 17 Pell's formulation that "Buckler, like David, often seems to be attempting to achieve a romantic comprehensiveness of, and transcendental signification for, all experience through his metaphorical and metaphysical style" (74) misses the point that such an attempt may be made in full acceptance of its impossibility, that such recognition may in fact be precisely the sufficient and necessary condition of possibility that allows the writer to write at all.



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## Embouchure

The sun grows garish, then gaunt.  
An acting orange organ  
in the bedroom,

embouchure.  
This is the way you've come to me this evening —  
in a box, on the wall, reflected.

Lodged  
in the slatted  
shadows of the shutter,

then not even there.

But before the orange ebbs completely,  
into the autumn night and  
you abscond,

I strain myself to listen  
for a tune  
of your affections.

And one comes up from the loin of my tongue  
like muddy  
waters onto my lips.

Though this could be my sentiment as well a phantom too —  
impalpable unreal illusory  
as nightfall on Uranus.

## Power Outage, Baltimore

You cannot believe the darkness.  
With these houses  
shut down, the whole sky  
lifts like a tarp bellied-up by wind.

Thinking is suddenly possible.

You walk into the street  
and silence unravels from trees.  
You pass, for blocks, unlit windows  
bruised in their frames.

At the end of the road you turn,  
stare back along it. Its sides  
wait like the flanks of a red horse.

This is no longer your home.

Below asphalt you hear raccoons  
fishing in a stream.

## Four Characters in Search of An Author-Function

Foucault, Ondaatje, and the “Eternally Dying” Author in *The English Patient*<sup>1</sup>

“**W**hat does it matter who speaks?” asks Samuel Beckett via Michel Foucault’s essay. “What is an Author?” “. . . Am I just a book?” asks the burned Englishman in Michael Ondaatje’s novel *The English Patient*, in response to Caravaggio’s attempts to reveal his past as the cartographer/spy Almásy. Both questions are germane to a central tension in the novel: What are the implications (for texts) of an absent/anonymous narrative creator? In this novel, the issue of “who speaks” is not an innocent one. The English patient would like, for various reasons, to absolve himself of authorial responsibility for his narrative. The most apparent of these reasons is certainly to avoid the repercussions of his being identified as Almásy. Yet the “black body” of this “despairing saint” gives no clue to his identity, and therefore to the “origin” of the discourse of which he is the source. He is an unreadable enigma, with “all identification consumed in a fire” (3), whom the inhabitants of the villa must nonetheless translate into their own narratives.

This absence of locating identification poses a problem for anyone who seeks to “read” the English patient in the terms of what Foucault names in his essay the “Author Function,” which (among other things) demands that we name the writer in order to understand the text. An anonymous narrative is problematic, since it stands outside the framing operation which for the modern reader provides a comfortable (if voyeuristic) view into the mind of the writer. According to Foucault, however, the operation of author construction also serves to limit/constrict/confine the discourse which it frames. In various ways, then, Ondaatje’s novel offers the reader an enigma

who is filing for divorce from his narrative, yet cannot leave the uneasy relationship behind.

Why should a discourse become confined, limited, or otherwise handicapped by the Author Function? According to Foucault, the need to inscribe texts with the name of an author derives from a particular set of historical and cultural circumstances, variously connected with the rise of a “system of ownership for texts” (108). Significantly for the discourse of the English patient, it is only when the “possibility of transgression” becomes inherent in what we would now call “literary” discourse that the Author Function is made a requirement of its dissemination (109). His “transgressions”—of nationality, of identity, of marital arrangements—clearly qualify his narrative for receipt of the Author Function. It would conveniently enable his audience to place him (and hence, his story) within the parameters which his history provide. He is a spy, so it is a spy story. He was in love, so it’s a romance. He is not English, and so he lies about the gardens at Kew. Yet for Foucault this too-convenient inscription of the narrative within the name of its author serves only to “impede the free circulation . . . of fiction” (119) within the false parameters of biography.

How, then, can we move from the “brakes on meaning” (to use Barthes’s term in *The Rustle of Language* 53) this inscription represents to a “proliferation of meaning” (Foucault, “Author” 119) unconstrained by the Author Function? Foucault suggests that the answer begins with the divorce of textual signification from the “game of writing” (103), a game at which the writer is already, sadly, dead. Where narrative (the Greek epic is his example) once offered the hero immortality, it has become an arena for the “voluntary effacement” of its writer, an effacement which is inherent in the writer’s “very existence” (102). The rise of the notion of writing as *écriture* (and the coincident re-evaluation of the status of the author in relation to writing) offers the opportunity to analyze the characteristics which condition its production, rather than its idiosyncratic manifestations. Here Foucault is building on and adapting Roland Barthes’s seminal work on the “death of the author” in Barthes’s essay of the same name. Unfortunately this “death” has not, suggests Foucault, been a final one, for the drive to resurrect a subject position that corresponds eerily to the writer still distorts (in collusion with the Author Function) the reception of a narrative. Foucault claims that the same questions are still asked of texts in the ‘post-author’ critical world: “From where does it come, who wrote it, when, under what circumstances, or beginning with what design?” (109) The agenda which drives these questions,

argues Foucault, is the basis for the classification of certain types of discourse as “speech that must be received in a certain mode and . . . must receive a certain status” (107). Yet our culture still has difficulty with writing that fails to provide these answers, which is one of the reasons why anonymous discourse is “intolerable” and initiates the “game” of “rediscovering the author” (109). This is certainly a game that the reader of *The English Patient* can appreciate.

What are the hermeneutical implications of an anonymously produced text? Can there be an understanding of it without a historically locatable author? Or is the map, in this case, the territory? The problem for the characters in *The English Patient* is how to receive the narrative of this “bogman from history” (96) who tells them he wishes to “erase [his] name and the place [he] had come from” (139). The English patient is sweeping his tracks from his narrative even as he relates it. This self-effacement makes the meaning of his narrative more mobile, more slippery, and poses a problem for the audience (most notably Caravaggio) that receives it. His story, then, must be somehow placed within the confines of an Author Function, in order to map its geography, the geography of the Hungarian Count Almásy and his historical role in the war.

This “faceless, almost nameless man” has three interlocutors, each of whom for various reasons resists or insists upon the responsibility of the writer for his narrative discourse. Hana, the nurse, is content to let him remain anonymous, since she is “not concerned about the Englishman as far as gaps in the plot [are] concerned” (8), and, as she later tells Caravaggio, “[i]t doesn’t matter what side he was on” (165). Caravaggio, the thief and detective, wants to “invent a skin” for the “man in the bed” and “reveal him for Hana’s sake” (117), suggesting that the story is not fully understandable at face value. Finally, there is Kip, who does not “yet have a faith in books,” the Sikh sapper who remains “an anonymous member of another race” (197), whose work defusing bombs depends on locating the mind that created it. Yet he is less concerned with identifying the English patient than with the “meadows of civilisation” (294) he represents as the spokesman of “English” culture.

Open to all of them at various times is a shared text, *The Histories of Herodotus*, which has gone from “commonplace” to “communal” book as Almásy has gone from adapting it to sharing it with his interlocutors. One begins to see how Foucault’s theory of unconfined discourse might have its harbinger in this text which has swollen to “almost twice its original thickness” (94) with the various additions of the English patient. Herodotus,

then, stands over the villa's occupants like a silent fifth, an "eccentric" non-centre within the narrative who acts synecdochically for an open discourse released from the constraints of the Author Function.

Further complicating these operations in the novel is a profound tension between the terms "English patient" and "Almásy." While it is not difficult to locate the English patient "as" Almásy, the correspondence is not strictly equivalent. There is a profound shift in agenda between the storytelling "Englishman" and the navigator and geographer whose narrative he relates. The English patient longs to "walk upon such an earth that had no maps" (261) while, in his incarnation as Almásy, maps were his *raison d'être*, a way to translate the world into two-dimensional space, to "fill the world with writing." These maps serve a framing purpose for the geographies which they re-present very similar to that of the Author Function in its relation to textual discourse. One names the land in order to obtain a certain control over it through the framing operation of language:

Still, some wanted their mark there. . . . Fenelon-Barnes wanted the fossil trees he discovered to bear his name. He even wanted a tribe to take his name, and spent a year in the negotiations. Then Bauchan outdid him, having a type of sand dune named after him. *But I wanted to erase my name and the place I had come from.* (139, emphasis added)

Naming conflates the individual and the thing named, the plain, the oasis, the *Djebel Almásy* (de Zepetnek 143). And maps are the things that the English patient most wants to live without. Even in this passage we see how Almásy seeks to avoid the hegemonizing functions of these Geographer-Gods, who would fill the desert with their own name.

Whereas Almásy sought to fix geographies within the publishable framework of the Royal Geographic Society, to have his name attached to monographs and maps, the English patient seeks to efface himself from the discursive operation. "We become vain with the names we own," he says (141), and this vanity is a thing he seems to want to move beyond as he tells the story. As a narrator, the English patient seems to embody (if you like) the thanatoid nature of the author within his discourse: "I didn't want my name against such names . . . Erase the family name! Erase nations!" (139). One might just as easily imagine him proclaiming, "Erase the presence of the author from his work!" This desire for erasure is present throughout the English patient's narrative, as he attempts to cover his footprints from the story he tells, just as Hana disguises her entry into the library—that temple of writing—to give the impression that her "corporeal body had disappeared" (12).

The English patient's drive to self-erasure is also echoed in the frequent obscuring of the narrative voice. "Who is he speaking as now," thinks Caravaggio, as the English patient switches seamlessly between the first and third-person position in his own narrative (244). "Death means you are in the third person," the English patient later tells Caravaggio, suggesting perhaps that it is possible to represent yourself in a narrative position that has meant your own demise. This ability to "speak sometimes in the first person, sometimes in the third person" (247) is also indicative of the ability of the English patient to stand outside his own discourse, to absent himself deliberately at the point of its creation. This ability is foregrounded in a curious passage in which he steps out of his narrative voice into that of the public observer:

In those days he [Almásy] and she [Katharine] did not seem to be getting on well . . . He was loud at the tables with us. When Almásy was like this we usually dispersed, but this was Madox's last night in Cairo and we stayed. (244, emphasis added).

The interchange of subject positions, this slipping between "we" and "I" and "he," contrasts with the other, more frequent, first-person narrator whom the English patient deploys in the telling of his story. Just as a "man in the desert can slip into a name as if within a discovered well" (141), the English patient can slip into a new position within his own discourse, thus frustrating attempts to inscribe him with a name and an Author Function. The English patient clearly understands "that pure zone between land and chart between distances and legend between nature and storyteller . . . [how] he was alone, his own invention . . ." (246). Narrative and its *trompes l'oeil* are familiar to this fabulist, who knows "how the mirage worked . . . for he was within it" (246). Switching narrative position is one more example of the prestidigitation that contributes to the blurring of the origin of his discourse.

Almásy's fluid relationship with language is further illuminated by comparison with Katharine's. Where words give Katharine "clarity . . . reason, shape," for the English patient they "[bend] emotions like sticks in water" (238). Yet he still seeks to "translate" her into his "text of the desert" (236), and is "unable to remove her body from the page" (235). She has maintained a "line back to her ancestors that was almost tactile, whereas he had erased the path he had emerged from." Here, again, there is a marked difference between the English patient in the villa and the earlier Almásy, for, as David Williams points out, the burned man is clearly trying to "atone for



his earlier mistake in charting the desert, or erasing the past” (41). Where Almásy’s maps “compress the world into a two-dimensional sheet of paper” (161), the English patient’s narrative seeks to open up the world to new possibilities of meaning and remembering. They, too, share the *Histories*, and their differing approaches to it are also suggestive of their divergent relationship to the written world. While Almásy “would often open Herodotus for a clue to geography . . . Katharine had done that [that is, read the story of Gyges and Candaules] as a window to her life” (233). For him a text will reveal the physical world existing outside the writing, while for her a narrative reveals as much about the teller/reader as the tale. In this, she is paralleled closely with Hana, who seeks signs of herself both within the texts of the library and in the anonymous tabula rasa to whose deathwatch she has dedicated herself.

And so Almásy’s stature as the “dead man” at the heart of the narrative is never far away. Hana dislikes the “deathlike posture” (62) of this “eternally dying man” (115), who seems to have been erased from his own life, who “reposes like the sculpture of the dead knight in Ravenna” (96). Although she is the first audience (at the villa) of this “despairing saint” (45) of “pure carbon” (109) and his most forgiving, she is too absorbed in her own narrative of personal reconstruction to inquire too closely about his own. She is “secure in the miniature world” she has built: “the other two men seemed distant planets” (47). Caravaggio feels she has “chained herself to the dying man upstairs” (40). The English patient is to her “like a burned animal . . . a pool for her” (41) who reflects, it seems, her own desire for anonymity and escape from history.

For Hana is also both reader and script in the novel. Her body is “full of stories and situations” (36), “sentences and moments” (12), yet she is also the reader—of books, the “summer night” (49), the English patient. She, too, writes in books, filling them with her own language and opening them to the communal production of discourse which lies at the centre of the novel. Her triple role as reader, writer, and inscribed text suggests an interplay within the process of signification, an interplay that the Author Function seeks to shut down. Perhaps this is why she is never terribly interested in locating the English patient as an historical figure within his narrative, for she (consciously or not) recognizes that the dialogic possibilities of the narrative he relates would be constrained by any effort to delimit them within biographical parameters. He fascinates her, for “there is something about him that she wanted to learn, to grow into, and hide in, where she

could turn away from being an adult" (52). Being an adult, for her, means cutting one's hair and avoiding mirrors (50). At the same time, she embraces writing, which has at its heart an author whose corpse is only propped up by an Author Function that refuses to acknowledge the mortality of the writer within discourse.

Without spending a great deal of time on mirrors, to touch on their role in *The English Patient*, particularly the ways in which they reflect the mortality inherent in writing for Hana:

She had refused to look at herself for more than a year, now and then just her shadow on the walls. The mirror revealed only her cheek . . . She watched the little portrait of herself as if within a clasped brooch. She. . . Only those who were seriously ill were still indoors. She smiled at that. Hi Buddy, she said. She peered into her look, trying to recognize herself. (52)

The phrase "Hi Buddy," which she had previously used with the dying soldiers placed under her care, here suggests that she, too, is "seriously ill" and the reflection she sees is of her own mortality. This reflection is, of course, echoed in the artistic analogy that the English patient sees in Kip:

There's a painting by Caravaggio, done late in his life. *David with the head of Goliath*. In it, the warrior holds at the end of his outstretched arm the head of Goliath, ravaged and old. . . . It is assumed that the face of David is a portrait of the youthful Caravaggio and the head of Goliath is a portrait of him as an older man, how he looked when he did the painting. Youth judging age at the end of its outstretched hand. The judging of one's own mortality. I think when I see him at the foot of my bed that Kip is my David. (116)

Compare this description of the painting to the physical posture of Hana as she recognizes her own mortality in the mirror which "revealed only her cheek, she had to move it back to arm's length, her hand wavering" (52). Hana, because she believes she "would have nothing to link her, to lock her, to death" (50), refutes the Author Function, for to admit that discourse could be delimited in such a way would be a sort of suicide for the sort of discursive possibilities she represents. The discourse must stand outside of the mortality of the author in order for it to avoid the life-in-death that the Author Function offers as an alternative.

It is Caravaggio who persistently asks the question which is at the heart of the operation of the Author Function—Who is 'behind' this narrative? He is convinced that there is "more to discover, to divine out of this body on the bed, non-existent except for a mouth" (247), and is determined to "unthread the story out of him," to travel "down the code of signals" that will reveal the historical man behind the story. It is Caravaggio who names

the English patient's narrative as "apocryphal," the discourse of a "mind travelling east and west in the disguise of a sandstorm" (248). He uses Herodotus to locate the English patient's story alongside that of Almásy, to follow the "flickering" of the narrative "compass needle" that makes the story "errant" (240).

Caravaggio knows about secrets, and he knows about the repercussions of revelation. His thumbs were removed when his identity was revealed, and he is like a detective attempting to ensure that the English patient does not elude the ramifications of his past by slipping into a comfortable anonymity. Yet by the end of the book Caravaggio, too, seems to have come to a different understanding of the role of the "Author-God" (the phrase is Foucault's) in relation to narrative. "We can let him be" (265), he tells Hana after hearing the poignant final installment of his narrative: "It no longer matters which side he was on during the war" (251). He feels he has "been in deserts too long" and perhaps has learned from them some of the same lessons that the English patient did: there is no author, only discourse. The English patient "learned everything [he] knew there" (177), after all.

Yet the question "Who is behind a 'work'" presupposes the non-problematic existence of a 'work' that is closed to further discourse. The presence of Herodotus' *Histories* demonstrates the principle of a 'work' that is somehow incomplete, or at least open to the very act of supplementation it claims as a guiding principle. Foucault makes it clear in his essay that the idea of a 'work' is very much under pressure in the absence of the classificatory functioning of the Author. Remove the various characteristics of a text that allow us to assign authorial integrity (an exegetical function he calls "religious" in nature) and what is left? In the absence of an acceptable "theory of the work" it is difficult to apply conventional notions of criticism, since we lack a tool by which to delineate adequately just what it is that is being criticized. The distinctions made between various manifestations of discourse (novel, textbook, poem and soon) are shown by Foucault to be arbitrary classifications rather than inherently unitary distinctions. Foucault has elsewhere remarked that the "frontiers of a book are never clear-cut . . . it is caught up in a system of references to other books, other texts, other sentences: it is a node within a network" (*Archaeology* 23). A work per se has never been satisfactorily defined, yet 'books' which are of a 'finite' nature exist.

The problematic presence of the *Histories* in the novel is an example of just such a work "under pressure." As a history made up of "supposed lies" which opens itself up to the various pastings and writings of Almásy, it

offers a prime example of the “communal book” that the English patient will later name as an alternative to the fixed codifications of Almásy, his compatriots, and the nation states that govern, define, and destroy. It is the first example in the novel of a text which is freely open to emendation as its reader sees fit. Just as Hana will later on keep a diary within *Kim*, *The Last of the Mohicans* and *The Charterhouse of Parma*, Almásy has insinuated himself and his own narrative of “supposed lies” into the *Histories*. He pastes in cigarette papers in the sections that are “of no interest to him,” and when he “discover[s] the truth to what seemed a lie . . . he paste[s] in a map or a news clipping” (173). The book, when Hana sees it, is “almost twice its original thickness,” evidence of the extent to which Herodotus’ text has opened itself to Almásy’s co-authorship. The presence of the *Histories*, with their curious blend of “skeletal act . . . and imaginative reality” (Greene 12), also underscores how the English patient presents his audience with what Ondaatje (quoting Vargas Lhosa) describes as the “truth of lying” (Wachtel 258). Not only do they challenge the notion of a text as a “fixing” of discourse between two covers, but they also both present and subvert the classificatory operations of the Author Function, since *The English Patient* is neither wholly fictional nor (in any “real” way) “historical.”

It is relevant, too, that the English patient refers to himself several times as Odysseus, the product of a communal discursive act that our culture has conflated under the authority of the name Homer. “I was Odysseus. I understood the shifting and temporary vetoes of war” (241). Odysseus, a man who Madox says “never wrote a word, an intimate book,” “felt alien in the false rhapsody of art” (241). Almásy is “too cunning to be a lover of the desert. More like Odysseus,” he is the great navigator, who also sought to name and to map. Within this model of hegemony through nomenclature, the ineffable desert represents a negation, an emptiness which needs to be made a part of the “fully named world” (21) that Almásy and others seek to create through maps. By placing himself within the framework of *The Odyssey*—a touchstone of our culture’s drive towards the classificatory operation of the Author Function—the English patient makes explicit the connection between Almásy’s “will to name” and the attempt to invoke a sort of closure on the world “outside” the text. As well, the connection reinforces his affinity with Odysseus’ ability to slip into anonymity when necessary, as he does when confronting the cyclops Polyphemus and escapes by adopting the name “Nobody.” Just as Homer’s name was devised to frame the problematic tradition of anonymity from which it sprang, Almásy’s

name is invoked to deploy the operations of the Author Function onto the narrative of the English patient.

Foucault also compares the modern drive towards the Author-God with the oral, anonymous production of discourses that we would now consider literary—poems and plays and so on. It is in oral narratives (the Greek epic is a useful case in point) where the redemptive function of narrative is most apparent. The sacrifice of the hero within the story is redeemed by the immortality provided by the concomitant epic narrative—Icarus may die but his cautionary tale affords him some measure of consolation. Herodotus' introduction to *The Histories* states as much. He is writing them so “. . . that time may not draw the color from what man has brought into being”—in other words to provide immortality to the “great and wonderful deeds” of the “Greeks and barbarians” of whom he writes. The Author Function “subverts” this redemption, and replaces it with the “voluntary effacement” of self-sacrifice, a subversion which provides narrative with the “right to kill” (102). As Williams notes (40), the English patient's narrative becomes, from this perspective, an attempt to translate Katharine's death into a representation similar to those he found in Herodotus, in which “old warriors celebrated their loved ones by locating and holding them in whatever world made them eternal—a colourful fluid, a song, a rock drawing” (249).

Herbs and dyes aren't all that he is using to “make her eternal” (260). Storytelling, as Foucault notes, often represents a Scheherazade-like postponement of death, which for the English patient will “locate and hold” Katharine in a “world” where the redemptive power of discourse has not been subverted by the thanatoid drive of the Author Function. Yet he later recognizes as flawed this attempt to immortalize his lover in art. Williams draws our attention to the way in which the English patient-as-narrator “has abandoned . . . fixity and embraced the flow of borderless text” (40). This “flow of borderless text” has a correlative in the “authorless discourse,” free of the framing operations of the Author Function, that Foucault is proposing as a new model of representation. It also resonates within the language of the English patient's final narrative:

We die containing a richness of lovers and tribes, tastes we have swallowed, bodies we have plunged into and swum up as if rivers of wisdom, characters we have climbed into as if trees, fears we have hidden in as if caves. I wish for all of this to be marked on my body when I am dead. I believe in such cartography—to be marked by nature, not just to label ourselves on a map like the names of rich men and women on building. We are communal histories, communal books. We are not owned or monogamous in our taste or experience. (261)

We do not own, nor are we owned by, our narratives. Our experience is not reducible to an idiosyncratic manifestation of name or label. What's in a name, after all is said and done? The hollow necro-nomenclature of the Author Function.

Yet a problem remains: How do we locate Kip within this attempt to free narrative from the grips of the Author Function? What is the textual role of this sapper with the "rogue gaze" who can see all the "false descants" in a "page of information" (111)? His "body allows nothing to enter him that comes from another world" (126), so that he stands apart from the inhalations of writing that typify both Hana and the English patient. In fact, he seems to stand apart from much of the narrative process in the novel. His existence on the "periphery" (80) denotes a relationship with language that is not coincident with any of the other inhabitants of the villa. He does "not yet have a faith in books"; at least, not in the book as a repository of a closed meaning. "He has his own faith after all" (80), we are told. And we are reminded again that his culture is not that of the Westerners with whom he shares the villa. Kip listens to the oral narrative of the English patient, becoming the "young student" in the presence of the "wise old teacher," since he is "most comfortable with men who had the abstract madness of autodidacts, like Lord Suffolk, like the English patient" (111). For Kip, knowledge is present yet never fixed, for in his work of defusing bombs, the text (of both the bombs themselves and the directions for defusing them) and knowledge are fluid, changing constantly as new wrinkles are found in the "jokes" which animate the connection between fuse and explosive. Knowledge is not contained within the authority of texts, but is mutable, open to change as new elements come to light.

The "communal book" that Kip shares with the sappers—the constantly shifting text of fuses and technique—reinforces the sense that for Kip, knowledge/discourse is not limited to or by an author; it simply is. Yet there is a personality behind the fuse/text, whose mentality must be approached in order for the creation to be intelligible. In this sense, Kip cannot refute the presence of an originating mind in the narrative of ordnance, because it would tie at least one of his hands behind his back. In this sense, perhaps, the bomb-maker/author is closer to Foucault's "functional principle by which . . . one limits, excludes, and chooses; in short, by which one impedes the free circulation . . . of fiction" (119). These are, however, fictions that perhaps should have their circulation severely impeded. For Kip, "the successful defusing of bombs ended novels," creations of an "enemy who had made

the bomb and departed brushing his tracks with a branch behind him” (105). When a text has its author uncovered, it is defused, harmless, inert. But when the bomb-maker succeeds in becoming anonymous to the sapper/reader, in “brushing his tracks with a branch behind him,” then the ending becomes a little more problematic. It seems that Hana and the English patient are not the only ones with motivation for disguising their entries into narratives.

There is another accounting for Kip’s presence as a refutation of the author function. He is presented continually as a man on the periphery, a “loose star on the edge of their system” (75), and so offers the viewpoint of the ‘other’ to their narrative process. And he also has a personal interest in the ‘will to name,’ having been variously “translated” into a “salty English fish” (87), David the giant killer, and a variant on Kipling’s Kim. The English have attached names to Kip in various forms since he entered the army. He draws the connection between the text on bombs and the yellow chalk that was “scribbled onto our bodies in the Lahore courtyard,” the first naming operation of the colonial military. After Suffolk’s death he is “expected to be the replacing vision,” an expectation which he compares to “a large suit of clothes that he could roll around in . . . he knew he did not like it” (196). This is the point where Kip understands that he is “capable of having wires attached to him” (197). It is this capability, to be suffused within English (and by Kip’s logical extrapolation White/European) culture, that he rejects, and leaves the unit for the more ‘comfortable’ environs of Italy, free from the threat of unwanted discursive penetration. As an “anonymous member of another race, a part of the invisible world” (196), it is only logical that he would refuse this wiring, which is really only an extension of the hegemonic drive which wrote on his body and translated him into an “English fish”—out of water, one supposes. The rejection of this drive is also an implicit rejection of the Author Function, for the will to name is really an extension of the will to construct a misleading unity out of disparate discourse.

What occurs at the end of the novel, with the explosion of the bombs at Hiroshima and Nagasaki, seems to represent the initiation of a discourse that is un-solvable for Kip, for there is absolutely no “joke” to be found in the fuses of the Atomic era. Where bombs had previously posed problems of logic and personality to him, his role as a ‘reader’ of their somehow-humanized ‘text’ is obliterated with the introduction of bombs that refute any attempt to defuse them through an utter lack of personalization. The

bombs fill the streets of Asia with fire, rolling across cities “like a burst map” (285, emphasis added). “He knows nothing about the weapon” (287) that has been dropped, only that “[h]is name is Kirpal Singh and he does not know what he is doing here” (287). This “author-less” weapon comes to signify, for Kip, a conflation of power with anonymity, a conflation that holds out the possibility of annihilation. And so he re-appropriates his name, shedding those other names he has been given, and rejects, finally, the wires of culture that they represented. With the Author absent from the work (textual or atomic), Kip loses his *raison d’être*, and his departure from the “meadows of civilisation” that the English patient tended is a foregone conclusion. The Atomic bombs are infused with Western cultural codes (which have sanctioned the eliding of personal responsibility in an act of mass destruction), and so he rapidly takes aim at the most emblematic representative of those codes of “precise behaviour” (283): the English patient. It is the “death of a civilisation” (286), but this is ambiguous: Whose, exactly? The Japanese or English/Western?

Kip has, to this point, been a lover of chapels, with a closely felt attachment to the icons found there. He has come to Western culture through Suffolk and the face of Isaiah painted on Chapel ceilings, and found comfort sleeping in a familial triptych with chapel statuary while facing possible death. As he reaches a chapel near the beginning of his journey home, however, he merely “wander[s] around like somebody unable to enter the intimacy of a home” (291). Yet still he “carries the body of the Englishman with him in this flight . . . the black body in an embrace with his” (294), a touchstone, perhaps, for the knowledge that the English patient imparted to him. While this knowledge may seem to be simple and unproblematic (“the author is dead, and we Westerners have killed him”), it must also be seen in the conflicted light that the English patient’s confession sheds upon it. In his final (self-) interrogation he questions the anonymity he had so dearly achieved: “Was I a curse upon them? For her? For Madox? For the desert raped by war, shelled as if it were just sand?” (257). And, later, “What had I done? What animal had I delivered into her? . . . Had I been her demon lover? Had I been Madox’s demon friend? This country—had I charted it and turned it into a place of war?” (260). The idea that the English patient is able to admit his complicity within the Almásy narrative is, in some way, a refutation of the comforting anonymity which he had sought through his denial of the author-function. The insistent “I” that marks these passages points to an authoritative personal voice behind what had been, to this



point, a talking absence. Perhaps this partial admission of guilt is what makes it possible for Kirpal Singh to “embrace” the “black body” and carry it with him in his journey out of Europe.

Finally, much of the novel takes place against the backdrop of the desert which appears as a kind of discourse that confounds the reductive attempts of the ‘Geographer-Gods’ to name and control it. The ones who survive are those who understand that in the desert “a man can hold absence in his cupped hands,” and find their way through the sandstorms and heat to the hidden wells. What is absent is the power to name, the drive to constrict meaning within the hollow man of an eternally dying author. Here we get a sense of the whispering of writing that Foucault has been pointing us towards, in which discourse may be understood in modes other than those which valorize the continued existence of the author:

What are the modes of existence of this discourse? Where has it been used, how can it circulate, and who can appropriate it for himself? What are the places in it where there is room for possible subjects? Who can assume these various subject functions? (120)

The Bedouin have no problem “reading” the burned man who falls from the sky. They are able to ask and answer at least a few of Foucault’s questions to arrive at a practical response to his arrival. He is used as a Rosetta stone for the deciphering of armaments. As desert dwellers they understand that a name is a useless appendage in the nation-less expanse of sand and wind. One gets the sense that the European presence in the desert is only a mirage, which will disappear into the vast ‘absence’ of this whispering discourse, for the desert makes “tribes . . . historical with sand across their gasp” (18).

This discourse also resonates with Foucault’s notion that the game of writing is “a question of creating a space into which the writing subject constantly disappears” (“Author” 102). It cannot be “claimed or owned” (Ondaatje 138) or, by extension, framed by the operations of either geographers or the Author Function—“all pilots who fall into the desert—none of them comes back with any identification” (29). Where Kip stands as a rebuke to the Author Function from the standpoint of the outsider to the hegemonic naming process, the desert answers the shouting of the name with a vast, often deadly, indifference. The mystery of the Senussi raiders is offered several times as perhaps the most lucid example of a people who are enigmatically able to survive in the desert without the obvious aid of Western technologies or the cartographical drive which is its close cousin.

Of course, the concept of the “Author Function is not without problems.

As Sean Burke has cogently pointed out, Foucault's elision of the author from the work relies on a dextrous misreading of Descartes and a willful "inversion" of Nietzschean exegesis (83). Foucault seems deliberately to evade questions of authorial power when it concerns those whom he terms "founders of discursivity"—Freud, Marx—individuals whose writing is inherently unique within the discursive formation from which it arose. Thus, within his own essay, Foucault contradicts his deterministic assertion that narrative production can always be located within an anonymous space. By attempting to deny the active *cogito* any role in the writing process, while simultaneously asserting that brilliant individuals may somehow stand anterior to their own writing, Foucault seems, like Almásy, to apply a double standard to those writers whose existence is deemed necessary for his elaboration of his archaeological theories. It is difficult to deny, too, the "Author-God" status that Foucault himself has assumed within post-structuralist circles. Like the English patient at the end of the novel, the elusive author thereby slips back into the act of writing, although perhaps in an unaccustomed subject position.

So "What does it matter who speaks?" The answer may prove as slippery as Foucault himself. While not without trenchant critics, Foucault's thesis remains an evocative one for a culture undergoing massive displacement in modes of narrative production. While the author may not be able to achieve full erasure from the text, it is clear that some sort of post-authorial anonymity is presenting itself as an alternative to the hegemony of the name (the seemingly endless flow of electronic text on the Internet is perhaps the most salient example). This reconfiguration of the role of the author in relation to text is echoed throughout Ondaatje's novel, and the "stirring of an indifference" (Foucault, "Author" 120) is both a reality and a site of conflict for the four inhabitants of the villa. They have faced the possibility of a discourse in the absence of a Foucauldian "regulator of fiction" (119), and found it variously unsatisfactory on its face. Some trace of this elusive writer remains, chastened perhaps, within a newly reconceived notion of the author within writing, a notion which may yet allow (over Foucault's objection) for the speaking subject of Kip's quotation from Isaiah to say with some assurance: *And my words which I have put in thy mouth shall not depart from thy mouth. Nor out of the mouth of thy seed* (Ondaatje 294).

NOTES

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## Oedipus and Menaud: The Self-Affirmative Complex in André Brochu's *Le Maître rêveur*

It is difficult to talk about André Brochu without mentioning *Parti-pris*, which Brochu helped found in 1963 when he was barely twenty-one. Essentially of Marxist-Leninist ideology, the self-proclaimed political and cultural magazine appeared monthly for five years, during which time its editors continuously sought to reconcile the publication's literary content with its political objectives. While Brochu considered literary criticism as a form of action similar to the political activity of *Parti-pris* ("La Nouvelle relation écrivain-critique" 54), he quickly found himself at odds with both his fellow editors and mainstream literary currents in Quebec: he did not fully espouse the new generation's avowed break with the past and had difficulty embracing structuralism which, in his mind, seemed to negate the very essence of literary creation. Brochu left the magazine only to state in 1967 that *Parti-pris'* shortcoming was partly due to the fact that its contributors had appropriated the revolutionary rhetoric of countries like Cuba and Algeria without linking it to Quebec and its traditions (Major 135). Consequently, Brochu was ostracized on two fronts. Not only was his vision of literary and cultural continuity not shared by the magazine's editors (Dumont 521), but his very concept of literature ran counter to critical movements of the day (Michon and Goulet 533).

Brochu's critical theories and essays inform his own creative writings. Indeed, he perceived his role as literary critic as that of striving to discover "une identité québécoise à travers les oeuvres qui composent notre tradition" ("La Nouvelle relation écrivain-critique" 53), and considered such a stance not as a type of regression or sterile attachment to the past, but rather

a quest for those forces that still vitalize the present and which might be used to anchor new forms of literary expression in firm ground (Dumont 521). Brochu's idea of the critic as a kind of *chercheur de trésors* in search of a definable notion of what it means to be Québécois likewise seems to underpin his poetic and novelistic endeavors. The past in fact has a crucial function in Brochu's writings, especially in his most recent novel, *Le Maître rêveur* unquestionably offers a rich layering of themes and narrative techniques focusing on identity, self-affirmation, survival, and expression through the written word. Intertextual references to the literary corpus of France as well as that of Quebec abound; yet it is without a shadow of a doubt Felix-Antoine Savard's *Menaud, maître-draveur*—a novel openly eulogizing the past—that serves as the culminating metatext in the construction of Brochu's narrative. The originality of the technique in this case stems from the fact that Brochu ingeniously meshes the reference to Savard with the Oedipus complex as formulated by Sigmund Freud. In tandem, these intertexts impart semantic depth to the main character's personal drama, giving it a national, if not universal dimension. They will therefore be used as analytical prisms in this reading of *Le Maître rêveur*.

Although Brochu experimented with a variety of critical methods of analysis, he never abandoned more traditional logocentric approaches, and showed a patent predilection for thematic studies. His 1984 examination of Gabrielle Roy's *La Montagne secrète* attempts to localize the work's underlying patterns and identifies three dominant time-frames (*Visée critique* 195). His 1966 analysis of *Menaud, maître-draveur* builds on then existent criticism of Savard's novel, stressing the work's three distinct chronological moments in the plot's development: the death of Menaud's son, the confrontation where le Délié in a cowardly fashion strikes le Lucon leaving him unconscious and, finally, Menaud's ultimate insanity ("Menaud ou l'impossible fête" 271). Interestingly, *Le Maître rêveur* concentrates on three important periods in the narrator's life. Doubly linked to *Menaud, maître-draveur* by an explicit reference to Savard's protagonist (186) and, more subtly, by its title (just one syllable shy of being identical to the epithet used to characterize Menaud), *Le Maître rêveur* is inseparable from *La Vie aux trousses* where a similar chronological network is discernible. The two novels in fact form a dyad which, like Savard's narrative, traces a largely linear diegetic development. Each recounts the story of Sylvain Mercier who is at once narrator and main character. Brochu has chosen to accentuate the interrelation of his two narrative's by titling *Le Maître rêveur* "La Vie aux trousses II." Yet

the second does not take up where the first left off. Instead, the two accounts form an intricate chronological overlapping.

The three chapters comprising *La Vie aux trousseaux* all revolve around a specific moment in the narrator's existence and are staggered over ten-year intervals. They represent the narrator at ages 9, 19, and 29 and cover the years 1951, 1961, and 1971. *Le Maître rêveur* follows an almost equally linear paradigm centring on events involving the narrator at ages 10 (1952), 30 (1972), and 45 (1987). However, episodes transpiring when the narrator was 10 are split in two. "Dix ans (I)" constitutes the novel's opening section and "Dix ans (II)" its third. The novel closes with a fifth section bearing the eponymous title "Le Maître rêveur," whose time period is not identified but which contains a reference to the 1995 referendum. Clearly, by virtue of its poetic, dream-like quality, this final segment is intended to transcend the preceding narrative portions, possibly marking a narrative victory in the self-reflexive process both at the diegetic and compositional levels.

More importantly, by fragmenting the section dealing with the narrator's life at age 10, Brochu draws attention to the influence that the past exerts on the present. The break takes place just after Sylvain's rude awakening to certain sexual realities: in the sombre depths of the cavernous cellar of the Jesuit school he is attending—symbolic of the inner recesses of the psyche where the libido lurks—Sylvain witnesses a priest, Father Locas, molesting a half-willing classmate. The perverse tryst is suddenly interrupted by the arrival of the school's disciplinarian, Father Lamontagne, and at that point the section abruptly comes to an end. The incipit of the next section, entitled "Trente ans," reads as follows: "Je déteste écrire. Je déteste. Maudit soit mon thérapeute, maudit, je le déteste" (75). Now 30 years old and recovering from a nervous breakdown, Sylvain is incapable of realizing his most cherished dream of affirming himself as a writer. The juxtaposition of the bizarre sexual act that Sylvain glimpses in the eerie darkness with his situation twenty years later tacitly establishes a cause-effect relation. The pattern is repeated—and the causal nature of the childhood event reemphasized—owing to the collocation of "Dix ans (II)" with the segment entitled "Quarante-cinq ans." Once again, a sexually imbued vision from the past (a sublimated homoerotic experience Sylvain now imagines at the close of "Dix ans [II]") is immediately followed by a portrayal of the narrator, still disturbed so many years later, as he contemplates the writing process and comments on his therapy sessions. In all, Brochu dedicates roughly half his novel to the narrator's childhood (over one hundred pages when parts I and

II of "Dix ans" are put together) and sporadically recounts those events in the present tense, thus putting them on a plane equal to subsequent episodes. What can be inferred is the futility of trying to completely sever the past from the here and now.

The discovery Sylvain makes in the school's subterranean is pivotal to his psychological evolution since it is essentially that scene which leads him to an awareness of his own mortality. Before the incident, Sylvain oscillated between the Manichean worlds of angelic-demonic absolutes. He would pray to God that he might become a great poet, though he was convinced great poets were all doomed to eternal damnation because they unavoidably strayed from the holy truth: "les grands poètes vont en enfer, ils s'écartent de la voie" (13). Yet their glory was, in his mind, immortal and he wanted to partake of their immortality. Inasmuch as he was still unknowing about the ways of the flesh, his dilemma at that point was how to write real poetry without offending the Lord, how to be a poet and still be saved: "faites que je sois quand même sauvé" (13).

Troubled by what he saw take place between Father Locas and his classmate, Sylvain seeks counsel from his Latin teacher, Father Philippon, who explains sex and its reproductive function as best he can. Suddenly, Sylvain's secure world of innocence and saintliness falls apart: "Fini l'ange. [. . .] Mes ailes étaient un effet de l'enfance. J'étais papillon, me voici chenille" (142); "je connais maintenant la science du bien et du mal, je sais la finalité terriblement pratique des corps, je suis un ange déchu [. . .]" (150). In the final chapter of the section entitled "Dix ans (II)," a confused and traumatized Sylvain ponders his sexual orientation and tries to stifle any homosexual leanings he might have: "[. . .] jamais je n'accepterai. Je corrigerai en moi le désir, le rendrai conforme à ce qui doit être [. . .]" (148). This last statement might serve as a paradigmatic image of the entire narrative construct. Time and again, Sylvain and ostensibly his narrative doubles (Olivier and, to a lesser degree, Camille) repress their real desires for a number of reasons: in response to social conformity, out of fear, or in the name of a higher ideal they deem absolute. Each becomes the victim of his or her own emotional suppression. Consequently, *Le Maître rêveur* unfolds as a novel of disillusionment, initiation, and quest, as they all seek a path to follow.

As critics have pointed out, the events comprising *Menaud, maître-draveur* are set in the wake of the great depression of 1929 and each of the work's three sections ends on a dramatic note (Boivin 39-40 and 50). This being so, further comparisons can be made between Savard's novel and the two narratives by

Brochu in question. While their sections may not necessarily each culminate on a dramatic note, they all unquestionably encapsulate a critical or dramatic phase for the main character. In addition, Brochu situates his narrator's experiences in distinctly significant periods of Quebec's sociopolitical history. He pushes the correlation between novelistic content and social reality further than does Savard by opting for three very different social climates. The triadic configuration of Savard's narrative is essentially derived from the events it delineates, all situated in the same historical timeframe. What strikes the reader in looking at Brochu's two novels is the extent to which Quebec's destiny and that of the main character run parallel.

1951-52: Quebec is in the grip of *la grande noirceur* or traditional conservatism under the rule of Maurice Duplessis who favors political stability through resistance to change, an ideology that, according to Denis Monière, incited French-Canadians not to contest their submissive and impoverished status (300). The psychological overtones of this depreciatory outlook are evident. In the 1951 segment of *La Vie aux troussees*, Sylvain attempts to forge a sexual and social identity through a series of apparently innocuous episodes, yet a feeling of malaise dominates: "C'est effrayant, d'être moi" (66). The concluding portion of the segment contains the highly charged question: "Pour l'instant, qui étais-je?" (83). In the sections of *Le Maître rêveur* taking place in 1952, an awareness of the rigid hierarchy of the province's social structures as well as deep-rooted sentiments of inferiority prevail among Quebec's French-speaking population: "Je suis un Canadien français, un miracle de la survivance à moi tout seul dans cette mer de grandes personnes qui parlent la langue du réel. Des francophones, il y en a et on les reconnaît soit à leur silence, soit à leurs échanges rapides à voix basse, soit surtout à leur accent quand ils répondent, reconnaissants, aux questions condescendantes de la race supérieure" (27). Sylvain's school is presented as a haven of French in a predominantly English-speaking city (45). Terrified of violating preestablished rules of conduct (69), Sylvain becomes introverted and seeks refuge in his personal "paradis intérieur peuplé de mots" (65). He ponders whether French in Quebec will be able to survive the degradations to which the historical situation subjects it on a daily basis (120). Furrowing his way through the crowded passenger train he takes daily to get to school, Sylvain reads disapproval on certain faces: "[. . .] d'autres passagers ne ressentent qu'exaspération devant les cabotinages de l'enfance ou les maigres pétulances francophones que j'incarnais *a priori* à leurs yeux" (120).



1961: The momentum of the Quiet Revolution grows as new hope for change is assured by the victory of the Liberal Party under the leadership of Jean Lesage. The narrator of *La Vie aux troussees* openly speaks of these events and states that when Duplessis died, so did French Canada; the time was right for Quebec to emerge (98). The sexual orgy during which Sylvain loses his virginity is denotive of the fundamental changes at work eroding the strong moral and religious taboos that had ultimately paralyzed the culture for so long. At once despairing and indifferent (137), Sylvain describes himself as torn between the beckoning of his instincts and unrealistic intellectual aspirations (129). Both he and Olivier turn to literature in their efforts to solve life's riddle and give focus to their intense existential questioning—a reaction that is in no way surprising given the unprecedented flourishing of the creative arts in Quebec during the 1960s.

1971-1972: The aftermath of the October crisis and the dissolution of the FLQ give way to more orthodox fora for channeling political hopes of a sovereign Quebec, namely through legitimate political action. It is a time of both frustrated ideals and new optimism. In the 1971 segment of *La Vie aux troussees*, this antithetical mingling surfaces when Olivier and Sylvain, both married, raise their glasses to René Lévesque as Olivier says with a half smile: “on peut toujours croire au miracle” (204). Future political setbacks at asserting a collective identity are symbolically presaged by Sylvain's individual failing: unable to cope with the stress of completing his doctoral dissertation, which would mean taking a critical stand by defining his literary persona, he suffers a mental breakdown. The 1972 portion of *Le Maître rêveur* depicts Sylvain in slow recovery, tormented by his complete state of social and emotional dysfunction. His *angst* is a metaphorization of Quebec's dilemma as perceived by anti-federalists: “Je voudrais simplement être moi, avec des droits, avoir un peu de joie à exister. C'est cela qui est impossible. Il faudrait n'être pas qui je suis. Il faudrait n'être pas” (107).

1987: Quebec is still licking its wounds following the 1980 referendum, the 1981 constitutional repatriation agreement (from which Quebec was excluded), and finally the Lake Meech Agreement that was in the making and which, in the eyes of hard-line separatists, undermined future chances of achieving autonomy for the province. In the 1987 segment of *Le Maître rêveur*, Sylvain equates his inability to take hold of his life with Quebec's indecisiveness: “semblable à mon peuple lui-même qui refuse de se donner les moyens de vivre” (154). Decidedly, Quebec's struggle for self-affirmation mirrors the narrator's (or vice versa) and now he finds himself confronting

a void. After the Church ceased to represent the vehicle of salvation for Quebec, intellectuals turned to literature and politics in the hope their messiah would materialize in the person of someone like Réjean Ducharme or René Lévesque (169). However, the savior did not come. Sylvain now realizes there is no solution from without.

Through various dialogues, politics and the fate of Quebec come to the fore in this segment of *Le Maître rêveur* transpiring in 1987. The date is significant when one considers that it is also the year Brochu's article, "Menaud Today," appeared. In it, the author states that upon rereading Savard's novel so many years after the 1980 referendum, he could not help being struck by the work's pertinence to the present political situation ("Menaud Today," 76). He also alludes to the racial glorification found in Savard's narrative—typical of discourse in Europe in the 1930s (76)—yet adds that rallying the population around concerns over race (as Menaud tried to do) does not constitute a concrete program of action but rather a dream doomed to failure (78).

These remarks on dream and race shed light on their function in *Le Maître rêveur*. If Sylvain proves to be a master at dreaming—hence the title of the novel—it is because it is a way of avoiding the essential issue over which he feels powerless: "il n'y a que le rêve pour surmonter l'écoeurant besoin d'exister" (191). Similarly, if he declares that he is racist (187), it is because federal immigration policies, coupled with new multicultural perspectives, have rendered nationalist thinking politically incorrect: "Rétablir l'enseignement de l'histoire du Québec dans les écoles, ce serait chercher à imposer aux nouveaux citoyens une identité qu'ils rejettent. Ce serait raciste. Nous sommes des racistes, du moment que nous ne consentons pas à tout oublier" (211). Using Savardian imagery, the narrator likens Quebec to Marie and immigrants to le Délié: the province welcomes with open arms foreigners who have no vested interest in the culture of Quebec while those who wish to see its French-speaking population survive into the next millennium, the narrator included, go mad with rage over the insidious assimilation process taking place before their very eyes (187).

Cognizant of the growing territorial hold by outsiders and the collective disaster he sees looming on the horizon, Menaud expends all his energy trying to counter the situation. His efforts are ineffectual and ultimately stymied by madness, which Brochu describes as a kind of death or fetalization, that is, a return to the womb of nature ("Menaud Today" 81). A similar fetal image is used in *Le Maître rêveur* and would seem an intentional,

albeit implicit, reference to the narrative's principal metatext. The image appears when Sylvain tries to convey to his analyst how writing gives him the impression of expanding the sphere or womb he feels he is in to the point where he might actually come forth and be born: "[. . .] c'est comme le Québec. Le Québec existe très fort depuis une trentaine d'années, mais il existe *en dedans*, il n'ose pas quitter le sein maternel, et il va en mourir, docteur" (186). Thus, writing constitutes for Sylvain an antidote for his psychoneurosis. It is a means of self-generation, the opposite of suicide ("je me mets au monde, tous les matins" 157), a remedy not accessible to Menaud, who was torn between death and madness when faced with the inevitable tribal extinction he foresaw.

Confirming his analyst's diagnosis that he has a tendency to identify too closely with Quebec, Sylvain calls this behavioral tic his "Menaud complex." Since it operates as a focal point in the articulation of the narrative, his description of the disorder needs to be cited in its entirety:

—Oui docteur, c'est un complexe. Le complexe de Menaud. Il vaut bien celui d'Oedipe. Oedipe voulait tuer son père et épouser sa mère. Menaud a plutôt le culte du père et des ancêtres, et il veut tuer—c'est une façon de parler—son futur gendre qui sert les Anglais et qui trahit son peuple. C'est par la femme que le malheur arrive, que la modernité vient bousculer les valeurs de la tradition. La femme, c'est la fille de Menaud, elle s'appelle Marie et elle est la mère symbolique, celle qu'Oedipe veut épouser et que Menaud, pour sa part, se retient de chasser. Bref, l'oedipe québécois est à peu près l'envers de l'oedipe universel. —L'envers. . . ou l'inversion: à la limite, on tue la mère et on épouse le père. —Docteur, vous m'avez compris. (186)

Freud explains that, when confronted with the Oedipus complex, a child may react in one of two ways: he may put himself in his father's place to have intercourse with the mother as did the father, thereby rendering the father an obstacle, or, conversely, he may "supplant the mother and be loved by the father, whereupon the mother [becomes] superfluous" ("The passing of the Oedipus Complex" 169). The neurosis described by Sylvain would seem a spin-off of the latter. Nevertheless, once the intertextual reference to Savard's novel has been made in conjunction with the Oedipal fixation, a number of narrative elements already touched upon fall more squarely into place, such as the themes of lucidity and madness, the interplay between dream and reality, and the narrator's valorization of the past. Additionally, other narrative components come into focus, including the arboreal images that punctuate the narration and, paradoxically, the motifs of incest and homosexuality.

Pascal Riendeau has convincingly argued that traditional paradigms of sexual identity are challenged in *La Vie aux troussees*, whose narrative impetus fluctuates between an idealization of exaggerated virility and an ironic presentation of sexual roles in society as being predeterminedly restrictive (575). The narrative in fact seeks at times to bolster orthodox visions of masculinity and at others to call them into question. This effect explains the narrator's emphasis on writing since it is an ingenious tool for inventing one's own identity (576). If the narrator's attempts at establishing a sexual identity on a personal level are a metaphor for the author's quest to define a collective Québécois reality, Sylvain's swing between heterosexual and homosexual relations can be viewed metonymically as a struggle to find a balance between traditional values and new ways of thinking. Furthermore, many of the narrative ingredients associated with this dichotomous tension in *La Vie aux troussees* and *Le Maître rêveur* become enriched when placed in the context of the Menaud complex.<sup>1</sup>

Savard's novel is based on a patriarchal ethic, but underlying that ethic is, as Brochu's himself states, the notion of freedom ("Menaud ou l'impossible fête" 269). In both *La Vie aux troussees* and *Le Maître rêveur*, the narrator attempts, at one point or another, to repress desires he identifies as ordinarily repudiated by society: "Je me suis corrigé, comme on corrige un gaucher. J'ai refait mon existence contre moi. J'ai construit, parfait, poli, mon mensonge [. . .]" (MR 80). The psychological dangers of repression that betrays the self are well known and, in the case of Brochu's narrator, it leads to bouts of dementia. Thus, social restrictions regarding sexual orientation, voiced most strongly in *La Vie aux troussees* by the narrator's mother, might be interpreted as symbolic of all forms of interdiction that diminish legitimate self-expression. At the same time, the narrator's homosexuality serves as a thematic device in the weaving of the Menaud reference. Through this conceit, the author prepares the reader for both the Menaud complex and the Freudian twist he gives to Savard's novel.

Brochu sees the narrative structure of *Menaud* as binary, presenting two distinct spheres of activity, namely the feminine—suggested by the house—and the masculine—represented by the mountain ("Menaud ou l'impossible fête" 289). By extension, nature and horizontal expanse are also part of the female identity by opposition to the vertical space of the mountain where Menaud is able to communicate with his male ancestors: "la hauteur dans l'espace est liée à la profondeur dans le temps, et tous deux impliquent un même refus de l'étendue, c'est-à-dire de l'étranger et, plus secrètement,

de la femme” (282). Savard’s narrative is intransigent in that it leaves no room for reconciliation between the two (284). Feminine relations are open to “l’étranger” (as evinced by Marie’s courting of le Délié who collaborates with outsiders) whereas masculine relations are exclusive and self-contained within the tribal unit. In light of this information, Sylvain’s homoerotic experiences with Olivier and Luc take on new meaning. Both are described in detail in *La Vie aux troussees* (158-60 and 231-43) and each is evoked in *Le Maître rêveur* (87 and 174-75).

The frenzied escapade with Luc begins when Sylvain meets the former separatist terrorist while wandering in a state of delirium on the mountain in Montreal. Serving as an archetypal space, the mountain inscribes Sylvain’s euphoric lunacy in the paradigm established by Menaud. In the symbolic network of Savard’s narrative, the mountain is reserved to male characters and is a privileged locale, connoting both freedom and Quebec itself: “tous les lieux de la montagne, profonds et sacrés [étaient] comme le sanctuaire de son pays” (Savard 113). It is a wild, uncivilized space, harboring memories of the past (Savard 38) and serves as a place of refuge for both Menaud and le Lucon. In going to the mountain, Sylvain is seeking to liberate himself from the social hypocrisy that is stifling him and connect with the forces of freedom from which he feels cut off.

Luc—or Lucky as he prefers to be called—shares a definite onomastic bond with Savard’s character, le Lucon. What is more, his former terrorist maneuvers vaguely echo le Lucon’s active support of Menaud’s subversive operations. Sylvain’s fascination with Luc’s terrorist past is perhaps compensatory for his own inaction regarding an issue that speaks to his very soul. Pushing the parallel with Savard’s novel still further, one may imagine Sylvain as symbolically replacing Marie in a union of lucidity and madness as ambivalent as Menaud’s final state: “Ce n’est pas une folie comme une autre! Ça me dit, à moi, que c’est un avertissement” (Savard 155). Luc’s name is in fact contained in the word “lucid” which, as Sylvain observes in *Le Maître rêveur*, comes from the Latin word *lux*, meaning light (102). Indeed, madness and lucidity are inextricable: “Au fond du fou, il y a toujours un désespéré lucide qui s’active” (85). Luc is likewise contained in Lucifer, an identity the writer must also assume: “un écrivain c’est peut-être cela, Lucifer” (23). When Luc tells Sylvain his name, Sylvain renames him Lucifer, at least in his mind (*VT* 232). Luc-Lucifer becomes a catalyst for Sylvain, allowing him to complete his dissertation at last. Interestingly, as if suggestive of a schism between the male and female strata, the whole inci-

dent takes place after Sylvain's wife, Yolande, has left on vacation so he can have the peace and quiet necessary to concentrate on his writing. Her absence is not absolute, however, and it becomes clear that unlike Menaud, Brochu's narrator seems to be striving for some sort of balance between the spheres of masculinity and femininity (or between tribal and foreign forces): "Mon délire fait que Yolande et Lucky se superposent au sein de ma raison aimante, forment un seul corps. Il n'y a plus de sexe ni de choix ni de limite [. . .]" (VT 239).

Sylvain's adventure with Luc is triply transgressive. By its homosexual nature, it violates traditional societal codes. Second, the place of the encounter is associated with a criminal offense. It was on the mountain that, in his terrorist days, Luc set off sticks of dynamite; his going back periodically to the mountain is, in essence, motivated by the pleasure derived from returning to the scene of the crime. Last, and in conjunction with the idea of transgression, the relationship is cast in an incestuous light: Sylvain views Luc as a brother or daughter (239).

In the sexual act between Sylvain and Olivier, multiple levels of semantic operation are discernible. It, too, serves to crystallize the themes of transgression and inversion, but additionally becomes a symbolic consummation of the Menaud complex if one takes into account that, earlier in the narrative *La Vie aux troussees*, Sylvain ascribes a paternal identity to Olivier on two occasions.<sup>2</sup> Interpreting their sexual intercourse from the perspective of a Québécois Oedipal fixation—as defined by Sylvain—would seem justified in view not only of the psychoanalytical overtones of the two narratives (psychoanalysis is part of their diegesis), but also because of the express references to Freud which they contain.<sup>3</sup> Sylvain's need, immediately following his moment of physical pleasure with Olivier, to have sex with a woman, replicates the oscillation between masculine and feminine spheres to be found in the encounter with Luc.

More significant here, however, is the effect his erotic experience with Olivier has on his relationship with his mother, who has little trouble deducing what transpired between her son and his classmate. The incident causes a rift between them that prompts Sylvain to move out. One might ask if Sylvain's conduct is not motivated by a latent desire to punish his mother for the restrictiveness she symbolizes?<sup>4</sup> Freud in fact speaks of the case of a young woman whose lesbianism stemmed from unexpressed anger with her father; it was a type of revenge directed at him as the result of an unresolved Oedipus complex.<sup>5</sup> On a related note, it is appropriate to recall

that a male child's early bonding with his father is in part an instinctive reaction in resistance to "the regressive pull [of] the reengulfing, symbiotic mother" (Blos 19). Generally speaking, in Brochu's two novels, Sylvain's sexual relationships with women seem to derive chiefly from the urgency to prove his "normalcy" ("Quelle joie, d'être normal!" [VT 124]) and ultimately conform to socially acceptable modes of behaviour. Conversely, the release he finds through sex with males is symptomatic of his response to an innate call for freedom which on both social and political levels is equated with proscribed behavior.

Returning to Brochu's commentary on Menaud, we read: "La femme ne représente jamais l'épouse mais la mère; l'épouse, au contraire, c'est bien la liberté [. . .]" ("Menaud ou l'impossible fête" 289). Savard stresses the maternal qualities of his female characters (who all extol the virtues of stasis) in order to free the males and allow them to pursue the elusive love object they so dearly covet, that is, freedom. Metatextual reverberations of this effect can be felt in *La Vie aux troussees* when Sylvain, in an acute state of delirium, asserts that his wife, Yolande, is his mother (246). Although, in spite of his momentary madness, he is speaking metaphorically, the notion suggests that, as with Menaud, any real conjugality Sylvain might experience will ultimately be with the object of his obsession. If Menaud's expeditions to the mountain are symbolic enactments of such a union, Sylvain's liberating homoerotic experiences serve a similar function.

Obviously, in terming Sylvain's isogender attraction—or negative Oedipal complex—a Menaud complex, Brochu is adapting a clinically defined disorder to the specific purposes of his narrative intent. He seems to use certain features of the symptomatology of the psychological condition which are consistent with Peter Blos' views on father-son relationships to reinforce his literary construct. For example, boys will typically seek "by active and persistent solicitation the father's approval, recognition, and confirmation, thus establishing a libidinal bond . . ." (11). Sylvain does just that *vis-à-vis* two characters who serve as father substitutes. The first and, by far, most influential paternal figure is Sylvain's teacher, Father Philippon, whom the boy considers a poet. The fact that the young Sylvain wants to show his own poems to his teacher and wishes that he himself might one day become a great poet (*MR* 12-13) signifies that Father Philippon is an object of emulation. Sylvain turns to him for positive feedback and recognition, as well as guidance during his pubescent stage. Furthermore, Father Philippon represents traditional values (the fact that he teaches Latin links him to a vast tradition of learning

and culture) and is treated with respect by the narrator. It is he rather than Sylvain's real father, about whom minimal information is provided, who incarnates ancestral ideals (*MR* 120). Interestingly, the dialogue between male and female zones of activity, inherent to Brochu's two novels, is apparent in the narrator's presentation when Sylvain alludes to Father Philippon's paternal OR maternal instincts (*MR* 120).<sup>6</sup>

Another important father figure is Sylvain's psychotherapist, Doctor Papin ("Papin, cela sonne comme papa" [*MR* 101]) for whom he expresses a definite attachment (183). Sylvain even admits, if only in his diary, that he likes/loves him: "Je l'aime" (183). This was not the case with Sylvain's first therapist whom he detested (75), most certainly because of the doctor's inexperience and extremely young age (77). Doctor Papin, on the contrary, is an older gentleman who somehow reminds Sylvain of Father Philippon (180). While the significance of this doctor-patient relationship based on a father-son emotional attitude (at least on the patient's part) is obvious here, the situation is not limited to novelistic invention. According to Blos, the common tendency of father-fixated men to overidealize their male analysts can be explained in part by a need for fatherly protection (11). Furthermore, claims Blos, resolving the Oedipal conflict involves renouncing residues of infantile ties "to both parental figures, i.e., to both their dyadic and triadic imagos. An adjunctive or corresponding resolution pertains in many cases to an incestuous tie of the adolescent boy to his sister . . ." (143). In both of Brochu's narratives, hints of a libidinal attraction between Sylvain and his sister, Camille, are omnipresent. She provides Sylvain his first glimpse of the female anatomy (*VT* 28) and he repeatedly expresses his love for her (*VT* 47, 63, 139). As a child, he imagined her as a damsel in distress and himself as the courageous dragon-slayer coming to her rescue (*MR* 15-16). The first concrete signs of an incestuous relationship appear in *La Vie aux troussees* when Sylvain confesses that the real reason he moved away from home was to flee Camille and his desire for her (178). The *Maître rêveur* narrative is even more explicit and employs the word "incest" in conjunction with Camille (97). The concluding oneiric segment of the novel provides a poeticized dialogue between the now dead Camille and her brother wherein she confides her passionate love for him. She states that she married Olivier only because it was quintessentially a way of marrying Sylvain (217-18).

Clearly, this manifestation of incest elicits the notion of transgression and, as an extension of the Oedipal taboo, is thematically polysemous. On a psychological level, it reiterates the impulse behind the male child's allogene-



der parent fixation: the subject's nostalgic yearning for a lost paradise, that is, existence as it was prior to the burdens of decision making and responsibility (Durand 67). In mythological terms, it suggests a need to reintegrate the golden era of perfection and harmony when Time did not exist, an era Mircea Eliade calls the primordial *illud tempus* (55). Both perspectives indirectly amplify the prestige allotted the past in Brochu's narratives, especially in light of a difficult present. As the object of forbidden desire, Camille emblemizes the inaccessible ideal plaguing the narrator. This process is evidenced by Sylvain's seemingly paradoxical refusal to allow his sister to become a maternal figure for him: "J'aimais trop Camille pour la laisser s'abaisser au rôle de mère par défaut" (VT 139). She is rather a sublimated wife figure: "Ma femme, ma soeur, ces mots sont synonymes et contraires [. . .]. Ma soeur est mon ciel; la terre est ma femme" (MR 218).

If Camille embodies an unattainable ideal or realization of desire for Sylvain, the incest motif surrounding her takes on additional thematic significance in light of the functional purpose of taboos. Broadly speaking, interdictions assure the integrity of social institutions, essentially harmony and order, or cohesion based on an attitude of humility. But they also draw attention to obstacles, thereby generating the energy necessary to overcome them (Caillois 165). In Brochu's novels, braving taboos—of which incest is perhaps the most basic—has the symbolic significance of challenging the status quo.

On still another level of interpretation, the incestuous attraction between Sylvain and his sister has a grounding in the cosmogonic legends of creation that were frequently used to explain the existence of a people. Indeed, as Roger Caillois explains, incest was practiced by the gods and often, in mythological representations of the origins of the world, the first couple was comprised of a brother and sister. Thus, incest myths recount the story of creation and were used to explain the beginning of the human race (150). The implications of this process in relation to the Brochu narratives are two-fold. Firstly, the endogenous nature of the union marks an aversion towards all things alien. The consanguinity it suggests seems almost like a mythological transcription of Menaud's xenophobia, expressed in Savard's novel through the repeated use of Hémon's phrase, "Des étrangers sont venus!" Secondly, the sacred fertility of the couple corresponds to the theme of genesis which, narratively speaking, addresses the issue of textual production.

A 1964 article by Brochu on Louise Maheux-Forcier's novel, *Amadou*, provides information pertinent to this topic. In it, Brochu states: "l'inceste et l'inversion sont les modalités privilégiées de la passion au Canada

français” (Major 126). Indeed, the Brochu narratives weave an intricate network of implicit incestuous relations. At its core is the concept of desire which delineates the totality of Sylvain’s experiences: “Je n’avais rien compris à ce que je croyais être l’égarement de mon désir, qui tendait vers tous les corps [. . .]” (VT 166). In making incest and homosexuality the *modi operandi* of his two narratives, Brochu is drawing from the literary well of what he deems established components of French-Canadian literature to examine the “passion sauvage pour la liberté” (Savard 25-26) that Sylvain ostensibly shares with Menaud. Physical passion operates as the concrete vehicle allowing the author (and the reader) to partake in a dialogue whose substance both scrutinizes the existence of the cultural community from which the written work emerges and calls into question the very writing process itself.

The notion of textual genesis is encoded in Brochu’s novels through a variety of means that can only be partially explored here. One technique, however, which has direct impact on this discussion is the author’s use of arboreal imagery which culminates in the final segment of *Le Maître rêveur*. Through these images, elements of the Savard metatext are blended and transformed to take on renewed signification. It is important to begin by underscoring the homogeneity that exists between Menaud’s tree-covered mountain and the forest. Indeed, Savard assigns Quebec’s woods and rivers (“le libre domaine des eaux et des bois” [80]) the same liberating qualities he so often attributes to the mountain. And, as Réjean Robidoux and André Renaud point out, Savard aptly conveys the bewitching presence of memory and ancestry in the voices that fill the depths of the forest (41), making it, like the mountain, a storehouse of treasures from the past. In his article, “Menaud ou l’impossible fête,” Brochu affirms that the two are virtually synonymous (271). Consequently, the decor Brochu has chosen as the setting for the Sylvain-Olivier episode is just as significant as the mountain in the narrator’s adventure with Luc. The island is private property (theme of transgression) and, because of its remoteness, offers the two travelers refuge. When Sylvain and Olivier disembark, they immediately notice two tall elm trees whose branches form a sort of canopy (VT 157). Trees constitute the main distinguishing feature of the location: “Il [Olivier] m’avait possédé dans un espace neuf, où les arbres avaient leur pure et simple dimension d’arbre, de la base au faite, masses laïques désertées des pertinences symboliques” (160). The experience is important for what it brings Sylvain by way of psychological and emotional growth. Whereas the episode with Luc is recognized for the madness it was (“Cet infini n’était ni moins ni plus que le délire”

[MR 107]), the one with Olivier is viewed positively: "Il était resté pour moi comme un point lumineux, au milieu des choses refoulées" (MR 175).

Traditionally accepted as a symbol of the unconscious, the forest harbors both positive and negative discoveries, joys and dangers ("des loups y brillent" [MR 103]). This is why writing—essentially delving into the unconscious—is no easy matter. The narrator wants to overcome his trepidation and take the plunge. If he does, he will have to push forward into the woods, he says, to the very end, to the very last word (MR 103). He finally undertakes the inner journey: "J'entre dans un moi grand comme la forêt, tout encombré de broussailles et de troncs morts, mais planté de fûts vigoureux qui élèvent vers le ciel leurs nuages de feuilles" (MR 158). The final segment of *Le Maître rêveur* can be regarded as the concretization of that journey, a possible victory over the fears and taboos that had paralyzed the narrator to that point. Qualified as a dream, the segment describes in highly poetic language the narrator roaming through a forest where the trees, all people from his past, speak to him. But the victory proves equivocal. One wonders if it is a product of madness or lucidity. Has he attained the higher awareness he has been seeking? Is *Le Maître rêveur* a self-begetting novel like Proust's *A la recherche du temps perdu* whose conclusion ultimately leads into its opening and where the hero forges his identity as novelist and through a novel (Kellman 8)? The final dream sequence ends with the words "l'aube inouïe" (220) while the opening scene begins with "Le rêve" (11) of the narrator in the early dawn light.

The ambiguity shrouding the novel's conclusion echoes the precariousness of both literary expression in present-day Quebec and the future of its French-speaking population. This notion is contained in Sylvain's comment that the great elms are gone and all that remains are the old roots in testimony of their past existence (MR 172). Thus, when Sylvain (whose name is derived from the Latin word for forest) laments to Olivier (whose name, it should be recalled, signifies olive tree)<sup>7</sup> that nature is dying, he is metonymically talking about the slow extinction of a collective consciousness.

Although *Menaud, maître-draveur* belongs to the period of the *roman de la terre* novels advocating traditional values and territorial appropriation, the critics Robidoux and Renaud prefer the term *roman de la fidélité* (23). The designation is broad enough to include Brochu's two novels, because they share a similar premise, namely the urgency of preserving Quebec's distinct cultural identity. Overtones of the alarmist message found in *Menaud* are also present in *Le Maître rêveur*. Menaud's plea for mobilization

is of no avail because it is met with apathy: “l’indifférence est générale” (“Menaud ou l’ impossible fête” 272). Similarly, the narrator of *Le Maître rêveur* perceives literary works in Quebec as ineffectual, like so many false prophets teeming in “l’indifférence générale” (MR 183).

*La Vie aux troussees* focuses on the narrator’s breakdown, while *Le Maître rêveur* places emphasis on his struggle for psychological and emotional rehabilitation. Together, at their most elementary level, they relate the case of a male child who fails to bring his Oedipal stage to a conclusion and is therefore unable to construct his superego successfully and integrate paternal authoritativeness into his own personality to establish an autonomous identity. However, the issues raised in this account have broad repercussions. Indeed, its individual and collective implications are glaring and focus on the imperative-ness of assuming one’s differences and affirming one’s individuality.

## NOTES

- 1 It bears noting that Brochu viewed his role as literary critic from a Freudian Oedipal perspective in that he felt his development as a creative writer in his own right was stunted by his being limited to commenting on works by others (“bloqué qu’il est [. . .] dans la phase oedipienne du développement de sa personnalité d’écrivain” [*La Visée critique* 116]). It is like a child who never resolves his complex and never asserts his own identity. Operative in this study is the importance Brochu gives the Oedipus dilemma: “Oedipe est sans doute la figure maîtresse du XXe siècle, Oedipe l’inliquidable, et l’écrivain aussi bien que le critique ou son lecteur, communique à son destin.” See “Le Critique et son lecteur” in *La Visée critique* 115-20. Although the scientific validity of certain of Freud’s theories has come under fire, their authoritativeness is less an issue in this reading than the textual meaning Brochu succeeds in generating by alluding to them.
- 2 The first is blatant, the second indirect. At one point, Sylvain says to Olivier: “Tu parles comme mon père” (VT 102). Later, he jokingly tells his sister, Camille, that Olivier is old enough to be her father (136). Carrying this logic a step further, it could be said that if Olivier were Camille’s father, he could be Sylvain’s as well.
- 3 Sylvain evokes the analyst’s name in all seriousness in a conversation with Olivier (VT 128) and again in a decidedly tongue-in-cheek manner while musing in the bath—a symbolic representation of the womb (“je suis dans ma maman d’ivoire,” [VT 88]). The latter rumination brings him to consider the Oedipus complex and finally ask: If I were Socrates, would I sleep with Oedipus? (VT 150).
- 4 In *Le Maître rêveur*, religious and maternal dictates of conduct merge into a single discourse of proscription: “la colère maternelle est cruelle et arbitraire” (20); “Dieu [. . .] faites que [. . .] j’obéisse à vos saints commandements” (21); “maman n’est pas toujours consciente de tout ce que je fais [. . .] pour respecter ses commandements” (22).
- 5 In the example provided by Freud, the young woman’s behavior was motivated by her frustrated attraction to the parent of the opposite sex or, in her case, toward the father

imago (See Freud's article entitled "The Psychogenesis of a Case of Homosexuality in a Woman"). In the symbolic network generated by Brochu's narratives, a similar frustrated attraction for the parent of the opposite sex (that is, by Sylvain for his mother) could be maintained, given the character's bisexuality. Yet it should be stressed that Brochu's intention is less psychoanalytical than literary and thematic.

- 6 In addition, the narrator places Father Philippon in the same category of mother figures as Lucie and Odette, the young women with whom he travels daily on the commuter train (MR 130). In comparing Father Philippon today with a photo taken of him years earlier when he was serving as a chaplain in the army, Sylvain finds that he has lost his harsh physical traits and now looks more like a mother hen (130).
- 7 Arboreal imagery in conjunction with Olivier recurs when Sylvain describes his friend as almost becoming a tree and enveloping him with his leaves: "en m'enveloppant de son beau regard plein de feuilles" (MR 177). In addition, the name of the river that takes them to the island where they make love is "la rivière de l'Orme" (VT 156).

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## Auspicious Beginnings

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**Gail Anderson-Dargatz**

*The Cure for Death by Lightning*. Alfred A. Knopf  
\$28.95

**Terry Griggs**

*The Lusty Man*. Porcupine's Quill. \$16.95

Reviewed by Marilyn J. Rose

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In these first novels, Gail Anderson-Dargatz and Terry Griggs offer readers a great deal in terms of the "pleasure of the text." The novels do seem somewhat diffuse. Both writers published short story collections prior to these novels: Griggs' *Quickening* was short-listed for the Governor-General's Award for fiction in 1990 and Anderson-Dargatz's *The Miss Hereford Stories* appeared in 1994. In turning to longer fiction, each may have attempted to include too much, to touch too many bases in getting to novel length. The ensuing books sometimes give the impression, like Stephen Leacock's horseman, of riding off in all directions at once. At the same time there is a certain charm in the sheer energy that characterizes these books and to read them concurrently is to marvel at the ways in which a familiar site in Canadian literature—that generic space where "the regional" meets "the gothic"—continues to be plumbed in enthusiastic (and sometimes even refreshingly perverse) ways in the late 1990s.

In *The Cure for Death by Lightning*, Anderson-Dargatz presents a fairly straightforward coming-of-age narrative in which 15-year-old Beth Weeks, growing up in the

1940s in a remote British Columbia town called Turtle Valley, contends with a great deal: her mother's inability to speak out except through an esoteric scrapbook, her shell-shocked father's degeneration into grotesque and erratic violence, her own awakening sexuality, and the apparent possession of her remote British Columbia community by a bear—or "bearwalker"—who may or may not be devouring children. The book won the Ethel Wilson prize for fiction and was nominated for the Giller Prize in 1996, reflecting the generally positive critical response to this novel. Indeed it has been seen by some as a worthy successor to Sheila Watson's *The Double Hook* in its evocation of small-town, rural British Columbia and its respect for First Nations myths and traditions, particularly those having to do with the enigmatic figure of Coyote.

Anderson-Dargatz's novel is protean in comparison to Watson's spare prose and clear focus, and this is something of a problem. Beth labours to define herself against two adult benchmarks—her own mother, who speaks indirectly through the fragments assembled in her scrapbook (with its clippings, recipes, pressed flowers and amputated butterfly wings), and the old Native woman, Bertha, who dispenses holistic wisdom at every turn. A malicious incarnation of Coyote is thought to be haunting Turtle Valley, an outpost which has been made ill, it is suggested, by a mean, male-driven and essentially white territoriality (a metaphor for the European war which draws young men, including

Beth's brother, away from home over the course of the narrative). This debilitating "land greed" is symbolized in the novel by the escalating feud between Beth's father and his neighbour, "the Swede," over fences, as well as by the political line that severs town from reserve, falsely dividing Turtle Valley (whose name echoes that of "Turtle Island," the First Nations vision of a politically seamless North America).

At the same time, a sense of looming, covert, potentially explosive sexuality pervades the narrative as a whole—in the boy called Goat who ejaculates from church steeples, in the half-Native Nora's courting of Beth in dark and buried rooms, in the tongue-tied love of the Tourette's-ridden hired hand, "Filthy Billy," for Beth, and, horribly, in the sexual abuse of Beth by her father and the impotence of her mother in dealing with it. In fact, there is so much going on in *The Cure for Death by Lightning* that the novel seems dispersed, decentred, as if it can't quite decide what it wants to be: a novel of "girls and women" in the Alice Munro tradition, an examination of Native and white value systems, or a bizarre suspense story about an evil force preying upon children, like Beth's classmate Sarah Kemp who has been mauled to death by a "bear," or worse.

At times Anderson-Dargatz writes extraordinarily well, and there are a number of remarkable passages in *The Cure for Death by Lightning* that bring the book to life despite its sometimes ponderous plot. The scene where the world turns blue under a death-dance of flax petals is dazzling, as is that where Filthy Billy intercepts a rush of dog-odoured energy—a wind-driven, pounding, grass-splitting swath headed straight for Beth—then collapses in convulsions. Anderson-Dargatz has a gift for seeing the magic in those heightened moments when the dust-cover is lifted from the ordinary, and we glimpse with unease the preternatural that exists just

below the rational surface of things. If the "cure for death by lightning" is to soak its victims in cold water and vinegar, the vinegar in this novel is acuteness of vision, this novelist's sharp rendition of the breathless, sensate moment. The "cold water" is having too much going on that is also too conventional: incestuous sexual abuse, wise Native elders, bizarre small-town inhabitants, and so on. A larger ratio of vinegar to water, indeed a more concentrated solution altogether, might work better in snapping her readers to attention.

*The Lusty Man* is a very different kind of book, a Rabelaisian romp, a roaring whirl. The comedic Terry Griggs conducts a veritable "three-ring circus," to use Ruthie Stink's words, as a hapless quasi-scholar from Toronto (where else?), with the hegemonic name of Innis C. George (a comic fusion of the names of Canadian scholars Harold Innis and George Grant, no doubt), penetrates a Northern Ontario island community in search of an ancient Celtic fertility figure, the "lusty man" of the title. Unceremoniously dunked into the lake upon arrival, red Triumph TR4 and all (at which point he loses his lucky charm, a stone penis glued to his dashboard—so much for the virility of academic men), Innis is rescued and reborn into a raucous world dominated by the Stink family, a clan wherein fertility is hardly a symbolic issue. For the Stinks are real-life lusty men. They exude body heat, and those around them sooner or later capitulate to the bawdy as if the very atmosphere about them were saturated with irresistible male pheromones. Ruthie Stronghill marries Gram Stink in spite of the fact that his hands smell of dog food, because he simply makes her "eyes pop out" and her body "say howdy." Young Rita Cabel seeks her own entry into the world of lusty men via membership in the all-male "Snakes Club." Even the resident nun, Sister St. Anne, takes a flying leap into carnal temporality before the story ends.

In the meantime, timelessly and silently, cousin Holmes Stink has created a blissful counter space to the above-ground chaos that governs life on the island. His underwater living room, furnished with cast-offs that never require dusting, is a "Blue Room" made for solitude, meditation and healing, and accessible only to divers—a true mythic space whose fluidity echoes, at one calm remove, the creative chaos that is life on land in this novel. In contrast to "Holmes," Innis George is a false mythologist, never "at home" on this fecund island and its watery environs. An academic "iconologist," an "investigative antiquarian," he has given himself over to the pursuit of the dead, the calcified, that which is not-life. After being led a merry chase through a fecund Stink-filled landscape, he can only be spat out in the end, indigestible urban lump that he is. There is anti-hegemonic method to Griggs' madness: the island's fruitful chaos is construed as a proper response to both academic inquiry and the outside control it represents. What matters in the face of centripetal invasion is centrifugal response. The metropolitan cannot pin down the hinterland if the hinterland refuses to stand still for it.

*The Lusty Man* is good fun but tends to suffer from overkill. There are too many characters too thinly drawn, too many plot lines, and too many broad jokes ("How many pecks of pickled peckers did Peter Inch have?"). Griggs' word play is often sparkling: who else would speak of the weather as wanting to "spill its umbles"? Hilarity rules, and it is difficult to resist the book's humorous resistance to everything—including the sombre gaze of Innis-like academic critics trying to pigeonhole books in reviews like this one. But at the end of this novel, not much sticks: there is too little to remember and almost nothing to take to heart, despite the good time that has been had by all.

What links these novels is that both are "regional" in a sense, the one dealing with

the interior of British Columbia and the other with Ontario's island-strewn near-north. (Griggs hails from Manitoulin Island, and it is clear that the book is set in that kind of space.) And in that familiar Canadian way, each yokes "the region" and "the gothic" in noticeable ways. *The Cure for Death by Lightning* plays it straight. A young woman criss-crosses a haunted landscape, her labyrinthine quest representing a voyage of discovery, an unveiling of dark and suppressed sexual mysteries at once feared and desired. Her task is to emerge initiated but unbroken, as Beth does at the end of the novel, hand-in-hand with her beast-turned-knight, no longer a child but a woman of sixteen who has herself slain a dragon or two in the dark forest along the way.

In *The Lusty Man* gothic conventions are evoked only to be parodied. Here too a quester enters a daunting landscape populated by grotesques, but that protagonist is male. There is nothing to fear on the island but the inevitability of being rendered foolish by ribald yokels. A labyrinthine journey is undertaken, but more by George's car, at the hands of manic locals, than by the "hero," Innis C. George himself. In this inverted-gothic world, sexuality is to be neither feared or revered, but simply saluted as pleasurable play. In carnivalesque fashion, the disorderly undoes the "upper world" of light, reason and power elites in this novel, and instead canonizes a lewd lower order where unfettered appetite rules. The very sins that dethroned Innis George's predecessor, Professor Peter Inch (who "diddled" himself out of his position as an esteemed "Mariologist") are not sins on the island, but virtues which foster perpetual plenitude, endless Stinks requiring endless Adamic naming in a virtual paradise of virility and vitality. What Griggs has done is to turn the gothic upside down, emptying it out like the "fat gut" that is Irene Inch's purse, thereby interrogating



the notion of the “haunted wilderness” that has so often shaped “straight” Canadian fiction. Her comedic deflation of the idea of a “Gothic North” is a side-show perhaps, but one worth the price of admission, to employ her own apt circus metaphor.

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## Courtepointe dramatique

**Christian Beaucage**

*Le théâtre à Québec au début du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle: Une époque flamboyante.* Nuit blanche éditeur 24,95\$

**Chantal Hébert et Irène Perelli-Contos (dir.)**

*Théâtre, multidisciplinarité et multiculturalisme.* Nuit blanche éditeur 23,95\$

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Reviewed by Sylvie Bérard

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Dans *Le théâtre à Québec au début du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle: Une époque flamboyante*, Christian Beaucage remonte l'une des sources culturelles québécoises et s'attarde à la vie théâtrale dans la ville de Québec durant les années 1900-1911. Cette étude au spectre réduit se révèle comme un travail archéologique et une leçon d'histoire débordant les limites spatiales et temporelles de l'objet initial.

D'une part, l'entreprise est historique. Elle consiste à dresser une chronologie sous différents angles: les salles de spectacle, les artisans, le public, etc. La recherche est délimitée historiquement par deux *catastrophes*, soit des incendies ayant ravagé deux importantes salles de spectacle.

D'autre part, le projet a une visée analytique puisqu'il s'agit d'interpréter l'histoire. Le théâtre, en ce qu'il a de rassembleur, est considéré en tant qu'indicateur significatif de l'activité culturelle d'une société. Après avoir, au premier chapitre, dressé ce qu'il appelle une “cartographie des lieux,” et proposé un tableau des événements ayant marqué l'époque étudiée, l'auteur s'emploie, dans les deux chapitres suivants, à établir un portrait sociologique des acteurs et des troupes d'un côté, des genres et des

formes de l'autre. Son dernier chapitre est consacré aux fonctions sociales du théâtre.

L'analyse repose sur de nombreux documents d'époque et notamment sur des journaux que l'auteur a dépouillés pour repérer les annonces et les critiques de spectacles. L'ouvrage s'enrichit d'un paratexte éloquent: reproductions d'affiches, extraits, photographies. Liés aux deux volets principaux (artisans et œuvres), on y retrouve deux tableaux présentant la chronologie des salles de spectacles et la liste des œuvres ayant attiré les publics les plus nombreux. De plus, l'étude s'accompagne de deux annexes qui nous permettent, en tant que lecteurs et lectrices, d'accéder à notre tour aux données recensées par l'auteur: liste des pièces françaises et calendrier des spectacles présentés durant la période couverte.

Malgré l'intitulé des chapitres insistant sur sa visée analytique, ce n'est pas la dimension sociologique de l'ouvrage qui retient l'attention, mais sa portée documentaire. Si la conclusion paraît courte, c'est que, la démarche semblant beaucoup plus insister sur la nécessité de rappeler cette époque à notre mémoire que de l'interpréter, c'est l'histoire elle-même qui transmet ses leçons: le théâtre au Québec a des racines en grande partie populaires et a crû dans une idéologie puritaine sinon ultramontaine tout en étant sujet à se tourner, par tropisme, vers les aspects les plus contemporains de la culture internationale.

Plus de huit décennies plus tard, c'est l'éclatement des frontières qui retient l'attention. Toujours à Québec, a lieu en 1994 le colloque *Théâtre, multidisciplinarité et multiculturalisme* dont les organisatrices, Chantal Hébert et Irène Perelli-Contos, viennent de faire paraître les actes. L'objectif est de cerner comment le théâtre contemporain fait usage du croisement des cultures, des pratiques et des disciplines, et de proposer des pistes d'analyse pour appréhender les productions.

Les participantes et participants, issus de différentes sphères, ont abordé ces questions sous divers angles, y cherchant parfois un enseignement. Replaçant les phénomènes contemporains dans un contexte historique, Louis Francœur leur trouve une filiation théorique, celle du théâtre brèche. De même, Irène Perelli-Contos en conclut que le théâtre actuel ne rompt pas avec la tradition et continue de nous apprendre à saisir le monde. Frank Popper parle des liens entre les arts plastique et dramatique comme d'un signe avant-coureur de l'abolition des frontières artistiques. Chantal Hébert, qui y voit plutôt un phénomène de transition, insiste sur l'intérêt de la métaphore comme concept théorique permettant de transposer l'insaisissable. Jean-Pierre Ryngaert, quant à lui, repère la présence d'un travail politique renouvelé qui trouverait sa voie, non dans l'idéal archaïque d'une création ordonnée, mais dans un travail incessant de reconstruction. Enfin, plutôt que de voir le texte se fondre dans un théâtre de plus en plus multi-, Rodrigue Villeneuve inverse de manière intéressante la problématique et pose la multidisciplinarité comme un retour du plan spectaculaire au plan textuel.

Certains chercheurs se concentrent sur la différence culturelle ou linguistique. La question de l'acteur étranger, qui prend une résonance nouvelle à l'ère où les distributions doivent refléter la composition d'une société en constante mouvance culturelle, retient l'attention de Georges Banu qui observe différentes façons qu'on a trouvées pour intégrer la différence. Lucie Robert aborde la sempiternelle question du statut linguistique du jocal, mais la revisite à la lueur d'un débat récent illustrant que le conflit se situe toujours entre la variation (l'oral) et la norme (l'écrit). C'est à une conclusion similaire, celle d'un tiraillement entre l'universel et le particulier, que parvient Gilbert David en se penchant sur l'accent préconisé dans le théâtre présenté au Québec.

Une contradiction constante marque cet ouvrage: ces œuvres reposant sur un principe perturbateur font l'objet d'un colloque où les mots cherchent à redonner de l'ordre aux choses. Par exemple, la contribution d'Alain-Michel Rocheleau sur le théâtre vancouverois réserve une place considérable au résumé, comme si la complexité des œuvres analysées commandait leur reconstruction préalable. De son côté, Louise Vigeant propose un retour aux fondements de la sémiotique, et pourtant, on sent que *Rivages à l'abandon* échappe à l'appréhension, l'analyse ne pouvant éviter de mimer l'expérience théâtrale plutôt que de repérer les structures de l'œuvre. Quant à Jean-Cléo Godin, ce sont les personnages muets ou invisibles en tant que relais du discours de l'auteur qui retiennent son attention, comme si l'analyse devait se réaliser en biais pour mieux cerner son objet. En quête d'une grille permettant de saisir ces nouvelles dimensions du théâtre, Roger Chamberland utilise la théorie du chaos pour aborder le théâtre de Carbone 14. Dominique Lafon, pour décrire la prolifération des voix dans le théâtre de René-Daniel Dubois, se sert de l'analogie avec le système multiplex, ce qui lui permet de mieux figurer le réseau complexe de références.

Illustrant à merveille la labilité des œuvres étudiées ici, les contributions de trois créateurs québécois viennent clore l'ouvrage. Le metteur en scène Denis Marleau propose différentes affirmations en vrac visant à délimiter sa pratique du théâtre. La dramaturge Carole Fréchette confie que c'est lorsqu'elle a cessé de lutter contre le texte et le contexte dramatique qu'elle a commencé à ressentir la plus grande liberté. Normand Charette, en tant que dramaturge, considère lui aussi que le théâtre est d'une grande souplesse pour peu qu'on accepte de replacer les différents niveaux créatifs dans leur contexte d'apparition.

Bien que les analyses réunies ici partent

dans tous les sens, il se dégage paradoxalement de leur nombre et de leur diversité une unité théorique dont le but n'est pas tant d'expliquer la multiplicité mais de traduire cette prolifération—fût-ce par l'absurde, certaines études montrant combien ces productions résistent à l'analyse. Les articles de ce recueil se présentent comme autant de jalons dans l'approche d'une création renouvelée qui commande des outils neufs ou, du moins, dépoussiérés.

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## Saisons fictives

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### Estelle Beauchamp

*Les mémoires de Christine Marshall*. Prise de Parole \$18.00

### Pierre Gélinas

*Saisons I: La neige*. Triptyque n.p.

Reviewed by Bertille Beaulieu

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La narratrice du premier roman d'Estelle Beauchamp, personnage qui a plus de soixante ans, entreprend de reconstituer la vie de ses parents. Sa mère, Éveline Desmoulins, est issue d'une famille canadienne-française installée à Montréal au début du siècle, et son père, Thomas Marshall, d'origine irlandaise, est né à Montréal, lui aussi. En plus de puiser dans ses souvenirs personnels, Christine Marshall, enfant unique, s'inspire des confidences de sa mère pour décrire la famille Desmoulins, l'apprentissage du métier de modiste, les amours du cousin Félix et la rencontre de Thomas, ancien combattant de la Première Guerre mondiale, commis dans un magasin et personnage très discret sur son passé et ses sentiments. «Éblouissante et exaltante», Éveline dirige sa propre boutique de chapeaux dans l'ouest de Montréal, alors que Thomas, dont la santé est chancelante, prend une retraite précoce.

Ce roman se situe dans un espace et une époque bien reconstitués: Montréal au temps des tramways, le parc Sohmer, le vieux port, des faits divers, des activités

sociales et récréatives. Malgré une recherche minutieuse et la lecture de récits d'anciens soldats pour bien décrire l'expérience militaire de Thomas, ce roman ne relève pas de la biographie ni du récit documentaire. Il s'agit bien d'un ouvrage littéraire, car au réel historique et social se superpose, à un autre degré de l'imaginaire, une intéressante réflexion de la narratrice sur la part de l'imaginaire dans sa démarche d'écriture. L'originalité du roman d'Estelle Beauchamp relève en effet de la narratologie, en particulier de l'autocritique que Christine Marshall présente dans de courts passages en italiques, intercalés ici et là et écrits à la première personne.

Ces relais de narration autorisent la divulgation de sources d'inspiration complémentaires: photographies anciennes et lettres trouvées dans une malle au grenier, procédé analogue aux artifices du roman français au dix-huitième siècle. La narratrice—ou plutôt est-ce Estelle Beauchamp en flagrant délit de dédoublement par le biais de la fiction—confie à son lecteur éventuel, narrataire implicite, ses propres hésitations, dilemmes et découvertes, à mesure que le livre prend forme. Une sorte de catharsis s'accomplit par l'écriture et la narratrice, qui avouait au début sa révolte face à la mort et la hantise de l'oubli, accède à la maîtrise de son art. «La page blanche ne m'effraie pas; je ne crains plus l'oubli. La voix d'Éveline habite désormais le rêve de Thomas». Christine a pris conscience du véritable héritage qui lui a été légué: de sa mère elle a reçu un don précieux, «l'amour qu'elle portait au monde et à ses merveilles infinies», alors qu'elle hérite de son père le goût et l'aptitude à l'écriture de la fiction.

Un espace citadin commun, c'est-à-dire la ville de Montréal, ainsi que le temps marqué par le passage des saisons, soit les générations dans *Les mémoires de Christine Marshall* et la traversée de l'hiver représentant la période de gestation de l'Alliance populaire dans *La neige*, constituent les

points communs entre les romans d'Estelle Beauchamp et de Pierre Gélinas.

Premier tome de la trilogie *Saisons*, *La neige* s'inscrit dans une continuité puisque l'auteur revient aux préoccupations sociales et politiques exposées, quelque trente ans auparavant, dans ses romans *Les morts, les vivants et les autres* et *L'or de l'Inde*. *La neige* décrit un État quelconque situé dans un avenir imprécis où règnent le désordre et l'injustice. Les opposants du régime politique en place rêvent d'une société juste, d'un État plus humain où l'Ordre, la Justice et le Travail auraient la priorité. Ces mots d'ordre résument l'essentiel de l'idéologie qui anime l'Alliance populaire, mouvement dont le destin constitue la trame essentielle de ce roman, à la fois réaliste et utopique, aussi paradoxal que cela puisse paraître. Puissante oeuvre de la maturité, le troisième roman de Pierre Gélinas atteint l'excellence, surtout par la qualité de l'écriture enrichie par le symbolisme de la neige et de l'hiver, le recours à une langue classique et au ton juste, parfois sarcastique mais jamais amer. Surtout, le narrateur maintient une égale distance vis-à-vis tous ses personnages, peu importe leur allégeance politique.

Malgré quelques indices concrets révélateurs de la ville de Montréal, l'espace romanesque pourrait bien être n'importe quelle ville du monde, triste et sale, avec ses quartiers abandonnés ou dangereux. Les dirigeants y habitent un secteur protégé nommé la Zone, et les forces policières, en partie corrompues, sont munies d'un service secret efficace. Il ne s'agit pas d'une société évoluée et parvenue à l'ère de la mondialisation, même si divers groupes ethniques sont présents, en particulier des Latinos et des Asiatiques, et que certaines phrases s'énoncent en anglais, en allemand ou en espagnol. La présence médiatique du journaliste de Télé-Cité sur les lieux de tout événement sensationnel tient plutôt de la parodie et de l'obsession de la nouvelle instantanée que d'une véritable intention d'informer.

Les travers politiques et les désordres sociaux décrits sont à peu près les mêmes qu'au tournant du troisième millénaire: grèves successives dans les hôpitaux, les transports, le téléphone et autres services publics, combines politiques, manifestations populaires et massacres. Les droits individuels ont préséance sur le collectif dans cet État, où le gouvernement s'illusionne sur son pouvoir et doit pactiser avec les forces policières, le cartel intersyndical, le comité du patronat, le conseil oecuménique et autres groupes de pression.

*La neige* est une oeuvre assez complexe où une idéologie s'affiche par le biais de monologues intérieurs, révélateurs des opinions, des hésitations et des aspirations des principaux acteurs de ce drame social, inspiré d'une philosophie de l'histoire, d'une dialectique matérialiste, sans pour autant se nommer socialisme. L'Alliance populaire s'organise autour de quelques personnages réunis par hasard: un démagogue féru d'histoire, qui cite les auteurs classiques grecs; un journaliste en quête d'emploi qui fonde et publie le journal *L'Ordre*; un imprimeur; un homme fort, sorte de garde du corps des chefs, un doux qui croit aux valeurs de solidarité et de fraternité; un organisateur débrouillard qui recrute des camelots dans la rue et dirige un commando de Casques Noirs non armés. La foule des membres du mouvement n'appuie pas suffisamment une marche sur le parlement, et un coup d'État raté termine le roman. Cependant *Le soleil*, deuxième roman de la trilogie de Gélinas, laisse présager un rebondissement, peut-être l'accession au pouvoir de ce petit groupe d'idéalistes qui osent encore croire que l'Ordre, la Justice et la Liberté sont des valeurs à promouvoir.



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## The Point of the Story

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**Mark Bell**

*Aphorism in the Francophone Novel of the Twentieth Century.* McGill-Queen's UP n.p.

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Reviewed by Gloria Nne Onyeoziri

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Mark Bell examines different conceptions of aphorism employed by seven twentieth-century Francophone writers from different regional literary canons (French, Québécois, "Négro-Africain" and Swiss). His main concerns include the aphorism's behaviour in a novel, its value when taken in isolation, its characteristics (for example, concision and compactness) and its signifying function, provoking the reader to thought and action.

He begins with studies by Jefferson Humphries and Geoffrey Bennington, which aid in understanding the marriage of aphorism and imaginative prose, and then turns to German scholarship for a thorough definition of the genre, and to North American linguistics and theorists for the description of the function of aphorism within a narrated chain of events. Since the study of aphoristic propositions constantly involves structural analysis and interpretation, Bell discusses Paul Ricoeur's revisiting of traditional hermeneutics to explain the reception of aphorism as a highly concentrated expression of thought and to expose the problems inherent in the term *aphorism*, including the narrative and discursive function of aphorism within the novel, the interrelations between the structure of aphorisms and their epistemological and hermeneutical narrative functions, as well as problems that arise from reading aphoristic sentences in isolation from their original context. This shift from structural analysis to interpretation enables Bell to maintain a link between past studies (Geoffrey Bennington, Richard Gray, T. John Gross, Roger Fowler, and especially Harald Fricke), along with sociolinguists

such as William Labov, and his own specialized study which involves the unique world of a given text. Ricoeur's hermeneutical model helps bring out the generalizing traits of aphorism as well as its unique role in each novel. Ricoeur's ideas of distancing of the "world" of the text and of appropriation provide Bell with a breakthrough for a "coherent" study of the novels.

Bell discusses in detail the German scholar Harald Fricke, whose research on aphorism largely informs his own methods and conclusions. Fricke elaborates on the history of French and German aphorism and the role of aphorism in novelistic discourse. The strength of Fricke's method (from which Bell takes his cue), is that "only after he has observed the behavior of aphorism in many contexts," does he enumerate the constitutive elements of aphorism as a literary genre. Fricke warns against considering an isolated remark an aphorism, without taking into account text, co-text and context in establishing its status.

Concerning the narratological consequence of aphorism, Bell examines sociolinguist William Labov's narrative elements, of which Bell finds evaluation ("the means used by the narrator to indicate the point of the narrative") most pertinent to aphorism. Aphorism "tells the point" with "sophistication, wit and subtlety" and its "narratological *raison d'être* is to amplify, to comment on, to universalize, and thus elicit a more involved response to the story" through rhetorical and semantic procedures that provoke the reader's active response. Bell concludes his theoretical considerations by asking how aphorism elicits such a response and positing the need to explain both its structural characteristics and its potential to signify beyond formalism.

The "hypothetical continuum of aphoristic intervention," with which Bell justifies the ordering of his seven novels ranges from the author conspicuously, and often

didactically, stopping the narrative momentum with aphoristic commentary to post-modern narratives that subtly integrate subjective intrusion. Bell accounts for a wide variety of ideological grounding: Nietzschean elitist humanism (Saint-Exupéry), modest humanism (Gabrielle Roy), Marxian utopianism (Jacques Roumain), New Historicist concern for race, gender and class (Simone Schwarz-Bart), an idiosyncratic view of consciousness and memory (Claude Simon), a metaphysical vision in which the author is both present and constantly seen to withdraw (Charles-Ferdinand Ramuz), and a post-modern, overtly reader-oriented and indeterminate textuality (Hubert Aquin). Bell has chosen appropriate novels, given their shared humanistic questions. However, he relies largely on Carolyn Fowler's critical work on Roumain, and almost entirely on Beverly Ormerod's opinion of Schwarz-Bart's *Pluie et vent sur Têlumée Miracle*. When he does express his own ideas on these two novels, he is tempted to adopt a condescending attitude, in the guise of commenting on the aphoristic formulations, being unable to resist the clichés of the "uneducated classes," the "simple," lack of "sophistication," "straight-forward language," though he had earlier met similar phenomena in *Terre des hommes* and *Alexandre Chenevert* without thinking of them as simple or unsophisticated. If Bell, who has produced such a fine work, were to allow *Pluie et vent* to speak to him directly, he would find it full of aphorisms in different forms, and not only at the beginning of narrative segments. For example, he does not consider Man Cia's advice to Têlumée, a clear example of didactic aphorism; even the narrative segments themselves constitute aphoristic propositions. It is interesting that, at the risk of contradicting himself, he observes later how intelligent and subtle the two texts are.

Nevertheless, Bell's work overall is rich, and extremely well structured, suggesting avenues of further research. It is a significant contribution to the study of the genre.

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## Tracking the White Rabbit

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**Stephanie Bolster**

*White Stone: The Alice Poems*. Signal Editions  
\$12.00

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Reviewed by Méira Cook

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Stephanie Bolster's first book of poetry, *White Stone*, subtitled *The Alice Poems*, recently won the Governor General's award and is a fine debut full of wit, intelligence, intertextual references and self-referential quirks. The poems explore the narrator's fascination with the persona of "Alice," both the child-muse of Charles Dodgson's photographs and fiction, and the "real" girl-woman-and-wife called Alice Liddell whom Dodgson (a.k.a. Lewis Carroll) befriended and who apparently inspired *Alice in Wonderland*.

The first section, "Whose Eyes," is an exploration of the imagined childhood of the dreamy girl in her Victorian garden, courted obliquely by Dodgson as an Oxford don with a dark cloth draped over his head, his "huge contraption of a camera" as fixed an appurtenance as his "large nose." Dodgson's literary reputation as a man suspected of being overpartial to little girls is evoked even as it is evaded, in an aside where the narrator positioned as witness observes that: "Although it's dim, I think I can say with near / assurance he does not attempt / to unlatch her collar."

The collection's opening poem, "Dark Room," introduces us to Alice by way of Dodgson's photographic technique as we wait, like the photographer, for Alice's image to emerge on the developing plate. Yet the dark room contains another witness, a narrative voyeur who is invisible to the photographer and his model: "They

don't seem to know / I'm here, poet on the corner stool, watching / a kind of home-coming." The narrator who watches Dodgson create Alice's image is, in turn, animated by a similar desire: the desire to catch and hold the spirit of the elusive, wondering girl. And, as this opening poem makes clear in a trope reminiscent of Ondaatje's *Billy the Kid*, her desire comes to light in the dark room, so that by the closing lines she is herself a photographic plate, an image emerging from the chemicals where she has steeped, "emulsified." In the poems that follow, the narrator is always implicated in the process by which Alice is caught and held during "the long exposure." And it is the narrator's hesitation with regard to her tentative place in the story—her identification with Dodgson and his ambiguous desires no less than with his readers who will later accompany Alice through the looking glass and into language—that invigorates these poems.

Bolster's assurance in the language of implication and ambiguity is given full play in the second section, entitled "Close Your Eyes and Think of England," a consideration of Alice's adulthood through cultural artifacts, photographs, portraits, biographical details, and poetic imaginings. Yet whether posing as Cordelia in her "unfurrowed girlhood," dressed as St. Agnes the patron Saint of Virgins, or imagined as a woman with her "waist / unlatched," whether staring up at the camera in the mistaken belief that "a shutter-click will reunite you / with yourself" or staring out at the reader as the unblinking paper-girl who has been folded all these years between the pages of a book, Bolster's Alice is a replica, a reproduction in monochrome, a still life. As the drifting sign of other people's desire, she is neither the "real" woman uneasily fixed in the amber of biography nor the imaginary girl of Dodgson's sepia-tinted reveries. Indeed the poignancy of the poems lies in their tightly controlled navi-

gation of these two wholly imagined yet incomparably real states. While Dodgson holds his breath for "forty-five long seconds," waiting for his Alice to appear in black and white, the little girl renounces her pose and flounces outside to play hide-and-seek. As readers we too are obliged to seek these hidden images through the pages of a writer at least as decorously obsessed with the elusive Alice as her doughty old mentor has been.

The third section, a series of annotated "Portraits of Alice," comprises an imaginative free fall into language reigned in by structure and wit. In these poems the narrator imagines Alice's replication in fiction and myth, contriving a literary persona who is alternately "buried and written upon extensively." In poems that carry the critical weight of inquiry by which Alice is both overwritten and undervalued, Bolster gestures toward an apprehension of the paper girl who can neither speak nor be silent:

The critics overwrote each other  
till all their words were tattooed black  
upon her. Have mercy, she cried as they  
came  
with the thousand-volumed weight of  
archives,  
but those words were not hers either.

In order to set her free from this palimpsest of annotation and allusion, the narrator imagines Alice through a series of metamorphoses: as chrysalis, as bestiary, as her own foot, as companion to Persephone, Elvis, Christopher Robin and, finally, as a self-portrait in nine vignettes. Playful and inventive, these poems present themselves as off-beat fantasies. In "Portrait of Alice and Elvis," for instance, the King of Rock 'n' Roll and the Queen of Wonderland are introduced as child-like loves who share a strawberry shake at the Burger King in Memphis, then visit the Tate Gallery in London to ponder the Lady of Shalott. They argue over who is more famous and

who has been quoted more frequently, then dine on fried chicken, tea and scones. The poem is witty and anachronistic, yet the final line (as is characteristic of many in these poems) veers away from playfulness towards breath-catching tenderness: "In sleep," the narrator confides, "their tear-blotched faces could be anyone's."

The assorted images of "Alice" that both enchant and elude the reader are given full play in the final section, appropriately entitled "Hide and Seek." In these poems the writer travels "overseas" to seek her muse in the configurations of English landscapes, doors that open into fields, and Old World gardens that return her, unexpectedly, to the New World by way of her own autobiography:

Since I began  
to seek her, I've found  
love, moved to a land  
white as a page. I rarely stop  
to think of her these days.

It is hardly surprising, given the writer's concern with narrative positioning, that the search for Alice resolves into the search for an elusive and fugitive self. The final poem has the narrator stumbling through a doorway and, much like Atwood's Susanna Moodie, following her own footsteps back to a tentative and provisional subjectivity: "This is fear, this is here, / this is me, I am: the doorway, opened." From the dark room where she first emerges by way of desire and photography to the snowbound landscape where she learns to unlock her "gated chain of cells," the narrator of *The Alice Poems* pursues the figments of identity and imagination with all the frantic tardiness of an exceptionally talented white rabbit.




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## Trusting in Movement

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**Marilyn Bowering**

*Autobiography*. Beach Holme \$12.95

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**Mary di Michele**

*Debriefing the Rose*. Anansi \$16.95

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**Liliane Welch**

*Dream Museum*. Sono Nis \$12.95

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**Elizabeth Brewster**

*Garden of Sculpture*. Oberon \$27.95

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**Carolyn Zonailo**

*Wading the Trout River*. Empyrean \$12.00

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Reviewed by Susan Drodge

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Together these five collections speak to the concerns of Canadian women poets with the multiplicity of selfhood and the motivating force of desire. They tend to look outward in their representations of being and world, as they attend to the influence of others, texts, and expectations on women's experience and art. Movement is key here. Indeed, in many of these collections, the self achieves clarity only when it stops resisting fluidity and instead immerses itself fully in a spatial and temporal flux—a flux that can, paradoxically, affirm the importance of home as a measure of desire. As Liliane Welch writes in *Dream Museum*,

Why moonlight with an Italy  
if not to measure it against the true  
home that governs us—our keepsake  
we throw mindlessly from hand to hand,  
its blessings dependable as clouds of rain.

The fluidity that is thematically and structurally foregrounded in many of these collections facilitates an abundance of personae and a multiplicity of female voice.

Marilyn Bowering's *Autobiography* is a compelling collection of six poetic sequences that rigorously engage in an inquiry of origin and design. Her chilling yet compassionate renderings of helplessness and honour speak to our profound human desire for meaningfulness. The multiple personae of *Autobiography* attend to the dynamics of the self



and collectively signify a fluidity of existence and meaning. For Bowering, difference itself is at the root of the divine mystery.

"How Were the People Made?" was a winner of the *Malahat Review* Long Poem Prize; here Bowering offers a striking response to "the Bible, Darwin and Mr. Emery, her grade six school teacher." The abundant possibilities she proposes in reply to the poem's title question resist authority and privilege ambiguity. Her vision attends to both minutia and magnitude, with her claims for human origins ranging from "They were scraped together from shavings, / scraps of sand and mouse dung" to "They were made from paintings / by a child with an imaginary friend." In *Autobiography*, difference abounds, and paradox proliferates. Technology and folklore, absurdity and pathos, angels and animals, all mingle easily within the marvellous field of play Bowering constructs as World.

Mary di Michele's *Debriefing the Rose* offers 23 lyrics, prose-poems, and long poems that likewise foreground the multiplicity of self and voice, as personae again abound. The abundance and resourcefulness of this collection are further manifest in a plethora of languages this poet draws upon in her generous efforts to understand and be understood. The rose is a unifying motif here as many of these poems revision and renew the multiplicity of this cultural symbol.

The long poem "Crown of Roses," published here after being selected for the 1996 Confederation Poet's Prize, is a moving tribute to absent voices, namely those of Sappho and Bronwen Wallace. "Crown of Roses" recasts the absence of these women as influence and inspiration, negotiating the boundary between absence and presence. Some of Sappho's fragments that "lend / to the postmodern" are borrowed by di Michele as she assumes a multiple female subjectivity which moves through space and time. Sappho is by turns represented as irreverent—"tell me how could I, / without numbing

the senses, / forget to mention / her sandals were gold lame"—and raw—"The gods got it all wrong! / I wanted my daughter—/ not my verses—/ to be immortal!" This poem is a powerful and memorable exploration of what "a woman's words are worth."

Like *Autobiography* and *Debriefing the Rose*, Liliane Welch's *Dream Museum* attends to the fluidity of existence. This collection of 65 poems is sophisticated in its style, intense in its imagery, and unrelenting in its interrogations of time, space, and human desire. Welch's poems move elegantly from Canada, where the wind is soulful and wild, to Central Europe, "where each summit knows / its name." A dream-like spatial movement characterizes the overall development of this collection, and a portrait emerges of the self in flux.

For Welch, the verb is a powerful voice of desire and disappointment, as its syntactical force mirrors the sway of expectations on human perceptions and experience. In "Anticipation," her diction couples hope and disillusionment:

They cruised only anticipations,  
not the highway of fear  
where Clarke was killed.  
Alone in her garden today Sheila audits  
the past: fifty tulips planted for  
a husband lost.

"Memories" likewise portrays the unbearable weight of expectation and memory, depicting a regretful lover who "shovels / his memory open to overtake / the morning of sadness / with a silence older than bliss." In *Dream Museum*, the self longs to be filled by something, whether love, movement, art, or knowledge. "Afternoon at Namurs" is a particularly tender rendering of one victim of emptiness:

She was still young,  
in her late twenties,  
when she put on weight.  
Did she simply open  
the doors of her mind  
to the melodies of cakes?

For Welch, however, there is remedy for emptiness and regret: simply to keep moving through “the lovely world.”

With a similarly gentle touch, Elizabeth Brewster’s *Garden of Sculpture* portrays the complexity and generosity of the human spirit. The 39 poems of this collection are frank but gentle. A synthesizing impulse is at work here—a circularity that highlights the correspondence of the fragments that make up history, art, and human lives. This impulse informs both content and form, as Brewster’s poems unfold in four distinct yet non-exclusive movements, respectively titled “Angelic Influence,” “Circular,” “Family Ties,” and “Garden of Sculpture.”

The poems of “Angelic Influence” infuse traditional Judeo-Christian discourse with a sense of immediacy as Brewster rewrites biblical stories, parables, and prayers. This section concludes with two circular glosses that take as the last line of each of their four stanzas the last line of their subject texts, namely a children’s bedtime prayer and A.M. Klein’s “Autobiographical.” The result is a graceful form that explicitly acknowledges the lasting impact of our dialogues with texts and the ideas those texts represent. “Child’s Prayer: a Gloss” synthesizes text and experience, as well as innocence and experience, to conclude

Not only children dread  
the night-horse riding through the night.  
Come back, my blessed messengers  
along the tracks of stars.  
Put dark to flight.  
I do not fear the dead  
as once I did, but there is space  
and emptiness and absence.  
Stand as you stood before,  
angels around my bed,  
two at the foot and two at the head. (30)

The second movement of this collection offers a number of different constructions of time and space, highlighting the variety of movements (chronological, non-linear, and transcendent) available in and through

consciousness, art, and relationships. Brewster is deft with poetic form, moving gracefully from the lyric to the prose poem and back to the intertextual gloss. The poems from the third section are, by contrast, striking in their simplicity. “Sweet Peas,” for instance, depicts the innocence of children in the face of death, with “flowers going / before their time / down into the dark / with Grandmother” and “Stella and I at our first funeral / both (I think) grieving / for the flowers.” The concluding movement of *Garden of Sculpture* documents the elderly poet’s journey to Jerusalem, fulfilling the movement promised by the earlier sections of this collection. The incredible spirit of the poet herself is here manifest in a manner akin to the image with which she concludes this wonderfully sculpted collection: “the spirit leap in air / like a kite / soaring above the trees.”

Like *Garden of Sculpture*, Carolyn Zonailo’s *Wading the Trout River* speaks to the power of influence and attests to the influence of Judeo-Christian discourse on our grapplings with the ineffable. This collection likewise moves through four different sections: “Geographies of the Heart,” which offers a number of memorable portraits of human compassion and vanity; “The Male Nudes,” which resurrects “the divine masculine” from “the reckonings of our gendered selves”; “Twin Souls,” which plays with notions of self, shadow, and romantic love; and “Letters of the Alphabet,” which infuses each letter with romantic expectation and desire.

Zonailo is direct in her diction and compassionate in her characterizations. In “Old Ladies of Montreal,” she depicts women who “have earned their chin / whiskers or mouths where / lipstick runs over the edges,” while in “Alex the Doorman,” she mythologizes a socially marginal character who has assumed the position of “a liminal god, / addressing all who enter or exit.” *Wading the Trout River*, however, is obscure at times in its communication of experience,

as its intimate addresses to a specific romantic partner assume an understanding between subject and other that limits the imagery of some of these poems. This readerly desire for more detail, on the other hand, could signify Zonailo's ultimate success in eliciting a voyeuristic impulse to synthesize self and other—an impulse that seems to be the motivating force of many of her poems. This synthesizing impulse is one that Zonailo shares with Bowering, di Michele, Welch, and Brewster. Ultimately, in their respective constructions of time/space, self/persona, absence/ presence, each of these poets affirms that there is indeed meaning in experience, art, and world.

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## Girl Guide's Honour

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**Nathalie Cooke**

*Margaret Atwood: A Biography.* ECW Press \$24.95

Reviewed by Colin Nicholson

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Margaret Atwood can notch up another victim position: celebrated writer pursued as real-life subject by well-meaning acolyte. Chapter 24 of Nathalie Cooke's account reintroduces a "suffering artist" figure (invoked in her opening pages) now eclipsed by Atwood's rise to fame. The only relationship obtaining between that remembered figure and Cooke's living one is Atwood's refusal of its relevance to her case: "a strong, defiant, 'No.'" After finishing the book I felt a fuller sympathy for the semi-controlled impatience with which its subject responded in 1995:

I don't give a piss about generalised "roles." Never have. If I'd believed in "roles," espec. the ones being doled out in the 50's, I never would have been a writer. Would have been Betty Crocker instead. See Edible W. on the subj. of roles. (Rolls.) Why are people, espec. women, always being told they have Roles? It is not a play. The contribution you make as a writer can't be figured out

ahead of time and then enacted by you. It doesn't work that way.

Cooke describes as evasive Atwood's insistence "throughout this whole exercise, that 'I am not who you think I am.'" Leaving aside both the insistence and its duration over time, using Petrarch's idealised figure of the feminine for truth-effect signifies something rather more than evasion. Atwood also brought to this biographer's attention a number of books and excerpts bearing on the genre, including Alain de Botton's comic *Kiss and Tell*, about which Cooke comments: "The narrator's asides, his oh-so-obvious subjectivity, as well as his too earnest attempts to pursue the application of every single hair and thread and trivial incident are all part of the fun and quite to the point." The point seems nonetheless to have eluded her. Quoting extensively from Atwood's portraits of elder relatives, and interspersing this with less than sparkling commentary, risks direct exposure of trowel to scalpel. "Writing can be a profession," we are somewhat redundantly informed, "a way of spending one's days, of earning money, of acquiring influence. It can also be a vocation—something for which one is chosen or to which one is called. In this sense, writing is a kind of responsibility, something a writer serves rather than something she is served by. (Remember the biblical story of the three talents?)" In a perspective where Atwood's first visit to London was "much like that of any other young North American woman arriving for the first time in the mid-1960s," and a trip to Paris "a fairly typical one," when the suggestion is made that Atwood's life and writing are "committed to the exploration of contemporary ethics" and Cooke moves to identify "important lessons," revelation is predictably muted: "Don't judge a person too quickly or too easily. (In other words, don't judge a book by its cover.) And, above all, recognise that there is much more to a person than meets the eye. Atwood, in her work and in

person, proves this truism time and again." That last sentence is still demonstrably true, notwithstanding the incipient attractions of a biographical narrative connecting back to relatively enlightened and powerfully capable Presbyterian women in the Annapolis Valley and forward to a writer whose "professional ascent has coincided with her establishment of a stable family and community life."

Enthusiasm mediating gossipy acclimations subdues a complex subject for non-problematic consumption. During what often reads like a high school conspectus, Cooke makes liberal use of her belief that comparison between life and art is implicit in any writer's biography: "just like [sic] Alfred Hitchcock did in his films, she appears in [*The Edible Woman*] just once, and briefly." "Remember Joan Foster" [in *Lady Oracle*] "working as a waitress, trapped by a marriage proposal? Atwood found herself in a similar predicament with the short-order cook" when she took a temporary job as cashier in a Toronto restaurant after her first year at Harvard. Although her experiences in the United States had "something to do with it," the "precise origin of Atwood's feminism is hard to pin down." Where people are concerned, origin is always already mythic, unlike structures of feeling recoverable from effective writing. "Motherhood was wonderful for Atwood," and "being writers, Mum and Dad were able to spend plenty of time at home with Baby Jess": with little analytic presentation of this mother's complicating attitudes to what Cooke elsewhere calls "the woman question," let alone any attempt to situate them in a social and intellectual context beyond reference to Bob Dylan's "The times they are a-changing," a couple of television programmes and a claim that "feminist ideas were in the air in the 1950s and 1960s," the chapter called "Feminism" is misleadingly named. Just as disconcerting is the use here of a

reply Atwood made during an interview with Elizabeth Meese:

And what do we mean by "political"? What we mean is how people relate to a power structure and vice versa. And this is really all we mean by it. We may mean also some idea of participating in the structure or changing it. But the first thing we mean is how is this individual in society? How do the forces of society interact with this person?

"This statement," we are advised, "serves as an extremely concise summary of the politics of *The Handmaid's Tale*." Since it summarises innumerable social fictions, and seems designed to recuperate political dimensions inherent in public writing, the cultural specificities of Atwood's dystopia—as well as the politics of its narration—are left begging. Another of the chapter headings here, "The Right Balance," haunts the margins of this book. Twelve months Atwood spent working for a market research company generate pages of material; her years of political activism produce an exercise in the banal: "it's clear that she is pursuing these concerns because she is genuinely committed to them and because she is determined to give something back to her community. It's a question of a Girl Guide's honour, so to speak." Lived and imaginatively focused as a productive, secular citizenship that effectively radicalises postwar North American stereotypes and their invasive determinations, perhaps.

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## The Garrulous Twenties

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**Tamas Dobozy**

*Doggone*. Gutter Press \$14.95

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**Joseph Kertes**

*Boardwalk*. ECW Press \$16.95

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Reviewed by Lawrence Mathews

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A famous line from Sartre's *No Exit* asserts that "Hell is other people," but many of us can be more specific than that. For me, hell

might well be a twenty-something guy telling me about his life for, oh, 200 to 250 pages. That's what these two novelists are up against.

Joseph Kertes's *Boardwalk* is narrated by Eddie Markson, at 22 the bland, inexperienced younger brother of the charming slimeball Clyde. Eddie's brief self-analysis encapsulates what is wrong not only with him, but with also the novel: "The truth was I did not have the courage *not* to be a nice guy. I was not brave enough, like other guys, to say no when I felt like it, to push other people off." Nice guys not only finish last, in baseball great Leo Durocher's famous line; their narratives tend not to be terribly compelling, either.

Such is the case here. Unattached Eddie and married Clyde drive from Toronto to Atlantic City for a brief holiday. Clyde wants to get laid; Eddie is along for the ride. For much of the action, Eddie is on his own, drifting around the casino and the town, encountering various characters carefully designed to be "colourful," most of them surprisingly decent and sympathetic as well. There is a plot of sorts, though a hundred pages go by before something that could reasonably be called a twist occurs.

And there is, ubiquitously, Eddie's voice. Eddie is bright, literate, self-deprecating—and boring. He speaks in an articulate idiomatic prose that's easy to consume but so devoid of interesting content that the experience of reading it is deeply unsatisfying. It's impossible to communicate this quality by means of representative brief quotation. Any paragraph excerpted at random will seem to be doing its workmanlike job in an unobtrusive way, and the reader of this review would wonder why that particular hundred-word snippet had been chosen.

There are some gestures of *homage* towards *Catcher in the Rye*, and perhaps that connection provides the most convenient explanatory image here. Think of a young adult Holden Caulfield whose innocence is

(almost by definition) annoying rather than engaging, and who lacks both Holden's emotional intensity and his wit. I haven't read *Catcher* for years, and I can remember Holden's description of a fellow-student as being "about as sensitive as a toilet-seat"; I've just finished *Boardwalk* and I can't remember a single phrase.

By contrast, the prose of Tamas Dobozsy's *Doggone* calls attention to itself with a vengeance:

Small breasts in a burgundy bra: for all the world they fitted there like alliteration, every part of her so filled with possibilities I couldn't picture all her anatomy at once. You could isolate and spend years resourcing every square inch of her physique. Kissing, now naked, we walked out one of the kitchen's four exits into my room, me plodding forward, her backwards. Our heads aslant in the kiss, we both had one free eye; the tongues made slippery work, and keeping four left feet and twenty thumbs in sensual play is no junior patrol. But she seemed more proficient at movement. I let her lead. We didn't go astray.

Let's start with the positives: energy, and a willingness to take risks with language. But then: "anatomy"? "resourcing"? "physique"? "her"—not "she"—"backwards"? "made slippery work"? "no junior patrol"? Given the context, do we need to know that the kitchen has four exits? Does it need to be noted that they leave through only one of them? By most standards, this paragraph is about three revised versions away from publishability—and the same can be said of much of the rest of the book.

Dobozsy's protagonist, Gabe, is 29, a British Columbian of Hungarian extraction whose life is chock full o' sex, drugs, and rock 'n' roll. There's a tortured love relationship ("Lala cheated with other guys just to show she loved me"), wacky anecdotes ("Once, my great-uncle ate a cat by accident"), slapstick involving a corpse ("With

one high bounce, I propel Giovanni's body straight up like a missile into the attic"), and lots and lots of drinking ("The road to salvation tonight involves liver damage")—but nothing other than Gabe's high-energy voice to tie it all together. Such strength as the book has lies in its presentation of individual incidents, and its occasionally successful witty or imaginative verbal flights.

Making a virtue of necessity, the back-cover blurb claims that "this is a rollicking romp that tromps on conventions of timelines, character consistency, and narrative coherence." Translation: "There's material here for a number of good individual stories, but the author didn't have the patience and/or skill to write them—so we've smushed it all together, thrown it against the wall, and called it a novel."

Until now I've avoided mentioning the obvious linkage between *Doggone* and *Boardwalk*, the fact that Dobozy and Kertes are both Hungarian-Canadians—avoided it because the fact seems to have no significance whatever. Kertes (b. 1951) has climbed the greasy pole of CanLit politics. According to one of *Boardwalk's* French sleeves, he's "Director of the distinguished Humber School for Writers." (Perhaps the adjective differentiates it from an undistinguished competitor of the same name?) Dobozy (b. 1969) is just starting out. Kertes's Eddie presents himself as standard-issue Canadian (as if), unscarred by ethnicity, interested in comparing Canada and the U.S., while Dobozy's Gabe eagerly explores his Hungarian heritage: "The wine I drank . . . must have hallucinogenic qualities. Maybe this was the definitive Hungarian drug I'd requested after."

But in the end, so what? Ethnicity has no bearing on the quality of either book. Dobozy may one day develop into a good writer. I wouldn't bet so heavily on Kertes. But I refuse to conclude by drawing some grim moral about how, in Canada, ignoring one's ethnicity is connected to the writing

of prose that is fluent but bland. Nor will I celebrate the "subversive" quality of Gabe's colloquial (ethnically influenced?) discourse. (University-educated, he frequently misuses words, believes that there are degrees of uniqueness, and is unaware of the distinction between "lie" and "lay.") I'll simply say that, in these books, Dobozy's writing is alive in a way that Kertes's is not, and leave it there.

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## An Ultraliterary Life

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**Douglas Fetherling**

*The Gentle Anarchist: A Life of George Woodcock.*  
Douglas and McIntyre. \$35.00

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Reviewed by L. M. Findlay

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The expression "man of letters" has outlived much of its usefulness, but it still applies to this independent and prolific biographer and his subject. Douglas Fetherling knows whereof he speaks when dealing with the realities of a writer's life. This knowledge, combined with his twenty-five year friendship with George Woodcock, makes this account of the latter's life and work stimulating and broadly persuasive. Admittedly, a book of this length has to practise severe economies, especially with the mass of materials in the Woodcock archives at Queen's University, but much of Woodcock is here, and there are regular indications of where to go for the rest. Some dozen photographs vivify the study of a man who published three volumes of autobiography but still remains something of a mystery, even to those of his intimates who agreed to be interviewed for this biography. The tensions captured in the expression "gentle anarchist" and in the various paradoxes of Fetherling's account can be assigned in part to Woodcock's personality, but one is encouraged also to give due weight to the historical events that directed his years of "soured gentility,"

pacifism, and literary bohemianism in England and that helped shape his later activism in Canada.

Woodcock lived from 1912 to 1995, and witnessed first-hand what war could do to individual and collective freedom, and what literature could do to contest the lies and brutalities of the time. Commitment came early to the autodidactic railway clerk, and Fetherling effectively portrays Woodcock's driven versatility as poet, novelist, pamphleteer, and later as dramatist, broadcaster, critic, teacher, biographer, autobiographer, travel writer, translator, and anarchist. In 1947, Woodcock returned to Canada with his wife, Inga, and settled permanently in British Columbia. His name was soon synonymous with West Coast culture and politics, and with the flourishing of Canadian letters. Moreover, he negotiated the immigrant experience and international involvements in ways which continue to bear suggestively on Canadians' sense of themselves and their place in the world today. Fetherling wishes to play down the "dichotomy—it is practically a seismic fault line—that runs across Woodcock's career," between its British and Canadian phases. He therefore devotes two thirds of his text to the years in Canada, and traces continuities across "the central dividing line of their lives," but still emphasizes unduly the "complicated and elusive" reasons why the Woodcocks came to Canada. This kind of quest for origins promises causal explanations which tend to make less remarkable what was accomplished in a new milieu.

The indigence and political menace of the 1930s honed Woodcock's irony, while his experience as a conscientious objector assigned to farm work in Essex generated perceptive anti-pastorals where neither culture nor nature yields the degree of freedom he desired. Nature would later disclose in the Canadian north purer freedoms, but such freedoms were available only fleetingly

to the visitor or at a price to the Indigenous "outlaw." Ecology and human justice were among the later themes explored in freer but no less disciplined verse where the anarchist poet comes to terms with poetic "law." Studies of Kropotkin (1950), Proudhon (1956), Orwell (1966), and Herbert Read (1972) amplified Woodcock's sense of a rich and living tradition of anarchist thought and social practice, while some of its specifically Canadian articulations were pursued in *The Doukhobors* (1968).

If you believed, as Woodcock did, in dismantling the state and decentralizing services and responsibilities, then there was some obligation to counter social atomism with evidence of "natural," unadministered goodness and Kropotkinian mutual aid. So, in a country where dispersal, fragmentation, and appropriation still pose special dangers, he had to nourish as well as critique forms of collective life and representation, while working for a regionally inflected, endlessly vulnerable, but recognizably *Canadian* culture. While contributing invaluable to a distinctive national culture, Woodcock continued to see the nation state and its cultural apparatuses as an excludable middle between local authenticity and global diversity. Indeed, he helped to remake Canadian identity not only through the details and caveats of books like *Ravens and Prophets* (1952) or the more inclusive *Canada and the Canadians* (1970) but also via sharply internationalist books on the ancient civilizations and current travails of Mexico (1957), Peru (1959), the newly independent India (1964), and Asia (1966). As a string of awards and honorary degrees attested, Woodcock had become a leading figure who could be entrusted with jurying Canada Council applications and contributing to the second edition of the *Literary History of Canada*. Woodcock's incarnation of the labour of writing, reading, debating policy, and mobilizing opinion (and material aid to groups like the

Tibetan Refugees) remains exemplary and inspiring, in his own and Fetherling's versions. He lived indefatigably within and by dissent, and Canada and Canadian literature are much the better for that.

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## Paths within the Onion

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**Cecil Foster**

*A Place Called Heaven: The Meaning of Being Black in Canada.* HarperCollins \$20.00

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**George Elliott Clarke, ed.**

*Eyeing the North Star: Directions in African-Canadian Literature.* McClelland & Stewart \$19.99

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**Peter Hudson, ed.**

*North: New African Canadian Writing, a Special Issue of West Coast Line: A Journal of Contemporary Writing and Criticism 22 (Spring/Summer 1997)* \$10.00

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Reviewed by Uzoma Esonwanne

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Onion is round, but there are paths within it.  
—Ewe Proverb

It seems to me better to think of Canada, not simply as British America, but as culturally descended from the Tory opposition to the Whig triumph at the time of the Revolutionary War. This is a view of it that would, *mutatis mutandis*, include French Canada, which still flies the pre-revolutionary flag of the lilies.

—Northrop Frye, "National Consciousness in Canadian Culture"

Every February—the "Black" History Month—teachers, politicians, newspeople and community activists solemnly intone important facts about African-Canadian peoples. Two in particular are often recited: that Black Loyalists first arrived in Nova Scotia in the late eighteenth century, and that peoples of African descent have been productive members of Canadian society since the early colonial period. Such facts, one admits, are true. But their truth does not explain why, today, African-Canadians remain peripheral to Canadian life.

Asked to explain, people often proffer

rote answers or clichés. Might it not be better, we wonder, to begin with specific questions? Thus, for example, we might ask if, despite some historical truth, Northrop Frye's attribution of Canada's genealogy to a single, decisive, political event in Britain does not, ultimately, oversimplify the complex processes of nation-formation in Canada. Is there any connection between genealogies such as Frye's and the inscription, in "official" narratives, of the French and English as Canada's "founding peoples"? Are canonical genealogies and narratives of nation-formation in Canada linked to race-making cultural, economic, social, and political practices? If so, might not the nation thus created have become, particularly for those disenfranchised by the process, somewhat round and hermetic like the proverbial Ewe onion? Such are the kinds of questions that the books under review compel us to explore.

Notoriously paradoxical African proverbs offer inconclusive solutions to intractable problems; *North Star*, *North*, and *Heaven* provide no easy answers to these problems either. And, as anthologies of art and criticism, *North Star* and *North* are even more circumspect. Still one may discern in the visual and literary art collected here a variety of aesthetic practices from which one might deduce some insights. One such practice Edouard Glissant has called "counter-poetics," that is, forms of language "deformation" which one might also find in the visual arts. Our first example is Jan Wade's "Epiphany." A triptych of crosses, "Epiphany" is a visual re-presentation of the history of the Americas. Considered independently, each cross symbolizes a stage in the European imperium. Considered consecutively, however, they seem to be violent phases in the progressive desacralization of the Christian heritage in the "New World." In panel two, the black Sacred Heart—impaired on a plain, wooden Cross in panel one—is displaced by a small,



dark hand impaled upon a garishly adorned cross pointing heavenward, as if invoking divine intervention. In panel three, both Sacred Heart and supplicating Hand are displaced by the United States dollar, named GIVER, which is shielded from INDIAN and OKANADA by a buffer of military figures, and from CUBA by clenched fists whose middle finger points (defiantly?) upwards. In “Epiphany,” Wade cuts, splices, and rearranges images from the crucifixion, the history of the African diaspora, and the triumph of American multinational capitalism in a manner that endows them with unorthodox meaning.

Counter-poetic techniques may also be found in the domain of literary art. In “Legba, Landed,” a cornucopia of alliterative sounds cast in the form of concrete verse, Compton makes Legba (the Yoruba God of Interpretation and Owner of the Crossroads) the figure of the immigrant who “crossed the border/line in a northern corner;/ . . . created/a/here;/one/foot/in a-/merica/one/foot/in a/canada.” But Canada, he soon realizes, is not a place of repose for “one/negro,/liminal.” Suspended “in flight,” all “hope/of landing” dispelled by symbolic Canada geese which “kill their crippled/for fear of attracting stalkers,” he submits to fate: “death./no./rest./I am sweet to the prey./my only thought: I fly on,/on, my sky home/home.” Far from arriving, then, Legba remains in a state of suspended flight. Thus, he becomes the artist’s trope for the African-Canadian: someone who exists on the borderline.

The poetry and short fiction collected in *North* and *North Star* demonstrate that African-Canadian writers are resourceful *bricoleurs*. M. Nourbese Philip’s rewriting of Ceres’ search for Proserpine in “And Over Every Land and Sea” and George Elliott Clarke’s *reprise* of Ezra Pound in “The River Pilgrim: A Letter” and “Each Moment is Magnificent” testify to this resourceful use of imposed and received

aesthetic forms. Olive Senior and Pamela Mordecai use Creole in “Swimming in the Ba’ma Grass” and “de Man” respectively, poignantly to underscore the significance of *patois* in the construction of an African-Canadian aesthetic. That, at present, such aesthetic work must of historical necessity be diverse is, perhaps, owing to the multinational cast of writers represented in both anthologies. In any case, it would not be an exaggeration to say that African-Canadian literature today owes some of its imaginative vigour—especially as manifest in Dionne Brand’s “Just rain, Bacolet,” Claire Harris’s “Policeman Cleared in Jaywalking Case,” Paul Tiyambe Zeleza’s Kafkaesque “The Rocking Chair,” and Andre Alexis’s exquisitely crafted “Despair: Five Stories of Ottawa”—to the “diverse range of styles” and ideologies (“pan-Africanism and black nationalism”) to which each writer subscribes.

Though published separately, both anthologies may be read as complementary volumes, particularly because *North* also contains criticism, reviews, and interviews, including Lillian Allen with Kwame Dawes, Leslie Sanders and Arun Mukherjee with Claire Harris, Rinaldo Walcott on Dionne Brand, Leslie Sanders on M. Nourbese Philip, George Elliott Clarke on Austin Clarke, and Wayne Compton on George Elliott Clarke. That one of the most lucid articulations of African-Canadian literary response to the challenge mentioned earlier occurs in criticism—specifically Walcott’s “A Tough Geography”—merely confirms the complementarity of *North* and *North Star*. Walcott states explicitly what Compton suggests in “Even the Stars Are Temporal: The Historical Motion of George Elliott Clarke’s *Saltwater Spirituals and Deeper Blues*”: namely, that for African-Canadian writers, language is a site of struggle, and repetition a strategy of representation and resistance. Thus, far from offering them an escape, language embroils

them in contestations over meaning. Or, as Walcott puts it, their “practices of revising language continually disclose its constructiveness, making evident language’s importance in both domination and resistance.”

Foster’s *Heaven* substantiates Walcott’s proposition. However, in Foster’s calculation, politics (and, to some extent, economics) combined with active intervention in national debates displace language as the site, and repetition as strategy, of struggle. Commenting on the segregated and alienated African-Canadian community in Montreal, Foster argues that rather than continue letting “white” French- and English-speaking Québécois bat them back and forth like political Ping-Pong, they must intervene in Quebec politics. Similar interventions, he believes, are essential in other provinces of Canada. To bring about the changes they desire in Canada, African-Canadians must take two paths. First, they must “continue to believe in Canada.” Secondly, they must build the future they desire—economic security, collective pride, cessation of police harassment, “positive” representations, and an end to being scapegoats—by actively intervening in national affairs in a manner that would secure their collective self-interest:

We have to be in the middle of the discussion on the future, a discussion taking place on the very nature of Canada itself. A discussion in which Blacks can make a difference, the same way our forefathers and foremothers left us their proud legacy as United Empire Loyalists fighting against the republicans to the south, to help forge a country called Canada.

So simple is this conclusion, and yet so radical, that it is necessary to recapitulate how Foster arrives at it.

*Heaven* consists of twelve essays, each of which presents anecdotes Foster garnered from personal “experiences and observations” of what being “black in Canada today” means, and how African-Canadians

respond to experiences of being “black.” Together, anecdotes and authorial commentary, both of which are written in lucid prose, lend Foster’s account of the meaning of blackness an air of transparency. But this transparency can be misleading since, as many of the anecdotes show, it does not completely dispel the dark shroud that conceals the meaning and significance of “race.” Still, by the time one arrives at “Angrinon Park,” one understands that, far from naming objective states of being, “black” and “white” are linguistic devices in race-making processes whose meanings are contradictory and contested, and whose effects are multiple. For example, while “whites” (and some “blacks”) afflicted by “chromatism” (a highly serviceable term I borrow from Gayatri Spivak) may perceive blackness or Africanness as a “curse” or emblem of malevolent otherness, African-Canadians “claim and celebrate it as a blessing.” So blackness and whiteness, Africanness and Europeaness, and cognate euphemistic terms (“peoples of colour,” “minorities,” “ethnics,” and “*real* Canadians”) are, in fact, discursive strategies in the “racial formation”—which Michael Omi and Howard Winant define as the constellation of “sociohistorical processes by which racial categories are created, inhabited, transformed, and destroyed”—in Canada. Such categories, we now see, are meaningful precisely because they are integral elements of historically distinct projects which represent, organize, and deploy “human bodies and social structures” in order better to facilitate the emergence of hegemony.

A few anecdotes from *Heaven* make clear why terms like “black” and “white” are best understood as discursive strategies in the “racial formation.” Foster is ticketed for Driving While Being Black (DWBB), Audrey Smith is strip-searched for looking suspicious, and Donovan Bailey is asked, after he wins a race in the Olympic Games, if he could claim “without any difficulty”

that he is Canadian. A proud mother reveals that her son was featured in *Chatelaine*, only to be asked by her “white” colleague what he did to be jailed. New European immigrants ask descendants of the Black Loyalists what islands they came to Canada from, and “white” comrades in the socialist New Democratic Party wonder aloud what African-Canadian party-leadership candidates *want*, since Canadians are not yet ready for a “black” prime minister. Anecdotes such as these, as well as those depicting the views of segregationist patrons of the Toronto booze can, make very clear not only how profoundly discourses of “race” saturate civil and political society in Canada, but also how indispensable they are even to adversaries of racism—for example, integrationists like Foster himself.

That Foster invokes “race” even as he rightly denounces racism, and that his political blueprint for racial desegregation depends, paradoxically, upon granting the necessity for African-Canadians, as a people subjected to racial discrimination, exploitation, and repression, to resist racism in the name of “race,” are what makes his insight at once simple and radical. Foster says nothing about whether “races” exist: *Heaven* deals with a world in which their existence is almost an article of faith. The strength of Foster’s work is to be found in this hard-nosed realism. But might this not also be its weakness? In any case, *Heaven*, *North Star*, and *North*, propose that the answers to the questions with which we began, and thus the paths through the Canadian onion are to be found in the interventions we make in the domains of culture and politics.



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## Northrop Frye: A Double Vision

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**Northrop Frye, and Robert D. Denham, ed.**  
*Northrop Frye's Student Essays 1932-1938: Collected Works of Northrop Frye* Vol. 3. U of Toronto P  
\$95.00

**Northrop Frye, and Branko Gorjup, ed.**  
*Mythologizing Canada: Essays on the Canadian Literary Imagination.* Legas \$25.00

Reviewed by Heather Murray

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These two volumes may be placed as part of a larger project to assemble and to assess the critical legacy of Northrop Frye. The collection of Frye’s earliest extant writing is an early volume in the series, based at Victoria University at the University of Toronto and under the general editorship of Alvin Lee, which will eventually result in Frye’s collected works: the well-known writings, along with less familiar publications, as well as letters, notebooks, lectures, and occasional productions. This volume represents with a few exceptions essays penned for courses at Victoria College and Emmanuel College in the 1930s, and will be new to all but the most specialized student of Frye’s *oeuvre*. The articles in *Mythologizing Canada*, on the other hand, are for the most part familiar (at least, in the context of Canadian literary studies), and this collection will make them more conveniently available for classroom use and restore them to curricular circulation. Despite the differences between these collections—the one a scholarly volume of fresh materials by a novice writer, the other an accessible collection of often-cited articles by a figure of public significance—the publication of each raises questions about the relationship of these texts to the more systemic critical works seen as Frye’s centrally important productions. What can Frye’s early essays teach us about the critic in formation? Do they hold an interest other than biographical, as works in their

own right or as documents of Canadian intellectual history? The publication of some of Frye's essays on Canadian literature and culture, on the other hand, queries at least implicitly the internal relationships among Frye's more mature writings, often viewed as divided. When wearing his critical toque—or so the story goes—Frye encouraged (or condescended to) an emerging Canadian literature by resorting to an evaluative, thematic, contextual approach at odds with his other theorizations. Even scholars dubious of this account often consider the two bodies of writing separately. Are these really contradictory or—with hindsight—can they be seen as relating dialectically?

Having just finished a stint of spring grading, I embarked on Northrop Frye's weighty collection of essays with some trepidation: more than four hundred and fifty pages of them, exclusive of the editorial notes. Many, if not all, of the essays have an intrinsic interest for the reader: a fine essay on the thought of Raymond Lull, for example, or a delightful and ingenious fantasy, submitted for a course in Church History at Emmanuel College, in the form of a fictitious letter from the Franciscan scholar Robert Cowton to Thomas Rondel, his Oxford tutor. One's reading experience of the volume overall, however, can be characterized as principally hermeneutic, in the traditional sense of the word; while proceeding through these essays in their chronological arrangement, one is also reading speculatively ahead to the well-known later works to find how the first anticipates the latter, while the latter completes the former. Certainly, one can find hints of the Frye to come: a concern with genre and genre theory in the essay on Wyndham Lewis as a satirist; a repeated concern with the topos of *katabasis*; a prediction that the "cultural anatomy" will become the dominant mode of twentieth-century writing. But readers searching for

*Anatomy of Criticism* in embryo will be disappointed by this collection, and not only because the bulk of the essays deal with religious and theological topics. On the other hand, there may be a more fundamental link between the early essays and the later work. Frye, one could argue, did *not* in some important respects mature critically; rather, his later writings—as his earliest ones—are full of the big questions and bold statements about Life, Art, and Thought that many undergraduates bring to their studies, and are soon dissuaded from pursuing.

*Mythologizing Canada: Essays on the Canadian Literary Imagination* provides eleven essays by Frye written over a period of more than forty-five years. These essays are also arranged chronologically, which encourages the reader to trace developments and commonalities in Frye's Canadian criticism. (The provision of the conclusions to the first and revised editions of the *Literary History of Canada* also invites comparisons.) Branko Gorjup's thoughtful introduction to *Mythologizing Canada* begins by tracing the ways in which Frye's criticism has been viewed—creatively, critically, inspirationally, antagonistically—over a number of decades. Frye's Canadian criticism can be brought into perspective if we reconsider the problem it was designed to solve: not so much what is (or what could be) a distinctively Canadian literature, but what are the conditions under which literature is created? A stance which appeared to some patronizing, Gorjup suggests, now emerges as presciently "postcolonial" in its concerns. (One could argue, too, that critical ambidexterity is itself a distinctively Canadian tradition: Archibald Lampman wrote Canadian poetry and W.J. Alexander boosted it, but both felt the new nationalist poets would best be prepared for their work through a wider literary study.) Further, Gorjup suggests, we can attempt to

reconcile the two bodies of Frye's theory schematically: that the "universal" and the definable "here" are not mutually exclusive terms but are related to one another structurally. To continue to explicate the complexities of that arrangement, then, is a task that Frye has bequeathed to a new generation of critics. One is reminded of the apocryphal story, widely told when I was an undergraduate, of Frye's opening class of the term. Professor Frye steps to the board, draws a huge circle, and labels it "Universe." He looks at the class: "Would anyone like to take the chalk and show us where we are?"

While the volumes both have a scholarly interest, and the selections are exhaustive in the one case and careful in the second, some criticisms could be made of the accompanying annotations. The primary interest of the early Frye essays, it could be argued, is as a record of *reading* rather than as a record of *writing*. Frye was clearly a genius, but not *sui generis*. While we are told for which courses essays were submitted (and, rather amusingly, the grades received), the annotations to the volume—in other ways painstaking—do little to reconstruct the institutional texture of the times: the personalities, lectures, syllabi and societies through which Frye was trained. (The editor, Robert Denham, does trace the citations and the connections among these essays in great detail, both in the notes and in the introduction to the volume.) *Mythologizing Canada* is marred by numerous errors in the notes: we have the publisher "MacClelland and Stewart" and the newspaper "La Press"; "Gray Owl" and "the Maratime provinces"; the poet "Shelly"; and a novel with the rather alarming title of *Sowing Seeds at Danny*, for example. These inaccuracies impair the utility of this collection for classroom use.

The issue of essays by a student Frye along with Frye's essays intended for students seems a pleasing synchronicity. Frye

came from, stayed in, and belongs to the classroom: something to be borne in mind as the process of critical reassessment unfolds.

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## Regards sur la nation

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**Sous la direction de Gilles Gallichan,  
Kenneth Landry et Denis Saint-Jacques**

*François-Xavier Garneau: Une figure nationale.*  
Éditions Nota Bene \$24.00

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**Sous la direction de Gérard Bouchard et  
Yvan Lamonde**

*La Nation dans tous ses états: Le Québec en comparaison.* L'Harmattan \$35.00

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Reviewed by Kenneth W. Meadwell

La notion de collectivité nationale est l'objet d'étude de deux ouvrages collectifs fort intéressants. Dans un premier temps, il s'agit de *François-Xavier Garneau: Une figure nationale*, qui révèle la mosaïque qu'ont été la vie et l'oeuvre de celui nommé "historien national" de la collectivité québécoise. Dans un deuxième temps, *La Nation dans tous ses états: Le Québec en comparaison* fait état, sous une variété d'optiques, de ce qui constitue au Québec, comme ailleurs, l'identité collective.

François-Xavier Garneau (1809-1866), autodidacte, poète, historien et mémorialiste né à Québec, est un nom bien connu par ceux qui étudient l'histoire intellectuelle et littéraire du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle québécois. La parution en 1845 du premier tome de son *Histoire du Canada depuis sa découverte jusqu'à nos jours* a marqué un point tournant dans l'historiographie du Canada. Cet ouvrage, vaste entreprise de synthèse et de recherche, a été suivi de trois autres tomes et de nombreuses rééditions. Membre fondateur de la Société Saint-Jean Baptiste de Québec en 1842, Garneau a aussi participé à la création de l'Institut canadien en 1847.

En octobre 1995 à Québec, l'Association québécoise pour l'étude de l'imprimé et le Centre de recherche en littérature québécoise de l'Université Laval se sont réunis

pour étudier les problématiques suivantes: celle des rapports entre Garneau et son milieu, celle de l'écriture et de la production de son oeuvre, et celle de la fortune de cette dernière.

Par rapport à l'époque qui a "produit" Garneau, dans "Espace mal connu: La vallée du Saint-Laurent au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle," Serge Courville, Jean-Claude Robert et Normand Séguin démystifient certaines représentations folklorisantes au sujet de la société québécoise du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle, à savoir celle d'une société paysanne repliée sur elle-même et isolée par une agriculture traditionnelle. Au contraire, il est question d'abord d'un mode de vie enraciné dans les siècles précédents, et qui incarne un rapport à la terre où dominent les activités agraires; et par la suite, vers 1840-1850, de la montée urbaine et villageoise, alimentée par la croissance démographique, l'essor de l'industrie et des activités commerciales. En fin de compte, ce siècle est effectivement celui de l'affirmation urbaine et villageoise, mais est aussi traversé par un certain mouvement de modernisation.

Dans "François-Xavier Garneau et le caractère national des Canadiens", Marc Lebel fait état de quelques éléments qui ont contribué à la fortune de *l'Histoire du Canada*. Chez Garneau, le portrait de l'évolution du caractère national des Canadiens est saisissant. Pour brosser ce portrait, Garneau procède par contraste et oppose, d'une part, le "caractère belliqueux, indépendant, chevaleresque" des Canadiens sous la domination française, et, d'autre part, leurs "habitudes paisibles, laborieuses et sédentaires actuelles." Ce faisant, l'historien insiste sur la rapidité et la profondeur de la transformation qu'il qualifie de "révolution." De ce point de vue, Garneau est assurément de son temps, car il écrit à une époque où la notion de caractère national touche peut-être son apogée en Occident, l'expression "caractère national" s'étant déjà retrouvée chez les Philosophes, chez

Mme de Staël, dont l'ouvrage *De la littérature* (1810) a fait date, et dans les carnets de voyage d'Alexis de Tocqueville.

En fin de compte, ces commentaires sommaires ne sauraient cerner la richesse et le grand intérêt que possèdent la vie et l'oeuvre d'un grand homme, tels qu'ils sont dévoilés par les articles érudits de *François-Xavier Garneau: Une figure nationale*.

Un autre ouvrage collectif qui rassemble des communications données lors d'un colloque, organisé en novembre 1996 par l'Institut interuniversitaire de recherches sur les populations, *La Nation dans tous ses états: Le Québec en comparaison*, présente sous une multiplicité d'angles le thème de la nation. L'originalité de cette recherche consiste dans la démarche comparative qui l'a alimentée. Aussi lit-on des titres aussi attirants que "Le rôle de l'histoire et de la littérature dans la construction des mythes fondateurs de la nationalité argentine" de Diana Quattrocchi-Woisson, "Contested Terrain: Commemorative Celebrations and National Identity in Ireland and Québec" de Ronald Rudin, ou encore, "Politiques linguistiques et identité nationale comparées au Québec et en Catalogne" de Guy Rocher et Bruno Marcotte.

L'un des articles les plus intéressants, aux yeux du littéraire, serait celui d'Earl Fritz, "The Interplay of History, Fiction, and Language in the Development of Colonial Literature in the Americas: Québec and Latin America." Il s'agit, d'une part, d'une liste de questions que se pose Fritz: à l'égard du contexte socio-historique européen—en France, en Espagne, au Portugal et en Angleterre—qui a créée la motivation d'exploration outre-mer. Quelques questions que pose Fritz sont les suivantes: Existe-t-il des parallélismes dans les motifs de l'exploration nationale, à savoir par rapport à la traite des fourrures en Nouvelle-France, la séduction de l'or et de l'argent en Amérique du Sud, et la culture de la canne à sucre au Brésil? Pourrait-

on comparer le “nouveau roman” québécois, sous-estimé par les critiques, à l’émergence de la “nueva novela/novo romance” à la même époque en Amérique Latine? A travers cette sorte de questionnement, Fritzsche tente de cerner de près et dans toute sa spécificité l’origine et la place qu’occupe en Amérique, à une époque post-coloniale, la littérature québécoise.

Enfin, Geneviève Zubrzycki présente un aperçu nuancé des changements sociaux, telle que la sécularisation de la société, qui ont influencé la construction identitaire de la nation polonaise et celle québécoise. Selon Zubrzycki, en Pologne, l’Église accepte mal la nouvelle pluralité qui caractérise l’ère post-communiste, et tente de défendre et d’imposer sa vision dans un discours d’exclusion, alors qu’au Québec, l’état-providence provincial a remplacé l’Église dans l’exercice de fonctions sociales et dans l’articulation du discours nationaliste. Au Québec, estime Zubrzycki, l’Église est devenue pratiquement marginale. En Pologne, la situation serait plus nuancée car l’Église a perdu de son influence sociale, l’anticléricalisme est à la hausse, mais la pratique religieuse jusqu’à maintenant se maintient. (Le maintien de la pratique religieuse s’expliquerait par la nature ritualiste et non réflexive de la religiosité des Polonais.) Consciente de sa position antérieure plus puissante, l’Église catholique polonaise tente de se réinventer un ennemi depuis l’arrivée au pouvoir des néo-communistes, et essaie en vain de rallier les Polonais à sa cause.

*La Nation dans tous ses états: Le Québec en comparaison* confirme que nombre de nations traversent actuellement une période de mutation, et que ces évolutions soulignent en vérité que chaque nation est effectivement en perpétuel devenir, la globalisation venant exercer son influence sur chacun d’entre nous.

Ce trop bref parcours de deux ouvrages collectifs a permis de voir que la nation,

dans toutes ses manifestations et ses métamorphoses, continuera à fasciner historiens et sociologues, linguistes et littéraires, bien au-delà du nouveau millénaire.

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## Indirections

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**Brett Josef Grubisic, ed.**

*Contra/Diction*. Arsenal Pulp Press \$18.95.

**Rob McLennan, ed.**

*Written in the Skin*. Insomniac Press \$24.99

Reviewed by Stephen Guy-Bray

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I want to begin by pointing out that there are many good stories in *Contra/Diction*. The stories by D. Travers Scott, Stephen Beachy, John McFarland, ae christopher, Michael Bendzela, Michael V. Smith, Blaine Marchand (who has an excellent poem in *Written in the Skin*), Michael Ritter, and Duane Williams are especially fine. I was less fond of the others, but no one expects to like everything in an anthology. I would like to single out two authors for dispraise: Wes Hartley, who runs a fairly promising idea into the ground, and Jim Provenzano, whose desire to return to his Italian roots does not include the desire to learn how to spell Italian.

*Contra/Diction* has a good mixture of established writers and new writers, and of different styles and settings. This is a real plus with an anthology, of course, and this kind of variation is one of the strengths of many of the recent anthologies of gay stories. But in his introduction, the editor, Brett Josef Grubisic, is careful to distinguish his anthology from what he would probably think of as mainstream anthologies like the *Men on Men* series (a comparison explicitly made in the press release). *Contra/Diction*, then, fits into the latest niche market: products for homosexuals who feel they are too cool to be gay. This marketing ploy is inherently tiresome, but it’s also bad politically; dividing gay people and the things they buy (furniture, clothing, anthologies)

into “queer” and “gay” is the sort of thinking that caused all that trouble in the first place, isn’t it? *Contra/Diction* provides still more evidence that it is every bookish person’s dream to be a rebel. This anthology is strong enough to stand on its own without relying on trashing other anthologies.

Grubisic does acknowledge a forebear, however. He says that the earlier Canadian anthology “*Queeries* has stood as a model for me.” It does not appear to have been a good model, however. There is a certain overlap between the two anthologies, as they share four writers: David Dakar, George Ilesley, Andy Quan, and Duane Williams. With the exception of Williams, these writers all did better work for *Queeries*. Even more unfortunately, Grubisic, like Dennis Dennisoff, allows his writers to make author statements (in addition to the biographical notes). The main purpose of these statements would seem to be to demonstrate how little talent short story writers have for explaining themselves. Almost all the statements are dire, and some are almost as long as the shorter stories. I thought the worst case was Reginald Shepherd, whose author statement almost ruins his very fine story. On the other hand, Aldo Alvarez’s statement is superior to his story, so perhaps it all evens out.

*Written in the Skin* is a poetry anthology which bills itself as “A Poetic Response to AIDS” (and the royalties will go to AIDS charities). The subtitle might suggest a collection of thematically driven poems, but in fact the poems here are only rarely about AIDS in any obvious way. The editor, Rob McLennan, groups the poem into three categories: Love, Loss, and Death. This grouping is about as close as the collection or any of the individual poems gets to straightforward narrative. Indeed, the connection between the individual poems and the groupings in which they are placed is not, as a rule, particularly clear, which is one of the strengths of this valuable anthology.

McLennan has managed to avoid the bathetic literalism of much writing on AIDS. *Written in the Skin* is not a commonplace book (in either sense of that term), and it is emphatically not part of what Daniel Harris has memorably called “AIDS kitsch.” The anthology requires the reader to do the work of piecing together the poems and connecting them to each other and to their (ostensible) subjects.

A similar indirection can be seen in the excellent photographs by Jules de Niverville. These photos, often slightly blurred or taken from odd angles, have only a tangential relation to the poems they accompany—if that is indeed what they do. It could be said that the status of the photographs as illustrations mirrors the poems’ status as poems about AIDS. This point may be clearest in the case of those photographs which have handwriting on them, handwriting which is itself often blurred. De Niverville’s work adds another layer to the problematizing of representation which is such a salient and interesting feature of the anthology as a whole. Perhaps the closest photographic analogue to the poetry is the picture on page 31 of a young man, wearing a costume consisting of a fur stole, a tiny g-string and what appear to be swimming goggles. On his slim and boyish torso is painted—written on, if not in, the skin—the musculature of a far more athletic man.

Like Grubisic, McLennan has included different styles in his anthology. While some of the poems are fairly traditional in genre—lyric, narrative, ballad—others are more experimental. There are strong poems of many kinds, lengths, and genres in *Written in the Skin*, from Michael Achtman’s biblical narrative and John Barton’s “Saranac Lake Suite” to the shorter and fierce lyric speeches of Stephanie Bolster, Clare Latremouille, and Gil McElroy and the more noticeably experimental poems of Jill Battson, Brian Burke, and Clint Burnham. These were probably



my favourites, but almost all of the poems in *Written in the Skin* are worthwhile. The contributions by Sky Gilbert, R.M. Vaughan (who is also in *Contra/Diction*), and Judith Fitzgerald are weak, but my opinion of Fitzgerald's ballad may have been affected by her biographical note. Her self-promotion—she apparently gave up a very well-paying job for moral reasons—is particularly distasteful in an anthology largely devoted to poems about people who are sick or dead, as opposed to just not as well-off as they would like to be. Apart from these really very minor objections, I highly recommend *Written in the Skin*.

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## Another Great Thing

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**Lawrence Hill**

*Any Known Blood*. Harper Collins \$28.00

Reviewed by George Elliott Clarke

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The anglophone African-Canadian novel, since its modern debut in the 1960s, has been typified by Austin Chesterfield Clarke's Horatio Alger burlesques, in which striving West Indian male immigrants often achieve a middle-class lifestyle and respectability, but at the price of losing their authenticity, their "roots" culture, or, if partially Americanized, their *blackness*. Clarke's fellow Barbadian-Canadian novelist, Cecil Foster, has continued to mine this ground, though with an emphasis on the necessity for black nationalism. In contrast, *In Another Place, Not Here* (1996), by the Trinidadian-Canadian novelist Dionne Brand, features protagonists who reject every measure of bourgeois success except the ascetic and aristocratic pleasures of attempting to secure an anti-capitalist revolution—or to perish, joyously, in its ruins. The Ontario-born, African-Canadian novelist Lawrence Hill has blazed an alternate trail in his fiction, eschewing both the Malcolm Xian bleakness of Clarke and Foster and the Marxist *élan* of Brand. In his

first novel, *Some Great Thing* (1992), and in his follow-up, *Any Known Blood* (1997), this son of an African-American immigrant father (who once helmed the Ontario Human Rights Commission) and a Euro-Canadian mother has consistently depicted black male heroes who struggle to build professional careers—to integrate, at least class-wise, in the "white" world—but who never lose their pride in their African ancestry. Nor do they ever meet a racist they do not manage either to ridicule or to convert. Hill's novels chronicle black male achievement—with sweat, blood, and tears, yes, but also with wit, spirit, and style. In *Some Great Thing* (which is, incidentally, one of the few African-Canadian works in English to find its way into French), the protagonist Mahatma Grafton, a mixed-race journalist with a Winnipeg newspaper, combats—that is, exposes—police brutality, French-English tensions, white racism, black sell-outs, and anti-communist hysteria, but also explores black Canadian history, journeys to Cameroon, wins a white woman, and scores major scoops. He is insightful, ironic, and indomitable.

*Any Known Blood* offers a series of similar protagonists, namely, five generations of Langston Cane—I, II, II, IV, and V. Most of the novel is narrated by Langston Cane V, a mid-1990s 38-year-old who, in seeking to establish a writing career following the loss of his marriage and his Ontario civil service job, travels to Baltimore, Maryland, from Oakville, Ontario, and back in time, via family interviews and letters, to uncover layer after layer of Cane history. The novel's *pièce de résistance* is, arguably, Langston Cane V's recovery of a journal kept by Langston Cane I, an escaped slave who had lived in Oakville before heading to Harpers Ferry, Virginia, with John Brown, in time to take part in—and to survive—Brown's famous if failed assault on the US Federal arms depot. The journal reinforces the novel's theme that pluck and luck can allow

even a black slave to rise above his circumstances and find love and prosperity. (Indeed, Cane I takes one of Brown's daughters for a mate.) By novel's end, then, Cane V has essentially written his novel. His African friend, Yoyo (a character who, like Hélène Savoie and Mahatma Grafton, is imported—incestuously—from *Some Great Thing*), tells him, "You have to get this published, my friend," a moment that echoes the writing-will-bring-me-riches-and-fame, self-reflexive conclusion of Dany Laferrière's *Comment faire l'amour avec un nègre sans se fatiguer* (1985). In addition, Cane V finds a voluptuous and willing African-American woman to help him recover from his divorcé woes. *Any Known Blood* is, like *Some Great Thing*, a true *black* comedy.

But it is also, in ways unavailable to the first-generation-immigrant black Canadian novelists—Clarke, Foster, Brand, et al.—a novel steeped in African-North-American history, both above and below the 49th Parallel. Though Hill is a second-generation African-Canadian, the clearest models of his novel are, fittingly enough, African-American. His arch protagonists carry the names of the chief African-American poet Langston Hughes and the signature novel of the Harlem Renaissance, Jean Toomer's *Cane* (1923). The plot seems to shadow that of *The Chaneyville Incident* (1977), a neglected masterpiece by African-American writer David Bradley, whose black protagonist—a professional archivist—retreats from a troubled relationship with a white woman to research his genealogy, specifically that of his slave-liberating ancestors. *Any Known Blood* opens with an allusion to African-American novelist Ralph Ellison's celebrated *Invisible Man* (1952), but also with a signifying difference. While Ellison's protagonist is "invisible" because whites do not affirm his presence as a black man, Hill's Cane V does not appear to be recognizably black at all (a trait he shares with Hill's Mahatma Grafton):

I have the rare distinction—a distinction that weighs like a wet life jacket, but that I sometimes float to great advantage—of not appearing to belong to any particular race, but of seeming like a contender for any.

In Spain, people have wondered if I was French. In France, hotel managers asked if I was Moroccan. In Canada, I've been asked—always tentatively—if I was perhaps Peruvian, American, or Jamaican. But I have rarely given a truthful rendering of my origins.

Admittedly, this hesitation around biracial (black-white) identification appears in some African-American texts, but it is far more common in African-Canadian ones. The likely reason is that the paucity of all-black communities in Canada encourages a greater degree of intermarriage than is possible in the United States. In any event, Cane V is a bit of a chameleon, or a mask-wearing Negro. He even describes himself as "Zebra Incorporated." Still, a colleague notices, "You're a revolutionary under that placid exterior," an observation the narrative verifies.

Then again, the tradition of being a coloured subversive is precisely the family history that Cane V discovers. This "greatness" is the grandeur of the "great-great-grandfather," Cane I—the progenitor of "a family of people with great accomplishments"—and it is Cane V's destiny to pass it on. Thus, "There's nothing more humbling than family history." But it is not until Cane V begins to document it that he can begin to sense that writing will be his own contribution to his family's greatness.

*Any Known Blood* is satirical, hopeful, and, especially in Cane I's journal, masterful. Hill writes with a lyric clarity and a witty lightness that accords all his intimations of grandeur a beautiful and graceful gravity.



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## Regeneration on Broken Ground

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Jack Hodgins

*Broken Ground*. McClelland & Stewart \$29.99

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Reviewed by Waldemar Zacharasiwicz

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Unlike Margaret Laurence or Alice Munro, who frequently tapped their personal memories and presented autobiographical material in their fiction, Jack Hodgins did not begin to exploit such recollections until the 1990s, and from the outset he largely avoided first-person narration. Apart from the story "Earthquake" (1986), there is little to indicate Hodgins' turning to family memories in the Comox region of Vancouver Island, an area which he was the first to put on the literary map in stories published about 30 years ago. Recently Hodgins has availed himself of "tribal" memories and family stories he grew up hearing. The first substantial fruit of this fertile territory was *The Macken Charm*, a *Bildungsroman* depicting the tragedy of an outsider (Glory), with whom the adolescent Rusty Macken, who dreams of becoming a film director, is enamored. Here Rusty's maturation is set against a rich backdrop of stories narrated by members of his extended family at a reunion.

*Broken Ground* is one of the two projected companion pieces to *The Macken Charm* mentioned by the author in his interview in Tim Struthers' helpful collection of essays on Hodgins (*On Coasts of Eternity*, 1996). The new, more ambitious novel presents several "revenants" known from the author's earlier books, and it uses a much wider canvas. *Broken Ground* privileges the perspective of Charlie MacIntosh, first seen in the 1920s as an adolescent boy who loses his father in an accident involving explosives on their stump farm, and later, in section three of the novel, as an octogenarian, looking back on the community's pioneer

days. The book thus renders events on several temporal levels from the years of World War I and the 1920s to the mid-nineties, when a cinematic reconstruction of those crucial years (by "young Macken") is screened locally. While the metafictional reflections of the novel's self-conscious narrator stress the elusiveness and the provisional nature of representation, there can be no doubt that tribute is being paid to the persistence and dedication of the pioneers of the Comox region, a generation to which Hodgins' own parents belonged. Though the narrative juxtaposes many voices and times, and thereby emphasizes the multiplicity of potential angles and the "indefiniteness" of all representation, Hodgins' narrators differ markedly from those of postmodernist authors in that they are granted substance; the author does not regard characters merely as nodes within the text. Charlie, for instance, subsequently reveals his sources of information on the progress of the private emotions of other figures, and defends his "narrative licence" as extrapolation justified by his long experience and familiarity with the people. The long opening section in the fragmented, multi-voiced narrative is also later revealed as coming from the pen of a local chronicler, while the brief middle section in the tripartite narrative turns out to be made up of excerpts from Matthew Pearson's bleak war diaries and letters from the aftermath of the war ("The Fields of France"), which have been passed on to Charlie by Pearson's widow, Maude.

Yet the book is not primarily concerned with narrative experimentation or the acknowledgement of indeterminacy, but—like the author's earlier books—with the empathetic investigation of varieties of human dilemmas, including generational conflicts and the reaction of community members to emergencies, most notably the "Great Fire". The novel explores the shared trials of a multi-ethnic settlement comprising

oldtimers as well as newcomers, with Scandinavians, French and Slavonic settlers, Texans and native people among them, and the narrative is overshadowed by the traumatic experience of young soldiers in the trenches. The community includes strong women patiently waiting for the return of those missing in action, or caring for the casualties of the war (such as Donald, Maude Pearson's disfigured brother), but also keenly observing the shortcomings of their neighbors. The novel depicts the heroic efforts of the veterans to clear and cultivate land unsuitable for farming, granted to them by a myopic government. Clinging to their stump farms, the returned soldiers and their families must endure the "Great Forest Fire of 1922," which ravages the community, taking several lives and new homes. For some veterans, especially in the highly literate Matthew Pearson, the devastating fire triggers vivid memories of the ruined landscape of the Western front with its gruesome "obscenities." Matthew, who serves as a surrogate father for Charlie, suffers harrowing pangs of conscience concerning the fate of one of his students, who was court-martialed and executed after having allegedly deserted. Matthew Pearson's ordeal, which takes him to the brink of suicide, is aggravated by the loss of his beloved illegitimate daughter Elizabeth (fathered in a tenuous and elusive relationship with a French village girl and later adopted by him and his wife), who is asphyxiated in the forest fire.

While the rendition of the theatre of war and the ruined countryside in Picardy, with its bomb craters and wreckage—apparently based on extensive research by the author—is reminiscent of Timothy Findley's *The Wars* or Robertson Davies' *Fifth Business*, Matthew's anguish and self-incrimination truly create the aura of sorrow prevailing in parts of the book. However, while the novel does strike such sombre chords as these, this composite, polyphonic chronicle of the

pioneer generation could not have come from Jack Hodgins' pen if tragedy had not been blended with comedy. Veterans up against both tree stumps and Vancouver Island's drenching rains paradoxically express their frustration in an orgiastic celebration. In fact, the comic spirit which runs through the book is engendered in the exhilarating opening scene in which Charlie's father's death is set against the arrival of a stranger in scorched clothes. This stranger, John Wyatt Taylor, and his romantic devotion to Nora Macken furnish numerous ludicrous incidents and moments of sheer fun. A jilted suitor, Taylor nonetheless comes to demonstrate an almost incredible reservoir of strength and human goodness, which makes him into a darling of the community and eventually wins him the love of its Penelope, Johanna Seyerstad.

Characters such as Wyatt Taylor are reminiscent of strains in Hodgins' earlier work, seen by some as aligned with "magic realism." Certainly, Matthew's desperate wrestling with Taylor while the former is on the brink of suicide contains biblical echoes. Even so, the detailed descriptions of Taylor's energetic involvement in the mundane affairs of the community root him firmly in the physical landscape. He wins Johanna's surrender in a sensuously rich scene during which they travel in a "speeder" along the tracks, through untouched green forest, "second growth" areas and over "a sea of flowers." Ironically, it is also this stranger, hired to save logging equipment, who has unwittingly brought the devastating fire upon the community.

It seems no mere coincidence that the book is framed by references to the arrival of this stranger "from the wrong direction" and by speculation concerning his outfit. Here and elsewhere in this book rich in intertextual allusions, there are echoes of Robert Penn Warren's prototypical story of initiation, "Blackberry Winter"; there, the

arrival of the stranger signals the intrusion of an alien, destructive force into the idyllic childhood world of Warren's protagonist and narrator. It appears significant that despite Taylor's unintentional involvement in the forest fire, the prolonged "visit" of the "stranger" eventually contributes to the healing of individual and collective afflictions. In later years, the "Wyatt Taylor look-alike contests" ritually reenact the playful mood and good humor associated with this new arrival.

In his emphasis on the government's insensitive treatment of the veterans and the "obscenity" of the war machine, Hodgins has, no doubt, exposed aspects of the human experience that seem grim and bleak compared to his earlier novels and their irrepressible zest for life. By depicting figures who can communicate fully with, and who "care" for, each other, and by dramatizing restorative situations within the context of a densely textured regional chronicle, which nonetheless incorporates journeys to the wider world, the author affirms rather than subverts the "master narratives" of Western civilization.

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## Orphans and Ghost-towns

**Constance Horne**

*The Accidental Orphan*. Beach Holme Publishing  
\$8.95

**Ann Walsh**

*The Doctor's Apprentice*. Beach Holme Publishing  
\$8.95

**Joan Weir**

*The Brideship*. Stoddart Kids \$6.99

Reviewed by Gernot R. Wieland

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Only recently has the plight of British orphans shipped to Canada made the headlines. It is not surprising, therefore, that novels for young adults follow in the wake of these headlines. Two of the books here discussed, *The Accidental Orphan* and *The Brideship*, examine the fears, hopes, defeats,

and triumphs of two orphan girls on their passage to, and settlement in, Canada. The third of the books, *The Doctor's Apprentice*, follows the fate of a young man whose parents are still very much alive; it does, however, converge with both other novels in the time in which it is set, and with *The Brideship* in the locale in which it takes place.

An "accidental" orphan? Horne's title raises questions, and even incredulity. Ellen, the heroine of the novel, is an orphan, though she fiercely denies it because she lives with her uncle. In order to earn some extra money, she sells flowers, an activity which seals her fate. Her flower basket seems just the right hiding place for some sausages a street urchin had stolen. He claims that Ellen is his accomplice, and, in her attempt to get away from the strong arm of the law, she finds herself on a boat of orphans ready to set sail for Canada. All her attempts to get off the boat before it leaves England prove futile. Charles Dickens seems to have inspired this first part of the novel: the street urchin, the spotless heroine wrongly accused, the bumbling butcher and policemen, the concatenation of events that prevent the heroine from escaping her seemingly pre-ordained journey to Canada—quite a number of Dickensian characters may see themselves partially mirrored here. Once she is in Canada, Ellen can think of nothing else but to return to England. But here, too, events conspire against her. She is taken in by a kind family in Manitoba, and though she has thus acquired a new father and mother, and even brothers and sisters, she still pines for her uncle. The remainder of the novel chronicles her eventual acceptance of the family's kindness and of Canada, and, once she has made up her mind to stay with them, she is also re-united with her uncle, who had left England in search for her.

Horne writes a suspenseful novel. Though at first she strains our credulity, eventually she convinces us of the probability of the "accident" in the "accidental

orphan." The characters are well drawn, the feelings of despair, abandonment, hope, and joy realistically portrayed. This could be the story of an accidental nineteenth century settler in Canada.

There is nothing "accidental" about the orphans of *The Brideship*. Four dozen of them, some of them as young as sixteen, are sent off to the West Coast of Canada on the vague promise that they will find work there. Sarah eagerly volunteers to go; she will do anything to get out of the hated orphanage. An Anglican clergyman has organized the emigration, and this fact alone seems to guarantee that the promised positions will materialize, and that the four dozen girls are in good hands.

Appearances, however, deceive. A few days before their arrival in Canada, the girls find out that "there aren't as many jobs available" as had originally been thought, and that they are to be "brides instead." The clergyman, too, is not what he seems: aside from being responsible for deceiving the girls, he is also a thief. He triumphs in the short run, but his dishonesty eventually catches up with him. In these aspects, *The Brideship* stays closer to the headlines than *The Accidental Orphan*: children deceived, trust abused, coercion into marriages, dishonest clergymen. Sarah, however, never gets to meet the man intended for her. She escapes to Barkerville, sets up a laundry business there, and falls in love with someone she chooses for herself.

This, too, is a novel full of suspense. In contrast to *The Accidental Orphan*, *The Brideship* concentrates more on action than on emotion. While Ellen is the clear focus in the first book, Sarah gets somewhat pushed into the background by the question of whether the Anglican Church really did organize shiploads of female orphans under the pretense of getting them positions as governesses, then offering them as brides to the miners working in British Columbia instead. And if, as Weir contends,

the answer is "yes," then one wonders why the author neglects to show some outrage in at least one of the unfortunate "brides." Not even the heroine expresses any offense at such a monumental deception; she is worried that the husband the clergyman has chosen for her might be a brute, but it does not seem to enter her mind that the clergyman had no right to choose a husband for her in the first place. Although *The Brideship* has a lot of action, it is short on psychological realism.

With Ann Walsh's *The Doctor's Apprentice* we stay in Barkerville, and we return to psychological realism. Ted, the novel's fourteen-year old protagonist, suffers from nightmares; in Walsh's earlier novel *Moses, Me and Murder*, Ted had helped to convict the murderer James Barry, and had seen him hang. In *The Doctor's Apprentice* James Barry is back and haunts Ted's dreams and any dark place he has to pass. As a result, Ted does not get enough sleep, cannot concentrate on the work in his father's workshop, keeps the family awake at night with his screams, and seems to alienate all his friends. When a doctor is called in, he offers a cure by making Ted his apprentice. What Ted does not know, though the parents do, is that the doctor, "J.B.," has had his own share of nightmares which he fights every now and then with generous doses of opium. The story chronicles how Ted overcomes his nightmares, while those of J.B. come back to haunt him, and the apprentice has to cure his master. It ends with the great Barkerville fire of 1868, a fiery exorcism of both their demons.

Walsh provides excellent insight into Ted's troubled mind. He knows that he helped to bring a murderer to justice, but in doing so he also caused the man's death. Fear of the dead man's brutality and guilt at his death are the twin sources of Ted's nightmares. J.B., too, is driven by guilt, guilt at having failed a patient and a friend, and in a few broad strokes Walsh makes us

understand the doctor's pain. Psychological realism is coupled with historical verisimilitude; Walsh has drawn inspiration from the tombstones of the Barkerville cemetery and brought some of its inhabitants successfully and entertainingly back to life.

All three novels are set in the second half of the nineteenth century. All are successful quest stories; the orphans seek and find a family and a home, and Ted seeks and finds a cure for his mind. They also draw attention to a psychological law: the human mind cannot easily tolerate "absence." Just as the authors of *The Brideship* and *The Accidental Orphan* seek to fill the void left by their protagonists' deceased parents, so the author of *The Doctor's Apprentice* strives to re-populate a town left empty at the end of the gold rush. Orphans and Ghost-towns: people and places in search of the absent Other.

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## Carrefours discursifs

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**Jósef Kwaterko**

*Le roman québécois et ses (inter)discours*. Nota Bene \$24.00

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**Jacques Savoie**

*Les ruelles de Carezzo*. La courte échelle \$14.95

Reviewed by Carlo Lavoie

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Plusieurs chercheurs voient de plus en plus le roman québécois comme une sorte de carrefour qui vit des affrontements et des polémiques de la société et qui en produit dans son espace discursif. Un carrefour où vivent et naissent des discours qui s'entre-croisent et s'entrechoquent.

Dans *Le roman québécois et ses (inter)discours*, Jósef Kwaterko présente quelques-uns de ces interdiscours qui se retrouvent dans le roman québécois des années 1960 aux années 1980 afin de montrer «les procédés par lesquels la fiction incorpore les représentations du social et devient un carrefour de médiations où divers discours et savoirs se rencontrent, négocient entre

eux, se heurtent, s'opposent les uns aux autres.» Cette étude, qui fait voir l'écrivain québécois (qu'il soit Québécois de souche, d'adoption ou qu'il le soit devenu par «une curieuse coïncidence») comme un «homme-en-société» qui est à l'écoute de la société et qui se charge de commenter ce qu'il entend.

Kwaterko part tout d'abord de l'Histoire à titre d'intertexte. Une Histoire qui, par le fameux rapport Durham, hantera l'écriture québécoise des années 1960. Il se dégage ainsi que les auteurs étudiés de cette période, Ferron, Aquin et Carrier, utilisent cette Histoire, ou ce «passé traumatisant,» afin de se libérer, de la refaire en mettant en jeu les significations historiques et anciennes. Deux grands axes se dégagent ainsi de cette étude.

Le premier touche l'interdiscursivité des romans analysés dont l'enjeu est de produire une transformation esthétique des discours de références logés dans les textes par le biais de réappropriations stratégiques. C'est ainsi que le repérage de ces discours dans les romans de Réjean Ducharme permet une réflexion sur les liens unissant les romans et les façons d'entrevoir la quête identitaire québécoise des années 1960. Le deuxième axe de la problématique interdiscursive, pour sa part, dégage l'enjeu fondamental des préoccupations langagières liées à l'esthétisme romanesque permettant par exemple à Jacques Godbout l'emploi du vernaculaire québécois et à Gérard Bessette celui du français hexagonal. Cette problématique intertextuelle et langagière est également étudiée en relation avec l'émergence d'une écriture (im)migrante dans les années 1980 avec *La Québécoise* de Régine Robin. Ces deux axes dégagés tendent ainsi à démontrer non seulement la place qu'occupe l'Histoire comme intertexte, mais aussi la prégnance de l'altérité «mettant en valeur la travail sur la langue comme inhérent à l'organisation interdiscursive du texte.»

En cette époque où le libre-échange tend à faire de notre planète un village, un village

global tel qu'en parlait prophétiquement McLuhan, il est facile de s'imaginer que l'intertexte peut devenir interculturel et multidimensionnel. Ce que Józef Kwaterko fait voir de nouveau avec son essai, c'est justement ce tiraillement dans l'écriture où se rencontre le désir de vouloir se faire de plus en plus mondial et l'attachement aux racines par l'utilisation de l'Histoire. L'exil, l'errance, l'aliénation et le sentiment de la perte, chers aux «codes symboliques de la société québécoise,» sont ainsi confrontés à une Amérique mondiale.

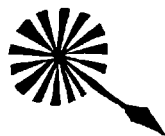
Cette Amérique mondiale se retrouve également dans *Les ruelles de Careso* de l'auteur d'origine acadienne Jacques Savoie. Dans ce second roman de la trilogie du *Cirque bleu*, le lecteur retrouve Hugo, un ancien clown de cirque converti en libraire qui tente de remettre de l'ordre dans les livres et la maison de son père, Victor Daguerre, dans le but de mettre sur pied un salon de lecture, le Cirque bleu. Cette histoire, que l'on peut qualifier «d'amour,» est aussi une histoire de livres et d'information, mais d'abord et avant tout celle de familles éclatées voulant se reconstituer. L'enjeu est toutefois double.

D'entrée de jeu, Hugo vit avec Marthe, son premier amour qu'il crut jadis être sa demi-soeur. Cette dernière a la garde partagée de son fils de onze ans, Charlie, qui se retrouve au beau milieu d'une guerre froide entre ses parents qui veulent tous deux l'avoir en permanence au sein de leur foyer respectif. Hugo fera les frais des discussions en servant involontairement d'intermédiaire entre les deux parents de Charlie. Mais Hugo n'est pas au bout de ses peines. Son ex-partenaire au cirque, Lazlo Tizza, lanceur de couteaux de profession, est à Montréal pour le convaincre de reprendre son travail au cirque Barnum and Bailey. Tizza, grand inventeur d'intrigues, fera de Marthe l'intermédiaire involontaire de ses discussions visant à réintégrer Hugo dans la grande famille du

cirque. Au beau milieu de ces tourbillons, Charlie, du Cirque bleu, se promène en toute naïveté dans les ruelles de l'Internet. À l'adresse Hei@weimar.com, il trouvera une jeune fille prête à s'enfuir avec lui afin d'éviter tous ces méandres de la vie adulte. Encore une fois, Hugo se retrouve pris entre deux feux, cette fois entre la mère et son fils, afin de faire comprendre à ce dernier que la vie ne correspond pas toujours au rêve.

Au fil de ces intrigues, le narrateur change, étant tantôt l'un des personnages du roman, tantôt un narrateur omniscient. Si les discours provenant de l'Histoire (tant nationale, culturelle que personnelle) s'avéraient être le noyau central des romans étudiés par Kwaterko, ces derniers se voient, dans le roman de Savoie, alliés à un élément de la modernité, l'ordinateur. Ainsi le Pentium, dont Hugo fait l'achat afin de répertorier tous les volumes qu'il possède, devient l'élément autour duquel se voient reliés des thèmes chers à la littérature québécoise, soit l'exil, l'errance, l'aliénation et le sentiment de la perte. Par l'aventure virtuelle, la quête identitaire s'entend à l'échelle planétaire et devient partie prenante d'une nouvelle recherche langagière, celle s'effectuant à partir d'un langage mondial (probablement le seul langage mondial), celui de l'informatique.

*Les ruelles de Careso* sont peut-être l'illustration de cette croisée des chemins où se retrouve le roman québécois de la fin des années 1990. Ce nouveau carrefour discursif offre à l'auteur la possibilité d'utiliser l'Histoire comme matériau tel que l'a montré Kwaterko afin de demeurer québécois, tout en explorant un monde dont la virtualité tend à le rendre de plus en plus petit.





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## Glancing Back, Fondly

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**Ian G. Lumsden**

*Early Views of British North America from the Collection of the Beaverbrook Art Gallery.*  
Beaverbrook Art Gallery \$24.95.

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**Diane Eaton and Sheila Urbanek**

*Paul Kane's Great Nor-West.* UBC P \$39.95.

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Reviewed by I.S. MacLaren

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These are two well-produced books about early Canadian painting that break no new critical ground. In 1994, Ian Lumsden chose a safe subject with which to celebrate the thirty-fifth anniversary of Lord Beaverbrook's gift of an art gallery to the people of New Brunswick. His approach to the topographical painters and their work is art historical in the conventional sense. In some ways, the activity of the inventory sciences in nineteenth-century Canada, which Suzanne Zeller studies so ably in her book *Inventing Canada*, remains a necessary model for us today, since so much Canadiana still needs to be properly identified. It is always a service to have factual catalogues of collections compiled and biographical profiles drawn, and this text exhibits sufficient care in the details as to render it a dependable resource, but we would all be in the debt of Canadian art historians if they would regularly interpret works rigorously in terms of the larger projects of imperialism, colonialism, dominion building, and, in some cases, capitalism in which they played a not insignificant role.

Even in a project the aim of which is chiefly celebratory, it is disappointing to find expressions of contentment with the old saw about the "unquenchable thirst" of the British "for knowledge, both written and pictorial . . . of the enormous breadth of the Empire." Aesthetic criticism of some of the works is offered. Lumsden finds a "brittleness" in the work of George Neilson Smith's compositions, "which attempt to integrate buildings into the landscape with

the buildings executed in a manner totally incompatible with the handling of the natural landscape." It remains to the reader to extend this observation to British North America in general, and to look at the ways in which imposing public building and natural, even if idealized, space remained incompatible. In an identification of these four dozen works—depicting people and places as far flung as the Haida at Skidegate (Jules Tavernier), Kakabeka Falls (John Arthur Fraser), the high Arctic (William Smyth), Niagara Falls (Elizabeth Sophie Storie Saunders), St John's Newfoundland (Robert William Best), and much of New Brunswick, both wilderness (Anna Maria Yorke Head), including Micmac culture (Hibbert Newton Binney and two anonymous works), and settlement (for example, John Hewett and John Elliott Woolford)—Lumsden strays no farther than the summary claim that this significant "part of our national patrimony created by military officers, travellers, government officials, talented amateurs and professionals . . . afford[s] the enthusiast a dimension of appreciation and understanding of this nation's early years that transcends the written word."

This last statement could have appeared in *Paul Kane's Great Nor-West*, a "cross-over" publication aimed at both scholarly and general readers. Both are told—again—that "Kane's visual and written records create a unique and immensely varied panorama of the 'Great Nor-West.'" This remark suggests that the case of Kane is unproblematic and coherent, yet the editors, having republished excerpts from my edition of some of Kane's field writings, have argued that "the voice in *Wanderings of an Artist* is of an altogether different order" from that in the field notes, and that "Kane's manuscript—like many other travel books of the time, including Sir George Simpson's—was clearly ghostwritten." Such implicit contradiction will not satisfy either

kind of reader. To have one's research cited must be gratefully acknowledged, but its implications are not taken up. Eaton and Urbanek content themselves with the image of Kane as the national hero, an image into which he has been cast ever since returning to Toronto in 1848 from his travels to the Pacific, in such publications as *Paul Kane's Frontier*, Russell Harper's formidable 1971 study of Kane as an artist.

Colour in some of the reproductions is well used, and the selection of illustrations is careful. Most of the book comprises the rehearsing in Eaton and Urbanek's words of *Wanderings*, first published in 1859. The false claim that Kane emerged from a trip through nothing but wilderness is reiterated. (The Willamette valley had been overrun by emigrants to Oregon by 1847, when Kane saw it, and the Red River settlement had long since converted wilderness to rural landscapes.) Thereby, Kane's urge—some-what misplaced by the mid-1840s—to record the unchanged lives of Native peoples is offered unquestioningly yet again. With only a measure of accuracy, Eaton and Urbanek regard him as “witness to the last bright flash of the Hudson's Bay Company empire in its glory days.” Theirs is a fond glance back, driven, no doubt, by market demand.

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## Renaissances historiques

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**Nicole Macé**

*Marie Carduner, Fille du Roy. L'Hexagone n.p.*

**René Boulanger**

*Les feux de Yamachiche. VLB Editeur \$21.95*

Reviewed by Marilyn Randall

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Le double pacte du roman historique relève de l'oxymoron: trop historique, il sent le document; trop romanesque, l'Histoire s'éclipse. Deux romans historiques illustrent les écueils et les limites d'un genre dont la popularité dépend de sa capacité à confondre fiction et “vérité historique”

sans, toutefois, que la confusion se fasse voir par le lecteur.

*Marie Carduner, Fille du Roy*, traduit du norvégien par l'auteure Nicole Macé, est le premier roman qu'elle fait paraître en français. Le récit raconte les aventures de deux jeunes soeurs, Marie et Catherine, orphelines depuis l'incendie qui a détruit l'imprimerie de leur père. Ainsi déshéritées, elles sont réduites à un avenir comme Filles du Roy. Après de nombreuses péripéties survenues dans leur pays natal, les soeurs s'embarquent avec d'autres Filles du Roy pour la Nouvelle-France. Pendant la pénible traversée, Marie se lie d'amitié avec un imprimeur français qui espère établir une imprimerie en Nouvelle-France. Impressionné par ses connaissances et son amour au métier d'imprimeur, appris aux côtés de son père, l'imprimeur propose à Marie de s'échapper au sort de Fille du Roy en devenant apprenti imprimeur chez lui. Le récit se termine sur l'arrivée à Québec.

Traçant le trajet de la condition de fille petite-bourgeoise à celle de Fille du Roy, le récit relève plus de l'“historique” que du “romanesque.” Et c'est peut-être pourquoi un détail retient surtout l'attention: c'est l'établissement en Nouvelle-France d'une imprimerie, là où l'Histoire nous en enseigne l'absence. Je m'y accroche: s'agit-il de la fantaisie dans ce récit aux allures pourtant fort documentaires? De l'erreur? Ou bien d'un fait historique peu connu? Mais puisque Macé abandonne ses personnages au seuil de leur “nouvelle vie [qui] commençait,” on ne saura jamais ce qui est advenu de cet imprimeur déconcertant, absent aux annales de la grande comme de la petite histoire.

Déconcertant aussi est le style narratif trop apparenté au résumé, presque dépourvu du dialogue et des “scènes” qui feraient sortir les personnages de l'Histoire pour les faire habiter le présent de la lecture:

Les médecins s'écartèrent d'un pas et [...] la sage-femme déplaça la lampe au-dessus

des cuisses de Marie. Elle sentit tout à coup un doigt rugueux sur l'endroit innommable d'où coule le sang [. . .], elle vit la main s'élever vers un visage [. . .], et elle entendit une voix dire: "*Virgo intacta. Probalite impuberaque.*"

"Elle sentit . . . vit . . . entendit": voilà le récit historique à l'état pur qui fait l'esquisse d'une série d'"aventures" plutôt qu'il ne les raconte. On en sort avec l'impression d'avoir lu un roman peu "écrit," un récit en attente d'une narration, une histoire inachevée. Peu romanesque, contrariant notre sens de l'Histoire, *Marie Carduner, Fille du Roy* remplit mal le double pacte du "roman historique."

Tout autre est le deuxième roman de René Boulanger, *Les Feux de Yamachiche*. Renouant avec les pulsions originales du roman historique au Québec, il s'agit de faire revivre un passé aux dimensions héroïques d'où sortira inéluctablement un présent dont il est à la fois la mémoire et la continuation. Ici, l'Histoire fait place à "l'imaginaire ancestral". Sur fond de la guerre ("tragique") de la Conquête, le récit "ressuscite la magie du rêve comme façon d'échapper à la résignation."

Il s'agit pourtant moins d'une résurrection que des naissances, dont celle d'un héros original, le "prêtre-guerrier." Joachim, de nom significatif, fuit son passé en Normandie pour devenir missionnaire auprès des Indiens en Nouvelle-France où il poursuit son tourment, son expiation, son martyre et sa sanctification. Personnage surhumain, Joachim est à la fois ivrogne, cœur de bois, de jupons et Saint. Rappelé de sa mission, il s'établit à Yamachiche avec son jeune fils Alexis, dont la mère indienne est morte. Là, il s'éprendra d'Anne, la seigneuresse, elle aussi guerrière et martyre. Joachim lui apprendra que l'amour est un sacrement; remplissant leur destinée éponymique, Joachim et Anne, à l'image des parents de la Vierge Marie, donneront naissance à "une nouvelle humanité."

Le roman évoque le versant populaire du

conflit franco-britannique, sans doute trop fixé dans notre imaginaire sur les affrontements militaires professionnels. Non seulement paysans et Indiens mais surtout femmes et enfants lutteront et seront massacrés, pendus et violés par les Anglais et... cannibalisés par leurs alliés indiens. Si l'alliance anglo-indienne sème la mort, la fusion franco-indienne fait naître un nouveau monde magique: une résistance commune aux Anglais ouvre aux deux peuples les portes d'un même Ciel qui doit plus aux traditions païennes que chrétiennes. A l'Anglais diabolique répond une sorte de divinité sauvage dont une nouvelle génération salvatrice sera née, fruit d'un métissage autant spirituel que charnel. L'atmosphère est à la fois épique, mystique et fantastique: bêtes diaboliques et visions prophétiques visitent les personnages; une apothéose apocalyptique, une descente victorieuse aux enfers clôtrent un récit à la fois didactique et prophétique, qui ne se refuse ni à l'engagement ni à la grandiloquence:

[Alexis] était devenu le prince d'un nouvel empire dont la capitale ne pouvait être Paris, mais son cœur révolté qui dirigerait la lutte des hommes assoiffés de liberté. Alexis serait à la fois baume et glaive, tribun et guerrier, politique et organisateur. Fils de Joachim et de Ishekeguën, dernier d'une antique race et premier d'une nouvelle...

*Les Feux de Yamachiche* imagine un passé mythique générateur d'un avenir idéal dont le présent fait douter: "Une rumeur, un chant traversaient l'Amérique. Toutes conquêtes s'effaceraient un jour sous l'action de la mémoire. La renaissance des peuples opprimés s'annonçait universelle." Plus prophétique est la toute dernière phrase du roman qui annonce une victoire "réelle" et donc bien moins ambitieuse que celle de la "renaissance des peuples opprimés": "Joachim prit le bras d'Anne, enceinte d'une nouvelle humanité, et descendit [...], suivi d'Alexis et de ses gens: les gardiens du rêve, les fils

de la révolte. Car encore peuvent se dire ces mots dans la langue des Francs.”

Prêtre-guerrier, ivrogne, coureur de jupons, l'Homme-étoile pour les Indiens, Saint, voire Père d'une nouvelle Humanité, voilà l'incarnation d'un passé que la tradition ne s'est pas encore permis d'inventer. Il manquait sans doute au roman historique de renaître dans l'au-delà.

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## Travaux de recherche

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### Daniel Mativat

*Le Métier d'écrivain au Québec (1840-1900)*  
*Pionniers, nègres ou épiciers des lettres?* Tryptique  
 n.p.

### Lori Saint-Martin

*Lectures contemporaines de Gabrielle Roy*  
*Bibliographie analytique des études critiques*  
 (1978-1997). Boréal n.p.

Reviewed by Réjean Beaudoin

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L'étude de Daniel Mativat résulte d'une vaste recherche sur le statut des écrivains et les conditions matérielles de leur travail, du milieu jusqu'à la fin du siècle dernier. L'ouvrage représente une contribution majeure au domaine, aujourd'hui très fouillé, de la sociologie de la littérature québécoise. Non seulement l'information rassemblée est considérable, soigneusement présentée et méthodologiquement réfléchie, mais la langue du chercheur est précise, alerte et lisible. L'analyse couvre plus d'un demi-siècle au cours duquel apparaissent et se développent les premiers rouages d'une institution littéraire qui cherche son autonomie relative dans un contexte fort différent du milieu parisien qui sert de modèle aux théories des systèmes de production des biens symboliques, c'est-à-dire des textes littéraires. Entre l'Acte d'Union et le début du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle, le Canada français n'a pas grand chose en commun avec le monde littéraire français. Daniel Mativat a judicieusement ajusté son outillage conceptuel pour

l'adapter au corpus québécois. S'il utilise les travaux de Pierre Bourdieu, Jacques Dubois et Alain Viala, parmi d'autres, il met aussi à profit les chercheurs québécois qui ont balisé le terrain (Belleau, Robert, Brunet et Lamonde, par exemple).

Le livre se divise en trois parties qui correspondent en gros aux fondements théoriques de la sociologie de la littérature, à l'ébauche du portrait type de l'écrivain de l'époque, statistiques à l'appui, et à l'évolution de la reconnaissance publique de la littérature au siècle des Garneau, Fréchette, Tardivel et Buies. L'une des questions traitées tout au long de l'enquête, comme son titre l'annonce, est celle de la professionnalisation du métier d'écrivain au Québec. La question soulève une série d'interrogations complexes. Comment le champ littéraire se distingue-t-il peu à peu au sein du marché du livre canadien?

Quelle part occupe la production locale, en librairie comme en bibliothèque? Comment les lents progrès de l'alphabétisation scolaire jouent-ils progressivement dans la circulation générale des imprimés? Quels sont les coûts de production du livre, ses tirages et ses réseaux de distribution? Comment se répartissent les responsabilités entre les différents agents impliqués? Et surtout, qu'est-ce que les auteurs tirent de leur travail en termes de prestige et de rémunération? En somme, les écrivains sont situés dans un espace global qui met en jeu l'ensemble de la société.

Le profil sociologique de l'écrivain québécois de l'époque représente un homme d'âge mûr, père de cinq enfants, vivant en milieu urbain, mais proche de ses origines terriennes. Il pratique souvent le journalisme et finit ses jours dans la fonction publique. Peu d'hommes de lettres tirent un revenu important de leur plume. Les exceptions se nomment Chauveau, Casgrain, Faucher de Saint-Maurice ou Fréchette, dont la prolixité se double du génie des affaires, mais ce dernier trait n'ex-

clut pas toujours le trafic d'influence. Ces vedettes n'hésitent pas à profiter des rapports privilégiés qu'elles entretiennent avec les politiciens disposés à seconder leur ambition littéraire. Beaucoup d'intellectuels cumulent les rôles à la manière de l'homme-orchestre, mais le succès ne sert pas nécessairement la fortune personnelle du créateur. Consacré poète national, couronné par l'Académie française, membre de la Société royale et omniprésent sur toutes les tribunes patriotiques, le fastueux Louis Fréchette laisse autant de dettes que de biens à ses héritiers. C'est avec beaucoup de pertinence que Daniel Mativat parle du double statut de l'écrivain québécois. On peut donc être l'auteur reconnu d'une oeuvre irremplaçable et s'éteindre dans l'indigence, comme Octave Crémazie et François-Xavier Garneau, car il n'existe "aucune corrélation automatique entre la prédominance sociale, la supériorité intellectuelle, le génie créateur, la richesse financière ou l'ancienneté."

Avant la toute fin du siècle, il n'y a pas de différence qui tienne entre poètes, historiens, romanciers, journalistes et éveilleurs de conscience nationale. Ceux qui prennent la plume pratiquent en général plusieurs genres. La fonction d'éditeur n'est pas encore nettement délimitée dans une activité diffuse où la division du travail tarde à s'imposer: de l'impression à la distribution, de la rédaction à l'édition, l'auteur s'occupe de toutes les besognes et en assume les frais la plupart du temps. Puisque seuls les journaux rejoignent un lectorat important, les livres sont rares et chers. Par conséquent, ce sont les patrons de presse qui disposent du capital à investir dans les innovations technologiques (presses à vapeur, rotatives, électrification) qui augmentent les tirages et rabattent les coûts de production.

Le principal véhicule éditorial de la littérature, au milieu du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle, réside dans la presse périodique. L'essor du journalisme entraîne son progrès croissant, si

bien que la tendance à la concentration des entreprises finit par dicter des normes médiatiques à l'expression littéraire: "Feuilletons bâclés, récits de voyage pastichant les classiques du genre, poèmes de circonstance, contes fantastiques soigneusement expurgés de toute déviance et de tout élément vraiment subversif, nouvelles d'un moraliste larmoyant, bluettes des premières rubriques féminines, voilà en gros la place qu'occupe désormais la littérature dans la grande presse." Cette denrée inégale provient largement de la reproduction illicite de sources françaises outrageusement pillées. Le piratage est de pratique courante et la propriété intellectuelle systématiquement ignorée. La situation de l'écrivain canadien-français qui évolue dans cette situation n'a rien d'enviable.

L'un des maillons clé de la chaîne institutionnelle repose évidemment sur la librairie. Or celle-ci semble l'un des éléments les plus lents à s'organiser. Vers 1860, alors que les revues littéraires et les associations culturelles se ramifient, le commerce du livre est si rudimentaire qu'il ressemble à un magasin général de produits d'importation. On y trouve des vins fins, des vêtements de luxe et des articles de piété. La littérature ne représente qu'une proportion infime des livres pratiques, savants ou religieux, presque tous imprimés en France. La clientèle ne dépasse jamais quelques milliers d'acheteurs, dont le clergé constitue plus de la moitié, l'autre moitié consistant dans la petite bourgeoisie professionnelle et industrielle. Ces lecteurs sont dispersés sur un territoire grand comme le tiers de l'Europe. Les rares collectionneurs commandent à Paris. Dans de telles circonstances, la faillite des frères Crémazie, à Québec, n'est que la pointe visible de l'iceberg.

L'état des bibliothèques semble encore plus déplorable, car la censure ecclésiastique maintient le réseau dans une sorte d'anémie complète en appliquant les

proscriptions romaines de l'Index. On connaît l'histoire tristement célèbre de l'Institut canadien. L'écrivain du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle canadien-français travaille dans un contexte hostile à la circulation du livre. Les obstacles sont de tous les côtés. Même les développements positifs qui, au tournant de siècle, créent tardivement un semblant de marché pour la littérature nationale ne jouent pas en faveur des auteurs. Quelques libraires-imprimeurs-éditeurs s'emparent du livre scolaire, seul créneau où la production littéraire trouve enfin une modeste place au soleil, grâce aux livres offerts en prix aux élèves. C'est quand même ce mécénat gouvernemental, exercé sous la vigilance du clergé, qui assure la légitimation d'une poignée d'auteurs promus au rang de "classiques" dans les écoles et les collèges de la province.

Le livre de Lori Saint-Martin et de son équipe appartient à une autre catégorie, celle des instruments de recherche. *Lectures contemporaines de Gabrielle Roy* rassemble les études critiques consacrées depuis vingt ans à l'oeuvre de la célèbre romancière. Cette bibliographie confirme, comme on s'en doutait, que l'écrivaine n'a pas cessé de nourrir l'intérêt des spécialistes. Ce que l'on savait peut-être moins, c'est que cet intérêt s'est accru sensiblement au cours de deux dernières décennies et qu'il dépasse largement les frontières du Canada. L'auteur de *Bonheur d'occasion* était déjà en bonne position parmi les écrivains canadiens les plus étudiés; son étoile ne semble pas sur le point de pâlir.

Précédée d'un essai critique qui décrit les travaux recensés, la bibliographie se divise en deux parties: les livres, qui comptent vingt-deux titres, suivis des articles et des chapitres d'ouvrages, qui totalisent plus de trois cent trente entrées. Chaque document fait l'objet d'un résumé sans jugement de valeur. Grâce à deux index, le lecteur peut retracer aisément les sujets traités et les approches méthodologiques utilisées. Enfin

deux annexes proposent deux choix d'articles: ceux qui peuvent servir d'introduction à l'oeuvre et ceux qui portent sur la littérature québécoise et qui mentionnent Gabrielle Roy.

Thèses, articles de journaux et comptes rendus ont été écartés. La justification du début de la période—1978—se fonde sur la clôture de la bibliographie de Paul Socken: "Gabrielle Roy: An Annotated Bibliography", R. Lecker et J. David (dir.), *The Annotated Bibliography of Canada's Major Authors* (Downsview, ECW Press, 1979, 213-261). On peut supposer que le travail de Lori Saint-Martin prétend à une certaine exhaustivité, bien que l'intention ne soit pas explicitement revendiquée. Chacun sait qu'aucun inventaire de cette nature ne peut s'assurer d'être absolument complet. J'ai tâché de découvrir des lacunes et j'en ai relevé quelques-unes, mais trois ou quatre oubliés sur quelques centaines de titres ne changent rien à la solidité de l'ouvrage qui constitue un outil très utile pour les professeurs, les étudiants et les chercheurs. L'utilisateur y trouve rapidement ce qu'il cherche. Les résumés qui rendent compte de chacune des entrées sont fidèles et strictement descriptifs.

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## Rough Passages

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**David W. McFadden**

*Great Lakes Suite*. Talonbooks \$29.95

Reviewed by Eric Henderson

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*Great Lakes Suite* is comprised of David McFadden's three previously published volumes, collectively recording circuits around lakes Erie, Huron and Ontario (with two more volumes promised for some indefinite date). More than ten years have elapsed since the publication of the last trip (Ontario, in 1988), and the books appear together for the first time—"edited, updated, revised, rewritten," according to the back cover. That McFadden feels deeply about

his mission is self-evident: as he puts it in "A Trip Around Lake Ontario," he is concerned with talking "randomly" with "interesting people who lived close to the lake, people who, although strangers to each other, were being touched in their lives by the presence of the lake and were therefore becoming of one tribe"; in "A Trip Around Lake Erie," McFadden speaks personally about Erie as his favourite lake and about his desire to give "evidence of these feelings at this point in the planet's history. That this is one of the ways consciousness felt about these lakes in the twentieth century, if that doesn't sound too terribly pretentious."

The tribal and cosmic claims, though, are misplaced. *Great Lakes Suite* is only peripherally about the lakes themselves, or even about the lake-dwellers; the third volume in particular is best read as the personal odyssey of a man who has lost his bearings and seeks to restore equilibrium to his artistic and personal life, a sense of creative renewal and, perhaps, even of dignity. If we read "A Trip Around Lake Ontario" in light of this vague but underlying intent, it emerges as a confessional narrative, a muted and mature groping toward the light of consciousness.

"A Trip Around Lake Erie" (1980) and "A Trip Around Lake Huron" (1980), however, are lesser works, informed by a disturbingly different spirit. When McFadden comes to write "A Trip Around Lake Ontario," he and his wife are divorced and his children are grown up. There is a poignancy in witnessing the older man attempt to reconstitute himself both as artist and lover. And McFadden, shorn of familial responsibilities, is, frankly, a better writer; liberated from the domestic shackles, he is free to indulge in the kind of intimate, gossipy exchange where he is most adept and engaging. McFadden's voice emerges most eloquently when he talks with poets about poetry or artistic fellowship, when he can revel in chatty, anecdotes of personal idiosyncrasies.

In *Great Lakes Suite* McFadden reveals a discerning eye for the idiosyncratic, for the freakish and the foolish, and he is led to seek out such exhibitions in his travels. These take such forms as a visit to the "World's Strangest Babies"—a collection of jars containing deformed embryos—and his fascination in general with human quirks and frailties. Unfortunately, his rarified sense of the exotic is largely untempered by any fund of sympathy. McFadden all too often indulges his feelings of superiority, particularly in his contacts with Americans. McFadden's anti-Americanism frequently manifests itself in petty and trite commentary. He sees virtually every American as obese, for example, and feels called on time and again to reiterate this "insight": "The fat people were out in force. Hundreds of them. In Canada everyone tries to keep as slim as possible. In the U.S.A. everyone tries to get as fat as possible. That's one of the many (subtle?) differences between the two countries. *Vive le difference [sic]!*" (98).

It is difficult to overlook such passages because they are symptomatic of McFadden's tendency to dismiss those marginalized beings who populate his vision. His contempt for these types is so palpable that it often leads him to miss opportunities to chronicle their colourful stories with a compassion tempered, perhaps, by irony. (Unfortunately, too, McFadden does not have a gift for rendering dialogue.) Such is the case with Caribou Jack from "A Trip Around Lake Huron," a "study in classic jealousy" whom McFadden seems to take excessive pleasure in exposing to ridicule.

Such insensitivity is endemic in the first two volumes where McFadden's anti-politically correct stance takes egregious forms. In one incident, McFadden contorts his face and body, pretending to suffer from muscular dystrophy in order to claim a discount at a McDonald's restaurant. Though relating the incident "embarrasses"

him, it is far from his only effort at demeaning others—most of them unacknowledged—including his wife at the time, Joan. It is odd that *Great Lakes Suite* should undergo such extensive revision and remain so pointedly offensive to the sensibilities of the late 1990s.

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## Reflections of the Rock

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**Don McNeill**

*Submariner's Moon*. Oberon \$15.95

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**Edward Riche**

*Rare Birds*. Doubleday Canada \$19.95

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**Patrick Kavanagh**

*Gaff Topsails*. Cormorant \$19.95

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Reviewed by Bryan N.S. Gooch

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These books all provide their readers with sensitive and engaging tales centring on life in Newfoundland. They weave into their tapestries not only a range of memorable characters and events but elements of the economic, geographical, and climatic challenges which have become so much a part of the Newfoundland legend. Yet, despite their regional focus, they all display a universality of appeal which should earn them attention and respect beyond provincial or national boundaries.

McNeill's *Submariner's Moon*, unlike the other two books, is a collection of six elegantly crafted stories, taking its title from the volume's third piece. Only in its final paragraph does this story come to focus on the term which holds such fearful connotations for those who recall the potential fate of vessels visible in the prying monacle of the stalking U-boat. However, the narratives are not about the undersea war, about torpedoes, explosions, oil slicks, and watery graves; rather, they deal largely with issues on land, with individuals, personal relations, and moments of sudden discovery. Death is one theme, certainly; illumination, more consistently, is another. War and

memories of war can provide, of course, a compelling focus; the first narrative, "Merrymeeting Road," centres on events leading to the death of Malcolm (Monk) Wallace of the justly famed Royal Newfoundland Regiment at Saill-Saillisel in World War One, a story in which superb handling of dialogue, fragments of letters, and vivid description make inescapable the situation of the ordinary soldier in the muck and terror of trench warfare. "Cosy," which follows, looks at the personal complications in the life of Cosy Lyall at the time of Charles Lindbergh's visit to Bay Bulls in 1933, his involvement with Nell Cluett (whom he marries) and the aggressive, irresponsible, and drunken reporter Loy Fleming who abandons Nell after fathering her first child. Even here, international conflict is not far away, whether it is a visit of Italian sailors and aviators to a regimental reception or the two-paragraph coda which brings one briefly to the harbour of St. John's in the days of World War Two. "Submariner's Moon" deals with a young man's coming to an understanding of death with the passing of his uncle, a veteran of the Regiment, while "How It Was Done in Old St. John's" looks at a boy's first sexual encounter with a prostitute. "A Passage to India" offers a touching and troubling account of the death of a globe-trotting reporter's mother. He had given Forster's novel to her in order to distress her (and her attending nuns) and is now unable to apologize for his cruelty. Difficult personal relations, among them a shabby forced wedding, a large formal one, and more than a modicum of alternative relations mark "Authentic Fires." More family conflicts and a letter suggesting illegitimacy, set against a background of St. John's and the southern outport scene, figure in "Boggers." Each of the stories displays a high level of emotional intensity and credibility; there is nothing flat about McNeill's work, and there are no weak moments,



though some readers might wish, on occasion, for less physical candour than the author provides.

Riche's novel *Rare Birds* offers rather different fare. It is a highly amusing, imaginative, suspense-filled romp through convolutions of events caused by a ruse, namely the putative sighting of Tasker's Sulphurous Duck, to draw patrons to the tables of David Purcell's failing restaurant, the Auk, located outside St. John's at Push Cove. The clever scheme is the creation of David's eccentric neighbour, mechanical wizard Alphonse Murphy, who is secretly developing a recreational submarine. The absence of David's wife, the potential for close-range romantic involvement, and the continuing efforts to keep prowlers away from Alphonse's clandestine technology keep the reader well connected to the narrative, though the splendid dishes which come from the Auk's kitchen and vintage wines which emerge from the cellar prompt a competing notion that one indulge in at least one memorable repast. This is, indeed, a book which is really hard to put down. Riche is an experienced writer for stage, radio, and screen—the practiced hand shows clearly in the control of pace, dialogue, and description. *Rare Birds* is a smash, and it is a first novel. More, please.

And may we have *more*, please, from Patrick Kavanagh, whose *Gaff Topsails*, also a first novel, is also a genuine winner. Looking at the events of the Feast of St. John the Baptist (24 June) in 1948 in a Conception Bay outpost town, near to which an iceberg has grounded, Kavanagh takes one through the activities of a wide range of citizens culminating in the traditional evening bonfire and the romance of Michael Barron. He also evokes the sights, sounds, and smells of the town, the country, the coastline, and the sea, as well as the long history of settlement and often precarious existence. The story of the day is the binding motif of Kavanagh's extensive and beautifully inte-

grated design. His descriptions are stunning and magical, and his characters are convincing and reachable. Here is virtue and fallibility, cruelty and compassion, death and renewal in nature and in human existence perched dangerously on the edge of the Rock; in the background are the heights of Gaff Topsails and the occasional wail of a steam locomotive's whistle from the now abandoned and much lamented Newfoundland railway. At 400 pages, this is not a quick read, but it is an enjoyable one. The portraits of characters like the village priest Father MacMurrough, young Kevin Barron, or the old, alcoholic lightkeeper Johnny the Light remain firmly in the mind. This book provides a narrative of grand dimensions with brilliant results.

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## The Gut of Fiction

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**Brian Moore**

*The Magician's Wife*. Random House of Canada  
\$32.95

**Denis Sampson**

*Brian Moore: The Chameleon Novelist*.  
Doubleday Canada \$34.95

Reviewed by Kerry McSweeney

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In 1985, Brian Moore, then in his sixty-fifth year, remarked that "As I've become older I've become interested in different forms of writing. I've discovered that the narrative forms—the thriller and the journey form—are tremendously powerful. They're the gut of fiction." Embracing both narrative forms, *The Magician's Wife* is the sixth novel Moore published after this *virage*. Like the others—*Black Robe*, *The Colour of Blood*, *Lies of Silence*, *No Other Life*, and *The Statement*—it also has a political and ideological dimension.

And like *Black Robe* it is a historical novel. The setting is France and Algeria in 1856. Henri Lambert, the greatest magician in the former *pays*, is summoned to Napoleon

III's country palace at Compiègne. He is asked by the Emperor himself to aid in the subjugation of Algeria by travelling there and displaying his magical powers to the native population, in the hope that doing so will undermine the influence of Bou-Aziz, the charismatic religious leader said to possess miraculous powers.

Once Lambert and his wife leave Algiers to journey to remote desert locations, a good deal of suspense and excitement are generated, and the climactic scenes are handled with the professional skill one expects of Moore. So is the period detail in the French half of the novel and the travelogue mode of the Algerian half. The elaborate social rituals at Compiègne are a bit of a costume drama, but this is appropriate for these staged events that the Emperor has performed for the benefit of his guests. And the quality of Moore's understated prose makes the copious descriptions of Algerian places and peoples different in quality, if not in kind, from the local-colour, tourist-eye filler found in best-sellers.

Inevitably, there were trade-offs involved in Moore's decision to renew his career by using popular fictional forms. The most serious of them concerns character. As Moore has explained, in the kind of novel he has chosen to write "you must sacrifice character for plot." *The Magician's Wife* is told from the point of view of its title character, Emmeline, who undergoes a process of dislocation and destabilization leading to a life-crisis in which she feels as if "she had been slipped out from her body, leaving it null." The precipitates of this slippage are closely interwoven with the narrative: her distaste for the blood sports and social routines at Compiègne, including Mass in the Emperor's private chapel; and her growing disgust with the *Realpolitik* of French colonial administrators in Algeria in comparison with the moral and spiritual dignity of Bou-Aziz.

But in essence, what happens to Emmeline

is what happens to the central characters of most of Moore's previous novels. One cares about Judith Hearne, Diarmuid Devine, Ginger Coffey, Mary Dunne, Fergus Fadden, Sheila Redden, and other Moore protagonists because the inner lives of these fully developed characters are the principal subject of the novels in which they appear. In contrast, it is hard to take much interest in Emmeline's predictable and lightly sketched *crise*, especially when so much that is exciting is going on around her.

Moore's novels have been the subject of a number of critical studies. What Denis Sampson offers in *Brian Moore: The Chameleon Novelist* is the first "critical biography." The outlines of Moore's life have long been known from interviews and his occasional prose, and by inference from novels with obvious autobiographical elements like *The Emperor of Ice Cream* and *Fergus*. Sampson's book adds a good deal of detail to the outline. I found particularly interesting the information concerning Moore's home life during childhood; his relations with other writers, including Mordecai Richler, Graham Greene and Brian Friel (and with Alfred Hitchcock); and the genesis and composition of the novels, including the literary influences on them. All this material is ably assembled and presented by Sampson, who has performed a most useful service for anyone interested in Moore's distinguished career as a novelist.

Sampson's book is nonetheless disappointing. The reason is not what it leaves out so much as what is offered in its place. I take Sampson's point when he speaks of his "freedom" being "circumscribed" by the right of people still living to keep private "controversial or painful episodes in [their] personal lives." But he goes on to say that he "had to learn to recognize the patterns in a life that offer more significant kinds of truth than those particular details not available to me. The absence [that is, non-availability] of documents or

of personal confessions forced me to trust my imagination. . . .”

In this context, “imagination” can only mean penetrating critical scrutiny of Moore’s novels. But Sampson’s “critical biography” is not critical. Moore’s own point of view on his works and his valuations of them are accepted and parveyed throughout. In some places, indentation is the only indication that Sampson is no longer paraphrasing Moore but directly quoting from him. And much of the critic’s own commentary is belletristic. Of *The Doctor’s Wife*, for example, one is told that “Moore called on his old strength for female characterization . . . Moore’s deep commitment to realism denies his fictional heroine a romantic outcome . . . the opening engages the reader’s attention with its sly recall of Moore’s career as a writer of thrillers, but soon gives way to etc.”

G. K. Chesterton once observed that “Either criticism is no good at all (a very defensible position) or else criticism means saying about an author the very things that would have made him jump out of his boots.” As with other recent biographies of living Canadian writers, Sampson’s book leaves its subject’s feet fully shod and firmly on the ground.

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## Hearing Voices

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**Cecilia Morgan**

*Public Men and Virtuous Women: The Gendered Languages of Religion and Politics in Upper Canada, 1791-1850.* U of Toronto P \$55.00/\$18.95

**Carl Ballstadt, Elizabeth Hopkins, and Michael A. Peterman, eds.**

*I Bless You in My Heart: Selected Correspondence of Catharine Parr Traill.* U of Toronto P \$39.95

Reviewed by Klay Dyer

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The sixth book in University of Toronto Press’s series of Studies in Gender and History, Cecilia Morgan’s *Public Men and Virtuous Women* seems positioned by virtue of its explicit theoretical affiliations

to contribute to the ongoing re-examination of Canada’s still misty past by way of what Mariana Valverde has described as post-structuralist gender histories. As Morgan elucidates in her introduction, such explorations attempt “to bring together the insights of both feminist history and post-structuralist thought in order to delineate the ways in which gender informed particular discourses,” as well as to bridge what Tina Loo describes as the “gulf of discourse” that has traditionally separated the empiricist “island” of Canadian historiography “from the larger sea of social history” and contemporary theory.

Resisting the simple binaries that many feminist historians recognize as the foundationalist and paradigmatic baggage informing explorations of women and gender, Morgan builds each of her five chapters around specific constellations of political and cultural events, prominent and less prominent figures, and emerging and evolving cultural tropes. In her engaging opening chapter, for instance, she uses events from the War of 1812 to explore gendered constructions of patriotism and loyalty as they came to be represented by such familiar figures as John Strachan and Sir Isaac Brock. These densely coded constructions, Morgan argues, were easily absorbed into a Loyalist culture that naturally privileged such enduring images of masculine virtue as the “protecting husband and father” and the “Christian soldier,” that is, images that reinforced patriotism “as an affirmation of male activities and manly virtues.” Subsequent, somewhat uneven chapters deal with the discourses of political debate (Robert Gourlay and constructions of “manliness”) and evangelical religion (Methodism and the family). Morgan dedicates her two final chapters to what might be broadly defined as the role of gender in shaping public and private behaviours, most obviously through the various codes of conduct that permeated

Upper Canadian society; these latter chapters are the least focused and by extension the least successful in the book, a reflection perhaps of what Morgan calls the “thesis-to-book process.”

Ambitious and generally well written, *Public Men and Virtuous Women* ultimately falls short when read alongside theoretically like-minded histories by Valverde or Constance Backhouse for a number of reasons. The first is Morgan’s somewhat clumsy attempts at relating the (dis)continuities and (in)consistencies of the gendered discourses of religion and politics to the vaster circuitry of discursive practices that they inevitably brushed up against in Upper Canada, specifically the discourses of race, class, and colonialism. As Morgan recognizes, “examining the discourses of gender in Upper Canada” can and does “illuminate links” between subjects that are “often . . . enmeshed and mutually dependent”; but to acknowledge that gender “can serve as a window through which other systems of power may be glimpsed” is but an early step toward the full interrogation of these mutual dependencies. Confronted with the ubiquitous and multilayered term “lady,” with missionary writings about indigenous cultures, or with the presence and writing of abolitionist Mary Ann Camberton Shadd, Morgan too often collapses such potential openings, choosing simply to reiterate the self-evident (“the term ‘ladies’ was as imbued with assumptions about status, class, and race, as it was with ones of gender”) or to develop discussions that never question vigorously the multivalent implications of such discursive constructions in the various relations of power shaping Upper Canadian culture. However well intentioned such broadening enquiries might be, the discussions of class and race that punctuate this study rarely attain the level of rigorous and detailed consideration they demand and deserve.

An even more troubling *lacuna* given that

this book is at its core a historical study is the inadequate attention paid to Egerton Ryerson, a patently public man whose rise to prominence parallels neatly the cultural and discursive formations at the heart of Morgan’s book. An influential member of the Methodist Episcopal Church whose much-publicized forays against Strachan placed him at the centre of Methodism in Upper Canada (the focus of Morgan’s third chapter), he was also a founding editor of the *Christian Guardian* (from which she often cites), an important figure in the Reform cause (chapter two), and one of the most powerful figures in early Canadian education. Indeed, Ryerson’s determined alignment of education with moral edification seems ideally suited for detailed consideration within Morgan’s fourth chapter, “Manners, Mores, and Moral Behavior,” yet his name appears only twice in the whole of this cognomen-filled and well-indexed study, once simply by way of supporting a brief discussion of newspaper editor Francis Collins. Although I agree wholeheartedly with the theoretical impulse shaping this study, as well as with Morgan’s assertion that there has been a tendency among some poststructuralist historians “to use historical evidence cavalierly and without careful consideration of the importance of context,” it is difficult to understand how her own strategies, producing as they do a book with such an obvious oversight or erasure, can raise an effective and rigorous challenge to either poststructuralist cavalierism or to those islanders whose voices continue to beckon from the shoals of empiricist historiography.

Anyone familiar with *Letters of a Lifetime* (1985) and *Letters of Love and Duty* (1993)—the two books of Moodie correspondence co-edited by the troika of Ballstadt, Hopkins, and Peterman—will quickly recognize in *I Bless You in My Heart* the same significant strengths and persistent weakness shaping this selection of correspon-

dence of Catharine Parr Traill.

As was the case with the earlier volumes, the production values for this UTP publication are consistently high and the scholarly apparatus first-rate. Drawn from nearly 500 extant letters, the 136 missives included here have been selected, quite astutely, with an eye toward avoiding unnecessary repetitions while ensuring “reasonable coverage of the many personal and professional aspects” of Traill’s careers as “mother, pioneer, writer, and botanist.” This selection is arranged comfortably according to three “periods” of Traill’s long life, each section defined by a pithy subtitle lifted from one of her letters: 1830-59 (“The changes and chances of a settler’s life,” 37 letters), 1860-1884 (“The poor country mouse,” 39 letters), and 1885-99 (“The sight of green things is life to me,” 60 letters). Each division is introduced by a biographical essay that is immaculately detailed (at times, almost to the point of overwhelming the letters that follow) and thoroughly annotated. Taking into consideration the chronology, genealogies, archival photographs and illustrations, map, and index that grace this volume, the reader can have few reservations about the care and scholarship that have gone into building this volume.

Less careful, though, is the editors’ tendentious construction of Traill as “an important Canadian heroine.” Leaving the broader cultural and theoretical issues for debate in other forums (why heroine and not female hero, for instance?), such a determined effort means, most obviously, that we never get a real sense of Traill’s relationship with her husband, Thomas. Instead, one is left with the troubling impression that Traill’s partner, like J.W.D. Moodie before him, is written into this text solely in service of a vision of his wife’s heroic perseverance, and of an image of a woman willing to stand beside a man “whose strength,” the editors seem eager to press, “was so noticeably less than her own.” Despite this irritant, *I Bless*

*You in My Heart* will join its predecessors on bookshelves as a well-thumbed and much appreciated pedagogical and research tool.

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## Artful Pros

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**Joan Murray**

*Tom Thomson: The Last Spring*. Dundurn P \$34.99

**Tom Smart**

*The Art of Mary Pratt: The Substance of Light*.  
Goose Lane Editions \$50.00

**Michelle Facos**

*Nationalism and the Nordic Imagination: Swedish Art of the 1890s*. U California P US\$50.00

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Reviewed by Shannon Bagg

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Despite a shared focus on the visual arts, these texts have little in common, especially in terms of scope, approach, and level of critical analysis.

Over the past twenty years, art historian Joan Murray has produced several texts and exhibitions about the life and work of legendary Canadian artist, Tom Thomson. In her latest book, Murray examines a series of paintings that—according to the author’s research—was completed over the course of the spring of 1917, during the last months of Thomson’s life. Having found thirty-eight out of a likely forty works still in existence, Murray presents the various oil sketches of Algonquin Park in what she believes is rough chronological order, to show how the artist captured “the stages of the advancing season.” Although the narrow focus of the book would seem to allow for more in-depth analysis of artwork than is usual with a monograph, *The Last Spring* provides little by way of serious art historical inquiry. Instead, the book pays tribute to the artist’s *genius* through an anecdotal (and somewhat confusing) account of his life.

Ill-suited for readers who are unfamiliar with Tom Thomson’s artwork as well as his mysterious and untimely death in the summer of 1917, *The Last Spring* is premised on the notion that the artist died in his prime.

Repeated allusions to Thomson as poised at the threshold of something new and exciting in the spring of 1917 reinforce this sentiment. Notwithstanding the author's obvious enthusiasm for her subject matter, the celebratory tone of the text, at times, proves almost too much, as in: "[Thomson's] best work is an unusual mixture of gorgeous colour, newly minted imagery, and remarkable sections of passionately applied paint." Regrettably, since Murray fails to move beyond this level of criticism in her discussion of the oil sketches, scholars are likely to overlook the original research and archival material that the book does contain. The most notable aspect in this respect is the inclusion of inscriptions from the backs of works, excerpts from letters describing images, and the author's justification for assigning certain dates alongside many of the reproductions.

Tom Smart's book is a well-rounded study of New Brunswick artist Mary Pratt. Published in conjunction with an exhibition of the same name at the Beaverbrook Art Gallery, the text explores Pratt's artwork within the context of her biography. Smart traces the artist's life from her privileged upbringing in Fredericton in the 1930s and 1940s, through the years she spent at Mount Allison under the tutelage of Alex Coleville, Lawren P. Harris, and Ted Pulford, to her long and rather strained marriage to fellow artist Christopher Pratt. Consideration is given to many of the barriers that Pratt faced as a female artist and as a mother of four, including being overshadowed for many years by her husband's success and being pigeonholed for painting domestic subject matter such as the family dinner table and food in various stages of preparation. As Robert Fulford, quipped: "[Pratt] wants to be . . . the visual poet of the kitchen."

In addition to the artist's life story, Smart offers an examination of how Pratt moved from an impressionist style of painting to a photo-realist approach by adopting the

practice of projecting 35mm slides onto blank canvases and then painstakingly eliminating traces of brushstrokes while painting. Many of the slides used by the artist are reproduced in the book along with her paintings. This feature of *The Art of Mary Pratt* not only allows readers to compare the original idea with the finished work, but also helps demonstrate the otherwise indescribable quality of light that served to inspire each piece. Although Pratt has claimed that the play of light on objects is an "erotic experience" and that her subjects give her "a bit of a kick," Smart's persistent characterization of the artist's work as somehow sexual is unconvincing. Additional statements by the artist, as well as a fuller explanation of the reasoning behind such an interpretation, would lend strength to the author's case.

Developed from a dissertation, Facos's book is a well-researched and well-written examination of the artwork of the National Romantic movement in Sweden at the end of the nineteenth century. Focused on an era in which art and politics were interwoven, the book explores how a wave of Swedish artists who once upheld Parisian art as their model came to idealize Sweden and to embrace the National Romantic goal of promoting "a national identity by preserving indigenous culture, traditions, and values." In their effort to transform Swedish society according to principles of freedom and equality, these artists, in turn, had a profound effect on the very character of Swedish art. Although the author gives credit to both generations of National Romantic artists for their contribution to the success of social democracy in Sweden, she ultimately concludes that "National Romantic painting triumphed because it mirrored the aspirations of its generation and because a network of powerful politicians, collectors, writers, and critics promoted it."

Since there is only a small amount of literature about Swedish art history that is

available in English, this book represents an important step toward broadening the understanding and appreciation of Swedish art in countries such as Canada, the United States, and Britain. Beyond presenting a new and interesting topic, Facos's book features artwork that is, for the most part, completely unfamiliar to audiences outside of Sweden. For this reason, however, the limited number of colour reproductions in the text is particularly disappointing. Moreover, readers may find that while it offers a thorough analysis of the decade preceding the National Romantic painters' rise to prominence, including the greater social and political environment in Europe at the time, a relatively small portion of the book is actually devoted to the 1890s. However, the discrepancy may have more to do with the appropriateness of the title of Facos's book than with the value of the study itself.

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## Shake, Rattle, and Roll

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**W.H. New**

*Borderlands: How we talk about Canada.* UBC P \$49.95/\$19.95

**Reinhold Kramer**

*Scatology and Civility in the English-Canadian Novel.* U Toronto P \$50.00

**Kieran Keohane**

*Symptoms of Canada: An Essay on the Canadian Identity.* U Toronto P \$40.00/\$18.95

Reviewed by Jon Kertzner

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Here are three books offering paradigms to express the paradox of Canadian sociability by locating it figuratively along the line, beyond the pale, and in the midst.

W.H. New asks in his subtitle how we talk about Canada, and his three linked essays, originally delivered as lectures at UBC, sound like a good conversation. Polished, anecdotal, addressing a general reader, they show how borders act as "metaphors of relationship and organization" to envision

Canada "as a place that *includes*, a place that *excludes*, as a place *divided*, as a place that *distributes* resources and power, and as a place that embraces some ongoing principle of *boundary negotiation*." New counters to Abraham Lincoln's warning that "a house divided cannot stand" by insisting that the Canadian house must cherish its divisions. His exploration of this spatial paradigm will offer few surprises to readers of *Canadian Literature*, but his argument is clear and concise, and as one would expect from New, it is always witty, knowledgeable, and western in its orientation. Jack Hodgins is his favourite boarder in the house of fiction. The first essay explores the ramifications of borderland rhetoric; the second examines how a communally-minded Canada positions itself alongside the more individualistic United States; the third offers an entertaining account of the "pig war" (the dispute over the San Juan Islands that redrew the Canada-US border) to illustrate contrasting views of civility, which for New is the highest virtue.

Drawing on a range of authors, New shows how borders serve as ambiguous metaphors that mark power relations, that define the permeable limits of selfhood and nationhood, and that permit a venturing forth from the known into the unknown and the unknowable. As critic he walks along this same line, sympathizing with rival theoretical positions (nationalist, feminist, post-colonial, ethnic) but agreeing completely with none of them. If he occasionally seems to rise above the fray—something his own paradigm forbids, since it permits no such lordly perspective—ultimately he admits that there is no cozy solution to the fractiousness of Canadian culture, because that culture is built on borderlines which, by their very nature, create factions. In effect he endorses a paradoxical motto once used as a title by Gary Geddes: *divided we stand*. Both as citizen and critic, New wants to inhabit ambiguity

without being made giddy by it. However, his sense of Canadian sociability is so generous, and his gentlemanly deconstructions are so reasonable, that he is never in danger of losing his critical balance. Indeed, it is a relief to see him lose his temper at exclusive attitudes, whether from the political left or right, which energize themselves through scorn and refuse to negotiate over their own tight borders.

Reinhold Kramer looks beyond the pale by analysing all that is rejected and abjected, that is, the cultural excreta that societies cast off in disgust but subconsciously desire. He heeds Christie Logan's advice in Laurence's novel, *The Diviners*: "By their garbage shall ye know them"; or perhaps he has been consulting the oracular compost heap from "Fraggle Rock," as well as critics like Bakhtin, Kristeva, Foucault, Stallybrass and White. Scatology expresses the baseness of life that is also the basis of life. Filth, flesh, animals, disease, immigrants, polluted women, "the British fucking empire"—all inspire loathing that turns into desire for a fierce and redemptive vitality. All provoke a dialectic of body and spirit that doubles back on itself to confound the antithesis by proposing a new sociability, laden with materiality and far more messy than the kind defended by New. Civility has a dirty secret.

Kramer reveals the value of scatology by piecing together an argument in which selected authors employ a sequence of literary modes (mimetic, allegorical, parodic) through which repudiation is followed by recognition, recuperation, and finally a sceptical undoing of the binaries (self/other, mind/matter, healthy/diseased, purity/taboo) on which the whole process is based. This is a familiar deconstructive pattern, here transplanted to the nightsoil of the imagination. Kramer cites many works—but mostly novels from the last thirty years—to build his case, with the result that they all contribute to one grand

story of cultural formation, deformation and conflicted reformation. This is a neat argument, but the price of neatness is that the novels forfeit their individuality, since all are relevant only in so far as they confirm Kramer's thesis. They also lose their local specificity: it is not clear why he limits attention to English-Canadian novels, since others could illustrate just as well what appears to be a universal cultural/psychological syndrome. There is another price that he is happy to pay. His argument is top-heavy with theory, as he brings an impressive array of critical sources (theology, anthropology, medicine, books of manners, the latest postmodern critiques) to bear on meagre material. For instance, a feeble joke about an outhouse in *As For Me and My House* prompts the interpretation: "Scatology can become credit in a post-Freudian economy of confession . . . when [Mrs. Bentley] acts as the Puritan and repeats the anal retentive joke against herself, she gains a materialist epistemology to subvert the older, no longer convincing respectability."

Following Kramer's logic, it would be a compliment to say that his book stinks. It is fun to read and full of nice insights. I admire the perceptiveness with which he digs through respectable texts with an eye to anything that might offend our noses. Ironically, he has trouble finding literature that reeks with the robustness of a Rabelais, a Pope or a Swift. Canadians are rather tame when it comes to crudity. We are usually "scato-humanists" like Robertson Davies, who revels in the Jungian dung heap, but always in a narrative voice so proper and professorial that his novels remain oddly unstained by their own philosophy. Even Leonard Cohen's *Beautiful Losers*, after unearthing diamonds in the shit, proclaims, "It is all diamond." I get the impression that Kramer longs to find at least one gross, Canadian, literary turd worthy of his theory.



If Kramer argues that all symbolic systems, including religion, literature and society, “constitute themselves on filth,” then Kieran Keohane treats such systems as symptoms of a reality forever absent. Of the three books under review, *Symptoms of Canada* is the most infatuated with paradox and *aporia*, in the midst of which Keohane seeks a Canadian sociability founded on friendship and a Heideggerian solicitude for the Other. He sifts through the aftermath of postmodernism, which he treats as a *fait accompli*, in order to forge an ethic “not grounded in transcendental, unified subjectivity, but rather in the wreckage of that subject, the split, incomplete, impossible subject who is condemned to work out its differences with the Other.” Canada is a wreck, an absent reality that can never be identified, only diagnosed in terms of characteristic patterns of enjoyment and theft. Theft is necessary since—following Lacan—enjoyment requires transgression: we desire only what we lack. But through the symptomatic forms of our lacking and longing, we discover who “we” are collectively. The Canadian cyborg refined by these post-structuralist fires is surprisingly similar to the more genteel figure in New’s pages. He/she/it is a vulnerable person who is preoccupied with endurance, committed to the community, tolerant and unpretentious, and who builds a safe space in an unruly world, a rumpus room is the current form of garrison. Keohane’s insistence on enjoyment as the primary psychological and cultural motive causes him to refigure traditional Canadian themes in ways that I do not find entirely convincing. For example, Atwood’s old theme of survival is reinvigorated, but now the struggle to survive is fun, because our encounter with nature has a “frosty, tingling eroticism” (“There are strange things done in the midnight sun”) so that even mosquitoes provide masochistic pleasure. Similarly Keohane adopts Frye’s image of

Canada as a leviathan swallowing Jonah, but adds that Frye failed to appreciate the “obscene enjoyment” of being consumed.

I like to think that Canadian literature forces critics to temper their theoretical fervour, which is liable to sound a trifle pretentious here. This book, like Kramer’s, is driven by a sophisticated theory and bolstered by an avalanche of references and quotations, whose interpretive momentum pushes it to make extravagant claims. Theorizing can also be a voracious leviathan. For example, according to Keohane the Canadian “eh” is far more than a careless idiom: “I think that we can locate in the ‘eh’ of the Canadian conversation a strong ethical commitment, a utopian moment that reaches out to the Other, openly and invitationally, an explicit acknowledgment of how Canada is unlimited, unfinished, and a commitment to keeping it unlimited. . . . The Canadian ‘eh’ is the key to understanding Canadian ethics. ‘Eh’ is the Canadian idiomatic way of designating *aporia*, the moment of discourse when interlocutors reach a gap . . . ‘eh’ is the return of the repressed in Canadian idiom. I think that in it one can locate a trace of desire for collective identity that persists against all the odds, as it were.”

Eh?

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## The Give and Take of Theory

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**Juliana Makuchi Nfah-Abbenyi**

*Gender in African Women’s Writing: Identity Sexuality and Difference.* Indiana UP \$14.95

Reviewed by Gloria Nne Onyeoziri

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African women’s “drum beat and war cry” can no longer be ignored; their voices and texts must be heard, and what they have to say must be taken seriously. This author invites us to consider how African women writers subvert gender and redefine the

contradictions inherent in gender relations by relocating feminist theories in an African literary context. Nfah-Abbenyi “interrogates” Western feminist theories of gender but also states clearly from the start that the theories grounding her arguments are mainly Western, since she is writing for a predominantly North American audience. She also remarks that “post-colonial” literary theories suggest methods based on Eurocentric thinking and biases, which imposes heavy responsibility on her in her critical reading of Bâ, Emecheta, Aidoo and Tlali, to name a few of the writers she treats here. Whose concept of “post-colonial” feminism is she using, given that these are terms she apparently cannot avoid, though it is her North American readers who impose them on her?

As a first step toward making these voices resonate with great impact, Nfah-Abbenyi refuses to encourage further fragmentation of African literature into linguistic camps and thus includes in her study anglophone and francophone writers, despite their different colonial and religious experiences. One of her goals in writing this book on the construction and reconstruction of gender is to let women’s voices be heard directly by quoting them generously. This is a dynamic representation of their writing, where most of their women characters come alive as speaking subjects and agents for change. As she explores various dimensions of gender—identity, sexuality and difference—Nfah-Abbenyi provides extensive documentation of conference themes, books, essays, interviews and articles connected with African women’s writing—their motivations, goals, tools and achievements. Her documents contain useful insights into opinions on African women writers as well as on dramatic changes in the literary scene, thereby highlighting both past and present. This shift shows how Black African women writers are aggressively breaking the silence imposed on them for a long time by a “racist

world and a sexist one.” Through rigorous analysis of the works, and especially of the most powerful statements, often from the female protagonists, Nfah-Abbenyi reveals how women seek to affirm their identity and subjectivity and to achieve social, political and artistic empowerment.

The author devotes much of her discussion to feminism, the formulation of which constitutes a major difference between African women writers and their Western counterparts. Statements from interviews with major women writers of Africa show that, although aware of their responsibility to paint a realistic picture of African women’s conditions, they wish to dissociate themselves from the concept of feminism as defined by Anglo-American women. To make their point clear, these women writers of Africa, while advocating a general solidarity for women, reject any form of cultural imperialism. They posit, reclaim and reaffirm the anteriority of an African feminism, one that can share with a Eurocentric feminist movement and at the same time teach something, since African feminism has always been grounded in lived experience.

Through this experience, African women writers bring out the complexities of gender politics, problematizing both the universal and particular aspects of women’s oppression. Nfah-Abbenyi maintains that the novels she studies are all in themselves theoretical texts. Their theory is embedded in the polymorphous nature of the narratives, and they foreground teleological, ontological and epistemological insights relevant to the specific histories and politics that precede the fictional texts. The theoretical foundation and framework of Werewere Liking’s fictional texts, for example, lie in Bassa oral tradition. Nfah-Abbenyi cites African and African-American theorists who insist on using indigenous Black principles of criticism to interpret African fictional works. She therefore reads the works of African women writers as “fic-

tionalized theories or theorized fictions”: Africans are receivers as well as makers of theory. Cultural tenets associated with social and sexual relationships should be considered in understanding texts by women writers of Africa and the contradictory gender roles they may depict. The issues involved are not usually separated, but problematized as different facets of women’s struggle against patriarchal oppression. A focus on multicultural dialogue and a shared search for areas of overlapping concerns will avoid reductive, negative feminist politics.

Concerning identity and difference, Nfah-Abbenyi contends that a critical reading of these fictionalized theories reveals that African women not only fluctuate between and within subject positions, but can redefine and reconstruct racial, cultural and historical difference in ways that undermine binary oppositions. Nfah-Abbenyi shows the thorny issue of women’s sexuality, involving the subjugation and appropriation of their bodies by men and patriarchal ideologies, to have always been a contested area. African women writers reinscribe other African women’s protests through fiction. Since the women for whom they speak are already fully aware of their predicament, they use writing to demand social changes through concerted efforts. For example, Mariama Bâ’s main message to Senegalese/African women and all women contains signals of how to take charge of their own destiny, refusing to be denied freedom or reduced to a depressive state, in order to disrupt predetermined patriarchal hierarchies. Bâ prescribes writing (which also implies reading) as a weapon that would reinscribe African women in ways that transgress and destroy hegemonic male representations. As a weapon, their writing is not only defensive (lamenting and criticizing), but also offensive, unabatedly invading the battlefield hitherto occupied and dominated by their

male counterparts. This commitment leads Nfah-Abbenyi to pay critical attention to what these women writers have to say about women’s solidarity. It is not a given; most of the writers problematize complexities and contradictions that are intricately linked.

Nfah-Abbenyi’s book is a major contribution to the theorizing of gender as redefined and reconstructed in texts by African women writers and analysed by an African woman literary critic. Because she identifies personally with the issues, the state of the literature is extremely well documented. Men and women critics are cited for a purpose and receive appropriate commentary on. The chosen texts are rigorously analysed in the light of Western feminist criticism. Some of her analyses expand on previous texts, but after examining other critics’ opinions, the author, in keeping with her goal, often draws persuasive personal conclusions.

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## Writing Traditions

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### Ato Quayson

*Strategic Transformations in Nigerian Writing: Orality and History in the Work of Rev. Samuel Johnson, Amos Tutuola and Ben Okri.* Indiana UP \$39.95

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Reviewed by Robert A. Miller

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Rather than setting out to demonstrate an organic continuity between twentieth-century African (specifically Nigerian) literature and oral traditions, which he shows to have been the dominant practice to date, Ato Quayson sees the use of traditional oral sources by modern authors in a different light. He views these traditions as conceptual resources taken up in a dynamic, ever-changing relationship with other forms of literary and cultural discourse. At the same time, key elements of oral tradition, such as liminality (the sense of an ambiguous world or passage between reality and the spiritual or mythopoeic realm), are not simply evoked and reproduced by writers, but are

reworked and even reconceptualized according to new strategies designed to create and concretize cultural and political identity. Thus the tradition of Yoruba culture, which Quayson adopts as a “partial and illustrative case” of these strategic transformations within the corpus of Nigerian literature, is at least to some extent the result of a “hundred years of vigorous and successful Yoruba cultural nationalism.” It is certainly to Quayson’s credit that he does not naively assume the existence of a monolithic Yoruba culture, while he does recognize, in the work of the authors studied, a tendency “towards perceiving a common heritage.” He explains how this perception results in attempts by various forms of written discourse at the “stabilization of flux in oral tradition.”

Samuel Johnson, author of *The History of the Yorubas* (completed 1897; published 1921), puts together various elements of traditional Yoruba historiography, such as praise-songs celebrating the deeds of past rulers, with the dual purpose of preserving the knowledge of Yoruba culture and of placing that knowledge “within Christian or foreign frameworks in order to construct a pan-Yoruba identity in the face of growing dissatisfaction with European colonial domination.” If Amos Tutuola, the second author studied, was often misunderstood in his early days, this misreading resulted from the fact that his attempt to express in writing “marginal forms” of “folkloric intuition” conflicted with the realistic mode that dominated African writing in the period preceding and immediately following the independence of modern African states. Tutuola adapted to writing, for example, a type of “ghostly” or “horror” story traditionally directed at children. Such stories were then read by “Western adults” as having “important messages for the adult world,” an interpretation which was, according to Quayson, “intolerable for an African intelligentsia eager to express

their capacity for rationalistic engagement with problems of the real world.” Despite this problem, Tutuola’s work remains important as an attempt (albeit unconscious) to re-articulate cultural values, an attempt reflected in the writing of both Soyinka and Okri. Wole Soyinka takes the heroic code and the notion of liminality, already prominent in Tutuola’s fiction, in order to express a sense of ambiguity and questioning in relation to traditional values as the socio-political implications of nationhood become a more and more central preoccupation for post-independence Nigerian writers. His play *Death and the King’s Horseman* (1975) “shows the lapse of the efficacy of the traditional culture because of the larger historical and political realities on the one hand and the weaknesses of the human self on the other as they conjoin to usurp the glory of cultural aspirations.” Nevertheless, Soyinka’s attempt to crystalize the tragic mode in the figure of Ogun, one of the gods of the Yoruba “pantheon,” reflects a key phase in the strategic formation of a progressive, politically aware and critical sense of Yoruba cultural traditions.

The choice of Ben Okri’s stories and of his novel *The Famished Road* (1991) for the last two chapters reflects Quayson’s awareness that cultural and ethnic boundaries in Nigerian writing are not clear-cut or impermeable, since Okri, while not of Yoruba origin, is profoundly influenced by the same cultural traditions that played an important role in the works of Johnson, Tutuola and Soyinka. Okri has also established direct intertextual links with the writing of both Tutuola and Soyinka. In *The Famished Road*, Okri’s narrator Azaro evokes the traditional figure of the *abiku* child. The *abiku* child persists, through a cycle of premature deaths and rebirths, in making the passage to and from the spirit world. The episodic narrative framework of seemingly arbitrary shifts that this figure

creates, combined with an absence of temporal indices and with frequent adult-sounding proverbial statements on the child-narrator's part, results in a replicating of oral discourse within a self-consciously literary mode of narration. As always, however, Quayson does not limit himself to a technical analysis of this transformation of traditional resources, but also interprets the changes in social and historical terms. The ghostly "anxiety-generating" forces, for example, that lend a sense of "Other-worldliness" to Tutuola's mythopoeic fiction, become in Okri's work expressions of "real-world existence, especially in the context of squalor and dispossession." Liminality has become, for Okri, the experience both of a multi-ethnic urban life in post-colonial Nigeria (particularly in cities like Lagos) and of his own condition as a writer living in the diaspora "where the need to negotiate multiple identities becomes more acute."

In his conclusion, Quayson suggests that, although his study focuses on the construction, through writing, of a Yoruba cultural and political identity, a comparable, though not identical, type of reading could be relevant to other African cultures and writers since "in the work of . . . Achebe, Armah and Ngugi, the movement of their work has been from protocols of realist representation to those of mythopoeic experimentation." *Strategic Transformations* is a pleasure to read, not only for its effective analysis and thorough documentation, but also for its tight-knit consistency. Quayson never fails in his promise to show dynamic links between oral traditions, literary strategies and historical contexts, nor does he allow himself easy or convenient conclusions. Although the reader sometimes wishes the author would reflect more openly on the apparent absence of women writers in the tradition he is discussing, the book remains a convincing and significant contribution to our understanding not only of African literature but also of literary and cultural theory.

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## The Changing Shapes of Postcolonial Theory

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**Gita Rajan and Radhika Mohanram, eds.**

*Postcolonial Discourse and Changing Cultural Contexts: Theory and Criticism.* Greenwood Press  
\$59.95

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**E. San Juan, Jr.**

*Beyond Postcolonial Theory.* St. Martin's Press  
\$35.00

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Reviewed by Laura Moss

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To say that postcolonial theory is constantly changing shape has become virtually a platitude. However, the speed with which it is changing is still remarkable. Two recent texts are particularly concerned with the evolution of postcolonial theory. While *Postcolonial Discourse and Changing Cultural Contexts* focuses on the efficacy of developing postcolonial theories, *Beyond Postcolonial Theory* shifts from a concentration on the theories of postcolonialism to an emphasis on the actions of political resistance groups. In San Juan's view, the two are incompatible, whereas in the views of several of the contributors to the Rajan and Mohanram collection, they are necessarily linked.

In its fourteen essays, *Postcolonial Discourse and Changing Cultural Contexts* encompasses topics ranging from questions of postcolonialism in the classroom, to the conjunction of Hilary Beckles and Frantz Fanon in Barbados, to Hanif Kureishi's articulation in film of marginalized race and sexuality in the Asian immigrant community in England. Because this eclectic mix lacks a unified approach to postcolonial discourse, it reinforces the very multiplicity it is espousing. The editors aim to explore constructions of the "language of empire" through discussions of nationalism and modernity, identity politics, the status of exilic subjectivities, and "border intellectuals." While the collection addresses the changing contexts of postcolonialism, the atavism of some of the arguments is evident in the

implicit definition of the postcolonial as both a celebration of heterogeneity and a response to empire. This final point is further emphasized in the filial relationship implied in the repeated references to England as the "mother country." Still, the collection provides a useful overview into postcolonial studies in the nineties.

Three essays in particular stand out as indicators of the wide range of discussions of postcolonialism. Perhaps the most engaging is Christopher Wise's "Dialectics of Négritude: Or the (Post) Colonial Subject in Contemporary African-American Literature." Wise brings African-American literature into postcolonial debates through an appeal to Amiri Baraka's version of *négritude* and Fredric Jameson's theories of periodization. Although Wise is persuasive in his assertion about the need to include African-American literature in postcolonial discussions, his strong support of a return to *négritude*, even while acknowledging the limitations of an appeal to origins in the contemporary world, detracts from the efficacy of his argument about the limiting nature of postcolonial boundaries.

Harveen Sachdeva Mann's "Women's Rights versus Feminism? Postcolonial Perspectives" is noteworthy for its distinction between women's rights and feminism in postcolonial contexts. Unfortunately, Mann tends to rely on generalizations. For example, she cites Linda Hutcheon as Canada's representative of "first-world postcolonial feminism" and proceeds to criticize both Hutcheon and Canada sharply for being neither postcolonial nor feminist enough. Her misreading of Hutcheon is typical of her misreading of several "Western," "academic activist" feminists. Mann juxtaposes Western feminists who remain "confined to an institutional space" in their theoretical thrust with "theory-praxis" "non-Western" women's rights activists. Clearly, in Mann's paradigm, non-Western women

have more access to postcolonial women's concerns than Western women, because, in her terminology it seems that "postcolonial" is another word for "third world." Although many would argue against Mann's polarization of Western and non-Western feminisms, it is useful to note her warning against the cooption of the "third-world woman" by Western academics.

The third essay of note in the collection is the editors' interview with Sneja Gunew. Gunew presents a counter-example to Mann's ideas about Western academics confinement to theory as she discusses her role in "excavating the concrete ways in which multiculturalism gets translated into policy documents" in Australia. She distinguishes between literary postcolonialism (a continuation of the old notion of Commonwealth literature), literary multiculturalism (the discourse of the migrant condition), and public versions of postcolonialism and multiculturalism that are the province of state power. Indeed, Gunew relates the way in which the state often uses the theories of postcoloniality and multiculturalism to deflect the "real" problems of life in a multicultural setting. She also presents an interesting comparison of multiculturalism in Canada and Australia.

A recent tendency in postcolonial theory, illustrated in the discussions of both Mann and Gunew, is marked by a movement away from theorizing resistance to a concentration on more active forms of political insurgency. This development relies on the breakdown of an assumed theory/practice divide. At the forefront lies San Juan's *Beyond Postcolonial Theory*. He takes a confrontational approach to contemporary theories of postcoloniality by arguing that exploitation and racism, arguably overlooked by theorists of postcolonialism, assume a central position in his work. San Juan confronts the "fundamentalist diseminations" of the now canonical figures of Homi Bhabha (in his "indeterminism and

contingency”) and Gayatri Spivak (in her “ventriloquism of speechless subalterns”) through an appeal to the more well-rehearsed theories of Antonio Gramsci and Fanon, among others. He often uses case studies to show how postcolonial indeterminacy breaks down at the site of the destroyed body of the individual activist. San Juan particularly criticizes what he labels the postcolonial fixation on, and fetishization of, “unevenness” as he argues for the necessity of radical democratic social action. San Juan acknowledges that his type of criticism could be read as a nostalgic celebration of national liberation movements, but preempts such a criticism by noting the necessity of self-determination for all those communities “tyrannized by capital and other irrational forces.”

San Juan situates postcolonialism in the framework of “the structural crisis of international capitalism” in order to bring the problems of globalization into the postcolonial theoretical arena. However, this arena seems to be virtually confined to the liberal American academy in his discussion. He regularly asks questions such as “Where were the postcolonial gurus during the Gulf War?” Still, his examples of the need for successful forays beyond postcolonial theory lie in places such as the Philippines and Guatemala. He opens the discourses of postcolonialism beyond the confines of the English-speaking world—the confines of the Rajan and Mohanram collection.

*Postcolonial Discourse and Changing Cultural Contexts* is such a mixed bag that it should appeal to a wide range of readers interested in developing their ideas on postcolonial concerns. San Juan assumes substantial knowledge from his reader and relies on him/her to be conversant with the debates in question. *Beyond Postcolonial Theory* is unquestionably a more challenging read (although at points it is unnecessarily elliptical), but it is perhaps ultimately more rewarding precisely because of the

degree to which San Juan encourages the reader to move beyond the state of theory in the present. Because it is highly contentious, this book will certainly accelerate the rate of change in an already quickly changing area of literary studies.

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## “Lecture et création”

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**Denis Saint-Jacques (dir.)**

*L'Acte de lecture*. Nota bene \$17.00

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**Fernand Ouellette**

*En forme de trajet*. Éditions du Noroît n.p.

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Reviewed by Janine Gallant

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*L'Acte de lecture* (1998) et *En forme de trajet* (1996) découlent tous deux d'un travail de réédition. Le premier, ouvrage collectif de critique littéraire, est passé d'un format standard à un format poche. Le deuxième, recueil d'essais de l'écrivain Fernand Ouellette, est passé de la seconde partie d'*Ouvertures* (paru en 1988) à une constituante de la nouvelle collection *Chemins de traverse* (où l'on retrouve aussi *Depuis Novalis*, première partie d'*Ouvertures*).

*L'Acte de lecture* réunit dix-huit articles issus d'un colloque tenu en 1992. L'objectif de l'ouvrage est clairement énoncé dans la présentation qu'en fait Denis Saint-Jacques: répondre à la question “Comment lit-on?” Si la table des matières n'introduit pas de divisions, Saint-Jacques propose néanmoins un plan qui permet de partager les articles en cinq parties.

La première s'intéresse à la pratique de la lecture en lien avec des événements historiques. Hans-Jürgen Lüsebrink aborde la réappropriation des lectures traditionnelles lors de transformations politiques tandis que Max Roy propose d'esquisser une histoire de la lecture au Québec à travers l'exemple des rééditions de *Charles Guérin*. Vient ensuite l'étude très fouillée d'Ellen Constans qui se concentre sur la période de 1850 où se dessinent de nouveaux lectorats. Jean-Claude Vareille se penche quant à lui

sur la "Belle Époque" (1870-1914) pour y examiner avec clarté la lecture populaire. Martine Poulain assure la transition avec la partie subséquente en offrant l'historique de quelques travaux sociologiques. La diachronie faisant place à la sociologie, Bernadette Seibel ouvre la deuxième partie avec le catalogue de lecture des cheminots selon leur secteur d'activité. Nicole Robine rappelle que les lecteurs dits "populaires" sont souvent peu préoccupés par la question de légitimité culturelle de leurs lectures. Julia Bettinotti s'intéresse pour sa part à la lecture sérielle des romans "sentimentaux." Enfin, Jacques Lemieux et Dirk Geisen concluent cette partie sociologique avec une étude sur les best-sellers qui a le mérite d'exprimer les limites imposés par leurs outils de recherche, d'où le sous-titre de l'article ("Comment dit-on lire?").

La troisième partie regroupe des articles qui privilégient les formes de discours autres que le texte écrit. Line Grenier, Roger Chamberland et Irène Perelli-Contos dégagent tour à tour une nouvelle approche de la lecture en musique, une analyse à la fois cognitive et sociale de la chanson et une réflexion sur le théâtre de recherche. Un quatrième ensemble d'études s'articule autour de l'aspect sémio-cognitif de la lecture. Après l'utile analyse introductive de Christian Vandendorpe s'inscrit la contribution originale de Bertrand Gervais qui examine les fonctionnements cognitifs mis à profit dans la recherche de l'accélération en lecture. Par la suite, Richard Saint-Gelais illustre de manière convaincante la nécessité d'un nouvel objet d'étude qu'il appelle "les lectures erratiques," soit celles qui "hésitent, se trompent." Paul Bleton examine quant à lui six cas de "lecture louche" ou "stéréosémie." Enfin, pour clore l'ouvrage, deux articles mettent en avant une forme de synthèse. L'article de Pierre Ouellet soumet les courants de recherche en lecture à un nouvel examen alors qu'Alain Viala élabore une "rhétorique du lecteur."

Comme c'est le lot de bien des ouvrages collectifs, *L'Acte de lecture* souffre d'un manque de cohésion, notamment au niveau de la forme. Ainsi se côtoient les études exploratoires et les études définitives. De même les articles dont les traces de communication orale peuvent parfois déranger voisinent avec ceux qui sont rédigés en fonction d'une publication. Cependant, le manque d'unité a aussi sa contrepartie: la réunion dans un seul livre d'une telle étendue de courants de recherche en lecture. En conséquence, l'ouvrage semble incontournable pour le spécialiste et sert également de bon tour d'horizon pour le néophyte qui chercherait à se familiariser avec les multiples angles d'observation de l'acte de lecture.

Si le premier ouvrage disséquait la réception d'une oeuvre, le deuxième s'intéresse plutôt à sa création. Également divisé en cinq parties, *En forme de trajet* commence par le "Parcours" que retrace Fernand Ouellette de sa propre oeuvre (poétique, autobiographique, romanesque). L'auteur se penche ensuite sur les formes artistiques autres que l'écriture. Dans cet esprit, "Connivences I" explore la musique et "Connivences II," la peinture. De ces deux parties ressort une fascination pour ce que l'on pourrait qualifier de trinité des arts dont les composantes (musique, peinture et poésie) demeurent indissociables. La quatrième partie, "Spirale", débute par des remarques un peu usées concernant la liberté de l'écrivain, mais renferme aussi ce qui s'impose peut-être comme la pièce centrale de l'ouvrage, soit une réflexion très poussée sur le travail du poète, sur ce "cercle de l'augure", à la base de toute oeuvre poétique vraie, selon Ouellette. La dernière partie, tout simplement intitulée "Accents", se présente un peu comme un retour à l'objet étudié par l'auteur au fil de son ouvrage: la poésie. Apparaissent donc des impressions sur la mer, puis sur les glaces, qui se lisent comme de véritables poèmes. Au fur



et a mesure que l'on avance dans ces "Accents", cependant, on revient au mode de la dissertation, le temps de lire une réflexion sur la bêtise et quelques interrogations sur le livre, pour enfin retourner à une dimension poétique avec les dernières considérations de l'ouvrage.

On aurait tort de croire que la lecture de cette nouvelle édition apporte peu à quelqu'un qui a déjà lu *Ouvertures*. Les changements d'une édition à l'autre sont nombreux et substantiels, ce qui n'étonnera pas de la part d'un auteur qui retravaille presque systématiquement ses oeuvres lors de rééditions. Des chapitres entiers ont donc été gommés de l'ancienne version pour être remplacés par des textes inédits. Et lorsque Ouellette conserve les mêmes chapitres dans une partie ("Accents"), il n'en décide pas moins d'en réorganiser l'ordre, ce qui s'avère judicieux et crée un savant effet de crescendo-decrescendo-crescendo dans le style d'écriture, là où l'ancienne version se présentait sous la forme d'un va-et-vient plutôt confondant. De plus, l'auteur a fait un imposant travail stylistique, atteignant souvent l'écriture "épurée, silencieuse et aérée" à laquelle il aspire désormais.

Toutefois, malgré ces manipulations ingénieuses et bienvenues, *En forme de trajet* souffre un peu du même mal que *L'Acte de lecture* en donnant l'impression d'un collage, en grande partie due aux origines diverses des chapitres (entretiens, allocutions, cartons d'invitation à des expositions, etc.). Le contenu lui-même évite cependant cet écueil grâce aux thèmes-phares de l'auteur (recherche de la lumière, cercle, différences entre les genres d'écrits, trinité des arts et mysticisme), véritables fils conducteurs. Cet ouvrage, alliant écriture soignée et allusions érudites, reste donc de lecture fort agréable pour quiconque veut faire une incursion dans la pensée (mise à jour) de l'écrivain.

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## German Critics on Canadian Women Writers

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**Christina Strobel and Doris Eibl, eds.**  
*Selbst und Andere/s*. Wissner Verlag n.p.

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**Hannelore Zimmermann**

*Erscheinungsformen der Macht in den Romanen Margaret Atwoods*. Peter Lang DM118.00

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Reviewed by Rosmarin Heidenreich

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Studies in Canadian literature by critics from other countries often present intriguing glimpses of how Canadian works are received in other cultures. The two volumes under review reflect the diversity, originality and strength that a number of European critics see in Canadian writing by women.

The first volume is a collection of twelve essays by young German female academics. As a whole, the volume makes a substantial contribution not only to feminist Canadian studies but also to applications of feminist theory in the broader sense. The editors have presented a competent and compact summary of the status of current research in the area, and the articles themselves, most of which appear in English, have an astonishingly broad focus, ranging from film studies (an analysis of Patricia Rozema's *When Night is Falling*) to Quebec theatre, and from the role of women in Native societies to lesbian narratives by Jane Rule and Daphne Marlatt.

The editors' premise is that gender is a function of a hegemonic discourse, an expression of the normative hierarchical system that affirms the binary norms and values of the social consensus, inscribed in the fictional as well as the historical record; women don't exist in history except as diluted traces, and the dominant discourse creates a normative structure in which women are always marginalized, always Other, often in multiple ways. All the essays focus on manifestations of this alterity in a feminist context.

Andrea Braidt's perceptive piece on Patricia Rozema and Doris Eibl's beautiful

and suggestive contribution on Suzanne Jacob's *Maude* analyze the symbolic significance of visual perspective in the gaze of "the other." While Braidt's context is cinematic and Eibl's is textual, both emphasize the subversive potential of deviating from and drawing attention to the narrative conventions of perspectivalisation. Hélène Destrempe's essay, the only one that appears in French, deals with the significance of Native women's *prise de parole* and its emancipatory role in native communities, whereas Pamela Dube thematizes the multiple marginalization of "women of colour," pointing out that the latter expression has been perceived as opposing "feminism," resulting in an implicit dichotomy between white women and "women of colour."

Ulrike Lange and Marion Schomakers have co-authored a fine piece on the blurring of gender boundaries in Monique Proulx's *Le sexe des étoiles*, while Brigitte Mertz-Baumgartner argues in her eloquent essay that the "monologue," a popular theatrical genre in Quebec, has, in works by female writers like Clémence DesRochers, Jacqueline Barrette and Denise Guénette, not only popularized the issue of sexual relationships but also created a strong female voice that opposes the hierarchical, male-dominated dialogic structure.

Caroline Rosenthal on Daphne Marlatt's *Ana Historic* stresses the obliteration of women in history and the necessity of female re-invention as subject. Hers is a convincing piece of work, and one finds oneself wishing she had referred to other striking examples (such as Carol Shields's *The Stone Diaries*) that might have created a broader context for her subject. Dunja Mohr presents a generic and theoretical framework to contextualize a hardly original but solidly researched account of Margaret Atwood's dystopia in *The Handmaid's Tale*.

The most original and elegant pieces in the book are those by Colleen Ross and

Christina Strobel. Ross argues that the split between "factual" history (male) and "imaginary" fiction (female) is an illusory concept, inscribed in a patriarchal culture that privileges the former and trivializes the latter. Using translation as a model, Ross suggests that this split is overcome in the transcription of women's experiences, in a translative process that rewrites the "original" (male) text in a new voice. Christina Strobel's essay on the work of Jane Rule emphasizes the valorization of alterity—not only of gender but also of class, colour, age and region—that Rule celebrates in her work, inscribing it in an ethical context in which difference is not a stigma that marginalizes but a vehicle of independence to be cherished, respected, appreciated.

One wonders why the editors of this collection chose to include Christiane Harzing's piece on the German immigrant experience in Toronto and the article on "Bodyscape/s" co-authored by Katja Pfrommer and Tamara Pianos. The empirical findings on which Harzing's contribution seems to be based are unfortunately thin, and do little to advance the argument, either theoretical or thematic, that underlies the rest of the volume. The contribution from Pfrommer and Pianos is theoretically underlaid by poorly (if not mis-) understood Irigaray, applied with an at times embarrassing naïveté. In the authors' description of the "body-landscape-relation" the reader is startled by perspectively unmediated statements such as the following: "Native people, analogous to women, are closer to nature while at the same time being usually less intelligent and less civilized."

Notwithstanding two rather dubious articles and some careless editing—typos, punctuation and syntactical errors as well as occasional unidiomatic English expressions occur—this is a worthwhile book. It brings together a multiplicity of perspectives on Canadian writing by women that

both illuminates and advances the state of knowledge of what “writing in the father’s house,” as Patricia Smart puts it, is all about.

In Hannelore Zimmermann’s impressive study of Margaret Atwood’s work, power is seen as a basic theme underlying virtually all of Atwood’s prose fiction, manifesting itself in social norms, human relationships, restrictions of personal freedom, ecology issues, and in the way Canada’s role in world politics is presented. Zimmermann points out that the gynocentric criticism underlying numerous studies of Atwood’s work (as a vehicle to advance the feminist cause) is reductive and hence invalid: the really vicious power battles are carried out between Atwood’s female figures.

According to Zimmermann, in Atwood’s fiction the power mechanisms that give rise to aggressors and victims are based on complicity between the two, and it is hence the victim who enables the aggressor to assume the position of power. As Zimmermann observes, this conception points to resistance as a subversive strategy, in personal relationships as well as in political ones—in particular the unequal economic and geopolitical strength of the United States, compared to Canada. Zimmermann goes on to comment on the significance of this resistance strategy in making Atwood’s work an issue in “post-colonial discourses.”

Zimmermann’s analysis of Atwood’s texts in terms of this “complicity theory” is supported by her application of Foucault’s model of power, control and punishment. The thoroughness and articulateness of the analysis and the fastidiousness with which Foucault’s model is applied create a new perspective on the complex motivations and interpersonal relationships that characterize all of Atwood’s work.

In her conclusion, the author observes that while historical conditions may change, the mechanisms of power do not, a statement eloquently borne out by the

analyses of individual Atwood texts constituting the substance of the book. For the present, regrettably, this valuable contribution to Atwood criticism and to Canadian studies as a whole is accessible only to German readers. One hopes that excerpts, if not the entire book, will eventually appear in translation. The inclusion of an English version of one of Zimmermann’s chapters in the anthology edited by Eibl and Strobel would have been a welcome first step in this direction.

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## Romantic Colonies

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**Katie Trumpener**

*Bardic Nationalism*. Princeton UP us\$19.95

**Alan Richardson and Sonia Hofkosh, eds.**

*Romanticism, Race, and Imperial Culture, 1780-1834*. Indiana UP us\$39.95

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Reviewed by Miranda J. Burgess

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Katie Trumpener’s groundbreaking study of the Romantic novel shares its major goal with Alan Richardson’s and Sonia Hofkosh’s important collection of essays on Romanticism and empire. Both books seek to open up the constitution of “British Romantic literature” by expanding its reach beyond Britain, tracing its continuity with the literary culture of the colonial new world, and describing the imperial consciousness, awareness, and interests of Romantic-period British writers. Reading together the history of the British Romantic novel with the origins of what has since come to appear as a Canadian canon, Trumpener calls for a radical revision of the conventional definitions of “British” as well as of “Canadian” literature. Her argument begins by tracing the early formation of Irish and Scottish nationalisms within the United Kingdom, in ballad collections and annalistic histories and in Ossianic epic. Trumpener argues that these nationalisms, forged in critical dialogue with the Enlightenment colonialist genres of the survey and travel narrative,

were—variously—nostalgic, aggressively traditionalist, or committed to an “accretive” notion of progress that relies on preservation of the lessons of the past. All three impulses made their way at the turn of the nineteenth century into the competing genres of the national tale and historical novel. In these new narrative forms, the diverse relations between nationalist and Enlightenment impulses and discourses mark the infinite variety of British and Irish novelists’ differing approaches to relations between nation and empire or history and geography, and to the role of human agency in political change.

The second half of Trumpener’s argument demonstrates that the “peripheral” nationalisms she delineates were exported to the colonies along with printed books and, sometimes, with their writers, even as Britain, and British writers, imported raw materials from the colonies. Trumpener shows that interest in empire—critical or uncritical, acknowledged or disguised—was a defining characteristic of even the most “domestic” early nineteenth-century English fiction. At the same time, however, nationalist narratives, as transformed by Walter Scott in particular, were exported to Britain’s colonies, where they were converted to aid in the ideological consolidation of empire. It is out of such materials, as Trumpener illustrates in an illuminating reading of John Galt’s *Bogle Corbet* and its Canadian publishing history, that the “national” literatures of British postcolonies are forged in a process of selective memory and forgetting. Yet the hybridity of these narratives, and their unstable blend of Enlightenment progressivism with nationalist recoil, also preserves seeds that may, if differently transformed, lead to a productive colonial resistance.

The ideological subtlety of Trumpener’s analysis results in large part from this complex dialectical approach to literary history. Because no literary form is immutably tied

to a single ideology, no literary work can univocally serve a nationalist resistance or an imperial master: Trumpener calls for a rigorously formalist textual archaeology that must also, and simultaneously, be rigorously contextual. As they investigate texts in context, taking up Trumpener’s concluding call for “new ways of describing the formation of colonial consciousness,” further studies will need to consider the role not just of writers and publishers but also of readers and reading publics in producing imperial and postimperial cultural formations, and in forging colonial resistance. Such studies now have an indispensable historiographical foundation on which to build, and a powerful literary analysis with which to engage or contend.

Whereas Trumpener emphasizes the cooperation of literary forms over the specificity of literature as a category, Richardson and Hofkosh’s collection reflects the essayists’ shared interest in examining the cultural institutions of Romanticism in British imperial contexts. The essays by Moira Ferguson, Alison Hickey, and Sonia Hofkosh emphasize the circulation of Romantic texts to the colonies and the multivalent ideological consequences of that circulation. Laura Doyle, Hickey, Joseph Lew, and Saree Makdisi address works by canonical Romantic poets, tracing canonicity in various ways to each poet’s role in defining Britain’s relations with its emerging empire; Nancy Moore Goslee and Alan Richardson discuss the inescapability, though not necessarily the triumph, of colonialist assumptions among the most sympathetic or anti-imperialist of poets. Deidre Lynch and Rajani Sudan examine the institutional role of the cultural production and circulation of maternity, whether successfully naturalized (Sudan) or inevitably failed and dangerously resistant (Lynch), in forging a national community and economy. The remaining essays address the ways in which

Romantic-period writing models for or questions the lines of political authority in the colonies. Balachandra Rajan discusses competing feminized conceptions of India in British Romantic narratives as prototypes for colonial rule and for approaches to Indian self-determination. Ashton Nichols explores the ambivalent rhetoric of Mungo Park's African exploration narratives as the product of tensions between Enlightenment progressivism and Romantic primitivism. Anne K. Mellor discriminates co-operating axes of race, class, and gender that recombine in early nineteenth-century colonial ideology. The slippage between axes, she argues, and the discursive reliance on some alongside the rejection of others, can undo the best attempts of abolitionist writers to make room for real considerations of difference. Hofkosh discusses the capitalist education of the African-born autobiographer Olaudah Equiano as at once a baseline for early nineteenth-century cultural education and a visible corrective to Romantic individualism, with its claims to transcend material things.

It is impossible in the small space of this review to do adequate justice to the thirteen excellent essays in this collection. Perhaps the strongest common thread among them, and the element that makes them most readable from the present theoretically sophisticated standpoint of post-colonial scholarship, is the refusal of an ideological singlemindedness that commits a text to a stably imperialist or anti-imperial posture. Several essays, notably by Richardson and Goslee, illustrate the unstable swerves of anti-imperial texts into and out of colonial stereotype. Other essays suggest that reader resistance can potentially overcome a pro-imperialist didactic thrust: Hickey's brief formulation of Wordsworth's educational canonization in the colonies is powerful here. In Lynch's and Lew's essays, ideologically indispens-

able female figures are read as combinations of ideal passivity and a dangerously peripatetic power: colonial and foreign others refuse to stay in their place, over there and below, migrating into the domestic heart of British Romantic culture. That the shared focus of all these essays is on the ideological instability of Romantic texts, and their shifting relations to imperial contexts, points to two other valuable aspects of the collection. Disagreements between essayists over particular authors or texts are permitted to stand, and "dialogue and debate" between the contributing scholars is foregrounded in the introduction. Thus Makdisi's disagreement with Lew over Byron's orientalism not only illustrates the diversity of possible approaches to Romantic texts in imperial context, but highlights once more the ambiguity of the texts they discuss. When Richardson's reading of Helen Maria Williams and Mellor's discussion of uncanonized abolitionist writings by canonical and noncanonical writers share conclusions drawn in Makdisi's analysis of Shelley, a second major emphasis of the editors is foregrounded: the argument that Romantic canonicity is very much a historical product. The opposition between canonical and noncanonical works is as fluid as the relations between imperial periphery and metropolitan centre, and the histories of both oppositions, as this collection and Trumpener's literary history both illustrate, are usefully read together.



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## Word Jazz 2

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Kevin McNeilly

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George Elliott Clarke's *Beatrice Chancy* (Polestar, \$16.95) unfolds between libretto and poetic drama. The text, which rewrites with a certain operatic grandiloquence the murderous tragedy of Beatrice Cenci, was set to music by James Rolfe, and premiered in its full form at the Music Gallery in Toronto in June 1998, having been performed as dramatic reading and workshop draft for the previous three years. Artificial at times to the point of preciousness, Clarke's book lovingly mires itself in the formal pleasures of stylized language. Affecting what can only be described as a latter-day aestheticism, Clarke produces a vital, moving and thoroughly crafted work of sustained lyric beauty.

He offers a historical setting, but a history defined and informed by the verbal music of poetry:

*Scene: This drama harries Clemence County, Acadia, an oasis of nullification.*

*Translated there as the chattel of Saxon-American Supplanters, African-American slaves pray and expire in the shadows of sunflowers, in 41 George III, our Common Era, this nineteenth sour century. Their cries must shake the starry floor of heaven.*

The floral motifs throughout, coupled with an astonishing and erudite range of reference and allusion (ranging freely throughout Western literatures, from Dante to Hopkins, Chaucer to Baudelaire), suggest Shelley, Wilde or Pater, or perhaps the ritualized

drama of W. B. Yeats or James Reaney. Clarke's text is relentlessly arch; even the stage directions scan. ("*Darkness. The moon comes out and says nothing.*") But *Beatrice Chancy* is not simply a cooked-up version of *The Cenci* transplanted to Nova Scotia; its Africadian context—to borrow a term coined by Clarke to describe east-coast African-Canadian culture—does much more than “echo” the Renaissance tale and its other formal incarnations. Consider the following exchange between Francis Chancy, slave-owner and Beatrice's father, and The Reverend Ezra Love Peacock:

*Peacock:* Now that she's sixteen, you could sell Beatrice.

*Chancy:* She's too expensive to waste. I'll graft her

On some slave-endorsing Tory  
To fat my interests in the Assembly.

*Peacock:* Chancy, I would buy Beatrice, if you like.

*Chancy:* *Oui, mon hypocrite lecher, mon Salammbô, mon friar!*

You are chaste, I think, Peacock, as a whore.

Clarke's line parodies Shakespearean blank verse, but introduces a bastardized “*Au Lecteur*” from *Les Fleurs du Mal* (as well as gesturing to Flaubert's black exotica), swelling to a duplicitous alexandrine. The tone is at once precocious and pretentious, not out of keeping with Chancy's character—who is, in a certain sense, the pimping patriarch of white Western culture itself—but nonetheless also deliberately, overly formal; the intertext is pulled, convoluted, reshaped in such a way as to expose its own

hypersensitive craft and to place those very pretensions in full view, with an irony that is at once playful and deadly serious. This is, I think, a vernacular formalism, a turning of traditional form against itself, all the while maintaining an utter infatuation with that same tradition. Clarke doesn't cast out English poetry, but inhabits the language by pushing it to its lyrical limits, exposing the linkages between literary wonderment and human abuse. "Wolves yowl in bracken," Lustra, Chancy's neglected wife, tells Beatrice. "Don't be poetical." Or later: "That's a tragical performance, Beatrice. / But save it for theatre, not real life." And so we too are reminded to listen carefully for the elision of experience into artful deceit, of meaning into music.

But this text never lingers on verisimilitude. If anything, readers expecting a drama focusing on racism and slavery to adhere to the tenets of some sociological realism will be sorely disappointed, but such expectations are themselves shaped by an implicitly racist agenda, relegating socially-committed or "political" texts to the low mimetic, and forgetting (at least in the African American tradition, in which Clarke's play positions itself) the technical mastery of Paul Laurence Dunbar, the astounding formality of Countee Cullen or the playful art-songs of Rosamund and James Weldon Johnson. *Beatrice Chancy*, I think, voices its politics at the level of style. One of a number of exchanges between the lovers Lead and Beatrice mimics Dunbar's doubled voice, shifting between the pristine and the demotic (as NourbeSe Philip might call this mode) to suggest a sub-cultural tension, a parodic duplicity inherent in the position of the Black speaker in a decidedly white cultural dominant:

*Beatrice unbuttons Lead's shirt. She eyes a cruciform cut.*

*Beatrice: (Gasping)* Wounded! I'm wounded seeing this wounding.

*Lead:* Massa branded me, but he's hurt you more.

*Beatrice: Moi aussi, je suis blessé. Mes yeux saignent.*

*Lead:* Bee, we gotta run. Scape to Halifax.

*Beatrice:* How? Can we run from one end of Nova

Scotia to the other? Hound-face scarecrows  
With hounds will thresh roads and fields  
to snatch us.

*Lead:* I don't give a damn for any white son  
Of a bitch — or their bitches. I'll kill em.

Beatrice, son of a slave woman and Chancy, educated in European cultures and mores (as her allusive French and poetic speech—echoing Francis Thompson—evinces), seeks an authentic identity in the black community of her mother, and the erotic union with Lead represents this cultural bond. Lead's vernacular style, rough though perfectly scanned, embodies a form of Africadian discourse which has fully assimilated the conventions of the cultural dominant, not to be overtaken by them but to use them in the service of its own social and linguistic meanings.

Beatrice's last words in the play, as she is hanged for murdering Chancy, are metrically broken:

Lustra, my sterling Lead, I'll keep *Love's*  
sun

Steeped in our tombs in endless

Thanksgiving.

It's all but all.

Perhaps she's cut off as she's executed, her voice cinched by the same legal system that allows for slavery, but her final sentence fuses vernacular common-sense with poetic paradox. Its interruption signals at once a wounded speech, slashed through by the vicious and violent strictures of a racist society, and an opening into potential healing, the idealized, poetical "love" which Beatrice so ardently takes up. (I should note, too, how "Nova/ Scotia" is sliced through by the metre in the previous quotation: a broken new world in need of poetic mending.) Significantly, Beatrice's line—its missing six syllables—are

immediately completed by the final song of the Liberateds: "Oh freedom, oh freedom, / Oh freedom over me." The gospel tradition of black North America, with its subsequent modulations into reel, blues, Tin Pan Alley song, and so on, embodies the multifarious fusion of possibilities toward which Clarke's drama aspires. I haven't heard Rolfe's music, but I can offer some relevant speculations. Composed according to the notes for violin, piano, bass and percussion—a version of a hard-bop quartet—the score must at least in its format embody a tension between the classical and jazz traditions. Joe Sealy's 1996 jazz oratorio *Africville Suite*, with poetry and lyrics by David Woods and Dan Hill, is a significant parallel to Clarke's work, recovering Africadian history through musical genealogy, instigating a radical pride of place, and investigating the spiritual geography of Africville as Clarke himself did poetically in *Whylah Falls* (1990). But I really want to compare *Beatrice Chancy* to Wynton Marsalis's Pulitzer Prize-winning oratorio *Blood on the Fields*. Its libretto, which Marsalis penned himself, is inferior to Clarke's, but Marsalis's insistence on presenting extended vocal music within the conventional "legit" formats of the Western music hall (and his work at Lincoln Center in New York) suggests not accommodation or selling out—Uncle Tomming to the establishment—but exactly its opposite: taking hold and asserting a stylistic authority, which emerges in the web of appropriation and subversion that has shaped Black North American cultures. Clarke's *Beatrice Chancy* is just such a masterful challenge to the endemic mastery of a racially-exclusive cultural dominant. And, as poetry of the highest order, it stirs its listeners to visceral, sensual transformation.

*The Clamorous Alphabet* (Periplum, \$19.95), a collaborative recording by Vancouver poet Catriona Strang and clarinetist/composer François Houle, thought-

fully finesses the dynamics of poetic cross-talk. Their performances attend to the often exquisite and delicate interchanges between the spoken and the melodic, defining a tenuous middle ground as voice-music, perhaps, or musical vocalise. Word meets sound, and each is pulled across, enmeshed with, distended and caressed by, the other. There have been a number of readings released on CD this past year, most of them principally concerned with historical documentation of poets or movements, such as the discs by Al Purdy and Patrick Lane put out by the Cyclops Press, or the *Carnivocal* anthology of sound poetry released by the Red Deer Press and Raincoast Books. But none of these CDs is particularly concerned with the dynamics of spoken performance and of interactive listening with the intensity and care that Houle and Strang demonstrate. (Despite an avid interest in hearing poets read their own work, I have to admit that most are not particularly articulate or technically proficient as readers; the same could be said for many attempts at sound-poetry by, well, untrained or unpracticed speakers, however enthusiastic.) *The Clamorous Alphabet*, as the title suggests, interrogates the technic—in the sense of *techné*, art—of kinship and quarrel, the dialogism of making, at the conjunction of sound and sense. Strang seems to describe their sometimes consonant, sometimes incommensurate duo in "Rev," where she plots a movement between the aleatory and the deliberate: "our volted orbits welter/any wander enfolds/ and every cut's clean gone/ right?" In the weave of typeset score and unscripted improvisation, of text and tone, Strang and Houle create what Gilles Deleuze once described, in terms of Leibniz and the baroque, as a *fold*, which he exemplifies in the confluence of the musical and the textual: "How to fold a text so that it can be enveloped in music." Solutions, Deleuze continues, "no longer pass through



accords.” Harmony, in a sense, has been re-conceived in terms of trajectories, dynamisms, flows. Strang’s verse, a species of nomadic “wander,” glosses and gleans the liquid, shivered figures tugged from Houle’s clarinet. And vice versa: they dance.

But I’m getting ahead of myself. Scores for *The Clamorous Alphabet* have appeared over the last three years in *Sulphur*, *The Capilano Review*, and *Rhizome*, and as a chapbook, *Steep*, from a California small press, Seeing Eye. (Houle and Strang also collaborated on scoring her translations of the *Carmina Burana*, which appeared in 1993 as *Low Fancy* from the ECW Press; a number of Houle’s scores are reproduced there.) Two texts with music, “Rag” and “Broil,” can also be viewed on the internet (at [www.speakeasy.org/subtext](http://www.speakeasy.org/subtext)); I’ll focus my commentary on these because they are probably easiest to access, since no scores are reprinted in the booklet for *The Clamorous Alphabet*, although fragments of “Broil” decorate the inner cover. Strang’s “Rag” demonstrates her particular melopoia:

l’d rather l’d never  
stone-code, same old  
considerably rib  
can shiv all strips  
or even badger no note  
so everyone and always  
already my own  
oracle  
winch-rand  
whose which best  
any so long  
letter-up or now  
tufts rippy  
a day-roll  
evening’s rough-up

The sensuous textures of her language—its modulating vowels, half rhymes, and braided consonants, its tugging at the hems of sense through nonce-words and disrupted syntax—are reminiscent, strangely enough, of Gerard Manley Hopkins. But where the Jesuit might offer his readers lush chiming and indulgent accord, Strang

produces succulent, often tender, clash. Her interest is clearly in the fabric of language, its blockish morphemes and grammatical struts. By the sustained, purled unknitting of linguistic conventions, she foregrounds the processes of making, of how words put themselves together; she makes the everyday transparency of utterance temporarily opaque, not to block speech but to pay close attention to the mediating colours of speech as it unfolds. This is not sound-poetry, despite its reveling in the phonemic, nor is it L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poetry, although the influence of Lyn Hejinian or Charles Bernstein might be detected in the shifty syntax and tangled colloquy. It is closest, I think, to lyric, and aspires to the condition of song.

Houle’s clarinet playing draws on a history of avant-garde solo performance, both in the chamber-music and jazz realms. A 20-minute solo, “Slap Circ,” coming at the mid-point of the disc combines the textural and rhythmic tenuity of Olivier Messiaen’s “Abime des oiseaux” (a solo from his *Quatuor pour la fin du temps*) with the technical prowess of Evan Parker’s soprano saxophone solos, employing circular breathing and flickering arpeggios. Houle’s intensive concern with timbre looks back, I think, to the solo work of Jimmy Giuffrè on *Free Fall*, while the suite-like structure both of solos and of settings of poem-sequences (such as “Set” and “The Clamorous Alphabet” here) are reminiscent of the performances of John Carter, to whose music Houle recently dedicated a CD. Houle uses a range of extended techniques—slap-tonguing, disassembling his instrument, playing the clarinet without its mouth-piece, as a flute, playing into a clay-pot filled with water, playing two instruments at once—both to create a complex palette of sonic possibilities and, more importantly, to draw the instrument away from the perfected technical purities of trained playing and to make contact, through

cadence and intonation, with the more variant and unstable grain of human speech.

Houle's settings for Strang's poems rarely employ standard notation, emphasizing instead the graphic indeterminacies of transcription or score. "Rag" offers text and music side-by-side vertically, constructing a movement in parallel. The handwritten headnotes suggest a mimetic relation between words and accompaniment: "*tongue clicks etc./ sparse interruptions / nocturnal.*" The instruction picks up metaphorically on the last line of Strang's poem ("evening's rough-up"), while also asserting musical genre (although the nocturne or "night-piece" is, in the romantic tradition, only vaguely defined, permitting Houle a wide range of improvisational potential). The graphic score consists of pointillistic dots, ovoid scrawls and cross-hatched scribbles, its width expanding from and then contracting to a node as it proceeds downward. Pitch and rhythm, while unspecified, are inferred visually. Rather than simple echo (as in, if the poem says soft play softly, if the poem says violent play violently), the relation between text and sound might be better understood as "rough-up," or as Houle puts it, "*sparse interruptions.*" The score, like the poem, refuses to be reduced or cleaned up to common sense, and instead foregrounds the arbitrary nature of musical setting; in other words, it interrupts and roughens both itself, before it can settle into conventional forms, and the programmatic or allegorical connections it tends toward as accompaniment. The performance of "Rag" on the disc juxtaposes a series of airy flickers, gradually building in intensity, to Strang's confident, well-defined reading. Instead of mimesis, we hear the dusty, vascular efforts of a breath aspiring to articulation, set against the articulate declaratives of the poem as it's pronounced.

The give-and-take between Strang and Houle might be better understood by look-

ing at "Broil." Here, the music is written interstitially, penned between the typographically firm text like a translator's gloss. Houle uses notation much closer to conventional score, specifying rhythm and duration above each syllable; pitch, however, is not fixed, indicated only by a rising and falling line scrawled over the stems of the notes. The poem, like many in this set, suggests the terms of an unresolved interchange between self and other:

scorch-ardent  
I am burst, yet  
turmoil-mangled, and very hot  
thoroughly molted, *dipped*  
(ha, who's well-played tumult, eh?)  
you'd climb customary, and I'd learn your size  
it'll quicken all, or  
dope us, whet muddied mire — how like  
a meal — steal such skimp-play, so duly un-  
snipped and I'll still gimlet every limb's  
drag without spite — impossible luck

The contradiction-in-terms of a "well-played tumult" gestures at the sweetly dissonant accommodations between clarinet and spoken word, as well as to the offset of the technical mastery of the score by improvisational unruliness. Houle's setting asserts that the duo work "*together [in] unison,*" and the actual performance on the recording is a mutual shadowing, as instrument and voice fold into one another. But rather than fuse into agreeable unanimity (notice the conditional in Strang's assertion of concord, "you'd climb customary, and I'd learn your size") what happens in practice is an essentially rhythmic distension, as their respective voices wait, yield, then surge at, cut, and contest each other: not the mutual dissolve of an enmeshment, but—mindfully—the heave and tug of a push-me-pull-you. This is, I think, a version of what NourbeSe Philip calls *kinopoeia*, of the in-between, the dynamic, which simultaneously subverts and asserts, and which accesses the fundamental plurality of language. Houle and Strang collaboration may

not, finally, discover the political edge of work like Philip's or Clarke's, but I believe it lays the formal groundwork for a politicized poetry, that is, a poetics of relation, a "word jazz" that both interrogates and embraces the music of human becoming.

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## Transit

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Stan Dragland

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Spanner/Wrench

immigrant: 'over here my friends think me ludicrously filial, whereas over there i'm considered barely filial. over there, they think me lazy & naive, whereas over here, some think me sagely & epigrammatic. a friend from here who went back there with me observed that those traits of mine which drove her crazy (my punctiliousness, aloneness, hardness, sense of duty) are casual when compared to my family. there, i'm deemed too relaxed, here i'm reckoned too goal-oriented. over here, people complain i'm curt on the phone, over there, they wonder why i waste time giving out details . . .'

local: 'so what do you do with all this??'

immigrant: 'i . . .span it.'

jam. ismail

1

In the world out there that I sleepwalk through, neither completely in *it* nor in the other world I seek the key to: a water skier towed by a SeaDoo. I should watch. I should pay attention even to this—as to the lake, to the green of trees on the far shore. That's an elm over there, now that I notice, arching up over the other trees. Survivor of the Dutch Elm plague. A tough tree.

I'm looking through it again, barely in the moment I'm living.

Dead end, blind alley, cul de sac.

*Shortcut.*

Always moving elsewhere. Always leaving dear friends. Why can't it be here *or* there,

all or nothing, as a shade steps out from this body into the hole it sought. Uneventful descent. The story never lingers on the way down. It rushes to meet the demanding old woman I must be nice nice nice to. She will give me three chances to improve my life. She will let me shake out her feather comforter so the snow will fall. Down there has its own sky! And by the wonder of some folding, some tumbling, inside out, that snow falls on us. Feeling those flakes on our faces, we know this is no mere story.

2

Look at all the bad that happens when the favourite daughter refuses to say what she feels for the king, her father. But how could she be direct without occupying the low ground her false sisters have claimed? "I love you as meat loves salt," she says, and the old fool flies into a rage. There is no story if he catches the wink of travel between what she says and what she means, I realize that. And nothing will stop these stories from happening. Nobody solves the riddle before riding to hell and back. But I can't help thinking that a literary education would have done this father some good—a course in narrative patterns might have been helpful, but I'm especially thinking of rhetoric. If the field marks of trope had been explained to him, for example, he might have read his daughter aright. There's no crossing those tiny bridges of metaphor when you come to them if you can't even *see* them.

3

I am the tourist. I am the prodigal who hates the tourist.

Michael Ondaatje

The evenings were cold in Jammu last January. It was colder, coldest for the travellers from that arctic country, Canada, who thought they were visiting a temperate land. The spectacular view of the

Himalayas from Air India windows might have recalled the effect of elevation on climate but it would have been too late. Travellers to the conference from other parts of India had brought scarves, heavy jackets, fur hats; our winter clothes were back in Canada.

At the end of the first day of presentations, the promised car did not appear to return chilled Canadians to their heated hotel. We stood about shivering, some of us more annoyed than I thought seemly. Our hosts ushered us up to a brazier of coals some workers had lit to warm themselves. I didn't think that was right either. Professor Malhotra had an idea. "Would you like a drink," he asked. "I have some rum in my room." "That sounds good," I replied, and he left us.

Returning, he showed us into a seminar room off the courtyard of the humanities building. There were four glasses of rum and water on the table. Seeing that, my colleagues recoiled. I had never seen actual recoiling outside of a movie. They mumbled their thanks-but-no-thanks and returned to the brazier. I couldn't blame them; only I had anything invested in the moment, since the kind offer had been made through me. And I couldn't accept either, having lost two days in Calcutta to some dietary indiscretion that I still don't understand. I explained that our delicate Canadian innards could not risk Indian water, but there was no bridging the awkwardness.

Later in the evening, now warmed by an excellent dinner, I ran into Professor Malhotra. He had not let the rum go to waste. He was unsteady and there was food on his chin. He could not keep his pain from showing. "I failed," he said.

In my own country I am socially inept. An overdeveloped sense of irony and an undeveloped sense of when to use it combine to keep me admiring graciousness from afar. But India is the ancient seat of

hospitality. In India it is said that the guest is a god, and story after story is told to reinforce the lesson. Temporary god that I was, I had no need of irony. "It is completely impossible to fail," I said, "in a gesture of genuine hospitality." My words may have been appropriate for once, but they had no effect. Professor Malhotra was inconsolable.

\*

He held up a worn paperback copy of Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing*. He could not understand certain passages in the novel, he said. Would I be so good as to tell me what they were about. Each of the three problem passages he showed me was an indented quotation. Two of the quotations were from children's rhymes. One of these also appears in Robert Kroetsch's "Seed Catalogue," where it lower-cases the myth of the fall:

Adam and Eve and Pinch Me  
Went down to the river to bathe;  
Adam and Eve fell in,  
So who do you think was saved?

Scarcely a Canadian kid has failed to learn from this rhyme how viciously a proper noun may turn into an imperative sentence. This is why so few in my country enjoy ambiguity. It was pinched out of us when we were kids.

The other passage was from the singing of Vera Lynn:

There'll be bluebirds over  
The white cliffs of Dover  
Tomorrow, when the world is free . . .

I'm a generation and an ocean removed from those who hoped their way through the Second World War with the help of that song, but I know what it meant to them and so I know what it means, or rather what it is doing, in Atwood's book.

Since I can identify those passages, I could start with any of them and work my way into *Surfacing* or out into the culture the novel comes from. Since my Indian

friend had no purchase on those rhymes, they were blanks in a text that must elsewhere have been closed to him as well. He was immensely grateful for annotations that cost me nothing. As for me, I had travelled all the way to India to be shown three passages in *Surfacing* that had been invisible to me. I had never paid attention to them. My new friend was too distant and I too near. Together, we shared a pair of eyes.

I am grateful for much more than the new perspective on *Surfacing* given me by a man willing to hazard simple questions. There can hardly be enough reminders that ignorance hides in knowledge. Strangeness lurks in the familiar reality I sleepwalk through every day. If I were to wake? Amazing Grace. I once was blind, but now I see.

\*

There is a Borges story, "Averroes' Search," about a translator of Aristotle who, "closed within the orb of Islam, could never know the meaning of the terms *tragedy* and *comedy*." Sealed within his own rich culture, and confident that Islam encompasses reality, Averroes has no choice but to find Islamic equivalents for foreign terms. He broods and broods about Aristotle's words until, after an evening of wine and collegial disputation in which his orthodoxy has shone brilliantly, it suddenly comes to him what Aristotle's words must mean. The solution to his problem, Englished from the Spanish of Borges by James E. Irby, is as follows: "Aristu (Aristotle) gives the name of tragedy to panegyrics and that of comedy to satires and anathemas. Admirable tragedies and comedies abound in the pages of the *Koran* and in the *Mohalacas* of the sanctuary." Averroes is missing the boat by about a week.

At this point in the story, the scholar and his milieu that Borges had worded so painstakingly, "suddenly, as if fulminated by an invisible fire," poof! disappears. The surprise ending seems both weird and

unfair until Borges folds it back on himself. The fiction of Averroes having exploded, the irony suddenly doubles as the narrator removes his omniscient mask and confesses as author: "I felt that Averroes, wanting to imagine what a drama is without ever having suspected what a theatre is, was no more absurd than I, wanting to imagine Averroes with no other sources than a few fragments from Renan, Lane and Asin Palacios." The fiction evaporates when the author stops believing in it. My encounter in India changed this story for me. Now I am inside it, as both the blind Averroes and "Borges" the self-reflexive writer, and I am outside it as well—outside with my irony on hold, loving the writer who travels so far and so ardently from his desk and then abruptly, in an onset of humility, scraps a creation he had made me believe in.

Having risked another reality, though, he is not absurd. Blessed are those who see their own culture circumscribed.

#### 4

I feel so lonesome facing the flood of 19—. That road is washed out—so much water on the prairie, the prairie so flat the water spreads and spreads. Lake Agassiz. You only learn later where you were. There is a sepia photo. A father in a rumpled suit—he has been driving in the suit. Why would he not at least remove his jacket in the heat? A suit and a fedora. The sweat from his brow has soiled the felt above the sweat band. Most of this is invisible in the photo. He stands, and his wife stands beside him, looking into the flood. There is a child in his arms and though that child is a girl with bobbed hair, she is also me, as I am also—thanks to my Ontario distance—this camera/man seeing and saying to you what I see. Having flown across the ocean to do so in Germany. And when I return to Canada it will not be to my second home in Ontario but to a Newfoundland whose songs and stories and jokes travelled west and began

to make a Newfoundland inside me. But that couple—*forlorn*—with their *forlorn* child, they had hoped for something new in these bad dry years. There was news of land north of that now-uncrossable water where they could homestead, land the government would give them just for improving it. Now the future is drowned.

Say what you like. Say what the textbooks tell about Lake Agassiz, how it covered the prairie after the last ice-age. Say anything you want, it's still not right that so much hope should be dashed in 19—by a flood that dried up millennia ago. Those people had drifted for years like prairie topsoil in the wind, and now they were going home to a land that had drowned. It just isn't right.

## 5

The word "bridge," in the name of the Alberta city on the banks of the Belly River that was named for William Lethbridge, signifies nothing.

In this place appears a bridge. A postcard of a bridge. On the reverse, under the space for a message, is the caption: "The longest, highest railroad bridge of its kind in the world. Constructed in 1909 in Lethbridge, Alberta." I bought the postcard to take into my classes whenever I teach Thomas King's *Medicine River*. Harlan Bigbear tricks his brother Joe into jumping off that bridge. The same bridge is the key to my past, and a clue to my moving now.

My father had a small stock of family stories, like the one about my jumping into the Banff Hot Springs pool at the age of six. I had never been near a pool but swimming had looked simple from the observation deck above, so I hustled into my trunks and raced from the change room to the pool and jumped in at the five-foot level. The second time I surfaced, someone noticed and pulled me out by the hair. The punchline my father savoured was the line I met him with as he emerged poolside: "Dad"—

he always caught the amazement in my tone—"I can't swim at all!"

And my father used to tell about hopping a freight in the dirty thirties on the Lethbridge side of that world's longest and highest bridge and hanging in numb terror out over the valley until the train made the far side and he tumbled off, never to ride the rails again. So I was conceived out west, in Alberta. I was not and never will be born in Ontario, where I have lived the second half of my life to date, where my children were born. Two thousand miles away from Alberta and that bridge back in Lethbridge, an okay place to visit but you wouldn't want to live there. Don't have to; I brought Alberta with me when I moved east. And sometimes in one of those long, lovely Ontario evenings, if I'm not careful, if I have one too many Scotches, I can feel Alberta begin to throb inside me and I hear some ambient western movie soundtrack stir, and start to swell and, and wouldn't you know it—Wilf Carter, *The Yodelling Cowboy*:

In the Blue Canadian Rockies  
Spring is sighing through the trees,  
And the golden poppies are blooming  
On the banks of Lake Louise.

## 6

"Much have I travelled in the realms of gold."

John Keats

Duncan Campbell Scott had been best friends with Pelham Edgar for almost fifty years when he wrote to a relative that "Edgar is here now in the Censors and is rather a thorn in our flesh. Between ourselves, one gets impatient with an old friend sometimes who has not learned, after all these years, to understand one's likes and dislikes and who keeps rubbing one's fur in the wrong direction so often." Too bad, this static between old buddies, but my mind slides off it to the vision of a man becoming cat before my very eyes. It was natural enough for Scott, who con-

fessed that he was “addicted to cats” (he always wrote with a cat across his knees) and who quite approved of Mark Twain’s habit of renting a few cats to prowl the hotel room wherever he was on tour. Yes, that is Scott’s cat Skookum frolicking on the music room floor with Rupert Brooke in 1913 while Scott, smoothing his whiskers, watches. There doesn’t seem to be a human anywhere in the Lisgar Street house tonight, but there will be. Just wait until flame-haired Belle gets home. Brooke wrote to Harold Munro back in England that Scott was “the only poet in Canada” and “a nice fellow.” “He has a wife,” Brooke added, period. Nuff said between old boys and cat fanciers. Reading ‘wife,’ the hairs stood up at the back of Munro’s neck.

\*

Maybe it’s silly, maybe it’s sentimental, to gravitate towards those critics whose reading practice agrees with yours, but wouldn’t it be perverse not to? Would you choose your friends out of those who rub your fur the wrong way? Maybe you would, maybe you should. It is easy to get too comfortable while reading, dozing in front of the fire after dinner with paws tucked in. Maybe you need a wakeup call. Maybe you need a dose of Frank Davey. Maybe I do, that is. Frank is from Abbotsford, British Columbia, but he writes as if he were from Missouri, the “Show Me” state. “I myself,” he says in *Post-National Arguments*, “am conflicted in particular ways that have the potential to alienate me in some way . . . from elements in every Canadian text which I encounter.” Reading across the grain, he raises a profile of text that shows itself to no other approach, so it would be folly not to pay attention. But Frank’s criticism often rubs me the wrong way. I turn from his distance, his resistance, to the truest thing Duncan Campbell Scott ever said in prose: “efforts [of criticism] to define

what is undefinable tend to become creative attempts, approximate to poetic utterance, and endeavor to capture the spirit of poetry by luring it with a semblance of itself.”

\*

I was a university student of pristine ignorance when I picked up Robert Kroetsch’s *The Studhorseman*, the first book I ever read that seemed written for me. I loved those strange scenes set in the city I was living in—especially the winter carnival chaos of 500 horses sprung from the Edmonton stockyards into a city centre paralyzed by blizzard. Those horses, giddy with freedom, clopped in and out of my own haunts all night: The Palace of Sweets, The King Edward Hotel, The Rialto Theatre. I liked those places better with horses than without, and I’m no horse-fancier. Edmonton was for the first time fraught with metamorphosis. The city has never been the same since, and, now that I come to think of it, neither has anything else.

\*

At the conference to celebrate Robert Kroetsch’s 70th birthday, 25 years after *The Studhorseman* woke me up, I listen to Roger Lemos speak of Kroetsch in Portugal, at Coimbra, where Roger taught for 12 years. He is speaking not of *The Studhorseman* but about *Alibi*, about the scenes set partly on Roger’s home ground, Luso, with its “companion mountain, Bucaco.” In *Alibi*, Kroetsch is no more literal with Luso than he had been with Edmonton, his home ground and mine.

Kroetsch’s love for Luso and its surroundings [says Roger Lemos] is obvious. A better [account] you will never read. The descriptive details, peppered with Portuguese words and phrases, reveal that a barrier to communication is being transcended. The allure of and identification with this sensual, feminine environment,

as I see it, is encoded even further when Julie is transformed into a beautiful, tall Portuguese woman while apparently yet another dwarf caresses her pubis, his stature giving him such a well-placed vantage point. "His hand, gentle as a butterfly's wings. That hot black blossom underneath." I held my breath as I read this. The forest of Bucaco has never been the same since.

If he loves the landscape he enters, does the foreigner cease to be a tourist?

"We own the country we grow up in, or we are aliens and invaders," says Michael Ondaatje about Sri Lanka, his Sri Lankan identity having been crossed and compromised by years of living abroad and growing into the grain of a very different country, Canada. Roger Lemos owns Portugal. It belongs to him as he belongs to it. He is so comfortable in his owning that he feels no colonizing threat, no expanding imperial centre, when Robert Kroetsch moves in to the territory. Roger Lemos owns the country he was brought up in, so he can tender it freely to a guest. And, given away, it returns to him multiplied:

As for Robert and me [he says], our mutual experiencing has led to shared visions (his) and presumptuously objective accounts (mine); for me, a relationship bringing multiple possibilities, where the scientific soon becomes unreliable, and a growing awareness that reality is only so, for a fleeting, often intangible moment, before becoming fiction. Kroetsch deals with this dichotomy quite comfortably, and denies the distinction, fusing essay writing, poetry, fiction and possible autobiographical bits, into each other. I, the reader and occasional companion, have come to enjoy this blurring of frontiers for what seems to me a better representation of how we become fictional within our memories, and how stories and myths become in turn so much more real in our psyches.

## 7

Ye'll tak the high road  
An I'll tak the low road

Thea Gray sends me her personal anthology of Canadian poetry, poems and passages from the red heart on her sleeve, copied out in her own careful hand and, when necessary, improved. The covering letter has a p.s.: "Why don't you write about Elpenor?"

Thea knows that I like Elpenor best of all the minor characters in *The Odyssey*—Elpenor and Argos, the faithful dog who rises from the dung heap to greet Odysseus in Ithaca twenty years later. Humans are easier to fool than dogs. No disguise could fool a dog. Thea's letter enters my struggle to write something for this conference on the literature of travel, and I suddenly see that Elpenor is a traveller, none swifter, none more reluctant. One minute he was walking the roof-beam—got a snootfull of the wild wine and somebody dared him—the next he was dead. Odysseus of many wiles took ages to reach the underworld. If he had set one foot down wrong on the way there, if he had skipped one step out of Circe's elaborate directions, it would have been back to square one. Or worse—remember that bagful of wind? I suppose Elpenor was one of those who got suspicious and wanted a look inside.

Whoosh!

Why couldn't Odysseus ever confide in somebody? See what happens when you hoard your secrets?

Elpenor, they were laughing at you right up until your foot slipped. Why is it you, least of all the companions of resourceful Odysseus, who has become a name for always wandering with a hungry heart, why is it you I love the most?

Elpenor, you are never coming home.

"Better to plunge once into a breaking wave and be swept away than to eke out an easy life on land that tamely supports you."



Doesn't the heart lift to that? Doesn't it just inflate you with the kind of conviction that soldiers plain people into battle for the grand cause? Where they are mowed down by the other side. Somebody in command didn't think it all the way through. For the High Muckamucks, "casualty" was nothing but a casual word.

Elpenor, casualty of wild wine and evil will, return to Ithaca was never in the cards for you. Would you have preferred a hero's plunge into that breaking wave and drowning in the Earth Shaker to your own slightly comic fate? I think not. After all, every other one of the lost companions died the death of an extra. You alone were granted a voice. In a story rich with stories and tellers it means something to narrate your own death, even if the tale *is* nothing but climax.

\*

There was this big party at the apartment on Johnston Street where all the real parties seemed to happen that year. This was 1969, Elpenor, the end of the turbulent Sixties, and the students gathered in that second-storey apartment on Johnston St. in Kingston, Ontario were doing their best to get loaded on the wild wine—those who weren't smoking up—or the barley brew.

Here's the part you'll like:

The beer had filled my bladder to the overflow, and the john was occupied, so I stepped out onto the unlit rear balcony and started down the fire-escape, looking for a dark place to relieve myself. The stairs turned left from the landing but I turned right and stepped into a gap between landing and wall. I plunged five or six feet down, twisting, my back scraping brick. My right foot remained hooked on the landing. Those were my flexible days, Elpenor, and a drunk, as you know, is extra pliable. I ended up locked in a high kick.

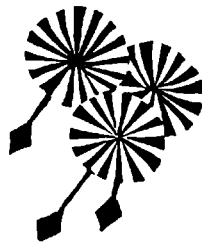
You, Elpenor: one false step and your neck bone is snapped.

Me, I couldn't just walk away from that

drop with one leg hiked up over my head, but I couldn't stop laughing either. Now here's the thing, Elpenor: if the apartment were on the 5th floor, the 6th, I would have turned in the same direction, and I would have dropped right into Hades. Might have been. I might have been you.

So your story keeps happening. There was this man in my country not long ago who got pie-eyed at his best friend's place. He climbed onto the roof of the house for a high dive into the swimming pool—drunk diving it's called—but he missed. A broken neck isn't always fatal these days, so he didn't quite make it to Hades. I don't think he should have sued his best friend, Elpenor. I didn't see you blaming Circe when that trap door opened into Erebus.

There was a bit of the dog-in-the-manger about Odysseus, wasn't there, a bit of the know-it-all. He always wanted to be the one out front. He wanted to be the one lashed to the mast with the naked women serenading him while you and the others rowed with beeswax in your ears. He didn't want anyone, and you least of all, beating him to the underworld. It must have been something to see his face when first shade to the blood was yours. "You have come faster on foot than I could in my black ship," he said, to mask how peeved he was to be second. Black ship, black joke: that was your moment, Elpenor, still fresh after 3000 years.



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Stan **Dragland** has recently taken early retirement from the University of Western Ontario to move to St. John's, Newfoundland. "Transit" is part of a work-in-progress called *Apocrypha*.

Sherrill **Grace** teaches English at the University of British Columbia. She has published widely on twentieth-century literature and edited *Sursum Corda: The Collected Letters of Malcolm Lowry*, 2 vols, and *Satan in a Barrel and Other Early Stories by Malcolm Lowry*.

Henrik **Gustafsson** is completing his dissertation at the University of Gothenburg on the pastorals of the eighteenth-century Swedish poet and musician C.M. Bellman. He has published essays on *Thoreau* in the *Thoreau Society Bulletin* and *Concord Saunterer*, as well as in Swedish journals.

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Tom **Penner** is currently working on his PhD in English literature at the University of Alberta. His research interests include Canadian fiction, post-colonial hybridity, and liminal performances of identity within diasporic communities.

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