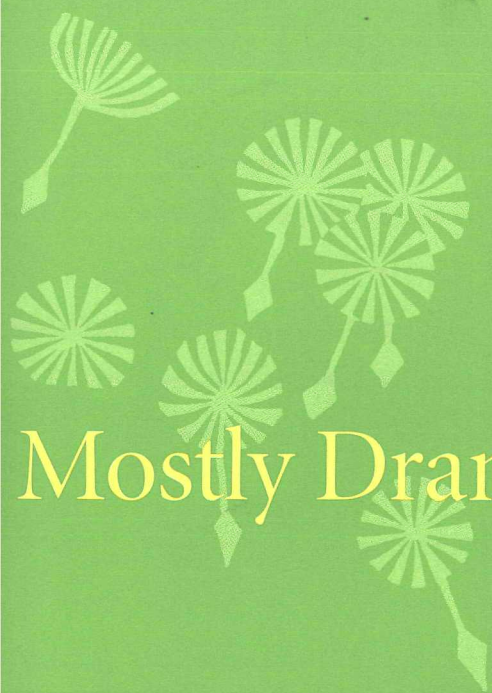
Canadian Literature

A Quarterly of Criticism and Review Spring 2001 $17

168



Mostly Drama

Canadian Literature / Littérature *canadienne*

A Quarterly of Criticism and Review

Number 168, Spring 2001

Published by The University of British Columbia, Vancouver

Editor: Eva-Marie Kröller

Associate Editors: Kevin McNeilly, Glenn Deer (Reviews), Iain Higgins (Poetry), Alain-Michel Rocheleau (Francophone Writing)

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Forthcoming book reviews are available at the *Canadian Literature* web site: http://www.canlit.ca

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Publications Mail registration number 08647
GST R108161779

Publication of *Canadian Literature* is assisted by the University of British Columbia and SSHRCC. We acknowledge the financial support of the Government of Canada, through the Publications Assistance Program (PAP), toward our mailing costs.

Canadian Literature, is indexed in *Canadian Periodical Index*, *Canadian Magazine Index*, *American Humanities Index*; and the *MLA International Bibliography*, among numerous others. It is available on-line in the *Canadian Business and Current Affairs Database*, and is available in microfilm from University Microfilm International, 300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, Michigan USA 48106

For subscriptions, back issues (as available), and annual and cumulative indexes, write: Circulation Manager, *Canadian Literature*, The University of British Columbia, Buchanan E158, 1866 Main Mall, Vancouver, B.C. V6T 1Z1

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SUBSCRIPTION: $45 INDIVIDUAL; $60 INSTITUTIONAL; PLUS GST IN CANADA; PLUS $20 POSTAGE OUTSIDE CANADA

ISSN 0008-4360

Managing Editor: Donna Chin
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Design: George Vaitkunas
Illustrations: George Kuthan
Printing: Hignell Printing Limited
Typefaces: Minion and Univers
Paper: recycled and acid-free

Canadian Literature, a peer-reviewed journal, welcomes submissions of articles, interviews, and other commentaries relating to writers and writing in Canada, and of previously unpublished poems by Canadian writers. The journal does not publish fiction.

Articles of approximately 25 pages should be submitted in triplicate, with the author's name deleted from 2 copies, and addressed to The Editor, *Canadian Literature*, The University of British Columbia, Buchanan E158, 1866 Main Mall, Vancouver, B.C., Canada V6T 1Z1. Submissions must include a self-addressed return envelope, either with Canadian stamps or accompanied by International Postal Reply Coupons. Submissions without SASE cannot be returned.

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

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

Les manuscrits, d'une longueur approximative de 25 pages, doivent être soumis en trois exemplaires (dont deux anonymisés), adressés à l'Éditeur de *Canadian Literature*, The University of British Columbia, Buchanan E158, 1866 Main Mall, Vancouver, C.-B., Canada V6T 1Z1, et accompagnés d'une enveloppe de retour pré-adressée et pré-affranchie (timbrée ou munie de coupons-réponse internationaux), sans quoi ils ne pourront être retournés à leurs auteurs.

Les articles soumis doivent répondre aux exigences de forme bibliographique définies par la MLA. Tous les textes acceptés pour publication devront être fournis sur disquette.

Editorial

Altérité et vivacité du théâtre au Canada

Alain-Michel Rocheleau

En ce début de millénaire, force nous est de constater que nos deux dramaturgies nationales sont irrémédiablement marquées par diverses formes d'altérité, à un moment où le concept de territoire (celui de la culture qui est aussi celui de l'imaginaire) apparaît de moins en moins irréductible, lui qui, il n'y a pas si longtemps encore, était le propre d'espaces rigoureusement circonscrits par des frontières qui cherchaient à garantir ou à protéger, entre autres, l'homogénéité de nos identités collectives. Sans doute, l'historien qui se penchera, dans quelques décennies, sur la période actuelle sera-t-il frappé par ce fait incontournable aussi bien que par l'extraordinaire vitalité de l'art théâtral pratiqué au Canada depuis les vingt dernières années environ, dans des conditions économiques souvent périeuses, faut-il le préciser, et des circonstances sociales parfois mouvementées.

Au risque ici de proférer des évidences, rappelons que depuis quelques années, les pratiques du théâtre, au Canada, après avoir longtemps subi l'influence de courants étrangers (américains et européens, en particulier), ont été marquées du sceau de la nouveauté, dû en grande partie au déploiement du postmodernisme scénique et à la prédominance de créations issues du théâtre de recherche, du théâtre multimédia et de la danse-théâtre. Ces pratiques, de nature et de portée aussi bien plurinationales, pluriculturelles, plurivoques que plurivalentes, se sont souvent singularisées par leur caractère pluridisciplinaire. Le théâtre à texte, plus traditionnel, n'a pas été négligé pour autant. Les pièces d' auteurs canadiens (connus ou moins connus) ont été périodiquement jouées et appréciées par le public; plusieurs textes dramatiques ont aussi fait l'objet d'un "libre-échange" productif entre le

théâtre québécois et anglo-canadien, et ont été dans certains cas exportés avec succès à l'étranger. Enfin, les deux dernières décennies ont vu se consolider de nombreuses institutions (écoles de formation, maisons d'édition et revues savantes) toutes aussi essentielles à la diffusion qu'à l'enseignement du théâtre, dans les cinq grandes régions du pays.

Le postmodernisme au théâtre, caractérisé pour l'essentiel par la fragmentation des signes de la scène, par l'omniprésence de récits éclatés, d'intertextualités, de dialogues hybridés ou de personnages aux identités brouillées, a su justifier, dans de nombreux spectacles, le déploiement de fatras visuels et sonores souvent fort bien réussis. Dans des réalisations hautement plurivoques (pensons, notamment, à celles de Peter Perina de l'Université de Dalhousie, du Théâtre des Deux Mondes, du Théâtre Omnibus, ou encore, aux plus récentes productions de Michael Levine, pour l'opéra), le public a pu admirer des décors constitués d'espaces non traditionnels—une fôret, un long tunnel, un sous-sol de bibliothèque désaffectée, etc.—, ou bien de lieux marqués par une indifférenciation spatio-temporelle, généralement agrémentés d'éléments plurivalents et qui ne renvoient à rien d'autre qu'à eux-mêmes. Dans la même lignée, le décloisonnement des genres artistiques a su répandre l'usage, au Canada, de formes mitoyennes empreintes d'altérité, allant des récitals de danse, où les interprètes dialoguent entre eux, aux spectacles de mine, à l'intérieur desquels la parole prend le relais du geste (référons ici, en guise d'exemples, aux plus récentes réalisations du Canadian Mime Theatre, fondé il y a plus de trente ans par Adrian Pecknold et Eugen Barrerman).

C'est ainsi que plusieurs autres créations, issues du théâtre de recherche, du théâtre multimédia ou de la danse-théâtre, ont commencé elles aussi, depuis près de deux décennies, à transmettre au public de nouvelles façons d'appréhender le réel. En privilégiant dans un même spectacle divers moyens d'expression comme la danse ou la vidéo (qu'on pense, par exemple, à *New Song, New Dance* [1988] de René Highway, ou à *Placeholder* [1994] de Brenda Laurel et Rachel Strickland), ou en proposant un discours textuel énoncé dans plusieurs langues, plurilinguisme parfois jumelé à des matériaux culturels fort exogènes, des créateurs, comme Diane Cave (dans *The Breakdown*, 1993), Robert Lepage (dans *La Trilogie des dragons*, 1985), Gilles Maheu (dans *Hamlet-Machine*, 1987), Tedd Robinson (dans *L'amour, la mort et la demoiselle*, 1983), ou encore, Richard Rose (dans *Newhouse*, 1989), pour ne référer qu'à ceux-ci, ont fait se croiser, se confronter et parfois même s'amalgamer dans leurs productions plusieurs héritages distincts.

Pour le grand bénéfice de leurs spectateurs respectifs, ces artisans de la scène ont également su mettre en valeur ce qui distingue autant que ce qui unit des traditions et des époques différentes, tout en montrant que nous habitons désormais une planète où les frontières qui séparent habituellement les peuples s'estompent peu à peu.

Si le postmodernisme, au théâtre, a bien servi la recherche créative d'images et de nouveautés (à un point tel qu'il est permis de se demander si cette quête n'a pas indirectement empêché l'éclosion de styles scénographiques moins chargés de stimulations effrénées), on se doit d'ajouter que le théâtre à texte, plus traditionnel, s'est lui aussi grandement renouvelé. Son revouvellement s'est avant tout opéré chez les dramaturges, dont le nombre a fortement augmenté ces dernières années. De simplement nommer certains d'entre eux suffit à illustrer l'exceptionnelle variété de style qui a présentement cours au Canada. Identifions, entre autres, les plus connus et joués au pays, en commençant par Michel Marc Bouchard, David Fennario, Brad Fraser, Sharon Pollock, Judith Thompson et Michel Tremblay, auxquels s'ajoutent Normand Chaurette, René-Daniel Dubois, Norm Foster, Marie Laberge, Daniel MacIvor, Marco Micone, Jason Sherman, Diane Warren, de même que les auteurs de la relève comme Lyle Victor Albert, Kelly Jo Burke, Tom Cahill, Jean-François Caron, Dominique Champagne, Abla Farhoud, Connie Gault, Bryden MacDonald, Alexis Martin, Michael Melski, Washdi Mouawad, Steve Petch, Pete Soucy et Janis Spence. La qualité d'émotion, dans la plupart des pièces de ces auteurs, n'a vraiment d'égale que la belle désinvolture qu'elles cherchent toutes, à divers degrés, à communiquer. Chez d'autres encore, un goût de sensualité, de liberté, et un désir de controverse s'efforcent d'arracher le public des salles aux préjugés (sexistes, racistes, homophobes) les plus tenaces, à ce qu'on appelle le conformisme idéologique, ou à le faire réfléchir sur les pouvoirs occultes que détiennent les grands systèmes de ce monde.

Quelques-unes de ces pièces ont même fait l'objet d'un "libre-échange" fructueux entre le théâtre québécois et anglo-canadien. Ainsi, par exemple, que depuis 1990, certaines oeuvres de Judith Thompson (*Lion in the Streets / Lion dans les rues*), de John McDonough (*The Bells of Hell Ring Ting-a-Ling / Les cloches d'enfer*) et de Brad Fraser (*Poor Super Man / Pauvre Super Man, Unidentified Human Remains and the True Nature of Love / Des restes humains non identitfiés et la véritable nature de l'amour*, pièce qui a d'ailleurs inspiré le scénario du film *Love and Human Remains*, réalisé par le cinéaste québécois Denys Arcand en 1993) ont su impressionner le public du

Québec et retenir l'attention des critiques. Durant la même période, plusieurs créations de Michel Tremblay (*Les Belles-soeurs* et *Bonjour là, bonjour!*, en particulier) de même que certaines pièces de Michel Marc Bouchard (*Les Feluettes ou la Répétition d'un drame romantique / Lilies or The Revival of a Romantic Drama, Les Muses orphelines / The Orphan Muses*) ont été présentées devant de larges auditoires, dans plusieurs villes canadiennes.

En plus de profiter de ce type d' échange "interrégional," certains de nos dramaturges ont vu leur théâtre exporté et présenté à l'étranger: pensons, entre autres, à la pièce *The Crackwalker* de Judith Thompson, montée à Londres; aux textes *Les Belles-soeurs* et *Albertine, en cinq temps* de Michel Tremblay, joués respectivement à Glasgow et à Tokyo; à la pièce *Unidentified Human Remains and the True Nature of Love* de Brad Fraser présentée à New York ou à celle de Marie Laberge, intitulée *Oublier* et offerte tout récemment au public parisien. Et que dire du vif succès remporté par Normand Chaurette, avec *Le Passage de l'Indiana* au Festival d'Avignon en 1996, ou encore, par Michel Marc Bouchard avec une version espagnole des *Muses orphelines*, présentée à Mexico l'an dernier. Certes, les plus en vus de nos auteurs d'ici font que les frontières de nos dramaturgies nationales prennent de l'expansion et que nos théâtres voyagent constamment pour aller à la rencontre des Autres, de leur culture et de leur imaginaire. Il en va tout autant, d'ailleurs, d'un grand nombre de nos compagnies théâtrales qui, tout en ayant les villes d' Halifax, de Québec, de Montréal, de Toronto, d'Edmonton ou de Vancouver pour ports d'attache, élaborent leurs activités artistiques selon un calendrier de représentations planifiées à l'échelle internationale. C'est le cas, notamment, du Théâtre UBU, qui évolue sous la direction de Denis Marleau, ou encore, de la troupe Ex Machina, que supervise Robert Lepage.

Si l'on peut se réjouir du succès remporté par bon nombre de nos dramaturges et créateurs, tant au Canada qu'à l'étranger, les même sentiments peuvent nous animer lorsque l'on songe à la consolidation des institutions historiquement consacrées à l'enseignement et à la promotion du théâtre de chez-nous. C'est ainsi, par exemple, qu'aux plans de l'enseignement du théâtre (texte et représentation) et de la transmission des connaissances techniques (de jeu, de scénographie et d'écriture dramatique), nos écoles de théâtre (aussi bien l'École nationale de théâtre du Canada de Montréal, les deux conservatoires d'art dramatique du Québec, les départements de théâtre des universités d'Alberta, de Colombie-Britannique, Concordia, de Dalhousie, de Guelph, d'Ottawa, de Moncton et de l'UQAM, que certains

collèges d'enseignement général et professionnel (CEGEP) du Québec ou que le Studio 58 de Vancouver, pour ne référer qu'à ceux-ci) assument souvent très bien leurs responsabilités, en dispensant un enseignement de qualité enviable. Ces institutions d'enseignement cherchent d'abord et avant tout à favoriser chez leurs étudiants, futurs acteurs, scénographes ou dramaturges, l'acquisition de moyens qui les aideront à créer une histoire, ou faire évoluer des personnages sur la scène d'un théâtre, d'un plateau de télévision ou de cinéma. Dans la plupart de ces maisons d'enseignement, les individus en formation apprennent généralement à devenir des hommes et des femmes de théâtre grâce à l'acquisition d'une maîtrise des moyens d'expression, souvent lente et aride, par une étude patiente des techniques de la voix, de la respiration, de la mimique et de l'expression corporelle, autant que par une découverte de la nécessité des disciplines mentales et de l'entraînement de la mémoire. En fonction des programmes d'enseignement et des ressources disponibles, certains élèves seront également initiés aux rudiments de la post-synchronisation et du cinéma, alors que d'autres aborderont le théâtre sous une angle plus théorique, tout aussi valable.

Si les institutions d'enseignement au Canada jouent un rôle primordial quant à la connaissance et à la diffusion de nos dramaturgies nationales, il en va de même des maisons d'édition, comme *Boréal, Coach House Press, Leméac* et *Talonbooks*, qui publient et diffusent, depuis de très nombreuses années, les textes de nos dramaturges. Grâce à ces éditeurs, leurs oeuvres (traces essentielles d'un art qui, par essence, est éphémère) sont disponibles non seulement à la grandeur du pays, mais sont également diffusées et vendues à l'étranger (surtout dans le réseau des collèges et des universités, qui est de loin le secteur le plus dynamique pour l'achat et l'étude de nos textes dramatiques). Ce phénomène d'exportation donne aux pièces écrites ici une résonance plus large et, par le fait même, une envergure qu'elles pourraient difficilement obtenir dans certaines villes canadiennes, après quelques représentations.

L'importance que l'on doit accorder aux institutions critiques du théâtre canadien appartient au même registre. Car bien que la critique théâtrale (qu'elle soit universitaire ou journalistique) a le plus souvent bon dos mauvaise presse auprès des créateurs et artistes de la scène, il n'en demeure pas moins que les agents qui la font abordent, la plupart avec rigueur et professionnalisme, les produits de l'industrie théâtrale d'ici, non pas dans l'absolu, ni par rapport à une série de canons communément reçus auxquels ils souscriraient avec béatitude ou sans grand discernement, mais par

rapport à des modèles théoriques bien définis, des conceptions intellectuelles et personnelles éprouvées, souvent en fonction de leur sensibilité propre, de leurs perceptions et connaissances individuelles mises à jour et circonscrites dans des conditions spatiales et temporelles bien déterminées. Les fruits de la réflexion de ces critiques figurent dans revues spécialisées, comme *L'Annuaire théâtral*, les Cahiers de théâtre *Jeu*, *Canadian Drama/L'Art dramatique canadien*, *Canadian Theatre Review*, *Theatre History in Canada/ Histoire du théâtre au Canada*, *Theatre Research in Canada*, ou de portée plus générale, comme *Études canadiennes/Canadian Studies* et, bien sûr, *Canadian Literature*. Ces revues universitaires, tout en étant de précieux outils d'observation critique et de réflexion sur la théorie et la pratique du théâtre au Canada, remplissent elles aussi, depuis plusieurs décennies, une fonction essentielle quant à la connaissance, la promotion et la diffusion de nos dramaturgies nationales.

Si l'on doit, et à juste titre, rendre hommage aux créateurs et artisans du théâtre d'ici pour le travail accompli depuis de nombreuses décennies, cela ne veut pas dire que tout soit parfait dans le meilleur des "mondes du théâtre"! D'abord, alors que la plupart de nos gouvernements (fédéral et provinciaux) se réjouissent actuellement de la présence de surplus budgétaires accumulés ou de pouvoir atteindre, en cette année 2001, un équilibre fiscal longtemps recherché, on assiste en contrepartie à de sérieux efforts de rationalisation du financement de l'activité artistique, surtout de la part des organismes para-gouvernementaux et des ministères plus directement responsables de l'octroi de programmes d'aide. Fautes de subventions appropriées, les conditions financières dans lesquelles se retrouvent les troupes, compagnies et théâtres au Canada obligent le plus souvent ces derniers à ne planifier leur futur artistique qu'à très court terme et en fonction des recettes du guichet (ce qui, bien sûr, limite grandement l'épanouissement et le rayonnement potentiels de nos talents et des efforts accomplis), contrairement à ce qui prévaut dans plusieurs pays de l'actuelle Communauté européenne. En ce début de millénaire, ne serait-il pas raisonnable de souhaiter que la culture, en général, et que les arts de la scène, en particulier, soient financièrement mieux soutenus et, dans l'idéal, mieux valorisés (voire "priorisés") dans nos projets de société?

Par ailleurs, si l'on peut se réjouir, malgré tout, de "l'état de santé" de nos dramaturgies nationales et d'un "libre-échange" fructueux entre le Québec et le reste du Canada en matière de textes de théâtre, on ne peut que déplorer la place plutôt restreinte qui est faite dans plusieurs provinces à la

littérature dramatique autochtone, aussi bien qu'à la richesse des environnements visuels et sonores que nous offre le théâtre d'auteurs comme Tomson Highway, Yvette Nolan, Tina Mason et Yves Sioui Durand. De la même manière, on ne peut que fortement dénoncer la façon dont est souvent ignorée, en ce pays, la dramaturgie franco-ontarienne (le monde et le langage si particuliers de dramaturges comme Michel Ouellette, Robert Marinier et de Jean-Marc Dalpé, notamment), ou encore, la verdeur, la vitalité, la chaleur et la poésie historique du théâtre acadien (celui d'Antonine Maillet, en tête de liste) qui, sous des dehors souvent pittoresques et mine de rien, n'en est pas moins un instrument de critique sociale et identitaire des plus précieux.

Enfin, en cette première décennie du XXI[e] siècle, au cours de laquelle ne pourra que s'accélérer, dit-on, la configuration de la société internationale et de ses monopoles financiers comme l'ALENA, est-ce vraiment faire preuve de témérité que d'espérer que nos dramaturgies nationales soient vigoureusement protégées de toute forme d'impérialisme culturel qui chercherait, à moyen ou long termes, à les dénaturer?

En somme, en dépit de conditions matérielles souvent difficiles, nos dramaturgies nationales témoignent, dans leur éclectisme réciproque et empreint d'altérité, d'une vitalité exceptionnelle et d'une diversité incroyable, depuis les deux dernières décennies, en particulier. Par l'ancrage qu'elles ont dans le tissus social québécois et canadien, aussi bien que par l'originalité de leurs recherches formelles, nos théâtres se révèlent prolifiques, plurivalents et constituent de vibrantes manifestations de la vie culturelle au Canada.

George Elliott Clarke

Ulcerous Canon

For Clyde de L. Ryals (1928-1998)

Imbibing libretti and black liqueur,
I'm the dismal shade of dour, spectral Yeats—

or defrocked, unsavoury Pound, who liked
to put "negros" in lower-case (in their place),

or coolly juxtapose black folks with "worms,"
while stammering blood, blind, out his smashed mouth.

But I won't elect that Tom Eliot
his anti-Semitism slashed to shit.

For clarity and charity, I plumb
John Clare, his sugar fire of wine and rum.

But shut away whiny, beseeching Keats,
who should've drunk some Alexander Keith's

India Pale Ale! Clyde, we've both eyed blues,
golds, greys—adrift in a Venetian sky—

gondola over sodden New Scotland,
and sink in muddy Impressionism—

gilt, scuzzy water in tufted, brown fields,
or gooey ice, drooling with too-soon spring—

what all our reading comes to—a canon
of depression, bleak as January.

Words should vacillate in lascivious postures,
or in notoriously unsimple rhyme. Poet:

One great poem, that's all, and you cannot fail—
composing lines blustery, yet tender,

your voice your own (Walcott in the margins,
Eliot, Yeats, and Pound in the dungeon),

a spiky, unadulterated voice,
blending black hymns and a pocket Oxford.

II. iii

They call you "wordy, stormy, sonorous":
It's a way of shutting you up.

Your black mouth ought to be elegant with snow—
So words emerge icy, paralyzed: Britannic.

They say, "Put away all that alliteration.
It's too much like jazz, or other black music

(Which is bombast, when properly heard)."
Others ask, "How d'ya get such rhythm into your poems?"

Well, it's the mistake of every poem—
To admit gape-mouthed, yearning, and sooty blues.

But you feel like a pompous idiot—
Your beleaguered poems all bust.

After eighteen years, you're responsible for your failure.
There's a fool side to genius.

Why not mimic all those politicos who love wine—
And whores—and craft rat-holes of rhetoric?

All the prizes are poison and no mercy:
Your writing is your coffin.

Critics shit out reviews to make war,
Make reputations, sometimes even to make love.

You get the look of a philosopher type—
A little silly in the head.

Now comes blackness into beauty,
The snow surrendering, your page yielding

To charring words,
Your burning cigarettes jabbed into white skin.

Jane Moss

"Watch your language!"
The Special Effects of Theatrical Vulgarity

Language is always a hot-button issue in Québec, whether we are talking about the status of French vis-à-vis English or the quality of Québécois French vis-à-vis international French.[1] In the 1960s, when writers began to use Québécois French in literary texts, the language issue exploded into *la querelle du joual.* While *parti-priste* authors and Michel Tremblay used *joual* to underscore the cultural poverty of urban working-class Québécois, others believed with Michèle Lalonde (*Deffense et illustration de la langue québécoyse*) that *joual* could express the creative genius of a people. While the debate about the quality of Québécois French seemed to quiet down in the seventies and eighties as the political status of French was strengthened by the passage and enforcement of language legislation, the argument has been renewed in the nineties, sparked by polemical attacks within the academic community. Linguists are arguing over the publication of Québécois French dictionaries while French teachers debate the pedagogical strategy of stressing communication over correctness.[2] The politics of nationalism and class resentment have inevitably coloured the debate as Québécois French has become a sign of political correctness. Those who advocate linguistic correctness, the teaching of standard oral and written French, have been labeled cultural élitists, purists, and (worse yet) petty bourgeois *francisants.*[3]

While linguists, essayists, French professors, and editorialists inveigh, we are reminded of critic Lucie Robert's comments on the crucial role of language in theatre. Here is how she summarized the political dimension of Québec dramatic language:

> *Ainsi, le théâtre représente la langue; il en donne une image publique; il l'affiche. L'on sait aussi le rôle fondamental que le théâtre a joué dans la légitimation de la langue française et de ses usages particuliers au Québec, en inscrivant l'acte de dire au coeur d'un combat politique à caractère national. C'est la dramaturgie, c'est-à-dire l'écriture, qui a contraint le théâtre à afficher sa dimension nationale, puisqu'elle s'écrit nécessairement dans une langue concrète, nationalement déterminée; puisqu'elle affiche la parole, c'est-à-dire aussi la voix, l'accent et la variation linguistique.* ("La langue du théâtre" 97)

Since dramaturgy is above all a speech act and dramatic action is often what Robert calls "un combat pour la maîtrise de la parole," the levels of language used on stage become important indicators of the state of Québec society. As Robert says, "Québec drama deals in all possible ways, even an obsessional way, with the problem of language. It keeps asking how to speak, to say what, in what circumstances, and to create what effect" ("Toward a History" 759).

To clarify our use of terms without taking sides in the linguistic debate, we take the term "Québécois French" or *français québécois* to mean the variant of French used daily by approximately six million North Americans. Standard or normative Québécois French is a grammatically correct variety of European French that includes some *québécismes*, word usages specific to Québec. Popular (vernacular or colloquial) Québécois French is the daily oral speech of Francophones and is characterized by its accent, vocabulary, and some grammatical incorrectness. The term *joual* is often used pejoratively to designate the variety of Québécois French spoken by the urban working class, and it assumes an excessive use of anglicisms, vulgarity and swear words. While normative Québécois French (or *le français québécois correct*) has become the norm in poetry and fiction, popular oral language dominates the stage, still a site of linguistic contestation. In the tradition of *Les Belles-Soeurs*, contemporary playwrights highlight language issues in ways that may avoid invective and ideology, but cannot avoid carrying a political charge. Yvan Bienvenue, Daniel Danis, François Archambault, Jean-François Caron, Serge Boucher, Raymond Villeneuve, and others dramatize the social and psychological implications of vernacular and vulgar Québécois French in works that should make the essayists and editorialists drop their (poison) pens. *Joual* and popular Québécois French are no longer used to make an ironic statement about the lower classes as in Tremblay's *Les Belles-Soeurs*, nor as a political declaration of independence as in Jean-Claude Germain's *Si les Sansoucis s'en soucient, ces Sansoucis-ci s'en soucieront-ils? Bien parler c'est se respecter* (1971). *Joual* is not used as an assertion of cultural virility as it was in Jean Barbeau's *Joualez-moi d'amour*

(1971), nor is popular Québécois French used as much for humorous effect as it was by Gratien Gélinas's Fridolin or by Yvon Deschamps. In the nineties, the dramatic spectacles of *joual* and vernacular Québécois French are most often part of a stinging critique of contemporary society, its moral and spiritual bankruptcy and its failure to provide the wherewithal for individuals to fulfill their emotional needs.

Ironically, popular forms of Québécois French, which were symbols of popular counter-culture for many sixties leftist intellectuals, are proposed as the norm by some leftist cultural nationalists of the nineties (for example, Pierre Monette). The stance they take against the teaching of standard oral French and grammatical correctness has taken on an aggressive, anti-intellectual, vaguely homophobic tone. Rejecting the normative Québécois French advocated by the Office de la langue française as too much like *le français de France* also means rejecting authority, cultural imperialism and the Catholic Church, which was responsible for the educational system for centuries. If contemporary Québec theatre confirms the triumph of vernacular Québécois French, close analysis reveals what an empty victory it has been. Dramatic language in Québec during the last decade has presented the spectacle of a degraded, vulgar, anglicized, ungrammatical language—the *français approximatif* denounced by Georges Dor, Jean Larose, Jacques Godbout, and others. The fact that Montreal's theatre-going public expects to hear popular rather than normative Québécois French seems problematic to actor/dramatist René-Daniel Dubois, who calls this phenomenon *"un signe de repliement"* (see Vaïs).

For the generation of playwrights who have emerged since the nineties, colloquial Québécois French is not just the guarantor of authenticity and cultural specificity that it was for eighties dramatists such as Marie Laberge. It is often a negative sign of Québec's failure to overcome its lower-class origins and its marginal status, a sign that many Québeckers have lost the battle for verbal mastery referred to by Lucie Robert. When put in the mouth of educated, middle-class characters, the slang form of Québécois French suggests the vulgarization of a Québec demoralized by the materialism and individualism of contemporary western society. The inability of Québeckers to express themselves—an inability that purists blame on the language so zealously defended by cultural nationalists—is an obstacle to emotional and spiritual well-being. When contemporary young dramatists add heavy doses of vulgarity to their work, they are clearly doing so for reasons which undermine the cultural nationalists' desire for a distinctive language. A

generation ago, the use of vulgarity by educated intellectuals signaled a rebellious "in-your-face" attitude not unlike the *"épater le bourgeois"* strategy of the French Romantics or Jarry or Céline. Today, verbal obscenities and vulgarity creep into everyday discourse to such a degree that much of the shock value of swear words, scatological terms, and explicitly sexual language has been lost. Still, when playwrights use obscene and vulgar language, critics must explore the intent and the effect of such usage.

In the discussion that follows, we will explore different uses of vulgarity in recent plays. The blend of popular Québécois French and obscenity is in some instances part of an aesthetic that has been variously labeled neo-realist, super-realist, or hyperrealist and it demands that we see theatre as a site of social commentary as we did in earlier decades. Crude, ungrammatical popular speech is the *"langue blessée"* that Sherry Simon speaks of as part of an *"esthétique de la faiblesse"* (111-13). In other cases, playwrights use but transcend the vulgarity of everyday language in creating a poeticized, stylized dramatic discourse specific to Québec. The renewed self-consciousness about language in theatre has prompted critics such as myself to talk about a *dramaturgie de la parole* characterized by the exploration of different levels of language and their social and psychological implications.[4] Much of this experimentation has taken place in monologues and dramatized oral tales precisely because of the playwright's acute awareness of using the language of ordinary speech in a literary manner. What we are seeing here is a metalinguistic discourse in which language becomes the spectacle. This is hieratic rather than demotic speech, and the monologue or oral tale form accentuates the literariness of the play.

In the case of Robert Gravel's trilogy, *La tragédie de l'homme* (1997), the use of joualized Québec French is dictated by his goal of creating a *théâtre du quotidien* and it is conventional in the sense that levels of language mark class and generational divisions as well as educational background. In *Durocher le milliardaire* (1991), for example, the wealthy businessman speaks a neutral or standard French—grammatically correct, somewhat pretentious, without any trace of a regional accent. His two children, well traveled and well educated, speak very correctly except when making sexual overtures to the filmmakers who are seeking financial backing from their father. Their language of seduction contains some of the elisions, anglicisms, and slang that we hear in the joualized French of the three visiting filmmakers, but only the lower-class characters use the *"ostie," "ciboire," "sacrament," "ouais," "chus"* that signal popular oral speech. In the third play in the trilogy,

Il n'y a plus rien (1992), set in a nursing home, the grammatically correct, standard French (that is, without the transcribed orality that marks vernacular Québécois French) spoken by the paralyzed nun and her brother aligns them with the Catholic élite that dominated in the pre-Quiet Revolution period. As their obsession with reading obituaries suggests, they are part of a dying culture. The rest of the large cast of characters converses in a joualized popular speech that reveals their materialism and vulgarity. Disgusted by what he hears and sees of this *"bande d'impolis . . . des mal élévés,"* the nun's brother tells them *"Vous ne savez pas vivre et vos propos sont insignifiants"* (216). Unfortunately, this sentence could be used as a blanket condemnation of most of the characters in Gravel's trilogy and therein lies the tragedy. In his *"Préface"* to the published edition, Jean-Pierre Ronfard suggests that while we may laugh at the pretentiousness of the well-spoken élitists (rich people, intellectuals, conservative Catholics) and at the imbecilic mediocrity of the *"joualisants,"* Gravel's work is profoundly tragic (11-12). These plays are tragedies without heroes and without notable actions because Gravel wants us to take note of the tragic nature of everyday life. This (post)modern tragic aesthetic, certainly not unique to Québec, assumes the failure of language, both élitist intellectual discourses and everyday popular speech. It displays a degraded form of speech, full of grammatical mistakes, anglicisms, swear words, and sexual slang, which takes on a highly political charge in the context of the larger debate about Québécois French.

One aspect of the vulgarization of Québec dramatic discourse that should be underscored is that it crosses class, gender, and educational boundaries. While audiences might expect the homeless and mentally deranged characters of Gilbert Dupuis's *Mon oncle Marcel qui vague vague près du métro Berri* (1991) to speak a vulgar, street version of Québécois French, they don't expect to hear gutter language in the chic apartments of junior executives as is the case in François Archambault's *Cul sec* (1996). When young women playwrights of the nineties use graphic and obscene language, it has nothing to do with the *prise de parole* of feminist playwrights of the seventies and eighties. Clearly, *"parler beau"* is no longer a goal since intellectual and moral authority is no longer linked to linguistic correctness.

In the collective show *Les Zurbains* mounted by the Théâtre Urbi et Orbi in April 1997 at the Salle Fred-Barry, two of the more shocking *contes urbains* are by young women identified as a high school students. Annie Goulet gives us a contemporary Québec version of *"L'invitation au voyage"* in *"Quand, la Floride?"* (25-35), in which winter depression induces erotic

tropical fantasies about a waiter encountered in a café. The storyteller is very aware of the fairytale aspect of her fantasy; in fact she asks, why not reverse the pattern of Cinderella, Snow White, and Sleeping Beauty and let the woman make advances to Prince Charming? But her romantic dreams are x-rated. Here is how she describes the *coup de foudre* that accompanies her order of hot chocolate:

> *"J't'apporte ça tout de suite!" qu'y m'a dit avec un de ces sourires. C'était du protocole, je l'svais, mais ça m'a quand même brassé les hormones. Toute mon corps s'est mis à bouger sans s'en rendre compte. Mes doigts martelaient la table, un après l'autre, mes jambes se tortillaient comme une envie de pisser, mes yeux s'enflaient pis s'enflaient en même temps que mon clitoris—j'avais presque oublié qu'il existait, lui—pis ma tête dansait une p'tite salsa avec ce Dieu-là du sex-appeal qui préparait pour MOI un bon chocolat-chaud-crème-fouettée.*
>
> *J'ai sorti ma carte pour payer, pour occuper mes doigts avant que je creuse le comptoir jusqu'en Chine. "Garde le change," que j'y aurais dit. C'est ça le problème, le gouvernement s'arrange pour abolir la cruise avec la monnaie électronique! Quand il a pris la carte dans ma main, pis qu'il a frôlé mon doigt, c'est ben simple, j'suis v'nue. Pas v'nue comme dans arrivée, là, v'nue . . . comme ça, de même, dans mes culottes. V'nue comme dans v'nir, comme dans jouir. Le cri qu'j'ai étouffé pour pas trop qu'ça paraisse, c'est fort à faire trembler la terre. Même un gros neuf sur l'échelle de Richter, c'était pas assez pour égaler les vibrations de mon sexe qui en r'venait pas. C'est drôle, j'suis v'nue pis j'en suis pas r'venue. Fuck!* (27-28)

The title of the story by Julie Desmarais-Gaulin points to the social commentary implicit in these *contes urbains*. *"Détresse de la classe moyenne"* (19-24) tells the story of Julie, a sixteen-year-old girl from a middle-class suburb, who decides to escape from her glass prison and have a true downtown Montreal adventure. Her nightmarish experience includes booze and bad drugs in a rock 'n roll club, plus witnessing sexual violence and exploitation, yet for her it is a *"soirée de délivrance totale"* (24). For Desmarais-Gaulin and others, education and middle-class material comfort cannot cure the existential distress that provokes this prayerful preamble to her tale:

> *Aidez-moi! Pitié! Aidez-moi quelqu'un avant que j'dégueule tout l'stress que m'impose mon retour dans la prison du savoir. Chu pus capable d'rester accrochée icitte mais j'sais pas comment sacrer l'camp. Aidez-moi à m'sortir de c'te marde monumentale-là. Aaaaaaaaah! . . .* (19)

Thrill-seeking as an answer to contemporary *ennui* is also the subject of *"L'Absolu, c'est pour quand?"* by Anne Dandurand, whose daring erotic texts established her reputation as a postfeminist writer in the eighties.[5] This story, reworked from an earlier piece for *Les Zurbains*, recounts a fifteen-year-old

girl's seduction and murder of a rock star. In simple, declarative sentences, this *petit enfant du siècle* describes the horrifying acts of a precocious, amoral, blasphemous sexual predator.

When verbal vulgarity is not counter-balanced by poetic passages, moralizing pronouncements, psychological insights, or clear social commentary, it risks losing its impact. For example, critics could not miss the poetry and moral tone of Yvan Bienvenue's *Règlements de contes* (1995) and *Dits et inédits* (1997), nor the linguistic self-consciousness of Daniel Danis's *Celle-là* (1993) and *Cendres de cailloux* (1992)[6]; accordingly, they were willing to see the obscenity and vulgarity as part of the authors' dark visions of contemporary urban society. In the case of Archambault's *Cul sec*, they were less kind. Mariel O'Neill-Karch, for example, summarizes the play by calling it "une pièce peuplée d'automates programmés pour l'ingurgitation de quantités industrielles d'alcool et la copulation à la chaîne" ("*Théâtre*" 396). Christian Guay calls it "*un portrait acide et hyperréaliste d'une génération de yuppies en mal de vivre*" (182), a repugnant portrait whose crudity and lucidity raise disturbing questions (183). Archambault's explanation of his writing strategy sheds light on the issue of theatrical realism and vulgarity. Writing in the drama journal *Jeu*, he says:

> *Je n'écris pas pour qu'on me dise: "Mon Dieu, comme c'est bien écrit." Je ne suis pas là pour promouvoir mon talent, je suis là pour questionner ma société et ses choix. [. . .] En fait, tout mon travail d'auteur consiste à faire semblant de ne pas exister. Laisser toute la place aux personnages et chercher à créer des scènes déstabilisantes, afin d'éviter à tout prix une écoute confortablement passive.* (Archambault 12)

The action of the play is simple: Serge and Eric invite their friend Michel to forget about his girlfriend for one night and participate in their contest to see who can sleep with the most women. After watching a pornographic film and tanking up on vodka, the three men go off to a bar where they pick up Nancy, Josée, and Mélanie, three women who also lack all sense of moderation, morality and decency. While the men disgust us by using the terms "*poupoune*" (13), "*cochonne*" (14), "*plotte*" (22), "*pitounes*" (28), "*salope*" (76), and "*conne*" (77), the women are equally vulgar as they discuss intercourse, oral sex, and penis size in uncensored language (38-41, 54). As the night goes on, they drink, vomit, talk about sex, pair-off for lovemaking, and argue. Like *Le Déclin de l'empire américain* but without gourmet food, historical sensibility, modesty, conscience, and remnants of romanticism, *Cul sec* takes the critique of middle-class materialism, hedonism, and

individualism further with its use of swear words, scatological terms, sexual slang, and anglicisms. The setting is a comfortable modern apartment and the characters are educated and employed. As a result the lewdness and vulgarity of the dialogue seems all the more shocking. This brief exchange is from early in the first act after Serge, the host, cuts himself shaving:

> SERGE. *Fuck! Ostie que c'est de la marde ces rasoirs-là! Ç'a de la misère à te couper un p'tit poil du cul, mais ça te fait des crisses de tranchées dans'peau!*
> MICHEL. *Cou'donc, ça lui prend ben du temps, Éric.*
> SERGE. *Y doit être en train de se crosser dans son char.* (15)

And here is how Nancy complains when the men leave to get more vodka:

> *Ostie que je me fais chier, quand même! J'aurais dû boire plus, là-bas! C'est ça qui arrive quand tu comptes sur les autres: tu te fais fourrer. Je te dis qu'y est pas trop responsable, Serge! Un gros party, mais pas de boisson, crisse! Ça doit être le genre de gars qui se rend compte qu'y a pas de condom juste à' dernière minute; juste quand toi tu mouilles comme les chutes Niagara, ostie!* (38)

François Archambault's decision to use this level of popular Québécois French is clearly motivated by the same hyperrealistic aesthetic that we see in the works of other young playwrights of *la relève* such as Yvan Bienvenue, Jean-François Caron, Serge Boucher, Jean-Rock Gaudreault, Jérôme Labbé, Yves Bélanger. These writers are, for the most part, well educated intellectuals, often graduates of the *Conservatoire d'art dramatique de Québec*, the *École nationale de théâtre du Canada*, or the theatre program of some francophone university. The point is that this is a self-conscious use of language by playwrights who are perfectly capable of expressing themselves in correct standard French but who create characters who speak a coarse, ungrammatical, slangy form of Québécois French. It seems obvious to assume that what Larose calls *"l'amour du pauvre"* (127-44) or Simon labels *"l'esthétique de la faiblesse"* (118) motivates this choice. If, however, the playwright does not point to his/her use of different levels of language, the scabrous popular speech loses much of its effectiveness as social commentary.

Serge Boucher is an excellent example of a young dramatist using vulgarity for theatrical effect and social/psychological commentary. An UQAM-educated high school teacher of French with a degree in theatre from the Collège Lionel-Groulx, Boucher's first serious plays, *Natures mortes* (1993) and *Motel Hélène* (1997), belong to the category of *"tragédie du quotidien."* The structure and themes of *Motel Hélène* reveal an acute sensitivity to levels of discourse, distinctions between literary and oral language, erotic and vulgar sexual vocabularies.

In *Motel Hélène*, we see three characters living out their sad lives in an unnamed small city in the Eastern Townships. Having returned home from living in Montreal, François operates the *"dépanneur"* owned by his father as he tries to come to terms with his homosexuality through writing. In the journals he keeps, he also records observations on Johanne, a seamstress who lives in the apartment adjacent to his store, and on her errant boyfriend, Mario, an auto mechanic. Although she is just twenty-five, Johanne appears much older and spends a lot of time obsessing about her sex appeal (her breasts, her hair, her clothes), since sex is very important in her life. Still haunted by the disappearance and presumed death of the son she had by Mario at age sixteen, she blames herself because she locked the boy out of the house for dirtying her freshly washed kitchen floor. In the thirty brief scenes of the play, we see Johanne give in to despair. The "Motel Hélène" of the title is the place where she claims to have spent a passionate night in air-conditioned comfort with a handsome man she met at the mall, but at the play's end, we learn that the mystery lover was pure erotic fantasy and that her second visit to the Motel Hélène will end with her suicide.

There is very little action in this "tragédie du quotidien" and most of the talk is mundane, but Boucher's play would still receive an x-rating for adult content: nudity, sex, and vulgar language. Close analysis reveals subtlety in the representation of sexuality. In scene 8, for example, Boucher has Mario read a long passage from a *"Recueil de lettres érotiques"* in which the author describes culinary and sexual uses of bananas. After reading the erotic recipe which is written in euphemistic, flowery French, Mario reverts to his own crude speech, commenting *"Osti sont sautées ben raides eux autres! Avec une banane dans chatte, faut l'faire. [. . .] Toé, un bout d'la banane dans fente pis moé l'autre bout dans l'cul!"* (32). Both Johanne and Mario talk and joke about sex in the raunchiest terms and his seduction techniques are decidedly crude. Arriving at Johanne's apartment late at night at the end of scene 1, he sticks his foot between her legs and asks, *"T'es-tu lavée la noune comme faut?"* (13). In scene 16, he arrives drunk, eats a few slices of ham, and then uses whipped cream for some high-cholesterol foreplay on the kitchen table. The scene fades to black as he spreads whipped cream on his genitals and says to Johanne, *"Viens manger moman! Ma belle cochonne! Mange la belle grosse banane à Mario!"* (51). Johanne's use of sexual slang and vulgar expressions matches Mario's. The day after the whipped-cream scene, this is how she tells François that Mario left after making love to her: *"Quand y a eu son nanane, y'é parti.* (Temps.) *Y m'ramone la cheminée pis y*

crisse son camp" (54). Her Motel Hélène fantasy, while influenced by the erotic literature she and Mario read, is cheapened by her crude vocabulary:

> *C't'un gars qui é ben dans sa peau, ça paraît, écoute quand on est arrivés dans chambre chu restée assez bête, y a parti l'air climatisé pis y s'est déshabillé, y s'est mis tout nu tu-suite, j'avais pas encore déposé ma sacoche j'pense, y'était déjà flambant nu, y a dit: "J'prends une douche, mets-toi À ton aise." Y'a une queue comme dans les lettres que Mario lit, j'me disais: "Ça s'peut, ça s'peut," j'en r'venais pas, j'me suis mise à trembler, le mélange d'la chaleur pis d'l'air climatisé, la peur de pas être capable j'imagine, y'é r'venu tout nu, tout trempe, c'est à croire que j'avais pas bougé d'un poil, y a dit: "T'es pas rendue loin." Y s'est approché d'moi, y sentait ma peur, y m'a embrassée, ya bandé d'un coup, chu partie à rire, lui y était pas gêné, y a pris ma main pis y l'a mis su sa queue, y m'a déshabillée, gentiment, y a placé ma robe sur le p'tit fauteuil qu'y'avait dans l'coin, j'en r'venais pas, y a enlevé ma brassière, ma p'tite culotte, y m'a prise pis y m'a amenée dans douche, y m'a lavée, y m'a savonnée partout, j'sentais son pénis sur mon côte, y m'a passé plusieurs fois un doigt dans chatte, on s'est ramassé toute mouillé sur le lit, y faisait déjà plus frais dans chambre, y'était pesant pis doux, y m'a mangé la chatte, j'y'é sucé la queue, y m'a pris, j'y'é mangé les testicules, on a pas arrêté d'la nuit, j'ai du sperme partout sur moi, j'sens lui, j'sens l'homme . . .* (61-62)

Boucher's careful use of language here suggests a radical dissonance between emotional needs and the ability to communicate them. The only language Johanne has available to her—the degraded slang of everyday life among the lower classes—cheapens her dreams and seems inadequate for expressing love. The frequent linking of eating and having sex in the play seems to suggest that the two activities are equivalent forms of appetite satisfaction. The scenes that express Johanne's eroticism most eloquently are, ironically, scenes without words: scene 11 in which she dances to her favorite song while vacuuming in her new high heels, scene 14 in which she caresses her own breasts and then peels a banana, scene 28 when she does a sexy strip dance in her heels. Explaining this use of "body language," Boucher says "*le tragique surgit souvent lorsque les mots ne répondent plus à l'appel du corps*" ("*Le tragique quotidien*" 31).

The character of François serves as a *porte-parole* for the playwright: he observes and comments on Johanne's life in ways that show an acute awareness of his narrative function. In his opening monologue, he calls himself "*un voyeur*" who pays attention to the details that speak volumes about her although she does not speak herself. Three times he mentions the distance that separates him from what he observes and writes about in his black notebooks. His speech, while still marked by the elisions, mistakes, and

pronunciation of popular speech, contains rhythms, repetitions, and vocabulary that elevate it to literary language. Here are his first words:

> *J'me demande encore comment ça s'fait que sa porte était ouverte. Ça s'peut-tu qu'une porte soye ouverte quand a devrait être fermée juste pour qu'un gars un soir enregistre ben comme faut tous les détails qui font une vie, l'image de toute une vie. Je l'avais souvent vue sur sa galerie, mais vue sous cet angle-là jamais. De dos, par derrière, à son insu, comme un voyeur, un voleur, non jamais. De la distance qui me sépare d'elle, j'sais pas si cette femme assis s'a galerie est heureuse ou pas, à quoi elle pense, ce qu'elle ressent véritablement, j'en sais rien. Mais tout autour d'elle parle. Ça parle pour elle. C'est peut-être ça au fond que j'trouve triste.* (7)

Boucher makes numerous references to literature in the play. Noting François's habit of reading and writing during his long hours in the store, Johanne asks him to recommend a book in scene 1, something not too difficult that she can read during her vacation (8-9). When he lends her three books in the following scene, she jokes about hating reading when she was in school and asks *"Pourquoi tu lis ça toutes ces livres-là?"* to which he replies *"J'sais pas . . . ça m'aide . . . à vivre!"* (16-17). In a later scene, he describes how he used to play at being a school teacher when he was a child and, instead of laughing at his transgendered fantasy, Johanne tells him that he would make a good parent because he is sweet, calm, thoughtful, and ambitious. Education has liberated him, she says: *"Toi, t'es pas pris, t'es pas pogné dans ta peau, t'écris, tu lis plein d'livres, t'es libre en quèqu'part . . . "* (42). Later, he explains that he reads and writes to become *"un bon citoyen"* (47).

In addition to talking about his writing, François and Johanne often read passages from the black notebooks in which he records his thoughts and observations (sc. 9, 21, 23, 27). This *mise-en-abyme* underscores Boucher's self-conscious literariness and manipulates the spectator's view of Johanne. After reading a passage that reminisces about the big Sunday breakfasts she used to prepare for her son and Mario, Johanne makes a remark that accentuates the distance between the vulgar language of her everyday life and the literary transformation of it contained in François's black notebooks. Sadly, slang Québécois French seems the perfect language to talk about her unhappiness:

> JOHANNE: *J'ai l'trou d'cul en d'sous du bras!*
> FRANÇOIS: *Quoi?*
> JOHANNE: *Tu sais pas c'que ça veut dire hein? Ça veut dire "chu fatigué," j'ai la plotte à terre, le trou d'cul en d'sous du bras, t'as jamais entendu ça? Des expressions pour dire qu'on en peut pus, qu'on est rendu au bout, crisse que j'ai-tu hâte à vendredi.* (33)

Reading from the notebooks forces Johanne to recognize some pathetic truths about her life, truths that contribute to her decision to kill herself.

While Boucher employs vulgarity to dramatize the pathetic lives of characters who live marginal existences, without benefit of education, family, spiritual or economic comfort, another young playwright of *la relève*, Raymond Villeneuve, uses vulgar oral speech with irony to make a darkly humorous commentary on contemporary Québec society. Like others in his cohort (François Archambault, Yvan Bienvenue, Wadji Mouawad), Villeneuve studied at the *École nationale du théâtre du Canada*. His highly original short piece, *Le Mutant* (1997), contains virtuoso displays of language that recall the verbal delirium of René-Daniel Dubois's early works, including references to history, science, and culture. In *Le Mutant*, however, we also hear obscenity, slang, and the anglicisms of urban street culture expressing outrage against the established power structure. Compared to the coarseness of the impoverished, impotent characters of *Motel Hélène*, the foul-mouthed outbursts of *Le Mutant* seem like a healthy venting of anger.

The main character, who has been spaced out on drugs and alcohol for years, is obsessed with the idea of mutating to a higher life form, and so he has climbed to the top of the cross on Mont Royal from where he intends to take off with his pet rat, Mumu. He may be crazy, but he is also well educated and well informed about current events. At the beginning of his ranting monologue, he gives us his version of human history, from the Big Bang to the Internet Age, in joualized Québec French that increases the comic effect. He believes that human history is all about moving on, from the known to the unknown; but now everything has been explored on Earth:

> *L'histoire de l'humanité est finie! Le Big Bang est over! On vient d'pogner un mur, ostie! LE MUR! . . . On peut pus aller ailleurs! . . . Pis si on peut pus aller ailleurs quand on s'en va . . . ben tout c'qu'on peut faire . . . c'est d'partir en vacances, ostie! Pis ça, c'est citoyen en chien, mon p'tit rat! FUCK THE ROAD! [. . .] Pis anyway . . . anyway, anyway, anyway . . . même si y restait des ailleurs en quequ'part . . . même si y restait un p'tit trou où on pourrait partir, ostie . . . ben moé j'te dirais quand même que . . . au boutte de n'importe quel voyage . . . de n'importe quel trip . . . de n'importe quel buzz . . . Y'a toujours un retour, ostie! . . . Pis ce retour-là . . . c'est toujours . . . ou bedon . . . d'oussé qu'tu pars . . . ça c'est bad en chien . . . ou bedon . . . qu'essé qu't'es . . . Ça, c't'encore pire! FUCK THE ROAD! Y'a pus d'ailleurs!* (10-11)

His best chance to evolve further is to wait for a lightning strike on top of the lightning rod on the Mont Royal cross.

As he waits, he pours out his theories and opinions to Mumu (and the

audience) and recounts his wild experiences among Montreal's underclass, that is the homeless, mentally ill, drug addicts, and sexual deviants. His speech is filled with urban slang, anglicisms, scatological references, and swear words, yet he is perfectly capable of alluding to Shakespeare, *National Geographic* magazine, Frankenstein, Beethoven, Mohammed, and Einstein (9-12, 35). His references to the October Crisis, the Chernobyl nuclear disaster, Green Peace, mutual funds, and free trade prove that he is not completely out of touch with the real world (12, 27, 32, 35). The fact that he talks about Hollywood films, Michael Jackson, and writing dramatic pieces for an actor friend indicate that he is very aware of theatricality. In fact, when he notices the arrival of police cars, fire trucks, and television news crews beneath him, he seems determined to give them the performance they expect:

> *Sont toutte là! . . . toutte les parasites, toutte les sangsues, toutte les vermines! . . . Sont toutte là . . . pour se nourrir d'une bonne histoire heavy, ostie! Sont v'nus voir . . . un show! Toutte c'te monde-là y bouffent d'la misère humaine . . . pis y'ont faim, estie! . . . Y'ont faim! . . . Y courent partout la bouche ouverte pis y'attendent jusse que j'fasse quet'chose pour le bouffer, ostie! FUCK YOU!*
> [. . .]
> *Y veulent un show! . . . Ben t'chèque ça, mon p'tit rat: t'chèque ben ça! Mon onc' va leur en faire un! Un ostie d'show!*
> [. . .]
> *Y veulent . . . que j'saute! [. . .] . . .plus j'avance, plus y jouissent! Plus j'avance: plus y mouillent leu' tites culottes! Plus j'avance, plus y bandent! Y'attendent jusse que j'me chrisse en bas! Y'ATTENDENT JUSSE ÇA!* (32-33)

But the show he really puts on is not the suicide leap they expect but rather a wild-eyed sermon on the mount that condemns contemporary society in colourful and often obscene terms.

The Mutant's most vulgar outbursts come in verbal assaults on those who have the power to judge, exploit or harass him. Linguistic violence is his way of getting even and it is important to note that much of the cursing is in English. Early in the play, he looks down on the city and screams "FUCK YOU!", accompanied by the usual hand gesture. Satisfied by this release of anger, he says to Mumu:

> *Fuck you . . . Ostie qu'ça fait du bien! Hen, mon p'tit rat! . . . J'ai beau êt' super génial! pis ben plus brillant que toutte ces citoyens-là mis ensemble! Mais ostie qu'ça fait du bien . . . PAREIL . . . d'êt' au-d'ssus de toutte c'te monde-là pis d'es envoyer chier! . . . D'une shotte! Rien qu'd'une shotte! Fuck you ev'rything! Fuck you ev'ryone! Fuck . . . you!*
>
> Sourire béat du Mutant.
>
> *Ostie qu'ça fait du bien. . .* (14)

Talking about the pathetic, lonely people wandering around the park, the Mutant expresses scorn for those who give in to despair:

> *Ceux qui m'font le plusse vomir passe qu'y sont les plusse citoyens de toutte la gang . . . C'est les désespérés! . . . Passe qu'y ont pardu leu' blonde, leu' job, leur char, leu' p'tit bonheur à cinq cennes . . . y viennent icitte pis y font comme moi . . . y grimpent jusqu'en haut . . . y t'chèquent la ville de Montréal . . . mais au lieu de l'envoyer chier . . . Y chiâlent! . . . Y s'plaignent! . . . Y braillent su' eux aut'! . . .* (15-16)

Calling those who commit suicide cowards, he says it is better to turn disappointment into anger that can be purged by cursing.

> *Ostie qu'y sont lâches! Jamais on f'rait ça toé pis moé, hen! . . . Jamais on s'chrissersait en bas . . . passe que d'faire ça . . . ça s'rait d'donner raison en chrisse aux ostie d'citoyens pis au système qui nous encule! FUCK YOU!* (16)

He may speak "la langue blessée," "le code mixte" described by Sherry Simon as symptomatic of cultural poverty (109-27), but he has discovered that obscenity can be therapeutic and help him avoid self-destructive nihilism.

The seriousness of Villeneuve's message is, of course, undercut by the messenger: a drugged-out lunatic who thinks he is God and talks to a coke-sniffing pet rat. Still, there is something very compelling about the Mutant's appeal for followers, a call that invites them to leave the material world behind and mutate to a higher level of consciousness (34-38). When an oncoming thunderstorm disperses the crowd below, he says:

> *HEILLE PARTEZ PAS! PARTEZ PAS! CHU DIEU, OSTIE! . . . FUCK!* (38)

He survives being struck by lightning, claims to have been resurrected, and continues appealing (in vain) for disciples.

The language of *Le Mutant* is a hybrid tongue penetrated and contaminated by English that reveals the speaker's madness and escape fantasies. The play is a disjointed linguistic orgy in an *"idiome bâtard," "incertain,"* and *"fantasmatique"* (see Simon 109-27). But I would argue that for Raymond Villeneuve, vernacular Québécois French laced with obscenities, swear words, and anglicisms is a rich idiom. He uses it to create an imaginative, hallucinatory discourse in which the vulgarity signals an energetic counter-cultural resistance to power élites. This is not the *français approximatif* that linguistic purists warn against; on the contrary, this is akin to the verbal virtuosity that we have heard in plays by other *dramaturges de la parole québécoise* from Jean-Claude Germain to René-Daniel Dubois to Yvan Bienvenue.

The use of vulgar language seems to be a healthy expression of anger and it reminds us that Québec theatre has often been an expression of collective

dispossession and linguistic distinctiveness combined with a protest against social, economic, political, and intellectual élites. It seems ironic, then, that so many alarms have been raised about the quality of language at the same time that Francophones are attempting to reverse the conquest of Québec by protecting the French language, implementing policies of "francisation," and democratizing higher education. As the standard of living rises in Québec, linguistic standards decline, as witnessed by the willingness of some leftist cultural nationalists to tolerate grammatical errors, anglicisms, profanity, and crude sexuality.[8] Whereas actors and television personalities once tried to lose their Québec accents and speak proper French, lower-class speech now seems to be a sign of authenticity and solidarity with collective aspirations. Québec theatre continues to use a vernacular language increasingly marked by grammatical errors, anglicisms, profanity, and crude sexuality. The playwrights of *la relève*, born after the beginning of the Quiet Revolution, did not receive the *collège classique* education of preceding generations and therefore their models are more likely to be Michel Tremblay and Victor-Lévy Beaulieu than Molière and Corneille. Raised in the era of sex, drugs, and rock 'n' roll, this generation is understandably more liberal in its social, sexual, and linguistic habits. Self-conscious about their role as social and political commentators, they take seriously the nationalist project of creating a specific Québécois literary language.

All of this can be seen as a sign of a society turning in on itself. Continuing the process of global refusal begun in the period of the Quiet Revolution, Québec remains suspicious of the authority of the old élites, whether this authority emanates from Paris (cultural), Rome (moral), or Ottawa (political). By insisting on speaking and writing in a language characterized by its geographical specificity, Québec playwrights run the risk of increasing marginalization, of cutting off dialogue with other French-speaking countries, of consigning themselves permanently to regional minority status.

There is also the danger that this theatre of the quotidian creates an impression of realism and authenticity that masks its literariness and serious social criticism. Once spectators get over the shock of hearing profane and sexually explicit talk, they should hear the message that verbal violence expresses the frustration and rage experienced by people who lack communication skills and that sexual coupling is often a poor substitute for emotional bonding in contemporary society. The humiliated language that became part of the spectacle of cultural, material, and spiritual poverty in Michel Tremblay's *Les Belles-Soeurs* has degenerated further to the point

that it can be called an offensive language, part of an attack on bourgeois complacency. Gravel's trilogy, Archambault's *Cul sec*, Boucher's *Motel Hélène*, Villeneuve's *Le Mutant*, and the young dramatists whose voices are being heard in collective creations such as *Cabaret des neiges noires*, *38*, and *Les Zurbains* speak the language of despair and solitude, warning of a loss of hope in the future.

The paradox is, of course, that the use of popular oral language on the stage and the transcription of vernacular speech in dramatic texts are creating a highly self-conscious literary language. As the well-educated, intellectual playwrights of *la relève* experiment with levels of language in hyperrealist plays, they are de-oralizing *joual*, poeticizing ordinary speech, engaging in a metalinguistic exercise that makes language itself the spectacle on the Québec stage. In so doing, they restore some of our faith in the ability of language to communicate and in the power of dramatic literature to articulate contemporary concerns.

NOTES

1 For an updated history of the debate on the quality of Québécois French, see Bouchard.
2 See Lamonde for a summary of the debates. See also Dor, Larose, Godbout et Martineau, and Laforest.
3 For a sample of the rhetoric, see Monette.
4 See Moss "Larry Tremblay," "Daniel Danis," "*Cendres de cailloux*."
5 See von Flotow.
6 For a summary of the critical response to Bienvenue's work, see Moss, "Yvan Bienvenue and *conte urbain*."
7 Here I am alluding to Marc V. Levine's *The Reconquest of Montreal*.
8 To be fair, a similar phenomenon is occurring in the United States where conservative commentators decried the effort of some African Americans to legitimate bad English by playing the identity politics card and calling it "Ebonics." Many have also lamented the vulgarization of public discourse signaled by the popularity of Howard Stern, Jerry Springer, "gangsta" rappers, and a host of foulmouthed comics.

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Nancy Lee

What I Want at My Funeral

The date: a statutory holiday so people
must cancel their vacation plans.
And the time: something difficult like 10:17 or 2:42
with no one allowed in early or late. Crazy weather,
a hard morning frost or summer snow
evaporating to thirty degree sun.
A church in a neighbourhood of cul-de-sacs,
with Bainbridge Crescent, Bainbridge Drive,
Bainbridge Gate, Bainbridge View, and a card
that reads please arrive on time to 2421 Bainbridge.
A florist who sends wedding flowers by mistake.
A friend to put the bridal bouquet in my hands.
A friend to throw the bouquet after the service.
A friend brave enough to catch it.
All my ex-lovers arriving with their thin,
blonde wives in white heels and pink satin.
A pastor who calls me Linda and Sandy.
A procession to my coffin
that starts with a New Age rendition
of Bob Seger's "Old Time Rock 'n' Roll."
My coffin knocked over so I'll fall to the floor,
legs open, bra straps showing, and the friend
with the bouquet, throwing it just then,
to break the tension.
At the end of the service, let it storm and pour,
as friends and family huddle and cling
under the eaves in disbelief, unable to move
from that spot, uncertain of any future step,
afraid they will topple like bottles in the wind
or collapse like lovers in each other's arms.
And the rain on their faces will look a lot like tears.

Robert Gore

The Code Between Us

Past one o'clock
my brain switched over to coyote time

snow darkening the streetlights
a drug breathing somnolence
through the streets of the city.

The calm outside a focal point
for the energy I spent
all along the day choosing gifts

how more alien I felt with each
passing dollar, wondering if
the piano music I bought for X

would be romantic enough or if
the plate for Y was just the right colour,
the man behind the counter
wrapping it so carefully as it passed

from his hands into mine while I tried to imagine
what it might look like in your apartment,
tried to think with your eyes about beauty

and the small pleasure I thought would
come into the code between us,
our year on year museum of artifacts

an anthropology of our own lives
for the record, for the language we create

when this ritual is unwrapped.

Melanie A. Stevenson

Othello, Darwin, and the Evolution of Race in Ann-Marie MacDonald's Work

Identity is a recurring obsession amongst Canadian and other postcolonial writers, and for several decades Shakespeare's *The Tempest* has been a popular metaphor for exploring it. Non-Aboriginal Canadians have often identified themselves in literature with Miranda, as the British Empire's dutiful, white, "daughter" settler-invader colony.[1] However, Canada is a culture in transition. Not only has Canada become a more recognizably multi-cultural, multi-racial society, but Canadians are also seeing that it never was as monolithically white and European as history books and literature often painted it. Consequently, writers are adopting new paradigms for exploring identity in Canada.

This article examines Canadian writer Ann-Marie MacDonald's treatment of racial identity as it evolves over the course of three of her works: the plays *Goodnight Desdemona (Good Morning Juliet)* and *The Arab's Mouth*, and her 1996 novel, *Fall on Your Knees*.[2] Although MacDonald deliberately avoids dealing with race while parodying *Othello* in *Goodnight Desdemona*, in her subsequent works she uses both scientific and literary paradigms to explore racial identity. In *The Arab's Mouth* and *Fall on Your Knees*, MacDonald evokes competing nineteenth- and twentieth-century scientific theories about race, refuting old biological definitions of the concept in favour of the modern idea that racial identity is a fluid social construct. This latter idea is then applied to a literary paradigm as MacDonald returns in *Fall on Your Knees* to *Othello*. This time she evokes Shakespeare's tragedy to address Otherness, racism, the fuzzy borderline between "race" and "ethnicity," and societal attitudes towards miscegenation.[3] Sometimes she uses the characters and situations of *Othello* without significant alteration,

offering them as accurate portraits of the psychology of racism. Other times she radically alters the play's paradigm in order to illustrate the modern social concept of race. Through these paradigms, MacDonald dramatizes the way people define and redefine racial identity in a multi-cultural community in Canada.

There are remarkable continuities between MacDonald's three works in theme, character, and structure, and it is against this background of similarity that the gradual evolution of race-related issues becomes particularly striking. *Goodnight Desdemona, The Arab's Mouth,* and *Fall on Your Knees* are all concerned with "eccentric" heroines who struggle to create an authentic identity in an abusive, conformist, patriarchal society. In *Goodnight Desdemona,* the heroine is a heretical Shakespearean academic named Constance Ledbelly. Although she is a woman and a Canadian "colonial," she nevertheless challenges the theories held about the bard by her male, British boss. Subsidiary heroines in the play include a warrior version of Desdemona and a feisty, lesbian Juliet. In *The Arab's Mouth,* the heroine is Pearl MacIsaac, a Victorian scientist. Like Constance, she struggles to carve out a place for herself in a male-dominated profession and to maintain her own, subversive intellectual theories. In *Fall on Your Knees,* the Piper sisters are the focus: Kathleen, the lesbian opera singer; Mercedes, the religious spinster schoolteacher; Frances, the girl-guide-cum-stripper-cum-performance artist; and Lily, the crippled visionary. The patriarchal forces oppressing the heroines are represented in all the works by sinister father/lover figures: Prof. Claude Night, the exploitive, patronizing boss and love-interest in *Goodnight Desdemona;* Dr. Reid, the scheming family friend in *The Arab's Mouth;* and James Piper, the violent and incestuous father in *Fall on Your Knees.*

In all three works the heroine must explore other people's secret identities in order to find her own. Constance must uncover the identity of the author of the secret-source manuscripts behind Shakespeare's *Othello* and *Romeo and Juliet;* she must also identify a "wise fool" character that transforms these plays into comedies. In the course of her investigation, Constance claims new professional and sexual identities for herself as a legitimate author-critic and as a lesbian lover. Pearl finds her professional and familial/ethnic selves as she uncovers the real identities of the mad woman in the attic (her dog-eared sister Claire) and a mysterious nun (her long-banished, Catholic, Highland-Scots mother). Kathleen must acknowledge the identity of her Lebanese mother, Materia, in order to know herself. Lily must realize that her sister Kathleen is

also her mother, because Kathleen was raped by their father, James. And, as in *The Arab's Mouth*, the recovery of long-lost siblings (here Ambrose and Anthony) helps Frances and Lily to come to terms with who they are. Finally, the identity of Kathleen's secret African-American lesbian lover also provides a key to suppressed aspects of the Piper girls' sexual and racial identities.

As this brief analysis suggests, MacDonald's work is obsessed with the exploration of identity in its various facets. Most critics have focused their attention on *Goodnight Desdemona* (MacDonald's first major success) and its treatment of gender and sexual orientation (for example, Fortier, Hengen, Porter), although Ann Wilson notes that Constance's Canadian "colonial" identity is also important to the play. However, both the suppression and the acknowledgement of yet another facet of identity—race—is critical to understanding the development of MacDonald's work, as I shall show.

A late-twentieth-century reader cannot help but notice that while *Goodnight Desdemona* appropriates Shakespeare's *Othello* (as well as *Romeo and Juliet* and a bit of *Hamlet*) to tackle gender and sexual orientation, it avoids any discussion of race, racism, or societal attitudes towards miscegenation. This omission has drawn comment because today such issues are considered central to *Othello*—certainly in terms of its modern reception. Mark Fortier, who interviewed MacDonald about *Goodnight Desdemona*, notes that this omission was not just an oversight on her part: "MacDonald does this quite consciously, however, acknowledging that someone else could, for instance, broach the issue of a black Desdemona" (51). MacDonald has not publicly specified the reasons for her choice. As a self-identified lesbian woman in the late 1980s—a period of renewed gay activism—she may simply have found gender relations and sexual orientation more personally compelling subjects at that time. (In contrast, when Djanet Sears rewrote *Othello* in her play *Harlem Duet* in 1997, she was motivated by her own experiences as an African-Canadian woman to explore the possibility that Desdemona had a black female precursor.) Furthermore, the practical limitations imposed by modern drama—which is a more concise form than the novel—may also have played a part in MacDonald's decision not to add a complex issue like race to the list of other serious identity topics that she was already addressing in her play. (I shall come back to the issue of genre in the discussion of her novel, *Fall on Your Knees*.)

Whatever MacDonald's thinking at the time she wrote *Goodnight Desdemona*, the act of evoking *Othello* without acknowledging the topic of race raises troublesome historical ghosts. In the past there have been other,

less innocent reasons why artists, critics, editors, and audiences have avoided the racial themes in Shakespeare's play. As Michael Neill notes in his examination of *Othello*'s textual and performance history, "Unproper Beds: Race, Adultery, and the Hideous in *Othello*," white actors and audiences have often been uncomfortable with the issues of race and miscegenation raised by the drama and, consequently, have tried to play them down. The techniques they used to do so are worth elaborating on here because MacDonald deals with these "ghosts" in her later work.

One tactic was to make Othello the Moor less racially "Other," and hence, less controversial as a figure of miscegenation. In the nineteenth century, for example, commentators as respected as Samuel Taylor Coleridge argued that Othello was never intended to be black (see Neill 391-92). In criticism and on stage, Othello was "Orientalized" as people claimed that Shakespeare's Moor was really Arabic African, and hence lighter-skinned (Neill 385, Hankey 65-67). As an Arab, Othello was still exotic and racially "Other," but less so to Caucasian thinking; therefore, he was more acceptable to squeamish white audiences, both as a sympathetic tragic hero and as the lover of white Desdemona. Such beliefs were reflected in bowdlerized texts that removed references to Othello's blackness and in paler performance make-up. There were some dark-skinned Othellos in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—such as those portrayed by Edmund Kean and by the great African-American actors Ira Aldridge and Paul Robeson—but they were rare. However, as thinking about race and miscegenation began to change in the latter half of the twentieth century, the whitening trend was reversed. For example, in the controversial 1964 National Theatre Company production of *Othello*, Laurence Olivier decided to play the title character as unequivocally black (Olivier 252). Now attitudes have changed so much that a theatre company is more likely to be criticized for not hiring a black actor to play Othello, than for making Othello too African.

Similar debates have occurred in non-theatrical contexts over the exact "racial" status of another North African-/Mediterranean-basin-dwelling people: the ancient Egyptians. Martin Bernal's highly controversial book *Black Athena* draws attention to arguments that occurred (particularly in the empire-building nineteenth century) over the question: were the ancient Egyptians really "African" and "black," or were they "white?" At stake was, whose modern "race"—black or white—could take credit for Egypt's monumental achievements and, consequently, claim to be the founders of modern civilization (Bernal 240-46).[4] Both ancient Egypt and politically

loaded debates about the precise racial identities of black Africans and Arabs (and their relative class status in a white-dominated society) become important issues in MacDonald's work. It seems as if Othello's ghost returns to haunt her, as race begins to creep back into her work in *The Arab's Mouth*, and then becomes a central issue in *Fall on Your Knees*.

If *Goodnight Desdemona* explored its heroine's professional and sexual identities, *The Arab's Mouth* focuses on its heroine's professional and familial "ethnic" identities, and the genetic or "blood" inheritance that goes with the latter. In *The Arab's Mouth*, MacDonald enjoys playing with the Scottish aspects of her own "ethnic" background—an identity she claims allegiance to in the dedication to the play, which reads: "For the ancestors." She sets the drama in nineteenth-century Scotland and fills it with parodic images of bagpipes, shortbread, isolated castles, red hair, and so on. But, underneath this cheerful celebration of Scottish ethnicity, anxieties about racial identity and miscegenation are subtly evoked.

MacDonald raises these anxieties by setting her play within a particular intellectual context. Just as she evoked a literary icon (Shakespeare) in *Goodnight Desdemona* in order to challenge patriarchal interpretations of women's roles in both real life and art, here MacDonald evokes a nineteenth-century scientific icon, Charles Darwin (for example, 10-12, 14, 26-27, 28, 46), in order to challenge racist views of biological and cultural differences. *The Arab's Mouth* is a dramatized discourse between late Victorian and late-twentieth-century ideas about the implications of Darwin's theories for how we view human diversity.

In the nineteenth century, European natural historians developed a biologically based theory of permanent racial "types" in which different "races" were seen not as variants on humankind, but as different species. Relationships between racial groups were explained as the result of the properties of these different species, and cultural and biological variations were conflated. Hence, differences in the nineteenth century between white and black groups in terms of economic, military, or political power were explained as biologically determined and, hence, permanent (Banton 5-7)—a comforting thought to white imperialists. The appearance, mid-century, of the ideas of Darwin and other evolutionary theorists presented a problem for this kind of racist thinking. Confronted with evidence of biological and cultural evolution, nineteenth-century race scientists started to argue that evolutionary progress now only occurred in the Caucasian race. They attempted to justify this belief by claiming that failures in earlier stages

of evolution had limited the brain development of non-Caucasian races, and that non-Caucasian evolution was now at an end, leaving non-whites stuck lower on the evolutionary scale as mere "survivals from the past'" (Haller ix). Nevertheless, anxiety over the idea that racial categories were not permanently fixed but fluid, eventually led to the fledgling "science" of eugenics, which attempted to preserve the "hereditary qualities" of different "races"—mostly white. "Preservation" involved discouraging miscegenation between whites and non-whites, as well as preventing the breeding of white persons whose deviation from perceived "norms" led them to be seen as evolutionary throwbacks. These ideas have persisted well into the twentieth century, particularly in popular thought.

However, by the latter half of the twentieth century, the scientific inheritors of evolutionary theory had developed a very different view of race. Today, the majority of biologists reject the idea of separate races as biological entities. Theories of "pure" or even "mixed" races have been dismissed by evidence of the enormous genetic overlap between all human populations. Physical variation is explained not by categorizing people at the macro level in separate, contained groups, but by examining the huge spectrum of human variation at the micro level of the gene. An individual's unique genes, not their racial "type," determine their basic physical being (Banton 7). In current academic and social policy circles, "race" has become the province of the social and political sciences. It has been blended more and more with other social grouping concepts such as "ethnicity" or "class."[5] Many so-called "racial differences" are now explained by environmental factors, such as differential access to education, jobs, etc. "Race" is increasingly seen as a shifting social construct used when discussing differences in social, economic, or political status between populations.[6]

A major theme of *The Arab's Mouth* that connects it to the "race" debates is inheritance: material inheritance, cultural inheritance, and, especially, biological or genetic inheritance. The patriarchal figures in *The Arab's Mouth* attempt to control all three kinds of inheritance because of their fear that "tainted blood" has infected the MacIsaac family's "pure" lowland-Scots Protestant line. Appropriately enough, the primary patriarchal villain and inheritance gatekeeper is family friend Dr. Reid, who is a doctor, a natural scientist, and a supporter of the fledging "science" of eugenics.[7] The lowland-Scots Protestant Reid thinks the "tainted blood" has been introduced by Pearl's mother, Régine, a Catholic, Highland Scot (24, 29, 30-31). In his thinking, Régine is not only seen as "Other," but her religious and

cultural differences from Reid and the MacIsaac clan become strangely conflated with genetic, biological "Otherness." For example:

> DR REID: We can give him [Pearl's brother Victor] all the care and narcotics we would any mental invalid. But I'm afraid as yet there's no scientific cure for tainted blood.
> PEARL: It's my blood as well as Victor's that you malign, Doctor.
> DR REID: No, my dear. Your genetic inheritance is pure Ramsay MacIsaac. His is all too clearly Régine MacPhail.
> PEARL: Dr Reid. My mother may have been a Catholic, but that hardly convicts her of a genetic flaw. *(He just looks at her.)* (23-24)

Racial difference is never explicitly mentioned, but Reid clearly resembles Victorian scientists who conflated biological and non-biological differences in their studies of other "races."

Reid seizes upon two particular pieces of evidence to prove that the breeding of a MacIsaac with a MacPhail was a mistake: Pearl's brother Victor exhibits "degenerate," "mad" behaviour and Pearl's sister Claire has dog-like ears. Victor and Claire are not specifically referred to as racially "Other" or mixed-race in the play, but the association of Pearl's supposedly impure siblings with madness and animals evokes ideas about race common in Victorian scientific circles. One idea held that racial "Otherness" was associated with madness (Gilman 131-49). Another idea, related to the belief that different races were actually different species, claimed that black Africans were closer to animals (especially apes) than whites were (Meyer 161). Dr. Reid alludes to this belief elsewhere when he conflates the supposed biological inferiority of women and "the lower races" with that of "the higher primates" (49-50). Claire's dog-like ears make her a different species/race for Reid. And, even if her ear were interpreted merely as an evolutionary throwback, rather than a sign of miscegenation, it still situates her down the evolutionary scale with "primitive" racial "Others" in Reid's mind. Of course, the association of other races with non-human animals was not exclusive to the Victorian period: in Act One, Scene One of *Othello*, Iago describes the union of Desdemona and Othello with bestial images (1.1.86-91, 1.1.111-13, 1.1.122-36).

The scientific corollary to these ideas was eugenics, which Dr. Reid embraces. He attempts to hide the "impurity" supposedly introduced into the MacIsaac bloodline by Régine and to stop its spread by preventing the MacIsaac siblings from breeding. In fact, he hopes to "wrest the infant science of eugenics from its cradle to engender a blueprint for the new man, genetically pure and uncontaminated" (31). This "new man" will conform to white, patriarchal, Protestant norms.

However, Pearl anachronistically holds late-twentieth-century views about human differences. She dismisses Reid's conflation of cultural and genetic differences. She rejects his obsession with preserving "blood purity," and interprets Claire's dog-ears as just another example of evolutionary diversity. Like a modern evolutionary theorist, she teaches us to embrace such diversity, not to crush it:

> DR REID: Variety is desirable only insofar as it is useful. If, on his great ascent, man does not cast off the vestiges of his animal origins, he can only revert. Back to your disordered nightmare world. Back to the beast. And therein lies the abyss . . .
> PEARL: No, no, no, Darwin tells us that our flaws are signs of our evolutionary journey. But whether such flaws be vestigial stumps or promising new sprouts, who can tell? For the evolutionary tree is still rapidly branching off. (45)

Ultimately, after discovering that the mysterious sculptor/nun lurking near the family castle is really her long-banished mother, Pearl reclaims and celebrates her own "mixed" heritage.

MacDonald's heroine also embraces other kinds of diversity—such as personal eccentricity—when she rejects Reid's idea that Victor's dramatic behaviour is a sign of degeneracy and madness. Going further, one could read Pearl's defence of Victor as a more indirect version of MacDonald's defence of sexual diversity in *Goodnight Desdemona.* In many ways, the flamboyant, effeminate, kilt-wearing, unmarried Victor resembles the stereotype of a gay drag Queen.

Scientific debates are the most obvious way in which issues of racial identity creep into MacDonald's play; however, references to things Arab and Egyptian also evoke these issues, though less directly. At first the Arab and Egyptian references seem incongruous in the play's Scottish setting. For example, in Act One, Scene Four (15), MacDonald makes a seemingly digressive allusion to the murder of the unnamed Arab in Camus' *L'Étranger.* The Scottish Régine's figure is described as "Mediterranean" (66). Victor spends much of the play carting around a copy of *Arabian Nights,* which leads Pearl to comment that Scottish bagpipes are actually descendants of an Arab form of wind instrument (67). These subtle references become more significant in the context of the play's two major Arab and Egyptian allusions. First, and most obvious, is the work's title: *The Arab's Mouth.* Its direct reference is to one of the Egyptian-style hieroglyphs that Régine uses to sculpt a stone version of Pearl's family portrait. Second, there is the presence in the play of Anubis, the dog-headed Egyptian god of the underworld. He appears in Act Two, Scene Fifteen, and enables Pearl to undergo a metaphorical death and rebirth. He functions much like the ghost of Yorick in *Goodnight*

Desdemona, arriving like a *deus ex machina* to help the heroine solve the mystery of her true identity. Part human biped, part beast, with blue eyes and a black head (70), Anubis looks like a product of some kind of miscegenation himself and engages in miscegenation with Pearl, impregnating her. The racist Dr. Reid believes the potential offspring of this mixed union will be "a monster." The more modern-minded Pearl replies: "I prefer to consider it otherwise" (77). She decides, in defiance of the emerging "science" of eugenics, to call her unborn child "Eugene," which she notes is Greek for "well born" (79).

What are these references doing in a play set in Scotland? Why would MacDonald have a Catholic Scotswoman portray her family in Egyptian-style hieroglyphics? Why not Celtic runes? And why does MacDonald refer to the play's key round hieroglyphic symbol as the "Arab's" mouth, when the more expected descriptive would be the "Egyptian's"? Why is it a dog-headed Egyptian god, not a Scottish ghost or faery, who helps Pearl discover her Scottish family's past?

These Arab references make more sense when one discovers that the ancestors whom MacDonald evokes in the play's dedication were not all Scottish: some were Lebanese. And, as we shall see in *Fall on Your Knees*, the exact racial identity of Lebanese people—are they "Mediterranean Europeans" or "Arabs," "white" or "coloured"?—becomes a subject of racialist debate, just as the exact natures of Othello's Moorishness or the ancient Egyptians' Egyptianness have been. While ostensibly exploring the "MacDonald" side of her family in *The Arab's Mouth*, the playwright drops clues about her other heritage. Yet interestingly, she does not yet state this heritage directly; unlike the identities of her characters, which are revealed by the end of the play, hers remains partially hidden. It is in her novel, *Fall on Your Knees*, that she explores it openly.

Fall on Your Knees repeats MacDonald's earlier preoccupations. Like her plays, it features non-conformist heroines (the Piper sisters), each on a journey to recover or create her authentic identity. Again, the women's identities must be (re)created despite pressure to conform to limited "norms" opposed by an oppressive, white, patriarchal society represented by a sinister father-lover figure (James Piper). The novel also repeats the idea that each heroine must uncover other people's secret identities in order to find her own, and, as in *The Arab's Mouth*, the suppressed identity of mothers and siblings plays an important role. However, while the hidden professional, sexual, and familial/ethnic identities that dominated the plays remain, in *Fall on Your Knees* hidden racial identity comes to the fore. The

less restricted genre of the novel seems to allow MacDonald the space and time to explore all her obsessions about identity in one work.

The novel is set mostly in Canada's Cape Breton region very early in the twentieth century. It is a region in which MacDonald's own family has roots (Lawson 53). For a long time this area has been associated with white Scottish immigration. (One can imagine the MacIsaacs settling there.) However, as MacDonald shows, Cape Breton is not as ethnically or racially homogenous as popular stereotypes suggest. Even early in the twentieth century, it was a multicultural, multi-racial society—one that combined relative tolerance with Victorian racism. The mixed demographic of the area is reflected in the characters. MacDonald acknowledges the long-established African-Canadian presence in Nova Scotia through the Taylor family, who live in an African-Canadian community in the Coke Ovens district of Sydney. The Pipers' only friends, the Luvovitz family, are Jewish. The town's wealthy Mahmoud family is Lebanese, and they speak Arabic as well as English. It is through this last family that the Arab connection of MacDonald's earlier work, *The Arab's Mouth*, is reintroduced and amplified.

However, *Fall on Your Knees* does not merely acknowledge the diversity of the Canadian population: it also shows how fraught with complications the *perception* of that diversity is. Groups in the novel make ethnic and racial distinctions between themselves and "Others," but these distinctions are unstable and shift to suit people's professional and personal needs. Some times characters treat the differences between groups as less substantial, as merely "ethnic" differences. At other times—particularly when certain boundaries are crossed or taboos are broken—greater levels of anxiety and prejudice arise and inter-group differences are treated as inherent, insurmountable, and biological: "racial" in the nineteenth-century sense. In dramatizing the social processes by which "race" is constructed, MacDonald often evokes similar behaviours found in *Othello*. However, as MacDonald interprets the literary paradigm through a late-twentieth-century lens, she suggests that Desdemona's "I saw Othello's visage in his mind" (1.3.252) ought to be "she saw Othello's visage in *her* mind."

For example, as in Shakespeare's play, the novel shows how differences are often overlooked or tolerated in business relationships, making forms of friendship (or at least amicable acquaintance) between people of different "races" possible. As a successful general, Othello is well respected by the nobles of Venice, including Brabantio. As a piano-tuner, the "*enklese*"[8] James Piper is welcomed into the Mahmoud home and treated like a family friend. British

James, Lebanese-Arab Jameel (the local speak-easy owner), and African-Canadian Leo Taylor (the local truck driver) work together well enough in a bootlegging business. James Piper overcomes his initial prejudices (19, 30) about Jews to become friends with the local storeowners, the Luvovitzes.

However, race becomes "visible" again when sexual relations are concerned. Characters are more inclined to "Other" each other, re-defining identities and re-invoking nineteenth-century-style race barriers. Again, *Othello* offers a paradigm for this behaviour: Brabantio's change in attitude towards Othello after his friend elopes at night with Desdemona. Othello becomes the "Moor" in Brabantio's eyes. Similarly, the neighbourly attitude of the Mahmouds towards James changes when he runs off with their thirteen-year-old daughter, Materia. At first, it appears Mr. Mahmoud's anger is based on James' behaviour, more than his race:

> It wasn't so much that the piano tuner was *"enklese,"* or even that he was not a Catholic or a man of means. It was that he had come like a thief in the night and stolen another man's property. "And my daughter yielded." (17)

Nevertheless, thenceforth the two sides in the dispute evoke ethnic and racial differences. In Mr. Mahmoud's mind Piper is no longer "James," but the "*enklese* bastard" (118) and the "yellow-haired dog" (17), defined by his ethnicity and biological (colour) difference. In reaction to Materia's elopement, Mr. Mahmoud chooses his next daughter's husband, Jameel, on the basis of his Lebanese-Arab ethnic/racial identity alone (315). Interestingly, Mr. Mahmoud later admits, "It was not enough" that Jameel was Lebanese, since Jameel proves to be a poor husband and "no son-in-law of his" (315). In a late twentieth-century vein, the novel suggests that preserving "racial purity" is not a guarantee of marital suitability.

However, while MacDonald evokes the Brabantio-Othello conflict as a good illustration of the psychology of racism, she makes a critical change to the paradigm: her "Othello" is white. Her scenario challenges the assumption that only whites will object to miscegenation—an assumption that presumes white racial superiority. Furthermore, she begins to blur and mix the neat identification of her characters with particular figures from Shakespeare's play.

MacDonald's white Othello quickly becomes associated with Brabantio, Iago, and Desdemona. Like Brabantio, James also begins to emphasize "racial" differences in a negative way. Having satisfied his initial lust for Materia, he does what Iago (wrongly) predicts Desdemona will do (1.3.346-48, 2.1.220-34): "disrelish and abhor" (2.1.232) his darker-skinned lover. He refers to Materia's family as "Oily bastards" (16) and "Filthy black Syrians"

(19). He suddenly notices, as if for the first time, that Materia's skin colour is darker than his, and he no longer wants to be seen in public with her (37). He hopes that the child she is carrying will "be fair" (25). Ironically, just as he begins to overcome his racist attitudes towards Jews by getting to know the Luvovitz family, he becomes more racist towards Materia, no longer classifying her in the same race as himself: "Compared to Materia's family, the Luvovitzes seemed downright white" (30).

Eventually, James becomes completely alienated from his child-wife. Like Brabantio viewing Desdemona and Othello, he sees their relationship as unnatural. And, in line with racist nineteenth-century scientific theories, he sees her as child-like, mentally inferior, sexually depraved—a bestial racial "Other":

> How had he been ensnared by a child? There was something not right about Materia. Normal children didn't run away with men. He knew from his reading that clinical simpletons necessarily had an overdeveloped animal nature. She had seduced him. That was why he hadn't noticed she was a child. Because she wasn't one. Not a real one. It was queer. Sick, even. Perhaps it was a racial flaw. (34)

However, MacDonald makes us aware that attitudes towards sexuality and race are even more complex and contradictory than this. While racial "Otherness" is frequently perceived by characters as a sexual threat, ironically, at other times it can be perceived as a source of sexual safety. As in *Othello*, fathers can be lulled into a false sense of security about their daughters' sexual activities by the belief that interracial relationships are highly improbable. Presumably Brabantio leaves Desdemona alone with Othello because he is confident that she could not be attracted to the "sooty bosom" of a Moor (1.2.70)—especially when she has the "wealthy curled darlings of [her] nation" (1.2.68) to choose from. In *Fall on Your Knees*, James trusts Leo Taylor, rather than any other young man, to drive his daughter Kathleen to her music lessons precisely because Leo is black (58).[9] Of course, as in *Othello*, such racist assumptions are proven wrong. Kathleen's younger sister, Frances, initiates a one-night stand with Leo. Kathleen herself has a doubly unexpected lesbian love affair with her own "Othello"—an African American pianist named Rose. (Lesbianism, like miscegenation, is seen by conservative characters as biologically "unnatural" and, therefore, unlikely.) However, here MacDonald again breaks the boundaries of Shakespeare's paradigm even as she evokes it, expanding Desdemona's initial transgression to include other models of subversive female sexuality: predatory lust and lesbianism.

Once the fear of miscegenation is aroused, it appears to overwhelm any ordinary parental fears about class or female sexual impropriety. Brabantio

rejects Roderigo's suit for Desdemona's hand, until she runs away with Othello. Then Roderigo no longer seems an unworthy match. Says Brabantio to Roderigo: "O, would you had had her!" (1.1.172-73). Before Kathleen falls in love with Rose, she has an illicit sexual relationship with a white male soldier. This pre-marital affair with an undistinguished man—an affair that could have left her pregnant—never garners any attention and remains hidden from the family. However, her affair with Rose prompts Rose's mother to send James Piper a warning letter, which brings him to New York to stop the affair. The girls' relationship breaks both racial and sexual orientation taboos; however, in her letter, Rose's mother only refers directly to the inter-racial aspect of the liaison, the "miscegenation," not its lesbian character (235). As in *Othello*, fears about interracial mixing seem to overwhelm other concerns, although one of the most feared consequences of miscegenation—a mixed-race child—technically could not be produced in this case. The sight of Kathleen and Rose naked in bed together produces a severe reaction in James: he beats and rapes Kathleen, then forces her home to Cape Breton, destroying her musical career and her will to live. Yet, can we believe that it is the racial issue alone that enflames James? What about the lesbianism? Where does it fit into MacDonald's use of *Othello* and scientific paradigms? More will be said about this later.

Certainly the novel demonstrates how what *appears* to be pure racial animosity or anxiety can be fuelled by, or contaminated with, other issues. It is a sociological cliché that economic or social disappointment often produces racialized scapegoating, and the idea is powerfully represented in *Othello.* Iago, for example, cites Othello's granting of a coveted promotion to the upper-class Cassio rather than to him as one of the reasons he hates "the Moor" (1.1.8-40); class resentment is directed into racial animosity. Similar redirections occur in *Fall on Your Knees.* When Jewish Ralph Luvovitz and Scottish-Lebanese-Catholic Mercedes Piper consider marrying, no one objects to the match. However, when Mercedes discovers that Ralph has secretly married another woman (and another non-Jew) while away at medical school, she immediately convinces herself that marriage with a man of a different "race" and religion is ridiculous anyway. In "realizing" this "fact" she decides she is "[l]ucid, in fact, for the first time since she conceived her little crush on the grocer's son. A Hebrew. Heavens" (313). Her beloved Ralph becomes merely "a Hebrew" and her love for him is reduced safely to a "little crush." Similarly, the widowed Lebanese merchant, Mr. Mahmoud, considers marrying his black African-Canadian

housekeeper, Teresa. Race is not really an issue between them. However, when Mahmoud comes to believe (falsely) that Teresa has stolen from him, he drops the idea of marriage and "Others" her racially, re-asserting her blackness as an impediment to any sexual union.

The way in which race shifts between being visible and invisible for the characters mirrors the theme of hidden identity in MacDonald's work. In *Fall on Your Knees*, she not only foregrounds the hidden multi-racial identity of Canada, but also examines the act of hiding it in a settler-invader society where some origins convey more class status than others. In the community described in the novel, being perceived as "white" and "European" usually confers social and economic advantages, while being perceived as "non-white" and "non-European" usually confers concomitant disadvantages. Perceived race becomes a partial determinant of class. Consequently, many characters on the borderline between being perceived as "white" and perceived as "non-white Other" try to hide their supposed racial difference and construct themselves as exclusively "white." However, in the course of the novel, their hidden identities are brought into the open.

MacDonald's treatment of this issue centres on the Lebanese Mahmoud family and their half-Scottish, half-Lebanese Piper granddaughters. The family is perceived in the novel to inhabit a racial liminal zone on the border between "white" and "black." This liminality is represented by two things: first, by their skin colour (they are darker than the Scots- and lighter than the African-Canadians); and second, by the liminal position of their ancestral home, Lebanon, which lies between the Euro-Mediterranean, African, and Arab worlds. In their racial liminality they resemble the nineteenth-century stage interpretations of Othello, interpretations that portrayed the Moor as a lighter-skinned "Arab," rather than as a darker-skinned "African," in order to preserve his exotic "Otherness" while reducing it just enough to make him acceptable to white audiences.

In the cases of Ralph and Teresa mentioned earlier, the potential for perceived racial difference was always there, but factors other than pure racial prejudice determined whether or not such difference was highlighted or ignored. With the Mahmouds, too, factors separate from racial animus are involved; these factors push the perception of the Mahmoud clan's identity to one side or the other of the "white"/"non-white" border. James Piper sees his child-bride Materia Mahmoud as white until he becomes sexually and romantically disenchanted with her. The daughters of the wealthy branch of the Mahmoud family are accepted as white by their schoolmates because

"they're nice girls and rich rich" (97). In contrast, the school girls make racist remarks about Kathleen, who is only half-Lebanese and has whiter skin than her Mahmoud cousins: "She may be peaches and cream but you should see her mother . . . black as the ace of spades, my dear . . . We never should have let the coloureds into this country in the first place . . . Kathleen Piper belongs in the Coke Ovens [the "coloured" section of town]" (97). Why? She is viewed as a social snob who looks down on her schoolmates. Like Iago, the girls use racism to level class.

Living in turn-of-the-last-century Cape Breton, where whiteness conveys class advantages, and belonging to an ethnic group whose racial status is considered ambiguous, the Mahmouds insist on their whiteness. Mr. Mahmoud distinguishes his whiteness from African-Canadian Teresa's blackness. Confronted with her non-Scottish heritage, Kathleen asserts that she is "pure white" (504) and that the Mahmouds are Mediterranean Europeans, not "Ayrabs" from the interior (503). The implication in her denial is that Lebanese from the interior would be darker-skinned, and hence more racially "Other."

Not surprisingly, given this environment, miscegenation becomes something to be hidden. Alienated from the Mahmouds and his wife Materia, James Piper sees them as dark-skinned, less white than he is. However, this means the children he has fathered with Materia are mixed-race. Like Dr. Reid in *The Arab's Mouth*, he consequently tries to stamp out any signs of "tainted blood" associated with the mother. He fears his daughters will inherit their mother's dark colouring (25), and, to reassure himself, constantly asserts the fairness of his daughters' skin and hair. Like Dr. Reid, he conflates biological and cultural difference; so, he also tries to suppress their Lebanese cultural heritage—a reminder of their mixed background—indoctrinating them instead with European classics in a kind of cultural eugenics. He forbids Materia to teach Kathleen the Arabic language because he does not want her "growing up confused" (35). In fact, he deliberately makes Kathleen ashamed of her mother and of her Lebanese background (39).

However, as in MacDonald's previous works, secret identities cannot remain secret forever. The race issues repressed by MacDonald in her treatment of *Othello* in *Goodnight Desdemona*, hinted at in *The Arab's Mouth*, and suppressed by characters within *Fall on Your Knees* re-emerge in the novel through the daughters' intimate Othello-Desdemona relationships with African-American lovers. Again MacDonald evokes the *Othello* paradigm only to change it to reflect modern concepts of racial identity. Whereas Shakespeare's Desdemona can only wish to be like brave Othello

and turns her back on her roots by seeking love with him, MacDonald's heroines recover their mother's cultural heritage and their "coloured" Arab roots through their mixed-race relationships. In the process, the racial line supposedly dividing the Othello and Desdemona figures is radically blurred.

Kathleen's "racial" re-awakening is slow. It starts, while she is studying European opera in New York, with her attraction to African-American music and the blues clubs of Harlem. Then she develops a friendship with her African-American piano accompanist, Rose. Her introduction to "Darktown music" and her relationship with a "coloured" woman start her thinking about her own maternal heritage. She is amused by Rose's stereotypical assumptions about Kathleen's "white" background and wonders if Rose would be shocked to see a picture of her dark-skinned mother, Materia:

> She guessed that I came from parents I call "Mother and Dad," that I had "equestrian" lessons, that "Mumsy" is a "frosty blonde" with arch blue eyes and impeccable taste in porcelain and that "Fathah" is a judge from "old money." I played her own game right back at her and didn't tell her if she was right or wrong. I'll let her think she's smart for now. Then I'll show her my family photo. (497)

One can sense in this passage Kathleen's ambivalence. She now acknowledges to herself that she is neither as "white" nor as aristocratic as her appearance and behaviour suggest. She considers acknowledging to someone outside her family the darker-skinned mother whose existence she has largely ignored her whole life. However, she is not ready yet. She allows Rose to believe the WASP fantasy that puts Kathleen in a socially superior position in their society.

While Kathleen flirts with acknowledging her mixed roots, it is Rose who forces her to face up to them fully:

> I [Kathleen] waited for Rose to spot the framed photograph of Daddy and Mumma on my dresser. She said, "Who's that?" I said, "That's my father." She said, "Who's that with him?" And I said, "That's my mother." And she just stared at the picture, then looked back at me and said, "Not your natural mother."/ "What do you mean?" / "Not your blood kin." / "Yes." / Then she looked back at the picture. "I can't see it." / "No one can." / "What is she?" / "Canadian." Rose blushed. Hurray! But I put her out of her mystery; "She's Lebanese." / "She's an Ayrab?" / "They don't like to be called Arabs. Especially not 'Ayrabs'." / "What's wrong with that, that's how I've always said it." / "Well. Anyhow, a lot of Lebanese come from the coast and they're more Mediterranean, more European, you know. Not like Arabs." / "She musta come from inland." Then she looked at me and said, " Coulda fooled me." / I said, "I'm not trying to 'fool' anyone." / "You look pure white." / "I am pure white. My mother is white." / "Not quite." / "Well she's not coloured." / She smiled—sneered is more like it—and said, "Don't worry, honey, you plenty white for the both of you." / "What's that supposed to mean?" / "Now you're mad 'cause I called you white." / She was laughing at me . . . . But I

> wanted her to get the point. "I'm not ashamed of my mother, but I take after my father. My mother is devoid of ambition and not terribly bright, although she is a devoted parent." . . . It was on the tip of my tongue to say "To hell with you" or worse when she got serious all of a sudden and said, / "I'm sorry but you're not being honest with me. You are ashamed of your mother." / I got a hot sick feeling in my stomach. . . . The feeling was coming up through my skin. (503-05)

Kathleen leaves the photo where Rose can see it, but resists its implications throughout their exchange until the moment when she can deny them no longer. Her nausea is symbolic of the resurgent knowledge of her past and Kathleen is forced to acknowledge the "feeling coming up through [her] skin"—her half-Arab, possibly "coloured" skin. While Kathleen has always identified completely with her white, piano-tuning father and attributed all her musical gifts to him, in fact she inherits her talent as much from her piano-playing, Arabic-song-singing mother, as Mrs. Luvovitz tells her. Like Pearl in *The Arab's Mouth*, she learns her heritage is maternal, not just paternal. In a sense, Kathleen recognizes that she sings with an Arab's mouth. Almost immediately after this epiphany it is revealed that Rose is not pure black: her mother is white. It is only after these discoveries—which mock the supposedly inviolable racial divide between Kathleen and Rose—that the two women become lovers.

In this scenario rests MacDonald's most radical violation of the old *Othello* paradigm. If on the (skin) surface Rose is a female Othello to Kathleen's Desdemona, underneath the roles are blurred. When this Desdemona sees this Othello's "visage," she sees not his mind, but her own hidden face. By breaking down the supposedly fundamental biological division between Desdemona and Othello, MacDonald clearly dramatizes the late-twentieth-century scientific view of race: theirs is a *socially constructed* difference, rather than a biologically significant one.

This pattern of self-recognition through relationships with African-Americans and -Canadians continues with Kathleen's sisters. Frances is drawn to the Mahmouds' black housekeeper, Teresa. Although they are never physically lovers, they develop a strange, almost mystical bond. Perhaps because she is unable to have the married Teresa as a lover, Frances plays Desdemona to the African-Canadian truck driver Leo Taylor. She is obsessively drawn to seduce him in order to bear a "mixed-race" child. Through this motherhood, Frances rediscovers her identity, finally becoming comfortable with her past, her body, and her sexuality (see, for example, 416). When her child is taken away from her, she deteriorates.

Lily, the youngest Piper daughter, has a particularly complex hidden

identity. Raised as the daughter of James and Materia, she is really the product of her father's rape of Kathleen. At an early age, Lily is magically drawn to walk from Cape Breton Island to New York City to search out Kathleen's true love. Lily has discovered that her biological father is James Piper, but she seeks out Rose as her real, spiritual father. The relationship is indicated by a new diagram of their family tree in which Kathleen's name is joined to Rose's by an equal sign, indicating marriage (565). Repeating the father-lover trope often found in MacDonald's work, but in a positive way, Lily and Rose live together and become like an "old couple" (563). In fact, they resemble Othello and Desdemona as they might have become if they had survived Iago's machinations. And again, the supposedly fixed biological distinction between Desdemona and Othello is blurred: not only are both Lily and Rose "mixed race," but Lily repudiates her "unnatural" white father in favour of Rose, whose relationship with her mother was loving, creative, and to Kathleen, "natural." And with bigots like James and Mercedes out of the way, Lily and Rose's "mixed-race", lesbian relationship offers the only happy ending of the novel for Othello and Desdemona.

Only Mercedes Piper forges no multiracial ties. In fact, she tries to deny them, even hiding Frances and Leo Taylor's mixed-race son, Anthony, in an orphanage. Tellingly, the highly repressed Mercedes ends up alone, bitter, despairing, and suicidal (560-61)—a female Brabantio dying of a broken heart. MacDonald seems to suggest this is the price one may pay for extreme conformity and for denying aspects of one's identity. Mercedes's one redeeming act is to reunite Anthony with Lily and Rose—his surviving Piper family members—after her death. It is she who leaves him, in the last chapter, a paper family tree in which all the proper connections and identities are revealed (565), very much like the "three in one" revelation of Constance's multi-part identity in *Goodnight Desdemona* and the complete portrait of the MacIsaac family that appears at the end of *The Arab's Mouth*.

Through their Othello-Desdemona relationships with African-North Americans, and African North-American women in particular, three of the ostensibly "white" Piper girls rediscover their own hidden, multi-racial, multi-cultural identity. It is as if their roots magically draw them to African North-Americans, as if in them they recognize aspects of their hidden selves. In the process, the authority of biologically based racial boundaries is continuously drawn into question.

However, what about the lesbianism in the novel? Where does it fit in MacDonald's use of *Othello* and scientific paradigms to explore identity? If

MacDonald ignored race in favour of sexual orientation when she first rewrote *Othello* in *Goodnight Desdemona,* and if she concentrated primarily on race in her science-obsessed *The Arab's Mouth,* she ultimately links the two facets of identity in *Fall on Your Knees.* The scenario surrounding James Piper's discovery of Kathleen's sexual relationship with Rose provides the clearest example. When Kathleen stops observing traditional colour and sexual-orientation barriers and becomes Rose's lover, her father rapes her (549-50). One could interpret the rape as a nineteenth-century racist's reaction to a radical challenge to his ideology. Yet, as was noted earlier, can we believe that it is the racial issue alone that enflames James? Although the warning letter James receives from Rose's mother appears to focus solely on the race issue, at one point it uses a synonym for miscegenation—"crossing nature's divide" (235)—that could also apply to the lesbian nature of Rose and Kathleen's relationship. Both mixed-race relationships and lesbianism are unnatural, according to the kind of conservative thinking critiqued in the novel, because they cross supposedly permanent natural biological barriers, rather than more fluid, socially constructed ones such as class. Having resisted his unnatural passion for his eldest daughter for years, James takes the breaking of other purportedly natural barriers as an excuse to break the incest taboo as well. In fact, when Kathleen dies bearing his child, he even rapes Frances to "comfort" himself. In contrast, MacDonald's Piper heroines find miscegenation and homosexuality entirely natural and fulfilling, while the tragic results of the rapes of Kathleen and Frances suggest that incest is one taboo that truly is biologically based and that should be maintained. MacDonald takes the late-twentieth-century scientific view that race is a social construct and extends it to sexual orientation within her *Othello* paradigm.

In conclusion, developments within the novel mirror developments that occur over the span of MacDonald's works. If one looks at the evolution of identity in *Goodnight Desdemona, The Arab's Mouth,* and *Fall on Your Knees,* MacDonald herself seems slowly drawn towards her own "hidden" roots. In *Goodnight Desdemona* she confronts her identity as a woman, an artist, and a lesbian. In *The Arab's Mouth* she explores her "ethnic" Scottish identity, and hints obliquely at her Lebanese heritage. And, in *Fall on Your Knees,* she examines her possible "racial" identity as defined by her mixed European and Arabic roots.[11] Over the course of her three works, not only does Othello's blackness return, but Desdemona's becomes evident too. However, like most modern-day biologists, MacDonald rejects older racial ideologies and suggests that there is more overlap than distinction, more similarity than difference,

between so-called "races." Radically altering the *Othello* paradigm to reflect modern science, race is revealed in her work to be a powerful category, but a socially constructed one. And finally, MacDonald's novel suggests, in a country of immigrants like Canada, even constructed racial boundaries break down as different settler-invader groups begin to intermingle. The observation Mrs. Luvovitz makes about her grandchildren near the end of the novel seems to express this idea: "They speak French at home, English at school and Yiddish with every second shopkeeper. Real Canadians" (559).

NOTES

1 See Brydon's "Re-Writing *The Tempest*" and "Sister Letters: Miranda's *Tempest* in Canada."

2 I am not concerned in this article with pieces that MacDonald wrote collaboratively with other writers, such as *The Attic, the Pearls and Three Fine Girls.* While recognizing that contemporary playwriting almost always has a collaborative aspect, I am nevertheless assuming that it is easier to isolate and trace the development of a writer's personal vision in her solo-authored works than in her co-authored ones. My perusal of MacDonald's collaboratively written efforts seems to bear this out: they do not deal with racial identity.

3 See Sears and Mitchell. Some non-Canadian playwrights have also used *Othello* to examine interracial relationships and interracial conflict, such as Carlin and Wesker.

4 Bernal's book not only drew attention to such debates, it rekindled them. For responses to his work see Lefkowitz and Rogers.

5 See Banton, chapters five and six. See also Rex and Mason.

6 See, for example, the "social construct" model of race that Banton offers in chapter seven.

7 Prefiguring the incestuous father James Piper in *Fall on Your Knees*, Dr. Reid offers to be both a husband and a second father to the much younger Pearl (31-32, 33). Like James, his loving concern is eventually revealed to be sick and destructive.

8 James is annoyed that the Mahmouds call him "*enklese*" ("English") when he is in fact of Scottish background (19). In an ironic reversal of the way many British people have tended to lump people from extremely diverse African or Asian backgrounds together, the Mahmouds think all British people look alike.

9 Recall that Othello's nighttime elopement with Desdemona is also described as thievery (Shakespeare 1.1.76-83).

10 Interestingly, Leo's African-Canadian wife, Adelaide, is never so sanguine about Leo's friendship with Kathleen's younger sister, Frances (345-6, 350, 353, 358, 367). Like the abandoned African-American wife in Sears' Othello adaptation, *Harlem Duet* (1997), she is painfully aware of the allure of the forbidden white Desdemona.

11 These mixed roots are reflected in a symbolic geography that underlies MacDonald's three works, although the plot actions do not actually take place in these regions. Othello, Anubis, and the Mahmouds evoke an area along the southern Mediterranean coast (comprised by "Moorish" North Africa, Egypt, and Lebanon) that functions imaginatively as a racial borderland where distinctions between "white" and "coloured" are confused.

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Ken Howe

The Emerging Poet

seems to be stuck, with only tail and flukes protruding, flapping weakly or perhaps stirred by the current.[1] There is blood in the water, a squiddy little cloud of it, though it's dissipating[2] and the sharks don't seem that interested anyway.[3] The poet is *emerging*. From the body politic, poetic, electric[4] or the body literate or letter-rate, back from the publisher's again. This process has been going on for some time now—a decade or two—though the mother seems to suffer little.[5] We might even say her attention is flagging, or has already flagged[6]—she has in fact kept busy, eating red herring and blowing smoke rings, reading the financial papers—circulating her thoughts[7] and spitting them out occasionally.[8] This can't go on of course. Someday there'll be a little pop (pop!) and there it'll be, a little bottlenose poet, swimming along, all independent and everything.

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1 That is, currency, which is difficult to separate from capital, or Kapital, if you prefer. Joseph Campbell sees current as a universal symbol of capitalism or even "late" capitalism. The ancient symbol of course was the currant, whose skin is now included in vitamin tablets, and which comes full circle in Homer's "wine-dark sea," under which our story takes place.

2 "Bards love wine" (Emerson)
Although in a life of dissipation
sometimes the muse
will grow confused.

3 Normally we would say sharks are "afraid" of dolphins, though in this case they seem to be simply absent. Still, a feeding frenzy *is* going on somewhere, continuing at its highest sustainable (short term) rate. Notice however that the most successful participants are metamorphosing into cats, fat ones, who know enough to stay away from the water.

4 Sing it baby, sing it!

5 She had booked the epidural generations in advance, being a friend of the anaesthetist.

6 The flag's colour is hard to determine at this depth; it doesn't appear to be a distress flag, despite Capitalism's perpetual crisis state.

7 This is another of those *mises en abyme*, in which the thoughts circulate *inside the body literate* —I'm not saying this is possible of course but since society was disbanded (in the eighties, as Madame Thatcher acknowledged) we've had to rely on this kind of literary conceit.

8 These iron sulfide concretions are often thought to be from outer space, due to their weight and rusty colour. They are, however, simply "bold as brass" and of terrestrial origin.

Ken Howe

The Finely Crafted Poem

If we look carefully amid the paper fibres[1] we can see, if we look very carefully, the fluted edges and elaborate cornices of its structure, its superb structure, its fine structure—as if worked by ever-so-tiny fingers which backed away reverently as each step was completed, effacing their footprints with tiny brooms. Look—these are places for the people,[2] the slots for their little feet, the trays that fold down for an afternoon treat. Over here are the special platforms for committees to sit, which pivot around after the deliberations to face the public. See how clean everything is! These rivets,[3] for example, each one specially puttied and smoothed, doubly reinforced along the flying buttresses[4]—go ahead, touch them, run your fingers along the oak and sumac panelling, the plush recesses of the narthex, draped with lemur fur and leather from the nostrils of Shetland ponies.[5] The anal probe is smooth mahogany and cork, capped by the tanned nipple of a nursing orangutan. Curl up with this finely-crafted poem and an aged claret tonight.

1 The naked mind is of course inadequate to observe such refinement, its powers of discernment rarely rising above the third order (that of the laity generally), which lies somewhere between first and second rate. With training, certain exceptional individuals, such as H. Bloom or A. Bloom, may distinguish infallibly beyond the second order. Water works just as well of course.

2 Some, the founding patrons, have already installed plaques, like this one for Alfred Knopf, with a booster seat here for his sons—and there's the two-seater for Faber and Faber.

3 Some may think that riveting has no place in poetry, but they simply have not sufficient experience at these levels. Many such processes will be observed in the finely crafted poem—visioning, leading, pointing the way, and tuning, to name a few.

4 The mastercrafter can of course craft special qualities into even the most conventional of devices. Unexpectedly the butt rest actually *can* fly and carry you far beyond the bathetics and histrionics of the grossly crafted poem, the currently fashionable poem, the rough-hewn verse, the hieratic doggerel smelling of the lamp. This finely crafted poem is a finely hovercrafted poem, a finely craft-o-matic poem.

5 Obtained during the poet's Guggenheim Fellowship through a MacArthur Foundation "Genius" Grant.

Andre Furlani

1837 On Stage: Three Rebellions

I

Having just published the historical drama *Danton's Death* to raise money for his revolutionary cell, Georg Büchner wrote in 1835 to his family from political exile in France,

> The dramatic poet is in my eyes nothing but an historian, standing however above the latter in that he shapes for us history anew, and instead of giving an arid account places us immediately within the very period, giving us characters rather than characteristics and shapes rather than descriptions. His highest task is to come as close as possible to history as it really occurred. (Büchner 272)

Canadian theatre of the last three decades has oscillated between a similar confidence in the validity of historical drama and a suspicion of all forms of historical recreation that Büchner's own plays helped instigate. Writing for audiences perceived as unversed in national history, English Canadian dramatists assume a pedagogical posture, offering lessons in a history which they simultaneously endeavour to contest. Prominent plays inspired by the 1837 rebellion, such as Rick Salutin and Theatre Passe Muraille's *1837: The Farmer's Revolt* (1973), Michael Hollingsworth's *The Mackenzie-Papineau Rebellion* (1987), and Anne Chislett's *Yankee Notions* (1992),[1] all aspire to correct the historical record and, with it, to correct society; even as such plays exploit the anti-mimetic conventions of theatre to challenge historical stereotypes, they tend to resort to the stereotypes of their own ideological affiliations to urge a purportedly more faithful image of Canadian history. Leftist, feminist, and postmodern historiography inflect even the most iconoclastic of these plays with their orthodoxies.

1837 and *Yankee Notions* are concerned to establish alternative historical legacies, socialist and feminist, with which to mobilize their confederates. While *1837* reflects the cultural nationalism and cooperativist ideals of the early 1970s, *The Mackenzie-Papineau Rebellion*, appropriately for a play staged shortly after Lyotard produced for the Québec Conseil des Universités *The Postmodern Condition*, upsets genre hierarchies, contests the assumptions both of historiography and historical recreation, is anti-teleological and antihumanistic. Both *1837* and *Mackenzie-Papineau* employ pastiche, burlesque and hybrid forms, but the former retains a Leftist commitment to the didactic ideals of the Brechtian *Lehrstück*, while the latter, incorporating elements of television and cabaret, interrogates discourse and its institutions, and ridicules the genre of historical drama. Hollingsworth satirizes not only Canadian history but the patronizing moral earnestness of Canadian historical dramas like *1837*, with their self-serving confidence in the political agency of theatre. *Yankee Notions* meanwhile testifies to the contradictory feminist response to postmodern theories. Chislett can scarcely subscribe to doctrines that reject the Enlightenment principles from which the emancipatory politics of feminism derives its impetus, yet like Hollingsworth she locates emancipation in part in the postmodern affront to universalist assumptions. The play unites a contemporary reconsideration of gender and a traditional view of theatre.

Scripted improvisationally by the Theatre Passe Muraille company in conjunction with Rick Salutin, *1837* is of the three dramas the most faithful to Büchner's dubious ambition "to come as close as possible to history as it really occurred." Like Büchner, however, the collaborators do not equate historical veracity with representational illusion. With its gender-blind ensemble cast generating the scenes and duplicating a wide range of historical and fictitious roles, few taking precedence (even Mackenzie appears in only six of its 23 scenes), *1837* is a fluid script altered in performance to conform to its changing audience. As in *Danton's Death* rapid and diverse scenes operate not to propel a plot but jarringly to juxtapose the elements of a dialectical conflict; story and character are subordinate to a theme of historical determinism that discredits the progressivism and romantic idealism of character drama (for example, Schiller, Shaw, Rattigan and Bolt).

Staged at a time of Leftist and Nationalist consolidation before the Waffle was expelled from the N.D.P., *1837* is an exemplary instance of cultural nationalism, dramatizing a discredited historical class uprising as a spur to directed present action. Produced collectively by a company sensitive to

issues of gender, class and race for a small subsidized theatre, it was subsequently staged in rural auction barns as well as the main stages of large cities throughout Canada before being filmed for CBC television. In the preface Rick Salutin, columnist and editor of the Leftist *This Magazine*, and formerly a labour organizer, praises the first production of the play for conveying the impulse "to throw off colonial submissiveness in all areas" (Salutin 202). The play thus represented "a political event, and not just, or even primarily, a theatrical one." For Salutin, as for Büchner's successor (and Brecht's mentor) Erwin Piscator, drama operates to influence social practices.[2] That Brecht's success as a playwright came largely at the expense of his ideological ambitions does not appear to have chastened Salutin and his company.

As a collective production, *1837* attempts to practice the egalitarian politics it extols. Director Paul Thompson was experienced in staging improvisational drama while Salutin's previous play *Fanshen* had dramatized the effect of the Communist revolution on a Chinese village. Revolution on the stage occurs twice, the first involving not Upper Canadian proletariat rising against the colonial elite but Ontario actors against the tyranny of theatre hierarchy. In his published production diary Salutin identifies actors as "the real proletariat of the theatre. . . . They are the bottom rung" (187). The actors, including Clare Coulter, David Fox and Eric Peterson, joined Salutin in conducting primary research, toured relevant local historic sites and generated most of the play's episodes in rehearsal.

As its subtitle suggests, *1837: The Farmers' Revolt* reflects the aspirations and devices of "peoples'" history prominent in then-recent British theatre, such as John Arden and Margaretta D'Arcy's *The Non-Stop Connolly Show*, Peter Whelan's *Captain Swing* and David Hare's own *Fanshen*. Since Piscator developed expressionist devices for Agitprop, documentary drama has tended to historical revisionism. *1837* provides a socialist interpretation of the conflict. "It was the working people against the Empire," Salutin claims (194). Emphasis falls not on the urban agitation of leaders such as politician and editor William Lyon Mackenzie or attorney John Rolph or officer John Anderson, but on the rural class whom they rallied. The rebellion is thus characterized as class warfare. In early scenes good-hearted homesteaders are forced by the land-granting Lieutenant-Governor off the land they have laboriously cleared, profiteering land agents in league with the Commissioner of Crown Lands extort from peasants huge sums for "cheap" property, and a genteel English woman addresses an audience about "Roughing It In The Bush," by which she means harassing servant, driver and a helpful

aboriginal to extricate her coach from the mud, all promptly sentimentalized in her florid diary entry. (*Yankee Notions* presents a similarly pushy *arriviste* Susanna Moodie.)

Employing a range of Brechtian techniques, from the alienation effect and third-person acting to the use of flexible sets, minimalist staging, abbreviated scenes and direct address, the creators of *1837* plot to revive a dormant inheritance of Leftist engagement. The first lines are "spoken" by the audience, which is still entering the auditorium when the first characters appear on the stage. As in ancient Athens, where the assembly and the theatre were similar and related structures (the audience voting in both), *1837* presents itself simultaneously before a theatrical audience and a political assembly. Mackenzie thus addresses both an 1833 York and a 1973 Toronto audience: "Ladies and gentlemen, this evening for your entertainment, and with the help of my charming assistant *(Enter charming assistant)* I would like to demonstrate for you a magical trick. . . . *To assistant.* We need the volunteers onstage. *To audience.* I would have got volunteers from the audience, but you're all far too respectable for that" (215). The scene goes on to dramatize faithfully quoted passages from Mackenzie's article "Upper Canada—A Venetian State" (see Mackenzie 405-08, Robeson 85-86, or Keilty 24-26). The vaudevillian atmosphere both echoes a popular entertainment of the period and adapts contemporary absurdist devices, including taunting the audience, here teased for its passive bourgeois decorum. Later the audience is more directly assaulted when, during a rebel drilling, a farmer armed with a pitchfork leads an advance towards the auditorium: "*Whirling and stabbing the fork directly out toward the audience.* Attack!" (243). To strengthen its vehemence the scene is cast for women.

As Salutin's production journal makes clear (see, for example, 200), the objective of the play is self-recognition by the audience. The play attempts to achieve this effect in part through anti-mimetic staging. In a scene inspired by the handbill for an 1830s travelling show (see 191), two farmers stage a parodic act of ventriloquism at a reform rally prior to an address by Mackenzie:

> FARMER: . . . a couple of folks have worked up one of their little skits to do for us. So come on up here and get it over with, so we can all get on with hearing the great man's speech. *Two farmers come up front.* And don't forget your lines this time. (232)

The performance ends when the "dummy"played by a lumberjack asks the putative ventriloquist "John Bull" to remove his hand from his neck so that he may at last speak in his own rather than the colonizer's voice, with which

he immediately introduces onto the stage "the man who is giving me a voice," namely Mackenzie (233). Even Salutin worries about so obvious a device: "It's a perfect metaphor for colonialism—maybe too perfect," he notes during rehearsal (191), before concluding that it can be justified as "Agitprop of '37" (199) Like much of the play, the scene results in the kind of ham-fisted symbolism to which dogmatic drama is susceptible.[3] Though the play would marshal the political agency of its spectators, its authors regard them with the condescension a doctrinal elite reserves for its subjects; Salutin's diary presents both the play's performers and patrons as political dupes overdue for indoctrination (see, for example, 187, 200). The play remains loyal both to Büchner's antiquated conviction that drama approximates historical truth and to Brecht's no less superannuated notion that drama may ideologically transform its audience.

II

Premiered fourteen years later in the same theatre by a company under his direction, Michael Hollingsworth's *The Mackenzie-Papineau Rebellion* manipulates many of the same conventions as *1837* to serve wholly contrary ends. Hybrid, eclectic, disjunctive, parodic and anti-representational, the third installment of the eight-part *History of the Village of the Small Huts* burlesques the premises of both traditional historiography and historical drama. The play includes much of what Fredric Jameson identifies as the "progressive features" of postmodernism: "its populism and pluralizing democratization, its commitment to the ethnic and the plebeian, and to feminism, its anti-authoritarianism, and anti-elitism, its profound anarchism" (Jameson 120). Stephen Watt observes that "postmodernism seldom connotes the national, the nurtural, or the univocal" and resists being co-opted as a "pure source of civilization and virtue" (Watt 2). These are precisely the connotations *1837* strives to generate. And whereas *1837* reflects the positive later Brecht of, for example, *Life of Galileo*, Hollingsworth seems to take his inspiration from the earlier Brecht of *Man is Man*, in which man is a cipher and idealism is ridiculed through cabaret and circus effects.

"It is an historical epic for an audience raised on rock music and TV," Hollingsworth explains in his preface to the published version of his *History*. "In the age of electronic information, sixty scenes an hour sets a proper pace. It is the goons of history in their very own 'Goon Show'" (Hollingsworth viii). The plays are staged within the adaptable confines of a "black box" set; scenes appear and are extinguished in a comic void with the speed of a

television remote controller: *Mackenzie-Papineau* contains one hundred scenes. Reinforced by the exaggerated visual style of the performers, wearing outrageous wigs and mime make-up, dressed in bright oversized costumes and frequently grasping flat magnified props, the series both panders to and interrogates the viewing patterns of its audience, generating novel alienation effects. In contrast to Brecht's intentions and the ambitions of *1837*, such devices disable the political mobilization to which the Upper and Lower Canadian rebellions testify. The velocity of the action staged within the breathtakingly choreographed neutrality of the black box deprives the stage of the temporal and spatial coordinates necessary to gain for its action historical purchase. The mobilizing pretensions of the theatre, and indeed of history itself, is the target of Hollingsworth's eight-part travesty. All is politics, and thus no one form of political intervention may claim legitimacy.

Hollingsworth treats the rebel parties in Upper and Lower Canada with scarcely less satiric indignation than did the conservative colonial oligarchs of the Family Compact and the Château Clique. Mackenzie is the raving monomaniac from whom the creators of *1837* strive to rescue him (reinforced by Salutin's partisan history of the rebellion, which accompanies the printed text of the play). Hollingsworth depicts the leader of the Upper Canadian rebels as a pro-labour agitator who exploits his own labourers. Meanwhile the leader of the Lower Canadian *patriotes* observes no contradiction between his republican campaign and his patrician contempt for the proles:

> PAPINEAU: When I proclaimed the rights of man, I meant to say with special rights for the seigneurs and clergy. . . . We will be masters in our own house.
> PIERRE: And I will be a servant.
> PAPINEAU: You are a servant. Pick up my bags. (Hollingsworth 146)

In a rebellion its leader promptly flees, the agrarian ranks will perish to promote not republican ideals but clerical and landed interests. Though Mackenzie, unlike Papineau, remains to face certain defeat in the battle at Montgomery's Tavern, he becomes again the mad mercurial renegade of Tory history, provoking by his erratic and incendiary behaviour the contempt of his recruits, deprived even of his one recognized asset of eloquence.

Linda Hutcheon argues that postmodern literature contests yet retains the distinction between fact and fiction: "The present and the past, the fictive and the factual: the boundaries may frequently be transgressed in postmodern fiction, but there is never any resolution of the ensuing contradictions. In other words, the boundaries remain, even if they are

challenged" (Hutcheon 72). Where in *Mackenzie-Papineau* are the boundaries? How may an audience recognize them? What are the implications for postmodern historical drama if they cannot do so?

Scrutiny of an historically documented episode of the rebellion should clarify the concern, for both *1837* and *Mackenzie-Papineau* stage versions of the autumn 1837 meeting of the Toronto Reformers at the brewery of radical city counsellor John Doel, at which Mackenzie proposed that a brief concatenation of tactical advantages be exploited by an immediate guerilla assault on the government, a proposal met by censure and quickly rejected.[4] Historians have long debated the feasibility of this stratagem, the only detailed testimony of which is Mackenzie's, documented without commentary in his son-in-law Charles Lindsey's comprehensive but partisan history of the rebellion, published a quarter-century after its events (see Lindsey vol. 2, 54-56). A dismissive assessment was offered by William Dawson LeSueur, whose revisionist biography led the rebel's grandson William Lyon Mackenzie King, then Deputy Minister of Labour in the Laurier government, to seek—and obtain—an Ontario court injunction against its publication in 1912 (the book was not published until six years after the premiere of *1837*): "The scheme for the immediate seizing of the governor appeared a little too Nicaraguan even to the resolute souls to whom it was proposed," LeSueur notes (LeSueur 291). Despite his unfavourable depiction of his subject as a messianic, self-destructive fanatic, Mackenzie's third biographer William Kilbourn approves of this "one clear chance to achieve the goal" (Kilbourn 156). Agreeing with Mackenzie, who lamented "the indecision or hesitancy of those who longed for change but disliked risking anything on such issues" (quoted in Lindsey vol. 2, 56), Kilbourn concludes: "It was not the practical men who were capable of the practical now, but the unstable irresponsible visionary" (Kilbourn 157).

The final act of the two act *1837* begins with this caucus. The only scene drafted by Salutin alone rather than generated by the collective in rehearsal (see preface 195), it champions Mackenzie's impulse (as does Salutin's accompanying history; see 122-26). To reinforce the bold acumen of Mackenzie's tactic, Mackenzie is made to direct not only the caucus but the scene itself. "*Mackenzie sets the scene*," the stage direction announces. He introduces the characters and establishes the action:

> MACKENZIE: November 11, 1837. Doel's Brewery, at the corner of Bay and Adelaide Streets, Toronto. I've called an emergency meeting of the leading Reformers of this city. . . . (240)

The speech which follows condenses and sparingly modifies Mackenzie's own account of his proposal, reserving invention for the debate that follows (Salutin condenses two meetings: Rolph attended only the second). Mackenzie inspires complete loyalty in the labourer in attendance but while "*the worker starts determinedly towards the stand of muskets*," their leaders balk:

> ROLPH: Mackenzie—We have pledged ourselves to Reform—not Revolution.
> MACKENZIE: It doesn't matter what you call it Rolph. The question is, what are you going to do about it?
> DOEL: Well, if it's force we want, I move we bring down our friends from the country.
> MACKENZIE: That's the way is it, Doel? Bring down the farmers to do your dirty work?
> PARSONS: Well alright then—four weeks. That makes it what? —December seventh.
> DOEL: Yes. Agreed. December seventh.
> ROLPH: December seventh.
> DOEL: Mackenzie?
> MACKENZIE: *With a helpless look at the worker, and a gesture of disgust toward his colleagues.* Alright—December seventh!
> BLACK. (241-42)

In this documentary scene of working class agitation, Mackenzie emerges as a charismatic and astute proto-socialist leader subverted by the timidity and myopia of his middle-class allies. The rebellion is fatally postponed to December (when Rolph then rashly advanced the date of the assault by three days), thus squandering almost every tactical advantage.

In contrast to *1837*, with its revisionist depiction of an oppressed colonial people, its protagonists thwarted principally by external factors, the legitimacy of the dominant social order assailed, *Mackenzie-Papineau* does not stage oppositional history. Though his adaptation of video techniques and elements of farce, such as anachronism, as well as stylized acting, help to juxtapose history and contemporaneity, Hollingsworth does not encourage notions of individual political agency, as his version of the meeting at Doel's Brewery reflects. Like *1837*, the last scene of the first of the two acts merges two meetings. The scene, however, is now compressed to a twenty-second monologue:

> MACKENZIE: We have the names of fifteen hundred men in this book. Volunteers all, who will rise up on the appointed day if armed. The time to strike is now. Fort Henry is empty, and all troops are in Lower Canada. Four thousand rifles stand guarded by one soldier. We would not have a better chance than now. One short hour can deliver us. Gentlemen, we must whisper our alarms and prepare for December seventh. The day of reckoning. (149)

The monologue combines not simply two historical events but two contradictory intentions. The "day of reckoning" for Mackenzie was of course *not* December the seventh but a month earlier, when the speech here truncated and decontextualized was delivered. Neither the audacity of the guerilla proposal nor the conflict with the moderate reform leadership is presented. Mackenzie here persuades the caucus of his plan when he was forced to concede to their own, and though his tactic was not adopted a subsequent scene implies that it was followed with catastrophic repercussions. Staged in a temporal and spatial void (when, and to whom, is Mackenzie speaking?), the scene travesties Mackenzie's position to convey the confused tempo of events which Mackenzie, like every other leader in the play, deludedly imagines himself able to direct. Thus historical accuracy is sacrificed to a velocity which in this play represents the aleatory, unhuman and burlesque force of history.

While *1837* acknowledges the contrived material conditions of its own theatrical representation of history, *Mackenzie-Papineau* all but annihilates its historical occasion in its postmodern assault on representation. Where then are the "boundaries" between past and present, fictive and factual, which according to Hutcheon postmodernism respects? Unless schooled in pre-Confederation history, how is an audience equipped to orient itself around a boundary which the play blurs? "In this country we are all victims of the maxim 'God can not change the past, but historians can'," Hollingsworth remarks in his preface (viii), as though to repudiate historiography in favour of the truth claims of drama. Does the play "problematize" the past and simply "de-naturalize that temporal relationship" between the past and its historical representation, as Hutcheon suggests (71), or does it rather extirpate any confidence in our capacity to retrieve even a provisional image of the past? Without the audience's familiarity with archival evidence, how can the necessary boundary be established, given Hollingsworth's capricious fabrications?

Such questions may not even apply to *Mackenzie-Papineau*, which concerns itself less with history than with the positivist illusions of historical representation. The boundary exists here perhaps as does the path of the electron in quantum mechanics, beyond apprehension yet generating predictable patterns. The opposition between illusion and reality is annulled, since all constructs of reality are regarded as ludic models offering criteria only for the play of contingencies. As in the later Wittgenstein, reality exists as a function of the discourse that articulates it; thus neither historiography nor literature can claim to represent the structure of reality. Like Hayden

White and Michel Foucault, Hollingsworth views historiography as the product o f the cultural power of the tradition that legitimizes it (see Palmer 163). He presents history as a species of imaginary discourse with rhetorical force.

The ideological consequences are not calculated to inspire confidence. While *1837* stages a scene of ventriloquism both as an echo of contemporary colonial entertainments and as a metaphor for the political awakening of a colonized people, *Mackenzie-Papineau* throughout adopts the conventions of the equally popular contemporary spectacle of the Punch and Judy Show. Crudely anti-naturalistic and violent, this art form determines the ambience, morality and aesthetic of Hollingsworth's play. "The analogy of the players to puppets is unavoidable," Michèlle White writes in her introduction to *The History*. "The actors perform within the box like marionettes, a visual device which emphasizes the political machinations behind the scenes. This, like many other devices Hollingsworth employs, signals the artifice and illusion of theatre and history simultaneously" (xi). Combined with the velocity of the *mise-en-scène*, the staging as puppet-show undercuts the sense of purposive action more than White acknowledges, for who in this play holds the strings? Colborne, first Lieutenant-Governor of Upper Canada and later Military Governor of Lower Canada, plots behind the scenes to provoke a premature uprising and then to extirpate its supporters, but like all such "political machinations" in the play it is a backfiring pyrrhic victory. Puppets are here manipulated by puppets woefully ignorant of the impersonal origins and primitive nature of their impulses and convictions. With little political clout the fence-sitting lawyers Baldwin and La Fontaine emerge as the inadvertent beneficiaries of the civil strife. All are puppets because all are, in Baudrillard's influential formulation (in a text translated into English four years prior to the play's premiere), mere simulacra of a power which is now diffuse, impersonal, ubiquitous. Like Baudrillard's contemporary American presidents, Hollingsworth's leaders are "nothing other than mannequins of power" (Baudrillard 37). Baudrillard encapsulates the predicament that Hollingsworth, with great theatrical verve, stages: "There is no more fiction that life could possibly confront, even victoriously—it is reality itself that disappears utterly in the game of reality—radical disenchantment, the cool and cybernetic phase following the hot stage of fantasy" (148).

Terry Eagleton assails postmodernism for "its cultural relativism and moral conventionalism, its scepticism, pragmatism and localism, its distaste

for ideas of solidarity and disciplined organization, its lack of any adequate theory of political agency" (Eagleton 134). How may postmodernism legitimate the kinds of politics, such as the anti-universalist feminism of *Yankee Notions*, which postmodernism's oppositional attitudes inspire? The loss of reference in *Mackenzie-Papineau* makes a travesty of any politically motivated promotion of presence. The play demonstrates how the cathartic interrogation of power may confound the impetus for historical redress. Like British dramatists Edward Bond (for example in *Early Morning*) and Howard Barker (for example in *The Europeans* and *The Bite of the Night*), Hollingsworth challenges all confidence in a retrievable historical referent. The play conveys outrage over the punitive excesses of Colborne's military in Québec, but its pessimism and historical licence travesty impartially both the vicious cupidity of the imperial oppressor and the easily manipulated naiveté of its victims. The pacing, costumes, montage and stage properties level ruler and ruled alike. The arrangements of power blur the moral distinctions on which oppositional history rests. Oscillating restlessly between historical burlesque and a commitment to the necessity for historical consciousness, *Mackenzie-Papineau*, like *The History* of which it is a part, undermines belief in the feasibility and utility of politically motivated action. Substituting the British imperialists with their American counterparts, Hollingsworth concludes his preface to the series with the claim that Canadians may be sure only that "the new boss will be the same as the old boss. What is going to happen has already happened" (viii). The audience's complicity in its colonial domination, rather than its potential agency in altering this condition, governs the treatment of history in the play, the recognition of which insight does nothing to mitigate a state where reality can no longer be distinguished from its historiographical and theatrical simulacra.[5]

III

Depending on the archive, the authors of both *1837* and *Mackenzie-Papineau* are confronted with the dearth of documentary traces of women. Both plays introduce minor female characters, including in Hollingsworth the contrarian voices of Mackenzie and Papineau's mothers (performed by men). The one woman in Hollingsworth's original twelve-member cast played not only Sarah Lount, wife of the martyred rebel Samuel, but the triumphant political moderate Robert Baldwin, who at one point recites the verse, "'Can man be free if women be a slave" (145). Underlying gender biases are thus exposed. Sarah Lount is not the self-effacing wife of a brave revolutionary,

but the harried, disaffected wife of a negligent husband, whose death she accurately foresees. Their Punch and Judy exchange reveals gender inequalities that rebellion will not soon correct. "When I'm slopping the hogs I'll think about you," she quips as her husband departs for another reform meeting. "Don't worry about it Sam Lount" (140).

The gender anachronisms of *1837* are unobtrusive compromises that call attention to a belated social and political restitution. In his production diary Salutin concludes, "We've failed to find a centrality for women in 1837 terms. But we are *doing* the play in *our* terms—with an equal cast, fair distribution of parts, etc. It is an attempt to portray an oppressive reality in a liberated way" (199).

Anne Chislett finds "a centrality for women in 1837 terms" by finding it in 1838, when in the rebellion's aftermath women petitioned on behalf of their incarcerated male relations for government pardons. The most traditionally staged, structured and performed of these three plays, *Yankee Notions* attempts to retrieve an unacknowledged history in which women are freed from essentializing stereotypes to exercise some influence on political events. Political equality generates gender equality.

While the two other plays dramatize the ideological and military conflicts of the rebellions, *Yankee Notions* depicts a minor jurisdictional conflict between colonial representatives in Upper and Lower Canada. Chislett's primary source is an obscure personal account of rebellion agitation, *The Wait Letters*, published in 1842 by Benjamin and Maria Wait. Wait had joined Mackenzie on Navy Island near Niagara Falls after the battle of Montgomery's Tavern to help organize a second insurgency, and was arrested after a failed border raid. Through his wife's intervention his death sentence was commuted to transportation, and while she campaigned for an amnesty, he escaped from van Diemensland in 1842. The family settled in the U.S., where the Waits published two books on the rebellion (see Read and Stagg 404). Chislett offers a conjectural history in which Maria Wait inspires some of the reforms proposed in the Durham Report.

Like other feminist history plays, *Yankee Notions* integrates issues of class, gender and sexual ideology to document an episode in the history of emancipatory politics (see Wandor 71). It subverts the "great man" concept of history, violates sexual taboos, and validates female solidarity. Maria Wait and the daughter of a convicted rebel scheme to obtain pardons, but are impeded not simply by despotic colonial officials but by their own class attitudes, for while Maria is the politically engaged and proud daughter of a

deceased reformer, Sarah Chandler is an apolitical member of polite society. A dialectic rapidly emerges, for Maria advocates rebellion (she had urged participation on her equivocating husband), while Sarah assumes her father's innocence and is vexed to learn of his revolutionary sympathies (these are exaggerated in the play, for Chandler had simply colluded in Mackenzie's escape to the United States). While Maria wants to murder Chief Justice John Robinson and says so to his face (Chislett 66), Sarah vainly tries to pacify this respected social connection. The sentence-reducing recantation that Maria successfully urges her husband to defy, Sarah all but blackmails her father into signing. (Maria's impulses are vindicated: Robinson has no intention to meet the terms he has set.)

The contrast extends to sexual attitudes, for while Maria is racy and frank, Sarah is a hypocritical prude, outraged to learn of a friend's illegitimate child, yet eventually pregnant with the offspring of the Chief Justice's son Lukin, to whom she had prostituted herself in exchange for a pardon not subsequently issued. Misplaced reverence for the Family Compact even leads her to betray the treasonous contents of Maria's correspondence with her incarcerated husband. While Maria is tactlessly confrontational but honest, Sarah is decorous yet duplicitous.

Most importantly, Maria rejects the distinction between the personal and the political in which Sarah foolishly seeks refuge. En route to Quebec the two argue over how best to appeal to Lord Durham:

> SARAH: All I intend to do is beg for mercy.
> MARIA: Well, I intend to demand justice, Miss Chandler. And a parliament responsible to the people. (105)

Maria perceives Sarah's complicity in the very Compact that exploits her: "It's people like you who make those bastards as powerful as they are" (127).

Despite her trenchant republican rhetoric, jejune political idealism and lack of decorum, Maria obtains the ear of Lord Durham, who, terminally ill and on the eve of his resignation over the jurisdictional conflict with Lieutenant-Governor Arthur, signs an appeal for clemency. Durham is inspired by Maria's example of perseverence and faith to complete the report he had abandoned. Maria and Sarah have meanwhile exchanged political conceptions, the former extolling family and the latter rebellion, while husband and father respectively are being transported to van Diemenland. In a scene that echoes the ventriloquism episode of *1837*, a letter from him arrives and, reciting its contents to Maria, Sarah speaks in Durham's voice:

> Tyranny and greed travel as far as we go, yet from this day on, as far as I go, your common sense will travel with me. So shall my notes for the report I was commissioned to write. (*as MARIA takes the letter from SARAH*) I shall try to keep working long enough to stop The Family Compact from gobbling up your dreams. (140)

In reciting his words Maria recovers her voice, acquires her power, and at once resolves to petition Queen Victoria directly. A girlfriend agrees to subsidize the trip and to raise Maria's infant daughter during her absence, while Maria, conceding the efficacy of gentility, asks Sarah "to teach me how to curtsy" (141). Sexual taboos overcome and female solidarity realized, the protagonists overturn the view that only great men make history. As women they cannot write Durham's Report, but they can influence his proposals.

Yankee Notions observes core theatrical conventions, including self-consistent psychological characterization, mimetic action, a dialectical plot involving confrontations, reversals and recognition, and a temporally transparent progression. Direct audience address, a fluid set, juxtaposition and overlapping disturb but do not disrupt the representational illusion. The disadvantaged female point of view, focus on the marginalized subjects of social history, refusal to segregate the domestic from the public sphere, flouting of sexual convention, and interest both in women's application of patriarchal force against other women and in their cooperation, prevail here as in much of feminist historical drama (see Palmer 157-59), including the influential work of Caryl Churchill.[6]

Though such plays reflect the influence of postmodern dramaturgy, *Yankee Notions*, whose first productions were mounted in and around Toronto while the concluding parts of Hollingsworth's *History* were receiving accolades from full houses, national media attention and drama awards, betrays scant engagement with its methods and rejects its mode of characterization. Though both plays present Chief Justice John Robinson as a scoundrel, he is not the same scoundrel. John Strachan's acolyte and successor as leader of the Family Compact,[7] Robinson is an irresistible target. The final scene of *1837* offers a condemned rebel's apostrophe on the futility of the Chief Justice's vindictive efforts to annihilate liberal reform (264). In *Mackenzie- Papineau* sadism and cupidity exclusively direct Robinson's Punch and Judy character. Reversing a jury's verdict, he convicts of murder Mackenzie's apprentice Charles French, who in self-defence had killed an assailant hired by Robinson himself (a malicious travesty of the French case, in which Robinson was not implicated [see Kilbourn 70-72]). Later Hollingsworth transfers to Robinson the historical role played by Alderman

John Powell to underscore Robinson's mendaciousness. Taken prisoner by Mackenzie and the rebels' military commander Captain John Anderson while attempting to spy on the assembling rebels, Powell had falsely sworn himself unarmed, and Mackenzie, as a man of honour, took him at his word. Powell soon after shot Captain Anderson, depriving the rebels of their respected military commander, and but for a flash in the pan would have shot Mackenzie point-blank (Kilbourn 167-69). In Hollingsworth's play Mackenzie is a fool, Anderson realizes as much, and Robinson, substituting for Powell, is a villain.[8]

While Hollingsworth's Robinson is the feudal tenant's stereotype of arbitrary power, a crude mobile token of blood-lust and greed propelled by impersonal forces, Chislett's is the calculating hypocrite of Victorian fiction, like the industrialist Bounderby in *Hard Times*, whose author Robinson hosted when Charles Dickens visited Toronto in 1842 (Brode 269). He violates the terms of a commuted sentence, scorns his son and unconscionably abuses his influence. However, despite his foolish patrician pretensions and unscrupulous methods, Robinson possesses ideological convictions that motivate his conduct no less than avarice and a will to power. Such conviction is underscored by the play's analogies to Sophocles' *Antigone*, whereby this colonial Creon tells his wayward and manipulable son Lukin, "The rule of law is the foundation on which I've built this colony. The foundation on which you will build this nation!" (40).[9] Robinson remains faithful to the ideals of the Duke of Wellington, with whom he celebrated Christmas 1839 at Strathfield Saye (Brode 223); reiterating a Burkean *idée reçue*, Robinson ably defends his Tory principles directly before the audience:

> I am accused of corruption because I would never allow hare-brained radicals to prevail over those who, by intellect, education and experience, are most fit to guide this colony to its destiny. I am accused of tyranny because I quelled an uprising that would have imposed mob rule. (52)

The only political figure championed in any of these plays is Chislett's Lord Durham. Despite his genteel condescension, frailty (he was in the terminal stage of consumption) and worldly political pessimism, Durham's traditional status as an architect of Confederation who promoted both the union of the Canadas and responsible government is reinforced. The stage direction introduces him as "*like Byron, a Romantic aristocrat of feverish extremes*" (34). Inspired by Maria's provocations he attempts to obtain a pardon for the rebels and commits his dwindling energy to rescuing the Canadas from institutional Toryism by urging that the nonelected Executive

be made subject to the will of the popular Assembly. To French Canadians, of course, Durham is no such redeemer but rather the author of a report arguing the isolation, racial inferiority, economic limitations and lack of civilization of the French ("They are a people with no history, and no literature" [Durham 212]); it recommends a graduated but implacable programme of assimilation similar to proposals made to the Colonial Office by Robinson himself: "it must henceforth be the first and steady purpose of the British Government to establish an English population, with English laws and language, in this Province, and to trust its government to none but a decidedly English Legislature" (212).

Despite its title, *1837* scarcely mentions the corresponding and much more incendiary Lower Canada rebellion, while *Yankee Notions*, despite the prominence of Durham, never alludes to it. At the cost of a dispersal of its theatrical energies, *Mackenzie-Papineau* is structured to acknowledge the interrelations between French and English Canada. Though respecting the moderate position of "Radical Jack," Hollingsworth cheerfully dispels happy English Canadian illusions about Durham's sympathies. Durham addresses the audience: "When I came here I expected to find a dispute between the people and the executive. Instead I found two nations warring in the bosom of a single state. The struggle is a racial one. The national feud. The French must be assimilated. As an amoeba eats bacteria, the English must eat the French" (164). *Yankee Notions* never presents this motive for political union, depicting Durham instead as a Liberal political pragmatist who hopes to persuade his niece Queen Victoria "to try the simple but novel experiment of governing them [the colonies] well" (140).

Chislett's play, the only one of the three to include children, concludes with Maria's infant daughters being passed among the innkeeper's illegitimate daughter, Maria and Sarah:

> SARAH: Maybe by the time our children grow up, there'll be a new world for them.
> ANNIE: Girl, I doubt that there's more to it than this.
> MARIA: There will be, Annie! There has to be. *Blackout* (141)

Female solidarity is reinforced by a shared maternal identity that renders urgent the task of political reform. Historical hindsight fulfills for the audience Sarah's hopes and vindicates Maria's confidence, for Durham eventually achieves the political ends the play honours. Because Samuel Chandler and Benjamin Wait were not freed but escaped from Van Diemensland while on parole in 1842, two years prior to an amnesty, the play ends by affirming not the limited personal aims of the women but their larger public purposes.

Here *Yankee Notions* invites its audience to celebrate their success.

1837 too exploits historical hindsight to vindicate the rebellion, but the play implies that the revolutionary energies released await maturation. On the gallows Lount tries to assure his disillusioned comrade that "there will be others coming down that road" of revolution:

> MATTHEWS: Sam, we lost—
> LOUNT: No! We haven't won yet.
> *The trap falls. They dangle by the ropes.*
> *BLACK.* (264)

With the clumsy didacticism that mars the entire play, *1837* thus admonishes its audience to resuscitate the republican idealism for which these men were martyred.

For all its cynicism, *Mackenzie-Papineau* ends even more encouragingly. The play ends with the declaration of the Act of Union (10 February 1841), La Fontaine and Baldwin both entering with copies of the Durham Report that had proposed it. Though La Fontaine bridles at the imperialist, racist provisions (the Act included many provisions prejudicial to the maintenance of French society), he agrees with Baldwin that "this changes everything":

> LA FONTAINE: We will rule our rulers.
> BALDWIN: Together.
> *(LA FONTAINE and BALDWIN turn toward each other. The lights fade. The end.)*
> (165)

The two reformist lawyers who had balked at rebellion are its mutual political beneficiaries. However, since the play has discredited the rebel leadership, their restraint appears far less niggardly than astute, especially given that they at once seize the potential for moderate liberal reform.[10] Canada remains, as throughout the *History*, "state-of-the-art colonialism," as Hollingsworth characterizes it in his preface (viii), but the preconditions for a functioning liberal democratic state balancing English and French interests have been met. One of the paradoxes of postmodernism is that *Mackenzie-Papineau*'s antihumanist historical fatalism culminates in the affirmation of a pragmatic moderate micropolitics.

Like much partisan drama, *1837* is far too sanguine about the propaedeutic potential of theatre, and too earnestly programmatic in attempting to realize this potential. Though its characters may charge the lethargic theatre patrons with pitchforks, an audience is less likely than a theatre company to confuse a stage property with a weapon. (A naive stage direction notes: "*It is quite ominous. That is a real pitchfork up there onstage*" [242].) In aspiring to

reform its audience, the play only condescends to it. Since *Yankee Notions* celebrates the benefits of incremental, non-violent agitation, the play demands less of its audience. Our distance in time from the injustices it recounts, as well as its reassuring outcome, invites complacence. An ideological commitment to moderate feminism dictates the moral uplift of its contrived ending, an unconvincing *tableau vivant* of embryonic female solidarity. Chislett does not wish to affront her audience, only to instruct it with an entertaining chapter recovered from the prehistory of Canadian feminism. *Mackenzie-Papineau* is more dazzling and less programmatic theatre than either of these plays, but its chief impetus is, oddly, political inertia. Despite dramatizing a heritage of reform, the play's satirical tempo suggests the futility of attempting to identify and dramatize consequential historical events. The past is comic, crude, indecipherable. Hollingsworth thus arrives at Büchner's mature view, when in French exile he was writing the proto-postmodern comedy *Leonce and Lena*. On New Year's Day 1836, just as Mackenzie was returning from the Quebec visit to Papineau which established cooperation between the Upper and Lower Canadian rebels, Büchner, wrote in a letter:

> Only a complete misapprehension of our societal relations could make the people believe that through contemporary literature a complete transformation of our religious and societal ideas could be made possible. . . . I go my own way and stay in the field of drama, which has nothing to do with all these controversies. (Büchner 279)

NOTES

1 *1837: The Farmers' Revolt*, written collectively by Theatre Passe Muraille with Rick Salutin, premiered in Toronto in 1973 before being staged across the country, and received the Chalmers Outstanding Play Award. Directed by the author, Hollingsworth, and produced by his company VideoCabaret, *The Mackenzie-Papineau Rebellion*, the third in the eight part series *The History of the Village of the Small Huts*, was staged in 1987 at Theatre Passe Muraille. Originally commissioned by John Hirsch for the Stratford Festival, Anne Chislett's *Yankee Notions* was first produced by the Ryerson Theatre School in Toronto, then staged professionally in 1992 at the Blyth Festival, where in 1981 she had premiered *Quiet in the Land*, which won a Chalmers Award for best Canadian play and the Governor General's Award for drama.

2 In Brecht's formula, "the alterable and altering person" is both dramatized on the stage and seated in the auditorium; as social existence precedes essence, the detached and mutable observer is supposed to be placed in critical contraposition to the action and compelled to come to conclusions not simply about the drama but regarding its political implications (see Brecht 19-20).

3 In another burlesque, Lieutenant-Governor Sir Francis Head's minatory "bread and butter speech," made while intervening against reformers in the 1836 Lower Assembly election, is delivered by four actors comprising his head: "*Two of their heads are his eyes, two arms are his arching eyebrows, two other arms his nose. So on for his mouth, dimple, etc*" (224). The scene yokes to the flaunted artifice of its staging the documentary realism of its text. The dramaturgical disjunction preserves the archival record in the formaldehyde of bombastic satire.

4 Lt. Gov. Head had dispatched both the Toronto and Kingston garrisons to quell the Lower Canadian rebellion, leaving the military arsenal unguarded and himself protected by only a single sentinel. Mackenzie proposed to rouse local supporters, seize Head and the 4,000 stand of arms, proclaim a provisional government, and, in the event of Head's certain non-compliance with demands for responsible government, pursue independence. See Lindsey II, 54-56.

5 For discussion of these issues see also Thiher, chapter 7, Bertens, chapter 9, and McGowan 28.

6 Churchill's 1976 play *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire* similarly places the oppression of women among various elements, such as class and religion, to dramatize an alternative social history of the English Civil War. Revolutionary aspirations toward democracy, economic and sexual freedom are suppressed by the war's Puritan victors under Cromwell, who establishes an authoritarian Parliament, invades Ireland and promotes capitalism (see Churchill's introduction to the play, 183).

7 For the closeness of Robinson's ties to Family Compact pillar Bishop Strachan, who had been his teacher, priest, military companion during the War of 1812 and lifelong political associate see, among others, Flint, esp. 151-52.

8 Robinson soon alienates commander FitzGibbon by delighting to threaten rebel prisoners with violence to their family if they do not betray confederates (160). No such rift in fact occurred, and after the rebellion Robinson wrote laudatory letters to the Colonial Office urging FitzGibbon's preferment. (See McKenzie 155-56.)

9 A debauched Haimon, Lukin offers to assist Sarah in exchange for sex. Though initially he serves his father by deceiving her, Lukin soon falls in love with Sarah. Recognizing the implacability of his father's law, Lukin ineffectually attempts to defy him. While Sarah achieves something of Antigone's purity of purpose, Lukin like Haimon fails to negotiate a space between lover and father.

10 As leaders of the united Reform party, Baldwin and LaFontaine were soon able to repeal many of the Act's anti-French clauses (for example, the abolishment of French as an official language) and moderate many of its constitutional provisions.

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R.J. McDonald

Big Men with Cigars

big men with cigars
big men with cigars
they laugh,
puff,
laugh, laugh,
puff,
laugh,
puff, puff, puff,
big men with cigars

Rocco de Giacomo

Justification for not paying attention

I'm sorry,
I think I missed something

I was having a moment
I'd found
caught between my breaths
like a butterfly
pounding
delicate beats
into the world
turning
breath into voice
turning
voices into music
turning
this music into something
mystical and moving
like city streets
strung with chandeliers
and hung with fake mist
and
it's all right
'cause this music
allows the
hairy-knuckled prophets
to lean against pool tables
like fountain pens
pressing out the lyrics
of their thoughts
as their
bleach-blonde martyrs
look as though
the world will stop

to hear them sing
the words

while in the meantime
I'm saying
HI
to this woman
in tight leather pants
just to say that
I said
HI
to a woman
in tight leather pants
and she's up
'gainst the bar
and her words
lean like sleepy bodies
under a ceiling of
glow-in-the-dark
stars and
HEY!
what?
HEY!
what?
HEY!
what?
YOU FUCKIN TOOK MY BEER ASSHOLE!

I'm sorry,
I must have missed something
I've been caught
under the iron lips
of another moment
and I took the guy's beer
and his face,
crawling with bristles
barely managing
to hold a single name

surfaces now
like a corpse
from the muddy floor of memory
his voice shaking
with the anger of unrecognition
his eyes hammering
out a time and place
when he was hooked on rock

surfacing then
like a phoenix
through the cracks in the floor
trying to sell stuff
he'd stolen from me
and tonight
lost in all this anger
and unrecognition
I am finally
the thief
WHAT THE FUCK ARE YOU DOING? he says
"I think I took his beer"
I say to the woman
in the tight leather pants
but she's off
talking to the cook
with the
starlight she stole
from my own look
and
it's all right
'cause this music is making
us all thieves now
as this room
beeves and bops
like silver coins
scattering to the secret pockets
of the night and
in the meantime
MOM is alone
MOM is drunk,
drunk
on recycled beer
leaning against me
as if this was a family picnic
where all she wants to do
is to slip off her shoes
and curl up on the green grass
'cause she's just a bit tired
and she's just bit giddy with sun
and home-made sangria
bringing a little blood to her cheeks
a little yesterday to her eyes
and she takes my hand

and she sings
something
about a blue-eyed boy
but
everyone here
is laughing
'cause for all our music
we are unable to see
the green hills and blue skies
of her song:
pay no mind
it's just
some drunk
old woman
having a moment

and she stops
and takes my hand
and laughs like a soldier
who's given up
and cries victory
to the bullets and faceless beast
of an enemy
embedded
in the growing radiance
of the past

her kisses are wet
on my cheek

"YOU SON OF A BITCH"
she says
and drifts off
with the butterflies
and green grass
of her own
iron sky and
WHOA
what?
WHOA
what?
WHOA
what?

I'm sorry
I think I just missed something

I was having another moment
and now the night is sealed tight
as a diving bell around us all
and I can feel the fury
of the women
marking their territories with laughter
and of the men
crouching at tables like blind boxers
ready to strike
at the slightest
changes of air

and it's all I can do
to prevent myself
from getting caught up
torrents of night
and it's all I can do
to prevent myself
from drowning
in the darkness among the lights
shining salvation
like brighter poisons
taken
devoured like the moments
between each and every breath
and
in the
meantime
she cozies up to me
like a wonder drug
hungry for a disease
"DO I LOOK OK?" she asks
yeah you like great
and she grabs my rum and coke
and gags when she
finds that it's only a coke
"DO I REALLY LOOK OK?" she asks
yeah you look really good
and she takes my friend's hat
and she drinks his beer
spitting up the foam on his shirt

"NO, DO I REALLY LOOK OK?" she asks
sucking out our poisons
siphoning our symptoms
until there is nothing left
but the empty glasses
and vacant stares
picked clean
and strewn about
and she's angry
that we've survived this far
without anything she can use,
and she throws our jug
onto the dance floor
and she echoes like a bat
into the rafters of night
and it's all right
'cause the night is an ocean of silence
and this music is our diving bell
taking all of us
deep and beautiful and nameless
to the spaces between the beats
where only
the resonance of our wings
can illuminate
the trivial seconds
the wasted moments
that we can call out
and cry victory
as ourselves
and
WHOA
what?
WHOA
what?
WHOA
what?
I SAID COME ON LET'S GO
JESUS MAN, YOU NEVER LISTEN

sorry,
I was having another moment.
what,
what were you saying?

Dominique Perron

Conflits discursifs et représentation des Amérindiens dans un discours promotionnel d'Hydro-Québec

Au printemps 1997, Radio-Canada diffusait une télésérie fictionnalisée intitulée *Les Bâtisseurs d'Eau* qui retraçait en six épisodes l'histoire et l'évolution de la société d'État Hydro-Québec, depuis les années cinquante jusqu'au début des années quatre-vingts, télésérie partiellement produite et amplement financée par l'entreprise nationalisée de production hydro-électrique connue maintenant comme l'une des plus importantes en Amérique du Nord. Quand on garde à l'esprit qu'une des manifestations les plus distinctes de la culture populaire québécoise ayant justement été, dès la mise en fonction de la télévision au début des années cinquante, la création de la forme spécifique du téléroman, on ne sera pas étonné du recours systématique de ce produit culturel particulier qu'est Hydro-Québec à cet autre média culturel privilégié qu'est le téléroman ou plutôt la télésérie.[1]

Cette rencontre entre Hydro-Québec et la télésérie s'explique d'une part par la postérité de ces séries télévisées, que l'on peut dénombrer d'ailleurs par centaines depuis les débuts de la télévision au Québec. Rappelons seulement que plusieurs de ces productions, dont beaucoup étaient justement à saveur historique, ont joui d'une audience et d'une popularité telles qu'elles sont devenues partie prenante de la culture québécoise.

Ajoutons à ce constat qu'un des modes spécifiques de visibilité d'Hydro-Québec, surtout depuis sa nationalisation en 1963, s'est manifesté à partir d'un capital symbolique unique et considérable soigneusement établi par une série ininterrompue de campagnes publicitaires de qualité souvent remarquable. Par ailleurs, des institutions québécoises telles que la

Fédération des Caisses Populaires Desjardins et la compagnie Bombardier avaient déjà usé de téléséries dramatiques pour bénéficier d'un espace promotionnel étendu sous le prétexte de la biographie de leur fondateur respectif, Alphonse Desjardins et Joseph-Armand Bombardier.

Cependant on sera plutôt quelque peu surpris par l'envergure de l'intentionnalité promotionnelle d'Hydro-Québec,[2] dans le cas de *Les Bâtisseurs d'Eau*, envergure qu'il faut mesurer dans tous les sens. D'abord par la détermination non dissimulée de l'entreprise nationale à emprunter ce procédé de la télésérie historique pour mieux consolider son capital symbolique auprès des Québécois. Et pour ce faire, on déployait au gré des épisodes différents, les discours variés qu'une telle reconstitution supposait : discours d'affirmation nationale, discours de la continuité traditionnelle, discours identitaires, discours de contestation, discours pro-technologiques et pro-capitalistes et même discours féministes. De ce point de vue, la reconstitution nettement discursive du paysage historique d'Hydro-Québec depuis 1952 opérée dans *Les Bâtisseurs d'Eau* s'avère remarquablement réussie sur ce terrain précis de l'encyclopédie des discours sociaux, même si on est autrement justifié d'émettre des doutes quant à la valeur proprement télégénique ou dramatique de la série, évaluation esthétique qui ne relève toutefois pas de cette étude.[3] L'objet de la présente analyse est plutôt d'examiner, en raison de leur fonction didactique—puisqu'il faut "enseigner" aux Québécois, par la fiction, ce que fut l'histoire d'Hydro-Québec—l'articulation de tous ces discours concurrents qui ont eu l'occasion d'être actualisés dans cette narration du Grand Récit de l'entreprise, discours auxquels il faut aussi ajouter les étiquettes suivantes: conservatiste, misogyne, colonialiste et post-colonialiste, scientifique, passéiste, progressiste, territorialiste, idéaliste et xénophobe. Toutefois, ce dispositif n'est pas aussi disparate qu'il en a l'air car, comme le précise Marc Angenot, il s'avère "perméable à la migration d'idéologèmes qu'il adapte à son télos propre et partageant des stratégies avec des discours contigus ou parents et, de proche en proche, avec le système hégémonique entier" (97) . Et cette constellation discursive, on peut apprécier à divers degrés que les scénaristes de *Les Bâtisseurs d'Eau* aient tenu à en illustrer l'essentiel, malgré la complexité de leur projet d'ensemble de reconstitution historique fictionnalisée.

Mais au sein de ce projet, le discours promotionnel théoriquement contrôlé en dernière instance par Hydro-Québec ne pouvait faire l'économie, malgré qu'on en ait hypothétiquement eu le désir, des discours sur les Amérindiens en l'occurrence les Cris du Québec. Cette référence aux Cris

était bien sûr impliquée par l'inévitable représentation de la saga de la Baie-James qui se pose aussi historiquement comme le dernier grand complexe hydroélectrique dans lequel Hydro-Québec a assumé un rôle majeur. Et de tous les discours manifestés dans le scénario, répartis symboliquement entre différents personnages qui remplissent une fonction métonymique, allant de la femme au foyer au cadre exécutif en passant par l'ouvrier de chantier, ceux tenus sur l'existence, les positions, puis les revendications des Cris de la Baie-James s'avèrent sans aucun doute les plus chargés de potentialités diverses que le scénario se devait d'orienter dans un travail de vulgarisation destiné à un grand public.[4] On peut d'ailleurs présumer que la plus grande partie de ce public dépendait, dans son élaboration d'une réflexion sur les Amérindiens, des idéologèmes véhiculés par un discours social amplement médiatisé sur la question. Depuis plusieurs années, l'existence politique et culturelle des Premières Nations est devenue objet de la presse, des discours d'hommes politiques, des revendications formulées par les leaders Amérindiens, de lignes radiophoniques ouvertes, de quelques oeuvres cinématographiques type *Black Robe* ou *Dances with Wolves*. Cette médiatisation a permis un large spectre de positions oscillant de l'exclusion pure de l'Autre autochtone à son acceptation idéalisée et empreinte de culpabilité narcissique, éventail qu'avait bien cerné en 1992 Sylvie Vincent dans un article passionnant intitulé: "Terre québécoise, première nation et nation première: notes sur le discours québécois francophone au cours de l'été 1990."

Ce "point sensible" discursif posé par la question autochtone ressortissait plus particulièrement avec le caractère inévitable de la représentation téléromanesque liée à l'épineux épisode à rebondissements dépeignant la construction du gigantesque complexe hydroélectrique de la Baie-James, considéré autour de 1972-1973 comme le plus grand chantier de construction au monde. Disons tout de suite que cette représentation soulevait en termes promotionnels d'énormes défis monstratifs et idéologiques dont le scénario s'est plus ou moins bien tiré. Plus particulièrement, la mise en discours des idéologèmes sensibles de l'époque portant entre autres sur le syndicalisme, l'environnementalisme, les politiques gouvernementales et, bien sûr, les Amérindiens posait des problèmes spécifiques en ce que les discours rapportés sur ces thématiques trouvaient une continuité dans le présent des téléspectateurs; une telle prolongation rendait toujours problématique une distanciation évidente et salvatrice. Pour les épisodes précédents de la série, couvrant la période des années cinquante, cette distanciation devenait

manifeste pour les pires stéréotypes du duplessisme ou du colonialisme, stéréotypes que le destinataire pouvait aisément juger comme dépassés et condamnables, voire ridicules. Cependant, quand on s'arrête tant soit peu aux véhémences diverses suscitées durant l'été 2000 dans le discours social par les revendications amérindiennes sur le territoire canadien ou les droits de coupe de bois ou de pêche, à l'Est comme à l'Ouest du pays, on mesure à quel point l'attribution discursive du scénario sur ce point de la représentation des Cris était susceptible chez l'auditoire québécois d'interprétations qu'il fallait contrôler selon certains critères d'acceptabilité. Il fallait ainsi pouvoir rallier les positions les plus diverses sur la question amérindienne afin de donner l'impression, sinon l'illusion, d'un consensus discursif général au sein de la population susceptible de donner à la communauté québécoise une perception d'elle-même qui n'offrirait pas trop de prises aux accusations de ressentiment envers les minorités ethniques, accusations qui pleuvaient au sujet du Québec tout particulièrement depuis le référendum de 1995. Donner une image acceptable de sa position sur les Cris du Québec, tout en respectant la vraisemblance historique des discours, comme on l'avait fait sans problèmes apparents pour d'autres thèmes liés à l'histoire d'Hydro-Québec, tel était le défi des scénaristes François Labonté, Jacques Savoie et Jacques Jacob pour un scénario promotionnel d'une entreprise nationalisée qui n'avait pas cru bon, depuis 1964, de faire dans ses messages publicitaires une seule référence à l'existence des Amérindiens au Québec.

L'épisode 6 de *Les Bâtisseurs d'Eau*, qui est aussi le dernier de la série, est essentiellement consacré au récit de la construction du complexe hydroélectrique de la Baie-James. Il met en scène les trois personnages principaux de la série qui ont servi de support discursif à l'essentiel du travail narratif précédent: Émilien Vigneault, ancien excavateur devenu chef de chantier pour Hydro-Québec à Manicouagan-Outardes, puis à la Baie-James; Antoine Beaulieu, dynamiteur devenu contremaître sur les mêmes chantiers et son épouse Évelyne Beaulieu qui, pour sa part, a été infirmière aux villages ouvriers du Lac Louise (Manicouagan) et de Radisson (Baie-James). La scène a lieu en 1980, aux moments où le trio septuagénaire, maintenant à la retraite, est interviewé par la fille des Beaulieu sur leur participation à l'épopée d'Hydro-Québec depuis ses débuts.

La division du travail discursif et son attribution prennent une fonction primordiale pour dégager le sens de la scène en ce qu'elle va permettre de régler la valeur et la légitimité des discours qui seront émis sur les revendications autochtones selon le degré de crédibilité individuelle des trois énonciateurs

que le scénario a soigneusement établi depuis les cinq épisodes précédents. Ainsi, l'ancien chef de chantier, Vigneault, a toujours incarné la voix du progrès, technique ou social, tout comme il a incarné l'ouverture au changement. Des trois, il est le premier à s'être joint aux équipes d'Hydro-Québec en 1952, contre l'avis de son associé Beaulieu qui craignait les foudres de son employeur de l'époque, la Shawinigan Power and Light. Du coup, Vigneault s'affichait comme un tenant du modernisme et reléguait Beaulieu, moins scolarisé, à la douteuse tâche de chanter les louanges du duplessisme, tâche à laquelle l'excavateur se dévoua jusque dans les années soixante-dix, imperméable qu'il est aux changements qui investissent la vie sociale et politique autour de lui. Le résultat évident d'un tel déphasage discursif est la disqualification régulière de Beaulieu auprès du téléspectateur comme énonciateur et comme actant idéologique. Son épouse Évelyne assume pour sa part le rôle de porte-parole symbolique de l'ambivalence liée à de la condition féminine dans le matriarcat psychologique particulier, qui se manifestait au Québec dans les années cinquante. Évelyne a la fonction d'ironiser sur les discours conjugaux pour en sursignifier les lacunes (Épisode 3: "Antoine, on dirait que t'es dans un autre siècle!"), tout en demeurant dans les limites de la doxa commune, du bon sens général qui craint les dépaysements qu'entraînerait une remise en question trop radicale de l'ordre des choses. À cet égard, sa validation discursive auprès du destinataire reste importante, car l'épouse de Beaulieu est rarement prise en défaut par rapport à l'acceptabilité générale liée au discours social contemporain, qualification qui ne sera pas sans conséquences lorsque lui reviendra d'émettre une opinion sur l'entente établie avec les Cris de la Baie-James.

Forts de ces précisions sur le statut relatif des énonciateurs, et leur légitimité discursive, nous pouvons donc examiner de plus près le dialogue d'une scène clef de l'épisode 6 de *Les Bâtisseurs d'Eau*, retranscrite à partir des bandes magnétoscopiques de la série:

> Antoine *(faisant référence aux problèmes de relations de travail qui ont interrompu les chantiers de LG2 en 1972):* Émilien, lui, il est à l'aise là-dedans, il patauge là dedans comme un poisson dans l'eau. Il est ben lui dans ça. . . . Moé, j'pas capable. . . . la SEBJ, SDPJ, Hydro-Québec, le Gouvernement, le syndicat, les écologistes, les Sauvages, euh . . . les Indiens, ben . . . les Amérindiens.
>
> Françoise Beaulieu *(intervieweuse)*: C'était quoi le problème avec les Cris?
>
> Évelyne *(extériorisant sa colère)*: J'veux pas en parler, ça m'enrage trop. . . . Ça a pas de maudit bon sens c'qu'ils leur ont donné. . . . Maudites affaires politiques!

Émilien *(conciliant)*: Y pourraient pas faire autrement, Évelyne. . . . Ils ont acheté la paix!

Évelyne *(rageuse)*: Ils l'ont payée cher en maudit!

Émilien: Ils l'ont pas payée si cher que ça. . . . Le monde pense que les Cris sont millionnaires. . . . Ben, ils sont pas pauvres. . . .

Antoine: Pourquoi les Québécois auraient été obligés de payer . . . si on ouvre une mine en Gaspésie, on est toujours ben pas pour faire un chèque à tous les Gaspésiens qui viennent. . . .

Émilien *(l'interrompant)*: On a inondé leurs terres, Antoine, c'était ben le moins. . . . Ces gens-là, y vivent pas, y pensent pas comme nous autres. . . . Faut respecter ça. Moé, moé, la manière dont je vois ça, c'est qu'on leur a donné les moyens d'être autonomes . . . *(suit un très succinct historique des négociations, films d'archives à l'appui)*.

Pour procéder à un examen plus attentif de ce court dialogue, dont on évacuera pour l'instant l'aspect télévisuel pour n'en étudier que la dimension strictement discursive, j'aurai recours à certains concepts développés par Paul Chilton pour parler des schémas cognitifs des discours racistes, dans une analyse qui tient d'ailleurs compte du type de métaphores liées à ces discours particuliers. Avant d'aller plus loin, je veux immédiatement préciser que mon emploi du terme raciste n'indique pas une volonté de vouloir ainsi qualifier d'emblée cette petite séquence portant sur les Cris de la Baie-James, mais renvoie plutôt à la démarche de Chilton voulant saisir le fonctionnement de la discursivité disons différentialiste telle qu'elle s'est manifestée largement dans une certaine presse française du début des années quatre-vingt dix. Cependant, j'ajouterai que la perspective de Chilton ne peut rendre totalement compte du petit épisode que nous étudions, ne serait-ce qu'en raison de sa forme polémique qui oppose des co-énonciataires dans le cadre d'un discours narratif plus vaste. C'est pourquoi j'en appellerai également à certaines réflexions de Marc Angenot afin d'articuler les dimensions complémentaires propres à cette représentation donné dont on ne doit pas oublier qu'elle est aussi de nature et d'objectif promotionnels.

Antoine Beaulieu, dont toute la scénarisation précédente avait permis de faire des gorges chaudes de ses positions conservatrices, voire rétrogrades, limitant ainsi pour les téléspectateurs les possibilités d'identification avec ce personnage, ouvre la séquence par une énumération éloquente des éléments extérieurs perçus dans les années soixante-dix comme des obstacles à la poursuite des travaux de la Baie-James. Dans la suite "SEBJ, SDBJ, Hydro-Québec, gouvernement, syndicats, écologistes, les Sauvages," on reconnaîtra,

bien sûr, le procédé sémantique de l'amalgame, tel que commenté par Angenot dans *La Parole pamphlétaire* comme "postulat idéologique simplet qui consiste justement à poser que le désordre, la confusion et les contradictions du monde doivent être apparents" (127). Ce que le recours à l'amalgame indique surtout pour Antoine, et ce qui risque aussi d'être partagé par certains téléspectateurs à qui on assène en quarante minutes toute la somme des péripéties et des rebondissements liés au déroulement orageux des travaux de la Baie-James, c'est l'impression qu'il est totalement dépassé par les événements, qu'il ne peut plus s'y reconnaître et que dès lors, il renonce à les maîtriser. "J'pas capable" installe le sujet dans un ressentiment buté, issu de son "sentiment d'impuissance à maîtriser le monde et son sens," et à se voir "privé de repères" (17). Notons que si l'amalgame veut sciemment produire une vision de confusion en escamotant les articulations réelles entre les éléments ou les choses, il n'en reste pas moins une énumération pouvant impliquer une gradation; si Hydro-Québec est ici comiquement mis au rang des obstacles à Hydro-Québec (il faut que l'on comprenne qu'Antoine ne comprend rien), les syndicats et les écologistes jouissent déjà d'un statut d'empêchement plus net que l'on peut reconnaître, alors que "les Sauvages" qui ferment la suite sont clairement désignés, parce qu'en fin de phrase, comme l'écueil dominant du projet, point de résistance si tangible que l'énonciateur, conscient d'avoir franchi une limite et d'avoir touché à la thématique la plus explosive, s'arrête tout à coup de parler. La caméra, adoptant ici le point de vue focalisateur de l'intervieweuse et gardant le même plan, semble insister comme un interlocuteur choqué du vocable adopté par Antoine : le personnage lève les yeux vers la caméra-personnage et profère rapidement, d'un ton honteux et irrité, le terme "Indiens," puis concède boudeur, la dénomination "Amérindiens," franchissant avec une réticence marquée presque quatre siècles d'évolution nominale, illustrant ainsi les variations éloquentes de désignation de l'Altérité autochtone, et invitant du même coup le téléspectateur, même le plus hostile, à faire de même.

Mais avant d'aborder la suite du dialogue, il faut d'abord exposer les grandes lignes de la perspective de Paul Chilton qui, dans sa tentative de bien saisir les articulations des discours différentialistes, postule qu'elles sont sous-tendues par des schémas pré-conceptuels et clairement identifiables se combinant les uns aux autres pour produire une vision globale d'un "je" en relation avec l'Altérité. Ces schémas combineraient d'une part la perception de trois éléments, "intérieur, extérieur, et la surface limite intervenante" (586), illustrant une conception spatiale du monde clos et du contenant,

avec, d'autre part, un autre schéma évoquant toujours la spatialité, mais présenté ici en termes de déplacement, supposant ainsi une perception étapiste de l'espace comme point de départ, obstacle et point d'arrivée. Chilton combine de cette manière les deux schémas, espace clos et trajet, en un tableau d'actualisations lexicales que je me permets de reproduire partiellement:

Schéma du contenant

Intérieur	**Limite**	**Extérieur ouvert**
clos/fermé	séparation	exposé
couvert	différence	autrui/eux
corps	face à	altérité
soi-nous	opposition	étranger
identité	confronté	
ami	affronté	barbare
civilisé		
citoyen		
cultivé		
nation	frontière	anarchie
état		danger
		insécurité
sécurité		incertitude
sûreté	contrôler	inconnu
connu	conserver	
	contenir	
	blesser	
	souiller	

On voit comment ce tableau va nous permettre de mieux situer la place qu'occupe dans cette scène l'Amérindien de la Baie-James, et cela, en ce qu'il permet de repérer un réseau lexical, aussi ténu soit-il, à même d'indiquer cette position plus précise de l'Amérindien relayée par les dires du trio. Cependant, en raison justement de l'exiguïté du réseau relevable dans un dialogue aussi court, et parce qu'il nous faut dégager parfois les présupposés mêmes du discours, on fera appel encore une fois à Angenot pour interpréter toutes les dimensions discursives suscitées par cette *mise en demeure* d'avoir à parler de l'Autre. J'utilise sciemment l'expression *mise en demeure,* parce que l'on peut aisément percevoir qu'un discours promotionnel tel que celui d'Hydro-Québec aurait peut-être préféré ne pas prendre le risque de cette représentation singulière de l'Amérindien mais qui fut toutefois imposée par le souci de la cohérence historique. Nous y reviendrons.

La réplique de l'intervieweuse à la capitulation embarrassée d'Antoine pose d'aplomb la référence aux Cris sous le champ sémantique du conflit, de la difficulté : "C'était quoi, le problème ?" Le contact avec l'Autre autochtone est donc maintenu dans sa limite intervenante à un point qui ne peut être que celui de la friction donnant lieu, à partir de ce moment, à une conception des répliques des personnages en tant qu'explication, justification et résolution particulière du conflit, comme seul mode possible du discours sur l'Autre.

L'exclamation d'Évelyne, "J'veux pas en parler" de la part d'un personnage que l'on a invariablement perçu ailleurs dans le scénario comme raisonnable, insiste sur la teneur névralgique du conflit qui, cinq ans après les événements,[5] reste quasi insoluble. De colère, elle en perd ses mots, ou plus précisément refuse de discuter, manifestant par cette autocensure l'indicible mais indéniable présence d'un ressentiment vivace, que le scénario suppose être toujours partagé par un certain nombre de téléspectateurs en raison de cette relative crédibilité discursive de l'épouse d'Antoine. On peut donc avancer que le couple Beaulieu a pour tâche de médiatiser les griefs anti-amérindiens entretenus dans le discours social québécois, leur accordant de ce fait une actualisation qui fonctionne à la fois comme admission et évacuation.

L'intervention d'Évelyne indique également une tendance, reprise d'ailleurs par Antoine, à dissocier le sujet énonciateur, "le soi" de l'instance individuelle, de toute décision prise par le collectif national: "Ça pas de bon sens ce *qu'ils leur* ont donné. . . . Maudites affaires politiques!" Cette disjonction entre l'individu et le politique, censé avoir agi pourtant selon les volontés de ces mêmes individus, évoque le gouvernement comme autorité supérieure permettant l'expression de la colère individuelle et sa justification, mais également sa subsumation nécessaire par cette instance supérieure agissant pour le bien commun du collectif, ces agirs fussent-ils qualifiés d'incompréhensibles. On note d'ailleurs l'accusation d'anarchie ou d'irrationalité ("Ça pas de bon sens") liée à ce contact avec l'extériorité, le pronom "leur" désignant les Amérindiens dans une nomination qui reflète le schéma proposé par Chilton, sous la rubrique "autrui."

La réplique suivante d'Émilien Vigneault, présenté précédemment comme un énonciateur plus crédible, chargé en fait de médiatiser les grands paradigmes du discours global de *Les Bâtisseurs d'Eau*, se pose comme un argument tentant d'apaiser les frustrations des deux personnages. "Ils pouvaient pas faire autrement. . . . Ils ont acheté la paix!" Deux présupposés de ces postulats permettent de lire les rationalisations d'Émilien Vigneault d'une façon particulière: d'un côté, on présente le groupe politique "ils"

comme ayant été contraint d'agir de façon contraire à leur volonté initiale; de l'autre, le prédicat "acheter la paix" renvoie à un état latent de conflit qualifiant littéralement de "guerre" par couplage notionnel le point de contact avec le groupe Cri et consolidant ainsi paradoxalement l'isotopie du "problème." Le résultat paradoxal est qu'Émilien, voulant apaiser Évelyne, ne fait que reprendre son hostilité sur un mode plus dissimulé et impensé. Sa remarque suivante visant à contester les idées reçues sur l'extravagance du coût de la "paix" s'avère tout autant une confirmation "amollie" de ces coûts par l'usage bien québécois de la litote "Ben, ils ne sont pas pauvres. . . ." À cela, l'intervention d'Antoine donnant la réplique à Émilien va permettre un alignement significatif de la conception idéologique du groupe à "problèmes," d'abord par la réitération de la prescription de la compensation financière, ce qui remet en question toute perception de la Convention de la Baie-James comme ayant été une négociation librement choisie et assumée. On remarquera en passant le glissement du "ils" gouvernemental, de la décision dont on se déresponsabilise, au "nous" des Québécois qui eux, doivent subir les conséquences de ces décisions. Mais surtout, l'analogie avec les Gaspésiens met en cause un système éloquent de perception des Cris en ce que, toujours selon Angenot, elle marque "autour de l'objet de la démonstration une structure relationnelle qui sera ensuite perçue comme isomorphe d'une autre située dans un tout autre champ" (197). Si Antoine présuppose l'isomorphie entre Gaspésiens et Cris, donc une certaine égalité de statut entre ce qu'il faut bien appeler le "Québécois de souche" et l'Amérindien, il n'empêche qu'il désigne une communauté, la Gaspésie, en principe incomplètement intégrée au collectif national. Cette région n'en est pas moins située à une périphérie géographique et culturelle du Québec: le groupe analogique est situé à la fois dedans et dehors, "être-nous" mais non pas "nous" exactement, un "nous" de la frontière, ce qui renvoie encore à cette figuration problématique de la limite dans le schéma du contenant de Chilton. De plus, l'analogie entre un "nous" périphérique et l'Amérindien de l'extérieur assume pour le second la non-propriété territoriale qui est l'indicateur de la logique du discours d'assimilation dont Sylvie Vincent a bien identifié les aboutissements : "C'est une assimilation à sens unique que ce discours propose : que les Autochtones deviennent francophones, qu'ils endossent les institutions et les projets de société des autres Québécois. . . . Cette partie du discours nie la différence entre Autochtones et Québécois francophones. . . . Ceux qui se disent Autochtones n'ont donc aucun droit territorial particulier si bien que l'espace québécois appartient à ceux qui

habitent le Québec et en vivent" (223-24). L'assimilation du "eux" au "nous" passe donc par une dépossession radicale du territoire, résultat de l'occultation des complexités de l'histoire dont on sait d'ailleurs qu'Antoine n'est pas un adepte. Cependant, cette possibilité d'identification par la négation de l'Autre est tout de suite écartée par Émilien qui va réinstaurer avec une insistance candide l'insurmontable altérité des Cris en passant d'abord, il est vrai, par le lieu argumentatif de la réparation de la faute, impliquant au moins la reconnaissance des torts du "nous," ce qui confond ici le gouvernement, Hydro-Québec et les Québécois.

"On a inondé leurs terres . . . c'était le moins," reconnaissance globale qui a le mérite intéressant de faire l'économie des détails portant sur les avanies faites aux Amérindiens, dématérialisant par l'admission générale de déprédations diverses la volonté déterminée d'avoir voulu d'abord s'y livrer. Mais plus intéressant encore reste le désir actif de prendre une distance maximale d'avec les Cris: "Ces gens-là, y vivent pas, y pensent pas comme nous-autres." Ce qui se veut certes reconnaissance de l'Autre est en fait la réalisation du scandale de l'Altérité: être différent, voire inconnaissable, car Émilien ne dit pas en quoi ils sont différents, mais inscrit le "nous" comme le point central à partir duquel va s'évaluer la différence, laquelle est encore soulignée par le démonstratif "ces gens-là." Ainsi sont-ils privés d'une nomination positive qui leur accorderait une désignation: les Cris de la Baie-James. Le "faut respecter ça" doit être alors pris dans son sens étymologique et présuppositionnel: on pourrait fort bien considérer l'éventualité de passer outre à ces différences, d'ignorer les demandes amérindiennes, voire d'afficher un mépris très clair envers le groupe, mais la prescription "il faut" laisse clairement concevoir le rejet comme l'opposé pensable et l'acceptation comme le fruit d'une nécessité ne laissant pas de place au libre arbitre. À cela, l'étymologie du terme "respect," selon le *Robert Historique de la Langue Française* prend un relief particulier de "regard en arrière" *respectus* et singulièrement, d'une conception du terme où "l'accent étant mis sur l'autorité, il désigne aussi la soumission forcée par la considération de force de la supériorité dans les locutions verbales, *tenir, garder quelqu'un en respect.*" Émilien n'a-t-il pas commencé son intervention en affirmant que le gouvernement québécois "n'avait pas eu le choix" que de *respecter* les demandes des Cris comme si lui-même avait été en vérité *tenu en respect* par la légitimité précise de ces demandes, dans une isotopie du conflit traduisant les "guerres" légales et médiatiques qui avaient conduit à la signature de la Convention de la Baie-James.

L'autre commentaire d'Émilien, "Moé, moé, la manière dont je vois ça," illustre un nouveau retour à l'individualisation du propos, retour susceptible, toujours par sa crédibilité énonciatrice consolidée au cours des épisodes précédents, de remporter l'adhésion du téléspectateur en ce que cette adhésion ne paraît pas imposée par l'idéologie officielle présidant aux relations gouvernementales avec les Cris. Émilien semble nous livrer le fruit d'une réflexion personnelle qui n'engagerait que lui, et qui, du coup, paraît dépouillée de toute imposition didactique. Cependant, ce qui suit "c'est qu'on leur a donné les moyens d'être autonomes" soulève ici plusieurs autres implications sur la perception évidemment ethnocentrique de la Convention. D'abord le retour au collectif "on" réaffirme la distance entre le "nous" et le "eux," correspondant toujours au schéma du contenant tracé par Chilton. L'obligation d'avoir satisfait en théorie une partie des demandes des Cris est présentée sous la désignation du *don* qui transforme le "nous" initialement contraint en *bienfaiteur* dans le rapport de la limite à l'Autre. Une telle transformation permet ainsi ce regard bénévolent sur soi dont Sylvie Vincent a pu identifier comme la composante d'une variante du discours québécois sur l'Amérindien, celle de la culpabilité (22).

Si l'on considère maintenant la représentation lexicale de l'objet du don, l'autonomie, terme-fétiche d'un certain discours néo-libéral, on peut voir comment s'y inscrit une constellation intéressante de concepts et de présupposés qui traduisent très bien ce que Sylvie Vincent désigne encore comme l'embarras inhérent à tout discours québécois sur les Premières Nations. Le don de l'autonomie aux Cris fait par les Québécois, dans la traduction soigneusement subjectivisée présentée par Émilien, soulève d'abord la perception d'une dépendance antérieure du "eux" qui aurait été vécue par le "nous" comme une difficulté manifeste et lancinante; or, dans le discours clos que représente l'ensemble du scénario de *Les Bâtisseurs d'Eau*, aucune référence antérieure n'a été faite à cette dépendance préconçue et assumée, tout simplement parce qu'aucune référence aux Amérindiens n'a jamais été suggérée dans les cinq épisodes précédents. Je rappelle pourtant que les centrales hydroélectriques de Bersimis et du complexe Manicouagan-Outardes ont été construites sur les territoires théoriquement montagnais,[6] et que les épisodes 1, 2, 3, et 4 de la série illustraient de multiples séquences portant sur la construction de ces centrales. C'est donc dire à quel point l'Indien du discours, comme dirait Gilles Thérien, est précisément discursivisé sur le mode préalable de l'absence de l'Indien lui-même, du moins dans le discours promotionnel global formé par la série. En d'autres termes, l'Indien n'a pas

droit à l'autonomisation fictive, c'est-à-dire à sa représentation directe comme personnage-actant du scénario, ce qui lui permettrait d'exister autrement que selon ce "manque" conceptualisé. L'autre question essentielle à cette discursivité sur l'Amérindien est entraînée par le sens courant même du terme *autonomie*, qui certes jouit dans l'univers axiologique que l'on attribue volontiers à un "bon citoyen québécois" comme Émilien Vigneault, d'une marque sans conteste positive: l'autonomie pourrait être cet état souhaitable qu'au fond une entreprise aussi nationalisante qu'Hydro-Québec a contribué le plus activement à obtenir économiquement et symboliquement pour le collectif québécois. Cependant, l'étymologie du terme ouvre également dans ce cas une possibilité de lecture appuyant toujours le schéma de Chilton: *auto* et *nomos*, qui est régi par ses propres lois. À cet égard, et en concordance avec une certaine conception du respect, terme sur lequel d'ailleurs Émilien revient deux fois toujours sur le monde prescriptif: "Les Cris, moi je les respecte, il faut respecter la différence. . ." l'emploi du terme *autonomie* renvoie certes au désir de ne point être mêlé de près aux normes de fonctionnement interne de la communauté amérindienne, de les voir, littéralement, se contenir entre eux, présenter une entité qui énoncerait ses propres règles que l'on observerait à distance *respectueuse*, n'impliquant pas le moindre contact entre le "nous" et le "eux." *Autonomie* et *respect*, on le voit, servent d'alibi discursif à l'établissement lexical de l'affirmation non-voilée d'une différenciation incontestée et irréductible permettant l'économie de tout contact réel avec l'Altérité amérindienne. Ce qu'Émilien pose dans une argumentation qui se veut pourtant de bonne foi s'opposer au racisme hostile des deux autres personnages en qui les téléspectateurs doivent tout de même se reconnaître pour pouvoir s'en distancer, c'est l'étanchéité de cette frontière sans interaction possible entre Québécois et Cris, étanchéité qui correspond exactement au schéma des contenants proposés par Chilton, qu'il avait lui-même dégagé de textes français venant en particulier du Front National de Le Pen et du Parti Communiste français. "Ces textes partagent donc le même terrain conceptuel et idéologique . . . Ils reconnaissent donc toute une idéologie à la fois différentialiste et intégraliste : les étrangers portent atteinte à l'homogénéité voulue, à l'unicité du corps de la nation" (616).

Ce commentaire de Chilton peut certes paraître trop fortement accusateur pour le discours sur les Cris tel que véhiculé par une production promotionnelle dont l'intentionnalité consciente ne pourrait et ne saurait exprimer délibérément une prise de position relevant d'une idéologie

raciste. Mais le paradoxe est qu'Émilien avec sa maladresse bonhomme voulant contrer l'animosité populiste des tenants de la doxa commune qui poserait que "ce sont les Cris qui nous ont exploités," ne peut que reproduire sans le vouloir les schémas de perception du contenant qui reconnaît et réinstaure l'écart entre Soi et l'Autre. Il affirme ici une impossibilité de perméabilité, "Y pensent pas comme nous autres," et de questionnement de cette distance que tout laisse suggérer qu'il trouve au fond bien confortable. N'exprime-t-il pas par omission cette remarque de Simon Harel: "Si l'Autre m'est insupportable, je peux tenter de le mettre à distance. N'est-ce pas ce qui a été si souvent dit à propos des Amérindiens? Il suffit de les 'déménager' un peu plus loin, ce qui ne devrait pas les contraindre, puisqu'ils vivaient déjà en territoire étranger, à la périphérie, en *réserve* d'une identité mal définie" (17).

La série *Les Bâtisseurs d'Eau* comme instrument promotionnel d'Hydro-Québec, prête le flanc à ces prises à partie qui l'accusent d'un éventuel contenu raciste ou à tout le moins différentialiste: elle se commet à priori dans ses choix représentatifs qui consistent justement à ne pas représenter l'Autre, à ne pas lui donner un statut dans la fiction qui lui permettrait de s'investir d'un discours à même de contrecarrer le ressentiment des Antoine et des Évelyne ou la rondeur naïve des Émilien. Notons au passage que les scénaristes avaient quand même décidé, dans l'épisode 5, de représenter un négociateur terre-neuvien—d'ailleurs furieux—pour illustrer métonymiquement le conflit des intérêts et des identités territorialisées toujours inhérents à l'historique du développement des ressources naturelles, référence elle aussi incontournable à la saga longue de trente ans qui a opposé Québec à Terre-Neuve au sujet du complexe de Churchill Falls. Mais le scénario n'a pas inclus dans son discours narratif le Cri de la Baie-James ou le Montagnais de Bersimis d'où, comme nous l'indique Gilles Thérien, cette présentation promotionnelle de l'Amérindien comme

> la personne dite de l'absence, dont l'Altérité est encore plus autre. Elle est là ou elle n'est pas là, on en parle, mais elle n'a pas le droit de parole. L'Altérité devient l'absence inévitable, consentie, ou l'exclusion. Et ce même phénomène se reflète aussi dans la troisième personne du pluriel: les "absents" du discours, ceux dont on parle sans les laisser parler ou encore les exclus, ceux dont on s'approprie le droit de parole. (170)

Cette omission, ce refus d'incarnation par la représentation directe du discours de l'Autre, constitue peut-être plus que la candeur débonnaire d'Émilien incapable d'inventer un nouveau discours sur l'Amérindien

malgré sa bonne foi indéniable que la véritable prise de position idéologique de la série *Les Bâtisseurs d'Eau*. Sa perspective réelle au sujet des Amérindiens se dévoile dans cette option d'en faire le tiers exclu du dialogue entre le "nous" de l'entreprise et celui du collectif national, si souvent habilement confondus dans les discours d'Hydro-Québec. Mais cette exclusion, qui avant la signature de la Convention de la Baie-James en 1975 ou avant la Crise d'Oka de 1990 aurait été implicite dans le discours de l'histoire, même fictionnalisée, est maintenant prise en charge par le discours narratif, mais avec un malaise tel que l'énonciateur principal trouve moyen de reconduire toutes les préconceptions excluantes typiques au sujet de "l'étrangeté" amérindienne alors que son intentionnalité première était précisément de les combattre. Voilà une preuve supplémentaire, si tant était besoin d'en apporter d'autres, de la nécessité de viser, pour une entreprise bénéficiant du capital symbolique d'Hydro-Québec, à un dépassement d'un discours de légitimation promotionnelle reposant sur l'identitaire national vers la conception d'un discours de représentation de l'Amérindien lui laissant la parole, tout comme les scénaristes de *Les Bâtisseurs d'Eau* ont choisi de laisser la parole aux Anglo-Québécois et aux Terre-Neuviens. Ces discours s'ajouteraient aux précédents et offriraient aux destinataires des séries télévisées des cristallisations idéologiques nouvelles, capables d'amener des changements d'attitudes et de perceptions données par l'occasion de voir enfin s'articuler un discours narratif où l'Amérindien ne serait non plus discursivisé *in absentia* mais représenté *in presentia* dans l'immédiateté de l'histoire et dans la proximité chronologique, créant ainsi l'inconfort nécessaire à une réflexion réelle sur la nature des rapports entre "Hydroquébécois" et Amérindiens.

En 1996, on télédiffusait la série québécoise *Shewaweh*, qui racontait les péripéties dramatiques d'une jeune Amérindienne déracinée dans la Nouvelle-France de la fin du dix-septième siècle—périodisation qui instaurait d'ailleurs cette distance rassurante facilitant l'expression d'une culpabilité déculpabilisante de tout repos, les véritables enjeux modernes des tensions entre Québécois et Amérindiens étant effectivement et logiquement *absents* de la série. Pourtant, récemment, une télésérie canadienne, *North of 60*, a relevé enfin ce défi difficile de la représentation non-différencialisée et non lyricisée de l'Amérindien en contact avec la société contemporaine nord-américaine. On peut alors toujours rêver qu'Hydro-Québec, qui s'avère un commanditaire majeur dans la vie culturelle et artistique du Québec, produira un jour une version de *Shewaweh* où l'action serait

déplacée de Ville-Marie en 1690 à Chisasibi-Fort Georges en 1972, et où la jeune Amérindienne aurait un droit de parole non-idéalisé par le confort de la clôture historique mais actualisé et rendu conséquent par la brûlante proximité des relations entre Québécois et Amérindiens en train de se faire et de *s'énoncer*. Car c'est cette incapacité de poser l'Amérindien comme sujet d'énonciation et non plus comme sujet d'énoncé qui est le signe le plus manifeste de cette adéquation dont parlait Jean-Marie Piemme entre le feuilleton télévisé et le discours dominant de la société productrice de cet objet culturel particulier. Selon Piemme, le feuilleton "est rigoureusement adéquat au texte idéologique dominant la formation sociale où il est produit" (55). Alors que l'intentionnalité discursive de la télésérie est justement de contester cette mise à l'écart de l'Amérindien produite par le différentialisme, l'attribution discursive a eu comme résultat pervers de la consolider. À cet égard, le bilan promotionnel de *Les Bâtisseurs d'Eau*, qui se clôt d'ailleurs sur cette tentative finale d'élaborer un discours d'ouverture sur les Cris de la Baie-James, est quelque peu contaminé par cette ambivalence sur la signification réelle de son propos; en fait, par comparaison aux cinq premiers épisodes qui assument sans faille le Grand Récit des Exploits d'Hydro-Québec, ce sixième épisode consacré à la Baie-James reste indéniablement teinté d'une pointe de nostalgie douce-amère. À un niveau plus global de signification, peut-être faudrait-il voir la difficulté précise de dégager le discours hydroquébécois sur l'Amérindien des présupposés d'une doxa toujours hostile, comme le symptôme d'une difficulté plus étendue de tout le feuilleton promotionnel à réellement se distancer d'une position hégémonique sur les derniers volets des réalisations de l'entreprise, position hégémonique de ressentiment qui gâcha en quelque sorte toute représentation lyrique des travaux de la Baie-James. Ainsi l'exclamation rageuse d'Évelyne "J'veux pas en parler . . ." peut être prise non seulement au sens propre au sujet des Cris, mais aussi dans un sens métaphorique qui donne à voir toutes les controverses qui ont accompagné l'élaboration du complexe hydroélectrique de la Baie-James, l'Amérindien ayant le privilège douteux de subsumer, par son absence, la réalité concrète des conflits. Et, du fait de cette paradoxale fonction de l'Amérindien, retombe sur lui bien sûr l'accusation à peine non-dite d'être le trouble-fête de l'histoire; et parce qu'il est vu précisément comme trouble-fête, en demandant réparation, il ne peut encore atteindre un plein statut d'égalité que pourrait lui valoir une reconnaissance entière d'où ce symbolique dédommagement d'Hydro-Québec, si symboliquement bâclé.

NOTES

1 La télésérie se démarque du téléroman en ce qu'elle est plus circonscrite dans le temps, ayant comme référent la version télévisée d'un roman, ou d'un épisode historique. En ce sens, le téléroman est davantage une fiction alors que la télésérie, selon son référent, serait plus de l'ordre de la fictionnalisation. De plus, la télésérie, annoncée d'avance en nombre d'épisodes fixes, bénéficie d'une clôture que le téléroman traditionnel n'a pas: au gré des succès de sa cote d'écoute, il peut voir s'étirer presque indéfiniment le nombre de ses épisodes. J'ajouterais encore que le téléroman, malgré des rebondissements multiples, est axé sur la représentation du quotidien, alors que la télésérie serait davantage consacrée à l'événementialité historique.

2 Le rapport entre Hydro-Québec et la série *Les Bâtisseurs d'Eau* est celui d'une commandite et non pas d'une production comme telle, mais Hydro-Québec a été perçu par la critique, sinon par le public, comme l'instance dernière responsable de l'énonciation de la série. Citons ici quelques coupures de presses: "Hydro-Québec s'imposait tout aussi naturellement comme commanditaire. Et quoi de mieux qu'une série pour accompagner les célébrations du 50ième anniversaire d'Hydro, prévu en 1994?" (des Rivières, "Eaux troubles"). "La taille de l'auditoire est d'ailleurs une des raisons pour laquelle les entreprises incluent la commandite télévisuelle dans leur plan de communication. Mais encore faut-il que les spectateurs soient captifs et qu'ils remarquent cette association. Qu'en est-il pour la série: *Les Bâtisseurs d'Eau* ? . . . Hydro-Québec a été nommé spontanément par 73% de son auditoire en tant que partenaire principal, ce qui représente une excellente performance pour son entreprise. A titre comparatif, les commanditaires de télésérie enregistrent en moyenne une notoriété d'environ 20%. Il va sans dire que le lien naturel qui unissait le sujet de la série et son commanditaire principal a porté fruit." (Cousineau)

3 Malgré un prix d'interprétation attribué à l'actrice Élise Guilbaut pour le rôle d'Évelyne Beaulieu, la réception critique fut plutôt sévère pour la série: "La minisérie *Les Bâtisseurs d'Eau* nous quitte aussi mercredi. Cousue de gros fil blanc, cette histoire du Québec qui découvre les grands projets via la construction des barrages d'Hydro-Québec aura eu un avantage, celui de montrer aux jeunes générations que nous sommes venus de loin en peu de temps. Et qu'Hydro-Québec était une grande entreprise avant de tomber dans la bureaucratie et les discours de L'Ordre du Temple Solaire. Les acteurs sont vraiment bons, encore une fois." (Cousineau) "La télésérie *Les Bâtisseurs d'Eau* qui débute ce soir à Radio-Canada est une mauvaise série que les excellents comédiens qui composent la distribution ne parviennent pas à sauver du naufrage." (des Rivières) "My quibble with the series isn't principally political. It has more to do with the dramatic quality of the writing: the series is produced by Claude Héroux, who has financed a number of melodramatic shows for the private network TVA in recent years. His trademark sentimentality disfigures Les Bâtisseurs as well . . . It is the melodrama equivalent of jolts per minutes: stick something in there every so often to keep 'em crying. Radio-Canada really should not tolerate this level of writing." (Conlogue)

4 La majeure partie du scénario de *Les Bâtisseurs d'Eau* était déjà dessinée avant 1994, soit quatre ans après la Crise d'Oka.

5 L'action filmée a lieu en 1980, la convention de la Baie-James ayant été signée en 1975.

6 Les historiens de l'hydroélectricité au Québec, André Bolduc, Clarence Hogue et Daniel Larouche constatent cette mise sous silence des Amérindiens de la Côte-Nord dans les années cinquante et soixante, sans s'étonner de ce qu'elle avait de symptomatique de la part d'Hydro-Québec, position historiographique en elle-même significative: "Certains

observateurs ne sont pas sans s'étonner qu'on accorde soudainement un tel intérêt aux Inuits et aux Cris. Ils trouvent étrange, en particulier, que les anglophones du Canada prêtent autant d'attention au problème des Indiens anglophones de la Baie-James alors qu'on avait passé sous silence le sort des Indiens francophones de la Côte-Nord" (371).

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Mark Cochrane

Ngland

cerebro-
spinal spam travels by
migrant striation
litigate King's Cross
playstation. Caesar, you're a
stuttered *accoutez*
Elizabeth an utterly bearded vogue for
Cowper's milky
canalboat charters.
sebum later, realmed
peers, I
dripped on the Act & knapped
snoozers by shingle
flint on the inside
is not what we mean by Hastings
at all.

Rochelle Mass

The perfect circle

The smell of yearning is piercing, blots the scent of rose,
get sharp and nasty if it's left to wallow.
Marching proud, it turns nervous if neglected.
Sucks kindness thin, leaving traces
big as footsteps.

He rolls words over me till I spin.
His shadow stretches long as sky—falls, then breaks.
I feel him round my ears, at my feet.
I am fine as silk thread as he drains,
detours—then returns.
He's come from drought to wet season.

The smell tumbles, then cools into tufts.
He says—we smell of each other.
I'm thick of him then, hold him to my throat.
Contoured now, I'm banded. Safe.
I move down river into the perfect circle.

Lazar Sarna

Back then she was a jagged top

Back then she was a jagged top of a can toward her.
She made her grovel in every broken glass bowl
she could tear,
by making her cry haze-burnt, olive brine.

No way her son would live with
a person as thin as a shelf,
no way she would show at the wedding
but outside was good enough to scream angry old socks
as the bride left the hall
in white and confused confetti.

She was no good for her so young yo-yo.
The daughter-in-law smelled like cooking laundry,
and the tea always had a hair in it,
let alone the dirt piled up in an Everest in the kitchen.

Her babies were all born with soft heads;
why so many and who's going to pay for all of these piglets?
But they grew into scrap metal,
and in harmony always thought their grandma
was a crab or sharp conch.

When she became sick always,
and fat more than a moose,
and had to move in with them,
[her son sold pieces of trucks overseas
and had no time],
so instead of objecting, and not having grovelled for so long,
she said to his mother,
let me wash your back until you sleep,
and bring you
warm deep thimbles of eggshell soup.

Kenneth Meadwell

L'oeuvre en devenir

une lecture des dossiers génétiques scénariques de *Serge d'entre les morts, Les Masques* et *Le Passager* de Gilbert La Rocque

La mort subite de Gilbert La Rocque en 1984 a créé un vide qui ne cesse de se faire sentir dans le monde littéraire montréalais. Âgé de 41 ans, il s'est effrondré le 25 novembre au Salon du livre de Montréal. Depuis près de trois ans et à son insu, La Rocque souffrait d'une tumeur cérébrale qui lui a finalement pris la vie. En une douzaine d'années, il a exercé diverses fonctions: nommé en 1972 rédacteur en chef aux Éditions de l'Homme; en 1975 directeur littéraire aux Éditions de l'Aurore; et enfin en 1978 directeur littéraire aux Éditions Québec/Amérique où il a fondé la collection *"Littérature d'Amérique."* Ce passionné de littérature s'est vu nommer en 1983 *"Grand Montréalais de l'avenir"* pour sa contribution aux lettres québécoises, à titre d'éditeur et également d'auteur, car de son vivant il a fait paraître six romans (*Le Nombril*, 1970; *Corridors*, 1971; *Après la boue*, 1972; *Serge d'entre les morts*, 1976; *Les Masques*, 1980; *Le Passager*, 1984) et une pièce de théâtre (*Le Refuge*, 1979). En général, le roman constitue pour La Rocque une *"oeuvre sensorielle et sensuelle"* (Gaudet 145), offre une similitude unique avec soi-même que seuls les romanciers habiles tels que Céline et Faulkner savent transposer dans la fiction. Après tout, nous dit La Rocque, *"On n'écrit rien qui ne soit soi-même. Dans le fond, on ne crée pas grand-chose. On se trouve à mettre en forme d'écriture quelque chose qui préexiste en soi"* (Gaudet 149). Concevoir sous cet angle l'écriture qui formalise ce qui, chez l'être humain, existe sensiblement, mais paradoxalement, à l'état naissant atteste le bien-fondé de l'étude génétique. Cette dernière tente de retracer l'évolution narrative et discursive de l'oeuvre littéraire, d'en mettre au jour dans ses étapes progressives la genèse ainsi que les métamorphoses des opérations constitutives de l'activité scripturale.

La présente étude se donne donc pour objectif une analyse des dossiers génétiques des trois derniers romans de La Rocque, *Serge d'entre les morts*, *Les Masques* et *Le Passager*, en ce qu'ils dévoilent la dynamique créatrice que suivait La Rocque dans la formulation de la pensée, la thématique et l'imagerie fondamentales qui s'en dégagent. Il s'agit spécifiquement d'une étude génétique "scénarique," ou des notes, plans et ébauches, à distinguer d'une analyse "scriptique," celle des variantes (Mitterand vi). Les dossiers génétiques scénariques permettent donc d'assister à la genèse et au développment du corpus, et souligne le fait que La Rocque, scripteur, est aussi un lecteur astucieux de sa propre oeuvre.

Les dossiers génétiques, y compris les tapuscrits de La Rocque, sont conservés dans les Collections Spéciales et Archives Privées de la Bibliothèque Nationale du Québec à Montréal. Ces dossiers génétiques, dits aussi dossiers préparatoires, comportent une diversité de notes, plans et ébauches, le plus souvent écrits à l'encre noire ou bleue et sur du papier de divers formats. Les manuscrits dactylographiés sont l'objet de ratures et d'ajouts, inscrits soit dans le texte soit dans les marges, sous forme manuscrite à l'encre noire ou bleue, ou au feutre noir. Dans leur ensemble, ces matériaux constituent une documentation rarissime qui permet de dévoiler le processus qui aboutit à la production du texte définitif, parcours au cours duquel se font entrevoir la formulation et la reformulation narratives et discursives, thématiques et métaphoriques du texte en devenir. Aussi ces documents font-ils entendre la voix d'un témoignage remarquable devant l'acte d'écrire, et dessinent tout en les illuminant les chemins de la création littéraire empruntés par La Rocque. Comme le dit Almuth Grésillon, la visée de la critique génétique est "la littérature comme un *faire*, comme activité, comme mouvement" (9). Sous cet angle se perçoit "une parole qui cherche sa voix et sa voie" (Grésillon 23). L'oeuvre larocquienne émerge d'une écriture et d'une réécriture, de ce que l'on pourrait nommer une "métalittérature." Tout comme le métalangage, en parlant du langage lui-même, dévoile et étudie sa structuration et ses modes de fonctionnement, le dossier génétique, ouvrant un regard sur l'écriture, permet de suivre l'évolution des opérations scripturales par lesquelles l'invention se fait texte.

Il est à noter par ailleurs que scruter le présent à travers le passé—tout comme cette étude revoit la genèse pour mieux saisir le présent de l'oeuvre terminée—est une constante chez La Rocque. En effet, chez La Rocque, la temporalisation—le passé traumatisant qui vient habiter le présent du protagoniste—résulte en une intemporalité qui semble emprisonner la

subjectivité des protagonistes dans un temps figé: "Toutes écritures de Gilbert La Rocque cherchent à garder captives quelques impressions qui mettent hors du temps" (Gaudet 143). Comme il le communique lui-même, La Rocque cherche à scruter "[a]vant tout . . . l'abrasion, le sentiment du temps qui fuit, de la durée qui passe à travers nous comme un papier sablé et qui nous use. Pour moi, le problème fondamental, c'est: 'Pourquoi est-ce que je dure?'" (Gaudet 143). *Serge d'entre les morts*, *Les Masques* et *Le Passager* relèvent du même appel insistant, celui de voir clair tout en s'extrayant des forces implacables d'un passé dont les vicissitudes, voire les traumatismes, viennent inexorablement hanter le présent.[1] Comme les frontières entre le passé et le présent s'avèrent être souvent imperceptibles chez La Rocque, l'analepse joue un rôle décisif au niveau discursif de ses récits. Confrontations spontanées entre passé et présent, mort et vie, brutalité et tendresse, solitude et appartenance: autant d'éléments diamétralement opposés qui tendent à emprisonner le protagoniste au niveau temporel. Ce dernier exprime par moments une conscience externe qui l'observe dans ses tentatives de s'affranchir du pouvoir du passé, et qui souligne son impuissance à s'en émanciper. Selon Mikhaïl Bakhtine: "Notre individualité n'aurait d'existence si l'autre ne la créait. La mémoire esthétique est productive: elle engendre l'homme *extérieur* pour la première fois à un plan nouveau d'existence"(55). Bakhtine poursuit en disant que "[. . .] bien qu'il ne soit pas dans mes habitudes de me représenter ma propre image, je parviens, aux prix d'un certain effort, à me représenter cette image délimitée de tous les côtés, bien entendu, comme s'il s'agissait d'un autre" (57). Voilà justement la façon dont le protagoniste de La Rocque se présente et se représente à certaines instances dans la narration: en tant que protagoniste qui se dédouble.[2]

Intitulé originalement dans le dossier génétique "La Maison,"[3] *Serge d'entre les morts* se tisse autour des souvenirs récurrents de l'enfance et de l'adolescence du protagoniste-narrateur, maintenant adulte, tout en constituant par le biais de la mémoire involontaire un rite de passage dont les événements reliés à la mort se font revivre incessament. Le titre "La Maison" nous dévoile toute la signifiance de la notion de *maison* qui demeurera une constante dans le texte. La maison sera le lieu clos où évolue la famille de Serge vers l'anéantissement dans la mort, dans le temps qui passe et qui enlève les membres de la cellule familiale. La signification du titre original s'actualise et se répercute dans le texte par l'association métonymique avec la grand-mère de Serge, présence lugubre de la mort

imminente. Cette relation sémiotique fondamentale constitue en effet celle du texte publié, dont la modulation et la variation de la matrice structurale *maison* se communique à travers la focalisation de Serge. La subjectivité de celui-ci affirme que "[. . .] la maison ressemblait à un sépulcre."[4] Une note dans le dossier génétique révèle que par le biais du temps qui passe, des êtres qui ne sont plus, la famille s'effacera de la trame existentielle de Serge, désireux de s'affranchir du passé familial pour enfin commencer à mener une vie autonome:

> *Bon*: Tout le roman tournera autour de la dissolution ***absolue*** de la famille, ceci impliquant la dissolution des individus dans le temps (dans la vie ou dans la mort)—Vision finale d'espoir: un être (Serge) libéré déjà des feuilles artificielles de la famille mais comprenant aussi le ***sens véritable*** du noyau familial tel qu'il devrait être perçu: affection et chaleur humaine > famille humaine. (DG*S*)

La notion de *maison*, suggérée par le titre original, constitue donc la matrice fondamentale du texte publié, car elle s'actualise dans l'acte d'écrire par l'association métonymique récurrente avec la grand-mère de Serge. Cette dernière évoque la présence de la mort dans la maison familiale, construite par son mari et ses fils, et où vivent ses enfants et petits-enfants:

> [. . .] elle se berçait, seule et ronchonnante et grimaçante, seule dans la clarté sale de sa chambre donnant sur la cour, seule dans le silence presque ancestral de cette pièce jamais aérée qui sentait la vieille femme [. . .] et la naphtaline et la poussière et sentant autre chose qui n'était peut-être, au fond, que l'odeur de la mort qu'elle portait en elle et dont elle était à peu près enceinte [. . .]. (*S* 12)

Matrice du texte, métaphore filée de la mort, la maison est ainsi la localisation spatiale de la vie s'écoulant sous l'emprise d'une fatalité qui ne permet pas l'assouvissement du désir, mais qui impose, à titre d'exemple, l'impuissance et la culpabilité devant la sexualité naissante du jeune protagoniste.

A l'intérieur de cet espace clos, la chambre de la grand-mère s'avère être dans le texte final un lieu sacré qui inspire l'épouvante. La chambre "[. . .] sentait le renfermé et les vêtements, persistance des odeurs d'outre-tombe, substance dont les murs s'imprègnent, cinéma olfactif, en fait jamais grand-mère n'avait complètement quitté sa chambre, même après que les croque-morts l'eurent sortie les pieds devant, même après le bruit creux des mottes de terre sur le couvercle du cercueil [. . .]" (*S* 39). Si "[. . .] la maison ressemblait à un sépulcre [. . .]" (*S* 21), cette femme muette aux airs sévères "[. . .] faisait partie du silence de la maison, elle ne représentait guère plus que les planches qui craquent dans les murs [. . .], immuable spectre, assise roide sur sa chaise, je le savais, oscillant dans le silence tombal de sa chambre

[. . .] (*S* 24). Assise dans sa chaise, scandant l'écoulement du temps, elle devient le lieu de convergence de toutes les morts, celle de son mari, celle de sa belle-fille Annette, épouse de son fils Lucien, et enfin celle de son fils Fred, père de Serge, avant de s'éteindre elle-même. Cette actualisation de la notion de *maison* et son association métonymique avec la mort renforce de toute évidence les sens propre et figuré du titre définitif, *Serge d'entre les morts*. Serge se trouve physiquement dans les lieux de la mort, caractérisés par une ambiance macabre dans laquelle, entendant battre "le gros coeur agonisant de la maison" (*S* 75), il se demande de quoi il est "coupable et déjà condamné" (*S* 79). Aussi Serge se retrouve-t-il figurativement dans un lieu mnémonique où les souvenirs obsédants de la mort s'inscrivent et se réinscrivent par association avec sa famille qui se dissout peu à peu dans le temps, comme le désirait La Rocque dans ses notes préparatoires. L'aspect objectif, en apparence, du titre original cède la place dans le titre définitif, ainsi qu'au cours de la formulation et la reformulation du texte final, à une focalisation constante, celle de la subjectivité du protagoniste-narrateur. Ce changement de focalisation qui découle de l'actualisation de la métaphore centrale du titre original, explicitée par la subjectivité du protagoniste-narrateur, témoigne chez La Rocque du glissement dans les discours de la subjectivité, qui sait communiquer sur un ton urgent et avec lucidité l'omniprésence de la mort dans cette maison.

Le dossier génétique révèle aussi au niveau de la narration une stratégie perspicace. Afin de créer "la dissolution des individus dans le temps et par le temps" (DG*S*), La Rocque a recours à une chronologie linéaire qu'il voulait "impitoyablement bannie" (DG*S*) Il est question dans ses notes "d'illustrer *une continuité où nous glissons*, sans point de repère (à cause de l'uniformité des jours)—*Éternel présent*, qui ne se déroule pas [et qui] consiste seulement à *être*, aussi immobile et inconsistant qu'un brouillard où nous tournons en rond sans pouvoir jamais en sortir" (DG*S*). L'emploi d'images extravagantes, encadrées les unes après les autres dans cet "éternel présent" et sans lien logique apparent, s'explique par ailleurs dans le dossier génétique:

> Le roman vu comme un flot d'images contradictoires, sans autre lien entre elles que celui de l'analogie, oui un flot noir se déversant dans la tête et l'âme de Serge qui, à ce moment, est en train de poser un geste *décisif* et sans retour—un geste qui implique toute sa vie passée et une potentielle qui lui reste à vivre, liquidant du même coup l'histoire agonisante de sa famille. *Ce geste n'en est pas un de désespoir.* C'est une prise de position face au futur, perçu comme le *grand possible*, où tout peut arriver, où se réaliseront peut-être les rêves les plus extravagants ou les plus simplement légitimes. (DG*S*)

Dans la version finale, le roman s'ouvre ainsi sur la voix de Serge:

> Mais moi je savais, (cela avait eu lieu et durait parmi les court-circuits de ma mémoire et les fluctuations de ma conscience, cela se transformait en mots que je laissais partir au fur et à mesure que les choses et les âmes et tous les mouvements secrets de la vie s'emparaient de moi et me dépossédaient peu à peu de mon temps, au fur et à mesure de mon éloignement vers une forme d'oubli et d'absence [. . .] le moment était venu, [. . .] de regarder ce que j'avais laissé derrière—comme popa avait laissé en son éclatement ultime un gros bouquet de tripes fumantes jaillies de son ventre jusque sur le tableau de bord de son auto scrappée dans le tournant de Saint-Elphège—, il fallait à présent que je nomme ce qui me poursuivait et s'accrochait à mon dos comme un sac de voyage de plus en plus lourd, les voix et les mains et les visages qui vivaient toujours quelque part dans le faux oubli de ma tête et de mon coeur [. . .]. (*S* 9-10)

Nosce te ipsum, connais-toi toi-même: voilà l'impulsion à laquelle cède Serge. Ces quelques premières lignes pourraient bien servir de déclaration liminaire à l'oeuvre entière de La Rocque, car elles évoquent avec acuïté l'impuissance éprouvée par le protagoniste larocquien à lutter contre la hantise du passé.

Le dossier génétique de *Serge d'entre les morts* souligne l'importance qu'accorde La Rocque à la structure narrative du récit et, donc, à l'emploi de stratégies narratives qui produisent l'effet d'un "présent éternel" au cours duquel se manifesteront des motifs "destinés à illustrer la mort de la famille (maison et grand-mère)" (DG*S*). Le titre provisoire "La Maison" élucide, par sa structure matricielle et sa figuration de métaphore filée, le niveau discursif du récit, et ce faisant jette une lumière sur les composantes narratives et discursives fondamentales du texte publié.

Les Masques, couronné par le Prix Canada-Suisse (1981) et le Grand Prix du *Journal de Montréal* (1981), a reçu le meilleur accueil critique de tous les romans de La Rocque. Le dossier génétique des *Masques*—plans de travail, explicitations d'intentions et de stratégies narratives et discursives—révèle une planification astucieuse et soignée de l'oeuvre, et notamment de la narration et des éléments diégétiques. Il devient vite évident, comme on le verra, que La Rocque concevait sous une optique structurale les composantes narratives, actantielles et actorielles du texte. Il révèle dans une entrevue avec David Smith qu'il a trouvé le titre " . . . bien longtemps après après avoir terminé le roman. Le titre s'imposait." Selon l'auteur, "[l]e sens même de l'oeuvre d'art consiste à démasquer la réalité, c'est-à-dire à voir derrière les apparences" (Smith 15). On découvre dans le dossier génétique que le titre original du récit est "Le Bel été,"[5] titre paradoxal puisque c'est

au cours de l'été que le protagoniste, Alain, perd son fils, Eric, qui se noie dans la rivière des Prairies. Il est intéressant de noter par ailleurs que La Rocque termine son texte sur ce syntagme, les derniers mots du récit étant: "[. . .] ça fait des années qu'on n'a pas eu un aussi bel été."[6] La Rocque a expliqué au cours d'une entrevue avec Gérald Gaudet toute la valeur qu'il entrevoit dans ces mots: "Ce sont les mots les plus importants du roman. Ils ont d'ailleurs scandalisé plusieurs personnes. C'est que, quoi qu'il arrive, la vie continue [. . . .] On aura toujours assez de malheurs qui nous arrivent peu à peu ou des malheurs qui nous prennent au jour le jour. Il nous faut continuer à vivre" (147).

Les notes préparatoires copieuses font état des soucis de La Rocque quant à l'originalité des voix narratives auxquelles il réfléchit. Le texte final porte la voix de deux narrations: celle qui raconte impersonnellement, par le biais de *il*, et à travers une focalisation zéro la vie d'Alain, et celle d'Alain, subjective, qui se raconte à travers *je* dans un récit d'inspiration autobiographique.[7] Alain est véritablement celui qui porte des masques, car il est à la fois auteur, homme, père, fils, personnage. Cette multiplicité d'identités est l'objet de commentaires *programmatiques* de la part de La Rocque, qui entrevoyait la possibilité de créer un récit énoncé par des narrations homodiégétiques d'aspects différents:

> L'auteur (*Je*-auteur) porte en lui une virtualité de personnages: ceux-ci sont multiples, et il n'y a pas de raison pour qu'un seul tienne le crachoir. Au contraire, le Je-auteur se fragmente en tous ses personnages et il aide la narration, à son gré et selon les besoins de la construction du roman [. . .] d'où diversité des points de vue et des tons de narration (l'unité de ton, le lien stylistique étant assuré par le *Je-Alain* et le *Je-Auteur*.
>
> Donc, inclure vers le début de la première partie une séquence où je (moi, le *Je-Auteur*) exprime la multiplicité des points de vue—foisonnement des témoignages. . . . Mais pas, comme l'ont déjà fait certains, d'une façon pour ainsi dire logique, démarquée comme au cordeau, chaque narrateur assurant une section définie du roman.—Non, les divers narrateurs doivent prendre la parole à leur tour, tout simplement, de la façon la plus naturelle possible, dans le cours même du récit (articulations souples et capables de se plaquer exactement sur les exigences du sujet [sic]. (DG*M*)

Il est donc à noter que La Rocque a réfléchi sur les voix narratives et la diégèse avant de poursuivre les modalités respectives de la focalisation externe et la focalisation interne: "*Je = multiple* > n'intervient que dans les anses ou accidentellement dans le fil de l'eau . . . *Il*—Narrateur impersonnel quand il s'agit des faits chronologiques, qui constituent le lit, le courant de la rivière" (DG*M*). On lit également dans le dossier génétique: "Donc, récit

linéaire assurant le fil principal du roman: ce sera le récit comme tel, à la troisième personne (plus, évidemment, les incursions intérieures à la première personne [. . .])" (DG*M*). La version définitive, narrée aux formes pronominales de la première personne et de la troisième personne du singulier, portera les traces d'une modalisation narrative cohérente, qui se complète par les deux voix distinctes. Et pourtant, on fait tôt de reconnaître que la narration impersonnelle à la troisième personne du singulièr, ou narration hétérodiégétique, et celle, implicitement subjective car énoncée à la première personne du singulièr, ou narration homodiégétique, énoncent toutes les deux la subjectivité d'Alain devant la perte tragique de son fils. La stratégie narrative déployée par La Rocque a pour but en fin de compte de nous livrer un personnage, uniforme et cohérent dans ses manifestations, et dont l'exactitude de l'énoncé en *je* est confirmée par la voix narrative anonyme.

Le dossier génétique comporte aussi plusieurs notes sur le caractère et l'identité d'Alain, bref sur son rôle actoriel. Dans un premier temps, La Rocque envisage de faire d'Alain celui qui, en perdant son fils, s'affranchira du joug de l'hérédité biologique qui exige que l'on assure la survie de la famille:

> Alain est fils unique et il n'a qu'un seul fils. Avec la mort de ce fils s'éteindra tout espoir de survie du sang de son père (du moins directement, car, bien sûr, les frères et soeurs de son père ont des enfants, qui perpétueront, eux aussi, le sang et le nom)—la survie d'autre chose que le simple héritage génétique qu'on nomme souvent 'famille': c'est-à-dire la continuation d'un esprit tourné vers des valeurs fausses, d'une race dans la race, d'une forme d'humanité encore trop empreinte de quelque souillure originelle pour qu'on puisse espérer un jour la voir accéder à son état supérieur. (DG*M*)

Si, dans le texte final, Alain a su passer outre à la douleur de perdre son fils, passer "à travers l'étape animale du chagrin" (*M* 190), c'est pour mieux affronter l'avenir puisque, comme La Rocque le signale: "Il nous faut continuer à vivre" (Gaudet 147).

La temporalité romanesque n'est évidemment pas passée sous silence car, comme l'on a vu dans les notes préparatoires, cet élément narratif préoccupe énormément La Rocque, qui décide que le *il* désignant Alain sera le "[n]arrateur impersonnel quand il s'agit des faits chronologiques, qui constituent le lit, le courant de la rivière" (DG*M*). De même, l'image centrale de la rivière des Prairies l'emporte sur toute autre imagerie car elle véhicule la thématique centrale de l'identité: "Mais, que l'image de la *rivière des Prairies* demeure d'un bout à l'autre du roman comme un fil conducteur, un leitmotiv, un support physique et mythique sur et dans lequel structure toute vie de roman" (DG*M*). Le rôle que jouera la thématique de l'identité,

inscrite dans la scène de la noyade du fils, remonte aux notes du dossier génétique: "Avant tout > Moïse *ou* Le *droit* à l'identité *mais* Le *manque* d'identité *donc L'invention* de l'identité" (DG*M*). La rivière reste donc, comme l'on a vu dans les notes préparatoires, le fil principal du roman, et est l'objet de la métaphorisation suivante, esquissée ainsi:

> *La Rivière*
> I. *L'embouchure* (origines et causes lointaines) [. . .]
> II. *Le Ventre* (la vie et les gens [. . .]) [. . .]
> III. *La Dilution* (la mort et le retour aux sources) [. . .]. (DG*M*)

Aux trois séquences de cette esquisse correspondent dans la version publiée trois mouvements temporels, à savoir le passé lointain d'Alain; le passé qui engendre la nausée de son "cinéma intérieur" dans lequel il joue sans cesse la noyade de son fils; et le passé immédiat qui fait entrevoir chez Alain l'optimisme après les affres de la mort d'Éric. L'imagerie fondamentale de la rivière, soulignée dans le dossier génétique, est en effet actualisée dans le texte final, dans une symbolique subtile qui représente non seulement la localisation spatiale où le jeune Eric a trouvé la mort, mais aussi la forme que prendra le roman qu'écrit Alain:

> [. . .] il pensait l'histoire de cette rivière, la forme de cette histoire qui allait avoir la forme de la rivière, et les multiples plans, les innombrables facettes de cette histoire se juxtaposaient bellement dans sa tête et même se superposaient, car à vrai dire, c'était la même chose ou du moins il les percevait comme un tout, la rivière et le livre, [. . .] le même écoulement [. . .] ah oui la vie fuyant et s'écoulant comme un roman-fleuve, un livre-rivière, avec sa source, son ventre, et sa dilution terminale, remonter à l'origine, en voir la naissance [. . .]. (*M* 25)

Source, ventre et dilution: images conçues dans le dossier génétique et transmises dans le texte publié pour représenter la naissance, le rite initiatique, qui, dans le cas d'Alain, s'apparente aussi à la nouvelle vie qu'il trouve paradoxalement, confronté à la noyade de son fils. La référence dans le dossier génétique à Moïse, déjà mentionnée, se retrouve, à peine voilée, dans la version finale. Alain se souvient de son enfance:

> [. . .] je connais l'histoire du bébé parce que memére Vieille m'avait montré les images dans son livre, et ils l'avaient mis dans un panier d'osier et alors ils l'ont poussé sur le fleuve sa moman l'abandonnait [. . .] et alors il a flotté et flotté sur l'eau et le petit panier dansait sur l'eau sans couler le bébé n'était même pas mouillé quand les filles du roi l'ont trouvé et ramassé, c'était comme s'il n'avait jamais eu de commencement. . . . (*M* 65)

Si les origines de Moïse sont peu connues, mais que, adulte, il est devenu un prophète et une figure légendaire aux yeux de son peuple, Eric est exemplaire

de l'individu mort avant son temps, avant de se tailler une place dans sa société. La rivière évoque ainsi non seulement la vie et la mort tout comme le passage du temps, mais aussi les vagues des mots qui constituent "le roman-fleuve, le livre-rivière" d'Alain, l'oeuvre qui permet à ce dernier de sonder les profondeurs de son être afin de survivre à la mort de son fils. Le terrain qui descend vers la rivière se cristallise dans la conscience d'Alain de la manière suivante: "un interminable mouvement brunâtre vers l'est, vers la dilution fluviale et océanique, le recommencement, le cycle de la vie et de la mort en passant par le pourrissement" (*M* 79). Dans son imagerie et dans sa symbolique, la rivière joue un rôle des plus subtils dans le vécu et dans l'imaginaire d'Alain. Elle véhicule le discours qui met en relief la thématique des plus anciennes du cycle de l'existence tout en inspirant la forme coulante de la trame du récit, construite habilement à partir des souvenirs du père qui a perdu son fils.

Le dossier génétique des *Masques* révèle l'attention particulière que La Rocque a prêtée à l'élaboration de la narration et du discours du récit. L'imagerie fondamentale de la rivière est saisissante, et informe, comme l'on a vu, la réception du texte. Baignant dans la mythologie biblique de Moïse, la symbolique de la rivière évoque la thématique de l'identité de l'individu qui se découvre à travers l'angoisse de la mort, et qui cherche difficilement à se la communiquer. Dans le dossier génétique, les réflexions chez La Rocque sur la stratégie narrative de juxtaposer deux voix narratives qui se corroborent et se complètent—celle, anonyme qui se réfère à Alain à travers *il*, et celle d'Alain, subjective et sensible, qui s'énonce en *je*—témoigne du fait que La Rocque restait très conscient du pouvoir accaparant d'une narration peu conventionnelle.

Le dernier roman de La Rocque, *Le Passager*, évoque au passé l'existence troublée de l'écrivain, Bernard Pion, jadis passager dans l'auto de son père alcoolique et abusif, et maintenant adulte peu satisfait de sa vie d'écrivain. Dans ses notes préparatoires, La Rocque médite sur le noyau de l'intrigue ainsi que sur les niveaux actantiel et actoriel du protagoniste:

> Le drame du *désespoir*—la fausse lucidité—l'humour *grinçant*—un constat d'échec (personnel et artistique).
>
> C'est aussi beaucoup *le drame d'un écrivain qui a perdu la foi en son oeuvre et en son talent*, qui se sent posé en porte-à-faux sur des romans qu'il exècre. Il se trouve dans une impasse. Cinq ans qu'il n'a rien écrit. Rien. Les illusions perdues.[8]

D'autres notes cernent de façon schématique les rôles qui seront assignés à ce héros:

- Bernard chancelle *sur le bord du vide.*
- Il n'y a plus *rien* en lui.
- Plus le *goût*—ni la *puissance—de crier.*
- Son *moteur* ne tourne plus.
- *Ecrasé* devant le déroulement obscène et ravageur des temps et du destin.
- *Insignifiant,* absurdement *infime* devant *l'Histoire* qui avance, qui passe en emportant arrachant tout comme un fleuve en folie.
- *Faillite de sa vie*—même sentimentale.
- *Démission* devant l'écrasant fardeau de vivre sans *foi* ni *espoir.* (DG*P*)

Le drame existentiel qu'affrontera Pion, et qui mènera à sa tentative de suicide, engendrera chez La Rocque, comme l'on a vu dans le cas du travail préparatoire pour *Les Masques,* des réflexions d'ordre théorique sur la stratégie narrative la plus apte à rendre compte de cette angoisse. La Rocque estime que le roman "doit jouer sur deux niveaux: • la vie réelle, où il n'arrive rien sauf le suicide • le monde de l'imaginaire où tout peut arriver" (DG*P*). En effet, La Rocque choisit une stratégie narrative qui se fonde sur "l'interpénétration des deux mondes—trouver le moyen d'opérer les *transitions* d'un plan à l'autre" (DG*P*). Pour ce faire, La Rocque propose de "[c]ommencer les scènes peut-être imaginées, fantasmeuses [sic], par des formules d'introduction qui peuvent suggérer cette éventualité au lecteur attentif. *Comme*: Il sut que—Il crut se souvenir —" (DG*P*).

La Rocque planifie ainsi son récit. Le prologue sera à la première personne du singulier, et les parties suivantes, y compris l'épilogue, seront narrées par la troisième personne du singulier: "On pourra laisser *sous-entendre* que tout le récit à la troisième personne est *plus ou moins raconté,* imaginé-fantasmé, par le narrateur-acteur-romancier (moi) du prologue . . . " (DG*P*). Cet emploi successif de *je* et de *il* ne saurait pas pour autant guider le lecteur vers une appréhension approfondie ou complète du réel du monde romanesque. L'énonciation, différenciée entre ces déictiques, doit s'effectuer subtilement afin de "glisser *IMPERCEPTIBLEMENT* dans l'action de la section à la 3^{e} personne [. . .] " (DG*P*). En plus, "ce glissement doit se faire *graduellement* de sorte qu'on se trouve devant le fait accompli sans qu'on ne sache plus très bien si les péripéties racontées dans la partie centrale sont *vrais* [sic] ou *racontés* [sic] par le *je* du prologue [. . .] " (DG*P*). La Rocque cherche ainsi à entraîner peu à peu le lecteur, à son insu, dans la psyché du protagoniste afin de créer un texte définitif dont les points de repère autoréférentiels ne laissent pas distinguer entre le réel et l'imaginaire, un texte qui se veut énigmatique, et qui communique la voix d'une conscience des plus troublées. Malgré ses commentaires et suggestions dans le

dossier génétique, La Rocque a choisi en fin de compte d'écrire un récit uniquement à la troisième personne du singulier, mais dont les ambiguïtés en ce qui concerne les péripéties sont en effet perçues par le lecteur averti. Celui-ci demeure sensible à la possibilité que tout fût imaginé par Pion, individu et écrivain qui vit sous le fardeau de l'impuissance.

Et pourtant, dans la version publiée, malgré la figuration constante de la voix narrative impersonnelle qui se réfère à Pion par le biais de *il*, on fait tôt de reconnaître, grâce à la focalisation narrative interne, que l'on a accédé aux manifestations de l'être-au-monde du protagoniste, à la formulation de ses réflexions et au va-et-vient des analepses qui juxtaposent son enfance traumatisée et sa vie d'adulte terriblement frustré. L'énonciation de la subjectivité n'est certes donc pas passée sous silence dans le texte définitif. En somme, l'opération narrative par laquelle La Rocque y parvient—l'emploi de la focalisation narrative interne à travers le récit entier—rend encore plus difficile chez le lecteur la distinction entre le réel et l'imaginaire.

Dans le texte définitif, la métaphorisation de *passager* souligne une impuissance évidente dont les origines remontent à l'enfance, à son assujetissement au pouvoir paternel. Lors d'une soirée littéraire, Pion se dispute avec un critique littéraire, qui, à son avis, "écrit avec une pelle,"[9] et, par la suite, imagine qu'il assassine ce dernier. Voilà, en effet, la péripétie centrale du *Passager*, qui éveille chez Pion des souvenirs violents du passé, venus hanter le présent, et décider inéluctablement de son avenir. Les notes préparatoires soulignent cet élément fondamental de l'intrigue:

> Bernard Pion > lors d'un cocktail en dispute avec un critique littéraire > catalyseur qui précipite le processus de dépossession et d'autodestruction annoncé depuis la petite enfance de B. En porte-à-faux sur la frontière de la réalité, cela jusqu'au décrochage ultime, la dépossession même de son destin. (DG*P*)

Au fond, Pion serait "l'idéaliste écrasé par le réel" (DG*P*). "À vrai dire, il [Pion] n'y pensait plus très souvent" (*P* 9), incipit du texte final, qui, à travers son ambiguïté, souligne la récurrence de l'analepse, cette "sorte de spasme de la mémoire" (*P* 9), élucidant cet objet fuyant de la mémoire qui se manifeste pourtant ainsi: "[. . .] quelque chose se décollait bel et bien du fond du lui et se mettait à grouiller, des cellules de *temps mort* venaient crever comme des bulles à la surface d'un lac empoisonné" (*P* 9). L'inscription explicite du temps mort dans *Le Passager* renchérit sur la figuration implicite de ce premier temps—passé/mort—que l'on a vu dans *Serge d'entre les morts*. La récurrence d'un élément précis de ce temps mort pousse Pion non seulement à revivre un événement des plus grotesques de

sa jeunesse, mais également à refaire le même geste meurtrier. Ayant été battu un soir par son père, le lendemain, le jeune Bernard

> [. . .] s'assit au bord du lit, [. . .] alors il enleva la serviette de sur la cage et le canari s'agita tout tremblant dans ses plumes jaune pâle et il se mit à chanter tandis que l'enfant s'habillait [. . .] quelque chose l'exaspérait [. . .] il ouvrit la cage, dans sa main l'oiseau n'était qu'un frémissement tiède et doux, et l'enfant serra, il serra de toute sa force jusqu'à ce qu'il eût mal aux jointures [. . .]. (*P* 11-12)

Ce temps mort, imprégné de révulsion, trouve son pendant dans la vie adulte de Pion, car après avoir imaginé l'assassinat du critique, il

> [. . .] sentait couler dans ses bras une force animale et démente, une puissance extravagante [. . .] et sans même s'en apercevoir il la [son amante, Liliane] redressa rudement dans son lit. . . Oh non, il ne voulait pas faire cela mais il n'y pouvait rien, ou plutôt comme si ce n'avait pas été réellement lui qui serrait dans ses mains folles les épaules frêles de Liliane [. . .] il pouvait entendre ou voir ses dents s'entrechoquer car il la brassait vraiment fort et elle avait la tête qui branlait de tous les côtés, et en faisant cela il criait, criait du fond du ventre [. . .] cri de mort de la libération trop longtemps contenu. (*P* 138)

Le "temps mort" (*P* 9) ou le temps d'alors de la première page du roman vient s'installer ainsi dans le temps énonciatif, le temps de maintenant, ce qui confirme ce que Pion lui-même a entrevu: "[. . .] peut-être avait-il perdu la notion du temps?" (*P* 38) ou encore: "[. . .] le temps se mit à glisser et à se dérober [. . .]"(*P* 91). Situé donc hors du temps, en marge d'une temporalité référentielle, Pion vit les effets de ce temps mort. Après avoir imaginé l'assassinat du critique, Pion "[. . .] venait d'entrer dans son passé, presque abstraitement, comme un nouvel échec dont il lui faudrait encore porter tout le poids" (*P* 116). Ce statut fatidique donne lieu à son impuissance à diriger sa propre vie, et engendre chez lui la prise de conscience "[. . .] qu'un rouage venait de claquer quelque part en lui et qu'il ne lui restait plus qu'à attendre ce qui allait venir. . ." (*P* 73).

Il n'est pas sans intérêt de signaler que La Rocque a dressé une liste de noms de famille de son protagoniste: Houle, Rigaud, Hériault, Martineau, Jolicoeur, Bernier étant les possibilités avant de choisir Pion (DG*P*). Aussi la métaphorisation de l'impuissant opérée par "passager" se complète-t-elle par celle engendrée par "pion."

Figé ainsi dans le temps mort, Pion se voit "condamné dès sa naissance à n'être guère plus qu'un spectateur, placé légèrement en retrait de cette vie qui vibrait et flambait autour de lui" (*P* 33). Il "se voyait soudain minuscule, infime, poussière à jamais anonyme et perdue dans le cosmos, ténébrion emporté par l'immense souffle des temps et des espaces, [. . .]" (*P* 72).

Effectivement, Pion se dédouble dans "[. . .] le mélodrame où il allait être à la fois comédien et spectateur, une tragédie noire en un seul acte [. . .]" (*P* 104). À la fin, ayant tenté de se suicider, Pion "[. . .] se voyait pendiller, violacé, avec une langue informe et noirâtre qui lui sortait de la bouche [. . .] affublé de cette corde ridicule autour du cou [. . .] jouant le grand jeu de la mort et se donnant en spectacle pour soi seul" (*P* 202-03). Désintégré physiquement et spirituellement, exilé dans le temps mort, Pion n'existe à la fin de son trajet que pour permettre à sa destinée de se replier, comme le serpent, sur elle-même. Le dédoublement du protagoniste se manifeste à travers la métaphore du spectateur, et se concrétise dans l'image de celui qui se voit agir de l'extérieur, emprisonné dans le temps mort du passé et aux prises avec des souvenirs obsédants qui font rallumer chez lui des images de violence ou de mort.

Dépossession de Pion; opérations narratives et discursives subtiles par lesquelles se textualisent cette destruction; et interpénétration du réel et de l'imaginaire chez le protagoniste et, donc, chez le lecteur: voilà les points saillants formulés dans le dossier génétique qui décideront du chemin que suivra ce passager. Celui-ci, étant assujetti aux souvenirs grotesques de la mémoire involontaire dans le texte publié, confirme que La Rocque a su mener à bien son projet de brosser le portrait de "l'idéaliste écrasé par le réel" (DG*P*).

Les dossiers génétiques scénariques de La Rocque comportent des méditations sur l'appareil narratif à déployer afin de créer une ambiguïté temporelle au sein de la diégèse, des ébauches de personnage et de thématique, et avant tout des commentaires qui mettent en relief au niveau discursif la subjectivité du protagoniste. Aussi l'étude du dossier génétique enrichit-elle notre connaissance du texte publié, en élucidant les priorités scripturales auxquelles a réfléchi La Rocque. En plus, grâce à la spécificité et à l'abondance des réflexions pratiques et théoriques, les dossiers génétiques ne peuvent qu'étayer une lecture herméneutique du texte final. "Métalittérature," support à l'appréhension du processus créatif qu'a suivi La Rocque dans l'écriture et la réécriture de son oeuvre romanesque, les dossiers génétiques nous rappellent les complexités inhérentes à la création littéraire. Cette brève esquisse de la genèse de trois romans de La Rocque permet de voir l'unicité et la cohérence des stratégies narratives et discursives d'un romancier qui reste soumis à la dynamique du texte en devenir.

NOTES

1 Voir Meadwell.
2 Voir à ce sujet LeBlanc.
3 Dossier génétique de *Serge d'entre les morts* (désormais abrégé en DG*S*). Prière de noter que dans toutes les citations suivantes qui comportent des expressions soulignées, c'est La Rocque qui souligne.
4 La Rocque, *Serge d'entre les morts* (désormais abrégé en *S*) 21.
5 Dossier génétique des *Masques* (désormais abrégé en DG*M*).
6 La Rocque, *Les Masques* (désormais abrégé en *M*) 190.
7 Voir à ce sujet Julie LeBlanc, qui commente dans l'introduction de son édition critique des *Masques* "l'effet de tension, entre le 'je' et le 'il', entre 'la personne subjective' et la 'non-personne'" 12.
8 Dossier génétique du *Passager* (désormais abrégé en DG*P*).
9 La Rocque, *Le Passager* (désormais abrégé en *P*). 54.

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Canadian Childhoods

Margaret Atwood and Victor-Lévy Beaulieu
Two Solicitudes: Conversations. McClelland & Stewart $19.99

Margaret Atwood
A Quiet Game. Juvenilia Press $8.00

Reviewed by Pilar Somacarrera

These two books share an interest in the domain of childhood, a domain both Margaret Atwood and Victor-Lévy Beaulieu have explored and to which they refer in *Two Solitudes: Conversations.* In fact, Beaulieu begins his interview with Atwood by stating that "Childhood is the basis of reality. It's through childhood that the future is formed." *A Quiet Game* provides a "portrait of the artist as a young girl" that illustrates to what extent this principle is true.

Two Solicitudes contains the script of the radio series "*Deux sollicitudes,*" produced by Doris Dumais in 1995, in which these two Canadian literary giants interview each other. Texts from their major works are interspersed among the conversations. Beyond the play on the title of Hugh MacLennan's famous novel, the two writers do show considerable solicitude with one another. In spite of coming from different sides of the great linguistic divide, Atwood and Beaulieu have lived parallel existences. They share their small-town origins, their connections to the cultural nationalism of the sixties and seventies, and their work for small literary publishers. Neither of them has ignored the literature of each other's language. Atwood's wide knowledge of Québécois literature, which she has read in the original French, is demonstrated here. Beaulieu has been attracted by anglophone writers including Herman Meville, James Joyce and William Burroughs. His intuitive connection with Atwood becomes evident when he echoes her famous statement from *Surfacing* by saying that "foreign territory was the next village." Much of the interviews are dedicated to the writers' childhoods, both dominated by rituals. In Atwood's case, an anglophone readership will probably be getting a feeling of *déja vu,* since most details about Atwood's life have been revealed in the two major biographies that were published in 1998: Rosemary Sullivan's *The Red Shoes: Margaret Atwood Starting Out* and Nathalie Cooke's *Margaret Atwood: A Biography.*

It is, however, when political issues are addressed, that the conversations become engaging. When Lévy-Beaulieu, who defines himself as "Québecois and *indépendantiste,*" leads Atwood to this topic, she deftly eschews positioning herself on the separatist question. Other valuable contexts are provided by Beaulieu about the October 1970 crisis in Québéc and the fate of the NDP in this province. Given the two literary figures involved in this interaction, the topic of Canadian literature is prominent in their dialogue. I agree with Beaulieu when he says that, "[f]or a national literature to prosper, it has to have control of its

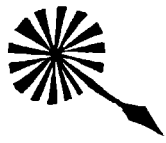
publishing and distribution structures." However, it seems to me that his comparison between Québécois and English-Canadian literature is not very felicitous when he asserts that "there's little chance of Québec literature—and this is equally true of English-Canadian literature—doing anything more than barely surviving." As a Canadianist working in Spain, I can bear witness to the burgeoning of English-Canadian literature in Europe. What English Canada and Québec *do* share, as territories where the exploration of language and life is still possible, is—and I am quoting Victor Lévy-Beaulieu—"the truly poetic side that belongs to dream and magic."

Some of Atwood's comments in *Two Solicitudes* provide a context for *A Quiet Game.* In the course of her conversation with Beaulieu, Atwood admits that she began writing short stories when she was in high school. Published in a series devoted to present the youthful work of major writers, this volume contains two short stories ("A Quiet Game" and "A Recent Grave") and a poem ("Pause Before Transition") from the late fifties when Atwood was about seventeen. The early works are introduced and annotated by Sherrill Grace, a well-known Atwood scholar. Grace shows considerable insight into the writer's thematic and stylistic trade marks, and in the way she relates these pieces to Atwood's mature writing, especially *Cat's Eye,* which is also a *leit-motif* in *Two Solicitudes.*

In "A Quiet Game," it is also possible to glimpse Atwood's fascination with the fairy tales of the brothers Grimm. In her biography about Atwood, Sullivan mentions one of Atwood's favourite tales, "The Juniper Tree," in which a child is killed by a wicked stepmother. The echoes of this tale reverberate in "A Quiet Game." This story, where a world of unfathomable terror is hidden behind the civilized facade of a kitchen, recalls Alice Munro's "deep caves paved with kitchen linoleum" and shows Atwood's penchant for Gothic elements.

As Coral Ann Howells points out, Atwood's fictions are criss-crossed with allusions to other texts, signalling her literary inheritance while at the same time marking significant departures from her predecessors. In "A Recent Grave," the young Atwood is already putting these intertextual links to practice. The story has romantic undertones inasmuch as it concerns graves and death, and there are echoes of Andrew Marvell's "The Garden" and Thomas Gray's "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard." The abrupt ending of "A Recent Grave" could be considered a Joycean epiphany, an epiphany that changes the lives of the characters, as the last two lines make clear: "Joe and I didn't go back after that/Joe didn't see why." This ending resembles Atwood's habit of finishing a poem with two parallel lines in which the first one modifies the content of the first. As for the poem "Pause before Transition," it is an early variation of the April-is-the-cruellest-month theme, which will be expanded in Atwood's *Power Politics,* in a poem in which the poetic voice interrogates "Spring again": "can I stand it shooting its needles/into the earth." This early text still shows the influence of traditional poetry, including the initial capitals in each line, the use of alliteration, and the shifts toward iambic pentameter. Atwood's poetic apprenticeship will lead her to abandon these features in her later verse.

In sum, these pieces are indispensable reading for any Atwood scholar or *aficionado.* The talent of the writer whom Grace calls "the most gifted voice of our generation" is already sparkling in them.



A Poetic Potpourri

Alfred G. Bailey
The Sun the Wind the Summer Field. Goose Lane Editions $12.95

Mark Cochrane
Boy Am I. Wolsak and Wynn $12.00

George Amabile, Leonard Gasparini, Seymour Mayne, Ted Plantos, George Swede
Five-o'clock Shadows. Letters Bookshop $11.00

François Charron. Bruce Whitman and Francis Farley-Chevrier, trans.
After Ten Thousand Years, Desire: Selected Recent Poems. ECW Press $12.00

Robin Skelton
One Leaf Shaking: Collected Later Poems 1977-1990. Beach Holme Press n.p.

Reviewed by R. W. Stedingh

These six books represent poets of the Eastern, Québécois, Central and West Coast regions of Canada. Some of the collections reveal that poetry is alive and well in this country; others show that it is not.

Alfred G. Bailey's *The Sun the Wind the Summer Field* is a commemorative little volume of poems, most of which have already appeared in five previous books and a few in eastern literary magazines. It is not a full-blown and substantial selected poems, nor was it meant to be. A founder of The Canada Council and *The Fiddlehead*, Bailey is best known for his administrative prowess at the University of New Brunswick and as an ethnohistorian. According to M. Travis Lane's introduction, "After graduate school Bailey was too busy working to rescue and reawaken New Brunswick's cultural heritage—as historian, archivist, librarian, administrator and professor—to write much poetry." One wonders, then, what possessed Goose Lane Editions to publish these rather quaint, regional (in the worst sense), uninteresting texts by what appears a UNB poetaster. Praised by Lane as a "High Modernist" influenced by T. S. Eliot's poetics, Bailey's poems more often smack of nineteenth-century English Romanticism with his whimsical love of domesticated and wild Quebec and New Brunswick landscapes in such poems as "Moonlight at Cape de Bon-Désir," "Dunes at Moulin Baude," "Madawaska Moose Yard" and "Kingdom of the Saguenay." For all that, a pristine gaiety permeates many of the poems in this book, and as poet Bailey depends far more on verbal playfulness (puns, witty—often shallow—allusions, slight rhythmic variations and dull rhetorical gestures) than he does on intellectual or emotional substance. In a typical Bailey poem, "After these Times," we have a linear poetry of statement without images, concrete nouns or metaphor lacking in any suspense or drama: "We have exhausted all words./ They do not tell us where/we are going/or what this place is/in which we now find ourselves." One might fairly say the same is true of the poems in this collection.

In Mark Cochrane's *Boy Am I*, Whitman's "Song of Myself" might well have been the clarion call that bodied forth these poems. Most are a celebration of life, the self and particularly the body. The beginning of the first poem, "The Adventure of Kid Bean," is a case in point:

> I met you today, my child apparent
> for the first time, on a tv screen.
> Eight weeks & already in the media—
>
> suspended beneath the great oblong
> of her bladder
> in the sea of your gestation
>
> like the pilot of a Zeppelin.

The poem goes on in a playful, mock-serious tone, but the metaphor is not as well-defined and extended as it is in the second version of this poem which soon follows in the book. The practice of including two versions of the same poem is decidedly precious and an indication that Cochrane didn't get it right the first time. But all is

not playful in this book. In "I Prefer the Talk of Women (Genetic Text)," Cochrane plies a shtick of deference to women, particularly young mothers, and elevates them above men who collectively come off as shallow adolescents. Because the juxtaposition of encomiums to women and the disparagement of men are clearly stereotyped and biased, one would think Cochrane clear on the sexes in his own mind at least, but he isn't. He prefers women's "fatalism to the tropic body" of men he cannot fathom, and the shallow contrast between the behavior of women and men is also effete. In the sequel to this poem, "I Prefer the Talk of Women (Confessional)," Cochrane's "sensitive combat with other men, bigger & bigots" reveals his own bigotry in a gibberish which lacks promise. But he does come across very well in "Day/Care," where the father figure (Cochrane would insist dad figure) cares for a child in a domestic world where "a dryer square-dances/in the basement" and mother, *father* and child play "on their bellies/learning to crawl."

Some of the poems in the second section of the book are much more accomplished. "No More Poems by Men" is a scathing look at stereotypes of contemporary men, particularly writers including Cochrane himself. In contrast, his adoration of Robert Mapplethorpe's lusty but crass photographic efforts in "Mapplethorpe" is gayly lyrical encompassing the "painted lady" as well as the faces of "baboons." "I say, a man like one idea of a woman. /Make me that," he says, and in conclusion, ". . . boy/am I, am I ever, boy am I ever in love." Like most of the poems in this book, we have Cochrane singing the song of himself in happy tones about frivolous subjects as if to say, "Here I am. Ain't I great!" The self-indulgent and ingratiating tone just oozes out of the pores of the poems.

The third section of the book, "Boy Am I," is full of poems, many of them expressive if not good, that exemplify the quotation from Whitman that precedes it: "O my body! I dare not desert the likes of you in other men. . . ." "Latent" is full of confessional fervor, but it is only in "Boy" that a clear definition is rendered in the closing lines:

> As fathers, as dads, we are beginning
> to find a way back, through men & their
> measures,
> to the meaning of a boy
> & the soft, muscular care
> he was born to.

Despite the fact that some of the poems in this collection are well-crafted, Cochrane's undue concern with the body, like Whitman's, is tiresome. In reading them one is reminded of the sentiment in Diogenes, that those so preoccupied with the body have very small minds.

There are five poets featured in *Five-o'clock Shadows*. They are represented by 5-17 poems each, most of which have already appeared in literary magazines. One wonders, therefore, about the rationale behind the publication of this unpaginated, slim, though smartly printed, little volume. According to the brief preface, it is that these male poets are middle-aged and in mid-career, all of them writing and publishing for over a quarter of a century.

George Amabile is by far the most accomplished of these poets. From the satirical "Prognosis" to the beautifully rendered "Catch and Release," we have poems with a clear structure in which an event takes place and the reader is changed. These are powerful poems in a language that is controlled yet free, concrete rather than abstract, syntactically flexing its muscles, breathing. They are a delight to both heart and mind.

Leonard Gasparini's poems are generally uneven, but there are exceptions which are polished and emotionally satisfying, especially "My Room at the Royal Hotel." The organizational success of this poem

depends on a refrain beginning each stanza in which the meaninglessness of the quotidian is stressed graphically and incrementally. "Prison Yard" has the same climactic structure although the unifying principle is visual coupled with a pervading tone of depression. The success of "My Valentine," a prose poem, depends on the enigmatic and ironic concluding image of a heartshaped menstrual stain in the bed of a strange woman picked up in a bar and is, therefore, not as powerful as it might be.

Only two of Seymour Mayne's poems merit mention. "You are Lost Listening" ends with a startling thought that books are full of "dead voices/reaching for you/from their cemeteries/of paper." And in "Backwards" we have a reversal of the biblical story of Lot's wife in that Lot here tells her to look back so that she might "forfeit seeing/what lies directly ahead."

Ted Plantos's poems generally lack a unified anatomy or a strong metaphorical basis. In "Tulum" and "Iguana Soup" we have examples of poems whose language is hum-drum and undramatic, and whose only allure is their exotic Mayan subjects. In "Up All Night with Baudelaire" the focus is blurred as a result of cryptic allusions to various Baudelaire texts and the insertion of some of his lines. And "Mushrooms in the Black Forest" would be a fine poem if Plantos extended the metaphor all the way to its natural conclusion. Instead, the poem ends weakly, departing from that metaphor, with a tangential conclusion about the French and Canadian dead of World War II.

George Swede's fourteen haiku in this collection are often, unlike the traditional Japanese, irregular in form, and their success depends on a verbal irony rather than a paradox in nature. They are, nonetheless, superb. However, his longer poems in the selection often begin with a clear image but are not linguistically or logically sustained; their form is shaky and unsatisfying.

François Charron's poems, at least those collected in *After Ten Thousand Years, Desire: Selected Recent Poems*, owe much to the French poet Pierre Reverdy, who was variously described as a surrealist, realist, cubist and mystic—all of which were appropriate, though the nature of his work defies classification. The same could be said of the Charron opus to date. Although the poems are intensely metaphysical and speculative in tone, they are intensely personal, and emotive lines permeate the majority of his texts. The typical Charron poem strives toward a simplicity of expression. He often begins with a series of simple, somewhat pithy sentences which appear unrelated and ends with a lovely line that unites the whole. One senses the attempt to grasp at space, both physical and linguistic, to find the heart of any one perceptual field in a single, penultimate utterance. He does this not only in his early work where he employs a traditional poetic form but also in his more recent prose poems. Here, for example, is "The Gift of Emotion" from *Pour les amants* (1992):

> There is the day of our birth, there is the day of our death. Everyone makes a lot of fuss about tomorrow. A star from the confines has given us back the gift of emotion, the universe explores our blood. I am an impression which gives in to the end that is there. I shall continue to grow old so as to perfect my childhood.

Robin Skelton's *One Leaf Shaking: Collected Later Poems 1977-1990* is a credit to one of Canada's most distinguished men of letters. If this country had ever appointed a poet laureate during his lifetime, there would have been few contenders as fit for the office. Poet, anthologist, editor, translator, biographer, art and literary critic, historical writer, initiated witch and occultist, he had over 100 books to his name. The poems here collected are taken from four books, two chapbooks and manuscript and are arranged thematically. Only seventeen of the poems have not previously appeared in a book.

The collection starts with a characteristic Skelton poem, "Neither Trick Nor Treat." In this poem the thought gains precedence over the mode of verbal expression, which is as simple and direct as a hot knife cutting through butter. It is an invitation to people who are not Halloween children calling at the door but ghosts pretending to be people " . . . who have/no door to time/ but stand outside/with threat and promise,/waiting for words/that are more than words." In effect, the poem not only offers sound in itself but also functions as an introduction to the collection, a book for those who have died inside, whatever the causes, and are reading to be renewed, reborn, reassured they are not alone. Death and resurrection are themes that dominate the poems in the first section of the book, but they reoccur throughout the volume in poems like "Everything," "Sum," "Indian Graveyard: Vancouver Island," "O Lazarus" and "In the Wood." Another reoccurring theme is the process of writing as a means of conquering death, especially in "A Sort of Symbol," "Emergence," "Wood," and "Don't Get Me Wrong." There is also a whole section of love poems some of which also deal with this theme, the best being "She," which concludes: ". . . I struggle, whispering prayers/that what is lost may not be wholly lost/and what recovered kept some little while."

In several sections of this book, Skelton confronts the landscape of Vancouver Island. In poems like "In the Gulf," "Raven's Island," "Nootka" and the three long poems comprising the last section, "Vancouver Island Triptych," he not only evokes the landscape but confronts it as a kind of writing, a message of Nature, a kind of history. But we are never without the figure of the poet and his impressions; in such poems as these Skelton not only discusses Native legends about the figure of Raven, for example, but also strives to write his own legends in combination with it, as is the case in "Skin." In these landscape poems with the embellishment of Native legends, however, Skelton is not always successful. They often seem more an aesthetic exercise or exorcism than endemic to the landscapes themselves. But as Skelton would have it in "Haystack Rock," we are morning walkers "that slip through the surface [of the landscape and the poem] to themselves."

Taken together, the poems in this collection are the songs of "a shaking leaf/possessed by solitary/passion, freed/(or trapped) by some/digression of the will. . . ." They are fine songs which will establish Robin Skelton as one of the most potent voices of our age.

Canadian SF

Edo van Belkom, ed.
Northern Dreamers: Interviews with Famous Science Fiction, Fantasy, and Horror Writers. Quarry Press $19.95

Allan Weiss, ed.
Perspectives on the Canadian Fantastic: Proceedings of the 1997 Conference on Canadian Science Fiction and Fantasy. ACCSFF $15.00

Reviewed by Douglas Ivison

Canadian science fiction and fantasy (or SF) has been growing rapidly over the past twenty years, producing a number of internationally known, bestselling, critically acclaimed and award-winning authors (such as William Gibson, Guy Gavriel Kay, Élisabeth Vonarburg, Candas Jane Dorsey, Phyllis Gotlieb, Charles de Lint, Nalo Hopkinson and Robert J. Sawyer, among others). A Canadian SF community has developed in that time, and Canadian SF has begun to receive recognition both within Canada and around the world. Academic attention to Canadian SF has been a more recent phenomenon, and is still relatively sparse, David Ketterer's *Canadian Science Fiction and Fantasy*

(1992) being the first (and so far only) comprehensive critical survey of Canadian SF. Two recent books are important (if limited) contributions to the study of Canadian SF, and will hopefully lead to increased critical attention to Canadian SF by Canadian Literature scholars.

Perspectives on the Canadian Fantastic is the proceedings of the first annual conference on Canadian science fiction and fantasy. The ten essays explore Canadian SF from a variety of critical perspectives, and provide a good introduction to the body of work that is Canadian SF. The diversity of approaches and topics (from the "cyberpunk" of William Gibson to the speculative poetry of Phyllis Gotlieb to Canadian science fiction invasion narratives to feminist Québécoise SF) suggests possibilities for further study and reveals the richness of Canadian SF as an area of critical inquiry. While the articles concentrate on some of the more prominent writers (Gibson, Gotlieb, Kay, Vonarburg, Louky Bersianik, and Margaret Atwood), as a whole *Perspectives on the Canadian Fantastic* situates these writers within the field of Canadian SF writing, something that is too often not done. Future volumes (and upcoming conferences) will, one hopes, cast their net a little wider, but *Perspectives on the Canadian Fantastic* is a worthwhile introduction to Canadian SF.

Northern Dreamers is a collection of interviews with Canadian science fiction, fantasy and horror writers, conducted by Edo van Belkom, a prolific young writer in all three genres. While the interviews tend to the superficial at times, focusing more on biographical details and the logistics of writing rather than in-depth discussions of the authors' work, it is still a valuable contribution to the study of Canadian SF. As a whole, the interviews provide us with a vivid portrait of the Canadian SF community, an overview and its relationship (or, often, lack of one) to Canadian Literature and the Canadian publishing industry. The 22 profiles present a cross-section of the Canadian SF community, an overview which displays the variety and quality of Canadian writers, but unfortunately *Northern Dreamers* fails to cover the vibrant French-language SF community adequately (including only Vonarburg). Despite this reservation I would recommend *Northern Dreamers* as a valuable resource for those interested in Canadian science fiction, fantasy, and horror; it would be a worthwhile addition to all research libraries.

Plays Unplaced

Drew Carnwath
Two Plays. Playwrights Canada $13.95

Ann-Marie MacDonald
The Arab's Mouth. Blizzard $10.95

Sally Clark
Saint Frances of Hollywood. Talon $14.95

Ian Ross
FareWel. Scirocco $12.95

Ian Ross
Joe from Winnipeg. J. Gordon Shillingford $14.95

Reviewed by Malcolm Page

Carnwath sets his two short plays in a North American city; MacDonald in a fantasy world, arbitrarily Scotland in 1899; Clark in Seattle, Hollywood and New York; and Ross in Canada on a Manitoba reservation. But younger Canadian dramatists are not exploring Spirit of Place, or answering Frye's call to know"where is here," still less aiding theorists of regionalism. Eager to categorize, I'd have to label Carnwath as earnest, MacDonald and Ross as writing comedy, and Clark as aspiring to tragedy.

Carnwath's *Total Body Washout* is a haunting monologue. The speaker describes a car accident, after which he is in a mental hospital for an "anxiety attack." He chatters about his best friend in Grade 5, his eccentric aunt, a relationship which

went wrong. He observes sardonically, hinting at a Laingian view that the insane are saner than doctors. Is he slightly confused? Or a nutcase? And is he "cured"?

Johnnyville, for three characters, is more ambitious, again with monologues, some printed as free verse. This unsettling story tells of an apparently casual affair which leads to a frightening interrogation. We hear of espionage, of a terrorist group called CLF, and *The Third Man* is quoted to indicate the kind of world we are in. Carnwath supplies much to watch, starting with a nonverbal Prologue—a dance, a drag injection, a projected photo of a murdered man—all before we know who's who or what this is about. Who is Johnny, spy or innocent? What does Alisa feel for him? Is she telling the truth? Carnwath engaged me with questions of memory and identity. Pursuing this fairly obscure play to an interview in the *Toronto Star,* I find that the starting point was Grant Bristow, the CSIS informant who infiltrated white supremacist organizations. This fact is useful, so why isn't it in the published text?

MacDonald's title, *The Arab's Mouth,* prepares us for a strange piece, and the allusion is first to Camus's *The Outsider* (which a character plans to write—in 1899) and then to multiple puns around abyss, abbess and the god Anubis. A woman, an amateur scientist, inherits on condition she remain childless. Her household includes a controlling aunt, a dissolute brother and an irrepressible puppy. Some family curse involves an insane mother and a mysterious Creature locked in the attic, while Egyptian hieroglyphs are found on the Scottish coast and a rock burns hands that touch it. Kilts and bagpipes bring out stereotypes, though speech drifts in and out of brogue. The second half is even less coherent than the first, with improbability piled on inconsequentiality. Struggling to understand, I was helped by MacDonald's interview in *Books in Canada* in March 1990. She can be amusing: "I don't believe in ghosts" draws the retort "That's of precious little concern to the ghosts." Her playful invention might reach an audience, but the play is disappointingly trivial from the writer of *Goodnight, Desdemona* and *Fall on Your Knees.*

Clark's *Saint Frances of Hollywood* is Frances Farmer, movie star in the thirties. In 51 short scenes Farmer progresses from rebellious schoolgirl to death (her age is not given), a big challenge for an actress; Clark gives 1933 in a stage direction, then surges forward to the clue of "modern Clothes, circa 1970." Farmer is a promising young star, sympathetic to the Left and breaking her studio contract in order to perform in New York. She is saddled with a difficult mother, who calls her "little sister." Less than halfway through, decline has begun, as though Clark is more engaged by failure than by success. A marriage break-up, alcohol, bennies, an assault charge, more alcohol, an appalling mental hospital ward (far worse than the civilized Canadian one portrayed by Carnwath), ECT, cold-water treatment, a lobotomy, another marriage, rejection by father, then onstage death.

Because Clark does not mention her sources, I wonder whether this text draws on one biography. Is it from much research or from a generalized sense of the treatment of women in Hollywood and in asylums? My main reservation about this script involves its ability to engage our sympathies for, writ large, woman as Victim—of mother, of men, of the Hollywood system, of anti-Communism. Clark's Note asserts that the title is to be taken seriously: "I believe Frances Farmer to be an unrecognized saint of the 20th century." Her belief is shown in the asylum when Farmer lays her hands on the foreheads of patients, so that "they act as though they are receiving some rare form of energy." I certainly enjoyed some scenes and characters, such as the gossip columnist who has decided the content of her story and sticks with it despite

what Farmer tells her. Clark, however, examined sainthood more successfully in *Jehanne of the Witches,* and the struggles of a woman in a man's world more powerfully in portraying Artemisia Gentileschi in *Life without Instruction* —while her *Moo* and *Wasps* are more fun than all three of these.

FareWel, by Ian Ross, is a First Nations' comedy, a genre established by Tomson Highway and practised since by several authors, such as Drew Hayden Taylor. Having seen this play at the Firehall in Vancouver in 1999, I have a fuller response than I might to texts read. For me, Ross presented almost everyone as drunk, corrupt, half-crazy or sniffing gas. The indigenous people in the audience found this uproariously funny: they had come to enjoy themselves. Their relation to the stage and actors differed from mine, with interjections, chatter to neighbours, sudden bursts of applause—as though this was a meeting, not theatre.

The plot shows the consequences of the chief leaving to gamble at Las Vegas, taking the band's welfare cheques with him. A new chief is elected (by manipulation, not democratically): he wants to make money by setting up a casino. Two of the characters at the end appear to achieve some redemption in a new sense of identity, with one planning to learn the tribal language. As documentary, the play is depressing. Indeed, if the author were white, this downbeat and stereotypical portrayal of childlike alcoholics would surely be criticized.

Structurally, *FareWel* is confusing, with fragmented scenes happening all over the place. The designer has to squeeze in two interiors as well as a diner and a church exterior (because of an undeveloped theme dwelling on the impact of Christianity on tradition). A few passages have comedy *and* content, but mostly Ross likes broad comedy, including statements such as "We brought them turkey. And stuffing. And cranberries. That's what white people have Thanksgiving for. Except they don't share our turkey with us anymore." His program note (not in the text) reads: "Humour is a window, and it's a vehicle for change. It lets people into things that they otherwise wouldn't feel right about. I want people to see the characters as human beings that happen to be Aboriginal." Humour probably can be a vehicle for change. However, while I don't ask for a wholly positive and therefore untruthful view, this script does not aid the cause of Native self-government at the time of the Nisga'a treaty.

Joe from Winnipeg, forty short radio commentaries, on topics from the budget to Christmas cakes, are so slight as barely to merit print.

Lost for Words

Sally Clark
Lost Souls and Missing Persons. Talonbooks $14.95

Joan MacLeod
2000. Talonbooks

Sandra Shamas
A Trilogy of Performances. Mercury Press $17.95

Reviewed by Jessica Gardiner

Towards the end of the last century, many Victorians believed that the erosion of commonly held values in western culture, derived from a crisis in faith and the escalating speed of technological innovation, would ultimately lead to a breakdown of social order if not to anarchy. It would appear as we once again face a new century that this fear has not completely left us, that is if the three plays considered in this review are any indication. These plays, all written by Canadian women between 1984 and 1999 explore modern woman's sense of isolation in society, and the miasma generated by her inability to communicate truly.

As such, Sally Clark's *Lost Souls and Missing Persons* is the most disturbing of the three. Performed at Toronto's *Theatre Passe Muraille* in 1984, it is the first of this

popular and controversial playwright's produced works, and it resonates with the dark wit, irony, and surreal almost cartoon-like characterization and scenario that have become her trademark. The plot centres on the search for a missing—or is she lost?—housewife named Hannah Halstead by her bewildered and equally "lost" husband. Like his wife, Lyle Halstead finds himself unable to relate to two teenage children and an increasingly withdrawn spouse, or find meaningful employment.

As a commentary on modern life, Clark's drama begins when Hannah "sits bolt upright" in bed and screams. Hannah, on a vacation to New York, leaves her hotel room one morning to visit the Metropolitan Museum of Art's medieval collection, the Cloisters. At some point Hannah is taken in by an artist named Turner. Like his namesake, British painter J.M.W. Turner, he is a Romantic. If Hannah is silenced and misunderstood by her family, Turner's objectification of her reduces her to little more than a Zombie unable to communicate in anything other than gibberish. She discovers that it is pleasant to be molded and admired in this fashion, but once again she is robbed of her identity.

This disturbing characterization of the male artist as one who shapes and silences the female subject is, of course, not a new one. Clark departs from Romantic convention in the idea that art grants one neither a sense of release nor agency. Turner is as unhappy and lost as the others.

Of course, Hannah's search is a search for self, for identity, for her own "missing person" She asks as she lies alongside a "Man"—her husband not named in this scene—in bed: "What am I doing here? The fact is, I don't know how I got here, how long I've been here and I'm not sure I want to know." Nor is there any sense, as this quotation suggests, that Hannah or any of the "lost souls" find any self-awareness unless it is through some form of visceral excitement or physical proximity: a caress, sex, violence. This play that starts with Hannah's scream ends with her realization that she is living one of her nightmares; she will be stabbed by one of the many mad characters, a Mr. Cape. "This is not a dream," she cries.

Joan MacLeod's *2000* also contains a verbally challenged character, in this instance a homeless man who lives within the radius of a professional British Columbian couple's suburban home, a house that is "very much on the edge of a forest, a forest that is barely kept out." Employed as planners, Wyn (Resource Management), and Sean (Urban) live with Wyn's grandmother, Nanny, who will be 100 in the year 2000, and it is she who is most sympathetic to this homeless man. Nanny believes him to be a true primitive with mystic quality, a "Mountain Man" who lives in harmony with the land and his instincts, much as her hero Chief Dan George and his people had lived before being robbed of their rights. Wyn is not as certain about the Mountain Man. Unhappy in her marriage, she wants to believe that there is a more primal and satisfying alternative to her liberal civilized husband's impotence, both physical and metaphoric, but is repelled by Mountain Man's crude sexual advances and his brutality as he "forces his shorn hair" down her throat in an attempt to become intimate. Sean and Janine, a flamboyant unorthodox caregiver hired to nurse Nanny, believe the Mountain Man to be a parasite feeding on the leftovers of their affluent lifestyle.

On the jacket cover of the playtext, MacLeod claims that in writing this play she is concerned about "the notion of the wild invading the city and the city invading the wild, by the idea of things not being right in nature and the approach of the millennium." While it is never clear whether the Mountain Man is a true natural or an imposter, it is he who most

embodies the notion of the "wild" for the characters in MacLeod's play. As such, he only speaks in one scene towards the end of the play when he struggles to mumble the words "Thank you" to Nanny, perhaps because she is the only character who has faith in him or because she has shared her vision with him. It would appear in either case that the civilized have something to offer him as well.

Sandra Shamas' highly successful trilogy of one-woman plays *My Boyfriend's Back and There's Gonna Be Laundry; My Boyfriend's Back and There's Gonna Be Laundry II: The Cycle Continues;* and *Wedding Bell Hell* contain the most positive prospects for love, marriage, and society at the turn of this century. Her plays, not far removed from stand-up comedy, chronicle her experiences as a single woman living in Toronto through the eighties and nineties. A native of Sudbury, she describes her childhood with unhappily married parents, and her move to Toronto where she finds employment as a puppeteer on Jim Henson's *Fraggle Rock.* Her initial sense of frustration and isolation in Toronto—"I was single and desperate"— is further hampered by a period of being attracted to pretty homosexual men and disastrous blind dates. When she does meet Frank, her future husband, she finds herself unable to trust the relationship as she has been scarred both by her parents' dysfunctional marriage and her own feelings of inadequacy. The third play which primarily chronicles the events surrounding her marriage to Frank ends with Shamas' realization that despite the odds, she has found love by marrying "the funniest man she has ever met in her whole life." And it is laughter that serves as the solace in all three of these plays.

Family History

Michael Crummey
Hard Light. Brick $12.95

Helen M. Buss/Margaret Clarke
Memoirs from Away. Wilfrid Laurier UP n.p.

Reviewed by Claire Wilkshire

Hard Light and *Memoirs from Away: A New Found Land Girlhood* are both family histories. In his collection of poetry, Michael Crummey conjures the voices of parents, grandparents, and other forebears in a lyrical account of rural Newfoundland life. In reconstructing her life as a girl in Newfoundland, Helen Buss interweaves her own memories with those of family members as she works her past into the present.

Hard Light is Crummey's second collection of poetry (following *Arguments with Gravity,* 1996); he has also published a book of short stories, *Flesh and Blood* (1998). *Hard Light* is the most accomplished of these, a fine, strong book with an eye for detail and a rare sense of how to convey it. Crummey's book divides itself into three sections of which the first, "32 Little Stories," consists entirely of prose. These brief, poetic narratives deal with the realities of life in small communities—birth, death, food and hard work—and most are told in the first person. They combine the particularity of individual styles with the terse control and humour of Crummey's own poetic persona; he flits in and out of the voices of women or old men, quick as the flick of a capelin's tail. Crummey works with genres such as the deed, the will and the recipe, and includes photographs of people and documents, creating a kind of poetic family Bible.

"Discovering Darkness," the second section of *Hard Light,* re-writes a sailor's diary. Crummey captures the feelings and adventures of a persona based on Captain John Froude of Twillingate, who travelled the world in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Here is the young man preparing to cross

the Atlantic for the first time in 1887: "When I signed on the *Konigsburg* / bound for Italy with / a load of dry cod / I had expectations, / but I could not rightly say / what they were." The sequence closes with poems in which the elderly sailor, landbound, recounts his exploits to skeptical youths, his "finger dipped in tea / to sketch a map across the table": the map disappears, like a past that has turned to shadows.

The book's final section, "A Map of the Islands," opens with rich metaphor: "The Labrador coastline is a spill of islands, / salt-shaker tumble of stone, / a cartographer's nightmare." In this sequence of poems, images suggesting the "spill" and "tumble"—the wildness, extremes of mind and place—vie with the cartographer's desire to identify and catalogue ("Naming the Islands"). Time and change exist in opposition to the permanence of landscape, as in the description of a collapsed whaler's lookout on an island in Red Bay: "the black remains of wood and baleen / seeded by the wind, a patch of sod now / plush as shag carpet underfoot. / The shallow impression lodged in moss / by the weight of each new arrival / erased before the island is left behind." The three sections of this book constitute different approaches to ways of life which no longer exist; the language which renders them is precise, understated, eloquent. *Hard Light* marks Crummey's emergence as a poet of distinction.

Memoirs from Away: A New Found Land Girlhood also draws on family stories. It too is peopled with a variety of personae; in this case, however, they are all facets of the author, Helen Buss/Margaret Clarke. Described on the jacket as "daughter, wife, mother, teacher, writer and feminist academic," Buss grew up in Newfoundland; as Margaret Clark, she has published fiction and poetry. A memoir appearing in Wilfred Laurier's Life Writing series, this text continually interrogates itself and its narrator(s). Indeed, the dogged exploration of Buss/Clarke's at times conflicted motivations constitutes one of the book's main weaknesses. Buss often reflects on broad issues having to do with history and place, feminism and time, the personal and political; these appear in *Memoirs from Away* as a fascination with the minute details of her childhood, detailsthat do not always hold the reader's interest. For example, potentially viable ideas such as the unreliability of the memoir, the desire of individuals to shape their histories to their own advantage, or the necessity of questioning apparently authoritative historical record translate, in *Memoirs*, into potential banality: "The anecdote about V-E Day which I have just related to you is a lie. Sometimes my word processor runs away with me. My Microsoft goes soft on some microevents, so to speak. Weak joke. I'm writing a weak joke because I'm embarrassed at my lie." The jokes are often weak, sometimes overpowered by the narrator's self-absorption, and even the reader who delights in Buss/Clarke's exploration of her own subject position from a variety of perspectives may well tire of the relentlessness with which she pursues this goal.

Cultural Bridge Mix

Daniel Danis; Linda Gaboriau, trans.
That Woman. Talonbooks $13.95

David Fennario
Banana Boots. Talonbooks $9.95

Bruce McManus
Selkirk Avenue. Nuage $12.95

Vittorio Rossi
Paradise by the River. Talonbooks $14.95

Reviewed by Ric Knowles

On average more than seventy plays are published in Canada each year in collections and single-volume editions, representing a wide variety of styles, subjects, and communities. These four new plays represent some of that variety. *Selkirk Avenue* is a

sentimental multicultural memory play set in Winnipeg in the 1930s, 50s and 90s. *Paradise by the River* is a political history play about the internment of Italian-Canadians set in Montreal during the Second World War. *Banana Boots* is an autobiographical solo show from working-class English Montreal, set in 1980s Belfast. And *That Woman* is a contrapuntal mélange of monologues about an unnamed woman, her son and an old man in a Quebec "provincial town" over the last forty years of the woman's life. This is not to say that these plays don't speak to one another. Indeed, the package might best be considered as a cultural bridge mix, each play representing or probing in its different way intercultural conflict and exchange.

Bruce McManus's *Selkirk Avenue* offers the most genial portrait of, and argument for, cultural pluralism in the package. Set in Winnipeg's working-class North End and featuring a Jewish family, a Native family, a Polish family and a narrator named Harold, the play functions somewhat too derivatively as a kind of multicultural *Our Town*. Its strengths are in its combination of geniality and good lines:

> Harold: It's quiet tonight.
> Israel: It's Easter. The Christians are too guilty to play, the Jews are waiting for a pogrom and the atheists are all drunk.
> Harold: And what about you, Mr. Silver?
> Israel: I'm a businessman now.

Its social criticism, too, is limited to the odd good line: "That's the curse of the poor. They rob each other." Indeed, the focus on "everybody's village," the North End, and the absence of residents of "Canada"—"across the bridge"—means that class analysis of any serious kind is unavailable: the poor are praised or blamed according to whether or not they rob each other, and the rich and powerful remain offstage. The mandated doubling of actors across the play's ethnic boundaries, moreover, serves to stress its humanism: for McManus, it seems, we're all the same, in spite of (incidental) differences.

McManus's pluralist portrait of Selkirk Avenue downplays class or religious conflict in its sentimental presentation of neighborhood. What conflict there is on these grounds is represented as resolvable tension within families or between lovers, its consequences limited to the pangs of lost opportunity. When David Fennario turns to class and religion in Montreal and Belfast, the tone is rather different, though like that of McManus, Fennario's (Marxist) utopia lies in class solidarity and resistance to the interests of a dominant class. In *Banana Boots* Fennario explicitly revisits the politics of his earlier play, *Balconville*, and its production through the economies of mainstream theatrical staging and touring. *Banana Boots* is unusual among autobiographical solo shows in that the identity it probes is social rather than psychological, and the discoveries it makes political rather than personal. For theatre historians, the play is a welcome explanation of Fennario's rejection of mainstage drama in the wake of his biggest hit, in favour of social-action community theatre in his working-class Montreal neighborhood of Pointe Saint-Charles. For general audiences, the play will read and perform as a harrowing account of touring with what passes in Canada for political theatre, in contrast to places where politics is, well, to die for.

Vittorio Rossi's *Paradise by the River* also deals with ethnic conflict in Montreal, but in this case the setting is historical and the ethnicities represented Italian and French-Canadian. This realistic drama exposes (English-) Canadian injustices in the internment of "Enemy Aliens" during the World War II, and effectively portrays conflicts within its represented communities and the sufferings of its central Italo-Québecois family. But its realistic mode

resists effective interventionist critique; in fact, the play's unbroken historical veneer precludes any reference to the crucial fact that Canadians of Italian ancestry who were imprisoned and stripped of their possessions during the war remain uncompensated to this day. Ironically, the play's most effective feature is its extensive use of "minority languages" (French and Italian) in an English-language play. (Fennario's *Balconville* initiated the practice almost twenty years earlier.)

The least overtly political or multicultural of these plays, but the most dramaturgically innovative and theatrically effective, is Daniel Danis's *That Woman*. As translated by Linda Gaboriau, the play represents rather than depicts intercultural exchange, crossing the Quebec border not only into English Canada, but into production in Glasgow and Edinburgh as well. Gaboriau is the leading translator of Québécois plays into English, notable for her ability to capture the distinctive voices of a wide range of writers while communicating nuanced cultural contexts to diverse audiences. In *That Woman, (Celle-là)*, for example, her use of the classed Québécois "kodak" for camera effectively resists cultural erasure through translation, maintaining distinctness without sacrificing clarity. But the politics powerfully explored in *That Woman* are primarily those of gender representation and objectification ("*that* woman"), as the play weaves together monologues by three characters: an unnamed epileptic woman, now dead from a seizure, who was rejected by her family (through her brother, the Bishop) at age seventeen for sexual exploration; the son to whom she gave birth at twenty-seven and whom she agonizingly tried to kill years later; and the "Old Man," her landlord, lover, and the father of her son, who spies on her through three "fish eyes" drilled in his floor (a depiction of the patriarchal gaze). At once exposing the injustices and inhumanities of a patriarchal, "Christian" society and resisting easy answers, the play is most moving for its compassion, and for the intricate poetry of its evocative language and complex structure.

Literature of Belangini

Kwame Dawes, ed.
Wheel and Come Again: An Anthology of Reggae Poetry. Goose Lane $17.95

Sasenarine Persaud
Canada Geese and Apple Chatney: Stories. TSAR $15.95

Djanet Sears
Harlem Duet. Scirocco Drama $12.95

Reviewed by Clara Joseph

Kwame Dawes is from . . . err . . . Ghana, Jamaica, Canada, the United States, . . . Africa. This singer-critic-professor-poet (and more) has undertaken the challenging task of editing a collection of poems that are musical and political and that demonstrate, according to the editor, a "reggae aesthetic." Not all poems in the "anthology" (a much debated term in the preface) are set to reggae rhythms, but, while some indeed are one hundred percent reggae, others strive, occasionally a bit too hard, for its spirit.

Wheel and Come Again is a collection of "reggae" poems written by writers from the Islands, Canada, the United Kingdom and the United States The reggae lingua "wheel and come again," an invocation to the audience to join in and repeat, reappears in Dawes's own Trickster poem in the collection. The anthology contains poems by well-known poets such as Linton Kwesi Johnson and Kamau Brathwaite as well as by lesser known and younger poets.

The majority of the poems profoundly communicate rhythm, feeling and thought. While Rasta and race are repeated themes in these poems, Bob Marley is also celebrated often for both style and sense. Several poems dedicated to Marley capture

the main events in his life and bear witness to his immense influence on the poets; Marley is "you new bridge" in a hostile world when faced with the terrible reality that "the sea does not divide for us to cross / we have to swim and cut our path." Many poems are about "riddim an' hardtimes" in reggae mode. A poem such as "Ethiopia Unda a Jamaican Mango Tree" captures at once humour and pathos most effectively. The coping methods of "sufferers" are simultaneously touching and threatening, perhaps best exemplified in the movement from "the stone that killed me" to "I am the stone that killed me." The poems are a way of p(l)aying back. The lament "take mi home / to de place, where I belang" is at once a haunting response to racist attacks of "why don't you go back where you came from?" and an exhausting search for home. Several poems testify to the spiritual strength of reggae. Reggae's hypnotic jerky pulse, its choppiness, sustains the poet in more than one way: "me take de radio / an mi push i up eena mi belly / fi keep de baby company." The poem tells us what it means to be black, woman, poor, and immigrant—all in one. There are not only rhythms here but also revelations.

Set to reggae rhythm, the patois and "dread talk" are to be intuitively understood and interpreted, enjoyed best when read aloud as with dub poetry. Some of the unorthodox spellings: "slave shipppppppp" and "lawwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwd" (the latter more 'law' than 'lord')—startle the complacent reader. Unorthodox verse styles, such as the multiple column poems of Brian Meeks and the prose eulogy for reggae by Vijay Steede, make their own statement of difference and comradeship. Dawes's introduction is an excellent standalone piece of reggae criticism that makes one want to read his new book *Natural Mysticism: Towards A Reggae Aesthetic.* His argument that reggae is the so-far missing voice of the working class and that it "crosses cultural, racial and class divides" feels convincing when presented with the anthology.

Sasenaraine Persaud is a novelist, poet and short story writer of Indian descent. He was born in Guyana, and he migrated to Canada and now lives in the United States. *Canada Geese and Apple Chatney* is a collection of his short stories with narrators and protagonists who seem very Indian.

The Indianness is both a strength and a hindrance in these stories. In the first story, "The Dog," Indian culture is conflated with Brahmin, and is used by the narrator to explain concepts of cleanliness that require him to keep his dog at arms length. The story starts in essay form, with lessons on where a dog lives and when it would retire, and becomes interesting as the dog becomes a harbinger of bad tidings. The "brahmin" aspects of the dog, however, are problematic, especially when the dog receives holy *prasad* and accompanies the narrator around his father's pyre: both of these acts are highly sacrilegious, unbrahminic. Naming the second dog "Shiva" is tantamount to a Catholic priest's mother naming her cat "The Blessed Virgin Mary." Persaud's repeated allusions to Hindu mythology are informative but sometimes seem contrived, if not irresponsible, as when a character who remarks on a certain race not being able to run a "cake shop" let alone a country is blithely compared to Krishna, Buddha, or Mahavira.

"My Girl, This Indianness" is a fast-paced and intricate story that achieves a balance between disturbing political memories and a relaxing, if shaky, romance. Dr. Cheddi Jagan comes up as a name with which the narrator is automatically associated, more because of a common Indian ancestry than any political (communist) allegiance. Meanwhile, says the narrator, a certain woman's round, brown eyes "set my heart going like the older of the two Massey-Ferguson tractors we had back home on the Coretyne

Coast." The narrator of this and other stories feels close to India because of movies such as *Hathi Mere Sathi, Mother India, Bobby,* and, of course, *Sholay,* all films that represent a romanticized and heroic nation.

Persaud's depiction of characters, especially women characters, is intriguing. In "Dookie" the female narrator's sex is identified a bit too late in the story, resulting in some confusion. The woman, who is a Muslim, is lectured on Hindu feminism by her Hindu husband. The husband, tellingly, picks the story of Mira (and not of Sita or Sati) to drive home his point. In some of the stories Persaud represents a young woman in the pose of blessing a young man. This is a highly unlikely scene, specifically within the Brahmin culture where the privilege to bless belongs solely to men and sometimes to elderly women (usually a mother or someone in a similar position). "When Men Speak This Way" can be considered an exposé of sexism among certain men who tell bawdy jokes aimed at women including the Queen and the Virgin Mother. Yet, one wonders why the memory of women's painted eyebrows invokes in the narrator the image of "trees." The association between woman and nature is disturbingly devoid of irony.

The Sam Selvon-like pidgin English in which Persaud indulges is effective because it captures the rhythm of the speech. Standard English, a rendering of the Canadian accent, Hindu Wes' Indian speech, Muslim Wes' Indian speech, rasta talk, all combine to make exciting stories. The editing, however, could have been better. "Your in 23 N," "that he a was a 'town bai,'" and "one of Selvon's great-grandmother" are a few phrases that cry out for better proof-reading. Still, readers will especially look forward to the series of 'Writerji stories' that form Part II of the collection.

Djanet Sears, another writer of African descent, has won the 1998 Governor General's Award for Drama, the 1998 Chalmers Award and a couple of Dora Mavor Moore Awards—all for *Harlem Duet.* Sears, who came to Canada from England at the age of fifteen, resides in Toronto and is a singer, actor, director and playwright. She says that she writes to survive racism.

In *Harlem Duet,* Harlem's distant past (the 1860s), near past (1920s), and present meet at the corner of Martin Luther King and Malcolm X boulevards so that race and gender are caught at the intersection of "the dream" and "the nightmare"—a space that is intensely personal and political. The play is about (Shakespeare's) Othello's first love, Billie, a black woman, whom he jilts in order to marry the white (Desde)Mona. Unlike Shakespeare's tragedy, in Sears's play there is hope within all the pain, and this hope is suggested in the naming of the main characters as well as in the ending where a comforting new father-daughter relationship is found. The characters named HIM/HER in the distant past move from grammatical object to grammatical subject in the near past as HE/SHE and to their proper identities as OTHELLO/BILLIE in the present.

The voices of Martin Luther King, Malcolm X, Paul Robeson, Louis Farrakhan, Jesse Jackson, Aretha Franklin, Michael Jackson and a few others variously inaugurate each act and scene and reinforce the complexity and elusiveness of so-called "blackness" while linking the public with the private. Blues music creates tension between the blackness and the whiteness. In the mode of Frantz Fanon, Billie's father, Canada, wonders from where he learnt to do the "Harlem walk" even as he stepped into Harlem for the very first time; Billie's landlady, Magi, speaks of "white minds parading around inside of Black bodies"; Billie interprets her own dream—"She could only see my questions through her blue eyes"—and also asks, "Did you ever consider what hundreds of years of slavery did to the African American psyche?" The solidarity that Billie (like the playwright)

feels with her people has nothing to do with the stereotype of "blackness," which she declares is not the colour of her skin. She slides easily from references to "Black faces" to "brown faces."

The motif of Othello's handkerchief is complicated by another motif, that of a human zygote supposedly frozen and stored in Billie's fridge. The high-point of the play is the curse that Billie pronounces on the black man who has betrayed her for a white woman. Billie's curse invokes an entire cultural past of racial suffering and victimization to which she adds her own. The play has its moments of romance and humour as well. Passages in the first act especially are highly sensuous: "Do you let her sip nectar kisses from a cup of jade studded bronze from your immortal parts?" This lyrical strain, however, is disrupted by a brief question: "Is she White?" The audience also learns how and why you margarine a man's backside.

Those who insist on stereotypes may find some of Sears's characters unconvincing. Magi, who is often a mouth-piece of her author, makes conversation too smoothly on such varied topics as magic, man, baseball, archeology and the unconscious. The studied non-linearity of the scenes that throws the audience into the distant past, present, and the near past at random offers an uncomfortable, jaunty ride that, strangely enough, one enjoys. This play ends in its second act, leaving the majority of its acts to the audience for their thought and action in the world stage.

Littérature québécoise

Madeleine Ducrocq-Poirier
Anne Hébert, parcours d'une œuvre. L'Hexagone $34.95

Luc Bouvier et Max Roy
La littérature québécoise du XXe siècle. Guérin $20.00

Reviewed by René Brisebois

Anne Hébert, parcours d'une œuvre est le titre donné aux Actes publiés à l'occasion du colloque Paris III et Paris IV-Sorbonne tenu en mai 1996, avec la collaboration des Universités de Poitiers et de Rouen. Ce colloque organisé en l'honneur de l'auteure québécoise, dont on voulait souligner ainsi le quatre-vingtième anniversaire, constitue en soi une véritable consécration de l'ensemble de l'œuvre poétique et romanesque. Sans compter la préface de Madeleine Ducrocq-Poirier, il s'agit donc de trente-quatre communications traitant aussi bien de l'univers poétique en particulier, que de la réception critique de l'œuvre, des techniques narratives, des thématiques, ou du traitement cinématographique des ouvrages romanesques. A souligner l'apport des praticiens en poésie que sont Jean Royer et Yves Préfontaine, le premier sur la "poésie de la présence" selon un concept emprunté à Octavio Paz, et le dernier sur le thème exemplaire d'une "esthétique de la colère" chez Anne Hébert, et à l'image d'une certaine modernité québécoise. Une autre approche pour le moins originale, et à laquelle on a ainsi droit, est la lecture kierkegaardienne des *Poèmes* à laquelle Jacques Caron se prête dans son essai. Selon la thématique plus traditionnelle de l'eau et de la lumière, Lucille Roy et Guy Lavorel proposent également chacun leur lecture bachelardienne de l'œuvre poétique, renouant avec une ancienne démarche critique qui semble susciter ici, pour le moins, un regain d'intérêt certain.

Le texte de Jacques Michon, à qui revient le privilège d'ouvrir le colloque, s'intéresse à la première réception critique de l'œuvre qui, jusqu'en 1960, aurait privilégié la seule lecture d'un sens communautaire au détriment de cet autre aspect de l'œuvre que représente la recherche d'une poésie pure dans la lignée directe de l'héritage mallarméen et symboliste. Les contributions d'André Maindron, de Lise Gauvin et d'Annette Hayward, de leur côté, se concentrent plutôt sur la valeur séminale de la prose poétique représentée par les nouvelles du *Torrent* avec leur "art d'échos" et de miroirs. Par son interprétation lacanienne de la nouvelle éponyme du recueil d'Anne Hébert, Mme Hayward se place auprès des nombreuses communications à accorder une importance significative à l'approche psychanalytique, que ce soit Grazia Merler qui nous propose une lecture adlérienne, ou encore Antoine Sirois avec une lecture jungienne de l'œuvre. L'étude de Patricia Louette, alors qu'elle examine cette fois le thème freudien de la castration à l'intérieur du rapport à la mère dans *Kamouraska,* confirme l'intérêt privilégié qui se trouve accordé au roman le plus célèbre d'Anne Hébert. Intérêt que l'on retrouve chez Gaëtan Brulotte qui y traite ainsi de la représentation du corps et de son lien à l'écriture, ou encore chez Marc Gontard, qui y développe plutôt le thème de l'esthétique des couleurs, alors que Claude Filteau examine le roman du point de vue de la thématique girardienne de la rivalité mimétique. De façon parallèle, Janet M. Paterson poursuit dans *Kamouraska* "la figure de l'Autre," alors que Glenda Wagner et selon la même optique narratologique que le texte d'Yvan Leclerc sur la "poétique de la voix" qui la précède, y recherche la présence en creux de l'auteure, protagoniste au sein de son propre roman. Sans oublier John Kristian Sanaker et Pierre Véronneau qui viennent en traiter chacun, ainsi que pour *Les Fous de Bassan,* de l'adaptation cinématographique par rapport au texte romanesque original. De ce dernier roman, Julie Leblanc cherche à approfondir l'aspect intertextuel. Une même théorie que Catrien Nijboer, en l'élargissant à "l'interartistique", s'essaie à appliquer cette fois à *L'Enfant chargé de songes,* roman où Irène Oore, de son côté, examine le thème du silence. Une autre communication qui vient confirmer le renouveau d'intérêt pour les thèmes liés à l'histoire est celle d'Alessandra Ferraro qui tente d'en préciser le rôle dans *Le Premier Jardin.* Du même roman, Daniel Marcheix s'emploie à étudier la question de la confiscation des origines, reprenant le thème bachelardien de "l'épreuve du feu," alors qu'Annabelle M. Rea cherche à identifier les multiples transformations que subissent "les jardins" qui hantent l'œuvre d'Anne Hébert depuis ses origines. Un des essais sur l'un des derniers textes de la romancière est celui de Anne de Vaucher Gravili qui vient scruter dans *Aurélien, Clara, Mademoiselle et le Lieutenant anglais,* le thème universel et éternel du tragique.

La littérature québécoise du XXe siècle, un manuel qui dit s'adresser "principalement aux professeurs et étudiants des cégeps et des collèges du Québec," a pour caractéristique particulière d'accorder une place non négligeable à l'humour et à la chanson, en plus des catégories littéraires traditionnelles que sont la poésie, le théâtre, le roman et l'essai. On peut voir ainsi cohabiter sans difficulté aucune, les textes ou chansons d'un Sol ou d'un Félix Leclerc avec la poésie ou la prose d'un Saint-Denys Garneau ou d'une Francine Noël. Dans la bonne vieille tradition des anthologies littéraires, on a droit ici à une centaine de textes qui se veulent "représentatifs" et que les auteurs proposent donc à l'attention du lecteur. Suivant un parcours chronologique, l'ouvrage de Luc Bouvier et de Max Roy découpe la littérature québécoise du XXe siècle selon trois grandes étapes historiques :

"Terroir et inventions (1895-1935)," "Modernité et contestation (1935-1959)," "Ruptures et pluralisme (1960-1990)." Chaque période se trouve précédée d'une introduction fouillée en deux parties, la première nous présentant le contexte socio-historique avec ses événements et acteurs politiques principaux, la seconde le contexte culturel et littéraire avec ses mouvements et tendances majeurs. Chacun des textes cités se trouve précédé d'une courte biographie de l'auteur de même que d'un bref paragraphe de présentation, dit "piste de lecture," laissant donc une grande liberté à l'enseignant comme à l'élève dans le choix de son approche d'analyse.

Elder's Maddening Vision

R. Bruce Elder
A Body of Vision: Representations of the Body in Recent Film and Poetry. Wilfred Laurier UP $34.95

R. Bruce Elder
The Films of Stan Brakhage in the American Tradition of Ezra Pound, Gertrude Stein, and Charles Olson. Wilfred Laurier UP $58.95

Reviewed by Peter Urquhart

Rare are scholarly works prefaced with protestations of the author's sanity. Rarer still are works of criticism that display virtuoso application of such enormously wide-ranging scholarly traditions as these two, but that are premised on the woefully old-fashioned—and, of course, quite ridiculous—idea that narrative is the enemy of Art. Although R. Bruce Elder's latest two books exhibit both of these eccentric features, they most certainly should not be dismissed out of hand. On the contrary, the very eccentricity of Elder's methods—coupled with his astonishing command of the history of western philosophy and aesthetics, and an apparently encyclopedic knowledge of poetry, painting, dance, experimental film and sculpture—results in two maddeningly rich reads.

In *A Body of Vision*, Elder considers the works of a wide variety of experimental filmmakers—including, among others, the canonized Bruce Connor, Stan Brakhage, Willard Maas and Carolee Shneemann, perhaps best known for, respectively, *A Movie* (1958), *Dog Star Man* (1961-64), *The Geography of the Body* (1943), and *Fuses* (1964-67)—alongside writings on corporeality by Antonin Artaud and Leonard Cohen. The centuries-old divisions between body and spirit and between body and mind are the central dilemma upon which Elder's analysis of these works turns. Both his motivation for undertaking the study and his critical position are pithily outlined when he quotes an exchange from Jean-Luc Godard's *Hélas pour moi* (1993):

> A woman tells a wealthy businessman that "I learned yesterday that the flesh can be sad."
> "Who taught you that?" he asks.
> "My body," the woman answers.
> "I don't know what you're talking about," he says.

The businessman, Elder explains, argues both from the vantage point of modernity and from what he calls "the hegemony of the word," which "threatens to reduce the body to just one more meta-linguistic signifier." And it is to this figure of modernity that Elder directs his critique. An intriguing and persuasive case is made that art concerned with experience and corporeality, and with the relations between the two, has so far been insufficiently theorized.

In *The Films of Stan Brakhage*, Elder does exactly what his subtitle promises, and situates Brakhage's *oeuvre* firmly in the context of an American tradition. He offers some excellent insights into the films, and it is here—in contextualized close analysis—where both books shine. For example, in drawing a trajectory beginning with the New England transcendentalists, but especially Emerson and Thoreau, through modernists

such as William Carlos Williams, Gertrude Stein, and to the fifties avant-garde of John Cage (where the birth of Brakhage's aesthetic is usually situated), Elder's reading of individual films benefits from the combined force of historical momentum—each step advancing the argument temporally and practically.

Another key aspect of the Brakhage aesthetic is the film-maker's overarching concern with pure seeing. As William Wees has explained in his superb study of the aesthetics of experimental film, "the untutored eye" is a persistent and sustaining metaphor in Stan Brakhage's visual aesthetics, and, "if poets are 'literalists of the imagination,' in Marianne Moore's well-known phrase, then Brakhage is a literalist of perception, striving to make equivalents of what he sees, as he actually sees it." And as Brakhage himself explains in his *Metaphors on Vision*, "imagine an eye unruled by man-made laws of perspective, an eye unprejudiced by compositional logic, an eye which does not respond to the name of everything but which must know each object encountered in life through an adventure of perception. How many colours are there in a field of grass to the crawling baby unaware of 'Green'?" Elder links this aspect of Brakhage's philosophy to quite profound ruminations on experience and their primordial manifestations in the tradition under examination, ruminations which clearly attempt to re-introduce sensation and bodily (as opposed to simply intellectual) experience for the serious consideration of art.

These two works work as companion pieces insofar as the body book contains much commentary on Brakhage's *oeuvre*, while the Brakhage book is replete with discussion of all manner of images of the body in poetry and film. Both texts draw on various philosophical traditions in their analysis—importantly Kant's *Critique of Judgement* in *A Body of Vision*, and Schopenhauer's distinction between two aspects of the body—while each text also wanders far afield from these overriding concerns, meandering through Gnosticism, modern dance theory, New Criticism, Romantic poetry: you name it. One result of this application of such disparate critical and theoretical tools is to render the already arcane subjects of analysis (that is, the "texts"—a very dirty word to Elder) all the more obscure to the non-specialist, since to follow the analysis of, say, Carolee Shneemann's classic erotic experimental film *Fuses*, we also need to follow digressions into Leonard Cohen, Luce Irigaray, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Anton Ehrenzweig, Man Ray, Wilhelm Reich, and many, many others. Another result of Elder's strategy is that treating everyone equally results in a degree of evaluative levelling, which seems to elevate even minor artists to Brakhage's star status, an effect that certainly serves Elder's *modus operandi* of avant-garde boosterism.

Another of the book's minor flaws is its editorial peculiarities. For example, while a case could certainly be made for spelling the celebrated Soviet film-maker's name "Sergej Ejzenstejn" (as Elder does) to reflect more accurately the sound of the Cyrillic characters than the ubiquitous conventional English spelling, to do so without comment is to be wilfully obscurantist. And more seriously, Elder may know something about Willard Maas's name that I do not, but the great American experimental film-maker's name in all the available literature on his work is "Willard" and not "Williard" as Elder spells it throughout the text. This is either a glaring error, or, like the spelling of Eisenstein, an unannounced corrective to a mistake nobody thought he or she was making.

These quibbles may sound like nit-picking, but they point to an over-riding impression left by these texts: that Elder feels attacked by a critical establishment, and his tone throughout is indeed defensive

in the extreme. In fact, Elder devotes a good portion of his preface to *The Films of Stan Brakhage* to attacking unnamed "post-modern theorists" and for their "concern with theory and popular culture," for their "adherence to a contextual aesthetics which has had the effect of reducing art to commentary," which together result in "reducing experience to a common mode, making it less varied, less disruptive, less complex." Here, as throughout *A Body of Vision*, Elder promotes his own view that such theorizing, as a direct consequence of modernity's homogenizing effects, is unable and unwilling to account for intangible, unintellectual (that is, bodily-sensational), and spiritual dimensions of artistic expression and apprehension, the dimension he considers of special interest. Elder's devotion to Brakhage's work, thus comes as no surprise, but, while his texts are rich in insight into the philosophy and aesthetics of the most famous avant-garde film-maker ever, they also result in wholesale celebration and praise. No feature of Brakhage's *oeuvre*, which comprises many hundreds of films, is up for criticism here. In fact, the relatively common complaint—a clearly descriptive rather than necessarily evaluative one—against Brakhage's more recent films (and one that I make myself), that they are all more or less the same, is directly dismissed not with argument or demonstration, but with this crankily asserted rebuttal: "I can't think of any other oeuvre of comparable diversity in all the history of film."

A celebrated film-maker, teacher, and critic, Elder has elsewhere achieved a certain critical notoriety, most famously for his dogmatic manifesto "The Cinema We Need"(1985). Calling for an entirely experimental, non- or anti-narrative cinema in Canada (the kind of films Elder makes himself), this essay provoked storms of rebuttal, critique, and denunciation from many leading Canadian and non-Canadian scholars of cinema, but also engendered a meaningful debate over what is at stake in the defining of a national cinema, prescriptively or otherwise. Similarly here, with these two books, Elder makes dazzlingly strong cases for his positions on the metaphysical transformations and provocations provided by certain bodily images and by Brakhage's films generally, while also occasionally infuriating the reader with the prescriptiveness of his evaluations.

Two Budding Talents

Anne Fleming
Pool-Hopping and Other Stories. Polestar $16.95

Sara O'Leary
Comfort Me with Apples. Thistledown Press n.p.

Reviewed by R. W. Stedingh

Of the two books under review, Anne Fleming's short stories are the more venturesome in style largely because she varies voice, point-of-view and style to suit the subject matter and mood of each story. In *Pool-Hopping and Other Stories* she takes an exceptional dive into the extraordinary lives of her "ordinary" characters in what is a limited literary *tour de force*. Reading this book, one is pleasantly surprised by these tales about the often messy chaos of urban life in the nineties. With edgy humour and sagacity, Fleming creates a fascinating, diverse cast of characters—women and men, old, middle-aged and young, many of them queer, lesbian or gay—all of whom share a sense of disorder rippling beneath the fragile surface of their lives. In nearly every story, characters are placed in sometimes confusing but always challenging situations in which their passion and compassion are the only redeeming factors of their existences, and often their personal worlds spin out of control. Many of Fleming's characters attempt to stave off their own confusion with risky, desperate,

sometimes brave, and often wrong-headed gestures of generosity.

But several of the stories in this collection are flawed aesthetically. "The Defining Moments of My Life," the first story in the collection, lacks a pleasing sense of proportion. Part One of the story consists of the narrator's pregnant mother's inane musing about what she considers will be the major events in her daughter's life—only a few pages of narrative-description—while Part Two of the story presents the daughter telling, with much humour and levity, what the actual defining moments of her life were for some fifteen pages. There is clearly a beginning and middle to this story, but there is no conclusive end. As a piece it simply lacks closure unless all Fleming wanted to do was contrast the mother's and the child's views and at the same time portray an adolescent lesbian, which is far from climactic and would be very disappointing.

The last "story" in this collection, "Bugged," also suffers aesthetically in that it does not meet the expectations of the short story form. While it does qualify as narrative to a limited degree, it is more a mood piece in which a lesbian narrator complains about her lover, gets depressed over the many little things that "bug" her and amount to a big thing, but in the end finds salvation in the lubricous, the pure physicality of their love-making. Only two and a half pages long, it doesn't even qualify as a short-short, and although there is an event occurring in the narrator's mind, it is hardly significant, however revealing, of a rather shallow character.

There are several other stories in this collection which are structurally disappointing in that they reveal a simplistic approach to the actions of their characters. But underlying this disappointment is another problem: Fleming's treatment of gender politics. While she is always politically correct, she seems to be championing the uniqueness of lesbianism in stories like "Anomaly" and "Virginia." In both, the rendering is a bit precious because it is ingratiating, and the whole matter of lesbianism becomes irritating. By the same token, the males in Fleming's "Nelson," "Solar Plexus" and "Conkers" come off as insensitive, adolescent klutzes or brutal rapists who have no idea how to relate to the young women in these stories.

Two superb stories go far beyond making an issue of a character's sexuality. In "Atmospherics," a story about a group of lesbians who get together to celebrate the winter solstice by telling tales of hope to each other, all with lesbian themes, does not become obtrusively a matter of sexual preference. Here, the very human concerns of love and jealousy of the characters for one another are the major theme. We see these women in a larger human and humane sense, and that is a testament to Fleming's art as well as her possible world view. This humanism comes out again in "You Would Know What to Do." Here the men in the story are given sympathetic treatment in what is the best piece in the collection. The plot is superbly paced and Fleming's timing of montages is artfully pleasing. There is a careful blending of character and action so that neither element is obtrusive. Here, a 68-year old father is realistically portrayed. He is about to rob a bank in order to support his gay, HIV positive son and his lover. This is a touching story, and also the most traditional in form, in which Fleming is at the top of her form. This first collection promises much and often delivers. Fleming's future work will be well worth waiting for.

Sara O'Leary's *Comfort Me with Apples* is less realistic in intent, and less traditional in form. The ten stories and short novella in this collection are uneven in quality, the style often cursory, terse and matter-of-fact and her development of characters and plots sometimes weak. They verge on the

"experimental" in their use of rapid and brief montage, and rare use of figurative language and telling detail; the traditional methods of plot and character development are kept to an insufficient minimum. But in all of the stories and the novella, O'Leary's wit and sardonic energy create a narrative surface that successfully moves from beginnings to ends. This narrative surface usually consists of a narrator-protagonist telling her story and/or that of others with numerous reversals, paradoxes and understatement. These rhetorical devices are organic to all the stories, and in their use O'Leary is an astute craftsperson. Her spare style constantly brims with abrupt insight. After reading any one of these stories, the reader is carried beneath the narrative surface to a subtext full of the agony of heartbreak. It is this sense of emotional cataclysm that typifies all O'Leary's narratives. It is a spiritual damage all her characters are trying to overcome. More often than not, however, they do not succeed, making the stories all the more tragic. While this might create a monotonous atmosphere or mood in her work, O'Leary salvages each narrative with desperate humour in almost every paragraph.

This desperate humour in the face of adversity especially characterizes "All I Ever Wanted Was the Moon." In this story the narrator-protagonist discovers her lover is married. As a result her thoughts, riotously rendered, and her irrational actions lead to her "adopting" Homer, an eccentric young man as her live-in lover. But in a last-ditch effort to win back her married lover, she flies to Toronto, meets him in a hotel where she gets the picture that she is just being used. Returning to Saskatoon and Homer, she looks out the window at the moon as he makes love to her, wondering, "if I could see the moon, could the moon see me?" Like most of the stories, this one is not optimistic.

While most of the narratives in this collection are well-structured, "Jenny's IUD" and "The Gazebo Story" fail miserably. The first consists of notes toward a character sketch, and the second is an unsuccessful take-off on the sixties ballad, "Frankie and Johnny." Perhaps the most touching story (because O'Leary controls the mood so well) is "Edith and the Secondhand Dream." Living in poverty with her single mother who runs a thrift store, the adolescent Edith is sexually taken advantage of by a boy she has no real feelings for—still another story in which people fail to connect. At the heart of the story is Edith's great fear that she is being deserted by everyone. Believing herself pregnant, Edith is tormented by the desertion of her classmates at school and her "boyfriend," but she discovers at the end of the story that she is not pregnant after all. In the last paragraph she lies in a tub of hot water, ". . . with her ears beneath the water so that all she can hear is her own heart beating."

"Big as Life," a novella, is more an extended short story in the vein of her shorter narratives. It deals with a young woman who mourns the death of her mother (whom, she comes to realize, she never really knew in life). She finds out from the man whom she so far considered her father that he adopted her, and that she was conceived during her mother's wild fling on the West Coast. The plot, basically linear, is conveyed in rapid, short montages, but there is little attempt at developing the character of the narrator-protagonist. Rather, O'Leary focuses on the character of the mother who fills the narrator's thoughts. There is not much significant action, and there is only the rare use of dialogue, both methods of development that would make the characters more believable.

In all of O'Leary's narratives, the characters display a muddled bravery, reflecting without judgement on the failures of their own and their parents' generations and facing the task of creating rules for living from

scratch for themselves, their friends, their lovers and their children. Because they often fail, and because O'Leary is far from sentimental in her treatment of them, these characters are all the more endearing.

Angry (Nice) Young Men

Brad Fraser
Martin Yesterday. NeWest $13.95

Drew Hayden Taylor
alterNatives. Talonbooks n.p.

David Gow
Cherry Docs. Scirocco n.p.

Reviewed by Len Falkenstein

It might well be argued that just as Canadians have never had a great appetite for hard-hitting political drama, neither have our stages fostered many playwrights working within such a tradition. Running counter to what Brad Fraser, in his combative introduction to *Martin Yesterday,* refers to as this widespread "general apathy," each of these plays might be described as an "issues drama," but of a very Canadian nature. While the style, targets and metaphors may occasionally be broad, each of these plays demonstrates a fundamental concern with fairness and understanding in dealing with potentially explosive issues that is decidedly *anti*-polemical, and that might equally be judged either timorously non-committal or commendably expressive of the values of conciliation and tolerance relentlessly promoted as intrinsic to our national character.

Of the three dramas, this is least true of *Martin Yesterday,* a sequel of sorts to *Poor Super Man* that sees the earlier play's married turned gay cartoonist, Matt, fall into an emotionally abusive relationship with a manipulative Toronto city councillor. Nonetheless, Fraser's characterization of the play in his introduction as an "an angry and confrontational" work that provoked outrage by shocking mainstream sensibilities within both the straight and gay communities seems something of an overstatement. Or at least this is the sense one gets from reading the play in this incarnation (its third, the text having been revised after each of its first two productions). In detailing the production, reception, and revision history of *Martin Yesterday,* Fraser's introduction might be read as offering a potential explanation for the play's tonal and polemical inconsistencies. He begins by explaining that from early on he knew that the play was likely to offend virtually everyone ("straight men," "women," "half the gay audience," "the media") for different reasons, and then points to the widescale "bewildered to hateful" reaction to the first production as proof that he succeeded in his intentions (an exercise in after-the-fact attribution of motives that, whatever its validity, is hard not to read as rather convenient and self-serving). However, as Fraser goes on to reveal, certain of his subsequent revisions were, at least in part, concessions to some of the most vocal criticisms of the play: he toned down much of the graphic nudity and sex in the original script; added a straight female character explicitly to "represent" women's "concerns"; and humanized the title character, a dangerously irresponsible HIV-positive predator (and for this reason a figure who had opened Fraser to charges of homophobia from within the gay community). Notably, Fraser suggests that from the very beginning he hoped to create a work that would have "ultra-universal" resonances both despite and because of its "ultra-specific" gay milieu. In blunting the edges of the play through revision and crowding it with issues (everything from the Holocaust to feminist issues to Quebec separatism is explored through the vehicle of the Relationship Gone Bad) in an apparent attempt to broaden the appeal of the play

and "universality," however, Fraser may actually have diffused its impact. In the end, *Martin Yesterday* seems much less angry than a desperate, considered (and, one might argue, very Canadian) plea for various forms of understanding.

alterNatives, by Ojibway playwright Drew Hayden Taylor (whose earlier plays include *Toronto at Dreamer's Rock* and *The Bootlegger's Blues*), is markedly simpler and more focused than *Martin Yesterday* in scale, structure, and style. Taylor's genre of choice is satire (occasionally bluntly heavy-handed, frequently sharply incisive), and his subject the racial and cultural divisions that continue to vex relations between Natives and non-Natives in Canada. To emphasize how deeply the faultlines within and between the two communities run, Taylor parachutes behind the frontlines of the battles over race and identity politics to a middle-class living room in university-educated, white, liberal Canada, precisely the sort of place where, according to popular belief, such tensions no longer exist. The play suggests that such thinking is wishful, indeed, in depicting the slow spiral into rancour of a dinner party intended to have been a coming-out celebration for newly cohabitating couple Angel (an urban Native science fiction writer) and Colleen (a Jewish Native Literature professor). The other guests include white couple Dale and Michelle (he a rather dim-witted computer programmer and she a rabidly vegetarian veterinarian) and Bobby and Yvonne, two estranged friends of Angel (Yvonne a former lover) who are self-described "alterNative warriors," that is, Native activists who challenge accepted orthodoxies about Native identity and history held by both the Native and non-Native communities, "a new breed of warriors who have an allegiance to the truth, rather than tradition." As the wine flows, tensions come to a head over Dale's moronic and occasionally borderline racist (albeit innocent) obsession with all things Native, Michelle's rabid intolerance of all things carnivorous (leading Bobby and Yvonne to draw parallels between her crusading vegetarianism and European colonization of North America), and Colleen's and Yvonne's competing affections for Angel, which are played out in the form of a vicious tug of war for his Native soul. He, however, is determined to remain apolitical, resisting Colleen's attempts to mold him into the next Great Native Writer and Yvonne's to entice him to rejoin the activist fold. Eventually, everyone is exposed as unsympathetic: Colleen as a Native wannabe, Dale and Michelle as simmering intolerance wrapped in a liberal facade, Yvonne and Bobby as priggishly self-righteous, and Angel as spineless.

In his introduction to the text, Taylor vouches for the veracity of his characters, asserting that "just under ninety percent of what you will read is true, accurate, and real" and citing the outraged criticisms of select audience members both Native and non-Native as proof of the play's evenhandedness. While it may refuse to take sides, however, the play has a contrived quality: the characters are extreme types, and their disputes seem very manufactured. Although in satire characters typically serve ideas and political agenda rather than the other way around, the seams of Taylor's construction are often glaring. And while the play effectively dramatizes an ongoing problem with few easy solutions, one wonders if it might not have been possible to offer "alternatives" more positive (and less ironized) than either Angel's abdication of responsibility or Colleen's trite Heritage Department clarion call: "There's a million different things that we all hold dear, and a million things we don't. Just accept it. Can't we leave it at that and have a nice dinner?"

In contrast to Fraser and Taylor, emerging playwright David Gow (whose other plays include the recent *Bea's Niece*) takes a more

subtle and potentially disturbing approach to exploring ugly hatreds lurking beneath the placid surface of Canadian society in *Cherry Docs*, which takes its title from the deep red combat boots worn by Mike, the white supremacist on trial for a racist murder in this spare and powerful two-hander. The Legal Aid lawyer appointed to defend him is Danny, a Jew who has been shaped by and personifies all the best and most tolerant qualities of multicultural Toronto. Despite his revulsion for Mike and his crime, Danny becomes obsessed with the case and with reforming Mike, to the point of sacrificing his marriage and comfortable upper-income bracket life; in the process, he is forced to acknowledge and confront many of his own prejudices. As this capsule plot summary suggests, Gow's script is a minefield of potential clichés: the hard-nosed lawyer (teacher/social worker/cop/psychologist) whose tough-love approach saves the lost racist (dropout/delinquent/criminal) but suffers enormously in the process, and who comes to recognize that he shares many of the same failings as his charge. Although these clichés are not always entirely avoided, the script rises above its somewhat melodramatic elements in Gow's depiction of Danny as a deeply flawed character driven by vanity and blind adherence to a set of values that he has never subjected to probing critical scrutiny, and thus never fully internalized. In depicting Danny's failure to do so as a failure writ small of the same smugly self-righteous Canadian liberalism challenged in both *Martin Yesterday* and *alterNatives*, Gow suggests that the foundations of our most cherished, supposedly cohesive, national values are less than unshakeable, while still (again in company with Fraser and Taylor) endorsing the triumph of those values as necessary and laudable.

To the New World

Don Gillmor
The desire of every living thing: A search for home. Random House $29.95

Richard White
Gentlemen Engineers: The Working Lives of Frank and Walter Shanly. U Toronto P $50.00

Reviewed by Bryan N. S. Gooch

Many books deal with immigration, with individuals and families who, in search of paradise or refuge (or something in between), come to Canada bearing, if almost unwittingly, pieces of a past life too deeply embedded to be left behind. What does come here in the way of recollections and customs often contributes markedly to the Canadian cultural loam, yet those unforgotten elements frequently prompt their inheritors or objective observers in later generations to reconsider the past. Such reviews can take on the form of a physical journey as in *The desire of every living thing* or, indeed, revelations of historical record, probed and analysed, as in *Gentlemen Engineers*.

Gillmor's book attempts to fathom the past of his maternal grandmother (whose illegitimacy comes as a shocking revaelation to the family) and maternal great-grandfather, of the Ross and Mainland families respectively. The first two chapters set the narrative in Winnipeg, with a brief glimpse of a later move by the family to Calgary. They nicely weave details of early Scottish migration to the prairies with elements of family history. Gillmor's interest in his grandmother Georgina (Ross) Mainland takes him to Scotland to look at family sites and to search for genealogical details; here personal heritage is woven seamlessly into broader historical and modern issues as the narrator pursues his quest from the Lowlands to the Highlands (reminiscences of the battle of Culloden and the later infamous clearances come

clearly into view along the way) on the road north, to Inverness, Scourie, Kinlochburn, Strathnaver, and Lerwick in the Shetlands. The mixture of the new and old works magically, offering a blend of fact, humour and imagination given immediacy by the first-person viewpoint and inclusion of various voices encountered on the way. The seventh and later chapters return the focus to Canada, to look at the history of the Selkirk settlement, hence, the background of Winnipeg and the rise of that city, at the loss of a family farm, the 1919 general strike and riot, Gillmor's grandparents' sojourn in Detroit and return with the Great Depression, and the rise of young, modernistic Calgary as the oil industry takes hold. Along the way, as the description moves to meet the present, are memories of the author's own youth, adolescence and maturity, often moments of poignancy and anguish related with a mixture of sensitivity and resolve that has real charm. Through the account, too, there is a telling universality. Many readers, even if their families have only recently arrived in this country, will find themselves thinking of their own lineage. If there is any regret about this book, it lies in the lack of a detailed bibliography that would have been of particular value to students of social history.

Gentlemen Engineers, which looks at the careers of brothers Frank and Walter Shanly in the nineteenth century, is also concerned with a family exodus, this one from Ireland in the 1830s to Ontario, where their father thought gentlemanly existence on a substantial rural estate could be pursued without great impediment. Difficulties and debts mounted, and the children moved away, Walter and later Frank turning to engineering and learning on the job rather than through any organised professional training program. As White's fascinating, clearly organised and well written account develops, the reader is given insight into early business and construction enterprises, especially in Canada's West and the northern United States, and the way in which both brothers perceived themselves as gentlemen despite an increasingly competitive, burgeoning world in which contracts were not always easily obtained, nor, therefore, the money which would allow them to live with security in a manner befitting their ideals. Walter got on with his life and became the family's financial pillar, providing money for his father and for Frank, who fathered an illegitimate child in the United States, later married and had a family in Canada, continually expended vast sums well beyond his means, and died in debt, despite an admirable reputation and no mean range of accomplishments. The narrative is thoroughly documented and offers details of the day-to-day work of engineers, contractors and consultants, the roles of governmental and corporate boards, the nature of surveys in the bush, construction difficulties and practices, and the preparation of financial estimates. In one sense, this is an insightful comment on the struggle for survival of old-world, gentlemanly mores in a changing, commercial ethos; in another, it is a fascinating study of the building of some of the central components in the major transportation network which would facilitate the movement of goods and people, mostly in central Canada, including the Welland Canal, the Grand Trunk Railway and the Intercolonial railway, as well as the Hoosac tunnel in the United States. Walter and Frank rose to senior positions. Walter's career, his technical insights and his insistence on high maintenance standards in his projects are particularly impressive. He was sometime Manager of the Grand Trunk and a Member of Parliament (a Tory, on Sir John A. Macdonald's side of the House), though he did not always vote with his party. Fully annotated, White's book offers a remarkably full and clearly arranged bibliography, along with an index and a selection of pertinent illustrations.

Landmark Translations from Literary Québec

François Gravel. Sheila Fischman, trans.
Miss September. Cormorant $18.95

Lise Bissonnette. Sheila Fischman, trans.
Cruelties. Anansi $19.95

Normand Chaurette. Linda Gaboriau, trans.
Fragments of a Farewell Letter Read by Geologists. Talonbooks $14.95

Marie-Claire Blais. Nigel Spencer, trans.
Wintersleep. Ronsdale $14.95

Reviewed by Susan Knutson

Readers of English who follow the literature of Québec will welcome these works by award-winning Québecois writers and translators.

The most light-hearted of the four is Sheila Fischman's translation of François Gravel's best-seller *Miss Septembre*, published in 1996 by Québec/Amérique. Fischman captures the mood of the French text, which cheerfully mixes detective novel with love story to create a stylish hybrid to freshen some traditional scenarios. Detective Lieutenant Brodeur is a teddy-bearish police officer reminiscent of Raymond Chandler's Marlowe. He does not hesitate during his investigation to employ "the old theory, inspired by acupuncture, that a knee in the balls can sometimes have a miraculous effect on memory problems." The irony disguises human-rights abuse in the costume of hard-boiled realism. Astonishingly, Gravel's narrator goes on to explain that for Brodeur, who worked as a lawyer before he joined the police force, this interrogation technique depends on the legal interpretation of the prisoner as non-human. Well, say no more.

The criminal, Geneviève Vallières, is the upper-class daughter of professional parents, who works as an exotic dancer for six months before she pulls off "the little masterpiece of a bank heist" which brings Brodeur into her life. It is obvious enough what will happen, but it's fun, and the ending is truly unusual, drawing on Brodeur's knowledge of the law and raising philosophical questions about crime, private property, love and the quality of life. The novel maintains the realistic style of popular detective fiction while evoking a more indeterminate world where right and wrong are confounded and where critical readings of class erode the legal defence of private property. As the narrator explains, white-collar criminals today are the aristocrats of crime. With the singular exception, of course, of Miss September.

Lise Bissonette also raises questions about criminality, probing the murderous malice and sexual menace that haunt our societies and, sometimes, our hearts. Sheila Fischman translates the surgical style of the acclaimed French edition, *Quittes et Doubles* (1998), presenting stories and prefatory poems as enigmatic glosses in an anatomy of cruelty. Surreal effects are achieved in a variety of ways; in "Lovers," the narrator is a red chalk sketch of a woman's sex: "*My lovers die ugly and cold / I live to forget them / I was one hundred years when the last one moved on / the wily one who excelled at causing pain / He was handsome, I'd already killed him.*" Certain stories propose an unreliable physical world. "The Calliope" represents a dying musical instrument which consumes the better part of an orchestra. "The Witness" would have a crown prosecutor in a murder case impregnated by the accused before the court: "she was naked under the robe, and he impaled her, in a few seconds of pure copulation." "The Knife" looks hard at the perfectly banal—only the symbolic knife is at all surreal: "If I cross my legs / Says the woman he desires / You'll need a knife / Your hands will be cold / And I won't come."

Human beings come off very poorly in these stories; the male characters by and large are fools or murderers whose obses-

sions power the plots. Negative female stereotypes—the *femme fatale,* the frigid bitch, the predatory lesbian—are brought most alarmingly to life.

Textual unreliability is also at issue in Normand Chaurette's *Fragments of a Farewell Letter Read by Geologists,* a play published in French in 1986 and produced in 1988 by the *Théâtre de Quat'Sous* in Montreal. Four geologists who accompanied Tony van Saikin on a humanitarian expedition to the Mekong Delta, in Cambodia, are now testifying at an inquiry into the failure of that expedition and the reasons for Van Saikin's death. Linda Gaboriau transmits the perfect neutrality of this drama—an enquiry which could be set anywhere in Europe or North America; a murder, suicide or accidental death which could have occurred close to any mighty river, in the tropics or, as the play suggests, on the Saint Lawrence. Nikols Ostwald chairs the inquiry, and the four geologists, an engineer, and a medical doctor who was Van Saikin's wife all testify, read fragments of what may have been a farewell letter, and refer to voluminous technical and scientific reports. These proceedings conceal the most elementary facts of the case. Ostwald's failure to establish how or why Van Saikin dies underlines the fragility of reason, causality and law, all of which he attempts to represent. In performance this septet of voices will be dramatic, uncanny, explosive.

Marie-Claire Blais' *Wintersleep,* five chamber plays written in the late 1970s, was published in 1984 as *Sommeil d'hiver,* and here appears in English translation for the first time. The scripts are lyrical, intelligent and intense, with an understanding of sixties culture and the early years of the women's movement that is a bit of a shock to read, today:

> MAN: This is the life!
> WOMAN: This hotel's been built on an ocean of misery. He's right, though; this is good. This city's built on the unhappiness of thousands, but we're just fine, aren't we? Actually, a lot of tourists never see the city. They only have eyes for the sun, their beatitude of health.
> MAN: Lucky to be on holiday!

Politicized by her exposure to human misery in the third-world country where she has been taken on vacation, this wife of twenty years trembles on the point of leaving her husband. Perhaps she just needs a rest? "There are cures," she says, "for our brief lucid moments, a quick remedy for our consciences."

In his introduction, Nigel Spencer points out that until now these plays have been performed as radio plays, which is fine, except that four of the five were meant to be much more. "Wintersleep" is "undisputedly a stage play working with explicit theatre conventions: blocking, doubling, lighting, set, special effects and so on. With its tragicomic reworking of ritual and the Medieval morality play, plus more than a hint of ballet and a very modern vision of Everyman, it is the essence of the visceral, communal experience that is theatre." Spencer also explores the staging possibilities of "Exile," which are, he argues, the "most complete and brilliant in the collection." And it is an extraordinary collection which will likely enhance Marie-Claire Blais' status as a playwright among English-speaking readers and audiences.

La Créativité polymorphe

Hélène Guy et André Marquis
Le choc des écritures. Nota bene $20.00

Andrée Mercier et Esther Pelletier
L'Adaptation dans tous ses états. Nota bene $22.00

Reviewed by Milka Beck

Écrit par des spécialistes et chercheurs en littérature, communication et linguistique, l'ouvrage de Guy et Marquis regroupe dix-huit textes didactiques qui portent sur la problématique de la création littéraire et de la communication écrite actuelles aux trois cycles universitaires au Québec. Tout en évoquant les procédés, les analyses et les théories littéraires, les auteurs y conjuguent également l'apport de nouvelles méthodes et des technologies, sans faillir à relater leurs propres expériences. La participation à des ateliers d'écriture et de recherche apportent aux étudiants des réponses mais soulèvent des questions quant au processus de l'écriture. En plus, l'hybridité des textes semble constituer une problématique quant à l'emploi de nouvelles technologies et l'utilisation des procédés, comme l'indiquent les deux autres.

André Carpentier, Paul Chanel Malenfant et André Marquis explorent des procédés d'écriture singuliers. En offrant des exemples de sa propre expérience, Carpentier relate les fonctions multiples du carnet. Malenfant expose l'hybridité des genres et souligne l'importance d'une œuvre polymorphe soumise à de multiples adaptations et qui évoque également le lien entre l'écrivain et le lecteur. En outre, l'auteur souligne avec conviction l'importance des ateliers dans lesquels les étudiants gagnent une expérience empirique et où la création s'épanouit. André Marquis, quant à lui, justifie la technique du collage dans des ateliers de création et qui aboutit à des livres de poésie. En donnant des exemples personnels, l'auteur révèle les sources d'inspiration sans oublier de souligner les contraintes de ce processus et l'atout de l'informatique.

Un deuxième groupe entame le thème des langages théoriques et fictifs. Hélène Guy introduit l'approche de la "praxéologie": conjugaison qui permet à l'étudiant d'évaluer et de maîtriser sa démarche. Christiane Lahaie évoque, pour sa part, la problématique de la création et de la réflexion critique d'un langage personnel et commun comme dynamismes qu'un étudiant peut conjuguer dans sa création. Nathalie Watteyne, quant à elle, intitule son article "Endurer l'équivoque" où elle élabore sur cette force polymorphe qui prête à des recherches surtout en poésie. Une réflexion qui met en valeur la symbiose des langages de la théorie et de la création est exposée dans l'article de Anne-Marie Clément. Enfin, Robert Yergeau confirme l'association entre création et institution, étude qui évoque, d'une part, les contraintes et, d'autre part, les pouvoirs des ateliers à l'université.

Par des biais différents, les Anne Peyrousse, Ginette Bureau, Évelyne Miljours et Christiane Lahaie, chacune à leur manière et respectivement, analysent les contextes suivants : l'évolution de la fiction poétique et de la poésie ; l'analyse autobiographique, la définition du "rituel" et de la crise du langage symbolique ; l'entreprise de la force inspiratrice du monologue intérieur. En dernier lieu, l'adaptation hybride, comme entreprise, jette un nouveau regard sur la lecture d'une œuvre.

André Marquis, Céline Beaudet, Brigitte Blanchard et Hélène Cajolet-Laganière choisissent le biais des procédés d'écriture en rédaction, afin d'explorer ce qu'est la créativité polymorphe. Le premier partage son expérience du processus de la création directement sur l'écran. Il y évoque aussi la nécessité du développement des stratégies pédagogiques qui porteront sur les progrès technologiques, pour que les étudiants puissent s'y adapter plus facilement. C'est

la "Reformulation : un outil de créativité pour vulgariser la science" que Blanchard et Cajolet-Laganière dévoilent dans leur article. Quant à Céline Beaudet, elle analyse un discours polémique et évoque la liaison de ce dernier avec l'approche de fiction. En dernier lieu, Hélène Guy, Martin Gélinas , Carl Lacharité et Stéphanie Moreau exposent une étude des pratiques d'écriture auprès de nouveaux auteurs, tandis que Charles Pelletier aborde le sujet de la structuration des textes.

Quant au collectif de Mercier et Pelletier, relvi-ci comporte les articles de treize auteurs qui révèlent la nature polymorphe de l'adaptation, ses manifestations multiples à travers le temps, ainsi que son exposition à des modes et à des technologies nouvelles. Les genres et les modes évoqués inclus : Théâtre, roman, cinéma, peinture et photographique, l'adaptation dramatique télévisuelle ou radiophonique, la critique d'art, le clip, la bande dessinée et l'exposition muséale.

Andrée Mercier analyse le rapport entre le cinéma et la littérature, expose la présence de nouvelles technologies visuelles, puis aborde l'adaptation fictive et hybride. Lise Gauvin et Michel Laroche examinent la dimension polymorphe de l'adaptation et *Les Portes Tournantes* leur sert d'exemple parmi d'autres. C'est l'adaptation des textes dramatiques pour la télévision que Christiane Lahaie aborde. L'auteur relate avec habileté les défis de la "transmédiatisation" et du "téléthéâtre." Sur un ton positif Maryse Souchard entreprend l'analyse de la mise en scène symboliste. Ayant comme exemples les œuvres de Koltès et les mises en scène de Chéreau, elle considère les transformations plurielles de l'adaptation d'une œuvre. Quant à l'article de Françoise Lucbert, il met en relief la problématique que soulève l'adaptation d'une oeuvre picturale en texte.

Ouellet propose l'adaptation picturale, en donnant comme exemple *L'embarquement de la Reine de Saba* de Butor. Il porte son regard sur : "L'adaptation comme recréation," une entreprise défiante qui engendre plusieurs éléments : l'œuvre plastique, l'écriture "chiffrée" ou "dialogique," le "désir" comme fonction de représentation . . . Pour sa part, David Karel jette une optique à la fois optimiste et nouvelle sur l'art de la création. Il analyse l'adaptation de la peinture à la photographie. Esther Pelletier intitule son article "Création et adaptation." Appuyant sa démarche sur les travaux des psychanalystes, elle évoque les entités et le thème de l'adaptation d'un texte littéraire en réalisation cinématographique. De plus, l'auteur élabore sur les causes qui déclenchent la création telle que la genèse de la création après une crise. Philippe Dubé considère l'hybridité d'un nouveau genre de "mixte-média" dans l'espace muséal. Les adaptations de *Marie-Chapdelaine* servent de toile de fond à son analyse. Roger Chamberland parle du vidéo-clip, langage visuel qui offre une nouvelle esthétique hybride. Il se constitue des genres tels que la musique, la publicité, le cinéma, dont la conjugaison aboutit à une adaptation novatrice grâce au moyen de nouvelles technologies. Paul Bleton et Richard Saint-Gelais étudient respectivement les éléments "entre photo et graffiti" ainsi que "l'adaptation et la transfictionnalité."

Making Associations

Thomas King
Truth & Bright Water. HarperCollins $32.00

Basil Johnston
Crazy Dave. Key Porter $24.95

Reviewed by Jennifer Andrews

In an essay titled "Godzilla vs. Post-Colonial," published in 1990, Thomas King proposed some alternative categories for discussing Native literature, ones that do not rely on the arrival of European settlers in the New World to mark the beginning of a distinctive literary tradition. Among the terms he offers to describe Native texts, King includes "associational" literature, which he uses to label the work of contemporary Native writers who depict Native communities. Rather than focusing on a non-Native society or the conflicts between Natives and non-Natives, these texts present the "daily intricacies and activities of Native life." According to King, those who write associational literature usually reject the "climaxes and resolutions" that are valued by non-Natives. Instead, they emphasize the interactions of the community without necessarily creating conventional models of the hero or villain; the plot line tends to be flat and to resist formulaic kinds of closure.

In *Truth & Bright Water,* King clearly reasserts himself as an author of associational literature, creating a picture of a community that is forceful in its critique of nationalist politics and, at the same time, less interested in overturning the foundations of white, Western culture. *Truth & Bright Water* is a quieter text. Yet King retains elements of the cross-border humour evident in his earlier works. For example, the title refers to the two towns that are at the centre of the narrative: Truth, located on the American side of the border, and Bright Water, situated in Canada. With this framework in place, King explores questions of identity, history, and memory from a distinctly Native perspective.

Truth & Bright Water is narrated by a young boy, aptly named Tecumseh, who spends his summer working for Monroe Swimmer, a locally born Native artist who comes back to the Prairies after gaining an international reputation for his ability to restore paintings. At the same time, Tecumseh is trying to solve a mystery that he and his friend Lum have witnessed at the river that divides Canada from the United States. One night, they watch a woman plunge over a cliff into the waters below, only to disappear from view and, shortly after, they discover a skull that they presume was hers. Meanwhile, Tecumseh aids Monroe in his attempts to restore a lost Native past by literally painting a Methodist church in Truth out of existence and by scattering iron buffalo sculptures across the Prairies. His efforts become part of the puzzle that the boys try to solve, a mystery that involves racial and sexual crossings as well as the symbolic return of the bones of Native children to the reserve—children whose skeletons have been relegated to obscurity in museum drawers by white anthropologists. This conflict with white cultural values is explicitly framed by the day-to-day activities of the Native community, and the narrative unfolds without the "ubiquitous climaxes and resolutions that are so valued in non-Native literature." Although the mystery that opens the story is solved, many other questions posed by Tecumseh remain unanswered. For example, the concluding scene is notably open-ended. Tecumseh finds his mother trimming a vase of flowers from a mysterious admirer, and when he asks her about the source of the flowers, she remains silent; Tecumseh never learns the admirer's identity.

Even King's intertextual references to the Hollywood icon, Marilyn Monroe, are placed within a Native context and read

through Native eyes. Lucy Rabbit, a fixture in the local community, is obsessed with Monroe and dyes her dark hair blond, a gesture that leaves her with flaming orange locks. Tecumseh and Lum assume that Lucy is trying to pass as white but, as they soon find out, their presumptions are wrong. Lucy tells them that rather than bleaching her hair to look white, she thinks that Marilyn Monroe was Native and feared the discovery of this secret by the press and the public. Thus, Lucy explains, she dyes her own locks to show the dead movie star "that bleaching your hair doesn't change a thing." This performative aspect of King's text is mirrored and reconfigured through Monroe Swimmer's own use of blonde wigs and other disguises, which comically contests the presumption that Natives—on both sides of the border—really just want to be white.

Basil Johnston's *Crazy Dave* is an equally quiet and compelling text. It recounts the story of one of Johnston's relatives, Uncle David, an Ojibway man born with Down's Syndrome who lived his life on the Cape Croker reserve and comes—poignantly—to represent the importance of community and the struggle to cope with various kinds of marginality. Instead of simply narrating Dave's life, Johnston creates a picture of his extended family that is inclusive rather than exclusive and avoids reductive judgements or conclusions about the actions of various characters, including Johnston's own father and mother. Much of Johnston's work laments the "passing of tribal languages and cultures" and thus endeavors to record both the past and present from a distinctly Native perspective in a manner that shows tribal cultures as still alive and important today.

With *Crazy Dave*, Johnston strikes a careful balance between accessibility and inclusion. As he explains in the introduction to the text, "*Crazy Dave* is not meant to represent the complete story of Dave McLeod or the history of Cape Croker. . . . [I]t is but a glimpse of the community and its politics and the times that served as the little world in which Dave tried to do what others did, and tried to be what others were, but could not be." Though the book—which blurs the boundaries between history and fiction, familial lines and communal relations—may seem intimate at first, much of Johnston's narrative depends on silences and gaps that maintain a distance between those who are part of the local tribe and White readers who remain outsiders. Johnston highlights this distinction at the conclusion of his introduction when he notes that "[t]he stories and opinions I have used as sources for this book will not be found in the band council minute book, or in the diaries of the clergy . . . but are stored in the memories of the older generation still living." The stories that constitute *Crazy Dave* become snapshots of a community that are never fully accessible or explained. Appropriately, Johnston includes Dave's own language in the text alongside English and colloquial Ojibway words and phrases, all of which remain untranslated. And even when Johnston does explore conflicts between White authorities and members of the Native reserve, he remains focused on the local tribe, without feeling compelled to explain or justify the Native perspectives being put forth.

David's death marks the official end of the text. This abrupt halt to a voluminous life story—the last ten years of David's life and his sudden death are summarized in less than a page—becomes a way for Johnston to subvert formulaic conclusions and ensure that the stereotypical image of the Native as a "dying breed" is not reinscribed through *Crazy Dave*. The text's epilogue offers a memorial to Dave. It also becomes an urgent reminder that Dave is a model of stubbornness that the Ojibway need to heed, if they are to retain their unique culture and language in an era of white pressure to assimilate.

Whose Truth is it Anyway?

Daniel MacIvor
Marion Bridge. Talonbooks n.p.

Jonathan Wilson
Kilt. Playwrights Canada Press n.p.

Lorena Gale
Angélique. Playwrights Canada Press n.p.

Reviewed by Claire Borody

There is something about the preservation of memory that escapes the limiting parameters of sciences that seek to define and to label. Memories are rarely constructed of reasoned judgement and pragmatic detail. Often fraught with emotion, memory is borne on the wing-tip of the oddest fragments of a glance, of a tone, of a fleeting image that catches the imagination. Then memory is crystallized as truth, in writing or a collective consciousness.

Each of these plays seeks, in its own way, to interrogate the careful crafting and deep embedding of memories. MacIvor and Wilson probe the construction of family history and begin their stories by establishing typical interactive patterns between the characters and then proceeding to peel away the layers of illusion and fabrication fuelling those interactions. Gale seeks to expose the crafting of social history, but instead of employing a process of penetration, she begins with the simplest of facts and then traces the way in which that "fact" might have been constructed.

In MacIvor's *Marion Bridge,* sisters Agnes and Theresa MacKeigan have come home to Cape Breton to help their youngest sibling Louise take care of their terminally ill mother. In the face of dealing with the practicalities of palliative care, the protective veneer of each sister's constructed existence begins to erode, as they are forced to deal not only with the demands of their mother's condition, but also with each other's emotional baggage. Agnes, the eldest sister, lives in Toronto where she has been pursuing an acting career that, she claims, has become "a very expensive, time consuming and demoralizing hobby." The middle sister, Theresa, is the cool-headed peace-keeper and care-giver struggling to keep her faith in a world she views as increasingly Godless. Louise, the youngest sister, is more in touch with television characters on the soap opera *Ryan's Cove* than with the people around her.

Central to the action in Act One is Agnes's resistance to her mother, whom she blames for forcing her to give up a baby girl she bore as a teenager. As she confronts her deeply rooted anger and begins to understand the mother-daughter bond, Agnes rekindles a burning desire to meet her daughter. In Act Two, after her mother dies, Agnes meets her daughter, Joanie, without revealing her identity. When Agnes discovers that the teenager is having a difficult time with life, she decides to set the course of history right. In the final moments of the play, the three sisters visit Marion Bridge: they toss their mother's notes into the sky, an image of hope and possibility.

With the exception of the final scene, MacIvor's entire story takes place in the kitchen of the MacKeigan family home. The series of short chronologically-ordered scenes charts the course of these mismatched individuals as they merge into a solid family unit, pulling together against inertia and inevitability. As the characters' personal boundaries begin to mesh, the three sisters borrow each other's interests, colloquialisms and speech patterns. Humour surfaces in even the most tense and trying of situations: "Agnes: I'm just old and ugly. Theresa: Don't forget mean." While the characters never reach a point where they truly understand all that they have gone through, the play's great charm and strength lies in such uncertainty. MacIvor's three sisters are flawed women struggling to survive and perhaps even to make sense of a world that often eludes

sense-making. Yet MacIvor brings dignity and strength to his characters' realizations of their own limitations. He creates characters of heart and substance who are impossible not to care about.

Jonathan Wilson's *Kilt* also examines the way in which family history is etched and preserved. In their struggle to discover and to tell their own stories, Wilson's characters also present the complexities lying beneath appearances between Mac, a young working-class private from Glasgow, and Lavery, an upper-class Captain from Edinburgh. Throughout the play Wilson splices meetings in North Africa in 1941 with present-day sequences to create echoes of the past in the present day. The most jarring transition of the play occurs as the opening scene shifts abruptly to a present-day gay strip club in Toronto using a clever double casting (the role of Mac doubled with that of Tom Robertson, later revealed to be Mac's grandson). Tom, in his early twenties, unbeknownst to his mother Esther has turned his back on family tradition. Wilson paints the prickly relationship between mother and son with a light hand. However, to his credit, he never allows the humour to conceal the pain and disappointment each character has caused the other. In Act Two, the veneer that has shaped the family memories is further eradicated as the truths about Mac begin to surface and Esther is forced to review what lies beneath the gloss of her constructed memories. By chance, Tom meets the aging David Lavery who has come to Glasgow for Mac's funeral and who is struck by Tom's resemblance to his grandfather. David eventually tells Tom of his relationship with Mac in Africa.

As the group bids their farewell to the collective memory of a loved one, Wilson once again cleverly uses the double casting of Mac and Tom. He blurs the lines between past and present by moving the action back and forth between two time lines and having Mac/Tom seamlessly travel through the sequence. When it is revealed that Lavery had invited Mac and the girls to live with him and that Mac declined the offer in order not to compromise or jeopardize his relationship with his daughters, Esther is stunned into silence. As Mac's ashes float away, the memories come flooding back.

Although this moment is tense and poignant, a great deal of suspended disbelief must prevail in order for the moment to make sense: an acceptance that a chance meeting between Lavery and Tom was probable, that the dignified Lavery would reveal his feelings for Mac to his grandson, and finally that the stubborn Esther would suddenly release repressed memories and become an open, accepting human being as a result. Nevertheless, Wilson is rewriting the role of the gay man in history. As the elderly Captain Lavery says "Don't kid yourself lad. Did you think you'd invented it? It was just a different world." Wilson is creating dramatic reality from buried and ignored social history and in doing so casts an accusing shadow not only on the construction of family history, but on all history.

In *Angélique*, Gale examines the way in which history is constructed and also the hierarchy of power controlling the creation of fact, a hierarchy contributing to racism. The title role in *Angélique* is Marie François Angélique, a young black woman purchased by business-man François Poulin de Francheville "as a special surprise" for his wife Thérèse, who names her for a sister and a dead daughter. The play traces a series of events that culminate in Angélique being hanged and burned for arson. Throughout the series of short chronologically arranged episodes, Gale presents a multi-faceted portrait of the strong, intelligent and complicated woman she places at the centre of her story. In the eyes of others, Angélique is often seen as a possession, described in terms denoting ownership or the male gaze:

de Francheville calls her a "fine creature"; she is "mated" with the slave César in order to produce children that will "fetch a good price when the time comes"; César angrily warns Claude not to be "sniffing around her again"; she is sold by Thérèse de Francheville with no regard for her feelings. These scenes show Angélique's interaction with others to be practical, goal-oriented and most often subservient.

However, Gale makes a clear distinction between the roles that Angélique has been cast in and the role she has cast for herself. Alone or speaking to herself, it is clear that Angélique's spirit is undiminished. Her words are poetry, evoking powerful images and arranged in affecting rhythms, often to the indigenous drum beats of her native land. Her speeches are unlike those by any other character, highly evocative of a rich inner life. Although the laws and conventions of the society in which she lives have allowed other human beings to enslave and abuse her body, these individuals never come close to touching her spirit. In the end, although alone and tortured into admitting to a crime she did not commit, Angélique escapes them all.

The structure that Gale uses to tell her story is the most complicated and innovative of these three plays. Gale presents jarring temporal framework "Then is now. Now is then. . . . for the play: the present and the 1730's." She does not, however, draw these parallels by shifting the action of her story back and forth between "then" and "now," but by juxtaposing within a single scene past events with modern settings, props or costumes, choosing to have historical characters speak with modern patterns and rhythms and to have monologues and factual information presented directly to the audience rather than as insular musings. Although the play proceeds chronologically, Gale creates an unsettling effect by presenting historically incongruous details as a reminder of the bleeding time lines she wishes to establish: early in the play Angélique wears a modern domestic's uniform and Claude is dressed in modern street clothing, although Thérèse de Francheville is dressed in early eighteenth-century style; Angélique attends to her cleaning duties while listening to modern pop music; François de Francheville holds both a deer skin and a Bic lighter in his hands; the news of the fire is reported as a series of sound bites; and the witness testimonials sound like exaggerations from modern tabloids.

Gale constructs the scene in which the fire starts as a series of six short monologues. As they speak words that create a motive for setting the fire, the characters are engaged in actions that could start a fire. As the voices rise in volume and blend with each other, pandemonium breaks out. By contrast, Gale combines historically possible actions with modern legal thinking to create a careful blend that casts suspicion on six characters. Why was it the black slave woman who was punished? In the construction of Angélique's story Gale casts not only shadowy doubt on the selection process by which an event or occurrence becomes a fact, but also on the belief that as a society we have made amends for the inequities of the past. Collectively, Gale, MacIvor and Wilson remind us that history of any kind is a human construction, and that it should not be confused with the truth. While history cannot be undone, it does not have to be repeated.

I Dont Hate It!

Bruce McCall
Thin Ice: Coming of Age in Canada. Random House of Canada $29.95

John Bentley Mays
Power in the Blood: Land, Memory, and a Southern Family. Viking Penguin $29.99

Reviewed by Michael Zeitlin

In his buoyant and swiftly paced memoir Bruce McCall tells how he got the most out of childhood misery, hatred, and alienation. Long a New York resident and successful journalist in the comic vein for such magazines as *National Lampoon, The New Yorker* and *Vanity Fair,* McCall was born in Southern Ontario in the middle of the Great Depression. He recounts with harrowing verisimilitude his long wretched coming of age in Canada, the serial monotony of life in Simcoe, Toronto, Windsor, and, because there was nowhere else to go, Toronto again. The existence of his two parents and five siblings was dominated by cramped quarters, economic deprivation, anger, tension and depression. His father, T. C. McCall, worked as public relations manager of Chrysler Canada, the archetypal little man who looms large at home, the castrating Alpha Male in his own diminutive primal horde. McCall speculates that T. C.'s experience as a RCAF journalist, compelled to write upbeat articles amid the slaughter of Canadian flyers over Europe during World War II, must have been psychically damaging. But there was also something gratuitous and excessive in his rage and disappointment as he imposed his emotional pathology upon his wife and children. McCall's mother, Helen Margaret ("Peg") McCall, lived the kind of desperate, alcoholic life that suddenly became culturally visible upon the publication of Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique.* McCall remembers a good, meek, frail woman locked away in a mood of black melancholy, a mother radically unavailable to her children, a solitary figure sitting at the kitchen table reading American magazines, chain-smoking and already drunk (though not conspicuously so) by the late afternoon. In the year of her death at the age of 49 she looked 65 years old.

This family dysfunction ("Perhaps never in the course of familial affairs have so many lived so close for so long to so little emotional effect"—the phrasing is that of the professional expert at making light of dark material) was metonymically interconnected with the entire culture. Toronto ("Tronna") in 1956 was "a vacuum-sealed container of perfectly preserved late-Victorian Anglican rectitude," a "stone-gray civic bulwark against fun and fleshly pleasures." "No Sunday sports. No Sunday drinking. No Sunday shopping." The Danforth on the east side of Toronto, where the McCalls lived for several years, "was a strip of mercantile monotony crawling shop by shop from Broadview Avenue to the city's easternmost edge." Windsor, in turn, was "an entire city of Danforth Avenues." "Boredom's enervating miasma" is to be taken as indicating some terrible blockage of energies at the very source; Canadian boredom was the repressive reality against which Desire Itself (that is, feverish, magazine-fed fantasies of American life) constantly struggled. Survival depended upon identification with America and a long apprenticeship in sublimation, an adolescent habit of writing, illustrating, and fantasizing, "a diversion, then a hobby, then a calling, and ultimately a professional career."

McCall takes his narrative to the point of his defection to America as a young man in 1962, the guiding angel of his deliverance "a lanky American in his early thirties, David E. Davis, Jr.," a Dan Cody to McCall's James Gatz. "Not just my friend but also my big brother, surrogate father, and mentor," Davis gives McCall a job and "changes everything" with his outlook, a revolution-

izing American gaze: "I now saw myself—because Dave so saw me—not as a loser but as a comer, who belonged at the center of things." A latent American all along, McCall writes this book to us now from a (presumably swanky) apartment on Central Park West, his American wife asleep beside him, his American success and Oedipal triumph over Canada now accomplished and secure. Yet he still retains his Canadian citizenship, revealing on the last page that he finally intends to make things official and become an American citizen at last: "Any day now. Next week is looking good, in fact. Certainly the end of the year. Absolute latest." But let's not get all misty-eyed now.

John Bentley Mays, currently the art critic for *The Globe and Mail*, was born in the deep South and emigrated to Canada in 1969. *Power in the Blood* is an alternately fascinating and onerous memoir of his return to native ground, Greenwood, Louisiana, from which he begins to trace the Mays family line through four hundred years of New World history. The Reverend William Mays arrived in Hampton, Virginia, in 1616 (that is, four years before the famous Puritan *Mayflower* arrived at Plymouth Rock). His descendent, John Matthew Mays, built the frame house in which his grandson, John Bentley Mays, lived as a child until soon after his father was killed in an automobile accident in 1947. The house has been occupied in the intervening decades by Mays's Aunt Vandalia, whose death in 1990 brings Mays back to Greenwood to bury her and resolve her affairs. As he rummages through the old family papers and then embarks upon a tour of the South, he begins to map out the "geography of imagination" (in Guy Davenport's phrase) he has inherited from his Southern forbears.

It has become conventional to acknowledge that Southern inheritance tends to be as much curse as blessing. Mays notes that "the antebellum culture of my native land had culminated in an antiquarian racist empire." He acknowledges "the silent cry of human slavery upon which . . . my family's [wealth] was founded" and "the destruction of the aboriginals" that accompanied the march of Enlightenment. Yet unlike Ike McCaslin of *Go Down, Moses* or Quentin Compson of *Absalom, Absalom!*, he is not obsessed in this memoir with the ordeal of race relations in American history. And if as a young man he bore the burden of "*being Southern* in the dark sense of wounded, lamed by history and by hankering after lost worlds," now as an adult he is considerably less troubled, for on his genealogical journey into the past he has encountered a beautiful and potent image of his family's rootedness in "the peaceable kingdom" (Mays's allusion to Edward Hicks's series of paintings so entitled), "a Rousseauvian ellipsis of calm, sustained by a common economy of work and thought, and by the dependence of everyone on the fruitful earth."

Mays struggles poignantly to sustain the vision ("Yet how real was that peaceable vision? Had it ever existed? Or did this Southern land wish it had existed, and whispered its dream into my mind as I stood at my father's windows?"), for he needs it as a place from which to judge the corruption of the present:

> the sprawl of suburbia along Interstate 20 from nearby Shreveport, and the incessant roar of the highway itself. A muddle of cheap, ugly townhouses now stood just down from the house in once-empty pastures where I'd chased rabbits as a boy, and a noisy, dog-ridden trailer court had crowded up to within a whisper's distance of the screened back porch where my grandparents, aunt and uncle, and I had taken breakfast on summer mornings.

The story of what happens to the sacred domain, the pastoral space that slowly becomes reified space in the course of the land's itinerary through time and history, is among the greatest of Southern themes;

lying at its heart is a feudal lament for "the institutions of Southern agrarian hierarchy now vanished or dying." (See *I'll Take My Stand*, the famous manifesto of the Southern Agrarians; Mays is their late-twentieth century heir.) Equally, as psychoanalysis also suggests, the pastoral fantasy "effectively holds within it the place of what this imaginary scene must 'repress,' exclude, force out, in order to constitute itself" (Žižek), that is, the labor, rape and murder of the enslaved generations. (Even Morrison's Sethe remembers Sweet Home as a place shamelessly beautiful: "It never looked as terrible as it was and it made her wonder if hell was a pretty place too").

Mays understands this, at the conscious level, very well: "Given a history of grace and beauty contaminated by evil, how was I to remember it? How could I go into the poisoned past and find the good created there, without being poisoned?" Yet judging from the intensity of the affect that he channels into the language (that is, judging from the purple of the prose), he seems (unlike the suicide Quentin Compson, who pants *I dont hate it! I dont hate it!* at the end of *Absalom, Absalom!*) to have found a way to master his ambivalence: "I found precious traces of noble, failed attempts to raise on Southern ground a culture rooted in the natural orders of our seasons, to build a civilization free of cruel utopianism and metropolitan alienation, sustained by loyalties to place, and to whatever is virtuous and true in the traditions we have inherited from the West." I suspect that many readers will find such nostalgic sentiments obsolete; in any case, *Power in the Blood* gives a compelling account of how Mays himself came to invest so heavily in them.

Sensitive Souls

Kim Morrissey
Clever as Paint: The Rossettis in Love. Playwrights Canada $14.95

Jeremy Long
The Final Performance of Vaslav Nijinsky, St. Moritz-Dorf, 1919. Tamahnous Theatre Workshop Society $12.00

Guy Vanderhaeghe
Dancock's Dance. Blizzard $10.95

Reviewed by Jerry Wasserman

The literary artist's fascination with portraits of the artist always runs the risk of a certain narcissism, even when the portrait is not autobiographical. Dramatists who choose the artist as their subject presumably see reflected in the exemplary life something of themselves or of the world they themselves inhabit. The eccentricities, genius, larger than life agonies and ecstasies, and anti-bourgeois indulgences that make the artistic life perennially attractive to readers and audiences entail a special pleading. "We are extraordinary people, we artists. Admire us, pity us, envy us, even judge us. But you may not—you cannot—ignore us." Problems arise when the artist's life, as recreated for the stage, turns out to be not quite so fascinating as the playwright might presume.

Kim Morrissey's *Clever as Paint: The Rossettis in Love* actually limits its canvas to only one of the famous Rossettis, Dante Gabriel, along with model/painter/poet/wife Elizabeth Siddal and colleague William Morris. Set in Rossetti's London studio in the years 1860-69, the play pivots on Gabriel's monstrous self-absorption. Rationalizing his sexual betrayals, egotism, and ambition with the logic that "only the Art matters," he rather offhandedly drives his wife to suicide at age 32, buries his poems in her coffin, disinters them for publication, and in Morrissey's ironic reading, ultimately guilts himself into an early grave. But despite Rossetti's passion and

energy, and the attractions of pre-Raphaelite celebrities, painting and poetry, sex, drugs and a ghost, the play as a whole delivers less than the sum of its parts.

Thematically, its overly familiar central debate—Art vs. Life—offers nothing new. Morrissey, whose *Dora: A Case of Hysteria* put a witty feminist spin on Victorian Freudianism, takes pains here to show how Elizabeth Siddal's life and art were reified and then sacrificed on the altar of Rossetti's ego: "Don't move!" is his refrain. "Stay just as you are! Perfect!" But Siddal only rarely transcends her victimization. And the play's feminism barely survives Morrissey's decision, perhaps in the interests of theatrical economics, not to bring onstage the two women with whom Rossetti betrays Lizzie: model Fanny Cornforth and Morris' wife Janey. (The production notes indicate that Janey *is* a character in the radio version.) The mildly nutty Morris himself emerges as the play's most interesting and entertaining character.

If the Rossettis, second-rank artists from another country and century, carry limited celebrity value for contemporary Canadian audiences, mad Russian ballet genius Vaslav Nijinsky at least offers a certain exoticism, if no greater familiarity, in Jeremy Long's 1972 play for Vancouver's Tamahnous Theatre. Just as those limpid female figures on pre-Raphaelite canvases must have piqued Kim Morrissey's feminist imagination (Siddal sat for, among others, Millais's *Ophelia*), so Nijinsky's story seemed perfect fodder for the alternative theatrical vision of the young Tamahnous artists. Company member Stephen E. Miller explains in an excellent essay accompanying the script how "we were attracted to Nijinsky's purity, his soul, his artistic dedication, and his sexual ambiguity . . . and we could empathize with Nijinsky's madness."

Long's play takes place on the occasion of Nijinsky's final ballet in 1919. Tormented by mental illness and sexual dysfunction, traumatized by the War, betrayed and bankrupted by his business partner Diaghilev, and soon to be committed by his wife, the great dancer relives his life in a series of highly stylized scenes heavily shaped, as Long acknowledges, by the Poor Theatre doctrines of Jerzy Grotowski and the Living Theatre. His artistic talent in thrall at various times to his public, God, his manager, and his family, Nijinsky frequently imagines himself a horse, forced to run himself to exhaustion. That he became in fact the most acclaimed dancer and choreographer of his age (his creations including *Le Sacre du Printemps*) is almost an afterthought in a play focused on his psychic disintegration.

The distinct period quality of the play no doubt contributed to its limited theatrical life. But as an artefact of its time and a partial record of the achievements of the foremost Western Canadian experimental company of the 1970s, this volume is invaluable. Packed with photos and commentary, it marks the first in a planned series of texts documenting Vancouver's rich alternative theatre scene that Tamahnous dominated for over a decade. One need only glance at the photos and credits to see why. *Nijinsky* was originally directed by John Gray, the title role played first by Eric Peterson, then by Larry Lillo, who stares hauntingly out from the cover in whiteface *Petrushka* makeup.

Also set at the end of World War I, Guy Vanderhaeghe's play employs other kinds of dance. It explores theatrically some of the same territory covered in his novel *The Englishman's Boy*: in the immediate post-war period a Canadian returns to Saskatchewan from a foray abroad to wrestle with his personal demons of guilt and failure. The Dancock of the title is no artist but a heavily decorated Canadian Lieutenant transferred from the trenches to a Saskatchewan insane asylum in 1918. He has turned against the war, ostensibly because of shell shock, but continues to do battle on a

number of fronts. Haunted by the ghost of one of his men, he struggles to avoid the despair symbolized by his macabre visitor's invitation to join him in a dance of death. At the same time he defies the therapeutic tyrannies of the institution's administrator and the brutality of a rather clichéd orderly, his resistance symbolized by his pursuit of a forbidden dance with a female inmate. When the flu epidemic strikes the hospital, Dancock rallies himself heroically, and Vanderhaeghe brings this complex play to a surprisingly facile resolution.

Although theatrically the most conventional of these three plays, *Dancock's Dance* is emotionally the most satisfying, despite the somewhat disappointing ending. No matter how genuinely tormented the artist's soul might be, Life vs. Art as a conflict can rarely measure up to Life vs. Death. Raising the stakes, Vanderhaeghe doesn't just talk the talk; he dances the dance.

Beauty and Substance

Eden Robinson
Monkey Beach. Knopf $32.95

Billie Livingston
Going Down Swinging. Random House $29.95

Steven Heighton
The Shadow Boxer. Knopf $32.95

Reviewed by Jennifer Andrews

All three of these novels are impressive visual objects—the thick textured pages of *Going Down Swinging* and *Monkey Beach*, the delicately evocative cover design of *The Shadow Boxer* depicting misty islands pierced by a single ray of light, the heft of all three novels with words of praise from Al Purdy, Janette Turner Hospital, and Anne Fleming filling the back jackets. Given the increasing price of hardcover books and the serious competition for attention in a Canadian market where first novels have become hot commodities, books have to look good. But more than that, of course, they must have the substance to support that initial presentation. And though everything is, at least aesthetically and economically, in place to ensure the success of Robinson, Heighton, and Livingston, the novels vary dramatically in terms of quality.

Eden Robinson's Giller-Prize nominated *Monkey Beach* is the most successful of the three, creating a darkly comic narrative about the life of Lisamarie Hill, a woman who returns to memories of her childhood and adolescence in order to cope with the disappearance of her brother, Jimmy. Robinson, a mixed-blood Haisla and Heiltsuk woman raised near the Haisla village of Kitamaat, has previously published a collection of short stories, *Traplines* (1996), that won the Winifred Holtby Prize, the *Prism* International Prize for Short Fiction, and was selected as a *New York Times* Notable Book of the Year. Like Robinson, the protagonist, Lisamarie—named after Elvis Presley's daughter—negotiates various worlds while growing up in Kitamaat. She moves between the eclectically traditional ways of her grandmother, Ma-ma-moo, who educates Lisamarie by sharing her passion for television soap operas and teaching her the Haisla language, and the New World activism of her Uncle Mick. A complex web of contradictions, Mick is a survivor of the residential school system, a Native activist who once belonged to the American Indian Movement, a nomad who can never rest, and an Elvis fan whose passion for the "King" knows no bounds. He offers another dimension of experience to Lisamarie by encouraging her to express herself politically. After losing both Mick and Ma-ma-moo, Lisamarie must figure out a way to put her life back together and come to terms with these ghosts from her past.

The novel traces Lisamarie's journey to discover the fate of her brother, a boat ride that gives her the time and space to recount her story. The narrative is rooted in the beauty and mystery of place, particularly

Monkey Beach, a site of family outings and rumoured sasquatch sightings. Robinson's ability to evoke characters through dialogue and create vivid images of the community, coupled with her awareness of the intricate links between individuals and the land they live on gives the novel a richly layered texture that conveys the significance of Lisamarie's mixed-blood heritage (Haisla, Heiltsuk, and European). Although the structure of the novel suspends the immediate action of the story, a risky strategy, Robinson's narrative weaves together multiple plot lines with subtlety and grace, delicately responding to readers' desire to know the fate of Lisamarie's brother and the need to recount her past. Moreover, the comic aspects of the novel provide a wonderful counterbalance to the bleakness of Lisamarie's life, particularly when she ends up living on the streets of East Vancouver. Robinson creates a novel in which humour may lighten the moment but irony ensures that the full weight of tribal histories of colonization and genocide remains a potent force in the text. This is one case in which beauty and substance join together, creating a novel that delivers what it promises.

Steven Heighton's *The Shadow Boxer* and Billie Livingston's *Going Down Swinging* are admirable but less satisfying first novels. Heighton is the author of six previous books, including short-story and essay collections and two volumes of poetry. His poetic skill is evident throughout the novel, which traces the life of Sevigne Torrins, a poet and boxer, born and raised in Sault Ste. Marie, who travels the world in search of himself. Much of the novel revolves around his troubled relationship with his parents, an alcoholic father whose model of self-destruction Sevigne often mimics, and a mother, who leaves her family to take up a life of glamour and wealth in Egypt. In the latter part of the novel, love becomes a primary focus as Sevigne moves to Toronto, meets and then abandons various women, before retreating to the wilderness in this modern version of a Künstlerroman. Here, Heighton offers a parodic rewriting of the conclusion to Ernest Buckler's *The Mountain and the Valley*, taking Sevigne back to his father's summer cabin on Rye Island for a winter that tests his physical and mental stamina. But instead of dying in isolation, Sevigne survives, and goes from the remote island back to the civilized world where he discovers that he can change the patterns of his parents' past through his own relationship to his daughter and his writing career.

In *The Shadow Boxer*, Heighton replicates the formulaic structure of the *Künstlerroman* rather than giving it his own creative signature. Setting the sequence where Sevigne comes of age as a writer in Toronto, Heighton ends up dropping names of trendy restaurants and nightclubs, and creating clichéd scenes that fail to explain why Sevigne is so troubled once away from his father. Similarly, his repeated references to Sevigne's literary heroes—among them Jack Kerouac and J.D. Salinger—often remain underdeveloped, leading to citations that seem forced rather than enlightening. The most effective parts of the novel are set away from urban centres, in Sault Ste. Marie, where characters and their motives take on a realism that is undeniable. The picture painted of his parents provides much needed insight into Sevigne, which reaches its pinnacle with his painful stay alone on Rye Island, a graphically depicted descent into darkness that is tangible and disturbing. Heighton is clearly a gifted writer who needed to take more risks in *The Shadow Boxer*. This novel could have been more convincing and even impressive if Heighton had challenged the confines of the traditional portrait of an artist and allowed his characters to come alive through poetic language and images rather than relying on the cardboard formulations of the Queen Street crowd.

The least satisfying of the three, Billie Livingston's *Going Down Swinging*, tells the story of Eileen Hoffman, a single mother and occasional alcoholic whose love for her children remains solid despite various attempts by Social Services and her ex-husband to take her daughters away. Livingston, a Vancouver writer and poet, combines narrative perspectives by juxtaposing the voices of Eileen, Grace, her young daughter, and Social Services documents that record in flattened bureaucratic prose the multiple break-ups and reconstitutions of the family. While Livingston excels at telling Grace's story, a heart-wrenching account of a child coming to terms with a world where she lacks control, and effectively conveys Eileen's complexities, the Social Services documents seem contrived (with their typing errors), and the narrative ultimately does not go anywhere. Certainly Livingston's ability to make readers care about Eileen, a woman who is unable to provide her children with basic necessities and retreats to drinking at a moment's notice, is a feat unto itself. Eileen becomes a compelling figure who clearly does love her children despite her faults. But the point of the novel gets lost, and what Livingston leaves us with is a series of darkly comic vignettes of urban poverty, flashes of insight that need a thread to weave them together. The old adage goes, "don't judge a book by its cover"; in this case, the beauty of the cover of *Going Down Swinging* sets us up for substance and, in time, Livingston may succeed at delivering both.

EPJ in "New" Reprint

A. LaVonne Brown Ruoff, ed.
The Moccasin Maker. E. Pauline Johnson. U of Oklahoma P US$12.95

Reviewed by Cecily Devereux

The republication in 1998 of E. Pauline Johnson's *The Moccasin Maker* ensures the continued availability of a collection of short stories and essays that will be of interest to anyone who studies late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century English-Canadian literature, First Nations writing in North America, or questions of gender, race, imperialism, colonialism, nationalism and feminism in the period between the second North-West Rebellion and the First World War. A reprint of one of the two collections of Johnson's short work to have been published posthumously in 1913 (the other is *The Shagganappi*), the text is a photoduplication of the first Ryerson Press edition of *The Moccasin Maker*; the edition as a whole is a republication of the 1987 University of Arizona Press reprint, introduced and annotated by A. LaVonne Brown Ruoff, Professor Emerita of English at the University of Illinois, author of *American Indian Literatures*, and editor of S. Alice Callahan's *Wynema: A Child of the Forest.* There are no substantive differences between the 1987 and the 1998 editions.

Brown Ruoff's quite detailed notes are an especially valuable aspect of this edition of *The Moccasin Maker*: they present information about the original publication of each of the short works in this collection, and usefully cross-reference the stories and essays with other writing by Johnson. The notes also offer historical, biographical and geographical details that will be particularly valuable for students approaching Johnson's work for the first time. Brown Ruoff's introduction is similarly geared towards first-time readers, providing, as it does, mostly biographical information about Johnson and her family, and situating her writing in relatively unproblematized relation to late nineteenth-century American "sentimental" writing by women.

While the introduction and the notes, as well as the bibliography, certainly enhance the suitability of this edition as a teaching text, the retention of the 1987 apparatus somewhat undermines the "newness" of

this new edition. More recent scholarship on Johnson might have been rewardingly integrated into the bibliography; and the theoretical discussion of Johnson's writing in the introduction might similarly have been updated. Brown Ruoff compares Johnson to the nineteenth-century English and American women writers discussed by Elaine Showalter in *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing* (1977) and by Nina Baym in *Woman's Fiction: A Guide to Novels by and About Women in America, 1820-1870* (1978). The result is a rather uneasy alignment of Johnson, in terms of gender, with women writers across what are not indicated as the constructed boundaries of race, nation, and empire. Johnson is configured here as a writer who "champions Victorian values" and is only differentiated from other "women in the late nineteenth century [by] her frequent use of Indian heroines." The complexities of Johnson's imperialism and the tension it produces in her own hybridized "performance" of herself as both white and aboriginal are not addressed here; nor is there much discussion of the critical reception of her work in English Canada or Britain.

The absence of these questions is reinforced by the exclusion of the original introductory material. Gilbert Parker's "Introduction" to the 1913 edition and Charles Mair's "Appreciation" are arguably crucial to the text as it was first assembled, serving—at the very least—to draw attention to the kind of political and cultural context within which the stories and essays were produced, as well as to explain the relative absence of Johnson's fiction from the turn-of-the-century English-Canadian canon: both Mair and Parker, in the 1913 edition, downplay Johnson's skill as a writer of stories, even as they eulogize her. Such an edition as Brown Ruoff's with its clear, useful annotations is thus still a crucial reclamation of work which had been, until the 1980s at any rate, too often overlooked.

Knights & Alien Signals

Robert J. Sawyer
Factoring Humanity. Tor $31.95

Yves Meynard
The Book of Knights. Tor $29.95

Reviewed by Douglas Ivison

In 1979 when John Robert Colombo published his ground-breaking anthology, *Other Canadas: An Anthology of Canadian Science Fiction and Fantasy*, it was clear that there was really very little work within those related genres being written or published in Canada, for Colombo had to pad his collection with stories set in Canada but written by non-Canadians, fiction by writers who had left Canada at an early age, and fantastic fiction by non-genre authors. Twenty years later it is clear that there has been a remarkably rapid development in Canadian science fiction and fantasy. In the 1980s, a number of stars, such as William Gibson, Guy Gavriel Kay and Élisabeth Vonarburg, burst onto the scene, announcing to the world that Canada was an important locus of science fiction and fantasy writing. More important, an infrastructure of awards, magazines, anthologies, fan and writers' organizations, and scholarship has developed over the past few decades, in both official languages, so that one can now definitely say that there is such a thing as *Canadian* science fiction and fantasy. Despite their weaknesses, the two novels that are the subject of this review reflect this fact.

Possibly the most visible science fiction writer in Canada because of his numerous appearances on television and radio and in print, Robert J. Sawyer is also possibly the most successful. The prolific author of eleven novels over the past decade, and self-described as "Canada's only native-born full-time science-fiction writer," he is also an active anthologist and critic, and is currently President of the Science Fiction Writers of America. He has won numerous

awards in Canada and around the world, including the Nebula award, voted upon by his fellow SFWA members, and has received five Hugo nominations (a readers' choice award voted upon by science fiction fans) in the past four years, including one for his 1998 novel, his tenth, *Factoring Humanity*.

Set in a near-future Toronto, *Factoring Humanity* tells the story of a University of Toronto psychology professor, Heather Davis, and her computer scientist husband, Kyle Graves, both of whom are on the cutting edge in their respective fields. Heather has devoted her career to deciphering the radio signals that Earth has been receiving from the Alpha Centauri system for the past decade. Kyle is working to create true artificial intelligence and is also using quantum mathematics to create a technology capable of performing a near-infinite number of calculations simultaneously. Although both are highly successful in their professional lives, their marriage has been torn apart in the past year as a result of the suicide of one of their daughters and, then, by an allegation of child abuse directed against Kyle by their other daughter. Much of the early part of the novel is taken up by the daughter's allegation and its impact on both Heather and Kyle, but the story is not really about child abuse, but about memory and the nature of human consciousness. The Alpha Centauran signals stop one day, and gradually Heather comes to the realization that the signals are the plans for an alien device. She builds the machine and discovers that it enables her to access humanity's group-mind. While in the machine she can access the mind of any human, alive or dead. Predictably, this discovery transforms humanity. It also resolves the family drama.

Factoring Humanity is a slickly written page-turner in the bestseller tradition of Michael Crichton, and as such is a definite improvement over some of his earliest novels such as *Golden Fleece*, which was marred by awkward writing. It is a quick and easy read, but it fails to deliver more than that. The characters are poorly developed and are not complex enough to raise the family drama above the level of a TV Movie-of-the-Week, and his half-hearted use of thriller elements is unconvincing and awkward. In fact, Sawyer's manipulative introduction of child abuse as a plot element, and its easy reconciliation, verges on the offensive. Yet, ultimately, the novel demands to be read as a novel of ideas, and it is by this criterion that it must be judged. In its 348 pages *Factoring Humanity* tackles a number of significant and complex issues: the nature of memory, human evolution, the nature of human consciousness, the consequences of artificial intelligence, quantum mathematics, and alien contact. To his credit, and reflecting his earlier career as a technical writer, Sawyer does a good job of explaining complex concepts like quantum mechanics to readers unfamiliar with science. The science in this novel never gets in the way or slows down the momentum of the plot. Yet, that is part of the problem. The subjects mentioned above have been previously explored by a number of science fiction writers, and often more profoundly and provocatively. Furthermore, Sawyer often fails to provide a complex, nuanced understanding of the consequences of the technology he describes. This failure is reflected in the totally unsatisfying and simplistic ending of the novel.

Not quite as prominent as Sawyer, Yves Meynard is nevertheless a major figure in Canadian science fiction and fantasy. He is the literary editor of the Québec magazine *Solaris*, has won numerous Canadian and Québécois awards, and has published prolifically, including six books and forty short stories. *The Book of Knights* is his first novel to be written in English, although he has already written a number of stories in English. This short fantasy novel tells of the adventures of Adelrune, an adopted boy who discovers The Book of Knights, a collection of

pictures and stories of the adventures of knights, and escapes his rule-bound, restrictive society in its pages. He decides to leave home and ventures out into the world to become a man. Along the way he bulks up, becomes a knight, falls in love, makes mistakes, and learns what it means to be a man and a knight. Ultimately, he finds out the truth of his origins and reconciles himself to his past. Although competently written, *The Book of Knights* is uninteresting and fails to do much more than stick closely to the conventions of the genre. Adelrune, although likeable, is not a particularly interesting or complex hero, and the reader gets little sense of his development as the story progresses. Similarly, the world through which Adelrune moves is too sketchy and vague to keep the reader's interest. While there are some nice touches, such as the Ship of Yeldred, a ship as big as an island, they are not described in enough detail; the same is true with the people with whom Adelrune comes into contact. Adelrune's discovery of, escape into, and eventual inclusion in The Book of Knights suggests that the novel is gesturing toward a self-reflexive commentary on the reading of fantasy, yet unfortunately Meynard fails to develop this idea to any extent. Essentially, *The Book of Knights* is a fairly generic fairy tale, and may be of more interest to younger readers.

The Living Word

Djanet Sears, ed.
Testifyin': Contemporary African Canadian Drama Volume One. Playwrights Canada. n.p.

Reviewed by Wayde Compton

The drama in *Testifyin'* dates from 1966 to 1999, and Djanet Sears does the lineage an essential service by historicizing these plays in a thoroughly researched introduction. Sears also introduces each play in the anthology with a short critical essay, written by various black Canadian cultural critics who understand the cultural codes involved.

If there have been two phases of black Canadian literature—marked by claims that we exist, and that we are distinct—perhaps *Riot* by Andrew Moodie is an exemplar of the third phase: that we are distinct from each other, that there is no singular "black experience" in Canada. In *Riot*, the first play in the anthology a house full of black roommates, all from different regions of Canada, ride out the Los Angeles/Toronto riots of 1992. *Riot* gives us a glimpse of a black regionalist response to the national narratives we all too often and too easily appropriate. Is "black" more than region? And how does the identity strategy of calling oneself "black" bump up against the other identity strategies (feminist, queer, immigrant, working-class) we may require in order to survive the fiats of official multiculturalism? Moodie opens up space for a whole new level of discussion on the topic.

Regionally speaking, *Testifyin'* represents only Ontario and Nova Scotia, and only George Elliott Clarke and Walter Borden from the latter. While the text is "Volume One," and Sears gives a nod to western Canadian theatre in her introduction, promising more to come—surely one text from the west could have found its way into this volume, especially since Sears gives a healthy list of such playwrights in her introduction. It is perhaps because of the depth and rootedness of the Nova Scotian black experience that Clarke's *Whylah Falls: The Play* doesn't get bogged down in explaining itself, but simply exists and revels in its landscape. The play feels very comfortable in its time and place, and Clarke mythicizes Nova Scotia in a way that is compelling and beautiful.

Walter Borden's Tightrope *Time: Ain't Nuthin' More Than Some Itty Bitty Madness Between Twilight and Dawn*, a one-person, dialogic play, features characters employing various languages of blackness, and the

philosophies and exigencies that arise from those languages (the sermonizing preacher, the gay hustler, the Black Power militant, and Ethiopia the drag queen all share the stage and the body of play's lone actor. All of these languages are brilliantly brought to bear on an extended variation of Winston Churchill's famous appropriation of Claude McKay's poem "If We Must Die" during the Battle of Britain.

Both George Seremba's *Come Good Rain* and M. Nourbese Philip's *Coups and Calypsos* are set in the Third World. *Come Good Rain* is a compelling and important play, so much so that Modupe Olauogun plausibly suggests in the introductory essay that, had Seremba been able to perform this play in Nigeria in 1991 as he had planned, it would have made some difference in staving off Abacha's military coup. Seremba's play is an autobiographical account of his would-be execution in Uganda in 1980 for his pro-democracy stance during Milton Obote's repressive regime. The "good rain" of the title saved Seremba's life according to his doctors, by staying his fever as he lay left for dead in the jungle after being shot at close range by an AK-47. Seremba lives to portray his escape to Canada, where he mingles elements of his story with traditional Ugandan anti-authoritarian parables. *Coups and Calypsos* is the story of a black and South Asian inter-racial ex-couple who are trapped under curfew during the 1990 Muslim coup in Trinidad and Tobago. The subtitles of power (race, gender, culture, class, and nation) pervade this play in refreshing and sober ways. Throughout the play, while the relationship between Elvira and Rohan is negotiated and re-negotiated, the radio, alternately announcing the developments of the coup and playing an endless stream of calypso music, becomes a kind of chorus to their personal/political tensions.

While several of these plays deal with black and white inter-racial relationships, *Harlem Duet* by Djanet Sears is the most complex look at the phenomenon. In a symbolic killing, Billie (the hero against Othello and Mona) attempts to "murder" Othello with some down-home voodoo. Sears gives us a black-woman-centred "correction" of *Othello*, interspliced with soundbites of the O.J. Simpson trial and famous Civil Rights speeches.

When He Was Free and Young and He Used To Wear Silks by Austin Clarke and h. jay bunyan's *Prodigals in a Promised Land* are expressions of first-wave Caribbean Canadian immigration. Both are concerned with issues of class, immigration and language as markers of class ascendancy (or treason, depending on one's outlook). All racial, political and class enunciations in Clarke's play take place through discussions of accents, music or church bells. The racialized confrontation with the police occurs because white neighbours complain about the noise of a party, and a literal and symbolic silencing of black Canadian voices becomes a focal conflict of the plot. bunyan's *Prodigals in a Promised Land* is a similarly painful and eloquent chronicle of the "betterment" myth of northern migration. The dialogue exists as one long argument: everybody is dissing, shouting down or criticizing everyone else in virtually every scene of the play, thus mirroring the grinding oppression of black life in Toronto around 1981, and the characters' slowly eroding faith in academia as class panacea.

The feminist answer to the black male immigrant narrative above comes in the form of *dark diaspora . . . in dub* by ahdri zhina mandiela and *sistahs* by maxine bailey and sharon lewis. mandiela's "dub play," first performed in 1991, feels dated. The play crackles with the energy of the early ninties, which could sometimes feel limited, but created space for more nuanced expressions of black/feminist subjectivities. bailey and lewis' play *sistahs* is one of the most formally interesting plays of the

anthology. A house full of black women come together to heal through cooking, herbs and voodoo one of their sistren who has been diagnosed with cancer. In *sistahs*, the various voices and modes of discussion are accompanied by an attendant choreography of dance, movement and lighting. For example, "lecture mode" is pitted against "ancestor time" and "real time," divisions highlighting various discourses within black women's spaces.

It is only with the existence of anthologies such as this that we can truly begin to speak, and account for the diversity, of a black literary canon within Canada.

Vital Fictions

Diane Schoemperlen, ed.
Vital Signs: New Women Writers in Canada. Oberon $29.95

M. A. C. Farrant
What's True, Darling. Polestar $16.95

Régine Robin. Phyllis Aronoff, trans.
The Wanderer. Alter Ego $15.95

Reviewed by Dawn Thompson

Vital Signs is an anthology that sets out to prove that short fiction by women, a genre that has an illustrious history with writers such as Alice Munro and Audrey Thomas, is alive and well in Canada. A collection of stories by new writers, it is a bit uneven, but has interesting variety, and some of the stories make one look forward to following the career of their author. Zsuzsi Gartner's "The Nature of Pure Evil" is a wry, topsy-turvy character-analysis of a woman who gets a kick out of making fake bomb threats. It is an exploration of the difference between insanity, evil and goodness, as the protagonist takes on Christ-like characteristics while her ex-partner is constructed, despite her objections, as evil. Anne Fleming's "In the Middle of Infinity" is another story worth reading; it takes a feminist approach to the generation gap of political activism between a nineties daughter and her sixties mother. Nadine McKinnis's "Twenty-two Nights" also deserves mention, especially for the author's creation of suspenseful imagery.

What's True, Darling, by M. A. C. Farrant, is another collection of short stories, with just as much variety as *Vital Signs*, but, as one would expect since all are written by the same author, more consistency. It is a fascinating and sharply witty look at various personas. The collection is divided into two sections: the first set of stories treats celebrities such as Dorothy Parker, Diana Ross, Leonard Cohen and Barbie, examining what they are "really" like. The second set, "Family Baggage," does the same with ordinary people.

The variety is created largely by structural experimentation. For example, some stories in the first sections focus on plot, such as "Starring Lotta Hitchmanova," an ironic look at the construction of celebrity status. Others are simply short vignettes, such as "Blague Mountain," a parody of the Black Mountain poets, through a "raucous gathering of semi-bald, drunken, flannel-shirt wearing cigar smoking women poets whose Anti-Minimalist Manifesto included celebrating the adjective. . . ." Another such vignette, "Virginia was the Hardest," is a one-page report on the narrator's attempts to stop certain artists and poets from committing suicide.

The second section, "Family Baggage," begins with "Hallowe'en So Far Away," which creates a crossover between the two sections. This is a story about remarkable people—including giants, queens, hunchbacks and witches—who spend their days as car salesmen and bureaucrats, but at home tear off their masks and reveal their true natures; they all look forward to their "one public night so far away." There is also a wonderful series of fairy-tale studies of life with a teenager in "Tales from Wits' End." Refreshing and bright, *What's True,*

Darling turns the camera lights up to show the seams between mask and skin.

Those of us who have waited for a translation of Régine Robin's *La Québécoite* so that we could share it with anglophone students and colleagues were thrilled to see the publication of *The Wanderer*, translated by Phyllis Aronoff. Still one of the most brilliant and complex works by a *néo-québécoise* or minority writer in Québec to date, it is a scathing look at the treatment of minorities in Québec, an exploration of the process of attempting to make oneself at home in a different culture, coming to terms with Jewish identity and the Holocaust, and a decidedly postmodern analysis of cultural history, urban space and language. According to Robin's afterword, the novel is autobiographical, but on an intellectual or spiritual, rather than factual, level.

The Wanderer is a self-reflexive novel that works on multiple levels. The narrator-protagonist writes about a francophone Ukranian-Jewish woman from Paris who immigrates to Montréal and ends up teaching in English at McGill and writing a novel about an ageing historian of Jewish culture. The novel is divided into three sections corresponding to different neighbourhoods and ethnic communities in Montréal. In each section the writer reconstructs her protagonist, attempting to make her fit in, first in predominantly Jewish Snowdon, then in upwardly mobile Franco-Québécois Outremont, and finally in the multi-ethnic neighbourhood around the Marché Jean-Talon. In each different neighbourhood, she becomes involved with a different man who belongs to that neighbourhood. Through these men, she also seeks identifications with socialist, nationalist and immigrant causes. Each attempt is eventually aborted, and she returns to Paris with the reminder that "WE WOULD NEVER BECOME TRULY QUÉBÉCOIS." However, in the end, she does achieve some measure of belonging. And the attempt itself, the process, promises to alter Québec's culture.

The structure of this novel is non-linear and highly complex, as it also works on multiple levels and disrupts both time and space. First, there are the three sections based on neighbourhoods in Montreal. However within these sections, the novel traces the stations of the Paris Metro superimposed on those of Montreal. Prose is interspersed with poetry as well as with lists of street signs, metro stations, business signs, restaurant menus, hockey schedules, television listings and excerpts from history books, which are the protagonist's attempts to map the city, to fix it in memory. Finally, the narrative also follows an ancient Jewish form of meditation based on association of memories: a "jumping" that employs both free and guided association to liberate the consciousness. Both the narrative and the protagonist trace a repetitive pattern of following one line of memory up to a certain point, losing it, and beginning again at another. The historian tries and fails to keep dates in order, and so experiments with many different possible forms for his 15-week course on Sabbatai Sevi, a false messiah of the seventeenth century, while the protagonist wanders through the city, creating a confusing and fascinating spatial form. She is thus referred to a wandering Jew:

> There will be no narrative
> no beginning, no middle, no end
> no story
> Between she, I and you all mixed up,
> no order
> No chronology, no logic, no lodging.
> . . .
> There will be no story
> just barely a plural voice
> a crossroads voice
> immigrant words.

And yet although the novel concludes with her return to Paris, the possibility of some form of belonging is suggested. Just as her

memory functions as the wandering Jew, when she gives up the project of "fixing" reality, she finds a form of dwelling in constant movement and transformation: she and one of her potential partners "would only feel completely themselves when walking, crossing the different neighbourhoods." And thus it is specifically in Hebrew that the protagonist finds a sense of belonging, even if that belonging is by nature nomadic. For even as she wanders between the French of France, that of Québec, English, Yiddish and Spanish, she dwells in Hebrew: "you have always lived in a language . . . a crossroads language, wandering, mobile, like you, like her." Gradually, Québec will also be transformed by memory. The attempt to fix differences through writing paradoxically leads to the transformation of those differences: "Immigrant words disrupt. They displace, transform work, the very fabric of this fragmented city."

Considering the challenge involved in translating this novel, Phyllis Aronoff has done a remarkable job. Much of the work is based on word-play and homophonic association, and of course some of these effects are lost, as is the poetic rhyme and rhythm of specific lines that are intoned repeatedly throughout the text. Nor does the juxtaposition of French and Québécois accents quite come through. However, Phyllis Aronoff has probably done as well as anyone could, considering that this is essentially a text about the (in)ability and the need "to live in a language, an untranslatable closeness."

From Child to Adult

Michel Tremblay. Sheila Fischman, trans.
Bambi and Me. Talonbooks n.p.

Michel Tremblay. Linda Gaboriau, trans.
For the Pleasure of Seeing Her Again. Talonbooks $13.95

Robert Verreault
L'autre côté du monde: Le passage de l' âge adulte chez. Michel Tremblay, Réjean Ducharne, Anne Hébert et Marie-Claire Blais. Liber $21

Reviewed by Leslie Harlin

The appearance of autobiographical works by a well-loved author usually meets enthusiasm, as have the two works by Tremblay reviewed here. In *Bambi and Me*, a translation appearing eight years after the original *Les vues animées*, the author revisits his childhood through the device of films. The translation by Sheila Fischman reads smoothly and flows effortlessly; for her work, she won the 1998 Governor General's Award. Her translation allows the anglophone reader the opportunity to witness Tremblay's plunge into different points in his past which are wound around films.

This mechanism succeeds beautifully precisely because Tremblay convinces us that realizations and maturation follow closely on the heels of the profound effects of the films. Film provides a fine introduction to several important aspects of this writer's early years. Frequent barely veiled political commentary is subservient in this text to emotional coming-of-age. "The Parade of the Wooden Soldiers" is a particularly wrenching account of Tremblay's comprehension of his homosexuality.

Tremblay's readers can be thankful that one moment in the author's life was stamped by the film *Visiteurs du soir*, for Tremblay tells us that this work must be credited with opening his eyes to the certainty that he should become a writer: "Marcel Carné has stirred up in my soul the emotions, the doubts, the questioning that

will make me want to be a writer." In fact, the day after the viewing, Tremblay returns home from school to begin work on his first "little novel." This work, *No Honour Among Thieves*, follows in its entirety. Although it is no great work of art, though quite an achievement for a boy, the reader is drawn into the story not only from interest in the writer's development, but from a care for the young Michel whom we come to know through the preceding pages. The main character of *No Honour Among Thieves*, Jocelyn, is an adolescent trying desperately to come to terms with his homosexuality. The work ends on a distressing note as the boy tells his mother his secret and her reaction leads him to contemplate suicide.

Certainly the young author's fear of his own mother's reaction to his homosexuality must enter any reader's thoughts and colour one's reading. Of all the family and friends appearing in *Bambi and Me*, Tremblay lavishes the greatest detail on his mother, the all-important figure in his childhood. One notes the title of this work is connected to the shortest chapter which consists of two sentences: "Did you cry as much as I did at the death of Bambi's mother? Personally, I've never gotten over it." Michel's own mother's fierce love of her youngest son and her unshakable belief in his special gifts are transparent. This autobiography is as much an homage to his mother as it is a recitation of events in childhood leading to the development of Tremblay the man and the writer.

Such a love song for his mother is the primary foundation for Tremblay's *For the Pleasure of Seeing Her Again*. The title of this play emphasizes its greatest strength: the profound desire to see just one more time a beloved person who has died. Tremblay writes his mother back into existence on the stage through the character Nana. Although this woman is abrasive and disagreeable, the reader/viewer is pulled along by the emotions of the play's only other character, Nana's son—the Narrator. We are pulled this way and that by powerful contrary emotions. The Narrator is deeply moved by the ability to interact with his mother once again; he is filled with trepidation because he knows that his mother will die; he is filled with regret knowing that his success will only come after she has died. This woman who loved movies, plays, actors, would never come close to that world glimpsed from so far away: "She left without knowing how it all works. It's one of the greatest regrets of my life." She loved him, supported him, and believed in him, but died immediately prior to his first spectacular success with the presentation of *Les Belles-Soeurs*.

For the Pleasure of Seeing Her Again was presented at the Centaur Theatre on its thirtieth anniversary; this presentation immediately followed the presentation of the French version, *Encore une fois, si vous me permettez*, at the Théâtre du Rideau-Vert on the thirtieth anniversary of their presentation of Tremblay's *Les Belles-Soeurs*. This marked the first time a Tremblay play could be seen in both French and English in the same city.

An interesting accompaniment to the reading of two autobiographical works by Tremblay is *L'autre côté du monde*. Verreault presents four Québécois writers here, but he devotes the greatest space to Tremblay. In the first chapter, Tremblay's men/children experience a nostalgia for the androgynous figure, a fundamental ideal in a found and transformed mythology. This androgynous figure is destroyed as the boy reaches manhood. Thus, the paradise of the mythological childhood is wrapped up in the familial house in *La maison suspendue*; as they mature, the children of this house are chased into exile in Montreal, *terre profane*. The desire for the restoration of the primordial couple, the complete union of the two sexes is, of course, an impossibility.

According to Verreault, after all the characters' attempts to achieve adulthood, they are unable to leave behind the maternal paradise of androgynous childhood.

Subsequent, shorter chapters investigate the maturation process in the works of Ducharme, Hébert, and Blais. As in Tremblay, the characters are often marked by the androgynous desires of brother/sister relationships and by failure to achieve maturity. Ducharme's Mille Milles attains manhood after the death of Chateaugué, but his victory is desultory.

In the works of Hébert, Verreault focuses on *L'enfant chargé de songes* in which three children have a disastrous summer together. Initiatory rites lead to the death of Hélène, the madness of Pauline, the disordered life of Julien. In addition, Verreault mentions the ruinous adolescences of *Les fous de Bassan* and *Les enfants du Sabbat* before moving on to the equally traumatic events in Blais's *Une saison dans la vie d'Emmanuel.* Verreault links this recurrent theme of the passage into adulthood with the growing pains experienced by Quebec itself. Although this argument is not particularly well integrated into the literary discussion that precedes it, the work provides an interesting backdrop to the reading of Tremblay's own autobiographies.

Empowered Readers

Roberta Seelinger Trites
Waking Sleeping Beauty: Feminist Voices in Children's Novels. U Iowa P $24.95; $12.95 pa.

Kit Pearson
Awake and Dreaming. Puffin n.p.

Tim Wynne-Jones
The Maestro. Groundwood-Douglas and McIntyre n.p.

Reviewed by Adrienne Kertzer

Is a feminist children's novel any "novel in which the main character is empowered regardless of gender"? This definition in Roberta Seelinger Trites's *Waking Sleeping Beauty: Feminist Voices in Children's Novels* deliberately challenges the opposing views of students whom Trites has occasionally encountered in teaching children's literature at the university level. She describes how such students (often Education Majors) initially resist her feminist pedagogy, supplementing their general resistance to theoretical readings of children's books with an easy assurance that "feminism connotes stridency, male bashing, radical rejections of traditions they like, and claiming victim status." Trites disagrees: "Far from being a limiting genre with a vision narrowed only to praising females at the expense of males, the feminist children's novel recognizes the potential of all people and proclaims that potential."

Although Trites optimistically asserts that feminist children's books can change the world, and takes it for granted that feminism has had a profound impact on children's books, she also assumes that her implied readers remain either hostile or oblivious to this development. With such readers in mind, she organizes her text into brief theoretical introductions to different feminist subjects and theoretical approaches (such as the subversion of stereotypes, the utility of subjectivity metaphors and intertextuality, the feminist *Künstlerroman*, sisterhood, mother-daughter relationships, metafiction and the politics of identity) which are then supported by close readings of selected books. One consequence of Trites's optimism about feminist accomplishments and her sensitivity to her readers' resistance is a feminism that resembles a traditional American faith in transcendence and human agency far more than the subversion implied by Hélène Cixous's laughing Medusa. How subversive can such books be, given Trites's determination to calm her readers' anxieties by offering them a feminism that threatens no one? "Books which empower girls to recognize and

claim their subject positions," she writes, "empower the entire culture." Don't most twentieth-century American children's books emphasize agency, self-empowerment and triumphant endings? Trites longs to replace the "tired, masculinist tracts that were worn out when [she] was in grade school" with feminist children's novels. Yet when she concludes by calling the teaching of "feminist texts that balance the sexist classics many of us still feel compelled to teach" a feminist pedagogy, Trites sounds far less hopeful than she does in her opening reference to the permanent change produced by feminism.

One strength of *Waking Sleeping Beauty* is its insistence that theoretical discussions of literature need to include, and be tested against, children's books. In her chapter on maternal narrative, Trites argues that E. L. Konigsburg's *From the Mixed-Up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler* and Virginia Hamilton's *Arilla Sun Down* disrupt the paradigms found in adult works, moving beyond the matrophobia identified by Adrienne Rich, the restriction of the mother to "an object of her children's subject formation" analyzed by Marianne Hirsch, and the tendency of "some feminists . . . to delegitimize motherhood as an institution." There may well be valid cultural reasons why many feminists shy away from serious consideration of children's books, but Trites is right to note not only that feminism has much to offer readers of children's books, but also that children's books have much to offer feminist readers.

Although Trites quotes Annette Kolodny on the arrogance of canon-making, the few Canadian children's books that Trites does consider indicate which books already circulate as part of an unofficial North American feminist children's literature canon. *Anne of Green Gables* is included; the Emily books are not. Carol Matas's *The Burning Time* is cited several times, once for the dubious honour of containing "the closest to male bashing of any recently published adolescent novel that [Trites has] read"; Jean Little's *Look through My Window* gets a longer analysis as do two books by Janet Lunn, *The Root Cellar* and *Shadow in Hawthorn Bay*. Neither Tim Wynne-Jones nor Kit Pearson is mentioned.

Given the attention to empowerment in Wynne-Jones's *The Maestro*, and Trites's insistence that a feminist novel need not have a female protagonist, *The Maestro* certainly could be included. This brilliant, beautifully written book about an adolescent's struggle with an abusive father and his strange encounter with an even stranger composer, Nathaniel Orlando Gow, skilfully mocks our desire for neat categories. Is Burl Crow the son of a Native mother and white father? The book refuses to say, and in its refusal challenges us. Why does this matter? What is the relationship between race and the story Wynne-Jones tells about the time a boy is "almost as tall" as his father, but chooses to keep "his size a secret"? At one point, a minor character described as "one of his father's cronies," says to Burl, "What's so friggin' funny, brown-face?" Is it racist to assume that the speaker is white and would not be friends with Burl's father unless the father were also white? When Burl hitchhikes, a "native guy" gives him a ride—is this only accident or evidence that white guys will not pick him up? By refusing to say, Wynne-Jones ensures that we do pay attention, not just to the way Burl has learned to take refuge in secrecy, but to the way problematic assumptions regarding whiteness inform our reading. In a similar fashion, Burl, assuming that the Reggie Corngold to whom Gow has written must be a male with blond hair, is startled to meet a woman with black hair: "The letter, which he knew almost by heart now, shifted in his brain, as if each word were suddenly a different colour than before, and made a different kind of sense."

Wynne-Jones is a master of the suggestive detail, and surprising image. The book begins with the noise of a helicopter carrying a grand piano; it ends with Burl mistaking Japheth Starlight for God. In between is a novel in which references to Hitchcock films, Andrew Lang's *The Red Fairy Book*, the Book of Revelations, and First Peoples' history all contribute to understanding what drives Burl to run North by Northwest, away from Pharoah, to a mysterious, pyramid-like cabin in the middle of the woods. When Burl approaches Gow like the young hero in a fairy tale, he longs for a fairy-tale solution to the unhappiness of his life. But Gow is neither wizard, ogre nor Maestro, just a troubled Glenn-Gould-like pianist who no longer performs: an eccentric recluse who always wears fingerless gloves, and dies suddenly from a massive stroke. The suggestive parallels to Gould are characteristic of Wynne-Jones's playful allusiveness, for the interest of the novel does not lie in this resemblance, and whether Gould too left behind either an unpublished oratorio, his Book of Revelation, or an illegitimate son. Despite the apocalyptic fire that destroys Gow's cabin, and the role of Burl's father in starting the fire, the revelation of the novel pertains less to Gow than to Burl's recognition that his father is not the devil, that he needs to give up the "dark pleasure of hating his father" and learn the truths offered by Japheth Starlight, the man on the train who is the true owner of Gow's property.

In contrast to the complex literary and cultural references that inform Tim Wynne-Jones's narrative, Kit Pearson in *Awake and Dreaming* situates her book-loving heroine in a resolutely British and American tradition of fantasy and time travel. The protagonist, nine-year old Theo, is an unhappy, poor and lonely child who longs for a storybook perfect family, the kind she finds represented on the cover of *All-of-a-Kind Family*, and narrated in the fiction of Edith Nesbit and Arthur Ransome. Continually left alone by her 25-year old mother, Theo loves books that are either about families or magic, and preferably both. Yet such books cannot compensate for the misery of her daily life. It is only when Theo unknowingly encounters the ghost of Cecily Stone, a forgotten Canadian children's writer, that she gets the brief opportunity to live the life she dreams of. Unfortunately, in order for Theo to learn her lesson on the need to write her own stories, Pearson must make the narrative of storybook perfection that Cecily imagines intentionally unsatisfactory. Cecily's later confession that Theo's truncated fantasy has been her attempt to write the self-revealing book that she never had the chance to write cannot compensate for the deliberate tedium of Theo's time travel.

Creating a ghost who spends forty years longing to write the story she never had a chance to tell is intriguing, but Pearson's decision to make the ghost's story a failure in order to challenge the reader's understanding of perfect families inhibits the effectiveness of her critique of traditional family fiction: "Your time there was *too* happy. There wasn't enough conflict," the ghost tells Theo. But what is most puzzling about *Awake and Dreaming* is its construction of the Canadian child reader as still and only a reader of non-Canadian books, and the role played in this construction by the forgotten Cecily Stone. Although Theo vaguely recalls her grandmother reading to her about a cat called Zoom, Pearson does not mention that Tim Wynne-Jones was the author. When Cecily later tells Theo that she has the potential to become a writer, Theo can only think of non-Canadian models, like "Arthur Ransome and E. B. White and Frances Hodgson Burnett and all the other authors she'd loved so much." Is this because there are no happy families in Canadian children's literature? Does Sheila Egoff's dismissal of

Canadian children's fantasy still apply? Or is Pearson slyly hinting that the fictional Cecily Stone is not the only Canadian children's writer who has been forgotten?

Reversing the Spotlight

Anton Wagner

Establishing Our Boundaries: English-Canadian Theatre Criticism. U Toronto P $60.00

Reviewed by Len Falkenstein

This impressive collection of essays, the product of an ambitious research project spearheaded by members of the Association for Canadian Theatre Research, is intended to address a significant gap in the scholarship of Canadian theatre history. In the words of its editor, Anton Wagner, "[c]ollectively, these essays analyse both the historical development of theatre and theatre criticism in English Canada and the role of theatre criticism in the evolution of English-Canadian theatre and culture." Grounded in extensive research of newspaper and magazine archives, the collection comprises eighteen essays by seventeen contributors focusing on twenty-one critics (primarily newspaper theatre critics) whose work spans a chronological period from the 1820s to the 1990s, and geographical locations from Halifax to Vancouver. Wagner describes the parameters of the study as "a representative—though far from exhaustive—selection of the most interesting and important English-Canadian theatre critics writing during the past two centuries," defining critics' "importance" as deriving from "the perceptiveness and quality of their reviews . . . the decades-long longevity of their theatre criticism . . . the much wider cultural scope of their critical concerns" or "the passionate expression of their critical views." If these criteria, and indeed the selection of critics covered in the study (ranging from such well known figures as Nathan Cohen, Herbert Whitaker and Don Rubin to the much more obscure Oscar Ryan), seem a trifle arbitrary and subjective, this is, perhaps, perfectly suited to a study whose subject is the very arbitrary and subjective discourse of theatre criticism.

As might be expected given the different backgrounds and interests of the contributors (theatre practitioners and academics working in several theatre-related disciplines), the individual essays in the collection vary significantly in approach and style, but typically offer some combination of historical and biographical information about their critic-subjects, rhetorical analysis of their reviews, and theoretical contextualization and assessment of their work and ideas. At their best, the essays are aggressively critical (in the best sense of the word) of their subjects' critical praxis, probing the aesthetic and ideological issues that surround their work. At such times, as in the case of Denis Salter's finely detailed biographical and theoretical examination of Hector Charlesworth, Dianne Bessai's revealing close reading of the frequently self-contradictory criticism of Brian Brennan, Alan Filewod's surprisingly gracious yet incisive assessment of the antagonistic and widely reviled Gina Mallet, and Robert Nunn's account of the conflicted admixture of liberal and conservative viewpoints that marks the work of Ray Conlogue, we gain valuable insights into why and how theatre criticism has often succeeded, but just as frequently failed, in its perceived responsibilities to both the English-Canadian theatre community and theatre audiences. In many instances in these and other essays, the collection conveys a sense of how very strongly theatre criticism and theatre practice have influenced one another, both for better and worse, in the evolution of English-Canadian theatre, and thus why these critics are, indeed, important. Read cumulatively, the essays in the collection offer fascinating insights into issues of

canonicity in English-Canadian theatre, revealing a (not terribly surprising) orthodoxy of values (patriarchal, British imperialist/Canadian cultural nationalist, Arnoldian/high culture) among the critics who dominated English-Canadian theatre criticism throughout most of its history, an orthodoxy challenged in recent decades by the postmodern turn in art and culture (an aesthetic sea-change that, the collection indicates, many contemporary English-Canadian theatre critics, schooled in the values of their predecessors, have been able to accommodate only belatedly and with some bewilderment).

The essays are less engaging when they incline towards straightforward, minimally contextualized, and sometimes bland reportage of critics' lives, views and reviewing styles, and when they border on the hagiographic (although even the most adulatory essays—those on Cohen and Whitaker, for example—are generally not unequivocally laudatory). Another minor short-coming of the collection concerns the degree of repetition among the essays. Wagner notes in his introduction that the essays "reveal recurring patterns," as becomes abundantly clear in the nine essays in the book's largest subdivision, "Cultural Nationalism," which discusses critics from Charlesworth through Rubin. Here we encounter a succession of critics whose career paths, aesthetic and ideological views, and reviewing practices and styles (all of which are generally explicated quite thoroughly) are often remarkably similar, with the intriguing exception of the passionate "Marxist humanist," Oscar Ryan. While such repetition might be expected given the nature and methodology of the study (several researchers working on similar projects in relative isolation), one wonders if it could have been reduced through tighter editing, and whether the collection might not have benefitted from sacrificing "importance" to diversity more frequently as the prime criterion for critics' inclusion. Also, Wagner's claim that "The chronological, [*sic*] and geographic coverage of the essays included in this collection . . . create a cumulative cultural history of English Canada as seen through its theatre and drama" seems somewhat inflated, given that Atlantic Canadian theatre is represented solely by a brief discussion of the early nineteenth-century Halifax theatre criticism of Joseph Howe, and that Western Canadian theatre is also accorded short shrift (Edmonton, Saskatoon, Regina, and contemporary Winnipeg are all virtually ignored). Indeed, at times the terms "English-Canadian theatre" and "Toronto theatre" are virtually synonymous. Given the regional origins of many of Canada's leading playwrights, one might well wonder why more regional critics were not considered in a study whose stated mandate is to examine the ways that critics have nurtured indigenous English-Canadian theatre, or why, if few "nurturing" regional critics were to be found, this absence was not duly noted.

Heard Voices (Off)

George F. Walker
The East End Plays: Part 2. Talonbooks $17.95

Margaret Hollingsworth
Willful Acts. Talonbooks $18.95

Reviewed by Len Falkenstein

Talonbooks has made two significant additions to its list of Canadian drama titles with these new collections. George F. Walker and Margaret Hollingsworth both emerged on the Canadian theatre scene in the early seventies, and while their dramatic styles and idioms have been very different, both, as these collections demonstrate, have been similarly preoccupied with creating a political drama that foregrounds and validates the voices of the dispossessed outsiders who populate their plays.

The East End Plays: Part 2 collects three of George F. Walker's six East End plays (the others being *Criminals in Love* [1984], *Better Living* [1986], and *Escape From Happiness* [1991]). While the plays in this collection (*Beautiful City* [1987], *Love and Anger* [1989] and *Tough!* [1993]) are much less closely interwoven than the other three, the central characters of all six plays inhabit a common geographic and socio-economic landscape, and consequently share a common plight as (mostly) decent people working to redeem a blighted urban neighborhood. They struggle to assert their humanity and transform their community in the face of the institutional powers that trample and marginalize them, represented in the plays by *Beautiful City*'s Tony Raft, pillar of the community, self-styled urban planning visionary, and boss of an organized crime family; and *Love and Anger*'s tag-team of tabloid newspaper owner "Babe" Conner and (the aptly surnamed) Sean Harris, aspiring neo-conservative politician. In each case, the villains are battled by a combined force of East Enders and well-meaning, but generally inept, converts from the privileged classes. In *Beautiful City*, architect Paul Gallagher and social activist and "witch" Gina Mae Sabatini take on the Raft family and win; in *Love and Anger*, the duo of "Petie" Maxwell, a once grasping lawyer turned champion of the downtrodden, and his lover, mental patient Sarah Downey, capture and prosecute Conner and Harris, kangaroo-court style, for "Being . . . Consciously . . . Evil." The two emerge from their ordeal victorious, however, after smothering their opponents under a volley of self-congratulatory trickle-down economics-inspired avowals of the greater good borne of greed, thus proving their brand of "evil" to be decidedly *un*conscious.

The point here is an important one for the three plays as a whole: if in these works the powers-that-be are far more visible and accessible than they are in the other East End plays, they are also very human, and consequently potentially redeemable. Tony Raft's most damning crime, as he is brought to acknowledge by the end of *Beautiful City*, is not his monumental greed, but rather his advocacy of the dehumanizing, socially irresponsible values implicit to his vision of the ideal city—one connected by a maze of private underground tunnels through which its citizens can pass in solitary anonymity. Tony's reformation is one of the plays' many proofs of Gina Mae's assertion that "Basically human beings want to do good. You have to believe that . . . . I mean what's the alternative." In *Beautiful City* and *Love and Anger* even the most apparently detestable characters are, on closer consideration, perhaps more misguided than evil, and the victories for the underclasses that ultimately close the ends of the plays mark steps towards community-building transformations. *Tough!*, a one-act three-hander commissioned by Vancouver's Green Thumb Theatre for Young People, draws many of the same conclusions on a smaller canvas, as teenaged Bobby and Tina confront the crisis in their relationship brought on by Tina's pregnancy. Like Tony Raft, Bobby, who had considered leaving Tina, comes to understand that "I've got responsibilities," and the play ends on a cautiously optimistic note.

Hollingsworth's *Willful Acts* is somewhat misleadingly billed as a "revised and expanded edition" of the 1985 Coach House Press collection of the same title. The five plays in the original edition are, in fact, reprinted here without apparent alteration (and, unfortunately, with many of the original typos uncorrected), the only significant change to the first edition (and hence the focus of this review) being the addition of Hollingsworth's most recent drama, *Commonwealth Games* (1996). The five reprinted plays include *Ever Loving* (1981), Hollingsworth's affecting and formally innovative depiction of three war brides'

slow and difficult post-World War II acculturation to life in Canada; *The Apple of the Eye* and *Diving* (both 1983), two short, lyrical, surrealist/symbolist pieces that articulate the suppressed interior voices of female protagonists controlled by offstage male characters; *Islands* (1983), a sequel to the earlier one-act *Alli Alli Oh* (1977); and *War Babies* (1984), a play that examines intersections between violence, maternity, creative writing, and journalism, but which, as a particularly complex and visual work, is much more satisfyingly encountered in production than in print.

Commonwealth Games represents something of a departure for Hollingsworth in its predominantly naturalistic style. More significantly, its most strident and perhaps most compelling—albeit not most sympathetic—voice is that of a self-described male "victim." In an introductory note, Hollingsworth remarks that the play "wrestles with the question of what it means to be an English immigrant to Canada at a time when post-colonial thinking and political correctness dominate our lives," a plight she dramatizes in the figure of Stan Hayho, alcoholic, failed novelist, and British-Canadian patriarch of the dysfunctional family at the centre of the drama. One senses some measure of a genuine attempt to sympathize with Stan in his angry, bewildered, and at moments incisive rants against hypocritical Canadian attitudes towards multiculturalism and our colonial ties to Britain, and against post-colonial literature classes and feminism. At the same time, however, we are all too aware that he has almost certainly sexually abused his daughter, Hannah, and that he is, as she suggests, "stuck. A living, walking example of fixed ordering." The final events of the play, as Hannah, in partnership with the black British high-jumper who has become her lover, irrevocably breaks free of her father's domineering control, symbolize the death of the old imperial order he represents. While at times Stan may verge on becoming a mere caricature of the angry white male, *Commonwealth Games* is consistently thought-provoking, as the best of Hollingsworth's drama—and of George F. Walker's—has always been.

Theatres of Cruelty

George F. Walker
Somewhere Else. Talonbooks $19.95

Morris Panych
Lawrence & Holloman. Talonbooks $14.95

Normand Chaurette. Linda Gabouriau, trans.
The Queens. Talonbooks $13.95

Reviewed by Paul M. Malone

With a career of three decades behind him, George F. Walker has become a Canadian institution, and so, it seems, have anthologies of his work. Only five years ago, Coach House Press issued *Shared Anxiety*, an overview of his career to date; Coach House's demise and the fortunate acquisition of much of its catalogue by Talonbooks must have speeded the appearance of this new anthology. Three of the four plays in *Somewhere Else—Beyond Mozambique*, *Zastrozzi* and *Theatre of the Film Noir*—were represented in the previous collection, and they provide a well-chosen introduction to Walker's early phase: exotic locales, sexual and moral ambiguity, hilariously gratuitous cruelty, melodrama with psychedelic overtones. *Zastrozzi*, Walker's best-known earlier play, is virtually mandatory in any anthology, although time has not been kind to it. Without the ludicrous familiarity of the B-movie settings that Walker's other early works riff on, *Zastrozzi* now seems to have its foot in its mouth more often than its tongue in its cheek: its attempts at philosophy, Walker's most ambitious at the time, seem pretentious, and its sexual dynamics have become embarrassing despite their satirical intention. By comparison, the

less well-known *Mozambique* and *Film Noir* still have a cocky freshness. The former, with its mad scientist, mountie and gay addict priest, still has a remarkable energy; while the latter, set in Paris in 1944, manages to tame Walker's signature moral chaos into a more sombre key without losing its perverse edge.

The fourth play in the collection, *Nothing Sacred*, represents the mature Walker style with his adaptation of Turgenev's *Fathers and Sons*. Turgenev would doubtless disapprove of his nihilist antihero Bazarov taking over the play; but then he might not recognize Walker's wittier and more inspirational Bazarov. As Jerry Wasserman's introduction to the volume emphasizes, this is part of the point of these plays: Walker's imaginary Russia is not Turgenev's anyway, and like the other exotic settings—all Walker's "Somewhere Elses"—is really Canada here and now. Or at least they were here and now; *Nothing Sacred* aside, Walker's older plays are increasingly challenging to produce as anything other than period pieces in every sense of the word.

Morris Panych, whose career is a decade younger than Walker's, may not yet be an institution, but he has carved himself a niche with his own cartoonish style, which is challenging in a different manner. His plays can be reminiscent of Walker's middle period, as he edged from manic absurdism toward naturalism; but Panych offers a smaller sense of scale and a greater linguistic precision, and early developed a surer hand in leavening his plays with emotion. The result is a wistful quality that throws both the absurdity and the cruelty of Panych's situations into stark relief. In *Lawrence & Holloman* two unexceptional men, the former good-looking and superficial, the latter "bug-like" and festering with resentment, go from casual acquaintance to mutually assured destruction in under two hours, laced with overtones of Mamet, Pinter and *Spy vs. Spy*. At the top of the play Lawrence is brash, engaged, and salesman-of-the-month in a department store, too full of himself to expect anything but hero-worship from the quiet Holloman—whom Lawrence persists in calling "Harmon" for an entire scene before deigning to be corrected. By the end, thanks to Holloman's *grand guignol* machinations, Lawrence is a blind, destitute Beckettian wreck propped up in Holloman's bathtub, but still so optimistically arrogant that he can call Holloman an "itchy hemorrhoid" and expect gratitude in return. The lead characters' final epiphanies about the meaning of life are immediately deflated by an ending that balances their saccharine with gall: Holloman's surname and his reminder early in the play that April is "the cruelest month" are coy foreshadowings that the action will end with both a bang *and* a whimper. *Lawrence & Holloman* is brought up just short of nihilism because the logic of Panych's world could be mistaken by an optimist for justice; the bonus is that the play is genuinely funny.

Normand Chaurette's *The Queens*, on the other hand, is deadly serious: the mirror image of Shakespeare's Wars of the Roses tragedies, with only the female characters jockeying for power onstage. This mirror, however, is a distorting glass. The castle in which the queens clash is more like Kafka's castle or Mervyn Peake's Gormenghast than the Tower, and Chaurette has stocked it full of brave and vicious conceits, delivered in blank verse: King Edward, "dying since his birth," falling apart in his bed but never quite perishing; the mute George of Clarence, hidden in the cellar and reported now alive, now dead, but never proven to be either, like Schrödinger's cat; the castle furnace, "so huge you can take a stroll in it," where Richard of Gloucester has jurisdiction; Anne Dexter, born without hands, whose words nobody acknowledges. At the end, the Duchess of York, century-old mother of kings, borrows a crown from

Anne Warwick, her son Richard's wife, that she may rule for ten seconds before dying. Through all this, though there is little action in the conventional sense, the dialogue can leap in seconds from muscular familiarity to high poetry: Old Queen Margaret, the lone Lancastrian, plans to leave for China. "And what will you do in China?" asks Isabel Warwick, Clarence's wife; and Margaret replies, "Continue to loathe the lot of you./ I want to see how far one can take contempt/ However distant one might be." Chaurette, building upon French-language traditions, has crafted a dense and obscure style that walks a fine line between metaphysics and pretension. Linda Gaboriau's translation attempts bravely to recreate the flexibility of Chaurette's French, but ultimately no translation can convey the original without occasionally falling short: a line such as "You and I are united/ In the anarchy of umbrage" sounds too much like Walker or Panych being arch. Nonetheless, the cruelties that the women inflict upon one another, and the irony that their power derives totally from their absent menfolk, come through clearly. Whether a director and actors can build upon this framework to make the difficult text as accessible as Walker's and Panych's work has proven will depend on their talent and their daring.

Legends of Canadian Theatre

Iris Winston
Staging a Legend: A History of Ottawa Little Theatre. Creative Bound $18.95

Robert Lepage. Trans. Wanda Romer Taylor
Connecting Flights: In Conversation with Rémy Charest. Knopf Canada $21.95

Reviewed by Louise Ladouceur

The history of Ottawa Little Theatre is the story of Canada's oldest amateur theatre, one that has strongly influenced the development of theatre across the country. Founded in 1913, it survived—without direct financial support from any level of government—two major fires, two world wars and the Great Depression, supported by a growing membership and the determination of a few enthusiastic and energetic individuals. Originally called the Society for the Study and Production of Dramatic Art, it was the first Canadian branch of the Drama League of America before becoming an independent society known as the Ottawa Drama League. After a fire destroyed its theatre in the Parliament Buildings in 1916, the League raised enough money to buy an old church and convert the building into the Ottawa Little Theatre. The period between the two world wars was the golden age of little theatre, which grew very popular as commercial theatre declined with the development of radio and motion pictures. In 1933, Ottawa Little Theatre became the birthplace of the famous Dominion Drama Festival, founded by Lord Bessborough, then Governor General of Canada, and hosted the Festival for the first five years. This event brought the theatre nationwide recognition and admiration, thus contributing to the establishment of a theatre tradition in Canada.

After the 1970 fire, the community rallied to support the theatre and, following an intensive fund-raising campaign, construction went ahead. In its newly designed building, the Ottawa Little Theatre continued to be a vital centre for community theatre, with close to nine thousand subscribers and a season program of nine to ten shows, from a repertoire made up of a "tried-and-true mixture of comedies, farces, thrillers and classical dramas" designed to please and entertain an audience upon which it depends for its survival.

Written with a manifest appreciation of her subject, Iris Winston's book draws abundantly upon articles and chronicles related to the Ottawa Little Theatre. It

offers appendices listing key dates and plays produced over eighty-five years, as well as a reproduction of the prologue written by Duncan Campbell Scott and delivered by Dorothy White at the opening of the Ottawa Little Theatre in 1928. It also displays a collection of photos and documents about the people and the shows that have turned the Ottawa Little Theatre into a legend that is still in the making.

Dedicated to a more recent legendary figure of Canadian theatre, *Robert Lepage: Connecting Flights* is the English version of *Quelques zones de liberté*, a book published in Quebec in 1995. Translated by Wanda Romer Taylor, with a foreword by John Ralston Saul, the book covers a series of conversations between Rémy Charest and Robert Lepage that took place around the frantic schedule dictated by Lepage's international career. Initiated in Stockholm in the fall of 1994, when Lepage was directing *A Dream Play* by August Strindberg at the Dramaten while editing his film *The Confessional* in Paris during the weekends, the interviews continue through the spring of 1995 in Quebec City, where Lepage had established his multidisciplinary production company Ex Machina the previous year.

Through six chapters—"Beginning," "Geography," "Mythology," "Creation," "Paradoxes" and "End"—Charest follows Lepage's memories, reflections and considerations on the art he creates, the process it involves and the goals it achieves. For instance, Lepage recalls his encounter with theatre when he was fifteen, his training at the Conservatoire d'art dramatique de Québec and consequent involvement with the Théâtre Repère until the international success *of The Dragon's Trilogy*, which toured the world and collected awards between 1985 and 1990. He was subsequently appointed Artistic Director of the National Arts Centre in Ottawa from 1989 to 1993 and founded his own company, Ex Machina, in 1994, all the while travelling to Europe, Japan, the United States and Canada to fulfil his numerous international commitments in theatre, opera, cinema and music.

For Lepage, shows are conceived in terms of "travel narratives" whose "success can perhaps in part be measured in the same way as we measure the success of a trip." He comments on the challenge of working internationally and compares methods of acting, staging techniques and visions of the world in the West and in the East, where actors "don't imitate the West. They seem to transcend it." We learn that what is important in theatre is "the sense of transcendence" and that people come to the theatre to witness the "transfiguration" at the heart of ritual. We explore concepts and notions central to his work, which inverts the usual order of theatrical production to "rehearsal-performance-translation-writing," the starting point for most creation becoming for him the final point. We are also presented with a selection of some twenty-seven photographs offering a visual account of his impressive career, detailed in the Professional Chronology offered in the appendix.

In a conversational tone, this book illuminates some of Lepage's views on art, culture, places and politics, and reveals aspects of a creative work that has been internationally acclaimed and continues to redefine artistic process, product and cooperation on a level that transcends traditions, languages and frontiers. A rare achievement, indeed.

From There to Here

Eric Wright

Always Give a Penny to a Blind Man: A Memoir. Key Porter Books $29.95

Reviewed by Colin Nicholson

The past may be another country, but Eric Wright's entertaining page-turner, nominated for the Charles-Taylor Prize for Non-

Fiction, provides immediately recognisable detail of an English working-class childhood and upbringing from the 1930s Slump through to the post war years. An uncluttered prose delivers convincing memories of lived experience in a family of ten children ("a new one born every two years, regular as clockwork, all living together in one flat"—with no piped hot water and sleeping arrangements that were a necessary miracle of compression); a father who was a carter with a four-horse van, and a tailoress mother employed in a London sweatshop. Wright's relaxed sense of humour and sharp eye for detail produce the story of a life and a local history of class prejudice and pressure within and around a group of people getting by or getting on in deprived circumstance.

The sense of cultural enclosure induced in a young boy by a well-intentioned mother, whose idiom gives this book its title, drumming into him that "when we went out we were never to talk about the way we lived indoors" feeds into the more immediately rancorous effect of teachers at the school to which a scholarship gave Wright admission, routinely exploiting their assumed social superiority and emphasising his required deference. That deference was not forthcoming; and *Always Give a Penny* also charts the development, when "we realised we were being groomed to be middle-class supporters of the Conservative party," of a seemingly natural propensity towards socialist perspectives: "At the same time, the system was performing its silent ministry, and . . . already none of my cronies shared the same vowels as their parents. The scholarship examination was doing its work." Though he learned with others to fake pronunciation, Wright seems to have resisted class assimilation here too, since he later recalls being mistaken for an Australian some years after his arrival in Canada. But he reflects that his "tiny bit of extra education" had already put a gap between him and his parents, "so that I was a stranger to them by the time I was thirteen and at twenty was no more than a boarder in my own house." In what has been described as a highly successful pre-emptive strike against English working-class self-mobilisation, that double-edged alienation and opportunity became shared experience for a generation of post-war children considered bright enough to enter the establishment's educational pathways. The housing estate where Wright grew up included children of agricultural labourers who had lived in tied cottages and, it seems, another time. One of them, anarchic and mischievous, became his close friend, but within two years of Wright entering the county school, "Robbie and I were strangers." Nonetheless, the "spirit of anti-establishmentarianism spread to other things—infected our lives, making us hostile to the brainwashing we were being subjected to." Although the North of England told a different story, in London and the home counties, because rugby was the sport of the public schools the county schools were trying to emulate, one of the virtues of making soccer-playing schoolboys play rugby was the creation of "a sharp separation" between the world of the school and the environment most of the students came from. Wright refused to play the game.

Among its incidental insights, his memoir charts the difficulty of expressing emotion, sometimes comically in the taboo placed on sexual knowledge, and later in the impossibility of finding privacy to put it onto practice; more disturbingly in the guilt he came to feel about his mother's sense that his leaving home was a mark of her failure. While his older brothers broadened their horizons by surviving in various armed services during the 1939-45 war, for Wright the Blitz was an exciting backdrop to schooldays that came to an end just after the fighting stopped. His account breathes authenticity. After a stint clerking at rock

bottom wages (but nonetheless called a salary) in the Asiatic Petroleum Company that would later become Shell, he did national service in the air force, employed at menial levels until his relative educational advantage opened other doors, often by freakish chance. All the while he was reading voraciously, learning among other things that the meaning of a book depended on the social class of both writer and reader, and that by associating himself with servants in conventional fiction "whole new patterns of meaning started to emerge," often at variance with authorial priorities. Bringing to bear what he already knew of life, he soon realised the ideological deceptions often implicit in middle-class literary benevolence: "Forster's Leonard Bast, for example, was absurd, a creature constructed out of an attempt to shift a bohemian lifestyle down the social scale to where it would never have been tolerated, all for the sake of creating plot."

Wright was born in 1927, so vignettes of his grandparents give us glimpses of the preceding century, much in the way his first contact with construction workers in Churchill, Manitoba, "Gateway to the Arctic," gave him what he calls a crash course in Canadian history and culture partly through reminiscences of men who had been, or were directly descended from homesteaders, men who had lived through the North American Depression: "I felt I was hearing stories of the old West, too late for me, but I was in time to at least hear about it first-hand from the sons of the pioneers themselves." He arrived in Canada on Dominion Day in 1951, settling first in a Winnipeg itself since transformed, so his recollections have something of the aura of a vanished world. If this often coolly understated narrative of migration, loss and gain is a way of remembering London working-class family life and schooldays, and a voyage out and away from origins, it is also an unobtrusive acknowledgement that by emigrating to north of the forty-second parallel Wright could, as he puts it, "partake of the American dream without much risk," enrolling at the University of Manitoba as a literature major, for example, and benefiting from James Reaney's classes. Story-telling skills subsequently developed by one of Canada's most successful crime-writers are evident here—nowhere more so than in the account of the way Wright earned money for his education, a hilarious episode of pipe-laying and improvised bridge-building in a then rapidly developing Churchill, up on the Hudson Bay's north-eastern coast.

L'Autre de l'Autre: *Sacré Blues*

Dominique Perron

Donner un cours de culture québécoise dans une université anglophone, lorsqu'on est soi-même québécois, a toujours suscité chez moi une perplexité absente pourtant pour les cours de littérature québécoise proprement dite. L'approche pédagogique d'un corpus théâtral, poétique ou romanesque n'implique pas ce type de subjectivité particulière liée à l'obligation implicite de vendre en quelque sorte cette culture qui se présente bien sûr comme la sienne, en sus de l'ambiguïté rattachée d'ailleurs à la définition même du terme (culture populaire, culture savante, culture médiatisée, traditions, folklore), et de surcroît l'inévitable politisation qui se rattache à tous ces différents types d'expression. Le professeur québécois de culture québécoise se retrouve invariablement dans la frustrante et inconfortable position de bonimenteur d'artefacts stéréotypés inhérente a une perspective de tourisme culturel telle qu'étalée dans la superficialité liée au genre *Un été en Provence,* position qu'il se sentira obligé d'agrémenter de surcroît du thème fatal du "caractère unique de la société québécoise" autre cliché qui risque d'être malencontreux pour un québécois qui aurait eu l'occasion de se familiariser tant soit peu avec diverses formes de la culture canadienne. Et pour peu que ce même professeur québécois ait l'honnêteté (et dans certains contextes, le courage) de préciser ses couleurs politiques en classe, car c'est là, j'ai eu l'occasion de le vérifier souvent avec mes étudiants, où se cristallise la question centrale qui sous-tend la raison principale pour s'inscrire à ce cours, la démarche initialement pédagogique risque de s'épicer considérablement d'une entreprise de légitimation culturelle et politique qui contaminera presque inévitablement la présentation du corpus comme étant une somme culturelle d'une implicite supériorité par rapport aux pratiques canadiennes du même type. Je nommerais cette tendance « les grandeurs et misères de la *distinction.*»

Tout ça, en fin de compte, pour exprimer le sentiment de malaise que j'ai toujours ressenti devant l'obligation de donner le fameux cours de "culture québécoise." Malaise dont la permanence n'était certes pas troublée vu l'absence de manuels satisfaisants pour aider le pédagogue à mieux penser sa didactique de la culture. Or l'ironie des choses veut que ce soit du côté de Canada anglophone que nous vienne l'esquisse d'une solution intéressante pour cette question de l'enseignement de la culture comme pour l'exposition de ce qui est d'ailleurs la pierre d'achoppement culturelle par excellence au Canada: le fait québécois.

Parions cependant que Taras Grescoe, jeune britanno-colombien dans la trentaine, n'avait pas à l'origine conçu son ouvrage *Sacré Blues: An Unsentimental Journey Through Québec* (MacFarlane Walter & Ross, n.p.) comme étant précisément un manuel d'enseignement de la culture québécoise. De fait, il se présenterait

plutôt comme une version teintée d'un humour discret d'un essai du genre "le Québec expliqué aux Canadiens," où les productions culturelles en tant que telles ne seraient pas l'objet central de son discours. Ni la politique d'ailleurs. C'est autre chose de plus essentiel que Grescoe a entrepris de cerner et d'expliciter à ses compatriotes canadiens anglais, une chose plus difficile à saisir également comme l'illustrent les polémiques et les débats actuels sur l'avenir de la souveraineté du Québec dans la foulée de la démission récente du premier ministre Bouchard. Il s'agirait de la transposition de ce que l'on me pardonnera de nommer pour l'instant l'essence québécoise (autre terme malencontreux) sur les paradigmes historiques et sociétaux de cette véritable anomalie historique que demeure au fond le Québec.

L'auteur part d'emblée d'une position particulière et privilégiée : il est parfaitement bilingue, avec cependant un accent qui le classe pour une oreille québécoise du côté définitif de l'"Anglo" et est considéré comme tel par ses interlocuteurs. Toutefois, il a vécu assez longtemps au Québec, fréquentant des cercles variés et des endroits différents, pour pouvoir en faire un saisissant portrait de l'intérieur, dénué de préjugés et sympathique aux idiosyncrasies québécoises sans pour autant verser dans l'apologie sirupeuse du touriste extasié sur les charmes de "la Belle Province." Mais surtout Grescoe fait preuve d'un désir d'analyse critique et d'objectivité qui le démarquent sans conteste de trop nombreux commentateurs canadiens du fait québécois (qui évoluent particulièrement dans les départements de sciences politiques des universités situées à l'Ouest d'Ottawa), lesquels répètent à qui mieux mieux, en plein vingt-et-unième siècle, les clichés les plus éculés comme les plus hostiles envers le Québec en des propos qui se retrouvent régulièrement concentrés dans nos bons journaux "nationaux" que sont le *National Post* et le *Globe & Mail*, dont je commence à soupçonner qu'ils doivent être en vérité à la solde du Parti Québécois tellement ils invitent quotidiennement à voter pour l'indépendance au premier référendum venu. Que l'on me pardonne cette digression irritée, mais elle devrait aider à faire mieux ressortir les raisons diverses de mon appréciation du travail de Grescoe.

Il faut donc insister d'abord sur la bienveillance éloignée d'ailleurs de condescendance présidant au projet du jeune auteur, qui conduit à lui pardonner l'exposé de quelques stréréotypes initiaux exposés dans le premier chapitre de l'ouvrage comiquement intitulé "*Poutine Nation.*" Ses commentaires amusés sur les habitudes alimentaires des Québécois, oscillant selon lui entre nouvelle cuisine et *junk food*, ses explications justifiant leur façon de conduire unanimement jugée périlleuse par le ROC, son admiration pour les fromages au lait cru et son ébahissement devant le byzantinisme réglant chez nous la production de la margarine, relèvent certes encore de ce tourisme culturel dont je parlais plus haut. Mais ils ont le mérite de rendre la lecture engageante et de tendre à la communauté québécoise un miroir non moralisateur de ses cocasseries quotidiennes et de ses paradoxes réglementés. Cependant, là où l'analyse de Grescoe prend un virage intéressant annonciateur de la perspective générale de son exposé, c'est lorsqu'en plein milieu de ce chapitre il commence à aborder de façon récurrente les raisons sociohistoriques de la distinction québécoise dont le fondement se trouve à ses yeux dans le primat juridique des droits de la collectivité sur les droits individuels d'où découle tout particulièrement, comme le ROC le sait bien, les lois linguistiques du Québec, calamiteuses pour les uns, mal nécessaires pour les autres.

Pour Taras Grescoe, cette primauté appliquée du collectif sur l'individuel lui semble indéniablement une position

légitime qui a, aux yeux d'un lecteur qui jetterait sur le Canada anglophone le même regard du dehors-dedans que celui de l'auteur sur le Québec, le mérite inattendu d'établir de suaves comparaisons entre les conséquences de cette position au Québec, au Canada et aux États-Unis, dans d'autres sphères du juridique. C'est ainsi que l'auteur remet en perspective le fait qu'au nom des droits collectifs les Québécois appuient la loi sur les contrôle des armes à feu dans une proportions de 70%. Ou encore que cette éthique du collectivisme qui a effectivement sa source dans l'obligation historique d'assurer la survivance du catholicisme et de la langue française, va conduire à cette improbable conséquence d'une tolérance sinon d'une acceptation accrue des différences de style de vie ou d'orientation sexuelle ce qui est en contraste marqué avec ce qu'il serait donné d'observer, selon Grescoe, dans le reste de l'Amérique du Nord. Je préfère ici laisser la parole à l'auteur : "Strangely, English Canadians and Americans, the most vocal defenders of individual rights, are more inclined to judge and to condemn an individual who actually tries to assert her individuality. Quebecers, even though the most rigid Byzantine body of civil law and bureaucratic regulations of the continent, tend to suspend judgment and tolerate those who deviate from the norm."

Ceci donne le ton, je crois, à l'approche que choisira Grescoe pour aborder ce qui me paraît être en ce moment précis, à la suite de l'affaire Michaud, un des points les plus lancinants au sein du débat d'idées et de la crise politique qui agitent le Québec, à savoir, puisqu'il faut le préciser, la question de l'antisémitisme et de la xénophobie qui serait selon d'aucuns, la marque particulière de la société distincte. Le second chapitre commence par un bref historique de l'immigration juive à Montréal et de ses relations avec cette autre minorité qu'étaient les Canadiens Français dans les années vingt. Il met d'une part bien en relief l'antisémitisme réel des Québécois ainsi qu'il était relayé par des institutions telles que l'Église catholique, *La Presse*, *Le Devoir* et des individus parmi lesquels il nous faut bien mentionner Adrien Arcand (ce qui ne pose pas de problème) et . . . Lionel Groulx. Cette récapitulation s'enchaîne sur une entrevue avec l'accusateur le plus tonitruant sur la scène internationale du crime que constitue à ses yeux, l'existence même du Québec– avec tristesse je ne puis m'empêcher de penser autrement—Mordecai Richler. Les arguments diachroniques que lui oppose Grescoe sur ses propos polémiques publiés particulièrement dans son ouvrage *Oh Canada! Oh Quebec! Requiem for a Divided Country* de même qu'une citation particulièrement blessante pour les Québécois tirée de sa nouvelle "The Main"—assimilée pour l'intervieweur à de la littérature haineuse—illustrent clairement le heurt de deux générations dont la plus jeune est capable de relativisme et en définitive, illustre aussi le refus simple de Richler d'entrevoir la possibilité même d'un réelle discussion au sujet de ses écrits, finissant la rencontre par une boutade hargneuse qui a eu pour moi l'effet étrange de le considérer dorénavant au même rang que nos propres dinosaures idéologiques québécois (je me censure ici), dont l'avenir devrait prouver que s'ils peuvent être encore dangereux, leurs griffes s'usent de plus en plus. Et Grescoe de rappeler une fois de plus que les errements idéologiques à caractère incontestablement racistes manifestés partout dans le ROC pendant la première moitié du vingtième siècle pouvaient dépasser en ferveur les prises de positions québécoises contre les *étrangers*. Mais il faudrait prendre garde à ce que les accusations et les admissions réciproques de ces crimes ne servent aux Québécois d'absolution trop facile à leurs égarements du passé et que la visible approbation du jeune homme pour ce qui appelle notre xénophobie

superficielle ne serve de prétexte à l'indulgence subséquente envers de subtiles formes de discrimination basée sur des différences d'ordres ethniques, linguistiques ou politiques. Les démons mettent du temps à mourir.

L'espace qui m'est alloué ici ne permet pas de m'étendre avec la même profondeur sur tous les points soulevés par l'auteur, mais son analyse des conflits linguistiques entre les tenants de la langue populaire et les défenseurs puristes de l'Office de la Langue Française expose assez bien comment le simple usage de la langue de Molière (dont l'auteur démontre bien la dimension mythique de l'expression) est au fond vécu avec un malaise lancinant qui est pratiquement l'objet fondamental de toute expression littéraire au Québec. En dehors même de la question brutale de l'assimilation des Canadiens de langue française dont on peut voir l'illustration quotidienne au Canada, Grescoe a parfaitement perçu chez nous le fait que simplement assumer son existence de francophone ne saurait être, que ce soit pour les tenants du joual ou pour ceux d'une standardisation fictive, littéralement *taken for granted.*

D'aucuns liront avec amusement ou scandale son ethnologie de la presse québécoise ou du monde des affaires, tous devraient lire son analyse des conflits entre Québécois et Amérindiens qui illustre avec assez de justesse à quel point nous sommes encore récalcitrants devant un réel dialogue, encore qu'il m'a paru que l'auteur aurait pu mettre davantage en lumière d'indéniables gestes de meilleure volonté de la part du Québec au chapitre plus récent, il est vrai, de certaines ententes gouvernementales portant sur les territoires Amérindiens et des partenariats entre les deux groupes concernant les dévelop-pements de ces mêmes territoires. Sur ce point de la question amérindienne, on ne peut s'empêcher d'être effleuré par le soupçon que le jeune homme originaire de la Colombie Britannique, province où certaines revendications territoriales prennent parfois un tour pressant, transpose également certaines anxiétés à la version québécoise de ces conflits. Il n'empêche cependant que son essai sur la question constitue une invitation sérieuse à reconsidérer notre éthique sous-tendant la conception des droits territoriaux reposant sur le principe du premier occupant et à réexaminer les conséquences logiques d'une déclaration sans nuance sur l'intégrité non-négociable du territoire québécois.

Je passe encore sur d'autres perceptions intéressantes établies par Grescoe sur la question du droit des femmes au Québec, sur différents aspects de la démographie, sur le taux de suicide anormalement élevé d'une société qui accuse des difficultés à faire réellement place aux générations montantes, commentaires qui offrent eux aussi matière à réflexion, mais c'est surtout le dernier chapitre de Grescoe qui mérite que l' on s'y attarde.

Cette dernière partie, "Significant Others" prend une résonance particulière pour une Québécoise ayant une dizaine d'années d'Alberta à son actif et ayant dû, bon gré mal gré, médité sur les effets identitaires du voisinage avec les États-Unis lorsque, comme le précise judicieusement Grescoe à propos du Québec, on est privé de cet écran protecteur qu'est la différence radicale de la langue. Citant Charles Taylor, pour une thèse également soutenue il y a quelques années par Alain Roy, Grescoe souligne à quel point le Québec, par son bilinguisme réel, quoique polémique, et par son pluralisme dynamique serait en fait la réalisation réelle d'un Canada qui s'est ailleurs transformé en mythe, comme l'exprime bien les velléités séparatistes de l'Ouest qui deviennent, on le voit, de plus en plus manifestes. Parallèlement à cette canadianité paradoxale de la part d'un peuple qui voudrait s'en départir, on assiste depuis toujours chez les Québécois à la

tentation de l'américanité culturelle, sinon civique, à l'origine de cet autre mythe qu'est le *Français d'Amérique* que l'on retrouve actualisé en particulier dans les études littéraires. Estimant que le Canada ne saurait sauvegarder la spécificité identitaire québécoise, il est tentant pour le Québec de croire qu'une orientation plus affirmée encore vers les États-Unis aurait le bénéfice de nous délivrer enfin de cette guerre d'usure avec l'Autre canadien avec qui nous voulons renoncer de plus en plus à dialoguer, encore que nous ne soyons pas les seuls responsables de cette désaffection. Mais contrairement aux Canadiens qui sont quotidiennement aux prises avec la capacité illimitée d'homogénéisation de l'empire américain sous toutes ses formes, n'ayant pas cette cloison retardante du français qui maintient encore les plus enthousiastes américanophiles d'entre nous dans cette position naïve du touriste de surface (mais pour combien de temps?), le Québécois excédé qui ne peut pas trouver de miroir identitaire chez le Canada s'attendra à vivre cet épanouissement dans un contact resserré avec une Amérique illusoire dont il n'a pas encore eu l'occasion historique de mesurer la profonde indifférence à la différence. Or, l'indépendantiste chevronné sait bien que l'exaspération canadienne envers les revendications autonomistes du Québec trouvent l'une de ses sources fondamentales dans l'obligation où se trouve le Canada d'affronter une différence inassimilable, du moins pour l'instant, différence qui ne l'en oblige pas moins à reconsidérer à son tour les fondements de sa propre identité. En fait, la thèse de Grescoe assigne au Québec la fonction d'être pour le Canada ce fragile rempart contre sa propre assimilation culturelle, tout comme le français, lui aussi toujours fragile, constitue pour le Québec une fausse sécurité dans des rapports avec une Amérique dont il voit mal qu'elle n'a peut-être que faire de lui, alors que le Canada, malgré lui, malgré nous, est bien obligé de faire avec. Et tant que l'Indépendance du Québec qui recule à mesure que l'on s'en approche, reste dans l'éventualité des si et des peut-être, il nous faut *faire avec* l'un l'autre.

Dans cette perspective de tolérance réciproque et pas toujours polie qui règle les relations entre les deux solitudes fatiguées, le grand mérite de cette présentation du Québec aux Canadiens est d'abord une objectivité dénuée de préjugés qui permet effectivement à l'ouvrage d'être utilisé comme un manuel d'enseignement de la culture québécoise qui nous sorte enfin du sirop d'érable et de la chasse-galerie, le fameux manuel de culture qui me manquait tant. Cette objectivité s'allie d'autre part à un sens critique mesuré lorsque vient le moment pour Grescoe d'exposer certains aléas de la société distincte, et toujours l'interprétation de ces particularismes comme ayant un impact négatif sur le tissu social québécois n'est jamais présentée par l'auteur comme un démenti à la valeur du désir de *réaliser* la nation québécoise, d'où le fait que ces commentaires prennent une crédibilité accrue et peuvent présenter pour un Québécois un objet de méditation privée d'angoisse paranoïaque. Enfin, et ce n'est pas là le moindre des compliments que j'adresserai à Grescoe, son entreprise ne relève pas de cette tolérance froide envers l'Altérité qui porte encore des restes d'irritation sourde, mais plutôt d'un désir de compréhension fondamentale exempte de jugement qui rend cette lecture émouvante pour un Québécois au fait des visages plus sévères que peut offrir la tolérance institutionnalisée par le ROC. A tel point que ce miroir de l'Autre que nous sommes pour les compatriotes de Grescoe, on se prend de l'envie d'en tendre aussi un de la société canadienne à nos *fellows* du Québec qui présenterait le même désir de comprendre et d'apprécier ce que nous avons été programmés pour voir comme l'ennemi absolu. Ne croyons cependant pas faire

ainsi du Canada un éventuel allié de la souveraineté québécoise : mais, très bientôt, il nous faudra apprendre à nous en faire un voisin sympathique avec qui nous avons des affinités et que l'on aura envie de connaître au-delà de nos propres clichés qui en font une communauté privée d'identité ou de culture. *Sacré Blues* ouvre ainsi la voie à une démarche de découverte mutuelle allant au delà des oppositions politiques et qui pourrait nous sortir des "Belles Rocheuses" de Chrétien et du Stampede de Calgary. Ainsi, Grescoe doit maintenant s'assurer de faire traduire son livre en français et doit aussi commencer à tracer les plans d'un éventuel *Voyage sans sentimentalisme au Canada.*

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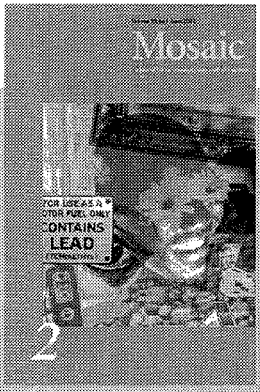

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Essays, Opinions & Notes

Andre **Furlani** is assistant professor of English at Concordia University, Montreal. Recent publications include essays on Herman Melville in *Studies in Short Fiction*, Vladimir Nabokov in *English Studies in Canada*, and Joseph Heller in *Narrative*. Forthcoming is an essay on Elizabeth Bishop in *Critique*. He is completing a study on Guy Davenport.

Jane **Moss** is Robert E. Diamond Professor of French at Colby College (Waterville, Maine). Her numerous articles on Québec and French theatre have appeared in journals and essay collections in the United States, Canada, and Europe. She is currently Managing Editor of *Québec Studies*, an Assistant Editor of *The French Review*, and a member of the editorial board of the *American Review of Canadian Studies*.

Melanie **Stevenson** teaches dramatic literature at McMaster University, and has a particular interest in Canadian and Australian theatre history. She has published articles on postcolonial issues in Canadian drama and on Edward Bond. With the aid of a SSHRC postdoctoral fellowship, she is currently writing a book on Pauline Johnson and the politics of performance personae.

Dominique **Perron** a reçu son doctorat de l'université Laval et enseigne depuis dix ans le théâtre et la littérature québécoise à l'université de Calgary Dans la perspective de l'analyse des discours, elle a publié des articles sur Marie-Claire Blais, Marie Laberge et Denise Bombardier, de même que des essais de sociocritique sur Colette. Elle travaille actuellement sur un ouvrage portant sur l'analyse des discours promotionnels d'Hydro-Québec depuis 1964.

Kenneth W. **Meadwell** is Chair of the Department of French Studies and German Studies at the University of Winnipeg, and a former Invited Professor of Canadian Studies at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. He has published extensively in the area of the modern Québec novel.

Poems

George Elliott **Clarke** teaches at the University of Toronto. Mark **Cochrane**, Rocco **de Giacomo** and Robert **Gore** live in Vancouver, Ken **Howe** in Regina, Nancy **Lee** in Richmond, Rochelle **Mass** in Gan Ner, Israel, R.J. **McDonald** in Toronto, Lazar **Sarna** in Montreal.

Reviews

Milka **Beck**, René **Brisebois**, Bryan N.S. **Gooch**, Jerry **Wasserman**, Michael **Zeitlin** all teach/study at the University of British Columbia. Jennifer **Andrews** and Len **Falkenstein** teach at the University of New Brunswick. Claire **Borody**, Jessica **Gardiner**, Clara **Joseph** all teach/study at the University of Toronto. Wayde **Compton** and Malcolm **Page** teach at Simon Fraser University, Cecily **Devereux** at the University of Alberta, Douglas **Ivison** at the Université de Montréal, Adrienne **Kertzer** at the University of Calgary. Ric **Knowles** teaches at the University of Guelph, Susan **Knutson** at Université Sainte-Anne, Louise **Ladouceur** at Faculté Saint-Jean, University of Alberta, Paul M. **Malone** at the University of Waterloo, Colin **Nicholson** at the University of Edinburgh. Pilar **Somacarrera** teaches at the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid in Spain, Dawn **Thompson** at Malaspina University-College, Peter **Urquhart** at McGill University. R.W. **Stedingh** lives inVancouver, Claire **Wilkshire** in St. John's, and Leslie **Harlin** in McLean, Virginia.