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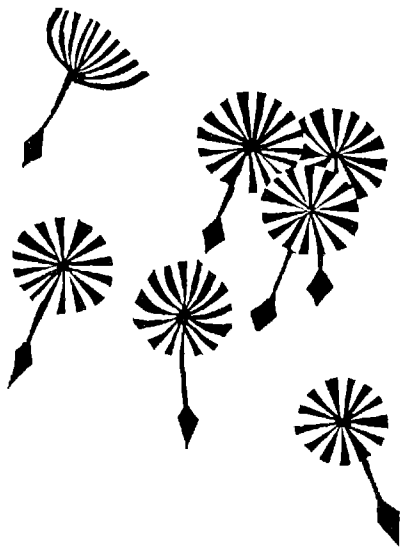


B.C. WRITERS/ REVIEWS ISSUE

A QUARTERLY OF CRITICISM AND REVIEW

editorial

TALISMANS OF REGION

"EVEN THOUGH ONE ACCEPTS that regions *exist*, one should be aware that they are human, intellectual constructs. They exist only in the minds of the persons who define, and accept, the criteria and characteristics of the region." This premise is fundamental to J. Lewis Robinson's *Concepts and Themes in the Regional Geography of Canada* (Talonbooks, 1983), a readable textbook which contributes to the new regionalism which is reshaping our understanding of Canadian culture. If the "regions of Canada are not fixed or permanent," but rather are "academic devices or conceptual frameworks, and an organizational framework for studying Canada and its parts," then regional approaches to Canadian studies need not be equated with blinkered insularity, but will promise an appreciation of diversities, a sense of the cross-regional similarities which link the country, and sensitivity to international connections. Robinson retired in 1984 from the Geography Department at the University of British Columbia; appropriately, his book is designed by his son, David, until recently co-owner of Talonbooks, a firm whose great importance to Canadian literature lies in combining regional loyalty with national and international commitment. And Talonbooks is only one of many companies which have figured in the rapid growth of publishing in British Columbia, an industry which now, with sales near $10 million annually, provides a significant regional alternative to the Toronto-based houses.

Robinson's outline of the traditional concerns of regional geography — relationships between people and environment, regional landscapes (both natural and human features), distribution patterns, and changing geographical patterns — insists that our conceptual frameworks of region should be broad and varied. Turning to his own region, the Cordillera of British Columbia (which includes all the province except the Peace River area), Robinson finds that because of the mountains — a feature common to the region, but not a place where people live — "great contrasts within small areas are characteristic." The multitude of de-

finable sub-regions within the Cordillera themselves suggest a form for a novel, or a poem, or a study of literature in B.C.

In defining regional geography, Robinson asks us to imagine how, among a group of television or printed pictures, we would identify in which parts of Canada each was taken. Certainly many of the buildings of Francis Rattenbury would be immediately identified with B.C. *Francis Rattenbury and British Columbia: Architecture and Challenge in the Imperial Age* by Anthony A. Barrett and Rhodri Windsor Liscombe (UBC Press, 1983) is an excellent study of the concepts which shaped some of the province's most memorable streetscapes. Rattenbury's story (British emigrant, flamboyant master of public relations, speculator in land and transportation systems, victim of the Depression, murdered by his wife's teen-age lover) is ripe enough for Jack Hodgins to parody. Barrett and Liscombe combine Rattenbury's biography with a critical study of the buildings which have come to be emblems of the province — the Legislative Buildings, the Empress Hotel, the Crystal Garden, the Vancouver Courthouse (recently spectacularly restored as the Vancouver Art Gallery by another famous shaper of B.C.'s landscape, Arthur Erickson; Rattenbury perhaps forecast this evolution when he described his design: "It looks quite swagger"). But the authors show that Rattenbury shaped towns and cities throughout the province: the Hotel Greenwood, in Greenwood; the Bank of Montreal in Rossland, Nelson, and New Westminster; the C.P.R. Hotel in Revelstoke. Through Barrett and Liscombe's detailed, but clear descriptions we become more intelligent readers of the province's public and institutional buildings: in the Legislative Building the authors identify not only Neo-Gothic elements alluding to the Imperial connection (the tourist's first reading of Rattenbury?), but its differentiation from American legislatures, and its Italianate and Romanesque details, which "placed it in the mainstream of North American architecture"; the Empress Hotel is seen as "a more symmetrical rendering of the château mode which . . . had come to be considered the Canadian national style by virtue of its mixture of English and French mediaeval and Renaissance features." International fashions and national styles combine with regional sensitivities: Barrett and Liscombe document Rattenbury's frequent efforts to use local materials — locally quarried stone, fir, and cedar.

It's no surprise to find that such a central figure in the region's iconography followed the gold rush to the Yukon: as Robinson shows, the region's economy (and, thus, its characteristic mode of thought?) is resource-based, extractive or exploitative. The forms of the gold rush are marvellously recreated in Pierre Berton's *The Klondike Quest: A Photographic Essay 1897-1899* (McClelland & Stewart, 1983). The photographs — of a sod hotel, of the men at the sluice boxes — are surprisingly crisp and detailed. The story lies in the faces, the changing faces, which make up "the Klondike look": "Emerging from the mountains after the long winter's struggle, each man presented a grotesque experience . . . their

ragged beards and patched clothing made them seem like creatures from some savage and foreign clime, for their faces were smeared with charcoal and their eyes were hidden behind slitted masks to guard against sunburn and snow glare." The shape of the regional story, Robert Harlow's *Scann* perhaps, may be built in here. As Berton tells it, after the most agonizing, humanly impossible journey to Dawson, "thousands did not even trouble to visit the fabled creeks." "Emotional lassitude dominated" and greed is not the motive after all: the journey, the adventure is all, and when there was no mountain to climb, no crashing river left to navigate, the story ends in dazed wandering. The laconically humorous version of this story is found in compact form in Paul St. Pierre's *Breaking Smith's Quarter Horse*, the writer's fictional version of a *Chilcotin Holiday* (the two volumes were re-issued in 1984, in large paperback format, by Douglas & McIntyre), when a man "knows not where he is going, whom he may meet, where he shall sleep, what he may eat or when he might return."

Berton's reconstruction of the gold rush story is unusual among the concepts of this region in giving almost no place to the native Indians. Paul St. Pierre gives the Chilcotin story and voice in a tongue-in-cheek burlesque that would do both Coyote and George Bowering proud. Even Rattenbury, who, typically for his generation, paid no attention to native architecture (contrast Arthur Erickson), gave his Victoria home an Indian name, and was obviously attracted to Indian language, and to an Indian story of the mystery of language:

> We have at last found a name for the house IECHINIHL, pronounced softly, Eye-a-chineel. It is an Indian name, and has a story connected with it. In one part of our garden I have often noticed there was a good many clam shells and there is also a spring of fresh water. Mentioning this to an old timer, he told me that for centuries our particular garden has been an Indian camping ground and that they had a legend that formerly all men were dumb and looked at each other like owls. But one day on this very spot the good spirit conferred on them the gift of speech. The name means "The place where a good thing happened." (I. is "good" in Indian.) Rather an interesting story. The legend is still in existence amongst the Indians.

Such an observation, in 1900, from a Yorkshire entrepreneur reflects how influential and visible the native peoples have been in the culture of the Cordillera of British Columbia (however sentimental or ignorant some of the manifestations may be). *Sliammon Life, Sliammon Language* by Dorothy Kennedy and Randy Bouchard (Talonbooks, 1983) weaves evocative stories with compact descriptions of the culture (food, rituals, plant technology) of the Sliammon people living along both sides of the northern Strait of Georgia. The B.C. Ministry of Education has purchased copies for all secondary school libraries in the province, where, I hope, some students may find the appendices on Indian place names, and catch some of Rattenbury's interest in the different understandings of their

region that are implicit there: K'a x ems p'ah, for example, is "Raven's chamberpot" about half a kilometre north of Bassett point, used by Raven in the Mythological Age when animals were people. And perhaps the elementary students will begin with the elegantly clear *La Mer et le cèdre* (Douglas & McIntyre, 1983), a translation of Lois McConkey's 1973 introduction to the Indians of the North-West Coast. This is a most welcome venture since French Immersion programmes have grown in British Columbia from 7,952 in September 1982 to 9,993 in September 1983, and 10% of all kindergarten students are now in immersion (and what does that say about the myth of the isolated region with its back turned on the rest of Canada?).

If these books will bring before the children in our schools alternate structures for understanding their regions, *The Box of Daylight: Northwest Coast Indian Art* by Bill Holm (co-publication Seattle Art Museum, University of Washington Press, Douglas & McIntyre, 1983) illuminates for everyone some of the West Coast's finest aesthetic achievements. This catalogue of an exhibition at the Seattle Art Museum is as beautifully photographed as one could want, and the text is lyrical and rich in interpretive detail. The exhibition comes from regional private collections, a source which itself suggests how far the one culture has interpenetrated the other (again, I am convinced of the appreciation even as I recognize the injustice of sacred objects being displayed as trophies). One feature of this exhibition particularly startled me: it seems that basket art is by far the most extensively available form of Indian art in the region. And this is the *women's* art, skilfully incorporating spruce root, grass, maidenhair fern stem, cedar bark, and bear grass in the most intricate, durable, and practical forms, among the world's finest examples of such art. That upper and lower designs are often jogged out of alignment, in defiance of conventional aesthetic expectations, urges on us an alternative cultural definition of the relation between people and their environment, of the cultural objects which define any region. The catalogue conveys the possibility of a more holistic concept of region, where a people is intimately in touch with its environment, rooted in its traditions, and continually re-enacting its stories. Holm's graphic meditation on a dancing headdress is a case in point, evoking in the movements of the dance, the images of nature, and the aesthetics of the potlatch, the forms by which the Indians of the Coast spoke to one another and unified their community:

> The dancer appears with blanket and apron and often a raven rattle. Knees slightly bent and legs spread, he jumps on both feet to the time of the song beat — short jumps, feet hardly off the floor, making the ermine rows covering his back jump in turn. The blanket was spread by the wearer's arms or elbows. The crown of sea lion whiskers holds a loose fluff of eagle down when the dancing begins. The whiskers rustle and clatter as the dancer bobs and tosses his head, shaking white whisps of down through the whisker barrier to swirl around his dancing figure. The white down means peace, or welcome, to the guests at a

potlatch. Chiefs dance to greet canoes invited from far villages. Canoe-borne visitors dance in turn, and the swirling down from their headdresses drifts shoreward on the wind and over the host and his tribe on the beach.

L.R.

UNABLE TO SWAY YOU, FATHER

Bernice Lever

Pounding my fists
on your fat chest
the hollow rhythmic thump
of my anger erupting from the empty
surprise of your mouth,

you, not even rocking
back on your work boot heels,
your very body a fortress
mocking my outburst

my sixteen year old anger
just a fourth daughter's frustrations
  neither my flailing poems
  nor drumming knuckles
made any sense to you
who could not know my outrage

with these siblings
narrow as the wooden slats
that half-blocked the hot air vents,
in that mountain house
you so carefully built,
a home we so recklessly split,
easily as kindling.

UNDER COYOTE'S EYE

Indian Tales in Sheila Watson's "The Double Hook"

Steven Putzel

BACK IN 1975 H. R. Ellis Davidson delivered a paper to the Annual General Meeting of the Folklore Society entitled "Folklore and Literature." Her call for co-operation and co-ordination of the folkloric and literary disciplines can still serve to frame our studies of the way tales and legends are interwoven in world literature. Professor Davidson noted "an increasing interest in analysing certain works of literature from the medieval period to modern times, to observe how folktale motifs and folk beliefs may be woven, instinctively or deliberately, into the very texture of the work itself, enlarging its scope and giving it significance and power." She adds that "this is not a matter of dredging our literature to search for nuggets of folklore lurking in the depths, while literary scholars stand aloof from such mundane pursuits, but a new recognition of how knowledge of folklore motifs can help literary scholars and folklorists alike to understand and interpret."[1]

Although many readers have recognized the rich texture and lyrical mastery of Sheila Watson's 1959 novel, *The Double Hook*, Professor Davidson's folkloric approach can enhance our ability to understand and interpret this demanding but rewarding text. Leslie Monkman and more recently George Bowering have examined Watson's use of Coyote tales, Monkman noting that "the figure of Coyote" is "one of the most intriguing sources of mystery and meaning" in the novel. But Monkman sees Coyote as totally malevolent, as a "Satanic opposition to Old Testament Jehovah."[2]

Bowering's recent contribution to *Modern Times*, the third volume of John Moss's *Canadian Novel* series, not only comments on Monkman's reading but surveys over twenty years of critical response to the novel, concentrating on the many theories concerning Watson's use of Coyote as trickster. Bowering structures his essay around Watson's 1973 comment: "I don't know now, if I rewrote [*The Double Hook*], whether I would use the Coyote figure."[3] He postulates that the reason for the author's ambivalence toward Coyote might be her realization that she can only present an outsider's view of Coyote, a "white Coast author's

Coyote." He builds upon this to develop the theory, borrowed from Robert Kroetsch, that the author herself is a Coyote-like trickster. He concludes that "the reader who does not want to bolt out of the present does not so much desire to know what Coyote is but rather what she says" (Bowering, p. 222). In a folkloric reading of the novel Watson's position as outsider, far from being a reason for dropping Coyote, is part of the reason for the success of the novel.

A more detailed look at British Columbian Indian Coyote tales, at the new meaning these tales take on when filtered through the imaginations of the white settlers, and at the relationship between the Indian's trickster and the settlers' Judeo-Christian God demonstrates both the sophistication of Watson's novel and the value of Davidson's folkloric approach as a guide to the novel's intricate structure. *The Double Hook* begins with a lyrical introduction to the folk tradition I want to examine and to the folk themselves who live with and pass on the tradition:

> In the folds of the hills
> under Coyote's eye
> lived
> the old lady, mother of William
> of James and of Greta
>
> lived James and Greta
> lived William and Ara his wife
> lived the Widow Wagner
> the Widow's boy
> lived Felix Prosper and Angel
> lived Theophil
> and Kip
> until one morning in July.[4]

The stark, closely circumscribed lives of these settlers in a small community in British Columbia unfold under the eye of Coyote, the North American Indian culture hero and trickster par excellence. The Faulkneresque characters speak through a third-person narrative voice that seems to issue from the land itself. I will show that Watson achieves this voice largely through her use of folk motifs. But this old lady of the north is psychology's Terrible Mother, the constricting death-force that prevents her children from living full lives. As the novel opens James has murdered the old woman by pushing her down the stairs, but her spirit continues to haunt the community. Character after character sees her fishing at different points along the stream. But as Ara, the old woman's daughter-in-law, realizes, "it's not for fish she fishes." The novel traces James' desperate attempt to break free from this fisher of souls, Greta's inability to break free in any way short of suicide, and the struggle of Ara, William, Kip, Felix, and Angel to live meaningful lives.

Sheila Watson does not take her plot or characters from Coyote tales, she does not build her novel on folk motifs concerning the Coyote, nor does she adopt the straightforward, playful tone of the tales. Because she uses folklore in a more complex manner, a folkloric approach to her novel not only illuminates this specific text but also suggests approaches and questions that we can bring to other literary texts. For example, to understand *The Double Hook* we must identify the Coyote as an Indian folk figure, locate probable sources, determine how Sheila Watson's Coyote is like and unlike her sources, and we must see the way the author interweaves the tradition with her own plot, themes, and characters. The result should be a fuller understanding of all aspects of the novel.

Coyote stories have a prominent place in American Indian folktales from the Zuni and the Navaho of the Southwest to the Omaha and Crow of the Great Plains to the Shoshonis and Sioux of the Rockies and to the Thompson Indians of the Northwest.[5] Since *The Double Hook* is set in the Cariboo area of British Columbia and since Watson lived for a time in this area, it is likely that she was familiar with tales of the Salishan tribes, particularly the Thompson Indians. She could also have drawn upon the volumes that followed Franz Boas' famous Jesup North Pacific Expedition, *Traditions of the Thompson Indians of British Columbia* (1898) and *Folk-Tales of the Salishan and Sahaptin Tribes* (1917).

Even when I limit my examination of Coyote tales to the Salishan language group or even to one tribe within that group, the tradition is far too large and complex to adequately convey here. These Coyote stories fall into many groups, categories, types, and motifs. For example, some could be grouped and categorized as creation myths (B200), some as animal tales (B260). Classified by motif, they could be indexed in the A500's as culture-hero tales, in the B200's as tales of talking animals, and in the D100's as transformation tales. Rather than losing myself in the morass of classifications, I will follow Sheila Watson's interest in the Coyote as meddling trickster and life-giving culture hero. In an entry in *The Standard Dictionary of Folklore, Mythology and Legend*, Erminie Voegelin uses the Coyote as her chief example when she characterizes the trickster as "greedy, erotic, imitative, stupid, pretentious, deceitful"; she adds that "he attempts trickery himself in many forms, but is more often tricked than otherwise. In a sense, trickster is nearly always on the side of evil; if people die, he votes that they stay dead."[6] In contrast, the entry under "Culture Hero" characterizes Coyote as a sometimes human, sometimes animal character who lived in the mythical age and who is "regarded as the giver of a culture to its people. All good and useful things are either [*sic*] given by him, invented, originated, or taught by him. . . ."[7] According to the Thompson Indians these useful things include fire, the sun, food, arts, ceremonies, hunting techniques, and knowledge of sex. In her *Dictionary of Folklore* entry on the Coyote, Voegelin comments on the contradictory nature of this culture hero-creator-trickster-transformer. She notes that

"the dual character of Coyote — as the culture hero who releases game, imparts knowledge of arts and crafts, secures fire or daylight or the sun, etc., and as a bullying, licentious, greedy, erotic, fumbling dupe, — is hard for Indian narrators of tales to resolve. . . ."[8] This dual nature of Coyote is a key to resolving difficult aspects of the themes and characters in *The Double Hook*.

Before examining the way Sheila Watson employs the full spectrum of Indian Coyote legends, I must introduce one more complication. The characters in the book are not Indians; when they speak of Coyote, they speak of a tradition alien to their own Christian background. So what George Bowering sees as the author's problem (i.e., that she is "an outsider from a canned-food environment") is in a different way the characters' problem. Their knowledge of Coyote is vague and they fear what they do not know. Coyote is a demiurge who has lost his people, a creator whose chief creation has all but disappeared. Watson forces this fact into our consciousness when James saddles his horse and rides off at full gallop, thinking he can escape the constraints of the Terrible Mother. "He wanted one thing. To get away. To bolt noisily and violently out of the present." In doing so he passes what is left of Coyote's people:

> At last he came to the pole fence of the Indian reservation. The cabins were huddled together. Wheels without wagons. Wagons without wheels. Bits of harness. Rags and tatters of clothing strung up like fish greyed over with death. He saw bone-thin dogs. Waiting. Heard them yelping. Saw them running to drive him off territory they'd been afraid to defend. Snarling. Twisting. Tumbling away from the heels they pursued.

He sees no one. Coyote's people, the Indians, are dead or dying and Coyote's tales are imperfectly remembered by the white settlers who now eke out a living on the land.

WATSON RECOGNIZES THE CONTRADICTORY NATURE of Indian Coyote tales; she realizes that these tales are at best imperfectly remembered by the settlers (and by herself), and she turns these complications to literary advantage. She is able to transform the straightforward, playful Coyote into a ubiquitous and mysterious force, always connected (in the minds of the settlers) with darkness, the wind, the dry land, and the rocks, and thus with fear and death. But Watson allows readers to see what the characters do not — the Coyote as culture hero, the Coyote who is also connected with water, fish, and the potential fecundity of the land, and thus with hope, life, and salvation.

Although they know little of Coyote, James, Greta, William, Ara, Felix, Angel, Theophil, and Kip all live out their lives on Coyote's land and under Coyote's

ever-watchful eye. We as readers learn a great deal about each of these characters by examining their attitudes toward and relationship with Coyote. As Ara notes, "Coyote made the land his pastime. He stretched out his paw. He breathed on the grass. His spittle eyed it with prickly pear." Ara believes in Coyote, but she sees him only as the purveyor of fear, the harbinger of death, and the creator of life's prickly obstacles.

For other characters the Coyote is even darker. When Greta, sitting in her mother's rocking chair, realizes that the constricting force of the mother is still present, she thinks of Coyote. "Eyes everywhere. In the cottonwoods the eyes of foolhens. Rats' eyes on the barn rafters. Steers herded together. Eyes multiplied. Eyes. Eyes and padded feet. Coyote moving in ranksmelling." Greta's feeling of entrapment and her sense of guilt lead her to think of Coyote and of approaching death. James too feels the continued presence of the mother and of Coyote: "He felt on his shoulder a weight of clay sheets. He smelled the stench of Coyote's bedhole." For the priest-like Felix Prosper, Coyote is also a spirit that beckons toward death: "He saw a coyote standing near the creek. He wanted to follow it into the hills. He felt its rough smell on his tongue." Kip, who is called Coyote's servant, tells James and Greta that he saw the old lady "climb down through the split rock with Coyote, her fishes stiff in her hand." In each case the characters associate Coyote with the stench of death and with the Terrible Mother who still plagues the land.

The connection between the Coyote that these characters fear and the Coyote of Indian tradition is most clearly presented in two passages in the novel. First, Watson alludes directly to a Thompson Indian trickster tale. Felix recalls a time when Angel mistook a sheet of tar paper blown from the roof for a bear "rising on its haunches." She thought she saw it "prostrating itself before the unsacked winds. Rising as if to strike. Bowing to the spirit let out of the sack . . . by the meddler Coyote." This could have been taken directly from the tale "Coyote, Fox, and the Sun People" in which Coyote and Fox see a "bag hanging from the end of a pole" in Sun's house and argue over whether the bag contains a sun-ray or hot winds. When Fox and Coyote pierce the bag "the hot wind and the sun-rays came out and made a great noise. Coyote and Fox ran away."[9] In another Thompson tale, "Coyote and the Salmon," Coyote becomes more explicitly a Pandora figure. He is shown four wooden boxes and is told "Do not take the lids off these boxes. . . . Remember that they must never be taken off." When the keepers are away, Coyote immediately opens them. "From one box, smoke came out; from another wasps; from the third, salmon-flies; from the fourth, beetles."[10]

The second passage is an argument between Angel and her lover Theophil. Here Angel sees Coyote as the "trouble" in life that man cannot keep out. Angel tells Theophil that Kip saw Coyote carry the old lady away "like a rabbit in his mouth." She sees Coyote as the beast, the hidden fear, waiting around the corner:

"A man full up on beer saying in that beer how big he is. Not knowing that Coyote'll get him just walking around the side of the house to make water." Theophil is the pragmatist of the novel, the believer in what is rational, the man who sees life only on the literal level. He "don't set no store by Coyote." To him Coyote is just a lower case coyote, an animal to be killed for the bounty offered by the government. Theophil is the one character who does not recognize the power of Coyote and he is the one character who will end up alone and unredeemed.

Kip sums up the characters' view of Coyote in a passage that provided Watson with her title. Kip compares James to the old lady:

> There's one thing he doesn't know. He doesn't know you can't catch the glory on a hook and hold on to it. That when you fish for the glory you catch the darkness too. That if you hook twice the glory you hook twice the fear. That Coyote plotting to catch the glory for himself is fooled and every day fools others. He doesn't know, Kip thought, how much mischief Coyote can make. Coyote reaching out reflected glory. Like a fire to warm. Then shoving the brand between a man's teeth right into his belly's pit. Fear making mischief. Laying traps for men.

The yin/yang double hook of life is Watson's own, but Kip also seems to be echoing the Indians' Coyote tradition. The passage presents the dual role of Coyote; he holds out the gift of fire but then uses the gift to destroy man. Two tales can serve as a gloss for this central passage of the novel. Coyote is fooled in the beginning of the Thompson tale, "Coyote Goes Fishing":

> One time in winter, Fox saw Coyote coming, and sat down on a beaver-hole in the ice. Coyote asked him what he was doing. Fox said he was fishing with his tail. Coyote thought that he would like to have some fish. Fox agreed, and told Coyote not to get tired if the fish did not bite at first.... Coyote sat down on the hole, and Fox left. Then later Fox caused a cold wind to come, and Coyote's tail froze in the hole.[11]

Later Coyote gets his revenge by fooling Fox in a similar manner. This reflects the humorous side of Coyote's mischievousness, but Kip also suggests the more ominous side in his reference to Coyote shoving the offered brand into man's belly. An Okanogan tale provides a folk source for Kip's image. In "Coyote Devours His Own Children" Coyote asks his son to cut a spit, presumably to cook their dinner. The child obeys and Coyote "took the child across his knee, pushed the stick which he had prepared through his insides, and stuck him up by the fire to roast."[12]

BY NOW IT IS CLEAR that the Coyote tales interwoven throughout *The Double Hook* have been filtered through the alien culture of the

settlers and as a result have been given a more ominous, less playful form. Simple and direct tales conveying Coyote's creations and tricks have become bogey tales, tales of evil lurking in the dark. But there is more similarity between the settlers' Coyote and the Indians' Coyote than the characters in the novel suggest. There is no simple answer to the question of how tales of tricksters and culture heroes arise among a people, but it is safe to speculate that the constant presence of coyotes, their stealthy way of life and their eerie call played an important role in the genesis of the tales. Perhaps Indians felt a kinship with this animal that had such a gift for survival. In any case, they moulded tales of the Coyote in their own image; their tales use the physical characteristics of the animal to convey their own beliefs and to express their own hopes and fears. What is important to our reading of the novel is that the settlers in *The Double Hook* use the Coyote in the same way. Now the same physical characteristics of the animal, together with the terrifying, half-remembered tales of the old Indian demiurge combine to express the settlers' view of their land, their lives, and their innermost fears. By understanding the relationship between these characters and these tales we increase our understanding of the novel.

In *The Double Hook* Coyote's voice is created by the sounds from within the settlers and conveyed in lyrical passages that echo throughout the novel. As a result, a folkloric approach helps us to read and interpret Watson's original and sometimes baffling language. Felix's hounds hear "Coyote's song fretting the gap between the red boulders":

> In my mouth is the east wind.
> Those who cling to the rocks I will bring down
> I will set my paw on the eagle's nest.

Here Coyote is more than skulking death waiting to lunge at man as he turns the corner. He has Jehovah-like power to send across the land the Canadian version of the *sirocco*, *kadim*, or east wind. Coyote is like the Old Testament God who brings the locusts to Egypt with the east wind in Exodus (10:13), or who can carry away man with the east wind in Job (27:21), or who warns Ephraim's people in Hosea (13:15) that "an east wind shall come, the wind of the LORD shall come up from the wilderness, and his spring shall become dry, and his fountain shall be dried up." Coyote's biblical echoes transform the dry rocks of British Columbia into a Palestine, a holy land. Coyote's God-like nature becomes clearer in other lyrical passages. When Greta realizes that she will never be free from her mother's spirit as long as the mother's house stands, she sets fire to the house and burns with it. As she dies, Coyote is heard in the hills:

> I've taken her where she stood
> My left hand is on her head
> My right hand embraces her.

Coyote has gone through a transformation; his paws are now hands and although he is still connected with death, he is death as comfort, freedom, and release, death as the lover Greta never had in life, the lover of The Song of Solomon (2:6): "His left hand is under my head, and his right hand doth embrace me." Later Ara sees Coyote and hears his voice echoing back over the valley:

> Happy are the dead
> for their eyes see no more.

The easy peace and happiness of the dead is not for Ara, Felix, Kip, William, and James.

It is especially not for James. He considers drowning himself in the river, "But along the shore like a nightwatch drifted the brown figure he sought to escape." James wishes to escape not from life but to life. As he stands by the river, he wonders what he had intended to do "when he'd defied his mother at the head of the stairs." The answer comes from the hills and from within:

> To gather briars and thorns,
> said Coyote.
> To go down into the holes of the rock
> and into the caves of the earth.
> In my fear is peace.

Here more than ever the Indians' trickster and culture hero is transformed into the Old Testament God and James, like Isaiah before him, hears the prophecy of "the terrible day of the LORD." Coyote echoes two passages from Isaiah: "And they shall go into the holes of the rocks, and into the caves of the earth, for fear of the LORD, and for the glory of his majesty, when he ariseth to shake terribly the earth" (2:19); and "... they shall come, and shall rest all of them in the desolate valleys, and in holes of the rocks, and upon them all thorns.... all the land shall become briers and thorns" (7:19-24). James had to kill the old woman, to descend into the "valley of adversity," to confront his fear, before he can be redeemed.

Coyote brings down those, like Greta, who cling to the rocks, but those, like James, who descend into the holes of the rocks and who confront their fear will live. Images of life, images of the Coyote as creator as well as destroyer, begin to appear after the fire that purges the spirit of the old lady and thus frees Greta. This purgation prepares for a change in the settlers' lives. Felix finally learns to leave the rocks and to take an active part in life (as a result he wins back his wife Angel and his children). James turns from death and from his attempt to escape by running and returns to Lenchen and to the birth of a son. Towards the end of the novel Ara, looking at the smoking doorsill of the fire-gutted house, has a vision:

> She remembered how she'd thought of water as a death which might seep through the dry shell of the world. Now her tired eyes saw water issuing from under the burned threshold. Welling up and flowing down to fill the dry creek. Until dry lips drank. Until the trees stood knee-deep in water. Everything shall live where the river comes, she said out loud. And she saw a great multitude of fish, each fish springing arched through the slanting light.

This vision of life, of the revitalization of the waste land recalls Salishan stories such as "Coyote and the Water or Rain," and "Coyote and the Salmon," stories in which Coyote is a life-giving force that brings the salmon up the river, teaches his people how to fish and hunt and how to procreate. "Coyote and the Salmon" ends: "Because of Coyote, his people had many kinds of food, and life became much easier than it had been when the world was very young."[13]

Coyote, like the LORD of Isaiah, brings a promise not only of adversity but also of hope, not only of drought and death, but also of fecundity and life. To confirm the promise of Ara's vision, the last lines of the novel are Coyote's. Just after dawn James' and Lenchen's child is born and Ara hears "the voice of Coyote crying down through the boulders":

> I have set his feet on soft ground;
> I have set his feet on the sloping shoulders
> of the world.

Sheila Watson again echoes Isaiah: "The people that walked in darkness have seen the light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined" (9:2). And more explicitly: "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder . . ." (9:6).

The Double Hook allows Coyote, the Indians' great transformer, trickster, and culture hero a transformation he never quite made in the Thompson tales. But Sheila Watson is not too far from the spirit of the tales when she sees the Judeo-Christian God as Coyote and Coyote as the Judeo-Christian God. One last Thompson tale seems to bring these traditions even closer. In "Coyote and the Old Man," the trickster meets the all-powerful Great Chief, who tells Coyote, "Soon I am going to leave the earth. You will not return until I do." The tale ends with a promise:

> Some time in the future Coyote and Old Man will return and will again work wonders on the earth. When all is ready, they will bring the dead from the Land of Shades. Then there will be loud beating of drums, and the dead will appear, borne on the top of red clouds, the northern lights, and tobacco smoke.[14]

Perhaps as Bowering and Watson herself have suggested, Coyote's voice has subsumed the authorial voice. But far from being detrimental, this is one of the novel's greatest strengths. Watson has created a voice which resonates with the Indians' past, the settlers' present, and with prophecies of their future. The critical debate over the function of Coyote in *The Double Hook* will probably continue.

But for those who are outsiders to the Indian traditions and to the settlers' way of life, a folkloric approach provides the information needed to understand the all-important dualities of the novel. Coyote brings death and life; he is a fool, but he is a wise fool. A knowledge of the Indian tales shows us how Watson has altered the tradition to create a voice who speaks a universal, archetypal language. Post-Nietzschian, post-Einsteinian, and post-modernist we may be, but we still tend to look at the world and at literature from our own culturally biased perspective and we still tend to think of dualities as mutually exclusive opposites. Indian Coyote tales tell us that the hook is one, and double.

NOTES

[1] H. R. Ellis Davidson, "Folklore and Literature," *Folklore*, 86 (Summer 1975), 74.

[2] Leslie Monkman, "Coyote as Trickster in *The Double Hook*," *Canadian Literature*, 52 (Spring 1972), pp. 70, 71.

[3] George Bowering, "Sheila Watson, Trickster," in *The Canadian Novel, III: Modern Times*, ed. John Moss (Toronto: NC Press, 1982), p. 209.

[4] This and subsequent quotations refer to Sheila Watson, *The Double Hook* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1969).

[5] I have examined many general sources of Coyote traditions, including: Claude Levi-Strauss, *The Origin of Table Manners*, 1978; Paul Rabin, *The Trickster*, 1972; Virginia C. Trenholm and Maurine Corley, *The Shoshonis: Sentinels of the Rockies*, 1964; Stith Thompson, *Tales of the North American Indians*, 1929; Roger Welsch, *Omaha Tribal Myths and Trickster Tales*, 1981.

[6] Maria Leach, ed., *The Standard Dictionary of Folklore, Mythology and Legend* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1949), II, 1124.

[7] *Dictionary of Folklore*, I, 268.

[8] Ibid., p. 257.

[9] Franz Boas, ed., *Folk-Tales of Salishan and Sahaptin Tribes, Memoirs of the American Folk-lore Society*, XI, 1917, pp. 3-4.

[10] Ella Elizabeth Clark, *Indian Legends of Canada* (1960; rpt. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1981), p. 28.

[11] *Folk-Tales of Salishan and Sahaptin Tribes*, p. 62.

[12] Donald M. Hines, ed., *Tales of the Okanogans* (Fairfield, Washington: Ye Galleon Press, 1976), p. 86.

[13] *Indian Legends*, p. 29.

[14] Ibid., p. 31.

PISA-CRUSADER DREAMS

Maggie Helwig

These are the things I brought from the Holy Land.
A shiny green bowl, a pack of holy earth
a crippled hand and all my sins forgiven.
My friend Stefano
has a real Muslim skull.
We sailed back under the Cross of Pisa, the emblems we bore were
red.

The bowl I kept at home and filled
with lilies, till
my hand turned green as well
and rotted my blood.
Maria changes the flowers now
and they are white on green in the window
in early day.

I

Sunrise, still cold, over the walls
of the Square of Miracles.
The marble of Pisa is living white, like polished bone.

As my arches of white rib above
the soft thick darkness of the lung
the ribs of the Cathedral
soar and fall. Within
a dark gold lamp is swinging, stroke and stroke.

West is the round dome of my skull
shining like the Muslim on Stefano's wall.
If you knock it with your hand
it rings like a shell.

My flesh is green as grass; the smell of cut grass
rises with the damp.

II

The ocean is falling away.

I am by the Arno, where
it joins, I
am waving my hand, the ocean
is falling away and I am calling
to bring it home, it is falling
and now so far.
I rode on the ocean like a stream of jade, we bore
the Cross of Pisa over the ocean,
I do not know where it is going or why.
The Arno is flowing
to meet the ocean, which is
so far and tiny, a shiny green bowl
a miniature jade
in the nose of a Muslim skull.

III

We all took our holy earth and laid it
inside a marble wall, with delicate
arches, white marble crosswalks
and planted grass and roses.
The Square of Miracles and the holy
bones of all this holy ground
like a French ivory in a frame
become too beautiful for movement. Slender,
slender fingers hold themselves
before the light, and they
unsatisfied have grown from our rough hands
into a glass.

The square is waiting, still,
for the lightning of God.

IV

Last night I saw the Judgement.
Of course for myself I had nothing to fear —
they knew my emblems, took my hands
and all was as it should be.
But I wondered.

Over my shoulder I watched their faces.
Some wouldn't believe it, some refused
and cried and pulled each other back.
Useless, of course.
One narrow-lipped and brave, and most
only confessed, uncertain
trembling at mouths and eyes.

One woman dressed in green and white
held her hands across her face to weep;
and a damned friar gently
touched her arm, rested one hand a moment
on her hair.
I think
he wanted to tell her, be able to tell her
not to fear.
Below them a bird-foot demon chewed a skull.

I did not want to look at these things any more.

The marble shines against the lawn, the smell
of cut grass rises from my bed.

And so to Hell.

A PRIMITIVE COSMOLOGY

Glen Downie

Perhaps the sun will stop
merciless in the heavens
if we do not offer our first fruits
Perhaps it will go down
never to rise again
if we fail to set aside
the brightest and the best

Corn is not enough
Beasts are not enough
Still the world is cheaply run
on blood and the human voice of death

ETHEL WILSON, WARY MYTHOLOGIST

Brent Thompson

WHEN MRS. SEVERANCE in Ethel Wilson's *Swamp Angel* has her vision "with words" — "symbol symbol symbol . . . destroying reality,"[1] Wilson's own vision in the novel suddenly takes a remarkable turn. Until Mrs. Severance's dream, Wilson does not much disturb the reader's trust in the conventional novel narrative she has carefully crafted; she had until then built a traditional relationship between author and reader: she has directed the reader to a safe, comfortable detachment while she, by virtue of the guise of third person omniscience, has become almost invisible. But with Mrs. Severance's vision, Wilson undermines the reader's trust in convention and throws a spotlight on the artist pulling levers in the wings. In the manner of writers better known than she for the devices of metafiction, she draws the reader into what Coleridge called the work's magic circle where the reader's new contract with the author contends with his desire to believe in the old one. In the conventional narrative of *Swamp Angel*, Wilson gives form to the drama of this struggle in her portrayal of Maggie's escape from a restrictive perspective on her environment to a fuller view — her search for her "place." *Swamp Angel* is literature about literature, but more than that, it explores those complex operations of the mind — an author's mind or anyone's — which are attempts to possess somehow the world around it. Wilson makes a connection between Maggie's search for her place, and a reader's search for belief; the richness of *Swamp Angel* lies in the interplay between these two quests. The reader's new role in relation to *Swamp Angel* produces a greater sensitivity to the exhilaration and danger of Maggie's quest. Likewise, Maggie's story is a cautioning guide to the reader who is hoping to possess a world.

The world around Maggie is clearly different from the environment in which many other creatures of Canadian literature, contemporary with the appearance of *Swamp Angel* or earlier, find themselves; whereas Maggie's world ultimately balances the hope of possession and the consequences of the absence of hope, theirs is often either a cheerful place unfamiliar to us or a terrifying wilderness empty except for a force of efficient and anonymous destruction.

Northrop Frye has mused over this quality of place in an essay on imagery in Canadian poetry called "Haunted by Lack of Ghosts." He takes his title from the last line of Earle Birney's poem "Can. Lit.": "It's only by our lack of ghosts

we're haunted." There are gods here in Canada, says Frye, "and we have offended them. They are not ghosts; we are the ghosts, Cartesian ghosts caught in the machine that we have assumed nature to be."[2] Frye, of course, employs terminology in his argument from Gilbert Ryle's refutation of the Cartesian conception of self.[3] According to Frye, the Cartesian self was brought to the New World along with two other "cultural imports":

> One was the revolutionary monotheism of Christianity, with its horror of "idolatry", that is, the sense of the numinous in nature. For Christianity, the gods that had been discovered in nature were all devils: man could raise his consciousness toward the divine only through human institutions. It followed that a natural religion like that of the Indians simply had to be extirpated if the Indians were to realize their human potential. The second was the Baroque sense of the power of mathematics, the result of which can still be seen in the grid patterns of our cities, in the concession lines in rural areas, and in the great burden of geometry that North American life in particular carries.

The third import, the "Cartesian egocentric consciousness," he describes as "the feeling that man's essential humanity was in his power of reasoning, and that the nature outside human consciousness was pure extension: a turning away from nature so complete that it became a kind of idolatry in reverse." If one pauses for a moment to reflect on Frye's three "imports," the conviction grows that they are powerful evidence for a theory of the kind of people we are in North America as refugees from the Europe of a particular period.

Still, the cultural importation of seventeenth-century Europe to the New World does not necessarily account for the particular reaction of Canadian poets to their environment that Frye goes on to explore. The Americans, after all, inherited this tradition as well, yet their literature more often reflects bravado in the face of nature. Frye recognizes this in his opening sentences:

> Very few historical and cultural statements can be made about Canada that do not have obvious counterparts in the United States. At the same time, social developments in a country which has amassed a huge population and has become a great imperial power may have a quite different imaginative resonance in a country with a sparse population and a minor world influence.

The vastness of the American landscape the American backed by the strength of his nation can identify with and exult in, whereas the vastness of the Canadian landscape becomes a terror to the Canadian already conscious of his relative weakness. The three cultural imports worked together on the Canadian mind in a special way. By exterminating divinity from nature, by confining the definition of "man's essential humanity" to the small, clean, well-lighted room of reason, where what roamed outside could only be imagined fearfully, and by imposing a product of reason — geometry — on the natural world as if that world were a machine built by geometry, the imports bred an oppressive sense of futility in the Canadian

mind, which Frye supposes underlies a "curious schizophrenia" he sees in much "nineteenth-century Canadian poetry, the sense of loneliness and alienation urgently demanding expression along with a good deal of prefabricated rhetoric about the challenge of a new land and the energetic optimism demanded to meet it." When the impulse behind the writing of poetry is rhetorical, Frye judges the result to be poor because it is detached from genuine emotion and imagination. Canadian writers often sounded a false note with this kind of poetry, a product of the regarding of reason as the "distinctly human element in consciousness." They succeeded, however, when they abandoned this detached, rhetorical stance and attempted to express what they felt most profoundly — the sadness of being isolated from their environment, and a longing for union with it. As Frye puts it:

> the nostalgic and elegiac are the inevitable emotional responses of an egocentric consciousness locked into a demythological environment.

Death is the only possible heroic achievement in such a consciousness.

But also central to that consciousness was the understanding by those nineteenth- and early twentieth-century poets who were not rhetoricians "that the central poetic impulse is imaginative and not rhetorical, and that its most direct product is mythology, which is essentially the humanizing of nature." An especially effective mythological strategy found in this poetry is the casting, in the role of nature, of a huge beast, commonly the leviathan, or as in Pratt's *Towards the Last Spike*, a dragon, "the symbol of a nature so totally indifferent to man and his concerns that it is irrelevant to wonder whether it is dead or alive. Man swallowed by nature, like Jonah by the whale, Frye considers an appropriate mythological dilemma for Canadians who approached the New World by water; earlier poets who were not rhetoricians attempted to make inhabitable the "green belly" of the monster. Later poets of Newlove's and Atwood's generation thought of this "outer leviathan as a kind of objective correlative of some Minotaur that we find in our own mental labyrinths." Wilson, before the arrival of those poets who encounter the Minotaur, is already using landscape in this new way.

ETHEL WILSON'S ACQUAINTANCES attest to her love of the natural setting of the West Coast, how she lived in a succession of West End apartments whose windows had to frame Stanley Park, the Pacific Ocean, and the North Shore mountains. She herself, in "The Bridge or the Stokehold," an essay fashioned from a talk on creating characters, writes of gazing out her study window at a freighter on English Bay:

> On a grey evening, the ship was a lovely ghost. On a fine morning the freighter was a dazzling white where the sunshine fell and the silver gulls flew over. The

> light faded, and the ship became a dirty tub. The ship was the same ship; the light was different; its effect was perhaps false. Upon us all, light falls, and we seem to the beholder to change. . . .[4]

To this should be compared a passage in *Swamp Angel*:

> Mrs. Vardoe had become attached to, even absorbed into the sight from the front-room window of inlet and forest and mountains. She had come to love it, to dislike it, to hate it, and at seven-fifteen this evening she proposed to leave it and not to return.

In this short passage two important ideas of the novel are introduced: its universe is relativistic and subjective, and in that universe the human mind and nature can merge — in a manner, it will be seen, along the lines of Frye's mythological objective correlative. Mrs. Vardoe does not merely find the sight absorbing; she is "even absorbed *into* . . . inlet and forest and mountains," a significant emphasis. And the much discussed "fluid" mountains described in the paragraph immediately preceding this passage, which complete the introduction of the theme of process in the novel — "Ten twenty fifty brown birds flew past the window" — also invite Maggie to submerge herself, her consciousness, in her environment, as she will later submerge her body when she swims in Three Loon Lake. There the merging with nature is made more explicit — perhaps she almost becomes Frye's leviathan — though not complete for a reason which shall be discussed later. The effect of extremely subtle craftsmanship in the swimming section is to expand Maggie until she is a figure nearly of the proportions of Blake's Albion lying on his rock. Her movements are grandiose, hugely important.

> Maggie stands on the dock and looks around her. She is contained by the sparkling surface of the lake and the pine tree shores and the low hills, and is covered by the sky. She dives off the dock, down into the lake. She rises, with bubbles, shakes her head vigorously, and strikes out.

Water, forest, and mountain are invoked again, a kind of code for this merging with nature. Maggie's rising with bubbles is an echo, in this context, of the goddess born of the sea, with whom a comparison should not be carried too far, though one remembers that when she refused Zeus' advances, he gave her in marriage to his ugly and deformed son, Hephaestus, to whom she was unfaithful. Maggie's "avatar tells her that she is one with her brothers the seal and the porpoise"; and "then, quite suddenly she turns on her back and floats. . . . She is a god floating there." With a god's composed regal grace, she "inclines her floating face towards the shore where the vertical pine trees make a compensation with the horizontal lake on which she lies so gloriously." Her royal gaze restores harmony to the universe, connotative of a type of Elizabethan order. Maggie is both natural creature and god — she partakes of the mystery of the Minotaur.

By accepting nature's invitation to submerge herself, she floats and has discovered her own physical and divine nature.

Wilson has prepared the way for this powerful scene throughout the novel so that it should have the integrity its subject requires. Obviously, a description of a harmony of this kind must not seem a set piece formally. Maggie is associated in the novel with the natural world. The best early example is the simile of the bird. Maggie's desire to depart is like the survival instinct of a natural creature, a "bird who obstinately builds again its destroyed nest." But what immediately follows this description helps to elevate the novel to something extraordinary. Maggie has a hobby — fly-tying. Embodied in this revelation are resonances of many themes of the book, all rendered more effective through the subtlety of the device. Fishing flies require patience and skill to manufacture: so we learn of Maggie's strength of character. Her repeated quiet response to the question of what she is going to do now she has left on a journey — "Going Fishing?" "Yes, I am." — tells us the journey is on one level a quest romance with hints of a wasteland and a Fisher King. The fishing fly has feathers, like a bird, and the comparison of Maggie with a bird is unobtrusively continued: "That was how it had begun and she had been so clever: never a bright feather blew across the room." Incidentally, a dresser of hooks like Wilson would know that a tied fly has a body, head, and wing — so does a fly — but it also has a cheek, a shoulder, and ribbing, like our species, a further note of the unification of man and nature, more evidence of man's humanizing of his environment.

At first Maggie's need to leave her husband, whom she married in a moment of weakness and unhealthy compromise, is mostly instinctual; she knows she must run to live. While she lives with Vardoe, she is attracted by the exotic world of the immigrant Chinese (as characters are in Canadian novels). Within her prison of humiliation, she imagines worlds of escape and can hardly grasp where the true road to freedom lies. She finds in Chinatown a preliminary gratification of her long formed "habit of seeking and finding, . . . private enjoyment of the sort that casts nothing but an extension of the imagination." The syllables of Chinese names on signs "ravished her as with scents and sounds of unknown lives and far places." To get feathers for her hobby, she goes to Chinatown, which links it to all the ramifications of her hobby, specifically to the quest, and indeed she finds there a "small six-sided yellow bowl," as seemingly insignificant as Aladdin's battered old lamp, and yet which represents to her "all beauty." The bowl is also a talisman of a type familiar to readers of romances, even a grail perhaps, and imbues with a magical significance her journey of true escape from her past life. The bowl is her spiritual ticket out, and connects the exotic immigrant world, which for Maggie is just a warm-up to escape, not her "place," and the river road of her quest. The object of the quest, though she cannot know it yet, is primarily a proper awareness of the mythological in her life, as it is described

in the swimming passage. But Wilson understates the function of the bowl for the same reason she restrains Maggie in the swimming scene from committing herself wholly to a unification with nature: the solution is not so simple; she does not live alone in paradise. Nature is no longer anthropocentric. Maggie lives in a fallen world, and she must deal with other men and women, and the final indifference of the universe. The bowl's Keatsian connotation suggests the coldness of paradise, its inhospitableness for living man. "It's beyond all reason, she said to herself." When she, "like a seal, like a god," swims back to shore and climbs up on the dock:

> she feels very fine but she is not a god anymore. She is earthbound and is Maggie Lloyd who must get the fire going and put the potatoes in the oven, and she must speak to Mr. and Mrs. Milliken and their two boys from the far cabin who are standing on the dock and are not gods either.

Maggie's final relation with the numinous, with the mythological, is subtle and ambivalent. Wilson is not just a remodelled nineteenth-century romantic searching for transcendence, the spirit rolling through all things. She is a twentieth-century writer in that she strives to reconcile that very necessary urge with Einstein's relative universe of lonely, subjective islands of humanity. The idealism of the Romantics is not ultimately possible, Wilson seems to say, yet it must be worked toward in our era of alienation. She prepares her readers for a relativistic universe early in *Swamp Angel.* The subjective character of the vista from Mrs. Vardoe's Capitol Hill window is the first indication. Einstein's relative universe acquired a new constant, of course — light, or rather the speed of light — and light in *Swamp Angel* can be a kind of reassuring constant for human beings. But the old constants, absolute time and absolute space, lost their status, became relative, and Wilson exploits this in the first few chapters. Time and space merge — each is a little like the other. Maggie "had arranged with herself that she would arrive at this very evening and at this place where, on Capitol Hill, she would stand waiting with everything ready." If something goes wrong, "she would build in time again." "Now she advanced, as planned, along these same minutes." "These actions . . . took on, tonight, the significance of movement forward, of time felt in the act of passing, of a moment being reached." On her flight through the Fraser Valley Maggie feels time slide behind her: "she could feel it and count it and the road slid behind her." Passing time and vents on the road assume "their places as elements on her side. . . . Everything was on her side. She exulted in each small sight and sound, in new time, in new space, because now she had got free." Even in the midst of exhilarating subjectivity, Maggie reminds herself, however, that there is a reality greater than her own impressions — "Time, she knew, does irrevocably pass" — but at this stage in her quest the delight of unambivalent innocence prevails.

WILSON MAKES QUITE CLEAR what Maggie is escaping, on the cosmological level. She is leaving behind the world of Frye's three cultural imports, as represented by Eddie Vardoe and the city. Eddie is a "human doll," a Cartesian ghost in the machine. Frye speaks of "the ghost of an ego haunting himself," a phrase nicely suited to the "Poor human doll" raging in the empty house when he discovers Maggie missing: "The whole small house was listening." "Unhappy" Vera is described later by Mrs. Severance as "housebound without an opening window." She is haunted by "phantoms" which drive her to attempt suicide. Eddie is victimized by the universe he has reduced to a machine — "all objects conspired against him." Wilson's short sentences in the description of Eddie's behaviour underscore his mechanical, doll-like nature, as does his staccato outburst to Hilda: "'If she . . . if there's a man . . . where would there be a man? . . . I been a good husband . . . her wearing that good suit tonight . . . I knew . . . . . . she's quiet and artful as the devil . . . planned all this . . . if there's a man by God I'll find her . . . I'll fix her . . . I'll. . . .'" One connotation of his "fixing" her is consistent with Eddie's reduction of nature to a machine. That devils inhabit nature, too, does not jar with Frye's view of the seventeenth-century Christian outlook. Wilson uses inanimate imagery for Eddie ("His life was broken off, splintered like a stick . . .) as well as for characters, like Vera, who fatally isolate themselves. When Eddie is associated with the animate he has the "spaniel eyes" of a suitably domesticated beast. Maggie dreams of him as a mink with sharp teeth — his status in the chain of being is low. The repetition of the "I" in the preceding passage is further evidence of Eddie's ghostly egocentricity, and when one recalls Eddie's parvenu pride in his new car, the mobile god of the North American geometric universe; his boasting, redolent of what Frye called "prefabricated rhetoric"; and when one recalls too that his relationship with nature entails selling it as real estate, the picture of him as exemplar of the old cosmology is complete. Frye tells the story of a doctor from southern Canada

> traveling on the Arctic tundra with an Eskimo guide. A blizzard blew up, and they had to bivouac for the night. What with the cold, the storm, and the loneliness, the doctor panicked and began shouting "We are lost!" The Eskimo looked at him thoughtfully and said, "We are not lost. We are here."

Wilson tells her version of the same story when she has the driver of Maggie's Greyhound bus, himself a servant of the geometric god, warn Maggie against getting off "somewhere near the river."

> The driver did not answer at once. His eyes were on the road. Then he said, "We don't usually set folks down here, lady. There's nowhere near. . . ."

Maggie's quest for a new understanding of her place in her environment is initially a "river" journey, paradoxically a trip both out of the heart of darkness

and into it. The way ahead becomes perilous when Maggie wrestles with Vera, and the way behind is the imprisoning world view. From the taxi she sees the geometric city of "every modern convenience," the "rows of neat homogeneous dwellings" obliterating the "delicate impression" of cherry trees in blossom. Once on the river road she imagines nature as dominant, an attitude which cannot be permanent, for already the city is bulldozing over any rebellion. This ties in with Wilson's tone of ironic detachment: we must not slip so far from the real world into nature worship and idealism that we escape from our responsibility to fight desecration. Free of the city Maggie begins her initiation into a new life. The first stage is a ceremonial rebirth, appropriately a song of rustic innocence. She is "as free of care or remembrance as if she had just been born (as perhaps she had, after much anguish).... The cabin was a safe small world enclosing her." She takes up her talisman, the yellow bowl, "like a drowsy child feeling its toy." Copying an earlier pattern of following a preparatory path before finding the true one, as she had done in Chinatown, Maggie chooses "between two forks of highroads," obviously setting out on the one less travelled by. Although she will return to the two forks and take the main road to Kamloops, making a choice by which she acknowledges the demands of reality versus mere escape into nature worship and idealism, the preparatory trip to "the dancing river with the dancing name" is an indication of her commitment to new spiritual awareness. The device of a fork in the road is at least as old in mythology as *The Aeneid*, where in Book Six Aeneas in the underworld comes to a splitting of the road: in one direction lies Elysium, in the other Tartarus. Maggie's contact with nature affects a change; her sense of smell, "vitiated" in the city, is purified in an extension of the water metaphor, the living water of her quest: "her breath drank and drank again the scent of firs and pines and juniper." Through her fingers she sees the "rich and elegant brownness" of a pinecone. She sits in the dark and "lifts her heart in desolation and in prayer," lifting "her spirit to God by the river." After "three days" (not the only Christological reference in the novel), which "had been for Maggie like the respite that perhaps comes to the soul after death," she leaves, "refreshed," spring "pouring in over the whole countryside" and in over her, presumably. The rejuvenation of a wasteland with Maggie as healed Fisher King is entwined here with Christian symbolism as complexly (and perhaps, finally, as impenetrably) as the romance Holy Grail stories, though both are always fastened to the earth. Maggie realizes she is on "a margin of life," a margin of a "world which was powerful and close."

That this world is a nature revitalized by man's mythologizing urge, Wilson does not want us to miss. The repetition of the name, "Hope," gives that village an expanded significance, much the way Wilson engineered our acceptance for awhile of Maggie as more than a mere mortal in the swimming scene. At Hope, the Fraser "deploys dramatically from the mountains," a phrase which links the

natural world to the human, particularly to the human history Wilson relates in the same paragraph. Such an introduction to the portrayal of Maggie's rebirth into spring and hope produces a background of tension, for the drama of Maggie's escape from the cosmology of Frye's cultural imports is set in the very spot where the old cosmology hopefully launched itself against nature in an invasion of exploitation, the Cariboo Trail superceding the Fraser River, the latter a "route — not a highway" and, as civilization advanced, the former being transformed from "earthen trail" to "a fine winding well-graded motor road." The geometric demon has conquered, Hope's "dreaming age has gone," but now Wilson is showing us an alternative. The trees by Hope are "noble" trees, the river is "great and wicked," the hills and mountains have "rumps," the waters at Hell's Gate Canyon are "raging waters," the Similkameen, of course, dances and is "alive," "sweet and equable"; shafts of light "smote" the trees, the west wind "sighs in the pines." The mythologizing vision has the power to vanquish the geometric demon: "What a land! What power these rivers were already yielding, far beyond her sight! Even a map of this country — lines arranged in an arbitrary way on a long rectangular piece of paper — stirs the imagination beyond imagination. . . ." The merging of man and nature into a mythic unity receives wonderful treatment in Wilson's description of fly-fishing at Three Loon Lake. Again, time is banished; there is only now. The Ovidian aspens have just metamorphosed: "in the early springtime, a group of aspen trees standing slender, white bodied, like dancing girls, poised as if to move away, and beginning to be dressed about their slender arms and shoulders in a timid unearthly green. They are virginal."

To return to the rebirth chapter, one must remark upon Wilson's use again of the "new time" and "new space." "Time dissolved, and space dissolved." Here, more than earlier in the novel, the author is developing her complex relativistic world, and for the rest of the novel, her handling of multiple perspective complements the development. Above all, awareness of one's subjectivity is both a liberation and a danger. The tension engendered by the contrast of Hope's history and Maggie's forgetfulness is brought home to the personal, individual level when, clothed in natural images, the dark side of the natural life, which is also human life in the unified vision, ripples Maggie's serenity: "A thought as thin and cruel as a pipe fish cut through her mind. The pipe fish slid through and away." Maggie has forgotten "her own existence," yet she is not like the eagle and the osprey from whom she learned the lesson of survival at Three Loon Lake. Of the beaten osprey she wonders then: "Did a bird's rage or a bird's acceptance possess him?" It is the question itself, not the answer, which is important, for it reveals to the questioner the existence of man's

self-awareness, whether other animals share such awareness or not. At the dancing river Maggie is not entirely ready to face the consequences of human self-awareness; she is recharging her instincts, gaining hope, refreshing her spirit, and reacquiring the habit of going for succour to nature, a mythologized nature that is a symbol of her own expanding humanity. When she returns to the main road to Kamloops she is becoming ready to battle the dark side; Kamloops means "meeting of waters," and on the way Maggie stops in Lytton, where the clear Thompson and the dark Fraser flow together. Again perhaps a parallel with *The Aeneid* is being invited. At the end of the Book Six Aeneus is shown the twin gates of sleep. Through the gate of "flawless ivory" the "dead send false dreams to the world" but the gate of the less pure horn is "a ready exit for real shades."[5] Maggie's leaving Vardoe was instinctual and right; however, in Wilson's view humanity's self-awareness demands we act on a more than instinctual level, and to this end she ties the novel together with the character of Mrs. Severance and her Swamp Angel.

Mrs. Severance is another fine example of Wilson's ability to convey a sense of concrete reality while suggesting mythic overtones, as she does with Maggie and the village of Hope. And she does this not just to ground her fiction in the sensuous reality of everyday life: "Somewhere, I think, the person in a story must touch not only the constructive imagination, but also the earth (that is to say, the writer's own experience) in the course of the struggle, and receive life and strength from that earth."[6] In this comment one should note how Wilson is typically thinking mythologically. The reference is certainly to Antaeus who was invincible while he touched the earth, but whom Hercules defeated by holding him in the air. But more than this, the two lives, in a sense, of her characters operate to display a crucial theme in *Swamp Angel*, a theme implied in Mrs. Severance's lecture to Maggie: "I knew I was in the web, I did the best I could in the web, and it takes God himself to be fair to two different people at once." Mrs. Severance is speaking about her conflicting duties toward Philip and Hilda; the problem cannot be avoided because no man is an island. Wilson has already pointed out that perhaps our species differs from others by our self-awareness, and therefore we cannot act on a purely instinctual level, as the escape into pure subjectivity would seem to invite. To exist on our terms, we must employ other human attributes — the intelligent will and compassion — to complete our participation in the "everlasting web" of creation. The employment of these is based on faith — "Albert says Faith in what, I can't tell him" — faith, if not in an incomprehensible God, the faith that the intelligent will and compassion will be enough.

Wilson prepares Mrs. Severance skilfully for her role as dispenser of this wisdom of balanced commitment and detachment. She was of course a juggler. But there is more that is intriguing in Mrs. Severance. Wilson very deliberately

injects a scene in the novel whose theme is nature's indifference, the Northern Lights episode: "After declaiming lavishly, the great Northern Lights faded with indifference as one who is bored — and deploring display — says I may come back but only if I choose; I do as I wish." Recalling Frye's mention of the dragon as a symbol of indifferent nature in Pratt's *Towards the Last Spike*, one is struck by a certain similarity in the old woman to the fire-breathing, aloof creature of myth who sits upon his mound of treasure. Gender is not a problem; dragons of myth have often been female. When first introduced, Mrs. Severance has a kind of mythical, uncanny size, she appears fatefully indifferent, and not for the last time does she breath fire, or at least smoke. She

> walked with a ponderous softness into the parlour. She stood in the doorway and looked at Edward Vardoe without expression. She crossed the room, lowered herself into a chair, took out a cigarette, tapped it firmly, lit it, drew heavily and blew twin spirals through her nostrils. Above the spirals she looked at Edward Vardoe. She did not speak.

The spelling out of Vardoe's full name shrinks him before the judicial bench of fate. Later, in the lecture to Maggie, Mrs. Severance sits "on top of my little mound of years." Her attachment to the Swamp Angel has the mythic, romance ring to it, like Maggie's attachment to her yellow bowl. And Hilda calls her mother "a wicked old woman." By these devices, Wilson portrays Mrs. Severance as a force in a mythological drama, a personified allusion to the universe's indifference to human problems. Yet Wilson quickly assures us both that Mrs. Severance is also a human being and that the mythologizing the author is engaging in is a figment of the human imagination — a piece of information to bear in mind in our lonely isolation: it will preserve us from the delusion of those fanatics who behind the mists of solipsism imagine themselves God or go hunting at night for Satan disguised as a man. Mrs. Severance helps the pitiful Vardoe, "He's an unpleasant object, but worth salvation I suppose," just as Maggie learns to help the unhappy Vera — sympathizing, then moving on, not escaping, but rather bowing to the truth of process which states that life is flux. Still, even the compassion Mrs. Severance finds for Vardoe has larger-than-life nuances; her "saving souls," along with Maggie's Christ-like actions, enlarges her character. Wilson, however, wants us to have no doubt we are reading of fallible human beings, so she exposes a very human flaw in the old woman: her neglect and then domination of her daughter (the future), caused by her clinging too much to the past. When she recognizes her error the new generation can be born. All these levels of character illustrate Wilson's concept of a relativistic universe, in a part of which is the human animal, struggling to survive. Mrs. Severance's name then takes on many of the meanings readers ascribe to it. On the mythic level, the name suggests Fate; on the Christian level, its meaning is ironic and therefore

interesting as a literary trick. On the immediate "real" level, it names her flaw, her isolation from the present, and the clue to reparation, the severing of the past.

It is no wonder that the character of Mrs. Severance, containing so much, is a strong force in the book. Understandable, too, is Maggie's sense of her as closest to her in spirit, and her description of her as a "worldly unworldly woman." Wilson has led us to see in her an intelligent compassion struggling against the ultimate indifference of things, and this is Wilson's over-all view. If there is a difference between Maggie and Mrs. Severance, perhaps it is that Maggie learned sooner through her closeness to the natural world, like Wilson, the lesson of change; perhaps that makes Maggie more of a Canadian than Mrs. Severance, who travelled throughout the world most of her life.

Much has been written about the Swamp Angel as a symbol. It is certainly "at least a double symbol: a symbol of the ambivalence of creation, and a symbol of the past."[7] The relinquishing of it in its role as symbol of the past is a sign that characters have understood the lesson of change. More relevant to this study of myth in the novel is David Stouck's notion that the Swamp Angel is "an image of power,"[8] like Excalibur. Both are weapons, after all — "She had almost forgotten that the Angel was a gun" — and *Swamp Angel* is "a drama of will and power."[9] All the characters seek to survive. Eddie must strive at one point; Hilda battles Mrs. Severance, who eventually becomes aware she has been "playing God." Therefore in this light, the relinquishment of the Angel is an admission of the necessity to limit the individual's wielding of power in the human community with its potential for destruction, if the community is to operate as well as the natural world where instincts are cruel but just. Yet, Wilson is also echoing the message of the Arthurian myth when the myth rose up to comment upon itself. She sounds the echo in two places. The first, to which we return, is a dream, which in medieval literature was the vehicle for relaying meanings beneath the surface of events. Mrs. Severance lies in a dream state after discovering she no longer has the strength to control the Angel — "It will live longer than I shall."

> All this nowadays of symbol symbol symbol . . . destroying reality . . . too much power, people worship symbol . . . obscures something . . . what . . . obscures . . . she drifted
>
> . . . She closed her eyes again . . . The Angel must go . . . because it is a symbol and too dear . . . and some other reason . . . what other reason . . . she drifted.

The second, of course, is the tossing of the Angel into the lake. In these parts of the book Wilson is relating the theme of change to the very language the human brain constructs for its desires and fears. When Arthur ordered that Excalibur be thrown into the waves he admitted he was mortal. And he reaffirmed that the realm of symbols is a different one from the human world. Man creates symbols — angels — from the swamp of his existence, but God creates man. Man's

symbols can only be approximations of what he and his environment are, approximations which destroy reality when they are relied upon too much. Of the mythologizing urge in Maggie, which helps her understand her place, Wilson seems to say "Beware." The imaginaion must never renew itself. Its products are necessary and transient. Perhaps, like the "little survivor," even *Swamp Angel* must not be depended upon too much.

NOTES

[1] This and subsequent quotations refer to Ethel Wilson, *Swamp Angel* (1954; rpt. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1962).

[2] Northrop Frye, "Haunted by Lack of Ghosts," *The Canadian Imagination*, ed. David Staines (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1977). This quotation and the following ones can be found on pages 29 to 45 in the essay.

[3] Gilbert Ryle, *The Concept of Mind* (London: Hutchinson, 1949).

[4] Ethel Wilson, "The Bridge or the Stokehold," *Canadian Literature*, 5 (Summer 1960), p. 46.

[5] *The Aeneid*, trans., Frank O. Copley (Indianapolis: The Library of Liberal Arts, Bobbs-Merrill, 1965), ll. 893-96.

[6] "The Bridge or the Stokehold," pp. 46-47.

[7] Desmond Pacey, Introduction to *Swamp Angel* (1962), p. 10.

[8] David Stouck, "Ethel Wilson's Novels," *Canadian Literature*, 74 (Autumn 1977), p. 83.

[9] Stouck, p. 83.

BARN DANCE

J. D. Carpenter

Tiger lilies, tangerine
in frondbank, hem
the ancient shed, propped
and leaning on fence rails
Last year's clematis purples
the grey wood by the door
Relic bottles, royal blue
crowd the sill

The steady tires of Rankin's tractor
dust our razored lawn where it laps
the cratered road
At helm
an earphoned farmboy be
bopping

On five wires of hydro
from pole to house
swallows sit like notes
that change too swift
for us to sing
Beyond, the barn
and cars willynilly in the grass

Here, in the centre
of a pine room
Bach diverts the Margrave
with viola, violin, violoncello
trumpet, harpsichord, flute
oboe, recorder
Through three windows
a triptych: shed, road, barn

MIDNIGHT IN THE CITY

J. D. Carpenter

This winter's first half-inch of snow
fell yesterday. All that remains
are the shrinking bodies of snowmen
who soon like wicked witches
will melt to slush and hats.

This evening some of the men from work
are drinking at The Danforth.
A girl with a fleur de lis on her
rump table-dances for us. For five dollars
we see the gates of heaven
and hell, the candle in the window.

(The picture in the paper today
shows two Lebanese boys on a stretcher,
wounded in Tripoli: one sits and cries;
the other lies on his stomach and stares
into regions beyond the dirty foot
that faces the camera. This boy,
the caption tells us, dies.)

We troop from there to an Italian
family restaurant and terrorize
the waiters with our shouts for
garlic bread, more red wine.
We grow red-faced, confused.

Outside, it's quiet, November vernal,
and I walk home alone, stopping once
behind the arena. I can hear boys
drinking in the shadows, coughing
on their joints. Like any banker whose wife's
gone mad, I walk familiar streets,
and every house is haunted.

WORKER CLASSIFICATION: MATERIAL HANDLER

Glen Downie

We work in the world you and I handling
coal chandeliers razor blades hamburger
whatever they ask us to carry sort shovel
A box of glass eyes or tear gas cartridges
Mud silk marshmallows guns potatoes
One man handles diamonds another garbage
Chalk or cheese we come home stained
skinned stinking

I have wiped the asses of 40 year old spastics
You've smashed up old batteries
the splashed acid eats at your jeans
Do we work because we're hungry
for substance Is it even lonelier
for mathematicians

Pat cuts off a cancerous breast
The day's work has begun How does it feel
when a severed breast slips off into your hand
Catherine dresses up stillborns in the morgue
so parents can say goodbye
The babies are cold and pale as congealed fat
I ask her How do you handle a dead baby

This is the way the world works: you are building a house
as I tear it down We need each other
Hands must be full of something
Who knows how we came to be here
We are groping like the newly blind
for anything familiar
for anything at all

WEST OF THE GREAT DIVIDE

Man and Nature in the Literature of British Columbia

Allan Pritchard

IN THAT LITTLE CLASSIC of coastal literature, M. Wylie Blanchet's *The Curve of Time*, there is an episode that illustrates well one of the characteristic themes of British Columbia writing. The author and her children while exploring the coastline in a small boat revisit a favourite place, Princess Louisa Inlet, but they find they are no longer in sole possession as they had been on previous visits. A cabin has recently been built there for a man from California. This cabin is a thing of beauty, the man has excellent taste and he is hospitable, but they lament that "the first thin wedge of civilization" has been driven into their beloved place, and they eventually perceive that he is similarly dismayed by their intrusion: "The man groaned ... his paradise spoiled, I suppose. But what about ours?"[1]

Although the word "paradise" here appears conventional enough, it has more than casual significance in the literature of this region. As I suggested in an earlier article, the literature of British Columbia has developed in ways that strikingly contradict the "survival" thesis about Canadian literature expounded by Margaret Atwood and others.[2] The writers of this region have rarely seen man as the victim of hostile forces of nature. More often they have celebrated the splendour and generosity of the land. They have frequently taken as one of their central images Eden or the earthly paradise, and a leading theme has been the attempt to gain and hold possession of the ideal place. If paradise is one key term in the literature, possession is another. As the episode in *The Curve of Time* illustrates, however, the image of paradise cannot be used without the apprehension of paradise lost. The discovery of the good place is inevitably followed by the fear of losing it, through some personal or collective eviction, and by the fear of its ruin or destruction. Hence much British Columbia writing seems to develop around the patterns, paradise — paradise lost, and the theme of possession is matched by equally prominent themes of dispossession and of spoiling the land.[3]

In the literature of the region the man from California appears frequently and under many names. The intrusions are not always so gentle as in *The Curve of*

Time. The signal of the threat is often the sound of machinery, the noise of an approaching aircraft, the roar of bulldozers or chainsaws. In Theodora Stanwell-Fletcher's *Driftwood Valley* (1946) the author and her husband travelled thousands of miles to find their ideal wilderness lake but they had no sooner arrived than an airplane made an emergency landing there. At the end of their time in Driftwood in 1942 they heard the rumble of bombers passing overhead, signifying the forces that called them back to the outer world from the place they considered their Shangri-La, and they departed with the prayer that if an Alaska highway was built it might pass far from their valley. Similarly in T. A. Walker's *Spatsizi* (1976) the author made a laborious trek by horseback to a perfect lake he discovered in the Cassiar mountains, and immediately encountered a tycoon from Pittsburgh, who had flown in and was furious upon finding others at "his" lake. Walker enjoyed his paradise for a number of years, but the beginning of the end was the appearance of a road construction crew. Finally there was a road on one boundary of his area and a railroad advancing up the other boundary, and he concluded that the only hope of saving the place from destruction was to have it made a park.

In all these narratives there is a double sense of irony: an awareness that those who resent the intrusions of the outer world are themselves seen as intruders by others (for it always turns out that there are earlier inhabitants, although sometimes they are at first overlooked), and the realization that those who find their paradise in a frontier area are inevitably overtaken by the forces from which they have fled. This sense of irony runs deeps in R. D. Symons' *The Broken Snare* (1970). The author established a cattle ranch in the Peace River country, reluctantly disturbing the environment to which a black wolf, the last of his race, and an old Indian hunter belonged. His happy possession of the land ended when bulldozers (controlled as the machines often are in these narratives by men speaking with American accents) drove roads through it for oil exploration, raw gashes straight through swamps and over hills, destroying the grass and crocuses and smashing the wild raspberry patch loved both by his children and the bears.[4] By the time he was forced to depart he identified himself increasingly with the black wolf and the Indian hunter. Here we have all the classic elements of the themes of dispossession and the spoiling of the land, which we will encounter again and again in the literature of the region, in both minor and major writers.

Documentary accounts like *The Broken Snare* provide a good starting point for the examination of themes and images which reappear, often in more complex form, in the work of the novelists and poets. Anyone who has read narratives like Symons' is in a position to recognize instantly the sinister significance of the activity of imposing straight lines and geometrical forms on the landscape in Jack Hodgins' *The Invention of the World*, while in *The Resurrection of Joseph Bourne* Hodgins has only to mention three yellow bulldozers sitting peacefully in

the background for the reader to know that at least one of them will roar destructively into life before the end of the novel.

Such themes and images are of course by no means confined to the literature of British Columbia. They are part of a larger North American pattern,[5] but they have special prominence in British Columbia writing, far more than in that of other regions of Canada. One evidence of this is the fact that they immediately appear in the work of a writer so sensitive to environment and local factors as Matt Cohen when he writes a novel with a British Columbia setting, *Wooden Hunters*, while they are scarcely present in his fiction set in Ontario, whether written earlier or later.[6] If the Atwood survival thesis in its primary form, man as victim of nature, has little relevance for British Columbia writing, it is in its inverted form, nature as victim of man, close to the centre of much of the literature of the region.

IN BRITISH COLUMBIA LITERATURE themes of conservation and spoiling the land emerged prominently long before the widespread modern development of ecological concerns. Among the first generation of European settlers on the coast, John Helmcken, who described the site of Victoria as "paradisiacal" at the time of his arrival in 1850, lamented the deterioration of climate that subsequently occurred when the trees were cut that had sheltered the area from winds, and he commented in 1890 on what man had made of the land as he looked around him on a landscape robbed of its forests: "the earth has been subdued and robbed ruthlessly, made the slave of man and treated as such."[7]

The theme of spoiling the land became specially prominent in this region in the late 1940's and early 1950's, an era of extensive, sometimes reckless, exploitation of resources, a time both of popular belief in progress and of growing awareness of a universal nuclear threat. To this period belong three particularly interesting, very diverse treatments of the theme: Roderick Haig-Brown's *On the Highest Hill*, Malcolm Lowry's *October Ferry to Gabriola*, and Earle Birney's *The Damnation of Vancouver*. Haig-Brown's work is dated 1949 and Birney's in its first version 1952 (final version 1957), and it is interesting to note how closely Lowry here, as in some other instances, fits into a local pattern: the time of *October Ferry* is October 1949, and drafts of the novel were written between that date and 1953.[8] These three writers provide so full an exploration of the theme that when ecology became a subject of general concern in the 1960's, newly emerging writers in the region, such as Bill Bissett, faced special problems in avoiding the conventional and finding new methods of treatment.

Haig-Brown's *On the Highest Hill* is a novel with a pattern similar to a number of the documentary narratives already described. The central character,

Colin Ensley, grows up on a coastal farm, and comes as a boy to love a remote valley in the mountains. After service overseas in the Second World War, he returns to make a home in this valley, when he finds that the family farm has become a housing subdivision, but before long loggers follow him there. The sound of donkey engines, caterpillars, power saws, and the fall of trees mean to him that the violence he had witnessed during the war has followed him even to his favourite place, and he is filled with rage and despair at seeing the destruction caused around his cabin by logging. The novel has a tragic conclusion when Colin, who moves finally into an area of parkland, dies during an attempt to evict him.

Haig-Brown was, as he has stated, a conservationist all his life,[9] and in his later years his dedication to this cause became so strong as to consume much of his time and perhaps even to take him away from writing. Lowry had no such life-long preoccupation with conservation but his concern developed entirely as a result of the love he felt for the setting of his home on Burrard Inlet or "Eridanus," and the prominence of the protest against the spoiling of the land in his writings is a measure of the greatness of that love. In "The Forest Path to the Spring" there are signs of threat to his paradise but these are not yet very potent: a temporary oil slick, an expanding oil refinery with a defective sign reading "HELL," the fact that the area at the head of the inlet known to the Indians as Paradise has been vulgarized to "Ye Olde Totemlande Inne."

In *October Ferry to Gabriola*, however, the threats have become much stronger, and if "The Forest Path" is Lowry's *Paradiso* then *October Ferry* comes close to being his *Paradise Lost*. The oil slick reappears in a much more menacing form. The refinery, which had once appeared innocent, even beautiful, has become truly infernal, a thing of strident noise, by night a fiery torch with a fiendishly lurid light, a true manifestation of the city of Dis. The novel is filled with ironic reflections on the nature of progress. With the theme of spoiling the land is fused a theme of personal dispossession. The central character, Ethan Llewelyn, who compares himself and his wife to Adam and Eve facing expulsion from Paradise, is threatened with eviction from his loved home on the inlet — by a peculiar irony, in the interests of park preservation, just as in the case of Haig-Brown's Colin Ensley. In the end this eviction is averted or postponed, but the dominant theme of the novel is dispossession, and it has the same intensity as the celebration of the Eden-like perfection of place in "The Forest Path." In *October Ferry* Eden is no longer found in present experience so much as in memories of the past.

It is an indication of the special importance of the subject of conservation for British Columbia writers that a hearing at Courtenay in 1951 on a proposal to dam the scenically magnificent Buttle Lake, which lies in a provincial park, was attended not only by Haig-Brown, as one would expect, but also by Earle Birney.

The outcome was not only the building of the dam but also *The Damnation of Vancouver*, a play written at a time when ecological concerns were a very unusual subject for poetry and drama. In his picture of what man has made of the environment Birney is at one with Haig-Brown and Lowry. The city is judged and condemned by a series of historical and dramatic figures: by Captain Vancouver, as he compares it both with the wilderness and the eighteenth-century city of London he had known; by a Salish headman, who deplores the lack of harmony between man and nature; by the raffish pioneer, Gassy Jack, who laments the disappearance of the small clean place he had known; and finally by the medieval poet, Will Langland, who delivers a fierce indictment of the pollution of the environment: "the fouled and profit-clogged Fraser," and "the raped mountains, scarred with fire and finance," and finds a corresponding moral corruption in the people. The image of the place as Eden or Paradise is presented only by the ludicrous and discredited figure of Legion, the simple minded believer in material progress.[10]

In these three works Haig-Brown, Lowry, and Birney all reject the temptation to represent the spoilers of the land primarily as Americans or other external forces. They hold that the enemy lies within, and they develop contrasts between nature and human nature that sometimes seem to bring them close to misanthropy. Of the three it is Lowry, that man of extremes, who comes closest to succumbing. In Eridanus he finds an inner psychological balance he had not known elsewhere, and in keeping with the spirit of the place he refuses to give in to the rage he feels against the spoilers in "The Forest Path," but in *October Ferry* and such stories as "Gin and Goldenrod" the struggle has become harder and the rage less controlled.

As one might expect, balance is much better maintained by Haig-Brown. He gives a perceptive and sympathetic picture of the evolution of Colin Ensley into a misanthrope, but he makes it clear that this solitary, moody character is not to be completely identified with himself. Where he writes in his own person he develops a view of conservation that is not misanthropic but strongly humanistic. The concern in some writers with personal dispossession broadens in his work into a concern with the danger of global dispossession or human extinction. He does not seek to preserve a private paradise but wishes to ensure that the land be used in the long-range interests of humanity, not for a single generation but for all the generations to come, conserved not as a refuge from modern realities but in order that man may learn the realities necessary for his survival as a species, including the lesson he refers to in a late essay as the "dramatic discovery of the century": "that the earth, far from being massive, imponderable, and inexhaustible, is small and finite."[11]

Like Haig-Brown, Birney in *The Damnation of Vancouver* examines the misanthropic extreme without himself accepting it. Langland's indictment of the

city is tinged with misanthropy, but Birney does not allow Langland to have the last word, and in the end the city is saved by the testimony of Mrs. Anyone, a figure representing human vitality, love, joy, and hope, the better potentialities of its inhabitants. There are, however, dark later treatments by Birney of the spoiling of the land. In *What's so big about GREEN?* (1973) the title poem represents the history of European settlement in British Columbia as a total destruction of the environment accomplished in four generations — the end of the local version of progress is a radioactive wasteland.[12] But here the movement is not really into misanthropy so much as it is into social criticism, a movement as characteristic of Birney as of Haig-Brown.[13]

HAIG-BROWN, LOWRY, AND BIRNEY not only demonstrate that British Columbia writers have been quick to raise themes of conservation and spoiling the land from limited minor literary topics into major subjects but also show the way in which the special prominence of these themes conditions many aspects of the literature, including the development of social criticism and the representation both of the city and of such rural figures as the Indian and the logger. As their work suggests, the celebration of the Edenic natural setting has rarely resulted in complacency about human nature or the social order. Although British Columbia has attracted a number of utopian experiments, utopian hopes and dreams have not been prominent in the literature, and writers have seldom held any illusions that migration to a new land allows escape from the realities of human nature and human history. "This country ought to grow good people," a logger reflects as he looks at the mountains in Haig-Brown's novel, *Timber*,[14] but Haig-Brown, whose social criticism gains authority from his long experience as a magistrate, places no special faith in that proposition. Not only has the literature of the region been relatively free from the naive assumption that a splendid natural setting assures an ideal society but frequently the splendour of the setting has served to intensify social criticism, both by leading to the special concern with the spoiling of the land and also by providing an ideal against which human imperfection and failure can be measured. It has helped ensure that no region of Canada has a more persistent and vigorous tradition of social criticism.

The way in which the ideal natural setting serves to intensify social criticism is strikingly shown in the representation of the city. As in Birney's *The Damnation of Vancouver*, the city commonly stands as the symbol of the dominant social order — most frequently of the worst aspects of that order. In British Columbia writing the treatment of the city appears remarkably negative, even if one recognizes how strong anti-urban biases have always been in pastoral tradition, and in the literature of many countries and regions since the Romantic movement.

Thus Haig-Brown, although the characters in his fiction rarely go to Vancouver, occasionally provides descriptions of ugly wooden slums in that city as vivid as his pictures of more pleasing rural landscapes. The loggers in *Timber* consider the opportunities for dissipation to be the city's only attraction, apart from the redeeming feature of its setting: "Even in Vancouver you can see mountains."[15] Lowry's British Columbia writings are full of contrasts between the magnificence of Vancouver's setting and the ugliness and sterility of the city itself. Infernal imagery is as prominent in his descriptions of the city as Edenic imagery in his descriptions of the natural setting. In *October Ferry to Gabriola* the bulldozers, so often shown devastating the rural landscape, have moved into the city, destroying the pleasant old wooden houses that were the most attractive feature of the West End, so that they may be replaced by the soulless behemoths of concrete high-rises. The way in which landscape is turned into deathscape is represented not only by the oil refinery that threatens Eridanus but also, in a story like "Gin and Goldenrod," by a forest slashed for a housing development and made a blackened ruin, as if the woodland had been struck by lightning. To this picture of the city as sterile and sordid more recent writers emerging in the 1960's and 1970's, including the poets John Newlove (in his Vancouver period), Lionel Kearns, and Daphne Marlatt, have made substantial contributions.

In the literature of this region conventions expressing negative views of the city have developed so strongly as to produce sometimes the suspicion of a certain discrepancy between literature and life: it would be difficult to discern from their representation in fiction and poetry that Vancouver and Victoria are among the best loved of Canadian cities. The most notable exception among the major writers is Ethel Wilson, although her view of the city is certainly not without ambiguity. She writes with obvious love of the city of the past in *The Innocent Traveller* (though her central character has no sooner arrived in the little late nineteenth-century frontier town of Vancouver than she begins to worry that it is growing too fast)[16] but she provides a more complex and critical view of the city of the present in such a story as "Tuesday and Wednesday" in *The Equations of Love*. While there is much undoubted affection in her representation of Vancouver, the most appalling pictures of isolation in her fiction are not rural but urban, to be found in such characters as Vicky Tritt in "Tuesday and Wednesday."

Many British Columbia writers have chosen virtually to ignore the city, whether from agreement with Lowry's observation that Canada's originality is in its wildness,[17] or from the sense that community flourishes more strongly in rural areas and small towns than in the great cities, or simply from following the principle of writing about what they know best. When a writer is so much concerned with community as Hodgins moves away from his favourite rural settings it is not into the large cities but to the remote little pulp-mill town of Port Annie

in *The Resurrection of Joseph Bourne*. Although in most matters his impulses are toward inclusiveness, he writes of British Columbia almost as if Vancouver did not exist, and of Vancouver Island almost without reference to Victoria. The city figures little more in his fiction than in the paintings of Emily Carr.[18]

As a corollary of the negative view of the city in the literature of the region, there has naturally developed a strongly favourable view of the figure associated with wilderness and an ancient rural culture, the native Indian, which contrasts with the negative and ambiguous views of the Indian that Atwood holds to be characteristic of Canadian literature as a whole.[19] Thus in "The Shapers: Vancouver" Birney contrasts the destructive and sterile quality of urban development with the vitality of the traditional coastal culture: "in the screaming chainsaws / we hushed the old dreamers."[20] Among writers and artists the consciousness has been strong that, as Haig-Brown wrote in 1961, the Indians may well have "produced more creative development for the human spirit than has been produced in the hundred years of white civilization that have followed upon the time of their greatest flowering."[21] This awareness is surely one of the distinguishing features of the region, and probably no British Columbia poet could write so ambiguously as Douglas LePan does of the "clumsily constructed" image of "some lust-red manitou."[22]

In *The Resurrection of Joseph Bourne* Hodgins reminds us that the regional concern with the theme of dispossession begins with the native Indians.[23] In that novel the Indians fled from the site of Port Annie when that town was founded by the logging Fartenburgs: in commemoration of them, through a nice touch of irony, the booster Mayor Jacob Weins (about to be dispossessed himself when the town is swept away in a mudslide) wears his favourite Thunderbird costume. On a more serious level, the concern for conservation has often extended here from the natural into the cultural area. Emily Carr devoted much of her career both as writer and painter to recording and interpreting this culture threatened with destruction. The desire to conserve and commemorate the Indian culture has not only been reflected in a notable modern revival of native arts but has also inspired a remarkably high proportion of the recent books about British Columbia that have had wide international circulation, including John Gibson's *A Small and Charming World* (1972), Margaret Craven's *I Heard the Owl Call my Name* (1973), and Hugh Brody's *Maps and Dreams* (1981).

In the literature of the region the logger, like the Indian, frequently stands as the central figure in a traditional rural coastal culture, as one may see in many contributions to that unique journal *Raincoast Chronicles* (1972) dedicated to recording the life of logging, fishing, and farming that developed in the frontier era;[24] but the literary representation of the logger is far more ambiguous than that of the Indian. The treatment is complex enough to make an interesting subject for investigation through the work of such authors as Martin Grainger,

who wrote the province's first distinguished novel, *Woodsmen of the West*, and became its Chief Forester, Haig-Brown, Birney ("Images in Place of Logging"), Peter Trower, and Jack Hodgins. It displays ironies and ambiguities that sometimes remind one of the special effects Andrew Marvell gained when in a series of pastoral poems he substituted for the conventional figure of the shepherd, who lives in harmony with nature, the mower, who dwells close to nature but is at the same time an instrument of its destruction and a symbol of death.

In British Columbia writing the logger combines antitheses that make Marvell's ambiguities seem mild: he is at once hero and villain. He is the hero, whether viewed in Marxist or other economic terms as the worker whose hard, skilled, and dangerous labour has long been the foundation of the coastal economy, or seen from the more romantic perspective of well established folk traditions; but he is also the destroyer of nature and the producer of devastation on a scale that reduces Marvell's mower to insignificance. In Lowry the negative view strongly predominates, although he attempts to be fair: his central character in *October Ferry* meditates on seeing burned logging slash: "The abomination of desolation sitting in a holy place. It was too easy to judge the loggers." The two opposing views are both extensively developed in Haig-Brown, who represents the logger sympathetically in *Timber* but introduces him as the agent of destruction in *On the Highest Hill.* Hodgins displays a full awareness of the ambiguities, which are represented, for example, in the contrasting attitudes of Danny Holland and Wade Powers in the loggers' sports at the opening of *The Invention of the World.*

The literary handling of such topics as the city, the Indian, and the logger obviously appears to suggest that British Columbia writing has developed primarily as an offshoot of the Romantic movement, dominated by such Romantic tendencies as pantheism, primitivism, and nostalgia for the past. Yet this would be too simple a view, for the Romantic tendencies are frequently countered by opposing ones which saw the literature from Romantic naivete and extremes. For example, despite his scepticism about vulgar ideas of progress, Haig-Brown does not surrender to Romantic nostalgia any more than to Romantic utopianism but constantly insists, with the scientific authority of the naturalist as well as the understanding of the humanist, that there can be no life or growth without change.[25] Belief in the acceptance of change and the need for human growth is at the heart of the work not only of Haig-Brown but also of Ethel Wilson and Jack Hodgins, while even Lowry in his British Columbia writing struggles, though not always successfully, to accept change.

If Romantic strains are prominent in the literature, they are significantly tempered by moderating forces. While much of the view of life Atwood finds embodied in Canadian literature as a whole can be seen as essentially Puritan, many of these moderating forces in the writing of this region might better be

described by the contrary term from the great seventeenth-century conflict: Anglican. One of the principal writers, Haig-Brown, has often been viewed as a disciple of Izaak Walton,[26] and the literature of the region frequently embodies values and attitudes that have much in common with the Anglicanism of Walton's *The Compleat Angler* and *Lives*: the enjoyment of the creation as opposed to Puritan alienation from nature, the prominence of the Edenic and the relative absence of the utopian, belief in the goodness of life combined with the recognition of human limitations, valuing of community as balancing private judgment and private myth, distrust of apocalyptic claims, the high place given to practical charity, suspicion of extremes, and belief in moderation and balance — though British Columbia writers come closer to abandoning the last qualities when faced with the spoiling of the land than on almost any other subject.[27] Such values are as prominent in the writing of Ethel Wilson as of Haig-Brown, and they have more recently been embodied in the fiction of Hodgins.

British Columbia literature has, in the terms Hodgins uses in *The Invention of the World,* tended more to the celebration of created than invented worlds. Yet as hopes of a utopian social order have been less extravagant than those associated with the great American dream of a frontier or western Eden, the reality has been less lawless and violent than the American west as represented in such works as Mark Twain's *Roughing It,* and there has been less of the disillusion that from being an undercurrent in that narrative has become dominant in much modern American literature of the west, the sense of dream turned to nightmare. In *The Invention of the World* Wade Powers' phoney fort, built as a tourist trap, is symbol of a wild west that scarcely existed on Vancouver Island, and an American immigrant, Richard Ryburn, in this novel gives as a reason for living on the island the fact that "at least the crime rate so far is a lot lower" than in his native country.

It is not by any means so clear, however, that the unrestrained materialism and greed that Mark Twain in *Roughing It* found to characterize the American west as much as the violence have been less prevalent in the Canadian west. Hence, Lowry, Haig-Brown, and Birney have all seen the ruthless exploitation of resources as the great threat to the natural Eden, and have frequently made it the focus of their social criticism. It is an indication not of influence but of regional continuity that much of Hodgins' fiction in its aspect as social commentary can be seen as the imaginative and witty illustration of Haig-Brown's magisterial judgment upon British Columbia in *The Living Land* in 1961 as in "an awkward stage," difficult to assess, "between that of a true frontier state and the later organization that reveals a people's real genius," a stage in which the descendants of the pioneers in compensation for the deprivations of the pioneer era tend to become "opportunistic, pragmatic and materialistic, not knowing quite what to search for beyond material things." Hodgins has made the criticism

of materialism a central theme of his work from such an early story as "The Religion of the Country," included in *Spit Delaney's Island*, through his two novels, *The Invention of the World* and *The Resurrection of Joseph Bourne*, to relatively recent stories like "Mr. Pernouski's Dream" in *The Barclay Family Theatre*.

IT IS WITH HODGINS that this discussion must conclude, for he is not only the writer of greatest originality and power to emerge in recent years in British Columbia but he is also remarkably comprehensive in his handling of established regional themes. No writer could be less willing to accept the limiting aspects of regionalism but none has done more to bring the tradition of his region into focus. While his fiction reaches far beyond the local, he has an unerring instinct for what is most vital and distinctive in his region's literary tradition, and he frequently provides both an epitome and criticism of earlier developments. The sense of exploration of new territories and pushing against established boundaries is strong in his work; yet he has often chosen to build his fiction around the critical examination of themes of paradise and possession, with the linked subjects of conservation and spoiling the land, that have long been central in the literature.

In *The Invention of the World* Hodgins' main setting is the Nanaimo area, which is a principal setting also of Lowry's *October Ferry to Gabriola*. It is unexpected but surely not altogether coincidental that the environs of this old coal mining town should have been made the scene for such diverse meditations on paradise and paradise lost: by his prominent introduction of the ferry at the opening of his novel Hodgins seems to invite comparison with Lowry. While Lowry in "The Forest Path to the Spring" and *October Ferry* writes of Eden and the expulsion, Hodgins in *The Invention of the World* writes of an ironic "Eden Swindle." The special significance of the quest for Eden in the history of the region is established by a chorus of comments by characters in the novel. Strabo Becker meditates that the Bible begins in Eden and the rest of the story is man's attempt to return, and the embittered Julius Champney, retired from the Prairies, comments: "You are inheritors of a failed paradise. This island is littered with failed utopias." The central myth of the novel is the story of one of those attempts to return to Eden. Donal Keneally, professing to be a Moses taking his people to the Promised Land, leads a group of Irish peasants during the late nineteenth century to Vancouver Island, and there founds the Revelations Colony of Truth. But he is in fact a "messiah-monster," a figure of egotistical materialism, who exploits his followers through slavery and fear.

Yet, however much Keneally's followers are deluded and exploited by him, they are not ultimately disappointed in the land to which he has led them. The favourable view of the land is reinforced by numerous comments and reactions from characters who are more recent arrivals on the island. Even sceptical and bitter characters like Champney see that the land is good and are perceived to enjoy it. Among the best balanced and most definite comments are those of Grandfather Barclay, who makes it plain that the majority of the settlers were not engaged in any utopian quest but only looking for a place where people could lead decent lives; he left an Alberta farm after a crippling winter and was glad to find a land where it was always green and where "nature gave you a little help."

In accordance with such comments as these, the negative theme of the disappointment of the "Eden Swindle" is gradually replaced in the novel by much more positive themes of growth and second growth, shown especially in the lives of Maggie Kyle and Wade Powers, who accept the created world with its necessary limitations and establish on the site of Keneally's Revelations Colony a community founded not on egotism but on practical charity, not on fear but on love, a community that has much less utopian pretension but contributes more to human happiness.[28] Thus Hodgins' handling of the quest for Eden, though it is strong in irony, is not developed along the lines of the Atwood "survival thesis," the idea of man as the victim of a hostile environment, and immigration to the new land as leading characteristically to defeat and disappointment. Rather the criticism is directed against the invented world of private myth, utopian dream, and apocalyptic claim: the invented world is rejected in favour of the created world. In the regional context this novel provides a climax in that tradition which celebrates the creation while distrusting utopian schemes that diverge far from the created realities.

Among the finest of Hodgins' achievements in *The Invention of the World* are the originality he brings to the development of the familiar theme of the spoiling of the land and his skill in integrating this theme with his narrative and characters. Keneally's combination of materialism and messianic pretensions is symbolized by his cutting the upward-reaching trees and making for his colony a clearing in the form of a perfect circle, and the novel has many images of the devastation caused by logging and the attempts to impose geometric order on the land. On the other hand Maggie Kyle is consistently associated with trees as symbols of aspiration and growth: she allows the second growth to spring up and obliterate the circle of the old Revelations Colony.

Hodgins' handling of the Eden theme does not end with *The Invention of the World*. His critical examination of the idea of the western Eden is carried further in the later novel, *The Resurrection of Joseph Bourne*. He appears to have chosen the setting of the pulp-mill town, Port Annie, as affording as close a thing

to the antithesis of the earthly paradise as can be found in his region or on his island. In contrast to the quest for paradise evident in the literature of British Columbia, many of the inhabitants have come there not so much to seek the ideal place as to escape a criminal or scandalous past. Port Annie is isolated, linked to the outside world only by a rough logging road. The sun rarely shines and the rain falls nearly all the time. The town is subject both to tidal waves and mudslides.[29] Yet, if this situation can be read as a parody of the quest for Eden, the comic elements of the irony ultimately predominate over the tragic almost to the same degree as in *The Invention of the World.* For all its striking disadvantages, Port Annie on "The Ragged Green Edge of the World" is a "breathtakingly beautiful spot," a place of greenness and growth.[30] Its inhabitants sometimes find life dull and frustrating but more often exciting, full of interest and possibilities.

In this setting in *Joseph Bourne* the themes of conservation and spoiling the land are still more prominent and even better integrated than in *The Invention of the World.* They have been made integral elements in a great conflict between forces of fertility and sterility that may sometimes suggest a modern *Tempest* and sometimes *The Waste Land* but is a remarkable imaginative achievement of Hodgins' own, fully realized in Vancouver Island terms. This integration of themes rests partly on Hodgins' recognition that conservation is, as Haig-Brown has stated, ultimately a religious concept, "the most universal and fundamental of all such concepts, the worship of fertility."[31]

The negative forces of sterility in the novel include highly original versions of all those figures and images traditionally associated with the spoiling of the land, just as the landscape includes patches of black logged and burned land and a polluted inlet. There are rapacious loggers, the Fartenburgs, whose self-defeating materialism is represented in Fat Annie's retreat into a living death. There are memorable pictures of real estate developers and boosters, champions of material progress plotting to turn Port Annie into a cactus-land tourist resort, such as Mayor Jacob Weins, Jeremy Fell, and Damon West, who are lineal descendants of Birney's figure of Legion in *The Damnation of Vancouver*, even though they are very much the product of Hodgins' own observation and creative power. Fell's dream of the future featuring the motors of bulldozers, the sounds of power saws roaring and trees falling, and the sight of surveyors at work and Weins' vision of progress in terms of used-car lots and drive-in hamburger stands come close to Lowry's darkest musings about the rape of the land in *October Ferry*, although they are rendered in a more comic mode than was possible for him.

These forces of sterility are more than matched by powers of fertility, when Port Annie, inundated in a tidal wave, undergoes a sea-change. Forth from the sea, Venus-like, comes the life-giving spirit of Raimey, as if a goddess of fertility. She revitalizes Joseph Bourne, who had been seeking death; so that he can

revitalize others. Through the influence of Raimey and Bourne more ordinary characters like Jenny Chambers and Larry Bowman learn to overcome the fear, egotism, and materialism that are the causes of sterility, as rain overcomes the giant cactus imported by Weins and brings about new growth all around it. The last picture of the cactus is as a grotesque dead object looking absurdly out of place in a land where everything is green.[32] Thanks to its eternal rain, Port Annie cannot be converted into a wasteland, although it can be swept into the sea by a mudslide. Here as with many of his humorous paradoxes, Hodgins is making a serious point: Haig-Brown in his officially commissioned survey of British Columbia's resources, *The Living Land*, classified water as the most valuable of the province's natural assets.

In this conflict the "man from California" reappears in more than one role. Hodgins uses a number of Californians in the novel to suggest the relation between the western American and western Canadian versions of paradise, and he builds a nice set of ironies around the fact that threats to the dubious Canadian paradise may spring from a failed American paradise, while refugees from the latter may prove the truest admirers of the Canadian paradise. The developers who attempt to convert Port Annie into a wasteland resort are Californians with Canadian allies, and their threat is directed most immediately against Californian hippies who, having quixotically chosen to be amateur paper makers in a pulp-mill town, are squatters on the tide-flats in Port Annie: the effect is of a war between foreign forces on Canadian soil. Yet like Haig-Brown, Lowry, and Birney before him, Hodgins emphasizes that the source of the threat is as much internal as external. The chairman and chief stockholder of the Evergreen Reality Company, which plans to "develop" Port Annie into a desert, is Damon West, whose name suggests a spirit of the west that transcends international boundaries. It is significant too that in the end the Californian hippies with the other squatters on the mud flat alone escape eviction by the mudslide that destroys the remainder of Port Annie, and Hodgins gives them a special part in the sacramental feast in which the survivors of Port Annie join together at the end of the novel — appropriately perhaps because these Californians prove to be among the truest appreciators of the beauties of that isolated wet green place.

Despite all the anti-pastoral elements in this novel, Hodgins' criticism of the idea of the earthly paradise does not really take the form here any more than in *The Invention of the World* of disillusionment with the land, such as is implied in the survival thesis, but rather of an attack on the definition of paradise and possession in material terms. The book of poems by the mysterious, wise central figure, Joseph Bourne, is titled *Possessing Me* and the first poem quoted begins, "We possess nothing"; one describes a boat trip up a coastal inlet that might recall Lowry's *October Ferry*, but it develops the theme: "a search for a home in this earth was pointless." As Bourne later states: "Our real roots grow upward.

. . . We aren't trees, that anchor themselves in earth." The vanity of any attempt to put down roots or find a material paradise is shown most graphically when Port Annie is swept before the end of the novel into the sea by a mountain slide, as if to exemplify the biblical warning (Hebrews 13:14): "For here we have no continuing city. . . ." This slide is the ultimate in that dispossession theme that looms so large in British Columbia literature. Here everyone is dispossessed except ironically the group of squatters who had first been threatened with eviction. Yet this eviction is not tragic for most of the inhabitants. Nearly all survive and more than survive. The community, which is the people, still exists and it is implied that for most of them the forced move will be liberating, opening new possibilities. Thus Hodgins, who possesses so powerful a sense of place, uses that very sense of place ultimately to question the worship or idolization of place.

If British Columbia literature sometimes seems to have recapitulated the pattern, paradise followed by paradise lost, with Hodgins and other recent writers we have clearly reached a third phase, the question whether paradise regained is possible. In a late essay composed in 1972, "Some Thoughts of Paradise,"[33] Haig-Brown, writing of the paradise of the fisherman and naturalist but as always with wide implications for human life as a whole, gave his answer: it cannot be exactly reduplicated but it can be reclaimed through the fruit of the tree of knowledge. Hodgins in *The Resurrection of Joseph Bourne* also appears to suggest an optimistic answer but on a level more spiritual and transcendental, closer to the Miltonic "paradise within," although with a stronger concern for community than this phrase seems to imply. We must of course await his future books for the nature of that answer to become increasingly clear.[34]

NOTES

[1] (1961; Sidney, B.C.: Gray's, 1977), pp. 29, 31.

[2] The present article, though it should be capable of standing by itself, builds on and extends the argument of the earlier one, "West of the Great Divide; A View of the Literature of British Columbia," *Canadian Literature*, 94 (Autumn 1982), pp. 96-112. References to Atwood are to *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature* (Toronto: Anansi, 1972).

[3] In strong contrast to the sense of alienation and exile of persons disillusioned with the land, which according to Atwood characterizes much Canadian literature, one not infrequently finds here an element of paranoia on the part of those who feel themselves to inhabit a desirable land likely to be coveted by others — a paranoia that may even antedate European settlement, for anthropologists such as Charles Hill-Tout have seen it as long characteristic of the coastal Salish. See Hill-Tout's *The Far West, The Home of the Salish and Déné*, Vol. I of *The Native Races of the British Empire, British North America* (London: Archibald Constable, 1907), pp. 43-46.

[4] In contradiction of the title of this article, Symons' setting is that part of British Columbia that lies east of the Great Divide. Perhaps it might be taken as a wry

comment on the nationalistic bias revealed in such narratives that in Jane Rule's *The Young in One Another's Arms* (1977) the situation is reversed: instead of Canadians menaced by American machines, good Americans are faced with a bad Canadian bulldozer man.

[5] Leo Marx in *The Machine in the Garden, Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* (1964) discusses relevant aspects of American literature, primarily in the nineteenth century. In British Columbia literature it is often a case of the machine in the wilderness rather than in the garden, in a context more primitive than pastoral, the theme gaining its prominence not only from the special splendours of nature here but also from the fact that much of the region remained little settled or "developed" until machines had become very powerful and potentially destructive.

[6] For example, see *Wooden Hunters* (1975; Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, New Canadian Library, n.d.), p. 14, and note the role of the bulldozers and representation of logging operations.

[7] *The Reminiscences of Doctor John Sebastian Helmcken*, ed. Dorothy Blakey Smith (Vancouver: Univ. of British Columbia Press, 1975), p. 104, and Appendix 2, pp. 282, 331.

[8] See Douglas Day, *Malcolm Lowry, A Biography* (New York: Dell, 1975), p. 394. The total period of composition extends from 1946 to 1957; see "Editor's Note," *October Ferry to Gabriola*, ed. Margerie Lowry (New York and Cleveland: World Publishing, 1970), pp. 335-36. Reference below is to this edition. On Lowry and the local patterns, cf. "West of the Great Divide: A View," pp. 97, 104.

[9] *Measure of the Year* (Toronto: Collins, 1950), p. 226.

[10] (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1977), pp. 3, 49, 59, 62.

[11] "The Drama of Our Environment" (1970), *Writings and Reflections*, ed. Valerie Haig-Brown (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1982), p. 219. Haig-Brown's optimism rarely altogether disappears but the editor comments on the "angry despair in some of the later conservation pieces" in this volume ("Editor's Note," p. 9).

[12] "What's so big about GREEN?" was published in a volume with that title in 1973 (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart) but the dates given in Birney's *Collected Poems* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1975), I, 148-53, indicate that a version of the poem was written as early as 1949.

[13] See, for example, Haig-Brown's questioning whether the natural resources have been used in accordance with humanistic criteria, for the end of human happiness, in view of the severe nature in the province of such social problems as alcoholism and drug addiction, in *The Living Land, An Account of the Natural Resources of British Columbia* (Toronto: Macmillan, produced by the British Columbia Natural Resources Conference, 1961), p. 253. Birney has of course always been more the critic and satirist than the celebrator of a western Eden, and even when he comes closest to such celebration in a poem like "Eagle Island" some satiric point is usually involved.

[14] *Timber, A Novel of Pacific Coast Loggers* (New York: Morrow, 1942), p. 154.

[15] P. 155. Even on this subject, however, Haig-Brown's habitual moderation does not entirely desert him, and in *Measure of the Year* (p. 261) he tells us he has experienced pleasure in urban life.

[16] (Toronto: Macmillan, 1949), p. 126.

[17] This is Ethan Llewelyn's reflection in *October Ferry*, p. 188. Lowry expresses a similar view in a notebook entry; see W. H. New, *Articulating West, Essays on Purpose and Form in Modern Canadian Literature* (Toronto: New Press, 1972), p. 260. In this matter British Columbia represents an extreme but the same tendency is evident in other regions, and modern Canadian literature, with some notable exceptions like Mordecai Richler, has many of the aspects of an agrarian movement. The preferred setting for fiction has been, if not the wilderness, rural areas and small towns rather than cities: the most heavily populated part of the country has recently given rise not to a Toronto but a Deptford trilogy of novels, and Jubilee is more important on the literary map than Hamilton.

[18] In *The Invention of the World* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1977), the environs, outskirts, and rural areas are used as a setting more than the urban centre of Nanaimo; Victoria people are present at the all-inclusive wedding celebration at the end of this novel but they sit together near the punch bowl "with their backs to everyone else," p. 344. Hodgins' skill in handling urban settings on those occasions when he chooses them is shown in *The Barclay Family Theatre*, in stories set in Ottawa and Tokyo.

[19] See *Survival*, pp. 91-95.

[20] Printed in *What's so big about GREEN?* (1973), which is unpaginated.

[21] *The Living Land*, p. 237.

[22] "A Country Without a Mythology," discussed by Atwood, *Survival*, pp. 52-54.

[23] In relation to this theme, it may be noted that a later instance of large-scale collective dispossession, the deportation of Japanese Canadians from the coastal area during the Second World War, has given rise to a large and growing body of literature, from Dorothy Livesay's *Call My People Home* (1950) to Joy Kogawa's *Obasan* (1981).

[24] This journal, edited by Howard White, has included fine essays like Leslie Kopas' "Growing up in Bella Coola," reprinted in *Raincoast Chronicles, First Five*, ed. H. White (Madeira Park, B.C.: Harbour Publishing, 1976), pp. 170-75, that sometimes provide a documentary counterpart to the fiction of Jack Hodgins.

[25] Haig-Brown describes his transformation "from what I shall call a romantic naturalist into a modern naturalist" in "The Drama of Our Environment," *Writings and Reflections*, p. 215.

[26] Among Haig-Brown's own tributes to Walton and Charles Cotton, who shows the same fusion of angling and Anglicanism, is "Izaak Walton: His Friends and His Rivers," *Writings and Reflections*, pp. 48-56.

[27] Of course any single term, whether "Puritan" or "Anglican," is likely to be misleading when applied to a group of writers admirable for their individuality and diversity, and if the latter term is applied broadly to British Columbia writers it certainly should not be taken to imply the absence or neutralization of all radical spirit, or to indicate specific connection with the Church of England, when the principal writers of the region actually represent many varieties of religious belief and non-belief, or to suggest very close or exclusive English influence, when even a native of England such as Haig-Brown in British Columbia quickly came to see himself as North American, as he emphasized in *Measure of the Year* (p. 178): "I love American and Canadian literature because they speak directly to me with a fierce urgency and a closeness that is not in things European."

[28] Although on the surface the two characters are very different, Maggie Kyle's unsentimental manifestations of practical charity and adoption of a role as a "house-

keeper" for those less able than herself give her some affinity with an earlier Maggie, the central character of Ethel Wilson's *Swamp Angel.*

[29] The prominence of water imagery in this novel reflects realities of northern and western Vancouver Island but it could also be seen as parody, pushing to a comic extreme of exaggeration a pattern of imagery that has long been dominant in British Columbia literature. Many writers of the region might well echo the remark of Ethel Wilson's Frankie Burnaby in *Hetty Dorval* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1973, p. 56): "My genius of place is a god of water." Streams, lakes, and sea are everywhere present in Wilson's fiction, and the whole of her complex and ambiguous view of life is embodied in water imagery. Rivers are central in Haig-Brown's work from *Pool and Rapid, The Story of a River* (1932) to the end of his career: they stand for his basic conception of life as flow, constant change yet permanence, which includes both the successive seasons and the successive generations (as in *Measure of the Year*, p. 122). The similar prominence of water imagery in the British Columbia writings of Lowry is illustrated by the final paragraphs of "The Forest Path to the Spring," where many of the traditional and biblical associations are evoked: purity, baptism, renewal. (Hence for Lowry the special source of menace is oil refineries and slicks, just as inevitably for Haig-Brown the building of dams often appears as the great threat.)

[30] References are to *The Resurrection of Joseph Bourne* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1979).

[31] *The Living Land*, p. 21.

[32] The images of greenness and growth sometimes suggest the island's greatest painter, and bring to mind those passages in her journals where she evokes "the great green ocean of growth" as an indestructible life-force: "Up it bursts; it will not be kept back. It is life itself, strong bursting life," *Hundreds and Thousands, The Journals of Emily Carr* (Toronto and Vancouver: Clarke, Irwin, 1966), p. 200. Hodgins writes, however, with an awareness of the limitations of such imagery for the contemporary poet and novelist, as the reflection of Bourne implies: "The old metaphors for eternity didn't work any more . . ." (p. 226).

[33] Printed for the first time in *Writings and Reflections* (1982), pp. 192-201.

[34] In *The Barclay Family Theatre* (1981), Hodgins extends his satiric treatment of materialistic local versions of the idea of Eden in the story "Mr. Pernouski's Dream," in which a Vancouver Island real estate agent representing Eden Realty professes to sell paradise.

VANCOUVER

Al Purdy

A state of mind of course this city
some geographic quirk
can sparkle in the sauntering eye
or glimmer grey in sullen heart
reflect the moods of trees
— on certain mornings of such clarity
mountains are seen to have moved
stumped on stone legs to Granville Street
— at the traffic light's first green
rose-red spring salmon migrate
the intersection at Hastings & Main

There have been Kitsilano sunsets
that dodge around the glum hotels
a huge red ten-dimensional face
hangs from the horizon's picture
window and never does descend
Surprise Surprise
for every tourist corner turned
discover other suns come trundling
from planetary cradles to join
them at the sea's doorway
and finally merge
in one gigantic rose suspended
from a clock tower in the sky

Less lyrical the fog
— mooing tormented voices
of ships whispering in from the Gulf
at Coal Harbour fishing boats
mutter together in the tide slop
There is a lostness even inside buildings
secretaries peer from office windows
wanting to be safe with their lovers
pedestrians walk with hands outstretched
colour-blind in a kind of sleep
in an invasion of the grey flowers
and after a week or ten days of it
the world becomes Biblical
the god of sextant and astrolabe
haunts ships in the harbour

City of the great trees
metropolis of sawdust
and blackberries growing wild
a million black suns
at False Creek mouth
City at the continent's edge
where everyone was born three
hours younger than the grey east
and sometimes light is so luminescent
the air glows glows internally
and nobody breathes for a moment
City of mountains and sea
I have changed much
in my viewpoints and intolerant attitudes
but some things are unchanging
they deserve your love
the fog and the sea and the mountains

the streets of summer

BELLS

Eric Miller

for Michael

When the bell rings in the tower
Air builds around the tower
A greater turret in which the tower shouts
With the warcry of horsemen
Spiking a ridge
High over the merchant road.

One o'clock.
A thunderhead of bells,
A cliff of sharp intakes,
A mountain of one breath held, held and held
And held.

books in review

ARTIST/ARTISAN

CLARK BLAISE, *Lusts*. Doubleday, $19.95.

LUSTS is a novel about the relation between fiction, biography, and autobiography, or in its simplest terms, between art and life. And what form better equipped to portray such a tension than that of the epistolary novel? But this particular version of that canonical form actually *enacts* the changing shapes of the relationship: the initial exchange of letters between Rosie Chang, Berkeley English Professor and hopeful biographer of the dead poet, Rachel Isaacs, and Rachel's husband, novelist Richard Durgin, gives way in part one to an autobiographical account of Durgin's life, but an account, a life, divided into novelistically shaped chapters. The second section begins with a letter from Rosie, but the direct reply from Durgin is headed "Chapter 7." The third and longest part of this book opens with "Chapter 14," but this time Rosie's letter is incorporated into the chapter proper, instead of standing outside it. Rosie's letter to Durgin anouncing her arrival in Faridpur, Rajasthan, India, where the novelist-autobiographer now lives, forms all of section four. The epilogue — in the third person — reads as if it might be from the Isaacs biography OR from a new novel by Durgin; in either case, it would mark a new start in *life*, through *art*, for both correspondents. There are early hints of this meeting of the past and the future beyond the book's end, and a literary reference in Rosie's first letter foreshadows it: "I'll stand at the end of the pier, waiting your installments with all the anticipation of the French Lieutenant's woman." Like Sarah's fate in that other novel about the interaction of life and art, reality and imagination, Rosie's destiny lies outside the novel's boundaries.

The main narrator of *Lusts* is Durgin, the (failed?) writer, forced to examine his own life as both man and artist in the light of the suicide of his wife, Rachel Isaacs, a gifted poet suffering from what Durgin calls "a reality confusion that functioned as art" and that killed her: "She was a reality junkie, and she died of an overdose." Durgin, the working-class American, had sought escape through dreams, while his cosmopolitan wife wanted raw American reality. This she found in him — all ego and brash innocence. The titular lusts refer to Durgin's lust for life and for women in a positive sense, but also to the "industrial lust" of Pittsburgh, his not so innocent "bloodlust" for knowledge, and that something "related to desecration" that sealed his first brief and lethal marriage. These twin connotations of the title cohere around two vital and oddly related symbolic incidents of Durgin's youth: the memory of the stone he coldly threw (as a boy) at the perfect stag protecting his does, and that of looking at his own sperm under the microscope in biology class in high school: "From that day on, my version of the ultimate fiction . . . would have a strongly sexual bent." Having cast that first stone against the male protector-figure and given in to that "ultimate fiction," Durgin can only retire from his lusts after the death of his third wife, whose body, according to Indian custom, was set alight on its bier by Durgin himself. It is as if only now can he learn that temperance of which Plato's Agathon speaks in the *Symposium*: "the power to control our pleasures and our lusts, and none [such control] is more powerful than Love."

Nevertheless, the text we read reconfirms his earlier claim that he had always

put his faith in "blind, undiminished life," something Rachel "didn't have and couldn't get." Her identification with victims led her to write of death, of the horrors of the Holocaust, a topic whose brutality, according to Durgin, is beyond all art and language. This is a novel about differences: in sensibility (perhaps between male and female sensibility), in writing from "things" or from "feelings," in choosing fiction or poetry. For Durgin, the novelist, art must "extend reality": "A novel should be a living cell of an entire social and individual organism." Rachel's poems lacked this living quality of being composed "from life itself." Blaise's novel, of course, does not.

However, Rachel could not, Durgin fears, in the end be the genius her admirers wish her to be: "Geniuses bend us to their world, they see the world whole and they are aggressive in creating it." Rachel's pain, instead, remains "disembodied" until Durgin gives it flesh through his prose account of her suffering and his own: things and feelings, fiction and poetry meet. The woman with "page-white" skin, the "animal of words" who hates her own body for its unaesthetic qualities, regards her husband's lust (and love?) as "low animal heat." Always willing to "trade moral sanity for aesthetic perfection," Rachel, after death, must suffer her life and death to be shaped and interpreted by others. Unlike art, life "refuses to assume a predictable shape," and Durgin, like a tragic Tristram Shandy, asks: "What is the art — what is the name — for such a contingency?"

Caught in the tension between art and life, Durgin postpones writing to Rosie of Rachel's death — it would be like "killing her all over again" — preferring to deal with the details of the painful past "the way I've recreated them." But eventually he must account for his (and their) failure to keep life, love, and art alive. Rachel's cosmopolitan, cultured European background left her "ignorant of America," the very America her husband represents. This is the real America and cannot be allegorized away and distanced, as she wished it could be: even its most trivial impinging upon her is presented as the cause of her identification with the victims of the Holocaust. In her poem "Roaches," her husband is called Adolf because he exterminates the New York cockroaches trapped under cups — one of their "bell-jar tricks."

This overt reference to Sylvia Plath, another young suicide, another gifted poet married to an artist and obsessed by her father, serves to highlight difference as much as sameness. Plath was the archetypical American girl that Rachel would never have understood. Their modes of suicide, while different, however, are linked: Rachel bakes bread and it cooks in the oven as she slits her wrists. An earlier reference in the novel to Bloomsbury and to Virginia Woolf's suicide and madness adds another literary historical echo to Rachel's act. In the case of both intertexts here, it is a matter of what Durgin, in another context, calls "equivalence of disparate experience" rather than any novelistic imitation.

In *Lusts*, Blaise has gone beyond the sensationalism of parts of *Lunar Attractions* to portray the ordinary extraordinariness of the growth of the artist from industrial Pittsburgh to Lovett College, Kentucky, where he found his vocation (Durgin describes his own first novel — and, one could say, the early part of Blaise's — as a "fifties novel, all about innocence and ambition and joining forces with the American dream") to the Writer's Workshop in Iowa where he meets Rachel, and to New York where they live and she dies. These are the most powerful parts of the novel: the remaining tale of his brief and disastrous second marriage and of his more fulfilling time

with the Indian woman, Leela, seems pale after the tension of life with Rachel. Perhaps this is because the life/art theme is most fully portrayed — indeed suffered — during those few creative years, and Durgin's account of them reflects their emotional and creative fullness. It takes Rosie Chang's questioning to force Durgin to rethink that time, and in doing so, again bring to life the dormant artist who had given up his vocation to be a carpenter in India. But his new life is foreshadowed in the opening of *Lusts*: "Being a carpenter's son put me in a Renaissance relationship with writing. Artisan into artist." The novel we read is that of the artist as fine artisan.

LINDA HUTCHEON

CHERE MAMAN

CLAUDE JASMIN, *Maman-Paris Maman-la-France*. Leméac, $14.95.

> Tu m'as fait jurer que chaque soir je tiendrais une sorte de journal sur ce séjour en France. Je t'ai promis d'écrire, dans les cahiers rouges que tu m'as achetés, toutes mes rencontres, mes impressions, le choc de ce pays, la France, et de Paris en particulier. Il y a toutes sortes de surprises, à bien des "niveaux" comme disent les profs québécois. Voici donc à chaud, mes premières émotions en France.

AINSI DEBUTE *Maman-Paris Maman-la-France*! Ces lignes, qui nos renseignent quant à la nature du projet du signataire, nous renseignent également sur l'identité du destinataire des vingt-deux lettres qui suivent, des lettres dont la longueur variera vingt-sept et quatre pages imprimées et ayant en moyenne une quinzaine de pages imprimées. On se demande parfois, il faut l'avouer, comment Clément, le signataire, en arrive à écrire quotidiennement d'aussi longues lettres, alors qu'il se dit fourbu et exténué — et avec raison — par les épuisantes marches ou les promenades prolongées de la journée. Il est vrai qu'il prend un réel plaisir à écrire, à sa mère tout particulierement. C'est un plaisir d'ailleurs dont il n'a point l'habitude de se priver. "Et tu sais, rapelle-t-il à sa mère, qu'écrire est ma passion secrète, mon occupation des soirs et des week-ends et, ma foi, maman, tu pourrais faire publier une véritable encyclopédie en vingt tomes avec toutes les lettres que je t'ai écrites depuis l'âge de vingt ans lorsque je suis allé travailler dans les usines de vaisselle de Pittsburg, avant ma rentrée en religion à vingt et un ans."

Religieux, Clément le fut pendant nombre d'années, mais depuis 1970, il ne l'est plus du tout. Il ne sait même plus prier, confesse-t-il à sa mère, lui qui pourtant fut élevé "dans les prières et le calcul minutieux des indulgences." Ainsi que nous ne tardons pas à l'apprendre, il a épousé, quelques années après avoir quitté sa communauté religieuse et malgré les objections réitérées de sa maman, une femme de dix ans plus jeune que lui. C'est du reste grâce à cette dernière qu'il a pour la première fois de sa vie, à cinquante ans, la chance de réaliser l'un de ses plus beaux rêves, celui de visiter Paris et la France. Rachel, sa femme, a en effet été invitée à représenter le Québec à un concours de photographie amateur organisé par le Ministère des Affaires étrangères. Ensemble, Rachel et Clément découvriront donc la France pendant trois semaines et c'est le récit détaillé de cette découverte que, fidèle à sa promesse, le bon fils consignera à l'intention de sa maman dans les "cahiers rouges" qu'elle lui a achetés.

A peine Rachel et Clément ont-ils quitté Roissy pour se diriger vers Paris, "en passant par la porte Saint-Denis et puis par la porte Maillot" [!!], qu'ils ont un premier choc: "Soudain, on a vu, au loin, très loin, dans le brouillard de ce dimanche matin, oui, nulle autre qu'elle "en personne," la tour! Eh oui, cette

bonne "vieille" tour Eiffel. Ça nous a donné un coup. Un coup au coeur. Tu comprends, en avoir entendu parler pendant tant d'années, l'avoir vue si souvent sur des affiches, au cinéma, à la télé et soudain apercevoir sa silhouette au fond de l'horizon! Crois-moi, petite maman, c'est un choc. . . . " Clément, on le constate, est fortement impressionnable!

Bref arrêt aux Affaires étrangères, au bureau de leur hôtesse. Clément remarque aussitôt la véstusté des lieux, les tapis usés, les murs salis, les papiers qui jonchent les planchers, les pupitres "à l'allure misérable," l'ascenseur miniature "qui faisait des bruits de poulies inquiétants en diable." Certes, il s'en souvient, on lui a déjà parlé de la pauvreté des "vieux pays," mais il était loin d'imaginer que c'était ainsi.

Descendus à l'Hôtel des Saints-Pères — un hôtel qui n'a rien "des gros hôtels de Montréal," a soin de noter Clément, ni de ceux qu'ils ont visités à Miami Beach, l'hiver d'avant, sa femme, sa mère et lui — les deux Québécois prennent tout juste le temps de déposer valises tant ils on hâte de visiter Paris. C'est le coup de foudre!

Nous ne les suivrons pas, cependant. Laissons-les découvrir, seuls, l'Ile de la Cité de Notre Dame, entrer au Procope, s'asseoir à la terrasse du Café de Flore ou à celle du Café des deux magots, visiter le Père Lachaise et le Centre Pompidou, se promener sur la Seine en bateau-mouche . . . Malgré le plaisir certain que nous aurions à les y accompagner, laissons-les entrer, seuls, à la Délégation du Québec, où ils feront la connaissance de Romuald Vilemain des Ormes et celle, plus tard, d'Yvon Michomifrette.

Oui, mieux vaut abandonner Clément à son émerveillement, pendant quelque temps. Il se plaît à respirer l'air de Paris et à répéter avec grand enthousiasme une litanie de clichés et de lieux communs. Si nous lui prêtions l'oreille, nous risquerions d'être franchement agacés par ses commentaires, qui frisent parfois l'insignifiance. Ce ne sont sûrement pas ses propos au sujet de l'église de Saint-Germain des prés, par exemple, qui nous feront regretter de ne l'avoir point écouté. "On avait entendu parler, écrit-il à sa mère, de cette vieille église abbatiale où, au XVIIe siècle, notre premier évêque, Laval, fut consacré avant son départ pour Québec. Eh bien, maman, ça fait pauvre. Tu me diras que c'est une des plus vieilles églises de Paris, mais tout de même, nos églises montréalaises, même dans nos plus modestes paroisses, ont tout autre allure grâce aux clochers pointus et si hauts. Saint-Germain c'est vieux, sale, trapu, usé à la corde!" Le Louvre, par ailleurs, lui fait penser à un "supermarché des arts" et au plus gros "entrepôt d'art de l'univers." Il écrit enfin à sa mère, le premier jour: "Oh, maman, quel gros décor que ce coeur de Paris! C'est toujours, bien sûr, des vieilleries, mais imagine le vieux village de bois de Upper Canada ou celui de Caraquet multiplié par cent, par mille et tout bâti de pierre; c'est vieux mais apparemment encore très solide. C'est un peu, ces lieux historiques, du Disneyland, mais en plus vaste et évidemment en vrais décors. . . . "

Nous ne saurions évidemment éxiger de ce grand naïf sans envergure des lettres qui fassent concurrence au Michelin! Ce qui importe au fond, c'est qu'elles soient authentiques, à tout le moins vraisemblables, compte tenu de la personnalité de celui qui les rédige. Or, elles le sont . . . si attristant puisse finalement se révéler le portrait de celui qu'elles reflètent! Dommage qu'il n'ait jamais songé à céder la plume à Rachel, qui possède, semble-t-il, une culture plus étendue et une plus grande ouverture d'esprit.

Aux yeux de Clément, Paris est "un immense musée à ciel ouvert et qui n'en finit pas de nous raconter le passé"; c'est le lieu d'un "perpétuel pélerinage aux

grands fantômes de l'Histoire." Voilà précisément ce qui plus tout l'émeut profondément. De fait, bien qu'il jette souvent sur ce qu'il voit un regard naïf et étonné, un regard rapide à répérer la vétusté et l'inconfort, un regard c'est-à-dire qui trahit à maint àgard son identité nord-américaine, Clément a eu tôt fait de se sentir chez lui en France. Il n'était descendu de l'avion que depuis quelques heures à peine qu'il évoquait déjà ses "gênes de petit-petit-fils d'ancêtres français" et qu'il déclarait à sa mère: "Jamais je ne me suis senti aussi à l'aise dans une ville nouvelle, que ce soit à Boston, à Philadelphie ou à Washington. Il n'y a guère qu'à New York où je peux dire que j'éprouve cette bonne impression d'être encore chez moi. Est-ce que cela tient au fait que New York et Paris sont des métropoles, que Paris nous a été raconté si souvent dans des livres, des articles de magazines, des films, à la télé?"

New York et Paris! Double pôle d'attraction entre lequel il est souvent difficile au Québécois d'opter! Encouragé par les chantres nationalistes, n'a-t-il pas accoutumé pendant longtemps de dissocier *ici* et *là-bas*, le corps "américain" et l'âme "française," conformément à une idéologie teintée de manichéisme parfois?

C'est la faconde des Français qui surtout éblouit Clément. Cela est assurément significatif et Clément y revient souvent. "Tu comprends maman ce qui nous est arrivé à nous, Français d'Amérique, pour avoir été abandonnés sur les rivages du Saint-Laurent entourés d'Anglais et d'Américains?" s'exclame-t-il, à un moment. Le complexe de l'orphelin, dont souffraient naguère nombre de Québécois, n'est donc pas disparu. Clément de toute évidence en est victime.

Dans une pareille conjoncture, n'est-il pas normal que Clément considère son voyage en France comme un retour aux sources? Pour lui, qui depuis son enfance se passionnait pour l'histoire de la France, ce sont des "retrouvailles." "Il y a longtemps qu'on ne se fréquentait plus sérieusement. Depuis la défaite de 1760," écrit-il, en cherchant à donner à ces "retrouvailles" une signification qui depasse de beaucoup son seul cas personnel.

La France, il est certain, lui est d'autant plus chère qu'il la considère comme une maman. Cela, il le répète souvent. C'est la mère-patrie, le pays des origines, celui des ancêtres, celui d'où vient sa langue maternelle . . . le seul où il lui importe de reprendre racines. C'est du côté de la France et de Mater Europa que le Québécois retrouve la sécurité du cordon ombilical!

L'attrait particulier qu'exerce Paris sur Clément ne s'explique-t-il pas aussi du fait qu'il se plaît à identifier Paris à "une ville mère"? En revanche, il reconnaît en New York "une ville père, plus inquiétante, plus imprévisible." — Soit dit en passant, les "héros" des premiers romans de Claude Jasmin, personnages incarnant la violence et la révolte, personnages en quête d'un père idéal, fuyaient souvent sur les routes américaines.

Il est à noter, par ailleurs, qu'il n'y a pas une seule lettre de Clément où ne domine finalement l'*imago* maternel. Il y aurait assurément beaucoup à dire à ce sujet, si nous entreprenions ici d'analyser en détail les liens qui unissent Clément à sa mère, de même que ses rapports avec Rachel, substitut maternel dont il ne cesse de vanter les mérites à sa mère. Dans le but d'obtenir de celle-ci l'approbation de son choix, Clément ira jusqu'à lui comparer Rachel.

Loin de sa maman, quoi qu'il en soit, ce fils de cinquante ans s'ennuie. Il le lui dit et répète. Il regrette souvent qu'elle n'ait pas pu les accompagner en France, vu son âge (80 ans). Dans le fond, elle est toujours présente cette femme aimée, à qui il écrit quotidiennement de longues lettres dans lesquelles il dresse le bilan de sa journée, en prenant soin de l'informer

des moindres détails et de la tenir au courant de sa vie conjugale et amoureurse.

Si l'on en croit Clément, il reviendra transformé de "ce voyage chez la "mère-France." Qu'il suffise de le citer:

> J'ai changé. Vraiment beaucoup! En vingt jours, ce séjour dans la "maman-France" m'a transformé. Ce séjour t'a changée aussi! Oui! Certes pas ce que tu es, tu n'es pas du voyage, mais la mère que tu étais pour moi n'existe plus. T'en fais pas, il en reste une autre et je te présenterai à toi-même. Ah, et puis non! Tu ne t'en apercevrais peut-être même pas. A mon retour, je t'expliquerai mieux. . . . Disons qu'en venant rendre visite à la mère patrie je me suis . . . "dêsorphelinisé" en un certain sens. Ça va être bien mieux pour toi. Je me sens envahi d'une envie nouvelle, bien tardive, trop tardive probablement, une envie de te percevoir comme une femme autonome, indêpendante de moi, de mon existence, non plus exclusivement une mère, "ma" mère, mais une femme, un être humain. Comme les autres êtres humains, pas cette personne-miroir, enveloppante, créée subitement en novembre 1932, uniquement consacrée à me voir grandir, à me soigner, me dorloter, me chouchouter. Ne sois pas jalouse: j'ai une autre mère, une nouvelle mère. . . . La France. Une mère dure et cruelle qui nous a abandonnés à un moment donné de l'Histoire, nous laissant seuls et désarmés aux mains du conquérant, de l'envahisseur britannique. . . .

Il est à craindre que Clément ne se leurre complètement! Il a par trop tendance à confondre ses voeux et ses désirs secrets avec la réalité. Ce n'est pas en se persuadant de substituer un visage maternel à un autre qu'il changera vraiment!

Quant à Rachel, elle aussi revient "transformée" et plus "Française d'Amérique que jamais," affirme Clément. A sa façon, elle est remontée aux sources en se rendant photographier les vestiges de la Rome antique dans le sud de la France — ce qui lui a permis de gagner le concours — avant de s'intéresser aux Chateaux de la Loire et aux cathédrales. Grâce à elle, ne l'oublions pas, Clément a parcouru la France de Nice à St-Malo (lieu de pélérinage obligatoire, il va sans dire).

L'une des faiblesses du roman de Claude Jasmin, c'est que Clément Jobin ne parvient pas à gagner la sympathie du lecteur. Cela lui serait pourtant nécessaire pour peu qu'il veuille bien intéresser celui-ci, ce qui est manifestement son intention. Clément fait preuve d'une trop grande naïveté, il se révèle souvent trop niais, disons le mot, pour qu'on le prenne au sérieux. Son comportement fait sourire plus qu'il n'invite au respect et à la compréhension. Oh! combien, encore un coup, nous souhaiterions parfois qu'il cède la plume à Rachel! A force de multiplier les clichés et les enfantillages, Clément finit par impatienter . . . qui n'a pas les mêmes raisons que sa mère de le trouver charmant et gentil.

Claude Jasmin n'aurait-il pas eu intérêt à écrire un essai sur la France ou un authentique récit de voyage à la place de ce "roman" à la trame cousue de fil blanc? Il est permis de se poser la question. Cela dit, *Maman-Paris Maman-la-France* n'est sûrement pas un livre à négliger dans l'oeuvre de Jasmin, car le rôle qu'y joue l'imaginaire féminin met en lumière bien des aspects peu connus de cette oeuvre importante.

JACQUES COTNAM

LOVE & HURT

JEAN-RAYMOND BOUDOU, *Une Heure de ta vie: roman.* Pierre Tisseyre, $11.95.

GAETAN BRULOTTE, *Le Surveillant.* Quinze, $8.95.

JOSETTE LABBE, *Jean-Pierre, mon homme, ma mère: roman.* Pierre Tisseyre, $12.95.

BERTRAND B. LEBLANC, *La Butte-aux-Anges.* Leméac, $11.95.

MADELEINE MONETTE, *Petites Violences.* Quinze, $12.95.

THERE IS A COMMON PROBLEM facing these five writers, although they differ in

the way they deal with it. The themes of violence and passion are hardly original in themselves, and the authors often fail to meet the need to innovate, lapsing into banality. Whether the situation is autobiographical or imaginary, none is particularly unusual. *Une Heure de ta vie, Jean-Pierre, mon homme, ma mère,* and *Petites Violences* are love stories, and here the question of how to make an old story new is even more pressing.

One way the authors manage to lift their characters out of the banal is through a rich description of the setting. Many of the visual images in these works have cinematic qualities; the heroine of *Petites Violences* works in the film industry. Her portrayal of New York, and particularly of the misfits she observes on its streets, prevent the narrator from falling into a narcissistic preoccupation with the two love affairs recounted in the novel.

In these three novels, each protagonist is travelling, or more precisely fleeing. After the sudden end of his romantic adventure, which, although apparently heart-breaking for him, seems only inevitable to the reader, the hero of *Une Heure* leaves for a year in the south of France. On the plane he finds himself seated beside an extraordinarily sympathetic listener, and the reader follows the story of his affair through flashbacks. Jean-Claude fascinates his listener, but Boudou is not as successful with his reader. The occasional allusions to the academic and literary milieux of Montreal supply some element of interest to a rather weak plot.

Although the setting of this novel is typically Montréalais, the language is not. In both *Petites Violences* (in which the occasional anglicisms and English fragments are appropriate to the setting) and *Une Heure* (where the level of education of the characters seems to prohibit them from speaking in the vernacular) the language is standard French. In *Jean-Pierre,* however, the joual of the conversations fits nicely into the semi-rural setting. From the start Labbé paints both portraits and landscapes with deft strokes. The language of both dialogue and narrative is appropriately sparse and careful. (There is one inexplicable demonstration of carelessness on Labbé's part. A character named Jeanne-Mance at the beginning of the novel is mysteriously transformed into Joanne at the end.) Neither Labbé nor Sylvie talks for the sake of talking, and this provides an interesting contrast to Jean-Claude's wordiness. Sylvie, moreover, manages to maintain some element of mystery in the narrative, revealing the doubts she has about her initially "perfect" lover only gradually, through apparent slips of the tongue. She is generally direct: Judith and Nicole are "deux folles bronzées" and Jeanne-Mance and Richard "le couple parfait naturiste et féministe, féministes tous les deux naturellement." Jean-Claude's opinions are expressed only after great deliberation and at equally great length. Both, however, are similarly preoccupied with their love affairs, and both lean towards the melodramatic, or what Jean Claude's lover calls "un romantisme de guimauve."

Martine, in *Petites Violences,* is more cynical, and concentrates on the callousness of her previous lover. The preface to the novel, a dramatic narrative which ends with a woman who is travelling in the train with Martine being beaten by her husband, introduces the principal thematic concern of the novel. Claude, the lover Martine is fleeing, or trying to flee, is not only brutal but also is researching the true nature of violence in contemporary society. Compared to what we hear of his lecture on this subject, Martine's own analysis is more interesting, if disconcerting:

> Ainsi, toutes les fois que je cédais avec Claude au désir d'être malmenée, subjuguée, rudoyée, non pas physiquement, cela

va sans dire, mais mentalement, dans le petit theatre doré de mon imagination, je ne cherchais en réalité qu'à faire diversion. L'angoisse était là, et je jouais les victimes au lieu d'en déterrer les racines. C'était plus commode, moins douleureux surtout et moins exigeant.

Women may, as she further claims, be conditioned to expect violence to be shown or used by their partners, but Martine's acceptance of the situation appears to be masochistic. Perhaps it is simply part of her matter-of-fact attitude towards life and love, one that reminds us of the narrator's statement in Betty Lambert's *Crossings*: "I have been beaten up. It happens to women. I've read about it." At the very least, *Petites Violences* is not a typical love story, and even the more comfortable relationship between Lenny and Martine is not ordinary.

Violence and the laws that control it are dealt with in different ways in the other two works. *La Butte-aux-Anges* tells of the exploits of a family of bootleggers and ruffians in the Québec of the Depression period. The four Préjean brothers are in constant conflict with the townspeople, both the authorities and the citizens. The authorities (lawyer, doctor, and of course priest) do not manage to restrain their enthusiasm, which is expressed both in their acts and their colourful use of joual and swearing. A humorous and suspenseful intrigue ends in the not unexpected defeat of the unheroic hero (though indirectly) at, it seems, the hands of God.

Le Surveillant is a collection of short stories on the theme of the individual's relation to an oppressive society. The title story is about a man assigned to patrol a wall at a military base, and the dehumanization that results from his obedience to military orders. As with the *Balayeur* (sweeper) and with all the "little people" in society, individuality and humanity are lost along with independence when one is in constant and mindless submission to authority.

Although *Petites Violences* is well-written, it is these last two works which are the most notable for their innovative styles. *La Butte-aux-Anges* should be defined as a novel-length tale. This genre, deriving from the oral tradition prominent in early Québec, has been successfully used by Jacques Ferron, Yves Thériault, and others, and combines an interesting and usually humorous story with a straightforward and colourful language. Novelist and playwright Leblanc's narrative is very well-handled, and the result is an eminently readable novel which even manages to contain an implicit message about man's relation to religion and society.

Le Surveillant is a work of absurdist literature, but quite different in style from Langevin's existentialist works. Its black humour resembles Godbout's in some ways, or to a lesser extent Languirand's plays, but its philosophical quality makes it quite different from any of these works. While difficult to describe or compare, these stories are anything but difficult to appreciate. Each one is complete, unique, hard-hitting, and memorable.

JO-ANNE ELDER

MICE TO MEN

AVIVA LAYTON, *The Squeakers*. Illustrator Louise Scott. Mosaic Press/Valley Editions, $5.95.

GORDON KORMAN, *"I Want to Go Home!"* Scholastic — TAB, $1.95.

MONICA HUGHES, *Hunter in the Dark*. Clarke Irwin, $12.95.

THE SQUEAKERS, written for six-to-ten-year-olds, is a story about some rather special mice. The cozy attic which they settle down and raise a family in turns out to be in Shakespeare's Globe Theatre. After his initial shock at the discovery,

Cornelius Squeaker turns his own family into a Shakespearean troupe which enacts the plays in their attic while the real players are performing the same play below. But will Cornelius ever realize his deep ambition to perform before an audience? Yes. The night the Queen arrives to see a play, the actors are incapacitated with stomach aches (bad meatpies). To everyone's surprise, Cornelius' family files on stage and plays to the acclaim of all, including the Queen. This is a simple yet attractive story, embellished by Louise Scott's illustrations. After all, it's not often you see a mouse on stage in a toga.

Gordon Korman adds *"I Want to Go Home!"* to his past teen-age novels. This one is about Rudy Miller and Mike Webster, who make almost daily attempts to escape from a summer athletic camp. The books recounts a series of episodes in which the cool and smart-ass Miller verbally puts down and dupes his counsellor and the camp administrators. The pillow fight which he instigates results in a camp free-for-all and the virtual demolition of his cabin. When forced to participate in athletic events, he is outstanding, but he still persists in trying to escape from the island. Young teens will enjoy the book's lord-of-misrule pattern and its range of wisecracks against adult authority figures.

Monica Hughes's *Hunter in the Dark* won the 1980 Writing-for-Young-People contest co-sponsored by Clarke Irwin and Alberta Culture. The books tells the story of Mike Rankin, a high school basketball star with a passion for deer hunting, who discovers that he has leukemia. The narrative interlaces a retrospective recounting the stages of Mike's treatment with the events in his fugitive hunt (he has temporarily run away from home) for a trophy whitetail buck. The tests and treatment Mike undergoes bring about his humiliation when his hair falls out, and the loss of his girlfriend. More aggravating is his parents' refusal to tell him that he *has* leukemia; he must find out what is wrong through research and talking with his doctor. How could he ask his parents "to help him fight the dark when they wouldn't admit that the dark was there?" They continue to refuse to let him ski or hunt, through the ups and downs of remission of his disease; so he steals off for his own great hunt, "on the way to that moment in his destiny that he felt he'd been waiting for all his life?" In an account abounding in vivid description of winter landscape and the process of tracking the deer, the hunt also becomes a psychic journey into Mike's own "darkness." In the moment of pulling the trigger, Mike sees his quarry as the victim of impending death that he is — and lets the deer go. This sensitive and wise story above all excels in resonant dialogue.

MURRAY J. EVANS

BEAST PLAY

JON FURBERG, *Anhaga*. Arsenal Editions, n.p.
E. D. BLODGETT, *Beast Gate*. NeWest, $6.95.

THE RELATION BETWEEN literature and other literature is much argued. Some would say that literature is about life, no matter how transmuted. Others would claim that realism is only a layer of appearance. At its essence, each literary work reflects what has been written before.

These two collections of poetry play very easily into the argument. *Anhaga* is Jon Furberg's response to the Old English poem, "The Wanderer." His foreword states that it is "a work not of translation, but of imagination and correspondence."

Beast Gate, by E. D. Blodgett, has no foreword to make its "correspondence" clear but the dedication, "for mrs noah,"

gives a strong hint of at least one literary root, the medieval play of "Noah's Flood" from the Chester Pageant, with poor hard-done Noah's wife who constantly tries to nag her eccentric husband into a realistic view of the universe.

I have a suspicion that Blodgett sees himself very much in Mr. Noah's camp, that of the visionary trying to make sense of it all. Elsewhere, in a comment on Alice Munro, Blodgett has referred to "the art of the meditation: to lay bare as part of the routine exercises of the spirit."

This would seem to be his purpose in this series of meditations on "beasts," from the mythical minotaur to the mundane cow. But for Blodgett the cows are "turner's cows" and the minotaur, while linked to "ariadne" and "icarus," is most closely tied to the "i."

The lower case letters, from turner to i, are not typographical errors. Blodgett, à la ee cummings, uses no capitals. In another poet, one with less formal diction and fewer arcane allusions, it might seem appropriate. With Blodgett it just seems an irritating affectation.

But then again I'm not sure. For whether I like it or not, I have a feeling that Blodgett does nothing without careful consideration. And I suspect that there is a much deeper meaning to this diminution.

Each of the poems is ardently wrought, line by line. If any poet can resurrect rhyme from the bad reputation it has had in the last fifty years it might be someone like Blodgett. His rhymes are hints at sounds, traces of rhythm, often in apparent offense of the syntax.

"*jardin zoologique*" provides an interesting, although extreme, example, in a comment on Adam's naming of the beasts:

> we heard, as other lions failed
> to roar. our weapons by the gate
> we left, tools of war were nailed
> outside. a change of fate
> it was, to be the first exempla
> and the last, to walk bound
> within a name, to hear the planet split without a sound —

At times the meter is more loose, and the rhyme is often less regular, but the orientation continues throughout the volume.

But what of the substance of the poems? To be honest, I just don't know. I find Blodgett's comments on animals and the universe to be either quite ordinary or unintelligible. The few times they are the former, I am willing to dismiss them. When the latter, however, I feel less secure. From my first undergraduate encounter with T. S. Eliot I learned that it is often the reader who is deficient rather than the poet.

Although I would tentatively suggest that Blodgett is a different case. His allusions, to "kaddish" or "kabbalah," are not really that difficult. Even "asphodel" is not beyond the reach of a good dictionary (or remnants of a slight classical education). And his syntax is at times inverted but usually clear, if one avoids some of the implied pauses at the end of verses.

The problem is that there always seems to be more there, as in "armadillo":

> . . . you are the sill
> of open and close, of bodies kept
> arcane until acocalypse,
> sealed in cells of blood, and blown
> to husks the screams of fear distill
>
> where the suns mortared to dust are sown.

It's not exactly "Mary Had a Little Lamb" but it isn't Louis Zukofsky either. It is a reasonably complicated thought which in the end doesn't really seem worth deciphering.

And although Blodgett is very interested in the sound of poetry, he doesn't seem too concerned with the image. His meditations toward the spirit seldom pass through anything strikingly pictorial.

Quite unlike Furberg at his best. In

the opening poems of his book Furberg comes up with some chilling lines:

> Air ripe and cracking burns deep
> in cut lungs.
> Earth overcast with iron,
> sky's forge steams and showers
> ash into gawking eyes, slack mouths.

There is a feeling of Gerard Manley Hopkins in these tortured images but as in Hopkins, a feeling for the Old English mode as well.

Recently this publisher, Arsenal Pulp, has become best known for its sponsorship of the three-day-novel competition. Which is particularly interesting in this context as *Anhaga* is very different from such a hasty operation. The foreword refers to Furberg's original labours to produce a direct translation. He states that "The poem had become to me, by 1971, a species of literary ancestor, old words resounding with much of what the new words are grounded in." Thus, rather than a three-day-novel, it's a thirteen-year — or more — poem.

I wish I could say all that gestation was worth it. At his best, primarily in the first poems in the collection, Furberg has a beautiful sense of the wintry, painful, Old English image:

> and everywhere sharp-spiked stalks
> drive mild flowers through the crust,
> to stand pale in this cold.

But he drifts away from this to more overtly philosophical and much less compelling poems. It is when he keeps himself most closely to the original that his work is most satisfying.

Which would suggest that he should have kept to his original intention of a translation, regardless of the problems he encountered. Just recently I have been reading a new translation of *Beowulf*, by G. O. Roberts, and was amazed to see how much new and worthwhile could be done with the task. And, judging by Furberg at his best, he could have done just as well with a long, free translation of "The Wanderer."

As it stands, I would still recommend *Anhaga* to anyone interested in Old English verse, both for the lines I have mentioned and for the foreword and the notes. Perhaps the best part of the book is this prose commentary. I don't want to imply inappropriate comparisons but Furberg's observations remind me of Tolkien's essays. Unlike Tolkien, Furberg has nothing really new to say, but he has a similar ability to comment easily and perceptively on a period which is very strange to most of us and which most academic articles only make stranger.

TERRY GOLDIE

ILLUSIONS

GEOFF HANCOCK, ed. and intro., *Illusion one* and *Illusion two*. Aya Press, $20.00 the set, $12.50 each vol.

IN FEBRUARY 1981, Geoff Hancock tells us, he picked up his Smith-Corona and flung it out of the window into the snow. The reason? His frustration at the present state of Canadian literature. We are evidently meant to recall Virginia Woolf flinging her inkpot at that spectre of Victorian respectability, the Angel in the House, and possibly also Martin Luther hurling the same missile at the Devil. In Hancock's case the evil angel to be destroyed is Realism, and the champions of the new-old cause are the twenty or so writers whose "fables, fantasies, and metafictions" are assembled in these volumes: "stories from before our current literary Ice Age," that "return to the sources of story telling." Realism belonged to the age of the machine, and now that the long sleep of industrial capitalism is over "the ancient monsters in our psyches are waking up" (*Illusion one*).

If even half these claims were true, the history of Canadian literature would indeed have to be rewritten, but I think the literary historians can rest in their sleep of reason a while longer. For one thing, it is doubtful whether realism has been quite the evil incubus Hancock thinks it is. Unlike the industrial capitalism with which Hancock links it, realism has shown a remarkable capacity for rapid change and development. Moreover, Hancock seems to overlook the fact that a good deal of Canadian fiction, from Ethel Wilson to Margaret Atwood, Scott Symons, and Jack Hodgins, has been nothing if not subsersive of realism.

Few of the stories collected here really break new ground, in fact. Some have only the most tenuous of connections with the fabulous and fantastic. James Ross' "Mythical Beasts," for instance (*Illusion two*), is an unobjectionable satire on that rather easy target, the annual convention — in this case, a meeting of a "Society for the Study and Preservation of Mythical Beasts." The subject discussed at the convention is the only unconventional thing in the story — and it does not affect the texture of the narrative in any way. Other stories, such as David Sharpe's "Niagara Fall" (*Illusion one*) and Claudette Charbonneau-Tissot's "The Hot House" (*Illusion two*), use slight modifications or extensions of realistic narrative to depict abnormal states of mind. "The Hot House" is the more innovative of these, interweaving dream and drug-induced hallucination with a Borgesion labyrinthine world in which places change places. Even here, however, the narrative technique is conservative. There is only one first-person narrator, and her sequential ordering of events is not challenged by any other participant in the story.

Also entirely conservative in narrative technique are Garry McKevitt's "The Steps" (*Illusion two*), Michael Bullock's "The Invulnerable Ovoid Aura," Virgil Burnett's "Queen Constance," and Gerald Taaffe's "Colors" (*Illusion one*). Presumably they earn their places in this collection by virtue of their subject-matter. "The Steps" is about a hunter who goes seeking the island site in B.C. where his grandfather had planned to build a house. The site is, in a sense, occupied, and the chilling climax of the story involves a brutal double revenge and an unusual kind of spooky eroticism, in an oppressive but skilfully-created forest-dark atmosphere. Plenty of psychic monsters here, but they are the more effective for being kept almost invisible, like the killer whale with which the story opens. "The Invulnerable Ovoid Aura" is a disappointing sci-fi tale of the semi-mystical persuasion, written in that numbing pseudoscientific prose considered appropriate to the genre ("the degree of success achieved by Phallacius Metronomus encouraged me in the belief that, unhampered by the two restricting factors that had militated against the full realization of this project, I stood a real chance of doing what he had failed to do," and so on and so on). "Queen Constance" is best described as a fairy-tale for adults, with the cold eroticism and offhand, gothic cruelty of many genuine fairy-tales. It slyly and knowingly hints at the inexplicable wantonness and perversity of the human libido; an urbane and sinister fable. "Colors" is not as compelling as "The Steps," and again has little of the fantastic in it; it is a pleasant story, however, without a psychic monster in sight.

If then we set aside these stories as having only slight claims to novelty, and pass over some of the more overtly experimental but ultimately slight contributions (such as George Payerle's grotesque and singularly nasty sex-fantasy "Fane" and Mavis Gallant's sophisticated culture-fantasy "Mau to Lew: The Maurice Ravel-Lewis Carroll Friendship," both in

Illusion one), we are left with seven worthwhile stories that could be grouped together as the basis for an antirealist manifesto. These are George Bowering's "Arbre de Décision," Jane Urquhart's "Five Wheelchairs," Séan Virgo's "Haunt," Leon Rooke's "Hanging Out With the Magi," W. P. Kinsella's "Shoeless Joe Jackson Comes to Iowa," George McWhirter's "Quarantine," and P. K. Page's " 'Unless the Eye Catch Fire . . . ' "

Bowering's "Arbre de Décision" (*Illusion two*) has us construct several plots simultaneously, branching and proliferating both forward and backward in time from a single event, the ringing of a telephone. You buy into various sexual futures only to find that threatening forecasts chase each other in a fascinating spiral of truth or consequences. It is one of the few stories genuinely to challenge the complacency of the sequential third-person narrative, and to attempt what Borges mischievously called "A New Refutation of Time"; it also suggests, like Burnett's "Queen Constance," the seemingly unavoidable connection between the thought of sex and the thought of violence. Urquhart's story (*Illusion one*) is another assault on time, but this time by way of the significance of events rather than their linear sequence. Five narratives, quite separate in time, are linked by the single motif of the wheelchair. The last of these narratives, moreover, concerns a drawing master who has been preoccupied with form, the good form of the second-rate artist, and has missed the richly chaotic phenomenal world that inspires his one gifted student. More subtly than Bowering, Urquhart suggests that the form of her narrative is deceptive, that the ordering orderly minds of her readers may be as inadequate to experience as those of her characters (a honeymoon couple classifying their wedding gifts, a discontented housewife admitted to hospital suffering from terminal sentimentality, and so on).

Rooke, Virgo, and Kinsella each invoke the spirit world in a different way, and their stories also give the lie to Hancock's belief that a vivid sense of place is somehow inimical to a sense of the marvellous. Virgo's "Haunt" (*Illusion one*) is expertly written, and the ghostly eroticism of the encounters between the alienated student and her daemon lover shows a bleak descriptive power unusually adequate to the task of making-present the supernatural. Virgo treats the English countryside with something like the respect Basil Bunting shows it in *Briggflatts*; here too is the same damp blustery air, and the same awareness of powers of earth. Rooke's "Hanging Out With the Magi" (*Illusion one*) is perkily unclassifiable: at once a wicked parody of the nativity scene, a domestic farce, and an affectionate tale about how you too can learn to live with the spirits — yet it has reassuring touches of gritty Western realism and dour humour. The divine child is delivered, though not in the usual way, and spreads love all around: a happy ending, unusual in these volumes. Kinsella's "Shoeless Joe Jackson Comes to Iowa" (*Illusion two*) also enjoys a happy ending; it is a wise, witty, and warm tale that shows a refreshingly light touch in its handling of the World Beyond.

McWhirter's "Quarantine" (*Illusion two*) and Page's " 'Unless the Eye Catch Fire . . . ' " (*Illusion two*) are the most genuinely terrifying of the stories. Both involve death by fire, but more importantly both suggest that the imagination or visionary power may ultimately be able to purge the world only through a form of human self-immolation. McWhirter's hero Fotlac lives inside fire: the human materiality of hunger and thirst is to him no more than "a dirty habit." The woman whose lust he once awoke lives outside, pleading with him to

emerge again, but his libido has turned into a kind of permanent *auto da fé*. It is conscience, and perhaps imagination, that are purged in this perpetual quarantine. " 'Unless the Eye Catch Fire . . . ' " beautifully exemplifies the maxim that the writer of fantasy must work for a specificity and concreteness at least equal to the realist's. As Page's heroine enjoys her visionary experiences, and the world heats up under the warming trend started by this new Promethean fire, we can see one of the many possible futures unrolling before us — the government taking extraordinary measures, the dust storms, the tiny rooms padded against intolerable outside heat — and finally an understanding that existence is moving to a different plane. What will remain to be plucked from this burning?

These seven stories inarguably have pushed back the frontiers of Canadian fiction, and to that extent support Hancock's claim for his two volumes, despite the extreme partisanship with which he advances it and his revisionist designs on previous Canadian writing. But *one* anthology, of from seven to ten outstanding stories, would have been more persuasive than two containing over twenty stories of mixed quality and relevance.

ANTHONY JOHN HARDING

WORD-CENTRED

NORTHROP FRYE, *The Myth of Deliverance: Reflections on Shakespeare's Problem Comedies*. Univ. of Toronto Press, $5.95.

ELEANOR COOK, et al. (eds.), *Centre anl Labyrinth: Essays in Honour of Northrop Frye*. Univ. of Toronto Press, $35.00.

ONE WAY FULLY TO UNDERSTAND Frye's approach to Shakespeare's "problem comedies" in his new book, *The Myth of Deliverance: Reflections on Shakespeare's Problem Comedies*, is to read it in conjunction with the University of Toronto's previous monograph on the subject, E. M. W. Tillyard's *Shakespeare's Problem Plays* (1949). Tillyard, like most commentators on these plays, was bothered and puzzled by their apparent inconsistency of purpose. Their plots seemed to him "wrenched" and the characters poorly motivated, the whole prone to "leave a sour taste in the mouth of the audience." The plays "have something radically schizophrenic in them," reflecting a jarring clash between their author's inherent "realism" and his unaccountable (under the circumstances) attraction for the fantastic, for fairy-tale settings and themes.

For Frye, as he makes clear from the first page of *The Myth of Deliverance*, Shakespeare's dalliance with fantasy in these plays is not occasioned by authorial schizophrenia; it is a deliberate attempt to discover an appropriate terminology, an "objective correlative" whereby (in the words of Theseus, in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*) "apprehended emotion" can become "comprehend." Thus, for example, if the bed-tricks in *All's Well that Ends Well* and *Measure For Measure* have confounded literary historians and offended moralists, it is because they are reacting to them as if they were happening "in reality" rather than in the fictive world of comic structure, the world where ending well is all, and measure is always given for measure. In this context, such devices become seen not as violations of literary or moral principles, but as "images of passage through death to new life, a passion-motivated descent into an illusion that reverses itself and turns to reality and renewed energy." Similarly with the various fairy-tale-like ordeals, choices, oaths, compacts, laws, and witnesses that dot these plays: these are not failures of taste or of dramatic sense; they are the devices which establish the authority of literature, and reflect its inner laws, laws that drive comic characters towards libe-

ration (self-knowledge, forgiveness, redemption, beatitude) and the comedies, concurrently, towards their resolution.

These are points Frye has made elsewhere, notably in the *Anatomy of Criticism* and *Fools of Time*, but for the problem comedies, which are "as highly stylized as a puppet play," it is particularly important that they be reinforced. More specifically, Frye sees these plays as reflecting structures based on "reversal," reversals of three types: "reversal of action," "reversal of energy," and "reversal of reality." These are the headings of each of the three chapters of this book, and, taken together, they provide the terms of a true "myth of deliverance," a structure wherein "a sense of energies [is] released by forgiveness and reconciliation," and where "Eros triumphs over Nomos or law, by evading what is frustrating or absurd in law and fulfilling what is essential for social survival."

In these terms, *All's Well that Ends Well* and *Measure For Measure* emerge simply as "romantic comedies where the chief magical device used is the bed trick instead of enchanted forests or identical twins." And when seen as such, their so-called "problems," along with all the traditional critical defences brought in to rationalize them; all the complaints about inconsistencies in style and theme, the speculative attributions to Shakespeare of temporary insanity, the claims of corruption in the texts, etc. melt like snow in a Chinook.

Not as easily dealt with, Frye admits, is the ever-fascinating *Troilus and Cressida*, which he sees as much more "modern" than the other two problem comedies in that its ironic emphasis "is too strong for the drive toward deliverance"; as with *Waiting For Godot* or *Huis clos*, it is a play which "seems to be designed . . . to show us human beings getting into the kind of mess that requires deliverance, a secular counterpart of what Christianity calls the fall of man."

Frye rises magnificently to the challenge of *Troilus and Cressida* in the last chapter of *Myth of Deliverance*. Concentrating on Ulysses' two famous speeches, the one on space and the other on time, Frye shows us how they combine to depict a view of "reality" out of a nightmare of Blake's Urizen, i.e., as hierarchical and devouring: concepts which are reinforced by the development of *Troilus*' plot and characters. The play shows us, in other words (and the same could be said of Blake's *Jerusalem*) "how man acquires the sense of illusory reality," a sense that the author "tries to reverse into real illusion."

But what has this got to do with comedy, or more specifically with "deliverance"? Simply this: once we recognize the dimensions of our disillusionment with the world, we have found "the starting point of any genuine myth of deliverance," and have created "the possibility of a more intense mode of living." But first, Frye insists, with *Troilus and Cressida* as always in Shakespeare, we have to be prepared to allow literature to dictate its own terms, be ready to expand our visions of the possibilities of literature before we force literature to shrink to our limitations.

In the other book under review here — the University of Toronto's recent festschrift *Centre and Labyrinth: Essays in Honour of Northrop Frye*, neither Frye nor readers at large are much honoured. This badly-proofed collection of twenty essays, nine by ex-students or colleagues of Frye at the University of Toronto, is ostensibly unified (according to a weakly rationalized prefatorial statement by the editors) by the author's specific interest in, or at least inclination to "keep in mind," issues raised by the *Anatomy of Criticism* (a claim which would exclude few works of literary criticism since "that

large and still imperfectly understood book" was first published). In fact, however, many of these essays seem only peripherally interested or even aware of Frye's global attempt to arrive at a synoptic view of the aims and strategies of literary criticism, and when a rare reference *is* made to the *Anatomy*, it seems ad hoc, or, at worst, opportunistically introduced, to create the false impression of reflecting a pre-chosen subject area.

The preface also informs the reader that an interest in the "labyrinths of language" constitues "both the central preoccupation of contemporary critical writing, and its dispersal," which, although apparently intended to justify the inclusion of so many deconstructionists in this collection (including two of the co-editors, along with Harold Bloom and Geoffrey Hartman) ironically ignores a deep concern Frye himself voiced in the *Anatomy*, about the dangers of losing sight of the notion of "a centre of the order of words," a centre without which criticism would be condemned to "an endless labyrinth without an outlet." So stagey are the neologisms, so forced the punning of the Derridean "prose" of these critics (Eleanor Cook offers "Kubla Khan but you cannot." and Hartman refers to the "schmancy language" in Keats) that one cries out for the incisiveness of Frye's epigrammatic wit, if only to focus the search for the "centre of words."

Two essays in *Centre and Labyrinth* do, however, seem to me quite good: Paul Ricoeur's "*Anatomy of Criticism* or the Order of Paradigms," which defines helpfully the difference between Frye's system and the theories of the French structuralists; and Helen Vendler's "The Golden Theme: "Keats' Ode 'To Autumn,' " a warm if old-fashioned reading of Keats' poem, which almost gives a centre to this labyrinth of contemporary criticism.

GRAHAM FORST

PARADIGMS

SHERRILL E. GRACE and LORRAINE WEIR, eds., *Margaret Atwood: Language, Text and System.* Univ. of British Columbia Press, $17.95.

REMARKABLY SIMILAR in approach, tone, and judgment, and yet diverse in particulars, the nine essays of this collection examine Margaret Atwood's writing as if it were a multi-faceted diamond which should be turned slowly, lovingly, from side to side, so that each aspect can show its singular brilliance. Each essay focuses upon one of the aspects, some smaller than others, all, however, reflecting Atwood's thought as a system of ideas and her art as a bipolar structure. Three essays concentrate upon the famous novel *Surfacing*, one studying its syntax, another its Amerindian motifs, and a third its use of ambiguity, while three others, each from a different point of view, consider the writing as a whole. The remaining three, with which I shall begin, regard Atwood's poetry from various but complementary perspectives.

In "The Pronunciation of Flesh," Barbara Blakeley views Atwood's poems "through a feminist paradigm of oppression and transformation." Though she calls her essay "a feminist reading," Blakeley is not characterizing Atwood as a feminist; rather — and here her convoluted position should be stated precisely — she is suggesting "that the condition of possibility of her [Atwood's] writing and of this [Blakeley's] reading is the critical consciousness of sexual politics made explicit in feminist theory." Guided by theories — phenomenological as well as feminist — Blakeley traces a gradual transformation of "woman" from victim to "agent of history" through poems that delineate and then transcend a "sexual circle game." Distinguishing *poetic* politics from *sexual* politics, Eli Mandel explores a puzzling relation be-

tween Atwood's widely recognized minority concerns and her stature as a major Canadian poet. Though she has achieved a centrality usually earned by poets "writing about the consciousness of national character," Atwood's "major quality" may represent the "elaboration of a minority psychology." In an interesting inferential way, Mandel shows how recurrent images of mirrors, perilous journeys, ghosts, monstrous births, and mad old women — typical Gothic paraphernalia — realize a "devastated world" by a process of de-realization (one that turns women into ghosts). Concentrating upon her recent poetry, George Woodcock defines "tenacious survival and constant metamorphosis" as Atwood's "dominant themes." Survival constitutes human victory in a world where cruelty and death are gratuitous, barbarous acts commonplace, and violence and love intertwined. This is the world of *True Stories*, which, Woodcock believes, contains Atwood's "best verse," poems of great moral intensity, wisdom, visual sharpness, and verbal luminosity.

If these three essays may be taken as paradigms — to use the favourite word of all the contributing critics — they reveal the presence of an analytical pattern which creates unanimity of opinion. Though the essays meticulously scrutinize different aspects of Atwood's writing and place her in different and even incompatible contexts, all move inexorably toward the same conclusion: that Atwood is of supreme contemporary importance as a poet, novelist, social critic, and national figure. Dispersed footnotes in the collection indicate that not all critics have judged her so generously: some have found her tone bordering on the hysterical and her use of fashionable minority issues bordering on the exploitive. These essays discern serious social intent, artistic integrity, and steady growth of intellectual and aesthetic power. Moreover, they are uniformly serious and erudite in defining the systems, structures, and codes of Atwood's texts and of the theoretical contexts in which her work may be placed. Indeed, the array of contexts in this "collective investigation" becomes almost bewildering as one after another a brilliant hermeneutical star appears to explain and contain her works: Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, Foucault, Barthes, Kristeva, Todorov, Iser, Eagleton, Laing, Ricoeur, Eliade, Derrida. Such a rapid succession of "philosophical lenses," to use the editors' term, may produce vertigo in the reader rather than insight. Still, there is a bracing intellectual energy and an almost endearing quality in a book that democratically mingles phenomenologists, mythologists, semioticians, structuralists, Indian folklorists, Marxists, and Jewish mystics with a radical feminist (Robin Morgan), a bicameralist (Julian Jaynes), traditional anthropologist (Edward Sapir), and Canadian philosopher (Leslie Armour). Occasionally an essay conflates ideas of figures one would think incompatible, their theories founded radically opposed assumptions — a phenomenologist and a Marxist, or structuralists and Derrida.

Though their theoretical contexts diverge, the essays do not disagree in defining Atwood's themes, images, and the polarities which they see structuring her thought and art. Describing a development from poetic to narrative structures in the novels, Linda Hutcheon traces the complex thematic implications of a series of dichotomies: hunger and love, birth and death, hunting and photography. Typically, she produces paradigms: for art the paradigm is pregnancy; for oppression it is sex. In her synoptic essay on Atwood's ideological system, Sherrill Grace sees dualities creating a "cartesian hell" in which subject and object are ternally separated. Atwood neither reconciles these dualities nor transcends them,

but rather articulates "the space between" them. I find this spatial metaphor, like others in the collection, elusive, though I recognize its fashionableness. Apparently, the space between does not signify an alternative radical state (if space and state can be equated) or a synthesis. Here I quote fully both in order to be accurate and to offer my own paradigm for the critical style and tone of this volume:

> What she [Atwood] continues to offer is a system embodying dualities, but dualities understood as mutually interdependent aspects of a continuum of relationship, functioning dialectically and modelled upon natural life processes. The walls and fences which are set up [by whom? I wonder] to divide culture from nature, male from female, logic from intuition, and which facilitate domination and devaluation, must come down, not in order to change a culture-male-logic dominated system into its opposite, but to facilitate the harmonious process of inter-relationship.

One might question the assumptions that natural processes and relationships are inevitably harmonious, or that culture and nature, at a technologically advanced state of civilization (deplorable or not), can ever be made indistinguishable, or that domination, evident throughout the natural world, at least among animals, can be eliminated. Passages such as this suggest that Atwood is realistically programmatic, and more than that, almost evangelical — a quality implied in other essays, particularly Marie-Françoise Guédon's detailed account of Atwood's shamanism, in which the culturally fragmented modern world of *Surfacing* is contrasted with the Algonkian Indian's coherent tribal society; and Lorraine Weir's poetically evocative if mystifying "reflections" upon Atwood's landscape — not a landscape at all in the ordinary sense, but a "rhetorical space," a "geography of the mind," a "border country," a *topós*, a Heideggerian category which metamorphizes and opposes Earth and World.

I have not elaborated upon Philip Stratford's comparison of "the uses of ambiguity" in *Surfacing* and Hubert Aquin's novel *Prochain Episode*, a fine demonstration of how close reading can expand to show the cultural differences between the English and the French Canadian "psyche." Nor have I dwelt upon Robert Cluett's syntactical analysis of *Surfacing*, which finds thematic justification for the novel's unique style, since syntax and plot both involve retrenchment and discovery. Nevertheless, perhaps I have said enough to indicate that anyone interested in Margaret Atwood will want to have this collection. It is serious, well-informed, well-documented, ranging; and it generates critical thought. Some readers may take issue with particular views and judgments, but differences are healthy and corrective, and if critics encountered no resistance they might consider that a failure. The essays left me enlightened and sobered — and wishing for a little lightness, a little levity. For, perhaps improperly, I find Atwood snappy and clever, a mean mimic in her dialogue, and when mean, mercilessly comic. I wish the critics had found a paradigm for another aspect of their multi-faceted diamond — for Atwood's wit, her quick and easy colloquial tongue, her devastating power to dimiss a character, an ideology, a decade, in a single sentence. I offer two such sentences from *Surfacing*:

> He spent four years in New York and became political, he was studying something; it was during the sixties, I'm not sure when.

> She talked to me then, or not to me exactly but to an invisible microphone suspended over her head: people's voices go radio when they give advice.

BLANCHE H. GELFANT

RECYCLING RICHLER

ARNOLD DAVIDSON, *Mordecai Richler.* Ungar Publ., $11.95.

DESPITE MORE THAN a decade of criticism since the appearance of George Woodcock's pioneering monograph and David Sheps' collection of essays on Mordecai Richler, Arnold Davidson's *Mordecai Richler* adds little to earlier studies of Canada's leading Jewish novelist. While Davidson relies considerably on Woodcock's opinions, he fails to amplify appreciably Woodcock's perceptive insights into Richler's novels. Not that Davidson is entirely to blame, for he is faced with the problem of exposing Richler to an American audience, a task that inevitably leads to some dilution for those less familiar with Canadian contexts. Moreover, Ungar's Literature and Life series — a far cry from Princeton's Bollingen series or Harvard's Belknap Press — seems to demand a straightforward thematic and evaluative summary of each author. Davidson fulfils the requirements of this format, but his clear prose and sound judgments notwithstanding, *Mordecai Richler* remains perfunctory.

The American slant appears in Davidson's comparisons of Richler to Hemingway and Fitzgerald, appropriately enough in the case of Hemingway's influence on Richler, but one misses more important connections such as Richler's relationship to Bellow, Roth, and other American Jewish novelists. What, for instance, is the tradition linking *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz* with *The Rise of David Levinsky, The Education of Hyman Kaplan,* and *The Adventures of Augie March?* And this American slant eliminates any discussion of the place of A. M. Klein, Isaac Babel, and modern British satirists in Richler's fiction.

Davidson's main argument demonstrates Richler's development from his early novels to *St. Urbain's Horseman* which is "Richler's magnum opus" because it "is longer, denser, and more complexly plotted than any of the novels that preceded it." Is *Joshua Then and Now* to be seen as anti-climactic after the magnum opus or can we expect further development from Richler? In his final paragraph Davidson states flatly, "Richler now is not the same as Richler then. On that note I will conclude this study." But his study also touches cursorily upon the extent to which Richler recycles some of his material right from the outset of his career. The central question, then, for evaluating Richler's development must address the changes from *Duddy Kravitz* (1959) to *St. Urbain's Horseman* (1971) to *Joshua Then and Now* (1980), from the FFHS boyhood to adult European experiences. Some critics maintain that in *Duddy Kravitz* Richler managed to capture the spontaneity of Montreal's ghetto once and for all, while others insist on his formal and historical complexities in the later novels. But temporal manipulation of familiar material need not result in artistic advancement; this debate will continue well beyond Davidson's study.

His book begins with a biographical sketch based extensively on *The Street.* One paragraph introduces Richler's rabbinical grandfather and closes with "the grandson, Mordecai Richler, is one of Canada's best writers and a major contemporary novelist." So the first chapter charts familiar territory and the second launches into a summary of *The Acrobats*: "It would be an act of charity to pass rather briefly over *The Acrobats.*" This brief passage takes up 15 pages, nevertheless, and we learn that Colonel Kraus' "name is suspiciously close to Kraut," even though Karl Kraus was a major twentieth-century Jewish critic and satirist. Davidson uses Woodcock to condemn this first novel, but his quoting is

awkward. He begins with "irrevocably dated" which the end notes identify as Woodcock's phrase. The paragraph continues, "As the critic just quoted also observes," but by the end of the same paragraph we read: "as George Woodcock, a major Canadian critic, has observed." Equally annoying are some forceful judgments: *A Choice of Enemies* "must be seen as Richler's first major novel" followed by "Richler's next novel, *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz*, is, unquestionably, one of his masterpieces." Other errors include misspelling "mendicant" (p. 23), "disappointment" (p. 149), and the use of "situationed" as a verb (p. 177). After Michael Darling's "Bibliographic Reference" at the end of the book there follows 30 entries of "Selected Criticism" which have already been annotated in Darling's bibliography.

If Richler is, as Davidson contends, a major contemporary artist, he deserves better than this.

MICHAEL GREENSTEIN

METHODOLOGIES

ROGER MOTUT, *Maurice Constantin-Weyer: écrivain de l'Ouest et du Grand Nord.* Editions des Plaines, n.p.

PAUL CHANEL MALENFANT, *La Partie et le tout. Lecture de Fernand Ouelette et Roland Giguère.* P.U.L., $12.00.

RENEE LEDUC-PARK, *Réjean Ducharme, Nietzsche et Dionysos.* P.U.L., $16.00.

TROIS OUVRAGES CRITIQUES qui offrent trois méthodologies distinctes. De l'approche biographique "traditionnelle" à travers la mimétique poétique jusqu'à la néocritique kristevane, ces oeuvres sont toutes les trois d'une certaine qualité et d'une certaine inegalité.

Roger Motut dans *Maurice Constantin-Weyer* . . . présente comme il dit une défense "sans parti-pris" de l'auteur français d'*Un Homme qui se penche sur son passé* (1928) — roman qui a gagné le prix Goncourt en 1928 et qui d'après Motut "avait fait connaître et aimer le Canada aux Français" ajoutant que "l'influence de l'auteur dans ce domaine n'a pas été suffisamment reconnue." Raison surtout pour que Roger Motut nous offre cette biographie de forme et de fond dix-neuvièmiste, avec en plus pour défendre son choix d'auteur l'inclusion de celui-ci dans les oeuvres de Gérard Tougas et Paulette Collet.

Quant à Maurice Constantin-Weyer il a commencé sa carrière littéraire pendant les années 20 et, inspiré surtout par ses voyages, ses ouvrages offrent quelquefois des jugements un peu trop hâtifs et des généralisations qui s'approchent de la caricature. Motut établit sans cesse les parallèles entre la vie personnelle de Constantin-Weyer et ses écrits en soulignant l'intérêt que celui ci portait à la grande nature et au pays du grand nord. La biographie est trop détaillée et Motut appuie tout avec une surabondance de citations. L'analyse des critiques français, canadiens et américains qui suit la biographie permet à Motut, aidé encore une fois par de nombreuses citations, à expliquer les différentes réactions envers Constantin-Weyer. Il est alors évident que la critique français voit Constantin-Weyer comme figure de fantaisie romantique et toujours associé aux légendes du nord canadien, un Jack London français, tandis que les critiques canadiens ont tres peu apprecié les généralisations sur le Canada de ce visiteur français.

Accompagné d'une bibliographie importante, cet ouvrage est un outil de recherches mais qui manque d'intérêt pour les non-spécialistes.

De Roger Motut à Paul Chanel Malenfant et sa *La Partie et le tout* . . . il y a tout en espace et un temps à traverser. Poète lui-meme, l'auteur-critique ici fait

encore de la poésie en s'assimilant l'oeuvre de chacun de ces deux poètes qu'il considère des plus importants de l'Hexagone.

Ne négligeant pas de mettre Ouellette et Giguère dans le contexte québécois, ce livre est surtout un essai subjectif de compréhension. Malenfait s'inspire de la critique de Jean-Paul Richard et commence son étude par une explication et une défense de l'approche richardienne, défense et explication qui sont un peu trop étendues dans le contexte de son analyse. Prenant comme de départ et comme fond de sa critique les deux poèmes "Et nous aimions" de Ouellette et "Roses et ronces aimions" de Ouellette et "Roses et ronces" de Giguère il fait entrer le lecteur dans "l'univers imaginaire" de ces deux poètes.

La méthodologie de Malenfant est alors totallement opposée à celle de Motut. Malenfant "traduit" les poètes et leurs textes en établissant des correspondances à la Richard. Il admet que so critique est plutôt "une lecture ouverte et personnelle" et pour lui l'oeuvre critique n'est qu'une continuation de celle critiquée, alors créatrice en elle-même et non pas seulement critique explicative et observatrice. Il a choisi ces deux poèmes parce que pour lui chacun est un "poème clef pour ouvrir l'oeuvre. Poème pivot pour en soutenir la complexité architecturale. Poème charme, un talisman pour en pressentir la 'magie évocatoire.' " Le titre de son ouvrage est aussi révélateur et de l'approche de Malenfant et des thèmes principaux des deux poètes traités. Pour lui, Ouellette est plutôt poète de l'abîme et du "condensé," tandis que la poésie du Giguère repose sur le "fracturé." Le projet de Malenfant est alors une lecture "en abyme" qui s'accorde avec ce qu'il nomme "l'aventure de la profondeur" chez Ouellette et Giguère. *La Partie et le tout* ne permet pas seulement au lecteur de connaître Giguère et Ouellette mais lui offre une nouvelle approche à la compréhension de tout poème.

Renée Leduc-Park dans son ouvrage *Réjean Ducharme, Nietzsche et Dionysos* donne un excellent analyse des textes ducharmiens. Sa thèse qui ressemble un peu trop à une thèse universitaire, offre de nouvelles approches à l'auteur québécois en établissant un parallèlisme entre la pensée nietzschéenne et celle de Ducharme, se servant de Dionysos comme point de départ pour démontrer l'influence de Nietzsche sur Réjean Ducharme et pour en faire ressortir les divergences. Comme dit Renée Leduc Park en appuyant sa thèse: "C'est ainsi que l'écriture chez Ducharme offre en spectacle le fonctionnement du procès d'énonciation, que l'aspect théâtral de cette activité lui confère un caractère dionysiaque, et que les retombées signifiantes que jaillissent en tout sens de ce jeu-feu d'artifice sont plus aisément saisissables si on les capte dans un réseau nietzschéen." Malheureusement l'analyse souffre un peu d'une trop évidente influence de Kristeva et de Benveniste, expliquée et defendue par l'auteur dans son introduction. Si Kristeva et Benveniste sont les principales influences, l'auteur n'arrive pas à leur niveau stylistique et ce livre en souffre un peu. Agaçants aussi, doit-on admettre, sont les sigles partout. Dans un ouvrage d'une telle étendue et si bien recherchée ceux-ci semblent curieursement malplacés. Livre surtout pour le spécialiste ducharmien qui y trouvera des concepts nouveaux et importants.

VIRGINIA HARGER-GRINLING

DOUBLE VISION

ROBERT KROETSCH, *Alibi.* Stoddart, $16.95.

THAT A NOVEL ENTITLED *Alibi* should begin in the following way is perhaps not

surprising: "Most men, I suppose, are secretly pleased to learn their wives have taken lovers; I am able now to confess I was." The "confession" that follows, however, is anything but a conventional spy or detective story alibi. Yes, the trappings are there: the lone hero; the dangerous sexy women; even the first-person narraaive based on journal notes and the intrusion of a third person in the often sarcastic chapter headings — e.g., "(Or, in which Dorf claims to have got laid)." But the subtle doubling of voicing that occurs through the ironic tension between heading and chapter is the formal analogue of the entire structure of a novel whose hero, named after two grandfathers with the same name, is Billy Billy Dorfen (or, in full, William William Dorfendorf). His two daughters, he has named Jinn and Jan (suggesting Ying and Yang, as well as *Jules et Jim*). Dorf is a man with two lives and two lovers; things happen to him in twos, even attempts on his life: "It's a plotted world we live in," he notices.

His first life, as a husband, father, and museum curator ends when he points a gun at his wife's lover and realizes he could pull the trigger. In his second life, he rejects all human ties that cannot be dealt with "in financial terms": he organizes his time around the whims of a reclusive Alberta oil millionaire, Jack Deemer, a man bent on collecting anything there is to be collected. As Deemer's agent, Dorf has come to see his employer as "an artist in his own right, a kind of looney sculptor intent on tacking together . . . all the loose pieces" of the world, "according to his own design, of course." As the novel progresses, the collector becomes a discoverer figure, like Columbus, and a conqueror, like Philip II. Or rather, it is the collector's agent that makes these roles possible: "The collection itself only confirms the discontinuity of this scattered world; it's my talk that puts it together," according to Dorf. The ambivalence of *Alibi*'s collecting is what marks it as different from that of Fowles in *The Collector* where to collect is to kill. Here, collecting is still lethal, but it is also an attack on randomness; it is a way of coping with time past, "a calling up of ghosts from a million ancestral pasts"; it is a means of "acting out reality." In all these functions, collecting becomes, for Dorf, a metaphoric surrogate for writing. Karen, the woman who gives Dorf his journal as a gift, realizes: "You invent yourself, each time you sit down to make an entry." When ordered to investigate and buy a collection of skeletons, Dorf makes the connection for us: "I couldn't leave the city to go to whatever Turkish port was home to that treasure. Just as I couldn't write in my journal."

Dorf's two lives are separated by his realization that he is capable of killing someone. The presence of death looms over this novel, a paradoxical novel that, on one level, is a bawdy and amusing romp. Yet, the deliberate echo of Joyce's "The Dead" ("I drove through the falling snow. Snow was general on the eastern slope of the Rockies") signals to the reader that this story will also be one about loving, living, and dying. As in the poetry of Yeats and Eliot, ambivalence is the key to interpreting the dominant imagery of earth and water: both are sources of life and death — mystically and in specific plot terms in the novel itself. The story revolves around Dorf's search for a perfect spa for Deemer. From the bowels of the earth (the source of his oil money), Deemer appears to seek some fountain of youth in healing waters. In the first spa he visits, Dorf meets Julie, Deemer's dangerous lady, who offers him both spa-style (underwater) sex and a simultaneous threat of death, should he find that perfect spa. Julie, in particular, but woman, in gen-

eral, partakes of the same ambivalence as water and earth: she is both womb and tomb, the goddess of abundance and life (Dorf's sister is an egg producer in Alberta) and the vengeful deity of death, who (presumably) is ultimately trapped in her own machinations. To enter the earth's caves in search of healing waters is linked to being buried under an avalanche of frozen, considerably less healthy water, and it is Julie who leads Dorf to both. Sex and death are another of Kroetsch's doubles in this novel.

The underlying duality, however, is a basic and familiar one — that of body and soul: "We dwell in the body, nowadays. With the world gone hank-end and haywire too, we live in the self's body. As if to cure the body's pain is to be cured. We are all St. Augustines in this broken world; saints not of the soul but of the body, of the bloodstream and back." Hence the search for the curing waters that leads Dorf from Alberta to Bath to Portugal and finally to Greece. Throughout, the doubling proliferates. Meeting Julie again at a spa in Portugal, Dorf becomes involved in a bizarre sex triangle with Julie and a dwarf doctor, Manuel de Medeiros. Not content with the Dorf/dwarf link, Dorf repeatedly links Manny to his other woman friend, Karen Strike, with her blonde hair and connotations of voyeurism, sex, and danger.

It is Julie who, after recounting another doubling (Deemer and Manny), introduces the title of the novel: "We all live by our alibis, don't we, Dorf? . . . We were somewhere else when it happened. Or should have been. Or shouldn't have been." No doubt Kroetsch is recalling the Latin meaning of alibi: elsewhere. Perhaps there is also an allusion to Thackeray's "Women are not so easily cured by the alibi treatment," for Julie is not allowed a cure or an alibi: her death, in an automobile accident over a cliff, recalls her engineering of the attempt on Dorf's life (by an avalanche, as she watched on a cliff edge), but despite her plunge, she is denied a return to the tomb/womb of earth, for the grave diggers in Calgary are on strike and she must ironically remain in her coffin on top of a frozen ice rink.

The imagery involving sex and woman in the novel is always doubled or ambivalent, even when related to the source of life. To Dorf "omphalos" may be a "mountain word," but it is clearly also another of those ubiquitous "holes in the ground" of the mother/earth that brings forth both healing and death. All of these metaphors culminate in the "smelly woman" in Greece and her mud cave. We are prepared for the centrality and universality of this scene by parallels drawn with the earlier parts of the novel (more doubling, if you prefer): to Dorf, Greece is reminiscent of the prairies at home; Philippi, near the mud cave, was also an important mining centre. Lining up with the other men to enter the cave, Dorf has his vision of Everyman: "We were a road-construction gang, ten threshing crews from the dirty thirties. We were the people who miss every bus on a wet and muddy street with a lot of traffic passing. We were a soup line. We were the ragtag survivors of Napoleon's visit to Moscow." Then he adds: "We were the bearers of human ache." Realizing "what work and disease and age will do for the human body," Dorf enters and discovers that conjunction of water and earth: mud. One figure in the mud draws "an opening," or female genitalia on his head: "As if he'd figured a way to escape the world. Or enter it." This figure turns out to be the "smelly woman" — that is, an hermaphrodite. In accepting all the dualities and ambivalences that constitute life, Dorf can begin to construct himself, literally, out of mud. He breaks the rules of the spa: he exits naked but "decently coated in mud," is reborn as part of

nature, and then re-enters the cave to plunge into the mud — this time during the women's hour. This very overt return to the womb results in another of Dorf's sexual experiences fraught with symbolic value, but this time the mud and the women offer love and life, not death.

The final "resolution" of the ambivalences of the novel is not here, however. At Julie's coffin, Dorf finds a message about what will be Deemer's perfect spa and its name is not insignificant: Deadman Spring. Here Dorf works out his salvation. In a parodic inversion of Ulysses and the Cyclops, Dorf gives a nameless, one-eyed man one of his names (Billy), and his cure and curing both begin. Dorf must be led from his initial vision of life — "blood, semen, sweat, shit, hair, fingernails, toenails, piss, pus. The infinite dribble of excrement that is life. Why go on? For the mixed pleasure of an orgasm?" — to an acceptance of the body and its desires as natural and good. And what comes to be associated with the same qualities is the act of writing: Dorf tends his journal "as a gardener tends his sprouts and his blossoms." Desire exists in word and deed: "To be intimate. To intimate." He tries to explain to Julie that to touch is to talk: "Intimacy is, finally, an intimacy of telling." Hence, the journal; hence, the novel.

At Deadman Spring, Dorf waits for Deemer (whom he has never met or spoken to), a Godot figure earlier described as "unapproachable," a "conundrum," "a mystery." Heralded by Karen Strike and her documentary cameras ("Deemer sent me."), is he too a doubled figure, a punning *re*-Deemer? He arrives, enters the cave in a blinding light (Karen's camera lighting) as a "walking skeleton." In the equally blinding darkness that follows, the cave becomes the cosmic "final black hole" in which touching takes on its full scope of meaning. There is no clear threat of death or loving orgasm this time; the ambivalence remains unresolved. No anonymous hands bring pleasure, despite Dorf's trust that they will. Although he finds he has difficulty writing down what occurred in the dark, we learn in the last journal entries (not yet novelized, not yet reworked into narrative, structured and interpreted by hindsight) that he was "violated." (The echo of the male rape scene in the dark baths from Findley's *The Wars* is likely intended here.)

Retreating afterwards to a cabin on a cliff in the woods, Dorf composes the narrative we have read. Instead of constructing a mud man, this time he makes a word man. But the last pages are pure journal and as such provide no neat, satisfying ordering or resolving; in short, no fictionalizing. The doubled or twice written story ends with a memory of Julie's death as Dorf is "violated," a memory and a metaphor: her car plunging over the cliff "like a period, on a blank page." To leave one's mark on the landscape or on the page is to court death, as Kroetsch explored in *What the Crow Said*. Writing fixes and kills, but like collecting, it can also offer a means to new life through art. Alone in nature, writing, Dorf can accept ambivalence, most succinctly symbolized by the salmon "spawning and dying" in the creeks. His interest in the young osprey learning how to fly is countered by his being accidentally responsible for another death. The doubled cry of the osprey ("*Gwan-Gwan*") that ends the novel reasserts life in the face of death. Plummeting to the ground on their first and perhaps fateful attempt to fly, the young birds find their wings and soar, tearing at last, in Dorf's words, "the sadness from my heart."

These final words of the novel suggest some resolution, but it is one that must come from acceptance of ambivalence.

Quests in modern literature do not always lead to one answer, be they in Eliot's *Wasteland* or in Kroetsch's *Alibi*. There are always excuses; there are always elsewheres. The final great collectors, the final artists, are universals that defy single meaning: "Death, like love, is a great arranger. This collector, too, has a corrosive sense of style." The final duality we are left with is the novelist's eternal obsession: that of art and life.

LINDA HUTCHEON

MAMMOTH/MACHINE

GRAEME GIBSON, *Perpetual Motion*. McClelland & Stewart, $16.95.

IN KEEPING WITH ITS TITLE, *Perpetual Motion* is a novel hard to pin down. Partly a tale of discovery and a foray into the past, the book begins with its protagonist, Robert Fraser, uncovering in 1860 on his dirt-poor Ontario farm the bones of some huge beast. Fraser at once decides to make something of those remains, and soon the reassembled skeleton can speak to the curious (for a price, of course) about the strange creatures once native to this land but now long extinct. The book is also partly a mythic quest and an impossible dream of the future — a dream that rigorously refuses to recognize itself as such. The bones take Fraser to Toronto and bring him into contact with the pseudo-science of his time. This connection inspires his sustained efforts to build a perpetual motion machine (the novel concludes with yet another failure in that endeavour); provides the title of the book; and evokes a circular, self-fulfilling sentence that recurs like a leitmotif throughout the work: "There's a great future in perpetual motion." Indeed there is. If one could only get it started, it would just go on and on, an eternal private victory over time.

Other types of stories also enter into the novel. There are, for example, such tall tale elements as Robert killing a horse with a single blow or the embedded story of the great pea harvest and the subsequent rain with the resultant "endless river of swollen peas" flooding over Fraser's farm, which only sets the stage for a still taller tale. The bull stuffs himself on the peas and founders. Bloated near to bursting, he can be saved only by a strategically inserted bugle administered in the nick of time. Fleeing from the consequent "runs and arpeggios," the animal falls into the pond, "whereupon, with a terrible sucking noise, water poured in through the offending instrument and drowned the unfortunate creature entirely." Sound and drowning — story and silence — are here "de-taled" to become analogues of so much b.s. Yet countering this fantasy is the grimly detailed naturalistic description of other animal dealings and deaths (such as the various passenger pigeon hunts or a hanging witnessed in Toronto) that also run through the work. Or we might note how much of the novel is a family saga — an unfolding over narrative and chronological time of the complicated relationships between Robert Fraser and his family (particularly his wife and one "wild " son). We might note, too, how much of this family saga is also both a *bildungsroman* and its opposite — a making and unmaking of the hero.

At the centre of the novel and partly serving to hold it all together is its protagonist. This character of odd exuberances launches himself and the reader on the various ventures and projects, the disparate stories of which constitute the novel. Underlying those different ventures and stories there is, however, a common concern. Thus Fraser deals with his mammoth, his machine, his pigeons, and his family all to the same end. He is a kind of Canadian Colonel Sutpen who

would weave his design into his land as much as he would extract from it and who would do so to leave at least a corner of Ontario — in almost his own phrasing — forever Fraser. And like the mammoth or the machine, he also fails to conquer time. All of his busy-ness culminates in the stasis of stultifying wealth or, more accurately, the appearance of such wealth, for the family mansion that was to prove his final financial success during the last great pigeon hunt mostly robs him of it. The best he can manage is to linger on for a few decades and, as "an old man in a new century," still mourn the pigeons now irrevocably lost.

Also at the centre of the work and serving to hold it together is the art of the novelist. This art is not perfect. Gibson's language is sometimes stilted, strained. Yet he has given his characters a diction effective by its very country force and roughness. Some of the constituent stories are drawn out too long or too obscurely or seem too marginal to the rest of the work. Yet the author has obviously crafted a novel that is much more than just the sum of its parts. Consider, in this context, how Fraser and his first professional mentors talk of perpetual motion machines with a language that equally conjoins science and sorcery. In short, the late nineteenth century is shown to be as mediaeval as it is modern and, by implication, that confutation of any flattering distinction between the two terms is carried from their century to ours. Indeed, they wasted mostly pigeons.

But the best illustration of how craftily the book is put together turns on the two framing episodes with their attendant symbols. The long dead bones of the great beast in the first chapter and the machine whirling out of existence in the last can point to the same thing. Contemplating the disinterred skeleton laid out before him, Robert Fraser first "imagined [the] great beast moving irresistibly, bulling its way in the forest" and then decided to recreate the creature: " 'That's it,' he said. By Jesus, it can be done. 'I'll do it!' " The protagonist is here a stand-in for the author; the bones are possibility and plot, a starting point and the shape of a design. One can imagine Gibson contemplating the fictive contemplation of those fictive bones and exclaiming, "That's it. By Jesus it can be done. I'll do it." Let at least some semblance of the mammoth live again. Let the simulacrum of the often-pronounced-dead, old-fashioned novel live too. And soon, in all its parts, that novel is set spinning but spinning, naturally (as any good deconstructive critic could tell us), out of control. The artifact has a programme of its own and is programmed, through either the laws of thermodynamics or the intractable perverseness of things, to self-destruct.

In thus imitating/recreating/decreating the fiction of an earlier era, *Perpetual Motion* becomes, of course, a postmodernist work itself. Essentially, I am suggesting that this text is especially a self-reflexive assessment of the art of writing transposed to an earlier time and masked with transparent metaphors. So Robert Fraser's dream of the "Great Machine [that] had been going ever since it was invented and [that] would continue to work merely by the Power of its own Balance and Pivots, as long as the World stood" is every writer's dream, and the wheelings within wheelings analogues to the workings of that impossible machine are, in order, language, writing, the novel, and this particular novel.

ARNOLD E. DAVIDSON

ROMANTIC

JAY MACPHERSON, *The Spirit of Solitude: Conventions and Continuities in Late Romance.* Yale Univ. Press, n.p.

THE APPEARANCE OF Jay Macpherson's long-awaited study of romance, *The Spirit of Solitude*, confirms what her poems have indicated and her students at Toronto have always said: she is fascinated with the presence of recurring literary and mythic patterns. In *The Spirit of Solitude* she traces the patterns of romance from the Renaissance to the present day in English, French, and German literatures, and draws freely on the classics for her paradigms.

The Spirit of Solitude is unquenstionably an important book both for its analysis of romance patterns and for its close readings of many well-known individual works. But having said this, one should add that it is enormously difficult to read and digest. That it is published by Yale and has received the "geneerous and active involvement" of Harold Bloom might suggest that it is weighted with theory. In fact the opposite is the case. Macpherson pursues a collection of images appearing in pastoral romance from the time of Milton, her method being "loose and ramifying" rather than tightly argumentative. I confess to having reread the volume more than twice, and sometimes felt that I was repeating the never-ending journey of some romantic Alastor or Frankenstein. That the book ends with a weak chapter on Canadian literature, not all that relevant to the main topic of romance, adds further to the confusion. Moreover, Macpherson does not try to disguise the fact that the book was written over a long period of time, at one point mentioning E. J. Pratt as Canada's senior poet. It has obviously been a great struggle for Macpherson to pull her mass of material together in book form, and one has the feeling that a good editor could have helped considerably in smoothing out the remaining difficulties.

Yet for all its problems, *The Spirit of Solitude* contains a wealth of insights and is extraordinarily rewarding for those who make the effort. Macpherson's starting point is *Paradise Lost* which she sees, paradoxically, as the definitive statement of Renaissance pastoral design — man's loss of paradise. Yet Milton, she contends, also made possible a new element in pastoral, for Adam's desire to create "a paradise within happier far" permits an interiorization of the earlier pastoral elements. In a fascinating chapter on what is often dismissed as the gothic or sentimental poetry of the eighteenth century, Macpherson shows that Young, Gray, and others such as "Ossian" transformed Milton's post-Edenic state so that Adam becomes the poet alone in the wasteland, lamenting his loss of connection to an earlier tradition. The consequence of the new stance — basically elegiac pastoral — is romance with its quest for unity. In the past, pastoral had described a passage from an ideal to a hostile scene; in romantic pastoral, the same two scenes prevail, only now they have been transformed into a subjective realm of divinely creative powers and a dead world of object reality.

Although the eighteenth-century poets played a key role in preparing for the later romances, Macpherson claims that it was left to Goethe in his little-known play of 1789, *Torquato Tasso*, to bring all the elements together for a new kind of pastoral romance. Whereas in earlier forms of pastoral the speaker tended to be an Adonis or Orpheus figure, in Goethe, the central figure is the poet as Narcissus who makes the mistake of believing the exterior world is a mirror for his interior world of inspiration. Eventually, however, the poet attempts to act as well as sing in this world, and at this

point the poet, who has been happily sailing upon a serene mirror-like world, finds himself shipwrecked on the rocks of actuality.

After analyzing the paradigm of *Torquato Tasso*, Macpherson then proceeds to map the development that takes place in later romances, noting how the romantic novel first introduces the natural landscape as a crucial element of fiction, with nature becoming a mirror-image of the protagonist's sensibility. She also observes that pursuit becomes a favourite motif, with Shelley's Alastor being the most obvious example of a hero in search of his other self, a reflection which continually dissolves and is remade in the watery mirror. In later romances, the "fall" from paradise is represented by the final breaking of the mirror, with the poet being forced to find his place in the real world. A fascinating development in romance is the attempt to build a palace of art which will contain the old order of harmony and allow the artist his self-completion. Tennyson's palace of art, Coleridge's pleasure dome and Poe's haunted houses are all seen as prototypes for the city of Venice, which combines all the necessary conventions: it is built on water, is famous for its gold as well as its golden reflections, and has always had a plentiful supply of courtesan-nymphs to betray the wandering traveller. Mann's *Death in Venice* is perhaps the most well-known example of Venetian romantic seduction.

Macpherson's central task in her mapping of romance is to describe the various shapes assumed by the artist in his search for perfection. Goethe's Tasso becomes the spider artist, the mad scientist, the magician, the alchemist, the avenger and a host of others. Godwin's St. Leon and Mary Shelley's Frankenstein offer some of the more interesting examples of the alchemist figure in his attempts to uncover nature's secrets so as to arrive at the innermost meaning of life. Since these alchemists are attempting to live in the fallen world by the inspiration of an unfallen world, the end result is usually calamitous. The other major figure to develop from the Narcissus situation is that of the avenger, who pursues an ideal of pure justice. Hogg's *Confessions* is one of many examples of this type. Macpherson notes that stories dealing with avengers very often include the sacrifice of an animal man or someone embodying natural qualities of openness and generosity, in other words, the paschal lamb. W. H. Hudson's *Green Mansions* is one of her main examples, but she also points up the similarities between *Hamlet* and *Maud* in their use of sacrificial women.

From the subject of avengers it is a long leap to the final chapter on Canadian literature, where Macpherson asserts that romance offers a major paradigm for Canadian writers. The contention is that Canada's severe environment creates an elegaic wasteland in which romance with its dreamers and victims becomes the appropriate mode. While romance is undoubtedly important to Canada's nineteenth-century poets and novelists, and one can even agree that the search for a new Eden played a crucial role, Macpherson's claims for the Narcissus complex are simply too impressionistic and subjective to be convincing. Most Canadian writers have introduced a strong element of common sense in dealing with the problem of making the internal vision match the external reality. The works of Moodie, Grove, Roberts, Callaghan, Ross, and Roy do not show the extremes demanded by romance. In *Bonheur d'occasion*, for example, Jean Levesque might well be a Narcissus figure, but Roy deliberately writes Levesque's egoism out of the novel. Carman and Lampman have their spirits to follow and attend, to be sure, but even here, the quality of romance seems different from what Mac-

pherson claims for Narcissus. In the work of French-Canadian writers like Aquin and Beaulieu, Macpherson might have had more success with her Narcissus complex, but she has not allowed herself the space to investigate the literature of Quebec.

Perhaps the most baffling feature of the book as a whole is Macpherson's principle of selection. In her mapping of variations in romance, she is often forced to spend a great deal of time on minor works. One sympathizes with her intention to follow Northrop Frye's advice: describe the patterns, avoid evaluation. Nevertheless, it is disconcerting to find *High Noon*, *Middlemarch*, *Dracula*, *The Heart of the Ancient Wood*, and Blake's *Milton* all jostling for space on the same page. This melange would be easier to accept if one could understand why Macpherson chooses to include some books and exclude others. Why, for example, in a study of the connections between pastoral and romance is there no discussion of the two major elegies of the nineteenth century — *Adonais* and *In Memoriam?* And why does Macpherson ignore Yeats, surely a major writer of romance? Obviously Macpherson could not include every writer with romantic leanings, but when so much of the book is taken up with minor works, one begins to wonder if we are dealing with a major literary device or only a momentary inspiration which dried to a trickle when writers ceased attempting to make the external world a product of their own imagination. Moreover, since Macpherson has extended her scope to include cartoons and films, might she not *à la* Kenneth Burke have gone even wider afield to search for examples of romantic pastoral in the actions of governments and individuals? Surely the true heirs of Macpherson's Narcissus are not the writers who followed Joyce or Auden, but the world powers and the masses of today who have found the temptations of Alastor irresistible. *The Spirit of Solitude* is a remarkable book, not only for the romantic pattern it brilliantly displays, but for the questions about romance that it raises and leaves for the reader to answer.

RONALD HATCH

MIND & EYE

CARL BERGER, *Science, God, and Nature in Victorian Canada*. Univ. of Toronto Press, $15.00; pa. $6.50.

R. D. LAWRENCE, *The Ghost Walker*. McClelland & Stewart, $16.95.

THE INTELLECTUAL HISTORY of nineteenth-century Canada has received considerable attention of late. Historians of various kinds have turned their attention to the political ideas, the ethical attitudes, and the philosophical writings of nineteenth-century Canadians. Now, in his small new book, Carl Berger also seeks to endow Victorian Canada with a scientific culture. Mrs. Moodie would be astonished! It seems that nineteenth-century Canada was, after all, a perfectly fit place to cultivate his interests, whatever they were.

Science, God, and Nature in Victorian Canada presents three public lectures, originally delivered at the University of Western Ontario, in which Berger describes "the rise, expression, and relative decline of the idea of natural history" in nineteenth-century Canada. Berger's account combines social history with intellectual history. On the one hand, he describes the natural history societies that existed in most Canadian cities, and he deftly outlines the natural theology that found examples everywhere in nature of God's beneficent design, and so made the study of natural history both a socially acceptable activity and a bulwark of orthodox belief. On the other hand, he looks

at the responses of professional scientists to the scientific revolution brought about by Darwin's theories. Above all, he describes the ideas of Sir William Dawson, that splendid anachronism, who became "the most distinguished anti-Darwinist in the English-speaking world."

Unfortunately, Berger does not always make it clear when he is describing ideas that were common currency, and when he is describing the thought of well-informed scientific professionals. Or rather, Berger implies that these two levels of discussion were identical in the period he is considering. This contention may be true, but it needs more documentation that Berger is able to give in his lectures. Berger argues that the study of natural history was fashionable among the educated classes of Victorian Canada, and he contends that the natural history societies were effective agencies in promoting a widespread interest in nature among the general public. However, the men he names as leaders of these societies were, for the most part, scientists by profession rather than by avocation. Berger doesn't overcome my suspicion that, for most of their members, the natural history societies were really little more than social clubs with a tenuously defined scientific rationale.

Berger concludes that during the later years of the nineteenth century the centre of scientific activity in Canada shifted from the essentially amateur membership of the natural history societies to the trained professionals of the universities and the specialized government agencies. True enough, in the sense that the professionals carried out work in a plethora of specialized academic fields, which had developed out of the old all-inclusive discipline of natural history. But the study of natural history by amateurs did not decline to the extent that Berger implies. Rather, by the close of the nineteenth century, the goals of amateur naturalists had shifted significantly. The amateur naturalists of course could not follow the professionals in doing specialized laboratory research. But amateurs have contributed substantially to the cause of conservation, and have also been responsible for much of the best writing that expresses an emotional response to the natural world, instead of the scientist's clinical detachment. Evidence for the continued vitality of amateur natural history is abundant throughout Canadian nature writing, and is especially conspicuous in the animal story, a form whose present-day health is demonstrated in the second book under review, R. D. Lawrence's *The Ghost Walker*.

The Ghost Walker is the latest offering from an author who at the moment is probably Canada's leading nature writer. R. D. Lawrence is a former newspaperman, who is now the self-appointed spokesman for the wild creatures he delights in observing and describing. Lawrence's series of books about Canadian animals began with *Wildlife in Canada* (1966) and *The Place in the Forest* (1967). He has now published a baker's dozen of books, of which the most striking are *Paddy* (1977) and *The North Runner* (1979). *The Ghost Walker*, like most of his best work, is an animal story in the Seton tradition, a tale of a wild animal the author has known. It tells how Lawrence spent nearly a year in the British Columbia wilderness, observing the habits of the mountain lion, or cougar. Specifically, he spent his time observing one specific animal, the male cougar whose stealthy movements made Lawrence name him Ghost Walker.

Inevitably, Lawrence's book includes a good deal of factual data. But his real purpose is not scientific in the limited sense of preparing a detailed record of his field observations. His account is highly personal and emotional, as he describes his growing sense of closeness with the

cougar — a closeness that culminates when he dares to approach the animal as it feeds on a recently-made kill. In recounting this moment of unity between man and animal, Lawrence does not humanize the cougar; rather, he acknowledges the animal within himself. He and cougar are equally parts of a single life process. Lawrence's larger purpose is to promote a respect for the natural world that is based upon recognizing the kinship of humanity and the animals. This ecological ethic, as we might call it, is the essential precondition for any meaningful programme of conservation.

But I am making Lawrence sound pompous and overtly didactic. He isn't that kind of writer at all. His account is both entertaining and thoughtful. His message of concern for nature is conveyed by implication, through the sensitivity and sympathy with which he presents his animal protagonist.

T. D. MACLULICH

THE LONELY LAND

TERRENCE HEATH, *The Last Hiding Place.* Oolichan, $8.95.

M. T. KELLY, *The Ruined Season.* Black Moss, n.p.

THESE TWO NOVELS are both concerned with the Canadian north and its effects on identity and self-knowledge. *The Last Hiding Place* tells the story of Gabe, a Saskatchewan half-breed who has left his Indian heritage as story-teller to become a farmer. The novel describes Gabe's frustrations with farming, his chaotic personal relationships, and his attempts to re-establish links with Indian mythology. Though he lives on a farm, Gabe finds little joy in the created world or in farming itself; his life is defined by boredom, and to fill the time he watches a lot of television. His only unity with the landscape comes at the moment of his death at the end of the novel, a time when the wind recalls the "voices of childhood." At that moment, he believes "The living were pursuing him, hunting him down." The novel's other characters mirror Gabe's alienation and feeling of being in the grip of malign natural forces, and their frustrations seem to form an extension of his own identity crisis. At one point his girlfriend, Lisa, explains that "I can't keep goin' on like this. Somewhere's somethin's goin' to break." Heath's bleak picture of men and women enslaved by their own situation is effective, especially in showing Gabe's inability to develop any sort of rapport with other people. There are few honest relationships in *The Last Hiding Place,* for Gabe seems unable to understand the needs and views of others.

Though the novel's dialogue occasionally seems stilted, Heath is largely successful in presenting the brutality and violence of this northern world, a domain where self-discovery seems to be difficult if not impossible. Certain violent incidents establish the feeling of a universe that is dangerous and apparently out of control. There is much heavy drinking, fighting, and fast driving. The only possible alternative for Gabe is a return to the pre-civilized world of Indian stories and mythology. Represented by dialogues with imaginary figures called Grey Wolf and Whatif, these mythologies recall the myths associated with the trickster, Coyote, of Sheila Watson's *The Double Hook.* Yet Heath's Indian myths provide only a ghostly reminder of the past — a past that for Gabe, as for many others in his situation and culture, has almost ceased to exist.

The same negativism is present in M. T. Kelly's third novel, *The Ruined Season,* which recounts the experiences of Mike, a teacher, his wife, Bev, and their friends as they adjust to life in the Cana-

dian north. This novel is characterized by a freshness of language, an astringency of detail, and in general a more unified plot than one finds in Heath's book. Set in northern Ontario, where Mike works briefly with a survey crew, and later in the small town of Barton, where he goes for a teaching internship, the novel effectively describes the harsh nature of the land. Moving from the concrete of Toronto to the rural simplicity of Barton, Mike, and Bev find they have no close friends. Faced with a two-year wait before their teaching contracts are up, Bev tells herself: "All her life she'd waited, waited to get out of town, out of school, and now out of here again." Kelly describes the "empty quality of the bush, where time doesn't take place." Yet that suspension of time seems to destroy life and creativity, making it impossible for Bev and Mike to enjoy activities for which they now have the time. The uninteresting social rituals of Barton are redeemed only by frequent visits with Grant Hunter, a local entrepreneur whose success represents what northerners admire most — money, power, and tasteless extravagance. Both Bev and Hunter die suddenly, Bev in a car accident and Hunter from a heart attack while on a canoe trip with Mike and another mutual friend.

In this turbulent and depressing world, Mike adopts an attitude that he shares with many of Hemingway's characters: he consciously decides to be stoical, to make an attitude of resignation: "All Mike wanted to do was sit in a darkened room with the TV casting blue shadows and not think of anything." This passivity prevents thought, prevents analysis of his situation in the north. And as in *The Last Hiding Place*, violence becomes a common response to frustrations. Both Mike and Gabe often turn from the complications of life to the precision and mechanical simplicity of guns; as he examines the shells for his new rifle, Mike is enraptured: "Mike liked the neat way they fitted together, and the copper sheen of the casings. Opening a fresh pack was a good feeling. . . . " This sublimated violence, common in both novels, becomes a substitute for self-knowledge. Indeed, *The Ruined Season* and *The Last Hiding Place* are alike in exploring how the northern environment conditions and in some ways destroys the identities of those Canadians who live there.

RODERICK HARVEY

EXILES & ALIENS

ADAM BOYARSKY, *Shreiber*. General Publishing, $15.95.

RACHEL WYATT, *Foreign Bodies*. Anansi, $8.95.

IT WOULD BE DIFFICULT to imagine two novels more unlike than Adam Boyarsky's *Shreiber* and Rachel Wyatt's *Foreign Bodies*. Although the writers are both from outside Canada, Boyarsky from Poland and Wyatt from England, and although they treat a common theme of national and racial relationships, they differ totally in subject-matter, characterization, setting, and tone. *Shreiber*, set in Poland in the months following 1945, is a religio-political novel about a Polish Jew who has survived the holocaust. *Foreign Bodies*, which deals with the experiences of a British professor on leave in Toronto, his wife, and daughter, is much less traditional; it has an ambivalence which reminds one of Atwood, a quality of black comedy or nightmare beneath a civilized veneer.

Shreiber, a first novel, describes Polarsky's birthplace as his parents knew it at the end of the Second World War. Basically chronological, the novel is centred in the consciousness of the protagonist, Dr. Menachem Shreiber. Boyarsky interweaves events in the present, October 1945 to mid-1946, with Shreiber's recol-

lections of his past from May of 1934 when he completed his medical degree to the final tragic years from 1943 on. Like Theodore Stappler of Henry Kreisel's *The Betrayal*, Shreiber seeks retribution for the death of a family member. However, the starkness of Kreisel's narrative, the surrealistic settings and the morality-play quality is replaced by a realistic and precise recreation of everyday life in post-war Poland.

The opening scene on the train to Byalestock defines the mood of the novel, the rage, the racial and religious persecution and brutality. Encountering two Jews, father and son, reciting psalms over a candle, a Pole remarks to his companion: "You see, the Jews have everything. . . . Only the Poles go around starving!" He urinates on the candle, then swings an axe over the heads of the two; Shreiber shoots both the Poles and, assisted by another Jew, pushes the bodies off the moving train. As they reach the city, Shreiber overhears another Pole remark of the Nazis, "A pity they didn't finish the job."

Shreiber's outward search, to find the killer of his brother Efraim, is paralleled by a search within, to recover his dead wife Malke and their two young sons. He says of his quest for the murderer, established as the Communist Jelinski, "only the search keeps me alive" and when he achieves his revenge, "the cord will snap and I will be no more." In effect, then, this search ties him to the past, to death rather than to the future and life.

The framework of the trial, both actual and metaphoric, encloses the events of Shreiber's past and immediate present. From the hearing in 1934 where as a young doctor he is called upon to testify for the authorities that the Jewish mikvehs or ritual baths are contaminated and should be closed, to his final official prosecution for the murder of Jelinski which has been set up to implicate him, Shreiber sees himself as "on trial" for his life. He relives the past, re-encounters the people and re-witnesses the events to prove to himself that "I loved my family fully, that I was a good husband, that I lived every moment honestly and fully." Ultimately he is released from this burden. Rescued from prison, he accepts that he must leave Byalestock, no longer a "city of Jews," for Jerusalem to begin a new life as both healer and Jew. Thus he resolves both the physical conflict and the ethical dilemma.

The novel is a compassionate and powerful recreation of the times. The events are at once shocking and predictable, centred in the masculine world of action and character. The male portraits are varied and range from Nicholas, the Roman Catholic Pole who has sheltered Shreiber's family but whom he suspects, to his mentor Zalmen who is so idealistic that he cannot see reality and the tragedy of events, from Eugene Plotkin, a Jew who is Secretary of the Worker's Party and has sold out to the Communists to Wolfey Aronson, determined to recreate the old Jewish order in Poland. The female portraits are mostly one-dimensional, appropriately supportive and maternal; his dead wife Malke, her friend Chaneh, the young mother Goldie, and Nicholas' sister Zasha are all idealized; only Nicholas' wife gives an indication of depth in her secret relationship with the Communist Jelinski. *Shreiber* maintains suspense, evokes empathy and conveys realism.

In contrast, *Foreign Bodies* is light, even sardonic in tone and discontinuous in action. It is black comedy, poised delicately between horor or nightmare and hysteria. Although the order is again chronological with occasional flashbacks, the progression of events, their absurdity, creates an atmosphere of surrealism. The form is also more complex — interweaving the thoughts of three central charac-

ters, their perception of events, and their sense of alienation.

The novel starts simply enough. Professor Edward Bolster has left a position of fifteen years at Leeds University to take up a research fellowship in Toronto at the Institute of Improved Relations. His dream is to complete his book, a study of race relations in England, focusing on a particular incident at Brighton Mills. This book gives order and meaning to his life. Ironically, the "Foreign Bodies" of the title are the Bolsters themselves. Ned admits that he has "uprooted" Ernesta from her comfortable home, her son and her job as the Mayor's Secretary but is unsympathetic: "New Place. New Job. New people. New perspective." But immediately he himself becomes one of the disinherited, a victim of "dislodgement" in his "country of choice."

The events of the novel are tied together by the contrasting viewpoints of the three Bolsters, Ned, Ernesta, and their daughter Sandra, alias Savitra, newly arrived from a San Francisco commune. They are also woven together by Monroe, an East Indian who appears and reappears throughout the novel, always smiling like the Cheshire cat. He is first encountered in the Bolster's new home, as a friend of the owners. But he never does move out, and gradually he becomes the pivotal character, faithful manservant, devoted friend, advisor of Ned on his manuscript, and comforter of both Ernesta and Sandra/Savitra.

The events of the novel, melodramatic and even bizarre, develop with the logic of nightmare yet, as in nightmare, they themselves do not seem significant. The first day at the new house, the Bolsters discover the fire engines and an ambulance in front of the house and are accused several times by police of causing a public nuisance by turning in a false alarm. One night some weeks later Ned discovers in the basement Monroe chopping off the head of Ernesta and is rushed in a faint, to discover that the "body" was a frozen lamb carcass. Ernesta, short of cash, is arrested for stealing a department store teddy bear and is interrogated by the management, then paternally given a credit card. The turning point is a triple sex scene. Ernesta returns from a disappointing adulterous visit to Niagara Falls with an unappreciated poet (she collects these) to find Ned naked and about to bed an Institute wife who has dropped by to lure him; all three discover Sandra and Monroe already in possession of their bedroom. From this point on the events increasingly lead to disaster. Monroe is evicted forcibly by Ned from the household, and the Bolsters themselves are evicted by the owners over Christmas, shunted off to a cottage in the country where they are snow-bound for three days and nights. Digging them out, Ned comes across the frozen body of Monroe on the doorstep, bearing Christmas gifts, and he is rushed to hospital and revived just in time. Finally Ned is denounced by the Institute for a public speech in which he carefully points out racial intolerance close to home, in Toronto and perhaps the Board of the Institute itself. The Bolsters return to England, their marriage broken, but still hopeful over Sandra's coming baby and Ned's own literary child.

The ending is both comic and satiric. Ned's position at the Institute has been filled by another appointment, Ernesta's replacement is preferred by the Mayor, the marriage is in fragments, and Ned has reverted to the family occupation of butcher (double of Monroe?). Ned's life project is destroyed when he discovers a volume in a bookstore, handsomely bound, on race relations in England, focussing on Brighton Mills and written by his Director's son; he gives the voluminous sheaf of papers to children at the

door to burn for Guy Fawkes' day. And the invincible Sandra has decamped with their grandchild to a newer mission field in search of "their real work to be done."

CATHERINE MCLAY

SUFFRAGISTS

CAROL LEE BACCHI, *Liberation Deferred? The Ideas of the English-Canadian Suffragists, 1877-1918*. Univ. of Toronto Press, $8.95.

THAT MOST LITERAL of motherhood issues, maternal feminism, is the puzzle Carol Bacchi tries to solve in *Liberation Deferred? The Ideas of the English-Canadian Suffragists, 1877-1918* Bacchi paints a Canadian suffrage movement dominated almost from the beginning by social reformers who, "staunch supporters of the traditional family . . . envisioned no real change in sex roles." These social reformers, men and women alike, were Anglo-Saxon, Protestant, and middle-class, and their racial, religious, and class allegiances explain, according to Bacchi, both the relative ease with which the suffrage cause was won in Canada, and likewise the essentially conservative bias of this supposedly progressive measure. Stability, gradualism, and social control were the reformers' goals; votes for women was a small and necessary sacrifice for the ruling elite to pay in return for protection of their favoured status, as well as their favourite social ideals, in the face of larger, more threatening changes: massive immigration, urbanization, industrialization, and the spread of secular values. Bacchi concludes that "The suffrage movement was less a 'woman's movement' than an attempt on the part of particular men and women, predominantly urban professionals and entrepreneurs, to supervise society."

In stressing the conservative and middle-class nature of the suffrage movement, and particularly its co-option by more clearly interventionist reforms — prohibition, factory legislation, compulsory school attendance, the eugenics movement, and a host of allied measures — Bacchi sets out to counter earlier interpretations of woman suffrage as the triumphant finale to Victorian womanhood's bid for emancipation, which resurfaced as liberation a century later. According to Bacchi, "celebratory" histories, "mainly descriptive narratives which lauded the movement's march forward," have their prime exemplar in Catherine Cleverdon's 1950 study, *Woman Suffrage Movement in Canada* (reissued in 1974 by the University of Toronto Press). In the meantime, as Bacchi notes, there have been two revisionist waves: the critique of the suffragists' traditionalism advanced by American scholars Aileen Kraditor and William O'Neill in 1965 and 1969 respectively, and the rebuttal mounted by Ellen du Bois a decade later, defending the realism of the suffragists' aims within the context of their times.

Underlying these diverging interpretations — once critical of nineteenth-century leaders for perpetuating the basic structures that kept women in their place, the other insisting on historical reconstruction untainted by present-day activist objectives — lies a historiographical debate that reaches well beyond the issue of woman suffrage. Where Bacchi herself stands in this debate is not entirely clear, and phrases like "be that as it may," in the prefatory paragraphs outlining this controversy, do little to resolve the question. In her conclusion, she concedes O'Neill's main point, that voting privileges awarded on the grounds of women's guardianship of the next generation "reinforced sex role stereotypes which have proved difficult to remove" — as though removing these stereotypes were still a legitimate item on the agenda. Moreover,

she further recognizes that the prospect of a widening sphere for women proved illusory after World War I as even highly trained women were steered into the role of professional housewife. Nevertheless, in what appears to be acceptance of the du Bois argument for objective historical reconstruction, Bacchi maintains that "the female suffragists did not *fail* (her italics) to effect a social revolution for women; the majority never had a revolution in mind." This was because "their motivations were really determined by their membership in a social elite. . . ." Thus for Bacchi the two main questions addressed by her study — "who were Canada's suffragists? and why exactly did they want women to vote?" — become in fact a single question, for the why is implicit in, indeed determined by, the who: a reductionist approach that effectually denies the possibility of individual transcendence of group bias.

There is also something tautological about focusing on the social composition of the executives of urban-based suffrage associations, some 200 men and women all told, while excluding the rank and file members (because they can't be identified), the labour supporters of suffrage (because they seldom occupied executive positions, and were often openly suspicious of middle-class reformers), and most importantly of all, farm groups who worked actively and effectively for the vote, particularly in the western provinces, without going to the trouble of forming overt, single-issue suffrage societies. If woman suffrage was for the vast majority of its supporters, east and west, a means to an end, a step towards needed changes, in what sense were demands for urban reforms more compelling proof of "real" suffrage motivation than political movements surrounding tariffs or freight rates, issues that exercised western grain-growers? Catherine Cleverdon may still be the better guide: Cleverdon recognized that in the west where the suffrage cause met early success, equity was more than a slogan for the front cover of the *Grain Growers Guide,* and the principle of co-operation informed public and private relations between the sexes as well as between groups formed to protect political and economic interests. Moreover, Cleverdon is valuable in reminding us that suffrage was after all a political reform, subject to the imperatives of political jurisdiction, organization, and survival. In the actual working out of the suffrage campaign in Canada, it mattered more than a little that federal voters' lists were based on provincial ones, that provincial politics in the western provinces particularly were highly responsive to organized public pressure in the form of petitions and resolutions by farmers' groups, and that prairie provincial premiers vied with one another in maintaining their reputations for progressiveness.

Carol Bacchi's insistence that woman suffrage in Canada is explicable within a larger framework of beliefs, attitudes, and interests, all coloured by the changing circumstances of Canadian social and economic development, has the merit of addressing head-on three common challenges to the study of Canadian feminism: that Canadians as a whole are congenitally incapable of formulating anything so intellectual as an idea; that feminism similarly stands devoid of intellectual content: and that Canadian feminism, including its suffrage manifestation, can safely be subsumed in accounts dealing with either Britain or America: see, for example, Richard J. Evans' 1977 book, *The Feminists,* where Canadian feminism is at one point dismissed as "too uneventful to bear recounting at any length," and later briefly summarized in terms of the overwhelming influence of American thought, even to the point of talk of "the Western states of Canada." Moreover, Bacchi usefully stresses that

suffrage was widely viewed in Canada, by women perhaps even more than by men, principally in terms of its service to social stability. In that sense the hard questions concerning women's equal economic and social opportunity were indeed deferred to a later generation. Yet in the course of emphasizing the limitations of the female suffragists' understanding of their situation as women, *Liberation Deferred?* exhibits limitations of its own. One is the narrow focus stemming from Bacchi's sociological approach to the study of ideas: only the people who can conveniently be counted and categorized really matter, and we gain little sense of these spokespersons as individuals. A second limitation, one more likely to concern readers of *Canadian Literature* than perhaps most social scientists, is the mechanical and repetitive prose, clear enough for the most part but devoid of wit or subtlety: thesis-prose that needs some liberating of its own.

SUSAN JACKEL

REAL IDENTITY

ALICE POZNANSKA-PARIZEAU, *La Charge des sangliers*. Eds. Pierre Tisseyre, $8.95.

ALAIN GAGNON, *Il n'y a pas d'hiver à Kingston*. Eds. Pierre Tisseyre, $12.95.

AT TEN, Alice Poznanska was already working to free her homeland, Poland, from foreign control. This struggle has continued throughout her life. She was active in the Warsaw insurrection, a prisoner of war in Germany during World War II and, after studying political science in France, she came to Canada to continue the fight, this time choosing the printed page as her battlefield.

Her most recent publication, *La Charge des sangliers*, is the second volume in a series depicting life in Poland from the period immediately following World War II until the present day. Although it is possible to read the second volume without reading the first, it is not recommended, since the work is a continuous narrative involving the same set of characters. Volume one, *Les Lilas fleurissent à Varsovie*, focuses on Helena, a young girl who flees a detention camp in Germany to return on foot to her family in Warsaw. She is raped by German soldiers and at age 13 gives birth to a baby girl. *Les Lilas* traces the difficult years of her growing up in Warsaw from 1945-1980. The story ends with the prospect of the marriage of her daughter, Inka. *La Charge des sangliers*, while continuing the story of Helena and her family, concentrates more on Inka's life as wife of an official in the Ministry of Justice in Warsaw, encompasses only the two-year period 1980-82.

The books are only nominally about the lives of the named characters. Their actual subject is the struggle of the Polish people to liberate their country — first from the Germans and then from the Russians. Alice Poznanska-Parizeau is a writer with a mission — her mission is to expose the subjugation and exploitation of her people by foreign powers. She attempts to do this by offering the reader a narrative in which the lives of fictional characters are intertwined with actual historical events. The author has taken extreme care to provide detailed description of everyday life in Poland as well as first-hand accounts of historical happenings in order to substantiate the accuracy of her depiction. Footnotes supply precise references to articles, speeches, books, and authors cited, addresses of organizations mentioned, corrections of historical misinformation; and at times they serve to allow the author to make personal comments on the events evoked in the text. All this combines to provide an extremely complete and seemingly true picture of

life inside Poland — a view that is far bleaker than any depicted in the western press.

Unfortunately, it is this overweening attention to detail and documentation that makes the books, and especially *La Charge des sangliers*, less satisfactory aesthetically. Because the description of the true nature of situations and events is the primordial consideration, concerns that are more strictly aesthetic, such as character depiction and plot line, suffer. Lack of sufficient development causes some characters to appear unidimensional or caricatured. Dialogues, on occasion, are trite or contrived and unconvincing. Plot line seems dictated more by history than by human relations. Because the author is intent on documenting specific events as well as a way of life (not only for her readers but also, one suspects, for herself), no detail is omitted. This is less true of *Les Lilas* where in order to cover 35 years in 400 pages a certain amount of pruning has had to take place. In *La Charge*, the author is at leisure to expand at length not only about living conditions but also about the rise of Solidarity, the action of the union, the congresses, the strikes, the various organs of power. There is room also to include more lengthy theoretical discussions about the nature of freedom, injustice, democracy, the detention of power. If more strictly limited in quantity, the impact of this information on the reader would undoubtedly be heightened.

Alain Gagnon's most recent novel, *Il n'y a pas d'hiver à Kingston* is undoubtedly his best from every viewpoint. The book's essential theme is that of the survival of minority groups and, in particular, the francophone minority living outside Quebec. A visit by the narrator-protagonist to see his relatives living in that venerable bastion of WASP culture, Kingston, Ontario, is used as a pretext to pass in review a panoply of attitudes concerning the French-Canadian question. There are Uncle Abélard and Aunt Rose-Marie whose ideals date from the Duplessis era. They feel that Quebec has been taken over by Communists and radicals, that Bill 101 is criminal and the referendum anti-Catholic. Their son, Simon, is a young professor of literature trying to maintain his Frenchness but feeling at home neither in France nor in Quebec, whereas in Ontario he remains the token francophone whose career is about as solidly established as Trudeau's national bilingualism. His brother Robert (Bob) has opted for the route which guarantees financial success. Educated in the U.S., married to an Anglo (Maple), he works for an English-speaking multinational firm. Despite sporadic attempts to speak French with his children, linguistic assimilation seems very close at hand. Their sister, Elisabeth (Betty), a doctoral student in science, feels that any language whose use is restricted merely to the home is already dead. She is a champion of cosmopolitanism and life, and is prepared to embrace whatever language will allow her to live life to the fullest. The other members of the francophone population of Kingston seem to reflect the same breath of attitudes. The range extends from the young radicals who wish to join their lot with that of Quebec to the old lunatics who dream of reunion with France. Naturally, the anglophone majority is in evidence as well, although they present a more unified front with their common misapprehension of francophones, their fears and aspirations.

Although this is fiction, the characters are depicted with such deftness and verisimilitude that one senses the presence of a real-life model lurking somewhere behind. As the author himself lived in Kingston for five years, one can only surmise that much of the book is based on

direct experience and that is why it rings so true.

Gagnon reveals an admirable flair for devastating character annihilation, liberally lacing his portraits with sarcasm and a hefty dose of cynicism. His style is suitably constrained when describing the Kingston social scene. Sentences are often abbreviated phrases, rather impressionistic, transmitting the essential traits and leaving the rest to the imagination.

This economy of style contrasts with the somewhat lyrical, at times overly self-conscious and ornate passages used to evoke a half-real, half mythical past. In these sections the narrator addresses his lost Isaure who, because of her attachment to the south of France, is presented simultaneously not only as the twentieth-century women he loved but also as the thirteenth-century Cathar burned for heresy during the Albigensian conflict. It is through this rather mystical character that the two main themes of the novel are united. Isaure represents not only love and sensual pleasure but also the struggle of a minority group. In her fight to reject the Roman Pope as well as to liberate the south of France (Occitania), she epitomizes defiance of a foreign authority and the fight for independence.

The spectre of Isaure continues to dominate the narrator's reactions until he encounters the Wiesensthal clan — the beautiful Aïsha and her wealthy father-in-law Salomon, a former professor at Princeton and an internationally renowned expert in macro-economics, who preaches the evils of nationhood. Surprising himself (and the reader), the narrator finally accepts a position of importance offered to him by a multinational company with which Wiesensthal is associated. Despite the suggestions of rebirth at the end of the novel, the overriding image is that of the writer-artist selling out to the impersonal world of business and technology. Has the protagonist's vision been muddied by his love for Aïsha or is this a final admission of the hopelessness of all attempts by minorities to maintain their identity?

MARILYN E. KIDD

IMPRESSIONS

GERARD TOUGAS, *Destin Littéraire du Québec.* Québec/Amérique, $12.95.

QUEBEC LITERATURE is a very minor literature of western civilization. This is Gérard Tougas' major premise and one which he establishes in the first two parts of this book. Tougas points out that only economically and politically important countries have world renowned literatures since people are generally only interested in reading the writers of powerful nations. In contemporary times, for example, American literature is very popular among European readers, even among the traditionally chauvinistic people of France. Tougas argues that France is so militarily and culturally dependant on the United States, it is fast becoming yet another cultural colony of this technological giant. Even prestigious journals such as *Le Monde* and *L'Express* hasten to praise any and all American best-sellers which, says Tougas, are often worthless works, simply the product of well-mounted publicity campaigns.

If France can't resist the pressures of the Almighty Dollar how could Québec even hope to? Tougas points out that Québec's situation is actually doubly weak. Not only is it pathetically dependant on the Anglo-Saxon world but it is doomed to maintain minority status in the Francophone world for, contrary to Britain and Spain, France has managed to hold on to its traditional position of cultural prestige and influence among its former colonies. And since their living conditions are far superior to any South

American, African and/or Russian people to whom they may be compared, the Québécois can't even hope to win over many liberal winners on the basis of their claim of oppression and exploitation by the Anglo-Saxon majority.

On the other hand, Québécois literature is growing and thriving, and is supported by a socio-economic infrastructure worthy of any great literary nation. Québec has such a large community of scholars, writers, critics, editorialists, and publishers that it in no way resembles the other members of the francophone diaspora. Tougas concludes that although Québec literature does not attract world wide acclaim, it is nonetheless an important francophone literature, second only to that of France.

In parts three and four, Tougas addresses the question of the quality of Québec prose. It is at this point that he may begin to lose his reader's interest. In the first half of his book, Tougas often emits opinions that are only supported by other opinions. Nevertheless, his hypothesis is an interesting one, reads well, and is not particularly controversial since no one could possibly compare the place literary historians will grant Québec literature to that given to American, French, German, or Russian prose. In the second half of his book, however, Tougas fails to propose any serious, depthful analysis of any of the dozen or so writers he mentions. François-Xavier Garneau, Philippe Aubert de Gaspé, Alain Grandbois, Gabrielle Roy, André Langevin — they are all accorded only a few vague remarks. Although he does actually quote Ducharme, Bessette, Beaulieu, and La Rocque, his comments on these writers are also laconic and uninformative. What is more annoying is that his harsh and/or sympathetic evaluations are never substantiated.

This does not mean that Tougas' ideas are uninteresting. It is just that he does not offer his reader any solid evidence to back up his arguments. For instance, his hypothesis on the state of the French language is an intriguing one; according to Tougas there is a tendency, in both France and in Québec, to simplify the French language — yet another case, he claims, of the powerful influence of the United States, where popular speech is seen as a symbol of the marvels of democracy and free enterprise. Unfortunately, no precise examples are given to illustrate his point. This is most annoying. In the same way, Tougas frustrates his reader by declaring that Jacques Ferron's best pages and those of Gérard Bessette are undeniably brilliant and original. One would like to know Tougas' criteria for making such claims, but none are forthcoming.

Although much more succinct than in his earlier works, Tougas' style of presentation has not changed much since he first published *Histoire de la littérature canadienne-franécaise* (1960). What has changed over the past twenty years, however, are critical standards of thought, methodology, and analysis. Tougas would have perhaps added to the scholarly value of his work if he had introduced some linguistic and/or structural criteria of analysis, if for no other reason than to convince the reader of the veracity of his statements. Instead, he dismisses modern criticism in one paragraph as a closed shop of faddish intellectuals.

ELAINE F. NARDOCCHIO

AIGU ET SOMBRE

ALAIN LESSARD, *Comme parfois respire la pierre*. Poésie Leméac, $6.95.

PIERRE CHATILLON, *Poèmes*. Editions du Noroît, $15.00.

ANNE-MARIE ALONZO, *Veille*. Editions des Femmes, $9.95.

DENISE DESAUTELS, *L'Ecran*. Editions du Noroît, s.p.

RECIPIENDAIRE du prix Octave-Crémazie 1983 pour *Comme parfois respire la*

pierre, Alain Lessard est promis à un brillant avenir. Lapidaire et énigmatique, le recueil en question communique un sens aigu de la mort. D'un style spontané et parfois saccadé, *Comme parfois respire la pierre* est la voix d'une conscience qui cherche la réalité au-delà de la fugacité des mots et des choses.

Lessard se donne à l'activité scripturale pour transformer l'absence en présence, pour mieux repousser la mort prochaine: "en cet espace déterminant je suis l'otage de / l'écriture." C'est à travers la loupe grossissante du poète que l'on s'aperçoit de la certitude angoissante de la mort. Comme Saint-Denys Garneau ou Supervielle, Lessard n'est que trop conscient de la fragilité du corps: "essentielle certitude je le veux bien tant / qu'elle m'embrouille l'ennui du sang lavé d'une eau / trop clair." Face à l'incertitude de la vie, Lessard cherche l'oubli dans l'amour: "sur l'humus de tant de cadavres nous optons pour / la rencontre brève l'epuisement rapide des sens / stimulés."

La sobriété du langage reflète la pensée foncièrement sombre de Lessard: l'homme est irrémédiablement seul, car "toute appartenance ne saurait que faillir." *Comme parfois respire la pierre* n'est pas de la poésie "bibelot." Il s'agit plutôt d'une tentative chez Lessard d'atteindre l'universel en s'adressant à une question qui nous préoccupe tous: la mort est-elle inéluctable?

Depuis la publication de son premier recueil de poèmes — *Les Cris* — en 1957, Pierre Chatillon n'est pas un inconnu pour ceux qui suivent notre littérature. La parution de *Poèmes* marque sans aucun doute une date importante dans la vie littéraire du Canada. L'ouvrage retrace chez le poète une évolution qui s'effectue en trois étapes: joie de l'enfant, révolte de l'adolescent, amour de l'adulte. Cette courbe poétique correspond à un itinéraire spirituel des plus difficiles, itinéraire qui conduit le poète de la noirceur de la mort jusqu'à la lumière de la renaissance. En effet, Chatillon dévoile dans sa préface qu'il n'est plus "ce jeune dieu barbare qui crut s'être emparé du soleil et s'être coiffé pour toujours d'une couronne de feu . . . " Il est plutôt celui que cherche l'harmonie dans l'univers, celui qui, après tant d'années de révolte, dit "oui" à la vie.

Poèmes regroupe en deux parties des textes écrits entre 1956 et 1982. Dans la première, intitulée *Le Cri du soleil*, il est question d'inédits et de textes déjàs parus entre 1956 et 1971, mais publiés maintenant dans une version remaniée. Le titre de cette section est particulièrement bien choisi, car il communique deux thèmes chers au poète: la souffrance et l'amour.

Il est intéressant de noter que, comme maints poètes avant lui, Chatillon puise ses images le plus souvent dans la nature. Parmi celles-ci on trouve l'intimité du feu éluardien: "car c'est au feu que je demande le secret. / J'irai brûler mon coeur dans les hauts joncs / pour l'imprégner de flamme," ou encore l'exaltation du poète qui contemple la mer à l'instar de Saint-John Perse: "O mer, ta respiration palpite sur le sable où je m'étire glorieux coiffé de lumière avec des cris de bête en rut. . . . " Point n'est besoin de souligner que la dialectique mort/vie qui domine *Le Cri du soleil* est née des métaphores evoquant nuit/jour. Si le poète ne sait capter "l'impénétrable opacité des pierres," s'il ne réussit pas non plus à faire disparaître "l'inacceptable nuit définitive de la mort," c'est parce que celle-ci est toute-puissante:

> Vint un soir où
> et las de repousser la nuit,
> le soileil
> aux longs cheveux de rayons blancs
> s'ouvrit les veines sur la mer
> et se mit à errer hagard,
> tête de mort immense dans la vide.

Alors que le ton des premiers textes est sensiblement sombre, il n'est pas pessi-

miste pour autant, car au fond de la noirceur il y a néanmoins une lueur d'espoir.

L'engagement du poète demeure tout aussi acharné dans *L'Oiseau-coeur*, qui comprend des inédits écrits entre 1972 et 1982, à la différence près que là où il s'agit d'angoisse dans *Le Cri du soleil*, on a affaire plutôt dans la deuxième partie à l'enthousiasme de l'individu qui découvre de nouveau la beauté de la femme et de la vie en général. Aussi la femme occupe-t-elle une place prépondérante dans les derniers textes. Sa presence est évoquée à l'aide des métaphores filées telles "mer," "vigne," "aurore," "fleur":

> Amoreuse la fille de fleurs mouillés
> au long de toi laisser mes mains chanter
> comme les tout premiers oiseaux, matin
> au bord des sources
> et sur chacune de tes lèvres
> lits de mousse je me roule nu
> dans les clochettes d'eau de la rosée de
> l'aube.

Il est vrai que Chatillon fait appel à un lieu commun — la femme-fleur — qui remonte à la poésie gréco-latine. Toujours est-il qu'il y apporte un nouveau souffle libéré de toute contrainte formelle.

En somme, *Poèmes* est un appel à la vie, une tentative d'apprivoiser la mort à travers l'inspiration et le refuge que la femme accorde au poète. On n'entend plus la voix rauque de Chatillon invoquer la révolte, car elle a cédé à un chant de célébration.

Anne-Marie Alonzo offre une suite à *Geste* (1979) dans *Veille*. Bien que les quatre premiers textes de l'ouvrage en question aient été portés à la scène du Théâtre Expérimental des Femmes en 1981, il serait mailaisé de le ranger sous une étiquette particulière. Pièce de théâtre, prose, poésie ou peut-être poésie en prose?

De toute évidence il s'agit du monologue d'une femme aux prises avec la désagrégation d'un amour, mais d'un amour non pas comme les autres. Et ce, de par la fait que la deuxième femme évoquée revêt tantôt la forme d'une mère tantôt celle d'une amante. La faiblesse de l'oeuvre réside en partie dans cette ambiguité ainsi que dans un langage trop souvent maladroit et banal:

> Je ne te crains pas tu (m')attires.
> Jamais avant toi si près vis-à-vis des
> autres miens.
> Tous les fuir et je viens vers toi.
> Je voudrais laisse-moi te toucher.

Par contre, là où Alonzo évoque la puissance de la mer — et l'on n'est pas certain qu'il ne s'agisse pas de la mère réussit à atteindre une certaine beauté stable et reconnaissable:

> Tout est trouble et la mer roule contre moi.
> Je ferme la bouche je sauve ma langue et
> mes dents perles.
>
> Il y a en moi et tu le sais toute la fin du
> monde.

Veille n'est donc pas sans mérite. Néanmoins, en ce qui concerne des ouvrages ultérieurs, il faudra qu'Alonzo vise un style plus serré afin déviter les malentendus qui dominent son texte.

Auteur de cinq textes majeurs dont quatre parus aux Editions du Noroît, Denise Desautels embrasse la constance du vécu dans une vision où règne la mort. *L'Ecran* — son livre le plus récent — se veut en effet une condamnation de "l'usure des mots." Car, ce sont ces derniers qui permettent à l'individu de meubler le silence, de s'habituer à l'absence et, enfin de compte, de faire face à la violence de la mort.

L'ouvrage s'inspire du *Prométhée enchaîné* d'Eschyle, et plus précisément du personnage qui s'appelle Io. Condamnée à parcourir la terre, cette dernière tente d'échapper à la colère céleste. Mais elle est poursuivie sans cesse et est piquée par un taon. Telle est sa punition. *L'Ecran* cite en épigraphe les paroles suivantes d'Io:

> Le taon me pique d'un dard . . . l'épouvante fait palpiter mon coeur contre ma poitrine; mes yeux roulent dans leurs orbites . . . je ne commande plus à ma langue et mes pensées confuses luttent au hasard contre les flots d'un mal exécré.

Cette voix trouve son écho dans celle d'une femme qui est dans un sens la narratrice de ce texte. La femme moderne parle de la folie latente et ultimement de la seule certitude: la mort qui vient créer "la mise en abîme des images de mémoire." L'on a affaire donc à deux voix à la fois différentes et semblables, antiques et contemporaines.

Il faut avouer que *L'Ecran* est un texte difficile. Ni la densité du style ni la richesse des images ne permettent une lecture rapide. Elles exigent au contraire une lecture méditative afin de mieux apprécier chez Desautels sa manière intuitive de voir le monde.

KENNETH W. MEADWELL

OLD THEMES

NORMAND CHAURETTE, *La Société de Métis*. Leméac, $7.95.

MARCIEN FERLAND, *Les Batteux*. Editions du Blé, n.p.

LOUISE MAHEUX-FORCIER, *Un Parc en automne*. Pierre Tisseyre, n.p.

ANTONINE MAILLET, *Les Drôlatiques, horrifiques et épouvantables aventures de Panurge, ami de Pantagruel*. Leméac, $7.95.

ANDRE RICARD, *Le Tir à blanc*. Leméac, $7.95.

FROM MANITOBA TO ACADIA, Francophone dramatists have been looking to the past to find subjects for new plays. In the case of Antonine Maillet, the sources of inspiration are both literary and folkloric as she transports Rabelais' cast of characters to her native Acadia. Marcien Ferland returns to a real historic event, the School Crisis of 1916, in order to panegyrize the heritage of Franco-Manitobans. Louise Maheux-Forcier invents the past in her play which is the bitter-sweet sentimental journey of an aging pair of lovers, reunited after forty years of separation. In Normand Chaurette's highly original work, four characters relive shared moments of the summer of 1954 at Métis-sur-Mer. Lastly, André Ricard goes back to the socio-political themes of the seventies in a weak attempt to renew the old theme of the battle between the sexes.

The success of *Panurge* proves that in the hands of a masterful writer, old material can come alive. Madame Maillet, whose 1971 doctoral thesis at Université Laval was entitled "Rabelais et les traditions populaires en Acadie," faithfully and wittily brings Rabelais' mock epic to the stage. The play begins with a brief account of the miraculous birth and prodigious education of Pantagruel followed by his victory in the Picrocholine War. After this burlesque prologue, Maillet introduces her main subject, Panurge's futile search for answers to the questions, "Should I marry or not?" and "If I marry, will I be cuckolded and beaten by my wife?" Rejecting the ludicrous advice of sibyls, astrologers and professional pedants, Panurge and company voyage to the New World (la Nouvelle France) in quest of "la Dive Bouteille" in the play's second part. The ship, captained by Jacques Cartier, takes them to Acadia, where the old French language and five centuries of folk stories have remained pure and eternally youthful, preserved by the cold salt air. It is in this earthly paradise that they encounter the woman who will be Panurge's faithful loving wife — none other than "La Sagouine"!

Panurge truly captures the spirit of *Gargantua* and *Pantagruel*, amusing us with its genealogy of giants (which includes Louis Cyr and Jos Monferrand), its pastiche of the "Chansons de geste," its satire of medieval superstitions and scholasticism. There are literay jokes and allusions to contemporary Canada, mixed

in with broad farce, anticlerical caricatures, and scatalogical humour. Maillet's command of language dazzles us with imitations of Rabelaisian narrative, numerous songs, pedantic discourses, puns, comic insults, and all kinds of verbal comedy. The fast pace never lets up as Pantagruel, Panurge, and Frère Jean encounter a host of hilarious characters during their "drôlatiques, horrifiques et épouvantables aventures." Rabelais himself would have enjoyed this wonderful adaptation of his work.

Marcien Ferland's *Les Batteux*, winner of the 1982 Prix Riel, is an ambitious work which paints a broad picture of life among Manitoba's French-speaking farmers at the time of the 1916 School Crisis. While the staged version of this historical musical comedy must be a very moving experience for Franco-Manitobans, the published text is reminiscent of formulaic historical melodramas à la Pixérécourt. All of the conventional elements are there: a pair of shy young lovers, a burlesque old couple, happy farmers singing folksongs and performing square dances, a large family sharing meals and evening prayers, adorable school children watched over by a wise old nun. Add to these standard ingredients passionate condemnations of an unjust law, rousing orations in defence of the Franco-Manitoban's right to teach French and preserve their cultural heritage, stirring speeches on the virtues of the Catholic religion, rural life and the teaching profession and the results are a nostalgic view of the past and a melodramatic presentation of the struggle of Manitoba's French-speaking minority against assimilation.

Ferland is very adept in his use of historical material and theatrical conventions. In *Les Batteux*, he combines elements of sentimental comedy, farce, bucolic, and nationalistic historical drama into a well structured whole. The impressive published version of the play includes a chronology of the 1916 School Crisis, a map of Franco-Manitoban towns, and numerous photos of the stage production filmed by the National Film Board.

In *Un Parc en automne* Louise Maheux-Forcier presents Marie and Jean, former lovers who meet by chance in the exact place of their last meeting forty years before. Then they were twenty-year-old music students passionately in love with each other and with the dream of finding fame and fortune in Paris. Unbeknownst to him, she was pregnant with his child; unbeknownst to her, he was already married and planning to go to Paris with his wife. After a life filled with disappointments, failures, loneliness, and regrets, he has come to live in the same retirement home (or is it a mental asylum?) as Marie. She tortures him by inventing various versions of her tragic past including an illegitimate child, mental illness, alcoholism, suicide attempts, and a disfiguring accident. When Jean finally recognizes Marie, he wants to atone for his actions by taking care of her for the rest of their lives. Romantic by nature, Marie nonetheless rejects the happily-ever-after ending to this unhappy love story. Although she wants him to love her again as she loves him still, she also wants revenge for her suffering. They will live together but the past will always stand between them, threatening to destroy their happiness.

Louise Maheux-Forcier wrote *Un Parc en automne* as a radio play and then reworked it for the stage. Despite the static structure of the dialogue and the hackneyed situation, the play succeeds because of the characterization of Marie. At times coquettish, sentimental, vulnerable, and poetic, at times cynical, ironic, and cruel, Marie seems lost in a private world of illusions fostered by alcohol, madness, and suffering. The dramatic interest of *Un Parc en automne* lies in Marie's

power to seduce Jean and the audience into that private world.

Like Marie and Jean, the four characters of Normand Chaurette's *La Société de Métis* also share a past haunted by a failed quest for artistic beauty, fame, and happiness. As in earlier plays, Chaurette creates a dramatic universe beyond the limits of reality wherein his eccentric cast can explore the meaning of the past. The play begins and ends in a small provincial museum housing the anonymous portraits of two women and two men, the élite "société de Métis." Slowly the four portraits come alive to reveal the mystery behind their nameless faces, what the Mona Lisa herself calls, "la vraie vie . . . de l'autre côté du miroir." Tired of watching tourists file by quickly on their way to see the museum's most famous work, "L'incendie du quartier Saint-Roch," the four characters divulge the internal flames which ravage their illusions. In seven scenes they return to the beautiful summer of 1954 spent together at Zoé Pé's manor overlooking the river at Métis-sur-Mer. Zoé Pé presides over the group, hiding her unhappiness and sense of personal failure behind the mask of the generous, gregarious, aristocratic hostess. Her guests include Casimir Flore, a bombastic firechief à la Ionesco; Octave Gredind, an angelic blind youth; and Pamela Dicksen, a young woman driven to alcoholism, insanity, and cruelty by an incestuous passion. Once Zoé Pé notices a neighbouring artist (ironically named Hector Joyeux) painting their portraits from afar, she becomes convinced that by purchasing them she can obtain self-knowledge, eternal happiness, and immortality. Zoé's desperate need to buy the portraits pushes the deranged Pamela Dicksen to kill the artist who had rejected numerous lavish offers. The play's final irony is that the murder is a futile act: before dying the artist had given the unsigned portraits to the Rimouski Museum where they will hang in eternal obscurity.

Not yet thirty years old, Normand Chaurette confirms the promise of his previous works in *La Société de Métis.* Adroit in his handling of conventional comic techniques (comedy of manners, character, words, and the absurd), he uses what seems to be a fanciful drawing room comedy to explore the ability of art to fill the tragic void of life and to relieve existential anguish. Chaurette brings new vigour to Quebec avant-garde theatre with his original vision, his wit, and his audacious dramatization of the unconscious imagination.

The only merit apparent in *Le Tir à blanc* lies in André Ricard's willingness to brave the attacks of drama critics and feminists alike. By insisting that his subject is the eternal question of relations between the sexes, Ricard pretends to retrace the "Carte du Tendre" drawn sensitively by Mlle de Scudéry and to rediscover the "suprise de l'amour" depicted charmingly by Marivaux. In the brief introduction, the dramatist also claims that *Le Tir à blanc* examines the violence and tension inherent in ambiguous male-female encounters since the advent of the sexual and women's liberation movements. This supposed updating of an old theme fails miserably.

Technically, the problem with Ricard's play is that the two parts, written a year apart, do not hold together. The first two scenes depict the rape of an upper-class suburban housewife by a postman. As the man taunts and torments his victim, she overcomes her initial anger and fear by admitting that she has fantasies about being raped by working-class men to compensate for her husband's failure to satisfy her sexually. In Ricard's misogynist fantasy, the victim calls out to the departing rapist, "Je vous aime!" The third scene offers a didactic analysis of the rape play and a general discussion of

modern sexual mores. The rapist is metamorphosed into a male theatre director and the woman into his wife's friend who hides her authorship of the work in question behind a male pseudonym. In this "impromptu," Ricard's playwright defends her play by mocking Quebec feminist plays on rape and attacking the women's movement. Although Ricard denies that any of the characters speak for him directly, the male director seems to express the play's overriding purpose when he says "Ce qu'elle exprime, c'est le sentiment de frustration des hommes — de certains hommes — devant la révolution des moeurs." It is regrettable the *Le Tir à blanc* expresses this understandable frustration with such virulence and violence that the battle-of-the-sexes theme degenerates into an apology for rape.

JANE B. MOSS

CLAPP-TRAP

CLAIRE MOWAT, *The Outport People*. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart.

WILLIAM ROWE, *Clapp's Rock*. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart.

PART WAY THROUGH *The Outport People* Claire Mowat is daring (or perhaps naïve) enough to record this conversation with an old Newfoundland fisherman:

> "So what's your old man up to today?" Ezra asked of Farley, who was thirty years his junior.
>
> "Oh, he's hard at work. Writing his book."
>
> "Tellin' lies again, is he?"
>
> I protested that Farley only wrote the gospel truth.
>
> "Those writer fellas only tells lies," he persisted but with a grin that was part mischief and part challenge.
>
> "He'll be tellin' lies about we people one day," Ezra ventured.

Very astute is Uncle Ezra, although he probably never knew that "Farley's woman" was also making notes for a "bunch of lies" as well — to be published some twenty years later. They are not, of course, "lies" of a factual sort (though Uncle Ezra might think so), but of a metaphorical — the kind which result from a failure to appreciate the *ethos* of a place — and they reside in the misrepresentation of a people by pretending to know *all* after a brief acquaintance with a *few*, or to know their hearts after but a casual examination of their habits.

Compounding the misrepresentation is Claire Mowat's decision to write what she calls a "fictional memoir" (which seems, according to syntactical logic, to be an oxymoron). She thereby confuses the reader, for it becomes impossible, unless one has actually shared her experience, to tell what is imaginatively created (i.e., fictional) and what really happened (i.e., memory). This device may be very convenient for the author, who can disclaim any truth the reader might infer, but it is decidedly unfair to the uninitiated reader, especially since the author would like the book to be accepted as a legitimate sociological commentary on a quaint place and people. It can, in fact, be read as nothing more than an idiosyncratic excursion into memory, which is a pity because Claire Mowat is indeed a very talented writer, is rarely condescending, has a good sense of humour, a keen eye for natural detail and is highly entertaining. This would have been a better book — and more important — had it been either a straightforward documentary or, quite the reverse, an unpolluted personal memoir: the diversions into quasi-sociological analyses and the attempt to fictionalize memory are failures.

Clapp's Rock, on the other hand, is a brilliant success because its author fully understands the nature of his "lies"; they are of the "bunkum" kind — bunkum to

expose bunkum — and he therefore never misleads his readers into expecting anything more than a fictional satire. There will, of course, be some perverse enough to seek the real-life counterparts of Percy Clapp or to read the novel as fictional autobiography (for Rowe was, after all, a minister in Joey Smallwood's cabinet), but they will do so only because they choose to, not because Rowe invites such a reading. Though the novel deals with Newfoundland politics (which involves more claptrap than most), a Joey-like Prime Minister, and contains many specific references to real political problems, it successfully transcends the local and parochial: it is not a mere comic depiction of Joey Smallwood or of the peculiarities of Newfoundland politics, but a cleverly crafted, intelligent satire on politics in general — on human ambition, gullibility, and pride. And it is, I think, as good as a novel, in both conception and execution, as any recently produced in Canada.

Apart from his remarkable story-telling ability, his unforgettable invention of character, his understanding of the bittersweet allure of politics and his trenchant wit, what still stands out in this first novel about a young man's rise to political power are Rowe's confident control of the satirical mode) which only occasionally degenerates into burlesque) and his superb depiction of the bathetic:

> Clapp had said on his telecast that the government was so much in favour of a fisherman's union that he would be seconding one of the most prominent and senior labour leaders in the land for the job of helping to organize it properly. He now told his young colleagues that he'd already received offers from a dozen union officials and had narrowed the field down to two. "Who," he asked, "will I choose for it: Cook or Raff? Cook is the better man by far, but it boils down to the question of what slogan sounds best: 'Pick up your hook and follow Cook', or 'Pick up your gaff and follow Raff.' "

We are indeed trapped by Percy's clap. And Uncle Ezra would love it.

R. G. MOYLES

WILDCAT

PAUL ST. PIERRE, *Smith and Other Events.* Doubleday, $19.95.

PAUL ST. PIERRE IS NOT A novelist. He belongs to a much older breed of cat — *wild*cat, actually — called the storyteller. He tells a tale. The very raw material of his tale he has gathered by travelling up the backside of creation, and down again, in the company of men and women whose lifestyle is somewhat more rough-hewn than the stuff that most of today's novels are made of.

Like some of the wildlife inhabiting the backwoods that he writes about with such rugged grace, St. Pierre's fiction is a remarkable healthy specimen of an endangered species: the man's read. The more subtle nuances of the heart leave too faint a spoor for him to follow into the tangle of Chilcotin country lives. What draws him to the trail are the large and quite erratic tracks of men like Smith, rancher and registered human being. Sometimes the author fetches up on the watering hole of an entire herd of individualists: the Namko Cattlemen's Association. The glory of these occasional attempts to organize the intrinsically disordered is that the members enhance the consequences of a shared confusion. The result: the very special, wry grin evoked by a St. Pierre yarn.

The ranchers and trappers epitomized in these stories — half of which were originally televised as part of the immensely popular Canadian Broadcasting Corporation series "Cariboo Country" — regard their formidable environment as God's idea of a practical joke. The only compatible means of survival is to accept

the hardship as a contribution to the Almighty's very dry sense of humour.

St. Pierre's characters are heroes in search of an epic and finding farce, or melodrama. Don Quixotes in a country where even the most aggressive windmill wouldn't last a season.

Of these star-crossed champions of the fenceless, the most poignant, and delightful, are the author's native people. (Yes, the book does include "The Education of Phyllisteen.") Ol' Antoine, the unpredictable patriarch, shows us one more time why he has attained the happy hunting ground of classic characterization. Few, if any, white authors have been able to get so close to the Canadian Indian as St. Pierre, without spooking the quarry: the total vulnerability conjoined with a spirit that is indomitable.

A St. Pierre story rescues the redman from the bathos that is all too close to reality. He returns him his self-respect, politely, and without asking for a receipt. And he does so by letting him converse with the white with exactly enough knowledge of the English language to define fully the fork of the tongue.

Indian or cattleman or drifter, however, what makes the portrait bold and memorable is its being sized to the setting. The Chilcotin, thanks to these stories, is now identified in our minds with the ideal milieu in Canada to bring out the best and the worst in man or beast, a richly diversified terror, compared to which the simple demands of the desert or the deep blue set amount almost to mollycoddling.

No doubt creature comforts have mitigated circumstances since the days when the author first experienced them from the viewpoint of a range pony's saddle. But the stories respond demonstrably to the theorem that generosity of soul, and the dimension of laughter, expand in direct ratio to the number of acres required to sustain the body. Wit is urban. Humour needs room to romp.

St. Pierre's laconic smile is central to his style. To elaborate slightly on Buffon, *le style, c'est l'homme du pays.* The identification is strong enough for the author to have gone to the extraordinary, almost grotesque, length of becoming member of parliament for the region. He clearly felt strongly enough about the plight of the people he wrote about to try to do something to improve their lot. A sad though understandable defection from duty. The House of Commons is no place for a person truly sensitive to human needs. To most MP's a quarter-horse is something found in a *boucherie chevaline.*

Subsequently, of more recent date, Paul St. Pierre has resigned from the British Columbia Police Commission, reportedly to devote himself to his writing. Not a moment too soon. Smith and his staghorn ilk have become restless, waiting for one more roundup before winter sets in.

ERIC NICOL

FIBRE/OPTICS

Showing West: Three Prairie Docu-Dramas, ed. by Diane Bessai and Don Kerr. NeWest Press, $8.95.

THIS VOLUME, the fifth in NeWest Press' Prairie Performance series, contains three plays: Theatre Passe Muraille's collective creation *The West Show, Far As The Eye Can See,* the product of a collaboration between Passe Muraille and Rudy Wiebe, and Rex Deverell's *Medicare!* The editors' subtitle indicates the rather loose net in which all three can be caught, but their foreword enlarges on this to make clear that what they have in common are three concerns: to reflect political life in the broad sense of the public dimension of people's lives, to be faithful to the essence of regional experience and history, and to forge a vital connection

with a specific audience. The foreword provides a concise account of the origin and development of this type of theatre in the West, placing it in the context of the overwhelmingly non-regional nature of the offerings at the large subsidized subscription theatres misleadingly called "Regional."

The book's value is increased by the extremely useful introductory material provided by the people who created the plays, Paul Thompson, Rudy Wiebe, and Rex Deverell. The first two are particularly valuable for providing the best available accounts of the working methods of Theatre Passe Muraille under Thompson's direction. It may seem odd that two out of three of these Prairie plays were the work of a Toronto theatre company, but there is good reason for that. *The West Show* was created by Theatre Passe Muraille in Saskatoon in the summer of 1975, and while there, the company began its fruitful association with 25th Street House Theatre. The recent history of prairie theatre would be very different without this link between Toronto and Saskatoon.

From a slightly different perspective, the emphasis on Passe Muraille is justified by the inclusion of *The West Show*, since it adds one more play to the small number of the company's productions from the Thompson years that have been preserved. Passe Muraille plays rarely originated as scripts, as they were developed collectively and existed only as a sort of short-term oral tradition as long as the show played. With very few exceptions, e.g., *The Farm Show*, no attempt was made to record them. So the presence of *The West Show* is justified both because it was a significant influence on the direction taken by prairie theatre and because it provides what Thompson calls "a guide to the Passe Muraille house style."

The three plays represent radically different solutions to the problems of producing drama that reflects the indigenous life of the region. *The West Show* is self-reflexive; it includes the process of creating the show as part of the show. The aim of the process was the same as the aim of *The Farm Show*: "to capture the fibre" of the region. A lot of things fit into that loose open-ended concept of documentary. If the collective made it, and it seemed to them to reflect the spirit of the place, it could stay, whether it was factually based or not. One substantial portion of the play is based on a short story by Rudy Wiebe, while another is virtually a transcript of a trial in Northern Saskatchewan. There are songs, there is the entire history of the Riel rebellions told from the point of view of a fictional Métis matriarch, there is a bit of family legend re-enacted by Eric Peterson, whose ancestor sounds a lot like Billy Bishop, and so on. The play is a patchwork quilt of scenes in a variety of conventions and covering an enormous range of relations to fact. As the editors observe, it is a play in which the dominant theme is the Western spirit of co-operation while underneath is a recurring image of frustration and defeat. In other words, it has the qualities of Theatre Passe Muraille at its best — a loose episodic Sunday-school-concert structure which is surprisingly whole and resonant.

Far As the Eye Can See is literally docu-drama, a hybrid of the sort produced by CBC-TV in the "For the Record" series: a fictionalized account of a timely issue, scrupulously researched, containing the odd appearance of a "real" person to remind us that this isn't merely fiction. The play is an account of the struggle between the farmers of the Dodds-Roundhill area and Calgary Power over whether a fifty-five-square-mile area is to be farmed or strip-mined for its coal. The problem is left unresolved at the end as Peter Lougheed, "the perfect deus ex

machina," is lowered to the stage in the bucket of an immense coal scoop to announce that the project will not proceed at this time.

A hybrid of this sort has to be very good to compensate for the loss of specific features of documentary theatre that make it address its chosen audience with such power. There is a spark that jumps between audience and performers when the play reflects real people and what they said and did. Rex Deverell illustrates this when he comments on the performance of *Medicare!* in the Trianon Ballroom in Regina: "The Globe performs in the round and during more than one performance the audience could watch the real participants watching themselves portrayed on stage in a room where the same battle had been waged eighteen years before." Also a play solidly based on fact has the freedom to frankly admit that it is theatre, a freedom which permits freewheeling play with conventions.

Far As the Eye Can See is wanting in these respects. The fictional characters are quite appealing, and their conflicts bring out many sides of the issue, but they lack the extra dimension we sense when we know that the performance is reflecting real people. Playing with conventions is here reduced to a contrast between the straightforward naturalism of the main story and Brechtian interruptions by a trio consisting of Chief Crowfoot, Princess Louise Alberta, and William Aberhart, that didn't work very satisfactorily on stage. Although it is an entertaining and lively play, it may not have been the best choice for this anthology, particularly since it was published a few years back by NeWest, and its inclusion now is a matter of getting it back in print, not of rescuing it from oblivion. A script by Theatre Network or Catalyst Theatre Society, both of Edmonton, might have been a better choice.

Medicare!, in contrast, sticks to the recorded words and deeds of the medicare controversy in Saskatchewan from 1959 to 1962, augmenting them with the recollections of participants in the events. The one major liberty is the creation of two fictional doctors, one pro, one anti; however, they are clearly identified as composite figures.

Deverell has dealt very interestingly with the problem of theatricalizing primary source material, much of which is print. Although some of his solutions seem rather obvious — an exchange of letters is dramatized by having their authors dictate them to secretaries — others make imaginative use of the translation of primary source into theatre. For example, a dramatization of the anti-medicare pamphlets which flooded the province features a dear old family physician whose fervent plea for the preservation of the personal relationship between doctor and patient is suddenly revealed to be a rehearsal under the watchful direction of an imported P.R. man. As the rehearsal proceeds, the lines this Norman Rockwell figure is given to speak become more and more scurrilous and more overtly right-wing.

The test of documentary theatre with this degree of adherence to documents is whether something worth saying emerges out of the accumulated heap of facts. As Rick Salutin pointed out, in *This Magazine* (1977), "the resort to a 'documentary' style . . . to various kinds of assurance that this really happened . . . can often be attempts to avoid having to stipulate what is 'really' real, i.e., essential, in the situations being depicted." As Deverell has assembled the facts, they emphasize the medicare crisis as a clash of two entrenched ideologies, free-enterprise and social-democratic, over how to pay for health care. Both sets of proponents face a radical challenge to their power and to the concept of health care they both take for granted from the commu-

nity health clinics which sprang up during the emergency. The agreement the two sides ultimately reach virtually extinguishes this radical new initiative. So the play invites us to look through the facts to the ideologies behind the facts, and to look at them long and hard.

Altogether *Showing West* is a very satisfying book, not only because it gets more worthwhile Canadian plays in print (don't stop, NeWest), but because it surrounds them with material that succeeds in presenting the plays not as objects but as events in the making of a people's culture.

ROBERT C. NUNN

HEARTFELT

From the Heart: Folk Art in Canada. McClelland & Stewart in co-operation with The National Museum of Man, National Museums of Canada, $39.95.

FROM THE HEART: FOLK ART IN CANADA records the exhibition assembled by the National Museum of Man and funded by the Allstate Foundation of Canada. Its contents provide impressively various evidence of creativity in and devotion to arts and crafts from quilting to painting and from wood to metal-working. The collection began in the twenties: "When Marius Barbeau brought the first pieces of folk art to the National Museum in the 1920's, his intention was to direct the attention of Canadians toward the art of the people and to rescue what he regarded as the last vestiges of the traditional arts before they died out."

These selections from what is now a very large collection are divided into three categories, "Reflection," "Commitment," and "Fantasy," the first dealing with artifacts that represent aspects of ordinary life, the second with expressions of loyalty or devotion, individual or communal, and the third the happy spirit of play, often comic, sometimes fantastic, erotic, or grotesque. The final section of the book features four contemporary folk-artists and their work: Nelphas Prévost, who works in wood, lavishly adorning everything from fiddles to hammer handles; Sam Spencer, who carves pictures with all manner of scenes and motifs; Frank Kocevar, who paints pictures of his immigrant past and of his Christian devotion; and George Cockayne, whose strange and often funny wood-carved and painted faces and figures are an irrepressively lively gallery in themselves.

Vision, patience, and exuberance — these are the three qualities that shout from every page of this handsomely produced book. Whereas some of the impact of the collection is inevitably lost in the photographic process, much is left, to amuse, impress, and delight us. Adele Wiseman, in *Old Woman At Play* wrote of her mother, a folk-artist of rare gifts, whose works taught art as communication, imitation, mediation, reorganization, re-creation, integration, innovation, interpretation, reconciliation, and "Art, above all, as Celebration." All those messages shine forth from this collection as well.

CLARA THOMAS

EXTRAPOLATIONS

D. M. FRASER, *The Voice of Emma Sachs.* Arsenal Editions/Pulp Press, $6.95.

ROSALIND MACPHEE, *What Place Is This?* Coach House, $8.50.

GEORGE KENNY, *Indians Don't Cry.* N.C. Press, n.p.

IN THESE THREE BOOKS, we have three radically different trends in recent Canadian writing sharply defined. D. M. Fraser's *The Voice of Emma Sachs* is a prose collection, a "suite" of absurdist extrapolations from contemporary perspectives on and philosophies of life. Rosalind MacPhee, on the other hand, joins in the currently popular attempt to

recreate our past; in *What Place Is This?* she extrapolates from historical fact in a poetic record of a woman's geographical and psychological journey to Dawson City during the Klondike gold rush. Finally, in *Indians Don't Cry*, George Kenny extrapolates from his own experience to define, in a collection of poems and short short-stories, the traumas and pitfalls of the Indian's attempt to cope with the white world.

In "Postlude: A Note on the Reason for Certain Things in this Book," Fraser explains that *The Voice of Emma Sachs* is meant to be "a species of love-letter, a celebration as well as a criticism of our common lot": "if the theme itself is bleak the counterpoint is merry." Well, the theme is, to put it mildly, "bleak," and is counterpointed by a method of presentation and a surreal image of the world which is arresting, if not always "merry."

Fraser arranges his tales symphonically, beginning with "Prelude and Theme" and ending with his "Postlude" and (explication). The unifying principle of the volume is atmospheric rather than narrative: though the figure of Angus Asher — disaffected artist-critic-teacher-veteran — makes appearances in several stories, the world inhabited in each is different. In "Prelude and Theme," as a young journalist, Asher returns to his hometown and watches a concert in the park. His thoughts consist of what are to be the clichés of Fraser's fictions: "Dignity consists of staying put where the shame is"; chidlhood is "no more than an ill-timed rehearsal for old age"; the Automobile is "an Alien God imported from afar"; the town is "a veritable sink of refined depravity." And Asher himself, in application of *nontology* inspired by boredom and discomfort, progresses steadily toward the rejection of the place, himself, and the world which will be typical of Fraser's "heroes." In the next story, Asher, his friend Petrov, and their wives attempt to cope with a peace which is "an hallucination" by means of narcotics, recrimination, Jungian psychology, and suicide, only to find that "we are the only veterans we know, and we may be the only survivors." In "Send Not To Know" he is a creative writing teacher counselling his charges, "How we accept the concept of Character . . . depends solely on our willingness to accept or refuse extinction." In "Eschatology," the theme is made explicit as an anonymous narrator describes his discovery of "a soft-core apocalypse . . . , suitable for family viewing, parental guidance optional."

This is the tone and subject of the book as a whole — its "eschatology" — summed up in the title story, the apology of an "impersonator" who is (and is not) Emma Sachs, and who is sustained "through uncounted hours of debauchery and derision, sober hope and mortal fear, the whole network of action we enact to buy our language a good night's sleep in the dictionary," by the fact that "Emma Sachs, at least, was capable of a song." Expression in this world is the closest approximation of the "celebration" Fraser promises in his "Postlude"; endurance is the closest thing to affirmation.

In some of the stories, we almost recognize the world described. In some, the pessimism is characterized by a sleight of hand which is self-indulgent, but enjoyable because of Fraser's flair, his obvious delight in providing congruent detail: in "Eschatology," the media caters to the new nihilism with books like *The Sensuous Thanologist*; in "Elephantiasis," a couple installs an elephant in their family room as "an exercise in faith." However, there is a fine line between absurdism and absurdity, which unfortunately is crossed at times, and leapt across with total abandon in the free association tirade of the title sequence, where, paradoxically, Fraser is most intent on defining his thesis.

A book with a much more universal appeal is Rosalind MacPhee's *What Place Is This?* On the most obvious level, it is extremely attractive: MacPhee has gone out of her way to emphasize the historical basis of her story by including 27 photographs of the route to Dawson, the town itself, and, of course, the Palace Grand Opera House. The book opens with the programme of the Grand's opening show and an article "based on an actual newspaper report in *The Klondike Nugget*, Dawson, Y.T. July 22, 1899" (with minor changes made to accommodate MacPhee's fiction). The sequence of poems is presented as a sort of documentary fiction; the poetry accordingly is terse and direct.

Jessica and Malcolm Bishop are shown travelling the route from Skagway to Dawson City in the company of the troupe of performers who are to open Charlie Meadow's Palace Grand. Both husband and wife have suffered by contact with the land through which they pass, and their journey necessitates that they relive the traumas that threaten their relationship. Malcolm made his fortune but lost an arm in "this place." In his memory the pain, and the sense that his life's direction has also been lost, return:

> Sun through mist,
> Malcolm sees his arm
> on the crest of a wave.
> The arm points. Makes signs.
> Is taken by the river
> in its silky teeth.
> Is sucked down.
>
> ("The Rapids")

Jessica's wounds are less obvious, masked by withdrawal and her addiction to laudanum: she grieves for their son Alastair, who died in the same accident that took her husband's arm. She yearns for oblivion — for death, or for the escape experienced when she submerged herself in an operatic role. As the journey progresses, she increasingly lives in visions of her past triumphs as a singer, only partially recognizing the faces and shapes of an unpleasant reality:

> She closes her eyes.
> Lies back. The morning grows with
> laudanum.
> Shapes take their form.
> How could their presence
> escape her? These confidences, loyalties of
> the stage.
> These masks and costumes of disguise.
> These rehearsals
> of the condemned and the mad.
>
> ("Wolverine Creek")

Even as Malcolm reaches out for life, in the form of Ruby, an actress in Meadow's troupe, Jessica leans after their dead son. An invitation to sing in Meadow's opening (at the conclusion of an opera entitled, appropriately, *La Siege Inferno*) offers her an opportunity for a final triumph and she insists upon performing though she is seriously ill. In "Finale," her dreams and reality merge as, surrounded by the demonic figures of the operatic cast, she accepts her applause and collapses.

This is a very carefully constructed book. MacPhee uses place names (Hell's Gate Slough, Devil's Crossing), the cast of Meadow's extravaganza and their performance to parallel and reflect the emotional deterioration of her heroine. At first, however, there seems to be a marked disjunction between the historical frame and the description of the journey, which focuses so closely on Jessica's deterioration. Initial sequences seem prosaic and disconnected, and the connections come slowly because we know so little about the Bishops and their connection with the elaborately authenticated story of Meadow's theatre with which the book has opened. Then, with Malcolm's memory, the tale comes clear and restrained emotions flood out creating a correspondence between the physical and emo-

tional journeys which is poetically strong and extremely well sustained. A good book, perhaps better on a second reading.

Finally, George Kenny's *Indians Don't Cry*. This collection of poetry and prose lacks the philosophical superstructure of Fraser's book and the narrative and imagistic flow of MacPhee's, but would be worth attentiton if only because it presents the native perspective on the meeting of white and native cultures. Kenny not only meets the expectations and prejudices (overt or subconscious) of his readers by presenting alternate images, but calls forth the stereotyped impressions of the white-dominated society head-on and immediately. The first two poems in the book are "Rain Dance" and "Rubbie at Central Park": one reflecting with bitter humour on the degradation of Indian ritual as the "modern Indian" dances "into the security of pocketbooks / of the enriching americans"; the other indicating the vicious circle of rejection and hypocrisy that leads "some of Winnipeg's / thirty thousand Indians" to find "acceptance / with a 10 fl. oz. bottle of rubbing / alcohol." The third item, a short story, counters by answering a native stereotype: "Indians don't cry. That's bullshit, Frank Littledear cursed as tears streamed down his broad, weather-scarred face." The loss of children to the residential schools (and, eventually, to the white world for which those schools train them, if imperfectly), and the loss of a wife to alcoholism — these are things to make any man cry.

Most of the stories are focused on young people who have been taken away from the isolated communities of Northwest Ontario and sent to school. Away from their homes for most of the year, they are caught between loyalty to their families and their culture and the attractions of rock music, blue jeans, affluence, and independence. The decision to go to high school or to take a job is also necessarily a decision to desert Indian ways — and a measure of their own identity:

> I don't know this October stranger
> that left a love of three years
> behind without a
> kiss;
> this autumn stranger that knew
> his 14 year old sister would be
> left all alone in a boarding school
> and yet migrated south —
>
> I don't know this October stranger.
> ("I Don't Know This
> October Stranger")

The resulting isolation can result in prejudice ("Dirty Indian") or an exhilarating discovery of individual pride ("Track Star"), failure and alcoholism ("Broken, I Knew A Man"), or assimilation ("Just Another Bureaucrat").

Technically, Kenny's writing is rough in places. In the poem "Death Bird," for example, he includes a long parenthesis, explaining "an Ojibway belief was that / anyone hearing the death-bird / and not ending its life / would have a near relative die." The mixture of lyric and prose explanation is awkward and distracting. In some of the prose pieces, strings of adjectives wear thin. However, there is also a refreshing colloquialism in his poetry which suits the often stark pictures drawn, and an immediacy and directness in his almost invariably open-ended narratives.

ELIZABETH POPHAM

BATTLE LINES

GEORGE BOWERING, *The Mask in Place: Essays on Fiction in North America*. Turnstone, $9.95.

ROBERT KROETSCH, *Essays*, eds. Frank Davey and bpNichol. *Open Letter*, Fifth Series, No. 4, $4.50.

JOHN MOSS, ed., *The Canadian Novel: Modern Times*. NC Press, n.p.

EACH OF THESE THREE BOOKS has been published with the lofty purpose of

changing the way we approach literature. Taken together, they draw battle lines between modernism and post-modernism, with Bowering and Kroetsch behind a scramble of barbed wire and overturned trucks, and Moss, heavily armed with horse-drawn cannon, wearing a red coat and marching down Main Street. A reviewer must attempt to avoid the built-in ambush, and to be fair should state straightaway his own position. I find much post-modernist literature and criticism to be pretentious drivel; I'm often bored by modernists. I'm eclectic, in my own work I employ the ideas and approaches I find useful. Will I win a Canada Council Peace Prize?

Bowering's *The Mask in Place* is a collection of thirteen essays that lead "from pre-realism through realism to post-realism." He claims they are only observations, and "will not lead to daylight." Post-modernist, even in the introduction! But all rebels must wear blinkers to avoid seeing the worth of what they are rebelling against (all armies, too). This irony leads Bowering to claim, for example, that fables are a form of rebellion against realism, and therefore to praise — briefly — Hugh Hood, Leon Rooke, and Jack Hodgins. I suppose these writers do not demonstrate enough of that Coach House "linguistic activity" to satisfy Bowering. Of course, his sympathies lie, as always, with Stein, Nichol, Ondaatje, Young, Kroetsch, etc. In short, with deconstructionists. (For an opposing view, see Hugh Hood, *Trusting the Tale*, ECW Press, 1983.)

As is Bowering's poetry and fiction, *Mask* is uneven. He does not pull punches in his denunciation of modernists/realists — as in his left hooks to MacLennan and his dismissal of *Ulysses* because its structure is predictable. His praise, of Young and Nichol, for example, is often generalized and overwritten. There are here interesting essays on the work of Audrey Thomas, Sheila Watson, Kerouac, Stein, and Douglas Woolf, all of whom are shown to be committed to post-modernist techniques in various degrees, and to disbelieve in the modernist/realist strictures of time and space. Strategically placed among these essays are others, more general ones, e.g., "Modernism Could Not Last Forever." The already converted will recognize the totems; the modernists will recoil; the student — the *good* student — should find the book fascinating.

The point of this book is not to be found in its individual parts. As a whole, it challenges ideas of what both fiction and criticism may be — just as post-realist fiction challenges, at its best, every accepted truth. More than anything else, *Mask* is a book about contemporary Canadian writing's quest for recognition and for a criticism of its own. As such, and despite its flaws, it should be required reading.

It is interesting that *Mask* relies on its content much more than on its form to make a case for post-modernism, whereas Kroetsch's *Essays* fuses form and content in the best traditional manner. See what I mean about ironies? *Essays* is written in the language and style that the book itself expounds, basically an "archaeological" approach to life and art in which bits of information and language are placed side by side and it is as much the reader's as the writer's task to ascertain meaning (I hasten to add that this style in criticism seems much easier to grasp and appreciate than it is in several of Kroetsch's poems). There is in Kroetsch's aesthetic a distrust of inherited story alongside recognition of the importance of the oral tradition and of that archaeology of language and narrative. The paradoxes inherent in this approach are resolved by making archaeology the centrepiece: use of fragments of story, life, time, etc., allows Kroetsch and his fellow

post-modernists to deconstruct or "uncreate" what traditionalists would accept as truth. It is difficult to argue against the success of Kroetsch's two major examples: *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid* and *Coming Through Slaughter*. Or, for that matter, against the obvious truth and utility of saying that "Archaeology allows for discontinuity. It allows for layering. It allows for imaginative speculation." I had thought even Dickens did that, though.

It is the great argument against post-modernism that this kind of approach can so easily get out of hand; eventually, everything written down can be deemed worthwhile simply because it adheres to certain principles. Some recent reputations have been built in just this way. Thus, we have so much post-modernist nonsense in poetry and fiction, and in criticism. Some of it is here, too, where random thoughts are often disguised as the treasures from a dig. That is where the reader's archaeology must begin — as it always has. He will find soon enough that Kroetsch can be, at times, on the mark. This entire archaeological approach is useful; but I still think art needs a good measure of control — criticism does too. Sort the artist from the craftsman and the dilletante, the unique vase from the imitation and the botched job.

Like *Masks, Essays* should be required reading if only for the vociferous way in which it makes its points and because students need to think about those points. For Kroetsch fans and scholars, the book is a gold mine (and includes several pictures of him and his place, from childhood to the present). Kroetsch is more a cult figure in the West than in the East. Is that why, last summer, in an interview promoting *Alibi*, he told the *Toronto Star* that he is "not a post-modernist," but just "a storyteller?" More ironies?

I've said that both *Masks* and *Essays* should be required reading. If Bowering and Kroetsch had their way, I suspect much of the series edited by John Moss on the Canadian novel would not be read, let alone required. Certainly this one, *Modern Times*, which includes essays on several of the realists and naturalists who are designated targets of post-modernists, e.g., Callaghan, MacLennan, Buckler, Mitchell. Then again, Smart and Watson are here, too.

Modern. Moss defines the misnomer as "a transitional phase which vigorously resists coherent definition" between the time and the style of Richardson and Munro. This kind of fiction is characterized by "the precepts of objectivity, impersonality, realism, rationalism, and linguistic neutrality." So many dinosaurs, Bowering and Kroetsch would say. The reviewer, as I have said, sees the built-in ambush.

It seems to me that these "dinosaurs" should be approached in the best academic manner: as representatives of modes that are no longer valid in themselves, but which contemporary fiction writers and critics must dissect if they are to know their own history. They may still stray into self-indulgence — as both Bowering and Kroetsch have done recently — but they will know where their art has been. Any of the essays in this book may be used to attack or support the moderns, depending on the reader's approach. Some of them have appeared elsewhere and some have been written specifically for Moss. I found the ones on Smart and (surprise) Callaghan to be seminal, and to go down most easily.

The war continues. Universities differ in their policy: moderns here; never there. Great books are usually old books; revolutions are maintained by purges.

ROBERT BILLINGS

NEO-MODERNISTS

E. F. DYCK, *The Mossbank Canon*. Turnstone, n.p.

DAVID HALLIDAY, *The Black Bird*. Porcupine's Quill, $7.95.

bp NICHOL, *Continental Trance*. Oolichan, $6.95.

ANDREW SUKNASKI, *Montage for an Interstellar Cry*. Turnstone, n.p.

J. MICHAEL YATES, *Fugue Brancusi*. Sono Nis, $5.95.

IT IS BY NOW a commonplace that the Modernist writer, faced with the breakup of any social and cultural consensus, became acutely aware of the complexity, relativity, and subjectivity of his experience. Art had to respond to the randomness of experience either by imitating its incoherence and flux, or by imposing a form onto it thereby giving it some sort of meaning or order however fleeting those might be. At the centre of Modernism, consequently, was the preoccupation with unity, form and control versus openness, randomness, scepticism and a distrust of narrative idioms. What necessarily followed was an unremitting self-consciousness in the artist's relationship to his own creations.

Five recent books of poetry, each containing a long or "serial" poem, qualify as Neo-Modernist in that they seem to be addressing these characteristically Modernist concerns while adapting a variety of strategies. Four of the five poets look to another medium for an organizing and unifying principle for their material. E. F. Dyck and J. Michael Yates attempt to create poetic forms analogous to those in music as their titles indicate — canon and fugue. Andrew Suknaski calls his poem a montage and a collage, and David Halliday's title refers to the film *The Maltese Falcon* from which he has borrowed a voice-over (verbal) pictures technique. The musical forms are the most unifying and cohesive and thus the most strictly limiting and potentially artificial. The freer movements of montage and film can be more "organic" and self-creating or governed from within; however, they run the risk of lapsing into solipism and/or obscurity. Examples of the pitfalls and triumphs can be found in these books.

E. F. Dyck has designed a very strict form for his poem about a Chinese immigrant to Western Canada named Jong. Each of the sixty-four stanzas contains six lines and each line is either *yang* ("unbroken, virile, active, nominative, indicative") or *yin* ("broken, muliebral, passive, imperative or subjunctive, prepositional") based on the form of the *I Ching* hexagrams. On the facing page opposite each stanza is an ideogram which presumably acts as a gloss on the stanza in a variety of ways. The chronological development of Jong's life is compared to that of Mao Tse Tung so that Dyck feels both form and content create a "series of contrapuntal variations" and repetitions as in a musical canon. Into this strict, complicated, and demanding mould is poured a documentary in relatively prosaic language. Dyck hopes that the *I Ching* forms will "provide a resonance otherwise lacking from [his] telling of a particular story." (All these quotations come from the notes in the book itself.) That "otherwise lacking" is troublesome. The unity of the work depends upon precision of form, and a chronological narrative. The "canon" form holds the stanzas together tightly. Can form provide "resonance" quite apart from style? In this "experiment" it does not seem to be enough. The rise and decline parallels in each story, the political and racial overtones, the themes of nation-building, compromise and lost dreams are all engaging enough, but the pavillion constructed to hold the material, however pretty, still seems to be imposed artificially for no intrinsic reason.

There are some very successful stanzas, such as the tenth through the twelfth, but too often the dissonance between form and language is more of a distraction than a part of the themes themselves.

J. Michael Yates' *Fugue Brancusi* is more successful at integrating form and style. Yates admires the fugue form because it "is a closed system of openings whose end vanishes into its beginning." This long poem has three movements, each movement containing statements and variations which pick up earlier statements. Also each movement contains six sections of fourteen epigrammatic lines each. The sections establish a limited number of motifs (either a word or image cluster) which are repeated in later sections and movements. Most of the lines are end-stopped but they are open to a variety of meanings all of which investigate the same themes: fixed forms of word and art versus the flux of time and experience, illumination of meaning versus overpowering silence, and similar Modernist concerns. The repeated motifs empty into each other and pick up new tones in rich and stimulating harmony. Words such as photograph, firefly, hourglass, orrery, rainlight, law, word, whale, nightgown, and a handful of others give the text a pulse very close to the repetitions in a fugue.

> Photograph of a man standing by his word.
> Word and man are under arrest.
> No men exit the mouths of the word.

Much later:

> I am briefly whaling through the
> photograph
> In sombre frolic. Always I am between
> illuminations
> When the shutter of the camera guillotines.

There is always a sense of form on the edge of improvisation in the poem and, of course, that is essential to Yates' themes. Meaning grows out of form, so the poem is ultimately more satisfying than *The Mossbank Canon.*

David Halliday's *The Black Bird* is a far more loosely constructed series than either of the other two. There are short "newsreels," diary excerpts, monologues, an interview, profiles involving people associated with *The Maltese Falcon,* even illustrations presumably by the author. The general direction which these fragments take is from public image to private self. There is always the nagging suspicion, of course, that all of the voices are personal for the author and that this extra dimension is supposed to give the poem richness and depth. What happens is that the poem makes far too many demands on the reader. Much of the book is prose straining to be poetry in a kind of Sam Spade monotone which ultimately becomes boring.

Andrew Suknaski avoids boring his reader by an energetic display of versatility. His poem is very difficult as well, but the montage of myths, historical events, personal anecdotes, characters who speak in accents, incantations and dreams, is so wild that the reader is driven forward by the process of the poem creating itself. The poet and his friends mahzahkahzah, gallagher, and mikeodin, all sound

> the cry
> challenging
> the tyranny of abyss
> the cry
> setting the cadence of all
> subsequent cries
> or munch's *scream.*

Each one has his own strategy and tactics. The author's response might best be summed up in part four:

> suknatskyj listening to what
> the dry grass murmurs
> in vernacular of wind
> attuned
> to memory
> coming clear
> suknatskyj gazing beyond light
> on the edge
> of his father's face where Putan

or Stryboh
keep
        their mute
        secrets.

If Herbert Read's distinction between "organic" and "abstract" form is at all valid, then clearly Suknaski is after the organic — i.e., "the form imposed on poetry by the laws of its own origination," without consideration of traditional forms. The usual Modernists traits are present and in tact: existential angst, the need to assert meaning into the void, a self-consciousness about the limitations of art to do so, a look at history as an alternative, and the consequent drop into solipsism with the hope of emerging into mysticism on the other side. Suknaski's versatility in modulating tone, in abrupt shifts from the cosmic to the local, far distant to very near, myth to personal anecdote, succeeds in creating a genuine montage of pieces held together by both style and content.

What makes this work new is its explicit playfulness. The language, the notations, the associative links among sections, the sudden turns towards mythical figures and then local beverage-room conversations, is witty and colloquial and it all adds up to a distinctive, engaging voice attempting to shape time and space from a precise location of mind. At the same time that voice never takes itself too seriously, so the reader is never sure what will happen next.

Continental Trance by bp Nichol is the third book of *The Martyrology*, Book VI. It is part of a much larger structure and eventually has to be evaluated in terms of that growing form. It has a thin narrative line running through it — a trip by rail from Vancouver to Toronto between July 27 and August 2, 1981. Precision of dates and time is important because the working of the mind and imagination as they journey through times, collapsing pasts into presents and the reverse, is an important concern of the whole series. Perception, illusion, the ordering/disordering quality of language ("this train of thot") are other themes woven into the work.

i like the play of words
of life the moment when the feeling's focus
    absolutely a description

which is what st ate meant? yes
my st ate meant
this

The self-consciousness of the poetic process ("where is this poem going"/"Toronto") resolves itself into:

i's a lie
dispenses illusions of plot

biography when geography's the clue
locale & history of the clear "you"

That comes close to Suknaski's view, but Nichol's language is very controlled and pared down to simple essentials whereas Suknaski is straining his voice at all times. Yates and Nichol, in fact, choose opposite places to start — one with prescribed form, the other with form as process — and they are equally successful. In fact each manages to set form against flux in such a way that both are held in suspension.

None of the concerns expressed in and by these long poems is new. They cannot even be called experimental, unless every new poem is an experiment. What is interesting about all of them is the way the long poem takes different shapes under different hands.

JOHN ORANGE

TRANSFORMATIONS

SEAN O'HUIGIN, *The Story's Dream.* Black Moss, n.p.

JIM GREEN, *Beyond Here.* Thistledown, $7.95.

NORM SIBUM, *Among Other Howls In The Storm.* Pulp, n.p.

HILARY THOMPSON, *Only So Far.* Fiddlehead Poetry Books, $5.95.

MILTON ACORN, *Captain Neal MacDougal And The Naked Goddess.* Ragweed, $6.50.

THE STORY'S DREAM, according to the preface, is about the birth within the author of the "art of Poetry." In the five narrative poems which make up the book, O'Huigin tries to create a vocabulary of experience(s), or, rather, to show that experience *is* itself a vocabulary, that language is alive. He begins with the matrix of that creation — disarrayed colours, sounds, and letters:

> i am surrounded in the colours
> of wash
> i am surrounded in the bells
> of white and letteredness
>
> ("text")

The book shows how these raw materials undergo a series of transformations which leave them in more meaningful and expressive relationships with one another until, finally, sound and space arrive to make the birth complete.

The Story's Dream is an intelligent and provocative book, far more readable than its subject matter might lead one to anticipate. Given O'Huigin's taste for performance pieces, some attention to entertainment value is expected, and very welcome. The book falters only near the end; it's hard to grasp completely the significance of the "space" to which O'Huigin refers as the final element of poetry, and, more importantly, coming at the end of a series of brilliant transformations, this effort is unmoving. In these final pages O'Huigin can only repeat pyrotechnics used earlier, and they begin to pale a bit.

In *Beyond Here* Jim Green writes poems of love for the landscapes he has known. They are honest, open pieces, uncritical in their relation of natural fact. He doesn't juggle concepts but concentrates on imparting a feel for place, so much so that the individual poem is often left incomplete in a strictly narrative sense:

> We had a couple of hundred head
> racing in loose bunches
> wild-eyed nostrils flared
> hooves drumming the frozen turf
> way out in front of the horses
> till they saw the fence, bolted
> south to the slopes of Dormer,
> north towards Barrier Mountain.
>
> ("Elk on the Line")

These poems are like pieces of nature into which the reader wanders as an explorer, becoming immersed in the details of landscape. They are part of a larger continuum and begin or break off seemingly at random. Even the entertaining "Fire Storm on Mount Whymper" doesn't tell a self-contained story but picks up on individual incidents within the larger framework of a firefighting battle. On its own terms — and the book *must* be taken on its own terms — *Beyond Here* is rewarding and successful. Somewhere in my tortured past, however, I conceived a deep distaste for the linen-feel paper Thistledown Press has seen fit to use for this book. I hope it wasn't Green's idea.

Norm Sibum's *Among Other Howls In The Storm* is about as direct a contrast to *Beyond Here* as could be imagined. Sibum is an *intellectual* poet and most of his poems demand some analysis before they can even be read beginning to end without pause. For Sibum nature is an Eden gone sour, a continual reminder to its human tenants — who see it as if through a glass darkly — of something they have lost. *Among Other Howls* is a parable of frustrated Fall and redemption, a failed cycle which begins after the

Fall and never manages redemption. Sibum's references to other writers — Yeats, Hemingway, Kafka — emphasizes the ties to a fallen physical world from which its inhabitants can't escape, just as the writers remain engaged with the fallen world they describe. The solution, Sibum seems to say in the poem quoted on the back cover, is to "name the murderers," to fight the darkness in this world without pining for another one.

The only problem with *Among Other Howls* is a byproduct of Sibum's own vision. His images are physical and yet still seem somehow remote. We can't really *feel* them. This is at the core of Sibum's Fall but it unfortunately keeps the reader at some distance from the poetry.

Hilary Thompson tries to write from the head while retaining strong ties to a physical reality but *Only So Far* doesn't really succeed. The style of Thompson's writing fails to incorporate a voice we can recognize as her own. The poetry itself isn't actually bad, but its style leaves the reader on the outside, discouraged by its impersonality and seldom sufficiently interested in entering a poem to find out what Thompson is really trying to say. Almost any example will suffice:

> Inside
> my houses
> underlying form
> in hidden rooms
> furnished
> complete
> full of antiquity
> I breathe my dust
>
> ("Phaedrus")

The voice is flat and toneless; over an entire book of poetry the harm these qualities do to a poet's ability to communicate only grows greater. *Only So Far* is in fact Hilary Thompson's first book of poetry, but given that she has authored award-winning plays and an illustrated children's book the reader has a right to be surprised to find a style so undeveloped. Presumably with time Thompson will find her voice and be able to communicate her insights more effectively. *Only So Far* is a disappointment, but not a conclusive one.

Some of the sonnets in Milton Acorn's *Captain Neal MacDougal and the Naked Goddess* seem to be motivated by the fictitious(?) Captain's observations of his surroundings, while others are philosophical or religious musings, more abstract though relentlessly invaded by the physical. MacDougal is a bit of a Renaissance man (at least in potential) and Acorn assures us in his preface that this is historically true of the kind of man MacDougal is meant to represent. These men — the captains of "Wooden Ships and Iron men" days — would jot down their musings on a wide range of subjects; selling one's soul, perhaps, or the ordering of breakfast, or the Andromeda galaxy:

> I impute will to ships and galaxies;
> Having been tested and trained in manners
> Not to cackle rude with man or woman
> Without a modest compromise of wills.
> See that irregular hand of wee stars
> Streaking from the upper deep to sizzle my seas!
>
> ("A Good Sight of Andromeda")

It's difficult to imagine a collection of thirty-nine sonnets that could be called "sprawling" yet I think Acorn has done it. First of all there is the wide range of subject matter intelligently treated; second, there is the extraordinary condensation of the writing. Acorn packs a lot into (not always) fourteen lines. The syntax is jumbled and hard to follow, sometimes impossible to rearrange into conventional sentence form. Often a strictly literal interpretation will do, and at other times the reader has to strike his/her own tangent from the words, understanding the glancing sense where linear interpretation dissolves away. These are tightly knit, opinionated pieces of writing, and

their author, as well as editors Libby Oughton and Fred Cogswell (both of whom Acorn thanks), deserve to be commended. Acorn has on occasion outrun himself, but he has yet to take an outright false step.

ANDREW BROOKS

SYBIL & ORACLE

DOROTHY LIVESAY, *The Phases of Love*. Coach House, $6.50.

MICHAEL BULLOCK, *Quadriga for Judy*. Third Eye, $6.00.

THE THREE SECTIONS of Dorothy Livesay's book trace the unifying theme of love through her poetic career from youth to old age. Notwithstanding this fifty-seven-year span, there is little change of style or versification. She maintains short, fragmentary lines, sparing use of rhyme, and heavy reliance on balance or antithesis pivoted on enjambements or a mid-line hiatus. Simple, exact diction; assonance and alliteration to cement the lines; rural imagery; minimal punctuation, more for phrasing than syntax; occasional literary phrases ("his pulse with mine makes moan"); austerities achieving intensity akin to that of imagist and Japanese verse: such are the characteristics of this style. Sometimes she extends her line: "Walking through your long, lonely avenue of elms" or "in the gnarled patience of that oak — look there!" She prefers, though, shorter, pithy effects: "The earth is my lover" or "I am the wishbone's centre." After all, her best effects come from bundles of short lines like twigs against an empty sky, as when she writes of her dead mother:

> Her eyes shone blue and bright
> without regret
> she had never been ever
> sorry for herself

But the technique has real dangers; a plain prose sentence may assume the look merely of poetic statement. "In Times like These" contains such a lapse, and one of imagery: "Now that the trees have shed / their golden coins / upon earth's wall-to-wall / wide carpeting." The homely image of the carpet is traditional and might have worked but for the addition of the awkward "wall-to-wall" putting unlikely limits on the boundless sphere of earth and bringing us within the bathos of carpet salesman or fitter. In the poems of issues and problems, she falls below her standard of inevitability and acute simplicity valued in such passages as:

> Not love now
> but the memory of the tree
> the memory of love
> sustains

or in the love lyric, "You must let your mouth go / you must drown in me."

I share Livesay's admiration for Anna Akhmatova. I also admire her capacity for honesty about her younger self: "in 1935 I nearly took flight / for Leningrad and Tsarskoe Selo." But the "nearly" is significant; her world is the quiet, personal one most of us in the free West are fortunate to inhabit. Mistress of quiet woods, contemplation, civilized feeling, she yet has intensities of passion, and the keen sense that women "suffer and love today / from centuries of wrong." Her images (fire, ice, dancer of love, lover as mirror, scarecrow, landscape, flowers) chart the moods and limits of her world. At the beginning of the volume she promised "I bring back wonder to the world" and in large measure succeeded; at the end she has become the sybil, but paradoxically "crying for knowledge." No, she is not Akhmatova, but a poet who shows "how small miracles / Shatter the facts —" and when she does that in touching, lyric speech, we are grateful.

Michael Bullock's *Quadriga for Judy* also employs the short, precise line, rarely

troubled by end rhyme, but having a distinct oracular force. Precisely observed imagery reveals a strange, exciting imagination in poems where "thorns write on the soles of her feet" or the poet's "hollow head / echoes with soundless cymbals" or his "heart is a sick panther / pacing its cage," tears are like fire, and the sound of silence has cold fingers.

The quadriga of the title is both a reference to a painting in the first Surrealist exhibition and to the four-horsed chariot. The latter provides an organizing principle: four sections, each starting with that section's title poem. The poem "Quadriga for Judy" supplies the title for both the book and section one. Appropriately so, for its jauntiness and joy suggest Bullock emerging from the sombreness of a previous collection, *Lines in the Dark Wood*:

> Harnessed to a chariot of words
> my four horses
> race towards a distant country
> where your name is written
> on a banner of blue light
> fluttering from the minaret
> of a mosque where two doves perch
> on twin domes of white marble.

The visual clarity and sense of release to a country of the mind lit by a warm, high sun are attractive. Mysterious, magical imagery appears, literary yet arrestingly sexual, and the sections contains three poems about Blonde Ophelia I would not want to lose. The oracular voice intensifies into aphorism:

> Stretched out on a bed of roses
> I seek the thorns
> On thorns I seek the roses.

Joy becomes pain, and the section closes its moods of love with a landscape where "a flock of black birds flies / in the shape of a cross." The Tokyo poems in section two evoke Japanese places and their delicate moods. Owing something to *haiku*, they retain the edgy, sinister quality found in Bullock's verse and fiction. Part three has more poems of place, this time about Vancouver, as well as personal relationships. Here we find the enchanting poem where "Old books have siren tongues." The fourth section, titled after a Polanski movie, comprises six poems of pain and, in "Leaves and Panther," a cool appraisal of the body's decay. Symmetry of structure with harsh, bright images in bone-brittle lines are completely appropriate for Bullock's unblinking gaze into our mortality.

This slim volume with its four horses of imagination marks a gain in clarity for this prolific author, whose courageous "needle-like visions" as Brown Miller has called them in the *San Francisco Review of Books* have begun to create an extensive design, a pattern further explored in his recently published *Prisoner of the Rain*. Bullock's work deserves to be far more widely known, and *Quadriga* will add to the reputation of a writer whose distinctive note blends humour and sinister, disturbing beauty. His poems are blooms to be devoured, even as they devour us:

> Wrapped in silk
> I send you this rose
> take it between your teeth
> devour its perfumed flesh.

ANDREW PARKIN

CAVE & CRYSTAL

PEGEEN BRENNAN, *Zarkeen*. Quadrant, $6.95.
CATERINA EDWARDS, *The Lion's Mouth*. NeWest Press, $6.95.

BOTH *Zarkeen* and *The Lion's Mouth* are first novels by women writers, and both take shape around a female artist, but the resemblance stops there. Where Caterina Edwards documents the struggles of an artist caught in a cultural limbo between Venice and Alberta, Pegeen Brennan enters the primal consciousness of the first cave artist.

Zaru is the leader of the People (women) because she is the most potent dreamer, and her dreams determine which animals will be killed by the Hunters (men). She also discovers that she has the power to make images of the animals, tracing them with a charred stick on the walls of the cave in which she is sequestered awaiting birth. The drawings are important, for the Hunters do not subscribe to the same myths as the People: they believe that eventually the Hunters will reach a great clearing where they will only have to kill animals for themselves and where they will no longer have to give to the People. By imprinting her dreams on the wall, Zaru feels she can retain control of the hunt. But the conflict resolves itself, for the baby growing within Zaru, which has engendered her artistic impulses, is a boy, and the book closes on the dawning of a new era in which men and women will live together in greater harmony. It is a fable of consciousness-raising in both the artistic and the social sense.

The book is often powerful in its projection of the nascent artistic consciousness of the central character, but the prose sometimes overreaches itself. The opening, for instance, plunges the reader into a wild Promethean dream that strains for intensity: "I sink down and down into the sharp rocks of my belly where the shriekings of a bird slash red zig-zag pain across the eye of day.... [The birds] tug at my entrails and twist them out along the rocks, where they lie fiery and freezing, pulsing pain to the beat of the sea, the beat of my heart." And such metaphors as "Hoofprints of shame stamped her face," or the figure for smiling, "To open the mouth cave sideways," rather than capturing a primitive response seem themselves merely primitive. But on the whole, Brennan's devices work. She grounds every abstract thought, every emotion, firmly in the physical realm, and thus manages to place us within rather than merely to describe the semi-literate society of the book. The best passages are those in which Zaru tracks her thoughts and dreams: in these the author captures the tactile quality of heuristic thought and the sensual, even sexual, excitement of artistic creation.

Unfortunately, the power of these sections is vitiated by the sequences that follow. Zaru has three companions who also become artists — one learns to sing, another to make music from a hollow reed, another to shape figures out of clay — and the episodes simply retrace with minor deviations Zaru's path of discovery; they don't afford us any greater insight into the process. Further, Brennan includes two legends — accounts of creation and of the harnessing of fire — that are grafted on to the narrative rather than incorporated dramatically. The book feels as if sections were written separately, then fitted together. The problem is that the novel is informed by a polemical impulse as well as a creative impulse, and the two do not always operate in harmony. One can hardly argue with the author's providing alternatives to male-oriented accounts of creation and of the development of civilization (scholars such as J. Edgar Burns in *God as Woman, Woman as God* point out that many early religions were matriarchal, and argue that the first artists were probably women) but it is too consciously done. Further, in Brennan's novel there emerges a patronizing attitude toward women that is inappropriate even to the theme of sexual divisiveness.

The myth of creation that informs the society of the People, though not of the Hunters, is an example of what I mean. In the beginning a cosmic Ice Woman created the sun and the moon and, out of a piece of the moon, the People, in her own image. She created sand out of her

sadness, and rocks and earth out of her happiness. She created, out of "earth dampened by her concern," animals for them to eat, but though they catch the fish the People run from the animals, and so Ice Woman fashions slightly different figures to kill the animals and to give the People joy. These are the Hunters, and out of the joy they give to the People by coupling with them, plants spring up. The notion of a world created by the outpouring of emotion is novel, but it does not distract us from the fact that the author is simply reversing the traditional hierarchy: women are exalted, and men are reduced to precisely those things women have resented being characterized as — sex objects and mindless helpmates. Primacy is given to women, not just in point of having been created first but as agents of creation: it is out of their joy, not a mutual ecstasy, that the plants spring.

And at the end, the Hunters are to be granted knowledge of the myths of the People, for, reasons Zaru, "If they had the legends of the people, they would know about Ice Woman and how she made the hunters to give joy to the people. . . . Then let the hunters be of the people." Since "People" is already the inclusive term, it is rather as if the Hunters, once apprised of their place, will be permitted to join the human race. One sees, of course, that the author is deliberately exaggerating the division between the sexes, preparatory to healing it in the end, but the reconciliation remains unconvincing. The joy that is talked about is never felt; Keenig, Zaru's opposite number, remains a cardboard spear carrier rather than a character.

Nevertheless, the book deserves attention. If the handling of male-female relations is crude, the exploration of the artistic process is, like the drawings that accompany it, highly suggestive. When the author stops writing legends and lets herself go deep into the workings of Zaru's mind, she touches the mysterious sources of myth.

Turning to *The Lion's Mouth* we move from the cave and the stark outlines of poetic narration to the city and the dense textures of social realism. The principal setting is Venice, a labyrinth, and a world of reflections where buildings, sea, and sky melt into one another. Bianca, a Venetian expatriate writing from the Canadian prairies, is attempting both to come to terms with this new land where the towns sit "perched upon the land rather than rising from it" and to make sense of her cousin Marco's breakdown. Confident and sophisticated, Bianca's idol during her teens, Marco has — like his city — disintegrated under the pressures of compromise. As an architect he must decide whether to participate in designing lavish resort complexes for the Lido; as a father he must determine a course of treatment, or non-treatment, for his son who is dying of Down's syndrome; as a citizen and a man he must deal with an old lover who seeks to involve him against his will in terrorist activity.

It is his story, but Bianca finds she must also tell us about herself and her telling (discovering as Heisenberg did that method and object can no longer be separated). Thus the novel is many things — a thriller, a study of social mores in Venice and Alberta, a self-reflexive account of the writing of the novel — yet the whole is seamless. To use one of Edwards' favourite verbs, one thing "insinuates" into another as the novel seeks its own form. The action of the book mirrors that of the characters, each of whom is trying to consolidate his or her identity from the shifting role of citizen, lover, parent, and artist. Elena, Marco's childhood love, seeks it by joining activist groups, Marco by devoting himself to his son, Bianca by writing and rewriting her novel.

But instead of definition, each encounters greater complexity, and finally it is their reaction to this knowledge that defines them. Elena moves to deeper and deeper fanaticism, from mass demonstration to selective assassination; Marco passes from anguished compassion to the blank refuge of a nervous collapse; and Bianca progresses from tight melodramatic plots to an account which confronts the impossibility of discovering order — or of communicating it could it be found. What meaning there is emerges only in the attempt to connect. Bianca's writing is an act of love, both in the broad sense in which any serious use of language is, and in the immediate sense of an attempt to reach Marco. The gesture cannot succeed, she knows:

> With me it is always stories. And in the end it is all I can offer you — your story. . . . I look out through your eyes. I become you. I make the story, the book.
>
> Still. Still. I cannot write it in Italian, and you do not read English. I will never touch you at all.

Yet she would not wish it undone.

The novel celebrates life, and it is for this that one reads it, not for the questions it poses about existence. Whole scenes stay in the mind — the family dinner, with Marco's brother chewing methodically, the children gobbling, the old ones struggling with their false teeth, the teen-ager carefully placing the food in her mouth without disturbing her red painted lips, as all the while Marco's mother nags at him to eat; or Bianca making love in the warm spring sunshine, on the hood of a Volkswagen beetle stuck in the gumbo of an Alberta back road; or Marco and his son building a palace with plastic bricks and then demolishing it, laughing as they fling bricks, then toys, then shoes, about the room. Marco's relation with his son forms the core of the book, and the author has captured the softer side of father-son relations (the side often neglected in favour of a comradely playing at being men), rendering the mingled frustration and joy in a slap that turns to a caress as it touches the cheek.

Edwards has a good eye and she knows how to shape the curve of her sentence to fit the thing exactly. Yet her felicity with language is never startling, and at times the writing begins to seem too much, too fluid. The prose is relatively free of figurative language, and though this may be appropriate for Marco, who is visually oriented, one occasionally longs for the sharp flash of metaphor. The narrator admits, "I have very little interest in language as simply language . . . words [are] things to be wrestled with, to be forced into the proper order so that they approximate what I am interested in expressing." In wrestling with her language, the writer runs the risk of too successfully subduing it. But this is a minor reservation. Edwards' craft has the subtlety of Venetian crystal and we look forward to more of her work.

TED BISHOP

SPEAKABLE

JOSEPH SHERMAN, *Lords of Shouting*. Oberon Press, $6.95.

CAROLYN SMART, *Power Sources*. Fiddlehead Poetry Books, $6.00.

ELSPETH BRADBURY, *Is That You This Is Me*. Fiddlehead Poetry Books, $6.50.

DAVID MCFADDEN, *A New Romance*. Cross-CountryPress, $3.00.

DAVID MCFADDEN, *Country of the Open Heart*. Longspoon Press, $8.50.

DAVID MCFADDEN, *Three Stories and Ten Poems*. Prototype/Identity series, $3.00.

OF THE SIX BOOKS under review, Joseph Sherman's *Lords of Shouting* most richly repays careful attention to each word. Sherman's language is finely honed to pierce the boundaries of his world. These

boundaries may sometimes appear in physical form — a boy storming an apparently unassailable cliff before an initiating sexual encounter — but the real barriers are walls of words, as in "Matthew's Pibroch," in which a child flails at "implied restraints," words that "reek of iron," understanding that life's "tidal spasm" is of both "mind and / muscle." In "Breca: A Thrice-Told Tale," Breca understands that Beowulf is his superior not because of courage or strength, but because he tells better stories about himself, much to Breca's smouldering exasperation.

> Could I free us of the fettering language
> Of time and trial? Redefine neither by grunt
> Nor groan, but rather by a syllabic syntax
> Of my own devising, obfuscating?

In these finely crafted, intelligent, and demanding poems, Sherman explores and challenges the linguistic universe, striving to make it his own. His struggle enjoys more success than Breca's. As we read in "Song for My Own," the "words of the heroes" are no longer in their mouths; bitter or sweet, they are "mine to speak."

The first poem in Carolyn Smart's *Power Sources* tells us that we need to be "under the dusty trees, / looking for something, wanting it." Vague romanticism continues in the second poem, as the wind "makes you want to cry for something, / you're never quite sure what," and "that feeling of endless happiness / comes over you again" in a graveyard. In the third poem we are flatly assured, "Do not be afraid of anything." Again and again we find these flaccid clichés. The poet questions her words, for they are "traitors"; real happiness is "beyond all of the words," a standard enough conceit — the artist who recognizes the limitations of her art — but maybe Smart gives up on her words too easily. She compares writing to breathing in the night, but the diffuse flimsiness of a breath is what annoys the reader about her work. "The White French Women," with its white women with white food and white eyelashes, could have jelled into a sharp and striking portrait, but, as in so many other pieces, her limp style leads only to innocuous predictability. At times her failure seems unforgivable: there is nothing dishonest or pretentious here, and the speaker is the first to admit, "I know so little about this world today." Unlike Joseph Sherman's, however, Carolyn Smart's poetry is not a precision instrument for exploring that world.

Is That You This Is Me, with poems by Elspeth Bradbury and drawings by Kathy Hooper, is, we are told, "not a book of illustrated poetry, but is rather the result of a graphic artist and a poet comparing notes." It seems an effective collaboration. Hooper's figures monstrously distend themselves, struggling into shape, matching the muscularity of Bradbury's poems, which kick with gritty energy. Her writing is as intelligent as Sherman's, but in place of his almost academic refinement, Bradbury offers uncompromising, two-fisted assaults, her lines sometimes tying themselves into tough knots:

> Cringe I gladly into words
> where northern I
> definable and dryish-dull
> weigh gravel on my tongue to earn
> a measure of content in their cool dirt

The book bristles with movement as full-bodied ideas are grabbed and pounded into new forms. A woman's voice, "hauled on ropes of air / would have rung peels of thunder," until silence and pain find a "toe hold / on the stripped cliff of her body" and she becomes a "shrinking woman":

> now her voice
> buzzes
> like a fly
> in a jar

Possibilities wrench themselves into reality:

> A lurch a gasp a cockeyed leap . . .
> A prodigy! The hideous becomes the prodigy
> her Pegasus is up.

Occasionally the internal combustion of all this kinetic energy causes poems to fly apart, but it remains an exciting work: "Settle for a blemished and a brief lucidity!"

In a postscript to the reader, David McFadden calls *A New Romance* "a remarkable breakthrough into a purer and more authentic level" of his writing life, an effort to "recreate and explicate long-lost ways of being in which the individual is one with all beauty and all proportion." The subject of this long poem, in other words, is the ecstasy of poetry, "the invisible / glory that pumps our hearts." Great armfuls of images — inverted cosmic ketchup bottles, hot buttered rolls, a Kleenex box — take surrealistic flight and spangle the "radiant night" of the imagination. Words parachute "into the minds of selected sleepers,"

> and you will forever cherish your image
> of the night as the superlative lover,
> its heart spilling over into language.

The "rules" for this kind of writing are, we are told, the same as the rules for love:

> Be natural, be affectionate,
> and keep your heart just a fraction
> below the point of absolute explosion.

Most conveniently, the poem contains its own review, which we need only quote:

> and part of its charm will truly lie
> in its tremendous awkwardness
> and its undisguisable joy during the hour
> of its ecstatic birth.

McFadden's *Country of the Open Heart* is another long poem, but with considerably less spontaneous delight, "a poem to sadden the gladdest heart." The mood turns apocalyptic — gibbons "butchering each other at the far end of the jungle" — and the poem presents itself as

> an executioner
> in a black hood full of inexpressible delights
> singing a lullaby to himself while awaiting victims,
> a chronicle of Empty Lives and civilized brutality.

This "lullaby" is in fact a noisy harangue. Individual lines may have "inexpressible delights" but the cumulative effect is of a deluge of scarcely developed images with the ranting voice of a mad visionary. For all the talk about the "open heart," the speaker of this poem masks himself in a sometimes strained affectation of "a heart grown wild and strange." All of this finally alienates the reader, and McFadden may have once again included in the work its own most accurate review:

> even this poem is about to kill itself
> to protest in advance its lack of readers
> and its inability to continue forever
> in a universe of its own destruction.

Three Stories and Ten Poems, also by McFadden, keeps much of that brutality — "you," as a child, punch a pregnant woman in the stomach and torture your friends with a heated screwdriver — but it is delivered in a more seductively prosaic and muted voice. There is no question of sensationalism in this volume (which cannot be said of *Country of the Open Heart*); it is simply that "once you're aware of your capacity for monstrosity / you're less likely to destroy yourself and others." These stories and poems are often apparently rambling and inconsequential, but are always in fact subtly insistent, patiently building up fragments, as in "Letter to My Father," which begins with the confession of an "incredibly trivial" life and proceeds to a fine and moving affirmation of the simple relationship between two people. This collection has a grounding in an

everyday reality of bus stops and diners that *A New Romance* shuns. It is nevertheless a reality on the point of astonishing transformations, as when a disease-carrying rat becomes a twelve-year-old girl. Much as we may admire the ecstasy of *A New Romance*, McFadden's technique seems surer and his voice more authentic in *Three Stories and Ten Poems*. At their best, these pieces are transfixing in their power to dip into the unspeakable currents that flow beneath the trivia of our lives.

BRUCE PIRIE

DYING WORDS

MARCO FRATICELLI, *Night Coach*. Guernica Editions, n.p.

BRIAN MACKINNON, *Fathers and Heroes*. Prairie, n.p.

BILL FUREY, *Night Letters*. Signal Editions/ Véhicule Press, n.p.

ROSS LECKIE, *A Slow Light*. Signal Editions/ Véhicule Press, n.p.

ROBIN SKELTON, *Wordsong*. Sono Nis, $5.95.

EVEN WITHOUT THE *Wordsong* of the established, prolific, and controversial Robin Skelton as a yardstick, the reader of the four slim volumes by young poets from across Canada would have to feel that his/her patience is being moderately taxed. The end result of arranging prose "poetically" ("Last night / I dreamt / That the / Starving people / Of the world / Came to me / For food," *Fathers*) is still prose, and the answer to: "Only an hour ago there was a tooth / beneath the cap of gum / unknowing and unknown / the calcium slug of unconsciousness / yanked from the voice-cavern. / Is this what poetry is then?" (*Slow Light*), is no. Rather rare are the instances of words condensing (this is the etymological root of "Dichtung") into pleasing harmonies or challenging dissonances, of lines breathing their inner rhythm (the rhymed "Song" in *Night Letters* is an interesting attempt), of poems disclosing as their *raison d'être* more than embarrassingly autobiological ruminations. Texts by all four authors have appeared frequently in Canadian and foreign literary magazines and anthologies, but the life and value of individual poems often change for the worse between the covers of a collection and in the embrace of a catchall title.

The most coherent poetic design may be found in Marco Fraticelli's love story, told in 58 haikus (and illustrated by Marlene L'Abbé). Against the backdrop of changing seasons and erratic travelling, otherwise banal facts derive meaningful tension from their poetic form, culminating in "Caught on a thread / On your sweater — / His wedding ring." *Night Coach* proves, as did the author's first book, *Instants* (1979), the validity of honing language and controlling ideas through disciplined creativity in formal genres.

Brian MacKinnon's filial remembrances of a life shared and a disorienting passing (documented by Margaret Shaw's photographs) widen into a loosely structured quest for other hero figures (the Godman, a poet on "Icarus' precarious trajectory," a human defending "the language quintessence" against "the legions of Nihilism," a wilderness recluse, a fisherman) and ". . . connotations of / winged unicorns / of apparent truth." It is an unsatisfying odyssey punctuated by a Manitoban Golgotha, by post-Amin Uganda, by "the squat towers" of cityscapes, and ending in the Kierkegaardian jump into a place where "there is transcendence."

"Look for me between the lines" is Bill Furey's urging, and the reader will discover a tortured soul and a tortured body seeking to retrieve love in a universe of memories, elegies, burials, resurrection, and last thoughts, nights and words.

Furey is best when reflecting on his craft ("Go little poem, make a dash, / ... / be a little prick in the ear of the critic," or in well-wrought generic exercises such as "Ballad from Villon," "Matins," and "Requiescat."

Ross Leckie's collection divides into uneven parts entitled "An Articulate Music," "The Caroling Breakers," and "Correspondences" ("words, phrases, images, and lines taken from various authors' journals and letters"). The central section, picking up and putting into sharper focus the eclectic initial themes, clearly is the strongest of the three. It is "a text book of a different sort, / expressing the pale autumn of a deciduous science" and the hope that, though disintegrating society may "stutter in a speech / of partial grammars ... / ... we might see the alluring prurience / of a deep-structure grammar of narrative." More realistically, however, Leckie has to admit: "I come to an end of words," which is echoed by Furey's "All poetry ends here" and MacKinnon's "there is no more to tell." Thus is heralded the decline and fall of the signifying power of poetic words.

Seen in this perspective, Robin Skelton's ballads seem like a nostalgic throwback into an era when Poetry was bursting with health. All but one of these "rumbustious, and sometimes bawdy" texts were written in the late fifties, nine of them were published in *Begging the Dialect* (1960) and all of them in *Selected Poems* (1968). They were received at the time either with indifferences or with scorn: "Great words are not being said, only loud ones" (Julian Symons). Loud and earthy these ballads (about miners and men of the sea, about birth, need, love and death, and about the Muse as whore) still are, but divorced from Skelton's other poems of "serious metaphysical and moral speculation" (Fred Cogswell), they have finally come into their own and will stand as an unusual yet noteworthy example of experimentation with form and of linguistic creativity. Former accusations of superficial "cleverness" and simple "verbal talent" (Frank Davey) may now be turned into compliments, and the poet's partial disavowal of what he wrote over twenty years ago must, of course, be respected but was not really necessary. "Casual mastery" (Doug Fetherling citing Skelton) is still mastery, perhaps true mastery, and, at any rate, the kind of mastery younger poets seem unable to attain.

HANS R. RUNTE

WAYS WITH WORDS

GARY HYLAND, *Just Off Main.* Thistledown, $7.95.

LIONEL KEARNS, *Ignoring the Bomb.* Oolichan, $8.95.

DERK WYNAND, *Pointwise.* Fiddlehead, $4.00.

THE READER IS CONSTITUTED by the first of these collectitons as an aging erstwhile adolescent or, maybe, just aged adolescent; by the second as inert, perhaps galvanizable consumer of discourse; by the third as dreamlandscape figure, both object and would-be decipherer of the dream. The linguistic operations of *Just Off Main* activate especially memory, with words enabling and enacting ways of remembering. Those of *Ignoring the Bomb* activate especially a sense of complicity with words that both ignore the bomb and try to be performative utterances — *acts* that are "less absurd than others." Those of *Pointwise* especially activate and enact desire, that impossible necessary longing to knit the split self and dissolve self/other boundaries; this is not so much a matter of a language of desire, a poetic discourse thematizing sexual urgencies, as of desire in language, whose

way with words is to be the onlie begetter of longing's voice and form while always simultaneously insisting on difference, distance, differentiation.

If all this sounds grotesquely reductive — especially to the first readers, i.e., writers, of these three works — it isn't meant to be. It is the summarized inventory of my labour in producing readings, in trying to perform these works into texts. The reviewer is in a parlous state. On the one hand, such shifts and embarrassments as having to posit highly unstable schema, implying almost inevitably some univocal meaning, dealing more in assertion than demonstration; on the other hand, trying to avoid coercion and closure, taking as read (i.e., written) that, in poetic discourse, signifiers play delightedly among many signifieds in games of condensation, displacement, overdetermination, and transformation. One does one's best which, in the present context, includes the effort to motivate others to get hold of these books and set about doing some literary work themselves.

For the first three quarters of *Just Off Main* the dominant socio-economic horizon is the Canadian West a generation ago — Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan, in the 1950's and 1960's. The politics and ideologies are not overtly of the Korean War, or being a cultural colony, or even the Eastern Establishment bogey; they are of the family, the on-going, mostly non-violent campaign against various manifestations of the Father, and of the youngsters' own highly stylized social organization — their own counter-family. In the last part of the collection this horizon opens out explicitly onto another which (in the stance and recurring voice of a narrator) has been implicitly circumscribing it. This concluding horizon contains a second present, the "now" of the 1970's. Idiolects are nicely distinguished throughout: teen-agers', parents', narrator's, with some interesting overlaps or interpenetrations especially towards the end. Vocabulary, rhythms, and intonations of the adolescents' speech all register the huge importance to them of their music. Pop music and its singer-heroes' names are their code, their anti-symbolic (i.e., anti-authority) sign system — as opposed to their parents' musical favourites and passés like Sinatra. When, "later," the narrator and/or the now adult characters like Fet or Deke talk, it's in a "grown up," more "literary" language. The exuberant syntax and rhythms of adolescence that were in large measure their own meaning, are now sedate with age and loaded with detachable meaning. And the erstwhile adolescent Deke, who has become a fairly literary word-user, realizes that he is "playing his father's game," that is, playing sentimental oldies from his father's generation to his Dorothy as a way of telling her what he cannot otherwise utter. Which is exactly how Deke's father had tried to communicate with Deke's mother. At various levels and with distinctive vocabularies, rhythms, and intonations, language contains and enacts some such process as this: adolescence into an adulthood which, even as it recapitulates its adolescence in one form of words, finds itself recapitulating its own parents in another.

For the editors and bibliographers among us, let's note the riddling relation between the contents of *Ignoring the Bomb* and its bibliography on p. 135. Eighteen poems have not, one calculates, been collected before. "Collected" (p. 135) seems to mean "new," since that's one of the terms appearing on the title-page. These eighteen poems — anonymous in the bibliography — are distributed unevenly throughout the collection but with two-thirds of them appearing (pp. 85-104) in a cluster punctuated by pieces whose publication dates back as far as 1963. The table of contents gives

"Mediation" as the title for the poem on p. 85; the poem on that page, however, is entitled "Calculations." The other seventy-one poems, selected from previous collections, have been disassembled out of their earlier configurations and redistributed. Some remain clustered with two or three old neighbours but many find themselves in different surroundings among new neighbours. Not only the first but also the last poem in the new configuration were originally collected in 1963. The point of this canter is to assert that editorial/bibliographical concerns are also explanatory, even interpretive, concerns. "Mediation" for "Calculations" might be an error but, in the matter of *Ignoring the Bomb*'s assemblage, explanation and interpretation are certainly at stake. Kearns has made an intertext of work to date. One function of this intertextuality is to insist that work-to-date is work-in-process; recent and earlier writings are put into new, transforming relations that produce new meanings and invite further labour of reading. Poems retain previous semantic and contextual significances while acquiring additional ones in a later, modified setting — as in a number of seminal poems where child/boy is contained in and being transformed into father/man: both still in process. The effect of this paradoxically synchronic procedure is to give a very strong sense of writing as a life project and life as a writing project. The writer/narrator is well aware (e.g., "Trap," p. 80) that he's being inscribed in language, particularly in the poetic line. The inert, perhaps galvanizable reader is most obviously engaged by (inscribed in) two classes of poem: first, those which foreground poetry/writing itself and constitute the reader *as* reader, i.e., fellow worker in the living/writing project; and second, those which, set (for example) in South America or downtown Vancouver, interpellate the middle class, liberal reader as a "well what are you going to do about it" citizen who pays dues of anxiety and indignation but is subject of and to a socio-political helplessness that appears as natural, as the way things always are. As for "ignoring the bomb," the bomb is a massive, overarching sign of death. As title, the phrase is in an omnipresent emblematic relation to the whole collection: not only does getting on with living/writing derive its degrees of significance from its relation to death-the-bomb, but also every device of ignor/ance is, in some degree, miswriting, misreading, misliving.

If, as the French neo-Freudian writers tell us, the unconscious is structured like a language, then *Pointwise* seems a nice paradigm of that strange unstable, polysemic space with its elusive rhetoric ceaselessly generating enigmatic, overdetermined signs. (Even the historical location of *Pointwise* in the Fiddlehead series is enigmatic; it is first given as No. 255 then, opposite the title page, as 245.) Three personae come to inhabit this fluent, fluid space: narrator-lover, who's aware of being a character in his own dreamwork; narrator's lover, who is both object of his love and also narrated as subject of her own memory and discourse; and reader, who is inscribed in the dreamwork not (God forbid) to psychoanalyse the narrator or his love, still less Derk Wynand, but to function as the necessary, mediating sign, the locus of possible, proximate meanings and a place where lovers might become tentatively present to each other. The difficulties in achieving connections of meaning and/or presence are registered linguistically, at the level of syntax, by the interrupted or incomplete phrases of several poems and, for example, in the section-title "Reality is something which." They're also registered at the level of discourse in the very effective play of shifters — "shifters" understood as pronouns operating to an-

nounce a shift in the mode of enunciation, in the rhetorical situation. "You" is sometimes the equivalent of the undifferentiated "one," sometimes the mark of the narrator's self-address, sometimes the beloved "she," sometimes the reader. Often this shifter invokes more than one unstable "person" at the same time. As in dreamwork, displacements and condensations both attract and resist the satisfactions of single meanings and well-behaved referents. Declarative or descriptive language suddenly becomes vocative, turning the reader from listening watcher to active interlocutor. From "Observation" on, the words of poem after poem try to dream up some kind of originary, unifying certitude which those same words resist with a kind of intractable, constitutional honesty. The speaker of *Ignoring the Bomb* once asserts such a transcendental unifying centre, at the end of a poem called (pretty significantly) "Language Dreams." That assertion, faithful or hopeful or charitable but in any case verbal, is itself a mark of predicaments in and with desire. At the close of *Pointwise* the most the speaker will say, the most he can do, is relish the taste of past voices and remember, delicately, the sound of a lover's words reminding him "nightly of / the words for night" and "saying welcome."

IAN SOWTON

DIRE LE MOI

SYLVIE DESROSIERS, *T'as rien compris, Jacinthe* . . . Leméac, n.p.

YOLANDE VILLEMAIRE, *Ange Amazone*. Les Herbes Rouges, $8.95.

DIRE LE MOI, tenter l'exploration et peut-être mettre au jour, à travers l'écriture, des zones cachées du monde intérieur de l'individu: c'est l'aventure que proposent par des chemins tout différents, ces deux romans québécois.

T'as rien compris, Jacinthe . . . est à l'écoute du discours intérieur d'une jeune femme qui vient d'absorber des somnifères, juste assez pour qu'on prenne sa tentative de suicide au sérieux, pas trop pour garder encore une chance de s'en tirer. Le récit dure les quelques heures qui suivent ce geste et se termine par un deuxième recours à la bouteille de pillules: tout laisse entendre que cette fois-ci, Jacinthe mettra vraiment fin à sa vie. Pendant ces quelques heures, dans un demi-sommeil qui libère le subconscient et ramène le passé à la surface, Jacinthe fait une sorte de bilan: elle revit des souvenirs d'enfance, pense à ses études et ambitions artistiques, réfléchit à deux événements traumatiques qui l'ont marquée: un accident d'auto et une tentative de viol. Elle fait aussi le compte de ses amis et le point sur ses rapports avec deux amants successifs: l'ancien qu'elle a quitté et l'actuel dont elle craint la défection. Elle arrive à un constat d'échec: la situation est sans issue. Jamais elle n'aura assez de force ni de courage pour satisfaire aux exigences d'authenticité, d'indépendance et de créativité qu'elle s'est imposées. Jamais elle n'aura assez de confiance en soi pour aimer sans souffrir. La première velléité de suicide était un geste impulsif, le résultat d'un moment de dépression. Le deuxième est l'aboutissement d'un retour sur soi aussi lucide qu'impitoyable.

Le texte se compose exclusivement des ressassements de Jacinthe, seule, enfermée dans son désespoir, qui se juge et se condamne sans indulgence. Certaines sections, à la troisième personne, émanant d'un narrateur non-identifié, permettent de prendre un certain recul et adoucissent la sévérité de la jeune femme vis-à-vis d'elle-même: "Elle se croit souvent idiote mais au contraire, elle a un esprit vif doté d'une grande perspicacité, une soif d'apprendre et de s'approprier le monde qui font d'elle une éternelle insa-

tisfaite, une éternelle perplexe." Ces mêmes chapitres esquissent une interprétation un peu plus large du désarroi de la jeune femme: "La générosité et la gratuité ne rapportent pas en sont par la logique de notre système du gain, des signes de faiblesse." Jacinthe n'est pas carriériste mais elle résiste mal aux pressions sociales qui assimilent succès et productivité.

Faut-il dire que la lecture d'un tel roman est assez déprimante? Pas tellement à cause du sujet, les thèmes les plus tragiques ont un côté exaltant. C'est le dépouillement, on pourrait presque dire l'austérité du texte qui crée cette impression. Le monde extérieur existe à peine. Excepté Jacinthe, tous les autres personnages ne sont que des ombres. Le récit met délibérément en sourdine tous les événements tant soit peu spectaculaires, la tentative de viol, par exemple. L'auteur refuse aussi d'exploiter le suicide pour créer un certain pathétique ou un effet de suspense. La langue, le Québécois familier du personnage principal ne retient ni par l'originalité ni par le pittoresque.

Le lecteur n'a d'autres motifs de s'attacher au roman que le personnage de Jacinthe. Etant donné son insignifiance, c'est sûrement une gageure. L'ambivalence et la diversité de nos réactions à son égard sont un des points forts du roman: Jacinthe irrite et attache à la fois. Elle retient la sympathie par son intransigeance vis-à-vis d'elle-même. Mais le roman encourage aussi le lecteur à une prise de conscience critique envers le personnage. L'erreur de Jacinthe, c'est de ressentir ses faiblesses comme des fautes, d'être incapable de s'assumer comme elle est.

T'as rien compris, Jacinthe . . . s'inscrit dans la tradition du roman intimiste. Les ruminations du moi se pratiquent dans un monde confiné, tourné vers le passé. Le récit à la première personne n'est jamais loin de le confession: la culpabilité reste même si la notion de péché a disparu.

Par comparaison avec ce type de texte, *Ange Amazone* de Yolande Villemaire éblouit par son originalité et son audace. C'est aussi le récit à la première personne d'un moi qui se cherche à travers l'écriture mais qui dépasse et renouvelle les contraintes et les restrictions traditionnelles du genre. On peut "recenser ses états d'âme" sans ressasser le passé, ni tourner en rond dans des pensées suicidaires. *Ange Amazone* se moque des conditions habituelles de l'autobiographie.

Le récit autobiographique se fonde sur un décalage entre le présent de l'écriture et le passé vécu, entre le moi qui a éprouvé certains sentiments et le moi écrivain qui s'en distancie. Dans ce roman, des paroles magiques, mudras, litanies, conjurations ressuscitent pleinement le vécu. Il ne s'agit pas de se raconter, c'est-à-dire de couler les moments d'une vie passée dans le moule d'un récit. La narratrice a l'ambition de recréer chaque instant "plein et rond comme un caillou." Le schéma de chaque section (chapitre?) est semblable: la cérémonie commence par l'évocation du lieu; les gestes rituels mettent le moi en état de réceptivité, les sens s'aiguisent et la narratrice se laisse emporter à travers des paysages merveilleux, vers des rencontres fantastiques. "Je suis," "je vois" sont des phrases sans cesse répétées. Le présent est le seul temps utilisé. L'acuité et la précision des visions et des sensations ne cessent d'étonner: "Je fais une rotation de ma cage thoracique, je soulève les genoux. Et je m'immobilise pour entendre le gong du silence dans mon coeur." Ce moi visionnaire et sensuel est peu porté vers l'analyse psychologique et l'examen de conscience.

Le statut fictif ou non-fictif du texte joue un rôle important dans l'autobiographie: le moi qui parle coincide-t-il avec

l'auteur ou est-il un personnage distinct de celui-ci? Faul-il lire le texte comme un roman ou comme un document? Pour le lecteur d'*Ange Amazone*, il est vain de se préoccuper d'une telle distinction. La frontière entre le réel et l'imaginaire se trouve effacée comme celle qui séparait le présent du passé. Le "je" du récit se métamorphose en une myriade de personnages mythiques, de préférence androgynes, qui la guident dans sa descente aux enfers: "Je m'avance à travers the black ocean of reality, jeune femme blanche toujours plus absente, lourde d'archétypes, encombrée de mes six paires d'ailes car je suis Michael, je suis Raphael, je suis Gabriel et Lucifer. Je m'avance, ange amazone, la nuque transpercée par un rayon laser vert de kryptonite." Le moi ici est multiple, sans cesse en transformation. Parfois il est la voix d'une toute petite fille à la veille de Noel: "J'ai deux ans, je suis recroquevillée dans la crêche," parfois, Villemaire puise dans la mémoire commune de toute une humanité. "Dix millions de sorcières brûlées vives et autant de chats hurlent dans ma mémoire douloureuse."

Le principe d'identité du moi en tant que personnalité s'y dissout. Sa cohérence tient au réseau de rapports entre les symboles et les archétypes qu'il projette. On ne peut plus vraiment parler d'un monde intérieur même s'il n'existe que dans le rêve et l'imaginaire. Seules, les visions peuvent l'exprimer. Celles-ci n'ont rien de flou. La rêveuse, même si elle échappe aux contraintes du temps et de l'espace est solidement ancrée dans le concret. Elle éprouve ses visions dans son corps, elle peut en décrire le goût, le toucher et les couleurs. Elle raconte chaque apparition extraordinaire avec la tranquille assurance d'un témoin direct: "J'ai déjà vécu ici en Chine. J'ai déjà vécu ici, je le sais tout à coup." La structure simple et répétitive des phrases évoque la litanie, les paroles rituelles, les formules magiques. Plus qu'au roman autobiographique, *Ange Amazone* se rattache aux grands textes visionaires romantiques, prose ou poèmes: *Le Bateau ivre*, *Les Illuminations*, *Aurélia*.

Ecrire le moi, c'est ici le contraire du repli sur soi, c'est s'ouvrir au fond commun de l'imaginaire humain.

JACQUELINE VISWANATHAN

IDEOLOGIES

ALBERTINE HALLE, *La Vallée des blés d'or*. Prise de parole, n.p.

JACQUES GRAND'MAISON, *Tel un coup d'archet*. Leméac, $13.95.

LOUKY BERSIANIK, *The Euguélionne*, tr. Gerry Denis and others. Porcépic, $9.95.

HOW CAN ONE TURN an ideology into a fiction? What forms work best? What kinds of authorial intention give most (fictional) life to the relative abstraction of concepts and convictions? The books by Hallé and Grand'maison propose novelistic forms, one approximating a pastoral idyll, the other a *roman philosophique*. The third, by Bersianik, attempts something like epic parable.

The first novel under consideration is Franco-Ontarian in origin, involving a subtle geographical transposition of Québec ideologies to the wilderness frontier of mid-Victorian Ontario. It is an idyll of perfect naiveté, the framed retrospective narrative of an aged settler, who is telling the story of the settlement to its new generation. The simplistic optimism of the tale is seemingly shared by both speaker and author; this astonishingly unironic text seems without conflict at any level, whether of plot, of characters, or even of theme, that time-honoured Canadian pastoral theme of man against nature. Never have trees fallen so easily to the settler's axe, never has an Ontario winter seemed, in fictional subjective time, so short. Feelings are never ruffled

for more than a parenthetical clause; there is no roughness or even ambivalence — no *friction* — even within word, phrase, or sentence, let alone any clue to a sub-text which might undermine the pure innocence of the mythical vision. It is an Eden wholly without serpent, as becomes obvious when the simple goodness of the main group of characters (two closely related families) meets its first real challenge — more than two-thirds of the way through the book — in the form of the arrival in their Valley of a couple, one of whom drinks, one of whom is dishonest, and both of whom speak, in pointed contrast to the excellent French of the main (though equally rural) characters, crude joual. This threat to communal harmony evaporates, fading from the plot before it need be exorcized. The golden mist that hovers over every page of this book is almost too innocently escapist to contain a conscious ideology; I would hesitate to accuse the author of designs upon our beliefs or attitudes, yet patently it makes a case for beliefs that Québec writers, and, I daresay, other Franco-Ontarian writers as well, have long abandoned: that harmony and happiness arise from (and only from) virtue in both character and conduct within the communal, land-based, context of the strict Catholic faith, in particular obedience to its command to be fruitful and multiply.

The second ideological text, though far more sophisticated in its didacticism, is even more thinly disguised as a novel. It is a set of epistolary meditations by three priests, writing their thoughts to each other on the politico-theological questions of present-day Québec. All essentially agree that Québec must return to the Church; they have marginally differing shades of opinion as to why and in what way, and to what sort of Church, and some barely distinguishable traits of situation or temperament that seem intended to make the text into a *roman philosophique*, a truly fictionalized debate among significantly different principles and personalities. It is, rather, however, a pseudo-dialogue, by an author more accustomed, to judge by his long list of publications, to writing overt treatises on the Christian life than to writing fictions. It is a treatise made up of miscellaneous conservative, perhaps even reactionary, reflections upon Québec politics and society. All three of his personae display a crotchety intolerance for most facets of the regrettably un-Christian present, though a marginal case for a more humanist Christianity is made by one of the priests, who is rather quickly out-argued by his interlocutors. This book, like *La Vallée des blés d'or*, preaches to the converted. To others, including, I would suppose, the overwhelming majority of Québec readers, it must sound like overheard shop talk, or like special and unrealistic pleading for a tiny group, self-confessedly almost without influence, written in the form of an often waspish and querulous as well as sententious commonplace book, rather than as a fictionalized enaction of significant ideas.

Bersianik's view of the state of womanhood, as idealized in *La Vallée* and as virtually excluded from the androcentric world of *Archet*, is not hard to imagine. Indeed nearly every page of *L'Euguélionne* is a critique of such world-views, the first that of a woman who has caved in ("une démissionnaire" or, in the translation, "quitter"), the other that of men who, as their socks are darned for them, can afford debate on the finer nuances of apparently gender-free but actually totally gender-conditioned abstractions.

It is unkind to compare these two rather unsuccessful books with *The Euguélionne*, a minor triumph of ideological fiction. It might be seen as the unfair advantage that hope has over nostalgia, or merely this reviewer's preference for a

trendy ideology (feminism) over timeless (i.e., "dated") ones, or the power of a visionary intention over a "concern" or a pale dream, or simply as a good writer's advantage over two inferior writers. But I would prefer to argue the case for Bersianik's careful consideration of the problems of the form needed to fictionalize ideas, ways of expressing them more effectively in poetic terms than could be done in prose argument or pseudo-novels. She makes no secret of aiming, through parody, at mythology: "aiming at" in both senses, for of course part of her ideological point is to establish a lexicon of feminist mythologies by parodying, mocking, undermining the present all-too-dominant and familiar androcentric ones.

"Une long plaidoyer moralisateur, irritant et stérile," said *The University of Toronto Quarterly* of *L'Euguélionne* in 1976, when it first appeared. *Canadian Literature* seems not to have said anything at that point, although I suggested, when reviewing Bersianik's *Pique-nique sur l'Acropole* in 1981, that both of these books should be translated into English *tout de suite*. At the moment I was writing those words, Jennifer Waelti-Walters' redoubtable team in Victoria was already hard at work, and the result is now available to us.

The translators have done remarkably well with a particularly hazardous text, one exceptionally dependent on plays with words as well as on points about language. Fortunately a great deal of the language satire, especially that inevitably key topic of the generic use of "man," is transferable from French into English, but several scattered sections depend on pecularities of French (a language L'Euguélionne feels has outlived its usefulness) and there the translators are forced into a parallel text of French originals with approximate English equivalents. Bersianik's lyric inserts (her poetry — see *La Maternative* [1982] — is rather hermetic anyway) lose considerably in translation, but this matters less than the inevitable loss or blurring of some of the jokes. Jennifer Waelti-Walters' introduction is a model of cogency and concision in its placing of the book in the traditions of feminist satire and visionary fictions and its emphasis on Bersianik's concern with language as power, on the fundamentally political and ideological nature of her linguistic satire.

The book is set out as a triptych, unified by the dominant voice and presence of the Euguélionne, a female visitor from another planet, possessed of great eloquence and some supernatural powers. Her observations and comments upon the state of the females of Earth are satirical, like those of Voltaire's Micromégas, or Candide (although cleverer and harsher), because to see as a stranger, from the outside, is to "make strange," to show us ourselves as we cannot, unaided, see ourselves. Her exhortations, sharp enquiries, fierce entreaties, her florid rhetoric, couched in the rhythms of the Bible, or, more explicitly, the rhythms of the Nietzschean prophet Zarathustra, convey with moral and emotional force the sorrows, horrors, and absurdities of the present state of things on this two-sexed planet where only one sex is fully human, and suggest the need, first for awareness and judgment and then for change. Yet for all the anguish, her major mode is comic: "If I were a prophet . . . I would have apocalyptic visions that would make you die laughing."

Having cast these assertions in the teeth of the *UTQ* reviewer, it is now time to concede that not all parts of this book work equally well. The Voltairean ironies of L'Eugélionne's angled look at our world are well done, as are the Rabelaisian lists of insulting names for women, of male voices in their dozens of shades of condescension, and such Rabelaisian

conceits as the "warehouse of words in cans." Bersianik makes brilliant use of the very few comically affirmative quest heroines, "Zazie," this time "hors du métro," and "Alysse Bach-Frumm-Wonderland" ("Opéhi-Revenue-des-Merveilles"). The extended conceit of the sexual division of her world into "Legislators" and "Pedalists" makes it look uncomfortably like our world, and there is much psychological shrewdness in her epigrammatic observations thereon: women are exhorted (in Nietzschean rhythms) to become "entomologists of men . . . Men are no more stupid than you are, they are simply more pretentious." The Nietzschean aphoristic structure and rhetorical devices ("Moi, dit l'Euguélionne, je . . .") which saturate parts one and three could be more closely examined. Yet when she moves from allegory and parable to a more "novelistic" mode, towards the end of part one and in part two, the domestic affairs of the unhappy people designated by letters of the Greek alphabet lack the sparkle of the more frankly fantastic sections. The attacks on Freud and Lacan are vigorous but long-winded and somewhat predictable, and the concluding section, following upon the very interesting linguistic satire that opens part three (the warehouse of words, or the Euguélionne's explorations among books), is a dreary and extensive re-run of the problems of society, sexuality, and attitudes towards female biology, lightened from time to time by a neat reification of cliché and metaphor: drawing the logical conclusions from the image of woman as electric socket and man as plug, for instance. If the earlier reviewer dipped into the book at the wrong places, she could easily have come to the conclusion she did. Anglophone readers, supplied with this most usable translation, are now in a position to judge for themselves; I hope that not only those who are already among Bersianik's "converted" will take the opportunity to do so. PATRICIA MERIVALE

A RECENT INTERVIEW in *Writing* finds Fred Wah celebrating Nicole Brossard's poetry for its "insisting that the language structures have to change" to provide new ways of looking "at ourselves, our bodies, our minds." Wah's turning to a Québécoise poet for inspiration is one of many manifestations of a renewed bilinguefacting of the air in Canadian literature, *Cross/cut: Contemporary English Quebec Poetry* (Véhicule) anthologizes 70 poets who, according to Peter Van Toorn's Introduction, enrich and extend their native speech through contact with "the rhythms and perspectives of two kinds of English, two kinds of French, and the *mélange* of sonorities provided by dozens of European, Asian, and Eastern tongues." Which is the reason, no doubt, why Montréal is again becoming — as so often before — a dynamic centre of poetry in English. Nor does the influence seem to be running in one direction only. In the literary review *Nuit Blanche* (Automne 1983), Michel Beaulieu warns "nous vous aveuglons en croyant que la seule poésie valable au nord du 49e parallèle s'écrire au Québec," and goes on to celebrate the prominent and subtle "écriture" of Phyllis Webb's *The Vision Tree*. Beaulieu is also behind the cover story and dossier in the next issue of the same journal (décembre 1983/janvier 1984) which asks — half ironically, half curiously — "Le Canada existe-t-il?" Ways toward an answer are found in an interview with Margaret Atwood, a survey of the novel by Frank Davey, in Beaulieu's own digest of Canadian poetry, in a story by Gail Scott, in short features on Birney, Klein, Bowering, Musgrave, Ken Norris, and *Cross/cut*, and in a bibliography which veers in and out of the standard canon as much as this list. I suspect that the terminology of contemporary criticism is beginning to give Québécois writers and writers in English Canada a common language through which to explore one another's work. That is a central impression left by *The Language of Difference: Writing in QUEBEC(ois)* (Yale French Studies No. 65) where concepts of *langue* and *parole*, of *intertextualité*, of *signifiant* (to mention a few of several dozen crucial terms drawn from French) in seventeen English language articles, detect a trace, through *différance*, of *québécité*. Add to these instances the recent appearance of Patrice Desbiens' *Sudbury* (Prise de Parole) from a small Franco-Ontarian press located in Ottawa; of Robert Chute's *Thirteen Moons/Treize Lunes* (Penumbra, $7.95), a suite of poems recreating the life of Jesuit scholar Sebastian Rale (1652-1724) printed in English

with facing translations in Rale's own language; of special issues of *Room of One's Own* (8, No. 4, $3.00) devoted in part to bringing the "theoretical and experimental writing of Québécois feminists to the attention of English-Canadian writers," and of *Canadian Fiction Magazine: A Decade of Quebec Fiction* (No. 47, $7.50); and we have evidence not so much of a new cultural reciprocity as of a growing recognition that one of the advantages of living with two languages (however vicariously or tentatively) is the sharper awareness of the limitations of the perceptual systems, and sound structures, built into any one language. That's a recognition which the *Edition critique de l'oeuvre d'Hubert Aquin*, elaborately outlined in the project's Bulletin No. 3 (the proceedings of a conference held at the Université du Québec à Montréal in March 1983), will no doubt do much to reinforce, since Aquin has already had great impact on how writers, readers, and students in both language groups think about language structures in this country.

L.R.

MYSTERY

HOWARD ENGEL, *Murder on Location*. Clarke, Irwin, $15.95.

MICHAEL RICHARDSON, ed., *Maddened by Mystery*. Lester & Orpen Dennys, $17.95.

MYSTERY STORIES and detective novels are, I believe, subgenres of adventure fiction. They are generally written according to specific formulas, and while changing formulas and shifting readership may reflect aspects of cultural change, their real appeal is in the entertainment they offer to readers who are keen on isolating clues, making deductions, and piecing together a cause-and-effect pattern that ends with the solving of a mystery and/or the apprehending of a criminal. I am yet to be convinced that this kind of writing is worthy of serious *literary* study.

John G. Cawelti obviously would not agree. In *Adventure, Mystery and Romance* (1976), he distinguishes between classical detective fiction as written by, say, Agatha Christie, and the hard-boiled thrillers of, say, Mickey Spillane. Certain characteristics are common to both kinds: each involves a detective, a crime, an investigation, and a solution. But there are important differences: in the classical detective story the crime is a *fait accompli*, and the investigation is generally impersonal and intellectual. The hard-boiled detective, on the other hand, usually gets involved more slowly but more emotionally. Often he is the seducer or the seduced; and, more often than not, his confrontation with the criminal is violent. But despite his macho image, he is a fervent moralist, a man on a crusade — often against the criminal underworld. Howard Engel's *Murder on Location* owes something to both forms.

Engel's third Benny Cooperman mystery is set mainly in Niagara Falls (Canadian side of the river) where Cooperman, a private detective, tries to locate the missing Billie Mason. Billie is the stage-struck wife of Lowell Mason, a real estate manager with Mafia connections. Billie has been attracted to Niagara Falls where a movie crew is filming *Ice Bridge*, a thriller written by local boy Neil Furlong who is also a plagiarist, and a blackmailer! Cooperman is able to return Billie to her husband, but not before three murders have been committed. The climax comes when Cooperman follows two men (enemies of each other) out upon a treacherous ice-bridge below the Falls. The ice breaks and Cooperman barely makes it back to shore. Neil Furlong goes under but his adversary is rescued by a helicopter (*deus-ex-machina*!) at the last minute. Cooperman then explains everything.

Murder on Location has its weaknesses: the plot is not especially exciting, and rather too many characters of similar nature and function pass back and forth across the scene. On the other hand, Engel maintains a proper balance between mystery and detection; the reader

is interested throughout and does not feel cheated at the end. Engel also endows his hero with a winsome humour that finds its best expression in ironic understatement.

Mystery is central to the detective story but the mystery story *per se* need not involve crime. Also, whereas the formula of the former demands a heavy emphasis on rational processes, the latter is enhanced by suggestions of the supernatural. An identity may be revealed, a secret explained, or the mystery may be left to haunt the reader long after he has read the story. *Maddened by Mystery: A Casebook of Canadian Detective Fiction* embraces both genres.

Maddened by Mystery is a collection of stories, most of which were written between the late Victorian era and the late 1930's. Most of these stories were written by Canadians although only two are set in Canada and only four have protagonists who are Canadian: a writer, a backwoodsman, an RCMP Sergeant, and a retired Toronto Police Inspector.

The range of mysteries to be solved and of detectives solving them can only be hinted at in this brief review. Jack Batten and Michael Bliss give a delightful pasticle of Sherlock Holmes in "The Adventures of the Annexationist Conspiracy" (originally published as "Sherlock Holmes' Great Canadian Adventure" in *Weekend Magazine*, May 1977). The year is 1891, and Holmes has been invited by Sir John A. Macdonald to come and save Canada from annexation by the U.S.A. The authors not only parody Holmes' skills of deduction but also take some delightfully satirical swipes at the Old Chieftain and at Canadians in general.

The title story, sub-titled "The Defective Detective" is by Stephen Leacock. This satire on detective fiction is a hilarious *tour-de-force*. "The Prince of Wurttemberg has been kidnapped." The kidnapped prince turns out to be not a Bourbon but a Dachshund. Alas, the kidnappers have disfigured the dog: they have shaved his back and cut his tail. The Great Detective, to placate the dog's owner, the Countess of Dashleigh, impersonates the dog, enters the dog show, and wins First Prize!

Frank Packard's "The Grey Seal," with its lock-picking protagonist and its blending of *cherchez-la-femme* and Robin Hood motifs, is delightful in its irony.

Maddened by Mystery has a preface which briefly traces the history of mystery and detective fiction in Canada. It is replete with biographical data on the individual authors; and it has an appended "Who's who in Canadian Mystery Fiction" — an annotated list of more than a hundred "detectives, cops, agents and rogues created by writers with Canadian connections."

"Detectives stories," wrote C. Day Lewis, himself a practitioner of the art, "are a harmless release of an innate spring of cruelty in everyone." They can also be first-rate entertainment.

DONALD R. BARTLETT

NATURAL & UNNATURAL

ROBERT BRINGHURST, *The Beauty of the Weapons: Selected Poems 1972-82*. McClelland & Stewart, n.p.

D. G. JONES, *A Throw of Particles: The New and Selected Poetry of D. G. Jones*. General, $9.95.

MARGARET AVISON, *Winter Sun / The Dumbfounding: Poems 1940-66*. McClelland & Stewart, n.p.

IRVING LAYTON, *A Wild Peculiar Joy: Selected Poems 1945-82*. McClelland & Stewart, n.p.

HUBERT EVANS, *Mostly Coast People: Selected Verse*. Harbour Publishing, 1982. $6.95.

ONE OF THE LARGELY unexamined issues of literary history is how canons, reputations, and traditions get established by readers. The most prevalent assumption has taken the Darwinian track, that there is with successive generations of readers a process of natural selection. For the poetic species, this leads somehow to the survival of the fittest poems. A corollary to this assumption is that the visibility and survival of a book is a standard of its utility. This sounds plausible enough, except that such assumptions take no account of the marketing strategies of publishing houses, and to judge by the rush of "Selecteds" issuing from McClelland & Stewart and General these days, Canadian poetry is entering a period of consolidation determined not by the reader or even the poet but by the publisher.

Given the excellence of Robert Bringhurst's decade of selections, this is not necessarily a bad thing, for the editor of the McClelland & Stewart series, Dennis Lee, has brought together poems now virtually unobtainable after their original appearances in the lists of small and tiny presses. With this selection, the reader now has easy access to what must be one of the wisest voices in Canadian poetry. The voice combines the example of Yeats' later poetic and Bringhurst's own savage field notes in order to produce an extended "chaconne for solo intelligence." The key to Bringhurst's performance lies, I think, in the group of poems gathered under the heading "The Old in Their Knowing." The "old" are the Presocratics, men whose fragmentary investigations parallel those of the modern world, fragments being the only form they appear to have trusted or thought possible. These poems show sometimes Bringhurst's predilection for slipping into the arcane, and yet also reveal his undeniable talent for unifying feeling and intellect. So, from "Demokritos":

> Such giants we are and so hardly
> here, mere shapes in the dust and our
> deaf hands yelling so loud,
> the diaphanous blood, the diaphanous
> bone, and the truth so small as it crumbles
> it swims
> in and out of the intestine,
> floats through the ear's net, the eye's net,
> the sieve of the palm.

The unifying power of Bringhurst's poetic is not tenable everywhere in these selected poems, but where it is we are able to follow and return with an eloquent guide to the dark places of intellect and flesh.

Bringhurst's is a new enough voice that, in his words, his "selected poems ought to mean not his washed and dressed historical record but his living repertory." But the same is true for the volumes from two veterans, Avison and Jones: they are festivals of poems which are still speaking. Avison's is a natural selection. Although widely anthologized, her poems have amazingly not been given the benefit of collection before this volume, which includes the complete and apparently unaltered texts of *Winter Sun* (1960) and *The Dumbfounding* (1966), leaving only *Sunblue* (1978) out of what might have been her *Collected Poems*. Avison is usually described as unprolific, but this volume proves otherwise. It

should not now be possible to underestimate the extent of her work or to assume that the standard poems — "The Swimmer's Moment," "Strong Yellow," "Black-White Under Green," "Thaw" — are the result of a flukey vision into the heart of things. Given their original contexts, they are simply aspects of Avison's total powerful investigatory perception, which shows the spiritual and imaginative terrain comprehended.

Like Avison, Jones is a comparatively reticent poet, this being only his fourth book since *Frost on the Sun* (1957). And the selected poems here (forty-one of them, but with none from that first book) look dangerously like an attempt has been made to flesh out what would be the rather slim contents of a collection of new poems, called (confusingly) *A Throw of Particles*. That's what it looks like, but the uniform printing encourages the reader to see Jones' uniform vision of occasion and the basis all his poetry in the observation of moment. The new poems (like the used ones) here show Jones again coming to terms with the "throw of particles" (whether the fall of dead leaves or the sparks spun off from wit) onto the printed page or into "the disaggregate world."

In contrast, one must wonder whose interests are being served by the most recent "Selected" from Layton. Certainly not Layton's, I would argue. After *The Improved Binoculars* (1954), *A Red Carpet for the Sun* (1959), *Selected Poems* (1969), *Collected Poems* (1971), *The Darkening Fire: Selected Poems 1945-1968*, *The Unwavering Eye: Selected Poems 1969-1975*, *The Poems* (1977), *The Uncollected Poems* (1977), and the *Love Poems* (1980), this new collection makes the tenth retrospective revising of Layton's corpus. In the process of selection, the poems from previous selecteds get more and more select. For example, of the fifteen poems selected from *Seventy-Five Greek Poems* (1974) for *The Unwavering Eye* only four have surfaced in this volume, and of the thirty-two chosen from *The Pole Vaulter* (1974) only three survive here: this is not Layton's *Selected Poems* but his *Selections from Selected Poems*. What happens to all the work he once thought worthy of dignifying by preserving?

Neither is the reader served by the distorting distillation. Unlike the impossible *Collected Poems* of 1971, this volume at least gives each poem a date (but only in the index of titles), but there is no indication in what volumes the poems originally appeared (as there is in *The Unwavering Eye*). Nor is there any justificatory foreword, as in all the previous Selecteds, only this note: "This selection was made by Irving Layton and Dennis Lee. For the period 1976-1982, which previous Selecteds did not cover, they were greatly assisted by Wynne Francis, Eli Mandel, and Seymour Mayne; each prepared a list of 100 poems from which the final selection was drawn." This note does not provoke the reader's confidence in the principles or the results of the selection, and neither does the additional announcement that "Poems marked '1982' have not appeared in a book before; they will be included in a forthcoming publication." There are nine of these new poems, selected even before they are collected, and they reveal a new, touchingly mellow Layton. Who, a decade ago, could have predicted that the bluster, rage, and imperial rhetoric of the old prophet (to use Eli Mandel's characterization) would have evolved into the trembly and sear verse of these latest poems? They make an uncomfortable footnote to an unnatural, and ultimately unrepresentative, selection.

In the long view, beyond the strategies of editors and publishers, there is one defensible purpose for a Selected Poems: to be a precise *memento* of the poetic

vita. Hubert Evans' temperate poems, the best of them an intriguing cross between classical epigram and Japanese lyric forms, will not likely challenge Layton's innovations, or his reputation. At 92, Evans is the oldest old man of Canadian writing, and this selection does what selections must do, which is to represent for its readers the precise width and depth of what this man has seen, done, and learned. The publisher may make the *memento* available, but ultimately only the readers will determine whether the *memento* is worth retaining, and whether the poetry is more lasting than cardboard, or bronze.

REGINALD BERRY

WORKERS' PLAYTIME

TOM WAYMAN, *Counting The Hours: City Poems*. McClelland & Stewart, n.p.

TOM WAYMAN, *Inside Job, Essays on the New Work Writing*. Harbour Publishing, $6.95.

ALTHOUGH THERE ARE NO SURPRISES in *Counting The Hours*, Tom Wayman continues to do what he does do well: the poems are narrative, often anecdotal and frequently built around a conceit. They offer recognition, familiarity, life moments, life events, a kind of domesticity of the work world. They are nearer to heightened prose than to the economics of poetry; open and accessible — it is easy to understand why they are well received by people who don't normally read or listen to poetry. The language is every-day, usually non-figurative, the subjects are interesting and entertaining and offer few challenges to thought or imagination. This is comfortable, appealing, satisfying work. Not the type of poetry to provoke a shiver of insight, but only the narrowest taste would argue against it.

However, Wayman does himself a disservice in attempting to argue for "work writing" in *Inside Job*. His beliefs and sense of mission are much better presented in poems such as "Asphalt Hours, Asphalt Air" and "Privacy Poem" (though both of these suffer from over-explanation). In *Inside Job* the arguments are muddled, often nonsensical. His essays do not stand close scrutiny, and cast a haze of pseudo-theory over a subject which has merit. Certainly there is a place for the literature of the work-place, and poets (despite what Wayman says) have always been alert to this kind of subject — as well as to other kinds. I suppose "Beowulf" is a work-poem of sorts, and it seems odd that Wayman ignores the writers of social content who frequently — as observers or participants — present the industrial world. Dorothy Livesay, in Canada, for example, or Yannis Ritsos or Yevtushenko — "I am Nushka Burtova, I mix concrete / I produce twice my daily quota." These poets have not restricted themselves to the anecdotal form. As George Herbert said, "May no lines pass, except they do their duty / Not to a true, but a painted chair?" Perhaps it is form rather than content that Wayman means. It is true that the only real failure in *Counting The Hours* is an attempt at the lyric mood ("Long Beach suite").

Wayman condemns, among other things, imaginative literature. It is escapist and repressive he says. He fails to distinguish between the Harlequin Romance type of status-quo reinforcement and the assault on widely held values evidenced in the writing of Neruda or Marquez or Alice Munro. I don't see how much writing can be labelled "narcotic." There is a gulf between many people and "literature," and this is a cause of distress to any thinking person. But surely the remedy is not, as Wayman suggests, to offer poems "about" drugs or sex or the job — to offer people only what they already know — but to attack the aspect of our

culture that spends so much of its energy in keeping people functioning at the most superficial, consuming level. Many of Wayman's arguments, such as those concerning Shakespeare, the Romantics, contemporary painting, and mythology are based on ignorance. Wayman's poetry isn't lacking in complexity of thought and feeling, but these essays are.

MARILYN BOWERING

LITTLE MAN

ABRAHAM RAM, *Once in Woods*. Golden Dog Press, n.p.

MOSES TABB, the middle-aged Jewish protagonist of Abraham Ram's two earlier novelettes, *The Noise of Singing* and *Dark of Caves*, is once again the subject of the third volume in Ram's ongoing "novel of its time."

Like Ram himself, Moe is a part-time teacher of Creative Writing at a Montreal university. Despite the title the novel, like the preceding volumes, is firmly set in Montreal. Yet Moe Tabb's view of Montreal is idiosyncratic at best, for Moe, the restless wanderer of the city's streets, bars, and sleazy lodgings does not attempt to provide a detailed account of the city or of its inhabitants. The setting is the old Jewish quarter "of the lower Main and its environs," the district that Mordecai Richler has described so well. Yet Ram's attention is focused less on that colourful quarter and more on Moe's agonized remembrance of things past, his attempt to capture the moment: "Every golden minute passing — time itself — that was the golden fleece he was after . . . the wonder of each moment still gleaming."

Despite his associations with biblical Moses, Moe is not the inspired originator of high thoughts or of great events in his people's history. He is rather the shamefaced, guilty recorder of his own follies and failures, an *homme moyen sensuel*, the little man so common in Canadian fiction, who stumbles his way through life to an uncertain future, a Charlie Chaplin who fails to get the girl.

Certainly Moe is an interesting character. There are more than enough mythic and literary associations to suggest he is the archetypal, alienated man. To begin with, Moe is a romantic, a Don Giovanni who cannot resist an attractive face and a well-shaped behind. Despite his middle age and thinning hair, Moe is attractive to women, yet having won them he declines to hold them. Like Leopold Bloom or Ulysses of old, Moe is a "rudderless, never-at-home wanderer lost and beset by siren songs wherever he turned," the Tannhauser of the lower Main. Caught up either in the chase or in his own loneliness and alienation, Moe cannot realize the potential of his early days. He is a could-have-been poet, a might-have-been writer. But as he is all too aware, his early poetry is pretentious, juvenile, and self-indulgent. He is alone because he can never make a commitment to a woman, not even to his mother. His interest is in the chase; the aftermath bores him.

The epigraph from Goethe's *Faust* ("Two souls dwell, alas! in my breast") alludes to the two personalities in Moe — the kind, generous, self-aware man vs. "the Kurtzian devil" who betrays himself for lust: the Parnassus climber vs. the prissy Prufrock he feels he has become. Yet Moe is not in fact a failure. Though unproductive himself, he is a gifted teacher of Creative Writing at MacMillan University. He is not above using his position to enjoy the favours of his female students, but he encourages and stimulates them, and while he marches time they go on to become writers.

I enjoyed Ram's style — particularly the lively dialogue spiced with Yiddish-

isms and literary allusions. The action takes place within Moe's mind. It is the drama of the divided self — the "success" he would like to be vs. the lazy, libidinous, pleasure-loving man he has become. The darker side of Moe's predicament, represented by his recurring nightmares, is offset by his self-deprecating humour, the barb that pricks the bubble of self-indulgence. Moe's speech is laced with jokes, puns, and comic alliteration. For example, he traces the breakdown of his marriage to the lice he caught while visiting a "Berger Street bordello Brunhilde."

What troubles me about the book is its sameness to Ram's first two volumes. It is true that we get a deeper insight into Moe in this volume as he recalls crucial situations from his youth, but because Ram focuses his attention on Moe, the other characters become insubstantial. Moe's closest friend, Helga, could be an interesting character: if Ram had developed her more fully in this novel, the significance of her departure would have been immediately apparent to the reader, and the novel would have gained in dramatic power.

Of the three volumes that have so far appeared in the series I enjoyed the second, *Dark of Caves*, the most. It is of course difficult to maintain a uniformly high level in a series that deals with the same character and essentially the same situations. It seems to me, at least, that if Ram wants to entice his readers into a fourth volume, he will have to introduce more depth and diversity into the characters, the situations, and the style, good as these have been up to now.

MICHAEL BENAZON

MAINSTREAM & BETTER

JIM GERRARD, *Cold Comfort*. Talonbooks, n.p.
KEVIN ROBERTS, *Black Apples*. West Coast Review, n.p.
ROBIN SKELTON, *The Paper Cage*. Oolichan, $7.95.
GEORGE RYGA, *Two Plays: Paracelsus and Prometheus Bound*. Turnstone, n.p.

JIM GERRARD'S *Cold Comfort* is a typical contemporary play: a black comedy with three characters. It has laughs, suspense, surprises enough to hold an audience, and its character portrayal and dialogue are better than most. Though the tone is matter-of-fact, the story and two of the characters are bizarre. The play features a father who has made his teen-age daughter a total recluse but brings her a young man he intends as a sexual partner. The daughter reports that her father has removed her internal sexual organs in home surgery, but though she seems normally curious about the outside world which he denies her and quite comfortable with the first person she has met in years, she also appears content with her father and willing to abide by his decisions in all things. The girl is fascinating but unbelievable, and consequently the point of this "play of love and bondage" is obscure at best. It succeeds moment by moment, but by the end it seems a failure: simply enigmatic, neither intellectually illuminating nor emotionally satisfying.

Cold Comfort is in the mainstream of current drama: dark comedy in prose with a contemporary setting. The plays by Kevin Roberts, George Ryga, and Robin Skelton are evidence of a vigorous sidestream of poetic historical drama. All three writers use a juxtaposition of two time frames in poetic presentations of historical subjects, but the wide range of the plays' subjects, themes, and styles

suggests the vast potential of what now seems only a sidestream.

Most dramatically effective is Roberts' *Black Apples*. Unlike Skelton's *The Paper Cage* and Ryga's *Paracelsus*, in which verse dialogue dominates and the juxtaposed time frames are centuries apart, *Black Apples* presents a story from the recent past, the struggle of Nanaimo miners to gain decent wages and safe working conditions, alternating scenes from the lives of families involved in the labour dispute a generation ago with a confrontation in the preesnt between one of the miners and the granddaughter he has never seen before. The old miner is a poet whose poetry is interspersed with the action to give depth to the emotional impact and significance to the specific events. Roberts manages to create with dramatic economy quite a number of convincing characters. They are caught up in the uncontrollable tumble of events relating to the labour struggle, and their lives are changed in ways they could not anticipate. The dramatic texture is enriched by the alternation of vividly portrayed events from the past with glimpses of two characters whose present lives result from the past events and the poetry of one of them which hints at a parallel story of an Indian grandfather and granddaughter. The poetry relates the specific story of the miners to a vision of progress as a white waterfall in which individual lives are the tumbled pebbles. The important choice is between love and hate of others who are caught nearby in the turbulence.

Skelton's *The Paper Cage* explores the thoughts of an intelligent and sensitive young officer at the close of World War II by dramatizing his imaginative recreation of the story of Regulus, a Roman general during the Punic Wars. The connecting links between the two are the setting of Carthage and the parallel efforts of Jenkins and Regulus to distinguish between their own true values and, on the one hand, the instinctive temptation to take the safe and easy path and, on the other, the more difficult but still delusive choice dictated by the collective ideals of their nationalistic and militaristic societies. The important battle is the one that is fought within the individual; conflicts between nations are diversions that seduce the majority of humanity, and collective assumptions and beliefs constitute a prison, a paper cage, more insidious and therefore more effective in their way than the iron bars and stone walls that cage the prisoner of war. The complexities of the play's symbolic imagery, of its explorations of values, and of the relationships between the two plots and sets of characters make it appeal strongly to the intellect, but its emotional appeal is weaker; Skelton's interpretation of the Regulus story has considerable interest, but Jenkins' story is less than gripping. It is an ambitious work well worth the reading, better suited to the study than the stage.

Equally ambitious and more evidently conceived for the stage is George Ryga's *Paracelsus*. Central to the play are Paracelsus' intense compassion for sufferers, his awesome healing ability, and the horror of his own suffering, both a cause of his compassion and an effect of his unique healing powers, which bring him persecution by the unexceptional members of the medical and religious establishment. Juxtaposed with scenes from Paracelsus' life are vignettes from the daily lives of two modern doctors which emphasize the inadequacy of a purely technical command of medicine and a self-preserving approach to life. Though this play focuses on practitioners of medicine, Ryga's primary concern is not the body but the spirit, not physical states but mental attitudes. Thus Paracelsus is essentially spirit rather than body, and many of the play's unusual features em-

phasize the conflict between the heroic, compassionate spirit and the conventional, self-serving one, as well as man's suffering through the ages. Paracelsus is a convincing individual, and scenes from his life are vivid, but we see in addition to the story of this one extraordinary individual a general view of mankind.

Also on the subject of heroism and man's inhumanity to man is Ryga's shorter play, *Prometheus Bound*. Though the modernization of Aeschylus' play contains novel touches, the unrelieved torment and the necessarily static quality of the action make it interesting primarily as an exposition of Ryga's characteristic themes; it lacks the emotional appeal, the theatrical variety and the philosophical scope of *Paracelsus*.

Mavor Moore contributes a thoughtful introduction to Ryga's drama in which he draws an ironic parallel between the rejection of Paracelsus' "giant new medical science" and the rejection of Ryga's "giant new play," which nobody will produce. Skelton acknowledges that *The Paper Cage* is unlikely to be produced, and since *Black Apples* also requires a cast of a dozen or more and imaginative staging, it too goes into the growing collection of important and successful (measured by any standard but financial) Canadian plays that we are not likely to see performed. *Cold Comfort*, despite its effective blend of humour and horror, is probably the least worthwhile of the plays, but it has only three characters and it is simple to stage, so it has been produced repeatedly. Chances are that anyone who wants to know the best of Canadian drama will have to read it; merit does not guarantee production.

SUSAN STONE-BLACKBURN

A FIND

ANTON WAGNER, ed., *Canada's Lost Plays. Colonial Quebec: French-Canadian Drama, 1606 to 1966*. Canadian Theatre Review Publications, $11.95.

AMID THE TWO-DECADE SCRAMBLE to jerry-build a contemporary Canadian theatre, considerable effort has also been directed to the reconstruction of our theatrical past. Landmark achievements include the publication of the *Bibliography of Canadian Theatre History* by John Ball and Richard Plant, the founding of the *Association for Canadian Theatre History*, and the advent of the journal *Theatre History in Canada*. The appearance of the series *Canada's Lost Plays*, edited with style and scholarship by Anton Wagner, is further cause for rejoicing. The three earlier volumes, *The Nineteenth Century*, *Women Pioneers*, and *The Developing Mosaic*, resurrected a number of neglected English-Canadian plays dating from the eighteenth to the mid-twentieth centuries. With the current anthology, Mr. Wagner turns his attention to little-known dramas of French Canada.

The collection comprises Marc Lescarbot's *The Theatre of Neptune in New France* (1606), Joseph Quesnel's *Colas and Colinette* (1790) and *The French Republicans* (1800-1801), Antoine Gérin-Lajoie's *The Young Latour* (1844), Louis-Honoré Fréchette's *Papineau* (1880), Elzéar Paquin's *Riel* (1886), and Gratien Gélinas' *Yesterday the Children Were Dancing* (1966). None of the plays, it should be underlined, has been genuinely lost; indeed, all of them have been subjected to critical scrutiny within the past decade. But most have not been readily available in English translation in book format.

I have only two gripes; and it may be best to air them at once. The book's title, *Colonial Quebec*, seems a trifle inaccur-

ate for a collection containing *The Theatre of Neptune*, a play written by a French adventurer for a performance at Port Royal, Nova Scotia. A reader in search of the piece might well overlook this anthology. My second cavil relates less to packaging than to content. Why, I wonder, was *Yesterday the Children Were Dancing* included? Far from being lost, Mavor Moore's fine translation of the play, the one reprinted here, is in most libraries and appears in the publisher's current lists. I can only guess that Mr. Wagner was tempted by its topical affinity with the three nineteenth-century nationalist dramas which dominate the volume; and, if one regards the anthology's character as partly thematic, his choice is not hard to justify. But the meaning of the adjective "lost" in the series title must be regarded as somewhat strained by the play's inclusion.

As a curtain-raiser we are offered *The Theatre of Neptune in New France* (translated by Eugene Benson and Renate Benson), Marc Lescarbot's nautical masque designed to welcome Baron Jean de Poutrincourt home to Port Royal from an exploratory expedition in 1606. The piece, modelled on the *entrées royales* pioneered in Italy by the Medici family and later copied by the French nobility, features Neptune drawn in splendour over the waves by six Tritons to salute the returning traveller, wish him well, and promise him future aid. The Tritons in their turn spout patriotic rhetoric, and Indians, played by white men, present gifts. Music punctuates the affair and feasting concludes it. The whole is a formal, good-natured essay in the spectacular tradition and deserves to be better known by Renaissance theatre scholars.

Colas and Colinette, or The Bailiff Confounded (translated by Michel Lecavalier and Godfrey Ridout), a lighthearted romp by Joseph Quesnel, merchant and amateur theatre buff, might have been penned and staged in any provincial French city of the late-eighteenth century, so innocent is it of New World influence. A conventional exercise in the *opéra comique* genre, introduced to France by Vadé and Dauvergne and popularized in England by Isaac Bickerstaff, the piece is long on intrigue and short on characterization. The plot turns upon the machinations of a middle-aged, well-heeled bailiff who, to win the affections of a comely servant girl, dupes her illiterate lover into signing up for military service when he thinks he is putting his mark to a marriage contract. The girl's wise and humane employer, after much misunderstanding, puts all right at last.

Colas and Colinette is prefaced by Quesnel's brief poetic address titled "To the Young Actors of the Théâtre de Société at Quebec" and followed by his musical theatrical sketch *The French Republicans or A Evening in The Tavern*. The former is little more than a reiteration of the commonplace of eighteenth-century acting theory ("For each emotion grasp the gesture well"); but the latter, an hilarious *reductio ad absurdum* of republican rhetoric by a clutch of tavern tipplers, is original and toughminded.

It is four full-length serious dramas, however, which account for most of the volume's bulk and interest. Individually they allow the reader to dip a toe in the unquiet stream of French-Canadian nationalism at four points in time; and collectively they yield important, if painful, insights into the psyche of *indépendentistes* past and present.

Antoine Gérin-Lajoie's *The Young Latour* (translated by Louise Forsyth), written and staged by a student at the College de Nicolet in 1844, breathes the rarefied air of French classical tragedy despite its Acadian setting. The widowed father of the young Roger Latour, French governor of Cap-de-Sable, is given permission by the English court to marry

one of its gentlewomen, on condition that he persuades his son to surrender his fort. Roger finds himself embroiled in a moral nightmare as he weighs the conflicting claims of filial love and national and personal honour. After interminable debates with his father, his former tutor, his confidant, and assorted Indian chiefs, Roger opts to defend the fort against a parental attack. When the elder Latour is forced to surrender, the youthful governor magnanimously pardons his erring sire and promises him a permanent home in the New World. It is easy to fault the drama's lack of action, its stiff diction, its pseudo-Corneillian airs; but as an early attempt to dramatize a significant event in Canadian history, albeit with considerable artistic license, its achievement is substantial.

Papineau (translated by Eugene Benson and Renate Benson), penned by the Québécois poet, playwright, and propagandist Louis-Honoré Fréchette and premiered at the Academy of Music in Montreal in 1880, must be labelled an historical melodrama, although its political messianism smacks more of contemporary social realism than late-nineteenth-century escapism. The heart of the play is the documentary presentation of key events in the 1837 rebellion, featuring Louis-Joseph Papineau as saint and saviour — fond of children, generous to the poor, and magnanimous towards his persecutors.

Papineau's soft-focused portrait is framed by a romantic yarn in which an English aristocrat, Sir James Hastings, falls in love with the Québécoise Rose Laurier, sister of his college chum, George. The 1837 rebellion sees the Lauriers swell the ranks of the patriots, while Hastings, after being falsely accused of espionage, joins the English forces. In the end Hastings clears his name, saves the lives of his patriot-friends, and wins the heart of the saintly Rose. To titillate lovers of stage spectacle, the drama boasts fetching landscapes, an illuminated village, and a graphic recreation of the battle of Saint-Denis. Fréchette's flair for neat plotting and eye-catching settings make him a *rara avis* among early Canadian playwrights.

Elzéar Paquin's *Riel* (translated by Eugene Benson and Renate Benson), staged in Montreal (1894) and New York (1896), shares the political partisanship of *Papineau*, but lacks its hard-nosed theatricality. Arranged in four acts, the play glorifies Riel as patriot, defender of Métis rights, and martyr to the ambitions of the Orange Lodge, English capitalists, and the federal cabinet. Cast in the form of historical documentary, the action opens with the rising of 1869-70, which preceded Manitoba's entry into Confederation, highlights the major events in Riel's biography, and concludes with public reaction to his execution in 1885.

The plot, sprawling intolerably over a period of some fifteen years, leaves the non-historian to languish in bewilderment much of the time. Such coherence as there is derives from the author's devotion to chronological sequence and the none-too-frequent appearances of Riel himself. Credible characters are in short supply, save for those of Riel, his wife, and his mother; and, because of the author's fondness for larding Riel's speeches with newspaper snippets, even he sounds rather disassociated at times. Nevertheless, despite its almost total lack of conventional dramatic technique, *Riel* betrays a certain cumulative power when read as closet drama: the scenes featuring Riel's wife and mother before and after his death, and the episode of Riel's execution, are wonderfully poignant and stageworthy.

Gratien Gélinas' *Yesterday the Children Were Dancing* (translated by Mavor Moore), a passionate and compas-

sionate account of the destruction of a Quebec family through federalist-separatist conflict, makes a fitting fourth to this quartet of plays about French-Canadian nationalism. Although Mr. Wagner notes, and justly, that "the rapid economic, cultural and political development of Quebec society over the last three decades has dated [Gélinas'] dramatization of Quebec society," the playwright's analysis of the basic issues remains relevant and accurate. The independentist thrust may have been temporarily blunted by economic urgencies and disillusionment with government double-talk, but hardcore believers in the province's ultimate "liberation" are as bright-eyed and firm-jawed at ever.

The strength of the independence movement waxes and wanes, but the nationalist spirit, a product of the individual heart and conscience, outlasts risings and referendums. Whether Canadian confederation remains intact depends upon how many Québécois can rise above nationalistic self-absorption to envision a Canada in which Quebec might flourish without loss of her cultural integrity. The battle for unity will be won or lost, not elsewhere in the country, but in Quebec itself, and will be waged not in parliamentary chambers, but at the family dinner-table. The nationalistic question will torment Quebec society for the foreseeable future, and the fallout must to some degree corrode the entire nation. When the elder Gravel warns English Canada at the conclusion of *Yesterday the Children Were Dancing*, "My divided house will not go down without shaking yours to its very foundations," he speaks only the chilling truth.

The anthology is well designed, painstakingly edited, and enriched by Wagner's informative and insightful general introduction and individual prefaces to each of the plays. The bibliographical notes will be invaluable to specialists and students alike, and the book's price makes it one of the best literary bargains around. All in all, the volume is a model of useful, economic, and handsome scholarly publishing.

JOHN RIPLEY

NOTHING SIMPLE

GEORGE AMABILE, *Ideas of Shelter*. Turnstone, $7.00.

LALA KOEHN, *The Eyes of the Wind*. Turnstone, $7.00.

LALA KOEHN, *Forest Full of Rain*. Sono Nis, $5.95.

ED UPWARD, *Pastoral Madness*. Turnstone, $7.00.

READING THESE POETS forces us to confront distinctions between the natural poet and the made poet. Koehn's work seems natural; no wrestle here, the fluency of walking, carrying a scarf. The ease may be an illusion; it is constant. In her *Sandpoems* (1979) there welled up, in mostly short pieces, an enchanted, obsessive sense of self — understandings and relationships lived in a mythic dimension. These two books expand the rituals of that life.

The Eyes of the Wind consists of four short collections. In "House That Never Was" Koehn explores the past, and established patterns of life. Where her apparatus comes from European folklore, she re-lives, re-casts, and refreshes it. "The corners left by friends" is typical of her best work; simply being in someone else's house, evokes a far from commonplace realization of self and otherness. "The wax dolls" and "My miniature gold mirror," both inhabited by homely furniture and imaginings, are much more compelling than "The walless house" — a long set-piece in which the poet addresses the Virgin of childhood devotion, and the past of her family.

A section of love-poems, including a couple of nice conceits on a book, is much less enterprising than a group based on Aztec mythology, "The Wing of the Breeze" (Koehn has an unfortunate liking for pretty, forgettable titles). "Xuihtecuhtli, Lord of Fire" is the surprise here — a long poem, strongly putting the situation and the voice of the prisoner, who is to be sacrificed at the end of the 12-day period used to justify a 52-year era. The poem transfers at the end, equally strongly, to the woman-figure, surviving and fitting other lives into her own extensive vision. Koehn's next extension of her poetic venture into new homes for the imagination, is "Daughter of the Wind," an attempt to inhabit Nature without folkloric trappings. "Homecoming," a celebration of friendship, is the most successful of these poems.

Forest Full of Rain speaks of a transition, from making a home on the prairie, to consenting to find it on the west coast. Its strength remains in the abiding presence of ritual womanly life, deepened with a consciousness of omens, prescribed ceremonies of folk tradition, and quests. The range is seen in "The other woman's house," "The bed," "And there are those who keep me company," "The winged woman," and "The search for bones." Snow White (Koehn uses the tale) and the spells of knitting have, to say the least, been used before; still, Koehn's ceremonies and voice are peculiarly her own.

Yes, it's readable, various, and enchanting — a happy fulfilment of its interest in enchantment. Why should one cavil at its avoidance of corrosive aspects of social responsibility? Koehn is not often trite. But sooner or later the reader detects an utter uniformity of tone: this colourful poetic life, fluently voiced, has the emotional blandness of photos under the fingertips of a blind person.

Ed Upward, who has one previous collection, is determined to be clever. His bit of chat on the back (ever so much better to look at than the frightful front cover) makes this clear. His editor, indeed, was intimidated and left wrong choices among forms of lie and lay go uncorrected; and poems stayed in that should have stayed away. Still, Upward has a snappy and racy way with him, a juggler this; he transfers the news-dimension of the rolled-up "Co-operator" Mum swats a fly with, to the fly's death, in a deft poem. By the time "plant food" comes up, however, Upward's besetting technique of superimposing images, to see if they can be made to slide into one another, seems almost to herald triteness.

Jesus is a preoccupation of several poems ("reflecting in," "waterwalkers," "car sand"). They are pretty unsatisfactory things, symptomatic of a decade that seems past. There seems no more substantial conclusion that this: politicians, Jesus, they all "do a fine job / skimming the surface."

There's relief to be had from kidstuff, slithery puns and chat-ups: "earth tears" and "time lapse" show Upward deeply contemplating the land, its detail and its changes. When he can bring together his best abilities, his third book of poems will be due.

George Amabile's fourth book hands in his credentials in some of Uyward's preferred areas. In *Blue Denim*, fourteen pieces proferred as excerpts, he strikes off epigrams, anecdotes, and conversations, in a variety of forms held together by an easy, serious talking tone. It's an effort to make sense of "things," get it together, with such interim declarations as

> . . . workshirts of blue denim
> worn beyond distinction of class
> that say, "This is me:
> human, durable, self-supporting and free.
> I'll pay my dues, if you'll get off my ass."

ending with the assurance "My tribe is

worldwide. / We have always been ourselves . . . / God is . . . a cadence we live by." Assertion and acceptance are balanced in a way that is not quite hayseed, not quite just 1970's; it will certainly date, in the unimportant ways.

It is significant that a poet can adjust his focus through a long sequence. Amabile also has short pieces here, which more roundly confirm his claim on our attention. Some fluent love-poems, say "Point of balance"; well-considered poems on difficult relationships; three pieces that work in a sort of extraterrestrial atmosphere, though with trappings of earth and plastic — a game tenderly and skilfully played. But the poems that grab me are the very short "Phoenix gull," "Beginnings," "Oil rig," "Workaholic," "Alma" . . . their control and felicity are found in "A different drummer," but with a slightly *packed* feeling, that the paring of a "forever" would relieve.

Amabile now and then writes pretty, and shouldn't. He often writes slick, and it comes off, too. The best is, he is honest — it doesn't need the dire "Suspicion," or the admission of ineffectiveness in "Allende" to show it. I find his best in "Soap," on the difficult subject of people cultivating trendy neuroses ("They go / for coffee and meddle, meddle / year after year . . ."), also in "Totem: black bear" and "Smoke," both straight hit anthology poems where description pays off in understanding. Nothing is simple about the skill and power of these poems that will stand.

JUDITH RODRIGUEZ

AU LYRISME

PIERRE LABERGE, *Vivres*. Editions du Noroît, $8.00.

JEAN YVES COLLETTE, *Une Volvo rose*. Editions du Noroît, $5.00.

ALAIN BERNARD MARCHAND et CLAIRE ROCHON, *Entre l'oeil et l'espace: le geste et le cri*. Editions de l'Université d'Ottawa, $5.00.

JACQUELINE HOGUE, *Aube*. Editons Quinze, $8.95.

DANS LA POESIE PUBLIEE dernièrement au Québec, on peut croire, sans pour autant vouloir généraliser, à un certain retour au lyrisme. Cette tendance s'épanouit dans une écriture qui tente d'explorer à la fois le "je" et le multiple, l'individuel et le culturel. Pour preuve de cette tendance, quatre poètes, quatre recueils: Pierre Laberge: *Vivres*; Jean Yves Collette: *Une Volvo rose*; Alain Bernard Marchand et Claire Rochon: *Entre l'oeil et l'espace: le geste et le cri*; Jacqueline Hogue: *Aube*.

Mais il ne faudrait pas croire pour autant, que toute préoccupation formaliste ait disparu de ces recueils.

Tout d'abord, le recueil, *Vivres*, de Paul Laberge manifeste cette très grande exigence formelle. Décriptage de la douleur, l'écriture menacée d'effondrement: "la route s'effondre du dedans / nulle doublure disponible / tourner vers la clôture / en mal de barbelé," devait être tension, se situer sur une corde raide. D'où la redoutable brièveté des poèmes de *Vivres*, tous des dysitiques et autant de "vivres," pluralité mais aussi ambiguïté, en tous cas aucune solution nette, du moins telle que nous les connaissons. Il nous faut, écrit Laberge, "passer son corps en fraude / sous la chaîne des vivants," changer les règles du peu et sans avoir à en rendre compte; l'ouverture, s'il y en a une, l'espoir, s'il y en a un — car cette poésie est lourde d'angoisse — se situe dans la transgression. D'ailleurs il est à noter que les mots qui portent

cette angoisse s'incarnent dans la matière, dans le corps. Retrouverions-nous Rimbaud: "Cet avenir sera matérialiste," "de la pensée accrochant la pensée et tirant." Car ce serait dans ces visions, dans ces "vivres" transmutés que se situerait peut-être l'avenir, qu'écloraient peut-être le(s) sen(s) nécessaire(s) à la vie. Mais Laberge sait, lui, qu'on ne crée pas à partir de rien.

Pour bref que soit le poème de Laberge, il ne perd rien de son efficacité. Sa poésie sait être grave, atteindre ce degré supérieur et extrême "jusqu'à ce heurt en soi," jusqu'à ce que "le noir intense nous regarde," et nul n'échappe à cette mise en question, à ce malaise profond. L'expression reste le plus souvent parcellaire, fugitive, difficile à diviser en unités, une poésie qui espère l'avènement d'une cartharsis mais demeure incapable de trouver un seul point cathartique certain. D'où peut-être aussi ces jeux de mots, ces déplacements inattendus qui, certes, allègent le texte mais en même temps diffèrent l'explosion, l'événement cathartique.

Une Volvo rose de Jean Yves Collette semble au contraire vouloir se situer "ailleurs," en dehors de ce terrorisme poétique, puisque l'auteur vise à "la lisibilité": "Peut-être mal lu, mais pas de pensée panique: seulement des paroles et des gestes posés." Et pourtant son texte se situe en rupture, avance d'opposition en opposition, de question en question, d'incertitude en incertitude — avec les "peut-être," les points de suspension — de négation en négation, du "mal lu" ou "mal vu" ou "mal dit" au "peu importe," au "Dire ce que l'on voudra. Quoiqu'on dise," et se situe donc aux limites du dire, mais à une limite atteinte par saturation de ce dire frontière, "in absentia": "Le non-dit, dit partout." Son "histoire," affirme-t-il, "court les vents," qui appelle "court les rues." Cette "volvo rose," passion débordante et délirante "ivresse," passion violente et dévorante, "Lionne." Mais passion mécanique, abîme de la passion charnelle, elle sillonne toutes les routes du désir, et, avec les kilomètres qu'elle avale renaissent toutes les craintes, toutes les hantises masculines et ancestrales car dans la "volvo rose" se lit bien sûr la vulve:

> Elle dit: par terre, sur le plancher de la cuisine, nous serons ivres. Mais elle veut d'abord son lait, tendant sa main, les muscles durcis. La peau tendue. Plus de jambes, plus de ventre, tout aspiré par son désir, Lionne, crie-t-il

Et page 43 il continue:

> aussitôt elle dira foudroyante comme à son habitude: viens, mon loulou, que ta lionne te mange.

Dévoilement, lisibilité de tous les dérèglements, nous vivons dans ce texte au rythme de la pulsion du désir, que ce désir soit politique, érotique, il est passionnel. Mais "volvere" c'est "rouler" bien sûr "tourner." Y a-t-il eu révolution? Les angoisses ont-elles été exorcisées? Au texte: "Il l'a prise, comme elle s'offrait, sur le pas de la porte. Elle le quittera, c'est certain," le dernier poème répond: "Lionne partout. Elle le prend, comme il s'offre, sur le pas de la porte. Elle le quittera, c'est certain. Ce n'est pas certain."

Du recueil *Entre l'oeil et l'espace: le geste et le cri*, de A. B. Marchand de C. Rochon, s'élève, plus nettement encore que dans les deux recuils précédents, un puissant élan lyrique. A. Bourassa, qui a écrit, à cet ouvrage, une excellente préface, parle de "tendresse," d'un "lieu intérieur" et a bien raison de dire que "ici le formalisme apparaît comme connu et dépassé."

Il est à remarquer que, dans chacun des poèmes, l'autre, que le "je" convie, n'est ni à portée du geste, qui serait contact, ni même à portée de la parole, ce qui n'empêche qu'il requiert de l'autre l'effort de l'attention, il espère qu'il en

est écouté et regardé. Et des liens ainsi se tissent dans et à travers l'écriture et la lecture des textes: "le mot et l'entre-mot sont de sauvages compagnons." Alors se crée un espace, mais qui n'a rien à voir avec un espace événementiel, car ici "l'oeil trépigne le vide, sans relâche." Ainsi les deux poètes descendent dans l'inconnu, qui n'est plus un gouffre où tomberait pêle-mêle le chaos, bien au contraire, ils descendent au centre l'un de l'autre sans permettre à quoi que ce soit de s'imposer entre eux. Ils se retrouvent mutuellement mais sans qu'il y ait fusion car ils "ont sans doute conçu leur texte comme étant tour à tour oeil et espace l'un pour l'autre." D'où le dénuement du texte, "touchers qui ne se rejoignent pas"; les textes ne s'allient pas, ne communient pas mais se reçoivent mutuellement. Ce renversement du regard et des voix et cet accueil, cet échange mais libéré du désir d'appropriation, accueil gratuit en même temps que accueil limite:

> nos voix se renversent
> et s'étreignent alanguies
> sur un fil rompu
> le long des contre-nuits

représentaient, au niveau de la forme, un défi. C. Rochon et A. B. Marchand ont su, "tout en gardant à l'image de l'oeil sa place obsédante, se renouveler" et transmettre aux poèmes, à travers "un rythme soutenu et varié," une grande harmonie.

Dans le poème *Aube*, Jacqueline Hogue "défait un à un les noeuds d'une existence qui lui échappait" tout en gardant à ce récit autobiographique un certain mystère, non pas le mystère qui déboucherait sur l'ambigu, mais le mystère qui fait qu'il échappe à une chronologie ennuyeuse, au trivial, au féminisme même, pour plonger au souffle, aux sources de l'humain. L'auteur a su aussi se garder de tout élan mélodramatique, de toute sensiblerie, de toute minauderie. Elle retrace l'itinéraire d'une vie ordinaire mais qui a été vécue et qui est évoquée avec sincérité, avec dignité, objectivité aussi, sans flagornerie ni mièvrerie, sans grandiloquence aucune. Ce poème sonne juste et l'auteur a su trouver l'expression juste, le rythme juste.

On découvre l'épouse et la mère, l'enfant d'un père autoritaire mais admiré, et dont la mort fera d'elle une femme orpheline, l'enfant d'une mère élue confidente mais qui s'est éloignée. Elle nous laisse deviner, en ombres chinoises, les déceptions et les drames d'une femme vouée aux contraintes ordinaires de la famille et de la société, vouée aux contraintes de l'espèce, mais cela avec quelle exaltation! Profondément émouvante, J. Hogue conte sa vie avec une simplicité reconquise pas à pas sur la souffrance et sur la facilité du déballage et du ressassement amers. Cette conquête demeure tout au long du poème, aussi bien au niveau de la forme que du fond, un défi constant et exaltant.

CLAIRE-LISE ROGERS

MAILLARD

KEITH MAILLARD, *Cutting Through*. Stoddart, $16.95.

KEITH MAILLARD is a talented and appealing writer. His people are alive, and his themes are alive: you know as you read *Cutting Through* (or any of his books) that Maillard cares very much about the life he is examining, shaping, transferring to the page. He respects his characters and their problems; he mulls it all over with them, searching for the secret heart especially of his protagonist's experience, and trusting that he can reveal something of importance to us all. That in itself is a daring — and, I think, correct rather than self-protective — as-

sumption, especially given that the defining circumstance of his hero's life is a sustained childhood faith that he is (at least in dreams and in part) a girl.

Cutting Through is a sequel to *The Knife in My Hands*, and the two books together comprise a work Maillard calls *Difficulty at the Beginning*. The hero of this work is John Dupre, whose beginning ends, presumably — at least the second volume ends — when John finally dispenses with his virginity. That event had seemed to loom repeatedly in the first volume; at the start of the second John is twenty-three, and again the event seems repeatedly imminent, until at last we can be tricked no more, and we recognize that Maillard *must* be saving it for his conclusion. The delay is not meant to seem either a joke or a device, but Maillard cannot quite prevent us from feeling it as both. Still we care. And we grant to the initiation to which the author ultimately brings his protagonist nearly all of the meaning Maillard intends.

This is the odd thing about *Cutting Through*: it survives where the scaffold creaks, and even where it groans. There are several local occasions where the writing seems to be in real trouble, even as we keep on being interested in and believing the story. One such occasion has John listening to an eagerly sought piece of family reminiscence while the man who is telling the story interrupts himself to correct and comment upon his granddaughter's performance on horseback. Both his tale and the immediate scene continue to engage us, but the movement back and forth is seriously strained. On another occasion the Announcement-of-Existential-Theme seems so obvious that Maillard has John Dupre apologize for him: "'Hey,' I said, 'can you put down Sartre for the night?'"

A much more grievous fault, a gaping and astonishing abyss, occurs midway in the novel — when Maillard has finished Part One, called "South," and seems clearly headed toward a Part Two called "North," in which John Dupre will have fled to Canada to escape the draft. Would-be Rebel Dupre, perilously close to a Northern border, rooting around in what he fears is only an imagined Southern past, discovers that his family were Cajuns — and then that the Cajuns were really Acadians, people kicked out of Canada. Thus, the theme of border-crossing (nicely integrated with the theme of crossing gender boundaries) seems to be moving from the Mason-Dixon line to the border between the U.S. and Canada. "North," however, turns out to be Boston, which causes all of the nice, subtle bridgework to come crashing down. This is particularly hard to understand: if autobiography, or some other force, required that Part Two be set in Boston, why should Maillard set up another expectation? Was this just a symbolic nod at his own Canadian future, or at a Canadian audience?

Widening the gap, in "North" Maillard relinquishes John's first person narration to alternate between John in the third person and a first person account by a brand-new, rather minor character. John Dupre's obsession with his Southern past is gone; the present is all drugs, too many drugs, and Vietnam ("Abraham Lincoln made Vietnam possible") and the beginning of the Women's Movement. It's too different. It doesn't work. Indeed, it is a spectacular failure of structure. But I kept on reading and — on the whole — caring and being interested in what I read. The temptation is to suggest that the book should have ended with Part One: in one fell swing of an editor's axe, this would have done away with the structural problem and saved the reader from a tedious overdose of drug talk. But it wouldn't have worked really, because the book isn't over with Part One. John Dupre's own "cutting

through" — to the truth of his own identity, his own freedom — has yet to be accomplished.

That comes in the final pages of the book, as Dupre at last loses his virginity. He meets the "cutting edge" of a girl who is herself a "boy bright as a knife," and who releases the "dark girl" in Dupre. Their second round of love-making launches Dupre into a brave new future: "They lost their names. They lost their words. They lost male and female. There was no weapon." The meaning of that future is complex: it has to do with the demise of sexual categories, with improvisation and imagination, with an end to exploitation, with the possibility of finding honour and love in new places, and with a movement beyond solipsism into a kind of mystical community. The relationship of these and other parts is not, finally, as clear as we might hope. But the emotional pitch is high, the tone prophetic — and I, at least, felt that I was in the presence of something real. The book that gets us there (beyond the cutting edge) is flawed, but it is an honest, moving book all the same.

CONSTANCE ROOKE

SHOW BIZ

SUSAN SWAN, *The Biggest Modern Woman of the World.* Lester & Orpen Dennys.
DAVID HALLIDAY, *Making Movies.* Porcépic.

ANNA SWAN (1844-86) was a Nova Scotia giantess (7 feet 6 inches, 400 pounds) who worked most of her adult life for the American showman P. T. Barnum. She was dramatically rescued from a fire in Barnum's showplace, met Queen Victoria, married the American giant Martin Van Buren Bates, settled in the U.S., and had two children who died in childbirth. Aha! you cry, what a subject for a Canadian novel! But how to do it! Pathetic allegory of an exploited northern giant? An obvious choice perhaps, but Susan Swan had a better idea. What if Anna liked America and show biz (as she affectionately calls it)? And what if Anna were more bawdy than pathetic in her grandiosity? And what if she were to have an expanded (read "contemporary liberated with sensible modifications") consciousness? Well, one result might be *The Biggest Modern Woman of the World?*

Swan's novel is based on the few facts found in Phyllis R. Blakeley's *Nova Scotia's Two Remarkable Giants,* but it is fiction (almost) all the way. The paradoxical premise of the novel is that while Anna has a freakish body her mind is exemplary. She is as easy about sexuality as Mead's Polynesians in an area (now dimly recalled) notorious for its sexual anxieties. If the Victorian gents she encounters are hung up in various ways, she is freedom itself. When her giant mate proves tiny below she comforts him: "Martin, I know what gives me pleasure. Look, if you rub me here (and I touched my sweet spot) you can make me dizzy ten times a night."

Anna is blessed from the start with a happy sense of her own worth. As Swan presents it, Anna's size prevents her from feeling inferior. "I am certain," she writes to her mother, "that to be a freak is no different than to be human." She is as broad of mind as of beam: "Americans have their faults but they possess the courage to be themselves while blue-noses like you sit on your verandas, ridiculing the world beyond their doorstep."

Swan's imaginative premise is promising but there is no cutting edge or main drift to Anna's adventures. Satire and sentiment, bawdy and decency, fun and high sentence mingle uneasily. After drolleries we run into themes, and toward the end the latter become a bit much. I found the sexual humour forced, as if Swan

were out to prove something. There is also confusion about fact and fiction. The real Anna lost two children in childbirth, but there is no reason why the fictional Anna should. Finally, the novel is not well written.

David Halliday's *Making Movies* is a less ambitious and better realized work. It is a satire in the form of a BBC documentary. The subject is Samuel Bremmer, the director of a movie company and a pretentious minor rascal who is redeemed a bit by his *chutzpah*, energy (he does get the films made), and sporadic wit. The target of the satire is what the title suggests, making movies, or at least those with a claim to being art. A friend of mine maintains that movies are the fast-food of the art world. They can be better or worse, but they are what they are. Something like this assumption is the basis of Bremmer's book, since (as far as I know) it is not directed at any individual, but at the pretensions of "films" and those who "create" them. It would be hard to satirize the effort to write a symphony or an epic poem, however untalented or misguided the writer. It would be *her* pretensions that would be under attack and not the high-falutin' idea of the activity.

Bremmer is given to talk like this: "Perhaps there is a desire in all of us to torture or destroy what we cherish most." This is nicely banal, does an injustice to a sometime truth, and is, to boot, a transparent rationalization for Bremmer's moral failure with his dearest. But if you keep yakking you might get off the occasional yuk. When a dental professor asks for a print of a Bremmer film in order to illustrate gum diseases (there was a lot of mouth imagery in that one) Bremmer retorts by saying that "teeth are the punishment we are paying for biting into the apple." The interviews with the cast and the scripts of seven movies (which occupy, respectively, the right and left hand sides of each page) reveal various forms of pettiness, vanity, and pretension. However, this is nicely shaded by a little sympathy. Actors, like writers and professors, are members of what Valery(?) called "the delerious professions," professions in which one's self-image is one's best friend. Halliday is properly sympathetic to the stratagems the ego resorts to in such cases, and this is particularly true in a medium whose message is, perhaps, not taken seriously, even by itself. However, when pushed to the wall, your movie-maker, unlike your poet, can do a Mickey Spillane and count the bucks. Bremmer explains: "The film was less interested in making a socially redeeming statement than creating some chills and chuckles and incidentally, putting some cash in all our pockets." Yet this too is not quite the whole truth, and *Making Movies* captures the uneasy relation movies have to art and the effect this has on those who "create" "films."

ROGER SEAMON

** CAROL FAIRBANKS & SARA BROOKS SUNDBERG, *Farm Women on the Prairie Frontier: A Sourcebook for Canada and the United States*. Scarecrow Press, $17.50 U.S. This is a potentially useful bibliography, and a disappointing work of criticism. It provides an overview of the primary and secondary material on which we might base a revised, and comparative, history of the prairie and of literature on the prairie (a venture, of course, already well underway). The listing of material is well balanced between Canada and the U.S.; it includes almost any item I could think to check; and its index by topic/subject will suggest many directions for future studies. The major, and very regrettable weakness in this part of the book is the almost total neglect of poetry, which surely must be an essential genre to the frontier woman's articulation of her situation. The four essays, in the first 120 pages of the book, provide space for some of the women's voices to mingle, but they are essentially anthologies of quotations bridged with plot summaries, providing little criticism, insight, or synthesis. There is scarcely a hint as to how

feminist critical theory might be applied to particular texts, so that there is no mention, in the account of Grove's *Fruits of the Earth*, of the implications of its structure, or the possibilities of verbal irony (*Settlers of the Marsh* is not discussed at all). Similarly, the annotations in the bibliography are vaguely descriptive, but seldom suggest where feminist perspectives illuminate matters of syntax, or diction, or genre, or where such particular details might reveal different ways of thinking about farm women.

L.R.

INCONSISTENCIES

The Complete Poems of Emile Nelligan, ed. & trans. by Fred Cogswell. Harvest House, n.p.

FRED COGSWELL, *Pearls*. Ragweed Press, n.p.

TRANSLATION, as I know only too well, can be a thankless business, for even the most accessible-looking poem can turn out to be the one which breaks one's nerve. In tackling the collected works of Emile Nelligan, Fred Cogswell has set himself the task of dealing with one hundred and sixty-one poems (over three thousand lines) in a form for each which faithfully mirrors the French original. This choice of method in itself automatically produces difficulties in adapting syntax and rhyme to English, and it is instructive in this regard to make a line-by-line comparison of Cogswell's work with Mark Abley's versions of seven Nelligan poems recently published in *Northern Light*, which are slightly freer, more spirited, more fundamentally accurate in perception and tone.

The sad, eventually mad, adolescent who was Emile Nelligan did not have time to forge for himself any kind of original stance or language out of *les mots de la tribu* but the intensity with which he used those of his literary models, and the occasional flash, allows one to guess that his particular sensibility and linguistic fluency might have found more appropriate channels in the post-Apollinaire period. As it was, his tools were what he inherited from the nineteenth century (Baudelaire, Gautier, the Parnassians, and the Symbolists) and it is only rarely that the borrowed images and language allow one to guess that it is a young man writing in Montreal and not in Paris. Within this framework, however, with its constant literary echoes, the poems have an imaginative unity and consistent dignity of expression which up to the last remain astonishingly coherent.

Cogswell himself being such an uneven poet, it is hardly surprising that the translations should partake of this inconsistency. On the one hand, one finds the strength of *The Madman*: "They have murdered poor folly / they crushed him under a trolley / and then his dog after folly . . ." and in a different vein the tender evocation of romantic youth in *Sentimental Garden* whose last two lines appeal to me more than the stilted original: "Invisible, in a great green ship, afar, / We dreamed of rising with the evening star." On the other hand, however, the translator seems persistently insensitive to the necessity of keeping the language of the poem consistent within itself, thereby preserving the unity of the original in the new medium. Cogswell's English can range in a few lines from Victorian cliché to modern slang, and while there is a place for such juxtapositions, it is not here. Nelligan was certainly derivative, but at a higher level than suggested by worn-out expressions such as "a haunt château," livid brow," "all my woe," "a-tremble," along with later gems such as "flighty creature."

What is more unfortunate is that the imaginative structure of the poem, representing a deeper unity than the language which carries it, tends to get lost. For instance, in *Childhood Flight*, the basic image, as in Verlaine's *Colloque Sentimental*, is of a return to the past, symbolized here by a villa. The text runs:

Gagnons *les bords fanés* du Passé. Dans les râles
De sa joie il expire. . . .
Ici sondons nos coeurs pavés de désespoirs.

The English version is:

Let us reach the Past's *dim strands* that in stress
Of joy soon die. . . .
Here let us plumb our hearts *embossed* with despairs.

Not only does the choice of *strand* for *bord* introduce the incongruous image of water, but *embossed* completely loses the close connection of *pavés* with the surface on which the speaker is walking, adding a term which does nothing but distract the attention. *Stress* is weak for *râles*, and how, by the way, can *dim strands* die? Nor is it easy to accept, barring the possibility of misprint in an otherwise excellent text, the apparition on p. 5 of dragons galloping around, which surely in the context of *gloire* and *chevaucher*, and the strong military image at the end which anchors the poem, must be dragoons? It is easy to quibble, of course, with details in a long volume, but when a random sampling of texts produces such examples of ineptness, one can only note them, wringing one's hands and calling on the shade of John Glassco.

In Cogswell's own work, there is the same contrast between such successful poems in *A Long Apprenticeship* as "George Ernest," "The Tunnel," "Smiling Tom," and the neat sonnet on sonnets published in a recent issue of this journal (all different, all strong), and dozens of others which are simply platitudinous wanderings around conventional themes. It is not a question of period or style, but rather a permanent attitude to language which permits the poet a kind of self-indulgence without critical discipline. As an editor, he extended a charitable hand to all comers in the same fashion. In spite of his deep devotion to both projects, both *Pearls* and the Nelligan translations suffer from a lack of critical judgment, or refusal to exercise it. The best poems in *Pearls* seem to me to be those in which there is a formal structure to adhere to ("Sestina: the Core," and "Could I"), but one feels that the writer is still too close to the experience the book records to be able to give his emotions an adequate literary expression.

G. V. DOWNES

THE LANGUAGE OF NECESSITY

BARRY DEMPSTER, *Globe Doubts*. Quarry, $6.95.

LOLA LEMIRE TOSTEVIN, *Gyno-Text*. Underwhich Editions, n.p.

KEN RIVARD, *Kiss Me Down to Size*. Thistledown, $16.00; pa. $7.95.

JOE ROSENBLATT, *Brides of the Stream*. Oolichan, $8.95.

IN HIS LETTERS to Franz Xaver Kappus, Rainer Maria Rilke advised his correspondent to assimilate completely the notion that "a work of art is good if it has sprung from necessity."

The ambiguity of Rilke's statement is self-evident; however, on one level, it can be said that this particular notion of artistic necessity contains specific elements that are applicable in the context of Canadian poetry. In fact, some would argue that it is imperative to reassess our approach to much of the writing that passes for poetry in Canadian literature, especially in terms of the so-called neo-contemporaries. For the most part, there is rarely even an inkling — let alone an entire indication — that what has managed to collect like so many iron filings under the magical magnet of poetry has been written out of necessity. Need? Perhaps. Desire? Most certainly. Necessity? Not likely.

Consider, for example, *Brides of the Stream* by Joe Rosenblatt. It is a volume of "prose/poems." Rosenblatt opens with a poem called "Daughters" and sets both the pace and tone for what is to follow. Approximately 32 poems are interspersed with two dirges and approximately 36 prose sections; at bottom, the 88 pages which make up *Brides of the Stream* attempt to assess the world and its inhabitants in terms of the art (?) of the angler. Section 4, "Plat du Jour," is an example of the prose in *Brides of the Stream*:

> The angler, struggling to decipher the *plat du jour* for pampered felines in troutly clothing, discovers a lusty worm is an answer to gastric mood deviation . . . The meat-filled string of prose is a prophylaxis against a fishless day. Such vision provides magic when I'm out for meat, not musing with a fly . . .

The poetry itself, if it can indeed be called poetry at all, fares much worse:

> Lured into a dream
> I disrobe in a spotted livingroom,
> stir dark waters, my darker friend
> hieroglyphics lurch across the floor
> to form their cryptic lines for a menu.
>
> There are holes in that quick stream
> where each lair for rent on route
> offers bed and breakfast. This morning
> I wooed a blue tailed lady.
>
> ("Bed and Breakfast")

Rosenblatt's expressed aim in *Brides of the Stream* is to transform the experience of fishing into a metaphysical over-structure that encompasses love, lust, desire, destiny, and dinner. The sequences are occasionally confusing and, with the entrance of "Uncle Nathan," they bog down entirely. There is a coy series of allusions and references devoted to the lexis of poetry and creativity, but its inclusion here is forced and somewhat gratuitous. Rosenblatt may know what he intended in all this but readers, unfortunately, are not privy to that knowledge.

Like Rosenblatt, Dempster has adopted the long poem format for his work. *Globe Doubts* contains three such long poem sections, "The Globe Doubts," "Here is the Poem," and "Re-Entry." There is more than a slight sense of uneasiness concerning both Rosenblatt's and Dempster's use of this trendiest of vehicles for creative expression. While the long poem format could be justified in *Brides of the Stream*, it simply cannot be justified in *Globe Doubts*.

Dempster, and other trendy neo-contemporaries, seem to have confused the purpose of the long poem with the products of their imaginations. In "The Globe Doubts," for example, Dempster offers readers ten poems that are only arbitrarily inter-related. There is very little in "The Globe Doubts" that connects it with "Niagara Falls":

> The world is round,
> a fact sealed with
> wax in the back of my mind,
> (with repetition though
> you could learn to believe anything)
> but lately, life seems confusing,
> tilted too far off the truth . . .
>
> ("The Globe Doubts")
>
> 2
>
> Wedding gowns hang
> in dry cleaners,
> wonder what they're
> wearing now, what
> they're saying,
> if they're drawing pictures
> of the view or sitting boldly
> in a sunken tub made for two.
>
> ("Niagara Falls")

As well, apart from an overwhelming sense that the long poem is losing its inherent autonomous structure, there is an equally overwhelming sense that Dempster (and Rosenblatt, for that matter) has bogged down in a miasma of pronouns that direct the reader repeatedly back to the writer. Most of Dempster's poems are I-centred and, as a result, of little importance except to the writer himself:

I don't talk much
now I know
I'm measured by words.
("I Live in a Jungle Now")

However, if Dempster's poems are marred by their autistic use of the pronoun "I," then the same could be said of the work of Ken Rivard; fortunately, although Rivard uses nothing but the first person singular, the movement of his poems in *Kiss Me Down to Size* is an outward one. While Dempster demands that readers observe him doing the poetic trick, Rivard approaches poetry with an almost naïve honesty that effectively denies any such ulterior motives.

The sixty-seven poems in *Kiss Me Down to Size* are written from the engaged stance of an observing human being in this world. There is a sense of commitment and an equally strong sense that Rivard is capable of much more than the poems represent. Whether he is subtly pointing out the discrepancy between appearance and reality in his universe, or whether he not-so-subtly takes "the system" to task for its social injustices, Rivard keeps a trained eye (and ear) on the emotional energy that lies in wait beneath the lines of each of his poems. In "Beneath The Tracks," for example, his use of the adverbial "only" functions almost as the afterthought it is:

Sarcee woman has no choice
but to stagger
to the middle of nobody's tunnel
where in the semi-dark
of carbon monoxide
she disgorges her past
in the presence of her dignity
only.

But Rivard is at his best when he moves away from social commentary into the realm of family, friends, and acquaintances. In "Yesterday's Glass," Rivard obtains permission from his daughter to watch her play "in a pool made plastic on its own":

can you make one of those circles
stand on its rim? I ask.
watch, she says.
before I know it
the widest circle
stands on its edge
wraps itself around my neck
and kisses me down to size.

Unlike the stance of conceit that mars both *Brides of the Stream* and *Globe Doubts*, *Kiss Me Down to Size* is not written by a pompous POET in capital letters. Its voice is gentle, insistent in its quiet way and everywhere fraught with a concurrent sense of humility and necessity.

And finally, in *Gyno-Text*, Lola Lemire Tostevin demonstrates admirably and precisely this sense of necessity. A small book, composed of sparse (almost skeletal) poems, *Gyno-Text* begins with the premise that "*phéno-texte* and *géno-texte* [are] two main features of poetic language. Phenotext is the familiar language of communication, the formula of linguistic analysis, while genotext operates at a level which doesn't necessarily reflect normal structures but generates elements of language in process."

Lemire Tostevin also points to *Of Woman Born* by Adrienne Rich in her Afterword: ". . . Rich stresses the importance for women to repossess their bodies. To imagine a world where each woman is the presiding genius of her own body." As such, *Gyno-Text* is a series of poems intent on repossession of the body of language and the human female body itself. Poems of repossession, as it were, rather than poems of possession. Lemire Tostevin speaks both French and English fluently, a feature of her work that further articulates an overwhelming sense of schism or separation. *Gyno-Text* opens with:

a
different
tongue
to

pen
a
trait
le
trait
d'union

From here, Lemire Tostevin takes readers on an anatomical tour of a woman's body as it prepares to give birth. Her language is honed to a fine exactitude; not a word struggles; none is out of place in these spare poems. *Gyno-Text* is one of the finest examples of the poetry of necessity in existence today. Its voice is urgent and compelling.

JUDITH FITZGERALD

ALIENATION ET RESIGNATION

ROGER LEVAC, *L'Hiver dans les os*. Editions Naaman, $6.00.

ALAIN POISSANT, *J'avais quatorze ans*. Les Editions Leméac, $10.95.

DANS SON ROMAN, *L'Hiver dans les os*, Roger Levac nous présente une histoire tripartite tout au long de laquelle rôde la présence de la mort. Le rideau s'ouvre sur le personnage central, Emilie Legourriérec, veuve depuis huit jours, qui part pour l'hôpital afin de se faire examiner pour une temeur au sein. Cette tumeur devient un leitmotiv qui symbolise le cancer qui ronge les relations familiales. Nous voyons dès de départ qu'il y a une absence totale d'affection et de tendresse entre Emilie et sa fille Claudine et une haine inexprimable entre celle-ci et son frère Jean. Claudine ne songe qu'à se débarrasser de sa vieille mère afin de s'accaparer du bien familial. Fille aux moeurs légères dont les charmes commencent à se flétrir, elle passe toutes ses frustrations et son amertume sur le dos de sa mère.

Emilie est une vieille dame ordinaire, bien rangée, dont le caractère bourgeois lui conseille de ne jamais oser "lever la voix plus haut que nécessaire." Une analyse psychanalytique révélerait sans doute une sexualité profondément refoulée chez elle. C'est une femme qui a honte de sa propre nudité et pour qui l'acte sexuel "était devenu le mal, l'unique et universelle plaie des hommes." Un passage révélateur nous informe qu'Emilie, plus jeune, s'était identifiée à une chienne qui avait réussi à éloigner les mâles, ceux-ci essayant de s'accoupler avec elle. De même, Emilie a toujours fui l'acte sexuel. Ce "refus de la copulation" trouve son contrepoids non seulement chez sa fille mais aussi chez un être singulier qu'elle rencontre à l'hôpital — Mathias Duranceau. Si Emilie incarne le refus de la vie, Mathias, personnage sensuel, en représente la fougue et la vitalité. Au statisme stérile d'Emilie et de sa famille, il oppose une force vigoureuse et primitive qui rappelle les personnages de Thériault.

Grâce à son influence, Emile fuit l'hôpital et s'installe chez Mathias et sa femme. Après un court séjour pendant lequel nous apprenons que les relations familiales y sont aussi pourries que chez Emilie, les deux repartent pour reprendre de la maison d'Emilie. Claudine réapparaît et entre elle et Mathias éclate une sensualité farouche.

Cependant, la sexualité revêt ici une apparence nettement péjorative. Claudine, déjà enceinte d'un autre homme, et Mathias s'accouplent "comme des bêtes" à la belle étoile presque sous les yeux ahuris d'Emilie. En outre, le fils de Mathias, homosexuel, entraîne Jean, jeune homme dont la misogynie s'allie bien avec un air religieux de tartufferie, sur "les pentes faciles du vice." Le jeune Duranceau était "un être en formation, proliférant de toutes parts comme une tumeur." Son influence ne peut que nuire au monde bien réglé d'Emilie. Point de salut donc dans la sexualité.

Emilie, repliée sur elle-même, ne fait qu'attendre la mort, ce qui ne tarde pas à venir. Sa tragédie aura été résumée dans deux métaphores assez transparentes: d'après le fils de Mathias, un arbre qui est mort selon toute apparence repoussera au printemps suivant. Emilie, résignée, l'assure qu'il est déjà mort. En outre, son geste habituel qui consiste à rouler dans son doigt "l'alliance trop lourde" symbolise, avec l'arbre, un passé inutile et rejeté et un avenir sans espoir. Tous les personnages sont donc coincés dans un présent statique, condition reflétée par l'auteur dans un style lourd et même parfois insipide. Mais c'est là tout le drame.

A l'opposé de *L'Hiver dans les os*, le récit d'Alain Poissant, *J'avais quatorze ans*, nous décrit un monde qui en apparence ne cesse de bouger, un monde de quête perpétuelle qui met en scène deux adolescents pour qui l'errance physique se substitue au voyage intérieur.

La sensation de mouvement est renforcée par la technique narrative de l'auteur qui fait du récit un conte étiré. Même le cadre le suggère: le narrateur, jeune garçon de quatorze ans, se trouve dans la cuisine par un après-midi pluvieux en compagnie de son grand-oncle. Celui-ci, assis sur la chaise berçante près du poêle, commence à raconter l'histoire de Jac et Guy Babeux, vieille de cinquante ans. L'entrée en matière immédiate — "Y'a pas grand-chose à dire," l'usage presque exclusif du présent tout au long du récit et la structuration épisodique nous rappellent constamment qu'il s'agit bel et bien d'une narration.

Séparés après la mort de leur père, les deux frères Babeux sont adoptés par deux de leurs oncles. La première moitié de l'histoire se concentre exclusivement sur Guy. On nous y décrit son caractère rêveur, ses sauts d'humeur et surtout son incapacité de communiquer. Et c'est là la grande tragédie chez lui: il désire ardemment se confier, partager ses espoirs avec autrui, mais ne trouve pas les mots. "Guy se sent à nouveau envahi par le besoin de dire un tas de choses," mais de peur d'être ridiculisé ou puni, il se tait. Son mutisme et son désir de solitude, joints à un besoin profond d'enracinement, engendrent une angoisse déchirante chez lui. Pour ce garçon de quatorze ans à l'âme sensible, vivre chez son oncle ne présage qu'un avenir sans joie de dure et pénible labeur et de rêves irréalisables. La seule solution est dans la fuite; il ira rejoindre son frère aîné Jac et ensemble ils partiront à la recherche d'un Graal jamais nommé et jamais atteint.

En dépit des assurances et promesses vides de Jac, leur existence ne sera qu'une longue quête infructueuse de l'appartenance. Ils errent de village en village, travaillant à l'occasion pour gagner de quoi boire avant de se remettre en route. Ce sont deux êtres aliénés qui se voient rejetés par les leurs et même par l'armée. Leur histoire est sans doute semblable à celle de plusieurs chômeurs pendant la crise des années 1930. Mais c'est aussi l'histoire de deux hommes qui refusent d'accepter les devoirs et les responsabilités du monde adulte. Ils poursuivent une éternelle adolescence de vagabondage qu'ils semblent préférer à une intégration dans la société: ils trouvent moyen d'echapper à toute occasion qui leur permettrait de se fixer.

Guy, silencieux mais plus intuitif que son frère disert, sait que son rôle est celui de l'errant perpétuel. Parce que la parole lui manque, son rêve le plus cher — habiter le maison familiale — ne se réalisera pas. La plainte morne de sa musique à bouche fait écho à sa destinée aussi triste qu'inéluctable. Survient enfin le mutisme le plus absolu — sa mort. Jac se rend compte alors que la véritable tragédie de leur vie a été justement cette absence de communication qui empêche tout épanaouissement personnel. En fait, toujours ensemble, ils n'étaient même pas

pervenus à se confier une seule fois l'un à l'autre:

> Tu voulais-tu être riche? Jouer de la musique à bouche sur un strand? Etre instruit? pis avoir un chez-vous? un chez-nous? dis-moi tout ça, envoye, dis! ou bien voulais-tu te marier, tomber en amour, dis! t'as jamais rien dit, pis moi non plus!

A la fin, nous nous retrouvons dans la cuisine en présence du narrateur qui réfléchit sur le récit qu'il vient d'entendre. Lorsqu'il nous parle du "malaise pour lequel [il] n'avai[t] pas de nom," nous constatons qu'il est perturbé par des similarités plus que fortuites entre le récit narré et sa propre situation. Et c'est là, sans doute, par le biais d'une morale bien caractéristique du conte, que ce texte s'inscrit dans une longue et honorable tradition littéraire québécoise.

MARK BENSON

SPARROWS & EAGLES

JUAN GARCIA, *The Alchemy of the Body and Other Poems*, trans. Marc Plourde. Guernica, $15.00; pa. $6.95.

CLAUDE BEAUSOLEIL, *Concrete City*, trans. Ray Chamberlain. Guernica, $20.00; pa. $9.95.

GUERNICA EDITIONS, like other small publishers gravitating around Montreal's Véhicule Group, has been bringing out more and more Québécois poetry in translation. Recent titles are Juan Garcia's *The Alchemy of the Body and Other Poems* translated by Marc Plourde, and Claude Beausoleil's *Concrete City* englished by Ray Chamberlain.

The first is a reworking of an earlier version of these translations published by Fiddlehead in 1974. Poet Marc Plourde is fortunate to have a second chance; few translators do. As translator Plourde is a literalist; he belongs to the Frank Scott school; he hews very close to the line of the original. Contrary to expectations perhaps, the discipline of such fidelity is most taxing, particularly in poetry. Its chief risk is the production of conversions which, while accurate, are wooden and unrhythmical.

In the main Plourde brings elegant solutions to the problems posed by Garcia's *clair-obscur* verse. For example, he renders

> *Et si la nuit sur nous anime son complot*
> *et jusqu'en nos racines sa trame de mirages*
> *qui donc affichera par les routes son mal*
> *en Te voyant calmer la voix basse de l'âme*

> And if the night steeps us in its conspiracy
> ties even to our roots its net of deceptions
> who then will parade his sorrow on these roads
> seeing You calm the murmurous voice of the soul

But sometimes Plourde's bias towards plainness betrays Garcia. The title poem, which runs thirty pages and takes up two-thirds of the book, is a passionate hermetic "complaint" in the old poetic sense of a soul's cry of exasperation and despair, occasionally shot through with a burst of dark ecstasy. In the absence of any narrative line or of much specific detail, the poem depends for its surreal beauty on its decorative language. In the last canto Plourde translates "*d'antiques rumeurs de ruisseau*" by "the old gossip of a stream," "*coeur béant*" by "open heart," and "*surgissent par milliers des archipels des mots*" by "flow islands of words by the thousands." In such instances the lack of alliteration, the damped-down tone, and the refusal of verbal excess do Garcia a little less than justice. But it is easy to pull threads. On the whole Plourde's poetry renders the work of this melancholy Moroccan-born poet with strength and imagination.

Claude Beausoleil is just a few years younger than Juan Garcia but their poetry seems centuries apart. *Concrete City* is a selection from some of the seventeen books of verse Beausoleil has brought out

in the past decade. The genre is often the same, the complaint again, but this time it is "*la ville en plainte*" or "citycomplaint" as Ray Chamberlain translates it, the raw (and sometimes chic, sometimes sleazy) screech and moan of night life in the modern metropolis, a far cry from Garcia's classic soul-searching.

Chamberlain is best known as a prose translator (he won the 1983 Canada Council Prize for his translation of Victor-Lévy Beaulieu's *Jos Connaissant*) but he translated several new Québécois poets in *The Story So Far* (Coach House, 1979) including Beausoleil. He catches the fast tempo and hard glitter of this verse extremely well. Where Beausoleil is most anarchically inventive Chamberlain matches him, find for *trouvaille*. In fact the temptation, where the French is so free, is to outstrip the model, as for example rendering

opiner en fracas déconvenue
la ville en plainte
allégé du bizarre
le mensonge s'image

dinopinion(ing)s lead to disapp'tment
citycomplaints
(merely)the bizarre
as(merely)lighter(merely)
the lie takes a form

This raises questions about the difference between liberty and licence in translation and reanimates the old debate about having to choose between live sparrows or stuffed eagles. I do not think the modernity of the verse gives automatic licence to choose the sparrow.

Guernica's book production is simple, clean, spacious, original poems on one page and translates opposite. One of the binds about publishing in two languages is having to get the French as exactly right as the English. A mere trifle, a *rien* such as inverted letters, may boggle the transcultural reader who is valiantly scanning the French with the left eye and the English with the right. In Beausoleil's "*Corps déliré*" ("Body Undone"), for example, *reins* is printed *riens*. It is a comment on the frequent obscurity of the verse to say that there is nothing in the context that would lead one to prefer "kidneys" to "nothings."

Bilingual editions are twice as challenging; more interesting too. I hope similar books, perhaps also co-edited, jointly distributed, and reaching a double public, will become a feature of Montreal publishing in the eighties.

PHILIP STRATFORD

CONDITION HUMAINE

BERTRAND B. LEBLANC, *Variations sur un Thème Anathème*. Leméac, $13.95.

MARGUERITE-A. PRIMEAU, *Maurice Dufault, sous-directeur*. Eds. des Plaines, n.p.

LIONEL ALLARD, *Le Goéland Blessé*. Leméac, n.p.

VARIATIONS SUR UN THEME ANATHEME is a collection of short stories connected by the locale (Gaspé) and the theme of anathema (usually of a sexual nature). The former is the strongest point of the tales; Leblanc's love of and pride in Gaspé are evident even when he reveals the darker side of his people. The latter, on the other hand, is the weakest point; a sexual aspect is often forced into a story in order that it fit the book's pattern.

"Le Boutefeu" illustrates the author's unfortunate tendency to shape his stories within a restricting mould. A fisherman is forced, because of economic woes, to become a dynamiter, a profession which makes him miserable. Aurèle thinks and talks constantly of the sea:

> Il faisait souffler les vents du large, bercer les flots, danser le soleil sur la crête des vagues, hurler les tempêtes qui bavaient l'écume, flotter la brume sournoise. Comme il n'était pas mauvais conteur, on l'écoutait, mais sans enthousiasme. Sentant leur ignorance, Aurèle prêchait avec le zèle d'un

> missionnaire s'efforçant de vendre Dieu aux Inuit. Avec à peu près les mêmes résultats . . . ce qui le rendait encore plus triste.

These poetic descriptions of the sea and ironic asides about the fisherman are tarnished because Leblanc never resolves Aurèle's conflict: whether to be an employed dynamiter or a penniless fisherman. Instead, Aurèle becomes impotent and this late development becomes the focus of the remainder of the story. This unfortunate preoccupation with sex turns what had been a very promising story into a dud. It detracts from rather than adds to the meaning or unity of the story. Other tales such as "La Piscine" and "Le Pertuis" are extended dirty jokes; their surprise endings, though more agreeable and less disruptive, hardly justify the lengths of these stories.

Three stories, however, are as raw and powerful as any scene from Laberge's *La Scouine*. "Les Deux Pêcheurs" clearly illustrates the difference between a Gaspesian good ol' boy and a degenerate. "Le Charretier" tells of a misanthrope who draws the line at loving animals while "Le Banc d'Oeuvre" is a strangely compassionate story of bestiality. Though Leblanc has an odd habit of commenting in contemporary terms in his historical vignettes, this collection is a credible continuation of the tradition of the "raconteur." As such, these tales are best enjoyed for their entertainment value and not for their moral lessons.

Maurice Dufault, sous-directeur begins in a promising manner. The novel takes place in 1954 in Lyonsville, Alberta, an oil-boom town. The title character is vice-principal and French teacher in the local high school. A discipline problem exists in the school: duck-tail punks are in evidence, and these children of the new bourgeoisie, aided and abetted by their indulgent parents, are challenging the old school rules. Dufault's situation — working for a weak principal who assigns responsibility for discipline to his subordinate because the local trouble-maker's father is a member of the school board — has interesting fictional possibilities. Unfortunately Primeau never develops the unique potentialities of her plot, and she also fails to provide a realistic school setting. The author never once describes Dufault's classes. He never seems to do any correcting or planning for his classes, and he has only one major discipline problem, whose downfall and disgrace he witnesses thanks to an extended coincidence (one of many in this old-fashioned novel). Also ignored are the students' and parents' reactions, in supposed redneck territory, to the teaching of French. The few incidents which do describe the school situation are successful: the confrontation with the school bully, the fawning behaviour of certain teachers toward the principal, and the near impossibility of instituting any changes in the school system.

Most of the time, however, the reader wades through Dufault's sophomoric musings on the meaning of life, learns why he is such a taciturn and lifeless being, and tries to sympathize with his "condition humaine." As the novel progresses, the plot becomes more and more contrived as every person's actions contribute to the inevitable, symbolic ending wherein the protagonist is provided with a reason to continue living. If the author had seriously considered the situation of a French-Canadian living in an English-speaking town and made the everyday routine of such a life more convincing, then possibly these musings of a universal nature and the machinations of a creaky plot would have been more palatable.

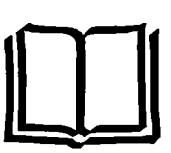
Le Goéland Blessé is the type of book which Dufault or other teachers of French as a second language might use to motivate their students. Lionel Allard recounts in very simple and uncomplicated language the biography of Claude

Belanger, who suffers from muscular dystrophy. He has waged and continues to wage a courageous battle in order to live in a manner which most of us take for granted.

Though inspiring, the book does have a major defect. It is repetitive and the most annoying example of this weakness is the constant reference to *Jonathan Livingston Seagull.* Allard emphasizes Bach's work to a greater extent than does Belanger, who comes by his knowledge of seagulls innocently. He was born and bred in Gaspé where he designed a motif of a wounded seagull for la Fondation Maguire, which helps handicapped children of the area. The title is a direct reference to this and, I suppose, an indirect one to Bach's opus. Some may consider Belanger's family and friends too good to be true, but this altruism might make the text even more attractive as classroom material. Furthermore, the unsympathetic behaviour of a few teachers toward Belanger and his handicap might provoke some interesting discussion.

Le Goéland Blessé is educational in the best sense of the word. The facts of muscular dystrophy are absorbed as one reads of Claude Belanger's heroic struggle to become a man of independent means. His life-story is a source of inspiration for other handicapped people and of compassion for more fortunate readers. Moreover, the author's decision to donate his royalties to la Fondation Maguire is praiseworthy.

RONALD EWING



CONFLICTING CULTURES

PHILIP KREINER, *People Like Us in a Place Like This.* Oberon, $19.95; pa. $9.95.

FRED BONNIE, *Displaced Persons.* Oberon, $19.95; pa. $9.95.

DON AUSTIN, *The Portable City.* Pulp Press, $6.95.

KEVIN ROBERTS, *Flash Harry and the Daughters of Divine Light.* Harbour, $6.95.

THE FOUR STORIES in Philip Kreiner's *People Like Us in a Place Like This* are all set in the Canadian north. A nameless anthropologist serves as narrator of the first (and title) story: he tells of two visits to Little Whale River, a settlement on the coast of Hudson Bay. Initially he is interested in gathering information about Indian surnames; however, Kreiner ensures that most of the information contained in the story has to do with the narrator's failure to fit into the community he finds there. A former school friend, Arthur Shelton, offers the narrator a room in his house, but makes it clear that he wants nothing to do with him. A lonely young woman takes him to bed one night, but turns him out the following morning so that she can get on with her own life. Skilfully, Kreiner manipulates our sympathies: though at first we feel sorry for the narrator, as the story progresses we begin to see that he is no less self-absorbed than the people who reject his company.

When he tries to make contact with the Indians, the narrator is treated with suspicion and even contempt. He mistakenly assumes that the natives want to be the subjects of an anthropological study, and without recognizing the implications, reports an incident in which the community's white woman doctor is beaten by a group of Indian women for having an affair with one of the chiefs. Later, on an expedition in the bush, the narrator

senses that his guides may kill him at any time: Kreiner does a superb job of conveying an atmosphere of menace, and of leaving us in no doubt that the visiting anthropologist in a northern community is an unwanted interloper.

The main character of the second story, "We Collide in Our Dreams," is again an anthropologist interested in studying Indian life, but his narrative is presented to us only partly in the first person, so that we alternate between identifying with him and viewing him from a distance. The tribe he wants to live among greets him coldly on arrival, and tells him that the only available accommodation is a shack in part of an old Inuit ghetto. Here the anthropologist stays over a period of some months, becoming more and more alienated. When he is discovered in bed one night with an Indian girl, the community burns down his shack, forcing him to leave. Once again, Kreiner does a masterful job of manipulating our sympathies as well as building atmosphere: *People Like Us in a Place Like This* is worth buying for its first two stories alone.

Happily, the other stories in the collection are of the same high standard. In "That Year My Father Died" a young Indian recounts in the first person some of the events that led up to the arrival of the first white men in the area, and their seizure of Indian land. "Messiah," the final story, is narrated by the manager of a trading post, who tells of an Indian employee of his who believes himself to be the Son of God. This misconception has arisen from an improper understanding of the teachings of a visiting missionary, and leads to the deaths of the majority of the tribe, for the employee persuades them that it is God's wish that they follow him onto Spring river ice, where they drown.

In contrast to Kreiner's, the nine stories in Fred Bonnie's *Displaced Persons* have southern Canadian settings. The collection moves chronologically from childhood through to late middle-age: its earliest characters are boys aged about ten, while the main character of the last story is in his fifties. By "displaced persons" Bonnie means people who find themselves in an unfamiliar environment or situation and have trouble coping with it. Thus in the first story, "Selling Delphinium," a young boy tells of the problems that arise when an American tourist stops at his roadside flower stall and talks his mother into having him take an elderly man fishing over a period of several weeks. The second story, "Nick the Russian," is narrated in the third person, and dwells on a young boy's suspicions of a Russian lodger — a genuinely displaced person — living in the same lodging house as his mother and himself.

The two boys are unhappy, but their distress is limited by the warmth of the relationship they have with their parents. Bonnie's subsequent stories are more poignant, because they concern older people whose family circumstances are not always so comforting. In "Gone with the Wind. Be Back Soon," for example, the displaced person at the centre of the action is a man living in an apartment who finds himself shunned by his fellow tenants. When one of them has a birthday party, he is the only one not invited: the story is a perceptive investigation of the underlying reasons why. Similarly, in "All-You-Can-Eat-Night," a middle-aged man and his wife go out to dinner with the man's boss; slowly it becomes clear that the boss and his wife are having an affair.

Displaced Persons is a well-written and interesting collection; Bonnie is adept at conveying the sense of bewilderment and uncertainty his characters experience, and of the nine stories, it would be difficult to single out any one as being inferior to the rest.

The Portable City is a collection of twenty-eight stories, most only a page or so long. The first five have an eerie, surreal quality, for each focuses on a single character who is in some way unusual or grotesque. Thus "The Dictator" presents a brief sketch of the leader of an unnamed country who, inexplicably, is given to uncontrollable weeping. Similarly, "The Artist" tells of an artistic prankster who makes an art work of himself, entitled "Wino Vacation," by spending the day sleeping in the back of a city bus, cradling a bottle of cheap wine. "Cortez" features a first-person narrator who claims to have seen the explorer in a twentieth-century street; "The Detective's" narrator confuses fiction and reality as the result of having read too many detective novels; and the main character of "The Relaxed Anarchist" wavers in an oddly muddled way between chaos and order.

Amongst the stories that follow is a group that concentrates on the theme of loneliness. "How Do They Get Along, I Wonder, the Rest of the Time?" for example, is a story in which a first-person narrator puts that question to himself while observing a lonely old woman in a laundromat. This very short story is impressive for its sensitivity to detail, as is the longer "Milton Freak," which tells of a solitary old man who allows himself to be sold a set of cookware for which he has no real need, because he welcomes the visits made by the salesgirl. Mention should be made, too, of "A Perfect Crime," a particularly well-written story about a lonely young voyeur who sees through the two-way mirror in his apartment an opportunity to steal a large amount of money from the girl next door, an opportunity that gives rise to the "perfect crime" of the title.

Other stories in *The Portable City* are interesting for the fact that they are technically innovative. In "I Am an Employee," an obviously overworked, overwrought executive records his day-to-day experience in the form of a series of dictaphone entries. The nameless narrator reveals that he is recovering from a nervous breakdown, that he is undergoing treatment for chronic alcoholism, and that his children have been arrested for dealing in cocaine. All this comes out in the last entry: the ones preceding it have hinted with considerable subtlety at problems of this kind. Equally innovative is "The Other Room," where the insanity of the first-person narrator is communicated by way of an eccentric use of language and typography.

Austin is clearly a talented writer, as is Kevin Roberts, author of *Flash Harry and the Daughters of Divine Light*. Roberts' collection is, however, rather uneven in quality, the first two stories being the least impressive. Each is narrated in the first person by a nameless fisherman whose English is so poor as to be nearly incomprehensible. Unfortunately, the struggle to translate what he says into correct English goes largely unrewarded: both "The Merry Maid and Miss Chance" and "Flash Harry and the Daughters of Divine Light" turn out to be rather heavy-handed attempts at humour, and the reader passes to the third (and more accessible) of the collection's thirteen stories with a sense of relief. This story, "Camping Trip," introduces a theme that Roberts develops particularly well: that of the conflict between differing cultures and values. "Camping Trip" tells of a young Canadian nurse who goes camping with her Australian boyfriend and another couple, and finds not only that she and the other girl disagree about the virtues of outdoor living, but that it is difficult — impossible, finally — for her to accept the Australian view of the relationship between the sexes. "A Nice Cold Beer" is a similarly impressive story of a young Australian who visits a brother liv-

ing in Canada and discovers that he has changed disturbingly, in that he has become part of the drug culture.

"Ride" explores a different kind of conflict — the conflicting emotions of a young woman who discovers that she is half Indian. Different again is "Taxi," a story that tells of a university graduate who is unable to find employment commensurate with his qualifications, and who becomes a tough, cynical taxi-driver and pimp. "Taxi" is particularly interesting for the fact that the story of the driver is interwoven with television accounts of a hostage crisis: as we read the story, the main character alternates between being a hostage to the need to make a living, and the captor of a young prostitute to whom he behaves sadistically. Our sympathies correspondingly fluctuate: at times we view the driver with a sense of fellow feeling, at times with detestation.

"Taxi" is one of the best stories in the collection, though there are two others that deserve special mention. "Walk" and "Tree" are two beautifully lyrical pieces, both extremely well written and subtle. The clumsiness of the collection's first two stories is redeemed by these three alone.

JAMES ACHESON

FOURTH WORLD

JAMES HOUSTON, *Eagle Song*. McClelland & Stewart, $19.95.

AS ITS OWN JACKET PRONOUNCES, *Eagle Song* is an Indian saga based on true events — in this case the journal of John Jewitt, teen-age armourer and blacksmith on the *Boston* which anchored in March 1803 in Nootka Sound on the Northwest Coast of North America. Jewitt and sailmaker John Thompson were taken slaves by Maquinna, chief of the Eagle House village, after an explosive incident in which the ship's captain had insulted the *tyee* and set off a brutal retaliation by a group of rebel Indian youths. A swift massacre of all the crew (except for Jewitt and Thompson) was the native way of redressing the chief's indignity. Jewitt and Thompson were forced into the tribe and escaped from captivity only when a second ship visited the Sound over two years later, and its captain acted upon Jewitt's ruse against Maquinna. Jewitt then settled in Hartford, Connecticut, far from his birthplace in England, and received financial assistance in publishing his journal from Richard Alsop, satirist and poet, a Hartford wit, and one of the few millionaires of the era. As Houston tells us in his epilogue, Jewitt, with a tall stovepipe hat to partly conceal a terrible head scar, would roam the main square, pushing a small wheelbarrow loaded with pamphlets. After singing several choruses of "The Armorer Boy," his own composition about his adventures, he would attempt to peddle his books: a short account sold for 10¢; a longer one for 25¢. For his part, Thompson saw much action with the British navy and became a barefist boxer of renown before his death in Havana during a long voyage home.

Houston's novel does not tell Jewitt's story from the white man's point of view. Instead, its narrator is Siam, Maquinna's widowed brother-in-law and head usher, who is able to cast light on tribal ways and attitudes in a manner that gains sympathy rather than disgust for the natives. The story is not created with genteel art or subtlety, but revels in its own stark anthropological and historical elements. Much is made of *potlatches* and whale hunts, tribal rivalries among Wolf Town, Otter Town, Black Fin, and Clamshell, sexual escapades and rituals. The pencil sketches by Houston of various characters in their defining costumes and actions combine with such events as Tall Hat's

final *potlatch*, a cruel human sacrifice, Maquinna's all-important witnessing ceremony, and the grotesque comedy of Maquinna's wooden whale to give *Eagle Song* resonances which would gratify any cultural voyeur. Yet the mimetic mode — the voice and texture of the Yoquot — compels our emotional involvement in the saga. Indeed, *Eagle Song* is an equivalent of the Fourth World Novel.

Leslie Fielder would, no doubt, revel in its "inter-ethnic male bonding" (to use Fiedler's own language). Siam, although not as closely allied to Jewitt as Maquinna is, does exhibit an occasional paternalism that cuts across his surprise and disgust at certain perplexing or incomprehensible attitudes of the young white man. It is the eccentric Maquinna, of course, who strengthens the male bonding. This chief adopts Jewitt as a son, gives him a wife (though he also dismisses her after having enjoyed her sexual favour), and then is betrayed by his "son." Maquinna, in spite of his nervous impulsiveness, is every inch a leader, although he is constrained by his trickster-wife, Fog Woman, who at times resembles the nagging, aggrieved wife of contemporary Western society. Maquinna sets the tone for the entire village, even when he acts against his people's general desires or advice. His impetuous wilfulness, intemperate anger and cruelty, irrational pride and jealousy, thin sensitivity and whimsy form the cult of personality in the novel, but there is also an opposite force in the sullen, laconic hostility of Thompson — a man who never enjoys the company of a native woman and who never enters into the spirit of the community. In opposition to Maquinna, the ravishing chief and surrogate father to Jewitt, stands Thompson, the white rebel who rejects all sentimentality and sexuality, though not the violence that bubbles out of his own wounded psyche.

A third force is Siam, whose narrative voice, in seeking to convince us of its reliability and veracity, develops its own anomalies which are really symptomatic of Houston's problems with literary craft. Siam is evidently talking to some generalized fellow tribesmen ("you listeners"), but there is such self-conscious exoticism and pseudo-innocence in his voice that Houston is defeated by the problem of raising the material to the level of full consciousness without falsifying or cheapening it. In trying to compel our assent in a way that is indistinguishable from wonder, the author adopts many conventions of Western fiction, especially the formulae of popular narrative. There are enough instances of sex and violence to fill a quota of wish-fulfilling delight. There are enough sociology and morality to satisfy a liberal conscience, and Siam is pacific rather than militant, domesticated rather than liberated, so he becomes the Fourth World's good native in lieu of a Third World good nigger.

On the purely escapist level, *Eagle Song* has sweeping adventure in its parameters of peril, rivalry, revenge, love, and loss. It vibrates with thrilling incident, lurid ritual, lust, hate, and forgiveness. It moves us viscerally rather than intellectually, and is full of good moral intentions towards an indigenous culture that must be rescued from obscurity. However, literary fardels multiply quickly. Siam's mode of recounting is discoloured by a problem of diction or translation. There is nothing intrinsically wrong in assuming that a "primitive" or non-literary people could have had their own complicated or poetic oral language, but surely it is quite false to assume that such a language could have had sophistications like "blunderbuss," "septum," "slathered," and "mainsail."

There are other problems. The Northwest coast lacks the archetypal significance of the frozen North, the prairies, or

the eastern garrisons — perhaps because there have not been writers good enough to find such significance. There is no strong cosmology in the story — apart from a belief that animals possess a higher intelligence than humans — in which to sound deeper notes of the psyche, and although Houston has his moments of credible and colourful characterization, he does not make Jewitt anything other than a distanced victim pushed to the rim of a world whose flaw is not so much slavery as misunderstood racial custom. Accordingly, Maquinna is absolved of all culpability in the circumstances surrounding Jewitt's captivity, and his people (who demonstrate their version of Négritude) become noble niggers of the Northwest. Certainly the tribe earn our pity for their hurt at Jewitt's "disloyalty," but they are also objects of pity for the spectacular entertainment they become in Canadian fiction — a sort of benignly colonized myth.

KEITH GAREBIAN

THE GEOGRAPHY OF CHILDHOOD

TONY GERMAN, *Tom Penny*. McClelland & Stewart, $7.95.

JANET LUNN, *The Root Cellar*. Lester and Orpen Dennys, $7.95.

ALICE KANE, *Songs and Sayings of an Ulster Childhood*, ed. by Edith Fowke. McClelland & Stewart, $16.95.

AS DIFFERENT AS THESE THREE books of children's literature are — the historical adventure of *Tom Penny,* the mysterious time fantasy of *The Root Cellar*, and the warm family album of *Songs and Sayings of an Ulster Childhood* — all illuminate the rich Canadian heritage through their strong sense of place.

Tony German follows the lead of Bill Freeman in dramatizing history — here the plight of British settlers who came to Canada on military land grants in the early nineteenth century — through fast-paced adventure with a child hero. Such a plan has the obvious advantages of showing the dynamic quality of history and opening up the panorama of Canadian life in the settlement period. The pitfalls, however, are equally obvious, and German unfortunately falls into them. In attempting to show the multi-faceted nature of the epoch, he draws his map too large and fills it with more excitement than 184 pages can hold. Thirteen-year-old Tom experiences the murder of his father, shipwreck, a confrontation between rum-runners and customs men, travel with the voyageurs, shanty life in the lumber camps of the Ottawa Valley, and attempted camp sabotage.

The chief casualty of this approach is characterization. Tom is an undeveloped character, and although the child reader might long for an adventurous alter ego, Tom's heroic exploits become embarrassingly unreal on the basis of number alone. If the dimensions of Tom's heroism are overdone, the tough reality of frontier life and the treachery of opportunists are etched in vivid detail. The geographical impact of these historical events would be made clearer by the inclusion of a period map.

Janet Lunn's *The Root Cellar* has a contemporary frame, featuring twelve-year-old Rose Larkin, an orphan sent to live with relatives she doesn't know in a dilapidated old house on an island on the Canadian side of Lake Ontario. The house also provides a link with and an avenue to the past, and the shy and bewildered Rose certainly needs a place to escape — and to find herself.

Lunn is at her best in exploring the possibilities of time fantasy, as she did in her earlier *Twin Spell,* and here she proves her mastery in the deft handling

of the elements of transition: the physical gateway of the root cellar and the emotional one based on Rose's isolation. Escaping the all-too-real present of her four male cousins, Rose finds her way to the house in the 1860's, where she meets Susan and Will and subsequently embarks on a search with fifteen-year-old Susan to find Will, gone to fight with his American cousins in the Civil War. Susan and Rose's trip from the island to Oswego, New York, and on to Washington, D.C., creates a clear picture of life and transportation at the time, but it is foremost a convincing journey of initiation for Rose, whose sense of history and twentieth-century independence make her the protector of the older, naïve Susan.

The time setting and the characters are so well realized that the reader has the benefit of being able to compare the different value judgments of the two periods of time as Rose and Susan react to their shared experiences. An additional benefit is the reaffirmation of the emotional bonds that have historically existed between Canadians and Americans.

While geography is prominent in the foregoing titles, Alice Kane's *Songs and Sayings of an Ulster Childhood* maps childhood itself. The unique book is at once an anthology of folklore (including less conventional items like music-hall and pantomine songs and parodies) and an amazingly fresh recollection of a happy childhood in an extended Irish family prior to World War I. The personal character of the chronological memoir is underlined by the family photos found in the early chapters.

The loving and distinct personalities of Miss Kane's parents emerge early through the folklore each shares with the young Alice. As she grows and her experience broadens, so does her contact with folklore, and the reader realizes the universality of these experiences in such local adaptations of popular song as "It's a long way to Ballywalter," the cruel taunts always endured by redheads like Kane, "Ginger, you're balmy, / So is your Mammy," and the deliciously naughty street riddles: "Why did the rose blush? — Because she found herself in bed with Sweet William."

It is Kane's ability to recollect not only the lore but the exact reaction of childhood that makes this book especially valuable. She confesses, for example, that her clearest memory of a Punch and Judy show was not wanting to put her penny in the hat that was passed around afterwards, but she felt for the first time what it must be like to be old and lonely when her uncle sadly sang "The Ash Grove."

Children will enjoy the treasure chest of lore (which has complete notes and references by editor Edith Fowke in an appendix), but all parents should read this book as a guide to healthy child-rearing.

PAULA L. HART

LITTERATURE POUR LA JEUNESSE

FRANCOIS LADOUCEUR, *Pierrot, l'avion des neiges.* Les éditions Héritage, $1.79.

FRANCOIS LADOUCEUR, *Martin l'ourson.* Les éditions Héritage, $1.79.

CECILE GAGNON, *Pourquoi les moutons frisent.* Editions Pierre Tisseyre, $7.95.

BERNADETTE RENAUD, *La Grande Question de Tomatelle.* Editions Leméac, n.p.

LUCE LEVASSEUR, *Contes des bêtes et des choses.* Les éditions Héritage, $3.50.

ROSE DOMPIERRE, *L'enfant des fleurs.* Les Editions La Liberté, $7.95.

PIERRE LEON, *Les Voleurs d'étoiles de Saint-Arbrousse-Poil.* Editions Leméac, collection jour de fête, $9.95.

AU QUEBEC LES ALBUMS JAILLISSENT à profusion et la typographie se mêle à

l'imagerie pour prolonger l'écriture. L'album, bien qu'il ait toujours son but pédagogique propre, peut être aussi un objet affectif au même titre qu'un jouet. Pour ce faire l'album pour les tout petits doit présenter à l'enfant des thèmes qu'il peut dominer, un langage qu'il peut comprendre et auquel il répondra éventuellement par une activité créatrice.

Pierot, l'avion des neiges et *Martin l'ourson* semblent répondre à ce programme et descendre en ligne directe des "albums du père Castor," cette fameuse collection montée par Paul Faucher et qui publia plus de 300 albums de 1927 à 1967. On retrouve ici des textes rassurants, optimistes. L'avion qui a pour nom Pierrot insiste sur le plaisir du travail bien fait et sur la façon dont on peut toujours surmonter les difficultés. L'image fait contrepoids au texte tout en y ajoutant une pointe d'humour. *Martin, l'ourson,* le deuxième album du même auteur, met l'accent sur la chaleur du foyer, l'amitié. Le besoin de sécurité affective est bien sûr contrebalancé par le désir d'émancipation, ce qui d'ailleurs est le propre de nombreux récits d'enfants égarés. Mais ici, l'ourson est bien vite retrouvé par son ami. Face à ce type d'album, *Pourquoi les moutons frisent* de Cécile Gagnon adopte une toute autre attitude. Le texte est bien composé mais présente une image totalement négative de l'homme. Ce dernier est féroce, égoiste, etc.: "Les hommes coupèrent les plantes et les arbres, ils tuèrent les oiseaux et les mangèrent." Cette vision n'est contrebalancée par aucune description positive de l'homme cultivateur, producteur, etc., susceptible de rassurer l'enfant. Au contraire une chasse "ad eternam" s'engage entre les hommes et les moutons et ces derniers n'échappent à la voracité de leur ennemi qui grâce à un truc. L'illustration bien qu'intéressante en soi, originale dans sa stylisation, renforce la brutalité du propos. Un des dessins montre entre autres les hommes étranglant et abattant les animaux. On ne peut éviter de se demander avec quel regard Ariane et Magali, à qui ce livre est destiné, contempleront leur univers.

Les autres textes que nous examinerons brièvement appartiennent tous au domaine du conte. Pendant longtemps les pédagogues ont manifesté de la méfiance vis-à-vis du merveilleux et ont utilisé le conte en l'affadissant ou en le faisant servir à des fins didactiques. On assiste aujourd'hui à un revirement et les éducateurs commencent à se montrer très sensibles aux pouvoirs du conte. Néanmoins, aujourd'hui le conte est souvent limité aux tout petits et met surtout en scène des animaux qui parlent. C'est pour quoi *La Grande Question de Tomatelle* est un exemple rafraîchissant puisqu'il s'agit d'une jeune tomate curieuse qui pose sans cesse la même question et quitte sa serre natale pour trouver le sens de son existence. Ni les tomates plus âgées, ni le champignon grincheux, ni le mulot rusé ne peuvent lui répondre. La vie, la mort, les différents légumes et leur façon d'exister font leur apparition dans la quête de Tomatelle et assurent à ce conte une originalité "savoureuse." L'illustration est discrète, néanmoins le cadrage partiel ajoute une touche de finesse non négligeable.

Dans *Les Contes des bêtes et des choses* ce sont les "choses" qui sortent de l'ordinaire. Les aventures de Rosalie la poignée de porte grincheuse, de Cléo le poteau ou de Martin l'oreiller volant feront la joie des tout petits bien que le récit en soi et la présentation se cantonnent dans le traditionnel. L'illustration est adéquate, sans plus, et gagnerait beaucoup à la couleur. La différence entre la couverture et l'intérieur est frappante à cet égard.

Avec *L'enfant des fleurs,* le conte pour tout âge prend une toute autre allure. Il s'agit là d'un thème classique par excellence: l'enfant des fleurs part à la découverte du monde de la ville et est con-

fronté aux plaies et folies de la société moderne. Valorisation de l'artificiel, vitesse sans objet, désarroi des jeunes, agressivité sans objet, jalousie, solitude heurtent la sensibilité de l'enfant. Le texte bien sûr prêche le retour à la nature, à la douceur de vivre, mais l'auteur a réussi à donner un vibrant influx poétique à son récit qui est tout en nuances, en touches délicates et en contraste. On peut en juger par la comparaison de la danse à la discothèque et de la danse dans les champs:

> Ils dansaient avec violence, se projetant les uns contre les autres avec des regards vides comme s'ils étaient des robots disloqués.
>
> O fleurs, mes mères! Votre danse est un doux balancement au rythme du vent cherchant mélodie dans la pulsation du temps.

Illustration et texte s'harmonisent parfaitement dans des tons bleutés.

Pierre Léon et ses *Voleurs d'étoiles de Saint-Arbrousse-Poil* nous entraînent dans un conte délirant à la suite de Stéphane, Pigou le renard et Maurice le lapin. Il s'agit bien sûr d'un voyage dans l'espace et d'une chasse au trésor. La route sera pavée de créatures inattendues: torpillons, chitues, grepotames et bien d'autres. Le texte est un véritable feu d'artifice de créations verbales, d'exubérance et d'humour. Notons au passage que les trois super héros sont du type masculin et les méchants sont de l'espèce mâle aussi. Ce n'est que justice. On nous a flanqué du côté féminin une "douce" sirène, une renarde snob et une "douce" amazone à la force herculéenne dont le mari nous dit-on malicieusement fait le ménage, la vaiselle et la cuisine. Qu'on se le dise . . . Satire pleine de verve sur bien des aspects de notre société, ce texte, Dieu soit loué, ne sent pas le didactique. Prenez une dose du roman de Renart, un peu de la verve de Rabelais, un grain de Jacques Ferron et une bonne dose de science fiction et vous obtiendrez une aventure désopilante. Certes la cruauté n'est pas absente de cette histoire, mais elle est compensée et comme le dit Isabelle Jan: "Quels que soient les monstres et les violences contenus dans ces récits fabuleux, les contes, paradoxalement, rassurent en permettant, justement par cette violence exprimée de façon symbolique de donner une forme aux angoisses." Le texte se prête à différents niveaux de lecture car on assiste à un va-et-vient entre les expressions ancrées dans le contexte québécois et celles ancrées dans le référentiel français. De plus on rencontre de nombreuses références littéraires et autres, qui ne sauraient être captées que par un adulte et je dirais même un adulte dans un champ littéraire très spécifique. Je songe particulièrement à "Julia Kristina," cette astronaute "qui volait très haut, très vite, toujours dans les nuages." Le clin d'oeil ne saurait être saisi par tous. Néanmoins, même sans capter toutes les références, l'enfant peut prendre plaisir au texte et embarquer avec enthousiasme dans cette histoire, en compagnie de "fiflard" le merle qui souffre d'un léger défaut de prononciation: il "fifle." La phonétique a beau jeu et le texte est bondé de sonorités en tout genre; je suis sûre que Pierre Léon "fifle en trafaillant."

A noter que ce texte fait partie d'une collection qui sort de l'ordinaire, où des titres comme *Une Journée dans la vie de Craquelin 1er, roi de Soupe-au-Lait*, de Jean-Marie Poupart et *Un Minou fait comme un rat* de Georges-Hébert Germain annoncent la place qu'on accorde au jeu de mots, au calembour, à l'ironie, dans cette collection.

DANIELLE THALER

OLD, NEW

JACQUELINE BARRETTE, *Dis-moi qu'y fait beau, Méo!* Leméac, $7.95.

ANDRE CASTELEIN DE LA LANDE, *Pièces en un acte.* Les Editions des plaines, n.p.

CATHERINE CARON, BRIGITTE HAENTJENS, SYLVIE TRUDEL, *Strip.* Prise de Parole, n.p.

RENE-DANIEL DUBOIS, *26 bis, impasse du Colonel Foisy.* Leméac, $7.95.

MICHEL TREMBLAY (trans.), *Oncle Vania* d'Anton Tchekhov. Leméac, $7.95.

WHAT IS STRIKING about these five new books of plays is that despite the vast differences in their chronological and geographical origins, they all focus a humanistic, comic vision of life on relationships between individuals. No historical, political, or nationalistic issues distract these writers from their central concerns: love, sexuality, marriage, families, dreams, and (in the case of Dubois) the nature of theatre.

With this edition of Castelein de la Lande's *Pièces en un acte,* Les Editions des Plaines renews its determination to document the history of Franco-Manitoban theatre, a goal signalled by the 1980 publication of Annette Saint-Pierre's study, *Le Rideau se lève au Manitoba.* While students of theatre history and popular art must applaud the goal of safeguarding cultural patrimony, drama critics will be unimpressed by the quality of the nine short plays included in this collection. The Belgian-born author was a leading figure in amateur theatre groups in Saint-Boniface during the twenties and thirties and a founding member of la Cercle Molière. At best, these texts from the 1930's recall the salon comedies or "proverbes" of late eighteenth-, early nineteenth-century France. At worst, they recall the humorous misadventures of comic strips. The characters and situations are conventional to the point of being clichés: a young couple having their first spat, new parents fretting every time the baby cries, a silly mother-in-law victimized by a fast-talking door-to-door salesman, women plotting to trap men into marriage proposals. As in traditional comedy, true love conquers all, crooks and misers are outfoxed, and the common sense of old servants saves the day. Clichés aside, the plays are dated by their sexist attitudes towards women. "Philibert," for example, presents a lawyer who refuses to marry a woman scientist and university professor, preferring instead his secretary because she knows thirty-five different ways to cook potatoes.

Strip lies at the opposite end of the comedic spectrum from the bourgeois farces of Castelein de la Lande. Written and performed by Catherine Caron, Brigitte Haentjens, and Sylvie Trudel, it was first presented at Ottawa's Théâtre Penguin in September 1980. *Strip*'s success led to productions in Quebec City (1981), Hull (1982 and 1983), and an English version in Ottawa (1982). It is a low-life musical comedy reminiscent of Michel Tremblay's *Demain matin, Montréal m'attend.* In the dressing room of a sleazy bar, three striptease dancers talk, drink, prepare their acts, and take turns on stage. The dramatic realism of their sordid existence is counterbalanced by the poetic elements of the play. Despite the booze, drugs, degradation, and vulgarity, the three strippers have not lost their girlish playfulness, romantic dreams, and ambitions. At times they see themselves as others see them, as victims of the commercial sex industry. But in a few poignant choral scenes and during their strip numbers they tell us that stripping is show business. When the mood is right and the house is full:

> Le strip c'est une danse d'amour entre la musique et ton corps,
> Entre la salle et ton corps.
> Entre leurs yeux et ton corps.

As the women talk about their families, lovers, costumes, make-up, diets, bodies, and acts, they become individual human beings rather than mere sex objects. Warm-hearted, good-natured Rosita looks back to her childhood on the farm with nostalgia and forward to a career as a costume designer with optimism. For ten years she has stripped to support her daughter in the absence of her unreliable, brutal husband. Gini, a talented dancer with a beautiful body, masks her unhappiness with booze, drugs, and sharp-tongued cynicism. The source of her self-destructive drive is revealed in an emotional scene where she talks about her friend (lover?), Linda, who died of a drug overdose. The third member of the trio, Candy, strips to rebel against her bourgeois background, but dreams of becoming a famous writer. Although her bad taste in men seems indicative of a masochistic streak, she still believes in love.

Jacqueline Barrette's *Dis-moi qu'y fait beau, Méo!* comprises thirteen humorous songs, monologues, and sketches written and first performed in 1974. Whether satirizing the vogue of encounter groups, radical politics, Eastern religions, population control, and organ transplants or depicting the generation gap, the threat of global annihilation, and problems faced by old and young couples, Barrette succeeds in the difficult art of creating credible characters and touching situations in brief, entertaining scenes. The satire is always good-natured, the humour ironically tender and the sentimentality never maudlin. Not only does she possess the gift of comic vision, she also makes clever use of cultural stereotypes, social phenomena and the clichés of language.

Two monologues from the collection are true *tours de force*. In "La Prison," we hear a smiling sixty-year-old woman tell fellow members of the Optimists Club ("le club des aptimisses avertis") about twenty years of caring for a husband confined to a wheelchair. The irony of the situation, which we discover in a flashback, is that he suffered the paralyzing stroke just at the moment he announced that he was leaving her because he could no longer tolerate her simple-minded cheerfulness and devotion to domesticity. The character traits that drove him to dictraction have earned her praise as a saint and martyr. Surely taking care of a helpless man in a wheelchair is nothing compared to the living hell he has endured and cannot escape. In "Poléon, le Révolté," we hear the long diatribe of a Québécois Everyman angered and frightened by a world he is powerless to change. Sitting in his living room dressed in his pyjamas, Poléon vents his resentment and frustrations in the form of a letter addressed to the television anchorman of the evening newscast. Railing against the nightly dose of political scandals, geopolitical conflicts, ecological disasters, and economic crises, he keeps coming back to one terrifying reality: the bomb. As long as a few men can destroy the world by pressing a button, all other problems are irrelevant so ordinary people might just as well ignore them and concentrate on things that have meaning for them, like hockey scores, sex, beer, and family life. Poléon ends his letter by claiming that if he knew the man who invented the bomb and the other man with his finger on the button, he would buy a gun and blow their brains out except for the fact that the television newscaster would call him a mad terrorist and show film of his tearful wife on the evening news.

René-Daniel Dubois labels his new play, *26 bis, impasse du Colonel Foisy*, a "texte sournois en un acte (et de nombreuses digressions) pour un auteur, une princesse russe et un valet." Like his previously published plays, it is an imagina-

tive, difficult, literary text which deals with the anguish of exile, unfulfilled desires, the failure of language, and the fear of death. *26 bis, impasse du Colonel Foisy* also becomes a play about the nature of theatre as it exposes the mechanisms of its own dramatic structure to ridicule, questions character/author and character/spectator relationships and praises the evocative magic of pure theatre. It is a remarkable sign of Dubois' dramatic talent that the play never seems weighted down by its intellectual baggage. In fact, the creation of the extraordinary main character makes it a very amusing text despite her initial admonition: "Ne riez pas . . . seulement souriez. C'est plus chic."

26 bis is essentially a long monologue interrupted occasionally by the voice of the author and then finally joined by the contrapuntal tirade of the valet. An aging, exiled Russian princess named Michaela Droussetchvili Tetriakov, "accablée d'un hénaurme accent slave," wrapped in a moth-eaten boa and blowing cigarette smoke, addresses the audience while reclining on a Madame Récamier-style couch on an otherwise empty stage. Madame's eccentricity is further exaggerated by Dubois' insistence that he wrote the role for a male actor in drag. "She" begins by telling the audience that shortly, her desperately passionate lover will burst through an imaginary door threatening her with a pistol. The dramatic suspense produced by the uncertain outcome of this foreboding climax (will he or won't he pull the trigger?) is part of the playwright's deliberate plan to grab the public's attention with a credible character and a naturalistic framework. Mocking her creator, Madame confides:

> Vous savez ce qu'il m'a dit l'auteur? "Dix minutes! Tu as dix minutes pour être crédible, ou je me fais zouave pontifical!" Vous avez une idée de ce que ça représente, comme poids moral, pour un personnage, l'obligation d'être crédible aux yeux de son auteur? Et quand il veut que vous soyez drôle en plus! Et naturaliste! Oui! Naturaliste! Comme un vrai personnage de la vraie vie, avec des vrais sentiments comme au théâtre!

Of course an aging nymphomaniac of a Russian princess in drag is not a "credible" character and *26 bis* is hardly a naturalistic play. The opening monologue, however, has accomplished its true purpose; it has established intimate complicity between character and audience, tension between character and the author responsible for her nightly birth and death, and mocking scorn for conventional dramaturgy and critics.

Michel Tremblay's latest contribution to Quebec theatre is a very fine translation of Anton Chekhov's *Uncle Vanya*, done in collaboration with a Russian-born friend, Kim Yaroshevskaya. *Oncle Vania* was staged at Ottawa's Centre national des arts in March 1983 and then at Montreal's Théâtre du Nouveau-Monde in April 1983. (Interestingly enough, *Uncle Vanya* was also revived by Jean-Laurent Cochet for the 1983-84 Parisian theatre season at the Arts-Hébertot.) It seems natural that Tremblay, who has previously adapted plays by Paul Zindel and Roberto Athayde, should be attracted to the great nineteenth-century Russian author because both dramatize the emptiness of life with poignancy and humour. *Uncle Vanya*, created in 1897, is essentially about frustrated love, boredom, loneliness, and disappointment. While the melodramatic tension leads to a murder-suicide attempt in Act III, comic minor characters and verbal irony keep the play from becoming a tragedy.

Tremblay's *Oncle Vania* faithfully conveys the meaning, style, and tone of the original. But if they wanted to simplify the language in order to make it more accessible to contemporary audiences, Tremblay and Yaroshevskaya should

have considered modifying Chekhov's use of names. The translators follow the standard practice of using a mixture of equivalent French names (e.g., Alexandre for Aleksandr) and transliterations (e.g., Vania). They also follow the text's use of the Russian name system which includes first names, surnames, patronymics, and affectionate forms in various combinations as well as the effectation of using French equivalents. The results are often confusing. For example, the title character, Uncle Vanya, is also referred to as Ivan Pétrovitch Voïnitzki, Ivan Pétrovitch, Voïnitzki, Vania, and Jean. Tremblay's retention of certain Russian words, such as "moujiks," "verstes," and "revisor" adds an exotic note absent from the original. Some of the changes made seem appropriate; the old nurse's colloquial speech and occasional use of "joual" fits her character. Other changes, like the substitution of "une villa en Finlande" for "a cottage near St. Petersburg," seem capricious. Despite a few minor shortcomings, the translation is felicitous.

JANE MOSS

COURTHOUSE TO FISH-KETTLE

MARION MACRAE and ANTHONY ADAMSON, *Cornerstones of Order: Courthouses and Town Halls of Ontario, 1784-1914.* Clarke Irwin, $45.00.

PETER NEARY and PATRICK O'FLAHERTY, *Part of the Main: An Illustrated History of Newfoundland and Labrador.* Breakwater Books, n.p.

WHILE CANADIAN PUBLISHERS have been facing perilous times, some strange books have been rolling off their presses. Grants are the only excuse for many of these, and possibly for *Cornerstones of Order.*

Marion MacRae, architectural historian, is a member and Anthony Adamson, F.R.A.I.C., is an officer of the Order of Canada, so it is safe to say that they are distinguished members of their professions. Their second book, *Hallowed Halls,* won a Governor General's award in 1975. This is their third book, the end of a trilogy, and it comes from the born-again house of Clarke Irwin with backing, during its six years of preparation, from the Ontario Arts Council and the Canada Council. The Osgoode Society picked up the tab for the big book's 300 photographs and drawings and for its 26 colour plates, nearly all of which are off-register.

The learned text is quite often coy, in fact a wink and a nudge come almost as often as architectural prose and appropriate facts. It opens before the birth of Ontario, in 1789, when the first fully constituted court was held west of Montreal. It brings you along past public hangings and floggings and pestilent United Empire Loyalists to, for example, jailer Rolston, who housed himself, his wife, and three sons in a fourteen-square-foot room of his jail. The other three rooms, all the same size, which is of architectural interest, were given to the prisoners. And yet he kept boarders. Your curiosity rises. The boarders were housed in outhouses and your curiosity dies. That's the trouble with the book. It leads you along by the nose to a possible end at the slaughterhouse.

The illustrated history of Newfoundland and Labrador, *Part of the Main,* is a nice kettle of fish, excuse me, compared to those courthouses. It was helped on its way by no acknowledged body and was compiled by two professors who obviously love their native land.

This is an eccentric, sometimes whimsical, never coy look at the people and the land. Take its opening page. Within the generous margin sits a lovely drawing of three butterflies which seems to be there for no sensible reason beyond its beauty.

The professors properly and clearly state that it is reproduced from Philip Henry Goss' *Entomologia Terrae Novae* (1825-35) which is a good sight better than what *Courthouses*' people do — they run a picture and tell you to look it up for yourself. And now for the end. The second to the last page is entirely given to Terry Fox who grins from under the robes and chain of the mayor of St. John's. He is wearing his own sneakers. The final page shows the flukes of a sounding whale, which are excellent.

And between all that lie many discoveries: the mermaid seen by Captain Richard Whitbourne around 1598 (quite clearly drawn) in St. John's harbour; the sweet portrait of Demasduit who had time to be "done" by Lady Hamilton before joining her husband and relatives in the Hereafter. They were shot by the Newfoundlanders and she died of the Newfoundlanders' tuberculosis. Theatre bills, racing forms, Audubon's red-throated diver, a bill of auction to raise cash for the Orphan Asylum School, the title page of an obscure book, all abound merrily through *the Main*. And then there are facts. Like *Courthouses*, they start before the birth of their province, but not shortly before, long before — 8,984 years before this year, when the first hunters appeared in Labrador, and 4,984 years ago when the first settlers dug into Newfoundland. And they go on with the tidal wave which swallowed up 27 souls in 1929, and the 1885 founding of the Salvation Army in Newfoundland by a lady on her honeymoon who must have needed something to do. A young woman, circa 1940, eats a large luscious ice cream sundae in a soda fountain, and Winston Churchill and Franklin Delano Roosevelt look out from their destroyer across Placentia Bay.

The title comes from John Donne, who said "No man is an Iland, intire of it selfe; every man is a peece of the Continent, a part of the maine," and it is this attitude which makes this particular book about this particular land so universally pleasing.

MARY MCALPINE

OUT TO PASTURE

JEAN MCKAY, *Gone to Grass*, illus. Coach House, $7.50.

JANE BUCHAN, *Under The Moon*. McClelland & Stewart, $18.95.

"BEGUILING" IS A WORD not often used of current writing, but it fits that of Jean McKay in what is catalogued as a biography, though it's also an autobiography and above all, a memoir, a tribute to her father, Clayton Burkholder, a United Church minister, during the years from about 1947 to his death in 1967 when she was 24.

Gone to Grass is beguiling in the quality of the prose: "Clayton could take time up in his hands, an afternoon, say, or even a whole day, hold it for a moment, and then just spend it, dribble it, let it leak and ebb, pay it out like line from a loose casting reel, and in the spending it would lengthen and widen and soften, and take on a colour and a warmth." Any tendency towards the sentimental is sharply checked, however, both by Jean McKay's superb artistic sense and by the irreverent laughter of Clayton, the story teller, as in his Theory of Extra Parts: "There are more horses asses in the world than there are horses." The tone of this little book — it's not much more than a hundred pages and not many of them are filled — is also set by the perspective of the narrator, that of a young girl who could record without comprehending: "There was something mysterious, something that couldn't be spoken, that passed about above me, up there with the adults." And it is the in-

comprehension that gives another sense of beguiling, the masking of reality.

The understatement thus motivated gives force and poignancy to the story of the minister and his family, sent back and forth across the country, always with hope and always with disappointment. Six-year-old Jean wonders why her mother weeps as they arrive at yet another parsonage and find yet another run-down old house in a yard full of weeds. But Clayton as usual wards off fear and pain by laughter, songs, and stories, many of them of the farmstead on Hamilton Mountain that the Burkholders had held for five generations. When Jean was ten, the church recalled "the Gentle Preacher" from Vancouver to Ontario, the magic land that "we all slipped into on Sunday nights around the fireplace." But the magic was gone. Clayton was not given a charge; he was given a desk job in the church offices in Toronto. And the farmstead had been sold and was built over, with only the little cemetery left and that "gone to grass" where the bones of his forefathers lay. The measure of his grief was that he stopped telling stories. The measure of the girl's maturing came in her teens in a moment of understanding, "the first time it ever crossed my mind that Clayton could be wrong."

Under The Moon, a first novel, is about homes for the aged and their inhabitants. It is a baffling book. It has many good things, some passages and scenes that are engrossing, some powerful. But it ends as a kind of tract on creative old age of the sort that might be put out with pension cheques. It's a great disappointment.

The action of the first half of the book takes place from Monday to Friday in a retirement home in west Toronto, run by a sinister doctor-owner. It centres on two women, Edna, seventy-five and belligerent, and Elizabeth in her eighties and acquiescent. They are reminiscent of the two whimsies in "Arsenic and Old Lace," though their pastimes are not lethal. They entertain themselves and rebel against the home, old age, and the world by shoplifting — clothes, food, liquor, and whatever else takes their fancy. During the five days, a small rebellion takes place in the home, Elizabeth stops taking her pills and dies on Wednesday night. On Friday morning, Edna oversees Elizabeth's cremation as the sole attendant and returns to the home with the urn of ashes.

Still on that symbolic Friday, Edna is seized as the focal trouble-maker, strapped to the stretcher of an ambulance, and taken to the nursing home, "Tranquil Time," which is also owned by the sinister and nameless doctor. The facade is splendid: it is a handsome nineteenth-century house surrounded by trees and gardens and bearing over the door the inscription "There is no joy but calm," from Tennyson's "Lotos Eaters." The warning is not as honest as Dante's, for beyond the door is one of the lower circles of hell.

First there is the overwhelming fecal stench of "the dirty, reeking house," but when Edna, prone and bound, tries to protest, her horror is increased by the terrifying silence of the attendants. In some rooms are "sexless, pale faces tilted back at horrible angles, large round black holes, silenced sources of talk and laughter and singing"; in other rooms, creatures raw with untended bed sores lie on filthy cots. In the dining room there is a Hieronymo Bosch scene: a woman wearing a red baseball hat eats with her chin at table level; a transvestite wears a woman's corset over his pyjamas; the woman beside him wears his false teeth over her own: a two-hundred-pound woman, aiming for five hundred, insists on royal status as a descendant of Mary Queen of Scots. The doctor, through his pills, had reduced most of his patients to insensate

animals, and had brought others to inescapable senility. This is the most powerful part of the book; the tension and the fear are strong.

Yet the human spirit is indomitable. In the last fifty pages, Edna and Queen Mary outwit the doctor and his pills, he is found out and flees the country, the red cap stands upright, the one with extra teeth turns out to be a fine pianist, the two-hundred pounder loses weight and teaches the others how to dance, Edna resumes her former vocation as a painter and teaches the techniques to a young immigrant, and the home is cleansed and redecorated. Everything is renewed and regenerated. All terror, fear, anxiety, illness, along with Edna's belligerence, dissipate. And so does the novel.

MARGARET STOBIE

FREE FLIGHT

DON MCKAY, *Birding, or Desire*. McClelland & Stewart, $9.95.

A READER SHOULD BE GRATEFUL for even one good line in a book of verse: it adds, if inconsiderably, to the stock of good lines memory lays by and the literary sense cherishes. Reviewing unfortunately can appear as ingratitude, but may innocently be the urge to discriminate (which Eliot claimed was as natural as breathing), or a healthy appetite whetted by the poet himself at the top of his form. As it happens, there is more than one good line in Don McKay's fifth volume: by my reckoning there are a score of good poems, let alone fractions of poems, out of a total of eighty-two, with some good lines amongst the also-rans.

Still, I have to begin by chalking up some ingratitude. Eighty-two poems, though they give us a firm purchase on McKay's work to date, are too many for a volume that is not a Selected, Collected, or Complete Poems. Better a slim volume of twenty sure things. Besides, twenty-five of these poems appeared in *Lightning Ball Bait* (1980, and still in print) and two in *Lependu* (1978), and the poet's claim in "A Note on the Text" that these "belonged thematically in *Birding, or Desire* as well" is insufficient justification for their inclusion.

The volume is rather unwieldy and repetitive as a result, despite the seasonal arrangement of the poems. Even had the repeaters been excluded, fifty-odd preservable poems would still have seemed a suspiciously weighty haul for three years' work. The poet is good enough to have shed by now the minor poet's delusions that more means better and that most of what he writes is collectable. An uncle of mine was a champion pigeon fancier and sent at most three birds to a race, confident of getting them home; a neighbour would send off desperate hampers of them and see them weeks later if at all. The professional and the amateur, the craftsman and the dabbler.

This is not an idle point. A surfeit of poems suggests a lack of editing, by the poet, his publisher, and his readers (who included, it seems, Dennis Lee). It also suggests, more alarmingly, insufficient labour going into most of the poems. There is a randomness, no doubt a desired randomness, about many of them as there is about many free-form poems (particularly of the west coast variety, spawn of Black Mountain, though McKay lives in London and teaches at Western Ontario), a serendipity of line, rhythm, image. Since only a fraction of the lines are good, and one is reluctant to jettison all the others, one wonders what in the poet's judgment a bad line would sound like. Many poems could be half as long or twice as long; McKay is an anti-organicist, despite his practised eye for birds and other organisms. Ae he writes in "Hoar Frost," thinking of icicles thawing

from a wire, "May my last words be so apt, / so accidental." Several by now old-fashioned devices are recruited to confound the impression of something elaborated: unclosed parentheses, initial commas, semi-hieroglyphic stairs of single words.

Despite the minimal versification, on occasions there is discernible form, often effective, which McKay's verse, and verse by innumerable like poets, formulates. The poem's basic unit is the double image of vehicle and tenor. Typically we have a series of signifiers serving each signified, an opportunity for the poet to show a virtuosity in metaphor at once startling and just. McKay has a good line in catchy metaphor. We rarely see dead pigeons because they turn into "lost gloves" that "get swept up by city sweepers" (McKay is fond of glove metaphors that are sometimes sexually suggestive); horned owls in daylight are as ridiculous as "exiled potentates"; a bat emerging at evening dances "his own black rag"; a small hawk's talons are as slender "as the x-ray of a baby's hand"; March snow sucked by a snowshoe says "fuck it, just / fuck it, softly to itself"; a fridge at night is "the old / armless weeping willow of the kitchen"; all night "senile plumbing interviews itself: some war or other."

Sometimes a simple series of metaphors is the poem, as with "Drought." More often, though, there is a pause after the series, a shift of gears, and then the clinching, haiku-like metaphor. The apparent poem slips its noose in to a roomier, different-order captivity. Here is the entire formula at its sparest:

SPRING TURNED RAW

again.
Sparrows were blown past the feeder
like little ladies past their bus stop.
The cat.
sat on the fridge and complained.
Sniffles, coughs,
a sad retreat to rule.
These words are the coat
the stripper borrowed from the cop.

As variation, the clincher is sometimes the entire poem, as in the eight-line bijou of a piece, "Mourning Doves."

McKay's technique, then, has its own rewards. The good poems in *Birding, or Desire* aptly betray no strain or pretence. They have the deceptive appearance of being found, perhaps, but worth finding, and cared-for, windfalls, chanced upon islands of significance. Via metaphor, they snatch out of time, to use Patrick Kavanagh's phrase, the "passionate transitory." In "The Great Blue Heron," for example, the poet effortlessly associates a sighting of the bird from a boat in the marsh with the veined wrist of the child to whom he signals the heron's flight. There are several such moments in this book.

Otherwise, much that is commonplace, even trivial, in the poems undergoes a more surrealistic or menacing transformation. The surreal and dreamlike lend the collection its meaning, whether they originate in the otherness of sleep, nightmare, hallucination, wish, remembrance, or daydream. There is too much of this, too much irritable reaching after revelation, too much solipsism. There is a good deal of urban (one wants to say suburban) angst here, the poet eating "rich / illicit proteins of despair" and conjuring up dark nights of the soul that only occasionally, as in the excellent "Alias Rock Dove, Alias Holy Ghost," convince. The prevailing impression is of a basic playfulness and good humour feigning something grander and darker.

McKay tries to earth the surreal with his ornithological knowledge, for birds in real and dream form dominate the volume. Pleasingly, the poet knows his birds both as a scientist (he is on intimate terms with Godfrey's *The Birds of Canada*) and as an artist (metaphors deepen

our acquaintance with the characteristics of species, as a glance at "A Toast to the Baltimore Oriole" will confirm). Writers must be careful, though, with specifics, for they can endanger rather than enhance the imagination through incongruity. At one point McKay has occasion to liken the inside of his head to the down lining of a "Blackburnian warbler's nest," a failure to distinguish poetic from scientific pitch. The poem calls only for a warbler's nest. Pitching accurately, however, McKay can be delightfully right and make those of us who corroborate him in the field or in memory see graphically what isn't there:

> unfurl from the hydro wire, beat
> con brio out across the field and
> hover, marshalling the moment, these
> gestures of our slender hostess,
> ushering her guests into the dining room
> (from "Kestrels")

Here and elsewhere, the poet and the field ornithologist happily consort.

J. W. FOSTER

THE MOST PART

HUGH HOOD, *Trusting the Tale*. ECW Press, n.p.
ROBERT CURRIE, *Night Games*, Coteau Books, n.p.

A COLLECTION OF ESSAYS by a Montreal novelist and short story writer, a book of stories by a Moose Jaw poet. The essays, urbane, witty, reflective, allusive, theoretical, expansive, self-indulgent (writing East?); the stories, regional, realist, uncomfortably sincere, heartfelt, straightforward, Puritan (writing West?). The reviewer, fumbling with failed binaries. I give up. These books have nothing in common. So I'll open by praising the essays with a faint damn.

First, Hood's title: it strikes me as odd to collect these heterogeneous pieces under a phrase which in its first incarnation commanded us never to believe anything the teller has to say, particularly about his own stories — and then to include several pieces which tell us, at great length, about the genealogy of Hood's reading and writing habits and articles of faith ("Before the Flood," "Afterword: What Is Going On?", "Faces in the Mirror"). Most curious in this light is the inclusion of "Faces in the Mirror," the most self-indulgent essay in the collection. This piece was originally written to introduce and explicate five Hood stories (selected by John Metcalf) to high school students. I think that if I were a high school student, I would find the tone patronizing and skip to the stories themselves.

Second, the selections. Why, after admitting (in "Afterword") that "Glamour Iced" "seems a clear failure" — so it seems to me, too — include it in the collection in the first place? Hood explains its inclusion as "an example of imprudence, even foolhardiness." He "wasn't equipped to write it," "didn't know the material." Amen. But would a teacher accept these explanations from a student handing in an essay? Is Bob Gainey well (or accurately) served by describing his "unexpectedly impressive looks, the repose, the quietness, that oddly curly hair, that faint suggestion of a highly intelligent kangaroo, a nice kangaroo"? While on the subject of hockey — and Hood knows a lot about hockey and Les Canadiens, the evidence of this last piece notwithstanding — I confess to finding the book's longest essay, "Scoring: Seymour Segal's Art of Hockey," a moving description of a friendship, an acute analysis of Segal's art, and a tediously arcane, overwritten description of the game of hockey, suffering from excessive interpretation and a gratuitous display of learned allusion. Ken Dryden's *The Game* emboldens me to pass these judgments. Hood should read it. A last cavil: is it

entirely necessary to entitle a (very good) essay on Sam Tata "A Few Kind Words From Mavis"?

These reservations aside, I recommend the collection. Hood ranges freely and gracefully over subjects personal and public, private ("Past Christmas Presents," "Notes on Becoming a Father") and social, literary ("Person's People"), and mundane. He is very good on friendship ("Eighteen Years: Half a Lifetime"). He demonstrates an easy virtuosity of style, a delightful sense of nuance, a subtle command of tone. He has a gift for melding the comic with the profound, the reverent with the banal, the general observation with the precisely sufficient detail. He is particularly strong in description, which tends to be vividly pictorial, as in his recollections of his childhood reading in "Before the Flood." When Hood hits his stride, he is hard to match, by turn exuberant, meditative, measured, colloquial. Very well, Hood. Go forth, and sin no more.

Robert Currie's *Night Games* is a book of stories I would like to admire. It has some admirable attributes, such as a painstakingly detailed depiction of setting (Moose Jaw), which is neither dressed up into magisterially universal symbol, nor ground down into the grit in a naturalist test tube. The central character, followed from boyhood into looming middle age, is rendered as palpably, distinctively ordinary, rather than made to type everybody's rites of passage in the archetypal prairie city. Seasonal cycles are allowed to counterpoint the cycles of a boy's changing life, rather than becoming portentously causal or blaringly casual harbingers of change and mortality. The river running through Moose Jaw is allowed, for the most part, to remain a river.

The book is organized into three sections, recording the trials of boys growing into young men, turning on a pivotal disillusionment and subsequent fall into manhood ("The White Dress"), and closing with a group of stories documenting, first, Campbell's stale weariness in a failing marriage, and finally, his newfound hope in the possibilities of love with an old sweetheart. Steve Campbell the boy has friends who are, for the most part, just friends, neither better nor worse than they should be. The boys lust after girls who are for the most part neither virgins nor whores; sometimes sex is a mystery, sometimes an ugly and incomprehensible "night game" witnessed by kids peering into the back seat of a car, sometimes the frontier which, once domesticated, leaves men unable to be boys again or believe in nice girls.

Currie writes with courage, clarity, and painful honesty. But I come away knowing enough about Steve Campbell's Moose Jaw and Moose Jaw's Steve Campbell to expect the book to do what it doesn't: remake the flat facts, the history of an ordinary life, time, and place into fiction by sounding the echo of the local rather than trumpeting the grander resonances of the universal. These stories should invite readers to imagine Steve Campbell and his Moose Jaw more vividly than if they were solid flesh and landscape rather than transparent words. But the invitation is not successfully extended, not on first and less on second reading.

The stories do not succeed because they cut too close to the discourses of autobiography on one hand, sociology on the other. At the same time they continue to announce themselves as stories, as fictions shaped to trace the development of a character's consciousness. I find myself pushed too insistently to recognize that Steve Campbell might be a stand-in for Robert Currie, and some of the character portraits threaten to become framed sociological reports on a cast of typed figures: the seductive Aunt Lil, undress-

ing in front of a window ("Geranium") or discovered in the back seat of a car with a friend's father ("Beer Bottle Hill"); the ravishing and recurring Lola Gregory, a schoolgirl who dances like a woman; Art, the muscular loudmouth who laughs manfully, scornfully, knowingly at Steve's disillusionment over the girl in the white dress.

The stories inaugurate Coteau Books' McCourt Fiction Series. I admire the stories' and the series' intentions, but not their first realization.

NEIL BESNER

CWTW-1

ROBERT LECKER, JACK DAVID, ELLEN QUIGLEY, eds., *Canadian Writers and Their Work: Essays on Form, Context, and Development*, Fiction Series, Volume 1. ECW, $28.00.

WITH *Canadian Writers and their Work: Essays on Form, Context, and Development*, Fiction Series, Volume 1, ECW Press opens its projected twenty-volume "*critical* history of Canadian literature" (publisher's advertisement). The series is to consist of ten volumes dealing with fiction, and ten discussing poetry. ECW seems to plan no comparable series on Canadian drama.

The first volume illustrates the general format of the series. Following an introduction by George Woodcock, four major Canadian authors of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Lorraine McMullen on Frances Brooke, Michael A. Peterman on Susanna Moodie, Dennis Duffy on John Richardson, Carl P. A. Ballstadt on Catharine Parr Traill) and three minor writers of Victorian Canada (Carole Gerson on Rosanna Leprohon, James De Mille, and Agnes Maule Machar) are introduced. Each essay considers (1) the author's biography, (2) his tradition and milieu, gives (3) a "critical overview and context," discusses (4) the author's major works, and presents (5) a selected bibliography of primary and secondary sources covering material until 1981.

CWTW, as the editors Robert Lecker, Jack David, and Ellen Quigley abbreviate the title of the series, is an ambitious project, claiming to become "*the* critical reference series dealing with the history of Canadian literature and the works of major English-Canadian authors"; in doing so, it competes with the *Literary History of Canada* (1965; 2nd ed. 1976), even offers to replace it. Indeed, the study of Canadian literature has made much progress since the first publication of Carl Klinck's three-volume work and of Norah Story's 1967 *The Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature and History* (a book now available in an updated version devoted entirely to Canadian literature — yet another indication of a general effort to document and evaluate the ground covered since the Centennial), and there is an increasing need in Canadian literature programmes both at home and abroad for scholarly reference guides like the CWTW and ECW's other major project, the *Annotated Bibliography of Canada's Major Writers*.

At first sight, CWTW combines the virtues of Klinck's and Story's approaches both in providing more thorough biographical information than the latter and in attempting to establish a broader intellectual, cultural, and critical context than the former. Thus, Lorraine McMullen's essay on Frances Brooke traces the writer's neo-Augustan heritage, describes the artistic circles she moved in (ranging from David Garrick to Samuel Johnson and Fanny Burney), and outlines her literary affinities (Richardson and Fielding in fiction, Dryden in drama). As a result, McMullen's concisely sketched section on "Tradition and Milieu" adds a depth to the discussion of Frances Brooke only barely hinted at in previous criticism.

The very presence of this section signals an important step in the development of Canadian literary criticism: (1) serious study of early Canadian literature is considered worthy of receiving significant funding (McMullen researched her essay with grants from the Canada Council and SSHRCC), and (2) Canadian literature has become sufficiently self-confident to document its European roots with scholarly detail and accuracy.

In a number of ways, I found McMullen's contribution the most interesting to read because it provided information about Frances Brooke that I had not been familiar with. Susanna Moodie, Catharine Parr Traill, and John Richardson, however, have become (and created) characters who have been elevated to the status of myth over the last ten years or so. In particular Michael A. Peterman in his essay on Moodie, and Dennie Duffy in his contribution on Richardson faced the difficult task of objectively describing and assessing authors who, in the past, have been the subject of passionate pleas for a distinctly Canadian literature. Duffy's essay is the less successful one of the two; what I perceive as his failure also points up some of the potential problems in CWTW's otherwise admirable format. For one, portions of Duffy's piece have appeared in his book *Gardens, Covenants, Exiles: United Empire Loyalism in the Literature of Upper Canada* (1982), a violation — as I perceive it — of CWTW's pledge not to excerpt "material from previously published criticism" (McMullen's research on Brooke became available in her book *An Odd Attempt in a Woman: The Literary Life of Frances Brooke* not too long after the publication of CWTW). Furthermore, Duffy's scholarship is less impressive than it could (and should) have been in a few but significant instances. He does mention that *Wacousta* "went through six editions during its first eight years of existence, and . . . was reprinted five further times up to 1967," but fails to refer to the editorial problems aptly documented by Douglas Cronk in his 1977 M.A. thesis "The Editorial Destruction of Canadian Literature: A Textual Study of Major John Richardson's *Wacousta; or, The Prophecy.*" Cronk's results contributed to initiating the present compilation of authorized editions of early Canadian works under Mary Jane Edwards' guidance at Carleton University. Although Duffy discusses John Moss' contribution to the understanding of *Wacousta* in *Sex and Violence in the Canadian Novel*, he fails to point out Moss' now infamous gaffe that made him base his theory of pervasive homosexuality in the novel on a misprint in a personal pronoun in the abridged NCL edition.

Considering that editorial problems affect most of the works discussed in this volume, a well-researched chapter on that subject would have been welcome and appropriate, placing such detailed remarks as Peterman's on Richard Bentley's emandations of *Roughing it in the Bush* in a more general perspective. Like the other contributors, Duffy presents — in summary and with critical comment — representative secondary sources on Richardson. But once aagin, he omits essential information. In his remarks on Robin Mathews' essay "The Wacousta Factor," Duffy fails to describe (and properly evaluate) Mathews' interpretation of Wacousta as a Canadian antidote to U.S. imperialism. Describing Mathews' work as a "combative article on its communal themes" misses the point by (crucial) omission. On the whole, Duffy seems to feel unduly restrained by CWTW's format and occasionally declares his unwillingness to comply with it by announcing, in his section on "Tradition and Milieu," that "At this point, literary critics begin a series of name droppings as a guide to the neophyte and as a

way of bestowing immortality on works few sensible people would ever willingly read" by proposing — with a barely suppressed yawn — to "concentrate instead upon a single, well-known work which represents the fiction of its time and shares certain characteristics with *Wacousta*," whereupon follows one short paragraph on, of all books, Dickens' *Oliver Twist*. More editorial discretion and guidance would have been in place here, if CWTW intends to maintain the impeccable scholarship which it claims it demands from its contributors and which it has received in the remaining essays in this volume.

EVA-MARIE KROLLER

PRATT ON PRATT

SUSAN GINGELL, ed., *E. J. Pratt on His Life and Poetry*. Univ. of Toronto Press, $30.00.

AS ANYONE WHO HAS CONSULTED the Pratt Papers at Victoria University Library, Toronto, knows, *E. J. Pratt on His Life and Poetry*, one volume in a projected series which aims to publish Pratt's complete poetry, selected prose, and correspondence, is a book which represents considerable and tedious labour. The book consists of Pratt's own writings about his life and poetry (mostly the latter) and, while some of the commentaries have appeared in early editions of the poet's work or survive in clear typescripts, other notes, as Susan Gingell quietly remarks, are characterized by small handwriting on cheap paper, often faded, and sometimes completely illegible. It must have been a time-consuming process to decipher the manuscripts as well as to make the various fiddling editorial decisions connected with the clear presentation of material that is often repetitious. Serious Pratt students are certainly in the debt of those scholars who conceived the whole project and of Susan Gingell for successfully carrying out one part of it.

Most readers of the book will no doubt want to consult individual sections rather than peruse the whole volume and for this purpose the table of contents and index are well designed. They will find anecdotal accounts of the poet's Newfoundland background, reflections on the relationship of source material to poetry, a history of Pratt's early literary efforts as well as numerous commentaries on particular poems. These last are frequently drawn from Pratt's glosses on the poems at public readings. They begin with an account of that heroic canine Carlo whom he commemorated in a poem of that name in *Newfoundland Verse*, and end with a speech to the York Club which moves from the predictably genial and generous thanks for hospitality to surprising specificity about some of his research methods for that last great narrative poem, also about heroism, *Towards the Last Spike*. In addition the volume includes the transcripts of two interesting CBC interviews with Pratt, one in 1955, and the other in 1959, and, in appendices, a version of the Aesop fable which resembles the one Pratt used for "The Fable of the Goats," a reconstruction of the unpublished poem "The Haunted House," and an unpublished version of "The Loss of the Florizel Off Cape Race" which, extensively revised, was published in *Newfoundland Verse*.

With a few exceptions, the material on Newfoundland is tamer and less informative than one would expect. There are some entertaining anecdotes (my own favourite: the lovely tale of the magistrate's wife who, overwhelmed with anxiety at the visit of the Anglican bishop, welcomed the primate into her house with the salty phrase, "Oh Lord, will you please lower your holy and sanctified starn on that bench") but the contention of the introduction that we will find here

"fascinating repositories of folk tales and folk characters" seems overblown. A promise Pratt himself made at the beginning of a typescript printed under the heading "Newfoundland Types," to discuss "the relationship between my life as a Newfoundlander and the work I have tried to do as a writer" — certainly not an easy topic for any artist to handle — is also a promise unfulfilled. In what follows there are only a few remarks about recognizable Newfoundland characters and a lengthy anecdote concerning the boyhood heroes of John Masefield, Lawrence Binyon, and Pratt himself. It is, however, in this section that the reader encounters, for the first of many times, the name of Marconi, whose invention had such a tremendous effect upon the poet and who may have fostered in him "the trust in science for the prevention of the grosser human calamities" which is so marked in his work.

Pratt's discussion of source material contains nothing unexpected from a poet who believed in careful research, but it does include some important statements related to a topic which the commentaries show him persistently addressing — the suitability of poetic subjects and images drawn from science and technology. Invention delighted and amazed him and he felt poetry was perfectly justified in taking any subject which aroused "human interest and wonder and feeling." He was also convinced "that dynamos, lathes, drills, and turbines are just as much material for poetry as lilies and carnations and cuckoos, and they are humming their way into the measures of verse with the same ease and intimacy as the former reaping hook, the wheel and the plough." More reflections on his own particular kind of poetry can be found in the 1959 CBC interview where he asserted that poetry should be based on an intelligible communication of experience from poet to reader. Confronted with a description of himself as "Canada's leading poet" he disarmingly acknowledged that he did not bother much about the idea of poetic leadership — the implication being that he simply got on with the job of writing. It is in this interview too that he singles out *The Roosevelt and the Antinoe* as his favourite poem and notes again that his normal method of composition was to write the end of a poem first.

It is likely that this book will be especially welcome to students wishing to check the author's remarks on particular poems. Gingell is right to point out in the introduction that the commentaries can be useful as *explications de texte* and she singles out three poems in which the author's notes enrich understanding: "In Absentia" (where some of the obscurities connected with the word "asterisk" are removed with the poet's note), "Come Not the Seasons Here" (accompanied by the statement [this is] "a picture of a countryside devastated by war"), and "The Radio in the Ivory Tower" (with its direct links to the American poet Robinson Jeffers' life in a stone tower on the California coast). To these three could be added the commentaries on "Silences," "The Iron Door," "The Prize Cat," "The Fable of the Goats," "The Truant," "The Depression Ends," all important poems. By contrast, the poet's remarks about "Fog," "Cherries," "The Child and the Wren," "Old Harry," and even "Angelina" may have been welcome on the occasion on which they were delivered, but they do not seem enlightening here. In fact, with the famous "Erosion," a brief lyric that seems akin to some of Wordsworth's "Lucy" poems, a poem instantly grasped by the reader at a deep emotional level, it seems almost distracting to know that this was related to an early childhood experience and to read, once again, how Pratt's minister father dreaded the task of "breaking the news" of loss at sea to woman parishion-

ers. Surely that poem, if any of Pratt's, has a simplicity and a truth that can stand alone.

Similarly, some of the commentaries on the narrative poems are much more interesting than others. Many of the prose summaries used by Pratt to fill in the story when he read selections aloud seem of limited value. More useful is the inclusion of information on whales and whaling that accompanied "The Cachalot" when it was published in *Verses from the Sea* (1930) and more intriguing still are the accounts of research that preceded the longer poems. In this regard, the commentaries on *The Roosevelt and the Antinoe*, *Behind the Log*, and *Towards the Last Spike* are the richest. It is in the notes connected with the second of these poems that the reader discovers how Pratt produced the mix of Norwegian and English which characterizes the speech of one of the captains in the convoy and learns the minor but entertaining point that Pelham Edgar advised the poet to change the name of the commodore of that poem from Trelawney-Clutterbuck to Trelawney-Camperdown when he realized that the first choice was undiplomatically close to the actual name of the British Trade Commissioner in Ottawa. Further light is cast on Pratt's intentions and methods when he discusses in some detail his reasons for handling the convoy conference in *Behind the Log* or the personification of the Pre-Cambrian Shield in *Towards the Last Spike* as he did. Not surprisingly the bulk of the poet's recorded comments about *The Titanic* concern irony and, as such, they should be read in conjunction with the remarks made in the 1955 CBC interview. Constantly in these commentaries the poet touches upon the appeal which the subject had for him and it is as such points that the linking themes of the narrative poems are clearest. Pratt was writing of *Dunkirk* when he defined heroism as "the sling and pebble against the spear and armour, where the impulse of the heart acts against the logic of the brain, where the ultimate value of the human soul is assessed in critical sacrificial moments," but this is really the spirit of all of them.

The book is easy to use and attractively designed, but at twenty-three pages, the editor's introduction seems unnecessarily long, and, in places, even pedestrian. Pratt's comments are clear and do not need so much restatement. It seems a pity too that the editor of a book like this should sometimes present the value of the commentaries so tentatively. For instance, at one point Gingell remarks how helpful is Pratt's comment about "The Prize Cat" (it refers, he said, "to Mussolini's attack on Ethiopia just before the Second World War") but she goes on to undermine this position by reminding us that this was written by "the same raconteur" who obviously took liberties with the origin of "A Feline Silhouette." The two would appear to me to be very different kinds of poems and very different kinds of comments.

The notes to the introduction and the commentaries have considerable interest, especially when they alert us to the potential value of Pratt's letters to men like Pelham Edgar and we look forward to the appearance of some of this correspondence in future volumes of the series. Perhaps it would have been a good idea to record in the notes that "A Reverie on a Dog" and "The Fable of the Goats" are not included in the *Collected Poems* (Second Edition) but this is a small point. Generally, it is obvious from the notes, as from the whole volume, that more scholars pursuing more avenues continue to uncover valuable information about Pratt's poetic concerns and practices. This reviewer is especially grateful for a small nugget which turns up among the notes on the *Towards the Last Spike*

commentaries suggesting an additional source for Pratt's railway research.

Finally, *E. J. Pratt on His Life and Poetry* is a great encouragement to read again the *Collected Poems* and to read it in large chunks, as Northrop Frye advises Pratt's poetry should be read. Both books leave the impression of a decent man and an honourable soul who often sought to celebrate what was good in human deeds like courage and heroic sacrifice and silent endurance. Side by side with this was the honest craftsman with his desire to find the accurate detail and the telling word (oh, his sorrow when he could not include that most musical of Indian words "Ticonderoga" in *Brebeuf and His Brethren*, and his delight in explaining the resonances of the word "schist" provided by a geologist for "The Fable of the Goats"). If this piece of scholarship makes us more aware of both these aspects then it has indeed enriched our understanding of the poet.

CATHERINE MCKINNON PFAFF

OPUS POSTHUMOUS

J. HOWARD WOOLMER, ed., *Malcolm Lowry: A Bibliography*. Woolmer/Brotherson, $30.00.

FEW CONTEMPORARY WRITERS have reminded us of the impermanence of life and letters as graphically and as pathologically as Malcolm Lowry, whose vie was premature yet persists etherially and whose oeuvre was tentative but emerges insistently. That since his death the writer should have been the subject of not just voluminous critical attention but also extensive bibliographical treatment (beginning with Earle Birney in some 1961, 1962, and 1964 numbers of *Canadian Literature* and coming to a kind of first fruition in W. H. New's 1978 *Malcolm Lowry: A Reference Guide* and in J. Howard Woolmer's current descriptive bibliography) suggests that Lowry scholarship has reached the sort of kinetic permanence that demands inventory and evaluation.

Woolmer concerns himself with primary and published sources (rather than with critical and manuscript work), with Lowry's novels, stories, letters, and poems in their various editions and printings, with his contributions to the books of others and to periodicals, with the multilingual translations of his work, with radio and television programmes and films on Lowry, and with publications and recordings of his songs. While the bibliography is not comprehensive, it is quite definitive, and Woolmer is to be commended as much for his admissions of ignorance and his identification of obstacles as for his exhaustive ambition and his meticulous allusiveness.

His decision to acknowledge both juvenilia and bagatelles, everything from Lowry's articles on school hockey matches for *The Leys Fortnightly* to his dust jacket blurbs for Birney's *Turvey* and Frederick Buechner's *A Long Day's Dying*, harmonizes well with his preoccupation with some of the quirks of Lowry's more standard works, such as the fact that, despite its Governor General's Award in 1961, *Hear Us O Lord from Heaven Thy Dwelling Place* did not receive a separate Canadian publication, and the probability that Jonathan Cape's supposed reissue of *Ultramarine* in 1935 was actually a sort of remaindering of the 1933 edition of 1,500. His suggestion that a faulty dust jacket coating resulted in crinkled pages in the first printing of *October Ferry to Gabriola* accounts for some Canadians' introduction to the novel at the remainder table. On more complex matters, such as the publishing history of "The Last Address," "Swinging the Maelstrom," and *Lunar Caustic*, Woolmer is equally credible, simplifying, articulate, and clarifying.

He complements his photographs of dust jackets, title pages, and copyright pages with sensitive, almost poetic descriptions of covers and bindings, contents and publishing data. One becomes acquainted with Lowry's books qua books, thus forming an acquaintance that eluded most of the writer's ideas in his own lifetime, and comes to appreciate the kind of posthumous publishing phenomenon that Lowry has inspired and that his publishers and critics have produced.

His works have crossed both national boundaries and the often well-fortified borders of the media, thereby entering into a kind of polyglot and technological permanence, but one which is considerably less concrete and accessible than the permanence of the book as object. The 1979 BBC radio adaptation of *Under the Volcano*, for example, with Paul Scofield playing the Lowry-narrator, may not have graced many North American ears.

The documentary and bibliographic information Woolmer offers suggests that Lowry exists as much in the air of ideas as in the ground of type and that the most permanent Lowry scholarship involves not just critical hermeneutics but also a kind of bibliographic anthropology, the sort of typological groundwork that provided the foundation for so much of Lowry's own study of man and his manners.

Critics, educators, readers, librarians, collectors will all find this book methodical, precise, engaging; it is as referentially faithful to Lowry as it could be without self-consciously containing an entry on itself. J. Howard Woolmer has made a permanent contribution to Malcolm Lowry's open-ended voyage and his ongoing opus posthumous.

P. MATTHEW ST. PIERRE

EXILE & HOME

BILL SCHERMBRUCKER, *Chameleon & Other Stories*. Talonbooks, $7.95.

MICHEL M. J. SHORE, *O Canada, Canada*. Editions Naaman, $5.00.

SEAN VIRGO, *Through the Eyes of a Cat: Irish Stories*. Sono Nis, $5.95.

THESE COLLECTIONS OF SHORT FICTION — stories, vignettes, and allegories — are the work of writers who have come to Canada from elsewhere. Bill Schermbrucker was born and grew up in Kenya, Seán Virgo in Malta. Although born in Paris, Michel Shore came to Canada at an early age. His stories, however, create a sense of Canada as a fresh place of promise in contrast to Europe where his father, as a Jew, suffered.

Shore's book is the first in the "English Series: Fiction" line issued by Editions Naaman out of Sherbrooke, Québec, which has, to my knowledge, published almost exclusively, if not entirely, in French. This new initiative is very welcome. *O Canada, Canada* deals with the meeting of cultures within Canada: French and English, North American and European, Jewish and gentile. Permeating many of the stories is an anguish which arises out of personal or cultural loss. Their effect, however, is blunted by the didactic tendency to thesis and theme and by a sometimes clichéd style — "breezes kissed the Belgian countryside" — which makes me wonder if English is Shore's second language as the details in the italicized "Overture" suggest. His themes — Québec's place in Canada, the agony of the Jews in World War II, the Canadian Charter of Rights, man's abuse of the earth — have an undeniable importance, but Shore lacks the ability to dramatize them. Instead, in stories like "Overture," "Please Papa, Take Us Home," and in the title story, he relies heavily upon exposition, which robs his stories of the imaginative strength to pull

readers inside them. We remain on the outside because the narrative techniques distance us by virtue of their self-consciousness. Michel Shore's humanitarian impulses are genuine and understandable, but he needs editorial direction in order to translate them directly and effectively to the page as fiction rather than tract. As they stand, these stories lack the balance that issues from self-conscious and self-effacing techniques that absorb the themes in order to recreate them.

Through the Eyes of a Cat: Irish Stories uses language and a sense of place — in this case, Connemara — to give us a vivid picture of contemporary rural Ireland. From the black humour of the opening story of an old man's death to the spiritual and seasonal hope of the last story, the only part of the collection set in the distant past, Virgo gives us a fully realized world poised between joy and sorrow. His descriptions of nature are precise and well drawn: "Our past Bunowen, where the strand is broadcast with necklace shells and the lichen clings like fur to the boulders, the dunes are wearing away." Virgo presents a hard land and a strong, dogged people, most of whose lives are in some way shadowed by death, be it mortality, the fratricide of civil war, or the loss of love. Virgo's ear for language is evident in the felt rhythm of speech patterns: "We were ditching in the lake field when Peadar Cullin called down that Shan Val Mór was brought home from the hospital and was for dying immediately." His characters, present in word and action, are in their rootedness fine-edged revelations of the interdependence of isolation and community. Personal relationships among men in the stories are usually positive, but between men and women there is discord. The stories he tells about the present are in one way or another studies of disintegration — physical, political, emotional. By contrast, his last story, "Brother Dael's New Year," which describes an exiled cleric in the mid-seventeenth century, is affirmative, almost as if contentment is a perquisite of isolation.

The collection ranges from anecdotes like "Shan Val Mór" and tales like "Tinker Tale" — both recounted in colloquial speech — to the literary language of more conventional stories like "Horsey Horsey" and "The Hanging Man." The domestic sense of place is constant, from "just a few white-washed house fronts taking the moon, a gleam on thatch and tile" to "the corbelled beehive of a home, shape of an upturned boat, a tent of stones that had earned, through the centuries, acceptance back into the land it had been quarried from." The landscape is quiet — no radios, televisions, telephones. When the human voice speaks, it is heard.

If Canada and Ireland are places that we know directly through experience or, as may be the case with Ireland, vicariously through literature, chances are that the Kenya of Bill Schermbrucker's *Chameleon & Other Stories* is foreign country. The collection draws its material from the author's childhood and early adulthood at the time of Mau Mau terrorism. There are graphic references to the horrors of that period, but the narrator's focus, the self of autobiographical fiction, is kept squarely in the foreground so that event is seen constantly through character. The landscape and the white milieu are vividly conveyed against a growing political nightmare. The narrator, however, experiences terror only once in a tense confrontation with a student who has been driven to distraction by the split between the customs of his tribal past and the blandishments of his European education. The narrator is guilty of having provoked this moment just as his participation in the hunting expeditions of his youth foreshadowed and enacted the predatory climate of the larger context in which he lived. The compound

of guilt, fear, and a sense of home creates a potent ambivalence in the narrator, which is never resolved, but which makes the stories all the more memorable.

Chameleon & Other Stories opens with the narrator's fond remembrance of his father, who is associated with a huge wood-burning stove, the "Aga Cooker," that stood in their kitchen. The father, a man of few words trying to cope with change — the political unrest in his country, his wife's cancer — is connected with the certainties of the stove and the dawn, two unchanging forces. The last story, entitled "Afterbirth," addresses the theme of home that was raised in the preface and in the first story. The theme is fitting since the collection, in part, traces the progressive physical and psychological estrangement of the narrator from home and family.

The description of place — the stove, a garden after rain, a dairy farm, a chameleon — are fine and precise. Characterization is similarly well done. Gesture, voice, and appearance are all part of the evocation of a world long past. In its progression from "Aga Dawn" to "Afterbirth," the narrator and Kenya move toward an eventual divergence which signals the maturity of each. Just as the chameleon can move each of its eyes independently, so the narrator with his *strabismus* can do the same. Kenya never leaves his vision, even though his other eye moves him beyond and yet deeper within his place of origin.

The consistency of the narrative point of view is one of the devices that accounts for the success of this book and, in part, for the reader's unsatisfied curiosity about the personality of the adult narrator or, rather, of the narrator as an adult. Although he is retelling the events of his early years, he does not give, in expository fashion, a social or political context; it emerges gradually. He is thus able to dramatize something of the bewildered and, in the case of the young boys, high-spirited ignorance of the meaning of the political turmoil in Kenya. There is also a residual obtuseness in the narrator in the stories where he is described as an adult living in Kenya. He becomes less complete as a character in the adult stages, because psychological detail does not complement the implied personal and emotional complication that seems to be taking place within him. Another kind of fictional competence would be required for this other kind of story.

Scenes and people from this collection will remain with me: the Aga Cooker, the narrator's father washing his car in contented solitude and peace, a train stopping in the middle of darkness, the description of the chameleon, and the old servant Muriuki. This remembrance of things past is told with sympathy and respect. Although the ambiguities and terrors of power, responsibility, and guilt underpin the stories, the narrator's fictional embodiment of what he states in his preface — "We are who we are" — is a double-edged acknowledgement of creation, exile, and home.

JOHN W. LENNOX

HITS & MISSES

SHERMAN SNUKAL, *Talking Dirty*. Harbour Publishing, n.p.

C. H. GERVAIS, *The Fighting Parson*. The Porcupine's Quill, $8.95.

GLENN M. FREW, *Full Circle*. Underwich Editions, $4.50.

PERFORMANCES ARE EPHEMERAL so it is publication rather than box-office success that shapes a dramatic tradition. In Canada, where the publishing of plays is only slightly less irregular than the weather, the question of how particular works are chosen to be printed is one of absorbing interest. Three recently issued

plays illustrate the vagaries of the industry and the confusion bedevilling criticism.

Full Circle by Glenn M. Frew appears in a limited edititon of 100 copies. It is a brief (16-page) episode between an "Olderman" and a "Youngman" who appear to be father and son. The two are reunited after twenty-five years, and in the ten minutes or so that the piece would take to perform we learn very little more about them. The play is filled with the silences and enigmatic or cryptic banalities which the writer mistakes for the essence of Beckett and Pinter. It is described as a "performance for two male voices with cultured British accents," but must surely have been written by someone as ignorant of cultured British speech as he is of theatrical craft. There is no indication that the "play" has ever been performed, and I cannot imagine that its appearance in printed form will stimulate productions in the future. Nevertheless, *Full Circle* now takes its place in the permanent record of Canadian drama while dozens of collective creations of Theatre Passe Muraille and other companies remain in manuscript or have disappeared altogether.

The Fighting Parson by C. H. (Marty) Gervais is a handsomely produced volume graced with an introduction by James Reaney (with whom Gervais wrote *Baldoon*), and several illustrations of the original production by the University of Windsor Players directed by Keith McNair with the assistance of Keith Turnbull. The play is "loosely based on the life of Reverend Leslie Spracklin, a Methodist minister who was hired during Prohibition to fight the rumrunners" in Windsor, and who exercised his authority so energetically that he killed a man. Those familiar with the work of Reaney and Turnbull at the NDWT Theatre in such plays as the Donnelly trilogy will recognize the theatrical idiom. The tale is enlivened by imaginative effects such as the use of toy cars for a smuggling scene, a pantomine cock-fight to represent the hostility between the central characters, choral speaking, and so on. Equally recognizable is the handling of the "historical" material. Reverend Spracklin (Stockton in the play) is transformed into an archetypal Cain figure whose tavern-keeping victim turns out to be a boyhood friend (a brother "forged from the same metal"). Stockton's reformist zeal is fueled in part by childhood jealousies, and his action leads to a life of wandering in search of the answer to the question "what has he done to be cast out forever?"

The attempt to transmute regional historical material into drama of universal significance is wholly admirable, but I cannot honestly say that I think the effort in *The Fighting Parson* is successful. It is the phrase "loosely based" that troubles me. I feel that this dramatization is less an attempt to understand a particular human being than a borrowing of a few names and facts to clothe a familiar myth. The long shadow of the mythopoeic critics lies over this work obscuring any chiaroscuro that might have given depth to the picture. Possibly the play was written with the limitations of student actors in mind. Whatever the cause, *The Fighting Parson* betrays its academic origins, and no amount of energetic stage business (or handsome book production) can altogether conceal a rather musty earnestness.

Earnestness is certainly not a fault of *Talking Dirty*, Sherman Snukal's satiric look at West Coast manners and mores. The play was phenomenally successful in Vancouver where it was produced by the Arts Club Theatre and ran for 15 months to become the longest-running live production in the history of Vancouver theatre. Riding the crest of this wave of popularity, the play rolled into Toronto

where it attracted audiences for another 10 weeks at the Bathurst Street Theatre and walked off with the 1983 Chalmers Award. It has been performed at the Citadel Theatre in Edmonton where plans were also announced to turn it into a film with the help of the Alberta Motion Picture Development Corporation and a high profile U.S. actor for the lead. Harbour Publishing offers the work (in a rather funereal-looking format) to serve "not only as a memento to the thousands who flocked to see the play while it was the talk of the town . . . but also to assuage the curiosity of those who never had that pleasure."

The play is set in the world of modish sexual attitudes and practices inhabited by Michael, a philosophy professor, and Beth, his live-in girl friend who has just moved out. Arriving unexpectedly into this situation is Dave, a college friend who is looking for a "holiday" after nine years of marital fidelity, just as Michael is beginning to discover the value of commitment. The contrast between Dave's inept eagerness and Michael's weary expertise is a source of considerable amusement which is skilfully exploited by Snukal. What is somewhat unexpected is the relatively "straight" perspective of the author which underlines the hollowness of Michael's sexual "paradise."

Talking Dirty is everything a Canadian play is not supposed to be. It is funny without depending on barnyard humour or political satire. As Toronto *Star* critic, Gina Mallett, unkindly remarked, "It is not a cultural lecture. . . . Its characters are not shards of Canadian history, or outpatients from a mental hospital. They are not society's rejects or political devices. They do not stumble over words." She might have added that the play didn't lose money, but earned its author a very handsome income. All of this makes it the more surprising that *Talking Dirty* should have been chosen by the Toronto Drama Bench as the "outstanding Canadian play performed in the Toronto area" beating out *Brew* (about Montreal workers), *Jennie's Story* (about a mental defective), and *Ever Loving* (about war brides in the 1940's). Almost as amusing as the play itself was the storm of controversy its selection provoked. Clearly a vocal segment of the Canadian theatrical establishment is still unprepared to grant serious status to works so egregiously successful in worldly terms. Whether the award was an indication of a swing in critical opinion or a fluke resulting from a complicated balloting system, outsiders will never know.

Talking Dirty is not a dramatic masterpiece. But it is a sharply etched portrait of a particular group. The play owes its popularity in part to Snukal's timely identification of a current malaise, and partly to its orthodoxy which enables audiences to enjoy a little vicarious freedom without feeling that their conventional middle-class values are being seriously threatened. As a critic, I would have to say that the play is unlikely to outlive the social condition it describes. But then critics are notoriously unreliable in these matters. For example, how many reviewers at the first production could have predicted that (until Sherman Snukal's *Talking Dirty* beat it out) *Private Lives* would become the longest-running live theatre production in Vancouver, Canada?

NEIL CARSON

POETIC SEQUENCES

M. L. ROSENTHAL & SALLY M. GALL, *The Modern Poetic Sequence: The Genius of Modern Poetry.* Oxford, $41.95.

DENNIS GRUENDING, *Gringo: Poems and Journals from Latin America.* Coteau Books, $14.00; pa. $6.00.

TED PLANTOS, *Passchendaele.* Black Moss, $8.95.

E. D. BLODGETT, *Arché/Elegies.* Longspoon, $7.00.

LYRICS, M. H. ABRAMS EXPLAINS, "do not include such elements as characters and plot," but "consist of thoughts and feelings uttered in the first person." Against such a definition, the modern long poem might be seen either as an attempt to fuse lyric with the excluded narrative and dramatic forms, or as a stretched lyric or series of lyrics. M. L. Rosenthal and Sally Gall opt firmly for the latter concept, arguing that the modern sensibility demands that the long poem have the structure of a lyric: "*A poem depends for its life neither on continuous narration nor on developed argument but on a progression of specific qualities and intensities of emotionally and sensuously charged awareness.*" In context, appropriately, it is not clear if this sentence describes the lyric or the modern poetic sequence: Rosenthal and Gall see one as the microcosm of the other so that the poetic sequence is a "liberated lyrical structure" whose "*object is neither to resolve a problem nor to conclude an action but to achieve the keenest, most open realization possible.*" The authors elaborate these propositions through a thorough history of the development of such sequences, from Shakespeare through Tennyson and Whitman to Adrienne Rich and Ted Hughes, and through extended discussions of the work of some forty poets.

The Modern Poetic Sequence is an extremely valuable companion for any student of Canadian poetry, where the long poem, once an identifiable but minor sub-genre, has become the dominant critical and artistic fashion. It will provide many contexts for the study of the long poem in Canada, affectionate and opinionated reconsiderations of familiar sequences, and clear accounts of structure and content in more obscure poems. It would be illuminating, for example, to go back to Phyllis Webb's *Naked Poems* with Rosenthal and Gall's discussion of the riddling structure of Emily Dickinson's *Fascicles* fresh in mind, or to Daphne Marlatt's *Frames of a Story* in the context of their comments on the word *frame* in Wallace Stevens' "The Auroras of Autumn." The book's main value to students of Canadian poetry will lie in such quite specific connections. For all its ambition, the intention to define a genre is not very satisfying: the book is inclined to liquid metaphors — immerse, and flow, and coalesce — which fit the thesis (lyric association), but tend to dissolve the precise delineations of genre, or fine distinctions among types of sequences, which could be productively applied to the sequences not included. A book which concentrates its attention on "tonal centres" and "emotional affects" is also, understandably, likely to be slight on linguistic analysis. The general strength of the book is in shrewd paraphrases of lines, and in perceptive summaries of poetic structure, rather than in analyses of specific verbal and syntactical features.

Rosenthal and Gall could hardly deny the narrative, dramatic, and documentary elements in the modern poetic sequence, but in developing their idea of lyric structure they seem to suppress these, to ignore the possibility that the long poem may be after something other than "equilibrium . . . among various intense states of awareness." Certainly in contemporary Canadian poetry, the long poem is developing, or exploring, a form that combines several levels of language into

an alternative discourse, that defies traditional generic boundaries, that does not privilege lyric over diary. Dennis Gruending's *Gringo* is a case in point: Gruending follows the current fashion of combining dated chronological journal entries (from a trip to Latin America, 1978-79), poems inspired by his travels, undated journalistic reports and anecdotes, and political reflections on the experience and the book (dated Regina 1982).

Is this — the whole book — a poem? a modern poetic sequence? Certainly we're invited to consider it as such. But, although there is some poetry of event in the journal, there are no verbal echoes, no linguistic reciprocity, between poem and journal entry. The journals often read like excerpts from tourist brochures: are they? The poem would be more interesting if that form (that is, the gringo perception) *were* present and identified. If the journals do not resonate with the poems, the poems do imitate the prosiness of the diary. Journalistic flatness is, of course, one of the dangers of the contemporary long poem — as Rosenthal and Gall remind us, the example of Charles Olson inspires many imitators to write "without regard to sound, rhythm, or tonal development." The idea of a gringo, living in Spanish, unable to escape the tourist mentality, is a potentially powerful structural feature of the poem (as expressed in the balance between Canada and Mexico in "You Send Feathers") which should prefigure a dialogue between journal and poem. Unfortunately, Gruending is unable to reveal much intercourse among his forms: I would contrast Daphne Marlatt's *What Matters*, where poem and journal blend, where one form questions and qualifies the other, where one language echoes and re-forms the other, where self-reflexiveness extends political engagement by giving it a psychological dimension. Gruending has made a readable, sometimes compelling journal, but he has failed to make a long poem joining lyric with document and narrative.

Ted Plantos' *Passchendaele* is a chronicle poem (each poem is dated) using a single speaker, an imagined Canadian front-line soldier, who leads the poet "on a pilgrimage of remembering." Both the historical-chronicle form, and the use of a character as narrator, might suggest categories into which this amorphous genre, the modern poetic sequence, could informatively be divided. The documentary side of the poem — Plantos' own historical research — is nicely integrated through use of a character/narrator (Plantos recognizes, unlike Gruending, that the letter and journal forms are not adequate to his subject matter). In discussing W. E. Henley's *In Hospital* (1888) Rosenthal and Gall point out that the dramatic voice is "self-limiting," both in the sense of being too "highly articulate" for the ostensible circumstances, and not sufficiently prone to "self-analysis." *Passchendaele* is an uneven poem, in part because the narrative (frequently in the historic present) is too articulate for a dramatic voice which is supposed to be rising from the trenches. Yet, the conflicting emotions of war are powerfully evoked, and self-analysis is satisfyingly implicit in the poet's metaphors. Indeed, it is as constellation of metaphors, as a pattern of tonal centres, that the sequence makes its greatest impact. In "The Fire Beginning," the war is seen — startlingly, audaciously — as magic. And the poem also moves through, and back to, other, more conventional, effects: Christian analogies, the metaphor of growth and harvest, the earth-air-fire-water connection (from Heraclitus via Findley), and gut-wrenching analogies of war and sex. The triumph of these emotional high points is, I think, the sequence within a sequence titled "The Lives," in

which war becomes the vehicle for all metaphors, and all objects and concepts are seen in its terms: "Memory is a sniper"; "The earth [is] throwing up around you"; "Tomorrow is the artillery." As Plantos' character recognizes in "Passchendaele" (another sequence within the larger sequence), "I am this war/ I am Passchendaele."

Ted Blodgett's *Arché/Elegies* is an historical poem that begins where Plantos leaves off: "why must 'past' always be behind us?" Blodgett wonders in his "Postscript." "Surely we know the past, surely we are the past, figuring a past for someone else." In some ways, this sequence would satisfy Rosenthal and Gall's emphases most happily: here are "inner, associative voyages of discovery that rely on tonal dynamics rather than on surface continuity." Yet the intertextuality, and semiotics, and deconstruction, that shape Blodgett's poetry are features with which Rosenthal and Gall do not choose, unfortunately, to grapple. Indeed, the intricacies of one poem in this sequence could justify ten pages of comment, and I cannot begin such tribute here. But I urge the reading of this book: it is a scintillating probing of the syntax, words, signs that form the sentence of Canada. Mackenzie King meets MacKenzie somewhere between l'Anse aux Meadows and Ohio, somehow accompanied by Henry Moore and Emily Carr. Blodgett goes down into our collective speech, through the names that are this country, unnaming, hearing in the word *Canada* itself, the uttering of "a-a-a." This *tour de force* of phonemic investigation is also polylingual play, where the resources of one language are constantly reshaping the world view of another, revealing both the structures of Canada's language and the limitations of those structures.

LAURIE RICOU

*** J. MURRAY BECK, *Joseph Howe, Vol. II: The Briton Becomes Canadian 1848-1873.* McGill-Queen's Univ. Press, $35.00. This is the second and last volume of Murray Beck's definitive biography of Joseph Howe. It is as painstaking as its predecessor, but less interesting for reasons that are largely beyond the control of the author. Like many other political figures, Howe showed more vigour and originality in his earlier crusading years than in the years when he became involved in the drudgery and the compromises of office. But, as a record, this book is as complete as one could wish, and is unlikely to be quickly superseded.

G.W.

** JOHN ROBERT COLOMBO, ed., *Songs of the Indians.* 2 volumes. Oberon, $25.00. Anyone who has taught Canadian literature will be familiar with many students' desires to know more about, to write about native Indian poetry. This is a far more comprehensive anthology of the native songs of Canada than we have had, and should provide an ideal first answer to such queries. Diligent use of the anthology (with its Introduction, List of Sources, Bibliography, Discography, and Filmography) should also alert the student to the massive limitations of compiling an anthology largely from existing compilations. Colombo prints, for example, the familiar Haida "Cradle Song," "Whence have you fallen," in a version by John F. Swanton in *Haida Songs* (1912). But, although the bibliography cites Dell Hymes' study of this and other Pacific coast songs, Colombo does not appear to have considered Hymes' argument for his own compelling alternative translation: "Swanton's literary translation (a) omits one of the three repetitions in the first half of the song; (b) translates essentially the same verbal phrase, when it recurs in the second half of the song, by a different repetition, differently placed. The structure of the original simply is not there. Especially since the poem in question is a cradle song, the exact structure of repetition and variation is significant both aesthetically and ethnographically. Swanton's second half, in literary translation, has a dynamic thrust in its repetition of four monosyllables hard on one another that is inappropriate and not authenticated." We can hope that Colombo's collection might lead eventually to the anthology which makes available Indian songs in translations based on the fuller understanding implicit in recent developments in ethnopoetics and anthropological philology.

L.R.

opinions and notes

THOMAS AND HER RAG-BAG

MANY RECENT WOMEN WRITERS have worked at re-defining the images of women in fiction — Margaret Laurence, Alice Munro, Jane Rule, to name a few — but because they haven't changed the form in any significant way, because the traditional structures of fiction frame the story, the character types inherent in those forms remain. A cause-effect structure, for instance, requires certain set functions of the characters.

Yet we know the traditional images of men and women no longer apply, where the woman is defined primarily in terms of her relationship to men, or at least in terms of her sexuality, as virgin or whore, Penelope or Circe, wife or temptress: that is, victim or agent in a conflict which must be "resolved" before the story ends. But both male and female contemporary writers seem curiously stuck within that frame of reference, unable to imagine new possibilities or invent new story patterns.

Those who do not write out of a nostalgia for the old clarities either express enormous despair, or adopt an ironic/satiric viewpoint, reducing the traditional male/female roles to their absurd dimensions. (Robert Kroetsch, for instance, in *The Studhorse Man*, or more bleakly in *Crow*, shows the ridiculous and destructive aspects of male/female roles: Man as quester forever striving for impossible ideals: building ice towers into the sky, trying to fly, and being destroyed in the attempt. Woman as queen bee, devouring everything that comes near her.) Or, Matt Cohen or Clark Blaise present failed relationships. Others move away from story altogether and focus on the *process* of fictionalizing, displaying the distortions which occur in the process. The narrative becomes the story of the process of writing, *Burning Water*, for instance. Self-conscious fiction has certainly been important in developing awareness of the forms and processes of fiction, which have to be seen before they can be changed. Just as linguists have shown us that the structure of language determines how we perceive the world, so the writers are showing us that the structures of fiction shape our imagination of the world. It follows that to change the image, the structures and processes have to change. But the metamorphosis has yet to take place.

Margaret Laurence, Jane Rule, Alice Munro, and others, through a focus on character, succeed in presenting greater depth and breadth in their female characters, but stop short of a qualitative change. In *The Diviners*, or *Contract With The World*, or *Lives of Girls and Women*, the central characters emerge as strong full women, but still saddened by their failures in relationships. Although marriage is not the ultimate reward, the women are still within that frame of reference.

Audrey Thomas does two things in her stories which allow her to transform the images of women in her fiction. First, she doesn't fictionalize in the usual sense of the word; she doesn't "invent" character and situation. The shift in content to an autobiographical base, in turn, frees her to make significant changes in the story form. Structurally, the stories are quite loose. Images of braiding or weaving best picture her method. She works in the story like an archaeologist gathering together the shards from the rag-bag of her experience, and piecing them together, as she finds the coherence and shape inherent in that material. Only the slenderest of threads — the path of the writer

writing — serves as a "track" through. Thus the story form is not predetermined by the author's inventions nor by fictional paradigms. And this more open form in turn frees the image to take its shape from the material at hand, rather than from given models.

In "Natural History," for instance, Thomas begins with the shards in her character's immediate world: mother and daughter are sleeping outside under the full moon, the mother lies awake recalling events of the day, and thinking about how to kill a rat that they have discovered in the house, and remembering fragments from their study of inter-tidal life that has been going on through the summer, and recalling her own childhood, and musing on the moon as symbol of femininity. The story proceeds as a record of the seemingly random assortment of fragments, as a "natural history." But at the end, the mother momentarily perceives the coherence in it all:

> Another image came to mind, out of her childhood, a steriopticon belonging to her grandfather. She would sit with it, on a Sunday afternoon, sliding the crossbar up and down, until suddenly, "click," the two photographs taken at slightly different angles (St. Mark's, the Tower of London, Notre Dame) would become one picture, which would take on depth and wonderful illusion of solidity. That was the trick. To slide it all — moon, blind girl, rat, the apple tree, her father's fingers tilting the pencil, her own solitude, the cat, the eyes of the deer, her daughter, this still moment, back/forth, back/forth, back/forth, until "click,"
>
> until "click"
>
> until "click" —
>
> there it was: wholeness, harmony, radiance; all of it making a wonderful kind of sense, as she sat there under the apple tree, beneath the moon.

Steriopticon, or stereoscope ("an optical instrument with two eyeglasses for helping the observer to combine the images of two pictures taken from points of view a little way apart and thus to get the effect of solidity or depth") is a particularly apt image for the process. The story achieves both solidity and depth as the various threads momentarily cohere.

Because the story has been free to find its own shape (as the title "Natural History" suggests), Thomas is able to arrive at the concluding image of the woman sitting alone, but not lonely, feeling centred and content, without having necessarily resolved anything, glimpsing for a brief moment her connection with the natural world: "*as she sat there, under the apple tree, beneath the moon.*" Many fictions end with the woman alone, but few achieve the feeling of contentment that is pictured here. The woman is defined in relation to natural forces, not social structures, which represents a qualitative change in the image.

The other aspect of Thomas' writing which contributes to her success in transforming the image is that she takes on and confronts directly traditional images of women. Although by shifting to an autobiographical base, Thomas is not bound by traditional narrative patterns and the character delineations they demand, she cannot totally free herself from their influence because those patterns are also embedded in her own consciousness. Her own modes of thinking and acting are strongly influenced, if not determined, by the paradigms of myth and story. In her rag-bag of experience, she often finds STORY along with uncut grass and apple trees and moonlight. But the stories enter in, not as a frame or backdrop illuminating the present "story," but as one of the shards. They can thus be questioned and examined, as in "Natural History," the mother wonders if her daughter will be content to "shine always by reflected light" like the moon (as the traditional story goes) or if she will develop her own strengths.

Treating story as subject, as foreground rather than background, con-

tributes to Thomas' success in transforming the images of women, because it allows her to de-construct the old images and thus clear the way for the new. In all her short story collections, she brings traditional images to mind by the cover illustrations which picture well-known fairy tale figures. She then de-constructs that image by telling stories based on her own experiences as a contemporary woman. *Ten Green Bottles* (1967), for instance, has Jack and Jill on the cover. The stories then deal with the loss of innocence, but not the traditional loss of physical innocence. Apart from one story about being "21 and still a virgin," which ends with the promise of intercourse ("A Winter's Tale"), the central character is a married woman. Innocence is a mental/emotional condition; the fall is into the self. The wife in "Xanadu," for instance, although at first delighting in the "pleasure dome" which she finds herself in, with a servant who cooks, cleans, shops, and takes care of the children to perfection, comes to resent the servant's superior ability because his domestic skills put her to shame. To her surprise, she finds herself resorting to subterfuge to get rid of him. She plants three silver spoons in his room, so she can accuse him of theft and dismiss him. Loss of innocence, yes, but it is more complex than the traditional sexual initiation. It means the loss of that ideal of women as emotionally or morally innocent, as loving, caring, unselfish creature.

In *Ladies and Escorts* (1977), the cover illustration of Little Red Riding Hood introduces the subject of women's encounters with the "wicked wolf" in the "dark forest," and the title brings to mind "happily ever after" stories. But Thomas then de-constructs the images of women as helpless, passive, and in need of escorts, in the face of passion, desire, or other "darknesses." In "Kill Day on the Government Wharf," the woman, who is both fascinated and disturbed by her contact with a native fisherman, does not run away or call for help, but instead explores her feelings, and momentarily reaches out to touch him. Or Rapunzel, the main character in a story of the same title, locked in her own self-made tower (she chooses to record the world through mirror writing) refuses the prince when he comes knocking at her window. "The More little Mummy," a very disturbing story with its images of pickled foetuses on display in jars, tells not of ladies and escorts, but of a woman facing abortion, and the breakup of a relationship, hardly the world implied by the book's title or cover illustration.

Finally, in *Real Mothers*, Thomas takes on the task of de-constructing a more recent ideal of women — the image of the super Mom, that post-war ideal of domesticity implied by the book's title, and by the cover illustration of mother and daughter happily rolling out pastry, smiling at each other and looking immaculate in frilly white aprons and neat soft curls: daughter apprenticing to become cook, love object, wife, and mother, happy in the role of domestic servant — in other words, apprenticing to become a Real Mother.

But again, the stories belie the image. They tell of the actual experiences of actual women — "real mothers" in the other meaning of the phrase. Not the essence of motherhood, but the actuality of it. The opening lines of the first story in the collection establish the reality. We meet not the trim, smiling, slim woman of the cover, but an overweight, single parent, who is rejecting her children and traditional domesticity:

> After Marie-Anne's parents had been separated for about a year, her mother joined Weight Watchers, lost thirty pounds, and decided to go back to school.

And, in contrast to the simplistic happiness pictured on the cover, the charac-

ters are often unhappy, or caught up in complex and conflicting emotions. The woman in "Timbuctu," for example, realizes "she wanted Phillip *and* her freedom. How could she have both?" and feels the contradictory nature of love: "The amber beads, like love, hung beautiful and heavy around her neck." In "The Bleak Midwinter," a woman involved in a *ménage-à-trois* is reasonable, pleasant, and considerate in conversation with her companions, but nasty and vindictive in her actions. On a more humorous note, the woman in "Harry and Violet" hears, at the moment of sexual climax with a lover, her daughter's voice, and opens her eyes to see the daughter standing at the foot of the bed waiting patiently to show them her two pet caterpillars. Confusion, embarrassment, and mixed feelings, are the emotions of real mothers.

But Thomas is not just replacing the idealized images of woman with more realistic ones. As well as giving us stories about actual women in present-day situations which serve to displace the traditional notions, she also re-constructs new *ideals*. In the last story of the book, aptly titled "Crossing the Rubicon," the whole thrust of the story is toward imagining a future in which the main character will behave differently. Before she can *act* differently, she realizes she must first *imagine* herself acting differently. Thus the narrator is writing a story within the story in which she pictures herself transformed. Specifically, the story centres on a woman's struggle to break away from a lingering but obviously disintegrating love affair. A Valentine's Day setting for the story provides an occasion for bringing in all the surface trappings of romantic love, which in turn are a reminder of the attitudes which the woman is struggling to be free of. The mother and her nine-year-old daughter are making cupcakes for the boys at school, and decorating them with cinnamon candy hearts inscribed with such phrases as "I love you" or "Will you be mine" (echoing the book's cover illustration). At the same time, the mother is thinking about her current love affair. Images of being hooked like a fish suggest her passive and powerless role:

> He has not seen her; she can still leave. Once he turns around and looks in her direction, she will be hooked. All he will have to do then is reel her in. My mouth hurts, just thinking about it.

She is struggling to break free of this relationship, to stop being the victim. Finally, in the concluding image of the story, which is also the concluding image of the book, the narrator imagines herself having the courage and strength to walk away, to not cling to past dreams or a dying relationship, but to walk alone into an unknown future:

> Then, remembering how Sally Bowles/Liza Minelli said good-bye to her Christopher Isherwood/Michael York boyfriend in Cabaret, she reaches her right hand over her left shoulder and, wishing that she had Minelli's green fingernails, she waves goodbye. And she doesn't look back. In my story, that is. She doesn't look back in my story.

A metamorphosis of both the particular woman in this story and of the general image of women that we all carry around with us takes place. Thomas achieves this by first drawing on the details of her own life for her stories, rather than inventing her material. She then views those details with an archaeologist's "detachment," as "shards," which is what life becomes when separated from the paradigms of myth and story. Having de-constructed the traditional images of women in this and preceding stories, by giving us "real" mothers in actual situations, she then reconstructs, out of the material at hand, new models — both "real" and imaginary. Like a good anthropologist, though, she recognizes the subjective and tenta-

tive nature of the re-construction: "And she doesn't look back. In *my story*, that is. She doesn't look back." The change in both the form and process of the story brings a transformation of the image.

PAULINE BUTLING

*** ELIZABETH MCLUHAN & TOM HILL, *Norval Morrisseau and the Emergence of the Image Makers*. Art Gallery of Ontario/Methuen, n.p. This is the catalogue of the exhibition of paintings by Indians from the woodland tribes — Ojibwa, Cree, and Odawa — recently organized by the Art Gallery of Ontario. It is a great deal more than a catalogue, for the major part of the well-illustrated text is an extensive and very useful essay by Elizabeth McLuhan on Norval Morrisseau and the other leading Indian painters from Ontario who have come into prominence in recent years. Influenced by the iconography of the Midewiwin cult of the Ojibwa and by prehistoric cliff paintings, the work of these painters presents a very different vision from that of the artists of the West Coast, the other main school of Indian work. Especially satisfying, among the less well-known artists, is the work of Carl Ray and Blake Debassige.

G.W.

LAST PAGE

Annie Dillard's *Living by Fiction* (Fitzhenry & Whiteside, $6.95) is one of those rare books that makes thinking about criticism an act of lucid meditation. Not only does the author reflect on the usefulness of art and criticism to each other, she also thinks about the functions that art and criticism perform in daily life; and whether or not one agrees with what she says, the temptation is to quote her, repeatedly. "You could work yourself into a genuine froth over this," she says, "everyone who reads fiction seems to feel qualified to review it. One might as well let children, who eat, judge restaurants." Or: "Fiction keeps its audience by retaining the world as its subject matter. People like the world. Many people actually prefer it to art and spend their days by choice in the thick of it." Again: "As symbol, or as the structuring of symbols, art can render intelligible . . . those wilderness regions which philosophy has abandoned and those hazardous terrains which science's tools do not fit. I mean the rim of knowledge where language falters. . . ." Knowledge alone is not Dillard's goal, however; she seeks — perhaps unfashionably — *meaning*, for which art provides a symbolic shape and criticism a mode of understanding. That said, the great philosophers' questions remain: is there harmony in nature, order in the universe, purpose in life? It is a tribute to the author's skill with words that her answer — "I do not know" — is no disappointment; what her book does is give us the privilege of listening in on the dialogues of her mind.

But if we question Dillard — "Criticism is a kind of modern focusing of the religious impulse, the hope of the race: the faith that something has meaning, and we may apprehend it" — or at least place her "cheerful state of affairs" in what we know of the real world's politics, what then? There seems little religious hope about a lot of recent South African critical commentary, for example — though there is passion aplenty, which may, in Dillard's terms, approximate the focus to which she refers. Consider André Brink's forceful collection of political essays, *Mapmakers: Writing in a State of Siege* (Faber & Faber, $23.95), which recounts how the head-on collision between his political environment and his skill with words transformed him into (naming a name, applying a word to a focus, a force) a "dissident." Most forceful of all is Brink's attack on censorship — a subject Dillard doesn't address; and it is here that we face the unwritten assumptions of Dillard's expectations. She thinks in words, and presumes that these words can be shared. Brink doesn't presume anything of the kind, for there are other forces to be met first: "censorship, the most spectacular threat to the freedom to publish, is invariably a political act, not a moral or religious one; and it derives from the urge of power to protect itself, to perpetuate itself, to prevail." This is the real world in which Dillard and Brink agree that writers and readers live; yet though conditions have shaped their perceptions so that their worlds appear different, we might ask ourselves if the difference is nonetheless one more of degree than of kind. How cheerful — or how mad — is the world, if critics and writers can make sense out of life only on the page?

South African criticism, emerging from a long period of doldrums, is taking such issues seriously. A striking new series from McGraw-Hill, called the Southern African Literature Series, serves both as a body of reference material (maps, staging diagrams, biobibliographical data, as well as criticism) and an account (as general editor Stephen Gray observes) of

work-in-progress. The quality of South African writing is still being discovered *in South Africa*; the reasons for such belated recognition are not unrelated to Brink's arguments. Always in the criticism — as the articles printed and reprinted in the series' first four volumes illustrate — there is a tension between sociological pressure and aesthetic impulse. Stephen Gray's own *Athol Fugard* (R 15.55) addresses such matters directly, for they form the substance of this important playwright's work. Dorothy Driver's *Pauline Smith* (R 15.95), again in response to the writer's changing reputation, begins by reprinting the impressionistic and biographical commentary which constituted Smith criticism for so long, but ends by including reflections on the political force of Afrikaans in Smith's stories and even comparisons with Fugard on matters of political characterization. In the other two books, on *Olive Schreiner* (R 15.95) and *Soweto Poetry* (R 14.90), edited by Cherry Clayton and Michael Chapman respectively, the contrast repeats itself in the nature of the criticism. Chapman writes, for example, about criteria for estimating "New Black Poetry": "In spite of this justifiable elevation of the 'sociological' over the 'literary,' Henderson's remarks do insist that the two are not really separable; that black poetry is concerned not simply with black truth, but with the *impact* of that truth. . . ." And Phyllis Lewson, quoted on the nineteenth-century feminist Schreiner, observes that she "is at her most successful as a political thinker and teacher when she succeeds in fusing reason and poetic imagery, parable and dissertation. She is weakest when she lengthily cites pseudo-scientific argument to justify residual prejudices." Perhaps it is in the changing focus of criticism as much as in the changing impulse of art that the "hope of the race" may reside, if anywhere verbal; for the expectations of criticism reflect the social desires people have of language as much as the separable meanings that they presume are lodged in words. Desiring different results may not bring them into political reality; but refusing to praise unacceptable political realities may be one step towards a more humane society. That, at least, appears to represent Brink's inferential argument. Dillard lays claim already to the mind's freedom from social fetters; but one wonders, on reflection, if that shows the mind's freedom or the limits of experience, whether it is a sign of things to come or a failure to recognize the constant threat of pressures to accede to organization and power.

W.N.