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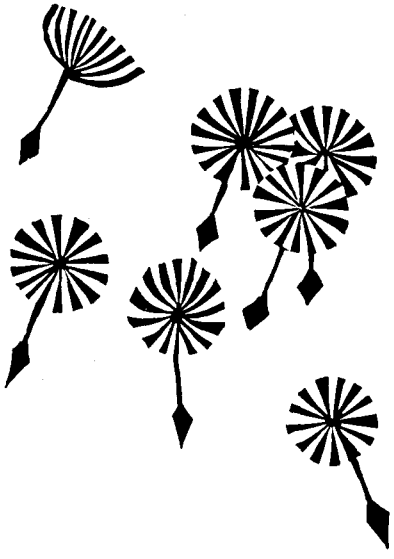

## SHAPING TEXTS

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editorial

# ABSOLUTELY MORE OR LESS

MY TITLE DECLARES a conundrum, one perhaps called "change." It all has to do with absolutes.

Absolutes invite exceptions. Exceptions lead to more absolutes. Now why the second of these truths should be so is absolutely unclear. But the first is simple. We dislike being told what our limits are. Except that we seem always to seek more limits. Attached to every positive choice, every approving judgment, every affirmative decision, there is a negative, or at least a series of alternatives. And the very fact of the existence of these ("negative") alternatives probably guided the initial affirmation or approval. Western culture has taught us, for example, that we choose right by recognizing what is wrong. Think of Milton, and his dismissal of cloistered virtue. (Hindu culture argues in another way, affirms that the alternative to a single choice or expression is the entirety of choices, including the one — not the entirety of choices *excepting* the one. But this [alternative] system of argument has not yet deeply marked Western thought.) Western thought tries to reduce choices to binaries, frequently distorting the range of possibility in the process. Hence my title. Binaries invite us to think in absolutes. Yes/no. Black/white. On/off. No room for maybe. Western culture rhetorically repudiates *maybe*. ("Don't sit on the fence," "You're either for us or against us," "weasel words.") Such repudiations are (as here) often illogical, but many people find inconsistency a greater sin than illogicality — hence their tolerance for absolutes, and absolutism. For the sake of illusory security of predictability ("you know where you stand"), they accept the rigidity that denies freedom of choice (you know at least where you are chained). But perhaps "freedom of choice" disguises another tyrannical absolute? Our language is full of *relative* words (*more*, *less*, *sometimes*, *seldom*, *often*, *fewer*, *less*, *more*, *better*, *worse*, *usually*). The rigid don't like them, for they invite the uncertainty of decision. But attached to every decision is the refuted alternative. Hence the freedom to choose, the freedom to be inconsistent, absolutely, is involved even in its illusory chaos in the process of drawing lines. Demarcating. Making distinctions. A qualification is itself a judgment. What this means is that value, like

meaning, is a social agreement, which in turn means that it's open to change. Absolutely, more or less.

* * *

The attraction of binary/critical rhetoric is that it seems to draw on a secure source of knowledge, a source perhaps beyond the reach of the ordinary. Such an illusion — like jargon — protects another demarcation, for it defines the privileged as the arbiters of value, setting the "ordinary" aside, excluding (it, them) from the authority to judge, if not absolutely from the freedom to choose. Limiting the options among choices, however — sometimes through irony, sometimes through false logic, sometimes through parody, anger, innuendo, moral appeal, or some other means — limits freedom even while appearing to preserve it. Consider George Eliot, writing in one of the *Impressions of Theophrastus Such*:

> We soak our children in habits of contempt and exultant gibing, and yet are confident that — as Clarissa one day said to me — "We can always teach them to be reverent in the right place, you know." And doubtless if she were to take her boys to see a burlesque Socrates, with swollen legs, dying in the utterance of cockney puns, and were to hang up a sketch of this comic scene among their bedroom prints, she would think this preparation not at all of the prejudice of their emotions on hearing their tutor read that narrative of the *Apology*, which has been consecrated by the reverent gratitude of ages. This is the impoverishment that threatens our posterity: — a new Famine, a meagre fiend with lewd grin and clumsy hoof, is breathing a moral mildew over the harvest of our human sentiments.

Or consider John Leonard, writing in the *New York Times Book Review* in 1980:

> To stare at a year of fiction is to have a year of fiction stare back at you, like a basilisk. A novel is an accident waiting for a season to happen to it, a reptilian dream, unaccountable. . . .
>
> Some of them are acquainted with the best-seller lists; most are not. They were probably not sincere enough about the obvious.

These are potent appeals to agree, because those who do so place themselves rhetorically among the elect of the inner circle. That's where one kind of security lies. Perhaps it's also what these people believe. Absolutely. Such beliefs, however, are codifications of value rather than ultimate expressions of value. Those who hold these beliefs face challenge from those who disagree with them, those who find themselves absolutely denied expression, more *or* less, by their particular demarcation of authority.

* * *

Which returns me to the conundrum. For we all, one way or another, cleave to demarcations somehow, even when we espouse relative values rather than fixed ones. Doctrinal flexibility is still doctrinal. And repeatedly, we define — or run up against — someone's limit to pluralism.

But whose? If values are indeed socially, collectively established, perhaps we can agree that racism, sexism, violence, and pornography are "wrong" — because they're *not right*, among other, less binary reasons. But by whose definition? At what point does something *become* "pornographic"? Whose boundary sets our values? Do such definitions and boundaries serve only those currently holding power or do they allow for choices? Do they rely on the uncertainty of an appeal to "tradition" or the seeming certainty of half-truths? Do we mistake distortion for information — or vice-versa? Do we accept the possibility of alternatives and alternative values, or do we, just possibly, embrace a set of alternatives as a new absolute, as confining as the old set in that (or although) it exchanges one group of authorities for another? Does power deny the desire to share choice? Does "or" expand or unduly limit the options we wish to exercise? More? Or less?

* * *

I have been reading Toril Moi's *Sexual/Textual Politics*, with a mix of admiration and uncertainty. Cogently and lucidly (my criteria of judgment?), the author traces a brief history of "Anglo-American" (including brief reference to Australia, ignoring Canada absolutely) and "French" (still ignoring Canada) feminist criticism. She finds the first group politically preoccupied but not sufficiently committed to political change, the second group linguistically and philosophically engaged but often politically mistaken. ("There is nothing surprising in this; all forms of radical thought inevitably remain mortgaged to the very historical categories they seek to transcend.") Moi also explicates the arguments of a series of particular theorists — Millett and Showalter to Cixous and Irigaray, among others — in the process (inevitably?) articulating obliquely her own vision (version) of the need for dynamic social change. Such a process leads her to challenge existing authority — its closed systems, its limited choices — but it leads her also to oppose unfettered pluralism.

> But if we wax pluralistic enough to acknowledge the feminist position as just one among many 'useful' approaches, we also implicitly grant the most 'masculinist' of criticism the right of existence: it just *might* be 'useful' in a very different context from ours.

Such a comment purports to be a self-evident truth — i.e., to dismiss the (absolute) enemy without querying whether or not the absolutism of the dismissal re-enacts the forms of the system it challenges. "Mortgaged" thus to historical categories herself, Moi goes on to praise Derrida for his "utopian" aspiration for "the multiplicity of sexually marked voices," without reconciling (or perhaps choosing to reconcile or choosing to try to reconcile) the inconsistent relation between plurality and boundary. About Julia Kristeva, Moi writes further that her "romanticizing of the marginal is an anti-*bourgeois*, but not necessarily anti-*capitalist*, form of

libertarianism." Using the word *romanticizing* pejoratively is part of her own political vocabulary; the word *mortgaged*, like the word *capitalist*, declares her commitment to *the* system she sees as *the* alternative to the present one and the (only logical) end of feminist change. Adjectives aside, is it necessarily "*the*"? Like Eliot and Leonard and many others, Moi appears to examine a range of possibilities while relying on a residual binary in order to judge and make distinctions.

What if we don't fit inside it? What if we live instead in a mixed economy (take that as metaphor as well as denotative term) and choose to stay there, arguing that it potentially allows for a greater number of choices and fewer restrictions on the paradigms of self-expression? Do we gain by refusing the boundary of system? Or do we consign ourselves to powerlessness, revelling in a romantic version of marginality or "self" when we could accept the choice to join in the prevailing system and to assert power as others have defined it for us? As with so many options — do you want absolutely more or absolutely less? — this distinction relies on another false binary. For it is the same "others" who define power in this paradigm who also declare where the margins are. If we accept that we live on their margins rather than believe that they live on ours (if indeed we can adequately identify "their" and "our"), then we have accepted their boundaries, their determinations of power and value. If, however, we can dream and design alternatives, we can choose with a variety of positives in mind rather than a singular threat of negative. Possibly.

But to do so still leaves the conundrum. We design our own boundary lines in the process of claiming freedom; we invoke limits to pluralism in the name of the freedom we claim; we live with inconsistency. Maybe that's absolute reality. What we have to learn — again, and then again — is to refuse to identify "rules" with logic and "inconsistency" with chaos.

W.N.

# WEEDS

*Andrew Wreggitt*

russian thistle
dandelions
sweet, deep clover

The dog pushes his muzzle through . . .
long grasses sweeping past his ears
shhh shhh
His tail swoops in the air
while the rest of him tunnels
in the thick leaves, thick smell,

his nose, a small wind
against the ground

A fat, striped bee lands
like a Boeing on the fireweed
and the stalk leans, tremulous
This kingdom of ditches, hums
in its cracked clay and dust,
under the low sky

horse tails
pigweed
morning glory

When I was half as tall,
I burrowed in weedy, vacant lots
The day so vast, morning and evening didn't exist
from the low hill of noon,
each day, its own field to be lost in,
with wasps and ants and sometimes
in August
a Monarch butterfly hovering for a moment,
laying its blessing on us

If I were to nuzzle down now in the clover and crabgrass,
I could not bring back that stunning expanse
of being young and closer to the ground,
of walking in the proximity
of the earth's own angels,
to smell these weeds so sweetly

pea-vine
marigolds
milkweed

The dog rubs his heavy fur
into the wild oats and burrs,
the pollen of this whole symphony
a thunderous chord
at the end of his nose
The bee bounces on a single petal,
then lifts off, heavy, sated
The fireweed springs back, purple

Up here on the road, the human
stands in his fourth decade,
holding a few grains of memory
Up here in the stratosphere
of adulthood,
nearly six feet off the ground,
having grown up they say
But he is thinking perhaps . . .

the limitless . . .
the odour that drifts without memory
in and out of pink lungs
Nothing is like anything else.
everything is only what it is . . .
astounding

it is not as much growing up
and it is growing away

# AVE MATERS

*M. Travis Lane*

May the gentle, unrecorded saints
in their unmapped progressions make
a dial around the minutes of my hand
and help me write.
Black stars,
they draw me through their sieves,
through their forgotten histories,
seeing the world from inside out:
mum matter, anti-matter moms —
the flipside of
OM OM

# THE LONG AND THE SHORT OF IT

## *Two Versions of "Who Has Seen the Wind"*

*Barbara Mitchell*

IN 1947 TWO SIGNIFICANTLY different versions of *Who Has Seen the Wind* were published. Little, Brown & Co.[1] published an edition that was approximately 7,000 words shorter than that released simultaneously by The Macmillan Company of Canada.[2] This seems to be a fact long since forgotten, not only by publishers and critics but by the author himself who was unaware that all subsequent editions[3] of *Wind* have used the American version rather than the Canadian. A recent edition (1982), published by McClelland and Stewart–Bantam Limited for the Canadian market, states that "it contains the complete text of the original hard-cover edition. NOT ONE WORD HAS BEEN OMITTED."[4] Ironically, the "original" edititon to which they were referring was the American shorter version. In fact, there has been only one edition, the original Canadian, that contains the text that Mitchell himself preferred, then and now.

*Wind* was accepted in 1945 by Little, Brown & Co (to be guaranteed by *Atlantic Monthly Press*, the coterie press of Little, Brown), but Mitchell sold only the American rights. Although he had been approached in 1944 by Macmillan of Canada about his novel, then titled *Spalpeen*, nothing came of this until March 1946, some months after Little, Brown & Co. agreed to publish. His decision to retain Canadian rights now seemed prophetic because he was able to deal independently with Macmillan and publish his preferred version with them. About the same time he was beginning to wonder if he had been unwise in contracting with Little, Brown & Co., for they had just written to ask him to consider reducing the text by about 10,000 words. There would have been an even more dramatic discrepancy between the two editions had not Mitchell insisted that half of the deletions requested by Little, Brown & Co. be re-instated. Writing to Macmillan he commented, "I appreciate very much that the Canadian edition is to be much the same as the manuscript I sent you; although I have managed to get about half the cuts re-inserted, I do not consider the Little, Brown edition as good as the Canadian."[5]

Little, Brown & Co. argued that high production costs and concern for a consumer price of less than $3.00 (which necessitated fewer than 300 pages) were the major reasons for shortening the novel. However, Edward Weeks, the editor, argued on aesthetic and philosophic grounds that the requested deletions would improve the novel. By the end of the editing process (nearly one year from manuscript to galley stage), it became quite clear that he and Mitchell held significantly different visions of the novel.

*Wind* is Mitchell's most meticulously edited work. Including himself there were four readers who carefully scrutinized the manuscript. Mitchell, by this time, had spent five years working and re-working the manuscript. He was 33 years of age, a graduate of the University of Alberta with a B.A. and a teacher's certificate, and the author of some fifteen published short stories; he was mature and experienced enough to appraise and defend his own work. As well, his mentor and second critical eye, Professor F. M. Salter, had edited every page of his manuscript before it was submitted. Therefore, Mitchell felt confident about the novel when he sent it on to Edward Weeks, the editor of *Atlantic Monthly*, around the middle of September 1945.

Professor F. M. Salter was Mitchell's first and most influential "editor." He "looked over his shoulder" (to use Mitchell's expression) from the beginning draft stages to publication and was far more in tune with Mitchell's intentions than was Weeks. Salter was a Renaissance scholar of international reputation and professor of English and creative writing at the University of Alberta. He was a remarkable man who inspired many beginning Canadian writers including Christine Van der Mark, who published the same year as Mitchell, and, later, Henry Kreisel, Sheila Watson, Robert Kroetsch, and Rudy Wiebe. Through his position as creative writing instructor he had made a number of contacts in the publishing world, and served, in Mitchell's words, as his "agent sans ten percent" for the marketing of *Wind*. Salter had earlier (late 1944) sent "The Owl and the Bens" and "Saint Sammy" to *Atlantic*, both of which were accepted and edited by Edward Weeks. Salter was impressed with Weeks's editing of the two stories and commented to Mitchell that *Atlantic*'s offer of Weeks's services as editor of *Wind* was "extremely generous"[6] and, indeed, very flattering to a first novelist. Weeks turned over the manuscript to Dudley Cloud, director and editor of Atlantic Monthly Press, for a first read and Cloud reported that it was being read with great enthusiasm.[7]

In spite of this initial expression of confidence in his work from Weeks and Cloud, Mitchell was cautious. Cloud assured Salter and Mitchell that *Atlantic* respected its authors in terms of both financial arrangements and editorial services. Weeks, he contended, was the best editor in the business, scrutinizing manuscripts meticulously (which was quite accurate judging from Weeks's detailed comments to Mitchell of Dec. 6, 1945). As evidence Cloud listed authors whom Weeks had edited: Mazo de la Roche, James Hilton, Agnes Newton Keith, Walter Lippmann, H. E.

Bates, Walter Edmonds among others (May 18, 1945). This was an impressive list at the time. However, sensing that Mitchell and Salter were impressed with but still wary of Weeks's authority, Cloud wrote to Salter (although not to Mitchell) that the author's autonomy was always respected at *Atlantic*. It is with considerable irony that we read these initial exchanges which hint at the dramatic confrontation to come over this very issue of an author's rights. Even at the galley stage Weeks and Cloud attempted to delete passages without consulting Mitchell; consequently the editorial process was not a happy one for Mitchell.

However, both Weeks and Cloud saw something unique and powerful in Mitchell's writing. Cloud responded first with genuine enthusiasm and suggested a few changes which were quickly followed up by Mitchell. In December, Weeks, himself, commented very fully. He remarked that the novel contains "clear evidence of your talent, and, when later we ask you to fuss over certain details of revision, do not forget that in discussing the minor aspects we have always in mind the humanity and the over-all scope of your narrative."[8] Certainly Weeks made some good deletions; however, his suggestions involving Brian and the wind did not illustrate an understanding of the author's "over-all" vision, nor were they "minor."

THE VERY ASPECTS THAT MITCHELL, with Salter's encouragement, had emphasized were the elements that Weeks wanted refined or cut. From the beginning Salter had suggested the enhancement of the wind motif, the conception of the Young Ben as "the symbol of the wildness of the prairie" (June 23, 1945) and the elaboration of the relationship between Brian and the Young Ben. What Salter saw as most vital to the novel and where he encouraged expansion, Weeks demanded deletions and revisions.

In his first letter (Dec. 6, 1945) Weeks summarized his main objections. In contrast to Salter and Mitchell's careful working of the wind motif, he felt that many of the wind and landscape passages were "dull" and "over-decorative." He thought Brian was too precocious, too independent (not punished enough for his misdeeds), and "too cute" with his references to R. W. God. Rather than appreciating the deliberately ambivalent ending with Brian, a small figure in the vast prairie landscape, he asked that Brian's future be spelled out, "whether he was to go to college, whether he would like to be an engineer, or a doctor." Weeks included an itemized list of comments (fourteen pages), some flattering, but many demanding deletions, particularly of the wind motif. To Mitchell these requests created more than a little "fuss" over details; in particular, Weeks's final comment caused Mitchell to rise up in arms:

> The ending is abrupt. It must be strong. It must be free and clear — with no chance for the reader to go wrong.

> The last two pages are now the weakest in the book, and they should be the best. The story in our minds will end with Brian, not with the wind. What of his future. (Dec. 6, 1945)

Mitchell consulted Salter about what he perceived as an attack on his creative integrity. Salter agreed that Weeks and Cloud were missing the point:

> I'm willing to bet that neither Mr. Cloud nor Mr. Weeks knows what this novel is about. They know that you are picturing a small boy growing up, and that's about all. (Dec. 29, 1945)

However, Salter, more the diplomat and agent, realized that a compromise had to be made to get the book published. This compromise was the Preface, mostly composed by Salter, which would make *explicit* the wind motif. He hoped that Weeks would re-instate many of the wind passages when he understood their significance. Salter, at least temporarily, had defused the issue and Mitchell, nearly two months later, wrote a surprisingly temperate-sounding letter to Weeks saying, "for the most part I have followed your very helpful suggestions" (Jan. 26, 1946). But he adamantly stated that the last two pages, as well as half of the requested cuts, must stay. He enclosed a point by point response to Weeks's editorial suggestions, patiently explaining, with occasional sarcasm, each passage he wanted retained. The same day he wrote to Cloud reiterating forcefully his main point: the book "must end with the wind" (Jan. 27, 1945).

Between December 1945, when Weeks and Cloud first responded with their editorial suggestions, and Setpember 1946, when Mitchell made his last counter-attack demanding that certain portions be re-inserted (at the galley stage), the four editors clashed continually over the vision of the novel. Mitchell was particularly upset by the deletions and changes involving the wind motif. In a recent conversation[9] he recalled vividly the confrontation with Weeks over the wind deletions but relatively dimly the requests for cuts and alterations to character and landscape description. Yet 75 per cent of the cuts involved these latter passages, not the wind motif. A number of reasons account for Mitchell's less vehement response towards these other cuts: most of the character alterations, particularly to Brian's character, occurred in the first hundred pages where Mitchell wrote he was "least sensitive" (April 11, 1946); also, he did not feel that these cuts as seriously distorted his total conception of the novel; he recognized that he had to compromise on some issues in order to stand firm on the wind passages; finally, in a few instances, Weeks's editing was perfectly correct and Mitchell knew that. Although Mitchell does not recall as accurately and vividly his arguments over these passages, he did, at the time, forcefully, sometimes sarcastically, defend their validity.

As it is impossible in this short space to detail each deletion Weeks requested and discuss Mitchell's responses, only three major areas will be examined: the wind motif, the relationship of Brian and the Young Ben, and the character of

Brian. Before discussing these cuts, it would be useful to summarize the nature and extent of the other, less severe, cuts.

In addition to the wind passages some thirty landscape descriptions were cut. Weeks tended to remove those of a less pleasant-sounding nature such as the initial description of the town as "a clotting of frame houses" (Mac. 2). Also, as he wrote in a rough note (Dec. 6, 1945), he wanted the facts without the "trimmings." One requested cut that particularly rankled Mitchell was Weeks's comment that the opening sentence, "Here was the least common denominator of nature, the skeleton requirements simply of land and sky" (3), was "too dull" (Dec. 6, 1945). Weeks did not understand the integral role of this mathematical image which holds in itself not only a symbolic representation of prairie (land, horizon line, sky), but the implication of Brian's search for an answer (the skeleton) and the "answer" itself which is ambiguously dual and no further reducible.

Another fifty passages dealing with minor characters were cut. Many of these reveal the inner world of Hislop, Digby, and Miss Thompson. As the "quests" of these three characters, particularly Digby, provide an adult parallel to Brian's search for meaning, many of these deleted passages are significant. Also they delineate one of Mitchell's continuing concerns, the concept of the "ideal" teacher figure. Even Miss MacDonald is given a fuller dimension in the longer version.

It would be unjust, however, to imply that Weeks and Cloud made no positive contributions. Indeed, Weeks suggested (in bare idea form only) the addition of a number of scenes which added considerably to the novel. He suggested an argument between Uncle Sean and the grandmother and a conversation between Sean and Gerald which became Chapter Two. He asked for more of Maggie and a Christmas scene which became Chapter Seventeen. Mitchell and Weeks had disagreed over the ending and, although Mitchell was not about to give up either the wind ending or have Brian become an engineer, he did relent and add a passage about Brian becoming a "dirt doctor" followed by the one in which Digby refers to "Intimations of Immortality" and Brian's "wisdom without years" (296-97). Furthermore, Weeks did cut one or two gratuitously sentimental scenes and edited the Digby-Palmer philosophical debates (it is arguable whether or not that was an improvement).

Although in a sense Mitchell lost the battle, forfeiting 7,000 words, he won the war, at least for the wind. An amicable compromise with Weeks was reached, and certainly one that did not damage Mitchell's reputation, but he was never truly happy with the changes. When this intense nine-month struggle was nearly over, Mitchell wrote to Cloud indicating just how difficult the fight had been for him:

> It is by choice that I don't deal through a representative and perhaps you wish to God that I did, but be patient with what may seem unwillingness to meet you halfway. I have already made the greatest concession I can make and that is to let somebody else cut *Who Has Seen the Wind*.... (May 14, 1946)

ASIDE FROM THE EXAMINATION of the editorial process as it illustrates the clash between two versions of the novel and, of course, the significant re-discovery of the author's preferred longer edition, a discussion of the most important discrepancies between the longer and shorter versions shows clearly Mitchell's ability to defend his work on a critical level, and illustrates again and again the meticulous craftsmanship that went into the making of this novel.

The major disruption to the thematic or philosophic concerns of the novel was Weeks's deletions of the wind motif. Mitchell has described his style in *Wind* as symphonic with the various rhythms or motifs blending into a harmonious chord at the end. The major motif heard above the others is, of course, the wind in *all* its voices, ranging from "lake-still" (Mac. 79) to a "lapping" wind (Mac. 315) to "a bereft sound winding lost and forsaken" (Mac. 111) to "Saint Sammy's" tornado. Weeks succeeded in removing approximately twenty passages involving wind and its accompanying light and dark patterns. He had requested many more cuts, about 2,000 words, which included two key sections — Brian's overnight refuge in the straw stack and the final two pages of the novel. Had he been successful "Neither you nor I" would have seen much of the wind in this novel!

Mitchell explained to Weeks that he had intended the wind to symbolize the growth of Brian's imagination:

> Throughout the novel, from the time that Brian stands upon the church steps, to the last lines, the wind is the God of the Old Testament, the God of child-like ancients and of modern children. The wind is present in each one of Brian's mystic moments, whether as a prairie breeze or an avenging tornado. (Jan. 26, 1945)

Concordant with the wind motif is the interplay of light and dark including references to clouds, shadows, lightning, and Northern Lights all reflecting Brian's "fleeting revelations" (Sept. 1, 1946). To remove any substantial number of these motifs, as Weeks proposed, would disrupt the contrapuntal effect, the balancing of the dualities of light *and* dark, birth *and* death, caressing *and* avenging wind, human *and* prairie voice, insight *and* incomprehension.

The first deletion was the second paragraph of the novel referring to wind and clouds:

> But for now, it was as though a magnificent breath were being held; still puffs of cloud were high in the sky, retaining their shapes for hours on end, one of them near the horizon, presenting a profile view of blown cheeks and extended lips like the wind personification upon an old map. (Mac. 1)

This passage reverberates with meanings which are essential to the over-all vision of the novel. The adjective "magnificent" immediately suggests the biblical connotation of Godhood (which Mitchell reluctantly made explicit in the Preface). The passage also suggests the ability of the imagination to magnify and make

visible (here in the shape of the clouds) an invisible force whether it is God, the wind, or the "feeling" (108). Magnification occurs again when Brian looks at the drop on the spirea leaf. The personification of wind is appropriate to the point of view of a young child who animates the world around him. The reference to an old map underlines the boy's quest to find the 'route' to knowledge, to seeing the wind. Finally, in contrast to the opening paragraph of the moving wind that has brought the drought, this paragraph presents the contrary view of a still, beneficent force.

Wind is always associated with Brian's holy-whole "feeling." Mitchell impressionistically establishes the spiritual quality of Brian's first feeling (initiated by his visit to the Church and culminating on the prairie) through the accumulaton of wind-light-dark patterns. Although other wind passages were retained in these final pages to Chapter One, none so clearly expresses, as does the following example, the sanctity of the wind and the natural world:

> Past hollyhocks' tall spires swaying in the light wind with clock faces tilted towards them, the boys went to the front of the Sherry house. They walked down the boulevard through dry and rustling grass. (Mac. 8)

The wind suggests the immortality of the natural world, yet the clock face hints at mortality. The choice of "spires" to describe the hollyhock (in itself evoking the word holy) is carefully deliberate and many such religious overtones are used throughout the novel to ironically juxtapose the spiritual natural world and the spiritless institutionalized Church. Fox-tails are "haloed" (Weeks wanted this removed) and the gopher watches from its "pulpit" (11). Another deleted passage, as Brian and his friend try to make angel wings, and "the late morning sun limned the swaying heads of fox-tails with light, and gave to the ribboning grasses a watering glint" (Mac. 32), again reveals the spiritual in the natural world and in the children themselves.

The key sentence of this first chapter, if not the master key to all of the wind-light-dark patterns in the novel, was cut by Weeks: "Half aware of the shuttering effect of trees' shadows, Brian walked back towards his home, from bright sunlight to broken shadow and back to light again" (Mac. 12). The alternating light and dark produced by the wind parallels Brian's spiritual quest from the brightness of innocence, through darkness and doubt, to the new light of mature knowledge. In the last two pages of this chapter, the "shuttering effect" is echoed and re-echoed: the dragonfly shimmers, the hawk passes its shadow over the prairie, the clouds break suddenly to reveal a "blue well shot with sunlight," a butterfly goes "pelting past," the Young Ben silently, mysteriously appears then disappears, and the "prairie itself was breathing in long gusting breaths" (this last deleted [Mac. 13]). However, the resonance of these is lost unless the key note is struck.

Like the wind with its contrary voices, light and dark images balance one another. Even in Brian's most intense moments when radiance and clarity predominate,

shadow and the ephemeral, shuttering effect are present. Juxtaposed to Brian's holy "feeling" when he sees the drop on the spirea leaf is his "nonfeeling" in Church when he searches vainly for a recurrence of this mystic moment. Weeks deleted nearly a page here which emphasizes the other side, the dark and indeterminate aspect of Brian's quest. These passages stress Brian's separation rather than his wholeness. In Church he feels only "a deeper darkness, a phantom shadow high under the vaulting roof" (Mac. 132); he has to leave the congregation to attend Sunday school in the basement ("downstairs for the kids . . . upstairs for the people") and wonders, "Was this the house of God too?"; when he looks at the spirea outside the Church, "*Their* leaves were quite dry" (Mac. 133).

The "shuttering effect" of light and dark, of revelation and obscurity, is perfectly represented by the effect of lightning and the Northern Lights. The description on the novel's final page of the tinting green light "dying here" being "reborn over there" (300), which so aptly suggests the rhythm of the seasons, would be more memorable had an earlier reference to the Northern Light been left in. On Christmas Eve, too excited to sleep, Brian looks out the window and sees the Northern Lights. The Lights suggest the (w)holiness of both the religious occasion and the more profane excitement accompanying his anticipation of receiving the skates:

> The street light outside was starred in the clear winter night; it made him think of the Star of the East and men on camels. Over the house across the street he could see the Northern Lights in a curtain shifting delicately, tinting green, fluted and rippling, with here and there a pale blush of pink. He watched them melt and reappear against the sky. (Mac. 176)

This passage also subtly foreshadows Brian's emotional shift as overwhelming excitement melts into bitter disappointment when he receives bob-skates rather than grown-up tube skates.

Similarly, when Brian invents R. W. God, his senses are heightened by the shimmering effect of light on the carpet created by the bevelled glass window, an effect that recalls the Northern Lights. Added to the impact of the light on his imagination is the shuttering effect of "the sound of the sewing machine [which] strengthened and weakened" (Mac. 38). In fact, in the original scene which is a prelude to a highly creative moment, all Brian's senses are engaged, but Weeks deleted nearly 100 words here that describe Brian's awareness of sound, smell, and colour.

Lightning, too, is used to highlight a moment of insight. One such occurrence (60) is at the end of Part I with the burial of the pigeon. Mitchell successfully argued the re-instatement of that paragraph, but not this one: "With a sudden flash of insight that sometimes comes to children, like summer lightning winking up the prairie's rim, he knew why Ab had never asked Annie to marry him" (Mac. 259).

ARGUING AGAINST ALL THESE DELETIONS, Mitchell wrote to Weeks, "I have worked hard for a quality of dualism" (Jan. 26, 1946). Nowhere had he worked harder for this than in the night scene (233-37) from which Weeks requested cuts of more than 300 words, and in the final two pages of the novel which Weeks wanted removed entirely. As the wind motif was so thematically tied to other aspects of this quality of dualism, Weeks was disrupting more than he realized. Integral to the wind pattern was the town-prairie dichotomy, the human community contradicting the lonely prairie voice, the transiency of man's life posed against the eternity of the prairie. Mitchell knew that extensive cuts to these two major portions, one the climax, the other the ending to the novel, would severely damage what he wanted to say.

The patterning of this dualism was vital in the night scene to underscore Brian's near loss of his own psychological balance. This section not only foreshadows the father's death, but suggests impressionistically the death of Brian's child-self and his passage through an experience of "apartness" (237) and "nakedness" (236). However, there are glimpses of light reflecting the emergence of a new perspective for Brian.

About 200 words were cut from these four pages. Mitchell, rather sarcastically, insisted on the re-instatement of two paragraphs which referred to the wind's "two voices" (235) and to Brian being "drained of his very self" (236):

> This is the wind again. The significance is that of an omen. I believe Shakespeare used them. The boy's father is being taken from him. Perhaps I don't achieve what I hope to with this sort of thing, then again I'm afraid I'm being obvious. (Sept. 1, 1946)

However, he did lose these following passages which emphasize Brian's crisis of alienation: his rejection of the human community ("They didn't have any right to boss him around the way they'd been doing" [Mac. 268]); his overwhelming feeling of insignificance amid the prairie which is silent except for the inhuman "twanging wind," the "rasping of grasshoppers," the squeak of a gopher, "questioningly — senselessly" (Mac. 269); and his frightening awareness of being alone, "as utterly alone as it is possible to be only upon prairie. The word, eternity, had grown in his mind, a word which had often fascinated him as he listened to Mr. Powelly's sermons" (Mac. 270).

The chapter ends on a tragic note with Ab's announcement, "Yer Paw down to Rochester — he went an' died" (237), a statement that Weeks thought was too abrupt. Here again Mitchell and Weeks were aesthetically opposed; Weeks wanted more explanatory dialogue, but Mitchell argued, again, that event and image would reveal meaning:

> This is what Ab would say. I have tried to say more in the preceding night scene. . . . I don't think that Ab or I should say anything more. (Jan. 27, 1946)

However, there are glimpses, as in the last few pages of the novel, of a balance to this darkness and death. Brian experiences a "singing return of the feeling" as the "sun exploded softly over the prairie's eastern edge" (237). But, other hints that Mitchell used throughout the scene to build up to this moment and to counterbalance the ominous note are omitted; at first the stooks are seen at the close of day, "their pattern shifting and changing" (Mac. 268); the wind was "twanging the telephone wires, gently so" and is a "dancing funnel" (Mac. 269); the vastness is described not only as "frightening emptiness" (235) but as "grandeur" (Mac. 270); and the "sliver moon now rising had the faintly pencilled outline of the old moon drawn from tip to tip" (Mac. 270).

These counterposed notes finally strike a chord in the last two to three pages of the novel. When Weeks suggested that the novel end with Digby's remark, "'Perhaps,' said Digby to Brian, 'you've grown up'" (297), Mitchell knew that Weeks had missed the extra-literal significance of the wind. Little wonder that Weeks at first disapproved of the title! He had missed, as well, the true meaning of Brian's maturity which does not rest with the occupation he chooses, as Weeks felt, but with how he 'sees' his world. There was to be no compromise on these last two pages. Mitchell knew intuitively and critically that the novel must end with the wind, not Brian: "This is a story of a boy *and* the wind" (Preface; emphasis mine) and the wind would be there at the last in all its voices.

It is incredible perhaps to suggest that the removal of twenty-odd passages and particularly the deletion of the "shuttering effect" sentence can produce such a drastic alteration in tone, mood, and ultimately theme; Mitchell believed it had. While this novel is indeed a celebration of life, it is a celebration of light and dark, clarity and obscurity and the continual quest for meaning. Mitchell felt that Weeks was skewing the balance by deleting the darker descriptions. He writes that, by the "recapitulation of the death theme," through words which suggest no answers such as "seeking, truant" (on the final page), and by showing "the transiency of man's days," he had hoped to create a tone akin to that of Conrad and Hardy (Jan. 26, 1946). Philosophically Mitchell and Weeks were at odds. Like Hardy and Conrad, Mitchell saw man as vulnerable, playing his life out against the vast, incomprehensible universe. Weeks, on the other hand, wanted Brian, alone, to be centre stage, and the ending to be "free and clear" (Dec. 6, 1945). He preferred a more upbeat tone to the novel, ending with Brian, the "comic" hero whose happy future would be firmly spelled out. But the darker note is clearly present in Mitchell's vision and is a note struck right from the beginning in the epigraph to the novel taken from Psalm 103:15-16:

> As for man, his days are as grass: as a
> flower of the field, so he flourisheth.
> For the wind passeth over it, and it is gone;
> and the place thereof shall know it no more.

Mitchell's vision contains, consistently, this strong minor note. Weeks's deletions have the effect of transposing this symphonic novel into an essentially major key.

As with the wind motif, Weeks requested a more clearly defined and realistic treatment of the Young Ben and Brian. He wanted to remove the mysterious, the extraordinary aspects to their characters, and he asked Mitchell to clean up Brian's more aggressive and earthy responses.

Mitchell wanted the Young Ben's presence to be as elusive and powerful as the wind. Although the Young Ben is, of course, a very real country boy, we see him through Brian's imagination as more of a supernatural being, the prairie incarnate. The first description of him at the end of Chapter One and Brian's first words to him, "This is your prairie" (12), give to the Young Ben this supernatural quality. Weeks commented: "Young Ben is too much a spectre, implausible, [*sic*] Make him a real boy here" (Dec. 6, 1945), and Mitchell retorted: "The making of the Young Ben a spectre is deliberate. It is as Brian sees him; he is a creature of the prairie and part of its magic" (Jan. 27, 1945). Mitchell did not alter his view of the Young Ben although he did agree to remove two seemingly redundant lines:

> The boy continued to stare at him.
> "It's your prairie," Brian said, "isn't it?" (Mac. 13)

Emphasizing through repetition the Young Ben's silent stare enhances his mysterious nature, but it does more; it is his silence that causes Brian to rephrase his original statement in the form of a question which clearly echoes the ambivalence of the question/statement title of the novel and the paradoxical interplay in the final five pages of Brian's questioning (298), his statement, "he would know" (299), and the prairie's final *quest*ion-answer.

The relationship between the two boys was extraordinary as well and very delicately, sparingly suggested. In a deleted passage Brian sees himself in the same terms as the Young Ben: "I'm a prairie boy — aren't I?" (Mac. 48) he asks his father. Mitchell in fact refers to the Young Ben as Brian's "alter-ego" (Jan. 26, 1946). Salter encouraged this relationship pointing out that "Brian *understands* the young Ben in a way that children often do . . . understand things that are too profound and complicated for their elders" (June 27, 1945).

In the end Mitchell lost five references to the relationship between the Young Ben and Brian (Mac. 13, 23, 48, 103, 118). One of these (Mac. 23) was an unfortunate loss because of its integral connection to the wind-light-dark motif. In fact, Weeks, at the galley stage, requested all references to the Young Ben to be cut from this scene. Brian, alone in his room, is feeling neglected because his parents are preoccupied with the very ill Bobbie, and he is frightened by the rising wind noises. He tries to find comfort in the memory of his first encounter with the Young Ben, but it is elusive and goes, "glimmering away as a reflection in water disappears when wind ruffles the surface" (Mac. 23). The reflection image suggests the alter-

ego role of the Young Ben, and the wind and "glimmering" repeat the shuttering light pattern; Brian's relationship with the Young Ben is as tenuous and intuitive as his understanding of the "feeling" produced by the wind. Mitchell lost the above lines but retained at least the mention of the Young Ben in this scene. In answering Weeks on this issue he indicates the significance of the relationship:

> On reading the galley I was struck by the fact that the Young Ben-Brian relationship did not stand out as I had intended it to. It is a delicate thing . . . but with all the deletions of the Young Ben references between Chapter One and Chapter Seven, it would take a very sensitive reader to recognize the wraith of the last chapter as the boy Brian met on the prairie in the first chapter. These references to the Young Ben should go back in. (Sept. 1, 1946)

He insisted that the appearance of the Young Ben be retained in two other scenes as well (24, 43).

IT IS, HOWEVER, the character of Brian that is most weakened by the cuts. These occur primarily in the first part of the novel and deal largely with Brian's inner world and his creation of R. W. God. Of course, the relationship with the Young Ben is indicative of Brian's imaginative response to the mysteries of life, and quite clearly Mitchell wanted to deal with the inner world of his main character to show the characteristics of visionary sight. "Seeing" is "feeling" in Mitchell's vision; the world is a subjective reality as Digby points out.

As with the wind motif, Weeks and Mitchell had dramatically different visions of Brian and his imaginary world. Specifically, Weeks objected to Brian's creation of R. W. God. In fact, Cloud notes in a rough draft of editors' remarks that Weeks found the humanizing of God (references to God in the bathroom and the use of the initials R. W.) so offensive (changed to "cute" when he writes to Mitchell) he wanted them dropped. Cloud suggested re-writing these scenes (Mac. 9-48) from Gerald O'Connal's point of view (Dec. 6, 1945) to avoid the problem. Weeks and Cloud showed here their lack of awareness of the psychology of the real child; ironically, Weeks suggested a "punishment" scene with Brian "sent sobbing to his hide-out" and a Christmas scene to add some "verity" to Brian's childhood (Dec. 6, 1945). In this confrontation Mitchell retained R. W., the references to the bathroom, and God's belching, and he agreed to write a Christmas scene, but, in the bargain, he did lose over forty passages dealing with Brian's inner world.

Along with his disapproval of R. W., Weeks also disliked Brian's aggressive behaviour. Weeks found Brian "too fantastic," not real enough. He wrote, "Brian's development troubles me throughout the first hundred pages. . . . at the beginning his feet must be planted on the earth" (Dec. 6, 1945). Quite the contrary, Brian is a very real child. Without going into any detailed biography, it should be noted that,

at the time, Mitchell was studying Psychology for an Education course at the University of Alberta, was reading Jean Piaget's work on child behaviour, spent some time eavesdropping on children at play and recording their conversations, and was making notes on memories of his own childhood. Brian is neither too intellectually adult, too sweetly childish, nor too cutely vulgar.

Weeks remarked that Brian was too "precocious," independent, original, too "cute" (Dec. 6, 1945); Mitchell counters by writing that Brian is to be "self-willed and independent" and that "Brian's frankness and bluntness are part of his character; they belong generally to his age; he comes by them honestly through his mother, grandmother, Sean" (Jan. 27, 1946). A closer look at a representative selection of the cuts will illustrate that Mitchell compromised a great deal here.

In the beginning two or three pages there were originally more details about Brian's fantasies. Brian imagined driving two horses (Jake Harris's fire wagon horses) which leapt from his clothes closet propelled by orange pop that fizzed all the way down to their stomachs (Mac. 3). We are told, a bit later, that this 'imaginative' child had placed Bobbie in the dumb-waiter which got stuck leaving "his brother half-way up the dark shaft, suspended over the soft water cistern" (Mac. 41). Mitchell was also requested to cut some of the more violent passages in which Brian *delights* in imaginatively punishing his grandmother for ignoring him while Bobbie is sick:

> His grandmother had no colour in her hair, he thought, as he gripped the shovel more tightly and with both hands so that he could hit the sand with greater force. As the shovel rose and fell, he made thunder in the back of his throat; hot fire, he decided, was coming from his nose, and eyes, and ears, and mouth. (Mac. 4-5)

Mitchell convincingly follows the child's mind in this sequence showing the free association that his senses make between the colour of sand and the colour of his grandmother's hair. The fantasy of himself as a beast of revenge is probably a mental association of Jake Harris's horses, fairy tale dragons and the abstract notion of a revengeful God instilled through his Presbyterian heritage.

Weeks also thought it offensive and irreverent to have God wading through "His prairie of oatmeal porridge" (Mac. 24) or have him, not just kick Artie once, but "drownd [*sic*] him too" (Mac. 38) and kick him again. Half a page of dialogue is removed in which God describes to Brian how He has fun bouncing on the clouds and how He travels by vacuum cleaner or piggyback by angel (Mac. 39). Brian plays store with God (who, like Brian's father, owns a pharmacy) and sells him toothpaste, toilet paper, and soda for the gas on his stomach (Mac. 40).

Again, this accumulation of detail shows how clearly Mitchell was aware of the imaginative workings of a child's mind; R. W. God takes on the characteristics of the most significant figures in Brian's world, the family members — the grandmother who belches, Uncle Sean who, although not a sheepherder, raises calves, and his father who recites "Casey at the Bat." Through fantasy, Brian attempts to

cope with the disappointments, fears, and injustices of the real world, just as Uncle Sean does with his story of the County Down little man or as his grandmother does with her tall tales about her homesteading years.

Unfortunately, most of Brian's imitations of Sean's language and manner have been deleted. He tells Forbsie that his Uncle Sean is "all the time talking goddam" (Mac. 6), which in his mind means that Sean knows God very well. At the dinner table when asked to eat his carrots, he replies, "Carrots are bloody" (Mac. 42), an expression his father thinks he has picked up from Sean. Once, he cheekily argues with his grandmother (Mac. 51) just as Uncle Sean does. By removing these more aggressive traits of Brian, the editor removed the Sean-like side of Brian's character, the active side of a predominantly reflective spirit. Furthermore, Weeks projected his own puritanical inclinations on the character of Brian and envisioned Brian's quest as a one-sided "search for that clean-washed, tremulous inner feeling" (Dec. 6, 1945). Ironically, he attempted and partially succeeded in reducing not the unbelievably fantastic but the psychologically real side of a young boy's character.

Right from the beginning of the confrontation between Mitchell and Weeks, Salter had urged Mitchell to defend his work critically and confidently: "you've got to become a critic yourself, and you've got to be able to follow up a suggestion or turn it down; you can't afford to have other people playing tricks with your future and your reputation, making you — let us say — merely popular and cheap when you want to be something else" (Dec. 29, 1945). Clearly, over the next nine months, Mitchell learned to deal objectively with criticism. Although, in the end, he had to compromise on many points against his own aesthetic judgement, and the Little, Brown version suffers as a result, he did not cheapen his work and certainly underwent a worthwhile initiation into the other side of authorship — the editorial process.

In summary, then, the longer Macmillan edition is superior to the American shorter version. Ideological differences, no doubt, accounted for the different visions of this novel held by Mitchell and Weeks. Weeks is urban eastern American; Mitchell is rural western Canadian. Although Weeks wanted the spice of a foreign, uncultivated (perhaps he was thinking uncultured) region, it was to be tamed to *Atlantic*'s eastern sophistication and decorousness. In his first letter to Mitchell he wrote, "it is exciting" to publish a man who writes about "a region so remote and little known as yours" (Dec. 6, 1945). Mitchell, however, was not an unsophisticate; while he wanted to faithfully recreate the prairies as he knew them, he also had something to say via the landscape. The long and short of it is that Weeks wanted a "clean-washed" Brian and a "free and clear" (Dec. 6, 1945) answer presented at the end of this novel; Mitchell refused to present anything short of the truth: a dual-natured character and theme, and an ambivalent, never-ending quest.

It is abundantly clear, from an analysis of Mitchell's correspondence dealing with the discrepancies between the two versions, that he is a consummate craftsman

who intelligently evaluated his own work. Mitchell had been well tested in his apprenticeship by both Salter and Weeks, his two chief critics. In the end they both had praise for his editorial skills. Just after Mitchell took his firm position regarding the ending to *Wind*, Salter wrote in admiration: "You might be granted your degree and graduate into the world of authorship. I cannot see that I can be of any further value to you; you are beyond the pupil stage" (Dec. 29, 1945). The world of authorship extended well beyond the writing of the novel into the extrinsic areas of criticism and marketing. And, in spite of the arguments, Weeks, too, thought Mitchell had proved himself admirably: "It is always a source of satisfaction to watch a narrator develop and defend the validity of his work . . . and to say that is to give you honest praise" (March 1, 1946).

NOTES

[1] W. O. Mitchell, *Who Has Seen the Wind* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1947).

[2] Mitchell, *Who Has Seen the Wind* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1947). All passages to be found *only* in the longer Macmillan first edition will be cited parenthetically (Mac. page number) following the quotation. This will indicate a passage deleted by Weeks.

[3] The subsequent editions of *Who Has Seen the Wind* are (1) Macmillan of Canada, 1960, with study material by Ruth Godwin; (2) Macmillan of Canada, 1960; (3) Macmillan of Canada, St. Martin's Classic, 1971; (4) Macmillan of Canada, Laurentian Library, 1972; (5) *Qui a vu le vent,* trans. Arlette Francière, Montréal, Cercle du livre de France, 1974; (6) Macmillan of Canada, 1976, illus. William Kurelek; (7) Canongate Publishing Ltd., Edinburgh, 1980; (8) McClelland and Stewart–Bantam Ltd., 1982.

[4] Mitchell, *Who Has Seen the Wind* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart–Bantam Ltd., 1984), copyright page.

[5] Mitchell, *Macmillan Archive* (Hamilton: McMaster Univ. Library), Oct. 28, 1946.

[6] F. M. Salter, *W. O. Mitchell Papers* (Calgary: Univ. of Calgary Special Collections), May 5, 1945. All subsequent letters from Salter are to be found in this Collection and will be referred to parenthetically by date only.

[7] Dudley Cloud, *Atlantic Monthly*/Mitchell correspondence (courtesy of Weeks), Sept. 21, 1945. Henceforth, Cloud's letters will be referred to parenthetically by date only.

[8] Edward Weeks, *Atlantic Monthly*/Mitchell correspondence (courtesy of Weeks), Dec. 6, 1945. Henceforth, Weeks's letters will be referred to parenthetically by date only.

[9] In conversation with W. O. Mitchell, Oct. 14, 1985.

# JIMMY'S DAUGHTER

*Brian Rusted*

There were whales across the bay
the day I left;
Jimmy's daughter at the mailbox,
in her father's truck,
the motor running.
I saw the blue exhaust
shut the house,
let the whale sounds
reach me in the garden.

Waiting for the cheques or something,
I surprised her driving by.
Jimmy's daughter's eyes caught naked.
She looked away across the bay.
All winter we'd kept her mother
from napping on the couch.

An hour west, I sacrificed a tire.
Slashed right through,
without a cry or quiver.
Wade laughed when I reached the gasbar.
He's seen others try to leave.
"No good," he says,
meaning I need another spare.

Wade called Jerry at the Texaco
but he didn't have the size.
Maybe Don over at the Firestone.
"I know he's home.
I just seen his wife
drive by for church."

He was and left his supper
to tear my tire off the rim.
Don made sure it joined
the others that'd tried to leave.
A small oblation to the terror.

Behind me things make sense again,
Jimmy's got the truck,
his daughter cashed the cheques,
her mother's napping on the couch.

Driving is the easy part.
It means I've left.
The house is shut,
I latched the garden gate.
But there are whales across the bay.
Thay chant louder now,
tear me off the rim.
My name they chant
and are waiting for me still.

# MIDDLE APRIL

*Naomi Rachel*

The Chinese goose is talking in her sleep, walking the ducks.
Herding them to and fro, their protests muffled by the shallow
breath of fatigue.
Her vocal dissatisfaction, constant.
She has no mate.
The moon is full.

Abed, listening, I recall last Winter.
November through February, the long season, the slow
re-reading of the works of George Eliot.
Her land: farms, estates, affections in the dependent clause.
Silas, Adam, Dorothea, Daniel.
A liturgy of violence repressed.

At last it is April on our farm.
The apple budwood has leafed, the pears are in bloom.
Brushed greenings on the fir seedlings.
The first curled sprouts from vegetable pods and flower seeds.
Their leaves grub white as they just appear through the black earth,
the push of life.

# HOW "THE STUDHORSE MAN" MAKES LOVE

## *A Post-Feminist Analysis*

*Susan Rudy Dorscht*

ROBERT KROETSCH IS A WRITER who "effs" the ineffable. He "screws up" or parodies our attempts to speak (of) a transcendental signified. He defers the possibility of the word being made flesh (except, possibly, horse/whore's flesh). He plays "on the edge of convention," takes the risk of "falling right into language," and effects a kind of "erasure of self" in his fiction-making (*Labyrinths of Voice*, 50). In the language of deconstructive theory, Kroetsch's writing undermines the Western philosophical discourse — the metaphysics of presence — which has defined our binary notions of male and female, presence and absence, meaning and non-meaning. Kroetsch as the bisexual self "he/she" (Kroetsch, "Effing the Ineffable," 23) speaks of/for the plurality of identity, textuality, and meaning.

Frank Davey argues that Kroetsch's "interest in Derridian deconstruction and archaeological approaches to the past rests squarely on this distrust of meaning" (9). But I would argue that his "distrust of meaning" signals another philosophical/critical moment in a Kroetschian text — a moment which I would like to speak of as not simply post-structuralist but also as post-feminist. To consider this issue, I will read one of Kroetsch's relatively early novels, *The Studhorse Man*, as a post-feminist text, both, and perversely, because its title so obviously places it outside the realm of the feminine and because some of its content — if considered apart from how the narrative produces meaning, or not — seems to be what essentialist feminists speak of as "sexist." I will begin with a brief outline of what I consider to be the initial theoretical/textual issues in a post-feminist analysis. I will then consider the text of *The Studhorse Man* in light of what it has to say and, significantly, what it does not say, and, therefore, is paradoxically able to assert, about the possibilities of meaning and sexual identity.

In order to speak of a post-feminist literary theory, we should be aware of what feminist literary theory means and has meant. French psychoanalyst Julia Kristeva sees the feminist struggle as occurring on three distinct but interrelated levels. In North America we are most familiar with the first level — the liberal feminist

struggle for equal access to the symbolic order (Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics*, 12). In feminist literary criticism, this aspect of feminist theory insists either that male texts — by which these feminists mean texts written by biological men — be scrutinized for their inherent sexism, or that female texts — that is, texts written by biological women — be recognized, included, and valued within the canon.

The second level of the feminist struggle is more radical; it rejects the entire male symbolic order in the name of difference. The paradox that exists within radical feminist writing rests on the notions of femininity as an essential difference and of female writing as a writing of the body. Although the "feminine" is valorized, it remains an unquestioned, indeed unquestionable, commodity, and so perpetuates the patriarchal myth that anatomy is destiny, that identity is a pre-cultural essence. This paradoxical affirmation and deconstruction of the feminine is evident in the work of a number of French feminist writers, including Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray pointing already towards the third level in the feminist struggle, a level which I am speaking of as post-feminist.

A post-feminist theory both breaks from and yet remains a part of the first two levels of the feminist struggle. It becomes a possible alternative only when we recognize that the dichotomy between male and female is a metaphysical one, based on the ideal of pure (male) self-presence upon which a phallogocentric world depends, and must therefore be rejected. Hélène Cixous has described *feminine writing* or, if I can carefully use the words "feminist" texts, as those which, as Toril Moi summarizes, "'work on the difference' . . . struggle to undermine the dominant phallogocentric logic, split open the closure of the binary opposition and revel in the pleasures of open-ended textuality" (108). This definition itself points beyond the radical feminist struggle merely to point out female difference and towards the post-feminist struggle to undermine binary oppositions.

Although Kroetsch recognizes that tradititonally we have "conceived of external space as male, internal space as female. More precisely, the penis: external, expandable, expendable; the vagina: internal, eternal," his reading of the sexual/textual politics between male and female overturns these phallogocentric assumptions:

> The maleness verges on mere absence. The femaleness verges on mystery: it is a space that is not a space. External space is the silence that needs to speak, or that needs to be spoken. It is male. The having spoken is the book. It is female. It is closed. (Kroetsch, "The Fear of Women in Prairie Fiction," 47)

This positing of the male as "mere absence" itself undermines the metaphysics of presence which insists that the male is self-present, the female an/other absence. His definition of the female is equally provocative. If the female is "the having spoken," "the book," "she" is both closed and open. She is, as Kroetsch says, "a space that is not a space." Like the text, she is endlessly misreadable, unfixable, plural. The pleasures of textuality and sexuality are thus interchangeable, spoken,

as I will argue that they are in *The Studhorse Man*, with/in a common language.

The following scene, in which Hazard seeks to describe the breasts of one P. Cockburn, serves as a textual springboard for this kind of discussion:

> This P. Cockburn, he announced, was a shade wrung in the withers, which I take it meant she was showing signs of her age and was therefore older than Martha. But, he went on, her tits were like nothing so much as two great speckled eggs of a rare wild bird. And having said this . . . he fell to musing about eggs of various birds, hoping to find a comparison that might be for me illuminating. (35)

At its first level, a feminist analysis would criticize this passage for its fragmentation of the woman's body, for the male appropriation of power over her through naming. But I find it more intriguing to look at the way the stable, male self is here undermined by his own speaking. In this passage and in the paragraphs that follow, Demeter is attempting to present Hazard as attempting to present an "argument" (36). He (Demeter? Hazard?) proceeds from metaphor to metaphor, searching for a way to make the absent breast present. But to no end. His "reader" does not understand his metaphors, has not seen the "real" signifiers which Hazard/Demeter attempts to fix to the absent signified. The more Hazard speaks, the less Demeter understands. In attempting to speak one always says other than what one means. A later reference to a lover telling his beloved that her breasts are "like great speckled—" (50) reinforces the notion that Kroetsch is parodying the male conventions which fetishize women's body parts by pointing out that the only real fetish is metaphor.

WE CAN ALREADY BEGIN TO SEE the ways in which sexual/textual identity is played with in *The Studhorse Man*. Indeed, this piece of writing argues that it is impossible to fix sexual identity. If the categories of male and female are undermined, it becomes equally impossible to speak simply of a piece of writing as being "sexist." The larger post-feminist issue that the text addresses involves the question, how is sexual identity constituted? As Toril Moi points out,

> the attempt to *fix* meaning is always, in part, doomed to failure, for it is of the nature of meaning to be always already elsewhere. As Bertolt Brecht puts it in *Mann ist Mann*: "When you name yourself, you always name another." (160)

To speak of a piece of writing as sexist is to dwell in the realm of essentialist feminism, where it is a given that there is an essential difference between male and female, that the signifier is riveted to the signified, that singular meaning is not only possible, it is inevitable. But the Kroetschian text always undermines such assumptions.

Think of the failed disseminator Hazard Lepage. Like Demeter, who is always searching for, and wondering/wandering over, the "proper name" ("The mind

wanders. What a strange expression" [135], he writes, for example), Hazard too has a "certain flourish with names" (72). As Demeter recognizes, "in the act of naming we distinguish ourselves from the other unfortunate animals with whom we share this planet. They seem under no necessity to deny the fact that we are all, so to speak, one — that each of us is, possibly, everyone else" (119). Like Brecht, Kroetsch is asserting that the self is always already elsewhere; when I say "I," I speak an/other's name.

As I have been arguing then, the struggle in Kroetsch's texts is always a struggle to break down these oppositions between masculinity and feminity, indeed, the opposition between self and other, and so to engage in a post-feminist manoeuvre which questions the notion of identity itself. When, in *The Studhorse Man*, the metaphor of sex "uneasily intrudes" ("The Fear of Women in Prairie Fiction," 47), it speaks to both the questions of human-sexual identity and to human-textual identity. When we ask, as Kroetsch does in "Fear of Women," "how do you make love in a new country?" we are also asking "how do you write in a new country?" because "one way to make love is by writing" (Kroetsch, "On Being an Alberta Writer," 70). For Kroetsch, "making love" is a textual occurrence: "without writing, I sometimes suspect, there would be no such thing as love" ("Alberta Writer," 70). The question follows, how does *The Studhorse Man* make love? How is s/he/it written/spoken? What is (not) said?

Although it seems almost too obvious to speak of, we must continue to remind ourselves that all of the sexual encounters described in the book are Demeter's reconstruction of Hazard's narrative accounts. Demeter never lets us forget the writtenness of the book. Phrases like "(I prefer the archaic spelling)" (63), "In a chapter that was seized by one of my doctors, I discuss at some length" (98), or "I too would like the preceding chapter to be more explicit" (144) insist that we recognize the narrative context of the narrative:

> I too get dressed up — by taking off my clothes. Sometimes of a morning I fold a three-by-five card into a little triangular hat and set it squarely on my perky fellow's noggin and pirates we sail here together in my bathtub, our cargo the leatherbound books and the yellow scribblers, the crumbling newspaper clippings and the envelopes with their cancelled stamps and the packs of note-cards that make up the booty of our daring. (39)

If this passage does not parody the link between the power of the phallus and the power of the pen I don't know what would. Even Demeter's name undermines the kind of cocksure identity which would have to be posited for the power of the male gaze to be effected.

Initially, it is not Demeter Proudfoot, but an unidentified narrative "I" who introduces our hero, Hazard Lepage. Hazard's name, too, indicates a lack of fixed identity. Although Hazard is (by chance, ha) the man of the "page," by the end of the text, "he" is also the "I" of the voice, of the narrator's voice. Hazard both

is, and is not, himself. The "I" of Demeter Proudfoot assumes Hazard's identity: "I was D. Proudfoot, Studhorse Man" (156). Demeter/Hazard signifies a slippage in sexual/textual identity and stands as *the* post-feminist, deconstructive figure: s/he is "one" whose identity is plural, whose occupation it is to disseminate meaning — "I am breeding the perfect horse" (*Studhorse Man*, 20) — in a world where meaning seeks to be fixed: "Whoever thought . . . that screwing would go out of style?" (11).

Demeter Proudfoot is and is not both male and female, writer and hero, present and absent. In *Labyrinths of Voice*, Shirley Neuman argues that

> the telling of a particular myth in a Kroetsch novel then must be analogous to the act of deconstructing myth itself. It would not be unlike the turning of a particular myth, say the quest myth, into the activity of the writer: the activity of Demeter, rather than the activity of Hazard Lepage. (96)

But the activity of Demeter is not only the activity of the writer, it is also the activity of the "woman" — both literally ("Forgive my misfortune — my dear mother, pretending to knowledge and believing Demeter to be a masculine name, affixed it to my birth certificate" [64]) and politically (as Luce Irigaray writes, "'She' is indefinitely other in herself. That is undoubtedly the reason she is called temperamental, incomprehensible, perturbed, capricious — not to mention her language in which 'she' goes off in all directions and in which 'he' is unable to discern the coherence of any meaning" [103]).

Like the French feminist concept of the woman as that which is outside the symbolic order, Demeter/Hazard is thus a trickster figure, "He's very subversive, very carnivalesque. Furthermore," Kroetsch writes, "the trickster is often tricked. That intrigues me. I suppose there is a kind of sexual origin in the figure of the trickster — the prick and its vagaries — but at the same time this instills a sense of the absurdity of all sexuality" (*Labyrinths*, 100). Like the writer — like the "woman," metaphorically — the trickster has an irrational, immoral impulse. Like the post-feminist, there is "no logic to his system, only anti-logic" (*Labyrinths*, 99). His/her play is in and of words.

Think of the linguistic battles that are waged in this text around the words pecker/peter/tool/whang/rod/pud. Although they speak of the male organ, the sense is of nonsense, of word-play, of the precariousness of meaning and of its dependence on difference: "You diddly dink. You d—— you d—— you dink. You dick" (43). To attempt to fix meaning is, inevitably, to hesitate, to stutter. Similarly, Hazard's warning of death is a play on words: "*La mer sera votre meurtrière.*" It is a play on words that both kills him and re/places him: Demeter takes up his identity. The "mare/mer" is present both in and as writing and loving: "posse / poesy / pussy" he calls her (11).

Demeter/Hazard is the mad(wo)man — "I am by profession quite out of my

mind" (61). S/he is reconstructing images: "a mirror is so placed above my sink that I have been able to sit for hours, attempting to imagine what in fact did happen (allowing for the reversal of the image) exactly where I imagine it" (85). S/he is writer/hero/storyteller/deconstructer; the one who speaks, and is spoken by, the book. S/he is, finally, the "daughter" who calls herself by a textual name that is not her father's: "D. Lepage, she now calls herself; and she has grown up to be something of a lover of the horse. To that same girl [who exists, obviously, as a difference from herself] I dedicate this portentous volume" (174).

In the end Demeter speaks himself in(to) the feminine because s/he is the bastard daughter of speech (Utter). S/he is the writing that destroys the logocentric ideal of pure self-presence. As writing, she forces us to ask, as the other Demeter had, "Why is the truth never where it should be? Is the truth of the man in the man or in his biography? Is the truth of the beast in the flesh and confusion or in the few skillfully arranged lines?" (134). With the writing of Derrida and Cixous, *The Studhorse Man* recognizes itself as a deconstruction of binary oppositions. The studhorse man is a woman.

To speak of *The Studhorse Man* as a post-feminist text is to ask how it deconstructs those categories which make sexism possible — the categories of the masculine and the feminine. Because the text insists at every turn that we recognize the writtenness and therefore the instability of sexual identity, we must, like the biographer, interpret: "the biographer must naturally record, he must also be interpretative upon occasion" (28). It is up to the reader to play with *The Studhorse Man*, to let slip the notion of sexual identity, to engage in the self-reflexive play and the endlessness of textuality figured in Hazard/Demeter/D. Lepage.

*The Studhorse Man* worries over the end of dissemination, the desire for order in a chaotic world, the need for simplicity in the face of complexity — the issue that speech and writing see "I" to "I" on in this text:

> Scurrilous, barbarous, stinking man would soon be able, in the sterility of his own lust, to screw himself into oblivion, to erase himself like a rotting pestilence from the face of God's creation: Utter and I surely saw eye to eye on that issue. (174)

Sexual desire, procreation, and birth control become metaphors for textual play, dissemination, and the fixing of meaning. In such an homology, the "pill" arrests the plenitude of meaning and becomes a metaphor for the sterilizing of language. It is not in the sterilizing, but in the "teazing" (63) out of the possibilities of multiple sexual subject positions that *The Studhorse Man*'s, and the post-feminist's, hope for the future of human sexual/textual relations lies.

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# FARMING ON WATER

*Roger Nash*

The dipping prow
ploughs clouds
firmly under.
It rocks flocks
of birds into lengthening
furrows of flight.
At river bends,
oar blades
saw whole
reflections of trees
unevenly down,
opening up
clearings for larger
crops of blue.

# AS BIRDS BRING FORTH THE STORY

## *The Elusive Art of Alistair MacLeod*

*Arnold E. Davidson*

EARLY IN "THE CLOSING DOWN OF SUMMER," the first story in *As Birds Bring Forth the Sun*, the narrator conjoins the quality of the local moonshine that he and his fellow miners are consuming on an isolated Cape Breton beach with their coming long, hard drive to Toronto to fly to South Africa, where they will take up again their trade as "perhaps the best crew of shaft and development miners in the world."[1] The alcohol is of the best too. The "purest of moonshine made by [their] relatives back in the hills," it is "impossible to buy" but "comes to [them] only as a gift or in exchange for long-past favours" (14). What is left of the drink, when they finally do embark on their procrastinated departure, will be transferred from the white Javex bottles in which they received it into forty-ounce vodka bottles and will be consumed during the drive. As the narrator comments, "we do not wish to get into the entanglement of moonshine brought across provincial lines and the tedium that accompanies it," but fortunately "the fine for open commercial liquor is under fifteen dollars in most places," and "the transparent vodka bottles both show and keep their simple secret" (15).

I begin with this minor detail in a story of men who, not surprisingly, put off the dark and multiple dangers of the distant mine for the sun and the sand of the local shore because it suggests an apt parable of Alistair MacLeod's overall art of fiction. His short stories, too, characteristically both show and keep their simple secrets — keep them even by the open manner in which they duplicitously show them. Usually a straightforward and often retrospective I-narration setting forth a crucial experience such as dashed hopes, the leaving of home, a family death, or some similar disaster and a consequent recognition that one's sense of self and of life need to be readjusted accordingly, the stories can seem simple and clear in both form (the bottle) and content (the drink). But on closer examination things are not always what they might first seem to be. In brief and as I will subsequently argue more fully, MacLeod's fiction, like all good fiction, demands a careful reading. And a careful reading demonstrates how much his art is a matter of displacement,

substitution, elision, of homey Javex bottles filled with the most potent of moonshine, of one thing passing for something else and passing into something else. It is an art, too, that plumbs depths, that does not stay on the surface and the shore but appropriately requires the reader to take on what we well might call a miner's point of view.[2]

Even the poetically resonant titles of the two stories which MacLeod uses as titles for his two collections of fiction suggest his strategies of displacement, substitution, and elision. "As Birds Bring Forth the Sun," for example, takes its own title from the unlikely premise that predawn avian song serves as a kind of aubade to summon up the sun and then elides that folk belief with an individual family's five generation tradition of the *cù mòr glas a' bhàis*, the big grey dog of death, the ghostly animal whose appearance signifies the eminent demise of some descendant of a man killed by the wild offspring of his own found, lost, and found again great grey dog. Or the earlier "The Lost Salt Gift of Blood" records a father's return to claim his now half-orphaned unacknowledged illegitimate son and his consequent recognition that the best "place" for the boy is his present displacement (from the narrator's point of view) with the dead mother's parents. What is lost is found only to be lost again. And not lost too, as both those losses are transformed into a narrative setting forth the complex logic of a father's legacy of continuing, but now concerned, neglect.

A closer examination of these two stories bears out the implications of their titles. In "As Birds Bring Forth the Sun," to take the shorter work first, the original avatar of the subsequent ghostly canine is described, in the opening paragraphs, as "a sort of staghound from another time" that was "left, when a pup, at the family's gate . . . and no one knew where she had come from" (*As Birds*, 137). There is a double displacement here — the dog from another place and another time — that soon elides into the equally problematic matter of the dog's disappearance, how it reached the isolated island where it bore and raised its six pups which presently kill their master, and how it left that island to enter still "another time" in which it becomes the "spectre" that will appear to "succeeding generations" of the first victim's family as the sign of their impending death.

The first death is itself the consequence of a virtual series of displacements. The dog left at the gate is while "still a small pup . . . run over by the steel wheel of a horse drawn cart" (137). Pressed, broken boned, into the mud, it is lifted up by its new owner and nursed slowly back to health instead of being, "as the more practical members of his family" (138) counselled, put out of its misery. Saved, it grows to immense size, too large to breed naturally, so the man, moved by "the longing of her unfulfilment" and used "to working with the breeding of animals" (139), borrows the biggest male dog he can find and arranges, thanks to a hollow in a rock by the sea and his own assistance, a mating. Then, sometime after the dog has disappeared, he and two of his teenage sons, while fishing at sea, are driven

by a storm to seek shelter behind a small island. The dog appears; the man calls to it; he wades ashore to meet it; it rushes towards him and leaps, as it always did in the past, to put its paws against his shoulders and to lick his face; that leap which on solid land would stagger him backwards is here delivered on the "rolling gravel" of the seashore and knocks him down. "Six more huge gray dogs hurtling down towards the gravelled strand . . . and seeing him stretched prone beneath their mother . . . fell upon him in a fury" (140) and, though soon driven away by their mother, left him mangled and dying.

I have summarized and quoted in some detail to suggest something of the tone and texture of this paradigmatic story but also to set forth the crucial displacements and elisions with which it begins. The originally displaced dog is again displaced. Displaced to the same place to escape an ocean storm, the man re-encounters the dog, whereupon one leap elides into another that again displaces him, knocking him beneath the grown dog that he lifted up and saved as a pup. The dog is then replaced by her grown pups which kill the man who brought them into being by placing their dam and sire so that mating might occur. "The large and gentle man with the smell of animal semen often heavy on his hands" (143) (that detail twice noted in the text) dies with his sons able to do no more for him than "hold his warm and bloodied hands for a few brief moments" before he "slipped away" (another displacement) into death, leaving his survivors and a strange story to be told and retold ("All of his caring for her was recounted over and over and over again and nobody missed any of the ironies" [143]) and then, in part, re-enacted. One of the sons who saw his father die, after a particularly vivid nightmare of the *cù mòr glas a' bhàis*, commits suicide. The other is killed in a drunken fight, a fight "perhaps" precipitated "some say" when he too "saw the *cù mòr glas a' bhàis* or uttered the name" (143) to be "perhaps" misunderstood by a "large grey-haired man" with six similar friends waiting outside. Signs of uncertainty — "perhaps," "some say" — preface the passage describing this third death and what is made of it: "the *cù mòr glas a' bhàis* had come again, said the family, as they tried to piece the tale together" (144). But that first proposition is conclusion, not evidence. It is the consequence of the "tale" having been already pieced together, which sets forth still another crucial displacement and elision. Uncertain event gives way to explanatory story. Story is asserted to become family tradition through retelling. Indeed, we are told immediately after the passage just quoted that "this is how the *cù mòr glas a' bhàis* came into our lives."

The whole narrative itself further attests to the continuing currency of the belief pieced into story. The occasion of its retrospective recounting — "it is obvious that all of this happened a long, long time ago" (144) — is the impending death of another father, and that brings in the final displacements and elisions of this text. Another "large and gentle man" is dying, the great-great-grandson of the original victim. He too is attended by his sons who can do little more than take

"turns holding the hands of the man who gave us life" (146). His six sons partly recapitulate, of course, the two teenage boys who earlier attended their dying father as well as the ten other children not there. But grown and grey, they also evoke the six grey dogs following their mother or the "six other large, grey-haired men who beat [the second son] to death on the cobblestones" (144). "Bound here in our own peculiar mortality," the narrator half acknowledges in the penultimate paragraph of the story, "we do not want to hear the voice of our father, as did those other sons, calling down his own particular death upon him" (146). But they too are themselves the sign they would not see, just as is the October rain in which the story begins with the saving of a dog and ends, generations later, with the impending death of another father.

"THE LOST SALT GIFT OF BLOOD" is in some ways a simpler story in that the issues are rather clearer to the narrator even from the very beginning of his tale, which itself begins with him "at the final road's end of my twenty-five-hundred-mile journey" (*Lost Salt Gift*, 67). At a small fishing village on the coast of Newfoundland, figuratively and literally at his road's end, he well realizes he might best get into his car and return to the midwest heartland from which he came. From which he twice came, for this is the second visit, and as the second visit stands in for the first the narrator himself draws the significant parallels. In awkward silence, unable to speak his present purpose, he helps himself to his host's smuggled rum and then notes the large implications of that minor action: "Not waiting this time for the courtesy of his offer. Making myself perhaps too much at home with this man's glass and this man's rum and this man's house and all the feelings of his love. Even as I did before" (81). Previously he had helped himself to this man's daughter, a daughter now dead who has left her — and his — illegitimate son.

He had been a bright young graduate student collecting folk songs and folk beliefs. She had apparently believed what he collected (a folk way of recognizing one's "own true lover" is provided in the text) yet was obviously left to another fate (two traditional songs, one on faithless male lovers and the other on the eternal separation of lovers through the young woman's death, are also appropriately provided). Although he supposedly has come back to claim his son, he knows, from the very beginning, just how insubstantial that claim is. And then he is further put off from his ostensible purpose by recognizing how naturally the boy fits into his present setting, by seeing how close he is to his grandparents, by hearing the grandfather tell of the one unsuccessful attempt to send the boy to his mother and her new husband in Toronto, by hearing from the child himself how little the city had

to offer him (only the gulls flying over the harbour), by noting in the grandfather's account of this separation ("Nigh sick unto our hearts we was" [79]) a love the father cannot even voice to himself, and by seeing how much his son has become the son of the grandparents, the son they never had. He also realizes how little he has to offer: "Come away from the lonely gulls and the silver trout and I will take you to the land of the Tastee Freeze where you may sleep till ten of nine. And I will show you the elevator to the apartment on the sixteenth floor and introduce you to the buzzer system and the yards of wrought-iron fences where the Doberman pinscher runs silently at night" (83). He realizes, too, that perhaps he came not even to offer that but to offer himself the vision of what might have been. "Again I collect dreams. For I do not know enough of the fog on Toronto's Queen St. West and the grinding crash of the pickup [the accident that killed the mother] and of lost and misplaced love" (83-84). Displaced himself a second time from the "heartland" of his unsatisfying existence, and recognizing himself the figurative depth of that displacement, he will not finally be party to a second displacement for his son and at the end of the story tacitly withdraws.

It is a necessary withdrawal as the story shows in still another way. In contrast to the grandfather's folk songs, folk beliefs, and even folk language, all of the narrator's language and figures are thoroughly academic. They seem as out of place as are his "smooth soled" leather shoes on the "slippery rocks" of the rugged Newfoundland coast. Indeed, back in the same room where he stayed before, he stands at the window and thinks of himself as "a foolish Lockwood" with "no Catherine who cries to be let in" (81-82). The comparison is doubly apt. Lockwood was, first, the intruder from somewhere else, and, still more to the point, Lockwood is also the man who tells himself out of even his own tale. In the final sentences of "The Lost Salt Gift of Blood" the narrator is, in fact, superseded and replaced by the passenger beside him on the flight from St. John's, a heavy-equipment salesman returning to his family after a week's absence: "The salesman's wife stands waiting along with two small children who are the first to see him. They race toward him with their arms outstretched. 'Daddy, Daddy,' they cry, 'what did you bring me? What did you bring me?'" (86).

The salesman takes the place of the narrator; the happy tableau of re-established domesticity with which the story ends stands in for the seduction and abandonment out of which it begins; this concluding reunion of father and children inverts the earlier reunion that did not take place. Yet still more is at issue in these replacements and reversals. The crude acquisitiveness of the children at the airport highlights the natural generosity of the other child left behind who, first encountered while fishing, offered his unknown father a try. He gave, too, to the departing, still unknown parent the particularly beautiful stone he had found on the beach that morning, a gift which oddly acknowledges the unadmitted paternity, for the son, it turns out, is also a collector. Furthermore, the gift is appropriate in still another

sense further underscored by whatever Newfoundland souvenirs the salesman may have brought back for his children. That father's gifts are the inverse of an earlier gift to a father, the stone presented to the narrator by his unknowing son, the son to whom he gave life (the gift of blood) and to whom he also gives the seaside life that son would choose. The almost perfect stone from the cold salt shore that the father carries with him back to the shimmering heartland of the continent sums up, then, the sorrow of his loss even as it also embodies the enduring salt gift of blood, the paternity that demands — an additional gift — it not be acknowledged.

OTHER STORIES ALSO EMPLOY distinctions and elisions to set forth their calculus of gain and loss. "The Golden Gift of Grey," for example, obviously does so even in its title. Or in "To Every Thing There Is a Season," the season is both present and past, Christmas and a time for dying. The adult narrator who "speak[s] on this Christmas 1977" is "speaking here of a time when I was eleven and lived with my family on our small farm on the west coast of Cape Breton," of another time when time itself passed differently. "My family had been there for a long, long time and so it seemed had I. And much of that time seems like the proverbial yesterday" (*As Birds*, 61). He remembers the slow advent of winter and how he waited for the coming of Christmas and the return of his "magic older brother . . . from half a continent away" (68), a brother who was working on the "lake boats" and who could not leave for home until ice ended, for that year, all Great Lakes shipping. He remembers, too, his continuing struggle to believe in Santa Claus. But the story is saved from being mostly a sentimental remembrance of a Christmas past by the adult narrator's awareness that the child's attempt to salvage Santa Claus (he already knew it wasn't true) was itself an almost necessary substitution for and displacement of the much more painful awareness that the father, only 42, was dying of lung disease. That awareness is worked into the details of the story — "sometimes we argue with our father, but our [returned] brother does everything he says" (66) — and into the ending. On Christmas Eve the 11-year-old is invited to stay up with "the older members of the family" (67-68). The cartons of "clothes" that the brother has sent back from various Great Lakes ports prove, of course, to be presents. Those for the younger children are marked "from Santa Claus"; those for the older are not; his are not and he knows "they will never be again," which elicits "a pang of loss at being here on the adult side of the world" (68). On that adult side now, he can see the care and concern that hold together the other adults in his family. But the struggle between this new awareness and the old illusions of childhood still continues to the end. The last sentence of the story reads: "'Every man moves on,' says my father quietly,

and I think he speaks of Santa Claus, 'but there is no need to grieve. He leaves good things behind'" (68).

What holds the story together is the narrator's awareness of the inextricability of the different items out of which it is made — how much the boy's attempt to retain the world of childhood proved his knowledge that it was passing and that his father was dying. Similarly, the narrator also knows that he cannot know in his present adult recounting "how many liberties I may be taking with the boy I think I was" (61). And these awarenesses elide in the story too: "It is true that at my age I no longer *really* believe in him yet I have hoped in all his possibilities as fiercely as I can; much in the same way, I think, that the drowning man waves desperately to the lights of the passing ship on the high sea's darkness. For without him, as without the man's ship, it seems our fragile lives would be so much more desperate" (62). The situation is the child's. The figurative depiction of that situation is the retrospective adult's, a man now well aware of his own mortality. As the reader should note, the ship sails on, not stopping to save the drowning man. Yet something still remains, if only the passing of the ship.

Or a crucial disjunction can centre on the difference that even a day makes, as in "The Vastness of the Dark," a story that moves from the pre-departure perspective of a young man determined to leave home on his eighteenth birthday to the way he sees his going. "After today," he can say on the crucial morning, about his present assessment of his past and his parents, "I will probably not have to think about it anymore. For today I leave behind this grimy Cape Breton coal-mining town whose prisoner I have been for all of my life. And I have decided that almost any place must be better than this one with its worn-out mines and smoke-black houses" (*Lost Salt Gift*, 39).

A little distance, and something more than distance too, soon teaches him differently. Hitching his way, he is given a ride by a crudely loud-mouthed businessman who presently stops in an even more unfortunate mining town, Springhill to be precise. "A hell of a place," the businessman observes, "unless you want to get laid," and then "it's one of the best there is," thanks to "lots of mine accidents . . . and the men killed off," leaving "women used to getting it all the time" (55). The businessman hopes to oblige one of those deprived women. The hitchhiker, invited to come along for this ride too — "There's always some left over" (59) — declines and remains in the car, to become victim, as the language of the story attests, to his own sudden cave-in disaster.

"The reality of where I am and of what I think he is going to do seems now to press down on me as if it were the pressure of the caving-in roof which was so recently within my thoughts" (59). He has just recalled the 1958 Springhill Cumberland mine disaster. Now, waiting in the car, he is a stand-in for the man elsewhere who would, himself, be a stand-in for some man killed in that disaster. He sees the businessman as hopelessly "other" and knows how shallowly that individual

assessed the town's inhabitants as shiftless and gutless. He sees himself as "other" and sees those passing the car seeing him that way too — "as if I am not part of their lives at all but am only here in a sort of moveable red and glass showcase, that has come for a while to their private anguish-ridden streets and will soon roll on and leave them the same as before my coming" (59). He sees how they see him and he agrees. "And I am overwhelmed now by the awfulness of oversimplification. For I realize that not only have I been guilty of it through this long and burning day but also through most of my yet young life" (59).

He still goes on but he realizes now how much he will have to go on, too, thinking about his past and his parents and that he must try, henceforth, to do so more honestly. Leaving the businessman, he is picked up next by three Cape Breton miners on their way to whatever possible new mines their old car might manage to take them to, and they drive "into the night" following, in the headlights, "the beckoning white line which seems to . . . draw us forward . . . forever into the vastness of the dark" (62). That last metamorphosis of "the vastness of the dark" conjoins the narrator's newly recognized uncertainties about his past with those of his future, the mine disasters he has heard about and imagined, the life his grandfather and father have led, and the life he will probably lead too. As Colin Nicholson aptly observes, the "twin and rival themes of entrapment and escape, enclosure and escape" that characterize this story elide into one another, just as they "mutate" through MacLeod's other fictions as well.[3]

THE LAST WORK I WILL LOOK AT in some detail is "Vision," a work whose title elides in two directions in the story itself. Most of the characters in this complex tale fall victim to blindness or second sight and often to both. It is, moreover, a story of place and displacement, of 11-year-old twins who go alone for the first time to visit their grandparents on a different isolated coastal peninsula; who are delivered by mistake to the dilapidated home of a mad, blind woman; who, after that error is rectified, spend a week with their grandparents and hear the grandfather's stories of "why this place is called Canna," after an island in the Hebrides whose people are now "all gone," and how, consequently, "we carry certain things within us . . . which we do not know or fully understand" (*As Birds*, 172); who later doubly reverse their ancestors' westward journey and on their way to World War I meet another young man from Canna to hear the local story of their grandfather and to discover thereby that the madwoman, now dead, was their grandmother, and how still later in World War II one of them was saved from death when the grandmother appeared to him and warned him back from the explosion that did blind him so that he never sees the son who later pieces together

the different stories and different tellings of the same story out of which this story comes.

"Vision," in fact, begins: "I don't remember when I first heard the story but I remember the first time that I heard it and remembered it" (149). In one of the last paragraphs the narrator looks back at his own account to see how "this has been the telling of a story about a story but like most stories it has spun off into others and relied on others and perhaps no story ever really stands alone" (188). There are, indeed, many different stories at play and interplaying in the field of this text, so much so that a whole essay could well be devoted to the attempt to sort them out — an enterprise that the story itself, with its concluding double parable on the limits of perspicacity, calls into question.

In the last paragraph the narrator remembers how "when we were boys we would try to catch the slippery spring mackerel" to perhaps "see" in the iridescent scales, which at first cover the eyes of these fish, "our own reflections" (one blindness mirroring another). He remembers, too, how, "when the wet ropes of the lobster traps came out of the sea, we would pick out a single strand and then try to identify it some few feet further on," and this time the lesson is explicitly drawn in the last words of the tale itself. "Difficult to be ever certain in our judgements or to fully see or understand. Difficult then to see and understand the twisted strands within the rope. And forever difficult to see and understand the tangled twisted strands of love" (189). But that final figurative denial of the possibility of some full and final unravelling does suggest that we can examine how the different strands are twisted together.

Thus a boyhood friend's romantic story of how blindly the gift of *Da Shealladh*, second sight, was used by an ancestor gives way to the stories the grandfather tells of Saint Columba driven from Ireland to the islands of northern Scotland by his gift of second sight and how he vowed never to look again on the Ireland that he loved, and these are superseded by a chance acquaintance's story of the grandfather's own gift of second sight and its consequence of misplaced love and marriage. All of these passed-on family stories are passed on again when they are incorporated into the narrator's own family story, a story that also tells how the former friend lost an eye in a senseless barroom brawl with the narrator who knew what his antagonist was going to do before he did it. We can notice, too, how the same words of the Gaelic exchange between their grandfather and the strange blind woman that the puzzled children overhear are repeated but reversed when the grandmother "appears" to her grandson on the Normandy beach. Or, finally, we can also notice how much of the story is itself repeated — and not repeated — as it is rendered from Gaelic into English which, we are told in the story, is, of course, "not the same" (182). For example, *Mac an Amharuis*, the Canna Gaelic designation for the grandfather, that commemorates his probably illegitimate birth, might be translated into English as "Son of Uncertainty." This most effectively

evocative Gaelic term is radically different from the crudely expletive English "bastard."

The transition from Gaelic to English that is regularly noted in these stories, and that is marked also by the need to gloss the few still surviving Gaelic expressions such as *Mac am Amharuis* in the work just considered or *cù mòr glas a' bhàis* in the earlier "As Birds Bring Forth the Sun," constitute one of the most significant displacements out of which MacLeod forges his fiction. In a number of the stories we even see a clear connection between physical displacement, impending linguistic dispossession, and the origins of the story itself. In "Vision," for example, the twins find out the crucial story of their grandfather's tragic past when they meet, bound for war, the young man from Canna. "And then, perhaps because they were far from home and more lonely and frightened than they cared to admit, they began to talk in Gaelic (178). Similarly, in "The Closing Down of Summer," the narrator notes his own "Celtic Revival," a return to "Gaelic songs because they are so constant and unchanging and speak to us as the privately familiar" (*As Birds*, 24), but he also sees beyond that constancy to both his passing and the language's. "For all of us know we will not last much longer and that it is unlikely we will be replaced in the shaft's bottom by members of our own flesh and bone. For such replacement, like our Gaelic, seems to be of the past and now largely over" (27). In the face of that impending double loss, the narrator would like to leave some record of his life, and thus the story that does just that.

Yet there is more to what we well might term MacLeod's poetics of loss than just the inevitable passing of people and the language that some of them once spoke.[4] Displacement, substitution, and elision do give these stories a characteristic elegaic tone and that tone is as much a matter of retrospect as prospect. Or more accurately, prospect and retrospect themselves regularly conflate into a present awareness of a past heritage of loss, a continuity, so to speak, of dispossession. Thus the miners, in "The Closing Down of Summer" (to end with the same story with which I began), driving hard to Toronto to fly to Africa, will find, during roadside stops in Quebec and Ontario, "small sprigs" of Cape Breton "spruce still wedged within the grillework of our cars." These they will remove and take with them "as mementos or talismans or symbols of identity," just as their "Highland ancestors, for centuries, fashioned crude badges of heather or of whortleberries to accompany them on the battlefields of the world. Perhaps so that in the closeness of their work with death they might find nearness to their homes and an intensified realization of themselves" (*As Birds*, 15-16). The sprig of spruce stands in for the sprig of heather; the leaving of Scotland is regularly re-enacted by the annual leaving of Nova Scotia; the men departing for the mines in Africa take their place in a long line of similar men similarly displaced. Moreover, "an intensified realization of themselves" works both forwards and backwards in the story. The departing miners can better know who they are because they know who they were. In Robert Frost's memorable phrasing,

they recognize their place on "the long bead chain of repeated birth" but they also know that one bead does not always lead to another. Their sons will follow different courses "to become fatly affluent before they are thirty," to not die in some mine disaster. They will follow these different courses, the narrator acknowledges, "partially . . . because we have told them" to and consequently we must watch in "anguished isolation" and "confused bereavement" as they travel "to distant lonely worlds which are forever unknowable" to us but which perhaps offer only "another kind of inarticulate loneliness" (27-28).

One generation succeeds another, which is both the displacement and the replacement of that which came before. It is this awareness of their provisional place in time that especially distinguishes MacLeod's characters, informs their accounts, and gives form to their narrations. Indeed, we could conjoin the implications in the titles of the two collections into a kind of composite, "As Birds Bring Forth — and Take Away — the Son," and emphasize thereby the interplay, in all of MacLeod's best stories, between the generation of fiction and the generations of life.

NOTES

[1] Alistair MacLeod, *As Birds Bring Forth the Sun and Other Stories* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1986), p. 12. Subsequent references to stories in this volume will be made parenthetically in the text as will references to stories from *The Lost Salt Gift of Blood* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1976).

[2] Through his choice of narrators, MacLeod regularly arranges to have the major perspective provided within a story be that of a miner too.

[3] Colin Nicholson, "Signatures of Time: Alistair MacLeod and his Short Stories," *Canadian Literature*, 107 (1985), 91.

[4] Nicholson notes, too, the degree to which MacLeod is "both memorializing [the passing of a New World Highlands Scottish culture] and, since he is writing in English, enacting that moment of slippage" and how this dual tension produces "MacLeod's . . . abiding note of loss and regret . . . as if the style itself were keening" (98).

# SCARED SPINELESS

*Gillian Harding-Russell*

When it's raining out, big drops
falling off the eaves and you push in the key
the wrong way and then the right way
the wind blowing great puffs out of clouds

and the baby's crying in your arms
not happy and you can't
put her down, her cry
a heartache because she's yours — not just another
baby in the supermarket — and, anyway, no one
should cry like that

you wonder
what's important, any more. Why
did you go out in the rain to mail
a letter to another world when it's
this world that's important  with the baby

crying, and it's
your fault. You shouldn't
have gone out in such weather. Bloody stupid
thing to do, with a four month old baby  but
you at your wits' end to touch finger ends
with another, always
holding onto your baby, so small

transparent on a windy cliff
among clouds and erasure marks of trees
in your dream (all this, and more
in your wavering thoughts  cross-currenting
with last night's dream). Thoughts

of babies falling
off changing tables when you turn
around  hot coals from the fire
tumbling over the carpet where your baby
crawls, mesmerized. You looking
for the page where you left off — so

irresponsible — deluded
something else  another world is more
important. Then

Babies. Their little necks
fragile as fish spines
in your mind's eye.

# WITH MOTHER IN THE MORNING

*Leslie M. Jackson*

As half-golden hues
with final traces
of leftover grey
linger still on the air,
I roll out of bed.

My fingers grip
the dark wood bannister,
I watch my feet carefully
making sure they hit
every carpeted stair.

You must be downstairs;
coffee aromas drift
and I sense your presence
as a daughter can.

Yellow in the livingroom
wakes me, pouring
between window panes,
filling spaces and falling
on cushions, wallpaper,
even your hair.

The color is yours;
it suits you
so I buy you things
like yellow scarves,
and citrine rings.

A thick paperback rests
on terry-cloth folds
of your lap
and I join you
to cradle mugs
and talk.
You let me see
before the house wakes
and colors change.

# UN RECUEIL DE RÉCITS BREFS

## *"Ces enfants de ma vie" de Gabrielle Roy*

*Jean-Pierre Boucher*

GABRIELLE ROY FIGURE au premier rang des écrivains québécois ayant abordé le genre encore mal défini du recueil de récits brefs. Nonobstant leur appellation d'ailleurs variable selon les éditions, sept titres de son oeuvre se rangent dans cette catégorie.[1] La critique d'expression française s'est jusqu'à ce jour peu intéressée à ce genre, privilégiant l'étude des récits individuels désignés comme des nouvelles, plutôt que l'analyse de l'ensemble dans lequel ils s'insèrent, le recueil. Au terme de son survol historique de la nouvelle française, R. Godenne souligne cependant l'apport original au vingtième siècle du recueil-ensemble de nouvelles dont l'auteur conçoit dès le départ la composition comme celle d'un tout cohérent, chaque récit ayant une place et un rôle déterminés dans la suite, l'unité organique de l'ensemble reposant sur des liens, des interférences, des interactions entre les différents récits constituants.[2] Comme le note avec justesse Michel Butor,[3] rassembler des textes les transforme, un texte seul, et le même texte en recueil, n'étant pas les mêmes. Plus près de nous, F. Ricard[4] constate le caractère paradoxal de la composition de semblables recueils, devant d'une part préserver l'autonomie de chaque récit et d'autre part les intégrer à la structure d'ensemble. Si une première lecture est en effet sensible à la discontinuité résultant des ruptures marquées entre les différents récits d'un recueil, une "lecture globale," pour reprendre l'heureuse expression de J. Rousset, est doublement nécessaire et exigeante ici pour saisir la structure d'ensemble. La signification d'un récit bref étant fonction de ses relations avec la structure englobante du recueil, étudier ce dernier en tant qu'unité constituée est donc une nécessité absolue.

Voilà cependant ce à quoi la critique francophone semble être réticente, continuant le plus souvent à quasi ignorer l'existence du recueil auquel on n'accorde guère plus d'attention qu'à un emballage sans intérêt. La critique anglophone se préoccupe par contre depuis longtemps des "short story cycles." Dans un ouvrage alliant la réflexion théorique à l'étude de cas particuliers, F. L. Ingram propose d'entrée de jeu la définition suivante: "A short story cycle, then, is a set of stories linked to each other in such a way as to maintain a balance between the individual-

ity of each of the stories and the necessities of the larger unit."[5] Définition qu'il modifie plus loin de la manière suivante: "I will define a short story cycle as a book of short stories so linked to each other by their author that the reader's successive experience on various levels of the pattern significantly modifies his experience of each of its component parts."[6] Et qu'il modifie à nouveau en fin de volume au moment de préciser la spécificité de la structure à double niveau des recueils de récits brefs: "Their overall structure emerges from the complexus of static and dynamic patterns of their self-contained relatively independent components. Each short story has its own static and dynamic structures. At the same time, connective pattern on all levels draw these together to form a cycle."[7] Selon F. L. Ingram, la spécificité des recueils de récits brefs tiendrait dans le jeu des "dynamic patterns of recurrence and development," c'est-à-dire dans la réapparition dans une forme modifiée ou un contexte différent d'un élément préalablement utilisé, de telle sorte que sa signification s'élargisse à chaque réapparition en même temps qu'elle modifie en retour celle de l'élément original devant alors être reconsidéré dans le contexte de l'ensemble.

La littérature québécoise possède quantité de recueils de récits brefs. Tant par leur nombre que par leurs qualités d'écriture et de composition, ceux de Gabrielle Roy offrent un champ quasi vierge à la recherche. Pour fin d'exemple, j'ai choisi *Ces enfants de ma vie*,[8] le dernier recueil publié du vivant de l'auteur et l'un des plus achevés de toute son oeuvre.

Notons en premier lieu que l'appellation du texte lui-même varie selon les éditions. L'originale ne précise ni en page couverture ni en page intérieure le genre de l'oeuvre. L'édition de poche plus récente chez le même éditeur (Stanké 10/10) identifie en page intérieure seulement, et encore de manière ambigüe, l'oeuvre comme un roman. Déterminer la part de l'auteur et celle de l'éditeur dans ce flottement importe peu en vérité, l'analyse révélant l'unité des six récits du recueil.

L'histoire recontée est en effet à la fois différente et semblable dans les six récits, chacun enchaînant de quelque manière sur le précédent, et le dernier, *De la truite dans l'eau glacée*, les résumant tous par la reprise d'éléments présents dans les récits précédents. Dans chaque cas se développe une relation privilégiée entre l'institutrice et un élève, le cercle formé par le couple originel s'agrandissant cependant progressivement à l'entourage familial, puis social, dans *L'alouette*, *Demetrioff* et *La maison gardée*. Le découpage temporel rapproche par ailleurs les enfants qui avancent en âge de l'institutrice qui, elle, rajeunit, amorce d'une réflexion sur le choc des valeurs de l'enfance et de l'âge adulte.

Les interventions de la narratrice réfléchissant aujourd'hui à des questions nées dans sa jeunesse mais non encore résolues au moment de sa narration, confèrent à son évocation du passé un caractère dynamique. Plutôt que de n'être que le lieu du souvenir, sa conscience est surtout celui de l'interrogation intérieure. Aux échanges d'autrefois entre l'institutrice et les enfants répondent maintenant ceux se dévelop-

pant tout au long du recueil entre la jeune femme qu'elle a été et la vieille femme qu'elle est devenue.

Le recueil peut aussi se lire comme une longue réflexion sur les mérites comparés de l'école du savoir et de l'intégration des enfants au monde adulte, et de l'école de la vie et de la nature, où l'institutrice est initiée par les enfants à une réalité sociale et spatiale qu'elle ignorait. Son voyage dans l'espace se déroulant au fil des six récits évoque ainsi son voyage intérieur. Tout le recueil apparaît alors comme une initiation progressive à la plaine et à ce qu'elle représente, l'exemple même de ce que F. L. Ingram désigne comme ce qui constitue la spécificité du recueil de récits brefs, la reprise d'un élément préalablement utilisé de telle sorte que sa signification s'approfondisse à chaque réapparition et modifie en retour l'élément original.

L'itinéraire suivi par la narratrice est en apparence simple: dans les quatre premiers récits elle enseigne dans une école de la ville d'où elle passe, dans les deux derniers, à une école de village aux confins de la plaine, avant de rentrer à la ville par le train à la fin du recueil. Cet itinéraire est cependant fictif, ne coïncidant pas, étant même à l'opposé, de celui parcouru par l'institutrice dans la réalité. Ses premières années d'enseignement se sont en effet déroulées à la campagne. Ce n'est que plus tard qu'elle a enseigné en ville, vraisemblablement quand, grâce à son ancienneté, des postes dans les grands centres lui sont devenus accessibles. La narratrice a donc substitué à l'ordre chronologique un nouvel ordre qui confère à son récit sa signification particulière.

Dans *Vincento*, premier récit du recueil et point de départ de son initiation, l'école dans laquelle elle enseigne se trouvant à la ville, toute référence à la nature est absente. C'est ici que l'école paraît la plus hostile à l'univers de l'enfance, Vincento réfugié dans les bras de son père et distribuant des coups de pied à l'institutrice. Ce n'est que dans *L'enfant de Noël* que la nature commence à franchir les murs de l'école par les flocons de neige accrochés aux vêtements des enfants: "Ils n'aimaient rien tant que de s'en venir à l'école sous ces flocons légers qu'ils s'efforçaient de cueillir au vol sur leurs lèvres entrouvertes ou dans leur paume tendue vers le ciel. Ils apportaient avec eux la bonne odeur de petits animaux à fourrure qui rentrent du froid. Parfois je trouvais intact sur leurs cils ou sur la manche d'un manteau un immense flocon en forme d'étoile. Je détachais avec précaution, pour la montrer à l'enfant qui la portait, cette merveille" (28).

Dans *L'alouette* cette invasion de l'école par le monde extérieur progresse de deux façons. Les jours de pluie, les enfants arrivent "enrhumés, mouillés, grognons, avec d'énormes pieds boueux qui eurent vite transformé en une sorte d'écurie ma salle de classe que j'aimais brillante de propreté" (43). Cette souillure de l'univers

aseptique de l'école amorce chez l'institutrice son initiation à des réalités sociales qu'elle ignore encore. En second lieu, et bien que cette école soit encore à la ville, apparaît pour la première fois la plaine, du moins de manière fictive. Les chansons de Nil, qui tient son surnom de sa ressemblance avec l'alouette des prés, évoquent "la ronde des amoureuses dans la prairie" (53) et l'Ukraine perdue que sa mère lui avait donné à garder, "sa prairie, ses arbres, un cavalier seul s'avançant au loin dans la plaine" (56), image annonçant l'apparition fulgurante de Médéric dans le dernier récit. Lorsqu'il chante, Nil désigne en outre de la main "au loin de cette chambre de malade une route? une plaine? ou quelque pays ouvert qui donnait envie de le connaître" (49). Suite à cette évocation imaginaire de la plaine, celle-ci apparaît pour la première fois directement dans le texte lorsque l'institutrice reconduit Nil à la cabane qu'il habite avec sa mère. Le site de cette cabane, dans une "zone de déshérités" (57), aux confins de la ville à laquelle elle tourne le dos indique la valeur initiatique de la démarche de l'institutrice guidée par l'enfant. La configuration du chemin qui y mène a même fonction. L'institutrice doit en effet perdre momentanément sa route avant de la retrouver au-delà de "la mare boueuse" où se dresse la cabane. Ignorante des lieux comme des conditions de vie des gens qui y vivent, elle ne sait de quel côté se diriger: "aussitôt que nous eûmes quittés le trottoir, je ne savais plus pour ma part, où poser le pied" (57). La marche est en outre difficile car "il avait plu très fort pendant plusieurs jours et les champs à travers lesquels me conduisait Nil n'étaient que boue avec, de place en place, des touffes basses d'arbrisseaux épineux auxquels s'accrochaient mes vêtements" (57). L'obscurité ajoute encore à sa détresse: "Je devinais plutôt que je ne voyais cet étrange paysage, car il n'y avait plus de lampes de rue là où nous allions. Ni même à proprement parler de chemin. Tout juste une sorte de vague sentier où la boue tassée formait un fond un peu plus ferme qu'ailleurs" (57). Elle s'en remet pour la diriger à Nil qui, lui, voit dans le noir, "se dirigeant dans cette pénombre avec la sûreté d'un chat, sans même se mouiller, [sautant] avec aisance d'une motte à peu près sèche à une autre" (57), se retournant, lui tendant la main, l'encourageant à prendre son élan pour sauter d'une planche à l'autre formant trottoir. Cette épreuve franchie, la jeune femme découvre enfin, "sous le haut ciel plein d'étoiles" (57), les cabanes "le dos à la ville, tournées vers la prairie que l'on pressentait vaste et libre" (57), alors que succède à l'odeur fétide de l'abattoir celle, puissante, de la jacinthe. L'aventure se termine dans la joie de la contemplation de la nuit que l'on écoute "sous le ciel immense," "à l'air libre" (59).

Ce voyage initiatique de l'institutrice est exemplaire: il sera repris, essentiellement le même mais avec quelques variantes, dans les trois récits qui complètent le recueil.

Dans *Demetrioff*, la jeune institutrice se retrouve en effet dans la situation exacte qu'elle a connue en se rendant chez Nil. Sa promenade, un soir, du côté de la Petite Russie la fait passer "en territoire inconnu," lui fait traverser "une frontière"

(73): "Jamais, dans ma propre ville, je ne m'étais sentie si loin aventurée à l'étranger" (73). Entre la cabane de Nil et "les pauvres maisons" (73) à la porte basse, éparpillées à travers champs, la parenté est évidente. De même aussi, puisqu'elles ont cessé "de maintenir entre elles une distance à peu près égale et de se présenter de manière à former une rue" (73), la jeune femme éprouve-t-elle le sentiment d'être perdue, d'être une "étrangère" (74). Comme aux abords de chez Nil, s'étend devant elle un champ ouvert sur la plaine: "Un vaste champ à l'abandon me faisait face, bout de ville retourné à la campagne, ou bout de campagne jamais venu en ville, comme on en voit parfois, réfractaire pendant des années à la cité qui les entoure. Toutes les mauvaises herbes de la plaine en étaient, jusqu'au *tumbleweed* qui ressemble si parfaitement à de vieux rouleaux emmêlés de fil de fer" (74). Au retour de cette nouvelle expédition où elle a rencontré Demetrioff père et fils, la jeune institutrice sait avoir parcouru une distance bien supérieure à celle séparant la ville de ce quartier limitrophe: "M'en revenant vers ce que nous appelions "notre" ville, "notre" vie et dont il me sembla avoir été éloignée depuis des années" (78). S'étant rendue ce jour-là au seuil de l'univers de la plaine, elle devra désormais résolument s'y enfoncer pour franchir l'étape suivante de son initiation. Aussi commence-t-elle à enseigner l'alphabet aux enfants par la lettre M, qu'elle leur présente "comme trois petites montagnes reliées qui marchaient ensemble par-delà l'horizon" (79). C'est, avant son apparition réelle, le paysage des deux derniers récits du recueil.

Au début de *La maison gardée* nous apprenons en effet que l'école où enseigne cette année-là l'institutrice se trouve non à la ville mais dans un village éloigné, un "pauvre village de la plaine" (109), et dans ce village, à son extrémité, c'est-à-dire dans la position même où se situaient, par rapport à la ville, la cabane de Nil et la tannerie Demetrioff. L'institutrice est ici placée d'entrée de jeu là où l'avaient amenée ses excursions pédestres des deux récits précédents: "L'école où je fus nommée, cette année-là, faisait partie, si l'on veut, du village, quoique attardée tout au bout, séparée même des dernières maisons par un champ assez vaste où paissait une vache. Malgré l'écart, il n'y avait pourtant pas de doute que j'appartenais au village triste avec ses pauvres maisons, la plupart en bois non peint, décrépites avant d'être finies . . ." (93). Les fenêtres de l'école ouvrent sur "un bout de route de terre qui s'élevait légèrement tout en tournant un peu sur lui-même et aussitôt se perdait dans l'infini" (96). De son pupitre "orienté du côté de la plaine" (94), l'institutrice guette l'arrivée de ses élèves dont "plus de la moitié . . . venait de ce côté sauvage et comme inhabité" (94). L'association est ici plus nette que jamais entre la plaine et l'enfance. La narratrice qui par le souvenir retourne dans sa jeunesse devra, pour remonter le temps, maintenant s'enfoncer dans la plaine dont elle est restée jusque là à la périphérie, habitant au village chez sa "logeuse" (127), alors qu'un André Pasquier s'enfonce chaque soir dans la plaine envahie par la nuit. Elle désire découvrir ce monde connu des enfants et dont elle se sent

exclue: "A présent c'était mon tour de perdre les enfants. Un moment, je les voyais comme tout nimbés de lumière, au sommet de la route, puis l'inconnu me les dérobait. Alors je me prenais à essayer d'imaginer leur vie dans ces fermes lointaines dont je ne connaissais rien. Je me doutais bien qu'une distance infinie séparait la vie de là-bas de la nôtre à l'école . . . , entre ces deux vies existait une frontière pour ainsi dire infranchissable. Pourtant je rêvais de mettre le pied dans ces fermes isolées, de me faire accepter peut-être par ces maisonnées de silence et parfois d'hostilité" (99).

Guidée par les enfants sur la route de la plaine, comme plus tôt avec Nil, elle découvre alors le "visage caché du monde" (106) dans l'atmosphère de douceur, de paix, d'harmonie de la fin du jour qui rappelle la scène finale de *L'alouette*. S'ajoute cependant ici l'expérience de l'ascension. Au début de la marche, le groupe a gravi une "petite montée" (101) d'où l'institutrice, en un phénomène de dédoublement analogue à celui de la narratrice adulte qui se retourne vers sa jeunesse, s'est vue dans l'école du village, "à [sa] place, à [son] pupitre, [se] regardant aller au sommet de la route avec les enfants" (102). Plus loin le groupe doit à nouveau remonter une légère dépression que le texte associe clairement à une montée vers le bonheur: ". . . il me semblait que nous montions infailliblement, les trois enfants et moi, vers le bonheur, invisible encore mais, à coup sûr, promis, sain et sauf, à nous attendre non loin" (106). Cette ascension au terme de la traversée de la plaine reviendra au récit suivant dans l'escalade des collines de Babcock dont l'institutrice demeure ici encore éloignée. Du moins la progression est-elle sensible par rapport aux récits précédents: l'institutrice a pénétré pour la première fois dans la plaine en même temps qu'à l'intérieur de la maison d'un de ses élèves, alors qu'elle n'avait pas franchi le seuil de celles de Nil et de Demetrioff. Dans la cuisine des Pasquier a été en outre réussie la fusion de l'école et de la maison, deux espaces jusque là étrangers, voire hostiles l'un à l'autre.

*De la truite dans l'eau glacée* pousse l'initiation de l'institutrice plus loin encore. L'école où elle enseigne se situe à nouveau dans un "village isolé de la plaine" (131), peut-être le même que dans le récit précédent. L'arrivée fulgurante de Médéric chevauchant Gaspard à qui il fait sauter la clôture de barbelé et qui, attaché au mât où flotte l'*Union Jack*, l'ébranle "comme sous une rafale" (132), l'associe d'emblée à la plaine libre et sauvage, alors que l'institutrice, en train d'écrire au tableau noir, lui tourne symboliquement le dos. Ses yeux qui la fascinent parce qu'ils lui rappellent les "teintes rares que revêtent parfois les crépuscules d'été" (135), comme celui contemplé dans le récit précédent en compagnie des enfants, il les tient aussi de sa mère amérindienne retournée dans sa tribu de la plaine. Il s'évade de l'école par son regard qui erre au loin, et, la journée finie, il fonce "dans l'immensité de la plaine rase" (137), suivi des yeux par l'institutrice "jusqu'à ce que l'eût englouti la bleuissante distance" (137). Plus que la simple curiosité pour un univers qu'elle ignore, ce spectacle la jette dans un "état d'insoumission" (147)

qui la fait s'interroger sur l'orientation de sa vie: "Si jeune, je me voyais enfermée pour la vie dans ma tâche d'institutrice. Je n'en voyais même plus le côté exaltant, seulement sa routine implacable" (147-48).

Au soleil couchant, le regard de l'institutrice est aussi attiré par "au fond du pays plat, tout contre l'horizon tendu de bleu vif, une ligne basse de buissons embrasés des couleurs de l'automne [qui] semblait brûler" (143). Cette vision à la limite de l'imaginaire et du réel constitue la première manifestation des collines de Babcock. A la question de l'institutrice — "Je parie . . . que tu galopes avec Gaspard vers ce petit bois qui brûle là-bas" (143) — ce dernier répond qu'en effet c'est dans les collines de Babcock qu'il aimerait être en ce moment. Réponse qui à son tour déclenche un aveu de la narratrice: "J'avais moi-même gardé de ces petites collines, traversées en venant prendre mon poste au village, un souvenir obsédant qui me faisait me dire presque chaque jour que je devrais retourner les voir" (144). Comme l'image de la plaine avait d'abord été fictive — dans les chansons de Nil — avant d'être réelle, de même l'apparition des collines est progressive. Suscitées par l'imagination, puis par le souvenir, elles prennent ensuite forme dans un dessin exécuté par Médéric: "Il saisit son crayon et, à traits vifs, avec un talent qui me surprit, dessina un massif serré, planta là un arbre, ici des blocs de pierre éboulés, sur les pentes des arbustes, et avec peu de moyens parvint à créer l'atmosphère d'un lieu infiniment retiré, où il faisait bon se détendre" (148).

Comme lors de la traversée du champ boueux aux abords de la cabane de Nil et de la tannerie Demetrioff, la marche et l'ascension vers les collines de Babcock de l'institutrice guidée par Médéric a tout d'un voyage initiatique. La route est longue et ardue, les deux voyageurs avancent "entre les blocs de pierre empilés," "dans le plus bizarre équilibre," à la recherche "de la fente" par laquelle se faufiler "vers plus haut et plus sauvage encore" (155), avec le sentiment de s'être égarés: "Puis un autre cirque étroit, et nous étions à nouveau enfermés en un oppressant silence. A l'ombre du roc terne, nous ne voyions presque plus le soleil ni rien, au fond de la journée radieuse, que, de temps à autre, des flèches de lumière égarée. Le pays toujours fermé sur soi, jamais ne s'ouvrant, montant en spirales de plus en plus resserrées, me déprimait" (156). Silence, obscurité, angoisse de s'être aventurée "en pays hostile et inhabité" (156) avec pour tout compagnon un garçon dont elle ne connaît pas grand chose, voilà l'épreuve à subir avant de trouver l'illumination de la plaine aperçue du sommet des collines: "Et soudain, familière, paisible, pourtant renouvelée et infiniment plus visible pour nous avoir été dérobée pendant quelques heures, la plaine nous était rendue, toute immobilité, et cependant d'un mouvement, d'un élan irrésistible"

(156). Jamais autant que ce matin-là, la narratrice n'a-t-elle "si bien vu la plaine, son ampleur, sa noble tristesse, sa beauté transfigurée" (156). Vision éblouissante qui plonge les deux voyageurs dans le rire puis le silence de l'entente et de la confiance en la vie.

Si l'excursion aux collines de Babcock s'inscrit dans le prolongement d'excursions préalables, elle est aussi reprise à l'intérieur même de ce sixième et dernier récit du recueil qui ne s'achève pas, comme il aurait été possible, au sommet des collines dans la contemplation de l'immensité de la plaine. Rentrés au village, les deux jeunes gens entreprennent en effet bientôt un second périple, la visite au "château" de Rodrigue Eymard, reprise et prolongation du précédent. Notation importante, Médéric est, de tous les élèves, celui qui habite le plus loin du village (166). Comme on l'avait prévenue contre les Demetrioff qui demeuraient aux confins de la ville, de même au magasin général et au bureau de poste prévient-on l'institutrice contre Médéric qui réside à plus de trois milles du village (131). Lui-même n'affiche que mépris pour les ragots des villageois: "Oh, le village! fit-il avec une sorte de commisération joyeuse . . ." (145). Si pendant l'ascension des collines, l'institutrice regrette la vie d'en-bas (156), au retour, alors que les deux voyageurs se sentent épiés des fenêtres de chaque maison, elle en arrive à partager le point de vue de son compagnon en une interjection semblable à la sienne: "Qu'ils aillent au diable! ai-je pensé tout haut" (162). En acceptant l'invitation de Rodrigue Eymard, elle prend en outre position contre le village qui prédisait qu'elle n'irait pas (167). Sa venue au "château Eymard," qui tient de la ville par son architecture et de la plaine par son isolement, lui révèle cependant l'ambiguïté de sa situation, associée qu'elle est à l'âge adulte de par sa fonction, mais aussi attachée à l'enfance par ses élèves et sa propre nostalgie pour un univers dont elle vient elle-même à peine de sortir. L'affrontement entre les univers de l'âge adulte et de l'enfance, de l'asservissement et de la liberté, qui traverse tout le recueil, atteint ici son paroxysme.

C'est pourquoi apparaît à cet instant précis, grâce aux souvenirs de Rodrigue Eymard, le personnage de Maria, la mère amérindienne de Médéric qui a tout quitté, maison, meubles, vêtements, berline, domestiques, pour retourner vers la vie nomade de sa tribu (174). La jeune institutrice, à qui Rodrigue Eymard propose en termes à peine voilés les mêmes richesses à condition d'épouser son fils, se trouve dans une situation analogue. Comme Maria, son double, et sans doute grâce à l'évocation à point nommé de son histoire, elle choisira elle aussi la part de la liberté. Car si son retour au village et son départ subséquent pour un poste en ville, "parmi des gens civilisés" (205), selon les termes du secrétaire de la commission scolaire, peut témoigner de son intégration définitive au monde adulte (comme ce sera sans doute aussi le cas pour Médéric tombé sous l'influence de son père qui l'oblige symboliquement à changer de costume), il est tout aussi vrai que son refus de l'offre de Rodrigue Eymard signifie son rejet d'intégration au monde adulte par le mariage, et associe son retour vers ses origines citadines à celui de

Maria vers sa tribu au-delà de l'horizon de la plaine. Malgré la direction opposée de la fuite des deux femmes, leur décision est la même. Aussi le retour du château Eymard au milieu d'une tempête de neige a-t-il valeur symbolique. Ici encore l'institutrice, guidée par Médéric, doit traverser une immensité rase, perdre son chemin avant de le retrouver, et connaître l'illumination en forme du rêve qu'elle fait qu'on la découvrira, elle et son compagnon, morts gelés: "Au chaud, entre les couvertures, je m'abandonnai au rêve de partir de cette vie. Je nous voyais saufs, échappés au mal, à l'hérédité mauvaise, à l'enlaidissement de soi que l'on craint peut-être plus que tout dans la fierté de la jeunesse. . . . Je nous imaginai, Médéric et moi, tels qu'on nous retrouverait, la tourmente passée, deux pures statues, les cheveux et les cils poudrés de frimas, intacts et beaux. Tout juste aurions-nous peut-être incliné la tête l'un vers l'autre" (181). Tout dans ce récit associe les deux jeunes gens à de jeunes mariés, et leur expédition à un voyage de noces en blanc, à la fois irréel parce que refusé par l'institutrice, mais en même temps accepté, sublimé, porté à son absolu, celui vers lequel tendaient ses relations avec Vincento, Clair, Nil, Demetrioff et André. Sa rentrée finale à la ville marque donc tout autant son arrachement définitif à l'univers de l'enfance que son refus de récupération par le monde adulte. C'est cela que dit l'apparition dernière de Médéric surgissant de la plaine sur Gaspard, comme la première fois.

*Ces enfants de ma vie* forme donc à n'en pas douter un recueil de récits brefs d'une remarquable cohérence. Si chaque récit semble à première vue un univers autonome, une "lecture globale" du recueil révèle que chacun éclaire les autres en même temps qu'il est en retour transformé par eux. La même histoire est dans chacun d'eux reprise, développée chaque fois davantage. Comme souvent dans ses oeuvres, G. Roy utilise le biais d'un objet privilégié pour livrer au lecteur une réflexion sur la composition de l'oeuvre même qu'il est en train de lire. C'est ici, par exemple, le bouquet lancé par Médéric à l'institutrice à la dernière page du recueil: "C'était un énorme bouquet des champs, léger pourtant tel un papillon, à peine se tenant ensemble dans sa grâce éparpillée, néanmoins il atterrit sur moi sans se défaire, s'ouvrant seulement un peu pour me révéler des corolles fraîches encore de leur rosée. Jamais je n'avais vu réunies autant de petites fleurs de la campagne. . . . Une souple lanière d'herbe l'entourait, nouée en ruban qui l'empêchait pour un instant encore de se défaire. Je le mis contre ma joue. Il embaumait délicatement. Il disait le jeune été fragile, à peine est-il né qu'il commence à en mourir" (211-12). N'est-ce pas là, et dans sa forme et son fond, l'image du recueil des six récits distincts et néanmoins liés?

De manière plus explicite encore, et doublement révélatrice puisque portant sur la découverte même de la plaine, un passage semble décrire tout à la fois la géographie de la plaine et celle du recueil, celui où Médéric et l'institutrice, au terme de leur ascension des collines de Babcock, découvrent soudain l'immensité de la plaine. Tout d'abord attirés par ses "innombrables détails captivants," ils en vien-

nent ensuite à être frappés par l'unité de l'ensemble: "Pourtant, ce n'était par aucun de ses aspects même les plus rares que la plaine prenait le coeur, mais au contraire, parce que, à la fin, ils disparaissaient tous en elle. Car si, au début, on voyait ceci et cela, et surtout le printemps dans son clos, bientôt on n'était plus conscient que de l'immuable. Les vagues rentrent dans la mer, les arbres dans la forêt, et de même, à la longue, presque tout indice de vie humaine, presque tout détail, dans la plan infini de la plaine. Ne disant rien de particulier, c'est peut-être ainsi au fond qu'elle dit tant" (157). N'est-ce pas là au mieux décrite l'architecture du recueil, le voyage dans l'espace évocateur du voyage intérieur de l'institutrice-narratrice.

NOTES

[1] Ce sont par ordre chronologique de parution: *La petite poule d'eau, Rue Deschambault, La route d'Altamont, La rivière sans repos, Cet été qui chantait, Un jardin au bout du monde, Ces enfants de ma vie.*

[2] René Godenne, *La Nouvelle française* (P.U.F., 1974), pp. 139-44.

[3] "Entretien avec Michel Butor," *Etudes françaises*, 11:1 (février 1975), 69.

[4] François Ricard, "Le recueil," *Etudes françaises*, 12:1-2 (avril 1976), 113-33.

[5] F. L. Ingram, *Representative Short Story Cycles of the twentieth century — Studies in a literary genre* (The Hague and Paris: Mouton, 1971), p. 15.

[6] *Ibid.*, p. 19.

[7] *Ibid.*, p. 200.

[8] Gabrielle Roy, *Ces enfants de ma vie* (Montréal: Stanké, 1977), 212 pp. Toutes les citations seront tirées de cette édition et la page indiquée désormais dans le texte entre parenthèses.

# A WOMAN'S SHOE

*Lorna Crozier*

They are moving the bones
in Santiago, making way
for the new.
The open
graves of the poor are holes
in the earth, utilitarian and simple,
the perfect shape
for a body,
nothing more.

Yet in one there is
a woman's shoe.

A black high-heel,
a platform sole.

It's a shoe
to stand tall in,
to make her hips swing,
her back arch, her breasts
push against her blouse.
It's the kind of shoe
a woman wears
to please a man.

It makes you think
of cigarettes and lipstick,
the sound of heels climbing the stairs
after dark, the flare of a match,
a button falling to the floor.
You can feel the leather
on your own foot
the weight
on your instep, the high arch.
You wore shoes like that
fifteen years ago.

Fifteen years ago a woman
walked to meet a man.
Her shoes made their own sound
on the ground. She floated
high above them
so tall
she knew they could take her anywhere,
even here

where a woman is built
from the ground up —
starting with one shoe,
a black high heel,
an open toe

# BIRTHDAY POEM FOR JOHN NEWLOVE

*Irving Layton*

All poets are magicians or murderers;
the indeterminate end up editing magazines
or working at Harbourfront.
Here prayers and connections are useless.

I can only speak for myself.
Still, when I read your verse
I feel you've looked on the Medusa face of love
and seen, yes, the glory and horror
in that gorgon's bloodshot eyes;
better than most
you know the awful price
a masterpiece exacts,
you having paid it oftener
than Trudeau has sniffed his red boutonnière.

I watched you lug around for years
your disappointment in God and yourself,
your pity for the lonely old men
fumbling towards their death
in libraries and public toilets.
Your opulent despair
at what we yahoos do to ourselves
— more often than not I share it.

But you don't leave me there forever;
there's also your enormous zest
for the different tonalities of noise
(grey music you call some of it)
"Were the bunks neat in Auschwitz?" you ask.
I can also imagine you laughing
at the fastidious copulation of spiders.

Whom the gods do not intend to destroy
they first make mad with poetry.

# ENDINGS BE DAMNED

## *Robert Kroetsch's "Gone Indian"*

*Margaret E. Turner*

IF ROBERT KROETSCH AND HIS WRITING have become a "cottage industry" in western Canada,[1] it is for good reason. Kroetsch recreates his *place* every time he writes; this is a profoundly interesting activity to the people who live in that place. In a sense, he accomplishes again and again what Sheila Watson did when she made the Cariboo "real" in *The Double Hook*. The difference, of course, is that Watson has been determined to maintain a distance from her work, while Kroetsch has demanded recognition of the complex relationship between himself and his texts. One reason for that difference may be simply a function of personality. The more interesting reason has to do with Kroetsch's self-conscious and public exploration of the writing process. Kroetsch does not allow that the processes involved with literature — the writing of poetry and fiction, or the acts of criticism or reading — are closed. If writing reinvents the world, reading reinvents the text. His poetry, fiction, and criticism function as commentary and extension of each other: he demonstrates his theories of culture and literature by reference to his own texts. In Kroetsch's own words, all are part of the story: "It's the story, its treatment, the narrative itself, that's the model, not an outside conception. . . . I think criticism is really a version of story, you see; I think we are telling the story to each other of how we get at story."[2]

Kroetsch demands recognition of the self-reflexive nature of his work early in his writing career: in fact in his fourth novel, *Gone Indian*, published in 1973. Although it is a major novel, there has been very little critical attention paid to *Gone Indian*;[3] much more attention has been given to the other two novels of the Out West triptych, and to the novels and collections of poetry since *Gone Indian*. The point remains, however, that Kroetsch highlights issues and ideas in *Gone Indian* that have preoccupied him in his subsequent work: play with traditional imaginative forms, and with the stability of the structures of language;[4] interrogation of the nature of author, of fiction, of place. *Gone Indian* maps the territory that Kroetsch has travelled since the early seventies.

Discussion of Kroetsch's work involves a discussion of place. The particular place of his writing is western Canada, often Alberta. The *idea* of place is not so simply defined. E. D. Blodgett argues that the frontiers of English-speaking western Canada were drawn in linear patterns of railroad, survey lines, and sections that enforced a geographic and psychological closure even as they opened the West. He extends this contradiction to include a further contradiction between the geometric design of place and the genres of English-Canadian fiction of the West.[5] In a sense the linear design does apply to Kroetsch's *Gone Indian*: Jeremy states his horror of "the inevitable circle" just before he vanishes, and his movement throughout the novel is not cyclic. The point, however, is made explicit that linearity does *not* require closure. It is precisely this contradiction between the perception of place and the manner in which place is presented in literature that Kroetsch addresses in *Gone Indian*. Jeremy wants to carry his quest further and he can: he is *not* trapped, either in the northwest or in reality. Because Kroetsch deliberately makes the place more real in language than in fact, Jeremy can transfigure himself *out* of it into what can be seen as an extension of the tall tale world he has encountered from his arrival: Jeremy goes Indian, and disappears. For Kroetsch, and for Jeremy, then, "to go west [is] to enter the mind's geometry, a long journey, one might say, of self-reflection, of finding one's self lost."[6]

Kroetsch's texts raise the question of place, an important question in Canadian writing. In a very real sense, Canada itself does not exist until it is written. Until that happens, until Kroetsch and Watson and others write the new world into existence, we remain mired in a middle passage[7] — caught in the movement from the old world of Europe, the source of Canadian colonists in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, to a secure and authentic existence in the new world. The middle passage is figured in absence, of both public and social structures of organization, and private and individual structures of belonging and identity. It is also figured in silence: silence is the logical and necessary condition in the middle passage, the pendulum swing between somewhere and nowhere, between old and new worlds. As the pendulum pauses — for a moment, forever — personal and cultural identity, history, memory, language do not exist. The middle passage raises questions about the nature of place, *this* place, and the nature and possibility of human being in it. To move from Canada as nowhere to Canada as somewhere involves finding a language, and using it to describe — to name — place.

Kroetsch's work is positioned at this point of the middle passage. For Kroetsch Canada, and especially the Canadian West, is nothing if not an idea; to use Henry Kreisel's words, it is a state of mind.[8] Much of Kroetsch's writing comes out of that idea: he is convinced that we can — *must* — make a new literature out of the new experience,[9] new land, new place, and new language. As he says of himself and of naming: "Naming a new world has intrigued me . . . it's been a primary concern, that sense of a misnamed world or an unnamed world that had to be named."[10]

He begins by un-naming and un-inventing, and reinvents place, as he makes language the site of his writing.

Kroetsch's awareness of the significance, possibilities, and limits of literary and social construction is developed in the dialogue that occurs within and between his literary texts and his critical writing, a dialogue which often bears on the nature of writing in this country. The distinction between forms is frequently blurred: in *Gone Indian*, as elsewhere, fiction is the subject of his fiction.[11] Kroetsch uses the idea of the critical act as a way to write fiction:[12] *Gone Indian* is a novel made out of Madham's commentary on Jeremy's taped text. Kroetsch denies the convention that the novel is not a fiction by engaging the reader in the fiction-making process.[13] The fiction becomes *fiction*, and at the same time becomes more *real* than fiction. As Kroetsch has it, we create the world by naming it: the translation into fiction makes our identity and experience real. Robert Lecker argues that the border is a key to Kroetsch's work: it is the point at which opposites unite and undergo a metamorphosis, and is always in the process of transformation as it defies the static structures of a fixed world.[14] In *Gone Indian* Kroetsch signals his interest in the border between security and diffusion of personality; in ontological terms between existence and annihilation; in language between creating and uncreating words and worlds.

WE SEE KROETSCH, with Jeremy, inventing the Canadian northwest in the writing of *Gone Indian*. The novel is an exercise in the creation of self and place, a point that Kroetsch makes explicit: one of Jeremy's unfinished doctoral dissertations begins with "Christopher Columbus, not knowing that he had not come to the Indies, named the inhabitants of that new world—."[15] Like Columbus, on his trip to Canada Jeremy does not *really* know where he has landed but soon finds out that the strangeness and possibility of the place equal, if not surpass, his expectations. His transformations, from graduate student to Grey Owl, from weakling and victim to the Winter King, and from impotent human to buffalo bull are aspects of his invention of what becomes *his* northwest.

Jeremy defines himself in his tape recordings and the notebooks he has ready for another attempt at his dissertation. In a similar manner Madham creates himself in his letters to Jill Sunderman and his purportedly scholarly comments on Jeremy's work. Madham's definition in words may well be more significant than Jeremy's, although Jeremy seems to be the main character: everything we see and hear of him, however, is filtered through Madham's eyes and words. Madham's is the controlling consciousness of the novel, and he is clearly not reliable in the traditional sense. Of course this is part of Kroetsch's design: through Madham's slanted telling of the novel we come to question not only *his* assumptions and beliefs but our own

perceptions, as well as the place and experience we thought we knew and understood. Madham's narration is also the source of irony and humour in the novel: "*It is my own opinion that everything he [Jeremy] says can be taken at face value. He was as surprised as are we by the course of events, failing to understand, as he did, the nature of freedom*" (2). Of course nothing that Madham *says* Jeremy says can be taken at face value, nor can Madham's comments about himself; we learn later that it is Jeremy, not Madham, who understands the nature of freedom.

Jeremy is preoccupied with the necessity of his own self-creation in language: after nine years as a graduate student in the English Department of an American university, his unwritten dissertation threatens to ruin his life — as it has his sexual performance. He has many failed attempts at the dissertation to his credit:

> "Going Down With Orpheus."
> Eighteen months and four hundred pages. Abandoned.
> "The Artist as Clown and Pornographer."
> Nine months of reading and three hundred index cards. Sold to an M.A. candidate for twenty dollars.
> "The Columbus Quest: The Dream, the Journey, the Surprise."
> Eighteen weeks. I couldn't get past the first sentence. (62)

Unable to write he carries a tape recorder so that, in Madham's words, "he might commit to tape the meditations and insights that would help him complete his dissertation" (1). He finally sets out on his own Columbus quest in imitation of his childhood hero, Archie Belaney. The ostensible reason for his trip west is a job interview which Madham has arranged for him "at that last university in the last city on the far, last edge of our civilization" (6) — the University of Alberta. However, at the airport he answers the Customs officer's "Purpose of trip?" with "I want to be Grey Owl. . . . I want to become—"(6). Only in Grey Owl's country — Canada — can his dream of transformation come true:

> "Sadness," old Madham says to me one day, "there's only one problem in this world that you take seriously."
> "Right," I said.
> "No," he said. "I mean yes. Why did Archie Belaney become Grey Owl?"
> "How," I said. I raised my right hand, the palm facing the good professor's beaming face. Why he was sweating I do not know.
> "The story of a man," I agreed, "who died into a new life."
> "He faked the death."
> "But he woke up free nevertheless."
> "Be serious."
> "One false move, Professor, and instead of addressing you, I'll be you. That's serious." (62)

That is, of course, exactly what happens: the twist in the novel is that it is *Madham's* quest that Jeremy lives out. All the discussion of identity comes from Madham, who controls the content of the book by presenting his edited transcrip-

tions of Jeremy's tapes: "Of course I have had to select from the tapes, in spite of Jeremy's instructions to the contrary: the mere onslaught of detail merely overwhelms" (13). Of course he also controls and disrupts chronological time in his presentation. Jeremy becomes real as Madham tells his story — and Madham does too. At the beginning of the novel he sums up Jeremy's motivations for the reader:

> Jeremy believed that his whole life was shaped and governed by some deep American need to seek out the frontier. A child of Manhattan, born and bred, he dreamed always a far interior that he might in the flesh inhabit. He dreamed northwest, that is undeniable. Only let me assert: it was I who sent him there. (5-6)

Madham is preoccupied with the transformation of identity because *he* has died into a new life. His words about Jeremy apply equally to himself: "The possibility of transformation, I must recognize, played no little part in Jeremy's abiding fantasy of fulfilment. It gave him, in the face of all his inadequacies, the illusion of hope" (7). Madham's hope is that he can go home again, and through Jeremy he does.

The random naming of Jeremy after Jeremy Bentham is no less bizarre than Madham's assigning of his own new name: Kroetsch seems to be saying that all identity is accidental, relative, random, and changeable. Curiously Jeremy is trapped into living out "the accident of his name: that one portion of identity which is at once so totally invented and so totally real" (51) — his mother tells him that his absent father "wanted [him] to grow up . . . to be a professor" (52). Like Madham's, Jeremy's status is figured according to academic standards. He has yet, however, to complete his degree and become a success in Madham's terms: "Professor Madham, you did this. You sent me out here. You, with your goddamned go-get-a-job syndrome, publish, head a committee. Become a dean and die" (19). He has spent his years of graduate school being guilty about the academic work he is not doing, which results in his inability to perform sexually:

> Guilt. Old-fashioned guilt. Every time I lie down I feel guilty because I'm not up and studying. Work on your new dissertation, Sadness. Review for the final oral. Retake that German exam. Write that paper that's four years overdue. I'M TOTALLY GUILTY. (35)

His rebellion against his eastern life is also figured in academic standards. On his trip west he begins by reacting against Madham and the university: "*Instead of doing as I instructed, he [Jeremy] used the recorder to insult everything the university must stand for*" (1). Naturally enough, he addresses his tapes to his thesis supervisor. After missing his job interview twice he gradually surrenders himself to the principles of the new order, which results in his discarding the tape recorder and disappearing. His problem of guilt is solved in the process: he and Bea Sunderman become lovers and disappear together.

After trying to live up to his namesake, and then to his supervisor, Jeremy tries to become his own hero. Like Madham, Jeremy eventually invents his new name and makes it and his new identity *real*. Like the reborn Grove, Jeremy is the quin-

tessential Kroetsch hero. He and Grove create a past while their real journey is into a future of possibility.[16] Like Grove, Jeremy is not acting out the quest for identity as the given authentic self, but the belief that the chosen fiction is the fullest and most free imaginative act.[17] Kroetsch says of Grove that "as his reality, so to speak, comes into doubt, he comes more and more to represent our own predicament."[18] We might say the same of Jeremy.

Madham attributes one thing to Jeremy which is corroborated by Jeremy himself: his need to seek out the wilderness. Jeremy substitutes the border for the frontier, and performs the liberating but risky act of crossing it.[19] He is very like Melville's "judicious, unencumbered travellers . . . who cross the frontiers into Eternity with nothing but a carpet bag, — that is to say, the Ego"[20] except that he has left his suitcase — and "himself" — behind. Jeremy fastens on the dream of Grey Owl and wilderness when he is playing the Indian with the other children on the street:

> I didn't want to be the Indian at all. They told me, You be the Indian, Sadness. We'll hunt you down. No matter where you hide, we'll hunt you down. We'll kill you. And they threw broken bricks and they tied me up. . . . So the tailor across the hall from my mother's apartment brought me in his books of Grey Owl; one by one, he brought them. Unfolded them. Unveiled them. He gave me his dream of the European boy who became . . . pathfinder . . . borderman . . . the truest Indian of them all.
>
> When I was old enough, brave enough, a teaching assistantship in my bedroll, I fled Greenwich Village. . . . Yes, to the wilderness. To a labyrinth of streets and highways and corridors through which, in nine years, I did not learn to find my way. (94)

What Jeremy sees as wilderness is Binghamton, the centre of cultivation and civilization that Madham fled to from the northern prairie. Jeremy's and Madham's imaginations *make* Binghamton signify whatever it does for each of them: in Lecker's border metaphor, it would constitute a border between prairie wilderness and Manhattan civilization.[21] As Kroetsch points out repeatedly, truth is not absolute: "A lie, I thought to myself. A downright lie. What has happened to truth?" (70). Kroetsch would say that nothing has happened to truth, but much has happened to our *idea* of it, and whether or not we even believe that it exists. Much of *Gone Indian* illustrates that, especially in the new world, truth, reality, and individual existence are not fixed and are not what we may have thought them to be.

MADHAM OFFERS NUMEROUS CLUES to his "real" name and identity: Robert Sunderman, the young man who disappeared playing hockey on a frozen slough. He and Sunderman both have "the perfect physique"; Madham is the same age as Sunderman would be; at the end of the novel he grieves that

Worlds End, which he has come to love as well as if it were his own (154), is deserted.[22] When he tells us that Jeremy dreamed northwest he says of himself: "I am a western boy who ever dreamed east" (95):

> The forest of my own intent is inhabited by strange creatures, surely. The figure of Roger Dorck for one comes to haunt me. He was a dedicated man who spent his life caring for the family of a drowned friend. I cannot for a moment accept the notion that his "accident" was motivated by disappointment in love. Accident is a part of our daily lives; if not, then all of modern physics is madness. Are not explanations themselves assigned almost at random? (51)

Of course Madham assigns explanations at random to Jeremy's actions, but Kroetsch is pointing up a more widespread disorder. Most revealing is Madham's admission that he has caused Jeremy's trip to "his" northwest. He casts it as a fulfilment of Jeremy's childhood dream, but clearly it is his own quest that Jeremy fulfils vicariously for him:

> The truth is, I was myself born out there on those wind-torn prairies, on the ripped edge of that northern forest — the details are unimportant. Perhaps I never mentioned as much to Jeremy. But no, he was the student, not I, and it was I who set him his demanding task, his continent's interior to discover . . . I sent him out there as on a mission, as on a veritable quest for something forever lost to me and yet recoverable to the world. (13-14)

That something lost to Madham is not only his wife, with whom Jeremy disappears at the end of the novel, but the magical possibilities which are opened up in the West. Bizarre events begin even before Jeremy is mistaken for Roger Dorck: in the Customs room at the airport he encounters the young blond smuggler disguised as a woman, who says he was a buffalo in a previous life. Jeremy responds by leaving the Customs quarters *disguised as himself*, but is mistaken for Dorck due to an exchange of luggage — and egos? The series of events thus started cannot be stopped. The ending has been determined: "Mr. Dorck must have read in this notebook, trying to discover who took his suitcase. And he printed across the bottom of the page: 'THIS, THEN, IS HOW IT ENDED'" (23).

In contrast to Jeremy, Madham appears to be satisfied with the civilized life which he sought and found. Madham escaped that strange western place, and as mysteriously as Jeremy eventually does: no one knows whether or not he actually went through the ice, and if he did, whether or not it was deliberate. His father's "[n]ever found hide nor hair of my boy" (131) heightens the comedy — a body could not *disappear* in a frozen slough. Nevertheless, Madham vanishes as completely as Jeremy does later, and with as little explanation. There are some similarities: Madham/Sunderman leaves a hole in the ice; Jeremy's tape recorder from which Madham constructs them both is left hanging from a bridge over a frozen river. Their ends are prefigured early in the book: "You [Jill] knocked a hole in the ice with your laugh. He [Jeremy] leaped. He plunged in at the broken edge. Re-

turned, returned. Into the bath of cold, and down. The white world around him turning black" (43). Madham is sure that Jeremy perished rather than escaped in the way he remembers because if Jeremy got away like *he* did, another exchange of the carpet bag/ego would occur and their identities would emerge — Jeremy would experience the same metamorphosis and *be* him: "It would surely seem impossible that anyone might drown in all that ice and snow. God knows, I shall never forget it. And yet, Robert Sunderman went through the ice. Or knocked a hole in the ice and disappeared. . . . No; it is just possible" (155). At the end of the novel Madham is "persuaded" by his jealousy and envy that the lovers could only have disappeared into death:

> She [Carol] would have them hop down from the train, even as Grey Owl and Anahareo might have jumped headlong out of a boxcar with their few surviving beaver. With all the unbounded wilderness rolling to the north. Making a clean break into the last forest. . . . "No," I told her. "Not ever. . . . I came east on that same line, rode through a hard winter. I waved at the section hands who only stood stock still in the blistering cold air and let me go. I saw the rivers running north. Under the ice and snow: locked—" (153)

He is unwilling to believe that Jeremy may have escaped as he did, or that the possibilities he denied himself could ever have become real for Jeremy. Madham's apparently concluded self is dearly won by exile and denial.[23]

Madham carefully cultivates his persona as the dignified professor. He "grasps" at "the professor's domain: the world of reflection, of understanding. The insight born of leisurely and loving meditation. The word made human. Jeremy, it would seem, only uttered a curse" (13). When irritated or threatened by Jeremy's tapes, however, his dignified demeanour lapses and with it his language: "The poor fucker finally flipped out. He was a buffalo's ass from the word go" (106). Madham must claim prior ownership — authorship? — when Jeremy makes Madham's northwest his own: "I must break my silence, Miss Sunderman. Your idiot lascivious student knew *nothing*: and yet would dare to dream *my* northwest" (101). When his control slips he gives away his past:

> Is it not odd, this impulse in the erring man: this need to divulge, to confess? This little need assumed immense proportions as Jeremy let himself be propelled by unconscious desires into self-revelation. To get into a corner on those vast prairies is not easy. And yet the words of self-betrayal flowed like a spring flood, like the waters from a breached dam, rolling and tossing and breaking a lost body into oblivion . . . (95-96)

The entire novel is a function of *Madham's* need to confess. What he says about Jeremy can be said of himself: Jeremy not only becomes Madham, but Madham in a sense becomes Jeremy as he is revealed through him. As Jill bends over Jeremy's open suitcase and creates him out of its contents (20), she is creating Madham as well: his life is on display in his comments on Jeremy's work. When Jeremy enters

Madham's former world he shares parts of his life, and other people's as well. Eventually he becomes Madham/Sunderman with Bea: "You came back. I have been waiting. It was a long time" (148). In the diffusion of personality we are left with, in Arnold Davidson's words, two unclear self-portraits joined in one blurred double exposure.[24] The diffusion of personality is completed when Jeremy disappears.

In the northwest Jeremy enters completely into the carnival world where the usual rules of behaviour and logic do not apply. Kroetsch presents this in the form of the Notikeewin Winter Festival, to which Jeremy is irresistibly drawn. All identity comes into question in the carnival world, until Kroetsch seems to be asking if we know who we are, or if we exist at all. It is an ironic and absurd world: in his Grey Owl outfit Jeremy is the one who looks most like an Indian — Joe Beaver's children giggle and ask why his hair is that way (65) — and is eventually mistaken for one: Jeremy and Grey Owl are the truest Indians of them all.

Jeremy discards his identity and his hold on reality: all things are possible as the boundaries between humans, and between humans and animals are dissolved. Mistaken for Dorck, who is the winter king, Jeremy re-enacts Dorck's snowmobile accident and finds another world under the snow: "Snow on my eyelashes told me that I was inside a snowman, looking out on a strange, distant world. . . . Say no more. Listen to the fall of silence, hear your own last breath and know for one instant you are no longer" (40). He wins the snowshoe race, although he has never worn snowshoes before: "like a bear that was learning to dance" (82) he runs right out of himself (90) and has to be dragged down at the end of the race as he heads farther west to the Rocky Mountains. During his race his human identity comes oddly close to the earth and the animal kingdom: he is urged on by a magpie that travels with him, he passes other runners by swerving to follow a rabbit, he dreams a buffalo and stumbles with it at the old buffalo jump. He cannot "connect," however, either visually or linguistically, with the men who look like muskrats and beat him for being the *Indian* who won the race: "Again I did not answer. When I might have saved myself, simply by speaking. But I would not speak. For if I had tried, it would have been a tongue I did not understand" (93). The transformation is complete — the next time Jeremy loses language he will disappear.

The diffusion of identities is complicated by the repetitions in the novel: the cowboy and Roger Dorck are both injured by wild fights and falls through the air; Dorck is Bea Sunderman's lover both before she marries Sunderman and after his disappearance, and Jeremy replaces Dorck with Bea and as Winter King; Sunderman telephoned Bea after his disappearance, which is re-enacted when Jeremy calls for Dorck after Dorck's accident; Bea's daughter becomes Dorck's lover after Bea's disappearance because he thinks she is a younger Bea; Bea disappears as her husband did, while Carol says that *she* would have gone with her husband; Mad-

ham replaces Jeremy with his wife, while Jeremy replaces Madham/Sunderman with his; Madham, with Carol, acts out the buffalo mating that Jeremy dreams; Carol is the same age as Madham/Sunderman's daughter Jill. Jeremy is acting out Madham's conflicting desire to return to the open possibilities of a disordered realm which he will not undertake precisely because of its lack of limit: "Carol, in her own delightful way, fails to grasp the consequence of the northern prairies to human definition: the diffusion of personality into a complex of possibilities rather than a concluded self" (152). Madham will not risk that diffusion — even though he may occasionally be "suffocating in this place [Binghamton], saturated, walled in, drowning" he will not go back, or even leave Carol's bed (152).

As well as rites of transformation, the carnival includes ritual tests of strength and endurance: "Combat, goddamnit, that's what it is. Trial by strength. Trial by chance. Trial by wager. Trial by drowning in your own sweat. Trial by freezing your balls off. Trial by falling. Trial by flying" (75). The highlight of the carnival occurs when Jeremy has to choose the Winter Queen from three identical contestants: "I mean, they didn't just bear a striking resemblance to each other. They were impeccable duplicates. They might have been Xeroxed copies of some lost original . . ." (112). He agonizes over the impossible choice, not knowing until afterward that the contest is rigged: "You're a figurehead. . . . You're not supposed to judge. . . . They sell tickets. The person who gets the most buyers is the winner" (120). Which reminds us of Dorck's comment in Jeremy's notebook at the beginning: this, then, is how it ended.

Jeremy's personality is, of course, diffused into a complex of possibilities which he finds at least as fascinating as they are frightening. Kroetsch delights in the skewing of reality he achieves in his fiction, by drawing on carnival:[25] rather than writing as if Jeremy's, and our lives depended on it, he celebrates the possibility of the dissolution of order. The carnival — the Notikeewin Winter Festival — reverses the usual order of things and raises uncommon questions and possibilities. Jeremy is plagued by problems of identity: they might be said to define him. His clothes, his idea of what Grey Owl should look like, are both a disguise and a reflection of his own identity. When he tries to be Grey Owl, Madham casts him instead as a savage: "He is sloppy, uptight, unclean: your version of a savage. . . . Jeremy is unshaven and wears no shirt over his bare chest. He has come in out of the icy sunlight in his levis and moccasins and his buckskin jacket. For your scalp. For your maidenhood" (21-22). His real Indian transformation happens only when Joe Beaver and his wife rescue him after his beating, dress him in Joe's clothes, and tell him "Grey Owl would be proud. . . . He was brave like you" (100-1).

The most radical questioning of the nature of existence and reality occurs in Jeremy's buffalo dreams. The buffalo seem to Jeremy to be a symbol of a positive, primitive force in mythical and historical as well as personal terms. The settlement

of the West is undone as Jeremy dreams the return of the buffalo to the prairie and a reversal of history:

> And the buffalo came back in his dreaming. Out of the north they came. . . . And the herds moved onto the bald prairies. The wheatfields were gone. . . . Tell the Bloods. The cattle are gone from the prairie ranches; the ranches are gone. Tell the Piegans. The wolves are come from the north, are waiting to eat. The grizzly comes down from the western mountains. Tell the Stonies to build the buffalo pound. Tell the squaws to gather buffalo chips. Tell the dogs to be silent. Tell the hunter to get for his medicine bundle FIRST a decorated pipestem, THEN . . . the skin of a grey owl, THEN a painted buffalo robe . . . (101-3)

He also dreams the scalping of Edmonton, an undoing of white settlement, and his new name:

> "Now," he [Poundmaker] said, "you are Has-Two-Chances."
>
> It was as if the calling of the name itself awakened him. Or perhaps it was only the motion of the moving truck. But he found himself in a dark so dark he might have been in a womb. Dreaming the world to come. (106)

His transformation is made complete by his sexual success with Buffalo Woman: "Lumpish and swollen, he could not tell the real from the feigned. The beast imagining the beast imagining the beast" (108). Madham thinks that Jeremy is fascinated by buffalo because they "*make love standing up*" (106), but the incident is clearly more than simply a solution of his physical problem: it signifies the potency and power he does not have in his Jeremy Sadness life and has found here, which is his reason for refusing to go back.

THE QUESTIONING OF HISTORY, existence, and identity in Jeremy's dream and throughout the novel calls into question the nature of place and reality. Kroetsch suggests that Jeremy's and Madham's northwest has many of the characteristics of the carnival because the physical place, the *landscape*, causes a change in existence, perception, and reality. Here is Jeremy on the topic: "It was my own theory at the time that man living in wide-open spaces had a different relation to objects: because he could see where he stood, where he was going" (87). Jeremy certainly has a different clarity of vision here and seemingly Madham did as well, which would explain both their actions. Humans are not simply transformed into other people or animals, but are connected with the earth: at one point Kroetsch describes Jeremy and Jill, covered in snow, as "moving landscapes" (57). Madham explains the mysteries of the place in terms of physical conditions, and ascribes to Jeremy the symptoms of arctic hysteria: "The extreme cold, the long nights, the solitude of *unbounded* space: these are the enemies that induce that northern ecstasy. . . . At any rate, the afflicted person, quite commonly,

senses the presence of another who is not in fact there" (123-24). As well as being boundless and curiously immaterial (surely a reference to Jeremy Bentham), the landscape is timeless: at World's/Worlds End all the clocks are stopped. Madham as much as admits that the presence of unbounded space and the absence of time have driven him east:

> Your Jeremy, growing up in the east, felt compelled to play Indian; I can only assure you I have been Indian enough. I prefer to forget the experience, and yet I do recollect the sense of being — how shall I say? — *trapped* in the blank indifference of space and timelessness. And I would insist it was just that — the pressure not of time, but of its absence — that horrified those brave men who stumbled onto the central plateau of Antarctica. (124)

The physical nature of the place affects the perception of it, as well as the nature of existence there. The blank indifference of space and timelessness is *real*, and determines what human efforts will succeed: clearly in Kroetsch's opinion it only *just* allows individual existence. Silence is related to space,[26] and it is silence that Jeremy enters at the end of the novel.

From the start Jeremy has seen that "this is a peculiar land, Professor. Illusion is rife" (8). In such a place the only shared reality is brought into existence *in language*: "That's when the driver said, 'Notikeewin.' As if by speaking the name he had created a place on the blank earth" (16). Kroetsch suggests, though, that the world thus created is a mirage, where Jeremy at least could disappear: "They [the telegraph poles] made me notice the space — they or their shadows on the snow, on the horizon — and I couldn't even pretend to sleep. Because if I did I might wink out and be gone forever" (15). Of course that is exactly what he eventually does — the place makes him disappear into itself. Jeremy is positioned on the boundary between reality as he knows it and some other order — like Madham, one false move and he becomes something else. In the "virulence and vise of his fatal impulse to seek out the unknown" (72) Jeremy, with Columbus, invents his new world: "The Columbus quest for the oldest New World. The darkest gold. The last first. I was lifting my hidden face. To the gateway beyond. To the place of difficult entrance. To the real gate of the dreamed cave. . . . I had tongued the unspeakable silence" (147). The sexual metaphor functions both for the process of creation and the limit of language: Jeremy loses words for the second time when he is in bed with Bea. His final transformation occurs as he moves out of language:

> I shall, at last, commence my dissertation. Christopher Columbus, not knowing that he had not come to the Indies of his imagination. Imagined that he had come to the Indies. . . . I am going to lie here for the rest of my life, talking, recording everything. Until I can think nothing that I do not speak. Speaking. Until the inside and the outside are one, united — (149)

When the inside and the outside are the same, Jeremy no longer exists, which is

where he has been tending throughout — reaching through the mirror to touch his own skin, fearing that Dorck's suitcase may contain his own possessions (19), metamorphosing from human to beast and back. Jeremy rejects the method of his self-creation and turns off the tape recorder. He discovers the failure of the word and rejects metaphor and language,[27] which has large significance for the world that language has created. Bea's house is truly Jeremy's world's end.

Madham would have it that Jeremy and Bea flee to be cornered like animals (157), run down by a train that was "both *off schedule* and using a track it was not supposed to be *on*" (153). In the middle passage where structure, organization, and meaning are in question, such circumstances are not only possible, but likely to occur. The strangeness of the place appropriately enough persists, and Jeremy is literally and metaphorically gone. In a sense he has the same problem as Johnnie Backstrom and the boy on the bull in *The Words of My Roaring*: since they don't lose they have to find a way to get off.[28] Jeremy jumps. Grey Owl makes a new life as an imposter and an illusion; in Jeremy's jump between illusion and reality,[29] which way is which? After he tongues the unspeakable silence of the Columbus quest for the oldest New World, he ceases to speak and thus ceases to exist — his taped and transcribed words are all that are left of him. He escapes into story: "the rest is fiction" (157). Jeremy becomes a fiction, the title of the novel. To go Indian is his fictive naming: the fiction makes him — and us — real.

Kroetsch raises a serious and complex issue here: if we make our place in language, and language is a game, what is the nature of place? Clearly place — and self — can be spoken out of as well as into existence. It is an unstable balance to maintain, a difficult negotiation of the middle passage — between somewhere and nowhere, in and out of silence — which threatens to become permanent. That appears to be what Madham feared, being mired between worlds, yet the trip into the middle passage is a positive move for Jeremy. In a sense Jeremy is an older new-world man than Madham, and after having experienced the so-called civilization of the East first-hand wants to return to a more golden place and time: *in illo tempore*. The release from identity which he welcomes is a risk Madham will not take; he opts instead for security, antiques, and the dignity of his grey temples. Who wins and who loses we cannot, and Kroetsch does not, tell.

Kroetsch raises the questiton not only of what this does to language, but of what it does to the speaker: Jeremy ceases to exist when he does not talk; Madham, having disappeared once, talks incessantly. Kroetsch circles back to language, and construction in language: his northwest exists only in his, Madham's, and Jeremy's words. The ending of *Gone Indian* must be as it is: we are left with a teller we do not trust and a tale we cannot realistically believe. If Jeremy is on the pendulum swing between worlds — not unlike the bridge which spans the abyss between the two worlds, the British garrison and the Indian encampment, in John Richardson's *Wacousta* — Kroetsch shows him swinging so far out that he disappears. He does

not so much enter the middle passage as exit the process entirely — or fall out of cosmologies.[30] As Kroetsch says, to go into pure chaos is to vanish.[31] For Jeremy, the Icarus flight — fall? — is infinitely preferable to cyclic repetition, a kind of closure:

> And then I was afraid. Frightened of the inevitable circle. . . . Remembering a passage from Grey Owl: a wall of snow . . . a hissing mass of snow-devils . . . caught in the grip of one endless circle . . . the deadly circle . . . always the lost man circling blindly, come back upon himself . . . finding himself only, his own tracks mocking him . . . the dark labyrinth become a place of phantasma and fevered imaginings . . . possessed by a shuddering dread . . . the endless circle his end — (144)

Early in the novel Dorck's, the cowboy's, and his own wild flights through the air show Jeremy that the difficulty is not in breaking out of the circle, but in the seemingly inevitable return: "Learning to fall, I was thinking: that's the trick. Flying is easy. The whole, the absolute mastery resides in knowing how to fall" (78). At the end Jeremy refuses that return. In Kroetsch's voice as cultural critic: "in our very invisibility lies our chance for survival."[32]

Kroetsch holds that we create our place, and our selves, in language. The place, the past has no meaning until it is dealt with — accounted for, if you will — in the writer's ledger. Occasionally the account balances: often it does not. And often the results seem to be inconclusive. Such is the case with *Gone Indian*. Jeremy remains in motion: endings be damned (24) indeed. Kroetsch believes that the absence of certainties is not a disadvantage or a falsehood: the absence of limit is the presence of possibility. As Madham says, getting into a corner on the prairie is not easy.

## NOTES

[1] D. B. Jewison, Nov. 24, 1986, in conversation.

[2] Shirley Neuman and Robert Wilson, *Labyrinths of Voice: Conversations with Robert Kroetsch* (Edmonton: NeWest, 1982), 30.

[3] The novel gets complete treatment in Arnold Davidson's "Will the Real R. Mark Madham Please Stand Up: A Note on Robert Kroetsch's *Gone Indian*," *Studies in Canadian Literature*, 5:3 (1980), and in Robert Lecker's 1986 study of Kroetsch. It comes into discussions of Kroetsch's aesthetic: see notes *infra*.

[4] Peter Thomas, "Robert Kroetsch and Silence," *Essays on Canadian Writing*, 18/19 (Summer/Fall 1980), 36-37.

[5] E. D. Blodgett, "Gone West to Geometry's Country," in *Configuration: Essays in the Canadian Literatures* (Toronto: ECW, 1982), 187-218.

[6] Blodgett, 215.

[7] The term comes from R. T. Robertson, "My Own Country: Prairie Immigrant Literature," in *The Commonwealth Writer Overseas: Themes of Exile and Expatriation*, ed. A. Niven (Brussels: Didier, 1976), 75-85.

[8] Henry Kreisel, "The Prairie: A State of Mind," 1968; rpt. *Contexts of Canadian Criticism*, ed. Eli Mandel (1971; rpt. Toronto and Buffalo: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1977), 254-66.

[9] Robert Kroetsch, "A Conversation with Margaret Laurence," in *Creation*, ed. Robert Kroetsch, James Bacque, and Pierre Gravel (Toronto and Chicago: New Press, 1970), 53.

[10] Neuman and Wilson, *Labyrinths*, 32.

[11] Louis MacKendrick, "Robert Kroetsch and the Modern Canadian Novel of Exhaustion," *Essays on Canadian Writing*, 11 (Summer 1978), 10.

[12] Geoff Hancock, "An Interview with Robert Kroetsch," *Canadian Fiction Magazine*, 24/25 (Spring/Summer 1977), 40.

[13] Hancock, "Interview," 42.

[14] Lecker, "Bordering On: Robert Kroetsch's Aesthetic," *Journal of Canadian Studies*, 117:3 (Fall 1982), 125.

[15] Robert Kroetsch, *Gone Indian* (1973; rpt. Toronto: General, 1981), 21. All subsequent quotations are from this edition and are cited within the text.

[16] Susan Wood, "Reinventing the Word: Kroetsch's Poetry," *Canadian Literature*, 77 (Summer 1979), 37.

[17] Peter Thomas, *Robert Kroetsch* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1980), 3.

[18] Robert Kroetsch, "The Canadian Writer and the American Literary Tradition," in "Robert Kroetsch: Essays," *Open Letter*, 5th ser., no. 4 (Spring 1983), 14.

[19] Russell M. Brown, "Crossing Borders," *Essays on Canadian Writing*, 22 (Summer 1981), 159.

[20] Quoted in Brown, "Crossing Borders," 161.

[21] Shirley Neuman, in conversation.

[22] See Arnold Davidson's "Will the Real R. Mark Madham Please Stand Up: A Note on Robert Kroetsch's Gone Indian," *Studies in Canadian Literature*, 5:3 (1980), 135-39.

[23] Thomas, *Robert Kroetsch*, 69.

[24] Davidson, "Will the Real R. Mark Madham," 136.

[25] In "Carnival and Violence: a Meditation ("Robert Kroetsch: Essays," *Open Letter*, 5th ser., no. 4 [Spring 1983], 111-22), Kroetsch acknowledges his debt to Mikhail Bakhtin and Julia Kristeva.

[26] Robert Kroetsch, "Introduction," *Boundary 2, A Canadian Issue*, 3:1 (Fall 1974), 1.

[27] MacKendrick, "The Modern Canadian Novel of Exhaustion," 25.

[28] P. L. Surette discusses the dilemma of Johnnie and the boy on the bull in *The Words of My Roaring*, and argues that Johnnie is made Fortune's fool through good rather than bad luck: "The Fabular Fiction of Robert Kroetsch," *Canadian Literature*, 77 (Summer 1978), 17-18.

[29] Roderick Harvey, "The Limitations of Media," *Canadian Literature*, 77 (Summer 1978), 24.

[30] Neuman and Wilson, *Labyrinths*, 25.

[31] *Ibid.*

[32] Kroetsch, "The Canadian Writer and the American Literary Tradition," 15.

# MESSAGE

*Michael Best*

Lit crit, esoteric precious precise
is an applied science:
what hides behind the words
of lover politician bossparent child
hidden agendas to be dissected.

Choose one of the following and discuss.
Justify your interpretation with detailed reference
to the text image gesture inflexion:
I think we should reach consensus on this point
I can't find my shoes
you look great tonight
o rose thou art sick
how about a nice quiet lunch
feel fresh natural secure with
my fellow countrymen
amen.

Survival skill to hear the message
behind the message behind
above beyond between below

a breast an arm a river
a tree a fallen log.

But still I crave a way to unperplex
sometimes to see river tree log
dried moss suncrisp lichen
no gaps between

no gaps between.

# VOIX ET LUMIÈRES DANS "SAUVAGE-SAUVAGEON" DE M.-A. PRIMEAU

*Simone Knutson*

CE TITRE — *Sauvage-Sauvageon*[1] — saisit toute la polarité sur laquelle le roman est axé: l'envers et l'endroit du personnage qui se raconte, le va-et-vient entre le passé et le présent, entre la nostalgie et le désespoir, et surtout les paradoxes métaphysiques du Bien et du Mal qui tourmentent la protagoniste. Dès le début, l'auteure nous avertit — et en un sens nous rend complices — du suicide qui doit mettre un terme au monologue intérieur et par conséquent au roman. Dans une des îles paradisiaques de la côte pacifique, Maxine Lefebvre, professeur de français à la Faculté, est installée dans une chaise longue face à la mer ensoleillée; derrière elle, le "cottage" qu'elle vient de vendre à la suite de la mort de son père; à la main, une bouteille de whisky. Malgré sa réputation de fille modèle, elle est rongée par le remord car elle sent qu'elle a tué son père "aussi sûrement que si [elle] l'avai[t] poignardé" (14). Et peut-être aussi sa mère, songe-t-elle consternée, et Marcel et l'enfant qu'elle n'a pas voulu, et plus sûrement Angela à Nice. Aujourd'hui, à trente-huit ans, elle est bien décidée à avaler l'ampoule de poison qu'elle tâte au fond de sa poche, puis comme si de rien n'était, à aller s'allonger sur un rocher que la marée montante recouvrira en fin d'après-midi. Mais avant l'acte ultime, il lui faut à tout prix retrouver le fil de son enfance et revivre les étapes de sa vie afin d'essayer, une dernière fois, de sortir de son labyrinthe. Maxine, c'est la nouvelle Thésée accrochée au fil d'Ariane et ce fil, Primeau l'a tissé avec dextérité.

L'intrigue débute par le compte-rendu d'un événement insolite survenu peu avant la mort du père de Maxine à l'endroit même où elle se trouve aujourd'hui. Elle se rappelle qu'un jour, son père et elle avaient aperçu au dessus de la baie un aigle s'envolant avec un saumon emprisonné dans les serres: incident déjà assez rare, mais dont la suite tire vers le fabuleux, car la proie s'était débattue si désespérément qu'elle avait réussi — à la grande joie de Maxine — à entraîner avec elle au fond de la mer son agresseur, maintenant incapable de la lâcher. "J'ai aperçu le bec entr'ouvert de l'aigle happer à son tour un dernier souffle d'air avant de s'enforcer dans l'écume. Et j'ai ri" (12). Cette réaction avait suscité chez son

père un sentiment où se mêlaient horreur et pitié pour sa fille bien-aimée. Dès les premières pages donc, l'auteure nous présente Maxine-*Sauvage* en même temps qu'elle nous plonge au coeur même du sujet, voire les liens complexes entre père et fille. Plus tard nous comprendrons que le saumon-triomphant-du-rapace est non seulement le totem particulieur de Maxine mais aussi la métaphore-clé du roman.

Ensuite commence le retour en arrière. Le ton allègre de la première étape, l'enfance, capte l'insouciance de Maxine, fillette, et traduit le contentement qui régnait dans la jeune famille Lefebvre établie dans un village albertain "qui s'écoulait lentement [vers la campagne] comme un ruisseau dont la source se tarit" (19). A cinq ans, Maxine, fille unique, choyée, impérieuse, vit pour le moment où son père rentre de son bureau d'avocat et l'emmène faire de folles gambades dans les champs avoisinants. Ce prince-magicien, à l'imagination encore fraîche, savait transformer un coin champêtre encombré de rosiers sauvages en un paradis embaumé d'églantines. A force d'écouter les légendes antiques qu'il lui racontait, telles celles de Proserpine, de Jupiter et de Cérès, Maxine commençait à saisir les mystères du monde qui l'environnait. Elle apprend aussi pourquoi son père l'appelle 'Sauvageon': Comme ces rosiers sauvages qui n'ont besoin de personne pour survivre, explique-t-il, elle aime "vivre à sa façon, sans rendre de comptes" (23). Or, de continuer son père, le sauvageon aux piètres fruits a pourtant ceci de particulier — *et de précieux* — qu'il peut nourrir la pousse d'une autre plante greffée sous son écore et ainsi produire le miracle de fleurs supérieures. Devant ce prodige botanique, Maxine reste néanmoins plus inquiète qu'émerveillée car elle avait tout de suite compris que la vie lui réservait des moments douloureux.

En effet, à huit ans, Maxine voit s'écrouler son monde fabuleux quand on lui annonce qu'un 'petit frère' — ou tel on l'espérait — viendrait combler la famille. Elle s'enferme dans un mutisme farouche: Maxine-Sauvageon refuse qu'on greffe son petit univers. La grossesse de sa mère la dégoûte car ses copines s'en étaient moquées tout en lui apprenant l'envers de la sexualité. A force de patience et de sagesse sa mère réssuit presque à la récupérer mais elle est emportée par une métrorragie avant que Maxine n'accomplisse le geste de tendresse l'absolvant de ses cruelles tirades. Ainsi se trouvera balayé tout espoir de bonheur pour Maxine et pour son père aussi, car elle ne lui pardonnera jamais d'avoir voulu un autre enfant — un mâle! — causant ainsi la mort de sa mère.

Dorénavant, une froideur s'installe entre eux. Après quatre années de veuvage, son père épouse en secondes noces une 'marâtre,' selon Maxine, dont la réputation quelconque se trouvera quelque peu justifiée quand elle abandonnera son mari huit ans plus tard. Dès le début, Maxine trouve intolérable "leurs visages épanouis . . . leurs yeux [qui la] narguaient de leur sensualité" (78). A quatorze ans Maxine est inscrite au couvent d'abord, puis à l'université; elle ne reviendra au foyer que pour y prendre ses affaires et repartir vers l'Europe, reniant à jamais son père et son passé. "Le passé était mort, je le *voulais* mort" (64).

Une bourse lui permet de poursuivre ses études à Paris où elle rencontre Marcel, affable rejeton d'une famille aristocrate. Celui-ci s'éprend étrangement du "petit être sauvage" (70) dont le regard mystérieux cachait une violence à fleur de peau. Voulant la guérir du mal qui la ronge, il s'évertue à lui faire connaître Paris et ses petites rues, Piaf, l'Opéra, les grands concerts. Maxine accepte tout de lui sauf l'amour: ses caresses, sa tendresse, elle les lui repaye par le mépris; elle préfère *Une saison en Enfer* à *La Carte du Tendre*. La passion farouche de Maxine n'est "ni amour, ni tendresse, ni affection," lui le sait, mais c'est ainsi qu'il la veut, la désire: plutôt "l'anéantissement dans l'acte d'amour [que] la naïve confiance de l'enfant triste qui se donne [laissant] une impression de viol" (70). Un jour, cependant, Maxine pousse la perversité à outrance et Marcel, hors de lui, trahit une passion aussi dure et intransigeante que la sienne. Surprise d'avoir enfin trouvé son maître, elle cesse de se débattre, et ruse pour "voir jusqu'où irait le déchaînement de sa violence, jouer avec lui tout le régistre de l'amour, pour détruire ce passé qu'[elle] traînait partout avec [elle]" (80). De la sexualité qu'enfant elle avait reniée, Maxine-Electre s'en était forgé une arme car elle restera Sauvageon, capable de n'aimer qu'un homme comme son père d'autrefois. Le lendemain — tout comme le saumon s'était débarrassé de l'aigle — elle chasse Marcel de sa chambre et de sa vie. Bientôt elle se trouve enceinte et, mesquine, elle apprend cette nouvelle à son père, qu'elle savait récemment abandonné, en l'assurant que "pour rien au monde un enfant [d'elle] ne verrait le jour" (81). Ol lui écrit en toute hâte la suppliant de rentrer ou du moins d'accepter son aide. Comme elle avait piétiné l'amour de Marcel, elle refuse la générosité de son père. Même, elle 'oublie' de lui apprendre qu'un jour son "petit-fils bâtard" avait, de par lui-même, quitté son corps.

Le ton sec et désinvolte que l'auteure prête à la scène parisienne — le premier des quatre chapitres qui font la deuxième partie du roman — traduit parfaitement le processus de durcissement qui gagne l'âme empoisonnée de Maxine. Ce paysage tout intériorisé va ensuite faire place aux espaces maritimes de la côte d'Azur. Tout à coup le ton s'épanouit et le langage s'enrichit à la mesure des splendeurs ensoleillées de la Grande Corniche. Maxine aurait-elle par miracle retrouvé son Paradis perdu? Car elle s'étire dans son "cocon" (86), grâce surtout à la chaleur maternelle d'une collègue méridionale qu'elle rencontre au lycée où elle est venue faire un stage. Angela Salvatti veut échanger sa robuste gaîté contre une jeune présence et Maxine a tout juste l'âge de Jeannot, le fils unique qui l'a quittée un soir du Mardi Gras il y a quatre ans. Pour Maxine, Angela remplace un peu le père de jadis: "Les paroles de mon père lors de nos promenades d'autrefois

mêlaient leur chuchotis intime, inoubliable, à la passion bruyante d'Angela" (96). Celle-ci promène Maxine partout sur la Côte, à Florence, à Marrakech; il semblait donc tout naturel que la jeune étudiante déménage dans la chambre de Jeannot. Mais bientôt Angela devient accaparante, Maxine se hérisse et la scène parisienne va se répéter.

Hypnotisée dans son fauteuil au bord du Pacifique, Maxine somnole: les ombres de son père, de Marcel flottent à la surface pour se mêler à celle — plus insistante — d'Angela. Soudain elle est arrachée de son rêve méditérrannéen par l'apparition d'un aigle qui tournoie au-dessus de la baie. L'introduction de l'aigle à ce moment précis de la narration rappelle instantanément l'image du saumon-prisonnier-triomphant-du-rapace. La métaphore prépare donc à la description de cette dernière nuit du Carnaval à Nice qui est l'une des plus réussies du roman et son apogée du point de vue 'action.' A travers les descriptions de la foule bruyante qui se meut rythmique et sensuelle comme une seule entité, se faufile une petite note sournoise qui fait contrepoint avec la fresque bariolée. C'est le moment de vérité où Maxine découvre la profondeur de sa perfidie.

Bien décidée de jouir de l'ambiance bacchanaléenne du Mardi-Gras, Maxine s'était arrangée pour sortir avec Johnny, un jeune Américain, et comme elle assistant au lycée. Elle trouve le moyen de se débarrasser d'Angela qui, craignant la solitude en cette veille lui rappelant le départ de son fils, avait accepté de Johnny l'invitation de les accompagner. Au cours de la nuit d'exaltation qui célèbre la désagrégation temporaire de l'ordre social et moral Maxine compte triompher de la virginité de son jeune compagnon. "Regarde," s'écrie-t-elle pour retenir l'attention de Johnny qui voulait retrouver Angela maintenant perdue dans la foule, "les Niçois acclament la mort de leur roi qu'ils ont eux-mêmes livrés aux flammes. . . . Feux d'artifices! Fête de la vie, fête de la mort" (117). La métaphore est explicite. Le rite de l'immolation du Roi Carnaval semble donner une bénédiction à leur passion: Maxine et Johnny y consacrent la nuit. Le lendemain, ils sont ahuris d'apprendre la nouvelle de la mort d'Angela dans un accident de voiture sur la Grande Corniche et ils se rendent soudain compte du rôle qu'ils avaient joué — surtout Maxine — dans cette tragédie.

Le temps finira par estomper le souvenir de cette époque traumatisante de sa jeunesse, mais Maxine en restera marquée. Elle regagne son pays et — sans daigner passer voir son père — va s'établir sur la côte du Pacifique. Là, pendant une dizaine d'années, elle mènera la vie routinière de professeur avec, comme amant d'occasion, un collègue spécialiste des grands Romantiques anglais. Shaun avait laissé en Irlande femme et enfants dont il ne comptait nullement se délester, ce qui faisait parfaitement l'affaire de Maxine. Pour elle, Shaun existait "juste le peu dont elle avait besoin" (117) tout comme de Johnny, d'Angela et de Marcel.

Son petit train de vie sera tout à coup bouleversé par la nouvelle de la crise cardique que son père vient de subir. Angoissée à la pensée qu'il pourrait mourir

avant son arrivée, Maxine accourt à son chevet prête à tout oublier, à tout recommencer. Mais devant le visage ravagé qu'elle n'a pas vu depuis quinze ans, elle reste figée, incapable de répondre au sourire fébrile de ce vieillard qu'elle ne connaît plus. Son père, elle le veut "tel qu'autrefois" (133). Toutefois, ne pouvant se résoudre à le faire entrer dans un hospice, Maxine le ramène avec elle, mais c'est à contre-coeur et quitte "à [ne] lui donner . . . qu'un certain confort matériel" (134).

Une affinité s'établira immédiatement entre Monsieur Lefevbre et Shaun. Ces deux coeurs romantiques se parlaient à travers les vers de Wordsworth, de Keats, et Shelley, accentuant chez Maxine son sentiment de solitude. En effet, Maxine ne savait plus sourire et son rire, qui se faisait souvent entendre, sonnait faux et cruel. Inévitablement crèvera la rancoeur qu'elle avait couvée depuis son enfance. Un jour, Maxine déverse tout son fiel sur son père abasourdi et pour bien le punir, elle rompt avec Shaun. Elle s'enferme avec son père — maintenant privé de tout contact extérieur — dans un mutisme acharné où sévit la haine et la folie. "La violence la brûle comme un soleil noir" (150). Ses gestes et ses silences parlent plus haut que les quelques paroles froides — bien choisies pour le diminuer — qu'elle lui adresse de temps en temps.

Maxine a maintenant fait le tour de sa vie; il ne reste que "cette scène qui [l']empêche d'écrire FIN au bas de la page" (146) et qui s'avère le clou du roman. Le père de Maxine, qui dépérit à vue d'oeil, était encore assez valide pour aller passer les vacances du printemps dans la propriété même où Maxine se trouve présentement. Le matin de Pâques, se rappelle-t-elle, l'île n'était que "fraîcheur des cèdres. . . . Parfum des pins centenaires, de leur sève rajeunie qui envoûte, fait chavirer vos pensées, de sorte que vos pieds dansent [comme autrefois] Sauvageon [dansait] à travers les champs" (148). Tout à coup, comme il arrive souvent aux temps des équinoxes, une tempête se déchaîne sur l'île, coupant les fils électriques, jonchant les routes d'arbres déracinés et semant la terreur. Devant ce cataclysme de la nature, Maxine — elle qui avait toujours cru prendre plaisir à partager la violence des éléments — se trouve complètement désemparée; par contre, son père retrouve sa force et son courage de pionnier. Comme par miracle, les rôles se rétablissent, les masques tombent et, isolés au sein de la tourmente, ils goûteront, l'espace de quelques heures, le calme et le bonheur d'autrefois. Au cours de la nuit, Maxine s'inquiète pour son père assoupi devant l'âtre; elle vient le 'border' et dans un geste spontané — le seul, peut-être, depuis son enfance — pose un instant sa joue contre la joue décharnée. Hélas, ce geste furtif restera inconnu de son père qui mourra quelques semaines plus tard privé de la consolation qu'il avait tant espéré. Et Maxine aura perdu à jamais l'occasion de se racheter à ses yeux.

C'est maintenant l'épilogue, scène cruciale et depuis si longtemps attendue. Devant la splendeur du soleil couchant, Maxine — qui avait refusé à son père "de le laisser s'apitoyer sur lui-même" (150) — tombe dans le plus profond désespoir:

"... la boîte de Pandore gît, vide ... aux pieds de la rampe" (158). La nuit descend, la marée est déjà haute, la bouteille de whisky, vidée et le tube de poison, à sa portée. Le suicide semble inévitable car tout l'annonçait depuis les premières pages. D'ailleurs, n'ayant jamais hésité à sacrifier les autres, pourquoi Maxine hésiterait-elle aujourd'hui devant ce geste ultime de liberté? Et de fait, dans les deux derniers paragraphes du récit, pour la première fois, l'auteure intervient à la troisième personne. Le lecteur se voit donc distancié de la narratrice-protagoniste devenu maintenant objet: "Le sommeil s'est abattu sur elle comme un coup de massue, anéantissant la journée qu'elle vient de vivre, dispersant ... les souvenirs, les remords.... Elle dort....

"Revit-elle la soirée de Pâques dans le cottage battu par la tempête où elle est revenue mourir? Comment le savoir? Il n'y a de réponse à rien, et les rêves ne sont ... que des rêves.

"Maxine-Sauvage-Sauvageon dort. Et rêve!" (159).

Je cite les derniers paragraphes du roman presque en entier pour en montrer toute l'ambiguïté. Est-ce le sommeil éternel, comme un critique l'a interprété?[2] Maxine se serait-elle "anéantie dans une bouteille de whisky"?[3] Ou faut-il plutôt entendre ces derniers mots littéralement comme l'insiste l'auteure?[4] Alors, pourquoi avoir donné si peu d'indications pour ce revirement subit? Recul moral devant un acte tenu répréhensible? Si cette longue confession devait être une ascèse menant au Salut, les indices existaient; Maxine avait tout de même accumulé quelques biens: son refus d'abandonner un père invalide et isolé, et surtout, ce geste spontané vers lui la nuit de la tempête. N'avait-il pas suffi d'un seul regard pour que fut sauvé le larron? D'ailleurs, le mythe de Pandore s'y prêtait puisqu'il reste toujours, au fond de sa boîte, l'ESPOIR. Un revirement à la dernière heure pouvait donc se légitimiser. Cependant Primeau a choisi de ne pas choisir: "Il n'y a de réponse à rien." Ainsi l'ambiguïté s'étend à la relation entre l'auteure et la narratrice — point sensible dans le roman confessionnel.

PRIMEAU A CONSTRUIT *Sauvage-Sauvageon* en trois temps et dans trois espaces dont le choix est symbolique: d'abord, enfance heureuse dans un coin encore sauvage de la prairie canadienne; puis, épiphanie de la jeune adulte dans la France de ses ancêtres; et enfin, retour au pays natal sur la côte pacifique où elle mènera pendant une dizaine d'années une vie très ordinaire avant d'en arriver à la crise de conscience qui est le noyau du roman. C'est par l'intensité de sa vision intérieure que Primeau transforme une vie tout à fait banale en une sorte de poème du quotidien.

Le choix du quatrain baudelairéen qui sert de préface:

> Homme libre, toujours tu chériras la mer!
> La mer est ton miroir; tu contemples ton âme

Dans le déroulement infini de sa lame,
Et ton esprit n'est pas un gouffre moins amer

est particulièrement heureux puisque l'image de la mer reflète les traits essentiels de la protagoniste: sa soif de liberté doublée d'une violence cachée, son narcissisme ("miroir"), et le vide spirituel que traduisent les mots "esprit . . . gouffre . . . amer." D'autant plus, le mouvement suggéré par "le déroulement" des lames se perdant sur la plage prépare au rythme d'un récit constamment interrompu par les accès de nausée qui viendront assaillir la narratrice-protagoniste. Or, la technique de scènes qui risquent de se dissoudre à tout moment accentue le sens d'urgence créé dès le début, non seulement par le poison à portée de main mais surtout, par la marée montante, silencieuse et inexorable qui cerne la durée du récit.

Si le roman exerce un tel attrait comme genre, c'est qu'il nous permet de partager et — en un sens — de vivre les secrets d'un autre. Une fois initié à la vie secrète de cette petite fille de cinq ans, singulièrement compréhensive, qu'est Maxine-Sauvageon, le lecteur est hypnotisé, entraîné bon gré, mal gré à poursuivre son histoire qui est, somme toute, l'histoire d'un 'crime' — ou de plusieurs. *Sauvage-Sauvageon* doit sa trame fascinante au fait qu'il est roman détective aussi bien que roman confessionnel. Mais confession entraîne justice: la coupable doit être punie et puisque qu'il n'existe personne qui puisse l'accuser — au contraire, ses voisins l'admirent comme fille exemplaire! — il ne reste à Maxine que . . . le suicide. Et pour le lecteur, il y a, bien sûr, le suspens.

A première lecture *Sauvage-Sauvageon* paraît d'une simplicité décevante: un récit à double but qui voudrait ranger les événements d'une vie en même temps que d'en faire le procès. Par conséquent Maxine — seul personnage 'réel' du texte — en est non seulement la narratrice mais aussi l'accusée-protagoniste ainsi que son propre juge. Une analyse de la forme du roman permettra d'en apprécier la complexité. Ainsi nous verrons comment Primeau a réussi à créer ces diverses facettes d'une seule personnalité qui ont chacune une voix.

D'abord, le roman confessionnel exige, bien sûr, l'emploi de la première personne. Mais l'écart temporel qui existe *ipso facto* entre, d'un côté, la narratrice qui aujourd'hui se sent coupable et de l'autre, l'auteur des 'crimes' commis au cours des années, déclenche nécessairement une angoisse, angoisse née de la divergence inhérente aux deux perspectives. C'est là que se manifeste invariablement un dédoublement radical du "je," le second étant le porte-parole de la protagoniste-accusée en train de rejouer les diverses étapes d'une vie passée.

Il y a donc deux histoires, comme l'explique Todorov en discutant les différents aspects du roman détective, ". . . l'histoire du crime [déjà terminé] et l'histoire de l'enquête [où] les personnages . . . n'agissent pas, ils apprennent [en examinant] indice après indice, piste après piste."[5] En fait, le lecteur de *Sauvage-Sauvageon* ne peut comprendre le 'crime' — même s'il sait qui est la coupable, qui ses victimes — avant qu'il ne soit raconté et rejoué par Maxine qui, elle aussi, bien sûr, veut à

tout prix comprendre comment "d'une petite fille rieuse" (13), elle était devenue cette femme silencieuse, dûre, acariâtre.

Le constant va-et-vient entre les deux "je" permet au lecteur de s'impliquer dans la psyché même de ce personnage à double visage. On s'étonne devant ses accès d'exaspération: "Qu'est-ce qui s'échappe tout à coup à l'ordre que je tente vainement d'appliquer aux événements qui se superposent, se juxtaposent, se chevauchent!" (63). Cette voix émotive, à l'encontre de la voix raisonnable qui tente de donner une perspective linéaire/horizontale au récit, nous plonge dans la perspective sous-jacente/verticale et lance au lecteur le défi du "puzzle" — non seulement de la vie qui se raconte — mais surtout du for intérieur de la narratrice, des replis de l'âme qu'elle voudrait taire ou qu'elle ne connaît peut-être même pas: en somme, le *pourquoi* de ses 'crimes.'[6] Maxine se trouve donc prise dans un engrenage qui la projette perpétuellement de l'axe horizontal à l'axe vertical et c'est justement l'alternance entre ces deux perspectives qui donne le mouvement — ici un mouvement circulaire et intériorisé — à la narration. Le monologue intérieur devient alors un dialogue plus ou moins décousu entre les deux "je" qui se dédoublent *en passant du passé au présent*, créant ainsi cette double perspective nécessaire à tout bon roman psychologique.

Il y a en plus, tout au cours du récit, une troisième voix: le "tu" de sa conscience qui juge et harcèle Maxine sans répit: "Tu hésites encore? Espérant quoi?" (36). Le passé est affreux, mais l'angoisse qui l'étouffe présentement dans son étau est intolérable. Malgré sa nausée, elle se voit donc forcée de replonger dans le passé pour y reprendre le fil de l'histoire. A première vue, le "je-tu" pourrait paraître la voix porte-parole des deux récits axiaux: ce serait s'y méprendre. Le "je-tu" dans *Sauvage-Sauvageon* est simplement un procédé technique qui sert à 'faire avancer' l'action, procédé nécessaire puisque les deux "je" refusent constamment de "continuer ce jeu d'enfer" (80). En multipliant les voix, Primeau multiplie ses personnages sur la scène, créant ainsi une dimension dramatique inattendue dans le roman confessionnel, généralement perçu comme intime et cloîtré.

Le point de départ et le point de retour est le père de Maxine, son "Agamemnon qu'[elle] avait voulu surhumain" (36). La chute était inévitable: une fois déçue elle devient "méprisante et haineuse" (36) et opte pour le chemin de la vengeance. Les trois autres relations personnelles explorées dans le roman sont des variations sur un même thème: celui d'une âme durcie dans un narcissisme invétéré et qui s'acharne contre tous ceux qui osent s'approcher d'elle.

ON AURA DÉJÀ REMARQUÉ le nombre d'allusions littéraires et mythiques qui jalonnent le roman. Ce procédé permet à l'auteure de passer au-delà du récit personnel pour en accentuer la dimension humaine. Son roman confessionnel s'en trouve plus étoffé, surtout par les multiples références aux mythes grecs

et judéo-chrétiens. En fait, *Sauvage-Sauvageon* contient une véritable fouille d'archétypes, à partir, bien entendu, d'Oedipe/Electre jusqu'à Pandore, en passant par Ariane et Thésée. Le mythe de la belle Pandore qui, dotée de sa boîte néfaste, réussit à séduire Epiméthée, suggère un parallèle avec Marcel et, plus tard, Johnny. Le thème de la découverte de soi rattache, il me semble, légende d'Oedipe à celle du Labyrinthe, celui-ci étant d'ailleurs un symbole faisant le pont entre l'Antiquité et le Christianisme. Car si l'on considère à rebours la légende du Labyrinthe où Thésée, accroché au fil d'Ariane, réuissit à sortir de sa 'prison' après avoir tué le monstre, nous trouvons Maxine au fond du Labyrinthe (Thésée), accrochée au fil d'Ariane (Maxine narratrice) *en quête* du Minotaure, son for intérieur. Et ceci relie au thème de la Rédemption — et à l'ascèse — car au Moyen-Age, les Croisés rentrant du Proche-Orient avaient incorporé le concept du labyrinthe, dans les dalles marbrées de leurs églises où les fidèles faisaient pénitence en poursuivant ces 'labyrinthes' à genoux.[7] Primeau nous avait préparée à ce mélange de mythes païens et chrétiens dès le début lorsque Maxine-enfant "avait du mal à comprendre pourquoi le Dieux chrétien [celui de sa mère] avait chassé Adam et Eve d'un jardin qui devait être aussi merveilleux que celui [qu'elle partageait avec son père] pour avoir goûté à une simple pomme" (21). Et de fait, comme Eve, Maxine a choisi d'échanger son Paradis contre le 'fruit défendu' de la science de soi-même.

Roman confessionnel qui déborde son cadre, *Sauvage-Sauvageon* est un microcosme à multiples facettes qui nous ouvrent une diversité de perspectives. Le riche répertoire littéraire et mythologique de ce récit confère au destin singulier qu'il raconte une vibrante universalité.

NOTES

[1] Marguerite-A. Primeau, *Sauvage-Sauvageon* (Saint-Boniface: Editions des Plaines, 1984). Ce livre a reçu en 1986 le Prix Champlain, honneur décerné aux écrivains francophones de l'Amérique du Nord en dehors du Québec.

[2] Françoios Bourboulon, "*Sauvage-Sauvageon,*" compte-rendu dans *Le Soleil de Colombie* (vendredi, avril 26, 1985).

[3] Carol J. Harvey, compte-rendu de *Sauvage-Sauvageon* dans le *Bulletin du Centre d'Etudes Franco-Canadiennes de l'Ouest,* 21 (octobre, 1985), 30-31.

[4] Selon une interview à Vancouver, le 8 mars 1986.

[5] Tzvetan Todorov, *Poétique de la Prose* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1971), p. 57.

[6] Analysant l'*Histoire du Graal,* Todorov concrétise ce double aspect littéraire en deux axes qui se croisent: le récit de contiguité qui "se déroule sur une ligne horizontale [tandis qu'] une série de variations qui s'empilent sur une verticale [fournit] un passionnant récit de substitutions, où l'on arrive, lentement, vers la compréhension de ce qui était posé dès le début (*Poetique de la Prose,* p. 143).

[7] Sir Frank Crisp, *Mediaeval Gardens* (London: John Lane, 1929), p. 70.

# SHE TALKS STORMS TO THE SKY NOW

*Kevin Perrault*

She is not his curled fingers
unbuttoning her mind
though he rubs her
like night surfaces
moon ash pale

She arcs electric
intimate distances
black wrapped
splitting in
the outside
storm

two voices
the sound of one
slapping at
silence

the other
her skin
clattering
like a sea
of rainbow crystals

What is the syntax
of her stillness?
the blood unutterable
bled
unbends the true

her fingers
pointing.

# SIRENS IN CRICKET SONG

*Kevin Perrault*

a road once many legs
would extend padding
soft tar steps,

a fresh sting of air,
& dry yellow grass itch
of heat, always

the inaudible drift of it,
always the argument
of eddies against
standing
cinched
to a face,

thoughts
plucked
by fingers of forest

ripple
shimmering
to the surface
of sound

like the morning hawk
edging into
a too quickly stilled
disturbance

a shadow of your body
you pass
urgently from.

# "THE PERFECT VOICE"

## *Mauberley as Narrator in Timothy Findley's "Famous Last Words"*

*E. F. Shields*

In *Famous Last Words*,[1] Hugh Selwyn Mauberley spends his final days writing on the walls of the Grand Elysium Hotel his eyewitness account of the activities of famous people, including the Duke and Duchess of Windsor, Charles Lindbergh, Rudolf Hess, and Joachim von Ribbentrop. In an attempt to keep Mauberley from telling what he knows about the cabal and its members, Mauberley is tracked down and killed by Harry Reinhardt, the cabal's enforcer. Because Mauberley saw too much and knew too much, Reinhardt drives an ice pick through Mauberlely's eye into his brain. Having silenced the source, Reinhardt then burns Mauberley's notes, unaware that Mauberley has already turned the notes into a full narrative on the walls in rooms across the hall. As a result of Reinhardt's oversight, when the American army arrives, Lieut. Quinn and Capt. Freyberg are able to read Mauberley's writing on the wall, and the novel's reader is able to read along with them.

Yet there are a number of problems with Mauberley's narrative. Mauberley is supposedly writing as an eyewitness, and for many of the events, such as the episode in China with Wallis or the *Nahlin* cruise or the trip to Spain with Isabella Loverso, he could conceivably (in fictional terms) have been an eyewitness or even an eyewitness/participant. In a few scenes, such as the discussion between Wallis and Ernest Simpson concerning arrangements for their divorce, his presence is cumbersome and unlikely but again conceivable.

For a number of scenes, however, there is no pretence that Mauberley was present as an eyewitness, and no attempt is made to account for Mauberley's knowledge. For example, we have the private meeting of King Edward VIII with his mother, Queen Mary, at Marlborough House; the conversation at Nauly between Lindbergh and Edward Allenby; Hess's flight to Britain and his treatment by Reinhardt; the attempt to kidnap the Duke and the Duchess while they are in Portugal; the conversations in Berlin between Walter Schellenberg and Ribben-

trop; the bedroom scenes between the Duke and the Duchess as well as those between the Duke and the mannikin of Queen Mary. In the narration of these scenes, the perspective shifts from the first person to the third person,[2] and we might think that they are actually narrated by the outer narrator rather than by Mauberley.

By the outer narrator is meant the narrator who narrates the entire novel, from the first page to the last. Imbedded within the outer narrator's narrative is the inner narrative, the one supposedly written on the walls by Mauberley. This inner narrative is essentially an account of the cabal and its members, starting with Wallis and Mauberley in China in 1924 and effectively ending in 1943 with the murder of Sir Harry Oakes and the failure of the Windsors to escape Nassau aboard a submarine.

The outer narrative covers events from March through May of 1945. This narrative is told to us by an unpersonalized omniscient narrator who relates the story of Mauberley's flight from Italy to the Grand Elysium Hotel in UnterBalkonberg, his act of writing on the walls, his dealings with Kachelmayer and *die weisse Ratte*, his murder by Reinhardt, the arrival of the U.S. Seventh Army, the discovery of Mauberley's body, the reading by Quinn and Freyberg of what Mauberley wrote on the walls, and finally the evacuation of the American troops from the hotel. In addition, the omniscient outer narrator provides both a type of prologue, presenting the suicide of Mauberley's father in 1910 (1-2), and epilogue, summarizing events which occurred after the close of the novel's action (394-95).

Theoretically, the inner narrator (Mauberley) narrates the entire inner narrative, while the outer narrator simply incorporates this inner narrative unchanged into his larger, encompassing narrative. In practice, the split between the inner and outer narratives is not so clear because, as mentioned above, parts of the presumed inner narrative seem to be told by the outer narrator. We might at first think that the outer narrator in relaying Mauberley's narrative to the reader uses his privilege of omniscience in order to fill in or supplement Mauberley's narrative, as he does in the epilogue at the end when, after the death of Mauberley, he tells the after-history of the characters in Mauberley's story. But this explanation breaks down when we realize that Lieut. Quinn reads the entire inner narrative. The Windsor tour of Germany in 1937 is recounted in the omniscient third person (146-47), yet we are told that for Quinn, "The German tour and all it implied had been quite an alarming read" (148). The intimate scene of the Duke and the Duchess in their stateroom aboard *Excalibur*, including the Duke's dream (242-52), is apparently read by Quinn who is so affected by what he has read that he then dreams part of the dream himself (254). Mauberley takes no part in the July 4 garden party in Nassau, and the account is written from an omniscient perspective, yet at one point in the outer narrative we are specifically told that "Mauberley was working in a corner etching the story of the Spitfire Bazaar"

(293). In addition, Quinn is able to reread Aunt Bessie's pronouncement about the conflagration: "*Fire*, Quinn read again, *is the one true terror and the only thing in hell I can't endure*" (289).

We might explain Mauberley's use of the third-person perspective and its accompanying omniscience by saying that Mauberley is writing fiction, just as Findley in telling about Mauberley is writing fiction, but this explanation, while essentially true, also causes problems and cannot be accepted without modification. We cannot, for example, dismiss all of Mauberley's narrative as fiction for the simple reason that much of it is historically factual. One does not invent a story which just happens to coincide, detail for detail, with historically verifiable facts. Also, within the logic of the novel's action, Mauberley is not tracked down and killed in order to keep him from writing fiction. The cabal, with its powerful backers, fears the revelation of the truth not the invention of lies.

Because Mauberley confesses that "all I have written here is true; except the lies" (59), we might at first think that the shifts in point of view mark shifts from fact to fiction and back again, but a comparison of the material told by Mauberley in the first person and the material supposedly told by him in the third person does not reveal essential differences in degrees of factuality. The third-person narratives are neither more nor less historically accurate than the first-person narratives: the Spitfire Bazaar (third person) never took place, nor did Isabella Loverso's trip through Spain (first person), but the *Nahlin* cruise (first person) did, as did the Windsor tour of Germany (third person). Obviously, we are not expected to place more credence in material presented through one type of narrative stance than in material presented through another, to view one as fact and the other as fiction.

It might seem that, after the various experiments in metafiction, inconsistencies in point of view no longer matter, that anything goes, but as Patricia Hough has pointed out, unlike aleatory writing, "Metafiction explicitly lays bare the conventions of realism; it does not ignore or abandon them."[3] For much of its impact, from the opening scenes depicting Mauberley fleeing from Estrade and her knife to the scene in the inner narrative in which Reinhardt forces Mauberley to lick Sir Harry Oakes's blood off Reinhardt's hands, *Famous Last Words* relies on the reader's acceptance of the conventions of traditional realistic fiction. Estrade, Mauberley, and Reinhardt must exist for the reader as real, albeit fictional, characters (through the conventional suspension of disbelief) for the reader to experience vicariously first Mauberley's panic and fear when he realizes that he is being hunted by Estrade (important in creating reader identification with Mauberley), and then later Mauberley's repulsion with himself as Reinhardt forces him to recognize that in being willing to use people like Reinhardt to achieve his goals Mauberley has become as bloodthirsty as his agent. Accepting fictional conventions, the reader accepts Mauberley, a fictional character, as an eyewitness to or even as a participant in a number of events, even though some of these events, such as the murder of

Oakes, are not invented or fictional. But having granted that fictional convention, the reader expects (another fictional convention) consistency and plausibility within the first convention.

Why then the violations of the conventions — the inconsistencies, the shifts in points of view? In recounting how the novel was written, Findley himself has provided a possible explanation. According to Findley, he had written endless drafts and gone through "five whole modes" before he hit upon the character of Mauberley. He immediately realized that he "had found the perfect voice to narrate the story."[4] But finding the perfect voice rather late in the creative process necessitated a great deal of rewriting and revision. For a number of scenes, including the memorable one at Marlborough House when the King and the Queen Mother discuss Wallis without ever mentioning her, it was obviously impossible to incorporate Mauberley as a plausible eyewitness or even as a plausible hearsay witness.

Some readers might feel that the novel as it now stands is a compromise, that Findley, refusing to accept that the story he wanted to tell could not be told by the narrator he wanted to use, nevertheless insisted on attempting to transform an omniscient third-person narrative into a first-person narrative. Yet, when Findley speaks of his "discovery" of Mauberley, it is clear that Findley believes that the use of Mauberley as narrator, rather than creating problems, made *Famous Last Words* jell, that Mauberley — the "perfect voice" — enabled him, in his own words, to bring the other characters "home."[5] Findley did not have to use Mauberley as the putative narrator of the entire inner narrative; he could have split the telling of the inner narrative between Mauberley and the omniscient outer narrator. But he chose not to, and an understanding of the implications behind that choice deepens our thematic understanding of the novel as a whole. Rather than succeeding in spite of the inconsistencies in point of view, *Famous Last Words* in good part succeeds because of them.

SUSAN LANSER HAS NOTED that it is not accidental that the term *point of view* refers both to the angle of observation and to the manner or attitude of viewing, for an author's use of point of view reflects not only technical choices but ideological ones as well, since "technique is never wholly independent of ideology."[6] The importance of Mauberley as Findley's main narrative voice can hardly be overstressed. In many ways, Mauberley is as important to Findley and to *Famous Last Words* as Marlow is to Conrad and to *Lord Jim*.[7] Through Mauberley's perspective and Mauberley's voice, Findley is able to express his own vision and to say, both directly and indirectly, what Findley wants to say.

The first and perhaps the most immediate function that Mauberley performs for Findley is to personalize the perspective, and thus lessen the distance between the reader and the characters in the novel. The people that Findley writes about are not in themselves especially attractive people, at least not as Findley portrays them. Charles Lindbergh, for example, apparently condones the elimination of his friend Edward Allenby after Allenby rejects Lindbergh's offer of membership in the cabal. Wallis, having lost the throne of England when David in her absence abdicated, is determined to regain power and position at any cost, while the Duke of Windsor, a weak man stunned by the effects of his own abdication and dominated by his wife and mother, seeks escape in drink and fantasy. Lindbergh and the Windsors are fascists or at least willing to use fascism to gain what they want. Because, except for a few groups of neo-Nazis, fascism today — at least as an official, acknowledged programme — has neither social nor political acceptance, the North American reader is thus distanced from the novel's characters not only by time but also by ideology.

One of the main themes of the Quinn/Freyberg interludes involves the them-versus-us split. Freyberg, traumatized by what he found at Dachau, cannot believe that he has anything in common with the people who conceived, built, and ran the concentration camps. Freyberg's way of dealing with the situation involves turning all Germans, all Nazis, all fascists into "them" — a separate species, fundamentally different from us. The evil is then outside, not within, not even potentially within us.

Lieut. Quinn seems, at first, to be much more perceptive and intelligent than Freyberg. He knows that Mauberley, because of his pro-fascist articles, has been designated a traitor (and thus one of "them") by Freyberg and other officials. But Quinn is also aware of Mauberley's literary achievements, and he feels there must be some explanation for Mauberley's fall from grace. For Quinn, "it wasn't good enough to say 'he was one of them.' It didn't help Quinn understand how Mauberley, whose greatest gift had been in the value of the imagination, could have been so misguided as to join with people whose whole ambition was to render the race incapable of thinking" (47-48).

When Ezra Pound was imprisoned after World War II, many admirers of his poetry felt that the action showed the pettiness and the lack of cultural appreciation typical of Americans in general and of the American government in particular. Freyberg certainly would want himself grouped with these "petty" Americans and with those who objected in 1949 when the Library of Congress awarded the first Bollinger Prize for Poetry to Pound. From the beginning, Freyberg is convinced that Quinn will find some way to excuse Mauberley (and those like him). As Freyberg tells Quinn, even if Mauberley tells the truth in his narrative, "'in the end, he will apologize. And in the end, because he has apologized, you and twelve million others will all fall down on your knees before these walls and you will forgive him'" (54).

In part, Freyberg is right. Quinn does believe that Mauberley was simply "misguided" (48), and he begins his reading of the writing on the wall biased in Mauberley's favour, "absolutely certain he would exonerate Hugh Selwyn Mauberley. . . . It was a question of interpretation, and this was Quinn's forte" (58). In Freyberg's view, any forgiveness, any exoneration of those responsible would make a mockery of the agony endured by millions of inmates in concentration camps.

Yet Quinn is not looking for excuses as much as for explanations. He wants to *understand* Mauberley and the reasons for Mauberley's actions. If Mauberley had been a crude, insensitive thug, his fascism would not have been so disturbing, but Mauberley and his circle were members of the social, political, and cultural élite of the western world. Far from seeing Mauberley as one of "them," Quinn identifies with Mauberley and is honest enough to admit the identification. In addition to sharing Mauberley's artistic interests, Quinn also shares some of Mauberley's personal traits. Like Mauberley who wears a succession of white suits, Quinn is personally fastidious: "His hair was always combed; his breath was always peppermint fresh and the moons always showed on his fingernails. Even when he had dysentery, his underwear was always clean" (39).

LIKE ELIOT, POUND, YEATS, D. H. LAWRENCE, and other writers who were attracted, at least temporarily, to fascism or fascist ideas, Mauberley is what Findley has termed a "thinker." In an interview with Barbara Gabriel, Findley commented that the inclusion of Mauberley significantly changed the emphasis of the novel:

> Now, the issue of *Famous Last Words* was the whole question of how artists can ally themselves with the great horrors of their time. How could writers advocate what Hitler was about? . . . These were the questions I found I had to came to grips with though this was not the book I set out to write. What was Ezra doing there — or any of these people?[8]

Mauberley and other artists like him are disturbing to us because they do not allow us to dismiss fascism as an aberration confined to a particular group or nationality clearly separate from us. Instead, they bring fascism within our circle, to "us." While readers might not identify with British royalty or with a twice-divorced American woman from the fringes of Baltimore high society, a certain amount of identification is inevitable when a reader encounters a writer. Anyone reading a serious novel presumably finds value in literature. Thus, the artist turned fascist clearly affects us as readers even if, like Quinn, we are not artists ourselves. And, as indicated in the interview with Gabriel, Findley as a writer, in using Mauberley as one of his narrative voices, became involved in the problem of the fascist/artist.

To narrate through Mauberley, Findley had to see through Mauberley's eyes and had to try to imagine how someone who was not basically evil or stupid could become part of an evil movement.

Findley has commented that he found Mauberley especially appropriate because Mauberley is "Pound's alter ego, a failed classical poet."[9] Although some critics, including Stephen Scobie, feel that Mauberley in his narrative "skirts very conveniently around the issues of how and why he became involved with Fascism in the first place,"[10] the explanation is actually presented in the novel in terms of Mauberley's character — his passivity, his tendency to drift, his desire to be part of the "in" group — and, more important, in terms of Mauberley's classicism. It should be remembered that the Mauberley that Findley took over from Pound was not as yet a fascist (Pound's *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* was published in 1920). Instead, Findley took Pound's Mauberley (as Findley understood him), gave him parents, and projected him and his characteristics into the 1930's and 1940's, and in this projection Findley has Mauberley, like Pound, turning to fascism, but for somewhat different reasons. Mauberley's classicism is revealed in his desire for order and for a new leader. In his well-known essay entitled "Romanticism and Classicism," T. E. Hulme, the anti-Romantic English metaphysician and Imagist poet who influenced the young Ezra Pound, defines the classical viewpoint as entailing a belief that man is a "fixed and limited animal whose nature is absolutely constant" and that "it is only by tradition and organisation that anything decent can be got out of him." The romantic outlook, on the other hand, sees the individual as "an infinite reservoir of possibilities" which require the "destruction of oppressive order" to fulfil their potential and produce "Progress."[11]

According to Hulme's analysis, in classicism "part of the fixed nature of man is the belief in the Deity."[12] For Mauberley, the classicist, it is necessary to believe in some type of Supreme Being, but for Mauberley, the Modernist, the man of his generation, belief in a supernatural God is impossible. Mauberley writes a series of articles for the London *Daily Mail* calling for a "new kind of leader — not the leaders we have" (93). As a result, he is recruited by Isabella Loverso into the cabal which is moving through and beyond fascism to a type of superfascism, with a leader beyond Mussolini or Hitler. (Ironically, the first leader the cabal picks is the weak ex-Edward VIII of England, but presumably he is chosen as a figurehead.) On the basis of the same *Daily Mail* articles, Mauberley is verbally attacked by a drunken yet perceptive Edward Allenby who tells Mauberley: "'You're some kind of pilgrim looking for a faith.'" Unfortunately, Mauberley has "'started looking for it under rocks'" (88).

Mauberley needs something to believe in, something to give his life purpose and meaning. Before leaping to his death, Mauberley's father had cried out, in the classical spirit (and in accord with the indictment of modern society expressed in Pound's *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley*), against the "raucous and wilful repudiation

of civilization by industrialized America" (67). Belief in tradition and humanism alone was not sufficient to sustain him, and he died "the enemy of progress" (67). Mauberley's mother, on the other hand, went insane because she could not accept imperfection, could not accept what to a classicist is reality, that is, the limited and imperfect nature of man.

In different ways, both his mother and his father are broken by life. Seeking for something to believe in that will keep him from committing suicide or going insane, Mauberley drifts towards fascism. He drifts because, unlike a romantic who finds self-definition within, Mauberley is essentially weak and passive, wanting others to set the rules and to define him. A follower, Mauberley has an excessive admiration for strength, and strength for him is normally associated with sharply defined sexuality (which he lacks). Immediately after his encounter with Allenby in the café, Mauberley watches a group of Mussolini's Blackshirts celebrating the Italian victory in Ethiopia. With their "inordinate display of strong white teeth," the Blackshirts exude "an aura of masculinity" (90-91). Mesmerized, the homosexual (or asexual) Mauberley watches, and when a young Blackshirt passes his table Mauberley wants "desperately to follow him" (91). Although Mauberley does not physically follow the young Blackshirt, he goes with him spiritually, "And knelt before his strength. And his victory" (91).[13] Mauberley does not become a fascist solely because he was a classicist, but his classicism, combined with his other character traits and with the temper (or temptations) of the time, makes fascism seem attractive to him.[14]

Findley reduces or blurs the separation between them and us not only by the conventional means of the empathetic narrator but also through the employment of a variety of metafictional effects. For instance, when we are reading what is supposed to be Mauberley's narrative and notice that the narration has shifted from the first person (with all of the restrictions associated through verisimilitude with it) to third person (and the omniscience conventionally given to this point of view in fiction), we wonder if we are reading Mauberley or the outer narrator. Since, regardless of sophisticated theories of narrative voices and personae, in practice an omniscient narrator is almost automatically associated in the reader's mind with the author (and is actually called the "authorial narrator" by some critics[15]), what we really wonder is whether we are reading Mauberley or Findley. Because of this uncertainty, we tend to associate Mauberley with Findley, and vice versa. Mauberley, in effect, becomes Findley's alter ego.[16]

THIS IDENTIFICATION (or confusion) of speakers parallels the method that Findley employs throughout the novel. What at first seems straightforward and clear-cut is on reflection frequently shown to be complicated and

ambiguous. For example, the inner narrative, scratched in the plaster of the walls of the Grand Elysium Hotel by Mauberley with a silver pencil, is obviously intended to remind us of the biblical writing on the wall in the Book of Daniel. According to the biblical account, Belshazzar and his guests are in the midst of a great feast, happily drinking wine and praising the gods of gold and silver, when suddenly, "In the same hour came forth fingers of a man's hand, and wrote over against the candlestick upon the plaister of the wall of the king's palace: and the king saw the part of the hand that wrote" (Dan. 5:5; quoted in *FLW*, 52). Because neither the king nor any of his counsellors can read the writing on the wall, let alone interpret it, the prophet Daniel is called in.

Findley repeats the allusion to Daniel 5 in the presentation of Lorenzo de Broca. In his plane *Icarus*, de Broca flies over the Windsors' garden party in Nassau, dropping pieces of paper bearing an anti-fascist slogan while writing in the sky the words which Daniel had read on the wall, "MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN" (*FLW*, 287), and which Daniel had interpreted to mean "God hath numbered thy kingdom, and finished it" (MENE), "Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting" (TEKEL), and "Thy kingdom is divided, and given to the Medes and Persians" (PERES or UPHARSIN).

The biblical parallels are numerous and pointed, and at first we might think that we are intended to view Mauberley's writing on the wall and de Broca's writing in the sky as modern-day versions of the hand that wrote on Belshazzar's wall and thus as condemnations, approved by the implied author, of the fascists and fascist sympathizers who were never forced to accept responsibility for their role in the events of the 1930's and 1940's. In good part, this perspective is correct, but at the same time that Findley is condemning the fascists (rather easy to do in the 1980's), he is also presenting through his fiction reflections on the human process of interpreting evidence, forming judgements, and dispensing retribution. The biblical allusions serve to emphasize ironic contrasts as well as similarities.

In the Bible, the hand that writes on the wall is either the hand of God or a hand that is writing on God's behalf (perhaps the hand of a recording angel). In either case, it is a supernatural hand expressing an absolute and ultimate judgement. There is no possibility of the judgement being faulty or subjectively limited. The hand speaks for God, and what God knows is absolute truth. In addition to being omniscient and infallible, God is also omnipotent; thus, the retribution announced on the wall is inescapable: although Belshazzar generously rewards Daniel for his reading, Belshazzar is slain that night and his kingdom is divided. In *Famous Last Words*, Lorenzo de Broca also makes a judgement, and on the bright green papers that he dropped from his plane he pronounces sentence: "DEATH TO FASCISTS EVERYWHERE!" (285). Unfortunately, in making his protest against fascists in Allied camps, de Broca unintentionally is the cause of a fiery conflagration in which a number of innocent people, including children, are killed, while the two chief

fascists at the fête, the Duke and the Duchess of Windsor, escape unharmed. In short, fiery retribution comes from the sky, but coming from a human source it does not necessarily land on the guilty.

Similarly, neither Mauberley nor his account offers exact parallels to the biblical writing on the wall. While the hand in the Bible states, without giving reasons, that a judgement has been made, Mauberley, the "compulsive witness" (21), is more intent on presenting evidence which will allow others to make judgements than in passing judgement himself. In March 1945, with his world collapsing around him, Mauberley feels compelled to tell, as honestly as possible, what he has witnessed, even though he was not always the innocent bystander and much of his testimony is self-incriminatory. Unlike de Broca and the biblical hand, Mauberley does not stand apart, judging and condemning others while he himself is excluded.

If Mauberley's writing on the wall is to reveal a judgement, the judgement must come from those who read and interpret the writing, not from Mauberley. It is in this role as a reader and interpreter that Lieut. Quinn, who is pointedly known only by his last name (39), is compared, frequently ironically, with his biblical counterpart, Daniel. As Daniel, famous for his interpretive powers, was brought in by Belshazzar to read the writing on the wall, so too Quinn, the demolition expert who believes that interpretation is his forte (58), is brought in by Freyberg to read Mauberley's narrative. Unlike Belshazzar, however, Freyberg can read the writing on the wall himself, and Freyberg is not impressed with Quinn's interpretive powers. Even before he reads the writing, Freyberg is certain he knows what it says, and he is equally certain that Quinn will misread the writing. Freyberg insists that Quinn read the writing because Freyberg believes that Quinn will learn something — something that Freyberg already knows — from what is on the wall.

Although initially we as readers tend to empathize with Quinn while rejecting the candy-bar chomping Freyberg, as the novel progresses, we gradually realize that Freyberg is neither as dense nor as insensitive as we first assumed. Freyberg's perspective, while different from Quinn's, is not necessarily wrong or invalid. Quinn emphasizes understanding, and he recognizes that Mauberley's narrative is a type of confession indicating repentance; Freyberg, on the other hand, responds with passionate moral indignation, asserting that in light of the corpses piled at Dachau an apology is not sufficient. For Freyberg, atonement is necessary. But the problem for Freyberg (and for us) is: after Dachau, what atonement is possible?

Quinn at times is perhaps a bit too much like Mauberley for our comfort. Freyberg cannot understand why Quinn's heart, if it goes out to anyone, "goes out to all these people" in Mauberley's narrative, people who, in their selfish preoccupations, never considered thinking about others (154-55). Although Freyberg seems to have little or no aesthetic sense, Quinn frequently seems to be excessively concerned with the aesthetic, valuing it over the human. For Quinn, Mauberley's scarf and the two halves of the broken Schubert record are what are worth salvaging when the

American army evacuates the Grand Elysium Hotel; for Freyberg, it is the collection of badges taken from the corpses at Dachau.

Quinn is not a modern-day Daniel, and we cannot blindly rely on him to tell us how to interpret Mauberley's writing on the wall or the events of the twentieth century or any other century. Daniel was a prophet, inspired by God; Quinn is simply a fallible human being like the rest of us. Without divine help, we all must read and interpret subjectively, as do Quinn and Freyberg. We can, perhaps must, believe in our own interpretations, but it is a matter of faith rather than of certainty. We cannot be certain because we can never, without supernatural intervention, have in real life an omniscient perspective or absolute knowledge.

We can, however, have this type of perspective and knowledge in fiction. Fictional narrative omniscience has long been described as a godlike point of view, not only because the omniscient narrator knows everything but also because according to fictional convention the narrator's knowledge is absolute, beyond question, incapable of being wrong — in short, totally authoritative. The omniscient narrator not only knows all the facts but also judges or evaluates these facts correctly. As Wayne Booth has pointed out, if we want to understand the story that follows, we frequently must "accept without question" the author's statement summarizing the moral nature of a character even though in real life we "could never trust even the most reliable of witnesses as completely as we trust the author."[17] Nevertheless, unlike God, an omniscient narrator has limits to his or her omniscience. An omniscient narrator can speak authoritatively only because the narrator is seen as speaking for the author (as is evident in Booth's identification of the narrator with the author), and because the people and events the narrator is presenting have no existence outside the mind of the author. Being invented or fictional, the characters and events are whatever the author/creator wants them to be or says that they are.

In *Famous Last Words*, however, people such as Charles Lindbergh, Charles Bedaux, Rudolf Hess, Walter Schellenberg, Joachim von Ribbentrop, Sir Harry Oakes, and the Duke and Duchess of Windsor have existence outside the mind of Findley (as do many of the events recorded in the novel). For these people, it is possible for even a supposedly omniscient narrator to make mistakes, to tell lies. In the epilogue, for example, when it is clearly the outer narrator who is speaking and not Mauberley (he is dead), the narrator tells us: "Count Galeazo Ciano was shot by a firing squad in Berlin — 1944" (394). The historical Ciano was indeed shot by a firing squad in 1944, but the execution took place in Verona, Italy, and not in Berlin, Germany.[18] Whether or not Findley deliberately included this mistake is not clear, but what is clear is that a mistake of this sort could not be made by a truly omniscient narrator. Nor could there be a mistake if the statement concerned a fictional person. We cannot, for example, question the statement, made on the same page, that Alan Paisley, a fictional being, died in 1954. Paisley has no existence outside the novel; Ciano does.[19]

One of the objections to the term *third-person point of view* involves the observation that in reality only a subject, only an "I," can narrate. Thus, in what is called a third-person narrative, we actually have an "I" narrating, but the "I" is not a character within the narrative and consequently does not ordinarily refer to itself by using first-person pronouns.[20] When reading a first-person narrative, we normally are acutely aware of the possibility of subjectivity, bias, and distortion. In the third-person point of view, the "I" is hidden, and hence we tend to accept this perspective as objective and factual. To remind us of the subjectivity of his own reading of historical figures, Findley not only uses the omniscient point of view, which is totally inappropriate when presenting historical people, but he uses the omniscience blatantly, calling our attention to it by presenting notably intimate scenes and clearly private thoughts. He then further emphasizes the artificiality, the essentially fictional nature, of this point of view by giving this omniscience to Mauberley who could not possibly have omniscient or absolute knowledge of historical personages — any more than Findley could.

Although, as Hayden White, among others, has noted, facts do not tell their own story and histories (or historical narratives) are actually "verbal fictions, the contents of which are as much *invented* as *found* and the forms of which have more in common with their counterparts in literature than they have with those in the sciences,"[21] most historians employ a very authoritarian (almost omniscient) narrative voice. For example, the following excerpt, chosen almost at random, exemplifies the type of narrative voice frequently employed in historical accounts. The author, a German, is describing Joachim von Ribbentrop:

> It was his great desire, which he pursued beyond the limits of the ridiculous, to appear himself as "a man with a strong face." Hence the forced toughness which he assumed; the artificial, screwed-up pose of the statesman filled with cares for the future; the laboriously furrowed brow; in short all the Caesar-like grimacing which, in all his highfalutin obtuseness, so often verged towards *buffo* comic opera. . . . The vanity, the provocative self-assertion and continual self-dramatisation, were merely the reverse side of his very ordinary personality.[22]

Although this view coincides with the views expressed by virtually all of Ribbentrop's peers in the German hierarchy, it is nevertheless a reading, an interpretation of Ribbentrop, and one that we assume Ribbentrop himself would not have seen as valid. Yet the reading is presented authoritatively. The historian tends to speak with as much assurance as an omniscient narrator.

Findley presents Ribbentrop as a much more intelligent character, one to be taken much more seriously than the person suggested in the excerpt above, because for his story — as opposed to the historian's story — Findley needed a serious character. Avrom Fleishman has noted that the peculiar energy of the historical

novel resides in its retelling of "history in order to make a truer story than has been written by historians."[23] Without quibbling over whether *Famous Last Words* should be classified as an historical novel or simply a "novel of the recent past,"[24] we might agree that Findley was obviously motivated by the belief that he had something to say about certain famous people and their involvement with fascism, something which could be better said through the medium of fiction than through a straight historical account. Whereas the historian is expected to stay within the known facts, Findley wanted the freedom to deviate from facts; he wanted to be able to follow the advice he quotes from Ezra Pound at the beginning of Chapter Five: "End fact. Try fiction" (218).

Findley clearly believes that he has given fair and honest portraits of Lindbergh and the Duke and Duchess of Windsor, even though he involved them in a number of invented scenes, in events which never existed anywhere outside Findley's imagination. Indeed, Findley has asserted that in his fictional projections he never had his historical characters "anywhere they couldn't be."[25] Nevertheless, Findley is quite aware that he is writing fiction, not only in the conscious creation of invented scenes and the conscious distortion of known fact, but also in his understanding and interpretation of the characters. Speaking of his presentation of Wallis, for example, he has said: ". . . the more I wrote her the more she became mine. Something about her seemed to be inside me, to come from inside. There's no question, all of this comes from inside you."[26] The Wallis in *Famous Last Words* is Findley's Wallis, just as the Wallis in the numerous books written about her is actually the production of the respective authors. Findley touched on this point later in the same interview when he rhetorically asked, "How do we know that Boswell's *Life of Johnson* isn't a work of fiction?"[27] The real question should be, "How are we to know how much of Boswell's *Life* is fiction?"

If Findley had written the inner narrative solely in the omniscient perspective, he would have, of necessity, been seen to be acting in a godlike manner, passing a type of final judgement on the historical characters, much as the hand in Daniel passed final judgement on Belshazzar. As it is, Findley is able to use the omniscient perspective to present a number of scenes which a realistic first-person narrator would not be able to present. At the same time, because this inner narrative is supposedly told by Mauberley, the conventions surrounding first-person narrative are violated, thus highlighting the artificiality of the omniscience.

In addition, Findley makes no attempt to trick the reader into believing, even momentarily, that the inner narrator might, like the obscure Adela Rogers St. John (268), turn out to be real or that Mauberley's narrative might be the authentic account of an actual eyewitness. As a character borrowed or taken over from another author, Mauberley emphasizes the fictionality of the novel in a way that it would be hard to duplicate. With Mauberley's fictionality never in doubt, Findley, by intermixing Mauberley's voice with the authorial narrative voice, can

within the novel itself emphasize the fictionality of the authorial voice and its supposed objectivity and omniscience. Because Findley is dealing, in good part, with historical figures, this emphasis on the fictional nature of the authoritative omniscient perspective is essential. Like historians, Findley believes that his presentation of the past is essentially true, but unlike historians, he has felt free to interweave fictions with facts, and unlike historians, he has acknowledged — within the text — the fictionalization that is inherent in interpretations. Accepting the inevitability of a degree of subjectivity and thus of fictionality in our perceptions and our evaluations of others, Findley uses fiction to show that the bigger fiction is the denial of this subjectivity: the pretence that we can know and judge others with godlike objectivity and certainty.

NOTES

[1] Timothy Findley, *Famous Last Words* (Toronto/Vancouver: Clarke, Irwin and Co., 1981). All page numbers given in parentheses refer to this edition. Pagination unchanged in Penguin paperback edition.

[2] In light of the numerous distinctions and terms that have evolved from contemporary studies of point of view, it perhaps seems both inaccurate and naïve to use the term third person to describe a narrative stance, but in doing so I follow the lead of Susan Lanser in *The Narrative Act: Point of View in Prose Fiction* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1981), pp. 157 ff.; and, for many of the same reasons: the terms first person and third person are convenient and still have meaning for the majority of us, while more precise terms, such as Gérard Genette's homodiegesis and heterodiegesis, do not enjoy ready recognition and frequently, because of their precision, tend to stress certain aspects while excluding others. Perhaps the term that comes closest to the vague inclusiveness of third person is Gerald Prince's unrestricted (or unsituated) point of view (*Narratology* [Berlin, New York, Amsterdam: Mouton, 1982], p. 51), but even here there are problems involving possible implications suggested by the words unrestricted and unsituated.

[3] *Metafiction* (London and New York: Methuen, 1984), p. 18.

[4] Timothy Findley, "Alice Drops Her Cigarette on the Floor . . .," *Canadian Literature*, 91 (Winter 1981), 16.

[5] *Ibid.*

[6] *The Narrative Act*, pp. 16-18 and *passim*.

[7] There are a number of parallels between *Famous Last Words* and *Lord Jim*, including the use of imbedded narratives, the portrayal of characters who feel compelled to tell their stories, the focus on the fictional audience's reaction to the stories, and the concentration on the them/us theme. In addition, like Lord Jim, Mauberley wears white suits and probably for similar reasons — to set himself off from others, to show that he is not besmirched by the dirt that sullies the bodies and souls of the average person.

[8] Barbara Gabriel, "Masks and Icons: An Interview with Timothy Findley," *Canadian Forum*, 65 (February 1986), 35.

[9] Quoted by Beverley Slopen in "Findley and the Wordsmiths," *Quill & Quire*, 47 (November 1981), 17.

[10] Stephen Scobie, "Eye-Deep in Hell: Ezra Pound, Timothy Findley, and Hugh Selwyn Mauberley," *Essays on Canadian Writing*, 30 (1984/85), 225.

[11] T. E. Hulme, in *Speculations*, ed. Herbert Read (1924; London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1958), p. 116.

[12] *Ibid.*, p. 117.

[13] As John F. Hulcoop has pointed out ("The Will To Be," *Canadian Literature*, 94 [1982], 119-20), this issue can be approached in terms of Susan Sontag's analysis of "fascist aesthetics." According to Sontag, unlike communist art which emphasizes utopian morality, "Fascist art displays a utopian aesthetics — that of physical perfection." See "Fascinating Fascism," *New York Review of Books*, Feb. 6, 1975, p. 26.

[14] The connection between conservative politics, traditional religion, and the classical perspective has been made most succinctly by T. S. Eliot, one of the high priests of Modernism, who in his Preface to *For Lancelot Andrewes* (London: Faber & Faber, 1928) described his own viewpoint as "classicist in literature, royalist in politics, and anglo-catholic in religion" (p. ix).

[15] See F. K. Stanzel, *A Theory of Narrative*, trans. Charlotte Goedsche (1979; Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1986), pp. 4-5.

[16] See Scobie, pp. 216-26, for a helpful commentary on doubling and the use of mirror images in the novel.

[17] *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago and London: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1961), pp. 3-4.

[18] See, for example, Ivone Kirkpatrick, *Mussolini: A Study in Power* (New York: Hawthorn, 1964), pp. 615-17.

[19] In the same passage, Findley's omniscient outer narrator asserts that "Charles E. Bedaux was murdered in his cell at Key Biscayne in Florida in February of 1944" (*FLW*, 394). That might be true — the circumstances surrounding Bedaux's death are somewhat peculiar — but the official report states that Bedaux died of a self-inflicted overdose of sleeping pills. See Frances Donaldson, *Edward VIII* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1974), pp. 329-30.

[20] See Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (1972; Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1980), p. 244. Similarly, F. K. Stanzel distinguishes between first-person narrators who belong "totally to the fictional realm of the characters of the novel," and authorial narrators who exist "on a different level of being from that of the characters." See *A Theory of Narrative*, pp. 4-5.

[21] "Historical Text as Literary Artifact," in *Tropics of Discourse* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1978), p. 82.

[22] Joachim C. Fest, *The Face of the Third Reich*, trans. Michael Bullock (1963; London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1970), p. 178.

[23] *The English Historical Novel* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins, 1971), p. 10.

[24] Kathleen Tillotson uses this term for novels set twenty to sixty years in the past. See *Novels of the Eighteen-Forties* (1954; Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1965), p. 92.

[25] Bruce Meyer and Brian O'Riordan, "The Marvel of Reality: An Interview with Timothy Findley," *Waves*, 10.4 (1982), 7.

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

[27] *Ibid.*, p. 7.

# SHE'S SNOWED IN

*Robert Harding*

She's snowed in herself
falling lost in
clumps for days night
sealed in time
with freezing rain &
all the live world dead
embalmed with ice stares
She's surrounded on the street;
might as well give herself
up forever.

# SHIELD

*David Hull*

Behind the bracing wind, you hear whispers,
The rasping pines in too-dry August,
Some congress passing deep in shade,
Rock bass burning in the acid.
But above all, the wind, the breath
That brings our breath together, blows
Searching through these shrewd woods
Where tough roots suck of rock, not earth,
And sweeps away the needles spread
Beneath trees that shake off death.

In flight from a mindless southern task
You're stunned by silence — 'deeper than peace,'
In the words of one who came before
And fell to mystic, vague 'Somethings,'
As one who follows doubtless will.
Silent it's not, though. Here sound long
Forgotten orders, murmured threats,
Promises. Beneath the sky's blue shell,
Exposed rock, an equal dome, asserts
Lack of need, its aging skill.

Largely, though, our work here's on stone's behalf
— Eager the granite is to reveal
Pure hardness to the wrapping sky —
Though for ourselves we claim this toil.
Witness the browning needle tips:
Perhaps they're so from dryness; perhaps.
Long fallen to mulch, broken down,
The red-rimmed pines of painted scapes
Now nourish less well-destined wood
From which a sour sap drips.

I've been to Thomson's grave in Leith
— His bones planted there like a seed —
And marvelled: so soft that churchyard,
The wind and rain erasing names.
On farms north and east of town
Dumb cattle feed. Those fields are gashed
By stone that bears the soil
Thrusting at air. The crag-rent green
Roots in a layer of dust on this ball,
In what we call solid ground.

Just so, between cold, timeless planes,
We tend to focus on details —
The scenes engraved on warriors' shields,
The importance words, like dreams, presume.
In plaster shells, in books, we hide,
With stone, ensheath our fires in hearths,
And brood and brood on melodramas.
But when the wage of crisis be paid,
When love, or will, is stripped away,
Or when you hit a clenched earth's pride —

Then, child, you'll feel your father's face
Push up through your caving features,
Tongue words, but in a mother's voice,
Breathless, because you've been scattered.
And as the stone beneath the soil,
Or the skull behind its veil,
Or the wind that swallows whole
The whispered passing of our tales . . .
What tales? Of ancestry, of home,
Or speech, love, and how all fail.

books in review

# IMAGES OF INDIA

ROHINTON MISTRY, *Tales From Firozsha Baag.* Penguin, $9.95.

IN AN IMPRESSIVE collection of eleven stories, Rohinton Mistry sympathetically presents the vibrations of life in Firozsha Baag, a residential block in Bombay inhabited by middle-class families of Zoroastrians or Parsis, a tiny religious minority in India that traces its cultural identity and beliefs back to pre-Islamic Persia. Mistry's narrative strategy involves locating the stories within the building complex as well as interlinking them with characters who appear and reappear in more than one story. These characters seem locked in a cycle of restrictive traditions, economic needs, racial and religious tensions, and inner psychological conflicts.

The definition of the setting and the concentration on a limited number of characters with whom the readers readily become familiar give the stories coherence in both tone and structure. In a subtle and unpretentious style, Mistry presents his characters and incidents with fidelity and dexterity. The narrative retains a detached irony yet shows sympathetic affection for the characters as they face their daily concerns, petty worries, and social and religious tensions. Despite near-tragic circumstances, Mistry's characters survive and cherish hopes for better days. Following the models of psychological realism set by Chekhov and Joyce, Mistry reveals a knack for generating humour in the midst of tragedy. As he portrays the behaviour of individuals striving to retain their distinctive identity alongside the constricting edicts of a traditional community threatened by a hostilely changing world, Mistry adroitly blends tragedy with irony, cynicism with humour, scepticism with belief.

The discourse in the collection's later stories transcends irony toward a potent social message; the narrative also expands into the experiences of Indian emigrants in Canada. "Squatter" and "Lend Me Your Light" illustrate Mistry's work at its best. Complexly structured to accommodate the narrative's shifts between India and Canada, these two exceptional stories dramatize clashes between Oriental and Western cultures. In "Squatter," Mistry uses the technique of story-within-story. Through the witty, sardonic Nariman, the storyteller, he narrates the comic tribulations of the Indian emigrant Sarosh who is transformed into Sid on arrival in Toronto. Among Sarosh's innumerable maladjustments is his perennial difficulty with the toilet seat:

> At the point where our story commences, Sarosh had been living in Toronto for ten years. We find him depressed and miserable, perched on top of the toilet, crouching on his haunches, feet planted firmly for balance upon the white plastic oval of the toilet seat.
>
> Daily for a decade had Sarosh suffered this position. Morning after morning, he had no choice but to climb up and simulate the squat of our Indian latrines. If he sat down, no amount of exertion could produce success.

As if anticipating his difficulties in his prospective land of promise, Sarosh's mother insightfully encapsulates the truth that every sensitive immigrant comes to embrace: "It is better to live in want among your family and friends, who love you and care for you, than to be unhappy surrounded by vacuum cleaners and dishwashers and big shiny motor cars." Sarosh's tragi-comic ordeals with the toilet seat, and his symbolic inability to perform his normal bodily functions (a malady that baffles his Canadian physician), cannot be overcome until he takes off back to India.

Amusingly, the storyteller Nariman

colours the sardonic tale to his enchanted young listeners from Firozsha Baag with a scathing comment on Canadian multicultural policy:

> The Multicultural Department is a Canadian invention. It is supposed to ensure that ethnic cultures are able to flourish, so that Canadian society will consist of a mosaic of cultures — that's their favourite word, mosaic — instead of one uniform mix, like the American melting pot. If you ask me, mosaic and melting pot are both nonsense, and ethnic is a polite way of saying bloody foreigner.

Retaining the story's ironic tone, Mistry closes with a parody of Othello's last speech. He lets Sarosh derisively sum up his immigrant experiences: just as Othello remained alien to the confusing values of Venice, Sarosh remains unfit for the dizzying world of Toronto:

> I pray you, in your stories. . . . When you shall these unlucky deeds relate, speak of me as I am; nothing extenuate, nor set down aught in malice: tell them that in Toronto once there lived a Parsi boy as best as he could. Set you down this; and say, besides, for some it was good and for some it was bad, but for me life in the land of milk and honey was just a pain in the posterior.

The implication of this acerbic treatment of the immigrant's experience may seem pernicious, yet the story's psychological thrust creates a humorous effect that counterbalances the cynicism. Moreover, the story closes with a humane scene of care and compassion involving the storyteller and his young audience.

Whereas humour prevails in "Squatter," tragedy predominates in "Lend Me Your Light," whose material possesses the expansiveness of a potential novel. Drawing on several layers of narrative structure and points of view, the story involves two friends: Jamshed, the spoiled upper-class malcontent who scorns India's backwardness and leaves for his American dreamland, and Percy, the idealistic middle-class enthusiast who chooses to devote his energies to help poor peasants against the exploitation of the village usurers. (As the story's epigraph suggests, Percy's project derives its inspiration from Rabindranath Tagore's humanist exhortation for the symbolic non-usurious lending of light pronounced in *Gitanjali*: "your lights are all lit — then where do you go with your lamp? My house is all dark and lonesome — lend me your light.") Between these contradictory attitudes stands the narrator, Percy's brother, who also leaves India for Canada, yet keeps his cultural identity as an Indian and maintains cordial but critical contacts with the Parsi community of Toronto. The conflicting visions in the narrator's mind are skilfully articulated in eye imagery and through the metaphorical use of the figure of Tiresias:

> But as I slept on my last night in Bombay a searing pain in my eye woke me up. It was one o'clock. I bathed my eyes and tried to get back to sleep. Half-jokingly, I saw myself as someone out of a Greek tragedy, guilty of the sin of hubris seeking emigration out of the land of my birth, and paying the price in burnt-out eyes: I, Tiresias, blind and throbbing between two lives, the one in Bombay and the other one to come in Toronto. . . .

The story thus offers two parallel levels of conflict: an external one between the pompous Jamshed and the idealist Percy, and its internalized version within the narrator between his roots and his new Western life style.

The story concludes tragically with the village usurers assassinating one of Percy's co-workers, leading to the collapse of the humanitarian project. Jamshed, of course, triumphs in his worldly wisdom. Once more, Mistry deploys his favourite Tiresian metaphor to close his narrative:

> Gradually, I discovered I'd brought back with me my entire burden of riddles and puzzles, unsolved. The whole sorry package was there, not lightened at all. The epiphany would have to wait for another time, another trip.
>
> I mused, I gave way to whimsy: I, Ti-

> resias, throbbing between two lives, humbled by the ambiguities and dichotomies confronting me. . . .

Regardless of this ambivalence, the story's tone unequivocally favours the self-sacrificing Percy. Despite defeat, he is not giving up: the struggle continues.

Mistry's critical but committed stance towards his cultural roots provides, as in Joyce's writings, infinite inspirational material. Mistry's irony creates a fit vehicle to expose gently, sensitively, and truthfully a traditional community that still regards women as unclean, practises arranged marriages, and believes in magic, ritual, and superstition. The writer's sympathies preclude his condemning or disowning his culture in its entirety, and the humorous rendition of character and incident makes the criticism poignantly effective and lasting. What enriches the humour even further is that the narrative blends the comic with the heroic as the characters strive to survive and transcend their reality.

With the publication of *Tales From Firozsha Baag*, a collection that shows brilliance and promise, Canadian literature has gained a fresh and distinctive voice. Mistry, together with such talented writers as Michael Ondaatje, Joy Kogawa, and Neil Bissoondath, opens exciting new vistas that expand the Canadian imagination beyond familiar Anglo-European motifs towards Oriental and Third World dimensions. Rohinton Mistry is a writer to watch and welcome.

AMIN MALAK

# WILY WESTERN

GEORGE BOWERING, *Caprice*. Penguin, $19.95.

WHAT IS GEORGE BOWERING up to this time, anyway? Renowned as an experimental if also wily writer, he has written a *Western* novel, set in Canada yet, which is such a highly entertaining *read* that any play with the conventions of narrative discourse it offers (and it does offer them!) just about sneak right by us. The pleasures of this text, then, are many and varied, traditional and innovative. *Caprice* is something very like a popular novel, and I can't wait to see the cover of the paperback; yet it is not quite the thing itself, and it does continue its author's quest to explore various fictional and historical possibilities tied to his own space, the coast and interior of British Columbia. Set in the 1890's, about one hundred years after the events presented (and re-presented) in *Burning Water*, *Caprice* is the middle book of a triptych which, Bowering says, will move from the beginnings of white appropriation of the West Coast to the present day (which when the next book appears will be the 1990's) while examining various "problems" of art and life which have engaged artists and thinkers during this time.

*Burning Water* not only reinvented the explorative journeys of Captain Vancouver along the coast of what eventually became British Columbia, it also provided a hilarious yet profound examination of the contemporary Romantic controversy concerning imagination and fancy. Much of the discussion of this matter was carried on by two Indians, an older teacher and a younger novice who intended to become an artist. These two are back, which is one sign of just how non-realistic *Caprice* is, but though they appear unchanged they are pursuing other questions: of perception and preconception or prejudice, of seeming and being, and of how language works to signal what we perceive, especially if we are perceiving something "new." That they do so in as deeply comic a fashion as they did before testifies to Bowering's wit, as well as his intelligence.

Of course, the questions they raise and debate are centrally important to the nar-

rative, a complexly spiralling tale of revenge in the Old West, with a woman playing the role traditionally filled by men. And that woman is Caprice, the oddly out of place hero of the tale. Of course, she is different, a poet from Quebec who has lived in Paris and now has come with her whip at the ready, riding her black Spanish stallion in pursuit of the American cowboy who callously and casually murdered her brother. Caprice is tall, beautiful, tough, and usually silent. Although she inspires awe in most of the people who see her, she is the lover of Roy Smith, a teacher and baseball player from Kamloops, and is, in her own chapters, a likeable character with all the doubts and fears proper to such a figure. She is, in fact, very like a "character" we would expect to meet in a conventional novel; so are many of the others she meets in her quest: Everyday Luigi, who gets into trouble trying to defend this strange and lovely woman; Gert the Whore, who has a traditional heart of gold and a mouthful of tall tales; John Kearns, who runs a hotel and loves good poetry; and even the object of her vengeance, Frank Spencer, and his evil, stupid partner, Loop Groulx. That she and they are also quite deliberately "framed" by a narrator who won't let us forget that all this is just something written down, does not detract from their fictional substantiality; and it is Bowering's ability to present them simultaneously in both realistic and self-conscious narrative terms that reveals just how well he comprehends the whole fictional enterprise.

Since *Caprice* is a Western, certain expected events must occur, and on the whole they do, though not in the expected fashion. Spencer's killing of Pete Foster, for example, which sets the plot in motion, fails to measure up to the Western's conventional standards: for one thing, it is more than usually unnecessary, even for a drunken brute, yet it is starkly efficient, and therefore very American. Perceived that way, it could be a clear example of prejudice at work, in both the act and the narration. But is it? For this narrative voice is very self-aware, and takes a great deal of pleasure in reminding us that we need to measure up to its demands just as much as it must serve ours. Thus it speaks directly to us on the very first page:

> If you just had ordinary English eyes, you would have seen late-morning sunlight flooding the light brown of the wide grassy valley and making giant knife shadows where the ridges slid down the hillsides, free of trees, wrinkles made in a wide land that didnt [*sic*] seem to be in that much of a hurry. As usual in the summer there wasnt a cloud in the sky, and you could not be sure where the sun was because you didnt dare look up at that half of the sky. You paid attention to shadows, to know what time it was, and because any animal with any sense was resting where it was darker.
>
> But if you had those famous Indian eyes you could look down into the wide valley and see something moving, maybe a lot of things moving, but especially one black or at least dark horse, which meant probably a rider too, and in a little while a rider for certain. Coming from the east, walking so slowly that puffs of dust rose no higher than the animal's knees.

Although the narration will shift for long stretches into what appears to be a version of old-fashioned omniscience, this sly voice keeps returning to remind us that we are *reading* a written work and that we ("you") have attention to pay, sometimes simply by sneaking a reference to reader-response theory into some scene or other, especially one with the two Indians. Yet the story gallops along, and it carries us with it, even as it insists we pause and contemplate, as do the two Indians, the possible meanings of what we "read" (or perceive).

In this it is quite a bit like a baseball game, which shouldn't surprise us in a George Bowering text. What might surprise us is that baseball actually appears

in the novel. What might surprise us even more is that Bowering's historical research revealed that baseball was actually played in the B.C. interior in the 1890's: so this is history, not simply fiction. But then is history not simply a form of fiction? At any rate, the narrative is allowed to meander and take its slow way to a conclusion, just like a game. And just like a game, this fiction has its rules that must be followed, by both writer and reader, even if the rules tend to be in the control of the former. For when the writer is aware, as Bowering is so clearly aware, of the conventions that might control his narrative were he too much the reader, unconsciously accepting all the rules, then he can get us to join him in questioning them. Not necessarily in order to dismiss them, but at least the better to understand how they affect our always changing comprehension of a text.

But now I'm making *Caprice* sound far too scholarly and didactic. And it is not; it is a delight, and such little literary insights as it might appear to offer add to the genuine pleasure it provides. Even those readers who desire a text to follow the conventions of a genre often tend to enjoy seeing them stretched somewhat, while readers who are not so stuck on conventions will likely find that part of their pleasure comes from perceiving how they are renovated. If Caprice, against both the odds and the advice of so many kindly men that she give up her quest, does finally track Spencer down for a showdown, both the story of the hunt and of the quarry's strange behaviour, and the showdown itself, refuse to fit the time-honoured (and American) paradigm. Indeed, the resolution of the "plot" (if we may call it that) is quintessentially Canadian, and that is all I'm going to say about it.

The working out of that plot would take up the space of a lengthy short story at most, yet *Caprice* is a full-length novel, and there is, for this reader, no fat. What we have, and in grand profusion, are any number of side tracks, delightful interruptions which turn out to be the real story after all. In one scene, "Gert the Whore and some of her attractive friends" are telling stories, which branch out from each other in the most complex ways. The scene is richly rendered, for Bowering has precisely captured the manner in which people interrupt and alter the direction of each other's narratives, none of which ever reaches a conclusion. Most of the "stories" in *Caprice* are similarly inconclusive, and that is the point. In this, the novel is perhaps more naturalistic than most fictions which go under that description, while remaining terrifically self-conscious.

Of the asides, I enjoyed the conversations between the two Indians the most, especially the wonderful new (Derridean) Coyote tale, but there are some nifty examinations of frontier verse, and of the nature of poetry, as well. Not to mention another western Canadian take on photography as historical record and possible artform (see Robert Kroetsch's *Badlands*), the generally high level of literary punning that occurs throughout the text, or the many literary in-jokes that sign George Bowering's presence in his text, yet also, by providing a pleasure that only a *text* can provide, reveal the fictional nature of the whole enterprise. Indeed, all the pleasures of *Caprice* (including its main story) return us to the fictive realm, to an appreciation of the novel as writing and as a shaping of the material from which books are made: language.

*Caprice* is many things, then, but it is first and foremost a wonderful combination of a readerly and a writerly text. It draws us in to a genuine narrative yet it also questions the whole narrative enterprise. It recognizes that "characters" are only made of words, yet it finds the words

to create "sympathetic" and interesting characters. It continually reminds us of the playful nature of the craft of fiction, yet it plays fairly by its own rules and provides a rich and complex pleasure for the reader willing to play along. This reader was more than willing, and thoroughly enjoyed the whole experience.

DOUGLAS BARBOUR

# GLOBAL VILLAGE

BRIAN FAWCETT, *Cambodia: A book for people who find television too slow.* Talonbooks, $9.95.

IN *Cambodia* Brian Fawcett conducts a series of investigations into the nature of the Global Village. As Fawcett himself claims, this book "isn't normal fiction. There's no plot, no dialogue, and the action is frequently off-stage, upstairs, in the past, or deferred because it is a threat to sanity and well-being." What we have here is art operating without a rule book. *Cambodia* is "about" authoritarianism in its many guises, including the guise of private authority and, for that reason, Fawcett refuses to exert the writer's authority over his subject matter, to translate it into a coherent sequential narrative. Instead he gives us a collage of diverse fragments of reality and fiction that makes no claim to hang together aesthetically. The effect is like flipping channels on the television: a meeting between St. Paul and Marshall McLuhan on one channel; a visit to Universal Chicken — every roadside franchise rolled into one greasy nugget — on another. Fawcett dilates historical, sociological, and psychological frames of reference — a newspaper article on Reggie Jackson, the Hinton train crash, the Challenger explosion — in an attempt to penetrate the "incomprehensible complexity" of the world we inhabit, and to expose the social and political contradictions of the Global Village that threaten consciousness and survival itself. At the end of one of his tragic-comic parables, Fawcett comments: "Sorry about not having a nice ending, but it's the world we live in that prevents that. We have all the information and the sensation, but none of the stories we hear quite add up. They just pile up, a different kind of assault altogether."

In a physical subtext that runs across the bottom of the main text, Fawcett meditates on Cambodia and its kinship to the Global Village. Here, Fawcett makes explicit what the fictions only hint at, by arguing that the ideological aims of the Global Village are no different from those of Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge during the 1970's. What the Khmer Rouge attempted to do to the Cambodian people, the Global Village is attempting to do to us: that is, to obliterate memory and extinguish human consciousness. The argument is a subtle and terrifying one; the subtext runs through *Cambodia* like a slow river swollen with bodies, statistics, waste and lies, a vocabulary of torture, civilization, and art. What emerges from Fawcett's thinking through *Cambodia* is a vision of a society and a world choking on its own contradictions as it undergoes increasingly rapid homogeneity.

Fawcett performs an exhaustive autopsy on the corpse of the "public," that once meaningful embodiment of democratic freedoms and responsibilities. In North America in the 1980's the public "has lost interest in public consciousness and given up on conversation"; democratic freedom has come to mean depressingly little more than the freedom to choose Coca-Cola over Pepsi. The demise of the publilc can be traced, Fawcett argues, to mass communications technology — television, film, computer technology — whose effects and practices Marshall McLuhan translated into the popular metaphor of the Global Village. The

backbone of the Global Village is "franchise-oriented consumer capitalism" whose spiritual roots Fawcett detects in Platonist doctrine and the Calvinist interpretation of that doctrine. Consumer capitalism is the logical result of coupling monopoly capitalism and bourgeois ideology. Thus:

> Queen Isabella did not send Christopher Columbus on a voyage of discovery, she gave him a franchise that demanded that he exploit what he discovered for the mercantile gain of the franchise owner. In the new world, God would reward wealth, not understanding. It was exploited without ever being explored.

Sleekly calculated and complacently undialectical, the Global Village offers the vast spectacle of a wholly commodified world breathlessly waiting to be consumed. It also furnishes a ruling ideology; freedom to consume, after all, looks suspiciously like freedom itself. The dream of possession is a dream of power.

A recurring theme of *Cambodia* is the insidious role played by television in reinforcing and supporting the notions of those in power. In "On the Difficulties of Crowd Control," Fawcett contends that the message delivered up by television has less to do with facts than with ideology. Focusing on the 1970 Kent State murders, Fawcett provides an acute and compelling analysis of how television edited the reality of the murder of four students by National Guardsmen into a coherent package suitable for consumption, complete with a neat sequential narrative and a moral lesson. According to Fawcett, the ideological message delivered by television about Kent State is clear: "it tells us that the authorities are on top of the situation, and that everything being done is fine and orderly and rational. It doesn't tell us what is in control. That question has been atomized by implied conspiracies, allegations, rumours, technically opaque editing. Don't ask."

Television distorts and shrinks our understanding of reality "by presenting . . . images of men who are virile, well-dressed, urbane and violent; women who are beautiful, sexually alluring, remote in their polished perfections; unhampered by inability, unwillingness, or second thoughts, serenely thoughtless in their slickly violent confrontations with ugliness and the other human frailties they treat as evil." Moreover, when violence and killing constitute the fundamental content of television, we stop asking ourselves difficult yet crucial questions about why violence and killing are so prevalent and where the responsibility for their prevalence lies. The ability of television to juxtapose factual and fictional realities and to draw an equivalence between them, has reached the point where the terrorist bombing we witness on the evening news carries no more dramatic impact than the terrorist attack we tune in to watch on an episode of "Dynasty." In this way, television serves the purposes essential to the workings of a consumer capitalist society by numbing the injuries of class, race, and sex, by creating dependencies and muzzling dissent.

It is Fawcett's contention "that the goal of the Global Village mass communications technology is to transform the complexities of contemporary life into a reality that resembles the Saturday morning cartoons" — in short, to make memory and imagination superfluous. In "Universal Chicken," Fawcett compares the iconography of the Global Village — Gulf, Pepsi, Speedy Muffler King, Burger King — to an "anti-memory device":

> In the Middle Ages they called memory devices "theatres." They were mental landscapes that helped people to remember who they were, what and where they were, and what connected them to other people, to nature and to God. What you've been in is the opposite. . . . The anti-memory device keeps pounding images into your head to tell you what to buy or what's fashionable. And

> while it's doing that it wears away your sense of who you are, where you are and where you're going by convincing you that you're just like everyone else and that all places are the same.

This then is the ultimate goal of the Global Village as Fawcett perceives it — to obliterate individual identity, to humiliate and, eventually, exterminate human consciousness. After peeling away the pretensions and hype surrounding the Global Village, Fawcett arrives at a conclusion that is as chilling as it is bleak. What he comes to realize is that the return to a "tribal consciousness," the shining dream held up to us by the proselytizers for the Global Village, has a dark underbelly: "every outbreak of genocide in this century has coincided with the propagandizing of tribal consciousness." The ideological core that drives the Global Village is the same one underlying two historical examples of totalitarian administrative brutality: the Belgian Congo massacres of the late nineteenth century (the subject of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*) and the Khmer Rouge atrocities of the 1970's: "they [the Khmer Rouge] wanted a world in which people existed without memory and without the ability or will to think independently. They tried to replace those uniquely human abilities with direct experience framed by an absolute and monadic authority. It is also what Conrad's Kurtz wanted to bring to the Congo natives in the 1890's." The methods of Pol Pot's Khmer forces and King Leopold II's army were cruder and more violent but their authoritarian aspirations were no different in kind from those Fawcett sees at work in the Global Village.

Early in *Cambodia*, Fawcett describes the book as "an essay, a short story, a novella, a harangue, a poem, a rant — whatever is dictated by the necessities of my subject matter." Fawcett situates himself as a writer within a community of literary exiles — Joseph Conrad, V. S. Naipaul, Breyten Breytenbach — "from the interzone between the First and Third world, where an observer can still see the opaqueness of the Global Village, and can peer into and perhaps decipher that which is taking form in the dark oppressed villages. . . ." The fact that life in the Global Village is meant to be experienced, rather than understood, is the basis for both its "innocence" and its aggression. Since understanding the nature of the Global Village is the only defence we have against it, the writer's role, as Fawcett sees it, is to transform our experience of the Global Village into an understanding of it. It is not enough to expose "the horror" itself; it must be penetrated, its brutal underpinnings revealed. Fawcett contends that the purpose of art is truth-speaking — a noble if somewhat daunting assertion given the slippery nature of truth — and he is critical of what he terms "apolitically experimental writing," literature that "seems either infrastructurally self-occupied, or purely psychological in its consequence": "It is prophesy that I am after, not visions of high imagination. I want to see how and where and why we're impaled on the spike of the present dilemma." And who would disagree with that? But then what? Do we abandon art altogether to polemic? Let it go on mumbling to itself in darkened cafés and small magazines? Should we delude ourselves that art has the power to bring about structural change? Is art irrelevant if it doesn't lead to change? Such questions are endless and, as a prescription for art generally, futile. "The truth," American writer Grace Paley has suggested, "finds its own level and floats." Writers will continue (and so they should) to explore truth as inner necessity dictates.

*Cambodia* is an impassioned, angry, anguished diatribe against the invisible authoritarian premises of the Global Vil-

lage. The power of *Cambodia* — and it is an extraordinarily powerful book — is drawn from Fawcett's moral rage. Fawcett transmutes that rage into a verbal assault that lifts you off your feet, slams you against a wall and pummels you with the contradictions and questions that remain unanswered in the Global Village. *Cambodia* represents a subversive act of memory and imagination. What Fawcett demands of us is that we be more conscious; what he seeks to reclaim are "direct and simple-minded" rights: "the right to remember the past and . . . the right to imagine a future." The achievement of *Cambodia* is that it points us in the right direction.

NOAH ZACHARIN

# RÉCITS

TIZIANA BECCARELLI-SAAD, *Les Passantes*. Triptyque, n.p.

THE RÉCIT IS A much broader generic category than any in English literature; even so, these little sketches are only borderline narratives. Ideally they would represent the trace or essence of more developed narrative situations, but I cannot help feeling that Beccarelli-Saad has simply backed away from more complex forms, such as the *nouvelle* or novel. There is little if any relationship, structural or thematic, to link the various *récits*. The first one, "Au coin de la rue," describes a crowd of passengers descending from a subway train and leaving the station: "toutes ces couleurs mouvantes, tous ces gens qui vivent leurs peines d'amour, tous ces gens qui vivent bien et tous ceux qui vivent mal, tous ceux qui partent et tous ceux qui n'osent pas." *Les Passantes* might be expected (perhaps this is a pedestrian expectation) to tell the stories of these passers-by, but any such tenuous continuity is soon abandoned.

The stories told are, moreover, selective — not those of "tous ces gens," but only of the "passantes," of women. The collection covers the usual feminist ground: women burdened with domestic responsibilities and/or self-doubt, lesbians and victims of rape, as well as the instinctive sisterhood that gives rise to phrases such as "Elle regarde ce sang. Ce sang de femme" and "combien d'hommes capables d'une telle chose." The collection is marred by a good deal of repetition, as in the passage quoted ("toutes ces couleurs . . .") and another passage from the same story: in the space of sixty words we learn not only that "Après tout, c'est vraiment dégoutant de régler ses comptes de cette façon" but also that on the pavement there is "une immense tache de sang très rouge. Vraiment très rouge." The stories — I use this term for want of a better one — are so brief, so faintly drawn in any narrative sense that we may well have a right to expect a sort of poetic perfection of the text. This said, it should be noticed that "Son ombre la suit" is exceptionally good, for its language, its psychological acuity, and its carefully controlled scheme of images.

"Fable," the concluding story, also suffers from verbosity, an odd weakness in tales so brief and slight. Although "Fable" is longer than most of the stories, it is repetitive rather than complex. The fable, the story within the story, is a sort of *mise en abyme* of the narrative situation, that of a mother whose son rejects her and effectively causes her death. The memorable last line deserves a firmer narrative support: in the fable, the corpse of the mother murdered by her son is heard to cry out, as the son stumbles in the road, "Mon fils, mon fils, tu ne t'es pas fait mal au moins?"

BARBARA BELYEA

# VARIATIONS

MARY WALTERS RISKIN, *The Woman Upstairs.* NeWest Press, $8.95.

PATRICK ROSCOE, *Beneath the Western Slopes.* Stoddart, $22.95.

DIANA GUTHRIE'S DISCOVERY that her dying mother is secretly in love with the widowed Reverend Westmoreland does not lighten her bleak outlook, but does let her extend to her mother's life some of the regret hitherto reserved for her own. She left home at 18 after her lover committed suicide. At 33 she comes back with the same paralyzing bitterness towards her mother which she felt at 18.

Like *Surfacing,* this narrative hinges on a self-enclosed woman's memories of parents and past. The memories are dark and perhaps adequately explain the narrator's sour vision of relationships: all relationships — yet her stance is clearly inadequate for survival; it needs revision. At the same time one sees and hears how she consistently blows her chances for revision, and her persistence grows irritating; one could have wished that, when her vision is opposed, there were more strength in the opposition. For example, Reverend Westmoreland, like a psychiatrist, tries to lead her to the admission that her mother didn't cause her lover's death. Since this admission (achieved at the end) is part of the painfully slight renewal that she finally attains and therefore pivotal to her development in the novel, this should be a suspenseful moment, but Westmoreland's presence isn't real enough for that. The first-person perspective needs more against it (from either without or from within) to have adequate tension, or at least to have more tension. Still, the conclusion is strong and moving in its refusal of easy answers or apocalyptic extremes and the memories of Noel, the suicide, are strong. Also, Diana is real; one's irritation at her is a measure of one's caring, for to the end she remains a potentially tragic figure.

Patrick Roscoe's daring *Beneath the Western Slopes* is a series of barely displaced myths, his theme the sacrificial gods of sun and vegetation and his variations thirteen tales set in a Mexican town where the pagan roots of Catholic Christianity are never out of sight. In "The Scent of Young Girls Dying," twelve young girls accompany the bereft Chonita to the graveyard where they replace the plastic flowers with magically fragrant blooms, the same flowers which the twelve girls eventually become, taking on the strong scent although they wear no perfume, then dying one by one, the deaths welcomed and celebrated in graveyard rituals where the priest calls the dead girls seeds and the parents splurge on beautiful monuments. "Imagine how much it would have cost to feed and clothe and keep happy my poor darling." This is not political in context — the music requires no such props — but it lingers, as do other similar comments.

As variations, the stories repeatedly, perhaps too repeatedly, give us the same elements. There is a contrast between the young people who become part of the ordinary life — pickers, labourers, restaurant workers, fishermen, mothers, wives — and the young people who transcend that life, either completely, through some kind of immolation, or partly, in visions that fade. In "Mariposa, Butterfly" a youngster accompanies his father to the banana-picking, discovers exotic butterflies that live on the hills, and spends the rest of his life pursuing this ineffable beauty. Worn out at the end, he lives apart, his dead visions pressed under glass. And, while her school friends become obsessed with kissing boys and getting married, one girl dreams a dream as exotic as any myth for a poor Mexican: "If she couldn't be a nurse like Florence Nightingale or a scientist like Madame

Curie, then she'd be happy enough working in a clean, air-conditioned office."

The tales identify the mythical realm of desire with the great world: Victor Aquino begins his transition from boy to god by putting on American roller-skates. But whether Spain or California, the great world is usually cruel. When Rosaria, who dreams herself a Spanish princess, learns about the Spanish conquest, she knows it must be a lie. "She would never accept stolen diamonds. . . . Her pirates were good and kind." The brilliant visions, like Keats's odes, are poised on the edge of squalor and decay, but as musical offerings, not as moral statements. America, America. Adieu, adieu, thy plaintive anthem fades.

LLOYD ABBEY

# GOING HOME

VERONICA ROSS, *Homecoming*. Oberon, $11.95.
DENNIS TOURBIN, *The Port Dalhousie Stories*. Coach House, $12.50.

WHAT SEPARATES THESE two collections of short stories is not the distance between Ross's Nova Scotia fishing villages and Port Dalhousie, but that between the perception and technique of the two artists. The seven *Homecoming* stories, previously published in a variety of Canadian magazines, continue Veronica Ross's striking and compassionate fictional record of life in and around the small town of St. Genevieve, known already to readers of her stories *Goodbye Summer* and *Dark Secrets* and her novel *Fisherwoman*. Though the new collection is not unified by a protagonist, except for the metafictional "Anna," the stories focus on family ties, perceived for the most part from the mid-life years in which far too many of these people are prematurally old, looking back as Clifford in "The Eyes of the Whore" with the "sadness of bewilderment that he hid from everyone," or forward, as Bruce Leicester in "Leicester County," to "emptiness, deadness . . . that feeling of nothingness." The failed marriages which leave these two narrators their legacy of loneliness are not the sole source of disruption, however. The masterful title story centres on a son's recognition that the barrier separating him from his father reaches forward after his father's death so that in the story's last words "now he could not leave here at all, ever." That "here" to which he has returned has been revealed as a complex world of place, gender, family and class, memory and emotion. The ties that bind are never gentle in any of these stories, but Ross subtly creates such a strong sense of intimacy between characters, author, and reader that we retain respect and concern for these ordinary people, while her voice modulates from scorn to compassion. Dark though the stories seem, Ross refuses to allow the harshness of life lived in a setting that reflects psychological and moral as well as sociological stony ground to justify despair.

In the manner that seems characteristic of female authors, Ross avoids closed endings. All the stories leave their characters with their problems unresolved, but opened out to mysterious spaces within the selves and behind the eyes which prove to be reservoirs of courage, compassion, and strength, at least to endure and to wonder, if not to hope. The greater strength — and the greater despair — is often associated with the women. Nevertheless, because the centre of narrative consciousness is male in the majority of the stories the women are the silent ones, known through indirection. While Ross defies the typical female writer's avoidance of the male persona, she uses the male to heighten gender issues and divisions from which violence, loneliness, and bewilderment flow for both sexes. Clifford divorces his wife when he discovers that

the resemblance he intuited between his wife's eyes and those of the whore he picked up in Toronto was a reality. But he retains the meaning of the eyes as a "warning or a reproach," of a mystery too big for him, a great void in his life that "orphans" him. In the final story, "Images," the Canadian Literature professor from Toronto uses his affair with his landlady, Kathleen, to revitalize his writing. But his inability to comprehend Kathleen means that the opening question "How to tell this story?" can only be answered one way — from his point of view, not "through Kathleen's eyes." When his help is rejected by the drunken Kathleen, thrown out into the snow by her husband, the professor's only protection is to restore Kathleen to a literary tradition, "like the character in some tragic Russian novel set in a remote land of frozen suffering." The reader can accept the accuracy of the frozen suffering, but must uncover for himself the story of Kathleen and the answer to her question "What do you know?"

Ross's style is like that of Alice Munro, a combination of realism that blurs the border between mimesis and a haunted inner world of psychological and moral mystery. Though not experimental in form, the stories are tightly structured, economic but vivid in detail, and especially interesting in narrative voice and structure. The evocative cover design by Noreen Mallory, of the body of a swimming woman whose head is hidden behind rock, suits a perspective in which absence is a powerful signifier of meaning. Reading these stories one thinks of Winesburg, Ohio, Manawaka, or Jubilee, other fictional worlds peopled with unique, universal, and memorable characters.

Even though I approached *The Port Dalhousie Stories* with considerable nostalgia, I could not overcome the discomfort created by the gap between present performance and previous tradition. A well-stocked memory and an eye for detail are not enough to make the protagonist, Dennis Tourbin, come to life to join the brotherhood of Huck Finn, Tom Sawyer, Holden Caulfield, or the zany protagonists of Hodgins or Kinsella. Tourbin (author) lacks the art of characterization, of evoking a sense of place in a setting, and of manipulating first-person narrative. There has to be some way of inducing narratee involvement beyond the constant "you know" of person, place, etc. And even condemned to an inarticulate and apparently totally insensitive and unimaginative youth as narrator, the true storyteller can find ways of evoking for the reader unseen and unfelt experience. The best that Tourbin does for us is to offer multiple ??? and !!!, combined with CAPITAL LETTERS and interminable but uninventive profanity. Given the tedium of the manly life made up of swearing, fighting, drinking, and wenching that characterizes the Port Dalhousie boys and their rock group "Evils," one is amazed at the nostalgia we are told about at the close.

The thirty-eight stories are given a lavish production, but they are not well served by the dust-jacket description as representing the "first major foray" into narrative of a "poet, painter and performing artist" who has been "painting words since 1969." The taped version of the stories, *Mouthing Off*, the first in the Coach House series of talking books, may represent the strength of this collection as oral storytelling of autobiographical vignettes. The declaration that the writer is "most interested in the exploration of language as a visual medium" may be a rationalization, but it adds a level of expectation that is not fulfilled either by the prose or by John Boyle's line drawings.

Sociologists may mine this book for dress codes, psychologists for adolescent hierarchical peer mores, local historians

for Lakeside Park as seen from inside. Realistic the stories may well be in their revelation of the narrow, inarticulate egocentricity of youth. Entertaining and amusing they are at times as in the predictable embarrassment of the youth when chosen to dance the "dirty boogie" by the young girl. But of the twenty-three illustrations, females appear only in four, and in ways that reflect one of the disturbing subtexts of the collection as a whole — woman as Other, a hard, ugly, vacant, threatening sexuality. Such an attitude, too common to be surprising, is again perhaps realistic, but it is one of the reasons this volume is so depressing, while Ross's much harsher view of life and sexuality is nevertheless enhancing.

Because Ross has done her work so well, one suspects that the story behind the eyes even of the young in Port Dalhousie twenty years ago may not be unlike that in St. Genevieve. The Ontario town awaits its teller; realism awaits transformation into reality.

NANCY BAILEY

# FANTASIES

FRANCE DUCASSE, *La Double Vie de Léonce et Léonil*. Les Herbes rouges, n.p.

FRANCOIS GRAVEL, *Benito*. Editions du Boréal Express, $14.95.

FRANÇOIS GRAVEL'S NOVEL *Benito* is a gentle fantasy, an optimistic reverie on our times, an allegory suggesting how happy we might be if dreaming, daydreaming, and affection were our priorities. Dr. Lionel Bienvenue has the magical gift of influencing the future career of babies he delivers by touching certain parts of their anatomy: "Pour obtenir un pianiste, il suffisait d'un léger toucher de l'oreille gauche et d'un long massage du majeur. Pour un écrivain il flattait de son index le tour du nombril." But, intending to endow humanity with a mathematician by pinching baby Benito's right ear-lobe and caressing his eyelids, Dr. Bienvenue produces a person who will always have a lifelong aversion for figures, but a love of dreaming and an extraordinary gift for encouraging others to confess to him their innermost cares and longings, and to feel much better afterwards. The story begins between the two world wars, and Benito owes his first name to an admirer of Il Duce. But this choice of name is an example of the (usually gentle) irony permeating the novel: Benito will become an anti-Mussolini, a saint-like incarnation of modesty, kindness, and yes, chastity.

Benito's early existence is not a bed of roses: his alcoholic father cannot remember his children's names, and is not kind-hearted; Benito's mother has suffered from amnesia since her wedding night, and must be reminded each day of her husband's name and of the number of children she has. The resulting parental neglect is not entirely negative for Benito, as it leaves him more time to dream: to this end, he deliberately tries to appear mediocre, to go unnoticed, to be left alone to dream. As a child he befriends a madam and spends considerable time in her brothel, where he becomes chastely enamoured of one of the girls, Nancy. Even after puberty, Benito wants no more than to contemplate Nancy's beautiful blue eyes.

It becomes obvious that when Benito stares at someone in the eyes, that person suddenly makes a full confession to him. Nancy becomes the business manager of this talent. Together this platonic couple raise Nancy's daughter Eléonore, to whom her mother has transmitted her hatred of men. Raphaël-Xavier(!), a young man "from the mountain" (i.e., no doubt, from the wealthier districts of Montreal), falls in love with Eléonore the "ouvrière" and therefore moves into her working-class neighbourhood, thus start-

ing a fad (and here Gravel's irony mocks the recent infatuation of part of the Montreal élite for areas such as the Plateau Mont Royal made trendy by the novels of Beauchemin and Tremblay). Eléonore moves to Florida (a very frequent spatial referent in Quebec novels over the last few years, reflecting the importance Florida has acquired in the Québécois imagination). She soon becomes a volunteer worker for police, stopping muggers by well-placed blows and kicks, especially to the genitals. Eléonore is eventually able to surmount her fear of men and sex, form a happy couple with Raphaël-Xavier, and bear a child who will likely have the same talents as his godfather Benito, since the delivering doctor touches his right lobe and eyelids. As for Benito and Nancy, they happily grow old together, Benito dreaming and spreading happiness around them, as his godson will.

Some may feel that the characterization in this touching, albeit rather light, tale is shallow and the novel's spatial references, themes, and characters tend to be clichés; but the mountain versus lower town, rich versus poor dichotomies, the clichés of the golden-hearted prostitute and the naïve, idealistic young man (a character type of which *Benito* offers several examples) may be justified by the novel's allegorical, didactic thrust: if we all learned to dream, to listen, to love, what a gentle planet this might be! The style is simple but alert, the vocabulary of an intermediate level.

Readers who are looking for more sophisticated fiction, both in content and form, may prefer France Ducasse's *La Double Vie de Léonce et Léonil.* This novel is even further removed from the mimetic, "realistic" tradition than is *Benito.* The presence of animals, nursery rhyme, Russian and Scandinavian folk tale, other forms of intertextuality, wordplay and sound-play, dream tales, impossible (or marvellous/oneiric) events, and fount switching emphasizes the fictive, scriptive nature of this text which thereby exemplifies not only the reflexive dimension of contemporary fiction but also its tendency to incorporate many genres.

The term "double life" in the title is spectacularly well justified: not only are Léonce and Léonil doubles of each other, but in a very special case of puberty these brothers become sisters and Léonce decides to rename herself Lénore, and to name her new sister Liliane. They take this sex change in their stride.

The problematics of family living and of the couple are major themes in *La Double Vie.* None of the family members seems particularly bad individually, but their cohabitation is frictional, often adversarial. Grandmother Amanda's creeping senility does not help, nor do the serious physical and mental health problems of her daughter, Marie-Po. The recurrent themes of sickness, mutilation, and death emphasize the importance of these phenomena in physical life, but also symbolize the tribulations of life psychologically, particularly within the framework of the family.

This novel of one mad family's life derives its undeniable quality and strength from two sources: one is the love that, despite disputes, misunderstandings, and outright tragedy, continues to circulate among family members; the other is the brilliance of the writing itself, writing that bestows on the novel fascinating diversity and intellectual appeal. Perhaps this brilliance is somewhat too self-conscious, too deliberately displayed; and, fragmenting the story-line, confuses the reader (who is certainly led to be an active participant in the signifying process) of an otherwise stimulating, well-written novel.

NEIL BISHOP

# BOMBARDMENT

JEAN-MARIE POUPART, *Beaux Draps*. Boréal, $19.95.

JEAN-MARIE POUPART'S latest novel is a technically accomplished but irritatingly self-indulgent narrative about an overweight, mediocre writer who has turned 40 and is still considering the suicide he has contemplated since the age of 12. René Faille is obsessively and melodramatically planning his own death as a gesture not of despair but of affirmation, whose impact would be felt by friends and enemies as well as by the sales figures of his books. What delays his speedy departure from life is first of all his decision to travel south where the hated sunny climate will spur him into action. To put this project into effect, he needs to sell a TV script, whose completion takes up much of the narrative. In addition, Faille meets a lesbian couple who ask him to impregnate one of them. Since Faille's sexual potency is as low as his creative powers, this task further puts off the moment of his death. At the end of the novel, Faille is quite predictably still alive. But he has finished the TV script and has fathered the baby. The final scene leaves the novel fashionably open-ended since Faille is boarding the airplane for his trip south. Poupart does not seem particularly interested in the plot, but the situation he has created permits him to exploit a great deal of irony at the expense of his character.

*Beaux Draps* is technically an ambitious novel, especially in its postmodernist shifts of perspective, its plotless meanderings, its open-endedness, its word plays, and its self-referentiality. Faille is alternatively, and often ambiguously, presented from first- and third-person perspectives; however, the dominant narrative approach is the use of "vous," permitting the narrator to address either his main character or the reader. Such manipulations of narrative perspective put the narrator into a position where he can either identify with Faille, treat him patronizingly, or judge him ironically. On the whole, Poupart gives the impression that he cannot be certain of his character at the same time as he never lets us forget that he has created Faille and can do with him what he pleases.

One of the novel's more engaging traits is the sheer exuberance with which Poupart writes for the pure pleasure of putting words on paper. His word plays are sometimes quite successful, as when he writes: "Faille se voit sous les traits de Mature (Victor) dans son interprétation de l'aviateur Saint-Ex se préparant à larguer en trombe ses bombes d'outre-tombola sur la collection de colombes qui lui collent aux colibacilles du cul depuis déjà plus de quarante ans." This intertextual play of signifiers is both the strength and often the weakness of Poupart's text. The narrator's comment that Faille is "plus soucieux des jeux de mots et des figures de rhétorique qui naissent dans [son] esprit que du developpement d'une idée principale" is obviously a self-assessment on Poupart's part. Indeed, the novel is less concerned with what it talks about than with how it goes about doing so. Poupart underlines his formalist stance with self-reflexive comments about the act of writing and with intertextual allusions to literature and film. Unfortunately, Poupart's insistently self-conscious assertions that his text is about the production of the text are too often derivative, self-congratulatory, and self-indulgent.

But the real trouble with *Beaux Draps* is that Poupart has little of interest to say. He bombards us with too many fleetingly introduced characters, with too many trivial observations about modern life, with too many banal situations, with too many tedious anecdotes, and with too

many digressions into Faille's past. Like Faille, who is said to indulge in philosophizing "à propos de tout et de rien," Poupart pontificates on every possible subject, treating us to such insights as: "Tout compte fait, les jeunes apprennent autant sur le monde si on leur raconte des sornettes que si on les assomme avec des cours sérieux." When Faille does not wallow in mean-spirited gossip about friends, enemies, and especially other writers, he watches with often voyeuristic intensity the behaviour of total strangers. The reader is indeed hard pressed to care about or even just remember so many superficially paraded characters. Faille himself functions too often primarily as a spectator of trivial events and as a mouthpiece for tedious observations about the world. Poupart is particularly concerned with Faille's writing and marketing of work, but he tells us little of value about the creative process. Faille's self-indulgent obsession with the process of writing tends to confirm his mediocrity, and is topped only by an even more self-indulgent preoccupation with his sexual potency. The story of yet another middle-aged male who worries about his sexual powers and ends up in bed with two lesbians is somewhat short on originality, and is at times in dubious taste. As a female reader, I found the novel too often vulgar and sexist. That Poupart anticipates this criticism by repeatedly pointing out the vulgarity and banality of Faille's thought and behaviour does not change the fact that the novel dwells on these. Women characters are generally deprecated, feeding either male fantasies or male fears. I found it somewhat annoying to find that no matter how impotent, unattractive, and cruel Faille is, he nevertheless manages, almost without trying, to seduce and satisfy women, even to the point where his lesbian partner may have fallen in love with him.

On the whole, I found it difficult to care much about Faille's suicidal tendencies, his erections, his attitude to writing, or his opinions about the human condition. On balance, then, *Beaux Drap*'s technical skill never quite compensates for Poupart's irritating self-indulgence nor for the shallowness of his "comédie humaine."

EVELYN COBLEY

# WRIT IN SNOW

J. A. WAINWRIGHT, *Flight of the Falcon: Scott's Journey to the South Pole, 1910-1912*. Mosaic Press, n.p.

POETS SOMETIMES LONG for a medium freed of language's mandate to record. Like Marley's ghost, each word and line drags its clanking shadowy chains of referents, forged together by lifetimes of habit and dull expectation. But how much can we expect of a set of scratchings born in a counting-house? Few poets dare, like John Ashbery, to release language from its traditional arrangements, to let words recombine in "new styles of architecture" which open alternate structures of meaning to us. At poetry's other pole is narrative. Here events beyond the page are our focus: we require no expressionist or didactic intrusions from the author — only clarity. In this illusionist mode, "the essence of style is that it vanish like glass before the eye of the beholder."

J. A. Wainwright's *Flight of the Falcon* achieves at least this goal of faithful transcription. The story of Robert Falcon Scott's fatal journey to the South Pole is told through extracts or paraphrases from his journal; through journal entries manufactured by Wainwright in Scott's voice, which "move beyond official vision"; through poems; through quotations from a historian's study of the expedition; and through photographs and maps (whose source is not acknowledged). The author

refers to these various texts as "ways of speaking Scott as reality and metaphor." As a metaphor for absurdity, this tragicomedy of vainglorious folly must have few rivals in recent history. In a true-life parody of the heroic quest, Scott and four ill-fed, ill-housed, and ill-clothed companions, pulling sledges over broken terrain, died in a race to the Pole ("an awful place") which had been won by Amundsen's streamlined team a month before.

The book is most successful in the tension generated between the real and imagined journal entries. The latter often provide a free-ranging psychological undercurrent to Scott's tersely descriptive entries: "Watching them (two birds), though they ate food, I knew we suffered in comparison"; "I called Taff stupid because he stumbled and held us back. They took this word from my journal so the schoolboys would not know I was human. Oh Taff, it was my stupidity and my pride that claimed us all." And they can be an informative gloss on the explorer's account, without entering the personal or spiritual dimension: "Vitamins were discovered the year we died." When the crevasse between intention and execution yawns widest they plunge into the banal: "Strange, I have never been to Altrincham, but I have been here"; "It is strange to think there are no glaciers in Hell"; "It is strange when I picture the globe to think where we were on it. To think of all that space beneath us."

Wainwright's prefatory notes say the book's eighteen "poems appear like depots to mark the way of language and experience and especially the perception of them. These poems also form their own narrative within the text." They begin with "Terra Nova," an elegy for the end of imperial expansion:

> When the ship left New Zealand
> it sailed off
> the end of the earth
> into white space
> none could comprehend
>
> ....
>
> Amundsen was on a raid
> not an expedition
> when he had been and gone
> the Pole-star
> collapsed upon itself

"Peripheries," a meditation on the author's relation to his subject ("I circle round your camp / like a pariah dog / the team has rejected / refusing to write"), is formally pedestrian and occasionally unclear:

> as for those
> I still pursue
> my face a blur
> my voice perhaps
> the one thing that remains
> I want only to ask of their children
> to tell of my own
>
> of the new territory
> I know we cannot claim
> carved from the old
> even as I let it go

"Bronze (Kathleen's Poem)" is in the voice of Scott's wife, a sculptor:

> in Waterloo Place
> I dressed you in your kit
> and made you last forever
>
> if I had held your burnished body
> if my hands had known you then
> this way
> they might have brought you home

This sensitive, powerful, and engaging personal voice resonates strongly against the callous and destructive ethos elegantly crystallized in the next poem, "The Right Stuff":

> what a disappointment
> had you made it — Lord Scott
> a loser who weathered a few blizzards
>
> but legends of an ice-palace
> appealed to blue blood
> rivers of it froze in your veins

Wainwright's conceptual originality and his artistic editing surmount the po-

etry's formal weaknesses to evoke a bizarre and disturbing spiritual extremity.

JOHN DONLAN

# CRITICAL BUZZ

D. J. ENRIGHT, *The Alluring Problem: An Essay on Irony*. Oxford Univ. Press, $29.95.

THOMAS PAVEL, *Fictional Worlds*. Harvard Univ. Press, $20.00.

RICHARD HARLAND, *Superstructuralism*. Methuen, n.p.

IT WAS NORTHROP FRYE who defined "irony" in his *Anatomy of Criticism* as that which "takes life exactly as it finds it." Enright goes back to Johnson and "a mode of speech of which the meaning is contrary to the words." But by the end of his "essay," one feels he has found irony a little too ubiquitous, ranging far beyond a "mode of speech" on one of those Cook's Tours of world literature much favoured by devotees of "Frank Muir going into . . ." Consequently, Enright is relentlessly amateur, drawing heavily on what he calls his "anecdotage" and using footnotes simply for more of the same. As an expatriate he draws on his experience in Singapore and Malaysia, and might have formulated interesting hypotheses about irony in Commonwealth Literature had he not decided after thirty pages of lively theoretical browsing to sit back in his easy chair and give us his "hours in a library."

Enright ranges from *Coronation Street* to Musil, from the Hardy perennial (yes, oh dear yes) to *Catch 22*. Occasionally, when discussing Brecht or Proust, he raises a few hares. In politics he threatens to be as acerbic and illuminating as in his brief treatment of romantic irony ("Affirm and deny in one sentence, and you too can be a romantic ironist"); he deftly traces the poles of "committedly uncommitted" irony in the best and worst senses — it can "operate as a permanent medical certificate excusing us from active service." But having begun with the notion that irony is a flash that you either get or do not, it is maybe not surprising that Enright the poet should end out of love with his subject, for he has just given a list of other people's flashes. What he probably does not realize is that he has also given a portrait of himself — you can tell a lot about a person by the ironies he does or does not get, and by those conditions (particularly in sexual matters) he sees as constituting the world "as it is found."

Laurie Anderson might call Thomas Pavel's *Fictional Worlds* "big philosophy." Although now teaching at the University of California, Pavel is indebted for this book to the Canadian academic community and specifically to a lecture by Kripke at Western Ontario in 1972. Pavel argues that in our poststructuralist age we must again address "the problem of the representation of reality in fiction." But his efforts seem peculiarly wooden. Borges' "Library of Babel" is significant because "we know what kind of object the libraries-in-the-actual-world are"; one philosopher is duly reported because he feels that works of fiction are "props in a *game of make-believe*"; the "strict delimitation of boundaries between fictional and nonfictional territories is not a universal phenomenon"; "reality in fiction is just a textual convention"; and "traditional thinking about literature perenially [*sic*] has hesitated between conventionalist and nonconventionalist stands." We soon sense that Pavel is unhappy with oscillation and mediation; indeed, he wants contemporary writers to stop "maximising incompleteness" and "to acknowledge gracefully the difficulty of making firm sense out of the world and still risk the invention of a completeness-determinacy myth." Would he then admire the "graceful" Jack Hodgins or Robertson Davies, and deplore the rowdy shillyshallying of Kroetsch and Bowering?

Eventually Pavel locates fiction in "a peripheral region used for ludic and instructional purposes," and hesitantly advances the analogy of the chess game. But like Enright, Pavel is encased by his old-fashioned structure which privileges self and admits "splinters" (the last word of his text) only when they are "the same few shiny splinters." In the end Pavel's anatomy of fiction, in its elegant generalities, suffocates the imagination.

It is like crossing the Channel, or having Frye draw one of his fecund circles on a blackboard rather than see him stomp around in the snow (as I recall him doing in an ancient CBC "who are we" special), to move from Enright and Pavel to Harland. Rather than buzzing like a fly under the jar, Harland lets us see the jar which makes the fly buzz. His title is a felicitous neologism which deserves currency, for it encapsulates the Continental revolution of thought which prioritises society over self and culture over nature. This excellent little book rehearses the work of Marx, Durkheim, Saussure, and Lévi-Strauss, with Lacan, Althusser, and the early Foucault as transition figures between structuralism and poststructuralism. Harland uses refreshingly simple language, free of jargon, to describe how the idea of superstructures encourages but finally frustrates the desire for "a single cultural forcefield." Early on he signals this *aporia*, with his description of a "superstructure so insidiously vast that it completely surrounds and encompasses its apparent base. . . . A dizzying state of affairs, where one cannot trust one's ideas and yet cannot get down from them either!" A chocolate bar further clarifies; there is a degree of order or lumpishness in nature, but it takes a language to break the bar into pieces — and not necessarily along the creases. Although he excludes literary criticism from his survey, Harland is insightful in picking Proust and the Symbolist poets as having the same concerns as the poststructuralists with signs: "for the Symbolist poets, the natural world was *never less* than signifiers; but by the same token, their own writing was *never more* than signifiers." In another homely metaphor, Harland describes Derrida's view of words not jostling up against each other but rather knocking each other over like a line of dominoes. One of Harland's most helpful achievements is to trace clearly and simply Derrida's debt to Hegel. Because "idealism is a dirty word" to superstructuralists, they "shed the religious baggage" and end up as metaphysical materialists. Finally, in one of the many insights of a book which habitually turns on clear binary oppositions and similarities, Harland suggests that Derrida's "signifier" is very like Foucault's "body."

Consistent with his early caveats, Harland ends by observing that like other philosophical systems "superstructuralism" is a *story*, which pushes towards an absolute truth but of necessity "peters out." He clearly prefers Derrida's meditative movement to the apocalyptic visions of Baudrillard. His own story is an exhilarating journey, which takes us away from Enright propping up a corner of an English pub, and whisks us around the world.

DAVID DOWLING

# ROSES ARE READ

ROBERT KROETSCH, *Excerpts from the Real World*. Oolichan, n.p.

ANY ATTEMPT TO describe the work of Robert Kroetsch must inevitably end — or even begin — in contradiction. Kroetsch's prose fictions (it is dangerous to call them novels or narratives — perhaps, as we shall see, even "prose" and "fiction" are risky terms) tend to be both generically and linguistically equivocal.

Thus, the seemingly simple act of summarizing Kroetsch's prose fiction to date unavoidably participates in the kind of playfulness the works themselves provoke: *Alibi* (1983) is a journal-novel that might be classified as documentary evidence against documentary evidence; *What the Crow Said* (1978) is a whimsical philosophical elucidation of be(e)ing and nothingness (and as such is anything but sweetness and light); Kroetsch's "archaeological treatise," *Badlands* (1975), becomes its own self-consuming artifact; *Gone Indian* (1973) is a sort of doctoral anti-thesis; *The Studhorse Man* (1970) is simultaneously an epic and the epic's epicedium; in *The Words of My Roaring* (1966), reading and speaking make and break the e-*lect-oral* promise, and the title of even Kroetsch's first and most conventional novel begins in an act of equivocation that simultaneously interpolates and alienates both reader and speaker: *But We are Exiles* (1965).

Given our experience with this beguiling body of prose fiction, it would surely be an understatement to say that we approach the title of Kroetsch's recent work, *Excerpts from the Real World: a prose poem in ten parts*, with a certain degree of scepticism. The real world is surely something that has never been very closely associated with Kroetsch's fiction. His writing, however, is *always* associating itself with the "real world" by invading and undermining the discourses that constitute that world, discourses we think of as "true" or "natural" or "real."

*Excerpts from the Real World* is certainly no exception to this (mis)rule. It is, for example, a "prose poem." Any dictionary of literary terms will tell us that prose poetry is a form of prose that makes extensive use of the figurative language and imagery characteristic of poetry. If we uphold such a definition with relation to *Excerpts from the Real World*, however, the term "prose poem" begins to sound redundant. This work violates the generic boundaries its subtitle implies, boundaries that seem to distinguish between poetry — writing that works by tropes and figures, and prose — writing that is, presumably, somehow transparently referential. In doing so, it also transgresses the boundary that distinguishes between the "literary" work and the "critical" discourse that comments on it.

*Excerpts from the Real World* is self-consciously cryptic, bizarre, and often opaque. Written in the form of a dated journal, it confronts us with such puzzling entries as this:

> 14/4/85
>
> Here in the Highlands the budded trees, obscenely mauve, ache to blossom. How do man and woman, in these blocky houses, speak against such arrays of stone? Thinking of you, I forgot to pack a sweater. Tell your new lover to wear glass pyjamas when he sets out from Winnipeg to transport bull semen around the world.

One might tend, on first reading, to respond to such a passage with, "If this is the 'real' world, then it is a strange one indeed!" But is it? There is something strangely *familiar* about the language of the preceding passage. There is nothing out of the ordinary about its syntax or vocabulary. It is the way familiar language has been arranged, the ways we are forced to read it that makes it strange.

Kroetsch's poem is surrealistic in its use of a sort of dream logic, its strategy of placing ordinary words, phrases, and images in incongruous juxtaposition so that the reader feels called upon to "interpret" them as metaphorical (that is, to read them as poetry) in order to make any sense of them at all. A section of one entry takes us through this process: "Blue apricots are rare. Perhaps the apricots are plums." We have no conventional referent for "blue apricots," but we can provisionally explain the unfamiliar conjunction of adjective and noun as a metaphor

for "plums." As readers we are being made aware of the process of interpretation that goes into *any* act of reading, indeed any act of perception *as* an act of reading. *Excerpts from the Real World* leads us down the garden path of conventional realism by using familiar situations, places, and dates, but that garden path is consistently exposed as a textual rug, and pulled out from under our naïve reading practices. For example:

> 17/7/85
> The hawk on the telephone pole, folding its wings like an angel at rest, is planning a gopher's visit to the blue sky. The grasshoppers hit our windshield like hail. You raise your head from my lap, asking what the sound is. This is called writing a landscape poem.

Perhaps the best counsel for the confused reader is inscribed in the poem itself: "Relax, and you'll kitsch yourself laughing." This is playful language that calls attention to its own pretentiousness, to the fact that by attempting to treat it strictly and simplistically as "referential" we are taking it too seriously.

Or not nearly seriously enough, for it is language that *creates* what we call the "real." Without attempting a comprehensive interpretation of the passage quoted earlier (the poem precludes such interpretations), one can not help but notice that it is "bull semen" that is being transported around the "real" world. Could it be that blatant fictions (bull) are being dis*semin*ated here? Is there a world market for prairie bullshit? And why is it important to wear glass pyjamas? So we can witness the "dissemination process?" *Excerpts from the Real World* may in many respects be opaque, but it reveals its own processes of signification in a way that "real" realist texts never do.

Kroetsch's work takes the conventionally "referential" prose forms of the autobiographical journal, travel diary, and love letter and turns them inside out. They refer, we must conclude, not outward to an external pre-textual reality, but to the "reality" constructed by texts themselves, the fictions they make real. Saskatoon, for example, one stop on the traveller's excursion, is a place "invented" by the writer Don Kerr, "by growing up inside a movie palace," another source of texts. In the same excerpt the "speaker" (the term must, as we shall see, be used with extreme scepticism) comments, "I've applied to the Canada Council for a pair of running shoes and a whistle," perhaps so that he can be a "refer-ee," both a mediator in the play of signs (he "blows the whistle" on them, catches them out, draws attention to them), and also a subject of discourse, the one who is referred to in the context of the poem, who is himself mediated *by* the poem's language.

While the conventional speaker in a journal seems to act as a "medium" between world and word, as a sort of messenger, in this case it becomes clear that the medium *is* the message, that we can make no easy distinction either between the spoken and what it speaks, or between the speaking speaker and the spoken speaker. "His" enunciation in the poem is equivalent to a birth, an "entry" — as both an ingress and an item in the journal — into the world of the poem: "I liked the telegram, the one you sent me announcing my birth." *In Excerpts from the Real World*, it becomes increasingly obvious that the speaking "I" is a creation of discourse, and is dependent on discourse. Each time the pronoun is enunciated its context changes. It is, therefore, never self-identical, and we can hardly expect a coherent speaking "voice" for the poem. In one excerpt, then, we witness the literal fragmentation of the speaker: "Even as I lay down, I heard myself walking away." Kroetsch's poem begins with the words "I want to explain why I didn't answer the door." "I" didn't

answer the door because any other use of the pronoun "I" necessarily makes it an other. Emile Benveniste elaborates on this contingent nature of the speaking subject: "I signifies 'the person who is uttering the present instance of the discourse containing I.' This instance is unique by definition, and has validity only in its uniqueness."

"I" is always defined in relation to an other, to a "you," which is, in one sense, a souvenir, the trace of the absent "I," seen from the outside, after the fact: "Like the ashtray I bought in Edinburgh (the castle, the castle), *you* remind me of where *I* once was" (my emphasis). *Excerpts from the Real World* deals with the traditional subject matter of the love letter, the relationship between an "I" and a "you," but the "you" of the poem is as indeterminate as its "I." How, for example, can either be established as a stable entity in such an ironic formulation as this: "'But most of all I luv you cuz yr you.' If you see what I mean"? "You" may be both lover and alienated self as in Rimbaud's "*je est un autre*" or the *autre* of the formulations of Lacanian psychoanalysis: "*L'autre*. The author. I'm not myself today. The other is a tramp. Confloozied." The other is a tramp, perhaps, because it is unstable, like a vagabond. It has no firmly established conventional signified; its meaning varies according to context, and is therefore "unfaithful" to any particular referent: it refers "promiscuously," like a "floozie," a "tramp."

In another excerpt, the "speaker" asks his lover, "When will you leave your retailer of bull semen, there on the outskirts of Brandon, and buy a ticket to the Equator." The alternative presented is, perhaps, "dissemination" as defined by contemporary literary critics like Jacques Derrida, a dispersal of meaning over the web of signifiers that constitutes a text, producing "a non-finite number of semantic effects," as opposed to a one-way trip from word to meaning that somehow "equates" one with the other. The very possibility of "getting the message across" in the latter fashion is being questioned at every turn in *Excerpts from the Real World*. One entry reads, "Everything recurs (more or less). Consider, for instance, spring. Or transmission problems" (35). The problem of "transmission," conveying meaning unchanged from one place to another is, it seems, at the very least problematic. Even recurrence happens only "more or less." Spring is never the same spring: even in the context of that sentence there are two non-identical *springs*.

Like "I" and "you," "here" and "there" signify only in context, so that we must, as one entry says, "Let place do the signing for us." Place, therefore, in *Excerpts from the Real World*, may be defined as discursive space. The travelogue, rather than being a narrative of travel, becomes a record of its own changing meaning, its "travelling *logos*," and the journal "entry" can therefore no longer function simply as a "passage" to or from its author's meaning or pre-textual events. The poem's first line, "I want to explain why I didn't answer the door," is supplemented by the information that "Doors, in a manner of speaking, are descriptive. Otherwise we wouldn't be here now." The journal entries ("doors," in a manner of speaking) are both entrances and exits. Appropriate to a travelogue, they are places where meaning is "just passing through."

The reader of *Excerpts from the Real World* comes along for the ride. She is drawn into a "relationship" with the text, since in any reading situation its "you" may allude to her: "The affair I never mention, the one that turns out to be with you, was occasioned by an ice storm that toppled power lines and brought angels crashing into the frozen fields." Any reading of such a passage necessarily

sounds reductive, but a possibility exists that the "affair" never mentioned is one between reader and text, an implicit relationship that takes place intertextually, rather than along the simplistic "power lines" of author and reader. In such a situation, "transcendental" meaning (the angels?) comes toppling down into the fields (of the play of signification?). One thinks of such complex intertextual relationships as those that occur in another passage: "Peter Eastingwood quotes John Cowper Powys to me. 'I like a chaotic strung-along *multi-verse*'." The "real world" is not a monolithic *uni*verse "out there." It exists within the polysemic world of the poem as "multi-verse."

"A chaotic, strung-along *multi-verse*" is a good way of describing the "real world" of *Excerpts from the Real World*, multiple both in meaning and form (the poem's numerous "excerpts"), and "verse" in its strategic *turn* of "realistic" discourse back on its own "poetic" or rhetorical status. *Excerpts from the Real World*, then, is a per/versely realist work. It exploits what Jerome Klinkowitz calls "the ultimate realism of words on the page and signs at play."

MANINA JONES

# FEMININE PLURAL

ANNE-MARIE ALONZO, *Écoute, Sultane*. l'Hexagone, $12.95.

CLAUDINE BERTRAND, *Fiction-nuit*. Éditions de Noroît, $10.95.

LOUISE COTNOIR, *L'Audace des mains*. Éditions du Noroît, $10.95.

MADELEINE GAGNON, *L'Infante immémoriale*. Écrits des Forges/La Table Rase, $8.00.

FERNANDE SAINT-MARTIN, *La fiction du réel: poémes 1953-1975*. l'Hexagone, n.p.

MANY OBSERVERS HAVE commented on the importance of the emergence of a feminist discourse in/on the Quebec literary institution in recent years. Summarizing the literary production of the 1970's in *Le devoir*, Jean Royer noted the innovative elements of women's writing as the most important force challenging and changing the course of literature in that decade: "women's writing . . . questions writing itself." Spanning three generations of Quebec women's writing, the poetry under review here testifies to the continuing variety and vitality of "l'écriture au féminin."

Fernande Saint-Martin is well known for her journalism for *La Presse* and *Châtelaine*, as former director of the Museum of Contemporary Art, as President of l'Académie canadienne-française, as art critic and semiologist. While engaged in these publicly acknowledged activities, she has also been a poet. Only a dozen of her poems have been titled and published; the rest of the poems in this volume in l'Hexagone's series of collected poems appear in print for the first time. Short lyrics conveying strong sensory impressions through a proliferation of vegetation images, these poems reveal the trace of surrealism. Like other poets in Quebec of the same generation, Saint-Martin develops her poems through an associative flux of image in the 1950's and 1960's, of sound in the 1960's and 1970's. The surrealist trace in content is unmistakable. The first poem in the collection opens with the celebrated image of the eye being cut from Cocteau's film *Le sang du poète*. Here the "stone" hesitating to cut is a "braid of light," "diamond of water," while the poem turns on the pun "sanglant/de la joie" meaning to "cry for joy" but echoing the "bleeding" of "sang." The sound play is more extended in a suite of poems, "Variables A à N," written over a period of twenty years. The words and sounds of a poem become the subject of a free improvisation, a sort of homolinguistic translation into one or more variations on the words. (I use translation in light of Nicole Brossard's

introduction of the term to describe her similar poetic variants in *L'Aviva.*) For instance, "Variable B-I" opens with "Ce plat ployè de rire / à sa louche plie l'arbre / appui en contrecou . . ." "Variable B-II" reworks the same phonemes into a different semantic content: "A se ployer cette vie / jucher à l'arbre la plaie / appui à contre-coup la porte. . . ." The effect of these poems demonstrates the "catastrophe theory" of poetry Saint-Martin elaborates in her introduction: "But poetry may also, like other forms of art, provoke in the other a 'silent catastrophe,' which leads to a bifurcation of energies and a veritable coupling with another human experience, hitherto unsuspected. This is the very definition of real communication between the self and the other" (my translation).

In this introduction, Saint-Martin puts on her other hats as professor and semiotician to explore the semiotics of poetry, locating a balance between the theories of Jakobson, for whom the poetic is the tautological, the self-referential, "a non-sign generating non-sense," and those of Bateson on the structure of ecosystems where diffuse knots of nonverbal events may be mapped into models of interaction. A semantic or syntactic approach to poetic language which presupposes a linear analysis of language propositions is totally inadequate to account for the material complexity of the poetic activity, which "attempts to construct new relations between sounds and agglomerations of sounds constituting the level of the signifier, in such a way as to call up more directly the underlying, multidimensional, conceptional and instinctual structures." Poetic theory written post-facto, it nonetheless offers insight into the verbal collisions occurring in Saint-Martin's poems. Though not specifically a feminist poet, in that neither her theory nor practice refers to an explicitly female world, Saint-Martin's poetry shares characteristics with other women-identified poets. The concreteness of the images of the material world are reminiscent of Cécile Cloutier, while her exploration of the arbitrariness of the phonetic and visual signifier has affinities with the disruptive work on language of a younger group of feminist writers.

Madeleine Gagnon has been one of the most prolific of this group, producing thirteen volumes of prose and poetry ranging from socialist feminist to radical feminist texts. In these latter she writes as the hysteric, in non-sense, taking the linguistic signs literally as in such texts as *Au coeur de la lettre.* Indeed, the opening short lyric in this fourteenth book echoes Saint-Martin's concern with the materiality of language: "Pensées / fugaces / une image / plusieurs / rien ne se passe tout arrive / *échos sonores aucun sens* / une musique des voix se perdent se gonflent / un chaos s'organize / des murmures / sortent / de l'oubli" (my emphasis). However, the unreadable, the chaotic non-sense into which the earlier deconstructionist project led has here become locus for promise — and a new direction. Refusing the violence of chaos, the persona chooses silence, a silence that is not "mutisme" because listening and vision are heightened, making it a "parole pleine," "exploréene," in Gauvreau's sense, of the carnal leaves.

"A new lyricism" is how Pierre Nepveu heralded Gagnon's preceding book, *Les fleurs de catalpa.* This one, too, is concerned with exile and illumination, with overcoming an awareness of death and chaos by constructing a continuous present through writing which is love: "l'ecriture possède de don unique: l'entrée dans la démesure du temps de l'amour." Love is being open to the other, "le lieu de l'entre." Love is what incites the persona to take the crazy risk of writing and pushes writing to the point of madness, to transport, which like metaphor is a trans-

port of meaning, of lucidity, of "Je à l'Autre," the movement in between which means that eternal death cannot be thought without eternal life. Invoking writing as the place between, the place of transformation, Gagnon plays with homonyms "inter-dit" "antre des signes," "les lettres circulent entre le cri des amants et la fin de ce cri." Language is paradoxical, absence and presence: "La fête de l'abondance des signes touche la fête de l'abandon du sens." "Beyond séparation there is engendering." In this continual process, life and death are interchangeable. Through paradox and process, the book resolves the loss and death with which it opens in "Requiem pour une abeille." Although written over a year from January 1984 to winter 1985, the four sections of the book form an elegy to Mireille Lanctôt, a young writer and former student of Gagnon's. They are roughly organized around the traditional elegiac pattern of mourning and consolation through the permanency of art. The details of Lanctôt's life and death outlined in "Requiem" are transformed in the next section, "La Fête," with the leitmotif of Orpheus and Eurydice. The title develops a theme — the feast of love — from Lanctôt's first published work, "la Cocotte d'argile," amplifies and affirms it through quotation which assures it permanency in a literary order, breaking also the silence of the survivor whose writing has been blocked by the death of a friend. The survivor takes counsel from her friend's letter to become "her own midwife." The introduction of images of birth adds yet another range of images through which Gagnon attempts to write the female body, images of the graph of the placenta, of the skin tattooed with hieroglyphs. Here "les mains font parler la peau." Beyond its particular reference to a dead woman poet, the text is one more example of Gagnon's on-going attempt to outline a country without a name, to communicate the "pensée de l'indicible" of women.

The four poetic sequences in this book develop a narrative line. So they succumb to the "seduction of fiction" ("la séduction du romanesque") which was the title of an issue of *Estuaire* (1985). Five of the seven contributors to that volume were women, exemplifying the impotrance of the long narrative poem in contemporary Quebec women's writing. Contributors to that volume included Denise Desautels, Carole Massé, Madeleine Ouellette-Michalska, Elise Turcotte, and Louise Cotnoir. To that list could be added Nicole Brossard, France Théoret, Louise Dupré, as well as the other writers under consideration here, Anne-Marie Alonzo and Claudine Bertrand. All these writers' texts are characterized by their self-reflexive meditation on the act of writing, their mixture of prose and lyric poetry or their prose poems, held together by a loose narrative thread. The boundaries between poetry and prose are blurred. Violation of generic norms goes along with the questioning of gender codes. More significantly, these women poets revolt against the lyric poem which, through its rhetorical effects, works to create a subject position for a masculine subject whose experience and feelings have shaped this poetic form, hegemonic for western society since the Renaissance, according to Anthony Easthope, a poetic form that positions woman as silent object of men's address. In order to come to voice, women poets have resisted the lyric, stringing out a long line into the void, as Madeleine Gagnon has with such success in *L'Infante immémoriale.*

Of the three volumes, Anne-Marie Alonzo's *Écoute, Sultane* is most seduced by narrative. A sequel to the story in her prize-winning *Bleurs de mine*, the two sections of the new book also detail the flight from Egypt placing in more chronological order the childhood in Alexandria,

the passage to the new country Quebec, the meeting with a lover, the impossibility of return to the native land, the role of women in Arab countries, etc. The first of these sections, "Du désert assombri(e)," single spaced in the text, develops the themes of childhood: the relationships with mother, father, and younger brother; with the maid and the maid's daughter; the schooldays at a German convent; the departure for Canada at age twelve; and the crossing of the Atlantic. This autobiographical material is presented in a tortured line, a prose-like sentence "poeticized" by constant inversion and hyphenization: "Vêtue-maquillée de cinq ans en valait trente rouge des joues-aux-lèvres khol au fond de l'oeil iris-en-barque-de-nil isis effrayée perdue." Through these broken cadences the reader teases out another theme: the troubled relationship with language. This little girl who never says a word, good little girl fulfilling her childhood vocation, "enfant se ronge au palais," moves from silence as resistance to create a new identity for herself in a secret language, the language learned at school, German: "Suis allemande arabe-suivra *das tor* close l'école comme îlot oasis en désert." Language and subjectivity, the difficulty in coming to voice — topos in Quebec feminist discourse — is presented here as the immigrant child's sense of linguistic alienation, this childhood "oasis" remaining as a remembered "état de grâce" when all around language seems clichéd, dead: "N'ai plaisir qu'à la lettre épuisée n'ai pas de nouvelle tout semble dit-su-rabâché tu aurais écrit expliqué." This theme is developed in the second section at greater length as the persona unfolds her memories in letters written to her lover, the female sultan, in an echo of Scherhezade on narrating as living, narrating as desire. More elliptical, the memories of often-told stories, of her childhood, are presented here in more evocative, double-spaced lines. Here the self-reflexive meditation on writing and silence turns on the varieties of silence, between that of snow-shrouded nights, of the absent beloved separated by distance, and of desire satiated when words are no longer needed to cover the gap, as in the final lines when the sultan's silence that has seemed a death sentence is transformed as "hands make the skin speak" (Gagnon): "De silence en baiser de silence nos corps frémissent tremblent." The love letter as poetic sequence has been a frequent device in Quebec women's poetry since Brossard's *Amantes* showed the way to write the body, to speak de/sire. Alonzo has added to this the poetic diary to further explode genres in a hybrid diary-narrative-letter-dialogue. The emotional force of this second section infuses the lines with power, the tortured syntax miming the processes of tortured desire. Here she sustains the success of *Bleus de mime*.

In *L'Audace des mains*, Louise Cotnoir also writes the female body, a body tortured by the structural violences of an oppressive society. "Femme figure-toi le noir" — the blackness of madness when life is played out on the glossy surface of magazines or of death from the terrible seductions of explosions, of nuclear warheads, woman paralyzed: "Prise au dépourvu par les deuils quotidiens." Like Gagnon, Cotnoir moves into this blackness and mud, desire deep in her mouth, to prepare a future that is otherwise, where this hallucination that is woman will no longer be natural. Like Alonzo, she must confront silence: "Je m'étouffe au milieu de la question posée." "La parole c'est la guerre." She forges a new language in tongues of fire, a language to be grasped with the hands of intelligence: "je sens, je suis." Here, too, "audacious hands make the body speak." This language of sensation "overthrows the paradigm," in a "double vision." Against "boucherie lugubre" women learn of the

falsity of this grotesque universe and, freeing their anger, "apprendre à défaire les fictions." This involves exploring the other side of codes: "bouche et sexe ouverts," cries, two women embracing using their skins in a gesture other than that of resignation when "n'y a-t-il pas de récit possible." Like Alonzo, Cotnoir finds the beginnings of speech in the semiotic, as Kristeva has termed it, the instincts and drives which precede the Oedipal phase and the entry into the symbolic. "La pensée séduit le corps comme elle cherche sa forme neuve, vivante." "Ça soutient le rituel et ça écrit: corps de femme." Painted in water colours, no longer in black ink, the woman sings an old chimera in a different tune, death seeming a minor probability now that she "loves to take risks" and is ready to engage with other women to block this violence. Through five sections, the quest has succeeded, moving through descent into silence and darkness like the "Welwichia Mirabilis" rooting into the desert to a new opening towards the possible. The vigour of Cotnoir's imagery, the pulsating rhythm of the fragmented sentences in the long prose lines, make this collection the most pleasing of the five for the reader. The pleasure is increased by the six ink drawings of women by Célyne Fortin. Incidentally, "Woman, picture the dark," the first sequence, has been translated into English in *(f)lip*.

Least successful is *Fiction-nuit* by Claudine Bertrand, which also develops the quest into the darkness of the female condition as its narrative thread. Like the others of her generation, Bertrand has published a number of other texts and is editor of a periodical, *Arcade*, which specializes in feminist writing, in contrast to the international orientation of Alonzo's *Trois* and the postmodernist one of *La nouvelle barre du jour* where Cotnoir was an editor for a number of years. Like them, Bertrand extends the themes and forms developed by the first generation of Quebec active feminists, Brossard, Gagnon, and Bersianik, choosing from Bersianik's *Maternative* the lines on "L'errante île délirante" as epigraph for the section "Textes des îles." A quotation from Gagnon's *Lueurs* about relearning the colours of the night, the writing of the night, is epigraph to the final section, "Les chercheuses d'images," which quotes from Nicole Brossard to outline the direction this new women's writing emerging from the dark night will take: "elles écrivent le je féminin pluriel / jusque dans le 'masculine grammatical *e*'." Writing women to overthrow symbolic Woman.

Bertrand's poetic sequences manipulate the familiar words of "l'écriture au féminin" without investing them with the power of the images of Cotnoir, the depth of feeling of Gagnon, or the freshness of autobiographical resonance of Alonzo. Her concluding image, like Cotnoir's, is the emergence of pink from black: "elles émergent dans la nuit rose-déclic / au commencement du *devenire* réelle destinée / elles sont agissantes et imprévisibles / urgentes dans la mâle machine-terreur." The terror is not realized, however, in "Les chercheuses d'images" though all the familiar elements of this new writing are deployed: puns ("le regard . . . tournée vers l'antérieur"), body language ("elles . . . sémaphores, éclaireuses / femmes de toute lumière"), hallucinatory vertigo ("le poème-vertige"), and the silent "e" of the feminine rhyme with its hidden force ("dans l'E qui éclêt / voyelle magique"). Granted, these sections are classified as "songs" and repeat these slogans like refrains for their incantory effect. However, in the most extended section, "La chambre en soi" (an echo of Virginia Woolf's writer's room), thirteen prose poems based on an inverted arcana, the same clichés reappear. The Tarot offers a revelation "en forme de *F majuscule en E majeur*" and the per-

sona dreams of delerious unravelling, of "une fiction en luna-texte inventée par les femmes au-dedans des femmes." To arrive at this, she passes through the 12th Arcana, "birth without origin," the night of transformations where the seeker of images is the absolute ruler, "je l'entends me dire sans voir *je te conduis aux sources fécondes de la destruction.*" From the ruins, from the delerium of love, there is a return to the state of foetus in the "limbo of patriarchy" and the utterance of watery words, the body as words: "elle dévoile ses propres mots."

While the double process of formation and deconstruction of subjectivity leading to sororality is effected through loving friendship in Gagnon's text, passionate love of women in Alonzo's, and women's loving struggle against patriarchal violence in Cotnoir's, it occurs through the agency of the occult in Bertrand's text. This recourse to magic, with its implication of automatic solutions to complex, millennial oppression, is ultimately what makes Bertrand's collection unsatisfying. To her credit, though, is her exploration of "lalangue," the semiotic "mother" tongue of "l'écriture au féminin," here presented in the opening island sequence by the Hawaiian language with its liquids and vowels, an "impapalable *languamour.*" Like Alonzo, Bertrand advances a hypothesis of women's double-voiced discourse grounded in bilingualism: "*mokuaweoweo!* . . . l'air est italique le souffle océanique / et près d'elle cette plante hermaphrodite / qui parle deux langues je l'entends d'ici / prononcer mon au féminin sur tous les tons / l'air est *it* and *she is me* je la sais identique." Also, like Alonzo, she situates this liquid, amniotic language of the body in the desert, in the volcanic lava of a sub-tropical isle, topos for the Utopian Amazonia in Brossard's writing. From the island come new perceptions and syllables to articulate the feminine, speaking otherwise.

Together, these five volumes outline the phases of the emergence of "l'écriture au féminin" in Quebec and the major figures of this alter/native discourse. They also reveal the dangers besetting a revolutionary challenge to hegemonic practices when it risks becoming enthroned as a new dominant form.

BARBARA GODARD

# OMNIBUS-TWO

CHARLOTTE VALE ALLEN, *Illusions.* McClelland and Stewart, $22.95.

ROBERT C. ALLEN, ed., *Channels of Discourse: Television and Contemporary Criticism.* Univ. of North Carolina Press, $25.00.

IEN ANG, *Watching Dallas,* trans. Della Couling. Methuen, $30.95/$10.95.

FRANCOIS BENOIT & PHILIPPE CHAVEAU, *Acceptation Globale.* Boréal, $7.95.

JULIA BETTINOTTI *et al., La corrida de l'amour: le roman Harlequin.* Univ. du Québec à Montréal, $10.00.

H. S. BHABRA, *Gestures.* Irwin, $19.95.

ROBIN BLASER & ROBERT DUNHAM, eds., *Art and Reality: A Casebook of Concern.* Talonbooks, $12.95.

IAIN CHAMBERS, *Popular Culture: The Metropolitan Experience.* Methuen, $35.95/$15.50.

MORRIS GIBSON, *A Doctor's Calling.* Douglas & McIntyre, $19.95.

E. X. GIROUX, *A Death for a Darling.* St. Martin's Press, $19.95.

WILLIAM LEISS, STEPHEN KLINE, & SUT JHALLY, *Social Communication in Advertising.* Methuen, $16.95.

DAVID MCFADDEN, *Canadian Sunset.* Black Moss, $14.95.

JEAN RADFORD, *The Progress of Romance: The Politics of Popular Fiction.* Routledge & Kegan Paul, $29.95/$14.95.

CHRISTOPHER REDMOND, *In Bed With Sherlock Holmes: Sexual Elements in Arthur Conan Doyle's Stories of the Great Detective.* Simon & Pierre, $29.95.

JACQUES SAMSON, ANDRÉ CARPENTIER, *et al., Actes: Premier Colloque de Bande Dessinée de Montréal.* Analgon, $18.00.

SHIRLEY SHEA, *Victims: A Pound of Flesh.* Simon & Pierre, $12.95.

CECELIA TICHI, *Shifting Gears: Technology, Literature, Culture in Modernist America.* Univ. of North Carolina Press, U.S.$35.00/ $14.95.

THIS IS MY SECOND try at an omnibus review of popular culture, and it is tempting to wander through these texts and repeat the concerns I raised in the first such review (*Canadian Literature* 108). For example, which works of fiction constitute "popular culture?" *Illusions* is certainly close enough to the typical Judith Krantz best seller to qualify, but *Gestures*, with its cover blurb from Robertson Davies, is a very different novel (although the similarity of the titles suggests some comparison could be made of marketing theories). If *Gestures* sold and *Illusions* did not, would that make the former popular culture and the latter not? Back when Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose* was outselling most of the trash, many raised this question. As you might note by even this glimpse, the process is a gyre more than equal to William Butler Yeats's wildest Celtic imagination: a bit up, a bit down, but mostly round and round. So instead, I'm going to use my opening question as a springboard to speculate a bit, less on what Canadians have in popular culture than on what we need.

The first answer could be nothing, at least in terms of primary material. Whether it is Vanna White, Twisted Sister, or Sidney Sheldon, there is enough junk around. Such a view of popularity is reflected in a recent comic strip, in which a perplexed author is told by his agent that none of his book ideas will sell. In desperation he offers to do anything that the agent wants. The last frame shows him at an autographing session where he is advertised as the writer of *Thinner Thighs for Your Cat.* If that is what popularity means, who needs it?

The other side of this coin is, of course, the national need. We love to take pride in Canadian achievements in all fields and popular culture is the most prominent place to make a splash. But since every Canadian who *really* makes it in popular culture becomes generally accepted as an American, who cares? Will anyone find a quintessential Canadian enrichment in the success of Michael J. Fox? Or even in an exception such as Donald Sutherland's "American" success and his various Canadian commitments, such as his work to get the film on Norman Bethune to the screen? We find ourselves caught between the theme of the film and its substance as a commodity in the business of film-making and distribution.

The role of the commodity is perhaps the key here. Free trade has made the culture business a very hot topic, as in an article by Joyce Nelson called "Losing It in the Lobby" (*This Magazine*, October/ November 1986). In an incisive, compelling argument, she shows how the difference between the Canadian view of film as culture and the American view of film as money has been a major element in the start of free trade and a significant metaphor for the whole process.

A consideration of some of the most "Canadian" parts of popular culture can suggest another difference. Pierre Berton is a popularizer, a non-fiction James Michener, but he is also one of the boys. I've never met him but I've seen him, all decked out in a sou'wester at a festival in downtown St. John's. It would be difficult to call Margaret Atwood one of the girls, and I've never met or even seen her, but her editing of the recent *CanLit Foodbook* (1987) shows that she has her own folksy touch.

Elsewhere I have made a distinction between popular and mass culture (*Canadian Literature* 104). I distinguished between mass culture, that purveyed in the mass media, and popular culture, a personal, small group reflection of mass

culture. This definition has limited appeal since most people use "popular culture" to mean both. It might have value here, however, in that Canadian mass culture is a very limited mass. A while ago I saw Knowlton Nash in an airport. I didn't talk to him but I knew I could if I wanted to. I doubt an American would feel the same about Dan Rather.

I could say that this is Canadian mass culture's Catch 22, except that that is such an American phrase. To return to my definition, Canadian mass culture always has an element of the "small-groupness" of popular culture. What we think of as truly mass culture only exists as Canadian product to the extent that it enters the American pattern of commodity culture. Its role there is not Canadian, except to change the balance of payments. That same thing in Canada operates almost as folk culture, a feeling of something which establishes a small society as it is passed from hand to hand, a part of personal contact. A part, if I may be so academic, of communitas.

This might suit the tenor of Mary Jane Miller's *Turn Up the Contrast: CBC Television Drama Since 1952* (1987). Some might slyly call this "unpopular culture," given the CBC's ratings for anything except news or hockey but it has to be the best example of that communitas: who is not friends with Barbara Frum? To date, studies of things Canadian have been primarily devoted to high or folk culture so this type of work must be applauded.

With a bit of luck it might prove an inspiration. To throw my suggestion into the pile, I have been waiting a long time for a study of *Chatelaine* magazine. *Chatelaine* is a quite lifeless accumulation of glitz at the moment, but under Doris Anderson it was an inspiring and surprisingly comfortable combination of feminism, homemaking, and fashion. Much more than *Maclean's*, or any of the few other Canadian magazines with some claim to a mass circulation, it also fit that CBC niche of drawing "us" all together.

Yet it still was not very mass. A drop in the magazine bucket in comparison to even the Canadian sales of its counterpart, *Ms.*, *Cosmopolitan*, *McCall's*, *Ladies Home Journal*. So should Canadians give up on popular culture? Not really. I like the fact that Lynn Johnston is a Canadian and even if I didn't love the *For Better or For Worse* comic books, I might still buy them, to help a neighbour along. But I have to remember that any Canadianness to her strip is incidental to her role in the true popular culture — which is American.

Of course, all of these comments must be limited in the context of Quebec. Many parts of popular culture there are Québécois in a sense that almost nothing in the same realm of English Canada is Canadian. The "bande dessinée" is perhaps the best example, but the night-time soaps on TV are another one. Still, the absence of French lyrics on rock format radio and the concern in *La Corrida de l'amour* for "le roman Harlequin," that so non-Canadian Canadian product, show that many elements are quite similar. *La corrida de l'amour* is limited, and there have been a number of far better studies of the genre, in various contexts, including the Radford volume under review. But it perhaps shows the best future for popular culture in Canada, as a source of academic analysis. *Social Communication in Advertising* is a good example. Consciously but not self-consciously Canadian, it looks at the world in which we live in a way that is perhaps most meaningful to a Canadian but still quite useful for an international readership. Ien Ang's *Watching Dallas* does the same from a Netherlands' perspective. They are the equivalent of any of hundreds of American books that speak to us in Canada.

Joyce Nelson's *The Perfect Machine: TV in the Nuclear Age* (1987) is an even better example. The author's combative approach and clearly centred left-wing, feminist, Canadian position create one of the best analyses of popular culture I have seen. One of those books to make you mad, either at the author or what she is confronting. It reminds me of a variety of books from "minority cultures," which have been able through sheer energy to compel the attention of the majority. If, as seems likely, free trade gives us even less control over our culture (mass, popular, and otherwise), this type of corrective vision will be even more important.

Another useful Canadian possibility might be that suggested by David McFadden in *Canadian Sunset*. This novel is élite culture which turns to popular culture for content. In the past, our "serious" writers often seemed quite uncomfortable with such material, as witness various novels by Hugh MacLennan. McFadden shows that a Canadian novel can do quite nicely with epigraphs from *Pogo*. At a more intense level, Brian Fawcett's *Cambodia: A book for people who find television too slow* (1987) suggests that pop-cult is a perfect battlefield for Canadian fiction.

Here we are again, the Canadian on the edge of things, life as tangent. But the positive view is not that we are "Americans on valium," as was recently stated, but instead the inside-outsiders. A Canadian must plunge right into the American culture ecnoomy to create a commodity like "Family Ties," something which approaches the omnipresent status of popular culture, but the novelist, the academic, or any other analyst might find it unnecessary to be in the belly of the Yankee beast. Better a pleasant little family of Canadians studying the entrails.

TERRY GOLDIE

# KLEIN'S ESSAYS

A. M. KLEIN, *Literary Essays and Reviews*, eds. Usher Caplan and M. W. Steinberg. Univ. of Toronto Press, $40.00/$19.95.

> A good poet, we think, is one who makes conviction issue from his work without sending irresponsible summonses to God and History and Luck to testify on his behalf.
>
> — A. M. KLEIN

THIS BOOK IMMEDIATELY catapults us into a lost world — several lost worlds, in fact. Caplan and Steinberg have chosen to begin the book with Klein's essays on Jewish literature, culture, and folk culture, a world that is foreign to many of us. The second half of the book is less esoteric but possibly no more familiar to many readers. The pieces on literature and the arts and on American, European, British, and Canadian literature recapture for us the years surrounding World War II, the maturing years of Canadian modernism. The book concludes with Klein's three ground-breaking articles on Joyce's *Ulysses*.

The second half of the book is filled with *bon mots*, as the poet's gift for language is tellingly and determinedly directed towards the cultural context that dominated his own reality. Here we see Klein wrestling with the poles of aestheticism and morality as he endeavours to participate in and respond to one of the major movements in the poetry of the century. His response to non-Canadian culture is characterized by a critical negativity. "It is impossible to speak of the general current of free verse," he writes waspishly. "Mud has no current." "Free verse," he insists, "is merely prose in the hands of an insane compositor."

The highly politicized nature of Canadian modernism emerges in these essays. Listen to Klein on the occasion of Pound's winning of the Bollinger prize:

> Much too frequently these cantos give the impression of an old man mumbling into his

> unkempt beard the gossip of two decades ago, the tag-ends of an outmoded pedantry, the dirty snivelling jokes of senile impotence. Frequently, too, that beard becomes frothy with malice, the spittle of hatred and frustration running down its matted clots.

The anger, however, is never idle or self-indulgent; its service to an acute sense of the moral responsibility of the artist is clear:

> It is as if [the judges] said: "Lesser spirits may be prejudiced by the man's treasonable activities, but we, aesthetes, pure and impartial, are above such merely political considerations; smaller souls might hold it against him that at a critical moment in the world's history, he was on the side of the hangmen and the kindlers in the crematoria, but we — we measure only the length of his lines, not his rope. Let the crass and the uninitiate judge the irrelevant; the fact that the poet is now in an insane asylum serves only to give authenticity to his genius; and that he did not see eye to eye with the thousands who perished in the last war only emphasizes the fact that we are face to face with an independent spirit."

On the occasion of T. S. Eliot's winning of the Nobel Prize, Klein is similarly disturbed. Describing *The Waste Land* as "403 lines, of which at least 25% are not the author's own, but excerpts from popular songs, and quotations from 35 different writers, in six languages, including the Sanskrit," Klein calls Eliot "a truly modern poet, an entrepreneur-poet, a poet-executive, one who knows how, as they say, to delegate duties." With devastating precision, he completes his exposure of what he perceives as Eliot's mediocrity by quoting a series of antisemitic lines and concludes by stating, "It can only be assumed that in the Swedish Academy Eliot has at last found his ideal readers: 'I myself should like,' said Eliot in *The Uses of Poetry*, 'an audience which could not read nor write'."

In "A Definition of Poetry," Klein expands his attack to include the very idea of humanism. He writes, "Quoth Matthew Arnold: 'Poetry is the most beautiful, impressive, and widely effective mode of saying things.' But what is beautiful? How is effectiveness judged? By circulation, perhaps?" It is a key question for a colonial poet to ask of the master spokesperson of established British culture, but for Klein, his sensibilities already aroused by the history of the Jewish people, the question has an even more poignant significance, for Arnold's definition of poetry again raises the spectre of massacre: "If I recall correctly, it was almost in the same words that the son of Mussolini defined his bombing of the Ethiopians: the most beautiful — their flesh, he rhapsodized, burst like flowers — impressive — and how! — and widely effective mode of saying things!" Yet, for all his search for the moral purpose in art, Klein is not a socially revolutionary poet like, for example, F. R. Scott. Protesting that poetry cannot be defined, he nevertheless (sounding much like Scott!) repeats at various points throughout the essays that poetry is "thought in blossom," and he continually stresses the importance of the formalistic qualities in achieved art.

If these articles seem to provide only a negative sense of what Klein endorses, his responses to his Canadian contemporaries make clear what he affirms. As he reviews Kennedy, Smith, Pratt, and Layton, there is no fear of praise, no desire to compare "our" poets with the better-known poets of other lands. Smith does not become a Yeats, a Kennedy, an Eliot. None is even situated with any authority within his own national boundaries. Rather, Smith is celebrated for his craftsmanship: "The record of an austere spirit, at once sensitive and intellectual, [*News of the Phoenix*] marks the closest step a Canadian has taken towards a 'pure poetry,' a poetry which is pure yet does not live in a vacuum." Layton's *Here and Now* "reveals an unmistakable talent, a power of expression which is

unique and personal, and a social awareness which endows poetic utterance with base and substance." The section on Canadian writers is lamentably thin, but it is a section that still tells us a great deal about how Klein viewed the poetic process.

Caplan and Steinberg account for the paucity of writing on Canadian literature by pointing out that Klein "no doubt saw himself as an English writer of Jewish background addressing a world-wide audience." There is little doubt that the tradition that Klein wishes to celebrate is Jewish, not Canadian. Klein reserves for the first section of the book, "Jewish Literature and Culture," the task of unfolding an unknown tradition to an audience that should be interested. Writing for *The Canadian Jewish Chronicle*, he is careful to educate his readers at every point. The writers he examines belong to no specific nation. His criteria are, as they are not in his discussion of Canadian, American, and English literature, often extraliterary: writers are praised for their sincerity, the purity of their motives, and, especially, their portrayal of a world of innocence. "Those who still have in them, despite the onslaughts of sophistication, a grain of Chassidic simplicity" are those who will appreciate J. I. Segal's *Lyric*, he writes. A review of Ariel Benson's *The Zohar in Moslem and Christian Spain* begins with "it is with a supercilious lift of an all-too-logical eyebrow that the rationalist is wont to regard the revelation of mysticism." A new edition of a Hebrew ritual book, the Passover Haggadah, is condemned for its modernity: "it is the very quaintness, it is precisely the old-fashioned quasi-mediaeval flavor of the Haggadah which endows it with all its charm and beauty." The work of Shloime Shmulevitz prompts him to assert, "It is only the sophisticated who require ingenious tragedies to touch them; the simple are moved by anything that is sad.... people's bards, like Shmulevitz, sing of sorrow simply because it is sorrowful." Reserved for this section as well is Klein's attempt to draw parallels between one of his key Jewish cultural figures and better-known Anglo-American writers. Chaim Nachman Bialik is introduced to us as the W. B. Yeats of the Semitic revival, the Matthew Arnold of Hebrew letters, his poem "God grant my part and portion be" the Gray's elegy of the Hebrew language.

It was, perhaps, a tactical error for Caplan and Steinberg to begin the book with Klein's writings on Jewish literature and culture. Klein's voice throughout this section is serious and earnest, and the material lacks the immediate appeal of that in the later sections. Nevertheless, the attraction of presenting over a hundred pages that revealed Klein's deep affiliation for the Jewish tradition and his thoughts about his own Jewishness must have been strong indeed. And, after all, there is nothing to stop one from reading the later sections first, a reading that will no doubt encourage even the most sceptical reader to tackle the opening.

The tone of Klein's writing throughout much of the book is uniquely his own — cross, acerbic, witty, satiric. There is no mistaking the voice for that of any of his contemporaries. Smith's academicism, Layton's bombast, Brown's democratized Arnoldianism are quite unlike Klein's tone or approach. We all know Klein was "great," but we are, perhaps, frightened away from the poetry by our sense of its exotic difference. Both Smith and Brown deemed him our greatest living poet at one point. If even his contemporaries recognized him as a major talent, surely we can do no less. Generally entertaining, always informative, and for the most part pertinent, *Literary Essays and Reviews* is essential reading.

LAURA GROENING

# CHAMPIONS DE LA LIBERTÉ

JEAN-PAUL DE LAGRAVE, *Fleury Mesplet (1734-1794): Imprimeur, éditeur, libraire, journaliste.* Patenaude Éditeur, n.p.

BERNARD PÉNISSON, *Henri d'Hellencourt: Un journaliste français au Manitoba (1898-1905).* Les Éditions du Blé, $25.00.

SALUONS L'HEUREUSE coïncidence de la publication dans l'espace d'un an, à deux coins du Canada francophone, de deux monumentales études historiques consacrées à deux journalistes-imprimeurs français, émigrés au Canada, où ils ont oeuvré comme pionniers de la presse d'expression française. Bien que deux siècles les séparent, tous deux ont été les témoins de la difficile gestation d'une province (celle du Québec pour Mesplet, celle du Manitoba pour d'Hellencourt) et ont activement collaboré à la création d'une presse autonome.

Dans les deux situations, celle d'une collectivité francophone menacée dans sa survie linguistique et culturelle, le fait d'écrire et de publier en français prend la valeur d'un acte de résistance face aux forces d'oppression. Or ce n'est point par hasard que ces deux champions de la liberté de pensée et d'expression, d'inspiration "voltairienne" ou au moins libérale, se sont trouvés en butte à une censure cléricale et sociale redoutable qui, malgré la persévérance et le courage de leur combat, les a touchés dans le vif même de leur existence.

Curieux chassé-croisé aussi que la carrière des deux auteurs, l'un Jean-Paul de Lagrave, Québécois mais ayant fait des études en France où il est Docteur ès Sciences de l'Information de l'Université de Paris, l'autre Bernard Pénisson, Français mais ayant enseigné l'histoire pendant huit ans au Canada. Ainsi, auteurs et sujets traités fournissent-ils la preuve tangible du maintien d'une interaction dynamique entre la France et le Canada français.

L'étude magistrale et touffue que Jean-Paul de Lagrave a consacrée à Fleury Mesplet (1734-1794), diffuseur des lumières au Québec, se veut un hommage à la mémoire du premier imprimeur de langue française au Québec et au Canada, étude publiée à l'occasion du bicentenaire de la naissance de la presse d'information à Montréal (1785-1985). L'auteur s'attache à nous faire "percevoir le choc d'idées nouvelles heurtant une mentalité traditionnelle," par le biais de la biographie de Mesplet: selon de Lagrave, ce dernier est un personnage-clé de l'histoire des idées au Québec et au Canada où il a fait connaître les grands principes philosophiques du dix-huitième siècle français et en a montré les applications possibles dans la vie même des habitants, et cela dans le contexte de la guerre d'Indépendance des États-Unis, puis de la Révolution française.

Au cours des 436 pages de son étude (plus les 60 pages d'appendices, de bibliographie, de chronologie, d'index et d'illustrations) qui, malgré son poids de "brique," se lit remarquablement bien grâce au style limpide de sa rédaction, l'auteur évoque avec force détails les tribulations de ce maître-imprimeur lyonnais, "missionnaire" de Voltaire dans un Nouveau-Monde féodal, encore fermé aux libertés de pensée et d'expression. Après un séjour à Londres, puis à Philadelphie où il est l'imprimeur de langue française du Congrès, Mesplet est envoyé à Montréal par Benjamin Franklin pour établir les presses des "Fils de la Liberté" dans cette ville. Pendant les dix-huit ans de son séjour dans la province (dont trois ans passés en prison pour ses idées voltairiennes), il a fondé deux journaux, *la Gazette littéraire* et *la Gazette de Montréal*, dans lesquelles il engage le combat contre la superstition, en faveur d'un enseignement public, d'une réforme judi-

ciaire et d'une nouvelle constitution. Malgré l'opposition farouche des "seigneurs ecclésiastiques" et des membres de la noblesse, Mesplet a réussi à jeter les bases d'une vraie liberté de pensée qui, selon les dires de l'auteur, est devenue "une tradition au Québec." Et pourtant, ce rêve généreux d'un Québec libéré de toutes contraintes aura mis deux siècles à germer, avant de connaître un début de réalisation.

L'historien français Bernard Pénisson semble s'être restreint, pour son étude sur *Henri d'Hellencourt: Un journaliste français au Manitoba*, à un domaine bien délimité en ne considérant que la carrière journalistique manitobaine de son personnage (1898-1905). Or, ce choix en apparence anecdotique du genre biographique n'apporte que l'enveloppe plaisante permettant à l'auteur de faire le point sur la presse franco-manitobaine de 1871 à 1914, d'analyser le mouvement d'émigration française vers le Manitoba et d'observer globalement la scène manitobaine de l'époque par personne interposée: en l'occurence un journaliste fort perspicace et hautement apprécié par Wilfrid Laurier.

Pour le non-spécialiste, l'agrément de cet ouvrage dense et rigoureusement scientifique par sa structure et sa documentation minutieuse (riche en cartes, tableaux, photographies), provient indéniablement de l'approche biographique adoptée habilement par l'auteur. Celui-ci réussit à nous attacher à la forte personnalité à la fois intègre et courageuse d'Hellencourt, en butte à une adversité constante: issu de la bonne bourgeoisie française, promis, en tant qu'officier de l'école militaire de Saint-Cyr, à un bel avenir dans la prestigieuse armée française, Henri sera obligé de donner sa démission pour avoir désiré épouser une jeune femme divorcée, de moeurs jugées "légères"; choix qui l'incitera à émigrer au Manitoba comme simple colon et pèsera sur toute sa carrière ultérieure dans un pays où ce "couple adultère" sera vite mis au ban de la société, entièrement contrôlée par les "seigneurs ecclésiastiques" de l'époque. Après les déboires de la vie de colon, d'Hellencourt trouve sa vocation, à l'âge de 35 ans, comme rédacteur de *l'Écho du Manitoba* où il mettra sa plume au service du parti libéral et de Wilfrid Laurier en particulier, et où il s'affirmera comme un éminent publiciste et un tribun populaire.

Avant de commenter les multiples combats livrés par le rédacteur libéral, Bernard Pénisson nous brosse en deux chapitres un tableau minutieux du Manitoba vers 1890 ("clef de voûte" de l'Ouest), de la crise politique issue des problèmes scolaires et linguistiques, des débuts difficiles de la presse franco-manitobaine et des tensions entre conservateurs et libéraux dans la mainmise sur cette presse. Vient ensuite le "règne" glorieux d'Hellencourt, pourfendeur acharné et efficace des conservateurs (soutenus, eux, par le clergé) jusqu'à la victoire écrasante de ceux-ci aux élections provinciales de 1903, date à partir de laquelle il deviendra victime de son succès journalistique, de la fragilité de sa position personnelle, et de la jalousie de ses amis politiques.

Avant de rapporter, au dernier chapitre, les péripities du départ du journaliste du Manitoba pour le Québec, Bernard Pénisson insère quatre chapitres significatifs où d'Hellencourt sert de témoin pour une étude rigoureuse d'une part des grands thèmes chers au journal libéral (et dont le plus important est la question scolaire manitobaine), par ailleurs de l'immigration française au Manitoba, de la colonie française que le même homme représente comme agent consulaire, et aussi de la politique provinciale de Laurier. En somme, le bref séjour du journaliste à Winnipeg aura été l'occasion d'un cours d'histoire dense sur le Manitoba d'avant la première guerre mon-

diale: Monsieur Pénisson fait preuve d'une réelle habileté de présentation.

Mesplet et d'Hellencourt apparaissent tous deux comme d'intrépides pionniers de la presse d'expression française. Immigrés impliqués dans la formation d'une province en butte à la censure cléricale et sociale, ils sont des champions de la liberté de pensée et d'expression: malgré le siècle et la distance qui les séparent, comment ne pas être frappé par les similarités de leur destinée? Semblable est aussi la démarche adoptée par leurs biographes: un destin singulier se révélera comme le point de mire, et aussi un défi lancé à toute une collectivité. Par ailleurs, l'un et l'autre sont saisis dans l'élan de leur devenir. Là où les deux études se distinguent, c'est dans le dosage entre la composante biographique et l'arrière-fond historique: Lagrave privilégie la première dans sa quête passionnée du souffle libérateur, alors que B. Pénisson donne prééminence au tableau d'époque où le héros sert de catalyseur. Au lecteur de préférer l'un ou l'autre dosage des ingrédients mis en jeu.

INGRID JOUBERT

# STRONG SHAPES

MILTON ACORN, *I Shout Love and other poems*, ed. James Deahl. Aya Press, $9.00

JAMES DEAHL, ed., *The Northern Red Oak: Poems for and about Milton Acorn.* Unfinished Monument Press, $10.00.

HENRY BEISSEL, *Poems New and Selected.* Mosaic Press, $10.95.

"A Special Issue on George Johnston," *The Malahat Review*, 78 (March 1987), n.p.

WORDS THAT MILTON ACORN addressed to Al Purdy in one of the early poems reprinted in *I Shout Love and other poems* seem to apply with peculiar force to himself: "Like a green lignum vitae tree, / a nuisance on the lawn, / dead you'd carve into strong shapes, / living you're a problem." There can be no doubt that the living Milton Acorn was a problem — both to academic critics, who found him equally difficult either to assimilate or to ignore, and to his friends and fellow poets, in whom he inspired varying degrees of exasperated affection, bemused respect, pity, and discipleship. The process of carving can be witnessed in *The Northern Red Oak* — beginning with its frontispiece, a splendidly sculptural full-face photograph of the poet, harshly illuminated from the left side. The poems which follow include familiar pieces by MacEwen, Purdy, bissett, and Wayman evoking their connections with Acorn, two by Lee and Atwood of which Acorn was particularly fond, and tributes written since Acorn's death, for the most part forgettable — though a few, notably those by Margaret Avison, Richard Lemm, and Francis Sparshott, resonate in the mind. From these tributes a collective portrait emerges: of Acorn's raw physical presence, the "bellowing frenzy" of his political passion, his incoherence, his gentleness, and his determination to be a voice for the silenced and oppressed.

In *I Shout Love and other poems* James Deahl has reprinted the three chapbooks that Acorn published between 1956 and 1960, bracketed by the first and final versions, edited from the manuscripts, of "I Shout Love." In these poems a remarkable development can be traced, from the unsteady power and bathetic lapses of *In Love and Anger*, to the emergence in *Against a League of Liars* of colloquial rhythms and a voice that moves with assurance, and on occasion with intricate delicacy, from satire to lyric. And then come the fourteen poems of *The Brain's the Target*, exuberant games with sound which proclaim both the poet's lyrical mastery and his commitment to a vision of human liberation. Between the two versions of "I Shout Love" printed here, the first from 1958 and the second

from 1970, a further development is evident: Acorn has swallowed Whitman, Ginsberg, and Christopher Smart. The final result is a stimulating poem which it is good to have (at last) in print. Yet the editor's note on the later text of this poem is disturbing: he confesses to deleting one line and re-writing four others "to improve the clarity of Acorn's thought." One would prefer to have Acorn himself, muddled or otherwise — not least because Deahl's introduction, veering between absurdity, unhelpfulness, and a calamitous banality, scarcely testifies to the clarity of his own thought.

Many of Henry Beissel's *Poems New and Selected* are as strongly political as Acorn's "I Shout Love," yet in a quite different manner. In these poems, some of which date back to the early 1960's, Beissel has protested powerfully against the Russian invasion of Czechoslovakia, against American war crimes in Vietnam and Central America, and, here at home, against "a wilderness / of voices bent on burying / us all in shame." Though there are several fine lyrics here, Beissel is insistently drawn to longer forms. And his own voice is typically not bound to the rhythms of the body in the manner prescribed by that 'projective' poetic which remains dominant on this continent; it tends rather to be impersonal, emanating like the choral discourse of Greek tragedy from a place beyond the gestures of its own utterance. The result, on occasion, is a lack of situatedness: the voice, to misappropriate Beissel's own words, is "a drum / muffled in the distance," giving the reader no direct sense of what impels it into speech. Yet when he moves beyond the merely documentary stance of a poem such as "Midwinter Moon Over Montreal" into explorations of the place from which this voice speaks and of what empowers it, Beissel produces poetry that combines mythic depths and historical understanding in a texture of admirable richness. Among his earlier poems there are clumsy things, lines and whole passages that might tempt one to apply to him Ben Jonson's famous assessment of Samuel Daniel. However, Beissel is also the poet of "The Ides of March," from *Season of Blood,* and of the excerpts from *Cantos North* reprinted in this volume: this is public poetry of the first order, lucid, complex, unflinching, and humane. One might add that it is a pleasure, after reading the tributes to Milton Acorn, to encounter once again Beissel's elegy for Walter Bauer, that strong poet and splendid human being.

*The Malahat Review*'s special issue on George Johnston celebrates the continuing vitality of a poet who has been active since the mid-1930's, and who is utterly unlike either Acorn or Beissel. Johnston's poetry is, above all, remarkable for its formal perfection, the delicious certainty of its rhythmic variations, the deflating ironies of his impeccable diction. The world it evokes is a contracted one — and contraction is one of Johnston's insistent subjects, from the Blakean reductions of *The Cruising Auk* (with its odd overtones of home-grown Ontario surrealism) to his recent taut exercises in the metres of the scaldic poets. Earle Birney in this issue calls him "a bard more Beowulf than Betjeman": an apt characterization, given Johnston's movement from an early melancholic frivolity to the laconic reticence of his later style, and the enduring coexistence in his poetry of the outlandish with a deceptive homeliness; equally apt is Constance Rooke's description of his vision, in her brief preface, as "sturdy, wry and generous." Johnston is present here in his own voice, in seven new poems and the meditative prose of "Bee Seasons," as well as in the fine calligraphy of his manuscripts of six poems which appeared in *The Cruising Auk* and *Happy Enough.* This issue also provides a generous sampling of his translations of Ny-

norsk, Norwegian, Danish, and Swedish poetry, and of Icelandic saga literature. Add to this the warm assessments of Johnston's poetry by P. K. Page, Harvey de Roo, and Elizabeth Brewster, scholarly evaluations of his brilliant translation of *Gisli's Saga* by John Tucker and Peter Foote, Jay Macpherson's memories of the beginnings of Johnston's writing career as an undergraduate at Victoria College in the 1930's, Johnston's own leisurely reminiscences in three long conversations reported by William Blissett, and an open letter from Robert L. McDougall which pays homage both to the man and the poet, and one has a remarkably complete impression of the reasons for which this writer commands our respect and affection.

MICHAEL H. KEEFER

# ENFANTS DE LA TERRE

JOVETTE MARCHESSAULT, *Des Cailloux blancs pour les forêts obscures*. Leméac, n.p.

THOUGH WRITTEN TO complete the trilogy begun with *Comme une enfant de la terre* (1975) and *La Mère des herbes* (1980), Jovette Marchessault's latest novel cannot really be considered a sequel to the first two books. Whereas those novels were openly autobiographical, this novel is narrated not by Marchessault herself but by a Quebec lesbian feminist writer named Jeanne. Still, the problems of autobiographical fiction provide an important theme, for the novel Jeanne is writing draws not only on her own life but on that of her lover, Noria, who wonders if the author's "droit de fiction" is not really the "droit de l'espoir." However, this change in narrator is less striking than the shift in tone from the lyrical exuberance and vehement polemic of the first two volumes to the more sober and meditative mood of *Des Cailloux blancs pour les forêts obscures*, whose plot often seems no more than a frame supporting the weight of the narrator's reflections, visions, and long dialogues with other characters.

As the novel opens, Jeanne and Noria are involved in a discussion about literature, life, and death, during which Jeanne, concerned about her lover, has a vision prefiguring Noria's death. When Noria does collapse, Jeanne watches over her and is soon joined in her deathwatch by Noria's father, nicknamed the Lion of Bangor. He helps Jeanne to better understand her lover by recounting the story of his relationship with his wife, who left him for a lesbian lover, and with his daughter, whom he recovered only in her teens after she had been abused by the Ku Klux Klan. The stuff of melodrama, no doubt, but Marchessault generally manages to avoid bathos by drawing the reader into Jeanne's quest for understanding.

Whereas in works such as *Tryptique lesbien* (1980) Marchessault wrote as a lesbian feminist striking out at a male-dominated society, in this novel she turns her critical regard on herself and her own milieu. For example, in a long dialogue with "la vieille garde" (that is, the lesbians who first established the isolated community where she lives), Jeanne reveals that her early idealization of them ended the night she heard the muffled sounds of one lesbian beating another behind closed doors. She does not spare herself in this censure, aware that her silence made her an accomplice. Similarly, the role of women as oppressors is exemplified by the violence perpetrated against Noria by the female members of the Ku Klux Klan.

Marchessault's feminism has also developed here to include a new-found acceptance of the father figure. Noria's father is an example of a man whose

wisdom and tenderness for his daughter led Jeanne to affirm, "Des pensées aimantes que je n'ai jamais eues au sujet des pères me viennent facilement quand je regarde le Lion de Bangor. Mais, plus que tout, je sens qu'en moi quelqu'une s'incline pour rendre hommage à leurs dons et à leur lumineuse mémoire." After many years of bitterness, Noria's father finally conquered his desire for vengeance against his wife's lesbian lover. He has come to accept the past and does not, as Jeanne had feared, condemn her relationship with Noria.

This expression of sympathy for the male does not, of course, preclude a critique of patriarchal society. As in other works such as *Lettre de Californie* (1982), Marchessault continues to revise the male-dominated version of history with her accounts of women's accomplishments. Here Noria, a pilot whose mother was a stunt-flyer in the pioneering days of aviation, describes the feats of the early women pilots and the discrimination these women faced.

Marchessault's most severe criticism of society is directed against the violent exploitation of animals by human beings; in particular, the use of animals for scientific experimentation. Noria became involved in rescuing animals from experimental laboratories after she discovered that her son, taken from her at his birth by the Ku Klux Klan, died as a victim of a scientific experiment. It is clear that for Marchessault our cruelty towards animals is directly related to our cruelty towards one another. For example, when Noria's father kills animals while hunting, in his mind's eye he is really aiming at his wife's lesbian lover; killing animals is for him an act of vengeance.

*Des Cailloux blancs pour les forêts obscures* is, however, less a critique of society than an inquiry into the relationship between lovers, between parents and their children, and between the oppressor and the oppressed. The style of this novel, lacking the ebullience of *Comme une enfant de la terre* and *La Mère des herbes*, may seem overly didactic, but this is no doubt inevitable given Jeanne's belief that we all have the mission of saving the world — literature being arguably one of the most effective weapons in this fight.

KATHLEEN L. KELLETT

# IDENTITÉS MYSTERIEUSES

NORMANDE ELIE, *La Gourou*. Editions Naaman, n.p.

ROGER DELISLE, *Le mercanaire de LG2*. Editions Leméac, n.p.

*La Gourou* est un roman-poème envoûtant, sensuel et mystique à l'image de son héroïne, Naura Karavidos. Cette nouvelle voisine, femme énigmatique d'une beauté remarquable, aiguise la curiosité d'Olivier Belisle, homme d'affaire marié et bien rangé dans une vie conformiste sans heurts et sans passions. Baroque et hédoniste, Naura stimule l'imagination de tous. Qui est-elle? Grande dame déchue, bohémienne, veuve brillante, ancienne psychosée, ou artiste raté — plusieurs mythes entourent cette femme de chez qui des étrangers, au petit matin, s'échappent furtivement. Et Olivier en est harcelé. Il dépend, cependant, du lecteur, que cette fascination aboutisse ou non à l'adultère. "La Voisine," première partie du roman, semble, bien l'annoncer. En effet, la dernière partie, "Souvenances," les présente seuls et devant eux, toute une journée volée. Et voilà pour ce qui en est des attentes du lecteur.

Celui-ci est obligé de chercher l'essentiel ailleurs. Chez Olivier, il pourrait le trouver dans l'émergence, ou plutôt la

résurrection, grâce à Naura, d'une passion latente connue une seule fois dans sa jeunesse. Chez Naura, quadragénaire elle-même, l'expérience semble se faire avant tout à travers des souvenirs de son premier amour à elle. Deux individus très différents sont ainsi rapprochés par des souvenirs, par la nostalgie de l'amour à dix-sept ans, un amour intense, vif et innocent.

Le roman, composé de six parties, est également intéressant du point de vue de sa structure d'ensemble. La "Voisine" et "Souvenances" traitent donc de l'envoûtement d'Olivier et de l'identité mystérieuse de Naura. La deuxième partie "Une Fillette Gourou," la troisième "Premier Amour" et la quatrième "Perdue dans la brume" tracent consécutivement l'enfance, l'adolescence, et la vie adulte de Naura. Il en ressort le schisme inhérent à la personnalité de celle-ci. La petite couventine est à la recherche de la transcendance. Pour être heureuse, il lui faut suivre le chemin la conduisant à l'autre elle-même et à la symbiose. L'adolescente amoureuse de Johnny, est tiraillée entre la rage de vivre sa passion et la ferveur religieuse. L'adulte subit une crise et, au bord de la folie, rejoint l'enfant dans sa quête d'identité.

La cinquième partie du roman, "Dernier Amour," devait, peut-être, faire contrepoids à "Premier Amour." Mais cette insertion gratuite de lettres d'amour signées par des personnages inconnus ("Annie" et "Frédérick") introduit une note discordante par rapport au reste. De plus, l'on peut reprocher à la romancière de n'avoir pas préparer ici la révélation de l'identité de Naura. Le dévoilement de cette femme-énigme dans la partie finale du roman est trop abrupt et n'est pas à la hauteur de ses promesses.

Prose d'une richesse poétique exquise, l'écriture de Normande Elie se caractérise par des phrases brèves, incomplètes mais exactes, semblables à des traits de pinceau. Une voix retenue mais explosive voltige rapidement de constatation en constatation sans chercher d'analyser, d'expliquer. Roman agréable à lire malgré des écarts dans sa composition.

Thriller à l'eau de rose, le premier roman de Roger Delisle, prometteur d'un certain talent en écriture, n'est pas, cependant, à la taille d'un Robert Ludlum, ou d'un Stephen King. Thriller? . . . peut-être . . . enfin oui. Jake Kordic, mercenaire québécois, vivant aux Etats-Unis, est chargé par la C.I.A. de discréditer Hydro-Québec qui veut vendre ses surplus d'électricité à la Nouvelle Angleterre. Frappée par l'ouragan Gloria (1985), la Nouvelle Angleterre sollicite le secours de Hydro-Québec et donne ainsi aux Québécois l'occasion de prouver leur efficacité. Mais le succès de la part de Hydro-Québec représenterait la ruine de la centrale au charbon et le chômage pour des milliers de travailleurs syndiqués américains. Comment éviter un tel ébranlement? Jake Kordic: le dur des durs. "Machine à détruire," "robot sans sentiments," celui-ci ignore, cependant, que la C.I.A. compte sur sa mort et en a confié la mission à son agent québécois Eric Landry. Jake Kordic, réussira-t-il sa mission? Echappera-t-il au destin que lui impose la C.I.A.?

Le déroulement de cette intrigue simple sera régulièrement interrompu dans les neuf premiers des quinze chapitres par des séquences traitant les problèmes sentimentaux des membres de la famille de Jake Kordic à Montréal: l'infidélité du père, l'amour de Janor envers une droguée, et le nouveau bonheur de Mitsou, ingénieur chez Hydro-Québec. Seule cette dernière histoire entretient des rapports avec celle de la destruction de la centrale électrique LG2. L'amant de Mitsou, José Mendez, tient à se venger d'Eric Landry pour le meurtre de sa mère et le viol de sa maîtresse, au Chili en 1973. Ces deux in-

trigues se renouent opportunément au douzième chapitre.

Quant aux deux autres histoires sentimentales, elles servent tout simplement de contrepoint à la vie froide et détachée de Jake Kordic qui conçoit l'amour en tant qu'acte sexuel et "outil pour mieux contrôler l'autre." Jake Kordic est incapable d'aimer et ne tolère pas qu'on le touche. Cela, le texte le répète jusqu'à abuser la patience du lecteur. Mais, voilà qu'au cours des événements, cet ancien membre, acclamé des Hells Angels pour avoir éventré un prêtre noir, subit un changement radical. Il devient "affectueux" et même capable de s'intéresser au bien-être d'autrui. Mais ce n'est pas tout. Trahie par la C.I.A., cette brebis galeuse qui, il y a peu de temps, n'aurait pas hésité à tuer sa soeur, décide de retourner au Québec et au sein de sa famille. La raison pour cette volte-face? Les sollicitations de l'Indienne Anik et la rencontre à la Baie James d'autres gens sympathiques qui lui veulent du bien, "lui qui avait passé sa vie à combattre le monde. Ce monde antipathique qui s'était toujours acharné à le détruire." L'explication est-elle adéquate? Au lecteur d'en juger.

Une thriller? Oui. Tous les ingrédients y passent: sexe, violence, corruption, et racisme. Un thriller bien écrit, facile à lire, plutôt tendre, sentimental. Ni violence à l'américaine, ni drame psychologique à la française. Un thriller québécois quoi.

A. M. MIRAGLIA

# BUTTERFLY WINTER

W. P. KINSELLA, *Red Wolf, Red Wolf*. Collins, $22.95.

W. P. KINSELLA, the winner of the 1987 Stephen Leacock Medal for Humour, has given us a new collection of short stories, *Red Wolf, Red Wolf*, which exhibits his exuberant comic imagination and yet also reveals the poignant stirring of desire that lies at the heart of so much apparent domestic contentment. The narrator of "Elvis Bound," the funniest of the stories, is married to the daughter of an Elvis Presley groupie who has inherited such a passion for the late pop artist that she must sleep beneath his "almost 3-D" life-size poster. The ballplayer/narrator uses the adhesive tape from his bat to bind Elvis's limbs where the captive voyeur looms from the wall, like a trussed-up turkey, and thus the ingenious husband regains his manly pride each night while he gives his mischievous wife the added thrill of being partner to imaginary exhibitionism. The bound Elvis becomes a part of the itinerant family's life because he travels the baseball circuit in his own full-length suit carrier.

The nomads of Kinsella's latest book are the rootless heirs of a prosperous society that can afford to have its citizens retire early or else indulge in directionless sabbaticals from occupations they find tedious. Thus, in "Driving Patterns," the wife of a fifty-year-old retired farmer (who has deserted the land for a comfortable annuity and a camper/trailer) heads the couple's luxury car, a sort of air-conditioned hearse, for the interstate highways each spring (at the time when they once seeded the land). While the husband, Wesley, seated placidly in the "death seat," reads aloud from books of sex and adventure, the dispirited Hilda thinks that "living without passion is the worst thing a person can let happen to themselves." From the doldrums of her memory there rises one night of love with an exotic biker, a moment never repeated and never to be really lived again. She feels "the power of the cycle between her thighs" and instantly feeds gas to the sumptuous Chrysler, gaining speed as she envisions the excitement of winding

mountain roads. The signs in Kinsella's text are not encouraging (the road map is hand-marked "like a river of blood"), but we hope that Hilda will exit at the next rest stop and hitch onto the first formidable "semi," which will roar her away from Wesley and the deathly fate of "mom and pop" trailer parks in the happy valleys of senile citizenry.

One of Kinsella's nomads who throws up a lucrative position in middle America (a Savings & Loans executive at 36) is the solid Henry Vold, who suddenly one day falls in love with his free-spirited daughter Carin's sexy friend Evangeline — "Karin" is the name of the fey child in Kinsella's fantasy, *Shoeless Joe* — and it is through "Vangy" that Henry comes to know "Evangeline's Mother," as the story is titled. If it is sex that makes Henry rise to the occasion of Evangeline, the lure of the mother for Henry is her "squalorous conditions" and the imagined joys that come with irresponsibility. So Henry "splits" respectable Albuquerque, with Vangy and Carin in the car beside him, not without noticing that Vangy's fingernails curl "frighteningly" on his thigh: "Images of talons filled Henry's mind." Talons or vultures appear several times in *Red Wolf, Red Wolf* to suggest a predatory instinct in the human species.

Another story that ends ominously — and even more fearfully with respect to the main characters involved — is "Oh, Marley," which was inspired by Kinsella's reading in one of his favourite sources of literary grist, "a *National Enquirer*-type magazine," about an unfortunate woman who survived a horrid number of murderous stab wounds because of her abundance of body fat. The story is told from the viewpoint of a disturbingly ambivalent narrator who cannot decide whether he finds "pathos" or "humour" in poor Marley's fate. His insensitivity is the equivalent to her obesity. Our sympathy is with the poor young woman who has sought to escape inquisitive stares by moving to the chilly anonymity of Vancouver. She cannot bear to look at her own nakedness because of the hideous "pink worms" that scar her flesh. Her future happiness depends upon "pretending" that the events of the past never happened, not upon any further threat from the dead assailant. Yet the story ends in this manner: "Tod's knife lurks, glittering, sinister, waiting for one of us to make a mistake." The mistake lies in the persistence of memory.

A departure in this collection from the basically realistic stories is "Truth and History," which reminds Kinsella's readers of the enigmas or indeterminate anecdotes (the author's "Brautigans") to be found in *The Alligator Report* (1985). "Truth and History" is a Borges-like fable about a Chinese restaurateur in Vancouver who is forced by ceremonial courtesy to enter into an agreement, which he cannot conclude. He constructs a fiction in order to get out of his unfortunate contractual fiction and, as a result, he vanishes from sight and becomes himself a fiction. In this game of names, Mr. Wang Ho turns into Mr. Wang Low, a low-profile character.

A different sort of prestidigitation from that of "Truth and History" is the Wizard's Magic of "Butterfly Winter," the lovely tale that won W. P. Kinsella the Okanagan Short Fiction Award (the story appeared in *Canadian Author & Bookman*, Spring 1986). Kinsella here resumes the history of baseball's great Julio, originally of the Dominican Republic (in *The Thrill of the Grass*, 1984), now from mythical Courteguaya. This is Kinsellan love fantasy at its best; the equal of raptures in *Shoeless Joe* and elsewhere. The jaded hero falls in love with the beautiful Quita and they lie together atop the butterfly hill, the resting place of the annual migration: "They looked like a burnt-orange sculpture in some erotic museum."

They will be blanketed by butterflies throughout the winter, waiting for spring; at the end of their "silken" night, Julio will return to the States and perform the diamond "miracles" for which in our rewarding world he is so highly paid.

The material rewards that a prosperous society gives in return for sexual favours are great, as we are told in "Lieberman in Love," an amusing, if cynical, story about a rich Jewish land developer's costly investment in Hawaii's human assets (her name is Shaleen). For Kinsella fans, however, the sentimental favourite in this collection must be the final story, "Mother Tucker's Yellow Duck." Here Kinsella takes us back to the nostalgia of "First Names and Empty Pockets" (in *Shoeless Joe Jackson Comes to Iowa*, 1980), his peaches and cream dream of the Janis Joplin days of the late 1960's. The setting is now the Vancouver/Victoria of 1980 rather than the San Francisco of a flower child's last days. The title refers to a defunct musical group (closer to B.C.'s "Pied Pumpkin" and their ilk than to J.J.'s "Full Tilt" blasters). An aging former hippie, the narrator has shortened his hair and taken a yuppie girl friend, who gave him a fancy silver watch that makes him look like a "wristwatch hippie" to the hardened "freaks" who hang around the old haunts. The narrator's new love is an ambitious Probation Officer — an indication of how far he has fallen from graceland! The narrative itself tells of his young love for the half-real "Glorianna" (if that is her real name; he never knew her surname) in the form of an unwritten letter. It is fitting that the memories are left unwritten and unspoken to Glorianna for she existed day by day, tentatively, on love or loan to a higher whim, never planning a real future. She lived with empty pockets and no direction — not even a terminus — in the present, never giving her age, always answering a question with a question. So one day she left "Mac" — son of whom? another enigma? or just plain Mac? — and she vanished with no forwarding address. It is fitting that Kinsella set "Mother Tucker's Yellow Duck" at the end of this most recent collection because the story shows one of his more attractive sides: his fondness for the things and people, real or imagined, that he has loved long and well.

DON MURRAY

# STATES OF NATURE

ANTONINE MAILLET, *Mariaagélas: Maria, daughter of Gélas*, trans. Ben-Z. Shek. Simon & Pierre, $11.95.

CLAIRE MARTIN, *The Legacy* [*Quand j'aurai payé ton visage*], trans. David Lobdell. Oberon, $12.95.

ROBINA SALTER, *Hannah*. McClelland and Stewart, $19.95.

MARILYN YALOM, *Maternity, Mortality, and the Literature of Madness*. Pennsylvania State Univ. Press, $17.95.

WHEN *Books in Canada* polled its readers and published the results in the May 1987 issue, it seemed only natural that seven of the top ten authors were women. (Munro, Atwood, Laurence, Gallant, Hospital, Engel, and Thomas headed the list, along with Findley, Davies, and Richler.) "That's as it should be," commented William French, "and reflects the strong position women writers have earned for themselves in recent years in Canada." Yet in a world full of competent, insightful, and unacknowledged women writers, it is this very acceptance that should occasion some surprise, perhaps a little suspicion, and certainly more sustained speculation. Why the ready integration of women authors into the Canlit canon? Which voices are harmonized, which heard, which silenced? Relevant, perhaps, are two other features of the *Books*

*in Canada* survey, which French has noted: that all the leading authors are fiction writers, and that "such widely known Quebec authors as Gabrielle Roy, Marie-Claire Blais, and Roch Carrier, whose works are widely available in English translation, were not mentioned." Thus the problem of women writers, seemingly settled, gives rise to an entire problematic. What women's writing is accepted, and on what terms? And what does this tell us about the very notion of a "Canadian literature"?

Three recent fictional works help to open up these categories, if only through their generic and geographic atypicality. Antonine Maillet's *Mariaagélas*, set in Acadia in the Depression, combines folklore, sketches, jokes, caricatures, and the tall tale in its narration of the adventures and inventions of the resourceful, rum-running Mariaagélas. "I remember dreaming," the narrator muses, "that one day I'd write about the beautiful adventures of Mariaagélas, who had fought so joyously against the sea, customs men, fishermen, priests, gossips . . . and life itself, during that most glorious and most tragic epoch in the history of my land." This closing sentence of the story could as well serve as an introduction to all of Maillet's work, an exploration of the interrelationship of people and land, tongue and past, which would seem to demand a place within a Canadian canon. Yet there could be no stronger challenge to the concept of "Canada" than the work of Maillet and the new Acadian writers, who tear open the smooth and soothing notions of historical progress, stylistic integration, and cultural unity, and in this way intersect with feminist literary work.

Claire Martin's *The Legacy*, a reminiscent romance somewhat in the manner of Françoise Sagan, also evades the realist norm with multiple viewpoints and voices that press tightly upon the central events of the story. The love affair of a woman and her brother-in-law is conducted on the terrain that Martin understands so well, the meeting place of desire, power, and capital that is the family, mapped unforgettably with the autobiographical *In an Iron Glove*. Here, however, the fine focus of the dyad, the absence of an interpretive voice, and a persistent lyricism serve to eroticize what previously was exposed and analyzed. While the titles of *The Legacy* and *Quand j'aurai payé ton visage* allude to the multiple determinants of personal relationships, the work's extreme asociality creates interesting classification difficulties, if one wishes to consider it as somehow, identifiably, either "feminist" or "Canadian."

Robina Salter's *Hannah* slides through a range of modes and conventions in its story of the labours and loves of an outport nurse in the late 1940's. While cover encomiums (from Newfoundland's lieutenant-governor, for example) attest to the work's veracity, that it "captures the quality of the land and the people," what begins as social realism ends as sentimental idyll, with a concomitant narrowing of focus. To say that the novel increasingly takes on the characteristics of yet another *de facto* Canadian genre, the Harlequin romance, is not of course to deny it sense or purpose, but to see it as solving (in a recourse to the individual and the emotional) the social questions it has established. Poverty is adjustable through charity, and illness through initiative; woman freely exchanges independent agency for the joys of life united. That the novel ends with the entry of Newfoundland into Confederation is a movement surely intended to valorize, not satirize, the romance resolution. But the underlying analogy, and the novel's turn from the political to the personal on national and sexual issues, reminds us that such "popular" fictions are worth reading seriously, in spite of — or because of — questions of

their literary worth and canonical status, and their uneasy fit to the category of "women's writing."

Marilyn Yalom's *Maternity, Mortality, and the Literature of Madness*, a comparative study of Sylvia Plath, Marie Cardinal, and Margaret Atwood, postulates an essentially female response to universal experiences upon which the idea of a women's writing could be based. Yalom's study is interesting as much for its procedural problems as for its careful tracking of journeys to psychic breakdown and reintegration in the works it examines. For in assuming foundational "existential realities" — uninflected, that is, by culturation or engendering, and established prediscursively — Yalom postulates a stable and essential "human" experience, which is, I think, exactly what demands a feminist critique. (As Terry Eagleton remarks in *The Rape of Clarissa*: "This is not to belittle 'humanism': it is merely to recognize that it is a project still to be constructed. . . .") The scheme of women's experience as a subsection of the human, with women's writing reflective of this, results in readings that assume a biographical mapping of author to persona, and a mimesis between real and fictional events. This lack of attention to language on a theoretical level has practical consequences — in a reductive description of the complex poetic-prose style of *Surfacing*'s closing chapters as regressively childlike, for example.

It is noteworthy that the treatment of Atwood is somewhat anomalous in this comparative study, and is seen by Yalom herself to be so. Atwood's obvious sanity disturbs the biographical approach, leading Yalom to suggest that "her use of madness is less an artifact of personal experience than a symbolic paradigm of the quest for self-knowledge." But the literalness of the thematic reading works against a full account of the novel's symbolic systems, although useful comparisons are drawn between the closing "psychotic" scenes and rituals of pregnancy and parturition. Further, *Surfacing*'s symbolics demand contextualization in Canadian writing and the project to develop a national and nationalist literature, for what Yalom sees as a concluding return to the nuclear family and the vaguely "social" was read by many, at least in 1972, as a call to cultural arms.

"For late twentieth century Americans who constitute a large portion of Atwood's readership," writes Yalom, "the Canadian hinterlands still offer the possibility of a primitive retreat; not so very long ago the American wilderness possessed this same symbolic value in the eyes of Europeans. In such a state of nature, one must depend entirely upon one's own resources, becoming one's own guide, parent, psychiatrist, reinventing religion." To allegorize, ironize, and dismantle the motif of the wilderness spiritual journey has until recently been an express project of English-Canadian literature (*Surfacing* most notably), and this may account in part for the continuing predominance of fiction as a genre. But a glance at the concerns of popular contemporary writers raises questions of whether this is or will continue to be the case. The works of Gallant, Findley, Hospital, Thomas, and Munro are not, or not always, identifiably "Canadian," either in setting or topic or direct exploration of national myths and patterns; the international reputation of many of the listed authors pushes the boundaries still further, as does their intrication with postmodernist and feminist projects. Characteristic, it would seem, of most of the noted authors, and many unlisted others, is an attempt to examine the consequences of being seen, as women, or as English-Canadians, or as members of Canada's other nations, as living in a "state of nature." If we are not to be the ground for an American "retreat," if we are not to be the perpetual carriers of

"symbolic values" not our own, we need to continue — with attention to many voices, forms, knowledges — these processes of literary defamiliarization and cultural construction.

HEATHER MURRAY

# BROADSHEETS

MAXINE TYNES, *Borrowed Beauty*. Pottersfield Press, $7.95.

KENNETH RADU, *Letter to a Distant Father*. Brick Books/Coldstream, $8.75.

A. R. KAZUK, *Microphones*. Brick Books/Coldstream, $9.50.

IT'S TOO BAD that the poetry broadsheet isn't more a part of our publishing tradition in Canada. How much better it would be if poets would publish only their best work, even if just a single poem, than the forty-nine to fifty pages that qualify as "books" according to the Canada Council. For the last fifteen years too many books of poetry have been published every year. Until broadsheets become more popular, or qualify poets for some kind of recognition by the Canada Council, every year we will have to wade through dozens of new poetry books in our search for what will make a lasting contribution to our literature.

A case for a broadsheet instead of a book is *Borrowed Beauty* by Maxine Tynes. Tynes is a politicized writer but she is not a poet yet; her writing deals overwhelmingly with the consciousness of what it means to be black in a predominantly white society. Unfortunately, she does not present the black experience in emotionally charged situations that might engage the reader's sympathy; her anecdotes tend to be superficially described; at other times her poems are full of rhetoric and, at times, clichéd left-wing propaganda with which she assumes the reader agrees. Some of her work sounds as if it is written to be read before a group of politically like-minded people, but not in front of an audience who know anything about poetry. Her poem "Avec Mes Soeurs, Con Mis Hermanas, With My Sisters" is little more than the propaganda poetry one would expect to hear being read in Cuba or Nicaragua at an Independence Day Rally. Its political generalizations fail to challenge the reader:

> your words of blood and
> struggle
> rise and root like trees
> in our collective auditorium
> hearts and minds
> this peace conference night
> sitting
> plush and comfortable
> as your words fall like knives
> we, too, are Nicaraguan

Tynes's work has an oral quality that emphasizes rhythm over concision, imagery, and emotions; this voice will be missed by those who do not read the poetry aloud. Tynes is a writer with something important to say; however, she needs to be more lucid in the articulation of her message.

The title poem in Kenneth Radu's *Letter to a Distant Father* would also make an excellent broadsheet. It is a well-crafted poem that meditates on Radu's discovery that his father, whom he believed dead after the author's childhood escape from an eastern European country at ten years of age, is still alive in a Black Sea hospital. Radu contrasts his present life in a high-tech society with his father's rural existence that seems, not only thousands of miles away, but perhaps centuries distant from today:

> Father,
> remember blue mist seeping
> down the mountain range,
> explosions of hot sun
> against our swarthy cheeks
> when we stepped out of the church
> of incense and shadows?
> I don't go now.

> The official who writes
> begs respectfully to inform
> that you tilt through silent
> corridors as if waiting
> for a secret door to open,
> that your left arm shakes from palsy.

Radu's poem avoids sentimentality in favour of authentic feeling; the father's ghostlike return is a time for reflection on Radu's own existence, which he shares with the reader as though they were two friends sitting listening to this news together.

The other poems in Radu's book are also well crafted but some are more artifice than art. "Royal Women" is such a poem; it presents portraits of various women who were either executed or exiled, some along with their fallen royal husbands, but it is more an exercise in writing than an articulation of insight.

It would be more difficult to excerpt a page or two to publish as a broadsheet, from A. R. Kazuk's *Microphones*, but it could be done. This is a book-length poem that could just as easily, and perhaps to its benefit, be written in prose; indeed, one wonders why this story of an imaginary character, Samson Tull, was written in poetic form at all. The story is about Tull's meeting various other characters, having erotic encounters, joining the police force, killing someone, and finally ending up as Head of Internal Security for the United Nations Building. In addition to all of this, the book is also a video text.

There are two simultaneous narratives in this volume: one, italicized, is a commentary on Tull's activities; the other alternates between a ponderous "poetic" language and the more accessible language of some of the characters. Here is Jésus Niero, Tull's partner, talking:

> Man, when I was born my father took me into the hills and cut my warts. Killed a chicken for each one. Like that's why my hands and face look like dried peaches, man, where these scars come from, like why I look so old. I take after him, my father. He smash up a lot of sluts, man, when he was alive!

Such "fiction" in poetry failed to hold my interest; I found the language ponderous and tedious when it should have been consistently quick-moving and exciting.

STEPHEN MORRISSEY

# ACADIA IN THE SKY

ANTONINE MAILLET, *Garrochés en paradis.* Leméac, $9.95.

ANTOININE MAILLET, *Le Huitième Jour.* Leméac, n.p.

THE NEWS OF La Sagouine's death, published intentionally in *Si Que* as early as 1979, is no longer exaggerated: on Christmas Eve 1985(?) the good lady, her husband Gapi, Don l'Orignal, La Sainte, and Mariaagélas were all blown to smithereens and *garrochés* — into Paradise — when their second-hand gas stove, a gift from the doctor's Widow, exploded in La Sagouine's shack; the same night, Noume's drinking life ended when he slipped on an oily deck, and the Widow choked to death on a chicken bone. *Requiescat in pace.*

For Antonine Maillet, 1986 would seem to have been the year in which, according to an interview in the *Gazette*, "to clean house . . . and put the Sagouine characters away." The decision to leave down-country Acadia behind and move on to new horizons is as applaudable as its execution is flawed (*Le Devoir*'s critique of 9 October 1986 was vitriolic; for an Acadian reaction see *Le Ven' d'est* [December 1986/January 1987]). Dead characters have little more to say than dead people do, and the sixth and final scene of this play, which opened on 1 October 1986 at the Rideau-Vert, is but a rehash of *La Sagouine* (1971), *Don*

*l'Original* (1972), *Mariaagélas* (1973), *Gapi et Sullivan* (1973), *Gapi* (1976), *Evangéline Deusse* (1975), *La Veuve enragée* (1977), and *La Contrebandière* (1981). More disturbingly still, in the anteroom of Paradise the seven characters are made to play up more cruelly than ever before the abyss of bigotry and masochism separating the righteous inhabitants of the right side of the railroad tracks (or the Chemin du Roi) from the Have-Nots wallowing in the misery of their backroads concessions. The standard theme of inter-Acadian chicanery, from which *Les Crasseux* (1973), *Les Cordes-de-Bois* (1977), or *Cent Ans dans les bois* (1981) derive much of their dramatic tension, here smacks of caricature. In Marie-Ange the Widow's eyes, her fellows-in-death have led a life of debauchery, orgies, laziness, thievery, drunkenness, vandalism, and all-round lawlessness; a few people like herself, hard-working and resourceful, have paid for everybody's family allowances, pensions, and U.I.C. benefits. To which the poor devils reply that all they ever received were fleas, bugs, filth, the back-row benches in school, no pews in church, accusations of poaching and rape, and some worn clothes with the buttons cut off.

Antonine Maillet's public used to side spontaneously with such underdogs, out of admiration for the pluck of the down-trodden or in nostalgic remembrance of a simpler if harsher life. That sympathy has died with the reader's patience. What, then, is one to make of this play? As a piece of gut writing ("I write from the guts," she says in the *Gazette* interview) finished two months after *Le Huitième Jour*, it may have been the means to get Sagouine & Co. out of the author's system. There is no denying the importance of such a cathartic act, of such an intimately private act. The public, however, may seek meaning elsewhere: after fifteen years of wrestling in novel after play after story with Acadia's problematic reality of past and present, Antonine Maillet finds herself reduced to grounding the future of her land in the transcendental leap into that Acadia in the sky where there will be "no more suffering and no more worrying." In the face of the Widow's unkind truths, some of which Statistics Canada can corroborate, the bard has hung up her lyre in resignation, for the old heroic tales no longer work their magic. *Garrochés en paradis* signifies an impasse, a declaration of the bankruptcy of a literary concept which has run its course and needs replacing.

The fairy tale, steeped in myth and rich in authorial invention as it may be, is an adequate replacement. *Le Huitième Jour* forsakes La Sagouine's Acadia and escapes into the otherworldly realms of dwarfs, giants, talking animals, and sorceresses. Four heroes — Tom Pouce made of dough, his brother Jean de l'Ours hewn from an oak trunk, and their friends René the sixteenth-century figurehead and Jour en Trop born out of time — set out on an interminable quest to hold Adam and Eve accountable for having wasted Paradise, and to ask the Creator to give the world a second chance. Despite all adversities (wild beasts, captivity, tempests, fires, bandits, plague, and death), they refuse to give up believing that in a better world "les possibles sont infinis."

Tom's craftiness, Jean's strength, René's wisdom, and Jour en Trop's timelessness have been Antonine Maillet's major themes from the beginning, so that in *Le Huitième Jour* only the setting is new. But the picaresque stringing together of adventures soon begins to tax the reader's patience, despite the usual verve with which the episodes are told. Only two succeed in distilling the dreamy moral of the book down to an earthly essence. Having crossed the horizon, the quadruplet enters an upside-down country

where the social pyramid stands on its point, where "le bachelier aspire à devenir docteur; le diacre, archevêque; le lieutenant, maréchal; le péputé, ministre; l'agrégé, titulaire; l'adjoint, directeur; le directeur, directeur-général; et tout le monde, président." Later on, war breaks out between two floating islands: "Ces peuples avaient jadis connu l'exil, quelque part le long de leur histoire, du temps qu'ils étaient encore frères. Eh! oui, frères, sortis d'une même souche, du même ventre d'une terre fertile. Trop fertile, c'était une tentation. Et dos voisins voraces avaient fini par leur tomber dessus. Oh! alors, quelle bouchée on en avait fait! Un morceau de lion! Et le lion vola leurs terres aux enfants du pays. Depuis, ils erraient de par le monde, traînant leurs racines comme des algues, cherchant une terre ferme et solide où les replanter."

Clearly, though, Antonine Maillet's creative genius is not bound by history or social realism. She is a storyteller, not a novelist, and with that unalterable vocation in her mind and "guts" she cannot but join the universal circle of folk philosophers who spin their yarn to teach the world. *Le Huitième Jour* confirms and proclaims what has always been latently present in her work: her fundamental belief that the story of Acadia could heal the world. This book resolutely transcends the Maritimes, Canada, North America, and the Francophonie, puts Acadia on Indian reserves and in black ghettos (cf. *Pélagie-la-Charrette*, 1979), in Jewish diasporas (cf. *Evangéline Deusse*), and in boat-people's exiles (cf. *Cent Ans dans les bois*), and celebrates nothing less than the indestructibility of the human spirit. It is this unfashionable optimism, perhaps more than any literary flaw, which makes the reader uncomfortable. In terms of Antonine Maillet's evolution as a writer, however, *Le Huitième Jour* was predestined, inevitably necessary, for, as Max Dorsinville puts it, "if one's particular situation is investigated deeply enough . . . then . . . the very articulation of one's specificity mutates into the universality of the human experience."

HANS R. RUNTE

# MOVEABLE FEAST

ANDRÉ VACHON, *Toute la terre à décorer*. Editions du Seuil, $19.95.

> C'est un texte sur lequel l'explication, l'interprétation n'ont aucune prise.
>
> — VACHON

ANDRÉ VACHON'S NOVEL is a kind of new *roman de la terre*, but one with a difference since the good earth is no longer just that of French Canada but also the cityscape of Montreal, as well as the world at large, Europe, and especially the United States. Furthermore, Vachon's novel is a social satire of the values, beliefs, and lifestyles of both traditional and contemporary Quebec. With this caustic and well-written text, Vachon has done for the Quebec of the 1980's what Gérard Bessette did for the Quebec of the 1950's in his seminal novel *Le Libraire*. Vachon's text is not always easy reading, for the novel is told in non-chronological order and the narrative voice is passed among the characters (and a narrator) like a cake of soap in a locker room shower. *Ils se passent le "je."* Nor is it always obvious about what or whom the novel is "speaking" as the discourse ranges widely across and through the fields of history, literature, and popular culture, as well as the personal stories of the characters. However, for the reader who is willing to give the benefit of the doubt to the text, meaning is undoubtedly present. And as the reader progresses in his textual journey through the fiction, meaning continues to be produced, in both directions, since a

later narrative sequence may well clear up a previous segment, which appeared to be incomplete or ambiguous. Like so much postmodern fiction, Vachon's text is fragmentary and the pleasure of the text is best savoured in the re-reading.

The principal characters who form a couple are native-born Quebecers, one francophone, one anglophone. Florence Larrivée, sometime student and later professor, is at the time of the narrative present — if one can speak of such a traditional given in an unconventional text — an anthropologist-sociologist in her late twenties: she is described as a "fillette gauchisante, structuraliste et syndicaliste." While growing up in Mistassin, the image of the city and the university represented a means to escape the country and the conventional values of the French-Canadian village and family. Inevitably, her search for new spaces will lead her to Montreal, McGill, and the United States just as her research leads her to English, "la langue franche de la pensée," as Vachon ironically puts it. Florence's approach to her discipline is based on semiotics, a semiotics grounded in a social critique for she is a born debunker, an expert demystifier who excels at turning upside down the received ideas of French-Canadian *doxa*: "Pas une idée qu'elle ne retourne comme crêpe. . . ." Never content with the fast food of North America any more than she was able to swallow the preconceived ideas of her convent upbringing, Florence has a passionate love for real ideas, real facts, and real food. It is therefore not surprising that, like her eighteenth-century *coureur de bois* ancestor, this Larrivée forever seeks to escape the grid of prejudice: the former lived with a *Sauvage* and in her quest for truth Florence teams up with an anglophone Quebecer in his late forties who is of Irish-Catholic descent. Appropriately enough, he is named McCoy: like the Quebec both characters grew up in, he was for a long time an inarticulate, silent person; i.e., *Mc* (= son) *Coy* (= *coi* or "silent" and *quoi?*/"what?"). But there is more, for the character's "label" is truly overdetermined: he is a man of law (*loi* rhymes with *coi*); his name recalls that of another Irish outsider, Molloy; finally, he joins Florence in her search for authenticity since both seek the "real McCoy." Although McCoy lived in a dull greyness (*grisaille*) before he met Florence — he spent time in the stacks of law libraries and the degrading, dirty spaces of taverns — he literally comes to life in the company of his francophone partner, and their appetites for words, ideas, food, and each other are complementary and insatiable. Interestingly enough, McCoy, the silent partner in their intellectual, culinary, and geographic travels, grows loquacious under his friend's tutelage. Furthermore, the older anglophone male who once preferred the centre — in point of fact, the empty, powerless, and meaningless centre of a tavern in downtown Montreal — grows to love the eccentric spaces that fascinate Florence: the antique stores of "la Main," Zeeland, and the Florida Everglades.

However, for the most part, the space of North America is seen by Florence as a giant grid: "C'est tout quadrillé! *A mari usque ad mare!*" and Canada appears as a land of little squares. Montreal too is a degraded and degrading space, one that is compared to a termite-like colony of tunnels inappropriately called *places*. Montrealers seem doomed to circulating in the half life of the underground, of relieving themselves of boredom in the debilitating greyness of yesterday's taverns or the scarcely less inauthentic spaces of today's ethnic restaurants. Montreal is unreal not by definition but by its unique geography: you know you're there because the sun always sets in the north. In other words, neither strong nor free, the

North (Canada) simply does not exist. Thus the cityscape appears as a disorienting space of falsehood: "on ne sait pas où c'est, on ne sait pas ce que c'est." As for post-referendum Quebec, in Vachon's novel it falls under the sign of the negative and the unformulated, of that which continues to remain difficult if not impossible to articulate and realize: "Le pays? Il serait là où, là dans quelque chose qu'on ne saurait encore pas, toujours pas." Furthermore, Quebec is a place which one is always leaving, so strong and necessary is the drive to the South: "Le pays réel fiche le camp, il part pour le Sud, tous les petits Québécois queue leu leu sur la 95." For Vachon, postmodern deconstructionist that he is, even the traditional critical clichés defining Quebec at the crossroads of France, Canada, and the United States are not beyond attack as he puts Quebec's problematical identity, her so-called difference, under the sign of a telling question mark: "Qu'est-ce qu'on est devenus? Plus très français. A moitié, oui, non, américains?" The only "real" place in Quebec is the fabulous "Place Lahontan" which is the object of the lovers' quest: it figures a mythic space that is beyond the grid system. As such it represents a space of happiness outside of the nauseating sameness that characterizes so much of the North American landscape. Although it may and probably does not exist in the "real world," it does not need to, for it does exist as an interior space, a space which lovers like Florence and McCoy can share and grow in together. As such, la place Lahontan, named for that perennial traveller, symbolizes a new *place* that is authentically Québécois. The quest is always already over, for la place Lahontan is an inner space, here significantly shared by two Quebecers, one francophone, the other anglophone. The "message" speaks clearly of the reality of today's Quebec, not in the name of some federally willed-for "biculturalism," but in the inward-turning of a(n) (inter-) personal search for authenticity.

Just as the novel may be read as a kind of map of the cultural space of the Québécois, so too their history is ever present in this encyclopedic text. From the outset, the question of the grid loomed large; i.e., Jesuit angst about just how little land was cleared, about how much remained free and open, inhabited by *libertins*, Indians, and *coureurs de bois*. Without religion or law, "ni foi ni loi," these intellectual ancestors of Florence escaped the stultifying effects of Cartesian geometry (the geographical grid formed by the *seigneuries*) and Catholic orthodoxy (the moral grid based on the absolute necessity of confession and sanctified heterosexual marriage amongst whites). In this carnivalesque novel, Vachon describes the outlaws of yesteryear: "Saisis, tous, par l'espoir d'un lieu hors du royal cadastre, hors des méridiens et parallèles; à l'antipode de ce soleil [the sun *and* the Sun King] qui tout éclaire, meut et lotit." Florence's ancestors symbolically represent various high (or low) points in the history of French Canada. An early Larrivée is supposed to have divulged to Wolfe's officers the way up the cliffs since he had had enough of European wars and French governors. And a nineteenth-century grandfather was one of the French Canadians hoodwinked by the Church and the ideology of the period to go north in order to "make land" in a region not fit for agriculture. Such, of course, was the "Conquête du sol" that was to be the wished-for antidote to the British Conquest of 1763 as well as the ad hoc American Conquest (of the brain and body drain) in the late nineteenth century. As Vachon puts it so succinctly in the following characterization of the *roman de la terre*, both novel and ideology: "La langue, la foi, la race, toujours, à purifier dans le creuset du Nord et

le coït avec le Terre vierge." *Toute la terre à dévorer* provides a biting denunciation of the lies of yesterday, while at the same time illustrating just how (inter) textually innovative a new "novel of the earth" can be in this era of postmodernism.

Language and literature, especially as they were taught to Florence in the stifling space of the convent, are part of the "program" in this most undidactic of novels. Now the sister who taught Florence the history and literature of French Canada had a problem naming the letter "Q" because of its French homonym *cul*, "ass." (Interestingly enough, *que*, which is homonymous with a word for "penis," was substituted.) And yet, however difficult it was for the nun to say the dangerous letter, she still managed to pronounce the actual sound and in fact took such pleasure in this forbidden phonological fruit that she appeared to reach orgasm: "Attaquée de front, cette consonne lui déclenche l'orgasme." Vachon's treatment of the misnamed but beloved letter is an insightful reading of French Canada's collective complexes prior to the Quiet Revolution. (In fact, he claims that at least until very recently even Quebecers' politics influenced their pronunciation of the forbidden letter, since federalists tended to say *que* or even *kiou* (in English) when speaking of the dreaded abbreviation, i.e., *le PQ*!) Of course, as thematized in Molière's *Les Précieuses Ridicules*, even "innocent" words may contain "obscene" syllables and sounds. The sister who taught Florence to mind her P's and Q's also took great pleasure in speaking of the vanquished state of French Canadians (since the Conquest). Such pedagogical discourse, in which the repressed letter returned with an insisting vengeance, is symptomatic not just of some personal neurosis but also of the collective insanity of an entire profession and nation, which had internalized a perceived inferiority in the very shape and form of their speech patterns. The nun's tongue/language was one which "détaillant des histoires de morts, de revenants, de déments, ne perd pas une occasion d'articuler le mot, au pluriel, au singulier et sous les deux sexes, le mot *vaincu*." Thus, those who claimed to be the most faithful to the origins and goals of the collectivity were responsible for the destruction of the language that they claimed to defend and illustrate. Furthermore, they preferred a second rate *paralittérature* of parodic facility to the "real stuff," represented by such writers as Rabelais and Voltaire, absent from and unknown in the traditional school canon of French Canada. The pedagogues of (at least) pre-1960's Quebec are thus seen to be as responsible for the adulteration of the intellectual food of French Canadians as today's bakers and cooks are responsible for the adulteration of the food that their descendants eat. Vachon's character, Florence Larrivée, articulates the need and necessity for authentic foodstuffs, whether for culinary or intellectual enterprises, and as such, she is the spokeswoman for the lost generations of Quebecers who were destined never to know either real thought or food. Vachon's critique is biting and, at least by analogy, today's intellectuals are not exempt from the satire.

In Vachon's novel, times and places (inter) penetrate each other as though in some giant textual coitus. Not that the contents of the fiction are always cheery. Rather, Vachon has thematized and fictionalized the blackness of a nation's collective past with admirable skill and economy. One of the most moving passages in the novel tells the story of a 40-year-old woman who had given birth to eight children. Sick, she sends for a priest to hear her confession. He delays setting out for the distant farm and arrives after the woman has died, only to tell her youngest

son that his mother has gone to HELL! So traumatic was the horrible experience that "Larry" turns his back on his country, goes south to Georgia where he forgets his French and changes his name. The woman was legion and her death typically unspectacular, but it is with a kind of uncanny foreboding that we read the end of this narrative sequence: Larry's real name was/is Victor Larrivée and the woman in question was Florence's mother. The story is doubly emblematic, of both the characters' personal trajectories *and* the collective story of Quebec. Indeed, the writing turns dark and the tone is reminiscent of *Refus Global*: "Rien que du noir. Partout le visage de l'erreur, une espèce de noirceur à l'intention des têtes qui éclate en phrases tronquées, mots et jurons confondus." Victor's bitterness provides a mirror image of Florence's caustic comments on Quebec, the country that literally sent her mother to hell. Thus, in terms of character "development," such an episode motivates (*vraisemblabilise*) the fiction, but it also provides the paradigmatic links without which there can be no text. No detail is too small to be important; no detail is superfluous in the space of the text. For example, just before Mme Larrivée supposedly arrived in hell, she was making pancakes for her children. Florence, we are told, is as apt at turning accepted ideas upside down as a good cook turns over her *crêpes*. But there is more, for the good reader must turn things (i.e., words) upside down too: *crêpe* is also the black fabric that is the symbol of death. Mourning becomes French Canada, hence the blackness of the costumes and the refusal.

Vachon's novel is a true carnivalesque text, a polyphonic orchestration in which different times and places, characters, and narrative voices mix and blend, not to mention the juxtaposition of various languages (French — modern, sixteenth century, European and Québécois — English, Greek, Latin). It is entirely to Vachon's credit just how much of the history — but also the "herstory" — of Quebec he has been able to include within the "bounds" of this open-ended fiction, for the text is both a kind of anti-History and an "anti-novel." Among the "characters" who play not-so-minor roles either as *actants* or *écrivants* in this mobile (inter-) textual feast, one could list Cartier, Lahontan, Durham, Papineau, Casgrain, de Gaspé Père, Crémazie, Sir Basile Routhier, Johnson, de Gaulle, etc. While the social critique is bitter, the thrust of the novel is not negative. Rather, by its style and narrative techniques, *Tout la terre à dévorer* acquires an impetus and a momentum that make it a novel of writerly and readerly bliss. Vachon, who has written on the literature of the sixteenth century, has given us a Rabelaisian "new novel," one that is also a postmodern *roman de la terre*, and one of the most authentically Québécois texts to appear since the advent of the 1960's.

RALPH SARKONAK

# MAÎTRE DRAVEUR

RENÉ DIONNE, ed., *Histoire de Menaud. Revue d'histoire du Québec et du Canada français*, 13 (hiver-printemps, 1987), $25.00.

BY THE TIME of his death in 1982, Félix-Antoine Savard had been recognized for several decades as a major figure of French-Canadian literature. Sought after by students writing theses on his work and by critics wishing to confirm their interpretations, Savard retained to the end a simplicity and dignity that few who achieve celebrity are able to maintain. Steeped in the wisdom of Christianity and the classics of Greek and Roman literature, he never lost contact with the common man; a firm believer in transcen-

dence, he remained very close to nature; a writer who preached and practised a classical, polished style, he retained a lifelong fascination with popular, rural language; a deeply committed nationalist, he could nevertheless not bring himself to support the referendum on sovereignty-association. Far from indicating contradictions within his own personality, as some have suggested, these paradoxes derive from his rather unique condition as an intellectual whose activity was informed by a genuine humility.

By general consensus, Savard's masterpiece is *Menaud, Maître-Draveur*, first published in 1937. Widely taught in schools and universities, it inevitably finds itself on most lists of classics of French-Canadian literature. It is most appropriate, then, that *RHLQCF* should devote an issue to the novel to mark the fiftieth anniversary of its publication. The issue contains eleven articles on *Menaud*, all of which are worth reading, but some of which merit special recognition.

Pierre-H. Lemieux takes issue in "L'Architecture de *Menaud, Maître-Draveur*" with the division of the novel into three stages (as proposed by Renaud and then Ricard), which, he claims, does not take into sufficient account the last chapter of the book. Lemieux sees the novel as composed of two movements, the first culminating in chapter five, in which the consequences of Joson's death are assessed, and the second culminating in chapter ten, when Marie and Alexis decide to continue their struggle in spite of Menaud's madness. This leads Lemieux to read the novel as optimistic rather than tragic. For Lemieux, the novel's closure does not mark the end of Menaud's struggle, but rather its continuation through the joint efforts of Marie and Alexis. The conciliation of the stable peasant (Marie) and the nomadic *trappeur* (Alexis) augurs well for the future. Lemieux errs, though, in depicting this struggle as a local affair devoid of patriotic or nationalistic implications. Clearly, the repeated quotations from *Maria Chapdelaine* are more than "une belle enluminure pour un sujet d'ordre local" as Lemieux affirms. There is no question, though, that Lemieux's essay is an important and original rereading of *Menaud, Maître-Draveur*, one that will certainly provoke controversy.

Claude Filteau's "Le Mystique du corps social dans *Menaud, Maître-Draveur*" is a substantial contribution to our understanding of the ideological substrata of Savard's novel. Filteau explores the text's relations to the religious tradition, its use of religious imagery, and its treatment of *Maria Chapdelaine* as a sacred text. He is alert to the humanistic traditions that inform *Menaud* and particularly its poetic presentation of nature. He analyzes the concept of race ("le sang") in the novel, and concludes that this ideologically conservative text defies modernity while being poetically innovative. Marie-Andrée Beaudet in "Le Procédé de la citation dans *Menaud, Maître-Draveur*" explores further *Menaud*'s relations to *Maria Chapdelaine*, seen as a canonical text. She correctly notes that, while the intervention of the voice in *Maria Chapdelaine* brings an end to the conflict, in *Menaud* it initiates and nourishes it. In Savard's novel, *Maria Chapdelaine* is not a book, but *the* book; that is, the sacred repository of truth. Beaudet's insightful essay does not, however, come to terms with the striking change in signification that occurs in part of Hémon's text as it functions in Savard's novel. Hémon's "Rien n'a changé," for example, refers to the quiet survival of the French, while in Savard's text it provokes a spirit of *revendication*. Beaudet is correct, however, in stressing that Savard's aesthetic preoccupations constitute in large part the newness and originality of the book.

The most personal essay in the collection is André Brochu's "*Menaud* Today" in which he expresses his post-referendum emapthy with Menaud the character and his saddened admiration for *Menaud* the book, which he reads as "un grand chant de défaite." Brochu discusses the text's nationalism in the context of the ideology of the 1930's (with its emphasis on race). This is a nationalism identified with religion (even though religion plays no overt role in the novel); it is also a nationalism in which the sense of nationhood does not have juridical or political dimensions. Brochu's mainly political analysis, it should be noted, is not without some pertinent and useful commentary on the narratology of the text.

Two essays by Jacqueline Gourdeau and Ruggero Campagnoli adopt a psychoanalytical approach to Savard's text. Gourdeau is interested in the presence of sexual and aggressive pulsions in the text and in their repression and sublimation. She is also concerned with Menaud's need for authority and domination, which she interprets as phantasms of megalomania, and with his narcissistic relationship to Joson and Alexis. Campagnoli argues that the reason for the hero's final defeat is to be found, not in the circumstances representing a historical reality, but in the hero's own profound impotence. Menaud is really a bearer of death, causing ultimately his own son's death and the sterility of his daughter and future son-in-law. Campagnoli finds both fear of sexuality and phantasms of endogamy in this text. There had not been psychoanalytical studies of *Menaud* prior to these two essays. They are both worthwhile and will undoubtedly lead to other attempts, which will certainly develop and perhaps alter the conclusions found here.

This issue also contains a study by Clément Moisan on how the novel has been assessed by literary historians, an analysis by Thomas Lavoie of the regionalisms in the first edition of *Menaud*, a brief essay by Jean-Marcel Paquette on a recent operatic version (yet unperformed) of *Menaud, Maître-Draveur* by Marc Gagné, and a discussion by Larry Shouldice of the three English translations of the novel.

EMILE J. TALBOT

# DEBTS REPAID

MICHAEL NOLAN, *Foundations: Alan Plaunt and the Early Days of CBC Radio.* CBC Enterprises, $22.95.

IN 1965, E. AUSTIN WEIR wrote in his book, *The Struggle for National Broadcasting in Canada*, that "those now engaged in broadcasting in Canada, and particularly those in the CBC, owe a debt that has never been adequately acknowledged, much less paid, to [Graham] Spry and [Alan] Plaunt." Twenty-three years later, the CBC has acknowledged its debt, at least in part, with the publication of a book about Alan Plaunt, one of the members of the Canadian Radio League, a group that lobbied for national public broadcasting in the 1930's. Though some may wonder at the tardiness of the acknowledgement, the CBC published *Foundations* in 1986 to coincide with its fiftieth anniversary celebration. It is a fitting tribute because, as the book's subtitle suggests, without Alan Plaunt's contribution to "the Early Days of CBC Radio," there may not have been a CBC to celebrate.

The author, Michael Nolan, argues that of the many advocates of public broadcasting in the 1930's, Alan Plaunt, "probably more than any other single individual, was responsible for the permanent establishment of publicly owned radio in Canada." The first chapters detail Plaunt's boyhood and university life, and

outline Canadian radio broadcasting up to the Aird Report of 1929. The rest of the book brings together Nolan's two chief interests — Plaunt and early CBC radio — charting how, from 1930 to his death from cancer in 1941, Plaunt influenced the course of public broadcasting.

Each chapter describes a milestone in Plaunt's efforts: the creation of the Canadian Radio League in 1930; the successful presentation of the League's views before the Supreme Court and the British Privy Council in 1931 and 1932; Plaunt's founding of the New Canada Movement, a young farmers' group lobbying to bring about a 'New Deal' for Canada, in 1933; his revival of the Canadian Radio League in 1935 and its successful lobbying for a Corporation to replace the unpopular Commission; the 1936 creation of the CBC; and, finally, Plaunt's founding of the Neutrality League (1938) and subsequent resignation from the CBC board in protest over wartime censorship (1940). The book closes with an epilogue that summarizes and amplifies Plaunt's contributions.

Michael Nolan is a former broadcast journalist, has a doctorate in history from the University of Western Ontario, and now teaches at the Graduate School of Journalism at Western. As a journalist, Nolan obviously enjoys the human interest quality of the Alan Plaunt story; as a historian, he is conscious of providing social and political details supported by archival collections of correspondence, official reports to the House of Commons, and interviews with Plaunt's associates, family, and friends.

For the general reading public, this combination makes for a more readable book than other, strictly factual accounts of the history of Canadian broadcasting such as Weir's *The Struggle for National Broadcasting* or Frank Peer's *The Politics of Canadian Broadcasting*. At times, the overcoming of the political obstacles is gripping, as in Chapter Seven when Plaunt convinces Prime Minister King to abandon the Canadian Radio Broadcasting Commission (CRBC) and establish the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC), or again, in the final chapter, when he champions free speech over wartime censorship in his confrontation with Gladstone Murray, chairman of the CBC board of governors.

But the combination of journalism and scholarship has its problems. In some of the chapters where Plaunt plays a secondary role, and where no clear dramatic situation presents itself, Nolan allows scholarship to overshadow story. This happens, for instance, when he details the creation of the Canadian Radio League by another advocate of CBC radio, Graham Spry. Nolan's impulse is not wrong: academic thoroughness dictates that he add background information to expand and qualify his main argument. But it does frustrate the reader's expectations, especially since the first two chapters on Plaunt's boyhood and education create the impression of a *Bildungsroman* and encourage the reader to expect that Plaunt will remain the principal character, an expectation reinforced by the subtitle, "Plaunt and . . . ," and the smart photograph of Plaunt on the jacket cover.

No doubt, this tension is one of the pitfalls of reworking a doctoral dissertation — a prose form with its own particular conventions and audience — into a book for a more general readership. To my mind, Nolan missed two golden opportunities to marry story and scholarship. First, Plaunt's 1934 and 1936 submissions to parliamentary committees should have been examined more thoroughly in conjunction with the 1936 Broadcasting Act, to show the reader more precisely how Plaunt contributed to the present-day Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. Likewise, the white paper (1938) that Plaunt prepared for the government on political

broadcasting policy deserves more careful consideration, since, as Nolan points out, the paper "governed political broadcasting in Canada for three decades, and served as a basic guide for parties and broadcasters until the passage of the Election Expenses Act in 1974." In general, however, Nolan treads the fine line between journalism and scholarship rather well. For those readers who would like a book that considers the political and social forces that created the CBC in light of one man's efforts, *Foundations* answers the need.

JILL TOMASSON GOODWIN

# KANADA-STUDIEN

KONRAD GROSS & WALTER PACHE, eds., *Grundlagen zur Literatur in englischer Sprache: Kanada.* Munich: Fink, DM 48.00.

IN OR ABOUT 1982 continental Europe began to take a serious interest in Canada. After all, Her Majesty's signing the Constitution Act in Ottawa did make the evening news. And so did Calgary's hosting of the Olympic Winter Games. But had not Montreal, too, received a lot of attention some fifteen years previously when Charles de Gaulle declared, "Vive le Québec libre"? Thus, the 1982 beginning is pushed back: for the past twenty years, at least, a growing number of German-speaking scholars have discovered an interest in Canadian literature and culture. With official Canada beginning to turn outward at about the same time, this seems to be a reciprocal relationship, leading, in the German-speaking countries, to the founding of the "Gesellschaft für Kanada-Studien" (Association of Canadian Studies), a scholarly journal (*Zeitschrift der Ges. f. Kanada-Studien*), and a host of publications on matters Canadian. With the educational institutions following suit, documentation centres sprang up, four major libraries began special collections, and even an Institute of Canadian Studies was founded (in Augsburg, Bavaria). Canadian Studies has made it into the curricula of at least five West German universities. So even if it were merely to satisfy the needs of an ever-growing scholar and student population at work in Canadian Studies, a book like this would be welcomed. As it is, there is much more for which this book justly deserves praise.

The covering title for the series to which this book belongs is "Grundlagen zur Literatur in englischer Sprache" ("fundamentals of literatures in English"), and the work is intended as one of a seven-volume series, eventually to cover the literatures of Canada, Australia, New Zealand, India, Western and Eastern Africa, South Africa, and the Caribbean. Similar in design, each volume will, by way of an introductory section, set up a framework for a collection of some thirty critical articles, both historical and contemporary, outlining the problems of identifying and defining a regional literature; related subjects are the development of a colonial politics of language and education, the role of literature in the struggle for nationhood, and, finally, the push and pull between regionalism and internationalism. The contemporary section includes perspectives other than literary (such as those of linguistics, sociology, and political science). The present volume is rounded off by an impressive interdisciplinary bibliography of secondary sources (updated through 1985) as well as by suggestions for readings in fiction, poetry, and drama. Seriousness of purpose is underlined by the three-part index (author, title, and subject). Particularly helpful is the provision of addresses of booksellers in Canada, as well as of research centres both in Canada and elsewhere.

All this makes the book wider in scope

than Carl Ballstadt's anthology, *The Search for English-Canadian Literature* (1975). Not only have the editors made it possible for the reader to do in-depth work by conveniently going back to the sources, they also have reconstructed the debates informing Canadian culture from its beginning. In their own account of the history of English-Canadian literature, Gross and Pache have adopted Hans Galinsky's four-phase model of literary history: a colonial period of cultural imports, to the subsequent reshaping of these, the struggle for an independent voice, and, finally, cultural maturity. The usefulness of this model is evident in that it takes the edge off the rather fruitless debate over whether the beginning of Canadian literature dates from the Quebec Act or from Confederation. Looking at Canadian literature within the context of world literature and social history, we recognize that in the nineteenth century the dominant rationalist-utilitarian ideology, explaining the historical process as a progress from barbarity to civilization, much as it would insist on the "usefulness" of writing at large, all but stymied an adversary tradition of romanticism.

Given the constraints of the model adopted here, the authors' decision to design both the introductory narrative and the anthology section along the lines of the great debate over a Canadian identity (i.e., around the question of whether there is a "distinctive . . . character" to Canadian literature) becomes a logical necessity. Hence a host of voices in the romantic vein from Thomas D'Arcy McGee through the conservative nationalism of Georges Bugnet and Lionel Stevenson, and also the modernists and their discontent with the Canadian Authors' Association. The reader will also be delighted to find such classics as E. K. Brown's essay "On Canadian Poetry," MacLennan's "Boy Meets Girl in Winnipeg and Who Cares?" and Douglas LePan's anatomy of the "Dilemma of the Canadian Author." Robin Mathews's analysis of Canadian literature and colonialism (from his *Canadian Literature: Surrender or Revolution*) seems intended to make for controversy. A different perspective is opened with Chapter B4, reconstructing the debate between "continentalists" and "true northists." Chapter B5 contains voices, from various points of view and over the past generation or so, that have shaped the debate over the Canadianness of Canadian literature (Malcolm Ross, Northrop Frye, John Robert Colombo, Don Gutteridge, Margaret Atwood, Ronald Sutherland); Chapter B6 is taken up by "selected topics," ranging from R. L. McDougall's essay on "Class in Canadian Literature" to Geoff Hancock on the Canadian Short Story, Eva-Marie Kröller on "Comparative Canadian Literature," and, finally, Robert Kroetsch's postmodernist piece on "Contemporary Standards in the Canadian Novel" (the extent to which the latter two fit the description of "identity" does seem to beg the question, however).

This is a representative collection, revealing a sure grasp of what is essential for an understanding of English-Canadian culture. Bearing in mind that in the social sciences the object is not so much a given as a construction dependent on choice of concepts and organization of discourse, quarrelling with the editors over the selection they have made seems not only over-fastidious but gratuitous. Those interested in how a different object construction accounts for a different selection of texts might want to compare this book to Eli Mandel and David Taras, eds., *A Passion for Identity* (1987), published too late to be cited by Gross and Pache. Mandel and Taras devote half of their book (which is essentially a collection of contemporary sources) to what they call "regional identities," thus privileging such notions as biculturalism and

multiculturalism, or ethnicity. In the *Grundlagen*, there is but room for one such voice: Hugh R. Innis.

There is yet another collection of texts published too late to be of use to Gross and Pache: Michael D. Behiels, ed., *Quebec Since 1945* (1987). I mention it here to draw attention to some of the consequences of what may be called the "balkanization of the discipline" (it is perhaps interesting to note that in the Republic of Ireland, the Association of Canadian Studies is located at the Department of French, Trinity College, Dublin). Thus it is not Gross and Pache who are to blame for paying insufficient attention to French Canada, although the call for the inclusion of French-Canadian literature and culture could with almost equal justice be complemented by a call for the inclusion of other ethnic literatures, including that of Native Canadians, if one takes multiculturalism or cultural diversification seriously. It must also be admitted that such a policy would be harsh for students of English, for whom most of the *Grundlagen* is already in a foreign language.

While the book is carefully designed and meticulously proofread, the fact that the notes appear at the end of the anthology section, arranged by chapter and cross-referenced, is bothersome. As to the usefulness of the notes, opinion will be divided. If one may find justifiable (albeit deplorable, from the point of view of a liberal arts education) the translation of Latin passages, I am not entirely convinced that students who have had at least some English literature before taking up Canadian Studies need to have John Milton identified. Inexplicable is the English summary of the introductory narrative (the book is written in German) sandwiched between that section and the anthology section. But I do not wish to end on a note of disapproval. I did enjoy working through the book, which is graced by both smoothness of style and a sure grip of diction. And one must admire the erudition of the authors. If I have taken the liberty of pointing out some of the ground not covered, as well as some of the roads a future Canadian Studies in Europe might want to take, it is not to deny that this book already transcends the fare offered by traditional English or American Studies. Like Pache's pioneering *Introduction to Canadian Studies* (1981), this book will be remembered both by the students, who will also appreciate the cautious guidance into the new, and by the teacher *not* at one of the major Canadian Studies centres, who will appreciate the work as a substantial compensation for inadequate library facilities and who may therefore find it less forbidding to go Canadian.

HEINZ TSCHACHLER

# SHORT STORIES

As a teacher, I have usually thought of Canadian short stories as something to be used as a supplement in a course on Canadian fiction, an extension, an extra, or a relief from the demands of the longer works. But the shape of a superbly interesting course (or several courses) on Canadian short fiction *per se* can be seen in a number of recent anthologies. As a core text, I would use either Margaret Atwood and Robert Weaver's *The Oxford Book of Canadian Short Stories in English* (Oxford Univ. Press, $24.95), or W. H. New's *Canadian Short Fiction: From Myth to Modern* (Prentice-Hall, n.p.). The former contains forty-one stories from as many authors; it opens with Isabella Valancy Crawford's "Extradited" and closes (the arrangement is by author's birthdate) with stories by Sandra Birdsell, Edna Alford, Katherine Govier, and Guy Vanderhaege. New's collection has sixty pieces by fifty-three authors, including "myths and tales," five stories translated from the French, and considerably more classroom apparatus than the Oxford collection. To supplement one of these texts, my imaginary course in Canadian short fiction would add one or two of the

following titles to develop a particular emphasis, to provide an amplification or reassessment of the standard canon: regional, through *Alberta Bound: Thirty Stories by Alberta Writers*, edited by Fred Stenson (NeWest, $4.95), or *The Old Dance: Love Stories of One Kind and Another*, thirty stories mainly from Saskatchewan, edited by Bonnie Burnard (Coteau, $4.95); cross-cultural, with *Invisible Fictions: Contemporary Stories from Quebec*, thirty-six stories edited by Geof Hancock (Anansi, $14.95), or *Evening Games: Chronicles of Parents and Children*, fourteen stories on the relationship of child to parent from several countries, including two by Canadians, collected by Alberto Manguel (Penguin, $9.95); or generic, through the use of the first anthology of English-Canadian novellas, *On Middle Ground*, edited by Douglas Daymond and Leslie Monkman (Methuen, $19.95), which collects seven novellas by Lowry, Gallant, Thomas, Metcalf, and others. The editors' note about this uncertain genre might serve as epigraph to my hypothetical course: "In an era in which a whole range of assumptions relating to questions of language, narrative and identity are being questioned, both cultures and genres once seen as marginal now assume a new prominence."

Anthologies of poetry seem in this context more specialized of late. One that catches an echo of Alberto Manguel's *Evening Games* is *Relations: Family Portraits* (Mosaic, $12.95), an anthology which editor Kenneth Sherman organizes according to the intriguing possibility of the poem, or a collection of poems, as family romance and a place of retreat from the new land. *Heading Out: The New Saskatchewan Poets* (Coteau, $9.95), edited by Don Kerr and Anne Szumigalski, might be read as a questioning of the propositions in E. F. Dyck's "The Rhetoric of the Prairie Formula-Poem," an article in a recent *Prairie Fire* (Spring 1987). The anthology seems to signal a disappearance of landscape, as family romance and urban garden seize none of the poet's attention. There may be something other than sheer coincidence in many of the poems on family connections in *Arrivals: Canadian Poetry in the Eighties*, an issue of the *Greenfield Review* (Summer-Fall 1986) edited by Bruce Meyer, devoted to introducing American readers to Canadian poetry. Carolyn Meyer, in one of the three essays included in the anthology, links doubting and family romance in concluding her discussion of Eli Mandel: "The family romance embodies the Oedipal relationship between Father and Son — Father and Son not only in the literal sense, but also in the poetic sense. . . . In the image of the petroglyphs we find the root of the recurring problem . . . in the past is foretold the future."

L.R.

# REFERENCE

NICHOLAS PARSONS' *The Book of Literary Facts* (Facts on File, $19.95) is a trivia sourcebook for some sorts of bibliophile; if you want Tolstoy's list of the books that most influenced him or Brophy's list of masterpieces we could do without, or stories of lost manuscripts and authorial calamities, this is for you. *Eyewitness to History*, ed. John Carey (Harvard, $24.95), assembles a few paragraphs by assorted worthies from 430 B.C. (Thucydides on plague) to A.D. 1986 (James Fenton on the fall of Marcos), all of whom saw at first-hand a notable event. The editor has interpreted "event" widely; mostly this is an American book, a record of battle and bombing and Europe, but it is punctuated with descriptions of bull-baiting, circumcision, curry-tasting, and suttee. The one reference to Canada I found was W. H. Davies' account of jumping a train in 1899. Jan Bassett's *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Australian History* (Oxford, $15.01) is precisely what it claims to be: a mini-*Companion* with brief notes on a range of persons, places, things, and ideas from ANZAC to QANTAS, "Canadian Rebels" to Patrick White. Webster's *New World Dictionary of Quotable Definitions* (General, $21.95) is a variant sourcebook for after-dinner speakers: how did the Famous define Law and Literature over the ages? Here they all are.

W.N.

* * *

HISTORIANS OF THE criticism of Canadian literature, who might categorize the 1970's as the decade when several alternate journals of scholarly criticism emerged and flourished, will likely describe the 1980's as the era of the compact biographical-bibliographical-critical dictionary. They will cite the *Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature*, ECW's Annotated Bibliographies of Canada's Major Authors, and omnibus bibliographies from Gale Research; they will note that behind much of this activity, although less exclusively literary, lay the massive accumulation of information

associated with the *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*. Much of this enterprise was dictated by a general desire in the community to begin to organize the random proliferation of publication which accompanied the expansion of academic studies of Canadian literature after 1960. It was all very well to have an article on Atwood's *The Circle Game*, but how did the critic's approach differ from or relate to other critics' comments? ECW Press developed the most ample series of guidebooks titled *Canadian Writers and Their Works* with a particular emphasis on coherence: each essay must begin with sections devoted, in order, to Biography, Tradition and Milieu, and Critical Overview and Context. Moreover, as the two volumes of the Poetry Series released in 1987 demonstrate, ECW also extends its concern with milieu and critical overview by collecting essays on individual writers into books on particular historical phases of Canadian literature. Poetry Series: Volume Three (ECW, $40.00) brings together essays on four poets who emerge as important and distinctive writers in the 1920's — Raymond Knister, Dorothy Livesay, E. J. Pratt, and W. W. E. Ross; Poetry Series: Volume Five (ECW, $40.00) is devoted to Earle Birney, Louis Dudek, Irving Layton, Raymond Souster, and Miriam Waddington, poets whom George Woodcock (one of his clear, informative overviews introduces each volume) describes without too many wrenching qualifications as neo-modernists of the American (rather than English) strain. A more compact work, of the "ready-reference" variety, is Dundurn Press's Profiles in Canadian Literature Series (Dundurn, $16.50 per volume). Sampling in Volumes 5 and 6 convinced me that the effect of such guides is not simply nor exclusively to reiterate the standard canon and to reinforce critical truisms. Merely putting Nicole Brossard, Réjean Ducharme, Gérard Bessette together in the same volume with Douglas LePan, Francis Sparshott, and Leonard Cohen necessitates reconsidering our assumptions about who should be taught and who should be read. For several of the writers editor Jeffrey Heath includes, only reviews exist to suggest a critical stance; thus I found interesting, for example, E. A. Trott's attempt to define Robin Mathews' political views, and Frederick Sweet's tentative beginning at defining W. D. Valgardson's style. The same reaction is provoked by *Canadian Writers Since 1960: First Series* (Dictionary of Literary Biography, Vol. 53, Gale, $88.00) edited by W. H. New. Sixty-seven essays (twenty on Québécois(e) writers) bring together the established (Robert Kroetsch), the established-but-neglected (Margaret Avison), the almost-invisible (John Buell, Yves Préfontaine), and the surprising (Laurence J. Peter). *Canadian Writers Since 1960: Second Series* (DLB 60, $92.00) recently added another eighty-two entries to create a still more eclectic and comprehensive resource-book for contemporary writing, while *Canadian Writers 1920-1959: First Series* (DLB 68, $95.00) extends the coverage to writers whose reputation was established as Modernism took hold. Cumulatively the various dictionaries will give us a grounding in facts (although many entries will soon need revising), and an initial critical framework for many writers who have been little discussed. Many of the essays entertain with new insights: Peter and Meredith Quartermain in their stylistically lively analysis of George Bowering's "Radio Jazz," or Linda Hutcheon's argument about social concerns and the relation between poetry and fiction in Atwood. But the real value of the development of dictionaries and handbooks may well lie in the next century. Almost everyone who has written one of these entries (and it is difficult in the Canadian critical community to find someone who has not) will tell you of their own discoveries, of their own rising interest in a writer whom they might otherwise have ignored, or in a book that had never been borrowed from the library since its publication. The promise is here, both for writers and readers, of a more mature and solid and imaginative study of Canadian writing, in the broadest sense, in the next two or three decades. The ripples made here will continue to affect us that long.

L.R.

**** JEAN ROYER, *La Poésie Québécoise Contemporaire*. Héxagone, $19.95. This book samples the poetry of seventy-seven francophone poets from Saint-Denys-Garneau and Rina Lasnier to Fulvio Caccia and Louise Warren. It is a very useful (though selective) first-hand guide to trends in modern Quebec poetry, and comes complete with a survey and biographical notes.

W.N.

opinions and notes

# THE ONE LIGHTED ROOM

## *In the Skin of a Lion*

AT EASE IN A VAST, black leather chair in a board room at The Pagurian Corporation, Christopher Ondaatje speaks with animation of the latest novel, *In the Skin of a Lion*, by his younger brother, Michael Ondaatje. Both are immigrants to Canada, both exceedingly successful in their diametrically opposed, respective fields of finance and literature. But as Christopher Ondaatje speaks, I wonder if the writer has strayed as far from the family for characters in his new novel as the financier suggests.

Christopher Ondaatje is clearly a "boss," having mushroomed the thirteen dollars in his pocket upon arrival in Canada into many millions. He could, without difficulty, be identified with either of two historical personages: the theatre magnate Ambrose Small or Commissioner of Works Rowland Harris, both fictionalized in his brother's new novel. Ceylon's independence in 1948 had sent Britain shopping for tea elsewhere and brought about declining fortune for the locals, including the Ondaatje family. Christopher realized there was no future for him in Sri Lanka. "The main thing I wanted to do was put the family back on the map, and rebuild the family fortune. If you are ambitious and want to get up from the bottom badly enough — of course you can make it! You have to learn everything about the country — the history, the geography and then the people. All the people. I read every book written on anybody who had ever made it in Canada — both politically and financially. Then I had to learn the 'players.'" Christopher finds it fascinating that both he and Michael, independently, were intrigued by the entrepreneur Ambrose Small. "But in the end Michael didn't really like the man at all and didn't particularly want to write about him. From being the central character at first Small's role diminished and diminished. Michael gets close to the financial scene but then shies off — unlike me — from 'that other world.' But then Michael never really understood Ambrose Small." When Patrick Lewis, the novel's main character, claims to have hated Ambrose Small "because he had what I wanted," Alice Gull counters, "I don't think so. You don't want power. You were born to be a younger brother."

Rejecting an early, intricate plot centred on the deals of Small, Michael Ondaatje's interest shifts to unwritten history, to the forgotten threads of community. (The book is dedicated to the memory of four of his friends, all of whom died violently before their time, passing into the grey of unrecorded history.) With *In the Skin of a Lion* he explores a sphere of the city of Toronto between 1918 and 1938, the lives of working-class immigrants, largely Macedonians, Italians, and Bulgarians; the lives of those "trying to get going, trying to leave their mark, trying to create a new life," according to brother Christopher, and their clashes with authority. Patrick Lewis, a native of Bellrock, Ontario, is another kind of immigrant — from the country to the city, to a community of Macedonians whose language is not his own. "He was their alien," we learn, the son of a dynamiter, an uncommunicative man who fulfilled his obligations matter-of-factly. Patrick is equally closed and self-contained, arriving in the city psychologically shut off from his childhood of "letters frozen inside mailboxes after ice storms." The narrative revolves around Patrick as he comes in contact with various labour and

social movements and two enigmatic women, Clara Dickens, the mistress of Ambrose Small, and Alice Gull, a mysterious woman without a past. Patrick's vitality, initially diminished to paralysis (he feels transparent, absorbs "everything at a distance"), is painfully reborn as he opens himself to affection, to community, to the goals of community and his past. He is "delivered . . . out of nothing."

*In the Skin of a Lion* celebrates the worker. The rich and powerful are suspect. Commissioner Harris, albeit a visionary, a builder of majestic cities, is a man who does not speak to his workers, and whose concern, when the Bloor viaduct claims a life during construction, is for the reputation of the bridge. "I can absolutely identify with Harris," Christopher Ondaatje interjects. "He wants to get the damn thing done. When Van Horne was building the railway line over muskeg and swamp, bridges collapsed, engines fell into the bog. He just had to start again. Bash on. You *have* to be inhuman or you wouldn't get the CPR built. And we needed the railway, just as we needed the viaduct. Someone has to take the responsibility."

Arriving ten years after his brother, Michael Ondaatje has lived in Canada for twenty-five years, writing of foreign landscapes, of Sri Lanka's palms and cinnamon, of American outlaws and unstable black mountains. He is an anomaly in the Canadian literary tradition. If the quality of his writing (a two-time winner of the Governor General's Award for poetry and a 1987 finalist for fiction) assures him a place in our history, the content and perspective of his writing have kept him an outsider. Until now. In *Running in the Family* he sought to decipher his splendid and terrible roots. This recovery seems, finally, to have freed him to explore this landscape, the Ontario landscape he has adopted, the one we have already seen in some poetry from *Secular Love*, the one that is now "home."

Not so many years ago Ondaatje protested, "I could never write about winter." Exotic landscapes were the author's obsession. When Ondaatje finally turns his macro-lens eye on winter he finds it as compelling, as mysterious, as dangerous as the tropics. Recording the drowning of a cow in frigid water, he writes, "In this whiteness where does the earth end. . . ." Patrick's father "puts his ungloved hand against the cow's ear to collect the animal's heat. He lies down sideways on the ice and plunges his arm down again, the water inches from his face." Winter forces Ondaatje to order the chaos that is his vision of life to a more distilled, more ascetic, more northern if you like, form.

One of the chief structuring and, therefore, unifying forces in this novel is its psychological (and painterly) play with light and shadow. While certain scenes, such as the dyeing vats in the tannery achieve their force through an application of rich colour, they play their strongest part as contrast to the pervading *chiaroscuro* that haunts the book from the beginning to the last line. The words "blackness," "darkness," "night" (and their counterparts "whiteness," "snow," "sun") receive astonishing repetitions, so emphatic and pervasive the "dark" forms an underlying *ostinato*, a pulse (the "light," clear overtones), to the novel. On page 9, forms of light and dark appear ten times in seventeen lines. This creates an underground, rhythmic inexorability, as in a Bach cantata, which drives the narrative along. Somewhat subversive, like the explicit content of this book.

Focus on the Ontario winter landscape may well have brought Ondaatje to this stark and abiding duality. In psychological symbolism, darkness represents the unconscious: the precondition of consciousness; the ground for disintegration and/or germination before experiencing

new insight, the white light of consciousness. White and black metamorphose into each other. Day follows night. Fire ultimately leaves charred ashes. Ondaatje intuits and deftly wields this symbolism. He once wrote a poem to his mother called "Light": flashes of lightning/insight in a midnight storm. A working title for *In the Skin of a Lion* was *Available Light*. Surely the choice of the name Caravaggio for a central character, while appealing to Ondaatje for obvious reasons relating to the painter's scandalous and lawless life, his rejection of idealization, and the immediacy of his work, must owe a good deal to his unsurpassed mastery of the drama of light and shadow. For Caravaggio, as for Ondaatje, this device is a prime unifying factor in his paintings. And "Clara," of course, means "light."

Patrick is symbolized by the moths that mesmerize him — in darkness drawn to light, "clinging to brightness." "They will have seen this one lighted room and travelled towards it." In the rescue of the cow from the frozen river, a scene of extreme trial in bitter cold, "there is no colour." Patrick is frightened of this whiteness, longs for the dark warmth of barns, the black current of the creek. "The night allowed scope. Night removed the limitations of detail and concentrated on form." Only later will he welcome light.

By far, most of the book's action transpires in darkness: the loggers skating "against the night" "waltzing" with "fire"; the constructed darkness of the Ohrida Lake Restaurant; the "brown slippery darkness" of the tunnel under Lake Ontario (the mules "brayed madly, thinking they were being buried alive"); the eclipse at Cato's funeral; Gianetta in "absolute blackness" "rubs this darkness (grease) into his body." On the train heading to Huntsville, Patrick "walked through the pools of light hanging over this platform and light has not attached itself to him. Walking through rain would have left him wet. But light, or a man polishing one tan shoe at four A.M., is only an idea. And this will not convert Patrick, whose loss creates venom." (Venom, too, is black.) Even Alice works at night and takes her name from a nocturnal bird, the parrot. But this darkness is always penetrated by some vestige of light: flaming cattails, fireflies, "a white midsummer shadow," eyes "bright," "a girl's white face," "blind whiteness," Clara "in her white dress . . . seemed the focus of all sunlight," a "coffin of moonlight," Giannetta's "black shadow moved parallel to her whiteness." And while Caravaggio waits "in the dark hall the whiteness of the milk disappears into his body."

Light edges into predominance even before the darkest sequence. When Patrick returns from prison he finds the streets deep in snowdrifts — all this winter and no mention of cold! He comes to the Geranium Bakery "entering the warm large space where winter sun pierced through the mist of flour (the white dust) in the air" and into the embrace of his friend, Nicholas Temelcoff. "A bear's grip. The grip of the world." (The embrace that locks the body of Ondaatje's young son to him, in the poem "Bear-hug," "like a magnet of blood.") And so to the young girl, Hana, waiting for him on the edge of the bed, "the light on beside her bed in the daylight." This double provision of light is subtle and powerful, only exceeded in power by the "Lights" in the last line of the book. Emphatic and positive, recalling the "Yes" at the end of *Ulysses*.

*In the Skin of a Lion* is meticulously researched and the exposition of the intricate details of bridge building, leather dyeing, salaries, sources of building materials, the making of bread, and the laying of tar builds up a solid base of trust in the reader. Such specificity! "281 feet

and 6 inches make up the central span of the bridge." Authenticity is assured. It is what Ondaatje does with these facts, their ordering, their tone, their enlargement, that ultimately transforms them into something more. His brother Christopher says, "He takes the facts and then creates them." Documentary becomes art.

This intense dwelling-on-things is a stock Ondaatje device. He rivets the reader to an image while he closes in on it, enlarges it until the lines on a hand become railway tracks, rivers. The image mesmerizes, unsettles, and often shocks in its forced proximity. He reveals the bizarre, the daring, and the alarming in a night-light, a moth, a hand. The local becomes hallucinatory, pulses with new meaning. He explodes the boundaries of naturalism, and delivers a new vision. The reader revels in these moments of transformation, of magic.

The structure of *In the Skin of a Lion* can be viewed as a necklace designed as a piece but with many pendants, each unique, studded with surprising imagery, each demanding individual admiration of its hue, its form, its embrace of light. Yet all belonging, all contributing, to a greater whole; like a fugue, where a certain number of bars are allowed to intervene from time to time before the subject is resumed. Ondaatje never disappoints us with these exotic detours: to rescue a half-submerged cow from an ice-clogged river; to witness Finnish loggers skating at night, flourishing flaming cattails; to focus our perception on the scent of persimmon, of *pimpernella*, of mint pepper, rosemary; to grasp the pulsing of a lunar moth in a green eye; to watch men leap "knee-deep within the reds and ochres and greens (of dyeing pools), . . . embracing the skins of recently slaughtered animals." Within these pendants we find recurring images of earrings, water, moons, moths, explosions, photographs, blood, and scars that net the reader in a web of psychological reverberations and expectations, bathing the book in a tone that operates structurally in much the same way as light does in a Claude Lorraine painting. They build a coherent whole, ultimately linking the disparate parts. As the book's narrator observes, there is "a falling together of accomplices."

Linking is also abetted through a see-sawing of time by the omniscient narrator. "It takes someone else, much later, to tell him that." "Years later . . . he will learn. . . ." "Five years earlier or ten years into the future. . . ." "It will carry trains that have not even been invented yet." These *entrées* into a wider time frame expand the web. Intrigue. Did the love scene between Caravaggio and his wife actually take place? Did we have a split-second vision of it? Does the footage loop back? Or will there be a Faulknerian replay with a new perspective? There are no answers to these questions. Perhaps they are all right. Certainly there is a magical ambiguity to the time frame. Although it could be argued that the heavy narration leaves few gaps for the reader to fill, the opposite is more plausible: the narration increases the complexity of the plot through layering and riddling, augmenting the challenge to the reader. Writing in *Photo Communique* Ondaatje speaks of his debt to the mural form:

> I was standing in the Detroit Institute of Art looking at Diego Rivera's "Detroit Industry" mural. I stood in that room for hours and turned round and saw more — echoes and alternatives, turned around, and somehow Rivera, using this form, held everything together. A time and a place. On other occasions during the writing I was drawn to cubism with its nexus of time or jazz with its solos and chorus. But it was the 360 degree world of the mural that I held onto most. All those shapes and forms seemed more exciting and believable as a possible structure than the standard novel form.

Ondaatje demonstrates, in *In the Skin of a Lion*, an allegiance to "community,"

the kind of community he espouses in the poems "Red Accordian" and "The Concessions," a world without superstars *à la* Billy the Kid, Buddy Bolden, or even Mervyn Ondaatje. This latest novel is strangely devoid of a main character that is a catalyst for action. Patrick Lewis is primarily an observer, a watcher, a recorder of life (not unlike a writer). He has his moment of action, it is true, but for very few pages. The action is, by contrast, distributed quite generously among a wide group of characters that form the book's community: Patrick's father, Nicholas Temelcoff, Clara Dickens, Ambrose Small, Alice Gull, Caravaggio, Rowland Harris. The weight given these persons is reflected in the book's formal composition: as one is introduced, his or her world of influence is intricately sketched, often to the temporary disappearance of other characters (here we have the pendants again). Caravaggio, a milk-drinking thief wanting "chicken and literature," enters like a thunderstorm two-thirds of the way through the novel. This is unorthodox (although Tristram Shandy was born halfway through Sterne's novel). Without the unifying devices that have been discussed, together with the rich lyrical voice of the poet-novelist that justifies every word, words that are tough and passionate and gentle, the format would have had difficulty sustaining the book's progression.

Ondaatje explores the implications of class, but denounces ideology for its lack of humanity. Patrick succumbs temporarily to Alice's battle-cry ("Alice had an idea, a cause in her eye about wealth and power, forever and ever") "to name the enemy and destroy their power. Start with their luxuries — their select clubs, their summer mansions . . ." where "bizarrely dressed society" dances "under false stars and false moonlight" with monkeys on chains in the coconut palms. "The animals had to dodge the champagne corks aimed at them — if you hit a monkey you were bought a free bottle. Sales of champagne soared and only now and then was there a shriek followed by a cheer." Cruelty to animals thrown in. Here Ondaatje knocks rich society — those "that do not toil or spin," who wear expensive tweed coats "costing more than the combined salaries of five bridge workers," those who do "not even cut the grass of [their] own lawn[s]." But he also quotes Conrad: "A sweeping assertion is always wrong" and this rich society is, after all, acceptable in Ondaatje's own forebears (in *Running in the Family*), given their *panache*, eccentricity, intelligence, and passion. And in *In the Skin of a Lion* the red-haired poet (based on the Ontario poet Anne Wilkinson, *née* Osler), a wealthy woman summering in Muskoka, the "play-ground of the rich," is redeemed by her earthiness, her generosity ("This is a good place"), her attempt to discover her capabilities, who she was, her focused stillness, her simple bare feet.

And Patrick, the searcher, ultimately finding himself in a position of total power eschews the use of it, rejecting symbolic and real violence, accepting the requisite compromise between creation and destruction, order and chaos. There is a recognition that history would not be there if men like Harris had not created it, albeit at a certain price. "We need excess, something to look up to," says Harris. Something for future generations to esteem, to inspire awe, to love. And Patrick's concession is paralleled by the generosity and humanity of his captor, supporting Conrad's view once more.

Gilgamesh, the hero who lends his epic exploits to the book's title and epigraph, he, too, at the death of a beloved, searches for "ancestral wisdom" over the limits of the earth, "desires above all else the light of the sun," wanders through the wilderness in the skins of animals, "kills lions playing in the moonlight." But when he

finds the plant of youth, he postpones eating this symbol of self-renewal, perhaps showing his acceptance of human destiny, the futility of struggling for what cannot be had. The plant is soon stolen and Gilgamesh returns home. The search is over, the spell broken: with "victory" within reach, then rejected/lost we find ourselves back where we started, content with the simple beauty of the city wall. The same loss, anger, meaningless destruction, and rejection of power characterize both the epic and this novel. And the same final, liberating peace.

James Joyce says there are no mistakes or accidents. Everything is intentional. For the pure pleasure of discovery, critics leap on coincidence and enshrine it. July 7, a "night of no moon, a heat wave in the city," the night that Patrick, "a bullet that has been sleeping," takes control of his actions and swims the long underwater pipe to explode into the Palace of the Waterworks, this date is also the anniversary of the birth of Ondaatje's daughter. Some twenty years ago Ondaatje commemorated her birth in a poem entitled "The Inheritors," a birth enacted at dawn into an uncertain world of compromise and latent violence. In the dramatic climax of *In the Skin of a Lion*, survival lies in "the first hint of morning colour . . . [coming] through the oculus," in the stemming of violence, in the mutual compromise that permits Patrick his reawakening, his rebirth. His life, in fact.

MARTHA BUTTERFIELD

# "POUSSIÈRE SUR LA VILLE" D'ANDRÉ LANGEVIN

## *Cinéma et théâtre, peur et soupçons*

TEXTE MARQUANT DANS l'évolution de la littérature québécoise, *Poussière sur la ville* (1953) d'André Langevin est un roman qui me semble avant tout reprendre la poétique de la séparation. Ce n'est pourtant pas cet aspect qui frappe ordinairement les critiques de ce récit très étudié. On y verrait surtout "une histoire d'adultère" (Brochu 1985: 120) ou encore un "cas de conscience" (Hébert 1983: 47).[1] Au-delà de l'évidence, la sémantique à l'oeuvre suffirait à nous indiquer que ces choix montrent qu'à l'analyse de l'espace les spécialistes d'aujourd'hui préfèrent encore celle du temps.[2]

Dans *Poussière sur la ville*, la structure thématique de la séparation est actualisée par le motif de l'illusion. Or le propre d'un motif c'est sa dimension concrète, ce qui impliquerait la nature paradoxale de l'hypothèse avancée. L'illusion est cependant ici entendue comme la sémantique générale du divertissement et ce dernier, même si figuratif, n'est jamais, dans un récit, une pure abstraction.[3]

Selon la typologie de Michel Arrivé (1982: 135-36), l'on pourrait classer *Poussière sur la ville* sous la rubrique du "discours clos." Dès les premières pages du roman l'espace est clairement indiqué: "Mais ici, les hommes se sentaient forts des limites de leur ville" (Langevin 1953: 32).[4] La précision de cette géographie psychologique durera jusqu'à la dernière page: "Je resterai, contre toute la ville" (213).

Ce discours clos n'est guère indèpendant de l'espace de l'illusion. Cette der-

nière ne peut, en effet, s'ériger en système que grâce à une certaine simplification qui se permet de mettre entre parenthèses le vécu phénoménologique. Le monde est ainsi identifié à l'échiquier, au terrain de sport, à la scène théâtrale ou à l'écran cinématographique pour des besoins structuralistes.[5]

Si l'illusion est un système qui doit actualiser un ensemble de motifs concrets, il s'agit tout d'abord d'identifier ces derniers pour ensuite les opposer, avec la netteté et la rigueur que de tels systèmes révèleraient en phonologie. Une évocation thématique du monde des loisirs ne serait guère suffisante à rendre compte de la configuration discursive de la spatialité du roman.

La plus remarquable des illusions dès l'ouverture de *Poussière sur la ville* est constituée par la sémantique du cinéma. Cette dernière, suivant une ethno-sémiotique de la hiérarchie sociale, est associée au plus petit dénominateur commun, c'est-à-dire à la composante prolétarienne du personnage de Madeleine:

> Ce besoin qu'elle avait de se dédoubler, de s'absenter d'elle-même par des moyens aussi gros que le cinéma ou la musique d'un jukebox m'inquiétait un peu sans que je susse pourquoi. (36)

L'espace de l'épisode cinématographique conduisant à une telle conclusion mérite d'être analysé. Lors de la première promenade que le Docteur et sa femme font en suivant la rue Green de Macklin, le lecteur est informé du fait qu'"il y a deux cinémas" (30). Le mépris du narrateur envers le septième art semble des plus explicites. Lorsque Madeleine indique qu'elle à l'intention de se rendre dans une salle de spectacles, Alain Dubois, en tant que narrateur, offre le commentaire suivant: "Au cinéma! C'est ce qu'elle considérait sans doute comme un fin en beauté" (34). L'attitude du jeune médecin envers l'art populaire qui pourrait sembler une pure prise de position intellectuelle est en réalité motivée par une insécurité, une "quête de la peur" dans le sens qu'A. J. Greimas donne à cette expression:[6]

> Se pouvait-il qu'elle fût déjà si éloignée? Pourquoi ne souhaitait-elle pas la retraite de notre appartement où nous serions seuls? N'était-ce que l'ennui d'un jour de pluie dans cette ville qui n'offrait pas d'autre séduction que le restaurant de Kouri et le cinéma? (34)

Entre une certaine mythologie et un certain folklore on retrouve ici une structure narrative particulière où "la récompense précède le contrat" (Greimas 1970: 245) et où il faut bien finir par se poser la question: "Qui fait peur au héros?" (Greimas 1970: 246). Le cinéma, comme le restaurant, est un lieu publique qui s'oppose à la vie intime souhaitée par Alain Dubois. Cette perspective ne suffit pas cependant à distinguer l'élément cinématographique des autres activités ludiques exercées au sein de l'espace social.

L'épisode de la voiture qui arrive de justesse à battre le train au passage à niveau est un autre exemple qui permet d'identifier le cinéma avec l'espace de la peur:

> — Laisse-moi peser sur l'accélérateur. J'hésitais.
> — Tu as peur! (21)

Le défi de Madeleine est ainsi commenté par le héros-narrateur Alain Dubois:

> Son mépris de petite fille qui ignore instinctivement la prudence et à qui le cinéma a enseigné que le risque n'est jamais dangereux en fin de compte. (21)

La scène du passage à niveau est un cliché cinématographique. Il est clair que Madeleine nous est présentée comme un personnage manquant de maturité psychologique. Cette illusion elle-même est surdéterminée par l'intertexte cinématographique. Ce dernier s'affirme en tant que catégorie spatiale et non pas en tant que référent. En effet, pour un roman qui

joue sur la sémantique de l'écran, *Poussière sur la ville* est singulièrement discret lorsqu'on en vient à la spécificité phénoménologique du film.

La suite de l'épisode cinématographique confirme cette tendance que semble avoir le discours figuratif à servir l'abstrait. Aucune discussion n'a ainsi lieu entre les époux sur le choix du film. C'est bien le lieu qui est privilégié lorsque le narrateur avoue au lecteur: "Je désirai moi aussi me perdre dans une salle de cinéma" (35). Si l'on se rend compte de la modalité verbale choisie et de la présence de la syllepse de sens, il faut conclure que la confession d'Alain Dubois est loin d'être négligeable. Le choix du passé simple dans une phrase où le lecteur, selon l'usage et la grammaire, se serait attendu à un imparfait implique que l'attraction du cinéma n'est que ponctuelle pour le narrateur. Cependant, elle est évidemment durative pour Madeleine. L'aveu au lecteur et celui fait à un autre personnage ne sont jamais identiques: c'est là l'une des conséquences du statut sémiotique de la littérature.[7] Celui fait à Madeleine confirme la nature du système descriptif: "Va pour le cinéma. Tu as raison. Ce serait macabre dans l'appartement" (35). L'opposition préalable est à la fois confirmée et complétée: le cinéma c'est la vie, l'appartement c'est la mort. On revient donc à la préférence que semble avoir Madeleine pour l'espace publique au détriment du lieu de l'intimité. La présence de la femme de ménage, Thérèse, qui fait en outre figure de dame de compagnie, suivie de celle plus excentrique de l'amant, Richard Hétu, sous le toit familial, ne constituent que des prolongements, si absurdes soient-ils, de ce désir d'être à la fois acteur, dans le sens usuel du terme, et spectateur.

L'épisode cinématographique souligne cette implacable symétrie. Madeleine, dès qu'Alain à cédé, se prépare à faire l'actrice: "Elle se détendit un peu, refit minutieusement son maquillage, replaça ses cheveux d'un coup de tête" (35). Puis elle commence à jouer son rôle: "En quittant le restaurant, elle me donna le bras et se pressa contre moi avec l'air d'annoncer au monde entier qu'elle était mienne" (35). Devant l'écran, et malgre l'obscurité de la salle, la femme du docteur, tout en devenant spectatrice attentive, continue à faire l'actrice:

> Au cinéma, elle pencha la téte sur mon épaule. Elle se tint ainsi immobile jusqu'à la fin, fixant l'écran d'un regard extrêmement brillant, pressant sa main contre la mienne lorsque des personnages du film s'embrassaient sur la bouche. C'était grotesque. (35)

Cette double nature de Madeleine envahit l'espace de l'intimitié même. De retour à l'appartement, après avoir débouché une bouteille de champagne pour "pendre la crémaillère, seuls tous les deux, et stoïques" (38), le couple se livre à une activité qui ne devrait guère surprendre le lecteur. Ce qui étonne c'est cependant l'écho cinématographique dans une telle scène:

> Je la caressai. Elle s'abandonna, passive, lasse ou ailleurs.... Ma main parcourait librement son corps sans l'éveiller tout à fait.... Cette sensation me devint intolérable et je l'obligeai à m'étreindre. En la laissant je vis dans ses yeux un éclat dur, d'une cruelle fierté. Madeleine, ma femme, était spectatrice aux jeux de l'amour. (38)

Spectatrice, sans doute, mais aussi actrice qui ne croit pas à son rôle. C'est à ce point de l'analyse que les habitudes thématiques sont à éviter car elles peuvent induire le lecteur en erreur. Ainsi, le cinéma est une catégorie figurative qui tend vers l'abstraction, alors que le théâtre fait déjà partie d'un espace symbolisé, en ce sens que les personnages de *Poussière sur la ville*, en dehors peut-être du narrateur, ne songent même pas à fréquenter une salle de théâtre qui ne semble d'ailleurs pas exister à Macklin. Ainsi, au cinéma,

espace de la peur, correspond le théâtre, espace du soupçon. Cette distinction est d'abord annoncée par la méditation d'Alain qui tente de se convaincre qu'il ne doit pas prendre au sérieux la mise en garde de Kouri: "Ces sortes de choses n'arrivent qu'après dix ans, et encore faut-il avoir un peu le goût des attitudes théâtrales" (14). Mais quelques pages plus loin le héros se surprend dans une pose digne du mélodrame:

> — Elle est à moi. Et pour la vie! Vous entendez! Je serais capable de dire cela à haute voix. Non. Je me sentirais ridicule. (24)

Ainsi un narrateur qui n'hésite pas à écrire ce qu'il n'oserait dire, est finalement hanté par le ridicule.[8] Et c'est toujours le théâtre qui est évoqué pour souligner le manque de sincérité au sein de la vie conjugale:

> Deux compagnons de rencontre qui s'étaient joué la comédie une nuit et s'éveillaient patauds et cireux, qui n'avaient plus le désir de rien exiger l'un de l'autre. (34)

Le jeu sert ainsi l'utopie de la simplification et réduit la texture romanesque à un échiquier muni d'un ensemble de règles. Mais comme à la linguistique de Saussure, il manque au narrateur de Langevin les lois qui régissent le monde externe. L'échec au niveau de l'intimité est fonction de l'espace publique. Ce paradoxe si frustrant en sciences humaines fait tout l'intérêt de la littérature en général et du roman 'd'analyse' en particulier, genre dont *Poussière sur la ville* demeure un *exemplum* marquant.

NOTES

[1] Pierre Hébert reconnaît sa dette envers un autre spécialiste: "Cette appellation, nous l'empruntons à Jacques Michon, qui désigne ainsi un 'genre' littéraire prédominant vers 1950." La définition du récit "cas de conscience" me paraît plutôt pragmatique: "Ce récit pose un problème de vie intérieure, résultat d'une confrontation entre plusieurs normes" (Hébert 1983: 47). "Le cas de conscience" serait donc un récit constituant un sous-genre du roman d'analyse. Le premier modèle de ce genre étant *Angéline de Montbrun* (Conan 1884) l'on se rend compte que "le cas de conscience" doit être défini diachroniquement, même si Pierre Hébert affirme que son intérêt se porte "du côté de la forme" (Hébert 1983: 47).

[2] C'est ainsi qu'André Brochu fonde son étude de *Poussière sur la ville* sur la perception du temps. Il accorde une importance capitale à la "Chronologie" et au "rythme narratif" (1985: 127-48) et analyse un temps fort du récit "Noël" (1985: 149-64). On remarque également que l'ouvrage ne contient pas de bibliographie et que l'état présent des études sur André Langevin est pratiquement passé sous silence. L'analyse de Pierre Hébert, plus rigoreuse et plus technique, elle, se fonde sur l'étude formelle du temps (1983: 45-69).

[3] L'une des affirmations de Denis Bertrand au sujet de *Germinal* permettrait d'insérer mes remarques dans un cadre plus général: "Le discours abstrait, pour maintenir le plan isotope sur lequel il se situe, doit s'interdire toute iconisation des figures qu'il est cependant amené à mettre en scène" (Bertrand 1985: 33).

[4] Toute référence ultérieure à cet ouvrage sera simplement suivie de la pagination mise entre parenthèses.

[5] La métaphore du jeu a une telle puissance qu'elle se retrouve, paradoxalement, à la base non seulement du monde mais aussi de la langue: "Pour la linguistique interne, il en va tout autrement: elle n'admet pas une disposition quelconque; la langue est un système qui ne connaît que son ordre propre. Une comparaison avec le jeu d'échecs le fera mieux sentir. Là, il est relativement facile de distinguer ce qui est externe de ce qui est interne: le fait qu'il a passé de Perse en Europe est d'ordre externe; interne, au contraire, tout ce qui concerne le système et les règles. Si je remplace des pièces de bois par des pièces d'ivoire, le changement est indifférent pour le système: mais si je diminue ou augmente le nombre des pièces, ce changement-là atteint profondément la "grammaire" du jeu. Il n'en est pas moins vrai qu'une certaine attention est nécessaire pour faire des distinctions de ce genre. Ainsi dans chaque cas on posera la question de la nature du phénomène, et pour la résoudre on observera cette règle: est interne tout ce

qui change le système à un degré quelconque" (Saussure 1973: 43).

[6] C'est ainsi qu'A. J. Greimas conclut l'analyse d'un groupe de contes populaires lituaniens: "Le narrateur — ou le transcripteur — de l'un des contes, un brave prussien rationaliste à la manière du XIXe siècle, termine le récit en notant qu'il existe, malheureusement, beaucoup de gens stupides qui ont peur de l'eau froide. Peur naturelle ou culturelle?" (Greimas 1970: 247).

[7] Sur ce point théorique on a beaucoup écrit. La formulation la plus simple et la plus claire à ce sujet me semble être celle de Robert Scholes: "Similarly, if the words of an utterance seem to be aimed not directly at us but at someone else, this duplicitous situation is essentially literary. John Stuart Mill emphasized this when he said that poetry is not heard but overheard. It is perhaps unfortunate, but situations of eavesdropping and voyeurism are in part literary — which is no doubt why they figure so prominently in avowed literary texts. The literary competence of readers with respect to this feature of communicative acts is often a matter of imagining the person to whom the utterance is addressed or of perceiving meanings that are not intended for, or understood by, the ostensible auditor. Every communicative subtlety requires a corresponding subtlety of interpretation" (Scholes 1982: 22).

[8] A la page suivante, après avoir répété à sa femme endormie (ou qui feint le sommeil) qu'il ne veut pas qu'elle aille chez Kouri, le Docteur avoue: "Je ne sais plus ce que je ressens. L'impression d'être ridicule sans doute" (25). Le motif du ridicule est repris tout le long du roman.

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ALEXANDRE L. AMPRIMOZ

# ITALO-CANADIAN POETRY & ETHNIC SEMIOSIS IN THE POSTMODERN CONTEXT

I HAVE CHOSEN TO insert my discussion of Italo-Canadian poetry in the larger context of ethnic semiosis in the postmodern episteme for reasons crucial to an understanding of the type of poetry (and poetics) exemplified in the anthology *Roman Candles*, edited by Pier Giorgio Di Cicco.[1] There is a level at which the anthology's individual poems, when taken as a single macrotext, recount a story that is common to all of them. It is this documentary level that appears least aleatory and best suited to the task of clarifying the conceptual limits and possibilities of the individual poems.[2] It might be called, roughly, the story behind the poems, the one all the poems are implicitly trying to tell, or more specifically, the level at which one is confronted with the narration of the attempt to work out an ethnic poetics. If we take *Roman Candles* as our text, then surely the very possibility of generating ethnic discourse becomes the pre-text.

Indeed, if one pushes each poem in this collection to its limits, one is inevitably faced with the larger and shared issue of ethnic semiosis, at the centre of which lies the very act of producing the ethnic sign and of constructing the ethnic subject as author and cultural protagonist. But judging from the poems themselves, the possibilities of inserting such ethnic poetry in the englobing context of its own model of ethnic semiosis are rare, due to a cultural politics shaped by the internal dynamics of a centring and centralized order of official discourse. In fact, as users of an "unofficial language" (Di Cicco's words in the preface) and as generators of a decentring ethnic semiosis, Italo-Canadian poets are naturally enough marginal to an interpretive order of cultural nationalism, which Di Cicco calls "Canadianism," and which leads to the ethnopoetic condition of a "displaced sensibility."[8] This is why, I presume, Italo-Canadian literature is a literature still fighting for cultural status and why it is of crucial importance to clarify the semiotic program, the pre-text, by means of which ethnic poet and his/her model reader may meet.

Needless to say, ethnic poetry is often considered culturally poor because of the poverty of its interpreter, or the latter's lack of fluency in the type of local semiosis that accounts for the ethnic subject and ethnic poetics. Far from being trapped in a pathetic anthropology that can at best promote a nostalgic quest for lost roots and existential wholeness, Italo-Canadian poets have disseminated a radical critique of the postmodern condition in Canada precisely by relying on what can be called the micro-strategies of ethnic sign production. The rest of my paper, therefore, will deal with a description of the cultural model behind the production of Italo-Canadian poetry.

*The Topological Scheme*

In his preface to *Roman Candles,* Pier Giorgio Di Cicco sums up his return voyage to Italy this way: "I went out of curiosity, and came back to Canada conscious of the fact that I'd been a man without a country for most of my life" (9). In her poem "Enigmatico," Mary di Michele expresses this condition even more dramatically:

> and she cries out caught
> with one bare foot in a village in the Abruzzi,
> the other busy with cramped English
> speaking toes in Toronto,
> she strides the Atlantic legs spread
> like a Colossus. (62)

The modality of di Michele's "striding" and the sense of radical dislocation expressed by Di Cicco point to a geographical strategy that suggests an aesthetics of spatial juxtaposition. In fact, ethnic semiosis is ultimately organized on the basis of a topological system that generates an open series of such binary isotopies as old world/new world; emigrant/immigrant; ethnic/non-ethnic; presence/absence; origin/traces; continuity/discontinuity; orientation/disorientation; dwelling/nomadism; house/road; centre/periphery; proximity/distance. This chronotopic system (to use a concept of Mikhail Bakhtin) provides not only a way of seeing but also a way of thinking that has its own type of *savoir-faire.* Its perspectival mechanism is stereoscopic and suggests how the ethnic subject proceeds in creating ethnic space within Canadian culture. For example, in Joseph's Pivato's poem "Alberta S.P.Q.R." there is this tensional strategy:

> Arno, Brenta, Po, Tagliamento
> no Lombardy poplars
> Canadian aspens
> reach up to
> a babelled horizon.... (78)

In reality, however, this ethnic space is essentially a hyperspace, a hermeneutical

nowhere and everywhere in which the ethnic subject floats between two worlds, two cultural models. The type of space I am referring to is the particular space of ethnic semiosis.

What is more, there is a strong degree of reversibility implied in the subject's being "between" that simultaneously permits both acts of conjunction and disjunction, ranging from Joseph Pivato's "First-Born Son" (79) to the desperate words "(N.B. I am without a country, speechless.)" of Mary Melfi's poem "The Wanderer" (64). Given this co-presence of cultural models and the principle of reversibility deriving from it, the ethnic subject is able to carry out his/her *jeu* of ambivalence, break up the unidirectionality of official cultural discourse, and unscrew the signifiers bolted down to established codes. In short, this self is ready to create semantic disorder, and through the production of a semantic excess, short circuit discourse based on fixed equivalences and the principle of non-contradiction. "That woman is either walking backwards or forwards," Melfi writes in "The Exile" (63). And in the second poem of his sequence, "Three Poems for Giovanni Caboto," Filippo Salvatore asks Cabot:

> Where are you looking to?
> Towards the new or the old world?
> You don't answer me, of course,
> you remain standing at Atwater and
> keep on gazing afar. (14)

Such a practice of ethnic interrogation as this, and one finds it operating throughout the collection of *Roman Candles*, refuses to reduce the order of discourse to a single meaning, a single code or cultural model and prefers instead a strategy of perspectival ambiguity. We are, in other words, in the midst of an economy of ethnic con-fusion, of *συηβάλλειν*, of symbolic discourse.[4]

*The Genealogical Principle*

Before relating this economy to an Italo-Canadian poetics and the latter to certain features of postmodernism, I must, even if briefly, try to outline the other necessary components that characterize ethnic semiosis in general. The very type of symbolic discourse that ethnic semiosis generates is fundamentally an expression of the quest for a *patria*, for a dwelling.[5] Within the context of its special topological system described above, ethnic discourse clearly tries, and is conscious of trying, to recompose the binary isotopies deriving from its spatial organization. That is why, for example, ethnic poetry often resorts to a highly narrative syntax, not because it eliminates the negative categories of the binary isotopies or abandons the aesthetics of juxtaposition (which would indeed be a case of pathetic anthropology), but because it uses the positive categories as part of its project of refounding the negative ones. Of course we are talking about the symbolic space of ethnic poetics, and on a broader level about ethnic semiosis, and it is perhaps the only space where these binary categories can be treated dialectically — or, in the extreme case, in utopian terms of allegorical inversion. The concept of the project (of projecting a possible world) and consequently the ethnic subject's confidence in narrativity are expressed in Filippo Salvatore's poem "My War" as "my fight" for "the just / dimension between man and the world" (23). But the ethnic aggressivity of the poem's narrative voice is knowingly based on "my patrimony in a cheap, pasteboard suitcase" (23).

The suitcase itself is a virtual text of the immigrant process of radical dislocation. What one would find in it were he at the customs office in the guise of a semiotic inspector is nothing other than the genealogical principle basic to any ethnic dis-

course, but also to writing characterized by Roman Jakobson's notion of contiguity. In Italo-Canadian poetry this principle is often inscribed tellurically in the Italian landscape as cultural memory; in which case "all the world is a village lost / in time, suspended / in space" and the very notion of an originating place becomes a "stop watch of human / memory" (see di Michele's poem "Across the Atlantic" [60]), a version of Solomon's sword for judging between our topologically generated isotopies. Genealogy can also be expressed as "Il Sangue," as it is in Len Gasparini's homonymous poem where "The blood that moves through your language / moves through mine" (26). It is on the strength of this ethnic pulse beat that Gasparini can calmly state, "The city's iron skyline / bends before the structure of a poem" (26-27). Once again the blood-ink of language flows back to an originating source, to "Our people" who "work in the Tuscan fields" (27), a genealogical source that opens an ethno-symbolic space in which the far is made near and the near far.

*The Politics of Memory*

I think it is now evident that the project of ethnic semiosis, its ability to *raccontare*, is also essentially an epistemological exercise in remembering. Put in another way, its model of *vedere* is an act of interrogating, through mnemotechnical strategies, various versions of the past considered as a temporal-spatial construct. The semiotic dynamic at work here can be expressed as follows:

MEMORY ⇄ PROJECT

It is within this cultural cathode tube that genealogical discourse is charted. There can be no project without memory and, without a project, memory has no coherence, as much of postmodern poetics surely proves. It is not surprising, therefore, that the mnemotechnical strategies, the rhetorical tropes of memory, used in the majority of the poems in *Roman Candles* take the form of recalling and interpreting old photographs, funerals and wakes, the calm gaze of grandparents, the defeat of immigrant fathers, and old-world place as an *umbilicus mundi*. In his poem "Archeology," in which the project of identity is founded on old-world geography as the locus of memory, Tony Pignataro says, "This is the inheritance of sons: / to be rooted in their father's faith. / To discover hewn stone" (50). In a poem entitled "Memento d'Italia" Di Cicco's narrator journeys to Italy "to learn images unrazed," and by poem's end can state:

> This I brought back with me.
> An affirmation.
> Much that went between this man
> [immigrant father] and I is changed (35)

Here not only is geography a memory system and memory geographical (or "Tutto il mondo e paese," Mary di Michele would have it in "Across the Atlantic"), but the ethnic self very consciously and obsessively assumes the role of son or daughter. This too is a genealogical stance, only now the constructive device is generational, even if the quest for continuity through a politics of memory is obviously the same. The point is, being a son or daughter within the topological scheme of ethnic semiosis implies a unique way of organizing experience and formulating a possible world. The ethnic subject, I repeat, measures himself/herself according to the circumstances of topology, the originating parameters of which were set down by the voyage of the emigrant/immigrant generation. Thus the subject produces ethnic semiosis through a strategic use of memory, which is nothing other than the intensive and extensive interrogation of the originating project of a founding generation. The ethnic subject goes forwards by going backwards. It is this kind of questioning

that produces an ethnic *savoir-faire*, both as competence and performance.[6]

*The Postmodern Context*

Now the need to define the place of ethnic semiosis in the postmodern context should seem imperative, for ethnic poetics, as is often thought, has little to do with a literal return or a mere repetition of elements called up from an already achieved cultural storehouse. To think otherwise is to deny tensional status of the ethnic *verbum*, to rob it of its specific difference, to domesticate its peculiar ambivalence through a system of reassuring cultural equivalences. In fact, we are not dealing here with a mimetic poetics, which would result in touristic and even voyeuristic modes of representation not unlike those of folkloric revivalism. Instead, ethnic representation lies in the *production* of identity through ethnic interpretation, which is made possible only through the ethnic subject's decision to stride two cultural systems. In other words, it is not a question of attributing a lost substance or metaphysical *Grund* to the ethnic self; but of metaphorically floating a series of culturally weak identifications through a disjunctive/conjunctive *jeu* of ethnic ambiguity. Thus, in this context what may be intentionally read as a simple strategy of retotalization is actually (within the perspective of ethnic semiosis) a strategy of producing a specific difference in the domain of the official culture. And the ethnic subject produces difference by thinking differently; that is, by questioning the original project of the immigrant fathers and mothers. In effect, ethnic semiosis as *poiesis* means recounting a rival story, what we might call a mapping exercise in ethnic tracing, an attempt to recount a series of micro-differences.

The original, foundational project is, of course, an absent presence, or there would be no need for the supplementary strategy of ethnic interpretation; indeed, the founding subject (the immigrant generation) is by definition out of place, the founding project so many scattered clues. That this is the peculiar condition in which ethnic semiosis operates is evident in Mary Melfi's poem "The Wanderer," where she observes, "We are all citizens of make believe" (64). It is not a question of mere continuism or of an act of literal reconstruction, therefore, but a question of generating micro-sequences of ethnic continuity within a broader context of discontinuity. One "can't make a living from tradition" (44), Antonio Iacovino notes in "You Went to the Big Festivity." Saro D'Agostino clarifies the epistemologically weak status of the Italo-Canadian poetic *verbum* when he says, "my father suffered more / indignities than words / could ever dream / of conjuring" ... "Father / I am sorry for these songs" (71). In "Cultura Canadese" Pivato's poet cries out, "where is our history in this land" (81)? In short, it is precisely through the act of creating the ethnic sign that the Italo-Canadian poet places himself/herself momentarily outside and beyond the reach of a totalizing order of cultural discourse. I say "momentarily" simply because at this point the ethnic self is caught in a double bind; knowing as he/she does that the very discourse he/she uses to criticize postmodern Canadian culture is itself subject to a larger order of discourse. In other words, while ethnic semiosis can produce an infinite and uncontrollable (because de-territorialized) series of micro-discourse events, it cannot rebuild its own cultural paradigm. There is no refoundation. We are now necessarily faced with the status of ethnic semiosis in a postmodern context.

Apart from the justified quarrel over the unfortunate choice of the term "postmodernism," I think we can agree on a set of characteristics that help to circumscribe contemporary experience. One is

certainly the fact that the old legitimizing macro-discourse systems (such as marxism, darwinianism, and freudianism) are no longer valid comprehensive paradigms; and resulting from this cultural state of affairs and from the fact that we now live in a technotronic mass-media society, it seems that the very notion of the modernist self has been reduced to a mere metaphor, to a set of simulated performances.[7] Furthermore, when Pivato asks in his poem "Cultura Canadese" "is this a paese / or a geographical hypothesis?" I think he has grasped the essential feature of contemporary reality in which it is no longer possible to dwell in the traditional sense of dwelling in the polis. All the negative categories pertaining to the topological scheme of ethnic semiosis are, it seems, attributable to life in the postmodern habitat. Of course, such categories as discontinuity and nomadism and radical change can be interpreted positively in the sense that the availabiiity of a plurality of simulated scenarios allows the metropolitan self to switch from one possible world to another with unthinking ease. And this floating version of subjectivity suggests that, at least, an open series of micro-strategies (getting along from day to day) can suffice to create an apparently free subject.

What seems missing from this postmodern frame, however, is exactly a politics of memory which, as we have seen, characterizes the semiotic program of the ethnic subject and which, indeed, allows him/her to define and deconstruct the very categories that make up the postmodern condition. I do not mean that the ethnic subject can escape this condition, but, through ethnic semiosis, he/she is surely in a privileged position to interpret it and include it within a larger self-reflexive *jeu*. Quite frankly, isn't this one of the reasons why ethnicity has become such a popular, not to say explosive, filter for questioning the very foundations of the way in which contemporary experience is organized? As a form of cultural politics and as an interpretative model, ethnicity has performed open-heart surgery on advanced post-industrial society and knows there is no heart to speak of. Through its mnemotechnical strategies and its use of genealogy as an alternative ordering principle, ethnic semiosis offers a double perspective of postmodern identity. "Ah, God, are they not our families, without / a place to go back to what will be our lives!" Antonio Mazza writes in "Death in Italy" (40). In such instances ethnic reflexivity tends to historicize the agenerational and atemporal condition of the present. Indeed, in a culture without a historical memory, where the crisis of identity and the crisis of memory are coterminus, remembering is itself the ethnic project. By interrogating the genealogical gaze of the parents and their *traditio*, the ethnic subject opens up a new inferencing field and constructs a different interpretation of cultural facts.

Of course, as I've already said, the ethnic poet knows it is impossible to escape the radical condition of discontinuity he finds himself in. Indeed, this condition is a constitutive part of the topological scheme that generates the ethnic sign. As Alexandre Amprimoz writes:

> Hubert, pauvre Hubert,
> il n'y aura plus de Prochain Episode.
> . . . . . .
> All images are political,
> there is no refuge,
> no Bohemian Embassy for poets. (76)

But it is exactly at this point that the ethnic *jeu* begins, as a micro-strategic exercise in cultural politics, in producing brief eruptive moments of ethnic difference. Outside of his interpretative act, the ethnic subject may even slip back into anonymity and be swallowed up by the larger culture. This ethnic circumstance of optional or symbolic identification is

captured by Filippo Salvatore in one of his poems on Giovanni Caboto:

> The life
> of your memory is as ethereal for me
> as this early morning-sun,
> as my lucidity.
> . . . . . .
> People continue to come out [of the metro],
> become a crowd that
> snakes me up, clogs me, carries me
> away. (16)

Although unseen, the ethnic self sees all. Paradoxically, even if in this culturally weak position — like Len Gasparini's "Marginal Man" "trying to survive / My environment . . . / Buried deepest in the work I love" (25) — the ethnic subject is semiotically strong because of the special status of the originating cultural *traditio* which, as an absent presence, solicits ethnic interpretation in a metacultural space that is nowhere and everywhere at the same time. As Michel Serres says, knowledge of foundations is founded on a tomb.[8] In "Nostalgia" Di Cicco writes:

> under a few cold lillies, my father dreams
> cicadas in vallemaio. I am sure of it,
> he left me that, and a poem that is only a
>
> dream of cicadas. . . . (32)

Here memory as project is quite explicit, and where this floating strategy leads to, Di Cicco suggests at the end of the poem: "I am a little marvellous, with the sunken / heart of exiles" (33).

If this symbolic vantage point occupies a minimal cultural space, still it can in no way be monitored or controlled, for the ethnic sign is dispersive, supplementary, polymorphic, the result of a contradictory and ambivalent "betweenness." Being dislocated, the ethnic subject's semiosis is often a mere factor of disorder or excess, a mere act of interpretation or questioning. But the competence of producing ethnic discourse in the context sketched above is spelled out brilliantly in Di Cicco's poem "Remembering Baltimore, Arezzo":

> I am not alone, I have never been alone.
> Ghosts are barking
> in my eyes, their soft tears washing us down
> to
> baltimore, out the chesapeake, round the
> atlantic, round the world,
> back where we started from, a small town in
> the
> shade of cypress, with nowhere to go but be
> still again. (37)

Here the genealogical project, the politics of memory, the double perspectivism of the subject are all operating, and as ethnic he is both everywhere and nowhere (his originating ghosts having become floating, disincarnated traces). But the poem goes even further to clarify the particular *jeu* of ethnic self-reflexivity and its subversive status:

> It is a way of saying twenty-five years
> and some german bombs have made for
> roses in a backyard that
> we cry over, like some film which is too
> maudlin to pity
> and yet is the best we have to feel human
> about.

There is no totalizing strategy in these lines, only a kind of semiotic challenge in a minor genealogical key. There is also an originating source of difference here which is, of course, the tomb of the immigrant father, and it not only precedes but makes possible the poet-son's act of reflection. Ethnic semiosis, then, is a way of thinking differently by thinking the difference, and in the postmodern framework this may be all the difference there is: a particular form of waiting, of holding one's ground. It is fitting to conclude now with these words from Antonino Mazza's poem "Our House Is in a Cosmic Ear":

> if the dream doesn't stop, here, if the word,
> if the house
> is in the word and we, by chance,
> should meet,
> my house is your house, take it. (42)

NOTES

1 Pier Giorgio Di Cicco, ed., *Roman Candles* (Toronto: Hounslow Press, 1978).

2 For a further discussion of the concept "documentary level," see Kurt H. Wolff, ed., *From Karl Mannheim* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1971), pp. 30-38. Briefly, it is at this level that one can delineate the objective possibilities, the structural horizon, within which the Italo-Canadian experience takes shape, whether consciously or not is here beside the point.

3 *Roman Candles*, p. 9. Subsequent page references to the poems in this anthology will henceforth be included in the text.

4 For a further explication of sign con-fusion as I intend it here, see Umberto Galimberti, *Il corpo* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1983), pp. 239-47.

5 See Martin Heidegger's essay, "Building Dwelling Thinking," in *L'urbanisme. Utopies et réalités*, Françoise Choay, ed. (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1965); Francesco Dal Co, *Abitare nel moderno* (Bari: Laterza, 1983).

6 I am referring here to the theory of modal analysis developed by A. J. Greimas, *Du Sens II* (Paris: Edition du Seuil, 1983), pp. 67-102.

7 See Jean-François Lyotard, *La condizione postmoderna*, trans. into Italian by Carlo Formenti (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1981); Gianni Vattimo, *Al di là del soggetto* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1981); Mario Perniola, *La società dei simulacra* (Bologna: Cappelli, 1980).

8 Michel Serres, "Introduzione a 'Rome' di Michel Serres," *aut aut*, nos. 197-198, September-December 1983, p. 3.

WILLIAM BOELHOWER

# ON THE VERGE

***** MAURICE LEMIRE *et al.*, eds., *Dictionnare des oeuvres littéraires du Québec*, Vol. 5 (1970-1975). Fides, $70.00. This invaluable series now extends into very recent history. A combination of chronology, critique, and critical record, this volume (like its predecessors) reviews every francophone Quebec literary publication during the years in question, appending to each commentary a reliable list of reviews and further references. Biographical data is meticulously researched, and the introductory comments on social and critical context are a substantial contribution to literary history.

W.N.

***** PAUL-EMILE BORDUAS, *Ecrits I*, ed. André-G. Bourassa *et al.* Presses de l'université de Montréal, $62.00. Another in the excellent PUM series of edited texts, this original volume gathers in one place several essays, commentaries, and interviews by the painter Borduas. The work is a departure from the usual series subject. (The more conventional subject is represented by another current volume: Joseph Lenoir's *Oeuvres*, edited by John Hare [$40.00], a careful textual account of the poems and historical writings of the nineteenth-century writer.) With Borduas's *Ecrits*, the series takes an innovative step in a different direction, redefining the limits of "literature" and seeking — as in the painter's illustrated comments on "perspective" — a new angle on cultural interconnections. In both the Borduas and the Lenoir, the textual commentary and list of variants is exhaustive.

W.N.

**** IAN CHILVERS *et al.*, comps., *The Oxford Dictionary of Art*. Oxford, $45.00. From van der AA to van ZYL, from Neoclassical to Picturesque, this volume is a handy (and apparently reliable, from my sampling of names and dates) brief guide to major figures and major terms in the history of western art. The volume includes references to Canadian accomplishments — Kane to Carr, Leduc to Borduas — though for the most part the account of individual Canadian paintings is limited. So is the reference guide. (Carr, we are told, is "well-represented" in the National Gallery, but there is no mention of Vancouver Art Gallery, which houses the major collection.) Nonetheless, this is a solid achievement.

W.N.

**** FELICITY NUSSBAUM & LAURA BROWN, eds., *The New Eighteenth Century*. Methuen, n.p. One of the most pervasive desires of recent criticism has been to overturn the canonical conventions that have been in place largely since the giant anthologies started to make their appearances. Critical generalizations, based on selective reading of a "Century's" texts, clouded the fact that they were themselves limited. This book aims to be part of a re-reading of critical practice and literary tradition, with an eye to that century the most

ill-served by generalities, the eighteenth. With thoughtful and argumentative essays on class, women, slavery, and other obverse faces to the "Age of Reason," the book interpolates textual study with social history: the economics of property is not far from travel literature here, nor is the authority of certain forms of speech divorced from money and power. Readers of Canadian Literature might find particularly interesting Laura Brown's essay on Aphra Behn, the slave trade, and notions of Imperial Romance.

W.N.

** ROGER FOWLER, *A Dictionary of Modern Critical Terms*, rev. and enl. Routledge & Kegan Paul, $5.50. Unfortunately, despite the quality — and the provocative character — of most of the entries in this dictionary (a dictionary of mini-essays on literary terms), the revised edition has not been expanded sufficiently. "DECONSTRUCTION" has been added, but not "READER-RESPONSE," and there is no "SUBLIME," no "PICTURESQUE," no "QUEST," and no "MISE-EN-ABIME." It is therefore limited for general use, though it remains valuable for the cogency of the comments that it does contain.

W.N.



OTHER BOOKS RECEIVED include Clare Best and Caroline Boisset, *Leaves from the Garden*, an anthology of garden writing (General, $49.95); William Bartram's 1791 *Travels through North and South Carolina* (Penguin, $10.95); Stanley Weintraub's history of November 1918, *A Stillness Heard Round the World* (Oxford, $14.95); Franco Moretti's *The Way of the World* (Methuen/Verso, $34.95), trans. Albert Sbragia; and Edwin Muir's *Selected Prose*, comp. George Mackay Brown (General, $48.95). Muir's autobiographical essay on Glasgow slums is a powerful commentary on the hidden cultural effects of industrialization. Moretti's book is a stimulating account of the nineteenth-century European *Bildungsroman*, which identifies this literary form (with its focus on the *interiorization of contradiction*, on *mobility* and the *ego*) with the nineteenth-century social acceptance of an idea of progressive modernity.

W.N.

# LAST PAGE

QUOTABLE BITS, FOR yet another commonplace book:

1. From Mary Dadswell's collection of twenty-three stories, *Circles of Faces* (Univ. of Queensland, $9.95): there is a nice image of a person who is wearing, to be stylish, "a pair of extremely low-cut Adidas." Wit, here, is one of the ways dread and joy intermingle in women's lives. These are lives made complicated by the transparency of one act, the obliquity of another, and the way misapprehensions are so often translated inadequately between generations.
2. From Peter Murphy's *The Moving Shadow Problem* (Univ. of Queensland, US$17.50) nineteen stories concerned with game and daydream: "I have always been a believer in autopsy, chiefly because it gives events a finality." Such is the power of belief.
3. From Frank Moorhouse's collection of (mock?) travellers' tales — there's the one about the death of the telegram, and the one about going on holiday with Roland Barthes — *Room Service* (Penguin, A$8.95): "Never do business with an Australian who says 'no worries' a lot."
4. From Nicholas Jose, *Paper Nautilus* (Penguin, A$8.95): "That was when John Fregenza started to be old, wrestling at night with the angel of emptiness in his arms."

The real focus, though, is on wartime relations between brothers, on the power of male-male bonding, and on the pressure of the desire for fatherhood.

5. From C. J. Koch, *Crossing the Gap: A Novelist's Essays* (Chatto & Windus, £4.95), a group of reflective essays on art and time, on "mystery and mysteries," and on place: a trip to India was "a detour for life"; a political reflection suggests that Australia and Indonesia have "a future to invent together."
6. From Frank Moorhouse, *Forty-Seventeen* (Penguin, A$29.95), a discontinuous May-December novel, or vice versa, the Grand Tour *vs.* the Cocktail Circuit, full of banter with a bitter streak running through it: "Australians wrote with the greatest freedom there is — writing without fear of being read."
7. From Barry Oakley, *Scribbling in the Dark* (Univ. of Queensland, $19.95), a set of comic essays, one on the Toronto International Poetry Festival and one on the halting conversations most mere people have with the famous, Atwood to Robbe-Grillet ("I have picked up . . . Ferlinghetti's black gaucho hat and passed it to him, noting the vastness of its circumference"); what do great writers do? he asks, and answers, warning: "They break through an inpalpable glass, reality's transparent pane, into some other region, whence they return with gifts. Read them, enjoy them, admire them, but don't, whenever possible, sit next to them."
8. From *George Steiner: A Reader* (Oxford, $14.95): "*Language is the main instrument of man's refusal to accept the world as it is.* Without that refusal, without the unceasing generation by the mind of 'counter-worlds' . . . we would turn forever on the treadmill of the present. . . . Ours is the ability . . . to . . . 'un-say' the world, to image and speak it otherwise." Steiner seeks a theory of the creativity of "misinformation." Sometimes misinformation is just a concerted effort to limit options and exact control.
9. From Harry Ricketts, *Talking About Ourselves* (Mallinson Rendel, NZ$19.95), interviews with twelve poets, including Ian Wedde: "I'd rather read something crankily anachronistic like Betjeman . . . than magazines full of boringly up-to-the-minute postmodern Canadian academics. I'd rather listen to the radio!"

W.N.

## contributors

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CORRECTION: The poem "Brown's Pond," attributed to David Carpenter in issue number 118, should have been attributed to J. D. Carpenter of Toronto. *Canadian Literature* regrets the mistake, and apologizes to both authors for the confusion.

# ACLALS
## Silver Jubilee Conference

"Trans-Formations: Cross-Cultural Communities and New Forms of Commonwealth Literature"
24-31 August, 1989
University of Kent, Canterbury, England

The Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies triennial conference in 1989 will emphasize Commonwealth connections, cross-cultural comparisons, the development of new forms, and the functions of literature in the Commonwealth. Attention will be given to expressions of multi-culturalism and the work of new communities formed within the Commonwealth.

Writers and speakers who have so far accepted invitations to attend are: Ama Ata Aidoo, Maria Couto, David Dabydeen, Anita Desai, Abdulrazak Gurnah, Wilson Harris, Keri Hulme, A. N. Jeffares, Joy Kogawa, Jackie Kaye, Shirley Lim, Liz Lockhead, Timothy Mo, Kole Omotoso, Michael Ondaatje, Ravinder Randhawa, Nayantara Saghal, Edward Said, Olive Senior, Derek Walcott, Ania Walwicz, and Fay Zwicky.

Panels have been set up on 'New Forms and Fictions,' 'Literature, Multiculturalism and National Consciousness,' 'Autobiography and Travel Literature,' 'Women in Commonwealth Literature,' 'Politics and Literature,' 'Drama,' and 'Literature of the Indian Diaspora.' The organizers would also like additional papers for panels on 'Women and Migration,' 'Language and Multi-cultural Identity,' 'Canon Formation and Anthologising,' 'Cross-Cultural Connections and Contradictions,' 'Colonial and Commonwealth Relations,' literature from Malaysia, the Pacific and East Africa.

Requests for information and detailed suggestions (not more than one A4 page) for papers for these panels or for seminars looking at individual writers (especially those who will be attending) from the perspective of the conference themes, should be sent to:

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