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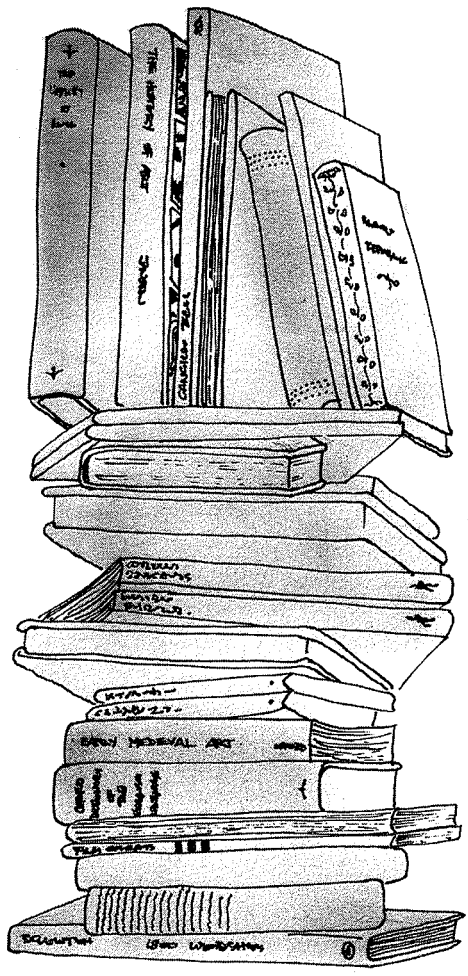

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editorial

THIS YEAR COUNTRY

ONE OF THE MOST INTERESTING publications of 1977 was a set of two volumes by Eli Mandel: a book of poems called *Out of Place* — an attempt to re-enter the world of his prairie boyhood — and a book of critical essays called *Another Time*, both published by Press Porcépic. They are not published as a set, but for Mandel the arts of poetry and criticism are twin acts of the same mind, and it is particularly because of the happy combination they make that they draw attention to the multiple dimensions of creativity.

Two books, two punning titles, two creative acts, two worlds: it would be tempting to locate a preoccupation with dualities here, were it not for Mandel's repeated revelation of the simultaneity of the acts. Doubleness, not dualism, is what the puns, for example, sound. The poems and essays are not Manichaean *either/or* activities, but declarations of the integrity of the human spirit — despite the uncertainties and tensions people daily experience. And lodged in the notion of doubleness is a whole theory of art which links person with place, place with time, time with home, home with identity, identity with language, language with person. The essays constitute a set of efforts to step at different points, with different perspectives, into this circle; the poems provide an evocative example of the linking process at work, revealing the mind catching at its own doubleness: marvelling at the mystery, and both fearful and a little surprised at the horror and the joy it discovers.

The first two sections of *Out of Place* (subtitled "The Return" and "The Double") enact two parts of the link: those of walking back into boyhood's landscapes and contemplating the mind's fascination with doppelgangers. The relation between the two is specified in the critical commentary: to return home is by its very nature to set up a doubleness, at once to affirm the difference between then and now and to collapse the distinction. And for Mandel himself, encountering "his own dilemma, writing west," the temporal/spatial dimensions transform by degrees into language, still asserting the multiple doubleness: "the shaping form

and the sense of otherness, the resistant material." The poet-critic's task as he isolates it, then, is to find the language that will voice the simultaneous twinning of person and place, rendering the public and private landscapes one.

Though it is somewhat deceptive, to return thus to landscape is to specify one of Mandel's central concerns. The deceptiveness derives from the usual definition of "landscape" as "setting." But landscape, undeniably "out there," also exists conceptually, and in this sense it serves as both the subject and object of *Another Time*. The configuration surfaces particularly in the group of essays called "Writing West," a group concerned with images of prairie man, the romantic and the real in Western Canadian fiction, and the relation between himself and region. Directly, he writes: "The images of prairie man are images of a search for home and therefore a search for the self. The question we have come to then is not *who* is prairie man, but what *images* does he choose?" The focus lies not on a story told but on a manner of story-telling; the creative circle exists not in theme but in process; and a regional consciousness consists not of a set of mimetic representations of external geography but of the process of sharing communally the spaces one mentally inhabits. As a consequence, for Mandel, the realities of Western writing do not manifest themselves in sociological realism but in the constant re-creations, re-enactments, re-inventions of the terms of the mind. "Region," embodied in the sharing of stories (which elements of folklore? what balance of rogues, outlaws, heroes, ballads, and myths?), is therefore not identifiable just with geographical boundary lines, nor even with the facts of history. The coherence derives from the language, from the recognition that identity is a fiction, shaped by the dreams of art and shared in the shaping.

The task of the reader, in such a world, becomes more demanding than simply to be a passive recipient of instruction or entertainment. No sharing can take place unless there are sharers. Reflecting more generally on theories of aesthetics, Mandel notes that the act of listening (an active silence) is a profound tribute to language. It asserts also the human value we attach to communicating, and in turn suggests again the public connection that literature repeatedly enacts. Art is often avowedly apolitical. But even when writers eschew politics, they frequently find themselves drawn or troubled by the public, political world. It is part of the external landscape through which they move, part of the tension that declares itself most deeply in the "private and perilous" recesses of the artist's mind. Sharing the dreamed identity, the imagined world, the shaping of fiction, the reader/listener shares in the tension, too. In the public world we draw identities on the map — delineating Alberta, the prairies, Canada, the West — for a structure to rely on in daily life. Sharing the fiction, we take part in the doubleness, recognizing the limitations of the boundaries we seem to need; we reach back for ourselves into regions we scarcely know, and actively listen for the voices we recognize as our own.

W.H.N.

THE WITNESSES

Patrick Lane

To know as the word is known, to know little
or less than little, nothing, to contemplate
the setting sun and sit for hours, the world
turning you into the sun as day begins again

To remember words, to remember nothing
but words and make out of nothing the past
to remember my father, the McLeod Kid
carrying the beat, riding against time

On the rodeo circuit of fifty years ago
the prairie, stretched wet hide
scraped by a knife, disappearing everywhere
to know the McLeod Kid was defeated

And rose again from the dust, to know
these things, to climb into the confusions
which are only words, to climb into desire
to ride in the sun, to ride against time

The McLeod Kid raking his spurs on the mare
the cheers from the wagon-backs
where the people sit and watch the local
boy ride against the riders from Calgary

To spit melon seeds into the dust
to roll cigarettes, to leave them hanging
from the lip, to tip your hat back and grin
to laugh or not laugh, to climb into darkness

Below the stands and touch Erla's breast
to eat corn or melons, to roll cigarettes
to drink beer, bottles hidden in paper bags
to grin at the RCMP, horseless, dust on their boots

To watch or not watch, to surround the spectacle
horses asleep in their harness, tails switching
bees swarming on melon rinds, flies buzzing
and what if my words are their voices

What if I try to recapture an ecstasy that is not
mine, what if these are only words saying
this was or this was not, a story told to me
until I now no longer believe it was told me

The witnesses dead, what if I create a past
that never was, make out of nothing
a history of my people whether in pain
or ecstasy, my father riding in the McLeod Rodeo

The hours before dawn when in the last of darkness
I make out of nothing a man riding against time
and thus my agony, the mare twisted sideways
muscles bunched in knots beneath her hide

Her mane, black hair feathered in the wind
that I believe I see, caked mud in her eyes
the breath broken from her body and the McLeod Kid
in the air, falling, the clock stopped?

PSYCHOPHOBIA

Mark Fortier

The mind is too complex and delicate
A thing for man; he'd feel much easier
With a computer that an expert set
Up with detailed instructions to refer
To at the slightest problem. For the mind
Is too confusing. Never has he seen
So many owner's manuals for one kind
Of device, but of those none has been
Stamped by the manufacturer. Some say
It capable of most incredible
And varied wonders and foresee the day
All other tools become dispensable.
  But still none whom he knows have gotten theirs
  To smoothly manage their routine affairs.

THE FABULAR FICTION OF ROBERT KROETSCH

P. L. Surette

"The fiction makes us real." ROBERT KROETSCH

IN SPEAKING TO DONALD CAMERON of his now-completed *Out West* trilogy Robert Kroetsch said of the last novel of the series:

> I'm fascinated right now by the effects of moving away from realism — the kinds of freedom you get, and the kinds of truth you get at, by departing from the sterner varieties of realism. I'm not sure anyone has a "realistic" experience; it's a literary convention to begin with, the notion of realism.[1]

I wish to explore the nature of that literary convention and the manner in which Kroetsch is moving away from it. He had earlier confessed to an impatience "with certain traditional kinds of realism, because," he said, "I think there is a more profound kind available to us."[2] It would seem that he wishes to distinguish his own writing from the tradition of realism, but wishes also to retain some of the connotations of honest-to-god truthfulness that cling irremovably to the term.

Kroetsch's *Out West* trilogy — or triptych, as he prefers to call it — is an elaborate creation of the "fiction" of the West. The three novels, *The Words of My Roaring* (1966), *The Studhorse Man* (1969), and *Gone Indian* (1973) share a common setting, but are independent stories. It is for this reason that Kroetsch prefers the term, "triptych." As he has said, the "connections are not narrative ones, they are of another sort: juxtaposition, repetition, contrast. The first volume is set in the 1930's, the depression, the second is at the end of the war, and the third will be contemporary."[3]

The Words of My Roaring is the first person narrative of Johnnie Backstrom, Notikeewin undertaker, "a heller with women," and Social Credit candidate in the provincial election. Challenged at an election rally to top the promises of his opponent, Doc Murdoch (who brought Johnnie into the world thirty-three years before), Johnnie asks his challenger how he would like some rain. That careless reply dominates the rest of the campaign, finally assuring the undertaker's election when the rain does fall on election eve.

The Studhorse Man is a novel of the road, but it begins and ends in the vicinity of Notikeewin and Coulee Hill. Its protagonist is Hazard Lepage, a studhorse man

of Acadian origin, squatting in an abandoned mansion overlooking Wildfire Lake. None of the characters from the previous novel has any role in this one, but the election of Backstrom is mentioned. The story is retrospectively narrated by Demeter Proudfoot, cousin to Martha, Hazard's fiancee. He is confined to an insane asylum as a result of his role in Hazard's death. The time of the story is some ten years later than the first novel, but Demeter's telling of it is still later.

Gone Indian is set in Notikeewin and Edmonton with the ghostly persistence of Binghamton, New York: whence the protagonist, Jeremy Sadness, an American graduate student, had come in search of a position in the University of Alberta English department. Jeremy becomes involved in the Notikeewin Winter Festival, replacing the grievously injured Roger Dorck. The story is narrated through the device of a long letter from Mark Madham, Jeremy's professor at Binghamton, to Jill Sunderman of Notikeewin. The letter quotes liberally from cassette tapes Jeremy had mailed to Madham before his mysterious disappearance in a blinding snow storm. This novel is set in the late 1960's or early 1970's.

Clearly these three novels do not form a trilogy in the usual sense of the term, for there are no narrative connections between them, nor even any persistence of characters. Johnnie Backstrom does put in a cameo appearance in *Gone Indian*, but the only real persistence is the setting. Of course the three novels are also related thematically, but not more strikingly to one another than to Kroetsch's first novel, *But We Are Exiles* (1965). Indeed, Morton Ross has written an excellent study of Kroetsch's first three novels demonstrating a consistency of thematic interest and of the device of pairing opposed figures.[4] The absence of narrative links in the triptych is, I believe, an important dimension of the "more profound kind of realism" Kroetsch is reaching toward.

Efforts to define realism in fiction are dauntingly numerous and disappointingly inconclusive. I shall not attempt to resolve the issue here, but some clarification of my understanding of it is necessary if I am to be understood myself. It would appear to me that much of the difficulty with the term "realism" stems from the fact that its meaning when applied to fiction arises from three quite different grounds of classification. One might conveniently classify virtually all narratives on the basis of four distinct grounds: their reference, their form, their manner of presentation, and the matter presented.

History, for example, is best defined on referential grounds, since it refers to past and witnessed event. Whatever the form adopted by an historical narrative, whatever its manner of presentation, and whatever the matter presented, it remains history if it refers to past witnessed events. Fiction is similarly definable referentially, since it refers to invented event. Realistic fiction, by the same token, is distinguished from fantasy on the grounds of references, since it refers to possible and probable events and persons, while fantasy refers to improbable or even impossible events and persons.

But fictions which deal with perfectly possible and probable events (such as lost children, shipwrecks, chance meetings and positive identification of long-lost children and parents) are commonly excluded from the category of realism, and labelled romance. Realism is distinguished from romance, then, on formal, not referential grounds. Romance narratives do not possess a sufficiently rational and unified plot to qualify for entry into the category of realistic fiction. In other words, it is not the events in romance that are implausible (as is the case with fantasy), but the manner in which the events are formally inter-connected.

Since manner of presentation is a rhetorical category it does not provide grounds for distinguishing between the traditional types of narrative. Any narrative theoretically has access to any or all of the rhetorical devices available to writers of narrative. However, if an historian were to write an historical narrative in the manner of stream-of-consciousness, he would probably find a larger audience among people with literary interests than among those with historical interests. Manner of presentation, then, permits classification *within* the major narrative types of history, novel, and romance.[5]

The last grounds, of matter presented, is a little more difficult to define precisely, but is essential to an understanding of the way in which we apply a term such as "realistic." For example, mythical narratives are defined by their matter, which is sacred event. Again, epic is defined essentially by its matter, which is great public event. A narrative about a little girl's outing into the country would not be labelled epic however many elements of epic form and manner it employed — such as invocation, epic simile, beginning *in medias res*, unity of action, etc. It could never be other than a mock epic.

The novel itself is distinguished from other forms of fictional narrative primarily on grounds of matter. The characteristic matter of the novel is domestic event. Those novels which depart from the matter of domestic event are distinguished from the novel proper by some qualifying epithet — as with the detective novel, the adventure novel, the pornographic novel, science fiction, and so forth. Ian Watt's notion of "formal realism" ("a full and authentic report of human experience"), applies the grounds of matter and reference rather than formal grounds in my sense.[6] The epithet, "realistic," when applied to the novel, stresses the characteristic domestic matter of the novel.

The mode of character definition is also a dimension of the matter. Mythical characters, for example, are defined by their function in the mythical story. The characters in heroic narrative and in romance are defined by ethical or religious ideals. The characters in the novel, whose matter is domestic event, are defined in terms of sociological and psychological types. Readers invariably complain that characters defined by function or ethical ideal are "unrealistic."

A further dimension of matter is the setting in which the events and actions of the narrative take place. A narrative whose setting is an imaginary country or

planet would have a difficult time being accepted as realistic however possible and probable were the events of which it was composed, and however "realistic" were the formal interconnections between those events. Novels with an exotic setting (novels of adventure and romance), or with a setting located in the past (historical novels), are seldom considered realistic even if they possess the appropriate elements of form and reference. It must be admitted, though, that one of the difficulties with the historical novel is that it confuses the issue of reference, since it commonly refers to both actual events and invented ones. It is perhaps on this ground more than grounds of matter that it is rejected from the ranks of realistic fiction.

THE PRIMARY PURPOSE of the foregoing discussion has been to explore the notion of realism when applied to narrative fiction. However, I have introduced a comprehensive scheme for the categorization of narrative, and have referred a number of times to the elusive category of romance.

Like "realism," "romance" is a term that is applied to all forms of art from the graphic arts, through literature, to music. There is also a particular narrative type commonly labelled romance. My interest here is in the term "romance" only when applied to narrative as a qualifying epithet on a parallel with "realism." That is to say, one wishes to know what elements of a narrative lead one to label it a romance.

As with realistic narartive, one identifies romance narrative primarily on grounds of form and matter. The romance can tolerate improbable event, but characteristically relates probable events whose interconnections follow the dictates of human wishes rather than the Aristotelian probability and necessity. Romance matter may be domestic and familiar or exotic and strange, but not public or sacred event. Romance character definition is based on generalized human type (for example, a young man, an old woman, etc.) rather than ethical, religious, sociological or psychological type.

But the crucial element of romance is setting. In romance narratives the setting functions metaphorically rather than representationally. Deserts, seas, fertile valleys, storms, droughts, etc. are introduced as needed to advance the story, set a mood, or express the theme. It is for this reason that romance narratives tend to be tales of journeys. A journey is the least question-begging means of altering setting.

Romance, then, is distinguished from other narrative modes primarily by the metamorphic and metaphorical character of its setting. This feature also makes romance peculiarly hospitable to allegorical expression, since allegory is essentially the transposition of one kind of event to another kind of setting — for example, a

political struggle transposed onto a barnyard, or a moral struggle transposed onto a jousting field.

The grounds of matter is the only important one for the realist movement of the nineteenth century in France, which is the progenitor of modern realism. The realists insisted upon certain types of subject matter in art. They declared that the unusual person and the extraordinary action (acts of heroism or sacrifice) were no longer suitable matter for serious fiction and confused the issue by asserting that the particular domestic and unheroic matter which interested them was referentially true, that is to say, real. But, of course, the realistic novelists wrote fiction. Hence their persons and actions were not referentially true or real. Indeed, an actual person, and an actual extraordinary human action — the story of Joan of Arc, for example—would be unsuitable matter for realistic fiction. The realistic writer might choose heroic matter as his subject, but would endeavour to make the agent of an heroic action conform to psychological or sociological type rather than ethical or religious type, as would be proper to an heroic action.

The fact that the realists declared certain kinds of matter to be true-to-life has seriously confused the discussion of realism ever since. Referentially defined, realism means a narrative of possible and probable events, and one can accept this definition without settling the philosophic issue of appearance and reality. Formally defined, realism means a rational and unified plot with a main action to which incident and chance event are rationally subordinated. It is only when one comes to the grounds of matter that the issue of appearance and reality becomes relevant. But even here the issue is a false one, because the realists do not so much insist that heroic action is unreal or illusory as that it is atypical. Such a belief finds its root in psychology, sociology, or even theology rather than in ontology. In other words, the realists assert explicitly that certain propositions about human nature and human conduct are true, and others false. The *real* is that which conforms to those propositions they assert to be true. Change the propositions and you change the reality. Thus the new propositions about human nature in this century, emanating from Freud and Jung, internalized the action of the realistic novel to the point where its reference was no longer fictional and plausible event, but the fictional perception of event, or even the implausible event of dream, as in *Finnegan's Wake.*

Kroetsch's fiction in the *Out West* triptych is realistic on referential grounds for the most part — although he introduces some rather implausible events in *The Studhorse Man* and *Gone Indian.* He obviously feels the referential criterion of realism to be a restraint, and seeks to escape it in *Studhorse Man* by inventing the insane narrator, Demeter Proudfoot, and by the device of dream in *Gone Indian.* Plausibility of event, then, is one of the conventions of realism that Kroetsch is moving away from.

On the grounds of matter, *Out West* is both realistic and unrealistic. The set-

ting of all three novels is primarily Alberta (with some recollection of exotic settings like Ontario, France, and Binghamton, New York), and it is described in verisimilitudinous detail. The types of events which form the matter of the narratives, however, tend to be somewhat exotic and unusual removing them from the category of realism. Nonetheless the persons involved in the actions are fully identifiable sociological and psychological types — as in realistic fiction. But because they are involved in exotic and unusual actions, they take on exotic and unusual attributes, thus moving them away from sociological type toward the exaggerated and grotesque satirical type. Clearly, once again, Kroetsch is straining against the realistic convention of character definition in terms of sociological and psychological type.

Finally, and most significantly, the *Out West* novels lack the Aristotelian plot, or unified and rational action. Although Aristotle does not draw the inference, a unified and rational action implies a single agent for the action of which the plot is composed. But the agent itself must be both stable and rationally comprehensible. One such agent is Aristotle's consistent and rational character (that is, obeying the rules of probability and necessity). Fiction which lacks an Aristotelian plot generally also lacks a stable and rational agent. The picaresque novel is one subtype of the novel which lacks both unified plot and stable character.

Stuart Miller, in his book *The Picaresque Novel*, is distressed by the disunity of action and the instability of character in picaresque fiction:

> The hero of the picaresque novel differs from characters in other types of fiction. His origins are uncertain. He becomes a rogue in a world full of roguery. His roguery differs from comic roguery in being gratuitous. He cannot love or feel strong emotion; he is incapable of anchoring his personality to some idea or ideal of conduct. His internal chaos is externally reflected in his protean roles. This instability of personality is seen in the picaresque novel as a reflection of the outer chaos discovered by the plot patterns. The picaresque character is not merely a rogue, and his chaos of personality is greater than any purely moral chaos. It reflects a total lack of structure in the world, not merely lack of ethical or social structure.[7]

Miller's assumption that an irrational plot and an unstable character in a work of fiction imply a chaotic universe reveals his expectation that the organization of a fictional narrative should perform an explanatory role. Rational plot and stable character tell the reader that God's in his heaven and all's right with the world, while an irrational plot and unstable character tell him that all Hell's broke loose. Miller's expectation is one that realistic fiction has fostered in him, for the matter and form of realistic fiction are designed to fit certain propositions about the nature of the world which are believed to be true. But not all narrative (nor all fiction) is designed to fulfil such explanatory expectations. Picaresque is one type of narrative not designed in its form or matter to fulfil an explanatory role.

The picaresque novel is not so much an anomaly in the history of the novel, as

the survival of an older narrative form alongside the novel. The realistic novel, from its earliest beginnings, has had a didactic function rather similar to that of epic. It has both articulated and preached the bourgeois world view just as Homer and Virgil articulated and promulgated the Greek and Roman *paideia*. But there has always existed an unofficial narrative art alongside the official, public forms of the epic and the novel. That unofficial art has never been fundamentally concerned with plot or stable character, because it has not been concerned to articulate a coherent world view. Its sources tend to be popular rather than learned, legendary rather than mythical. This other narrative tradition might be called fabular,[8] because it is basically a story-telling tradition. Its *raison d'être* is the story or fable conceived as a narrative metaphor unattached to time or place, to character or narrative causality. It seeks rationality and coherence elsewhere than in plot and character.

KROETSCH TELLS US that the connections between the three novels of *Out West* are to be found in "juxtaposition, repetition, [and] contrast," but he does not say what is to be juxtaposed, repeated and contrasted. In fact, it is not at all difficult to identify the major elements so treated. Each of the three novels possesses a roving figure (Johnnie Backstrom, Hazard Lepage, and Jeremy Sadness) and a static figure (Jonah Bledd, Demeter Proudfoot, and Professor Mark Madham). In each case the roving figure has affinities with the picaro figure in that he does rove, is morally irresponsible, and chaotic of personality. He is also, in each case, sexually active. Jonah Bledd of *The Words of My Roaring* is morally responsible, of clear and consistent personality, and happily married. The other static figures tend to be parodies rather than exemplars of the Jonah Bledd paradigm.[9] There are many more recurring figures in the three novels, in particular pairs of predatory and nurturing women, but it would occupy many pages to pursue them.

The recurring figures and situations — albeit recurring with alterations, reformulations and even inversions — provide a thematic coherence which is the hallmark of fabular narrative when it moves to larger forms, the kind of coherence which the framing device of the pilgrimage to Canterbury provides for Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*. The point of the Chaucerian frame is not, of course, to *justify* a collection of unrelated tales. His audience would not have expected or desired any such justification. Its function is, rather, to provide his readers with some guidance to aid them in *interpreting* his tales. For in the fabular tradition, the tale is a vehicle of significance, and it is the artist's function to articulate that significance. A tale is not a record of an event, as history, epic, and novella purport to be, but a parable of the human condition, and the parable requires a rubric or contextual frame to reveal its significance.

Kroetsch, then, achieves thematic coherence and provides his readers with some guidance in the interpretation of his tales or episodes, by means of recurring patterns and recurring figures. His patterns are formal or reflexive rather than narrative or progressive. Such patterns give coherence, not only to the *Out West* triptych, but also to each of the novels within it. Each novel is itself without stable character or unified plot. The following pages will illustrate the fabular form from *The Words of My Roaring.*

The writer of fabular fiction may clothe his take in the mousseline of romantic fantasy, the shrouds of gothic horror, or the tweed of everyday experience, but is in every case fundamentally unconcerned about either narrative plausibility or narrative coherence. Kroetsch chooses the tweed of everyday experience in *The Words of My Roaring*, but presents his readers with an inherently implausible story. Backstrom is a hard-drinking, philandering undertaker. "Six-four in my stocking feet, or nearly so," he says, "a man consumed by high ambitions, pretty well hung, and famed as a heller with women. Or at least I was, until the eldest unmarried daughter of the Burkhardt clan proved marvelously fertile on the strength of an awkward and hurried trial." He decides to run for election to the Alberta legislature behind the leadership of John George Applecart, a bible-thumping, teetotal, evangelizing preacher constantly inveighing against the Eastern "who-er of Babylon." His motives are entirely selfish and pecuniary. He hopes to sit

> up there in the Parliament buildings, gawking out a window at the streetcars crossing the High Level Bridge. The micks and bohunks be damned; let the krauts and the crazy Swedes bury their own dead. Tough titty, boys. No more digging the grave myself to make the extra two bucks. Not for John B. MLA. Indemnity they call it; nothing so crass as salary. Compensation for money that was never yours to lose. Five solid years of good green indemnification.

He shortly promises rain to his electorate in a moment of not-quite-sober embarrassment, as we have already heard. As the election nears, Johnnie encounters less and less derisive scorn, and more and more desperate hopefulness from the drought-stricken farmers; until the rain miraculously arrives on election eve, and his victory is assured. As if this sin against plausibility of plot were not enough, Kroetsch has the cynical, self-serving Backstrom suddenly turn into a reflective moralist. As the din of the rain mounts on the leaky roof of his hearse, he is seized by a "terrible doubt":

> The more I confronted the facts, the more I was overwhelmed by a terrible realization.
>
> I had nothing to do with the rain.
>
> I had not a thing to do with the coming of the rain. That realization came to me in the form of an emotion. I don't trust emotions. I have a goddamned good reason for not trusting them, they tend to run riot over my mind and body night and day.

> The rain had just happened. By sheer accident. And here I was, about to cash in on an accident.

One can see in the narrative device and Backstrom's reaction to his undeserved good fortune, the unstable personality of the picaro reflecting the outer chaos of the world — which Miller identifies as the essence of the picaresque novel. The difficulty with this reading is that the rain — far from being an instance of a chaotic universe — is evidence of a totally unexpected providential pattern in the universe. Backstrom's remorse — if it is explicable at all — is occasioned by his awareness that he has no connection whatever, in body, mind or spirit, with that providence. Moreover, Backstrom's keen awareness of his own instability of personality would suggest that it is not so much a device of the novel as its subject.

The main action — prairie politician gains seat in parliament on strength of promise of rain — is little more than a wire-copy Alberta joke, but it is an echo of the facts of Alberta political history. As Kroetsch himself puts it:

> In the rhetoric of prairie politics — the voices of Riel, Tommy Douglas, Aberhart, Diefenbaker — we go from Eden to the apocalypse in one easy leap. They never quite know whether it's the end or the beginning. I was playing with it a little bit in *The Words of My Roaring*. There's very little credence given to the notion that we exist in history, in time.[10]

And in Alberta political history itself, Kroetsch hears an echo of the historical and social thinking of evangelical Christianity. The story, in other words, is neither a plausible sequence of rationally related events, nor an implausible sequence of unrelated events, but a metaphorical pattern of event. In its generic form, it is the quest for the comfort and prosperity of the promised land.

It may seem tedious to belabour this point, but the orthodoxy of realistic fiction, with its insistence upon stability of character and plotted sequence of events, frequently prevents the perception of what would otherwise be obvious and apparent. The following review from the *University of Toronto Quarterly* demonstrates how thoroughly realistic expectations can interfere with the proper perception of a fabular narrative:

> Robert Kroetsch . . . does try, though perhaps a little too hard, to inject some humour into his Alberta novel, *The Words of My Roaring*, a story of one political campaign in the first Aberhart (Applecart in the novel) election in the mid-1930's. However, the time and place are largely irrelevant — regrettably so, since Alberta politics of that era would seem to offer prime material for the fiction writer. There is some significance in the fact that the anti-heroic narrator, an undertaker, is running against the old doctor who brought him into the world, and concurrently carrying on an extra-marital affair with the doctor's daughter, but the point is by no means clear. Incidents such as the suicide of the narrator's friend, Jonah, and the goring of a clown at a rodeo, seem gratuitous, though they may be intended to add appropriately modern dark elements to the robust comic scenes. The narrator's

election promise of rain for the parched farms, a promise which ironically comes true in the nick of time, also has little apparent narrative meaning.[11]

It is, of course, entirely unfair to cite, some eight years after the event, the hastily formed opinions of a man reviewing a book. But the spontaneous misapprehensions of a learned and intelligent reader most clearly reveal the kinds of expectations such a reader brings to a work of fiction. This reader attempts to stabilize the character of the protagonist by labelling him an "anti-hero," and expresses his displeasure at the absence of a rationally related sequence of events by the epithet, "gratuitous," and the phrase, "little apparent narrative meaning." The coming of the rain is part of the fable, and it makes no more sense to complain of its lack of "narrative meaning" than it does to register a similar complaint about Hamlet's death at the end of the celebrated play.

A MUCH MORE SERIOUS misapprehension, however, is the reviewer's assertion that "time and place are largely irrelevant." I assume that he misses the detail of social observation which is so central to nineteenth-century British fiction, and early twentieth-century American fiction. These expectations apparently blind him to Kroetsch's absolutely brilliant evocation of time and place. There is nothing in George Eliot or even Dickens to surpass the following recreation of Alberta in the dry thirties:

> We drove through the cooling night, and we felt pretty good, I can tell you. The crows had stopped knocking around the sky. All day they were boss, but now it was ours. A dozen bottles of beer were ours. It was all listed under our names, we were certain, and we drove and stopped and we had to stop again.
>
> Man, it felt good, just to be half-loaded and the pressure easing up in your bladder and the old tool held firmly in the right hand. For that one beautiful moment you feel you've spent a lifetime looking for a place to pee, and here you've found it. We watered the parched earth. You could hear water running, and that was a mighty pleasant change. Oh show me the way to go home. That clear sky above all rashing over with millions of stars and the baked earth letting out the breath it had held all day; the cowshit and buck-brush and a dying slough hole scenting the air; a little rank yet fertile with hope. It felt good.

Not only is this perhaps the greatest passage on peeing in literature (better than Rabelais or Swift), it is also attached intimately and significantly to its time and place. But the reviewer is blind to this evocation of place and others like it because they do nothing to advance the plot or develop the character. What they do is articulate the fable, Backstrom's quest for "five solid years of good green indemnification."

The ingestion and evacuation of liquids is a matter of no small concern in a drought-ravaged land — especially when that evacuation is performed by one who

is about to become responsible for his best friend's drowning in Wildfire Lake, and, ultimately, for the return of the fructifying rains. But Johnnie Backstrom's homage to the cowshit and buckbrush looks beyond even this novel to Hazard Lepage of *The Studhorse Man*. Hazard, like his great stallion, Poseidon, is not properly housebroken. We find him, dressed in a stolen Mountie's uniform, saluting the Alberta legislative building:

> Without further ado he aimed his golden stream at a commemorative garden a number of floors below. That moment was resonant with the future held in store; but Hazard, unthinking, fumbled with the historic buttons, resumed his burden then went in his cavalier way down the marble stairways, past the rows of glowering oil portraits, past the battle flags to an exit.
>
> A reluctant spring had come overnight to the city.

The future with which Hazard's golden stream is resonant is PMU, Pregnant Mare's Urine, from which estrogen is extracted in order, in Demeter Proudfoot's words, "to prevent the further multiplication of man upon the face of the earth." PMU proves to be the salvation of the Lepage stallions. However, the urinary vision reaches its apotheosis in *The Studhorse Man*. I cannot recall a single instance of liquid evacuation in *Gone Indian*.

The rigorous critic will observe that neither Johnnie's nor Hazard's evacuation is essential to the plot, and the fastidious will note that their characters are so thinly offensive that such gratuitous bad taste is hardly needed. Those who are neither rigorous nor fastidious may hear the delicate tracery of Kroetsch's prose through the hyperbole and vulgarity of which it is composed. Since event is treated as metaphor in fabular fiction, police court logic (rules of relevance, based on rules of evidence) does not apply. Both Backstrom and Lepage reveal their benighted humanity in simple and humble acts of mere animality that are nonetheless redolent with human imagination and significance.

Johnnie raises the issue of the final relevance of event himself while in contemplation upon the futility of his nightly amorous adventures with Helen Murdoch, daughter of his political opponent:

> You know, the way you half-despise yourself and half-know the boredom has set in already, and how the hell do I bow out without hurting anybody's feelings? How the hell did I get here? How long is it really great: maybe eight seconds. If a man comes for the grand total of six days of his life he will go down in history as a heroic performer. One miserable week of joy, including a day of rest. And to do that you spend seventy years; three score and ten conniving, cheating, betraying your wife, inventing filthy lies, wasting your money, missing sleep, deceiving your best friends, risking the creation of further ridiculous life, wrecking your clothes. My God, a two-week vacation is longer.

Backstrom has an answer for this scepticism, born of reading life as a well-plotted story:

> But out there in that garden with Helen, I wanted to reach up and stop the old world from spinning. I simply wanted to stop time right there and say, "Helen, I regret to say the sun will not come up this morning."

He rejects the inexorable logic of events, and the law of consequence, and embraces a futile desire for the infinite prolongation of the fleeting moment of his bliss. This is the Edenic and nostalgic counterpart of Applecart's apocalyptic preaching which would collapse time in order to hasten punishment of the wicked and reward the virtuous. Applecart, preaching over the radio to a group of voters in Backstrom's funeral parlour, accepts the law of consequence, but is impatient of time's slow chariot:

> Applecart was onto the dirty Easterners who were gouging the West. He had built up to that and now he was onto them. He was talking about the Second Coming and the Last Judgement, the final reckoning of the Fifty Big Shots. Just wait, he said. And he gave them a blanket condemnation. "Just wait, and in short order the wicked will be punished and the suffering good will be rewarded. . . ."
>
> Then it was time to drive home his point and he clinched her tight: "Come hither; I will show unto thee the judgement of the great Who-er that sitteth upon many waters . . . "
>
> I worked on the lakes for a number of years, but the thought had never struck my mind; the Whore, it turned out, was Toronto, and all her high-muckie-muck millionaires.

It is in the light of Applecart's apocalyptic fulminations and Backstrom's Edenic yearnings that his unexpected remorse upon the arrival of the rain must be understood. The coming of the rain has nothing to do with plot or character — and that is precisely the point. Johnnie repeats to himself the terrible realization that he had nothing to do with the coming of the rain. Through the entirely fortuitous coincidence of his prophecy and the event, he is sanctified in the desperate imaginations of the farm folk. The rain unmans him. In a nice inversion of the tragic role of Fortune, Backstrom becomes Fortune's fool through good rather than bad fortune. The coming of the rain forever denies to him the possibility of an honest victory over Dr. Murdoch, his political opponent and surrogate father. The reviewer's complaint, then, that the coming of the rain has little "narrative meaning," rather misses the mark. It has *no* "narrative meaning." It is an untoward intrusion of the desired into the actual; in other words, it has a fabular meaning.

Just as all of the tales in the *Canterbury Tales* must be read in the context of the pilgrimage to the shrine of the martyred saint as an act of Easter-time devotion, so all of the incidents in *The Words of My Roaring* must be read in the context of Backstrom's futile quest for "five solid years of good green indemnification," of Applecart's promise of the final reckoning for the Fifty Big Shots, of the necessity of dreams:

> Christ, you have to dream out here. You've got to be half goofy — just to stay sane.
>
> I'm a great one for paradox. My reading of the Bible, I suppose; dying to be born and all that. But really, it isn't an easy place to live. Like when the wind blows black, when it's dry, you drive all day with your lights on. Great electioneering weather. The fish lose their gills in this country. The gophers come up for a bite to eat, and they crawl right into the air.
>
> I won't swear to that — but it's a God's truth, you have to dream.

Backstrom is well aware of the futility of his quest, and is all the more appalled at its inexplicable success.

The "gratuitous" incident of the clown's goring by a bull is one of the many episodes enclosed by Backstrom's quest. A boy rides a bull in a rodeo for the full time, "making points all the way for style." But when the time was up

> the bull wasn't finished. He kept bucking and turning. And the boy who had been riding so grandly suddenly looked scared. His hat was too new, and that was a bad sign. He had got onto something and he didn't know how to get off, I suppose, and here he was riding the worst animal of the lot, and he wasn't losing. That was his trouble.

A rodeo clown, as tall as Backstrom, steps in between the boy and the bull, after the boy finally falls to the ground, and sticks out his rump.

> The bull saw the clown's red-and-yellow behind and snorted. The crowd roared. The clown started his quick sidestep.
>
> But he was just a split second late. The bull must have tossed him thirty feet in the air.
>
> The funny thing was, the crowd all thought it was part of the act. They roared and applauded. They thought the clown would jump up and run for his barrel. But he didn't. He tried to get up but wasn't moving quite fast enough, and the bull was on him again.

The clown, who was all skin and bones under his baggy costume, later dies in hospital.

Backstrom seizes the opportunity to address the assembled crowd, delivering an impromptu campaign speech, identifying himself with the clown, and the bull with the Fifty Big Shots from Toronto. The speech is phenomenally successful — particularly his repetition of the promise of rain. The point of it all is in Backstrom's ironic misidentification of himself with the clown. It turns out that he, like the boy on the bull, isn't going to lose.

NOTES

[1] Donald Cameron, "Robert Kroetsch: The American Experience and the Canadian Voice," *Journal of Canadian Fiction*, 1 (Summer 1972), p. 48.

[2] "A Conversation with Margaret Laurence" in *Creation*, ed. Robert Kroetsch (Toronto: New Press, 1970), p. 53.

[3] Russell M. Brown, "An Interview with Robert Kroetsch," *The University of Windsor Review* (Spring 1972), pp. 2-3.

[4] Morton L. Ross, "Robert Kroetsch and His Novels," in *Writers of the Prairies*, ed. D. G. Stephens (Vancouver: U.B.C. Press, 1973), pp. 101-14.

[5] Autobiography, it is true, can be distinguished on grounds of the manner of presentation, since only in autobiography can author, narrator, and the agent of the action be the same person.

[6] Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel* (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1960), p. 32.

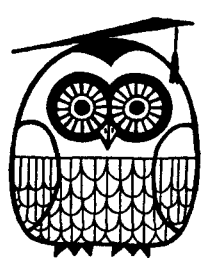
[7] Stuart Miller, *The Picaresque Novel* (Cleveland: Case Western Reserve University, 1967), p. 131.

[8] Robert Scholes has anticipated me in this use of fable — in *The Fabulators* (New York: Oxford, 1967). His earlier book in collaboration with Robert Kellogg (*The Nature of Narrative*, New York: Oxford, 1966) is an extremely useful discussion of narrative from Theocritus to Robbe-Grillet.

[9] These patterns are discussed in Morton Ross' article for the first two of the *Out West* novels and *But We Are Exiles*. Kroetsch himself mentions them for *The Studhorse Man* in the interview with Cameron (p. 50).

[10] Cameron interview, p. 49.

[11] J. M. Stedmond, "Letters in Canada: Fiction," *UTQ*, 36 (July 1967), p. 386.



THE LIMITATIONS OF MEDIA

Roderick W. Harvey

MARSHALL MCLUHAN HAS BEEN TELLING US for years now that the medium is the message. Modern Canadian poets and novelists have reacted to his work, and indeed have often used it as a springboard, for their experiments with media have made explicit the theories McLuhan gave us. Most literary critics have reacted against McLuhan's view of them as "Gutenberg men" or "print men" — terms not exactly complimentary but hard to disagree with. Yet the dilemma of Gutenberg man in the electronic age is a real one, for at what point does the book as experience give way to the book as print medium? Do electronic media improve our view of human experience? What are the limitations of the electronic universe? These questions are explored at length in two novels by Robert Kroetsch, *The Studhorse Man* and *Gone Indian*, though the conclusions reached are somewhat ambiguous.

Both these books explore the uses of different media; for both narrators, Demeter of *The Studhorse Man* and Jeremy Sadness of *Gone Indian* are Gutenberg men who are trapped, respectively, by print and tapes. Demeter seems trapped by his attempt to impose a chronological order on the chaos of his own experience. He is writing a biography of Hazard Lepage, the studhorse man, who is obsessed with junk — "scrap iron, rags, bones, and miscellaneous" — and stays alive by gathering stray bones and beer bottles. Hazard's environment is one of furnace rooms, telegraph keys, and bridges such as the High Level Bridge in Edmonton. He leads his horse, Poseidon, by a rein made from a "broken set of snow chains." And at home he has an amazing collection of junk, including rivets, horse liniment, Spanish fly and bones. The historian, Demeter, must take the details, the bones of Hazard's life, and reconstruct the life of a human being. Past events, past lives, and former deaths are pieces which the biographer must assemble like a jigsaw puzzle so the "very beast dismantled" can be put back together again.

The biographer's subject, Hazard, is actually a sort of archetypal Western

frontier hero, a difficult subject for a biographer; for it is difficult to write a good biography of a figure whose exploits are already legendary. How does the biographer tell fact from fiction? Hazard is an eccentric who is driven by his devotion to the Lepage horses; as the novel tells us, "extinction or survival was quite simply to be the fate of the breed of horse he alone had preserved through six generations." As he wanders from place to place in his wish to breed the "perfect horse," he looks for reference to the *Encyclopedia Britannica* and to the *General Stud Book*, a set of leather-bound volumes which form, we are told, "Hazard's history of man and his theology." He retreats into his bizarre mansion and pores over breeding lists; he becomes an authority on the attributes of the perfect mare. Every time Poseidon is used as a stud, Hazard pockets three dollars, which he uses to help maintain his quest.

But Hazard's chaotic wandering is a difficult area for his faithful biographer. Artifice and art prove to be an uneasy combination. Unlike the quiet, retiring Demeter, Hazard is a man of extravagant tastes. When the biographer first sees Hazard at a bridal reception, he notices that his subject is consuming huge quantities of food and drink. "In the midst of all that extravagance," Demeter complains, "I would only nibble at a shimmering jelly salad on one corner of my heaped plate."

When the difference between author and subject is so great, the myth changes, for the reconstruction may be incorrect. Sitting in his bathtub, surrounded by papers and notes, Demeter can see only a mirror image of reality: "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. It is then *time* I must reconstruct, not space." The Demeter-Hazard relationship is similar to the Professor Madham-Jeremy Sadness one in *Gone Indian*: in both cases a technological medium proves inadequate in capturing experience. But then biography is not life; it is a picture of life.

At the novel's end Demeter's new role as a studhorse man implies his rejection of biography. It is now he who will save the Lepage horses from extinction. Before this sudden shift, however, he is a dull, tedious priest to Hazard's colourful confession. He likes to believe that he and Hazard are "alike in strenuously resisting that distortion of facts by which men delude themselves." But he is still a man of facts, an historian, while Hazard is a man of action. Hazard denies the past and prefers life in the present; Demeter thrives on assembling "fragments" in a vain attempt to capture "a whole image of the vanished past." Hence his notes, carefully taken on three-by-five cards, mean nothing until they are interpreted for "invisible meanings." He must be both relevant and accurate, and much of the detail he recalls is simply relevant. This biography of Hazard Lepage is, finally, an incomplete picture of a man; the fragments of the past remain as they were, and the whole image escapes us.

IT MAY BE THAT GUTENBERG MAN is print-oriented and needs the freedom of electronic technology. If this is so, *Gone Indian* should be the reverse of *The Studhorse Man*, and Jeremy Sadness should be fulfilled where Demeter is frustrated. But this is not the case, for Jeremy Sadness is just as frustrated by his tape recorder as Demeter was by the biographical form. *Gone Indian* is really an anti-novel, a collection of tape recordings sent by an unemployed American graduate student, Jeremy Sadness, to his supervisor, Professor R. Mark Madham, who then plays the tapes and offers comments on them. This structure permits Kroetsch to manipulate the time sequence so that he can offer us miscellaneous events, which can be played back at various times. The novel is informed by a series of reflections and disguises. If Jeremy disguises himself as himself, what is he trying to hide? Is the mysterious Professor Madham a facet of Jeremy's own personality? Is it important that the name "Madham" is a combination of the words "madman" and "madam"? When Jeremy first sees Notikeewin, he notices a mirage at the same time. His own suitcase has disappeared, and the one he is carrying belongs to a mysterious Roger Dorck, the official Winter King of the Notikeewin Winter Carnival. On his arrival at the Edmonton International Airport, Jeremy is met by a beautiful blonde who proceeds to remove her "tattered mink coat," a "tattered red sweat-shirt," her "snowboots," a "patriotic plaid skirt" and, finally, her "tits." She claims to have been a buffalo in a previous existence. No wonder Jeremy asks for the patience of a buffalo, and notes that "illusion is rife."

Now we do not know how accurate Professor Madham's transcripts of Jeremy's tapes are. He is having an affair with Jeremy's wife, Carol, and is certainly not unbiased. As Jeremy tells Professor Madham, "how ironic: you do nothing, I do everything: we arrive at the same predicament." And once Professor Madham has listened to the tapes and has erased them, the record has been destroyed. We actually see Jeremy as Professor Madham wants us to see him, for Jeremy finally jumps off a bridge, leaving his tape recorder hanging from a protruding timber.

But Jeremy does not seem to be any better off with his tape recorder than he would be if he had to write a book. The details of his universe are fragmented and not accessible to him. Lost without his Samsonite suitcase, which contains his beloved "grip developer," sweater, socks, and a few chewed pencils, he complains he is "marooned for want of a Gillette Blue Blade." So he fortifies himself with a toothbrush, shaving set, and a "deodorant that is guaranteed to seal the body against disintegration." He always carries many unnecessary keys, and sees life as a door that might be unlocked, or, perhaps, as an experience he can collect. The three identical princesses at the Notikeewin Winter Carnival might be "Xerox copies," he muses, but he cannot decide which one to crown as the queen. He

notices that the bedroom at the Sunderman house contains many clocks, all of which have stopped. The travelling in the novel occurs in symbols of modern technology: trains, cars, and snowmobiles. Significantly, the railway track Jeremy ultimately follows to his death proves to be merely an antidote, a corrective to the "space of his own drowning" in which he is so totally lost.

The tape recorder becomes Jeremy's friend and companion. It allows him to record not only his notes and feelings, but also his asides, phone calls, and miscellaneous observations; and it is eventually found dangling from a timber in the middle of the Kelchamoot Bridge after Jeremy and Jill Sunderman have jumped to avoid a train which is "off schedule" and on a track "it was not supposed to be on." The recorder is Jeremy's most prized possession and his only real link with the outside world.

Professor Madham's problem in editing the tapes is, he claims, the overwhelming detail. The Professor's original suggestion is that Jeremy take the tape recorder with him to help him finish his dissertation. Since Jeremy is unable to *write* his dissertation, this idea seems logical enough. Jeremy will mail cassettes back to Professor Madham, who will then edit them into a presentable form. But problems arise when Jeremy finds that the tape recorder provides his only link with the real world. Instead of sending the cassettes to Professor Madham, he wants to hear his own voice for reassurance. On many of the tapes, he insults the university traditions of which Professor Madham is so proud. "I needed my tape recorder; given a microphone I could have spoken," he says at one point, and he comes to treat the tape recorder as a trusty weapon, often drawing the microphone as if it were a six-gun. He even uses the microphone to masturbate; and when he wants to test himself, he tests the tape recorder:

> Where he had expected to find his suitcase, he found instead his tape recorder. Consequence: He seized the recorder in his shaking hands. He jerked the microphone out of its leatherette pouch. He pushed the plastic buttons, listened for the first whisper of the turning tape: TESTING, TESTING ONE TWO, TESTING THREE FOUR FIVE SIX SEVEN EIGHT NINE. He talks. He jumps to his feet and falls down on the floor on his toes and fingers and one UP two UP three UP four UP five. He talks some more.

In spite of his tape recorder, Jeremy cannot escape the conditioning of his urban childhood. For he is, in essence, a programmed robot, and he sees all his experience in mechanized terms. A "child of Manhattan" who has "dreamed Northwest" ever since he was very young, he regards himself as a "poor city boy set down by blundering jet among the wicked and the rebellious of the vanished frontier." Innocent and in need of experience, he consoles himself with grip exercises, push ups, and sit ups; he feels a constant need to improve himself. His urban background has hardly prepared him for an adventure in the wilderness. He believes he was named after Jeremy Bentham, the ultimate scholar and professor,

and feels that there was an expectation in his own family that some day he would become a professor. But as Jeremy reviews his own graduate programme in English — the failed dissertation, exhausting teaching, and final oral examination that never came — he realizes that he would have made a poor scholar indeed.

This combination of urban life and scholarly activity has affected Jeremy's love life. He can get an erection when he is standing up, but not when he is lying down. He believes that this perhaps is due to the "OATH OF CHASTITY" he took when he was ten, and he often refers to himself through the sexual metaphor. He recalls his affair with a Miss Cohen at university; surrounded by copies of the *Norton Anthology*, the *Anatomy of Criticism*, and *Notes and Queries*, they had made love while standing up against a bookcase. But Jeremy is impotent in bed with his wife, Carol, even though he suggests she read to him from Gibbon's *Decline and Fall*; as he explains, "maybe I'm so programmed that I have to be in a learning situation." As in *The Studhorse Man*, the penis plays the part of a trickster. When Jeremy is worried he attempts to "flog" his "limp imagination," and when he is cold he worries because his penis may "freeze off." His only real sexual triumph comes when he is able to make love while lying down with Bea Sunderman, but he has already found out this new sexual potency while resting in a *coffin*.

These double symbols of creation and death emphasize Jeremy's need to reject the competitive values of his former urban life. Appropriately, he chooses as his model the mysterious Grey Owl, a man who left his native England in order to live in Canada as an Indian. This "model from the utmost cultivated shores of the civilized world" fascinates Jeremy but also terrifies him. He wants to emulate Grey Owl, but knows that to create Grey Owl another Englishman, the uninteresting Archie Belaney, actually "died into a new life." For although Grey Owl seemed to be a real Indian, he was actually an imposter and an illusion. And when Jeremy decides that he, too, must live as an Indian, he also becomes an illusion. Dressed in levis, moccasins, and a buckskin jacket, he resembles an Indian so much that he is actually arrested and taken for one. But as soon as he speaks to a real Indian, it becomes clear that Jeremy is a fake. In the city he has played at being an Indian, but never before has he attempted to live the experience, and he finds the jump from illusion to reality very difficult.

OTHER CHARACTERS BLUR THE SEPARATION between illusion and reality. One town resident apparently died while playing hockey, but phoned his wife after he died. This couple's house is appropriately called "WORLDS END. Some one had left out the apostrophe." But the character who most concerns Jeremy is the mysterious Roger Dorck, whose suitcase Jeremy has picked up by

mistake. When Jeremy calls Dorck's wife, he finds that Dorck went to the U.S. on business and cannot be located; later, he discovers that Dorck has met with a snowmobile accident and is lying unconscious in a nearby hospital. After a leap of legendary proportions on his snowmobile, Dorck is carried into "Our Lady of Sorrows Hospital" in Notikeewin and there he remains. The Northern "Kingdom of Dorck. Snow. And the cold sun" must put on a winter festival without its ruler in attendance.

Dorck himself is a trickster figure who represents the creative unconscious Jeremy is trying to explore. Usually Dorck is the judge at the Festival, and his absence forces Jeremy to decide whether or not he is capable of being a judge. The records Dorck has kept of previous contests are not available to Jeremy, and since Dorck remains in a coma until the end of the novel he can give Jeremy no guidance. Hence except for Professor Madham's admonishments and unhelpful directions, Jeremy is completely on his own. If he is to judge the contestants at the carnival, the final decision will be his alone.

When Jeremy reverts to his academic mentality for aid, however, he receives little help. Professor Madham is himself the judge of Jeremy, a judge who cannot resist the impulse to evaluate. And since he plays the part of Jeremy's acamedic alter ego, Professor Madham is often confused with Jeremy himself. As Jeremy says to him, "one false move, Professor, and instead of addressing you, I'll be you." As Jeremy's thesis director, Professor Madham has arranged a job interview for him at the University of Alberta; but we suspect this is really because the Professor is having an affair with Jeremy's wife, Carol. And Professor Madham is the stereotype of the college English professor. A pompous bachelor of forty-seven, he has a social life centred on the faculty club and regular "Friday Night Mead Suppers." The rest of his time is spent grading papers and writing a book on "The Tragic Vision in Modern Prose," which is pretentiously dedicated to "Professors Grunt and Fart for drinking stout with me in London." Since Jeremy looks and sounds like a member of the counter-culture, it is not surprising that Professor Madham's "greying wavy hair," "squash player's perfect figure," and omnipresent "pipe" are anathema to him.

Professor Madham tends to classify the information Jeremy sends him; and while he is editing the tapes, the Professor cannot resist adding sarcastic comments of his own. Although he realizes that the prairies symbolize the "continent interior" in Jeremy's voyage of self-discovery, he thinks the tapes reveal his student to be "avoiding life" and "failing miserably." He is unable to avoid approaching the tapes as if they were a student's term paper, and he complains that Jeremy "simply does not give us adequate motivation, adequate *allowance*, for what happens." Often he inserts marginal comments that indicate he does not really understand Jeremy. And the transcript he produces lacks the total content of the

tape medium, for it omits the speech patterns and inflections which are basic to the form.

Although Jeremy is rejecting this academic approach, he is limited by the academic quality of his own vision. His "stumbling, ossified, PhD-seeking mind" sees everything in metaphors, in symbols; he hates Professor Madham's "go-get-a-job syndrome, publish, head a committee," but cannot escape from seeing all experience in academic terms. When he is asked about women, for instance, he pompously replies that " I think I know something about women. I've done some graduate work in that area of specialization." He "skims" the titles of books in Jill Sunderman's bookcase so he can impress Chairman Balding in his interview. When he is asked to judge the princesses in the Notikeewin Winter Carnival, he cannot avoid "marking" then individually; as he puts it, "something in me wanted to write in the margins of those lives: Awk. Frag. Emph. Cap. Fig." Nine years of graduate school have made him arbitrary as well as submissive.

Jeremy may well be one object in Professor Madham's "collection of beautiful objects." He can compose articulate letters of reference and imaginative epitaphs, but neither of these does him much good in the world of the living, for he cannot finish his dissertation and thus cannot get a job. Titles and dedications become obsessions, for Jeremy loses interest as soon as he begins a particular topic. In fact, he begins to see life itself in terms of his dissertation. During a shoe race, for instance, he begins a dissertation called "Collapse: The Theory and Practice"; after making love to Bea Sunderman, he thinks he may reflect his success by writing one called "The Quest Unquestioned." None of these attempts goes beyond a title, but he has brought along six notebooks in case ideas start to flow quickly, and if he should finish one page he will immediately copy it "lest the original be destroyed in a two-plane crash or a bombing outrage." Yet even in the multiplicity of imaginative experiences in Notikeewin, inspiration does not come to Jeremy's academic mind.

Trained by the urban academic world to judge, to classify, and to evaluate, Jeremy finds himself in a situation where these skills are useless. At the Winter Carnival he is even addressed as "Judge," and people are impressed because he has come all the way from New York. Yet he finds the beauty contest cannot be judged, though his academic conscience tells him he *must* judge the beauty contest and he knows it. As he tries to reach a conclusion, he thinks of "Dissertation Number Eight," which appropriately takes the form of "Colon: Blank" and then, finally, "The Forgery of Distance: Ritual for a Long Night." After futile attempts to classify the contestants as I, II, and III, or as RED, WHITE, and YELLOW, he finally places the crown on the head of the "BUFFALO WOMAN," Miss Jill Sunderman, who is not even running in the contest. And in so doing he symbolically rejects the statistical mind, the academic mentality; he opts out of urban society by refusing to participate in one of its own rituals — the beauty contest.

He proves to be as inept at judging a contest as he was at writing his dissertation; and perhaps the two problems are related, for he is unable to use his facilities to extend his power through the media. This failure is as pathetic in its own way as Demeter's was in *The Studhorse Man.*

In *The Studhorse Man* and *Gone Indian*, Kroetsch's philosophical position is ambiguous. Both Demeter and Jeremy are limited in their power to communicate, and they seem compelled to explore their respective psyches through the media available to them. One novel is a mock biography, the other is a collection of badly edited tape recordings. These are considerable achievements, but they do not really present a unified vision of man in society; for Demeter and Jeremy are isolates, not typical men, and their societies are highly artificial. Kroetsch shows his talents for experimentation in these two novels, and his interest in how the media control us. But we still are, for all that, Gutenberg men, and we will, like Kroetsch's anti-heroes, continue to question and rebel against the media we created to serve our needs.

THE APARTMENT

Dayv James French

My bootheels tapping out the
boundaries of the apartment-to-let
will be the substance of my biography.

Once the carpeting is laid,
minor appliances find counter space,
I'll be only a footnote for reference.

Cocktail conversation will pose a question,
the necessity of annotation, e.g.
"I noticed egg shells in the sink.

Are they symbolic, the dichotomy
of cleanliness and godliness, obvious
Easter mythologies, spirit vs machine?"

I'll remember the rooms as empty,
needing no explanation but
will, strangely, not desire to move.

REINVENTING THE WORD

Kroetsch's Poetry

Susan Wood

THE HEROES OF ROBERT KROETSCH'S NOVELS stagger hugely into myth, roaring across the West in an endless quest that ends in death, or ironic triumph. The less-than-heroic narrators follow their progress with an analagous search for the words and form to tell the tale of a Hazard Lepage or a William Dawe. In *The Words of My Roaring*, that double search for a meaning and a mode of expression comes together in Johnny Backstrom's narrative, as he reveals the private, accidental and comic story of how he became a public hero. It's no accident that we last see him searching for words, to speak to the voters of Coulee Hill.

The double search recurs in Kroetsch's poetry. In several of the poems written between 1960 and 1975, collected as *The Stone Hammer Poems* (1975), and in the recent long poems *The Ledger* (1973, 1975) and "Seed Catalogue" (1977), he seeks his own roots (which assume national and archetypal significance) and an authentic language appropriate to the reality he discovers. Like Al Purdy holding a book of his ancestors' photographs at the beginning of *In Search of Owen Roblin*, or his own Anna Dawe following her father's field notes in *Badlands*, Kroetsch begins with the artifact, the relic. He evokes the remote Indians who shaped the stone maul, the grandfather who wrote the precise entries in the ledger, as he now shapes the search and writes the poem. Like Newlove in "The Pride" (for whom the search and the poem are also one), like Purdy in "Lament for the Dorsets," Atwood in "For Archeologists," or Bowering in "Grandfather," he achieves an intuitive connection with the past. A grandfather, a tribe of plains Indians; an Ontario mill, a prairie homestead; a dead Indian, a farm and a life abandoned by the now-rootless seeker: it has all become familiar material in contemporary Canadian literature. What transforms it, for Kroetsch as for the other poets, is the same power which transformed the stone into a hammer into a talisman: the power of the imagination. Those poets, like Kroetsch, who can speak to us of the presence of the past have not only achieved a unique, personal sense of its importance in shaping their present lives, but have also found the authentic language to communicate that vision.

"The Canadian writer must uninvent the word. He must destroy the homonymous American and English languages that keep him from hearing his own tongue," Kroetsch wrote in introducing "A Canadian Issue" of *Boundary 2*.[1] What does a given word, denoting a given artifact, mean for Robert Kroetsch, grandson of an Ontario miller and an Alberta homesteader, teacher at SUNY Binghamton, writer returning to Canadian settings in each of his novels? What does "a hammer/ of stone" mean?

1.

This stone
become a hammer
of stone, this maul

is the colour
of bone (no,
bone is the colour
of this stone maul).

The rawhide loops
are gone, the
hand is gone, the
buffalo's skull
is gone;

the stone is
shaped like the skull
of a child.

2.

This paperweight on my desk

where I begin
this poem was
found in a wheatfield
lost (this hammer,
this poem).

Cut to a function,
this stone was
(the hand is gone — [2]

The opening lines of "Stone Hammer Poem" announce Kroetsch's methods and preoccupations. In short, incantatory lines he repeats the word to evoke the object in different contexts and thus call up different memories and associations. The "colour of bone," for example, suggests the buffalo skull, and, in section 3, the

squaw who may have "left it in/ the brain of the buffalo." The "retreating" Indians of section 5, in turn, suggest in section 8 the sale of the land (formed by the "retreating" and "recreating" glaciers), to the CPR which sold it to the pioneer grandfather, who "gave it to my father . . . who/ gave it to his son (who sold it.)" The guilt and grief Kroetsch feels, remembering this abandonment, are powerfully suggested in section 10, as he moves closer to his own history, his own feelings. On one level, this section conveys the factual information that the father found and kept the stone maul that broke the grandfather's plough; on another, it provides a clear picture of an old man, "lonesome for death," and "lonesome for his absent/ son and his daughters."

The opening description of the hammer, too, suggests the hand, now bone, which cut the stone to its "function," as the poet's hand shapes his words. Tracing the history of the stone hammer, then, involves Kroetsch in a personal reckoning with his family, with the general Western experience, and with his own craft. At first, he is the observer, seeking the words to describe precisely. Yet the poet's mind, circling round the word, gradually edges closer into the world of the object, and the emotional associations it calls up. By the end of the poem, after accepting the memory of his father, old and alone, he no longer simply observes the stone. Instead, he has only to touch it to live fully, imaginatively in its world, smelling cut grass and buffalo blood. The process of association is weblike. Each separate strand (Indian, German grandfather, father, inheritor-poet) is finally perceived to be part of a pattern, with its centre the inheritance of life represented by the hammer: a tool to kill buffalo; a mere stone impeding another tool, the plough; a relic; now a paperweight and talisman for the modern poet, suited to his function:

> Sometimes I write
> my poems for that
>
> stone hammer.

This process of incantation, repeating the word to invoke visions of the object, is also central to the ongoing poem *Field Notes*, of which *The Ledger* and "Seed Catalogue" are the first two books. It is enhanced by the visual form of the books themselves. *The Stone Hammer Poems* is attractively designed by Joy Leach and Lilian Harrison, printed by Tim Chisholm in brown ink on sepia paper, to resemble a treasure from the attic. It is illustrated with historic photographs from the Glenbow Foundation: a plains Indian encampment for "Old Man Stories," retellings of the legends of Coyote the Trickster, clearly an ancestor of the comic-sexual Kroetsch hero; and a threshing crew, after "Spring Harvest" and "October Light," vivid farm memories. This extra visual dimension is used even more effectively in *The Ledger*, which extends the central metaphor to our eyes.

the	the ledger survived
ledger	
	because it was neither
itself	human nor useful[3]

The ledger is the "book of final entry, in which a record of debits, credits and all money transactions is kept," bought by Henry Hauck, Canadian-born son of a Bruce County pioneer, to hold his sawmill accounts. Grandson Bob found "the green poem," and wove it into another book:

EVERYTHING I WRITE
I SAID, IS A SEARCH
(is debit, is credit)

is a search	for some pages

remaining

(by accident)

the poet: finding	the column straight
in the torn ledger	the column broken

FINDING

everything you write	
my wife, my daughters, said	*the book of final entry*
is a search for the dead	*in which a record is kept.*

As originally published in *Applegarth's Folly* 1 in 1973, the double columns of the poem, first, recall the actual ledger and thus give force to Kroetsch's own accounting. "How much do I owe?" becomes a refrain. How much do I owe to the past? What debts of gratitude or guilt do I owe to these "specimens of the self-made men who have made Canada what it is?"

Shaping the trees.	I'll be damned.
Pushing up daisies.	It balances.

Second, the double columns force their own interpretations and representations, as the lines can be read both across (as in Anglo-Saxon poetry) and down, with the opposite column in ironic counterpoint. Meanings are multiple and interconnected, as are the six meanings of the key word "ledger," each unlocking a different vision of the past. The poet-accountant tallies up his family's past, our past, seeking to balance myths and realities.

THE FINAL, SINGLE-VOLUME FORMAT of the poem, designed by Michael Niederman and Hilary Bates, adds another dimension to this central metaphor. Two pages, flanking the titles, reproduce pages of Henry Hauck's ledger. The columns of figures tell of dead men's work and wages, await balance and interpretation. The title page, a map of Culrose and Carrick townships, Bruce County, 1880, extends the theme. A heavy black circle rings the notation "saw m," a red-ink scrawl proclaims, "Yes, that's the place, R.K." The poet asserts his place as a guide to, and modifier of, the past. Even the paper is heavy buff ledger stock. Finally, all the resources of different type styles, lovingly hand-set, complement the author's resources of language by emphasizing key words, and setting off the historical material (quotations, and entries from the original ledger) from the "green poem" growing around them.

Some accountings are the obvious ones of modern guilt:

To raise a barn

cut down a forest.

To raise oats and hay;

burn the soil.

To raise cattle and hogs:

kill the bear
kill the mink
kill the marten
kill the lynx
kill the fisher
kill the beaver
kill the moose

"As to the climate of the district, Father Holzer cannot praise it enough. He declares that during the first nine months of his residence here they had only one funeral, and that was of a man 84 years old."

Quickly, the balance becomes more personal. Ledger also means "a resident." Grandfather Henry and John O. Miller, brickmaker, meet:

That they might sit down to a pitcher of Formosa beer
a forest had fallen.

Canada Gazette notices of land for sale, census figures, become individual settlers; a national accounting becomes the personal vision of their hopes, and the failure of hopes.

CENSUS, 1861, TOWNSHIP OF CARRICK:

"Indians if any"

none

Gottlieb Haag's only son
grew up to be the first man
hanged for murder
in the County of Bruce

(I can't believe my eyes.)

having, on a wintry night, in
a sleigh box on the road from
Belmore to Formosa, clubbed to
death his rival

(I can't believe my eyes.)

Name: Catherine Schneider
Year of birth: 1841
Place of birth: Atlantic Ocean

Place of birth: Atlantis,
the kingdom sought
beyond the stone gates
beyond the old home,
beyond the ceaseless
wars of the Rhine
Palatinate. The sought
continent of fortune
lying beyond
your father's recurring
nightmare of the (forced)
march to Moscow
(my bones ache),
beyond the flight
from the burning
fields. Beyond
the night of terror
crossing the closed
border. Atlantis:
the kingdom dreamed

in love

The term "ledger" also means "a horizontal piece of timber secured to the uprights supporting the putlogs in a scaffolding, or the like." As such, it suggests not only settlers raising barns, but also Kroetsch erecting the scaffolding of a poem on that word. Each meaning becomes the organizing metaphor of a section. As "a large flat stone, esp. one laid over a tomb," the ledger suggests great-grandmother Theresia Tschirhart, who

Married three Bavarians.
Buried three Bavarians.

What did most men feel
in her presence?

What did they do about it?

it balances

Terror.

Proposed.

She embodies the mysterious power of the unknown new land:

The Canadian climate:
a short summer
followed by a short winter
followed by a short summer
followed by a short winter

She was a ringtailed snorter
just the same.

(you must marry
the terror)

Dead of a broken hip, buried in a frozen Alberta grave, she survives in the poem, after every settler has paid in full and Kroetsch has tried to complete his balances. She, grandfather Henry catching fish in the millpond, Joe Hauck mangled by the water wheel, all survive: not literally, as the ledger does, but imaginatively, summoned to the present by Kroetsch's imagination. As timber supporting a scaffolding, as "a book that lies permanently in some place," and especially as "the book of final accounting," the ledger becomes the living poem. As "the nether millstone," Kroetsch's mind too is the ledger, grinding the raw material of names and figures into a living account:

you must see
the confusion again
the chaos again
the original forest

under the turning wheel
the ripened wheat, the
razed forest, the wrung
man: the nether stone

The grandfather's cold figures from the past, the grandson's passionate search for the meaning of the past, move in separate columns, separate typefaces, down the thick buff pages to their final balance:

REST IN PEACE
You Must Marry the Terror

Kroetsch's immediate past cannot be summed up so neatly. "Seed Catalogue" is a more diffuse poem in form and content, with its central image forming an ironic commentary on the remembered incidents, rather than unifying them. The seed catalogue arrives in "the dark of January," promising spring, promising miraculous crops:

> #339 — *McKenzie's Pedigreed Early Snowcap Cauliflower:*
> "Of the many *varieties* of *vegetables* in *existence, Cauliflower*
> is *unquestionably* one of the *greatest inheritances* of the
> *present generation, particularly Western Canadians.* There
> is *no place* in the *world* where *better cauliflower* can be
> *grown* than right here in the *West.* The *finest specimens*
> we have *ever seen,* larger and of *better quality,* are *annually*
> *grown* here on our *prairies.* Being *particularly* a *high*
> *altitude plant* it *thrives* to a *point* of *perfection* here,
> *seldom seen* in *warmer climes.*"[4]

Mary Hauck, like the catalogue, came West in January, only to find "an absence." Similarly the poet, following the truth of his memories ("This is what happened," "This is a fact,") finds, at first, very little for his imagination. Where Bruce County had trees, fertile soil, history, Heisler Alberta seems to offer no artifacts of civilization, nothing out of which Kroetsch can reconstruct a past.

How do you grow a prairie town?

The gopher was the model.
Stand up straight:
telephone poles
grain elevators
church steeples.
Vanish, suddenly: the
gopher was the model.

How do you grow a past/
to live in

the absence of silkworms
the absence of clay and wattles (whatever the hell
they are)
the absence of Lord Nelson
the absence of kings and queens
the absence of a bottle opener, and me with a vicious
attack of the 26-ounce flu
the absence of both Sartre and Heidegger
the absence of pyramids
the absence of lions
the absence of lutes, violas and xylophones
the absence of a condom dispenser in the Lethbridge
Hotel, and me about to screw an old
Blood whore. I was in love.

The question begins to answer itself when Kroetsch begins to remember what *was* there:

the girl who said that if the Edmonton
Eskimos won the Grey Cup she'd let me
kiss her nipples in the foyer of the
Palliser Hotel. I don't know where she got to

or the local hero, the Strauss boy who "could piss right clean over the principal's new car." Here, he seems to be seeking what William Carlos Williams called "a local pride," expressed in its appropriate idiom. In a recent interview, he also acknowledged the debt Prairie poets owe to Al Purdy, who led the way in "abandoning given verse forms for the colloquial, the prosaic, telling yarns in the oral

tradition."[5] Thus while "Seed Catalogue" does make use of the double-column structure of *The Ledger*, it is less formal, less consciously "artistic" creation, appropriate to the unromantic reality it portrays. In fact, its primary form is not poetry at all, but anecdote:

> *How do you grow a prairie town?*
>
> Rebuild the hotel when it burns down. Bigger. Fill it
> full of a lot of A-1 Hard Northern bullshitters.
>
> — You ever hear the one about the woman who buried
> her husband with his ass sticking out of the ground
> so that every time she happened to walk by she could
> give it a swift kick?
>
> — Yeh, I heard it.

Unfortunately here, and in other poems in the *Stone Hammer* and *Seed Catalogue* collections, Kroetsch wavers uneasily between the poetic and the prosaic, unable to come to satisfying terms with either one. Unwilling to transcend the prairie town reality, which he records in its flat colloquial language, he ends by failing to illuminate it either. We've "heard it" before; so what's new? Similarly he seems unable, finally, to find meaning in his less-than-heroic origins. The final product of Heisler seems to be Kenneth MacDonald, the cousin shot down in 1943 over his great-grandmother's birthplace, Cologne:

> He was the first descendant of that family to return
> to the Old Country. He took with him: a cargo of bombs.

IT'S INHOSPITABLE SOIL for the growing seeds, or for the growing boy who fell off a horse that was standing still, and remembers, from his childhood, the hired man's jeers. The "home place" to which he returns is just a junction of lines on a map, a union of extremes:

> the home place: N.E. 17-42-16-W4th Meridian
>
> the home place: 1½ miles west of Heisler, Alberta,
> on the correction line road
> and three miles south.
> No trees
> around the house.
> Only the wind.
> Only the January snow.
> Only the summer sun.

> The home place:
> a terrible symmetry.

"How do you grow a lover?" the poet asks, remembering how he and Germaine, in the barn, "were like / one" — and remembering, too, how the priest taught them that they were "playing dirty." His friend, writer James Bacque, seems to answer the question when he comments to the adult Kroetsch: "You've got to deliver the pain to some woman, don't you?" With the exception of the mother, with her understanding and her sweet peas, the rest of the women in the poem are objects of frustrated lust (the Indian whore, "that girl / you felt up in the school barn,") or uncaring, like the football fan or the woman in the bar who won't listen to his story of the champion bronco-buster killed by his horse, the male destroyed by his pride. The only affirmations of life, in the memories of the past, seem to be the vanishing gophers and the badger that eluded his father's gun all one summer, in a long game.

> *Love is a standing up*
> *to the loaded gun.*
>
> *Love is a burrowing.*

Love is also not much in evidence.

Brome grass is about all that survives, in this climate. *"Flourishes under absolute neglect,"* the catalogue says. *"But how do you grow a poet?"* This is the central question of the poem; and Kroetsch finds no direct answer. His mother gives him cod liver oil, sulphur and molasses. His father, busy giving "form to this land," gives him appropriate tools — a crowbar, a sledge, a roll of barbed wire — and work:

> First off I want you to take that
> crowbar and drive 1,156 holes
> in that gumbo.
> And the next time you want to
> write a poem
> we'll start the haying.

Defeat seems inevitable: the only "poem" is the straight prairie road, "between nowhere and nowhere," with the poet as a porcupine killed trying to cross it; or it is the snow-covered prairie, with the poet as a rabbit leaving behind only "a spoor of wording." Rudy Wiebe shows him the land, and ways to write "great black steel lines of fiction" to give it imaginative shape. He and Al Purdy get drunk, shout poems in an Edmonton restaurant. He re-reads *The Double Hook*; he looks at a Japanese print that shows "How it is," the truth of everyday reality. Yet he still cannot find words for the land, which seems to offer only the alternatives of death or escape:

After the bomb/blossoms
After the city/falls
After the rider/falls
(the horse
standing still)

Poet, teach us
to love our dying.

West is a winter place.
The palimpsest of prairie

under the quick erasure
of snow, invites a flight.

How/ do you grow a garden?

How *do* you grow a poet? The question is a crucial one. Perhaps the answer lies in the poet's inability to lift the language and the town into some universal illumination. The world of "Seed Catalogue" remains harsh to the end. Nothing grows there:

No trees
around the house,
only the wind.
Only the January snow.
Only the summer sun.

Adam and Eve got drowned —
Who was left?

Not the poet, certainly, whose escape is confirmed in the third section of *Field Notes*. "How I joined the Seal Herd" is a sustained fantasy in which the narrator, like some Gaelic ballad-hero, learns to swim with his seal-lover in the life-sustaining sea. In "Seed Catalogue," however, there is no final acceptance, as there is in "Stone Hammer Poem" and *The Ledger*, unless it is in the lines: "We silence words / by writing them down."

Kroetsch, like many contemporary Canadian writers, acknowledges in "Stone Hammer Poem" his compulsive need to seek out his past:

?what happened
I have to/ I want
to know (not *know*)
?WHAT HAPPENED

Yet perhaps his most eloquent contribution to this theme is his acknowledgement that the past may not, in fact, have a positive meaning for us. The Heisler legacy may, in fact, be Kenneth MacDonald's "strange muse: forgetfulness," and his violent destruction of a past which no longer has meaning. The quintessential Kroetsch hero, then, is the reborn man of one of his most eloquent poems: "F. P. Grove: The Finding."[6] The writer Grove, "dreaming Europe / if only to find

a place to be from," creates a glorious past for himself; but Kroetsch gently mocks his falsehoods. Grove's real journey is a forward one, through the world-burying snows of *Over Prairie Trails* which lift "the taught man into the coyote self." It is a daring journey away from the created past, the civilized self, towards "the sought / and calamitous edge of the white earth," into possibility, and the new life represented by his wife. So Kroetsch seeks out his past, adds up his accounts — "How much do I owe?" — and then goes on to his future, the poet's task of "uninventing" the inherited words in order to tell new stories.

> Not to recover but
> simply to face/ force
> the past to discover:
>
> *e.g.*, that time
>
> *is*
>
> space
>
> *e.g.*, that the language
> itself is a
>
> word
>
> *e.g.*, that the poet
> was the morning of
> man and
>
> the sun setting.[7]

NOTES

[1] 3, no. 1 (Fall 1974), p. 1.

[2] "Stone Hammer Poem" in *The Stone Hammer Poems* (Nanaimo: Oolichan Press, 1975), pp. 54-59. The poem first appeared in *Creation*, ed. Robert Kroetsch (Toronto: new press, 1970), pp. 44-49.

[3] *The Ledger* (London: Applegarth Follies, 1975). The poem was first published in *Applegarth's Folly*, 1 (Summer 1973), pp. 79-97.

[4] "Seed Catalogue," in *Seed Catalogue* (Winnipeg: Turnstone Press, 1977). References here are to the author's typescript. This collection also includes the third section of *Field Notes*, "How I Joined the Seal Herd."

[5] Robert Enright and Dennis Cooley, "Uncovering Our Dream World: An Interview With Robert Kroetsch," *Arts Manitoba*, 1, no. 1 (January-February 1977), p. 36.

[6] "F. P. Grove: The Finding," *Stone Hammer Poems*, pp. 46-47.

[7] "Sentence," *Stone Hammer Poems*, p. 60.

EVENING DAYDREAM

Alexandre L. Amprimoz

light winds caress the plain
with young lovers' oaths

as seeds return to their first field
again your lost words
find my house
and the curtains are moved
by the echo of your kind breath

the walls recall your perfume
and I hear the photograph
your paper-heart
repeating a known beat

in your phantom-voice
I find at the bottom of words
a secure shelter — prelude
of a gone love
allowing me to assist
at my own birth

stripping the land of its bird songs
pushing the slow voice of bells
over the waterfalls
to find a tomb in my memory
the wind reverberates
like a magic mirror
your dead image

THE FINAL POEM

Irving Layton

I must go on with my crazy drives to the end;
in time my compulsions will become clear if not
to me then to everyone else, to my wife, friends,
children and to all who thought me a simple madman
sometimes vicious, most of the time laughter-provoking
in my passion to make rustless steel out of mere air

It is too late to whisk them out of my greying hair;
besides, they're not like dandruff to make a semi-halo
around my shoulders. The brush doesn't exist
that will free me of them, clear my head
and make it light and apostolical like my mother
who kerosened the lice out of it when I was a child

I'm insane enough to love two women
both ravishing, both good in bed, both equally sure
I'm that rarest of geniuses, one who's well-hung
and without a trace of sadism in his make-up
The trouble starts when they offer me
two opposing lifestyles, two opposite destinies

For the years still to fall from the calendar.
Take my word for it, the disjunction has given
my inflamed pebbles a turn for the worse.
O race of shallow materialists, shallower cynics,
the fruits of love, no man however wise
can quite foresee; and I'm a compulsive Heraclitean

Cruelly racked by ambivalences. I must have
two of everything: tape recorders, billfolds, poetic visions.
I never leave a store with only one hat or scarf.
Such amassing must content the self and anti-self
or were I toplofty as William B. Yeats I'd say
the man and his mask or something equally flaunty

For pedants who earn their chops decoding
the graffitti one writes on the walls of God's lively
ciborium. Well, they'll come for me at the end
when I stiffen in my love's arms — eeny, meeny, miny mo —
and should an imp of Lucifer hear me moan or pule
I'll do penance and write my final poem in Hell

WIEBE'S SENSE OF COMMUNITY

Francis Mansbridge

MOST CONTEMPORARY CANADIAN NOVELISTS are writing within an urban context. To be more precise, their concerns are generally those of our society in its more "highly developed" state — the problem of alienation, a sense of personal guilt, the search for basic values, the healing power of love — all are concerns which modern Canadian novelists explore, often with great skill and sensitivity. The nature of these concerns is often shaped by a vision of the world in which the traditional feelings of community have broken down; the individual finds himself in existential isolation, charting his own fate with no exterior guide on which he can rely, and no possibility of any return to a state in which the individual can strengthen himself on the values of those with whom he shares his life.

If not entirely opposed to this mainstream of the contemporary Canadian novel, Rudy Wiebe's interests are certainly divergent. Throughout Wiebe's work is a strong sense of community — a sense of man as part of a larger context, even though his protagonists often spend much of their time trying to establish their identity either within or in opposition to their community. His earlier work draws on his Mennonite background as a correlative through which to express this sense of community. Often, as in his first novel *Peace Shall Destroy Many*, the negative elements of repression exerted by the community are portrayed vividly. But even here the feeling emerges that the community is good and will, in some form or another, survive. It is logical that Wiebe should turn in his more recent writing to re-create the history of Big Bear and his times. Like the Mennonite society, the Indian society of this time possessed a strong sense of community, although, in Wiebe's version at least, a greater sense of the spiritual content of life. His novel *The Temptations of Big Bear* is the most detailed evocation of this society, but later writing has continued to reveal Wiebe's fascination with this time in such stories as "Games for Queen Victoria" in the March 1976 issue of *Saturday Night*.

A discussion of his first novel will serve to open up some of the central concerns of his work. Published when he was only twenty-eight, *Peace Shall Destroy Many* remains an unusual achievement, deserving far more than the condescending "promising" which is often the excuse for relegating first novels to the category of better dead than read.

Peace Shall Destroy Many describes the attempts of Wapiti, a Mennonite community in northern Saskatchewan, to isolate itself from the changing world of 1944. More particularly, it relates the growth of Thomas Wiens to manhood, and his consequent struggle for freedom in a community whose repressiveness allows little room for original thinking or acting. The formidable figure of Peter Block, (aptly named, for he blocks Thom's growth), is the major obstacle to Thom's achievement of independence. Block, the founder and unquestioned head of the community, is the autocratic father-figure whom Thom must confront to gain the power to release his own character.

The structure of the novel reveals considerable control in the hands of the young novelist. Oppositions between the old and the new, between youth and age, and between instinct and rationality, are effectively presented. Frequent changes of pace and the ability to express feelings associated with domestic scenes or bitter elemental conflicts help give the novel variety and interest. Wiebe's main problem in this novel appears to be assimilating a wide range of thoughts and ideas into a sufficiently refined form. The structure is sturdy, but roughhewn. There are too many passages, such as the long confrontation between Joseph Dueck and Peter Block in the first section, in which Wiebe indulges in long discussions of issues. While they have considerable merit these might have been presented more effectively either symbolically or through action.

Throughout much of Wiebe's work there exists a tension between the mystery of life and the rational; often they cannot comprehend one another. In this novel the tension between Peter Block and Thom Wiens is heightened by their differing attitudes toward the mystery that exists around them and within themselves. Peter Block's response to his instincts is stern Calvinist repression; he simply does not acknowledge the darker side of his nature. But the demons that lurk behind his religious exterior will not be stilled. He has killed a man in Russia, and threatens Louis Moosomin with castration for having had intercourse with Block's daughter. The instinctual fires also erupt in Elizabeth Block's affair with Louis Moosomin, in Thom Wiens' own sexual feelings towards the school teacher Razia Tantamount, and especially in the climax of the novel, in which Mennonite punches Mennonite, while Razia, straw clinging to her dress, is a bemused spectator.

In the course of the novel Thom Wiens realizes that there is more to this world than is dreamt of in the rigid, orthodox philosophy of Peter Block; there are aspects of his instinctual nature which he must recognize and accept. This recognition lies behind his acceptance of the half-breeds through teaching them Sunday

School. Conversely, Peter Block's rejection of the half-breeds is in keeping with his suppression of his instinctual nature. The half-breeds, because their instinctual nature is beyond the control of rationality, are feared and rejected by Peter Block and most of the Mennonite community.

This duality between instinct and rationality finds a natural expression through the use of the barn to symbolize instinctual nature, in contrast to the rational order with which the remainder of the Mennonite lives is generally characterized. Barns are traditionally the places in which or behind which instinctual things occur. And in *Peace Shall Destroy Many* it is in a barn that an enraged Peter Block threatens Louis Moosomin, and in a barn that the climax of the novel occurs, in which the repressed sex and violence of the young men finally finds some release. But it is in a barn also, we are reminded through the Christmas pageant just before the climactic scene, that Christ was born. Our instinctual natures have possibilities for good as well as evil.

THROUGH SUCH PARALLELS, Wiebe provides a suitable framework for the novel. But the prose in which he does so is often not as impressive. Wiebe is not a great prose stylist; he is living proof of the strange fact that a writer may be a considerable novelist while having a very indifferent command of the English language. One can admire the superb prose of such writers as Robertson Davies, John Updike, or Vladimir Nabokov, but the novel also has room for those such as Henry Miller or Frederick Grove — writers whose frequent awkwardness is tolerated by most readers. Perhaps we can feel a greater trust in their work, as glittering prose can dazzle the reader to the point at which he may feel he has been conned into accepting more than he had really wished. There is little danger of this in the work of Rudy Wiebe.

Wiebe's frequently awkward and ponderous style recalls that of Grove. Mordecai Richler has said of Grove that "the plain fact is he couldn't write very well." True, yet he is a formidable novelist, and so is Wiebe. But Wiebe's prose does have its difficult moments. Consider, for example, the following sentence from *Peace Shall Destroy Many:*

> For him to have another person in the house, one who did not leave hurriedly but peeped into his neat cupboards and fingered the windowcurtains, a woman who had just been there as slowly he must have grown conscious of her whom, as he had laughingly put it, he had before merely considered as the "Moosomin-girl-who-gets-the-milk", the raging storm must suddenly have seemed a thrust into humanity.

Even in context, this sentence, with its tongue-twisting clusters of personal pronouns, is hardly a model of clarity.

Similarities in characterization exist between Grove and Wiebe. Each has an ability to create impressive pioneer figures, but a similar faltering when attempting more "modern" character types. While Razia Tantamount and Hank Unger, in *Peace Shall Destroy Many*, are the least convincing characters in this novel, the Mennonite characters have a deeply realized vitality. And Wiebe is capable of a naturalness and humour with his characters, as in the scenes in the Wiens' household, that Grove rarely achieves.

Yet if Wiebe sometimes writes awkwardly, there are also happier times, as in the preludes to each of the four sections of which the novel is composed. They are both structurally and stylistically accomplished, and it is hard to imagine that the writer responsible for the sentence quoted earlier should also be capable of such evocative prose as the following:

> The man said abruptly, pointing north, "See the geese — beyond the grain — there."
>
> The boy stared, fascinated, high into the morning sunlight. The V of the wild geese wedged through the autumn sky, honking south over the prostrate field that waited ponderously ripe for harvest.

Each section is titled with a season of the year, and each prelude sets the mood for the actions that are to occur in that section, while suggesting what the general import of these actions will be.

Wiebe uses these preludes to both support the structure of the novel and illuminate some of its central concerns. The first prelude, to spring, describes two young boys playing hookey on a spring day. Though unnamed, the two are clearly presented as white and Indian; in the course of the novel it becomes clear that they are half-breed Jackie Labrett and Thom Wiens' younger brother Hal. Their warm, natural relationship indicates hope in the younger generation for inter-racial harmony that the older and most of the younger Mennonites cannot accept.

Jackie and Hal have skipped school to look for frogs' eggs; at the very end of the novel Hal says: "Wish it was spring so we could go lookin' for frogs' eggs again." When Thom and AnneMarie Lepp go riding to the Wapiti River on a moonlight night, they are fascinated by the frogs' singing. The frogs, and nature generally, embody a natural harmony that exerts a beneficial effect on those characters who are open to its influence.

Spring brings the awakening of Thom's consciousness; with summer comes continued growth. The prelude to this section shows Hal and Thom lying in bed while a prairie thunderstorm rages outside. The lightning's vivid flashes are described "as a revelation," while the thunder is like "long walls breaking" — perhaps the walls between Wapiti and the outside world. The association of the electrical storm with the mysterious, spiritual side of life is understood by the Indians, and by Hal's and Thom's mother. Thom at first counters Hal's feeling

that thunder is God speaking with the standard scientific explanation of thunder. But he agrees finally with his young brother that the Indians are after all more right with their less scientific explanations of nature's phenomena.

The second section shows Thom arriving at a greater awareness of the past and of the Indians' way of life. In the second section the skull of a wood-buffalo, unearthed by ploughing, becomes a symbol of the past, encouraging Thom's awareness of the country in which he is living. Thom also recalls a visit to Herman Paetkau, who has married a half-breed girl. While there, she tells Thom tales of her Indian past: "Hearing her tell of Big Bear, Louis Riel, Wandering Spirit, Thom glimpsed the vast past of Canada regarding which he was as ignorant as if it had never been: of people who had lived and acted as nobly as they knew and died without fear." Looking ahead, this is also an interesting commentary on things to come for Rudy Wiebe.

The prelude to the third part, Autumn 1944, again shows Hal and Thom talking. Thom is now referred to simply as "the man," an indication of the maturity he has acquired. An owl calls, and Hal mentions that he heard an owl the night before. According to Indian legend, hearing an owl means there will be a death in the family. Elizabeth Block's death occurs in this section — while not in Thom's immediate family, she is in the extended Mennonite family, and her death affects him deeply. But balancing this omen of death, a V of wild geese flies overhead on the way to a warmer climate. The birds suggest a combination of rational order with instinctual power, as well as the possibility of escape.

The prelude to the fourth section plunges the reader into the depths of a bitter Saskatchewan winter. Mention of individual characters is passed over in favour of the creation of an ominous atmosphere created by a blizzard followed by a cold spell:

> The trough-heaters, under prodding pokers, plumed smoke into the air; without them each pail of water had spread solid in the trough. Every breath drew a knife-wound down the throat. No one thought of the howling blizzard now. The men, dumping hay in mangers and heaping straw under the bellies of their stock, knew that the silent malignancy was far more deadly.

The "silent malignancy" reaches vital organs in this final section, as the powerful drives which the Mennonite community has repressed will finally be denied no longer.

Threats to the Mennonite community come most obviously from the half-breeds, but even more dangerously from the new school teacher, Razia Tantamount. Pretty and competent, she is able to adapt herself superficially to Mennonite ways, while remaining a self-seeking opportunist totally devoid of any community sense. At Elizabeth's funeral her face is "like a death's-head." Her association with death is enforced in the final scene of the novel when she gets together with Hank Unger, who has shot down twenty-seven Germans.

While the bulk of the novel is more realistic in its approach than the more symbolic preludes, symbolic passages enrich the texture of the novel. Imagery of light and darkness is particularly important. As Joseph speaks toward the close of the first section, bringing intellectual light to the assembled Mennonites, a lamp is brought in. As conservative Peter Block and Progressive Joseph Dueck argue, a moth flutters around the lamp. At the end of the section, the moth, having "dared all for the light," burns itself to death. Throughout the novel light and fire are associated with both intellectual enlightenment and destruction; the fate of the moth indicates the possible destiny of those who seek enlightenment. Later, scraps of the Promethean legend float through Thom's mind, indicating Thom's role as bringer of light and fire to the Mennonite community, and also his possible fate.

The light and fire imagery receives greater expansion at the end of the third section, which closes with Thom's spiritual crisis, presented through a huge forest fire that both purifies and destroys Wapiti:

> He heard a pop! Before his eyes an enormous spark arched through the air to fall at his feet on the tower. He could not stir while he stared in fascination as the glowing spark spread wider and wider its black circle to leap into flame with a tearing sound. Then the fire surrounded him on the tower he had thought limbless, and he could only grip the peeled-poplar rail blistering in the heat as the holocaust caught him. As his heart balked in terror, he was wiped away.

While the fire wipes out the barriers between Wapiti and the outside world, Thom is shaken by the intimation that his new freedom may involve his own destruction. The references to fire in this passage recall the Holy Ghost, whose evangelical associations are antithetical to the insularity of the Mennonite community, but in accordance with Thom's efforts to bring Christianity to the half-breeds.

WHILE SUCH SYMBOLIC SCENES enrich the texture of the novel, Wiebe's main achievements are in those standbys of the novelist's trade, narrative and character. Peter Block is his greatest success. Although Block has murdered a man before coming to Canada, is responsible for the unhappiness and eventual death of his daughter Elizabeth, is a hypocrite and bigot, Wiebe manages to gain most readers' sympathy for him. Block's chequered background and subsequent mental anguish are revealed in considerable detail; we see him as a driven man, motivated by his efforts to create a society in which his son may find the mental peace he has been denied. His ultimate failure adds to the pathos of his situation.

With little opposition from within his own family, Thom's rebellion naturally focuses on authoritarian Peter Block. The fact that Thom's chief mentor, Joseph Dueck, leaves Wapiti to join the army's Restricted Medical Corps isolates Thom,

shining the spotlight clearly on his own development. This growth is viewed largely in intellectual (but not abstract) terms. A romantic attraction exists between AnneMarie Lepp and Thom, but development of this relationship is foregone in favour of Thom's definition of his relationship with Peter Block and the community.

As Thom grows stronger, Peter Block's grip on his people and on himself begins to weaken. Block is shaken, although unable to cry, when he finds that his daughter Elizabeth was the instigator in her brief illicit relationship with half-breed Louis Moosomin. He is even more deeply shaken when Thom loses his temper in a subsequent argument with Block, bitterly criticizing him for his treatment of his children. But the third and mortal blow comes at the climax of the novel when his son Pete, who is in love with Razia, flattens his rival Hank Unger. Pete's justification, "Pa, you have to do what you think right," is a rejection of the nonviolence and mindless obedience his father had sought in order to perpetuate his own ideals:

> The Deacon bowed his scarred grey head to his hands, and the men of Wapiti community, Métis and Mennonite, standing in an old barn, heard the sobs of a great strong man, suddenly bereft and broken. They heard, terrified.

Rudy Wiebe's later novels are generally more accomplished as works of art, but *Peace Shall Destroy Many* has an unusual appeal. While he was born a Mennonite, it is neither possible nor relevant to know the extent to which this novel might be based on recollections of his early life. It is relevant, though, that the novel has a burning urgency not shared by his later works to the same extent. *Peace Shall Destroy Many* is a rough work. The style is often awkward, the characterization uneven, and the didactic elements often obtrusive. But it is borne onward by a rare driving passion. Wiebe conveys the feeling that he cares very much about his characters and what happens to them.

As a form which from its origins has been closely associated with the middle class, the novel has always had the old puritan problem of "how to live" closer to its heart than has any other literary genre. Yet an intense moralistic concern, as expressed in *Peace Shall Destroy Many*, became less fashionable by mid-century, as novelists tended to veil their concern beneath layers of coolness and sophistication. Perhaps Wiebe's stronger sense of community enables him to keep the problem of "how to live" closer to the forefront of his work. One has only to think of Wiebe in conjunction with such novelists as Matt Cohen or Margaret Atwood, who are only a few years younger than he, for the difference in their viewpoint to be apparent. Cohen and Atwood are products of an urban consciousness in which detachment and restraint are not only valued but perhaps also necessary for survival. Wiebe, on the other hand, is not afraid of committing himself — not even at the risk of appearing a fool. And sometimes the results are, indeed, strange, as in

his second novel *First and Vital Candle*. But this ability to let go can also create an impressive splendour which shines through in such accomplishments as *The Temptations of Big Bear* or *Peace Shall Destroy Many*. His willingness to try the unusual makes him one of the most individual novelists writing in Canada today.

TROPICAL FLOWERS

Irving Layton

Beyond the window
pussytail and neighbouring cereus
O lovely Cinderella among flowers!
And the heart-shaped anthurium, deep red.

Sweet-scented frangipani, Turk's fez
Napoleon's button, blue petrea, golden trumpet
the spectacular poinsettia
flaming in the distance, tiger's claw
and the passion flower
haloed stand-in for my brother Jesus.

Bloom, flowers, and blaze
with bright persistence. Tendril by tendril
ignite the encircling air
and by your rooted sprightliness disgrace
the shivering decadents
too frail for the squalls and windstorms
of this world, the quaggy
sentimentalists with planned utopias
in their sick livers.

St. Lucia
December 18, 1977

WIEBE & RELIGIOUS STRUGGLE

R. P. Bilan

W. J. KEITH HAS CLAIMED that Rudy Wiebe's *The Blue Mountains of China* is "among the finest novels written in Canada — or anywhere else, for that matter — in our time."[1] While I think that this extremely high praise needs to be qualified, I agree that Wiebe's novel is an impressive achievement. Although the problem of didacticism and the "syntactical awkwardness" in Wiebe's style — which leads to some very murky writing in places — are more obtrusive weaknesses than Keith allows, they are more than offset by the novel's strengths. In *The Blue Mountains of China* Rudy Wiebe not only vividly recounts the history of a segment of the Mennonite people, but, more importantly, he presents a complex judgment of the Mennonites and the modern world, and compellingly dramatizes his own radically Christian vision.

Wiebe relates the history of a group of Russian Mennonites, forced to flee Russia at various times because of restrictions on their religious freedom. The most conservative, committed Mennonites left Russia in 1870 and came to Canada, but when their freedom to use German in the schools was threatened, they emigrated once again, this time to South America. A second, more secular group of Mennonites stayed in Russia until 1929, departing only when their land was collectivized and they faced compulsory military service. Wiebe's main concern was not simply to re-tell this history, for as he explained in an interview with Donald Cameron, "in one sense historical novels are not really historical at all. You could call *The Blue Mountains of China* a historical novel, but it's about people struggling with exactly the kinds of things that we struggle with, except for a slight shift in time and place."[2] For Rudy Wiebe, and the Mennonites he presents in his novel, the "kinds of things that we struggle with" are primarily questions of religious belief. However, the struggle for faith and a truly Christian way of life is beset by many difficulties: the suffering in life, the attractions of the secular materialistic world, and, particularly for the Mennonites, the temptation to isolate themselves from the rest of the world.

Wiebe tells the Mennonites' history and explores his central themes in a book with a very unusual and complex structure. Many of the thirteen chapters of the novel read as almost self-contained stories, but Wiebe connects them in part by an intricate series of cross-references that help explain previous chapters and look forward to the ensuing ones. Also, the central characters in the novel — Jakob Friesen IV, Elizabeth Driediger, and John Reimer — appear in more than one chapter; Jakob, for instance, is introduced indirectly in the second and fourth chapters, the eighth centres on him, and he and John Reimer are the key figures at the end of the novel. The primary source of unity and continuity in the novel, however, is provided by the four chapters narrated by Frieda Friesen. In remembering the main events of her life, Frieda recounts the central experiences of the conservative Mennonites who twice emigrated for religious beliefs. Frieda herself, in fact, provides one of the touchstones in the novel; she has the kind of faith that makes a truly religious acceptance of life possible.

Wiebe begins the novel with Frieda's story because it takes us farthest back in time — to 1879 when her father Isaak Friesen came to Canada — and it establishes the religious theme. Frieda's opening words, as she remembers her earliest years in Manitoba, reveal her complete reliance on God:

> I have lived long. So long, it takes me days to remember even parts of it. . . . What I tell I remember only through God's grace. I never wrote anything down and didn't have more than the usual Mennonite village school. . . . But the Lord led me through so many deep ways and of the world I've seen a little, both north and south. If your eyes stay open and He keeps your head clear you sometimes see so much more than you want of how it is with the world. And if you don't you can thank Him for that, too.

Frieda's trust in God, is, in a sense, normative, and stands as a contrast to the increasing lack of faith and acceptance shown by Jakob Friesen. For Frieda, despite the hardships she endures, the advice from her father sustains her throughout life: "But think always like this, he said, 'it does come all from God, strength and sickness, want and plenty'."

The normative implications of Frieda's life are touched on again in chapter three where she recalls the years in Manitoba from 1903 to 1926. She describes her wedding to Johann Friesen, and the success of their marriage almost seems the blessing they receive for their faith. Once when Johann is away, however, Frieda faces a moment of temptation:

> It was a little later, November, 1906 when we already had two nice children, Johann and Esther, that God sent me great temptation and doubt. My nerves were very bad; I could not be alone. The devil stood right beside my bed with red horns and said, 'Do it, do it!' though he never said what. Twice the elders had to come to pray. Then I learned to know our Lord Jesus. Through many prayers and sleepless nights and God's grace I found forgiveness of all my sins and came to the true quiet faith.

This scene has a crucial structural and thematic significance in the novel. Frieda's faith is strengthened here, and, of equal importance, the nature of her temptation is deliberately left ambiguous, for what is being emphasized is her resistance to *any* temptation. But in much of the rest of the novel Wiebe examines the experience of Mennonites who succumb to various "temptations." The main structural principle of the first half of the book, in fact, is to alternate the presentation of Frieda's faith with a chapter showing a Mennonite struggling with the confines of the religious tradition.

Jakob Friesen IV is in many ways a contrasting figure to Frieda. At the end of the novel, as an old man, he claims he no longer "believes," but from the very beginning Jakob does not adhere firmly to his faith. When we first meet him, in the second chapter "Sons and Heirs," he has already succumbed greatly to the temptations of materialism and, unwilling to give up his possessions, has remained in Russia. He has become a rich kulak with the biggest operation in Karatow colony and we find out indirectly, through the reflections of his son Jakob V, that while other Mennonites were trying to get out of the "communist paradise":

> His father, face black with rage, said he was not moving, let the whole village run if it would. He would
> *let them run can't fit in when a little changes or some stupid communist says don't preach so much let them run won't take this from me they can't do anything without me and they'll have to keep exile pooh I'm no preacher*
> buy it up and run it all by himself. He almost had.

Jakob is a secularized Mennonite who has abandoned much of his religious tradition; nonetheless, he apparently is still a believing Mennonite at this point. However, the decisive event in his life occurs when the communists take Jakob V away in place of him, and assuming his son is lost, Jakob flees to Moscow with the rest of his family. Jakob never recovers from the guilt of abandoning his son and comes, unlike Frieda, to doubt God's justice.

As THE EXPERIENCE of Jakob V is described, the complexity of Wiebe's attitudes towards the Mennonites' religious tradition becomes evident. Jakob V is held in a cell for six weeks by the communists and is dazed and disoriented by the experience, but an even greater shock awaits him when he returns home and finds everyone but Escha, the Russian peasant who worked for his father, and Muttachi, his grandmother, gone. Wiebe uses a stream-of-consciousness technique to present Jakob's innermost thoughts, and the first thing we see is that his sexual desire is in conflict with his religious training: *"Blessed savior make me pure that in heaven I may."* Through Frieda, Wiebe shows the positive aspects of the Mennonite religion, but here he begins to examine its restrictive

features. Jakob regards sexuality as a temptation and a possible sin, and his religious tradition stresses the need for confession of sins:

> *the Russian girl in the water naked squatting and rising I never confessed that I saw my sister when and wet playing with jesus has come again he will come again will you be ready when the trumpets sound six times I was not ready with all my sins he has come.*

Jakob's religious upbringing has inhibited the free expression of his sexuality, and Wiebe implies a criticism here, even while he obviously does not approve of the loose sexuality represented by Escha, who is paying a Russian girl to sleep with him. Escha offers the girl to Jakob, who is repulsed and yet at the same time is struggling with his desire for her: "*blessed savior make me pure.*" But Jakob is ensnared by his desire and while talking to Muttachi about the fate of the fleeing Mennonites, he thinks:

> Runners and hiders and liars. There was lying here she had no inkling of, thank god. Everything seemed acrawl in him; control of mind and body he had fought for and he thought held, sometimes so very precisely in that stinking cell seemed now, when he placed a finger against it, almost moldered away that he was home in the huge, empty, house. He had been trained well, a good Mennonite boy; learned quiet joy and denial and prayers, sat between parents in church or, later, in front with the other boys, decently and quietly had been taught his sins and cried over them and asked the Lord Jesus forgiveness, and his parents too.... He prayed also, as always, as always all he had pushed aside and gotten round though he knew it wrong, rose in the praying blacker and heavier than sin and he asked forgiveness, crying. There was such comfort in cleanliness. Runners and hiders; liars.

The Mennonite emphasis on sexual purity has just brought Jakob torment and left him incapable of either resisting this temptation or responding freely.

Instead of pursuing his family to Moscow Jakob remains at home in a kind of daze, held by the girl. Wiebe captures something of the disoriented state of Jakob's mind when he first goes to her; she apparently draws him into a sexual dance, which results in a fight between Jakob and Escha. When Jakob leaves the barn he reflects:

> He had been taught man is not a carefree brute.... 'Thou shalt not.' He had been taught his sins. But now, like then on the studfarm, he had played with himself; alright, wanted himself to be played with, and he was beyond control.

He returns to the barn and kills Escha, whom he seems to blame for his "fall," then he sleeps with the girl. Jakob is quickly apprehended and as he is being taken away he hears that his "mother and sisters are out, Germany, the 25th, but your father — they're shipping him — ." His information mingles with his thoughts about what he has done; he realizes he experiences a certain relief, and

feels "*blessed alone out the 25th and shipping him blessed alone.*" When Serebro, a former Mennonite who has become a communist, offers to help clear Jakob of the murder, Jakob begins kicking him, bringing on his own death: "The commissar sank to the ground screaming, and Jakob was laughing so hard, laughing so dry and hard, he did not stop when down into his face the first gun barrel smashed." Apart from his obvious distaste for Serebro, Jakob kicks him because Serebro is tempting him to get away with his crime. Nonetheless, Jakob, I take it, has broken down completely at this point, and while the experience of being imprisoned by the communists and being left alone by his family have unsettled him greatly, it is also clear that much of the strain on him has been caused by his religious training.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER, "Black Vulture," is a pivotal point in the book, for, as Franz Epp tells John Reimer of the night in Moscow in 1929, when Jakob Friesen IV was taken away by the communists, we are introduced to all the other central characters: the Epps, the Reimers (out of consideration for John, Franz disguises Samuel Reimer Sr., calling him Ernst Balzer), and the Driedigers. One of the main points of Franz's tale is the implied contrast between his father and Jakob Friesen. Franz tells John: "If I was drafted, Pa wouldn't leave if they chased him, which wasn't likely. He was like that: he wouldn't leave one child behind. God had given them to him and he would not leave one in the godless country Russia had become." And Franz speaks of another father who acts badly: Balzer is concerned solely for his own family and is indifferent to the fate of Jakob Friesen — and to the grief of Mrs. Friesen. The implications of Balzer's selfishness are explored by Wiebe in the last part of the novel, and in a sense Wiebe sees the narrow self-regarding concern enacted by Balzer as the ultimate form of moral failure and the central temptation facing the Mennonites. In the immediately following chapters, however, Wiebe examines the more specific kinds of temptations that the Mennonites must confront.

In leaving Russia, and their villages, the Mennonites are exposed to a more materialistic way of life. In chapter five, "Over the Red Line," Wiebe describes the crossing of the Driedigers, Epps and Friesens to the new world, but focuses on the experiences of the young Elizabeth Driediger (whom we encounter at the end of the novel as the forty-seven-year-old, disillusioned professor). At first glance this chapter appears slight, providing, in W. J. Keith's words "a welcome relief from the harrowing tension of the earlier episodes."[3] But in fact it explores one of the central concerns in the novel: the difference between the Mennonite and the secular world. Like Jakob V, Liesel (Elizabeth) is attracted to something outside the Mennonite tradition — here the secular life on the Class A deck

aboard ship. Unlike Joseph, Liesel does not feel remorse for turning towards another world, for the hold of the religious tradition on her is already slight. We are told that:

> After crossing the barrier Liesel suspended thinking on what she had heard so often: the badness that a Mennonite child must never see or hear or think about to keep its eternal soul clean. . . . she had finally decided that her soul, since it was so important despite its elusiveness — perhaps because of that — must be prepared at certain times to take care of itself.

The tone of this is lighthearted, but the issues are serious.

Liesel sneaks up to the A deck where she encounters a way of life totally unknown to her. She sees a woman who "from her hips [showed] a hand-width of glittering leg above the knees." and Liesel comes across a man and woman engaged in a rather furtive sexual act. Wiebe seems to present these people critically, but to Liesel's eyes at least "they were all so tall and fine, so elegant, their movements so free, dignified. . . . Such laughing; like a grace. She had never heard such happiness or imagined there could be so many people together laughing in the whole world." While Liesel may be deceived, Wiebe does suggest that these people possess qualities lacking in the more restrictive Mennonite community. Nonetheless, he presents her attraction to the secular world as a form of a "fall." Leaning against a double railing, Liesel watches a pageant presenting a scene of guilt and confession — which has a direct relevance to her own actions. But, as she watches, "at that moment, like a new world opening, the double rails swung into space and she fell." Although Wiebe's depiction of the scene is unnecessarily confusing, she appears to fall into the sea, and the fall symbolizes the danger of her attraction to secular life. Further, Leisel's fall into the sea, and away from the Mennonites, contrasts with Frieda's baptism, in the opening chapter, into the Mennonite faith. Significantly, Liesel is rescued from the water not by a Mennonite, but by Mr. Adolf, one of the men she was attracted to. The closing scene between Liesel and her father reinforces the sense that she has been lost. The ship has now passed over the red line into the free world, just as Liesel herself has passed over to the secular world. Her father, recognizing his, and realizing that she will return again to seek out the A deck, comments:

> 'And next time, at least leave the shawl'. She stared, suddenly aware of his tone. He did not go in to switch on the light. 'We can't lose everything beautiful at once,' he said. He stood at the open door; standing aside, waiting.

To the father's conservative religious point of view Liesel has been lost, and while we can't simply identify Wiebe with the judgment implied here, the way in which he presents the scene — the father's comment concludes the chapter — suggests that he is in fairly close agreement.

But Wiebe's attitude towards the Mennonites and the modern world is complex,

and can't be ascertained from any single chapter. "The Well," which is in certain ways complementary to "Over the Red Line," examining the same issues, presents a different picture. As "The Well" is the seventh chapter it literally is at the centre of the book and, again, carries more significance than might at first be apparent. The trip made to the well by Anna Friesen, Frieda's daughter, dramatizes the choice between two kinds of life. And now for the first time Wiebe criticizes the conservatism of the Mennonites who have come to South America. The Indian women they encounter have a freedom and naturalness that the Mennonites distrust. Their women

> did not come like the Lengua women, one pot balanced on their head and the other in their hand, staring wherever their eye strayed; their pails hung from a wooden yoke, the weight of which sat mainly on the back of the shoulders. As a result, though Lenqua women always walked about like stallions in spring, the women of Schoenbach stooped forward whether they carried water or not. Which was a becoming posture for a woman, according to Elder Wiebe the Younger. Humility is required.

It is not, however, primarily the Indians that cause the conservative Kanadier to worry, but the Russlander Mennonites — those who have become "modern" and those who, like Jakob Friesen, had stayed in Russia until 1929: "They spoke the same Lowgerman as the Kanadier, though with a very different accent, with some unheard-of words. And they had emigrated only once for their faith. Not that the Kanadier were Proud." The Kanadier reject totally any modern ways and we begin to sense that Wiebe is not uncritical of their decision to leave Canada because they could not run their schools in "the German biblical way." Elder Wiebe the Older, who led them from Canada, preaches a fairly rigid traditionalism — rather like that put forth by Deacon Block in *Peace Shall Destroy Many*. Elder Wiebe

> intoned that the Bible, the Catechism and the *Kirkenbuch*, the plow and the shovel were the faith of their fathers. It was enough for them, and it is enough for their children and children's children, now and for evermore. To have too much is to want more. New ideas, book learning, singing in several voices are unnecessary and dangerous. The desire for knowledge leads to pride and self-deception. To long for change is to fight one's destiny. Fighting one's destiny is rebellion against God. Man's duty is to obey, pray, work, and wait in terror for God's wrath.

Not a very cheerful picture. In contrast to Frieda's open faith and trust in God, the Elder Wiebe is committed to a set of dogmas that are not the essence of religious belief.

The more modern Russlander are not as dour and their relaxed ways are viewed critically by the Kanadier:

> They could sing Highgerman and Russian in different voices . . . and laugh and quarrel far into the night. And crazy to laugh! Hearing this, Anna knew without being told, as did every Kanadier girl, that despite their Mennonite names and talk, these men were too different, too wrong and — obvious — to even think about. . . . They would not get into heaven.

Yet when Anna encounters one of the Russlanders, Joseph Hiebert, at the well, she quickly forgets about her fiancé, Abraham K. Funk. We already know that Hiebert has moved away from the Mennonite faith, but Wiebe's attitude towards him is somewhat ambiguous. There is a vague suggestion that the drink Joseph gives Anna has an alcoholic content — "yerba and unheated water gave terere" — and if so it would imply that we are to regard him critically. However, it seems more likely that the drink is strange to Anna simply because it was "outside regulation," and that Wiebe's criticism is aimed at the narrow restrictions of the conservative Mennonites. Joseph has lost the seriousness of the Mennonites, and while he may be becoming simply frivolous — he plays practical jokes on the Kanadier boys and teaches some of them to sing "Kommt ein Vogel geflogen" in four part harmony, which is forbidden — there is a certain attractiveness about him. Years later Anna hears that he is in Buenos Aires. "It was said someone had seen him eating and drinking at a table with a painted woman." He has abviously ceased to be a Mennonite at all, and, to that extent, he represented a temptation to Anna. The chapter concludes with Anna, now married, remembering the day at the well: " 'I last remembered, oh, it must be almost three years. I have almost forgotten.' And she would smile a little at her baby of that year, a quietness she knew as joy moving within her." Wiebe presents a fairly balanced, complex view of the issues here. Anna has achieved a joy by staying within the confines of the traditional Mennonite community, but she has a vague sense of other possibilities, and perhaps even of loss.

The ultimate temptation that confronts a Mennonite, however, is to lose faith because of personal suffering. Jakob Friesen IV, whom we encounter again, in chapter eight, "The Cloister of the Lilies," as a prisoner in Siberia in 1932, is unable to accept his suffering without misgiving. As Jakob and another prisoner are being moved they stumble onto a cloister; within they discover a picture of a row of lilies hidden beneath the grime on a wall. This seems to symbolize Jakob's own relation to his faith; it is buried, hidden, indeed almost lost. As they wait out the blizzard a man arrives with his wife, who is dying, and they are desperately trying to reach home: "But she cannot last a month as God is good and she wants to see the children at last." The woman is raped by the guards, yet she and her husband endure, and his advice to Jakob is "Survive." In the face of the man's grief, Jakob reveals what has been tormenting him: he abandoned his son. The man replies:

> A man could endure ten years. . . . There is the possibility. But he cannot afford

> thinking what you keep thinking; then it is impossible. You must survive. That is all. Survive as God is good.
>
> 'You keep saying that,' Friesen whispered.
>
> 'Yes.'
>
> 'Then why did all this happen? To us?'
>
> 'To live, it is the most necessary possibility.'
>
> Friesen was never sure to what question the man gave this answer . . . the faceless immobile man whose name and place he never knew, before whose immobile accepted suffering his own had finally broken between his teeth.

Unlike Jakob, the man not only accepts his suffering but is able to affirm that "God is good." Jakob is at the point of losing his faith entirely, or at least doubting it; at the end of the novel he claims he "believes nothing." Yet Jakob is obsessed with the man's ambiguous statement: "Whatever the man had said . . . seemed for an instant to blaze with a kind of holy wisdom that was." Jakob's attempts to understand the statement show that he is still struggling with his faith, and it is because of this struggle that later, as an old man, he is attracted to John Reimer.

HAVING EXAMINED VARIOUS MENNONITES in conflict with their faith, Wiebe begins to emphasize more directly, in the second half of the novel, the kind of Christian response he himself admires. David Epp, whom we meet in chapter nine, "Drink Ye All of It," represents the ethical ideal in Wiebe's religious vision. David and his family, with a group of Mennonites, escape from Russia into China, but David fears that the Mennonites left behind may be punished for their act. He decides, therefore, that he must leave his family and return to Russia to see if he can possibly exonerate the other Mennonites. He is giving up his freedom, and probably his life, in what may be a quixotic gesture. But the heroic nature of his act reverberates throughout the rest of the novel in the lives of those who come after him. David's selflessness contrasts with the narrow self-seeking that we saw represented by Balzer (Samuel Reimer Sr.) on the night in Moscow in 1929. Oblivious to the fact that Jakob Friesen is taken away, Balzer leaps for joy that he and his family are spared by the communists: "Oh God, my God how marvelous are Thy ways, how He answers prayer!" But old Mr. Epp, David's father, quietly admonishes him: "Ernst, I think Mrs. Friesen was praying too." Balzer's selfishness is even more clearly placed by David Epp's selfless act. In his radical concern for others and in his willingness to sacrifice himself, David Epp shows himself to be a true follower of Christ.

Frieda and her husband, as I've said, also embody a positive religious response, and in the following chapter, the tenth, we get her last narrative, which covers the early years in South America, up to the present, 1959. Despite Frieda's troubles — a child has died, there is sickness in the family, and she has repeated

operations for cancer — she reaffirms her trust in God. But the main point of the section is the affirmation her husband Johann makes as he is dying. He insists that their decision to leave Canada, giving up an easier life, in order to practice their religion freely, was right. Whatever the children may feel, he advises Frieda: "And don't let one of them, not one, make it hard for you. We did what we believed." His statement has a normative bearing in this novel; the lives of some characters — even Samuel Reimer — are finally a failure because they do not act on what they believe.

Frieda and Johann represent the best of the old ways and Wiebe's attitude towards them is highly approving. Nonetheless, Wiebe knows that their way is no longer viable in the modern world and this seems to be part of the reason why Frieda's final story is placed at this point. After Johann dies, Frieda comes to Canada in 1959 to visit her daughters, but the secularization she sees appalls her. Dennis Willms, her daughter Esther's husband, has changed his name to "Williams," largely abandoning his Mennonite heritage. And the congregation generally has lost the deep religious faith that led the Mennonites to seek new lands: "I went to their church. They prayed and sang and read from the Bible; it was all English and not Mennonite but the most people there came from us and to me it sometimes looked they were stretching themselves around for what they weren't." Frieda chooses to return to the more orthodox and traditional ways in South America, but, as Wiebe knows, the younger Mennonites must learn to live and act in the modern world she rejects.

The problem of the lack of religious faith in the modern world is confronted directly by Wiebe in the last two chapters of the novel. Here he examines the radical responses of two men appalled both by the materialism of modern life *and* by the insularity of other Mennonites. "The Vietnam Call of Samuel V. Reimer" is accurately described by W. J. Keith as a "biblical parallel-cum-parody (I Samuel 3) which succeeds in being both humorous and serious at the same time."[4] Samuel is called by God to go and proclaim peace in Vietnam. Wiebe apparently wants us to believe in the authenticity of Samuel's voice, but, in any case, in showing the resistance to Samuel and his mission, Wiebe presents his critique of the modern world. There is a total lack of faith and an inability to believe in the very possibility that God would still speak directly to man. The pastor of the Mennonite Church ludicrously wants "evidence" and asks Sam to tape the voice. And Wiebe is even more critical in his presentation of the institution of the Mennonite Church: "[The] Inter-Mennonite Church Service Society, Peace Section . . . had ruled his plans were too likely to raise derision and suspicion among both church members and government agencies for the Society to be able to support him, in any way." Facing disbelief in his voice and hostility towards his plan, Sam explains why he would still like to go to Vietnam: "If . . . [my children] could see, when they're old enough to see, that I was doing some-

thing needed. You know, that had to be, for others, not just so our family has it softer." He has the image of David Epp's heroic act in mind; he does *not* want to be like his father, and he recalls old Mr. Epp's words: " 'Samuel,' he said to my father, 'I think Mrs. Friesen was praying too'." A true Christian is responsible for all of his fellow men, and Samuel argues that even if something were to happen to him in Vietnam, "so what? I'd have been doing a Christian's job — not sitting here just talking, growing fat on the land." Samuel Reimer achieves a sense of what, in Wiebe's view, a truly fully Christian life involves, but the opposition to his plan proves too much for him; unlike David Epp, he fails to act on his belief. He gives in to despair and dies, and the story ends on an ironic note with the triumph of the material values he abhorred.

In the final chapter, "On The Way," Wiebe explores further — particularly through Elizabeth Driediger, Jakob Friesen IV, and Dennis Willms — the problem of the loss of faith among the Mennonites, and he sets against this the Christian view of John Reimer, Samuel's educated, and more articulate, brother. The section opens with the accidental meeting, in the Toronto airport in 1967, between Elizabeth Driediger, now a forty-seven-year-old professor, and Jakob Friesen, now an old man, who has come to Canada for the first time, to visit his daughter. They both claim that they are no longer Mennonites, but, for Jakob at least, the matter of belief is clearly still predominant. The main question Jakob has to ask Elizabeth is: "Are you still a Mennonite?" He very briefly tells her the story of his life, then states:

> 'Yes, I have a strong body. That is why I survived. And because I believe nothing.'
>
> 'You believe . . .' for an instant she doubted her knowledge of the word.
>
> 'Yes. Like you, I have no longer anything with the Mennonites.'
>
> That was not what she had meant, but she understood his expression exactly. Like some little grandmother who had never been beyond her *darp* street, despite his lifetime wandering there was for him still only one thing to believe or not believe. Well, she did not believe it any more, either. In that one and only way.

But without some openness to faith it seems unlikely that Jakob would have had the strength to survive his ten years as a prisoner in Siberia. Questions of religious belief are never entirely closed for Jakob, which is why he, and Elizabeth, seek out John Reimer, who is walking through the West carrying a cross, bearing witness to Christ's presence in the world.

Before presenting John, however, Wiebe brings Dennis and Esther Willms into the story, and through them shows the defeat of the Mennonite tradition by material values. Esther is Frieda's daughter, but she and her husband have long

since lost Frieda's strong faith. Dennis is almost totally assimilated into the secular modern world; he is a successful businessman with narrow concerns. Wiebe characterizes him, emphasizing his narrowness, by a reference to the mountains, symbol of the quest that the Mennonites have pursued throughout their history. Relaxing in his Cadillac, "Dennis stretched out, foam rubber cushioning his cheek against the window. He would see the mountains a bit longer across the rising land. Odd; he had never thought much about them, one way or another." When Dennis and Esther stop at the side of the road to speak to John, they find Jakob and Elizabeth already with him, and there is an unravelling of family relationships. As the various conversations take place, John's voice becomes increasingly dominant as he presents his social vision and his view of Christ. But Dennis is unwilling to listen, and only feels that John is making a fool of himself by "running across the country, like that"; he hopes that John will give up his walk and take a "worthwhile" job. Dennis and his family leave, but they are late, and in hurrying to Edmonton they are apparently killed in a car accident. (In fact, it is not entirely clear whether Dennis has had a heart attack and they are taking just him to the hospital, or whether the whole family is being rushed to the hospital: in either case Wiebe's point would be the same.) The accident (or Dennis's death) is a symbolic representation of the destructive tendency of a materialistic secular civilization, and the speeding, hurrying that causes it is in direct contrast with John's more relaxed and reflective state of mind.

John puts forth a view of Christianity which radically challenges the basic assumptions of the conservative Mennonites — and of many other Christians as well. He insists that a wide social concern is of the essence of Christianity and that "the whole idea of Jesus just telling about people being 'saved' and feeling good about it is wrong. Quite wrong. He was alive, on earth to lead a revolution! A revolution for social justice." And John is especially critical of the position taken by the Mennonite church, for he argues that Jesus didn't intend to achieve his revolution "by setting up a church that can never change no matter where on earth or in what century it is." He redefines what the real church should be: "No! The church Jesus began is us *living*, *everywhere*, a new *society* that sets all the old ideas of man living with other men on its head." The new society is built by our "thinking different" about everything.

In articulating this view of Christianity John is quite obviously a spokesman for Wiebe himself. In the interview with Donald Cameron Wiebe explains:

> I would like to think of myself as someone who's trying to live what the original Anabaptists were about. They're very contemporary, in a way, because they felt that the social structures that had evolved in the west had no sanction. To be an Anabaptist is to be a radical follower of the person of Jesus Christ — that's really what it's about — and Jesus Christ had no use for the social and political structures of his day; he came to *supplant* them.[5]

There is little separation between what Wiebe believes and what John advocates, and as Wiebe is largely using John to assert his own view, rather than fully dramatizing it, the novel comes close to being overtly didactic at this point. Elizabeth, it is true, objects to John's position, insisting "there's too bloody much sacrifice in the world already. . . . We need a world where everybody can live for himself, just be himself." But John replies decisively, "You want everyone except you dead?" In the final section, however, where John attempts to explain his views to Jakob Friesen, the professed unbeliever, Wiebe is more successful at dramatizing his religious beliefs.

John re-affirms his desire "to live the concern for others and love that Jesus showed" and when Jakob asks how he is doing this by walking along the road, John explains that he is simply trying to relate — show warmth and concern — to all of his fellow men. And the main point he makes is that unlike most Mennonites he is "not going anywhere"; by simply walking on the open road he is challenging the traditional goals of the Mennonites — those symbolized by the title of the novel. The title comes from the appearance of the Greater Khingan Mountains of China which David Epp, as he led his people out of Russia, saw as "*black and jagged from here black in the heartless cold nothing like the thin blue sketch, beckoning from across the river the beautiful mocking blue.*" The blue mountains symbolize the hope of the Mennonites that somewhere they will find a place where they will be able to lead their lives and religion in total peace and freedom. But the blue is "mocking" because the goal is unattainable, and, in the eyes of John Reimer — and Rudy Wiebe — it is finally undesirable. The Mennonites' dream of isolating and insulating themselves from the world involves a failure of true Christian responsibility, which is shown by being involved *in* the world.

John had been walking west towards the Rocky Mountains, but he realizes that they too represent a false dream. "They look so nice, I thought sitting on those hills outside Calgary, almost like a new world, sharp, beautiful, clean. But usually when you get over there's always more of what you climbed them to get away from." Instead, he heads north, but, unlike the conservative Mennonites who have moved into the north to "get away from everyone but themselves," John is neither withdrawing from the world nor hoping to set up a separated place. He criticizes the Mennonites for wanting to build their own private land, for, he claims, it isn't anywhere on earth.

> That's the trouble with Mennonites; they show it clearer than most other Christians, especially Protestants. They wish they were, if they could only be Jews. On the mountain Moses said 'Go over that river, there's the land God has given you forever,' but Jesus just said, 'I'm going to make a place ready for you and then I'll come and get you. You wait.' Moses gave his people manna to eat when they

were hungry, and Jesus did that a little but then he changed. Then he just said, 'I'm bread enough for you. Remember me.'

'That's the big trouble with Jesus,' said the old man. 'He never gives you a thing to hold in your hand.'

The other answered, 'There are things, many things that you can't hold in your hand.'

Jakob is sceptical to the end, but John has the last word. And while he redefines the nature of the religious struggle that the Mennonites, and modern man, must face, he makes it clear that in religious matters there can be no easily found answers; an act of faith is always necessary.

NOTES

[1] "Introduction" to Rudy Wiebe, *The Blue Mountains of China*, 1970 (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1975), p. 1.

[2] *Conversations with Canadian Novelists Part Two* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1973), p. 159.

[3] Keith, p. 4.

[4] *Ibid.*

[5] *Conversations with Canadian Novelists*, p. 148.

FOX

Ron Miles

Or Dog? No.
Fox, half rusty tail
beside the sage ahead
and I guarded by wind
for once, briefly his
superior, amazed he follows
my daily path, briefly mine.

Across the ravine construction has ended
for the day. He sniffs the distant buildings
senses me behind and runs
faster than I could, even in my mind
down into the ravine disappearing
while I dog his footsteps, down.
But up the other side
where only houses grow
daily in our path.

LA CHAINE TENUE

Roads & Railways in the Prairie Novel

Elizabeth Marsland

THE LARGE-SCALE SETTLEMENT of the Canadian prairies is bound inextricably with the existence of railways, which played almost precisely the same vital role for the farming communities as did the major rivers for those earlier white settlements, the fur-trading posts. Their importance lay in providing the means of access to the new "colony," in serving as the main artery for both transport and communication, and in forming the link between these colonizers and the centre from which they had originally come. Roads, apart from the few which developed from historical trails, were a by-product rather than an initiating factor of settlement; their role was different, but no less vital, and their importance grew as settlement increased. Because the homestead pattern of development led to widely-scattered districts rather than villages, roads were essential for all contact within the community; they also provided the connection with the nearest railway-station and served a valuable function as boundary-lines. In view of the extreme importance of these facilities in the historical existence of settlers, one is not surprised to find, in fiction which deals with the period of settlement and post-settlement farming in the prairie provinces, that roads and railways are frequently-recurring motifs.

Prairie roads as seen by writers may be divided into two kinds according to their physical appearance. A few are in an almost natural state like the one which, in 1919, links Avenir with Blueberry Lake in Marguerite Primeau's *Dans le Muskeg* (1960), following the lakeshore and the meanders of a stream, or that which Nipsya and her family take to Lac Ste. Anne (in Georges Bugnet's *Nipsya* [1924]), a path gradually developing from a game trail. Gabrielle Roy's track to the island in the Petite Poule d'Eau river is barely distinguishable from the grass around it; and Monge, the central figure in Constantin-Weyer's *Un Homme se penche sur son passé*, dispenses with roads altogether, riding over the open prairie. Most of the roads are far from natural, however — the new road to Avenir, for example: "C'était une route large et droite avec de profonds fossés de chaque côté pour le drainage. Il n'était plus question de jouer à cache-cache, la route allait droit devant elle comme quelqu'un qui se respecte."

Marguerite Primeau uses the straightening of the road to represent a change in the whole outlook of the village, from a place where no-one hurries — "on arrivera bien à Noël en même temps que les autres!" — to one where time is important. In Grove's *Fruits of the Earth* the unnatural straightness is used as a mark of man's presence, a reflection of the attitude revealed through the thoughts of Abe Spalding as he drives towards his homestead for the first time: "This immense and utter loneliness merely aroused him to protest and contradiction: he would change this prairie, would impose himself upon it, would conquer its spirit." By completing the road into town, thus ensuring the firm establishment of the Spalding community, Abe marks his conquest. However, as soon as he relaxes his vigilance, nature retaliates, attacking the road at its weakest point, where it crosses a patch of bog, and showing its superiority by converting the road into a dam which floods surrounding farmland.

The concept that man is at war with his environment is, of course, not confined to *Fruits of the Earth*, for Northrop Frye's notion of a "garrison" outlook, of being surrounded by a hostile frontier, is to be found in most western Canadian fiction in English. In French prairie novels, too, there are traces of an attitude similar to Abe's — the original inhabitants of Avenir are described as "une poignée de colons seulement, accrochés aux *homesteads* qu'ils continuaient de disputer au *muskeg*," and Cléophas, the old "Bonhomme" in Bugnet's *Nipsya*, draws the contrast between the new farming way of life which his son has adopted (with almost Abe-like determination) and that of the Indians and the voyageurs, who "savaient vivre sans gripper tout ce qui leur tombait dans les mains." On the whole, however, the "garrison" attitude is not prevalent in the French writing, and the people, like the roads they travel along, are usually in harmony with their natural surroundings.

This basic difference in outlook, the contrast between a willingness to accommodate oneself to nature and a desire to impose one's rule upon it, is demonstrated clearly in *Nipsya* in the Métis reaction to the new system of dividing up the countryside into seemingly arbitrary rectangles: "Ca n'a pas de bon sens. Où seront les chemins alors? Faudra-t-il passer dans les muskegs et été? . . . Ca peut être beau sur le papier, mais c'est idiot." It is worth noting that the one occasion when Abe's household for a short time approaches the idyllic state which reigns on Luzina's island in the Petite Poule d'Eau river is during the Christmas Day blizzard, when the straight lines of the road are obliterated by snowdrifts.

The anti-nature roads are not only straight; they are also graded, raised two or three feet above the level of the surrounding land. Laurence Ricou has pointed out that "the image of man as a vertical intrusion in a horizontal world is primary" in prairie novels:[1] to place people on a raised road is to emphasize their verticality. Grove in particular often equates the use of the road with exposure, to the extent that much of Abe's life seems to be lived on a stage. The concept of man's ex-

posure to nature on the prairie is present in the metaphorical figure of Frau Grappentin, for whenever Abe travels along the road to town he is observed by this witch-like old woman who lives beside it. At best her reaction to his coming and going is indifference, as when she "dully" watches his arrival at the scene of Charlie's death. Mostly, however, her commentary is malevolent, as she mocks Abe's lordly attitudes and predicts his downfall, in a terrifying voice "like the voice of the prairie." The natural roads, like those which Christine's mother knew as a child (in Roy's *La Route d'Altamont*), drawing the traveller on to find new hidden places, or like the path through tall reeds to Luzina's island, offer protection rather than exposure.

JUST AS THE APPEARANCE of the prairie road becomes, in the hands of the writer, a reflection of the outlook of the inhabitants of the community, so the function of the road, the reason why people use it, takes on varying significance in the different novels. Historically, the most important function of roads in the prairie provinces was to join together the main distribution centre and surrounding points. The English writers under discussion succeed in turning this simple fact into a device to represent monotony, fragmentariness, and a sense of imprisonment. Since most of the people in these novels go only into town and back again, they are familiar with a very limited portion of their neighbourhood, and travel in such a form offers no possibility of escape from what R. J. C. Stead in *Grain* describes as the "interminable furrow." In some ways *Grain* is a special case amongst the novels in English, since nature is not portrayed as the enemy, and the author's main concern is with the struggle between two valid moral positions, a conflict which is by no means limited to a prairie setting. However, a feeling of being unable to escape is basic to the subject, and Stead makes exemplary use of the road motif. All through the war years, while Gander Stake is fighting his personal battle between idealism and unimaginative common sense, his only travel is the repeated journey from his home to Plainville, usually "hauling wheat." When the end of the war brings him a feeling of release, as if he were a returning soldier, he begins to wander farther afield.

A similar sense of captivity prevails in Sinclair Ross's *As For Me and My House*, for whenever Mrs. Bentley travels by car, it is to go only to Partridge Hill, a desolate little community of people whose acceptance of the "grim futility" of their lives makes one almost thankful for the "false fronts" of Horizon. On the one occasion when she and her husband succeed in leaving for a vacation, Ross is able to heighten the impression of fragmentation, and of the imprisoning isolation of Horizon, by simply placing the group in a car a few hundred miles away from home, with no indication of how they left the town which had previously

seemed to be roadless. (Apart from Main Street, of course, but streets within the towns deserve a special treatment of their own.)

Christine, the narrator in *La Route d'Altamont*, whose words often appear to be a commentary on what is demonstrated in other novels, recognizes the "fragmentary" possibilities of prairie roads, as she describes the intersection of two of them — "je me rappelle leur accolade muette, leur étonnement à se rencontrer à repartir déjà et vers quel but? car d'où elles viennent, où elles vont, jamais elles n'en disent mot." She sees portions of roads, with no origin and no goal, meeting at a crossroads perhaps similar to that at which Gander's Willow Green was located, or Spalding school, giving the impression of being lost, "perdu dans l'éloignement." Roads which do actually link places other than those forming the route from a particular farm to a larger community — are rarely found in these English prairie novels. One exception is the Somerville Line in *Fruits of The Earth*, "running in a straight line, from Somerville in the east to Ivy in the west," and, it passes through the village of Morley, "hesitating on its way, forming something like a node in the stem of a plant." This continuous line, however, has the effect of making a settlement like Morley seem very insignificant, so man's attempt to make his mark or, in Henry Kreisel's words, to "define himself,"[2] has become a contributory feature in his diminution by the landscape.

RAILWAYS EVEN MORE THAN ROADS intrude upon "nature's softer architecture," but that particular aspect, though usually implicit, is not a major part of their value as a symbol to the prairie writers. It is noticeable, however, that the tracks for themselves, apart from their function, may be important, and as such Sinclair Ross uses them to full effect in *As For Me and My House.* To find one's pleasure in walking along railway tracks, as do the main characters in this novel, is deliberately to choose sterility (since they are a place where nothing grows), fragmentariness (for one can never complete the journey), and a sense of captivity between the "double line of fence." E. A. McCourt, who, incidentally, uses the motif of the baseball diamond for a somewhat similar effect in *Music at the Close*, has obviously not appreciated the full implications of the railway track when he criticizes Ross for providing "a fairy-godmother kind of escape" at the end.[3] Those inveterate track-walkers, Philip Bentley and his wife, are clearly destined never to live life to the full.

Like roads, the railway track may be used to make communities seem insignificant — the line through Morley, for instance, was "strung with towns at intervals of ten or twelve miles. From a distance all looked alike. . . ." However, such an image as "beads on a string" is valid only from an above-the-ground perspective; at ground level, the track, like "the Soo Line of the C.P.R." in W. O. Mitchell's

Who Has Seen the Wind, tends to disappear into "the prairie's flat emptiness." Thus there is a feeling of isolation which is not entirely justified by the remoteness of communities one from the other, and an impression of their individual loneliness rather than of their being linked together. That the track is in some sense a physical barrier augments this feeling of isolation — Morley is typical of many small towns: "the growth of the settlement was arrested by the right-of-way, no buildings but the grain elevators having been erected beyond it." Sometimes, however, the barrier of the railway is within the town, contributing to what Frye calls the "multiplying of garrisons," as it does in the town in *Who Has Seen the Wind*.

On the whole there is little in these English prairie novels to justify the assumption that the primary importance of a railway track is as a link with the outside world, or even as a means of travel at all. The few trains we see are mostly freight-trains, and their artistic function in the novel is usually to represent the machine — in reflecting the mechanical side of Gander Stake's personality, for example, or as a sign of destructive progress in connection with Abe's daughter, Frances. It will be recalled that, for all Mrs. Bentley's talk about the railway, her only train-ride during her residence in Horizon is on a handcar. Railway tracks without trains add to the sense of imprisoning isolation which characterizes many of the novels, and even when trains exist they have the effect of making one feel left behind, like those in Philip Bentley's youth "roaring away to the world that lay beyond."

Although the feeling of imprisonment is fostered by apparently fragmented roads, and train-tracks which lead nowhere, it is generally seen to be a mental condition projected onto the environment, with the prairie as the equivalent of the world outside. Mrs. Bentley, whose life is inextricably bound with her husband's failure, gives expression to such an outlook as she watches the departure of a freight-train: "It was like a setting forth, and with a queer kind of clutch at my throat, as if I were about to enter it, I felt the wilderness ahead of night and rain." Neil Fraser's prison (in *Music at the Close*), of which first the river and then the mountains seem to mark the edge, is similarly within himself, the result of his inability to balance dreams and reality. Although he claims to have travelled all over the continent, he is still mentally tied to the prairies, as we observe through the scene at the bus station in Calgary, and only his death in the war brings mental escape. The condition of mental imprisonment is even stronger in Gander Stake, who cannot bring himself to go to become a soldier because old abstract values like heroism fail to overcome his modern mechanical and common-sense outlook. The war between these two concepts is fought on the prairies — to the extent that *Grain* has many aspects in common with First World War novels[4] — and Gander can leave only when he has finally resolved his dilemma.

The sensation of being unable to escape is rarely found in the French novels

under discussion, for one of their most striking aspects is the amount of travelling which occurs. Monge, in *Un homme se penche sur son passé*, travels constantly, by all means and in all directions; in fact, his tragic mistake seems to be that he temporarily abandons his travelling way of life and tries to become a settler. The different stages of Nipsya's spiritual development are separated by journeys; there is constant coming and going around Avenir and the Petite Poule d'Eau island; and travel is the element which unites the separate sections of *La Route d'Altamont*.

The roads and railways which these travellers use, far from being fragments in the middle of nowhere, are obviously parts of a continuous system, and because of such connectedness the sense of isolation of the remote community is reduced. The technique used by several authors — Roy, Constantin-Weyer, Primeau — to introduce the reader to the settlement, relying on those same travel facilities, has similar effect. Portage-des-Prés may be a "petit village insignifiant," far away "dans la mélancholique région des lacs et des canards sauvages," but we are shown how the village is linked with Rorketon, the end of the railway — albeit only by "un mauvais *trail* raboteux" — as well as the four stages by which one reaches the even more remote island. Monge's journey to the settlement where he meets Hannah is less clearly specified, but one follows his general route over prairie and bushland. The effectiveness of this overland step-by-step linking of one place to the next may be appreciated through its contrast with the aerial approach to location which Mitchell uses in *Who Has Seen The Wind*, the gradual narrowing from a view which encompasses "land and sky" to focus on a boy's tricycle on the sidewalk. One has the impression that the possibility of ever finding this town again, having left it, would be remote, particularly since it has no name.

THE INTERCONNECTED SYSTEM OF ROADS and railways offers the chance both to depart and to return; Luzina goes gladly, knowing that, like the birds, she will come back, just as the Capucin, for all his wide travelling, always returns to the island where he feels at home. Similarly, many of the young people who leave Avenir — Tommy and Lucette, Frank l'Hirondelle, Antoinette — return, and all, incidentally, bring with them a new air of confidence. On the other hand, in the English works journeys out of the community are mostly one-way, into some kind of oblivion. Young people leave for the city and are hardly mentioned again, or they depart for the war, and die. Although Luzina's children leave their nest never to return, they do at least continue to exist and she is able to maintain contact with them. One need only compare the consolation which she gains from locating them on the old map with Mrs. Stake's futile attempt to find Jackie, to appreciate the difference between the two groups of novels in this respect.

A remote community immediately loses some of its isolation when it may be reached by outsiders, and visitors play a significant part in the lives of the French settlers. Travelling priests, who are prominent in most of the novels, help considerably in destroying any feeling of being lost, partly by the fact that they provide human contact under the most extreme circumstances, and partly, also, because they indicate that even the smallest and apparently most insignificant settlement is worthy of attention, but primarily because they respect a vital link with the cultural tradition. Thus the road which brings the Capucin to Luzina's island, or le Père Letournec to Avenir, serves as a reminder to the inhabitants that, in spite of their remoteness, they are still a part of a religious unity.

A similar sense of belonging results from maintaining contact with the secular aspect of the cultural heritage, the tradition of the early French colonists. Monge goes to Quebec and studies the history of French Canada; Mlle. Côté, on her first day in the Petite Poule d'Eau school, introduces Luzina's children to the tales of the early explorers, and Lormier, newly arrived in Avenir, reminds the villagers of their cultural heritage. *Dans le Muskeg* demonstrates, however, that adherence to the tradition must be natural and voluntary, rather than something arbitrarily enforced, for the future is also important. It is noticeable that, as soon as Lormier and his supporters talk of preserving the culture, garrison words appear in their vocabulary — *entrer* instead of *arriver*, *murs*, *entourer*, *défendre*, *serrer les rangs*. . . . Nevertheless, there can be no doubt about the pride which the French settlers feel in their forbears, the early explorers and the voyageurs, and especially about their pleasure in knowing that they are following a similar pattern.

Unfortunately, neither the secular nor the religious heritage may be looked upon as a unifying factor in the English novels. Religion is seen, on the whole, to be of little importance in the lives of the settlers; when it plays a larger part, as in *Who Has Seen the Wind* or *As For Me and My House*, it is equated with bigotry and hypocrisy, and with fragmentation rather than unity. Interest in the secular tradition is similarly lacking, and almost the only reference to the country's past, in Stead's description of the schoolroom at Willow Green, suggests a divisive rather than a unifying function: "on the west wall . . . was a lithograph of Sir John Macdonald, for many years Prime Minister of Canada, but now sufficiently dead to have his portrait displayed in a schoolroom without suggestion of partisan designs upon the young minds exposed to its contagion."

It is clear that any newcomer is unlikely to find the security of a familiar and unified tradition in the English community. His only hope for a sense of belonging is therefore through the awareness of a personal heritage, of the sort which links Christine with her mother and her grandparents, or like that of Monge at the beginning of Roy's novel, content with his past and unconcerned about the future. Marguerite Primeau uses Lormier's train-journey to Blueberry Lake to provide just such a link:

> Bercé par le roulement du train ... il remontit le cours des dernières semaines. Sa décision de venir dans l'Ouest, sa demande d'emploi auprès du Ministère de l'Instruction publique d'Alberta, ses adieux aux grand-parents qui l'avaient élevé, tout cela se confondait avec les péripéties de l'interminable voyage à travers les villages québecois, le long des forêts et des lacs de l'Ontario, jusqu'au fin fond des immense plaines de l'Ouest.

Here the railway track serves not only as a physical link across the country, a filament joining the place the protagonist has left with that in which he is arriving, but also as a connection between his past life and his present. In the final stages of his journey Lormier meets several people who will be important in his new life, so the continuous line also extends to his future.

Since almost the only exception to the "no train-travel" rule in the English novels is in the fact that several of the main characters arrive in their new communities by rail, one might hope to find there a similar kind of connecting with the past. However, the reader is usually brought onto the scene too late; the hero — Abe, for example, already arranging for the unloading of his possessions, or Neil Fraser, riding in his uncle's wagon — has left the train, so even that tenuous link is severed and no possibility for continuity remains. As a result, most of the people in English prairie novels seem to be simply "there," having come from nowhere, and Mrs. Bentley's feeling of being "lost, dropped on this little perch of town, and abandoned" may well be generally applicable.

Without the security of some kind of continuity, the newcomer to the prairies is subject to a loss of confidence. Even the intransigent Abe, deliberately choosing to abandon his past and to live only with a future, a "clear proposition," has momentary doubts when he appreciates the totality of his commitment. For Neil Fraser, cut off by circumstances from his former life, and arriving on the prairie as a twelve-year-old orphan, the loss of confidence is complete. He looks in vain for anything familiar, and "because the word river suggested something of the world he had left behind" he is anxious to see the one his uncle talks of. But the Saskatchewan, "black lookin' and black hearted," has little in common with the rivers he knew in Ontario, and the sight of it offers no consolation. As he goes to bed on his first night, his attempts to conjure up a vision of his mother fail before the "immensity of darkness" of the prairie night, and he knows that the vision is gone for ever.

By contrast, confidence is almost a key-word in the French novels. The village where Lormier goes, "ce lopin de terre perdu au bout du monde," is at the farthest point of civilization, but its inhabitants, even a newcomer like Lormier, are little troubled by its remoteness. Far from being made uneasy by the "vastes horizons" and the "sombre opulence" of the muskeg, they simply accept them, feeling, like Poulin, that in this community one is "chez soi, libre et indépendant." What distinguishes Avenir from a place like Horizon or Pine Creek is that "les Avenirois

avaient le regard clair et le rire facile de ceux qui ont confiance." The same confidence is to be found in the personality of Monge on the prairie or in the North, in the whole atmosphere of the Petite Poule d'Eau island, in the "tranquillité séreine" which Nipsya finds, and in the manner in which Christine happily and deliberately loses her way on the prairie. When confidence prevails, it seems, the need to look upon the landscape as a hostile frontier disperses in a mutually acceptable relationship with nature.

The basis of such confidence is the awareness of having connections. Roads and railways here provide the physical links which encourage one to travel and to return, permitting one to maintain contact not only within the community but also with the world outside. At the same time, they represent non-physical connections — the knowledge that one is not cut off from one's past or from one's family, and the sense of being part of a tradition which extends, in both space and time, far beyond the remote community. Marguerite Primeau's words, explaining the eagerness of the Avenirois to attend the monthly Mass and the social gathering which follows, will serve as a summary: "C'était une façon de maintenir leur solidarité d'êtres humains en face de tant d'éléments étrangers, de s'assurer que la chaîne ténue qui les liait tenait bon." To know that one belongs, that one is connected to the rest of humanity, even if by a "chaîne ténue," places one in an entirely different situation from those who, leading their essentially lonely lives with, perhaps, material success but in spiritual poverty, feel that they have been dropped on a perch of a town in the middle of the prairie and abandoned.

NOTES

[1] Laurence Ricou, *Vertical Man/Horizontal World* (Vancouver: U.B.C. Press, 1973), p. 18.

[2] "The Prairie: A State of Mind." *Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada*, 6, Series 4 (June 1968), p. 179.

[3] "Prairie Literature and its Critics," in *A Region of the Mind*, ed. Richard Allen, Canadian Plains Studies 1 (Regina, 1972).

[4] For example, the conflict between civilians and soldiers (the latter represented here by the non-soldier, Gander); the brutalizing effect of the tension caused by war (seen in his relationship with Jo); nature as an escape from confrontation; the ridiculing of military drill; in general, the prevailing sense of being compelled to stay at or near the scene of battle. All of these aspects are to be found in that conglomeration of World War I literary motifs, Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front*, and individually in other novels.

DUMPLINGS & DIGNITY

Danald R. Bartlett

In conversation with Donald Cameron, W. O. Mitchell stated: "To me the only justification for art is that this particular narrative, these particular people, shall articulate some transcending truth. . . ."[1] The "transcending truth" of *The Vanishing Point* is that the rights of others must not be violated, and that authority must be tempered with compassion if the delicate web we call civilization is to remain intact. But Mitchell knows that the word must become flesh; and his imagery contributes significantly to this incarnation in *The Vanishing Point*. It helps the theme to evolve not as overt didacticism but organically out of the whole matrix of character and situation.

The action begins when Carlyle Sinclair, a thirty-six-year-old widower who acts as teacher and agent on the Paradise Valley reserve, awakens one fine spring morning and prepares to drive into the city to spend the afternoon with Victoria Rider, a former student of his now training to be a nurse. Upon his arrival at the hospital, Sinclair is dismayed to learn that Victoria has disappeared. He begins a frantic search for her, at first in the wilderness and later in the city itself. When at last he does locate her, he learns that shame over "failing" both him and her parents has prevented her from returning to the reserve, and that she has been obliged to solicit and is now pregnant. Sinclair is shattered. He leaves her in the street. But later his instincts triumph over his vanity and over the values imposed upon him by an impersonal white society. He dances with her, sleeps with her, and determines to marry her.

This summary indicates little more than a quest and some measure of attainment. It reveals nothing of the humour and seriousness, the satire and sympathy, the conflicts and ironies which inform the novel. Nor does it indicate much about the theme or values, the "transcending truth" which Mitchell wishes to convey. But it does, I hope, provide some context for my subsequent comments about Mitchell's imagery.

The Vanishing Point abounds with images which relate significantly, and sometimes quite subtly, to idea and mood, and hence become in varying degrees symbolic. The categories from which these images are drawn are indeed diverse.

Places: Beulah Creek, Paradise Valley, Storm and Misty; objects: mirrors, reversed hearts, oatmeal biscuits, artificial birds and animals, drums, a magic lantern, a white nightgown, an oil company's coloured markers, Archie Nicotine's truck, Ian Fyfe's conservatory; natural things: a male grouse, a bee, an osprey, orchids, sloughs; the senses, especially of smell, sight and sound; even character or caricature where an idea or value and not psychological depth is primarily imaged: Ian Fyfe, Rev. Dingle, Rev. Heally Richards, Aunt Pearl, Old Kacky, Old Esau Rider, and Victoria. These and other minor images interact with the three controlling symbols or thematic images in the novel: excrement, the vanishing point, and bridges.

Human dignity is an issue in this novel. Sinclair recalls an early episode in which he had affronted and hurt Old Esau by boiling carbolic in the classroom, ostensibly as a disinfectant.

> "It's medicine, Esau," he'd lied defensively. "For the germs — it kills the germs — the ones in the air."
>
> Esau sat silent, his eyes on the oilcloth of the kitchen table, and Carlyle cursed the disinfectant's authority, bringing bitterness right into the kitchen, even though the door to the schoolroom was closed. How much sharper in Esau's nostrils after the outside winter air.
>
> "Hey-uh," Esau said, the Stony sound clipped off in the throat. It could mean almost anything: yes — no — maybe — you're right — you're wrong. "White people smell too."
>
> "Do we?"
>
> "Hey-uh." That was affirmative.
>
> "How do you mean, Esau?"
>
> "To us people, you know."
>
> "We smell to you."
>
> "Cow."
>
> "I don't . . ."
>
> "Quite strong."
>
> "Oh — milky. You mean we smell milky to you?"
>
> It was several deliberate seconds before Esau lifted his hooded eyes. "Hey-uh." This time he meant no.

What do whites smell like? It is an easy step from this question and Sinclair's reflection on "the disinfectant's authority" to the first of the thematic images I mentioned. Like Sinclair's deliberate misplacing of the Oil Company's markers but more consistently so, excrement as image is used to symbolize defiance of irresponsible and abused authority, to symbolize a response to some affront to human dignity. One of the most amusing anecdotes in the novel illustrates this. It occurs when Sinclair recalls the time he failed to obey Old Kacky's instructions during a lesson in perspective drawing. As a result he was ordered to Old Kacky's office and strapped. Then, left to regain his composure in the office, he defecated among the papers in Old Kacky's drawer. Old Kacky endured the indignity of living with

the smell for a week before discovering its source.[2] Years later Sinclair himself affronts the dignity of Harold Lefthand by bullying him over the poor attendance of his children at school. Lefthand retaliates by putting horse manure in Sinclair's water supply. Sinclair suffers the indignity of having drunk the water for two weeks before discovering the ruse.

Another important example of excremental imagery relates to Sinclair's Aunt Pearl, who produces white stools — "little white dumplings." There is an incongruity in Aunt Pearl's "purity": her stools are white but she burns string after each bowel movement, presumably as a deodorant. Her absolutes are arraigned implicitly in the following exchange between Sinclair and Doctor Saunders:

> "I never did get a professional explanation from you — what about Aunt Pearl?"
>
> "Her white stool? Oh — soppy — sippy — bland diet, I guess. You get it with older — no — more likely mucous colitis."
>
> "Whatever that is."
>
> "Anxiety — not ulcerative but — God, now wouldn't that be funny!"
>
> "What?"
>
> "Your anal erotic Aunt Pearl — responsible for the whole mechanistic mess we're in."
>
> "No. Not very."
>
> "Sent us all to play in the technological toy room — she's still burning her string you know — in that great bathroom in the sky!"
>
> "I agree."
>
> Sanders lifted a cupped hand, the thumb crooked back; he made a broad pass back and forth, depressing his thumb. "Haaaaaaah — haaaaaaaaah — sssssssssssit — pressurized cans of flora green — oh — oh, if only she'd toilet-train the hydro and pulp and gas and oil and the little automobile boys — before they do it all over the whole wild green broadloom!"

There is also something anaemic about Aunt Pearl that stands in sharp contrast to the red and raw vitality of the Stonys — or at least in contrast to the image of the Stonys before they contracted the white man's diseases. Mitchell apparently intended a similar negative connotation for Rev. Healy Richards who is described as a "photograph negative" and "the negative-man," and whose penchant for peanut butter makes Archie Nicotine shudder at the thought of a man eating all that "squirrel shit."

THE TITLE IMAGE OF THE NOVEL is also an image of negation. The vanishing point, in perspective drawing, is the point towards which parallel receding lines appear to converge. But the main function of the vanishing point in this novel is human rather than art oriented. The image does remind us of different ways of perceiving — not just objects but the human condition as well;

and it does allude to guiding lines in art and in life, where man draws lines of authority for himself and, often more destructively, for others. But the really significant thrust of the image, as Mitchell uses it, is towards a nothingness to which the species seems inexorably drawn because of the greed and callousness and intolerance of its members.

Disillusioned with Fyfe's attitude to the Indians as "terminal cases" and with his band-aid measures of helping them, disillusioned alike with what Sanders terms "the reserve-system slough — tepid with paternal help" and "the crowded, noisy, concrete and glass and plastic and asphalt slough," disillusioned with Rev. Dingle's "absent-minded masturbatory loving kindness that has borne no fruit," disillusioned with his own efforts, Sinclair by extension sees the whole human spectacle as futile. All is being "sucked into the vanishing point." "Despair like me . . . ," he tells Fyfe; "Right from the beginning the whole human race has been one God-damned mess!"

Alone at home, he recalls the premature death of his wife.

> For a moment there came back to him the profile of a woman seated in a window bench, her knees drawn up and arms clasped around them — and oh, the sad and shallow curve of her neck with head tilted down. So still — so still for hours! Once more, on an institutional counter, he signed away all happy days; he accepted a big Manilla envelope with its tiny silver wrist-watch, engagement ring, wedding band. Then a train was being sucked into the prairie vanishing point. He stood alone on a platform on a friendless planet.

But Sinclair, no matter how depressing the moment, refuses to say a permanent "No" to Life. Mate, his boyhood friend, had argued with him years earlier that the vanishing point is an illusion: "It only comes to a vanishing point. . . . " In the end the truth of Mate's remark is symbolically affirmed through traditional images of spring — new leaf, bird's song, soaring osprey, water, especially the "rebirth" of Beulah Creek — and in the working of Archie's truck. But this affirmation of life is made plausible through what I believe is the most important image in the whole book — bridges.

In the physical sense, bridges are essential links in communications and transportation systems: and one thinks immediately of the suspension bridge over the Spray, an essential link between the two worlds of this novel. But far more important to the revelation and affirmation of *The Vanishing Point* are the psychological bridges which must be erected among people if we are to escape extinction as *human* beings.

On the spring morning on which the action begins, Sinclair recognizes himself as a "thirty-six-year-old adolescent . . . starved for the thrust from self to the centre of a loved one." Later that morning, while crossing over the Spray, the need for positive contact among human beings prompts him to comment: "That was what

was needed really; some sort of suspension bridge that could carry hearts and minds across and into other hearts and minds."

Mitchell makes it clear, through his men of the cloth, that the Church has not erected such "bridges." Rev. Dingle's attempt at reaching the Stonys through their language provides a delightful little irony; and for all the Biblical texts referred to by clergy or layman, no mention is made of First Corinthians, Chapter Thirteen!

"Had he ever made it across to any of these people?" Sinclair asks himself. Occasionally he had — when personal and spontaneous good will rather than institutionalized charity had prevailed. There had been a genuine and mutual "thrust from self" in the giving of gifts on that first Christmas in Paradise Valley; even more sustaining had been that memorable August afternoon when he had taken Victoria, then twelve years old, into the city to have a tooth capped:

> As they walked through the crushing flow of people, she had taken his hand and held it as they walked. For the first time two worlds had merged, and he knew it. He and she were no longer so vulnerable on this concrete and asphalt planet. The memory of her hand in his could still surprise him with the dry, sun heat of its own.

Memories such as these, and Sinclair's initial faith in good works, help to articulate the thesis that mankind can escape "being sucked into the vanishing point."

But there is an Antithesis in his moments of depression, when he fears that communication among human beings might be just a dream: "What a weak bridge emotion was for people to walk across to each other — emotion swinging, unable to hold the heavy weight of communication."[3] And in his realization that the lines of authority which man draws do not ensure justice and dignity for his fellowman. Above all, he himself had dynamited a "bridge": he had failed Victoria when she needed him most. Out of these antithetical states of mind arises the Synthesis which is incipient in his admonition of Fyfe, in his glass world, amid his hybrid orchids, and away from reality and nature.

> "You're trying to — for something that hasn't got anything to do with what the orchid wants."
>
> . . . . . .
>
> "Listen to the orchid, Fyfe — let her tell her own delight and need. . . ."

Fyfe's imposition of his own will upon the orchid parallels what the white authorities are doing to the Indians, and, ironically, what Sinclair is doing to Victoria. Later, he will fully recognize that authority must be tempered by compassion; and that one may improve social conditions, but only if one has a sympathetic understanding of the human condition. People like Rev. Richards and Aunt Pearl lack the "compassion halo" and force other people into moral boxes. He, too, had not experienced the suffering and loss that help to build character, nor had he always

taken into account the dignity of others. "They perished and he taught them arithmetic; they thirsted to death on their time desert and he gave them reading and spelling lessons. . . . without twinning pain his compassion had been specious."

THE WHEEL COMES FULL CIRCLE. It was the drumming of a male grouse that had aroused Sinclair to new life on the morning he had set out to visit Victoria in the city. Near the end of the novel, the dance (and drums) — primitive ritual of transcendence and symbol of unity — finally lifts him out of "the home envelope of self." He seeks out Victoria, and, dancing with her amid that great tribal wash of passion that obliterates all but the Now, he rediscovers what he and Mate had discovered intuitively long ago:

> They were both alien from and part of a living whole. The dry husk of a dead gopher, an abandoned garter-snake skin, magpies, undertaker beetles, had taught them the terror of being human. But they knew that they were accountable to each other; the badger, the coyote, the kill-deer, the jack rabbit, the undertaker beetle, could not share their alien terror. They were not responsible for each other. Man was.
>
> Man lifted bridges between himself and other men so that he could walk from his own heart and into other hearts. That was the great and compensating distinction: man did — the jack rabbit, the badger, the kill-deer, the weasel, the undertaker beetle, did not. How could he have forgotten that! How could he have left Victoria on that city street. Archie hadn't; Archie had not destroyed a bridge. But he had turned away from her — from all of them, lost sight of their vivid need. Victoria had not truly failed, but he had. . . .
>
> He danced again with Victoria. . . .
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Who cared now — who cared now! Only the now remained to them — the now so great that only death or love could greaten it. Greater than pain, stronger than hunger or their images paled with future — dimmed with past. Only the now — pulsing and placeless — now! Song and dancer and watching band were one, under the bruising drum that shattered time and self and all other things that bound them.
>
> Her hand took his as they stood up, held it as they walked to the tent flap. The drum followed them all the way to Beulah Creek bridge, then with one lambasting sound, it was stilled.

This is the philosophical and emotional climax of the novel. Sinclair is, in Eliot's phrase, "At the still point of the turning world," where all opposites are harmonized. His subsequent sleeping with Victoria merely re-emphasizes symbolically his triumph over his own vanity, and his defiance of intolerant authority. Next morning, waking once more to the drumming of the grouse, and looking tenderly upon Victoria lying there without an "overlay of lace" and not "daisy-white," he reflects

that, until now, life "had given him the wrong commandments: be loved — don't love; tell — don't ask; take — don't give." But far from being "a separate peace," as was Frederic's relationship with Catherine in *A Farewell to Arms*, Sinclair's love for Victoria symbolizes universal kindness — the only solution possible in a world where Old Esau's Storm and Misty magic is obsolete, where Fyfe's welfare measures are demeaning, and where the miracle healing of Richards is just another form of prostitution.[4]

Three images — excrement, the vanishing point, and bridges — carry the burden of Mitchell's commentary on the delicate web we call civilization, and on the importance of compassion and responsibility in keeping that web intact. However, a word must be said about the minor images which twinkle in and around these controlling symbols and help to illuminate the theme, and to intensify the psychology of defiance and negation and abnormality, failure and despair, hope and affirmation which informs the narrative. (Here, a few examples must serve for the many.) Magic lantern, dead little Willis's toy-room, the three-balled bronze lion in Aunt Pearl's living room are images of the abnormality and artificiality which cramp the individual and help to negate all that we mean by such terms as "spirit" and "Life Force." Gloria Catface, the Indian prostitute, appears to have parallels in Miss Rossdance's girls. And "white" is almost always associated with excrement. But there are also images which are positive. The reversed heart image occurs at least twice in the novel: once, as a metaphor for the cloven-hoof prints near the beaver dam; and again, in the black comedy of the eccentric Dr. Dabbs at the hospital. The heart must be right: that message pervades the narrative. Bird's song, water, and soaring osprey symbolize love, generation, and the resilient spirit and contribute likewise to the motif of rebirth.

The little Powderface boy, playing with his battered toy truck or floating chips on his tiny canal system, reminds us that boys are one at heart, regardless of the colour of their skin. As he watches that "little bare-bum shaman," Sinclair reflects: "I want to mirror you so you may be more nearly true! . . . I promise you I won't destroy you with distorted image. I will not turn you into a backward person. . . . Let's you and I conjure together. . . . do our marvelous human tricks together!" The mirror image or metaphor, at various places representative of the Indians' shame and confusion, is, at the end, directed towards promotion of human dignity. Finally, there is "the little phrase," which may or may not constitute an image but which, by repetition and variation, contributes to the motifs of the novel and helps to provide rhythm: Fyfe's "see what transpires"; Archie's "that is the whole situation"; and Sinclair's "*Little lost lamb, Victoria!*"

But W. O. Mitchell is no romantic: he is not promoting images of "the noble savage" or the wilderness utopia. And the artificiality and bureaucracy of the white administrators are balanced by the filth and inefficiency of the Stonys. Mitchell is a lover of life for whom the "irresponsible" is often irresistible; and

his humour and irony help him to avoid the prejudice, sentimentality and condescension to which literature about ethnic and native minorities is so susceptible. He is a humanist who anchors his narrative in a milieu he knows well, the more convincingly to articulate a truth which transcends that milieu. The principle of love and compassion as the panacea for a troubled world is not new: what is important is that a man who is neither a cynic nor a sentimentalist can affirm it in our own time, and how that affirmation is made from experience filtered through a sensitivity and imagination unique in our literature. "[T]he main justification for art is that it grows out of the unique and individual human being, and that when the art experience happens between a creative artist and a creative partner [the reader], it is probably the closest a human can ever come to truly crossing a bridge to another human . . . ,"[5] Mitchell has claimed. His handling of image and idea in *The Vanishing Point* makes good that claim.

NOTES

[1] *Conversations with Canadian Novelists*, ed. Donald Cameron (Toronto: Macmillan, 1973), Part Two, p. 51.

[2] Heather Robertson, in a review of *The Vanishing Point*, recalls being told that the Indians of one Saskatchewan reserve used to steal into the R.C.M.P. detachment and deposit human excrement on the Corporal's living-room couch as a means of destroying the enemy's dignity without taking his life. (See "W. O. Mitchell: Pain Beneath the Laughter," *Saturday Night*, January 1974, vol. 89, pp. 31-32.)

[3] Later Sinclair reflects on the absence of real intimacy with his father: "It had been as though his father had decided that emotion was waste" and "He guessed that was the way it had been with him and his father: 'you in your small corner and I in mine'."

[4] Cf. Mitchell's skillful juxtaposition of scenes from Gloria Catface's prostitution and Rev. Healy Richards' evangelism.

[5] *Conversations with Canadian Novelists*, p. 51.

DISPROPORTION

Ralph Gustafson

Chalk this up: never before
Has such praise been given
Snow on the limbs of trees shaken
In a shoddy wind,

Have sparks exploded
In a stardom of glory
Thus from logs . . .
Two instances will do
Of the prodigiousness
As I sit here,
The window on my left on winter,
The fire on my right
Burning where the fireplace is.
Sprawl banners,
Slogans raise to the turn of events,
Psalteries and song even,
To all sorts,
To the procedures of
Being here, to knowledge of
Progressions, to imposed goings even.
The snow falls,
The fire burns,
I engage prodigies.

AT THE CA' PESARO

Ralph Gustafson

Music, modest as in this palazzo,
At the piano here, the Ca' Pesaro,
Canale Grande. And in how many places . . .
Madame's handkerchief before she plays,
Seta pura the low-cut gown
As thought of as the music, Brahms,
Berg and his nerve-ends; rubbish
In the canal, rinds, zucchini tops,
Yesterday's soaked news floating
Where Byron swam and Browning loved.
Out through the windows: 'Intermezzo'
For the passing world, Brahms drinking
His coffee, Madame rendering, impervious
To the *vaporetto*'s thump.

STATES OF MIND
Henry Kreisel's Novels

Robert A. Lecker

IN HIS ESSAY ENTITLED "The Prairie: A State of Mind," Henry Kreisel examines the relation between the prairie environment and the prairie consciousness as it is manifested in writing. Significantly, the essay takes as its point of departure Kreisel's own response to a landscape which he came gradually to know in the first years he spent in the Canadian west. Kreisel is at pains to point out that the assimilation of the prairie consciousness frequently precedes the objective recognition of the forms that consciousness can take and their deliberate expression in writing. For example, a short story Kreisel published in 1966, "The Broken Globe," is full of the images of prairie man that he only later recognized as recurrent in prairie literature: "These were in fact the images that came to me and I should myself have regarded them as purely subjective, if I had not afterward in reading encountered similar images in the work of other writers who write about the appearance of men on the prairie at certain times." As the essay makes clear, Kreisel had come under the prairie influence almost immediately upon going west prior to 1948. Even then, he was "awed" by a letter to the *Edmonton Journal* "in which the writer . . . asserted with passionate conviction that the earth was flat." In the 1968 essay, Kreisel notes that "even as I write these lines, the emotion evoked in me by that letter that appeared in a newspaper more than twenty years ago comes back to me, tangible and palpable."

The prairie which has had so potent an effect upon Kreisel is of course real, but it is also the author's metaphor. He is more concerned with a state of mind than he is with a specific place. He implies that we are all prairie men who carry within us the prairie consciousness. Above all, it is Kreisel who displays that consciousness — the men he writes about in his essay are very much a part of himself. The critique is as much a "romance" as his novels, a theoretical formulation of his own quest fictionalized in his work. Thus the essay functions as a displaced example of his deepest themes imaged in terms of the prairie landscape. As he studies other prairie fiction, Kreisel finds the symbols of his own sense of self. In turn, he transforms the prairie into a field of symbolic images which comes to represent the landscape of the modern mind. Thus the essay actually serves as a

key to Kreisel's own novels, for it provides us with a statement of the images, themes, and archetypes that reappear in *The Rich Man* and *The Betrayal.*

Kreisel likens the prairie to a sea: "Only the other kind of landscape gives us the same skeleton requirements, the same vacancy and stillness, the same movement of wind through space — and that is the sea." In actual fact, Kreisel connects not one but three landscapes with the prairie. He refers to Ross's Philip Bentley drawing scenes of the prairie as a desert, "scenes that mirror his own frustration." The "barren sea" which Philip Grove's horses hurl themselves against is synonymous with "those drifts of snow" characteristic of Arctic desolation. The prairie, the sea, the desert, the arctic — for Kreisel these "lonely and forbidden spaces" combine to form a metaphorical modern wasteland, a moral wilderness devoid of signposts and heedless of individual identity.

Kreisel also sees man's response to the wasteland in metaphorical terms. He becomes the archetypal wanderer "driven to follow a dream," or the mythical frontiersman "pitted against a vast and frequently hostile natural environment that threatens to dwarf him." Man the conqueror-explorer is frequently a victim, both of the elements and of loneliness. Again, the "extraordinary sense of confinement" which plagues the prairie settler takes on universal significance; "the theme of the imprisoned spirit" is the theme of modern literature.

Kreisel reminds us that the fate of the individual usually represents the fate of society at large. In its search for security, the prairie community often shuts out the world, but in so doing shuts itself in. The settlements become "islands in that land-sea, areas of relatively safe refuge from the great and lonely spaces." Ideals and dreams are constantly thwarted by the presence of the real: "Man, the giant-conqueror, and man, the insignificant dwarf always threatened by defeat, from the two polarities of the state of mind produced by the sheer physical fact of the prairie." As Kreisel says, "there are moments when the two images coalesce." The result may be a *doppelganger* motif, the ultimate expression of alienation. Or the divided spirit may be confused and self-deceiving, an escapist living in a private dream and pretending that the outer world is absent. Another may be an actor performing on a private stage — his artificial interior reality. A third may venture boldly into the wilderness to defeat the ambiguity of fate. Clearly, these are all attempts to deal in some way with the surrounding sea. Kreisel is writing about a quest for order, stability, and reason. He is describing the tactics men employ to guarantee their very existence. Kreisel presents the same themes and characters in his novels.

The Rich Man tells the story of Jacob Grossman, an older Jewish man confined for thirty-three years to the routine job of a clothes factory presser. In order to visit the family he has left behind in Europe, Jacob decides to leave work and the daughter he lives with for a six week trip to Vienna. Squandering his meagre savings, Jacob manages to impress his relatives as a wealthy man by their stan-

dards. But when a desperate situation forces the family to ask Jacob for financial help, the truth comes out. Jacob returns to Toronto shaken, unhappy, and exposed for the poor man he really is.

From the beginning of the novel, it is clear that Jacob remains an imprisoned spirit, an alien in his adopted homeland. The Toronto which Jacob has lived in for more than three decades is presented as an essentially barren urban wilderness. The more we follow Jacob in his movements at home or overseas, the more we realize the extent to which he has either denied his environment, or coloured his view of it so as to reinforce a contrived sense of security. The first scenes of the novel are interesting in this respect. We are introduced to Jacob as he emerges from the cocoon-like safety of his bed. Before the first line of the book is completed Jacob is not only awake but already seeking out the clock which will assure him that events are still well organized and proceeding on time as planned. In the first paragraph Kreisel is careful to emphasize the extent to which Jacob's survival depends upon organizing the day to come. Repeatedly we are told that Jacob's existence is a matter of what "should have been," what "he would say," how he "would go on," how he "would get down to the factory." The obsession with maintaining a sense of time and place continues throughout Jacob's day, magnifying the significance of his need for an almost hermetic isolation. Leaving his own room, Jacob makes his habitual moves from the kitchen, to the tramcar, and into the factory. Although Jacob has decided to upset the order of the day by speaking to the factory manager, he reassures himself by entering through the workers' side entrance. Before the door has even closed Jacob begins to look for the familiar symbols of stability: "He swung open the door. There, against the walls, were the time clocks, and instinctively, his eyes wandered to the rack where his own time card was. It was there, No. 1003, standing lonely in the left-hand rack beside one of the clocks." Clearly, Jacob is firmly entrenched in that neo-Calvinist "work ethic" framework that Kreisel refers to in his essay. Having laboured for more than half his life in the same building, Jacob has managed to insulate himself completely from life in the open. It is important to note that Jacob's alienation is chosen as much as it is imposed — it is essentially a means of defence.

When Jacob moves from the safety of Canadian enclosures to a European setting, absolutely nothing changes in terms of the exterior landscape. Overseas, as in Toronto, Jacob is equally at odds with everything outside. He (as well as every other character) does all he can to block out the surrounding world. After leaving the ship, Jacob completes the route to Vienna by train. Later, when he "tried to recall what the Belgian countryside looked like, he found that his memory was blurred and hazy." In actual fact, Kreisel informs us, "he paid no heed to the beautiful scenery. . . . Jacob saw nothing." Indeed, Jacob sees little during his entire visit. Retreating with his family from the atmosphere of anti-semitism and

political repression which surrounds them in the European city, Jacob's stay in Vienna becomes a series of interior adventures designed to deny the real hostility of the environment beyond the doorway. Correspondingly, spatial structures generally describe hidden, withdrawn, or highly enclosed areas. Upon his arrival, Jacob hustles the family into a taxi which in turn moves swiftly to their meagre rooms. The next day, Jacob visits the public bath. The image of the tomb is obvious here, for "the semi-darkness in which it was shrouded and the beckoning couches gave the atmosphere an extraordinary degree of restfulness and peace." Another excursion brings Jacob to Albert's book shop, "wedged in between a grocery on one side and a butcher shop on the other." The culminating enclosure scene, and the novel's finest representation of the attempt to retreat from a disordered world occurs when Jacob accompanies his nephews to the "cave" they have discovered in a nearby area. In their naiveté, the children give voice to what Jacob is reluctant to admit:

> when you're in the cave you can see everything that's going on outside, but anybody that's walking around outside can't see you at all when you're hidden inside.

JACOB'S IDEAL WORLD is described in the child's words about the cave. Throughout the novel Jacob is concerned with establishing a selective vision, one which will enable him to recognize the "outside" only when he chooses to, and even then, only from a governing perspective. At the same time, the cave metaphor is appropriate to Jacob because it represents his own need to hide from the outside at will, simultaneously substituting for exterior reality an artificial interior milieu. Kreisel underlines the negative qualities of such a synthetic existence. No sooner has man framed himself within protective boundaries than those boundaries begin to weigh him down. What was to be a zone of freedom is transformed into a narrow cell. Jacob's sensations at the close of the cave scene make this view explicit. He felt that "all the air seemed to have been cut off. It was almost like being in a small, windowless room, pressed against a narrow corner."

Life in *The Rich Man* may be generally described as windowless. Here, man is not interested in the true picture so much as in imposing his own picture upon the landscape, altering it to suit his needs, and refusing to recognize it except within the framework he himself has chosen. It is for this reason that Jacob's rare glimpses of Vienna tell us much more about Jacob and what he refuses to see than they do about the city itself. His first impressions, caught from the security of the taxi, are revealing:

> The streets were alive with people; old men and women promenading slowly up and down, sitting on benches in the mellow evening air, young couples walking arm

> in arm. The cafés were full of patrons, some sitting outside in the improvised gardens and vine-hung terraces, chattering and drinking coffee.

This is the romantic Vienna that Jacob has always dreamed of. Only later do we realize the extent of Jacob's self-deception. The streets are full of people, Reuben explains, because in a city of two million, three hundred thousand are unemployed. The men sit drinking coffee because "as long as they have a few groschen left they would rather do this. This way at least they save their shoes." Even the music performed by the street singers "is only another way of begging."

It is appropriate that the most important pages of *The Rich Man* should be those devoted to the actual voyage from Canada to the Old World. The sea Jacob crosses is metaphorically that "vast land-sea" which Kreisel spoke of. Upon this featureless expanse, Jacob sets himself as the explorer in search of his past and the innocent values associated with childhood. He has yet to learn that the age of innocence is irrevocably lost. In his own eyes, and in the white alpaca suit he has purchased for the occasion, Jacob becomes the mythical rich man of stature and strength — a transformed conqueror, the physical sign of his country's growth and prosperity. Jacob finds himself in pursuit of a dream, but he is repeatedly forced to confront the futility of his ideal and the reality of his own spiritual isolation. In an interesting way, this dichotomy has been foreshadowed from the first scene in Jacob's bedroom. As he shaves, "The Blue Danube Waltz" plays over the radio, but the waltz is preceded by a recording of a Negro quartet singing "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot." Throughout the novel, we find Jacob searching after the lost ideal of the waltz: "He wanted a lot of violins, hundreds of them, the way it was always done in movies about gay Vienna." Again and again Jacob asks to hear the piece, but never does he hear it properly. The music is always disrupted by some intrusion of the real. The Negro song is in fact much more suited to Jacob than the waltz — the never-changing form of his employment amidst "the steam of the Hoffman presses and the sweat of hundreds of workers" marks him as enslaved to a system that reduces men to strictly mechanical activities.

The ironies of Jacob's position are readily apparent: while he may be a big man in his own eyes, and perhaps a giant in the eyes of his European relatives, he is in fact a dwarf, a victim, not a victor. To survive, Jacob must involve himself in a dangerous game of role-playing. He can maintain himself only by assuming a false front that gives him a controlling sense of power. As Kreisel tells us, "there was indeed a great deal of the showman in Jacob Grossman." However, there is a very serious aspect to Jacob's acting, one which is crucial to the sea experience in general, for Jacob's quest for an appropriate identity coincides with his search for values, for an acceptable frame of reference through which he can see an unexplored world. Repeatedly in *The Rich Man* Jacob tries to find or purchase

physical objects which act as co-ordinates in relation to which he can place himself and his attitudes. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the meeting on board the ship between Jacob and the French artist Tassigny. Tassigny has completed an abstract painting entitled *L'Entrepreneur*, "remotely suggesting a human figure, though this was not at first easily apparent because a geometric construction built up of spheres and rectangular planes obscured it. The figure had a long fleshless neck, but no face. Where the head should have been, there was a thick, cylindrical, megaphone-like contraption, painted jet-black, and pointing sideways." The picture suggests Jacob's own adopted role as the entrepreneurial gross man. As his exaggerated stories and countless lies make clear, Jacob is all voice, but faceless.

In contrast to Jacob, Tassigny maintains that whether or not his expressions are understood is inconsequential, "so long as I have always told the truth, the way I see the truth." Tassigny's reasons for creating the painting are therefore diametrically opposed to Jacob's reasons for purchasing it. The canvas gives Jacob a false sense of power and wealth. He almost begins to like the painting, "not because he came to appreciate Tassigny's art, but because he fancied that with the purchase of the painting he had become, not only Tassigny's equal, but even his superior. He felt his ego grow, and become inflated like a balloon. For was he not now a patron of the arts?"

When at the story's end Jacob comes face to face with the futility of his own self-deception, it is appropriately Tassigny's painting which is angrily discarded; for in casting away the image of the entrepreneur, Jacob symbolically kills the myriad impressions which have governed his overseas life. Although the novel may seem to describe a progression from innocence to experience, or from falsity to truth, it is clear that in the end, by rejecting the painting, Jacob symbolically rejects any truths he has discovered in his journey through the external world. Having experienced the hostility of the wilderness around him, Jacob retreats to the safety of a framed lifestyle — he returns to that windowless complacence which blocks out the violence of the real. We are left with the nagging sensation that for Jacob, very little has changed.

KREISEL'S SECOND NOVEL, *The Betrayal*, also deals with a man who attempts to deny the threat of external experience by entrenching himself and his perceptions in a well-ordered but narrow sense of place. From the comfort of his high-rise apartment living room in Edmonton, Mark Lerner, a Canadian-born professor of history, recalls the story of Theodore Stappler, who has relentlessly pursued to Canada Joseph Held, the man responsible for his mother's death ten years earlier in Auschwitz. Through their mutual interest in

Held's daughter Katherine, Lerner finds himself involved with Stappler and playing the role of his confidant, constantly asked to judge and identify with Stappler's need for revenge and the potential guilt arising from Stappler's own inactivity in the face of Held's betrayal of his family.

Like Jacob, Lerner is confined within a punctual routine and imprisoned by his lifestyle. The habitual reading of essays merely replaces the endless pressing of garments that Jacob devotes his life to — both duties are the rituals around which these men structure their daily experiences. Lerner is a bachelor living alone two thousand miles from "familial love." Daily, he moves from his snug apartment ("though the sound-proofing could be somewhat improved") to a university office equally removed from life in the streets. Outside, there is always snow, or the frozen river, or "a light wind which made it seem much colder than it was." Lerner himself is antiseptically intellectual, as cold and sterile as the environment he shies away from. But he is not immune to the sense of prairie loneliness described in Kreisel's essay. Emerging from the Victoria Hotel towards the end of the novel, the landscape presents itself to him thus:

> Whiteness in darkness. It had very nearly stopped snowing. Only a few perfunctory flakes were still drifting down from the black invisible sky. . . .
>
> For a moment I felt as if I had stepped out onto a strange and unknown street. The landscape seemed curiously unfamiliar, like a landscape in a dream. The buildings were sombre, forbidding shapes, rising from the white pavement into the darkness above. There was very little traffic on the road. I did not know what time it was. It seemed the dead end of night.

The disorienting landscape which Lerner confronts reflects his own inner confusion. Lost in a timeless foreign world devoid of human fellowship, Lerner experiences the dead end vision of existential despair which marks him as a modern man. In his response to this metaphorical glimpse of the desert Lerner is identical to Jacob. He reveals his desperate need for stability and control by becoming a collector of paintings, seeing himself as one who can frame experience by purchasing it pre-framed and pre-packaged. Considering the three "distinguished" oils in his possession, particularly a scene by Emily Carr, Lerner boasts proudly that "I rather fancy myself a patron of the arts." The painting is indeed valuable, for it provides us with a key to Lerner's personality. By using the painting we can open those doors that Lerner has tried so firmly to bolt. Lerner's approach to the canvas is similar to his appreciation of history — what the professor wants is an intellectualized existence, the vitality and dynamism of life without its pain, its involvements, or its crises. Repeatedly he returns to the question of Charlotte Corday's potential guilt, presenting it as a universal example of the need for moral choice. But never does Lerner apply the problem to his own very questionable acts. He admits that he is "prepared to grant . . . a certain validity" to his colleague's suggestion that "I like the study of history because it involves me in the acts of suf-

fering humanity but at the same time allows me to keep involvements at arm's length." Although Lerner might try to convince himself that in the course of his encounter with Stappler he manages to shed this protective intellectualism, it is clear that he remains forever preoccupied with rendering the fluid static and with containing the shifting sea. We need only observe Lerner at the end of his story, as he continues to sit behind that ever-present living-room window which acts as his frame around the world. There, in silent isolation, he can "look down on the magnificent river winding its way through the city, and watch the changes of the seasons." Instead of participating in the exterior flow of nature, Lerner remains content merely to view life from a distanced and controlled perspective.

In keeping with this attitude, it is only natural that for Lerner, human action itself is denigrated to the status of an *objet d'art*, something to be toyed with and forgotten. The "meaning" of Joseph Held's life can therefore be consigned by Lerner to some dingy corner, out of the way, but available should the occasional need for it arise:

> Sometimes, wrestling with some intractable moral problem that history raised for me, I thought of Joseph Held and tried once more to come to terms with his action, but I could never settle the matter in my own mind, and it remained one of those loose ends which dangle somewhere in the attic of one's mind, untidy and uncomfortable, but fortunately out of the way, safely hidden amid the bric-à-brac that gathers dust there.

Just as *L'Entrepreneur* in *The Rich Man* was an abstract representation of Jacob, so in *The Betrayal* the Carr painting describes the real Mark Lerner who hides within a deceptively stable frame — a violent, terror-stricken individual torn by moral ambiguity and fear of an irrational universe. When Stappler comments that the work "expresses tangled emotions," he speaks unconsciously about Lerner's essence. Yet Stappler must still grasp the fact that those emotions are skilfully hidden. Within a page, he understands the relationship between surface and content characteristic of the book at large:

> "Everything seems quiet," Theodore Stappler said. "But that is only on the surface. Below, everything is in motion. The landscape is static, but the colours are dynamic. So everything is still, and yet everything moves."

In stressing the fact that everything *seems* quiet, Stappler touches upon what is perhaps the most important feature of the painting: it is deceiving, and it demands a second viewing. Again, the emphasis upon deception must be applied to Lerner as well, and we find, not surprisingly, that he is in another way very much like Jacob Grossman — he is an actor, and the classroom is but one of his many stages. From the very first page of the novel, Kreisel asserts this fact. "There is something in me, I think, of the actor," Lerner confesses. He complains when "the high dramatic moments" of his lectures fail to excite the entire student audience. Later,

speaking in his role as narrator, Lerner makes it plain that given the chance, he would cast himself as the hero of his play: "We are all heroes in our mirrors, or think at least that, when our moment of testing comes, we would not miss the chance to give a true, perhaps even heroic account of ourselves." Lerner's mention of the mirror is interesting on another level. His inability to effectively isolate himself from his surroundings is signalled by the fact that regardless of his will, he begins to take on and reflect the qualities of everything that is put in front of him. Thus he tries in futility to stop the "tangled roots" of Carr's painting from "coming out of the canvas and spreading into his brain." In a similar manner he attempts to detach himself from the events of Stappler's life, but is eventually forced to admit that "the more I tried to detach myself, the more involved, the more entangled I became." The "entanglement" metaphor begins on the canvas and spreads right through the theme of the story. Both Lerner and Stappler are caught between the image of what they should be and the image of what they are.

IN THIS RESPECT, PERHAPS THE MOST INTERESTING feature of the novel centres on the way in which Lerner and Stappler subtly exchange roles as the narrative progresses. Stappler, the encyclopaedia salesman, becomes the giver of knowledge, ironically replacing the professor, who in time becomes a true learner, the recipient of Stappler's "lesson of life." Early in the story, Stappler's own words anticipate the *doppelganger* motif. Realizing that he and Lerner were fated to meet, Stappler cries out Baudelaire's phrase, "Mon semblable! Mon frère!" It is primarily in their approach to existential responsibility that Lerner and Stappler are twins. For Lerner has consistently refused to act for the benefit of anyone but himself; he is guilty of complacence and apathy. His selfishness and lack of commitment make him a fine example of Sartre's *mauvaise foi.* Stappler's story attracts him because it is so like his own. Lerner would prefer to resist the truth, yet he is perversely fascinated by what is essentially the story of his own acts of betrayal:

> For he had involved me, subtly and in a sense against my will. He had disturbed the order of my life, and I found myself once again resenting his intrusion. Then, too, a part of my consciousness whispered to me that the events of the past had perhaps best be forgotten.... Yet there he was, this stranger who had suddenly burst in on me, and he wouldn't allow it. He dug it all up, like a dog suddenly uncovering a mouldering bone.

Lerner's academic study of "intellectual cross currents" in European history represents his own attempt to place his life in a rational well-defined context. He is fearful of the chaos implied by any form of ambiguity. In this respect, Stappler's tale appears terrifying:

> I found myself reflecting that the most terrible thing about the kind of situation he was describing — complete social upheaval and the tearing away of all moral sanctions, a situation not unfamiliar to me from my own study of European revolutionary history — the most terrible thing about such a situation was that simple, black and white distinctions between good and evil were all blurred. There was just a grey range of evils, all of them morally corrupting.

Stappler's "situation" forces him to flee from a twentieth century reign of terror in search of a more tranquil place. In the Arctic wilderness he eventually finds "a kind of peace and a sense of unity with elemental forces." His descriptions of the Arctic makes it clear that he found Kreisel's prairie. Stappler was "struck by the immensity of the landscape, by its great silence, by its timelessness." In his letters to Lerner he noted that "it takes some time before you become aware of any variation in the landscape at all," and he added that "time does not exist. Particularly here, in the great silence, in the great stillness." For Stappler, the frozen wilderness represented an ideal freedom because it existed beyond time — only in timelessness could he liberate himself from his past. However, Stappler's ultimate "freedom" led him only to death. As the victim of an Arctic avalanche he surrendered to an environment whose desolation overcame him. This final encounter with external reality cannot help but remind us of similar confrontations described by Kreisel in his discussion of the prairie man as the conqueror and the conquered. Stappler has always been the uprooted wanderer of Kreisel's essay. Throughout the novel he follows the dream of an ideal community secure from exterior threats. Soon after we meet him, he relates to Lerner a dream which effectively restates many of the images which Kreisel mentions in his critique. The dream itself is such a potent metaphor for Kreisel's view of the human condition that it deserves to be quoted in its entirety:

> The landscape was always the same, strange and yet familiar. It was evening, always evening, and there was something baleful about the evening. A deep red sun poured heat down upon a barren landscape. There were rocks like massive obelisks, and dried-up cactus plants, but also, scattered about here and there, a few green trees, like weeping willows. Suddenly huge black clouds appeared in the sky, like the outstretched fingers of a gigantic hand, and advanced towards the sun and threatened to engulf it. In this desolate landscape the figure of a man with a knapsack on his back and an alpenstock in his hand was stumbling from rock to rock. And as if, like Moses in the wilderness, he were looking for water, he struck each rock with his alpenstock and turned away again each time, for there was no water. He looked up into the sky and was terrorized by the cloud that was moving slowly towards the sun, and in his terror he sought refuge in the shadow of a red rock, but the rock threw no shadow, and so, stumbling on, at last he found a cave and crawled into the darkness of its black, gaping hole, and there squatted on the ground, his knapsack still on his back, his alpenstock still in his hand. Thus squatting, he pondered, but without any real hope, how he might ever get out of this desert, live again like a human being in a rational society, stop being agitated and

> terrorized by weird manifestations, cease to flee from rock to rock, grow roots anew, like the willow tree, and have his place again among men, in a universe that was not entirely unfriendly.

Stappler sees Eliot's symbolic wasteland, and it is this "desolate landscape" which he must traverse in search of permanent values. He becomes the mythical explorer in search of the promised land, just as he is the original settler seeking out shelter and food. Like a primitive, but also like Jacob, the man of Stappler's dream is drawn towards the safety offered by the cave. Most important is the profound sense of isolation which permeates Stappler's dream. To "live again like a human being in a rational society" would be to construct amidst the wilderness the social domain of the prairie community or homestead, it would be to find "a little schoolhouse standing lonely and defiant in a landscape that is like a desert."

The vision which appears to dominate Stappler's life also affects Lerner. He consistently looks for signposts which will direct his journey into the unfamiliar territory of Stappler's tale, and in response to the perils of that journey, he too hides in a series of well-structured cultural retreats. Eight years after his first contact with Stappler, Lerner is still collecting art. Of his recent acquisitions, the most valuable is a Lawren Harris, "one of those silent peaks, all white, rising out of a blue sea, all still, serene, and yet curiously tense, as if at any time the white mass would shatter and break itself." The Arctic which Stappler managed to confront in the raw is imported by Lerner in the form of a painting. Again, the canvas reflects Lerner's personality, also "curiously tense" and close to its breaking point. He admits that "in a way which I find hard to express, the painting seems to go together with my Emily Carr." Accordingly, he hangs them side by side facing the bed, so that they can be seen in the morning and just before sleep. The final position of these paintings signifies the fact that for Lerner, nothing at all has changed — the original vision is fundamentally the same as the vision which completes the book, and so the two paintings, like the novel's beginning and end, can be put side by side. Lerner remains in his rooms, trying to convince himself that life can be purchased and the real world denied. He tells us that "the walls of the apartment are glowing and alive" with art. But we know that these walls are the barriers which he has erected to shield himself from the universe beyond the high-rise. Although he hides in a kind of paralysis from life, when it comes to his paintings Lerner believes that he "responded to them immediately, spontaneously." Unlike Jacob, he cannot cast away the art which enables him to feel secure, yet the fate of all these paintings makes it clear that life in *The Betrayal* is no less futile than it is in *The Rich Man*. Both novels describe a failed quest for freedom. In the end, the actors return to the physical and mental fortresses they have been building all along.

Kreisel maintains in his essay on the prairie that "the knowledge of the vast space outside brings to the surface anxieties that have their roots elsewhere and

this sharpens and crystallizes a state of mind." The critical statement reflects upon Kreisel himself and also upon his fiction. His characters are filled with a deep sense of *angst* and worry about the irrational world around them. They are intensely conscious of their loneliness and their need for a genuine friend. The question is not so much whether they are prairie men, salesmen, or professors, but how they are human in every modern sense of the word.

MEDUSAS

Irving Layton

Flourishing nature's oriflamme
her gonfalon of hurt
medusas drop from wavecrest and white foam

In cities they wear fawning smiles
speak only to deceive
and possess two eyes
out of which look cruelty and lust

Observe: among them only poets and saints
are kind, having been born cross-eyed

Listen to the feral cries
of the wild-eyed medusas:
I'm a christian, I'm a maoist,
fascist, marxist, nationalist
I believe in progress and the rights of man

Foamblobs
time's ever-ready spike deflates
and smears like the brown scum
on the rocks below my feet

In Greece jellyfish are called medusas.

review articles

A LEGACY OF PLACE

Susan Jackel

DICK HARRISON, *Unnamed Country. The Struggle for a Canadian Prairie Fiction.* University of Alberta Press, $12.50.

UNNAMED COUNTRY, by Dick Harrison, is one Westerner's response to a persistent dilemma facing cultural historians in Canada, the dilemma posed by the phrase "Western civilization" when applied to prairie society, past and present. That society is Western, to be sure; but civilized? Describing his boyhood in Estevan, Eli Mandel has recently written, "Mentally, I was being brought up as a genteel Victorian boy, with a quaint though serious touch of middle-European gentility to boot. Physically, emotionally ... I was a sensuous little savage. The contradictions didn't strike me then, only later, only now." The same sense of disjunction between education and environment prodded another Westerner, W. L. Morton, into a life-long commitment to historical writing. In a *Mosaic* article of 1970, Morton wrote:

> Thus my actual landscape, the one my neighbours had made and worked in with apparent content, and my literary landscape, from the banks and braes of Bonnie Doon to the long beaches of Coral Islands, were in conflict. I had no single vision for both, but had to re-focus like one passing from dark to light.... The difficulty was to reconcile a landscape actually seen and realistically experienced with an internal landscape formed by reading. How could these be brought into a single, authentic vision in which neither would deny, but rather clarify, the other? How was one to see with a single eye that would do justice to a total experience of daily vision and literary perception?

The problem is far from new. It haunts the members of any colonial society as they attempt to arrive at precise and realistic definition of their relation to the parent culture; and it comes as small solace to Westerners to know, on the authority of such respected scholars as Morton himself, that the prairie West is a colony not of Britain or the United States, but of Ontario. In *Unnamed Country,* Dick Harrison speaks directly to this issue when he writes of "the spirit of empire, with its tendency to impose the culture of the dominant Ontario-British minority on the West." And he continues:

> Long after Connor's *The Foreigner* has been forgotten, the prairie school child of German or Ukrainian extraction is still being presented with English literature to study as his own. It is neither his nor his ancestors' nor the literature of the place or the people about him but the literature of the ancestors of a minority of his companions. What Wallace Stegner once said about learning in his small-town Saskatchewan school that history and geography extended no farther West than the Great Lakes is still almost universal prairie experience.

In the main, Harrison's approach to this dilemma is to argue that writers in Western Canada have been aware of conflict from the outset: thus the word "struggle" in his sub-title. He sees "painful incongruities" both in the experience of early settlers, and in the attempts by early writers to find words for this expe-

rience. With incongruity as his theme, it is understandable that he should feel the need to widen the usual concerns of literary history to include such aspects of emergent Western culture as survey patterns, movements in pictorial art, and even the occasional allusion to that most neglected of cultural components, the actual settler. It takes a very elastic approach indeed to literary studies to advance Lizzie McFadden's diary as a factor in the region's artistic maturity, yet in doing so Harrison has a point to make: that Lizzie McFadden's problem — "the lack of an imaginative framework to point the order and keep out the chaos" — is also the problem of the aspiring literary artist. The early fictions are weak, he claims, "partly because the novelists, like the settlers, are encumbered by their Europeanized culture. As Tennyson says, 'every man sees in nature that which he brings eyes to see.' Later novelists, from the time of Frederick Philip Grove, take this cultural blindness as a theme, but it never ceases to be a problem of the writers themselves."

One thing to emerge clearly from Harrison's study is that, compared to other regions of agricultural settlement in North America, the prairie West of Canada has been blessed (I hope that is the right word) with a high incidence of literary ambition among its anglophone inhabitants. This was Edward McCourt's observation, too, when he wrote in *The Canadian West in Fiction* that "in the Canadian West the first community institution seems to have been either a church or a police barracks; the second, one is tempted to feel, a Literary Society." Hard on the heels of the first Riel resistance, in 1871, came Alexander Begg's *Dot It Down*; within weeks of the second Métis uprising, the Canadian reading public was treated to J. E. Collins' *The Story of Louis Riel*, a rabble-rousing travesty of the Métis cause. Collins still has the power to raise hackles, it seems, for Harrison condemns him not merely for literary ineptness, but for "wilful misrepresentation of the West, catering to an outside audience's prejudices about what was going on there." More to the point, perhaps, is Harrison's observation that the popularity of writers like Collins, Luke Allen and to some extent Ralph Connor, points to prevalent attitudes among Canadians of the time — at once ignorance of, and contempt for, the prairie region's resident population, both before and after the onset of settlement.

I am stressing Harrison's comments on early writers here, because I think his inclusion of all levels of prose composition is right and proper for a study of literary evolution. But the question of forebears is only part of his concern. His ultimate purpose is to provide an overview of a whole century of fictional treatments of the prairies, and he does not linger long over ancestors. After two eclectic chapters on eighteenth- and nineteenth-century origins, Harrison moves on to more familiar names: Connor, McClung and Stead as proponents of "the garden myth"; Grove, Ostenso, Ross and the Stead of *Grain* as prairie realists; a chapter entitled "Archetypes of Ruin," dealing with recurrent symbols in prairie fiction which bespeak, to Harrison, the failure of the imagination; some remarks on adventure romance and sentimental comedy; and a final chapter on contemporary fiction — primarily, Laurence, Kroetsch and Wiebe. All in all, then, an ambitious programme.

In his preface, Harrison openly disclaims the role of literary critic, seeing his study rather as a bringing-together of the wider cultural influences that provide the context for literature. Contending that "universal critical standards, even within one language and one century, are an abstraction convenient to the academic mind," he focusses on "the unique chal-

lenge the plains environment presents to the writer's imagination," while at the same time taking into account "the influence of culture on man's reaction to the landscape." "Wide-ranging" is the word Harrison himself applies to his approach, and the comprehensive and admirably-organized bibliography at the back bears him out. Having advanced the plea, however, that the very scope of his study precludes his offering "the carefully argued critical judgements which will be necessary before the central canon of this fiction can be confidently established and its value assessed," Harrison places a rather large burden of trust on his readers. The trust is usually merited; but not always. The exceptions are to be found in certain minor misreadings of writers whose remarks are less useful for his argument than Harrison would like them to be; and, in rather more basic fashion, the occasional failure to recognize when carefully argued critical judgments might have strengthened his case.

As an example of the former — and I freely admit to the usual intransigence of the specialist in these remarks — I think that the travel writers and publicists have not been well handled, even within the terms of Harrison's own argument. W. F. Butler was no less culture-bound — indeed, more so, I would argue — than his Britannic contemporaries, when in *The Great Lone Land* he offered those descriptions of the prairie landscape that Harrison (and to be quite fair, a good number of other literate Westerners) find so evocative; while Milton and Cheadle, Harrison's unequivocal statements notwithstanding, *were* aware of what they owed to their Métis guides, and they *did* describe the terrain through which they travelled, although not in great detail or in emotive language. The evidence is there, in the text of *North-West Passage by Land*. And in the same vein, why *Picturesque Canada* but not *Ocean to Ocean*? It seems an odd choice.

But these are details. More germane is Harrison's success in placing individual works of fiction within the cultural framework he has been reconstructing — that is, his ability to make history and literature at least appear to exist in a continuum of experience, and not, as the comments of Mandel and Morton imply, in total separation from one another. This is an immensely difficult undertaking, and once again the scope of Harrison's study complicates his task. Titles, authors, themes and images jostle somewhat indiscriminately together, and it takes a nimble reader to make all the connections. Furthermore, there are issues raised about the relation of fiction to society that phrases like "must have" and "may have" do little to resolve. The following quotation gives an extreme, but I hope not unfair, example of this style of argument:

> "Realists" like Begg, Hayes, and MacLean probably did not speak *for* the people who were settling the West any more than the Mackies or Collinses. Possibly not as much. Writers like MacLean and Hayes seem to have come nearer to speaking for the new land itself, but the Mackies and Collinses probably spoke for a people who were themselves out of touch with the land. Mackie's and Collins's perspective on the settling of the West would not be popular today, but it may well have reflected the state of mind and imagination of the bulk of the settlers.

By the time we sort out the probabilities, possibilities, seems and may well haves, we don't have much left in the way of certainties.

Nor are the connections between, for example, the systems of land holding favoured by Mennonite and Métis communities, and the larger argument extolling adaptation to prairie conditions, fully explored and cemented in place. I think, for instance, of the work of John W. Bennett, the sociologist who spent ten years charting "adaptive strategy and processes"

in southwestern Saskatchewan. Bennett, reading Harrison on adaptation and alienation among Westerners, would wonder — with some justice — whether they were both working in the same prairie West; might even wonder whether Harrison really has a subject here, or merely some fairly forcefully expressed intuitions, backed up by a skewed sample of documentary evidence. Although I find Harrison's comments on the fiction of the last two generations perceptive on most counts, I remain unconvinced that economic and psychic man have to be so sharply divided.

In short, I would be inclined to argue that the problem of critical standards is at issue after all — that is, the question of how appropriate and useful critical standards can be drawn out of the particularities of time and place. That a significant adjustment of prevalent critical opinion can and should result from the kind of new perspective that Harrison offers here is scarcely to be doubted, and I fully sympathize with his feeling that certain stereotyped judgments of Western Canadian writers have persisted too long, for want of a more informed viewpoint. But Eli Mandel is surely right when he says that "the theoretical basis of literary regionalism is weaker than the historical or geographical" — and as historians and geographers will tell you, even their theoretical basis is none too strong. There is a temptation for the regionalist critic in any field to fall back on the nativist rallying-cry, "I was born and raised in these territories, and *I know*." In undertaking a work of the seriousness of this one, while still reluctant to grapple with critical principles, Harrison has left a rather large and inviting flank open to the assaults of more theoretically-inclined readers.

These reservations aside, there is clear gain from the presence of *Unnamed Country* on the scene. Harrison's sensitivity to a specifically Western viewpoint results in probing readings of several established classics in Canadian fiction, and deft assessments of dozens of lesser-known novels and romances. At the same time, his purposeful forays into broad fields of speculation, in search of that distinctiveness which is the *sine qua non* of regionalist study, effectively conveys the close personal engagement which accompanies an individual's discovery of tradition — not only his own tradition, but the complex web of legacies from the past that go to make up a collective heritage. For Harrison is above all alive to the challenge of history. "Like contemporary novelists elsewhere," he notes, "prairie novelists of the 1960's and '70's seem to be exploring the relationship between history and fiction, between the fictions of the historian and the other fictions with which man attempts to order the chaos of experience." Harrison would agree, I think, that the technical competence is higher, the imaginative reach immeasurably greater, when prairie novelists think of themselves as writers first and Westerners second. But to the extent that regional loyalties take their place in the mental and emotional formation of those individuals *as* writers, we will continue to need and benefit by studies such as his.

books in review

RIEL & DUMONT

RUDY WIEBE, *The Scorched-Wood People.* McClelland & Stewart, $12.95.

ONCE UPON A TIME, when the world seemed stable and secure, the historical novel was a fashionable kind of fiction, for adults and children alike. Victorian ladies and gentlemen welcomed glimpses into past worlds that seemed to confirm the superiority of their own; in novels about the heroic deeds of men — mainly British men — in the past, they thought to develop the characters and the ambitions of their sons. If Hell did not lie about us in our infancy, as Graham Greene has suggested, Henty and his valiant world certainly did. And those of us who are old enough to have grown up on the fraying margins of that era of stability remember now with a slightly incredulous nostalgia our enthusiasms at a slightly later age for *Ivanhoe* and *The Last of the Barons*, for *Old St. Paul's* and *The Three Musketeers*. How colourful — and yet how safely distant — they made the past appear! The re-emergence of a real Dark Age in Europe under Stalin and Hitler put an end to the great vogue for that kind of historical novel; the present was more violent and more dreadful and in its own way more adventurous than any nineteenth-century novelist had made the past appear.

Of course, there were always other writers about the past, whose historical instincts were more sophisticated, whose insights were tragic rather than formulaic, and who remembered that we are really free neither of our ancestors nor of our descendants. History is a continuing process, such writers know without needing Marx or Spengler to tell them so; the past has lessons for the present, even if they are sometimes misleading ones, and — little as we may think so — our actions will be used as lessons for the future. So in the nineteenth century there also appeared another kind of historical novel, often ironic in its insights, like Stendhal's *The Charterhouse of Parma*, which used the intrigues of a little Italian state in the age of Napoleon to teach us the permanent realities of political power. The grandest effort in this direction — and perhaps also in the most noble failure of all historical novels — was Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, which intermingled splendidly evocative personal dramas set in a Russia of the past with tedious didactic passages in which Tolstoy developed his own theory of history — a matter of great men being even more the puppets of history than the little men they conscripted into death.

I thought of *War and Peace* when I read our latest Canadian historical novel, Rudy Wiebe's *The Scorched-Wood People*, which too, on a very different scale, is about war and defeat in a vast country. Rudy Wiebe, whose ancestors lived many generations in Russia, has always struck me as being similar in many ways to Tolstoy, not in any way the equivalent in stature or in sheer artistry, but on his own smaller scale irradiated with the same kind of rather primitive religious concerns, and just as as prone as the great Leo Nicholaevich to subordinate his innate sense of form to a compelling didactic motive.

This is what happens in *The Scorched-Wood People*, which I found disappointing in comparison with earlier Wiebe books. The scorched-wood people are, of course, the *bois brulés*, as the Métis were originally called. In his novel Wiebe is not concerned, except for a few reminiscent references to the pre-1869 past that are necessary for background, with the

entire span of Métis history. He has written a tale about the two rebellions, of 1869-70 and 1885, in which the Métis unsuccessfully defied the centralizing power that entered Canada with Confederation and is the enemy of all Canadians who believe in personal freedom. The present of the novel begins with the halting of William McDougall, prospective Canadian Governor of the Red River, at the international boundary in 1869, and except for a very brief epilogue relating to Gabriel Dumont, it ends with the hanging of Riel in 1885.

Unfortunately Rudy Wiebe has been unable in *The Scorched-Wood People* to separate the purpose of historical fiction, which is to give us a plausible image and feeling of the past, from that of the historical moralist, which is to apportion blame, signal merit and formulate lessons. He feels too deeply about his subject to detach himself in the Flaubertian manner, yet at the same time he seeks to give some plausible fictional rendering of his feelings. He tries to do so through the device of a committed narrator who comments on the events as they occur, in fairly regular chronological sequence. But this very device, used to achieve a degree of verisimilitude, turns out to be the least convincing feature of *The Scorched-Wood People.* The narrator is a Métis oral poet, and we are led to identify him with Pierre Falcon, the most famous of the Métis bards, who was present at the skirmish of Seven Oaks in 1816, when he composed his famous song which became something of an anthem of the Métis "nation." Unfortunately Falcon died in 1876, nine years before the events that mark the end of *The Scorched-Wood People*, and the idea of his continuing as a spectral narrator strains one's credence to the wrenching point.

But it very soon becomes evident that Wiebe is little concerned with the history of the Métis, which he deals with very cavalierly, and much more with the iniquity of their fate. However, the real heart of the book, which creates its curiously frenetic atmosphere and provides an unstructured continuity far more compelling than the narration line, is the personality of Louis Riel, whose role as a religious visionary clearly fascinates Wiebe.

The publicity relating to *The Scorched-Wood People* presents it as an epic of Louis Riel and Gabriel Dumont, but little justice is really done to Dumont, either in terms of historical accuracy or in terms of a sympathetic portrayal of the man. For some reason which is not evident, Wiebe has thought it necessary to have Dumont present at the Red River throughout the period of Riel's ascendancy, which was not the case, and Gabriel is shown in attendance at such events as the turning-back of McDougall at the border and the trial and execution of Thomas Scott.

Since there is no record of Dumont's presence on these occasions, and he could obviously not be given leading roles in them, he is relegated to a role something like that of Shakespeare's attendant lords, and even when he moves into centre stage in 1884-85 he is still a diminished figure. His influence and his following on the Saskatchewan are shown as small, his role in creating the quasi-republic of St. Laurent in the early 1870's is minimized, and the clash between him and the Hudson's Bay people in 1870, which became an imperial issue with repercussions in Whitehall, is turned into a very minor affair. Finally, almost as if Rudy Wiebe intended to make him a foil for Riel, Dumont is represented as a crude and violent figure (a "savage" as he calls himself in the book but never did in history), with physical size (actually he was a man of medium height) as an intrusive feature, while he was made to speak like a badly educated Canadian, whereas in fact Dumont was a man of considerable subtlety of expression, and in his own way a highly sophisticated as well as a great and courageous man. Only the courage emerges in *The Scorched-Wood People*; the intelligence and the grandeur are somehow lost. Dumont emerges as a muscular oaf, and that is neither fictional nor historical justice.

Yet at the same time Rudy Wiebe, the chronicler of Mennonite religious agonies, has convincingly projected the spiritually tortured and divided Riel, and as a study of Riel as visionary hovering on the edge of insanity *The Scorched-Wood People* is often profound and always understanding. But the failure to portray convincingly a whole man like Dumont mars the book from beginning to end, and *The Scorched-Wood People* is a disappointing book for those whose expectations are at the level of *The Blue Mountains of China*.

GEORGE WOODCOCK

CALLAGHAN CINEMA

MORLEY CALLAGHAN, *Close to the Sun Again*. Macmillan, $4.95.

IT IS DIFFICULT TO SPEAK of a writer who has lived long and written much without referring to his total work. His books have had their youth and middle age and maturity: or sometimes they have remained static, frozen in time, a series of echoes out of a given bag of tricks. In either case the writer can never again simply produce this book or that. He has created, as the French say, an *oeuvre* and it is by that *oeuvre* that we judge him. Morley Callaghan's eighteenth book *Close to the Sun Again* is very much of a piece with his total work. He long ago reached a distinct and accomplished level of performance; and he has remained at that level for a good many years. When he sits at his typewriter forty professional years control his mind and his fingers. He has never changed his style; but he has greatly improved it. The substance of his work has always been the same. He has not wandered nor experimented, nor has there been anything but the love of a certain kind of story and a desire to tell it straight and to tell it well. These are admirable qualities. To have done this in Canada, a country in which writing has come hard, and the writer's audience has always been comparatively small, amounts to a very distinct kind of achievement.

Callaghan has known from the first how to capture an environment with a few quick strokes: he delights in a world you can see and touch and feel. He observes a great deal of external detail — how people look, human furniture, human decoration, how the body is clothed — "a funny tweed hat and an expensive camel-hair jacket" — "his expensive dark suit and black Irish-linen hat." Or skyscrapers viewed from an airport "the

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city's towers in rising floors of light." He possesses the concreteness of the modern-visual. He writes cinema. And then he has another quality. He feels his material down to the last button on those expensive jackets, down to the very fibre of those tweed and linen hats.

Callaghan's people are another matter, for he tends to see them also from the outside. When he tries to get "inside" it is usually to discover bewilderment and shock. The external world, with all its good things, turns sour once it is internalized: and the hero — there are more heroes I think than heroines — can't quite add things up. Callaghan's books contain old-fashioned ideas of chivalry and gallantry; an old-fashioned view of women, very often as sex objects; and a series of morally committed but puzzled individuals. Somehow the right thing must be done. Yet things invariably go wrong. The world goes wrong. Hallucination and phantasmagoria replace obsession in his simple-minded characters with a moral under-pinning. The risk Callaghan has run all these years, when he offers us such confused men, is that some readers are likely to ask: who cares? The answer is Callaghan cares. This care has animated his work and kept it from being all surface and sentimentality. We might add that a certain kind of audience also cares. An audience of the mystified and bewildered: and those who like action and suspense.

His people as I say are often platitudes: usually the macho trying to figure out what socked him. Or the unhappy punks James Farrell used to write about. Or the cool young women, immaculate and beautiful, intended only for bed. Yet the story moves; it is felt; it absorbs us. Criticism has not sufficiently measured the extent to which these worlds of Hemingway, Callaghan, Farrell, and to some extent Dos Passos — the writers of Callaghan's formative years — are really the world of the media. In the earlier days of the novel people came out of authentic observed worlds, the low-life of Dickens, the intensities and snobberies of Thackeray, the caste systems, the struggles of the young to make their way — all this derived from the very stuff of life. In an America that has a caste system based wholly on money it is more difficult to find such solid worlds: and many novels come out of the reflecting and distorting world in the city room of newspapers. Here are the children of the headline. A reporter lives not in his own world, but in the world of whatever story he covers. He is always on the outside. That's the way it was during my own newspaper experience. We were in the courts seeing human misery, not with the eyes of Dickens, but with the eyes of a "story" for some barbarian city editor whose measure of life was the brutal headline. We are all over the place, at police headquarters or the town hall, ambulance chasing or watching fights or politicians — a kaleidoscope world to which we belonged as witnesses, onlookers, who were supposed not to feel; assigned to take notes — distanced by our pencil and scratch pad — in the way young reporters today are distanced by tape recorders. And the final record was in monosyllabic prose. Life uninterpreted: camera-life.

This was the world that Hemingway poetized with considerable success. It is also Callaghan's world, possessing the same toughness as Hemingway's but I suspect a much deeper humanity. Callaghan's secret as I have said is that he *believes* in the front-page platitudes. His newest novel is about a war hero who swashbuckles through a corporate life and then gets a job as Toronto police commissioner. He is haunted by a mystery — a human triangle. This was his "fate" during the war; while commanding a corvette he fished out of the sea a chic educated (Smith College) tough daugh-

ter of a big-time gambler and her smooth Manhattan bodyguard. The latter was escorting her to London to her father when they were torpedoed. The hero feels a mysterious love for the girl. She seems to reciprocate it. They swap their private histories. But she is tied by a mysterious love-hate to her escort who once raped her. The police chief (he is as alcoholic as most such characters) has never been able to figure out what happened to his feelings, and what the girl represented. Dying in a hospital after a drunken smash-up he relives the phantasmagoria, the convoys, the depth charges, the rafts, the life-jackets, the smells, the tensions, the resignation, the rescues. The Callaghan cinema has great vividness; he holds you; he is a master of this kind of story-telling. But we ask: was it really worth the telling? Did Ira Groome, the bewildered *macho*, deserve all this hard-disciplined observation and verbal punching? It would be easier I think to accept him if Callaghan didn't try at the same time to give him some sort of phony culture. Callaghan's last novel *A Fine and Private Place* was filled with toughies discussing higher criticisms as in term papers. Callaghan's big men name-drop "literature" in their semi-literate world as if they were cars, or brands of whiskey: Yeats, Rossetti, Eliot, Auden, Lawrence, Hopkins, appear in succession in this novel. At a given moment, the protagonist finds himself saying about one of the characters "He's not even in this world. He's right out of some old western." Morley Callaghan here touches the truth of his scenario.

Having written this I ask myself whether I mustn't adjust my critical standards. How does one review an adventure-suspense story beyond saying it's well told even when it's unbelievable? That's about all one can say. There is sea adventure, figures on a raft, the vividness of humans caught up in the immensities of war and the sea — "clouds racing across the moon made him feel better, then, full of wonder that the night, the moon and the sea could be moving along in the internal rhythmical pattern as if nothing of any consequence was happening; when in fact, they were there on the float." It is this kind of effect, coupled with Callaghan's moral integrity and his professional perseverence, that gives his total work a certain vigorous substance. It represents a talent created out of sheer willpower and belief in struggle, in elemental things, in the veneer of civilization. It is the fantasy world of toughness and of "making it." And strangely enough it is not the best part of Callaghan. For in the long extent of his *oeuvre* what stays with us is not the machismo, but certain briefer works — a glimpse of humble folk, and humble dreams, some of his short stories that have given us a sense of wistful melancholy, the melancholy of a sparsely peopled continent, of people thrown in on themselves with the great snowdrifts outside, dreaming their dreams; the nostalgia of the provinces, for a great bright world, making the most of such "life" as is measured out. There are depths of humanity in Callaghan which he has too often buried in his melodrama.

LEON EDEL

FOUR NEW VOICES

SHARON RIIS, *The True Story of Ida Johnson.* The Women's Press.
BESS KAPLAN, *Malke, Malke.* Queenston House.
HELEN LEVI, *A Small Informal Dance.* Queenston House.
PAULINE GEDGE, *Child of the Morning.* Macmillan.

ALL FOUR OF THESE new books are about women, by women. With the exception of *Malke, Malke*, Kaplan's second novel, each of the others is a first novel, but

there the similarity ends. In purpose, setting, and choice of heroine, above all in style and technique, there are striking differences.

By far the most challenging of the four is Sharon Riis' *The True Story of Ida Johnson.* As a story of a "real person," it is simple enough. Ida, your average-looking small town girl, tells the story of her life — growing up in Longview, Alberta, early pregnancy and marriage, death of husband and kids (or was it murder?), odd jobs and scraping along — until we meet her waitressing and "gone to fat." The "story" is dedicated "to the careful reader" who is warned at the outset that "The truth of the matter is: there is none."

The truth of the matter is that this "true story," full of sharp detail and colloquial speech, probes the nature of reality itself, slowly enmeshing the reader in a verbal labyrinth despite a controlled surface simplicity. Who is Luke, the young hitch-hiker listening to Ida's story? Who is Lucy, the Indian child Ida played with, now come back as Luke? Who is Ida Johnson? Are they, in fact, aspects of one psyche? Riis' intriguing novel reminds me of a Maya Deren film fusing reality/illusion, fact/fiction, into a disturbing and haunting experience.

In terms of narrative voice, the book recalls Djuna Barnes' *Nightwood.* The reader is constantly kept at a distance, like Ida "insulating herself against pain." Point of view shifts from an impersonal third person narrator to Ida's down-to-earth speech or thoughts. At moments another cryptic voice intrudes with "explanations": "Imagery left to cramp inside the mind self-destructs. It explodes or, more probably, expires. Lack of air. Lack of *Lebensraum*?"

Sharon Riis has written an excellent book, ironic and thought-provoking. Ida Johnson comes alive with remarkable clarity while at the same time eluding the grasp. This is a book that demands rereading; therefore, it is no surprise to come to the end and find the tables turned:

> " 'Was all that stuff back there true?' asks Lucy. Ida laughs. 'What's the matter sweetheart? You miss the point or something?' "

Bess Kaplan's *Malke, Malke,* set in Winnipeg, is a delightful Jewish comedy of courtship at sixty. The heroine, Malke, wants her fourth husband, so she advertises in the paper. Luckily for her, Joe Finkle answers the ad and Malke makes a happy fourth marriage. Harry Schenkle, however, also answers. Much of the comedy arises from the fantastic situations that Malke finds herself in as she tries to fend off the irrepressible Harry, arrange a quiet wedding with Joe, and placate an irate widowed sister who thinks Malke is a disgrace. The formidable sister, Brunie, is finally married off to Harry — through an advertisement, of course — and the novel ends with Malke, a true "Shodchen," composing another newspaper ad for a widowed friend.

Although the situations of these people are amusing, and at times farcical, the people themselves are not. Malke is a lovable Jewish "Balabusta" who like to cook and care for others. Bess Kaplan's chief success in the novel is the dialogue which brings her characters to life and sustains both comedy and interest. Yiddish terms are used liberally with a glossary provided at the end, but usually the point is quite clear as when Malke tries to discourage Harry:

> "You're either a meshugganer or deaf. When I say no, by you it comes out yes. NO! No means NO! I decide who will be my husband. Not you."

As a portrait of Jewish life and situation comedy, *Malke, Malke* is very good indeed.

A Small Informal Dance, by Helen Levi, offers a picture of a small Canadian

town called Plum Buff. The action, comprised of teas, picnics, and showers, centres on Mrs. Bartley, a widow who strives to understand her adolescent sons and to cheer poor, pregnant Alice Dufault. But Alice's "fault" is not taken very seriously, and Mrs. Bartley, unlike Malke, remains a loyal widow who smoothes Alice's way through small town gossip.

Levi's style is simple, at times dangerously close to trite, and the dialogue too often slips into cliché. The italicized passages that serve as introduction suggest that the story will be a satire, but Levi's small touches of irony remain innocuous. Plum Buff is no Mariposa. Plum Buff is a Manawaka without the Hagars, Christies, or Grandfathers Connor, without the darker side, and without the serious social purpose. But as Levi points out, "in a democracy each has his own choice of lifestyle."

Child of the Morning is an impressive historical novel recreating the reign of Egypt's Pharaoh-Queen, Hatshepsut. Pauline Gedge has carefully researched her subject, and the personality of a struggling, proud, ambitious woman comes alive. Essentially, this is a story of court intrigue intensified by the fact that a woman cannot wear Egypt's double crown. Hatshepsut, however, rules peacefully for twenty years before being poisoned by her nephew and heir.

Hatshepsut is a remarkably modern woman. In fact, Gedge uses the story of her reign to press home a low-keyed feminism. Egypt was prosperous under Hatshepsut until the ruthless schemes of young Thothmes, supported by the priests, plunged his people into renewed war. However, the males in this novel are not all vain and power-mad or lascivious and weak. Hatsheput surrounds herself with capable ministers, chief among these the brilliant Senmut who becomes her architect, thus commemorating her reign, and her lover. It is in the handling of the love

interest that the novel weakens. Gedge does not manage to lift her love story beyond the princess and the pauper level, and the love scenes themselves are banal.

Child of the Morning is an ambitious book. Pauline Gedge writes a clear, simple prose, maintains a sure control over narrative pace and, for the most part, creates her characters with sensitivity. If the novel must be called a qualified success, it offers promise of still better things to come.

SHERRILL E. GRACE

TEXTURES OF DISORDER

RANDAL HARKER, *Adrift*. Macmillan, $7.95.
MARIE JAKOBER, *The Mind Gods*. Macmillan, $7.95.
BETTY WILSON, *André Tom Macgregor*. Macmillan, $7.95.

THE WORST THING about these three "first novels" is the way in which they are promoted as results of "the search-for-a-new-Alberta-novelist competition." This type of ultra-regionalism is inclined to create suspicion in the reader who wonders what he will have to endure for the sake of CanLit. However, I am happy to report that each of the three novels presents evidence of a lively mind engaged in its own mode of literary expression, adapted to a particular myth of survival in a situation of intimidating disorder.

The Mind Gods — the weakest in style of the three — shows how survival depends on the outcome of a "lottery with power." The Caronites are disciples of Roger Caron, self-styled Last Avatar, who, in a futuristic version of Anaxagoras and contemporary psychics, posits Mind as the ultimate power in the universe. Caron and his followers believe themselves to be the chosen people for whom cosmosis or total spirituality is achieved only by man's harmony with Mind. The Caronites inhabit Vilna, the Snow Planet and weak, primitive colony of the Janites. Janus (named after the Roman god) is a thriving technocracy intent on retribution after the people of Vilna, without provocation, annihilate a Janite military observation unit and overthrow the colonial government. Tanya Rastov, Janite Chief Research and Data Control Officer, narrates this parable of power-struggle, and while the genre is ostensibly in the tradition of what is sweepingly and improperly termed "science fiction," it becomes clear that this novel, because of its intellectual weight and discursive propensity, is closer to the didactic manners of Huxley, Orwell, and Burgess' *A Clockwork Orange* than it is to the elaborate mythology of Tolkien, the satiric fantasy of Swift, or the inventiveness of Peake.

There is an evident philosophic dialectic. While the Caronites cannot endure a world without certainties and so flee from the responsibilities of choice, the Janites prefer a struggle between form and dissolution. Tanya Rastov pinpoints with brutal irony how the Caronites sacrifice in the name of life the only thing that lives — the separate, unique, individual self. The Janites, on the other hand, stubbornly assert their intrinsic duality in a form of negative capability.

All this makes for engaging reading, but there are flaws. While Ms. Jakober moves frequently into poetic description, she does not dramatize enough. Her characterization is deficient: it explains more than it reveals through action, and its generalization deprives the sketches of sharp individuality. The style has tang but the philosophic exposition becomes too textbookish at times. Ms. Jakober has, of course, given herself a problem: she has sought to describe a battle between two different species of power, but she

does not know how to express the radical Caronite psychic force — especially in its final cataclysmic manifestation — except through exaggerated effects that seek to confirm the "incarnate will of some universal purpose."

But *The Mind Gods* asserts its belief in a type of life that is "some kind of absolute which admits no rules except its own incessant advance" on every path there is, and its view of life contrasts with that in *Adrift* where existence does not seem to have a point. The central character in Harker's novel is Peter Jedison, a drifting youth who returns from the "wilds" of his strong-willed grandfather's farm to "civilized life" in the city because he needs money. But Peter's interest in life has atrophied, and his boredom drives him to drugs which, while giving him psychedelic intensity and helping to break his usual pattern of thinking, do not save him from lethargy and self-mockery after his manic periods. Although his drug experiences are often a tribal ritual, a version of Dionysian religion, they underline his fundamental disorientation in a world of flow.

Peter knows what he rejects but is uncertain of what he wants. His expansive anger is directed at man's wasteful destruction but his nihilistic view that life is merely a waiting for death "in as refined a manner as possible" undercuts this anger and makes the sanguine optimism of the ending with its quasi-pastoral peace an unconvincing and inappropriate one — especially after Peter's suicidal experience and his fundamental incertitude about survival.

If judged chiefly for its statement, this novel is an unoriginal exercise about a blend of cynicism and romanticism. Peter is an obvious soul-brother of Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, and Holden Caulfield, and he is the type of hipster who stirs violent paranoia in organization men (the police) as well as in denizens of subcultures (youth gangs). He is the type of dispossessed whom society can neither eliminate nor ignore, but he is the victim of his own ennui and irony for his existence is both boring and uncertain whether it is a law or an absurdity.

What makes *Adrift* fresh and interesting is its texture. This goes beyond Jedison's drug-induced synaesthesia. It also goes beyond the author's satiric sense which combines dignity and mockery in comically grotesque displays. The style, while used for a work that is narrow and repetitive, does not subvert the content. The texture — with its ironic counterpointing — is obtained through episodes that seem first-hand experiences which give rise not to conceptual knowledge but to something like an excitation or lassitude. Emphasis derives from the *form* of action rather than from a particular repertoire of choices. The protagonist's intelligence is not obliterated by stretches of mental fog for it is wittily playful even in a language of frustration.

It is texture again that excels in the third novel, *André Tom Macgregor*, the winner in the Alberta competition. But here texture is produced less by the quality of language than it is by the relentless realism as Betty Wilson tells a stark and moving story about a teenage Métis who has considerable difficulty finding his legs in the white man's world. There is much sordor, plenty of sex, ample crime and frustration. The characters, while lacking depth and complexity, are adequate to Ms. Wilson's didactic purpose and, despite their stereotyping, stay fresh in the mind.

The greatest quality is the strength of incident and pace. While the spell of the bush is not conveyed through detailed geographical animism, it is a felt presence, pulling André from the alien, noisy city world where he feels homesick and desperate.

I wish that Betty Wilson had tried for greater symbolism. Apart from the bush, there is only one other effective symbol — that of the budgie which represents André's caged and vulnerable spirit — and this is not enough to elevate her realism to truly apocalyptic heights. Moreover, she reduces her final effect by settling on an optimistic ending. André, whose marriage to vapid Dolores Olson cuts him off from his mentor, Fr. Pépin, and sets him to flight, has to ironically *adopt* his own infant son and return to his ancestral place. However, instead of being true to the preceding tenor, the author attempts an artificial balance of tensions. André's son is named after Gabriel Dumont — a name also given to the ill-fated budgie killed by Dolores — but what possible hope could there be for this child brought into a squalid region, named after a Métis hero eclipsed by Riel, and fathered by a baffled, angry teenager who has fled from city to bush?

It is a troubling question — all the more problematic for the method of its generation — and it compromises an unusually good "first novel" whose straight realism about culture shock a reader is not likely to forget.

In sum, the three novels under review yield interesting literary textures, for they express their themes without leaving an impression of incoherence and also without pretending to be esoterically complicated. They give the lie to popular and gratuitous assumptions about the geophysical predominance in contemporary Canadian fiction for they show very real humanization of concern for different types of disorder. And they reveal this concern not as a regional property but in highly personalized writing that maintains the autonomy of the aesthetic and the stimulation of awareness.

KEITH GAREBIAN

ANTHOLOGY PIECES

Canadian Short Fiction Anthology, edited by Cathy Ford. Intermedia Press, $5.95 paper.
Getting Here, stories selected by Rudy Wiebe. NeWest Press, $2.95 paper.
Toronto Short Stories, edited by Morris Wolfe and Douglas Daymond. Doubleday, $6.95 paper.
Here & Now, edited by Clark Blaise and John Metcalf. Oberon, $5.95 paper.
Horizon: Writings of the Canadian Prairie, edited by Ken Mitchell. Oxford, $6.95.

AUDREY THOMAS, in her foreword to the *Canadian Short Fiction Anthology*, justifies the publication of this collection on the ground that it will "educate the reading public to demand short stories." I doubt it. Like the other three short story anthologies here under review, the *Canadian Short Fiction Anthology* is destined to reach only a small part of the reading public. Cathy Ford's collection will certainly interest those who keep track of the development of young writers, particularly those from the West Coast (the word "Canadian" in the title of this book is rather misleading). Many of the authors of the thirty-five stories (thirty of them previously unpublished) in this collection are not yet well-known, and most of them have still to realize their potential. Yet, given the unevenness of their work, the regional grouping of the writers, and the vague and sometimes flippant biographical notes at the back of the book, this anthology is hardly suitable for most classroom situations at any level, thus restricting its circulation in one of the usual markets for collections of this kind.

Getting Here also has a regional flavour. The seven women whose stories Wiebe has selected are all natives of, or currently resident in, the Edmonton area, and the book was published in Edmonton by George Melnyk's NeWest Press. Although less attractively packaged than the *Canadian Short Fiction Anthology*,

the stories (none of them previously published) included in *Getting Here* are of much better quality, which presumably reflects Wiebe's experience as an editor. He offers no preface explaining his reasons for choosing the material: it is left to stand on its own, and it does. None of the stories is less than competent, and Caterina Edwards' "Everlasting Mercy" is very good. The craftsmanship displayed most of the time in *Getting Here* contrasts favourably with the ill-considered experiments and downright carelessness evident in too much of the material collected by Cathy Ford.

Getting Here will have only limited usefulness as a textbook, however, despite its merits as a short story anthology. *Toronto Short Stories* and *Here & Now* are more obviously intended for the classroom, but neither one is likely to please a wide range of instructors. The first offers itself as "an opportunity to observe the city as reflected by the literary imaginations of twenty short story riters [*sic*]." This unfortunately, is just what most of the collection does *not* do. Toronto is a distinctive presence only in Hugh Hood's well-known "Recollections of the Works Department"; the other selections will stand or fall on their merits as short stories, not as short stories about a particular locality. That Margaret Atwood mentions the CN Tower in "Rape Fantasies," or that Hugh Garner refers to Queen and Adelaide Streets in "The Premeditated Death of Samuel Glover," is not enough to make either one a Toronto story, or to dissuade us from concluding that Atwood's story, although not one of her best, has sufficient substance to justify its inclusion in an anthology, while Garner's clearly has not. For those outside the area, and the influence, of Toronto, this collection will not be seen to be an effective way of introducing anyone to what the editors term "the distinctive flavour of Toronto." Unlike the

Wiebe and Ford compilations, this one is largely made up of previously published material; thirteen of the twenty stories may be found in other books.

Although all of the material in *Here & Now* has been previously published, only a few of these stories (such as Alice Munro's "Dance of the Happy Shades") could be termed familiar anthology pieces. Interestingly enough, the Munro story turns up in the Daymond-Wolfe collection as a "Toronto" fiction. Blaise and Metcalf include it for rather different reasons: their intention, they say, is to "publicize the short story," and their criterion for selection is "excellence," and nothing else. As a result, the fourteen authors represented here are all well known, including Hugh Hood, Austin Clarke, Jane Rule, Margaret Laurence, and Blaise and Metcalf themselves. The book will serve as a useful text, provided the teacher using it is not put off by the editors' introduction, where it is claimed that short story writers in Canada need "foreign models" and "foreign standards" because there is in this country nothing equivalent to the "mature" domestic tradition evident in our poetry. Someone not acquainted with E. W. Thompson, Leacock, Raddall, Callaghan, Ross, Knister or W. O. Mitchell, and therefore in no position to dispute the editors' assertion, will be content to view this book as a well-chosen sampling of the work of some of the best short story writers in contemporary Canada.

Ken Mitchell's *Horizon* is not a short story anthology. A companion volume to Gary Geddes' *Skookum Wawa*, this book is, like its predecessor, a fine compilation of short fiction, poetry and non-fiction which reveals the developing consciousness of a Canadian region. One can praise this collection, however, and still disagree with some of Mitchell's editorial decisions. Dorothy Livesay's "Day and Night" is, despite her Manitoba origins, clearly out of place here, and George Munro Grant's comments on "western bumptiousness" lose their intended meaning when Mitchell detaches them from *Ocean to Ocean*. More serious is the omission from this book of any representative selections by modern western Canadian historians. Mitchell claims that "all strands of the Prairie experience" appear in his anthology; if this were the case, one would have expected to find something from W. L. Morton included. Despite these objections, *Horizon*, like *Skookum Wawa*, will prove a serviceable book — albeit only a starting point — for any teacher, inside or outside of Canada, who wishes to take a regional approach to our literary culture.

DAVID JACKEL

RUSSIAN EMIGRE

SASHA SOKOLOV, *A School for Fools*, trans. Carl R. Proffer. Ardis, Ann Arbor.

THE NEW WAVE OF RUSSIAN emigration, the third since 1917, has cast upon our shores a thirty-three-year-old writer whose first published work of fiction, a novel called *A School for Fools*, is extraordinarily good. Sasha Sokolov has a Canadian passport and a Canadian birth certificate. He was born in 1943 in Ottawa, where his father, a personal friend of Stalin, had been sent in the forties to take charge of intelligence operations at the Soviet embassy. Sokolov left by ship from Vancouver when he was four years old and returned to the Soviet Union, where he lived until two years ago. (The photograph on the back cover of this book was taken in Regina, where he visits a Russian friend — one does not say "ex-Russian" of these new Canadians — and though he has a temporary job teaching in Michigan, he wants to come back to Canada.)

A School for Fools takes place in Russia and in the consciousness of its main narrator, who lives somewhere between the inner and outer worlds, between boyhood and manhood. It is a demanding book, for the narrator demands that you concentrate on him and on his world, which is also yours. A retarded, often schizophrenic schoolboy, somewhat cared for and sometimes destroyed by family, school and country, he has no name but the ones he has given himself. He also names the people close to him as they merge with his consciousness, his memory of them. Some names he forgets, like that of the nearby river Lethe. Other people or things can be conveniently called so-and-so and such-and-such; the insane have the privilege of remembering only what is important. The hero's emotions form the core of the book; the words he spins out of his emotions form its texture.

At the centre of his past, present and future life is pain: the pain of being called an idiot, of being in a special school, of being hated by his prosecutor-father, of not always being able to carry on the type of conversation that passes for human communication, of wanting to be loved by a woman, of not being able to acquire, through labour and status, the many items that people can own. Around this pain the hero secretes an entire world of humour and beauty. Like the artist, he succeeds in fusing the memory of a beautiful thing with its existence in the present. So he is really more alive, more perceptive, more human than most of us.

This book is a lyrical vision of extraordinary intensity. Sokolov has found the language to convey both the beauty and the pain. Carl Proffer's English translation is of the highest quality. The fact that this Russian novel fits into the best of modern literature seems less surprising than it should because the English is so good. In Russian Sokolov is an astounding new voice. Where he found his way of writing, so different from that of any other contemporary Russian author, remains a mystery even when one has talked to him about it. He admires Bunin, and certainly Bunin's lyrical rich tales of thwarted love may be closer to this novel than anything written since in Russian. But *School for Fools* can be compared to the best in modern literature anywhere.

No literary influence explains how Sokolov came to write so well. He is a careful writer. There is nothing extra in the book, nothing uneven about its intensity. Often several voices in it speak at once. Sokolov may have invented a new kind of dialogue, one between people: the schizoid hero's two voices and that of his interlocutor, whom he may be inventing at any time, since the fool knows in advance the effect he will have on others and can foretell their response, much as the writer imagines the speech of his own characters.

At one level this book is about the choice of words, of attitudes which we all must make when called out of ourselves ("as I usually do when no one hinders my thinking, I simply thought about everything I saw"). Any choice carries moral implications, and, to this reviewer, the real greatness of the book is its morality.

Yet Sokolov is not dogmatic; he is modest. He lets the hero make his own connections between memory and truth. In lieu of a real father, he provides him with a mentor, Savl Petrovich (Saul, who is also called Paul) Norvegov, a geography teacher in the special school, who goes barefoot and teaches only what his pupils need to learn, how to distinguish the true from the false. Norvegov is fired from the special school and dies, after telling the students his parable of the master carpenter who cannot practice his craft without getting materials from people who want him to crucify a man in exchange. When the carpenter agrees, he

finds that the crucified man is himself.

Sokolov's is a generation just beginning to make its compromises, having been educated by its elders to do that. This book should be the rallying cry of its refusal to do so, but with full awareness of the consequences. When the narrator dreams of a "normal" future, it must remain a dream, because his way of seeing everything makes him a stranger to those who see only a part of the world, who compromise emotion and expression.

The hero of *A School for Fools* has a genius for describing whiteness and for filling emptiness. He sees the white places in the newspaper where nothing (nothing false) is written; his father reads the other parts. He sees what the wind brings, has brought, will bring (time is collapsible). He howls a found word into an empty rain-barrel and images his one real teacher saying to him:

> So shout then — most capable of the capable, shout for yourself and for me, and for all of us, deceived, defamed, dishonoured and stupefied, for us, the idiots and holy fools, the defectives and schizoids, for the educators and the educatees, for all those to whom it has not been given and whose salivating mouths have already been shut, or will soon be shut, for all those who have been innocently muted, or are being muted, tongues torn out — shout, intoxicated and intoxicating: bacilli, bacilli, bacilli!

The best authors know that when the emotion is right, the word has meaning.

BARBARA HELDT MONTER

TV DINNER

LAZAR SARNA, *The Man Who Lived Near Nelligan*. Coach House Press.

LAZAR SARNA'S FIRST NOVEL (a twenty-eight-year-old Montreal lawyer, he has published two books of poetry and several legal textbooks) is as eminently disposable as the remains of a TV dinner. It is neither nutritive nor a new taste-sensation as the jacket blurb implies. The blurb deserves full quotation, for its encomia thinly veil the novel's faults:

> *The Man Who Lived Near Nelligan* is a delicately shaped narrative that lets you feel the teeth before you see them. The story manoeuvres in shifting traceries of the real/imagined, dips back into time to rescue 'fact', then curls around to deliver it home, a gift, *a present* — a rubbing from the alter of that mysterious living temple where our dyeing bleeds into history.
>
> Sarna's characters move gracefully in the borderland where flesh and paper comingle [sic], fuse and finally become that "indeterminate other' who speaks instinctually from 'nowhere' in the best and truest dialects of new fiction.

Rather than embodying the best aspects of new fiction as the last phrase of the blurb claims, the novel is a bland concoction of modernist assumptions about reality: that memory recreates the past; that chronology is not as important as free association; that the texture of everyday life is more illuminating than a chronicle of externally significant events.

Our narrator, Walter Burton, was committed to hospital because of senility at the age of sixty-five: it is from there that he tells his story. The chapters alternate between his past reminiscences and a mental commentary on his present life. Poems are interspersed, some written by Burton, some by an omniscent observer, and some by the French-Canadian poet Emile Nelligan. Nelligan was, in fact, a poet-prodigy who was overcome by nervous depression at the age of twenty, and spent the rest of his life in hospital. It is there that he meets the fictional English-Canadian entrepreneur Burton, in 1927.

The novel's worst vexation is its thematic haziness. Themes are not knit together at dramatic focal points, but diffused in a collage of scenes whose symbolism is muted. What is to be made of Burton's deluded attempts to blow up

Nelligan in the hospital, and to burn him to death when he visits Burton's home? Burton resents Nelligan as a reminder of his own tortured existence, patronizes him as a French-Canadian, and envies his artistic success; moreover, he seeks some sort of answer from Nelligan. What does he want?

The atmosphere of hopelessness, a common gambit in modern novels, may stem from the half-enunciated themes that any self-knowledge, any real meeting of minds, and any ascertainment of general truths about life, are futile. Or, this vague sadness may rest in the modernist perspective that although commonplace events are numinous, they are ultimately ineffable. Yet one should not be driven to such extrapolations: Sarna has neglected his duty to explain his world-view. We are forced to a literal interpretation of the blurb's suggestion that the novel speaks from "nowhere."

Furthermore, the novel goes nowhere. Burton, like Lear, "hath ever but slenderly known himself," but there is no tragedy here, for there is no struggle and no fall. Burton has had three wives who have died of illneses exacerbated by marital tensions, but he does not explore these tensions. He admits that fear of impotence and death plagued him when he should have been happiest, but does not ask why. Sarna introduces no events to either justify or challenge Burton's lack of commitment, nor any characters who are "engagé" to act as foils. The novel has no goal.

The blurbist's notion that Sarna's narrative has teeth should be dispelled: it is a fangless monster. Nor is it illusively convoluted: it is not convoluted at all. The distinction between reality and the narrator's fantasies is easily discernible, as in the childhood incident in which Burton accidentally shoots his hated father: the deliciously vivid details of that shocking moment immediately identify it as fantasy.

Similarly, the relevance of the poems is clear, and the time-shifts are easily followed, especially since they are delineated by changes in type-face. In fact, the narrative is more edited than molded, and more crudely hewn than "delicately shaped." Nowhere does it flow freely from the inner to outer worlds of major and minor characters, in the manner of Virginia Woolf.

Burton is a credible narrator, for Sarna's prose conveys his businessman's lapidary precision of speech, his occasional Victorian floridity, and his amateur poet's eye for imagery. Yet Sarna's prose, like his narrative and informing ideas, is unexceptional. The net result is nicely-packaged mediocrity.

JOHN W. ROBINSON

UKRAINIAN POETRY

YAR SLAVUTYCH, *The Conquerors of the Prairies.* Slavuta, Edmonton, $4.00.

EVERY YEAR IN CANADA a sizeable body of literature is produced that never comes to the attention of the vast majority of readers in this country This is the "ethnic literature" — poetry and prose written by immigrants for whom the natural language of expression is one other than either English or French. Generally, these works are not translated, yet they still form a part of Canadian literature. The rare appearance of any of these works in translation should be welcomed by the anglophone public as an opportunity to gain some insight into this other, relatively unknown, stream of our literature.

One such piece of "ethnic literature," now available in English translation, is a collection of poems by the Edmonton based Ukrainian poet, Yar Slavutych. In 1968 *The Conquerors of the Prairies* was

published in Ukrainian only. Recently it has come out in a bilingual edition, with English translations by an Australian, R. H. Morrison.

Yar Slavutych, a professor of Slavic languages and literature at the University of Alberta, has been writing poetry for over thirty years, in Ukraine, Germany, the United States, and most recently in Canada. He has published eight collections of poetry apart from this one, as well as a translation into Ukrainian of selected poems by John Keats. *The Conquerors of the Prairies* is particularly suited for translation into English. Much Ukrainian Canadian poetry concerns itself with issues that are not of great interest to the Canadian public — the "old country" and the authors' feelings about it. But *The Conquerors of the Prairies* is firmly set in the new country. Its principal themes are western Canadian history and the Canadian landscape, things that form a part of everybody's common experience. At the same time, the author gives an immigrant's view of this country, a view which the English public does not often encounter.

The conquerors of the prairies after whom this collection is named are the Ukrainian pioneers who came to Canada at the turn of the century, and turned the wilderness of the prairies into productive farmland. The twenty-two poems in the first section of Slavutych's collection are devoted to the subject of these pioneers. In the opening poem he tells us who they were:

> conquerors of the prairies, in their way,
> Came Pylypiwsky, Yelyniak, Leskiw

where they went: "Mundare remembers you, and Vegreville," and what they did: "Grubbed up the burnt-out poplars from their bed."

Slavutych presents the Ukrainian pioneers as "conquerors with a peaceful aspect," who won the land not by the sword, but by "the humble plough with home-made steel for share." They were simple people, who can be described in terms of

> Thick sheepskin coat and shoes of hide untanned,
> Slices of bread, and onion odor . . .

yet their achievement was as great as that of any conquering hero.

In a poem he calls "Sorrow," Slavutych delves into the feelings of the immigrants at finding themselves in a foreign land. He recreates their loneliness, their longing for things known and familiar. This poem was composed at the grave of the pioneer Ivan Pylypiw, and the poet attributes the words to Pylypiw himself:

> No cuckoo's heard, no nightingale is found,
> Like those that filled my youth with their sweet sound.

As an immigrant himself, Slavutych well understands the feelings of the pioneers. The feeling of spiritual rejuvenation in a new land that he attributes to Pylypiw at the end of this poem —

> And out there, where red cranberries' bushes stand,
> My life finds new strength in a foreign land

— is similar to his own experience in Alberta, which he expresses later:

> And all my former joy, and strength made new,
> I have discovered on Alberta's fields.

Perhaps the most striking poem in this section is "The Old Men." Here Slavutych paints a portrait of old pioneers whose time of action is past, and who spend their days sitting in the sun reminiscing about past joys and sorrows:

> Their time is past. They lean with knotty hands
> Placed heavily on bony knees, at rest . . .
>
> They sit there lost in thought, omniscient —
> Like old stone idols set on Scythian graves.

An interesting aspect of this section of

The Conquerors of the Prairies is Slavutych's attempt to step back even further into history to recreate scenes of Indian life. This is something rarely seen in literature by recent immigrants. Traditional Indian life is too far removed from their personal experience to be a subject for their writings. But there are several Indian poems in *The Conquerors of the Prairies*: "The Stallion," a tale of death and revenge set in a Cree encampment, "The Inheritance," a story of an old Indian whose only son has been killed, and a ballad entitled "Blackfoot," the only poem in this collection that has not been translated into English.

Slavutych's landscape is definitely western Canadian, and references to specific places abound. Inevitably, as an immigrant, the poet sometimes fondly recalls his native country ("At least in sleep I'll see Kherson") but his feet remain firmly planted in Canada: "This land of Edmonton that's my land too." The variety of winter scenes that appear in the second and third sections of *The Conquerors of the Prairies* ("Polar Sonnets" and "Northern Lights") are sometimes simply descriptive, as is this spare image of the northern landscape:

> Hungry coyotes' whining,
> Caw of glutted crows.
> Sterile tundra pining
> Where no tree-top shows.

Others are more subjective, giving us not only a picture of winter, but also the author's reaction to it. For the most part, the winter landscapes are very bleak and mournful. For Slavutych, the land of winter is a land of death. But in a few poems he takes a more positive view of winter. He extols the beauty of the northern lights, and, in the penultimate poem, presents a rather fanciful dream picture of the coming of spring to the arctic.

The Conquerors of the Prairies is not the place to look for anything startling or novel in the realm of poetic expression. The style is traditional, even old-fashioned. All the poems maintain strict rhyme and rhythm; their tone is lofty and heroic. The author seems to be overly fond of such out of fashion devices as apostrophe and heroic adjectives. Still, apart from such excesses as "The keen scythe hunts, athirst for prey," and "Stalk, do not weep and do not grieve," he may be forgiven for assuming a heroic tone. He is, after all, dealing with a heroic subject.

The English version of *The Conquerors of the Prairies* is true to the original in almost every way. The translator has retained precisely not only the meaning, but also the tone and the form of the original poems. As might be expected, his attempt to fit the English poems to the rhymes and rhythms of the Ukrainian ones has led to some difficulties — forced, stilted language in some places, unnatural word order in others, but on the whole Morrison has handled well the very difficult job of translating poetry. Obviously, a reading of one collection of poetry won't give a full indication of the breadth and variety of Ukrainian literature now being produced in Canada. But to the English reader interested in the subject, *The Conquerors of the Prairies* will give some insight into at least one of its strains.

ZONIA KEYWAN

SEARCH FOR HOME

MYRNA KOSTASH, *All of Baba's Children*. McClelland & Stewart.

AFTER THE BATTLE OF POLTAVA in the eighteenth century, Russia began the rusification of Ukrainian culture. In 1918 the Ukraine enjoyed a brief independence under a provisional government that fell when the Russian-Bolshevik army cap-

tured Kiev for a second time and continued rusification. For those who had come to see Kiev as the New Jerusalem the dream was gone. My father, having taken up a Saskatchewan homestead a few years before 1918, wrote in a spidery cyrillic script to his brothers — a priest and professor — in the Carpathians: "Brothers, the Ukraine? She has perish! All you have now are the songs you sing." These words have always haunted me.

In Canada, Sir Clifford Sifton, Minister of the Interior under Prime Minister Laurier, was pleased with the Ukrainian immigrants: "I think a stalwart peasant in a sheepskin coat, born on the soil, whose forefathers have been farmers for ten generations, with a stout wife and a half-dozen children is good quality.... These men are workers. They have been bred for generations to work from daylight to dark. They have never done anything else and they never expect to do anything else." Sir Sif might have prospered with a brief history lesson to inform his blatant racism. The stalwart gentlemen and their families came from a place once ruled by Tartars — an area altered by Asian culture (an area where some women dressed in silk, long before a peasant there put on a sheepskin coat). The place later became known as "Rus," the old term for the politico-cultural centre around Kiev by the Dnieper River. It later became the Kievian centre where Byzantine culture and Orthodox Christianity of the ninth and tenth centuries impinged on the chronicles of Slavic imagination. For a while the Vikings ruled the area in the twelfth century, but those inhabiting Rus displaced them. These were only a few of the cultural influences that laid the basis for my father's dream — my father who once had difficulty with 12 languages and wore a sheepskin coat, and later heard of Sir Sifton, and learned to live in this country under the yoke of that familiar Anglo-Saxon label, "bohunk." And, yes, my father was a realist; he knew, after the fall of Kiev, *Ukryina* "the Motherland" was only a mythic place existing only in the vague boundaries of the imagination where memory was sometimes illuminated by a single dream. A dream held in the transient meaning of home, held in the shifting coordinates of all possible places where the world begins — then, and now. Then, back in Galicia, his boyhood imagination was coloured by a world that began with *Selo*, "the village." He could see *Selo* and its onion-shaped belltower from the farm. In time his brothers went that way — and soon moved on to other intellectual pursuits in Kiev where their Dido, "grandfather," knew his world really began (since *his* Dido's Dido and Baba, "grandmother," knew the first definition of *Ukryina*: "that place surrounded by other cultures — languages and other things you had to learn in order to survive coexisting with everyone"). My father knew his meaning of home and country loomed somewhere between the Kievan centre one looked out from and all those frontierlands beyond, where Taras Bulba and Cossacks rode to defend "the Motherland." The poetry of Taras Shevchenko chronicled in lyrics those places and stories. My father and his brothers knew well the meaning of "eclecticism," being eclectic survivors themselves.

And what does all this have to do with Myrna Kostash and her book, *All of Baba's Children*? Well after being Americanized, urbanized, and McLuhanized in the great imperial centre of Toronto she goes home to Edmonton, Alberta. She buys a farm and house near Two Hills, and names it Tulova — after "the Galician village the Kostashchuks left behind." In Two Hills she spends four months of interviewing the townspeople, then sets about writing a social history delineating her relationship — political and spiritual — to a Ukrainian heritage.

She becomes involved in the process of new journalism, the writer's ego and imagination mediating between documented fact, objective reality, and the audience. Her energy sources become: the new left ideology, and social humanism, counter culture, regionalism, ethnic consciousness, and nationalism. The book slowly grows from a profound energy emanating from the social injustices suffered by the Ukrainian immigrants' children — her "parents' generation" and "their experiences between 1920 and 1950. . . ."

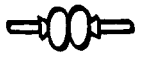
In a recent interview (*Student*, February 1978) she tells of her "excruciating position" where she sees herself being assimilated into what is "really inhuman in a lot of ways from [her] point of view as a woman, an ethnic, and Prairie person." Of the last chapter, "Mythologies," in *All of Baba's Children* she further says to the Ukrainian *Student* interviewer: "And yet the model which I was offered by which to resist that process — the Ukrainian Canadianness coming out of the mainstream of that community was also untenable. It didn't relate at all to my realities, my experiences over the last ten years."

Being of Ms. Kostash's generation (and yet not, because my parents were immigrants) I begin to understand her search for the meaning of country and a place to call home — and her ambivalent ending:

> A tourist I came, a tourist I leave. Like thousands and thousands of Ukrainian-Canadians of my generation and beyond, I only travel these ethnic sideroads when I need to find a breathing space while, away from the fumes of the cosmopolitan metropolis and all its works. But, metropolis is what I return to *when it's time to go home.* It is, after all, where Baba meant to have me live, when she mortgaged her life so mine would be deflected as much from the CPR quarter as from the *kolkhoz,* near Tulova, in Galicia. When I look at the remnants of the cultural reality left from her history and finger them like curios in a Tijuana souvenir shop, it's not that I'm ungrateful or even unmoved. I can store them in a trunk, along with my high school yearbooks and my mother's wedding dress. But if I tried to use them, they would fall apart in my hands. I have other skills now and assignments to fulfill that Baba never dreamed of. Not that she wouldn't be pleased.
>
> If there's any way at all that I carry on from where she left off, it won't be with her language, because I never knew it, nor with her habits, because they make no sense, nor with her faith, because I have lost it, nor with her satisfaction, because my needs have changed. (italics mine)

Ambivalent because she named her farm Tulova, and said at the end of her book's introduction: "I feel at home in Two Hills." Yes, *Selo* has changed after Henry Ford, Marconi, NASA, and McLuhan (and his theory of the "Global Village"). Baba *was* perfectly right in urging us to move on. And faith? If nothing else, I think deep in the recesses of her Byzantine-icon illuminated memory Baba meant to assure us of the possible refuge in the Kievian imagination monitored by an intertribal consciousness (that propensity to look from within beyond into the extended margins of void threatened by the phantom horsemen). The need to dream still remains. The Viking and Tartar horsemen still ford the rivers of our Slavic blood — even though here home is a lantern-carrying phantom walking the asphalt highway to the city. All else is myth: the Ukraine, the Ukrainian-Canadian, the Anglo-Saxon — all a myth. And the only reality is a mythic Ukrainian-Canadian, a tourist, fainting at Taras Shevchenko's grave on a hill near Kaniv down from Kiev, on the Dnieper, and then rising to bag a handful of earth to take home.

ANDREW SUKNASKI



POPBOILERS

IAN SLATER, *Firespill.* McClelland & Stewart-Bantam, $1.95.
T. A. KEENLEYSIDE, *The Common Touch.* Doubleday.
CLARKE WALLACE, *Wanted: Donald Morrison — The True Story of the Megantic Outlaw.* Doubleday.
CHARLES TEMPLETON, *Act of God.* McClelland & Stewart, $10.95.

POPULAR FICTION has long been a publishing category *sui generis*, largely unconcerned with critical aesthetics and currently fashionable standards of proper literary decorum. At its best it displays an imaginative vigour that puts the majority of self-consciously artistic creations to shame. But more usually it reads as if it was written in a trance — that amorphous "cultural trance" of cliché thinking and stereotyped characterization which embodies the half-conscious collective essence of any given *milieu*.

Take Ian Slater's *Firespill*, a book presumably conceived by its author as a cautionary warning in the form of a very contemporary ecological nightmare. Sometime in the near future, off the Alaska coast, two giant "supratankers" collide, spilling 600 million gallons of oil — which is then accidentally ignited by a sailor's carelessly discarded cigarette. Trapped amidst the resulting inferno is the U.S. Vice-President, a "captivatingly plump" young woman who coincidentally happens to be the passionately beloved ex-mistress of the President. The only hope for her rescue is a vintage Canadian submarine, complete with mutinous crew, leaking fuel-tanks, and a failing oxygen supply. And meanwhile, as the spreading "firespill" threatens to ignite the entire Pacific coast, from Alaska south to California, the authorities move to institute drastic emergency measures: nothing less than "the mass evacuation of the entire population of the Pacific Northwest."

Throughout, Slater's prose style is as flat-footed as his plotting, as woodenly lifeless as his sub-stereotypical characterization. Yet here and there amidst the prevailing murk glint brief flashes of something archetypally deep and dreamily compelling. "Leaping in a kind of mad unison," he writes at one point, "miles of orange red flame could be seen licking hundreds of feet into the dense smoke, reminding the President of childhood horror tales in which primordial creatures bent on destruction would rise out of a volcanic sea to devour the earth." This, then, is the true theme of *Firespill*, looming from behind the smokescreen of formula melodramatics: an apocalyptic vision of the world in flames, to which the only inadequate response is one of benumbed impotence in the face of overpowering catastrophe.

The sole emotion that rings true in these pages is a darkly despairing helplessness. And finally, in defiance of all conventionalized expectations to the contrary, it proves wholly justified. The submarine's heroic mission fails; Vice-President and rescuers alike go up in smoke; the firestorm is unstoppable, and the bewildered inhabitants of the Pacific coast are left to reap the whirlwind. In nightmares like this, there are no grounds for last-minute reassurances. The sole saving grace for the world at large, as it turns out, is the author's absolutely stultifying ineptitude, which effectively anaesthetizes his readers against the real import of his pessimistic driving vision.

Viewed as a timely warning, *Firespill* is a misfire — instead, it functions in the mass psyche in much the same fashion as those mildly troublesome dreams which, as Freud explained, have the secret function of blunting the urgency of potentially worrisome external stimuli that might otherwise awaken the dreamer from his slumber. This paradoxically self-negating quality is in fact characteristic

of that increasingly popular sub-genre, the semi-documentary novel which presses itself on the public as a thinly fictionalized but correspondingly eye-opening *exposé* of the real truth about some scandalous real-life situation.

Take, for instance, *The Common Touch*, by T. A. Keenleyside. The author here is a political scientist who spent several years in the diplomatic service; his book is explicitly intended as a scathing indictment of our foreign policies and the conduct of our official representatives abroad — a Canadian counterpart of *The Ugly American* of some years ago. Set in a fictitious Southeast Asian country, this tale of the tribulations of an idealistic young diplomat is knowledgeably conceived and indubitably well-intentioned. But despite a plethora of authentic-sounding details, neither the situations nor the characters come even remotely alive. Few readers are likely to be shocked out of their complacency by the stereotyped revelations of this plodding exercise in cliché-cloaked intrigue and formulaic disillusionment.

A different set of formulae predominate in Clarke Wallace's *Wanted: Donald Morrison* — the saddle-sore conventions of the old-fashioned pulp western. But this clumsily fictionalized re-creation of the hunting down of a "modern Rob Roy" in the Quebec of 1889 at least has the virtue of an interesting story to tell. And the connoisseur of bad writing will find it genuinely rewarding, for the author has a positive genius for the inspired malapropism. (Two samples: "He had a stubborn streak as long as a tapeworm" and "high above, the Canada geese seemed to stride across the sky with the steady pace of long-distance runners.")

Such spurious striving after vividness, the hackneyed stock-in-trade of correspondence-school writing-courses, at least makes a welcome change from mind-numbing dullness. But in the final analysis it is no less a screen against the travails of reality. In a foreword, Wallace earnestly proclaims his intention "of bringing alive the hardships, joys, and tragedies which faced unwary immigrants. . . ." But instead he belabours them to death, immolating historical actuality on the Procrustean bed of formula characterization and generally sub-formula writing.

Alongside these three variously misconceived botches, Charles Templeton's best-selling *Act of God* shines out like a reasonably good deed in a decidedly dreary world. In his early pages, to be sure, Templeton is every bit as guilty as Clarke Wallace of self-consciously overwrought prosifying, and over and over he lapses into currently-fashionable clichés of motive and presentation. Yet the overall impression here is one of amateurishness rather than outright ineptitude: the writing gets steadily better as the book progresses, as if Templeton is learning as he goes; the plotting, apart from one awkwardly-integrated subplot, is commendably tight; and above all the author plainly has the born story-teller's gift of seeing his characters and their interactions come alive in the theatre of his mind, however much difficulty he may have in setting this inner vision down on paper.

As every media-blitzed Canadian must know, *Act of God* deals with the discovery of what appear to be the authenticated bones of the unresurrected Jesus Christ in Israel, and the impact of their finding on a somewhat worldly American archbishop. Plainly, to do this theme full justice would require the powers of a Dostoevsky — or, at the very least, a Graham Greene. And, needless to say, Templeton falls short.

Yet he acquits himself surprisingly well, all things considered. His story is carefully thought out and patently sincere; its

chief characters, though somewhat stiff at times, are no mere lifeless stereotypes — though only one of them, the Toronto-born detective Copeland Jackson, comes anywhere close to being fully realized. The book's faults for the most part stem directly from Templeton's inexperience as a novelist. In the end, for instance, he falls into the characteristically amateurish error of spelling out all the underlying significations of his story in a tacked-on epilogue, rather than letting them emerge dramatically in the main body of the text. But the fact remains that this awkward conclusion really *is* the theologically and dramaturgically right one, for all the clumsy obliquity of its presentation. The conception is admirable; the fault lies in the execution.

The responsibility for such failings as these must rest as much with McClelland & Stewart as with Charles Templeton — for almost all the more egregious failings of *Act of God* could easily have been remedied by another run through the typewriter, under the guidance of an astutely sympathetic editor. (This, incidentally, is another mark of modern popular fiction: for the most part it is severely under-edited, if it is edited at all.) As it stands, Templeton's ambitious attempt at a novel vividly manifests both the strengths and the besetting weaknesses of the contemporary popular novel: genuine imaginative vigour, undercut by the stereotyped banalities of crudely conventionalized presentation.

JULIAN REID

ANOTHER WORLD

TOM MARSHALL, *The White City*. Oberon, $7.95; pa. $3.95.
DAVID HELWIG, *Atlantic Crossings*. Oberon.

IN A FOREWORD to *The White City* Tom Marshall speculates on the unconscious impulse behind what he calls his *book of air* (the last of a tetralogy which has focussed, in turn, upon fire, water, earth and air): "One can be chosen by a place before one is conscious of its psychic history. Perhaps we newcomers of recent centuries have, in spite of our sins, begun at last to soak up some of the psychic energies of this space." The poems themselves, however, are simpler and more accessible than the slightly intimidating preface would promise. Further, the volume is not so tightly unified as the airy theme suggests. This is, in fact, not so much an integrated sequence of poems on a common theme, as it is a collection of poems, many of them occasional, which are often related to AIR only through a determined editorial ingenuity.

Most of Marshall's poetry is based on a short line of one to four syllables; most of his images, like "orange lichen on grey rock", are sharply particularized; his direct presentation of immediate perceptions shows the pervasive influence of William Carlos Williams. There is, in other words, little in the form of this poetry to distinguish it from the work of a hundred other contemporary poets. But Marshall has a good sense of the textures and resonances of words. In one of my particular favourites, for instance, he catches the magic and mystery of the "Blue Mosque: Istanbul" in a few details:

> These windows are the broken
> colours of desire,
> cool promises of paradise.
>
> And pale as heaven
> the blue curvature, a
> geometrical abstract of roses.

Marshall creates a spacious beauty here not only by the images but also by moving from specific images to such abstractions as "desire" and "promises." The implicit suggestion of the mind's reaching out prepares for some intellectual specu-

lation which would otherwise seem quite unpoetic:

I remember this not
as dream but
a clear sky matter-of-factness

Or perhaps as
dream's mystical precision when
unrealized as dream.

This sense of a dream unrecognized by the dreamer becomes a description of "the serenity a work / of architecture carries." But then, as a good poet should, Marshall extends and reframes the entire poem with another discovery:

What awakening then
these ludicrous

bobbling chanticleers.

What absurd
incongruity — a prayer.

Suddenly we are moved outside the mosque, beyond its serene dream, to the discordant yet vitally energetic world which surrounds it. In one sense the rooster's crowing may be felt here as a prayer; in another sense the very existence of the chanticleer, and of the mosque, whose total experience is prayer, makes conventional prayer unnecessary.

In a short review it may be a distortion to spend so much time on one poem. Yet it is no more distortion than capsule summaries of a dozen poems. "Blue Mosque: Istanbul" reveals the rich pleasures which lie in Marshall's best poems; it suggests his typical forms; it shows us, by taking us inside the poet's mind and evoking the spirit of a particular place, what Marshall means by "psychic energies." If Marshall's strength as a poet is the sudden juxtaposition, or the surprising metaphor, which carries the reader into an undiscovered mental landscape, his weakness is his attempt at reporting sensory impressions without interpretation and synthesis. Marshall's poems, or parts of poems, in this mode — there are too many of them — don't go beyond the tediousness of a shopping list:

(light laid on fence-posts, grass
blue-tinged cabbages

cows and one horse grazing
swallows gliding

roosters crow
intermittently

sprinklers jerk)
("Imaginary Mountains")

White City contains two slightly longer poems (or sequences) in which Marshall considers, particularly through Indian myth and legend, the psychic history of Canada. The most intriguing of these is "A Message from the Garden of the Gods" in which the poet, proposing that there are two kinds of Canadians ("fanatics . . . [and] the secular shaman"), imagines Canada backwards. This vision moves us from west to east, and back through history, giving us a renewed and altered understanding of our past, ending with a realization that our mythic origins are in this land and in this time: "the white city, // the garden of the gods is here."

David Helwig is also reaching back to distant history to find the psychic energies of this place. His book, *Atlantic Crossings*, much more explicitly unified and focussed than *White City*, consists of four poems retelling the stories of four early crossings of the Atlantic: by the Irish monk, St. Brendan; by a slave-trader; by Columbus; and by the Norsemen. When I first read Helwig's "Voyage with Brendan" I was bewildered. Since I only knew Brendan as a name, I found it difficult to connect the bizarre images and events in the poem. But once I read an outline of the *Navigatio Brandani* upon which the poem is based, the details began to cohere. Brendan voyages west in search of the Earthly Paradise. The tempting association of Brendan's Land of Promise

with North America, though it has only a tenuous historical basis, gives Helwig's poem a most obvious connection with Marshall's discovery that "the garden of the gods is here." Brendan's voyage is told in the first person by one of the three latecomers who have been taken on at the last moment, almost as an afterthought. There is a marvellous, sometimes a nightmarish, quality about Brendan's legendary wanderings. Helwig's terse poetry expresses the sense of the fantastic, through the puzzled, awestruck voice of the narrator:

> near west an island green with grass
> trees and flowers like multiple suns
> an island stream poured light
> and we pulled the boat to harbour
> where by a fountain stood a wide
> tree leaved white with birds.

But delicious as Helwig's images are, and quotable as the poem is, *Atlantic Crossings* is a series of four narratives, and fascinating new perspectives on familiar stories are what keep bringing me back to the book. Each of the four poems tells, in a way, a story of the search for an earthly paradise; each reveals, along the way, the savagery and evil which stand in the way of such achievement. "The Middle Passage" is described by the captain of a ship crammed with black slaves destined for the North American market. The story here is grotesque, yet the horror is intensified by moments of great beauty. The ship, becalmed, becomes an emblem of the inhuman logic of the slave trade. Here, for example, is part of Helwig's description of dead slaves being thrown overboard:

> The next a child.
> The clothes of the man that carried him
> had been fouled by the floor of the hold
> where he had slipped and fallen.
> He held the body by arm and leg
> and turning sharply from the waist
> he threw it into the air where it floated
> slowly down like a dark bird
> and hit the water with a flat smack.
> It sank and suddenly that place
> was a fluid crimson jewel in the blue
> and shining ocean.

"Columbus in Jamaica" describes Columbus, through his own words, as Christ, disillusioned, despairing, realizing his dream of a "new world, Jerusalem" cannot be. Helwig retells "The Vinland Saga" from the woman's point-of-view, in the voice of Gudrid, wife of Thorstein. Her story, too, mingles a love of the great beauty of Vinland with the growing despair of ever making permanent settlement there: "This is a good land, but we will never/ live in safety." The poem, and the book, ends with the Norse leaving the new land, acknowledging their defeat.

Helwig's is a haunting and enchanting series of poems. Like the best poems of *The White City* is shows us, in the words of an epigraph which Marshall takes from Paul Eluard, that "there is another world, but it is in this one."

LAURIE RICOU

*** JEAN BRUCE. *The Last Best West.* Fitzhenry & Whiteside. One hears often of the Multiculturalism Programme that is carried on under the auspices of the Secretary of State's office, and here is at least one concrete manifestation of its existence, in the form of Jean Bruce's excellent documentary anthology compiled around the population of the Canadian West by immigrants from Europe, from the United States and from Asia, during the crucial years from 1896 to 1914 when the prairie provinces emerged out of the old Northwest Territory. Apart from a perceptive introduction, written with exemplary conciseness, the book consists entirely of photographs from the time and extracts from official documents and publicity material, and, on the other side, from the accounts of settlers themselves, in letters and diaries. The effect is a rich mosaic of experience, touching on every aspect of the settlers' life in Canada and bringing out — which is presumably the aim of the volume — the extent to which their responses were shaped by differing backgrounds. As memento of a stage in Canada's growth that is now receding from memory into history, it is one of the best of its kind. G.W

opinions and notes

THE RAILROAD IN CANADIAN LITERATURE

ALL OVER THE WORLD railroads revolutionized life. The impact of the railroad on Canada, however, was unique. The Canadian nation was literally built on rails; and for nearly seven decades, Canadian politics were the politics of railroads and railroad building.[1] For Canada, the railroad is not only a symbol of industrial progress; it is undoubtedly the symbol of modern Canada, embodying within it the many elusive dimensions of the modern Canadian identity. Images of the railroad in Canadian literature,[2] particularly in poetry and novels, reflect this modern national identity: especially, they reflect the ambivalence with which Confederation and conquering the Canadian wilderness are accepted. On the one hand, the railroad is treated as a romantic symbol of adventure and progress, and on the other as a symbol of corruption, dehumanization, and intrusion.

Hugh MacLennan humorously summarizes the dimensions of these two conflicting attitudes towards the railroad, in his essay "Journey Into The Present." He says, "It is a miracle of comfort and efficiency this train. It is — dare I say it? — the symbol of this bright new Canada of ours." It is a "metal snake," the sum of "burgeoning bureaucracies," the means of connecting the great expanses of land, and it is the result of what the "pioneers hewed out yard by yard." It connects men all over Canada, but it also "plays blameless, soul-destroying tunes to the happy captives" riding inside.[3]

As MacLennan suggests, the impetus for building the Transcontinental Railroad was a great, romantic vision of nationhood; but such a railroad was costly to build and was often sponsored by men who cared less about Canada's future than about their own crass economic and political gains. The romance of building this railroad was being a part of the wilderness that was Canada before it became an urban country; but the railroad itself is a part of the urbanization. The Transcontinental is a symbol of human achievement, of victory, over the almost impregnable Canadian wilderness; but the train is an evil, "mechanical" snake intruding into God's idyllic, natural world. Building the railroad brought men together in communal effort; but the train is a machine, a part of the industrialism which destroyed the quiet rural way of life and its values.

E. J. Pratt's epic poem, *Towards The Last Spike*, serves well as a reference point for an examination of these different conflicting attitudes. In the poem, Pratt develops the brightest of these images of the train, presenting it as the symbol of nationhood and romantic adventure. He focuses a great deal of attention on Sir John A. Macdonald, who twice bet his political career on the Transcontinental and Confederation. For nearly twenty years, including two terms in office as Prime Minister, over British Columbia's threats of secession, and through the Riel Rebellion, Macdonald juggled politicians, the military, money, and governments to accomplish his dream of building a railroad "from sea to sea." Pratt begins by describing Macdonald's sleepless nights; with a touch of mock-heroic humour he says,

> Insomnia had ripped the bed sheets from him
> Night after night. . . .
> For goblins had a way of pinching him,
> Slapping a nightmare onto dwingling snoozes. . . .

Upon his wall — the roads all led to
market —
The north-south route.

Macdonald knew that because railroad lines already existed between Canada and American cities, Chicago and other American Great Lakes cities would have undoubtedly become the centres of Canadian commerce unless an independent Canadian railway were built connecting the provinces to each other. He wanted an all-Canadian line, which meant crossing the Rockies — and more nightmares. Pratt writes:

He returned
To bed and savoured soporific terms:
Superior, the *Red River*, *Selkirk* . . .
He spat out *Rocky* grit before he swallowed.

After describing Macdonald's problems, Pratt continues with the adventures of the other heroes, the promoters, pathfinders, and engineers. One of the most important of these heroes is Van Horne, whom Pratt elevates to the status of a Canadian Paul Bunyan, capable of super-human feats:

Stephens had had his raw hands on Van
Horne,
Pulled him across the border, sent him up
To get the feel of northern temperatures. . . .

His Name was now a legend. . . .

Fast as a bobcat,
He'd climb and run across the shakiest
trestle.
Or, with a locomotive short of coal,
He could supply the head of steam himself.
He breakfasted on bridges, lunched on ties;
Drinking from gallon pails, he dined on
moose. . . .

Although Pratt's description lacks the hyperbole typical of some American folk legends, Van Horne is, nevertheless, cast as a prototype of the square-jawed hero, able to pit his great strength against all odds and win in the true manner of the romantic folktale.

In fact, Pratt's poem can be considered (among other things) as an exercise in attempting to create, or locate, a Canadian legendary hero. To satisfy their structural needs the epic poem and folktale-legend both require a superman, an Odysseus, Paul Bunyan, or Van Horne, fighting against the forces of evil. An unfortunate tension is created in this poem when Pratt tries to fulfill the requirements of the epic form he has set for himself, while at the same time trying to give an historically accurate account of what happened. To do the latter, Pratt must describe not only the acts of heroes like Macdonald, Van Horne, and Stephens, but he must also describe those of the workers who laid the tracks. Hordes of men slipped around knee-deep in mud and sweated under the hot sun to build a railroad across the Canadian wilderness, which at times seemed capable of swallowing and obliterating every tie and trestle thrust into it. It was a task equal to the strength of ten dozen Paul Bunyans.

So while Macdonald is off in a corner having nightmares and gagging on "Rocky grit" and while Van Horne is off romping through the mountains, jumping over trestles with a single bound, Pratt concerns himself with the problem of describing the heroic work of the labourers. And this is a complex problem. His epic form wants a single hero. Yet central to the experience of building the Canadian railroad and to the very Canadian cultural identity Pratt wants to frame into legend is a group and community experience so diverse[4] that it only obscures the achievements of individual heroes and also is itself practically impossible to characterize. So, how to describe it? Pratt turns the group into a single being; man and beast become one, melting together into a surrealistic mass, dividing, undulating, and reuniting:

Thousands of men and mules and horses
slipped
Into their togs and harness night and
day. . . .

As individuals
The men lost their identity; as groups,
As gangs, they massed, divided, sub divided,
Like numerals. . . .

In his poem, "Can. Lit.", Earle Birney indirectly, but aptly, summarizes the problem Pratt is attempting to resolve in *Towards The Last Spike*. Birney says, "Too busy bridging loneliness to be alone/ we hacked in ties what Emily etched in bone." Building the Transcontinental was so great a task that it did not have a single focal point; it was so huge a job that there was little energy left for Canada to produce an Emily Dickinson or a Walt Whitman to sing about it. Birney laments the lack of any one focal point in this experience suitable for myth-making; specifically, he laments the lack of a clear resolution to the problems of Confederation that a national railroad was supposed to have resolved but did not, Birney says:

We French, we English never lost our
civil war,
Endure it still, a bloodless civil bore;
No wounded lying about, no Whitman
wanted.
It's only by our lack of ghosts we're
haunted.

Indeed, Pratt's problem is that while it used up enormous amounts of time, money, and energy, building the Transcontinental did not produce ghosts which could be resurrected as legendary heroes.

Yet the Canadian railroad did, certainly, create the stuff adventures are made of. A much earlier poet than either Birney or Pratt, who did not try to write epics and who was not in the least concerned about the problems of Canadian epic heroes and ghosts, was Cy Warman. Born in Illinois, Warman spent much of his life working for railroads and writing about them. He settled in London, Ontario in 1904 and was quickly adopted as a Canadian writer and poet.[5] Like Pratt's, Warman heroes are strong, rugged individualists. They live in a world where men, machine and nature exist in harmony. For example, in "From Cornfield To The Cab," Warman expresses the tranquility and domance which the lone engineer feels sitting at the throttle, guiding his mighty iron horse as it races across the majestic landscape. Warman emphasizes the engineer's independence and sense of communion with nature:

To reach the summit of some high
mountain at
sunrise; to look down the winding trail
which
he must travel, and see the blue-jay cloud
lying
across the track; to dash through the cloud
and
out into the glad sunlight again . . . is apt
to impress one with the awful grandeur of
God's will.[6]

Man, nature, and machine are all part of one master plan. And man's magnificent creation, his beautiful iron horse, is overshadowed only by a force mightier than man:

I hear the whistle sounding,
The moving air I feel;
The train goes by me, bounding
O'er throbbing threads of steel.

My mind it doth bewilder
These wondrous things to scan;
Awed, not by man, the builder,
But God, who made the man.

This identification of man, machine and nature as one in God's great plan is possible partly because Warman conceives of the train as an organic, living being. In fact, it is an exciting mistress, a wonderful combination of woman and horse:

"Be swift", I cried, "oh matchless steed
The world is watching. . . ."
With quick and ever quickening speed,
The hot fire burning in her breast
With flowing mane and proud neck bent
She laughed across the continent.

Another thing certainly which helps support Warman's romantic vision of the railroad is its nostalgic identification with the lost idyllic setting of unspoiled nature. In Warman's poetry, the engineer is a

travelling man, a Dionysian character without roots. And most often he is looking backward in time, back into the sunset, back to a lost freedom in a world of joy and beauty. In "The Freight Train," Warman says:

> The man who rides these mountains, whose fiery steed of steel
> Drinks of Nature's flowing fountains, must . . . feel
> A divine and peerless painter spread the scenes. . . .
>
> Ah, how I miss the music of the whistle and the bell . . .
> And the mighty, massive Mogul seems to try to
> call me back. . . .

Ah yes, the romantic hero. He does well to die young. Nothing is quite so unnerving to the romantic sensibility as an ageing, pot-bellied Don Juan, surrounded by bratty grandchildren and a nagging, toothless wife. Conversely, nothing so touches the romantic heart as the bittersweet scene of fair maiden crying with confused emotion over the grave of her gallant knight (the engineer) fallen from his great steed (the iron horse). While she laments her loss, she is proud that he died with throttle in hand. Warman muses:

> T'would be sweet to know . . .
>
> That a woman would come to their graves once a year,
> Bringing wreaths of flowers; that a woman's tear
> Would dampen the dust on the graves of those
> Who have lived and died in their over-clothes.

But as the twentieth century progressed, the attitude Warman expressed, that the engineer was a gallant knight able to control his wild steed, was quickly replaced by the feeling that the railroad was a mechanical monster that controlled men's lives. Particularly in the early novels of social realism, the railroad was often depicted as being a menace. The train may still have been a symbol of escape from domestic responsibilities, but now the escape became desperate. For example, Robert J. C. Stead, in a number of rural realist novels about the problems of prairie farmers in the West, uses the train as a symbol of evil. In *The Smoking Flax*, the second of three novels about the same family,[7] Cal Beach goes West with his young nephew, Reed, the illegitimate son of Cal's deceased sister. Cal finds work at the Stake's farm, falls in love with Minnie Stake, and then discovers that Jackson, Minnie's brother, is Reed's father. Jackson, who cannot bear the shame of his discovery and his own failure, leaves the farm and hitches a ride on a freight train. No longer the beautiful steed of Warman's verse, the train is now a serpentine monster. Stead says, "With a strange fascination Cal watched his dark, many-jointed centipede roaring by. . . ."

Now the romance of the train becomes dark as the train becomes a means of escape from paternal and family obligations and personal responsibility. No longer is the train part of God's natural universe. Instead of sitting proudly at the throttle and seeing the sunshine and blue sky as Warman's engineers did, Jackson desperately hangs on between the moving cars; and as "the cars swing more and more boisterously, the vacuum of their motion sucked dust and cinders from the roadbed to fill his throat and eyes." The image of dust, like that of the "centipede" is one of death. Jackson philosophizes bitterly about life, saying that men live in the hopes that tomorrow will be better than today, only to find out that tomorrow mocks their hopes. At last, in his despair, he lets go his grip and is killed under the wheels of the moving train. His epitaph is written in the morning paper; he is called a bum, an unidentified tramp, accidentally killed while stealing a ride. For certain, none of Warman's maidens is go-

ing to come once a year to cry over his grave.

By the time of the Depression, this dark image of the railroad becomes even more hostile as mens' lives become more unbearable. In Irene Baird's novel, *Waste Heritage*, written in 1939, the train becomes a malevolent symbol of the struggle between labour and management as well as a symbol of death and mechanical determinism. The story centres on the life of Matt, an unemployed, angry and alienated youth, and works up to the climax at the time of the sit-down strikes in Vancouver and Victoria in 1938. Violence is central to the plot; Matt arrives in Ashelon (Vancouver) by train and beats a policeman to death. Also he indirectly causes the death of his friend, Eddie, who, like Jackson, is killed under the wheels of a train.

Likewise in Earle Birney's novel, *Down The Long Table*, which also deals with the 1938 strike, the train is again a symbol of the conflict between unemployed workers and the government. And here too, it becomes a symbol of hopelessness and death. The hero George Saunders, alias Paul Green, leaves the University of Toronto for the West Coast to help organize a Communist Cell there. To get to Vancouver, Saunders hops freight trains, where he meets men and women who have travelled back and forth across Canada many times looking for work. Although they do not have money and cannot find work, the railroad company will not allow them to ride on the freight trains even though it would cost the company nothing to do so. Consequently, the riders must hop off the trains as they approach the towns and run to the woods to avoid detection and arrest. While jumping from a moving train, one lad leaps too soon; both his hands are crushed by the train.

This image of the train as a symbol of destruction carries with it a further connotation of isolation and intrusion. Ironically, the Canadian railroad, built to bridge the vastness of the Canadian wilderness, to "bridge loneliness," and to create a viable Confederation, becomes a symbol of the very isolation and loneliness it was built to diminish. For one thing, the train means separation from home, loved ones, and things familiar. Patrick Anderson captures the mood of the traveller's sense of nostalgia in his poem, "Railroad Station." Here the train becomes the objective correlative for the grief and sorrow of departing:

> the train has moved
> out under the twisted iron . . .
> tearing the paper streamers
> of lover's eyes,
> gentle and terrible
> with no tearing noise
>
> before it has moved . . .
> the memories on love
> and the body grieves
>
> to feel, as a winter tree,
> careses die like the leaves —

It is important to note in this poem that the departure of the train and the lover's leaving are associated with winter. Winter is central to the Canadian experience, and many poets are fond of equating the feeling of loneliness and isolation with the cold, hard winters. Louis Dudek, in "Night Train," purposely sets the time of his poem in winter to contrast two kinds of isolation, natural and social:

> Outside, smoke crossing the country
> Fretted with oil tanks and forgotten freight cars,
> then the river
>
> Frozen under the bridge

This naturally isolated scene with frozen freight cars and silent frozen river is satirically contrasted to the less natural, human isolation inside of the heated train car:

> — the motion
> Of the railroad's belly pounding under us —

While within the lighted car, in the loudness,
Girls sit, their heads bowed over books,
Ferreting the pages of love, unsatisfied.

Outside is frozen quiet; inside, frozen tension. With a few quick strokes, as it were, Dudek paints a picture depicting a basic theme in Canadian literature.

It is a theme of ambivalence towards communication. In a country where winter and isolation are so close to the heart of the cultural experience, efforts to break the silence can take on the characteristic feature of a taboo. That is, the wilderness outside is brought into the human society, into the train, and is internalized deep in the human psyche. Dudek's frustrated passengers would rather sit reading books than risk penetrating into that wilderness by communicating, for to break the silence might mean uncovering the dark, passionate forces of the uncivilized wilderness.

Or it might even mean discovering the secret of life and death, itself, as it does for the passengers in Birney's "Arrivals." For them, the effort of communicating results in a nightmare. In the Eden-like setting of his poem, which is as "cosy as any Christmas Card," the train passengers are unexpectedly united in an unwelcomed "kinship of being alive." Their train has just crashed into an automobile and killed the driver. Suddenly, the passengers are united by death and by a commonly shared feeling of guilt. The train becomes an extension of them; their efforts to reach out across the frozen landscape to communicate have resulted in sin. While the train cuts across the physical wilderness, it figuratively cuts through the psychological wilderness of each passenger, laying bare the hidden fears and shame each would rather keep covered beneath an inscrutable blankness, like the blanket of snow which covers the ground. As the now stalled engine cools, it ticks like an insidious heart, "live under the snow"; and with each cooling tick, the passengers start with fear and "circle about/ as if for some where to put down the guilt."

Thus, the train that symbolized progress and adventure in the poems of Pratt and Warman becomes in Birney's poem an evil, intruding serpent and a symbol of man's sinful attempts to become god-like by trying to change a land of ice and snow into something other than God made it. In a curious way, though, the symbol of the train is still a romantic one in this poem, shifting now from light to dark, from a mighty "iron horse" and exciting mistress to a demonic machine of destruction.

But alas, as the importance of the train — at least for passenger service — becomes less and less in an age of jet plane and even rocket travel, the potency of its symbolism weakens. And the train becomes more the subject of anecdotal stories than of great epics. In a recent article, Martin O'Malley talks of the

train's nostalgic appeal to a passing age. There are, he says, only a handful left of that quickly vanishing breed of railroad enthusiasts who are

> turned on by whistles and puffs of steam and the rhythmic clickety-clack of steel on steel. They will fight to the last drop of diesel oil for their right to a lower berth.... But soon they will be gone, like enthusiasts of the past.[8]

NOTES

[1] See G. R. Stevens, *Towards the Inevitable 1896-1922* vol. II of *Canadian National Railways* (Toronto: Clarke Irwin, 1962).

[2] Critical literature dealing with the subject of railways, specifically Canadian railways, is sparse and often difficult to locate. Elizabeth Waterston has written two chapters on travel literature, both of which include bibliographical notes on railroad literature, in the *Literary History of Canada* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1965). pp. 347-65, 598-608. But except for some historical writings, some travel literature (see, for example, Douglas Gladen, *On The Cars and Off*, London, 1895), a few geographical studies and the infrequent writings of railroad enthusiasts, seldom has the railroad been treated as a major subject of literary criticism. For instance, I know of only one recently published anthology of railroad poetry written in English (Kenneth Hopkins' *The Poetry of Railways*, London, 1966) which includes British and American as well as Canadian poetry. In fiction, especially novels, the railroad usually appears as a part of the scenery or a part of a larger theme, such as industrialism. Novels like Sinclair's *The Octopus* are few; and the attention writers such as D. H. Lawrence, Thomas Wolfe, and Willa Cather give to the railroad is usually in relation to other themes.

[3] *Scotchman's Return and Other Essays* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1960), p. 38.

[4] Often entire communities were involved in the effort to build the railroad. Thus the societal features of the Canadian railroad have had a very important (if latent and, until recently, little considered) impact on the Canadian culture and on the Canadian literary imagination. For discussions about this communal effort and about societal aspects of the Canadian railroads and railroad building see R. A. J. Phillips, *Canadian Railways* (Toronto, 1968) and G. P. T. Glazebrook, *Life In Ontario* (Toronto, 1968).

[5] Warman is now a forgotten figure in the history of Canadian literature, but he does deserve a certain recognition as the Robert Service of Canadian Railways. See "Canadian Celebrities: No. XXXII — Cy Warman And His Work," *Canadian Magazine*, 18 (March 1902), pp. 410-12.

[6] *Tales of an Engineer With Rhymes of the Rail* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1913), p. 206.

[7] *Neighbors* (1922), *The Smoking Flax* (1924), and *Grain* (1926).

[8] "All Aboard," *Globe Magazine* (January 24, 1970), p. 10.

WAYNE H. COLE

ON THE VERGE

***** CHARLES RITCHIE. *An Appetite for Life: The Education of a Young Diarist, 1924-1927*. Macmillan. "I am writing because I do not want my life to slip through my fingers like sand," says Charles Ritchie in the early pages of *An Appetite for Life*. He had, still in his late teens, already abandoned the ambition to write fiction, but the urge to write in some way remained and made him, as he says "a compulsive diarist." But urge and ambition are different; Ritchie was so little concerned at the time to publish his diaries that they remained stored away until his retirement from the diplomatic service, when he published first his journal of the war years in London (*The Siren Years*), and now — as *Appetite for Life* — the journal of his college years, the mid-twenties in Halifax and Oxford. Ritchie projects a personality and a period with charm and authenticity, and his diaries have aroused much critical enthusiasm, perhaps because Canadians do not often succeed as autobiographers of any kind. Indeed, the Ritchie diaries make good social history, elegantly written, but Ritchie is no Pepys or Rousseau, and if we are thinking of autobiography as an art rather than as found literature, John Glassco in *Memoirs of Montparnasse* is a great deal better. Yet there's no denying that *An Appetite for Life* is good of its kind and compared with other recent Canadian autobiographical works (Diefenbaker, Hutchison, etc.) it shines. G.W.

**** RAMSAY COOK. *Canada: A Modern Study.* Clarke Irwin. This is Ramsay Cook's revision of a book first published in 1964. It is a history of Canada from 1760, now brought up to the dramatic point at the end of 1976 when the PQ gains provincial power in Québec. A non-academic study, it is refreshingly free of specialist pretensions, and sensitive to the regional issues that are now taking on such importance in Canadian affairs, and not merely in the matter of Québec and the rest of Canada. It recognizes the importance of personalities as well as geographical imperatives, and altogether it is one of the best popular histories of Canada in print: the kind of book from which a visitor or an immigrant could gain an excellent first view of the reasons why Canada is, as Laurier once put it, so "anomalous" a nation, and of the ways in which the many local cultures and ethnic groups have so far managed to live together.

L.T.C.

**** KATHLEEN COBURN. *In Pursuit of Coleridge.* Clarke Irwin, in association with Bodley Head. *In Pursuit of Coleridge* is so dedicated to its ostensible subject that, although a portrait of Coleridge appears on the back of the dust cover, and a photograph of some of his manuscript notebooks forms the frontispiece, there is no photograph of the author, Kathleen Coburn. Yet, despite this rather touching diffidence, *In Pursuit of Coleridge* is in fact a kind of autobiography, since it deals with the central theme of its author's life, the search for the widely scattered manuscript material that Coleridge left behind him. That search made Kathleen Coburn one of the world's great Coleridge scholars. She discovered and edited his Notebooks; she found much other valuable material about him, and she was deservedly chosen as the General Editor of his Collected Works. Research of the kind that Kathleen Coburn began when she first ventured to England from Victoria College, Toronto, can read as excitingly as any detective story, as those who remember A. J. A. Symons' *Quest for Corvo* will know, and since in this case the research was entirely interwoven with Dr. Coburn's life from her early graduate days, *In Pursuit of Coleridge* is also an intellectual self-portrait. The author emerges from it as a woman of great scholarship, rare persistence, and a charm which undoubtedly helped open many doors in modern Coleridge households that had been closed to earlier scholars.

G.W.

**** SAROS COWASJEE. *So Many Freedoms: A Study of the Major Fiction of Mulk Raj Anand.* Oxford University Press, Delhi. Rs.60. Mulk Raj Anand is in many ways an Indian Frederick Philip Grove, a writer of great power and intensity, but lacking the self-critical instinct, so that his works are often vigorous and always vivid in their rendering of the feel and small of Indian life, but frequently poorly constructed and patched over with passages of careless writing which does not seem consistent with Anand at his best. Thus, though Anand seems often a larger writer in his aims and sympathies than his main rivals, R. K. Narayan and Nirad Chaudhuri, both of them are more consistent and more finished writers, and we accept them with fewer misgivings. Perhaps it is this curiously unsatisfying quality in Anand, the feeling that so much potentiality has not been realized, that has made criticism of him up to now either blindly adulatory or conscientiously tentative. Saros Cowasjee's book, *So Many Freedoms*, is welcome and useful precisely because it approaches Anand's work with a recognition of the way in which so much power and sincerity are mingled with so much imperfection. He deals with all Anand's novels, judiciously mingling biography and criticism, and his judgments of individual works are generally sound. This is certainly the best introduction yet written to an always appealing yet often disappointing writer.

G.W.

*** JAY BOCHNER. *Blaise Cendrars: Discovery and Re-creation.* University of Toronto Press. Blaise Cendrars was one of the most important of modernist writers, the friend and equal of Guillaume Apollinaire; Dada and Surrealism both owe him a great but rarely acknowledged debt, but his work, in magnitude and variety, goes far beyond these movements. A restless wanderer, he never fitted into the closely-knit French literary establishment, so that recognition came late to him, and outside France he has received scandalously little attention, despite Henry Miller's efforts to arouse the interest of English readers. This makes Jay Bochner's book, the first full study of Cendrars, welcome in spite of its limitations. The first half is biographical, revealing how vague even now is our knowledge of large areas of Cendrars' life and how much of what we seem to know was distorted by his mythomania. Here there is a curious gap, for Bochner seems unaware that the anarchism of Cendrars had its roots in his childhood; La Chaux-de-Fonds, his home

town, was a great centre of early anarchism, and the name of Bakunin, who died only 11 years before Cendrars was born, was very green in the memories of the local watchmakers, who were devoted to both him and Kropotkin. The later, critical portion of the book is rather aridly written, and unlikely to provoke interest in those not yet familiar with Cendrars, though it will be useful to students. We still need a fluently written book on Cendrars that approaches him with his own zest and imagination.

G.W.

*** J. E. CHAMBERLIN. *Ripe was the Drowsy Hour: The Age of Oscar Wilde.* McGraw-Hill Ryerson, $11.50. The earnest importance of Oscar is the theme of *Ripe was the Drowsy Hour.* Every decade a bright young man discovers that Wilde's jests have a serious side, and Chamberlin is this decade's young man. Much that he says about Wilde has been said before — a great deal of it by Oscar himself, who never doubted his importance as a central and symbolic figure in his age, which indeed he was. Many writers have noted how Wilde seemed to focus all the artistic fads of the Nineties, have traced his relations with fin-de-siècle anarchist politics; Chamberlin performs a service by showing that Wilde — a man of wide and miscellaneous erudition, also focussed the perplexities of earlier Victorians about the nature of truth and falsehood and helped to resolve them in his teachings on the autonomy of art ("Art never expresses anything but itself") in which opposites can co-exist without the conflicts that life inevitably incurs. Only in art can we afford to make the Nietzschean journey beyond good and evil.

G.W.

*** FREDERICK W. ROWE. *Extinction: The Beothuks of Newfoundland.* McGraw-Hill Ryerson, $10.95. Tragedies such as the extinction of human peoples lend themselves to sensational treatment, and the story of the Beothuks in Newfoundland has been no exception. Their numbers have been vastly exaggerated, hence increasing the enormity of their extinction; some writers have seriously talked of 50,000 Beothuks inhabiting Newfoundland when the white men came, where it is doubtful if their terrain could have supported more than 2,000 in a hunting and fishing life. The real brutalities committed by fishermen and furriers against individuals and small groups have also been turned into massacres of hundreds of people for which there is no firm historical evidence. All this, in its way detracts from the special misery of what actually happened; that the arrival of the white men was fatal for the Beothuks not only because of the actual killings, but even more because new diseases steadily reduced the Beothuk remnant, and the occupation of traditional fishing and hunting grounds created starvation conditions in the territory remaining to the Indians. In *Extinction* Frederick W. Rowe endeavours to assess the facts on the basis of real evidence, and his book should be read as a corrective to the mass of sensational and unscholarly writing that has been devoted to the Beothuks. The reality was dismal enough; it did not need embellishing.

L.T.C.

** PETER OLIVER. *G. Howard Ferguson: Ontario Tory.* University of Toronto Press for the Ontario Historical Studies Series, $14.95. The Ontario Historical Studies Series is a project supported by the Ontario provincial government. It aims eventually to embrace all aspects of the history of Upper Canada, Canada West and Ontario from 1791 onward. It will include a general history, and studies in the economic, social, political and cultural development of the province. It will also, as at present planned, include some ten volumes on the more significant premiers of Ontario. The first volume in the whole series is Peter Oliver's biography of G. Howard Ferguson, premier from 1923 to 1930, an active Tory politician for years before his elevation, and later Canadian High Commissioner in London. It is not the best of send-offs for a new series. Surely it would have been more auspicious to have started the series with a Life of a man complex in character, like John Sandfield Macdonald, or of an influential advocate of provincial rights like Oliver Mowat. Ferguson was an adept machine man, with a narrow political vision, whose best achievement is probably the cleverness with which he edged his province out of prohibition. The rest is pedestrian politics. Ferguson deserves three or four thousand words in the *Dictionary of Canadian Biography* and will probably get it when his turn comes. There is just not enough in his achievements, which were mediocre, or his personality, which was humdrum, to justify the four hundred pages Peter Oliver has devoted to them.

G.W.

UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA MEDAL FOR POPULAR BIOGRAPHY 1977

In each year there is a particular collective character to the works considered for this award. In this instance, one aspect of that character is the high quality of the autobiographical books. Although this genre did not produce the winner, a trio of them do deserve special mention. Written in easy prose, Robert Thomas Allen's *My Childhood and Yours* readily conjures up one vivid image after another, and it must evoke powerful memories in all but those who were born old. Kathleen Coburn, author of *In Pursuit of Coleridge*, protests that her book is not an autobiography but, rather, a recounting of one series of adventures, spawned by the search indicated in the title. Putting her modesty aside, it must be said that her lively presentation provides the reader with carefully drawn personalities in company with some splendid anecdotes. Charles Ritchie was emerging from adolescence when he kept the diaries which are the substance of *An Appetite for Life*. Consequently, the work shows a style in process of formation, which is a delight to read.

In the biographical field, Doug Fetherling must be saluted for his *The Five Lives of Ben Hecht* which illuminates, as the title suggests, the prolific pentagon that was Hecht. But, in a negative vein it must be noted that political subjects nearly defeated their authors this year and this field was generally disappointing.

Of the twenty-nine books submitted for consideration, the committee selected David R. Williams' biography of Sir Matthew Baillie Begbie, "... *The Man for a New Country,*" as the medal recipient. The author-lawyer has produced an excellent study which clarifies the previously murky and misleading record of Begbie's career and establishes that his fascinating subject was very much an all-round man, who has deserved better and fuller treatment at the hands of historians. In lucid and entertaining fashion, the judge is placed in a finely drawn setting of the times. The publisher, Gray's of Sidney, B.C., should also be commended for the production of this volume.

C.H.