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editorial

FREEDOM TO CHOOSE

"I DARE SAY, OUR LIVES will be Pindaric," writes self-satisfied Ed Rivers towards the close of *The History of Emily Montague*. And after penning several more cheerful apothegms, he realizes what his friend Bell Fermor would likely interrupt to say: "Cela est bien dit, mon cher Rivers, mais il faut cultiver notre jardin." All our lives have been tempered by these two attitudes: the categorizing impulses of the idealistic optimist have recurrently met the dampening realities of the pragmatic ironist. We have grown, individually and as a state, and we find ourselves with each new experience deciding whether to be "liberal" or "conservative" in our reaction to it: to embrace and accept or to reject and deny, to aspire towards a prospect or to hold to an accomplishment, to live for the certainties of possession or to live for the dreams of future and past.

There are, of course, "liberals" and "conservatives" of both persuasions, which suggests that the way we see problems (as propositions requiring and supporting *either/or* answers) is less an article of belief than a habit of mind. Unfortunately such habits have lately affected more than just the persons who have them. Certain brands of nationalism, for example, must be held suspect precisely because the habits of mind that produced them are insupportable. The Blimpish English academic who refuses to read or recognize American scholarship on the grounds of its national origin has long been a figure of ridicule. How much more ridiculous must be any efforts on the part of Canadians to limit the scope of their own lives — and yet how many efforts lately there have been! Why is it that so many people should wish to deprive themselves of any positive encounter with possibility?

Consider the question of further immigration into an immigrant society. To read the newspapers is to encounter outcries against it, both plaintive and vitriolic. Yet often these are based on the fear and ignorance that combine to equate

"Nation" with "Purity of Racial Stock," which in multicultural Canada must always seem an absurd notion. The desire to maintain the status quo — whether in language, economics, religion, or politics — compounds the problems. What, for example, does one make of the outcry of the landed immigrant against further immigration? The only answer is another question: in what magic year did Canada stop allowing other alternatives? Clearly the place would *not* have been culturally the richer for *refusing* to allow Leacock, Layton, Skvorecky, or others to come, let alone the parents and grandparents of other generations of writers and readers and literary laymen. Adhering to the values of the past has many virtues. Trying to transform the present into a measure of security is an understandable human impulse. But closing the border against the future is patently blind.

Closing the border against information can be equally debilitating. Nothing appears to protect a provincial society better — yet in actuality strengthens both the limiting biases of its provincialism and the autocratic potential of its government — than ignorance. Yet only ignorance is served if we or anyone else were to deny ourselves the freedom to choose among options and the freedom to know about even those events and ideas and developments that we choose in the long run to reject. The CRTC must therefore not be allowed to cut off information from elsewhere — hence to control both the amount of information receivable and the perspective that will then inevitably be brought to information — in the name of resolving an economic problem. "Either/or" will not do.

There are other pressures currently affecting literature — and through literature the fabric and potential of Canadian life. There are citizens who cannot distinguish between satire and slander, and who would seek legal restriction placed over the art of cartooning. There are citizens who identify state support for publishing with state control over ideas and expressions, who would require that art serve the dictates of the state rather than the aspirations of the individual heart and mind and the commitments of the private conscience. There is a passive assumption that all is right with the world, and that all that is right will automatically continue to be so. But all will not be well if there is no reflection, no discussion, no privacy, and no choice. The garden that others in hope have cultivated can quickly in neglect dry out.

This is one of the reasons that the twin arts of journalism — reflecting and reporting — are so important to cultural continuation. They provide us with public and private avenues for enquiring into self and society, and some of the cultivation that our mental and social gardens require. The letter-writer, the diary-keeper, and the newspaper journalist alike weigh the "facts" they perceive against the "truths" they know; they try to be faithful to both, and in the personal balance they achieve between reflection and report they develop their individual styles. One we will find to be reliably objective, another to be enjoyably and

deliberately subjective; one will be passionate, another neutral; one analytic, another discursive, still others satiric, argumentative, witty, and emotionally compelling. No single one is more valuable than another and all are necessary to us. What we fundamentally appreciate are the respective values of information, enquiry, and individuality itself. If we close the borders of the mind we will put a stop to instruction as well as to imagination and invention, and if we do that we will begin to wither. If our culture warrants our watchful trust, then our writers also deserve the freedom of their own tradition: which is to say, a freedom born of options — a freedom to choose for themselves and to follow their own minds.

In *The Other Side of Hugh MacLennan* (Macmillan), Elspeth Cameron's admirable selection from among MacLennan's "essays old and new," we can follow not only the development of a fine essayist but also watch how a responsible writer tests his own imagination and intellect. Ranging in subject and tone, MacLennan's writings draw us repeatedly into contact with his world: into understanding how the mind and the world connect. "I think of a man," he writes, "whose temperament compels him to involve himself in his time, to live with his antennae naked to the stimuli of his time because he belongs to it." He describes himself, of course, the writer *engagé*. Idealist and ironist at once, he also describes the challenge of remaining free in an age when private choice and public policy collide.

W.H.N.

A HOUSE WITH A TOWER

Anne Szumigalski

the Celt within
who likes to stand up and sing
ecstatic and undulating songs
is the one who opens my mouth
and lets the lies out
they buzz like a hum of flies
their flight fills the air

with the beat of gauzy strips, and
Angle, that indwelling cousin,
cannot understand
how all the world is listening
says: "verse is a shelter
of blocks that must be built
carefully for, in the end
it may become a palace
with electric stars"

and together we
walk solitary
by a muddy puddle-edge
(call it a slough)
looking down into water
that returns no reflection
a blank die
shut eye

hidden by the dusk
that creeps up from behind
my shoulders
smoking out of the back trees

not hoping for daylight
not for a long time yet

but at morning
here we come
here I come
cry of throat
and twist of tongue
while it has taken Angle years to build his house
hammering beams and attaching tarpaper
tacking it on so carefully

now the liar, I
stand on the tower
shape the sky
with deceiving fingers
while green damsel flies
on their glassy wings rise
infesting the upper air

CALLAGHAN AS COLUMNIST, 1940-48

Judith Kendle

FROM MARCH 1940 THROUGH to February/March 1948, Morley Callaghan wrote a monthly column for the ill-fated national pictorial, *New World*.[1] Billed originally as an Editorial Associate (Sports), Callaghan began his career at the magazine as a sportswriter but gradually widened his interests until by July 1943, a date which corresponds with his assumption of the chairmanship of the CBC radio program, "Of Things to Come," he was writing what was, in effect, a personal opinion column, general commentary of a social or philosophical nature on the contemporary scene. Although his column always appeared under a by-line, it was not formally recognized as a regular feature until October 1946 and from that date was published along with a photograph of the author under the title, "This Month With Morley Callaghan."

Much of this work has gone unrecognized. Although his career as a columnist spans the entire lifetime of the magazine and comprises some ninety-five pieces, only two of these are regularly cited,[2] and while his sojourn as a journalist has been noticed, attitudes towards it have been incurious or dismissive. Undoubtedly some of this disregard has been due to the nature of the magazine itself. Edited by J. K. Thomas in blatant imitation of *Life*, *New World* was frankly populist in its appeal and not likely to appeal to highbrow tastes. It was, in fact, unindexed until 1948, just two short months before its demise, and complete runs of the magazine are difficult to obtain. Callaghan's articles themselves are open to charges of "hack work." Uneven in quality to be sure, and at times frankly trivial, they undoubtedly reflect in their discursive quality and casual conversational tone, the ephemeral world of radio and television broadcasting which he was to find increasingly so attractive during the 1940's and 1950's.

And yet they deserve to be read. Apart from the fact that they represent a hitherto unexplored record of what the author was thinking and feeling throughout what he has referred to as "the dark period of [his] life" during the second world war,[3] the pieces provide an opportunity to study the relationship between the didactic and the creative impulse in his work. Containing in embryo many of the themes and ideas he was to develop in his later fiction, as well as echoes from his earlier works, the essays possess the advantage, at least as far as the critic is

concerned, of being written in the author's own voice. As such they frequently illuminate (and always highlight) the unfathomable ironies and puzzling ambiguities of the author's fictional world. Moreover, they reflect a greater range of mood and of styles than is usually associated with his work.

Not that one is surprised at what one finds. Constituting, in effect, an important link between the two distinct phases of his literary career, Callaghan's columns reflect, in both their content and their style, a broadening of his canvas and a strengthening of conviction as opposed to either radical doubt or change of direction. Although satire largely replaces irony as the essays' dominant mode, world events, social, philosophical, and political trends continue to be viewed from the vantage point of the 1920's and the individual life, and the author proves himself, both in his stubborn insistence upon his own insights and his constant debunking of other philosophies, to be faithful to his original views. In particular he remains loyal to art. Despite what was to prove a period of spiritual dryness for him personally and a fallow period in his career, he continues to speak with authority as a man of letters completely convinced of the efficacy of art. Indeed, the pieces are remarkable for their self-confidence. Written in the interests of plain talk and sanity, against a background of cataclysmic events in Europe and conflicting rhetoric at home, Callaghan's columns continue to reflect an old-fashioned faith in common sense and Christian virtues and the importance of the independent point of view.

A word first about his role at the magazine: although Callaghan was probably in sympathy with the general aims of the journal, notably with its attempt to "portray the special genius of the Canadian spirit,"[4] and a few of his pieces were written to order, his arrangements with the editor were very casual, and he contributed little, if anything, to editorial policy. As he himself explains it:

> I was not involved at all in the management of New World. The editor, J. K. Thomas, was a personal friend of mine. So he had me write about sports while I was interested in doing so, then I gradually shifted to doing the monthly piece on whatever amused me. If sometimes I wrote on a theme that touched the theme of an article in the same issue, it came about as a result of J. K. Thomas phoning me, asking me what I was thinking about, or perhaps he would ask if the theme he was handling interested me. I knew the staff, yes, but I never sat in on staff meetings.[5]

Not surprisingly his pieces were often tangential to the magazine's central concerns. Focussed as they were, for the most part, upon the apparently insignificant personal event, they were, in particular, out of step with the highminded, exhortative character of the magazine. Doubtless some of this was by design. Growing as they did almost spontaneously out of Callaghan's original brief (Sports), they were obviously intended, at least in part, as a counterweight to more serious matters. But they reflected the author's prejudices as well. Convinced as he was that

it was small things and not great principles that often determined the course of human events, he adopted quite naturally an Olympian pose. Schemes for social reform, post-war reconstruction, and international political arrangements were all viewed with ironic detachment, and, in a sense, the magazine and its contents provided the material for his pen. Thus while *New World* conducted with increasing seriousness a variety of campaigns, advocating among other things closer rapprochement with Quebec, world union à la Clarence Streit, and an open-door policy with respect to immigration, Callaghan's columns, in their abrupt swings from the utterly frivolous to the serious and back to the trivial again, tended to mock such earnestness, and indeed, on more than one occasion virtually contradicted that which the magazine proposed.[6]

Not that Callaghan was depressed by what he saw. Evidently convinced that the best antidote for doubt, disillusionment, and despair was a healthy dose of scepticism with respect to political slogans, he possessed great faith in the humanity of the common man. Thus his pieces were addressed to the ordinary reader, the man in the street, who shared, Callaghan obviously believed, the author's irreverence for "great men" and professional opinion, and who was in any case more interested in the daily round of human existence and the vicissitudes of his own personal life than the march of great armies or public affairs.

His message was clear. In no sense "war effort" columns, but reflecting nevertheless a shrewd sense of civilian hopes and fears, Callaghan's pieces spoke to a population attempting to live the good life in the midst of anarchy and fear. As such they offered advice and frank opinion on a whole range of activities dear to the human heart. Homely observations about sex, love, women, and family life were mingled with speculation about popular culture (radio, music, movies, fashion, and sport), the nature of the Canadian character, education, philosophy, democracy, and art, and the whole was leavened not only with warmth, wit, and gaiety, plus a wry kind of delight in human foible and fancy, but also with righteous indignation and scorn. Throughout the author proved himself to be a shrewd observer of character and men, and his articles reveal not only a little of what it was like to be alive during the war years in Canada, but also a great deal about himself.

OF THE NINETY-FIVE COLUMNS Callaghan wrote for *New World*, more than forty are devoted to sport. The majority of these were written at the beginning of his career, between 1940 and 1943, and do not represent the best of his work. They do, however, reveal an interesting side of Callaghan's character, one that is generally overlooked, and they provide fascinating insights into his fictional technique.

In the main seasonal articles, the pieces cover a wide variety of sporting activities.

Although baseball, about which he writes with affection and authority, is obviously the author's first love, he does a journeyman's job with football and hockey and also provides us with a couple of interesting pieces on golf. He is not above revealing himself as an ignorant newcomer to a sport (in particular, skiing and bowling) and often makes an interesting column out of his attempt to get a story. A good piece on horseracing, for example, entitled "The Man Who Loved Horses" (June 1941), amounts, in effect, to the tale of his disillusionment with the supposed expert, Joe, and he lends colour to an otherwise lacklustre interview with an inarticulate boxer, "The Man From Montreal" (May 1941), by concentrating on the hangers-on.

His pieces are not, in fact, the more usual kind of sportswriting in the sense that they emphasize statistics and personality. Apart from a couple of pieces devoted to forecasting and another three defending the legitimacy of sport, they concentrate in the main on little known aspects of a game or on homely details which will permit the author to speculate on the social significance of an athletic endeavour. A piece on "Women and Wrestlers" (February 1942), for example, stresses not only the sexual but also the melodramatic implications of the art, and Callaghan is often just as interested in an analysis of the spectators as he is in the event itself.

Of particular interest is the series of personal portraits he devotes to sporting personalities. The exact oposite of mythmaking, Callaghan's portraits stress small details of dress and personal appearance which will humanize the heroes of whom he speaks, and while he is always generous in his recognition of talent, his effort is to make his subjects seem like ordinary men.

An important article entitled "Colour Blind" (June 1942), written in the guise of advice to a would-be sportswriter, explains his aims in this regard. Containing a brilliant definition of "colour," the piece has relevance for his fiction as well. It speaks in particular to his habit (especially in his short stories) of choosing his characters from the ranks of ordinary men and to his vision of "a businessman's world":

> Maybe I'm colour blind, I said to the young fellow, who wanted to be a writer, and who was turning to sporting characters in search of colourful material, but if you can't find entertaining lively and colourful characters among drug clerks, and bankers and drain diggers and advertising men and musicians you are certainly not going to find them among ball players and hockey players and fighters. The days of the roistering, swashbuckling brawling, laughing professional performers are over. It's a businessman's world now. The performers are just people like anybody else: they are romantic when seen against the background of the game they play. But people will always be interested in them if they are touched by a good writer because he will make them living human beings, maybe a little comical or pathetic or bewildering as Ring Lardner made them, and the writing about them will be eagerly read by the spectator because it will seem to bring the game that he loves to watch much closer to him.

Many of Callaghan's columns are not very far from his short stories, and three in particular are only loosely related to sports: "Sport on the Waterfront" (August 1942), "At Night in the Field" (September 1942), and "A Sporting Establishment" (October 1942). Written during the summer of 1942, such pieces fall halfway between reportage and the art of his short stories in their straightforward recording of conversation and subtle delineation of character, a fact which may in part be due to the nature of his scriptwriting duties at that period and the start of a new novel.[7] In any case, the quality of his pieces falls off dramatically during the following year, and with the exception, perhaps, of a piece entitled "The Game That Makes a Nation" (February 1943), a classic defence of hockey as the national sport, his interest in pure sport as such begins to flag. Although he will later write three more pieces on a sports theme, his official career as a sports columnist is over; in July of 1943, with a piece appropriately enough entitled "Things to Come,"[8] he begins to write general commentary on the contemporary scene.

There is a new confidence and depth to Callaghan's pieces as he moves to the wider scene and it seems appropriate at this point to analyze their style. Unhurried, leisurely, and spacious, the pieces combine the arts of argument with the relaxed informality of the radio talk, and reflect not only in their looseness of structure but also in their casual conversational tone a new sense of intimacy with the reader.

Couched variously in either long rambling periodic sentences making frequent use of the conjunction "and," or a string of simple sentences joined by semi-colons, the pieces rely heavily on rhetorical devices whose appeal is to the ear and not the brain, and they have a tendency to make a great deal out of little. Hard analysis, for example, is regularly eschewed in favour of personal opinion and anecdote, and an entire essay not infrequently is devoted to the making of a single, simple point.

The diction, too, is relaxed and informal, combining in roughly equal parts sports analogy and slang; jargon drawn from (frequently to mock) the worlds of the professional educator, publisher, and politician; and apparently verbatim transcription of apparently insignificant conversations. There is also a residue of a liberal education in the arts, and the pieces combine street talk with casual references to the Classics, great works of literature, and art.

Above all one hears the author's voice. Indeed, in marked contrast to the novels and short stories where his practice is careful self-effacement, here one is exposed to the full force of Callaghan's personality. One finds him in a variety of moods. Waspish and truculent, bitter and mocking, half-serious and whimsical by turns, he mixes bluntness and assertiveness with the sentimental, mischievous, and fey. It is, in fact, the vices and virtues of the personal essay that one sees chiefly manifested here, and in examining them one is struck by the similarities between the author's style in his essays and that of his fiction.

A favourite device, for example, and one which illustrates in a particularly striking fashion the strengths and weaknesses of his prose, is his use of the interview technique. More common in his sports pieces, Callaghan's use of dialogue frequently smacks more of total recall than it suggests the creative evocation of a scene — which points to a serious defect in the novels. Too often Callaghan attempts to convey by dialogue what could best be done by other means and one is reminded of George Woodcock's strictures against long passages of "undifferentiated, substandard" Canadianese.[9]

A happier ploy, and one which is used in the essays several times, is the author's adoption of a Polonius-like pose. Related in kind to the didactic impulse in all of his work, particularly in his novels, such a strategy permits him to offer advice in either a straightforward or satirical vein and is employed with particular success in pieces such as "Advice to Fathers" (August 1940), and "How to Become a Great Man in Canada" (February 1945).

Less common, but even more successful, is his use of the cautionary tale. Obviously related to the element of fable and parable in his work, pieces such as "Young Suffer War's Aftermath" (August 1945), "A Dilemma for the Dissenters" (May 1946), and "Too Much Tolerance Dangerous Thing" (June 1946), remind us of his habit of using characters to illustrate a moral or point of a tale, and one in particular of them, "This man couldn't find a fresh angle on Xmas, but he did find peace and good will" (December 1947), is in effect a short story.

Callaghan's use of personal experience is also worth mentioning here. Often beginning a column with the phrase, "I have a friend," he reminds us that his alone is the recording eye, and while his use of his own experience in his fiction is more distanced, he proves himself in both instances to be a man upon whom nothing is lost. The essays remind us, in their patient exploration of the smallest event and almost total reliance on examples drawn from life, that for Callaghan, at least, writing out of personal experience is at once a moral act and an act of creation. Callaghan does not so much manipulate the element of true story as celebrate it; his own experience is the beginning and the end of his art.

Other characteristics of the essays point to the weaknesses of his art. The way he resorts to rhetorical questions, for example, typically reflects flabbiness of thought. So, too, does his use of extended metaphor. Pieces such as "The Corpse in the Parlour" (July 1944) or "What makes a shirt stuffed?" (October 1945) are heavy-handed and overdone and remind us in their tendentiousness of the excesses of novels such as *The Many Coloured Coat* (1960). His style of argument is equally inflexible and in pieces such as "Hockey at the Whipping Post" (November 1941), "Pros and Cons" (March 1943), and "The Censors are Smiling at Last" (April 1946), he resorts to *reductio ad absurdum* when all else fails.

Callaghan is not a "thinker" in any profound or original sense of the word, and although he does a creditable job of poking holes in the logic of others' arguments,

his own observations are frequently banal. Thus his best pieces tend to be those that are peopled with brief bright caricatures or contain evocative descriptions of the contemporary scene, pieces such as "What makes us afraid of New Year's eve?" (January 1948), or "Boom, Violence, Mark Post-War Manhattan" (January 1946), and he is always better at identification than analysis of a trend or mood. Which is not to deny the interest of his ideas or arguments; they are worthy of consideration on their own.

THE FIFTY-ODD PIECES devoted to general commentary can be divided into several categories, and it is useful to examine each of them in turn. Although by far the largest number feature a Canadian theme, articles of a more serious nature also include speculations about the meaning of justice, problems of conscience, and the post-war world, and as well there are isolated pieces devoted to education, discipline, and democracy. Pieces devoted to family life, love, and women, or those occasioned by specific events such as Christmas, tend to be written in a lighter mood, as do a number of frankly whimsical pieces on the significance of moustaches and black hombourg hats.

All of them reflect a similar philosophical stance. Insisting on "looking at the world out of his own eyes and thinking his own thoughts," Callaghan holds himself rigidly aloof from intellectual fashion and in doing so proves, as Brandon Conron has pointed out, to be "a natural iconoclast" in opposition to almost everything anyone else has ever proposed.[10] Not that his opposition is simplistic. Although he tends to rely on classic formulations of human behaviour (if not overtly religious, at least implicitly so) in preference to narrow-gauge professional opinions in order to explain the phenomena he explores, his real motives are other than explanatory. Constantly probing beneath simple surfaces in order to expose complexity, Callaghan's forte is the analysis of confusion, the exposure of pomposity, self-importance, and silliness. He is particularly good at the psychology of rationalization and, as his articles on problems of conscience invariably prove, adept at illuminating the vagaries, self-deceptions, and illusions of supposed intellectuals confronted with a difficult choice. Ultimately his pieces are of interest less for their verdicts on contemporary issues, than for their fine sense of irony and satirical skills; they do not reflect specific events in the sense of "charters," "conferences," or "great principles," and the bulk of his arguments are *ad hominem*.

One is struck immediately by the detached, Olympian pose. Although Callaghan is barely in his forties when he begins his columns on the wider scene, he adjusts readily to the role of senior sage. While it is clear that several of his pieces have grown out of his increased participation in the public sphere, out of his association, for example, with the Adult Education Council in conjunction with his chairman-

ship of "Of Things to Come," or his membership in the Civil Liberties Union, he obviously feels himself to be out of step with the prevailing social ethos of the day.

Indeed, the list of his targets is legion. Armed with little more than common sense (and a naturally critical intelligence), he attacks all merely fashionable theories of childrearing and human personality, and delights in debunking expert opinion and those he refers to as "false prophets." "Muddled educators," politicians, and professors are all subjected to his scorn, and although he reserves his principal shafts for "progressive-progressives," he dismisses "bogus scientists" as well. This last category is a particularly large one and includes not only psychiatrists, psychologists, and economists, but also what Callaghan refers to as his "earnest sociological friends."

Callaghan's own views tend to be traditional. Whether defending the sanctity of the nuclear family, looking askance at new-fangled public opinion polls or the "cult of the teen-ager," or urging upon women their traditional roles, he proves himself a natural conservative profoundly skeptical of political slogans and change. In particular he resists the contemporary emphasis on "mass movements" and "regimentation," which he sees as part and parcel of the war-time ethos of social consciousness and "nobility," and himself defends an old-fashioned philosophy of personal priorities and love.

An article entitled "In His Image" (January 1944) explains his views. Written in defence of personal relationships, the article deplores the tendency apparently prevalent amongst public men to think in terms of "national objectives" and "world goals," and holds up to ridicule an Ottawa friend, a man of strong social purpose, "who long ago stopped thinking of people as persons":

> Nowadays he thinks of the "masses." And since he is interested in education he deals in mass education. Sometimes he breaks down a bit and concentrates on the community, but that's about as far as he will go. There was a time long ago when a personal tragedy could break his heart, but now he regards that part of his life as a shameful adolescent period, a time of decay and intellectual corruption.... Naturally my friend has no time to read novels.

Callaghan himself declares his colours in the piece and there is a strong sense of self-justification. Arguing that "in the rest of the human race in these times there is a great hunger to discover the essential humanity of someone against the tremendous backdrop of armies in motion, of thousands of deaths, of the daily reports of cities in flames," Callaghan cites "the universal fascination with the story of the general [Patton] who slapped the soldier, or the airman [Lonergan] who killed his rich wife" as evidence for his case. Convinced for his part that "an heroic willingness to sacrifice personal relationships... produces an abnormal way of thinking and feeling," Callaghan points to the Bible as a useful corrective, and it is clear that he has his own stories in mind:

> The Bible is full of similar stories packed with human interest: the stories of Cain

> and Abel, of the woman taken in adultery, of Salome, and St. John the Baptist, of Ruth, of David and Jonathan, of the Good Samaritan, of Samson and Delilah, of Paul on the road to Damascus, of the conscience of Pilate, of the suffering of Job, of the prodigal son, of the woman with the box of precious ointment, of the kiss of Judas. These are the stories that have haunted the heart of man for centuries, of the virtues and vices of men and women created in His Image, not in the image of the Mass Man.

A strong sense of self-vindication informs his social criticism as well, but whereas his general pieces show him to be something of a reactionary, here he flies in advance of public opinion. The two postures are related, of course. Always the champion of the free spirit and critical inquiry, Callaghan is as anxious to escape social conformity as he is to attack the dictates of "fickle fashion."

Callaghan devotes some seventeen pieces to his analysis of Canadian society and it readily becomes a major "theme." Although his concern with things Canadian can be dated with precision from his association with the radio program "Of Things to Come," there are signs of it much earlier in his sports pieces. Undoubtedly encouraged in his preoccupation by the editors of *New World*, who themselves once ran a public opinion poll on "What is a Canadian?"[11] he returns to the question again and again and it is clear that it is of more than passing interest to him.

It is the cheerlessness of the puritan tradition which Callaghan chiefly tackles here, and as he investigates that phenomenon, one is struck by the complexity of his views. Time and again bringing historical perspectives to bear in an attempt to understand the national character, he continually exposes paradox and conundrums, and one is impressed by the tentativeness of his opinions:

> Again and again trying in words to give a portrait of a Canadian, I have tried seeing him in turn as an inarticulate country boy, a shy self-deprecating fellow, a split personality, a heavy drinker, a man who goes about his business industriously in sober garments, six days a week and lets himself go with great boisterousness one day a week among the boys in the back room. But the portrait I conjured up never seemed to be satisfactory: some index of character was being missed — there was something that ought to be said that wasn't being said. Only the other day did I stumble upon what might be the missing index to the national character. Some friends were talking about poetry. One of them said dreamily, "Do you realize that nearly everyone you know writes a little poetry?"
>
> ("Does the true Canadian lead a respectable, colorless life clinging to a dream he can't express?" June 1947)

Of particular interest is the portrait Callaghan paints in the same article of the Canadian poet as professor:

> And come to think of it, how perfectly the poet as a professor fits into the pattern of the national character. Outwardly a good average Canadian living a solidly respectable life, utterly unbohemian, watching his step in fear of distressing the parents of his students, even watching what he says publicly in fear of distressing his employer; never the less [*sic*], in the fastness of his lonely room, he sits with

> his eyes rolling in frenzy, and bursts his bonds in the discipline of poetry on the page.

A prototype for Jim McAlpine, perhaps?

Simplemindedness, not complexity, is the keynote of many of Callaghan's other views. His defence, for example, of romantic love tends to be based on nothing more substantial than a reading of superficial cultural signs ("pop" music and movies), and there is a tendency to extol virtue rather than explain it. Not that Callaghan is unaware of what he does. An unrepentant kind of sentimentality informs his Christmas pieces, as well as those devoted to the family, and he is everywhere the champion of mystery and feelings. In short, Callaghan celebrates the heart.

His columns on women are typical of this tendency in his thought. Tending to view women, as he does in his novels, as the natural repository of instinctual wisdom and grace in opposition to reason and utility, Callaghan extols the virtues of "charm," waxes poetic about their beauties of form and face, and urges upon them the joys of "submissive love." He is particularly hard on intellectual women and those who would pursue an independent career: women are meant to complement their men. His portraits of movie stars are especially revealing in this regard: always they are seen in terms of prospective mates:

> Ingrid Bergman is the dream of a woman a man wants to keep beside him. She has to satisfy a man because of what she is in herself. Always being there beside the man, at least in the popular dream, is no small task, because she has to offer a world in herself, a delight that comes simply from knowing her, and which will be absorbing enough to make a man forget the restless and romantic longing for the lady in the distance, who can never be completely possessed.

Indeed, many of his descriptions of famous personalities remind us of his heroines — of Peggy Sanderson, for example, or Anna Prychoda. In idealizing his women, Callaghan stereotypes them, and the list of their qualities tends to sound like a catalogue of virtues, the virtues of Womankind in general:

> in Bergman one gradually becomes aware of an extraordinary availability which was exciting; it was not merely good humour and sympathetic interest, but the responses to life, the warmth, the laughter, the eagerness, the sadness, the joy were there within your reach and made available.

A final group of essays requires comment here. Pieces devoted to prognostications about the post-war world point to the importance of the 1920's in the formation of Callaghan's consciousness and the origins of the "debunking" impulse in his work. They also help explain (indeed, define) the "new romanticism" of his thought.

An article entitled "Are we on the eve of a new era? Look what happened after the end of the first world war" (May 1947), for example, is a lament for the 1920's; they are characterized as "the age of the debunkers":

> Just about everything interesting in modern American literature, folk music and theatre was being born in the twenties, and whatever is still hanging around now and registering with any impressiveness seems to stem from those times.... Most writers, painters and musicians, having seen the world blow up in the First Great War, had a frantic desire to make something new which could have no relationship with the old war slogans but which would be clean, hard, concrete and tough. They seemed to want to rub their eyes and look at the world freshly.

Again, in a piece entitled "Postwar May Usher in Debunkers Again" (May 1945), Callaghan predicts "another expression of disillusionment after this war" on the grounds of the "spiritual breakdown" that followed the first and points to "the birth of a new romanticism" as a probable corollary. This last, he argues, will probably entail not only the "casting aside [of] slogans" and "mass nobility" but also the search for "experiences that tend to enlarge [men] as individuals."

And finally, in a piece entitled "Young Suffer War's Aftermath" (August 1945), Callaghan defines the nature of the revolution. In essence the cautionary tale of a professor's daughter who has been carefully brought up on the doctrines of social service, and who renounces all in the name of a passionate personal love, the article extols "the fantastic adventure there is in the spontaneous play of one personality upon another," and promises that "all else is possible" if only she succeeds in making "a good intimate world with just one man." No political consciousness this, but one fashioned in opposition to ideology. Callaghan grasps at personal straws and the sources of his insights are literary.

WHAT, THEN, SHOULD ONE MAKE of their literary significance? Although few of Callaghan's pieces are written directly on a literary theme, comments about literature and writers are sprinkled throughout his columns, particularly in the pieces devoted to speculations about the future. More importantly, perhaps, the columns have biographical significance. They illuminate, as much by what they don't say as by their revelations, the nature of his personal difficulties during the war and the origins of his "personalist" stance. They also point to future directions. Apart from being a useful compendium of the author's opinions, the columns underscore, both in their outspokenness and their oral qualities, the increasing tendency towards explicitness and clarity in his later work.

They also signal a change of character and setting. Pieces such as "A Sporting Gentleman" (May 1943) and "Montreal café team have a secret for their success ... they make a habit of being themselves" (March 1947), for example, reflect the author's growing familiarity with Montreal, the site-to-be of both *The Loved and the Lost* (1951) and *The Many Colored Coat* (1960), while his constant preoccupation with "progressive-progressives" looks forward to the more mature, articulate heroes of his later novels.

Several columns connect directly with his novels. An early piece entitled "The Game That Makes a Nation" (February 1943) represents the first working out of the significance of hockey as a national sport (the game surfaces again as a symbol in *The Loved and the Lost* [1951]). In another article, "Justice for all . . . charity for none" (November 1945), Callaghan speculates about the meaning of justice and defends charity as an alternative ideal. In this case the column probably represents an advance in the author's thinking from his earlier handling of the theme in *They Shall Inherit the Earth* (1935). Already "justice" is compared to a "bomb," an analogy which looks forward with startling similarity to the "two-edged sword" of *The Many Colored Coat* (1960). And an article entitled "Maybe we're all making too much of a fuss these days about our teen-agers and their problems?" (July 1947) looks forward to *Luke Baldwin's Vow* (1948).

Still other columns have a general significance. Reflections in his pieces about education, for example, as well as all his speculations about the Canadian character, come to fruition in *The Varsity Story* (1948). A fictionalized description of the University of Toronto, this novel represents the author's return to creativity, although it clearly bears the marks of his journalism. Articles, on the other hand, such as "The Censors Are Smiling At Last" (April 1946) look forward to *That Summer in Paris* (1963). Indeed, the tendency toward autobiographical reminiscence alternates with the fictional impulse throughout Callaghan's columns and is one which results in some of his finest writing.

NOTES

[1] Enjoying a press run in its heyday of 170,000 copies *World News Illustrated* (1940-48) began a bilingual edition in January 1944 and advertised itself as "Canada's National Picture Magazine, Published Monthly in English and French." Owned by E. P. Taylor and published in Toronto by Anglo-Canadian Publishers, the magazine rapidly lost popularity after the war and was absorbed by *National Home Monthly* in 1948.

[2] "What makes us afraid of New Year's eve?" *New World*, 8, No. 11 (January 1948), 28-9; "Which comes first: love or money?" *New World*, 9, No. 1 (February/March 1948), 23-5, 32. For a complete list of Callaghan's articles, see Appendix attached.

[3] Robert Weaver, "A Talk with Morley Callaghan," *Tamarack Review*, 7 (Spring 1958), 20.

[4] "Editorial," *New World*, 3, No. 1 (March 1942), 5.

[5] Letter to the author, 17 November 1976.

[6] Compare, for example, the magazine's advocacy of community centres in an editorial entitled "We Will Remember Them" (November 1945) with Callaghan's articles, "Even Idleness is Now Regimented" (March 1946) and "Young Suffer War's Aftermath" (August 1945).

[7] Brandon Conron, "Chronology," *Morley Callaghan* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1966), p. 15.

[8] One should not confuse the title of the article with the radio program, "Of Things

to Come." Although the column was the occasion for some advertising — a photograph of Callaghan, as chairman of the new program, and his fellow panelists accompanied it — the piece itself was devoted to speculations about Canada's economic future. The program was, in fact, incorrectly referred to in the article as "Things to Come." According to CBC archives, its actual title was "Of Things to Come."

[9] George Woodcock, "Lost Eurydice: The Novels of Morley Callaghan," *Canadian Literature*, No. 21 (Summer 1964), 34.

[10] Conron, p. 8.

[11] *New World*, 5, No. 10 (December 1944), 14-15.

APPENDIX

The following is a complete list of Callaghan's articles for *New World*. The last page of his October 1942 piece is unfortunately missing; he wrote no article for August 1943; and the last issue, February/March 1948, is a combined one, numbered 9, No. 1. I am indebted to the staffs of the University of Manitoba Library and the Manitoba Legislative Library for their assistance in locating the articles.

A. *Sport*

1. "Guerilla Warfare in Hockey," *NW*, 1, No. 1 (March 1940), 48, 51.
2. "The Admirable Apps," *NW*, 1, No. 2 (April 1940), 13-15.
3. "Watching the Workouts," *NW*, 1, No. 3 (May 1940), 8-11.
4. "Stable Stuff," *NW*, 1, No. 4 (June 1940), 12-15.
5. "Fast and Loose," *NW*, 1, No. 5 (July 1940), 12-15.
6. "Advice to Fathers," *NW*, 1, No. 6 (August 1940), 38-9.
7. "Out in the Open," *NW*, 1, No. 7 (September 1940), 41-3.
8. "Yes, It's Cricket," *NW*, 1, No. 8 (October 1940), 40-1.
9. "From a Seat in the Sun," *NW*, 1, No. 9 (November 1940), 58-60.
10. "The Cream of the Jest," *NW*, 1, No. 10 (December 1940), 40-1, 52.
11. "Stanowski — the Totem Pole," *NW*, 1, No. 11 (January 1941), 46-77.
12. "That Man's Here Again," *NW*, 1, No. 12 (February 1941), 26-7.
13. "Even If You Can't Ski," *NW*, 2, No. 1 (March 1941), 46-7, 56.
14. "In These Times," *NW*, 2, No. 2 (April 1941), 52-3, 56.
15. "The Man From Montreal," *NW*, 2, No. 3 (May 1941), 46-7, 55.
16. "The Man Who Loved Horses," *NW*, 2, No. 4 (June 1941), 59-60.
17. "The Brooklyn Rhapsody," *NW*, 2, No. 5 (July 1941), 24-5, 56.
18. "The Collapsible Amateurs," *NW*, 2, No. 6 (August 1941), 52-4.
19. "Picture-Book Pitcher," *NW*, 2, No. 7 (September 1941), 54-5.
20. "Great Expectations," *NW*, 2, No. 8 (October 1941), 68-9, 72.
21. "Hockey at the Whipping Post," *NW*, 2, No. 9 (November 1941), 52-3.
22. "Alert and Smartly Tailored," *NW*, 2, No. 10 (December 1941), 66-8.
23. "Happy Day is Here Again," *NW*, 2, No. 11 (January 1942), 52-3, 60.
24. "Women and Wrestlers," *NW*, 2, No. 12 (February 1942), 44-5, 48.
25. "The Cauliflower Dignitary," *NW*, 3, No. 1 (March 1942), 46-7.
26. "From the Goal Out," *NW*, 3, No. 2 (April 1942), 48-9.
27. "Everybody's Alley," *NW*, 3, No. 3 (May 1942), 48-9.

28. "Colour Blind," *NW*, 3, No. 4 (June 1942), 40.
29. "In the Years of the Locusts," *NW*, 3, No. 5 (July 1942), 47.
30. "Sport on the Waterfront," *NW*, 3, No. 6 (August 1942), 42-4.
31. "At Night in the Field," *NW*, 3, No. 7 (September 1942), 38-40.
32. "A Sporting Establishment," *NW*, 3, No. 8 (October 1942), 54-6.
33. "Man Versus Machine," *NW*, 3, No. 9 (November 1942), 54-7.
34. "The Hurricanes are their Targets," *NW*, 3, No. 10 (December 1942), 54-5.
35. "What is Sport?" *NW*, 3, No. 11 (January 1943), 52-3, 57.
36. "The Game That Makes a Nation," *NW*, 3, No. 12 (February 1943), 35.
37. "Pros & Cons," *NW*, 4, No. 1 (March 1943), 54-5.
38. "Corrida de Toros," *NW*, 4, No. 2 (April 1943), 32-3, 58.
39. "A Sporting Gentleman," *NW*, 4, No. 3 (May 1943), 56.
40. "It's Always the Team!" *NW*, 4, No. 4 (June 1943), 54.

B. *General Commentary*

41. "Things to Come," *NW*, 4, No. 5 (July 1943), 40.
42. "Our Puritan Cities," *NW*, 4, No. 7 (September 1943), 28-9.
43. "Friends of Quebec," *NW*, 4, No. 8 (October 1943), 22-3.
44. "The Brains' Club: Men Who Mould Public Opinion in Canada," *NW*, 4, No. 9 (November 1943), 45.
45. "Are We Undisciplined?" *NW*, 4, No. 10 (December 1943), 44-5.
46. "In His Image," *NW*, 4, No. 11 (January 1944), 57.
47. "Those Men in the Black Hombourgs," *NW*, 4, No. 12 (February 1944), 36-7.
48. "Those Men of Action," *NW*, 5, No. 1 (March 1944), 37.
49. "A Woman Waits For Me," *NW*, 5, No. 2 (April 1944), 44-5.
50. "My War Against Women," *NW*, 5, No. 3 (May 1944), 36-7.
51. "The Democratic Voice," *NW*, 5, No. 4 (June 1944), 44-5.
52. "The Corpse in the Parlour," *NW*, 5, No. 5 (July 1944), 48.
53. "Who hit us on the head?" *NW*, 5, No. 6 (August 1944), 48-9.
54. "The Politician as a Hero," *NW*, 5, No. 7 (September 1944), 36-7.
55. "Love in Canada," *NW*, 5, No. 8 (October 1944), 52-3.
56. "How old is a woman?" *NW*, 5, No. 9 (November 1944), 52, 55.
57. "The Secret of Christmas," *NW*, 5, No. 10 (December 1944), 16-17.
58. "A Certain Kind of Woman," *NW*, 5, No. 11 (January 1945), 44-5.
59. "How to Become a Great Man in Canada," *NW*, 5, No. 12 (February 1945), 36-7.
60. "A New Kind of Democracy," *NW*, 6, No. 1 (March 1945), 27-8.
61. "They're Swell Gals But Shy on Mystery," *NW*, 6, No. 2 (April 1945), 36-7.
62. "Postwar May Usher in Debunkers Again," *NW*, 6, No. 3 (May 1945), 50-1.
63. "Why don't Canadians laugh?" *NW*, 6, No. 4 (June 1945), 37-8.
64. "What Men Hope They Are Shows Up in Their Moustaches," *NW*, 6, No. 5 (July 1945), 36-7.
65. "Young Suffer War's Aftermath," *NW*, 6, No. 6 (August 1945), 29-30.
66. "The Case of the Tall and Determined Girl," *NW*, 6, No. 7 (September 1945), 23-4.

67. "What makes a shirt stuffed?" *NW*, 6, No. 8 (October 1945), 35, 37.
68. "Justice for all . . . charity for none," *NW*, 6, No. 9 (November 1945), 39, 41.
69. "Christmas is Full of Golden Corn," *NW*, 6, No. 10 (December 1945), 34-5.
70. "Boom, Violence, Mark Post-War Manhattan," *NW*, 6, No. 11 (January 1946), 14-15.
71. "Canada Puzzles the Stranger," *NW*, 6, No. 12 (February 1946), 29-30.
72. "Even Idleness is Now Regimented," *NW*, 7, No. 1 (March 1946), 22, 24-5.
73. "The Censors Are Smiling At Last," *NW*, 7, No. 2 (April 1946), 31, 33.
74. "A Dilemma for the Dissenters," *NW*, 7, No. 3 (May 1946), 45-7.
75. "Too Much Tolerance Dangerous Thing," *NW*, 7, No. 4 (June 1946) 35, 39.
76. "Our Heroes Are Being Neglected," *NW*, 7, No. 5 (July 1946), 35-6.
77. "True Love Blooms in Hollywood?" *NW*, 7, No. 6 (August 1946), 27, 31.
78. "Canada: Land of Lonely People," *NW*, 7, No. 7 (September 1946), 28, 31.
79. "Our popular songs have a philosophy behind the words and music that may amaze some people," *NW*, 7, No. 8 (October 1946), 49-51.
80. "What's left for men of goodwill who learn that a political band wagon is no dreamboat?" *NW*, 7, No. 9 (November 1946), 45-6, 49.
81. "The case of the man who had his own pet formula for 'how a family should be brought up'," *NW*, 7, No. 10 (December 1946), 38, 41.
82. "What about our reputation as cold and distant in the light of the new fashion in national manner?" *NW*, 7, No. 11 (January 1947), 26-7.
83. "The man who solved the riddle why anyone who doesn't have to continues to live in Toronto," *NW*, 7, No. 12 (February 1947), 28-9.
84. "Montreal café team have a secret for their success . . . they make a habit of being themselves," *NW*, 8, No. 1 (March 1947), 30-1, 33.
85. "What's behind this strange frenzy that seizes our solid citizens at Junior Hockey play-off time?" *NW*, 8, No. 2 (April 1947), 44-6.
86. "Are we in the eve of a new era? Look what happened after the end of the First World War," *NW*, 8, No. 3 (May 1947), 34, 36, 38.
87. "Does the true Canadian lead a respectable, colorless life, clinging to a dream he can't express?" *NW*, 8, No. 4 (June 1947), 43, 45.
88. "Maybe we're all making too much of a fuss these days about our teen-agers and their problems?" *NW*, 8, No. 5 (July 1947), 36-7.
89. "Do the new hemlines herald a major depression as they did in the late twenties?" *NW*, 8, No. 6 (August 1947), 32-3.
90. "The person with real talent needs to have a better break these days in this broad land of ours," *NW*, 8, No. 7 (September 1947), 30, 33-4.
91. "The Woman Behind Lucille Ball," *NW*, 8, No. 8 (October 1947), 32-4, 37.
92. "Skirt lengths or philosophies — a fickle fashion dictates the style changes for them both," *NW*, 8, No. 9 (November 1947), 32, 34, 36.
93. "This man couldn't find a fresh angle on Xmas, but he did find peace and good will," *NW*, 8, No. 10 (December 1947), 26-8, 31.
94. "What makes us afraid of New Year's eve?" *NW*, 8, No. 11 (January 1948), 28-9.
95. "Which comes first: love or money?" *NW*, 9, No. 1 (February/March 1948), 23-5, 32.

A. M. KLEIN AS JOURNALIST

M. W. Steinberg

ALTHOUGH A. M. KLEIN'S FAME as a writer rests very largely on his poetry, his prose writings, which extend over a period of more than a quarter of a century, also represent no mean achievement. For the most part, these writings are in the form of editorials, articles and book reviews prompted by contemporary events during the time that Klein served as editor of *The Judaean*, *The Canadian Zionist* and *The Canadian Jewish Chronicle*. Even though during most of this period he was a practising lawyer and held various other positions, such as consultant for Seagram's Ltd. and lecturer in English at McGill University, he took his responsibilities as journalist very seriously. During his editorship of *The Canadian Jewish Chronicle*, for example, he contributed weekly a page or two of editorials and a section of commentary on current events, often very incisive and witty; he frequently added articles on such subjects as humour, folklore, poetry, the Bible; and in addition he wrote long book reviews and contributed poems, occasional short stories, and translations from Hebrew and Yiddish literature. Many of his editorials were written in response to passing local events, often out of a sense of duty to the community and its agencies, and at times written in haste to meet printers' deadlines, but they seldom descended to the level of mere hack work. These prose pieces, written regularly week by week, constitute, in effect, an intellectual and to some extent literary autobiography of A. M. Klein.

The influences that directed Klein to journalism and defined its purpose can be clearly discerned in his early background. Born of immigrant parents, he was brought up in Montreal, and except for a brief sojourn in Rouyn, Quebec, lived his life there. His formative years were spent in the tightly-knit community ghettoized in the area surrounding St. Lawrence Street. Even the Protestant high school that he attended, Baron Byng, had an enrolment that was preponderantly Jewish. The pattern of life that he experienced, with its religious festivals and observances, its institutions which sustained a high degree of social and cultural self-sufficiency, its mode of conducting business — on the street, in the small shops, in the needle-trade factories — and even its radicalism, was uniquely Jewish. The links of this

society were for the most part not with non-Jewish segments of the population in Montreal, let alone Quebec or the rest of Canada, but with the Jewish communities mainly in central and eastern Europe or with communities like itself in other cities in Canada and the U.S.A. News from these European sources was awaited eagerly and received fearfully. No child in this setting failed to hear from family and friends first-hand accounts of pogroms, imposed penury, abuse of every description suffered in the Old World from which they had fled. Klein's imagination and his responses were shaped by this pattern of life and these accounts, by the fears and the hopes for redemption which such experience fostered. They were shaped also by his home and his learning. From what information we have, Klein's home was rich only in domestic virtues. The father, a mild man, a presser in a clothing factory, provided only a scant livelihood, but both parents earned their son's reverent love. It was a religious home, and though Abe Klein was later in life to question some aspects of orthodoxy and depart from some of its practices, he was never able or willing to break the strong ties that bound him to the Judaism of his parents. This religious bond was reinforced by his studies. On completing his elementary education at the Talmud Torah, he studied with private tutors for many years and was fortunate in his teachers, whom he mentions affectionately in several poems and stories. As an adolescent, he was committed so strongly to Judaism that he considered going to a Yeshiva for rabbinic training. Instead, he embarked upon a secular career. After graduating from Baron Byng, a silver medallist, he went to McGill University for a B.A. degree (1930) and then to the University of Montreal for his degree in law (1933).

Klein's career as a writer began early. While still in high school, encouraged by one of his teachers, he wrote much poetry, revealing a concern for form and a sensitivity to language that promised well for his future as a writer. His literary interests developed much more fully, however, at University, where he became active in the Debating Union and contributed articles to *The McGill Daily* and founded a University literary magazine, *The McGilliad.* During his university years his circle of friends and his range of interests widened and embraced persons and causes not Jewish. But the main thrust of his life, determined by his beginnings and by the pressure of the social environment which tended to confine Jews to Jewish associations, was towards Jewish causes and needs. While at McGill he became treasurer of the Maccabean Circle, and a leading figure in Young Judaea, the Zionist youth movement. In 1929, at the age of twenty, he became editor of its national periodical, *The Judaean,* and the following year was appointed Educational Director of Young Judaea of Canada. As the Zionist movement gained momentum in the 1930's and as the spread of fascism and anti-semitism became an ever more threatening menace, his involvement in matters Jewish deepened. He served for a short while as Associate Director of the Zionist Organization of Canada in 1936 and as editor of *The Canadian Zionist* from 1936 to 1937. During

these years and after, he often toured towns in Ontario and Quebec and on occasion visited other parts of Canada lecturing and organizing on behalf of Zionism. This early concern with Jewish affairs found expression also in articles which he published in *The Canadian Jewish Chronicle* in the early 1930's. In 1938 he became the editor of this Anglo-Jewish weekly, a post that he held until 1955.

In an editorial reviewing the achievement of *The Canadian Jewish Chronicle* Klein singled out two functions of such a press as deserving special mention. "The first was the fact that it served, and serves, as a means of bringing to our English-speaking population a knowledge of the traditions of the past and an awareness of Jewish problems in the present. The second was as a means of communicating with our non-Jewish fellow citizens who first learned of the reaction of our community to current events only from its columns."[1] In this statement Klein indicated two of the central responsibilities he had accepted on assuming the role of editor. He saw himself as an educator whose task it was to teach his own people, especially the young North American-born segment, about their rich cultural past and to heighten their consciousness as Jews and their pride in their Jewishness, and at the same time to make them more aware of their current dangers and responsibilities. He wrote many articles and editorials on great contemporary Jewish writers and statesmen such as Herzl, Achad Ha'am, Tchernichovsky, and he drew constantly on his knowledge of the Bible, the Talmud and the works of rabbinic sages and Jewish philosophers and poets of the past. Jewish holidays, as they occurred in the cycle of the year, were carefully noted and commented upon. Whether Purim or Passover, Yom Kippur or Chanukah, the meaning of each was developed, given its full historic significance and contemporary relevance. The annual public campaigns for Zionist causes, for welfare and other philanthropic institutions, for Hebrew schools, Jewish libraries and Rabbinic Colleges, were supported vigorously, the editor prompted by his own commitments and sense of duty. Klein's editorials on these subjects often read like sermons, exhortatory and admonitory, at times fervent, at times witty, nearly always learned.

THE CAUSE TO WHICH he devoted himself as a journalist most constantly and energetically was Zionism. He believed that at a time when Judaism was becoming increasingly pluralistic, cultural Zionism would provide "a new principle of coalition," a more effective means of preserving Jewish unity. He shared Achad Ha'am's dream of Zion as a renewed cultural and religious centre from which the Jewish contribution to civilization would be made in more specifically Jewish terms, reflecting what he believed to be the characteristic, individual genius of the people. In one of his earliest articles, written at the age of nineteen, Klein stated, "It is to arouse the just recognition of the Jew to his own abilities,

and to prompt him to use it for the creation of his own culture, that this Zionism exerts all its efforts. A culture not of one language (for in the Diaspora that is an impossibility), but of one thought, a literature not of one style, but of one spirit, a product singularly Jewish and yet remarkably cosmopolitan — that was the dream of Achad Ha'am, that is the goal of cultural Zionism."[2] This culture had to be rooted in the soil, in a Jewish Homeland, but it had to be more than a product or an expression of an agricultural undertaking, or of a political-economic arrangement; it had to be concerned with "the redemption of a spirit." This ideal, this vision of an Israel restored to its Homeland, as a spiritual centre, persisted even though the rising menace of Nazism and the threat of physical annihilation of European Jewry made him emphasize the need for a Jewish state more urgently in terms of rescue and freedom from persecution. Throughout the late 1930's and 1940's, Klein, though an admirer in most respects of the British people, its institutions and its spirit, criticized the British government for its vacillating policies and its tactics in the Middle East and for its failure to implement the Balfour Declaration. In the force of his denunciations, as in the unqualified rejection of the Peel Commission plan in 1937 to partition Palestine, Klein went beyond the public utterances of most Jewish communal leaders, and displayed the integrity and boldness of a crusading journalist. The fulfilment of the Zionist dream, the achievement of Jewish statehood in 1948, was the happy culmination for Klein of years of dedicated labour on its behalf, an event made all the more solemn and exhilarating, momentous, almost Messianic in meaning, by the Holocaust in Europe that preceded it. Klein's response to that event found lyric expression in his "Notebook of a Journey," a diary-like account of his journey in 1949 to the new state and to some of the older communities in Europe and in North Africa from which immigrants flocked, an account that formed the basis of his novel, *The Second Scroll* (1951). Klein's support of the new state continued undiminished to the end of his career as a journalist.

At the same time, however, that Klein praised every achievement of the fledgling state and urged other nations and Diaspora Jewry to aid it, he was not uncritical of a small chauvinistic element in it that tended to disparage the non-Israeli Jew and the culture of Diaspora Jewry, contemporary and historical. He felt the need to re-affirm the positive values of Judaism developed during twenty centuries of exile. His own learning provided him with such an appreciative awareness of the Jewish heritage and its contributions to religious and philosophical thought, to science and the arts, that he dismissed the superficial negation of the Diaspora experience as unrealistic and unjust. In an article called "The Dangers of Success" he angrily attacked this negation as divisive, calling it wicked and pernicious, because it undermined the Jewish unity that he hoped the attainment of Zion, a spiritual, cultural centre, would reinforce. It set up an "aristocracy of residence" and an "abominable class distinction" between Jews who returned to the

Homeland and those who remained in the countries where they lived. "The *primum mobile*," Klein insisted, "is neither land nor language; it is people. It is the folk — and all of it everywhere — which is of the essence. Domicile, status, speech, etc., these are but adjectival; the substance is *Amcho* — thy people."[3]

Klein's criticism is sound and in the prevailing circumstances, timely, but the force of the attack against a relatively insignificant group in this article and in a subsequent one only two months later, "Of Jewish Culture,"[4] might suggest that it was in part also an attempted subconscious justification for his own unwillingness or unreadiness to live in Israel. The whole bent of his life, the essence of it as expressed in his writings, indicated that he should, but timidity and a deep affection for Canada weighed against such a step. In a later essay, "In Praise of the Diaspora,"[5] he again movingly recounted the manifold achievements of Diaspora Jewry, the creation of a culture and a spirit that would live on through a renascent Jewry, but the central theme of his earlier essays on this subject — the expectation of a fruitful interplay of Israeli culture and Jewish Diaspora culture — is missing. The tone of this essay, one of Klein's finest pieces of prose, is nostalgic; the praise, a graveside eulogy. The Diaspora, he asserts, the conditions that prompted great Jewish creativity in scattered lands, is dead. Clearly there was a serious ambivalence in his feelings about his own position, and perhaps a sad foreshadowing of his own not too distant withdrawal from life.

Almost as significant to Klein the journalist as his espousal of the Zionist cause, was the task of alerting his people to the gathering dark forces from within the local scene and from abroad that threatened their security and even their existence. This constant concern was addressed not only to his Jewish readers, but to the non-Jewish public as well. He felt it incumbent on himself as journalist to take up the challenge thrilled vituperatively by anti-semites from public platforms and in the press. Passionately and logically he made the case for his people to those whom reason and sincere feeling could reach, countering the lies and innuendoes of the anti-semites, and condemning anti-semitic action, whether vandal acts by a misguided mob or the calculated policy of civic politicians. He denounced restrictive covenants and other discriminatory practices in Canada, and he replied to the slanderous attacks by the Coughlinites and the American Firsters in the United States. His dislike for Soviet Russia on ideological and humanistic grounds, deepened by his resentment at its anti-Zionist stance, was related to what he recognized as its deeply-ingrained anti-Jewish bias, which existed despite the state's lofty proclamation to the contrary. Jewish cultural genocide was no more palatable to Klein than physical oppression, and he foresaw and warned against the connection between the two. His greatest concern, however, was over the increasing manifestation of anti-semitism, discriminatory and violent, in eastern and central Europe, by the governments and people of Poland, Rumania and Hungary, and above all of Nazi Germany. In his journalism, as in his poetry, he reviled the cruel policies

and barbarous acts. He appealed to the moral conscience of western nations and was deeply outraged at the relative indifference shown by the so-called liberal democratic nations of the western world to the plight of the victims in Europe and the refugees drifting on land and sea. The moral apathy of the world at large distressed him and may well have contributed to the deep depression from which he subsequently suffered.

The moral concern so clearly evidenced in Klein's articles and editorials on anti-semitism and the refugee problem, was not limited to matters Jewish. Scattered throughout his journalism are vigorous condemnations of harsh and arbitrary treatment of other minority groups. He denounced, for example, the policy of apartheid in South Africa, the unjust policies of the Canadian government towards its Japanese citizens on the West Coast, and of the Quebec government towards the Jehovah's Witnesses sect. Klein was equally ready to criticize his fellow-Jews when their actions in his view deserved censure. Thus, though he shared the ultimate objectives of the Irgun and the Sternists in the Yishuv — an independent Jewish state — he unequivocally condemned their acts of terror as conscienceless betrayals of morality. This concern over political and social abuses, voiced frequently in his prose, found parallel expression, stated or implied, in poems published in the 1930's such as "The Soirée of Velvel Kleinberger," "The Diary of Abraham Segal, Poet," or "Barricade Smith," and again in several poems from the forties. It underlay his political stance, that of a liberal socialist. Though for most of his life he was not active in political parties or political processes, he did let his name go forward as the C.C.F. candidate for Montreal Cartier in 1944, a riding with a heavy Jewish vote, but he subsequently withdrew it. In 1949 he was again prevailed upon to stand for the C.C.F. in the federal election and this time he fought an unsuccessful campaign. Although his defeat was not unexpected, the task of electing a C.C.F. candidate in Quebec at that time being virtually impossible, he had reason to be deeply disappointed in view of his record of service to the community.

Klein's journalism largely reflects his views on public affairs and his involvement in them, particularly in matters pertaining to Jews, but it manifests also another important aspect: his interest in literature. Although the journals that he edited and to which he contributed most of his prose non-fictional writings were directed chiefly to a Jewish public and perforce dealt with topics that interested them as Jews, Klein used the oportunity afforded him as editor to publish many reviews and articles on literary topics. Frequently these writings, too, dealt with Jewish themes, such as the Bible as literature, or Jewish folklore, or with books by or about Jews, but Klein wrote also about literature in general. His journalism reflects specifically his interest in the Canadian literary scene. Paralleling his increased involvement in the 1930's in Jewish affairs was his valued association with Leo Kennedy, A. J. M. Smith, and Frank Scott, the group known as the Montreal Poets, whose achievement, according to Klein, marked the emergence of a modern,

sophisticated literary culture in Canada. In the 1940's Klein's association with P. K. Page, with Irving Layton, John Sutherland, Louis Dudek, the *Preview* group and the *First Statement* group, attested to his continuing close connection with literary circles in Montreal. The strong moral sense revealed in his response to public affairs is evidenced also in his judgment of writers and writing. Thus he condemns Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, and Robinson Jeffers as poets on moral grounds, even though he finds much that is praiseworthy in the art of the last two. Similarly, his admiration for certain qualities of Karl Shapiro's poetry is over-shadowed by his angry criticism of what he considered to be Shapiro's negative, even hostile attitude towards the Jewish tradition. On the other hand, his high praise for poets such as E. J. Pratt and Chaim Nachman Bialik was earned not merely by their technical craftsmanship, their artistic skill, but also by the fact that they wrote within a national tradition and expressed clear and unequivocally strong moral values.

THE TASK OF THE JOURNALIST, according to Klein, was to be not merely the eyes and ears of the world, reporting its activities, but also a sensitive conscience, for which beliefs and values provided necessary standards. And, furthermore, the journalist had to be prepared to commit himself to act with the power at his command on behalf of those causes to which his conscience compelled him. In a review of Pierre van Paassen's *The Forgotten Ally* Klein scornfully provided a simple diagnosis of what he termed the classic ailment of reportage: "a pseudo-impartiality, a cynical hard-boiledness, a spectatorial and olympian aloofness from the realities which are presumably the journalists' métier. At such a one you can level no greater insult than to say that 'he takes sides.' It is his proud and pathological boast that he never takes sides, that he can describe the workings of iniquity with the same dispassionate unconcern with which he retails the philanthropies of virtue, and that he is, essentially and by definition, *au dessus de la bataille*."[6] Klein was well aware that the journalist, in taking sides or espousing a cause, might become a propagandist, or seem to become one, but this possibility the journalist had to risk. Facts for him were merely indicia; he had to search for conclusions and in his search he had to be guided by conscience and personal judgment. Klein sums up his views on the responsibility of the journalist by referring to van Paassen's quotation from a letter of Alfred Loisy to Pope Benedict: "No one has a right to be neutral in moral questions. Whoever pretends to be indifferent is in reality siding with him who is wrong."

Much of Klein's journalism is, as might be expected, ephemeral in nature, though many articles transcend the occasion that prompted them. All, however, are part of the history of the times, recording and commenting on the grim and

exhilarating decades that saw economic depression and growing international tension; the cancerous growth of Nazism with its accompanying horrors — the plight of the unfortunate refugees, uprooted and drifting, and the monstrous fate of the still less fortunate, the millions who perished in the Holocaust; the events of World War II and their happy termination; and the struggle for a Jewish Homeland which saw the emergence of the Jewish state. Whatever new events and public figures the passing years brought to the fore, most of these subjects constantly recurred, and the point of view — the events seen largely in terms of their impact on the Jewish condition — remained more or less the same through the decades.

Stylistically, Klein's editorials, articles and reviews differ markedly, but together they reveal the qualities that characterize Klein's writing, many of which are to be found in his poetry as well. He loved words, the sound and the sense of them, mouth-filling, polysyllabic words, teasing words that playfully become puns or homonyms, words that create pictures and extend the imagination. His notebooks reveal that his search for novel, strange diction, technical or obsolete or rare, was constant, and his essays and articles show the results of this search. He seasoned his writing with foreign words, Latin and French, Hebrew and Yiddish, and with historical allusions, often quite esoteric and remote, with the result that his writing is frequently over-spiced. His play with language is one form of his pervasive wit. His satire is another form, usually sharp, a quick plunging flash, but at times heavy and obvious, a verbal mallet. His tone and mood were varied. He could build up a case logically, writing in a cool, dispassionate manner, but much more often he indulged in rhetoric, the mannered, argumentative stance of the debater, a pose that he loved, or the swelling, denunciatory tones of the angry attacker or desperate defender, the spokesman committed to a cause dearer than life itself. In his strident passages Klein's comment on the Soviet journalist Ilya Ehrenburg applies to himself, for he, too, "is the Jew who writes with passion, with the memory of atrocity perpetrated against his kith and kin, with invective and malediction last heard of only in the *tochacho* pages of Deuteronomy."[7]

Klein's prose is frequently flawed structurally and grammatically, a consequence undoubtedly of the haste in which he wrote many of the pieces. Klein's sons relate that frequently he was composing at the very last moment, even as he was hurrying to the typesetter. Often he would dictate to his wife, seated at her typewriter, an entire editorial or article, with virtually no pause in the diction and no time for revision. One stylistic consequence of composing in this way is that such writing bears the impress of the spoken word. In these works Klein's prose rhythms are speech rhythms and the language is simpler, more colloquial than that of his more polished or more carefully wrought essays.

Klein's journalism suffers somewhat more serious flaws than those of careless grammar. He is at times too self-consciously "clever," and rhetorical to the point of artificiality. His unusual diction and abundant learned allusions, which clearly

reflect his mastery of language and his knowledge of Jewish and non-Jewish culture, also suggest at times an unawareness of the limitations of his readers, or of the fact that they might be distracted or bored by his frequent use of foreign expressions, or English words that are archaic or pedantically rare. Perhaps it would be more correct to speak of his unconcern — for he must have been aware — an unconcern that reflects a degree of indifference to the level of his readership and an occasional readiness to subordinate his journalistic responsibility to his literary impulses. While on the one hand it is to his credit that he never wrote down to his public and that he tried to be himself in his writing, saying what he had to say in the manner that best suited and pleased himself, these characteristics of his style suggest a measure of intellectual ostentation, and his indifference, insofar as it existed, perhaps indicates an aspect of cultural snobbishness, or at least conscious distancing, that seems to have been an element in Klein's complex make-up. His sense of verbal play and his obvious delight in the exercise of an agile, sophisticated mind, qualities which endear him and his writing to us, could at times become a compulsion to be witty at all costs, so that his humour strikes one at such times as forced or misplaced. But such lapses, seen in perspective, are really minor matters and do not significantly detract from the over-all achievement of Klein the journalist.

In an editorial celebrating the centenary of the *London Jewish Chronicle*[8] Klein mentioned two other purposes of an ethnic press, not unrelated to the purposes discussed earlier. The pages of such a journal, by chronicling the daily or weekly events of a community, serve as an authentic history of the community, but the journalist, he adds significantly, must not only record this history but also, in a sense, make it. Klein's writings constitute a truthful though not dispassionate account of the times. They did more. His journalism, which for him was not separable from his participation in the work of the Zionist Organization of Canada and of the Canadian Jewish Congress, or from his literary activities, undoubtedly helped to make the history of his community. It is difficult to assess the impact of a writer on his generation, but we can safely affirm that Klein's influence was pervasive and widespread. As editor of the leading Anglo-Jewish journal in Canada for many years, at what was probably the most critical period in post-Biblical Jewish history and indeed in world history, he reached a large reading-public and on the whole successfully gave expression to their feelings and helped to shape their responses. His wide reading, sensitivity, and intelligence made him a perceptive observer and an able analyst of current political developments, while his command of effective language, his passion, rhetoric and wit, made him an eloquent spokesman, on most occasions, for his people. These qualities put to the service of his people, particularly in their struggle against anti-semitism and on behalf of Zionism, enabled Klein in his journalism to carry out admirably the responsibilities, as he saw them, of chronicler and champion.

Klein's journalism, apart from its value as a chronicle and commentary on events of world-wide import, has particular significance for the student of literature. It is a body of prose writing of genuine literary merit in itself, and insofar as it relates frequently in substance and in language to his poems and fiction, it provides a very useful background, a context, for the study of his creative writing. In a more general sense, by revealing aspects of Klein's personality, ideas, values and commitments, these non-fictional prose writings contribute to our understanding and appreciation of A. M. Klein the poet-journalist.

NOTES

[1] *The Canadian Jewish Chronicle*, May 12, 1944.
[2] "Notes on Cultural Zionism," *The Judaean*, November 1928.
[3] *C.J.C.*, March 18, 1949.
[4] *C.J.C.*, May 13, 1949.
[5] *C.J.C.*, January 9 - February 27, 1953.
[6] *C.J.C.*, January 28, 1944.
[7] *C.J.C.*, September 22, 1944.
[8] *C.J.C.*, March 21, 1941.

POEM FOR VLADIMIR

G. Ripley

time bagged you at last,
pushed through your abdomen
that pin
which holds you tight inside
a cabinet of earth.
death classified you thus:
genius, aesthete, athlete,
a type both rare and known,
here local to the steppe.
when numbers moved and flexed
against your sleep,
you mimicked life, made hours stop
with words, made worlds,
holding the dream at bay and spreading
wings above the plane and linden trees.
perhaps you felt
the night explode again and multiply,
when time said you were dead.

OUR WESTERN TOUR

J. D. Carpenter

Lady bartender at home with a souvenir dog,
New Orleans, 1964
Albino sword swallower at a carnival,
Maryland, 1970
Masked woman in a wheelchair,
Pennsylvania, 1970

— *Diane Arbus*

1

Morning ablutions
— Bow River near Lake Louise

Young bear in garbage
— below Mount Stewart

Rock face
— Sunwapta Pass

Whistling marmot accepting oatmeal
— Maligne Lake

Doe on road
— Tête Jaune Cache

Rapids on North Thompson River
— at Blue River

Horse in field
— McLure

Sagebrush
— Heffley Creek

Loons, goldeyes
— Paul Lake

Hay loaves
— Semlin Ranch

Eatery
— Cache Creek

The Thompson meets the Fraser, grey meets green
— Lytton

Blind man visiting Hell's Gate
— Fraser Canyon

Camper pulling trailer carrying camper carrying
canoe, bicycles, lawnchairs
— Boston Bar

Couple in matching tops, floral pattern
— Jackass Mountain

Girl in ankle socks and cat head, dancing
— Sardis

Indians offering wine to cyclists
— Chilliwack River Road

Prawns, white wine
— English Bay

Man in sauna
— West Vancouver

Baltic II, Ripple Point, Squamish Chief,
Westminster Scout, Arctic Fox II,
The Polish Girl, Rose Beauty, Snow Bay
— Powell River

Clouds in kaleidoscope
— from *Sechelt Queen* in Georgia Strait

Coastal range, black grey, dove
— Grief Point

Car hauling stockcar about to kill
American tourist
— near Comox

Cornucopia, Kittiwake V, Sequel,
Lament, Now Then, Nereus, Serene,
Silver Harvest
— Victoria Harbour

2

Ship in sunfog
— *Coho* in Juan de Fuca Strait

Beer drinkers and majah
— Port Townsend

Lighthouse in silhouette
— from *Rhododendron,* Admiralty Inlet

Park ranger with cigarette
— Deception Pass

Rapids
— Skagit River near Newhalem

Muledeer grazing
— Loup Loup Creek

Sagebrush
— Mazama

Gunfighters, tourists
— Winthrop

Morning ablutions
— Sherman Creek

Flagman
— Columbia River at Evans

Short order cook and mirror
— Northport

3

Deserted street, early morning
— Nelson

Freeform dancers
— Vallican Whole

Europeans in mineral pool
— Ainsworth Hot Springs

Fawn at roadside
— Fry Creek

Swimmer in curlers
— Slocan Lake

Boy with fishbowl, ling cod
— New Denver

Scenic view, litter, three ravens
— Hills

Ruined arena
— Nakusp

Loggers bound for Parson
— aboard *Galena*, Shelter Bay

Moon Café
— Golden

Fawn killed by car
— Bragg Creek

Mad woman, union man, albino man,
men with whippets,
guitarist, flautist, tourist,
shoplifter
— 8th Avenue Mall

Wolf Child, Crowchild, Many Horses,
Laughing After, Went After Water,
Killed Close to the Water, Killed First,
Dog, Dog Eater, Eats Anything,
Scraper, Sleigh, Died After,
Dick Night, Dick Starlight,
Peter Manywounds, Well Slaughtered
— Sarcee and Blackfoot Indians, Glenbow Museum

Morning ablutions
— Round Up Motel, Motel Village, Crowchild Trail

Rabbits on the runway
— Calgary Airport

ORDEAL BY FIRE

The Genesis of MacLennan's The Precipice

Elspeth Cameron

In 1946, on a trip with his wife, Dorothy Duncan, to New York, Hugh MacLennan saw the American Ballet Theatre's new production, *Pillar of Fire*. The occasion was to focus the themes he was considering for his third novel, *The Precipice* (1948). This ballet, in its first performance on April 8, 1942, had marked the emergence of an erotic and modern mode of ballet. Anthony Tudor, choreographer and male lead, and Nora Kaye, the prima ballerina, soared into popularity to an ovation of twenty-six curtain calls. Enthusiasm for *Pillar of Fire*, especially for Nora Kaye in her role as Hagar, continued well beyond the year during which MacLennan saw it.

Before seeing the ballet, MacLennan had been considering two general notions for his next novel.[1] On the suggestion of his friend, Blair Fraser, he had decided to set the novel in "darkest Ontario" — not Toronto, but those small towns which still embodied the Canadian puritan heritage. This puritan heritage had already gone sour in the United States and promised to do the same in Canada — a sociological situation which, Fraser surmised, might prove an interesting subject. This third novel, then, would provide a literary map of yet another Canadian region. Receptive to Fraser's suggestions, MacLennan had spent a week or so in the Ontario lakeshore towns of Coburg, Belleville and Port Hope, chatting with local people, and getting a feel for the countryside. At Port Hope he saw the huge sanitary company there and discovered that it had recently been sold to an American company, with the result that mass-produced facilities of inferior quality were being made. The second idea MacLennan was working on was that of having his central character a woman. This he considered a challenge — how to present convincingly the female point of view.

Seeing *Pillar of Fire* in 1946 produced in MacLennan "an immediate, strong creative feeling." Here, suddenly and by accident, was the "form" which could integrate the general themes uppermost in his mind. As Dorothy Duncan remarked after the ballet, "You have the plot for your novel right there." MacLennan returned to see this "remarkable ballet" a second time; his first impression was confirmed.

Pillar of Fire was inspired primarily by Arnold Schönberg's *Verklärte Nacht* (Transfigured Night), but also by the sequence of poems, *Weib und Welt* (Woman and the World), which gave rise to this music.[2] These poems by the German romantic, Richard Dehmel, describe a situation between two lovers in which the woman confesses that she has conceived a child by a casual relationship. This experience has, she claims, taught her that she loves him rather than the sensual man she has encountered. As they walk through the moonlit woods, the man forgives her, accepts her and maintains that their love is so great that it will transfigure this situation, just as the moon transfigures the night.

Anthony Tudor in *Pillar of Fire*, as George Balanchine describes it in his *New Complete Stories of the Great Ballets*, "takes this story and presents it dramatically, introducing additional characters, giving us a picture of the community in which such an event can take place, motivating the characters as completely as possible."[3] In keeping with the Biblical title[4] (suggestive of a night transformed, not by moonlight and love, but by divine revelation), Tudor names his heroine "Hagar." This name recalls the Egyptian bondswoman of Abraham who is sent by Sarah, his wife, to conceive a child by Abraham; having done so, she is outcast, wandering in the desert until God gives her direction. The name Hagar suggested to Tudor the original "lost woman."[5]

Hagar in *Pillar of Fire* has two sisters — the "Eldest Sister" and the "Youngest Sister." The "Eldest Sister" is a rigid church-going spinster who dominates the household; the "Youngest Sister" is a pretty, insubstantial flirt. The two men who correspond to the true lover and the sensual lover in *Weib und Welt* appear in the ballet as the "Friend" and the "Young Man From The House Opposite."[6] The community in which Tudor sets these characters is Victorian, in keeping with the date of *Verklärte Nacht* (1899) and puritanical, in order to set up a moral framework in which Dehmel's tale might most fully express dramatic conflict.

In Tudor's adaptation of the story, the plainly dressed Hagar, fearing that it is her fate to become a spinster like the "Eldest Sister," hopes for the attention of the visiting "Friend." He, instead, is attracted to the pretty, blond "Youngest Sister" with whom he dances offstage. In a desperate attempt to resist her apparent fate, Hagar responds to the bold "Young Man From The House Opposite," dances a wild *pas de deux* with him and enters with him the house opposite where she has seen couples meeting and embracing. She emerges from the house into a world where her act will inevitably be seen as sin. The "Eldest Sister," in a violent scene, reprimands her, filling her with guilt. The whole community shuns her, even the "Young Man From The House Opposite." The "Friend" returns, disappointed in the superficiality of the "Youngest Sister," and offers Hagar his enduring love. The ballet closes with the two lovers walking into the dark moonlit forest where, presumably, the confession and forgiveness of Dehmel's story will occur.

In THE PRECIPICE, MacLennan bases his main character, Lucy Cameron, on Hagar in *Pillar of Fire*. Like Hagar, she has an elder sister, Jane, who is an inflexible spinster, and a younger sister, Nina, who is a superficial flirt. Jane, aged thirty-seven, takes after her calvinist father, John Knox Cameron:

> Her nose and chin were somewhat pointed, her mouth small and straight. Her features were sharp enough to give her an air of decision, though they were not gaunt. Her dark hair, severely drawn back, formed a widow's peak at the top of her forehead. It was a heart-shaped face, and a vain woman would have made much of it. But nothing about Jane invited admiration; everything about her demanded respect.[7]

Her father's Scottish harshness has turned sour whatever joy in life may have been latent in her, feelings that are revealed only when she plays the *Appassionata* on the piano; "a deep indignant passion of which Jane herself was obviously unaware." Jane is a music teacher, not because she finds music beautiful but because it is "useful." This puritan notion of usefulness also informs her gardening. No flowers for her, only vegetables. Typically divorced from nature, Jane stays indoors reading books as dry and lifeless as possible; for her, "sex was . . . near to the root of all evil." Like her father, she can "create at will an atmosphere in which everyone around her felt guilty." Sternly running the household as her father did before her, Jane, Lucy thinks to herself, "was like their collective conscience. She was the only one of them who followed in thought and in life, all the principles of the religion and morality which the entire Protestant part of the country professed to honour."

Nineteen-year-old Nina, like the "Youngest Sister" in the ballet, marks a contrast to Jane:

> She was a girl with blue eyes, golden curls, snub nose, a wide, laughing mouth, plump bare arms coloured like honey in the sun, and a short neat body that was never still.

In keeping with his placing of the novel between the years 1938-1945, MacLennan indicated that Nina has learned her craft from Hollywood actresses. Knowing herself to be "the prettiest girl in town," Nina indulges herself in clothes and parties as much as she can in the prudent Cameron household. If Jane is their "collective conscience," fun-loving Nina is their collective "id."[8]

Between these two extremes, Lucy is as uncomfortable as Hagar in *Pillar of Fire*. At twenty-seven spinsterhood closes in; Nina bluntly says to Jane, "Nobody would ever want to marry Lucy." Or as Bruce Fraser, her friend next door, puts it, "any pleasures Lucy Cameron would ever have would be shy ones." Even Lucy anticipates with pain "facing a blank wall for the rest of [her] life with a quiet and decent dignity." But the process which has almost completely repressed Jane's emotions has not been quite so effective with Lucy. Jane has an "iron will" and

flawless self-control; for Lucy there is still a lapse between response and repression. When Bruce Fraser calls across the hedge to her, for example, "quick pleasure flashed into her face as she saw him and then was immediately checked." Like Hagar with her clenched fists and palpable tension (and directly recalling Nora Kaye's performance),

> Lucy moved with the quiet grace of a shy animal, yet in all her movements there was an air of conscious control, as though she hoped whatever she did would escape notice. This same characteristic was even more marked in her face. It was an intelligent face ... essentially a proud face. Her chin and the upper part of her head could have modelled a cameo, clear-cut and distant. But in the eyes and mouth unknown qualities brooded. Her large eyes were brown and widely spaced, with curving brows. Her lips were soft and warm and sensuous. These features together with her air of dignified solitude, combined to give her the prevailing expression of a woman who has never been recognized by others for what she knows herself to be.

Thinking herself plain, Lucy disregards her appearance, pulling back her abundant dark hair into a severe style.

Three things in Lucy, however, help to militate against a future like Jane's: her intelligence, her love of beauty and her identification with nature. Lucy's intelligence is instrumental in freeing her from the past. In his treatment of the Cameron family, MacLennan works with the well-known Biblical theme that the sins of the fathers are visited on succeeding generations. Just as John Knox Cameron has been formed by "the merciless religion which her Father's aunts had inflicted upon them," so in turn, Jane and Lucy carry the burden of puritanism handed down by their father. "My father," Lucy realizes, "*was* queer, but it was such a Scotch kind of queerness we never noticed it till after he was dead. Jane doesn't realize it even now." Lucy does realize it — thanks to her intelligence and a three-year illness in her mid-teens which afforded her time to contemplate. Ultimately, Lucy can see what Jane cannot:

> The images of her father's aunts returned, and with them, a rush of indignation and a rise of self-assertive confidence. It was absurd that these two women she had never seen, so ignorant they believed even the misprints in the Bible were sacred, should bind their power into the third generation. Knowledge had power too. She knew what they had done to her father and what her father had done to her. Knowledge was the only power in the world which could undo the chain of evil men left behind them.

"Yes," she asserts, "there was knowledge. It exorcised the past from the present. Now this whole thing was throbbing with present life; the only thing of meaning and merit." Lucy can free herself from the past through intelligent perception.

Jane is immune to beauty. Not so Lucy who appreciates with a reverence. Recalling some romantic lines of poetry from William Strode's "In Praise of Music," Lucy responds deeply:

> One thing had stood by her, and she had learned how to foster it. She had learned how to discover beauty when no one else was near.... It was the kind of beauty ... which exists almost without knowledge of good and evil, probably the only kind possible in a puritan town.

Particularly from her garden and the beauty of flowers does she derive pure joy.

Moreover, Lucy feels herself a part of nature; from this identification she derives strength. Just as Jane is seen typically in the house, as is the "Eldest Sister" in *Pillar of Fire*, Lucy most often appears outdoors, especially in her garden. This garden, with all its Biblical and secular associations, recalls man's religious and natural roots. Certainly Dehmel had made much of this theme in *Weib und Welt*, where the lover takes most of his arguments from nature. Similarly, *Pillar of Fire* vindicates a natural world which is at odds with the civilized community which rejects "natural" behaviour. To reinforce this theme, MacLennan sets Lucy in the natural world, describing her as a "shy animal" and making her rejection of the town's values in favour of the natural world:

> Lucy went alone into the garden to inspect her flowers before it got too dark to see them. In full sunshine the garden was unchangingly brilliant, but in the morning and evening the flowers were like an assembly of living things, resting in the evening, in the morning like children eager to shout how fresh they were after the night and how much they had grown. Now the hyperion lilies had almost closed, but in the gathering darkness the nicotianas had opened and were filling the air with fragrance. A sickle moon was in the sky, half hidden by the upper branches of a maple tree. One pale star was visible beside it.

In a conversation with Stephen, Lucy confesses,

> "well, to me just being — just existing — would be a full life, if — "
> "If what?"
> "If I felt I were making the most of all that lay around me. If I felt free to be myself — as natural as one of those flowers."

MacLennan thus prepares the way for Lucy's sexual awakening through her identification with "nature"; in doing so, she harks back to both Dehmel's *Weib und Welt* and *Pillar of Fire*.

The transformation of Hagar in *Pillar of Fire* is transposed directly into *The Precipice*. Lucy's transformation from probable spinster to full-awakened womanhood is essentially the same as Hagar's. Flanked on the one hand by the "Eldest Sister" who represents the rejection of physical love, and on the other hand by the "Youngest Sister" who represents the superficiality of sensual love, both Hagar and Lucy discover through painful experience the fullness of a love that embraces both physical passion and tenderness. For each there is a rite of passage from innocence, through experience, to fulfillment. MacLennan relates this transfiguration in Lucy directly to the laws of nature. In her garden, early in the novel, Lucy speculates:

> Now all the thoughtless world was busy fulfilling innumerable life cycles, most of them with such savage cruelty that Jane would have been appalled if she understood what they meant. Lucy watched the lilies eager toward the sun, the nicotianas sturdy in the heat like white-faced women with closed eyes, the phlox crowding each other in their struggle to live. It was odd that gardening was supposed to be the gentle occupation. Any garden was an arena of frantic strife.

The view of life here is distinctly Darwinian; Lucy plunges into life, bidding for survival itself, compelled by natural urges more powerful than any individual.

As she herself concludes later,

> there is nothing unique in the fact that the least probable men and women attach themselves to one another and that time and place are more selective than we ourselves know how to be. People can join as much by random chance as the grains of pollen which meet in the air.

And her actual sexual awakening connects her with a prehistoric past: "Out of the ecstasy grew and became visible, a jet of unbelievable flame flaring out of primeval darkness." A revelation, a pillar of fire.[9] Lucy, like the plants she adores, never ceases to grow. Despite suffering, "she had refused nothing. She had lived . . . Now at least she was a whole woman."

Instrumental in Lucy's transformation are the two men in her life: Bruce Fraser and Stephen Lassiter. In both *Weib und Welt* and *Pillar of Fire* there are two men. In the former, there is the sensual lover by whom the woman has conceived a child, and the true lover who accepts her, despite her condition; in the latter, there is the sensual lover, the "Young Man From The House Opposite," and the true lover, the "Friend." In both works, the woman, desperate for the love of the true lover, turns to a sensual lover, then is outcast, to be accepted finally by the true lover. In *The Precipice*, however, the "Friend," Bruce Fraser, is also the "Young Man From The House Opposite." The sensual lover is Stephen Lassiter, the American efficiency expert who has been deserted by his wife.

The roles played by these two men are, consequently, somewhat different from those of the two men in *Pillar of Fire*. Like the "Friend" in the ballet, Bruce, at first, cannot see Lucy as she is:

> Bruce was too young, he was too engrossed in his own problems — in trying to understand the surfaces of so many different things — to be able to feel what lay within her, or even to know it was there. Like most of the men she had met, he looked for nothing in a woman's mind but some reflection of his own.

But there is no evidence in *The Precipice* that Lucy loves him as Hagar loves the "Friend" in *Pillar of Fire*. She is attracted instead to Stephen, the sensual man, who recognizes and answers her physical needs. MacLennan emphasizes Stephen's physicality by making him a young, athletic man; Lucy first sees him playing tennis:

> Lassiter was well over six feet in height, but his chest and shoulders were so powerful he seemed large rather than tall. In spite of his muscular development he was not still; he moved on the court with the feline precision of a natural tennis player.

This "animal vitality" links Stephen with the natural world of which Lucy is so much a part. He and Lucy are initially attracted to each other and ultimately "bonded" by natural instinct: "He had invaded her solitude and taught her finally that she was passionate, probably more passionate than the average woman." In marked contrast to Stephen, the more intellectual Bruce links Lucy's garden "with a political and philosophical idea."

Although Lucy does not consummate her relationship with Stephen, as Hagar does with the "Young Man From The House Opposite," she undergoes the same brutal criticism from society in general, and her elder sister in particular, that Hagar does in the ballet. In a scene taken directly from *Pillar of Fire*, Jane berates Lucy: "if they [the people of Grenville] said you'd been committing adultery with this sordid American — and you may be sure that's exactly what they *would* say if the talk started . . . do you think you'd be able to tell me *then* you weren't ashamed?"

Outcast like the woman in *Weib und Welt*, like Hagar in *Pillar of Fire* and like the Biblical Hagar before her, Lucy elopes with Stephen to New York. Only after she is married does Bruce perceive her beauty:

> he had been a fool not to have seen Lucy with different eyes all the years she had lived in Grenville. It was almost shameful to have come to New York and here see her with her husband and child before discovering that she was a beautiful woman.

This irony does not resolve into a happy ending for Bruce, as it does for the "Friend" in *Pillar of Fire*. Even when Lucy's marriage to Stephen disintegrates under the pressure of his "unnatural" work patterns and Lucy returns to Grenville with her children, she does not give herself to Bruce. Ironically she comes to see that she and Bruce have needed exactly the same thing, someone to see beneath the surface and recognize the true self: "She knew tonight, clearly for the first time, in what she had failed him. She had not sufficiently understood the tensions, she had given him no adequate releases for them." Her decision to return to Stephen leaves Bruce feeling as if he is on the edge of a precipice. Thus, although MacLennan altered in several significant ways the plot of *Pillar of Fire*, and the roles of the two men who act as catalysts in Lucy's transformation, his novel is clearly drawn in large part from the ballet.

Some settings in *The Precipice* can also be traced to *Pillar of Fire*. The set for the ballet in the 1946 production showed two houses facing each other across the stage; one belonging to the three sisters, the other belonging to the "Young Man From The House Opposite." Behind these is a moonlit forest as backdrop.[10]

In *The Precipice*, the houses are next door, affording Bruce a view of the Cameron garden. The "high, narrow house . . . embellished with Victorian scrolls"[11] from the ballet is transposed into a house in Grenville that MacLennan uses to foreshadow Lucy's rebellion against her Calvinist past; having "stripped off the imposed ugliness" of the harsh brown paint her father had used, Lucy has painted it white with a turquoise door and surrounded it with flower beds.[12] Though he based Grenville on three Ontario towns, MacLennan draws in more specific detail "the picture of a community in which such an event can take place"[13] from *Pillar of Fire*. Like the community there, Grenville has a small-town outlook, the result of puritan conditioning:

> Here was lodged the hard core of Canadian matter-of-factness on which men of imagination had been breaking themselves for years. Grenville was sound, it was dull, it was loyal, it was competent — and oh, God, it was so Canadian! . . . Until the Grenvilles of Canada were debunked from top to bottom, Bruce decided, there would be no fun and no future for anyone in the country.

The town is "prematurely old," largely composed of women and children preoccupied with respectability. Even the fields around it, Stephen observes, "look respectable." It is, Lucy sums up, "a town where people never divorced, where passion was either orderly and blessed by clergy, or else concealed and crushed out of existence." The town, in other words, is diametrically opposed to nature, imposing an overlay of respectability which hides the great passions and stultifies imagination. Lucy describes the force of this community as "closing in around her, freezing her into the mold of perpetual childhood."

Finally, vestiges of the ballet surface from time to time in MacLennan's descriptions of the gestures of the three sisters. Jane is always "erect" or "brisk"; Nina "gambols" and is "never still." Lucy's movements develop, like those of Hagar in the ballet, from tense constraint, through "quiet grace" to "suppleness." On one occasion, her inward response to Stephen's caresses could stand as a description of part of *Pillar of Fire* against the moonlit backdrop:

> She turned from him and moved inland. In this haunted, luminous mist the trees were strange. They were cool and ghostly like fungoid outgrowths of the darkness itself, like the colourless, scentless, noiseless landscape of a dark dream through which once she had wandered lost and alien, and then had awakened.

Indeed, the turning point in Lucy's transformation occurs at a dance to which Stephen takes her, after which she "never felt herself a spectator again." This scene is strongly reminiscent of that section of *Pillar of Fire* in which Hagar dances with the "Young Man From The House Opposite" before they enter the house and her sexual initiation takes place. During this part of *Pillar of Fire*, the "Young Sister" has danced off-stage with the "Friend," a situation roughly paralleled in *The Precipice*, where Nina's partner at the dance is Bruce.

BUT WHILE MACLENNAN uses directly several aspects of *Pillar of Fire*, he changes others significantly in his novel. The basic framework of the "Cinderella" theme[14] forms the backbone of the novel. Lucy's transformation from repressed girl to fulfilled woman is in essence and detail like that of Hagar. Her rite of passage is unchanged in its context of the three sisters. Any reader of the novel will recognize at once, however, that MacLennan does not let this framework stand on its own. He fleshes it out with themes, characters and concerns which overwhelm Lucy's story. Indeed, the novel's title *The Precipice* testifies to the centrality of the theme suggested by the Port Hope Sanitary Company — that of the puritanical drive for material success which motivates the American, Stephen Lassiter. Heavy with moral, philosophical and social comment, they swamp the more delicate theme of Lucy's rebirth which constituted the whole concern of *Pillar of Fire*.

MacLennan also accounts in great detail for the personalities, actions and motives of his characters. The burden of puritanism and its effects are traced back two generations, both for Lucy and her sisters and for Stephen Lassiter. Nina's flirtation is attributed to her interest in films; Stephen's attraction to Lucy is explained by noting her resemblance to his mother; even Grenville's attitudes are traced back to early Loyalist times. The novel is, consequently, firmly placed in small-town Ontario during the Second World War. This more factual representation of the story detracts from the mystery of *Pillar of Fire*, a mystery even more evident in *Weib und Welt* where the characters are unnamed and the timeless omnipresent natural world broods over them. On the other hand, this specific setting affords MacLennan the opportunity to speculate on such topics as the advertising world, Canadian nationalism, and puritanism in Canada and the United States — topics which may interest the more historically-minded reader.

While some of the settings in *The Precipice* are taken directly from the ballet, many are added by MacLennan. The set for *Pillar of Fire*, with its Victorian houses, must have suggested small-town Ontario to MacLennan, just as the Victorian morality of the community suggested Canadian puritanism. These settings, and those scenes in the woods, fields and beach near Grenville are strongly reminiscent of the ballet. MacLennan adds to these the scenes in New York and Princeton, taken from his direct personal experience. That these scenes seem of a jarringly different order than the earlier Grenville scenes is, consequently, not surprising. Lucy in New York is not only transformed from her earlier self, she also inhabits a different level of reality.

The theme of opposition between nature and society is essentially unchanged from *Weib und Welt* through *Pillar of Fire* to *The Precipice*. In all three, natural law romantically triumphs over civil law, and beauty is vindicated. Here, too, MacLennan renders the theme more specific. His view of nature has Darwinian

overtones, relating Lucy's struggle both to survival against odds (many men from Grenville being away at war), and to natural selection (in her urge to have children by the strongest male). Civil law is specifically defined as the moral codes of Scotch puritanism. In the debate between natural and civil law, MacLennan introduces as his spokesman a defrocked priest named Matt McCunn, who lives by anti-puritan values, symbolically outside the town.

The most pronounced difference between *Pillar of Fire* and *The Precipice* is the difference in the roles played by the two men. MacLennan portrays Lucy as faithful to one man. It is the sensual lover, not the friend, who commands her love throughout. Furthermore, unlike both Hagar and the woman in *Weib und Welt*, Lucy does not conceive a child out of wedlock. She discovers her full sexual nature gradually through marriage with Stephen, and MacLennan terms her a "whole woman" only after she has had children. This is significantly different from the more sensational sequence of events in *Pillar of Fire* and *Weib und Welt* where the woman, having conceived a child by a lover, returns to the deeper relationship with a friend.[15] This change alters the plot. Gone is much of the tension between Lucy and Nina, although Nina seems to be drawing Bruce away from Lucy, not only in the early part of the novel, but also later when Lucy leaves Stephen to return to Grenville. Instead, MacLennan has Nina compete briefly for Stephen's attention; though, again, it is never a serious competition. Nina, in fact, in one scene supports Lucy's bid to find love against Jane's criticism, a scene for which there is no precedent in the ballet. This dilution of the competitiveness between Lucy and Nina dulls the keen edge of the story and is inconsistent with the Darwinian view of nature propounded in the novel. By having Lucy remain loyal to Stephen, MacLennan seems to put forward a view that sexual intimacy and children bond a couple "naturally," a view consistent with his treatment of marriage in other novels.

Finally, the depiction of Bruce Fraser lends a completely new dimension to the original story. In *Pillar of Fire*, both men succeed: the "Young Man From The House Opposite" enjoys Hagar when he desires her; the "Friend" returns to have her permanently. A fine ironic balance is achieved in the ballet when the "Youngest Sister" wanders off with the "Young Man From The House Opposite" at the ballet's close. Bruce, in contrast to this, fails. He never cares for Nina and, falling in love with Lucy only after her marriage, he waits hopelessly in the wings. Even when it appears he may yet have her once she has left her husband, she decides to return to Stephen. Bruce's story runs parallel to Lucy's. Her true self is sought out and nurtured by Stephen; Bruce is not lucky enough to meet anyone to do the same for him. MacLennan seems to have identified with the role of Hagar in *Pillar of Fire*, as well as observing it as a feminine phenomenon. Indeed, Bruce's role — that of an "unreleased Hagar" — resembles that of Nick Carraway in *The Great Gatsby*. Like Nick, Bruce is the observer who merely looks on and records the lines

of those more passionate than himself. MacLennan was later to define the quality Bruce never develops as "spirit."

Somehow the story of *The Precipice*, though ostensibly Lucy's (and Stephen's) is really Bruce Fraser's. Had MacLennan allowed Bruce to narrate the tale, as Nick Carraway did in *The Great Gatsby* and George Stewart was later to do in *The Watch That Ends The Night*, the novel would have been a stronger and more ironic one. Bruce is, then, a prototype for George Stewart. In *The Watch That Ends The Night*, MacLennan's interest was to focus more clearly on the "Everyman" theme, which first appears with Bruce in *The Precipice*.[16] It must have been Hagar's anguished isolation at the beginning of *Pillar of Fire* which most struck MacLennan as emblematic of the human condition. Through *Pillar of Fire* and the raw working out of its themes in *The Precipice*, MacLennan was to strike the motherlode which was not to be fully mined until *The Watch That Ends The Night*.

NOTES

[1] Interviews with Hugh MacLennan, January 6, 1976 and September 29, 1976.

[2] MacLennan had studied at Oxford some poems from *Weib und Welt* in the *Oxford Book of German Verse*.

[3] George Balanchine, *New Complete Stories of the Great Ballets*, ed. Frances Mason (New York: Doubleday, 1968), p. 307.

[4] God is said to appear "by day in a pillar of cloud to lead them (the Israelites) the way; and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light" (Exodus: 13,xxi).

[5] Interview with Anthony Tudor, September 6, 1976.

[6] MacLennan saw the following cast in these roles: Hagar — Nora Kaye; The Friend — Anthony Tudor; Eldest Sister — Lucie Chase; Youngest Sister — Janet Reed; Young Man From The House Opposite — Hugh Laing.

[7] This description of Jane is reminiscent of Lucia Chase in her role of "Eldest Sister" in *Pillar of Fire*. Anthony Tudor described Miss Chase as "pure granite" (Interview, September 6, 1976).

[8] MacLennan seems deliberately to suggest this Freudian interpretation by calling Nina's dog "Pan." Just as Jane represents the "super-ego" Nina represents the "id," or hedonistic nature.

[9] Anthony Tudor was well aware of the phallic implications of this title, an implication hinted at here by MacLennan.

[10] The costumes and set of *Pillar of Fire* remain the same from performance to performance. Always Victorian in period because Schönberg's music was composed in 1900, only the slightest variations in set (silver birches in the forest for the Norwegian performance, for example) have given local colour to different performances. (In interview with Anthony Tudor, September 6, 1976.)

[11] Balanchine, p. 307.

[12] Something Hagar would never have been allowed to do by her "Eldest Sister." (Interview with Anthony Tudor, September 6, 1976.)

[13] Balanchine, p. 307.

[14] The term "Cinderella theme" is used here, as it is by MacLennan in his description

of the novel, in the general sense of the ancient "three sisters" story. Anthony Tudor disclaims any connection between the Cinderella story and *Pillar of Fire* and has taken great pains in his directing of the ballet to prevent any hint of Cinderella from appearing in the interpretation of Hagar. (Interview with Anthony Tudor, September 6, 1976.)

[15] Anthony Tudor intended his Hagar to have conceived a child in her brief encounter with the "Young Man From The House Opposite." (Interview, September 6, 1976.)

[16] At the beginning of Section 5 of *The Precipice*, MacLennan speculates: "We reach a point where we can physically go no farther, but our thoughts leap and then for a few moments we are on our way to becoming Everyman."

DREAM FOR AN ASTHMATIC LOVER

Susan Leslie

Lying in the moonlight
Lost lost
You fall
Through sheets and fingers
Down flooded halls
Past vacant beach
to the smooth enveloping sea

Water, you said
I dream of water
Nightly I drown
I am nightly devolving
This unseen fall
Is easier
Than the daily struggle for breath
I slip with the tide
Pulling back to the time
When I began
When I was simple
An urgent arrangement of flesh
This body swimming surviving
Before words before breath

Lying in the moonlight
You are breathing
The air comes through the open window
And you breathe as if
Equipped for this medium
For this cool, solitary air

But you walk
In the darkness and the slow slow time
Of the bottom of the sea
While I watch
You drift on the verge
Of continents
You shift in your sleep
And long banners of weed
Conceal your passage

You stay unmoving in the sand
Ignored by other things
No gasp betrays your presence
You have forgotten land and air
On the hills of the bottom of the sea
You lie

Lost in the moonlight
Drowning in your sleep
Miles below the surface I float on and touch —

SUNFLOWER SEEDS

Klein's Hero and Demagogue

Zailig Pollock

In "POLITICAL MEETING" A. M. Klein describes an orator addressing an anti-conscription rally in Quebec. The Orator, we are told, is "a country uncle with sunflower seeds in his pockets." The description of the sunflower seeds in the Orator's pockets is the most vivid physical detail in the poem. But it is more than just that. For anyone who knows "Political Meeting," the image of the sunflower seeds has the power to call up the complex mood of the poem, and, in particular, its ambivalent attitude to the Orator. Significantly, the image occurs exactly midway through the poem (in the twentieth of its thirty-nine lines), for in retrospect it seems to be a kind of centre out of which the whole poem emanates.

What, precisely, *is* the attitude to the Orator in the poem? The poem is subtitled "*For Camillien Houde*," but even without this subtitle it would be easy to recognize the Orator as a portrait of Houde, the popular mayor of Montreal who not only had the same appearance and manner as the Orator, but also, like him, spoke out strongly against conscription. Klein, as a Jew, had little sympathy with those who interfered with the war against Hitler, and when Houde was interned without trial by the Mackenzie King government, Klein certainly did not object. At the time, Klein was editor of the *Canadian Jewish Chronicle*, and he gleefully, almost gloatingly, reprinted an editorial from the Montreal *Gazette* condemning Houde as a traitor.[1] But "Political Meeting" was first published six years later, and though Klein still clearly disapproves of Houde's position as represented by the Orator, his attitude seems less simple than before, perhaps because he is no longer writing under the immediate pressure of war. He is not satisfied simply to condemn the Orator as an evil man; he is interested in exploring the strength of his appeal, and, through exploring it, he discovers that he himself is not immune to it, whatever he may think of the Orator's ultimate aims. The subtitle of the poem is, perhaps, revealing in this regard: though Klein is against the Orator, he is, in a sense, for him as well, "*for* Camillien Houde." This is what makes the Orator so dangerous, that there is something genuine and valuable in him and in his relation to his followers.

Klein's ambivalent attitude to the Orator, deep distrust mixed with fascination, even with a kind of admiration, comes through especially in the detail of the sunflower seeds. What are these sunflower seeds? Are they a cynical ploy on the part of the Orator to manipulate his audience's sympathies by parading his humble "country" background? Clearly they are that. But they are also a sign that, whatever his ultimate intentions, he really is rooted in the same world as the people he is addressing and that he is genuinely moved by the same concerns as they are.

This interpretation of the role of the sunflower seeds in "Political Meeting" is supported by a passage in *The Second Scroll.* The narrator of the novel tells how, when he was a child in Montreal, refugees arrived from his parents' village in the old country and described a pogrom which had wiped out many of his parents' friends, neighbours, and relatives. The narrator says of the visitors: "Their faces were lined and always held serious expressions except when they patted my head and I discovered that they had sunflower seeds in their pockets. They spoke with a great and bitter intensity." In a footnote, the narrator says "Somehow my entire childhood is evoked through this incident." I think it is legitimate to see Klein himself speaking here, especially since the note goes on to refer us to another version of the incident in a poem entitled "Autobiographical" which Klein had written several years before *The Second Scroll.* In describing the Orator, then, Klein has used a detail, "sunflower seeds in his pockets," which evokes for him the world of his childhood with its intense sense of community, of "home and the familiar" as he says in "Autobiographical." That is, he is associating the Orator with what is most valuable to him in his own life. He rejects the Orator's politics; he rejects the dark passions he arouses in the crowd; but he feels a deep sympathy for a man who, after all, is trying to defend his community with the same "great and bitter intensity" of the refugees from the pogrom.[2]

Klein's choice of the image of sunflower seeds, then, can be seen in two different contexts. We can see Klein as cleverly choosing a telling detail, in the fashion of a novelist of manners, which throws light on a particular social situation, or we can see him as making use of an intense personal association which is more significant to him than to his readers, most of whom have no way of knowing about it. Whichever context we choose, we seem to arrive at the same sense, a disturbing sense of ambivalence towards the Orator and what he represents.

There is a third approach to the sunflower seeds which also supports this sense, but which, in the end, tells us much more than the other two. This approach concentrates neither on the external world with which Klein's art deals — the world of Klein's society — nor on the internal world from which his art ultimately springs — the world of Klein's psyche; instead it concentrates on the art itself. Klein's lifework is a single complex whole unified by a central concern, and when we are able to see the image of the sunflower seeds as part of this whole, it takes on a resonance that could otherwise hardly be guessed at. Though it may be useful to

know about Klein's society and his spiritual biography, what we must really know about is his art and the vision it embodies.

A. M. Klein's work as a whole can be seen as one extended exploration of a central vision, a vision of the One in the many.[3] That is, although the nature of things is infinitely varied, this variety is the expression of an underlying unity. The underlying unity does not have an independent existence of its own; it is not, in some sense, "out there." It exists only in the variety through which it is expressed: the One exists *in* the many, not *apart* from it.

Throughout his career as an artist, Klein is concerned with recreating this vision of the One in the many in the very forms of his poems. Perhaps the most obvious way in which he creates formal equivalents of the One in the many is by grouping poems together under single titles. Nearly half the poetry in the *Collected Poems* consists of such groups. In this way we are presented with an experience of the many which points to an underlying unity. The most important of these more than twenty collections, and the one in which form most obviously mirrors content, is "Out of the Pulver and the Polished Lens," which is a celebration of Spinoza, the greatest philosopher of the One in the many. *The Second Scroll* can also be seen as a kind of collection demonstrating in its form the One in the many.[4] It consists of five chapters linked by their titles to the five books of the Pentateuch, the first scroll. Each book has a separate appendix, or gloss, and the last gloss is, in itself, a collection of poems.

WHEN WE TURN TO INDIVIDUAL poems, we continue to see the principle of the One in the many at work. In "Portrait of the Poet as Landscape," Klein speaks of the Poet naming the universe "item by exciting item." This is an excellent description of Klein's method in many of his finest poems, as well as in *The Second Scroll*, especially the "Catalogue of Incognitos." That is, Klein often makes use of the oldest poetic form of all, the catalogue or list of items. Though this technique may appear primitive, Klein's use of it is invariably sophisticated: listing the many is always some way of commenting on the One. A striking example of this technique is the opening of "Portrait of the Poet as Landscape," describing the indifference of the world to the apparent death of the Poet:

> Not an editorial-writer, bereaved with bartlett,
> mourns him, the shelved Lycidas.
> No actress squeezes a glycerine tear for him.
> The radio broadcast lets his passing pass.
> And with the police, no record.

This apparently random, unconnected list of different ways of ignoring the Poet

in itself demonstrates the fragmentation of a world which rejects the unifying power of poetry.

Another aspect of Klein's art which is even more striking evidence of his concern with the One in the many is his use of metaphor. Klein's use of metaphor is at its highest, most developed form in the poems of *The Rocking Chair.* Again and again he begins with one particular thing — a rocking chair, a refrigerator, a grain elevator — and spins out of it a seemingly endless string of metaphors which appear to lead off in totally different directions but which all take us back to the actual thing itself, whose essential nature provides them with their underlying unity. One example is "Lone Bather," which begins

> Upon the ecstatic diving board the diver,
> poised for parabolas, lets go
> lets go his manshape to become a bird.
> Is bird, and topsy-turvy
> the pool floats overhead, and the white tiles snow
> their crazy hexagons. Is dolphin. Then
> is plant with lilies bursting from his heels.

But of all the aspects of Klein's art which point to his central concern, perhaps the most interesting, the one which seems to work on the deepest level, is his imagery. There are certain images which recur again and again in Klein's work and take on a greater intensity as his art matures. These images tend to cluster together in the works which are his major achievements and his major statements on the purpose of his art, works such as "Out of the Pulver and the Polished Lens," "Portrait of the Poet as Landscape," and *The Second Scroll.* Two of the most important of these images are dismemberment and flowers.

Klein often uses imagery of dismemberment to represent the world of the many in which the unifying vision of the One has been lost sight of. The most powerful dismemberment passage in Klein's work occurs in Melech's description of the Sistine Chapel in "Gloss Gimel," the third gloss of *The Second Scroll.* Michelangelo's portrayal of the divinity of the whole human form reminds Melech of

> another scattering of limbs, other conglomerations of bodies the disjected members of which I had but recently beheld... I saw again the *relictae* of the camps ... the human form divine ... reduced and broken down to its named bones, femur and tibia and clavicle and ulna and thorax and pelvis and cranium....[5]

In "Meditations Upon Survival," Klein describes his dismembered people as "longing / for its members' re-membering!" The pun on remembering is important, for Klein often presents the process of unification, of "re-membering," as a kind of "remembering," of locating oneself in a tradition which has been temporarily disrupted. When Spinoza "remember[s] the thought of the Adored," and when Klein's poet "remember[s] his travels over [the] body" of language, they are both re-membering something which their misguided contemporaries have

dismembered. Klein's most moving description of the process of remembering occurs in *The Second Scroll*, when the narrator witnesses the coming to life of the ancient Hebrew language in the new land of Israel, and sees it as the restoring of a oneness which the Jewish people had yearned for over the centuries.

> It was as if I was spectator to the healing of torn flesh, or heard a broken bone come together, set, and grow again.
>
> Wonderful is the engrafting of skin, but more wonderful the million busy hushed cells, in secret planning, stitching, stretching, until — the wound is vanished, the blood courses normal, the cicatrice falls off.

If imagery of dismemberment suggests a world of the many where the One has been lost sight of, imagery of flowers, especially in bunches, occurs whenever Klein perceives the vision of the One in the many with the greatest intensity. At the end of "Out of the Pulver and the Polished Lens," we are told to

> Think of Spinoza . . . plucking tulips
> Within the garden of Mynheer, forgetting
> Dutchmen and Rabbins, and consumptive fretting,
> Plucking his tulips in the Holland sun,
> Remembering the thought of the Adored,
> Spinoza, gathering flowers for the One,
> The ever-unwedded lover of the Lord.

Spinoza's vision of the One in the many is symbolized by his picking tulips in the sun, which is their ultimate source, and gathering them up as a gift for the One.[6] "Portrait of the Poet as Landscape" ends with a similar vision of the poet alone in the garden of the One — the Garden of Eden — planting seeds. In "Grain Elevator," Klein transforms the huge cement box of the grain elevator into a flower box symbolizing the unity of mankind:

> always this great box flowers over us
> with all the coloured faces of mankind. . . .

In *The Second Scroll*, the narrator is sent to Israel to compile an "anthology" of Hebrew poetry which will give evidence of the oneness which Israel embodies. Klein, who describes the anthology as "flower-picking," is clearly aware that "anthology" is derived from a Greek word meaning "flower gathering" (compare Spinoza "gathering flowers for the One"). The most exciting poetry which the narrator discovers is the poetry of everyday speech, the poetry of a language and a nation reborn. We have already seen how he describes this discovery in terms of a dismembered body re-membering itself. He also describes it, in the same passage, in terms of flowers:

> Nameless authorship flourished in the streets. It was growth, its very principle, shown in prolific action! Twigs and branches that had been dry and sapless for generations, for millennia, now budded, blossomed — and with new flowers!
>
> I had at last discovered it, the great efflorescent impersonality.

IT SHOULD BE CLEAR BY NOW that Klein is deeply concerned with, even obsessed by, his vision of the One in the many. What may not yet be clear is why. My discussion so far may have suggested that Klein's concern is primarily philosophical or aesthetic. This, I believe, is not true. For Klein, the deepest significance of the vision of the One in the many is that it allows him to define the most important moral question of his age, and perhaps of any age, the relation of the individual to the community of which he is a part. To Klein, whose period of artistic maturity coincided with the age of the dictators and its immediate aftermath, this question presents itself in one form in particular. What is the difference between a hero and a demagogue?

Spinoza, who is the greatest spokesman for the philosophy of the One in the many, is also one of Klein's ideal heroes, for, as "Out of the Pulver and the Polished Lens" argues, the two go hand in hand. Spinoza's philosophy involves the rejection of the dogma of a transcendent God in favour of a vision of God as immanent. That is, the rabbinical élite of Judaism, as well as the priestly élite of Christianity, argue that God exists apart from His creation, which He controls but with which He has nothing in common. The rabbis and priests locate God "within his vacuum of heaven" where "suspended in mid-air" He "play[s] his game of celestial solitaire," the solitary One "exiled" from the many.[7] Instead of this transcendent God, Spinoza postulates an immanent God whose only existence is in the world of the many. Klein has Spinoza say to his God "thou art the world," recalling the actual claim of the historical Spinoza that nature, the world of the many, is simply the form in which we perceive the One which is God.

The reason why rabbis and priests present God as transcendent is obvious: by claiming that they are the chosen servants of a God who is beyond the world of everyday experience, they can acquire power as members of a ruling élite. In a typical Kleinian pun, the rabbis are said to have made God into a "factotum." A factotum, of course, is a menial servant, but the literal meaning of the word is someone who does everything; by claiming that the omnipotent God, the God who does everything, is transcendent, they have turned him into a servant whom they use for their own ends. The ultimate product of the transcendent religion of the rabbis is the demagogue Shabbathai Zvi who is described in the last section of the poem. Shabbathai Zvi was a contemporary of Spinoza's who claimed to be the Messiah and was accepted as such by most of the Jewish world. He eventually betrayed his followers, causing them immense suffering. As Klein describes him, Shabbathai Zvi perverts a holy ritual whose purpose is to bind men together, by using it to set himself apart from his fellow men. Specifically, he asserts his claim to be the Messiah by performing a public marriage ceremony with the Torah, the scroll containing God's word.

Spinoza, with his philosophy of an immanent One *in* the many, rather than a

transcendent One *apart* from the many, is the precise opposite of Shabbathai Zvi: a true hero rather than a false demagogue. In direct analogy with his immanent God, Spinoza refuses to set himself up to be worshipped. In the end, through his teachings, he exerts a unifying influence on his community which Shabbathai Zvi can only parody. But he exerts this influence unobtrusively from within the garden where he "gather[s] flowers for the One," heroically embodying, in his life as well as in his philosophy, the true vision of the One in the many.

For Klein, the demagogue is always a Shabbathai Zvi, a kind of transcendent God thrown up by a frightened multitude which needs to be reassured by hearing its many voices echoed back from a figure who can arouse a sense of worship. The demagogue is essentially passive and uncreative, a hollow personality constructed out of clichés, who, in the absence of the true hero, simply magnifies all that is most superficial, least vital in the people he claims to lead. In *The Hitleriad*, Klein says of Hitler, the most evil of demagogues:

> through him, magnified
> Smallness comes to our ken —
> The total bigness of
> All little men.

The hero, like the immanent God, the One *in* the many, never sets himself above his people to be worshipped. Unlike the demagogue he is not a public figure: he is hidden, private. As far as his people are consciously aware, he might as well not exist. Uncle Melech speaks of the version of creation in the Cabbala, the Jewish mystical tradition: "there [was] fashioned Aught from Naught," something from nothing. The Cabbala speaks of the Creator as "Naught," as nothing, because he cannot be perceived apart from his creation; if we try to look for the One apart from the many what we see is precisely nothing.[8] The same is true of the hero who works in hidden, unobtrusive ways creatively unifying the society whose profoundest ideas he embodies. In the most real sense of the word the hero does not exist apart from his society since his identity as a particular individual is what is least important about him. His real existence, all that really matters about him, is the unifying influence he exerts on his society. Because he works through his society's deepest, most unconscious levels, the hero is likely to be misunderstood and perceived as a threat rather than as a saviour. But, though rejected, it is he and he alone who can give continuing life to the community of which he is a part. As Klein says of Joseph: "Rooted in the common soil, he turns his eyes to new directions."

Klein gives other examples of the true hero, besides Spinoza. The Poet in "Portrait of the Poet as Landscape" leaves fame to demagogic "impostors," and accepts his anonymity as a condition for his true heroic task of creation; he "makes of his status as zero a rich garland, / a halo of his anonymity."

Uncle Melech is similarly anonymous. In his death, as in his life, he brings his people together, but we never see him apart from them: the only photograph of him is a multiple exposure. Like all true heroes, Uncle Melech is a "great efflorescent impersonality," a flowering out into the many, uniting his whole society, but doing so impersonally, without the personal fame and worship which is the motive of the demagogue.

The great danger of the demagogue is that, although he is a self-interested manipulator, the impulse he appeals to is, at bottom, a genuine one: the desire of a fragmented people for unity. Klein's portrayal of the demagogue is at its most powerful when he can make us feel this appeal, which he himself feels at the deepest level of his being, and, at the same time, can alert us to its dangers. Klein's attack on Hitler in *The Hitleriad* is such a dismal failure because he is so repelled by Hitler that he presents him as simply a disgusting buffoon who could not possibly appeal to any feelings that a decent person might share. A demagogue who is merely a buffoon is of no interest; one who, like the Orator in "Political Meeting," taps the same depths of feeling as the true hero is much more dangerous.[9]

In "POLITICAL MEETING," a community is united in a "ritual," a quasi-religious ceremony complete with cross ("the agonized Y"), "surplices," and "gargoyles." It is a kind of communion, and the moment when the Orator arises recalls the elevation of the Host — "The Orator has risen!" But there is something wrong with this ritual; it is directed towards a false god, an "idol" who is using a solemn ritual of unification for the purpose of being "worshipped," just as Shabbathai Zvi does in "Out of the Pulver and the Polished Lens."

The disturbing quality of this ritual is suggested by Klein's description of the crowd singing the traditional song of "the ritual bird":

> suddenly some one lets loose upon the air
> the ritual bird which the crowd in snares of singing
>
> catches and plucks, throat, wings, and little limbs.
> Fall the feathers of sound, like *alouette's.*

In summarizing "Alouette," which describes the plucking of a bird, he makes it seem sinister. He describes it as a kind of dismemberment, suggesting, through an image we have come to recognize, that the ritual which we are observing is one of destruction and not of creation. The sense of the sinister increases in the description of the crowd waiting outside to hear the words of the Orator:

> (Outside, in the dark, the street is body-tall,
> flowered with faces intent on the scarecrow thing
> that shouts to thousands the echoing
> of their own wishes.) . . .

The street outside has become a single body; the community has been re-membered. The sense of oneness is further emphasized by the flower image, "flowered with faces." But again we feel there is something wrong. The crowd is not being creatively transformed into a true unity; it is merely listening to its wishes being passively echoed back to it. It is an "idol" the people want, something they have made for themselves out of their own sense of frustration.

All this prepares for the Orator and for the image of the sunflower seeds with which he is immediately linked. By now, some of the resonance of this image should be clear. Continuing the image of the flowered faces in the previous stanza, it calls up the numerous associations of flowers with the One in the many through Klein's work. In particular, it recalls Spinoza "in the Holland *sun* . . . gathering *flowers* for the One." The image of the sunflower occurs again in Klein's only other poem which refers to Camillien Houde, and it does so to the exact same effect. In "Parade of St. Jean Baptiste," "the rotund mayor"[10] is presiding over the annual celebration in which the Québécois assert their sense of oneness. In a phrase recalling "flowered with faces," the crowd is described as having "flowering faces," and the parade as a whole is a huge bouquet of flowers. There are "gay attitudes of flowers," "wards and counties burgeoning hero / ribbons and countenances," "badinage of petals." Most important, though, is the phrase "this rich spectacle turned heliotropic." "Heliotrope" is, of course, another name for sunflower.

The image of the sunflower seeds, then, suggests that, although the Orator is a demagogue, a Shabbathai Zvi, he has some of the appeal of a true hero, a Spinoza. On the one hand he consciously manipulates the crowd for his own purposes; but on the other he has genuine links with his people. He really does feel himself at one with them, and they feel the same. "He has them, kith and kin," the poet says, and we can read this two ways: he has them in his power now, or they are his own kinspeople.

The climax of the Orator's speech is an attack on conscription and on "the clever English" whose policy it is. Although the Orator is attacking a policy which Klein wholeheartedly supported, he is doing so by appealing to some of the things which Klein holds most dear: "the virtue of being *Canadien* / of being at peace, of faith, of family." Klein sympathizes with the fears the Orator is exploiting: his description of the cross as "an agonized Y" suggests, through a pun, that he understands how conscription must seem to the Québécois who are losing their loved ones in a war which means nothing to them. But it is precisely the genuineness of the Orator's appeal which makes it most dangerous, for it allows him to draw his people together in a way which perverts their potential for good into one for evil:

> The whole street wears one face,
> shadowed and grim; and in the darkness rises
> the body-odour of race.

The disgusting smell of the tightly packed crowd, of its one re-membered "body," becomes, as "the body-odour of race," a vivid image of the evil which arises from the false unity which a demagogue can impose on his followers by eloquently echoing their fears and prejudices.[11] The Orator has brought his followers together, but only to divide them more completely against others of their fellow men. This is a grotesque and evil parody of the true unity which the hero creates by drawing on the most valuable impulses of his people, impulses which perhaps only he is consciously aware of. The Orator, like all demagogues, has perverted what should have been a ritual of re-membering into one of dismembering. In the words of Uncle Melech, the Orator and the rest of his kind "would be like gods; but since the godlike touch of creation was not theirs, like gods would they be in destructions." Behind the figure who presents himself as an Uncle Melech or a Spinoza we see a Shabbathai Zvi; the true nature of the "country uncle with sunflower seeds in his pockets" is clear.

NOTES

[1] "Commentary," *Canadian Jewish Chronicle*, August 16, 1940, p. 4.

[2] Milton Wilson notes the parallel and comments, "for one awful moment [we] see the shadow of Uncle Melech rising up behind the Camillien Houde who is his parody." "Klein's Drowned Poet: Canadian Variations on an Old Theme," *Canadian Literature*, no. 6; rpt. in *A. M. Klein*, ed. Tom Marshall (Toronto: Ryerson, 1970), p. 94.

[3] See Marshall's Introduction, p. x; John Matthews, "A. M. Klein and the Problem of Synthesis" in Marshall, p. 144; and G. K. Fischer, *In Search of Jerusalem: Religion and Ethics in the Writings of A. M. Klein* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 1975), p. 76.

[4] "The method [of *The Second Scroll*] is . . . of a piece with the patterning of diverse and seemingly discontinuous facts of experience characteristic of Klein's best poetry." Malcolm Ross, "Review," in Marshall, p. 89.

[5] For other examples, see "Elegy," "Address to the Choirboys," "Diary of Abraham Segal, Poet," and "Portrait of the Poet as Landscape." Dismemberment imagery in "Portrait of the Poet as Landscape" is particularly interesting. In sections ii and vi, the poet's vision of the true nature of language is presented in terms of a whole body. The poet's society has tried to replace the poet's whole language with "bartlett," a collection of dismembered fragments: Milton Wilson speaks of "an Orpheus dismembered into Bartlett's Quotations" ("Klein's Drowned Poet," p. 94).

[6] The image of flowers in a garden reaching towards the sun is an ancient symbol of the relationship between the Creator and the created. See Stanley Stewart, *The Enclosed Garden: The Tradition and the Image in Seventeenth Century Poetry* (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1966).

[7] For Klein's rejection of the concept of a transcendent God, see "Browning's Blasphemy," *Canadian Jewish Chronicle*, June 11, 1948, p. 9. Browning's blasphemy is that he claims "God's in his heaven," that, as Klein indignantly puts it, "He confines himself to heaven! . . . He does not intrude upon earth!"

[8] For a discussion of the Cabbalistic doctrine of "Aught from Naught," see Fischer, pp. 96-98.

[9] In his Introduction, Tom Marshall argues that Klein's "vision of unity" would have been "more profound" if he had had "a greater awareness" that "man's wish to be the One generates both what he calls good and what he calls evil" (p. xiv). I argue that Klein was fully aware of this, and it is precisely this awareness which gives his vision of unity its profundity.

[10] If this were not enough to identify Houde, the mayor's reference to himself as "Cyrano" would be. Houde had a notoriously large nose and as a young man he "tried to hide his chagrin by playing a magnificent Cyrano de Bergerac in small theatrical companies." Eva-Lis Wuorio, "The One and Only Houde," *Maclean's*, December 15, 1947, p. 7.

[11] For other examples of Klein's use of odour to suggest evil, see "Not All the Perfumes of Arabia," Version I and II, and *The Second Scroll*, pp. 64-65.

WHERE AM I GOING

Tom Wayman

I remember walking on a dirt road through the woods
one autumn afternoon as a child,
not far from a lake, with adults,
the sumach beside us
already crimson in the sunlight
and a small, chill wind — I am wearing a coat —
blowing down red and yellow leaves
where birds call, as we pass.

And the years afterwards
I belonged to the organizations
that went camping,
or my enjoyment now
of a breeze billowing the canvas of my tent,
are as though I could someday
be on a trail descending a ridge,
worrying as always
about the hour, or the weather, or about animals,
and at the bottom enter a wood
in October, and come upon an old road
and follow it, until ahead of me
I am aware of figures
— a man, a woman, and a child —
and find myself once more
walking securely in the turning seasons,
safe, in another time.

CLAIRE MARTIN

Une Interview

Françoise Iqbal & Gilles Dorion

Q: Que représente pour vous l'écriture?

R: Si l'on écrit, c'est parce que le "moi" peut s'exprimer par l'écriture. Il est bien entendu que si l'on travaille dans le domaine des arts, que ce soit la musique, la peinture, l'écriture, c'est pour exprimer quelque chose qui ne peut pas s'exprimer dans le courant de la vie par un autre travail. Cela ne veut pas dire qu'on ne peut pas vivre sans s'exprimer de cette façon. Pour ma part, j'ai cessé brutalement d'écrire tout à coup. Je fais encore un peu de traduction de temps en temps, mais cela, c'est la chose tout en ne l'étant pas. C'est l'acte extérieur d'écrire sans l'acte intérieur, c'est l'imitation d'écrire, si l'on peut dire.

Q: Pour vous, écrire incarne-t-il un dialogue entre "animus" et "anima"?

R: Je pense que c'est le travail de l'exégète d'analyser ce genre de chose. Je ne crois pas que l'écrivain soit poussé à analyser aussi finement. Je ne peux pas vous dire si vous avez raison. Où se situe l'"anima", où se situe l'"animus", je ne peux vraiment pas vous le dire. *Les Morts*, par exemple, c'est vraiment le dialogue entre les deux, c'est toujours la même personne qui parle, c'est-à-dire que je m'interroge et que je me réponds.

Un écrivain comme Gide, qui s'analysait énormément, qui réfléchissait beaucoup sur lui-même, qui se regardait vivre et écrire aurait pu répondre à cela. Mais la plupart des écrivains sont des êtres plus spontanés.

Q: Jusqu'à quel point écrire un roman est-il pour vous un exercice de style, un déploiement de virtuosité?

R: De virtuosité? Je ne crois pas. J'ai toujours eu le désir simplement. J'entends bien que la simplicité de l'un n'est pas celle de l'autre. Pour moi, ce doit être un exercice de style, avec autre chose en plus. L'histoire que j'écris doit être assez soignée pour que ce soit aussi un exercice de style. Cela fait partie du plaisir. Si j'écris n'importe comment, sans la moindre recherche, sans jamais chercher autre

chose que le mot qui me viendrait d'abord à l'esprit, sans jamais chercher de musique, d'assonance, de dissonance, dans le son que cela donne à l'oreille intérieure comme à l'extérieure d'ailleurs, il me semble que ça ne vaut pas la peine d'écrire une histoire. Ce n'est pas que cela écrire un livre.

Q: Ecrire, c'est le plaisir de l'écrivain. Est-ce que vous recherchez aussi le plaisir du lecteur?

R: Cela doit venir par surcroît, si c'est réussi. Ce n'est que le lecteur qui pourra dire si c'est réussi. Je fais toujours tout ce que je peux. Je laisse aller un manuscrit quand j'en ai fait ce que je peux faire de mieux. C'est le lecteur qui peut ensuite dire s'il en retire du plaisir. Mon plaisir à moi est tout à fait différent. Il faudrait être bien complaisant envers soi-même pour retirer d'un livre qu'on écrit le même plaisir qu'en retirera le lecteur satisfait.

Q: Que pensez-vous de la situation transactionnelle que l'on retrouve à l'intérieur du nouveau roman, situation qui fait que l'auteur interpelle le lecteur ou encore le dirige au moyen d'indices semés dans le texte?

R: J'ai beaucoup pratiqué le "nouveau roman" à ses débuts et, par la suite, je l'ai abandonné radicalement. Je n'en lis plus, j'évite cela comme la peste. J'ai pris cela en haine et je ne peux pas vous en parler. Je ne connais pas ces écrivains qui font des trucs transactionnels, comme vous dites, je n'en sais rien et je n'en veux rien connaître.

Q: Butor est un des auteurs qui pratiquent beaucoup ce genre et n'est-il pas vrai que vous aimez Butor?

R: Il fut un temps où j'aimais beaucoup Butor, dans le temps de *la Modification*, par exemple. Puis, comme pour les autres, je l'ai complètement abandonné. L'on change de goût, l'on change d'idée. Les derniers livres que j'ai lus de Butor étaient tellement enfoncés dans ces nouvelles façons de s'exprimer, qu'on ne sait même pas de quoi il est question. Il semble qu'on n'ait qu'une idée, c'est d'ennuyer. Je refuse de m'ennuyer en lisant. J'ai appris cela il y a une quinzaine d'années à peu près. Si la première page d'un livre me déplaît, je commence à me méfier sérieusement. Car je prétends qu'il faut plaire dès la première page, ou bien cela ne vaut pas la peine de mettre un livre entre les mains du lecteur. C'est presque l'insulter que de le forcer à continuer sans savoir s'il va l'aimer.

Q: Vous avez donc la hantise de la première page?

R: Oui, cela fait partie du respect qu'on doit au lecture. Cela fait partie aussi du respect que l'on se doit comme écrivain. Si on commence de travers, ça ne vaut pas la peine d'écrire. C'est important, un début de livre. S'il est raté, je pense qu'il ne se rétablira jamais. Autrefois, un livre réussi, ce n'était pas la même chose que maintenant. Des tas de romans du siècle dernier commencent par une très longue

introduction, une très longue présentation des faits, des lieux, des caractères, des familles. La plupart des romans de Balzac commencent par une assez longue exposition mais, enfin, c'est Balzac: on sait qu'on ne s'ennuiera pas. Je préfère finalement les écrivains du XIX^e siècle à ceux de mon siècle. Ils ne m'ennuient pas du tout.

Q: D'où vous vient votre amour de la langue, de sa justesse, de son raffinement?

R: J'ai eu une grand-mère maternelle qui était une déesse, qui parlait un français admirable, qui écrivait d'ailleurs un français tout aussi admirable, qui était grande liseuse, qui avait toujours Chateaubriand sur sa table de chevet, qui me faisait des reproches chaque fois que je parlais mal, que j'employais un terme fautif. Ma mère, sa fille, était pareille. Mais ma mère, toujours malade, était moins sévère. Grand-maman m'a toujours longuement expliqué qu'il fallait apprendre à bien parler, à bien écrire, quand on était petit.

Ensuite, je suis allée chez les Ursulines. On a eu souvent l'impression que j'avais bien mal parlé des Ursulines, dans *Un Gant de fer*. Je crois que j'en ai très bien parlé par moments. Les reproches que j'ai faits ne concernaient pas les études. Ordinairement, les cours étaient excellents et, surtout, les cours de français qui étaient donnés par des spécialistes.

A sept ans, toute petite, on ne faisait plus de fautes d'orthographe, ce n'était pas admis. Maintenant je reçois, d'étudiants qui finissent leur cours, des lettres où il y a une faute par ligne. Ca n'est plus important, dit-on. Je veux bien, mais on change la langue, on pratique la médiocrité.

Q: Vous avez écrit dans *Avec ou sans amour*: "Les défauts ont des sexes," l'écriture en a-t-elle un aussi?

R: Presque tout ce que j'ai écrit dans *Avec ou sans amour*, je le rejette plus ou moins. J'étais encore jeune et légère quand j'ai écrit cela. Très souvent, il y a des choses qui ne sont là que pour l'ironie du texte, qui ne me semblent pas plus vraies que leur contraire. Je pourrais dire aussi: "Les défauts n'ont pas de sexe," cela me semblerait aussi vrai. Cela dit, il y a des défauts qui ont des sexes. Ce sont de très graves défauts. Par exemple, la criminalité est masculine, c'est une chose bien connue. Puis, l'esprit de guerre, de révolte, de révolution, de violence et de je-vous-tue-dans-la-rue, ça, c'est masculin.

Q: Ma vraie question était: Est-ce que l'écriture a un sexe?

R: Je pense qu'elle en avait un bien gros autrefois, si j'ose m'exprimer ainsi. C'est une chose qui a un peu disparu, je pense. Peut-être que dans mes livres, si on cherchait dans ce sens-là, on trouverait beaucoup moins de différenciation féminine dans les derniers que dans les premiers.

Q: Y a-t-il un imaginaire féminin qui se différencie essentiellement de l'imaginaire masculin? Hélène Cixous dit, elle, que les femmes "écrivent à la place des hommes, dans une masculinité et sans jamais avoir cherché à capter autre chose, à inscrire quelque chose qui serait de l'ordre de la féminité."

R: Cela tend à disparaître, probablement à cause de la vie que les femmes mènent maintenant. Si nous faisons la même vie, si nous vivons de la même façon, nos réactions en face des choses tendent à s'uniformiser. D'ailleurs, le monde entier est en train de s'uniformiser. Je ne suis pas du tout d'accord avec ce qu'a dit Hélène Cixous à ce sujet.

Ecoutez, Colette, c'est la parfaite féminité dans ce qu'elle peut avoir de perfection. Son style, en perfection, est comparable à celui de n'importe quel écrivain homme.

Je pense que tout est vrai et que tout est faux. Il arrivera à un moment donné quelque féministe qui dira: "Cette femme, je la rejette, parce qu'elle a écrit p. 56 telle chose." Et George Sand, alors!

Q: Les féministes font une grande distinction entre George Sand et Colette!

R: Oui, mais on parle au point de vue féministe. Sand me semble un écrivain féministe. Je viens de terminer le onzième volume de sa correspondence et je vous la recommande, c'est une merveille!

Q: Y a-t-il, intégré à votre matière romanesque, une préoccupation consciente de l'affirmation de la femme?

R: Oui, cela me semble évident. La femme dont la destinée s'exerce en dérivation de celle d'un homme, qui n'est que la femme de celui-ci, la fille de celui-là, ou la mère d'un autre, ça me semble la fin de la désolation. C'est un des grands changements que notre siècle aura apportés et c'en est un merveilleux. Evidemment il y a encore bien des bavures, bien des difficultés. Une femme se demande s'il vaut la peine de travailler quand on lui dit: "Mais vous êtes bien payée, pour une femme, vous avez un très bon salaire pour une femme!" Mais c'est le propre de tout être humain de vouloir régir sa propre destinée. Ecrire des histoires de gens qui ne le font pas, cela m'aurait semblé fort ennuyeux!

Q: Et, pour vous, le dominant, c'est la femme, le dominé, c'est l'homme?

R: J'ai toujours cru que les femmes étaient très supérieures aux hommes. Les femmes sont capables de faire tout ce que font les hommes comme travail, en plus de faire des milliers de choses qu'un homme ne peut faire.

Ils sont rares les hommes qui peuvent apprendre à se débrouiller dans l'existence. Ils ont toujours besoin d'une femme, pour que tout marche. Je me demande si ce n'est pas pour cette raison qu'ils se marient . . .

Au point de vue intellectuel, je pense qu'il y a une assez grande différence. La femme n'est pas aussi "exhibitionniste," aussi vaniteuse, ce qui fait qu'elle fera beaucoup moins de choses stupéfiantes.

On nous dit souvent: "Où est votre Michel-Ange, vous autres, les femmes, où est votre Van Dyck, où est votre Shakespeare?" Est-ce que les hommes sont vraiment supérieurs pour cela? Bien souvent, cela signifie que les femmes sont mieux équilibrées, moins portées à faire des choses retentissantes. La vie quotidienne, pourvu qu'elle soit belle et enrichissante, leur suffit. Evidemment, ce serait malheureux qu'il n'y ait pas eu de Michel-Ange, de Shakespeare. Mais est-ce que ça veut dire que l'homme est supérieur?

La plupart des femmes n'ont jamais été en situation d'accomplir de grandes oeuvres d'éclat. Je pense qu'il faut longtemps pour entrer dans cet esprit. La plupart des femmes ne voient pas l'intérêt de sacrifier toute une vie à faire des choses extraordinaires.

Peut-être que les hommes ont plus de génie que les femmes. Mais on a toujours dit que le génie était près de la folie . . .

Q: Dans vos romans, les hommes sont votre cible favorite . . .

R: Non! les femmes aussi, parfois! Dans *Avec ou sans amour*, on peut dire "moitié-moitié." Dans *Doux-Amer*, mon éditeur n'est pas antipathique, il n'est pas si faible que ça, il est amoureux!

Q: C'est une faiblesse?

R: Ah! non, c'est une force d'aimer! Il se trouve qu'il aime d'une façon qui n'est pas admise par les gens. La plupart croit que l'amour, pour un homme, doit passer après le travail alors que l'amour, pour les femmes, doit passer avant le travail. Pourquoi doit-il en être ainsi dans tous les cas?

Q: On a dit, à propos de Colette, que l'homme était un objet pour elle, qu'il n'était, dans son oeuvre, qu'un accident de parcours. Pourrait-on dire la même chose à propos de votre oeuvre?

R: Dans les livres de Colette, les hommes sont encore plus objets que dans mes livres. L'homme, c'est vraiment un beau jouet, dans les livres de Colette. Je pense à *Chéri*, moins, à *la Naissance du jour*, qui est son roman le plus merveilleux.

Il y a des quantités de femmes pour qui un homme est un beau jouet. Ce n'est pas extraordinaire, cela! Les hommes croient qu'ils sont toujours assez bien, n'est-ce pas? Pourquoi le contraire ne serait-il pas vrai aussi? Pourquoi faut-il toujours que ce soit la femme qui soit le bel objet? Il doit y avoir de nombreuses femmes qui ont envie d'un bel objet aussi!

Q: Dans *Quand j'aurai payé ton visage*, Robert est un bel objet?

R: Oui, quoique Robert soit un homme doué d'une grande sensibilité et d'une grande moralité aussi. Il fait une vie qui, d'après les normes bourgeoises, est immorale, mais c'est un homme très moral. Ce n'est pas si fréquent la moralité chez les hommes!

Q: Dans *les Morts*, la disposition de l'appartement reproduit une scène presque classique. Il y a une série de portes qui ouvrent sur une antichambre et donc, c'est comme la scène théâtrale d'autrefois?

R: Oui, bien sûr, ça peut faire penser à ça. La preuve que ce livre fait penser à du théâtre, c'est qu'on a voulu en faire une pièce. Mais je me demande si ce n'est pas une solution de facilité. On s'est dit: "Voilà, c'est dialogué, ça peut se jouer."

Q: Votre oeuvre m'apparaît comme une élaboration de la sérénité par l'intermédiaire d'un regard réflexif. Cette sérénité est-elle un masque conquis sur des vertiges refusés, c'est-à-dire une sorte de triomphe de l'esprit?

R: La sérénité est toujours une sorte de triomphe, à moins qu'on ait beaucoup de propension au sommeil. La sérénité, ça se gagne comme n'importe quoi. Il s'agit de faire face d'abord et de gagner ce qu'on veut avoir, ensuite, de faire confiance à la vie et à soi-même et d'être entouré de gens en qui on a confiance. Savoir s'entourer, c'est déjà la moitié de la vie qui est gagnée. Je n'avais rien de ce qu'il fallait pour être une femme sereine à l'origine. On parle toujours des traumatismes de l'enfance; j'en ai eu ma bonne part! Cependant, j'ai refusé de me laisser traumatiser pour toujours par l'enfance que j'ai eue. Quand on commence à refuser ces choses-là, on refuse tout ce qui est contraire à la sérénité . . . si l'on veut la sérénité. Ce n'est pas tout le monde qui la veut. Il y a des gens qui ont besoin de leurs angoisses, ça leur est nécessaire. Il y a énormément d'écrivains qui suent l'angoisse; je pense que, si on la leur enlevait, leur carrière serait terminée.

Q: Croyez-vous qu'il y ait un lien entre le fait que vous ayez atteint la sérénité et le fait que vous n'écriviez plus?

R: Ah! non, c'est tout le contraire. Je me suis mise à écrire parce que j'avais atteint la sérénité. J'ai commencé à écrire alors que j'avais 45 ans. Dès l'âge de 30 ans, à peu près, j'avais atteint la sérénité. Sinon, je n'aurais jamais pu écrire *Dans un gant de fer*. Les faits que j'ai décrits ne peuvent être vus que d'un oeil serein et ironique.

Q: Quand on considère *Avec ou sans amour* jusqu'aux *Morts*, avez-vous l'impression qu'il y a une évolution du *paraître* vers *l'être*?

R: Oui, sûrement. Dans mon premier livre, il n'y a pas beaucoup de réflexions. C'est un livre léger; alors que *les Morts*, c'est un livre grave.

Q: Est-ce que le lecteur est justifié de penser que *les Morts*, laissant la narratrice avec elle-même, la libèrent?

R: En tout cas, ils la laissent seule face à son travail. Peut-on appeler cela une libération? La fin est quand même assez mélancolique. Je ne sais pas si c'est une libération, mais elle est libre de ne faire que son travail. Elle part. Qu'est-ce qu'elle va faire? Je ne m'interroge jamais sur ce que vont faire mes personnages quand le livre sera terminé.

Q: Comment vous vient l'idée d'un livre? Est-ce quelque chose que vous mijotez?

R: Que j'ai mijoté, oui. Je ne crois pas beaucoup à l'inspiration. Qu'on s'assoie sous le coup de l'inspiration et qu'on se mette à écrire, je ne crois pas à cela. Ordinairement, il y a un certain nombre de choses que j'ai envie de dire. Autour de ce que je veux dire se construit une histoire pour me permettre d'illustrer mon propos.

Ainsi, pour *Doux-Amer*: c'est la femme qui travaille et qui, peu à peu, émerge de la médiocrité quotidienne par une vie de travail. J'ai construit mon histoire autour de cette idée.

Q: Ecrivez-vous un roman à partir d'un plan précis et très détaillé?

R: Un plan précis? Oui. Très détaillé? Non. Je ne fais pas de plan chapitre par chapitre. Sauf dans *Quand j'aurai payé ton visage*. Habituellement, je sais exactement où je vais, ce qui va se passer, les événements principaux et je m'en tiens à ça. Je n'aime pas commencer un roman en me laissant mener par mes personnages. Cela ne m'inspire pas. Il y a peut-être *Doux-Amer* où, tout à coup, j'ai changé le début, en relisant mon manuscrit.

Dans *les Morts*, ce n'est pas pareil, ce n'est pas véritablement un roman, c'est plutôt un roman-essai. Il se passe peu de choses. Les faits ne sont qu'évoqués. Je n'ai pas fait de plan. J'ai seulement écrit les propos que je voulais tenir, une sorte de nomenclature des sujets que je voulais traiter. J'ai suivi mon inspiration comme dans une sorte de conversation. J'ai écrit à peu près six fois plus de pages que la publication elle-même. Après, j'ai effectué un tri.

Q: Quel est, parmi votre production, votre livre préféré?

R: Je crois c'est *les Morts*. Mais je mets à part *Dans un gant de fer*. Un livre autobiographique ne peut pas être comparé à un livre qui ne l'est pas. Je ne veux pas dire qu'il est meilleur, qu'il est moins beau, que je l'aime mieux, que je l'aime moins, je ne peux pas le comparer. C'est un secteur à part dans ce que j'ai fait.

Q: *Les Morts*, c'est aussi un espace autobiographique des lacs intérieurs, beaucoup plus que dans les mémoires?

R: Dans tous mes livres, sauf *Dans un gant de fer*, ce qu'il peut y avoir d'auto-

biographique ne peut être qu'intérieur. Je ne raconte pas des histoires qui me sont arrivées. Parce que Gabrielle est un écrivain, les gens simples s'imaginent que j'ai déjà été amoureuse d'un de mes éditeurs. Ca n'a rien à voir. Ce n'est pas comme ça que j'écris.

Q: Pourquoi avez-vous cessé d'écrire?

R: Il y a plusieurs raisons. La plus ordinaire, c'est que mon mari a pris sa retraite et que nous sommes allés vivre en France. Je me vois mal passant toutes mes journées à travailler avec un homme qui, lui, a cessé de travailler. Cela ne serait pas juste pour lui. Il serait isolé dans la vie, il serait tout seul. Surtout quand on vit dans un autre pays, on a besoin d'être très ensemble et de s'appuyer l'un sur l'autre.

Il y a aussi que tout ce qui s'est passé dans le Québec au point de vue de la langue m'a complètement dégoûtée. Je n'ai plus eu envie d'écrire. Ca m'a fait rager cette histoire de "joual," ça m'a rendue malheureuse, ça m'a desséchée. C'est pour moi comme une espèce de rancune qui fait que je ne me réconcilierai jamais avec l'idée d'écrire.

Q: Ca veut dire que quand vous écrivez vous vous adressez plutôt au lecteur québécois qu'au lecteur français?

R: Sûrement! Je ne me suis jamais adressée au lecteur français. On a dit: "Claire Martin écrit pour les Français," parce que j'écrivais en français. Mais, enfin! C'est ma langue, et je suis Québécoise. Si la langue a pris cette tournure, je n'y suis pour rien. Je me suis assez battue contre cela! Il me semble que j'ai prouvé que le français était ma langue. Quand on me dit: "Vous parlez le français international," je trouve ça effroyablement ridicule. Le français, c'est le français, c'est tout.

Q: Il y a de nos bons écrivains québecois, comme Aquin, Bessette, Carrier, Godbout qui eux ne recourent pas au joual mais ont néanmoins vécu cette période "joual." Ne peut-on pas considérer le joual comme un mal nécessaire?

R: Je ne crois pas au mal nécessaire, en rien. Par exemple, on dit que la violence est un mal nécessaire. Je ne peux pas accepter cela. D'autres ont accepté de continuer à écrire dans ce climat. Parmi ceux que vous avez nommés, il y en a qui ont refusé de vivre. Le joual y a-t-il été pour quelque chose? Je n'en sais rien.

Cependant, je vais vous raconter une petite anecdote à ce sujet. Un jour, j'ai participé à une table ronde, dans un poste de radio anglais, avec Jean Ethier-Blais, Hubert Aquin et d'autres. Aquin a dit "A partir de ce soir, je ne parlerai qu'anglais, parce que je refuse ce qui se passe dans le Québec, à propos de la langue." Il s'est écroulé sur la table et il s'est mis à pleurer. Je ne crois pas qu'il était homme à pouvoir vivre facilement avec cela. Je ne vous dis pas qu'il n'avait

pas d'autres raisons. Mais je vous dis que cette question le traumatisait énormément. On ne se met pas à pleurer devant tout le monde, surtout devant des Anglais, pour rien!

Q: Croyez-vous que le Québec soit en train de se sortir de cette phase "joualisante"?

R: Je n'en sais rien.

Q: Que pensez-vous des écrivains québécois de votre génération?

R: Bessette a écrit du joual, enfin du langage populaire. Aquin, lui, n'en a jamais fait. Aquin était un excellent écrivain, il écrivait merveilleusement. J'ai aimé les premiers livres de Godbout, mais après, je n'y comprenais plus rien. C'est toujours la même chose. J'ai participé à je ne sais combien de jurys. Je vais vous expliquer comment je procédais pour illustrer ce que je pense du joual et l'effet que cela me fait.

Je reçois quarante, cinquante livres. Je les mets en pile. J'en prends un, je l'ouvre et, si c'est écrit en joual, je le ferme, je le mets de côté.

J'écris sur ma feuille: *non*. Je n'en lis pas plus long, mon jugement est fait, je refuse de le lire. Je dis au jury: "Je ne l'ai pas lu, parce que c'est écrit en joual." Si on me dit: "Ce n'est pas juste." Je réponds: "Oui, c'est juste," parce que c'est une raison suffisante pour moi de le refuser.

Cela vous montre à quel point je refuse le "joual." Même si on me dit: "Mais c'est excellent," je ne crois pas que ça puisse être excellent. D'ailleurs, quand on travaille avec ce genre d'outil, finalement, il ne se passe rien. Il n'y a pas d'anecdote, les personnages sont inexistants. Il n'y a qu'un personnage, c'est le langage.

Q: Pour plusieurs de ces romanciers, cette lange qui manque de forme représente l'aliénation des Québécois.

R: Sûrement que cela représente l'aliénation des Québécois! Mais je ne vois pas pourquoi on essaierait de propager cette forme d'aliénation. Que ce soit le reflet ou la chose, à toute fin pratique, ça donne un livre. Ce livre se répand, les gens le lisent. Si vous avez une dizaine de nouvelles expressions là-dedans, tout de suite, on les adopte et ça se répand. Finalement, on ne comprend plus ce qu'on nous dit. Combien d'expressions à la mode a-t-on entendues qui étaient sombrement ridicules? Il faut dire que là-dessus la télévision est bien coupable.

Q: La critique vous reproche beaucoup ainsi que la jeune génération d'écrivains votre évasion hors de la "québécité." Quelles sont vos réactions en face de ces reproches?

R: Je n'ai pas de réaction. Car je ne les connais pas, ces reproches. Je ne reçois

jamais rien, personne n'est chargé de me faire suivre les commentaires dans les journeaux, dans les revues.

Je ne vois pas pourquoi je serais restée ici si je n'en avais pas eu envie. Je ne suis pas la seule. C'est assez curieux que les romancières québécoises finissent toujours par s'en aller. Nous sommes nombreuses à être parties. C'est un phénomène assez étrange . . .

Il y a plusieurs réponses à cette question, autant que pour le fait que j'aie arrêté d'écrire.

D'abord, le climat du Québec ne me convenait pas, les hivers sont trop durs, les étés sont trop chauds. Physiquement, je n'étais jamais à mon aise. Le médecin nous recommandait de changer de climat. C'est déjà une raison suffisante pour aller vivre ailleurs. Mon mari avait très envie d'aller finir sa vie sur la côte d'Azur, dans l'arrière-pays, plutôt. Puis, il n'y avait plus rien qui pouvait me retenir au point de vue "climat littéraire." Je ne voulais plus les voir et eux non plus ne voulaient plus me voir. Quand je suis partie, un de nos écrivains a écrit "Bon débarras." C'était réciproque.

Q: Est-ce qu'il y a dans votre déracinement une rupture qui est délivrance, ou un refus de soi stérilise?

R: Il n'y a pas de refus de moi. Il y a un refus, oui, mais du climat littéraire dans lequel je vivais.

Q: Avez-vous senti cette rupture comme une délivrance?

R: Oui, je crois.

Q: Alors vous êtes heureuse?

R: Bien sûr, que je suis heureuse! Remarquez que j'étais heureuse aussi au Canada. Je suis par nature une femme heureuse. Il y avait des choses qui me déplaisaient. J'ai pensé que je serais plus heureuse ailleurs: j'ai eu raison.

Q: Quels sont vos auteurs préférés?

R: Plus je vieillis, plus mes auteurs vieillissent aussi. Nous vieillissons ensemble. Il y a très peu d'écrivains actuels qui me plaisent vraiment. Je me suis mise à lire les auteurs de ma jeunesse. Je les trouve merveilleux. Je relis toujours Balzac, Stendhal. Je me suis mise à lire toute la correspondance de George Sand; de ce fait, j'ai commencé à lire ses livres, que je n'avais pas lus, pour la plupart, parce qu'on m'avait dit que c'était d'un ennui puissant, ce qui n'est pas vrai.

Je lis Gide, je lis beaucoup de mémoires, parmi les actuels. Tout le monde écrit ses mémoires maintenant. Souvent, ce sont des comédiens que j'ai vus jouer ou que j'ai vut au cinéma quand j'étais jeune. Il y a toujours une espèce de nostalgie.

On lit cela un peu par curiosité, mais j'ai toujours beaucoup aimé le monde des comédiens et le monde du cinéma, pas pour y avoir vécu, simplement pour les avoir vus jouer. Ces gens-là ont toujours des vies extraordinaires, un peu folles. Leurs mémoires sont très divertissants. J'en lis cinq ou six par année.

Q: Les auteurs français qui vous avaient influencée restent toujours vos livres de chevet?

R: J'ai tout Colette dans une très jolie édition. C'est déjà un plaisir de tenir ces livres dans ses mains. J'en lis tout le temps. Tous les mois, j'en lis un. Butor, non, je n'ai même pas apporté avec moi *La Modification*. Diderot, je le lis encore. Mais pour répondre à une question comme la vôtre, il faudrait se faire une petite liste. Quant à Hemingway, c'est fini. Il y a dans ses livres une espèce de violence, faussement virile, on dirait le rattrapage d'un castré.

Q: Lisez-vous des romans québécois?

R: On m'en envoie. J'en lis parfois. Je lis les livres de Louise Maheux-Forcier, par exemple. J'ai lu les romans d'Anne Hébert.

Q: Est-ce qu'il y en a que vous aimez particulièrement?

R: Spécialement Louise Maheux-Forcier. C'est un écrivain qui dit des choses très belles, mais qui se laisse parfois emporter par la beauté de la chose. Son vocabulaire est très fleuri. Il y a pléthore d'adjectifs, une sorte de lyrisme. Elle a un amour de l'enfance que, moi, je ne comprends pas du tout. Je n'ai pas gardé un bon souvenir de la mienne. Je n'aime pas les enfants. Je comprends mal qu'on soit si imbu des merveilles de l'enfance. Mais, je l'admets. Je vois bien que, pour elle, c'est une chose extrêmement importante. Ce n'est pas un reproche que je lui adresse, c'est simplement l'accusation d'une différence que je constate. Mais, on ne lit pas simplement les livres des gens qui nous ressemblent. Sinon, on serait toujours devant le miroir, ce qui ne serait pas sain non plus.

Q: Le principal thème de vos romans c'est l'amour. Est-ce que la beauté est synonyme de l'amour ou une condition de l'amour?

R: Non, c'est une circonstance. C'est quelque chose en plus. Dans certains cas, ce peut être une condition. En tout cas, il y a certainement un rejet de la laideur. Mais qu'il y ait une nécessité de beauté, peut-être pas. Le personnage masculin dans *Doux-Amer*, je ne sais pas s'il est beau. Je ne me suis jamais posé la question. Pourtant, il a été passionnément aimé. Je pense que, sans avoir de laideur, il devait être un peu comme tout le monde, un peu ordinaire. Le fait d'être beau change tellement de choses dans la vie . . . Je ne suis pas sûre que ce soit un bonheur d'être très beau. Je ne suis pas sûre que ce soit quelque chose de très bon pour le bonheur.

Vous me disiez: "Le thème principal de vos romans, c'est l'amour," c'est le thème principal de la vie aussi. Il n'y a rien de plus important que l'amour, je crois.

Q: Dans *Doux-Amer*, peut-on parler de soumission amoureuse du narrateur?

R: Oui, je crois. Je pense qu'il considérait Gabrielle comme une femme qui lui était supérieure. A ce moment-là, il peut y avoir soumission.

Q: Lui était-elle aussi supérieure au point de vue travail? Parce que c'est quand même lui, éditeur, qui l'avait lancée, avait corrigé son manuscrit. Il s'était pour ainsi dire substitué à elle. Parce qu'elle dit: "Le deuxième livre, il sera de moi."

R: Je ne me suis jamais posé la question pour voir s'il l'avait vraiment refait, ce livre, s'il avait fait du "rewriting," comme on lit, ou s'il avait simplement corrigé les fautes d'orthographe, s'il y en avait. Mais, j'ai l'impression que Gabrielle ne devait pas faire de fautes d'orthographe. Ou s'il avait corrigé quelques gaucheries, quelques bêtises. Mais, vous savez, je pense qu'un éditeur demande toujours de faire quelques corrections. Pierre Tisseyre m'a toujours demandé de faire de petites corrections ici et là. Je les ai toujours faites parce que j'ai confiance en lui et que je l'aime. Je sais que s'il me demande de corriger quelque chose, c'est pour mon bien. Mais, Gabrielle est une femme beaucoup plus vaniteuse que je peux l'être.

Q: Sur quoi est fondé le principe de domination dans l'amour chez vos personnages? Fondez-vous cela sur la supériorité de l'intelligence?

R: Pour moi ce qu'il y a de plus important chez les êtres humains, c'est l'intelligence. Même si, chez mes personnages, la beauté compte, l'intelligence est de beaucoup supérieure. S'il y a tant de beauté chez mes personnages, c'est parce que c'est une chose qui change la vie. Cela devient un élément éminemment romanesque. On n'a pas la même vie si on est beau et si on ne l'est pas. Ca, j'en suis persuadée. Il vous arrive des choses, si vous êtes beau, qui ne vous arriveraient pas autrement. Pas toujours des choses agréables, cependant. Une comédienne extrêmement belle ne fera pas la même carrière qu'une autre qui n'a que du talent. Est-ce un bien? Probablement pas.

Q: Dans *Doux-Amer*, votre éditeur ne se complaît-il pas dans les "souffrances" de l'amour?

R: Oui, bien sûr. Mais les "souffrances de l'amour," c'est encore de l'amour. Il dit quelque part: "Puisque c'est tout ce qui me reste d'elle." J'ai l'impression que ça doit être vrai pour bien des gens. Bien souvent, les souffrances de l'amour sont aussi importantes que les plaisirs de l'amour, parce que c'est ce qui vous prouve que vous aimez, ce qui vous fait toucher du doigt que cet amour existe, qu'il est important. Plus vous souffrez, plus il vous semble qu'il existe et qu'il est vrai. Ce n'est pas une raison suffisante pour chercher à souffrir. Si un amour est heureux,

on le prend comme il est. Je vois une exception: la jalousie. La jalousie peut faire d'un amour heureux un amour malheureux, parce que c'est une névrose. C'est un vice qui ne m'a jamais beaucoup inspiré. Il y a un passage dans *Doux-Amer* où il parle de sa jalousie, mais c'est bref. Je ne pense pas que c'était là le caractère de l'éditeur. Ce sont simplement les circonstances qui font que, lorsque'on aime et qu'on est trompé, on ne peut pas faire autrement que de souffrir de jalousie.

Q: Dans *les Morts*, vous dites que l'amour c'est de l'obstination?

R: Si on ne s'obstine pas après un amour, il n'existe plus, finalement, au bout d'un certain temps. L'amour, ce n'est pas une chose qui reste là comme un objet qu'on met sur une table. Un amour, il faut s'obstiner à le garder, à le faire fructifier, à l'embellir. C'est un soin de tous les instants.

Q: Dans *les Morts*, la narratrice trouve l'amour après la mort de ses amants. Est-ce une preuve que l'écriture est une entreprise de sublimation?

R: Elle doit être frappée par le fait que tous ces gens soient morts. Elle ne peut faire autrement que se poser des questions: "Comment se fait-il que je sois entourée d'amours mortes?" Il peut y avoir à ce moment-là une sorte de sublimation, justement par obstination.

Q: Dans *Doux-Amer*, tout se passe dans le registre du souvenir. Le narrateur revit ses sentiments, ses peines d'amour et se complaît dans ses souffrances amoureuses. N'est-ce pas du masochisme?

R: Je ne cherche pas à faire des livres où les gens n'aient pas de défauts, où les gens n'aient pas de névrose, des personnages qui seraient pleins de qualités.

Q: On a déjà dit de vous: "Claire Martin, c'est une intellectuelle, plutôt un intellectualiste, elle n'a pas de sentiment."

R: Pour être noté comme étant quelqu'un de sensible, il faut pleurnicher. Je n'ai jamais pleurniché dans la vie, je ne vois pas pourquoi je le ferais dans mes livres.

Q: Peut-on dire que le perfectionnisme des femmes dans votre oeuvre romanesque, camouflant en quelque sorte leur orgueil, leur amour-propre et une certaine complaisance, se rattache à l'art de la tromperie?

R: Oh! mais c'est très vilain ce que vous dites là. Le désir de mieux faire serait en somme un mensonge?

Q: On dit que c'est souvent de l'orgueil, le perfectionnisme.

R: Le perfectionnisme, cela me semble une immense qualité. Voilà encore une autre chose qu'on met sur le même pied que l'intellectualisme. Si tous les êtres humains étaient des perfectionnistes, ça marcherait autrement que ça marche dans le monde. Ce serait l'euphorie. A partir de celui qui ne jetterait pas un papier dans

la rue à aller jusqu'aux oeuvres les plus extraordinaires, aux travaux les plus transcendants. Que les femmes soient plus perfectionnistes, je crois que cela arrive souvent. Je pense que c'est une sorte d'entraînement. On attend toujours plus de la petite fille dans le domaine du perfectionnement quotidien et domestique. Cette attitude finit par se répandre sur toute une vie.

Q: Dans vos deux livres de mémoires, les événements sont racontés d'une façon objective, mais, dans vos romans, il y a beaucoup de sensibilité?

R: Je le crois. Je n'ai rien contre la sensibilité, au contraire. Un être qui n'est pas sensible est un pauvre être. Je me sens assez bien pourvue pour vivre confortablement une vie heureuse.

Q: On vous reproche vos mots d'auteurs, vos maximes, vos sentences. Vous êtes moralisatrice?

R: Oui, j'ai même pensé en faire un petit livre. Je me dis que ça pourrait être drôle parce qu'il doit y avoir là-dedans tous les contraires possibles.

Q: Est-ce que ces réflexions ajoutent de la densité à vos personnages?

R: Ca doit faire partie de ce que pensent mes personnages. Je n'aime pas que mes personnages expriment de grandes idées. On fait un personnage, on en fait un grand philosophe et, quand on ouvre les guillements, on lui fait dire des bêtises insondables. Mes personnages pensent un peu et, la plupart du temps, ils pensent comme moi. Ou bien, s'ils sont contraires à moi, ils pensent exactement le contraire de moi, bien sûr! De temps en temps, ils émettent des propos et ces propos viennent souvent sous forme de maximes.

Q: Dans *Quand j'aurai payé ton visage*, qu'est-ce qui comptait le plus pour vous: l'histoire d'amour ou la critique sociale?

R: Ah! la critique sociale! C'est un milieu que j'avais assez bien connu quand j'étais à la radio, les petits bourgeois riches, étroits d'esprit.

Q: Dans ce livre, vous parlez du visage. C'est apparu à certains critiques comme un peu superficiel en tant que manifestation de l'amour, en même temps, cependant, un peu sensuel, mais à fleur de peau. C'était un amour masque?

R: L'amour, c'est d'abord un visage. La seule chose qu'un être a à vous offrir, en premier lieu, c'est son visage. Même s'il avait les qualités les plus profondes et les plus surprenantes, c'est une chose qu'on apprend plus tard. On dit toujours que le visage, c'est le miroir de l'âme, je pense que c'est vrai dans un certain sens. On ne peut pas aimer quelqu'un dont le visage déplaît, ça me semble impossible. Il y a toujours une certain beauté, ne serait-ce que dans le regard qui fait que vous êtes attiré par cette personne tout d'abord. Ce n'est que plus tard que l'attachement

peut découler de qualités plus importantes. Ce n'est que par le visage qu'on peut exprimer l'intérieur de soi-même.

Q: Est-ce que pour vous le visage représenterait tout le corps?

R: Jusqu'à un certain point. Quelle que soit la fascination que le corps peut exercer sur l'autre, quel que soit le désir que peut inspirer un beau corps, il doit toujours être surmonté d'un visage qui vous dit quelque chose. C'est du visage que sort la parole.

Q: La solitude semble très pénible à vos personnages particulièrement dans *Doux-Amer* et dans *Quand j'aurai payé ton visage*. A part les maladies de l'amour, croyez-vous que la solitude soit le sentiment le plus dangereux pour le bonheur?

R: La solitude est quelque chose d'assez néfaste pour la personnalité et qui est supportée plus ou moins bien selon les individus. Il y a peu de gens qui supportent bien la solitude et qui s'en tirent indemnes. La plupart des gens qui souffrent vraiment de solitude finissent par développer des façons d'être assez effroyables. Si mes personnages supportent mal la solitude, cela doit déprendre d'une certaine idée que je me fais des malheurs de l'amour parce que moi je ne souffre pas facilement de la solitude. Je ne me sens pas très menacée de ce côté-là. J'endure assez bien d'être seule, assez longuement. Je ne m'ennuie jamais seule. Ce que je suis et ce que sont mes personnages, ça n'a souvent rien à voir. Mes personnages ne sont pas une image de moi.

Q: Dans *les Morts*, on a dit que vous avez joué avec les sentiments et avec la raison. *Les Morts* ont semblé à plusieurs une sorte de "jeu intellectuel."

R: Je pense qu'un écrivain est habituellement un intellectuel. Je pense aussi que le mot intellectuel n'est pas une injure, au contraire. Je trouve risibles les gens qui vous traitent d'intellectuel en pensant vous insulter. Moi, ça ne m'injurie pas du tout. Ca me fait plaisir. *Les Morts*, c'est un jeu intellectuel.

Q: Je crois que ceux qui parlent de cette façon trouvent que *les Morts* est un livre difficile d'accès.

R: Quand on ne raconte pas une histoire de A à Z, bien sûr que c'est moins simple. Mais je serais bien incapable d'écrire des choses difficiles à comprendre. Ce n'est pas du tout dans ma nature. J'emploie toujours des mots à la portée de tout le monde et les idées que je développe dans mes livres sont toujours ordinaires. Qu'est-ce qu'il y a dans ce livre? Des choses contre la violence, contre la guerre. C'est ordinaire.

Q: Pourquoi votre narratice des *Morts* s'attache-t-elle aux nomades, aux amoureux nomades?

R: L'amour est toujours une sorte de nomadisme. C'est le sentiment lui-même qui

est nomade. Si, en plus, un être humain a une certaine crainte d'être envahi par l'amour . . . Presque tous les êtres humains ont un peu peur de l'amour. L'amour est dangereux en soi: il peut changer votre vie, vous forcer à faire des choses que vous ne voulez pas faire ou que vous estimez ne pas vous convenir. Il peut vous forcer à accepter la vie avec quelqu'un qui voudra vous changer. De sorte que si l'amour existe avec un être plus ou moins nomade, il se termine par lui-même. Un jour, l'amour s'en va, on ferme la porte, le danger de voir sa vie bouleversée s'en va en même temps.

Or, pour l'être qui travaille et qui accorde une grande importance au travail, l'amour peut être préférable quand il est un souvenir au lieu d'une réalité qui est là et qui vous envahit. Je crois que c'est, en gros, le sentiment de la narratrice des *Morts*.

Q: Est-ce que c'est parce que vous craignez que vos personnages deviennent routiniers, ou qu'ils prennent l'habitude de l'amour comme dans *Doux-Amer*?

R: Quand vous écrivez des livres, il ya un certain nombre d'intrigues qui vous sont possibles. On ne peut pas toujours refaire les mêmes. Mois, l'amour-habitude, c'est un des thèmes que je chéris, mais je ne peux pas toujours recommencer. Je ne suis pas François Mauriac pour refaire toujours le même livre avec bonheur.

Q: Mais vous trois livres ne sont-ils pas en somme le même livre écrit de façon différente, avec des structures différentes, des constructions différentes?

R: J'ai l'impression que non. Mais, comme celui qui est de l'autre côté du livre se rend bien mieux compte de cela que celui qui l'a écrit, c'est possible.

On m'a déjà dit aussi que c'était la continuation, la même livre en plusieurs tomes, la continuation d'une même histoire . . .

Q: On pourrait même prétendre que c'est Gabrielle qui s'interroge dans *les Morts* et qui pense aux anciens amants qu'elle a eus?

R: Oui, pourquoi pas? Et que dans *Quand j'aurai payé ton visage*, c'est Gabrielle jeune . . .

Q: L'ensemble de votre oeuvre est-il une remise en question de la condition féminine?

R: Assurément! C'est dans ma nature profonde de remettre en question la condition féminine, ça m'accompagnera jusqu'à mon dernier souffle. Si vieille que je vive, je ne crois pas que la condition féminine s'améliore profondément.

Q: Dans vos livres, on relève beaucoup de prémonitions. Est-ce propre à l'écrivain ou à vos personnages?

R: C'est propre à moi. J'ai beaucoup de prémonitions et de pressentiments. Non

pas que je sois prophète, mais un romancier, surtout, peut ressentir ce genre de chose.

Q: Pourquoi faites-vous de la traduction?

R: Je fais de la traduction parce que de temps en temps j'ai envie de travailler. Tout à coup, même si j'ai de multiples occupations, je sens un certain besoin de me mettre devant ma machine à écrire et de faire quelque chose. Comme je ne veux plus écrire de livres signés par moi, la meilleure chose que je puisse faire, c'est de la traduction. Ca me paraît sécurisant, en un sens: vous savez que vous allez terminer le livre. Ce livre, il est là. On ne risque pas de se décourager. L'intrigue est là, vous savez où vous allez.

Q: Quand vous écriviez, vous avez la hantise de ne pas terminer vos romans?

R: Pas souvent. Ca m'est arrivé dans le cas des *Morts*. Quand je me suis vue à la tête d'un nombre incalculable de feuilles, obligée de choisir pour ne retenir que ce qui me plaisait, j'ai trouvé cela décourageant.

Q: Vous avez eu de la difficulté à écrire *les Morts* ou vous étiez désarçonnée par l'abondance de la matière?

R: Désarçonnée par l'abondance de la matière. Je voulais faire un livre bref. Un livre semblable, s'il est long, devient d'un ennui mortel. Il ne faut pas que ce soit plus long qu'une longue conversation. Je ne voulais conserver que ce qu'il y avait de plus important. J'étais en butte à de nombreux problèmes. En supprimant des passages qui me semblaient de moindre valeur, j'avais toutes les difficultés du monde parfois à raccrocher les autres passages ensemble. Ca m'a pris du temps à écrire ce tout petit livre. Quatre ans, je pense.

Q: Quand Yvette Brind'Amour vous a demandé d'en faire une pièce de théâtre, quelle a été votre réaction?

R: D'abord, j'ai dit non. Après, on m'a tellement suppliée. Les gens du *Rideau Vert* ont pris le livre, l'ont complètement démoli en petits morceaux, puis l'ont recollé pour qu'il soit plus scénique. Moi, ça ne me plaisait pas toujours. Je considérais le tout avec tellement d'indifférence. On pouvait en faire ce qu'on voulait à la condition que je ne récrive pas le texte. Mais quand des raccords ont été nécessaires, c'est moi qui les ai faits.

Q: Est-ce que les représentations de la pièce vous ont plu?

R: Ca ne m'a pas déplu.

Q: Pourquoi avoir modifié le titre?

R: Parce qu'on me l'a demandé. Il paraît que *les Morts*, cela aurait fait peur aux gens.

Q: Est-ce que le titre de la pièce, *Moi, je n'étais qu'espoir*, ne donne pas, justement, la signification du livre qui se termine sur une note d'espoir pour la narratrice?

R: Une note d'espoir? Pas tellement.

Q: L'utilisation de l'humour et de l'ironie dans votre oeuvre, c'est constant?

R: C'est ma tournure d'esprit. Je suis toujours très sensible à l'humour. Un livre humoristique, tout en ayant quelque chose à dire, est extrêmement efficace. Cela frappe beaucoup plus que si c'est dit sur le mode solennel.

Q: Justement, je m'étonne que vous sembliez renier *Avec ou sans amour* que vous appelez un livre de néophyte. Alors qu'il est très brillant. L'esprit y est un peu caustique, un peu mordant. D'ailleurs, la réussite de la formule de la nouvelle est incomparable.

R: Je vous remercie de tous ces compliments. Mais, je ne sais pas pourquoi, je le sens un peu loin de moi . . . Je disais tout à l'heure que je le trouvais léger. Pourtant, quand il a été publié, je l'aimais bien, j'en étais assez satisfaite.

Il m'est arrivé quelque chose d'assez traumatisant. Quand on l'a publié dans "le livre de poche," on m'a envoyé les placards à corriger et j'ai trouvé ça d'un ennui mortel. Je ne sais pas si c'est parce que je connaissais toutes les ficelles de ce livre, évidemment, sont inconnues du lecteur. J'ai fait une chose que je n'avais jamais faite. Je n'ai pas terminé les corrections: j'ai mis le manuscrit dans une enveloppe et je l'ai retourné comme s'il avait été corrigé.

Q: Je trouve pourtant que c'est un livre très abordable, peut-être à cause de la formule de la nouvelle?

R: Il y a peut-être aussi le fait qu'il y a dans ce recueil des choses que je ne pense plus. On change avec l'âge, notre vue des choses change. Les événements autour de nous font que les circonstances sont autres. Toutes sortes de faits nouveaux se produisent à l'intérieur de nous.

Q: Réécririez-vous vos mémoires?

R: Ah! non! Parce que c'était le moment pour moi de les écrire. J'étais mûre pour les écrire. Cela faisait des années que je les préparais. D'ailleurs, je ne voulais pas les écrire avant de me sentir prête à les publier et avant que je sente les gens prêts à les accepter. Or, si je les avais publiés en 1959-60, c'aurait été un peu tôt. Ils auraient tellement déplu qu'ils seraient tombés à plat. Si je les avais publiés plus tard, c'eût été trop tard. Il ne faut pas arriver en dernier avec un livre de ce genre. Il faut être un peu en tête de file, sinon on a l'impression de faire comme tout le monde.

Q: Quelle définition donneriez-vous du Québécois d'aujourd'hui?

R: Le Québécois a énormément changé en bien et en mal. Je crois que beaucoup de Québécois ont cessé de rêver à un certain perfectionnement. Je ne parle pas seulement de la langue, je parle de tout. C'est d'ailleurs universel. La notion de perfectionnement est devenue quelque chose de risible pour la plupart des gens, dans tous les domaines. C'est une chose que je trouve absolument indispensable chez l'être humain et qui peut lui servir de religion.

L'homme québécois est devenu un homme très différent de ce qu'il était. Il m'apparaît très libéré comparé à ce qu'il était autrefois. Il a sûrement changé ses vues sur l'amour, le mariage, les femmes, les hommes, ce qui est absolument bénéfique dans la plupart des cas.

Q: En quoi l'être québécois vous a-t-il déçu?

R: Je trouve que les choses ont mal tourné au Québec. Je ne parle pas politiquement. Je trouve que les gens ont perdu le respect d'eux-mêmes dans la vie quotidienne.

Q: *La petite fille lit*, qui est votre dernier livre, je l'ai trouvé bref. J'aurais aimé le voir exploité à la façon de Proust, que vous citez en épigraphe. C'est très intéressant, mais on reste sur sa faim. Il m'apparaît, tel quel, comme un petit exercice littéraire.

R: C'est ça, c'est un exercice littéraire. J'ai été écrivain invité à l'Université d'Ottawa et, lorsque l'on accepte l'invitation, on accepte en même temps de laisser un petit texte en partant. Je n'ai jamais pu écrire sur commande, cela me dessèche. Alors, j'ai fait ces vingt pages. En somme, c'est un article.

Q: Vous êtes optimiste, mais vous êtes capable d'observer avec un certain pessimisme les réalités de la vie. Vous êtes sévère aussi?

R: Je suis sévère et je ne suis plus tellement optimiste non plus. J'ai perdu toute confiance dans les humains. Je sais qu'ils sont capables de tous les crimes. Je suis intimement persuadée que tout cela finira dans des catastrophes effroyables.

Q: Vous ne croyez pas que les hommes peuvent se racheter et produire quelque chose de mieux?

R: Je sais qu'ils sont capables de le faire, mais je sais qu'ils sont presque incapables de le *vouloir*. Je vois tout ce qui se passe dans les pays d'Europe. Les gens veulent courir à leur perte, ils ont un désir presque incoercible de courir à leur perte. C'est ainsi dans beaucoup de pays. On ne veut pas que ça aille bien, on veut que ça aille mal et pouvoir crier. Le désir de la catastrophe, c'est humain aussi.

WILDLIFE

Lorne Daniel

Building dams
of clay in wet May ditches
watched by the yellow eyes
lynx springing out
of sight
Prowling the dump
for parts to cars
I don't own
rattle and tumble
bear all around
Trudging through boot-top snow
frozen
with a start: deer flight
across my eyes
Bent over cracking husks
flushing a squeek of grey
whump: thrashing wings lift it away
Walking through woods
whispers behind
brushing through bush
scratching stinging
puffing through winter
cold breath around my ears
stepping softly
through memory:
wild-
life
in the back of my mind

review articles

SHORT FICTION'S FABULOUS REALITIES

W. H. New

E. T. SETON, *Selected Stories of Ernest Thompson Seton,* ed. Patricia Morley. Univ. of Ottawa Press, $6.00.

DAVE GODFREY, *Dark Must Yield.* Press Porcépic, $12.00; paper $6.95.

DAVID ADAMS RICHARDS, *Dancers at Night.* Oberon, $15.00; paper $6.95.

DAPHNE MARLATT, *The Story, She Said. BC Monthly,* vol. III, $3.00.

MATT COHEN, *Night Flights: Stories New and Selected.* Doubleday, $7.95.

THESE FIVE BOOKS make an odd combination: Seton's nineteenth-century Darwinian animal tales, Richards' coarse slices of smalltown Maritime life, Godfrey's 1970's nationalism, Cohen's dreams, Marlatt's perception of words as designs. But through all runs a preoccupation with the twin impact of things linguistic and things physical on the mind. And in all cases, the writers have contrived varieties of fable in order to render this impact. In an evasion of realism lies their route to reality — which in turn shifts uneasily from inside a perceiver to outside and back again, less at will than by the tricks of the mind's associations.

Seton asks us, of course — this collection reprints some eight of his tales — to accept that animals talk like human beings as they fight and adapt and connive their way to survival. We accept that they communicate. The fabular reality results because Seton equates communicating with talking (not in the *substance* of the tales, which mentions tailslapping and such phenomena, but in their *method*). And because of the method it is impossible to maintain that the narratives are solely animal, that they have no connection with human society. What readers receive from Seton is a message about their own animal nature, their participation in the physical world. Somewhat paradoxically, they receive the message because of the way they respond to language: not automatically, as a reaction to one *woof* or two, but associationally, inferring meaning and connection where none is necessarily implied.

Richards' world, of the other four created here, is closest to Seton's. His is a human society, exerting its animal nature frequently enough, violent as often as it is protective towards its own kind: a world in which — as in the title story of *Dancers at Night* — sputtering obscenities constitute an automatic code that communicates well enough, but substitutes for talk. It is a world where violence

and protectiveness are inextricably connected, where sneers and insults and old jealousies have more of a power to hurt than do sticks and stones, yet a world where the people who are so profoundly motivated by words are reduced (perhaps raised?) to silence in those moments (of fire and death, for example) when the physical world actually intrudes into their lives. When the silence breaks, they fall back on custom, on ritual. When inexperience and inexcusable pride lead to a man's death in "Ramsey Taylor," the man's son is offered a warming, dulling draught of rum, but he demurs: " 'I'm not allowed to drink yet,' the boy said." As though in sympathy with that refusal to mask the pain, Richards' stories repeatedly insist on their own kind of confrontative ritual: the voices in his stories always seem suspended, disembodied, yet their verbal dances are dances of night — repeated (and a little repetitive) manoeuvres that finally turn puritanically in on the weaknesses, strengths, and horrors of the bodies those voices inhabit.

Matt Cohen's world of *Night Flights* is not unrelated, but the writer he most approximates is not Seton but Morley Callaghan. The stories contrive two levels of talking: a laconic surface narrative that relates bizarre and interrupted events, and a deep flow of passionate will that strives but often fails to find a way to express itself openly. The actuality of the passion and the debility that hides it constitute Cohen's recurring subject. (There are many bursts of anger and angry love, but these, rather than being "open," are part of the failure of the will to sustain its effectiveness.) This central subject, moreover, subsists in Cohen's technical method. There is a repeating moral code to these fables — "God's love" is the only thing "constant" in the world, says Columbus to the fat lady in a marvellously funny and serious story reprinted from an earlier volume (these early fables remain Cohen's best so far). But the overt topics (rural encounters, sideshow vagaries, urban vagrancies) are less the substance than the medium by which we understand the dimensions of stasis in people's lives. The passion flows, but to what purpose? Who (or what) has the power to move, to grow, to alter?

For Marlatt and Godfrey the immediate answers to these question are often sardonic (influence grows, corporations move, politics stays the same) ; like Cohen they rely on their fabular technical method to present this state of affairs, but in their case the method, too, is an answer of sorts, and an emblem. *The Story, She Said* is a story-in-progress, the result of a communal game (involving Marlatt, Bowering, Kiyooka, and several others) of writing a story on a journey, which Marlatt then brooded on and recreated alone. The prefatory "warning" is worth quoting: "constancy is not of this world. Characters change from story to story, depending on what was said between the writing, the lines of relation continue to move. . . ." And indeed they do. As the characters ("names given to gestures") travel along the Pacific Rim/Rime (cf. grim/grime), they turn into the story. The *story* (an echo of Lowryesquerie) tells *them*, moves them from place to place, moves the places through space, time, and attitude: the "real" town of *Spence's Bridge*, for example, is transformed into *Suspension Bridge*, *S'pension*, *Spencer*, and *Suspense*. Landscape becomes language, becomes technical method, reinvented by every gathering mind. (In Cohen's "Heyfitz," one conversation reads like this: " 'Do I pass the test?' asked the doctor. 'Of course,' Franz said. 'If you weren't going to pass, I wouldn't have invented you.' ") The artifice of such enterprise is obvious, perhaps for some readers intrusive. Certainly it doesn't tell conventional narrative or tell narrative conventionally. But the

point of it all exists in its will to resist rigidity — a rigidity which can appear in language most readily of all, in a susceptibility to code-words and definitions, and a resistance which fabular narrative, relying on correspondences with what we think rather than with what we see, allows a reader to experience in literary form as well as to appreciate in life.

It is Godfrey's world that, of the ones created by these works, I find most involving. Not all the stories are successful — "A New Year's Morning on Bloor Street" doesn't work — nor are they all new. "The Hard-Headed Collector" is here again, along with several other familiar pieces. But the point, as before when Godfrey has reprinted fragments from his ongoing Book of Changes, is that the *context* is different. If Cohen and Richards find themselves repeatedly dancing and flying through the night, Marlatt's "train moves on, into the night" only to allow the characters to discover night's morning. For Godfrey, too, "dark must yield." This is not a blithely naive utopian illusion; much of the book — particularly the last "fables and inputs" — is spent, in fact, as a kind of multiple commentary on the observation made in "The Chrysler/The Bridge":

> Man [has] three fantasies: sex, slaughter and utopia. And I like to think they come to his life in that order, at least in terms of arriving with sufficient force to function as determiners of action.

It is part of an enactment, rather, of the observation made in the central, pivotal essay-story "East and/or West"; reflecting on his past, the narrator observes:

> And all this past, these movements, searches, learnings, flights, live in me. So when you say place, I say movement. Can they really die, these breathings; what is the physical place more than locus of events? Elements lose meaning.

It is worth reflecting on the relation between this observation and Seton's inter-

pretation of Molly Cottontail and her rabbit-son Rag:

> She fought a good fight in the battle of life. She was good stuff; the stuff that never dies. For flesh of her flesh and brain of her brain was Rag. She lives in him and through him transmits a finer fibre to her race.

Seton saw the world as a set of biological determinations, and by means of a conventional Imperial language managed to incorporate with these ideas an at least latent political and racial message. Genetic science lies close to the surface of Godfrey's world, too — I look forward to someone explaining to me the computer metaphor of *Dark Must Yield*, and the implications, technical and otherwise, of the binary dysfunctions it probes — but it seems less to determine character than to account for the multiplicity of possibilities in the world, the constancy of change, and (hence) the shifting context which the variety of prose forms mirrors, derives from, and further serves.

The book divides into three sections, separately titled "Tales," "Realities," and "Fables and Inputs." There is more straight *story* to the tales, more open autobiography, essay, and political rhetoric to the realities, more literary self-consciousness to the fables. No group is better than any other; the three together constitute simply different voices, all working in their own way — tale and fable as counterpoint to reality — toward political reform. Sovereignty over the *locus of place* was the chief issue of Godfrey's *I Ching Kanada*. The same issue surfaces here as well in the allusions, observations, and realizations by which the speakers of each section apprehend meaning. There are violent cinematic visions of the future:

> The producer knows better.... The producer knows there is no connection between the two facts. The producer is the only one with enough sense to go out and retrieve the raft, haul it ashore, send down divers for the gun and lay it in the sun to dry. Better even than the pilots, or the ferryman, or the biologists, he knows our needs. Knows that the gun, before too long will come in handy once again. It is never rewritten. Its plot is in the quicksilver of genebirths.

There is a recurrent creative chorus that tries to make sense of visions like this:

> I get but slowly to my story, for I have had it doubted before this, and I too admire the details of truth.
>
> There are other names for enclosures. There are other names for reserves. Those who do not possess place in some equality possess nothing. Are gifted with the skill of false-naming. And fear of the truth.
>
> And ... perhaps we had no need to ask him questions, perhaps we were part already of ... the tales....
>
> She .. looks him up to talk to him about the dream, the first dream, the dream about which she has made such accurate notes.
>
> My only accomplishment is to have gained enough power over magic to control some of the transformations, to learn something of the pigments of time.

These are various voices — dour and ironic and ruminative and bold — all speaking here out of context. But together they constitute a kind of subtext in the book as a whole, confirming for the author the aspiration of a character in an early story: "In the morning he would become again his image of himself, a spark of chaos in the traditional world. ..." For Godfrey it is a political as well as a literary aspiration, glimpsed here in fragments of a larger vision of cultural heritage and social possibility. There are fabulous realities to be won from the world, say Godfrey's fables and others. The disorder we suffer to find them derives both from our fear of the future and from our debilitating satisfaction with some of the more constraining possibilities of the past.

books in review

NO FUTILITY

WYNDHAM LEWIS, *Mrs. Dukes' Million*. Coach House, $7.50.

IN 1973, SECKER AND WARBURG published *The Roaring Queen*, a 1936 Wyndham Lewis novel that typically never saw print because of libel threats. Also in that year came *Unlucky for Pringle*, Vision Press' collection of Lewis short stories, some previously unpublished. Four years later, Coach House Press in Toronto published what must be one of the most attractively printed books of recent years as well as one of the more delightful of Lewis "finds." *Mrs. Dukes' Million*, editor Frank Davey informs us in his brief note, was likely written in 1909 or 1910 — about the time, that is, of Lewis' first published fiction in the *English Review*. The typescript, discovered by Charles Handley-Read in a London junkshop over twenty years ago, has resided in the Lewis Collection of Cornell University Library — a rather ironic place of rest, given Lewis' early successful resistance to his father's desire to send him to that institution. It is, of course, ironic as well that a Toronto press should publish this work, since Lewis' novel, *Self-Condemned*, betrayed quite frankly his feelings about his wartime exile in that city.

Mrs. Dukes' Million, however, predates the defiant *Enemy* persona of Lewis and adds yet another dimension to his work. To our awareness of Lewis' range — from the tragic self-destruction of the Canadian novel to the vituperative satires on falsity of *The Apes of God* and other novels — we must now add what Davey calls a "mystery novel, an art novel, a comic novel." Although to call it an "art novel" seems rather forced, clearly it is in the Sherlock Holmes-in-disguise mystery novel tradition, complete with an exotic Eastern ambassador as mastermind of a clever and theatrical plot to defraud an old Cockney woman of her newly inherited million pounds. The tale revolves around the kidnapping and subsequent successful impersonation of this Mrs. Dukes. But there are twists that range from a clichéd rival American gang that kidnaps Evan Royal (the ingenious actor disguised as Mrs. Dukes) to the more novel and amusing substitution of his stand-in, Hercules Fane. There are traditional scenes of suspense amid secret passages in a Liverpool house, but there are also such deliberate exotica as a new type of terrifying strangler — a beringed idol-like Mesopotamian giantess.

From Lewis' letters to his literary agent, we know that even the titles of the chapters of this "miserable pot-boiler," as he called it, were chosen to be "vulgarly effective." That Lewis had an eye out for possible serialization seems clear. Chapter 43 ends: "At the silence that followed these words of the doctor's, we will leave this group as it is for a moment, and go back to Evan Royal dreaming desperately of escape in the house of the three tall Americans." This self-consciously manipulative narrator intrudes frequently in his tale, often seemingly for the sheer delight of irritating his reader, or perhaps showing off his newly discovered narrative tricks:

> The young men wandered off again — but let me hasten to explain that we are not following these young men round because they interest us in the least. On the contrary, they are very tiresome — although charming — young men. We are merely using them as a convenience. As we have not been invited ourselves to this reception, and there is no one that we know, except the host, we are using the eyes of these young gentlemen — and even we have condescended to make use of their voices — in the imparting of a little information. For this reception is of great interest and of

> importance in the progress of our story. This is merely said in case the reader should imagine he was expected to pay any attention to them — glance at them, give a smile. No, he can be as rude as ever he pleases with them. They are people of no interest or consideration. Mere conveniences.

This narrating voice presents certain problems, however, for the novel's coherence, for there are shifts in tone, from the bantering, admiring raconteur to the solemn, condemning moralist (shifts that Lewis' later taste for satire would integrate more successfully). The original Mrs. Dukes, for instance, is kept prisoner in a fake hospital room "where many before her had lain, and who, once they had entered in, never went out again to the life they had left, but went out changed people, transformed by some sinister magic. . . ." Yet the very moral ending of the novel, in which Mrs. Dukes *is* restored — in fact, to a better life than before — undercuts this and similar moralizing.

Lewis claimed, in *Blasting and Bombardiering*, that he had "never done anything considerable in the art of writing" before *Tarr*. While *Mrs. Dukes' Million* is not likely to prove him wrong, it remains an interesting comic novel. T. S. Eliot felt Lewis' humour was "near to Dickens" and yet "not too remote from Ben Jonson." And indeed, from the opening paragraph the spirit of these great comic writers is present:

> Mrs. Dukes was about sixty-five years old, her hair quite white, with rifts of red where it grew scarce, and although not exactly fat, she was lumpy in an expressionless, puzzling way. It was as though the fat within her case of clothes were loose and adrift, and like the contents of an ill-made bolster, would sometimes collect in one place, sometimes in another.

Lewis, the original "portmanteau-man" in his own estimation, brought even to this early fiction his multiplicity of interests and talents. Although in 1910 this book might not have seemed "marketable" to his agent, Lewis was wrong in feeling that it was a "lesson showing the futility of pot-boiling" for him. What *Mrs. Dukes' Million* offers, beyond the pleasure of a good mystery engagingly recounted, is another document with which to combat the reductive danger of seeing Lewis' work only in the light of its least attractive element — its authoritarian politics. His range was wide — from satirical fiction to speculative literary and art criticism, from autobiographical memoirs to social polemics. To this we must now add a recognition of his ability as a writer of primarily non-satirical comedy. The characters of *Mrs. Dukes' Million* are, in a sense, types within the mystery genre, yet at the same time they escape such classification because of what even one of Lewis' "enemies," Lytton Strachey, had to call his "fiendish observation, and very original ideas." Perhaps the source of the comedy of this early novel is best explained in Lewis' own terms from "The Meaning of the Wild Body": "The root of the Comic is to be sought in the sensations resulting from the observations of a *thing* behaving like a person. But from that point of view all men are necessarily comic: for they are all *things*, or physical bodies, behaving as persons." Young actors disguised and successfully masquerading as an old Soho bric-à-brac shop lady is probably as close as men can get to being "*things* . . . behaving as persons," and the result is surprisingly deft and engaging comedy.

LINDA HUTCHEON

MOSTLY MIDDLE

GEORGE BOWERING, *A Short Sad Book*. Talonbooks.

VONNEGUT, BARTH, FOWLES LOOK OUT: Here comes Bowering. The parody of realistic fiction or anti-novel (to use the

familiar semi-literate label) is itself parodied in *A Short Sad Book*. George Bowering has descended from the Black Mountain to cock a snook at post-modern fiction, to have some fun with Canadian nationalism, Canadian history, Canadian literary personalities, and to raise some heavy philosophical issues, as in the following:

> I saw a line of trees at Naramata British Columbia & then when I moved I saw a diagonal line of trees. From the air it was a rug of trees.
>
> But I had to get up there by machine, so much for the subjective Scenery has no beginning or ending but you have & I have & my dog has & even airplanes have.

A Short Sad Book does have a beginning and an ending, but like scenery and Canadian history, it is mostly middle, and — to put the cart before the horse in this review — a delightful middle.

It is, of course, essential to identify the specific genre of a work if one is to give it due consideration — particularly in the context of Canadian literary criticism. Accordingly, it should be noted that Bowering has given us an anatomy, of which an eminent Canadian literary critic might have written that he was impressed by

> first, the clarity with which the sights and sounds and smells of Canada come to life, the rotundity of the character-drawing, and the naturalness of the dialogue. Second, the elaborate way that the story and characters are parodied by being set against archetypal heroic patterns, notably the one provided by Canadian history. Third, the revelation of character and incident through the searching use of the stream-of-composition technique. Fourth, the constant tendency to be encyclopaedic and exhaustive both in technique and in subject matter, and to see both in highly intellectualized terms.

The sights, sounds, and tastes of Canada are caught early in the words of its narrator, George Bowering as an eight-year-old:

> It is true, we have to find out what we are not first. We are not first.
>
> In Mexico we were not even second. Cuba was second.
>
> I found out I was not American first.
>
> Long before that I knew I was not British & I thought I must be American.
>
> I listened to King & lickt the backside of George the sixth.

The plot of the anatomy is structured by the manipulation of a continuous parallel with the pattern of Canadian history whose loci are: the Conquest, the expulsion of the Acadians, the two Riel uprisings, the war of 1812, the building of the Railroad, the two World Wars, and the Stanley Cup. All of this is brilliantly embodied in a tragic romantic encounter between Sir John A. MacDonald and Evangeline on a mountain overlooking Burrard inlet:

> In the mountains with the Acadian girl, John A. MacDonald felt all at once very romantic. He pickt some alpine flowers & offered them to her in his trembling fist.
>
> The flowers are nice, she said. But I would rather have the earth they grew in.
>
> But this land is promist to Macmillan-Bloedel, he said. Everything over a thousand feet to Macmillan-Bloedel, everything under a thousand feet to the CPR.
>
> Who is Bloedel, she enquired.
>
> I wish you hadnt askt me that, he said. I dont know, but I can assure you that he is a part of the national policy.
>
> It sounds to me like a classic rip-off, was her reply.
>
> I'm afraid you will eventually end up in Louisiana, my dear. Come, let us go down now. I just have time to catch my train.
>
> You couldnt catch a cold, she thought to herself. Theirs was a love-hate relationship.

Third, the revelation of character and incident through the searching use of stream-of-composition technique:

> Sparrow said we got to stop them Americans from getting the beautiful Okanagan Valley but he wrote it the way the Americans do in Washington. Okanogan, with an O.
>
> It was a dead give away. He went to college in the U.S. That's where he was re-

> cruited by the CIA. He was also approacht by the NKVD. He copied the spelling of the OK Valley from their instructions I mean the CIA. That was AOK with them. Back in B.C. we are careful about our letters.
>
> There's a lot of Canadian literature at the bottom of Lake Okanagan.

Bowering goes on from this to the archetypal Canadian incident of the drowning of Tom Thompson [*sic*], illustrating both the encyclopaedic tendency of *A Short Sad Book* and the ironic potentialities of the spelling of motif.

The encyclopaedism, however, is not restricted to Canadian history — as has been noted by Marshall Delaney in a pseudonymous review, "Bowering, me, and the Robertian Conspiracy" (*Saturday Night*, April 1978) over the name of Robert Fulford. A list of references to contemporary Canadian literary personalities will suffice to illustrate my point since *A Short Sad Book* is provided with an index. These, then are some of those personalities: Al, Bob, Carol, Stan, Lionel, Vic, Frank, and Brian. There are, of course, many more familiar names in the book, some with both first and second names.

In short, there is something for everyone in this book. The professor of literature will find his undergraduate lecture notes comically echoed; the student of Canadian literature and history will find his clichés trotted out and thumped; the trendy follower of contemporary fiction (amongst whom the present reviewer must meekly number himself) will find himself cleverly out-trendied; the observer of Canadian literary and academic politics will recognize a variety of send-ups; and, finally those worrying about Canadian identity might be able to laugh at the comical echoes of their worries.

A Short Sad Book is a truly delightful piece of comic writing, and one that I have not begun to exhaust in two readings.

LEON SURETTE

MYSTERY & MANNER

JOAN HARCOURT and JOHN METCALF, eds., *77: Best Canadian Stories*. Oberon, cloth $15; paper $5.95.

DAVID CARPENTER, ed., *Stories from Alberta*. Oberon, cloth $15; paper $5.95.

MICHAEL ONDAATJE, ed., *Personal Fictions*. Oxford University Press, $4.50.

THE TITLES OF THESE THREE BOOKS of short stories are good clues to their editors' intentions. Oberon's annual collection, between 1972 and 1976 called *New Canadian Stories*, has reasserted, and with greater right, the 1971 volume's claim to being *Best Canadian Stories*. The similarity in title and function to Martha Foley's *The Best American Stories* is deliberate. The editors feel, as they said in last year's foreword, that it is time we honour our own writers. The change in title corresponds to a change in the editors' policy of selection. Until last year the Oberon anthology accepted only unpublished stories. This year Judith Penner's "Cuixmala" is the only previously unpublished piece. To find the other seven stories, the editors read their way through twenty-three Canadian magazines and the CBC Anthology series. To judge from the foreword, the experience left them exhausted and shaken: "To read nearly all the literary magazines published in Canada during one year is to realize how ephemeral much of the work is and how precarious the lives of the magazines themselves." Surely, however, they are overly despondent when they claim that their anthology "directs the attention of readers to writers who otherwise might have been consigned to the vaults of microfilm." In fact six of the eight authors in this anthology have had books published — W. P. Kinsella, W. D. Valgardson, and Beth Harvor by Oberon itself, which publisher admittedly has done more than its share to foster Canadian short stories.

Kent Thompson's "Perhaps the Church Building Itself" about the break-down of an elderly narrator and Judith Penner's "Cuixmala" (the title means graveyard) are exceptions to the generalization I am about to make. Which is that the stories in this volume celebrate endurance often with humour and sometimes even (is it possible?) with joy. In W. P. Kinsella's "Illianna Comes Home," the Indian narrator Silas Ermineskin tells the funny-sad story of his sister's return with her white husband to the reserve. In Elizabeth Spencer's "Prelude to a Parking Lot," an essentially shrewd narrator with a flair for irony and parody recreates the cluttered lives of Mother, Brother, Uncle Jess, Janey, and herself in a crowded house in Nashville. Beth Harvor's "Travelling On" is about a woman who discovers she can cope — cope with the memory of her imposing and self-dramatizing mother, with the break-up of her marriage and the end of an affair with a younger man, and above all with discovering who she is.

However, it is Jack Hodgin's allegorical story, "More Than Conquerors," that dominates the collection with its length —sixty-six pages — and its vibrant characters. The lives of inhabitants on three levels of an A-frame house on Vancouver Island grotesquely intersect as each strives to conquer death: the aging artist on the top floor through art; the middle-class family in between through a physical resurrection of their dead daughter; and in the basement the working class family Carl and Gladdie Roote by their lusty love of life itself. The Rootes are the "more than conquerors" in the story, which ends with this affirmation:

> "Hell Gladdy." ... He ran [his] hand up her leg. "Any bugger who's saddled with an old rip like you for a wife's got no business looking for signs. It's them other people that have to make them up. The ones that don't trust something."

Spirits are less buoyant in David Carpenter's *Stories from Alberta* and despite the strength of many of the individual stories, the collection as a whole is less satisfying. In his lengthy introduction on "Alberta's regional psychology," Carpenter is far more impressed than I am by the metaphoric possibilities of Alberta's provincial flower: Alberta, "the virgin land of wild roses, a new version of mother earth"; "a romantic vision seen ... through wild-rose-coloured glasses"; "turning the rose-strewn wilderness into a prosperous Promised Land"; "an unmolested, natural Eden blossoming with roses and forests and oil derricks"; "Alberta's provincial emblem may be the wild-rose but its flagpole is the oil derrick." Perhaps fortunately, very few of these prelapsarian wild roses are in evidence in the stories themselves which, taken together, show Alberta's transition from Indian possession to pioneer farm to industrialized city.

Rudy Wiebe's opening story "Along the Red Deer and the South Saskatchewan" begins, "This is long ago. Before whites dared to come into our country...." This Indian culture has been eroded in Georges Bugnet's "Mahigan's Atonement." Mahigan's attempted slaying of his brother occurs within the frame of a larger contest between the Evil Spirit Mati-Manito and the Great Spirit Kitse-Manito, but this traditional mythic structure is being undermined in the story itself, as Bugnet perhaps unintentionally shows, by the white missionary.

The majority of the middle stories represent, in one way or another, the loss of innocence or the failure of romance. In McCourt's "White Mustang," a boy looking for a legendary white horse finds instead a defunct grey nag sunk in quicksand. Helen Rosta's "The Magpie," like some of Alice Munro's stories, shows the schoolyard as a treacherous and violent place where teachers have no more real authority than do guards in prisons.

Kroetsch's "The Harvester" is a nostalgic view of the displacement of the legendary thresher and the old farm kitchen by the combine and the short-order take-out. In the last two stories by Bowering and Atwood, the transition to the urban setting is complete, and the city itself turns back again into a wilderness. Atwood's "Polarities" uses the Edmonton setting to explore the contrasting images of open and enclosed space. By the end, the protagonist recognizes his own failures of love and commitment and the utter inadequacy of his own attempts to define and defend a structured human space:

> the land opened before him. It swept away to the north and he thought he could see the mountains, white-covered, their crests glittering in the falling sun, then forest upon forest, after that the barren tundra and the blank solid rivers, and beyond, so far that the endless night had already descended, the frozen sea.

Had Carpenter included the usual biographical and bibliographical notes on the contributors, it would have helped the reader see the book as an "expression of Alberta's regional psychology" and directed his attention to less familiar writers like Georges Bugnet, Helen Rosta and Betty Wilson. It *does* make a difference to one's reading of the story to know that Georges Bugnet's "Mahigan's Atonement" was first published in French in 1924 and republished in 1929 in the Constance Woodrow translation reprinted here.

Michael Ondaatje undertakes his editorial task with more flair and imagination. The title *Personal Fictions* comes from a quotation by Clark Blaise which is provided in an appendix, "The Authors on Their Writing":

> I think the real reason I'm fond of "personal" fiction is that two things move me in fiction — texture and voice. *Texture* is detail arranged and selected and enhanced. . . . By *voice* I am referring to the control, what is commonly referred to when we mean the "world" of a certain author. . . . what we sense of his final concern and bafflements.

This book allows exploration in some depth of the fictional worlds, concerns, and bafflements of four writers.

Ondaatje solves the problem of range by a judicious selection of his authors: Alice Munro, Rudy Wiebe, Audrey Thomas, and Clark Blaise. He gives us two women and two men; two native Canadians who recreate their childhood environment, and two new Canadians who range more broadly for their settings; two writers who have found a consistent narrative voice and point of view that are carried over from story to story, and two who dramatize the different voices and ways of seeing of a wider range of character types. Some of the stories, like Munro's splendid "Peace of Utrecht" are well known; others, like the selections from Audrey Thomas, have been published just recently. Munro carefully recreates the texture of life in small-town Southern Ontario and Vancouver. Wiebe gives fictional shape to the historical experience of Indians and Mennonites in the Canadian West. Thomas uses British Columbia and Mexico as settings to explore, as she puts it, "the terrible gap between men and women." And Blaise depicts the "North American education" of a wary outsider at home in neither of his two settings — the American South and Montreal.

I found *Personal Fictions* the most consistently satisfying of the three collections of short stories. The overall quality is higher because Ondaatje is not constrained within the strict, though legitimate, limits that govern the selections of the other editors. Ondaatje's inclusion of writer's comments, taken from published interviews and essays, focusses attention on the kinds of worlds created in these personal fictions. More than that, the comments suggest some of the preoccupa-

tions common to writers in all three volumes. Some examples:

> I'm very excited by what you might call the surface of life.... It seems to me very important to be able to get at the exact tone or texture of how things are. (Munro)
>
> What I suppose I'm doing, really, is trying to unbury the story that I see is there. (Wiebe)
>
> I like to set things in alien cultures because they're that much starker. (Thomas)
>
> These [Montreal and the Deep South] are places where setting is not merely an excuse, but where setting is in fact the mystery and the manner. (Blaise)

CATHERINE ROSS

STRATEGIES

DAPHNE MARLATT, *Zócalo*. Coach House, $4.50.

MONICA HOLDEN-LAWRENCE, *Mad About the Crazy Lady*. Air Press, cloth $10.95; paper $5.95.

JOHN RIDDELL, *Criss-Cross*. Coach House, $4.50.

THE SENSITIVITY AND PRECISION that have distinguished Daphne Marlatt as a poet serve again in *Zócalo*, her first sustained work of prose fiction. *Zócalo* (which means "square," or "piazza") recounts several days and nights in the journey of a Canadian couple through the Yucatan in Mexico. With its alertness to detail and personal response, the book combines the best features of both the travelogue and the diary, and the mere fact that a reader should make this comparison says a lot about Marlatt's ability to conjure the heady experience of travelling, when the mind and body teem with new impressions and the associations they invoke.

But the author is attempting far more than the evocation of a journey. Ultimately, through her unnamed narrator — the female member of this travelling couple — Marlatt seeks to express one woman's consciousness as a simultaneity of perceptions, thoughts, and memories, irradiated by sensations and feelings. One is reminded of Virginia Woolf's "luminous envelope" and the connection is justified. There is, however, an instructive difference between the types of sensibility articulated in Woolf and Marlatt. Woolf uses a ubiquitous and anonymous narrator who is not so much a person as a medium through which an ambience or envelope of experience, enclosing several separate characters, gains expression. Marlatt's narrator, in contrast, is a definite character examining her own experience, but without employing the first person pronoun. Instead, the narrator refers to herself throughout as "she," and the objectification provides an effective solution to the problem Marlatt poses. Her aim is to express a sensibility so reflective that it is continually turning experience into an object of thought. The narrator cannot let

go even for a moment and lose herself in some activity, as her companion, Yoshio, is able to do through photography. At times, the pull of self-preoccupation is so strong that she is tempted to abandon the external world and wander through her private universe forever.

Thus, *Zócalo* is far more than a travelogue or diary. It becomes a struggle for contact, for what Marlatt calls "the mutual day," and this gives an urgency to the descriptive passages, since only through responding to the outside can the struggle be won. There is no final victory; the two poles of participation and withdrawal (Marlatt calls them "presence" and "absence") are never resolved. Through their tension the book achieves considerable power.

Mad About the Crazy Lady is Monica Holden-Lawrence's first full length work of prose fiction. It is an extraordinary text that augurs well for the career of its author. The book is experimental in enlarging the novel form to express not merely the discovery of the author's own creative centre (after *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* such an enterprise would not be new) but also to voice a debt of gratitude to the reader for consummating her identity as a writer and as a person. This warm address transforms the experience of reading, not by making us feel responsible for breathing life into the characters as Sartre urges, but by involving us in the very impulse that led to their creation. To convey the vitality and excitement of this communion, first within the author and then between author and reader, Holden-Lawrence uses sexual metaphors of all types: narcissistic, homosexual, heterosexual, and hermaphroditic.

The strategy is fascinating and depends upon the venerable device of a story within a story. Here, the story of reaching her own centre is contained in a later story which tells about reading the first story to a high school audience. It works like this. In the earlier story about reaching her own centre, the author divides into three aspects of herself: "Mon as Mon. Mon as Zoa. Mon as the Crazy Lady." Freudians especially will have a field day deciding exactly what parts of the psyche these fragments represent. At any rate, Mon's mission is to find the Crazy Lady. To do this, she must write a story about the search, and hence we get yet another story within a story. By the end, neither the Crazy Lady, who is still at large, nor Zoa, who helped in the search for her, is needed any longer; Mon has finally found her own true centre. The discovery, however, is incomplete, for to find oneself is to find nothing, to have nothing external by which to tell who one is: "It's just me and the black." Yet, as this story is contained by the larger one about reading to a high school audience, there is a solution. Mon has found her creative centre, but she is not alone with it; there is the audience to share it with and, by extension, the reader. Holden-Lawrence, then, gives new form to an old insight: only through being read does an author's true identity emerge.

John Riddell, the author of *Criss-Cross*, is not so concerned with writing fiction as with writing about and illustrating a particular theory of fiction. He experiments with what Richard Kostelanetz calls "visual fiction" — the coordination of various compositional techniques, such as concrete poetry, cartoons, and collage, to enhance the reading experience. *Criss-Cross*, consequently, is not a novel, but a collection — one might say a handbook — of possible approaches to visual writing. At their best, the results are interesting. Just as Cubism presents a large number of simultaneous points of view on the same object, so Riddell exploits several aspects of the reading experience. For example, in a

parody of phenomenological analysis, he portrays visually an experience all too common to readers of this kind of prose: the sudden encounter with obscurity when the text simply stops making sense. Riddell represents this phenomenon typographically, first turning the words themselves into gibberish, then merging the lines until by the bottom of the page all we see is black ink. Elsewhere, however, *Criss-Cross* seems too derivative for a book trumpeting stylistic innovation.

ERIC P. LEVY

WEST COAST SEEN

JIM BROWN, *Northern Light*. Blue Mountain Books, $4.95.

MARILYN BOWERING, *One Who Became Lost*. Fiddlehead Poetry Books.

MARILYN BOWERING, *The Killing Room*. Sono Nis Press.

PENNY KEMP, ed. *West Coast Works*. Applegarth Follies, $3.50.

AUGUST KLEINZAHLER, *The Sausage Master of Minsk*. Villeneuve, $4.00.

> you dont get any where
> if you dont take some
> chances

THESE LINES OF JIM BROWN'S ought to apply to poets anywhere, anytime. In the last ten years or so, however, it seems that most of the chance-taking poets have lived, written and published in B.C. With the notable exception of bp Nichol in Toronto, the most interesting experimenters — Bill Bissett, Daphne Marlatt, Gerry Gilbert — have been West Coast natives. Jim Brown, as one-time editor of Very Stone House Press and Talonbooks, has been a part of the postmodernist scene in B.C. for some time now. *Northern Light* is his ninth book of poetry and contains poems written between 1970 and 1976.

Brown's poetry concentrates on perception; his "I" is the visionary self: "eye see you through / these storms." The phenomenological world is important to him in its revelation of the eternal, and as a poet, his role is to reveal the presence of eternity in the immediate world. Nothing unconventional here. Brown's voice is similar to Bissett's, vatic and incantatory:

> the beat is in the music
> the magic is in the eye
>
> it all flows out of the moon
> and it all flows into the sun

On the whole, Bissett does this sort of thing better, and Leonard Cohen, in the "God is alive. Magic is afoot" section of *Beautiful Losers*, does it best.

In his introduction, Edwin Varney suggests that the movement from the personal to the universal in Brown's poetry pivots on a specific line or phrase. I found this to be true of some of his earlier poems, such as "Late february" in *If There Are Any Noahs* (1967), but disappointingly inapplicable to the present collection. In moving towards a freer mode of composition, he is sacrificing verbal dexterity:

> eye dont build poems like eye
> used to. . . .
> these words are more related
> to the flight of random
> birds
> in a swarm or like bees
>
> do they find their way to
> the petals of your heart?

The answer is no. Joe Rosenblatt's bumblebees might have served as a model of energy in a poem. There's no sign of it here.

Marilyn Bowering's two books reveal a close relationship to the land, specifically the West Coast. Her images are of death, blood, bone and corpses, and many of her phrases are curiously reminiscent of A. J. M. Smith's early poetry: "white jagged

ribs of the land" and "the visionary lust / dissolves flesh" are metaphysical, and, insofar as they resemble the poetry of the 1920's, dated. Bowering's voice is truest and most original in the poems that appear to reflect her interest in West Coast Indian mythology and the elemental unity of man and landscape. In *One Who Became Lost*, these poems are the core of the book. "Sea-Woman Curse" is a fine example:

> Woman, curse the sky's
> male-brazen light
> and clot the flood black sea
> with hungry blood.

Her poems are "peopled" with eagle, bear, salmon, cormorant and clam. She writes in short lines, piling up opposing pairs of nouns modified by simple adjectives: "leaden beach," "scarring bed," "tonguing sea," "steepest sky," "wrinkling skin," and "silver brink" are all from a single poem. This method works well in exemplifying the eternal balance of natural forces. Human relationships, however, are often depicted as vicious, unconsummated, wounding: "I pushed a stick through his eye." The Atwood of *Power Politics* is a debilitating influence here, but in *The Killing Room*, Bowering moves towards a more personal poetic statement:

> He cannot die
> who makes things
> as he wants them.

Neither Brown nor Marilyn Bowering is included in *West Coast Works*, but many big names are represented: Daphne Marlatt, Robin Blaser, Susan Musgrave, George Bowering, Judy Copithorne, Gerry Gilbert. Unfortunately, only a few of the poets have been allotted more than a couple of pages each. Generally, more poems by fewer writers make for better anthologies, unless the book is designed to show many variations on a single theme (*Love Where the Nights Are Long*) or a specific form (*The Cosmic Chef*). Margaret Atwood has said that "anthologies are mirages created, finally, by their editors." If so, then editor Penny Kemp's contribution might hold the key to her editorial procedure. Sadly, her work is a pale imitation of Daphne Marlatt, and that ought to say something about the rest of the book as well. By far the best piece in it is Marlatt's own "Pluto Seen From Earth: A March Journal for South Vietnam, 3-5/75." This is a brilliant fusion of reality and myth, blending the attributes of Pluto — death, darkness and burial — with the slaughter in Vietnam, and contrasting that with the poet's own situation, planting seeds on a Sunday afternoon in B.C. The planting is a ritual gesture directed against death but also involving burial, and other similar paradoxes are irresistibly drawn out in a dialectic of death and rebirth. Playing on the meanings of the different names given to the god of the underworld (wealthy, unseen, mouth), Marlatt makes the words of the poem, like the seeds she plants, ritualized, redemptive, and finally transforming. As Al Purdy would say, this poem will freeze you right inside your clothes.

That's something that can't be said for August Kleinzahler's *The Sausage Master of Minsk*, though it's a pleasant little book. There are a number of awkward phrases in it that suggest a young poet in search of a voice. No one ought to be scrupulously pleased with lines like these from the title poem:

> the eldest son, no boon,
> even with the shop's renown, was
> I to my parents.

The staccato phrasing of these poems reflects an urban consciousness almost totally absent from the poetry of the West Coast, and I suspect that Kleinzahler has lived long enough in Montreal to absorb some of the energy of the poetry

scene there. He offers a mixed bag of settings: West Coast mountains, alpine lakes, European beaches, Minsk and Mount Royal, but his vignettes of urban life are his best poems. "A BL&T with Old Ed Hopper in Gimbel's Luncheonette" is pure Souster. And the poem on a snowy Montreal winter ends with this fine image:

Cats
threw cats
off
each shed's
sweetest angle.

If only for those lines, Kleinzahler should be in the recent Montreal Poetry anthology, if he is indeed a Montreal resident now. Vancouver publishers, indeed publishers everywhere, are put to shame by Fred Louder's handsome printing of the book for Villeneuve Publications.

MICHAEL DARLING

CEREMONIAL HOUSES

GEORGE WOODCOCK, *Peoples of the Coast.* Hurtig, $17.95.

JOHN VEILLETTE and GARY WHITE, *Early Indian Village Churches.* UBC Press, $29.00 cloth; $15.00 paper.

GEORGE WOODCOCK SAYS THAT the art of the Coast Indians, immediately appealing though it is, can be understood only if we understand the society that produced it. His book *Peoples of the Coast* makes it clear why this is so and goes a long way towards providing that understanding. It has made me turn, again and again, to *Northwest Coast Indian Art* and the conversation between Bill Holm and Bill Reid, to Wilson Duff's *Images Stone B.C.*, hearing more, seeing better.

Woodcock's book is not simply about the art of these peoples, though it is, he says, "among that art's products that we find ourselves most closely in contact with their intellectual and spiritual life." His intent is to portray, in all its aspects and at its height, the culture of the Coast Indians, "homogeneous in spirit yet marvellously varied in its detailed manifestations."

It was a culture that had developed very slowly. Evidence from archaeological discoveries, as well as from studies of languages and myths, suggests that between ten and twelve thousand years ago, people came down through the Fraser canyon towards the sea. As they settled along the coast or on the near islands, the mountains behind them and the deep fjords of the coastline northwards gave them a measure of geographical isolation. Food was abundant. They had no need — as agrarian communities do — to dig and delve. The earth gave "without the need to disturb it"; and the sea provided so richly through seasonal runs of salmon that the peoples of the coast could devote the winter months to the art and ritual which manifested their sense of the closeness between the daily world and the world of spirits. For them, all things were imbued with spirit, not only the all-providing salmon with whom thy felt profoundly connected, by whom they felt so gifted, but the great cedar and indeed every creature, object, or event significant in their lives.

The winter ceremonies were the spirit dances and the potlach. All the Coast cultures used both ceremonies to validate possessions of such tangible goods as canoes, blankets, engraved coppers, or intangible possessions like one's own dance and song, the clan or lineage rights to fishing waters or hunting grounds, to names and crests. Though they respected material wealth, the Coast Indians valued intangible property more, since it was on its manifestation that a man's standing in society depended, "or rather, his seating, since it was where he sat at a potlatch or

during a winter ceremonial and the order in which he received gifts that determined his rank and thus deeply affected his honor." Possessions of any kind were pointless unless they were "validated," which entailed not only a public performance or claiming before witnesses, but the presentation of gifts to those witnesses. "A chief of the Kwakiutl or more northerly peoples could only dance the dances that supernatural beings had given to his ancestors, or assume his hereditary title, or give his son a prestigious name, or celebrate the puberty of his daughter, or raise a totem pole to record his greatness and his family's legends . . . after he had validated his pretensions by a potlatch feast."

To describe the different social and ceremonial patterns developed by different people, Woodcock devotes a chapter each to the Nootka, the Coast Salish, the northern peoples, and the Kwakiutl. Among the northern peoples — the Haida, the Tlingit, and the Tsimshian — competition between clans for prestige stimulated magnificent carving, of poles, of crests, of head-dresses, masks, rattles, and other ceremonial objects. Differences between their ceremonies and those of the central Coast peoples are evident in the fact that, for instance, the Haida carvers seem concerned to hold to the existing natural form of pole or feast dish. The Kwakiutl, "grandiose and expansive" in their winter ceremonials, were more inclined to give the form to be represented a kind of sculptural freedom.

The Coast Salish were the only people who did not develop an art within the symbolic-figurative tradition. Their genius lay rather in mystical introspection. They were intensely involved in the guardian spirit quest, the attempt to encounter a spirit that might inspire one man to be a shaman, another to be a canoe-maker or a fisherman. It was the guardian spirit which gave one dancing power, and one's own dance bore witness to the encounter. For the Coast Salish, the individual experience was of primary importance, whereas for the northern peoples, to whom clan and lineage were what mattered, ceremonial patterns were more highly organized; potlatches were more formal; individual spiritual experience was transformed into a socially approved collective experience.

The groups described in these chapters were not political entities. They were language groups within any one of which many dialects were spoken. People lived in independent villages, many of them isolated. Even within the village, rivalries between kinship groups for prestige precluded an organization of a political sort. What brought them together — work rhythms, rites, and ceremonies — kept all the coastal people in touch. They traded with each other; they exchanged techniques and ideas; there were all manner of cultural borrowings. Their way of living, evolved over so long a period of time, very little changed for several hundred years before the arrival of the first European explorers and traders, was maintained for another hundred years after that time. But finally the invaders, for their various reasons, began to interfere. The success of that interference is startling enough to require explanation. In his penultimate chapter, Woodcock refers to the myth of the Transformer, a myth deeply rooted in the consciousness of the Coast Indian. For him, the Transformer — Trickster was Raven; for the peoples of the interior it was Coyote. Just as Simon Fraser was taken for one of Coyote's companions, the first white-sailed ships were thought by Coast Indians to be Raven returning. "And in their own ways the newcomers did fulfil the mythical roles attributed to Raven and Coyote." Their gifts were double-edged, at first stimulating, finally deadly.

It's a familiar but still a terrible story. Woodcock does not sentimentalize it. "The aboriginal culture," he says, "was no more ideal than any other" and even without such open attacks as the law banning potlatch, the winter social ceremonials, the spirit dances, it would probably have declined for other reasons. The economic basis of Indian society shifted; their land was pre-empted; their fishing grounds trespassed upon. There was a shift away from communal houses, communal property. The leisure of the long winter, the social motivations for art, the basis for the potlatch and the spirit dances were all gone. The animist view of the universe is no longer pervasive in Indian societies. There is, Woodcock says, no possible return to the life they lived before the white invasion. But the terrible breakdown of morale seems over. The pride and the artistic accomplishment of the native people are alive and growing. George Woodcock's book, like his final chapter, is a witnessing — full, factual, fair-minded as is his way.

Early Indian Village Churches, by John Veillette and Gary White, is one of a number of books in Indian studies and B.C. history being published by the University of British Columbia Press. It's hard on this volume to turn to it from *Peoples of the Coast*. Its pictures have been collected with real concern and affection, and the several commentaries thoughtfully prepared. But the churches we are shown were, as the foreword says, "the structures . . . of the newly arrived whites. An imposed culture was conveyed by an imposed architectural form." It is an extraordinary experience to turn from the pictures and descriptions of the Coast Indian house to the pictures of these churches, the carvings in their interiors.

Many of them are, of course, gone, burnt down or simply deserted, neglected. Wooden structures don't last forever in the rain forest, and the native peoples were never much concerned to preserve their artifacts anyhow. The authors, who have helped to restore two churches, clearly hope others will be preserved. But Harold Kalman and Robin Fisher both show how many questions arise about the value of restoring or preserving churches that seem redundant.

HELEN SONTHOFF

THE MIXTURE AS BEFORE

G. H. GERVAIS and JAMES REANEY, *Baldoon*. The Porcupine's Quill.

FOLLOWING THE TEXT of *Baldoon*, James Reaney and Marty Gervais have thoughtfully caused to be printed an "Appendix Incorporating *Scholarly Apparatus* for the use of EDUCATORS." And of REVIEWERS, one might add. One hopes that audiences are provided with similar assistance, and time to absorb it before the performance begins. Both audiences and readers need all the help they can get to digest the rich mixture of *Baldoon*.

The basic ingredient, as in Reaney's trilogy about the Donnellys, is local history. In Baldoon, near Wallaceburg, Ontario, a nineteenth-century farm family suffered a long series of supernatural visitations, ranging from the usual poltergeist tricks to fires and visions. Various efforts at exorcism failed. Finally, driven nearly to despair, the farmer obtained the services of a doctor and his psychic daughter from Long Point on Lake Erie and, following instructions, shot the wing of the stray goose in his flock with a silver bullet, thus causing the witch who was the source of the trouble to break her arm and be both identified and rendered powerless. It's a good yarn, and Reaney, a vigorous opponent of soulless modernity, likes to believe it is true. The printed text of the play is occasionally embel-

lished with Victorian typography which helps establish the feeling of the dusty archives and Goodwill Shops Reaney explored to find his story. His commitment to local history as the raw material of drama is now firmly established.

Part of the mixture, as always, is metaphor. Metaphor dominates the language of the play, both the prose and the verse, and is complicated by a dense Scots brogue for McTavish, the haunted farmer, and a Pennsylvania Dutch patois for the Doctor. Metaphor merges into symbol and symbol manifests itself not only verbally but also in concrete forms: puppets shaped like birds represent the souls of the three principal characters, marionettes represent mechanically-minded people, and hand puppets associated with some of the witches represent elements in the other characters' warped psyches. (Not all of these meanings are readily apparent from the text, even with its chatty stage directions, but the Appendix helps.)

Some other elements in the brew are songs, magician's tricks, a chorus, doubling of roles and of locations, an "illusion box" and a model of a church, a plethora of stage business including children's games, mime, flashbacks, a novelistic narrated conclusion, and assorted Brechtian effects. Out of all this, and out of the legends and the Calvinism, arises — somehow — a sense of Reaney trying to exorcise his own puritan past, to identify and break the mind-forged manacles and liberate the guilty soul by confronting and confessing the guilt, and by rejoicing in the fullness of life, very much as Hagar Shipley learned to do in Margaret Laurence's *The Stone Angel.* Hagar's message comes through directly as she narrates her own insights. Reaney's, however, is so nearly swamped by his own bag of theatrical tricks that the good Doctor is occasionally given the task of stating it, metaphorically but nevertheless baldly:

> Yes, God does hold you over a pit — a valley, an abyss of happiness filled with frankincense and citrons and dancing and music and love — he hangs you by the slenderest chust thinnest filmiest flimsiest cobweb thread ever seen yet and — you spiders — you won't let go, you won't let go.

Add to all this — and stir well — the NDWT Theatre Company, the actors and director who brought life to the Donnellys and again to *Baldoon.* Reaney writes for and works with his own gang, not to the point where he produces "collective creations" (the voice of the play is always his) but to the point where text and production interact so completely that a perceptive Alberta reviewer wondered in print if anyone else could perform Reaney's plays satifsactorily. This puts the reader of the play at an even more serious disadvantage than usual, as he wades through improbable stage directions while wrestling with the other multitudinous elements of the text. To have seen a production of a Reaney play — any Reaney play — is almost a prerequisite for reading one.

Other dramatists have done these things — written for a specific company, exhumed the chorus, dipped into local history, devised methods to put narrative into drama, broken through theatrical conventions in various ways. Brecht in particular comes to mind, an influence that Reaney acknowledges. But, as far as I know, no other dramatist plays so many theatrical games simultaneously as Reaney does. Reading or seeing a Reaney play, especially the Donnelly trilogy or *Baldoon,* is like attending a workshop in dramatic technique. Reaney and his gang are devoted to workshops, both for children and adults. On tour with the trilogy, they conducted workshops from British Columbia to the Maritimes, demonstrat-

ing their cats' cradles and urging children to revolve like the Husky Tower. The stage directions in *Baldoon* dictate similar activities or make various suggestions that would leave the actors free to follow their impulses of the moment, though within the constraints of meaning imposed by the Appendix. The line between workshop and finished play is not clearly drawn. But in the finished play, the feeling generated is not so much that of the spontaneity and individual creativity supposedly fostered by a workshop as that of frenetic activity and a compulsion to demonstrate the full range of exercises which the company has practiced. What Reaney has to say, interesting and valuable though it is, is almost lost in the melee. The mixture is rather too rich.

ANN P. MESSENGER

SURVIVORS OF THE MARGINS

NICHOLAS CATANOY, *Modern Romanian Poetry.* Mosaic Press/Valley Editions.

LYUBOMIR LEVCHEV, *The Left-Handed One.* Hounslow Press, $4.95.

GILES EDWARD GOBETZ and ADELE DONCHENKO, *Anthology of Slovenian American Literature.* Slovenian Research Center of America, $7.00.

LINO LEITAO, *Goan Tales.* Vesta Publications, $4.50.

REFLECTING THE PLURALITY of Canada's cultural heritage, these four collections of ethnic poetry, fiction, and art are strikingly different from one another in subject, form, style, and artistic merit. Yet together they raise central problems of second-language literature and literature in translation — essentially, how to communicate the experiences of one place and culture through a language having none of the original associations — and they also share common themes, including uprootedness, fascination with the past, and marginality.

One highly successful experimental solution to the translation dilemma is presented by *Modern Romanian Poetry*, an anthology of ninety-eight poems by fifty-three twentieth-century Romanian poets — some having lived abroad (such as editor Nicholas Catanoy who is based in Fredericton) but most living at home, and all using their native language. The poems were first translated into English by Catanoy and others; then these translations were recreated as poetry by leading English Canadian poets, including Atwood, Bowering, Lee, MacEwen, and Marshall.

The most distinctive poems — transformed by some of our most densely symbolic contemporary Canadian poets — depict eerie, apocalyptic mindscapes, twilight zones of loss, solitude, paralysis, and breakdown. Psychological exiles under a political regime from which they feel estranged, these poets wander in labyrinths of fantasy, nightmare, or nostalgic reverie. Even in the most overtly engagé poems, gathered together in one section entitled "The Alibi," their protest is vented through strategies of silence, and their imagery — intensely compelling — ranges from the grotesque, to the surrealistic, to the gossamer.

> Take this bony body
> Gone thin, almost transparent,
> And that dying dog of a rag;
> From these, stitch me a garment of light.
>
> "The Coat": Eugen Jebeleanu/
> D. Dutescu/J. Michael Yates.

An informative Afterword gives a brief survey of the evolution of twentieth-century in Romania. Two names which stand out are Tristan Tzara, founder of dadaism, and absurdist playwright Eugene Ionesco; their influences are felt in a

veiled way throughout this collection, which seems written, for the most part, just one shock short of total disintegration. Bearing little family resemblance to the most celebrated Canadian poet of Romanian birth (who contributes some poetic resuscitations and a brief Foreword) — namely, Irving Layton — these poets fall flat on clichés when they attempt direct lyric expression ("Your ankles were dearer to me / Than heaven or earth") but rise to eloquence within the luminous confines of the subconscious, leaving us "richer for the marvels we have lost / On opening our eyes again."

The Left-Handed One presents a selection of poems by Bulgarian poet and Minister of Culture, Lyubomir Levchev, whose writing is translated by John Robert Colombo and Nikola Roussanoff, a Canadian writer of Bulgarian background. The title is a literal translation of the poet's surname, suggesting the confessional nature of Levchev's poems, even when they promote the cause of communist revolution. The personal narrative threaded through the collection takes us from Levchev's ancestral past ("Hey, you, grandfather, / great far-off grandfather, / your blood is flowing in my veins"), through "A Song about Me" and "Self-Portrait," to the point where the poet's son asks him, "Father ... / don't you think it's necessary for me, too, / to become a revolutionary ... ?"

Totally unlike the Romanian poems, Levchev's demonstrate little skill with imagery and even less with rhythm and the sounds of words. Despite his alleged reputation as the most contemporary of Bulgaria's poets, Levchev's poems — at least as they have been transmitted here — do not manage to achieve even a one-light-read Waymanish individuality. Thematically they fail to penetrate beneath the superficial, while stylistically they fail to rise above the mediocre. The communist ideology which informs the poet's vision brings Western readers an unusual source of poetic inspiration, for there are poems prompted by Levchev's admiration for Neruda, Lorca, and Engels. But the text suffers from sloppy editing, and generally even Levchev's revolutionary dedication amounts to little more than adolescent verbal fisticuffs:

> I don't want them to find
> my skull
> without a hole from a bullet
> or a knive [*sic*]!

Anthology of Slovenian American Literature, a collection of writings and art work by immigrants to North America from Slovenia (the northernmost republic of Yugoslavia) would be easy to dismiss by certain conventional norms as non-art. The literature consists of autobiographical narratives and thinly fictionalized accounts of the immigrant experience and working-class life largely confined to the Cleveland area in terms of setting, but with some vignettes portraying crises of adjustment in Southern Ontario as well. Though deeply felt and at times painfully affecting, these stories are not written in a style that commends itself on grounds other than its utter honesty, so that the collection's main interest and value are not aesthetic but sociological.

One of the most moving personal reflections on dislocation and otherness is Rose Mary Prosen's "Looking Back." In a disjointed and child-like way, she describes the gradual process of the weaning from a Slovenian family heritage and her difficult search for selfhood and an integrated identity as she grows up in a U.S. where fathers raise rabbits and chickens in city garages, mothers take in boarders in every room of the house including the kitchen, and girls commonly go to work in factories by the age of fifteen. Prosen closely observes this community of economically-pinched, hard-working immigrants — out of necessity

frequently doing double shifts in mines, steel mills, or bakeries — and she comments on how some of the older people "felt displaced their whole life long, never learning English, never leaving the neighborhood, hugging their own blood, their own plot of land, living still as workers on the landlord's great estate." Predictably, their old world values and rituals are perceived as a source not of strength and reassurance but of embarrassment by the younger generation whose schooling presents them with the startlingly dissimilar, sanitized, orderly world of Dick, Jane, and Run! Spot! Run!

From these rough hewn stories, filled with personal sacrifice, financial hardship, accident, death, and also ceremony, emerge examples of quiet heroism amongst marginal people — those suspended between two worlds — which is a human condition probed no more candidly, but clearly more searchingly and memorably, by leading writers in many newer Commonwealth nations, too.

Goan Tales presents more stories written in English by an immigrant, Lino Leitao, who was born in Goa (the former Portuguese colony which is now part of India), was later expelled from Uganda in Amin's purge of 1972, and who now resides in Montreal. His unornamented accounts of peasant life in Goa and satirical exposures of the European community and its Asian "assimilados" in colonial India or Africa are narrated in a straightforward and at times even fairytale-like style. But the simplicity of the surface is supported on a foundation of political comment, and the naivety conceals professional cunning.

For example, in "Armando Rodrigues," an Emperor's New Clothes tale given specific political focus and culminating with scatalogical intensity, Leitao exposes the hypocrisy of the "assimilados" and their misguided adulation of the colonial masters by depicting the Goans' shocked reaction at the discovery that an important European government minister, "a real Portuguese," can be bent double with diarrhea on a public platform beneath the broiling Asian sun. This event marks the political awakening of the youth, Armando Rodrigues, who concludes that "all men are equal.... They all shit."

Those stories which take as their ostensible subjects unhappy marriages are less successful, for Leitao's women are either saints (who go mad) or whores, and his depictions of betrayal and adultery are melodramatic and unconvincing. Still, even these stories address salient social and racial issues, though less directly, since themes of misunderstanding and miscommunication between people remain more than peripheral.

WENDY ROBBINS KEITNER

DUSTED INSIDE

JOE ROSENBLATT, *Top Soil.* Press Porcépic, $7.95.

HARRY HOWITH, *Multiple Choices: New and Selected Poems, 1961-1976.* Mosaic Press, $3.95.

DAVID MCFADDEN, *The Saladmaker.* Cross Country Press.

MOST OF THESE POEMS are rather selected than new, but all of them belong to well established figures — steps in our recent literary history. Since Rosenblatt's first seven books are out of print we understand the important service that Press Porcépic is providing for poetry lovers with the publication of *Top Soil.* The collection is divided into four parts. The first three sections retain their original titles: *The Bumblebee Dithyramb* (1972), *The Blind Photographer* (1973) and *Dream Craters* (1974). The fourth section, entitled "More of the Insane," includes poems from Rosenblatt's early books as

well as recent unpublished material. So with the exception of *Virgins and Vampires* (1975), we have with *Top Soil* the complete Rosenblatt reader.

The sound-poetry presentation like "Moth Sonata," the intricate songs that the poet weaves with the thread of subhuman worlds, a rich imagination pushed to the limits of originality and a comic perception of the universe that often takes the dimensions of a full rhetoric of irony make of Joe Rosenblatt a frivolous Kafka, an amusing Poe, a smiling Lautréamont; in short: a man André Breton would have welcomed in his anthology of black humour. Because he is all this, the author of *Top Soil* should be considered as the most talented poet writing in English Canada today, even if (not like many others) he doesn't take himself seriously.

As for the other two poets, I recognize their good quality, I am aware of their importance but I am afraid they are too pale, too heavy-footed in their realism and too domestic in their confession to inspire real enthusiasm. McFadden's major collections are *Letters From the Earth to the Earth* (1969), *Poems Worth Knowing* (1971), *Intense Pleasure* (1972) and *A Knight in Dried Plums* (1975). The titrology is not misleading; the poet's egotism is no secret for his readers. The twenty-three poems of *The Saladmaker* originally appeared as the ninth issue of George Bowering's *Imago*. This time the author has provided an introduction for his pamphlet and it is worth noticing that he dated it "Halloween, 1976." It is perhaps better to let the reader decide about the taste of McFadden salad:

> These are mediocre moments in a mediocre life
> as I bathe daily in diabolic acid.
> And I hope I have not bored you
> with details of a life you'll never live
> being sick enough with your own.

Harry Howith is the man Louis Dudek called "The best poet writing in Canada today." About *Multiple Choice* this is what Howith tells us: "This book contains poems which I wish to preserve. Most were first published in other volumes, but have since been revised; thirteen are recent and hitherto unpublished." Less original than Rosenblatt, Howith retains — far more than McFadden does — a sure elegance, a sense for solid meditation and a classicism through his modernity. Poems like "Autumn 1959" illustrate Howith's firmness as a poet:

> Autumn
> in this country of cold Pepsi-Cola
> and hot politicians
> is the time to take the first drags
> on the nicotine of need,
> . . .
>
> This is surely the season
> for the politics of need and desire,
> and I do not wonder
> that so many revolutions happen
> between September and the snow.

We will perhaps see longer studies about poets like these. One could begin with a rhetoric of attitudes. For instance, we could ask: "Why are these poets writing today?" Each one of them gives us an answer that is somehow a key to the reading of their works. Rosenblatt tells us:

> In the genes of my poems
> in the body of the beast, the spirit
> moves on fours, thumps its barrelled chest,
> devours the black mud, snarls, growls.

For him this happens when "The Muse in Mid-Winter" hibernates. So even when inspiration is at its lowest tide the poet writes by instinct, acting in a way similar to the bumblebee, an insect he celebrates in many of his poems.

McFadden doesn't write by instinct and must therefore furnish an explanation for his poetic activity:

> into my notebook because someday
> it will all be dead, dead, dead

and I'll curse myself for not having
recorded its images

Does this kind of poet keep his notebooks next to the family album? Whatever the intention is, vanity doesn't seem to be excluded from the indirect motivations:

for I am Adam and my screams
drown out all others, the song
of the language of my pointed moments
protecting me from putrefaction

As for Howith, he tells us that his publisher thinks that his poems are a contribution to society, while his friend believes that writing is good therapy.

Instinct, desire of immortality and social considerations are the motives here. But if poetry must remain the exploration of a new language I will stop with Joe Rosenblatt at the threshold of instinct. I salute him as a sign of hope, as a man who only needs three lines to make you dream:

The capsule is lost in each fire:
a sun with a bishop's mitre —
the tulip is dusted inside.

ALEXANDRE AMPRIMOZ

GERMAN TRANSLATIONS

WALTER RIEDEL, ed., *Moderne Erzähler der Welt — Kanada.* Tübingen & Basel: Horst Erdmann Verlg.

AS GENERAL TRANSLATOR AND EDITOR, Walter Riedel outlines in his Introduction that this collection of short stories is an attempt to bring closer to the German speaking reader the richness of Canadian short prose. Since this volume is largely intended for the European market the editor begins, quite justifiably, with an excursus on the concept "Canadian" in its geographical and historical sense, underlining thereby the human experience of a vast and often empty country of fiendish snowfields, desolate tundras, and endless prairies that colour many a Canadian story. Not only a hostile nature, however, but also aboriginal people — now themselves threatened — and the economically dominant neighbour to the south are felt here as a potent threat to man's existence. Often, therefore, as an important aspect of this specific "Canadian experience" the central motif becomes that of physical and cultural "survival."

It is this very aspect of the Canadian experience in the prose coupled with its literary quality, Riedel asserts further, that guided him in his "subjective selection" of the stories in this anthology. The traditional chronological division of the material is fortunately abandoned in favour of an ethnic one with four sections: I. Eskimo and Indian prose, II. Francocanadian prose, III. Anglocanadian prose, and IV. Germancanadian prose (one sample). The distribution is consistent with the general literary representation in Canada in that more than two-thirds of the material make up the third group, whereas unfortunately only two aboriginal voices, those of Markoosie and George Clutesi, are heard, both writing with an intriguingly mythical touch about their native land.

Although most of the remaining prose is very readable indeed, it varies widely in literary quality, Canadian content, and emotional and intellectual impact. Pieces such as "The Painted Door" by Sinclair Ross and "Water" by Frederick Grove are of good rhythmic style and proper proportion, concise and freshly realistic, psychologically motivated but without overintellectualisation of the problems involved. Moreover, the Canadian perspective is intensely captured in the first instance in the inescapable impact of a relentless snowstorm in the vast, silent

prairie on a young farmer's wife, and secondly in the longing of a shrewdly deceived farmer for his lost Northland fields. Contrary to the gripping intensity of some of these texts there are others which portray only rather thin insights into life with little Canadian flavour like Mordecai Richler's "Bambinger" or Don Bailey's "A Bauble for Bernice." Adhering to his own criteria for this prose selection Riedel could well have chosen different samples by Richler, Bailey or say Hugh Garner: compared to for example "The Yellow Sweater," although well known as the title story of Garner's first collection of stories, "The Conversion of Willie Heaps," the highlight of this book and winner of the Northern Review Prize in 1951, lacks the stereotyped clichéd plot of the former text and is, in fact, a much more original and skilfully ambitious piece of writing. Even Garner's "One-two-three little Indians" might have been a preferable choice, providing a gruesome insight into the often degrading and hopeless living conditions of the poverty stricken Indians on this continent.

Although for instance Margaret Atwood, Pierre Berton, Marie-Claire Blais, Leonard Cohen or Robertson Davies who are all well known to have greatly contributed to the literary establishment of a Canadian identity could not have been included in this anthology, since it is strictly limited to short stories only, Riedel's book can be readily recommended to the German-speaking reader seeking a quick overall orientation. Furthermore, the editor has provided a helpful biographical index of the authors, although its usefulness is somewhat impaired by certain omissions in both the publication dates of the texts chosen and the birthdates. All in all, Walter Riedel has presented us with an interesting, well translated and very readable anthology that vividly captures for the German-speaking public the social, cultural, political and climatic spirit of the Canadian literary scene.

UTA WILLIAMS

DISCONNECTING

MICHEL FOUCAULT, *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, ed. Donald F. Bouchard, trans. Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon. Cornell University Press, $12.50.

ROBERT MELANCON, ed., *Le Lieu Commun (Études françaises*, 13, 1-2, April 1977), $6.00.

JEAN-PIERRE ROY, *Bachelard, ou le concept contre l'image*. Les Presses de L'Université de Montréal, $14.00.

JEAN FISETTE, *Le Texte Automatiste: Essai de théorie/pratique de sémiotique textuelle*. Les Presses de L'Université du Québec.

DARKO SUVIN, *Pour une Poétique de la Science-Fiction*. Les Presses de L'Université du Québec.

INTELLECTUAL LIFE IN THE ENGLISH speaking world has been less dominated by universalizing, totalizing thought than the French or German. For Anglophones, Forster's "only connect" seems a somewhat plaintive exhortation, almost a predictive reproach for not having made enough connections between different ideas. Hence the force of Michel Foucault's project of breaking links, scattering clustered associations of ideas and creating gaps instead of filling them, is likely to be felt less strongly than in milieux where totalizing systems of thought like Marxism are part of the air intellectuals breathe. Just as one must know the great line of German philosophers from Kant to Schopenhauer and Marx to fully savour Nietzsche's radicalism, one must have felt the power of dialectics in order to relish Foucault.

Even so, we should welcome Donald Bouchard's translation into English of a

collection of Foucault's essays. It deserves the widest possible readership, especially among literary people, for literature is its principal focus. The most striking essay is "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History." Implicit in this notion of genealogy is the idea of history without sources, without explanation by origins. The past is reconstituted as a space in which the genuinely new is possible, and hence the genuinely old, rather than the merely pre-modern. The search for pre-existent causes, the reduction of the new to the already there, neglects the vicissitudes of history, "its jolts, its surprises, its unsteady victories and unpalatable defeats" — precisely those radical, inexplicable *coupures* or fault lines which stratify Foucault's own archeology. Nietzsche's idea of genealogy as "wirkliche Historie" is contrasted to traditional history, which "aims at dissolving the singular event into an ideal continuity — as a teleological movement or a natural process. 'Effective' history, however, deals with events in terms of their most unique characteristics, their most acute manifestations." The smooth and fluent medium of conventional historical time is replaced with a view of dramatic highlights, sudden breaks and unexpected intensities. The Nietzschean genealogist is also strong, sufficiently confident of the rightness of his own present standpoint to recognize and relish the alienness of past events, in their interconnection of sheer chance. Historicism, which might at first seem to present a courageous imaginative sympathy with cultures other than its own, then timidly effaces that difference with the comforting blur of an evolution leading inexorably into the present. Genealogy's tracing of a line of descent maintains events in their singularity, their dispersion, their unnecessity. The tenuousness of their connection forms a kind of counter-memory, severing the lines with his own past man has imagined for self-reverence or meta-

physical reassurance. Counter-memory discomforts us, defamiliarizes the past we thought we could remember.

The tribute this essay pays to Nietzsche immensely clarifies one's sense of the temper of Foucault's philosophic endeavour — its stony calm, its steadfast negativity, its disruption of usual groupings, its breaking of established connections. The mountainous terrain its metaphors continually seek is a landscape of "fissures, abrupt descents and broken contours," a landscape full of barriers beyond which nothing can be known or foreseen — one can only leap. Foucault replaces dialectic with limit and transgression in a reciprocally conditioning relation: a limit is only realized as such by a transgression, and vice versa. The "beyond" is defined by the threshold which forbids it. Transgression is not to be equated with negation, however, even though negation plays the same definitive, identifying role in dialectical thought. "Transgression opens onto a scintillating and constantly affirmed world, a world without shadow of twilight, without that serpentine 'no' that bites into fruits and lodges their contradictions at their core." In this redeemed world, dark is not needed to define light, nor good to define evil. The positive, the affirmative, is independent of the negative. Foucault proposes a "thought without contradiction, without dialectics, without negation; thought that accepts divergence; affirmative thought whose instrument is disjunction." The infinite connexity created by dialectics is replaced by a space of disconnection, of genuine difference, where the unexpected, the radically new, exists beyond the limit of each entity or subject of thought. It is reached not by contradiction or contrast or continuity, but by a leap, a break, a transgression.

Limit and transgression: this model is at work in all Foucault's characteristic areas of concern. Imprisonment and freedom, sexual repression and libertinage, rationality and madness, the inescapable limitation of a historical era's epistemic grid and the sudden "break" that makes way for the new: all are variations of the same pattern. Yet ultimately, God is the definer of limits and transgressions. The event of his departure or death denies us "the limit of the Limitless," and the texts of Sade and Flaubert, Hölderlin and Nietzsche, Bataille and Borges, all bear witness to this modern predicament.

Hölderlin's work emerges from "a struggle at the limits of language." Foucault images this limit as a mountain ridge, an "escarpment of mythical lyricism" on which we are free to graze. "He made it possible for us, positivist quadrupeds, to climb the slopes of the inaccessible summit which he had reached and which marked the *limit*, and in doing so, to ruminate upon the psychopathology of poets." This limit divides reason and madness; it also marks "a division that is responsible for every work in our culture, a division that links it to its own absence." If Hölderlin's language is perpetually in danger of being silenced by madness, Sade's, his contemporary, displays the opposite propensity of never being able to attain silence. Profanation must be infinite, since it cannot finally locate the sacred. Hence the exhaustive, exhausting, unreadable character of his work: "to a world of captive readers, Sade, the captive, denies the possibility of reading." The infinite repetition of sexual transgression can only be recorded at infinite length: to this corresponds the reflexivity by which language can create an infinite depth within itself. "Headed toward death, language turns back upon itself; it encounters something like a mirror; and to stop this death which would stop it, it possesses but a single power: that of giving birth to its own image in a play of mirrors that has no limits." This folding of language over on itself forms a *world*; thus mark-

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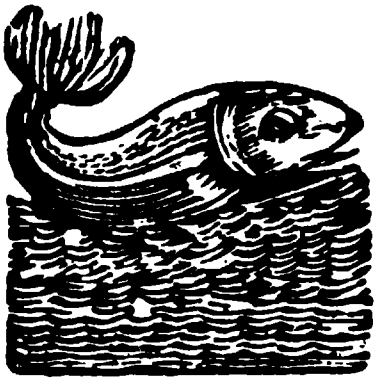

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University of Toronto Press

ing the birth of literature in the modern sense. Here the Book takes on the ambition to rival and abolish the World it should represent. The authority of God's book was scattered among all books and is now to be recollected first of all into a Library and then into "a book which tells of all the others." This is the limit ambition of the modern novel from *Don Quixote* to *Ulysses* and the dreamed Book of Mallarmé; but Foucault takes Flaubert's *Tentation de Saint Antoine* as his exemplar. Repeatedly rewritten, this text is repressed beneath all his others; "the entire work of Flaubert is dedicated to the conflagration of this primary discourse: its precious ashes, its black, unmalleable coal." Foucault reads the *Temptation* as a "Fantasia of the Library": its allusive erudition "recovers other books; it hides and displays them and, in a single movement causes them to glitter and disappear." As a book of books, it becomes self-sufficient, purely literature, a world in itself, with infinite recession into its depths through the series of visions within visions Foucault follows. The death of God, "the limit of the Limitless," has condemned us to a literature of infinite length and infinite depth, corresponding to language's alienation from the world, which in God's day was known as the Book of Nature: Language, by folding over onto itself, becomes Literature: a world of its own, a world without end.

Though they rarely attempt Foucault's more visionary flights, the four other books under review amply demonstrate the vigorous presence in Canada of the "new French criticism." The special issue of the Université de Montréal's *Etudes Françaises* devoted to "Le Lieu Commun" posits a rupture of recognizably Foucaultian character between the Classical-Medieval use of commonplaces as necessary and productive instruments of thought, and their modern degeneration into cliché, stereotype, and stock response. Jean-Pierre Roy's *Bachelard* offers us a "non-Bachelardian" reading of his subject aimed at deconstructing the dualism between his epistemology of the scientific concept and his poetics of the literary image. Roy sees this disjunction as symptomatic of much modern thinking about literature, and as an obstacle to the development of criticism into a science. What that development might produce in practice could be something like Jean Fisette's *Le Texte Automatiste*, which elaborates a theory of semiotic text analysis and applies it to works by Borduas, Giguère, and Lapointe. Scientific criticism might seem especially appropriate for science fiction, but Darko Suvin's *Pour une Poétique de la Science-Fiction*, despite its use of diagrams and numbered propositions, falls to a great extent within the more traditional field of genre theory. As such, it is greatly needed, and the theoretical section leads well into separate studies of Wells, Verne, Capek, and Russian science fiction. In addition to his knowledge of Slavic sources, Suvin shows a fine synthesis of both French and Anglo-Saxon literary methods and ideas. For Canadian criticism this is a consummation, or rather connection, devoutly to be wished! And appropriately enough, Yale University Press has now published an English version: *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction: On the Poetics and History of a Literary Genre.*

GRAHAM GOOD

ISLAND ROMANCE

TREVOR FERGUSON, *High Water Chants*. Macmillian, $9.95.

THOUGH ONE OF THE PRIMARY AIMS of the novel is to create and sustain an imaginary world, some novels pretend to give us an immediate vision of the real world, while others do not. This distinction is

what leads us to differentiate between the novel proper and the romance. Trevor Ferguson's first novel. *High Water Chants,* is most assuredly a *romance,* though its author does not seem to have been fully cognizant of the fact. From his occasional confusion of genres derives a number of significant flaws; despite them, *High Water Chants* is in parts quite good and as a whole of some value.

Ferguson sets his romance on an imaginary island off the coast of British Columbia. His plot is archetypal both in form and in content: the major characters are severally compelled to journey to the island's interior, where they make certain discoveries; then they return to civilization and follow the consequences of their discoveries through to the end.

The story revolves around the heart of darkness in what appears to be a family with a curse. A sole girl-child, Gail, is born into the vast, brawling Duff family. Her birth reforms her father, who thereafter treats Gail as the incarnation of good, her unregenerate brothers as the incarnation of evil. One of her brothers, Morgan, eventually rapes her and sets her adrift at sea. The book opens when Morgan returns to the island, years later, to commit a miner's rape upon its virgin wilderness. A second brother, Thomas, has become the hermit guardian of that wilderness as well as the keeper of Morgan's secret. Four more brothers, all speechless "idiots" who seek reunion with Thomas in order to redeem their collective sin, perceive that Morgan must destroy the hermit or have his crime come to light. Mysteriously, they compel Ferguson's four heroes — Henry, Doc, Evlin and an Indian named Billy — to go to the hermit's aid.

This array of characters is not schematic, I think, but mythopoeic. It is a composition of symmetries in which every archetypal figure is balanced by its opposite: the martyred saint, by the devil; the fool who guards the secret, by the historian (Henry) who seeks knowledge; the four wise men (the idiots) who cannot act, by the four heroes who know not why they act; and so on. The trend is perhaps overdone when Evlin turns out to be Gail's double and serves momentarily as her ghost. But this mandala-like construction is integral to Ferguson's holistic world and message. Evil only arises, he is saying, when we exacerbate the tension between antinomies. Redemption is achieved through wholeness, and the route to wholeness is through knowledge.

The antinomic tension between doing and knowing provides Ferguson with many of his best passages. By shifting the point of view, but only among his four heroes — those who *do* but do not *know* — he permits the reader both to observe and to share their confrontation of mystery. The four all-knowing idiots are never more than a shadowy presence of undefined power, kept just at the edge of the reader's vision. Ferguson's handling of point of view suggests that he possesses the instincts of a fine writer, but not enough of the training. Of his four heroes, only Henry is sufficiently well developed as a character to permit us to see vividly through his eyes. Henry at least is, however, an effective and original creation whose persona contributes much towards making the fiction convincing.

Mastery of genre is perhaps less important than mastery of point of view, but authorial confusion can be equally devastating in both areas. On two crucial occasions Ferguson fails to capitalize on his genre's characteristic potential for high drama; on other occasions he corrupts his romance with elements of realism. At the beginning of the last third of the book, Morgan is left wounded but still dangerous in the island's interior. There he is confronted by a mysterious woman on a

horse, whom he takes at first for Gail's ghost — but who turns out to be merely Evlin, her look-alike. Evlin's appearance here, apart from the implausibility of a number of details, is anticlimactic. The more apt invention, and a brilliant romantic device, would have been for the rider to be Gail herself, or (since her rape and disappearance occurred seventeen years earlier) Gail's daughter. The latter choice would have expanded the symbolism while preserving the symmetry. Ferguson's second failure of nerve comes when Morgan is at last delivered up to his four idiot brothers. The book's entire structure demands an apocalyptic climax here, but the episode is trivialized and foreshortened. Only later are we informed — rather offhandedly — that Morgan has been sawn into pieces at the local mill.

One of the special characters of the realistic novel is its pretence of transparency. By transparency I mean the quality possessed by referential language, in which words are transparencies through which we see actual things. Romance, by contrast, revels in opacity almost as much as does poetry. That is, instead of pretending to watch the real world through the page-as-window (or as mirror), in romance we focus on the page's own imaginary world, and on the texture of symbolic meanings woven therein. Corners of transparency — of novelistic realism — then have a disruptive effect, much as would a hole or a window in the middle of a movie screen. Ferguson's worst reversions to realism are the passages on reform in the island's white settlements — a prime concern of Doc and Evlin — and on the self-reform of the Indians under Billy's leadership. Both subjects are treated sketchily, and both have the air of tangential intrusions from what ought to be separate works of fiction.

ROD WILLMOT

MOTLEY MAGIC CARPET

MARTIN MYERS, *Izzy Manheim's Reunion.* General, $10.00.

MARTIN MYERS' TWO PREVIOUS NOVELS have elicited comparisons with Joyce, Vonnegut, and Groucho Marx. With his latest, *Izzy Manheim's Reunion,* one might add Pynchon and Barthelme, Tolkien and Atwood, Tom Robbins, Mel Brooks, John Fowles, and Agatha Christie. But amazingly, he has woven out of this motley a magic carpet of a book. It soars and swoops, performs dizzying arabesques, and every time it threatens to careen out of control Myers brings it safely down to earth, only to send it off again next crazy sentence. This is a novel that lives dangerously and, just because it does, makes exhilarating reading.

It does not begin auspiciously. The narrator of the first few chapters seems to be an obsessive, third-rate standup comic who insists on at least one excruciatingly bad joke per paragraph. Is a bad joke any less bad for being self-consciously so? The information that Izzy Manheim has made his fortune in glue gives to a string of groaners involving words like "sticky," "tacky," and "grab." The unlikely parentage of both Izzy (son of "a lapsed Jewish ritual slaughterer and Polish Canadian former rodeo queen") and his wife Elspeth ("born in Singapore of a Norwegian operatic soprano's illicit liaison with a Kurd rebel chieftain") is just too forced to be funny. But once Myers sets to work he becomes *genuinely* funny — and the story he tells is exciting and compelling.

Thirty years after leaving Toronto for Africa, where he has become the glue magnate and one of the world's richest men, Izzy Manheim decides to return home and organize a reunion of his college graduating class. Unaware of his own

real motives and ignoring his wife's protestations that you can't go home again, he buys the biggest, gauchest house in the city and proceeds to contact all his former classmates. They are a somewhat bizarre lot, particularly the twelve who have gone off to live monastically in a computer centre in the Arizona desert, dressed in fluorescent blue jumpsuits, bound together by a gold chain, and committed to a vow of silence until 1984. Even more curious is that while Izzy remembers each of his fifty schoolfellows in intimate detail, none of them seems to remember him at all. The unravelling of this mystery comprises one of the two major strands of the novel.

The other consists of a series of flashbacks involving Izzy's early years in Africa as an anthropologist and climaxing in his discovery of "the power," which is also the secret of making the glue which makes him rich. This narrative, too, has a silly beginning; but as it develops and weaves itself in and out of the present, it thickens with suspense. These chapters contain some wondrous writing as well as the novel's most extraordinary character, Kakapupu. He is a man of many talents — African witchdoctor, Detroit disc jockey, Harvard Business School graduate, Mephistopheles to Izzy's Faust, Daedalus to his Icarus, and master-of-ceremonies at the novel's brilliant finale. Izzy's relationship with Kakapupu, as with his fellow graduates, is a complex mixture of love and hate, guilt and shame, all the permutations of which are explored at the reunion.

One of the chief marvels of this novel is the way it successfully modulates back and forth from zany cartoon comedy to science fiction fantasy to domestic and psychological realism. Almost as if testing the limits of his own fiction, Myers at once demands that we accept the outrageous proportions of his story and still care about his characters. And somehow we do. Interpolated memories of Izzy's childhood and quiet, intense confrontations between him and his wife at first seem jarring in the midst of computers that hum "Get Up and Boogie" and characters like Pop Göesthe, who remembers things before they happen. What unfolds, however, is in fact a serious novel. "Anything was possible," Izzy realizes at one point. And it is just such a world of infinite possibility, transcending the narrow consistencies of genre and tone, that Myers renders so imaginatively.

Myers' Toronto is the familiar contemporary landscape of big-city alienation and absurdity. Subway riders who avoid eye contact, old ladies forced to carry guns, neighbours who never see each other, black towers and impenetrable bureacracies are symptoms of life's reduction. As Izzy's former philosophy professor succinctly puts it, "Everything is shit." On his return Izzy himself feels "the sameness," the sadness, "the irretrievability of the past." But he has also experienced the magic of Africa, where the most radical transformations have proven possible. The "reunion" of the title is more than just a gathering of alumni. In an Italianate castle built by a Japanese in the middle of a Canadian city, African mystery and American technology combine to liberate suppressed energies and re-unite the fantastic with the mundane. Appropriately, Kakapupu concludes the proceedings with a tour de force that joins music hall and magic show, encounter session and detective story, just as he himself embodies a union of disparate cultures. The novel ends — almost — with a group-sing, a most traditional comic reconciliation of individuals and community.

Comedy, someone once said, is a funny thing. It can be used as either a delicate instrument or a sledge-hammer, and Myers is often better at the first than at the second. He can even be elegant, as

in this passage where Izzy considers the mysteries of the plot in which he seems to be caught up:

> If anything was going to happen, it was going to happen when it was ready to happen and not before. That seemed clear. Besides, when one doesn't know what to expect, how does one go about expecting it? The adage that watched kettles don't boil may have some application out there, but it doesn't in here. For one thing, if there is an analogue to the kettle, what is it? Without knowing that, what does one watch? Until one knows what to watch, one cannot know what it is capable of doing, unwatched, that is analogous to boiling. And finally, to conclude this circumlocutory piece of reasoning, even if one knew what the kettle and boiling analogues were, but, being human, watched nonetheless, then if the adage holds water, the watched kettle analogue would not boil analogue. In short, nothing would happen.

In contrast is Myers' frequent inability to resist pure *schtick*, corny one-liners, and gratuitously ridiculous proper names. One doesn't mind so much that a minor character is named, for no particular reason, Lou Shmendrick. But the name "Kakapupu" is not only irrelevant but inappropriate, and even in some curious way embarrassing. Similarly, the ex-gangster's gangsterese, the East Asian detective's speeches peppered with "by golly" and "oh my goodness," and Kakapupu's ghetto patter are generally uninspired (though in the last case, often very funny). Perhaps *Izzy Manheim's Reunion* provides its own explanation for such lapses when Elspeth, herself a novelist, tells Izzy that when she is having trouble with a novel she writes jokes: "I resort to humour, the writer's last resort." But in Myers' case apologies are unnecessary. These are minor flaws in a fine writer who has the feel of a major novelist. Besides, who can complain for long about a novel that concludes with a list of its own Loose Ends and Red Herrings, sung by the entire cast of characters to the tune of "Putting on Your Top Hat"?

JERRY WASSERMAN

ART IN QUEST OF CRAFT?

CAM HUBERT, "Rites of Passage," *Room of One's Own*, Vol. III, No. 2 (1977) $2.00.

HERSCHEL HARDIN, *The Great Wave of Civilization*. Talonbooks, $4.95.

KEN MITCHELL and HUMPHREY & THE DUMPTRUCKS, *Cruel Tears*. Talonbooks, $4.95.

JULIUS HAY, *Have*, trans. Peter Hay. Talonbooks, $4.95.

A DECADE OR MORE AGO Canadian writers, prompted by an orgy of theatre-building, discovered the stage as a medium; and audiences responded with delight to the novelty of home-grown scripts interpreted by our own performers. That the playwright, more often than not, possessed little qualification beyond ownership of a typewriter was not held against him. Now that a stage existed, we thought, dramatists would acquire the craft necessary to exploit it. Meanwhile, patience and encouragement were the watchwords.

For some fifteen years I have sat through Canadian dramas by the score, resolutely turning a blind eye to intellectual poverty, naïve characterization, hackneyed language, and stylistic ineptitude. To date I have witnessed perhaps a dozen plays worthy of the name when appraised by the most generous of international standards. Lately I find my tolerance waning. When, I ask myself, will Canadian dramatists begin to take their art form seriously?

My impatience with Canadian plays has been often tempered, it must be said, by unqualified admiration for the craft and ingenuity of actors and directors who lavish upon these apprentice pieces more art than they deserve. I cannot but wonder, however, in my more cynical moments, how many would willingly do so were it not for Canada Council insistence on native content as a virtual pre-condition for regional theatre subsidies.

New plays by Cam Hubert and Herschel Hardin do nothing to allay my nagging skepticism.

"There are times in women's lives," Ms. Hubert tells us in her Prologue to *Rites of Passage*, "when we pass, almost predictably, through an empty land devoid of guidelines or signposts. We have to learn to venture out of the nest, then to build our own, and finally to live in a nest once crowded, now private.... We have to learn to live alone, learn to have the courage to fail. Hardest of all, we have to learn who we are." She might well have stopped there. Her play, a veritable rag-bag of clichés drawn from Women's Lib rhetoric, is merely a tedious demonstration of this truism.

Bess Sutherland, the wife of an immigrant Vancouver Island miner, spent her life hurtling between stove and scrubboard without time to question the purpose of it all. Now a grandmother, and with her husband dying of pit-lung, she pauses to ask what her existence amounts to. Her daughter, Beth MacDonald, victim of a shotgun marriage to a young miner, is shattered by her husband's desertion after more than a decade of marital misery. Confronted by the choices her new-found freedom allows, her will is immobilized. Thirteen-year-old Maggy, offspring of Beth's youthful indiscretion, knows only that she wants a life different from her mother's; and between snatches of "Oh, dear, what can the matter be?" she canvasses her seniors for wisdom and support.

Ms. Hubert opts for realism as her stylistic vehicle, but is betrayed by her want of craft. Action, whether physical or psychological, is realism's life-blood; yet we are fobbed off with static debate. Opportunities for direct character-conflict are sacrificed wholesale in favour of narrative recollection.

The protagonists might evoke some sympathy for their plight were all three more sensitive and less sententious; but the playwright seems oblivious to everything but their didactic function. Ms. Hubert has a neat way with dialogue and a good ear for dialect; but they are not enough to make a play of what is essentially a pamphlet.

The Great Wave of Civilization has an equally well-worn axe to grind. Although Hardin's theme is the exploitation of Blackfoot Confederacy Indians by nineteenth-century fur traders, contemporary capitalists are not meant to mistake its relevance to their concerns.

Little Dog, of the Northern Blackfoot tribe, exasperated by the white man's greed and the passivity of his people's response, attempts to convince the tribal elders to adopt a more aggressive stance. When rhetoric fails, he constitutes himself a one-man guerilla force, and wreaks sporadic vengeance on the enemy until he is cut down in a shoot-out with the free traders.

Hardin, like Hubert, has little new to say; and his choice of the Brechtian epic style only underlines *The Great Wave*'s intellectual feebleness and political naïveté. Most of Brecht's faults flourish in abundance — preachiness, bias, and patronization of the audience, to name only a few — but Brecht's vigour, brutal wit, and keen eye for moral contradiction are lamentably absent.

Slide captions appear and fade; moral lessons are administered by tribal chiefs; Indian argues alternately with Indian, trader, and clergy; and spirits of sky, water, and the animal kingdom are evoked *ad nauseam*. Apart from a telling scene or two, the action moves us about as much as a CBC documentary for schools.

It is perhaps Hardin's abuse of language which disappoints one most. At his best he is an impressive word-wielder. The austere phrasing and flat cadence of the Eskimos in *Esker Mike* a few years

back still haunt my ear. But his Indians espouse no such restraint. Their verbal pretentiousness and rolling periods smack more of the pulpit than the pow-wow; while the white man's utterances, if somewhat more direct, would hardly do credit to a third-rate western.

The tedious propaganda of Hubert and Hardin tempt one to overvalue Ken Mitchell's *Cruel Tears*, a forthright tale of jealousy and violence, crafted with style and theatrical flair. Nevertheless his achievement is considerable.

Indebted for its theme and handkerchief device to *Othello*, a loan frankly acknowledged, the play takes as its hero Johnny Roychuk, a Saskatchewan truck driver, who marries his boss's daughter and seems destined for an idyllic marriage and a gilt-edged future. Jack Deal, a fellow trucker, unhappily mated and jealous of Johnny's success, manipulates chance events to exacerbate the latter's insecurities. The bloodbath which ensues costs Johnny his felicity and Jack his life.

Described as a "country opera," *Cruel Tears* is a minor stylistic *tour de force*. Shaped by the aesthetics of Country and Western music, an all-pervasive if not uniquely Canadian art form, script and songs complement each other with rare aptness. The simple melodic line, strong beat, crude emotions, and romantic idealism of the Country and Western ballad find their counterpart in the drama's crude plot, over-simplified psychology, and sentimental tone. The music by Humphrey and the Dumptrucks is tuneful, and the lyrics as good or better than the average Country and Western product.

All three dramatists could profit from a close study of Hungarian playwright Julius Hay's *Have*, now available in a new and stageworthy translation by Talonbooks editor, Peter Hay. Written partly in a Viennese prison in 1934 and completed in Moscow after his release in 1935, *Have* explores the social and economic lot of women in an early-twentieth-century Hungarian village. Victimized by government bureaucracy, industry, the church, and male avarice, the village wives turn to their midwife for relief. Her assessment of their plight is blunt, and its implications horrific. "The master of the yours-and-mine is master of the world," she tells them. "Is the world the village? Yes. The world is the village. Out there is the Count, out there is the Sugar Company. Where they begin, there the world ends. It's not mine, it's not yours. Between them, here, this is the world. It might be mine, it might be yours."

Concluding that property means power, the women form an unholy compact to poison their husbands in order to inherit the few acres of land they leave behind. And once dedicated to materialism, they prove even more ruthless than the men. The slaughter of village males ends only when Mari, a local girl, weds rich farmer David to buy the prosperity necessary to unite her with her lover Dani, an impoverished policeman. Romantic idealism leads her to refuse her husband his conjugal rights on their wedding night; and want of caution proper to capitalistic enterprise incites her to poison him the morning after. Her arrest is inevitable; and exposure of the entire conspiracy follows.

Although Hay's analysis of social conditions betrays Marxist sympathies, he eschews doctrinaire solutions. He issues only a warning, as grim as it is profound: the society which subordinates human fulfillment to material gains runs terrifying risks.

Have's dramatic thrust owes much to its folk-play inspiration. The village venue yields a wealth of colourful and representative characters. The earthly simplicity of the peasant psychology, and the rigidly-defined social system within which it operates, allow Hay to make his point with

parable-like economy. The precision of his observation and the logic of his argumentation are almost scientific; yet the humane sensibility which animates his inquiry is never in doubt. The language, superficially realistic but artfully stylized, is evocative, vivid, and poetic.

Less familiar in the West than *The Horse* (1964), *Have* merits closer acquaintance. Eisenstein spent a year exploring it with his students. Will Canadian directors prove equally susceptible to its charms?

JOHN RIPLEY

STRIKING IMAGERY

SUSAN MUSGRAVE, *Becky Swan's Book*. The Porcupine's Quill, $4.95.

CATHERINE FIRESTONE, *Daydream Daughter*. McClelland & Stewart, $4,95.

FRAN SPAFFORD, *Snowmelt*. Pieran Press.

I READ RECENTLY IN *Vancouver* that Susan Musgrave considers some of her own poetry obscure now even to herself. The interviewer went on to comment confidently: "In her later poems, Susan Musgrave treats her subjects with clarity and wry intelligence that is lacking in the earlier ones." With this reassurance, I was prompted to look again at *Becky Swan's Book*.

I am impressed by the handsomeness of the publication. With its Cloister Old Style type and its Kelmscott stock, it emulates early book printing practice. The cover illustration and the densely decorated inside covers are intriguing, mysterious. Part of the visual trick, along with the type, is the distracting device, used throughout, of placing at the bottom of each poem, the first line of the poem that follows on the next page. But the promised "clarity and intelligence" of the poetry I cannot find.

The book is obviously about people, since sixteen different ones, most of them women, are mentioned in the eleven short poems. Nowhere is there any mention of Becky Swan, or of any Becky at all. Obviously, too, the book has to do with bizarre, remote situations and happenings. Nearly every poem contains some startling lines:

> Mary Matlin
> why do you poison her?
>
> Lucy Littlecote
> wearing 18th century boots
> was found bricked up in the
> rectory only yesterday
>
> I confessed to uttering spells
>
> I go into witch country with a
> dowry of wild cattle
> . . . he beheaded me for adultery

But what do the *mentions* (that's all they are) of witchcraft, poisoning, adultery, murder, etc. really add up to? I just can't say. When I try to grasp, rationally, the culminated "meaning" either of any one poem or of the total eleven, I find the book merely pretentious, a work relying completely on slick, visual effects.

Certainly I'm left with a *feeling* that I've somehow been contacted by some long ago spirit who has a compulsion to communicate a state all too familiar to her. Although the constrained, understated symbols hint at some inner, ancient world of torment, I cannot help but feel that the communication is effected more by the total format than by the poems themselves.

Susan Musgrave may later find the poetry of this book obscure as she has her earlier works. But, at the time of writing, I think she *knew* Becky Swan. With help from outside the poetry, I think I know her too.

While I found more than I had expected in the Musgrave book, that the reverse was true of Catherine Firestone's *Daydream Daughter* can perhaps be attributed to my expectations set up when

I learned that this poet composes in both French and English. I immediately (and excitedly) assumed that she uses both languages in one book, even in one poem. Bilingual poetry. What a step toward solving one of our national problems. But no, the French and English are in separate books.

Overall, Firestone's poems are not pleasing. Too much consciously used rhyme and alliteration, too many overused connections, and persistently mixed metaphors mar her artistry. Examples of all these deficiencies emerge at the very outset, by the fifth poem, in fact. "Out of her haze / and craze and daze," "untimed, mimed mood," are two unfortunate rhymings, both in the title poem, the first in the book. The third and fourth poems give us "the whelp of whalebone" and "croaked crones." "Graves are rocked cradles," in the fourth poem, introduces the tendency to trite connections, while the jarring movement from organ soloist to solitaire player to "birdwide toucher" to "pudding of pig" to "hollowed-tree remnant" to "the churlish blind" of the fifth poem warns us of the mixed images in store throughout the book.

However, there are exceptions. Five poems in particular, appearing in sequence in the last quarter of the book, are gratifyingly different. "Kelday's Last Night" is a powerful poem about a girl who died at fourteen. The power derives from the prose-like form with which the poet seems more comfortable. The lines, "She even filled the bodice of a peasant / blouse and at that was an early woman neatly tucked together" offer a striking example of what Firestone can do when she frees herself of the flaws mentioned earlier. "The Round Game" successfully communicates its rather unusual theme (a woman's need to pretend she is pregnant), even in its title and in the opening lines: "You hold the bundle of laundry / like a bundle of baby."

"Our Sib's Ribs" is a strong social comment with its juxtaposition of starving children ("their bellies reach their haglike / knees, their legs are thin as pencils / so that small garters would drop / easily down") with the well-fed "us" who "decide how much candied peel to add / to the mincemeat steaming hot." Another poignant juxtaposition, this time between child and adult, is central to "Child I Kneel to be Your Size" with paradoxical, unembellished lines such as "I will grow up to be a child, as you."

"In the Housemaid's Pantry," a comment on mother/smother love (my rhyme), I would judge the most successful poem in the book. Every line evinces amazing control of image so that the total effect is one of that powerful kind of compactness one finds in so much of Seamus Heaney's poetry. The undeniable control of the mother is firmly established in the first stanza:

> she taught him to tie
> a shoe lace as if it were a closely
> fitting corset, to gobble the goodnight
> kiss as if it were a rush on gold;

while the effect on the son is aptly conveyed in the concluding lines:

> He had become her; wads of coil wade
> through
> the vortex of the heart to the roof of mouths
> and nothing can tear them out.

Firestone's range of subject matter is variable, and though, unfortunately, her poetic competence is also, the good poems are *very* good. I still hope that she may, some day, combine this potential with her linguistic ability and give Canada some much needed, excellent, bilingual poetry.

Fran Spafford's *Snowmelt*, while a much humbler publication than the other two, has a unity of theme and imagery that, I feel, makes it superior to both. There is no pretentiousness whatsoever, either in the "chapbook" format or in the form and diction of the poetry.

The promised winter theme of the title is evident in nearly all twenty-seven poems, sometimes obviously, sometimes obliquely. The imagery that carries the theme is always strong, sure. Snow spiders are "tentacled oracles / Spreading little winters," whose webs are hurled to earth "In tiny, mad blizzards"; hawks are "Thermal cowboys / riding autumn out / and rounding up winter"; a cloud is "a torn tattered cloud mother / her white belly swollen / with tiny snow children."

And the imagery of winter expands to give a sense of the land:

> the countryside lying
> like some great wintering animal
> beside the highway
> in the sun

and the people, both general:

> the world is full of winter people
> hibernating in winter caves
> feelings slowed to a minimum
> for survival
> in a world of below-zero humanity

and individual:

> you began a personal migration
> as full of purpose and intent
> as geese salt and peppering the sky
> in southbound arrows.

There is also a delicate fibre of "story" that touches on the Indian condition. "For Keith — Who Will Not Trust Again" introduces a runaway boy of ten, "full of brown pride," who

> arrived in a series of rusty half-
> tons; riding in the back with matted
> dogs and old lumber

and "Helen" tells of a girl "reeking with vanilla, and too many lovers" whom the poet addresses thus:

> You are fourteen, Helen
> Even now the old squaw
> looks out from your eyes,
> and holds your hand
> to shuffle down
> to the beer parlour on Main Street.

The whole book speaks of the emotional climate of the prairie. While the cold and the hardship predominate, there is a strong underlying hope of alleviation, although the limit of its extent is fully realized:

> Winter people —
> Praying for a chinook,
> Never daring to hope for a heat wave.

If there is any agent of "snowmelt," it is, for Spafford, the warmth of personal love:

> Let winter melt through your pores
> To puddle at your feet
> and evaporate in the heat of two.

PEGEEN BRENNAN

THREE FACES OF FRENCH CANADA

JACQUES FERRON, *Quince Jam*. Trans. by Ray Ellenwood. Coach House, $6.50.

GABRIELLE ROY, *Garden in the Wind*. Trans. by Alan Brown. McClelland & Stewart, $10.00.

BEN-ZION SHEK, *Social Realism in the French-Canadian Novel*. Harvest House.

THESE THREE BOOKS — one a work of criticism, the other two collections of short fiction — illustrate an extensive range in critical thought and literary practice in current French-Canadian writing. The most interesting result of considering them in juxtaposition is that the major thesis of the criticism does not account for the effectiveness of the fiction.

In his study of social realism in the modern French-Canadian novel, Ben-Zion Shek sets a curious problem for himself. Beginning with the obvious fact that Gabrielle Roy and Roger Lemelin were two of Canada's best novelists writing in French just after the Second World War, Shek argues that they established a tradition of social realism which can be traced in the work of their contemporaries and

successors. He commences with the masterpieces, exhaustively analyzing *Bonheur d'Occasion*, *Alexandre Chenevert* and Lemelin's Quebec City trilogy as urban novels which arise out of and comment upon specific socio-economic conditions. He then calls attention to secondary novels of the post-war decades which also deal with poverty, class struggle, labour disputes and similar matters of modern working life. Yet as Shek himself acknowledges, most of these secondary works are items of modest literary value which do not belong to the mainstream of recent Quebec fiction. Rather than declare that the tradition he seeks is hardly a tradition at all, but a phase which bloomed quickly and then modulated into another kind of writing (exemplified by Roy's own move from slice-of-life realism to more philosophical, metaporical fiction), he shifts his definition of realism.

Shek coins the term "neo-realism" to describe the often politically motivated aesthetic experiments conducted by the generation which exploded upon the Quebec literary scene in the 1960's. This critical leap could work if his argument gave equal weight to realism and neo-realism, showing in detail how the former grew into the latter. As it stands, however, the book's title is misleading; it is essentially a study of two novels by Roy and three by Lemelin, brought up to date with two appended chapters dealing rather hastily with the work of recent writers. A simple page count indicates the imbalance: Shek devotes forty-six pages to *Bonheur d'Occasion* and thirty to *Alexandre Chenevert*; then he disposes of Hubert Aquin in four, Marie-Claire Blais in three, Roch Carrier in one, and all but ignores Anne Hébert.

Despite this difficulty, Shek's judgments are generally insightful, illuminated by a comprehensive knowledge of Quebec daily life and social history. Their presentation, however, does not do them justice. Basically a warmed-over dissertation, Shek's book suffers many of the common faults of thesis-writing: undigested lumps of plot summary, a compulsion to mention the opinion of every single critic in the field, and a pendantically objective tone whose impersonality dulls the impact of cogent critical perceptions. In addition, conventional footnotes are replaced by a frustrating system of documentation which sends the reader scurrying to an inconvenient bibliography at the back. Thoroughly re-written, Shek's book could satisfy the current need for a comprehensive English-language study of the social ramifications of modern French-Canadian fiction.

Social realism, "neo" or otherwise, is not the motivating factor in the other two books under consideration, Gabrielle Roy's *Garden in the Wind* and Jacques Ferron's *Quince Jam*. Neither book locates its primary sense of reality in the external world determined by socio-economic circumstance. Instead they both begin from the inside, concentrating upon the subjective nature of perception. Roy establishes this inner focus in her choice of content, Ferron in his manipulation of narrative form.

Ferron's witty tales are controlled fantasies in which the fragmentation of the self and of reality is reflected in the fracturing of conventional narrative structures. Events and characters overleap the boundaries of the stories themselves, disappearing unresolved in one tale only to reappear unexpectedly in the next, as usual causal sequences collapse into dream-like surrealism. Verbal fluidity and patterns of recurrence replace the usual logic of cause and effect, yet Ferron's stylistic fluency creates an overall sense of continuity.

This is not to say that Ferron avoids all social commentary. In "Papa Boss," his sardonic version of a modern annunciation and immaculate conception, Ferron

applies his irreverent sense of illogicality to the materialism of the automobile age and the failure of organized religion. He plays with ironic double images: the virgin is replaced by a fallen nun and the annunciatory angel is her landlord, a suicidal character named Gerald Pelletier whom, significantly, everyone keeps calling Gérard. Drifting into the hallucinatory core narrative are pieces of literary parody and odd encounters with distorted images derived from Quebec's folkloric and religious inheritance.

Woven into the other three interrelated stories is a series of doubles whose implications are simultaneously literary and political. Ferron poses the problem of the relation between the author and his characters when he eventually announces that he personally stands behind François Ménard, the introspective narrator of the nightmarish "Quince Jam," and declares autobiographical the charming glimpses into small-town Quebec life. Ménard's mission is to poison Frank Archibald Campbell, a "Montreal Rhodesian" to whose grandfather Ferron attributes verses by Bliss Carman and Duncan Campbell Scott. Ferron avows his hostility to the liberal Anglo-Saxon culture Frank represents (espoused most perniciously by Hugh MacLennan, he claims), yet he gives François and Frank more in common than their first names. Both are born in Maskinongé county, Ferron's own native ground. François recognizes Frank as the cop who had beaten him up twenty years earlier during a radical student demonstration and calls him "the skillful engineer and malicious witness of my sellout," but he also concedes the attractiveness of the image of the English gentleman. Upon seeing the (poisoned) quince jam François has brought to their weird midnight encounter, Frank is reminded of his own Quebec City childhood spent in an enclosed garden, yearning for the liberty and humanity of the forbidden French world outside. Ferron appears to imply a sense of reciprocity between the two cultures: if not friends, they relate as adversaries, defining their separate identities against each other.

More conventional and accessible is Gabrielle Roy's *Garden in the Wind*. Like Ferron, Roy is a master stylist; in these four superbly crafted stories her controlled use of understatement heightens the loneliness and displacement of her characters. I am puzzled as to why Alan Brown, Roy's translator, changed the title from *Un Jardin au bout du monde*; the four stories share an end-of-the-world quality, the characters' physical distance from their native lands corresponding to their social and psychological alienation. Each tale concerns individual isolation in the immense Canadian West, and the need to root identity in a particular place. In the first, an engaging con-artist exploits the feeling of homelessness shared by the Québécois who emigrated to Manitoba. Pretending to come from the old villages left so many years ago, he moves from household to household, earning his keep by fabricating stories about the emigrants' long-lost relatives. His victims half-consciously comply with the deception because they yearn for the sense of identity he provides, yet feel deeply betrayed when the imposter is eventually unmasked.

These stories arise out of Gabrielle Roy's personal past, covering territory familiar to readers of her western fiction. In her introduction she explains that three of the four pieces are reworkings of older material; it almost appears that she returned to her own literary roots in order to describe individuals seeking compensation for their uprootedness.

A mood of poignant reflection pervades all four stories. Sam Lee Wong leaves China for a Saskatchewan village, attracted to a string of little hills on the horizon which strike a subliminal chord in his imagination. Due to a series of mis-

understandings, his hard-won acceptance climaxes ironically when the community forces him to leave by giving him a farewell party. He moves to another town, on the other side of the hills. But the rounded hills themselves, the emblem of his striving, he will reach only in death. In "Hoodoo Valley" a group of Doukhobour settlers, misled by the illusive light of sunset, selects a wasteland because it momentarily reminds them of home. And in the title story an old Ukrainian woman dying on a remote homestead in northern Alberta compensates for the failure of human love by pouring her final energies into her brilliant flower garden.

Despite these themes of mirage, displacement and isolation, Roy's writing is remarkably affirmative. She dwells less on defeat than on the will to persist, celebrating both idiosyncracies and universals of human behaviour with a masterful touch of restraint and affection.

CAROLE GERSON

FERRON & FICTION

JACQUES FERRON, *Escarmouches.* 2 vols., Leméac.

JACQUES FERRON, *Wild Roses.* Translated by Betty Bednarski. McClelland & Stewart, $6.95.

WHEN A NATION IS STRIVING to assume its identity, the avant-garde plays a significant role in giving voice to the aspirations of the masses. This phenomenon has been particularly apparent in Quebec, where it has often produced partisan criticism which obscures the distinction between good writing and effective propaganda. Jacques Ferron, the doctor-artist, speaks in a unique voice in which a distinction between craft and content cannot be made.

Discussing his role as an artist Dr. Ferron has said:

> J'écris avec des mots qui ne me sont pas personnels mais avec des mots qui appartiennent à tout le monde. Le mot est un outil. C'est ainsi et je n'accepte pas du tout que l'écrivain soit considéré comme un homme de métier. Ecrire, c'est aujourd'hui un droit, une liberté semblable à la liberté de parole.

Nowhere is this philosophy more clearly illustrated than in *Escarmouches*, a two-volume collection of Ferron's occasional writings from 1948 to 1974. Defined literally as unimportant combat between a few members of two opposing armies, "escarmouches" also has a figurative sense — "disputer légerment." A subtitle, "la longue passe," extends this connotation. That the thrust is of a pen rather than a sword takes nothing from the sharpness of the attack. *Escarmouches* has three sections: "politiques," "médicales," and "littéraires." Ferron's literary criticism is sensitive; his social satire of hypocrisy and behavioural absurdity is both acute and funny; but his political satire is mordant, its force doubly apparent after the election of the Parti Québécois.

The tone is not consistently light. Indignation and outrage surface in an early article on the 1959 strike at Radio-Canada, the event that started René Levesque on a new political path. Jacques Ferron, too, spoke out: "La seule façon de sauver nos minorités: nous sauver nous mêmes." The English workers at CBC, he termed "des hypocrites et des Taitufe; des racistes dans toute la force du mot." In 1960, Ferron resigned from the P.S.D., Quebec wing of the C.C.F., after the Convention passed a resolution supporting self-determination for Algeria, but defeated the doctor's parallel motion demanding the same rights for French Canadians. In "Adieu au P.S.D.," he begins in typical Ferronian style: "La C.C.F. est un partiouesterne. Il est né de l'accouplement de monsieur Woodsworth et d'un bison, accouplement bizarre: le bison en est mort. . . ."

Frank Scott is a favourite target of Ferron, for whom he epitomizes the Englishman who has preserved archaic traditions, a colonizer despite himself who would leave the French in peace as long as they do not interfere with him; but who cannot understand why they should be at odds with one another politically when they are so similar racially. When asked about his reaction to the possible francization of McGill, Scott flaps his arms "comme un épouvantail dérangé par un moineau."

Ferron uses parable, mock fable, and Biblical imagery to effect. Much of his satire could be classified as modern bestiary with politicians cast as wolves in sheep's clothing. For Trudeau, Pelletier and company, he has antipathy. He has Pelletier say, "Notre avenir? Moi, je n'en sais rien. Je suis comme le prophète Jonas dans la baleine. Il reste à savoir où la baleine le vomira." He considers Trudeau a greater threat to French Canada than "le plus arrière des Blue Nose." In several sketches, he calls Trudeau "le Prince," a Machiavellian power monger, not to mention a common name for a horse.

It is impossible to convey the full flavour of *Escarmouches*, which ranges over a vast area of history, politics, literature, art and medicine with probing intellect and ironic humour. Reading them, one moves into the intellectual climate of Quebec today and senses that Ferron will be hailed as having been a prophetic voice of what is now coming to pass.

Wild Roses takes the reader into Jacques Ferron's fiction universe where he reorders a "wasteful" reality into complex, compact artifacts. Winner of the 1972 Prix France-Québec, this novel is a deceptively simple tale of a selfish young executive whose wife commits suicide, leaving him with an infant daughter whom he boards with an Acadian family in Moncton until she reaches majority and flees her father's encroaching madness. Symbolic and historic perspectives extend the meaning of the story.

Wild roses twine through the narrative carrying a fairy-tale curse with their scent. Soon after his marriage, Baron and his wife transplant wild flowers near their bungalow. The roses immediately

> perked up when transplanted, and they proceeded to do so well that by the second year they almost covered the windows of the bedroom which remained dark from the time of their flowering in the third week of June until the coming of the snow, and became darker still as the roses grew thicker with the years.

The roses' curse of darkness contributes to the wife's madness, but they are also related to a curse that Baron carries within himself. The first description of him notes that "he took all the light and never spoke of the dark." The roses extend Baron's function. Their thickening mark his wife's progressive withdrawal into total isolation. She dies when they are in full bloom and Baron absorbs her guilt. The scent of the roses becomes unwholesome, following him even to Moncton, haunting him until his own death.

The historical perspective becomes apparent when Baron arrives in Moncton, during a conference on Mental Retardation, with a charming young English woman from Newfoundland whom he has met on the plane. They tour the city and he gives a capsule history of the Acadians, for whom Ferron has infinite compassion. The author himself attended that conference, sending back two articles on "Les Chiacs" to Magazine McLean. Much of this material appears unchanged in *Wild Roses*.

> Quoi, Monsieur! Vous les instruisez donc, vos Acadiens ... Y avez-vous pensé? ... Instruire les Acadiens, et en français, non, je n'en reviens pas! Voulez-vous apprendre une nouvelle, Monsieur — ? Eh bien vous allez avoir tantôt un hard time.

Ferron comments on the tragic destiny of this people, less vocal and militant than their Quebec compatriots: the Acadians who received no rights after the Conquest and were tracked down like wild beasts to the edge of the forest. Baron repeats their story to Anne Higgit, although there is some incongruity in his political pronouncements since he "was not interested in politics and attached no importance to all these conflicts, remnants of a past he was unable to comprehend." But it may be that Ferron attributes Baron's own tragic destiny to this attempt at sloughing off a past which is part of him whether he acknowledges it or not.

Wild Roses has been well translated by Betty Bednarski who also translated the earlier *Tales From an Uncertain Country.* But despite its ingenuity, it left me less moved than the spleen and wit of *Escarmouches.*

LINDA SHOHET

A TASTE OF EARTH

ALBERT LABERGE, *Bitter Bread.* Translated by Conrad Dion. Harvest House, $9.95; paper $3.95.

JACQUES BENOIT, *The Princes.* Translated by David Lobdell. Oberon, $9.95; paper $4.95.

THERE ARE THREE GENERATIONS separating Albert Laberge and Jacques Benoit, and the gulf between their worlds is as deep as that separating the Quebec of a hundred years ago from the Quebec of today.

Albert Laberge (1871-1960) studied for the priesthood but lost his faith and became a journalist instead, working as a sports writer and art critic for *La Presse* and then retiring while still a young man to write short stories and works of criticism in his house in Chateauguay. *Bitter Bread* is Conrad Dion's translation of Laberge's only novel, *La Scouine,* which, condemned as pornographic by the church, was published privately in 1918. What Mgr. Bruchési considered pornographic won't even raise an eyebrow today, but the oblivion to which this extraordinary novel was consigned from the outset has strangely persisted, and it is only recently that it has begun to acquire the reputation it deserves as a masterpiece of French Canadian naturalism.

"La Scouine" is Marie Rose Paulima, born in 1853 the daughter of farmer Urgèle Deschamps. She quickly emerges as a character who must take her place alongside Hagar and Isabelle-Marie as one of the memorable women in Canadian fiction. Laberge's novel follows her escapades in thirty-four chapters, each of which focuses briefly and devastatingly on one episode in the life of the rural community around Beauharnois, where Laberge himself grew up.

As a child she wets her bed every night and her school companions nickname her "la Scouine" because of her smell. (The term has no particular meaning, and Dion has wisely refrained from trying to translate it.) Forcing a popular new teacher to leave the school, telling tales on her friends, and lording it over the other children, she is a little horror, exactly the kind of child one would not want to have, and she grows worse as she grows older, drowning a dog in a well and giving a lead quarter to a hungry beggar before sending him back out into a bitter Christmas night.

What is surprising is that a book centring on the exploits of such a very unpleasant woman can exude a warmth rarely equalled in any fiction. How Laberge succeeds in this can clearly be seen in the episode concerning itself with the death of la Scouine's twin sister.

La Scouine takes charge of the house for a week, and since the children are crying she leads them into the room where their mother is lying.

> "If ya're bad, your ma'll come and pull your toes at night," she told them.
>
> Terrified by this threat, the motherless children quieted down. They cried in silence, afraid that the one who had loved them would come to hurt them. Fear had entered their minds, the way an intruder enters a house; it wandered inside of them eerily and rent these young, defenseless beings, harassing them by day and keeping them awake at night.... Their bare feet touched the floor nervously; and when they curled up in their bed, they bunched up one against the other in anguished expectation. They could scarcely close their eyes for fear and would suddenly break out in tears.

The short chapter concludes with an excited la Scouine smugly describing the funeral to an acquaintance ("she stressed every detail, sputtering, her big, thick lips shot little humid beads in the old lady's face") and boasting: "Father Dubuc said he'd never seen such a nice coffin in his church, never seen such a nice coffin."

The life of the people populating *Bitter Bread* is the relentless life of working a merciless land, a life sustained by the round loaves of a bread that is "heavy as sand, sour and bitter to the taste." The frequent references to this "bitter bread, marked with a cross" leave no doubt that his novel is no simple celebration of the rural life Laberge saw disappearing, and his bleak view is further darkened by powerful images of disease and death startlingly linked with religious images: "the land seemed eaten by cancer, leprosy or some disgraceful, malignant disease. The fences had been burnt in certain places, and the burnt stakes cast their black shadow on the plain, like a long procession of monks."

But above all the hardships and sorrow there emerges a compassionate picture of humanity, however warped, and we are left with a taste of the earth that is sourer, more bitter than the bread itself, but that is the staff of life for all that.

The translation is stark, evocative and poetic, like Laberge's French, but Dion does tend to use redundant phrases ("she boasted proudly") and occasional gallicisms ("little humid beads"), and his attempt to render the dialect in English (always a difficult job) is eyecatching and irritating.

Jacques Benoit (born 1941) won the Prix de la Province de Québec for his first novel, *Jos Carbone. The Princes* (*Les Princes*, 1973, admirably translated by David Lobdell) is his fourth and, in its disconcerting combination of fantasy and realism, it is typical not only of his own best work but also of much of the fiction being produced by the talented younger writers in Quebec today.

An elaborately described imaginary city in *The Princes* is populated by more-or-less human beings, monsters and dogs. The starving people break a centuries' old taboo and start killing dogs for food, and the highly organized society of dogs retaliates first of all by making themselves poisonous and then by killing and eating people. The militia steps in, the dogs are hideously mutilated and massacred, and commander Kroknell goes home to another section of the city, happily calculating that he personally is responsible for the death of 91 dogs. His pet dog, Nina, slinks away from him on his arrival, and it is only later that he wakens to find her at his feet with a large black mastiff beside her. Just as he is vaguely thinking of reaching for his cutlass, the mastiff hurls himself forward, his jaws closing on Kroknell's throat.

> Avoiding the spreading pool of blood, Nina leapt on to the commander's chest, pressed her muzzle to his face, and plucked the man's eyeballs from their sockets. Raising her head in the air, she gulped them down.

The characteristics that they share show up most clearly the contrasts between Laberge and Benoit. Both have a remarkable eye for the striking detail, and both record their observations crisply, but where Laberge is compassionate in his

chronicles of cruelty and ugliness, Benoit is dispassionate, and the world of *The Princes* is as cold and inhuman as that of *Bitter Bread* is redolent of sweet stinking humanity.

Some of the best fiction ever written centres on people we aren't meant to care very much about. I'm thinking not only of extreme cases such as Beckett's derelicts but also of the characters in a whole range of more accessible novels from *Crime and Punishment* to *Death in Venice* to *1984*. But even if Raskolnikov, or Aschenbach, or Winston Smith are poor enough specimens of humanity, the power of these novels lies in their authors' ability to make us care about the predicament the characters are in, if not about themselves as individuals.

At the end of *Bitter Bread* a now aging la Scouine, her mother and her brother Charlot have moved off the land and into the village. La Scouine is not unhappy with the change because now she can pester the parish priest and his assistant as often as she likes; the mother is dying and spends her days looking out the window at the cemetery; but Charlot is suffering abominably:

> This is what it will be like forever and ever. He had abandoned the land to be able to rest, to lead an easy life, but he has only discovered boredom, a killing and consuming ennui. He is not living, he is waiting for death.

The land was not kind, but its loss is more awful than the cruelest of winters The prospect Laberge saw for the people he wrote about was not a cheering one, and it is a tribute to a great writer to say that he makes us feel their predicament. The machinations of dogs and men in *The Princes*, however, lack importance: there is nothing in this novel to make us care about what happens to anyone. In this *The Princes* is fortunately not at all typical of recent Quebec fiction.

LINDA LEITH

PLAYGOER

WAYNE E. EDMONSTONE, *Nathan Cohen: The Making of a Critic*. Lester and Orpen, $12.95.

IN 1948, WRITING FOR THE *Canadian Jewish Weekly*, Nathan Cohen stated that the primary duty of a drama critic was "not to lay down rigid rules and thereby arrive at decisions, but to serve playgoers as a guide and to assist dramatists and performers and producers, by constructive suggestions, in raising their standards of achievement." He adhered to this principle, though with increasing impatience at the too gradual replacement of amateurism by professionalism in national theatre in Canada, throughout his career as a drama critic. That career germinated in 1940 when Cohen joined the Mount Allison *Argosy Weekly* as a staff writer. By the time he left the paper as managing editor in 1942, it had become more of a newspaper than simply a typical university student production, mainly because Cohen had shifted its emphasis to features, sports, and editorials rather than literary contributions and had infused the former with lively social and political comment. In the same fashion, by the time of his death at forty-seven in 1971, Cohen had reshaped the role and perspective of drama criticism in Canada through his work as newspaper journalist and radio broadcaster by emphasizing theatre as an art rather than idle entertainment and insisting on higher standards of content and production.

Nathan Cohen: The Making of a Critic is a eulogistic account of Cohen's evolution as "national" critic, or as Wayne Edmonstone grandly declares, "one of the architects of our cultural consciousness." That's a formidable claim to fame, and justification of it will probably have to come from a book whose author identifies less closely with his subject than does Edmonstone. A former colleague of Cohen

at the Toronto *Star*, and now visual arts critic for the Vancouver *Sun*, Edmonstone lacks sufficient distance from Cohen's role as mentor in his own career to avoid over-identification with Cohen. Some identification, of course, is necessary for a biographer on any level to understand his subject's background and state of mind, and the way in which he expresses himself. But if the biographer is unreserved in his identification, he risks writing as much about himself as about his subject.

Edmonstone makes no claim to have written a scholarly biography and hasn't exactly written a dull one. His approach is "documentary" or "narrative." "I have let Mr. Cohen do the talking, to make his own case. I hold the view that a writer's ideas are best served by the clear presentation of what he has written, rather than someone else's interpretation of that writing." What results from such an approach is an undiluted and undigested account from which the reader is expected to draw his own conclusions.

I have two main criticisms of the approach. I now feel as if I have indeed *read* Nathan Cohen, but I also feel I have read a biography in the making rather than a completed one. There is something raw, for example, about coming upon ten straight pages of direct quotation from the September 1950 issue of *The Critic*, a small magazine of theatrical reviews and arts commentary that Cohen founded that year. This particular quotation is Cohen's side of a debate with Mavor Moore on the subject of Canadian theatre. It is typical of Cohen's generally lively, incisive, and uncompromising prose: "until a few years ago, the only thing that characterized our arts was a hollow adequacy, taxidermal competence, and nothing more. There was nothing in the arts for the public to come to grips with; our artists were either dilettantes, who plied a precious ignorance disguised as intellectual mystery, or else flyweight hacks." As Edmonstone points out, the whole exchange quoted, in which Cohen was defending his claim to a widely growing theatrical awareness in Canada against Moore's contention that Cohen overestimated this awareness, still occurs. But do we need ten pages of quotation to make this point? Over and over, we are given these long "narrative" chunks of quotation.

My second criticism is that in adopting this approach to biography, Edmonstone also adopts a folksy and anecdotal tone that cloys. For example, describing Cohen's voice as one "caught somewhere between a Papal pronouncement and terminal sinusitis," Canadian artists as "drooling and whimpering about their lack of recognition in their own country," and a broadcast by Cohen about Celia Franca as being "delivered in the tone of a disappointed lover, who sees his goddess in danger of becoming a slattern — if not a prostitute — before his eyes" is cute and colourful but self-indulgent. The occasional reference to "Mr." Cohen sounds rather obsequious. And the occasional pompous remark such as the following assumes a lack of interest and awareness among his readers that is simply offensive: "In fact, for those of us who are old enough to remember, the world *was* to be reconstituted 'on the same old post-1918 basis. . . .'" (This is in reference to an editorial for the *Argosy Weekly* written by Cohen in 1941.) I may not be old enough to remember, but I *can* read and I don't like being patronized.

Despite its tone and subjectivity, *Nathan Cohen: The Making of a Critic* is a worthwhile contribution to the history of drama criticism in Canada if it does nothing else than remind us of Nathan Cohen and of what he said. Obviously, being outspoken as he was and, towards the end of his life, increasingly acerbic about the state of Canadian culture and of Cana-

dian drama in particular, Cohen was not universally admired and respected. Edmonstone throughout his book works towards achieving a balance in Cohen's favour. He contends that a distorted image of him has been promulgated since his death, one in which Cohen appears as a prejudiced, provincial, insignificant influence. This image is surely inaccurate, though depicting Cohen as the white knight of Canadian drama criticism in the twentieth century may be going too far the other way.

Whatever the bias towards him, Nathan Cohen himself was clear about his role and what he liked and didn't like, and that is refreshing. He loved the theatre: "I believe it's the most humanistic of all forms of art, and the most stimulating — emotionally and mentally." What he looked for in a play was "what it said, what its underlying purpose was," and then he tried to explain and interpret the play "at least as well as the person who wrote it." He does occupy a unique place in Canadian drama criticism, and though this biography is disappointing and somewhat irritating, it is a just acknowledgement of Cohen's role in the development of that criticism.

JEAN WILSON

IN PERFORMANCE

HARRY ADASKIN, *A Fiddler's World.* November House, $14.95.

"GOD HAS A FEW OF US whom he whispers in the ear; the rest may reason and welcome; 'tis we musicians who know," said Browning's Abt Vogler: *A Fiddler's World* is one musician's characteristically idiosyncratic and candid attempt to explain something of what it is that musicians "know," of what it means to *have* to be a musician and, consequently, what the life of a professional musician entails. The Friends of Chamber Music see only the violinist and pianist, the quartet, or whatever, formally attired on the platform giving a performance; some of them may, afterwards, meet the musicians at that equally formal occasion, "the small party to meet the musicians." Adaskin describes the long preparation for the concert-hall performance. He takes us further than back-stage — back into his own youth, his discovery of the violin and music, his need to become a fiddler. To discover what one wants to do and to be able to do it is a fine thing. But a good fiddler is not made by practising until one becomes better and better and, one day, becomes a founder member of the first (and what many reckon still the best) Canadian string quartet. Quartets play harmoniously in public and their members may well be as harmonious in their private lives. Adaskin, while recognizing this, talks uncompromisingly of the stresses such an artistic "marriage" produce over the years. The rewards of music and of being a musician are often expensively earned.

There are times when the satisfaction of the artistic drive demands hard decisions: Adaskin never lacked the nerve to make these — from changing early teachers when they had taught him all they could, to resigning from the Hart House Quartet when his career seemed at its peak. To have the nerve is one thing, to realize the cost and accept it is another. Adaskin freely tells what he did and what it cost him. There is nothing of the apologia about this: he does not offer himself as the "artist" whom others did not "understand." The candour reveals perhaps more than the writer is aware, but his truth is told. The feel of what it is like to play the violin for a living, literally to thrive upon music, is finely caught. One has to practise, of course, and others' inability to understand this is amusingly illustrated by the story of the summer cot-

tage residents who assumed the Adaskins were there to play sweetly of an evening for them as background to social talk; they had to be put to flight by steady Bach (poor Bach! but far poorer the residents). The summer in France (the best and most moving part of the book) shows another aspect of the artists' life: the chance to meet Ravel and introduce his string quartet to North America yet another.

Such experiences helped to create "a fiddler's world," the creation of which demanded sure sense of purpose. The new world took Adaskin into a different society from that in which he had grown up without making him ashamed of his background. It asked a willingness to learn (a learning that is not always carried lightly). It is also a world full of love and affection.

Chronology, happily, gives way to digression and reminiscence. This is a spoken book and it speaks the man: it reminds us why his classes are still remembered at the university where he taught for so many years.

R. W. INGRAM

COMIC VARIATIONS

MORLEY TORGOV, *The Abramsky Variations.* Toronto: Lester and Orpen, $8.95.

DENNIS T. PATRICK SEARS, *Aunty High Over the Barley Mow.* Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, $12.50.

SHANE DENNISON, *Sidehill Gouger or What's So Deadly About Caterpillars.* Toronto: Doubleday, $8.95.

TORGOV'S *The Abramsky Variations* is more ambitious in scope than his first novel. In three sections, Torgov explores how three generations of Abramskies (or Brahms) variously express their will to live through fantasy rather than to accept reality, and how they attempt to reconcile essentially Gentile ambitions with their Jewish tradition and identity. Part I, set in Toronto, traces the rise of Louis Brahms (Leibel Abramsky) from his arrival as a new immigrant to Toronto in 1927 through his marriage to Goldie Glicksman and prosperity as owner of a chain of delicatessens. Part II, also set in Toronto, examines the mid-life crisis of Hershel Brahms in the summer of 1960. Part III, set in France near Nice, treats the coming-of-age of Bart Brahms in 1976. Each generation identifies with a Gentile hero: Louis and Goldie with the aviator Charles Lindbergh who achieved a victory over nature and space, Hershy with the scientist-explorer Thor Heyerdahl who vanquished time by sailing a papyrus boat over the route of the early Egyptians to India, and Bart with the Beatles who translated their age into art. All three seek adventure and a sense of significance missing in their own lives.

Torgov clearly identifies with Hershy, the middle generation. Yet the most vivid and compelling section is Part I with its depiction of ethnic streets and markets in Toronto in the 1920's and 30's and its portrayal of the exuberant Louis. Part II is monotonous and clichéd; the malaise of affluent lawyers, employed by rich clients to handle income tax evasions and seeking release from the ennui of life with their $10,000 Mercedes, expensive stereos and barbecues at the lake, is extremely dull. Part III is little more stimulating in its depiction of the world-weariness of nineteen-year-old cynics, already bored with life beyond their motor-bikes and their current love affairs.

A major weakness lies in the parallelism. It is Goldie rather than Louis who fantasizes that he is Lindbergh, yet Louis is clearly the protagonist and the representative of the first generation immigrant, and the book ends abruptly and cryptically with his checking into the Hotel Lindbergh in Paris. The novel has pos-

sibilities and it suggests a deeper problem, the search of the modern Canadian Jew for cultural roots and heroes. But it does not really fulfill its predecessor's promise.

Sears' *Aunty High Over the Barley Mow* is also somewhat disappointing. The novel, like *The Lark in the Clear Air* and Sears' autobiographical sketches *Fair Days Along the Talbert*, is set in the sparse farming country of the Laurentian shield near Lindsay and depicts the life of the shanty Irish of the district. The story is told in retrospect by fifty-year-old Padraic Fallon and concerns the initiation into adulthood of Padraic (Patch) and his sister Brigid, significantly nicknamed Bride. The Fallon men grow up in a tradition of fighting, drinking and wenching, and many problems are solved by the fists or the bottle. The Fallon women die young, and indeed the book is dedicated to Sears' three aunts who died in their twenty-second year. Eight italicized interludes spaced irregularly through the text provide the chief points of reference: the early idyllic relationship between Patch and his sister, the marked change in this relationship when Patch takes out his first date, the final parting as he leaves at seventeen for the war, and his mourning of her and the lost ghosts of his past.

There is much humour in the treatment of local characters and the style is at times richly lyrical and at others pithy or colloquial. But the realism and toughness of the individual episodes is countered by the over-all tone of sentiment and nostalgia.

Dennison's first novel is more truly comic in overall tone. In the title itself and the chapter headings, which form a complete sentence, Dennison is playing games with conventional techniques of the novel and the effect is entertaining if sometimes distracting or unclear. The novel is set in Chance, B.C., a little town remote from any city, with a population of 67. The most successful characters are the eccentric townspeople. However the focus shifts disconcertingly between these colourful but one-dimensional characters and the adventures of Stumpy Ross Lorringer, a sixteen-year-old student, and the married teacher Laura Wilson Bloddy. The book examines the conflict of Ross and Laura with the conventions and power structure of family, community and educational authorities. Dennison clearly identifies with Ross, treated by his family and teachers as a "re-tard," and sensitively develops the relationship between an imaginative but misunderstood boy and a perceptive teacher, a relationship which deepens into love. Ross is identified with the side-hill gouger of the title, the mythical mountain creature with one leg worn short to adapt to its hillside environment. It can be defeated only out of its own area but Ross insists, "I'm going to fight it out right here in the hills."

Many early scenes are highly comic. With more experience Dennison may sharpen his focus, choose between the novel of action, the novel of psychological development, and the collection of character sketches, and control his comic techniques in the service of an overall unity. For Dennison's novel is the most original of these three, and promises a rich vein of humour to be developed in future.

CATHERINE MCLAY

ON MERTON

GEORGE WOODCOCK. *Thomas Merton: Monk and Poet.* Douglas & McIntyre, $12.95; paper $5.95.

GEORGE WOODCOCK AND THOMAS MERTON would appear to have little in common: Merton, a Trappist monk who spent his life amidst the austere and authoritarian surroundings of a rural Kentucky monastery, and Woodcock, a well-travelled

author and genteel anarchist who admits to not being particularly religious. It turns out that they have a lot in common — their maturation in England in the 1930's, their distrust of political power, their pacifism, their attraction to Eastern spirituality, and the fact that they are both poets. Moreover, Woodcock recalls that Merton once said that if he had not believed in God, "conscience would have made him an anarchist."

In addition, both Merton and Woodcock have been highly-productive, wide-ranging authors, and it is in the area of Merton's prolific publishing, a puzzle to many observers, that Woodcock lends an especially sensitive ear, noting in connection with Merton's apparently conflicting careers that the contradictions were "more apparent than real." Focusing on Merton's paradoxical identity as the talking monk whose life was formally dedicated to silence, Woodcock argues lucidly that the "creative persona is not the self as commonly understood; he is a different being from the man with the same name whom the world encounters in the street or at the bank." The trinity of identities within Thomas Merton, Woodcock writes, essentially encompassed the creative writer, the Trappist priest, and the hermit who eventually moved away from the communal buildings into a cinder-block cabin on the monastery lands. Working it all out, Merton kept "one name for the monastery and another for the public. Father Louis never published a line under his monastic name; Thomas Merton never performed a sacerdotal act."

Inevitably for many readers, Merton the man is as interesting a phenomenon as the writings. Thus, Woodcock devotes a lot of space to Merton's life and to recent developments in the Catholic Church in order to bring out the outline of the man in a loosely chronological study of Merton's career, sampling the writings with care as he works through the life. The book is a general rather than a literary study, although it contains some useful distinctions about the kind of poetry which Merton wrote (e.g., the poetry of the choir and the poetry of the desert). It is a lucid, engagingly candid, and generous appraisal, probably the best of the general studies of Merton which have appeared in such number in recent years. Woodcock is most acute in dealing with Merton's contemplative poetry, his attitudes towards the politics of the 60's and his ill-fated but spiritually fertile trip to Asia in 1968, areas in which Woodcock and Merton might be said to understand each other. Where Merton writes as the orthodox man, Woodcock politely turns away from the writings, which have obviously become opaque for him at that point.

Although Woodcock's is an accomplished book, general studies of this sort have their limits. In summarizing Merton's career, for example, Woodcock writes that the "role of the monk and the role of the poet had come together, each serving the other and both, in his belief, serving God." While attractive, such a view overlooks the detailed evidence from Merton's essays on poetry and contemplation where it is made clear that Merton saw his commitment to poetry as abbreviating the life of contemplation. He decided to give himself to both poetry and contemplation with the consciousness that, in terms of his own ideas of spiritual perfection at least, he was trying, finally, to be only second best. This gives a subtlety and poignancy to Merton's inner reconciliation of his various identities which George Woodcock's and other general studies of Merton have tended to miss.

ROSS LABRIE

THERIAULT'S *Agoak*

LE DERNIER ROMAN d'Yves Thériault forme le troisième volume de la trilogie *Agaguk — Tayaout — Agoak* et referme le cercle d'évolution cyclique des personnages. A la fin d'*Agaguk*, le héros atteint un sommet: l'Agaguk primitif est, grâce à Iriook sa femme, devenu plus humain, plus sensible aux valeurs de vie et d'amour, libre dans un royaume où il a prouvé sa vraie mesure. Le couple Agaguk-Iriook est arrivé à un stade d'unité, de communion, de respect mutuel peu commun. Le premier volume se termine par la victoire éclatante de l'amour et de l'enfant, par la vie jaillissante après la fille, acceptée enfin par Agaguk, naît un fils perpétuateur de race. Couple comblé donc, où homme et femme se retrouvent en tant qu'égaux, entourés de leur progéniture, intégrés à une nature libre et grandiose. *Tayaout* nous montre la lente déchéance d'Agaguk, l'héroïque pèlerinage du fils Tayaout. Comme son père jadis, Tayaout s'en va loin de la tribu pour devenir un homme véritable. Solitaire dans son itinéraire existentiel, il découvre la stéatite, la pierre magique. A Tayaout incombe la mission sacrée de redonner à son peuple la pierre des Esprits. Les Inuits, menacés de matérialisme et de corruption par l'entourage pervertissant des Blancs, se remettent à délivrer l'âme de chaque pierre, refaisant ainsi des gestes millénaires, concrétisant leurs rêves, leurs angoisses, dévoilant dans leurs sculptures le message mystérieux des dieux. Malheureusement, Agaguk trahit son peuple en vendant ses sculptures au Blanc et en reniant de ce fait son âme même. Tayaout se fait le justicier du père, il le tue impitoyablement. Mais Tayaout lui-même n'est pas pur, il a douté des dieux et est puni: l'ours blanc l'écrase en une masse méconnaissable. Tayaout et Agaguk se rejoignent dans la mort, tas de chairs déchirées, déchiquetées, abîmées, sanguinolentes, morts sans visage. Ce qui s'annonçait comme un renouveau humain, comme une renaissance de dignité, de spiritualité échoue en un reniement des dieux et des valeurs ancestrales. L'ébauche de l'homme purifié s'efface; l'évolution vers un être civilisé, spiritualisé est avertée. L'homme retourne à la terre, poussière sanglante avalée dans la nuit des temps, graine anonyme qui ne germera peut-être plus dans l'aridité d'un monde sclérosé par le manque de foi et la cupidité de l'argent.

Agoak, petit-fils d'Agaguk (Agaguk a eu deux fils, Tayaout et Agaguk), continue la lignée de ses ancêtres. A l'inverse du héros qui dans *Agaguk* évoluait de l'homme primitif à l'homme plus civilisé, Agoak retrace le chemin inverse, regressant de l'Inuk éduqué, raffiné, intégré à la civilisation blanche, à l'esquimau primitif, brutal, dont la seule obsession est celle de la survie dans un milieu dur, hostile, violent.

Alors que dans *Agaguk*, la femme Iriook est la compagne bénie de l'homme, celle qui l'initie au vrai partage, à l'amour généreux, Judith, la femme d'Agoak, est source de désaccord, de désunion, de regression, de perte. Agoak seul parmi les Blancs, se sent parfaitement intégré à la société capitaliste nord-américaine; il s'est haussé intellectuellement au niveau des Blancs, il s'est adapté à leurs manières, il a acquis leur confiance; comme Nochasak son ami, Agoak vient de loin. A Frobisher Bay, il vit à l'occidentale, porte des habits comme ceux des Blancs; il a des gestes tendres et raffinés dans ses ébats amoureux avec sa femme. C'est Judith qui ne reconnaît plus en Agoak l'Inuk qu'elle a connu à

Pov: "On dirait que tu es un autre homme."

Elle lui reproche de "devenir un Blanc," de renier les valeurs primitives, de se concentrer sur l'achèvement d'une évolution à laquelle elle reste totalement étrangère et pour laquelle elle n'a que mépris: "Pour toi, vivre signifie être un Blanc. Pour eux, cela signifie être un Inuk." Agoak ne comprend pas sa femme: "Etre Blanc, être Inuk n'importait pas tant. Etre et bien servir les desseins lui paraissaient suffisants."

La tendresse érotique, l'acharnement à jouir du jeune couple ne parvient pas à les sauver. Le physique devient cause de perdition, à l'inverse des autres romans thérialesques. Pour remplir les jours creux, Judith sur l'instigation de son mari, travaille dans un restaurant. Sa beauté primitive et simple attire les regards de deux jeunes Américains riches — image un peu stéréotypée du monde capitaliste, vandale et exploiteur — qui la suivent jusque chez elle et l'y violent brutalement. Agoak revient du bureau et apercevant les assaillants immondes, il les tue, les dépèce sauvagement en proie à une furie déchaînée. Dans sa rage, Agoak a les gestes de l'homme non civilisé, les instincts de ses ancêtres. L'héritage d'Agaguk, son grand-père, est bien ancré dans Agoak, fardeau impossible de nier, resurgissant spontanément contre toute logique calme et ordonnée. C'est cette sauvagerie inexplicable, sadique, inhumaine que le Blanc ne peut comprendre et qui sépare Agoak des sociétés civilisées. L'occident pardonnerait à Agoak son homicide justifiable; il ne lui pardonnera jamais son primitivisme inné qu'aucune éducation, si poussée soit-elle, ne peut extirper.

Le couple Agoak-Judith s'en retourne dans les grands espaces blancs. Leur départ est loin d'être la déliverance à laquelle Agaguk et Iriook aspiraient. Cette fuite sinistre n'est point retour à une vie libre, épanouissante; elle est au contraire une course désespérée avec comme unique but la survie physique. Le combat d'Agoak contre l'ours blanc n'est point une initiation aux valeurs d'adulte, il est un retour aux forces animales pures et simples, une confrontation de deux masses physiques, le plus fort éliminant le plus faible.

Nous assistons ici au scénario renversé d'*Agaguk*. Au lieu de soigner son mari, Judith tente de s'en débarrasser, de s'enfuir; au lieu d'un duo amoureux, nous assistons à un duel presque sans paroles où Agoak, le plus rusé, le plus brutal finira par vaincre Judith, la peureuse. La maison, l'igloo symbole de chaleur, uni à la féminité rédemptrice dans *Agaguk*, devient ici la prison étouffante, lieu de sombres complots. Agaguk avait tué le trafiquant Brown, malhonnête et mauvais, mais Iriook parvient à lui faire comprendre l'horreur de son acte, même si celui-ci était justifié. Agaguk finit par se repentir et promettre de ne plus tuer, de respecter la vie. Agoak, après avoir tué les deux violeurs, rejette complètement tout le code civilisé et laisse dans son sillage un véritable carnage, tuant la famille d'Esquimaux amis qu'il recontre et les deux policiers Inuit, massacrant donc non seulement des Blancs mais des gens de sa propre race. En plus, Agoak à l'inverse d'Agaguk écrase la fille nouveau-née de Judith, creusant par ce refus au droit de vie, l'abîme le séparant de sa femme et de son passé. Si Agoak ne tue pas Judith, c'est uniquement parce qu'elle lui est nécessaire à sa survie.

Nous trouvons Agoak totalement transformé en sauvage cruel et sanguinaire, ravalé au niveau de la bête humaine. Judith devient une bête de somme, docile, matée, présente pour satisfaire le besoin sexuel du mâle, besoin dénué de toute tendresse. Judith qui n'avait point apprécié les conforts de la vie moderne, qui avait méprisé les allures efféminées et tendres de son mari, se rend compte sou-

dain de l'aberration même de ses rêves: la vie primitive ne peut être élevante pour l'homme, vu qu'elle est uniquement centrée sur sa survie individuelle. Elle en arrive à regretter le sain raisonnement d'Agoak, la déférence attentive qu'il lui témoignait; elle aspire au retour à ce passé si proche, celui où son mari et elle vivaient dans une sécurité bienfaisante, rassurante. Même la prison lui paraît être un paradis comparé à l'igloo froid, glacé, isolé. Sa dernière tentative de dialoguer avec Agoak ne mène à rien.

"J'essaie de te faire penser," dit Judith (alors qu'avant Agoak avait vainement essayé de faire penser Judith ...) "Je veux que ce soit comme avant... Nous vivons comme nos ancêtres ont dû vivre, à peine mieux que des bêtes...." Dialogue inutile, le couple ne se rejoindra jamais plus: Agoak est redevenu un véritable animal hanté par sa survie. De la bête, Agoak a acquis la brutalité gratuite. Alors que dans tous les autres romans de Thériault c'est la bête qui mutile l'homme, éprouvant ainsi la valeur de l'être, ici c'est Agoak qui mutile, se dégradant donc au niveau da la bête. Le mot "instinct" revient de nombreuses fois dans ce roman. Agoak, mû par un subconscient démesuré, ne garde plus rien de son éducation raffinée. "C'est une chose qui n'existe pas un homme civilisé," dit Agoak. Affirmation troublante, cynique d'Yves Thériault lui-même.

Agoak est peut-être le livre le plus violent, le plus érotique,[1] le plus pessimiste de Thériault. Avec *Agoak*, il semble bien que le héros thérialesque ne puisse plus sortir de son cul-de-sac comme Victor Debreux; il s'enfonce dans la bestialité morbide d'un Bruno Juchereau.[2] Est-ce là l'optique négativiste d'un auteur qui voit dans la société moderne aussi bien que dans la vie primitive une impasse: l'impossibilité pour l'être de s'épanouir totalement, librement, joyeusement? Ce roman serait alors une condamnation: l'homme voué à la déchéance se retrouve tôt ou tard dans le cercle infernal d'une existence absurde, vouée d'une part à un matérialisme anéantisseur, d'autre part à ses instincts sauvages, destructeurs, narcissiques orientés vers la simple conservation physique. Quelle sera l'issue? Peut-être un prochain roman d'Yves Thériault nous la montrera.

NOTES

[1] Avec *Les Temps du Carcajou*. N'oublions pas *Oeuvres de Chair*, contes érotiques paru en 1976, ouvrage léger, fort bien écrit.

[2] Victor Debreux, le héros de *Cul-de-Sac*; Bruno Juchereau, le héros des *Temps du Carcajou*.

LOUISE VANHEE NELSON

BLESSED ARE THE GUILTY

Dark of Caves (1977) is described by its author, Abraham Ram, as "part two of a novel of its time." In the first volume, *The Noise of Singing* (1955), Ram introduced us to Moe Tabb (he who pays the tab?), a middle-aged, balding teacher of English in a Montreal Jewish parochial school, graduate student at MacMillan University, aspiring playwright, divorced, and now permanent resident in his parents' home. Moe is a "shmo," a "little man," a "loser" — a familiar enough figure in Canadian literature in both languages. But Moe is also burdened by a sense of guilt. In the course of the first volume he undergoes a series of personal reverses and seems doomed to lose his job in the parochial school. In the last scene, in a desperate attempt to keep order in the classroom, Moe threatens his pupils with "a judgment" at the end of their school year. But immediately he feels "a curious sense of anomaly. He was now a judge. And who would judge him?"

These final lines of Part I lead directly into the much superior *Dark of Caves*, in which Moe's obsessive guilt becomes the principal theme of the novel. From first to last, *Dark of Caves* is pervaded by Moe's awareness of the approaching Jewish High Holydays. Moe does not observe them in any formal way, but they nonetheless dominate his waking and sleeping life. As Yom Kippur, the Jewish Day of Atonement approaches, Moe dreams he has been brought to court on Judgment Day confronted by a faceless prosecutor and a witness box full of those he fears he has neglected, exploited, estranged and betrayed. He succumbs to his feelings: "The prisoner beats his breast and cries: '*Al chait!* I have sinned!' " Yet Moe is a good man —humble, thoughtful, kind, generous, sensitive and essentially honourable in his dealings. He has no real reason to feel guilt, but he has only to meet one of his former pupils, now Dr. Arye Cohen, to feel uneasy: "All much further along in life than he."

Moral breast beating belongs to an earlier and different stream in Canadian literature. We find it in Niels Lindstedt and in other characters in the novels of Frederick Philip Grove, in the fiction of Hugh MacLennan, in Sinclair Ross' *As For Me and My House*, in the first two volumes of Roch Carrier's trilogy, in Margaret Laurence's *Stone Angel*. Some critics have observed that the guilt which afflicts characters in Canadian novels is the by-product of the Puritanism that has suffused both English and French-Canadian literature.

If, as most critics have assumed, Canadian literature, no matter what its regional or ethnic origin, reveals a certain unity, we should not be surprised to discover that Canadian-Jewish writers are also preoccupied with guilt. Yet how could this be the result of Puritanism? Judaism does not contain anything like the Calvinism or Jansenism that had so marked an effect on the conscience of Canadian Protestants and Catholics. The Jewish tradition does, of course, contain the notion of sin and the need for divine forgiveness. Hence the significance of the Day of Atonement which most Jews, including the irreligious, are aware of, and can't help feeling guilty about — even when they are most determined to ignore it. But Judaism regards all human beings as sinners and does not reject an individual simply because he or she has sinned. Nor does Judaism make its adherents feel anxious or guilty because of their sins, sexual or otherwise. It tends to emphasize the here and now rather than salvation or damnation in a world to come. Hence the stress on life which characterizes Jewish culture and much of its literature. By and large Canadian-Jewish writing does not, as English or French-Canadian writing often does, express guilt for sexual urges or even for sexual misbehaviour. Nonetheless, the guilt motif is obvious enough in Canadian-Jewish Literature. It is to be found in the characters in Wiseman's *The Sacrifice*, in Kreisel's *The Rich Man* and *The Betrayal*, in much of Richler's fiction, in the short stories of C. J. Newman, and in some of the narrator figures in Norman Levine's stories.

The guilt motif usually takes one of three forms. In the works of the older generation of Canadian-Jewish writers the characters or narrator figure sometimes express guilt for having survived the Holocaust of World War II, while millions of their fellow-Jews perished. Thus in "Meditation Upon Survival" (1947), A. M. Klein writes:

> At times, sensing that the golgotha'd dead
> run plasma through my veins, and that I must live
> their unexpired six million circuits, giving
> to each of their nightmares my body for a bed —
> inspirited, dispirited —

those times that I feel their death-wish
bubbling the
channels of my blood —
I grow bitter at my false felicity —
the spared one — and would almost add my
wish
for the centigrade furnace and the cyanide
flood.

Similar feelings can be found in Henry Kreisel's two novels, which deal directly with the holocaust experience, and in Jake Hersh, the hero of Richler's *St. Urbain's Horseman.* The post-war Jewish-Canadian writers are conscious of the Holocaust, but are not affected as their elders were. Survival-guilt is, of course, distinctive to Jewish writers, though it is possible to detect in other novelists the sense that Canadians enjoy a life that is sheltered, protected and comfortable while other less fortunate peoples do not. In *Peace Shall Destroy Many,* for example, Rudy Wiebe raises the moral issue of Mennonite non-involvement in the Second World War. Annamarie accuses her own people of profiting from the pain and sacrifice of others:

> The whole world is now in it. We can't avoid it. Father raises pigs because the price is high: some men charged up the Normandy beaches last Tuesday with our bacon in their stomachs. Pete Block can stay home because Mr. Block's farm is big enough to be called an essential industry. Sam works in one now too. He wrote last week he was being shifted to Ontario to work in a boot factory. Alternative service is necessary to winning the War. Wars can only be won with some fighting, so we divide the job: I supply you with bacon to eat and boots to wear and you go kill the Germans — for the good of both of us."
>
> Thom shuddered. After a moment, she went on. "Only, we have the better part. We don't take any risks — and grow rich besides."

It is not surprising that some Canadian-Jewish fiction expresses discomfort or guilt for having relinquished Judaism. In Norman Levine's "Why Do You Live So Far Away?" the Jewish narrator who has settled down in England with a non-Jewish wife is one day visited by his sister Mona:

> My sister looked at the Christmas tree, the decorations, the cards.
>
> "Do they know about Chanukah?"
>
> The kids were silent.
>
> "Your Daddy will tell you." Then back to me in the same low disapproving voice.
>
> "You celebrate Christmas?"
>
> "We sort of have a tree — and I give out the presents on Christmas Day."
>
> "I always say, how you want to live your life, that is your business," Mona said.

The Jewish protagonists of Charlotte Fielden's *Crying As She Ran* and Richler's *Son of a Smaller Hero* and *St. Urbain's Horseman* are engaged in similar struggles of conscience.

A third kind of guilt is caused by the desire to achieve. This is in large part a North American phenomenon, stimulated originally by the so-called Protestant work-ethic, and the American dream, but it took root among American Jews who believed, more perhaps than any other immigrant community, that the way out of poverty and the ghetto was through business achievement or through education and the professions. Jewish immigrant parents who did not themselves climb the economic ladder often led vicarious lives of success through their educated children, and so parental pressure was applied to encourage children to become doctors, lawyers and academics rather than poets and writers. At the same time, and this is true of other immigrant groups, they tried to hold their children in ethnic traditions that the Canadian-born no longer believed in. The confrontation scene between old Melech and young Noah in Richler's *Son of a Smaller Hero* brings both of these motifs together:

> "Other boys go to college. They make something from themselves."
>
> "I can't make something of myself that way, *Zeyda.* I'm sorry. I think it's freedom

> that I want. I — I no longer have any rules to refer to the way you had. I . . . "
>
> "Listen how he talks. You should study Talmud."
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Noah hesitated. He felt guilty, tempted. He had never heard Melech ask for anything before. "I'm sorry, *Zeyda*. I can't. I can't go back."
>
> . . . . . .
>
> "I wanted you to be a somebody. Something. Something not like them. All there is for them is money."
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Melech was old, but he was full of justice and not to be pitied. *Yet I had nothing but apologies to offer him.* Noah did not feel triumphant. He felt small. He started up the car and drove off into the night.

Moe Tabb, the protagonist of Abraham Ram's "novel of its time," does not express survival-guilt, but he is most certainly conscious of being an underachiever:

> He'd betrayed his own bright hopes. The bright day is done, and we are for the dark.
> . . .
> Here he was — hiding, hiding. He must exorcise that load of guilt, free himself from it. But — the bowl of sky atilt overhead — how to harness the wheeling periphery of events, the mesh of everyday trivia, the inevitable pattern . . . This, this he had failed to do, latter day Ancient Mariner Ishmael that he was. I, Moe Ishmael. Ishmoe . . .

As the allusions to Ishmael and "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" indicate, Moe is a symbolic figure as well as an individual. He is a wanderer, a quester, torturing himself for having failed to achieve the status and the success that North American life makes people feel they have to attain.

The recurring motif of guilt in Canadian literature has been attributed to the influence of Calvinism or Jansenism. The sense of guilt in Canadian-Jewish writing appears, however, to be different in kind and origin. Are the forces operating in Canadian literature so very different? Or is it that Puritanism is inadequate as an explanation of the guilt theme in Canadian literature? Perhaps a more profound force, which is bound up with the nature of this country, its origins, and its relations with the outside world, underlies the guilt theme in our literature, something connected perhaps to our colonial mentality, to our tutelage to systems and forms of government not indigenous to this soil. Puritanism may be one expression of this, but the real thematic problem underlying Canadian literature may be a fear of life itself, the symptoms of which are frustration, defeat and guilt.

In his struggle to find salvation in his own way Moe must resist family and community pressure to conform. In *Dark of Caves* Moe appears to make some headway against this, but he pays a heavy price in guilt. Probably in the next volume Moe will reveal more of the attributes of his namesake Moses, leader and law-giver, but if Ram does choose to develop the analogy further we should not be surprised if Moe never reaches his promised land. At any rate, if Ram can maintain his present quality of writing, the third volume will be well worth waiting for.

MICHAEL BENAZON

QUEBEC'S REVOLUTIONARY NOVELS

FOR ANY ENTHUSIAST in Canadian literature who had become familiar with the recent québécois novel, the "new page" in Quebec history opened by the November 1976 election could scarcely have come as a shock. The direct expression of political partisanship in certain pages of *L'Hiver de force* (1972), a work written by so prestigious an author as Réjean Ducharme, is a case in point.

Historically speaking, a literary expression of aspirations towards independence is a constant québécois phenomenon, for it appears that a revolutionary spirit has always existed in Quebec; it grew in the aftermath of the Conquest.[1] Any revolutionary mythology, however, needs some form of palpable support in order to grow. A truly revolutionary literature burst forth only in 1837. Little did the dozen or so patriots who died on the end of an English rope at that time realize that their cause would survive and express itself with shouts and tears of joy over a century later one November night in the wake of a bizarre election.

It is certainly not my purpose to retrace the whole of this ideological current here. Nonetheless, it is interesting to note that Jules-Paul Tardivel's novel *Pour la patrie*, written in the post-Confederation era, expresses a virtually paranoiac fear that the English (under the sway of the masons) were plotting the destruction of the Catholic French nation in North America.[2] Equally pertinent in this work is the fact that it is the wealthy and treacherous Montarval, attempting to sell out his blood-brothers, and not the English, whom Tardivel sees as the chief villain.

Perhaps the work of prose fiction expressing most perfectly the French Canadian mystique, the fundamental "complexe d'aliénation"[3] and spirit of revolt evident in so much of their literature is Mgr. Felix-Antoine Savard's epic *Menaud maître draveur* (1932): old Menaud, who has long struggled against those who have threatened his land, his culture and his identity, wanders alone in a despairing delirium. It is significant here also that animosity is not mainly directed against foreign incursions, but rather against Le Délié, the sly coward who, for wealth and power, betrays his own race.

The demise of colonialist powers through the events of the Second World War gave Quebec's nationalist and revolutionary spirit a new impetus. Signs of mounting tensions are apparent, for example, in a work which has become a virtual classic, Gabrielle Roy's *Bonheur d'occasion* (1947). With sombre indignation, the author portrays her people: the French Canadian migrants from the land turn in the hellish circle of the St. Henri slums, while the English bourgeoisie occupies mansions on the slopes of Westmount.

Eventually, with the 60's and the "révolution tranquille," Quebec began moving more forcibly out of its torpor. It was during these years that two principal tendencies of thought became more clearly discernible in its literature: the first, liberal, in the broadest sense, verging on the universal and aiming chiefly at pure authenticity and literary goals. Here we would place such authors as André Langevin, Gérard Bessette, Roger Lemelin and Anne Hébert. The other current, thoroughly nationalistic and treating literature often as a vehicle of social change, has become ultimately entrenched in the independence movement. Among its chief representatives may be found Hubert Aquin, Jacques Ferron, and Jacques Godbout. The two currents are, of course, not mutually exclusive. Indeed, we cannot ignore the fact that all Quebec literature is fundamentally inspired by a sense of cultural uniqueness. Both Lemelin and Bessette may be seen as compassionate advocates of social reform and certainly Godbout's great knowledge and scope go well beyond his quebecitude. Marie-Claire Blais would seem to be firmly attached to the first tendency, while her creation of adolescent monster-figures embroiled in negative and powerless revolt has doubtless a distinct bearing upon the second.

It is this second tendency, particularly in its more recent manifestations, which is my principal subject here. A brief glance at fiction written in the militant

vein just prior to the 1970's shows that, despite a pressing desire for initiative and a strong potential for violence, it was essentially a time of hesitation. Whether in reference to Godbout, Aquin, or Claude Jasmin, it is striking that these writers *inter alia*, although adept at describing the québécois predicament in the midst of North American civilization, are nonetheless perplexed when it comes to formulating justifiable paths of action or to determining precisely who is to blame.[4] Despite these instances of indecision, already in 1965 the Dean of French Canadian theatre, Gratien Gélinas, created a prophetic drama, *Hier les enfants dansaient*, which, through the presentation of a young revolutionary figure thoroughly equipped with a resolute and well-rounded separatist ideology, underlined the growing menace.

The October crisis in 1970 marked a turning-point: in Quebec FLQ terrorism may have been defeated; however, an intensification of hostilities on the social level was reflected on the literary plane by the upsurge of a more radical nationalist current. For example, André Langevin, who had gained fame in his earlier novels for his predominantly psychological and existential analyses of human interrelationships, adopted in *l'Elan d'Amérique* (1972) a new approach clearly symbolic of the Québécois' principal causes for rancour: linguistic and ethnic discrimination, exploitation, dispossession in their own homeland.

In addition, while socio-economic factors might explain in part a new mode that was developing in Quebec letters, other elements were also involved. There was, for example, the growing ability of television to exploit material that was formerly the domain of literature. The novel itself was in question, and this initiated a more acute search for new forms of expression. The best works of the rising generation of the 70's are permeated, moreover, with an intense effort at exorcising a religious and humanist ethic largely held responsible for the past paralysis of the québécois sensibility.[5] Thus, the treatment given human sexuality and all physical existence: texts are interwoven, often gratuitously, with scenes which are either distastefully crude or brutally lascivious and obscene.

Among the authors of this generation who are of "revolutionary" bent, probably the most talented of those to emerge has been Gilbert La Rocque. In his first novel, *Le nombril*, La Rocque portrays qualities of the québécois personality pushed to a pathological extreme; the severe tenets of a jansenist catholicism inculcated in his formative years have condemned the hero to a horror of all flesh, culminating in obsessive fantasies of death and putrefaction. We, the readers, sense age-old themes, and indeed, many of the author's topics are well worn, but it is the dynamics of his style, the sheer ferocity of his expression, that constitutes his value.

The horribly anguished Jérome, protagonist of *Le nombril*, continually thrown back upon his own inner prison, examines within his conscious experience the various forces that together provoke failure and sterility.[6] Inhuman years of schooling, his father's passing, the labours of a mother devoured by disease and resultant enslavement to routine drudgery in a mercantile system largely controlled by "outsiders," these are among the elements fomenting trauma in a sensitive morbid nature. Strong hints of xenophobia (one of the most unseemly aspects of nationalism) underlie his dreams of revolution. Symbolic revolt comes when he strikes his always proper Jewish employer, Jacob Drachs, and is fired. He wanders, near despair and madness, through the ugliness of Montreal-North. Possible escape and salvation arrive, however, in the form of Nathalie who, herself long-suffering, offers him love. Rather than grasping at

this chance to project beyond himself, the weight of his "nombrilisme" proves too much: at first, the girl provides release for his suppressed sensuality, but then, faced with love's demands, Jérome proves himself as impotent as in everything else. In the end, only through his own gratuitous choice between living and dying can he find a source of identification and freedom.

Here we have an intensified, even exaggerated rendition of the Québécois' human condition. As utterly cruel as this novel appears, its conclusion, as well as its touches of tenderness, preclude the "misérabilisme" of some of La Rocque's contemporaries. In his second work, *Corridors* (1971), which is also his best, this search for positive values is more pronounced. Its plot less encumbered, more rapid-moving than those of his other creations, *Corridors* has, moreover, the great virtue of examining effectively several cogent human problems: violence, revolution and self-discovery. At moments, in keeping with the author's penchant for savage imagery, his desire to stress man's fundamental bestiality, we feel, with Clément, that we are in a maniacal presence similar to Jérome's.[7] However, though Clément may be touched with the same basic complexes as his predecessor, he is the most appealing of québécois revolutionary heroes. There is his delicacy towards his family, his protective affection for his retarded brother, Rosaire, and above all the girl of his heart, Céline. Indeed, it is a remarkable balance between opposites — the two familiar aspects of life — the cruel and the beautiful, that produces a striking realism.

In the opening pages, Clément has discovered his love for Céline and they have a child. However, sensing his own lack of personal evolution, he flees this bond. Fearing aimlessness, he joins the Quebec revolutionary movement. Within a subgroup of the FLQ, theory soon turns into action as he finds himself punishing a certain Van Den, a rogue who has informed on a captive cell. True to the pattern, we have here once again the central image of a lowly traitor (though with such a name there is an unmistakably xenophobic nuance). It is then that Clément realizes that he is not a terrorist. Seeing Van Den tormented and beaten by his long-haired assailants, he reacts much as he had done years before when his brother, Rosaire, suffered humiliation. As if by a purely visceral impulse, Clément helps the traitor escape. Recaptured, it is with greater resolve that he saves the villain turned victim and, as a consequence, is gravely wounded.

Through this bloody experience, having returned to his working class home, the convalescent matures rapidly. He realizes, through an innate integrity, that only by liberating himself from his family and accepting his own individual responsibilities can he fulfill his true role. This role he had falsified as a member of a band of pseudo-revolutionaries who, dope-ridden and vicious, planned strategy in the smoke-filled Pan Club surrounded with dark "filles de joie." Neither the stagnant "révolution tranquille" nor the petty terrorism of men like Jean-Louis and the sadistic Morneau could ever help to bring about the authentic emancipation of Quebec's people. For Clément, there must be no flight from reality nor abdication from this ideal. Certainly, violence would be necessary if the "fédérastes" refused to release their grip, but it would be a violence expressed not as a vengeful egocentric gesture, but clearly in the name of an entire people. This is already prefigured in the novel with Clément's original remarks on violence:

> frappant plus fort et plus juste jusqu'au moment où le peuple dirait OUI, adhérerait en masse au principe de la vraie révolution, c'est-à-dire le progrès social, l'unification sociale, sans prostituer le sens du mot révolution, sans ravaler la révolution au seul ni-

veau des règlements de comptes et des boucheries, mais en se proclamant uni et libre, en s'arrachant lucidement des mâchoires séniles de la Confédération, en admettant enfin qu'il faut vivre debout.

In contrast with this idealism, the portrayal of jean-clad québécois youths, with their beer, hashish, electric music, and dark sanctuary, is a biting indictment of a prevalent mania. The negresses in the Pan Club bar provide the author free reign for his scatological fantasies. Their licentious postures stir Clément's virile impulses; however, when it comes to exchanging cash for sexual favours, he is filled with nausea: that it is all just another empty adventure. Thus, this young man has crossed through a further "corridor" of consciousness in a quest for self-affirmation. In the end, in full control of his own destiny, he can allow himself the commitments of love with Céline.

A less moderate view of French Canada's revolutionary struggle appears in Pierre Gravel's *A perte de temps* (1971), which suggests that only explosions will stir the people from traditional inertia. As regards Alice Parizeau's *Les militants* (1974), the plot is shrouded in a fairly commonplace apology for political sovereignty. However, the same year there appeared Yves Beauchemin's more imposing novel, *L'enfirouapé*, which is an ebullient, grotesque and often shocking parody of the October crisis.

The ingredients with which Beauchemin concocts his story are those of a poor detective novel set in relief by a good deal of ribald wit and immature buffoonery. In a series of fantastic scenarios, we first discover the intrepid young Maurice Ferland, who comes to Montreal to seek his future. Here he meets his girl friend's uncle, the wealthy Jerry Turcotte, who inveigles him into removing a desk and its contents from a private residence. Maurice soon finds himself on trial for theft and assault, for Turcotte is, in reality, what the English close homonym suggests, the archetype of the québécois "turncoat." A widower and owner of large firms, he is a deputy in the government as well as a sot and a lecher. As it turns out, Maurice actually pilfered documents that could have helped their *parti québécois* owner to contest Turcotte's election. Betrayal, again, is at the core of this novel, for the young scapegoat is packed off to jail where he broods in hatred for some time.

Once free, he forms a gang of social victims who set about kidnapping the despicable Jerry. Demanding a heavy ransom, they hole up in an apartment surrounded with guns and bombs. The War Measures Act is declared, whereupon the populace is stricken with fear. The police finally close in and the drama mounts in a crescendo of blood and violence. The frantic Jerry tries to escape by throwing himself through a window pane.[8]

The survivors of the siege are offered free passage to Cuba in exchange for their hostage. However, in a weird twist, Maurice crashes the plane at the airport in a vain effort at destroying the "Prince" of the powers that be. This mysterious potentate, after escaping the resultant explosion, turns to his surreptitious manoeuvres at keeping the populace in tow. Though not explicit, the political ramifications of the novel are in keeping with the mood of the times. With his tongue-in-cheek approach, Yves Beauchemin manifests complicity with the view that the FLQ had often justice on its side; in this, we can scarcely feel he was alone.

As a final example, we may now consider the most ambitious work of fiction yet undertaken in this revolutionary current, Paul Villeneuve's *Johnny Bungalow*. It is the sheer immensity of this author's project that is in part responsible for this novel being an artistic failure. Irregular in structure, redundant and laborious in style, it suffers from the principal fault of

these young writers of the 70's: verbosity. Despite these drawbacks, Villeneuve's obvious sincerity, the dynamic quality of his work, as well as its rich symbolism, render his product quite fascinating.

In 1963, charged with terrorist activities relating to the Quebec liberation movement, Jean Martin, alias Johnny Bungalow, a 26-year-old from the working class, decides to reply to his judges and to denounce social injustice in all its forms. In his efforts at self-justification, Johnny feels that he, another young "nombriliste" born to poverty and misery, must tell all "jusqu'à la moelle des choses." In a similar way, Villeneuve shows in the course of his work a total adhesion as a novelist to the deprived of this earth, and not to any intellectual élite. As witness to the lives of two generations of his fellows, Johnny intends, furthermore, to revive all their dreams, sufferings and misfortunes as well as his own and, at long last, restore meaning to these dreams. With Villeneuve, as is the pattern in Quebec literature, dream fantasy is a predominant facet of his writing.

In 1937, towards the end of the great depression, Johnny's father, Aimé, tired of the unlivable city, leaves with his wife, Marguerite, and others, to build a colony in the Abitibi region of central Quebec. This "goût de la grande route" is later seen by Marguerite's brother as having portended evil. There is an incredible struggle to build a homestead, clear the land. One day, in the midst of his labours, momentarily blinded by the sun, Aimé accidentally slips and is dragged to death by his horse. Marguerite is consequently left destitute with three small sons.

In the first instance, settlement of this remote region by these Québécois colonists can be seen as an effort to found a "Terre promise" far from the industrial centre which, with its inhuman distortions, could no longer conform to their dreams. This migration expresses, moreover, on the level of creative fiction, disillusionment with the real world and an attempt to formulate an imaginary geography, or, in other words, to build out of language a new land.[9] As far as Aimé's fatal accident is concerned, there are some remarkable parallels with the deaths of several outstanding characters of the Quebec novel, all symbolic of the fundamental sentiments of victimization, impotence and defeat.[10] A number of events — the founding of a home, man's closeness with the earth, the cycle of seasons, the curé's power — all recall quite closely Ringuet's classic "roman de la terre" *Trente arpents* (1938). The second section of Villeneuve's chronicle, entitled "Montreal I," with its descriptions of slums, alleyways and gang fights, clearly evokes the great social novels of Roger Lemelin and Gabrielle Roy. In the same way, the latter part of *Johnny Bungalow*, with its young males, alcohol and violence, brings us closer to the present. What I am saying is that, besides elucidating many historic details which parallel his narrative, Villeneuve attempts to summarize within it the principal phases in the Quebec novel's evolution. This might perhaps be better defined as an endeavour to reformulate a nation's mythology, to synthesize a spiritual geography which, dark and defeatist, seeks some form of rebirth. Described as a chronicle, *Johnny Bungalow* greatly surpasses, in actuality, the conventional realism of its style.[11] But once again, to understand this, we must return to the story itself.

After Aimé's death, a heartbroken Marguerite is forced to return to Montreal with her children and, with unemployment rampant, scrape together a living as a waitress. Young, pretty and defenseless, she is noticed by a scoundrel, Bernard; finally, in her loneliness and desperate need of love, she gives in to his advances. Her sentimental nature allows her to embrace new dreams, but they are

short-lived. A job and material comfort involve her also in complying with the desires of other men; should she refuse, her children are threatened. Marguerite, like a hunted animal, is thus won over to a life of prostitution. Escape comes when she is hired as housekeeper and stays on as mistress in the Westmount home of Perry, a wealthy Irish Canadian whose wife is an invalid. It is here that her Jean becomes Johnny, "the little genius" of this new father figure, and Marguerite finds some respite in her tragic life. Here, though it is expressed in English, there is happiness and love. The children grow in this home and think it theirs, but misfortune is their natural state; Perry, unstable and haughty, evicts them on a sudden impulse. This means a return to the tenaments of the lower town and a life of prostitution.

Only in the latter sections of the narrative does Johnny play a paramount role. Buffeted from job to job in labour gangs throughout the North, his only lessons are gained from a life without security or hope of any headway. Society, to him, resembles an immense concentration camp; his people are enclosed in concerns which are mean, material and mediocre.

In reality, it is the author's concept of man's predominant animality which explains, at times not too convincingly, much of the fabric of this work. Love is seen principally as erotic passion: thus Marguerite, the once pure girl, then a deeply enamoured wife, is finally transformed into a woman of easy virtue. The sex act, a virtual obsession, is treated with coarse effrontery; sordid details receive irrelevant attention; self-pitying characters drown themselves in drink. Despite the writer's political intent, there is a basic pessimism in all this, for, outside of Aimé, none of these "damnés de la terre" portrayed in *Johnny Bungalow* has any moral fibre. Johnny's companions, an obdurate lot, find their only purpose in beer, sex, and automobiles.

It is Johnny's brother, André, an intelligent dreamer, broken by life, who defines the situation with the words: "Il y a deux sociétés icite et c'est ça qu'il faut casser." In hopes for regeneration, a family house is eventually built. However, the memories of sumptuous meals at Perry's table, doubled by other images of filth and greyness, frequently stir the restless Johnny. The first FLQ bombs have begun and it is time for action.

The symbolism of the terrorist episode towards the narrative's end deserves close attention. In this melodramatic scene, Johnny bursts in on his former patron and holds him at gunpoint. He burns old photos, the only traces of his and Perry's companionship: "c'est fini cette comédie de l'amour et des grandes amitiés entre le p'tit garçon canadien-français et son papa anglais."

All Johnny's blame is heaped upon Perry's head: for having tried to assimilate him into the English world, for offering him, in good faith, wealth and a future. The family sword, symbol of British power and prestige, was also to have passed to the boy when he had come of age. This old saber had fascinated Johnny, but was never to be his. Since a true marriage wtih Marguerite would only have brought shame, so the Canadian had betrayed his Québécois sons and flung out their mother when he had done with her.

Quebec's history is clearly represented in these symbolic events. The image of an orphan is indeed not new to this literature. Johnny had twice lost a paternal figure: the first, his real French father, fallen in his prime, the second, an English father who destroys this bond through treason. In *Johnny Bungalow*, English Canada, then, is held directly responsible for the betrayal of Confederation and for the ills of its French speaking compatriots. Even though Villeneuve's frenzied ter-

rorist is incapable of murder, his enemy is unequivocally identified, and we learn that "à l'avenir, y aura aucun coup de feu inutile."

Johnny's resentment appears to stem principally from the fact that he could never truly aspire to the family sword of honour. If a marriage had taken place in this Westmount home, are we to understand then that for Johnny (and for Villeneuve) all would have been well? Could the Québécois's historic resentment not also be attributed, at least in part, to their own age-old "nombrilisme"? These questions and others assail the reader. It is strange, for instance, that Perry is the only "traitor" chosen for vengeance, while we should remember that it was the schemer, Bernard, a Québécois, who was first guilty of betraying Marguerite's true sentiments, thus provoking the whole subsequent disaster in their lives. In any case, isn't Bernard meant as a further product of the "English" mercenary system? There is also a hint that this man may have been of Italian origin.

Perry's discomposure before his aggressor reminds us immediately of Jerry Turcotte's sufferings in *L'enfirouapé*. While we are supposed to find the young gunman heroic, Johnny might just as easily be seen as a ridiculous tough.

These outstanding examples of French Canadian revolutionary literature present thematic strains quite removed from everyday reality. The holy cause of nationalism has long been an obsession distorting québécois prose with themes of powerlessness, defeat and death.[12] For Villeneuve, as for the others, normality can, of course, only come through independence. Notwithstanding this, signs portend that, whether the nationalists win their dream or not, given the "new page" recently turned in its history, Quebec will henceforth reflect a happier, more serene image in its letters.

NOTES

1 Joseph Costisella, *L'Esprit révolutionnaire dans la littérature canadienne française* (Montréal: Beauchemin, 1968).

2 Jules-Paul Tardivel, *For My Country 'Pour la Patrie'*, Intro. by A. I. Silver, transl. by Sheila Fischman (Toronto & Buffalo: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1975). Originally published in 1895 by Cadieux & Derome of Montreal.

3 Yvon Daigneault, "*Menaud maître draveur* devant la critique 1937-1967," *Livres et auteurs québécois 1969* (Montréal: Editions Jumonville, 1969), pp. 248-62. Daigneault states that *Menaud* is one of the great myths of the human soul, and mentions that Gilles Marcotte considered it "L'illustration du complexe d'aliénation des Canadiens français" (p. 257).

4 I am thinking, in particular, of Jacques Godbout's *Le couteau sur la table* (1965), Hubert Aquin's *Prochain épisode* (1965) and Claude Jasmin's *Ethel et le terroriste* (1964). Godbout's narrator cannot decide whether to kill or not to kill his English-speaking mistress, Patricia; Aquin's revolutionary vacillates between admiration and hatred for the multi-faceted de Heutz, and Jasmin's terrorist is fraught with the dilemma of his love for the Jewish girl, Ethel. At the same time, betrayal recurs as an important theme in each of these works; in another instance, in Godbout's *Salut Galarneau* (1967), a violation of sexual loyalty involving two brothers is central to the plot.

5 Victor-Lévy Beaulieu, "Etre écrivain québécois," *Le Devoir*, samedi 21 octobre, 1972, p. 18. In this article, while marking the emergence on the literary scene of Jacques Renault, Réjean Ducharme, and himself, Beaulieu announces with the arrival of these young "Turks" a new phase in the Quebec novel. He defends, moreover, the abject image of man and the obscenity evident in their writings as producing a more authentic reflection of reality than the bourgeois formulae of the past.

6 Gilbert La Rocque, *Le nombril* (Montréal: Les éditions du jour, 1970), p. 9. The title means "navel." In so far as xenophobia is concerned, Mlle. Squash, Drach's stoutish secretary, is the most grotesque portrayal of an Anglo-Saxon yet made in French Canadian literature.

7 Gilbert La Rocque, *Corridors* (Montréal: Les éditions du jour, 1971). In a certain

passage, Clément refers to a man who, because he was too prolific, carved out his own testicles with bloody precision.

[8] Yves Beauchemin, *L'enfirouapé* (Ottawa: Les Editions La Presse, 1974), p. 233. (The novel's title is a slang term for "the dupe.")

[9] In the "Annexe" to his novel, Paul Villeneuve considers a return to the earth and the colonization of the Quebec hinterland as a necessary national enterprise. This search for a new land is even more apparent in the author's first novel, *J'ai mon voyage* (1969), where he takes us on an extensive ramble through his inner as well as his exterior world. A flight from an unbearable reality is likewise one of Réjean Ducharme's main themes.

[10] I am thinking of the fate of François Paradis in *Maria Chapdelaine* and of Menaud's son, Joson, in *Menaud maître draveur.*

[11] Since one of his chief objectives is social reform, Villeneuve conforms to the precepts of zolaesque naturalism. Nor would Zola have taken exception to this novel's mythological essence.

[12] Victor-Lévy Beaulieu, "Une question de niveaux," *Le Devoir*, samedi 11 décembre, 1976. "Des générations d'hommes, et non parmi les moindres, ont été conscrites par l'idéal politique, au point de s'y castrer véritablement," p. 17.

LEONARD W. SUGDEN

GROVE'S "THE CANYON"

IN 1926, SHORTLY AFTER the publication of *Settlers of the Marsh*, Lorne Pierce of Ryerson Press turned down a novel by Frederick Philip Grove entitled "The Canyon." The novel describes the ill-fated marriage of a young Canadian poet and a beautiful heiress. The story ends with the woman's suicide, undertaken in the belief that her death is necessary for her husband's art. Readers of "The Canyon" who do not understand Grove's philosophical assumptions have deemed the novel prolix, turgid and bizarre. Arthur Phelps summed up the reaction of Grove's friends when he reported to Grove: "I am prone to say it's too analytical, lacking in action and human variety to make a 'seller'." Margaret Stobie, quoting Phelps, further describes "The Canyon" as "narrow, tight-lipped, forced," held together by an "attenuated nervous logic."[1]

The novel depicts a young couple's discovery that their marriage is doomed according to Plato's laws of metaphysics. "The Canyon" can be fully appreciated only in the perspective of Plato's thought. It is a measure of Grove's highminded innocence that he submitted such a novel for mass publication without giving a hint of its philosophical basis. Rather, he seems to have misled his readers unintentionally. In an Author's Note, he says: "In the matter of thought content of this book my indebtedness is, of course, to all who have gone before; specifically to acknowledge all claims would be impossible. But, when this work was being sketched in its first form, a friend sent me James Branch Cabell's 'Beyond Life'; and in it I found some of my own conclusions so perfectly expressed that I could not resist the temptation to borrow two or three phrases literally. I herewith make my bow to Mr. Cabell."[2]

Popular in the 1920's, James Branch Cabell was an American writer of romantic novels. Margaret Stobie cites Grove's words to support her view that he "borrowed a good deal more than two or three phrases" and "The Canyon" is "an attempt in James Branch Cabell's manner," an "experiment" intended to gain Cabell's success.[3] In fact, Grove's novel resembles Cabell's work only in choice of subject. Both novelists are concerned with the tendency of some young men to confuse a woman with a spiritual ideal. Each one treats the subject in a different way. "The Canyon" is a dogmatic philosophical tragedy, while Cabell's works, usually set in a mythical part of medieval Europe, are playful ironic romances. As Grove

suggests in the Author's Note, the thought expressed in "The Canyon" stands in a long tradition of work involving an idealization of female form. Grove's ideas gain definition from Plato. "The Canyon" describes, in Grove's most explicit terms, the tragic interpretation of Plato's dualism which informs most of Grove's work. In particular, "The Canyon" illuminates Grove's two other "Platonic" tragedies, *Settlers of the Marsh* (1925) and *The Yoke of Life* (1930). Rather than being an aberration, as Stobie suggests, *The Canyon* provides a key to a clearer understanding of the mainstream of Grove's thought.

Philip Grove studied Plato as a student of Classical Philology at Friedrich-Wilhelms University in Bonn between 1898 and 1900. In letters and poems, Grove reveals that he has a broad knowledge of Plato's work and regards the philosopher as the world's most profound thinker.[4] There are three volumes of Plato in Grove's library in Simcoe, Ontario. The most important — *Five Dialogues of Plato Bearing on Poetic Inspiration* — contains marginalia in Grove's hand and is underscored.[5] Briefly, Plato teaches that the material world in which we live is an ephemeral and flawed expression of true reality which is spiritual in character. In reality, truth, beauty, goodness and man's other spiritual ideals (or "Ideas") actually exist fully realized and eternal. The desire to achieve union with the realm of Idea is the divine principle which underlies all of man's higher endeavours. The task is attempted by transcending the physical world, and/or by recreating the ideal vision on the material plane. While Plato suggests that a large measure of transcendence is possible, Grove does not pursue a life of divine contemplation. Instead he concentrates on man's endeavours to recreate the ideal in the material world. As an artist he sees his work as an attempt to recreate an ideal conception of beauty or truth. His tragic vision is based on the fact that while the human spirit craves perfection, the ideal never can be fully realized, as Plato explains, matter is ultimately intractable. To the dualism of spirit and matter Grove attributes human suffering, ignorance and of course mortality. Nevertheless he believes life gains meaning and dignity ("true tragic greatness") by dauntless striving for perfection which despite inevitable failure manifests the divine spirit in man.[6]

According to Plato, love is another expression of the spirit's longing for union with the immortal realm of Idea. The things people ordinarily love are but reminders and reflections of their real desire. The desire for eternal perfection is expressed by creative acts. Most people achieve a kind of immortality by having children, but gifted spirits identify with the ideal through noble deeds and great works of art. In comparison, sex for its own sake is regarded as wasteful and deceptive. It focuses attention on the ephemeral reminder and obscures the Idea of beauty which is the true object of love. By its alternation of desire and satisfaction, sex identifies the lover with the transitory natural world and the cycle of growth and decay. In contrast, the Platonic lover's desire for the immutable Ideal never wanes because necessarily, and in Grove's view tragically, the desire is never fulfilled. The lover of the Idea thus identifies himself with the eternal spiritual realm and achieves a kind of immortality in his work.

The teleological character of Grove's tragic vision is well illustrated by "The Canyon" which depicts the unpleasant consequences were man able to attain perfection. Intoxicated by sexual desire, a poet convinces himself that his wife is the perfect incarnation of the Idea of beauty rather than a flawed reflection. He soon finds he can no longer create because he

has lost his vision of perfection. His wife, too, is dissatisfied with a purely mundane love and commits suicide in order to restore the original vision. She becomes a symbol of perfection in her husband's mind which once again inspires him to create immortal works. Thus Grove asserts that an ideal reached is an ideal lost, and man's "tragic" condition is part of a felicitous ultimate design.

Harold Tracy, the protagonist of "The Canyon," seeks immortality by pursuing in poetry a "dream" of perfection (the Idea). He falls in love with Frances Montcrieff, an attractive young heiress whom he mistakes for a "fulfillment of his dream in the flesh."[7] Frances is "his poem become flesh and blood; she is beauty incarnate." "Is beauty so much?" Frances asks Harold. The poet replies: "God is beauty; and truth is beauty. The highest, the finest there is in the highest and the finest mind or soul is but a reflection of an immortal thought; and that immortal thought took form in you."

Frances protests that she is not the Idea incarnate but only a reflection of it, and that his vision of her (and hence the Idea) will remain intact only if they part. Love will "forever illumine our earthly days unless we allow it to be drowned in the intimacy of the dust." Harold also knows that "the finest and highest in them could indeed come into play only if they parted; and not to see it in play seemed already tragedy. Frances had been right; from a love like theirs nothing could come but disaster unless it remained unfulfilled; fulfillment meant degeneration."

Despite their spiritual need for an unattainable ideal, both Frances and Harold are also aware of a purely human need for carnal fulfillment. We are told that Harold

> longed to touch the lovely cheek, the lips, the hair of this woman; and it seemed as if the mere touch would carry its own reward of peace and happiness that would pay for the loss of the soul even though it might be eternal.
>
> His suffering sprang from this dualism of flesh and soul. In his heart of hearts he knew he was on the point of sacrificing this woman, and with her his own finest conception that called it into being — he would sacrifice her on the altar of what is not eternal but fleeting.

Harold marries Frances because as the narrator says, "nature is cunning and will have its way, so that the ecstasy of the lovers may be bodied forth again in the wail of an infant. . . ."[8] Almost immediately, however, Harold and Frances are unable to reconcile their action with the demands of the spirit. Harold longs for immortality through his poetry but while his vision of the Idea is obscured by the physical presence of Frances, he cannot write a single word. He is "no longer the free man he had been." Frances also longs for immortality through Harold's poetry. "She didn't care if his vision of her was a true image; something of her was in it, that something she wanted to see perfected into a form which would stand forever."

In time Frances learns to regret that they married. She rues the fact that

> what had thwarted their insight was sex, not only in the sense of the body but in the higher sense of the need of the soul for completion, of the mind for confirmation of its own secret tenets. She saw now that, even in their first ecstatic raptures at having found each other, sex had played its part: sex in that highest, alluring, iridescent transfiguration and disguise, in which it could deceive the most finely organized natures into a union of the flesh. It was a cunning trick of nature to sublimate the vulgar passions into that ethereal ecstasy where not the remotest reflection of a thought was on the body — where at the most the body was a symbol of the soul . . .

Once they had taken the great step "from the plane of the spirit to the plane of the flesh, the rest must follow. The rest? What was it? She looked into an abyss. Desire and satisfaction in everlasting

alternation: a succession of contrary errors between which their victims must oscillate till satiety came; and with satiety must come estrangement, at the best, mutual toleration: that peaceful goal at which most marriages end."

Harold and Frances attempt to resolve their dilemma by agreeing that Harold should separate her from his dream by ignoring her. "The man must die if the poet may live," he tells her, "and in his death, the woman in you must share; then perhaps the goddess will arise from the ashes"; and he goes on to declare: "I shall be submerged. For only by killing my personal life can I give life eternal to my dream." Although Frances counts herself "blessed above all earthly women," the "earthly" part of her becomes jealous of the attention Harold pays to his dream. When he notices her suffering, he decides to forego his poetry and devote himself totally to Frances. "Never now would he find that solitude in which alone the dream could rule him to the exclusion of a reality which did not measure up to it. Never now would it become so strong and compelling within him that he must put it out of himself, into a form which would endure forever."

Despite Harold's decision, however, they remain mindful of their dilemma. While walking in the park, Harold notices some swans in a pond and asks:

> "Why is that reflection of the birds less real than the birds themselves? Is it as perfect?"
>
> "Because," Frances said and stopped; again she was poignantly aware of the symbolism of what she was going to say. Then she said it in spite of that. "The slightest breath of wind breaks and destroys it."
>
> "But it is the bird I love, not its image."
>
> She smiled. "You do not and cannot see the bird itself; you can only see the cage in which it is caught."

Gently, Frances is reminding her husband that the spiritual world is invisible and eternal while the material world, of which they are a part, is ephemeral and destructible. In devoting himself to her, he has not chosen the eternal Idea, but rather the flawed material reflection.

Yet Harold and Frances cannot reconcile themselves to living only in the temporal sphere. Though they decide to part, "only in the moment of their first meeting was parting possible." This decision they are unable to carry out becoming aware once again that "they had fallen." Frances reflects on the future: "What was to be the future? If they lived, she would never have the strength to stay away from him. She might go, yes! But she would return. And then? The vicious circle! Abnegation, desire, surrender, satiety . . . Anything rather than that!"

Suicide, Frances decides, is the only solution. The couple go camping at Banff, the locale of the first avowals of love. Frances steals away and reaches the ledge of a waterfall. From the edge she tells Harold that she does not reproach him. Natural imperatives had subverted their spiritual desires. "We had surrendered to life and life played with us as it always does to obtain its ends. Between spirit and flesh there is war everlasting. And so is there between man and woman, male and female." Harold's initial vision of her should have been a reminder of the Idea, she declares, not a substitute.

> "No poet has ever created out of the void; for you our meeting had been the great fertilization of your soul. But no great poet ever married the woman he loved and did not rue it. For human reality is not perfection. I had been a fleeting vision to your imagination on fire. And there I was in the flesh, contradicting the vision, interfering with it, slowly destroying it. That vision I had to rebuild. That is why I asked you to go back with me to the mountains."

In order to create, Frances says Harold would have to exclude her from his dream. As a woman, she would be jealous and would do everything in her power to destroy his dream. Rather than that, she

prefers suicide. "Those who have the insight and live with their soul," she says, must live in the future rather than the present. "All this you and I foresaw from the beginning. The peculiar thing is that our frail humanity forced even us to test its truth by the test of reality. But we see clearly now not to . . . bid the sun stand still. . . ." Harold begs her to wait but Frances prepares to leap. "I shall always be with you, dear, in the spirit," she says. "In the flesh we shall never meet again." She throws herself into the canyon, symbolic of the abyss between spirit and matter.

After Frances' death, Harold conforms to the Platonic requisite that he love the Idea and not its material reflection. He marries a "commonplace" woman and remains childless. Before his death, he publishes two world-famous volumes of poetry. Harold's poetry, tragically, can never duplicate the Idea of beauty, but it is immortal testament to the hunger of the human spirit for perfection and a higher state of being. "The Canyon" demonstrates that while man is tragically doomed to fail, the endless struggle for the ideal is the design of life. Harold cannot create as long as he thinks he has achieved his goal. Only when Frances commits suicide is he capable of striving once more.

As Grove suggests himself, there are parallels between some of these ideas and those expressed by James Branch Cabell in *Beyond Life*. In an essay entitled "The Witch-Woman," Cabell explains a concept of love which has Platonic overtones called "woman worship" or "domnei." The essence of "domnei" is "that the woman one loves is providentially set between her lover's apprehension and God, as the mobile and vital image and corporeal reminder of Heaven, as a quick symbol of beauty and holiness, or purity and perfection. In her the lover views all qualities of God which can be comprehended by merely human faculties . . . And instances are not lacking in the service of domnei where worship of the symbol developed into a religion sufficing in itself, and became competitor with worship of what the symbol primarily represented. . . ."[9]

In Cabell's view, many young men are in love with such a vision of perfection, which he calls the "witch-woman." They are, he writes, invariably disappointed when, after the initial rapture of love, their wives fall far short of the ideal vision. While these men are reconciled to their predicament, they do not forsake the witch-woman; they are the "witch finders" and express their faith in the vision of ideal beauty by creating works of art. "For here and there art's masterworks become precursors of the witch-woman's advent, and whisper of a loveliness, as yet withheld, which 'never waxes old,' of a loveliness which stays as yet the nebulous goal of art's surmise. . . ."

Cabell deals with the theme of "domnei" in two novels published before "The Canyon" was completed in 1925. In contrast to "The Canyon," these novels are primarily concerned with the protagonist's quest for the witch-woman rather than with the consequences of finally marrying her. At the conclusion, the heroes finally attain their object, but the result is quite different from Grove's novel. Cabell's protagonists are disappointed that the incarnation fails to match the ideal, but, unlike Harold Tracy and Frances Montcrieff, they become reconciled to this fact. In *The Cream of the Jest* (1917), Cabell's persona, Felix Kennaston, discovers that the witch-woman whom he has pursued in his dreams is really the image he had of his wife during the initial euphoria of love. Referring to the lover's dsappointment when passion dissipates, he remarks: "to marry for love is to invite inevitable tragedy." He concedes, however, "who are we to mate with goddesses?" and

affirms the virtues of domesticity: "the ties of our ordinary life here in the flesh have their own mystic strength and sanctity."

In *Domnei* (1920), Cabell depicts the heroic efforts of the Frankish brigand Perion to rescue his beloved Melicent from the harem of a Moorish warlord, Demetrios. When, after many years, the quest is rewarded, Perion "knows disappointment for the first time." Melicent, an ageing yet still compelling woman, is not the girl for whom he fought; nor, he realizes, was he the same man whom the girl had chosen. "Then Perion perceived that love may be a power so august as to bedwarf consideration of the man and woman whom it sways." Renouncing his expectation that Melicent should be forever youthful, he becomes aware of a "new and finer love."

In a short story entitled "The Wedding Jest" (1919), Cabell depicts Melicent and Perion many years later. Melicent says that the love that bound her to Perion while she was in Demetrios' thrall has been replaced, in marriage to her champion, by domestic bickering. There is no rancour, however: "So Perion and I grew old together, friendly enough; and our senses and desires began to serve us more drowsily, so that we did not greatly mind the falling away of youth . . . and we were content enough. But of the high passion that wedded us there was no trace, and of little senseless human bickerings there were a great many."[10] Cabell slowly moves towards Grove's conclusions with regard to the consequences of marrying the "ideal woman." In a 30-page prose poem entitled *The Music From Behind the Moon* (1926), a poet finally beds his muse and finds that he no longer has inspiration for poetry. Only after she dies a natural death does he once again hear the "music from behind the moon."

While Grove and Cabell deal with the same general subject, the view that Grove is merely imitating his American contemporary is unwarranted. The treatment of the topic by the two authors differs radically. In "The Canyon," Grove adheres dogmatically to Platonic tenets. He stresses, more than Cabell, the duality of spirit and matter, of Idea and reflection. Unlike Cabel, he portrays sex as a primitive expression of love, and he emphasizes the constant conflict between carnal and spiritual desire. More than Cabell, Grove makes clear that creative work modelled on eternal ideals best expresses man's love for perfection and immortality. In contrast to Cabell's ironic acceptance of mundane existence, Grove's protagonists assume a "tragic" grandeur by sacrificing everything to their spiritual aspirations. Apart from philosophy, the two authors differ markedly in aim and style. Grove, always the didact, presents a mirthless exercise in metaphysics; while Cabell, more interested in fantasy than reality, is happier to entertain than to instruct.

Finally, we must recognize that the theme of tragic dualism is not limited to "The Canyon" but is present in almost all of Grove's work. The conflict of spiritual and carnal desire is at the centre of Grove's metaphysical vision. "The Canyon" expresses this vision in Grove's most explicit terms and therefore illuminates more subtle and skilful novels like *Settlers of the Marsh* and *The Yoke of Life*. In the former work, Niels Lindstedt's spiritual aspirations are undermined by carnal desire which finds its object in Clara Vogel. By murdering Clara, Niels liberates himself to pursue the Idea of perfection symbolized by Ellen Amundsen. In *The Yoke of Life*, Len Sterner and Lydia Hausman commit suicide because, like Harold Tracy, Len cannot reconcile lust for Lydia with his need for her as a symbol of the ideal. He seeks in death the higher state of being which his spirit cannot attain while housed in the flesh.

Both these novels are elucidated by a study of "The Canyon," where Grove depicts most clearly man's tragic paradox. Harold and Frances consist of both matter and spirit; they are both human and divine. As human beings, they need the fulfillment that this world offers; as spiritual beings, they crave eternal life through the pursuit of unattainable ideals. As poet and goddess they cannot live together, but as man and woman they cannot live apart. Frances Montcrieff sacrifices carnal existence in favour of spiritual aspirations. Through her action, Grove asserts that man's primary motivation is a desire for perfection. As Harold's poetic rebirth indicates, Grove believes man's tragic fate is to struggle everlastingly for the ideal.

NOTES

[1] *Frederick Philip Grove* (New York: Twayne, 1973), p. 96.

[2] F. P. Grove, "The Canyon," Unpublished Typescript, Grove Collection, Elizabeth Dafoe Library, University of Manitoba.

[3] Stobie, p. 95.

[4] See Desmond Pacey, ed. *The Letters of Frederick Philip Grove* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1976), pp. 57, 308; and an unpublished poem, "Questions Reasked" (Grove Collection), which begins:

> What are we? Whence? and whither are we bound?
> O questions answerless which still we pose
> As Plato posed them who could more deeply sound
> Such problems than whoever went or goes.

[5] Plato, *Five Dialogues Bearing on Poetic Inspiration* (Ion, Symposium, The Meno, Phaedo, Phaedrus) (1910; rpt. London: J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd. "Everyman's Library," 1924). I wish to acknowledge the kind co-operation of Mr. A. L. Grove who allowed me to inspect his father's library.

[6] F. P. Grove, *It Needs to be Said* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1929), pp. 150-53. Cf. F. P. Grove, *In Search of Myself* (1946; rpt. Toronto, NCL, 1974), pp. 230-31.

[7] When Grove submitted "The Canyon" to Ryerson Press in 1926, his suggested alternative titles were "Frances Montcrieff,"

"The Unending Quest," and "The Poet's Dream," (Grove to Pierce, April 8, 1926). Grove's use of the word "dream" in the suggested title is ironic. In the novel, "dream" refers to the Idea of beauty after which Harold strives in poetry. In the suggested title, Grove also uses the word in its strict Platonic sense. In the *Republic*, Plato says: "Consider: is not to dream just this, whether a man be asleep or awake, to mistake the image for the reality?" In mistaking Frances (the image of beauty) for the reality (the Idea of Beauty), Harold was dreaming.

[8] This is one of the phrases that Grove borrowed. Cabell writes that humanity is hoodwinked by the dynamic illusion known as love, "in order that humanity may endure, and the groans of a lover be perpetuated in the wails of an infant. . . ." James Branch Cabell, *Beyond Life* (New York: R. M. McBride, 1920), p. 76.

[9] Ibid., p. 77.

[10] Edward J. O'Brien, ed., *The Best Short Stories of 1919* (Boston: Small, Maynard, 1920), p. 120.

HENRY MAKOW

ON THE VERGE

*** PETER STURSBERG. *Lester Pearson and the Dream of Unity*. Doubleday, $17.95. *Lester Pearson and the Dream of Unity* is a rather superior example of what not long ago we called a "non-book." Peter Stursberg has followed the method Barry Broadfoot gave its Canadian celebrity by consulting a great company of witnesses to the past, and trimming and sewing their statements into a book. This, he tells us, is the first part of a two-volume work; the second volume will deal with Pearson in terms of his relationship with the United States and the United Nations. In other words, a somewhat artificial division is made between the Canadian Pearson (whose internal policies are still haunting us with their ineptitude) and the international Pearson whom on the whole we regret because of the parochialism of his successors. What, I think, makes for the appearance of vigour in *Lester Pearson and the Dream of Unity* is the broken and varied and often rough texture produced by the technique of tape-recorder mosaic, which is particularly stimulating to a reader who has been subjected to the characterless blandness of Pearson's own memoirs. Most politicians, of course, live mainly through the eyes and ears of those around them, and it is significant that Stursberg's earlier garlands of tape recordings about Diefenbaker were also more interesting than what Diefenbaker had to say about himself.

** LEOPOLD INFELD. *Why I Left Canada*, translated by Helen Infeld. McGill-Queen's University Press, $16.95. Leopold Infeld was a Polish physicist who left his country between the World Wars, collaborated with Einstein at Princeton and in 1938 joined the University of Toronto. At the war's end Infeld welcomed the establishment of socialism in his country (though he was far from being a Stalinist Communist), and in 1950 went there for a summer of teaching, to be deprived of his Canadian passport. Infeld never returned. Much of *Why I Left Canada* is a description of the incidents that led to his exclusion. The rest of the book, translated from the Polish original, consists of reminiscent essays about people — Einstein and Niels Bohr, Max Planck and (this piece written with unexpected venom) Oppenheimer. Infeld lived through interesting times, knew interesting people, yet he communicates little of the excitement of such experiences, and one suspects that his evident self-absorption made it difficult for him to tap the real essence of other men's personalities. *Why I left Canada* is mainly interesting for its documentation of a piece of witch hunting that shows clearly the influence of McCarthyism on Canadian policies.

** JOHN A. B. MCLEISH. *A Canadian for All Seasons: The John E. Robbins Story*. Lester & Orpen, $14.95. The title is not the only uninspired aspect of this biography of John E. Robbins, a notable figure in the great transformation of the Canadian cultural and educational world. But there is more to biography than facts. There is the establishment of a man's personality, and personalities are defined by shadows as much as by highlights. There is no doubt that, as McLeish so enthusiastically demonstrates, Robbins was one of Canada's eagerest beavers. But was he so entirely flawless? Did he always do the RIGHT THING? Was everything he did equally interesting, equally estimable? Did he walk without a shadow? McLeish evidently believes all of this, but his readers will not. Robbins had his defects and it is no service to his reputation to pass them blandly over. Nor is it honest biography.

G.W.

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