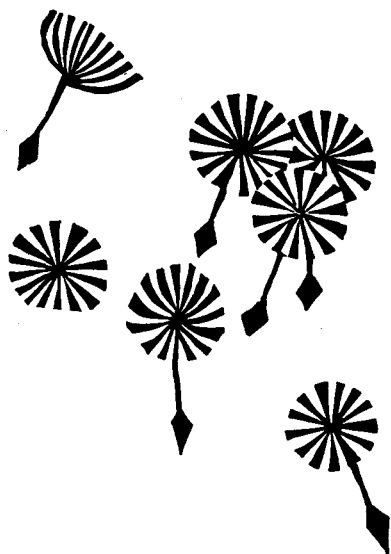


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*Spring, 1989*



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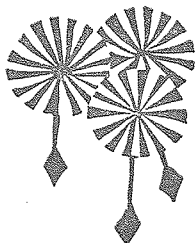
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## SIGNS OF SPRING

CANADA'S CONTACTS with Slavic and East European cultures range from the military to the folkloristic, the sociological to the geographical. So which of the following is the "typical" link: the long, cold border with the Soviet Union? the prototypical "peasants" of prairie settlement policy? an Orthodox spire with onion-shaped dome? the intricate egg designs of an Edmonton Easter? a Doukhobour settlement? a memory of a pogrom? the relief of Archangel? pyrogies? the challenges of Sputnik, 1956, and 1968? the names of centre forwards and cabinet ministers? Too many items in this list are simply clichés, the easy signs of identity and demarcation. But what lies beyond them? Generalizations are misleading. This issue of *Canadian Literature* attempts not to locate a monolithic commonality but to hint at the variety of contacts — and to consider these several contacts as history has translated them into literature *and* as literature has translated them into signs of cultural persistence.

As long ago as Stephen Parmenius's travels, Hungarian eyes turned to North America. The process of contact went on. One way of counting *contemporary* East European literary connections seems like an alphabetic progress towards arithmetic infinity: Balan, Busza, Czaykowski, Faludy, Fiamengo, Gzowski, Ignatieff, Iwaniuk, Kostash, Krizanc, Kulyk Keefer, Kurelek, Layton (Rumanian-born Lazarevitch), Mayne, Newman, Parizeau, Rajic, Ravel, Ryga, Skvorecky, Slavutych, Suknaski, Szumigalski, Vizinczey, Waddington, Zonailo, Zend. The hidden and the oblique connections add dimension to this catalogue of names: the Cossacks who ride through the pages of Rudy Wiebe's *The Blue Mountains of China*, the Hungarian art teacher in Atwood's *Cat's Eye*, the fictional Ukrainian grandmother who "tells" W. P. Kinsella the stories of *Red Wolf Red Wolf*, the travel texts of Daryl Hine's *Polish Subtitles*, the Bulgarian translations of John Robert Colombo, the Russian iconographies of Al Purdy and R. A. D. Ford. (The reverse direction traces other paths still: the "influence" of Tolstoy and Sholokov, of Turgenev and Pasternak, expansive writers on the world's expanding stage. Or the glimpse of lightness lined by Kundera. Or the confinement of Kafka's corners. Borders open, and borders close.) For inevitably language limits some forms of contact — it walls people away as well as preserves them from outside influence.

So do expectations and preconceptions. In recent years, contacts are blocked by Iron Curtain images. Real enough (*comrade, commissar, camp*), these, too, are tropes of expectation, though perhaps they are changing. As the curtain lifts, it discloses the open spaces of the Baltic, Black, and Adriatic Seas. In glimpses. As metaphors. *Glaznost* has become an English word. But it still asks for translation. And what, after all, does “openness” mean? Getting beyond the sign to the meaning has always been at issue.

It is Clifford Sifton to whom Canadian historians have granted an ambivalent pride of place in establishing one form of connection between Canada and Eastern Europe, and a long dominant image of place and person. For it was Sifton who introduced what he considered “peasant stock” into the prairies at the turn of the century, presuming (did he consciously ask the question, I wonder?) that they would be absorbed into the Anglo-Celtic mainstream. From this perspective, “Culture” (is it always so?) seems to have been the intellectual property of the previous majority, already in place; but such attitudinal “definitions” of culture (and of “peasant”) are the sort that spawn exclusionist ethnic jokes, the slur-words of schoolground malice and “adult” aside. What Sifton didn’t apparently imagine was that a new people would bring culture with them, and value culture sufficiently to keep it, in its new contexts, alive; that there would be writers and storytellers among the new immigrants, creatively working with a variety of “unofficial” languages; and that these additional cultural connections would, over the course of time, modify the “mainstream” and encourage it along braided channels.

Does Canadian culture recognize this process yet? (It’s happening, continuing to happen.) Or is it still so in love with elegant Easter eggs that it continues to refuse its *otherself*, to demarcate resistant lines of difference (ironically) by shaping signs of spring?

W.N.

*Canadian Literature* is pleased to acknowledge the financial assistance provided by the Koerner Foundation and the office of the Ministry of State (Multiculturalism and Citizenship) in the production of this issue.

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## IDEOLOGY

*Rhea Tregobov*

On stretched plastic handles, the grocery bags  
have their own momentum; like political belief  
or religious conviction, carrying you a bit further  
than your body meant to go.

Their sadness  
the sad weight of necessity, the body's hunger  
for bacon and eggs, for coffee.

    Their sadness  
the sad weight of necessity, the body's hunger  
for control, for relinquishing control.  
The sad weight of cops, of strippers  
in their uniform obedience, their bodies  
given over.

The weight of the necessity of ideology.

So we do what we can't: the impossible thing  
above his head where he can't see but must believe it,  
the weightlifter dazed by his own strength.

## FOR ALICJA MARTYRED BY THE IMMIGRATION OFFICE

*Florian Smieja*

Some freckled grey-haired official  
prim and proper and of the right pedigree  
observed you closely with his masonic eye.  
You came from the wrong stock  
a nation that neither slaughtered  
in Ulster, nor traded slaves. Not even collaborated.  
How could you meld with all the hockey talk  
and gum chewing salesmen who think  
they have God himself by his feet.  
Oh Alicja, you shall forever haunt  
the jaundiced bureaucrats, a bitter taste  
in their ritual coffee. They are not  
true north. Your ashes remain.

# ANOTHER COUNTRY

Janice Kulyk Keefer

ONE EVENING, NOT LONG AGO, I came into the possession of an envelope — plain, brown, 8 x 12 — on which two words were marked, in my dead grandmother's handwriting. A foreign language, a different alphabet. Yet however much of my Saturday-school Ukrainian I'd forgotten, I couldn't fail to know these words by heart. They were the reason translation was necessary in the first place — translation from one country, language, future into another. "Moyèh pòleh: my fields."

*Paszport: Rzeczpospolita Polska* — contents inscribed in Polish and French. In Latin, official recognition of private life: *Testimonium copulationis: Thomas Solowski, aetas 20, Helena Lewkowycz, aetas 18*. A map of fields narrow as piano keys: the land my grandparents still own in a vanished country. From the Polish Transatlantic Shipping Company, a Notice to passengers Helena Solowska (34) and daughters Natalja (14) and Wira (12). Disclaimer of responsibility — in English, Polish, Ukrainian, German, Finnish, Lithuanian, Latvian, Roumanian, CzechoSlovak, Serbian, Yiddish, and Croatian. And finally, on cream-coloured, durable paper: Certificate of Canadian Citizenship, Helena Solowska. Address, Toronto, Ontario, Canada. Place of birth: Poland. Distinguishing Marks: None.

Confirmation in paper, ink, official stamps of a world I know only as memories and stories: a country as different from my own as "Rzeczpospolita Polska" and the crowned eagle is from Canada and its scarlet maple leaf. The land with which I've been obsessed ever since I was old enough to know how to remember.

WHERE TO BEGIN with something that's as much a web of gaps and silences as words? Thanks to the envelope I have, at last, something definite, concrete: Pid-Volochiska, the name of the village, though it may now be called by another name. I know that my grandfather, Tomasz Solowski, was Polish: my grandmother, Helena, Ukrainian. And I know from history books that Ukrainians living in Poland weren't allowed to speak or read their mother tongue, that the language had to survive underground, in the fields and in the home. The village in which my mother grew up was then on the border between Poland and Russia:

my grandmother told me of how she once went to market in the nearby town and bought a fine pair of pigs only to have them run away and end their days as Russian bacon. More than pigs escaped — young men were always being shot at the border, trying to cross into the worker's paradise. My aunt has stories of how she and my mother would play "mourner," draping themselves in black scarves, following the coffins to the burial ground; eyes streaming for strange young men buried with no more ceremony than if they'd been dead birds or barn cats. And there were *Liebestods*, as well — I have heard of the beauty of the young men, and that of girls in shifts stiff with blood-red embroidery, their long braids glistening, roped around them. Dead because their parents had forbidden them to marry, dead because nothing but landlessness, the kind of poverty which means starvation, could come of love. They'd hang themselves or slit their throats: I have been told about the open coffins the whole village would parade to see: protruding, purple tongues cut off; chins propped, necks scarved: that's how it was then, that's the kind of thing which happened there.

Unless, like my grandparents, you spat in Death's face. The story of their meeting I have heard and reheard, embroidered so that I can't tell, and do not wish to ask, what I've made up and what is memory. My grandmother, a mere fifteen, the youngest in a family of girls where only sons were wanted. My grandfather, a soldier, a cavalry man, going to a dance in the village. Tomasz Solowski: uniformed, handsome, tall — the girls a storm of doves around him. Of them all, he asks my grandmother to dance. She is wearing a kerchief on her head, even though young, unmarried girls may wear their long hair loose and unconfined. And while she is dancing with Tomasz, the girl who was her best friend runs up to them and whips the kerchief from my grandmother's head. Instead of thick, wheat-coloured hair, there is just a downy fuzz, like that of baby chicks: she has had Typhus — her hair is only beginning to grow in. Shamed, she runs into the garden — would there have been flower gardens in a Polish village? Never mind, I want a garden here, a river, nightingales and pear blossom. . . . Tomasz follows her, his uniform kindled by the white-fire moon. He comforts, kisses her. They are married within the next month.

Against both parents' wishes. She was to have been matched with a farmer whose lands were adjacent to her father's: he was to have married his step-sister, so that the land would not go out of the family. All this is true, and yet I have embroidered, misheard: I have their marriage certificate now, from the envelope — the *Testimonium Copulationis*. They were not fifteen and eighteen, as I'd always believed, but eighteen and twenty. I also have the photograph — whether it really is of my grandmother's mother I do not know, but it is her only possible likeness: a woman encased in a black dress, with a black scarf clamped round her head, cutting off her forehead, the way a nun's coif would do. And with no band of white for relief: just black, even the shadows out of which her stone eyes peer.

My great-grandmother, come to witness my mother's birth: I have been told that she sat with folded arms outside the room in which her daughter screamed. Sat, and spoke only once, saying, "You wanted Tomasz: you've got Tomasz." I've also been told that my grandmother spent only a few hours resting after her labour. She had to get back into the fields — there was planting to be done, and no money to hire help on the land.

The land, always the land: moyèh pòleh. Thin strips marked out on the tissue paper map, snipped ribbons of land, scattered through the village, handfuls of earth to be halved and quartered between what was to have been four children: my mother and her sister and then the twins who would die before they were a year old, for whose sake, the day after their birth, my grandfather went off to Canada. I have my grandfather's Certificate of Immigration, earned by a voyage, third class, on *The Empress of France*, to earn Canadian dollars and buy a few more strips of Polish land. And here, another story, one that people tell me cannot possibly be true; one that I've entirely invented. That the man in the sepia photograph stapled to the immigration card was shipped from Quebec to Saskatoon, and found himself forced to work for a farmer who treated his labourers worse than he did his livestock. How my grandfather, who'd not been a farmer back in Poland, but a soldier, set out in October to walk east to the city, any city. And through freezing rain, tempests of snow, walked all the way to Toronto, where he found work in a foundry, a place no less hellish than the farm he'd abandoned. Somewhere in my mother's house is a memento of his days in that foundry: a metal nutcracker he cast, in the shape of a dog: you press the tail down and the jaws smash whatever's caught between them.

**I** PICTURE MY GRANDMOTHER and her daughters, leaving the port of Gdynia, bound for a country that's no more than a foreign word, the stamp inside a passport. The crossing — my grandmother sick as a dog in her stifling, third-class berth — while her daughters dance to the accordion music sailors play on tilting, windy decks. Young girls coming down to their mother, calling her to wake up, dance, look at the moon's face, or nets of sunlight on the waves, and she'd push them away, groaning in the belly of that reeking, rolling ship. For my aunt and my mother, a time of the first leisure, the first freedom they have ever known, or would know for a long time after. No schoolwork and no farmwork, but dancing, careering round and round the decks. Until the day they dock, and officials come aboard to inspect the cargo. The blunt, purple stamp of the Health Officer on my grandmother's immigration card. And my mother remembering this: a room full of naked women, women forced to strip to the skin to assure their new countrymen they carry no hideous disease, bear no contagion. My mother thinking

that the older women are all wearing aprons, until she looks again, and sees that the aprons aren't cloth but flesh: sagging breasts and bellies of women worn and wrung out like scrubbed clothes, hung on the racks of their own bones to dry.

Now it is the dockyards at Halifax, the porter who helps them onto the train. My mother cannot say please or thank you — not just because she doesn't know any English, but because she is dumb with fear. For this man is black, she has never seen a black person before, and the village priest has told them only devils are black. This man with his uniform, his jaunty whistle and wide smile, this is the devil helping them onto, shutting them into a train bound for what, where? How did they survive that journey, sitting upright in the coaches whirling past a landscape indecipherable as the language of its people? Of the journey, my mother has told me only one thing: how she stepped out of that hot and smoky train into the night of a strange city, to find not stars but letters scrawled across the sky. Fiery, enormous, unfathomable: Sosa Sola, Sosa Sola. When she learned to read them not in the Cyrillic but the Latin alphabet; when she read them, not in electric letters on the sky, but round a coca-cola bottle, were they more or less meaningful? What sort of clue did they furnish to this place where nothing grew — where you had to go to the store for bread and milk and eggs? So that my grandmother would lock herself in the bathroom of their rooming house (having had to patiently queue for her turn). Would let the taps gush in order to cry without being heard — cry for everything she had left behind, the orchard filled with pear trees, the cows and geese and chickens, fields of wheat and rye, root cellars stocked with potatoes, onions, beets.

I remember my grandmother remembering how she'd wept: how, the only time I asked her if she wished she'd never taken that boat to Halifax, she couldn't answer me, as if my question were not only meaningless, but lunatic, like asking if you wished to be unborn. I remember for myself the backyard of her house on Dovercourt road, the narrow strip of grass at the back, bordered by prodigally fertile earth: roses and zinnias and phlox and asters: beans and tomatoes and garlic which, once harvested, would hang in wreaths on the cellar joists: cucumbers for pickling: raspberry canes and strawberry beds her grandchildren were free to harvest. That narrow strip of garden fed my aunt's family as well as my own — could the land my grandmother had left behind in Poland, those paper fields, have ever produced so much? Could that earth have been any richer, blacker?

Blacker, yes, because the dead were there, my mother's sister and brother, twins who'd died in infancy. For years the ghosts of that unknown aunt and uncle haunted me: I would scour the old albums and find pictures of babies which I'd persuade myself were them, Ivan and Marusha, even though the photos were taken on Centre Island or at Niagara Falls, and these children had died in another country. For a long while I only knew that they'd died young. I hugged this mystery to myself, half-shocked and half-enchanted: nobody else I knew possessed

this kind of ghost, was singled out in such a distantly macabre way. And then, much later, information came without my asking. When I was pregnant my mother told me, for the first time, that Ivan had died only a few days after his birth: that Marusha had suffered all her short life, from epilepsy. They couldn't afford doctors, there was no hospital nearby, and so to keep the baby from harming herself they would put her into the trough used for kneading dough, holding her body straight until the fits had passed. And then my mother told me of the night her year-old sister died: the open coffin, no bigger than a cradle, being placed on a high shelf, and my mother, curious, not understanding, reaching up to where the baby lay. Finding something impossibly cold and small, something which she still cannot believe had been her sister's hand. Years later, my mother recounted a dream my grandmother had had, the night before Marusha's death. Something evil had come into the house — something long, snakelike, thick as felt in the mouth. She'd had to roll up this evil thing in her arms, roll it up like a carpet and then push it outdoors. When she woke she'd found herself standing outside, arms pressed against the fence, her feet and fingers stiff with snow.

I HAVE IN MY POSSESSION a plain brown envelope stuffed with tissue paper documents the colour of dead leaves. I have, too, a set of stories, memories of other people's memories. And an obsession with a vanished country, a landscape of differences and mirrors, prodding me to link scraps and pieces into something durable, before silence undoes all the strings. My grandparents' lives haunt their photographs and signatures on those dead Passports stamped with heraldic eagles. The faces of my mother and my aunt reflect the faces in their Polish passport photos the way a gibbous moon reveals the new. Sometimes new stories are disclosed — things I can't imagine and don't know how to ask for. Not long ago I spoke on a radio programme to do with Ukrainians and war crimes about the need to face and respond to, not just "transcend" the past. I spoke of how the children of immigrants had never been told the necessary things, how any history of complicity and guilt had been hidden from us. And received, some weeks later, a letter from my aunt, who'd happened, by pure chance, to have heard me speak. It was a very ordinary, affectionate letter, full of news of her children and questions about mine. But she began by speaking of the radio interview and by telling a story of what had happened to a cousin of hers, who'd been a young boy when she left Poland in 1936. During the war, Nazi sympathizers in his village had gouged out his eyes, cut out his tongue, while his mother was forced to watch. Relatives had written, after the war, recounting this. And now my aunt wrote to me, not in anger, but in perplexity: "We never wanted to burden you children with this — how could we have told you? Is this what you really want to know?"

Not want, but have to know, along with all the stories of lovers in a garden,  
 memories of neon stars and epic journeys by boat and train and foot. The stuff  
 that my particular obsession feeds on, threading images and words through ever-  
 larger silences.

## AURORA BOREALIS

*Rudiger Krause*

at the northern frontier  
 the early warning line  
     of pine and spruce  
 trembles

as night spreads  
     all the blinds  
 and curtains in our settlements  
     are fluttering  
 in the solar wind

only minutes away  
 towering tongues of fire  
     erupt — a corona of  
 angels leaping and laughing

a dance reflected  
 on the throbbing retina  
 of the optic sky

a riot of photons  
     a roaring lightshow  
 for the deaf

mute  
 we stare at the awesome  
 wonder  
     distant wings feathered with glory  
 on the verge of our night

within reach  
 within our eyes

# "FELICE"

## *The Polish Beginning*

*Robert Harlow*

WE DECIDED on an extended honeymoon. I had a sabbatical year coming up and wanted to attempt yet again to write the war novel I'd been planning and occasionally writing pieces of for fifteen years. There were friends in Poland at the Embassy in Warsaw and so, to begin our extended trip, we decided to importune them, look behind the Iron Curtain and go to see the landscape near Wroclaw where some of the Stalags for airmen were situated during the war. The first part of the novel was to have been set in a prison camp.

We never got to Wroclaw.

The year was 1981. We went by ship from Montreal to Gdynia, a 16-day voyage at 17 knots. It wasn't simply a pleasant time, it was, and is, for me at least, the best kind of travel and the sanest way to traverse a half dozen time zones and arrive rested and alert.

It was the beginning of the first week of August when we landed. Solidarity and Lech Walesa were in very real opposition to the Polish Communist Party government and appeared to be a threat, at least to Moscow's hegemony. (We learned quickly enough that Walesa wanted not to overthrow the government, but only to make it independently Polish. He was, and is, a dedicated socialist.)

The night we docked — at one a.m. — there were said to be eighty Russian ships of war within sight of the Polish coast, circling and waiting, as well as seven tank and infantry divisions at the Russian and East German borders ready to reprise the action taken a decade earlier in Czechoslovakia. The large Canadian flag nailed against the wall of the customs shed looked faded under the green sodium dock lights. It was there as a welcome to the four or five hundred of us who had come as tourists or as family visitors, but I think many of us stood at the rail and hoped we'd see the Maple Leaf again in its natural setting.

But of course nothing happened. The Russians went home after a while. The Poles I met never for a moment thought the Russians would invade. "Who would want to take over this?" one of them asked, gesturing widely, quite happy with the proven reputation the Polish people have of being impossible to conquer, despite having been invaded at least a dozen times in the last eight or nine centuries.

In the morning, the crowd at the dockside looked pretty much like a crowd anywhere else. The Poles like colours and flowers and are full of large emotions. The men and women at customs were properly thorough and as dour as Canadians, and the immigration people were no different than any others I'd encountered. We were met by our friends, Maureen and Oakley Duff, and we drove in their car through Gdansk where there were fewer police than at home and no army at all.

That first half-hour on Polish soil was important to me. Nothing was as I had imagined it, and I sat in Oakley's car embarrassed at how much a North American I was, how much the propaganda about the Eastern Bloc had given me a particular mindset, and how willingly I had accepted it. I really had expected uniforms, straight lines, Gulag life, soldiers, police, rules, regulations, suspicions about foreigners, absolute conformity. The 350-km trip to Warsaw, down a good two-lane highway, was travelled mostly in my head where many reversals and revisions happened.

Oakley drove us, five hours later, through the wide thoroughfares of Warsaw and finally down a crescent street bordered by hedges and trees and stopped in front of a house that caused a further revision in my view of at least some kinds of life behind the Iron Curtain. Across the street was parked a new Mercedes. Next door was a rose garden and then a three-storey stuccoed house on whose balcony was the daughter of the senior army officer who owned the place. So much for equal pay and perks for everyone. Oakley's house was, of course, one assigned by the Polish government to the Canadian Embassy for use by its staff. For soft North Americans it was a wonderful place to come back to every day after seeing how most Poles had to live.

I have been to countries where I was simply a stranger, and to others where it took a week or two before useable realities registered, but Poland began to happen to me immediately. I forgot what I had thought I'd come for and started reacting to something there that restimulated visceral feelings about my own country I'd been carrying around since shortly after W.W.II. I think those feelings were made into sensitivities during Canada's cultural dark age — those twenty years between the war and our centennary in 1967 when our culture was indistinct to the point of transparency. Those were twenty years when we had to export denigrations of ourselves and have a few of them stamped okay by our American or British masters before being read, seen, sold here. My own first published novel, *Royal Murdoch*, was one of I think two novels released here in 1962 that did not have a New York or London contract before being published in Canada. The book was from B.C. rather than from old Upper or Lower Canada. The Winnipeg-based person who reviewed it in *Canadian Literature* said it was set in Alberta, as if our Central Interior was too far away and in the wrong direction: and a CBC literary person thought the effort useless because the book was regional; i.e., not based in a carefully unnamed Toronto (so that it would sell elsewhere) as was the habit of, say, Morley Callaghan. The idea that a work should be local

before it inhabits the world was an idea that was anathema to most Canadians because it upset the picture of ourselves our cultural oppressors had given us, a comfortable picture that let us be everyone's protected kid brother — a picture still revered by many and loved by our current give-away government.

In any event, I'd thought about oppression and felt I knew it, but I had not known a people before who'd fought it so visibly and so often successfully. Images of refusal and remembrances quickly appeared. Warsaw's Old Town had been made rubble by the vindictive Germans. When Poles returned to their capital city in 1945 they rebuilt Old Town stone and brick, so that now it looks exactly as it did before the war. Citizens who had little food and often no real shelter worked there voluntarily, feeling deeply that their personal deaths would be useless if this heart of Poland did not beat again.

I am not an intellectual. Research and analysis make my brain go numb. I am emotional, and experiences such as Old Town are what make for me indelible emotions and images which are liable to force me to write. Early in my visit to Poland, my mind began searching out a way to speak for and make live the images that were beginning to scintillate in my head.

Our visit was for three weeks. I could not hope to chew and digest Poland in that time. I could not even become wise about it, as so many three-week travellers do. What I had were my feelings about surviving oppression, backed up by some few facts. For instance, in Warsaw there are over three hundred monuments, plaques, reminders of atrocities done to Poles by invaders. One for every day of the year, Oakley said. Rape, butchery, mass murder: the physical options for the oppressor. Spiritual pillage does not show, except in cultural expression, and if that has been suppressed, then it can be revealed only in individual people themselves. The plaques and monuments were memory and anger, distress and defiance cemented into the physical fabric of Polish life. The poster art we bought in sophisticated shops, the movies the Poles were making, the theatre we were told about, the great jazz we heard, all gave me a sense of a culture clawing up through and splitting the laid-on cement of Soviet domination. My grey-flannel Canadian soul, grown obediently soft and fluffy to warm the commercial appendages of Yankee cultural accountants, took on a bit of colour and if I had known the words I might have joined the Poles in their anthem — a song based not in national puffery but in reality — "Poland Has Not Yet Perished."

WE WENT TO KRAKOV. In that city's central market square there is a tower, and on top of it there is a lookout where sometime in the fourteenth century a bugler was in the middle of blowing a call to arms against an invader when an arrow struck him in the throat. The time was noon. Now, and so far as

I know, ever since then, a bugler has climbed those stairs at twelve o'clock, has blown the call to arms and always it stops on a strangled note, a replica of the moment centuries ago when there had not been enough vigilance and the enemy had come so swiftly upon Poland that it was there before the bugle had finished sounding. The man who volunteered his time and who called Poland to remembrance every day was said to be the owner of a meat market near the Central square.

We stayed only overnight in Krakov, the city founded by the legendary Prince Krak, whose daughter, Wanda, drowned herself in the Vistula rather than marry a German prince. Another German prince came there during World War II. Fifty-five thousand of its Jews were sent to Auschwitz by Hans Frank, Hitler's Governor. The next day we drove in a westerly direction out of Krakov, intending eventually to find a highway south that would allow us to visit the ancient Polish salt mines.

I have to confess now that I didn't know that Auschwitz was along that road; in fact, I did not know Auschwitz was in Poland. I don't know where I had thought it was: perhaps in all the places the Germans had been during the war. Its exact location had not mattered to me until Oakley, an often laconic man, mentioned that Auschwitz was not far from where we were at that moment. Then it mattered, and I remember persuading the three I was with, all of them born since the war, that we couldn't pass Auschwitz by. Perhaps it didn't mean a lot to them, I remember saying, almost apologetically. They indulged an old sweat and said we could see the salt mines another time.

To me Auschwitz was the heart of the evil that had made me think, when I finally understood about it, that World War II had been a necessary crusade. Those of us who fought never were told what was at the centre of German insanity, and especially what was happening because of it. Churchill knew, Roosevelt, the Pope, Stalin, the tiny whoremonger, Hitler-admirer and anti-semite who was Canada's prime minister knew, but Auschwitz and nine hundred other extermination camps like it did nothing to change how they thought about the war or how they prosecuted it. One thing had always been for me certain: had our leaders not been anti-semitic at least by omission, the holocaust could have been stopped. The men who supplied France and Italy with resistance, parachuted battalions into Yugoslavia, stalked the Germans in Norway, played exciting schoolboy espionage games all over Europe could have found a way of halting the slaughter, could have revised their priorities and made those extermination camps a front so vigorously pressured that Germany would have had to retreat from it, millions of people would not have died, and neither would our integrity and humanity been so wounded that we live still with a guilt we did not need to have.

The oppression of the Jews is basic, bottom line. All other oppressions — physical, political, spiritual, cultural — come from centuries of practising oppression,

the purpose of which is to heap one's own anger about feeling impotent and oppressed (personally, nationally) on another and then, by a leap of illogic, kill that other (physically, politically, spiritually, culturally) and think therefore that one's own projected feelings will be permanently relieved. Down the line from monarch to priest, to executive, to the privileged, to parents to children goes the oppression and the punishment. Back up the line from those who believe themselves powerless goes agreement — yes, I am bad, I am worthless, evil, I deserve oppression — and back down again comes more hate from advantaged people or nations who are trying to rid themselves of feeling not powerful enough, and often oppressed. By what? They don't know.

The cycle is as irrational as its purpose. But it is a terrible engine of destruction, and it helps keep the advantaged in power, and in a world where power and dominion are thought to be good, there must be someone to blame for those continual rotten feelings that come from having to hurt and maim and kill to stay on top. God is thought to be good and therefore cannot be blamed; if God is evil and omnipotent, there is no hope. So, the oppressors, who also feel oppressed and secretly bad about themselves, need an earthly and on-going reason for what they persuade themselves is necessary behaviour. The Jewish people, stigmatized by the Christian church as Christkillers, have for 2,000 years been for the oppressors a way of excusing themselves their inhumanity; and, for the oppressed, the Jews are a people to feel superior to while they fail to fight oppression. Institutionalized anti-semitism is our way of keeping alive — while we teach it to succeeding generations — the practice of every kind of oppression.

I had thought about this absurd process often, but now I was going to Auschwitz, and when Oakley drove us through the camp gate my mind and breath stopped for a long moment. I had not been caught up and sent here; I had insisted on this visit. It was necessary. For the oppressor and the oppressed in me, in us all, this was home.

Germans were there. Three busloads of them. I didn't believe it, and later Felice didn't either. But one of the reasons to write a book is to grow. I'm happy they were (still are) going there. For some, no doubt, their reasons were vague and experiences inconclusive, but for others the visit must have been, as it became for me, a necessity.

In the book, during a walk through Warsaw's Old Town, Canadian diplomat Ben Collins tells Felice that yes Germans are free to visit. "After the war," he says, "we gave them a life sentence — suspended for life. It saved us coming right out and forgiving them."

What Canadian diplomat Collins was saying was that what the Germans did was unforgivable and remains so. Later in her odyssey, Felice discovers herself thinking that the word Nazi is a euphemism. Why say Nazi when you mean German, a people as anti-semitic as any other, who indulged in, wallowed in, an orgy

of evil in the extermination camps, as well as in perverted politics and juvenile militarism at home? It was not Mackenzie King or the Canadian government who turned the Jewish refugee ship *St. Louis* back, it was Canadians, all of us, despite the excuse that we hardly knew it was done. We, too, were anti-semitic, and therefore we had not bothered to train King and our legislators to respect the Jews as people and as refugees and to act rationally when the request came for Canada to give life to a shipload of otherwise doomed victims of German insanity. And train our leaders we must. For a good example of sanity insisted upon, look to Costa Rica, which has no military, and is open, humane, and is perhaps the most rational country on earth.

We got out of the car and went past the German buses, the notions store, the bookstore, the ice cream vendor and through the main entrance, each of us alone with a self cut away from the group we'd been a moment earlier. The point is — or at least it was for me — that when you enter Auschwitz you are faced with at least two fears. One is of the unknown, that here something absolutely evil threatens life itself. The other is the fear that something in you will connect, will understand, *will* make you one with Auschwitz. Another true thing is that visiting there is the opposite of going to visit a shrine of the arts or politics or religion. There is no uplift, no glorying. But it is also true that as in other shrines what is there at Auschwitz is past, done, has become example, is the shell of a dead time, and to be able to experience what it means depends on one's sensitivities, knowledge and imagination. But if you have these things, dare you apply them and risk what might happen?

**M**Y PERSONAL VISIT was like birth: afterward I did not easily remember that violent experience. I had to work on it. That's the genesis of Felice's book and what it's mostly about.

There is a scene in the Auschwitz section of the novel where Felice is with a professor from Krakov at the Wall of Death where prisoners were shot for fun after a good lunch by members of the camp's Political Section. She is brought to the edge of the horror that is Auschwitz by this gentle but tough man whose brother was in 1943 pushed against the Wall and shot by a Waffen SS man. She goes to the wall, touches it.

Still there was a barrier in herself. Then on her right, peripheral to her vision, she saw a piece of brown paper. It was wrapping paper. Someone had torn it into the shape of a heart no bigger than the palm of her hand and had pinned it with a small gold-coloured safety pin to the ripped-up wood. It fluttered in the small wind that eddied gently against the wall. She put her finger on it, held it steady and read: 'John and Sally Lusacombe, from Andover, England, were here.' The words were a shock. She expected, hoped for, more: some kind of guidance from

a clearer mind. She didn't know whether she'd gone calm or empty; then she thought: They are right, there is no message, except that you've been, felt. Her tears surprised her. They arrived pressured by a grief she hadn't known was personally hers: a rag, a bone, a hank of hair. The Jewish woman in the cattlecar appeared — a portrait, nothing else, caught at that moment beyond knowledge where understanding begins. Her own tears were prismatic; they brought the cool precision of colour back to consciousness, along with a sense of herself weeping for something dead, uselessly lost. She couldn't remember, ever, not caring who saw her crying. There was a freedom in that.

Felice's tears and loss of self-consciousness make her ready, in scenes following this one, to go to the centre of Auschwitz's purpose and terror, with survivor Paula as her guide. And that experience will, in turn, sustain her later on when she and Ben Collins' Polish housekeeper are taken separately to ZOMO Headquarters, the heart of another evil, where having to meet head-on the reality of saying No to oppression changes her personality and her life profoundly.

After nearly a month in Poland, it appeared to me that there was no better ground anywhere on which to act out that process through which one may progress from being an unthinking, unconsciously tyrannized middle class cipher (most of us are) to personal freedom. Poland is where a people has lived a thousand years suffering oppression of every kind. It also has demonstrated well how to say No to it. One of Felice's overseas Canadian acquaintances tells her:

"The Poles knew, like the rest of us, that personal survival is the wall up against which the conquered may be shot if they don't turn around and submit and, like the rest of us, the Poles turned around and submitted. Not easily, and they never would give up being Polish. But when the Germans came in the war, the orders were to exterminate Poland. Survival was no longer a barrier. They fought and died, and if you look hard you'll see that despite millions dead they won. Since the war there have been three revolts, each stronger than the last, and they all toppled regimes. But the real victory each time was the loss, even in the face of personal destruction, of the fear our rulers always count on to feed our habit of obedience."

Solidarity's power at the moment of our visit was the result of nine-and-a-half million people suddenly saying No. The government knew what had happened. It was Polish too.

I've been interested in oppression for a long time, and I believe it to be basic to human distress, so meeting Poland in the summer of 1981 was the revelation I needed to start me writing about it again. In 1984 I'd published *Paul Nolan* which, for me at any rate, was a study of the soft underbelly of oppression. It was done on domestic ground and some reviewers and readers accused me of being a male trying to speak for the feminist cause. Feminists want support but, quite rightly, want to speak for themselves. Still, the Nolan book is a portrait of a man that tells the story of the other side of oppression. Without knowing how habitual, childish, weak, impotent the oppressor always is, and how put-upon he himself

feels, saying No to him remains a terrifying act. At the end of the book, Paul's wife, Katherine, says No, but she only takes his power and is not able to share it back with him. At the end of the Felice book, Felice does not get rid of her repressed, conservative dentist husband. She is so free that she is able to leave her life open to sharing the power she has found, even though that sharing depends upon him and everyone else in her life becoming strong enough to join her.

So, by the time our Polish visit was finished, the notion of a book to complement the earlier *Paul Nolan* was growing toward becoming a novel. As we travelled to Vienna, Venice, and then to Sardinia, I tried to find a protagonist who would be right for the story and the process I saw as happening in Poland. It had to be someone from my own national culture, and it had to be someone oppressed from inside and out. Someone Canadian for certain. An obsequious, obedient, typical resident of a colony of the American empire. Then, reluctantly, I knew the protagonist was a woman, because women are institutionally oppressed by male power structures and the results are easily identified. Briefly, I thought of making her a Native woman. How oppressed could one be: Canadian, female, Indian? But I knew very little about native Indian women, so I decided on a Point Grey housewife, spouse of a professional man, happy with her stay-at-home existence and the fact that foreign travel for her was going to Hawaii for Christmas. She was 48 years old, bright, but sectorally uninformed, and had those strengths that nurturers often have which can be converted into virtual heroics when death threats occur. She was also open and compassionate, capable of understanding the oppressed even though she knew nothing about oppression itself.

At a hotel near a village in northern Sardinia overlooking a beach named Sinatra, I wrote the first words of *Felice: A Travelogue*. We went to Greece for ten weeks and I wrote from breakfast till the noonhour every day. During a twenty-day voyage from there to Savannah, Georgia, on a decrepit freighter, I wrote the Auschwitz section, and knew when I was done that my life was changed.

After five months in Costa Rica, the book was finished. That was in May 1982. Over the next months, rejections came from McClelland & Stewart, who had published *Paul Nolan*, from General, who suggested it be made into a thriller, and from Macmillan. I'd been rejected before. I revised. Then in 1984 Ron Smith at Oolichan took in the book, edited it, as he later did *The Saxophone Winter*, with compassion and skill, and published it in 1985.

To Poles and experts about their country, my relationship with Poland may look like a one-night stand. I suspect it may have been. Still, while I must make no claims for the book, I do for the experience, and now I consider a certain kind of Polish learning ground as my own.

# AN EVENING IN THE OLD PEOPLE'S HOME

*Rohel Korn*

*Translated by Miriam Waddington © 1989*

Under the pillars of the broad balcony,  
on chairs set out in rows  
as if upon an open stage  
the old people sit with folded hands.  
They are like wax figures all set to pose  
for twilight, whenever it arrives,  
with its brush and palette, ready to paint  
each one's singular portrait.

Their white heads are framed with wild grief  
are like those coins of snow that winter leaves behind  
as casually as a tip for the fresh green of grass.

Words are as lean and dry and bare  
as the days and nights of these old people;  
they chew the cud of memory in the long hours  
while everything they ever knew or were  
recedes beyond the furthest reach of distance.

They yawn, they sigh, and throw a few brief glances  
at the street once faithful and familiar,  
once packed with laughter and the shouts of children —  
that was before the street joined all the other streets  
in search of new suburban districts —  
that was long before it left them here  
with the *Moshev Zkeynim*, the Old People's Home,  
like so many unclaimed pawn tickets  
among the patched-up crumbling houses.

Now spring floats towards the balcony  
carrying the scent of lilac and of jasmine flowers,  
the hands of the old people, cradled in their laps,  
clasp and unclasp, while their thoughts  
rock, and rock, and keep on rocking  
the sleepless emptiness of night.

*From the Yiddish "Die Genod fun Vort"*  
*(The Blessedness of Words), Tel Aviv, 1971.*

# VITPALNO

*Andrew Suknaski*



*VITPALNO /  
i / 'spiritus mundi'*

*'if the moon rises before  
the bright star  
it'll be calm  
no wind  
the next day /*

*if venus  
the bright star rises before  
the moon  
it'll be windy /*

*now if  
the bright star an moon are followed by  
the light red star*

*it'll be dry  
an windy . . .'*

*— Eddy Straza  
(Wood Mountain)*

*vitpalno*  
'the castaway'

now it all begins in shunning  
that bear

originally  
man

denied the staff of life  
bread and salt

legend  
holding

*spiritus mundi*  
assumed

awesome symmetry  
melding into forest

to seek  
refuge

with guardian spirits  
and other gods /

*perún*  
*strybóh*  
*dasbóh*

gods of wind  
thunder

and  
lightning /



*vitpalno*

the shunning

that denial

of human kinship

it flowers in fascism

of spirit

genghis

and batu khan

displacing

*slavonic fragments*

to yield to

*visigoths*

and

*ostrogoths*

all castaways finding a place

among feuding factions

love and hate polarizing

balto-slav world /

mongol hordes fanning out over

steppe

to rape and pillage those

who keep faith

in *spiritus*

*mundi* /

the offspring

descending gypsy roads

into europe's

sad

heart

of darkness

that will

coalesce

into

fascism

of spirit

surfacing in

the failed

artist

shunned by

a vienna art school

because  
he couldn't draw  
or balance  
naked symmetry  
of  
woman /  
he  
who then rose  
to flourish  
among  
molderings  
of unbridaled  
megalomania  
and a cadence  
that tyrannized  
humankind  
and *spiritus mundi* /

*vitpalno*

witness the list

growing with  
a cockancunt-dynamic  
of a deadringer for  
some black forest god  
as the castaway  
turns into numbers  
before a million  
listeners /

*'Bedriegen*

betray or to deceive someone . . .

for 20 years

. . . either banish or accept my offer

and give the germans in the sudetenland

*freedom . . .*

(bedeviled by  
ascending numbers  
demigod sputters on to  
a madman's verbal orgasm  
with nuremberg audience  
in palm of hand)

*SEBEN EN DRIEZIG TOUSAND!*

*VIEDER (THEN)*

*EIN EN SEXTIG TOUSAND!*

(UP TO)

SEVENTIG TOUSAND!  
TUCHENTIG TOUSAND!  
NEGINTIG TOUSAND!  
HUNDRED VIER EN DRIJIG TOUSAND!  
(NOW)! HOYTE!

(THE BRAIN HAS BEEN FRIED  
BY PURE ARYAN  
CONDENSATION OF  
MADNESS)

HOYTE!  
HUNDERD EN VIER  
EN SISTIG  
TOUSAND!"

HEIL HITLER!  
HEIL HITLER!

while venus casts  
her blank

gaze  
over moon

and *spiritus*  
*mundi*

the demigod reaches  
back

to the moment  
of

a universe's  
creation

suddenly  
the whole world seems

within  
grasp

of a closing  
fist /

ü / *morgan pasture*  
/ *wood mountain*

pale moon  
listless

above hills in  
east /

*pam'iatka*  
 a single memory  
     in girlhood  
     place  
         now  
         a game preserve /  
 greying sophie  
 elated  
     in propinquity  
     of berry  
         benevolent  
         *fates*  
             and  
             *familia*  
     'once more in yer life  
     yer pickin  
         berries . . .  
         wow!  
             that wind  
                 blown  
             branches  
                 away!'

sophie's  
 right hand  
     waving  
     away  
 from  
*pam'iatka* /  
     . . . *taka*  
     *sprava*  
         'so passes the will  
         of fate'

venus sails on  
 invisible  
     beyond dry  
     blue  
         *atmo*  
         *sphira* /



*iii / vitpalna*

'outcast'  
the infidel

great grandmother anonymous  
fleeing tyrannizing con

-figurations  
of surfacing will

to  
power /

grandmother running  
from

death of God  
and pan

grandmother fleeing beyond  
margins

of black forest  
and nightingale's

song  
still

in throat  
of *voke*

'wolf'  
 of heidegger's  
 nihilistic  
 germany  
 and melding  
 portents  
 of *voke*  
 and *volk*  
 proud  
 flower  
 of fate  
 rooted in  
 blood  
 and  
 earth /  
 sophie demjanew telling of  
*vitpalna*  
 grandmother pauline domich  
*puhanenka*  
 drunken infidel wired  
 to plum brandy  
 and martin  
 karasinski  
 the waggon  
 maker  
 body fueled with  
 powerful  
 ancestral thirst  
 for *spirytus*  
*rektyfi*  
*-kowany*  
 his mother  
 trying to teach  
 german  
 to ten grandchildren /  
 vacillations  
 of faith /  
 swaying chokecherry  
 branches  
 and the waving away hand  
 while sophie  
 reaches  
 back

into *pam'iat*  
to brush away

the *memory*  
of bitter

berry /  
*pam'iatka*

wisp  
of memory

martin  
back from

*kurchma*  
to wiggle

that radio-active  
thorn

in suture  
of mother's skull /

'... *dosta!*  
enough

don't bother teaching them  
anymore german ...'

steeped in  
*spirytus*

*vetpalny*  
the outcast

he is lowered by  
four strong

men  
handling hemp ropes

into polish earth  
of '33 /

the following three  
nights

martin's *spirytus*  
marinated

ghost  
totters

while strong  
arms

brush away

and topple

the niggling  
nihilists /

heidegger  
nietzsche

*übermensch*  
ghost

of pale  
and fair

*man*  
*overcome /*

it is only then  
that

true *peace*  
*spukiy*

begins to coalesce in  
*spiritus*

of austere  
2256 old

diogenes  
flickering candle

in lantern  
angled up

to craned  
neck /

*ἀνθρωπον ζητω*

*'i am looking*  
*for one*  
*honest*  
*man . . .'*

martin's ghost  
to wizened

*spiritus*  
men for

millennia  
deemed mad /

SUKNASKI

*'spukiy*  
*kulega . . .*

*peace*  
*my friend /*

search no more  
believe only  
what drunkards  
an little children say  
. . . they *always*  
tell you  
the truth  
an God  
loves them  
best . . .

an as  
gypsies say  
*do not be*  
*so honest*  
*that yer children*  
*starve to death . . .'*

*spiritus*  
diogenes

perfectly  
bewildered

'but what do we do  
with a drunk  
woman  
who says  
she loves you?'

'unbuckle yer  
belt . . .

God will give you  
faith . . .'

*'bravo!*  
do you have a touch  
of plum brandy  
on your person  
. . . i mean  
*spiritus'*

a clear bottle  
levitates /

'thank you!  
how you say?  
*kulega . . .*'

as ghosts of nihilists  
begin

to nuggle  
in

on  
*spirytus*

*vetpalny's*  
ghost

raises his  
left hand

summoning balto-slav  
gypsy's

incant  
-ation /

*'nachazna satanah!*  
*v'okum*  
*vuzy*  
*voke*

*ie pavukey*  
*hatch!*

*na leca*  
*na horeh*

*ie*  
*kamenya!*

*away satan!*  
*in yer eye*  
*lurk*  
*snakes*  
*wolf*

*an spiders!*  
*away*

*to forests*  
*to mountains*

*an*  
*stones!'*

*iv / vitpalny*

wood mountain

gypsy

makeshift table

beneath

a maple's

lengthening shadow /

sophie demjanew

the oldest

of *proclaty*

'the cursed ones'

as *suknatskyj familia*

has named itself

weaves the fabric of fate

in ponderous

cadences of

*pam'iat*

the splayed shards

through memory /

sophie recalls

*vitpalny*

those fall away where

*the fates*

and wind

move heavyhanded /

'our mother

she was one of em

*vitpalny*

for a while

she like her wine

picked water pails of chokecherries

along the morgan hills

would make 30

40

50 gallons of wine each fall

would fuss over it

an savour it all winter

spring an *leto*

liked her *wine*

*spirytus*

like her polish father

an german grandmother too

they who liked to go to the *kurchma*

the village tavern nightly  
mom became

*vitpalna*  
went gypsy like the rest  
an fell away  
from her faith . . .  
*vitpalna*  
like her mother  
loved to play  
*marine band music*  
on the gramophone  
good fridays  
back on the farm  
. . . her grandmother  
was a woman of romance  
liked to read  
romances

an drink  
an dance  
an admire beauty  
beautiful  
men an women  
. . . a man always  
*takiy*  
*prestoyny*  
*carries imself*  
*so*

*beautifully*  
jus like a gypsy  
one moment  
here

then suddenly  
somewhere else!’

sister pauline  
slowly  
waving a  
willowthin

finger  
murmurs /

‘. . . but?  
but she became  
quite

religious  
following that time  
so why do you  
think  
that happened?’

sophie's grizzled  
head  
    bent  
    her silence deepening  
                    the wind's  
                    stillness  
    gnarled hands  
    crossed  
        on her  
        right knee /  
        'a miracle  
        just  
            ... a miracle'  
                    gypsy  
                    wind  
                finally  
                stirs  
                    hooks around  
                    great maple /

*v / floating entry*  
*ghosts of 'viovode' /*

floating entry  
'viovode'

warrior /  
village hero

though it is  
*suknatskyj's* backyard

in wood  
mountain

it could be  
*sushnu*

village at gypsy  
crossroads

along margins  
of *lvov*

in western  
ukraine /

floating entry  
olivefaced

gypsy  
*viovode*

eternally hungry  
for a good fight

and *spirytus*  
after

with one  
defeated /

*viovode*

grandfather *suknatskyj*

‘... *takiy*  
*prestoyny!*’

too goddam  
good looking

for his own  
good /

tall  
darkhaired

finally finding  
his match

for once  
with another

drunken miller  
called

martin  
karasinski

who floats  
a few front teeth

back into  
*suknatskyj's* throat . . .

they retire to  
the *kurchma*

*spirytus*  
the sweet refuge

from  
pain /

humbled  
*viovode*

the coalescing  
of a new bond

where young daughter  
of one

and other's  
son

will  
discover

one  
another

even  
later

marry  
in new west /



for a while  
the hate

between germanpole  
and gypsyuke

will remain  
minimal /

the new world  
father

will slowly  
warm up to it /

the laying of boots  
to  
his sons  
or rolling pin  
to mother  
carrying daughters /

it will take  
a while  
to discover  
the sweetness of  
*spirytus*  
and latent  
madness  
of chokeberry  
and  
barley  
brewed  
under  
prairie  
moonlight  
where  
a handful  
of lye  
speeds things up  
immensely  
not to speak of  
flowering  
*fates*  
or sorrows of  
*familia* /

father *suknatskyj*  
kept  
partially  
sane  
by  
*kaplitska*

SUKNASKI

blessed by  
pagan gods  
of balto  
-slav  
world  
and songs  
his brothers  
stop  
singing  
when  
russians arrive  
to  
ruscify  
the ukraine /



*vi / reverry  
/1939*

*mars  
the red star  
faintly glows  
beneath  
venus  
and moon  
over  
-head /*

*mother and  
daughter  
are crossing  
nadulenska*

*'the small coulee'*  
*at farm /*

*they have killed*  
*a few*

*withering*  
*potatoes*

*in the third*  
*garden*

*the last promise*  
*of faith*

*in a dry season along edge*  
*of eastern field /*

*suddenly*  
*shards*

*of red light*  
*illuminate*

*the whole*  
*sky . . .*

*mother*  
*to sophie*

*'keynetch!*  
*shveta . . .*

*end of*  
*the world!'*

*sophie's*  
*revery /*

*. . . vera*  
*faith*

*vitpalna*  
*navernula*

*na*  
*chash. . .*

*the fallen*  
*away one*

*has returned*  
*in time . . .*

*vii / proclaty*

'the cursed'

*suknatskyj*

*home for the stampede*

as they all like

to say

though most now

endure

somewhere else /

*vetpalny*

*proclaty* walks

down path

of semi-

abandoned

place

*revery /*

*... hiy!*

*hiy*

*jip!*

*an owl*

*feather!*

*who!*

*who sez all signs*

*fail*

*in a dry*

*season?*

*pay yer back taxes*

*proclaty*

*this place*

*ain't*

*thru with*

*you yet /*

*spukiy*

*peace*

*calm wind*

*faintly*

*nuzzling*

*grass ...*

# GEORGE FALUDY

## *An Interview*

*Jacqueline d'Amboise*

J.A.: Mr. Faludy, after many years as an exiled poet, wandering from France to Morocco, from the U.S.A. to England, Italy, and Malta, you came to Canada in 1967 and have lived here ever since. How do you feel about that now? Was it a mistake?

G.F.: On the contrary, it was the happiest decision I ever made, though, to be precise, I didn't actually *decide* to move here. Friends in the Toronto Hungarian community lured me here with the promise of an academic position, which turned out to be non-existent. I was annoyed at first, then took heart and looked for work on my own.

J.A.: What did you find?

G.F.: (*Laughing*) Nothing. The Canadian universities I applied to in several cases didn't even answer my letters. Finally, in despair, I accepted a lectureship Columbia University had been offering me, and for three years commuted weekly by air between Toronto and New York in order to teach there and live here.

J.A.: That looks like a lot of loyalty towards a country that hadn't treated you particularly well. What was your reason?

G.F.: New York City, like much of the U.S.A., is a civilized environment for millionaires and their servants. Canada furnishes reasonably civilized conditions for, I would guess, at least four-fifths of its citizens. Toronto is not Athens under Pericles, but no place is nowadays. At the age of 77 I can leave my downtown Toronto apartment at midnight to post a letter without much risk of being mugged. In the world as it is in 1988 one could not reasonably ask for more. But there is more! What other country would take in a wandering poet at the age I was when I arrived, 57, and then ten years later give him an old-age pension, free medical care and even, from time to time, financial help such as Canada Council grants? In many ways Canada has been a sort of paradise for me, a gift I have tried to repay with my writings. \$308.00 is not, admittedly, a magnificent pension, but no other country, I think, would have given me as much.

J.A.: Are you telling me that you live in downtown Toronto on \$308.00 a month?

G.F.: (*Laughs again*) No. There is a sort of provincial supplement that doubles it, if you don't earn anything. Unfortunately, I was never able to find an academic — or indeed any other — position in this country, so I am not eligible for Canada Pension. And once you make a certain amount of money, as I usually do from my writings, you are not eligible the *following* year for the supplement. So if I did not publish anything or give any public lectures this year, I would, for a period of two years, have only the \$308.00 a month to live on. This is obviously impossible, but I won't complain about it as it keeps me working! If I live to be a hundred I suppose I'll still be caught in the same strange situation, and still not complaining about it. Writing has been my life, and, so far, it has kept me alive.

J.A.: What about other exiled writers and poets in Canada — I am referring especially to your colleagues from Eastern Europe — would you say their experience has been similar to yours?

G.F.: Not at all, really. Of the handful of serious East European writers who have found refuge here — and by "serious" I mean the comparatively small number whose work will have a lasting place in their native literature — most arrived at a much younger age than I did and have had little trouble building careers apart from their literary activities. But, apart from mild poverty, I feel that I have been luckier than most. I have published eight books since arriving in Toronto, some with editions in New York, London and, since the advent of Mr. Gorbachev, even in Budapest. Major Canadian writers, beginning long ago with John Robert Colombo, have volunteered to translate my poetry. Dennis Lee, for example, Robin Skelton, George Jonas, George Johnston, Stephen Vizinczey. Many others. Imagine that happening in, say, France! A Hungarian poet in that country will — and I know this from painful experience — either become a French poet or a French ditch-digger, or else he will simply starve to death. It is much easier for a foreigner to starve to death in France than it is in Canada, you know. The only really unfortunate case I know of among talented East Europeans in Canada is the young Russian novelist Sasha Sokolov. He was born in Ottawa when his father was at the Soviet Embassy there — as a KGB agent, I'm told. Several years ago he got out of the U.S.S.R. and took refuge in what was, in effect, his native land. He has written what I consider quite probably the most brilliant Russian novel since Bulgakov's *The White Guard*. It's called *A School for Fools*. You don't write a book like that while building a career, and I think Sokolov had a very difficult time living in Canada. The Canada Council turned him down when he asked for help. I don't think they had any idea of the talent of that young man. I don't know where he is now, or what he's doing. The Americans published both his novels — in Russian as well as English! — so perhaps he's there.

J.A.: I don't know of any major Russian writers who have come to Canada. Are there any?

G.F.: Not that I know of. There aren't many, anyway. The level of writing in the U.S.S.R., including [that of] the dissidents is, in general, pretty awful. When they get out they usually run straight to the U.S.A. The Americans think *Doctor Zhivago* is a great novel, and anybody who thinks that is bound to be thrilled when people like Aksenev, Solzhenitsyn, and Edward Limonov land on their doorstep. Every subliterate Soviet hack can strike pay-dirt in the U.S.A., and if Sokolov — who deserves better — has more luck there than he has in Canada, I wish him well.

J.A.: Do I detect a note of bitterness regarding Russian writers?

G.F.: Absolutely. But bitterness, not envy. Russian culture, as that splendid lady Nadezhda Mandelshtam once said, died of a bullet in the neck sometime in the 1930s, if not earlier. With very few exceptions they're living on the reputation of their grandfathers. I don't think there's been a really serious poet in the Soviet Union since Pasternak. And none born after the Revolution. Novelists are in equally short supply, which is what makes someone like Sokolov such a miracle. It makes me bitter that hardly anyone in this country or the States knows his name; that people queue up to buy wooden, utterly deadly stuff like Solzhenitsyn's *Lenin in Zurich*, but have never heard of the really talented novelists of Eastern Europe — none of them from the Soviet Union — such as the Rumanian exile Petru Dumitriu, or Poland's Jerzy Andrzejewski.

J.A.: Do you feel that your own work has been neglected?

G.F.: Far from it! My name is certainly not a household word in Saskatoon — or in Toronto for that matter — but, then, that's never been one of my ambitions. I'm printed as widely in English as most poets nowadays. I got a letter from a reader in a village in Tennessee not long ago, an Anglican lady priest, thanking me for my poems. And a letter from a sheep-rancher in New Zealand! You can't imagine how extraordinarily moving it is for an exiled poet to receive such letters coming from an audience quite different from the one he had in mind when he put pen to paper.

J.A.: Do you always write in Hungarian?

G.F.: Poetry, always. Prose, usually.

J.A.: You mentioned that you are being published in Hungary again. If this liberalization process continues, would you ever consider returning there to live?

G.F.: No.

J.A.: If I may ask, why not?

G.F.: I am grateful to Hungary for having given me birth, so to speak, for having given me a marvellous language, and for a few wonderful lifelong friends. No other grounds for gratitude come to mind on the spur of the moment.

J.A.: I understand that you have been asked to visit Budapest.

G.F.: Yes. Various magazines and periodicals there have been running articles about me lately, mostly apologetic about the "sad past" and so on. Also a feature-length film about me is being shown, and I have just signed two contracts with Hungarian publishers for editions of 50,000 copies each. All this means that a certain amount of money is stacking up in my name in the National Bank, and as the Hungarian forint cannot be exported I may go there for two weeks in September to visit old friends and spend the money — to buy clothes and things I can seldom afford in Toronto. It used to be a case of "Go West, young man" to get rich; with me it's a case of an old man going East. All in all, though, it's better to be broke in Toronto than rolling in forints in Budapest.

J.A.: You've said a lot of nice things about Canada, and the translator of your forthcoming book *Notes from the Rainforest* [Hounslow Press, October, 1988], Eric Johnson, tells me that apart from all else it's one long paean of praise for Canada. There must be something you don't like about your adopted country.

G.F.: Well, look. I am 77 years old. When I was growing up there was still such a thing as Western Civilization, something I love almost as much as life itself. In any form in which one could recognize it, it's largely gone now. Or rather is transmuted into the bizarre society one finds now everywhere from São Paulo to Singapore, with far too many people, a general subliteracy and, at the top, the hierarchy of technocrats, most of them — except for their technical specialties — as uneducated as the proles working for them at minimum wage, or less. When I was at the University of Berlin in the early thirties the prospects for the world looked pretty bleak, but not nearly as bleak as they've turned out to be. Like everywhere else, in Canada today there is pollution, the nuclear threat, social misery, a proletarianized educational system, and, for the most part, a pretty stagnant situation in the arts. But, except obviously for the permanent possibility of nuclear extinction, in almost every way life is still better here. In 1978, when the University of Toronto gave me an honorary doctorate, I said in the convocation address that of all the countries I have lived in — and I have held five different passports — this is the most marvellously decent society I have ever lived in. Not perfect, God knows, but *decent*. There is, you know, no Hungarian word that quite expresses what English-speakers mean when they use that word. That precise connotation, which is missing not only in Hungarian but in every other language I know, is in itself enough to tell you why I feel so grateful to be in a country where it is not only understood, but also applies.

# ODE TO BARTÓK

*Gyula Illyés*

*Adapted into English by Margaret Avison from the literal translation  
by Ilonn Duczynska*

October, 1955

‘Jangling discords?’ Yes! If you call it this, that has  
such potency for us.  
Yes, the splintering and smashing  
glass flashing from earth — the lash’s  
crack, the curses, the saw-teeth’s screeching  
scrape and shriek — let the violins learn this dementia,  
and the singers’ voices, let them learn from these;  
let there be no peace,  
no stained glass, perfumed ease  
under the gilt and the velvet and the gargoyles  
of the concert hall, no sanctuary from turmoil  
while our hearts are gutted with grief and know no peace.

‘Jangling discords?’ Yes! If you call it this, that has  
such potency for us.  
For listen! listen; there’s no denying  
the soul of this people, it is undying.  
it lives, hear how its voice rises, cries out:  
a grinding, grating, iron on stone,  
misery’s milling, caught up in modulation  
if only through the piano’s felts and hammers  
and vibrating vocal cords — a clangour  
of truth, however grim;  
let it be grim, if that’s how it’s given to man  
to utter the rigors of truth,  
for jangling discord alone — cacophony  
rebellion hounded, hurt,  
but howling still, striving to drown  
out the unholy’s hellish din —  
can assert  
harmony!

Yes, only the shriek will do — cacophony  
not the dulcet songs however charming they be,  
only the discords can dictate to fate:  
Let there be harmony!

Order, but true order, lest the world perish  
 O, if the world is not to perish  
 the people must be free  
 to speak, majestically!

Thin, wiry, dedicated musician,  
 stern, true artist, true Hungarian,  
 (held, like so many of your generation  
 under disapprobation,)
   
was it not deep compulsion, this creating:  
 That from the depth where the people's soul lay waiting,  
 a darkened tomb  
 that you alone can plumb,  
 that out of this profound,  
 from the long echoing chambers down,  
 this mineshaft, from this narrow throat  
 you could send forth the piercing note  
 that rings to the outermost vault  
 of the ordained, geometric concert-hall,  
 the rounds and ranging tiers  
 where remote suns are hung as chandeliers?

Who soothes my ear with saccharine strains  
 insults my grief. I walk  
 slowly, in black.  
 When your own mother is the dead you mourn  
 the funeral march should not be Offenbach.  
 A fatherland broken, lost, who dares to play  
 its dirge, its threnody,  
 on the calliope?  
 Is there hope yet for humankind?  
 If we still ask that question, but our minds  
 stall, speechless from attrition,  
 O, speak for us,  
 stern artist, true musician,  
 so that through all the struggle, failure, loss,  
 the point of it, the will to live,  
 may still survive!

We claim it as our right  
 as human beings, bound for eternal night,  
 and adults now — to face up to it straight,  
 since anyhow the pressure is too ponderous to evade;  
 if pain is nursed inside,

pressed under, it is only magnified  
past bearing. Once we could? We can no longer  
cover our eyes, our ears; the winds blow stronger,  
to hurricane force.

We cannot hide from it now, nor hinder tomorrow's curse:  
'Could you do nothing? why  
were you no use?'

But *you* do not despise us, you revere  
our common nature, treat us as your peer  
when you lay bare all that to you it plain:  
the good, the vile, the saving act, the sin —  
As you respect our stature  
you grant us stature.  
This reaches us at last,  
this is our best  
solace — how different from the rest!  
human — nothing fake —  
this grapples with us, concedes what is at stake  
and gives us, not just responsibility,  
but strength with it, to withstand destiny's  
ultimate stroke, to bear  
even despair.

Thank you, thank you for this,  
thank you for strength that can resist  
even the darkest, worst.  
Here at last at rock-bottom, man can stand firm.  
Here, the exemplar of the few who seem  
burdened for all mankind, gives utterance  
to anguish, owes an intolerable duty  
to say the intolerable, and thus resolve it  
in beauty.  
This is the true response of the great soul,  
art's answer to existence, making us whole  
though it cost the torment of hell.

We have lived through such things —  
unutterable things —  
only Picasso's women with two noses  
and blue, six-footed horses  
can, soundless, scream  
or whinny in their nightmare galloping  
what we, just human creatures, here, have known.

No one can understand who has not borne it.  
 Unutterable things — thought cannot form it,  
 or speech reach down so far, eternally, utterly down,  
     nothing but music, music like yours,  
 Bartók, and yours, Kodály — music can pierce  
 this night, your music, music expansive and fierce  
 with the heat from the heart of the mineshaft — music endures,  
     in visions of things to come  
 when people will sing once more — music, the song  
     of this people, risen, reborn,  
 so liberating our souls that the very walls  
 of the prisons and camps are torn down,  
     so fervent in iconoclastic prayer  
     for our salvation, now, and here,  
     in sacrifice so savage, so insane  
 to salve us, that our wounds are stanch'd.  
 To listen and comprehend is to be exalted, entranced  
     with wonder, our souls are hurled  
 out of the shadows into a brighter world  
     of music, of music —

Work, work, good physician, who will not lull us to sleep,  
     whose healing fingers of song  
 touching our souls and probing deep  
     find what is wrong.  
 How blessed is this cure, how searchingly profound!  
     We are made whole  
 when the tempests of pain that batter and throng  
     in our mute, locked hearts  
 breaking over you wholly somehow, and sweeping along  
     the chords of your mightier heart  
     issue in song.

(*Gyula Illyés'* Ode to Bartók was written in the Autumn of 1955, at a time when Hungarian literature came under renewed pressure. Having seen its first 'thaw' under the régime of Imre Nagy, it was now gradually being forced once more into regimentation by Rákosi. Back in power, he personally took the lead in trying to subdue the writers and enforce 'Socialist realism.' At the tenth anniversary of Bartók's death ample lip service was paid to him throughout the country, while his music remained largely banned. Illyés came out with the Ode in an inconspicuous popular magazine, containing the weekly entertainment programmes of Budapest, 'Szinház és mozi' (Theatre and cinema). The effect on the public was tremendous. A few days after publication of the issue (some 60,000) the police on the quiet cleared the stalls of copies still on hand.)

# LE 22 JUIN 1941

*Négovan Rajic*

**L**E 22 JUIN 1941, à l'aube, l'Histoire se mua en une immense vague de fond qui, de la mer Noire au cercle polaire, déferla sur la plaine de Russie. Ce jour-là, elle faillit m'emporter dans un de ses innombrables et lointains ressacs.<sup>1</sup>

La guerre n'était pas un jeu pour adolescents à l'imagination fertile. J'aurais dû le comprendre dès le 6 avril, au petit matin, quand de sinistres oiseaux de feu survolèrent par vagues successives Belgrade, laissant derrière eux ruines et désolation. Trop fière pour pleurer, la *Ville Blanche* se drapa alors d'un nouveau voile de deuil.

Mais au lieu d'en tirer une leçon et de me tenir coi, je fus pris par le jeu de la guerre et de la mort. Six jours plus tard, dans une petite ville de province, il m'apparut particulièrement captivant. Durant douze heures, je regardai, en spectateur curieux et inconscient, *les nôtres* résister à l'assaut des blindés ennemis. Une image, en particulier, resta gravée dans ma mémoire : à la lueur du jour naissant, un de ces coléoptères d'acier tournait en rond, mortellement blessé. J'en conclusai, un peu à la légère : "Les vainqueurs ne sont point invincibles . . . un jour viendra où nous les bouterons dehors."

Tout compte fait, il y avait dans la guerre un côté au moins aussi passionnant que dans certaines abstractions auxquelles je rêvais de consacrer ma vie et puis, et puis ne pouvais-je pas, à la limite, concevoir la guerre comme un interlude entre l'adolescence et la vie d'homme ?

Pourtant, ce 22 juin 1941, avait débuté comme une journée ordinaire de l'occupation. Ceux qui disposaient d'un poste à ondes courtes avaient écouté, à 6 heures du matin, le premier bulletin de la BBC sur la longueur d'ondes de 31,32 mètres. Ces quatre coups de la cinquième symphonie de Beethoven, annonçant le début de l'émission, gonflaient d'espoir bien des hommes dans l'Europe occupée. Un peu plus tard, dès la fin du couvre-feu, les fonctionnaires et les ouvriers prirent le chemin des bureaux et des usines. À leur tour, vers neuf heures, les retraités et les vieux partirent à la chasse aux choux-raves.

Ce jour-là, je m'étais levé très tôt pour réviser, une dernière fois, mes leçons d'histoire. Des rois, des princes, morts depuis des lustres, des batailles perdues, des victoires, des sièges . . . Qui cela pouvait-il bien intéresser encore quand le vieux continent se défaisait devant nos yeux, quand l'Histoire grondait sous nos pieds et quand tout le monde luttait pour survivre ? Qui, mais à 8 heures je devais passer le dernier oral de mon baccalauréat. Après tout, la guerre ne pouvait pas durer

éternellement; un jour les universités allaient quand même finir par rouvrir leurs portes.

Ma tante, qui m'hébergeait chaque fois que je venais dans la capitale, logeait au premier étage du 42, rue Elie. Les frondaisons des tilleuls montaient jusqu'au minuscule balcon sur lequel elle nourrissait déjà les oiseaux. Songeant à ma dernière épreuve, elle me rassurait: "Tout se passera bien, tu verras."

Un peu songeur, je regardais la rangée des arbres qui, le long de la rue Elie, descendait jusqu'au Ministère du transport. En deux mois à peine, Belgrade avait tellement changé; ses habitants autant que ses rues. Une semaine auparavant, en revenant dans ma ville natale pour la première fois depuis le bombardement, je m'étais longuement attardé au croisement de l'avenue du Prince Analphabète et de la rue Elie, devant les murs calcinés de l'Académie militaire.

Dans l'enchevêtrement de poutres d'acier pendait l'aile brisée d'un avion frappée de la croix gammée. Quelques-uns des *leurs* avaient payé le prix de la victoire. Dans le sous-sol du bâtiment, la salle d'escrime semblait intacte. Par les fenêtres, au ras du trottoir, on pouvait voir encore les masques et les fleurets alignés le long d'un mur, comme si les escrimeurs venaient de sortir pour aller prendre une douche. Dans la salle où, deux mois auparavant, résonnaient le cliquetis des fers et les ordres brefs du maître d'armes, régnait, à présent, un mystérieux silence. Je songeais, avec une pointe de tristesse, au destin tragique de ces élèves-officiers, morts ou prisonniers. Ils ne reviendraient plus s'exercer aux arts martiaux.

Avant de partir pour l'examen, j'eus droit à un lait à la chicorée. Le café, introuvable dans les magasins, se vendait hors de prix au marché noir. Se procurer du lait tenait déjà d'une prouesse.

Dans la rue, une fine poussière blanche crissait sous mes pas. Depuis le bombardement d'avril, elle recouvrait la ville entière. Dans la Deligradska, devant l'ambassade des États-Unis, des déménageurs chargeaient des caisses dans un camion. Les Américains quittaient Belgrade. Tout le monde savait que bientôt l'Amérique entrerait en guerre. Ces employés d'ambassade qui surveillaient les caisses et parlaient une langue étrangère faisaient partie d'un monde presque irréel. Dans une semaine ou deux, ils allaient être de l'autre côté de l'Atlantique, dans de grandes villes aux noms de rêve: Washington, New York, Philadelphie, déambulant dans les avenues inondées de lumières et d'enseignes clignotantes. J'imaginais les noctambules sortant des théâtres et des cinémas de Broadway, libres d'aller où le coeur leur disait, les gens achetant à volonté café, sucre ou n'importe quoi. Dans ce monde, encore loin de la guerre, les étudiants pouvaient étudier, les professeurs enseigner. Le plus curieux, ces gens croyaient que tout cela n'avait rien d'extraordinaire. À Belgrade, nous étions pris au piège, avec les magasins vides, le couvre-feu, la ville plongée la nuit dans l'obscurité, les facultés fermées et les murs placardés de listes d'otages et signées par le *Oberbefehlshaber für Serbien*.

Pourquoi ces Américains avaient-ils plus de chance que nous? À cause du hasard

d'un lieu de naissance ou d'un passeport? . . . Par quel hasard du destin ou par quelle malchance mes ancêtres avaient-ils choisi de vivre sur cette terre basse de l'Histoire où le flux et le reflux des invasions nous condamnaient à recommencer perpétuellement l'oeuvre déjà si fragile de l'homme?

Place de Slavia, j'attendis le tramway sous un soleil brûlant, malgré l'heure matinale. J'aurais préféré aller aux bains des *Sept Peupliers*, comme je le faisais autrefois, pendant les dernières semaines de l'année scolaire. De toute façon, il s'agissait d'un voeu illusoire; les baignades dans la Sava étaient interdites par ordre des autorités sanitaires. On craignait des épidémies. Sur le fleuve naviguaient lentement d'étranges outres: des cadavres gonflés d'hommes, de femmes et d'enfants. Certains portaient sur eux des inscriptions dans le genre de: nos meilleures salutations . . . bon voyage de retour . . . Comment cela était-il possible au milieu du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle, dans un pays qui depuis mille ans se réclamait du Nazaréen?

Je pensais à ces malheureux et à la lugubre prophétie dont mon père m'avait souvent parlé. Quelque quatre-vingts ans auparavant, à Uzice, sa ville natale, un jour de marché, au milieu d'une foule bigarrée, un vieux paysan descendu de la montagne s'était écrié: "Mes frères, les temps viendront où les vivants envieront les morts et leur demanderont de se lever afin qu'ils puissent se coucher dans leurs tombes." Je me demandais si ce temps n'était pas venu?

UN TRAMWAY BRINGUEBALANT interrompit mes sombres pensées. Sur la plate-forme avant, réservée aux troupes d'occupation, plusieurs soldats ennemis riaient avec une bonne humeur matinale. Je remarquai la vétusté des wagons. Les nouveaux avaient disparu de la circulation. Ils roulaient maintenant, s'il fallait en croire les rumeurs, dans une des villes de nos vainqueurs. Personnellement, cela ne me dérangeait pas. J'avais un faible pour ces vieux wagons sentant le cambouis et le bois.

Je descendis devant l'ancien Palais royal, gravement endommagé par une bombe. Les débris de l'immense coupole noire gisaient encore sur le parterre de fleurs. Par la brèche béante de la façade écroulée, on pouvait voir la grande salle de bal. Du plafond, aux moulures dorées, pendaient les carcasses des lustres. En octobre 1934, tous les lycéens de la capitale avaient défilé dans cette salle, devant le catafalque du roi Alexandre I<sup>er</sup> assassiné à Marseille. Je me souvenais encore de son visage de cire. Bien des années auparavant, un matin d'août 1903, gisaient devant ce même palais les cadavres défenestrés du dernier roi de la dynastie Obrenovitch et de son épouse morganatique Draga Machine. Comme pour faire oublier ces tragiques souvenirs, l'orchestre de la garde royale jouait, jadis, certains dimanches d'été, des marches militaires et des ouvertures d'opéras dans les jardins du Palais royal.

Je pris les escaliers qui, entre la banque d'Amérique et l'ancienne ambassade de

Russie, descendaient vers le Deuxième Lycée de jeunes filles, un des rares à ne pas être réquisitionné par les troupes d'occupation. Dans le couloir du premier, mes camarades de classe attendaient dans le brouhaha habituel. Ils étaient tous là : Janot Lapin, Abbas, Blanchot, Milenko, Frantz . . . Seul Moché manquait. On le disait réfugié en Italie avec toute sa famille.

D'un instant à l'autre, la commission d'examen allait commencer à appeler, par ordre alphabétique, les candidats. Tout le monde avait envie d'en finir avec ce baccalauréat, les professeurs autant que les futurs bacheliers. Personne n'enviasageait l'idée d'un échec. Nos professeurs, assez sévères dans d'autres circonstances, semblaient enclins à la mansuétude. Sans doute, avaient-ils présent à l'esprit le destin tragique de ces 1200 caporaux serbes, tous étudiants, qui en 1914 partirent pour la guerre et dont seulement une poignée revint. Aux yeux de nos maîtres, nous portions déjà les stigmates d'une génération sacrifiée.

L'oral prenait maintenant l'allure d'une formalité. Les candidats tiraient leurs questions, réfléchissaient quelques minutes puis se mettaient à débiter la réponse. "Ça va ! . . . ça va ! . . . vous pouvez sortir . . . au suivant."

Je tombai sur *le roi Milutin et son temps*. À peine avais-je commencé, qu'on m'arrêta, presque aussitôt. "Très bien ! vous pouvez disposer." Je quittai la salle bachelier frais émoulu. Déjà un autre candidat entrait.

Dans le couloir régnait une agitation inhabituelle. Ce n'était pas le joyeux brouhaha de potaches sortant d'un examen. Non ! l'oral n'intéressait plus personne. Il y avait autre chose. Mais quoi ? Parlez-en, nom d'une pipe !

— Comment ? Tu ne sais pas encore ? C'est la guerre ! mon vieux ! . . . une nouvelle et, cette fois, ça va barder ! Du cercle polaire à la mer Noire, les Allemands et leurs alliés viennent de franchir les frontières de l'Union Soviétique. Ah ! mais cette fois, les Boches vont tomber sur un os . . .

L'énorme machine de guerre, l'orgueil d'un peuple de forgerons, s'était mise en branle. Le Führer ne voulait pas qu'elle reste trop longtemps au repos. Elle risquait de se rouiller. D'après les premières nouvelles, elle broyait déjà les champs de blé sans fin de la Biélorussie.

J'avais peine à le croire ! Le pacte Molotov-Ribbentrop semblait tenir à merveille au bénéfice mutuel du Troisième Reich et de l'Union Soviétique. D'après une de ses clauses secrètes, la Pologne avait été partagés en septembre 1939, sinon fraternellement, du moins comme il convenait entre puissances qui se respectent. Le Grand Moustachu avait dit et redit que l'Union Soviétique ne tirerait pas les marrons du feu pour les capitalistes. Autrement dit, l'Union Soviétique était décidée à rester à l'écart de la guerre à l'Ouest. Mon lointain parent Ephrème, vieux conspirateur, écoutait chaque nuit radio-Moscou. Maintes fois, il nous avait prévenu : "Les classes laborieuses n'avaient rien à gagner dans ce règlement de compte entre capitalistes." D'ailleurs, d'après lui, tout se passait exactement comme le Grand Barbu l'avait prédit quelque soixante-dix ans auparavant. Tout ou presque

tout car voilà qu'avec le temps le conflit était devenu plus complexe et la guerre en quelque sorte triangulaire : chaque bloc espérant voir les deux autres s'épusier dans un combat à deux.

Ah ! la nouvelle me paraissait autrement plus importante que le *Roi Milutin et son temps* ou la vie d'Hélène d'Anjou venue, il y a des siècles, de *la douceur angevine* pour épouser un prince serbe.

La conscience de vivre un moment exceptionnel de l'Histoire me rendit téméraire. Je retournai dans la salle d'examen afin d'annoncer la nouvelle aux membres de la commission. Alec, notre professeur d'histoire, avec son air faussement bourru écoutait un candidat. Je lui chuchotai la dernière nouvelle. Il bondit. Il voulait savoir s'il ne s'agissait pas d'une de ces fausses rumeurs qui, comme les tentacules d'une pieuvre, se propageaient dans toute la ville depuis l'armistice.

Et si je lui avais raconté un bobard ? Si j'avais dérangé pour rien tous ces messieurs respectables ? Heureusement, il n'en était rien. D'une minute à l'autre, les nouveaux arrivants confirmaient ce qui d'abord nous paraissait invraisemblable et inimaginable.

Déjà, les discussions passionnées allaient bon train. Ceux qui jusqu'à hier dénonçaient la guerre comme impérialiste soudainement lui conféraient des lettres de noblesse. La nouvelle donne mettait à jour la mémoire du passé. La guerre honnie se muait soudainement en guerre patriotique. Alors certaines consciences se mirent à basculer.

Au fond, j'étais content. Bien avant cette nouvelle, nous étions quelques têtes brûlées à rêver de la résistance. Maintenant, plus rien ne nous séparait de nos camarades qui, jusqu'à hier, nous considéraient comme des blancs-becs excités.

**M**AIS QUE FAIRE ? Nous n'avions pas d'armes. Comment s'organiser ? Qui croire ? Alors Gabriel me chuchota discrètement : "J'ai un paquet de cartes d'état-major chez un de mes oncles. Ça pourrait toujours servir. Si cela t'intéresse, il te faudrait venir les chercher à Zemlin . . . aujourd'hui même car ce soir je rentre chez moi." J'acceptai sur le champ. De paroles, j'en avais assez. Il me fallait tremper dans l'action, quitter l'adolescence, faire l'apprentissage du danger, de la mort. Pourquoi pas ? Ce n'est qu'à ce prix qu'on devient un homme.

Oui, j'étais décidé : au début de l'après-midi, je prendrais le bac qui fait la navette entre Belgrade et Zemlin et à deux heures je serais chez Gabriel. Dans l'excitation, j'oubliai mon baccalauréat. D'ailleurs, pour l'instant, il ne me servait pas à grand-chose. L'université était fermée par ordre de l'occupant. De la faculté de philosophie il ne restait que des ruines calcinées et la faculté technique était transformée en *Kriegslazaret*.

Je courus rue Elie. Ma tante était encore au Ministère du transport. J'avalai un morceau de pain de maïs, m'emparai de la serviette noire et me précipitai vers

le port. À peine eus-je traversé la passarelle que les mariniers la retirèrent. Une minute plus tard, le bateau à aubes se détachait de l'embarcadère dans le bouillonnement des flots verdâtres. La sirène poussa un long mugissement plaintif et le bac haletant se dirigea vers l'autre rive dans le clapotis des pales.

De la Sava pointaient, comme la carcasse d'un monstre préhistorique, les structures de l'ancien pont suspendu, autrefois orgueil de la capitale. Avant sa destruction, dans les tout premiers jours de la guerre, il reliait Belgrade avec la banlieue de Zemlin. Maintenant, le bac restait le seul lien entre les deux villes.

Un moment, j'admirai, par les écoutilles de la salle des machines, la puissante bielle se colletait avec les pistons géants, puis je m'installai sur le pont. L'image de la ville avec ses toits, son clocher de la cathédrale orthodoxe et son ciel bleu, un vrai chromo, commença à rapetisser.

À vrai dire, j'étais content de faire cette promenade sur l'eau. Il faisait beau. La veille forteresse de Kalimegdan, fondée par les Romains, cinquante ans avant la naissance du Christ, au confluent de la Sava et du Danube m'impressionnait toujours. Je l'imaginais comme un puissant vaisseau naviguant à travers vingt siècles d'histoire. Tout me rappelait les excursions d'avant la guerre quand avec notre professeur Kosta, certains dimanches après-midi, nous allions à Zemlin, déguster des gâteaux viennois dans des pâtisseries au charme désuet.

Le quai d'embarquement à Belgrade se trouvait sur le Sava tandis qu'à Zemlin on débarquait au bord du Danube. À chaque traversée le petit bateau devait donc passer des eaux de la Sava à celles du Danube et inversement au retour.

Cette ligne, sur laquelle les deux puissants cours d'eau se rencontraient, me fascinait depuis mon enfance. On pouvait clairement distinguer les flots de la Sava, habituellement plus verts, des eaux troubles du Danube. En approchant j'avais toujours une petite appréhension, comme si je craignais qu'une sorte de maelström puisse aspirer le petit bateau à aubes, précisément au moment où il traversait cette ligne mystérieuse. Bien sûr, il ne se passait rien. Le bâtiment tressaillait légèrement dans le remous et sous la quille les deux eaux bouillonnaient, se mêlaient, comme les tresses de deux naïades qui à partir de cet instant continuaient, tendrement unies leur route vers le défilé de la Porte de Fer et la Mer Noire.

Au débarquement de Zemlin, j'eus pour la première fois la désagréable impression de pénétrer dans un monde étrange, franchement inamical. On ne savait pas très bien à qui appartenait la ville. À l'Etat Croate Indépendant, nouvellement proclamé ou à une sorte de protectorat de la puissance occupante? Et à quelle armée appartenaient ces hommes en noir portant un mauser en bandoulière? Les uniformes — visiblement ceux de l'ancienne armée yougoslave — étaient tout simplement tients. S'agissait-il de SS, comme on aurait pu le croire d'après la tête de mort sur leurs callots, ou d'Ustachis? Personne n'aurait pu le dire. Je ne savais pas et je n'avais nulle envie de poser la question à ces hommes qui visiblement n'avaient pas envie de plaisanter.

La rue du Dragon se trouvait tout près de l'embarcadère. Je m'arrêtai devant la porte du numéro 19. Je sonnai. Gabriel m'ouvrit. Il m'attendait. Un long escalier droit montait au premier. Les cartes d'état-major m'attendaient sur un guéridon. Elles appartenaient à l'un de ses parents, un officier de réserve. Nous échangeâmes debout quelques propos sur la guerre. Nous ne doutions point qu'un jour le Führer serait battu. Je pris congé un peu après deux heures.

En ouvrant la porte, je me heurtai à un véritable mur de chaleur. Dans la rue du Dragon, il n'y avait pas âme qui vive. En débouchant sur le quai, j'eus la mauvaise surprise de voir, à une trentaine de pas devant moi, les hommes en noir fouiller les cabas des voyageurs qui montaient sur le bac. Ma première pensée fut de rebrousser chemin, mais paralysé par la peur, je continuai d'avancer. Hélas! plus j'avancais, moins j'avais de chance de revenir en arrière sans me faire repérer. Ma serviette, bourrée de cartes d'état-major, me brûlait la paume, se transformait en un boulet de bagnard. Comment me débarrasser de lui? Il n'y avait rien à faire. Il était soudé à mon poignet gauche.

Je me voyais déjà mourir bêtement devant un peleton d'exécution, le jour même où je venais de décrocher mon diplôme de baccalauréat et deux jours avant mon 18<sup>e</sup> anniversaire. Et pourquoi s'il vous plaît? Pour rien! Pour avoir voulu jouer au brave! Quel imbécile!

Les secondes s'allongèrent démesurement. Figé par la peur, mon cerveau avait cessé de fonctionner. Semblable à un de ces jouets mécaniques en tôle qu'on offre aux enfants, je continuais d'avancer vers le bac.

Que faire? Que faire? Qui pouvait m'aider? Face à un grand malheur, nous retombons dans la lointaine enfance quand, effrayé par un petit chien inoffensif, nous courions nous blottir contre la jupe de notre mère. Mais à présent j'étais seul. À qui demander de l'aide? Devant qui implorer grâce? À Dieu? mais au moment où des millions d'hommes tombaient fauchés comme les blés à l'Est et dans les sables de l'Afrique du Nord, Il devait certainement avoir d'autres chats à fouetter que de s'occuper d'un jeune écerelé qui voulait jouer au héros.

Alors, au creux du désespoir, un premier miracle se produisit: mon cerveau se remit en marche. Avec rage, sans désespérer, il examinait, calculait, trillait, rejetait des solutions farfelues pour en envisager de nouvelles. Tout cela pour sauver ma peau et, d'une certaine façon, la sienne.

Ce n'était pas la première fois. Déjà, à certains examens de mathématiques, il arrivait qu'il se démenait soudain pour trouver des solutions qui, après coup, me laissaient pantois et que de toute façon je n'aurais jamais été capable d'imaginer dans la somnolence de la salle d'étude. Cette fois-ci le problème ne portait pas sur le carré des hypoténuses. Il s'agissait d'être ou de ne pas être. Alors, au bout de cette activité fiévreuse, il se produisit un second miracle: mon cerveau me proposa une solution *imbécile*, d'une simplicité enfantine.

Ces hommes en noir croyaient appartenir à la race des seigneurs. Ils n'avaient

que du mépris pour les chétifs, les infirmes et les laissés-pour-compte de la nature. Cette conviction les rassurait, les renforçait dans l'idée d'être des surhommes. Il suffisait donc de se déguiser sous le masque d'un débile, à la lippe baveuse, au regard vide, de traîner piteusement une jambe, pour devenir un intouchable. Simuler l'idiotie, était probablement mon unique et dernière carte.

Heureusement, j'avais quelques prédispositions pour l'art dramatique. Au lycée, j'avais joué dans plusieurs pièces. En classe, en attendant l'entrée d'un professeur, il m'arrivait de parodier les discours déments du Führer ou du Duce. Les copains toujours prêts à faire le chahut, hurlaient Sieg Heil! . . . Sieg Heil! ou Duce! . . . Duce! Mais j'excellais surtout dans le rôle du vagabond débile, injustement accusé de meurtre, dans le film *La bête humaine* de Jean Renoir. Mais cette fois, il s'agissait de jouer un *Untermensch*, et ce n'était pas pour amuser la galerie. En cas d'échec, j'avais toutes les chances de me transformer en un de ces macchabées qui descendaient lentement la Sava, implorant une sépulture décente.

Déjà, je marchais traînant ma jambe gauche, le visage figé sous le masque d'un abruti. Chaque pas me rapprochait davantage du cerbère avec son mauser en bandoulière. L'épreuve s'avérait infiniment plus difficile que l'examen d'histoire. À chaque pas, la chamade de mon cœur semblait atteindre le seuil du supportable. Il me fallait aussi une force surhumaine pour garder intact mon masque.

Enfin, j'étais devant l'homme en uniforme noir. J'attendis docilement qu'il finisse d'inspecter le cabas d'une vieille puis je me présentai devant lui avec mon regard de bête battue. En m'apercevant, il recula légèrement, comme s'il venait de découvrir un visage ravagé par la lèpre. Ce mouvement, à peine perceptible, ce regard rempli de dégoût, quel meilleur hommage pouvait-il rendre à mon talent d'acteur dramatique?

*Gehma, gehma schnell! . . . Schnell!*

Oh! il n'avait nulle envie de fouiller la serviette d'une épave humaine ni de toucher le moindre objet lui appartenant. Tout ce qu'il voulait: ne plus me voir. Je ne désirais pas autre chose.

Je passai! Sauvé! Il était temps de me débarrasser de mon masque! Les muscles figés de mon visage commençaient à se crispier dans un rictus douloureux. Une dizaine de secondes de plus et j'aurais éclaté en sanglots. Le dos tourné au cerbère, j'avançais sur la passerelle aux lattes transversales, traînant ma jambe, mais rentrant peu à peu en possession de mon visage.

**E**NTRE L'EMBARCADÈRE ET LE BAC coulaient lentement les flots troubles du Danube. Sur le pont, attendant le départ, les voyageurs s'installaient sur les bancs. Je contournai la passerelle du capitaine, m'installai face au large. Au loin, de l'autre côté du fleuve se profilait la terre basse de *L'île de Guerre*

avec sa végétation rabougrie, sese buissons pleins de mûres. Le soleil était encore très haut, mais un petit zéphyr agréable glissait sur les flots. N'eût-ce été la présence des hommes en noir et de leur tête de mort sur le calot, on se serait imaginé un dimanche après-midi d'avant-guerre, quand les promeneurs prenaient le bac pour le plaisir d'une excursion sur l'eau. Enfin, je pouvais souffler, retrouver avec joie mon vrai visage.

Un vieux monsieur, avec une étoile jaune sur le revers, vint s'asseoir à côté de moi. Il me sourit timidement. Nous échangeâmes quelques propos anodins, mais déjà complices. Je lui demandai s'il était au courant de la nouvelle du jour. Oui, il l'avait entendue le matin. Je lui parlais de ma ferme conviction que les armées du Troisième Reich finiraient, comme la Grande Armée, en s'enlisant dans l'immensité de la terre russe. Il partageait mes vues, mais il souriait avec tristesse. Il devait se dire : peut-être, mais pour moi et les miens la victoire viendra trop tard.

Son étoile jaune me rendait mal à l'aise. À cause de ma joie inavouable de ne pas la porter ? Peut-être. Nous, autres, qui ne l'arborions pas, nous étions coincés entre la honte et la peur. J'eus envie de lui dire ce que je transportais dans ma serviette, mais je me rendis compte à quel point cela aurait été puéril. Je me tus. Le vieux monsieur aussi. Nous partageâmes le silence jusqu'à la fin de la traversée.

Enfin, quelque chose de puissant remua dans les entrailles du bateau et, dans le bouillonnement des roues à aubes, le bac se mit à s'éloigner des berges. Nous mîmes le cap sur la vieille forteresse de Kalimegdan. Cette fois, le chromo se mit à grandir.

Je pensais à ces légionnaires romains qui, vingt siècles auparavant, bâtissaient ici, sur les marches de l'Empire, la forteresse de Singidunum. Depuis ce temps-là, combien de convoitises n'avait-elle pas suscité ? Combien de sièges n'avait-elle pas soutenus ? Des barbares, des Huns, des Slaves, des Autrichiens et des Turcs l'avaient occupé tour à tour. Pendant presque quatre siècles, le drapeau frappé du croissant avait flotté sur ses remparts et il n'y avait même pas cent ans depuis que le rouge, bleu et blanc du royaume de Serbie l'avaient remplacé.

Je ne sais pas exactement pourquoi, mais je pensais aux hommes assoiffés de pouvoir, rêvant de fonder des empires millénaires. Il me semblait que, l'oeil fixé sur un avenir hypothétique, ils se débattaient désespérément dans le présent. Je me suis demandé si la vie des humbles ne serait pas plus douce et plus sereine si les puissants de ce monde pouvaient s'arracher, ne serait-ce qu'un instant, à l'étreinte sinistre du présent pour méditer sur le passé ? Mais le pouvoir n'est-il pas la passion suprême de l'homme ?

Instruit par l'expérience, je pris mes précautions au débarquement de Belgrade. Je laissai les autres voyageurs s'engager sur la passerelle pour voir ce qui se passait. Il n'y avait pas de contrôle. En cas de fouille, j'avais décidé de me débarrasser des cartes dans les toilettes du bateau.

Dix minutes plus tard, je remontais la rue Brankova. Milenko, mon vieux complice, m'attendait. C'est lui qui devait faire parvenir les cartes à la résistance. *Place*

de la Bascule régnait une effervescence inhabituelle. Les colporteurs ne savaient pas où donner de la tête. Les gens s'arrachaient l'édition spéciale du *Novo Vreme* annonçant les premières victoires de la Wehrmacht. Tout le monde sentait inconsciemment que la guerre prenait une nouvelle tournure et que, pour les décennies à venir, notre destin dépendrait de son issue.

Je traversai la *Place de la Bascule*, content d'avoir berné ces pauvres bougres qui se prenaient pour des surhommes, mais j'avais tort de me réjouir trop tôt.

En quittant la place, je m'engageai dans la rue du *Roi Alexandre I<sup>er</sup>*. Juste en face du tribunal de première instance, se trouvait un restaurant d'aspect assez modeste, mais réputé auprès des gourmets de la capitale. Au moment précis où je me trouvais à quelques pas de son entrée, la porte s'ouvrit et un soldat en feldgrau, visage et uniforme ensanglantés, dégringola plus qu'il n'en descendit les trois ou quatre marches. Deux brutes le suivaient en le frappant sauvagement à la tête.

Visiblement, la nouvelle de la guerre contre l'Union Soviétique avait dû semer la zizanie chez l'occupant. Certains soldats ennemis commençaient probablement à douter de la victoire finale. J'avais dû esquisser imprudemment un sourire de joie, car un des deux énergumènes se précipita vers moi levant son poing et hurlant : "*Willst du auch?*"

Je pris peur. Par chance, l'homme n'insista pas. Visiblement, les soldats ennemis avaient ce jour-là les nerfs à fleur de peau.

Vingt minutes plus tard, j'entrai dans la cour de 24 rue Galsworthy. Je surpris Milenko en train d'écouter la *Danse macabre* de Camille Saint-Saëns. Le vieux gramophone répandait des sons déroutants. Milenko prétendait entendre distinctement dans cette musique le bruit des squelettes dansants. Je finis par y croire. Comme d'habitude, le temps passa vite en discussions sur tous les sujets imaginables et quand je m'avisai de partir, il restait moins d'une demi-heure jusqu'au couvre-feu de huit heures.

Je pressais le pas, afin d'arriver rue Elie avant huit heures. Bien qu'il fût encore jour, les rues se vidaient des derniers passants. Mes pas résonnaient dans une ville déserte. En passant à côté de l'ancienne ambassade de la Hongrie, je fus frappé par la végétation qui commençait déjà à envahir les ruines.

En marchant, je n'arrêtais pas de penser et repenser à la fragilité des constructions humaines et aux événements du jour. Un doute me gagnait aussi. Au lycée, j'avais souvent rêvé d'une vie rangée, auprès d'une femme douce et aimante, une vie remplie par le travail et les amitiés, loin du tumulte. Ce rêve me semblait maintenant comme un songe. Pour la première fois, ce jour-là, l'existence m'apparut comme une longue errance.

Enfin, éreinté, l'estomac vide, je montai les sombres escaliers du 42 de la rue Elie. Malgré la chaleur, je me sentais fiévreux. L'image de la tête de mort, avec ses tibias, sur le calot de l'homme en noir, ne me quittait pas. Une autre chose me

travaillait : n'avais-je pas commis un sacrilège en me présentant, devant le cèrbière, avec mon visage dénaturé?

Une rude journée s'achevait. Heureusement, dans quelques jours j'allais regagner Uzice, la petite ville perdue dans les montagnes.

Pendant que nous partagions un maigre repas, ma tante se réjouissait de me voir enfin bachelier : "Tu vois, tout s'est bien passé."

Elle ne croyait pas si bien dire; j'avais mon baccalauréat dans la poche et ma tête sur les épaules. Ce n'était déjà pas si mal pour ce mémorable 22 juin 1941, quand l'Histoire se mua en une immense vague de fond qui faillit m'emporter dans un de ses innombrables et lointains ressacs. Je servécus. Par hasard ou par miracle?

DANS TROIS ANS, un demi-siècle aura passé depuis ce jour où mes camarades de classe et moi avions passé l'oral du baccalauréat. Plusieurs ont disparu dans le tumulte de la guerre. Le temps aussi a fait son oeuvre. Récemment j'ai appris la mort d'Abbas et de Blanchot qui, chacun à sa façon, étaient des hommes remarquables. Milenko est resté fidèle à la grande passion de son adolescence : les sciences exactes. Jeannot Lapin est directeur d'une centrale thermique. Gabriel est devenu un personnage important et quelque peu distant. Une fois l'an, les survivants se réunissent chez Frantz, devenu pharmacien, pour évoquer les souvenirs de leur jeunesse. Ma tante s'est éteinte doucement, il y a une vingtaine d'années, sans que j'aie pu la voir encore une fois. Au premier étage du 42 de la rue Elie habitent maintenant des inconnus. Cela n'a évidemment rien d'extraordinaire. C'est dans l'ordre des choses . . . tout passe !

Quant à moi, voilà déjà quatre décennies que j'ai quitté le pays pour vivre à l'autre bout du monde dans une ville tranquille au bord d'un grand fleuve qui me rappelle Danube. Là, entouré d'une petite famille et de quelques amis je ne cesse de creuser le passé, cherchant désespérément à lui donner un sens.

Je n'ai jamais su, je ne saurai jamais si ces cartes d'état-major ont servi à la résistance. Cependant, une chose est certaine : en ce lointain jour du 22 juin 1941, j'avais pris trop de risques pour un acte dérisoire. Je n'en garde pas moins une petite fierté : en ces temps troubles, je n'avais pas été de ceux qui se terraient lâchement.

15 juin 1988

#### NOTE

<sup>1</sup> L'origine du texte a été publiée dans N. Rajic, *Service pénitentiaire national* (Montréal : Les Éditions du Beffroi, 1988).

# NOT GOD'S ORDER

*Rhea Tregebov*

*For Harley Ayearst,  
February 1987 – October 1987*

What my father was building in the basement,  
afternoons held in by the smell of sawdust,  
the sound of hammering: our lives.  
How you do it, build ordinary;  
a day and then another, solid, touchable.  
How we knew our lives, their beginning, continuing:  
cold sunlight through the lightwell glazing the wood.  
How we survived.

How we survived and believed  
there was a reason for things,  
a good man good with his hands  
could anchor the small lives he fathered;  
never believing we survived  
not God's order  
but the discrete,  
idiosyncratic order of crystals.



The small day stops.  
No fragment of wind, no leaf, no feather.  
Sparrows on the weathered fence, the giant,  
healing machines, gravel still in the driveway.

The sky is blue and cold  
so each feels winter rising  
like a future in its brilliant bones.

Not one bird, no pebble, none  
I look down on from the bay window know  
the small life.

\*\*\*

There is a moment she is neither alive nor dead.

There is a moment we live in  
between moments to hold her.



Infinitely helpless, confident, parents,  
we bring these small strong faces to light;  
development — like prints in the chemical, amniotic bath,  
the features emerge from the empty.  
We give life knowing and denying we give also death,  
but *not here, not now*.  
Pray for ordinary! — and sound  
of the two-year-old landing at the bottom of the stairs  
crying and afraid and alive.



What is left of the family continues ordinary  
around the edges of Monday, absence, Friday, absence,  
Wednesday, absence, absence, absence.  
Who love the way you held a snatch of cloth over your face  
as if the world of your sleep were too beautiful,  
too powerful. Who love the way you lived for almost eight months.  
Whose love did everything it could.



My father still in the basement, still resolutely building  
not God's order but our new house. "Cheers,"  
says the two-year-old, whose face I don't have to imagine,  
over his juice. I take ordinary every morning,  
drain the cup.



# ATTENDING SUZANNE'S FUNERAL

*Irving Layton*

I just can't take it in  
that what I'm looking at  
    is your cadaver,  
recalling your abundant health  
and glistening eyes avid for more life,  
the strong sensitive fingers  
    that probed for tubers  
in the frozen Siberian ground.

This late afternoon  
it's cold comfort  
    to tell myself  
you always enjoyed a good laugh  
and now may be sleeping off  
the genial cups of wine  
you shared last night with a friend  
solitary as yourself  
in London, Ont.,  
    pulling a long face  
only to give Death back  
some of his own gloom.

With so much dignity in your mein  
and a touch of your mother's primness,  
it's plain you want to go on  
treating that boor  
as though he were  
one more interrogator,  
one more Soviet flunky  
    eliciting as always  
your absolute silence  
your tightlipped disdain  
for his peasant gaucheness  
as you snap, my dauntless Suzanne,  
this last chain of illusion  
    and break away  
finally and forever free.

## SUMMER

*Charles Rea*

is the bird-mirror  
of your desire and

mine; departs with  
beating wings muffled

by inevitable music  
as dry yellow leaves

sing their swan's song  
of memory.

## RASPOLOZENJE

*Marya Fiamengo*

"I cannot live without history."  
*R. A. D. Ford*

To live without history  
is to nurture a fool's dream  
of oblivion. Follow a faithless  
heraldry. Run after rain with  
a sieve. Escape into deserts of stone.

Apples catch fire and frost  
glitters on the rowan berries. The river  
frets and the tides retreat. What  
holds us clear and luminous  
in the present? Breathing? Devotion  
to being? For answer the world  
turns. Flowers seed under the earth.

On certain damp and mist chill  
days when the sky is wet Vancouver  
grey, blank and featureless as fog,  
I recall light in the square.

I remember courtesy. August  
 in Sarajevo. Partisan soldiers  
 who direct me to the museum of  
 state and history. I witness patience  
 for halting accents, broken speech mended  
 in the hills of Bosnia.

Acknowledged mountain freshness. The feel  
 of cold clean water. Observe  
 resemblances. Kindred. Topography  
 left behind in another climate. Doukhobours  
 folded like linen handkerchiefs in the  
 pockets of Kootenay valleys.

## II

It steals over me. A mood  
 of the soul. Raspoloženje. I lean  
 on it like the lame lean on a strong  
 stick. Bosnia. Scented ambiance  
 of bazaars. Difficult dialects.

Old men bent over silver designs.  
 Sinister Turkish tracing. Patterns  
 of oppression. Teutonic outrage.  
 Defiance. Germane assassinations.

Raspoloženje:  
 childhood in maternal attics  
 paternal voices mutter, "Mirna  
 Bosna." To remedy a mad world  
 peace in Bosnia.

Sloboda. Potreba.  
 Freedom as necessity. Fathomless  
 longing. Justice. Crystal pain  
 in slavic longitudes.

Ancestral demography. A thirst  
 quenched on the sweet acids of  
 lemon, We move from substance  
 into silence. Music of vivid  
 voices. History the murmur  
 which remains.

III

Improbable the juxtaposition of place.  
Paradigm of significance. Obscure  
in a grassy side lane pointed toward  
the Juan de Fuca Strait. A stalwart  
edifice to faith. The church.

Small, Blue-domed. Russian.  
White-washed walls. Orthodox.  
Once a garage. Now gardened.  
The Czarist flag flies beside  
the Union Jack. Ikons of empire  
in decline.

In the dusty cemeteries  
of Bosnia stubborn graves. Bogumel.  
These Christian heretics compete  
with the bayonet dazzle  
of Minarets: Begava Dzamije.

Above the pointed poplars circular  
the kestrel hawk flies. Swallows  
stammer in the pointed aspens. A bell  
chimes.

Serenely temporal the Russian  
church dreams. Becalmed by  
the western sea. A window  
on sorrow.

Raspoloženje. Resonances  
of geography merging into  
mythology. History.  
Making of summer's fire  
and winter's indelible ice  
an element true  
as air, older  
than desire.



# "WHERE IS MY HOME?"

## *Some Notes on Reading Josef Skvorecky in "Amerika"*

Sam Solecki

1. TRANSLATION, in one form or another, has always been an issue in the reading of Josef Skvorecky's fiction. Because of his nearly life-long fascination with jazz, Hollywood films, and American literature, his writing has been marked from the start by the English language and the Anglo-American cultural tradition to the point that it is tempting to see the work of his Czech period (1945-1969) as pointing West, and that of his exile (1969-1988) as written with one eye on the anticipated English translation. In a manner of speaking, Anglo-American culture is the tacit sub-text of his novels when they are published in Czech, while Czech culture is the sub-text of the translations. In both cases, we have fiction oscillating between two languages and two cultural traditions to the point that doubleness can be said to be a constitutive element in Skvorecky's vision: East/West; Czechoslovakia/America; Czech/English; socialist realism/Hemingwayan realism; politics/jazz; Marxism/Catholicism and so on.<sup>1</sup>



2. THE COWARDS (*Zbabelci*, 1958, 1970)<sup>2</sup> Skvorecky's first novel, anticipates the presence in later work — *Miss Silver's Past*, *Miracle*, and *The Engineer of Human Souls* — of intertextual material drawn primarily from sources other than contemporary Czech or even European ones. Similarly the novel's formal, stylistic, and thematic assumptions, including its choice of Skvorecky's version of Hemingwayan realism over socialist realism as well as its modernist mix of formal and demotic Czech (*spisovna cestina* as opposed to *obecna* or *hovorova cestina*),<sup>3</sup> all point west. At a time when most Czech and Slovak novels were cautious weathervanes turned east, Skvorecky's remarkably mature first novel — written in 1948 at the age of 24 though published a decade later — already indicated an opposed set of linguistic

and cultural preferences, a choice not without political implications. Milan Kundera emphasized this “American” aspect of Skvorecky’s career when he told an interviewer that

Skvorecky is an author who was oriented towards America. . . . Skvorecky is one of those who were fascinated by American literature due to, I believe jazz itself. He was a jazz musician as a young man and therefore from an early age an Americanist. He has done marvelously good translations of William Faulkner. So Skvorecky’s personal originality, for a Czech, is that he is a connoisseur of American literature.<sup>4</sup>

In other words, if Skvorecky is now a Czech presence in Anglo-American culture, before 1968 he was perceived as an “Americanist” in Czechoslovakia.



3. SKVORECKY’S semi-autobiographical hero, Danny Smiricky, is as apolitical as Huck Finn, Frederic Henry, or Holden Caulfield, and *The Cowards’* melancholy ending reflects his essential lack of interest in the momentous historical events taking place around him.

Still, a novel can be political even if its hero is uninterested in politics and if political and ideological discussions do not figure explicitly in it. The category is an elastic one and can include works as different as Alfred Döblin’s *November 1917*, Arthur Koestler’s *Darkness at Noon*, and George Orwell’s *1984* at one end — the more explicitly political — and Twain’s *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and Skvorecky’s *The Cowards* at the other. The last two raise questions of a political nature even while seeming not to be directly engaged in political ideas and issues or, perhaps more accurately, while leaving one with the impression that their protagonists don’t consider political concerns to be especially important. Political judgments in these novels are usually generated ironically when the reader perceives the gap between the quality of the response of the adolescent apolitical hero, on the one hand, and the implied responses of the controlling narrative voice and his own, on the other. In other words, whatever politics we perceive in the novel belong more often to the author and the reader than they do to the character. (This comment doesn’t apply to Skvorecky’s later more explicitly political and historical novels such as *Miracle* and *The Engineer of Human Souls*, where the viewpoints of the first person narrator and the author are almost identical.)

But *The Cowards* is also tacitly political in a simultaneously more obvious and more complex way by the very fact that it seems to refuse complicity with political issues in a state — neo-Stalinist Czechoslovakia — in which every aspect of social

being is shaped by politics. A significant part of what, following Sartre, we could call Skvorecky's political contestation in this novel comes from his obvious refusal to offer the usual socialist realist hero or to adhere to the formulaic, optimistic inanities of the socialist realist plot. In other words, the very fact of writing apolitically in a culture that insists on the politicization of literature constitutes a political gesture. Even as small a detail as the title of Skvorecky's first novel sounds a resistant note different from the titles of the standard Soviet and Czech classics of the period — many of which create expectations of a happy story or optimistic ending: Semyon Babaevski's *Light over the Earth* or Marie Pujmanova's *Life against Death*.



4. FROM ONE POINT of view, *The Cowards* is a meditation on the systems of values or philosophies governing the lives of European man in the twentieth century. The theme is dealt with more explicitly in the extended, often theoretical dialogues of the novels of exile but it is already subtly adumbrated here in the novel's engagement with humanism, fascism, Catholicism, and communism. Although Danny Smiricky's frame of reference is still residually Catholic, the novel's universe or world view is fundamentally secular and post-Christian with no system of belief or ideology either metaphysically privileged or prioristically authoritative. Christianity, like the liberal humanism of the older generation, is shown in the novel — as it was in history — overwhelmed by fascism and communism respectively. And although Danny, like his country, century, and author, is still on occasion a sentimental Christian longing for the emotional and spiritual satisfactions faith once provided, he recognizes that, in essence, he believes neither in it nor in the equally holistic systems claiming to have supplanted it.



5. IN AN INTERVIEW that took place in Prague in December 1966, Skvorecky told Antonin Liehm that he wrote *The Cowards* "shortly after the February events [of 1948], filled with a kind of socialist enthusiasm (although I must admit that I was never a political thinker)."<sup>5</sup> Whatever may have been the intensity of that momentary enthusiasm — and the setting of the interview makes the declaration slightly

suspect — it wasn't sufficiently fervid to leave its mark on *The Cowards*, in which the arrival of the Soviet army and the promise (or perhaps threat) of a communist society leave Danny Smiricky more anxious than enthusiastic. At best, one could say, that having no real choice or voice in the matter he is willing to suspend judgment and give the Communists the benefit of the doubt. Skvorecky's next novel, *The Tank Corps* (*L'Escadron blindé*, 1969; *Tankovy prapor*, 1971), takes Smiricky into the Stalinist fifties and shows both character and author radically alienated from the new social order. Written in 1954 and set in the autumn of 1952, *The Tank Corps* deals with the last two weeks of Smiricky's compulsory military service. The events are clearly based on Skvorecky's own term of duty between 1951 and 1953 with the élite Tank Division posted at Mlada, near Prague. Whatever hopes and illusions may have been generated by May 1945 and February 1948 — and we need only read Kundera and Pavel Kohout to feel their intensity — have long disappeared for Smiricky and his fellow soldiers, with the result that the novel's attitude to the society it depicts is almost completely ironic and negative.

That the novel is ultimately more concerned with Czechoslovak society than with Smiricky is indicated by the then provocative sub-title, "Fragment z Doby Kultu" — "A Fragment from the Period of the Cult." Writing in a country more Stalinist than Stalin's and before Nikita Khrushchev's midnight speech to the Twentieth Party Congress in February 1956, Skvorecky must have realized that everything from his sub-title on was being written for the drawer. One of the few advantages of the drawer, however, is that one can write about anything in one's society, including the unmentionable though pervasive cult of personality. The book's focus, then, is a satiric critique of a particular period of a particular society — its distinguishing attitudes, assumptions, values, and contradictions.



6. THE OFFICERS and men in the occasionally Svejikian world of *The Tank Corps* may be equal in theory, but in practice the first group or class is predictably more equal than the second. This is particularly obvious in the scene in which the enthusiastic Lieutenant Prouza claims, as he tries to persuade the unenthusiastic men to take their exams, that "In our people's democratic army examinations take the form of a dialogue. . . . We will discuss our work and our experiences and we will show how our reading helps better our preparation for combat and for politics" (*TP*, 86; *EB*, 93).<sup>6</sup> The Lieutenant and his soldiers function in the scene rather like a traditional comedy team: he plays the straight man — Oliver Hardy, Bud

Abbott — whose claims and stories are deflated by the seemingly simpler soldiers — Stan Laurel, Lou Costello — who, for the most part, are too canny either to believe their officers or to let them know that they disbelieve them. The examinations reveal the inequality between the officer and his men — an inequality based ultimately on the social power of the former and the powerlessness of the latter — and although they take the form of a dialogue, it's a dialogue of unequals in which the leading questions are designed to produce the desired answers. The examination described by Prouza at the start of the scene bears no resemblance to the examination we witness. As the discrepancy between the two grows wider and wider during this long but always lively episode, the humour and absurdity increase.

We should notice, however, that here, as in the plays of Vaclav Havel or in the novels of Tadeusz Konwicki, Milan Kundera, and Vassily Aksyonov, the origins or causes of absurdity are *social* rather than metaphysical. Our sense of the absurd — and of the humour implicit in it — arises when we perceive the chasm between an account of reality (a character's) and reality itself (the narrator's), and when we recognize that the essential terms of the character's account either have no referents in the latter or else are being used in a sufficiently novel way to make them incomprehensible from the point of view of common or traditional usage. In Prouza's speech, for example, we remark his use of the phrase "our popular democratic army" and realize over the length of the scene as well as from what we have already read that this army is neither democratic nor popular — at least not in any of the shades of meaning these adjectives possess in Czech, English, or French. We also note that this official expression is never used by the draftees whose vocabulary and topics of discussion belong to a world that doesn't seem to overlap with that described by their officers. Prouza is also representative of his class in his insistence on what could be termed a "grammatical" or "semantic" classlessness, indicated by his repeated use of the first person plural, which has no basis in the daily life of the army. Like his repeated use of "soudruh" or "soudruzi" ("comrade" and "comrades"), his emphasis on the plural pronoun describes a non-existent set of social relationships and states of affairs, the unreality of which is implicitly indicated by his reliance on the future tense.

Prouza's relatively innocent statements are related to the more monitory exhortations of his various superiors. These, when not threatening the men with some punishment, try to encourage them to greater efficiency by evoking for them a socialist Czechoslovakia menaced by traitors at home and imperialists abroad — both dedicated to destroying this best of all possible societies. The speakers draw on a common formulaic vocabulary: duty, responsibility, honour, nobility, self-sacrifice, and hard work are emphasized; "soudruzi" is reiterated obsessively and mechanically; and every concern is related to the new "popular democratic government and its Soviet supporters." Most statements begin and end at a level of abstraction that never connects with quotidian social and historical particulars.

Buzz words, meaningless set phrases and official clichés — “firm and at the same time comradely” (*TP*, 93) — replace the language actually spoken by ordinary people. And the streams of official nonsense remain unchallenged — and therefore tacitly pass for sense — because everyone realizes that despite the claim that there are no barriers between officers and men, the speeches have the status of dogma.

Equally noticeable is the way in which the official speeches (whether dealing with cultural, social, political, or military topics) are punctuated by allusions and references to Soviet examples as well as by the occasional use of Russian.<sup>7</sup> The overall force of this rhetoric of power in *The Tank Corps* is to make the reality of army life disappear in discourses whose referents are either in Leninist-Stalinist political theory or, in what amounts almost to the same thing since party literature is subordinate to party ideology, in exemplary official discourses about the Soviet revolution and Soviet life. The language is still Czech but its contents are foreign in crucial senses to the experiences of the soldiers.



7. THE BACKGROUND and genesis of *Miss Silver's Past* (*Lvice*, 1969, 1974) are dealt with in Skvorecky's preface to the American edition. There he explains that

... I began spinning the yarn of *Miss Silver's Past* as a sticking-out of the tongue at both the turncoat aesthete and the censor. *Epatez le snob marxiste, dupez le censeur staliniste!* was my credo, when I decided to tell about my *Dies Irae* experience [between 1959 and 1961 over *The Cowards*] in the form of a sort of detective story, a genre I loved, because it had helped me survive some of the worst times in my life. I decided to make it look like light literature, like an entertainment, although the subject matter was so bloody serious. To make it a melodrama, a debased genre, so that it would escape the attention of the man with the rubber stamp and make the aesthete wonder why the author of *The Cowards* and *The Bass Saxophone* was writing a crime story about such an improbable sexbomb as Miss Silver. ... Was it because he wanted to please the crowds?, the former preachers of “art for the masses” would ask contemptuously.<sup>8</sup>

In other words, the novel concerns not only Lenka Silver's revenge against Emil Prochazka, the man responsible for her sister's death in a concentration camp, but also Josef Skvorecky's implicit settling of accounts with the Czech literary establishment that had censored and banned his books. The “turncoat aesthetes” were those literary critics who (after the “rehabilitation” of Franz Kafka at the Liblice Conference in 1962) abandoned “sorealism” for the more fashionable “isms” of Robbe-Grillet, Michel Butor, and Roland Barthes. The same critics who had at-

tacked *The Cowards* in 1959 for not being socialist realist, now attacked it for not being sufficiently modern. He found himself dismissed condescendingly as only "a good story-teller."<sup>9</sup> "Deeply discouraged by adverse criticism,"<sup>10</sup> Skvorecky responded with his two great novellas, *Emoke* (1963), *The Bass Saxophone* (1967), and, most decisively, *Miss Silver's Past* (1969), which although made to "look like light literature, like an entertainment," is nevertheless ultimately closer to "the serious line" among Skvorecky's works than to the underrated Boruvka detective stories with which it seems to belong generically.



8. THE TANK CORPS and *Miracle* (*Mirakl*, 1972; *Miracle en Bohème*, 1978) were written almost twenty years apart, years in which Skvorecky wrote screenplays, mystery novels, novellas, essays, short stories, and *Miss Silver's Past*. His interest in Danny Smiricky was confined to some stories and *The Bass Saxophone*. It's conceivable, therefore, that but for "the fraternal help" of the Soviet invasion of August 1968 and Skvorecky's emigration, the Smiricky series would have ended with *The Tank Corps*, *The Swell Season*, and a few stories about the war years. Instead, a national tragedy which resulted in Skvorecky's permanent exile from Czechoslovakia served, paradoxically, to resurrect Smiricky and to stimulate Skvorecky into writing his most ambitious novel. *Miracle* was begun almost immediately upon arrival in the West in 1969, almost as if Skvorecky had not stopped looking over his shoulder from the moment the decision to leave had been made; he returned almost immediately in memory and in writing to the very place he couldn't return to in fact — with the crucial difference that, liberated by exile, he was able to write about Czechoslovakia more openly than ever before. The result is his single greatest work and a national masterpiece.<sup>11</sup>

Though it is obvious that *Miracle* is written by the same writer as *The Cowards* and *The Tank Corps*, it is equally evident that there is an almost qualitative difference between it and its predecessors. Responding to the private and public emotional and intellectual pressures generated by exile, Skvorecky expanded his palette and his conception of the novel in order to deal with a more complex set of historical events, giving expression, in the process, to a more profound and comprehensive vision of life. Without the fact of exile, therefore — without, that is, the pressure of the need to justify his decision to leave, as well as to settle accounts with history — it is conceivable that Skvorecky would not have become the important novelist that he is.

The continuities between this first novel written abroad and its predecessors are clear enough: comic realism and a common sense view of language; the tell-tale references to Hemingway; the often invisible, skeptical, camera-like hero; the interest in jazz; the residual and problematic Catholicism; and the almost reflexive concern with how reality is described (or, more accurately, misrepresented when put to ideological uses). All of these appear in *Miracle* but with a difference: the medium of Skvorecky's message has changed. *Miracle* is not only the first novel of Skvorecky's exile, it is also the first of his works to be obviously innovative in form. It is a generic hybrid, something immediately indicated by the unusual sub-title — "Politická detektivka" or "political detective story." Its chronologically earlier narrative (set in 1949) is an occasionally autobiographical comic love story as well as a political and religious detective novel; the narrative dealing with 1968 is a *roman à clef*, a superb novel of ideas with a trenchant critique of Marxist-Leninist theory and practice, and a politico-historical novel about the fate of the generation of 1948, the same generation that is at the heart of Kundera's fiction. The vision of this sprawling novel is still basically that of a comic realist, but Skvorecky now interweaves the comic and the tragic to an extent greater than before, implying that at its most comprehensive the comic vision not only intersects with the tragic but also embraces it.



9. IN *Miracle*, as in *The Engineer of Human Souls*, the novel's open or fragmented form should be seen as reflecting on the level of structure one of the novel's central thematic concerns: the author's profound doubts both about whether history is meaningful and about systems of thought — faiths, ideologies, philosophies — claiming to understand it. Skvorecky would agree with Iris Murdoch's comment that since "reality is incomplete, art must not be too afraid of incompleteness."<sup>12</sup> In his case, however, this is not just an aesthetic or philosophical position — it has political implications as well. The novel's fragmented form and Smiricky's commitment to "details" — his version of Gunter Grass's "snail's viewpoint" — are both aspects of its resistance to the authoritative and often authoritarian claims of all systems of thought claiming completeness (*M*, II, 261; *MB*, 384).<sup>13</sup> Analogously, almost all the information gathered in Smiricky's private and casual work of detection into the religious miracle of 1949 — a church statue moved — and the political miracle of 1968 — the Prague Spring — is either absent from or contradicts official accounts of events. The optimistic homogeneity of state history,

state literature, and ideology is achieved only by a calculated amnesia about anything contradicting the official point of view. The incomplete stories, rumours, newspaper clippings, and letters Danny Smiricky encounters are all fragments retrieved, so to speak, from Winston Smith's tube and, therefore, untrue as far as the state is concerned. Gathered and reassembled by Danny — and the reader following in his tracks — they constitute an alternative social and political history, an authentic, fragmented, and "incomplete" totality challenging the factitious totality of the state.



10. AT ISSUE in both *Miracle* and *The Engineer of Human Souls* is the question of the status and function of the writer — one of Skvorecky's central concerns throughout his career. In a society whose media are state-controlled, the writer, when choosing to dissent, obviously has a different function — one that includes a heightened sense of moral responsibility — than he normally does in a society whose media are not state-censored. To choose one example: if history books either misrepresent or are silent about certain people and events, then history can become a necessary subject of fiction and the novelist the chronicler of what Solzhenitsyn has called "a nation's lost history." Thus *Miracle*, Skvorecky's first novel of exile, shows him more openly concerned not only with the question of the writer's role but also with the lacunae of Czechoslovak history and, inescapably, the political ideas and practice of Soviet Marxism, none of which could be discussed openly in Czechoslovakia.

One of the results of this new concern with history and politics is the deliberate blurring of the discursive and cognitive boundaries separating autobiography, history, political discourse, and fiction. Any novel which like *Miracle* includes historical figures like Antonin Novotny, Gustav Husak, and Alexander Dubcek (chapter nine) among its characters, refers to specific political and historical events, and includes discussions of contemporary political ideas challenges our assumptions about the definition of fiction, the truth claims of fictional discourse and the status of fictional "facts."



11. IF SOME OF THE GREAT East European artists of the nineteenth century — Mickiewicz, Petoffi, Dvorak — can be said to have established their national cultures, then Skvorecky, like Milosz, Kundera, and Solzhenitsyn, can be seen as preserving in exile a certain ideal of a nation and a national culture at a time when that ideal is threatened with extinction. These writers, however they differ in their aesthetics and politics, nevertheless recognize that there is a dimension of mission in the writer's vocation. For the East and Central European exiles, this "mission" involves a dimension of national proprietorship and salvation.<sup>14</sup>



12. THE COMPLEXITY and ambiguity of Skvorecky's attitude toward 1968 is reflected in *Miracle* in the fact that although Smiricky's position is presented as preferable because more clear-sighted than that of the idealistic students and second-time-around revolutionaries, it is not offered as normative. The attractiveness of the more "romantic" and historically un-Czech stance of rebellion — the "Polish" response — is clearly and strongly registered by the rhetorical force of the prose describing the student speeches and the report of Jan Palach's suicide by burning. As well, as the novel recognizes, there is the problem that Smiricky's position also represents a surrender, however reluctant, to the corrupt status quo which he despises as much as anyone. Each stance involves a catch-22 situation: if you challenge the Soviet Union, you will lose; if you don't challenge it, you simply continue the present losing situation. The choice, as all of Skvorecky's Czech readers would instantly recognize, repeats the situations of 1938 and 1948: to fight or to surrender without resistance. One of Skvorecky's larger concerns is to show the emotional and political *impasse* of the contemporary Czechoslovak situation for anyone not completely co-opted by the state. Smiricky's apolitical skepticism and irony, for example, seem to offer some degree of independence and self-respect, but ultimately the position is another form — though a more honourable one — of acquiescence. It can make the *status quo* tolerable but it cannot help change history. In addition, there is always the dangerous possibility that the detached stance of an ironic observer will become an end in itself, an Epictetan *modus vivendi* with the world as it is — as it does in the slightly sinister, though dangerously attractive figure of Smiricky's friend Doctor Gellen.

In the end, *Miracle* seems to suggest that Smiricky's skeptical stance is safer though ultimately as futile as the reformers' revolution: neither can alter history. Much of the novel's near despair arises out of Skvorecky's clear-sighted and tough-

minded awareness of the claims of both positions as well as out of his inability to see any alternatives in 1968 beyond the usual choices — complicity, an inner anti-political emigration, a repeat of the “romantic” Hungarian Revolution of 1956, or the continuation of the “realistic” Yalta settlement. Without access to what Max Weber calls “the house of power,” Czechoslovaks need a real miracle to change their contemporary history.

Almost two decades later, George Konrad’s *Antipolitics* and Adam Michnik’s *Letters from Prison* would offer pretty much the same analysis of the East and Central European dilemma. The mention of Konrad should also serve to remind us that while *Miracle* may be about Czechoslovak history and the Prague Spring, its political analysis, like Skvorecky’s essays, points beyond 1968 and the borders of Czechoslovakia.



13. THERE IS LITTLE DOUBT that *The Engineer of Human Souls* (*Pribeh inzenyralidskych dusi*, 1977, 1984) is a sequel of sorts to *Miracle*: both were written in exile and, as Skvorecky has pointed out, both share “the multi-level structure” he developed in order to overcome the formal problem of dealing with a warehouse of materials and events separated by decades. Up to a point, then, *Miracle* teaches us what to expect: there’s a new amplitude in approach; a more experimental attitude to construction; a greater frankness in dealing with recent Czechoslovak history; a continuing settling of accounts with socialist realism; and a new, more explicit engagement with ideas and ideologies. But a reading of *Miracle* can’t prepare us for the following: a novel more reflective than anything Skvorecky had written previously; a more intellectual Danny Smiricky actively engaged in discussions of ideas; an increased concern not just with an individual’s thinking but, as in the later fiction of Saul Bellow, with ideas themselves — to the point that the discussion of ideas becomes a primary focus (in *Miracle*, the discussion of ideas is more closely integrated to the historic events taking place around Smiricky); a subject matter more extensive and heterogeneous in scope; and a fluid first-person narration often associational in manner that shows Skvorecky has gone to school not just to Hemingway but also to Faulkner, Joyce, and Woolf, all of whom are mentioned in the novel.

Present as well is a more explicit, self-conscious, and extensive dealing with literature and aesthetic issues that seems intended as a summary of all previous discussions in Skvorecky’s work — from *The Cowards* to *Miracle* — about jazz,

poetry, fiction, painting, and sculpture. But *The Engineer* also offers another kind of summary which helps explain Skvorecky's use of a more elastic narrative structure. There is a possibility that the latest Smiricky novel may also be the last. If this is so, then I suspect that *The Engineer* may also be Skvorecky's attempt at a summary of the series and Smiricky's life and generation: the novel's war-time scenes recall *The Cowards*, *The Bass Saxophone*, and *The Swell Season*; the nearly three dozen letters Danny receives include many from the early 1950s, offering a new perspective on *The Tank Corps*, *Sedmiramenny svicen* (1964 [*The Menorah*, untranslated]), and the chronologically earlier scenes in *Miracle*; discussions of the Prague Spring and the Soviet Invasion recapitulate *Miracle*'s second plot; and, finally, the émigré sections take Smiricky into Canada and the 1970s, the world of some of Skvorecky's later stories and of his unpublished play *Buh do domu* (*God Help Us!*).



14. LOOKED AT POSITIVELY, exile or separation can be seen as conducive to the achievement of a detached and pluralistic viewpoint or of a stance tending toward an objectivity that is a privileged perspective on life. If this were all, then we could speak of exile primarily in positive terms as a situation in which the end gained, a deeper and more comprehensive experience and view of life, almost redeems the painful historical road traversed and what Edward Said has described somewhere as "the crippling sorrow of estrangement." From this point of view, the exile is compensated with an originality of vision which, for the artist, may result in *The Divine Comedy*, *Pan Tadeusz*, *Guernica*, or *The Engineer of Human Souls*. These are among the paradoxical "pleasures" of exile, possible only for those who, while wounded by exile, have insisted on recalling the causes of the wounds, keeping the wounds open and writing about them. Milosz, who has described Dante as the "patron saint of all poets in exile, who visit their towns and provinces only in remembrance," has also speculated that "it is possible that there is no other memory than the memory of wounds" (*Nobel Prize Speech*, 20). Whatever may be the specific nature of that wound in Skvorecky's case, we find traces of it in symbolic form throughout *The Engineer*. This is most obvious, I would suggest, in those moments when memories of the Czech past, described nostalgically and with great affection, pull Smiricky away from a Canadian present he claims to prefer but to which he is less deeply attached and about which Skvorecky can never bring himself to write as evocatively and with as great an emotional intensity as he can about his

homeland. Despite Smiricky's early avowal that "the Toronto skyline is more beautiful to me than the familiar silhouette of Prague castle" (4), the *quality* of his feelings towards Canada is closer to the description in Skvorecky's 1977 essay "Red Music" where, in a poignant passage, he refers to "the schizophrenia of the times" in which "you find yourself in a land that lies over the ocean, a land — no matter how hospitable or friendly — where your heart is not, because you landed on these shores too late" (*Bass Saxophone*, 29). Implicit in the "too late," of course, is a nostalgia not just for a homeland but also for a time when one was *young* in that particular homeland. This desire to return forces its way into the novel in a moving late scene in which Smiricky hears about Veronika's return to Czechoslovakia. The ending of the story of this very sympathetically presented Czech immigrant who admits to being "obsessed with Czechoslovakia" (148) allows Skvorecky to indulge, for a moment, the unrealizable dream of going home. The dream is unrealizable, incidentally, not simply for political reasons, but because ultimately the "home" longed for is something other than the Prague of today.

Not surprisingly, Skvorecky followed *The Engineer* with a novel — *Dvorak in Love* (*Scherzo capriccioso*, 1983, 1986) — about another Bohemian artist who also arrived "too late" in North America but was able to return to Prague.



15. PERHAPS THE SINGLE most important connection between Skvorecky and Antonin Dvorak is the fact that, in middle age, each travelled to "America." Skvorecky settled here in 1969, Dvorak made three crossings between September 1892 and April 1895. The America Dvorak visited was the America Skvorecky read about as a young man in Czech translations of Twain, Bierce, Harte, Howells, London, and Dreiser; in other words, it was the idealized "literary" America (Kafka's "Amerika") of his youthful dreams. It's even possible that had Dvorak not lived and worked in the United States, Skvorecky would not have written a novel about him. I'm not suggesting that Dvorak, without an American period, would not have been an interesting enough subject for a biographical novel, only that he would not have interested Skvorecky because one of the essential correspondences between their lives would have been missing. And without these correspondences, Skvorecky would not have been able to write a novel that is simultaneously fictionalized biography and a displaced autobiography.

The crucial difference between their journeys, however, is self-evident: Dvorak travelled freely back and forth between the two countries; Skvorecky, like Solzhe-

nitsyn and Kundera, took a one-way ticket from his native land. If one of the ways we can read *Dvorak in Love* is as a novel that is also in part an articulation of a complex of ambivalent wishes, then I would also argue that one of its profoundest desires — enacted in the historical fact of Dvorak's return to and death in Bohemia — is the author's impossible desire to return "home."

*Dvorak in Love*, I want to suggest, allows Skvorecky to dream simultaneously about arriving "on these shores too late" and, more importantly, about going home. To the question, "Where is my home?" (the title of the Czech national anthem), the exile always points in two directions.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Skvorecky's novels are published in Czech by Sixty-Eight Publishers (Toronto); in French by Gallimard (Paris); and in English by Lester and Orpen Dennys (Toronto). *The Cowards* and *Miss Silver's Past* were first published by Grove Press, and are now available in Penguin and Picador editions respectively. Unless otherwise noted, the English translations are by Paul Wilson. Date of publication for the books discussed is given in the body of the essay. When a title is followed by two dates, in almost all cases the first refers to publication in Czech, the second in English; thus *The Cowards* (*Zbabelci*, 1958, 1970). Of the books discussed, only *The Tank Corps*, *Miracle*, and *The Menorah* have not been translated into English; the first two are, however, available in French.

<sup>2</sup> *The Cowards*, trans. Jeanne Nemcova (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972).

<sup>3</sup> For a good introduction to the question of the relationship between formal and informal Czech, see Henry Kucera's informative essay on Skvorecky and "The Language Dilemma of a Czech Writer," in *World Literature Today*, 54, 4 (Autumn 1980), 577-81.

<sup>4</sup> Jordan Elgrably, "Conversations with Milan Kundera," *Salmagundi*, No. 73 (Winter 1987), 8.

<sup>5</sup> Antonin Liehm, *The Politics of Culture* (New York: Grove Press, 1968), 170.

<sup>6</sup> The translation is my own.

<sup>7</sup> The Soviet references, made almost without exception by the officers, include Lenin, Stalin, Kalynin, the Komsonols, and the 1917 revolution, as well as such less significant names as Oleg Kochevoi and Pavel Morozov. The last, by the way, is incorrectly identified in the French editions as "Héros soviétique de la Deuxième Guerre mondiale" (104)! Morozov (1918-1932) was famous, if that's the right word, for having denounced his father for the latter's supposed Kulak sympathies. He was subsequently killed by a group of outraged peasants led by his uncle.

<sup>8</sup> *Miss Silver's Past*, trans. Peter Kussi (London: Picador, 1980), xvi. Substantial portions of the Czech text are missing in the version. The French translation reproduces Skvorecky's text in full.

<sup>9</sup> "I Was Born in Nachod" in *Talkin' Moscow Blues*, ed. Sam Solecki (Toronto: Lester and Orpen Dennys, 1988), 56-57.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> On the subject of the positive or beneficial aspects of exile, see the following sentence from Adam Michnik's essay "Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors (1973)": "[Pilsudski]

had been an exile himself for some time, and he knew that for a conquered nation emigration is a priceless treasure, an eye and an ear on the world, a mouth that can speak freely and breathe fresh air, absorbing it into the nation's body" (*Letters from Prison and other essays*, trans. Maya Latynski [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987], 204).

<sup>12</sup> Iris Murdoch, "Against Dryness," in *The Novel Today*, ed. Malcolm Bradbury (London: Fontana/Collins, 1977), 31.

<sup>13</sup> The first page reference is to the two-volume Czech edition, the second is to the French translation: *Miraki* (Toronto: Sixty-Eight Publishers, 1972); *Miracle en Bohême*, trans. Claudia Ancelot (Paris: Gallimard: 1978). Here as with *The Tank Corps* the translations into English are my own.

<sup>14</sup> This seems to me true even in the case of Milosz who, even while resisting the enormous pressure and temptation to play Mickiewicz for the Poland of his time, has nevertheless fulfilled from abroad the role of national bard and national conscience. See Ewa Czarnecka and Aleksander Fiut, *Conversations with Czesław Miłosz*, trans. Richard Lourie (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1987), 324-25.

## COVENANT

*Seymour Mayne*

The rainbow we were supposed  
to behold the next day  
or the day after  
never appeared.  
Our eyes grew strained,  
our necks stiff,  
and the heavy ashen clouds  
settled over the hills and streams.  
The fish rose to the top  
and rolled over  
like silver bombers in manoeuvres.

Who could believe it?  
No rainbow, no  
break of colour, no  
sign? Someone's forgotten,  
we reasoned.  
And we began to pray  
for the cleansing rains again  
and the waves rising  
to wash our cities —  
friend's and foe's alike —  
with the green tow of return.

## LAST CHANCE

*Seymour Mayne*

He ushered them all in hurriedly  
and wondered — had he done right?  
Why was he obeying the loud commands  
given in the dead of darkness?  
Why not abandon everyone  
to shriek and howl  
as the waves begin to rise  
and water rushes in  
to flush out mole, weasel and worm?  
Let everything drown.  
There will be no other time  
or need to bring down  
the doom of wrath.  
Whoever broke this upon us,  
let Him also stare  
into the abyss of despair—  
this is His last chance.

## SILENCE GRATES

*Charles Mányoky-Németh*

A dense fog hangs in the air, shrouding the land,  
One cannot find a patch of sunlight.  
A dark, sinister, unknown spasm  
Is taking hold of my hand.

I roam the streets during the night  
And discern by the dim street light  
Scores of budding new ideas  
That seem to teem by the mute walls.

I cannot feel home at this place,  
This great inaction grates on my nerves.  
As I listen, the silence hurts,  
And solitude gets oppressive.

*December 28, 1956.*

# MRS. MAZA'S SALON

*Miriam Waddington*

**I**N THE FALL OF 1930 when I was twelve my family moved to Ottawa from Winnipeg. The reason was this: my father had lost his small sausage-making and meat-curing factory to a partner in a lawsuit. The world was then in the grip of the great depression, and the west had been especially hard hit. My father had the idea of starting a small sausage factory in Ottawa, and since there seemed nothing else to do, my parents rented out our Winnipeg house, sold the piano, packed us children into the car and set out.

The whole family was unhappy about the move. My parents were secular Jews who had emigrated from Russia in the early years of the century before the First World War. They had met and married in Winnipeg and were firmly integrated in the circle of secular Jews who had founded a Yiddish day school and named it after the famous Yiddish writer, Y. L. Peretz. In Winnipeg my father and mother had led a busy social life and had many close friends. They went to meetings and lectures almost every night and they had family-friend dinners on Friday nights in winter and went picnicking or camping with other families in summer.

In Ottawa it was a different story. There were very few non-observant Jews and even fewer Jews who had, like my parents, made Yiddish language and culture their home and community. It took them some months to find congenial friends, especially since their energies were absorbed by the task of finding a place to live and settling us four children — all under the age of fourteen — into a new school environment.

Their problems in adjusting to this strange and unfamiliar Ottawa community must have affected us children. I know that I mourned the loss of my two best friends until I found a new one with whom I could walk to school, go to the movies, and share my innermost thoughts and feelings. Also, Ottawa in 1930 was still a small city which (with its population of 80,000) seemed like a village compared to Winnipeg. There was some compensation in the fact that Montreal was so close — only 120 miles with frequent two-dollar weekend train excursions. After a year or so, my parents discovered the large Jewish community in Montreal, and we came to know a number of families whom we could visit.

**A**MONG THEM WAS A YIDDISH POET, Ida Maza. She had published several volumes of poetry and knew all the Yiddish writers and painters in Montreal and New York. Her husband was an agent who represented several manufacturers of men's haberdashery — mostly shirts and ties. His route took him through the small towns between Ottawa and Montreal, and also past Lachute up into the Laurentians. Whenever he was in Ottawa he stayed with us, and he often took me back with him at times when I had no school.

It is hard, if not impossible, to describe Mrs. Maza and what I have come to think of as her salon, without placing her in the social context that I remember from my childhood. For example, my parents and their friends spoke Yiddish among themselves and regularly addressed one another by their surnames. If it was a man, he would be addressed simply as "Maza," and if it was a woman, it would be Mrs. Maza. First names were rare and reserved for close relatives. Similarly, when speaking Yiddish — which is an inflected language — they used the polite form of "you," never the intimate "thou."

Mrs. Maza was what is called a *jolie laide*. She looked Japanese and emphasized her oriental exoticism with her hairdo, her carriage, and her way of walking and dressing. She had thick black hair which she piled up around her face in interesting twists and turns like doughnuts and buns. Her colouring was that of the native girls in Gauguin's paintings, and like theirs, her cheekbones were wide apart and prominent. Her eyes were large and dark and somehow Mongolian in feeling. She was small in stature and slight in build, and always wore long kimono-like dresses with sashes and wide sleeves into which she would often tuck her hands. Her shoes were simple low-heeled slipper affairs, and she walked with small shuffling steps, for all the world as if her feet had been bound. She had a beautiful low voice, full of dark rich tones, and a chanting trance-like way of talking. Most of the time she was serious and melancholy in mood, but every now and again she would break into short little bursts of soft chuckling laughter. This was usually when she was with her husband whom she always treated with tender affection. She sometimes liked to tease and jolly him because he took everything to heart with a childlike seriousness.

Looking back I realize she was a highly intelligent woman full of cleverness and wisdom. She had been born in a village in White Russia and had been brought to Montreal while she was still a child. Since she had lived most of her life in Montreal, she spoke English with only a slight accent.

I met Mrs. Maza when I was fourteen. I had been writing poetry for about four years and my mother must have mentioned it because Mrs. Maza at once offered to read my work. I showed it to her hesitatingly, and with fear, because she was not just a teacher but a real writer. She praised it and at once took charge of my reading, urging me to Emily Dickinson, Edna St. Vincent Millay, Sara Teasdale,

Vachel Lindsay, Conrad Aiken, and Yeats. Occasionally she would read me one of her own Yiddish poems; I listened but I confess that I didn't give her poems my fullest attention. Most of them were children's poems, playful and tender; or else they dealt with the relationship between mothers and children, not a subject of great interest to a girl of fifteen. I have since gone back to read Ida Maza's poems with an adult eye, and find them full of warmth and a lyrical charm that manages to shine through even a rough translation. For example, here is her *Spring Secrets*:

Spring wears a yellow cap  
and a green gown,  
and spreads a fresh apron  
on every lawn.

She leans on the wind,  
inclines to his voice,  
then bobs up and down,  
and curtsies twice.

She looks at the sun,  
and turns her head —  
confides to her neighbor  
*Winter is dead!*<sup>1</sup>

Or, to take another, *Thieves*:

Tu whitt here,  
tu whee there,  
someone's in  
the cherry tree,  
is it one or  
a pair?

Two little thieves  
with fluttering wings,  
who like to eat lots  
of nourishing things,

So not a cherry  
is left for me,  
those mean little thieves!  
tu whitt tu whee.<sup>2</sup>

In the next two or three years I often stayed with the Mazas during my Christmas and Easter holidays. They lived in a third floor walk-up on Esplanade. The building was old and resembled a tenement. It contained a buzzing hive of small apartments that you entered through an enclosed courtyard. It faced east and looked across a small park to the Jewish Old People's Home, and just down the street, also on Esplanade, was the Jewish People's Library which served as a lively community centre for lectures and educational programs.

The staircase leading up to the Maza apartment was narrow and dark. Once inside, however, the front room was bright and colourful, the walls covered with paintings and the furniture draped in East European embroideries and weavings. The furniture consisted of a small sofa and two mission oak chairs sternly upholstered in brown leather. There was a matching oak library table loaded with books, and more books were encased in glass on the shelves of an oak bookcase. A long skinny hallway led from the front room to the kitchen past two bedrooms that branched off to one side. On the way to the kitchen, and before you reached it, there was a dining room with a round table in the middle, surrounded by chairs. There was also a sideboard, and what was probably the most important and most used piece of furniture in the house, something called a Winnipeg couch — but by Mrs. Maza and her friends, it was referred to as a lounge, and pronounced *lontch*. On this couch her husband took his Sunday afternoon naps and in the evenings visiting poets and painters sat on it two or three abreast, listening to poetry being read out loud by one of them, or on occasion trying out new ideas for publishing a magazine or a manifesto. Or else they discussed new books and just gossiped. The reason they sat in the dining room instead of the front sitting room, I now realize as I write about it, was that it was close to the kitchen, that universal, non pareil source of food.

To these artists, most of them middle-aged and impecunious, and all of them immigrants, Mrs. Maza was the eternal mother — the foodgiver and nourisher, the listener and solacer, the mediator between them and the world. There she would sit with hands folded into her sleeves, her face brooding and meditative, listening intently with all her body. As she listened she rocked back and forth, back and forth, and, as it then seemed to me, she did so in time to the rhythm of the poem being read.

She gave herself entirely and attentively to the poem; she fed the spiritual hunger and yearning of these oddly assorted Yiddish writers whenever they needed her; but not only that. She also fed them real food; not just once a week, but every day. She served endless cups of tea with lemon, jam, and sugar lumps; plates of fresh fruit, Jewish egg cookies (*ayerkichel*), home-made walnut strudel, delicately veined marble cake, and for the really hungry there were bowls of barley soup, slices of rye bread thickly buttered, and eggs — countless eggs — boiled, omeletted, and scrambled. I never knew her to serve anyone, including her family, a conventional meal from beginning to end; but she was always making someone an egg or opening a can of salmon or slicing a tomato to go with a plate of pickled herring.

WHO WERE THESE YIDDISH WRITERS and painters? Some were occasional visitors brought from New York or Israel to give a lecture in Montreal. If I ever knew their names I have forgotten most of them, but there is

one writer I remember well. She was Kadja Molodowski, a Yiddish poet from Warsaw living in New York. She wrote many children's poems, and one poem, *Der Mantel* ("the coat") was a masterpiece, read and loved by Jewish children everywhere. She had a mild European face that shone with blessedness.

The occasion I remember is Louis Muhlstock's coming to Mrs. Maza's apartment to draw Kadja's portrait. He was very tall and thin with a mop of dark hair and an animated rosy face. He was a well-known painter even then, although he couldn't have been more than twenty-three or -four. He set up his easel in the front room, unrolled his paper, tacked it up, and in the most relaxed way he began to draw and talk, talk and draw. Kadja talked too, and laughed, and told funny stories — and neither of them minded the awkward fifteen-year-old girl who sat there watching.

Of the poets who lived in Montreal and frequented Mrs. Maza's salon, Y. Y. Segal was the most outstanding. He was a prolific writer, well known in the Yiddish literary world, and had already published many books. At the time I stayed with the Mazas, Segal was on the staff of the Yiddish newspaper *Der Kanader Adler* ("the Canadian Eagle") and was also giving Yiddish lessons to children.

A number of other poets also frequented Mrs. Maza's. Moshe Shaffir, Shabsi Perl, Esther Segal — the sister of Y. Y. Segal — Gottlieb, Yudika, and one or two other women poets. Some of the writers worked in factories and lived lonely lives in rooming houses. One of them wrote a poem with an image that has stayed with me to this day. He likened his heart to the empty untidiness of an unmade bed. At the time I thought the metaphor with its image of the unmade bed was so weird that I remembered it for its absurdity. But since it has stayed in my mind for more than fifty years it can't really have been so absurd. The more I think about it, the more it seems to epitomize and sum up the essence of poverty with all its disorder and loneliness.

The image must also have touched a sensitive spot in my own unconscious and that was my ambivalence about my parents' generation of immigrant Jews. At that time I bitterly resented my difference from my Canadian friends whose parents had been born in Canada of English background, and who spoke without an accent. How could it have been otherwise when Canadian society during the twenties and thirties brainwashed every school child with British Empire slogans, and promoted a negative stereotype of all East European immigrants, but especially of Jews. Moreover, during all my primary school years, the phrase "dirty Jew" had regularly been hurled at me from the street corners and back alleys of North Winnipeg. Later, when I attended Lisgar Collegiate in Ottawa, I also sensed a certain disdain directed towards Jews, a disdain equalled only by that felt for French Canadians in those days. Perhaps it was no accident that the girl who became my bosom friend was French. She was also from a minority within her social group because

her parents were that rare thing — French-speaking Protestants. Her mother came from an old clerical Huguenot family in France and her father was the son of a well-to-do converted Catholic who had quarrelled with the priest in his small Quebec village.

I was not very conscious in those adolescent years of the nature and source of my ambivalence and conflicts — but they manifested themselves in vague feelings of uneasiness and guilt and an awkward sense of always being a stranger in both worlds and not belonging fully to either. It was to take me many years to come to a positive and even joyous acceptance of my Russian Jewishness — in short of my differences, ones that I had inherited and had little choice in creating. Ambivalence, I now realize, also tinged my admiration and fondness for Mrs. Maza and her circle. I often felt uneasy at what I thought of as their exaggerated feelings, or at any rate, their exaggerated expression of those feelings.

I didn't see Mrs. Maza only when I visited Montreal on school holidays. For several years our families spent part of each summer together near St. Sauveur in the Laurentians. The Mazas would rent an old farmhouse, and my parents would camp somewhere not far away. Mrs. Maza loved the gentle contours of the mountains and the way the changing light continually moved up and down their slopes. And there was always a little river — hardly more than a creek — in the neighbourhood of her house. It was good for wading in the shallows, but we children wanted to be near a lake where we could swim. Failing that, we had to amuse ourselves by hunting for mushroom puffballs in the farmer's pasture or climbing up the mountain to pick raspberries.

Sometimes I would wander over to the Maza's house at four o'clock when the humming heat hung over the afternoon, and would find Mrs. Maza sitting alone on the veranda, her hands folded into her sleeves — she always wore long sleeves even in summer — rocking back and forth and looking very sad. I remember asking her once why she was so sad and she answered in her slow musical voice, making every word count, that today was the anniversary of Jacob Wasserman's death. Thanks to her I already knew who he was, and under her tutelage had read *The Maurizius Case*, *The Goose Girl*, and *Dr Kerkhoven's Third Existence*. There wasn't much I could say, so I sat there dumb as a stone, watching the bees alight on the blue chicory flowers beside the veranda, listening to her as she dramatized Wasserman's unhappy life and mourned for him in sad funereal tones.

And he wasn't the only writer whose anniversary of death she observed; there was Edna St. Vincent Millay, Elinor Wylie, Sara Teasdale, and a long roll call of dead Yiddish writers. She mourned them all, and recounted their tragic lives as well as their artistic triumphs in spite of adversity. She would often read me passages from their work, and sometimes she would ask to see my poems and read them back to me, analyzing and praising and prophesying a good future.

WHEN I THINK BACK TO THOSE SUMMER AFTERNOONS ON her veranda — actually it was a low open balcony in the French-Canadian style — I can still picture her rocking and keening. She radiated a sibylline and mystical quality, and possibly that was the secret of the magnetism that drew so many artists to her Esplanade apartment.

I have still another good memory of those Ottawa years when my parents felt so exiled from their beloved Winnipeg. When it came time for the high holidays, *Rosh Hashonah* and *Yom Kippur*, my parents, the Mazas, and two or three other families all converged to a farmer's house near St. Sauveur — the Lamoureux place. There we stayed for a week or ten days enjoying continual harvest pleasures. Mme. Lamoureux set a long table with huge bowls of food: soup, chicken, beef, vegetables — raw and cooked — apple and blueberry pies, and homegrown Lamoureux pears, apples, and plums. Everyone heaped his or her own plate at these country feasts, and I have no doubt that the grownups, as they strolled along the gravel roads, gave thought in their own way to the year past and the year still to come.

The Lamoureux are long dead and their farm is no longer a landmark; it was long ago absorbed by modernism and the autoroute to the Laurentians. And Mrs. Maza is no longer alive to mark and mourn the anniversaries of the deaths of her favourite writers or the loss of the Lamoureux farm with its harvest bounties that were so happily shared by a group of friends.

But they are all still alive and present in my mind and they keep me company whenever I watch the light change on mountains or pick wild raspberries in some overgrown ditch. Somewhere Mrs. Maza is still urging hungry poets to have a bite to eat, and turning on the light in her dining room to illuminate a crowd of displaced Yiddish writers. And behind them stretches a larger crowd, the long procession of every writer who ever wrote in whatever language.

No matter. Each one paid his individual tribute to the love of language and to its inexhaustible resources: and their traces still linger, marking out the path for all writers still to come.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> "Spring Secrets," *Wachsen Meine Kinderlach*. Montreal, 1954, p. 80, translated from the Yiddish by Miriam Waddington.

<sup>2</sup> "Thieves," *Wachsen Meine Kinderlach*. Montreal, 1954, p. 83, translated from the Yiddish by Miriam Waddington.

#### *Biographical note*

Ida Maza was born Ida Jukovsky, July 9, 1893, in a small town in White Russia. In 1907 when she was 14, her family emigrated to Canada and settled in Montreal. There she married and had three sons, one of whom died in childhood. During her lifetime

she published three books of poetry, *A Mother*, *My Children are Growing*, and *New Poems*. In 1954 she was working on three books — *Stories for Children*, *Selected Poems*, and a historical novel about Jewish settlements in White Russia, *Diena*. She died in 1962 and her novel *Diena* was published in 1970, largely through the efforts of the Montreal Yiddish poet, Moshe Shaffir.

## THE FIREBIRD

*Yar Slavutych*

My mother sang to me about the firebird,  
The sovereign of heights and magic deeds,  
That did not know of grain, or wellspring water,  
But in the nighttide pecked at Pleiades.  
    At dusk, when tired of playing in the meadow,  
    I on my pillow laid me down to rest,  
    My mother mellowly her tales narrated,  
    And with her gentle hand my head caressed.  
“In distant lands, far in a golden kingdom,  
In place remote that no man dares to see,  
Where ’round about exists no tree, or dwelling,  
There stony coffers happiness conceal.  
    And at the time when stars bloom in the highest,  
    And when the moon suspends its curvéd sword,  
    To seek and to unlock the stony coffers  
    Through clouds, with golden keys, the firebird soars . . .”  
Into the small boy’s soul these words had fallen  
As on the dismal hills a spray of sun,  
I thought: “This happiness is mine to conquer,  
That not to all contrariwise be done.”  
    “At night,” I reasoned, “I will fetch the firearm  
    Off granddad’s tapestry upon the wall,  
    I will espy and I will seize that firebird,  
    I will unlock the stony coffers all.”

*Translated from the Ukrainian  
by Orysia Ferbey*

# IN THE NAME-OF-THE-FATHER

*Robert Zend's "Oāb" (or the up(Ž)ending  
of trīdution)*

*Sherrill Grāce*

IT IS NOW FOUR YEARS since Exile Editions Limited of Toronto published its superbly printed and illustrated two-volume edition of Robert Zend's "NEOVEL" *Oāb*.<sup>1</sup> It is also four years since Robert Zend's untimely death. But to the best of my knowledge little has been said about the author or his extraordinary text, either since 1985 or before. Barry Callaghan, who nursed the volumes into print, once commented that

Robert Zend has applied with great wit all the gestures of mime, the optical illusions of Escher's logic, the play of concrete poetry, the psychology of paranoia and split personalities, and the closed literary circles of Borges to the creation of his extraordinary chronicle of a life collapsing into fullness, *Oāb*.

*(quoted from the cover)*

And he is to be commended for the fact that we have the book at all.

According to Zend's own version of the textual and publishing history, most of *Oāb* was written during two weeks in May of 1970 (*Oāb* 2, 204), and that was to prove the easy part. Except for a thirty-page excerpt in the literary quarterly *Exile*, in 1972, and despite praise from illustrious quarters (Northrop Frye, Robert Fulford, and Richard Kostelanetz), no one would publish Zend's combination of doodles, drawings, poems, and narrative. The years began to tick by: 1973, 1976, 1978 (and how about a video asks a man in Hollywood); in 1982 Exile Editions prepares to publish the work, but Zend has trouble finishing it. Then "in 1985, the final revised text is delivered to the printer. On the 27th of June, Zend dies. On the 2nd of July, he is buried. On the 16th of July, *Oāb* is born" (*Oāb* 2, 206). But what kind of book is it that inscribes its creator's obituary within the record of its own gestation? Or could there be some symbolic connection between the two? And who was Robert Zend anyway?

ZEND WAS BORN in Budapest in 1929 and, until his emigration to Canada during the 1956 Revolution, he worked as a columnist and cartoonist on various newspapers — this latter skill is important to keep in mind when reading *Oāb*.<sup>2</sup> He settled in Toronto where he continued to live and work for the next nineteen years, studying Italian at the University of Toronto, writing for the CBC and publishing poetry. By 1964 he was writing chiefly in English and, as the extensive play with language in *Oāb* demonstrates, he had an extraordinary gift and sensitivity for both the visual and aural effects of words. What is more, his English, with its playful neologisms and scatterings of real and invented diacritical marks, seems to echo, even parody, his native Hungarian.

If Robert Zend is to be remembered for his contribution to Canadian or post-modern literature, it will be for *Oāb*, a work that defies classification, unless we accept the narrator's own locution and call it "A NEOVEL." In some ways it reminds me of Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*. Although it is minimalist where the *Wake* is baroque (in its verbal super-abundance), it too is a night-book, a family romance, and a myth of paternity: for HCE read OAB. Or again, it recalls *Paradise Lost* as it goes about explaining the ways of Words to Man and charting our fall from bliss into the Symbolic order of language: for Satan read Oāb; for Adam (you and me) read Zênd. Because this book/work/text (for it is all three) is so unusual and unknown, I should describe it in some detail before venturing any interpretation or assessment, let alone conclusions about it.

The two volumes of *Oāb* contain twelve, well, "chapters" (sections, parts, units?) is what I'll call them, beginning with "The Conception of Oāb," whose position as titular hero is always open to debate and *différance*, and ending with "Transubstantiation." These twelve chapters are preceded by a series of nine photographs of Zend himself, starting with a full-colour close-up of his left eye on the cover and ending with a distance shot of Zend at his desk dreaming "Oāb." This last photograph faces the first page of the text, a holograph draft of poem/narrative describing Oāb. From this page of manuscript on, Zênd, the narrator who must not, of course, be confused with Robert Zend, experiments with every imaginable type of script, typeface, font, drawing, diagram, and cartoon, and with several genres of photographic reproduction in order to tell his tale. Just as volume one does not begin in the conventional manner, so volume two does not conclude as we expect. The last word of chapter twelve is the Name-of-the-Father: "Zênd!" (*Oāb* 2, 202), but the book continues for another thirty-five pages of heterogeneous materials: they are not always labelled, but I will call them appendices and they include textual and publishing history, "Table of Contents," excerpts from the galleys, Zênd's search for a sub-title (which fills the better part of a page and concludes jubilantly with "NEOVEL"), dedication, a prayer, visual footnotes and

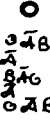
explanations of symbols, and a post-oābian, historical document from the *Terrestrial Times* dated: “Zénday, Īrduary 15, 2985 A. O.”

In between chapters one and twelve, Zénd narrates his story of (and by) Oāb through elaborate, but always playful strategies of visualization, from traditional to concrete poems and passages of prose narration whose textuality is foregrounded typographically, to a variety of more obvious semiotic modes such as diagrams, games and puzzles (notably “Scrābblē” and crosswords), specific indexical and iconic signs, comic strips and illustrations. For example, Zénd explains his creation of Oāb like this:

I understand you, my Oāb:  
before you, I  
may have physically  
looked like this:

ZĖND

but my soul was like this:

Z  ND

that's how you grew in me

ZGĀBĖND

till I gave you life:

ZĖNDGĀB

I needed you to find out what I am.

(Oāb 1, 78)



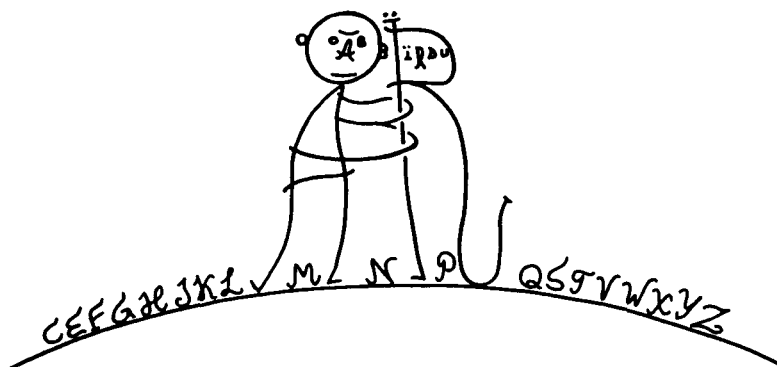
Language begets/conceives language; story begets/conceives more story in a kind of inverse and endless parthenogenesis. (I say inverse because Robert Zend's vision of creation is exclusively male.) According to the oābian mysteries, Oāb ("symbol of all that has ever been created by man on earth") chooses his author; the author has no say in the matter and he cannot escape his own fatal attraction to the creative enterprise. The irony and pathos of this dilemma is addressed in "Oāb's Lullaby," the closing and the darkest, most threatening passage in this otherwise light-hearted handling of metaphysical characters and ontological themes. Zēnd is left lying "stiff and with closed eyes" in the arms of his book; he has served his only function as a vehicle for a creation that always already exists because "real time flows backward—" (*Oāb* 2, 202). In the last analysis, it would appear that the creature kills his so-called creator just as, so Freud tells us, the son kills his father.

Although Zend's creation myth tips toward the tragic and elegiac in "Oāb's Lullaby," it must be remembered that Oāb is not the last word of the text; Zēnd is. By allowing his almost eponymous narrator the post-oābian words of the various appendices, Zend returns his myth to parody, to a carnivalesque de-crowning of Oāb himself. He also completes what I read as an elaborate parody of Christian myth, from *Genesis* to *Revelation*, in a typically postmodernist gesture that appropriates history and myth in order to reaccentuate them in a new *quaternity* of endless recreation. This enterprise reminds me of the visual world of Maurits Cornelius Escher whose play with mathematical formulae, investigation of perspective, and narcissistic reduplications of images are echoed (and acknowledged; see *Oāb* 2, 212-13) throughout Zēnd's text.<sup>3</sup> In *Oāb* Zend has created a deliberately, delightfully Escheresque *mise en oābime*!

ELSEWHERE I HAVE DISCUSSED *Oāb* as an essentially dialogic text because Bakhtinian theory provides an illuminating approach to the questions about discourse and authoring addressed by Zend.<sup>4</sup> None of the voices is finalized in this hybrid narrative where the other is always side-by-side with the author in a dialogue, and the story resists closure by giving the *ultimate* words to "Dr. Sylvester Staggeridge" in the *Terrestrial Times* for 2985 A.O. (precisely 1,000 years after the publication of *Oāb*). According to this theologian-historian, Professor of Neo-Oābian Studies and expert on the Lake Ontario Scrolls (which contain the *Oāb* text we are reading), theories about the Ancient Oābianist cult are "subject to change" whenever the government agrees to fund more research. Moreover, the theories this eminent professor leaves us with are quite preposterous and, with them, the text of *Oāb*, like the Möbius strip that Oāb and Īrdu play with/on (*Oāb* 2, 119-20), circles back on itself so that anything remains possible. *Caveat lector* (and *scriptor*)!

A Bakhtinian approach, however, is by no means the only pertinent guide to reading *Oāb*. Of even greater relevance, perhaps, are Lacan's views on the unconscious, language, narrative, and self-other definition. To undertake a Lacanian analysis of *Oāb* here and now is beyond my abilities and the space available, but a few words may evoke the larger absence to be explored and charted by future narratives about this text. First, *Oāb* is manifestly concerned with desire; it foregrounds and flaunts Zënd's desire, his acute awareness of an absent reality which he inscribes in (which *is*) the narrative of *Oāb*'s creation. However, instead of approaching closer to the pre-symbolic realm of self and mother by exchanging the Name-of-the-Father for the phallus itself, Zënd (and *Oāb* after him in his creation of Īrdu) *necessarily* becomes more and more entangled in narrative. (Language, Lacan insists, precedes and is the condition for the unconscious.)<sup>5</sup> It is their narrative of endless creation that repeats, reveals, and re-presents that absent reality, the (M)other.

If his characters are inextricably caught up in their desire, in the dream world of the unconscious where we leave Zënd and *Oāb* at the end of the story (though *not* at the end of the narrative or the text), Robert Zend is not. Although he cannot free himself from the desire in/of language and narrative, he has refused to be cowed by it. The flamboyant textuality of *Oāb*, its verbal/visual pyrotechnics, its parody and characteristically postmodernist play with history, myth, and human desire succeed, I believe, in upending literary tradition, unveiling (could the semiotics of indexical and iconic signs assist in subverting?) the Symbolic order of language and releasing instinctual drives and repressed consciousness. In *Oāb* Zend acknowledges the Name-of-the-Father for what it is — a word: Zënd. The result is a postmodern creation myth and a Lacanian discourse in/through the unconscious like nothing else in Canadian literature. If Lacan is right that language precedes the unconscious and is the only way of gaining access to consciousness, then Robert Zend's *Oāb* is showing all of us who and where we are: literally, on the curve of the wor(1)d.



(*Oāb* 1, 50)

NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> *Oāb*, 2 vols. (Toronto: Exile Editions, 1985). Zend did most of the artwork and layout, with help from Eydi Caines-Floyd.
- <sup>2</sup> For these few facts concerning Robert Zend, I am indebted to John Robert Colombo's entry on Zend in *The Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature*, ed. William Toye (Toronto: Oxford, 1983), 842. Colombo also worked with Zend on English versions of his poems: *Beyond Labels* (1972) and *From zero to one* (1973).
- <sup>3</sup> I would go further and say that Escher's vision has much in common with Zend's, and an investigation of the parallels between the two and of Zend's mimicking of Escher would reveal a good deal about Zend's method and philosophy. Zend dedicates *Oāb* to Escher and others such as Bach, Bartók, Blake, Magritte, Pirandello, and Rilke.
- <sup>4</sup> See "'Listen to the Voice': Dialogism and the Canadian Novel," *Future Indicative: Literary Theory and Canadian Literature*, ed. John Moss (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1987), 129-31.
- <sup>5</sup> For Lacan's theories in translation, see *Écrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1977). For her discussion and analysis of Lacan I am indebted to Anika Lemaire, *Jacques Lacan* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977).

## WORE DRESSES

*Dave Margoshes*

*Actor Charles Bronson says his family was so poor he started school wearing dresses outgrown by his sister.*

— news item

Mailer is wrong, isn't he  
about tough guys, Charlie,  
you and Papa both debuting  
in skirts then going on  
to help define the lay  
of the land beneath,  
giving weight to the roll  
of flesh without bone  
we can feel in our hands  
without touching, by  
senses alone.

Papa, your mother  
decked you out in dresses  
not because she yearned  
for daughters in her life  
but irony, the sense

of doing right even  
when doing wrong. Genteel  
Michigan doctor's wife  
that she was, she sought  
romantic tension, not merely  
romance, giving you the idea.

In my day, we learned  
to dance at school, in  
gym class, scornful boys  
paired with girls shy  
but arrogant with secrets  
of sex only they knew,  
secrets we could only  
guess at, gasp at like rarefied  
air on Kilimanjaro until  
we found our own footing,  
took our own forms of flight.

## NOT BORN CYD

*Dave Margoshes*

*Dancer Cyd Charisse was born  
Tula Finklea.*

*— news item*

None of us are  
who we become until  
we arrive, Tula,  
the sum of our grasp  
exceeding only the parts  
of our reach. I myself  
was born a child and  
have transmogrified  
into an adult, losing  
something along the way.

Granted our legs  
are true, whether we  
dance or hobble is up  
to us, the cocoon  
we wrap ourselves

in indifferent  
to the changes going  
on within, the lofty sky  
oblivious to what  
emerges from darkness.

## INFIDELITIES OF THE HEART

*Carolyn Zonailo*

(from *Poems of the Heart*, for Anna Akhmatova)

Infidelities of the heart occur nonchalantly,  
without deliberation or a backward glance —  
the heart has no time to consider,  
and why should it? It keeps on looking  
toward the future — and here is opportunity,  
glimpsed obliquely, like a push from behind.  
It has something to do with the way hairs  
grow along the length of an arm,  
or even the stiff tendrils on an ear lobe —  
rarely the conventional gesture or sexual lure:  
what is broadcast is not the heart's infidelity.  
This is letting the heart be in two places at once,  
following the almost unseen gesticulation.  
This is the heart playing tricks, stealing something  
and hoping to get away with it. Trying to get  
a leg up, a headstart, a leap from now  
into then. This infidelity is like banked money,  
something to draw on, a permanent image.



# MY GREAT-GRAND-UNCLE'S BEQUEST

*for my daughter Eva*

*Andrew Busza*

**E**CCENTRICS, LIKE POETRY, are no longer in fashion. What Arnold told Clough in the middle of the last century is once again and perhaps much more literally true today: "Reflect too, as I cannot but do here more and more, in spite of all the nonsense some people talk, how deeply *unpoetical* the age and all one's surroundings are. Not unprofound, not ungrand, not unmoving — but *unpoetical*." Ours is an age of prose — of prose composed and recorded on magnetic tapes and discs. The narratologist brushes aside Blake's *Tyger* to play cat's cradle with *Wuthering Heights*; while the yuppies of Silicon Valley would find my great-grand-uncle Zarembo much odder and more puzzling than some one-eyed alien from *Star Trek*.

Space monsters, however frightening and ugly, are in the final analysis rather comforting creatures. They are deliciously and reassuringly predictable, sporting a perfect fit between signifier and signified. They look sinister and have thoroughly black hearts (except when they are inhumanly mechanized). Even their generic impurity has the easy slickness and lubricity of kitsch.

Now, my great-grand-uncle had dark penetrating eyes (two of them, like most people) and an impressive walrus moustache. He was tall and apparently very good-looking with a severe, dignified manner. As chief notary of the border-town of Kutzy, he was universally respected and, indeed, feared. But in the surrounding countryside, among the Hutzul highlanders, the respect was more often mixed with affection. They called him the "Hutzul Notary." They sought his advice on legal as well as domestic matters. They turned to him when there were disputes to arbitrate and quarrels to settle. No district judge enjoyed such prestige and so much authority. All that, in spite of some of his singular ways. When he walked through the town-square he barely noticed people, dismissing the doctor, the priest, and the mayor with a supercilious nod, but on meeting a beggar or one of the poorer Hutzul shepherds, he took off his hat first, and bowed low and graciously. When asked

why he behaved in this odd manner, he replied: "The first don't need my bows — it is the others who crave for respect."

Although Zaremba married and even had a son (not a great success, I am told), he was, by nature, a loner. After retiring at sixty, he spent more and more time wandering alone in the Carpathians. Once in a while, he would appear unannounced in his country home, stay a day or two, pay for his food and lodging, and then walk off back into the mountains as suddenly and unceremoniously as he had come. In his later years, as if afraid not to lose his independence and freedom, he became obsessively tight-fisted and miserly. Distrustful of banks and other financial institutions, he carried large sums of money inside a wide, padded leather belt, especially made for the purpose, which he wore under his shirt. Once, a servant, who had accompanied him on his treks for almost two years, vanished together with the belt and money after they had put up for the night at a mountain inn. Old Zaremba had a new belt made to order and from then on travelled alone, sometimes in the company of a stray dog.

Not to inconvenience or to feel beholden to anyone, he prepared his own burial many years ahead of time. He selected and bought a plot in a small country-churchyard on the outskirts of Kutý, refusing to be interred in the family tomb. He carefully supervised the making of an oak coffin with brass studs and handles. This coffin waited in the corner of his room for many years. It was covered with a black-white-and-red Hutzul rug, on top of which there stood a small Dresden china doll. Inside, neatly folded, lay an old-fashioned Polish gentry coat which buttoned up under the chin and had elaborate gold-thread trimming on the front. It was to be his last formal dress.

But there was nothing, strictly speaking, gothic about my great-grand-uncle (except perhaps for one characteristic); in fact, his official life, as structured and handed down by family tradition, bears the generic imprint of Polish Romantic narratives. It is a typical story played out against the landscape of historical events and rendered meaningful by the patterning of history.

Uncle Zaremba came from a distinguished gentry family whose roots can be traced back almost to the beginnings of the Polish state. One of his forebears was a thirteenth-century bishop of the ancient See of Poznań; another fought against the Teutonic knights at the battle of Grunwald in 1410; a third belonged to the infamous Confederation of Targowica, a group of Polish nobles who collaborated with the Russians at the time of the Second Partition. It was to expiate this inheritance of guilt and vindicate the family name and honour that Zaremba joined the uprising against the Russians in 1863.

His parents, not at all keen on the idea, first tried to dissuade the over-eager sixteen-year-old. He could serve his country more effectively when he was a little older, they argued. He could count on Polish history to provide him with another opportunity soon enough. Since, however, the boy did not seem to be amenable

to persuasion, the parents resorted to coercive measures. He was placed under family house-arrest. A servant would guard him all day long. At night, he slept in an alcove separated from the rest of the house by a high-vaulted chamber, which served as a bedroom for his sisters and girl-cousins. It was felt that the young man's sense of propriety and respect for the feminine modesty of family guests would prevent him from escaping as effectively as stone walls and iron bars. And, indeed, my great-grand-uncle would not think of offending the pudency of my great-grand-cousins; indeed, one night, just as dawn was breaking, he climbed out of the alcove window onto a stone ledge, then onto an adjacent mulberry tree, and from there onto the gravel path that led to the stables. Within minutes he was cantering on his favourite mare Sophie into the misty darkness.

Two days later, one of the servants found a hurriedly scribbled note on the mantle-piece next to the silver-plated family coat of arms with its three knots and lion rampart. It read: "I've gone to pay back our great-grand-father's debt."

YOUNG ZAREMBA spent several months "in the forest," fighting with various partisan units. In the summer of 1863 he was in the south in the Holy Cross Mountains under the command of M. Heydenreich, alias the Raven. On August 8 he took part in the daring dawn attack on a Russian convoy escorting government mail from Warsaw to Lublin. The ambush, led jointly by the Raven and an Irish volunteer named O'Brien de Lacey, was a great success. By midday the Russian column had been virtually annihilated. The partisans, having captured a treasure chest with a large consignment of money, intended for the border fortresses, disappeared into the forest well before the arrival of Cossack reinforcements. Uncle Zaremba galloped up the wooded hillside with only a scratch to his neck and cheek. A pine-tree branch had grazed him during the downhill charge.

But no more than a fortnight would pass before his entire troop were lying dead or dying on a sunlit clearing of a young forest east of Lublin. Zaremba had been shot in the chest, and having lost consciousness had fallen off his horse. The Cossacks, who were rounding up prisoners and killing off the more grievously wounded, left him for dead. At nightfall, some Gypsies, who were camping nearby, came to scavenge on the battlefield. They found the boy still alive and took him back to their camp and looked after him.

He stayed with the band several weeks, nursing his wound and regaining strength, and increasingly enjoying the freedom and truancy of life on the road. It was better than the summer holidays. He could sleep in till midday; sit by the camp-fire under the fluffy stars past midnight; and, best of all, there were no aunts nagging and fussing around him. With the eagerness of a schoolboy, he learnt

about the ways, customs, and lore of the Romany people. Soon, like Pushkin's Aleko, he even fell in love with a bright-eyed Gypsy girl.

Uncle Zaremba's idyll of the road came to an abrupt end on a bridge on the Dniester, barely sixty kilometres from home. The Gypsies had agreed to take him to Sniatyn on their way to Moldavia. Their intrinsic kindness found reinforcement in the boy's often repeated assurances that his parents would reward them generously. However, as the band was crossing the river near Halicz, a troop of Hungarian hussars stopped the train and started searching the wagons. They found young Zaremba hiding under a pallet in one of the caravans. In later years he would say that a rival for the affections of bright-eyed Zemfira had informed against him.

There followed eighteen months of imprisonment in Kufstein, and then, after the amnesty, a two-year-long stay in Paris. It was there that he began to acquire the reputation of an original. He was seen daily, taking long solitary walks along the Boulevard St. Michel, dressed in a shabby military coat, with an insurgent cap on his head. In cafés where the émigrés congregated to discuss politics and ways of making money, he would come up to strangers and offer to read their future from a pack of soiled tarot cards.

On his return to Galicia, he took a degree in Law at the University of Lemberg, married the daughter of one of the best families in the district, and served as the chief notary public of Kutý for almost forty years.

MUCH IN HIS LIFE had not turned out quite the way he had wished or planned. This was clearly the case with his funeral. He had always wanted to make a quiet, unobtrusive exit. He would say: "May the end — when it comes — be sudden and simple like the shutting of a window." Then, puffing on his long-stem pipe, he would add: "And remember, I don't want fanfare or ceremony. Let two tramps carry my coffin to the cemetery at dusk by the light of a single lantern."

In the event, however, his wishes were not fulfilled; or perhaps more accurately, they were only half-fulfilled. He died in November, at the time of the first snow-falls, and only a handful of his closest family could make it to Kutý. At least, that was the excuse they gave. The parish priest came — for obvious reasons. So did the Fire-chief, who knew old Zaremba from childhood and who, in the old days, played chess with him in the chequered shade of a sour-cherry tree. Though the two chess partners saw little of each other in later years, they knew that whoever died first, the other would go to his friend's funeral. But none of the other prominent citizens or town officials bothered to attend. The funeral procession, which nevertheless numbered well over two hundred persons, was made up mostly of Hutzul

shepherds, village headmen, two or three Ruthenian priests, and a fairly large contingent of vagrants and church beggars. A stray dog closed the motley cortège.

And then there is one more fact concerning my great-grand-uncle. The chief notary of Kutu, it was said, had psychic powers. This is the story which made the rounds of the inns and taverns of the Prut Valley: One rainy Sunday afternoon, Zaremba was sitting with several regulars in the corner of Urumbein's restaurant in Kosow. They were smoking and sipping thick black coffee after their usual lunch of boiled beef in horseradish sauce, mashed potatoes, and brine-pickled cucumbers, while Zaremba reminisced about his Gypsy days. Then his eye fell on a black walking-stick with a large silver knob that was lying on a chair next to an empty table across the aisle. A few minutes earlier an elegant middle-aged man in a brown check suit of English cut, with a waxed moustache and beige spats on his patent leather shoes, had got up from that table and walked out of the restaurant. Zaremba leaned across the aisle and stretching out his hand reached for the walking-stick. "I'll tell you something about the owner," he said, touching his forehead with the heavy silver knob. For a while he sat in meditative concentration. Suddenly, he went pale and muttered almost inaudibly: "I see blood. A dark pool of blood on a Hutzul rug." The company froze, silent and aghast. Several minutes passed and no one said a word. Then Urumbein, who had joined them for coffee, spoke: "Ten years ago, a young woman was found dead in a hotel room in Kolomyja. There was an inquest. The coroner concluded that she had been bludgeoned to death by a prowler. Apparently, she had surprised him on returning to her room at night. But many people, including the girl's parents, weren't happy with the verdict. There were rumours that she was having an affair with her cousin, Baron Skarbek. Someone had even seen them quarrelling in a fiacre outside Sandler's millinery shop. But Baron Skarbek had a solid alibi, and, what's more, he was very influential in the district. With time the cloud of suspicion that surrounded the baron dissipated and people forgot the story." Urumbein stubbed his cigar on the marble ash-tray. After a long pause, he said: "The gentleman who lunched at that table was Baron Skarbek."

The incident, which became the talk of Kosow and the surrounding area for weeks, established and sealed Zaremba's reputation as a clairvoyant. It did not seem to occur to anyone at the time that my great-grand-uncle, like Urumbein, could easily have known the story of Baron Skarbek and his unfortunate cousin. But he might not have known it. What is certain, however, is that he enjoyed the reputation.

Apart from a century-old photograph, showing an elderly man with a splendid white moustache sitting in the middle of a family group consisting of five men and four women, I have nothing tangible left from my great-grand-uncle. He left me neither his insurgent cap, nor his walking-stick, nor his tarot pack. I have inherited neither his panache nor his psychic powers. All that he bequeathed me is his

colourful, blatantly old-fashioned and slightly ambiguous personality and a story encrusted with the patina of a family's imagination. This may seem little — but it is really very much. In this tumbleweed world of ours in which homes are periodically abandoned, families disposed of, friendships dropped, loyalties betrayed; in which we suffer perhaps more than from anything else from what John Fowles calls the *nemo* — the sense and anguish of being nobody — it is truly comforting to have such an anchor in one's past even if the reality in which it is grounded has vanished for ever, even if it is in part shaped by the poetry of illusions.

## CIRCUS

*Jars Balan*

"Circus / (for Tamarka and Katrusia)" [*Tsyрк, dlia Tarmarky i Katrusi*] is part of a larger work I call *Autobiographica*.

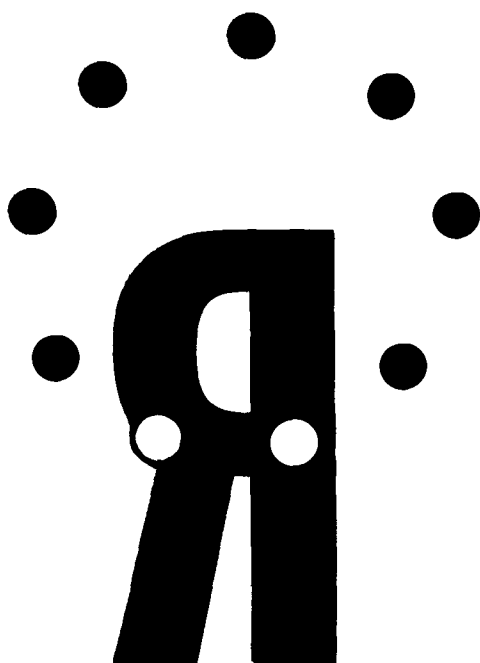
The text of the entire collection is composed of the cyrillic letter resembling a backwards R, pronounced like the German *ja*. As this cyrillic letter also represents the personal pronoun "I" the book can be seen as a kind of extended hymn to individuality, though that by no means adequately describes the subject matter of *Autobiographica*. The primary intent is to explore the pictographic possibilities of phonetic script — repressed for utilitarian reasons — by celebrating the expressive potential of single character. Hence, the letter is presented in a variety of interpretations (distortions), configurations, and graphic contexts, which I hope will rekindle a child-like sense of wonder about writing besides challenging readers' narrow assumptions about poetry. The particular cycle, "Circus," is done in a style I call "cartoonographic," but many of the other works in the collection are less representational.

There is long and rich tradition of visual poetry in Ukrainian literature, which I am attempting to extend, popularize, and develop through my creative work. It is a genre that is of specific and growing critical interest to me. Pattern poetry was very much in vogue in Ukraine during the baroque era, and graphic forms of writing were briefly revived by the Ukrainian avant-garde of the 1920s. I consciously draw on these and other non-Ukrainian sources in my efforts to perpetuate the use of visual forms, which I first began experimenting with in 1971, while a student at the Banff School of Fine Arts.

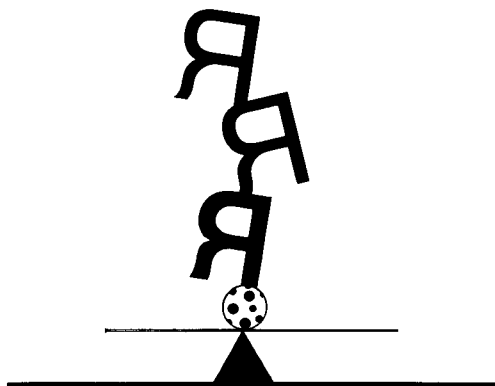
Although I also write visual poetry in English and expect to produce works in a number of other languages, for various political and aesthetic reasons I am working primarily in Ukrainian at the present time. Essentially, I want to establish that there are no "official" literary languages in Canada, only languages that Canadian writers adopt as their preferred means of communication. I further see my work in Ukrainian as a kind of gesture of defiance, contributing in a small way to the on-going struggle against the Russification and stultification of literary life in Soviet Ukraine.

# Цирк

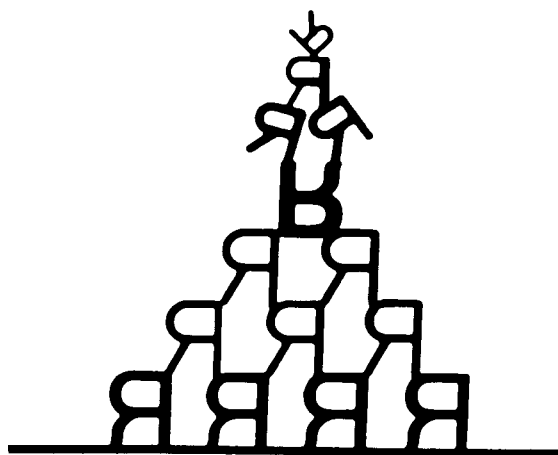
для Тamarки  
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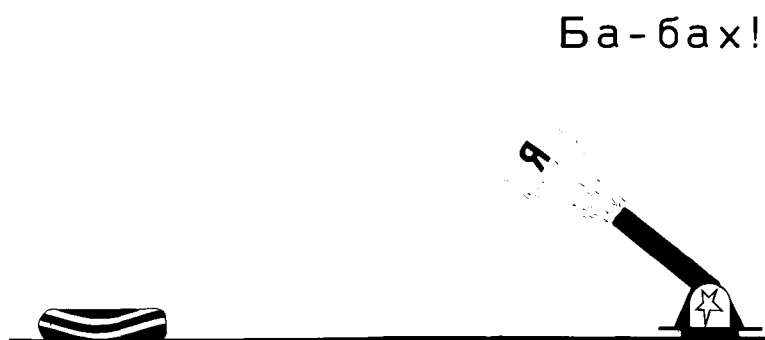
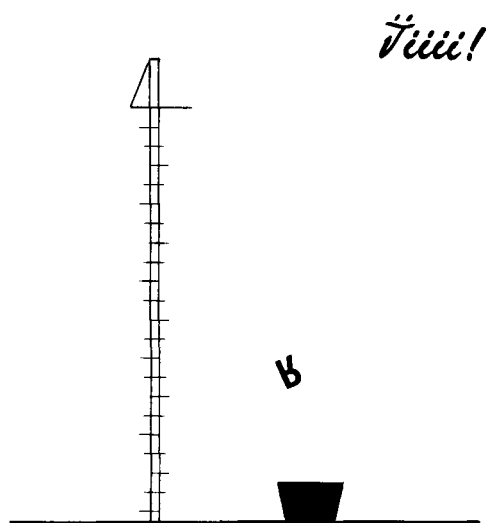


*Oooo!*

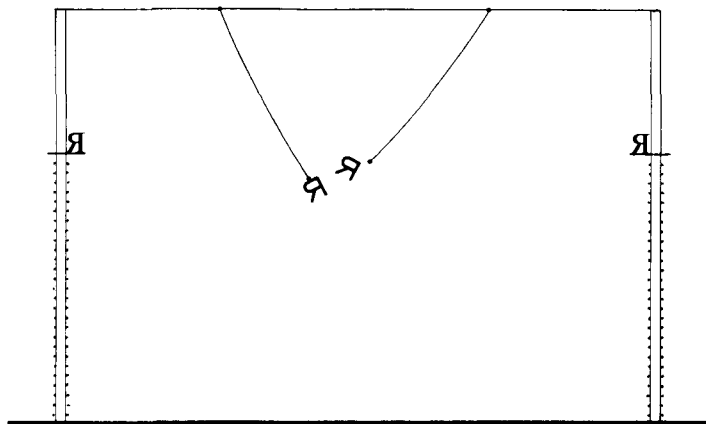


*Ура!*

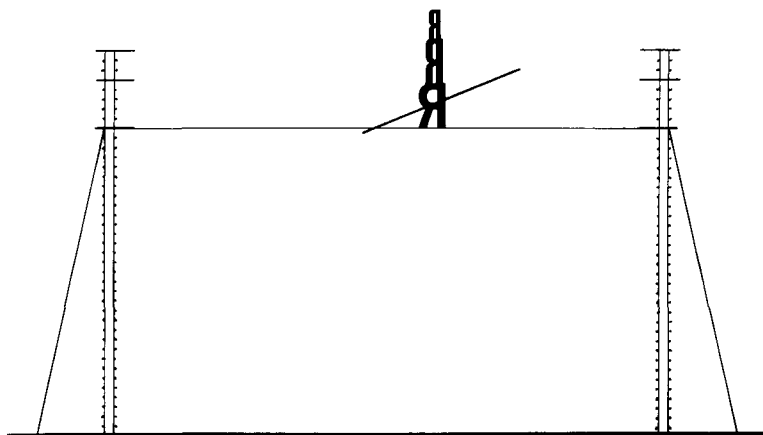




*Уууу!*



*Аааа!*



# RUSSIAN WRITERS AND THE DOUKHOBORS

George Woodcock

ONE DAY WHEN I WAS TALKING to Mavor Moore about his childhood, he recollected going in his parents' house to answer a ring on the doorbell. "And there stood Princess Kropotkin." Princess Kropotkin was actually Alexandra (Sasha), the daughter of the famous Russian anarchist and geographer, Peter Kropotkin; after her father's death near Moscow in 1921 she had migrated to the United States and lived in New York. The friendship she sustained with Mavor's mother, the actress Dora Mavor Moore, was a continuation of that which had existed since the mid-1880s between her father and James Mavor, the distinguished Scottish Canadian political economist who was Dora's father, and whose memoir, *My Windows on the Street of the World* (1923), is one of the most interesting of Canadian autobiographies. It was a friendship that would involve a number of important Russian writers and intellectuals and that led to the coming of the Doukhobors to Canada.

Kropotkin and James Mavor first met in November 1886 when Kropotkin had gone to Edinburgh to lecture on anarchism. He stayed with James Stuart Blackie, the Classical scholar and translator of Aeschylus, and among the people he met on that occasion were Patrick Geddes, Fridtjof Nansen (then a young man studying in Scotland), and James Mavor, who was then professor of political economy at St. Mungo's College in Glasgow; he would not take up his post at the University of Toronto until 1892. The meeting stayed vividly in Mavor's mind, and he wrote in his autobiography what is perhaps the best portrait we have of the anarchist prince at this time, when he was forty-two and at the height of his vigour.

He was short, not more than five and a half feet, slight in build, with unusually small feet, a slender waist and broad shoulders. He had a short neck and a large head. He wore a full brown beard, seldom trimmed and never lacking its distinctive character. The top of his head was destitute of hair, but on the sides and back of it his dark-brown hair was ample. His eyes sparkled with genius, and when he was roused became almost incandescent. His manner had about it the air of a court; but with his friends his affectionate solicitude was the outcome of a sincere and warm heart. He wrote in English with accuracy and distinct sense of style, and he wrote in French with equal facility and distinction, but in speaking the languages his accent was by no means perfect.

The friendship continued, Mavor visiting Kropotkin in Harrow, which was his home in exile, and they kept in touch after Mavor went to Canada. In September 1897, when the British Association for the Advancement of Science held its annual meeting in Toronto, Kropotkin gave two papers there, derived from the geographical expeditions that had predated his anarchist militancy, on the glacial deposits of Finland and on his influential theories regarding the structure of the East Asian mountain ranges. He stayed for several weeks with Mavor, and then travelled across Canada as far as Victoria, taking advantage of an excursion on the Canadian Pacific which William Van Horne had arranged on behalf of the visiting scientists. He returned more slowly, stopping in the new towns of the prairies and the pioneer settlements that were rapidly and rawly growing up. Often he came into contact with people from the Russian steppes: the Ukrainians — then mostly called Galicians — whom Clifford Sifton was industriously importing, and especially the Menonites who had left Russia in the 1870s to avoid military service and who were living in communal villages and using their experience of dry farming on the steppes to pioneer agricultural methods suited to the prairies. Kropotkin embodied his observations in a lengthy article in *The Nineteenth Century* (March 1898) which is still worth reading for its vivid impressions of a pioneer world.

It was this article that came to the attention of Leo Tolstoy's close friend and follower, Vladimir Chertkov, who like Kropotkin was living in exile in England where he had founded a Tolstoyan colony at Purleigh, which became the headquarters of the Tolstoyan Committee seeking aid for the Doukhobors, at this time suffering great persecution in Russia because of their refusal to bear arms. The Tsarist authorities had expelled them from their rich farms in the Caucasus and sent them into an exile in Georgia so rigorous that they could survive only by emigration. A pioneer group — assisted by Tolstoyans and English Quakers — had already gone to Cyprus, then a British colony, but conditions there turned out to be unsatisfactory, and Chertkov and his committee were considering an alternative when Kropotkin's article appeared, describing the favourable conditions the Menonites had obtained for settlement on the prairies. They had received their land in large blocks, instead of in quarter sections of 160 acres as happened to ordinary farmers under the Dominion Land Act, and had been allowed to settle in villages instead of being required to reside each on his own homestead. This enabled them to maintain their own form of communal organization, which was not unlike that of the Doukhobors, while they had been exempted from the provisions of the Canadian militia laws.

As soon as Chertkov wrote to him, Kropotkin went to Purleigh, and convinced the Tolstoyan Committee that Canada was the best of all possible places for the Doukhobors to settle. Two Doukhobor delegates were already in England, and it was decided that they should immediately go to Canada to assess the situation. Meanwhile Kropotkin wrote to James Mavor, unaware that Mavor's interest in

the plight of the Doukhobors had already been aroused, and he had suggested independently to Clifford Sifton that the Doukhobors might fit well into his plans for the settlement of the North West Territories. At the same time Mavor had written to Tolstoy, and in the correspondence that followed Tolstoy had assured him that the Doukhobors were excellent farmers. When Mavor asked about the Doukhobor attitude to education Tolstoy — rather rashly as it turned out — expressed the view that the Doukhobors would send their children to school, “provided the children would not be obliged to receive religious training.”

Meanwhile, without waiting for an answer to Kropotkin’s letter to Mavor, the Doukhobor delegates had set sail for Canada on the *Vancouver* on September 1. Here two further leading members of the Tolstoy circle became involved, for the Doukhobors were accompanied by Prince Hilkof, like Kropotkin a “conscience-stricken nobleman” who had given up his fortune and privileges to serve the cause of the people, and Aylmer Maude, the English carpet dealer who acquired fame as Tolstoy’s leading translator. While his companions travelled steerage, Maude took a first-class cabin because he was susceptible to sea-sickness, “feeling much ashamed of myself for such un-Tolstoyan self-indulgence.”

To the connections Mavor had made, Maude added his own in the carpet trade, and through the merchant James Morgan he made contact with Thomas Shaughnessy, vice-president of the CPR, who offered favourable terms for transporting the Doukhobors if they came. Maude in fact turned out to be the most useful person on the delegation, keeping constant touch with Tolstoy and the Tolstoyan Committee in England, and mediating between the Canadian authorities and the Doukhobor delegates who spoke no English and who became suspicious of their non-Doukhobor companions, actually accusing them of “making money out of the Canadian government at the expense of the Doukhobors.” Tolstoy tried to soothe the ruffled feelings of Hilkof and Maude by remarking: “All descriptions of Doukhobors . . . are so idealistic that they become unbelievable, and therefore such incidents only lend reality to the picture.” Despite such discouragement, Maude went on a tour of the United States to raise interest, and gained some support from the novelist William Dean Howells, and, more important, from the American Quakers. Thanks to Maude’s efforts, assisted by some backstairs persuasion on Mavor’s part, agreement was reached by October 1898 on the terms on which the Doukhobors would be granted land in Canada.

Once the Canadian government had finally wired on October 27 that everything was clear for the arrival of the Doukhobors, the *Lake Huron* was chartered to take the first shipload from Batum to Halifax. Tolstoy himself raised \$17,000 — almost half the cost — by appeals to wealthy Russians. He also donated the royalties of his last novel, *Resurrection*, but this was not ready for publication until the end of 1899, and the \$17,000 it raised was actually used to help settle the Doukhobors after they reached Canada. The arrangements at Batum were made on Tolstoy’s

behalf by an attractive young Tolstoyan, Leopold Sulerzhitsky, a renowned and reformed ladykiller who had become a convinced pacifist (converted by Tolstoy's daughter Tatiana) and had served his own term in prison for refusing military service. The first voyage out, indeed, was accompanied by a whole contingent of the Russian intelligentsia, for Tolstoy's son Sergei also sailed, while one of the doctors, Alexei Ilyich Bakunin, was a nephew of the dead anarchist leader, Michael Bakunin, Kropotkin's predecessor as the leading ideologue of the movement. The *Lake Huron* left Batum on December 21 and docked in Halifax on January 24, 1899. Sergei Tolstoy returned to supervise further sailings, but Sulerzhitsky remained with the Doukhobors for a whole year, until early 1900, helping them get settled on the land allotted to them in what later became Saskatchewan.

ON THE SECOND VOYAGE of the *Lake Huron*, the Russian Marxist writer Vladimir Bonch-Breuvich, later a close associate of Lenin during the October Revolution and the Civil War years, was among the sympathizers accompanying the Doukhobors. His interests were largely sociological, and he spent much of his time familiarizing himself with the sect's rich heritage of oral literature, psalms and hymns, which the Doukhobors themselves called the Living Book.

Another Russian writer of some importance who became involved with the Doukhobors in Canada was Paul Biriukov, the former naval officer who became Tolstoy's disciple and eventually his official biographer. Like Vladimir Chertkov, Biriukov did not accompany the Doukhobors to Canada in the 1890s, but, from his vantage point of Geneva, where he lived at this time, he provided a channel of communication between the Doukhobors and their friends in Canada and the Tolstoyans in Russia. Later, however, when the Doukhobor leader Peter Verigin died mysteriously in 1924, and his son Peter Chistiakov (the Purger) came to Canada in 1927 to take over his father's role, Biriukov finally reached Canada in his train. Now more than eighty, he had been told that he could organize a Tolstoyan system of education for the Doukhobors. But nothing came of his expectations; after reaching Canada he was given nothing to do and treated as a butt for Chistiakov's jests and rages. He returned disillusioned to Russia, the last of the writers of that country's classic age to be connected with the Doukhobors.

These contacts resulted in a number of books, all appearing in the first decade of the twentieth century. Tolstoy's *Resurrection*, whose completion was hastened by the plight of the Doukhobors, even if its theme had no relation to them, was the most important. Aylmer Maude wrote *A Peculiar People: The Doukhobors* (New York, 1904), a wry record of disillusioned sympathy. Leopold Sulerzhitsky, after returning to Russia, had a distinguished career as an actor and director with the Moscow Arts Theatre until his early death in 1916, taking part in a number of

Stanislavsky's productions of Chekhov's plays. His account of his experiences, *V Ameriku s Dukhoborami*, appeared in 1905, and it was finally published in English and in Canada, translated by Michael Kalmakoff, as *To America with the Doukhobors*, in 1982. Maxim Gorki, who was an affectionate friend of Sulerzhitsky and included an essay on him in his *Literary Portraits*, complained of the disorganized way in which the book was written (it was in fact little more than a rewriting of the diaries Sulerzhitsky kept at the time), and recorded how he had urged "Suler" to include some of his own interesting adventures to enliven the text, but Sulerzhitsky had replied: "What have I to do with it? The Doukhobors are the subject; I am an outsider to this unnatural coupling of religion and politics."

Unlike his *Life of Tolstoy*, Paul Biriukov's book on the sect, *Dukhobortsy* (Moscow, 1908), has never been translated, nor has the material from the Living Book which Bonch-Bruevich included in his various studies of the Doukhobors. Perhaps indeed the most important material remains the series of Tolstoy's letters regarding the Doukhobors and their emigration, which has never been completely published in English, though it appears in the Russian editions of his collected works. Probably the best book written at the time outside Russia on Tolstoy's involvement with the Doukhobors was J. Bienstock's *Tolstoi et les Doukhobors; fait historiques réunis et traduits du russe* (Paris, 1902). Tolstoy's letters, indeed, show him turning from a somewhat naïve and misled admirer of the sect as an example of Christian anarchism into a critic of the theocracy that its leaders practised in real life, the kind of mental evolution everyone who has had close contact with Doukhobors has undergone. "How is it that you have turned from a martyr for the truth into a despot?" he shouted at Peter the Lordly when the latter returned to Russia on a visit in 1907 and called at Vasnaya Polyana.

By this time, indeed, the interest of Russian writers in the Doukhobors, now facing new problems with the Canadian government, perceptibly diminished. No book sympathetic to them was published in Russia after 1908, when Biriukov's account appeared. This was not merely because the Doukhobors were out of sight in Canada, and therefore largely out of mind. It was, even more, because, between the revolutions of 1905 and 1917, new developments in Russia were demanding attention, and the problem of the Doukhobors, though it continued, was no longer thought of as a Russian one.



## POEM

*Yar Slavutych*

It was when you arrived in white,  
Beside me stopping, slender-waisted,  
That suddenly the mist which thrived  
In heavy dismal brume had wasted.

It was as though your lips of flame —  
Myriads of rays from heaven reeling.  
And I knew not that brightness came  
From you, or from your dress was stealing.

*Translated from the Ukrainian  
by Orysia Ferbey*

## FROM A SIMPLE TRIPTYCH

*Oleh Zujewskyj*

The book does not say how the strong eagles  
Started their journey into the unknown.  
Their only witnesses were the waves  
And the wind which never stops blowing.

And though the sailors, no other experts,  
Could always remember anything that is not chimera.  
(Read about them in the conclusion  
To the second book of *Gulliver's Travels*)

You would admit a silent forgetfulness  
While eagerly commencing to tell the instructive story  
How Odysseus, from littoral grass  
Is stretching his hands to Nausicaä.

# VISITING AUNT ANNIE'S

*Carolyn Zonailo*

Always the soft sound of the Russian tongue  
as we sat in Aunt Annie's small house,  
the windows in the kitchen steaming up  
from all the cooking  
and the animated conversations,  
half in Russian, half English —  
my Dad's face young and laughing  
and far away from my mother  
lost in the language of his childhood.

Then we ate borscht and vareniki  
and caggabe rolls until our stomachs  
were so full we felt sick but still Babooshka  
would be saying "eat, eat"  
in her soft, persuasive voice,  
a refrain all the aunts  
would take up too — "eat, eat . . ."

Babooshka would show us  
her latest rag-rug, the coloured rags  
braided into long strips  
and then circled into a carpet;  
and I remember the strips made from nylon stockings,  
the multi-coloured patterns of the rugs.

The women's bodies soft, too, like  
their voices speaking Russian —  
fluid and large-bosomed;  
the men with shining eyes  
and quick laughter  
starting to shout now,  
then suddenly someone bursts into song  
and the others join in, singing in Russian.  
Later, when we are driving home  
and I am falling asleep in the back seat,  
the Russian words I don't understand echo in my head  
like a lullaby, lulling me to sleep.

# ON DOUKHOBOR PSALMS

*Mark Mealing*

## *I. Introduction*

I am dreaming of someone who entered a great garden and wandered happily, amazed by noble and exotic flowers, straying in fragrant groves and wondering at low bushes with healing powers. With so much to find, not for days did he realize that on one side of the garden was, brought from far away, a great and ancient tree of singular beauty and worth. It is like this for those who consider the literature of British Columbia: between our known and established writers, the richness of the vernacular of fisher, logger, rail and cowboy poets, the potent myths of native people and the bright work of rising and rebellious authors, it is easy to miss the local and obscure performance of Doukhobor psalmody. This psalmody is rarely heard outside the West Kootenay — and then only at worship or infrequent community festivals. Time and circumstance thus conceal a potent and elegant transplantation of Russian spirituality, its richness sometimes unseen even by its preservers. In this essay, I hope to introduce the form and a little of the content of this tradition.

The sect that came to be known as Doukhobors was born out of the *Raskol*, the schism that followed reforms in the Russian Orthodox Church in the 1650s, when many rejected Orthodox form, scripture, hierarchy, liturgy, and authority as corrupt or corruptible and in any case inferior to the voice of God within the believer. God's People, as they named themselves, must not take life, even as soldiers at the State's behest, because to do so would be not only to kill but, far worse, to silence the divine voice: adding decide to homicide. Horrific persecutions followed as a matter of course from both Church and State. Over the 18th and 19th centuries the Doukhobors acquired their current name, a principle of spiritual leadership, and a special body of liturgical texts. Supplemented by hymns, legends, prophecies and healing charms, these came to be known as the Living Book. St. Paul comments (II Cor. 3/6, NEB) that "the written law condemns to death, but the Spirit brings life." So Doukhobors proverbially say, "Write it on the heart, reveal it through the mouth" — meaning at least to imply that we are not so well addressed through cold print as we are through the speech of a living companion.

Conscription, spiritual revitalization, and punitive outrages drove the most devout Doukhobors from Russia to Canada at the turn of the century, and external and internal conflict brought them to their present circumstances: most living in the West Kootenay of British Columbia, as many in their first refuge in eastern Saskatchewan, some in the lower Fraser Valley, a few everywhere. They are divided into three major factions: the Community, Independents, and Sons of Freedom. And they are challenged by their own divisions, by the acculturative pressures of the North American late 20th century and by the ominous shades of war and the beggaring of the natural world. The mother tongue is not strongly preserved; young people are confused by external lures and internal failures; the future is in doubt. Yet still the Psalms are recited and sung, because they speak to the condition of life and have answers worthy to be heard.

Doukhobor Psalmody has been neglected by scholars<sup>1</sup> till very recently. Nothing easily available to the researcher was documented before the turn of the century; the first and great serious collection is that of Vladimir Bonch-Bruevich, a Marxist scholar (who became Lenin's personal secretary and favourably influenced Soviet policies toward sectarians), made in Russia and Canada at the turn of the century and published in Russia in 1909. This was translated (but, alas, issued before the rough translation was revised) in 1978. Kenneth Peacock collected widely in the mid-1960s and published three tune and song texts with translation and LP floppy transcription in 1970; and in 1972, I presented over a hundred texts in transcription and translation in a dissertation that is currently undergoing revision for publication. The Union of Spiritual Communities of Christ published an excellent revised collection of Psalms, hymns, and secular songs, edited by Peter Legebokoff and Anna Markova, in 1978.

## *II. The Music of the Psalms*

All Psalms may be spoken, but some are also sung in meetings (never privately or by one person: they are a communal expression). The music is remarkable. Its origin is uncertain but is clearly rooted in Russian religious tradition, possibly preserving some qualities of the lost, indigenous *Znanemi* chant of Orthodoxy, certainly cognate with the post-Byzantine hymnody of medieval eastern Europe. It is polyphonic in a manner simpler than the western Baroque tradition but more complex than any European folk tradition and arguably equalled only by the *Gamelan* folk-orchestral tradition of Indonesia. It shares with the Southeast United States Sacred Harp tradition a provocative archaic choral structure: the melody is carried by two central voices, Lower Female and Upper Male either in unison or parallel octave, while Lower Male and Upper Female move in approximate but regularly varied four-to-five interval organon below and above the central

voices. In a large assembly, four or five female descants and perhaps two male contrabasses may sing lines of extreme harmonic freedom.

The fundamental harmony is simple, but other factors complicate what is heard. Melisma is extreme: a verse of a typical psalm may run anywhere between 1½ and 6 minutes at a rate of up to two or three pitch-changes per second, and cover 6 to 12 words. Singers who falter through age or inexperience will not pause till they recover, but will improvise an independent line leading back into the general melody they ought to follow. When choirs from regions with variant traditions share a common performance, unexpected changes result. Finally, an acoustic effect (harmonic resultant) may cause the listener to hear most clearly notes that no singer is producing.

The choral tradition was strictly oral till the last 15 years, when two hymnals<sup>2</sup> were published among Community Doukhobors. While musical style has been buttressed by the making of recordings (disc and, more recently and generally, tape) since the 1940s, the Psalms are not represented in published recordings. All regional communities are chorally active, with groups composed variously of Elders, Men, Women, Young People, Children, and (mixed) Adults. Since hymns and secular songs can also be performed by soloists, duets, trios, quartets, and larger small groups of any age, enthusiastic singers may perform in more than one group through their singing lives. I would guess that at least 5% of Doukhobors have extended choral expertise and that about 17% have experience characteristic of Anglo-Canadian church choristers.

### *III. The Texts of the Psalms*

The texts of the Doukhobor Psalms present distinctive religious concepts through distinctive literary techniques; it seems appropriate to outline these before we consider some representative examples.

It is difficult to classify the Psalms: they deal with subjective and transcendental ideas that are often opaque to logical dissection; further, under the rubric of Psalms, Doukhobors include several kinds of text: Cataphetical texts; the core indigenous body of communal texts; personal prayers; Biblical, liturgical and devotional excerpts; healing prayers; and texts comparable to amulets. Bonch-Bruевич essayed a fourteen-part classification but could not avoid inconsistency; however, we should recognize his major classes: Dogmatic; of the Next Life and of Future Judgement; Accusing; Didactic; Suppliant; of Thanksgiving; of Praise; on Events from the Gospels; and Miscellaneous. I elect, practically, to keep to his numbering system. To set up and argue a new classification here goes beyond an introduction, but its outlines may appear when we consider the Psalms' religious content. It is, of course, obtuse to speak of religious content in religious documents; but it is less so to note

motifs and elements of style that mark religious concepts and moods specific to Doukhobor belief.

There are three classes of motifs prominent in the Psalms and characteristic of Doukhobor belief, at least in contrast with schools of Western psalmody. I have set aside some well-represented motifs that occur more widely, such as New Jerusalem, Church/Temple, and so on; those retained have special contexts for Doukhobors. References to Psalms by Title refer to texts collected in my dissertation but not by Bonch-Bruevich.

#### A. Expressions of Doctrine

1. **CHRISTOLOGY:** Psalms 1/3, 16; 71; 74. Christ is described, with no detail, as "God . . . within man"; "God . . . speaks with a human mouth." "In his own being the Son bears witness to the Father." Miraculous or supernatural attributes and acts of Christ are pointedly not discussed.
2. **TRINITY:** Psalms 1/5; 64. "In every quality of the spirit, the human power is this: memory, reason, will. By memory we are likened to God the Father; by reason, . . . to God the Son; by will — to the Holy Spirit, thus in the holy Trinity there are three persons, yet they hold one spirit; three spiritual powers, but one God." Cf. Augustine, *De Trinitate*, ix, iii.

#### B. Definitions

1. **CLEANLINESS:** Psalms 1/10; 6/12, 43, 114; 6 Var./69. Physical cleanliness is a sign of spiritual purity.
2. **COMMUNION:** Psalms 1/24; 6/123; 6 Var./65-67; 74; 76. The Eucharist consists of sharing Christ's suffering and receiving the strength of spiritual knowledge from him.
3. **IMAGE:** Psalms 6/63; 74; 83; 146. It is a sin to bow to any but God, whose only image is Christ and man; Doukhobors bow not to man but to the God within man.
4. **MILLENARIAN CHANGE:** Psalms 6 Var./12; 144/5, 6. The world and the Believers in it move continually forward from chaos to perfection.
5. **MIRACLES:** Psalms 1/13; 191. Believers need concern themselves with no miracles beyond that of the redemption of sinners.
6. **ORIGIN:** Psalms 6/70; 6 Var./16. The Three Holy Children (cf. Daniel 1, iii, esp. 16-18 or iii) are the archetypal Doukhobors. (They defied blasphemous tyranny, were condemned to torment and were miraculously preserved, to the tyrant's edification.)

## C. General Concepts

1. ANTICHRIST: Psalms 6/100; 6 Var./20; 130; 143; 166. Once named, twice identified as Goliath, twice as Antiochus: archetype of human opposition to Christ and his Believers.
2. DIRECTIONS: Psalms 6/103; 6 Var./71; 61; 71; 89; 123; 140; 197; 213; 156; 266; 342; 352; *Maiden Mother-of-God*; *Against Witchcraft on the Way*. Believers, Blessings, the Christ-Child, the Lord in Judgment, and the Sun and Morning-Star all appear from the East. (The concepts /Sun/ and /Star/ appear twelve times, half of them associated with the direction.) Believers, like the Willow-Herb (Fireweed), float Upstream (against the common direction).
3. GREEN EARTH: Psalms 161, *To Invoke Forgiveness for a Child, Help Me, Jesus Christ Yourself*. Lit., "Damp" or "Virgin" earth; includes "Mother-" Earth: a pre-Christian entity.
4. GUESTS: Psalms 181; 213; 243. Guests are associated with the need for or arrival of divine blessing.
5. LIVING BOOKS: Psalms 113; 156; 267. The Living Book(s) of Heaven record the redeemed and are offensive weapons against evil.
6. a. MOUNTAIN: Psalms 6/118-119; 71; 113; 324; *I Raise my Voice*; *A Doukhobor is One*; *Against Appendicitis*. Mountains may symbolize approach, through faith, to God. Upon Mount Zion the heavens rest, thence judgment is given.  
 b. SPIRITUAL FOUNTAIN: Psalms 71; 146; 334; *Maiden Mother-of-God*. From Mount Zion rises a mystical spring that washes away sinfulness (cf. Book of Enoch, xxvi; Apocalypse xxii, 1-2).
7. PATH: Psalms 6/44, 72-75, 98; 150; 176; 182; 197; 226; 262; 276; 328; *Maiden Mother-of-God*; *Christ is One*. Faith and the will of God are a path upon which the Believer walks.
8. PILLAR: Psalms 6 Var./20; 79; 91; 106; 166. A Pillar(s) is a very holy person upon whom the Lord may rely; or, it is the might of the Lord himself. (In one case, a strong support for the Antichrist: the inference of /support/ is central.)
9. a. SPIRITUAL KNOWLEDGE: Psalms 1/124; 6/123; 64; 146; 181; 277; 299; 316; 384; *With Prayer I Call*. "We wholeheartedly want to attain this, that you[, Lord,] would speak with us inwardly." Also see COMMUNION above: the Believer's mind is one with that of God.

- b. PRE-CULTURAL IGNORANCE: Psalms 161; 267. Spiritual Knowledge of both high and lower kinds was not always available to the Believer.
10. SEVEN: Psalms 1/120; 147; 324; *We "Cossacks" Sing; Against Appendicitis; Against the Evil Eye; Against Sore Throat*. An arbitrary "magic" number (as against 3, 4, and 12, which are used in one-to-one counting however symbolic): perfection, completion, power.
11. SUFFERING: Psalms 1/15, 24; 6/55; 130; 139; 140; 143; 202; 205; 226; 243; 252; 256; 286; 343; 345; 284; *In the Garden of Gethsemane; With Prayer I Call*. The Believers are often in a state of Suffering whence they cry out to the Lord. Psalms 140 and 143 especially, which cite intolerable sufferings, call to mind the experiences of the Old Believers under Empress Sophie.
12. TREASURE-HOUSE: Psalms 316; ?320; 328. The Lord is an eternal treasure-house. Psalm 6/123: God's innermost mind, secret truths.
13. WILDERNESS: Psalms 140, 143; 166; *Against Fear II; Against Witchcraft on the Way*. The Wilderness is (usually) a place of trial for Believers. *Against Fear II* tends to reconcile the Wilderness through the *Green Earth* concept.

If the Psalms are the House of Doukhobor belief, motifs such as the above are the stones of its walls: but stone must be bound with mortar. This task is performed by two classes of stylistic elements. The one is Generic; it includes a heavy reliance upon Apocalyptic myth. The other is Syntactic, characterized by dyadic structures. One case, *Righteous Souls* . . . , is clearly edited from an OT external source (Wisdom III, 1-9) and appears to be modelled on the formal parallelism of the Hebrew Psalter.

#### A. Genre

1. APOCALYPSE: Psalms 6/96-106; 71; 99; 113; 123; 144; 146; 267; 324; *I Raise my Voice; A Doukhobor is One; We "Cossacks" Sing*. Drawing upon the tradition of the NT Apocalypse, these psalms allude to this sequence of future events: the tribulation of the righteous; the coming of the Lord; victory over evil; the punishment of the sinful and the vindication of the righteous; the eternal Kingdom of God.
2. EXUBERANT & HIGHLY METAPHORIC DICTION: Psalms 91; 320; 324; 359; *Maiden Mother-of-God*. (Healing Psalms are generally of this character.) Psalms cited here are characterized by climactic strings of short, noun-laden clauses of rich affect and covert semantic coherence; or by florid diction.

3. GNOMIC: Psalms 138; 159; 161; 182; 187; 241; 384. Psalms wholly or in part composed of formulae or practical aphorisms inculcating worldly virtues appropriate to a Believer.

## B. Dyadic Structures

1. DUALISM: Semantic groups in which paired concepts are opposed and contrasted, often in phrases of parallel syntax.
  - a. MATTER/SPIRIT: Psalms 6/3, 68; 78; 144; 313; *A Doukhobor is One; Basic Rules for Young Children*.
  - b. SINNER/BELIEVER: Psalms 64; 74; 88; 123; 140; 156; 182; 252; 276; 384; *Questions on Citizenship; We "Cossacks" Sing; Christ is One*.
  - c. SUFFERING/VINDICATION: Psalms 61; 191; 219; 260; 335; 349; *Righteous Souls; Christ is One*.
  - d. PAST/NOW: Psalms 172, 352.
  - e. NOW/FUTURE: Psalms 143, 243.
2. DUAL ADDRESS: Psalms 61; 87; 113; 130; 140; 143; 150; 161; 166; 247; 276; 344; 345; *In the Garden of Gethsemane; I Raise my Voice; We "Cossacks" Sing*. Two speakers are present, not of equal status. Commonly the Believer(s) complain of present suffering and the Lord replies, promising early vindication.
3. DUAL SYNTAX: Psalm 139; 166; 184; 213; 321; 359. A parallel sequence of two-part sentences appears, of which one part tends to be repeated without change. The fixed part may be either a phrase, or a semantic slot within a phrase. This is a primary technique of Hebrew Psalmody: cf. OT Psalms, CXXXVI.

## IV. Some Doukhobor Psalms

In most cases, I follow existing convention by presenting texts<sup>3</sup> in undivided prose blocks. Their structure has provoked some experiment, seen in a few examples, with a free verse form reflecting syntactic patterning. The headnotes are by no means exhaustive; I keep to analytic comments.

### *Psalm 61*

*This Psalm characteristically includes dialogue between God and the believers in a didactic frame.*

God is a holy spirit, a holy place in himself; his spirit [is] a body — never aging, not born, not created, eternal, self-existing, wrapped in

light as [in] a robe, in his eternal immortality; in this place we bow to Father, and Son, and to the Holy Spirit; for your rule, Lord, [is] in all the heavens, and on the earth, on the sea, in all the abysses. You the one Heavenly Father were pleased to pour out [your] mighty power with your right hand. [God speaks:] When the star [rises] in the evening sky, then shall I judge you with my true justice. I will gather you, for the sake of truth, in the isles of the sea, by ones, by twos, by threes — for the sake of your holy name. We pray and beseech you the one Lord, maker of heaven and earth, when you show yourself among the nations and take up the staff of patriarchal life, the nature of the Highest, then bring us exiles together from the four corners of the earth. Your path is holy truth, your path [is] a rest in our midst. Stay with us from age to age, [in] this age [and] in the age to come remember us, Lord, when you come into your Kingdom.

### *Psalm 78*

*As with Psalm 61, millenarian hopes are uttered; the soul is held to be the essential person or self, which ought to recognize its divine provenance.*

Our heavenly homeland — I, a Christian, would have for myself on earth; thence we all began, we were born, we are divine [in nature]. The earth is not our home, we are strangers on the earth. Our earthly body is not a person — the person is a soul within the body, a heavenly, divine conscience; our earthly body will change into dust, but the soul will return to its eternal home, where there is no death, no misery, no guilt, no hunger, no thirst, but an everlasting day, unbroken light!

### *Psalm 91*

*This is one of the most popular of the Psalms; its exuberance is built upon piled-up assertions of the power of sacred song. Yet it speaks from a remarkable position, introspective and expressive at once, and recognizes both individual and communal benefits from song. Basil's Homily on the First Psalm (Patrologiae Graecae xxix, 209-13) may be a distant source.*

The singing of psalms — adornment to our souls. It brings angels to our help — drives away darkness, creates holiness, strength for the mind of man, effaces sin. It is like the charity of saints; it increases faith, hope, and love. As sunlight it lightens, and as water it cleans; though like fire it scorches, [yet] like holy oil it anoints. The devil it shames, God it reveals, fleshly desire it quells. It is like the [holy] oil of charity, destiny rejoicing, an honouring of chosen angels, it drives out ferocity, it quietens all kinds of rage and shatters wrath, it is unceasing praise to God. It is like honey — the singing of psalms! The songs of the chosen are before God. It drives away sin, it teaches all, it reveals all, it honours the soul, it cleanses sense and gladdens the

heart, it builds the high pillar, it enlightens man, it opens the senses, it destroys all evil, it reveals perfection. Whoever has [within himself] memory and love, also fear and praise of God in his heart, he shall never fall away [nor perish], but after all he shall make merry, always in prayer before God. Serenity of mind — it is the proclamation of peace. Psalms pray for the future, give praise for the present, repent of the past, rejoice for good deeds, with gladness they recall the kingdom of heaven. In turns by psalm-singing — the great shield of truth is thrust against devilish power. The brightness of truth shows, to the old — comfort; but to the young — beauty, perfection of the mind. Christ himself — God's work, helping, giving to the tongue prophetic power. These very psalms, established by the lips of prophets [of old], carefully teach [us] always to pray. [In the singing of psalms] there is praise and honour [to God], greatness, goodwill, radiance, wisdom and thanksgiving, power and strength.

*Psalm 113*

*This archaic Psalm, drawn in part from the Apocalypse (IV, 6-8; XII, 9-11), is commonly sung in Sunday Morning Prayer (/Molenie/) and at Commemorations (/Paminki/); at the latter, it would assert the justification of the dead as a believer. I gloss /of multitudes/ in the last sentence, following traditional interpretation of the apocalyptic "sea."*

Our Lord walks without touching the earth, opening up his heart, a wonder of heaven is revealed, Mount Zion is glorified. The Lord speaks to his people: [Here am I] with my arms outstretched all day [long] to unrepentant people, — enemies of his word. He prophesied: reason itself will judge them, it will become unbearable for them. For the holy Lord God, All-creator, was the [sole] judge from time immemorial and will be forever. Soon heaven will open, the angels of God will carry forth the throne upon four awesome beasts. They shall place the throne in the earth's midst with great sounding of trumpets. Then shall all the living books open their mouths, but one book, which is the book of life, will direct the judgement. Then Michael the Archangel shall sound his great trumpet, he shall do battle with the ancient serpent. He shall defeat the serpent of old with the living scriptures. He shall tumble Satan from the throne, he shall smash Satan's throne utterly, the devil's glory shall perish. Then the kings shall behold him, the princes shall come and bow deeply before him for fulfilling the word of the Lord; therefore are you faithful, o holy Israel, chosen of your Lord, and you shall have power over the sea [of multitudes], and shall gain power over all its waves.

*Psalm 150*

*This Psalm, notably used at funerals, couples very open dialogue between the Lord and his people with apocalyptic imagery apparently unique to Doukhobor tradition. Bonch-Bruevich notes that /iron doors/ are sometimes read /iron chains/.*

From the beginning [of time] and to this day the Lord calls his children: Come to me, children, come to me, my dears — for you the Kingdom of heaven is prepared by our Lord God. Do not be sorry [to leave] your father [and] mother, all your kin, all your perishable fleshly goods, — take pity on me, your Father, the heavenly king in the spirit. The children call to him, the dear ones pray to him: Lord, Lord, it is so hard for us to enter your heavenly kingdom; all the paths to you are choked [with obstacles]. On the paths stand doors of iron, gates of brass, at the gates stand wicked guards. The Lord speaks back to them: Do not fear, my children, do not fear, my dears; for I, the mighty fighter, go in strength before you. I will break down the iron doors, I shall tear down the brazen gates, and shall scatter the evil watchers, but you I shall lead into my own heavenly kingdom, and will reign with you [there] forever. I go to the heaven of heavens, the face of the God of Jacob.

*Psalm 166*

*This beautiful psalm (whose imagery recalls the Baltic exile, self-imposed, of many skoptsy and khlysty<sup>4</sup>) symbolizes the experience of suffering believers as a journey, against hard odds set by the Lord, to a mystical Jerusalem. Three speakers appear: a narrator, who sets the stage and records actions; the young men, witnessing believers; and the Lord. Tribulations are symbolized both by the human and anti-christian opposition of the Antiochus figure, and by threatening natural objects and forces. The youths have two duties: to press against opposition and to wait in patience. The 'ship of Noah' appears in the NT as a type of salvation through both righteous acts and faithful witness (1 Peter III, 20-22).*

Young men were born from holy clouds.  
 The young men cry out before the Lord:  
     Lord! Lord! We have neither family nor kin,  
     we have only spiritual brothers and  
     sisters,  
     our children count few  
     years.  
 They go forth, the young men, about the world in glory, in greatness,  
     in the beauty of man  
 Beauty in man — [that is] the pouring forth of blood upon the earth  
     for the name of the Lord,  
     for witnessing for Jesus  
     Christ,  
     for the word of God.

Antiochus the King shut up the youths in gloomy dungeons.

The young men wept bitter tears before the Lord :

Lord! Lord! Free us from the dark dungeons:

We want to go on to your Jerusalem-town,  
there to look upon the great fiery  
pillar;

it shines from earth even to  
heaven.

My young men! My Jerusalem-town is far away

beyond lofty mountains,  
beyond shadowy forests,  
beyond gloomy seas.

My young men, open up my Lordly gates

opposite the gates of Hell.

The young men wept bitter tears before the Lord :

Lord, Lord! Your gates are hard to open up :

your gates are blocked by living stone,  
they are buried by the sands of the  
sea

For us to open your gates — is to pour our blood  
upon the earth.

My young men, you will go on through the shadowy forests,

you will go up into the lofty mountains,  
you will come to the gloomy sea,  
you will embark in the ship of Noah.

The wild winds were uproarious,

the dark sea was stirred up.

The young men wept bitter tears before the Lord :

Lord Lord! Why do you allow the wild winds to rage,  
the waves of the sea  
to billow up,  
the dark sea to heave?

It is not possible for us

to come to your Jerusalem-town,  
there

to look upon the great fiery pillar  
that shines from earth  
even to heaven.

O Young men, stay you a while by the sea,

wait a little for fair weather,

till the Word of the Lord comes to you

for witnessing to all nations,  
for exposing the unrighteous.

My young men, you stand upon my pillar

though you do not see the pillar!

*Psalm 172*

*This penitential Psalm, used among youth as well as at /molenie/, associates sin with attachment to worldly goods.*

Creator, my creator, my guardian, you made me in this bright world.  
First of all I loved God, thus God's fear was then in me. O, you my  
God, my Merciful [one], when I was poor, I asked for all from God,  
but when I grew rich, I grew forgetful of God. When I then began  
to adorn my flesh, I began to strip bare my soul. O you my God, my  
Merciful [one]! What sort [of man] I have been, but what sort I have  
become: sinning, without control.

*Psalm 181*

*The three spiritual guests resemble the three angels who visited Abraham under the Oak at Mamre (Genesis XVIII); the early Church Fathers interpreted these as the Trinity, and Russian iconography set the image of the angels as the Trinity's proper signifier.*

Not just one guest serves me, but three guests care for me: Wisdom,  
Innocence, and the third is Peace. Dense clouds are made light  
through understanding; all our sins are scattered by all our pure  
desires to love the Lord God.

*Psalm 242*

*This devotional Psalm is taught to young children. The reference to knowledge means the spiritual wisdom that shares the mind of God.*

Calm me, Lord, quieter than the waters;  
Humble me, Lord, lower than the grass;  
Strengthen me, Lord, stronger than a precious stone.  
You, Lord, give me birth  
and you, Lord, strike me,  
you quench [Life's] flame within me.  
Make me able, Lord, to know all,  
to understand everything,  
to perform your will  
and to live with the saints forever.

*Psalm 343*

*A Psalm for Christmas morning prayer, derived from the Gospel accounts of Christ's birth, the adoration of the shepherds and the massacre of the Innocents: a contrast not far from Doukhobor experience of piety and punishment, and fervently expressed. Bonch-Bruevich notes that it resembles a text from the repertoires of the Wandering Cripples, a class of religious mendicant singers.*



*Against Sore Throat*

*This pre-Christian charm is reported to have been used as late as the 1950s against Poliomyelitis; it is "to be recited three times early in the morning and late at night, spitting and blowing on, and massaging the sore throat or affected part." The mysterious /latyr/ or /ladar/ -stone may be lodestone; or it may be amber, associated with the Baltic sea and with Buyan (now the isle of Rugen), an ancient centre of pre-Christian Slavic religion. Presumably the charmed affliction fades by degrees, just as the toads vanish one by one, or twilight fades.*

In the sea, in the ocean, there lies the white latyr-stone.  
 On the stone sit seven crones, casting spells on seven toads.  
     From seven to six,  
     From six to five,  
     From five to four,  
     From four to three,  
     From three to two,  
     From two to one,  
     From one to God's servant N———,  
 [There remains] not one.

*Help Me*

*My informant said of this Psalm, in part: "Maybe [a child] had an accident someplace . . . especially when they get scared, that's the best place — there you should recite it. . . . It helps just as good, as long as you ask God, that's the main part. Because it's not we that help, it's God that helps; we ask him and he gives, that's how it works out." As a spiritual consolation and aid, this short prayer certainly calls upon all available powers. (/Matiushka/, the diminutive form of Mother, implies not small size but great affection.)*

Help me, Lord Jesus Christ yourself, and you, most holy Mother,  
 Bearer of God. Rise up, all Saints, to my aid. Help me, Little Mother,  
 Mother green earth. Forgive me, O holy place, in body and soul and  
 in all thoughts of [my] heart. And to you, Little Mother, Mother  
 green earth, a great bow! As twilight fades at dawn, so may my illness.

*V. The Uses of the Psalms*

The use of Psalms for private devotions or healing is not always accessible to the outsider. I can say little beyond noting that I have encountered the former use in both formal and informal modes, and have been told of the latter many times. These are usually private matters, but we note that they also represent the interaction of an individual's cultural heritage and mores, will, and deep experience and needs. Like all forms of prayer, they represent a dialogue between the self and

the divine. Tradition and group use affirm the enduring and communal need for that dialogue.

Psalms are also used publicly, and here always communally, in the major events of worship, marriages, funerals, commemorations, and festivals. They may be sung (about 50-60 texts extant), spoken, or both; often they are spoken by one after they are sung by all in worship. Some are used frequently or even at fixed points in the liturgies of marriage, funeral, or the Sunday morning Prayer assembly; the last of these consists essentially of the singing and recitation of Psalms, supplemented by the singing of hymns. At community festivals, choirs from various locales recite and sing Psalms and hymns in massive assemblies.

Such use is oral in spirit as well as in fact. It serves many purposes: the young learn the tune and song texts; the older refresh their memories; the skilled present exemplary versions. More deeply, the community joins in great, explicit and implicit unities by sharing the performance roles, by uniting in common breath and sound, by harmonizing diverse voices. Old and young often experience an alteration of sense perception. More deeply, the substance of Doukhobor faith is raised to consciousness and once again shown to be real. Certainly, to be a Doukhobor is to sing the Psalms.

The Psalms, then, serve several purposes in Doukhobor society. They record and embody the Doukhobor view of existence and experience. They represent the community to itself and to onlookers. They bind the community in one kind of shared experience and in reference to other sharings, spiritual and historic. They mark two times: the calendar of the year with its worship and festivals; and the human life-cycle. They provide individuals with modes of healing, spiritual and mantic. They channel expression, joining theological and literary arts that at present, alas, appear in abeyance, with a musical art that continues to evolve.

Doukhobor modernization has not dealt too well with the Psalm tradition. It is seen as relatively inaccessible because archaic and difficult, and only a few Doukhobors apply themselves to the texts from time to time in an analytic way, though many more use them as sincere (or pro forma) personal prayers and aids to meditation. The Healing Psalms and the more metaphorical Psalms present particular difficulties. The latter are held, even by many Doukhobor intellectuals, to be opaque to any but the most spiritual eye and hence less valuable because less plain and direct. The Healing Psalms are often discarded as pagan superstition to which ineffectual elders cling, and this is a great tragedy: they include texts not only of great antiquity and beauty, but also of proven worth in at least the process of psychological preparation for healing. Folklorists, anthropologists, and medical experts have only in the last seventeen years begun to recognize or discuss the validities of such techniques and must bear some of the blame for the levity with which such healing is viewed.

If the Psalm tradition is not markedly easy of access, we would do well to recall that Doukhobors did not receive it in a lump, as a printed book (at least till the last decade). Rather, it was taught by parents over the childhood years and developed by song and perhaps discussion in the community. Traditionally, spiritual insight and living demonstration were essential for the growth of understanding of this oral literature and, like all such literatures, it was not divided from other intrinsic aspects of life. Though Doukhobors state that only Doukhobor identity and knowledge of Russian give final access to the texts, it may appear by now that they bring much to those who look at them with honesty and humility. In whatever tongue it speaks, the soul cries out and is heard.<sup>5</sup>

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Major Doukhobor Psalm Text sources:

Bonch-Bruevich, Vladimir D. *Zhivotnaia Kniga Dukhobortsev*. Series 'Material' i k istorii i iskucheniiu russkavo. St. Petersburg (?), 1909; Reset (?) Winnipeg, Regehr's Printing, 1954; *The Book-of-Life of Doukhobors*. "Materials toward the Study and History of Russian Sectarianism." Blaine Lake, Sask.: Doukhobor Society of Saskatchewan Project. Tr. V. Buyniak (but published before revision);

Legebokoff, Peter & Anna Markova. *Sbornik: Dukhoborcheskikh Psalmob, Stikhov i Pesen*. ("Collection: Doukhobor Psalms, Hymns and Songs"). Grand Forks, B.C.: Union of Spiritual Communities of Christ, 1978;

Mealing, F. Mark. *Our People's Way: a Study in Doukhobor Psalmody & Folklife*. Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania. Ph.D. Dissertation, Dept. Folklore & Folklife, 1972;

Peacock, Kenneth. *Songs of the Doukhobors*. Bulletin #231, Folklore Series #7. Ottawa: National Museum of Man, 1970.

<sup>2</sup> Nicholas N. Kalmikoff, *Dukhovn'ie Stikhi i Narodn'ie Pesni: Dukhobortsev v Kanade*. ("Spiritual Verses and Folk Songs: of the Doukhobors in Canada"), Richmond, B.C.: privately published, 1973; and the *Sbornik* as above. See also: Youth Sunday School Committee of the USCC, *Stikhi i Psalmi*. . . . Grand Forks, B.C.: Union of Spiritual Communities of Christ, 1968, mimeographed pamphlet.

<sup>3</sup> My sources are the 1954 reprint of Bonch-Bruevich's collection; the 1968 USCC collection; materials collected and translated about 1970 by Roman Piontkovsky; and my own informants. My original translations were based on texts supplied by Mercedes Cheveldayoff Blaine Lake and Eli Popoff of Grand Forks; I am most grateful to them and to J. McKintosh of the Library, U.B.C., who is giving great assistance in revision.

<sup>4</sup> The skoptsy and khlysty were radical sectarians. The khlysty were self-flagellants; the skoptsy practised more extreme austerities, including permanent hermitage and self-castration.

<sup>5</sup> Material in this paper is based on relevant sections of my dissertation and has been presented in shorter form at the annual general meeting of the American Folklore Society in Portland 1974 and at the annual general meeting of the Folklore Studies Association of Canada in London in 1978.

# R. A. D. FORD, POET AND DIPLOMAT

## *A Poetry of Tact*

Ann Munton

**R**OBERT ARTHUR DOUGLAS FORD has lived two lives, one as a poet and one as a diplomat. Twenty-one years of this double life were spent in the Soviet Union, where Ford was Canada's Ambassador from 1964 to 1980. Each of his two careers, moreover, in itself suggests a tension or duplicity. Further, his relation to place, being "in place" or "out of place" in all the paradoxical meanings that Eli Mandel suggests,<sup>1</sup> is ironically similar to the doubleness experienced by poets who are immigrants to this country. Gazing out his window, which is glazed with a winter frost, Ford looks out on a bleak northern landscape. This expanse of snow and cold could be northern Ontario; it could be Siberia. It could be the poet dreaming in metaphors who watches the endless wasteland; it could be the diplomat composing dispatches. This could be his homeland, or it could be the land of the "other."

Born in Ottawa, Ford studied English literature and history at the University of Western Ontario in London, doing graduate work in history at Cornell. He joined the Department of External Affairs in 1940 and retired four decades later. His foreign service career has led him to live in many of this century's foci of violence: South America, Eastern Europe, the Middle East, and the Soviet Union. He has witnessed discord, deprivation, and repression, and translated his vision into a bleak and uncompromising poetry. Speaking nine languages, Ford has also translated the visions of other poets and given voice to them in English. Since his first volume of poetry, *A Window on the North* (1956), which won the Governor General's Award, Ford has published six more volumes. As well, he has been a frequent contributor to literary magazines in Canada, and in 1989 he published his memoirs, *Our Man in Moscow, A diplomat's reflections on the Soviet Union*.

**F**ORD'S ROLE AS DOUBLE is nowhere clearer than in these "diplomat's reflections," in which he explains both Eastern and Western perspectives. He is very much the Western diplomat, but equally he is writing from his position

within the Soviet Union. First arriving in Moscow in 1946 immediately after the war, he has experienced life in Russia under the various Soviet leaders: Stalin, Khrushchev, Brezhnev, and Gorbachev. With his historian's training, Ford provides readers with a lesson in Soviet politics and motivation. With his poet's vision, he provides insights into the artistic community. He warns that Gorbachev is the product of his Soviet experience, and that the present is shaped by this distinctive past:

The present leaders as the heirs of Russian history and traditions and of nearly seven decades of Soviet communism carry with them the same historical, political, and ideological baggage that shaped the actions and reactions of each of their predecessors. (OMM x)

Although today, reading the enthusiastic press coverage, one might hope for a more positive evaluation from Ford of Gorbachev's chances for real change, after studying Ford's poetry, one is not surprised by the cautious and even gloomy conclusion. Gorbachev the man, Ford admires, yet the leader cannot, he argues, be separated from history.

*Our Man in Moscow* is best read as a collection of essays — on detente, human rights, KGB surveillance, Afghanistan, Sino-Soviet relations, etc. — as there is a lot of repetition from one thematic chapter to the next. The book's strengths are its focus on artists and dissidents, often one and the same, and its detailed reporting of conversations with high-ranking Soviet officials, which must be based on extensive journals Ford kept at the time. Some writers whom Ford has translated, like Andrei Voznesensky and Anna Akhmatova, also appear in his memoirs in their roles as dissidents and/or friends.

Ford has a casual way of dropping important names and then quoting conversations to explain otherwise perplexing Soviet positions or the interaction of Westerners and Soviets. Often finding himself in this position of clarifying mediator, Ford reports one conversation in which he tries to explain to a "Soviet official" the importance of human rights issues in the West. The conversation progresses to a critique of Solzhenitsyn by the Soviet, who, after admitting that he has not read *The Gulag Archipelago*, is startled by Ford's offer of his Russian copy. The official, needless to say, refuses. This is a telling incident. It is one of many meticulously recounted in which Ford's access to officials is crucial, as well as his ability to converse fluently in Russian. The linkage of political and artistic matters is Ford's strength, his double vision, and it is what makes the book particularly appealing.

ONE MIGHT EXPECT that the tension created by Ford's seemingly diverse occupations would lead to the creation of two personas: one the reserved, urbane diplomat at home in his official capacity dealing with foreign

government dignitaries and composing "the judicious, elegant dispatches that were the envy of his peers" (Abley 40); the other the open, passionate poet equally at home in his more private pursuit of revealing his personal responses with introspective, free-flowing candour. Indeed it is tempting to create such a scenario, but in Ford's case it would largely be false. Although there is certainly a tension created by the doubleness of much of his life, it isn't worked out as neatly or as easily as this paradigm would suggest. Ford the diplomat and Ford the poet are equally reserved and equally worldly. Raw emotion would be as foreign and out-of-place in his poetry as it would be in his diplomatic dispatches. The poetry is considered and formal, and the doubleness reveals itself in complex metaphors reflecting bleak landscapes and the lessons of history and politics.

Significantly, the etymology of *diplomat* suggests both Ford's dilemma and his poetic solution. The word *diplomat* is a "back-formation," in the same manner as *aristocrat* and *democrat*, in this case from the word *diplomatic*, or "having to do with diplomas." In turn, *diploma* originates from the Greek for "folded paper" and "double," "hence official document." The idea of a linguistic "back-formation" is suggestive of Ford's view, that the present is the outgrowth of past years of history and tradition, whether in Canada or the Soviet Union. That doubleness is built in to the very word for his chosen career is a fortuitous recognition of a particular vision. Trained to see two sides of issues or situations, the diplomat and poet both translate the doubleness into language. The constant awareness of "other" is encoded into the texts of translations, of diplomatic dispatches, and of poetic descriptions of northern landscapes. Behind all is a basic desire to explain one to the other, a desire that is played out in the tension built into the poetics Ford creates, a poetics which reflects a state of mind suggestive in turn of the immigrant's dislocation. Ford is a ghostly presence in his own poetry, never wholly realized, often removed behind the distortion of a frosted window. The northern landscapes he describes are arctic wastes which could be either Canadian or Siberian. His position in the Soviet Union is not that of the immigrant, but it is nonetheless "*un-natural*," and he often expresses the classic immigrant burden: "of living simultaneously within the influences of our own and another's culture."<sup>2</sup> Eli Mandel eloquently translates the landscape of "ethnic culture" into a psychological one, focusing on the troubling question of identity, and defines "ethnic writing [as] a literature existing at an interface of two cultures, a form concerned to define itself, its voice, in the dialectic of self and other and the duplicities of self-creation, transformation, and identities" ("Ethnic Voice" 99).

Again, as a type of "back-formation," Ford qualifies here as a kind of ethnic writer, the Canadian living in and transforming his own and Soviet experience. "The Emigrants" suggests Ford's awareness of his dilemma, the Canadian representing his country in a foreign land, having traced in reverse the journey of immigrants to his country. Even his use of "*emigrants*," with its emphasis on the land

left behind, rather than “immigrants,” with its insistence on the new land arrived at, emphasizes Ford’s double perspective. He notes the continuum of immigration: “It was not me but someone before me / And maybe someone before that / Who took a ticket on a cattle boat,” and he locates himself at once as a Canadian, but one outside Canada. Ford indicates that the answer to the unasked question is affirmative, “Yes.” But for the Canadian “immigrant” located in Russia, the former immigrants were “going in the wrong direction.” Ford identifies with them: “it is my journey into the unknown,” he says, and tells us that he “see[s] them [as] almost part of me.” Then he clarifies, “Part now of my country,” in a way different from Ford who lives in a kind of exile from his country, but in an important way very similar, both caught between cultures, both caught in the tension between “departure and . . . home-coming” (*HS* 34).

The “dialectic of self and other” is perhaps the paradigm for all of Ford’s writing, whether the more obvious dialectic established by translations or interpretations of political interrelations, or the less obvious dialectic of translating oneself into an alien world. The formal solutions range from a poetry of reticence, the gradual simplification over the years as words are measured against a standard of silence (“The spare word is the sword / That guards better than silence” [“The Spare Word,” *DWS* 19]), to the naming of self through the naming of others. Ford “seek[s] to eliminate / The unessential” and “savour[s] / The economy of sound / For the maximum of sense” (“Balance,” *DOP* 29), while quotations from and allusions to other writers pattern the lines and provide images. In “The Unfamiliar City” Ford begins with an appropriate quotation from Henry James: “But I have the imagination of disaster and see life as ferocious and sinister” (*DOP* 19), while Dostoevsky and his works are used as a model in a cycle of Ford’s most recent poems. The dialectic between “I” and “you” is ambiguous as well as significant, as Ford reads into the names of others his own name. He acknowledges the power he derives from the dialogue, being “stronger for the word / And brave for what we heard” (“Homage to Fyodor Mihailovich,” *DOP* 34).<sup>8</sup>

This dialogue, in turn, suggests the last etymological gloss to the word *diplomat*, “folded paper.” In the sense that Roland Barthes uses folding, as a naming or re/naming process, it applies to Ford’s poetics. Barthes tells us that to read “is to proceed from name to name, from fold to fold; it is to fold the text according to one name and then to unfold it along the new folds of this name” (*S/Z* 83). Ford directs us in this reading process, hiding himself within the many names of writers and their words, so that we can hear his voice in the dialectic he creates, the folding from one name to the next. At the interface (of names or languages or cultures) the *unfolding* takes place.

The stark dualities of Ford’s poetry reflect metaphorically the dualities within himself (“I am a schizophrenic in the light”) and his century:

Dismemberment — that word I use  
 To separate the core  
 Of misery from the decade's rose,  
 The sick man from the cure. ("Dream 64," *SC* 26)

Ours is "an age of sudden violence" ("Knuckle-Dusters," *SC* 37), Ford tells us. He concentrates on bleak northern landscapes ("the trauma of the north," "The Winter Meadows," *SC* 34) locked in the dark and silence of desperate winters ("One / Tends to repeat," he tells us ["The Inclusive Universal Theme," *SC* 32]), but there are poems that picture equally bleak desert landscapes bleached by sun and heat. The titles of some of Ford's poems over the years give a good idea of his unrelenting outlook: "Unheeding in Despair," "The Waste of the World," "Emptiness," "The Losers," "Anguish," "Into the Wilderness," "The Age of Terrorism," "Mystic Terror," "Terrorists," "A Child Dying," "The School of Fear." Poem after poem describes "the northern cold / smothering the world," in which life is "oppressive" before the "immeasurable horizon" ("Twenty Below," *WN* 4). Under a "frightening" sky, "ready for shattering," apocalyptic ends seem likely: "A sudden end seems poised / In the air" ("The Waste of the World," *SC* 35). The barren landscape, "the barrens of the world," matches the lives of "true sadness, the gripping melancholy" ("A Window on the North," *WN* 7). And there is "danger in our northern world," "blunt[ing] the urge to live." Although northerners "are conscious" and "have sensation," Ford tells us, "we / Are dumbed by the world" ("Anoesis," *HS* 58). This dangerous silencing Canada and Russia share:

The whole landscape drifted away to the north,  
 To Moose Factory, hundreds of miles, to the pole  
 And beyond, to the Arctic ends of the earth,  
 Sullen, Siberian, grey, . . . ("Window on the North," *WN* 7)

The Canadian north feels the lash of "The same uninhabited wind, / The same hard drawn sky / As devastates the horizon / Of the Hungry Steppe" ("The Tundra," *HS* 38). Living in the Soviet Union provides a particularity to Ford's bleak images: "Too many check-points are set up / Too many eyes suspiciously / Peer and probe," he laments ("Into the Wilderness," *HS* 43). There is a loneliness, a forsakenness, an emptiness, of both man and landscape, and the poet is "heavy with the melancholy of the day" ("Thaw in January," *WN* 12).

Equilibrium is often lost, whether on the icy surfaces of frozen ponds or within the shifting shadows of the mind. "We never find, of course, / The balance," Ford tells us ("Under the Boat," *DWS* 20), while still "Searching [his] life for / Equilibrium" ("Balance," *DOP* 29). Vertigo is a continual affliction: "The invading emptiness . . . / Clears the mind vertiginously" ("Emptiness," *HS* 6). In "Roadside Near Moscow," the poet turns his gaze from a "column of prisoners" "profoundly / Occupied with the secret reconstruction / Of their balance," lest he be

implicated in the guilt of accused or accusers (*WN* 15). A number of poems contain hunting images, but the hunters are not viewed as valiant and victorious, eking out their existence in a harsh landscape. Rather, the hunters are wounded and silent and seen in the larger context of the century, "in vain / seeking the vengeance of killed men" ("Two Sonnets on a Hunting Theme," *WN* 27). Ford sums up:

Maybe there is a pill to take  
 Against this century  
 But I think our conscience is too bad  
 For any remedy ("Sleeplessness of our Time," *NE* 21)

Many poems make clear the link between the bleakness of the northern landscape and the bleakness of our times, what Ford calls "the tundra / Of our century" ("Needle in the Eye," *NE* 30). Terrorism becomes a metaphor for our day, with land "mines . . . laid / Haphazardly, the symbol of our age." Ford proposes love as "the only help," but the solution seems largely academic and unbelievable in the face of the mounting terror he details, "The inevitability / Of decay in our precarious age" ("The Coast of Childhood," *NE* 41).

Ford's poetry is full of conceits and obscure, almost impersonal metaphors. It is controlled, formal, detached. At its weakest it suffers from a sterility reflective of the recurrent landscapes:

This northern wound laid bare  
 To the unpractised urgent hand  
 Cries in the crystal night  
 To the heart and the bludgeoned head. ("Siberia," *NE* 40)

At its best, as in "The Mongols" (*NE* 26) and "For Pasternak" (*HS* 40), a particular object or happening triggers Ford's response: in the first case to Russian history and vulnerability, and in the second, to the great Russian writer. Ford's most recent poetry allows us a glimpse of the aging retiree, still "Listening beside [his] half-open window," and a hint of human frailty creeps in, as he acknowledges that he "ought to close" the window on doctor's orders, "To avoid further complications in my lungs, / Not to mention arthritis and various other / Hinted at malfunctions of an aging body" ("Solitude," *DOP* 53). In "Contemporary Thinking" (*DOP* 63) Ford reviews his diplomatic career from his window post and questions his culpability. Still, in spite of these few poems, Ford the man remains for us largely obscured behind his "slightly glazed" window. There are no poems, for instance, which deal *directly* with the loss of his wife who shared his life's adventures. There are few which deal specifically with his retirement to France, and we get only brief allusions to the crippling disease from which he has long suffered.

HIDING HIMSELF within the lines of poetry, behind the folding names of other writers, Ford seems to epitomize the paradigmatic Canadian predicament that Robert Kroetsch enunciates: that of someone who is “reluctant to venture out of the silence and into the noise. . . in our very invisibility lies our chance for survival” (“The Canadian Writer” 15). In “Unhiding the Hidden” Kroetsch continues by describing the central paradox of Canadian fiction as “the tension between [the] appearance of being just like someone else and the demands of authenticity” (17). For ethnic writers, of course, this tension is particularly powerful, and for Ford it is manifested in images of dislocation/disjunction/dismemberment. “Ghost-like we cut our bones away, / And walk with severed heads,” he says in “Dream 64” (*SC* 26). Ford is mesmerized by the concealing silences of the northern landscape and the resemblance between Canadian and Soviet tundras, but his dilemma remains the one Kroetsch and Mandel outline: the tension between similarity and authenticity. There *are* crucial distinctions. “The innocent snow” that covers both the Russian and Canadian north conceals deeper differences. “Remember[ing] Siberia,” Ford says: “The landscape is the same but I know there / Under the virgin snow lie the unjust dead.” He concludes, identifying closely with Canada: “Our nature / Now seems less unfair” (“Innocent Snow,” *DOP* 47). But such easy identification is not the norm; it only emphasizes Ford’s predicament. Two poems, written about twenty years apart, highlight the dilemma “of living simultaneously within the influences of our own and another’s culture” (“Ethnic Voice” 91) and the doubleness that such existence entails. In “The Winter Meadows” the “deep silence” and the frozen pines are the same, but the conditional form of the verb indicates the conditional nature of Ford’s identification. It is tentative and marks hesitancy. The pines “mark the path *I would have used* / To seek return to what I was” (emphasis added). But the condition of the immigrant, as many Canadian writers have discovered (Michael Ondaatje and Daphne Marlatt among others), is such that one can never “return to what [one] was.”

Only the gaps in our experience  
 The row of empty spaces      the clear  
 Omissions are the reality  
 And      like a sacred emptiness  
 Stretching into the winter steppes  
 Smother us with their established distances  
 So that the journey back is no more  
 Possible than the remembrance  
 Of an act of love      a show of fear  
 And the things we did      or think we did  
 In the landscape of the past      (“The Winter Meadows,” *SC* 34)

On an obvious level, Ford builds the "gaps" or "empty spaces" into the lines of his poem. But silences, "gaps," absences are also the clear result of the dialectic between the two worlds which are superficially quite similar, yet in actuality quite different, "with their established distances." The disjunction created by the inability of complete identification one with the other is reflected in Ford's continued fascination with silence,<sup>4</sup> trying to fill in the gaps in understanding, between self and "other."

His recent poem, "A Temporary Destination," also suggests in its very title Ford's predicament. Again the tentative nature of his situation is underscored, and the tension between "temporary" (limited) and "destination" (settled goal) mirrors the continuing tension between belonging and alienation. "Returning from afar," following the route of earlier immigrants to Canada, Ford finds "The land, the lake, while ours, / . . . alien" (*DOP* 14-15). After a long sojourn abroad, Ford finds the cabin in Canada is foreign territory ("terror"tory).

This tension seems to be enfolded within the career-diplomat/poet who has spent more recent years at "home" abroad than at "home" in Canada. The facile title, *Our [Canada's] Man in Moscow*, conceals the troubling questions of identity that continue to concern Ford. Travelling through other lands and other languages, in all his professions Ford translates and records the "dialectic of self and other." As a type of immigrant poet, Ford has been translated from one world to another, and his poetics document this translation. The necessity of inter-lingual translation is, of course, based upon semantic differences, and Ford is adept at this type of translation as well. But "to translate" derives from the Latin "to bear across," and it is in this larger sense of transference that all of Ford's work can be viewed as a form of translation. George Steiner, in *After Babel, Aspects of Language and Translation*, argues for a "totalizing" definition of translation which provides "a theory of language" and by extension a theory of "all meaningful exchanges" (279). Ford's concerns about his ability to translate inter-lingually, or even the possibility of translation, are similar to his discomfort when changing one location for another. Kroetsch's and Mandel's troubling "duplicities" arise. Translation confirms that "The world . . . can be other" (Steiner 235). Steiner's discussion of the translator's experience is similar to Mandel's description of the immigrant's experience, and both in turn are similar to Ford's poetics of his own experience. "The craft of the translator is . . . deeply ambivalent: it is exercised in a radical tension between impulses to facsimile and impulses to appropriate recreation" (Steiner 235). Steiner speaks of "duplicity," "conceal[ment]," "unvoiced intent," and "silence" (46) as part of translation and language theory. A translation in Ford's first book of poetry, from the Russian of Sergei Yessenin, captures the doubleness of much of his own later poetry:

I have returned to my own country.  
Who remembers me? who has forgotten?

I stand sadly, like a hunted stranger —  
Now master of my own domain. ("Blue Mist," *WN* 29)

"Autumn in the Bourbonais," in Ford's latest book, describes his present situation "in the geographical / Centre of France." Here the smoke of leaves burning "is the same / As it was along the Ottawa." "It hurts me in the heart," Ford tells us (*DOP* 77). The dialectic continues in the shift of verb tenses from past to present. The smoke of remembrance is in the past, while the pain in his heart is very much in the present. Facing the world, the "other," Ford has spent his life translating, writing himself into understanding; for his readers, his poetry offers a way of participating in this process of transformation.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> In "Writing West: On the Road to Wood Mountain" Mandel describes the doubleness of the regional writer, while in "Ethnic Voice in Canadian Writing" he describes the doubleness of the ethnic writer. Both essays eloquently describe Mandel's personal experiences as a poet and analyze those of other writers.
- <sup>2</sup> "Ethnic Voice," 91. Mandel acknowledges that he is here paraphrasing M. L. Laute, "Sociology and the Canadian Plains," in Richard Allen, ed., *A Region of the Mind*, Canadian Plains Studies Centre (Regina: Univ. of Saskatchewan, 1973), 138.
- <sup>3</sup> Ford shares Dostoyevsky's images of asylums, crimes, guilt, and in particular doubles. Through Dostoyevsky Ford reads his own experiences of Leningrad, Dostoyevsky's St. Petersburg.
- <sup>4</sup> Silence is a repeated image in Ford's poetry, continually associated with the northern landscapes he describes and, as in "The Winter Meadows," the disjunction created by the "immigrant" dialectic. In addition, silence is linked to creativity ("A Poem in the Night," *DWS* 39), Ford's poetics (the "spare word" already discussed), and politics. "Words . . . are . . . inadequate" ("The Quiet Wood," *DWS* 25) and silence can sometimes be as guilty of complicity as language: "The absence / Of the necessary word / Can wound well enough" ("Violence," *DWS* 67).

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## THIS LAND . . . (CANADATA)

*Rudiger Krause*

nation lost in  
an oversized land  
ancient and raw  
(materials — perhaps —  
for a country)

a broad land  
bony and buckling  
skyward. eroded by  
draining rivers and  
seeping national insecurity

stretch-and-sew  
mosaic of regions  
patched and subsidized  
across time-zones and  
seasonally adjusted rates

\* \* \*

we are naturalized in this haven  
of refugees  
where even natives are displaced

we are never just Canadians  
dabbling  
in identities in our just society

we would freely trade our national  
debt  
for irresponsible government

our S.I.N. is reckoned  
therefore  
in nine-digit numbers

\* \* \*

gentle polar lightning  
flickers noiselessly across  
the blueline of our defenses.  
caught off guard for once  
we see with glowing hearts

## THE HOUSE

*Harold Rhenisch*

He broke into the moon's house  
at dawn.

Everything was light:

darkness,  
the still throat  
of water:  
it all shone before him.  
Only the moon  
there,  
sitting back  
by her table,  
cracking filberts  
into a blue bowl,  
stood apart,  
zinc.

When she saw him  
she threw a handful of filbert shells  
at his eyes.

They left her fingers  
as birds;  
by the time they reached him

at the door  
they were a scatter  
of sparks  
in wind;

then they were gone.

The house was empty  
and still:  
broken glass,  
drifted leaves  
against the walls,  
the floor warped  
by rain and snow,

a flat grey light:

no-one had lived there for years.

## CINDERELLA

*John Donlan*

You're so white this is like talking to a page.  
What fills the darkness behind the mask  
is on your side. It wouldn't wreck you  
to come to the party dressed as a princess:

you are a princess — one we fall in love with  
because we can't imagine being you.  
You don't believe this. You slouch by the fire  
making its shapes matter. The cat

on your lap dreams of biting off a little life for herself.  
Who would you rend and snap, if you had those teeth?  
Forget it. The kitchen walls contain you  
like a well.

When everyone is gone, the silence  
liberates you, encourages your scraps  
of songs, fantastic stories of thousand-candle  
ballrooms, your magic drawings in the ashes.

## books in review

### RUSSIAN RIDDLES

MICHAEL IGNATIEFF, *The Russian Album*. Viking Penguin, \$24.95.

LOUISE DE KIRILINE LAWRENCE, *Another Winter, Another Spring: Love Remembered*. Natural Heritage/Natural History, \$12.95.

JOHN WATKINS, *Moscow Despatches: Inside Cold War Russia*, ed. Dean Beeby & William Kaplan. James Lorimer, \$22.95.

DEMOCRATIC TRADITIONS AND economic systems aside, the Russian Empire and its current Soviet embodiment have had much in common with Canada. The two modernizing colossi are not just resource-rich and largely nordic, but they are also ethnically diverse, delicately governable lands in search of their own special identities. To add both commonality and diversity to the comparison of the two lands, many Poles, Jews, Germans, Ukrainians and other peoples of the former Russian Empire have come to Canada to rebuild lives that had become either barren or unbearable back home. These three books offer *personalized* insights into a number of crucial historical conditions and periods which many Canadian immigrants have experienced.

The broadest historical and social overview is provided by Michael Ignatieff's *The Russian Album*. It is also, in a strictly neutral sense, *elitist*, for Ignatieff's paternal ancestors, the Ignatieffs and the Mestcherskies, include some extremely prominent figures: Russia's first great modern historian, N. M. Karamazin (1766-1820); a relative of Kutuzov, the general who bested Napoleon; a great-great-grandfather who was prominent in quashing the Decembrist rebellion of 1825, and imprisoned Dostoevsky in 1849; a great-grandfather, Nicholas Ignatieff, who between 1860 and the early 1880's, negotiated not

only Russia's Pacific-region border with China, but also the treaty concluding the late-1870's Russo-Turkish war, and this same ancestor rose to become the Minister of the Interior who in 1882, just after the assassination of Alexander II, arranged for anti-Jewish legislation that helped mightily to foster long-lived anti-semitism and general repression in the Russian Empire; less famous but far nobler was Ignatieff's grandfather Paul ("a quite typical member of the liberal service gentry" and "a non-party constitutional monarchist") whose pre-revolutionary, democratizing efforts and substantial achievements in health care, social programs and mass education probably saved him from execution when the Reds imprisoned him during the Civil War in 1918.

Michael Ignatieff's delving into his ancestry necessarily imposes a wide scope on his narrative. He moves from his ancestors' early nineteenth-century, pronouncedly Slavic roots through to their increasing Europeanization, and on to their revolutionary uprooting and ultimate transplanting in Canada. However, his narrative especially focuses on: 1) his great-grandfather Nicholas's dubious renown and legacy; 2) his grandfather Paul's futile attempt to overcome that legacy through progressive policies amidst benighted reaction and war; his grandmother Natasha's heroics to protect her family from ruin first during the Civil War, then in foreign lands — Turkey, England, and Canada. Michael Ignatieff bases his *Russian Album* largely on unpublished memoirs, historical accounts, personal interviews, family photos, and visits to ancestral estates. He generally renders his subjects' experiences indirectly, highlighting thereby the difficulty in conveying the lives of one's ancestors, who themselves often understood them imperfectly. Although a trained historian, Ignatieff does not write history here (he mistrusts it), nor is he in search of roots,

but rather he seeks to accommodate to a past that has haunted him in spite of his own non-Russianness. He tries to "register the impact of [his grandparents'] struggling to remember." In doing so he strives for truth and provides an often moving, markedly human account of the disintegration of a prominent part of Russia's former ruling class.

Louise de Kiriline Lawrence's *Another Winter, Another Spring* focuses on the cataclysmic Civil War which replaced that ruling class with Bolshevik rule. After a brief account of her happy, decidedly upper-crust childhood and education in Sweden, which was somewhat affected by the French-Revolutionary ideals of a tutor and the selfless philanthropy of an aunt, Lawrence tells how she became a nurse during World War I. It was while nursing POWs in Copenhagen that she first met the convalescing Lieutenant Gleb Nikolayevich Kirilin. His good looks, his mysteriously passionate yet guarded nature, his rich, pan-European, but deeply Russian culture, thoroughly captivated Lawrence. The feeling was almost mutual — except for Gleb's persistent devotion to the ideal of a reformed tsarism. This took him back home where ultimately he joined allied interventionists who were fighting the Bolsheviks in the far north around Archangel and Murmansk.

Kirilin's flight from the safety of Copenhagen to the maelstrom of the Civil War directly followed his marriage to Lawrence. Undaunted, she used her nursing credentials and marital status to overcome countless obstacles to joining him near the fray. *Another Winter, Another Spring* is thus very much a quest of a heart that is ever in search of its vital, yet precarious bond. Lawrence stays with Gleb both through the allied defeat and then through his imprisonment. She hopes the Bolsheviks will free him out of respect for the Sumski-Posad surrender conditions, his patriotism, and the military ex-

pertise he could offer the new Soviet state. In narrating her quest Lawrence provides a vivid, exclusively personalized account of Russia's far north, and the bitter Civil War conflict. In general she sides with the whites against the reds, whom she occasionally depicts as primitive and barbarically cruel. However, both she and her husband give ample testimony to the good and bad on both sides. If Michael Ignatieff gropingly searched for the truth of his ancestors' Russian experience, Lawrence relies largely on letters to her mother from the period, and also on reflections that ripened within her over many decades. As a result she is able to convey an experience she actually lived. Still, her perspective too is essentially that of the outsider trying to fathom the enigma of her husband's Russianness and the land that so controlled him.

Quite similar is the perspective of John Watkins' *Moscow Despatches*. Watkins, as Canada's *chargé d'affaires* from 1948 to 1951 and Ambassador from 1954 to 1956, strove to crack the riddles behind the secretive façade of last-gasp Stalinism and early post-Stalin rule. Actually, Watkins' own Soviet experience poses riddles. According to the Introduction by Dean Beeby and William Kaplan, Watkins, whose sudden death over dinner in Montreal at age 61 seemed mysterious, appears to have been homosexually compromised during his diplomatic posting in the U.S.S.R. However, Beeby and Kaplan found no evidence that the KGB was able to gain any advantage from Watkins' predicament. The same Beeby and Kaplan, who selected from hundreds of official letters and despatches to produce the edited versions in their book, give an excellent account of its content:

... the despatches provide intimate portraits of Soviet citizens with whom Watkins shared many evenings in animated conversation. They offer a glimpse of a vast country struggling, under the tyranny of Joseph Stalin,

to rebuild after the devastation of the Second World War. They detail the confusion in the Moscow diplomatic corps following Stalin's death. They catalogue the diversity of cultures in the Soviet Union, especially in the accounts of Watkins' trip to previously forbidden regions. And like a Greek tragedy, they chronicle Watkins' deepening involvement with two secret police operatives who eventually tried to blackmail him.

Besides being well-written, Watkins' observations were often acute, for example, his 1951 view of the need for appropriate Western initiatives to counter the U.S.-S.R.'s privileged position *vis-à-vis* China (cf. his opinion that the U.S.S.R.'s intense domestic propaganda for peace was a dubious strategy for a nation *presumed* to be preparing for war). Watkins wrote candidly of the problems confronting a diplomat who wished to solve the Soviet enigma:

A two-year term spent mainly in the isolated society of the Moscow diplomatic corps is barely enough to scratch the surface. The impressions so acquired are inevitably superficial and often, no doubt, misleading. The Kremlin divulges none of its secrets to the diplomatic corps.

That he dared to make more personal Soviet contacts than any of his western colleagues may explain his relative success in cracking the Soviet façade. It could also explain his being one of the first westerners to establish successful trade and cultural agreements with the U.S.S.R. That he was apparently *set up* along the way will convince some that he was being manipulated. That nothing demonstrably negative came from the setup can suggest that his refusal to settle for superficiality had its rewards.

R. L. BUSCH

## IMAGES OF POLAND

BRIAN MOORE, *The Color of Blood*. McClelland & Stewart, \$19.95.

BRIAN MOORE HAS written a political novel structured on the formal tenets of

the detective genre. It is unclear whether its action evolves in one of the Soviet satellite states or refers to Central Europe as a whole, but the plot is simple. An attempt is made on the life of the Church's highest prelate, Cardinal Stephen Bem. He miraculously escapes death, but the event gives the authorities an excuse to intern him on the pretext that a right-wing Catholic group wants to assassinate him for his soft stand on communism and co-operation with the regime. Is the danger real or is it faked by the communists in order to manipulate the Church? Whatever the case, Cardinal Bem is caught between unshaken devotion to God and loyalty to his Catholic nation on the one hand, and the duty or necessity rather, ensuing from his position as the Church's official, to negotiate with the authorities, on the other. To be sure, there exists a strong conservative orientation (called Christian Fighters) within the Church. As an important religious celebration draws near, Archbishop Henry Krasnoy, who leads the opposing faction of the Church, prepares an inflammatory sermon which is to be delivered for the occasion. Cardinal Bem is aware of this conspiracy but his intention to thwart it coincides with the internment. This situation prompts Cardinal Bem's desperate escape from isolation. Two-thirds of the novel relates the main protagonist's unusual adventures as an escapee. The Cardinal eventually attends the celebration and he, not Archbishop Krasnoy, addresses the crowd. But this is also his last Mass and sermon: he is murdered while administering Holy Communion to the faithful. Four major episodes mark the progression of the basically detective narrative: the assassination attempt; the internment; the escape; the murder.

The novel constitutes a blend of events which, if taken in isolation, may refer to separate countries of Eastern and Central Europe, but as they operate within the

centrifugal and unifying structure of the plot, they seem to give a generalized image of the region as a whole. If so, then the novel does not fulfil its task. And the reader never does receive a clear answer as to what the real purpose of the author is. The fact that he fails to clarify his intentions ought to be taken as the novel's most serious drawback.

Moore is not the first author to weave a story based on problems of Central and Eastern Europe. Miroslav Krleža, the great Croatian writer who showed interest in social and national conflicts of this part of Europe, published between 1938 and 1962 his novel *The Banquet in Blitva*. It can be described as a novel about the political mechanisms in dictatorships popularly known as "banana republics." But Blitva is somewhere in Europe, most likely between the Baltic and Adriatic Seas. The fictitious land of Blitva may include Poland and Lithuania, Romania and Hungary, Bulgaria and Yugoslavia — in other words, all the dictatorial and semi-dictatorial states that existed in Central Europe between the two world wars.

In Moore's novel, distinct features determining the space of the story's action are confusing and not as clear-cut as they are in Krleža's, because they often contradict each other; the political factors which destabilize the existing equilibrium in this particular geopolitical area are different, too: the thematic level of the book refers almost exclusively to the conflict between Church and state. This emphasis, of course, brings the reader to the midst of modern political history. Yet the author's effort to illustrate it and make it credible seems flawed. If, indeed, as the plot seems to suggest, he intended to present the region in its entirety, then too few "real" and "diversified" events which would characterize the conflict on a more global regional scale have been brought into the novel. Their absence may leave the reader with the impression that the author did

not sufficiently familiarize himself with the relevant material before turning it into an artistic experience. The examples of events or problems which could represent the situation in Eastern Europe are too scarce and too ambivalent to sustain a broader generalizing interpretation.

The few examples which occur in the text can be easily enumerated. The first is the so-called patriotic clergy, a group of priests who co-operated with communists and allowed themselves to be manipulated by them. It gained some strength in such countries as Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, and to some extent in Hungary. Another trait or device which is probably supposed to lend spatial uniformity is the use of Russian surnames and names of fictitious geographical places; their function, of course, is to create "couleur locale," suggesting Soviet domination of the region. The secret police and the militarization of society also imply Eastern Europe: this is the most obvious and least questionable characteristic, as it typifies all societies under the Soviet rule. It should be noted, however, that the first two features ("patriotic clergy" and Russian place names or surnames) are clearly discordant with the major framework of the novel, which shows a strong Church in struggle with the communist state and impels the reader to interpret the novel as a story about Poland.

The weak leadership of Cardinal Bem and his alleged soft stand on communism might be an allusion to Cardinal Glemp, who has ascended primacy upon the death of Cardinal Wyszyński and is often criticized for his indecision in relation to communists. Some other details seem to betoken Poland as well. For instance, the internment of Cardinal Bem brings to mind the real event of the internment of his predecessor Stefan Cardinal Wyszyński. The main protagonist's escape from his isolation has some validity in its reference to the vicissitudes of Bishop Kacz-

marek, who was accused of anti-state activity and sentenced to imprisonment in the late 1940's. After the lightening of his sentence in the early 1950's he was transferred to a monastery in Rywald (incidentally, this is the only actual geographical name that appears in Moore's novel) from where he moved to Warsaw without asking the authorities for permission. It can be said that the central figure, Cardinal Bem, personifies all of the major troubles which the Polish Church's hierarchy went through with the communist state; and yet in no other country of Eastern or Central Europe has the Church managed to preserve its position as a stable and independent religious institution. Hence the "patriotic clergy" (to which considerable role is ascribed in the novel) did not play any notable role in Poland and its introduction to the narrative is unconvincing, as it diminishes the referential and representational power of the novel.

In this context even more questionable is the use of Russian proper and geographical names. In the novel Archbishop Krasnoy neither represents the "patriotic clergy" nor is he in any other way a traitor to the Catholic faith. On the contrary, within the Church, he represents the hardliners who reject any compromise with the communists. To name him "Krasnoy" (which is almost identical with the Russian word *krasnyi*, and means "red") is a misnomer to say the least, and evokes no connotation of Polishness. Proper names often play a symbolic role in narratives, strengthening the function which characters are destined to play in a plot structure. This is not the case in *The Color of Blood*. Similar reservations can be expressed about such names as "Prince Rostropov" or "Gorodok," which in Russian means "little town," but has no meaning in Polish. On the semantic level of lexis these contradictions are so mutually exclusive that one is tempted to repeat what A. Jarry said in *Ubu Roi* about the

setting of his play: "The scene . . . is set in Poland, which is to say, nowhere." In short, the faulty onomastics of names and places alienate the story from its Polish (Catholic) reality.

Finally, one more comment: if the novel is intended to be a serious discussion of national and political problems of Poland or for that matter of any other country in Eastern Europe, the sensational development of its plot does not serve the purpose. In fact it trivializes the whole problem and makes it a popular entertainment. Consequently, the novel offers little insight into the modern dilemmas and problems of the Church and its relationship with the state. It is more of a fantasy presented to the reader with possible scenarios, rather than with actual substance.

The question of how an author perceives and creates the image of another nation or country seems to have gained increasing attention in recent years and now constitutes a separate literary discipline defined by some German critics as *Imagologie* (*imageology*). One speaks about the image of Canada in American literature, about the image of Germany in English literature and so on. According to a well-known Austrian theoretician of literature, Franz K. Stanzel, such an image is mediated through stereotypes which "are determined as much by literary as political conditions." Recent political history of Poland (or Eastern Europe) became the subject of numerous works of literature written in the West after the Second World War. As far as Poland's image is concerned, three basic stereotypes have been developed: it has tragic history; it is a religious, Catholic country and consequently a representative of the Church, be it a priest, bishop or cardinal is always present and plays an important role; anti-Semitism remains persistent.

Moore does not go beyond these stereotypes. By tying them with some of the most recent political happenings, he

slightly modifies them. To be sure, they are difficult to overcome. The stereotype of a foreigner or a foreign country as a whole occurs relatively seldom within a given national literature and therefore persists for longer stretches of time as it is able to preserve the power "of making it strange." As Fr. K. Stanzel points out, the image of the drunken German in English literature lasted longer than a century.

It seems that the Polish stereotypes in Western literature have reached the point at which they can hardly be exploited any longer as innovative figures, and they call for some sort of a creative revision. It will be interesting to see who will have the courage and talent to obliterate these petrified and hackneyed images.

E. MOZEJKO

## HEROIC ARTISTS

BARBARA HILL RIGNEY, *Margaret Atwood*. Macmillan, £16.00; pa. £4.95.

RUTH GOWERS, *Emily Carr*. Berg Publishers, n.p.

ADELE WISEMAN, *Memoirs of a Book Molesting Childhood and Other Essays*. Oxford, \$13.95.

IN HER NEW volume of essays and autobiographical reflections, Adele Wiseman quotes Robert Kroetsch's comment to a group of writers in China: "where writing is concerned 'Our heroic men are women'." The accomplishments of Canadian women writers have indeed been heroic, achievements often realized while under the pressure of domestic, social, and moral responsibilities that men are allowed to elude: Wiseman writes that, "it is considered somewhat heroic and even a sign of genius in a man if he behaves with irresponsible selfishness in his personal life. He is considered redeemed by his utter devotion to his art. The exact reverse is usually true for a woman artist. The writer who also wants to live her life fully as a mother and wife is constantly

faced with largely artificial choices and has her guilts set out for her." These three books highlight the achievements of three Canadian women artists.

Ruth Gower's *Emily Carr* is a compact biography in the *Berg Women's Series* and it invites comparison with Maria Tippet's authoritative and superbly researched *Emily Carr: A Biography* (1979). Tippet, writing as a native of British Columbia, and having grown up with the work of Carr and the landscape of Vancouver Island around her as a child, enters the mind of Carr and the people of her life with a novelist's passion and precision. But while brilliantly diagnosing the psychological development of Carr, Tippet still writes as a Canadian who takes some knowledge for granted: she expects that we already know such simple facts as where Vancouver and Victoria are located on the map.

Ruth Gowers, a cautious British scholar, never enters as fully as Tippet does into the life of her subject, never offers psychological diagnoses of Carr's "hysteria," and never assumes that we already know the geography of the West Coast: she includes a map of the West Coast and like a conscientious travel guide tells us where in "Victoria today one can visit the home of James Douglas's daughter and son-in-law, Dr. and Mrs. Helmcken — a log-built house lovingly preserved with the furniture and fittings installed in the 1850's, complete with piano brought round Cape Horn." Gowers hopes to reach a different audience than Tippet: she acknowledges that while in "North America, [Carr] has been the subject of both large- and small-scale biographies, as well as a mass of chapters in collective biographies, memoirs, sketches, notes, reminiscences, and articles . . ." in Britain "she has received little notice in print from critics or art historians."

Admirably concise, clear, and informative, Gowers' treatment of Carr empha-

sizes the artist's determination and indefatigable attempts to educate herself and develop as an artist. Gowers' account de-emphasizes Carr's psychopathologies and loneliness, the self-deprecating persona that Gowers would contend was a fictional creation in Carr's autobiographical writings — she shows how Carr was often busier with her art work and more active in the social circles of the art community than Emily the autobiographer would have us believe. Gowers reports on the artist's resourcefulness and endurance in creating her work under living conditions that were often uncomfortable and inconvenient for artistic activity. What endures in this excellent introductory biography is a compelling picture of a stubborn, durable individual who succeeded in climbing over many barriers to achieve independence and the rights of adulthood.

Barbara Hill Rigney's *Margaret Atwood* is a concise monograph that is meant to introduce the newcomer to Atwood's work in broad outline and from the perspective of a feminist critique of male ideology. The intended audience, the undergraduate and the general reader, is presented with Atwood's critique of politics, sexuality, and the psychological self-entrapment that causes the victims of oppression to comply with and surrender to the oppressor. Hill Rigney sees Atwood as a moral and prescriptive writer who is able "not only to describe her world, but also to criticise it, to bear witness to its failures, and, finally, to prescribe corrective measures — perhaps even to redeem." The first chapter, "Maps of the Green World," argues that the moral lessons taught by Atwood are "through negative example"; the narrators in novels like *The Edible Woman*, *Surfacing*, and *Lady Oracle* are actually subjected to Atwood's ironic critique and are distanced from the author's own position. In this introductory chapter Hill Rigney surveys Atwood's deconstructive use of fertility

myths, artist archetypes, sisterhood roles, victimization and the increasingly political vision developed in later works like *Bodily Harm*, *True Stories*, and *The Handmaid's Tale*.

Five subsequent chapters treat Atwood's novels and poetry in chronological order, with a final chapter on "Atwood as Critic; Critics on Atwood." Hill Rigney proceeds in each chapter to summarize selectively each novel, focusing on theme and character; she connects, very briefly, the concerns of the novels to those of the poetry, considers relevant critical material, and offers some defence of her own readings. However, she does not break substantially new interpretive ground in this book and often the critics she cites for support, or to highlight an interpretive disagreement she has with them, demonstrate a more richly developed interpretation of Atwood's accomplishment than the one she herself offers: Sherrill Grace's *Violent Duality: A Study of Margaret Atwood* and Frank Davey's *Margaret Atwood: A Feminist Poetics* still present more convincing structural and narrative analyses of Atwood's work.

A major problem in Hill Rigney's approach is that it evades the description of Atwood's narrative craft and control of language. We can sympathize with the intention of the author, to present an enthusiastic and compact guide that can be comfortably read in one or two sweeps, but the thematic generalizations based on character analysis without rhetorical or narratological framing go begging for proof. Often Hill Rigney overlooks the important Canadian works that Atwood is dialogically addressing: for example, in the third chapter that features *Surfacing* and *The Journals of Susanna Moodie* only three pages are devoted to the *Journals* out of a total of twenty-three; more troubling than this lopsidedness is that the critic never mentions important Canadian statements on the documentary long poem

as a genre — for example, by Dorothy Livesay, Eli Mandel, Michael Ondaatje, or Frank Davey — nor does she direct the potential student to Susanna Moodie's *Roughing It in the Bush*.

Other irritations in this book raise nationalist hackles, especially in this time of Free Trade jitters north of the forty-ninth. Hill Rigney, a Professor of English at Ohio State University, patronizingly refers to our literary debates over the merits of Atwood's *Survival* as "largely uninteresting quibbles over which authors ought to have been included." This dumping of the political struggles of distinctive regional writers and writing groups into a melting pot that disperses differences of aspiration and point of view is inexplicable for a critic who writes for a feminist series of books that hopes to disrupt the male-dominated canon of literature — for it is the politics of literary institutions and the use of canonical texts that is at the heart of the *Survival* debate, and this is now one of the major questions of contemporary literary theory and feminism: it is not simply an "uninteresting quibble."

I would be cautious in recommending this book to my students. It shows the proper enthusiasm for Atwood's considerable achievement, but it falls short in describing Atwood's superb control of voice and irony; and while casting our Canadian political habits into such lofty phrases as the "vaster concept of the Canadian mind" it stumbles into such factual lapses as when a character is described running in "circles around Toronto's Parliament Buildings."

Adele Wiseman is one of our most supple yet eloquent stylists. Winner of the Governor General's Award for the epic *The Sacrifice*, her collection of essays is an exquisite blend of meditations on her development as a woman and Jewish writer; she was among the first generation of women, along with Margaret Laurence, to break into the special ranks of distin-

guished post-war writing. Here we have Wiseman's powerful feminist reading of Henry James, reflections on ethnic marketplaces, travel notes on China, and contemplations of Canadian landscape in an age of ecological crisis. A producer of some of our most energized prose, earthy, robust, crackling with humour both bawdy and delicately ironic, her enthusiasm for language and experience is seductive and inspiring. The essays and reflections presented here add up to a mixed autobiographical album, taking the reader in jagged chronological order from the rites of childhood and initiation into the pleasures of literature to later poignant explorations of human suffering. To prevent this collection from lapsing into too dark a pitch, Wiseman concludes with her angry, comic, and defiant complaint against the incompetencies and injustices of civic life and property inspectors in Toronto.

Wiseman's prose signals the distance that women writers have come since Emily Carr's generation, a generation that could not speak with Wiseman's ebullient and colourful confidence about sexuality, political life, and the morality of literature. Wiseman has the ability, rare in any writer, both to tell us what it feels like to be gripped by the pleasures of the book and to engage us in her passionately moral vision of literature's purpose. Here is the conclusion to the title-essay of a book that anyone interested in superb writing should own:

Books have continued to be the other worlds I live in, primarily because I still adhere to the hope that I may yet be able to create my own true magic model for the spirit of a more humane world among them. But I have no more illusions about the world of books that I have about any other world. In books as in life, the greatest burden on the future is the past. Literature is a holding tank for the worst as well as the best in our culture. The lessons we learn are too seldom the lessons ostensibly being taught. Nevertheless, I still approach every new work with a hesi-

tation that is like a preliminary washing of hands, and the profound conviction that I am about to learn to read. I enter books as I enter days, with respect and hope; each a chapter each a part of the passion, the continued yeagon of my life.

GLENN DEER

## WAR WITHIN WAR

TEDDY KUTSCHER, avec PATRICK COPPENS, *Les Enfants de Sophie*. Edns Naaman, \$14.00.

IN THE EARLY 1920's, Moishe Kutz and his wife Sophie left the Jewish ghetto in Cernauti, Roumania, for Paris. Although their intention was to pause briefly in the City of Light before following Uncle Samy to the U.S.A., the plan was never implemented. For Roumanians who had suffered persecution by the Russians as well as their own government, the liberal air of Paris was difficult to leave, while at the same time the coming of children strengthened their ties to the pleasant *quartier* off the rue Rochechouart. Contentment and relative prosperity led the Kutz family, in the late 1930's, to underestimate the significance of the increasingly anti-semitic rhetoric of rightist organizations like *Les Croix de Feux*. Thus, with the collapse of the French state, they suddenly found themselves confronted with the genocidal policies of the Third Reich carried out by the local French police. First Moishe, and then Sophie disappear in the early *rafles* against the Jews, but their five children, aided by their wits and by an occasional, compassionate Frenchman, will scatter and to varying degrees resist. It is their experiences, sometimes in their words, which give us the unusual view of a war within a war within a war which was the Jewish contribution to the French Resistance. At the end of the first volume of this projected trilogy, one of the children will have joined his parents among the missing and presumed dead, while the remaining four celebrate

the liberation which their efforts had helped to bring about.

*Les enfants de Sophie*, whose principal author Ted Kutscher is one of the children in question, manages to engage the reader in a variety of ways. First, there are the ethnic snapshots laden with cultural insight, whose heightened authenticity, one gathers, has arisen from the telling and retelling of family stories over the years: Sophie's ruse for eluding the persistent Isaac on the train from Cernauti; Moishe refusing to exercise his tailoring "art" among the common people; Sophie shopping and gossiping her way across Paris with two children in tow. These vignettes, however, along with their eastern European charm disappear relatively early with the deportation of Moishe and Sophie, and the remainder of the novel is comprised of the interwoven experiences of the more culturally assimilated children, in particular, Albert and Ted, respectively the oldest and the youngest sons of Sophie.

The pages chronicling the activities of Albert and Ted make up about sixty per cent of the novel and the alternation of tone and content between the young men's adventures constitutes the main feature of its design. The account of Ted's experience, ostensibly based on journals he kept during the occupation, are filled with the sober but fascinating details of life under the Nazis and, in particular, with the operation of the *Compagnons de France*, the boys' vocational program established by Pétain after the French defeat. Albert, by contrast, lives a life worthy of James Bond, replete with attractive women, secret missions, and syncopating acts of violence. Moreover, it seems clear that without the structure of timely alternation between the straight personal history of Ted and the more flamboyant version of Albert, a not insignificant element of suspense, and, with it, the average read-

er's enthusiasm for turning pages, could be diminished.

This last reflection leads us to the troubling thought that the "faits véridiques" promised on the book's cover seem at times awash in a largely fictional sea. There is, for example, no suggested documentation for the exploits of Albert who, after joining the maquis, will die in battle without ever again contacting a member of his family. In point of fact, the texture of Albert's escapades is so different from the rest of the book that one is tempted to discover in them the justification of the inclusion on the book's cover of a secondary author. Whether or not there is merit to this speculation, the authors have paid an involuntary tribute to the squeamishness of the reader who prefers to know where his history stops and his fiction begins: they have omitted from their "Table de Matirès" a full chapter entitled "Lisa et Albert," in which the brutal interrogation of the fascist dentist is intercut with their own passionate embraces. This is the sort of thing that will keep the reader awake, but one has the sense that Sophie may not approve.

JOSEPH I. DONOHUE, JR.

## MCFADDEN'S WORLD

DAVID MCFADDEN, *Gypsy Guitar: One Hundred Poems of Romance and Betrayal*. Talonbooks, \$10.95.

"SOMETIMES," SAYS David McFadden in "A Date with Margaret Hollingsworth," "I think our sacred duty as human beings is simply to sit still / and emit rays of ec-static light in the immeasurably intelligent night." "The theme of all great art: it's nice to be alive," he says in "How to Be Your Own Butcher"; and, "Everything is true of everybody, when you think of it" ("Ocean of Sadness"). Such pseudo-mystical profundity is complemented by romantic egotism: "Writers who don't re-

veal themselves with every breath usually don't interest me" ("Transparencies"); "I . . . prefer writers who talk on and on about themselves, even / if they don't realize they're doing so" ("Nightmares").

If these observations, taken out of context, sound rather banal, McFadden's preface to *Gypsy Guitar* seems to set the tone. "To read a book of poetry is to form a bond with the writer," he explains solemnly. And with the mock humility of a Renaissance lyricist, he affirms that his "bloated, overblown sonnets" are "sentimental but sincere." But such a blatantly conventional apology has to be taken as an ironic signal that *Gypsy Guitar*, in spite of its subtitle, is not about romance at all. Messages to an unidentified mistress provide the occasion for many of the poems, but they usually resolve into satirical comments on the culture in which the artist finds himself, and bemused reflections on the incongruities of the life of the imagination. "It'd be such a treat," he says, "to become a robot like all the other robots instead of spending my / life writing sad endless poems far into the morning light" ("La Traviata").

The "sonnets" in *Gypsy Guitar* each consist of about thirty blank-verse, seven-foot more-or-less iambic lines, poems which are fairly conventional looking at first glance, but which seem to be ridiculing the whole idea of conventional poetic form. In various lyrics he invokes Baudelaire, Whitman, Blake, and oriental wisdom writers, as well as contemporaries and friends such as Susan Musgrave and Margaret Hollingsworth. Several of the works are, in fact, free translations, mostly from the prose poems of Baudelaire. But summaries or quotations reflecting this literary indebtedness tend to be misleading, because they call too much attention to the tradition and not enough to McFadden's unique artistry. To get an idea of his considerable talents in at least one direction, it is worth comparing some of his

Baudelaire translations with the originals. "Have a Nice Day," for instance, is an irreverent rendering of "Le Mauvais Vitrier," in which the splenetic egocentricity of the original is turned into surrealist farce, with the gratuitously violent climax neutralized by the empty American cliché of the poem's title.

There is a similar atmosphere of surrealism and irreverence in most of the poems. This atmosphere is frequently based on incongruous conjunctions of the romantic and the commonplace, the subjective and the objective, the supposedly real world and the world of dreams. Using the familiar two-part structure of the traditional sonnet, McFadden combines meditations on romantic love with images of the CN Tower; Blakean visions and elephants (McFadden seems to have a thing about elephants); expressions of modern angst and Alex Colville's paintings; a lion in the streets of Toronto and introspective musings about self-centredness. The combinations do not always work; many of the poems are rather cluttered, too inclined to move in many directions without arriving anywhere. But the confusion of the imagery is frequently compensated for by McFadden's laconic, tongue-in-cheek solipsistic tone. At its best, *Gypsy Guitar* provides an exhilarating immersion in a uniquely bizarre and irrepressible imagination, and forces a reconsideration of many assumptions about poets, poetry, and human experience in general.

JAMES DOYLE

## TESTIMONY TIME

HARRY LOEWEN, ed., *Why I am a Mennonite: Essays on Mennonite Identity*. Herald Press (Kitchener), \$18.95.

THIS IS A COLLECTION of thirty essays by thirty people responding in different ways to the question implied in the title. Harry Loewen, the editor, occupies the Chair of

Mennonite Studies at the University of Winnipeg. Loewen gives all contributors to his book "complete freedom to write . . . as they [see] fit," and makes no attempt to impose an order on the essays he publishes, arranging them alphabetically according to surnames of the author.

The label, *Mennonite*, carries as many ethnic connotations as religious. Loewen wisely solicits essays from both the purely ethnic Mennonites, who have renounced all orthodox Christian belief, as well as from recent converts to Mennonite Christianity whose ethnic roots are in other traditions. The majority of contributors, however, are ethnic Mennonites who have responded more or less positively to their religious upbringing and are now "treading the crude consistence" of the North American cultural melting pot with Miltonic determination. While most speak with conviction, a few bring to mind a verse from Matthew Arnold: "Light half-believers of our casual creeds," but all command respect for their frankness and honesty, a frankness and an honesty seldom achieved when people talk publicly about their own religious and ethnic roots.

Such honesty necessarily reveals conflicting opinion and Loewen makes no effort to hide this. While Mennonites seldom quarrel with the long recognized virtues of "peace, love, justice, tolerance, [and] community building . . ." they do not agree, for instance, as to what methods should be used to encourage others, particularly their own children, to join the faith. All too often tactics resembling those employed by American evangelical fundamentalists at revival meetings have been sanctioned, sharply dividing the community and causing within the individual what Di Brandt calls "soul torment." Poet Patrick Friesen describes the "choreography":

The frightening sermon, the tear-jerking hymns, altar call, the men watching from the back of the church, or from the platform in

front, watching for signs of personal turmoil, watching, then moving toward some troubled person, arm around his or her shoulder, whispering into that torment, cajoling, pushing. . . .

Friesen remembers these meetings as "voodoo evenings of spiritual violence" and several other contributors remember them with bitterness. Yet for Bernie Wiebe, who responded to the altar call at a revival meeting after being "nudged" by his teacher, the experience became "an awakening to 'Being'."

Not only do viewpoints expressed in the book vary sharply, writing styles do too. In Di Brandt's witty essay, "how i got saved," a parody of the revival meeting, she remembers her Christian camp experiences and how at "Testimony time" there was "the tremendous pressure to get up & declare one's eternal loyalties in the reddish light of the campfire." Her prose-poem stands as an eloquent protest, not only against the rules of punctuation and the conventional use of upper-case letters, but against what she perceives the God of many Mennonites to have become: "the old man in the sky who cares only for ice in the belly not the grieving."

Another triumph of the imagination is Magdalene Redekop's "Through the Mennonite Looking Glass." Claiming not only Lewis Carroll's metaphor but also his wit, she writes a provocative essay boldly assuming the radical stance of her ancient anabaptist ancestors. Redekop, a teacher of English literature at the University of Toronto, has "faith in the redemptive power of the human imagination" and admires Jesus as "someone who had the very best of imagination: the ability to identify with another." The Mennonite community, she argues, has stifled the imagination, especially of its women. Because of "the profound failure of the imagination among Mennonites," observes Redekop, they see Jesus as "an abusive husband" and the church as his

"geriatric bride." Fortunately for the reader, Redekop, Brandt, and many others represented in the book, demonstrate an immunity toward the alleged Mennonite blight on the imagination.

*Why I am a Mennonite* will certainly be of interest to Mennonite readers and probably, as Loewen states in his preface, to all "who struggle with the questions of who and what they are in today's society." However, Loewen would have realized his goal more fully if he had sought a wider representation among his contributors. Although Mennonites can be found around the world, all but two of the essays are written by North American Mennonites and the vast majority of the contributors are academics. About two-thirds of the writers in the book are Canadian, and over half of those come from Winnipeg or vicinity. For readers of *Canadian Literature*, perhaps the most regrettable discovery will be that Rudy Wiebe is not among the contributors.

ED FRIESEN

## OVERVIEWS

L. W. CONOLLY, ed., *Canadian Drama and the Critics*. Talonbooks, n.p.

AUGUSTINUS P. DIERICK, *German Expressionist Prose: Theory and Practice*. Univ. of Toronto Press, n.p.

IN 1928 MERRILL DENISON published those snide comments on the impossibility of a Canadian drama that have echoed down to us over the years *ad nauseam*. Imagine my delight, then, when I discovered no sign of Denison in the early pages of Len Conolly's *Canadian Drama and the Critics*. In fact, there is only one reference to his sarcastic remarks — and that occurs on page 172 when Alexander Leggatt puts him to rest in a 1976 review of James Reaney's *The St Nicholas Hotel*. Leggatt notes Denison's remark that without a national capital and a cultural community, Canada can never have a theatre art, but

he counters Denison's negativity succinctly:

[Canada] contains many . . . communities within it; and what has happened, as our drama has flourished in defiance of Denison's prediction, is that our dramatists have turned to local communities, not the nation as a whole, for their material — and the best of them, by telling us about one particular group, have made the rest of the country listen.

Furthermore, as this collection of reviews, essays and interviews demonstrates, not only has Canada fostered a number of active theatre communities, but also we have produced a wide and varied range of playwrights, some of major status, and a rich tradition of critical writing about the theatre.

Conolly explains in his Introduction that he has limited his material to those plays included in three recent anthologies of Canadian drama by Richard Plant, Richard Perkyns and Jerry Wasserman with four exceptions; for various reasons he decided to include material on James Reaney's *Sticks and Stones*, John Murrell's *Waiting for the Parade*, David French's *Leaving Home* and Theatre Passe Muraille's *The Farm Show*. The result is an interesting, informative and useful book that provides a critical companion to the anthologies and an overview of our drama and our critical responses to it.

Because the readers most likely to use this volume will be students and teachers of Canadian drama who are looking for information on or about particular plays and their authors, everyone will have his or her own particular needs; therefore, what I'd like to note are a few general observations that come from reading the entire book.

First — James Reaney has received the most unequivocal and sustained praise of all the playwrights dealt with; if our reviewers and critics are to be trusted, Reaney is our classic giant. By contrast, Mi-

chael Cook has received the most negative criticism, and a particularly lively debate took place in 1972 over Carol Bolt's *Buffalo Jump*. Certainly, our theatre critics have not been afraid to attack or to praise. Second — our critics have tended to privilege realist drama over more experimental forms (with Reaney the obvious exception) and to have paid very little attention to staging, sets and production values. I felt starved, reading these commentaries, for a sense of what these plays looked like on the boards, and there is not a single production photo in the text. This surely is a significant loss for both drama teachers and theatre historians.

Third — fascinating contrasts emerge between the performance reviews by Canadians of Canadian productions and those by foreigners, whether they are reviewing productions here or abroad. By and large, foreign reviewers are unsympathetic and it would appear that few if any Canadian works have proved easily exportable. Erika Ritter makes the point sharply in a 1982 interview: "we have critics who have been brought from other places who don't understand the audience yet make pronouncements about what that audience likes." To some degree I think such misunderstanding contributes to some of the negative or condescending attitudes toward Canadian writing in general, and yet I also wonder whether or not truly superior work for the stage, when well acted and imaginatively staged, will not earn the respect of any experienced drama critic. And I also wonder if there have not been more Canadian plays produced and well received abroad than this collection implies.

It is to Conolly's credit, however, that this volume of criticism leaves the reader with questions. Together with the three anthologies to which it responds, *Canadian Drama and the Critics* is a clear demonstration that theatre is alive and well across this country. It provides a criti-

cal map to our drama, a useful and stimulating context for our plays, and a basis for the on-going debate that makes the theatre important in our lives.

While Canadian theatre was finding itself in the early decades of this century, Germany was experiencing one of the most exciting and innovative periods in its theatre and other arts. The Expressionist Movement, which began with the visual arts about 1905 and peaked with theatre and cinema in the 1920s, proved to be one of the most iconoclastic and controversial constituents of Modernism. It took its impetus from the wide spread antipathy to bourgeois values of materialism and morality and to the aesthetics of realism and impressionism, and its passionate rebellion was felt in all the arts.

Unfortunately, however, Expressionism has not been well understood outside the German-speaking world (except by art historians), in part because expressionist literature does not translate effectively and in part because Hitler removed most examples of the painting, theatre and literature from the public domain, thereby creating a considerable time-lag in our re-discovery and re-assessment of this art. Dierick's *German Expressionist Prose* is an important new step in the dissemination of information about the literature of this exciting period.

Perhaps the most important gap filled by this new text is the one created by language. Several anthologies of expressionist plays have appeared in English and several studies of the Movement have either been written in English or translated, but this is the first critical study of the short fiction of Expressionism to be written in English. Dierick gives an extended analysis of this fiction that enables us to understand and appreciate it in its own right and as a part of Expressionism. That said, however, this study immediately presents a serious problem for the North American reader: all passages

from the stories are quoted in German only. Although I can understand Dierick's desire to use the original, it is a shame to have only German used. The very audience that should be discovering expressionist prose is largely excluded by this decision. Where this policy may be understandable with the fiction for stylistic reasons, there seems no reason at all to insist upon it for the secondary, critical quotations, far too many of which are introduced into the main body of discussion where they overwhelm the author's own arguments.

To compensate for this limitation, Dierick provides plot summaries, and on the whole he manages without becoming tedious or repetitive. Themes are his main concern; therefore, the chapters are divided thematically and the stories are selected in conjunction with their thematic focus. There are many fascinating insights into the concerns of better-known writers like Gottfried Benn and Alfred Döblin, but the study is more useful for the light it sheds on lesser-known writers such as Carl Sternheim and Franz Jung. For example, the obsession with sexuality is a well-enough documented aspect of expressionist art, from Ernst Ludwig Kirchner's paintings of Berlin prostitutes to the aggressive females of Kokoschka's or Alfred Brust's plays, but the theme is central to the fiction as well.

In his chapter called "Eros in Extremis" Dierick demonstrates Franz Jung's and Ernst Weiss's cynical or brutal treatment of the battle between the sexes and goes on to comment at length on Döblin's more complex handling of similar issues. If I were to take issue with Dierick on this matter, it would be because he does not seem to recognize vicious misogyny when he sees it. Too often a violent sexual death for the woman is presented by the writer as a so-called *Erlösung* (deliverance) when it is little more than a murder and/or rape voyeuristically presented and vi-

cariously enjoyed by the narrator. Here the critic must distance himself or herself enough to criticize the narrator/author's position.

The best chapter of *German Expressionist Prose* is the tenth — "God and the Search for Utopia." Religious themes and quasi-Christian echoes abound in expressionist works, but the profound influence of Nietzsche precludes a conventional Christian message from most expressionist writers. Here Dierick draws some useful distinctions and reminds us of the importance to many expressionists of their spiritual relationship with nature and the passionate search, by others, for a Utopia based on universal brotherhood that would alleviate, even eradicate, the socio-political and industrial sufferings of their day. But as Dierick sensibly concludes: "These utopian writings tell us a great deal about the reasons for the failure of Expressionism as a political and social force. While seeking to break away from a multiplicity of doctrines in a relativistic bourgeois society, Expressionism in turn became the victim of a multiplicity of doctrines."

Although I am grateful to Dierick for bringing this hitherto little-known material to light in English, two serious shortcomings of this study should be mentioned. In his concern to tell us what these stories are about, Dierick fails to question naïve assumptions about the relationship between language (or art) and reality. These works cannot be viewed as bearing a direct relationship to socio-political conditions in the *real* world or as presenting an unmediated expression of the authors' inner world; they are, after all, artistic constructs in language. Nowhere does Dierick seem aware of the "expressive fallacy" (the term is Hal Foster's in *Recordings*, 1985) by which expressionists *thought* they were giving free expression to their inner visions in opposition to the constraints of a repressive society. If they

failed in their enterprise (and most did), it is in large part because they were unable to come to grips with the *impossibility* of escaping the traces of socially constructed identities.

In the last analysis, there is no such thing as an untrammelled, unconditioned and uncoded subjective expressivity. Perhaps if he had paid more attention to language and form, and if he had developed a clear theoretical perspective on his materials, Dierick would have located the central dilemma of Expressionism more clearly. The parataxis he acknowledges, but fails to analyze, is only one way of deconstructing the repressive structures against which the expressionists were struggling — ideologically, linguistically, aesthetically and spiritually — in order to formulate and release their new vision of man.

SHERILL GRACE

## GROVE/GREVE

PAUL HJARTARSON, ed., *A Stranger in My Time: Essays by and about Frederick Philip Grove*. NeWest, \$21.95/11.95.

IN AN AGE WHEN critics and readers are questioning, modifying, revising — even abandoning — the notion of "author," *A Stranger in My Time* will be seen in many ways to be a model of its kind. First, the book, consisting not only of essays and diary entries by Grove/Greve himself, but also of twelve essays by various writers (as well as a short Preface), repeatedly focuses on the main issues: Who is Grove/Greve? What exactly are his contributions to Canadian Literature? How should he be approached, nationally or internationally? Second, because the twelve contributors clearly represent a number of approaches to Grove/Greve, there is enough variety to provide the reader with both an overview and an in-depth introduction to Grove and the concerns

involved in analyzing his achievement. Finally, because Hjartarson balances Grove's essays or journals with loosely related essays by various critics, the reader never loses sight of the fact that the enigmatic author is never simply the Grove or the Greve of any one of his "own" essays, nor is he the personality of any one of his critics' creative imaginings. Hjartarson's editing of the dossier never slights the complicated issue of Grove/Greve as a "stranger."

The book is divided into four parts, and each part attends to a central issue of Grove's career. In the opening section, which gives focus to Greve's German writings: Walter Pache, E. D. Blodgett and D. O. Spettigue considerably extend our understanding of the various influences of the European tradition upon Greve/Grove's novels. Blodgett's tracing of the tension between *Naturalism* and *Neuro-mantick* in the works deserves close attention. The second part of the book emphasizes Grove's major works of the Manitoba Period. Included here are essays by J. J. Healey, W. J. Keith, Camille R. La Bosiére, Margaret Stobie and Henry Makow. Of particular interest is Makow's essay, which includes and offers excellent commentary on five letters by Grove to his wife (letters not included in Pacey's edition). The third section of the book is mainly concerned with material Grove wrote after leaving Manitoba in 1929. Kenneth C. Dewar rather mechanically examines the "Technology and Pastoral Ideal in Frederick Philip Grove's Writing"; Margaret Stobie pays meticulous attention to "Grove and the Ants" (and thereby almost makes rereading *Consider Her Ways* worthwhile); and R. D. MacDonald, forgetting that the classic sense of the term *tragic* died long before Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*, rather weakly argues that *The Master of the Mill* is not a "tragic" work. To conclude this section the editor elects to include one

of his own essays dealing with an earlier period, the 1920's. His topic is the diary of Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven (formerly Elsa Greve), and he indulges himself by discussing the sexual politics of Greve/Grove's personal life while over-emphasizing the "startling new discovery" that Elsa was party to "Greve's suicide." By the end of his essay, the "startling revelation" is brought down to earth; only the "implication" of her complicity, not the fact, is clear. Finally, the book ends with "Thoughts and Reflections," a seeming diary, but actually a fascinating, at times rambling, self-conscious *apologia* written by Grove between 1933 and 1940.

The material by Grove/Greve himself makes this book indispensable. Even skim reading it reveals that the essays, novels and autobiographical works by Grove/Greve seriously challenge the way we have read him. Grove's problematic works, their ambiguous generic overlapping, their puzzling "authority" — being neither quite realism, nor quite symbolism, nor quite novel of ideas, nor quite history, nor quite biography — demand the re-evaluation of the traditional concepts of *autos* (self), *bio* (life) and *grapho* (writing).

As Hjartarson points out in his introduction, the book allows the "stranger" to speak for "himself." The "self" Grove/Greve reveals, however, vascillates, shifts and contradicts itself without remorse. Grove is truly the modernist, as much a stranger to himself as he is to us. The view is made plain in his shifting picture of himself in his "own" words, if we conclude that the poses he assumes are as revealing as they seem to be. In several uncollected and lesser-known essays, in a previously untranslated newspaper article on Flaubert's theories of art, and in the previously unpublished "diary" that closes the book, Grove hints at the complicated aesthetic sense of art, artistry and individuality which underlies his at times seemingly

naïve and inept "prairie realism." Whether one can ever fully delineate his aesthetic theory will probably be at the heart of debate over the next decade. In any case, the seeming flaws, fractures and cracks in his novels, those which have so distracted the very critics included in the book, now find a new context. Whether the issue is aesthetics, novel writing, ethics, philosophy or characterization, Grove's underlying vision is centred on the belief that

the only thing which is merely fiction in our conception of ourselves is precisely this that we assume an independent and spontaneous "we," which is as little of our making as the image we see in the mirror is of the mirror's making or assembling.

For Grove, then, identity is circumstance, and circumstance is identity. No wonder he contradicted Descartes by stating *cogitas ergo sum* ("You think; therefore I am"). This reversal of the famous *cogito* reveals much about the difficulties readers have with him and his writings, be it the German man and author or the English-Canadian. No wonder his novels smack of the European tradition of the "novel of ideas," no wonder his seeming efforts at realism never quite come off; he never fully trusted that any sense of the "real" was possible. Works like *Fruits of the Earth* or *Settlers of the Marsh* or *Master of the Mill* lean towards realism to establish circumstance, and then shift in focus (either narratively or structurally) to lean toward the problem of conceptualizing the impossibility of sustained identity. The peculiar combination represents an artistic integration designed to explore how we build an interpretation of ourselves "like a cardhouse to shelter us from the blast of reality." Ironically, the critical essays on *Master of the Mill* or *Over Prairie Trails* or *Fruits of the Earth* largely carry on the habitual thinking that Grove/Greve questions; few of the essayists take seriously the notion that an au-

thor can also be in search of his supposed self.

Clearly the essays and diary entries by Grove are the strength of the book. They indirectly and persistently underscore then deny, affirm then contradict, question then answer, resolve then puzzle, clarify then cloud the issues in the essays by the critics. On a general level, reading this book compels reconsideration not only of what is meant by the term "author," but of what any definition of the term entails for critical practice. On a more pedestrian level, a careful reading reveals that *A Stranger in My Time* still needs a final proofreading: several minor errors suggest that the material did not always receive the full editorial attention it deserved. However, the book so compels readers to rethink both Grove/Greve's achievement and his critics' understanding of that achievement that the issue of "What is an author" — what "constitutes" a Grove/Greve — cannot be dismissed, ignored or overlooked.

ED JEWINSKI

## (DIS)CONTINUITY

HELEN POTREBENKO, *Life, Love and Unions*. Lazara Publications, \$7.95.

LILIANE WELCH, *Word-House of a Grandchild*. Ragweed Press, \$9.95.

TWO RECENT VOLUMES present (mostly brief) poems grouped into three sections, but if these books bear a general similarity of structure, they express very different voices. Welch's *Word-House of a Grandchild* begins with a four-page prose Preface, in which the author states:

I have learned from my genealogy that a family epic is something as forbidding, incomprehensible and ritualistic as a wilderness area; that when you are looking for one specific ancestor at the beginning of a path, another one is awaiting you at the next turn. Thus, at those moments when I was most intently searching for my grandfather, im-

ages of my grandmother spoke to me. I also learned that, whether remembering the web of experiences lived with my grandmother or examining the cast of characters in faded photo albums, unawares I was always penetrating from the outside of my background and antecedents into the inside of my own life's narrative.

In the lyrics that follow, the speaker speculates about the lives of her grandparents and associates her own situation with the known, or guessed at, or imagined past of the grandparents. Welch also explains in her Preface that her grandmother was strongly rooted in "her fief in southern Luxembourg" while her grandfather "was an Italian migratory labourer." The volume proceeds to employ a Southern European-Northern European distinction or polarity, which Thomas Mann made such famous use of. Welch gives clear indication, at the outset, of how she will employ this North-South distinction: the opening line of the first poem reads, "We're in Italy to dig up my roots."

Part I of *Word-House of a Grandchild* establishes a background for the essential dialectical tensions — between South and North, between past and present — that provide the bedrock for Welch's investigation of identity. In Part II, Welch begins with a poem entitled "I Write the Love-Poems They Never Wrote"; there follows a series of poems alternately headed "*He*:" and "*She*:"; and closing the section is the volume's title poem. The title poem gives poignant recognition that what's "lost in the past" can only be reclaimed by "dream." In Part II, the currents mingle, and interesting moments emerge: in "Italian September," "our hands could dismantle / the . . . night of . . . rock."

Potrebenko's *Life, Love and Unions* has the three sections of the volume's title. "Life" repeatedly refers to the job of typist. Potrebenko, in "Song of a Dicta Typist," refers to "Life, cut up into squares, disappearing / into white bond

letterhead." Boredom and poverty become some of the ways of ensuring "walking down the dirt road to nowhere." The second section of the book, "Love," includes a poem called "The Amazement of Cucumbers": "How can there be cucumbers? / They are made of earth and air and water / but resemble none of these." In the final section, Potrebenko notes that "Life, love and unions are process, not events." The first section refers to "the dirt road to nowhere," the last to "a long bleak road." Welch's work finds a metaphor in mountain-climbing, Potrebenko's in journeying down a road.

Neither volume ultimately concentrates on the present: Welch seeks ways out of the present in order to revive the past, while Potrebenko seeks ways out of the present and into the future. Welch looks at private life, Potrebenko at working life. While both volumes comment on relations between men and women, Welch focuses on specific couples and a particular family, while Potrebenko presents the relations between men and women in groups and social life. Both writers are deliberately international: Welch gravitates toward internationalism as a way of exploring discontinuity, while Potrebenko leans toward internationalism as a way of establishing continuity.

JOY KUROPATWA

## EYE & EAR

DENNIS COOLEY, *The Vernacular Muse*. Turnstone, \$12.95.

INTEREST IN ORAL and written language has increased in the last twenty years for both linguists and literary critics. While linguists have been exploring differences which pertain to morphology, syntax and discourse structure, literary critics have investigated how differences between these media affect genres such as the heroic epic and poetry generally. Dennis

Cooley's *The Vernacular Muse* is an important contribution to this ongoing exploration. Though not a coherent collection of essays, Cooley's examination of the place of orality in modern poetry, specifically Canadian prairie poetry, his development of a grammar of line breaks, and his consistent attention and sensitivity to language in individual essays distinguish his work as theoretically and practically significant.

The essays in Cooley's collection are not organized into categories of theory and application, but might and should have been. Moreover, some, such as Cooley's discussion of Margaret Laurence's *The Stone Angel*, seem out of place given Cooley's principal topic of the vernacular in modern poetry. This essay itself is a brilliant Jungian analysis of *The Stone Angel*, but is very oddly juxtaposed to the first essay in the volume, "Placing the Vernacular: The Eye and Ear in Saskatchewan Poetry." The subject of the vernacular muse is not taken up directly again until five essays on in the collection.

As a theorist Cooley is combative and agonistic; it would be hard to imagine Cooley sitting on a fence. The reader too is seldom allowed such a posture. Among Cooley's range of disputants, two stand out: traditional critics who embrace conventional poetics with its attention to levels of ambiguity and "meaning"; and Roman Jakobson. Cooley attacks traditional critics who discount the use of the vernacular in poetry because such poetry holds, at least in their view, no opportunity for interpretation and analysis; it is "flat," low, meaningless, and simply "is." Cooley identifies this rejection of the poetic use of vernacular as more accurately an adherence to a specific definition of what poetry is or should be. Traditional critics define poetry as timeless high art rather than vulgar vernacular discourse located in time and place. In this way poetry is aligned to the written standard

and not to dialect. Valued also are the figures of speech employed by poets which in turn can be interpreted by trained critics functioning as high priests of poetic art. Of all the figures, most important is metaphor since this device gives most opportunity for interpretation. Roman Jakobson is singled out for special attention by Cooley, since Jakobson has broadly correlated poetry with the metaphoric pole in language, while associating prose with the metonymic.

In the three essays primarily devoted to poetic theory, "Placing the Vernacular: The Eye and the Ear in Saskatchewan Poetry," "Breaking and Entering (thoughts on line breaks)," and "The Vernacular Muse in Prairie Poetry," Cooley challenges conventional wisdom by setting up related oppositions: oral/written, metonymic/metaphoric, Post-modern/Romantic, narrative/lyric, dialogic/monologic, contextualized/decontextualized, demotic/bourgeois, male/female. Most interesting is Cooley's correlation of vernacular poetry with metonymy, and his rather extensive attack on metaphor, which he identifies with lyric, Romantic poetry. The association of metaphor with lyric, Romantic poetry Cooley gets from Jakobson, though he skews Jakobson considerably, not only by confusing Jakobson's notion of a metaphoric pole with de Saussure's notion of a paradigmatic axis, but also by defining this axis as "essentially lyric." What Jakobson actually says is that "In Russian lyrical songs . . . metaphoric constructions predominate, while in the heroic epics the metonymic way is preponderant" (*Fundamentals of Language*). Jakobson's point is not unlike Cooley's, that is, that metaphor is typical of certain types of poetry, while metonymy characterizes other types, in particular the heroic epic, but also modern vernacular poetry which according to Cooley "often resort[s] to narrative and in some cases anecdotal

modes." Narrative poetry, epic or anecdotal, exploits metonymy more than metaphor. And that should be O.K., and certainly is according to Jakobson and other Prague School Theorists.

Cooley's attack on élitist views of language has long been anticipated by linguists. Poets such as Eliot have also been clear in their valuation of the vernacular. Cooley's own defence is important, not because of his attacks on metaphor, which are frequently silly ("Finally, a few guys start questioning metaphor, begin to think there might be something else"), and often inaccurate, since the one thing metaphor is not is referential or a "principle of conveyance," but because of his own skilled analysis of vernacular poetry. Although I see line breaks as an extension of a visual, writerly poetic and not a freeing of form for metonymic play and ultimately for a vernacular poetics (as Cooley does), his analysis of line breaks, ultimately a grammar of line breaks, is excellent theoretical work which itself denies any notion that vernacular poetry is formless and meaningless. Cooley demonstrates again and again a poetic which is alive and, as he says, "ludic," characterized by its own brand of wit and artifice. That this poetic also exploits metaphor, as Cooley's own use of a baseball conceit ("they want to / pick you / off the short / stop catch you / way off base") demonstrates, needs his attention, although he is correct that metonymic play on the syntagmatic axis is with dialect and vernacular most often foregrounded in Postmodern poetry.

The remaining essays in Cooley's volume concentrate on individual writers, specifically Margaret Laurence, Robert Duncan, Sinclair Ross, Dorothy Livesay, and Michael Ondaatje. His essays on Laurence and Duncan examine sociopsychological conflicts for the individual and for the poet respectively. That on Ross looks at narrative perspective and

most particularly the disjunction between protagonist and narrator in first person narrative. A transition from lyric to social narrative is examined in Cooley's discussion of Livesay, while a similar transition is discussed in iconic terms in his treatment of Ondaatje's *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid*. All these essays reveal Cooley's sensitivity to language, structure, and the interplay between theme, structure and linguistic expression. All are valuable contributions to our understanding of each of these writers.

As sensitive to and careful of language as Cooley is, it is regrettable, nonetheless, that his use of linguistic terminology and application of linguistic analysis to poetry and fiction is not always exact. There is a great deal of linguistic error in his discussions, and this is important because Cooley uses linguistic analysis in poetic analysis. In one instance Cooley confuses the passive voice with the past tense ("this is what happened" [287]). The verb *happen* is intransitive and not a candidate for passivication. There is misunderstanding of the article system in English. Cooley almost consistently identifies *a* as marking old information and *the* as marking new, when in fact the opposite is the case. Examining phonetic symbolism in a poem by Dennis Gruending, Cooley observes the "push of low back vowels muscling their way, hypnagogically, through the poem" (188). The use of the plural is confusing. There is one low back vowel in Canadian English, /a/, and it is present but not foregrounded in the poem. Cooley also remarks that there is a "relative shortage of front or high vowels, and of nasals, glides and even fricatives." Both high and front vowels are used extensively in the poem under analysis, but especially high front and high back vowels. Nasals are also foregrounded in words such as "now," "c'mon," "honey." As to fricatives, Cooley seems not to realize that the glottal he com-

ments upon ("We hear the throaty rasp of glottals [hudda, hot, honey, right-hander, ohhhj]") is a voiceless glottal fricative and that there is not much of a "throaty rasp" to such a glottal fricative — more of a whisper. In another discussion, Cooley identifies a sequence of fronted or left-hand participle phrases as "anaphoric" when they are cataphoric. They modify a noun phrase which follows rather than precedes them. Cooley's use of the term "dialogic" is also strange, since he applies this to a dramatic monologue which does not foreground the addressee as he maintains but the speaker and most particularly the register employed by the speaker. As in traditional dramatic monologues, the character of the speaker is revealed through his language.

These errors and others in his essays mar otherwise impressive literary analysis, what Jonathan Culler would refer to as "thick description." In general, however, Cooley is a critic who makes us look and think and take pleasure in the text, and his arguments for recognition of a vernacular, metonymic poetics, and for that matter, a Canadian Prairie vernacular, metonymic poetics deserve attention and admiration.

MARCIA MACAULAY

## (DIS)ILLUSIONS

MAX LAYTON, *Some Kind of Hero*. Mosaic Fiction Series, \$19.95/10.95.

JAMES MISFELDT, *the half-finished christ*. Fifth House, \$19.95/8.95

BRYAN MOON, *Seeds*. Oberon, n.p.

WHEN REVIEWING FIRST novels by unknown writers, I find that a good philosophy is "one out of three isn't bad." In this case, as a measure of artistic accomplishment, it is completely appropriate. *the half-finished christ* by James Mischfeldt is a terrible book; at \$19.95 for 58 pages it is larceny. The publisher's blurb should provide adequate warning. Like

the novel (that is, without capital letters or punctuation and rife with solecisms), it describes the book as "an anarchist's view of global insanity a nihilist's prayer a sex maniac's deepseated respect for women." This is, in fact, a prophecy not of the contents but of the pretentious, self-indulgent and egocentric voice of the novel: a "middle aged writer" whose fragmentary diary records his relationships with the women in his life (none of which is marked by "respect"). The plotless entries are interspersed with epigrams, dialogue and short vignettes. The latter indicate some possibilities for an interesting and ironic narrative if the author could overcome his literary posturing:

and me  
i write on and on  
an obsession  
like smoking cigarette butts off the street  
like mooching women off your friends  
like masturbating in public places  
nada who are in nada nada be thy nada

Max Layton has not been well-served by his editor/publisher either. The novel has a number of spelling errors and a missing page at the climax (the missing text is provided on a loose-leaf insert). More seriously, the potential in setting and situation for a strong, complex novel is undermined by superficial characterization and pretentious philosophizing.

Graham Walker has left his career as a stockbroker and his failed marriage to "find himself" in the "real" world of a Vancouver Island lumber camp. He finds greed, violence, a rough camaraderie, a brief and disappointing sexual attachment and, ultimately, the same kind of corruption and cynical disillusionment as on Bay Street. The plot involves his quest for heroism — a macho courage to stand up against peer pressure, management exploitation and union corruption — and turns on the mysterious disappearance of a former lumberjack with the same ideals.

Layton portrays in realistic detail the setting and workings of a British Columbia logging camp, the atmosphere which alternates between frantic, dangerous exertion and mind-numbing, lonely boredom, and the trite, colloquial dialogue punctuated by outbursts of violent profanity. These are the strengths of the novel. The weaknesses are a product of Layton's professed attempt to write a novel which "can be read on many levels — as an adventure story, as a metaphysical novel, as a suspense mystery, as a novel addressing environmental concern etc." With such a diffuse focus, the book does not succeed on any level.

The male adventure story works best because of the realistic action, although the macho heroics are (unintentionally?) ironic and futile, and the treatment of women (all whores or homemakers) is outrageously sexist. The metaphysical theme consists of readings from Nietzsche by the stockbroker-philosopher, and mystical associations with a crazy preacher who dies a sacrificial death — all very contrived and unconvincing. The suspenseful mystery unfortunately lacks suspense, and its mechanically-creaking solution functions only as a dubious blackmail ploy. The environmental commentary — that government, business and unions are collaborating in the destruction of the forests — is valid but cynically superficial. It is difficult to care about, or sometimes even to take seriously, the heroics of Layton's ponderous protagonist and the cardboard characters around him. The terse Hemingwayesque prose is an appropriate style, but ultimately seems as phony as the other pretensions of this novel.

*Seeds* is (depending on whether one reads the front cover or the press release) part one of "a novel in four parts" or "a quartet of novels" called *The Grapefruit Tree*. Either way, it is nicely produced (typical of Oberon), stands very well on its own and arouses anticipation for the

three sequels promised in 1988. It is the story of 12-year-old Jonathan Corning whose preliminary initiations into "the mystery of life" in his city home are confused and faintly corrupt, what he calls "the beginning of the end of my innocence." Therefore, when he is sent for the summer to his grandparents in a small prairie town, he determines to resist time and change and preserve the enchantment of the past which he has always found in his grandmother's artifacts and his grandfather's stories. Of course, his maturation proceeds inevitably as he opposes the town bully to align himself with his garrulous grandfather, a retarded but perceptive playmate and various other small-town "characters."

Although it is at times sentimental, the novel avoids triteness because of its intelligence and artistry. The narrative voice is an older Jonathan who usually delivers the ironic distance and perceptive insights he promises in the opening pages:

There you have it: an old man's disillusion and a young boy's dream are both recalled by an older and wiser narrator. Most readers could fill in the remaining details and I can think of many stories that are written along similar lines. The Old Man, the Young Boy, the Hot Summer, and so on, provide fertile if somewhat sentimental ground for storytellers. My story, however, is going to require much more than one paragraph. Indeed, it was that summer more than two decades ago that forever removed from me the possibility of telling the kind of sentimental tale that I have just outlined.

The structure of six episodes, after setting the stage, only covers two summer days (lots of time left for the sequels) with leisurely digressions (often humorous and sometimes genuinely pathetic) and low-key meditations. The detailed observations of small-town life, the authentic atmosphere, the organic symbolism, and the generally realistic dialogue are all rendered in a fluid, unobtrusive style. The

main characters are likeable, memorable, unpretentious and occasionally profound. All in all, the novel illustrates its own theme: the power of ritual, words and stories to create myth, meaning and community. "It was as if we both had a story to tell, and we both realized we needed each other to listen to it."

BARBARA H. PELL

## CAVES & STORIES

KENNETH RADU, *The Cost of Living*. The Muses' Co., \$20.00/9.95.

DOUG MELNYK, *Naked Croquet*. Turnstone, \$8.95.

IN THE CONCLUDING chapter of *The Lives of Girls and Women*, Alice Munro has Del Jordan, now an apprentice writer of realist fiction, neatly delineate the central problem facing those who choose to chronicle the everyday lives of ordinary people. It concerns the paradoxical nature of such lives: "People's lives, in Jubilee as elsewhere, were dull, simple, amazing and unfathomable — deep caves paved with kitchen linoleum." This is the central problem facing Kenneth Radu and Doug Melnyk in their respective collections of short fiction: to uncover the amazing and unfathomable beneath the dull and simple. Their approaches are strikingly different, as are their degrees of success.

Though Kenneth Radu is no stranger to the Canadian literary scene, having previously published two children's stories and a collection of poetry, *The Cost of Living* is his first published volume of short fiction for adults, and an auspicious debut it is too. Of the thirteen stories collected in this volume, all are worth reading, several are outstanding. Radu, I suppose, should be regarded as a traditionalist as far as short story writers go: all of his stories feature recognizable characters in discernable plots. His approach is essen-

tially that of the realist, serving up slices of the sometimes unusual but always credible lives of his characters. While he experiments occasionally with points of view, he generally favours the central consciousness which permits him to explore the world from a variety of perspectives, male and female, ranging in age from adolescents to the elderly.

As Radu's title implies, life invariably exacts a price, though rarely is it simply the economic one such a phrase might lead a reader to expect. In several of Radu's stories, indeed, it is our contemporary world's almost exclusive focus on economic or material considerations which compounds that cost. In the shrewdly ironic "Dressed for the Occasion," for instance, an unemployed librarian, laid off *because* an expensive new library has been built, is put through a series of escalating humiliations by his sweetly sadistic wife, all in the name of some secularized version of the Protestant work ethic that insists that a job, any job, no matter how demeaning or inappropriate, is necessary "to give meaning to life. To keep hope and interest alive." In "Prodigy Makers," another equally telling tale for our times, an adolescent victim of manipulative, over-achieving parents vainly struggles to resist their designs upon her, to mold her in their own image to serve as their ultimate possession constantly on display for others to envy. Finally, in a fury born of desperation, the girl shatters her parents' mirror and lacerates those perfect, pianist's fingers on its broken shards, both powerfully symbolic acts speaking eloquently of the cost of her living.

For some the cost seems overwhelming, bare survival purchased at the price of all that might make existence meaningful. In "Which Is the Road to Florence?," for instance, Radu describes the painfully circumscribed life of an elderly expatriate, a holdover from pre-revolutionary

China trapped within her romanticized past in a hostile, uncomprehending present. Passed over by a history in which she has played no role but ignorant victim, she yet clings all the more desperately to the European culture that has abandoned her, muttering lines from Dante to her keepers or the equally indifferent young journalist from the West who impatiently waits for her story. In a similar way Natalie in "A Bird in the Hand" is trapped by the memory of a father who dominated her while alive and still enthralls her in death, preventing her from ever seriously considering the several marriage proposals (and later sexual propositions) she has received. The title points to the story's central irony: though she ventures into the waters of the flood that encircles her home to rescue a bird trapped in a cage, she can never venture so far on her own behalf. These are among Radu's most memorable stories, because in them he reveals something of the profound depths that lie beneath the seemingly unexceptional surface of his characters' lives.

If Radu is a traditionalist, Doug Melnyk can most accurately be termed a minimalist. *Naked Croquet* is a melange of minuscule anecdotes told by a myriad of voices, a succession of the merest fragments of what might generally be thought to constitute fiction. Its structure seems arbitrary, even haphazard. Seven main sections, alternately long and short, comprise any number of smaller ones of one or two pages. These in turn consist of one or, more often, several paragraphs where voices recount snippets of stories, usually several to a section. The stories seem tenuously connected to each other, if at all. Sometimes the same story seems to resurface several times with minor variations or embellishments though it is difficult to tell since none of the speakers is identified. The result verges on chaos. Instead of slices of life, Melnyk serves up slivers.

Reading *Naked Croquet* is like passing through any large public gathering place — a bus depot, bar, shopping mall or cafeteria — and eavesdropping on the multiple conversations going on. One of Melnyk's innumerable voices confesses to indulging in just such a pastime on a flight to Hawaii. I wonder if perhaps the whole work has not been assembled in much this way, since it often reads like a fictional equivalent of the "found" poetry briefly popular a few years ago. For such an approach actually to work, to fashion some kind of unity from such disparate fragments, would require skills in compilation — the ability to discern the apt or striking juxtaposition of voice or incident — far beyond what Melnyk exhibits here. Melnyk has undeniable talents: an ear for the rhythms of colloquial speech, an engaging sense of the comic, and a delightful taste for the bizarre and absurd. But unfortunately these are not enough to sustain a work of this kind. In the end it falls flat, because of the banality of the minds revealed and the poverty of their expression. There are just too many voices with too little to say, as if Virginia Woolf's *The Waves* had been rewritten with ten times the number of voices, each with a tenth (or less) their wit and perception. What's missing is the amazing and unfathomable; all that's left is the dull and simple.

HARRY PREST

## CULTIVATING RACE

TERRENCE CRAIG, *Racial Attitudes in English-Canadian Fiction, 1905-1980*. Wilfrid Laurier Univ. Press, \$23.95.

WHEN ARTHUR LOWER considers race one of "the perennial Canadian ghosts," bi-cultural English-French conflicts are foremost on his mind. To the extent that one regards Canada as a multicultural country, the ghost of race can become a much

more unsettling phenomenon whose presence is manifesting itself increasingly in nationalist, separatist, racial, and related ethnocentric responses to the fundamental human conflict between self and other. In this context, the inherent ambiguities of the country's most numerous licence plate mottoes — "Yours to Discover" and "Je me souviens" — complement each other remarkably well. It goes without saying, of course, that discovering and remembering more serious Canadian literature could help in the transformation of multicultural ghosts and realities into pursuits of happiness, if only for a minority of readers.

Craig's study provides a timely socio-historical survey of racial attitudes in English-Canadian fiction. His topic, however, is a difficult one to do justice to in a slim volume. As Craig acknowledges himself, "Racism will appear in any work of fiction that is true to life as a whole"; and, consequently, "not all writing is easily identifiable as racist or anti-racist (categories which can be misleading and [are], indeed, not very useful)." In addition, the generally negative connotations of *racial* do not automatically become positive for long when interchanged with the connotations of stand-by terms like *ethnic* as used by Craig in concentrating "on those works that have grappled with the phenomenon of ethnocentrism in significant ways." His intentions are welcome; and so are, at least from a liberal arts perspective, his efforts to bring out the constructive aspects of ethnic tensions and to substantiate the acceptance by Canadian writers of "the responsibility to ease the friction between self-seeking groups."

In the end, however, Craig's translations of *racial* attitudes into *cultural* contexts and contingencies lack feeling for nuances as well as depth; some of his points are even misleading. F. P. Grove,

for example, whom Craig likes to see as "possibly a Russo-German by birth," is quickly turned into a natural spokesman for Russo-Germans. Such very questionable ethnic labelling simply will not stick to Grove; and it certainly is no more piquant in Craig's examination of Margaret Laurence's fiction. The interpretive limitations which his perspectives often entail come out symptomatically perhaps with regard to O'Hagan's *Tay John*: "English-Canada is symbolically kept at arm's length throughout this novel. Events occur for which non-Indians have no explanation. . . . The narrator, Jack Denham . . . imposes a basically English-Canadian interpretation upon Tay John's life, but one that definitely remains open to the heroic and the mysterious."

Of the many authors under investigation only relatively minor ones like Charles Gordon, L. G. Salverson and Vera Lysenko, and only a few of the major ones like Richler, Wiebe, Klein, and Austin Clarke fit well into the framework of this study. On the whole, Craig's defence of his "sociological" approach as "not only necessary but legitimate" complicates the simple fact that the racial issues in the works he surveys should be self-evident and self-explanatory to any conscientious reader in our present climate of world-wide ethnic tensions. "The ubiquitous problem of racism may never be wholly defeated," states Craig; "but in helping to discredit it and its supporters Canadian authors fill a valuable role. Remove those works which have channelled and still direct public opinion in anti-racist directions and Canada would probably be a much more violent society than it is." Any such broad conception of literature as a buffer zone to transmute the country's potential for social violence appears to reflect little else but liberal arts optimism and, besides, goes against the basic principle that constructive tensions

also require destructive ones. Some books, no doubt, do well for purposes of psychic and limited social therapy or education. Yet even among those who read literature, fundamental and complex tensions of interpretation are also a ubiquitous problem. Putting it differently, Craig has not struck an agreeable balance between the demands of a perceptive essay on racism in Canadian fiction and the desirability of a survey of thematically grouped works.

Even as a useful and informative overview, his book begs questions: What are the reasons for its time frame? (Joy Kogawa's *Obasan* (1982), a prominent novel about racial issues, is passed over in one sentence because of the 1980 cut-off date.) Why omit French-English tensions categorically and, as a result, have Hugh MacLennan's work become off-limits, as it were? His most suitable novel, *Voices in Time* (1980), thus rates a quotation and a sentence, while his equally appropriate *The Watch that Ends the Night* (1959) is simply left out.

Disregard of a major force like MacLennan, whose fiction encompasses much more than the obliging two-solitudes theme, points out the drawbacks of Craig's central distinction between English and French "charter groups," a term he adopts from John Porter's *The Vertical Mosaic*, and "non-charter-group immigrants." It would be more helpful for Canadian literary studies these days to think *magna carta* and to reassess misleading clichés about charter groups, mosaic, and melting pots for that matter.

Its many shortcomings notwithstanding, Craig's study is not without merit, partly in its background research on racial theories in Canada at the beginning of this century, and partly in its indirect caution to any reader wishing to cultivate ethnic determinants in Canadian fiction.

K. P. STICH

## CRAZY CRAMER

SHIRLEY FAESSLER, *A Basket of Apples and Other Stories*. McClelland & Stewart, \$19.95.

IT HAS BEEN OVER ten years since Shirley Faessler published her first novel *Everything in the Window*. In a country where the tendency on the part of its writers is to publish too much too quickly the gestation period for Faessler's new collection of stories promises a pronounced development in vision and style. Regrettably this is not entirely the case.

In *A Basket of Apples*, Faessler returns to the novel's world of Jewish immigrants who settled into Toronto's Kensington Market following World War II. The narrator, in both the novel and the stories, Avrom Mendl Glicksman's second daughter, is a sharp observer of the people around her with a wry sense of humour and a sharp tongue; but whereas in the novel the narrator tells the story of her failing marriage to a "goy," in the stories she brings to life the lives of her family and relatives and friends tracing as she does, through the stories' chronological order, two generations.

The collection is divided into two sections: in the first part the narrator is a girl and young woman recounting the stories of her family and relatives, a closely knit family of Russian and Roumanian immigrants who barely speak English. By the last story of this section, the narrator is married to a "goy." In the stories of the second part of the collection, the narrator is middle-aged, one of a circle of Jewish matrons obsessed with their weekly game of rake poker.

For the reader familiar with *Everything in the Window*, a strange *déjà vu* occurs reading the stories in the first part of this collection; in fact the second story, "The Night Watchman," the story of how the narrator's father Avrom Glicksman became a night watchman, Faessler lifts in its entirety from chapter twenty-seven

of her novel. The only change she makes from the novel is in its third person point of view, which becomes a first person point of view in the story.

Certainly it is acceptable for writers to use recurring locale and characters in their work: Joyce and Faulkner did it, and closer to home, Margaret Laurence, Alice Munro, and David Adams Richards have used recurring place and character as a means to new illumination and an expanding vision. Unfortunately in the stories in the first part of *A Basket of Apples*, Faessler not only returns to the Glicksman family, she also retells the same stories and anecdotes about the family already told in the novel. There is no new revelation, only repetition.

Generally, the stories in the first section, with the exception of "The Apple Doesn't Fall Far From the Tree" (a story about the narrator's involvement in a friend's marriage) are about the narrator's relatives. "Henye," appropriately placed as the collection's first story, begins with the narrator's recollection of her embarrassment at having to accompany her aunt, who, she says was ugly, to the doctor's to translate for her, and sets in motion the story of Henye's arranged marriage to the handsome Yankov and their emigration from Russia to Toronto. The story provides the background information to the Glicksman family, since it is Yankov, who brings his niece Chayelet from Russia to live with his family and then arranges to have her marry Avrom Glicksman, a Roumanian Jewish immigrant, who has lost his wife and is looking for a good woman to be a mother to his recently orphaned children.

The collection's title story, the last and most successful story of the section, recounts Glicksman's marriage to Chayelet. The death of the narrator's father provides the moving account of Chayelet's life-long devotion to her husband. To the others her husband is a pedlar and a

nightwatchman, but to her he is a king who made her house a palace.

With the exception of "A Basket of Apples," the best stories in this collection are the three in the second part, where Faessler's digressional and anecdotal style work best: the focus returns from the story being recounted by one of the women to the women playing poker. She excels in depicting the middle-aged Jewish women, who gather weekly to play rake poker: Crazy Cramer, Deaf Dora, Chinky Cora, Matilda Blabmouth, and rich Mrs. Mintz. The game of poker brings the women together and provides a continuity to the stories.

The success and the charm of these last stories rests in the descriptions of the women's obsessive poker playing, descriptions which beautifully evoke the hot, sweaty, smoky rooms and the mounting tension of the players as they win and lose at their game. The stakes are high and nerves are frayed as the ladies play and gossip into the early hours of the morning. Faessler's use of the colloquial voice, and particularly the Yiddish inflections of her characters' language bring her characters to life.

In general, Faessler brings to her stories a compassion for her characters and a sense of humour; they may be eccentrics, gamblers, bootleggers and pedlars and their lives may be made up of deprivation and struggle, but her vision of them is compassionate. Faessler's vision is finally a limited one, but within its limitations it is a moving one.

ALICE VAN WART

## GRAND TOUR

EVA-MARIE KRÖLLER, *Canadian Travellers in Europe 1851-1900*. Univ. of British Columbia Press, \$25.95.

I READ EVA-MARIE Kröller's new book *in situ*, over two weeks spent in a London

bed-and-breakfast, and through its agency called to mind my own first encounter with the "great wen": the traditional arrival at Tilbury by ship, the vast confusion of Piccadilly, the horror of the Earls-court Road ABC, modern motifs in the archetypal pattern of the provincial's first journey abroad. Perhaps there is a book to be written about later journeys. I manage London like a native now, and am used to being treated as representative of a culture not only new, but necessary; the inquisition on Munro and Kroetsch at a Cambridge high table, while by no means routine, is not unexpected. The truth is, the jig is up; we've been discovered, and "going home" can never be the same.

One reason, of course, is that for almost all of us, the image of Europe as "home" is fading fast; we travel not as explorers (that relationship is always one of movement beyond the periphery of the known) but rather like eighteenth-century participants in the Grand Tour or members of the Society of Dilettanti, who returned to the monuments of the ancient world to recover their meaning for post-Renaissance intellectuals now confident of their ability to absorb whatever the past had to offer them. The common ancestor of the tourist of today is Goethe, avidly touring the picture galleries of Rome by torchlight.

This kind of confidence was not initially the possession of the travellers chronicled in this vigorous and interesting new book, who in varying degrees almost all set out with the view that they were members of a client nation of one of the great world powers. Kröller's resourceful work in unexpected archives makes possible an intensive topical survey of the personalities, the modes of vision, and the experiences of an interesting chunk of the Canadian middle and upper classes, both English and French, during a period in which the grand hotel and the Cook's tour were invented and the passage across the

Atlantic shortened from nine weeks to six days. Businessmen and their wives, politicians, churchmen, journalists both male and female, artists and writers all made the journey, and as her introduction rightly points out, this is a body of cultural experience well worth investigating, the more so if it helps to turn us away from our often narcissistic concern with life at home.

What emerges, as always in a travel book, is less a portrait of places visited than of the travellers themselves: a sturdy and inquisitive group despite their intense cultural conservatism (a social characteristic which seems to have defined the Canadian Abroad as much as assertive republicanism defined the American). This conservatism of course links Kröller's travellers with the middle classes of the nations they chiefly visited (England and France). Yet the Canadians emerge from a social scene much less intricately textured than that occupied by the European middle classes, a fact which accounts both for their insistence on values about which Europeans were likely to be more sophisticated, as well as for the inevitable repudiations: too many monuments, too many snobs, too many people who don't know anything about *us*!

All this is to be expected (at least for a reader of Duncan or James); Kröller's task therefore is to evoke the texture of the society represented by the travellers themselves. This she does with great success, despite an initial misjudgement which leads her to begin the book with an extended account of two sample journals, one by the Ontario lawyer Fred C. Martin (1881), the other Joseph-Nérée Martin, the parish priest of Saint-Gervais, Québec (1882). Without the help of what proves to be richly-developed research and of the gift for synthesis she later displays, these are heavy going indeed. Once launched, however, she proceeds not by meekly covering the available texts, but

by examining the problems and possibilities confronting the travellers who wrote them: the effects of sudden modernization on the ancient art of getting from place to place, the conflict of values between new world and old, the role of women travellers in the age of the birth of feminism, metaphors of travel, and most interestingly the reaction of these builders of new cities to the old ones they visited, and their response to the way their own image was presented abroad at World expositions.

The most valuable results are the insights we gain into the complex web produced by the interweaving of private and public discourse in Victorian Canada (what a journalist like Kit Coleman can say, and what not say), the least valuable the treatment of "metaphors of travel," where the dominant images ("mother and child reunited," "the journey to Jerusalem") demand a richness of literary background that the brevity of the chapter makes clear is simply not available. There are other weaknesses: Kröller sketches the context of the travel book without saying enough about the way the vast literature of travel read both by Europeans and Canadians was constructed for them by a long history of such writing; the ethnocentrism she observes, for example, is endemic in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century writers (particularly the North-South contrast applied to Italy), and there was a well-established roster of "things to be observed by the diligent traveller" which the possessor of a gentleman's education would have absorbed. (Or the readers of books written by such men; I once possessed an eighteenth-century copy of Baron Von Pöllnitz's *Memoirs*, purchased in the dispersal of the early books of the Kingston Mechanics' Institute library.) The narrative sometimes lapses into file-card mode, and the editing is not stringent: I was irritated by the constant use of "allegorical" where

"figurative" seems really to have been meant.

At the same time, this is a pioneering book on an important topic, one students of early Canadian literature sunk in *The Golden Dog* or lost in *Wacousta* ought to be reading. In taking a journey through our own past Kröller exhibits not only a healthy capacity to break down standard assumptions, but a genuine power of synthesis, linking the experiences of her subjects with transitions not only from provincial to cosmopolitan but from rural to urban and from Victorian to modern. To judge by this book, the Canadian traveller in this now almost lost past is bilingual, feminist, and fully possessed of the cultural confidence her predecessors could only imagine.

GERMAINE WARKENTIN

## WAR WORDS

PETER BUITENHUIS, *The Great War of Words: British, American And Canadian Propaganda And Fiction, 1914-1933*. Univ. of British Columbia Press, \$27.00.

FOR READERS OF *Canadian Literature*, the special interest in Peter Buitenhuis's book lies in his revelation of a considerable Canadian involvement in British and American propaganda activities in favour of the Allied prosecution of the Great War. Although propaganda was not governmentally organized and supported in Canada to the extent that it was in Britain and the United States, there were many Canadians eager to become involved in propaganda. Chief among these were Max Aitken (Lord Beaverbrook), Sir Gilbert Parker and the novelists Beckles Willson and Ralph Connor (Charles W. Gordon). An honourable exception was the novelist Charles Yale Harrison whose little-known novel *Generals Die In Bed* was published in 1930 and more recently republished by the enterprising Hamilton,

Ontario, publisher Robert Nielson's Potlach Press.

Buitenhuis's main focus, however, is upon a group of British writers who threw themselves into propaganda work early in the war. He shows the toll that the work took upon them and their writing because of compromise, distortion and loss of integrity. Few of these writers continued to command serious attention after the war and some of them felt themselves that they had either lived beyond their time or sold their independent birthright as writers for a mess of propagandistic pottage. The cases that Buitenhuis considers most fully are those of Sir James M. Barrie, Arnold Bennett, John Buchan, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, John Galsworthy, Rudyard Kipling and H. G. Wells. Against them he cites the case of Ford Madox Ford who began the war as a propagandist in its favour but after joining the army wrote against the war in his tetralogy *Parade's End*.

A notable feature of Buitenhuis's study is that he does not merely blast hypocrisy in a simple-minded way. He has enough human compassion and historical awareness to recognize that it was not always jingoism that led writers to support the war. Although we doubtless end with greater respect for writers as various as D. H. Lawrence, Bertrand Russell and George Bernard Shaw, who opposed the war, the motives of their fellow writers who supported it were not always self-serving, though in some cases they certainly were. Buitenhuis's compassion and awareness do not eschew judgement, and some of the instances he cites are, indeed, shocking.

The most striking case of self-deception masking self-interest is that of Arnold Bennett. Bennett was one of a privileged group of propaganda writers who was taken to visit the front and was horrified by what he saw to the extent that his experience brought on stomach trouble that

stayed with him until his death. Nevertheless, Bennett continued to write propaganda, so keen was he to gain the power and position it brought, though after the war he wrote a novel, *Lord Raingo*, that expressed some disillusionment with the conduct of the war.

A more complex case for literary criticism is that of Rudyard Kipling and, in particular, his story "Mary Postgate." Kipling was a dedicated patriot who eagerly supported his son John's enlistment in the Irish Guards. Yet Kipling was shattered by his son's death in 1915. He wrote a history of his son's regiment as an act of devotion. Also, he joined the War Graves' Commission and did everything he could to see that the soldiers killed in the war would be remembered and honoured. At the same time Kipling wrote powerful stories like "Mary Postgate" that presents in a compelling way the dehumanization and horror caused by war. A major writer, Kipling clearly provides a case in which literary criticism must be discriminating and subtle since he cannot be written off as a simple-minded jingoist.

The inspiration behind Buitenhuis's study seems to be the wish to explore the phenomenon, which he argues could no longer exist in the democratic world at least, of large numbers of writers being pressed into service by governments to provide wartime propaganda and eagerly accepting such work. Buitenhuis suggests, too, that in the free world the lesson of the Great War of Words has been well learned since few writers subsequently have accepted roles as government propagandists for war. Rather they have preferred to maintain their integrity as artists.

Despite Buitenhuis's disturbing revelations about government-supported propaganda in Britain and the United States, the most moving story for all the participant nations, including Canada, that *The Great War of Words* has to tell is the

human tragedy of the Great War itself — for example, of July 1, 1916, described by one historian, whom Buitenhuis quotes, as the blackest day in British military history. It will be hard for Britons and Canadians ever to forget the loss of 20,000 lives on that day. The young E. J. Pratt was shaken to the roots of his being when he saw the lists of names of his Newfoundland contemporaries killed that day. Such a memory puts into perspective our recent, albeit muted, celebrations of the later Canadian victory at Vimy Ridge. The waste of human life in war is surely one of the worst features of the twentieth century. Buitenhuis's book shows us how even writers (Shelley's "unacknowledged legislators") can deceive themselves not only into celebrating but also into advertising and even lying about war.

JOHN FERNS

## FORGER & PARROT

ERNEST HEKKANEN, *Medieval Hour in the Author's Mind*. Thistledown, \$22.00/10.95.

ROBIN SKELTON, *The Parrot Who Could*. Sono Nis, \$9.95.

Above all, Canadians desire art to reflect the shallow breath and lulling emotions of the half-conscious. They don't want dissonance; they want sensual trees and limitless prairie landscapes ad infinitum, they want what is entirely knowable. They want an art form that will not stretch their imaginations or tax their sense of themselves. . . . I [Alexander Mikkonen], on the other hand, seek to confront the human spirit, not to anesthetize it.

— ERNEST HEKKANEN

ERNEST HEKKANEN'S NEW collection of eight interrelated stories is a stunning achievement, an absolutely brilliant debut. It's extremely difficult not to drop into endless superlatives to describe the power of this eerie, weird, and grimly comic writer (and woodcut artist). Hekkanen has obviously enjoyed Hoffman,

Kafka, Poe, Calvino, McEwan, Genet, Garcia Marquez; and it's a tribute to his considerable talents that these writers exist for him as comrades rather than father-figures; they do not *influence* so much as interact with his conversational reporting of the most magical and fabulistic of events. By now one of my reviewerly *bêtes noires* is the excessive jacket blurb, but in this case Thistledown's editors have done Hekkanen a disservice to say merely that his stories "are mythic, allegorical, fabulistic, timeless"; that they "transform the ordinary into the magical and the revelatory." These stories do much more: they participate authoritatively in what is becoming the mainstream of much "international" writing. Folkloric, magically-gothic, and deliciously contorted, they *play* with the reader along a narrative path that is difficult, winding, and always fascinating.

*Medieval Hour in the Author's Mind* is also a potpourri of writerly styles and readerly concerns, a collection brimming with mischievous sleights-of-hand and authorial pranks. Although each story stands confidently on its own, the collection revolves around recurring images and certain controlling ideas. In the addictive first story, "Preface: The Influence of Alexander Mikkonen," Hekkanen teasingly interweaves historical references with a short "biography" of his (?) own covering cherub: a Latvian gypsy adept at forgery, languages, swindling, photography, cartoons, the tarot, woodcutting and counterfeiting! Mikkonen, in fact, embodies the entire artistic tradition within which Hekkanen is working and reappears throughout the collection in a variety of guises. Like Houdini (one of his own subjects), however, he escapes continually from our readerly desires for certainty and it becomes progressively impossible to distinguish whether a subsequent character is either Mikkonen in disguise or another figure altogether.

Hekkanen delights in playing his own reader with a taut line and has his narrator, "E.H.," blithely itemize the talents and themes which his mentor has bequeathed: an anarchistic freedom with past "art," captivity and escape, the artist as chameleon, the ability to align oneself with "the vital force," and perhaps most apparently familiar to Canadian readers: the intriguing similarity between criminals and saints. As Mikkonen quips in his interview with "E.H.":

Both [criminals and saints] step out of the lives they would normally carry on; both observe the rigors of discipline; both sharpen their senses due to the acts they commit. Here, of course, I am speaking of master criminals and master saints. Both are amplified individuals. But what of the criminal-saint? The individual who comprises both natures, side by side, in one body, someone who has combined the dichotomies? This is the main thrust of my work.

Given the fact that "E.H." has earlier confided that he has "achieved some independence of vision and style," it would be unfair to say these are also the main thrusts of *Medieval Hour*. But they are there. Mikkonen's obsession with the principles of "geometry in motion" is matched by his creator's; Hekkanen also shares Mikkonen's politicized concern with "authority" and the importance of the "amplified individual." Most of the stories experiment with the evocation of a chilling Kafkaesque terror: "The Successor," for example, is a bleak documentary of a nameless victim who undergoes endless interrogation; "The Fatal Error" is a bizarre tale of coincidence: how a man looks up from the footpath to be impaled by his own falling screwdriver. Throughout these stories Mikkonen's own supposed works exert their Svengali-like "influence," if only in telling title: *Counterfeit Man: or Forging an Identity*, *The Authorities versus the Human Spirit*, and the tantalizingly named *Houdini Cycle*.

But Hekkanen is an "adept" in his own right. These stories contain unparalleled moments of exquisite grotesquerie: a monk, followed by a swarm of flies in the shape of a giant moth (with a human face), relentlessly mimes zen-like koans; an entire town in South Dakota is struck dumb; an unspecified cathedral complete with gargoyles looms throughout the collection; and in the magnificent end piece, "The Aviarum, Fantastikka," an old fisherman nets an egg which, when hatched by his elderly wife, produces a winged child. In much the same vein as such disparate writers as Marquez or Eco, Hekkanen builds upon inherited structures, formulating a fiction which seems traditionally irresistibly "suspenseful," but a fiction which then self-consciously exposes the workings of those very structures themselves. As such, *Medieval Hour* epitomizes Mikkonen's artistic ideals quoted above.

What makes this collection so rewarding, then, is that each of the stories seductively lures the reader into a literary space that is genuinely dazzling and imaginatively rejuvenating. Hekkanen writes an angular, deceptively simple prose which, in the best tradition of deadpan delivery, fractures most of our assumptions about art, freedom, society, and "all that." My one quibble is his handling of dialogue. Reminiscent of Calaghan at his most painful, Hekkanen occasionally tumbles into the stilted and wooden, the exchanges awkwardly jarring with the overall narrative fluidity. But this is a small inconsistency in what is otherwise an extraordinary tour-de-force.

Although *The Parrot Who Could* by no means reflects the "shallow breath and lulling emotions of the half-conscious," it does avoid the invigoration of Mikkonenesque dissonance. Robin Skelton's twenty-one tales are, as Christopher Wiseman rightly comments, "little chips of imagination . . . crackling with de-

light." The operative word here is "little." Each vignette is a Leacockian exercise in delicately modulated irony. Staying securely within the boundaries of the classic tale, Skelton's narrator is often the real focus of the author's craft and the reader's attention. Skelton masterfully exploits this carefully formulated intimacy with his audience, and frequently the reader, amiable narrator, and hapless character together share a small expectation gently frustrated, a delusion wittily exploded. This is most successful when, like Gulliver (whom he often resembles), our narrator quietly moves from the actual to the humorously fabulistic. "The Parrot Who Could," for instance, has a twist(ed) ending which few would expect and it is at this type of bizarre turn that Skelton excels. Most satisfying are the tales dealing with the smart set, the coterie or local "artistic" community (complete with amateur operettas, prima donnas, and earnest party organizers). Skelton here revels in the arch-understatement and most of these conclude with a likeable-enough narrator invisibly shaking his head, slapping his knee, and (hopefully) sharing a rueful chuckle with the reader. (The book also has a cracklingly delightful cover painting of a parrot.)

GARY BOIRE

## WOMEN & LES MOTS

SHIRLEY NEUMAN & SMARO KAMBOURELI, eds.,  
*A Mazing Space: Writing Canadian Women Writing*. Longspoon/NeWest, \$19.95.

THIS BOOK MAY have begun modestly as the editors claim in the Preface, but in its purple and green published form it does not give that impression. Instead it suggests excess in its format, its size, and its range of contents over thirty-eight essays. This collection takes up a challenging contemporary position on the gender question and sets out to demonstrate the

current range and strengths of Canadian feminist criticism. Taking its direction from the 1983 Vancouver conference *Women and Words/Les Femmes et les mots*, it marks the speed of development in this area. No longer is feminist criticism in the wilderness, but established Canadian critics (a few male as well as female) plus new critics are engaged in the enterprise of reading women's texts with a view to valourizing their difference. Such an enterprise is international and *A Mazing Space* has much in common with Showalter's *The New Feminist Criticism* and Abel's *Writing and Sexual Difference*. The Preface offers a useful summary of the programmes of current Anglo-American and French feminist criticism plus a distinctively Canadian contribution with the emphasis on bilingual dialogue between anglophone and francophone critics. We are urged to re-read Canadian literature from a feminist perspective while quite a lot is made of 'breaking the rules' of traditional critical inquiry and displacing the literary canon. One of the fascinating quests for the reader is to discover how many rules are being broken in these feminist engagements. How much is genuinely new? How much evidence is there of a peculiarly feminine way of looking at things or writing about them? I think these are real questions given the claims made in the Preface, for feminist criticism is a social and historical phenomenon with radical implications for change in cultural and academic traditions. Reading through the essays, I found that the Preface began to look somewhat polemical and that Shirley Neuman's final essay with its focus on the doubled discourse of feminist writing seemed a much subtler registration of the true complexities of women's cultural and literary resistance which this collection demonstrates.

The essays exemplify in various ways the integration (or non-integration) of

feminist perspectives into critical, theoretical and imaginative discourse in Canada. There is enormous diversity here, and a catalogue must serve to indicate the range of contributors and approaches: essays on feminist literary theory (Hutcheon, Bennett, Tostevin), on poststructuralist methodology and its relation to feminist critical practice (Blodgett, Kambourelli, Paterson), on feminist revisionist history (Buss, Friewald, Godard, Gunnars, McMullen, Stanley, Williamson), and on the 'nouvelle écriture' of Quebec (Dupré, Forsyth, Hlus, Waelti-Walters, Weir). Overlapping with these is by far the biggest group — essays that seek to identify language and narrative strategies that characterize women's writing (Barbour, Blodgett, Buss, Cotnoir, Friewald, Harasym, Hutcheon, Irvine, Ricou, Rooke, Scott, Theoret, Verthuy) and one unambiguous example of creative rather than critical practice, Sarah Murphy's didactic fable "Putting the Great Mother together again or how the cunt lost its tongue." This attempt at classification is both incomplete and excessive, though it does suggest the multivoiced discourse within Canadian feminist criticism. Such multiplicity speaks for the analogy of the many-chambered spiral shell which is the leit-motif of this collection, and there are occasional 'conversations' which arch across the volume (Blodgett and Neuman).

However, there are genuine problems here. How do different kinds of feminist criticism relate to one another? All these essays may be engaged in looking at women's writing, but different ideological slants and methodologies produce more than shifts of emphasis; they suggest radical differences within feminist criticism. Faced with such a display of pluralism, one begins to long for criticism which ceases to make gender difference the most important principle of the creative imagination or of critical inquiry.

Fascinatingly, this collection includes essays which scrutinize and blur gender differences, as well as essays which privilege them. Donna Bennett's "Naming the Way Home" offers a witty examination of the paradigms and excesses of contemporary feminist theory in a form which itself blurs the difference between creative and critical writing. Her 'in-flight entertainment' might be subtitled "We're Getting There" for she offers her intelligently sceptical reappraisal with the conviction that feminist criticism has taken off and is flying high. Diane Bessai's essay on Sharon Pollock argues persuasively that what in Pollock's plays might be taken as feminist should more appropriately be seen as the playwright's response to new challenges in the Canadian theatre of the 1970's and 1980's. Moving beyond the limits of gender, Bessai offers a broader genre context. There is a notable transgression of gender boundaries in Laurie Ricou's essay on the poetry of Phyllis Webb and Daphne Marlatt, a cleverly deconstructive analysis by a male critic deviously exploiting his own 'différance' to test the stance of reading as a woman — and doing it with great sensitivity. The question of a female-speaking subjectivity in writing is further explored in excellent essays by Bina Friewald on Anna Jameson and by Louise Forsyth on Nicole Brossard. The nineteenth-century Englishwoman and the contemporary Québécoise share a remarkable self-consciousness about women's relation to language and culture, while the works of both offer versions of female heroism — one as a traveller in Upper Canada and the other as urban space explorer.

Surprising connections are made across boundaries, and it is the collaborative effort to open up new spaces for women's writing that gives this collection its energy. Some of the connections actually work against privileging gender and many

of the essays reveal that gender in writing is a more complex construction than the Preface assumed. Godard's splendid essay on native women's oral texts alerts us to some problems to be considered here. I do not believe, though some feminists do, that feminist criticism has to be exclusively woman-centred; nor do I think that anglophone feminist critics in Canada or elsewhere use a different language or methodology from non-feminist critics. There are different emphases certainly, but procedures of reading are learned within the academic establishment which feminist critics cannot easily unlearn. Critical inquiry is a dialogue which may transcend gender as the interaction between feminist criticism and poststructuralism triumphantly shows. Arguably the real significance of *A Mazing Space* as Canadian feminist statement is that it disturbs the simplicity of the traditional separation between Anglo-American and French feminist modes, offering new models for negotiating cross-cultural approaches. If our response to this collection combines enthusiasm with attentive argumentativeness, this is surely what the diversity of these essays encourages.

CORAL ANN HOWELLS

## WAR, SEX, SENTIMENT

GEORGE PAYERLE, *Unknown Soldier*. Macmillan, \$19.95.

IN THE PAST, most war novels have generally been written by veterans impelled to present an oblique account of their own experience, both physical and psychological. Timothy Findley broke new ground in *The Wars* by combining the war novel with historical fiction, reconstructing the First World War at a time when few who had participated in it remained alive, and making the fact of reconstruction his primary theme. George Payerle now investi-

gates the Second World War in a related manner. He is profoundly interested in an event that deeply affected the world in which he grew up but had ended, as the dust jacket points out, "just days before his birth." Moreover, despite the fact that the battle scenes are among the best in the book, this is not where the novel's emphasis falls. His protagonist, Sam Collister, survived a particularly bloody and traumatic military engagement in Belgium in 1944, during which his best friend had been killed at his side. *Unknown Soldier* is the story of his lengthy struggle to come to terms with living in the aftermath of this horror. The book is not so much about the war itself as about life under its sickening shadow.

Payerle is bold in undertaking such a book, since his work will be scrutinized and judged by three distinct groups: those who fought in the War, those who did not but are old enough to remember it, and those like himself who were born into the post-War era. I had better state (since these factors inevitably affect one's judgment) that I belong to the second category. One of my earliest memories is of 3 September 1939; I lived as a child in southern England during both the Battle of Britain and the Blitz, and was once literally blown out of bed by a bomb (my father, though not on active service, suffered a nervous breakdown in the course of his war duties from which he never totally recovered). In addition I served for two years (involuntarily) in the post-War British army. I bring, then, a perspective to the material very different from Payerle's; I can only hope that it has not seriously affected my response.

Sam Collister is a memorable (if infuriating) figure, and the backgrounds to his story (Victoria, Vancouver, London and Devon) are convincingly evoked. The novel is told in the present tense from Sam's viewpoint though not through his own words, and Payerle manages this

technique with considerable skill. All the secondary characters are well differentiated not only in their personalities but also in their speech patterns. Payerle's theme of war and its effects is clearly one of the utmost importance; moreover, he extends it by showing how Sam faces up to the fact of death not only on the battlefield but at the bedsides of his sister and a veteran friend, and by implication in himself since he becomes acutely aware of his own mortality. With all these positive qualities, *Unknown Soldier* ought to qualify as a major work. Why, then, am I convinced, firmly but regretfully, that it ultimately fails?

The Sam Collister we meet at the opening is an embittered and seemingly broken man. After surviving the War, he had married his English girl friend and returned to Canada, but could not adapt to post-War civilian living. As a result, he took to drink, eventually deserted his wife and small son, and is now little more than an alcoholic bum. Apart from the ever-present memories of war, he thinks of nothing except drink and sex. Predictably, his speech is loaded with the standard obscenities that 1980's fashion considers "real" and commonplace. Personally, I find them objectionable in context — not, I must insist, because they are shocking in themselves, but because they so quickly become monotonous and boring. Of course, old soldiers say "fuck" the way most of us say "er" and "um" (and basically for the same reason), but the skilled novelist does not repeat our habitual hesitations, and there is no reason to reproduce all the obscenities either. (Payerle also seems to present in detail every occasion on which Sam drinks and urinates; since these are frequent, it makes for a long novel.)

Obviously aware of a language difficulty, Payerle tries to offset Sam's limited vocabulary by offering the narrative itself

in a carefully worded prose that often eschews the self-consciously "poetic." These passages are clearly intended to express what Sam himself cannot articulate, but they seem as far removed from his sensibility as from his language. I found myself wondering, unfairly perhaps, if Payerle had fully worked out precisely what kind of man his protagonist was. Sam insists at one point, "I still read a lotta books," his apartment is said to contain "lots of books," and occasionally, though uncharacteristically, he makes reference to poems. But at no point does he show any powers of reflection. He rails against "asshole" officers in the War, and against civilians, women, and "young punks" later, but we come to no intellectual awareness of his grievance as we do, for example, in the case of Findley's Robert Ross. Instead, Collister comes close to what Robertson Davies, following Edmund Fuller, calls "the Yahoo hero" presented according to the sentimental attitude that such characters are victims of society and not responsible for their own failings. In consequence, Payerle never feels the need to explain why Sam drifts into his shabby and lonely way of life. His war experience is not in itself a sufficient reason, since we know that thousands of veterans with similar experiences were able to return to steady jobs and a responsible position in society. There is something lacking, one feels, in the psychology here. Indeed, the more I read *Unknown Soldier*, the more I suspected — against Payerle's intention, I presume — that Sam uses the War as an excuse for his deficiencies.

All these suspicions are exacerbated by the "romance" ending. Suddenly, in the midst of various sadnesses, Sam is reunited with his son, and is offered what he at least considers a "pretty good job" (only part-time, but a barman!). Above all, he picks up a sympathetic and ac-

commodating woman in — where else? — a bar. They immediately return to her home for the inevitable sex scene (of the damp-and-spongy variety), but this proves to be love at first sight. After some weeks of accidental separation they are reunited and settle down to a companionship which we are encouraged to believe — or, at the very least, to hope — releases him from his war trauma. That this occurs in the 1970's rather than earlier (or later, or even never) seems a matter of chance and so detracts from the theme of war's effects. Unfortunately, despite the supposed "realism" of the final sex scene (where Payerle fails to solve the perennial challenge of how to present so private and intimate an encounter without casting the reader in an embarrassed voyeuristic role), this ending seems to me damagingly sentimental.

In the final analysis, the book is especially disappointing for the ironic reason that it so clearly contains the seeds of a major novel. The climactic scene on the battlefield, where the Belgian girl risks her life to cut out and bury the heart of her lover (Sam's best friend) is, in its combination of horror and romanticism, potentially magnificent; Sam's juxtaposed vigils at the bedsides of the veteran and his sister contain wonderful possibilities; the scene where he is presented with the ribbon of an unknown soldier's VC (echoing an incident in which he challenges a young punk's casual wearing of a German Iron Cross) is highly complex. Payerle goes so far in suggesting the inherent subtleties but, hamstrung by an intellectually limited protagonist, is never able to deliver the insights of a major novelist. *Unknown Soldier* falls short of success, I think, because, although it offers much for the emotions, there is (as too frequently in contemporary fiction) so little for the mind.

W. J. KEITH

## IMPLIED OTHERS

MARIE MOSER, *Counterpoint*. Irwin, n.p.

DIANA G. COLLIER, *The Invisible Women of Washington*. Clarity Press, \$10.00.

A NEW ORTHODOXY is apparent in the writing of women, and these novels are an illustration of feminist inquiry as it has translated itself into some forms of fiction. Both Moser and Collier are interested in a woman's view of history and society, in what it is to be female and the kinds of restrictions and inequalities that are the environment of femaleness. Both novelists locate themselves loosely within the pursuit of a female tradition which comes both from a desire to locate female voices of the past and oppose them to the dominating male voices history records, and from a wish to dissociate the female tradition from male constructs, the kind of question Gayatri Spivak raises when she talks about the need for a double focus in writing by women: "not merely who am I? but who is the other woman? How am I naming her? How does she name me?" Marie Moser and Diana Collier suggest quite different responses to these questions.

Moser's *Counterpoint* was the winner of the New Alberta Novelist competition for 1986. It is a novel very consciously written about women's history, using a female line of descent both as its narrative structure and as a way of raising questions about the history of women. Odette Dupré, who has inherited her mother's estate including the house of her maternal grandmother, journeys from Vancouver to St. Prosper du Lac in Alberta to investigate her inheritance. Her journey is a journey into the past and into the connections between these women; Odette's view of history is an exploration of women's experience, an attempt to find the real story. The novel uses two narrative voices to establish a view of the past that

is inaccessible to the contemporary narrator except as reconstruction; the narrative alternates between Odette and her grandmother Céline. Between the two the missing voice of mother and daughter Philomène is suggested and in this absence much is implied, for it is Philomène who is the rebel, the modern woman, who chooses to be a doctor of advanced ideas and cannot accept that her own daughter chooses to be a ministering mother and wife, just as Odette has, in turn, lost her daughter Sylvie who wants to 'do different things.' The counterpoint in question is a quilt begun by Céline on the morning of her wedding and added to throughout her life. It is a part of Odette's inheritance.

Moser uses these structures to make a number of observations which might be expected. Odette is a woman in transition: "My children have gone and all of a sudden I am left alone to contemplate my life. I was prepared for the empty-nest syndrome, planned on opening my own music store maybe, but now that the children are gone I feel curiously restless, unable to settle on one idea." Her journey, which is also a journey away from her husband for whom she leaves a fridge full of prepared meals, raises many questions, some of which Moser deals with symbolically, for while Odette's consciousness is concerned with questions of descent and relationship, penetrating the past, she is also re-enacting the great journey West her grandmother made, to the French-Canadian settlement of Western Canada, and to the objects and places in which that life is expressed. Odette's mother Philomène gives her the counterpoint made by Céline after a period of estrangement, remarking: "This is how women expressed themselves in those days, through their crafts." Odette sleeps under the counterpoint while travelling; Céline's interspersed narrative reveals the events and decisions that lie behind its design.

Moser is concerned with the differences of women's lives, from each other, from men, and from expectation. It is noticeable, for instance, that the male view of history represented by Odette's grandfather in his plans for the expansion of the west, is present but distanced from the concerns of the women, imaged in Céline's giving birth while in the background her husband makes his speech for St. Jean-Baptiste Day. *Counterpoint* suggests the communality of women over time: "I have lived not only my own years: my memories begin years before I was born, in the lives of my mother and grandmother and perhaps even — yes, in the life of the daughter of the King, la fille du Roi, Jeanne-Françoise de la Rochelle. A story my mother told me." In fact Odette's journey to her grandmother becomes a journey to her daughter Sylvie. Her recognition that "I have come to say goodbye. I cannot be my grandmother though the resonance of her life has affected mine" leads to a resolve to find Sylvie; Odette's discovery that she has half her life yet to live seems to have been brought about by her rediscovery of the familial relationships between women, a continuation of the novel's insistent pattern.

If Spivak's doubly focused questions are asked of *Counterpoint*, however, it is clear that the "other woman" the novel addresses lies in the homogenous past of the contemporary narrator; *Counterpoint* is a view of history within very specific conditions: white, middle-class, affluent, French-Canadian. Compared to the questions raised by *The Invisible Women of Washington*, Moser deals with problems that are inherently spiritual. Collier's novel is located among the powerless poor of urban America. Abby-Jean, driven by poverty from her home in Beaufort Carolina, ends up in Washington looking for work. After two nights in the bus station's waiting room, she takes

a room in the women's residence, filled with roaches, rubbish, and poor, sick, unemployed, racially and socially disadvantaged women. Nothing can help Abby-Jean, not her youth or her good temper or her willingness to work; she remains unemployed and poor and ends up back in the bus station waiting room. The kinds of connections made between women in these circumstances are a limited form of human potential but Collier's interest is not really in exploring the triumphs of the human spirit in adversity; she is unrelenting in her description of poverty and the impenetrable barrier it raises between Abby-Jean and her co-habitants and the society which unwillingly harbours them.

They picked you off one by one, Abby-Jean was thinking. But who would have the face to say "What makes you think you're so important?" to millions of people standing there all together? Who could do that? Lord, millions with families needing, young folks wanting to get married, wanting to have children, wanting to send money home? More millions of lives hanging on that... it amazed her, walking along K street, how for other people life seemed to be going on as before. She saw people working in banks, in offices, in drugstores, in restaurants. The people driving past in cars, surely they had been working too. Millions. It was hard to get a feel of the on K street before the 5 o'clock rush under the bright spring sun.

The events of *Invisible Women*, which are the small events of disappointment culminating in a fire in which an old lady dies and the residence is burnt down, constitute a polemic: the roaches, the dirt, the lack of any material comfort in the sticky heat of a Washington summer breed hostility and despair in the women; Abby-Jean's innocent reflections are the intensifier by which the experience of poverty is transmitted to the "other women," the visible women, who do not live in such circumstances. The face of poverty is also the face of a woman. From a nineteenth-century French-Canadian

counterpoint to the female urban poor is a long jump. In a sense Moser's and Collier's novels imply each other in their absences; the craft of a female tradition deriving from middle class families is both more decorative and better executed than that which speaks against the conditions of the poor, but it is to the benefit of women's writing and feminist inquiry that such answering explorations occur.

LYDIA WEVERS

## MILOSZ

EDWARD MOZEJKO, ed., *Between Anxiety and Hope: The Poetry and Writing of Czeslaw Milosz*. Univ. of Alberta Press, \$24.95.

THERE ARE DIFFICULTIES about our perceptions of Czeslaw Milosz. Most people who know his name associate it with that highly didactic book, *The Captive Mind*, and this makes them wonder how far he was awarded the Nobel Prize as a political gesture, for what he stood for rather than for what, as a writer, he did. And then, there is the matter of religion. Milosz has been presented as a Christian poet, which would fit in with the general line of Polish resistance to the irreligious rule of the Communists, but he has also been called a Manichean, and the constant interplay of good and evil in his poems leaves little doubt that he is, at the very least, a gnostic. Then there is the matter of his poetry itself. Clearly it has to stand first on its own merits, and that it does, when one reads it in good translations. But where does it stand? Classic or Romantic? Traditionalist or Modernist? Certainly not postmodernist, but enough of all the rest to make one hesitate in finally labelling him. Was it this sense of a great, deliberately undefined protest against the modern age in terms both political and aesthetic that appealed to the temperamental conservatives who award Nobel prizes?

Similar ambiguities attend *Between Anxiety and Hope*, the book on Milocz that has recently been edited and published in Edmonton. Milosz's relation to Canada is essentially transient; he had visited the country several times from 1972 onwards and has been appropriately fêted, but he has never made the kind of commitment to the country that, say, Josef Skvorecky has done. So we are not celebrating a strong connection. The book in fact seems like a kind of *festschrift* put out to celebrate little more than the respect a few Canadians feel for Milocz. Fair enough. But in such gratuitously organized collections most depends on the quality of the contributions, and here the standard is uneven. There is a good essay on "The Idea of Reality" in Milocz's poetry by Bogdan Czaykowski, and a sound study by Madelijs G. Levine ("Warnings to the West") of his political prose. Brief pieces by E. D. Blodgett and Paul Coates are interesting enough to make one wish they were longer. There are also many prolix pages that could have done with rigorous editing.

GEORGE WOODCOCK

## A PROPOS DE RIEN

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

*Beaux Draps*, Jean-Marie Poupart's latest novel, is a technically accomplished but irritatingly self-indulgent narrative about an overweight, mediocre writer who has turned forty and is still considering the suicide he has contemplated since the age of twelve. René Faille is obsessively and melodramatically planning his own death as a gesture not of despair but of affirmation whose impact would be felt by friends and enemies as well as by the sales figures of his books. What delays his speedy departure from life is first of all his decision to travel south where the

hated sunny climate will spur him into action. To put this project into effect, he needs to sell a TV script, whose completion takes up much of the narrative. In addition, Faille meets a lesbian couple who ask him to impregnate one of them. Since Faille's sexual potency is as low as his creative powers, this task further puts off the moment of his death. At the end of the novel, Faille is quite predictably still alive. But he has finished the TV script and has fathered the baby. The final scene leaves the novel fashionably open-ended since Faille is boarding the airplane for his trip South. Poupart does not seem particularly interested in the plot, but the situation he has created permits him to exploit a great deal of irony at the expense of his character.

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

One of the novel's more engaging traits is the sheer exuberance with which Poupart writes for the pure pleasure of putting words on paper. His word plays are sometimes quite successful, as when he writes: "Faille se voit sous les traits de Mature (Victor) dans son interprétation de l'aviateur Saint-Ex se préparant à larguer en trombe ses bombes d'outre-

tombola sur la collection de colombes qui lui collent aux colibacilles du cul depuis déjà plus de quarante ans." This intertextual play of signifiers is both the strength and often the weakness of Poupart's text. The narrator's comment that Faille is "plus soucieux des jeux de mots et des figures de rhétorique qui naissent dans [son] esprit que du développement d'une idée principale" is obviously a self-assessment on Poupart's part. Indeed, the novel is less concerned with what it talks about than with how it goes about doing so. Poupart underlines his formalist stance with self-reflexive comments about the act of writing and with intertextual allusions to literature and film. Unfortunately, Poupart's insistently self-conscious assertions that his text is about the production of the text are too often derivative, self-congratulatory, and self-indulgent.

But the real trouble with *Beaux Draps* is that Poupart has little of interest to say. He bombards us with too many fleetingly introduced characters, with too many trivial observations about modern life, with too many banal situations, with too many tedious anecdotes, and with too many digressions into Faille's past. Like Faille, who is said to indulge in philosophizing "à propos de tout et de rien," Poupart pontificates on every possible subject, treating us to such insights as: "Tout compte fait, les jeunes apprennent autant sur le monde si on leur raconte des sornettes que si on les assomme avec des cours sérieux." When Faille does not wallow in mean-spirited gossip about friends, enemies, and especially other writers, he watches with often voyeuristic intensity the behaviour of total strangers. The reader is indeed hard pressed to care about or even just remember so many superficially paraded characters. Faille himself functions too often primarily as a spectator of trivial events and as a mouth-piece for tedious observations about the

world. Poupart is particularly concerned with Faille's writing and marketing of work, but he tells us little of value about the creative process. Faille's self-indulgent obsession with the process of writing tends to confirm his mediocrity and is topped only by an even more self-indulgent preoccupation with his sexual potency. The story of yet another middle-aged male who worries about his sexual powers and ends up in bed with two lesbians is somewhat short on originality and is at times in dubious taste. As a female reader, I found the novel too often vulgar and sexist. That Poupart anticipates this criticism by repeatedly pointing out the vulgarity and banality of Faille's thought and behaviour does not change the fact that the novel dwells on these. Women characters are generally deprecated, feeding either male fantasies or male fears. I found it somewhat annoying to find that no matter how impotent, unattractive, and cruel Faille is, he nevertheless manages, almost without trying, to seduce and satisfy women, even to the point where his lesbian partner may have fallen in love with him.

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

EVELYN COBLEY

## VICEREINES

MARIAN FOWLER, *Below the Peacock Fan: First Ladies of the Raj*. Penguin, \$25.00.

MOVIES LIKE *Gandhi* and *A Passage to India*, along with collections of Raj stories and V. S. Naipaul's books on India, have brought the history of the British

Raj squarely into the popular imagination. *Below the Peacock Fan* draws on that interest to recreate the lives of four women, wives or sisters of British Viceroys, from Emily Eden who went to India with her brother in 1836 to the American Heiress, Mary Curzon, who was Vicereine at the end of the century. Two major strands hold the book together: the development of Raj myths of the white man's burden, of British superiority, self-sacrifice and suffering, which become progressively more restrictive and hypocritical as the century progresses, and the changing, though always subservient, ideals of womanhood which the First Ladies act out as models for other British women abroad.

Running like a countercurrent through the book is the gradual erosion of the Indian states as the British assume power, so that the Arabian Nights princes of Emily Eden's day become drunkards and profligates by the time Mary Curzon shines beautifully around the Imperial Courts of British India. The book presents the now familiar historic movements and the stereotyped roles which the century demanded of the First Ladies. However, for anyone familiar with India or the Raj, there are difficulties of focus here. It seems as if the author cannot free herself sufficiently from the obvious historic pageantry of the Viceroys to concentrate on the "secondary" characters of their consorts, with the result that Robert Lytton's hemorrhoids and George Curzon's steel corset and iron personality sit as long in the memory as the women who are the real subjects of the book.

The problem of focus is related to the confusion of history and biography. The sense of the sequence of historic events, where the Viceroy is most prominent, is strong, but too few reconstructions of personality bring the experiences of the Vicereines convincingly alive outside of an endless round of parties, trips, durbars and pregnancies. Perhaps the problem is

in the narrative sequence itself, where historic perspective suggests order and sanity merely because events continue to follow each other in time. However, the implication, not followed through in the book, is that when people try to live a myth in a land not their own, they actually step outside of history into fantasy. The examination of the minds of the Vicereines, detached from a familiar landscape and lost from the historic process, is missing here.

A major difficulty arises from the author's obvious lack of experience of India. It is doubtful if one can write convincingly about the British in India without going to India and feeling, smelling, hearing and sensing the world which affected the British so profoundly. As V. S. Naipaul observes in *India: A Wounded Civilization*, "An inquiry about India . . . has quickly to go beyond the political . . . it has to be an inquiry about Indian attitudes, . . . about the civilization itself." Small things add up. A tonga is not a "two-wheeled covered cart drawn by ponies" but a two-wheeled, spring-suspended carriage drawn by horses. This is a problem of scale. A follower of the teaching of Mohammed is a Muslim ("one who submits" to Allah), not a "Mahomedan" as Europeans earlier thought. Sensitivity to religious difference is essential to writing about India.

The language of race, like the language of gender, is fraught with pitfalls, and the author has difficulty here. The narrator makes the distinction between Government House in Calcutta and "squalid India" beyond, as if all of non-British India could be described that way. She refers to "natives" often, not being aware of the insulting colonial colouring in that term; she alludes to the "typical Eastern fatalism" as the British themselves might have. As a consequence, it is not always possible to tell if the dismissive or jocular tone is that of the narrator or of the Raj.

These may seem small things, but they reflect a larger failure to address the Indian reality which was such a large part of the consciousness of the four women in the book. Mary Curzon, haunted by India, longed to return even in her final illness; Charlotte Canning, trying desperately to keep the fear and terror at bay, died there shortly before she was to return to England; Edith Lytton was very grateful, even in the poverty of her declining years, if anyone would talk to her about India; Emily Eden was changed forever by her stay in the land which had destroyed so many of the British. Why? What effect did the country itself have on them? We are told only superficially.

The large patterns of biography and history are present, but the small, living details are missing. It is, after all, in the small things that the clash of Western "reason" and Eastern "instinct" are felt — those often repeated categories which may prove on examination to be as inadequate to express the reality of India as the main "feminine" and "masculine" categories are to express the roles of women and men in the book.

Some odd contradictions arise at the end. The narrative presents four women who are caught, tragically, in a play of surfaces, creating a fairytale drama for themselves, playing at being Kings and Queens while the world crumbles. Then the hastily added conclusion suggests, unexpectedly, that the women had an important civilizing effect on the British men, when earlier the author had said that the *memsahibs* prevented the men from establishing any meaningful contact with the Indian people because they had "conceived a hatred of all Indians which came from a deep unconscious fear of the Indian's power to murder and mutilate." *Below the Peacock Fan* portrays the Vicereines as heroic victims, but does not wish to face the implications of their lives,

to see the tragic effect of the sort of cultural hubris they represent.

BRUCE F. MACDONALD

## EN QUÊTE DE TENDRESSE

LOUISE WARREN, *L'Amant gris*. Triptyque, \$7.50.

MARTHE JALBERT, *Au beau fixe*. Triptyque, \$7.50.

PIERRE-YVES PÉPIN, *La Terre émue*. Triptyque, \$7.50.

ROBERT BERROUËT-ORIOI, *Lettres urbaines*. Triptyque, n.p.

JACQUELINE DÉRY MOCHON, *Clara*. Triptyque, \$8.00.

EACH OF THESE poets has chosen to eschew hermetic obscurity for a more direct expression of feelings and aspirations. The poems of Warren and Jalbert are lyrical outpourings of personal emotions. Those of Pépin are a celebration of the natural world. Although there is an implicit *art poétique* in these three works, the collections by Mochon and Berrouët-Oriol are a more explicit study of the poet's mission.

The poems of *L'Amant gris* present a highly personal and sensual exploration of female eroticism. Each brief poem is an elegiac lament reminiscent of Ovid's *Heroides* and Louise Labé's sonnets. Each is an intimate revelation of the poet's frustrated sexual aspirations. These poems constitute a modern "Carte du Tendre," written by a woman poet who, following in the footsteps of Rimbaud, has plunged into the complex depths of her own psyche ("Déplier la carte / amoureuse pour en faire des petits bateaux ivres et des avions saouls"). The poet describes her desperate, and ultimately unsuccessful, effort to communicate with her lover, who seems absent from her in spirit even when he is physically present. Occa-

sions when the lovers' souls, and not only their bodies, come together are rare and fleeting. The woman's frustrations are only intensified when she must face the anguish of breaking up with her lover and then trying to find his special qualities, again unsuccessfully, in other men. The poet is not unaware of her own failings and bears her share of the blame for the failure of the relationship. She reveals throughout the work her immaturity of outlook, her obsession with her childhood, from the memory of which she is unable to free herself, and her tendency to escape from reality into an imaginary world of her own making ("Dans la vie, je fais du cinéma, c'est tout. . . Je fais des rêves . . ."). Such a dichotomy develops between her real and imagined selves that she comes to look upon herself as two women ("deux femmes, la même").

The brief lyrics by Marthe Jalbert are an eloquent evocation of all that is transient and evanescent. Intense emotions and poetic visions are but momentary illuminations fleeting across the poet's mind, only to disintegrate into nothingness within an instant. Adjectives like "fugitif" and "tenu," and recurring present participles, fittingly suggest this Mallarmean flight of all things into non-existence. The collection is structured upon the fundamental antitheses of light and darkness, transparency and opaqueness. The poet is in constant pursuit of those privileged moments when the surface of reality opens up and the hidden meaning of the universe is brought to light. Such epiphanies occur when the poet divests herself of all sense of independent selfhood and makes herself one with the world about her. "C'est au moment où je m'absente en tant qu'être humain que je suis en présence de la chose et qu'elle prend valeur d'éternité, et me donne un peu de son éternité, de sa lumière."

Each of the *poèmes en prose* of *La Terre émue* is a verbal landscape picture

in which Pépin captures the "présence imminente" of the hidden cosmic forces which give life to nature. His poems are all the more eloquent for being suggestive rather than declamatory in presenting their author's philosophy of nature. In them, as in the scenes from around the globe which they describe, universal vitality remains an invisible but intensely felt presence pulsating just below the surface of visible phenomena ("Sentiment d'un monde à ses débuts malgré la tombée de la nuit. Dilatation de l'âme. Plénitude"). The most intriguing segment of the collection is the long opening description of the Mississippi delta. Here the four elements blend together in a kind of primeval chaos which is teeming with creative forces and the possibility of new life. Such a landscape is peculiarly symbolic of the poet's inner universe, from whose latent potentialities for meaning the poet creates significant and ordered verbal structures ("Puissance sauvage d'un milieu dont on perçoit les lourdes pulsations lentes, source d'une énergie indicible, lente cosmique, une vision sans entrave").

In the poems of *Lettres urbaines* and the accompanying essays (*Le dire-à-soi*), the author's special preoccupation is with language itself. He explores the universe of words the way Pépin investigates nature, and he uses his training as a linguist to the utmost in his effort to create ever new possibilities for expressiveness:

Nomade des prologues binaires  
des cliquetis de syllabes  
je convoque la veillée d'un chant  
doigts à l'affût des logiciels  
toutes énigmes au rendez-vous des clefs  
d'accès.

The poet is "en quête de parole-lampadaire." In four essays on poetry, Berrouët-Oriol expresses his respect for language: a Haitian living in Québec, he rejects the efforts of poets in both places to use native verbal habits (*créole* or *joual*) to deconstruct the French language and

thereby achieve a more "authentic" means of expression. He says that one must re-invent a language from the inside, have a total mastery and appreciation of it truly to be innovative in its manipulation. "Pour soi: la poésie ne crée pas une nouvelle langue, elle ne s'écrit pas en orbite de la matrice originelle. Elle ré-invente la langue qui nous traverse en ce sens qu'elle en fait l'exploration jusqu'à ses extrêmes limites picturales et harmoniques."

The most moving of these collections is Jacqueline Déry Mochon's *Clara*, her literary debut. Her ambition (as it was for Hugo, Mallarmé, Saint-John Perse, Grandbois, and Lasnier) is nothing less than to attain the infinite, to discover and give expression to the essence of reality, to make visible the invisible. "Ne plus rien cacher désormais. Au contraire, tout mettre en forme, même l'inconnaissable; et redonner ainsi à l'insignifiant sa signification." She pursues a vision which will embrace the entire universe; she makes personal the great themes of poetry: nature, love, friendship, memory, childhood. She is eager to bring to light the hidden beauty of people and of the universe: "Terre nouvelle à apprendre, à comprendre et à aimer. . . . En quête de tendresse." The most delightful aspect of this work is the disarmingly modest tone which the poet adopts to describe her titanic metaphysical and spiritual ambitions.

JAMES P. GILROY

## CHEZ HIM

RENÉ-DANIEL DUBOIS, *Being at home with Claude*. Leméac, \$8.95. Trans. Linda Gaboriau, *Canadian Theatre Review*, Spring 1987.

THIS FASCINATING PLAY manages to combine a uni-dimensional search for truth and order with multi-dimensional layers

of passion and intrigue. On the surface, it simply reproduces the final hours of a long police interrogation in which one haggard but determined and methodical inspector (The Inspector, Guy) drags an explanation for his crime from a young male prostitute (Him, Yves) who has confessed to slitting the throat of an equally young male student (Claude). An apparently painstaking and painful process for the inspector, the reader/spectator should find it exciting and fast-paced; the author even specifies in his stage directions that the final three knocks on a door which introduce the final scene must be heard precisely one hour after the play begins.

Entrances and exits and knocks on doors by police officials are the standard devices used by Dubois in this piece effectively to segment the dialogue into the logical units during which more and more of the hard facts the inspector so desires are provided. Pieces of new information are interspersed at a staccato pace with short summaries of the situation as the inspector sees it. Finally, Him reveals how and why he killed Claude: he slit his throat while making love in order to preserve in time and from daily mediocrity their mutual moment of ecstasy. The description of this crime of passion is one of the most moving and entrancing monologues in Québec theatre. And since it appears after a long, increasingly charged period of questioning, it becomes, like the slaying, a privileged moment of intense emotion. Moreover, as Him explains his fatal gesture, the violence and death he describes are transformed, paradoxically, into symbols of beauty and life.

Yves' (Him) life is sordid and he knows it: one-night stands, ungrateful, disloyal customers, gang bangs in the park on the mountain, compulsive sex, loneliness, fear, and self-contempt. On the other hand, he has no desire to live otherwise, despises even the thought of settling

down. Until he meets Claude and falls in love. Then he begins to get sentimental, generous, tender and, to his dismay, dependent. That fatal night, he also realizes that this love is mutual and that the idyllic moments he could share with Claude in the future would slowly be destroyed by the hassles that come with everyday routine, changing lifestyles, and interfering friends. In spite of everything, Him is an idealist, who dreams of vibrant beauty and united souls. When his dreams are finally realized, when his search for absolute love is rewarded, he becomes, "born again," and ready to get involved. This means, to Him, taking the necessary steps to protect his lover, forever, from disappointment and suffering. And so he slits his throat and they both scream out with joy and pain, drowning in blood and tears, exploding with love.

The universal themes of love and death, the mediocre and the sublime, that this play deals with, particularly in the final monologue, have been the central focus of the positive critical assessment of *Being at home with Claude*. Very few critics have dealt with its social-political nature. This is bizarre and unfortunate for just as Michel Tremblay's work, of great universal value, cannot be dissociated from the Québec context in which it was conceived and produced and the Québécois it reflects, so the plays of René-Daniel Dubois, who has often been hailed as the Tremblay of the 1980's, cannot be read in a vacuum, nor were they written without references to Québec and to today's world.

*Panique à Longueuil*, Dubois's first success (produced in 1980) centres on an average apartment dweller in Longueuil, a sort of Québécois everyman, who takes a fantastic journey up and down his apartment building losing both a sense of security and identity in the process, two common themes in Québec literature. In *Ne blâmez jamais les Bédouins* for which

Dubois won the Governor General's award in 1984, an English (Santa Claus) military train and a Russian one (Stalin) are on a collision course which may possibly be stopped by a strange three-bodied beast (French, German, and English) and "the Fighting Group South Belvedere," a surrealistic military group of anglophone helicopters. For Dubois, the world, his world, has gone wrong and nothing is as simple as we would like it to be. This applies as much to *Being at home with Claude* as to his other works for it is more than an intense psychological drama.

Although written in 1984, the action takes place in 1967, a particularly charged period in Québec's history and at a time, July 5, which allows Dubois to refer regularly to Confederation Day (July 1), and to Expo 67. The passion and emotion which surrounded these two events, and which often pitted anglophones against francophones, become the backdrop to further references to separatist agitation and to independence movements such as the R.I.N. of which Claude was a member. The interrogation takes place in the elegant, wood-panelled chambers of a judge Him claims to know (probably as a male prostitute but we never learn exactly). The possibility of scandal contributes an important element of tension to the drama, but the opulence of the judge's chambers and the large, coloured map of Montréal which hangs on the wall are also significant. Add to this the knowledge that Him comes from a formerly rich family (presumably francophone) from Montréal's English enclave, Westmount, that Claude's family have been long established in Québec's bourgeoisie and that both families have/had "friends in high places" and you have social and political intrigue.

Nor can the reader/spectator ignore Yves' extensive use of the English language or the fact that the play's original

title is in English. One could claim that the use of English is merely a device consistent with the realism of the play. Perhaps, although literature is never what it appears to be on the surface. What is sure is that the English phrase, which is used in the original title, but nowhere else *per se* in the text, is not an accident. Furthermore, as Him considers settling down with Claude a threat to his independence and to the realizations of his dreams of freedom and adventure, this English title implies that cohabitation or "association" is an English concept to be avoided at all costs even if one has a burning desire to love one's other self. The double irony here is that this other self is a francophone and love of self and of one's other leads to violence. Gripping and lyrical, *Being at home with Claude* is also, in such insights, fascinatingly ambivalent and complex.

ELAINE F. NARDOCCHIO

## LES GUERRES

BERNARD J. ANDRÈS, *La Trouble-Fête*. Leméac, n.p.

RÉJEAN BONENFANT & LOUIS JACOB, *Les Trains d'exils*. Hexagone, \$16.95.

OF THESE TWO RECENT Québec novels on wars and the devastating effects of wars, the first is obviously the finer work of art, although (and perhaps because) it reads with considerable difficulty. The second, much simpler and more direct, explores only the shallows of the psyche of its characters. While Andrès' text speaks with many voices and boasts a narrative multiplicity that is both disturbing and enriching, Bonenfant and Jacob present a straightforward third-person narration from which subtlety is essentially banished.

In addition to dealing with the behaviour of a restricted group of characters making do in catastrophic circumstances, the two works resemble each other in an-

other more distant way by being built around a shared fictional device: the chance meeting or near-meeting of characters who throughout the works become preoccupied with the others, who seek them out despite appalling circumstances, whose destinies interweave and whose independence wains. Again, the second novel's use of this narrative armature is simple and direct. It might at best be considered the stuff of a reasonably diverting mini-series for Sunday night television. *La Trouble-fête*, on the other hand, makes use of three distinct narrators, a sullen, deformed concierge, a bright young technician, and an intellectual pacifist who becomes the fiction editor of a state publishing house. In the end, the marked diversity of these characters fades into a confused blur, and we suspect that their mysteriously shared preoccupations may be explained by their ultimate oneness.

The growing body of Québécois science fiction and *littérature fantastique*, both genres to which *La Trouble-fête* simultaneously belongs, has numerous able practitioners, writing and publishing for a discerning readership. The novel is situated in Montreal, in the near future. The explosion of a neutron bomb to the north of the city has sown disease and deformity among the unfortunate stragglers who had not fled the impending catastrophe. The irradiated survivors lose their hair, noses, lips, ears and fingernails, and evolve with nightmarish rapidity into a blob-like state in which their monstrosity becomes in fact the new normality. They have survived a nuclear winter, but in their isolation are unsure of what has taken place elsewhere in the world. The narrator of the first panel of this triptych novel, an American of francophone origin, is one of many who have been brought to the devastated city to fulfil some unknown function. For reasons at that point unclear, he becomes the con-

cierge of an insalubrious apartment house where drug dealers, prostitutes and strippers, all deformed survivors of the holocaust, constitute his unsavoury clientele. To combat the insanity of this looking-glass world, he takes refuge in his sumptuous library (its entrance hidden by a mirror), where he composes with monomaniacal determination a diary describing the events he witnesses. At the end of the first part, the narrator is murdered. In his agony, he suffers the ultimate indignity of seeing his precious text being thrown into the fire.

In the second part we step back in time to the nuclear winter itself. The story is told by a young American technician, again a diarist, who has been placed in the city to observe the inhabitants and report on their behaviour to a group of scientists from M.I.T. (we are not sure that the initials denote *the* M.I.T. until later), snugly housed in a bunker under Mount Royal. At first suspended between two worlds, he eventually drifts away from his mission and installs himself as a squatter in a luxurious house, again equipped with a rich library. A period of some two years passes, towards the end of which time itself fades into indefiniteness. He combats cold and hunger, writes his text, and probes the identity and character of the mysterious host or hostess whose dwelling he inhabits. Our suspicions as to his true identity are confirmed when we learn that he in fact bears the same surname as the concierge.

This second part of the novel, like the first, consists of a coherent and more or less accessible narrative that could be read as an extended *nouvelle*. However, both sections are larded with puzzling references to the past, as well as portents of revelations yet to come. In the second part, for example, we wonder why the copy of *The Alexandria Quartet* is missing from the library shelves. Like many other details of the novel that seem at first

to be mere wanton embellishments, this fact becomes a key element of the puzzle that is not explained until the end.

The concluding portion, told by a third-person narrator, deals with the perusal of a thick manuscript in three sections by the new fiction editor of the Éditions d'État, a publishing concern whose aim it is to rid the post-war public mind of the dross of past errors by presenting an enlightening and formative corpus of correct literature. The character's name, Jeanne Audet-Bertrand, is almost an anagram of the author's, and bears the same initials. We pick up her story as she is moving her library into a large house in Montreal, a house with which she shows suspicious signs of familiarity. Her immediate task is to determine whether the manuscript is worthy of publication. We discover eventually that the collection of books in question is the library of the late concierge, who of course as the technician had lived in this very house and had taken them from their present location. As she fled, just before the catastrophe, Jeanne had taken away with her one work: *The Alexandria Quartet*.

What had seemed at first a generalized war, even to the characters, proves to have been merely a limited and localized display of nuclear force, of which the inhabitants of Montreal were the unfortunate victims. Similarly, Jeanne Audet-Bertrand is not physically a normal woman, despite her appearance. Rather she turns out to be one of the deformed *exposés*, who had in fact participated in the murder of the concierge but who has since suffered an attack of amnesia. Her reading of the first two volumes of the manuscript thus leads to a rediscovery of her own apocalyptic past. As a *trouble-fête*, she is compelled by her editorial zeal to modify the texts and redefine the concierge/technician in her own image. As a once-removed manifestation of the author, she participates not in the creation,

but rather in the destruction of his characters. Her baggage of deconstructionist and narratological theory, informing her reading and transmission of the texts, results in their ultimate disintegration. (The surname of the concierge/technician is Leprohon: *le pro[fesseur] hon[teux]*?) In order to preserve the integrity of her reworked version, she must consign to the flames the all-telling third portion of the manuscript, about which we learn nothing other than its undefined destructive potential. But the *cahier* is booby-trapped: Jeanne, the manuscript, the books and the study are all blown to bits; the text destroys its manipulator. The novel thus concludes, even before all the facts congeal, with a bang and a good narratological joke. Lawrence Durrell, that master of narratological sleight of hand, takes a bow from the wings.

By contrast, *Les Trains d'exils* makes pallid reading. The plot consists of the chance meeting and subsequent coincidental reuniting of four distinct characters during the period 1944-1946. A Canadian soldier from Québec meets Vanessa, as English as trifle, in a London air-raid shelter. A German infantryman witnesses the rape of a young Frenchwoman. The brother of the Canadian's fiancée has accidentally bombed a Hamburg hospital and killed the mother of the German. Later, in the ruins of a church in Caen, the Canadian discovers the German, who by this time has deserted his unit and begs to be killed. Both soldiers (the Canadian, being a noble sort, spares the deserter) find their way to Berlin after the war. The desperate Frenchwoman, having meanwhile lost her family, accepts the German's invitation to join him in Berlin. During the trip, she coincidentally finds herself in the same train compartment as Vanessa. At the same time, the Canadian and the German meet in the Berlin station and are joyously reunited.

The two couples become a foursome, and friendship blossoms.

Bonenfant and Jacob recount their simple if highly improbable epic with remarkable sincerity and emotional power. Perhaps it is their realistic virtuosity in describing love, death, and the dreariness of post-war Europe that saves the novel from the abyss of melodrama. In addition, their reader cannot help being reminded of the astoundingly rich fictional possibilities of such settings as the passenger vessel and the railway compartment, both of which are exploited with considerable effectiveness in this text. The authors thus provide us at least a timely reminder of the essential literariness of leisurely travel in groups.

DENNIS ESSAR

## PAYS & PAYSAGE

VICTOR-LÉVY BEAULIEU, *Steven Le Hereault*, trans. Ray Chamberlain. Exile Editions, \$14.95.

ANTONINE MAILLET, *Mariaagelas/Maria*, daughter of *Gélas*, trans. Ben-Z. Shek. Simon & Pierre, \$19.95.

GASTON MIRON, *The March to Love*, ed. D. G. Jones. International Poetry Forum, Byblos Editions X. Limited edition of 300, n.p.

WITH A CAST OF CRAZY, passionate and bizarre characters, Beaulieu's *Steven Le Hereault* is one of the most disturbing novels I have read lately. This tale, in a series of picaresque-to-the-point-of-surreal adventures, exposes the essential Québécois soul whose different facets are embodied by the members of the Beauchemin family, part of an extended tribe originally from Trois-Pistoles, now of Montreal.

In the beginning, we rejoin the family with Steven and Gabriella who are returning to a post-referendum Quebec after a 15-year sojourn in Paris and Dublin where Steven, among other things, has been doing research on James Joyce. (Hence this novel's title, a corruption of

*Stephen Hero*; genre, autobiographical fiction; and direction, the failed book.) Steven and Gabriella are lovers — and siblings. However, given the family context, incest loses something of its shock value. As the story unfolds, Steven and Gabriella's relationship becomes no more than an extension of their mother's maternal sensuality, and relatively beautiful compared to the degeneration of other family members.

The plot revolves around Abel's insane scheme to finish the failed book and fulfil the prophecy of his name. En route, Abel slashes certain Canadian novelists for creating, in their literature, a Jewish Montreal. And he encourages Olga in her sexual degradation to become an extension of a minor character in Leonard Cohen's *Beautiful Losers*, "certainly the only book she'd ever read — and that was a long time ago, before the poet began to take himself for Mordecai Richler, that little Jew who climbed out of the garbage can to the heights of New York, coming down only to defecate on Quebec."

It is useful to remember here that while characters may assume something of their own life within a novel, they rarely transcend their author's ideology. This has broad implications for the unreal treatment of female characters within the literary tradition where they are used allegorically to represent such concepts as love, chance, or society — and are degraded or raised to sublime heights.

If feminist criticism has taught us anything it is the importance of analyzing the political framework and social context of any literary endeavour. In this case, Beaulieu seems to be struggling as Quebec has done since the Quiet Revolution to come to terms with the influence of the Roman Catholic Church and concurrent anti-semitism — for Abel sincerely loves Olga in his own warped way and if there is degradation it is surely mutual. In fact it is this kind of even-handed character

portrayal that rescues this novel from simple polemicism and allows for psychological insight. *Steven Le Herault* is primarily a novel about overcoming failure (timely at this point in the history of an aspiring nationalist Quebec). Beaulieu, like Abel, has also written a popular TV series, as well as the ongoing saga of the Beauchemin Family: the depressed Abel, unable to complete his novel represents in real life the writer's block that Beaulieu must destroy so that the book may be written. And we are left with the paradox — Abel dies before his book is completed and yet the book is completed. *Steven Le Herault* is a provocative novel that works on many levels. It is fast-paced and blackly humorous, extremely Québécois but not parochial. I would call it a great book except that that kind of superlative must include a critique of style, something difficult to ascertain in translation.

Antonine Maillet is a prolific author recognized for exploring the dialect, oral tradition and folklore of her native Acadia. She is probably best known to English-speaking Canadians for *La Sagouine*, a monologue narrated by an Acadian charwoman (that was dramatized several years ago by the CBC) in which the joys and hardships of a difficult life are recalled without rancour. *La Sagouine* was originally published in French in 1972 and was not published in English until 1979 — the same year that Antonine Maillet won the prestigious Prix Goncourt for *Pélagie-la-Charrette*. It has likewise taken a number of years (thirteen to be exact) for an English translation of *Mariaagélas* to appear. These delays suggest the degree of difficulty involved in translating the Acadian dialect, a dialect rooted in seventeenth-century French.

*Mariaagélas* is the story of Maria, daughter of Gélais, a determined Acadian girl of an old but impoverished family from the wrong side of the bridge. (The

bridge, in true Maritime fashion, replacing 'the tracks' as the geographical boundary which exists in any town between respectable and disreputable.) Maria has a lot of spunk and too much pride to be a servant or cannery girl. Prostitution is out of the question but when Prohibition hits Acadia, Mariaagélas seizes upon the opportunity to become a rum runner. There ensues a lively story in which Maria outwits custom officials, law enforcement officers and the local busy-body, the Widow Calixte.

This tale is undeniably well crafted and the plot is subtle enough even if the characters are not. Maillet overcomes the technical problem of using a narrative voice for a story which unfolds in the third person by using a prologue in which she sets herself up as a storyteller quite in keeping with the oral tradition of the Acadians. Unfortunately this technique seems to limit character development; the artificiality is not dispelled until the epilogue in which the author admits to writing, not speaking, the story: the noticeable shift in style at this point may owe more to problems of translation, than to any strategy of the author.

With a cover drawing by Aristide Maillet, *The March to Love* is a beautifully bound hardcover book, which originates mysteriously from the International Poetry Forum, an organization for which no place-name is given, as though to be international is to be displaced. In lieu of place it is noted, however, that publication was made possible by a grant from Michael D. Cheteyan III in tribute to the Life President of the Armenian General Benevolent Union. Strange perhaps... but stranger still given the context (in that it is so very Canadian, especially considering that other volumes in the Byblos Editions series seem to include introductions by poets, like Yevgeny Yevtushenko, for example) is the introduction by Guy Gervais, Literature Officer of the Depart-

ment of External Affairs, who emphasizes the universal aspects of Miron's poetry while only alluding to his (Separatist) politics.

Gaston Miron's creative energy has always been focused beyond his writing in the socio-political arena of his native Quebec. He has been particularly concerned with the development of a distinct Québécois culture and in purifying the Québécois tongue. As one of the founders of Les Editions de L'Hexagone in the 1950's Miron was responsible for encouraging a generation of poets; but content to have his poems appear in periodicals and anthologies, Miron has mostly left the task of collecting and publishing his work to others.

*The March to Love* is another such volume of selected poems. Edited by D. G. Jones, it is a volume of translations (and originals) gathered from periodicals and from the previous translation by Marc Plourde of *L'Homme Rapaille* (The Agonized Life). I found the book extremely uneven. This response may in part be explained by the number of translators involved: there were six, not equally skilled. Also, the poems were selected from different periods and disparate sources. But I suspect that the main problem lies with the original poems whose two recurring themes — Québec, *pays* and *paysage*, personified and often likened to a woman; and the unattainable woman — are reflected upon by the personal and collective "I." These are poems of struggle and yearning that somehow lose the personal in their reach for the collective and rarely convey enough emotion to merit their dramatic voice: "... I am back to myself like a man in a house / built in his absence / I salute you, silence / ..."

I would dismiss the whole volume as bathetic were it not for the title poem and for some of the word plays and internal rhymes, so difficult to translate, that

set up lovely asymmetrical and unpretentious rhythms within many of the other poems: for example, "comme un defoncé enfoncé / toute la sainte face de journée / toute, goutte à goutte," lines from "Le verre d'eau ou l'inacceptable," an existential poem about a (cliché) thirst that goes beyond the corporeal.

The title poem is a love poem which sustains for ten pages an eroticism of universal proportions. It is translated here by D. G. Jones, whose translations best seem to capture the movement of the originals. The imagery and tone of this poem reminded me of the Song of Solomon, although its comparisons between the beloved and the world are drawn from a more northern world:

your hair the night of willow trees  
your face is dusted with the snows  
and fruits of fortune, and your gaze  
is held still mistress to the hidden springs  
and in your veins a thousand insects sing  
and in your manifold caress a thousand  
petals rain

But love is not attained, the girl is not to be found:

I have no more face for love  
I have no more face for anything at all  
sometimes I sit down out of kindness to  
myself  
I open my arms to the cross of sleep

The power of this poem alone is redemptive. It saves the book.

JEANNE HARRISON

## ESSENTIALLY IRONIC

MICHAEL DARLING, ed., *Perspectives on Mordecai Richler*. ECW, \$15.00.

JOHN METCALF, ed., *The Bumper Book*. ECW, \$12.00.

A RICHLER NOVEL always promises a different perspective on life: marginalized internationally as a Canadian, nationally as a Quebecer, provincially as an anglophone, municipally as a Jew, he adopts

an essentially ironical response to culture, one that evidently threatens many readers. Many teachers of Canadian literature can probably identify with the experience of having been threatened with a lawsuit by a "mature" student (at the University of Toronto), or indicted (in Smoky Lake) for purveying smut after including *St. Urbain's Horseman* on a reading list. Thus, any collection of perspectives is welcome that endeavours to see Richler's work as ethnically germane and morally defensible.

Not all the essays in Michael Darling's edition pertain to *Horseman* (though the central position occupied by those that do sets that novel above the others, as the only one too good to be made into a movie). The editor has chosen to order the essays according to critical approach; ranging from the thematic through the scholarly and literary historical to the new critical and questionably post-modern, they form a worthwhile panoply of readings of various models. While some of the essays prove unavailing, their approaches are not necessarily so, with the exception, perhaps, of the thematic essays, whose weak appearance shortly after the publication of the latest full-length thematic study of Canadian literature—Gaile McGregor's *mise en abyme, The Wacousta Syndrome*—gives rise to the possibility that thematics may have lost its future even in this its favourite field of refuge. Preceding these essays, Darling's introduction usefully surveys previous reviews and articles; moreover, it points the way to the need by literary historians to make use of the archival materials on a host of Canadian authors that the University of Calgary Library has collected. As editor, Darling has worked well, though one oversight deserves mention: all five essays that cite *Horseman* helpfully use the same edition, but, unhelpfully, it is the out-of-print Bantam paperback. As its pagination differs from that of the NCL edition,

in print since August 1985, Darling ought to have had all citations converted; without such a conversion, the articles' usefulness diminished before the book appeared.

Thomas Tausky contributes a fine essay on the documentary aspects of *Horseman*. Working from Richler's notion that the modernist novelist bears witness to his times, Tausky traces in some of the materials of the Richler archive at Calgary the way in which various secondary sources and Richler's own articles on Israel for *Maclean's* find their way into the novel, occasionally *verbatim*. This approach all but resituates the novel as historical/autobiographical fiction: "Jake is not Richler, but Jake's world and Richler's world are nearly congruent." Beside Tausky's article in the middle of the collection Darling has placed Wilfred Cude's perceptive essay on Richler's use of Samuel Johnson — both Johnson's writing as a humanistic backdrop and his ghost, hovering over Jake's character development into, not the golem of Joey, but the avatar of Johnson. This essay goes well beyond ones that Cude has previously published on the topic, convincingly arguing against W. J. Keith's vigorous dissent from the attribution to *Horseman* of spiritual, moral, and intellectual probity. Cude's point remains that Jake is not Samuel Johnson *per se*, but a Johnson of the 1970's endeavouring to gain a defensible view of society and its values. While Cude goes on to exaggerate in claiming that Kafka's *Trial* and Jake's trial are shaped "out of astonishingly similar materials," he does provide another strong literary historical link, to the Austrian novelist.

Laura Groening makes links between Malamud's and Richler's fiction in several useful ways, while Zailig Pollock revalues the role of Zeyda Simcha in *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz* to show an unforgiving mentor whom Duddy apprentices to emulate. Robert Cluett and

Suzanne Ives show that Richler adores the packed noun phrase in *Duddy Kravitz*; these authors throw up a miasma of computer-generated lists but seem unable to do more with it than conclude lamely that "Cliché, money, time, and knowing *are* the substance of this book." The reader not only must wonder at the ways in which such a claim has been fashioned, but must set it against Pollock's considered view that "Whatever motivates Duddy, it is clear . . . that it is not just money; whatever he is, it is clear that he is not *just* a materialist."

The two thematic/image-pattern essays mar the collection badly. Michael Greenstein provides thematic wallowing in a jejune collation of the image patterns in several models. Ponder this blooming frippery: "On a physical level Jake's revenge of spraying a murdering lime solution on Old Lady Dry Cunt's rhododendrons resembles Duddy's destruction of Westmount tulips, Harry's slashing a Silver Cloud Rolls Royce with his knife, or Joey's fight at the Palais d'Or." "Ultimately all these circles lack centres," Greenstein announces; so do a few other things that his essay resembles. In an essay whose poor style stands out most prominently, Margaret Gail Osachoff argues that Richler is a pastoral writer. This essay's memorable second section deals with the image of the car in *Horseman*; by confusing the pastoral with nostalgia, Osachoff says that Richler's memories of superseded technology form a pastoral setting for his plots. Wildly implausible in her borrowing of Raymond Williams' view of *British* society to end her essay on Richler's youth in Canada, she assembles images and then abruptly terminates the discussion with the assertion that this type of pastoral literature "will become more common in the future." Here is writing-on-empty indeed, a persistent form of lit-crit that one hopes will grow less common.

Stephen Bonnycastle offers the only non-modernist perspective, and while the attempt is worthy, it falters from inaccuracy. Bonnycastle claims that *Joshua Then And Now* fragments into hundreds of pieces "in a fairly arbitrary way"; the relative adverb is instructive, for Bonnycastle nominally professes "to consider *Joshua Then and Now* without reference to other works of literature in the first instance." The novel's structure does not seem in at all arbitrary in comparison, say, to Robbe-Grillet's *Topology of a Phantom City* (1976). Other anxieties attack this essay: a Freudian terminology makes irregular appearances, as does a shallow reading of Hayden White, a violent misreading of MacLennan's *Watch That Ends the Night*, and a continuous abuse of the term "deconstructive" and "deconstruction" to signify only "destructive" or "critical," as in, "There is [in the novel] also an overriding cynicism about the institutions of society and a deconstructive attitude towards all the professions which we encounter, except that of professional gangsterism." Without doubt, Bonnycastle opens discussion of some important questions, such as the function of flashback in the novel, given that "Joshua rarely uses the past to illuminate the present. . . . What is interesting about these shifts is their frequency and the fact that they seem to have no significance whatsoever." Is Richler merely infatuated with screenwriting or can one legitimately ask what problems beset a narrative of the 1980's that seeks to wrest modernist unity out of chaos just as a post-modernist awareness of multiplicity exerts itself relentlessly on the Arts?

In sum, the edition would have been stronger at two-thirds the length; for the most part, however, it capably surveys perspectives of Richler the novelist. But not entirely the writer: these essays collectively suffer a general myopia that pre-

cludes any detailed perspective on Richler as screenwriter, as journalist, as essayist, as short story writer. Such a study would prove most welcome; at least one perspective that needs viewing in these regards concerns the influence of Richler, as writer for the Book of the Month Club, on which Canadian authors receive more and less exposure abroad.

Another equally well-produced ECW publication is John Metcalf's first edition of a promised series titled *The Bumper Book*. The first collects thirty-five articles, bits of gossip, and doggerel on topics ranging from literary criticism to book publishing to the literary institution in Canada. To its credit, ECW has published the book without assistance from any funding agency — at least none is acknowledged. Credit too must go to Metcalf, at least initially, for including a salutary appraisal of his own critical essays by Sam Solecki, who identifies Metcalf's traditional use of criticism to clear a place in the literary scene not only for his own genre — the short story — but also for his preferred literary concern — stylistics over ideas, although clearly the two rarely seem separable in the finest writing — and his preferred authors. Here Metcalf appears to come clean; yet, not so. Unknown perhaps to many of the contributors, Metcalf perpetrates a hidden control: without an academic platform, he exploits this first editorial Hyde Park corner to draw much attention to his own work. Much attention? Besides framing the collection with his own pieces, he arranges and selects contributions so that his own literary criticism alone receives competent, thorough, and sustained attention in this book. An apparently Heraclitean assortment of ideas and perspectives may bump in many directions but Metcalf operates the Platonic control switch, and the centre of the oval around which the misguided motorcars bump is no other than himself. No mis-

take: Metcalf has found himself his own editorial circuit.

The circuit has some shiny cars, driven by George Woodcock into politics and the arts; by W. J. Keith into the policies that McClelland and Stewart practised with the Canadian Classics series (it did not bother to do any new typesetting); by Douglas Gibson into editing as a career in this country; by Morton L. Ross (in a good used car from 1978) into the critical vicissitudes that *As For Me and My House* has suffered; and by Allan Weiss into how, since so much contemporary writing comes from institutionally based writers, the literary tastes of particular teachers of creative writing helped shape regional Canadian literatures. In this flux of salutary contributions, a number of heaps and stalled jalopies dent one another. There are the simply silly backfirings by Louis Dudek; Norman Snider offers an underinflated, journalistic, and notional bump on Robertson Davies, Canada's best living Victorian plotist; Fraser Sutherland twice proves himself as inept as he weekly does in *The Globe and Mail* (that this nation's poets suffer his superficial musings attests to nothing other than their masochism) by passing off Edsel-like twaddle for literary history and criticism. His are two bumps that would do nothing for the book or for the reputation of Metcalf as an astute, calculating editor were one not left admiring the way in which he has set up Sutherland as one of those "pathetic, barely competent book reviewers of the national and local press" whom John Mills then lambastes in the book's next essay. In turn, Mills follows on the exhaust of Layton's general condemnation of his ilk who end their lives "in one of the country's famous learneries." Some of the other intertextual crashes were not editorially arranged. When Solecki quotes Metcalf — "'Our two most important poets are Irving Layton and John Newlove but it's far too

early to assess their achievement'" — one sees in the rearview mirror Keith's signal: "It is worth remembering that as recently as twenty-five years ago Margaret Laurence was unknown. It is fatal to apply the cautious procedures appropriate for a venerable literature to a vigorously youthful one."

The thrill of bumper cars resides, after all, in their chaos; still, the chaos occurs within a controlled voltage and floor space, both of which are too limited here, and at a price, all three of which Metcalf has set. What he arranges is a high-profile discussion of Canadian literature and the arts as he understands them, that is, generally speaking, as they have existed since he has been here, and on which he has attempted and continues to attempt to exert his influence. Very fairly, Solecki points out that as a critic Metcalf tries to displace history less recent than his own here, and to dismiss "'most Canadian writing up until 1950' as 'rubbish,'" as have most British-influenced modernists since Woodcock. Just so Metcalf as editor: an essay on the criticism of *The Mountain and the Valley* by Lawrence Mathews looks like a Model T on a circuit contested mainly by and about Metcalf's contemporaries. And only male contemporaries at that, car racing and bumping being largely male preserves. Indeed, the pit stops of gasoline alley bar any females, and the female writers mentioned are only summarily bumped, with the exception of Katherine Govier, the victim of a shameless, because anonymous, hit and run. Suzi Darling Knickers not quite anonymously adds tidbits that show Metcalf's anti-feminist proclivities capable of unrestrained self-indulgence. Even in the contemporary scene then, Metcalf has huge blind spots in his editorial mirror, denying a place on the starting grid to half the eligible drivers. Here he only practises a crude self-aggrandisement and -enfranchisement. A

mortarboard careers across the book's cover; it label, RETURN TO SENDER, one might expect from an editor whom academe has not enfranchised. But the label might also be read — the print is small and "s" vague — as RETURN TO GENDER. Metcalf has chosen who will steer and, by the essays' order, in which direction. Whether or not the male contributors were aware of it, this is a mug's game, controlled by Metcalf at the start, at the end, and throughout. Prospective contributors beware.

I. S. MACLAREN

## ENTENDRE VIBRER

*Choisir la poésie*. Ecrits des Forges, n.p.

GUY GERVAIS, *Verbe Silence*. l'Hexagone, \$9.95.

GILBERT LANGEVIN, *Comme un lexique des abîmes*. Ecrits des Forges, n.p.

JEAN ROYER, *Depuis l'amour*. l'Hexagone/la table rase, \$11.95.

JEAN CHAPDELAIN GAGNON, *Dans l'attente d'une aube*. Editions Triptyque, n.p.

ROBERT GIROUX, *Du fond redouté* (1982-1985). Editions Triptyque, \$8.00.

CHOISIR LA POÉSIE. Three dozen poets met under this title in Trois-Rivières in October 1985 to affirm their faith in their art and to explore their commitment, their option for poetry. The proceedings, mostly responses to questions on the poet's stance, affinities and projects, are dedicated to the memory of Gatién Lapointe (founder of the Ecrits des Forges in Trois-Rivières) and Michel Beaulieu. Lapointe's warm humanity remains a powerful force to inspire the cultural life of the Fondation des Forges which acted as host. Joseph Bonenfant starts by comparing the collective *prise de position* of the poets at this National Festival of Poetry with the first of the Rencontres mounted by Jean-Guy Pilon in Sainte-Adèle in 1957 which produced *La Poésie et nous* published by l'Hexagone the following

year. One poet linked the two events — Gaston Miron, whose contribution is sadly not included in *Choisir la poésie*. The tone has changed. There were uncertainties in 1957. Québec was not sure it had a literature. But there was a shared, urgent sense of a need, a thirst for words. The birth of the word was in sight. The time to speak was near and this anticipation could be sensed. Michel Van Schendel (but others too) asserted their faith in the power of poetry to transform the world.

The threat of extinction, uncertainty about the literary genres — Claude Beausoleil attacks the subject head on; Hugues Corriveau says we must seek poetry outside the genre to which we give the name — reluctance to define or to generalize, to affirm even, "les sécheresses de l'intellectualisme." All these make *Choisir la poésie* much less buoyant in tone than the manifesto of the earlier generation. Honesty has replaced stridency; a kind of wayward sincerity, sometimes very debilitating, has replaced the shared vision of l'Hexagone. Not that literary camaraderie is no longer apparent. This remains a very attractive feature of the Québec literary scene. Poems are regularly dedicated, intertextual references abound, flattering mutual quotation, the affirmation of friendship — all this constantly intervenes, even though the genial Beausoleil points to an exaggerated fear of "copinage," poetry as a cosy club. But the value of solitude is affirmed too. "Les groupes m'effraient," writes the Italo-Québécois Antonio D'Alphonso. And André Roy points to the serious consequence of the solidarity of poets — the disaffection of the reader: "Nous avons fait de la littérature pour écrivains, une poésie pour poètes." The media have helped by aiding and abetting this isolation.

A number of poets in their statements say that Québec poetry has to find new readers. Literary theory (G. Genette) has

announced the death of the author, which leads France Théoret to comment: "la poésie s'accommode mal du deuil du poète." Normand de Bellefeuille complains of a "moment d'arrêt." For André Roy, Québec poets are still caught in the formalism of the 1970's. There are no signs of new styles, new voices. Claude Beausoleil is struck by two things — the high quality of current production and its lack of originality. Everywhere there is a gentle, cautious critique of formalism, modernity, new poetry. Julie Stanton feels there is no need any longer for Québec poetry to prove its dexterity. One writer claims that Québec leads the avant-garde and formalist experiment has gone further there than anywhere. One single firm and unequivocal statement comes not unexpectedly from Nicole Brossard: "La prise de parole par les femmes et le recentrement de leur corps, de leurs émotions, et du quotidien dans une approche autre que seulement réaliste ou fictive, autre que seulement poétique, textuelle ou prosaïque a modifié la pratique littéraire québécoise."

Sartre once said that Jules Renard invented the literature of silence. He further defined modern writing as beginning on the other side of "le bavardage," thanks to Mallarmé. Guy Gervais, by the title of his collection *Verbe Silence*, his sixth, commands words to cease their prattle — no formalist intention to distance meaning but a humble confession of the ignorance of man on which mystery flourishes. This mystery feeds the imagination, "seul germe des champs de l'esprit." He expresses no boundless faith in words. "Les mots sont trop lourds sous leur peau éphémère." The poet must remain awake to his prophetic instinct: "quel oracle se glisse dans l'espace de nos chairs?" And poetry is ultimately a collective act: "la vie serait un long message inscrit dans notre fibre / que nous lirions ensemble à

haute voix." But it is silence that promises to be most fertile:

silence, silence, feuille unique d'un automne  
j'entends vibrer ton rire, éternelle douceur  
sous l'aurore de la naissance d'un homme du  
soleil

This silent, gentle, patient tone is a characteristic of Québec eloquence, perfectly matched in that of Jean Royer. Robert Yergeau describes him nicely as one of those who has chosen to "faire confiance a la force tranquille des mots." Pierre Nepveu once wrote, speaking of the Surrealists, that love is "l'espace nécessaire à toute poésie et la poésie . . . le langage même de l'amour." Jean Royer would say "amen" to that:

serait-ce que l'amour  
trompe le temps ouvre l'espace

Qui sait  
tout ce que l'amour contient  
de pensée en nous

These lines, in his *Depuis l'amour*, are worthy of this most gentle friend of poets who sprinkles his verse with the names of fellow writers, from Milton to Marie Uguay, from Camus and the Québec artist Pellán to Miron and Michel Beaulieu — "le corps heureux de l'inédit / éclaire la chambre de l'amour" — at once an ontology, a manifesto, a statement of faith, an option on poetry. "Par la poésie je réapprends que nous sommes les amoureux de la présence," writes Royer in *Choisir la poésie*.

Gilbert Langevin lists 24 previous publications, including a Governor General's Award-winning *Mon refuge est un volcan* in 1978. *Comme un lexique des abîmes* belongs to the same uneasy, disturbing language, threatened by the *abîme* of the title. Langevin's verse is full of quirky puns and neologisms, some laughable — *poésie* makes us squirm — full of ellipsis and verbal surprises. Langevin yearns for "la naissance d'une parousie remplie de racines communicantes," for peace and

"une voix amie" but "les mots mangent la phrase," we await the click of the "minuterie de la mort" with a "mentalité d'hécatombe." The poet, given the name Triste, "s'écorche le sourire en écrasant son âme" in this poetry of self-laceration. "Un témoin, un créateur capital" (Francois Ricard), no doubt, but an uncomfortable one.

The last two collections are both published by the Editions Triptyque, elegant, slim volumes prepared with great respect. And it is the word which is the focus of Jean Chapdelaine Gagnon's poetry of the problematics of writing. The canvas and the blank page are images of the challenge confronting the artist. The poet nags obsessively at words which haunt him. The second section is a modern funeral ode, "dans l'orbe des ombres." The first three sections are all dedicated to absent artists, one of them Michel Beaulieu whose presence is still everywhere. The poetry here is very different from Beaulieu's calm, evenly-paced meditation on life. Here, "la moindre parole semble un cri."

With Robert Giroux, we enter an altogether wider verbal universe. Jean Royer's eclectic writing is full of extratextual literary reference, but with Giroux it is by discrete quotation, of Rimbaud and Apollinaire most notably. Other arts are invoked, music especially, and the poems are accompanied by detail from Hieronymus Bosch's *Garden of delights*. The first sequence has West Africa as its background in precious verse resonant with the names of African musical instruments and *danses*. The collection ends with the elaborate trans-media metaphor of the long-playing record warning against "ce qui continue de tourner sans aucune imagination." Rare words, alliterative word-play, clashing sonorities, humour—the poet is threatened at one point by the "avancées furieuses" of "la torpeur."

Poetry for poets this may be, under-sold, even less read, over-subsidized but under-funded, self-indulgent and self-congratulatory perhaps; nevertheless these poets command our patient, humble attention. In an age of slogans, media-babble, information saturation and the hyperbole of publicity, the poet as ecologist of our verbal habitat and curator of our word bank is the servant of us all.

CEDRIC MAY

## TERRITORY

ALICIA SUSKIN OSTRIKER, *Stealing the Language: The Emergence of Women's Poetry in America*. Beacon, \$19.95.

ALICIA OSTRIKER, *The Imaginary Lover*. Univ. of Pittsburgh Press, n.p.

BARBARA CAREY, *Undressing the Dark*. Quarry, n.p.

IT WOULD HAVE BEEN easy for a pioneering study of women's poetry in America to give us the illusion of a comprehensive survey by assessing only a handful of the most established poets: Emily Dickinson, H. D., Sylvia Plath, Andrienne Rich, either Denise Levertov or Anne Sexton, plus one token black poet, perhaps Gwendolyn Brooks, or Audrey Lorde, or Nikki Giovanni, or Lucille Clifton. Then, for backup, brief references to several of the most accessible anthologies: *Rising Tides*, *No More Masks!*, *The World Split Open*, and *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings of Radical Women of Color*. But Ostriker's scholarship is not confined to an "elite" handful of the most recognized women poets: her monumental survey assesses, in significant detail, a multitude of nationally visible and emerging poets, which include, in the early part of the alphabet, not only those named elsewhere in this review, but also Alta, Elizabeth Bishop, Louise Bogan, Diane Di Prima, Kathleen Fraser, Judy Grahn, Susan Griffin, Erica Jong, June Jordan, Carolyn

Kizer, Maxine Kumin. As even this abbreviated list indicates, Ostriker's scholarship represents poets from both coasts; from divers classes, colours, and sexual preferences; from varying poetics and politics; from feminist and small presses along with the more established. Even the powerful mother sequence of Judith Hemschemeyer's then-unpublished third book, *The Ride Home*, is discussed — and this the year before *The Ride Home* won the national Associated Writing Programs Award in poetry.

Ostriker's conclusions are thus not narrowly-based rhetoric, but authoritatively grounded in the evidence she presents to show that the post-1960 renaissance in American women's poetry is "a literary movement comparable to romanticism and modernism," "a woman's equivalent of what Walt Whitman meant when he said he heard America singing in varied voices mysteriously united"; that this poetry unprecedentedly "illuminates the condition of women and therefore of humanity"; and that as poetry it is exciting enough "not merely to be accepted into the literary mainstream but to influence the stream's course."

Working inductively, from a seemingly exhaustive knowledge of the field, Ostriker defines the motifs of American women's poetry: its focus on female marginality and divided selves; its celebrations of women's bodies and of the natural world; its anger and violence as critiques of gender polarization, war, and hierarchies; its intimate erotics and communal "dream of a common language" (Adrienne Rich); its revisionist mythology.

Margaret Atwood is rightly included as one of the thirty or so poets assessed in detail; Atwood's poetry has been, since 1973, highly influential among U.S. readers. *Power Politics*, for example, is assessed along with Diane Wakoski's *George Washington Poems* and Anne Sexton's

"Jesus Papers" as one of three powerful but ultimately entrapped critiques of gender-polarized patterns. Atwood's "This Is a Photograph of Me" — which, incidentally, was first published in the United States, in *Kayak* — is read as an ironic version of Whitman's "'look for me under your bootsoles,'" and as part of an invisible woman tradition which Ostriker has traced back to Anne Bradstreet's compelled modesty and Emily Dickinson's duplicitous "I'm Nobody!" In contemporary women's poetry, as Ostriker shows, "Photograph" belongs with Joyce Carol Oates' *Invisible Woman*, Marge Piercy's radical intellectual "in the men's room(s)," Robin Morgan's institutionalized "Invisible Woman," and others, which draw on and recast Eliot's Prufrock and Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*.

Here and elsewhere, Ostriker's conclusions are backed by footnotes that map anthologies and articles yet unmade: after "Photograph's" invisible woman, for example, come discussions and footnote-catalogues of poems of muteness, of the dissolving self, of the self as monster, of split- and multiple-identities. The analysis of motherhood motifs is backed by ten footnote-catalogues; the historic overview of women's myth-poems, by pre- and post-1960 catalogues of works from sixty-five poets. Though some infelicities of rhetoric occur, Ostriker has given us a monumental survey, analysis, and legitimizing of women's poetry: this is a germinal book, and will be a hard act to follow.

Ostriker's seventh book of poetry, *The Imaginary Lover*, has just won the 1986 William Carlos Williams Award of the Poetry Society of America; like Barbara Carey's impressive first book, *Undressing the Dark*, which inaugurates Quarry Press's New Canadian Poets Series, *Imaginary* is really a double book, divided into sections which read like chapbooks, or survivors of longer manuscripts. Os-

triker's back cover speaks of feminist consciousness, Carey's of a seemingly-synonymous post-feminism; both poets articulate a feminist humanism which includes the global, the local, the familial and the female as essential parts of the human condition. In both books, the familial poems are very strong: Ostriker revenant-father "Meeting the Dead" and her outspoken love poems for a grown daughter ("Having lost you, I attract substitutes"); Carey's parental poems, especially the loving portrait of the aging "mr. fix it," alone in the basement, "using your life / like a power / tool, motor cut / caustic blue / sparks dying / on the pocked floor."

In both books the familial poems are a minority; the worldly poems, spoken authoritatively by women who are part of the world, predominate. Perhaps the strongest of those in Ostriker is the courageous and compassionate Holocaust "Poem Beginning"; in Carey, the newsreel politics of "When love isn't possible." Though both poets name the horrors of a world that is manifestly wounded, dancing and burning with hatreds, a world where precipitation means, in official words, "'an average of only / four bombs a day'" on one small country, yet both poets move *through* these horrors to responsibility, courage and compassion: even though, as Ostriker points out, we cannot know before the crucial day "Who among us will risk the fat that clings / Sweetly to our own bones"; and even though, as Carey reminds us, we too, in the vengeful post-coup crowd we watch on newsreels, would feel quite small and quite surrounded.

JUDITH MCCOMBS



## PENSER LA MORT

MICHEL CLÉMENT, *Nekuia ou le chant des morts*. Triptyque, n.p.

DENISE DESAUTELS, *Un livre de Kafka à la main* suivi de *la Blessure*. Éditions du Noroît, n.p.

FRANCE LACHAINE, *Travail au noir*. Éditions du Noroît, n.p.

WERNER LAMBERSY, *Noces noires*, la Table Rase/Éditions du Noroît, n.p.

QUE JE SOIS d'accord ou non avec l'incipit de Franz Rosenzweig (1887-1929) dans *l'Étoile de la Rédemption* (1921) — "La mort, la crainte de la mort, amorce toute connaissance du Tout" — il y a un fait inéluctable c'est qu'à mesure que je vis-vieillis j'approche de la mort mienne, que cette mort, quoi que j'en dise, m'étreint, qu'elle ne peut être qu'une contre-vie tant que j'ai l'appétit de vivre. Le hasard a apporté sur ma table de travail quatre livres de poèmes qui nomment la mort; peut-être le poème est-il la forme qui donne le plus à sentir la mort parce qu'il se situe la plupart du temps dans l'instant, le fragment, l'aléatoire. Il ne faut pas se surprendre si les lecteurs/les lectrices de poèmes sont rares: qui est prêt à faire face à sa mort — la mort de l'autre ne peut que me renvoyer à la mienne. Sans doute ne se met-on à penser à elle que lorsque les autres autour de nous commencent à être brûlés — ce sont les parents puis les amis qui ont votre âge, alors votre tour approche: votre chair est sur le versant d'ombre même si votre désir rêve toujours de soleil. Peut-on penser la mort à partir des mots qu'on lit dans des livres de poèmes.

Michel Clément dans *Nekuia ou le chant des morts* en cent neuf fragments faits de vers libres très courts décrit la décomposition des corps:

des corps bistrés  
semblant de parcelles  
entre un dos camphre  
et les reste  
de l'ouvert

ce craquement complet  
sinistre  
ce val faux  
gorgé de décombres.

Toute l'entreprise de l'écrivain paraît un exorcisme: nommer le corps, l'ouvrir, compter ses blessures, sentir son urine, voir le pus, le sang, la vomissure, les peaux, les baves, pour arriver à cette petite phrase qui fonctionne comme une dénégation: "quoi de plus banal que ce corps / inerte." Ce corps inerte n'est pas banal, sa décomposition est extrêmement vive: elle ne se laisse pas dire dans des phrases rassurantes, il n'y a que ces petits tas de noms qui montrent bien que l'oeil voit autre chose que ce qu'il voit, et que cela il n'y a que le blanc qui le nomme. Michel Clément aurait-il dû suivre le conseil de Tirésias à Ulysse qu'il place en exergue à son livre: "Pourquoi donc, malheureux, abandonner ainsi la clarté du soleil et venir voir les morts en ce lieu sans douceur?" Pourquoi préférer la morgue aux rues ensoleillées, décrire la chimie des corps se défaisant au lieu d'êtreindre les êtres aimés. La contemplation de l'horreur détruit-elle l'horreur.

France Lachaise (1956- ) dans *Travail au noir* connaît bien la blessure et la joie de "l'étreinte inoubliable" du corps de l'autre. Avec ses dessins et ses poèmes elle tente d'inventer tout un monde marin "où l'état de poussière n'existe même pas." Un être dit son envie de la vie, sa résistance, sa lutte pour se laver des blessures du monde, sa naissance par l'eau; elle met dans sa bouche ces mots d'Anaïs Nin: "J'appartiens, en effet, à la race de ces gens qui voient toutes les choses à travers un rideau de mer, et mes yeux sont couleur d'eau." Les textes de France Lachaise sont comme des lueurs sur la page; ici encore pas d'articulation forte du discours, plutôt des bribes de phrases qui remontent à la surface. Une rebelle cherche à démêler sa vie, rêve d'accalmie, de réconciliation, cherche sa voix.

"La mort indécemment insistait" dit Denise Desautels. Dans *Un livre de Kafka à la main* suivi de *la Blessure* on retrouve l'écriture feutrée de *la Promeneuse et l'oiseau*. La perte, la blessure, la tristesse insistent: "Un jour, il ne m'a plus été possible de lever la main ni de parler avec légèreté. . . . Ce que je vois maintenant n'a plus de nom dans aucune langue: une enfant se perd dans l'anecdote." L'anecdote est un souvenir d'enfance qui revient par une photographie de 1950 où apparaissent dans un parc deux petites filles et leurs mères: une petite fille a cinq ans et son père vient de mourir, on chuchote autour d'elle la mort du père, on dit les paroles de circonstance. Voilà la blessure; une petite fille est orpheline: "Elle n'a plus de père." Toute la prose lisse et liante de Denise Desautels brode autour de cette blessure, répète sa perte; la phrase est tranquille, pas de cri même si le cri est nommé, la phrase utilise sagement les mots même s'il n'y a "plus de nom dans aucune langue" pour nommer ce qui est arrivé. Pourquoi Kafka dans le titre: "Un livre de Kafka à la main, je me jette dans la confusion, la répétition, l'évidence; je piétine d'effroi et agite mon regard circulaire parce que je ne peux faire autrement, / au risque de passer pour folle"; on ne saura pas quel est ce livre — je me plais à imaginer que ce sont les *Préparatifs de noce à la campagne* où l'on trouve l'insoutenable "Lettre au père" — et je ne vois pas pourquoi l'auteure a tenu à masquer le titre qui seul convenait, *la Blessure*, par un autre qui est trompeur; effet voulu de modernité alors que son écriture est celle de la transparence classique. Le livre matériellement est beau: papier glacé, jaquette rose sombre, photographies invitant au rêve de Jocelyne Allouche — têtes d'arbres ou sculptures — photo de l'auteure sur le rabat — visage et cheveux d'Amérindienne, élégance de la main qui tient une cigarette, il me semble que j'entends sa voix grave.

Le livre *Noces noires* du poète wallon Werner Lambersy (1942- ) avec une encre de Célyne Fortin est ainsi nommé parce qu'il pense la mort de sa mère: au verso de l'encre qui représente une tête dont le visage sans nez ni bouche n'a à la place des yeux que deux formes noires irrégulières, il y a cette indication qui ressemble à celle que l'on trouve sur les stèles que ne se paient pas de mots: "Juliette Rosillon 1916-1983." Tout le travail du poète est dit à la première page: "On prend des images. On regarde l'inconnue rejoindre l'inconnu. On répète l'opération jusqu'à n'être plus concerné." Ce livre par ce ton sobre est celui qui m'a le plus ému, ce ton fait sa justesse: pas de pose ici comme chez Michel Clément ou Denise Desautels, quelque chose comme des notes d'accompagnement où morte et vivant, convoi funèbre, présence de la nature, bruits de la ville, se mêlent. C'est un beau livre par l'esprit, qu'il ne soit pas beau matériellement me paraît précieux: petit livre de quarante pages non paginées, au papier un peu rêche, à la jaquette fade, presque ratée, avec au dos cette phrase du poète: "Ce livre est la seule tombe qu'aura jamais ma mère." Une centaine de notes de deux à quatre lignes à raison de quatre par page — chaque fragment comme le corps de la gisante qui se déplace. Lien entre les morts et les vivants: "Dans cet instant sauvage et près des larmes, quand c'est trop fort et que peut-être les morts sont morts de ça. . ." Malaise des vivants: "Près du cercueil, gestes maladroits, mal adaptés. On n'a pas pris les mesures: espace inconnu de la mort." Disparition de la morte: "Il n'y aura pas d'autre pierre tombale que le regard, soudain, opaque et fixe." Comment penser la disparition de celle qui a donné naissance: "Il faut manger sa mère, l'avalier, lui offrir à son tour enfin le passage. . . Les mots ne serviront qu'à dire mon étonnement devant cela."

PHILIPPE HAECK

## DIRTY/BEAUTIFUL

MARK ANTHONY JARMAN, *Killing the Swan*. Porcépic, \$7.95.

ROGER MOORE, *Broken Ghosts*. Fiddlehead/Goose Lane, \$7.95.

DAVID DONNELL, *The Natural History of Water*. Shaw Street Press, \$50.00/25.00.

JAMES WHITTALL, *Troubles in Paradise*. Noovo Masheen Press, \$2.00.

I WANTED VERY much to like *Killing the Swan* by Mark Anthony Jarman. He writes a kind of "dirty realism," choosing for investigation bars, bus depots (Is there any place on this continent more depressing?) and other urban sites not generally on Gray Line Sightseeing Tour itineraries. I guess "seedy" is the word I'm really looking for: he gives us the seedy, other-side-of-the-tracks, hidden-underbelly-of-a-city world. In a country like ours where most of the poets tend to be academic — whether conservative or radical — it's good that there are still people like Jarman to pay attention to the poor, the oppressed, the unemployable.

Jarman doesn't stop there; in fact, he rarely sits still. We move from the city as if on a train to see mountains, prairies. Jarman likes to describe scenes in quick, sharp, richly metaphorical brushstrokes, and we feel like we really are on rails as these sights go shooting by. He does not choose the easy Romantic route, however, offering nature in a teaspoon as a kind of antidote for urban decay. Jarman remains more interested in the hard side of life and writes about it — in his selection of metaphors — with a certain hard violence. This is not poetry for the queasy.

But there is also bad news. Too often the dirty realism is supplanted by a kind of dirty surrealism; by this I mean you know the poem is set in a bar but you don't know what the poem is about. *Killing the Swan* is divided into three sections, but the poems from these sections are easily interchangeable. After a while you get

the feeling that you could take all of these lines, put them in a bag and shake them up, and pull out any number to make a Jarman poem. Jarman needs to exercise more control over his imaginative metaphors; he also needs to let up more often on the unremitting pounding lines and allow a little more tenderness, if only by way of a change-up, as in the first two lines of "Wizard Lake": "Frail pier stepping into the lake / Like a lady with her skirt pulled up." He might also enlarge the range of his content. Okay, so he travels in a subculture of booze and blues; over the course of a book that can become rather precious, at times almost immature. I want to see him write more simply about the things that really move him. See early Newlove. If Harman can get his exploding talent under control, he could well carve himself a niche in the literature of this country.

Roger Moore in *Broken Ghosts* does not excite like Harman. His technique is conservative, his interests quite civilized. You get the feeling that these lines did not come easily or, if they did, that Moore immediately cooled them down:

The trees, the breeze,  
The distant Atlantic combat the sun,  
Cooling its ardour. At night the heat drops  
off.  
Supper time soon. My stomach growls.  
Tonight  
I will eat alone and drink to absent friends.

There is discipline and craft here. There is also a halting intelligence in every poem. Moore does more than report; he considers:

Conversation  
Struggles, lags: rheumatic words in clumsy  
Arhythmic jerks lend unwelcome forms to  
Our straggling thoughts.

This intelligence occasionally leads to preaching, as in "War Games," but Moore's biggest problem in this collection is the very discipline that often allows individual poems to succeed. As the poems

wear on, the emotional restraint becomes relentless; the pace, unfortunately, sleepy.

David Donnell's *The Natural History of Water*, published in a limited edition of 175 copies by Shaw Street Press, is a beautiful thing to have on your shelf for its appearance (printed letterpress in Optima and Stencil types on acid-free paper and sewn into paper covers) but regrettably its content is very slight. The statement, "There's a certain amount of water in every chicken," leads off David Donnell's 105 entries in what the publishers call a prose poem "on water's place in the world of men and things." I myself would have cut that first entry and at least 25 others equally unsuccessful in their cleverness. Donnell, however, can be very witty indeed as in entry 29 ("Blood is largely inside people, except during wartime . . .") and in the first of five "Miscellaneous" entries tacked on at the end in a mockery of the pseudo-academic tone of the piece ("Moby Dick is not a great American novel so much as it is a great Eastern Seaboard novel").

The work needs serious editing and also could be improved if its randomness were given some direction. The personification of water, successful in entry 35 ("Water thinks of the entire plumbing industry of North America as a series of signals"), is at times picked up, and then dropped. Donnell is brilliant in a number of the longer entries, but these appear only sporadically. Entry 36 on American culture is a *tour de force*; this is an excerpt from entry 98:

think of the waterfalls in Goering's diseased  
gangster fat brain, think of the tiny red  
Niagara hemorrhaging beyond belief: now  
think of these monsters, after the fall of  
Europe, being transported by water in the  
dead of the night across the Atlantic; think  
of the cold implacable female vibratory  
shudders of that great clean ocean at the  
thought of what was being transported  
across its back; transported and deposited,  
disembarked, in some small South American  
port, while the sweet song-birds of James

Wright's Ohio were telling the cows to go to sleep and the neon signs of the North were turning Times Square into an arena for Pepsi and Chrysler.

Why couldn't we have more of these?

*Troubles in Paradise* by James Whittall is the first publication in the Noovo Masheen Chapbook Series, a series "designed to give new and established poets an opportunity to publish satiric or ironic work which other presses might find 'unpublishable.'" I love the idea, and I have enjoyed very much many of the pieces in the scandalously disrespectful *Noovo Masheen*, a magazine of satire edited by Whittall and Frank Manley at the University of Ottawa. One of the more obvious characteristics of Canadian Literature has always been its satire and irony; we like to lean back and watch the rest of the world make fools of themselves. As Whittall writes in "The Witness":

All day he sits at his window.  
When life starts  
he picks up his phone.

Even for a chapbook, however, *Troubles in Paradise* is too thin. Less than half of the fourteen poems are successful, although when Whittall is good he is sometimes *very* good. Nevertheless, there is good reason why other presses might find many of these "unpublishable."

DAVID O'ROURKE

## L'AGONIE

JACQUES BRAULT, *Death-Watch*, trans. David Lobdell. Anansi, \$9.95.

FRED BONNIE, *Wide Load*. Oberon, \$12.95.

WELL KNOWN IN QUEBEC as a major poet, Jacques Brault in *Agonie* (Boréal Express, 1984) for the first time turned his talents to the novel, or perhaps more accurately to the novella. In bringing this winner of the Governor General's award for fiction to English-speaking readers as *Death-*

*Watch*, David Lobdell has done those readers a considerable favour. As suggested by both its French and English titles, this book is not a light amusement, a "good read" in the popular sense of that cliché. It is, however, good reading for those who enjoy the philosophical novel in the tradition of Malraux and Sartre. Imbued with many of the hallmarks of theme and characterization of the "typical" existential novel, *Death-Watch* is distinguished by its technical sophistication and lyrical power.

One recognizes the nearly-stock qualities of the existential "hero" in Brault's central character, a nondescript loner whose undistinguished academic career has led him to being shunted into the dead-end task of teaching a course in scholastic philosophy. He is the aloof, isolated wonderer with a troubled, indistinct identity and a persistent death wish, whom readers of European existential fiction have met before, though perhaps more the object of ridicule and pity than most such characters. The professor, "a little grey man" we never know by name, is afflicted with a life-long "melancholia" from which he is redeemed only briefly by two encounters with love. Brault uses this isolated character, who is sufficiently amorphous for the reader to see him as everyman, to explore the human response to an uncaring universe in which humankind is condemned to isolation, anguish and ultimate "homelessness" and death: a world from which meaning can only be wrested by a subjective act of self-definition, and the closely linked act of deciding how to regard one's death. Indeed, the French title *Agonie*, the "moment de la vie que précède immédiatement la mort," perhaps more than *Death-Watch*, suggests that all of life is just such a moment, and choosing our death is our ultimate preoccupation.

These are grimly familiar themes for the existentialist, but Brault explores them

with a remarkable skill and grace that not only lends the book multi-faceted depth, but also turns it into a moving evocation of the human condition without the brittleness that sometimes limits both the appeal and the power of existential fiction. By using as a first-person narrator an aging and discontented former student through whose recollections, current observations and interpretations we see the lonely professor struggling to come to terms with his life/death, Brault is able to illustrate the fineness of the distinction between observer and observed, fact and fiction, self and other. The narrator, with his now-tender, now-callous rendering of the professor's existence, becomes his double, his own agony mirroring and amplifying that of the professor.

This narrative device also enables Brault to infuse the novel with a rich intertextuality. Perhaps not surprisingly, the novel's structure is based on a poem — an enigmatic lyric about possible approaches to death as embodied in the lark, the quail and the canary. To solve the riddle of this poem becomes not only the object of the professor's course in scholastic philosophy, but also the obsession which fuels the narrator's desire to unmask the professor. The poem is also the reader's key to unlocking the several meanings of the novel. Brault also includes other texts — the professor's diary, the gossip of colleagues and students, and, of course, the recollections and comments of the narrator. Together these form the ambiguous, tortured narrative of the unnamed professor's anguished journey.

It may be reading too much into this complex text to see in it as an apocalyptic comment on Quebec for the quiet revolution: "l'agonie d'un régime politique." One must surely see it, however, as the delicately wrought lament of a *Tireseas*.

Fred Bonnie's latest collection of short stories is noteworthy for the way it combines "wide" variety with satisfying co-

herence. Each of the volume's six stories stands alone, yet all share sufficient common elements to constitute collectively a recognizable psycho-social landscape. Though one of the stories, "In Another Language," with its double narrator and its, at times, surrealistic quality, is mildly experimental, the volume is united by its realism. Some readers may view this as a flaw; others, like myself, may find it refreshingly unaffected and effective.

Though Bonnie's goal is not a *passé* regional verisimilitude, he nevertheless succeeds in evoking both region (particularly the American South and Border South) and class (particularly the lower-middle and working class). He does this largely through dialogue and subtle characterization rather than description, as for example in "Wide Load, Where Are You?," which thrusts the reader into the world of Melvin, the long-distance trucker from Memphis, and in "The Bulk Tour," in which he evokes the rhythms and mythology of the American South through the embellished monologues of Harland Musgrove, an elderly tour guide at a southern historic sight who has his own sense of history. "Mistrial" also evokes region through dialogue, as well as through tapping the abundant American lore that casts southern hill people as grotesques, symbolic of the dark side of the American pastoral idyll.

A subtle, but nevertheless recognizable American sensibility also unites these stories. For example, the ambivalence toward women and their "civilizing" influence that runs so deeply through American literature informs the title story and is a significant feature in most of the others. Melvin, with his yen to travel the highway and to escape his wife's talk of babies, her insistence on monogamy, and her penchant for cleanliness is a thinly veiled Tom Sawyer. One also meets in these stories several versions of that other, closely related character so ubiquitous in

American fiction — the loner in search of authenticity in a phoney world. In "Name the General," Private Jacobs' attempt to find peace of mind and the genuine while running an ad campaign for a careerist general, is disturbingly suggestive of a slightly older Holden Caulfield forced to grapple with the moral ambiguities of Vietnam.

Bonnie's stories are also preoccupied with other facets of the theme of individualism: with the sheer will to survive in an "Eat or get et" world of violence and neglect, as exemplified by the boy Jesse in "Mistrial"; with the debilitatingly fierce desire of the little man to achieve recognition for his unique talents in "Take a Seat Not a Solo"; with the desire to impose romance, colour and adventure on a world in danger of succumbing to standardization as exemplified by the creative tour guide in "The Bulk Tour." This desire to weave colour, romance and adventure underlies, in part, the impulse to storytelling and its art. *Wide Load* shows Bonnie to be a storyteller able to defeat both silence and uniformity with considerable skill.

TAMARA J. PALMER

## ELEPHANT & DELIRIUM

PENNY KEMP, *Some Talk Magic*. Ergo Productions, \$7.95.

PATIENCE WHEATLEY, *A Hinge of Spring*. Fiddlehead/Goose Lane, \$7.95.

YVONNE TRAINER, *Everything Happens at Once*. Fiddlehead/Goose Lane, \$7.95.

CLAUDIA E. LAPP, *Cloud Gate*. The Muses' Company, n.p.

JUDITH KRAUSE, *What We Bring Home*. Co-teau Books, \$7.00.

DIANA HARTOG, *Candy from Strangers*. Coach House, \$7.50.

THROUGHOUT HER LIFE Margaret Laurence reminded us that art can be found even in domesticity, that the world is

filled with the grandeur of the minim. In exploring the depths of the ordinary, Laurence exercised an intrinsically poetic sensibility. This same spirit is evident in the work of some of Canada's younger poets, those whose voices fill the little magazines and whose books are published in very limited runs.

In *Some Talk Magic*, for example, Penny Kemp holds the microphone up to nature and in a sequence of untitled poems records the colloquy of a mother and her children (the poet and her own children, as it happens). The result is sound poetry which takes spontaneity to the point of artlessness, but which takes the artless to the point of sentimentality. Kemp's leave-the-tape-running style lends itself mainly to performance, and the book would probably work best on the poetry reading circuit or with one's own kids on a stormy Sunday afternoon:

*Mommy this might sound strange  
but sometimes I think you are  
a different person  
than you are*

And he draws pictures  
of fangs fierce as can be  
wild spaghetti hair arms  
orangoutang long and rounding

In its ease of extemporaneity the verse evokes more open house at the day care than the word habitats of children. As sound poetry it is, in the end, rather unsound.

Two volumes of more conventional verse take the ordinary and expose it for what it is not. In *A Hinge of Spring* Patience Wheatley focuses on sites and scenes, persons and personages: her snapshots of Canada and Europe are vivid. Although the verse itself is uneven, lapsing into such trite observations as "British bombers hurled death from the sky" and "I smelt the odour of antiquity," Wheatley does have a smart comic sense manifesting itself in some rather earthy images, like this one from "Circling":

Marriage is being,  
is being sat on  
by a fat woman  
caught  
in the cleft  
of her buttocks.

Here logic has breadth, to say the least! Yvonne Trainer also celebrates the frivolous, but in *Everything Happens at Once* her main concerns are for the stark simplicity of human experience. (She fittingly dedicates the book to Alden Nowlan.) Two poems stand out. The title sequence meticulously breaks down a common hospital experience into fragments of delirium. As the speaker puts it:

All these people standing around  
like so many lies  
I'd like to crawl deep down  
into these sheets and not come up

In its simplicity the language can accommodate a variety of emotions and interpretations. Taking the ordinary to the other extreme, "The Appearance" presents "the devil walking toward the United States / dragging the prairie behind him like an old sack." But the poem draws to a whimsical end, the speaker confident

... they won't let him through  
not with all that burlap and no papers  
and being a foreigner with a birthplace in  
Hell

Not all those officers  
who walk straight in their stiff blue uniforms  
with their guns at their elbows  
as though they're ready for anything.

This is poetry that delights precisely by deflating pomposity and demeaning authority, poetry with a conscience, finding in the commonplace something uncommonly precious.

A more self-conscious collection, *Cloud Gate* identifies the intimations of permanence open to all who can penetrate the superficial. In tone, the poems are philosophical, in mood oriental. Claudia E.

Lapp sees the world as alive with colour and form, motion and sound. She has tried to capture life's quintessences in verse of perfect simplicity. Virtually all the poems reinforce the connotations of her coined word "indream," most prominent in a section titled "Oneiros." But by also addressing herself to the spirits of "Animus," "Wilderness," and "Cloud Gate," Lapp provides a whole picture of supernal reality. As she observes at the end of the title poem, "any gate may open to anywhere." The collection is impressive for its consistency, but perhaps most admirable are the poet's evocations of yang and yin. In "Wildermann," for example, the speaker admits: "i love a man / with some wildness left in him." In "Waters" she acknowledges

being born  
borne into the life current  
  
out of my mother's belly  
into the world again,  
thank you for bringing me into the  
current,  
mom, and how i miss your eyes, our  
imperfect fleshy connection  
and you, dear spirit, have reached  
the joyous fluidity of the waters  
  
i am healing

So disingenuous is this verse, teetering between zen and endlessness, that the reader can only nod in acquiescence.

The word that best describes Judith Krause's *What We Bring Home* is *elephantine*, such is the poet's fascination with everything from "*elephantitis genitalia*" to "the elephant man," from "elephant grass" to "Elephant Mountain." Although the collection's geographic focus is Africa, its elephant motif appears mainly on a continent of imagination. The poet's interests lie less in elephants as creatures than in our perception of the elephants of the mind. In this regard, Krause demonstrates a clear eye for character ("Under a couple of the sundresses / breasts hang shapeless / and you can

almost hear thighs / rubbing against themselves") and a keen ear for dialogue:

look man    we were just  
driving down the road  
and I check the gauge  
& nod at Ricky and  
say    hey man  
         we need gas

The verse is refreshingly upbeat, whether she considers the mundane or the mysterious.

Undoubtedly the most technically and thematically daring of these six poets is Diana Hartog, whose poetic line nudges the paragraphic and whose stanzas jiggle with ideas. *Candy from Strangers* develops an equation of surreality-over-reality, each of its poems inviting the reader to perceive being and actuality in a new way. Rather than concentrating on dream, which seems to defy corroboration, Hartog fixes on imagination and intuition, which she feels prove themselves over time. In "Bird's Eye View," for example, she begins conventionally enough: "Ah! my dream from last night: I was flying, over the trees, over the houses." But soon fancy reverts to fact as the speaker explains how under the byline "Robin" her mother wrote a newspaper column called "Bird's Eye View," and how she came to read it on the radio. One soon recognizes that a woman suspended over a village and on the air is indeed "flying" in reality as well as vision. One might well dismiss poetry of this kind as metaphysical revival, but Hartog's interests appear more subtle. Her intention seems to be to trace the material dimensions of language and humankind, fashioning a poetic of variously sober, absurd, and facetious animism.

Ranging from sound poetry in *Some Talk Magic* to prose poems in *Candy from Strangers*, from the elephants of *What We Bring Home* to the delirium of *Everything Happens at Once*, these collections point to the spectrum of free

verse open to poets today. One suspects, however, that Eliot's dictum that no verse is free for the man who wants to do a good job may still apply, even in special Canadian circumstances.

PAUL MATTHEW ST. PIERRE

## CAPE BRETON

JOE NEIL MACNEIL, *Tales Until Dawn: the World of a Cape Breton Gaelic Story-Teller*, trans. and ed. John Shaw, McGill-Queen's, \$15.95.

BRIAN TENNYSON, ed., *Impressions of Cape Breton*. Univ. Coll. of Cape Breton Press, \$14.50.

JOE NEIL MACNEIL (b. 1908) has acted as the transmitter of tales themselves passed down from remote Scottish Gaelic origins in the relatively recently closed and self-sufficient cultural world of Cape Breton. The purpose of a collection such as *Tales Until Dawn* is to compensate for the waning of the oral tradition in preserving what has survived for posterity: in this effort MacNeil warmly acknowledges the essential aid of his scholarly translator and editor, John Shaw. The tales are, where possible, grouped as deriving from families of reciters — the Kennedys, the MacLeans, the MacIsaacs — whose "performing gifts" were "a part of the shared cultural store, rather than the exclusive property of gifted individuals." Wonder-tales and hero-tales form the bulk of the longer pieces, but they "have suffered erosion here, as they evidently also have in Ireland." In print much is lost anyway — gesture, speech-inflections — but several of the Fenian tales here are fragmentary or opaque because corrupt, and contribute, at best, their mite or variant to the already rich store of Gaelic folklore published elsewhere. A modern variant of the hunting "tall tale," Angus MacIsaac's "Trip to the Moon" can be merely fatuous, scarcely worth preserving. Overall,

this collection's folk- and fairy-tale remnants hold less appeal than its few pages of condensed gnomic wisdom, of "Proverbs" and "Expressions": "The hand that gives is the one that receives," "Pity the person who will do for evil whatever he can." Signs, superstitions and premonitions are also pursued, and there is much incidental detail, such as of deft dancers "snuffing out the candle with their heels," to conjure up vivid glimpses of a communal life now past. There is an excellent bibliography, together with helpful annotations and definitions of folktale type.

Brian Tennyson's *Impressions of Cape Breton* presents, by contrast, the travellers' perspectives of twenty-eight visitors or temporary sojourners from 1634 to 1942. Many of these are by well-meaning, superior or patronizing outsiders concerned with the island's "backwardness," its disadvantageous relation to mainland Nova Scotia, its want of — and need of — "civilisation" and material improvement. Inevitably, these travellers reflect the predispositions of their time, which the reader may often fall into measuring against those of his own. Reactions to Louisbourg well illustrate this: for T. C. Haliburton (1829) and B. W. A. Sleigh (1853) its ruins are agreeably "melancholy" and "desolate"; to John Bourinot an enticing "perfect solitude" (1867); by 1935 Morris Longstreth can still respond to "this place of mist and memories" though now some excavations are going on, uncovering relics for "the little museum." One day, he foresees, Louisbourg "will lure travellers in greater stream up the length of the Province," but he could not foresee the Fort's gargantuan reconstruction, its historical charades and mimicry of that past he and his predecessors were content to visit only in the imagination. An enduring contrast between the socio-economic view and the sentimental outsider's, shaped by his or her own emotional needs, is well pointed by the

two closing extracts: Frederick Edwards (1941) calls for "more diversified and independent industries" while Dorothy Duncan, nostalgic for a preindustrial past preserved in Cape Breton amber and proposing "a refuge for anyone in need of the solace of tranquillity," dotes upon the Noble Gaelic Savage (the Micmacs having enjoyed no such distinction since Julien Perrault, 1634) who courteously dug her cesspit.

It must be said that the liveliest, best-written piece — despite what Tennyson fairly calls its "arrogance" — is Lieutenant B. W. A. Sleigh's caustic account of his reception by the provincially genteel of Sydney; it reminds one of Goldsmith and Sheridan, but the sharp humour is, in the end, softened by a warm tribute to the "unbounded kindness" Sleigh and his wife enjoyed once they were settled in. Most of the pieces are at least worth their place, though the brief extracts from William Dyott's *Diary* are trivial and that from John Inglis, though perhaps indeed "valuable and memorable" as a pastoral record of its time (1843), is flat and pedestrian in the telling.

MICHAEL THORPE

## RADIO DAYS

HOWARD FINK & JOHN JACKSON, eds., *All the Bright Company: Radio Drama Produced by Andrew Allan*. Quarry Press/CBC Enterprises, \$29.95/19.95.

MOST OF US TREAT the Stratford and Shaw Festivals as if they were instituted at Confederation, fully developed and without predecessors. Very few theatre-goers know, for instance, that CBC radio provided Stratford with its first Canadian actors and actresses, and the Shaw with one of its founders, Andrew Allan. Even fewer know that the very words "professionalism" and "nationalism" were once synonymous with a radio drama series

and its producer — CBC *Stage* and Andrew Allan — or that *Stage* was called Canada's "National Theatre" of the air, and Andrew Allan, the "Sun King," who reigned over the "Golden Age" of radio drama.

With the publication of *All the Bright Company*, Howard Fink and John Jackson call these facts to our attention. In the first of four radio drama anthologies underway (the next three are on CBC producers Esse Ljungh, J. Frank Willis, and Rupert Caplan), Fink and Jackson introduce readers to Andrew Allan: the producer-director of, and occasional writer for, CBC's nationally broadcast radio drama series, *Stage*, which began January 1944. As a producer-director of radio plays, Andrew Allan controlled every facet of his series, from hiring actors to selecting and editing scripts to suggesting the nuances of musical scores. Consequently, his influence on the sound and style of his radio plays creates, as Fink has pointed out, an aesthetic unity quite unusual in the theatre.

*All the Bright Company* collects eleven plays, most produced for *Stage*. The editors chose carefully from the more than four hundred original Canadian works that Allan produced between 1942 and 1955, and then, again, in 1961-62. They include one adaptation as well. Nine of the eleven plays are the longer, one-hour dramas which started after 1947. These plays deal with very domestic — and for this reason, perhaps, perennial — themes. Indeed, of the eleven plays, six deal with families and communities: W. O. Mitchell's *The Devil's Instrument*, with a Hutterite boy in his hypocritical religious community; Lister Sinclair's *Hilda Morgan*, with an unmarried, pregnant young woman and her status-conscious family and friends; Harry Boyle's *The MacDonalds of Oak Valley*, with a father and son conflict over the land and farming; Patricia Joudry's *Mother is Watching*, with

three sisters and the pervasive influence of their now-dead mother; Len Peterson's *Man with a Bucket of Ashes*, with an Abraham-like father who kills his son and horrifies the community; and Joseph Schull's *The Jinker*, with the fatal struggle between two rival seal-hunters in a turn-of-the-century Newfoundland community. The struggle for identity, the tyranny of parental or communal oppression, journeys of exile and integration — there are issues, if not patterns of human behaviour, that are timeless.

The remaining five plays represent the other social, political, and artistic facets of the Allan productions. The two half-hour, pre-*Stage* plays are Andrew Allan's *All the Bright Company* and Fletcher Markle's *Brainstorm Between Opening and Closing Announcements*. The other three plays include *Stage*'s most famous adaptation, Gerald Noxon's reworking of Conrad Aikens' short story, "Mr. Arcularis"; Tommy Tweed's spoof of docudramas, *Full Speed Sideways*; and Reuben Ship's infamous satire on American Senator Joseph McCarthy, *The Investigator*, a play which sparked debate in the House of Commons and many letters to the head of the CBC. These plays not only deal with pertinent issues, but are dramatically interesting. The portrayals of the various family crises are clever and well-paced; their resolutions, powerful and often poignant, especially in Boyle, Sinclair, and Peterson. The word-play of Markle and Tweed, the symbolism of Schull, the devastating satire of Ship, the suggestive characterization of Joudry — all these point to polished and well-constructed work. Less evident from the printed page, but important nonetheless, are the features of the plays unique to radio; the way music and the sound effects create a wide range of artistic techniques (from surrealism to symbolism, expressionism, and realism) and an equally startling range of settings (from heaven to hell to

mountain tops, ships on the prairies, and ice-floes in the Atlantic).

Fink and Jackson make sensible choices in this first anthology, given that we have not had access to the radio play material before. Their purpose, of course, is both to rekindle the interest of those readers who heard the plays over the air, and to spark the interest of younger readers. Even so, the editors have made sacrifices: Hugh Kemp and Alan King, two important and regular contributors, were not included, while W. O. Mitchell, whose radio fame rests on another series, *Jake and the Kid*, was. Conspicuously absent are plays from the *Stage* years 1944 to 1948, the half-hour (and some hour) plays probably more controversial because they were distinctly topical: soldiers fighting in Europe and returning to Canada emotionally and psychologically scarred; the exposes of bigotry and intolerance in post-war Canada; the contemporary examples of self-serving and greedy middle-class, and so on. Perhaps the publication of *All the Bright Company* will generate interest in these other plays, and we will begin to see ourselves through the social criticism of an earlier generation of Canadian dramatists.

JILL TOMASSON GOODWIN

## ANTIQUITY & LANGUAGE

KEITH HENDERSON, *The Restoration: the referendum years*. DC Books, \$14.95.

COLIN RENFREW, *Archaeology and Language: The Puzzle of Indo-European Origins*. Cambridge Univ. Press, \$29.95.

WHAT DO A SHORT first novel by an English Canadian and a scholarly book by a well-published professor of archaeology at Cambridge have in common? In contemporary thought, the concept of time is being re-examined. For those alert to the

postmodern sensibility, lineal time is suspect. The novel satirizes political events in the months just preceding the Quebec referendum. Henderson's novel is one of the first in English to unravel how the debate politicized all aspects of daily life. The 'yes' disparaged the past. Yet an architectural landmark becomes a symbol of the *ancien regime*. Time present, as it were, is validated by the manipulation of time past.

In his work, Colin Renfrew illuminates pre-history. Lineal time may be explained by the development of the written/printed word. Using archaeological evidence not usually consulted to establish language change, Renfrew pushes pre-history further back. The narrative line for *The Restoration* is complex. Political events and personalities are revealed unexpectedly in short episodic chapters. This technique accentuates the personal and political urgency of the sovereignty debate. The characters are allegorical rather than stereotypical. Archetypal symbols — fire and the seasons — are linked with the more social symbols of political upheaval — family break-up and personal disloyalties.

The window into the narrative is the return early in 1980 to Montreal of an anglophone graduate student to continue his funded research on historic buildings. Among the architectural landmarks is one currently owned by a well-established but failing English printing house. His enigmatic and anti-French father is the long-standing company accountant. During a strike by the predominantly francophone workers, the student discovers that some time earlier a deal was struck with a francophone municipal official to avoid designation of the building. Company records also reveal that there were other institutions on the site. He is tempted by offers of a film about the building and a provincial grant to document it in more detail — both from the 'yes.' The student

and the building are pawns in the political hegemony which strains family and personal relations. Yet, the real, i.e., the archaeological past of the building, can be restored only if the 'yes' are successful.

There is vigorous debate about the archaeological evidence appropriate to use in historical linguistics. Renfrew summarizes the shift from language migration to language replacement and demonstrates that the more traditional evidence can be augmented. Renfrew plots archaeological evidence for the adoption and spread of similar and related crops. Residents of the relatively stable settlements based on farming spoke the separate but related Indo-European languages. Renfrew is modest about his claim. More archaeological evidence is needed to give canonic status to his inferences. He has, however, confirmed the direction for the conjunction of broad archaeological data and Indo-European historical linguistics. The origins of this language group can now be set earlier in the pre-historic process of linguistic replacement. A reader of this journal is tempted to also infer an unknown and lost storehouse of oral myths.

SHELAGH LINDSEY

## PRAIRIE LOCUS

ED DYCK, ed., *Saskatchewan Writing*. Saskatchewan Writers Guild, \$14.95.

E. F. DYCK POINTS out that this collection of essays about English poets, dramatists and fiction writers who are also long-time residents of Saskatchewan is intended to serve as an introduction, tracing developments from before the inception of the Saskatchewan Writers Guild (1970) to the recent flourishing interest in drama. Dyck does not attempt to rank art and theory in relationship to each other; rather, his editorial perspective centres on the notion of *prairie*. He comments, "The

new language emphasizes the continuation of absence, the failure of completion." This attention to region, and the rigorous focus on language in a number of the essays serves to illuminate universally accepted artistic merits in works that address themselves to a specific locale. In this way, the collection avoids the cliché of a regional perspective that is "provincial" in the worst sense of that word. By beginning with this local viewpoint, these critics also avoid a pre-defined academic sense of "Literature." They consider the works on their indigenous ground, rather than from a distanced and distorted perspective. Dennis Cooley, who contributed to this collection, discusses the importance of this critical approach extensively in *The Vernacular Muse*.

These essays are revealing and polished (see John Newlove's "How a Man May Reveal Himself," or Laurie Ricou's "Vertical Man/Horizontal World: Man and Landscape in Canadian Prairie Fiction"), but are perhaps too brief. Some papers are both highly creative and humorous, such as Kroetsch's "An Erotics of Space" and "Effing the Ineffable" but are addressed to the prairies in general, and do not focus specifically on Saskatchewan in spite of Dyck's contention in the introduction that the prairie of Saskatchewan is unlike the prairie of other provinces. A number of these papers have been published previously and may disappoint those seeking new viewpoints, but there is a strong argument for the utility of books that collect a range of seminal works on the same topic.

Other essays were commissioned for this collection, but necessarily offer a survey of numerous writers rather than an in-depth analysis. This is the case with Arnason's extensive study on contemporary Saskatchewan fiction which informs succinctly but still generates reader interest. Michelle Heinemann's article offers a balanced analysis of the vigorous

growth of the Saskatchewan Writers Guild. Heinemann discusses funding bodies, conferences, writer-in-residence programs, the Saskatchewan Writers' Colony, and a variety of local publications. Fred Wah's essay, "Contemporary Saskatchewan Poetry," first considers the problem of identifying a "Saskatchewan" writer, then defines and classifies numerous works from the last ten years and locates them in the categories of lyric poetry, vernacular and anecdote, long poem, and prose poem. Wah explains that for now, he is concerned with "apprehending the terrain rather than comprehending it." Wah closes his discussion by pointing to the merits of the contemporary Saskatchewan long poem and prose poem. Diane Bessai's balanced historical perspective on contemporary drama provides an insightful scan of "Who's Who" in Saskatchewan theatre. The book closes with a comprehensive bibliography. *Saskatchewan Writing* is an important mapping of the literary ground of Saskatchewan. It serves the same function for Saskatchewan that earlier essays such as Wynne Francis' "The Expanding Spectrum" (*Canadian Literature* 57), and books such as Frank Davey's *From There to Here* have for Canada.

KARL JIRGENS

## FEMINIST

GAIL CHESTER & SIGRID NIELSEN, eds., *In Other Words: Writing as a Feminist*. Hutchinson Education, \$15.50.

NANCY BAUER, *The Opening Eye*. Oberon, n.p.

*In Other Words* is an interesting collection of reflections on feminist writing. The volume is the outcome of the Edinburgh Feminist Writers' Conference and brings together feminist writers of all kinds: novelists, dramatists, poets, journalists, political agitators, writers of classroom textbooks, authors of erotica, trans-

lators and editors. The authors come from all types of social backgrounds, crossing boundaries of class, race, sexual orientation, age, able-bodied and disabled, published and previously unpublished, feminist activists and those just emerging from isolation in the home. This diversity of experience has resulted in a volume with something to say about the writing process, especially the difficult task of making women visible in all of their contexts, for women in almost any situation.

The book is organized in four parts: what women write; taking control; writing about ourselves; and support and communication. The articles in the collection are uneven, but there are good pieces in each section. A major theme is one common to most feminist writing, the need to end the silences that have surrounded women's lives in a society where images and historiography have, until very recently, been entirely constructed by men. Many of the authors — for example, Caroline Halliday ("I tell my 3 year old she's real . . . : writing lesbian-feminist children's books"), Pearlle McNeill ("Writing for my mother"), Pratibha Parmar ("Words are Weapons"), and Evelyn Conlon ("Broadening Visions") — try to construct alternative visions and "truths" about women's lives to validate women's experiences and aid in the process of social change. Other essays deal with practical problems for women writers, such as barriers to writing (like motherhood and isolation), the problems of getting published, and the lack of credibility attached to feminist views which do not reflect the mainstream experience.

*In Other Words* is a collection worth reading by all those concerned with ending the silences and creating a space where the imagination of women from all backgrounds (not just white, middle class, heterosexual, able-bodied women) can be nurtured rather than suppressed. It is not

a collection celebrating how far women have come in recent years, but a testament to how much work remains to be done.

Nancy Bauer's *The Opening Eye* is an attempt to construct an alternative vision of gender relations. The novel focuses on the creation of an alternative family arrangement (the "tenement") composed of seven characters, four men and three women (the "folk"). The "tenement" represents a unique form of communal living with the maintenance of private spaces (apartments) for each individual as well as common living space. Bauer has tried to write about men and women in a context in which gender is largely irrelevant to their interactions. The novel focuses on group dynamics, not relationships between individual characters. There are no sexual tensions here, indeed there is no expression of sexuality, not even between those who form romantic relationships. Friendship is the basis of all relationships between the characters (with the exception of one outsider). The author has attempted to present a non-patriarchal, non-nuclear, extended family alternative, with support and friendship built on independence, not dependence.

In the process, however, the characters have been constituted as one-dimensional men and women. This is surprising because the novel is constructed in the form of a journal with entries from the various "folk" providing alternative impressions of events. In general this technique works well and might have been expected to provide greater insight into each character and the relationships between the "folk." But by ironing out the masculine and feminine elements of personality and the tensions between men and women the author has, instead, produced an alternative family that lacks depth and realism.

In spite of this weakness *The Opening Eye* will be of interest to readers following developments in feminist fiction. As the

authors of *In Other Words* remind us, to imagine alternatives is itself a political act aiding the process of social change.

GILLIAN CREESE

## POÉSIE-MANIFESTE

EDDY GARNIER, *Plaie rouillée*. Éditions du Vermillon, \$7.00.

LOUISE DUFRE, *Chambres*. Éditions du Remue-ménage, n.p.

LOUISE LAROSE, *Voyante*. Éditions du Noroit, n.p.

CES TROIS RECUEILS sont assez différents. On peut noter, d'un côté, un monologue poétique engagé très clair d'expression, de l'autre, deux ouvrages plus difficiles de réflexions sur la création poétique. Immigré au Canada depuis 1972, Eddy Garnier n'oublie ni Haïti ni la masse de sa population famélique. Conscient de l'alliance entre noirceur de peau et sous-emploi, il se fait le dénonciateur de toute société viciée qui, profitant honteusement de la misère, la fait durer, la perpétue. Ce thème n'est pas nouveau. Il demeure toutefois terriblement d'actualité à une époque où Haïti — comme l'Afrique d'ailleurs — subit non seulement la pression souvent égoïste des blancs mais aussi d'une partie des citoyens noirs sur l'autre. Cette diatribe à la première personne se trouve rehaussée par une expression percutante dont le halètement sauvage doit beaucoup à l'expérience de la scène que possède l'auteur. On peut toutefois reprocher à *Plaie rouillée* de demeurer assez simpliste dans ses revendications — plus adaptées, semble-t-il, au 19<sup>e</sup> qu'au 20<sup>e</sup> siècle — sur les seuls droits à l'instruction et au respect de la personne humaine. Comme si, avec du "langage de Voltaire," la situation enviable était celle du travail "à contrat" des ouvriers d'usine! Il est vrai que, pour souligner le retard de l'île, notre poète choisit d'incarner tour à tour

le *Domestik*, la *Bò-n*, le *Jeranlakou* (jardinier), le *Restavèk* (saute-ruisseau). Ses plaintes, non dénuées d'humour, ne peuvent laisser le lecteur indifférent pas plus que le martellement implacable de celui qui s'affirme "force de frappe."

Le même genre de piétinements, de redites, nous le retrouvons chez Louise Dupré. Il s'agit là moins de protestation que de procédé rendant compte de l'inéluctabilité du destin de l'homme hanté par la mort, engendrant et créant sous son halo. Le troisième recueil de cet écrivain intitulé *Chambres* joue avec le triple sens du mot: lieu des ébats amoureux, appareil de prises de vue (caméra), endroit où développer les photos (chambre noire). Les poèmes apparaissent comme des instantanés inlassablement le thème essentiel mais avec quelques variantes: "elle avait buté sur ce mot sans pouvoir s'en départir. Le répéter, le répéter comme la photographe et l'imprimer, agrandi." De même que l'enfant ressemble à sa mère, de même l'écriture se modèle sur l'écrivain et, dans un certain sens, l'enveloppe comme dans une chambre close: Le malheur ne serait-il pas / là emmurée dans un / poème et vivante / y consentir." Donc, comme on refait inlassablement l'amour, on écrira poèmes sur poèmes pour prouver sa vitalité contre la sclérose, le définitif et l'éternel: "ce vide au rythme de la voix disperse ses vertiges." Et, si les mots n'expliquent rien, "ils sont là, seulement, ils durent." La première section du recueil compte des poèmes plus longs que ceux des parties suivantes, elle parfait la plus originale et la plus compréhensible car moins elliptique. Bien rythmé, doté d'un vocabulaire très classique, le texte s'empainte d'une certaine monotonie due aux répétitions et au manque de majuscules. Voulue par le thème abordé — le cycle vie-mort — elle a l'inconvénient de fatiguer un peu le lecteur.

Moins pure de ligne avec une avalanche de termes technologiques et anglais,

*Voyante* de Louise Larose n'en paraît pas moins bien menée et très attrayante par ses élans de modernité. Bien influencée par Rimbaud, celle qui met en valeur "la main visuelle," rend compte de l'ascèse à pratique pour provoquer les "illuminations," de la richesse de ces dernières mais aussi de leur côté éphémère. Le meilleur du recueil réside dans une croyance enthousiaste dans le rétrécissement des limites humaines grâce à l'aide des "nouvelles machines à explorer le corps le cerveau la coupe l'irreprésentable" et à la venue d'une nouvelle ère, le 21<sup>e</sup> siècle, qui nous propose comme tout acte, toute création, tout poème, un saut dans l'inconnu. Pour celle qui assigne comme terrain à la poésie "le jamais vu d'un visage," "un espace encore non vu non senti inédit," les "micro-processeurs vibrent déjà de toutes leurs informations heurtant/transmutant la mémoire humaine faillible jusqu'au jamais pensé avant dans le stockage fabuleux prêt à susciter les promesses d'énergie découplées." Quoique sans ponctuation, en paragraphes très courts, ces poèmes ne s'avèrent pas d'une lecture difficile et laissent tout de même, de temps à autres, assez d'ambiguïtés pour piquer la curiosité, assez d'humour pour dégonfler les prétentions des productions de masse: "Tourist Rooms déserts," "vidéo cheap pour projection privée," programmes médiocres offerts par "des écrans de télé de magasins à rayons sous l'oeil indifférent du consommateur."

Sans être vraiment novateurs, ces trois recueils attestent de la vitalité de la poésie francophone et constituent, chacun dans leur genre, des sortes de manifestes: le premier, contre l'injustice et l'inégalité, le second pour la vie et l'amour malgré la mort, le troisième en hommage au progrès. D'une tonalité harmonieuse dans leur approche respective du social, du métaphysique et de l'éthique, ils répondent certainement tous trois au goût d'un public qui combine tradition et moder-

nisme, naturel et sophistication et qui semble par-dessus tout friand d'oeuvres de qualité.

MARIE NAUDIN

## LE TERRITOIRE

BERNARD PROULX, *Le Roman du territoire*. PUM, \$12.00.

JEAN PROVENCHER, *C'était l'hiver*. Edns Borel, n.p.

POUR JUSTIFIER SON traitement du roman de la terre, Bernard Proulx adopte une démarche sociocritique guidée par un principe: chercher les endroits où se rejoignent l'idéologie et ce genre romanesque. Il veut fournir les éléments fondamentaux de compréhension qui manquent encore à l'analyse du genre et ce, afin d'essayer de répondre à la question suivante: "Qu'est-ce qui a fait vivre, puis vivre, puis mourir, le roman de la terre?" La période étudiée s'étend de la Rébellion de 1837 jusqu'à la parution de *Trente arpents* en 1938. Proulx écarte donc les facteurs reliés aux contraintes imposées par le déroulement de l'intrigue, la psychologie des personnages et la narration, pour partir à la recherche de l'idéologie dont le roman doit nécessairement se faire le porte-parole. Aussi nous informe-t-il sur les époques, leurs courants idéologiques et leurs luttes politiques ayant certainement marqué les écrivains et leurs contemporains. Des détails biographiques tels que l'éducation, les métiers exercés, l'activité syndicale ou politique, les amitiés et les oppositions constituent la substance de cet ouvrage. Par conséquent les romans qui figurent à la table des matières reçoivent parfois un traitement plutôt limité.

Dans quelle mesure l'approche préconisée enrichit-elle notre compréhension, premièrement du genre, et ensuite des oeuvres du corpus? Il ne s'agit pas de remettre en question la validité de la socio-

logie de la littérature mais plutôt d'une de ses interprétations. En effet, il semble que Proulx réduise son analyse à un procès d'intentions. Il est tout étonné lorsqu'un romancier lui fait faux bond en abordant des sujets ou en faisant agir des personnages qui contredisent ses positions prises dans la vie réelle. C'est en fait nier la créativité et la complexité de la personnalité d'un auteur. Les oeuvres se trouvent ainsi enfermées dans un carcan si étroit que celles qui ne répondent pas aux critères de la catégorisation sont reléguées à la "garlerie négative," sorte de sous-catégorie pour romans jugés "marginaux." Entre autres, *La Scouine* de LaBerge où "tout est dégradant et laid" reçoit ce traitement un peu expéditif; son analyse n'occupe que quatre des quinze pages du chapitre portant son nom. Néanmoins, la grande constatation du *Roman du territoire* consiste justement à mettre en relief la difficulté à catégoriser la production romanesque: roman de la terre, roman urbain ou roman de... quoi?

Le volume de Jean Provencher sur la vie rurale traditionnelle dans la vallée du Saint-Laurent, est le quatrième et dernier d'une série consacrée à la vie quotidienne au dix-neuvième siècle. Chaque volume décrit les faits et gestes d'une population encore épargnée par les bouleversements de la révolution industrielle, et qui vit au rythme des saisons — d'où les titres des volumes (*C'était le printemps*, *C'était l'été*, *C'était l'automne*). Plus particulièrement, *C'était l'hiver* traite de la période "morte" de l'année. En réalité, il fallait se livrer à une multitude de travaux qui allaient du soin des animaux à la fabrication de chaussures. Mais quel intérêt pour le spécialiste de la littérature québécoise? La vie rude des paysans exige une certaine socialisation. Les corvées, Noël, la guignolée, le jour de l'An, les Rois, la Chandeleur, la Saint-Valentin, les jours gras et les noces ponctuent l'hi-

ver de "désordres" qui sont autant de prétextes aux chansons folkloriques et aux contes et légendes du pays. La créativité et l'imagination d'un peuple fortement influencé par sa religion, voire par les restrictions qu'elle lui impose, donnent naissance à la littérature québécoise. Comme pour en préciser le moment, l'auteur a cru bon d'inclure une version de la chasse-galerie et quelques chansons.

Tel un écrin, la prose dépouillée d'artifices de l'auteur fait ressortir l'écriture plus ornée de l'époque; la première partie de l'ouvrage en offre maints exemples dont cette description des vents d'hiver: "si en effet on sort des appartements, l'on est saisi d'une bise glaciale dont les pointes taillent la figure et arrachent les larmes, et dont les rafales impétueuses et massives font chanceler sur un verglas glissant." Si dans l'ensemble le contenu littéraire proprement dit est réduit au minimum, la densité du contenu historique a au moins la qualité de rectifier les faits, parant ainsi une tendance à expliquer la société québécoise à partir de sa littérature. De plus, dans ce très beau livre sur la petite histoire du Québec, transparaît la passion de l'auteur pour son sujet. A lire absolument par ceux que la littérature orale intéresse.

DANIELLE TRUDEL

## ROMAN DU COEUR

MICHEL TREMBLAY, *Le coeur découvert, roman d'amours*. Éditions Leméac, \$16.95.

*Le coeur découvert, roman d'amours* de Michel Tremblay est un roman unique. Devant ce texte si tendre, si ouvert, si limpide, j'étais émerveillée. *Le coeur découvert*, ainsi que le suggère le titre, s'offre au lecteur dans une vulnérabilité rare. L'honnêteté, la franchise de Mathieu, la recherche du vrai de Jean-Marc, les deux personnages principaux, créent une ambiance où l'inauthentique, le mensonge

font fausse note et deviennent vite inacceptables. Sensible et doux, ce roman n'est pourtant ni mièvre, ni fade: c'est que le rire y joue un rôle absolument central. Ce rire, "le vrai rire, celui qui délivre et vous met les larmes aux yeux," et non pas "le persiflage vénéneux déguisé en bonhomie familière," procure détente et donne courage, libère et soulage, désarme et crée des liens, ce rire on l'entend tout au long du roman et il retentit joyeusement encore dans les tableaux finals des amants Mathieu et Jean-Marc, et des amantes Mélène et Jeanne.

L'action du roman est toute simple: deux hommes se rencontrent et s'aiment. Jean-Marc a 39 ans et est professeur de français dans un cégep à Montréal. Mathieu a 24 ans, est vendeur chez Eaton et acteur en chômage. Mathieu et Jean-Marc, couple homosexuel, vivent les hauts et les bas d'une histoire d'amour et des débuts d'une vie en commun, où il s'agit d'accepter l'autre, son passé ainsi que sa famille. Alors que Jean-Marc a tout un groupe d'amies lesbiennes qui lui sert de famille, Mathieu, lui, a un fils de 4 ans — Sébastien. Jean-Marc constate: "Rien n'est jamais simple, sauf quand on est tous les deux tout seuls." Or, ces contacts humains, quoique parfois difficiles, sont essentiels à la survie du couple. D'ailleurs, si l'histoire d'amour de Mathieu et de Jean-Marc est au centre même du roman, d'autres histoires d'amour, comme le sous-titre "roman d'amours" l'indique, occupent une place très importante dans le roman. C'est l'histoire de l'amour de Mathieu pour son fils, sa raison d'être, Sébastien, et l'histoire d'un amour infiniment tendre entre Jean-Marc et Mélène, celle d'un amour doux et serein du vieux couple de lesbiennes Mélène et Jeanne ou d'une "complicité stupéfiante" entre Zouzou et Arielle, autre couple de lesbiennes, ainsi que des histoires d'amour esquissées de Louise (mère de Sébastien) et de Gaston, de Rose (mère de Mathieu) et de

son amant (des couples "straight"). Ainsi est développé tout un réseau de rapports et d'histoires que sous-tendent inmanquablement l'émotion et la générosité. Michel Tremblay parle de ces relations avec un émerveillement d'autant plus intense que les rapports invivables de drague et de chasse où l'autre n'est qu'un "butin à consommer," ou une "victime" constituent le fond du roman. Les rapports inauthentiques où chacun se trouve "en représentation continue," où l'on veut séduire ou être séduit, ces rapports ne sont qu'"un jeu collectif pratiqué par une collectivité qui a toujours été attirée par les miroirs déformants et les leurres de l'imagination." Si la communication au niveau des "niaiseries et des généralités" ou encore au niveau de "la viande" comme la décrit Jean-Marc avec mépris, est aliénante et détruit toute possibilité d'intimité, un geste de douceur et de tendresse, un regard intense, suffisent à construire parfois une complicité délicate, fragile et combien précieuse. La communication authentique, courageuse, celle qui risque et dit la vérité afin de l'assumer, crée des liens durables. Ainsi, au fur et à mesure que le roman avance, nous acquérons un respect nouveau pour des personnages tels Rose ou Louise qui font un véritable effort pour demeurer lucides face à leur propre désarroi ou désespoir, et qui dépassent dans cet effort les mesquineries et les préjugés de toute une société qui les entoure.

Plus encore que dans son action, dans ses dimensions temporelles et spatiales, le roman est d'une simplicité qui relève presque du théâtre classique: "Qu'en un lieu, qu'en un jour, un seul fait accompli"... En effet, l'histoire se déroule entièrement à Montréal, à part un bref interlude où Mathieu va à Provincetown, passer quelques jours de vacances "gay" et qui ne s'avèrent pas "gay" car il ne fait que penser à Jean-Marc et à son amour pour celui-ci. D'ailleurs, souvent dans le

roman Montréal atteint la stature d'un personnage. La ville est fréquemment personnifiée, féminisée et Jean-Marc fait allusion à son passé ainsi qu'à son devenir. Les rues, les cafés, les bars, Outrement où habitent Jean-Marc et Mathieu, le métro, sont décrits avec sensibilité et amour. Montréal la nuit, Montréal en automne, Montréal en hiver, le roman serait aussi un chant d'amour pour la ville.

Tout se déroule en cinq mois, à peine: le roman commence un vendredi soir, à la fin du mois d'août 1984 et finit vers la première semaine de janvier 1985. D'abord l'histoire avance lentement, au rythme de la relation naissante, hésitante encore, entre Mathieu et Jean-Marc (la première semaine constitue un tiers du roman), puis à mesure que l'amour se cristallise et s'intensifie le rythme du roman accélère (vers la fin du second tiers du roman nous sommes en mi-novembre) pour se terminer, comme il convient à un "roman d'amours," sur un commencement: le mois de janvier, la nouvelle année et... l'amour tout frais, naïf et émouvant entre le petit Sébastien et sa camarade de garderie, Marie-Eve Quintal.

*Le coeur découvert, roman d'amours* est un texte fascinant du point de vue de la narration: jouant des possibilités qu'offre l'usage alterné de la narration à la première personne et celle à la troisième personne, le texte crée à la fois une distance critique et une familiarité qui permettent rire et réflexion. Comme on le ferait dans une pièce de théâtre, Michel Tremblay introduit les narrateurs en les nommant. Leur nom est apposé, tel une étiquette devant leur "partie." Ainsi, l'étiquette "Jean-Marc" est suivie d'un monologue intérieur: un "je" parle et pose une réalité qui lui est intérieure. La focalisation y est interne. L'étiquette "Mathieu," ainsi que celles vers la fin du roman "Louise et Gaston" et "Sébastien," sont suivies d'un narration à la troisième

personne. La focalisation y est zéro. Tantôt intime à nous-mêmes qui partageons sa vision des choses (focalisation interne), tantôt placé devant nous (focalisation zéro), le texte maintient en les alternant une tension et un intérêt constants. Il faut noter à ce propos que tout en maintenant l'alternance de la narration à la première et à la troisième personne, Jean-Marc "parle" pendant une vingtaine de pages à la fois, alors que Mathieu, Sébastien ou Louise et Gaston n'ont droit qu'à quelques pages. . . . Ceci contribue à la création de l'intimité du texte, intimité où le coeur peut être "découvert."

Que dire encore de ce roman fascinant? Tremblay y proclame la nécessité de comprendre ce qui se passe en nous avant de pouvoir le faire comprendre à l'autre. Le roman constitue une invitation à reconnaître la vérité telle quelle, inspire le courage d'assumer ce que nous sommes, et celui d'accepter ce qu'est l'autre, au delà de nos préjugés et de nos peurs, au delà aussi de nos humeurs, de notre "déprime," de notre découragement ou panique. Et il chante la vie simple, transparente, quotidienne même, mais jamais banalisée. Roman du coeur et des amours découverts, infiniment vulnérable mais infiniment courageux en ce qu'il découvre sa vulnérabilité même.

IRENE OORE

## CHILD MAGIC

LAURIE RICOU, *Everyday Magic: Child Language in Canadian Literature*. Univ. of British Columbia Press, \$22.95.

ACCORDING TO Laurie Ricou, child language has too often been treated in literature as merely an occasion to indulge in artificial baby talk which, on closer examination, proves to be no more than a series of clichés. On the contrary, for the author, any deep study of this theme should be based on as many scientific premises

as possible; therefore his first chapter, "The 'As If' of the Child's World," places his survey in the context of Piaget's and Eve V. Clark's findings. Child language is envisaged as an entirely spoken one, which makes little reference to the past and none to the future. It is also characterized by the fact that the child is unaware that others do not have access to his own thoughts. After raising these preliminary questions, Laurie Ricou offers a series of essays on writers who have used children's language in different ways. Comparing Margaret Laurence's *A Bird in the House* with Alice Munro's *Lives of Girls and Women*, he shows how the two writers, seeking an alternative to the *Bildungsroman*, use different points of view. Laurence tells a story from the standpoint of the forty-year-old Vanessa. Munro assembles Del's multiple stories in a much more elaborate structure which combines many voices ranging from the oral to the highly imaginative narrator's perspective. Laurence's book has the characters speak in stock formulas, clichés, and fairly flat metaphors, showing the significance of the ordinary, whereas Munro experiments with the transformation of the ordinary, using a more sophisticated syntax often to approach the aphorism.

A different form of speech is represented in Clark Blaise's *A North American Education*: Blaise exemplifies "perpetual beginnings"; beneath the individual stories is a narrator caught in a compulsion to repeat. Mitchell, Buckler, and Carr provide still further examples. In Ernest Buckler's *The Mountain and the Valley*, Ricou argues, the consciously literary language contains markers of the child's perception. The paradox seems to lie in the simultaneous presence of these two apparently incompatible elements. Buckler delights in long lists, in elliptic statements and uncompleted utterances which produce a dreamlike trance and

hypnotic magic. But with Emily Carr and her *Book of Small*, the accent is placed on the presentness of perception. Small's dimension is stressed by a propensity for adjectives formed with a -y ending, by a very concrete, "verb-oriented" language and by a scarcity of pronouns.

Ricou then goes on to examine poetry and drama. The poems of P. K. Page, Dorothy Livesay, and Miriam Waddington are part of a lyric strategy where spontaneity and overflowing feelings dominate. Page represents the remote observer; hers is a vision before language, with the child remaining an implicit presence. In Livesay's poems, the child is a nostalgically regarded object of contemplation. Waddington blends the child's voice with that of the poet so that the two become difficult to differentiate. The effect of immediacy is reinforced by the present tense, the short lines with two-to-four syllables and the frequent absence of relative clauses. Drama is represented by James Reaney's *Colours in the Dark*, a play which imitates play in all its manifestations. The writer delights in listening to words, in making up patterns of movement for the sake of having fun. Reaney's purpose is to show the importance of unlearning, of forgetting the categorization and division of the world which is implicit in the process of language learning.

Laurie Ricou's last chapter examines what is obviously an extreme experiment in recreating child language. Dennis Lee, and even more particularly Bill Bissett, seek to encounter words as they were before they signified anything to us. This play on words (not unlike Lewis Carroll's) leads to the generation of sequences which arise from aural associations. Bissett creates an atmosphere in which words are received as if they did not refer to any particular meaning. The book, which bears some similarities with a child's scrapbook, is marked by a propen-

sity for repetition. Bissett's colourful spelling includes frequent orthographic mistakes, the elimination of many vowels, which imitate the slurring, unhurried rhythm of everyday speech. Language is broken down into phonemes; through the visual aspect of the lines, the reader is made aware of the units of sound rather than the meaning. Bissett has long worked on reviving in his audience inactive perceptual mechanisms which date back from early infancy. His is a concrete poetry which pays close attention to the physical appearance of words, letters and type. His handling of the written text is often similar to a child's syntactical playing. He favours definite articles used in the child's deictic way, to direct attention to particular objects, without much concern with coherence of discourse. His lines have the intermediate level of generality characteristic of a child's early language (choosing such terms as "flowers" rather than "daffodils"). For Ricou, his poems, which generate metaphors almost accidentally, begin and end before language and carry us to the magic of surface, to the pleasure of what is there, in sound and repetition, in echoes of child language.

In *Everyday Language*, the author frequently refers to a "universal language" which all children supposedly share before they are shaped by their particular environment. Some psychologists and linguists would probably question this presupposition, arguing that a child's language is, right from the beginning, fashioned by the intonations, sounds, and rhythms of the people around him (and of his mother in particular). For many scientists, there is no stage when a child is not already influenced by the linguistic peculiarities of his environment. One only has to have the experience of babies in another culture to know that their first babbling is already conditioned by the symbolic codes and peculiarities of the

microcosm where they live. Still, this objection is largely theoretical and aims only at questioning what can be seen as a tendency on the part of the author to overidealize the pristine child, a sort of "noble savage," a tabula rasa unsoiled by the perverting categories of adults. This in no way detracts from the remarkable quality of the scholarship involved in this study. Laurie Ricou shows an exceptional sensitivity to linguistic patterns in the texts examined. His close analysis of the writers' idiosyncrasies is based on a careful and methodical study of the words and sentences, which leads to coherent and convincing interpretations of the processes of literary creation. This angle of approach, as well as Laurie Ricou's obvious passion for his subject, provide a sufficiently tight link to bind the otherwise clearly discrete chapters. The reader is left with this sense of magic which the author evokes with such power of conviction.

JEAN-PIERRE DURIX

## POSTMODERNISM

JOHN FEKETE, ed., *Life After Postmodernism: Essays on Value and Culture*. New World Perspectives, \$15.95.

STANLEY FOGEL, *The Postmodern University: Essays on the Deconstruction of the Humanities*. ECW Press, \$15.00.

ARTHUR KROKER & DAVID COOK, *The Postmodern Scene: Excremental Culture and Hyper-Aesthetics*. New World Perspectives, \$15.95.

THE NOTION of postmodernity, though current in literary discourse since the 1960's, has during the past decade become the subject of vigorous theoretical debates involving Jean-François Lyotard, Jürgen Habermas, Richard Rorty and Terry Eagleton, among others. Any attempt to define postmodernism is thus likely to seem contentious — not least because, as Linda Hutcheon has remarked

in *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, the term shares with the "grand flourish of negativized rhetoric" that habitually accompanies it (words like 'discontinuity,' 'indeterminacy' and 'antitotalization') the paradoxical property of incorporating that which it disavows. But whatever their evaluations of this tendency, most interpreters would accept Lyotard's description of the postmodern stance as one of incredulity towards metanarratives — in particular those of the liberation of humanity and of the speculative unity of human knowledge, which have separately legitimized the institutions of humanistic and of scientific research, and which come together in the *grand récit* of Marxism. The cultural politics of postmodernism, while incorporating deconstructive hermeneutics and a corresponding suspicion of institutional forms of knowledge and power, thus also involve resistance to any kind of totalizing impulse, whether Hegelian, Marxist or neoconservative. The result, not surprisingly, is paradoxical: an insistence (to paraphrase Lyotard's bleakly playful formulation) on presenting the unrepresentable, and on refusing both the solace of good forms and any nostalgia for the unattainable.

The books under review offer several very different Canadian perspectives upon this deliberately amorphous tendency. Stanley Fogel's book (to start at the shallow end of the pool) will disappoint any reader expecting a sustained analysis of, for example, the university's role in legitimizing and reproducing the present social order. Its central section consists of a grab-bag of literary pieces — two review essays (lively, but perishable), articles on Pynchon and on freeplay in postmodern fiction, and an essay on John Barth which, being written to him as well, displays some of the rhetorical peculiarities of prayer, among them that of telling the addressee things which he might be supposed already to know. These are fol-

lowed by some short, cheerfully iconoclastic texts written in the manner of Barthes' *Mythologies*, but lacking the semiological and political acuity which made that book compelling. Only in the two theoretical essays which constitute its first section, then, does *The Postmodern University* do much to earn its title. Self-regarding, stylistically clumsy and too often based upon secondary responses to theoretical texts, these essays manage nonetheless to make some forceful, if scarcely novel, points — about, for example, the parallel decomposition of narrative forms and of institutional metanarratives at the hands of postmodern fabulists and theorists, about the fatal ease with which a merely content-oriented postmodernism can be neutralized within the universities, and about the manner in which “the controllers of those subjects with the shakiest claims to grounding, with perhaps the most anarchic materials, resist most mightily any kind of structural tinkering.” But while challenging the “authoritarian tilt” of the humanities, Fogel himself allows name-calling and appeals to authority to take the place of argument, as when he writes off representational mimesis by quoting a sentence of Derrida, or attacks the “CanLit critics” as propagandists engaged in literary “empire building” — at the same time failing to see that his own canon of mostly white, male, and American writers might expose him, if one wanted to talk about empires, to more damaging charges.

The essays assembled by John Fekete in *Life After Postmodernism* throw the reader at once into deeper water — which is sometimes also muddy, as in Charles Levin's wearisome attempt to stir motifs from psychoanalysis and art criticism together into a discourse on value; sometimes fast-moving, as in Susan Stewart's sparkling essay on graffiti as crime and art; and more often clear and still, as in Jay Bernstein's finely written essay on aes-

thetic alienation. Arkady Plotnitsky's post-Derridean recovery of a Nietzschean concern with questions of value, György Márkus's questioning of the totalizing impulse in Gadamer's hermeneutics, and Barbara Herrnstein Smith's meditation on “Value without Truth-Value.” Fekete's reasons for bringing these essays together are explained in his own strenuously lucid contributions to the book. Remarking that the familiar modernist and positivist antinomies of object and representation, of unvalidated fact and subjective value, have been superseded by a postmodern paradigm in which all interpretive activities are seen as conditioned by prior experience and prejudices — in short, by values, he sees an opening for a renewed discourse on issues of value. Fekete's strategy is to represent value as underlying and subsuming the terms of poststructuralist and postmodernist discourse. Value is a circulating medium, he proposes, of which both the subject and the object terms of discourse are effects — though active and productive ones. He would thus reverse the structuralists' exclusion of value judgments from literary criticism (an exclusion which quietly ratified established literary canons and evaluative authorities), and at the same time would challenge the poststructuralist emptying of the human subject, and in particular of the author.

This may all seem rather austere. And indeed, one problem with Fekete's attempt to give priority to an emergent postmodern discourse on value is that he never shows concretely how it would alter the ways in which we currently produce and receive texts. Another obstacle to his project can be summed up in the name of Jean Baudrillard, a key postmodern theorist whose recent work happens to be unreservedly nihilist. Baudrillard's theorizing of what Fekete calls a culture of “vampire value,” in which “dematerialized, dead value” and “disseminated,

dead power" feed upon and deform human desires is uneasily absorbed in Fekete's own contributions, but re-emerges in the ecstatic nihilism of the essay by Arthur Kroker with which the book concludes.

It is Baudrillard, again, who has pulled the plug in *The Postmodern Scene*. By his analysis, social relations are being emptied and symbolically destroyed less through the ownership of the means of production than through control of the signifying codes by which human exchange-relations are regulated. Rather than seeking to challenge this control, however, Baudrillard advocates a perverse acquiescence in consumerism: a passive consent to every conceivable form of excess will, he supposes, abolish the system by forcing it into "hyperlogic." One might want to argue on behalf of Arthur Kroker and David Cook that their maelstrom rhetoric is as much a parody as an imitation of Baudrillard's recent texts — for they seem both to acquiesce in and attempt to exceed his analyses ('hyper' is their favourite prefix). But the result, all too often, is something that Hunter S. Thompson would no doubt recognize as Gonzo theory. Although *The Postmodern Scene* includes perceptive essays on such figures as Barthes, Foucault, and Serres, much of the book is marked by a deliberate hysteria, a persistent de-materializing of causality, a frequent recourse to such universals as 'the will' and 'the body' (ironic, given the concern of poststructuralism to deconstruct universals), and by the substitution of an oracular and universalizing 'we' for sustained argument. Kroker is at his silliest when, in an oddly pompous essay, he acclaims St. Augustine as "the first, and most eloquent, of modern structuralists," and finds in his writings (of which, by the way, he shows few signs of direct knowledge) the dividing line "between classicism, the discourse of modernism, and its postmodern fate." His

and Cook's readings of visual images are sometimes equally unreliable. (In Mark Gertler's painting *Merry-go-round* [1916] — the beginning, by their account, of postmodern politics — they see only "soldiers, sailors and businessmen." Yet at least six of the fifteen figures in this painting are female.) How should one respond to this collection of essays? Perhaps by quoting — as a counter to the authors' lapses into nihilism — the words of John Fekete in the introduction to his book: "We need to believe and enact the belief that there are better and worse ways to live the pluralism of value. To see all cows as the same colour would truly amount to being lost in the night."

MICHAEL H. KEEFER

## TRADITION

T. D. MACLULICH, *Between Europe and America: The Canadian Tradition in Fiction*. ECW Press, \$15.00.

THE TITLE OF MacLulich's book promises a lot. After we have slowly — and often grudgingly — accustomed ourselves to the ideas that there really is no Canadian literary tradition and that the concept of a national literary tradition is obsolete in an age of international communication, MacLulich suggests that we were all wrong: "I think that an identifiable tradition of Canadian fiction has existed for a considerable time." His book will be, we expect, his definition and delineation of that tradition.

*Between Europe and America* is an ambitious project. MacLulich provides a brief history of English-Canadian fiction, several readings of prominent Canadian authors (most notably Duncan, Davies, MacLennan, Richler, and Callaghan), a condemnation of the literary practices commonly referred to as postmodernism and metafiction, and an attack against the

role that the universities play today in the writing and teaching of Canadian literature. All of this is interesting, but not really what we had been led to expect.

The question that inevitably guides our reading of *Between Europe and America* is one about the Canadian tradition in fiction. Unfortunately, the answer to the question proves to be rather elusive. MacLulich's problems begin when he attempts to define the tradition. Referring to Grove, Callaghan, MacLennan, Buckler, Davies, Wilson, Ross, and Mitchell, he claims,

The work of these authors constitutes a tradition in two senses. In the first place, their books exhibit family resemblances — similar characters, similar settings, similar conflicts, and upon occasion similar stylistic features. In the second place, after these Canadian authors began to create a distinctive body of fiction, their work was used by subsequent writers as a point of departure.

Whether these factors exist in the manner MacLulich wants them to and whether their existence suffices to consider them shaping a tradition, remains to be seen. A bit further on, MacLulich states his working hypothesis:

I think it is inevitable that any historical examination of the Canadian tradition in fiction will trace a movement away from the emulation of British writers and towards an increasing awareness of the work being done by American writers.

Now we expect MacLulich's demonstration of his claims. But almost as soon as he has stated his thesis, he undercuts it: "Many of the leading characteristics of the Canadian tradition in fiction are apparent in the work of Frederick Philip Grove, the first Canadian novelist who can justly be described as a 'major' literary figure." After all, critics such as Spetigue have argued repeatedly over the past fifteen years that Grove has significant European roots which we must not neglect in our reading of his works. But even more surprising is the fact that the

presumably so representative Grove is not treated in significant detail. He is referred to a number of times, but we never get the sense of his oeuvre we would need to understand MacLulich's claim.

The concept of the Canadian literary tradition that MacLulich wants to convey to his readers becomes somewhat clearer in the historical part of his book. In eight chapters and 204 pages, MacLulich gives us his readings of the main developments in Canadian fiction from *The History of Emily Montague* to Hugh Hood's *The New Age*. His position toward the various phases of this development becomes evident from some of his chapter titles — "The Aristocratic View of Literature," "The Superstitious Valuation of Europe," "The Colloquial Style and the Tory Mode."

For most of his book, MacLulich considers the development of Canadian fiction as the gradual overcoming of a wrong point of view: "For much of the nineteenth century our writers remained faithful to social and literary paradigms that were increasingly inappropriate to North American conditions." Curious about the basis of MacLulich's judgment, the reader is soon enlightened: "Canada is a North American nation, in which class distinctions are less clear-cut than they are in the old world." Is it really? Did not the cultural élite that constitutes the readership of most novels MacLulich mentions consist largely of transplanted members of the British middle class feeling very much in exile in North America? Does not Doug Owram's *Promise of Eden* demonstrate very well that these people wanted to turn Canada into a lesser North American copy of Britain?

But MacLulich insists that Canada has a different spiritual foundation than the mother country and that this difference becomes evident even in the most conservative of all literary forms, the historical romance: "By the turn of the century,

then, even historical fiction, which once presented an exclusively aristocratic conception of society, has become a vehicle for expressing the egalitarian viewpoint that prevails in the new world." According to MacLulich, the big breakthrough for Canadian fiction came with the development of regional fiction:

The writers of the regional idyll were the first who attempted to do what the major figures of a later generation of writers have been praised for accomplishing: the making of serious literature out of materials that are unmistakably and unashamedly Canadian.

Here MacLulich encounters a serious problem. The authors he praises in this chapter, Ralph Connor, L. M. Montgomery, and Adeline Teskey, are rather questionable representatives of serious literature. And the best among the works he tries to count among the regional idylls, *The Imperialist* and *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town* are, as MacLulich has to admit himself, untypical. Whether the fact that Duncan and Leacock knew of the traditional sentimental idylls suffices to count them among the authors of such texts appears rather questionable.

The suspicion that MacLulich attempts to construct something with only a small basis in actual facts is strengthened by his chapter on early modernism. After a very interesting section about the feud over literary perceptions between the Canadian Authors' Association and the *Canadian Forum*, MacLulich is overwhelmed by his intentions. Discrediting European modernism as "elitist" and naming as outstanding Canadian modernists authors such as Ostenso, Grove, Stead, Day, and Knister, MacLulich is forced to admit that his Canadian modernism "remains close to the norms of the traditional bourgeois novel." But don't we regard modernism as the literary movement gaining coherence only through the attempt to overcome exactly these norms? Can we

define modernism simply as anything that took place after World War I?

How dubious MacLulich's argumentation becomes fully obvious when he talks about "Our Place on the Map" in chapter 5. The basis of his discussion is Leslie Fiedler's distinction between Northerns, Southerns, Easterns, and Westerns. Although Fiedler discusses only American literature, MacLulich insists that Fiedler "is speaking — whether he intends it or not — in continental terms." While one may accept this claim as a working hypothesis, it still needs to be proven. But MacLulich does the exact opposite. On the next page he undercuts his argument:

It must be borne in mind that these forms of fiction are the products of historical circumstances. They cannot be defined in purely aesthetic or purely formal terms. They must be understood as part of the response made by nineteenth century American society to the social forces at work within that society.

Not only are the Canadian and American societies factually different from each other, they also have a different perception of historical development. MacLulich himself had to admit that "American and Canadian authors have selected different 'mythological moments' as the heart of the historical process by which European culture spread over the continent." Yet MacLulich tries to fuse the two. Apparently because it is the only way in which he can rescue Canadian literature from the allegedly elitist British tradition and claim it for the supposedly egalitarian North American.

The ludicrous consequences of MacLulich's attempt to disclaim the British element in Canadian fiction become most evident in his chapter on "The Superstitious Valuation of Europe." In this chapter, MacLulich essentially writes out of the tradition some of the most prominent Canadian authors — Duncan, Davies,

and MacLennan. Even Richler is rather dubious. So whom are we left with? Atwood, Laurence, and ———? Salvation comes in the guise of Hemingway-epigone Morley Callaghan. His plots may be utterly implausible, but his colloquial tone is, at least in MacLulich's eyes, the right medicine against the élitist "Tory" mode with which authors such as Davies, MacLennan, and Hugh Hood threaten the literary expression of the Canadian mind. Strangely enough, Frederick Philip Grove reappears as one of the bad guys. On page 15, he had represented the tradition; on page 203, he stands opposed to it because "educated in the Europe of another era, he naturally acquired the notion that literature should be set apart from ordinary life or should comment on ordinary life from a superior moral and cultural plane." Can we get a Canadian literary tradition only if we make our arguments incoherent? While there undoubtedly are Canadian authors whose attitudes correspond to those of Americans, they are certainly not the rule. And whether the American tradition really is as egalitarian as MacLulich claims, is still a matter of contention.

In the last chapter and the epilogue, MacLulich turns around dramatically. Not that Canadian literature would suddenly have become British. It is still American to him but, *horribile dictu*, it has become élitist. Canadian authors have begun to copy American metafiction, and the élitist university scholars have been and keep supporting them. MacLulich's invective against postmodernism culminates in his statement,

When the creation of art becomes introverted and self-serving to this extent, when art serves the need of so narrowly defined a group of specialists, who are far removed from the centre of their society, we may well wonder if such art any longer fills a meaningful social niche.

Rather than argue with him here, let us

ask what has happened. Inexplicably, the supposedly egalitarian American society has inspired an élitist fiction. MacLulich neglects to mention that the same literary development has occurred in practically all Western societies.

MacLulich concludes with the fear that this trend will, as Northrop Frye predicted twenty years ago, lead to the gradual levelling of distinct national characteristics in favour of an international style. Against this development MacLulich proposes "a marriage of popular fiction and the art novel." But where this new direction in Canadian fiction shall come from remains as obscure as the basis of MacLulich's other arguments. *Between Europe and America* in no way fulfils the expectations its title raises. Parts of the book are interesting because they provide unusual readings of some authors, but these sections cannot offset the weaknesses that arise from MacLulich's confused and confusing premises.

AXEL KNOENAGEL

## HÉBERT SONORE

ANNE HÉBERT, *Le premier jardin*. Seuil, \$19.95.

THE FASCINATION OF this novel lies in its ambiguity and the elusiveness of its subject. It is about aging, about writing, about renewal, about role playing, about the reconstruction of past time, about finding one's roots, about the mystery of a woman's life. But it is also about youth, an apotheosis of life and exile. Like other novels of Anne Hébert and like most good novels, it lends itself to multiple readings. The tone is that of tenderness, the prose is rigorous; nostalgia is absent despite the Proustian subject. Love emerges from the restraint of the spiritual just as the familiar attempts to override it.

In its simplest dimension the novel is a reconstruction of past time by a sea-

soned and successful actress returning from Paris and Touraine to her birthplace, her youth, "the first garden." In Québec City, as she slowly becomes Winnie, Beckett's character that she has to play for a Summer theatre, she also seeks out her past. At first, in fear, she resists the memories (much like Elisabeth in *Kamou-raska*) but soon she assumes them with the unexpected excitement of being able to name things deliberately forgotten. The surprise rediscovery, at first just of space, the walled city, the first garden and then the slow reconstruction of her first eighteen years of life, allow her to endorse her present life. This process of reconciliation that Flora Fontanges sustains allows her also to adopt the particular tone of affectionate distance from a reality that is intimately hers and yet is already assimilated as if it were someone else's.

The idea of the first garden acquires an almost epic quality as the novel honours the courage, the sheer capacity for life, of the many women who preceded Flora Fontanges, alias Marie Eventurel, alias Pierrette Paul. And much before her there was Marie Rollet, wife of Louis Hébert who planted the first garden, and a country grew. And then there was Angélique, the daughter of the Governor, frightened by the potent breath of the forest and the earth and the howling wolves, and Guillemette Thibault, a blacksmith who refuses marriage and so becomes Agnès-de-la-Pitié, and the many "filles du Roy" sent from the Salpêtrière with specific orders to marry a fortnight after their arrival, and Renée Chauvieux found dead for refusing to honour the marriage contract, and Aurore Michaud, who also met a violent death at nineteen for being too desirable, and Rosa Goudrault who died heroically in the fire where Pierrette Paul (now Flora) almost died. The continuity of past and present is thus established together with the cycle of exile, solitude, love. Flora Fontanges

and her daughter Maud, like their ancestors, are consummate rovers and determined guardians of their glass menagerie. Like flowers in a garden, the litany of the names surfacing from the past join the names of the stage heroines, the roles played, Ophelia, Phèdre, Julie, Jeanne, and many more. And now more names are added, they are the friends of the fugitive Maud: Raphaël, Céleste, Eric, the searching youths of the 1970's. Linear time, that of waiting, is thus defused.

History and fiction are submitted to individual subjectivity. The historian, the writer of fiction, and the actress have in common the privilege of manipulating reality. Because of their subjectivity they are free to decide what to show of themselves. The task of the actress is to inhabit for a brief moment another character and give it a new life, the task of the writer, in its broadest sense, is to create a stylized reality, also in order to honour humanity. In this context, both are gestures of love. Both writer and actor have the privilege of renewing the giving of themselves under the mask of another (either a role to play or the invention of a fictional character). The tension created by this hide-and-seek process, the various levels of intertextuality as well as the overt autobiographical analogies all contribute to the elusiveness of this novel.

Embedded in the main story, therefore, is not just the past of the main character and the evocation of her ancestors in the New World, but all the various roles of the heroines she has played and, by extension, of all the various characters that the writer can generate out of a mixture of personal experience and imagination. Flora Fontanges has returned to her birthplace to play the role of an aging woman. The concern that Beckett has with time, not as something that passes but as a continuum, as well as his vision of art as an apotheosis of solitude, find an echo in this novel. Flora Fontanges is waiting to play

the role of Winnie, an old woman coping with aging, but she is also waiting for her daughter Maud to play again the role of the mother, or its illusion. We are all familiar with the paradoxical nature of the role of waiting in Beckett's world: a combination of doing nothing and doing something, trapped and thus condemned to lucidity and consciousness.

The palimpsest of the novel reveals yet another thread. As in some of her other novels, Anne Hébert captures a certain spirit of a time, a fad, a fashion: the fascination with exorcism in the late 1960's emerged in *Les enfants du sabbat*, the vampire punk found its echo in *Héloïse*. In this novel also a tribute is made to the generation of youths attempting to live in communes. They are sexually free, emotionally disoriented, spiritually ritualistic and determined to find an alternate way of life to that of their bourgeois parents, searching for truth in Franciscan frugality. Raphaël, the lover of daughter Maud, accompanies Flora Fontanges like a guardian angel through her pilgrimage, as they both await the return of the runaway daughter. The narrator comments on the skill of the actress capable of acquiring many faces to please a variety of customers: "Longtemps, Flora Fontanges a été une voleuse d'âme... à l'affût." This case is different, however: "Pour ce qui est de Raphaël, peut-être n'a-t-il pas d'âme du tout? Elle n'arrive à saisir de lui que son étrange beauté, parfaitement animale et déconcertante. Est-il possible qu'il soit sans mystère, ni repli de songe, comme une eau lisse? Flora Fontanges, qui est une voleuse, n'a rien à voler ici. Raphaël lui échappe comme l'innocence." Equally mysterious is the ritual of the reconciliation of Maud and Raphaël. Flora watches them dance:

Leur solitude surtout l'étonne, elle qui a été habituée à ce qu'on l'enlace pour danser... Maud est debout, parfaitement immobile, comme se recueillant. Tout son corps

se charge d'énergie et de rythme. Ça s'engouffre par tous les pores de sa peau, pareil à une tempête, fait sonner ses os et cogner son sang à gros bouillons. / Bientôt elle s'avance... frôlant... se fauflant... se frayant un passage, suivant son idée, seule au monde, dans un magma de corps ruiselants, d'éclairs de lumière et de chaleur, de désir brut.

This thief of souls is fascinated by youth, as she is before a new role to play. Theirs (Raphaël, Maud, Céleste, Eric) is also perhaps the only role she does not wish to play. To their almost feline determination and their acrid intransigence to find truth she can only oppose her profound experience of subjective relativity.

In the end, her daughter Maud has come back to her lover, and Flora Fontanges, for a moment, just prior to that had the passing illusion of being a mother again, a fleeting illusion that both mother and daughter entertained, because both of them knew it was a fantasy. Much like Signora Frola in *It is so, if you think so*, Flora Fontanges returns to Paris and her new role awaiting her. She is ready to create a new illusion against silence. To the Pirandellian cynicism, Anne Hébert opposes and reiterates her firm belief in the power of the word.

As with her other novels, the language is perhaps the most effective seductive device. Flora Fontanges, surrounded by the friends of her daughter, sitting on a park bench, with a captive audience at her feet, expresses a similar belief:

N'est-elle pas actrice, ne possède-t-elle pas le pouvoir de changer les mots ordinaires en paroles sonores et vivifiantes? / Elle voudrait être à la hauteur de leur attente. Leur réciter un beau poème tout bas, le velours de sa voix tout contre leur oreille, exigeant d'eux une attention aiguë, une ferveur amoureuse. Les tenir tous en haleine, au point le plus haut de sa vie. Être soi-même, un instant, ce point lumineux, en équilibre sur l'horizon, qui vacille et retombe en une gerbe d'écume.

Like an actress, the writer has the humil-

ity and the courage to start anew the task of finding the point of precarious balance, to celebrate life by the creation of illusion.

GRAZIA MERLER

## CARR'S ANGER

PAULA BLANCHARD, *The Life of Emily Carr*. Douglas & McIntyre, \$26.95.

EMILY CARR IS one of Canada's best-known artists. The life story of this "woman ahead of her times" is riddled with the myths and legends which she fostered during her lifetime and in her writings. These myths have been examined and cross-examined, analyzed and psychoanalyzed, by people who knew her, by people who tried to know her and by people who dubbed themselves historians and experts. The result has been a wealth of resource material on this one artist, including several biographies. And now we have yet another book — another detailed biography. What is the fascination with this woman which continues to attract the Canadian audience? What is there that has not already been written about Emily Carr, that needs to be written?

Paula Blanchard's *The Life of Emily Carr* follows Doris Shadbolt's *The Art of Emily Carr* (1979) and Maria Tippet's *Emily Carr: A Biography* (1979). Shadbolt's book is a study of Carr's art, written by one of Canada's leading art figures. Tippet's book gives a very detailed account of the artist's life, including confusing psychoanalytical explanations of the artist's behaviour and the work which resulted from this behaviour.

Paula Blanchard writes a seemingly unbiased biography. She approaches the topic as an outsider. Unlike previous biographers, Blanchard claims no previous acquaintance with Emily Carr. An American, she is as foreign to the artist as she is to the artist's nationality. With the ad-

vantage of distance from the subject-matter, Blanchard provides us with a clear understanding of the inner conflicts of a controversial and complicated woman. Blanchard's contribution to the study of Emily Carr dispels some misunderstandings of the artist's conflicts which other writers have created.

Much controversy has arisen over Carr's fifteen-month period in a Sanatorium in Suffolk, England. After a three-year period (1901-1903) of studying art in London, St. Ives, Bushey and Boxford, Carr's health suffered. She complained of persistent headaches, vomiting, depression, and paralysis in one leg. Her condition was diagnosed as hysteria. In *Growing Pains*, Carr alluded to her ailment as "overwork breakdown," and claimed all she required was "rest, good feeding, and open air." But Maria Tippet bluntly documents the disease as a reaction to Carr's father's "brutal telling" in her early years which "had a deep and painful effect on her." Tippet goes on to say that "its paramount place in her recollections suggest that before the event, and more so after, sex was a sensitive issue with her. The brutal telling could have had an element of incest. The psychological model of a hysterical woman has usually experienced an episode, probably fantasized, in which she is attacked by her father; the fantasy is the sublimation of the woman's incestuous feelings for her father."

Blanchard is perhaps more kind in her discussions of this period. "There is no doubt she was emotionally exhausted," Blanchard writes. "One cause of that was London; Emily herself laid the lion's share of blame for her illness squarely on the city." Blanchard describes Emily Carr's London as "a looming, engulfing, imprisoning presence" which "cut her off from nature, diminished her to an "atom" and clogged and choked the channels of renewal that were necessary to her art and well-being. She would never be able

to tolerate human beings *en masse*; she could only like and trust them one by one. In England these feelings were still relatively vague and undefined, but it would always be her access to the natural world that kept them in check."

Blanchard does not exclude the sexual aspect. "It seems clear," Blanchard writes, "that her fundamental distrust of people and her corresponding love of nature had a sexual component." But, as is unfortunately the case with most women artists, this "sexual component" has been over-emphasized. As Blanchard explains, "added to it [the sexual component] were the many other elements that estranged a gifted, passionate personality from a rigid, philistine society. Her emotional and artistic health depended on the natural world in its prehuman state, and in that sense her illness was as much spiritual as it was physical and emotional. London deprived her of what, for lack of a better term, we can only call God."

London was not the only problem which culminated in Carr's illness. The pressures of being an artist and aspiring to success in her chosen vocation were paramount. "The pressure increased," Blanchard explains,

as she saw her funds dwindling away and she became more and more impatient with her slow progress. She had reached a crisis of commitment, brought on partly by her disappointment in love in Victoria and partly by her refusal of Mayo Paddon. In losing the man in Victoria she felt she had lost the possibility of passion. In refusing Paddon she turned away from a compromise, a life rounded with human affections, many-faceted, anchored in that strength she always drew from having others depend on her. . . . The equal partnership she needed in marriage simply was not possible with Paddon. He would have left her no room. For all his gentleness, he was conventional itself. She saw that he demanded "worship," just as her father had demanded of her mother. Marriage would have meant the slow, sure stifling of her art.

Sexual echoes haunted Emily Carr and her art until the day she died. Her relationship with nature in its purest form is seen in her later paintings (in the 1930's) as witness to the opening of the artist's heart and mind in her quest for her inner-self and her supreme God. Themes of life, growth, and rebirth constitute the artist's firm belief in God's rejuvenating infinite life force. Biographies such as Doris Shadbolt's suggest otherwise. "There is much sublimated eros in her work," Shadbolt writes,

and some imagery of strong sexual connotation was frequent in the formal painting period [c. 1930's]: the contained hollows and openings in the woods; the phallic poles, stumps and tree trunks . . . in her later work is translated into a powerful and more generalized sexual energy, as openings and enclosures vibrate with light and movement, trunks thrust upward into sky, earth fecundates, and death and decay are absorbed into the irresistible regenerative cycle.

Blanchard avoids such psychoanalysis. She emphasizes more the anger so evidently repressed in Emily Carr. According to Blanchard, anger and fear were the driving forces behind Carr's powerful, creative outbursts. "The positive uses of anger," Blanchard writes, "particularly women's anger, is a subject that needs more exploration than it has yet received. Perhaps because our culture is more uncomfortable with anger than it is with sex." Emily Carr's anger was a complex combination of other impressive qualities, such as "physical endurance, courage, a powerful set of old-fashioned values, a stubborn innocence, a love of play, a saving sense of irony and a deep — if skittish — capacity for love." But, as Blanchard points out, "in a culture that discouraged both anger and artistic vitality in women, Emily Carr conspicuously preserved both and remained whole."

EMILY-JANE ORFORD

# L'HIVER DU PAYS

BENOIT FRADETTE, *L'Écrit-Vent*. Edns Leméac,  
\$13.95.

HUNKERED DOWN IN an abandoned logging camp in the north of Quebec, an octogenarian outsider confronts the imperious but disturbing urge to justify on paper a life which to the average person could well appear shapeless and without significance. For reasons that the reader may soon feel inclined to reformulate, the narrator of Benoit Fradette's novel has decided not to emulate the old ship which sometimes goes down "sans livre de bord racontant ses traversées." While the ancient narrator approaches his task with some trepidation, there is no evidence in the *récit* that he is ever fully aware of the paradox inherent in his project, i.e., that of reaching out for approval and understanding to a human community whose greed and fraudulence he has described for years and apart from which he has chosen until now to live his life. A traditional novelist's eye for the beauty of the land, intercalated verse, apostrophes and meditations (some bordering on the solipsistic), bound up in an *écriture* both articulate and compelling, fail to mask the internal contradictions of the narrator. Surely there is something of the tragicomic unawareness of Alceste in this old vagabond who now asks to be "distinguished" by the race of men for his high-minded misanthropy. Only on the last page of his narrative does l'Écrit-Vent (perhaps a play on Ecri(t)-vain) seem to take cognizance of the breach of integrity implicit in his gesture. "Me serai-je menti toute ma vie?" he asks, only to respond with a bit of bravado that may ring hollow for the reader: real human beings, he declares, renounce "le mirage de la sérénité" and the lies which its acquisition implies.

L'Écrit Vent recounts his life in a series

of tableaux hardly designed to shed additional light on his integrity or motivation. Aside from Chapter Three, "Les Bûcherons," in which we learn of his upbringing, interrupted education, abortive environmentalist efforts and finally his decision to drop out of conventional society, subsequent episodes could seemingly be rearranged at will without changing the impact of the narration. What difference should "La Forêt du Vieux Sauvage" precede "Trêve de Tendresse," or if both should follow "Batarito?" Little or none, since there is no growth or deepening of insight on the part of the narrator once he has turned his back on society. Moreover, all of the characters that he has chosen to celebrate in successive episodes are, with the possible exception of Elise, marginals like himself (recluses, prostitutes, orphans, vagabonds), who think along the same lines and are most unlikely to provoke soul-searching on the part of the narrator. Also, in spite of his claim to have travelled the world, we never see l'Écrit-Vent interact either with individual or landscape which is not Canadian or, for the most part, not *québécois*. Here again the narrator escapes unchallenged and unenriched by the potentially revealing encounter with another set of cultural perspectives. The reader, on the other hand, finds himself repeatedly exposed to a suite of Rousseau-like *propos* which however articulately rendered begin ultimately to sound alike. The old man has chosen the easiest and least fruitful path to self-justification, inundating the reader in the process with a rhetoric designed primarily to protect his own fragile convictions.

In answer to the questions posed by l'Écrit-Vent in the liminary chapter, "Ai-je consumé mes énergies à poursuivre un idéal éthique inculte, ou au contraire ai-je réussi, à force de recherches entêtées, à percer une brèche, si minime soit-elle, dans le mur des déterminismes et

cloisonnements humains?" the reader is inclined to answer "yes" and "no," in that order. For this modish variant on the "coureur du bois" the beauty and simplicity of life in the forest has proved to be a trap. Despite the somewhat *précieux* rationalization of his departure, the reader knows that l'Écrit-Vent should have remained with Elise and her children, in what are arguably the warmest, most resonant pages of the novel. At some level, l'Écrit-Vent would probably agree, for toward the end of the  *récit*  he tells us that for the first time he has begun to experience the fear of "l'hiver du pays," especially, he adds, "celui qui m'habitait." On the other hand, his stiff upper lip just may have taken in the author of this unusually interesting and very promising first novel.

JOSEPH I. DONOHUE, JR.

## VERSIONS OF VULGAR

DANY LAFERRIÈRE, *How to make love to a Negro*, trans. David Homel. Coach House, \$9.95.

KENT THOMPSON, *Married Love: A Vulgar Entertainment*. Goose Lane, \$7.95.

IN THEIR PROBING introduction to *The Postmodern Scene* (1986) Arthur Kroker and David Cook characterize the postmodern condition by using both Nietzsche's view that existence is "a throw of the dice across the 'spider's web'" and Foucault's manifestation of "transgression" as the "'lightning flash' which illuminates the sky for an instant only to reveal the immensity of the darkness within: *absence* as the disappearing sign of the limitlessness of the void within and without..." Such definitions are useful touchstones in any attempt to deal meaningfully with Dany Laferrière's first novel, only perhaps, in this case, since the author is black and a Haitian refugee, a negative of Foucault's lightning image would be more appropriate. Like much postmod-

ern literature—say that of Richard Brautigan (a strong influence here?), or Dennis Cooley the prairie poet—this is life seen from below, by those who live on the edges of genre and of what is normally social and moral in our society. For the author, though, and for his narrator, who he suggests lives in similar physical and mental space, that means that a good deal of the nothingness is white. Accordingly, they are more voided than the void itself and this book tracing the "cruising" of two blacks in contemporary Montreal is full of rage and sexual violence.

A great deal of this negative energy is directed toward the numerous white females in the novel. Notice for example, the following lines from a chapter entitled "The Negroes are Thirsty": "Last night Bouba dragged in a couple of half-dead females. Both of them were dogs. . . . When he came in Bouba whispered to me that the big one was mine and I could do whatever I wanted with her: fuck her, sell her, throw her out the window. I didn't want any part of it. It wasn't in my job description."

Obviously, on the level of story the treatment of women in this novel is shocking. They are only good for "fucking," not even lovemaking. Even when the narrator uses the word "love" he is doing it "at the edge of an abyss." In fact, we are told that "In the sexual act, hatred is more effective than love." And there are few if any indications of either sensitivity or tenderness on the part of writer or characters in the performance of sexual encounters.

On the other hand, the author perhaps explains such lacunae in the interview of the writer/narrator on Radio-Canada. Like Dennis Cooley in *Bloody Jack*, he parries possible critical thrusts by making them himself in a chapter designed as a review and an explanation of the novel. Here the audience is told "There are no individuals." Thus, the blacks and the

women function as types; in the case of the women we might even say allegorical figures. None has any significant individuality. Only two have first names and, then, not for long. They are Miz Literature, Miz Sophisticated Lady, Miz Alfafa, Miz Snob, Miz Gitane, Miz Cover-girl, Miz Mystic, Miz B, etc. According to *How to make love to a Negro* this is only fair since blacks have always been types to whites. Nietzsche, the sometime father of postmodern thought, would perhaps understand. In *Thus Spake Zarathustra* he speaks of how "out of wrath and ill-temper, the will rolls stones about and takes revenge upon him who does not, like it, feel wrath and ill-temper" at the inability to change "time's it was."

Thus, one of the lessons of the novel is that we all inherit the cultural scars of the past. They are largely manifested here by the jazz motif provided by such black stars as Charlie Parker and Bessie Smith. And for a black man they mean that he cannot afford a conscience or a smile, that hatred is safer than love. It's not surprising then, that when the book was originally published in French, André Gaudreault of *Le Nouvelliste* had difficulty finding any morality in it.

Like many postmodern novels this episodic, almost storyless book full of nihilism works *à rebours*, using humour from time to time to rise above the garbage that functions as an image of contemporary civilization. But the humour is black, an "effective weapon," more absurd than funny. If this book *does* have a morality, it is the morality of words, for this is — like many postmodern novels — writing about writing. Laferrière is at times making love to his words, at times "fucking" them, at times drunk on them. The description of the eccentric Moslem mystic Bouba's conversation is brilliant, but in other places the text seems clumsy or out of control. Nevertheless, Laferrière believes in what he is doing. Thus, this novel

becomes on the last page an "only chance," "in the sweet adolescent dawn," "a handsome hunk of hope." Considering what has preceded, the latter is, to say the least, an overstatement. The same is true of the opinion expressed within and ratified somewhat by the reviewer in *Books in Canada* that the author is comparable to James Baldwin. And similarly indiscreet are the translator, David Homel's comments in the preface that see Laferrière's as a "gale force" remedy for a "recent Quebec fiction" "lost in grim retrospection." We might ask Homel if he has forgotten writers like Jacques Godbout and especially Roch Carrier who possess as much energy and more sophistication and vision.

*Married Love*, Kent Thompson's newest work of fiction reveals a good deal more subtlety and humility than *How to make love to a Negro*. On the other hand, this is Mr. Thompson's fourth novel. He has held several posts as writer-in-residence in Canada and abroad and clearly writes from the position of a secure insider. This novel, for the most part, affirms the culture in which he fits. Thus, whereas in Laferrière's novel the comic is swallowed by the tragic, in *Married Love* the opposite seems to be the case.

This novel is definitely not postmodern. Rather Thompson writes realism, perhaps what is known as Supermarket Realism. Though the image of blood helps unify most of the novel and we end with the image of the carnival, meaning is carried basically by story not image. Plot is linear, characterization rather shallow and predictable, and relatively little on the page is shocking. This is rather light reading. On the other hand, it doesn't pretend to be more than that. The subtitle, after all, is "A Vulgar Entertainment." Thompson isn't out to set the art world on its ear. He has a good idea for a story and though the last chapter seems patched on rather than growing organi-

cally out of the situation, he does a competent job with it. He also makes us laugh a great deal. The novel is written in the third person by a male writer, but basically from the point of view of the major female character, and yet it deals with feminine sexual and psychological processes in a convincing way. Indeed, Thompson subtly and effectively moves back and forth between Alice's objective reality — her body which is about to experience her period even as her husband tries to make love to her — and her psyche — even as she fearfully anticipates the arrival of her mother-in-law for a visit on the Labour Day weekend. The failures of middle-class married life and its limited successes are described sensitively and with a good deal of psychological if not philosophical insight.

Especially moving and insightful are the author's renderings of the battle between wife and mother-in-law for the affection of the man whose love they share and the continual conflict between mother and father over the child: father trying to protect him from infancy, mother trying to protect him from anything else. Nevertheless, problems here are accepted with good humour and *en famille*. If Laferrière's book is a scream of rage, *Married Love* is a contented smile.

DANIEL S. LENOSKI



Paul Aubin and Louis-Marie Côté have produced an impressive third section of the *Bibliographie de l'histoire du Québec et du Canada/Bibliography of the History of Quebec and Canada* (Institut québécois de recherche sur la culture). As Pierre Savard points out in the preface, the period covered (1946-1965) was a crucial one in Canadian/Québécois historiography, and the titles and rubrics listed on almost 1400 pages bear witness to both the

richness and the diversity of the works published during this period. The bibliography is broken down into General history, Prehistory, Ethnohistory, Explorations, Euro-Canadian era, and contains demographic indexes and genealogies and also various other indexes. Section 5 (Eurocanadian era) especially reflects the enormous variety of materials available. The subsection on visual culture for instance lists works on popular prints, comics, popular arts, engravings, gilding, painting, sculpture, silversmith's trade, photography, cinema and television. Also an indispensable reference work is the first volume of *Bibliographie de la critique de la littérature québécoise et canadienne-française dans les revues canadiennes*. Compiled by René Dionne and Pierre Cantin, this instalment covers 1974 to 1978 and proves yet again the great usefulness of the journal *Histoire littéraire du Québec et du Canada français* to researchers. *Voix et images: littérature québécoise* covers a more recent period in its *Index-Thesaurus 1967-1987: vingt ans de recherche en littérature québécoise*, compiled by Pierre Hébert and Bill Winder. Particularly useful rubrics in their listings include "thèmes," "genres," "approches" because they are indicative of both prevalent and neglected research areas. A surprise, given the strong interest among Québec literary critics in theory, is the apparently unbroken strength of thematic studies. Whereas these reference books list works on Québec and French-Canadian literature and culture *in toto*, the *Répertoire des écrivains franco-ontariens* (Prise Parole) is a more modest and more specialized publication. It presents short biographies, bibliographies and contact addresses of such authors as Alexandre Amprimoz, Hédi Bouraoui, Cécile Cloutier and Hedwige Herbiet who have documented a special interest in Franco-Ontario and have published with Franco-Ontarian publishers and reviews. Despite this common bond, the cultural and ethnic diversity of the authors profiled is remarkable: Amprimoz was born in Rome, Marguerite Andersen in Germany, Hédi Bouraoui in Tunisia, and Hedwige Herbiet in Brussels. Another specialized bibliography is Norbert Spehner's *Ecrits sur la science-fiction* (Ed. la Préambule, 1988), a 534-page listing of international criticism on sci-fi literature, cinema and illustration between 1900 and 1987, which, like Aubin and Côté's bibliography, documents the growing interest in Canadian/Québec studies for interdisciplinary and paraliterary approaches.

E.-M.K.

## STEPHEN PARMENIUS AND CANADA

... for you there lies  
In distant parts, another world to bring  
To light. A world which has not felt the  
weight  
of Babylon, the Persians' might, nor known  
Victorious Macedon, and never was  
Subdued by Rome. Nor has the Moslem wail  
Disturbed those regions: there no scheming  
hand  
Of Spain rejects the early church and God  
Himself, to make a Papal sacrifice  
Barbaric with the blood of fellow men.<sup>1</sup>

THESE LINES OF POETRY, translated into English from the Latin original, were written by Stephen Parmenius of Buda in 1582. They express a feeling of joy at the prospect of going to the New World, a feeling that has been with many a European throughout the centuries. It derives from both curiosity and dissatisfaction. Here, the associations of history — economic, religious, and political — bind one man to the Old World, but they haunt another. So the second man, in search of a better world, crosses the Atlantic.

The motives which led Stephen Parmenius himself along his chosen path are manifold. They are to be sought not so much in his origins — he was born in Buda, sometime after the Turkish occupation of the city in 1541, to Christian, probably Calvinist parents — as in his education, which took place in Hungary and at “the universities of the Christian world” in Europe.<sup>2</sup> It was, however, England and the people with whom he came in contact there that had the greatest impact on him:

let me say that no situation, no people, no  
state has pleased me so much as your coun-

try of Britain [he wrote to Sir Humphrey Gilbert] whatever aspect of my plan I consider. In addition, the warmth with which I have been received at every turn, by the people with whom I have had any dealings, has so exceeded all my expectations that now (and I say it with due patriotism) the delightful friendship of the English has almost dispelled my longing for Buda and the Hungary which I am bound to call my homeland. As a result of this, I had often had the urge to publish some token of my goodwill and respect; so it came about entirely in accordance with my inclinations that, while I was concerned with paying tribute to, and getting to know, eminent people in London, my distinguished and learned friend Richard Hakluyt took me along to you, having expounded me to your celebrated plan to lead a colonizing expedition to the New World in the near future. In the course of this, I was able to recognize that you are a man of such stature and spirit as deserves to be remembered for ever by posterity; ... I decided that much the most suitable time had come for me to discharge some part of my obligation and intention towards you and your countrymen. This is the seed from which my *Embarkation poem* grew.<sup>3</sup>

The age Stephen Parmenius happened to live in has been referred to as “A Brave New World.”<sup>4</sup> (Shakespeare undoubtedly was a spokesman for his own time when he wrote: “. . . O, wonder! / How many goodly creatures are there here! / How beauteous mankind is! O brave new world, / That has such people in ’t!”<sup>5</sup>) But the single word that best characterizes England during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries is EXPANSION: expansion in the historical, the geographical, the scientific, the political, the social, and the artistic senses. People pushed their capacities to the extreme; to use a modern psychological term, they were characterized by growth.<sup>6</sup> And as a Hungarian opposed to the Turkish occupants of his city Stephen Parmenius chose to embrace “growth” rather than surrender to “defeat.” In particular, he grew when he accepted the invitation to join Sir Humphrey Gilbert’s expedition to the

New World. He chose and was chosen to be a discoverer; and his poem to Sir Humphrey reads:

I now begin the praises  
 Befitting such a time  
 By sounding first this fanfare  
 Of unmelodious rhyme.  
 Then, when you bring back safely  
 The ship we put to sea,  
 Fresh laurels will adorn you  
 In high festivity.<sup>7</sup>

In accordance with the customs of the Renaissance, Stephen Parmenius wrote in Latin (his writings were translated first into English and centuries later into Hungarian). He was a humanist scholar in the best traditions, having spent three years at various European universities<sup>8</sup> — though only two German academic institutions, Wittenberg<sup>9</sup> and Heidelberg,<sup>10</sup> provide evidence. Although he did not achieve much by today's standards — he wrote two poems with dedicatory prefaces in England, and one letter in Newfoundland — these few writings seem to have been artistically promising. His premature death in Canadian offshore waters cut short his creative career. But is his work "Canadian literature"?

Some Canadian critics like to differentiate between literary history and *historia litteraria*,<sup>11</sup> claiming that not everything written at any time on what today we can safely call Canadian soil should be termed "literature." I think, however, that when summing up a country's literary traditions, critics should not ignore the roots. Rather, they should appreciate and cherish them — for no mainstream literature develops without a background, and tradition is part of that background even if a given work of art was produced before the country "Canada" came into history. Thus if Eastern European "connections" are mentioned in a Canadian literary context the Hungarian Stephen Parmenius of Buda should be considered related to Canadian literature, for he is a sort of pre-

cursor to the more contemporary "immigrant artist."

The two dedicatory poems Parmenius composed in England were directed to specific individuals, in the hope of gaining some advantage or preferment. Sir Humphrey Gilbert (c.1537-83) was to lead the expedition to Newfoundland, to colonize it in the name of Queen Elizabeth I for England. The *Embarkation* poem of 330 lines is directed to him. The other poem, the *Thanksgiving Hymn Modelled on Psalm of David 104*, was addressed to Henry Unton, a close friend of Parmenius in England, a man "famous for his noble ancestry, personal qualities and wide learning."<sup>12</sup> This poem celebrates Parmenius's safe journey from Hungary to England. (Parmenius's poem evokes more the spirit than the choral lyric verse form of the ancient Greek "Psalm.") In 1582, when the two poems were put to paper, Stephen Parmenius was staying alternately in Wadley, at the Unton estate, and at Christ Church College, Oxford; in Oxford he lodged with Richard Hakluyt the younger (c.1552-1616), who was not only keenly interested in the geography of the New World but also teaching the subject. (Hakluyt had encouraged the publication of the English version of Jacques Cartier's [1491-1557] voyages along the St. Lawrence River in 1534-36, entitled *A Short and Brief Narration of the Two Navigations to New France* [1580], and had himself published another book, entitled *Divers Voyages Touching the Discovery of America* [1582].<sup>13</sup>)

The two poems of Stephen Parmenius show considerable literary skill, though a few stylistic modifications were introduced after their completion (owing mostly to the influence of the scholarly environment of friends and the reading of other literary works). The poems were written, in accordance with the literary traditions of the time, in the pastoral

mode; they reveal a love of nature and display an erudite knowledge of Greco-Roman mythology. A eulogy of the Virgin Queen, Elizabeth I, is an important technical component; it is also a confession of true admiration on the part of the young Hungarian poet:

... great Godlike Queen  
The world has heard these things, and every  
part  
Longs to accept your rule . . . and even those  
That are reluctant wonder at your  
strength.<sup>14</sup>

An historical panorama and an evaluation of the different European nations, moreover, reveal the brooding mind of an Eastern European:

... the cities shaken by disastrous wars,  
And kingdoms beaten down on many sides  
By despots: African and Asian lands  
Are crushed by brutal Muslem regiments  
And bow submissive heads. In Europe too  
The hateful rule of pagan mastery  
Is now conceded by Rumania,  
By Greece, by Macedon and all the land  
Through which the ancient river Hebrus  
flows . . .<sup>15</sup>

Several references assert Parmenius's Hungarian origin and declare his concern for the contemporary political situation in his homeland:

... citizens of Hungary  
Who, never yet subdued in war, now guard  
Her narrow boundaries against the threat  
Of conquest. . . .<sup>16</sup>

Elsewhere he says:

... To sing reluctantly of sad defeats  
In Danube lands: the Fates must keep me  
back  
For tasks like that,<sup>17</sup>

and then

... the distant parts  
Of Hungary decide to federate  
For safety's sake within one boundary.<sup>18</sup>

All these references allude to the Turkish conquest of 1541 and the subsequent occupation which was to last in Hungary for

150 years. Stephen Parmenius's lot, however, was to be steered away from his beloved homeland towards remote parts of the world, to New Found Land. And he was to commemorate the *terra incognita* for generations.

Following the example of the Portuguese Luis de Camoens, Parmenius intended to become chronicler of an overseas expedition, in this case Sir Humphrey Gilbert's. (Richard Hakluyt, around the same time, was to be sent to France on a diplomatic mission.<sup>19</sup>) And so Parmenius joined the crew of the *Swallow*. The captain was Maurice Browne, a young man with very much the same inclinations towards the New World as Parmenius himself, though more practically inclined. For his part, Gilbert was in possession of Queen Elizabeth's patent (for six years, starting in 1578). Charged "in very vague terms, to discover and settle 'heathen lands not actually possessed of any Christian prince or people,'"<sup>20</sup> Gilbert's 1583 expedition initially involved five ships. The *Barke Raleigh*, with Vice-Admiral Walter Raleigh [?1552-1618] on board<sup>21</sup> and Lieutenant Michael Butler in command, turned back two days after sailing out. The others set out to sea from Plymouth on June 11, 1583:<sup>22</sup> the *Delight*, the flagship under the command of Sir Humphrey Gilbert himself, the *Golden Hind* under Captain Edward Hayes, the *Swallow*, and the *Squirrel*.

These vessels sailed together until July 23, when thick fog obstructed visibility and the four ships took different courses.<sup>23</sup> Rain and unfavourable winds slowed down the passage (usually twenty to thirty days long, it took them fifty-two). Nevertheless, on August 1, the *Swallow*, *Golden Hind*, *Delight*, and *Squirrel* met again and moved together to the port of St. John's, where Sir Humphrey Gilbert wanted to land. The four ships were at anchor on August 3. On August 5, "New Foundland" was taken into possession of

the British Crown, amidst great celebrations, and in the presence of about twenty Portuguese, French, and Spanish ships besides the many English fishing vessels and the four ships of the expedition.<sup>24</sup>

Parmenius had three days to look around in the vicinity of the harbour and to pick up information. Careful observation prompted him to form his first impressions of the place and to forward a letter to Richard Hakluyt. The epistle *To his Distinguished Friend and Brother, Mr. Richard Hakluyt, Master of Arts and Philosophy, Christ Church College, Oxford*, dated St. John's Harbour, Newfoundland, August 6, 1583, is the first account of Canada written by someone sailing under the British flag. The epistle contained 51 lines in Latin and 92 lines in English translation.<sup>25</sup> It describes the voyage to Newfoundland, supplying precise geographical evidence about the course of the ship — not naming his vessel, but hinting at it by revealing the name of Maurice Browne — and not mentioning any hardships either, but making sure to let Hakluyt know that he, Parmenius, was in good health. The next paragraph sums up compendiously the colonizing ceremony in the presence of the crews of foreign ships.

Thirty-one lines in Latin and forty-four lines in English speak about "New Foundland," more exactly about the vicinity of St. John's harbour:

There are inexhaustible supplies of fish. . . . The whole terrain is hilly and forested: the trees are for the most part pine. Some of these are growing old and others are just coming to maturity, but the majority have fallen with age, thus obstructing a good view of the land and the passage of travellers, so that no advance can be made anywhere. All the grass is tall, but scarcely any different from ours. . . . I found some blades and ears that resembled rye and they seem capable of being adapted easily to cultivation and sowing in the service of man. There are blackberries in the woods, or rather very sweet strawberries growing on bushes. Bears

sometimes appear round the shelters and are killed: but they are white . . . and smaller than ours. I am not clear whether there are any inhabitants in this area, nor have I met anyone who was in a position to say. . . . Nor do we know any better whether there is any metal in the mountains; . . . their appearance may indicate underlying minerals. . . . At this time of the year the weather is so hot that if the fish which are put to dry in the sun were not regularly turned over they could not be prevented from scorching. But the huge masses of ice out to sea have taught us how cold it is in winter. Some of our company have reported that in the month of May they were stuck for sixteen whole days on end in so much ice that some of the icebergs were sixty fathoms thick. . . . The atmosphere on land is moderately clear, but there is continuous fog over the sea towards the east. And on the sea itself around the Bank (which is what they call the place about forty miles off shore where the bottom can be reached and they start catching fish) there is scarcely a day without rain.<sup>26</sup>

The accuracy of the description can easily be checked against the pages on Newfoundland in the 1982 Michelin Green Guide of Canada! Precision of detail is not the only merit of Parmenius's remarks. This passage is also valuable as a guide to social attitudes and presumptions. Parmenius, that is, had started out to the New World with certain expectations, as revealed in his *Embarkation poem*:

An unknown race and people occupy  
That land: are they perhaps, from our stock  
Or do they boast an ancient ancestry  
Derived from Pan, inheriting from times  
Gone by a land of woods and fertile fields  
And cities needing not the rule of law . . . ?<sup>27</sup>

He had hoped to meet human beings there (if of a potentially mythic kind). Not finding any prompted him to start his description of the place, saying, "I see nothing but desolation."<sup>28</sup> Undoubtedly, however, the word *desolation* here refers to emptiness or void of *people* and not to a miserable state, for, on the contrary, what he says about wildlife around the harbour illustrates his surprise at finding

ample numbers. His stylistic technique is instructive. He starts by making comparisons about the length of the grass, and the blades and ears which resemble rye. But in these observations, whether consciously or not, he takes on now-familiar roles. He is the European colonizer first, immediately thinking of agricultural use of plants. He wants to put them "in the service of man." Then he is the tourist, who tastes the blackberry in the woods and calls it "rather sweet." Then he demarcates differences, making a comparison between the bear known in Europe and the newly found species: "they are white . . . and smaller than ours." Then he is the colonizer again, wanting to put his findings to use.

The careful observer of wildlife, weather, flora, and landscape, compendiously summing up the area, Parmenius combined his comments with the *rationale* of the colonizing white man, the intelligent, learned man who is looking around with a purpose. His judgment is portentous, but well-founded. He is also the good friend who remembers his Oxford associates warmly. He is also the good scholar, the good essay writer, proportionally dividing his communication into several parts and designing it as a complete work of art. Which it indeed is, the first literary description of an area of modern Canada.

What followed the composition of this letter is tragic both for Stephen Parmenius and for about a hundred sailors. The expedition remained for another fortnight in St. John's, during which time Stephen Parmenius probably worked as secretary to Sir Humphrey Gilbert. He may have worked also on the structuring of another epic poem which he had in mind.<sup>29</sup> But on August 22, the *Delight*, *Golden Hind*, and *Squirrel* left the harbour and headed south. The *Swallow* was left behind in the harbour of St. John's to take the sick back later to England, under

the captainship of William Winter. Parmenius went on board the *Delight*, which (following the orders of Sir Humphrey Gilbert) was to make for Sable Island with Maurice Browne as the new captain. After nine days of labouring against the elements at sea, on August 29 the *Delight* went aground. Only one officer, the master Richard Clarke, survived the tragedy. The crews aboard the *Golden Hind* and the *Squirrel*, unable to extend help because of the bad weather, practically watched the tragedy. And then Sir Humphrey Gilbert himself, sailing in the *Squirrel*, was swamped in heavy seas on September 9. No-one survived.

The only vessel which made it safely back to England was the *Golden Hind*, which put into Falmouth on September 22. Captain Hayes conveyed the news of the lost vessels. And it is Edward Hayes' whole eloquent description of the death of Stephen Parmenius which can be considered as Parmenius's epitaph. Written originally in English, Hayes' tribute bewails:

This was a heavy and grievous event, to lose at one blowe our chiefe shippe fraighted with great provision, gathered together with much travell, care, long time, and difficultie. But more was the losse of our men, which perished to the number almost a hundred soules. Amongst whom was drowned a learned man, a Hungarian, borne in the Citie of Buda, called thereof Budaeus, who of pietie and zeale to good attempts, adventured in this action, minding to record in the Latine tongue, the gests and things worthy of remembrance, happening in this discoverie, to the honour of our nation, the same being adorned with the eloquent stile of this Orator, and rare Poet of our time.<sup>30</sup>

And yet, even after his death, Stephen Parmenius has had the power to command attention. His two poems and the letter were translated into English by Richard Hakluyt and included in his impressive *The Principall Navigations, Voiages and Discoveries of the English Nation*, the first edition of which ap-

peared in 1589. (Hakluyt's huge book, a grandiose undertaking, has been republished several times.) What Stephen Parmenius of Buda accomplished, moreover, has been duly appreciated by English and American scholars, and more recently, for about a century, by Canadian and Hungarian historians and critics. The many articles written in Hungary have appeared mostly in the twentieth century; they vary in accuracy, several being rather boastful. The most memorable commentary is the book entitled *The New Found Land of Stephen Parmenius of Buda* by David Quinn and Neil Cheshire (1972, republished in 1985 both in England and in Canada). One further comment took a different form. Mention must be made, finally, of the memorable tablets mounted on two cliffs and unveiled on June 22, 1984, in the harbour of St. John's, Newfoundland; it was the 400th anniversary of the expedition, and it honoured both Sir Humphrey Gilbert and Stephen Parmenius of Buda.<sup>31</sup> In that act, the one-time "English" colony acknowledged in a tangible way its earliest Eastern European connection.

# NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Stephen Parmenius of Buda, *De Navigatione*, ed. David B. Quinn and Neil M. Cheshire as *The New Found Land of Stephen Parmenius* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1972), 85-7.
- <sup>2</sup> Parmenius, "Author's Preface to this Celebrated Knight," *New Found Land*, 77.
- <sup>3</sup> "Preface," 77-8.
- <sup>4</sup> See G. B. Woods and G. K. Anderson, eds., *The Literature of England*, Vol. 1 (Chicago: Scott, Foresman, 1958), 297-303.
- <sup>5</sup> *The Tempest*, v:1.
- <sup>6</sup> Wayne W. Dyer, *Your Erroneous Zones* (London: Sphere, 1976), 36.
- <sup>7</sup> Parmenius, "To the Thames," *New Found Land*, 81.
- <sup>8</sup> E.g., Michael S. Batts, "Literary History and National Identity," together with Comments by George Bisztray, Gerald Noonan,

and Suwanda H. J. Sugunasiri in *Canadian Literature*, Supp. No. 1 (May 1987), 104-18.

- <sup>9</sup> "Preface," 77.
- <sup>10</sup> György Gömöri, "Uj tények Budai Parmenius Istvánról" [New Facts about Stephen Parmenius of Buda], *Magyar Hírek* [Hungarian News], 38, No. 1-2 (19 January 1985), 15.
- <sup>11</sup> Cited in *New Found Land*, 6.
- <sup>12</sup> *New Found Land*, 18.
- <sup>13</sup> *New Found Land*, 20.
- <sup>14</sup> *New Found Land*, 99.
- <sup>15</sup> *New Found Land*, 87.
- <sup>16</sup> *New Found Land*, 87.
- <sup>17</sup> *New Found Land*, 93.
- <sup>18</sup> *New Found Land*, 99.
- <sup>19</sup> *New Found Land*, 45.
- <sup>20</sup> *Encyclopedia Britannica*, Vol. 10 (Chicago and London: William Benton, 1963), 411.
- <sup>21</sup> Richard Hakluyt's *Collection of the Early Voyages Travels and Discoveries of the English Nation*, III (London, 1810, after the edition of 1600), 189.
- <sup>22</sup> *Encyclopedia Britannica*, *supra*, note 20.
- <sup>23</sup> "Stephen Parmenius's Letter to Richard Hakluyt from Newfoundland," *New Found Land*, 169.
- <sup>24</sup> *New Found Land*, 49.
- <sup>25</sup> *New Found Land*, 169-73.
- <sup>26</sup> "Parmenius's Letter," 171-3.
- <sup>27</sup> *New Found Land*, 87.
- <sup>28</sup> "Parmenius's Letter," 171.
- <sup>29</sup> *New Found Land*, 56-7.
- <sup>30</sup> Cited in *New Found Land*, 59-60.
- <sup>31</sup> Dénes Balázs, "Parmenius István Emléktáblája Ujfundland on [Memorial Tablet of Stephen Parmenius in Newfoundland], *Magyar Földrajzi Tanulmányok* [Hungarian Geographical Studies], 1 (1984) [Erd, Hungary], 61.

ANNA JAKABFI



## EAST EUROPEAN CHARACTERS

*In English-Canadian Short Stories of the Post-War Era*

IN 1979, JOHN MUNRO (then the Minister responsible for Multiculturalism) observed that "Cultural pluralism is no stranger to Canada. The history and development of this country is very much the story of successive immigrations and the interaction of these groups with the existing society. How they adapted their way of life to Canadian conditions and influenced Canadian patterns has been and will continue to be one of the determining forces in establishing a Canadian identity and nation."<sup>1</sup> The aim of this paper is to examine some aspects of this interaction, restricting the subject to the relation between East Europeans and Canadians as English-Canadian short stories since the end of the Second World War have reflected it. The field is not vast. Out of the 170 short stories read during the process of collecting material, just ten percent was relevant (i.e., at least one East European character was present). But even this material revealed certain paradigms.

The first feature of the East Europeans as shown in these stories — and by far the most conspicuous — is their strangeness. They are different from the natives to such an extent that it embarrasses the Canadian-born. The newcomers seem enigmatic, impossible to unravel. In Alice Munro's "Material," for example, the Canadian wife says of her Romanian-born husband,

He was mysterious to me. Long after he became my lover and after he became my husband he remained, remains, mysterious to me. In spite of all the things I know about him, daily and physical things. . . . I cannot describe him.<sup>2</sup>

Similarly, Gabrielle Roy writes about the "inscrutable faces" of the newly arrived Doukhobors in "Hoodoo Valley."<sup>3</sup> Indeed, the inscrutability is the reason why natives often misinterpret facts, statements, and intentions — as in the excellent example of misunderstanding that occurs in "The Old Friends" by Mavis Gallant. The two main characters are Helena, a famous actress, and her old friend, a German police commissioner. Helena was born in Silesia, and during the Second World War "she was dragged through transit camps on the fringes of Germany, without — thank God — arriving at her destination."<sup>4</sup> The fact that she was not raped in these camps is interpreted by the commissioner as good news, something to be almost glad about. Yet for Helena it is nothing like that; it is simply a statement of a logical fact, for "Rape would have meant one was a person."<sup>5</sup> Here, the discrepancy of interpretation divides two Europeans: East European and West European. Though the commissioner and Helena were born on the same continent, the difference in their past experience has predestined them for misunderstandings. When East Europeans get in touch with Canadians, the likelihood that misunderstandings will occur is even greater.

A much more tragic case is presented in Douglas Spettigue's "The Haying." Van, the immigrant in the story, is of unstated nationality. ("I don't know much about him. He came from different places and I think he had been a German soldier in the war. . . . We called him Van because you couldn't pronounce his real name."<sup>6</sup>) Not to make an effort to pronounce his name properly represents (even if the "injury" is unintentional) a disregard for personal rights. It is both disturbing and humiliating. But this immigrant has to suffer even more affronts. An upholsterer in the old country, Van is

drawn back to the trade as though by accident:

My mother had got him to put a cover on her parlour chair. He came into the parlour while we looked at it and Mrs. Anderson was there. He wouldn't touch the cover with his hands though they weren't nearly so brown under the nails as mine. He stood close by the chair so everybody would know who did it but Mrs. Anderson said,

"That's a real fine cover, Vera," to my mother. And then to Van she said,

"Are you an upholsterer?"

So my mother had to explain, "No, he's our hired man."

That was when Van left. I still remember his face when he went out and they all noticed it too because Mrs. Anderson warned us he looked like a bad one. But he didn't need to go, we said then. He was our hired man and we only let him do the chair to please him.<sup>7</sup>

Good intentions turn into an unpremeditated injury to Van's ego. While realizing that Van was eager to do some upholstering — the trade in which he invested his sense of self-worth — the Canadian family does not let him fully enjoy the accomplishment, his only real success in Canada. Craving praise and recognition, he is degraded instead; he was just their "hired man," nothing more.

Van's subsequent story adds to the fictional model of social behaviour. He leaves for the city, but he does not get a job, so he returns to the farm. Not wanted there either — "I got no place to go, no place to stay. . . . You don't want me. You don't want to know I am alive. You keep me for the haying, I know. Then I am done. Then you forget"<sup>8</sup> — he hangs himself in the barn. The tragic end is the logical outcome of the familiar situation: one group of people does not recognize the needs of another, particularly those of a single outsider. Because of their different backgrounds, the gap between them cannot be bridged. Van may have been overly sensitive, but if one takes into account the fragments of his past as revealed in the short story, his actions are not at all

surprising. The narrator recounts, however, how the failure to understand difference leads to a failure of communication:

my mother asked him one time if he had a wife and you could see him running it over in his mind before he made a zoom with his hand like a bomber-plane and never said yes or no. But their letter said he was a widower which means he did have and could just as easy have said.<sup>9</sup>

There is no way for a Canadian family which was spared the dark shadow of the Second World War to realize Van's need to be accepted, to be taken into a family. To grant Van's desire to find a substitute for his lost family would have been a sacrifice too great to be expected by anyone with a perfectly unharmed psyche. So both parties expect each other to do something they are not able to do. The family cannot embrace Van — "I didn't want him because he didn't belong in our loft"<sup>10</sup> — and Van cannot just work knowing that he will have to leave after the haying is over. His expectations are too high.

Great expectations can lead very easily to false hopes. Gabrielle Roy's "Hoodoo Valley" provides an example. Roy writes about the Doukhobors, "a strange folk, gentle, dreaming, with only one foot in this world,"<sup>11</sup> who are looking for a place to settle on the prairie. But coming from the Caucasus, they find the flat land, the "naked plain,"<sup>12</sup> falling short of what they want. Finally they catch a glimpse of Hoodoo Valley ("so named by the Indians who were frightened of its strangeness and the curious power it had — precisely at this hour of the day — over the unstable souls of men").<sup>13</sup> And even though they are told that the soil is useless and that it is only a mirage they see, the Doukhobor leaders choose this spot as a place to settle.

"They know, at least I think they do," the interpreter reported, "that the mountains

and rivers aren't real, but they say, 'What is the difference, as long as we can see them? And if the three of us, by God's grace, can see again the mountains and river of our sweet homeland, why should it be different for our wives and children and old men? Won't they see these things too? And when they've seen them, won't they be reassured, as we are?'"<sup>14</sup>

The Doukhobors are willing even to cheat themselves in order to satisfy their deep desires. The settlement agent is at a loss. A man of reason, he cannot comprehend what emotions have to do with the choice of land. Here again the reasoning of the Canadian character comes into opposition with the immigrants' emotions, and once more the inevitable outcome is the failure of the immigrants. The Doukhobors will not be able to earn a decent living on that poor soil. Still, their choice is unavoidable, for it is predetermined by their attitude to life.

The East Europeans in these Canadian stories — who were usually compelled to leave their native country for some negative reason (war, revolution, racial or religious prejudice, poor living conditions, etc.) — are very often helpless in the new land. Roy's Doukhobors, for example, would

suddenly...begin to weep, doubtless because of some vague perception that the plain would finally take their children, would take thousands of others, would absorb as many lives as there were grains of sand, before this would even show. Still others, a few about to bear children, had an even stronger hatred of the stark land and the giant sky which their eyes probed in terror.<sup>15</sup>

If the Doukhobors (who, in a group, are "like an immense family"<sup>16</sup>) experience this feeling, then solitary immigrants are even more likely to become a prey to fears. Katherine Govier's "The Dancer" tells of a woman whose

parents were cousins, European peasants who'd escaped their village in a fit of courage before the war, thinking to enact their

marriage on the hard bed of the Canadian prairies. Once there, they'd caught fear from the land.<sup>17</sup>

Because of their fears, many immigrants either become as paralyzed as those parents ("They huddled in the creases of a small town, working for other people. . . . In the latter years their daughter had become an intruder in their conspiracy to survive"<sup>18</sup>) or they try to take advantage of any opportunity as Gyorgi Szigeti does in Helen Weinzwieg's short story, "Causation." Narrowminded, primitive, unschooled, Gyorgi is not able to make subtle distinctions; for him: "Life is. That's all. You're either alive or dead."<sup>19</sup> So an eccentric woman, lavishly supported by her ex-husband, seems to Gyorgi to be an excellent route to social and financial power. Both Gyorgi and the woman want to believe in their relationship, but for different reasons. He needs money, social status, and a solid background he has never had. She needs someone to keep her company, someone to entertain her. But the fantasy does not become true; their backgrounds and purposes cannot be brought to terms. She wants to talk; he usually has "no idea what she was talking about."<sup>20</sup> She admires distinction; when he wants to behave in a distinguished way, "he assumed the dignity of the foreman he remembered in the Bechstein factory."<sup>21</sup> She seeks the exotic; he is a closet fascist. The failure of communication is evident.

Gyorgi's attitude to his past, to his native country Hungary, is worth further comment. When the woman asks him to sing him some Hungarian folk songs, he rebukes her, "I told you a dozen of times, I hate Hungarian anything."<sup>22</sup> A similar way of treating the past shows up in Alice Munro's "Material": "He was born in Romania, he lived there until the end of the war, when he was sixteen. He has forgotten how to speak Romanian."<sup>23</sup> Both men turn against their past, which seems convenient when they start a new life. For

the past can be just another obstacle getting in the way of adaptation. But a more difficult way of handling the past is described in Mavis Gallant's "An Autobiography." Here, a character named Peter Dobay invents a brand-new past for himself:

He never told the same story twice, except for some details. He said he was picked up and deported when he was ten or twelve. He was able to describe the Swiss or Swedish consulate where they tried to save him. . . . Once, he said he was poor and had sold papers in the street to pay for his shoes. But he was such a liar. He may have been poor, or he may have been from a solid family who lost him along the way; but it was not a Protestant family, and his father was not a professor at Debrecen. Also, he was not in Budapest during the uprising in 1956. He was in a city on the Rhine, starving, with me.<sup>24</sup>

But this technique has its drawbacks:

He daren't be nostalgic about anything, because of his inventions. He would never be certain if the memory he was feeling tender about was true.<sup>25</sup>

A dreamer, Peter Dobay lives "in a fantasy of false names, false fortunes, false parents. . . ."<sup>26</sup> He waits for "phantom letters from ghost friends."<sup>27</sup> And though he reaches harbour of some sort, with the help of a rich wife, he cannot find peace of mind. For while, "At a word of truth he would have stayed, if only to hear the rest,"<sup>28</sup> Peter Dobay has become a dangerous dreamer. His behaviour is not just self-destructive, it threatens everybody around him, bringing unhappiness with it, and a feeling of waste and emotional failure.

Hugh Garner's title character "Hunky," by contrast, tries to be honest to himself and to everybody. He comes from Poland, his parents having been killed in a concentration camp. And he seeks actively to be absorbed into the new community:

His ambitions were the modest ones of most

immigrants: to buy a place of his own, marry, and have children. He placed great stress on the fact that he hoped to become a Canadian citizen in the fall. His longing for citizenship was not only gratitude and patriotism towards the country that had given him asylum, but a craving for status as a recognized human being.<sup>29</sup>

He works hard, putting aside money in small amounts from the wages he earns. Even so, he cannot succeed. His employer, the Belgian Vandervelde, runs him down in his car because Hunky stands up for his and his fellow-workers' rights. The Belgian is also angry because Hunky, a displaced person with nothing in hand, wants to marry Vandervelde's daughter. But there is a third element to their rivalry which throws further light on the immigrant condition. Hunky is looked down upon *by other immigrants who have already acquired Canadian citizenship*. This contempt is often present when immigrants are in question. Ken Mitchell's "You Better Not Pout" conveys the attitude graphically:

When I begged my mother to let me go, she said, "You wouldn't like it. There will be rowdies." It seemed the concert was also considered a charity for immigrant children in our Saskatchewan town. She feared infection by lice.<sup>30</sup>

In such circumstances, a new "community" remains beyond reach. Perhaps in response to such resistant attitudes, many East European immigrants like to settle in groups, but such a gesture only produces more problems. Cities become divided, as is depicted by Ed Kleiman. Kleiman's "The Immortals" depicts Winnipeg, but the following descriptive passage could in principle apply to almost any other city in Canada as well:

The North End consisted mainly of immigrants from Eastern Europe, labouring classes, small foreign-language newspapers, watch-maker shops, a Jewish theatrical company, a Ukrainian dance troupe, small choirs, tap-dancing schools, orchestral groups, chess clubs, and more radical politi-

cal thinkers per square block than Soviet Russia had known before the Revolution. The South End — or River Heights, as it is more fashionably called — was basically what that revolution had been against. The mayor, most of the aldermen, the chairman of the school board, and many of the civic employees — not the street sweepers, of course — lived in River Heights.<sup>31</sup>

On the whole, the fate of East European immigrants as presented in these short stories is unenviable. Despite the official immigration policy of the Canadian government, they rightly feel amputated. Even if the native-born do not exclude them, they are unable to make themselves feel at home. They cling together in order to be among people with similar fates, people who have suffered similar traumas, those that led to exile in the first place and those that attended the crises of immigration. To leave one's native country is sometimes a deliberate, almost always a difficult, act. With their sense of identity shaken, the immigrants find that succeeding in the new land is almost as hard a task as attempting to dance with the hands and feet tied. That is why the short stories discussed here are mainly about failures.

Just as Canadians struggle with the question of a national political and cultural identity, the East European immigrants in their stories (and, perhaps, in life) struggle with a parallel problem on a personal scale. Because of the sufferings they have endured previous to their emigration, they find it difficult to identify wholly with the new world. "Transplanting" is usually beyond the reach of the first generation. Even the second generation cannot always free themselves from their elders' past. This entrapment is masterly rendered by Mavis Gallant in "The Legacy," through an image of ownership. After the death of her mother, a character named Marina cannot get rid of the mother's shop, *Rumania Fancy Groceries*, foisted on her by her brothers:

Marina flung out her arm, almost striking him as she threw the key away. "For me?" she cried again. "I'm to live here?" She looked around as if to find, once more, the path away from St. Eulalie Street, the shifting and treacherous path that described a circle, and if her brothers, after the first movement, had not held her fast, she would have wrecked the room.<sup>32</sup>

This heritage, which feels like a burden to the second generation, is, however, to be cherished by further generations, the members of which have been born Canadians. And in their experience, perhaps, lies the subjects and cultural prototypes on which the stories of the future will rely.<sup>33</sup>

#### NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> "Multiculturalism — the Policy," in *Multiculturalism, Bilingualism and Canadian Institutions*, ed. Keith A. McLeod (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1979), 12.
- <sup>2</sup> In *Canadian Short Stories*, Third Series, ed. Robert Weaver (Toronto: Oxford, 1978), 243.
- <sup>3</sup> In *More Stories From Western Canada*, ed. Rudy Wiebe and Aritha van Herk (Toronto: Macmillan, 1980), 162.
- <sup>4</sup> *The Pegnitz Junction* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1982), 94.
- <sup>5</sup> Gallant, 95.
- <sup>6</sup> In *Canadian Short Stories*, ed. Robert Weaver (Toronto: Oxford, 1966), 389.
- <sup>7</sup> Spettigue, 395.
- <sup>8</sup> Spettigue, 391.
- <sup>9</sup> Spettigue, 390.
- <sup>10</sup> Spettigue, 390.
- <sup>11</sup> In *More Stories From Western Canada*, ed. Rudy Wiebe and Aritha van Herk (Toronto: Macmillan, 1980), 153.
- <sup>12</sup> Roy, 155.
- <sup>13</sup> Roy, 159.
- <sup>14</sup> Roy, 161.
- <sup>15</sup> Roy, 156.
- <sup>16</sup> Roy, 152.
- <sup>17</sup> In *More Stories From Western Canada*, 165.
- <sup>18</sup> Govier, 165-6.
- <sup>19</sup> In *Small Wonders*, ed. Robert Weaver (Toronto: CBC Enterprises, 1982), 164.
- <sup>20</sup> Weinzwieg, 160.

- <sup>21</sup> Weinzwieg, 167.
- <sup>22</sup> Weinzwieg, 163.
- <sup>23</sup> Munro, 242.
- <sup>24</sup> *The Pegnitz Junction*, 121-2.
- <sup>25</sup> "An Autobiography," 126.
- <sup>26</sup> "An Autobiography," 122.
- <sup>27</sup> "An Autobiography," 123.
- <sup>28</sup> "An Autobiography," 128.
- <sup>29</sup> In *Canadian Short Stories*, Second Series, ed. Robert Weaver (Toronto: Oxford, 1968), 32-3.
- <sup>30</sup> In *More Stories From Western Canada*, 34.
- <sup>31</sup> In *More Stories From Western Canada*, 40-1.
- <sup>32</sup> In *Canadian Short Stories* (1966), 370.
- <sup>33</sup> See also Peter C. Newman (himself a Czech immigrant), "Curse the Winter, Love the Land: Enjoying the Canadian Dream," *Maclean's* (April 1973), 3.

KLARA WIX

## GEORGE GRANT, 1918-1988

GEORGE GRANT was almost Canada's only public philosopher. Philosophy, for him, was a fundamental reflection on the whole condition of man and his place in the universe. The contemporary thinkers he mentioned when he wrote his report on philosophy in Canada for the Massey Commission were men outside the departments of philosophy: Charles Cochrane, a classicist, Harold Innis, a political economist and economic historian, Northrop Frye and A. S. P. Woodhouse, literary critics. In the eyes of some holders of chairs of philosophy, George Grant was not quite one of them. Still, his report spoke well of some of their dead (John Watson and George Brett) and singled out the philosophers at St. Michael's College and the Institute for Mediaeval Studies at Toronto for collective praise.

He chaired the philosophy department at Dalhousie for a few years and the department at York for (literally) a few days. He then became chairman of the McMaster religion department, and when he died in September 1988 at the age of 69, he had served for some years as a special professor of almost everything at Dalhousie University. *Dialogue*, the official journal of the Canadian Philosophical Association, published an extended critique of his most scholarly work, *English-speaking Justice*, in 1988 — eleven years after it was first published by the library of Mount Allison University. The book was later published by Notre Dame University Press, and it was the only one of his six books published by a generally recognized scholarly press. His more than fifty articles on philosophical topics were all published outside the journals technically labelled as philosophy.

These facts tell us more about philosophy than about George Grant: they illustrate the extent to which what Grant thought of as philosophy has migrated to other fields. But he thought there was something important in the relationship of philosophy to classics and literature. Plato was his first love and he believed that the great ideas and the great civilizing forces all have roots either in classical antiquity or Christianity, and that people like Cochrane who tried to learn how they fitted together were doing real philosophical business. Northrop Frye's *The Great Code* did not altogether please him, but Frye's central critical works spoke to Grant's conviction that there is a unity to the basic ideas in our present and past and that the structure of literature provides a necessary element in the philosophical vision.

Grant's "conservative Canadianism" included a defence of traditional Christianity and a view of man as closely tied to nature, yet in danger of losing his soul through the magician's box of technologi-

cal tricks and the salesman's pitch. This is the view Thomas McCulloch offered in his *Letters of Mephobosheth Stepsure*, although he painted such convictions as already dimming in the Nova Scotia of the 1820's. McCulloch ultimately taught philosophy at Dalhousie. He was also the founder of Pictou College which, in turn, produced Grant's grandfather, the celebrated Principal George Monro Grant of Queen's. Principal Grant liked the idealism of John Watson, but Grant himself turned against such soft philosophies.

Grant preferred to have his feet in Nova Scotia while he looked at the world (though he was born in Toronto). But he expressed his vision through applications of and glosses to a line of major thinkers — Plato, Hegel, Heidegger, and the European-American political theorist Leo Strauss. None quite satisfied him. His vision of a world dying from its own cleverness caught the imagination of Canadians in his *Lament for a Nation* (1965), which portrayed Canada as drowning in what *Technology and Empire* (1969) was to characterize as the Great Lakes civilization. The larger human problem had been exposed in his 1959 CBC Massey Lectures, published as *Philosophy in the Mass Age. Time as History* (1977), more Massey Lectures, addressed Nietzsche and the unsuitability of time as a milieu for serious human life. His last book, *Technology and Justice* (1986), is a collection of essays on Grant's most familiar themes.

His constant, honest, intelligent struggle for an adequate vision of the world brought him a scholarly following. His public loved him for his gentle humanity which he was somehow able to combine with an unswerving devotion to principle. An early mystical experience affected him deeply, but he saw himself simply as offering the reflections of an educated man in a difficult time. He has no apparent successor in Canada.

LESLIE ARMOUR

In the wake of current reassessments of British imperialism, Victorian and Edwardian Canada's governors-general have acquired new interest. Sandra Gwyn's *The Private Capital* (1984) comes to mind; more recent publications include Sydney Checkland, *The Elgins, 1766-1917: A Tale of Aristocrats, Proconsuls and their Wives* (Aberdeen UP), Jehanne Wake, *Princess Louise: Queen Victoria's Unconventional Daughter* (Collins), and Robert M. Stamp, *Royal Rebels: Princess Louise and the Marquis of Lorne* (Dundurn). Calling the Lornes "rebels" may be exaggerating, but their lives and activities were certainly complex and unusual enough to warrant attention. Their efforts to profile themselves as writers and artists and thus establish a reputation independent of their privileged position echo those of other European royalty, the Empress Elizabeth of Austria and her son Rudolph among them, who were aware that the monarchy had outlived its right to exist. Lorne — like the Elgins — was moreover a member of the Scottish aristocracy, and his emphatic initiatives during his term as governor-general, such as the foundation of the Royal Canadian Academy and the Royal Society, may be read as a bid to establish himself in the British-dominated bureaucracy of the Empire. That imperialist condescension is not yet a thing of the past, becomes clear from a review of Wake's book in the *Times Literary Supplement*, which complains that the study "is not always well planned. Characters appear in the story, and it is often some time before we find out who exactly they are. Anyone ignorant of Canadian history might well wonder why Sir John and Lady Macdonald feature so prominently. It is never revealed that he was Prime Minister of the Dominion." The Lornes' marriage was more complex than most (Lorne was a homosexual), and there were numerous observers to watch and interpret their every step. Often the result is negligible gossip, but sometimes there are also valuable insights: Stamp gives information on Louise's affliction with neurasthenia, a psychosomatic illness found among an alarming number of Victorian women of the affluent classes. *Royal Rebels* is a work of popular history, and it has both the virtues and defects of that genre: it is short on analysis of the larger historical and social implications, but thoroughly researched, fluently written, and entertaining to read.

E.-M.K.

# ON THE VERGE

\*\*\*\*\* RÜDIGER JOPPINE & BERNARD SMITH, *The Art of Captain Cook's Voyages*, vol. 3 (*Catalogue and Text*), the voyages of the 'Resolution' and 'Discovery' 1776-1780. Yale, \$225.00. James Cook's expeditions during the latter 1770's took him to the South Pacific, South Africa, Southeast Asia, and (most relevant here) the northwest coast of North America. On these voyages were two artists, John Webber (a realist, a painter in oils, trained in Paris) and William Ellis (a surgeon's mate, draughtsman, and water colourist), whose visual record of events and observations did much to challenge romantic views of native custom and conventional images of scenery. Several portraits and scenes depict Nootka figures and habitations. The authors are at pains to demonstrate that, in these, conventions persisted — some ethnic stereotyping, some structural borrowing from Watteau and others. But they also tell (out of journals, biographical detail, and art history) an extraordinary meta-narrative about the role of representation in the construction of European/non-European relations. This is meticulous, extensively illustrated scholarship; the materials (carefully annotated) have been assembled from almost sixty collections, primarily in the U.K., Canada, Australia, and New Zealand.

W.N.

\*\*\*\*\* JARS BALAN & JURI KLYNOVY, eds., *Yarmarok: Ukrainian Writing in Canada Since the Second World War*. Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies, Univ. of Alberta, n.p. An anthology of poetry, essays, stories, and dramatic sketches by Canadians of Ukrainian descent, this collection brings together works by some 49 writers, from Ryga and Kulyk Keefer, Kostash and Slavutych, Suknaski and Lysenko, Dennis Gruending and Brian Dedora, Maara Haas and Jars Balan himself, to those who are less well known to anglophone readers: Maria Holod, Volodymyr Skorupsky, Lydia Palij, Boris Oleksandriv. George Morrisette is here, represented in part by "Finding Mom at Eaton's," a poem about the discovery by the poet (brought up by a Métis family) that he had Ukrainian parentage. Other themes include responses to the idea and the landscape of both Canada and the Ukraine, and reactions to the borderlands of exile. "Who, now, remains whole," asks one poem by Svitlana Kuzmenko, "When dual worlds already exist within?" Deprivation also, however, turns

some people towards alternatives and opportunities; Helen Potrebienko, faced with yet another strike, contemplates walking beyond the limit of the picket line: "Before I get too old for walking, / I'd like to get to Newfoundland. / I've always wanted to visit Newfoundland, / walking slow." A striking sampler of Ukrainian connections in Canada, this book also provides an extremely valuable biobibliographic appendix, with data on the writers included. (An unexpected endnote — "N.B. George Bowering is not represented in this book" — perhaps relates to a recent occasion when Bowering's occasionally-used Italian-looking nom de plume appeared in a list of Italian-Canadian writers.)

W.N.

\*\*\* *Canadian Studies on Hungarians, 1885-1985: An Annotated Bibliography of Primary and Secondary Sources*, comp. John Miska. Canadian Plains Research Centre, \$35.00. Under the heading "Hungarians in Canadian Literature" this bibliography includes Robert Kroetsch's *But We Are Exiles* ("the amorous adventures of Michael Hornyak, 'that crazy bohunk,' who may or may not be a Hungarian") and Norman Levine's *Canada Made Me* ("sprinkled with Hungarians throughout"). Obviously Miska has tried to touch on all corners of his subject; with its spacious format and compact annotations this should be a very helpful guide to those interested in the polylingual dimensions of Canadian literature. In addition to primary listing by the standard literary genres, the Subject Index cross-lists thirteen aspects of literature, including ballads, children's literature and literary criticism.

L.R.

\*\* MORRIS ZASLOW, *The Northward Expansion of Canada, 1914-1967*. Canadian Centenary Series, Volume XVII. McClelland & Stewart, \$39.95. The truth, though necessary, is all too often unattractive. I cannot imagine anyone reading Morris Zaslow's belated volume in the Canadian Centenary Series, *The Northward Expansion of Canada, 1914-1967*, for pleasure. It offers us at first sight a rather stodgily written accumulation of facts that have not been assimilated into an interesting narrative. There is nothing here of the grand half-mythical sweep of history as told by a Creighton or a Lower, none of the critical sharpness of an Underhill or a Cook. And yet, in his own steady way, accumulating bleak fact on bleak fact, Morris Zaslow may be offering us a more exact picture of the dismal process

of the opening of Canada's north. For, stripped of the heroic mythology that Diefenbaker and his kind exploited, this has been a rather wretched record of profit-bribing enterprise and daring, which in their turn have destroyed an extraordinary and unique way of human life — that of the Inuit and the northern Indians — developed over millenia of slow evolution in response to one of the world's most unfriendly environments, an environment whose rigour yet concealed a fragile balance of animal and vegetable life that the northern movement of what we call civilization has also imperilled. Our record is not a resplendent one, and perhaps it is appropriate that, with such devastating facts to offer, Zaslow should present them in leaden tones. We have heard enough, for the time being, of the golden bells of romantic history-making. Read this book for information, perhaps for anger, but not for entertainment.

G.W.

\*\*\*\* JOHN ROBERT COLOMBO, *Colombo's New Canadian Quotations*. Hurtig, \$29.95. As the Great Canadian Magpie, Colombo has parlayed the role of an ingenious but distinctly minor poet into that of a major figure in the Canadian literary world. His companions stand on the shelves of critics, historians and journalists, and whether they are willing to admit it or not, if they want a quick check on a fact they are likely to go first to *Colombo's Canadian References* or *Colombo's Book of Canada*. His *Canadian Literary Landmarks* is an informative and often entertaining gazeteer of the geography of writing in Canada. But undoubtedly the most important of the gatherings he has offered to us with such zest and industry is the series beginning with *Colombo's Canadian Quotations* and now reaching its third volume in *Colombo's New Canadian Quotations*; 4,000 of the 4,600 quotations, we are told, have not appeared in the preceding volume. Such books are useful sources and even occasional points of inspiration for writers, and once they exist, one wonders how one had ever done without them. But they are also, in their own ways, charts of the Canadian collective consciousness. We are (provided one listens to the echoes as well as the words) what we say. So Colombo presents us, and in the process defines us, for a dictionary of quotations helps to chart a culture in the same way as a dictionary of words defines a language. After all these years, Colombo has become so useful that, to paraphrase Voltaire, if he did not exist we would have to invent him.

G.W.

\*\* JAMES G. GREENLEE, *Sir Robert Falconer: A Biography*. Univ. of Toronto Press, \$37.50. Do university presidents have inner lives? Their biographies often lead one to doubt it. James G. Greenlee has written a book about the career of Robert Falconer, who was president of the University of Toronto at one of its periods of greatest growth, from 1907 to 1932. As an essay in the history of education, dealing with the transitions in Canada from a university system dominated by parsons to one dominated by laymen, and from an English to a Germano-American view of the way knowledge is to be transmitted, it is interesting and valuable, even if it proceeds at a plodding gait. But the hero, Falconer, who is quoted and paraphrased at often tedious length on the educational issues of the time, and fights and wins or retreats in so many academic skirmishes, seems as cold and marmoreal as the posed photograph that figures on the book's dust cover. There is little in the book that seems to bring the statue to life, yet one cannot entirely blame Professor Greenlee for, as he says, "the university leader assiduously destroyed most of his" correspondence. As Greenlee wistfully concludes, "Sir Robert continues successfully to hold the biographer at arm's length," which he does to the end of this long book. However, the art of biography is of necessity at least partly fictional, and the biographer gains his sense of the inner man as much from empathy as from documentation. Clearly Greenlee has been too cautious to make the leap of empathy, and so we are left with the cold portrait of a man who speaks and acts and holds office but in the imagination hardly exists.

G.W.

As designations of different cultural levels, "high brow" and "low brow" were derived from phrenological categories, meant to distinguish the "Human Idiot" from the "Enlightened." The highest brow of all was said to be found among Caucasians, although there too distinctions were to be made: "the closer to western and northern Europe a people came, the higher their brows extended." Probably the most interesting implications of Lawrence W. Levine's *Highbrow, Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Harvard Univ. Press, \$25.00) are those pertaining to the cultural identity of a multi-cultural society, for it was believed (and, covertly, perhaps still is) that the "primary obstacle to the emergence of a mostly American music . . . lies in the diverse character of our population. American music cannot be expected until the present dis-

cordant elements are merged into a homogeneous people." Frederick Nast's observation, in 1881, about American music was applied to the whole of American society and culture by Henry Adams, who affirmed the leadership of the Anglo-Saxon over "millions of immigrants, negroes, and Indians far in the rear, somewhere in archaic time." Levine's book is richly documented, with an especially detailed and informative chapter on popular versions of Shakespeare, but also illuminating comments on topics as diverse as the Columbian Fair in Chicago, Central Park in New York and the music of John Philip Sousa. The book is richer in detail than in analysis, but it is inspiring nevertheless, with many parallels to be drawn to the Canadian situation.

E.-M.K.

ALSO RECEIVED: Fidelis Morgan, *The Female Wits*, an anthology of Restoration plays by women (Random House, \$21.95); Mohamed Amin et al., *Kenya: The Magic Land*, a spectacular book primarily of animal photographs, with a serviceable travel-text (Random House, \$45.00); Richard Dalby, ed., *The Virago Book of Ghost Stories* (the twentieth century), a testament in part to the attractions of the form to contemporary women writers, for a variety of reasons spelled out in Jennifer Uglow's introduction (Random House, \$32.50); Jack Zipes, *Victorian Fairy Tales*, a lively anthology of didactic and utopian tales (Routledge, US\$24.95); Jack Zipes, *The Brothers Grimm*, a biographical and critical account of fairy tale reception (Routledge, \$32.50); George Bishop, *When the Master Relents*, a lucid attempt to "read" some "non-canonical" short stories by Henry James, in an endeavour not so much to "rehabilitate" them as to account for their apparent strategies of form (UMI Research Press, \$34.95); Robert Knille, ed., *As I Was Saying . . .*, a Chesterton "reader" (William B. Eerdmans, n.p.); David Lodge, *Write On* (Penguin, \$9.95), a collection of occasional essays (on America, Catholicism, and academia) by an elegant stylist; Nancy R. Harrison, *Jean Rhys and the Novel as Women's Text* (Univ. North Carolina, \$34.95); Margaret Oliphant, *Chronicles of Carlingford: Miss Marjoribanks* (Virago/Random House, \$13.95); Somerville and Ross, *The Real Charlotte* (Virago/Random House, \$11.50); Elaine Hobby, *Virtue of Necessity: English Women's Writing 1646-1688* (Virago/Random House, \$27.50), a valuable survey of poetry, prose, drama, and a variety of non-fiction forms, including meditations, biographies, guidebooks, and social commentaries.

## LAST PAGE

Is it easier to recognize posturing among those of one's own gender? Or is it just a question of the familiarity of stereotypes? J. K. Baxter's only novel, *Horse* (Oxford, \$13.50), written in the 1950's, tells of a 1940's young man who makes sex, drink, and poetry his "religion." And David Foster's *The Adventures of Christian Rosy Cross* (Penguin, A\$7.95) reconstructs in parodic picaresque the alchemy of drugs and the 1960's. Reading either book is an education in suspended acceptance. *Maybe so*, we say, *maybe so*. Beside them, Barney Roberts' *Where's Morning Gone?* (Penguin, \$8.95) seems positively idyllic. Roberts' stories of a boy growing up are lovingly recalled autobiographical moments, detailing a world where gentlemen, song, and justice still have the power to do battle with the bullies and the martinets. And still we say *maybe so*, though it's a lovely read. So is Tim Winton's *That Eye the Sky* (Penguin, A\$14.95); but in this case the options don't seem so extreme. Winton's novel tells of an adolescent (named Ort Flack), whose encounters with sex, death, and a family gone awry take him into himself and into substitute communion with the sky; the whole book is a sustained revelation of disorder in a world that God, it is suggested, apparently made.

Still more books announce male traumas. One is Michael Gifkins' story collection *Summer is the Côte d'Azur* (Penguin, NZ\$14.50), which frets over problems of belonging, using wit as a defence against loneliness and disintegration, asserting a world where love still exists and recognizing that envy and malice are love's inevitable attendants. Another is Murray Bail's novel *Holden's Performance* (Penguin, A\$24.95, pa. \$9.95), in which acting and snapshots are recurrent metaphors: Holden's support for the power in power makes him the ideal aide, ultimately, for the Australian legation to the U.S. — his Australian predictability, the author sardonically observes, demonstrates his usefulness. Peter Skrzynecki's *The Wild Dogs* (Univ. of Queensland, \$9.95) is a story collection that recalls the joys and terrors of a Polish refugee camp outside Sydney and that demonstrates how these experiences shape memory.

Then there are the several parallel books about women discovering the traumas of life. Are they any more or less real, more or less traumatic? Or is the difference primarily one of the separate conventions? What is it that makes Elizabeth Jolley's *The Well* (Penguin, A\$8.95), so stylishly written, seem enigmatic?

Does enigma constitute its power as well as its subject? Why is it so much more effective than Yvonne du Fresnois's *Frédérique* (Penguin, US\$8.95), which struggles with an exclamatory diction (*Ah! Ha! Ja!*) too often to turn purported history into purported myth? Five more works deal with women in small-town surroundings, committing themselves to decision, even if they don't always believe in results: Olga Masters' *A Long Time Dying* (Univ. of Queensland, \$19.95), Shonagh Koea's *The Woman Who Never Went Home and Other Stories* (Penguin, NZ\$17.99), Patricia Grace's *Electric City and Other Stories* (Penguin, NZ\$14.99), Joy Cowley's *Heart Attack and Other Stories* (General, \$24.95), and Kate Grenville's *Lilian's Story* (Allen and Unwin, A\$14.95). Masters' book looks ironically at New South Wales social life, Cowley's at New Zealand, Grace's at Maori life, Grenville's at Australia from the year of Federation onwards. Cowley's endings are characteristic: "It doesn't matter," "There was nothing to say." They tell of eloquent *acts*, to which speech cannot add.

In one of Grace's stories, a scene of a woman watching water rushing down a drain seems a powerful synecdoche about male power in a marriage of unequals. Again, endings resist closure ambivalently: "Ahead of them is one corner, and another, and another. All she wants for now is to come to each one blindly — and not to know what is round this bend, the next, the next one after that." It's easiest to see difference, perhaps, tonally. Koea's book is all mock romance, with characters called Adalbert and Edmund, but the real romance still lies with the women who find joy by trying at least to transcend the chaos of suburban "urbanity." However, the most interesting of this group is, I think, *Lilian's Story*, partly because of its technical skill. The ending echoes the other books: "*I am ready for whatever comes next.*" But the book is more concerned with the identities lodged in language than the others are; it openly (and wittily) questions (even while it acknowledges the force of) verbal implication. Lilian, that is, has inherited behaviour through the language of parents and others ("*A lady does not hurtle, Lilian dear*"; "*Snails, Father went on after swallowing the last of his trifle, Snails have an average life span of seventy-two days, barring accidents*"). Lilian comes to realize that words tell messages — "*My grandmother comes from Transylvania*," "*I am just a simple bush bloke*" — and that the most obvious are not always the simplest. Lilian, in this story, charges through her life with gusto; her recognition of the

shaping impulses of words gives her a greater claim than others might have to the readiness she says in hers.

When Russell Haley's moodily effective *The Settlement* (Hodder and Stoughton, NZ\$29.95; pa. \$19.95) declares "How ambiguous even the simplest language is," it's not quite what "Lilian" means. Haley's story, full of images of mazes, culverts, nets, and pressure, tells of an attempt to escape from an unnamed authoritarian environment to something else; language in these circumstances is either a threat (i.e., a civil constraint) or a protection (i.e., from civil upheaval). The result, here, is not so much a study in history as a study of history: a fable about the manipulation of behaviour through the public and private forms of speech. Stevan Eldred-Grigg's *Oracles and Miracles* (Penguin, \$8.95) takes up the same issue in an historical frame, constructing a novel out of the fragmented observations of twin females and an historian, all revealing glimpses of working-class Christchurch during the 1930's-1940's. The novel contrasts two pressures in the women's lives; growing up (sex and misinformation, the hardships of factory life) *vs.* growing away (the focus remaining on the working-class, and demonstrating the "death" to the workers of the twin who gets "out"). Yet another contrast involves the language of memory. The historian sees the period only as a career opportunity, reconstructing a version of experience out of magazine advertisements and other hard "evidence." The twins, by contrast, remember poverty — of things, and of love.

Two further works take up this paradox of the fictions of history and memory. Gerald Murnane's *Landscape with Landscape* (Penguin, A\$11.95) is a series of six related stories about the "landscape" of fiction — i.e., its territoriality as image or its physical space as a page. One story, in which a man tries to explain himself to himself, questions the character of the world:

I could only wonder whether the women who looked briefly at me during the rest of the evening saw a man whose eye had ranged widely over the world but who now chose to scrutinise their quiet streets for his own purposes, or a man who had failed somewhat in the world at large and who now came humbly to learn from them what they saw beyond their kitchen windows all day or in the greyness of their television tubes late at night after the last image had dwindled to nothing. And I wondered too how I might have described myself or the book I was sup-

posed to be writing: whether I could still claim that what passed in front of my eyes deserved to be distinguished from what others called the world, or whether I had only used the word 'landscape' (and still resorted to it occasionally) to console myself for failing to see what others saw quite clearly.

But it's really a story of repeated *différance*, whose ending takes place in space, although its words defer identification with it or any action based upon it. Other stories take up questions involving uncertainty, solitariness, the relevance of Kerouac to Australians, and the coded oblique communications that constitute "closeness" between males. The final story reiterates the motif of articulateness — this time self-reflexively, for it tells of someone (writer/husband/father/etc.) whose practical actions do not extend to the page, and whose articulateness does not extend off the page, the dilemma expressing what we have come to think of as the modernity of paralysis.

Rodney Hall's brilliant *Captivity Captive* (Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, \$15.95; Penguin, A\$29.99) — the title echoing the *structure* and some of the implications of "Paradise Lost" — is something of a thriller, something of a romance, something of an historical reconstruction, and something of a narrative self-justification on the part of the first-person rememberer. It tells of a family murder, distantly contained by the past, that refuses easy packaging. More fundamentally it explains why a farm called *Paradise* (a cultural mythology as well as a locally specified place) is so enticing and so enslaving. As if that were not enough, it also concerns itself with language (the vocabulary and syntax become progressively more complex as the novel unravels its mystery), until the reader, along with the character, is captivated by the complex structures of received verbal form as well: slowly coming to realize that language is one of the agencies of enticement and slavery. This is a fascinating book. Read it with care.

W.N.



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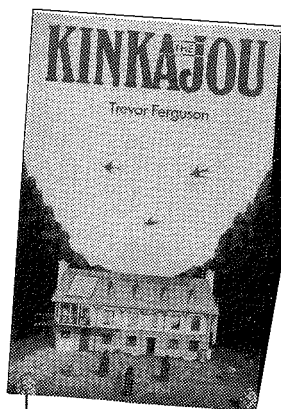
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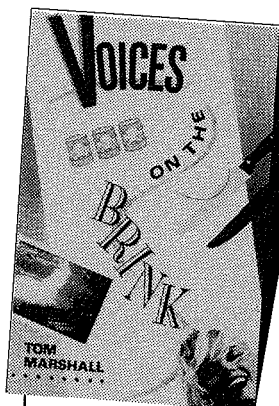


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