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# CANADIAN LITERATURE

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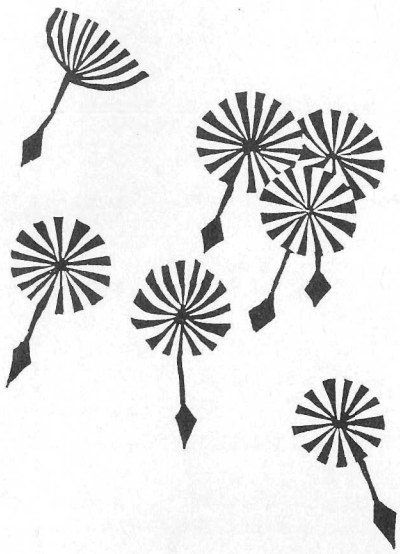

## LETTERS & OTHER CONNECTIONS

A QUARTERLY OF CRITICISM AND REVIEW

# *Dear George,*

# *Thanks.*

*Jack & Robert*

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# CANADIAN LITERATURE

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## contents

editorial

# BRYAN, BOOKS, & BARRICADES

WHEN *Quill & Quire* was advertising the forthcoming books of 1991, the editors called the publication list "A Season for Sure Things." Atwood, Davies: the list was made up of certain sellers. And they did sell, even though the economic climate was not so sure, which is of course why the list was so conservative. For businesses folded; markets dried up; "security" became the watchword of the industrial imagination—likely with the survival of existing industrial power in mind: with a clear desire to market familiar names and products, but paradoxically without much measure of the energy of cultural desire. Despite the popularity of the familiar, there is across the land a widespread impatience with the powers that be, an impatience with self-serving politicians of all stripes, with commercial feather-bedding and academic gobbledygook (which are simply other forms of me-first arrogance), and with the casual disregard by which institutions variously and repeatedly sacrifice individual human lives to the tyranny of system.

*People* run institutions, but you'd seldom know it: many such people live in order to serve the system, not the other way around, and they devise all kinds of justifications for keeping *other people* out, cutting *other people* off, refusing *other people* opportunities that they themselves have had. Always it's "other people's" problem, in their mindset — it's "good for 'them' to suffer," say the system-servers, or "if 'they' didn't make the *right* choice 'they' have to take the consequences," or "'they' should develop the skills of the 'self-made man'" (self-made, my foot: such individuals grew up somehow, with nurturers, teachers, opportunities). The system-servers say these things, moreover, only until their own power is threatened; *then* their vocabulary shifts, and they start claiming to be just system-folks, needing help from the government (you and me, remember), except more so, because they're already bigger and (maybe, just maybe) have a government ear.

But then some of the folks who want to turf out the system-servers don't stand up to much scrutiny either. They don't really want to turf out the *system*; they just want to insert themselves into the *power*. Many kinds of separatism are born of such ambitions: it's a familiar Canadian scenario.

These comments started off to reflect informally on some of the books published in 1991 that I enjoyed. A few plain statements, a few plainly subjective reactions.

Nothing more, nothing less. But in a year of political absurdity, economic disparity, competitive arrogance, and an insensitivity to sensitivity, everything connects. A society that does not produce its own food is, by definition, reliant on another's diet. (Metaphor, metaphor.) An industry that does its own workers out of a job does itself out of a market at the same time. A culture that thinks it's healthy just because it's devised a set of self-protective rules has understood neither the function of the rules nor the character of health. When an institution like the CRTC's Broadcasting Board can declare that a Bryan Adams song cannot be played often on Canadian radio because it's *not Canadian enough*, then authority has got in the way of common sense. When the Parti Québécois can claim that Quebec can secede from Canada but that "the rules" do not allow any smaller unit to secede from Quebec, then a malicious arrogance is at loose in the land. And when the Canadian book industry wants help in securing itself against unfair competition, that may be laudable; but if it devises authoritarian barricades that would in practice establish distribution *monopolies*, and consequently prevent bookstores from obtaining books from outside the country even when they are not available within, then — *in practice* — the legislation that would ostensibly facilitate publishing would in fact ghettoize Canada, cut Canadian readers off from the rest of the world, confirm provinciality in the name of independence and leave power once again in the hands of a few.

But it seems to me that the desire for safety in publishing in 1991 led to banality rather than security, which is apparent in the quality of so many publications. Honest aspiration needs to be encouraged; but tedium does not. And aiming for the "safe" market — the market that does not wish to be intellectually disturbed by the unfamiliar, the unconventional, or the innovative — seems to encourage tedium more than honesty. While "style" is sometimes the criterion that one brings to literary evaluation, this time it's not the only one. I'm as impatient with a stylish story like Margaret Atwood's "Death by Landscape" in *Wilderness Tips* (which seems to be a pale reflection of the Australian story called *Picnic at Hanging Rock*) as with the effortful progress of, say, Katherine Govier's *Heart of Flame*, or Davies' recent tales, or a score of lesser works. The literary challenge for 1991 seemed less a desire to educate, inform, entertain, or amuse than a failure *to engage*. I do not think that this year's readers are any more bored or blasé than other years' readers (except perhaps with the so-called Constitutional Debates), but stale plots, stale styles, easy politics, and fashionable attitudes are no invitation to enthuse.

Fortunately there were some exceptions to this general dismissal of a year's publications. Like many another reader, I'm enthusiastic about Rohinton Mistry's *Such a Long Journey*, with its analytic exactness about cultural priorities, human relationships, and the parallel between the two. George McWhirter's *The Listeners* bristles with political contrarieties, and along with the anecdotes and tales in his

story collection *A Bad Day to be Winning* testifies to a creative talent that is still too little recognized. Margaret Sweatman's *Fox* stylishly probes the personal dimensions of the 1919 Winnipeg General Strike. Veronica Ross's *Hannah B.* examines the resentments that surround a German Jewish identity. In a welcome return to short fiction, Matt Cohen (with *Freud: the Paris Notebooks*) again shows his talent for combining wit with passion and historical insight. Norman Ravvin's *Café des Westerns* and Michael Kenyon's *Rack of Lamb* both reveal the promise of a constructively skewed comic vision; and in Mark Frutkin's *Invading Tibet*, Don Dickinson's *Blue Husbands*, and Ekbert Faas's *Woyzeck's Head* are to be found serious preoccupations with popular culture and language. But of other books of fiction, the most interesting are collections — editions and re-evaluations — including the standard anthologies from Oxford (Robert Weaver's 5th series of short fiction) and from Oberon (*91* and *Coming Attractions 91*, both solid), Susan Gingell's *Bridge City* (Saskatoon stories), Ven Begamudré and Judith Krause's *Out of Place* (proving the multicultural character of the Prairies), the third volume in Hugh Hood's collected works (*The Isolation Booth*: many of the stories not collected before), John Thurston's *Voyages* (the short narratives of Susanna Moodie, as interesting for the editing as for the fiction), Sandra Campbell and Lorraine McMullen's *New Women* (a welcome re-examination of women's contributions to the literary history of the first two decades of the 20th century, including stories by Alice Jones and Georgina Sime), and Gwen Davies' fine edition of Thomas McCulloch's *The Mephibosheth Stepsure Letters.*

I'm generally enthusiastic, too, about the editorial and bibliographic enterprises, both because they demand a meticulous scholarship and because they serve subsequent readers, making information available that was difficult to locate or assemble before. Hence the new volume in the CWTW fiction series — on realists from Grove to Ross — merits attention, as do the articles assembled on 22 writers in volumes 7 and 8 of Jeffrey Heath's *Profiles in Canadian Literature* series (designed for a more general audience than are the ECW books). Also welcome is the *Canadian Feminist Periodical Index 1972-1985* from OISE; the 20th anniversary issue of *Event*; the 40th anniversary issue of *Quarry*; and such critical editions as Doug Barbour's collection of essays and interviews called *Beyond "Tish."*

Editorial consolidation as much as innovation also marked the year in poetry. Kathleen Scherf's excellent edition of *The Collected Poetry of Malcolm Lowry* brings a large body of (admittedly uneven) material together in one place, enabling future readers to draw on reliable texts. Betsy Warland's *InVersions* is an anthology of gay writings, political in intent, its contents ranging from testament to manifesto. Fred Cogswell and Jo-Anne Elder edited *Unfinished Dreams*, translations from the contemporary poetry of Acadia, which has been largely unknown outside its region and undeservedly consigned to cultural margins. Al Purdy in-

troduced *Last Makings*, a collection of late works by Earle Birney, which records how constant Birney's talent has been; Louis Dudek revised *Europe*, a poem that should renew interest in his fascination with modernism and cultural tradition; and among important volumes of "new and selected works" are Florence McNeil's *Swimming Out of History*, Dorothy Livesay's *The Woman I Am*, Margaret Avison's *Selected Poems*, and to my mind the most fascinating (for its verbal textures, its imaginative field) — *because perhaps it's the least familiar*: such are the barricades of literary canonicity — Colleen Thibaudeau's *The Artemesia Book*. I hurry to declare that not all books of poetry or fiction came my way in 1991, and to reaffirm that my comments are not a selection of THE "best," whatever that might mean in these circumstances, but a free-ranging meditation on some of the books I enjoyed reading. To which I would add another dozen titles: Roy Miki's *Saving Face*, William Robertson's *Adult Language Warning* (his "A Father Who Has Lost a Young Son" is a devastating poem), Rhea Tregebov's *The Proving Grounds*, John Barton's *Great Men*, April Bulmer's *A Salve for Every Sore*, David Manicom's *Theology of Swallows*, Sandra Nicholls' *The Untidy Bride*, Richard Harrison's *Recovering the Naked Man*, Heather Spears' *Human Acts*, Daphne Marlatt's *Salvage*, and Fred Wah's *So Far*. What is it that appeals? A cadence, a voice, a lyric intensity, a single image, a narrative impulse sometimes. There is no one reason for poetry, no rule for security of line.

This reflection leads to another. Among non-fiction works, a number of politically correct works probed racism, margins, gender, class — most of them worthwhile enterprises, valuable correctives to the conventions of history. Why is it then that one encounters such a covert (and not always covert) resistance these days to the aims of "political correctness" — the aims, that is, of re-evaluating the assumptions of historical generalization, questioning the priorities of a privileged ruling class? Perhaps in fact it's not the aims that are most being challenged, though inevitably some people exist who have so invested their self-image in aspiring to class power that they cannot brook any questioning of the status quo, cannot imagine themselves outside the safety of Received Opinion. Perhaps, that is, it is the *rigidity of political correctness in operation* that offends those who resist it. No-one with a shred of decency would champion racism, sexism, or other forms of cruelty. But no-one with a shred of common sense expects the world to be entirely free of bias either, even among those who champion political "correctness." In practice there is little difference between the rule that finds a song "not Canadian enough" and the rule that says only one political perspective is permissible.

Though Margaret Atwood's *Survival*, one might have thought, would have sufficiently exposed the political implications of "victim positions" to have made them psychologically unappealing, victimage (if one believes the newspapers and trusts the trends of academic magazines) has come close to being the *de rigueur* experience that permits a contemporary Canadian to speak at all. If so — if the

nation's multiple culture is thus reduced to a set of competitive disadvantages — then political re-evaluation has not served Canada well, or history; for there is much to admire in Canadian society, and if "political correctness" serves only to attack history and not at the same time also to praise *whatever each generation finds praiseworthy* in the present and past, then those who already scrabble to place themselves as the arbitrary designers of possibility will have taken over. Rather than being freed into generous alternatives, the future will be constrained. Power will not have been dislodged; it will simply have been renamed.

Consider this list of 1991 publications, all of them of some interest, some of them of great interest indeed: Robert McGehee's *Canada Rediscovered*; the reprint of Marius Barbeau's 2-volume work classifying *Totem Poles*; Orest Subtelny's *Ukrainians in North America*; Dionne Brand's *No Burden to Carry* (narratives of Black working women in Ontario between the 1920s and the 1950s); Denis Johnston's *Up the Mainstream: The Rise of Toronto's Alternative Theatres*; Joseph Pivato's *Literatures of Lesser Diffusion*; Ormand McKague's *Racism in Canada*; the special Ethnicity/Multiculturalism issue of *IJCS*; Gwendolyn Davies' *Studies in Maritime Literary History 1760-1930*; Patricia Smart's *Writing in the Father's House* (in English translation, on the emergence of a feminine voice in Quebec writing); Robert Lecker's *Canadian Canons* (attacking them); Brian Fawcett's *Unusual Circumstances* (attacking a lot of things); Smaro Kamboureli's *On the Edge of Genre*; Sylvia Söderlind's *Margin/Alias* (on "Canadian" and "Québécois" fiction); C. H. Wyke's *Sam Selvon's Dialectical Style and Fictional Strategy*; Ben-Zion Shek's *French-Canadian and Québécois Novels*; and Volume II of *Gatherings*, the *En'owkin Journal*. All declare an angle of discord; all use that angle to fish for converts in troubled waters. Yet when, one might ask, does the "politically correct" turn as restrictive as the attitudes it seeks to replace or at least subvert? When does political correctness merely mask personal diatribe? Why is it that Brian Fawcett's essays — so willingly and openly curmudgeonly — are so refreshing in a context of safe class, safe gender, safe edge, and safe razor?

Of the books in this list, some that on the surface seem most neutral turn out to be very political indeed — McGehee's attractively illustrated book about explorers' "discoveries" of Canada, for example, which remains bound by an Atlantic focus: "discovery," apparently, comes from the East. Other writers, by contrast, make their geographic bounds a term of analysis, as do Davies and Johnston, in extremely cogent literary enquiries, or make them function as metaphor, as does Kamboureli, writing provocatively and effectively about the status of the contemporary long poem. Several critics run aground on political binaries: is *Canadian/Québécois* "correct"? (It's politically charged, though neither as valid nor as absolute a division as many of those who use the terms as an exclusive binary pair would like us to believe.) Is *French-Canadian/Québécois* ALSO CORRECT,

and if so, what does this mean — that many correctnesses are possible but only some are acceptable? To whom? Who is the arbiter of acceptability, the officer who polices critical speech? Who can suppress language, and why can language be "acceptably" suppressed in the name of cultural security?

Given these tensions, two biographies published during 1991 — Rosemary Sullivan's *By Heart*, about Elizabeth Smart, and John Oliphant's *Brother Twelve* — almost epitomize the year's preoccupations. The two subjects interestingly relate: a not-very-interesting man, it transpires, who nevertheless ran a cult and (until it dissipated on him) exercised power; and a woman who turned up her nose at social convention but who never quite gave up the power that her family and class accorded her, thus leading the onlooker to deduce that it was primarily the security of social position that permitted a secure rebellion. Such a conclusion suggests that fashion rules all, or at least governs what constitutes an "acceptable" behaviour, for rebel and ruler alike. The subjects' inner lives, of course, like the ordinary daily lives of a good many other people, might tell a different story. In another book, Mary Meigs comes closer to revealing this inner life, talking about being lesbian, being old, and being in a sensitive documentary film: *In the Company of Strangers.*

The film's title metaphor — Company of Strangers — is not irrelevant to these reflections; nor its subject: the sometimes deliberate, sometimes accidental isolations that desolate old age, and the companionship among strangers that *can* compensate for different kinds of loss. That companionships can develop among strangers is a testament of sorts, both a gift and a promise to the next generation and the next. The gaps that separate generations, however, and the gaps that people (even literary critics) construct to separate themselves from others in their own generation threaten not only the promise of companionship but also the working ties of community. In many ways, the political correctness "movement," if that is what it is, simply declares some legitimate objections to being made to feel irrelevant in a given society, at a given time; a *restrictive enactment* of "correctness," however, does not resolve social disparities, and a simple reversal of power and marginalization would just be conventionally spiteful. But like self-indulgence and ambitious rebellion, impulsive acts of spite are signs more of insecurity than intentional cruelty. At once claiming authority and disparaging others' authority, they suggest both an extraordinary presumptuousness and an extraordinary uncertainty. The desire to *be correct*, in parallel fashion, simultaneously designs a version of perfection and barricades it, in case to others it might already be obviously inexact. The insidious and potentially violent implications of this pattern should be obvious. Those who design the perfectly correct are always at the same time designing those who do not do as they do, think as they think, say as they say, *as the "imperfect" as well as the ostensibly "incorrect."* From there to scapegoating is a very short step. Paradoxically, this is a conventional, not a radical

position, the kind of position that only the personally insecure ever find persistently, emotionally necessary. Seeking safety, of course, may well be common sense. Seeking safety at the expense of others, however — championing the uniform of self as the only arbiter of possibility — guarantees neither security nor productive change. New "correctnesses," like old "binaries," have at some point to be read as "systems." And do systems have a way of perpetuating power? Oh yes. Their own, especially. Sure thing.

W.N.

# TAKING LEAVE

*Matthew Manera*

from opposite sides
of the train window we are
balanced on the edge
of separation the glass

uncouples voice
from gesture we are
disarticulated you

are frozen on the receding
platform guarding the negative
inside the camera in which

i have never been allowed
to leave the station

in which i have forever
surrendered impetus
to implication

# FELIX, ELSA, ANDRÉ GIDE AND OTHERS

## *Some Unpublished Letters of F. P. Greve*

*D. O. Spettigue*

IN 1976 DESMOND PACEY, with the assistance of J. C. Mahanti, published *The Letters of Frederick Philip Grove.*[1] In an Appendix, he included correspondence between Felix Paul Greve and his publishers, the Insel Verlag of Leipzig, letters held in the archive at Weimar. At that time, the Insel letters comprised most of what was known of Greve's European correspondence, apart from a few letters to Stefan George and Friedrich Gundolf that also had been identified in my *FPG: The European Years.*[2] Inevitably letters turn up after a publication, as biographical interest draws attention to them. There do not seem to be many Greve letters extant, though he was a prolific correspondent, but a few more have appeared that help to fill some chronological gaps. These hundred-odd letters, both those to André Gide and those of Greve's acquaintances in the Munich circle, give us occasional glimpses into his strange life. Equally strange and relevant, of course, is the autobiography of Elsa Ploetz, Greve's German wife, who later became the Baroness von Freytag-Loringhoven.

The principal correspondence examined here is the fifty-five letters from Felix Paul Greve to André Gide, written from Switzerland, France and Germany in the period from December 1903 to October 1907. The remainder is the forty or so letters relating to Greve's year in Munich, 1901-02, where he met Elsa Ploetz, his first wife and his *femme fatale.* The letters centre on the arty-social circle of Karl Wolfskehl (1869-1948), and the related Berlin salon of Melchior Lechter (1865-1937). These few letters are part of the extensive correspondence of Karl Wolfskehl. Of a wealthy Darmstadt family, Wolfskehl had established himself, his household and his 'jours fixes' at the centre of Munich art society. *München um die Jahrhundertwende ist ohne Karl Wolfskehl nicht denkbar.*[3]

The letters from Felix Paul Greve to Karl Wolfskehl, examined here, are part of the Wolfskehl Collection of the Deutsches Literaturarchiv of the Schiller-Nationalmuseum at Marbach. Mine of art talk and social gossip though it is, the Collection

has not been indexed with Felix Paul Greve specifically in mind, so that the Greve references are coming to light only randomly. The present article is therefore interim.

I include with the letters from Greve, reference to an early letter from Wolfskehl to Melchior Lechter, probably from 1899 or 1900, and a 1902 letter from Ernst Hardt to Botho Graef, because both refer to Elsa. In addition to Greve's letters are two photos of him, taken in July 1902, inscribed as postcards, and included among fifteen picturepostcards from Greve to Wolfskehl of 1901-02. The Wolfskehl Collection holds thirty-three letters from Greve to Wolfskehl, most of them short notes; this article describes only a dozen of them. There is also one calling-card from Greve, undated, and there are six letters (1904-1906) from Greve to the novelist Oskar Schmitz (1873-1931). The letters to Schmitz are dated, but not numbered; the earliest (28 May 1904) from the Bonn prison, was written just before Greve was released (incidentally the point where Elsa's autobiography ends). Two are from Switzerland, the first dated 21 September 1904; the second date appears to have been cut by a paper punch, so that only ... I.05 is visible. The other letters to Schmitz are written from Berlin and dated 6 September and 14 December 1906.

The German letters are courtesy of Dr. Jochen Meyer of the Deutsches Literaturarchiv at Marbach. The Gide letters are included with the kind permission of Mme. Catherine Gide-Desvignes of Paris. Both groups of letters are examined here by permission of A. Leonard Grove of Toronto. The Elsa manuscript is courtesy of Blanche Ebeling-Koning, Curator of the Rare Books and Literary Manuscripts Division of the University of Maryland Libraries.

In this essay, as in Paul Hjartarson's "Of Greve, Grove and Other Strangers,"[4] quotations from the Elsa manuscript are given Part numbers (capital Roman) and page numbers, because the manuscript is numbered by Elsa only within its three discrete parts. Djuna Barnes' lightly edited typescript copy of it, however, which I use, numbers the pages sequentially throughout, while retaining the three part-divisions, as I do here. Thus, Part I ends and Part II begins on p. 33 of the typescript, so (II, 38) means the thirty-eighth page overall, though it occurs in Part II. The Greve-Wolfskehl letters are held in two sub-collections of the Wolfskehl papers; one of the two is closed to the public at this time. Most of the longer letters are dated; the brief notes are not, nor is their chronology clear, but all the Greve-Wolfskehl correspondence falls in the one year between November 1901 and October 1902. For reference purposes I use the Marbach index numbers that appear on the photocopies I have, though these are not consistently chronological, and two notes lack index numbers. The Gide letters are identified by date. The Munich correspondence is in German, the Gide correspondence in French, but for a few German phrases whose translation is being debated, but all these correspondents, and especially Greve, used numerous foreign phrases — in Greve's case English, Italian, Latin and Greek.

In this article all translations and paraphrases are my own, unless otherwise identified. Wolfskehl's letters are a special problem because his handwriting is execrable to the point of illegibility. I am especially grateful to Maria and Tony Riley of Kingston, who succeeded in deciphering almost all of the one Wolfskehl-Lechter letter I quote from herein.

THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF the Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven will be published by Oberon Press under the title "Baroness Elsa" in 1992. It is carefully examined by Paul Hjartarson in his "Of Greve, Grove and Other Strangers." Though it is in a special sense an autobiography, I would describe it as a confession, perhaps a confessional memoir. It begins (as Elsa wrote it), "I AM BORN AT THE EAST SEA IN MY FATHERS OWN HOUSE IN SWINEMÜNDE," as though it were going to be a full-scale autobiography, but page one takes us to the death of Elsa's mother when Elsa was eighteen. By page five she has run away to Berlin, where her career as chrous-girl, courtesan and artist begins. The bulk of the 205 pages is taken up with the years 1892 to 1904, from Elsa's escape from home in the summer of 1892 to her impending reunion with Felix Paul Greve on his release from prison at the beginning of June 1904. Of that record, the emphasis is heavily on the few months in Palermo, Naples and Rome in the winter of 1903-04 when, after Felix has been arrested in Bonn, Elsa is on her own in Sicily and Italy. She is at loose ends, she misses Felix, she is bored. She has no interests, she tells us, apart from men — her poetry is a sublimation of sex, and practised only when seducible men are unavailable. Her love for Felix obliges her, in consideration for him, to supplement by her own efforts the meagre amounts he can send her from his earnings while he is in prison. The only way she can imagine making money is — not by prostitution, which she says is out of the question for her — but by finding men to support her. Unfortunately, by a quirk in her own character she repeatedly analyzes, she cannot ask for money for sex. All her "affairs" are therefore futile; she even pays to travel with a man, and suffers the torments of guilt not at having had affairs but at failing to earn money from them. She is a fascinating woman, unimpeachably honest with herself, perceptively probing her feminine psychology, and perpetually in the dilemma of the woman who is fiercely independent and at the same time totally dependent on men.

Critically we might say that in this work Felix Paul Greve is a privileged absence. Not much of the book is devoted to him, but he is the referent, the model to whom other men must compare to their cost. She tells us relatively little about Greve because, as she says, it is her story not his, but at the same time she cannot ignore

him because, she acknowledges, he was her greatest lover, and the one she lived with (for ten yars) longer than any other (II, 62-63).

From the point of view of the Grove scholar, the interest of "Baroness Elsa" is in Elsa's assessment of Felix's character. She admired him immensely at first, loved him passionately, then hated him, and sees him finally as the trickster who tricks himself to his own destruction. Unfortunately for us, she tells us almost nothing in the way of biographical fact; her gaze is inward. She does give delightful glimpses of herself — at the northern sanatorium where she is having her "womb twiddled" in compensation for her first husband's impotence and writing notes to Felix Greve; and in the honeymoon triangle, the cuckolded husband accompanying Elsa and Felix on the voyage to Italy and demanding their sympathy, until Felix buys him a bicycle and drops him off at Isschia to learn to ride it. In one of her leaps forward she presents dramatically the dialogue between herself and Felix when, farming in Kentucky ten years after their liaison began, and hating each other "up to the killing point," (III, 107) they approach their final separation, his betrayal as she sees it, of her. But this is not narrated in context, but as achronological leaps that Elsa makes as she examines herself as she was in Sicily in 1903 from the vantage of where she is, "captive in dead Germany," in 1925, reflecting on herself and writing out her reflections for Djuna Barnes.

THE NARRATIVE SEQUENCE of Felix Greve's life from 1902 until 1909 derives largely from the Insel Verlag correspondence as outlined in *The European Years*. Because it deals specifically with books, contracts, payments, publication dates, that correspondence is a limited but accurate guide. It leaves out, however, much of Felix's personal, and almost all of his social life, particularly as these relate to Elsa Ploetz. That story, or rather the essence of it, the psychology of it, is provided by Elsa in two complementary forms: the novel *Fanny Essler*, which she says was "dictated by me" as to "material," (II, 34)[5] and the autobiography. *Fanny Essler* gives us an apparently exaggerated portrait of the young Greve as Friedrich Carl Reelen, the god-hero-villain. The autobiography gives us the same portrait without the guise of fiction, and the two are remarkably similar, except that Fanny does not survive to become as disillusioned as Elsa was.

In one respect, the autobiography vindicates Felix, showing him in a more sympathetic light, and that is in connection with his trial, his elopement with Elsa, and his relation with Kilian. Whereas the trial and contemporary newspaper accounts portrayed Greve as an ingrate who had defrauded his best friend Kilian, and absconded with the wife of another friend, August Endell, from whom he also borrowed money for the purpose,[6] Elsa interprets Kilian as having been attracted homosexually to Felix, supporting him lavishly for that reason, and betraying him

finally because of Kilian's jealousy of Elsa. She also shows that the impotent Endell connived at the love of Elsa and Felix; that he accompanied them on their 'honeymoon,' and that Felix paid for Endell's wardrobe for that trip. When Felix was imprisoned and desperate for money, both to bribe his warders to let him work at his translations in prison to support Elsa, and to repay Kilian, Endell insisted on their agreement to a false divorce document that absolved Endell and threw all the blame on Felix, in return for Endell's repaying to Elsa the money he owed her lover.

A minor figure who appears in both *Fanny Essler* and the autobiography is the artist Melchior Lechter, called 'Muki' in the novel and 'Mello' in the autobiography. Elsa describes him as her "first artist friend" (I, 10) and portrays him as a prosperous, miserly esthete and designer of stained-glass windows, dabbling in pseudo-medievalism as the Stefan George Kreis did. Elsa, who suffered from his miserliness and hypocrisy, cheated on him, or tried to, using Wolfskehl for the purpose. The result, as she tells it, was hilarious but frustrating, because his penis was too big for coitus with her. She left Lechter to have a stormy love-affair with 'Ernie,' i.e. the poet-scholar Ernst Hardt, whose contemptuous treatment of Elsa led to her being rescued by his gentle young friend Richard Schmitz, who carried her off to Italy, where she lived in comfort for more than a year, having her own furnished studio in Rome. As the Wolfskehl fiasco took place in Berlin about the time of her break-up with Lechter, the Wolfskehl-Lechter letter apologizing for it, written a year after the event, must be the earliest relevant correspondence we have, dating from 1899 or 1900.

WHEN ELSA GAVE UP Richard and comfort in 1901 to study art in Munich, Richard's author-brother introduced her to the artistic salon recently established there by Karl Wolfskehl, who was hoping to make a place for himself in arty society. There she met August Endell, an architect/interior designer she identifies as one of three 'masters,' the other two being Melchior Lechter and Stefan George. Felix Paul Greve was another of the young men she met at Wolfskehl's. Apart from Greve, whose reputed wealth and sophistication distinguished him from all others, and Endell, whose initial success as a designer impressed her, all were would-be poets and artists and what Elsa scorned as "esthetes." As distinct from real artists, all esthetes are impotent, she says (II, 38). These men were all acquainted, were connected to the same salons, and wrote for the same little magazines. Their correspondence gives us some of the gossip of those ingrown little circles, including their reactions to Elsa and her relations with Endell and Greve.

To the dismay of the Munich circle, Elsa and Endell married and moved to

Berlin, where Endell was enjoying a temporary success. The marriage was a failure. A year later Elsa found herself hopelessly, as she thought, attracted to Felix Greve, who also had moved to Berlin and was offering advice to Endell, who had formed a business partnership with Richard Schmitz. At Christmas, 1902, according to the autobiography and *Fanny Essler*, Elsa and Felix consummated their love and, with Endell tagging along, sailed to Italy and thence, having escaped from him en route, for an extended 'honeymoon' in Palermo. The idyll ended when Felix was lured back to Bonn by Kilian, and arrested. This is the period covered in most detail by the autobiography, which ends with Elsa returning to Germany for Felix's release.

Ernst Hardt, 'Ernie,' Elsa had fallen romantically in love with when they first crossed eyes at one of Lechter's afternoon teas. Later, Elsa tells us in the autobiography, he became a theatre director. When she returned to Germany she tried to borrow money from him, twenty-five years after their passionate affair. In a sublimated way, Hardt draws on Elsa for a character in his drama, "Der Kampf ums Rosenrote,"; in a letter to Graef of 10 May 1902 he reports that he has changed the character's name from Elsa to Käthe.[7]

Oskar Schmitz, the author, I take to be Richard's brother, although Marbach cannot document this. To the long letter to Oskar just before release from prison in 1904, Felix postscripts his "regards to your brother." Perhaps it was Richard's loyalty to Elsa that retained the Schmitz connection through the years of Felix's imprisonment and subsequent exile and isolation in Switzerland, England and France. Felix's letters to Oskar Schmitz date from 28 May 1904 to December 1906, ending then probably because Felix and Elsa returned to Berlin. Together, and fitfully, Greve's letters to Schmitz and Wolfskehl, and the larger group to Gide, provide a social role and a social milieu for Felix in those critical years of his literary career and his domestic life with Elsa in Europe.

There is other correspondence between Wolfskehl and Lechter, but the only relevant letter yet identified is the effusively confessional and apologetic one of 1899-1900. Wolfskehl, apparently just ending a long visit to Berlin, begins:

> I cannot leave here without having told you something awful that has stood between us for nearly a year now and has practically put me in the madhouse.

He has, he confesses, been "guilty of committing the sin with Fraülein Plötz on whose account you were angry with Hardt." (As we have seen, in Elsa's account the sin was not quite committed.) In this letter Wolfskehl appears as excessively confessional, self-deprecating, and deferential to the Lechter for whom Elsa feels little respect. Elsa herself is not blamed at all for her part in the affair.

The Greve-Wolfskehl correspondence may be assumed to begin shortly after Greve's arrival in Munich to enroll at university in the fall of 1901. He had dropped out of university at Bonn, without permission, a year earlier, and had spent most

of the intervening year wandering in Italy, where he wrote his 'Wanderungen' poems. Now, attempting to re-enter university, he needed permission from Bonn, which was granted early in November 1901.[8]

There is no introductory letter to the Wolfskehl correspondence; the first dated letter, (80 96/1) and the first known letter of Felix Paul Greve's, is of 2 Dec. 1901, and it shows Greve already a familiar of the Wolfskehl world, to which he may have been introduced by Friedrich Gundolf (1880-1931). It is a formal world, however; the letters to Wolfskehl are all addressed 'Dear Doctor,' and all end with formular good wishes to him and his wife. Many of these notes apparently were to be delivered by hand, as few of the envelopes are stamped, and some bear only Wolfskehl's name, others his name and street address, usually in Munich, rarely in Darmstadt. I have interpolated the undated notes into the chronology of the correspondence as a whole, but only speculatively, as all the evidence is circumstantial.

THAT FIRST LETTER to Wolfskehl establishes not only that Felix is well acquainted with him now but also that Felix is already translating, or perhaps just reading English authors, as he offers a copy of Beardsley's 'Later Work.' He sends the Beardsley along with his next letter, of 10 December, (80 96/2) but also encloses some poems from his translation of Dante's *Vita Nuova* of — he claims — three years earlier. That Dante reference interests me because many years ago the German scholar Robert Boehringer wrote me from Switzerland that he had found in possession of the Wolfskehl family a translation of Dante's *Vita Nuova* that included parts by Greve. When I asked for more details, he replied cautiously that the family members he was dealing with were simple people, and apparently nervous, so that retrieving the book would be difficult. The book never did appear, but now it seems certain that Boehringer was correct, though I no longer have that correspondence, and I have not been able to identify which Dante edition he was referring to.

One of the undated notes (80 96/5) sent with it a revision of Greve's lyric 'Irrender Ritter' (Knight Errant); he hopes the Wolfskehls will appreciate the new style. This helps date the letter, which must have been written in January or early February 1902, because 'Irrender Ritter' is the last poem in Greve's *Wanderungen*, published in Munich in February 1902, and the version in the book is the revised one accompanying the note. Similarly, note #31 probably relates to *Wanderungen*. In it Greve writes that a mutual acquaintance, Franz Dülberg, (1873-1934, critic of art and literature), has said that the Wolfskehls would like to see more of Felix's poems. He encloses some, but adds that he is not pleased with the 'Heracles' because of the difficult rhymes. As 'Herakles Farnese' is also in *Wanderungen*, this note can be dated about the same time in January/February 1902.

Note #29 is one of a group mentioning photography. Asking to be excused from that evening at Wolfskehl's, Greve explains that a Herr von d.Müller is leaving and he and his friends want to spend the remaining time with him. "I'll find another day for the photography," he adds. #28 refers to "the pictures," which Greve is pleased with, especially of Wolfskehl and his wife, which are "little works of art." Again, a dated postcard of August 14th promises that "tomorrow" Greve will come and "do the photographing." Possibly 28 and 29 refer to the same event, and note #30 says "I shall bring my pictures this afternoon." It begins: "As Miss Klages is dining with you today, may I perhaps ask you kindly to tell her that in the Dorian Gray Ms. the first chapter is missing?" Helene Klages was a writer; was she going to look over Greve's translation for him? Though he is very busy, he will call later in the afternoon to bring some pictures. Note #16 says that he has "kept a copy of your picture for Helene Klages." Apparently Greve was both taking and developing the photos — which may remind Canadian readers of the metaphor of photographic development in *Our Daily Bread*.

Most of the notes and letters have to do with writing, negotiating with publishers, and planning publishing ventures, interrupted occasionally by visits and Felix's own travels. On March 12th he writes that the publisher Max Bruns has begun setting *Intentions*, (80 96/7) and at the same time that "my friend has left" — possibly referring to a visit to Munich by Herman Kilian.

Probably also in March, in a note dated only "Tuesday evening" (80 96/34) Felix reports that he has been searching all evening for a plan to bring their proposed undertaking to fruition. Though the outline is not yet complete, the main points are covered. This letter concedes that gaps have been left in the "list of recommended works" because "I have no directories here, to look up exact titles." Readers will recall Friedrich Michael's reference of 1972 to Greve's plans "to edit the whole of German literature in verse";[9] though it got no further than one volume of Hofmanswaldau, this may have been its origin. Wolfskehl would subsequently compile an anthology of early German poetry himself. In that spring of 1902, however, a meeting had been planned to discuss the outline Felix was to provide, but even then he "still won't know what to say" about it, and apparently cannot face it as, weather permitting, he hopes to escape on Thursday or Friday for a day's respite in the mountains. On March 17th he does send the outline, but concedes that a formal prospectus is not yet ready and would not be successful at this time (80 96/8).

The great undertaking must have been at least part of the incentive for a trip Felix takes in April 1902 to Leipzig, Dresden and Berlin. On April 21st he writes from Dresden, where he has consulted his physician.

> The result is a favourable one. He doesn't need to operate and says, moreover, the overall condition of my illness shows significant improvement over last year. With a sensible lifestyle, absolute abstinence from alcohol etc.etc. the doctor believes

> the fluid will gradually subside, as otherwise I have an absolutely healthy and strong constitution. (80 96/9)

Possibly the doctor was Kilian's father, the chief surgeon at Dresden, but this seems unlikely given that Felix for some reason is in Dresden secretly:

> The weather is marvelous. Everything is green here. I almost regret my incognito, and should like to stay here longer. But my work doesn't permit that, so tomorrow evening I travel to Berlin, where I have reserved accommodation at the Hôtel de Rome. I have written to Mr. Endell, and asked for a meeting.

The next day Felix writes from Berlin, on hotel stationery, that he has met Endell, and will dine with him, and plans also to have supper with Botho Graef (80 96/10); probably both Graef and Endell were initially Wolfskehl introductions. Felix has taken the opportunity also to negotiate with the book designer, Holden, and writes that "my play will about break even in his hands." Japan printed, it will be "a typographical art work." The play is Felix's *Helena und Damon*, a closet drama written for the nuptials of a friend. Published in May 1902, in multichrome, it was described by Verwey as "beautifully printed."[10]

Felix is bringing home with him a load of books and manuscripts, apparently as part of the great undertaking.

> ... I'm bringing the wealth of India with me to Munich. Manuscripts and incredible treasures in books. You will be proud of me. Frankly I've spent so much, I'll have to postpone setting up my establishment for a few months.

With these letters is Felix Greve's calling card, probably from this date, the printed Bonn address replaced by the handwritten Munich one, and the inscription offering a gift of Dresden candies.

Three weeks later he is travelling again, this time with Kilian. They stop at Gundolf's home in Darmstadt and then on May 16th they visit Stefan George in Bingen, before continuing down the Rhine. From Cologne they send a joint postcard to Wolfskehl on the 17th (80 96/12), and on the 21st another joint card from Paris, "after a few lovely days in Darmstadt and Bingen." (80 96/13) Felix returned to Munich at the end of the month.

A SERIES OF LETTERS emerges from his summer holiday of 1902. It is during this break that he introduces himself to the Insel Verlag. In a letter of 12 July he writes to von Poellnitz, the editor, using Wolfskehl as his reference. He has heard that Insel might be interested in translation from English literature, and he offers Dowson's *Dilemmas*. On his return he writes again, reporting that during his 'long sojourn in Italy" he has translated Pater.[11]

The long sojourn was a little more than three weeks, from about July 20th to August 14th. All the letters to Wolfskehl and to von Poellnitz from Gardone are

dated in that August fortnight, but the only date on the photos from Gardone is July 23d. Felix is back in Munich on August 15th. Gardone-Riviera in the lake district of northern Italy was a favourite spot of Greve's. Probably it was inexpensive because of the summer heat: he reports temperatures of 46 degrees celsius. He sends Wolfskehl a photo of his very modest pension there, the Pension Haberlin, and inscribes it simply: "It speaks for itself."

The first letter from Italy, of 3 August, asks "Have you kept the pictures?" which presumably refers to the series of photopostcards of himself and of Gardone scenes, which must have been sent earlier. His holiday activities: "letting my beard grow, swimming, and translating Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*," which he raves over as "the supremest nonsense."

In the Gardone setting we see Felix Greve posing as an Englishman, spending the hot afternoons in pubs talking politics with the locals, and denying everything cultural and philosophical. As a result of his swimming exploits, he claims, the Italians would elect him to parliament, except that they know "I hate all cultural questions."

In *The European Years* I referred to a letter of 6 August 1902 from Albert Verwey to Wolfskehl in which he reports that Greve has sent him "his poems [*Wanderungen*], a beautifully printed drama [*Helena und Damon*] and Wilde's aphorisms."[12] At that time I assumed the aphorisms meant *Intentions*; it was, however, the *Epigrams* which Felix translated as *Lehren und Sprüche*, his first Wilde publication. Presumably Felix had sent Verwey the books just before leaving on his holiday.

The swim — "my immortal swim" he calls it — was a nine-hour marathon across the lake and back. In a letter of 13 August Greve reports that as a result he is considered another of the "mad ingles," especially as he also has translated into Italian and distributed among them his *Wanderungen* poems (80 96/18).

In this same letter we see Greve in a role that he repeated sometimes in Canada, posing as someone with exceptionally sophisticated connections in order to mock the ignorance of his interlocutors. In this his longest letter he is mocking a Berliner, but he himself passes as English in order to put down his fellow countryman's pretensions to literary knowledge:

> He was a Berliner who in my leisure hours declaimed Schopenhauer in a guard lieutenant's voice. I began to talk of Schopenhauer's wife and Nietzsche's son, both of whom I knew personally, and that helped. Finally I defended Christianity and presented him with the Precepts and Sayings. . . . Unfortunately he had read them and took me for Oscar Wilde, because I had spoken English in order to get rid of him, and said doubtfully: I believe, sir, you are a cynic. I was grateful for his good intention, gave him my Dublin address (where W. was born) and invited him to visit at his convenience, which he promised to do.

The pictures referred to in the 3 August letter may be the photopostcards, of

which the Marbach Literaturarchiv has fifteen. They were not sent as post-cards; there are no addresses on them, and they have the slightest of inscriptions: Gardone from Portese; Ferrara Castle from Lecchi Island; Verona, Umberto I Bridge. Two are distant shots of fishingboats and fishermen, inscribed as "friends." A group of three little urchins is labelled "Three more friends of mine."

Most interesting of them all, for Grove students, are the two photos of Felix Paul Greve himself — the only early photos we have. They seem to have been taken on the same occasion: in both he is wearing a wide-brimmed hat but otherwise is formally dressed, including starched white shirt with high starched collar and a white bow tie, as well as a black jacket despite the heat. He wears a mustache, and though the photo is not clear, there may be a spiky beard. The first inscription reads:

> This is the way I looked on 23.VII.1902, on the day I began to let my beard grow, which only yesterday I had cut off.

The second photo shows him in a boat. Greve is on the edge of the picture, which centres on an Italian workingman, perhaps a fisherman. The inscription reads:

> May I present to you the noble Francesco, my friend and boatman who, with his boat and provisions, had the honour of accompanying me on my immortal swimming tour (Gardone–Lecchi–Gardone)?

On August 15th Felix is back in Munich, faced with catching up the work he has missed, and begging off temporarily his copying for Wolfskehl. This presumably refers again to the joint editing project they were contemplating, but he has his own grand designs: "This winter I shall astonish the world."

AT THIS POINT, in the late summer of 1902, a published poet and translator, Felix Greve is optimistic and confident in himself. He is planning a major critical statement on Decadence — there his reputation will rest, he is certain — but financial success and public acclaim will derive from his translations, notably of Wilde. On 20 August he sends a coy note to Wolfskehl:

> Dear Doctor:
>
> I quite forgot to tell you about another event in prospect for this winter. For the last few days I have been besieged by half a dozen theatres on account of Wilde. I should like to know who put them on to my trail. They all talk about me as the 'well known' translator and the 'knowledgable expert' [orally from Berlin!] on the poet.

At this time too he has reached the contract stage in his negotiations with Bruns to publish *Fingerzeige* [Wilde's *Intentions*]. A few advance copies have been designated as for sale by the translator, and inadvertently he sends an order form to

Wolfskehl. On 23 August he writes again in embarrassment: of course the subscription form was not meant for the doctor, who will receive one anyway. Then he returns to the theatre excitement, toning it down only a little: "Definite negotiations are in progress with two theatres. I am keeping four copyists busy. Dorian Gray!" Then he adds, with a more sceptical reference: "Que scais-je, as Montaigne would say" (80 96/24).

He has been negotiating with von Poellnitz of Insel. "Now I am to translate Pater. I've committed myself, if they give me time." (Only six days before he had written von Poellnitz that on the Italian vacation he had translated the Marius and almost all of Pater.)[13] Though Felix could not know it, years of frustration over his Pater translations were to follow. Meanwhile, the theatres were demanding too much of his time:

> The theatres both want another play to perform, and want translations from me. Where am I to find them? And people are so incredibly naive. They think I can translate a four-act play in an afternoon. I think I'll tell them shortly, I don't know Wilde.

Events move along quickly, however, and on 14 September Felix is able to announce that four of the Wilde plays are being produced at once, "in translations by one Mr.F.P.G." (unnumbered, 24a). The premiere of *The Importance of Being Earnest* is taking place in Berlin under the title *Earnest*. Tuesday evening Felix will travel to Dresden, from there to Leipzig and thence to Berlin, presumably both to negotiate with theatres and publishers and to glory in his premiere.

Presumably, but not certainly. This trip was to be a fateful one for Felix, but the narrative line is not clear. On September 28th, writing to Gundolf, he is still his bumptious self: 'Dekadenz' will be his "most distinctive book."[14] A week later, the house of cards has all come tumbling down.

How much of the tragic fall was due to malice in others, how much to weakness in Felix's character, how much to the sexual power wielded by Elsa, we cannot say. In that note of 14 September to Wolfskehl, Felix's mood seems to shift from buoyant to truculent. He has decided to publish his article on George to show that criticism does not have to attach blame nor beat the reader over the head. Had the critics begun to hurt him? We know that from *Wanderungen* on his rival reviewers had been merciless. Apparently there were also slanderous tongues. A hint is given in von Poellnitz's letters to Felix of 4 November and 12 November. Having returned the Marius manuscript, and given Felix the cold shoulder, he finally admits that it had to do with that Leipzig visit. There had been Felix's "premature" request for an advance of 800M, on short acquaintance with Insel, ostensibly to buy a rare collection of Decadence literature. Then there was talk of lavish dinners given for FPG in Leipzig, and of the many books of his that Insel was going to publish. And, von Poellnitz adds, when he began to look more closely, there were some other, uglier things.[15] As Felix acknowledges, in a second reply, that he has

more than just himself to worry about now, clearly the uglier things had to do with the liaison with Elsa Endell.

It is the timing of the correspondence that is puzzling. We know from "Baroness Elsa" that during the autumn of 1902 Elsa was in that northern sanitorium having her "womb twiddled," that she was back in Berlin having afternoon teas with Felix "more than a month . . . up to Christmas" (II, 43), and yet the unexpected, shattering letter to Wolfskehl is dated as early as October 7th:

> Dear Doctor!
>
> I intend to write some words to you, but *I beg you earnestly not to ask what is behind them.* You will not see me in Munich any more. I'm going away. Where, I don't yet know. Perhaps initially to Berlin, until I have made all the arrangements to leave Europe. Now I'd like very much to say something very heartfelt to you and your wife. . . . Only this much: the past year has been the happiest one of my life. And much, very much of that is thanks to you. (80 96/25)

In this painful letter Felix confesses that his highest hopes have now been crushed, but he cannot say why. Instead, he launches into an obscure poem beginning "Life is the most bitter satire," and then concludes: "I'm selling my things. I'm leaving as soon as I can get ready."

We do not have Wolfskehl's reaction, but writing for the last time on 10 October, Felix reports that he is leaving on Sunday for Berlin to "arrange last things," and then to Hamburg where he will depart on a "German-African steamer"; he has tickets for an eighteen-month trip (80 96/26). He leaves to his friends his books and manuscripts. He would like to see Wolfskehl once more in Darmstadt, but that is impossible: "I'm in a state where I may break down at any moment."

HERE THE WOLFSKEHL correspondence ends. Elsa tells us the story of Felix's travelling with the reluctant virgin on whose brother's behalf he paid 10,000M. It was the scandal over this, she says, that caused his break with Munich and move to Berlin (II, 58). This would account for Felix's financial crisis, as of course he didn't have 10,000M. But Elsa considered the virgin story to be common knowledge in the circle; there would have been no need for Felix's elaborate reticence in writing to Wolfskehl.

Which ever crisis it was, virgin or Elsa, Felix knew in breaking with Wolfskehl he was breaking with the whole Munich circle and with its tangents in Darmstadt, Bingen and Berlin, and perhaps also with Kilian and his financial support. On 1 December, writing to von Poellnitz, Greve says for the first time, "You know I have not just myself to think about now." By this time, then, the Elsa story was out. Her autobiography gives the impression that the liaison began at Christmas, 1902; clearly the crisis had begun more than two months earlier. The astonishing thing

is that Felix recognized that socially, professionally and financially it would ruin him, all his hopes shattered if he made that liaison — and still with the fatalism of high tragedy, he did it.

In *The European Years* OSKAR SCHMITZ is mentioned in connection with Gide and Greve.[16] Oskar was almost certainly the older, author — of *Lothar* and other works — brother of the "sweet boy" Richard Schmitz who rescued Elsa from the beloved but spineless and cruel 'Ernie' Hardt, and whose wealth sustained her during their year and more in Italy. Oskar's name had been her 'Open Sesame' to Wolfskehl's salon. During and after his prison experience, when Greve seems to have felt himself ostracized by others, the Schmitz's apparently kept up their friendship.

The six letters from Greve to Oskar Schmitz — five plus a two-line note — are mostly literary in focus, Greve playing the role of omniscient critic looking slightly condescendingly at Schmitz's work but simultaneously flattering, almost fawning on him, which seems not untypical; Felix could never be confident of his own position.

The first, long letter, of 28 May 1904, alludes to earlier correspondence. "To my great regret," it begins, "I have not yet been able to answer your kind letter of January, to thank you for the dedication to your 'Halbmaske'." After praising certain of Schmitz's works, it goes on to pontificate about "our young authors;" Greve himself is 23 at the time.

His praise of Schmitz's poems is too general to be meaningful, and he acknowledges that he cannot make connections: "I am writing beside packed suitcases," unable to look up the classics that a few chosen lines of Schmitz recall:

> almost like reading Rabelais or, to name something modern in the same genre: the best poems of Swinburne (the great Ode on Victor Hugo or the Adieu to Mary Stuart, perhaps also the Laus Veneris, of which I no longer know a line, though I have read them hundreds of times), or finally like Wilde's Ballad of Reading Gaol, perhaps as art the most meaningful poem of the whole English Decadence (an awful word). Lucian, the divine, belongs with them, Apuleius, Pé[trarch?] and Pindar and Homer. You see the association is frightening, but also to stand, if only with one line, in such company is worth a little trouble, I think.

Greve's own poems, "whose still remaining copies I have had pulped, hopefully will, if not disappear, at least be forgotten. But," he adds, "I am preparing a huge novel for the press, that should come out during the winter [*Fanny Essler*], and I'm at work already on a second" [*Maurermeister Ihles Haus*]. The familiar arrogance, name-dropping and simultaneous debunking of his own work continues:

> What will interest you more is that I am making progress with my British work. To arouse attention in your circle, there will be a little book that Bard, Marquardt and

> Co. will publish in Berlin, in a series sub auspiciis Georgii Brandis (!!!!for godssake don't blab it yet!!!!): its title reads: 'Stefan George und die Blätter für die Kunst.' In the same series of publications I expect to bring out another book: 'George Meredith and the English Romantic Tradition.' (Unfortunately I'm committed to these awful titles.) In addition I plan, in a very expensive private edition for subscription (to be printed at the Ormond Press in London, where my Wilde-Essays probably will appear in English, translated by the author) a small collection of Aphorisms: 'Prolegomena to an Aesthetic of Artwork' (to complement the earlier 'Aesthetic' of the Artist to be published privately.) This pamphlet could be out already, except that is seems to me, whenever I try to send off the Ms., to be awfully funny, because it is so serious; at this rate I won't see it published for the next ten years.

He then turns to his translating, which has "blossomed" over the past year. He has asked Bruns to send Schmitz a copy of 'The Ordeal of Richard Feverel,' and is sending today both a couple of little Browning plays ['On a Balcony' and 'In a Gondola'] and Wilde's Tales. Because the books have been packed for some time now [as Greve awaits release from prison] he can't remember whether he has inscribed them; if not, he will do so when he comes to Munich.

Greve then adds a forwarding address, at the Hotel St. James and Albany in Paris; evidently the Gide interview has already been arranged. But thereafter he hopes to escape to the distant north, perhaps to Greenland, whence he may send a card. Wouldn't you like to escape too, he asks Schmitz, to some godforsaken little seaside resort, where you could swim and ride? He would himself be ready "for such immortal things, if I could find companionship." Clearly Greve is ready to leave Elsa behind; it is not her sort of companionship he has in mind. After arguing that it could be done cheaply, and not necessarily in German territory, he ends the letter — but for the marginal greeting to Oskar's brother — with the question, "What do you think?"

Presumably there was no further conversation that summer, as Schmitz has not had Greve's address. The next letter to Schmitz, dated 21 September, is from Wollerau, on Lake Zurich, in Switzerland. It begins: "I've wanted to write to you for a long time and thank you for sending your book. Of course it reached me late, after coming a roundabout way." The letter is entirely about their respective publishing, but typically it is very indefinite in its criticisms: "that a few corrective combinations; that sharply reducing a single small part; that omission of one or other episodic arabesques, could have improved it. But all this is trifling, set against the great plasticity of the episodes and good structure."

Greve complains that he has accomplished little, his whole summer having been taken up with "travel and trivialities." He is, however, prepared to send a copy of his Wells translation, shortly to be published, if that is to Schmitz's taste, or his translation of the Browning-Barrett correspondence, if he likes "fullscale English Sentimentality." It is, Felix adds, "a hideous document temporis et morum." He

attaches a postscript attacking the degeneration of the magazine, *Die Blätter für die Kunst* — the outlet of course for Wolfskehl, Gundolf, Verwey and George, Felix's erstwhile friends.

The one brief note from 1905, also from Switzerland, congratulates Schmitz on his forthcoming marriage, and adds that whenever Greve's "huge novel" comes off the press, he will send a copy.

SOME TIME IN 1906, the Greves returned to Berlin from their self-imposed exile. A letter of 6 September — the address is Nachodstrasse, where they would live as long as they remained in Europe — apologizes for "my long silence." They had come from Paris, via Cologne. Since then, Felix has had to struggle with six large volumes of translation, and then to go to England where he became ill "and remained so through the whole trip, and still am. I don't yet know if my lungs will come through." Back in Germany now, he has had to furnish an apartment by his own efforts.

> As I could not, and would not, enter a furniture store, I had to learn to bang tables together with glue, etc., etc. And just to complete the story, I add to this that I have a novel in press, plus a volume of grotesque novellas, and a comedy to finish up. Translation work is also waiting, and in order to carry my workload, I've had to start using the typewriter. My novel, once the printing gets done, in mid October (I'm seeing it through the press) may yet come out before Christmas, otherwise it will be next summer. Once again it was started too late. Of course I've got insurance. Perhaps that is no longer necessary in your case. Your books begin to appear by themselves. How lucky!

In assessing Schmitz's *Lothar* series he notes that the second novella is "not quite genuine Berlinish," and then offers: "If, as a specialist in German dialect, I may help you with modest corrections for a possible new edition — I am at your disposal." The novel Felix was seeing through the press was *The Master Mason's House*, published by Karl Schnabel in 1906. The novel mentioned in the 1905 letter was of course *Fanny Essler*, which Axel Juncker had published.

Two brief notes follow, both dated 14 December 1906, and both related to Felix and Elsa's marriage. One of the innumerable puzzles of Elsa's autobiography is that she tells us about her marriage with Endell, and at least in response to a question she notes that she married the Baron in 1913, but she never says where or when or — except very indirectly — whether she and Felix were married. The only clues we have, therefore, are provided by this first (typed) note to Schmitz:

> Two things: 1.) Could you send me the address of the cigarette supplier again? I thought I knew the firm, but cannot find it any more. Many thanks, in anticipation. 2.) Would you be interested in a 'luncheon' with us, mid next week? I would take you to an old Berlin pub for gourmets, in a so-called 'Stadtküche.' I will try

to persuade Siegfried Jacobsohn as second guest. As tables are often booked some days in advance during this shopping season, I'd be pleased if you could let me know soon. I suggest Wednesday the 19th, at 2:00.

Best Greetings from both of us.

P.S.

If you enjoy English ways, you might consider it as a wedding breakfast, as I have just got word that, in the opinion of researchers employed for the purpose, the impediment to a legalizing of my marriage is removed. Naturally this is good news.

This is no more precise than any other of Greve's personal remarks, but it does seem to say that he and Elsa had gone through a form of marriage, that a legal difficulty had been raised, and that after professional consideration the difficulty was now judged by "rechercheurs" to be removed. He does not say that it has been legally removed, or that they are, or are to be, married, but only that the luncheon can be considered "as good as" [so gut wie] a wedding breakfast. We do not know what he told Elsa. The second note, the same day, only confirms the date and time as Wednesday at 2:00, when he will try to get a table at Ewest's on Behren Street.

This last of the Schmitz letters tells us all we know of the marriage, assuming that there was one. The only other reference is Gide's, in the 'Conversation avec un Allemand,' where he has Greve say that he and Elsa are leaving for Switzerland where in two months they will be married. Typically, they then left not for Switzerland but for England. My examination of marriage books in England for 1904 and the following years failed to uncover any record of their marriage there, nor has correspondence resulted in any positive replies from either Swiss Cantons or Berlin.

THE ACQUAINTANCE OF Felix Greve with André Gide apparently began as correspondence, but we do not have that beginning. The first letter we have from Greve to Gide is dated 27 December 1903, and it regrets that Felix [who is in prison] cannot meet Gide in Italy. It thanks him for his letter and the book, with its inscription, presumably to Felix, which arrived, he says, "just as I sent two essays to you c/o the *Mercure*." Felix longs to meet him, however, and suggests next June in Paris — where in fact they did meet, as the 'Conversation avec un Allemand' records.

Whereas Gide's 'Conversation' of June 1904 has FPG say that he and Elsa are going to Switzerland, the second letter to Gide, dated July 20th, apologizes for Felix's failure — because of continuous illness — to write him from England. By this time the Greves are in Switzerland, in a remote but scenic corner of the Canton of Schwyz:

> Now I am in Switzerland — with my wife — and I have two small rooms in the little inn of a little community on Lake Zurich. The view is marvellous. From my window I take in most of the lake. But I have to work from 5:00 a.m. until 9:00 p.m. So forgive me. I'll write at length and send you the letter I promised you in a few weeks — after our luggage arrives.

Felix has undertaken to get translations of Gide's works published in Germany, but is not having much success. The Insel Verlag having turned him down, he suggests Bruns. Gide's reply (5 August) is, however, cool to the Bruns suggestion, and the negotiations drag on through the summer. Greve makes other suggestions, tries to place Gide's dramas, tries to get excerpts from translations into magazines. A difficulty is, of course, his own wounded reputation in Germany; the journals he prefers will not accept him. At one point he even suggests using a translation by his arch rival, Franz Blei, just to get Gide into print. In the event, confusion about what was Blei's and what was Greve's was to rupture the friendship with Gide and involve Felix in a legal brawl.

Late in October, after not writing all summer, Greve "bombards" Gide with letters (ie. of 23 and 25 October) "like the sound of cannons in the mountains" (whose purpose he apparently does not grasp). He has made a deal with Bruns (for the *Immoralist*) for 2000 copies, but typically would like a little deluxe edition of twenty. Would Gide be willing to have his name with Greve's on the title page? (Since his imprisonment, Felix has been using pseudonyms, but wants to begin using his own name again; the letters include frequent arguments for such a move.) And what other Gide books may he translate? What about *Nourritures*? "You know I have translated it." Perhaps he can get an excerpt published in a journal: "Unfortunately, at the moment, *Freistadt* is the only one available to me." He writes in haste and apologizes for the scrawl — interestingly, in this as in the German correspondence, Greve has a wide range of handwriting, depending on his correspondent and his circumstances.

Only rarely do we get any sense of the life the Greves were leading at Wollerau. Early in November Felix complains at having had to walk all the way to Zurich to look up a word, as he had no library. On November 24th, "after a week of nervous fever," he is discouraged about the *Immoralist* proofs, but he encloses a fragment of *Nourritures* for publication, and notes that the magazine *Zukunft* will carry two little articles of his on Wells and on Meredith — so the translator's name can appear.

No doubt he was cheered by Gide's reply (undated, but on or about 27 November). Gide is delighted with the *Nourritures* fragment, which he is sending on to Blei, and he adds his praise: "To translate some parts as you have done, you had to grasp my text with the senses as well as with the mind." He finds in the translation the "rhythm," the "nuance" and if he may say so, the "*temperature*" of his own work. Perhaps both men later regretted the fulsome praise. Because of it,

Greve pressed for, and believed he got, exclusive rights to translate Gide in Germany, and Gide had later to point out that subsequent Greve translation had not maintained that "temperature."

In reply to Gide's concern that Greve has arranged to put part of the *Immoraliste* into German journals, Felix replies from Zurich on 31 October — one notes how prompt the mails were in those days — that of course he meant to place an excerpt from the *Nourritures*, not the *Immoraliste*. But there are problems. On the one hand, he prefers *Die Neue Rundschau*, but to publish his translation there, it "would be necessary to suppress the translator's name," as Greve and Bruns are involved in a legal suit with S. Fischer Verlag — hence the suggestion that the excerpt be, or be seen to be, a Blei translation. (This raises a bibliographical problem unsolved in the 1990s: Is the unidentified translation of a part of the *Nourritures* in *Die Neue Rundschau* of 1906 by Blei or by Greve?)

SUBSEQUENT LETTERS RELATE almost entirely to business: how to get Gide published in Germany, how to hurry publishers, how to get more work for FPG. Like Grove in Canada, Greve in Germany never doubts he can work beyond normal human limits as long as his health allows, but psychologically he was wearied and frustrated at the lack of recognition and financial return. He is forever at Gide to find more French authors for him to translate, forever scheming for more publications, forever lamenting the lack of success and the burden not only of work but of the thousands of marks he had to repay. He wanted at the same time to beg employment any way he could and also to play the role of the man of integrity whose work could not be challenged by mere hacks — like himself. He rails continually at editors' criticisms, but apologizes abjectly for errors pointed out to him by Gide. On 1 December 1904 he is furious with Bruns for giving Greve's translation to a philologist for correction. In February he has been battling with the "stupid critic," but he is "désolé" at the corrections Gide has had to make; there hadn't been time to correct the proofs of the *Menalkas*.

In the same letter of 7 February 1905 he cites the Berne Convention and points to the calendar: when will protection expire on *Paludes*? Can he then have it for translation? Moreover, he wants to translate the *Immoraliste* into English. Possibly Reginald Smith would publish it. "Right now I am translating my Wilde essay into English. . . . probably I'll translate my novel, *Fanny Essler*."

Uncharacteristically then, he turns to "choses personelles":

> I'm looking for a little seaside place; not too bourgeois, not too dear. I've been thinking of *Blonville*. What I need is a two-bedroom maisonette, dining room and, if possible, bathroom. Moreover, this maisonette must be located close to a hotel, where lunch and dinner are available. Conditions sine qua non: sandy beach (no

> stones) close to a town. Living costs (including rental of the maisonette) should not exceed 400 frcs a month for two people and two dogs.

Elsa would not, could not prepare a meal, hence the need for a hotel-restaurant nearby, but Felix wanted solitude, hence the need to be out of town, both for his bruised emotions and his work. But his translating work, he assures Gide in this same letter, is not to be supposed to involve long reflection:

> My 'desk diary' for 1904 reads: *'Gide Immoraliste, commencé: 16 avril, fini: 1er mai.*... You are astonished? A second entry says: 'Gide, Immoraliste, revised 26 and 27 October.' That's all. I simply do not understand how a translator can translate otherwise. The author has done everything.... all that remains for the translator: is *nothing*! He must take the temperature (as you say) of a book, get the tone.... and shape the *sense* by keeping the same words as far as possible. Could anything be simpler? Of course: he has to be able to write: but that's just what I flatter myself I can do.

That this breezy attitude to translating contradicts his own agonized complaints about his struggles suggests that he did not mean Gide to take it seriously.

In his next letter (13 Feb.) Felix is searching for an equivalent to Gide's title, *Paludes. Sümpfe* would be the literal translation.

> The title always seems to me the hardest part. We shall see. It's something that just hits you one day, that comes like an inspiration, the way a line of poetry comes, without thinking about it. Do you remember Wilde's 'Pen, Pencil, and Poison?' I translated it by 'Gift, Stift und Schrifttum,' after pondering it for more than six months.

Turning to his holiday plans, he elaborates on the sort of place he wants on the French coast: "Perhaps I forgot to mention something very important: that is, that I don't want mountains, nor hills," and he adds in the margin, "except dunes! Avoid everything picturesque!!" What he wants is level plain:

> completely flat and monotonous. I have a real thirst to see a simple expanse without elevations. I'd go, certainly, to north Germany, if I weren't shunned there. What I want to see is ploughing, harvesting, and the extension of the plain at low tide. Above all: no arrogant countryside like this, like Italy, Spain, Greece. And I want no more 'distractions.' The salt air, a plain, where I can get on a horse, the smell of cow-dung, farmers, that's what would suit me.... Only, I have to think of Madame, which means that two or three times a week there must be at least the *possibility* of receiving visitors, and serving tea. As for my own need, to see *life*, I'll take a whole mouthful in just one night in Paris. That will last me for months at a time.

What he wants, he goes on to say, is a flat of his own, where he can shut himself in, seeing and hearing no one. Then, absorbed in Gide's novels of moral freedom, he adds: "What I need is

PALUDES

in the neighbourhood of a city."

Through February and March he is working on Wells' *Anticipations* ("How boring Wells is!!!") of which Bruns is printing the first part before Felix has translated the last, and he is completing a draft translation of *Paludes*, which is more difficult than he supposed, and is bombarding Gide for more work to translate. Early in April he sends a copy of the *Immoralist*, with apologies for the appearance. He has wanted it austerely grey and plain. Bruns' style is "bourgeois and old-fashioned." Felix has a horror of what "MM. Diederichs, S. Fischer etc call 'Buchsmuck.' I wrote to him: no arabesques, no vignettes etc! The result, you see." Felix has heard, however, that von Poellnitz, of the Insel Verlag, is dead, in which case they may be able to return to Insel.

THE PROBLEMS WITH publishers and publishing were endless. On 9 April Greve writes that he spent a month translating Stendhal's *Vie de Henri Brulard*, and three months seeking a publisher for it, only to find that it had already been published elsewhere. Moreover, his own reputation is such that he cannot get 'Fanny Essler' published. In the April 4th letter he explains:

> I have myself written a "roman de filles": it is powerful and would be a great success. Bruns accepted it: it now appears that he did so without having read it. I should have parted with him when he refused to print it. This has been an unexpected blow. And now: everybody is *afraid*. Nobody will print it. If I could write in French, I would publish the book in Paris. As for England: M. Reginald Smith has read two chapters in my translation: that may be the end of our friendship. Besides, it is *indispensable* that the book be published in German because a large part of it is written in the Berlin and Munich dialects. What to do! I don't know.

In May 1905, amid the struggles with translations and publishers, Greve is preparing to leave Switzerland. (Elsa too, but as she tells us in the autobiography, Felix had to do the work because she could not even pack her own suitcases. III, 155) On 10 May Greve reports enthusiastic response to the *Immoraliste*. "A M. Oskar A. H. Schmitz, to whom I gave a copy, will write to you." (This is Gide's first notification about Schmitz; on 31 May, according to his journals, he dines with him in Paris.)[17] Greve adds that Schmitz's *Lothar* has enjoyed some success, and then says condescendingly that Schmitz has some influence: "He may send you his books. Don't read them. But do me the favour of speaking nicely to him. He will do an article for the "Hamburger Korrespondent — a rather important journal."

Other news: Harden, of *Die Zukunft*, will publish Gide's 'Ménalque' and a few lines of Greve's about the *Immoraliste*. Bruns has accepted *Paludes* for September. Felix is still negotiating about his own novel, but hopes to come to Paris.

On 19 May he reports that he finally has a publisher for *Fanny Essler*, though on very bad terms, but it may be enough to pay for the move to France. He expects

to arrive in Paris on 1 June. Then he returns with ill concealed excitement to his novel:

> I believe (and my editor believes) that my novel will be a smashing success. The book could perhaps be better, but it could not be more artful than it is. It was written with success in mind. I must have *a voice* in Germany. Then we shall see. That will help all our enterprises.

Elsa tells us that she and Felix both counted on its success, and were disappointed. (II, 35).[18]

EARLY IN JUNE the Greves settled at Paris-Plage, near Etaples, on the Pas de Calais. Felix writes ecstatically on 6 June:

> As for the landscape, I am delighted. The dunes, the plain.... it is Germany — but Germany more complete, more perfect — never have I seen anything so right. Now I feel ten years younger.

Felix sends note after note through June, partly with variant translations of Gide's verse Envoi, with and without rhyme, partly with news from publishers about the Gide translations, partly with concern about *Fanny Essler*. On June 12th printing has begun; he would like Gide to read some of it in proof. On the 20th he has re-read it himself, and has not found it good, but it does move along.

On July 1st he writes that he has sold 'Kritik und Kunst: eine Kampfschrift' (Criticism and Art: A Manifesto). This is another bibliographical puzzle, because there is no record of the publication, though the title appears in lexica. The same is true of the next two works he mentions:

> As a diversion from the harshness of my "Sentimentalist" — I am writing "Pindar, Schiller und Herr Märzenbach, Drei Grotesken von F.P.G." There is scarcely a German poet who is not pilloried in it.
>
> Only ... I'm so curious as to what you will say about my novel. That intrigues me. For — after all — however written with an eye to success ... having re-read it, I saw with considerable astonishment that it was I who wrote it. The method is mine; and it is a method without commentary; editing the text without annotations.
>
> I swim and I sleep. I scarcely work at all. There are the dunes, the dunes!!! and there is France.... and there are the French! the French!!!! All the little children speak French!!! It's very strange.
>
> And, I bought a white *rabbit*, that already follows me around like a dog.

(There is much of Grove as well as Greve in this. Readers will remember that, in *A Search for America*, Phil's father retires to this same spot near Etaples, and that when in the fiction he dies, he leaves behind a hutch full of rabbits.) Bruns advertised Greve's novel, 'The Sentimentalist' in *Fanny Essler*, for publication in February 1906, but apparently it was never published.

He had other irons in the fire. In August he is still working on *Paludes*, still can't get Gide's verse Envoi right, but is so "overloaded" with reading the proofs of *Fanny Essler*, the proofs of Flaubert's Correspondence, and those of Wells' *Anticipations*, that he accepts Gide's corrections to *Paludes* without checking them. Moreover, he is trying to found a literary journal of his own. On 14 August he writes that, though Insel has published half a dozen of his translations in the past, the company is run by men he cannot work with, to his regret, because he wants to leave Bruns (with whom Gide was not pleased) and he needs the Insel Verlag, especially now:

> at the moment when I start my journal (weekly, politics and literature — I hope to publish the first number in April 1906 — and I'm counting on you!! — the literary contributors will be from all countries) I shall break definitively with Bruns. In all this I'm relying heavily on my novel, which will certainly be charged by the public prosecutor. That is the best advertisement I could hope for. That will 'launch' my journal. . . .

He warns Gide that he can't expect to enjoy the novel; it is

> disgusting in the extreme. My "Sentimentalist" is making progress. After all, it is *my book*. In addition I'm doing some poems in the style of *SOMEBODY*. (Needless to say the "somebody" doesn't exist.) Do you want to hear about it? It will be a volume called "Lieder eines Irren" — a mystification, like almost everything I write. . . .
>
> P.S.
>
> In two weeks I'm leaving for England, where I expect to stay for a week.

A rather strange letter, dated 17 August, is prompted by the receipt of Gide's article on Wilde's *De Profundis*, a book Felix dislikes and will not read.

> This man, who was nothing in himself, as artist or as man, had to take his punishment, as he took everything, that is, in reference to others. Really, I have long regretted having my name associated in any way with Wilde's. And I regret it, because one cannot consider his work as work, separate from the man. Certainly there is scarcely a man I should less have liked to live with than Flaubert: but 'Madame Bovary' and 'Bouvard et Pécuchet' — they are *something*. . . . This impossibility of separating the *odor* of the author from the odor of his work means that I can hardly bear to read more than a few lines of the German poets. Goethe, George, Hoffmannsthal don't smell simply bad but always weak. It's a physical antipathy. If I prefer 'les capitaines vainqueurs," it may be because of their 'strong odor.'

Then in a postscript he turns to a very different subject, perhaps to illustrate his political astuteness, in 1905, or his personal cynicism:

> If war breaks out between Germany and England — which is probable — I shall have to fight; which is not something I would mind. But there would have to be a Franco-German alliance. I hope to see that some day. You ask if I am mad? Mais oui.

Greve's letter of 2 September hints at a possible rift between him and Gide, perhaps on the ground of Felix's failure to place his Gide translations:

> I've already done all I could. We shall see. Only: never ever will you get from Bruns or any other German publisher except the Inselverlag . . . anything faultless. On the other hand, the Inselverlag will never publish more than a stated number of copies; it is not at all popular. I understand what you're saying and that you would prefer not to have a large audience at the price of being vilely edited. If I had the money, I'd do the same as you. I designed the cover for my novel myself, for free, for the simple reason that I didn't want to get something unbearable. Believe me, what Bruns did for the Immoralist was, compared with the average German publishing house, an *effort*.

Felix will not deal with Insel under any circumstances; he has had to threaten legal action to get paid for his last translation with them, Browning's *Paracelsus*. If Gide wants to deal with Insel, he may do so on his own. If he prefers to work with Blei rather than Felix, Blei at least has contacts with Insel and S. Fischer.

In a letter dated 8 September Felix proposes Cassirer as a possible publisher for Gide. Cassirer has been begging him for a Wilde translation; Felix has offered 'The Sphinx,' which he has worked on for three years. But Felix has also "insinuated" Gide's name: is Gide interested? A second piece of news is that the three little plays Greve wrote in prison are under negotiation. "But!!! nobody understands a word of what is *not* said in the dialogue. Nobody has even understood the rather subtle psychology." So Felix asks Gide to read one of the manuscripts and tell him "if it is *impossible* to understand."

On 20 September he offers to send the 'Sphinx' manuscript if Gide will write an introduction for it. He will also send the play. All three plays, he admits, are "so personal that I foresee nothing but a terrible failure." What he fears, however, is not failure but "indifference."

> The printing of my voluminous novel (576 pages) is almost finished.
>
> I want to know if it is the same with all writers: I have written three strong books, of which one promises more than common success, and I haven't received a cent. I'll be here for the first part of the winter probably, until December. I'm not translating any more, having nothing left to translate, and I feel like a tower that is crumbling to ruin. In revenge I'm writing a satire: Der Zahnadel (The Tooth Aristocracy), a title you won't understand, and I'm outlining some chapters of my 'Sentimentalist' — a novel which certainly will fool everybody who expects from me something exciting, titillating — everybody except the two or three friends; but what serious book doesn't deceive practically everybody! As for Fanny Essler, I am so certain of its success that I'm only awaiting its publication before negotiating with a financier on the basis of my 'Twenty-first Century' political and literary, for which I want to write the political articles.

With that letter Greve sends the manuscript of one of his plays. His next letter, of September 28th, reacts to Gide's criticism of it:

> You've given me just what I wanted. That is, an impression, but sometimes an impression can be a critique: yours is. The play is a flop, I see that. It is incomprehensible. Completely — COMPLETELY — You don't understand me? Well, no. But you don't want to understand? Maybe. . . . What is certain, is that you can't. As a work of literature? Certainly I am not making literature. If I make anything, it will be — revolution. But still . . . some prestidigitation? Yes — but isn't a literary work always a sort of prestidigitation? I don't believe I know just exactly what a work of art is. Nevertheless I shall make a criticism. We shall see. But still . . . document? Document of me or of. . . . But it isn't that. I've taken care not to appear and for this reason, that I am holding a truth that I don't want to reveal until the end, that is, after I have said all I have to say about the others. Believe me, you don't know me. I don't know if you *want* to (you understand me?) . . . For I am a *moralist* — an angry moralist. I feel the urge to preach. I'll do it. . . . There is a scene in my novel that resembles this little play that you just read. . . . I don't believe you're reading the novel: it all goes *contra coeur* (is that French?) — but if you read the chapter that follows this scene, there you might find a revealing phrase, a phrase that is the basis, the pivot of all I think about a life that is not one of glacial solitude — like mine. I don't think that the person who might be found in that phrase . . . yet this is the single instance where I show my face. You don't think I can be SERIOUS. Of course — I'm not what you call a "pessimist' — quite the contrary. I am not one of those who are broken by prison. But even less am I one of those who cannot learn. I learned a lot there, more perhaps than I have learned in my whole life. And everything I have learned leads me to believe in my own strength.

In December the battle with Blei begins. In his letter of 16 December Felix claims that Blei has cheated him twice. "Je suis en conflict avec M.Blei," who "invokes the living and the dead: you and M.de Poellnitz." It is a literary scandal. I may be forced into court, Greve says, and he warns Gide that "I may not be able to keep silent as to what you have said and written to me about M.Blei." Not only has he been cheated by Blei, but he has also been insulted in his name: "M.Harden has said that *I*, F.P.G., should be pleased if the public mistook a translation of F.P.G.'s for one of M.Blei's!!!"

Greve's letter of 28 December 1905 outlines the conflict and incidentally further complicates the *Bunbury* puzzle:

> It's about a little book of Wilde's that I published in *1902*. This was not *translation*, but word for word was changed, especially the title. Now I find the title, which was not Wilde's, and my version in a publication of M.Blei's. That's not all: two months after the publication of my version M.Blei, then one of the editors of the Insel [*Insel* magazine, which preceded the Insel Verlag] printed it in the last number of the review, without any authorization on my part. But see what he claims: he never took his new version from my volume, which he knew very intimately (from having printed it) : he says he translated it without even remembering my version!!!

There is a further charge, apparently involving Gide and his 'Ménalque' as well as Blei and Harden, which Greve withdraws. But, he warns, if it comes to court, he must use Gide's letters against Blei.

BY FEBRUARY 1906 the Greves are back in Berlin. In March Felix reports that *Fanny Essler* is into its second edition [apparently a second impression], and *Maurermeister Ihles Haus* is in press. The latter he describes rather oddly as "the study of a sort of unconscious übermensch: the master mason is something like a wild beast become bourgeois." Of the unknown *Sentimentalist* he says that it is "the story of a young Berliner — but without the least resemblance to Flaubert's *Education* — the intention, I may say, of my novel is of another world from that of Flaubert's novel." Meanwhile, Felix must "translate and translate," and again he begs Gide for titles: "novels, if possible; it's not at all necessary that they be *good*: quite the contrary!"

At some point during the summer of 1906, probably after their return from England, the Greves move into the apartment on Nachod Street in Berlin that was to be their home for the remainder of their European life. On 28 August Felix writes to Gide that — again — he "may have" a buyer for Gide's *Nourritures* and *Saül* and the shorter works. For himself, he is working on "a new novel, two philosophical volumes, a volume of verse" and a translation of the works of Gabriel Tarden from an English edition he got from H. G. Wells. In a few months, then, he will be publishing "my FIFTIETH volume." He misses Paris-Plage, however, "the only place in the world where I could be happy."

> I spent the summer in England (in London and Folkstone). But the dira necessitas to make money, money, money forced me to locate finally in Berlin, where I have furnished a little apartment. I live absolutely devoid of friends. Even you have been silent for some months. And again I am ill — a sort of chronic pleurisy — and an eternal cough. . . . I'm getting old, and I despair a little, and fear that I may die sooner than I would like.

As for his work, "I no longer believe in success. I'm nothing but a writing machine, and I'm becoming dull, uninteresting." On 13 October his spirits have been buoyed somewhat by the prospectus for the first volume of his translation of the *Thousand and One Nights*, but he is still unwell, and Berlin air is almost as "murderous" as the air of London. There has not been much correspondence in the interim, and he fears he has offended Gide. (As drafts of Gide's German correspondence for the same period show him looking for another translator and trying to place his works with journals, Greve's fears seem to have been justified.) On 14 November he sends the first typewritten letter to Gide, while apologizing for being so busy.

There may be missing correspondence; the next letter from Greve to Gide is dated 14 February 1907, and begins without preamble to list Felix's charges against Gide for breaking their unwritten contract. He quotes from Gide's letters and from their conversations in Paris, with dates, to show that Gide had said

consistently that Felix was to be the sole German translator, in this case specifically of the *Saül*. Readers will recall the entry in Gide's *Journal* for 12 February 1907, when he must break off his reading of the proofs of his *Fils Prodigue* to answer the letters from Berlin: "Blei and Greve are sniping at each other over my *Saül*, each one thinking he is winning out."[19] Felix had felt confident that he had won out; now he feels compromised:

> I committed myself: I publicly denied that it was M.Blei who had your authorization. I said (in the Litterarisches Echo) that M.Blei could never do a translation without stealing it or getting help. I won the victory in this affair.
>
> 'The efforts made by Blei to place Saül (I'm quoting you) were *my own* efforts: *he only embellishes what others have done*: *that's his way.*
>
> 'Don't be under any apprehensions' (I'm quoting you) — *never* will your Saül be performed for the handsome eyes of M.Blei. It has a special interest for you, and I *guarantee*, that Saül will be played for itself, and a little out of *friendship for me.*

Felix reiterates his position: he is committed, he must prevail in this. And he adds ominously: "I always succeed in doing what I want."

In this instance Greve does win. On February 16th Gide writes to both Blei and Greve, stating clearly that the translation of the *Saül* is entrusted to Greve. This might have settled the matter, and Greve's next letter, of 3 March, makes no mention of it:

> My work over the last 2 years 9 months? ..... 62 volumes, including 5 vol. of Flaubert (correspondence, Temptation), 4 vol. of Browning (poems), 6 vol. of Meredith, 8 vol. of Wells, 2 vol. of Pater, 2 vol. of Lesage, 1 vol. of Murger (what a Horror!), 5 vol. of Wilde, 3 small vol. of André Gide (not counting the vols. that are not yet published or sold), 6 vol. of the 1001 nights, 2 novels, 1 comedy, a treatise by me (not counting the articles, little poems etc., spread among the reviews) etc.etc. I'm also preparing an edition of the selected works of the German poets of the 17.century, of which the first volume will be out in a few weeks. That's enough, isn't it?
>
> My illness? Pneumonia. I'm overworked, undernourished; I suffer from the winter. Can't stop working. I was forced to keep to my bed for 7 weeks, but then I had to dictate. This will last for about 10 years, until I am freed from my debts. Then life will begin. Success? I no longer expect it. I have shed my illusions. Work, that's all. As a result of the work, I earn, I 'make,' twenty thousand marks a year. I'm beginning to be read. Well, maybe that will reduce slightly the term of work: maybe, but I no longer count on it. I make books, as the cobbler makes boots. 'Life'? That means 'Wirken' [to be effective], I don't know the French word. One can't 'wirken' by books. One 'wirkt' by money. At least that's my theory.

But the Blei problem had not gone away. Greve's letter of 25 April begins:

> Sir,
>
> In the last number of the 'Rundschau' I find a translation of one of your works done by Kurt Singer. You once gave me your word that you would not let anyone

translate you but me. If you regret having given me that word, then say so plainly. It is true that we have no contract. I didn't think one was necessary. I was mistaken.

Really I don't think much of your treatment of me. You visit Berlin without telling me — and you change directions like clothes. If you prefer Messrs.Blei and Singer as translators, fine, I'll dissociate myself from your books. I think I have done more for the success of your books than M.Blei, who flatters you and belittles the merits of others. What moved me was the interest I took in you personally — not the little bit of money I could earn from this hard work. In return I ask to be treated like a 'gentleman.'

That's all I have to say to you.

P.S. In a few days you'll receive a copy of my translation of Saul.

Gide's reply is equally cold:

Monsieur Greve:

The tone of your last letter displeases me strongly, and nothing justifies it. Bie [Oskar Bie, journalist and editor, who had criticized Greve] asked me to contribute to the Neue Rundschau; I sent him 'l'Enfant Prodigue' that I had just finished. It pleased Bie to assign my manuscript [for translation] to a M.Curt Singer, whom I knew only from a very friendly letter he sent to me on the subject. I took care to write to Bie that I retained *all rights* to this work. . . .

But Gide, once he establishes his command, is prepared to be magnanimous. The unwritten agreement with Felix applied only to the *Narcisse*, *Philoctète* and the *Ajax*, not yet complete. "You are free to consider them yours," and if so Gide will send them on.

M.Grève, it is in my nature to be loyal, but not to maintain connections that upset me. True, when I was aware of your Immoraliste translation I expressed the wish that you might translate other works as well. But that was an expression of my free will, and I insist on the right to withdraw it, if you write any more letters like that one.

Rebuked, Felix can now be forgiven: "I'll ignore your last letter, if you wish." Apparently, however, the power was not all on one side. Felix maintained a silence that Gide was forced to break. He writes again on May 17th, urging a reconciliation:

What am I to think of your silence now? Don't you think I need a word of assurance from you that your last letter does not represent your opinion of me?

He "eagerly awaits" Greve's reply. By coincidence, Felix had written him the same day, a typed, businesslike letter that avoids mentioning the quarrel. But his next letter, of 26 May, also typed, returns to the charge, though he must be brief because he is so busy translating the whole of Cervantes. (He does not claim to speak Spanish; the assumption is that he used other translations.)

I identified myself with your interests. I have done battle for you. . . . If M.Bie asked you to contribute to the Rundschau, the credit is entirely mine. If he asked

> you directly, that's because he hurt me once, and it's always embarrassing to ask for something from someone you've hurt. Once you told him it was F.P.G. he had to reply to, he wouldn't have done it. Today he already has. But this time you spared him the pain. That is what I blame you for. It is I who won the battle, another who enjoys the victory. Well, t'was ever thus.

We cannot know whether Gide's reply, pointing out that "four or five persons" could make the same claim as Felix, was ever sent; it exists in the correspondence as a very rough draft reviewing the course of the quarrel.

FELIX'S LETTER of 17 June 1907 is written from "*Neuendorf auf Hiddensee* (bei Stralsund)." It says briefly, "Let us say no more about it," then goes into the cost of copyright for the Ajax. A brief postscript explains the address:

> I had to leave Berlin, because I was rather ill once again. I have found a very solitary island, deserted in fact, where I am all alone.

There is no mention of this in Elsa, who does not deal with this period.

Felix writes from the island again on 1 July, a brief note, saying "Excuse me. I am ill. And there are crises in my life." Then he deplores the poor return he makes on translations. For the twelve volumes of the *1001 Nights* he earns 7000 marks. Each volume costs him sixteen days' work. And the six volumes of Cervantes "(of 500 pages each)" pay him only 2750 marks. "But I believe that some day the Immoraliste will achieve success. Then that will return something *without* any more work."

A short business note from Berlin on 22 September encloses a letter from the publisher Oesterheld & Co., declining the 'Ajax' on the grounds that it has already appeared in the 'Rundschau' in Kurt Singer's translation. Felix explains that the other three treatises have been accepted. His letter of 18 October is typed, with apologies:

> I am overloaded with work, as always. The first two volumes of my Cervantes will appear shortly, and add that I am committed to supply three more (not counting three volumes of the Nights) by the end of the year, and you will readily imagine the load I bear.

With this letter, of October 1907, the file ends, though the correspondence did not. Extant elsewhere there is, for example, Greve's letter of 22 June 1908 in which he announces to Gide both that he will be going to Norway, and (wishful thinking?) his divorce.[20]

What we have of Greve's correspondence — the Wolfskehl letters of his Munich days, the Schmitz and Gide letters of his post-imprisonment — give us not so much

new information as new impressions. They confirm our sense of the metamorphosis of Felix from dandy to drudge. Along with Elsa's revelations about the Endell affair and the trial, these letters elicit our sympathy. We have to admire the courage with which Felix faced that change, and wonder at the capacity for sheer work that enabled him to produce those sixty-two volumes in thirty-three months, when virtually everything was against him. He was an extraordinary young man.

What he acknowledges to Gide, but perhaps could not have anticipated, was the resultant 'burn out.' He is becoming "dull, a writing machine." How could it have been otherwise? This — together with the discovery that he could not find enough work to translate — must have led to the revulsion that prompted his flight from Europe. Otherwise he might have done the near-impossible, repaying the 40,000 marks!

The other side of the story, though, also appears dimly through the Gide correspondence: that sense of being despised and rejected, that seeking for desert islands and lonely dunes, and a place of his own. That he was trapped, with Elsa, in a domestic situation he could not escape from, that was making far more difficult the repaying of the debt, and adding to his miseries, is his side of the story Elsa tells. She felt that he betrayed her; we might say that he betrayed, through her, himself; he could never be free after making that fatal liaison. As Elsa herself says, he was really her slave. (III, 96) Regrettably we have nothing to tell us why he had her follow him to America; why he arranged for her to meet him in Pittsburgh; why he included her so illogically in his pioneer-farming attempt in Kentucky. Perhaps it was integrity; or what Niels Linstedt felt as his "peasant nature" continuing doggedly on a course when there was no longer any reason for it. Perhaps it was to give us the plot of *Settlers of the Marsh.*

NOTES

[1] Toronto and Buffalo: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1976.

[2] Ottawa: Oberon Press, 1973.

[3] A useful source-book, which includes not only excerpts from the correspondence of Karl Wolfskehl, Albert Verwey, Friedrich Gundolf, Melchior Lechter and Stefan George but also photographs of them all, is Manfred Schlösser's *Karl Wolfskehl 1869-1969: Leben und Werk in Dokumenten* (Darmstadt: Agora Verlag, 1969).

[4] "Of Greve, Grove and Other Strangers: The Autobiography of the Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven." *A Stranger to My Time: Essays by and about Frederick Philip Grove,* ed. Paul Hjartarson. (Edmonton: NeWest Press, 1986): 269-84.

[5] Barnes misreads the passage, substituting 'dedicated to' for Elsa's 'dictated by.'

[6] *The European Years,* 95-96.

[7] Copy of the Hardt letter courtesy Dr. Jochen Meyer.

[8] *FPG: The European Years,* 62.

[9] *FPG: The European Years,* 172.

[10] *FPG: The European Years,* 73.

[11] *FPG: The European Years*, 75-76.
[12] *FPG: The European Years*, 73.
[13] *FPG: The European Years*, 76.
[14] *FPG: The European Years*, 78.
[15] *FPG: The European Years*, 83.
[16] *FPG: The European Years*, 131.
[17] *FPG: The European Years*, 131.
[18] Paul Hjartarson has *Maurermeister Ihles Haus* the one they pinned their hopes on (*A Stranger to My Time*, 281), but this is a misreading.
[19] Quoted in *The European Years*, 142.
[20] Pacey, ed., *Letters of Frederick Philip Grove*, 548.

# MUMMERS

*Cornelia C. Hornosty*

the squeeze of university
causes extraordinary leapage
into air, water, onto pavement
towards the golden splay
of birch trees in afternoon sun

the burden of beards and briefcases
among heavily loaded libraries
forces us onto sidewalks —
here we make a serious search
for crevices of human error
hints of the usual and unread
for comic book bubbles
of thought in small words,
casual talk and careless chatter

in this silent game
of costumes and credentials,
no one means to be a poseur —
yet say your lines on cue,
focus your eyes just so,
bob and sway to the music,
otherwise in this locale
among the cracks and leapage
flat out on parking lots,
play yourself and die

# VELVET CAIRN

*M. W. Field*

You are not here.

I choose stones from the river cliffs.
I consider them carefully in the frost,
in the algae and cat-fight smell of the valley
and take them home, take some dark
green velvet, some navy blue
a little burgundy
and stitch the velvet neatly round the stones.
They look like throw cushions,
or bruises.

When you come home,
you don't notice
the cairn beside our bed
but while you lie there
I pace through the house
unable to sleep,
loading stones
in your coat pockets
and into the free angles
of your sleeping limbs.

# SILVER AND RAIN

*Wayne Keon*

if i ever i needed you
the silver and rain
ever needed you
needed you now
and once again i said
i needed you all through the nite
the earth and stars and earth start again
all through the nite if i ever said
i needed you all nite long
and laid down my song and
i laid down my song for you
and all the oceans emptied out and emptied
all the tides ran down ran down along the sea
there isn't any return now there isn't any at all
any return to all this wind and rain
and in my dreams i saw you saw you once again
there isn't a time of day now
not any time of day there isn't any moment
now when i don't think of you
when i don't think of you and stars
these stars can't count my love for you
can't count love for you anymore
these stars can't count any more love
or any day now can count the stars for you
without my dreams a long way into the nite
you know that i would
you know that i would do anything
at all once again and you needed me and
if i ever needed you needed you
once again i would i would need you
all the forever time i would need you
time forever and time and needed
and if i ever needed you and if i
ever said i needed you now
there's nothin left but now
there's nothin left but
nothin left now but
silver and rain

# ALICE MUNRO'S WILLA CATHER

*Robert Thacker*

THE FALL AND WINTER of 1927-28 proved a difficult time for Willa Cather: she had been forced to move from her Bank Street apartment in New York City and, just after returning east from a long Christmas visit with family and friends in Red Cloud, Nebraska, she received news of her father's death there. Recalling this period of their life together, Cather's longtime companion, Edith Lewis, wrote that during the following "summer, Grand Manan seemed the only foothold left on earth." They had been visiting Grand Manan island, off the coast of New Brunswick in the Bay of Fundy, since 1922, staying at the Whale Cove Inn but, in 1928, their newly built cottage was ready (Skaggs 128-30, Brown and Crone 41-46). Lewis continues, saying that "With all her things in storage" owing to the move, Cather "looked forward fervently to her attic at Grand Manan. No palace could have seemed so attractive to her just then as that rough little cottage, with the soft fogs blowing across the flowery fields, and the crystalline quiet of the place" (153).[1]

These experiences presage the situation of "Before Breakfast," one of Cather's last stories; written in 1944 — about three years before her death — it was included in the posthumous *The Old Beauty and Others* (1948; Arnold 165). It is set on an island — though off the coast of Nova Scotia — and its protagonist, Henry Grenfell, a well-to-do American businessman, is seeking a refuge from his overwhelming sense of ennui. He is fleeing what Alice Munro has described in "Chaddeleys and Flemings: 2. The Stone in the Field" as the "pain of human contact" — her narrator admits to being "hypnotized by it. The fascinating pain; the humiliating necessity" (MJ 27). Such sentiments, too, inform Munro's "Dulse" (1980), a story first published in *The New Yorker* and, after revision, collected in *The Moons of Jupiter* (1982). And like Cather's story, Munro's derives from its author's knowledge of Grand Manan island: Munro has explained that while working on a story involving the character who became Lydia, the protagonist of "Dulse," she visited the island and there met a person steeped in Cather's history on Grand Manan; that person's veneration of the American writer served Munro

as basis for Mr. Stanley in "Dulse" — the two parts of the story, she said, seemed to fit well together (Telephone interview).

Although critics have examined Munro's Cather connection, more consideration of the matter is warranted. Klaus P. Stich has discussed Munro's use of Cather as both presence and authorial icon in "Dulse," pointing out a wide variety of apt thematic and imagistic parallels ranged throughout Cather's works. But though his article includes much that is relevant to an initial understanding of the Cather-Munro connection, Stich's analysis presents a partial picture only. Even so, his discussion of it is far superior to those offered by the critics who have published extended critical analyses of Munro's fiction: Martin, Blodgett, and Carrington. While presenting detailed readings of "Dulse," none pursues the Cather connection much beyond the superficial — she is merely present, as Blodgett argues, to represent a view of art that is "hermetically sealed," one "that Munro finds wanting" (113).

In "Dulse" Munro offers a story which grew out of her own visit to Grand Manan and which recapitulates the physical setting, midlife-crisis mood, and cathartic *dénouement* of "Before Breakfast." What is more, Cather appears in effect as a character there — a compelling presence whose status as no-nonsense-author-of-consequence needs to be probed and (as far as possible) understood, by Alice Munro, by her protagonist Lydia, and by the readers of "Dulse." Cather's importance to Munro's story, moreover, is borne out by the evidence of draft versions of "Dulse" in the University of Calgary archives. The connection between them extends beyond this pair of stories to a broader parallel, one which persists yet: Munro's recently published story, "Carried Away" (1991), features a protagonist among whose favourite authors is Cather, and that in February 1917, when the American was still rising to the fame that was to be hers (34).[2] This notwithstanding, Cather's presence in "Dulse" remains the central connection, and it is one that invites further analysis.

That Munro would be drawn to Cather's work is not surprising. As women who have sought to depict the "home place," in Wright Morris's phrase, writing out of their inheritance and lineage to create fictions derived from protracted and intimate knowledge of their respective rural small towns, the two have much in common. Munro would have been aware of Cather's prominence among American writers from the 1920s on but, more than that, she may also have been attracted by the appeal of Cather's work outside of academy; *My Ántonia* (1918), for example, has not been out of print since its publication. This quality persists, and it would likely not be lost on an aspiring writer of Munro's intelligence and ability. Nor would Cather's penchant, as Merrill Maguire Skaggs has recently argued, for seemingly revisiting the same material again, since Munro has shown the same tendency.[3] Finally, while Munro has been seen as a writer of perception and sensibility, rather than one of erudition or allusion, much recent scholarship

has confirmed in her fiction a detailed awareness of a wide range of literary forebearers, both paternal and maternal (Blodgett, Carrington, York).

Taken together, these lines of parallel treatment and influence suggest a compatibility between Cather and Munro which, if not of the crucial importance of Sarah Orne Jewett on Cather, is a relation far deeper than has been acknowledged thus far.[4] In fact, Cather's well-known phrase describing Jewett's relation to her subject, "gift of sympathy," may be aptly applied to describe Munro's view of her American precursor, Cather (Preface). Thus the appearance of Willa Cather as a major presence in "Dulse," along with a telling invocation of the messages of Cather's *A Lost Lady* (1923) there, is not just a singular occurrence within Munro's work: it is a direct acknowledgement of Cather's influence and of their shared values.

At the beginning of "Before Breakfast," Henry Grenfell glimpses the morning star, the planet Venus, but it brings no solace: he has arisen from a difficult night's sleep brought on by his personal dissatisfactions and aggravated by a chance meeting he had with a geologist the evening before. Going about his morning toilet upon rising, "Grenfell rejected his eye-drops. Why patch up? What was the use . . . of anything?" (148; Cather's ellipsis). This final question is what — through the mediations and actions of the story, all occurring before breakfast — Grenfell must get beyond. He does, ultimately, finding solace in the passage of time from youth to old age, in reconciling himself to the geological history of "his" island — a perspective which troubled him the night before — and, finally, in the transformative powers of Venus/Aphrodite.

Like Grenfell, Munro's Lydia has come to Grand Manan seeking a refuge and, like him too, she spends just a single night there during the story. At its end, she is left at least hopeful if not, like Grenfell, seemingly transformed. Her feelings at the outset, however, are not so deeply felt as his, though they appear to be more chronic. Even so, Munro is defining the nascent beginnings of a despond similar to Grenfell's. Lydia is forty-five, divorced with two grown children on their own, working as an editor for a publisher in Toronto; significantly, too, she is a poet — but is not forthcoming about it. She is a person who is particularly unconnected to those around her. Having just broken up with Duncan, with whom she had been living in Kingston, Lydia is travelling, in the words of a rejected draft's phrasing, "hoping to manage some kind of recuperation, or even happiness, before she had to start working again" (38.8.20.1.f1).[5]

Parenthetically, draft versions of the story are being used here for both the greater articulation of authorial intention they reveal and also to demonstrate the process of Munro's composition. Passages from rejected drafts — such as this one

— are not to be seen as preferable to the final versions, although the papers reveal that Munro is an author who works very hard on crucial passages in a story, consequently rejecting descriptions and phrasings which both add to an understanding of her intentions and might well have been retained.

And while this essay is looking at the most direct connections between "Before Breakfast" and "Dulse," more subtle parallels are present as well. Cather's use of the planet Venus, replete with its mythological associations as well as a timeless quality, is essentially mysterious: it suggests meaning apprehended but not fully understood. Thus Grenfell's dissatisfaction arises in part through the well-intentioned factualities of the geologist's knowledge; these have the effect of dispelling the mysterious attraction he feels for his island, which in turn have been of such solace to him in his daily life away from it — the island is his mainstay in just knowing it is there.

Similarly, in the *The New Yorker* version of "Dulse," Lydia's ex-lover is Alex, a geologist, one "absorbed" "in the crust and content of the earth and in his own distinct energies" (38). A more interesting parallel is found in Munro's title story for the volume in which "Dulse" was collected: "The Moons of Jupiter." Narrated by the same person who narrates the "Chaddeleys and Flemings" stories, this one focusses on the apprehended death of the narrator's father. Thinking of herself as both daughter and mother during this time, Janet jokes with her father — in the hospital awaiting heart surgery — about the names of Jupiter's moons after she had visited a nearby planetarium. Throughout, her concern is finding truths which can be believed with absolute certitude; here, even the facts of science fail, so she is drawn inexorably to the mystery of the solar system: its enormity, mythic proportions (that is, the names of the moons), and ultimate inscrutability.

At the outset of "Dulse," Munro describes Lydia's disorientation and her futile attempts to connect to the people and things around her and then encapsulates those efforts in a detached sentence: "She set little blocks on top of one another and she had a day" (36). Stopping at a guest house for the night, she muses over the moves and motives of the people she meets, seeking to infer and then to understand the source of their apparent wholeness.[6] She realizes, Munro writes early in the story, "that people were no longer so interested in getting to know her" (36), and she seeks an understanding of herself in view of such changes. What Lydia is most bothered by, and wishes most to understand, is "what gave" Duncan his "power? She knows who did. But she asks what, and when — when did the transfer take place, when was "the abdication of all pride and sense?" (50). In a rejected draft version of the same passage, Munro is more precise: "Then what had given him his subsequent power? Easy to say it was the foolishness of Lydia, the abdication of all pride and sense, a most persistent streak of cravenness[.] But it was no help to her, this explanation, it explained nothing, she was left to sit regarding her own life with sad disbelief." The whole of this passage, a part of a typed draft, is struck

out and a holograph insertion replaces it, reading "Then what had given him his subsequent power?" Munro appears to have considered putting from "Easy . . . disbelief" in parenthesis before rejecting the whole (38.8.20.1.f10-11).

That evening Lydia meets her fellow guests: a Mr. Stanley, to whom she is introduced, eats dinner with, and with whom she discusses Willia Cather; at the same meal she acknowledges at another table three men who work for the telephone company. Throughout the story, Lydia's thoughts focus primarily on her own concerns, especially on Duncan and their relationship (at one point we read of her discussion of it with a psychiatrist), and on their recent breakup. She thinks as well about the members of the telephone crew, with whom she plays cards later in the evening, imagining each as lovers (one of them, Eugene, tries to beckon her to his bed). Each is evaluated relative to Duncan, whom she remembers in considerable detail as to habits, preferences, and peculiarities. She knows she is now, for him, merely the latest in a long line of former girlfriends, "Morose, messy, unsatisfactory Lydia. The unsatisfactory poet" (52).

Even though such thoughts make up most of the story, Lydia meets Mr. Stanley first and through him, the personage of Willia Cather. They talk of Cather generally at dinner and, the next day at breakfast, they have a second — and far more specifically pertinent — exchange about her, one which directly defines her presence in "Dulse." As such, Stanley and Cather frame the story. By using Cather in this way, Munro provides Lydia with another person's (aptly relevant) life to wonder over at this crucial moment in the protagonist's own life. Cather — the author of *A Lost Lady* whose Marian Forrester is, like Lydia, a woman whose whole identity is dependent upon men — is offered as a frame for Lydia's "recuperation." And Lydia, for her part, might well be seen as Munro's "lost lady."

BUT, JUST AS THIS IS Alice Munro's Willa Cather, so too is Lydia offered Mr. Stanley's Willa Cather, itself a persona to be probed. Mr. Stanley, opening their first conversation with "'Are you familiar with the writer Willa Cather?'" (38), uses his enthusiasm for Cather as mealtime chit-chat, telling Lydia of Cather's summers on Grand Manan island, mentioning her view of the sea, her composition of most of *A Lost Lady* (his "favorite") on the island, and telling Lydia of his plans to talk that evening with an 88-year-old woman "'who knew Willa.'" "I read and reread her,'" Stanley says, "'and my admiration grows. It simply grows'" (39). Evaluating Stanley's conversational manner, Lydia thinks of "a time when a few people, just a few people, had never concerned themselves with being democratic, or ingratiating, in their speech; they spoke in formal, well-thought-out, slightly self-congratulating sentences, though they lived in a country where their formality, their pedantry, could bring them nothing but

mockery. No, that was not the whole truth. It brought mockery, and an uncomfortable admiration." "And his adoration of the chosen writer was of a piece with this," Lydia decides, "it was just as out-of-date as his speech" (39-40).

Lydia suggests the possibility of creating some sort of memorial on the island, but Stanley rejects the idea, saying that on the island many "thought" Cather "unfriendly and did not like her," but Lydia realizes that for him this is a "private pilgrimage" so he wants nothing to do with a memorial, which would see, Lydia thinks, their guest house "renamed Shadows on the Rock." "He would let the house fall down and the grass grow over it, sooner than see that" (41).[7]

The draft versions of "Dulse" suggest that Munro worked hard at getting Stanley's character — and so the Cather connection — right. Initially, Stanley was named Middleton, "from Boston, a brisk and courtly and menacing old fellow," and Lydia accompanies him to Cather's cottage; Grand Manan is named, as is *My Antonia*. Munro has Cather's date of death over twenty years early, 1925, and Lewis is referred to as "Edith Head" (38.8.19). Subsequently, *A Lost Lady* — parts of which were written on the island — replaced the earlier novel and Lewis's name appears (38.8.21). Lydia was a university teacher of American literature, then worked in a bookstore but "had majored in American literature at university" (38.8.20; these are alternate versions, the first typed, crossed out, with the latter as a holograph correction). What these changes suggest — beyond getting a series of plausible connections that hang together — is that Munro was trying various ways to make the Cather connections resonate and, equally, to have in Lydia a person of suitable background for their understanding.

Stanley, based on a person Munro actually met, is developed so as to create a particular version of Cather which Munro seeks to first establish and then probe. He is foregrounded: after introducing Lydia and her situation at the outset (presenting only a bit of her fundamental malaise — she wonders if she could find a way to support herself and so live on the island), Munro moves at once to Mr. Stanley and the discussion of Cather, which takes up the story's first portion. The mockery Lydia anticipates for Stanley is visited upon him by the telephone crew — obliquely during dinner as the men overhear his conversation with Lydia and, later, when he returns for the night after his visit with the woman who knew Cather (48). At the same time, Stanley's formal manner recalls aspects of Grenfell's character; the latter, for example, signs cheques for his family's expenses without looking at what they are for, since to do so would be unseemly (OB 154-55); and Stanley's devotion to Cather is akin to Grenfell's devotion to his island retreat.

Finally and most tellingly, his version of Willa Cather, his "durable shelter" (59), shows Stanley to be one hopelessly "out of date" and, almost, insignificant. Given Cather's critical reputation throughout her later years (from the 1930s on, she was often seen a kind of aged literary dinosaur, charmingly still concerned

with the romance of the past while American fiction had moved on to social relevance), Munro's characterization of Stanley has particular resonance, both for Lydia and for Munro herself (see O'Brien, "Becoming"). In view of Lydia's awareness that "people were no longer so interested in getting to know her" (36), she fears becoming passé, like Stanley, a nonentity. Equally, Cather's parallel fate within literary renown — benign throwback to a simpler time — may be feared by both Lydia, the poet, and by her creator, Munro.

Yet concurrently Munro counters this view of Stanley with another, more positive, one. When the two meet, she leaves Lydia vague as to Mr. Stanley's age; in a brief chat with the woman who runs the guest house, the latter offers Lydia an assessment which applies equally well to Cather's Grenfell: the woman says, almost triumphantly (since Lydia has been unable to guess Stanley's age accurately) that he "'is eighty-one. Isn't that amazing? I really admire people like that. I really do. I admire people that keep going'" (43). Cather and Munro are writing about such people: Grenfell and Lydia reach moments on their respective islands in which each must decide how to "keep going"; throughout their work, both have focused on such moments, Cather most clearly in *The Professor's House* (1925) and Munro throughout her fiction, though most precisely in her last two books.

THESE POINTS SPEAK directly to the presence of Alice Munro's Willa Cather, the characterization of whom lies at the heart of "Dulse." What the draft versions suggest is that Munro endeavoured to make Cather's characterization more inscrutable by probing the author's known public persona in tandem with the largely unknown, private being implied by that persona. Thus Lydia, whose poetic vocation seems equivocal since she seldom mentions her work to others and has decided "that probably she would not write any more poems" (37), has reason to wonder about the persona presented by a famous woman writer, generally in view of her own uncertainties but more specifically because of the vocation she shares with Cather. More precisely, Cather is directly relevant to Lydia's situation because of the unwavering persona she presented to the world throughtout her life. For her, the preeminence of art, and of her own vocation as artist was, always, *the* uncompromised value. Mr. Stanley, for his part, understands this: speaking of Cather's reputation on Grand Manan during dinner, he says "'The people here, you know, while they were very impressed with Willa, and some of them recognized her genius — I mean the genius of her personality, for they would not be able to recognize the genius of her work — others of them thought her unfriendly and did not like her. They took offense because she was unsociable, as she had to be, to do her writing'" (40-41).[8]

In *The New Yorker* version of this passage, "personality" is "person" (31), and the tension between the two words — between the interiority of the first and the externality of the latter — suggests Munro's direction. For Lydia's sake as well as her own, she is probing the distance between person and personality, between what a person is seen to be and what she shows herself to be by her "self" — that adumbration of actions, speech, appearance, and presence that make a person herself, both to herself and to others. For Munro as for Cather, this is no easy matter, nor are answers at all unequivocal. This issue, finally, is crucial to Alice Munro's Willa Cather: in "Dulse" the author of "Paul's Case" (1905) is offered by Munro as a difficult case in being human, in being an artist, and in being a woman writer — difficult for Lydia, for the reader, and for Munro herself.

During their initial discussion, Lydia passes over Mr. Stanley's assertion that Cather had to be "unsociable . . . to do her writing," but they return to it the next morning during breakfast, after Lydia has meditated upon herself and her problems throughout the story proper. A paragraph about Lydia's lover and their relationship — included in *The New Yorker* but omitted from the book — is directive; its omission, no doubt, was caused by the changes in the lover's character between versions (his name, profession, and his meeting with bears), but it speaks directly to Munro's need for Willa Cather:

> All this points to a grand self-absorption. A natural question follows: What did I think would be left over? But self-absorption honest as that [Alex's] can be pure relief, once you've seen a few disguises. He was a great man for not lying, and blithe about it; none of your wordy justifications. He had real hopes for us. He thought we could be true companions: me, a poet, a grownup, hardworking woman absorbed in that, as he was in the crust and content of the earth and in his own distinct energies. He hadn't known poets. (38)

Although the final sentence here is equivocal, it points back at Lydia herself (as well as at her poet colleagues, Cather and Munro)[9] and, accordingly, so too toward Munro's point: her version of Willa Cather in "Dulse" is essentially a meditation on the artist's need for *both* self-absorption and disguises.

Thus in *The New Yorker* version, Munro may be seen pursuing this issue by sidestepping Lydia as first-person narrator and addressing her reader directly:

> But there is more to it than that; take a look at Lydia. Her self-absorption equals Alex's, but it is more artfully concealed. She is in competition with him, and with all other women, even when it is ludicrous for her to be so. She cannot stand to hear them praised or know they are well remembered. Like many women of her generation, she has an idea of love which is ruinous but not serious in some way, not respectful.

The personal sacrifices she made for her relationship are catalogued, and Munro concludes, saying of them: "They were indecent. She made him a present of such power, then complained relentlessly to herself, and much later to him, that he had

got it. She was out to defeat him" (38). This paragraph is retained in revised form in the book version of the story, but Munro moves it, in effect, away from herself as author; it is placed far more clearly in relation to Lydia's psychiatric analysis. The key to these meanderings — both perceptual and textual — is found in the question asked abruptly, a separate paragraph, after "defeat him" in *The New Yorker*: "Is that the truth?" (38). In *The Moons of Jupiter*, the same question becomes "That is what she said to the doctor. But is it the truth?" (55).

The difference between these two versions — along, one thinks, with the need to shift from first to third person — is crucial. In *The New Yorker*, owing to the narrative fissure between narrator and author demanded by the story, the question encompasses more than Lydia's situation: it expands, given Munro's detached commentary on it, to include herself as author. In the book version, Munro has revised and backed away from these implications; this passage is more circumscribed and focused on Lydia herself. In both cases, however, the issue is the truth of self-absorption, and all the characters in the story — including Willa Cather — are decidedly self-absorbed.

THE OVERALL EFFECT OF the shift from the first-person perspective of *The New Yorker* version to the third-person in *The Moons of Jupiter* is one of distancing: Lydia seems more disconnected and detached in the revised version. At the same time, these two articulations of Lydia's self-analysis confirm Judith Kegan Gardiner's argument concerning narrative techniques employed by women in relation to an author's personal identity and, more specifically, offer a parallel to Cather's *A Lost Lady*; there, Cather uses a third-person point of view (although an early use of "us" [10] reveals the authorial presence behind the narrative), but she creates Niel Herbert's vision of Marian Forrester so vividly that readers often recall the narrative as his first-person account.[10] Munro's need to comment directly on Lydia in *The New Yorker* version, and her subsequent shift to third person, suggest a similar situation, solved through the creative distance afforded by the more detached narrative approach.

The shift in point of view between the published versions of "Dulse" was not a last-minute change, however; there are drafts using each point of view in the papers: the holograph drafts (38.11.7 and 38.8.19) are, respectively, in third and first, and the typescript drafts (38.8.20, 21, 22) are third, first, and third. Munro frequently tries both points of view to see which is the more appropriate, although the shifting back and forth throughout this story's composition and publication indicates more than usual difficulty in settling on a narrative perspective. As well, the change from Alex to Duncan, from a geologist bothered by polar bears to a historian nudged by black bears may be part of this self-absorption — the ordinari-

ness of Duncan's life being preferable to the more exotic nature of Alex's; or it may have to do with the demands of *The New Yorker* and its audience — there is something of an American cliché about Canada in Alex's polar bears — although Alex's background is present in the draft materials (38.8.20).

When Lydia joins Mr. Stanley for breakfast, "The telephone crew had eaten and gone off to work before daylight." She inquires after "his visit with the woman who had known Willa Cather," whereupon Stanley launches into a full report, and the ensuing discussion goes directly to the heart of "the case of Willa Cather." The woman had run a restaurant when Cather was staying on the island and she and Lewis would often have their meals sent up; sometimes, however, Cather would not like the meal and send it back, asking "'for another dinner to be sent.' He smiled, and said in a confidential way, 'Willa could be imperious. Oh, yes. She was not perfect. All people of great abilities are apt to be a bit impatient in daily matters'" (56-57). Speaking to Lydia's mood at this moment, the narrator comments: "Sometimes waking up was all right, and sometimes it was very bad. This morning she had wakened with the cold conviction of a mistake — something avoidable and irreparable." This is by way of accounting for Lydia's mental response to Stanley's last comment: "Rubbish, Lydia wanted to say, she sounds a proper bitch" (57).

Continuing, Stanley reports that sometimes, "'If they felt they wanted some company,'" Cather and Lewis would eat in the restaurant. On one such occasion, Cather discussed a proposal of marriage the woman was considering: "'Of course,'" Stanley says, Cather "'did not advise her directly to do one thing or the other, she talked to her in general terms very sensibly and kindly and the woman still remembers it vividly. I was happy to hear that but I was not surprised.'" Lydia's reaction to this, and the ensuing discussion, bears quoting at length:

> 'What would she know about it, anyway?' Lydia said.
> Mr. Stanley lifted his eyes from his plate and looked at her in grieved amazement.
> 'Willa Cather lived with a woman,' Lydia said.
> When Mr. Stanley answered he sounded flustered, and mildly upbraiding.
> 'They were devoted,' he said.
> 'She never lived with a man.'
> 'She knew things as an artist knows them. Not necessarily by experience.'
> 'But what if they don't know them?' Lydia persisted. 'What if they don't?'
> He went back to eating his egg as if he had not heard that. Finally he said, 'The woman considered Willa's conversation was very helpful to her.'
> Lydia made a sound of doubtful assent. She knew she had been rude, even cruel. She knew she would have to apologize. (57-58)

Retreating to the sideboard and feeling bad for the hurt she has just done, Lydia talks briefly to the owner of the guest house, who speaks of longing to get away and, remembering something, gives Lydia a bag full of dulse — an edible seaweed which she professes to have a taste for — left for her by Vincent, the man on the

telephone crew she found most attractive as a potential lover. She takes it back to the table as "a conciliatory joke," asking "'I wonder if Willa Cather ever ate dulse?'"; Stanley ponders the question quite seriously, looking at the leaves and "Lydia knew he was seeing what Willa Cather might have seen."

The three paragraphs that conclude the story encapsulate the essential question posed by "Dulse," and so speak most directly to Alice Munro's Willa Cather; they need to be quoted together because of their mutuality, amounting to a symbiosis:

> But was she lucky or was she not, and was it all right with that woman? How did she live? That was what Lydia wanted to say. Would Mr. Stanley have known what she was talking about? If she had asked how did Willa Cather live, would he not have replied that she did not have to find a way to live, as other people did, that she was Willa Cather?
>
> What a lovely, durable shelter he had made for himself. He could carry it everywhere and nobody could interfere with it. The day may come when Lydia will count herself lucky to do the same. In the meantime, she'll be up and down. 'Up and down,' they used to say in her childhood, talking of the health of people who weren't going to recover. 'Ah. She's up and down.'
>
> Yet look how this present slyly warmed her, from a distance. (58-59)

COMMENTING ON THE story, some readers have made much of the exchange over Cather's relationship with Lewis, assuming the lesbian cast that has been a central concern of some Cather critics. Thus Munro is seen as either taking a swipe at lesbians on behalf of heterosexual women or, more charitably, she is adopting the point of view of some of the marginalized.[11] Without engaging this view, the very partiality of such arguments need to be recognized, as does the partiality of any such single analysis. The story, and Munro's creation of a particularly resonate version of Cather, is far more complicated than that. Munro's work shows itself open to alternative ways of seeing any single event in a character's life; such an approach is evident throughout "Dulse," but it is especially so in its concluding paragraphs where — through successive drafts — Munro can be seen honing her version of Cather by making that writer's presence more, not less, ambiguous.

Overall, the book version is more articulate and, equally, more open-ended. In *The New Yorker*, Lydia thinks that Mr. Stanley "wouldn't have known what I was talking about" in the face of her question, "How did she live?" (39); in the book that assertion has become "Would Mr. Stanley have known . . . ?" Likewise, the flat statement in *The New Yorker*, "She was Willa Cather" (italicized in an earlier draft: 38.8.21.f19) becomes "If she had asked . . . she was Willa Cather." Finally, "The day might come when I'd find myself doing the same," has "will count herself lucky" added to it. Indeed, given the open-endedness of Munro's

conclusion, it is not far-fetched to see the rejected paragraph from *The New Yorker* version, which makes mention of "true companions," in reference to Cather and Lewis as much as to Lydia and Alex.

Eudora Welty — one of Munro's acknowledged influences ("A Conversation") — has asserted that "The story is a vision; while it's being written, all choices must be its choices, and as these choices multiply upon one another, their field is growing too" (245). Willa Cather's presence is essential to the choices Munro has made in writing "Dulse": through the echoes of "Before Breakfast" there, through her apt presence on Grand Manan island as shade, local character, and most fundamentally by "the mystery of her life" — to paraphrase Munro's own words in "The Stone in the Field" (MJ 33) — Cather is central to the story. Taken together, the choices Munro made created a version of Willa Cather which resonates throughout "Dulse," amplifying the mysteries and uncertainties of Lydia's confusions. The case study Cather represents in both the self-absorption and disguises of the artist, most particularly the woman artist, continues to whet the imagination for Munro, for Stanley, for Lydia, and for the reader even after the story has been laid aside.

Accounting for the composition of "Dulse," Munro has said that she was working on a story involving Lydia when, with a friend, she visited Grand Manan and there met a Willa Cather "fanatic"; the two parts of the story just seemed to fit well together (Telephone interview). The initial inaccuracy of the draft references to Cather bear her out as, indeed, does the flavor of Mr. Stanley's character generally. But more significant than a holiday incident providing a new element for a story in process is how Munro used her experience of meeting a Cather "fanatic" close up. It became the basis for a complex invocation and meditation upon Cather which is, at once, both something of a homage, an acknowledgement of their shared vision and purpose, and also a caustic analysis of "fanatical" self-absorption — Cather's, Stanley's, Lydia's and, finally, her own. This invocation, moreover, serves as a precise object lesson for Lydia, though the matters it raises are not resolved, only intimated and essayed.

THE COMPLEXITY OF THE issues Munro confronts in "Dulse" are evident by moving backwards through the story's final three paragraphs. Lydia is "slyly warmed" because — Marian Forrester-like — she sees her ability to attract a man, still, confirmed in Vincent's present of dulse. Yet the obverse of her pleasure here is the implication that Lydia is still getting her identity from men — giving them the same "power" over her that she allowed Duncan, which so obsesses her, and which Cather and Munro both confronted as artists in a male-dominated world. The notion of being "up and down," with its connection to Mr. Stanley's

"durable shelter" and to "the health of people who weren't going to recover," recalls Grenfell's predicament in "Before Breakfast"; throughout each writer's work, moreover, is the acknowledgement that none of us, ultimately, is "going to recover." Thus the central questions posed by "Dulse," by way of both point and counterpoint, are those which speak directly to the "mystery" that was—and is—Willa Cather: "But was she lucky or was she not, and was it all right with that woman? How did she live?"

Writing of both biography and autobiography, James Olney quotes an observation of Clarrisa M. Lorenz's: "'What ordinary mortals can't swallow about artists is the ravaging of others. But the daemon will continue to destroy with impunity. Art, after all, is born of a colossal ego re-creating the world in its image. 'A creative person has little power over his own life,' said Jung. 'Those pay dearly who have the creative fire.' So do those who are closest to them'" (436).[12] Elsewhere in the same essay, Olney asserts that "it is autobiography, or the presence of the biographer's life, the presence of the authorial 'I,' that draws biography across the vague, wavering, and indistinct line that separates history from literature . . ." (429).

As a writer who has often shown herself to be uncomfortable with the "authority" the role seems to demand of her as a person, Munro is writing what amounts to a meditation on the artist's self-absorption. Perhaps, too, "Dulse" should be seen as a meditation on the self-absorption of us all. And the implications of Cather's work beyond *A Lost Lady* and "Before Breakfast" — which, including them, are now rightly seen as nowhere near as simple as they once were—are also an unstated but very clearly implied presence in the story. In "Dulse," too, Munro is writing autobiography, biography, and fiction: the commingling is indeed, following Olney, literature, but it is also an acknowledgement on Munro's part of her kinship with Cather at a fundamental level. Its sense of an ending that is not really conclusive echoes both *A Lost Lady* and "Before Breakfast," and it is an acknowledgement of their shared values. Yet in keeping with each woman's own distrust of absolutes, Lydia's unanswered questions about Cather acknowledge, finally, the very mystery of being which drives any artist: "But was she lucky or was she not, and was it all right with that woman? How did she live?" Mr. Stanley does not know, Lydia does not know, Munro does not know. Nor, really, do we. But by asking these unanswerable questions, Alice Munro both acknowledges and celebrates Willa Cather's ability to take the mystery of her life with her. Rather than emissary from a simpler time, an anachronism, Alice Munro's Willa Cather is kindred spirit, influence, foremother.

## NOTES

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[1] The Cather-Lewis companionship has received considerable attention; the two met in 1903 and, five years later, when each was working at *McClure's*, they began sharing an apartment. This living arrangement continued until Cather's death in 1947, after which time Lewis guarded her friend's reputation as executor until her own death in 1972. For a judicious overview of the relationship, see Marilyn Arnold's foreword to the most recent edition of *Willa Cather Living*; also O'Brien's discussion of it — though perhaps overstated — recognizes its importance in Cather's life (WC 353-57).

[2] This essay is a part of an ongoing project involving Cather and Munro's fiction, among others. Although "Dulse" offers the most discrete indication of the influence of Cather's fiction on Munro, numerous other echoes are worth pursuing. Not the least of these is the structural symmetry between Cather's "Old Mrs. Harris" (1932) and Munro's "The Progress of Love" (1985). Both stories focus on three women — grandmother, daughter, and granddaughter — and probe the paramount values of each; that is, how each woman lives with dignity, given the social mores of the time and her own personal values. Munro, moreover, has called "Old Mrs. Harris" her favourite Cather story (Telephone interview). Similarly, this comparison could be extended further throughout both writers' works in that relations between women of different generations, and especially mother-daughter relations, is a shared central theme.

[3] Thus when Munro published *Who Do You Think You Are?* (1978), some reviewers complained that it was a revisiting of her earlier material in *Lives of Girls and Women* (1971). Carrington, however, has recently refuted these claims, arguing convincingly that Munro does not "repeat herself," she "demonstrates the validity of her own aesthetic: by returning to the same theme, she clarifies her misconception of what she thought was happening and sees what she had not understood in the earlier attempt" (98).

[4] Jewett's influence on Cather — coming as it did at a propitious time, when the younger woman was struggling to free herself from her duties at *McClure's* in order to write — has been seen as critical to her development. See Woodress (201-06); O'Brien (WC 334-52 and *passim*).

[5] Unless indicated otherwise, parenthetical page references from "Dulse" are from its final form, that in *The Moons of Jupiter*; all quotations from Munro's papers are from the second accession; the identification numbers are from the published catalogue.

[6] Of those in print, Carrington's reading of "Dulse" is much the best. "With the paradigmatic clarity of a psychiatric case history," she writes, the story "dramatizes self-destructive ambivalence" (146). Carrington relates the story well to the rest of Munro's work, applies Karen Horney's work on neurosis to Lydia's situation, and sees Cather as "an alter ego of the writer-protagonist" (148), but she makes no real attempt to probe Munro's Cather for its full meaning, nor does she suggest Cather's influence on "Dulse" more broadly.

[7] Munro may have been aware that what Lydia envisions here for Cather's cottage is exactly what Edith Lewis allowed to happen to it after Cather's death, and this despite pleas from Grand Manan residents to see to repairs, according to Brown and Crone (129-36). Through the same sorts of oral sources they used, Munro may have heard this history.

[8] As regards Cather after her reputation was established, this description of her behaviour is accurate. What is more, a vital part of Cather's persona was her great determination to succeed, a quality she evinced from her university years onward,

and which is treated autobiographically in *The Song of the Lark* (1915). When she arrived at Grand Manan for the first time, in 1922, however, her reputation was established and was in the process of being cemented. Brown and Crone, in their study of Cather in the northeast, offer a version of Cather on Grand Manan which accords with Mr. Stanley's (36-43); this book, which O'Brien has rightly called "maddeningly undocumented" (WC 244, n.47), could probably not have been a source for Munro since it was published in the same year as "Dulse." The more likely source for Mr. Stanley's version of Willa Cather is the person whom Munro met on Grand Manan; it conforms to the folklore surrounding Cather on Grand Manan as presented by Brown and Crone.

[9] Though known primarily for fiction, each wrote and published poetry. Cather's first published book was a collection of poems, *April Twilights* (1903) and Munro, for her part, wrote poetry, although the extent of its publication has not yet been established. An untitled poem of hers, signed Anne Chamney (her mother's maiden name) appeared in 1967 in *The Canadian Forum.* I should like to thank Jean Moore, of the University of Calgary Special Collections staff, for bringing this to my attention.

[10] Gardiner's article is particularly useful as regards the workings of the autobiographical in Cather and Munro. There, drawing upon the identity theories of Erikson and, especially, Choderow, and arguing that "female identity is a process," Gardiner looks at "typical narrative strategies of women writers — the manipulation of identifications between narrator, author, and reader and the representation of memory" in order to suggest ways that an author's text relates to her own identity. Following this, Gardiner asserts that "novels by women often shift through first, second, and third persons and into reverse. Thus the author may define herself through the text while creating her female hero" (349, 357).

[11] This reading of the story is one that I have heard in discussions of "Dulse" but I have not seen in print; it was also put to Munro herself in a letter she received just after "Dulse" appeared in *The New Yorker* (38.1.82).

[12] Lorenz was Conrad Aiken's second wife; Olney is reviewing her *Lorelei Two: My Life with Conrad Aiken.*

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# MY GRANDMOTHER AND KNOWLTON NASH

*Carl Leggo*

my grandmother's world
was framed by her bedroom window

with eyes almost blind she saw
a twilight world of shapes and shadows

the harbour and the paper cargo ships
on which her husband once sailed as cook

the world's largest pulp and paper mill
where her brother worked for a day

the Blow-Me-Down Mountains
where her father had been a guide

Meadows across the harbour and at night,
lights where a daughter's house had been

with eyes gray-sad my grandmother saw
a haphazard world, helter-skelter, no shelter

and like an air traffic controller
she tried to organize and direct her world

every night flitted back and forth
between her room and the telephone, calling,

checking on the children and grand-children,
everyone home?  everyone safe?

always flying with the northeast trade winds,
said Skipper, I wish she'd get stuck in calms

but she was forever sailing on the waves
of her fears, unending tempests

the world like the underside of a tapestry
woven by Knowlton Nash in the multicolored

threads of disaster, danger, disease, death,
destruction, depravity, debacle, damnation

when I told her from grade eight geography
Newfoundland was in the Tropic of Cancer

she was convinced we would all get cancer
and when Knowlton Nash reported the mystery

of Legionnaire's disease, my grandmother
heard engineer's disease and feared

her son and grandson, both engineers,
would get the dread unknown disease

nothing to worry about, Missus, said Skipper;
no, nothing, she replied, but I'm still

worried, and Skipper nodded, knowing
nothing cannot be fixed

and nights Skipper often drove downtown
and to the west side to confirm all was well

and nights my grandmother phoned the neighbours
of her children to confirm all was well

while death for me was almost always a fiction
on television, my grandmother knew death,

had not so much stared death in the face
as been smothered by death like heavy blankets

her father drowned on a hunting trip
a brother crushed by a hill of pulp logs

her husband lost in a truck-train collision
a daughter and three grandsons in a housefire

like my grandmother who framed her world
in a window, a resistant, uncontrollable world,

I stare through a window and try to control
my world in words like erecting cairns

to guide navigation in treacherous country
but my grandmother and Knowlton Nash

remind me constantly that the world
cannot be contained in the frame of a window

# STUBBORNNESS

*Robert Hilles*

You blame yourself for your father's
memories. You have the eyes he lost.
His voice lodged in your throat.
The last time you saw him he needed a shave.
He dances for you out on the front steps
and you see instead a young man kicking at the sky.
You do not see his sloped shoulders or how he
turns away from the faces of his family.
Pressure builds in his head, glasses shatter with
his reflection, his face caught by jagged light.
Your father dances as though he knew the mistakes
you make with words, writing them in small groups
on the page. Words that say too much but are silent
existing politely in sober people's heads
words he is unable to say or spell
words that sound like the end of the world.

He packs your books for you neatly into boxes
their weights surprise him, small containers of hope.
From your office you can hear your father breathing
short desperate breaths as though there was not
enough air left to finish his life. He swears
at something maybe a TV show or a memory that won't stop.

When the books are removed from the house he acts freer.
He stands in the empty living room and stares out a
window as though he were remembering the day you moved
into this house. You do not see what he sees.
For you an empty room is something to leave not enter.
When the books are unpacked later, they come out
in the wrong order. You place them randomly on shelves.
Spines face you like utterances from your life.
Any arrangement of them will be wrong
too much care put into something insignificant.
Some books' spines are thin like the
frail bones of your father's fingers.
Others are thick robust visible from a distance.

But you know the thin books are best.
Books of poems barely visible in a wall of books
squeezed between novels like parentheses.
Even all together they fill only a few shelves.
You put them at eye level so that you can
see them from anywhere in the room. Some are so
thin that there is no name on the spine
merely paper folded around images.
The books tell a separate story: a story that
contradicts yours.

Your father forgets the books after they are moved.
Content, he sits beside you in the car speechless
as you ramble on in fear, steering
as though you had to guess at the road.
Your foot searching, now and then,
for clutch or brake as automatically as
your words seek your father's ears.
If your father were to speak, you would not hear him.
Instead his hand speaks for both of you
as he touches your knee while you wait
for a light to change. He does not turn to you instead
he watches the pedestrians passing in front of the car.

# SARAH BINKS AND EDNA JAQUES

## *Parody, Gender, and the Construction of Literary Value*

*Carole Gerson*

BEFORE CONSIDERING THE REPUTATIONS of the fictional Canadian prairie poet, Sarah Binks, and Edna Jaques, the real woman whose verse Sarah's approximates, we need to examine the institutional context which has allowed one (Binks) to be received into the canon while the other (Jaques) remains the butt of critical disdain.[1] Sarah Binks was formally introduced in Paul Hiebert's 1947 book, *Sarah Binks*; coincidentally, Edna Jaques, Canada's most popular poet through the middle decades of this century, had published nine volumes of verse between 1934 and 1946. One might speculate whether the creation of Binks was inspired by Jaques—a possibility enhanced by the similar sounds and identical rhythms of their names. However, the purpose of this essay is not to dwell only on a specific instance of possible parody, but to consider as well some of the larger questions this case implies, with regard to the gender- and class-based premises underlying the processes of literary canonization in English-speaking Canada that have prevailed since the modernist 1930s and 1940s.

The feminist critique of modernism currently mounted by British and American critics has not yet inspired many Canadian critics to re-examine the Canadian past.[2] The projects of Gillian Hanscombe and Virginia Smyers, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, Shari Benstock, and Bonnie Scott Kime include the recuperation of modernist women poets and novelists marginalized because, as Benstock charitably puts it, "Modernism as we were taught it at mid-century . . . was unconsciously gendered masculine."[3] While the work of these scholars significantly advances the recovery of many female literary authors, it has yet to address the gendered aspects of the split between élite and popular writing that contribute to the modernist process of "edging women out."[4] In Canada, the gendered bias of modernist critical practice becomes particularly interesting when we compare the reputations of male and female popular poets.

During the modernist era, as high culture established its intellectual and artistic separation from popular culture,[5] folk poets became an easy target — perhaps

even more so in Canada than elsewhere in the English-speaking world because the general insecurity of our high-brow cultural arbiters sharpened their implicit hostility towards low-brow local versifiers. During the nineteenth century, in Canada as in the United States, the division between literary and popular poetry had been less distinct; dialect verse, intended for oral recitation, was a favoured genre that flowed from the pens of many authors, including Alexander McLachlan, Isabella Valancy Crawford, and even Sara Jeannette Duncan.[6] Although McLachlan and other Scottish-Canadian poets[7] poeticized their own more or less authentic speech patterns (with Burns as their mentor), the only vestige of dialect verse to be formally accepted by the Canadian academic modernists of the 1930s and 1940s was William Henry Drummond's turn-of-the-century "French Canadian" poetry, which the modernists viewed as an authentic expression of the ethos of Canada. Drummond remained in all three editions of A. J. M. Smith's influential *Book of Canadian Poetry* (1943, 1948, 1957), an anthology of seminal importance in the shaping of the Canadian poetic canon, as well as in his *Oxford Book of Canadian Verse* (1960).[8]

An Irish-born medical doctor, Drummond scarcely resembled the Québécois peasants whose voices he appropriated. I would suggest that the continuing acceptance of his pseudo-folk verse by the Anglo-Canadian literary establishment originated, in part, in its unarticulated socio-political subtext. When the middle-class Drummond condescended to the appearance of replicating the speech and experience of a repressed agrarian and working-class community, he inadvertently forestalled the possibility of that community speaking to English Canada on its own terms. As well, his verse put French Canada in its place by stereotyping it as a society of happy *habitants*, expressing in broken English their contentment with their cultural and material impoverishment by the very forces that Drummond represented.[9]

Towards more authentic forms of popular poetry, the literary taste-makers of modern English-speaking Canada have been much less charitable. In 1927, W. A. Deacon's book, *The Four Jameses*, poked unforgettable fun at the pretensions and productions of four naive male versifiers who are, as a result, regarded as our "great bad poets." The establishment treats their unintentional comedy with a combination of derision and affection, in particular James MacIntyre's "Ode on the Mammoth Cheese." The "best" of their poems because it is the "worst," it remains in the public eye, reproduced in James Reaney's play, *Colours in the Dark* (1969), as well as in several American anthologies of "the best bad poems in English."[10]

The majority of Deacon's real-life "bad" folk poets are men, as are the vast majority of the contributors to *The Stuffed Owl*, the 1930 anthology of bad verse (mostly by British authors) compiled by Wyndham Lewis and Charles Lee. The

illustration composed by these modernist editors to explain their distinction between "good Bad Verse" and "bad Bad Verse" is clearly gender-specific:

> Bad Bad Verse is a strong but inexperienced female child doggedly attacking Debussy's *Fêtes* in a remote provincial suburb on a hire-pay pianoforte from the Swiftsure Furnishing Stores. Good Bad Verse is Rummel or Lamond executing *Warblings at Eve* on a Bechstein concert-grand.[11]

Hence it is scarcely surprising that when critics have presented examples of inadequate poetry, they have tended to prefer verse written by women. One such instance occurs in Chapter Seven of *The Literary History of Canada* ("The Maritime Provinces, 1815-1880"), where the author cites male poets as examples of "point and polish," good style, "dignified expression," and "clarity." The only woman to be named is summoned to represent "sentimentality"[12] — a quality more often ascribed to women than to men, and of course utterly unacceptable to the modernist ethic of virility, austerity and restraint that has governed the academic approach to Canadian letters since the late 1920s. As objects of burlesque or parody, the androcentric literary establishment seems to prefer "bad" authors who are female; even the term "poetess" in this century invariably carries pejorative connotations. Deacon's book suggests that in Canada, comically naive male poets outnumbered (or at least outperformed) their female counterparts. But when the literary world burlesques its lower levels, it reserves a disproportionate quantity of contempt for its female practitioners. Mark Twain's melancholy Emmeline Grangerford, who appears in Chapter 17 of *Huckleberry Finn* (1884), is one memorable prototype.

In Canadian literature, the figure of the comical poetess has been memorialized in two well-known incarnations. The earlier appears in Frank Scott's "The Canadian Authors Meet," a nasty poem by an otherwise progressive poet. First published in 1927, it is included in almost every teaching anthology in use now and during the past two decades. This poem mounts a stinging attack on what Scott regarded as the conservatism of the Canadian Authors' Association, which had been founded in 1921 to promote the professional interests of Canadian writers. The poem's modernist wit and iconoclasm guarantee its position in the Canadian canon; less frequently noted is the way that Scott's disagreement with the Association's literary views shifts to an attack on the members whose gender was becoming dominant,[13] caricatured as "Virgins of sixty who still write of passion."

Likewise enshrined in the Canadian canon is Sarah Binks, "the Sweet Songstress of Saskatchewan, the Poet's Poetess"[14] unveiled by chemistry professor Paul Hiebert nearly half a century ago and still a going concern. Simply put, Sarah Binks

is to Canadian poetry what P.D.Q. Bach is to classical music. Hiebert's mock critical biography of this "simple country girl [who] captured in her net of poesy the flatness of that great province [of Saskatchewan]" (xviii) is still in print, at last count (1977) selling 2,000 copies a year.[15]

While the continuing popularity of this book contradicts the notion that Canadians lack humour, an analysis of what we find funny may quench some of our laughter. While researching this paper I happened to pick up a program for an academic conference on Canadian writing held in May, 1990, where the entertainment included a male actor impersonating Sarah Binks. This is not a new idea; in 1981 actor Eric Donkin costumed himself as Rosalind Drool, one of Sarah's fictional biographers in Hiebert's book, and "mounted a one-man stage adaptation of some of the book's scenes" which toured the country.[16]

The gender-based humour of this cross-dressing deserves some attention. Within *Sarah Binks*, much of Hiebert's satire targets trivial academic research. This almost amounts to self-parody, as the chemistry professor caricatures his artsy colleagues by concocting hilarious footnotes and blundering investigators such as "Horace P. Marrowfat, B.A., Professor Emeritus of English and Swimming of St. Midget's College," Dr. Termite of Toronto, and Rev. Beckus Puddy. However Rosalind Drool, Sarah's only female biographer, is not a professor. Rather, Hiebert echoes Frank Scott's "virgins of sixty who still write of passion" in describing Miss Drool's "natural proclivity to take a vicarious and Freudian delight in incidents and experiences which she has not been privileged to enjoy" (88). In other words, the men are funny because of their misguided professional zeal, but the women are funny because they are constructed according to the stereotype of the frustrated spinster. Drag performances of Sarah Binks accentuate the way Hiebert's book is often read as poking fun not at academic research, or at naive poetry *per se*, but at women poets in particular. In their most recent analysis of modernism, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar point out that male cross-dressing, parodying the outward appearance of femininity without relinquishing the masculinity of the male body, serves to assert male power, especially during a historical period of gender disorder.[17] When the parodic object is a popular female poet, the implication can only be that, while the establishment finds inherently funny all poets it categorizes as naive or "bad" (or popular or folk or whatever term one may choose), the women are even more ridiculous because they are incomplete: real women don't write poetry; or, to turn it around, women don't write real poetry.

In a 1975 interview, Hiebert explained the genesis of Sarah Binks in terms that reinforce my point. Sarah's poems originated as amusing ditties that Paul Hiebert and his brother composed as children. When he first gathered them, he attributed them to "some country bumpkin by the name of Henry Hayfoot. But that didn't get me anywhere; and then it suddenly occurred to me that if these had been written by a girl they would be a bit more fascinating." Hiebert goes on to describe

how Sarah Binks was conceived in order to bait a female audience, whose naiveté is constructed to suit his own agenda:

> [I]n the universities, when they used to hold social gatherings or conversaziones, as they called them, the women of the faculty, in order to keep up their intellectual end, would discuss the latest literary sensation or the latest book. . . . So I used to quote them these poems and say: "Have you heard this?" And they would remark: "That's a very nice thing; who wrote that?" . . . and I'd say: "This was written by that Saskatchewan poetess, a newcomer in the literary field of Western Canada, and she's attracting quite a bit of attention."[18]

Sarah Binks' continuing popularity with the Canadian academic literary establishment — primarily male by gender and by values — derives from a subtext similar to the one I outlined earlier concerning English Canada's eager acceptance of W. H. Drummond. In both cases, power is maintained by subordinating the other (defined by gender or by language) in humorous writing purporting to represent the other, but penned by a member of the power establishment. While recent sensitivity to the cultural dignity of French Canada has encouraged several critics to reconsider Drummond,[19] the only inkling of critical discomfort with Hiebert appears in Louis MacKendrick's passing comment (in his 1988 *DLB* entry) that Hiebert's humour relies on "numerous stereotypes of region, gender, and ethnicity."[20]

When we compare the reputation of Sarah Binks with that of Edna Jaques, Canada's most successful real-life folk poet, we arrive at an interesting intersection of high culture with popular culture. Whereas high culture often appropriates folk poetry for parodic purposes, popular poetry operates in its own self-sufficiency, with little concern for approval from the élite. In 1952, Jaques claimed (legitimately, I believe) to be Canada's best-selling poet, with annual sales of 5,000 volumes and annual profits of $1,000. She was born in Ontario in 1891, and as a small child was taken to Saskatchewan by her family who gave up the comforts of a settled town for the crude life of a prairie homestead. Most of her education occurred directly on the farm; her grade 8 schooling was extended only by secretarial training taken when she had to support her daughter after the collapse of her marriage. While still a child she began to publish poems in the local newspaper (the *Moose Jaw Times*); in 1932, as the Depression intensified, she collected some of her work into two booklets priced at 25 cents each, of which she sold 20,000 copies. She later decided that "the secret of their success was their size. They were small enough to fit into an ordinary envelope, and hundreds of women bought them as little gifts for friends, instead of greeting cards."[21] From this early success there was no turning back. Over the next two decades ten sub-

stantial volumes followed, all of which went into many reprints, along with several editions of *The Best of Edna Jaques* (1966, 1967, 1974) and a final posthumous collection in 1979, *Prairie Born, Prairie Bred, Poetic Reflections of a Pioneer*. Her autobiography, *Uphill all the Way*, was published in 1977, the year before her death at the age of 87.

Edna Jaques was a genuinely populist poet. Unlike Nellie McClung, who was a personal friend and who also wrote heart-warming, optimistic words to cheer the hard lives of women, Jaques did not speak down from a middle-class perspective but directly to her peers in the kitchens of the country. She regarded her pieces as "common, ordinary poems, telling about life in Canada and especially on the prairies" (*Uphill* 79). When asked about a possible "humorous parallel" with Sarah Binks, Jaques replied that she hadn't read Hiebert's book, and "likely wouldn't see any cleverness in it."[22]

Not surprisingly, the literary establishment has extended greater hospitality to the parody than to the reality. Paul Hiebert and/or Sarah Binks appear in the *Literary History of Canada*, the *Canadian Encyclopaedia*, the *Dictionary of Literary Biography* and the *Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature*, none of which mentions Jaques (although they do include Drummond as well as popular male poets like Robert Service, Wilson MacDonald, and Tom MacInnes).[23] Upon publication, *Sarah Binks* was reviewed in such august cultural organs as the *Canadian Forum*, the *Dalhousie Review*, and the *Canadian Poetry Magazine*. While some academic reviewers regarded the book as a parody of literary nationalism and misguided scholarly zeal, several read Hiebert's target as the object rather than the method, and concurred with Earle Birney's wish to congratulate Hiebert for having written "the first funny book about Canadian poetry and [supplied] a local habitation and a name for that protean nymph, the Bad Canadian Poetess." Birney recommended that the book be "required reading for all English professors, reviewers, and members of the Canadian Authors' Association" (in line with Frank Scott's earlier attack on the CAA).[24]

At the same time, established periodicals all but ignored Edna Jaques, whose home turf was the daily and weekly press. With the exception of *The Golden Road* (1953), which was disparagingly noticed by *Saturday Night*, no reviews of her books or her autobiography were picked up by the compilers of the *Canadian Periodical Index* over the four decades of her career. Hence it is nicely ironic that the only sustained serious attention Jaques received was in "Letters in Canada," the *University of Toronto Quarterly*'s annual review of Canadian literature which was initiated in 1935. During its first few decades its contributors attempted to consider everything of a literary nature written in this country. Here we can observe professors wrestling with popular verse they would have preferred to ignore. In the first issue, E. K. Brown, who presided over the poetry section, gave Jaques short shrift:

> The critic need concern himself with mediocre literature only when he has before him a book to which the reading public, or a substantial fraction of it, is disposed to assign a false importance. Mrs. Edna Jaques' *My Kitchen Window* is such a book. . . . Love, patriotism, even religion itself, take on a kind of cosiness in her verses as they, doubtless, do in the minds of a multitude of Canadians. Her verses are an expression of the ordinary self of the Canadian middle class, that is to say, of the immense majority of Canadians. They stir one to fear that an Eddy Guest may be the next phenomenon in Canadian literature.[25]

Several volumes later, Brown conceded that Jaques

> is probably our most genuinely popular writer of verse. But her popularity is not a very consoling fact to anyone who would wish a literature in this country, profound and penetrating and great. She enables us to see what Canadian taste really is.[26]

In 1950 Brown was succeeded by Northrop Frye. Interested in accounting for all forms of literary endeavour, Frye issued several statements defending popular poetry in theory only to then discredit the results produced by those who actually engaged in the practice — especially if their work reflected female values or experiences. His first discussion of "naive or primitive" verse regretted that the search for "fresh experience" is usually blighted by "self-consciousness and schoolmarmism." (Is there a masculine counterpart to "schoolmarmism"?) When he came to Edna Jaques, Frye described her as a skilful practitioner of "the doggerel school," whose "mastery of the central technical device of nostalgic verse" lay in her ability to "flatter the selective memory" with a "smoothly edited and censored transcript of wholesome food, happy children, simple virtues, and, of course, mother dear."[27]

Brown and Frye were evidently far more perturbed by Edna Jaques — or at least, by the threat her popularity posed to their academic values and national literary agenda — than she was by them. Her chosen audience was women — in her autobiography she declares that she "always loved women" and "never really liked men" (*Uphill*, 238, 240) — and women of her own class: the small-town and rural women who said to her "You might be my sister"[28] and "You speak our language" (*Uphill* 220).

WHAT JAQUES OFFERS ordinary women is a celebration of their strength and experience as mothers and home-makers, and valorization of their daily labour in the home. "My work-bench is a kitchen sink / The table where I mix my bread," begins a poem in one of her first books.[29] At a period when motherhood was the destiny of most Canadian women, Jaques voiced this central factor in their lives:

My future is no longer mine
For it is bound and sealed and tied
To this wee girl of half-past four
Who skips and dances at my side.
("The Mother," *MKW*, 20)

When the Second World War called women into Canada's offices and factories, Jaques followed suit in both her life and her verse. Some pieces, like "Munition Worker," acknowledge the physical hardships of factory labour; others commemorate the silent anguish of the "mothers of heroes" who wait for news of sons serving overseas.[30] In Jaques' verse, women are significant for their accomplishments, not for their persons. Her poem about her own fortieth birthday (*MKW*, 41) proclaims the value of experience, as does her poem on "The Older Woman" who lacks "glamour" but embodies love (*RinD*, 50-51). Thus the workers and home-makers who buy her books find themselves positively mirrored in verse that accords worth to ordinary women who have "no special gift of anything" and will "never set the world afire."[31] The celebration of women's friendships and sense of community is another of her consistent themes.[32]

In her recent study of folk poetry in Ontario, Pauline Greenhill points out that "unlike an academic poet, a folk poet's words are valued in a community in so far as he or she has roles, values, and worldviews in common with others in it, not in so far as he or she is different."[33] While Greenhill assumes that community is defined by geography (as, to some extent, does Laurie Ricou in his essay on popular prairie poetry[34]), Jaques' community spans most of Canada, and is defined instead by gender and by class. Her book titles alone suggest her cultural terrain: *Drifting Soil* (1932?), *My Kitchen Window* (1935), *Aunt Hattie's Place* (1941), *Backdoor Neighbors* (1946), *Fireside Poems* (1950). In line with her role as community poet, most of her poetry tends to reinforce rather than challenge prevailing values and conditions. While Jaques wrote several bitter pieces describing the devastation of the dust-bowl years on the prairies,[35] the Depression poems that refer to "the poorer sidewalks of our town" (*MKW* 21) more often than not advocate finding happiness in poverty and achieving contentment with one's lot by focussing on "Small Lovely Things" (*MKW* 67). Still, a counter-voice occasionally breaks through that does ask hard questions. In "To the Old Poor" and "Poverty," she demands "WHY?", and in "A Girl-Mother Wonders,"[36] she establishes strong sympathy with a young unwed mother who will never know the child she is forced to give up for adoption. "Slums," published in 1946, depicts "A hopeless woman sitting on a stoop / In a bedraggled housecoat soiled and torn, / Watching her children with pathetic eyes." The poem concludes:

How is it, then, in such a land as ours
Rich beyond words, and still with youth aglow,
That anyone should live in poverty

> And life be cheap and sordid as men go
> Down bitter roads where sin in bright array
> Touches the lips of children as they play?[37]

If Jaques' verse shows little change over the years, this consistency can be attributed to the stability of her audience and her themes. The women for whom she wrote saw little change in their lives and horizons through the middle years of this century. Today, although a new generation of scholars is establishing the economic and social value of women's traditional work in the home and the family, Canadian anthologies of the poetry of work, such as Tom Wayman's *A Government Job at Last* (1976) and *Going for Coffee* (1981), are slow to recognize unwaged domestic labour as real work. Jaques' strongest appearance in this field occurs in the second volume of Brian Davis's *Poems of the Canadian People, 1900-1950* (1978), where, with four poems, she is the best represented woman poet.

CONTEXTUALIZING A PARODIC FIGURE like Sarah Binks within the shifting grid of literary value shaped by the changing reputations of real, albeit very different, popular writers like Edna Jaques and W. H. Drummond allows us to see in operation some of the biases of class, gender and ethnicity that have been unquestioningly accepted by the profession that constructs literary value, and in many instances still prevail. The Canadian literary academy needs to recognize the extent to which it continues to be shaped by its modernist past, and to acknowledge that its acceptance of the literary representation of others—including women, Native Peoples, French-Canadians, members of the working class, popular poets, non-whites, and various combinations thereof — often occur in texts whose stance or authorship reduces the threat of their otherness. Canonicity, in Canada as elsewhere, cannot be divorced from the problematics of power.

## NOTES

[1] Research for this paper was supported through the Canada Research Fellowship Program of the SSHRCC.

[2] Gillian Hanscombe and Virginia L. Smyers, *Writing For Their Lives: The Modernist Women, 1910-1940* (London: Women's Press 1987); Sandra Gilbert & Susan Gubar, *No Man's Land: The Place of the Woman Writer in the Twentieth Century*, vols. 1, 2 (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1987, 1989); Shari Benstock, *Women of the Left Bank: Paris, 1900-1940* (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1986); Bonnie Scott Kime, *The Gender of Modernism: A Critical Anthology* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1990); Carole Gerson, "The Canon Between the Wars: Fieldnotes of a Feminist Literary Archeologist," in Robert Lecker, ed., *Canadian Canons: Essays in Literary Value* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1991): 46-56.

[3] Benstock, Introduction, p. 2.

[4] Gaye Tuchman with Nina E. Fortin, *Edging Women Out: Victorian Novelists, Publishers, and Social Change* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1989).

[5] See Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (London: Fontana 1983): 90-91, 136-7, 236-7, where it is clear that the restricted definition of "culture" as "intellectual and especially artistic activity" and therefore to be distinguished from folk and popular elements coincides with the rise of modernism in Britain at the end of the nineteenth century. Alan C. Golding's essay, "American Poetry Anthologies," in Robert von Hallberg, ed., *Canons* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press 1984): 279-308, describes how the modernist shift towards the avant-garde during the early twentieth century eliminated many early popular poets from the American canon, and bequeathed a distinctly anti-popular stance to most subsequent canonizers (see especially 293 ff.).

[6] See Duncan's 'Irish' dialect poem, "My Washerwoman's Story," *The Week* 5 (23 Feb. 1888) 203.

[7] See Daniel Clark, ed., *Selections from Scottish Canadian Poets* (Toronto: Caledonian Society, 1900).

[8] For further discussion of the canonical impact of Smith's anthologies, see Carole Gerson, "Anthologies and the Canon of Early Canadian Women Writers," in Lorraine McMullen, ed., *Re(dis)covering Our Foremothers* (Ottawa: Univ. of Ottawa Press, 1990): 55-76.

[9] In his effusive preface to *The Habitant and Other French Canadian Poems* (1987), Louis Fréchette's overstated congratulation of his friend, Dr. Drummond, for avoiding "caricature" "bouffonnerie," "vulgarité," "le grotesque," "bizarrerie" and "burlesque" in his "sympathique et juste" portrayal of "un pauvre illetré . . . comme un type national à part" seems more a defense than an endorsement. Fréchette attributes a positive political value to Drummond's verse "qui ne peuvent que cimenter l'union de coeur et d'esprit qui doit exister entre toutes les fractions qui composent la grande famille canadienne appelée à vivre et à prospérer sous la même drapeau." The experience of being culturally indoctrinated to participate in one's own repression is common to ethnic minorities as well as to women. Even in 1897, Fréchette sensed that to be acceptable in French Canada, Drummond's verse required careful qualification; during the 1960s, its continuing presence in the high school anthology used by the Protestant School Board of Greater Montreal (where I first encountered "The Wreck of the Julie Plante") aggravated the tensions that would explode in the Quiet Revolution.

[10] "Queen of Cheese" appears in James Camp, X. J. Kennedy, and Keith Waldrop, eds, *Pegasus Descending: A Treasury of the Best Bad Poems in English* (New York: Collier, 1971): 73-74; their source was William Cole, ed., *The Fireside Book of Humorous Poetry* (New York: Simon & Shuster, 1959), where it appears in a section headed, "*Primitive* poems that are so bad they're good."

[11] Wyndham Lewis and Charles Lee, eds., *The Stuffed Owl: An Anthology of Bad Verse* (London and Toronto: Dent, 1930), ix. Of the 60 contributors, 52 are men, seven are women, and one is unspecified. Even in the realm of Bad Verse, that written by men is more likely to be judged "good" (i.e. worthy of inclusion in an anthology like this one) than that written by women.

[12] Fred Cogswell, "The Maritime Provinces, 1815-1880," in Carl F. Klinck, general editor, *Literary History of Canada* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1967): 117, 120, 123, 124, 107.

[13] In 1924, women were 45% of the more than 800 English-speaking members of the CAA; by 1933, this figure had increased to 58%.

[14] Paul Hiebert, *Sarah Binks* (1947; rpt. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1964) : 141. All subsequent quotations are taken from this edition.

[15] Reynold Siemans, "Sarah Binks in Retrospect: A Conversation with Paul Hiebert," *Journal of Canadian Fiction* 19 (1977) : 68.

[16] Louis K. MacKendrick, "Paul Hiebert," *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, vol. 68, *Canadian Writers 1920-1959*: 180. The conference whose banquet entertainment featured "Jack Dueck: performance of *Sarah Binks*," was titled "Mennonite/s Writing in Canada," and was held 10-12 May 1990 at Conrad Grebel College, University of Waterloo. A similar (albeit more spontaneous) event occurred at the conference on Scottish influences on Canadian literature in Edinburgh in May 1991, where a group of male Canadian scholars created a comical Canadian poetess for an evening's entertainment.

[17] Sandra M. Gilbert & Susan Gubar, *Sexchanges*, vol. 2 of *No Man's Land: The Place of the Woman Writer in the Twentieth Century* (New Haven, Yale Univ. Press, 1989), 324-36.

[18] Siemans, 66.

[19] See Gerald Noonan, "Perceptions of Drummond, 'Cet Idiome Batard,' and the French Canadian *Pastorale*" *Essays on Canadian Writing* No. 27 (1983-84) : 35-40; Lee Briscoe Thompson, "The Shelving of a People's Poet," *Journal of American Culture*, 2: 4 (Winter 1980) : 682-89; Jay Johnson, "The Age of Brass: Drummond, Service, and Canadian 'Local Colour,'" *Canadian Poetry*, No. 23 (1988) : 14-30.

[20] *DLB* 68: 181.

[21] Edna Jaques, *Uphill all the Way* (Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1977) : 80; hereafter identified as *Uphill.*

[22] Janice Tyrwhitt, "Rhymes in a Ten-cent Scribbler," *Maclean's Magazine* 65 (1 Sept. 1952) : 44.

[23] Reynold Siemans and the editorial staff at the *Journal of Canadian Fiction* were so unfamiliar with Jaques that when Hiebert mentioned her name during the interview, they allowed it to be misspelled "Jakes."

[24] *Canadian Poetry Magazine* 11 (Mar 1948), 42; a similar comment regarding "that bane of the newspaper editor's life — the Bad Canadian Poetess" appeared in the *Ottawa Citizen*, cited in *Canadian Literature* 75 (Winter 1977) : 113. B. K. Sandwell likewise suggested that "'Sarah Binks' should be compulsory reading in all courses on Canadian cultural history." *Saturday Night* 63 (29 Mar 1948) : 17.

[25] "Letters in Canada," *University of Toronto Quarterly* 5 (1935-36) : 367.

[26] "Letters in Canada," *University of Toronto Quarterly*, (1939) : 288.

[27] "Letters in Canada," *University of Toronto Quarterly*, (1950) : 260; (1953) : 263. The critical strategies of Frye and Brown are typical of others who disparage popular verse in that they scorn not just the style, but also the topics and sympathetic readers of folk poetry. See Pauline Greenhill, *True Poetry: Traditional and Popular Verse in Ontario* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's Univ. Press, 1989), 6-7.

[28] Tyrwhitt, 15.

[29] Edna Jaques, *My Kitchen Window* (Toronto: Allen, 1935) : 4; hereafter identified as *MKW.*

[30] "Munition Worker," "Her Son is Missing," "Sons Going Away," *Roses in December* (Toronto: Allen, 1944) ; hereafter referred to as *RinD.*

[31] Edna Jaques, *Dreams in Your Heart* (Toronto: Allen, 1937): 59, 61; hereafter referred to as *Dreams*.

[32] "Wherever Women Gather" *Fireside Poems* (Toronto: Allen, 1950) p. 61; "Companionship (Between Old Ladies)" *Prairie Born Prairie Bred* (Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1977): 16.

[33] Pauline Greenhill, *True Poetry: Traditional and Popular Verse in Ontario* (McGill-Queen's Univ. Press, 1989), 37.

[34] "The Meadowlark Tradition: Popular Verse of the Canadian Prairie," *Essays on Canadian Writing*, No. 18/19 (1980): 161-68.

[35] "To an Abandoned Farmhouse" *Dreams*, p. 8, "Drought Area" *Beside Still Waters* (Toronto: Allen, 1939): 60.

[36] "All" *My Kitchen Window* (1935); also, "If My Girl Came," *Wide Horizons* (Moose Jaw: "Times," 1933?).

[37] Edna Jaques, *Backdoor Neighbors* (Toronto: Allen, 1946): 60.

# THE CORN MASK

*Tony Cosier*

He balanced the Seneca mask
Back on its hook with care
Put on his coat and his boots
And set down the creek past the mill.
To the gulley buried by cedars
He hoped was the one at last.

High walls that narrowed to squeeze like a vise said it was.
A rivulet chuckling at pebbleglut spoke like a tongue
And agreed. Leaved vines and ferns and moss said this
Was the ancient ground. He looked for shapes in the cliffs.
At noon he found a slab of rock that was warm.

He thought of the poet farmer who read aloud in the hall
Leaning on his cane, how when he reached the proper line
Set the cane aside and fondled for a cob in his packsack
And held it high in the air in his tightening bones.

He thought of the soldiers burning the fields in the year of the massacre.

And he dreamed of a man in a black hat who loved the mountain storms.

By dusk he was finished with reverie. He looked for more,
An affirmation, some gift back from the land
Out of time. He wanted a buck with antlers
That told a story. Or a stonetrapped print of a bear.
Something. Then the questions caught him. Who
Was he to presume so much intimacy? What
Was earth that it needed to talk to anyone?

He accepted his reproof. And stayed.
Stayed long after he had left the ravine.
Stayed with the mountains for years. Lasted snowstorms
And sudden floods. Honoured the legends.
Grew corn. Slept lightly so when winds
Picked up at night and shook his house
He could almost hear his answers rumbling
Behind the wallboard and out through the mouth of the mask.

# HOTEL CENTRALE, ROTTERDAM

*Daniel David Moses*

I am awake between stiff
sheets tonight in room thirty
four, listening to the heat
tick through the radiator,
seeing a television

pour out news of the war,
the war in the air, the war
in the Gulf. The walls vibrate
with video light. This is
no room for sleep anymore.

There is no room here for dreams.
The shooting stars on the screen
are as real as a rain
of fire can be, falling
on some other city. And

here I have a star's eye view
— the glide toward the intended
target, the blink of a bridge
into nothing. Do I want
to see that again? I do.

Who am I now? Where? I want
to be in that blue leather
armchair down in the lobby,
talking with the people there
about the stories we're in

this city to tell. But now
they're using their several
tongues to question the news and
I want none of that, want not
to fall for it again. I

am trying to fall asleep.
Those people keep on asking
all night through. *Where are the wives?*
*How much is lost? Just what is*
*the story?* In that, a small

glory — like that glow, say, down
below, as my overnight
flight ended, a greenhouse bright
as day, a dream suspended
in the blue and frost of dawn.

# THE LACK

*Elizabeth Gourlay*

The worm was large and green and striped
hung from cleome leaf
I flicked, then quickly stamped it
death under my garden boot

o pity
for I think now I should study how to tell
the cutworm
from the Lepidoptera grub

these last two years the garden shows
a dearth of butterflies
some winged creatures, craneflies, bees and wasps but
gone the yellow swallows the velvet mourning cloaks

they used to float
like happiness
above the garden blooms
alight and lift and float again in many-coloured arcs. . . . .

# FIRE WATER

*K. V. Skene*

*(. . . for the use and enjoyment of our tidelands)*

1. Respect local limits and any beach closures
caused by red-tide.
fire water air earth
cave cradle bitch birth
2. Don't catch or dig up more than you need. Back-
fill your holes.
shell claw gill fin
rag bone nerve skin
3. Learn local regulations and obtain license
for food fish. Be aware of tideland boundaries.
day week month year
moon flood stone tear
4. Leave everything 'as is' on shorelines. Don't
take plants and animals from unusual areas.
eye tooth fist feet
run rape kill sleep
5. Don't dump trash on tidelands or throw garbage
over the side of your boat.
thunder mountain ocean tree
bread blood cupboard key
6. Conservation, reverence for life and proper septic
systems ensure a quality marine environment. Don't
pump sewage near shellfish beds.
rod hammer man liar
earth air water fire

# "THE WILSON COLLECTION" AT ACADIA UNIVERSITY

*Richard A. Davies*

ACADIA UNIVERSITY HAS enhanced its valuable Thomas Chandler Haliburton collection of printed editions by the acquisition of a family archive, donated through the generosity of Mr. and Mrs. Charles Wilson of North Vancouver, British Columbia.[1] "The Wilson Collection" is the only T. C. Haliburton family archive that has come to light thus far, so a brief description and review of its contents will be of interest. The archive is especially valuable because the papers Thomas Chandler Haliburton entrusted (when he moved from Windsor to Isleworth, London, in 1856) to his son, Robert Grant, then a Halifax lawyer, were destroyed in a fire in 1857.

The five T. C. Haliburton letters in the collection and the two letters written by his wife Louisa, reprinted here, reveal the hitherto hidden face of domestic life at "Clifton"[2] (Haliburton's home in Windsor, Nova Scotia, from 1836 until 1856), both before and after the death of his wife Louisa in 1841. They complement and extend the letters collected in my 1988 edition of *The Letters of Thomas Chandler Haliburton*.[3] "The Wilson Collection" offers numerous direct and indirect biographical insights into the world of Thomas Chandler and his children and reveals, for the first time, the attempts of his children to memorialize their parents. The two older sisters, Susannah and Augusta, in particular, actively planned to publish a selection of their father's writing, prefaced by a memoir. Even though the plan did not come to fruition, they did manage to commit to paper (aided by their brothers Robert Grant and Arthur) many early memories of their mother, whose life and ancestry were largely a closed book to them.

The collection can be divided into 5 groups:

1. TCH letters and documents.
2. Neville family documents.
3. Letters received by TCH and other members of the family.
4. Family documents penned by TCH's children and others in their attempt to write and record family history.
5. Photographs and prints.

## *Group 1: Letters and documents by TCH*

THE GROUP CONTAINS FIVE personal letters by TCH to Augusta Haliburton, dated 18 April 1849, 17 September 1849, 2 May 1851, 17 February 1862, and 20 February 1864; a copy of a letter sent by TCH to Ellen Fowden Haliburton of Whitley, near Wigan, Lancashire, England, dated 30 November 1840; a copy of a letter (in TCH's hand) to Richard Bentley, dated 23 August 1843; a letter written to Alexander Fowden Haliburton, dated 21 March 1849; and a curious coded letter sent by Colonel Inglis to General Havelock during the Siege of Lucknow (1857), rendered into English by TCH.

The letters to Augusta, reprinted here, reveal how central she was to the running of Clifton following the death of Louisa in November 1841.[4] And they reveal how close TCH remained to her even after his marriage to Sarah Harriet Williams.

1.

Lunenburg.
Wednesday 18 Ap [18]49

My dear Augusta

Court rose yesterday after a tedious and laborious session — I shall proceed tomorrow or next day to Liverpool — I am tired but tolerably well, with the exception of a weakness of chest which I think arises from cold
Tell Clarke[a] — 1st potatoes must be put into hot bed, and the field potatoes sprouted 2 also corn (Indian) without delay — 3 I only want one sheep fattened as I have not food enough for all — 4 Team must be kept agoing, 5 no extra hiring but Latty who was to come on 16, till I return 6 Send Arthur to Dy Sherriff to say to Ross I will take the two cows — Songster[b] will value them and any body else Ross chooses and he shall have credit for their valuation 7th. After Monday the 23d of April whenever ground is in order Clarke may sow the 4 acre field near hedge (plowd last fall) with oats —
7 I should like him to see Songster about filling up hole over Tunnel in pasture — My team & two men can help — *raise it a little above level as it will settle* —
8 Lowther must get a bottle of blistering ointment from Harding & blister my horses ankle — It must be first washed with warm water so as to let it penetrate and not waste ointment — Mr. Porter[c] will shew him — if needful — Hotbed must be pushed, for we are always backward in that —
9 When did calf go? and who got it if not gone it had better be kept a few days for Butcher, as there is evidently a job going to be done by giving a bargain to some one —
10 Send to John Smith[d] to make sky light tight When I return I will attend to floor
10 Tell Arthur to look at the work every day — it is a great check — *and see no cattle are poaching meadow lands*
11 Let Lowther clear front cariage yard & keep it in order removing the ladder to the back of the fence of coach yard — where it will be handy —
12 Tell Arthur any rainy day he cant get to school to see that the men split wood —
13 Arthur will tell Clarke that I want ground where oats were last year *very heavily manured*, for green crops it is better to have *at* home just now than *from* Windsor,

as it will expedite work — Let me be written to next week, giving me an acct at Shelburne of all work done up to that date

14 I have seen Church Times and am pleased with Bobs position at the end of the term

God bless you all — T.C.H.

Keep this note by you

[a] Probably Clarke was one of Thomas Chandler's "men": others mentioned in these letters are "Ross" (who looks after the horses), "Lowther," "Harding," and "D. Geldert." "Ross" is probably Nathaniel Ross (1797-1876), labourer; "Lowther" either Samuel or John Lowther, both labourers; "Harding" possibly "T. S. Harding"; Lennie Geldert was TCH's coachman. For help in identifying these people I would like to thank Larry Loomer of Windsor, N.S.

[b] John L. Sangster was Haliburton's agent who looked after his gypsum quarries. The name was sometimes spelled "Songster," sometimes "Sangster."

[c] Probably Reginald Porter (1813-66).

[d] Probably John Smith (1802-72), eldest son of the carpenter and shipbuilder of the same name.

2.

Windsor 17th Sepr [18]49

My dear Augusta —

We miss you very much — Laura fancies she aint well but she only misses you and is very cross with every body, what she will do when I go I dont know, for she has to fly to me from necessity now — I go on Thursday bothered enough as you may suppose, from a variety of causes, *never* to occur again I hope — I like Ross very well, but I cant find a man for stable and 4/- a day is ruinous for the care of horses only — Ems letter will give you all the news — I tried Weldons recpt on Connolly's house[a] and it is as good as paint it answers remarkably well — Thereafter I will do all those Windsor buildings with it — Materials for Connolly's have cost 2/ only I have 55 Bushels of potatoes of first rate quality — I thought it best to get them in — I shall make one of the men sleep here when I am gone — You have managed the accts so remarkably well, my best thanks are due to you — Warn Em. to be careful in my absence — D Geldert said rent was too high and gave warning — he succeeded so well last time he thought he would try his luck again, I told him very well, it was probable he could do better elsewhere — I hope he is the last of the Mohicans that I have to do with — I shall hope to see you here on my return — Love to Susan — Weldon and all — *Hoof B* [?] — like a spaniel is more civil the more he is kicked — he has insulted[?] Amelia T.C.H.

[a] Probably John Connelly's house. Haliburton owned several properties on a triangle of land in Windsor, bounded by Victoria, Stannu and Albert streets, and described by Larry Loomer as Windsor's first "subdivision."

3.

Barrington 2d May 1851
Friday evening —

Dear Augusta —

I have reached this place 20 miles of Shelburne & 45 from Yarmouth which latter I hope to reach by dinner time tomorrow, with every prospect of a beautiful day —

Yesterday morning I received your two letters (including money one) by same mail — My foot is better I discontinued the poultices on Sunday last, and hope to be able to wear my boot by the time I reach Annapolis —

The pain has nearly all gone, but the foot is still swelled & tender — I have a very good easy winter shoe-cover which I wear, and can walk, but not exercise

I am thankful to escape so well for the agony I suffered at Liverpool was almost insupportable — I took 4 gout pills to kill pain, which they did, but they have had a very stupifying effect — I am mending fast, and the only inconvenience I suffer is from confinement —

*Mem*

1 I should like *meadows* to be rolled —

2 I hope to hear from you at Annapolis

3 The floor of *addition* must be on a *level with kitchen*, in other words it must be excavated level with cellar —

4 — I dont know what you mean by small passage by chimney — if you mean passage from 3d story to Geldarts attic, there is to be a door if you mean the passage by Harding's to back stairs there is to be a door there with light over it —

Your truly
T C Haliburton

4.

Gordon House,
Isleworth,
17th Feby [18]62

Dear Augusta,

I was just about writing to you when I got your letter — I have received the other day at board meeting your interest, which is this half year exactly ten pounds in even money, and is in shape of ten pound note —

Will you have it by post, cut in two, or entire, or in cheque, or how?

I am startled at your account of fire, but on reflection think old houses safer than new ones, which are not so well built — I congratulate you with all my heart on your escape which was a very narrow one — Mary Weldon is here to remain till vessel sails on Thursday — Poor thing!!!

Yours always T.C.H.

5.

8 Albert Terrace,
Knightsbridge,
20th Feby [18]64

Dear Augusta –

Our lease is out, on the 18th March, and I am most anxious to know when the Parkers[a] return home — I am afraid they will watch our return & Mrs P. have the old man to be fed up by us till May or June –

If so I wont return yet, but make arrangements otherwise — Will you endeavour to find out their movements, from her, without letting her know when we go home —

If I find she is waylaying us, I will take a flat in the new Lodging House near Palace Hotel, but this is a great bore —

Try and find out and let me know — on Friday I spoke for some time in the house, and was utterly unconscious of having been ever effective in speech — On Friday next I speak again — At one time (3 months ago), I was afraid I never should be able — I am more than 7 inches less in circumference — I propose to stop when I reach 10 inches – When shall we see you in town –
Love to Alexander & believe me your always

Th.C. Haliburton

[a] Haliburton's friendship with Robert Parker (1796-1865) of Saint John, N.B., was always warm, even to the end of his life. The "Parkers" referred to here are most likely Neville Parker (Robert's brother), and his wife. Mrs. Parker was something of an evangelical zealot and Neville came under her influence.

On 18 September 1840, Maria Edgeworth the novelist, wrote a note of thanks to Haliburton's daughter, Susannah, then in Liverpool, for she had just received a complimentary copy of one of Thomas Chandler's works.[5] The letter was delivered by mistake to Ellen Fowden Haliburton at Whitley, near Wigan, Lancashire. Ellen wrote to Thomas Chandler on the 27 October 1840, enclosing Maria Edgeworth's letter, pointing out the error, and beginning a correspondence between the two families that continued throughout the 1840s. Ellen took the opportunity to introduce herself and her family to Thomas Chandler, knowing that on his recent visit to England, he had visited "some of the old localities of the family" in Scotland. Here is Thomas Chandler's effusive reply:

(Copy, not in TCH's hand)

Windsor, Nova Scotia, 30 Nov. 1840

My dear Madam,

I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt of your very kind letter enclosing one from Miss Edgeworth to my daughter and beg you to accept my best thanks for the trouble you have taken and the flattering terms in which you have been so good as to express yourself. In truth the very sight of your name has a charm for me, that you have never been exiled can scarcely conceive — It is seldom I hear or see it unless addressed to me or my own family, for tho' my progenitors migrated to this western world more than 120 years ago, here I am alone without parents or brother or sister and no kindred near me but my own little flock under my own roof — The world is a world of strangers to me and every namesake is new to me. I have read your letter again and again with pleasure as the letter of a—Haliburton, as one of that dispersed flock which whenever found are the same, solitary and alone – I feel happy that accident has procured for me, what I much desired when

in England, an introduction to you – I had heard of your father and was several times asked if I was related or known to him, but knew no one of whom I had the right to ask to be the medium of our acquaintance. Nothing therefore was left to me but a self-introduction, and this is rather an awkward affair, and commonly regarded as one likely to have disagreeable sequel – This I the more regretted as I had been at great pains and expence to accumulate every family record, parish register, antient charter, and old document, as well as tradition relative to our stock, which I have traced to its origin, a Danish chief of the name of "Treucte" – This extends to a period of several hundred years and is as perfect perhaps as that of any other family in the Kingdom – You may easily suppose therefore my disappointment in not being able to know your father and hear his traditions on the subject, especially as I (with a friend of mine to whose antiquarian researches I am much indebted, and who is of the same name) intend hereafter to arrange these materials and print them for the use of the family only — The name is all we have, but it is a good one, thrice enobled, honorable in prosperity and respected even in its poverty – It is one of which tho' am not weak enough to be vain, I confess I am proud, and as I believe this feeling to have a beneficial effect on the mind, it is one which I love to cherish in those who are to come after me. [Thomas Chandler then proceeds to relate the origins of the Haliburton family as he understands them] . . . From one or the other of these three great branches are all the Haliburtons now existing derived, but all have one common descent, "Treucte the Dane." I have many curious anecdotes relative to the family, both in the olden time and in the commonwealth, and hope to have the pleasure some day of laying them before you — Walter Scott has acted with some disingenousness in this matter, and has had himself served by a jury as heir of the name and he's buried in our vaults as last representative — To say the least of it, it was unworthy of him – his own fame was sufficient for him, and he might have left to the poor all they had "their language and their name." But Walter Scott tho' he has achieved many great things has done some very little ones also — And now my fair friend and kinswoman do not let me suppose that this is to be the last of our correspondence I pray thee better not to have known thee than to have lost thee thus — It is too agreeable a thing for me to receive a letter subscribed with my own patronymic, to surrender the hope that it will be the forerunner of others and that it will lead to a friendship that a common origin and a common name (and I think I may infer) a common pride of our stock seem to lay a subtantial ground for — If you will so far honor me, I assure you it will confer a real pleasure on one, who has but few of his own family that have it in their power to add to his happiness — Should any of your family ever visit America pray consider that Nova Scotia is the nearest part to Europe, and that Windsor contains "Haliburtons" that will be right glad to welcome you to the new world. — We shall hope in that case you will consider our house your home here –

Please to present my respects to your father and the rest of his family and say to him should I ever again visit England (which I dare not hope, it is so difficult for a Judge to be absent from his duty) I shall avail myself of his permission to become personally known to him — you who write so easily and so well, will surely not deny me the favor of hearing from you again, may I therefore request your indulgence when I ask for the traditions of your branch and such facts as are within your knowledge of "our house" — With many thanks, I am dear Madam, Your affectionate "*Scotch Cousin*" Thos Haliburton.

## *Group 2: Neville family letters*

THE SECOND GROUP (Neville family papers) contains eight items, dated 1811, 1812 (2), 1814, 1837, 1839 (2), and n.d. The earliest is a letter written by Louisa's father, Captain Lawrence Neville, just one year before his death. In 1814, Louisa received and kept a vivid, eight-page, eye-witness account of the Battle of Plattsburg written on the 18 October 1814 by her brother, William Frederick, stationed in Chambly, Lower Canada. Two letters, written in 1839, by Louisa herself, offer additional glimpses of domestic life at Clifton. When Thomas Chandler returned from his year-long visit to England in March, 1839, he immediately sent his eldest daughter Susannah to stay with his new-found relations, the Burtons.[6] His other daughter, Augusta, was sent to Boston for the summer to stay with the Fales family (Thomas Chandler's Aunt Abigail had married Boston merchant Samuel Fales). So when Louisa received an excited letter from Susannah in England, she sat down and copied out long passages from it into the letter she was writing to Augusta:

Clifton 22d October 1839

My dear Augusta –

I wrote you a few hasty lines by the Arcadian acknowledging the receipt of 2 letters from you & from Mrs. Dunlop and a kind postscript from Mrs Fales requesting to have you with her during the winter — I have prevailed upon your father with *some difficulty* to consent to your staying, feeling convinced the change of climate for several months longer would be of great service in restoring your health — he does not know how much you have suffered for the last two years — however that is settled and you are to stay — With regard to masters, as there is a piano in the house, I should like you to take lessons in music if it would not *annoy Mrs Fales* — I suppose the same master could teach singing also which you must try if they think you have any voice at all which at present is uncertain, as you have never tryed yet — The cake we have not got yet. Geldart will probably bring it up today, so you must make our best thanks for it, those your Aunt names shall not be forgotten, besides a number of others who will expect to come in for a share — You will no doubt miss Eliza very much but there are such facilities for getting about now, that she can frequently visit home — Your father intends having a Governess as tutor in the family next Spring to teach languages and other branches required, so that he thinks you had not take lessons in anything but music while in Boston, but just amuse yourself, take exercise, and endeavour to get well & strong — and to do your best to please and make yourself useful to your dear Aunt, by reading to her, & amusing her in any way you can — I hope they will treat you like one of the family and not put themselves to any trouble —

We heard from Susan by the G. Western & by last Packet — the first dated St Leonards 22d August written in very good spirits — She went with Mrs. Stewart to Southampton and from there to London by the rail road, where she stayed about 10 days at Mrs Ferons in Regents Park. She was delighted with all and every one she had seen, not disappointed in anything, and found things pretty much as she expected — The only part that exceeded her expectation was the extreme kindness

of her reception — She says 'For the whole of the first week I felt completely knocked up by fatigue, but drove every day & went to the Opera one evening, where I was much amused — Mr James I admire very much. He is one of the most wellbred persons I saw *& so like Gussy* he is decidedly the flower of the flock — They teaze him and call him my papa — but having had a tooth ache & not being able to go out, Septimus who is the kindest in the world *is pa 3d* & as Jane commanded me to call them all by their Christian names, it sounds rather absurd —

— On Saturday I received letters from Mrs Hopkinson, Miss Burton & Emily, which I answered — Jessy's manners are like Mrs Grigors & Mrs Burton looks like Mrs Dalton and is remarkably lady like — I like her amazingly — all the children have taken wonderfully to me, indeed they are nice little things one & all — They all say my manners surprise them, and constantly exclaim "I think that I am talking to a person who has passed her life in the most polished circles" — they really make me feel very foolish by saying "where did you ever get those lady-like manners" — On Tuesday 16th I came with Septimus Mrs B & Arthur to St Leonards, where Miss Burton received me most kindly — The archery meeting amused me much. Helen got the bracelet and a gold arrow. At dinner I sat next a Major Bloomfield, a man who has changed his name to *Mason* for a fortune — at the ball I danced all the evening. Rose looks like pa — Helen like a[?] Almon and Mrs. John Ritchie, and Emily like Sally Wilkins in manners — how kind they are to me, Miss Burton makes a great many wonderments about my manners — A great party here and one at Mrs Woods tomorrow — The plans arranged are, I go on the 1st September to Mrs Hopkinson under escort of James — She takes me into Wales — & in the mean time I remain here — I am better but weak — they are pleased with my [music?] — I have been talking German to Decimus — I find my dresses are all the fashion' — Susans other letter is dated Tunbridge Wells 1st Sept in which she says 'I left St Leonards on Friday for here, and it has rained ever since I came. We go to London tomorrow — I have had a curious fortnight so many picnics & evening parties — I have been amused of course tho' tired — The family have been most kind — Septimus & James tho' still continue to stand fast in my regard of the men & the Doctor next — Rose is the image of papa & I do love her dearly, Helen too comes next — I have always had the best partners where I danced, and the pleasantest escorts at all the picnics — I saw everything in the neighbourhood worth seeing — I did not get so much acquainted as I hoped with the relations for I was constantly in company — Major Bloomfield was so in raptures with my Waltzs that I had to play them every evening to him' —

I have given you long extracts from Susan's letter knowing it would interest you more than any Windsor news of which in fact there is but little — Mrs Dixon from Gibraltar is here with 5 daughters, they are all at Mrs Mackays, but will move soon into th[e] [h]ouse [M ?ing] lived in — they are rather w[eak lo?]oking children, and she is a more r[atio?]nal being than she used to be — Fanny Bliss goes with her uncle tomorrow to town — he is expected in the steamer tomorrow f[or?] the last time — do you remember the 19th of last October — Robert Prescott sent us some beautiful peaches lately — Mr Allison is dead which is a great affliction to them all, Mrs J. Fraser is with her sister in Halifax — Mrs Gibbs gave a concert here last week I fear she made but little — I had to lend my piano as they could not get one in the village — We have also had a play at the Academy. The boys performed very well — Miss Yates goes in the boa[t] tomorrow, she expects to pass the winter

at St John's. Mrs W. King has another son — And [Mrs?] Carver [has?] a daughter — Mr Valentine is here again I am sitting for him – he has taken an excellent likeness of Mrs Mackay and is now painting Mr King (the rectors) portrait

Pray remember me most kindly to our friends, and tell them how grateful I feel for their kindness to you ever your affectionate mother Louisa Haliburton PS. your father will write you about money

Laura and Emma are improving in their writing, the latter is now learning *La Colorutie retrancee* I think you need not get any German books as we have so many — Mr Davis has borrowed some of them — Mrs Bliss hears of late from Elizabeth — She is very much pleased and was to spend some weeks in Liverpool before she went to Scotland

The cake has arrived safe — it is so beautiful that I intend to keep it for a time to look at before it is cut — I hope Mrs Fales got your fathers letter — The letter bag of G. Western will go next packet, he could not get it copied in time for the last. We have letters from Decimus — James — Mrs Hopkinson & Mrs Wood, the last addressed to me — what nice kind people they are

Spend as little money as you help Augusta this is a very expensive year for us

Your father will write soon

A little over a month later, Louisa replied to the letter from Mrs. Wood, mentioned above:

Windsor 25 November 1839

My dear Mrs Wood

Your very kind and much welcome letter — confirming Susans account of the amended state of her health, was a source of very good pleasure to us all — I entertain great hopes that a few months longer residence in England, surrounded as she has the good fortune to be, by so many kind friends, will quite restore her —

She is delighted with all she has seen since her arrival, and speaks with the greatest of gratitude of the very affectionate reception she met with from all the family and I trust nothing will be wanting on her part to endeavour to recommend herself to their favor by every means in her power —

'The Letter Bag of the Great Western' is now on its way to England — I think the subject a difficult one but Haliburton has treated it with his usual humour and tact, and I hope it will be well received — I believe we have to thank you for the papers containing the account of the archery meeting, I am glad Susan arrived in time to be present and that Miss Wood obtained the second bracelet — the pair must be very beautiful and valuable and as the gift of *Royalty*, will no doubt be carefully preserved as family jewels by her and her heirs for ever —

Susan is very fortunate in having the opportunity of seeing so much of England, and she appears greatly to enjoy her visit to Wales — I can scarcely persuade myself that I have not actually been at St Leonards, I have so clear an idea of it from the very pretty drawings you were so kind enough to send me, the lively recollections Haliburton retains of it, and the constant reference he is making to his visit among your kind and agreeable family —

Augusta has lately returned from [Boston] feeling I am happy to say, very much in health, the voyage and change of climate has been of the greatest service, and we longer consider her an invalid

I hope Mr James Haliburton will not relinquish his intention of visiting us next

> Spring, and that he will bring with him my dear young relative Rose, whose acquaintance I have to make, Haliburton says he has a promise from him to that effect, and as the opportunity will be so good — one, I hope, my dear Mrs Wood that you will gratify as to entreat him to our care. We have but little inducement to offer in this poor country to a young person but what we can do, we will have great pleasure in doing to make his visit as pleasant as possible — I must again repeat my best thanks for all your kindness to my dear Susan, and with kind regards to Mr Wood and the young ladies, believe me my dear Mrs Wood your obliged humble servant L. Haliburton

## *Group 3: Letters received by TCH and other members of the family*

THE THIRD GROUP of material (9 items) contains the first letters Thomas Chandler received from Ellen and Alexander Fowden Haliburton. Alexander's first letter to Thomas Chandler is dated 4 November 1842. He started writing to Thomas Chandler after several letters had been received by Ellen, letters which were shared with the rest of the family. One passage in Alexander's letter concerns James Haliburton:

> I have now your last letter before me, and with regard to the Mr James Haliburton who you mention, I may remark that I was present with my brother at Gravesend, when he received his letter, and at that time we could not avoid having suspicions as to the genuiness of his blood, as he stated that he thought he had met my brother in Scotland formerly, when he bore the name of "Burton," of which my brother had no remembrance — I will, however, acquaint him with your remarks, and I am sure he will have great pleasure in making his acquaintance on his return.

Alexander's reluctance to embrace James Haliburton as his kinsman contrasts with Thomas Chandler's enthusiastic but seemingly short-lived friendship with James Haliburton, a man Thomas Chandler often invited and fully expected to visit him at Clifton. Whether or not he made the trip is uncertain. References to James Haliburton disappear from Thomas Chandler's correspondence after the early eighteen forties, even though James Haliburton lived until 1862.[7]

Thomas Chandler's passion for researching his Haliburton heritage and developing relationships with other Haliburtons continued until the end of his life. Copies of two letters from a Joseph Haliburton living in Paris (dated 27 May 1864 and 18 July 1864) also survive. The passion for exploring their lineage passed to his son Robert, who made his own visit to Scotland in 1859. Robert continued researching the Scottish descent of the Haliburtons for the remainder of his life.

Also present in the collection are notes to Thomas Chandler from R. H. Barham (8 July 1843) and Mrs. Frances Trollope (21 July 1849); a newsy letter to Susannah Haliburton (dated 16 December 1845) from Lady Amelia FitzClarence (wife of Lord Falkland, Lieutenant-Governor of Nova Soctia) inviting her stay at Government House in Halifax; and an autograph of Harriet Beecher Stowe

(who Thomas Chandler and Augusta met on the steamer *Canada* en route for England) dated 9 April 1853.

### *Group 4: Family Documents*

THE LARGEST GROUP OF materials, the "family documents" (in excess of 95 items), throw considerable light on Thomas Chandler's children, and through them on Haliburton himself. They are full of interesting comments and snippets of information about both Thomas Chandler and his wife Louisa, as well as the children themselves. In their middle and later years, the children began to reflect fondly on the days when their mother had been alive and the family had been intact. After her death, the daughters married, one by one, in the years leading up to 1856, the year of Thomas Chandler's removal to England and the beginning of his new life with Sarah Harriet Hosier Williams. His sons embarked on their own careers (Robert Grant in the legal profession, and Arthur in the army commissariat).

In the mid 1880s, an interesting series of letters passed between Susannah (widowed and living in Halifax) and Augusta (widowed and living in Torquay, England), concerning an old project of theirs. Fourteen years earlier, they had intended, as a tribute to their father, to issue a selection of the best of their father's writing, separating what they called the plentiful "wheat" from the "chaff," and omitting the "nasty jokes" (which "poor mamma never could stand"). The project had been abandoned following the untimely death of Susannah's only son, Haliburton, and Augusta's husband, Alexander, both in 1873. But Susannah's desire to memorialize her father revived when she discovered that the librarian at the Legislative Library in Halifax, F. Blake Crofton, was contemplating writing a life. The thought made Susannah shudder, and stirred her once again into action.

Augusta urged Susannah to put on paper all that she could remember about their mother. When Susannah sent her recollections to her sister, Augusta then made extensive marginal notations and showed the manuscript to Robert Grant, who added seven pages of his own commentary. Arthur even hired a researcher to search military and public records for information concerning the Neville family. The basis of their knowledge, however, remained the stories about herself that Louisa had passed on to her children. The stories recorded in their group memoir must have been seen by Emily Weaver in the 1920s because they form the basis of her article: "Women of Canada: Louisa Neville, wife of the author of 'Sam Slick'," which appeared in the *Canadian Home Journal* in 1924.

Further family correspondence includes a group of letters written by Alexander and Augusta during their extensive travels in the Holy Land in 1856. The recently-married pair tented their way across middle-eastern deserts with typical Victorian fortitude and intrepidity, carrying as many of the comforts of Victorian England with them as they could manage. Many items of a genealogical nature, written by Thomas Chandler's children, complete the collection.

## *Group 5: Photographs and Prints*

AN UNDOUBTED BONUS ARE the photographs and prints that accompany the manuscripts. Two new photographic images of Thomas Chandler in his later years can now be added to the ones we already know well [Figures 1 and 2]. Ten fine photographs of Gordon House are also in the collection, dated 1865. They are part of the same series as the interior photograph of Gordon House reprinted in my edition of *The Letters of Thomas Chandler Haliburton*.[8] Haliburton is present in all his self-reflected glory. In Figures 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7, when not actually present physically in the photograph, he is present in portrait, print, or plaster bust. All the exterior shots including the one reproduced here [Figure 8] reveal a highly ordered and pleasant garden, very much the second Mrs. Haliburton's pride and joy. Also amongst the photographs are several of his children, Augusta [Figure 9], Laura, Emma Marie, and Robert, as well as fine interior shots of both Augusta's [Figure 10] and Emma Marie's [Figure 11] houses. The interiors of the daughter's houses in Torquay and Dover betray a love of art, prints, and Victorian bric-a-brac. They confirm the family's place in the pantheon of late Victorian middle-class respectability.

Figure 1. TCH by A. Claudet, 107 Regent's Street, London, "in later years after retirement in England."

Figure 2. Private Studio Portrait by Arthur James Melhuish, 12, York Place, Portman Square, London.

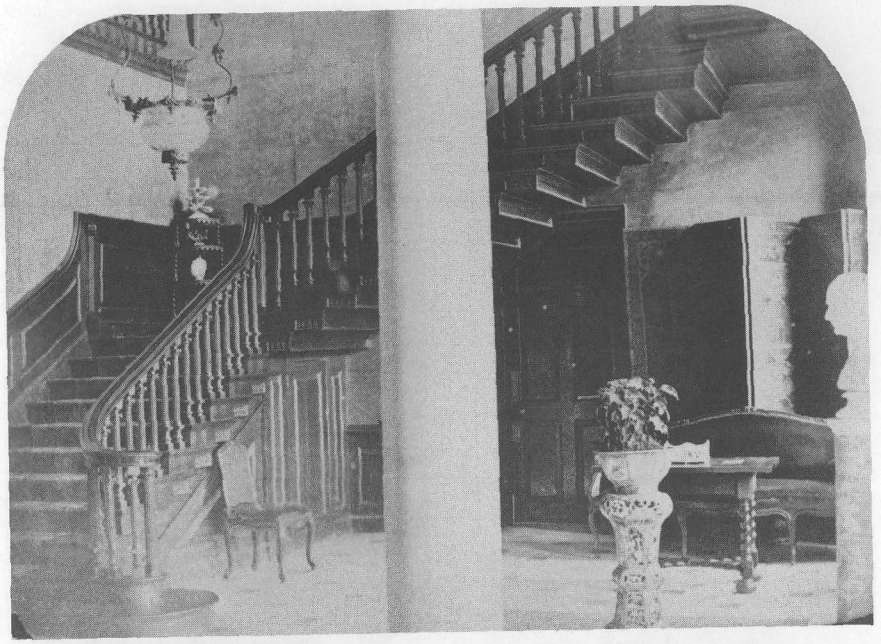


Figure 3. Stairway, Gordon House, Isleworth.

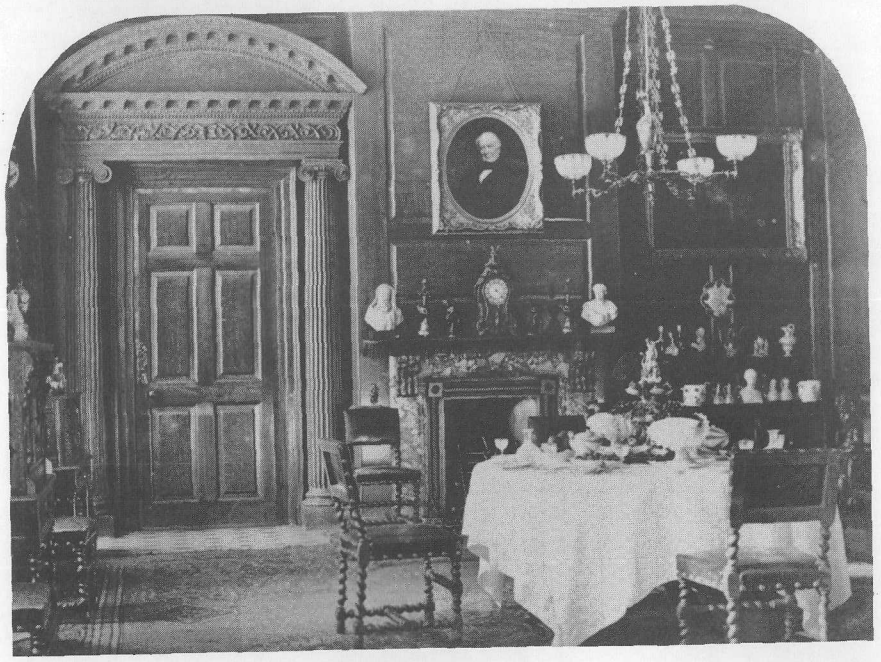


Figure 4. Gordon House.

Figure 5. TCH in his study at Gordon House.

Figure 6. Another view of the study.

Figure 7. TCH in the drawing-room of Gordon House.

Figure 8. An exterior view of Gordon House.

Figue 9. Studio portrait of Augusta Haliburton by Martin Jacolettry, Queen's Gate Hall Studio, South Kensington and Dover.

Figure 10. Interior of Grafton House, Torquay, the home of Augusta Haliburton: photo by Cox & Durrant, Torquay.

Figure 11. Interior of Emma Marie Haliburton's house, East Cliff, Dover.

"THE WILSON COLLECTION" offers direct glimpses of Haliburton himself, his family circle at "Clifton" in Nova Scotia, and, later, of his Gordon House world. We literarily look over the shoulders of his children, during the final years of their lives, as they reflected (from the comforts of their later years) on the world they had long left behind. "The Wilson Collection" provides invaluable personal and pictorial glimpses of the private world Thomas Chandler Haliburton inhabited, and bequeathed to his children. The paradox, of course, is that Haliburton's passport to all this Victorian respectability was the often indelicate and robust "Sam Slick."

NOTES

[1] The acquisition of "The Wilson Collection" by Acadia University would not have been possible without the initiative of the editors of *Canadian Literature*, the generous assistance of Professor Carole Gerson, Department of English, Simon Fraser University, the encouragement of Iain Bates, Librarian at Acadia University, and financial assistance provided by Acadia University. The photographs were prepared by Gary Boates, Audio-Visual Department, Acadia University. I would like to thank Charles and Patricia Wilson for their placing of this collection in the public domain and for granting permission to reprint both letters and photographs.

Charles Wilson descends from Thomas Chandler's daughter Emma Marie Haliburton (1828-1911) who, in 1850, married the Rev. John Bainbridge Smith, Mathematical Professor at King's College, Windsor, N.S., and Anglican minister. They later moved to England. The documents were brought to Canada by Emma's youngest daughter, Emily Agnes (1864-1941), who emigrated to Victoria, British Columbia, in 1912. Charles Wilson's father, Emily's nephew, also emigrated to British Columbia and inherited the material from his Aunt.

[2] I can find no confirmation that the name "Clifton" derives from the birthplace of Louisa Neville, as is generally assumed. Details in the papers of the "Wilson Collection" suggest that Haliburton's family felt that they had property rights at "Clifton" on Kale Water in the Scottish Borders region. The family's interest in their Scottish roots started with Thomas Chandler's grandfather, and was continued by his father, who wrote enquiring after the exact nature of the family's links to "Clifton."

[3] Published by University of Toronto Press.

[4] Besides Augusta (1823-1891), the other children mentioned in the letters are Laura (1824-1910), Emma Marie (1828-1911), Amelia (1830-1902), Robert Grant (1831-1898), and Arthur (1832-1907). Susannah (1817-1899), the eldest daughter, had already married John Wesley Weldon, judge of the Supreme Court of New Brunswick in 1848. She was his second wife. The *DCB*, XII, 403-404, spells her name "Susanna" (admitting that burial and death records spell it "Sussanah"). As Lady Falkland writes: "Farewell *Susannah!* I know not if Susannah as [sic] one or two *Ens*" (16 December 1845). Clearly, she never anticipated two "s's." The family referred to her always as "Susan."

[5] A fifth edition of *The Clockmaker*, First Series, now owned by Mr. C. Buhagiar of Toronto.

[6] Besides James Haliburton (1788-1862) and his brother Decimus Burton (1800-1881), Haliburton had been introduced to Jane Burton (1792-1879) who married

Thomas Walker Wood (1786-1867), her daughters Emily (1815-92), Helen (1816-1903) and Rose Anna (1818-1847); Septimus Burton (1792-1842) and his son Arthur; Octavia Burton (1796-1846), who married Edmund Hopkinson (1789-1869); Henry Burton (1799-1849); Alfred Burton (1802-1877); and Jesse Burton (1804-1844), who married John Peter Fearon (1804-1873), most of whom are mentioned in the two letters following. My thanks to Neil Cooke of London for supplying these family details.

[7] According to Neil Cooke of London, England, who has extensively researched James Haliburton's life, his later years are almost a complete blank.

[8] 180. Larry Loomer of Windsor, Nova Scotia, speculates that the series might have been designed to be viewed through a stereopticon.

# THE CHAIR

*Kevin Roberts*

I have put down my tools, hung
the plane, square, saw up
in their allotted space because
the fir, though kiln dry, bucked
its grainy twist, refused me, pulled
its mulish dance against its imagined
shape, resists the straight back, solid
four legs

I hang my apron, hammer down, smell
the sweet chips, shavings fallen
in a scuff on the floor

finally the effort wearies, the wrist
weakens, the eye fails at the straight
run of every edge

I consider that the wood
should have stayed ringing in the trunk
sprung diurnal out to branches, leaves
silent but graceful, its own artisan
without pretense

And I want the simple ground
under its shade, to sit quietly
without the turbulence of process
chainsaw to log truck to mill to planer
to the sober struggle of reshaping
to a rump

I shut the workshop door, do not turn
out the light, hope that in the dark
outside, I will dream the way
of civil shape.

# STRIKES OFTEN

*Dave Margoshes*

*Men are struck by lightning five times as often as women.*
— news item

Taller, of course,
more foolhardy, more's
the fool, and more likely
to have forgotten an umbrella,
to be out walking and fail to notice
rain assailing our unprotected
lives the way your love can if we
let it, but that alone can't explain
why our lives are in jeopardy,
why we take the chances no
one would reasonably assume
we should, not in this life
with all its teeth and broken glass.

Montreal haunts us the way livers
do drunks. Sick and complaining,
they insist we somehow are at fault,
we who take all the chances,
who put ourselves ahead
of whatever comes, that we brought
it on ourselves, and maybe we did.

Say something often enough
and even the liar starts to believe
it, let alone the altar boys,
lip syncing the litany, *big boys*
*don't cry, rats' tails and snails,*
*that's what boys are made of.*

When it does strike, lightning,
it doesn't do it twice but over
and over again till we've got
the drill in our sleep, dreams
blossoming up like fish surfacing
with bubbles for kisses, till
the choices dry up, even the few
we started with. The house
is in darkness, the children
asleep, your breath steady as tide
on the pillow, the owl silent
in its tree, We lie awake,
listening for thunder.

# EARTH CELLAR

*John Reibetanz*

It opens like the first line of a poem:
a trap door propped back on its hinges, in-
vitation. Go below the floorboard's edge
where light ices the pine. Obscurity
yawns for you. Dimming lines of plank step sink
and footfalls crack like splitting wood until
earth's crunch surprises. Dungeon gloom washes
dully, slowly sets shapes (rockface, lintel,
runnels and sump), never itself hardens
to crystal, but shows the persistence of
a lesser glass, as if sunset upstairs
would not break it: not light, but light's preserve,
stored to ferment here in a cache of time
and run out endless as a final line.

books in review

# RECORD OF WRITING

GEORGE BOWERING, *Sticks & Stones*. Talonbooks, $8.95.

ROY MIKI, *A Record of Writing: An Annotated and Illustrated Bibliography of George Bowering*. Talonbooks, $29.95.

THE ALMOST SIMULTANEOUS publication of George Bowering's first "book," *Sticks & Stones*, and Roy Miki's bibliography of George Bowering's work, *A Record of Writing*, is more than a fortuitous coincidence. It is a double event that, designedly and paradoxically, provides a tentative frame for the career of one of the most important and innovative Canadian authors. If *Sticks & Stones* marks the auspicious beginning of Bowering the poet, *A Record of Writing* signals the recognition due Bowering for the extraordinary body of work he has produced since 1963 — "the birthdate most commonly assigned to" *Sticks & Stones*.

Reviewing the book that inaugurated the career of a now celebrated and award-winning poet is not a simple task. Offered as it is to the reader as a *first* book, *Sticks & Stones* occasions a response that depends on hindsight. I cannot read, for example, the poem "It is a Kind of Pressure" —

> in the throat
> seeing the way she walks
> from this long room
>
> elbows moving out at her sides
> head dipped back on her shoulders
> hips augmenting
> a move of green felt skirt

— for what it is: a short lyric exacting from its language both stillness and motion, sensation (both inner and outer) and the correspondence that localize a woman's body in the time and space of a single moment (imagisme), all present in desire (the palpable shape of a knot inside the throat). Instead, I read through these imaginatively literal lines for traces of things that have made Bowering the poet he has become, and I find them not so much in the notation of this poem as in its title, in the pressure he puts on language. I hear the influence of Williams and Pound and H.D. on the then-young Tish poet, but I also hear the poet of *Delayed Mercy* and the critic of *Errata*. And when I read "Walking Poem" —

> One step two steps
> from the avenue
> where I live —
>
> trees lining me
> walking within
> the margins of the mind . . .

— I see him walking hand in hand with Marianne Moore, the poet who taught us how to read a poetry engaged with surfaces: from the inside out.

Now available in a legitimate (and legible) form, with the original preface by Robert Creeley (a great endorsement for the fledgling poet that Bowering was in the early 1960s), the original drawings made for the book by Gordon Payne, and an "End Note" by Roy Miki (written for this publication's occasion) that accounts for the various mishaps and mysteries surrounding its bizarre incarnations in photocopied and stapled form, *Sticks & Stones* fills a gap in the record of Bowering's writing career. It establishes a continuity between the experimentation of his early days and the great accomplishment of such poems as *Kerrisdale Elegies*. Yet, although it might have been a phantom book for close to thirty years, *Sticks & Stones* doesn't contain any secrets that we didn't know about Bowering's craft. Rather, as Guy Davenport said, "the eyes cannot see themselves, but something other." If there is one thing that is ubiqui-

tously present in the poet Bowering was then and the poet he is now it is his relentless desire to disclose the otherness of language.

It doesn't come as a total surprise that what began for Miki as a systematic reading of Bowering's voluminous works ended up becoming a book-length bibliography. *A Record of Writing* (as the title intimates) is a bibliography that offers itself not merely as a source of scholarly information but as a highly readable text, that can indeed be read with pleasure. Next to it, the ongoing project of *The Annotated Bibliography of Canada's Major Authors* published by ECW, no matter how useful and thorough, pales in comparison. But, then, this comparison might be unfair, for Roy Miki has composed a book that exceeds the "genre" of bibliography. "While the enormity of the task overwhelmed me," Miki explains, "I found that one reference did lead back to another, and another, and another. At some point the checklist was abandoned, the archaeological impulse took over, and the search began in earnest to assemble the pieces, or as I thought of it, to unscramble the record."

Miki executes the bibliographer's task admirably, but also offers information and insights about Bowering's writing that show an astute critic at work. For instance, in pursuing the publishing history of a book like *Sticks & Stones*, or the many archival guises of a story or essay, he demonstrates that archives are not merely sources waiting to be unearthed, or obscure little magazines piled up in Bowering's study. The archives Miki gathered together here are events in themselves, events that are made and remade, whose beginnings and effects not only set the "record" of Bowering's career straight but also unfold a narrative in a discourse that disperses in more than one direction.

The result of this approach to bibliographical pursuit is a record of Bowering's numerous publications, and publications about him, orchestrated in ways that evoke the genres of biography (the writing life of a writer), literary history (Bowering's literary career intersecting with those of contemporary authors both in Canada and abroad), and the life of a book beginning with a book's anatomy — how it is written, how and by what means it is made, and how it reincarnates itself through reprints or translation. This feat owes as much to Miki's own, almost insatiable, desire to create "archives" — very rarely do I remember seeing him at conferences and literary gatherings without a tape recorder or a camera — as to his subject, for George Bowering as a writer is emblematic of those who make literary history.

The product of at least six years of labour and fifteen sessions with Bowering, *A Record of Writing* begins with "A Writing/Life: A Chronology" that deals, schematically but thoroughly, with the main events of Bowering's life and writing career up to 1988, the cut-off date of the bibliography.

There are in particular four features that make this bibliography the great accomplishment that it is. First, Miki presents the technical and other details concerning the description of books, pamphlets, and magazines in a gracious style. A standard feature in many bibliographies, the physical description of Bowering's publications includes information about binding, front and back covers, and size given in both inches and centimetres. The painstaking details Miki provides here are especially useful, for the design of many of Bowering's books (quite often the result of his input) is intricately related to their content. Here is the description of *Genève*.

> Casebound with orange boards. Brown dust jacket with floral design on front and back; rust coloured pages. On front flap, publisher's blurb with photo; on back flap, publisher's information and books in print. The dust

> jacket folds out to reveal the tarot cards used in *Genève* arranged circularly, from the centre out, in the order turned up by GB while composing the poem.

Miki also provides the release date of books and pamphlets, gives the exact number of copies published for each printing (if there is more than one), and names the printer. While the Bowering scholar might not be interested in such details, literary historians and those interested in what we have come to call cultural industries will find this information very useful in determining the factors affecting the life of a book.

The other element that makes this bibliography a real delight is the "Notes" that appear after each entry in the first five sections. Structured in point form, these notes contain a wealth of material (most of it not previously available but discussed in Miki's interviews with Bowering or excerpted from Bowering's manuscripts) ranging from the conditions under which various texts were composed or printed to explanations pertaining to their dedications, and comments by Bowering or other authors about the texts in question. One example from the entry under *A Short Sad Book* will suffice to show why this bibliography will become a basic critical tool for those writing on Bowering.

> In the section 'The Pretty Good Canadian Novel,' there are paragraphs taken straight out of so-called great Canadian novels and just fired into the text, because they're so silly. I just picked them at random. Nobody has ever said anything about the fact that I plagiarized a paragraph out of Hugh MacLennan, a paragraph out of Mazo De la Roche, a paragraph out of Morley Callaghan, a paragraph out of Ernest Buckler, etc.

Finally, the first five sections of the bibliography are regularly punctuated by photographs, and by Bowering's voice speaking from within fragments from his diaries, letters and interviews, many of them available only in the library collections of his manuscripts. These fragments selected by Miki offer yet more fascinating information about Bowering's writing process and the extent to which he has been actively engaged in the making of writing in Canada.

SMARO KAMBOURELI

# AESTHETICS, INSIDE & OUT

DOUGLAS BARBOUR, ed. *Beyond Tish*. NeWest Press. Eds., [Special Issue, *West Coast Review*, Vol. 25, No. 1, Spring 1991], $8.00.

TONY BENNETT, *Outside Literature*. Routledge, $23.00.

ALTHOUGH DIFFERENT in approach and context, these books share an interest in the place of aesthetic discourse within the broader cultural and intellectual landscape. I must admit from the outset my partiality to this special issue of *West Coast Line* entitled *Beyond Tish* — an issue that illuminates and plays out in memorable ways a number of the questions and concerns raised by Bennett in his *Outside Literature*.

In *Outside Literature*, Tony Bennett attempts a methodical distancing, not only of himself, but the entire contemporary enterprise, from aesthetic conceptions of literature. In his debunking of the autonomy, special status and universal, transcendental reality ascribed to literature by the Arnoldian-Leavisite tradition, Bennett calls to his aid the forces of Marxist inquiry. At the same time he is aware of the limitations of their 'hierarchised conceptions" and "totalising pretensions." Having invoked the limping muse of Marxism, Bennett proceeds to "write [his] way out of aesthetic discourse by means of a critique of the ways in which Marxist categories have been written into that discourse."

Bennett endeavours, in his four-part study, to position himself in relation to both aesthetic and Marxist discourse, using an approach he calls "post-Marxist." His basic strategy involves a rigorous but sometimes obscure critique of dominant sets of bi-polarities that underpin both aesthetic and Marxist commentaries: literature/history; inside/outside; subjective/objective, and "Criticism versus Theory." Questioning the viability of the dichotomy of literature/history and working towards his own position "beyond" aesthetic discourse, Bennett proposes a "non-literary theory of literature which will theorise its object as a set of social rather than formal realities and processes." Bennett's proposal draws on the ideas of such theorists as Eagleton, Lentricchia and Foucault, although he is careful not to adopt any one writer's work as a "totalising" discourse.

At certain points in *Outside Literature*, Bennett's argument seems highly cogent, but it also remains largely abstract and prescriptive. Whether Bennett manages to break out of the prison of bi-polar distinctions is questionable; the binary pairs he attacks tend to remain firmly at the basis of his own thought. His call for an institutional, historically specific, post-Marxist, non-literary theory of literature remains unsatisfying for three reasons: first, he underestimates or chooses to overlook the part that oppositional discourses such as feminism have already played in corroding traditional assumptions about the production and consumption of literary texts; second, he fails to delineate or even suggest what the approach he is advocating would look like in practice; third, he does not take into account the role postmodern thinkers have played in re-positioning aesthetic discourse as a newly politicized and re-vitalized field of inquiry.

Much of the writing in *Beyond Tish* illustrates in a Canadian context how effectively writers *can* incorporate poetics and aesthetic philosophies into an ongoing critique of dominant cultural and discursive practices.

The first of three parts of *Beyond Tish* is devoted to new work by the writers who formed the original editorial collective of *Tish Magazine* in Vancouver from 1961 to 1963: Frank Davey, George Bowering, Fred Wah, David Dawson, and Jamie Reid. This section also features work by the second wave of *Tish* writers, including Lionel Kearns, Gladys Hindmarch, Don McLeod, David Cull, Daphne Marlatt, Robert Hogg and David Bromige. The second section of the book contains a dialogue, assembled by Irene Niechoda and Tim Hunter and prefaced by Roy Miki, between various members of the *Tish* community. The second segment also includes interviews with Daphne Marlatt and Lionel Kearns. The third part of *Beyond Tish* contains eleven essays by various critics on *Tish* writers. Finally, Douglas Barbour has contributed a brief afterword to the issue.

At the risk of canon-making, I would designate *Beyond Tish* as essential reading for Canadianists. Part One's "New Writing" will be of particular interest for readers studying the development of individual writers. Part Two's "Tishstory" dialogue is a bit 'in-groupy,' but it has numerous worthwhile moments to offer such as Frank Davey's discussion of the multi-marginalization experienced by the *Tish* poets. The dialogue between Daphne Marlatt and various male writers highlights how female writers were marginalized in the Tish movement.

Of all the contributions to this issue, four stand out: Davey's "Dead in France," included in the "New Writing" section, Brenda Carr's interview with Daphne Marlatt, Janice Williamson's essay on Marlatt's *Touch to My Tongue*, and E. D. Blodgett's essay on Frank Davey. The latter is an incisive fleshing out of the

relationship between *Tish* — foregrounded through a consideration of Davey's work — and postmodernist as well as post-colonial concerns. Indeed, Davey's own deconstruction, in "Dead in France," of such bi-polarities as inside/outside, literature/society and literature/history reflects a newer direction for aesthetic discourse — a direction missing from Tony Bennett's discussion.

JEANETTE LYNES

# CONTRASTS

LUC LECOMPTE, *Les Geographies de l'Illusionniste*. l'Hexagone, n.p.

PIERRE DESRUISSEAUX, *Monème*. l'Hexagone, n.p.

YVES GOSSELIN, *Programme pour une mort lente, Les Guerres sont éternelles*. Le Nordir, n.p.

JACQUES POIRIER, *Nous ne connaissons la mort que de nom*. Le Nordir, n.p.

PIERRE ALBERT, *Le Silence des Dieux*. Le Nordir, n.p.

THESE BOOKS from publishers in and outside Quebec form interesting contrasts. A house that needs no introduction is l'Hexagone; the importance of its work during the 1960s and 1970s in Montreal can never be overemphasized, and now that the period of revolution and experiment has evolved into new, more theoretical and possibly even less political patterns, l'Hexagone continues to winnow the wheat from the chaff in a changing intellectual environment. These judgements are, I suspect, more difficult to make than one might think, as poets who have their living to earn become quite frequently professors not just of literature, but of literary theory. I. A. Richards managed a healthy blend of the theoretical and the creative, but no one has ever called him a major poet.

Les Editions du Nordir, on the other hand, have been since 1988 part of the francophone world outside Quebec. Situated in Hearst, Ontario, and supported by the Collège universitaire of Hearst, as well as the Ontario Arts Council and the Canada Council, this small press has produced some aesthetically pleasing volumes with art-work which mirrors most effectively their varying contents. But those contents seem a far cry from the shifting ambiguities of deconstructive linguistics and the self-reflecting mirrors echoing to infinity which are turning up in Montreal. The work of Nordir is an example of the traditional contrast between the *métropole* and the provinces and has, in this case, very little to do with poetic forms which have become fluid everywhere, but a great deal to do with the atmosphere generated by a choice of material and the angle from which the poet comes to his subject.

As a brief biographical note indicates, Luc Lecompte belongs with the academic *avant-garde* if indeed one can still use the term with any precision. He is certainly an explorer of the possibilities inherent in the prose poem. But it would be wrong to assume that a thesis on the "mécanismes de génération dans le texte moderne" is necessarily fatal to lyricism. On the contrary, in the work of any writer of talent, the enhanced consciousness of process may lead to a deeper understanding of the medium and however conscious of himself he becomes, he will not be stifled by such auto-analysis. "Les Géographies de l'Illusionniste" has a traditional structure which lends it a solidity frequently lacking in experimental works. It is simply a day in the life of the poet — conjuror, magician, juggler — as he follows the procession of the hours from dawn to dark. One of the most intriguing aspects of these totally contemporary prose-poems is the way in which references to older mythologies are woven into the dense jungle of the prose — St. Sebastian, for

example, and Charon's bark. And since Lecompte belongs to a generation to which Surrealism is already history, he can exploit its possibilities also. These are actually poems about consciousness. Meditating as he moves through the day, the "homme énigmatique" of the publisher's blurb flashes broken fragments of experience in front of the reader, like film-clips rapidly following one another, or multidimensional images on a screen. The syntax is jerky — half sentences, single words, whole sentences — and the language ranges from the simple to the arcane. Narcissistic in the extreme, these poems are a strongly individual account of one man's deliberate assumption of the rôle of the poet-trickster.

Stylistically, Pierre Desruisseaux is at the opposite pole from Lecompte, although he too is involved in contemporary linguistic studies. At first glance, the poems in "Monème" appear more accessible than Lecompte's, whose densely packed prose-poems defy the reader to follow them. The simplicity is deceptive, however, for they are as carefully wrought as a haiku. Instead of piling up detail, Desruisseaux systematically strips the form bare of everything but the words essential to the survival and the communication of the theme. Such a strict aesthetic, which of course harks back to the beginning of the century and even earlier to the work of Mallarmé, marks a refusal to be seduced by the richness, or the chaos, inherent in experience of the inner and outer worlds we inhabit.

Desruisseaux possesses a sophisticated sensibility whose consciousness of the word in time, the sign at the shifting crossroads of perception, forms the groundwork of the poems. The danger in this approach to writing, of course, is that a tendency towards abstraction, so much more marked in French than in English, pushes the language into an aridity which cancels lyricism and emotion at its very point of departure. Desruisseaux, on the whole, avoids the abyss by the use of concrete terms which anchor the poems in a reality, however mysterious. The following reminds one of a di Chirico painting:

> par delà le vent vénéneux
> chiffre sous l'horizon la route
> bordé de masques

Desruisseaux never forget that "la voix bleue du réel" is always there to counteract the vertigo induced by the mind's adventures with language and the cosmos.

The Nordir authors seem to inhabit a somewhat different literary universe, one which evolved in the nineteenth century with the rebellious romantics, and proceeded to spawn the even more wicked symbolists defying bourgeois morality and God. Yves Gosselins's faintly theatrical rhetoric evokes that era, when, having renounced religion, the poet was thrown back on Woman and Art, both of whom were unsatisfactory replacements for a deity, and the self, which turned out to be hollow too. I find it difficult to take seriously at the literary level (which is the crux of the matter) a poet who asserts he is pursuing, in poetry, "une oeuvre de perdition" and proclaims a hundred years after Rimbaud:

> Vivre en poésie, se faire aussi monstrueux que Dieu: l'âme qui n'existe pas a besoin de ce subterfuge

The banality of the sentiments is not redeemed by any originality of expression and imagery, or richness of vocabulary. Nihilism and pseudo-philosophising become self-defeating if the poet cannot forge a personal language and create a style from a despair.

In Jacques Poirier's "Nous ne connaissons la mort que de nom," the elegant blue and white photograph of a skull caressing the plaster cast of a woman's head illustrates perfectly this persistence of nineteenth-century poetic baggage into the present day. He too, has an "itinéraire

poétique," supported by his two obsessions "la femme et la mort." Since Woman and Death and indeed universal, one way or another, in man's experience of the world, one can sympathize with the point of view, but regret the paucity of invention and poverty of language which he brings to his theme,

si Dieu existe
je jure de me venger

Pierre Albert's work reflects a more optimistic vision. He is concerned with love and death and poetry, but his search for meaning is more constructive, and even if there isn't the faintest flavour of individuality in his portrayal of his beloved, she appears at least as a beneficial presence rather than the whore of the Romantics, an indulgence on the road to damnation. But her cry at the end "Quel poème te sauvera? Quel poème de sang et de mémoire?" is not enough to compensate for the lack of inspiration in the rest. Le Nordir press seems on the whole to be offering an outlet for young men suffering from the age-old withdrawal symptoms of the believer who can no longer believe.

G. V. DOWNES

# CURIOUS ENCOUNTER

MARGARET AVISON, *Selected Poems.* Oxford, $17.95.

MARGARET AVISON'S poems were anthologized in A. J. M. Smith's *The Book of Canadian Poetry* in 1943. It was not until 1960, when she was forty-two, that her first book was published. Six years later her second book (reprinting many poems from the first) came out — in the United States. In the following years publishers large or literary petitioned for a manuscript to no avail until 1978, when an unknown publisher in rural Nova Scotia produced an amateurish-looking collection. In 1989 that same publisher presented a much better collection, *No Time*, which, like Avison's first book, earned the Governor-General's award for poetry.

Four books in fifty years.

But it has become a cliché in Canadian literary matters that Margaret Avison is the poet's poet, and for many readers the best poet in this country's century. Two publishers have tried to make the news available to students and others. In 1982 McClelland & Stewart published *Winter Sun/The Dumbfounding poems 1940-1966.* Now Oxford has a 166-page *Selected Poems.*

Many of our more serious poets of recent times have claimed Avison as a forebear and sometimes as a companion in verse practice. This country did not make modernist poetry during the heyday of International Moderism; but by the time of late modernism Avison became one of the best modernists in the world. Her poetry has always and notably exhibited the modernists' faith in the image, but the image as rendered, as work, not as picture gathered to a distributive ego. Avison instructs the optic, not the optician's heart: "wait / until this very stone / utters," she writes in a poem from *Sunblue* (1978).

Readers will re-encounter here the anthologized, canonized poems: "Snow," "The Swimmer's Moment," "The Dumbfounding," and so on. Avison's startling one-liners will re-emerge, to puzzle or delight old readers. "(Glee dogs our glumness so.)" One can never tire of her early sonnets, including a sonnet against sonnets, composed to tie knots of barely-contained energy. The sonnet "Snow" must have been memorized by decades of readers. It is a real Canadian classic, in case you were wondering whether there were such a thing, but I will bet that few can trace its logic. If you can, you will

recognize that experience as something like achieving the bright blue sky above the thick bumpy clouds.

Thus notes on Avison insist on the tradition of the 17th Century Metaphysicals; in fact the back cover copy of this book does. Avison does delight in the purchases found in Donne-like convolutions of syntax, negatived negatives and the like, sentences like serpents among spokes. And she has an ear like that found in the gorgeous Herbert. But she does not, as A. J. M. Smith did, employ a diction that sounds like the 17th Century. One can sense affinities with Hopkins. The early poems can remind one of Emerson's flux as opposed to fixity, as a seen challenge to the stationary image that Pound warned against. On the other side of the generational fence there are references to bp Nichol. And in a mid-career poem called "Oughtiness Ousted" there is a wonderful imitation of Emily Dickinson.

Most of those poets are more than normally Christian, and Avison is a Christian woman whose work has taken her to some mean streets, following Christ's

> lead through the garden to
> trash, rubble, hill,
> where, the outcast's outcast, you
> sound dark's uttermost, strangely
> light-brimming, until
> time be full.

Many of Avison's lyrics present outcast street people. Many of her poems from the Seventies are takes on passages from Scripture. Avison applies the same method to Biblical scenes that she practises upon Sherbourne Street, because for her the writing of Christianity is its enactment. The very sharp images, and the difficulty of following their grammar, are moral instruction, that finding a way to live and to mean in the world is difficult and possible, and requires an outgoing from the self. Poems cannot simply be consumed, as people's lives should not be. "Privacy is unadmitted prison," says an early poem previously uncollected.

Perspective was invented in an age during which centralized commerce and the individual were invented. Avison's eye-flying verses create a challenge to perspective, and while doing so suggest that the concept of pure cause- and-effect may be utile fancy:

> Your law of optics is a quarrel
> Of chickenfeet on paper. Does a train
> Run pigeon-toed?

Well, perspective was a mercantile method for painting, and Avison will not let the reader stand comfortably in front of a poem that frames nature. Her modernist abruptness with her images serves to keep the reader off his heels, helps him follow her discounting of systems that people rush to fashion out of perceptions, science and politics. One of her heroes is Tycho Brahe, subject of a longer poem, a 16th Century Danish astronomer noted for his accuracy, his devotion to art, his difficulty in getting along with rulers, and his highly disruptive discovery of a nova among the fixed stars. His message was to seek the new with courage, not the fear of chaos. It is a message that poets, teachers and Christians will do well to receive.

A much later poem sequence, "The Jo Poems" from *No Time*, will one day be a standard. It tells of the dying and after the dying of a friend, and of the living's "terrible need." It is a prayer and a paeon and a beautiful long poem that can do only as much as those two things can do, and now do them for us, mortal, too.

Thus, and because they are so rare, these *Selected Poems* are a big event in our lives. Newcomers will feel that they have to spend unusual time and brain on these poems, unlike so many that may seem to look like them nowadays. Oldtime readers will be glad that the book is here (as long as we have to wait for a Collect-

ed, or better a Complete), so that they can open it before the eyes of tyros and say: see, look what we've had all along.

GEORGE BOWERING

# MOSAIC DISSECTED

RACHEL FELDHAY BRENNER, *A. M. Klein, The Father of Canadian Jewish Literature: Essays in the Poetics of Humanistic Passion.* Edwin Mellen Press, paper $29.95.

JOSEPH KERTES, *Winter Tulips.* McClelland-Bantam, paper $4.95.

A. M. KLEIN holds an unusual position in Canadian letters. In some way sainted, he is the sentimentally remembered mentor of numerous younger poets and novelists, and his stories, essays and poems have recently been reissued in collected critical editions by the U of T Press. But alongside these accolades, Klein has remained a troubled and difficult persona. His twenty years of resolute silence preceding his death in 1972 and the deeply Jewish themes of his poetry and fiction, have marked him as an ambiguous literary hero. In a study entitled *A. M. Klein, The Father of Canadian Jewish Literature*, Rachel Feldhay Brenner struggles with these ambiguities and strives after ways in which to derive solace and instruction from what is most troubling and difficult about Klein's life and work.

In one sense, Brenner's study is an effort at rescue. She labours to extricate Klein from the ranks of the "too Jewish," by insisting that his poetic vision is never parochial, but one that puts forward "a truly humanistic statement." Brenner offers strong readings of both the poems and of *The Second Scroll*, in pursuit of the context within which Klein saw fit to make use of Talmudic, Yiddish, and Zionist culture, along with that of Francophone Montreal, and the tradition of English poetry that he held in such high esteem. Brenner focuses our attention on Klein's wide-ranging, seemingly scattershot and polyglot style, to show how it derived from a particular cultural attitude that was expressed through intertextual play. Brenner may make the argument for Klein's humanist passion a bit too strongly, at the expense of an understanding of his Jewishness, but there is no question that Klein deserves to be discussed in these more general literary terms. In fact, Brenner offers the poet, posthumously, the kind of accounting Klein felt the critics and his readers had always denied him.

On the issue of Klein's silence, Brenner is somewhat less convincing. She is right to argue that the poet's retreat from his audience has produced an almost uncanny need among his readers to "reactivate the discourse between society and poet." But her concluding reading of *The Second Scroll* leaves us with an exaggerated sense of Klein's success in coming to terms with himself as a spokesman for diaspora Jewry, as a poet in an unpoetic age, as a "solitary man." By concluding her study with a reading of *The Second Scroll*, Brenner almost leads us to forget that the novel appeared at the beginning of Klein's two final silent decades, and not at their end. This does not diminish Brenner's reading of the novel. She avoids the kind of anatomy of reference and detail to which the novel is often treated, and presents a thoroughgoing critique of its confrontation with the difficulties of writing about the Holocaust. Making use of Spinoza and Buber, Brenner contributes to the difficult discussion (to which Emmanuel Levinas is the most challenging contributor) of how God can be thought after the camps. Brenner reminds us that Klein was an early and brilliant investigator of this question.

If A. M. Klein's oeuvre tempts us to consider the difficulties with which traditional Judaism has dealt with the Holocaust, Joseph Kertes' first novel, *Winter*

*Tulips*, poses a number of questions concerning the state of ethnic communities in contemporary Canada. The bulk of the novel takes place in Toronto, though its main character hails from Jewish Montreal, and although the story is first and foremost one of young love, the narrative is framed by an insistent attention to the character of Canada's multicultural communities.

The novel's star-crossed lovers are, as Kertes calls them, a "man from Mount Sinai" and a woman "from Mount Olympus." What arises from this collection of opposites is a humorous tale of adolescent love and self-knowledge. *Winter Tulips* conjures no sub-plot bent on a deeper reading of the cultural marriage between Hebraism and Hellenism. This omission, however, may contribute to one of the novel's strengths: it is never didactic and rarely forces its theme of cultural diversity on the reader. It is by way of a nicely crafted narrative that Kertes reveals his belief in Canada as "the best of all possible worlds," where a guest "attending a wedding of a Jewish man to a Greek woman [might] address a haggis." This type of equation has become one of the guiding topes of recent Canadian culture. Spirited treatments of our culture-as-potpourri have appeared in film — most recently in Deepa Mehta's *Sam and Me*, and more convincingly, in Srinivas Krishna's *Masala*.

Still, there is something depressing about Kertes' bright vision of our polyglot society, and if my response is based on more than personal emotional predilections, the book is worth reading simply to examine this effect. Something odd has happened to Kertes' Jews as they've melded into the mosaic. In what may be the most unsettling section of the book, the young lovers return to the woman's ancestral Greek village, Krokos, on the Gulf of Salonika. As they drive along dusty roads, the now absent Jewish population of the area is commented on in a strangely oblique way:

> "There were quite a few [Jews] in Greece — more than seventy-five thousand — and most of them lived in the north. There aren't many left, though."
>
> "The war?"
>
> Dianne nodded.

There is something sadly lacking in this commemoration of the island's Jews, and it may be here that what is repressed in Kertes' multicultural picture of Canada erupts. As if to atone for how negligibly Jewish his Jewish characters are, the Holocaust makes a quiet entry, but is quickly shown the door.

Still, Kertes' novel provides an open-hearted and hopeful interpretation. One can only hope that what he leaves out of the picture will not return too soon to haunt us.

NORMAN RAVVIN

# DISMANTLING

LEO BERSANI, *The Culture of Redemption*. Harvard, $25.00 U.S. (cloth).

TERRY EAGLETON, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*. Basil Blackwell, $27.50 Cdn. (paper).

PERHAPS THE most important contribution contemporary literary theory has made to our understanding of literature has been to dismantle many of its most sacrosanct pretentions. Post-structuralist theory has demystified literature by enabling us to see it is as historically and culturally specific discourse with its own privileged terms and concepts and its own institutional history. In recent years, several theorists have begun to deconstruct this history, to examine those key terms and concepts to determine what has been involved in their adoption and dissemination. Each of the books under dicussion here makes valuable contributions to this enterprise.

In *The Culture of Redemption,* Leo Bersani addresses a central assumption in modern literature, and in the humanistic criticism that has made that literature available to us, namely, the belief that "a certain type of repetition of experience in art repairs inherently damaged or valueless experience." Bersani calls this belief in the authority of art "to master the presumed raw material of experience" a "redemptive aesthetic," tracing the form it takes in writers as diverse as Proust, Benjamin, Freud, Klein and Joyce.

His central thesis is an important one. In his view, acceptance of this truism involves a serious devaluation of historical experience of art: "The catastrophes of history matter less if they are somehow compensated for in art, and art itself gets reduced to a kind of superior patching function, is enslaved to those very materials to which it presumably imparts value."

Unfortunately, the full force of Bersani's thesis is often lost amidst the vagaries of his argument, and it is the "conceptual mobility" that he refers to in his preface which seems to be the source of both his strengths and his weaknesses. This conceptual mobility enables him to move rapidly from the "mortuary aesthetic" of Proust to Klein's theory of sublimation, and to contrast the anti-modernism of Benjamin to Nietzsche's "post-modern" renunciation of this "redemptive aesthetic." Yet several of these moves are made so rapidly and with so little preparation that it is difficult to follow Bersani. In fact, it is difficult not to feel that Bersani's rather unflattering characterization of Walter Benjamin's procedure is also a fairly accurate characterization of his own.

A striking exception occurs in the chapter on Melville, who is included here to represent an alternative to the view of art contained in Proust, Benjamin and Joyce. Bersani describes *Moby Dick* as a novel which is obsessed with interpretation. Not only is it full of enigmatic texts, but of characters intent upon understanding them. The virtue of the novel lies in its refusal to privilege any one of these characters or subject positions, as we might call them. Not even Ishmael, whose function is to be the "hermeneutical ground of all models of interpretation," can stop the interpretive process set into motion by Melville. Apparently it is this model of radical indeterminacy which Bersani would recommend as a more appropriate aesthetic than the redemptive aesthetic that has dominated modern literature and its criticism since the time of Proust and Joyce.

Terry Eagleton's *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* makes a more substantial contribution to the deconstruction of literature now being carried out under the name of post-structuralism. To call the book an historical critique of the aesthetic tradition in modern European thought is to overlook the full scope of his project, which involves nothing less than a recovery or recuperation of the concept of the aesthetic from the "burden of idealism" which has weighed it down.

Eagleton offers several reasons for the emergence of aestheticism in post-Enlightenment thought. In the rarified context of modern philosophy, he argues, art alone continues to speak of the concrete and the particular in human experience as opposed to the abstract and the general. Aesthetics represents modern philosophy's effort to elevate this concreteness to the status of a science. Moreover, the versatility of the concept has meant that it can be used to accommodate a wide variety of concerns, including questions of "freedom and legality, spontaneity and necessity, self-determination, autonomy and particularity." Finally, however, the concept of the aesthetic has attained the privileged position that it has because it effectively mirrors the bourgeoisie's understanding

of itself and of human subjectivity in general and thus has been able to help reproduce this understanding in the form of a very powerful and attractive ideology.

Eagleton's most penetrating insight into the history of aesthetic thought, however, concerns its unacknowledged materialism. As he points out, "aesthetics is a discourse born of the body." Though the history of modern philosophy reveals a gradual devaluation of the materiality of the concept, according to Eagleton, its recovery is anticipated in the writings of Marx, Freud and Nietzsche, each of whom had begun to re-think the aesthetic from the standpoint of the body: "Marx with the laboring body, Nietzsche with the body as power, and Freud with the body of desire."

It is impossible to do justice to the scope and the subtlety of Eagleton's argument here. The book consists of a full-scale frontal assault on the entire aesthetic tradition, and includes readings of most of the major figures in this tradition, from Kant and Hegel to Benjamin, Heidegger and Adorno. Yet so important is Eagleton's critique of aestheticism that it seems safe to say that subsequent histories of modern aesthetic theory will have to begin with *The Ideology of the Aesthetic.*

PAUL TYNDALL

# OPEN ROOM

GERRY SHIKATANI, *1988: Selected Poems and Texts.* Aya Press, $9.00.

ROBERT HILLES, *Outlasting the Landscape.* Thistledown, $9.95.

BRUCE MEYER, *The Open Room.* Black Moss, n.p.

GERRY SHIKATANI represents an extremely experimental approach to poetry, while Bruce Meyer is a proponent of New Formalism. Robert Hilles falls in between, writing a familiar, perhaps too familiar, kind of contemporary free verse poem.

Shikatani's poems are always lively and entertaining. They stretch the possibilities of the page, often using typography and drawings in a way that evokes bp Nichol. Shikatani is interested in the use of spacing: his gaps on the page are essential to the success of many of his poems. He is also, like many other contemporary poets, interested in foregrounding language and he has a real gift for doing so. He generally writes in a compressed way that evokes the haiku aesthetic which seemed to permeate his earlier big collection, *A Sparrow's Food.* That collection had a more salient serious strain in the poems for his father. Here, the playfulness is dominant. The disappointment in *1988* comes in the most conventional poem, a "Journal of a Trip / down to Moosonee and Moose Factory," a relatively conventional diary-narrative that meanders on for seventeen pages without creating much interest. The leaps of imagination and line placement that make Shikatani's work so engaging are lacking in this travelogue, and nothing important comes into focus. One intriguing element of the book is the inclusion of poems from a work-in-progress, "the Eastern White Pine Language Project." "White Pine Lodge" is Shikatani's contribution to Canadian mythology: it is the perfect (and cliched) Canadian wilderness resort. The whole

work will be an event. The poems in *1988* are a good prelude.

Robert Hilles is a talented poet, but this collection is not very exciting. There are some obligatory references to "the language" and some reflexive gestures ("This Poem Not Harm You"), but his real concerns are personal. Hilles tends to hector the reader or the addressee of the poem — and he takes for granted that the intricacies of his family relationships will be universally interesting. Most of them turn around the speaker's father and mother, his wife, and his children. A world-weariness pervades the book. The speaker often refers in a self-critical way to his anger, but he never provides an adequate context or motivation for this recurring theme. At times the family poems are touching, and even a relatively flat poem is often redeemed in the last few lines by a brilliant phrase, such as: "Beauty a diagram inside the / sleeping right brain." Not necessarily a brilliant image, as in the work of so many poets: Hilles can use abstractions well. Two stylistic weaknesses vitiate this collection. The constant use of sentence fragments becomes a tiresome mannerism. Instead of making a contribution to the tone of the poem they become a tic, foreseeable and not really functional. And there is a peculiar uncertainty about genre. Some of the poems appear to be prose poems, judging from the meaningless line-breaks, but they are not set as prose, which leads to some confusion about the approach. It is hard not to read those works as anything but formless poems. For all his gifts, Hilles has not thought enough about form and about the lyric problem of making the poet's intense emotions universally interesting. "Who has not sat trembling before his own heart's curtain," Rilke said, but the resulting drama has to be interesting to an audience that does not include the poet and his circle.

Bruce Meyer has been touted by his publisher as a New Formalist, and that seems a good description. After so many years of free verse, a counter-revolution was inevitable: as J. V. Cunningham once said, "the last variation is regularity." Canada has several poets who have kept formal faith, like George Johnston and, more recently, Richard Outram. But it is the American New Formalists who have received much attention in the last few years; there is a publicity machine at work. In particular, Dana Gioia has written articles and manifestoes; one was even carried in *The Atlantic*. Most of these writers, including Gioia, have mastered the forms but found little to say that is not platitudinous. Meyer, fortunately, is not platitudinous. His poems are as concrete as any open-form work, and they also use abstractions intelligently. As he moves through a poetic form, the material is never distorted by the matrix. The forms are put to work; they are not (to recall an anti-formalist cliche) mere receptacles into which material is poured. His pacing seems natural in spite of the framework of meter and stanza. There are poems about travel and history in this collection, and others that explore ideas. Meyer is perhaps most effective when he writes tributes to other writers, like Fernando Pessoa, Milton Acorn, Tu Fu, Samuel Beckett and Apollinaire. He also has poems for Monet, Whistler, Nietzsche and T. E. Lawrence. These are not academic tributes: they engage issues of genuine importance. He can write quite movingly about history. "By Wood and Wire," one of less formally-rigorous poems, deals at length with aviators in World War I, and there is a good poem about Dieppe. Form turns out to be an open room, not a closed one.

Between them, Gerry Shikatani and Bruce Meyer reveal the full range of stylistic possibilities in English language poetry. While Shikatani is the experimen-

tal poet, Meyer offers the greatest surprises. Cunningham was right: the last variation is regularity. That doesn't sound very exciting, but a poet like Meyer can make it so.

BERT ALMON

# HUMAN ACTS

HEATHER SPEARS, *Human Acts*. Wolsak and Wynn, $10.00.

COLLEEN THIBAUDEAU, *The Artemesia Book*. Brick, $14.95.

RICHARD HARRISON, *Recovering the Naked Man*. Wolsak and Wynn, $10.00.

THERE SEEM to be two kinds of poems in Heather Spears's new collection, *Human Acts*. Some poems leap off the page, like the literal suggestion in "The Poem Walked Out:"

> The poem walked out and it did not
> know where to put itself . . .
> The boot of a soldier crushed it in the
> road . . .
> A girl lifted it between her fingers
> but it withered . . .

The second type is the poem that withers, the poem that does not maintain the intensity it requires. Some of the poems that try to answer larger questions of existence (such as why a child contracts a debilitating and painful illness) lack passion, though perhaps not sincerity. The generally fluid style is occasionally forced in its playfulness ("my head that I've been pushing / a/head of me"). Luckily, the strength of the first type counter-balances the weaker ones.

The stronger poems are those about political refugees and those that seek out new poets in their original languages (even Arabic). That sense of curiosity and exploration is translated in Spears's poetry into a search for explanations, and for the chance to rewrite and revise. Most powerfully, this revision in "Mother of Battles I" attempts to find understanding, peace, and reason in chaos. The narrator comforts a refugee whose brother is in Kuwait during the Gulf War:

> Why not get all the lies and stories
> possible, so we can choose,
> secretly, whatever will comfort us —
> from minute to minute and day to day,
> like milk or the touch of a hand.

*Human Acts* sees in various corners of the world ways to revise survival tactics to achieve more than mere survival.

Colleen Thibaudeau's poetry uses time and space more metaphorically than Heather Spears. "Name Dropping as Skipping Stones" quotes Milton Acorn: "Colleen, you must stop living in Queen Alexandra's time." While I would not date the poems in *The Artemesia Book* as quite so old, they do have a "days gone by" feel. This is not necessarily harsh criticism: the poems recall childhood adventures, memories, locations with clarity and wit.

Family is of central concern in these poems, and many remember a family of years ago, or comment on a current collection of relatives. Occasionally, these poems move beyond the realm of the "real" to a fantasy world that can supercede the existing world. The poems in this book have the same sense: "Inwhich [sic] I Put on My Mother's Old Thé Dansant Dress" explains this encompassing impulse:

> I think, my whole life-span is in this dress.
> And, as I strew these words,
> rose petals are falling from the matching
> hat she made.

The poems in *The Artemesia Book*, many of which are taken from previous collections (*My Granddaughters are Combing Out Their Long Hair* and *The Martha Landscapes*), communicate best when read aloud. The language is very resonant, as are the alliteration, assonance, and rhyme. At times it reads somewhat

heavily, but the crafting of the word clusters is very carefully worked, as the "nonsense" poems illustrate: "from Throgmoggle and Engestchin: A Relationship" is composed of "words" that do not form an "accepted" language. The patterning of sounds is, nevertheless, quite remarkable. Thibaudeau's parodies of Atwood, Souster, W. W. E. Ross, Purdy, and Gotlieb are bitingly accurate and very entertaining.

"This Dragon Year will Eat you up for Sure," contains a telling line: "'My grandmother / says, tell you, you have Chinese mouth, always talking and eating.'" The narrator is very pleased with this pronouncement, and it suits most of Thibaudeau's wrok: the narrator's voice is entertaining and thought-provoking, if a little unadventurous.

Richard Harrison's *Recovering the Naked Man* deals productively with linguistic problems that gender differences and feminism have uncovered. "Left Out" notes that "The man the feminists want / has not yet been born." This collection of poems is about being male in the knowledge of feminism and feminists. It searches for the "male language" ("we spend our time hunting for words, / the old language dying on our lip" in "Recovering the Naked Man") that can help decipher experiences such as male violence towards women, particularly the Montreal Massacre. "December 6, 1989: After the shooting deaths of fourteen women at l'Ecole Polytechnique" is particularly powerful: "It is not his madness that makes him / the brother for whom we cannot apologize."

In "Men's Language for Their Pain," he notes that

> Men have not invented the language
> they desire, the one that delivers
> both power and comfort.

The poems implicitly recognize the irony in trying to create a "male language" since language is already "male." Harrison's language will distinguish the various violent acts of other men from his behaviour, to make women realize that he is different.

The narrator uses the feminist form of the body to search for this language, since his body has also been rejected. From "The Whole Body," he writes:

> I am a man and I have been rejected
> just for that,
> my body not whole but joined
> in memory with other men.

Making a distinction between types of men seems to be a very worthwhile endeavour, especially when certain forms of feminism lay the blame for all women's problems with the collective, "men." There is, however, also an annoying sense that the narrator in these poems just wants to be liked and loved, a feeling that obscures the deeper aims of trying to articulate a re-positioned man in the 1990s.

JOANNE TOMKINS

# BODY RIGHTS

KATE BRAID, *Covering Rough Ground*. Polestar Books, $11.95.

GEORGE ELLIOTT CLARKE, *Fire on the Water: An Anthology of Black Nova Scotia Writing* volume one. Pottersfield Press, n.p.

ARNOLD H. ITWARU, *Body Rites (beyond the darkening)*. Tsar Press, $9.95.

MICHAEL TURNER, *Company Town*. Pulp Press, $10.95.

FOUR TEXTS WHICH at first sight appear to have little in common turn out, in spite of radical differences, to be addressing the same thing: the experience of outsiders whose lives are defined by their struggle against alienation and exploitation. In *Fire on the Water* the ground of oppression is race. In *Company Town*, racial inequality is subsumed within the systemic

injuries of class, while *Covering Rough Ground* deals with the uncovering and overcoming of sexual stereotypes.

These three works are in some sense documentary. Clarke's *Fire on the Water*, the first of two projected volumes, is an act of rediscovery and validation — of "witness to words that once existed in invisibility." In it the experience of black men and women in Nova Scotia from the 1780's to the mid-twentieth century is expressed in their own words and through the spirituals, folk songs, and tales that comprise the "Africadian" tradition. *Company Town* is a thinly disguised history in prose and verse of the last of the independent fish canneries on the Skeena River in B.C. conveyed through the multiple voices of the cannery workers — Indian and white, male and female — and the bosses. Turner has an acute ear for speech rhythms and idioms, and an awareness born of direct experience of the contradictions that define working class life with its mixture of pride and anger, irony and alienation.

In *Company Town* Turner comments that "over half the labour force was made up of women." Women also undeniably played an essential role in the survival of Nova Scotia's black community from the pre-Loyalist period to the present, as Sylvia Hamilton and Sharon Fraser have pointed out in *Multiculture* and *This Magazine* respectively. Curiously, women are accorded only a small space in either volume. It is thus refreshing to turn to Kate Braid's witty and energetic feminist verse.

Braid makes her living in what is called a "non-traditional" job — that is, a job usually reserved for males: she is a carpenter. Most of the poems in *Covering Rough Ground* explore the experience of a woman working among men, and passing the tests that are in fact meant to confirm her inferiority to her male coworkers. It is tempting to use carpentry as a metaphor for Braid's verse. This is not to trivialize her achievement as a poet. She writes with the authority of a good craftsperson, dovetailing thought and feeling and driving her point home with economy and skill. In a tribute to Emily Carr called "Wood Interior 1909," for example, she writes:

> There it is, earlier still.
> Such a naive picture,
> with all the parts we are
> supposed to recognize as
> bark leaves branches
> green in its place.
> You felt it like that then.
>
> But even this early
> your spirit stares
> and sees what is between the trees
> joining them.
> It is a space
> any carpenter would understand.
> It is the reason we build things.
> Looks like air to some,
> fresh breeze, a touch of chill
> or fog.
> It is the spirit of the tree.
>
> Now I know who you are.
> Another woman who knows wood.

In *Body Rites* the elaborate figures of race and class are inscribed in a scene of exile and absence, the realities of exploitation and injustice located in the body of the oppressed. George Clarke asserts in the Introduction to *Fire on the Water* that "Africadians . . . believe that identity is found, not primarily in the self, but in the group"; he insists on the "anti-romantic" and "anti-modern" character of Africadian culture. However, Ernst Fischer's remarks on Baudelaire which Clarke quotes in support of his claim seem more appropriate to Itwaru's poems. In Baudelaire, Fischer writes, Beauty "is like the angel of wrath holding the flaming sword":

> Its eye strips and condemns a world in which the ugly, the banal, and the inhuman are triumphant. Dressed-up poverty, hidden disease, and secret vice lie revealed before

its radiant nakedness. It is as though capitalist civilization has been brought before a kind of revolutionary tribunal: beauty holds judgement and pronounces its verdict in lines of tempered steel.

Many of the poems in Itwaru's first volume of poems, *Shattered Songs*, (1982) appear with minor or significant revisions in *Body Rites*, but what one reviewer referred to as the "broken language" of the earlier volume has been reshaped, the "kaleidoscopic fragments" pieced together in a powerful indictment of violence and tyranny.

Radically different as they are, the four volumes considered here share a deep commitment to exposing the wounds of injustice and oppression in order to heal them. Itwaru writes:

offspring of another parting i am
a blesser of crossroads
the heart the smile the naked touch
this dance which dances me
i renounce the wounds
the scars are healed
the sowers of pretext and pillage
the posturers
the procurers
the protectors of deception and tyranny
have been named

In its own way, each of these volumes speaks in the voice of the outsider. The levelled site of Africville on the shores of Bedford Basin, the abandoned canneries on the Northwest coast of B.C., the hierarchies of race and class and gender remind us that we are all either outsiders —on the side of the outsider — or accomplices in tyranny, and that in Itwaru's words, "When the actions of nation-states rewrite themselves in the gruesome ecstasies of the day poetry must rethink its body in whose corporeality we fearfully dream."

HILDA THOMAS

# UNCOMMON DREAMS

ALLISON GRAYHURST, *Common Dream*. Edge Unlimited, n.p.

D. C. REID, *The Women Who Surround Me*. Ekstasis, $10.00.

SANDRA NICHOLLS, *The Untidy Bride*. Quarry, $11.95.

IF THERE IS a common realm of experience in these first books, it is that of love, relationships, and women's lives. Allison Grayhurst, the youngest of this trio of poets, is a new talent with a voice of her own, whose lyrics are attractive, if sometimes loosely expressed. There are simple, passionate love-poems, like "In Reply"; vivid, surreal images, as in "Tree," "Stage Fighter," "The Panther's Tongue" or "Bowels of Eden"; and a freedom of expression with some iridescent phrasing. The colorful dream imagery ("Purple Mile," "Crimson Room") suggests that Grayhurst has read Rimbaud as well as Thomas and Plath. There is a freshness and seeming artlessness in these emotive gestures to an unseen friend or lover. Unevenness comes from the varying intensity with which experiences are transmuted (and there are some mechanical errors), but the reader quickly attunes to the personal tone and seems to hear a speaking voice. Grayhurst's rapturous outpouring of imagery makes her poems easily enjoyable: "I will run now / like a drunkard / at dawn. The waves / of morning's early light / will be my medicine — the blue / & purple & orange thin arches, / all aglowing." The stance is open and intuitive: like a seer the poet seeks to fathom sensual and spiritual experience through the images of a dream.

D. C. Reid's *The Women Who Surround Me* is a promising first book from a more experienced poet. Sensuousness and self-awareness are combined in Reid's better poems, such as "Strawberries," a lushly sensual poem that associates "straw-

berry flesh" with lovemaking, "The Intelligence of Spiders," and "Christmas at Angler's Marina." Reid's poems deal with relationships with wife, daughters, sister-in-law, and father. A gory poem of childbirth and a perplexed one of estrangement consort with more tender lyrics. In "The One Whose Role is a Mother," Reid celebrates dual roles of house-husband and father/mother, that culminate in learning how to give confidence to children. This is significant in light of the poet's sense of his own emotional deprivation in childhood. In "Ricepaper Eyes," which links cherry blossom and "rosewood" with "[a] drop of blood / perfect as a ladybug" on a child's finger, Reid experiments with Japanese aesthetics (*ikebana*) and unpunctuated spacing (comparable to the art of flower arrangement), in dealing with a child's fears. A child's perception of the world through the "transparency" of art is dramatized in "Tess Looking Through Monet," in which

> Monet stands rumpled and homespun
> with his glory,
> having painted what is and isn't there,
> having moved across and then returned
> with the light that grows inside the air.

Only the last four lines of this skilfully balanced poem skirt sentimentality, which Reid generally manages to avoid.

"The Answer Grows Me Old" is a warm and tender poem to a four-year-old daughter, while "I'm Going to Tell You, Father" attempts to express feelings of hurt resentment that can't be spoken directly. "This Boat That Floats Between Us" returns to the crucial father-son relationship, dealing with a painful sense of psychic crippling, but ending with a gesture of reconciliation. Reid's poems have an emotional honesty and a sensitive grasp of the incongruities of experience.

Sandra Nicholls' *The Untidy Bride* is the most sophisticated of these first books. It is divided into three sections, "Writing About the Dead," "Accuracies," and "The Untidy Bride." The first section is marked by Nicholls' wry sense of the comic; her casual tone holds many surprises, and her sustained inventiveness hinges fantasy upon reality. A sequence of poems ("The Laws of Physics," "Glass Lanterns," "Illness in the Family," "The King of Paper Cups," "Grief") concerns visits to a dying father, and the last of these is particularly skilful, moving, and eloquent in its obliquity:

> we lit matches
> trembling in the doorway.
> I could not bear
> the quick terrible movement
> of your expert hands,
> or the sound that rose
> from the pavement,
> the spent match folding inward,
> my father alone falling into light.

The central section, "Accuracies," deals with a modern woman's experiences of separation, male violence, menstruation, motherhood, and gropings for religious faith. "The Untidy Bride" section, which is mainly concerned with male-female relationships, opens with a cuttingly witty poem, "The Male Feminist," about a man "who wants / you to feel free / about your body, / but only with him." The awkwardness and pain of loving is memorably expressed in "Casualties" ("All the night / I shift my wounds, / to cope with your embrace") and "Metamorphosis," whose passionate, animistic imagery recalls Syvia Plath:

> I place myself white
> in your hands, peel back
> my lizard skin
> offer my green caress;
> my kisses breed and sting
> and circle in swarms;
> my arms grow
> poisonous leaves.

"Mapmaking" ironically charts an ill-omened relationship in five quick sketches ending with the sadness of cross-grained love, while "Magnetism," with its beauti-

ful, poised imagery, dramatizes the attraction between a couple, "the power that can lift / steel, split the world in two." "Love Poem" has a supple, precise grace, its musical continuity articulated by commas where one might expect periods. Finally, "The Untidy Bride" ironically deconstructs the idea of perfection, of the totally fresh start, realizing, against such illusions, that "[each] time we are a new combination, / a practical weave of the old fibres / of the other lives . . ."

Nicholls' poetry has an elegant maturity and a controlled clarity of expression. She never needs to raise her voice, preferring the lingering effects of understatement. Her tone is cool, her language apt and accurate. Nicholls is a poet who repays close attention: her first volume is remarkably intelligent and assured.

JACK STEWART

# ECHOES & REALITIES

LEONARD NEUFELDT, *Raspberrying*. Black Moss, n.p.

GLEN SORESTAD, *West into Night*. Thistledown, $11.00.

ALLAN SAFARIK, *On the Way to Ethiopia*. Polestar, $11.95.

LEONARD NEUFELDT and Glen Sorestad show the virtues of restraint. Their meditations are rooted in a sense of oneness with nature. Neufeldt's "Handbook for Berrypickers" combines hands-on experience of the work, with delicate sensory impressions and easy-breathing rhythms ("Blue insouciance will walk through mists / on the valley floor . . ."). Visual and tactile observations ("the unfathomably soft ambush / of a spider's thread of light") become resonant with a deeper significance. Like Taoist poetry, Neufeldt's subtly relates mind and spirit to nature:

> the last mountain will float out of smoky clouds
> somewhere between your desire to quit and the light
> sticking once again to acres of raspberry leaves

The poet finds spiritual nuances in commonplace events. This is not a matter of symbol or allegory, but of embracing familiar things and actions in a way that casts light upon experience. The ideal is compared with the sensory and the remote with the immediate:

> You'll have heard about them: cedar-green silence,
> fields free of arguments and desire,
> each berry beautiful beyond description,
> but tasteless. Their flavor is nothing
> compared to smaller berries you have picked
> all morning in the rain, and which you have brought
> to the weighhouse, where people you know
> were expecting you.

These meditative poems balance luminous immediacy with the social and the transcendent.

The history of Russian and Ukrainian Mennonites in the Fraser Valley is recorded in simple acts of daily life. Long, slow rhythms accommodate a wealth of calmly observed details. In Neufeldt's understated art, "simple things" are arranged and clarified by memory. His contemplation of rivers, mountains, farmlands, and people suggests subliminal relations between landscape and lives — and his humorous study of his Mennonite father suggests similar relations between individual and community.

A self-reflexive image from "The Rhetoric of Raspberries" illustrates Neufeldt's aesthetic: "When the idea reddened / his fingertips . . . he could taste and eat / what was also in his hand held farther back / for focus . . ." The mysteriously real supersedes the imaginary: "Raspberries are not pomegranate blossoms / nor similes dark as dried blood, nor epics / like September stems"; they are "berries

large and red," that grow in geographical locations from the hills of Galilee to Dyke View Berry Farm. In his cool, detached focus, Neufeldt artfully interweaves natural and personal worlds:

> Coolness bursts out of low-branching light
> sudden as blossoms, dancing among
> eyelashes:
> morning starved to nakedness by dreams
> pendulous as unpicked berries hanging
> behind large leaves in the bush's heart ...

Glen Sorestad's quiet, reflective prairie poems have a simple strength and plainness. His moments of observation link past with present, foregrounding memory: "The world begins and ends in memory; / what I remember is what I am.... / A remembered world holds truth / and realities far clearer than echoes." Sorestad issues an invitation to the reader — "We will read our history in firelight" — that evokes the shared experience of a community. The act of imagining back through things is a search for self-understanding. One comes to appreciate Sorestad's unassuming, meditative tone. His forte is a kind of rustic minimalism that (at its best) recalls Chinese nature poetry of the Tang and Song dynasties.

Sorestad achieves bold simplicities ("the world sprang into the mysteries / of green") at the cost of occasional banalities. He experiments with rhythm in "The Song of Mount Rundle," ringing changes on song/sun/rock/sky, and with spacing in "Cat in Morning," which jumps from left to centre to right down the page. Sorestad's themes are memory, freedom, desire, and simply "being there." Observation leads to reverie. There is also a strong sense of human connectedness and of man's relation to the land.

Allan Safarik's poems, in stark contrast with Neufeldt's and Sorestad's, are tough, startling, bitter, laconic, with a freakish sense of black humour and a fund of real-life images that collide in surreal conjunctions. Safarik conveys grim realities with mordant fantasy. The everyday world turns nightmarish, Kafakaesque. "The Threesome" describes an encounter with a doppelgänger on a streetcar, "The Price of Loneliness" with an "eloquent" black spider. There is a visceral hilarity to "The Double Broiler," which deals with a severed and sautéed human tongue, and "Swordfish Steaks" (to be grilled on the exasperated speaker's forehead). Black comedy borders on sinister farce in "Bringing Down the Hammer" and "Exit Through Window Glass," while there is a lighter ludicrous vein in "Field Worker."

Safarik knows the power of compressed images. His short-line poems, dealing with natural phenomena — like "Meaning of Time," "Yellow Bird," "Perfect Zero," "Wood Bugs," "Lake of the Moon" — are among his best. "Mimicry of Birds at War," whose theme is the vagaries of mechanical communication, ends on a striking visual note: "In the morning, white fields / illustrated calligraphy of crows." Safarik's fantasies are colourful and bizarre or apocalyptic, as in a surreal vision of nuclear fallout over White Rock. In a series of winter poems, his imagination thrives on absence. "Winter Garden" creates a "black and blue / winter melancholy," with "cold air ... / covering the world / with a white tarp." "Mexican Winter" explores zero conditions through jump-cut imagery and a kind of magic realism that inflates details: "nothing moving but de- / iced wings of an impaired / fly stuck on the sun- / burned window." "Winter Midnight" modulates from mundane to surreal without losing touch with reality:

> Walked a square block
> around blue hours, smoke
> billowing from my footsteps
> Everything calm and still
> until, silence struck like a match
> in the minus-forty air
> My hair exploded into flames

I took out my comb,
and cooler than a glass of ice,
feathered it in place

"On the Way to Ethiopia," which supplies a symbolic title for these reflections on the hazards of existence, is grimly comic and crammed with menace. *Ethiopia* is Safarik's fifth collection of poetry and, while not always pleasant, it packs a wallop.

JACK STEWART

# SMALL & PERFECT

LOUIS DUDEK, *Small Perfect Things*. DC Books, n.p.

KEN MITCHELL, *Witches and Idiots*. Nightwood Editions, n.p.

J. A. HAMILTON, *Body Rain*. Brick Books, n.p.

THE TITLE OF Dudek's latest collection derives from his own *En Mexico*:

No matter how steamy the jungle
small leaves are perfect in detail.
Order remains unimpaired
in man and matter,
despite all poverty, insanity, or war —
the jungle, in its excesses.

In the midst of the jungle's excess, one seeks the small perfect things which reveal order. Instead, most of these poems — a roughly equal mix of short satires, epigrams, and imagistic lyrics — bitterly lament the jungle's excesses. "Poetry" ends with, "Well, that's how it is, or ought to be," revealing the focus of the book: how things "ought to be," a standard which virtually everything Dudek examines fails to meet. This volume is not animated by joyous recognition of the perfect detail in the chaotic whole, or even genuine anger at the failure of the benighted masses to perceive that perfection, but by a surly peevishness that things are not as Dudek believes they ought to be. This is especially noteable in the "Epigrams" section which, much like 1975's *Epigrams*, are epigrams only in their brevity: they haven't the wit, the incisiveness, the turn of thought and phrase that inform and energize the form. Most are simple declarations of opinion — typically reactionary — often about the misfortunes of the poet in Canada: savaged by reviewers, castrated by critics, and ignored by readers. The satires are much the same, but the lyrics in the final section, "Small Perfect Things," help ameliorate the sourness of the previous sections somewhat; some poems do recognize and celebrate small and transitory pleasures. Too little too late, though, because it is the despair that overwhelms, colors all. The final image is of the poet futilely seeking beauty in a barren cultural landscape: "One solitary fleck, a butterfly / hops from dry leaf to dry leaf / looking for a flower."

Ken Mitchell, the Prairie dramatist and and poet, seems as dour as Dudek in the opening section of *Witches & Idiots*, "Coming of Age in Saskatchewan," bemoaning the imaginative and cultural vacuity of Canadian life. But in the latter section, "The Pilgrimage," the focus of the collection becomes clear. The first section depicts the stunting of the Canadian imagination, the repudiation of local magic, the numbing of mental and perceptual faculties; the second section celebrates the reawakening of those faculties through exposure to other, ancient cultures, though that fresh awareness often includes pain and suffering. The book begins with two trains headed in opposite directions, one loaded with cattle going to slaughter, the other with people. The "dehorned white-face cow" being railroaded to its death becomes an emblem of the Prairie youths raised in a deadening, constrictive atmosphere. The "Great Divide" of the poem's title is virtually non-existent — the young men are little more than farm-fed cattle headed for an early spiritual death until they break out

of the confines of Saskatchewan. The final poem in the section presents an image of both despair and hope: "I'll cross this dark river / I cannot see to a port / I will never recognize / from a harbour beyond recall."

In the second section, "Pilgrimage," crazy men, magical women, the aged, the sick, and the dying are valued and cared for in the various cultures Mitchell moves through, unlike the derided and ignored local oddities in the first part. These poems are increasingly direct in their rejection of the insular self-importance of North Americans, culminating in "Poem for a Graduation Banquet": "the world is not your golden plum / waiting to be plucked and nibbled." The final poem is a response to the "great divide" of the opening: "each word you hear is a thing of naught. / Our communion is the poem, / bread and wine to take you home." The cumulative resonance between the poems of the two sections suggests that Canadians are possessed of an iconography as potent and complete as the foreign society's — we can embrace and feed upon our culture, once our eyes are opened by the exposure to the world, breaking out of our cultural isolation.

As the cover blurb contends, J. A. Hamilton's *Body Rain* "does not read like a first book of poems." The poetic voice is very strong, if often derivative, a voice that speaks of pain, betrayal, abuse, abandonment, and death unflinchingly. The Body Rain is a downpour of blood: the consequence of existence is pain, particularly pain inflicted upon children by parents. This poetry is not easy or pleasant, in form or content. One poem appears to be an apology to Ted Bundy from his mother for allowing him to be abused as a child. The desecration of innocence is demonstrated by the perversion of childhood rhymes and icons: teddy bear becomes Ted Bundy, the nursery rhyme bespeaks an unspeakable act ("one two unbuckle daddy's . . ." "they all fall / down"). These are unsparing, despairing poems of what it is to be a girl/woman in a brutally patriarchal society; man is typically characterized as hunter, and woman as wounded, often fatally. A few poems suggest a possible future, like the promise in "Menstruation at Ten" that the girl can bring her childhood with her into womanhood without having it degraded and sullied by abuse, but most of what affirmation there is comes from the depth and passion of the vitriol the poet feels and the vitality and clarity with which it is expressed:

> What is left on the stalk
> is silver and silk, is shells . . .
> This is more beautiful than I had hoped,
> Helen.
> I could be wrapped in it, Helen, I
> could be buried in
> honesty.

JIM SNYDER

# INTO THE CLEAR

RALPH GUSTAFSON, *The Celestial Corkscrew & Other Strategies*. Mosaic Press, n.p.

DON KERR, *Talkin Basie. Cormorant Books*, n.p.

GLEN SORESTAD, *Air Canada Owls*. Nightwood Editions, n.p.

RALPH GUSTAFSON has long been known as an academic poet, given to delivering sermons in a distanced, impersonal voice. The poems in this book, collected from several distinct periods in his career, may not always represent his best, most accomplished work, but it is often his warmest, most personal and colloquial work. The irony does still tend to be rather heavy-handed, and his targets — institutionalized religion, the soul-killing emptiness of modern urban existence, the stolid, stultifying nature of the typical Canadian — are too easy and dated. And Gustafson does not help matters any by displaying his considerable erudition at

*every* turn. As Frank Davey has said in a different context, one does not so much read these poems as decipher them. But there are a few poems about real people, not symbolic, historical, or mythological characters, are especially appealing are those which promise to reveal something of Gustafson, with "I" as participant, not observer.

The second section of the book, "Figurations," is chiefly a series of tributes to/parodies of Gustafson's contemporaries, and the poems are enlivened both by being about people for whom Gustafson displays deep affection and by being couched in styles less academic than his own usual form. Some are done badly, perhaps (ee cummings, for example), but all are energized by his admiration.

Don Kerr's *Talkin Basie* is much more visceral and alive than Gustafson's often remote poetry. He draws on the rhythms of jazz and its musicians, he bases several sections of the book on prose remembrances of the late thirties through to the late forties when Basie's band was at its height. Basie is celebrated for the vitality and spontaneity of his music; his band recaptures the "fun / kids playin in the mud." The growth of the poet and of the musical form — particularly Basie's own immersion into the Kansas City scene — are paralleled. One of the constants in the growth of each is the mixture of fear and excitement, suggestive of musical improvisation — the fear and excitement of working without a net.

The book is in five sections. The first, "home town," is the awakening of the spirit by the accidental introduction of jazz into a Prairie boyhood. The second section, "Talkin Basie," is the most technically accomplished. Kerr patterns it according to the indefinable logic of a Basie arrangement, moving from character to character as each takes the spotlight, except legendary saxophonist Lester Young: virtually every speaker alludes to him as the preeminant soloist, but he never plays/speaks himself.

"Kansas City," the third section, encapsulates the end of the golden age, contrasting the wide open city of Basie's beginning with what was left when the reformers got through with it. The fourth section, "The Last of the Blue Devils," is a refusal to mourn or memorialize the spirit of this age — it lives still, despite the contemporary audience: "English graduate students ... high on Frye / groovin on McLuhan." The final section, "small heavens of jazz," focuses on the new jazz of the suceeding era which is not as vital as the Basie band. The book ends, fittingly, with Lester Young's delayed solo, emphasizing again the mixture of fear and desire, the need to keep moving and the price paid for that flexibility.

The poems in Glen Sorestad's new collection are about temporal, spatial, cultural, and psychological dislocations suffered by world travellers. The title of the first section, "Travelling to Dieppe," suggests the fate of the Canadians landing again in Germany — "another time our blood rejects" is clearly not just jet lag. It also introduces the repressive Prussian love of order and control which is linked with technological, civilized man throughout the book, in conflict with human compassion and childhood wonder. As in the Kerr collection, alcohol looms large here: the bankers and businessmen consume alcohol in a very efficient, business-like manner, paralysing their senses to cope with the vacuity of their existence. "Luxembourg September" provides the pivotal image of modern urban existence: in a city enclosed by protective walls, the bridges connecting the walls serve as the perfect launching pads for suicides — the high walls that protect also create the chasms which welcome the jumpers. Similarly, a joyous, boozey Sunday afternoon celebration with a local family, occasioned by a miscommunication, is followed by

images of the silent, self-destructive victims of drink on the street outside the cozy confines of the pub.

"Bistros and BMWs," the second set of poems, begins in a Montreal bistro in which, again, human aspirations contend with technology, even in its simplest forms, and are found wanting. The growing disenchantment with the world, exacerbated by the disappointing foray into foreign lands, is undercut in the last section, "Night Flights." Here, the wonder and awe of the new travellers rubs off on the poet, who hopes to merge his voice with theirs, "spontaneous in delight." He relocates his sense of self, no longer the world-weary traveller or the boozey wanderer, but now is, once more, the youth, descending from the clouds into the clear for the first time.

JIM SNYDER

# HEALING'S PROGRESS

SHEL KRAKOFSKY, *The Reversible Coat.* Moonstone, $9.95 pa.

SOSHANA FELMAN & DORI LAUB, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature.* Routledge, $56.50 (cloth), $19.95 (paper).

ON THE COVER of Shel Krakofsky's first collection of poetry, *The Reversible Coat,* is a striking silkscreen in sepia and black of an unnamed European family in their best clothes. Beneath their faces is twice printed in Hebrew — *Shema Yisroel* — the letters intertwined with barbed wire, a spatter of carmine interrupting the elegant script. It is surprising then, to find that past this melancholy cover is a collection of poems focused on the humorous side of life.

But in its way, the cover has its place alongside Krakofsky's poems. Many of the pieces collected here focus on the place of the Jew in contemporary secular culture, and in a rather original manner, Krakofsky turns the ancient cry of "Hear O Israel" into a preamble for poems portraying Succoth along New York's mean streets; a "Stanley Cup Seder"; and the falling off of Jewishness as the children of immigrants succeed and assimilate. In a related poem about the urge to practice one's craft on the Sabbath, Krakofsky examines the happy contradictions that arise as he tries to reconcile his observance with the secular work of writing poety:

> So I can now record
> at the end of this
> day of rest
> that I missed
> another opportunity
> to imitate God.

The poems heralded by the book cover's antique photo — evocative of the lost ones — are strange and less successful. The pieces addressing the Holocaust often make use of a contorted diction that is difficult to follow, and of the kind of declamatory, extreme language that seems not to have emerged enough from its source of anger and loss to convey a clear sense of the writer's ideas. A poem about Ernst Zundel is nearly inexplicable, and another, entitled "The Meal," enacts a Laytonesque assault of which readers of the randy old man of Canadian-Jewish anger have become all to wary.

Still, Krakofsky's extreme and often inconclusive treatment of the Holocaust raises an important issue related to the pain felt by those who address the event. Dori Laub, in his contributions to *Testimony: Crises of Witness in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History,* brings such psychoanalytic terms as trauma, working through, and acting out, to bear on his examination of the way in which survivor's recount their experiences. We too, in our empathy for survivors' trauma, must take part in their struggle to speak about their lives and return to health, if we are to purge our culture of the emotional residue of the Holocaust. Laub's

somewhat clinical approach to the aftermath of the German death camps may at first strike one as overly rigid and bound to a limited Freudian vocabulary, but it is, ultimately, a far more practical response than most to the imperative that we ensure that such events, such history, must not return.

Krakofsky's Holocaust poems are evocative of a latent trauma, and of the desire for an as yet unfound health. But his lyrics written for his daughters and son intimate that the poet has numerous resources and will continue to work through our common struggle. Images of strength and communal health abound in the poems Krakofsky devotes to family outings, daily ritual, and to the ability of parents and children to teach each other. The power of children to rejuvenate tradition is brought home in the poet's celebration of his son as the

> sexton of our home
> guardian of our Sabbath
> herald of precious new weeks.

Amid the Canadianisms and local colour of *The Reversible Coat*, there are many similar passages that emerge as authentic portraits of an age-old contract of love and respect between parent and child. Krakofsky presents a very different take on this subject than does Irving Layton, whose memorable poem, "For My Sons, Max and David," induced the boys to be "gunners in the Israeli Air Force." Krakofsky avoids such rhetorical fireworks and tells his children, simply,

> first
> learn Torah
>
> then
> find yourselves.

Krakofsky's poems focus on the quiet domesticity of Jewish life in Canada, and it is through his mining of this theme that we learn more clearly and honestly about where we stand in relation to the events of Hitler's war. Our comfort, our unhurried introspection, our integration — for the present — in a multicultural society appear all the more invaluable.

It is this kind of honesty that is lacking in Shoshana Felman's contributions to *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing*. In an effort ostensibly aimed at examining the difficulties of addressing the Holocaust in a university setting, Felman's analysis of the relationship of survivors' testimony to an earlier tradition of testimonial writing, tells us more about the writer's professional commitments than the fraught experience of studying the Holocaust. Buried halfway into the collection, is a revised version of the highly contentious essay that Felman published in the summer of 1989, as the debate over the revelation of Paul de Man's wartime collaborationist writings raged. In "After the Apocalypse: Paul de Man and the Fall to Silence," she portrays de Man as an heroic victim and witness whose writings do "nothing other than testify to the complexity and ambiguity of history as Holocaust."

The centrality of this claim to the arguments Felman makes concerning the nature of our post-Holocaust "trauma" puts her entire project under suspicion. Making use of some of the psychoanalytic material that Laub integrates so well, Felman produces work that is mired in its own emotional and personal commitments.

We see in Shel Krakofsky's poetry the difficulties of rising out of trauma toward health; and in Dori Laub's essays we are offered a prescription for opening up what has been sealed off due to suffering. Felman's work in *Testimony* proffers an obstruction to these worthy projects. Instead of working through trauma, she puts it to work — a dubious and unworthy labour.

NORMAN RAVVIN

# METAPHOR-LAND

RICHARD STEVENSON, *Whatever It Is Plants Dream*. Goose Lane Editions, $9.95.

JACQUES OUELLET, *Où Serons-Nous Dans Une Heure*. Éditions du Noroît, n.p.

RÉJEAN PLAMONDON, *Écritude*. Éditions du Noroît, n.p.

THESE THREE SMALL books of poetry span the gamut of invention and imagination. They also cover at the same time a full range of late twentieth-century free verse and of, yes, classical influence. All three reach for a highly individual poetic voice and, strangely, there could also be argued that they share a common aesthetics meant to be palpable to the touch and the eye.

Stevenson's *Whatever it is Plants Dream*, with each of its poems dedicated to a plant, is reminiscent of a Renaissance herbal deliberately up-dated as a modern sale-catalogue for flowers. By contrast, Plamondon's *Écritude* is a series of epigrammatic short poems investigating being and time, under three main section heads entitled "Je," "Tu" and "Elles." Five purposely not quite visionary enamellings by André LeMay give fine point to Plamondon's feeling his way metaphysically through the self. Then Ouellet's *Où Serons-Nous Dans une Heure*, which could have justified bearing Plamondon's title of *Écritude*, because of its references to writing, is really a single very long poem divided into over sixty fairly romantic parts. Towards the end, a group of poems on writing compare composition to an act of self-birth. Three "eaux-fortes" illustrations (engravings colored in by the artist Nicole G. Ouellet) add to the volume's sense of crag and romance.

Each in its own way all three volumes are often deliberately amusing. But the sense of the comic is an extension of irony into poetic language. In Ouellet's *Où serons-Nous*, the amusement is the least evident but it is there and present in the sophistication of the romantic narration. In an early lyric of the volume the smallest pain is created by the greatest vacuity. A large empty space, like an elephant, gives birth to the mere mouse. And the small pain, which is death, ruins the life-long tediousness of the blasé sophisticated sufferer; the sufferer must sit up and take notice of death: "peu à peu la vacuité m'achève / une petite douleur / abîmerait l'ennui."

The amusement and the irony are more evident in Stevenson's volume. The title of each poem is the name of a plant, and the name of each plant is followed by its Latin dictionary equivalent. We read each poem as an item in an horticultural catalogue. But the spoof with its directions for planting the plants in the lines that follow, is only title deep. For, as in *Cups and Saucers* (*Cobaea scandens*), the horticulture yields strikingly to human creative effort: "Fill the trellis of our words / with singular adjectives, never verbs. / For such is the limit of our cup." And in *Blue Passion Flowers* (*Passiflora caerulea*), the passion teeters between raw sexuality and the birth of a poetic metaphor. The sensuousness of the flower becomes analogous with the sensation of Christ's nails on the Cross, and a poetic metaphor is born:

> Yet from the compost a tendril,
> one green filial worm, breaks loose,
> the nails of Christ's passion
> have come to a head the ways a sliver does.
> Language will out. The word extrudes its
> own petals.

In *Écritude* the irony and hence the levity is in the verbal play. In the most ancient tradition of epigram, the puns and clever turns of phrase transport the imagination. To strike the iron while it is hot in "Infinitif" is rather to beat hell while it is boiling because of the play on "fer" and "enfer" — "Battre le fer / pendant / qu'il est chaud." Or beat hell

out of hell. And elsewhere in *A Poor Lonesome Poet / A Long Way from Home*, the poet attacks the killers of joy but the irony, as is typical of Plamondon's figures, is sardonic. In a series of three quick puns, to kill joy-killers is fun and is therefore the pass-time of a failing rather than of a succeeding poet. To attack the out-laws or the out-of-joy is not legitimate defence but illegitimate relaxation. To be poetic must be only to suffer: "J'attaque les hors-la-joie / en toute illégitime / détente." The real creator's way is painful effort.

The creative effort is no less extenuating in Ouellet's *Où Serons-Nous dans une Heure*. In an untitled lyric, the body thrives on the dawn of the day created by writing, "Le corps attend l'écrit prépare / le jour sa blancheur particulière / la première page ambrée de signes." The effort is particularly devoted to harnessing space. The universe must be made to yield to creativity: "Il fallait reconduire l'aube / le vide attendait," says one lyric, and two lyrics later, the creative adventure of the poet has still not yet triumphed. Humanity risks becoming but a mere collection of memories that came into being as though unsupported by events and by history. There is a page before us but it is blank and without purpose: "la page nous abandonne / le ciel nous abandonne." To harness whatever is necessary for one's creative effort is an exercise that is at once protracted in time and that takes the poet out of it.

With their sense of form and style, the poetry of Stevenson and Plamondon is less interior and more public than Ouellet's. The reader senses a dialogue between himself and the poet. Stevenson's world is a bright world, plastic only because symbolic, pointing rarely with violence to a whole other imaginative dimension of life, full of "green thoughts," "green words" and "green tongues": perhaps here the influence of Andrew Marvell and his mower poems. The trip in Stevenson's garden is unforgettable. The duel with existence there is in the pen of the poet, the same duel that in Plamondon's *Révolté* will have us force time into a corner: "Je condamnerai / le temps / à m'attendre / dans un coin / en forme de glas." Our defense is the metaphor, and our repose is the poem, and the line of verse is our only way to fight back.

ANTHONY RASPA

# CENTRE/KNOT

DON DOMANSKI, *Wolf-Ladder*. Coach House, $12.95.

PAUL DUTTON, *Aurealities*. Coach House, n.p.

DAVID MANICOM, *Theology of Swallows*. Oolichan, $10.95.

THESE THREE volumes of poetry provide different examples of how Canadian poets are responding or not responding to increasingly powerful "decentering" influences emerging from post-modern discourses. David Manicom's second volume of poetry, *Theology of Swallows*, fails to make use of double-entendre and word-play to the same extent as his first volume, *Sense of Season* (1988). It is as if the poet had become more insecure of his ability to control his medium. In fact, this feeling of insecurity and need for control dominates the poems. The poet, referring to swallows, writes,

> . . . The flyers stir us with nostalgia,
> that heavy, watching joy. We are never the centre,
> we are weighted in more places than we can ever
> arrive at. Birds in the earth's grass,
> peering like doctors at the strange, disobedient afternoons.
>
> [Birds, flight]

The Romantic root of Manicom's "nostalgia" for a centred perspective, for the role of the active healer who can order

the day in a decentred world, is revealed in the opening poem entitled "Longitudes." The poem also outlines the volume's "micro/macro" structuring oppositions — individual/world; poet/audience; healing (love)/suffering:

> Two poles clearly true:
> nations dense with suffering,
> my state suffused with you.
> What axis runs through?

The poet reveals his quest to be for a single, unifying axis. Why not axes as the title would suggest?

Manicom highlights the tensions produced by such ethically loaded oppositions. However, his search for a single unifying principle limits the complexity of his explorations. Many of his poems register a fear of being watched by a swallow-like audience:

> I recognize the puzzled tilt of your head
> from the way birds lay their soft heads on
> their feathered shoulders
> when they linger on the ground and
> contemplate our eyes.

Don Domanski does not suffer from the anxieties of modernity articulated by Manicom. In his fifth book of poety, *Wolf-Ladder*, the poet is confident of his ability to guide the reader. Domanski is, as Lorna Crozier has stated, "a lyricist in the grand tradition." The intensity of Domanski's imagery fills the minute spaces in the landscape with a highly charged, mythical energy that touches upon the evangelical. Domanski's lyric energy is produced, in part, by his constant layering of modifying clauses — a technique he has used with increasing success since his second volume *Heaven* (1978).

Domanski's search for details of the land discovers overlooked micro-beings and charges them with spiritual force. Like the "Words Engraved On a Bead," Domanski speaks for

> . . . the god of drowned mouths
> the god of lost hands
> with his rosary of flies
>
> an old amphibious god
> a pre-world divinity
> that leans upon the blood.

What "leans upon the blood" is a fear of not feeling the full intensity of a place and a fear of leaving too soon. The focus, then, is on rendering what lives between/amidst the obvious. The full landscape is captured within a concept of unity reflected in the poet's singular voice. This voice contains the reader (and others):

> As if we were two travellers
> with all our possessions carried in the body
> of a wolf
> lashed to our backs, to those ghost-licked
> shapes, those solid
> and unpainted spaces between the sounds."

This is a traditional function of myth: the rendering of absence as presence. Domanski's development of wolf mythology and his consistent use of wolf imagery create a context in which his poetry emerges as a howl, carying to "those solid and unpainted spaces." It is implied, therefore, that there is no place in which the poet's voice is not heard. Amidst all this luxurious mythologizing, however, there is a neglect of ideology. Power relations are left untouched and I'm left fearing for the sheep within the eerie beauty of Domanski's howl at the moon.

Paul Dutton's *Aurealities*, however, does confront power relations between poet and reader. His latest book of poetry is consistent with his previous works, both with and without The Four Horsemen, in its focus on the textual and aural aspects of language. "Alpha/Omega," the lead poem of the section entitled "vocagraphics," maps particular sounds present in the opening stanza. Letters are moved (stuffed) out from each line, stanza by stanza and the remaining letters are stuffed together:

Any old stuffin
I stuff in I
stuff out.

Any old stuffn
stuff n
stuff out . . .

The final stanza reads, "ff/ff/ff," focusing attention to the "ff" sound of stuffing or the poem. Is "ff" the sound of stuffing or being stuffed or both? It is certainly a sound produced by "stuff." The foregrounding of the concrete aspects or letters in *Aurealities* is consistent with Dutton's previous works in both consistency and quality.

Dutton's explorations of the aural aspects of language produces poetry which challenges the dominant ideologies informing signification, the production of meaning, and even what it is that should inspire poetry. *Aurealities* contains what many language poets refer to as "language for language's sake."

Dutton associates language and reading with jazz. The jazz of language, true to the word's etymological origin, is celebrated as the action in which informing "genes" are mixed, producing new offspring in the musical field of the poems. The poet does not guide, but the production of meaning or experience is shaped by the social act of reading his writing. *Aurealities* attempts to appeal to a broad range of readers in its focus on sound but the poems are still constrained by their own vocabulary. Nonetheless, Dutton's poems have a refreshing rhythm and sound at a time when so much energy is responding to a *need* for control and correctness.

SCOTT MCFARLANE

# JOURNEY AMONG DISCOURSES

STEVE MCCAFFERY. *Theory of Sediment.* Vancouver: Talonbooks, $11.95.

LINDA SPALDING & MICHAEL ONDAATJE, eds. *The Brick Reader.* Toronto: Coach House Press, $22.95.

IT WOULD BE HARD to conceive of two more different books than these two, but as representative texts of concepts of writing at the opposite ends of the literary spectrum, each of them stands out as a superb example of its type. Since Linda Spalding took over the editing, with Michael Ondaatje, of *Brick* in 1985, it has, in Russell Banks's words, become "more deliberately international in its literary interests and more politically engaged, without at the same time giving up its commitment to small presses in general and Canadian writers in particular." It has become the home, as Banks says, of "that sadly neglected form, the personal essay," and, as such, it contains some extremely fine writing by writers most Common Readers recognise and admire. Steve McCaffery, although he could undoubtedly write such an essay, has long set himself, as a writer, against everything such fine writing stands for: as the very title of *Theory of Sediment* implies in its punning way, he seeks to inscribe the materiality of language so forcefully into his text that his readers will simply not be able to ignore it, and the various texts that make up his book ply an economy of words cut off from any sense of 'transparency' or simple emotional declaration.

*The Brick Reader* is a rich cornucopia of essays, letters, memoirs, interviews, and delightful illustrations (most of the latter chosen by Michael Ondaatje, whose eye for the strikingly absurd remains impeccable). As someone who has been taking *Brick* ever since Stan Dragland and Jean McKay started it in the mid 70s, I must

confess a certain fondness for the delightfully arcane reviews of often-out-of-print books which filled it in the early days. That early *Brick* was a beer bash, full of boisterous conversations, personal opinions being put on the line, and the voices ranged from the barely known to the famous. I'm sorry that the editors have chosen to give us nothing from those early issues, but their intent was clearly to create an anthology along the lines of "the more deliberately international" *Brick* of the late 80s. The result is as good as one could expect, and it would be harsh readers, indeed, who did not find much to satisfy them in its pages. Spalding and Ondaatje have contacted some of the best and best known authors in the world and have selected moving, engaging, often thoughtful and provocative, work from them (and if some of the pieces by the best known have appeared first in similar magazines in other countries or as introductions to books, still readers of *Brick* will most likely discover them therein, first).

Most of these writers have a story to tell or an argument to make; they also have a sense of style, especially of personal style, and they write well in terms of a traditional, essentially representative rhetoric. For them the essay is both an open form and an open forum, and they trust their readers to follow the windings, the ins and outs, of their arguments or their remembering. Indeed, some of the best pieces in *The Brick Reader* are memoirs, such as Marilynne Robinson's "When I Was a Child," Eaven Boland's "Outside History," and Jane Urquhart's "A Rough Journey and a Sad Heart to Follow It;" or deeply affecting tributes like Sarah Sheard's of bpNichol and Ken Adachi. But there is much fine writing about other writers and their works here too, and in every case one feels that the writer of the essay is really getting personal here: as when Robert Kroetsch tells us of his enduring love of John Hawkes, Lawrence Garber writes of his life-long engagement with James Jones, Leon Rooke reveals how he discovered Cormac McCarthy in a Victoria second-hand book store, Joyce Marshall recalls her ongoing delight in Ethel Wilson's fiction, or Lola Lemire Tostevin remembers a conversation with Anne Hébert. And as someone who would nearly kill to own a David Milne, I found Saint-Denys Garneau's letter on viewing some of his paintings absolutely fascinating, especially as he responds so fully to the act of, the work of, art-making in Milne's canvases.

Of the interviews, with such authors as Alistair MacLeod, Alice Munro, Kazuo Ishiguro, Russell Banks, Grace Paley, Don DeLillo, and Richard Ford, none is less than informative, and a few are superb. Criticism appears in many forms but is never to formal in appearance; in most cases these are writers writing intensely but freely about other writing they love, and the results are both affecting and stimulating. I especially liked Stan Dragland on George Bowering's *Kerrisdale Elegies*, bpNichol on David McFadden's *The Art of Darkness*, and Robert Stone on Stephen Crane's *The Red Badge of Courage*, but others will have their own favorites. I cannot recommend highly enough George Bowering's witty and paradoxical little *Errata* pieces, but everyone who cares about such things should have the book. Finally, there are the essays which simply give us a complex world of information, of which the two John Berger pieces are extraordinary examples, but I would include Geoffrey York's "Oka," and the various essays by Rohinton Mistry, Russell Hoban, P. K. Page, John Ralston Saul, as exemplary in their own ways.

Far fewer readers will wish to struggle with Steve McCaffery's brilliantly recalcitrant *Theory of Sediment*, but those adventurous souls who try will find much there to puzzle and reward them. As a

leading experimental writer over the past 20 years, McCaffrey has steadily developed theories of language, performance, political responsibility, and their conjuctions in the text. *Theory of Sediment* is a deliberately opaque, deliberately a-meaningful text, in which the material presence of language is foregrounded over its communicative aspects. Yet, however much we recognize that words are only arbitrary signs, the larger context in which they operate, the *langue* that no *parole*, however perversely idiosyncratic, can completely leave behind, assures us that, as readers, we can discover some connection, some meaning in any gathering of them. *Langue* is perversely conservative that way. McCaffrey knows this, and however much he accepts Derrida's assertion of the materiality of all discourse, he also recognizes that readers will produce a meaning, however garbled or confused, no matter what damage the text has done to syntax, grammar, and general structure. His texts are designed to take advantage of that fact as they refuse us the meaning we seek but give us the meaning, at least, of that refusal.

The various texts of *Theory of Sediment* approach their subversive project in different ways. Parts of "Hegel's Eyes," for example, repeat sentence structures while replacing sentence elements, including putting grammatical terms into play where terms of "ordinary life" seemingly belong. The result can be weirdly comic as the text calls attention to the way in which it would otherwise build up an illusion of transparency. Indeed, one of the major items on McCaffery's theoretical agenda is the destruction of linguistic transparency, of the "given" representational "nature" of language. In the various poem-like structures of "Clints & Grykes," he uses formal constraints like allowing only a certain number of letters per line, or interrupting the discourse with numbers, or repeating a sentence form across four lines but always with parts of speech substituted, in order to disrupt our "natural" reading habits as we engage them. "The Entries" parodies dictionary definitions so as to undermine any sense that sense can be made of words as they float free of context. Yet some of these are artfully comic and actually do make a kind of odd sense. Take this on "psychiatry": "invasion of the bloodstream / by any type of snake"; or this, on "optimism": "the sturdier loitering / of bicyclists as the decay / of sense / in men."

Perhaps the most stringent display of language's historical materiality is "Lastworda," a tour-de-force of linguistic research. One long "sentence" of nearly 14 pages, it takes the reader on "a journey back through an English lexicon along the sweep of a single continuum. Commencing with selected words current in contemporary usage the continuum retreats a few lines to each decade, in this way as far back as Anglo-Saxon. (The book's last word, *lastworda*, incidentally, is the Old English word for *memorial.*)" Linear meaning is quickly lost here, yet the fascination is in following a vector back through usage further and further into the apparent chaos of what seems to be an other language: the meaning of the piece is, precisely, what is lost, or at least hidden, of the historical.

Perhaps the strongest criticism one can bring against McCaffery's methods is that they almost necessarily appeal only to an audience already deeply aware of the problem, and of the theoretical attacks being launched against it. Nevertheless, for those who dare the adventure, *Theory of Sediment* offers a stimulating journey among discourses that deepen our appreciation of the complex construction of "ordinary" writing or communication.

DOUGLAS BARBOUR

# RE-MEDIATING BAKHTIN

GARY SAUL MORSON & CARYL EMERSON, *Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of a Prosaics*. Stanford University Press, $49.50/14.95.

GARY SAUL MORSON & CARYL EMERSON, eds, *Rethinking Bakhtin: Extensions and Challenges*. Northwestern University Press, $36.95.

AT THE FIRST Symposium on Literary Theory and Canadian Literature in 1986, Bakhtinian theory so dominated proceedings that George Bowering wished there had been fewer systematic Bakhtinian readings of Canadian texts. Although Bowering's wish has come true in so far as Bakhtin's terms and concepts are now employed more creatively, and often *without* the inverted commas that mark them as another's, Bakhtinian theory continues to offer a set of extremely valuable and powerful tools for reading and writing in Canadian and other post-colonial and multi-cultural contexts which in turn offer fresh critical perspectives on Bakhtin.

Two important new (re) mediations of Bakhtin therefore warrant notice. *Rethinking Bakhtin: Extensions and Challenges* and *Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of a Prosaics* are companion volumes accomplishing complementary tasks. *In Prosaics*, Gary Saul Morson and Caryl Emerson draw on the entire corpus of Bakhtin's available writings to provide the most comprehensive, detailed, and coherent exposition yet written about this work. The essays collected in *Rethinking Bakhtin* explore the limits of Bakhtin's thought, and articulate points of intersection between his perspectives and those of other influential post-structuralist theorists. The interest of both volumes lies not only in their analysis of Bakhtin's ideas, but also in their illumination of — and participation in — the dialogue, often hotly controversial process, euphemistically referred to as "ordering Bakhtin's legacy."

*Prosaics* expressly refutes Michael Holquist and Katerina Clark's contention that Bakhtin authored volumes attributed to his colleagues, V. N. Vološinov and Pavel Medvedev. The diachronic perspectives offered in *Prosaics* argue not only against the ahistorical reductivism of Tzvetan Todorov's *Dialogic Principle*, but also against Holquist and Clark's thesis that Bakhtin's earliest essays contain all his subsequent ideas in embryonic form. The most sustained and vigorous expression of Morson and Emerson's remedial objective, however, is their rejection of the common perception of Bakhtin solely as a Bakunin-like exponent of the anarchic carnivalesque (a perception which arose largely because *Rabelais and His World* was for a time the only Bakhtinian volume available in English). "Carnival," Morson and Emerson contend, "... ultimately proved a dead end" for Bakhtin, not the triumphant culmination of his life's work.

By drawing on Bakhtin's earliest writings (such as "Art and Responsibility" and "Toward a Philosophy of the Act"), Morson and Emerson effectively re-accent Bakhtin's entire oeuvre. They shift the emphasis away from the book on Rabelais and re-centre attention on the writings immediately preceding it (particularly "Discourse in the Novel"), as well on some of the later essays (notably "The Problem of Speech Genres" and "Towards a Methodology for the Human Sciences").

Morson and Emerson organize their narrative of the evolution of Bakhtin's thought around three perennial concerns — Prosaics, Unfinalizability, and Dialogue. "The Shape of a Career," tells a tale of balance lost and subsequently regained: Bakhtin (under the influence of Rabelais) becomes infatuated with Unfinalizability, leaving Prosaics and Dialogue sadly languishing on the sidelines,

to be taken up in later years by a more temperate, more circumspect Bakhtin.

Parts II and III of *Prosaics*, dealing with "Problems of Authorship" and "Theories of the Novel," walk patiently through all Bakhtin's themes and topics. In the name of thoroughness, these sections lapse at times into sentence-by-sentence paraphrases of the well-known major works. Readers already familiar with those texts might wish for a more searching, more *critically* analytical approach, something a little less prosaic, as it were.

The companion volume, *Rethinking Bakhtin: Extensions and Challenges*, satisfies precisely such a need. Morson and Emerson's introductory section contains an extended discussion of Bakhtin's little-known early work, "Toward a Philosophy of the Act." The main body of *Rethinking Bakhtin* consists of eight essays, arranged into pairs in order to structure the volume dialogically. "Extending" Bakhtin theory, Gary Saul Morson and Linda Hutcheon write on parody, while Paul de Man and Mathew Roberts explore "Dialogism and Absence." "Challenges" to Bakhtin (or to certain perceptions of Bakhtin) are mounted by Ann Shukman and Caryl Emerson, who write on "Authority and the Tolstoy Connection"; and by Aaron Fogel and Michael André Bernstein, who offer two intriguing perspectives on "The Dangers of Dialogue." An Appendix contains Caryl Emerson's translation of Bakhtin's Prefaces to Tolstoy's Dramas and to his last novel, *Resurrection*.

Although Morson and Hutcheon's respective historicizations of parody are fascinating and useful, Fogel and Bernstein's discussions of "The Dangers of Dialogue" remain for me the most stimulating and suggestive essays in this book. Fogel's "Coerced Speech and the Oedipus Dialogue Complex" analyses the politics of dialogues across lines of power difference (including a text's dialogic engagement with readers), to argue that storytelling is itself an imperialistic practice, "a sublimation at most of other desires to conquer." Fogel's discussion of Conrad implies that Bakhtin's paradigm of dialogue between free, equal, willingly attentive interlocutors proves in historical actuality to be the exception rather than the rule. From a reading of Conrad's torture scenes, Fogel alerts us to the extreme romanticism of Bakhtin's view of anacrisis as solely a *verbal* process of eliciting another's words. This romanticism is all the more surprising given that Bakhtin worked for so long under the grim shadow of Stalinist totalitarianism.

The most intriguing and radical challenges to Bakhtinian orthodoxy are mounted in Michael André Bernstein's "The Poetics of *Ressentiment*." Re-reading Dostoevsky's renditions of the pain of *ressentiment* (reminiscence-as-suffering) for those characters imprisoned in a world where originality and singularity are fetishised, but where all utterance remains ineluctably citational, Bernstein demonstrates that dialogism in Dostoevsky's novels "is not just a literary technique . . . but rather the fundamental problem with which the characters [and readers] consciously wrestle." Bernstein isolates the "darker and more desperate" aspects of dialogism, and challenges Bakhtin's distinction between (and differential valuations of) dialogue and cacophony. After touching on, but unfortunately not pursuing, the fascinating question of the genderness of Bakhtin's dialogic ideal, Bernstein develops very persuasively the broader argument that an uncritical embrace of dialogism might prove disabling to marginalised individuals and groups whose psychology or political survival depends on finding a unitary, pro-active, non-citational voice.

To return to Canadian literature, one need only think of the struggles of Atwood's or Munro's heroines to find a voice

of their own, or of the vain attempts of Wiebe's Big Bear to overcome the diffuse, politically impotent polyphony of the Plains Cree, to see that Bernstein's argument might find considerable support in Canadian literary circles, and that Canadian literature itself can re-mediate Bakhtin.

PENNY VAN TOORN

# TRANSFORMATIONS

HORTENSE SPILLERS, ed. *Comparative American Identities: Race, Sex, and Nationality in the Modern Text.* Routledge, $17.50 pa.

HARTMUT LUTZ, *Contemporary Challenges: Conversations with Canadian Native Authors.* Fifth House, $15.95, pa.

HORTENSE SPILLERS brings together distinguished critical voices on the tripartite subject of race, sex, and national identity in modern and contemporary texts. Eight essays (and an introduction) in cultural criticism treat literature and film of the "Americas" — broadly defined to include the United States, Canada, Latin America and the Caribbean. The authors agree that in such a multinational environment, partially "invented" in the first place under a multinational and culturally conflicted European gaze, no essential, unified American identity could ever have developed. Accordingly, the essays in Spillers' collection variously investigate complex issues of race and gender as these pertain to the dialectical development of national identity in a land characterized by profound differences between marginalized and mainstream populations. In Spillers' words, the essays focus on the "ways and means of negotiating borders and centers [that] constitute a new area studies in the liberal arts curriculum." The essays also focus on national identity as it develops through intertextual processes that, according to Spillers, began with the first efforts of Europeans to imagine America, efforts inevitably bound up with the texts of European culture.

Perhaps the most original and provocative work in this collection of consistently excellent essays is Vévé A. Clark's "Developing Diaspora Literacy and *Marasa* Consciousness." Clark defines "diaspora literacy" as dependent upon a semiotic code assumed by a narrator and required of a reader who wishes to make sense of works written by authors inscribing in their works elements of African and Caribbean indigenous cultures. Clark also describes the reader-role appropriate to decoding these cross-cultural texts as a *marasa* consciousness — a role that derives from and resembles the participatory role of "Vodoun initiates instructed in the interpretation of signs." In fascinating discussions of works by Marie Chauvet, Maryse Condé, Paule Marshall and Rigoberta Menchú, Clark goes on to outline the intertextual *marasa* relationship between and among these texts. Clark's essay is an invaluable contribution to the development of reader-response theory apropos the cross-cultural text.

Also extremely valuable are Mae G. Henderson's "Toni Morrison's *Beloved*: Re-Membering the Body as Historical Text" and Kimberly W. Benston's "Re-Weaving the 'Ulysses Scene': Enchantment, Post-Oedipal Identity, and the Buried Text of Blackness in Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon*." Both essays incorporate an appropriate, sophisticated critical apparatus to disclose Morrison's strategies for subverting and revising traditional aesthetic forms to reveal the "buried texts of blackness" (Benston's term). Overall, Spillers has put together an impressive collection of essays offering the reader startling perspectives on American national identities as these arise at the "margins" of mainstream, Eurocentric culture and as they also play transformative roles within that culture.

Likewise investigating tensions between

marginalized and mainstream cultures is Hartmut Lutz's collection of interviews with Canadian Native writers. Lutz interviews eighteen authors ranging from the well-known, such as Tomson Highway, to the lesser-known.

Of particular interest in the current era of educational reform toward multiculturalism are the diverse opinions of these Native writers on the subject of "appropriation," which may take at least two forms: non-Native people may appropriate Native stories either because they truly admire them and wish to share them with a wide audience or else because they themselves wish to gain money or fame as writers; non-Native people also transgress when they appropriate by misinterpreting Native stories and thus misrepresenting Native cultures to the world at large. The writers that Lutz interviews do not, of course, share a single opinion on this difficult subject. Some are glad that non-Natives are finally recognizing the value of Native art, and some are even eager to help in this process. Others, however, justifiably fear that behind the current trendiness of Indian literature is yet another act of co-optation and commodification of Native culture by the mainstream. Nearly every one of the authors whom Lutz interviews has a few words of advice for the well-intentioned non-Native who wants to study, teach, or tell Native stories. The advice is to respect the works and the people they belong to by first *learning* about the material through *listening* to the only true voices of authority on the subject — the Native peoples themselves. In the words of Lenore Keeshig-Tobias, who says she is willing to give such cautious non-Natives the benefit of the doubt: "The way things operate in Native society: if you are doing something and you are doing okay, you are not going to hear anything from anybody. They are just going to let you exist and go and do what you have to do. But as soon as you make a mistake: watch out! That's how it works. So, you'll know."

Lutz, who is from Germany, also points out some important differences and similarities between Canadian and American Native people. His perspective as an apparently trusted "outsider" is valuable (many Native writers agreed to talk with him, and several state their trust of him outright); he avoids taking center stage in these collected "conversations," but the reader will appreciate the subtle evidence of his presence as a sensitive editor and interviewer, asking intelligent questions and allowing the many different voices of these writers to emerge. Lutz has also evoked from these writers such substantial information on a wide range of subjects: Native politics, oral versus written Native literature and matters of genre, questions of Native identity and voice, and the cross-cultural "messages" that some Native writers are attempting to deliver.

Despite their often embittering experiences as colonized and devalued people, the writers included in Lutz's volume seem in the long run extraordinarily tolerant and hopeful about the future. Most of them see themselves and other Native writers as playing a positive role in the development of cross-cultural communication and instruction. For instance, Beth Cuthand's last words in her conversation with Lutz are these: "I see a new beginning. . . . I also see that down the road, someday, we are going to come to terms with cultural differences, with racism, and it is going to free up humanity to do better things than to kill each other." Cuthand would probably agree that such "killing" has taken place through the letter and the word, as well as through physical acts of violence. Native and non-Native readers alike will find much in Lutz's book to help them avoid the kinds of "violence" that can be done in word and deed owing to ignorance of cultural differences.

CATHERINE RAINWATER

# FAMILY RESEMBLANCE

MASAO MIYOSHI & H. D. HAROOTUNIAN, eds., *Postmodernism and Japan*. Duke, $30.00

LINDA HUTCHEON & MARION RICHMOND (eds.), *Other Solitudes: Canadian Multicultural Fictions*. Oxford, $14.95.

MAGGIE GOH & CRAIG STEPHENSON (eds.), *Between Worlds: A Collection of Writings on the Canadian Immigrant Experience*. Rubicon Publishing Inc., $16.95.

THESE THREE COLLECTIONS bear a sort of family resemblance to each other. A is related to B; B is related to C; but A and C have little in common.

The topic that links the Miyoshi/Harootunian and Hutcheon/Richmond collections is postmodernism, and the distinct relationship Japan and Canada, respectively, may or may not have to that concept. It is commonly said that "'Japan just *is* the postmodern'", and the essays in the first volume critically examine what such a statement might mean. The Hutcheon/Richmond collection, on the other hand, following the lead of Hutcheon's own *The Canadian Postmodern*, seems to be concerned with asserting that Canada is (rather than "*just* is") postmodern.

The Miyoshi/Hartootunian collection is based on a series of workshops held in the United States in 1987, and the bulk of the papers appeared first in Japanese that same year, and then a year later in the *South Atlantic Quarterly*. To the original collection this edition adds essays by the architect Isozaki Arata and the novelist Öe Kenzaburô.

Japan's relationship to postmodernism is of course heavily conditioned by its response to and perceived place in the modern, or more correctly, in "modernization." A text central to several of the discussions in this collection is the 1942 Kyoto symposium on *kindai no chôkoku*, "overcoming the modern." "For the most part," Harootunian writes, "'modern' meant the West, its science, and the devastating effects it had inflicted on the face of traditional social life." Kawakami Tetsutarô, one of the organizers of the conference, "felt that the discussions reflected a struggle between 'the blood of the Japanese, which truly motivates our intellectual life,' and 'Western knowledge, which has been superimposed upon Japan in modern times'". Both Harootunian's and Naoki Sakai's essays explore, in part, a post-war reading of this symposium by Takeuchi Yoshimi (1910-77), who stressed the European nature of modernity, and the position of the Orient in it as Other. It was this imposition of marginality that led Kôyama Iwao (1905- ), again in 1942, to call for pluralistic world history. Yet, as Sakai concludes:

> Pluralistic world history proves itself to be another version of monistic history. I do not know how one could possibly avoid this conclusion when the subjects of world history are equated to nations ... What they [Kôyama, et al.] were opposed to was the fact that, in the Eurocentric arrangement of the world, the putative unity of the Japanese happened to be excluded from the center.

What the Great East Asian Co-prosperity Sphere and the second world war could not achieve, however, modernization theory could. Japan's central place in the "modernization" of Asia was articulated at yet another conference, on the "Modernization of Japan," in Hakone in 1960, led by such famous American historians as E. O. Reischauer.

While the essays by Najita, Harootunian, Sakai, and Koschmann deal with the historiographic side of the coin, the majority of the remaining essays look precisely at the issue of culture in relation to national identity and postmodernism. Several of these, in good postmodernist fashion, deconstruct the "modern," and use a plethora of inverted commas to do it.

A more positive view of postmodernism is the basis for the Hutcheon/Richmond

collection: Canada as *the* postmodern, pluralistic society. Few shadows from consumerism, nationalism, or logocentrism fall on the stories reprinted within. Instead, the concern is to "investigate the intersection of ... the ideal and the ideology" of "the multiracial, pluri-ethnic nature of Canada," a regionalized national identity that defines itself "against centres." The selections are arranged chronologically, according to the birthdate of the author, starting with Josef Skvorecky (b. 1924) and concluding with Paul Yee (b. 1956), which provides an interesting historical perspective on the differing nature of the immigration experience. Each selection is followed by an interview with the author, and the entire collection is followed by a final section of three interviews, rather curiously entitled "The First and Founding Nations Respond."

One half of the eighteen authors are discussed in Hutcheon's *Canadian Postmodern*; those are not authors born after 1950. The interviews generally rehearse the same set topics: ghettoization vs. celebration, melting pot vs. mosaic (Hutcheon notes that "the political and cultural ambiguities of Canada's relations with her powerful southern neighbour are the topic of conversation in over half the interviews," and so on. The stories are mostly family histories of immigration, supporting Cole Harris's "'archipelago' theory of Canadian regionalism, [where] the historical settlement pattern — island by island, across the country — created socially and culturally disparate groupings." The selections also support what Hutcheon defined in 1988 as the distinctively Canadian postmodern:

> What [Stan] Fogel sees as important to postmodernism in America — its deconstructing of national myths and identity — is possible within Canada only when those myths and identity have first been defined ... Canadian novelists must return to their history ... in order to discover (before they can contest) their historical myths" (*Canadian Postmodern*).

The third collection is presumably intended to encourage that kind of discovery in the classroom: it is specifically geared for Senior ESL and English courses and comes with a teacher resource book. It includes poetry, fiction and non-fiction. Some of the selections are wonderful, Annie Dillard's "Sojourners," Nazneen Sadig's "Ice Bangles," Wayson Choy's "The Jade Peony" among them, but others are very strange: a longish quotation from Lao Tzu, Atwood's "The Man From Mars," and an essay by Fil Fraser that presumes a rather extensive knowledge of the last thirty years of Canadian history. However, the publisher received suggestions and evaluations from educators in Vancouver and Toronto and teachers should find the book useful in bringing some of Canada's many voices into the classroom.

JOSHUA MOSTOW

# TELLING SUBJECTIVITY

KAY J. ANDERSON, *Vancouver's Chinatown: Racial Discourse in Canada, 1875-1980.* McGill-Queen's Press, $34.95.

ROY MIKI & CASSANDRA KOBAYASHI, *Justice in Our Time.* Talonbooks, $18.95.

THROUGHOUT *Vancouver's Chinatown: Racial Discourse in Canada, 1875-1980,* Kay Anderson reiterates her promise to explore the concept of Chinatown as a "western" construction, designed by eurocentric Canadians to contain the equally artificial idea of innate "Chineseness." Not simply a chronicling of the systemic racism endemic to all three levels of government (although it is that), Anderson's text traces the complex development of racialization surrounding this construct, "the process," she defines in Miles' words, "by which attributes such as skin colour, language, birthplace, and cultural practices are given social significance as markers of distinction."

Anderson spends the bulk of her text in establishing the evaluative nature of the terms "Chinatown" as a historically persistent signifier of the impermeable boundary erected by a white, Christian, dominant "us" as a defense against a "Chinese," heathen, subordinate "them," regardless of the multiplicity of self-definitions held by Canadians of Chinese ancestry. In the space of *Vancouver's Chinatown,* this process of signification acquires force as the motivation behind the myriad governmental policies designed to maintain that distinction. Immigration exclusionism of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; discriminatory municipal licensing practices; targeted urban "renewal" projects (that is, slum clearance); denial of the franchise to all Canadians of Chinese ancestry until 1947 — these and numerous other actions emerge as forced inscriptions of the otusider status of Chinatown's residents. Neither do the less overtly racist ideologies of liberalism and pluralism escape Anderson's hand. She exposes both the showcasing of Chinatown for Vancouver's 1936 Jubilee celebrations, and the "courting" of Chinatown in the multicultural flush of the 1970s as more subdued components of the same assertion of difference employed by those determined to "keep British Columbia white."

At times the magnitude of this task overwhelms the narrative. The reader must follow Anderson from phrenology through social Darwinism to multiculturalism, and from Aristotle to Foucault, absorbing citations of very nearly every major theorist on the way. Some academics may be pleased with the breadth of such research, even if Anderson's treatment of the respective theories is, at times, thin, but the balance of her intended wider audience will likely become impatient with such grand parameters. Similarly, those Foucaulvian enthusiasts tantalized by the book's subtitle will be disappointed: that theorist makes only fleeting appearances.

Such reservations ought not to detract from the importance of this work. Anderson has amassed a substantial body of letters, newspaper articles, and Vancouver city council, legislative, and parliamentary minutes, which, by their sheer existence, support her thesis quite adequately. But this writer is not content to let Canadian policy makers shoot themselves in the foot: her examination of each incident and quotation assists the reader in making critical connections between theory and praxis, often—as in the case of "[d]edicated officer Bonham['s]" barbecued meat crusade of the 1970's — in a wryly ironic voice which lightens the task.

At times, Anderson's text falters over ambiguous or inadequate documentation (Where, for instance, does W. I. Thomas assert that "if a thing is defined by people as real . . . it is real in its consequences"?).

It even has its own share of troubling definitions: truth is parenthetically defined as "a one-to-one correspondence with what is 'out there'"; the designation "Chinese" is used at times, apparently unselfconsciously and without quotation marks, to refer to Canadians of Chinese ancestry. Nonetheless, this significant work satisfies Anderson's proposed intention to "expose the susceptibility of racial beliefs to change and challenge," and is a crucial resource both for those studying that process of change, and those attempting actively to meet the challenge.

Whereas Anderson explores a discursive theory of racism, in *Justice in our Time: The Japanese Canadian Redress Settlement*, authors Roy Miki and Cassandra Kobayashi construct a subjectivity once silenced by such discourse. In his preface, Art Miki, the president of the National Association of Japanese Canadians (NAJC), introduces this book as a celebration of the redress settlement obtained by the NAJC on behalf of the Japanese Canadians who suffered at the hand of the Canadian government during the second World War. Miki and Kobayashi expand this theme of celebration in their acknowledgement that the realization of the phrase "justice in our time" is also significant as an "affirmation of human rights." Between these two statements unfolds a narrative of each stage in the struggle for redress that consumed the members of the national movement from January 1984 until September 22, 1988, the day Art Miki and Prime Minister Muroney signed the Redress Agreement.

Through the efforts of those involved in the redress movement, Canadians are hearing the injustices: by November 1942, 22,000 Canadians of Japanese ancestry—living within 100 miles of the British Columbia coast (the so-called "protected area"), had been forcibly uprooted from their homes, dispossesed of their property and businesses, and interned in various residential and work camps. A small proportion of this group were allowed to resettle outside the "protected area." By the spring of 1945, Japanese Canadians were required to "choose" between the two government policies of "dispersal" (resettlement east of the Rockies) and "repatriation" to Japan. Despite the war's end, and the fact that no Japanese Canadian had ever been charged with sabotage or disloyalty — an admission made by Mackenzie King even in 1944 — it was 1 April, 1949 before these Canadians were allowed to return to the west coast.

*Justice in our Time* repeats this story along with a telling of redress, but intersecting the text, often obliquely, are photographs, testimonials, biographical sketches, government notices and letters, tables, and figures which not only forestall the easy read of a linear evolution of human triumph, but also tell other stories, in insistent voices. Where possible, each voice is named, to the extreme of listing the 700 individual and 60 corporate members of The National Coalition for Japanese Canadian Redress. Too familiar with the silencing generations of racialization, Miki and Kobayashi appear determined not to trade, as their government did, in the anonymity of stereotype.

The didactic thrust of this project is softened by the visual in *Justice in our Time*. Whether it is a photograph of Hide (Hyodo) Shimizu raising a happy toast the evening before the Ottawa Redress Rally, or a group huddled in raincoats as they listen to Norm Oikawa tell his internment experience, the pictures tell of people reclaiming and making their history. And after the long hours of negotiating the redress settlement, the double page of "family photos" of the negotiators tells of a community that, despite the conflict that inheres in any group of individuals, worked for justice.

MARILYN IWAMA

# BUILDING LIVES

ANN W. FISHER-WIRTH, *William Carlos Williams and Autobiography*. Pennsylvania State, $24.95.

PAUL MARIANI, *William Carlos Williams: A New World Naked*. Norton, $16.95.

IRVING LAYTON & ROBERT CREELEY, *The Complete Correspondence, 1953-1978*. McGill-Queen's, $32.95.

PAUL MARIANI'S biography of Williams first came out in 1981 and was soon recognized as a landmark in literary biography. This Norton paperback edition is, alas, unrevised, so that the (admittedly few) factual errors of the first edition remain. Nevertheless, it provides a good opportunity to see how Mariani's biographical technique — complete empathy with the subject — has stood the test of time. A decade on, Mariani's massive work, in his own proud words the document of a "ten-year obsession with another man's life," still reads well, although some of the passages where the author's desire to merge with his subject leads to linguistic mimicry ("Art was no effete aesthetic game, damn it . . . ," "Hell, what could the English show the Americans now?"), seem less palatable today. Mariani himself sensed the potential embarrassment of this approach when he conceded in the book's preface that in his search for "the inner life of Williams himself" he might have infused too much of his own life into that of his subject: the poet's biography had, in some ways, also served the critic's autobiographical impulses.

If Mariani wanted to unearth the poet's "inner life," Ann Fisher-Wirth argues in *Williams and Autobiography* that Williams himself had been doing nothing much else most of the time — that, in short, the poet himself had been his own most eager and consistent biographer. "Autobiography," in the comprehensive sense which Fisher-Wirth gives to the term, marks the "place in which a writer discovers his or her inner standing." Unsurprising as this definition might seem, Fisher-Wirth's approach to the Williams canon does at first promise some fresh insights, and were it just for the unusual selection and arrangement of the texts she discusses — her argument moves from the elusive *Autobiography* (1952) back to Williams's play *A Dream of Love* (1948) and the very early poetic fragment which Fisher-Wirth entitles "Philip and Oradie" and then forward again to poems like "Love Song" (1915) and "The Crimson Cyclamen" (1936) and, finally, "Asphodel, That Greeny Flower" (1955).

Yet Fisher-Wirth's text raises serious questions as well, and not only because, unlike Mariani, she never really addresses the problem of her own, the critic's, "standing." Fisher-Wirth's almost wholesale rejection of Williams's *Autobiography* in the first two chapters of her book as not satisfyingly "autobiographical" (especially when compared with a work like *Paterson*) ignores differences of genre and, more importantly, also makes us wonder about Fisher-Wirth's own definition of biographical "truth." How do we know that some texts are more "true" than others, and is it really the purpose of autobiographical literature to reveal the writer, as Fisher-Wirth seems to believe, in "all the truth of nature"? Williams himself apparently did not always think so and warned the readers of his autobiography: "I was a liar and would always be one, *sauve qui peut*!" Incidentally, the rather late essay from which Fisher's epigraph is taken ("The artist is always and forever painting only one thing: a self-portrait"), suggests that the artist's truest self-portrait may be the one which is most hidden: "It is his own face in the terms of another face" ("Emanuel Romano: The Portrait," 1951). According to Fisher's logic, "innocence" is, since nobody can really be "innocent" this side of

paradise, bad, mere show, a role, while "nakedness" (one of the most frequently used terms in the book) is good, since it implies, in the biblical sense, knowledge and therefore also forgiveness. The poet who declines to speak about "sin" must, in these terms, be less truthful, believable and "brave" than the one who anguishedly admits it. The important methodological distinction between the author's biographical self and the author-as-textual-subject is, at any rate, ignored throughout the book.

For all Fisher-Wirth's talk about sex and "fornication," it is clear that her argument, which disparages the "conventionality" of Williams's *Autobiography*, finally itself subscribes to a rather homely Christian view of autobiography: "pain brings forth joy," as Fisher-Wirth writes later in the book. Even in the section on "Asphodel," which might very well be the most detailed explanation we have of the poem, too much of Fisher-Wirth's argument is either just plain statement ("This is what it feels like to be human,") or poetic paraphrase of extensive quotations ("... the deathless imagination flowers without ceasing ..."), and too little of it is grounded in careful analysis. We still lack an adequate comment on Williams's readiness to acknowledge what would count, by the same conventional standards which Fisher-Wirth thinks apply to the *Autobiography*, as definitely "unpleasant," as, Fisher-Wirth would say, "surliness," "bitterness" or "self-hatred." Passages in which the unrepentant author calls himself a "liar," in which the doctor repeatedly admits that he would rather treat his patients as "material for a work of art" than as persons to be "cured," and notably the gruesome account of "Pop Williams's" death, brought about by the son's own "unjustifiable" medical intervention, make *The Autobiography of William Carlos Williams* a much darker text than Fisher-Wirth realizes. This would also hold true for the doctor stories or a poem like "The Ogre," presenting as it does the thinly veiled scandalous fantasies of a pediatrician (some important insights on this topic are contained in Marjorie Perloff's 1980 *Georgia Review* essay). As Williams very well knew, the foregrounding of the mask — in this case, the mask of the doctor who exploits his patients' nakedness for other than medical purposes — can itself turn into a mask. Interestingly enough, right at the beginning of his Autobiography, Williams casts doubt on the validity of the whole project itself: "the hidden core of my life will not easily be deciphered." Or, as Williams wrote in a little-known but interesting autobiographical text that is not mentioned in Fisher-Wirth's book: "I reserve myself for myself" ("Three Professional Studies," 1917).

This is not to say that Williams was aloof. Fortified by generous quotations from Williams's unpublished correspondence, Mariani makes a strong case for the sympathy Williams would show towards younger American poets like Robert Creeley or Allen Ginsberg who he felt were carrying on his search for a new idiom in poetry. Thus, Williams also wrote letters of encouragement to Irving Layton, the Canadian poet who was writing in an altogether different tradition, and his "Note on Layton" served as an introduction to the younger wirter's *The Improved Binoculars* (1956). Letters indeed are the very stuff of literary biography, and not surprisingly the more interesting passages in the correspondence of Layton and Creeley, which has now been made available in an edition by Ekbert Faas and Sabrina Reed, have already appeared in Elspeth Cameron's 1985 biography of the Canadian poet. The annotations to the present edition are generally helpful, although some readers might want to question the need of pointing out to an audience interested in Lay-

ton, a writer notoriously wary of tags, that Mark Twain was an "American," Kafka an "Austrian writer" and Sigmund Freud a "neurologist" — why not also identify Shakespeare or Mozart, then? (Louis Zukofsky by the way, is consistently misspelled as "Zukovsky").

Are these letters (the earliest goes back to February 17, 1953; the last hurried note is dated November 14, 1978) autobiographically relevant or interesting? Creeley and Layton did not meet in person until 1963, so their dialogue for a large part took place on paper only. Technical questions surrounding the publication of Layton's collection *In the Midst of My Fever* (1954) are thoroughly and sometimes a little cryptically discussed, unless one keeps all the abbreviations in mind ("Some more IMOF came from BMC . . ."), and Layton and Creeley also exchange criticisms and suggestions for the revision of each other's texts to be published in magazines like Layton's *CIV/n* or Creeley's *The Black Mountain Review*. Without a "mag," Layton points out, Canada, "this huge country of ours," would be just a literary wasteland, "a derisive epithet." In a different context, Layton once boasted that he put Canadian poetry on the map by first of all putting himself on it, and the "immediate presence" of the Canadian, which, although he had never seen him, so greatly impressed Creeley, can be felt even in this correspondence. One would look in vain, however, for Fisher-Wirth's "truth of nature" in these exchanges, obsessed as they are with such details as the missing period at the end of a line or the hypen after the word that ought to have been a dash. As Layton writes to Creeley, "high thinking and deep feeling belong to a bygone age." Disappointing as these letters may sometimes seem to the literary theorist as well as to the biographer more interested in, say, the juicy details of Layton's tempestuous life, they help us to realize that writing can be a way of life too — from the first, very private idea for a good metaphor all they say through to finding the right publisher, proofreading and, finally, the excitement of seeing one's own text in print. "With careful fragments," as Layton once put it ("Providence"), do we build lives."

CHRISTOPH IRMSCHER

# SEXUALITIES

MARJORIE GARBER, *Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety*. Routledge, $43.95 (cl).

DIANA FUSS, ed., *Inside/out: Gay Theories, Lesbian Theories*. Routledge, $74.50 (cl); $19.95 (pa).

THE ROUTLEDGE catalogue seems set to become the gay and cultural studies bible for the nineties. Two recent offerings, Marjorie Garber's *Vested Interests* and the essay collection *Inside/Out* edited by Diana Fuss, indicate the present richness of the field.

*Vested Interests* explores the figure of the transvestite as symptomatic of "cultural anxiety." Garber argues that many gender studies and feminist texts look through, rather than at, the transvestite, recuperating the figure into a male/female or homo/heterosexual binarism rather than celebrating its disruptive potential as a "third" element. In a redeployment of Freud, Garber argues that heterosexuality is founded upon "the naturalizing of the fetish" of the penis. Culture is thus continuous theatre, a reenactment of fetishism in which the phallus "become re-literalized as a stage prop, a detachable object. No one has the phallus." Hence the cultural centrality of the transvestite and the "category crisis" it introduces.

Garber's text is divided into two sections; the first, "Transvestite Logics"

traces transvestism's part in cultural production while the second, "Transvestite Effects," discusses at length specific examples of cross-dressing. The range of the book is dizzying, discussion of dress codes in Japan following examination of medieval European sumptuary laws, Madonna rubbing shoulders with Shakespeare. *Vested Interests* is also stylistically engaging, intelligent, insightful, and mercifully free of jargon. The sheer audacity of its performance — so many cultural balls in the air at one time — temporarily blinds the reader to its weaknesses: the frequent thinness of research material, and thoretical conjuring tricks that do not stand up to close examination. An article in the *New York Times* does not seem adequate basis for the discussion of dress codes in Japanese schools; theoretical "back-formations" such as "transvestite panic" on the model of Sedgwick's male homosexual panic are glibly inserted without analytical foundation. The greatest weakness in *Vested Interests* is, paradoxically, a marked reluctance to interrogate the notion of culture itself. A discussion of Kabuki leads into *M. Butterfly*, followed by an exposition of Balzac's *Sarrasine*. Garber's rhetoric flows on, but there is a tendency for each item to become a picture at an exhibition, removed from the context of its material production. As a lucid preliminary survey, however, Garber's text merits attention.

The essay collection *Inside/Out* is the first to give a broad sampling of work being done in the most productive area of contemporary theory and criticism. Diana Fuss's volume features not only the stars of lesbian and gay theory — Judith Butler, Ed Cohen, Lee Edelman and Cindy Patton — but also essays by graduate students and AIDS activists. The result is a pleasing and provoking mixture of modes of address.

*Inside/Out* scorns the smoothness of *Vested Interests*: it is structured so as to encourage dialogue and even contradiction. Its title reflects the exploration in Fuss's introductory essay of homosexuality's paradoxical position as exterior yet foundational to heterosexuality. In the following essays, Judith Butler's call to "gender insubordination," to play and replay the "subversive possibilities" of drag contrasts sharply with Carole-Anne Tyler's archaeology of a particular transvestite moment in "Boys Will Be Girls." Butler is again interrogated and found wanting in Ed Cohen's rumination on gay identity. Richard Dyer, while acknowledging, like Butler and Cohen, that we live in a universe after "Roland Barthes' pronouncement of the death of the Author and Michel Foucault's labeling of the homosexual as a social construction" argues that the author's identity still matters. In a healthy counterpoint to Fuss' and Butler's flights of theory, Dyer suggests that analyses of identity be firmly grounded in a material analysis of the author's and the reader's social position within discourse.

A second, valuable feature of the essays in *Inside/Out* is their ability to make canonical texts seem strange again, or rather, perhaps, to explain why they have always been so hauntingly familiar. Lee Edelman, in a typically ambitious essay, reads the journal of an eighteenth-century Frenchman in London in conjunction with Cleland, Smollett, Freud and Derrida, to establish the threat that "preposterous" representations of sodomy pose to an epistemology based upon the distinction between observer and observed. D. A. Miller, not at his most pellucid, nonetheless splices together a telling analysis of the representation of closeted homosexuality and heterosexuality in Hitchcock's *Rope*. Patricia White detects the haunting presence of the lesbian and defences against it in both Hollywood Horror and in feminist film theory; Michèle Barale, in contrast, shows how

the artwork on the covers of various editions of a recognisably lesbian text, Radcliffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness*, manages to colonize the novel for and place it within the dominant discourse.

Essays on activism and art during the present AIDS crisis and on pedagogy round out the collection, providing a timely reminder of how closely lesbian and gay theory is imbricated in the political. Given Fuss's expressed interest in pedagogy in *Essentially Speaking*, it is disappointing that neither Simon Watney's nor Cindy Patton's essays directly addresses the pragmatics of classroom teaching. A further disappointment is *Inside/Out*'s limited international scope: Watney's essay on education in the U.K. after the passing of Section 28 of the Local Government Act in 1988 is a notable exception. Fuss does not include essays by European theorists such as Gert Hekma, and her collection does not address the question of different cultural constructions of homosexuality, or the place of sexuality within development. What is inside *Inside/Out* is very good, but it is a little disturbing that a text that produces homosexuality as "an indispensable interior exclusion — an outside which is inside interiority making the articulation of the latter possible" should itself be exclusionary.

PHILIP HOLDEN

# NEW ALLIANCES

ROBYN R. WARHOL, *Gendered Interventions: Narrative Discourse in the Victorian Novel.* Rutgers.

MICHAEL MOON. *Disseminating Whitman: Revision and Corporeality in "Leaves of Grass."* Harvard.

THE EXPLOSION in both feminist and gay and lesbian studies has recently produced several critical works that go beyond the now lukewarm debates of essentialism versus constructionism or French versus American feminism to forge new theoretical alliances. Moon's and Warhol's works apply new paradigms to American and British texts; in doing so they indicate the potential that such combinations of theories may have in the area of Canadian literature.

Robyn Warhol's *Gendered Interventions* explores a new, if not completely uncharted field in its efforts to develop a feminist narratology. Focusing upon British and American novels written in the period 1845-1865, Warhol identifies an "engaging mode" of direct address as characteristic of narration gendered as feminine. Unlike masculine strategies of direct address which, through their irony and metafictionality, introduce a distance between narrator and narratee, engaging interventions by the narrator serve, Warhol stresses, to bring narrator and reader into a close relationship, and hence to incite political action.

Warhol's theoretical groundwork is well laid, although her narratological framework inevitably results in some sidestepping of the contemporary debate over agency in feminist theory. Her illustration of the thesis is less satisfactory. Holding up Gaskell's *Mary Barton* as a text exemplifying engaging address, Warhol has then to add strained biographical interpolations to explain the absence of such a strategy from *North and South* or the *Life of Charlotte Bronte*. She elaborately discloses the "distancing strategies" of Kingsley's *Yeast* and Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* but only to conclude that "[t]he most significant difference [from Gaskell], however, is in the contrast in the narrators' attitudes." "Attitudes" here seems a strangely subjective term in the context of a putatively objective narratological analysis. Further discussion of counter-examples, of the female authors of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and *Adam Bede* "treading

the masculine territory of distancing narrative discourse," and of the appropriation of feminine technique by the authors of *Can You Forgive Her?* and *Bleak House* does not clarify the argument; indeed, the number of counter-examples throws the premise of the original identification of "feminine" as opposed to "masculine" narrative strategies into question.

Michael Moon's *Disseminating Whitman* also yokes together two disparate critical approaches in the study of a series of nineteenth-century texts. Founded upon the seminal work of Eve Sedgwick and Michael Foucault, *Disseminating Whitman* mingles Sharon Cameron's poetics of embodiment with a return to Freud in order to produce an innovative reading of the genesis and early development of *Leaves of Grass*. Moon explores Whitman's "project of subverting the generally repressive discourse of male sexuality in his day" in the successive editions of his major work. Using two versions of one of Whitman's early published stories, "The Child's Companion," as a paradigmatic text in the discussion of self-censorship and specularity, Moon traces an evolutionary attitude in Whitman's representation of male sexuality and homosexuality desire within the first four editions of *Leaves of Grass*. The first edition privileges a fluidity of both form and content, destabilising a masculine gaze; the second moves beyond such textual indeterminacy to a recognition of Oedipal prohibitions. The third edition, published in 1860, reaches a compromise, recognising the presence of difference without overestimating its importance; the fourth illustrates the power of the maternal which, Moon maintains, is associated in Whitman's poetry with the liminality between life and death.

Moon's study is marked by a return to Freud through Lacanian lenses that provides both keen analytical tools and a teleological framework. Yet the potential effectiveness of Moon's methodology is undermined by his reluctance to interrogate psychoanalytic assumptions fully; *Disseminating Whitman* does not raise many of the questions regarding the heterosexism of Lacanian psychoanalysis, with its association of desire and difference that contemporary theorists such as Michael Warner have addressed. Casual references to Irigaray, Kristeva and Lacan without an exploration of the problematic place of male homosexuality in their work is a small but troubling blind spot in an otherwise exemplary cultural study.

PHILIP HOLDEN

# HUMANISM VS. DECONSTRUCTION

BERNARD HARRISON, *Inconvenient Fictions: Literature and the Limits of Theory*. Yale, n.p.

GEOFFREY H. HARTMAN, *Minor Prophecies: The Literary Essay in the Cultural Wars*. Harvard, n.p.

Is HUMANISM compatible with deconstruction? Can the conversational style of criticism be mixed with the theoretical? Both books under review attempt in various ways to give a positive answer to these questions. Bernard Harrison argues that deconstruction and humanism do not necessarily exclude each other, despite the evident mutual hostility. He claims that critical humanism can be detached from logocentrism, "refurbished and rehabilitated. . . . and installed within the purlieues of deconstruction." Geoffrey Hartman, himself usually seen as an eminent Yale school deconstructor, seems to be showing signs of regret for the Public Critic, the Common Reader, and even for Plain Prose, while at the same time being

unwilling to relinquish the style of High Theory.

How does Harrison arrive at his deconstructive humanism? He wants to rescue something from what he sees as the mistakes and exaggerations on each side, and combine the rescued parts. From humanism he wants to take the notion "that literature stands in some sort of relationship to reality and that it can be a source of cognitive gain to the reader." The mistake humanists have usually made is to adopt the wrong model of knowledge for arguing this. They have tried to assimilate literary cognition to scientific cognition, of the type first organized in the seventeenth century around the concept of the unmoved and unmoving Ideal Observer. But the kind of knowledge that literature creates, Harrison argues, is precisely the kind that *changes* the knower. He adopts a distinction from Merleau-Ponty between "constituted" language, which confirms our habitual ways of perceiving, and "constitutive" language which makes the workings of our own language visible to us by setting it against an alternative language. Thus "one of the functions of serious literature is to unsettle the confidence of the self in the cognitive adequacy of the standpoint it happens to occupy." Literary language has the power to force us to expand our moral views by subverting their existing structures. This is why, to refer back to Harrison's title, fictions are *inconvenient;* the new cognitions, instead of fitting conveniently into our usual categories, inconveniently challenge or upset them, to our gain as moral beings.

Harrison's reoriented version of critical humanism is met by a corresponding reinterpretation of deconstruction. The starting point for this is the deconstructive reading of Saussure. Previous critics of deconstruction, like John Ellis in *Against Deconstruction* and Raymond Tallis in *Not Saussure*, have also drawn attention to the common misreading of Saussure's theory of language, which is partly caused by using about four pages of canonical excerpts rather than the whole of the *Cours*. But where Tallis and Ellis pin the blame on Derrida himself, Harrison throughout wants to rescue his own version of Derrida, which differs markedly from the Derrida of Culler, Norris and other commentators. Harrison distinguishes a Strong and a Weak reading of Saussure: the Strong one is that "none of the signs of the language refer to entities external to 'the linguistic system'"; the Weak one is that "the extra-linguistic reference of terms in a given language is in part under the control of sign/sign relationships specific to that language." Harrison rejects the Strong reading as absurd, and claims that the Weak reading is itself sufficient to justify his version of deconstruction. But he does not really prove that Derrida's is the Weak interpretation. Harrison comes out as what might be called a deconstructive moderate, and recasts Derrida in this way. For Harrison, "Deconstruction is not, in short, to be equated with the thesis that texts can mean anything you like, but with the thesis that texts can always turn out to mean more than you might prefer them to mean." This is the point at which Harrisonian deconstruction meets Harrisonian humanism: the literary text's unsettling of moral and perceptual habits.

Harrison expends a great deal of ingenuity trying to combine humanism and deconstruction at the theoretical level, but it's rather a forlorn effort, since neither camp is likely to accept his version of its position. Nevertheless, Harrison is consistently clear and interesting to read, especially when he moves away from his theoretical project to provide case studies, which include discussions of Sterne and Locke, Forster and Moore, Spark and Austen, and of topics like parable and metaphor. Of course these studies are

meant to illustrate the theoretical synthesis, but even if you find it unconvincing it definitely lends energy and insight to the readings offered. For instance, the chapter on "Parable and Transcendence" starts from the idea that "parabolic narrative has as one of its functions the subversion of the conceptual scheme in terms of which its hearers construe the world and their lives in it." After a fascinating discussion of New Testament parables as subversions of specific questioners' assumptions, Harrison almost convinces us that deconstructive humanism was pioneered by Jesus Christ.

Where Harrison focusses on the philosophical underpinnings of humanism and deconstruction, Hartman's *Minor Prophecies* takes a much wider historical and cultural context for them, and focusses the issues on two critical *styles*: the first is the conversational "friendship" style of essay writing pioneered by Montaigne, and continued in France by writers like Sainte-Beuve and Valéry, while in England it extends from the early *Spectator* essays to the present. The second style is associated with German philosophy and scholarship: it is systematic, unafraid of technical language, and often expressive of a totalizing prophetic vision of Western history. This style has come to predominate in France also, according to Hartman, from the 1930's onwards, leaving American critics like himself with a choice between the "English" style of civility and the "Continental" style of systematic intellectualizing. In terms of personalities, the choice is between F. R. Leavis and Paul de Man (the subjects of two central chapters); or, as in the jingle that provides the title of Chapter Two, between "Tea and Totality."

The basic opposition is similar to Harrison's humanism versus deconstruction, and like Harrison, Hartman wants to have it both ways. At different times in this collection of pieces originally published in the mid- to late 1980's, his sympathy sways to one side, then the other. At times he presents a very dated stereotype of criticism in England as a genteel and superficial literary gossip over cups of tea in an Oxbridge room, apparently unaware of the politicized, "continentalized," and "totalizing" theoreticians who now increasingly dominate the English scene. At other times he is haunted by the interconnections between "Continental" theorizing and totalitarianism, by the political dangers inherent in a single unifying vision of history and society and by the failure of German culture and German academia to offer effective resistance to Nazism.

Thus both alternatives seem inadequate at times: why not, he seems to ask, try to combine the best of both, the clarity and readability and pluralism of the "English" style with the scope and coherence of the "Continental"? He cites George Steiner and Frank Kermode as critics who try for a middle style, yet he goes on to praise them somewhat condescendingly as "superb reviewers rather than originative thinkers: their vocation is the Arnoldian diffusion of ideas and not a radical revision or extension of knowledge."

Ultimately, this is where Hartman himself, at least in this book, belongs. This is not really an original book ("originative," he would say), but a somewhat rambling set of discussions about the social and intellectual context of criticism, and how that influences its style. His own style can be rather bumpy, rising to learned technicality ("Intertextuality as a heuristic theorem"), or sinking to colloquialisms like "fix." In between we are in danger of simple ineptitude in phrases like "nymphal consciousness," and French and German words are given in the original far more often than necessary. What is wrong with Hartman's style is not that it is a mixed style, but that it hasn't been mixed thoroughly enough. His mistaken assump-

tion seems to be that difficult issues have to be treated in a difficult, forbidding style, which can then be relieved by something light and chatty. But there are plenty of models for writing about complex intellectual issues in clear, consistent, readable prose: Edmund Wilson, Susan Sontag and Northrop Frye are just three names that spring to mind. Or one could cite the New York critics of the 1930's and 1940's: their style is accessible, but far from the genteel teatime conversations of Hartman's Oxbridge. Harrison's book, despite the dubious fate of his theoretical project, is finally much more rewarding, through its greater intellectual energy and stylistic precision, as an example of philosophical criticism of literature.

GRAHAM GOOD

# AGAINST DECONSTRUCTION?

JOHN M. ELLIS, *Against Deconstruction.* Princeton.

DECONSTRUCTION HASN'T made great inroads in Canadian criticism to date, and if John Ellis is to be believed, we're not missing anything of value. Ellis is a Germanist who has published books on Kleist, Schiller, and the German *Novelle*, as well as an earlier theoretical study, *The Theory of Literary Criticism* (1974). The title of the latter work evokes Wellek and Warren's *Theory of Literature* (1949), and is organized in the same way, around a series of central issues, though Ellis treats fewer topics at greater length. The Preface to *Against Deconstruction* alludes to the coming into dominance of deconstruction "during the last fifteen years," roughly the period since Ellis' own theoretical book. We can sense in the new work some of his frustration with what he calls the "degeneration" of discussion on many of the issues he and others had already clarified.

What does Ellis have "against deconstruction"? Here is a selection of things. It is founded on the misunderstanding by Derrida of Saussure's theory of language, for example, the simple error that "the arbitrariness of the sign makes meaning arbitrary in the sense of indeterminate." It persistently and inaccurately attributes epistemological naiveté to its opponents. It wilfully obscures its language, thus concealing what would otherwise be obvious mistakes or banal truisms. It ignores large bodies of work directly relevant to the issues it discusses. Its rhetoric is marked by exaggeration, provocation, and overstatement. Its predilection for attacking common sense as bourgeois stupidity goes back in French culture to Baudelaire and Flaubert, and its false pretences of being an academic *enfant terrible* go back to Barthes and Foucault's assault on the university establishment of the 1960's. Deconstruction's posture of "subversiveness" is inappropriate in the American context, where the monolithic conservatism attributed to "traditional" approaches to literature in France has never existed. Deconstruction shows contempt for its opponents rather than trying to learn from them or conduct a rational debate with them. Its aggressive and intimidating style is meant to silence opposition, and to conceal the absurdity or banality of its propositions.

If all of this is true, how could Deconstruction have succeeded to the extent it has? Ellis attributes this to the emotional satisfactions Deconstruction offers: delight in being excitingly shocking, in feeling superior to the bourgeois herd, and in displaying intellectual sophistication. Even so, Ellis is puzzled about why there has been no effective challenge to Deconstruction's manifest absurdities by now. At this point Deconstruction begins to sound like Ingsoc in *1984*, an ideology

whose power is based on "collective solipsism" and the blatant denial of common sense and rational argument. Ellis' predicament as the sole dissenter begins to resemble that of Winston Smith: is he the *only* person, he wonders, to have noticed the absurdity of what the authorities are saying? Or are there others whose dissent is surreptitious and unwritten, since they lack the confidence for a public challenge? Ellis writes: "there is far more grumbling about deconstruction in the corridors of academic institutions than ever finds its way into print." To be sure, Ellis concedes, there are a few foolhardy challengers like M. H. Abrams, but they fall into the trap set by Deconstruction and are beguiled into assertions of naive realism and common sense of exactly the kind it thrives on. They are as easily disposed of as Winston Smith and his desperate "Truisms are true" slogan.

Ellis in fact uses some of Orwell's own favourite strategies and rhetorical devices for hitting back at the idologists. One is translating pretentious-sounding phrases into plain English or vice versa, as Orwell does in "Politics and the English Language" and elsewhere. In a similar vein, Ellis accuses Deconstruction of repeating "magic" formulae and set phrases as a substitute for the less dramatic but more difficult and rewarding task of seeking precise formulations. Its slogans, like "the metaphysics of presence," "the death of the author," or "all interpretation is misinterpretation," turn out on examination to have as little content as the Ingsoc slogans in *1984*. Another Orwellian tactic used by Ellis is to produce a set of numbered quotations and work through them one by one in a mocking search for something meaningful, as he does in his quest for a definition of the term "logocentrism."

Behind the high-sounding obscurantism of Deconstruction's language, Ellis finds a few simple manoeuvres which create the semblance of profound thinking. The chief of these is to focus attention on the most naive formulation of the view being attacked, and then simply reverse it, which creates the dramatic effect desired. "For example, words do not refer to things in the real world but only signify other words; authors do not create the meaning of their texts by composing them, but instead readers, by reading them; texts do not have a particular meaning that can be investigated but are limitless in their meaning because of the free play of signs; a careful reading does not give knowledge of a text, because all readings are misreadings; whatever the obvious meaning of a literary text is taken to be, one must stand it on its head." Deconstructive sophistication is thus for Ellis simply a reversed naiveté: "Primitive ideas reversed produce more primitive ideas." The sophistication is an *illusion* created by contrast to the first, naive position. Yet on occasion Ellis seems to use the same trick himself: "on the contrary" and "quite the reverse" are recurrent phrases in his book. *Against Deconstruction* itself often reverses deconstruction's claims: deconstruction is not radical, but conservative; it is not theoretical, but a defence against theory; it is not sophisticated, but under the pretentious language, embarrassingly naive; it has not improved the quality of literary criticism, but helped it to decline. At one point he writes that "these judgments obviously need reversing." At times Ellis seems to be attributing to Deconstruction everything he says Deconstruction attributes to naive traditionalism, while appropriating for his own position Deconstruction's claims to be innovative, sophisticated, radical, and so on. At least twice he makes fun of Deconstruction's catch-phrase "demystifying privileged Ideas," but it is actually quite a good description of his own purpose here.

Overall, Ellis' demystification of Deconstruction is persuasive. He is certainly not a naive traditionalist, and is well

versed in linguistics and philosophy. His writing is clear and precise, and he provides helpful summaries along the way. He has nothing good to say about Deconstruction at all, so it's not exactly a balanced assessment; yet his presentation of Deconstructive thought does not seem to me to caricature it, but rather to pick out its crucial flaws with commendable skill. The energy of the writing is inevitably negative in a polemical work of this kind, and at times there is an edge of exasperation, of an authority figure making an effort to remain precise and calm in the face of provocation. There is also a trace of hostility towards French culture, perhaps understandable in a Germanist who has seen Anglo-American "theory" refuse to import German ideas except via France. He also exaggerates the Lansonian orthodoxy of French criticism before Barthes. It's worth noting, too, that Ellis does not take on Derrida's work as a whole, or even any one text in detail: his crucial chapter on Derrida's misreading of Saussure generally refers to the first fifty pages of *Of Grammatology* and to the interviews in *Positions*. Otherwise the main targets are the Anglo-American expositors of Deconstruction: Hawkes, Norris, Lentricchia, Johnson, and of course Culler. Ellis has a lot of fun at Culler's expense, suggesting that the reason why High Deconstructionists are so suspicious of his work is that its relative clarity comes dangerously close to exposing Deconstruction's basic fallacies. It will be interesting to see what responses this sweeping polemic draws from the Deconstructive camp.

GRAHAM GOOD

# COSMOLOGIES

NORMAN AUSTIN, *Meaning and Being in Myth.* Pennsylvania State, $28.50 US.

R. D. STOCK, *The Flutes of Dionysus [:] Daemonic Enthrallment in Literature.* Nebraska, $42.50 US.

FOR ALL THE awareness of current material trappings and the cultural/ethical imperatives which twentieth century technology brings to bear, it is still necessary to recall the mythological ground in which much of western literature has been — and continues to be — so firmly rooted. Neglect of such a body of cultural heritage as Norma Austin and R. D. Stock explore is as unwise as it is unhelpful.

Austin's volume, finding its terms in Plato, Buber, Hegel, Lacan, Jung, et al., emerges, to use his own words, as ". . . a full-blown cosmology . . . ," and explores ". . . myth as the medium for the articulation of our experience in the world and for the world's revelation of its own inner dynamic to the human mind. . . ." Moving from an introductory section entitled "The Numinous Ground," in which Austin travels easily between the Hellenes and, for instance, Camus, the reader is offered a series of focused studies involving Job, Herakles ("The Hero of the Anima"), Homer "The Divine Presence in the *Iliad*"), Shakespeare (Hamlet's Hungry Ghost"), and Camus (a consideration of *L'Etranger*). The chapters on Hesiod, Herakles/Hera, and the *Iliad* — the last with an extensive comment on Achilles (". . . an ego hardened by its grievance against the world can find no place for any honor but its own") — are models of their kind, and there are always sufficient links to negate any risk of complete compartmentalisation. The chapter on Hamlet's father's ghost has to be read seriously not only by those who have wrestled at length with possible causes for Hamlet's inaction but by those who simply

want to come to reasonable terms with the play. Austin's analysis of Meurseult in Camus' *L'Etranger* is as probing as that of and the adversary is Helios — "... the modern version of the ancient myth of a hero's combat with primeval powers," and the adversary is Helios —" ... the mind blinding itself to hide from the gaze of its signifiers." For all the intensity of the discussion, Austin's approach to his subject is entirely clear and nicely sustains the proposition that "... myth stands with its semaphone flags, to guide the soul's ascent from physics into metaphysics." While the book does not purport to comment on all of western literature, the potential applications of the work are clear enough even to Canadian works.

R. D. Stock's *The Flutes of Dionysus* offers a rather different approach to a similar theme; this book, as the title suggests, has a more particular reference, namely, the manifestations of Dionysian influence in western culture — in the Bible and in literature from the Classics to works of our own time. Hence, one finds a consideration not only of "Dionysian Yahweh," Satan, and Job, but of the work of Homer, Virgil, Dante, Chaucer, and succeeding writers, both English and American, although, for instance, Goethe, Baudelaire, and Mann also receive due attention. The technique here is chronological and its result is a somewhat encyclopaedic coverage. The effect seems something like that of a tour through a major collection of pictures which addresses only one issue common to each canvas: one is left tantalised and perhaps a little frustrated that time has not permitted more lingering considerations. And yet the book's clear intention is to achieve just such a linkage that a circuit of that sort can demonstrate, and, hence, in what seems to be its particular shortcoming lies its major strength, for Stock's demonstration of the pervasiveness of Dionysian variants, from dualistic Venus to benign Pan, is totally convincing, and one stands in awe of what is clearly a convincing mastery not only of the specific subject but of a substantial corpus of western letters. Yet despite the commanding sweep across the centuries, Canadian authors receive no attention, except as critics such as Northrop Frye and Patricia Merivale (the latter's work on Pan he justly admires). At the risk of seeming parochial, I find that a pity. Charles G. D. Roberts and Bliss Carman, more recently, Robertson Davies, have at least a small place in the tradition. Still, students of Canadian as well as other literatures would do well to take its observations into consideration, along with, for example, Frye's *The Great Code*. Like Austin's *Meaning and Being in Myth*, Stock's *The Flutes of Dionysus* is carefully documented; the notes to both volumes are extensive, and they offer substantial bibliographies, valuable research tools in themselves.

BRYAN N. S. GOOCH

# ANGEL-MINISTER

NORTHROP FRYE, *Words with Power: Being a Second Study of The Bible and Literature*. Harcourt, $24.95.

NORTHROP FRYE, *Reading the World: Selected Writings, 1935-1976*. Ed. Robert D. Denham. Peter Lang, $72.00.

NORTHROP FRYE, *A World in a Grain of Sand: Twenty-Two Interviews with Northrop Frye*. Ed. Robert D. Denham. Peter Lang, $59.95.

AT THE END of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, Blake speaks of an angel who became a devil. He sat with him often, he says, "read[ing] the Bible together in its infernal or diabolical sense," the sense in which the Bible is not the killing letter but the life-giving spirit — "the Eternal Vision or Imagination of All that exists."

How prescient was Blake to envision, two hundred years later, the angel-minister Rev. H. N. Frye as the devil-professor

N. Frye, bringing to the twentieth-century reader his vision of Blake's "Bible of Hell" in *Words With Power*. For Frye's Bible is, finally, Blake's: a secular history of man in the world written in poetry, and revealing what poetry inspires — what was, is, and will be.

*Words With Power* was to be Frye's penultimate book (*The Double Vision*, a "shorter or more accessible version" as Frye called it of his two Bible books, was to follow). It complements the dazzling *Great Code*, which explored "inwardly" the language and structure of the Bible, by illustrating "outwardly" where the Bible "fits" in the context of secular European literature.

As always, Frye's subject is, as his title indicates, the power of *words*, which he was convinced can only be illustrated by tracing the lines of our major verbal structures back to their poetic and mythological roots. And this course of action means, as Frye has stressed so often, a thorough study of the Bible (or, to be more exact, the *Christian* Bible), since, as he says, "the organizing structures of the Bible and the corresponding structures of 'secular' literature reflect each other."

Experienced Frye-readers will not be surprised to find that Frye takes his traditional four-fold approach to Biblical myth and metaphor in *Words With Power*, roughly following Blake's four-fold creation metaphor of Eden-Beulah-Generation-Ulro. Each of these "realms" corresponds, says Frye, to one of four main "primary [human] concerns": the need to create, to love, to assimilate to the environment, and to escape from slavery. And, according to Frye, the Bible contains four corresponding patterns of Biblical metaphor, that is, mountains, gardens, caves and furnaces, each of which he explores in great depth.

As usual, however, whatever one thinks of Frye's taxonomic arrays (personally, they make me recall Schopenhauer's description of Kant's intricately balanced systems as "symmetrical architectonic amusements"), his analyses of literary works are as breathtaking as ever. The discussion of the *Mutabilitie Cantos* in the "mountain" section; of the Jahwist creation myth and the "Song of Songs" in the "garden" section; of the myth of the double in the "cave" section, and of *Moby Dick* and Job in the "furnace" section should be required reading for anyone interested in the links between Biblical and secular literature. However, in *Words With Power*, Frye was not well-served by his editors at HBJ: the text is sloppily proof-read — we get "Mutabilite" for "Mutabilitie"; *The Waste Land* is attributed to James Joyce, and there are puzzling references to a non-existent Shakespearean work called "A Winter's Tale."

The last two years of Frye's life saw not only the publication of *Words with Power,* but also of two anthologies of Frye's essays, articles, sermons, editorials and interviews, edited by the tireless Robert D. Denham, titled *Reading the World: Selected Writings, 1935-1976*; and *A World in a Grain of Sand: Twenty-Two Interviews with Northrop Frye*. Although they carry an outrageous price tag (the two together would cost well over $150 in Canadian funds!), this co-incidental publishing of Frye's earliest thought with his latest affords an excellent opportunity to study the continuity of Frye's thought.

Of the two, I found *Reading the World* the more interesting, for two reasons; first, because much of the pleasure which comes from reading Frye is in enjoying his mastery of the written word and of the essay form; and second because there is nothing revealed in the collection of interviews which we do not already know from Frye's great trilogy, *Fearful Symmetry*, *Anatomy of Criticism*, and *The Great Code*, much of which is simply glossed

here for a mass public. Not that *Reading the World* does not continually reflect Frye's traditional concern with the function of literature and its social relevance, with the poetic aspects of scripture and with "the indwelling of a divine presence in man." In fact, it is fascinating to see that these ideas were there in his earliest published writings. No, what makes this collection of prose pieces so interesting is to see how this great literary critic approached such subjects as music and painting and the performing arts, as Hitlerism and Stalinism and the Nuremberg Trials, as racism, censorship, unemployment, poverty, Vietnam, student unrest in the sixties, and the cultural impact of television. There are brave pieces from the *Canadian Forum* written in the 1940s castigating the events which led to the McCarthy Hearings, condemning American post-war imperialism and the church's acquiescence in the commercialisation of its institutions and rituals. There is also a fascinating, previously unpublished autobiographical lecture delivered at the University of Saskatchewan in 1968 in which Frye outlines in detail the growth of his interest in myth and archetype and which contains the germs of both his "Bible books"; and there are very interesting book reviews, editorials, and many, many defenses of Canadian culture made at a time when that phrase was considered an oxymoron.

Both volumes are reasonably well proofed (although to cite one strange case from *Reading the World*, Mendelssohn's *Rondo Capriccioso* is referred to twice as "*Rhondo*," both in the text and in the index), with extremely helpful indexes. (The indexes of the two books, by the way, are almost mirror images, and excellent reflections of Frye's interests: dozens of references to people one has never heard of, then a full page of references each to the Bible, Blake, Milton and Shakespeare.) But perhaps the most tellingly sad page in both volumes is the acknowledgements page, where Denham expresses his gratitude to the "[American] National Endowment for the Humanities." Where was the Canadian Council? And why is Frye not being published by the University of Toronto Press?

GRAHAM FORST

# RECURRING SUBJECT

FELICITY A. NUSSBAUM, *The Autobiographical Subject: Gender and Ideology in Eighteenth-Century England*. The Johns Hopkins University Press, $29.95.

JUDITH RYAN, *The Vanishing Subject: Early Psychology and Literary Modernism*. The University of Chicago Press, $29.95.

AUTOBIOGRAPHY HAS been a central stamping ground for literary theorists over the past twenty years or so because it highlights, focuses, and refines issues that arise in virtually every other area of theoretical concern. Explicit self-reference distinguishes the autobiographer from the novelist but opens discussion on the referentiality of language, the necessity of fiction, the psychodrama of memory, the process and purposes of self-creation, the politics of self-expression, the nature and possibility of truth and the value, indeed the inevitability, of lies. And central to autobiography, of course, is the problem of the "self," the "subject." No other genre makes so vivid the impossibility, certainly the inconclusiveness, of its apparent objectives. (Already my own language is throwing up its barricades. The object of the verb to be is in the nominative case.) No other genre, certainly, focuses so clearly on the politics of difference, on the subversive nature of the subject in its cultural context, or on the bottom-line problematics of there being a coherent or identifiable "autos" about whom to write if one only knew how. Well may Woolf ask "Where does the subject

locate itself?" These two recent works on "the subject" contribute significant answers to her question though they approach the problem from different positions; at their most specific and secure, they also raise further questions and should therefore be considered seminal rather than definitive.

Nussbaum takes a materialist/feminist approach to varieties of autobiographical writing in eighteenth-century England; her opening chapters on "The Ideology of Genre" and "The Politics of Subjectivity" pave the way for readings of Bunyan, Wesley, and Boswell that reconsider the constructed self according to prevailing norms, religious, economic, sociological, and gendered. She examines eighteenth-century philosophic discussion of the self, analyzes revised and repeated versions of life-writing, considers production and audience, and engages in close reading of particular texts. Her organization of this multiply-layered discussion is impressive. The force of her approach is most evident and, to my mind, most valuable when she deals, in her last four chapters with "The Gender of Character" and then with heteroclites, scandalous memoirs, and Thraliana. Nussbaum's approach is predominantly new historicist but it is also preeminently feminist; her work on women's writing moves her text from impressive to exciting. She concludes by quoting Hester Thrale: "Doctor Johnson always said there was a sex in words," and identifies the final issue as a concern for "what forces will name and manage gendered subjectivity and its representation in texts."

Ryan's effect is less frontal; indeed, the political in her text is more apparent as the response of various writers to the intellectual predicament in which they find themselves than as subversive or prescriptive agenda. Ryan relates late nineteenth-century psychologies very closely to creative writing and, incidentally but significantly, to art and architecture. She demonstrates thoroughly and persuasively the part played by empiricist thought in early modernism in North America and in Europe. Her "clusters of authors" in their diversity work with the issues raised by empiricist thinking; the four parts of this text, indeed, explore first the late nineteenth-century sense of the dissolution and fragmentation of the self, the sense of the self in relation to perception (involving subject/object relations and the instability of any given perspective), efforts to consolidate the self and, finally, a movement, as she puts it, "to revalorize the empiricist vision" exemplified by the works of Proust, Woolf, and Musil from whom she borrows the phrase descriptive of this effort, "daylight mysticism."

Ryan opens with Hermann Bahr's phrase, the "unsalvageable self," and concludes with the "daylight mystics" who "develop mechanisms for making [empiricism] functional and productive. They show us how to see the world in a radically new way." She does not claim that literature inspired by empiricism represents a movement in its own right but, rather, that "it is an important strand in literary modernism, a motivating force to which there were many responses." Her interweaving of problems and responses is subtle and delicate, illuminating and stimulating rather than programmatic.

The covers of both these books help to define the critical enterprise of each one. In the detail from Angelica Kauffman's Self Portrait on Nussbaum's jacket, the artist regards us directly and intensely, engaging our reflection and response. Her hands form the V that centres her face, the left clasping drapery over her bosom, the right holding pen and pad/paintbrush and notebook propped away from her body. Plump flesh contrasts with these instruments of translation from life into art. The paintbrush points in two directions, both to the hand at the heart and

outward to the text. Ryan's *Vanishing Subject* is illustrated by Ernst Mach's drawing from his *Analysis of Sensations*. Framed within the outline of his own eye-socket, nose, and moustache, the subject perceives (an idiosyncratic perception for us, the external viewer) his own (necessarily headless) reclining body, his hand that is drawing the body to which it belongs, and his specific angle on the chair and room that provide his physical context. Where the first cover suggests an articulate feminist challenge, the second demonstrates an endangered self and the isolated nature of its perspective.

What we have, then are two distinctive and important contributions to autobiography studies, to feminist studies, to modernist theory, and, centrally, to the complex, shifting, and creative ways in which we think about our "selves," ways which, politically and artistically affect perception, narration, and "self" presentation. Both works will surely invite further scholarship, not because their own need be faulted but because they open so many possibilities for exploration.

SUSANNA EGAN

# LIFE AFTER DEATH

ROBERTSON DAVIES, *Murther & Walking Spirits*. McClelland & Stewart, $27.95.

THE NARRATOR of Robertson Davies's new novel discovers his wife and a subordinate *en flagrant délit*, and is fatally bludgeoned for his trouble. Instead of undergoing the proverbial review of his life, the narrator unexpectedly witnesses, as if watching a series of motion pictures, a review of the lives of his ancestors from the eighteenth century onward. In dying, ironically, he learns something profound about living, and he actually undergoes a change of self.

He learns the truth of Heraclitus's observation "that anything, if pursued beyond a reasonable point, turns into its opposite." Again and again, he beholds the continuous rise and fall and resurrection of human desire and achievement as generation after generation experiences success and loss, affection and contempt, female principles and male principles, life and death. In his own instance, aptly, life has not only led to the seemingly antithetical enigma of death, but death has led to closure with the very mystery of life. "We live and learn, yes. But we die and learn, too, it appears." Life after death is the discovery of "a sense of life more poignant and more powerful than anything" he ever knew while he was physically alive.

This revelation of the Herclitian monad of mutually constitutive oppositions exposes as well that every human life is in effect one drama within the *theatrum mundi*. Metaphors drawn from the stage and from the cinema abound in the narrator's account, suggesting that life is a dream reality, a medium less firm than we tend to think while we live the particular version we know as our existence. Life is as much an artwork, a fiction, as is any play or film or novel. The *matter* of this dream version of a life, especially the fate of mutually constitutive oppositions, may be reality, but the *manner* of personal development in terms of this matter includes a greater variety of production, performance, and persona than we tend to realize. Although archetypes, palimpsests, or influences underlie all of our behavior, nonetheless the "surface" version we re-enact at any given moment may range from a very rough to a quite refined "management of the scene" in which we play a part and for which we also have some directional responsibility.

The dying narrator, for example, eventually appreciates that the most trivial features of life are simultaneously the

most noble, and that the most comic are also the most tragic: "There is no such thing as a person who is 'nobody very much.' Everybody is an agonist in one of Fate's time-worn games on the earth." No longer thinking himself "superior to others," he realizes that "these people are my people and I suffer with them, and I do not take sides." At the end of his narrative he feels, in the very marrow of his being, a love that is expressed as "charity and forgiveness."

This is the message of Davies's book. If life is essentially the same as art, then art should be essential in life. Art should encourage its audience to live "more consciously," especially through charity, forgiveness, and acceptance. "Literature is an essence, not a piquant sauce," we are told. Art, particularly the "shady sort of narrative" of "an unauthorized translation" (like Davies's book) can "open the door" to aspects of life that tend to be glimpsed "only in dreams or waking reverie."

Davies anticipates that his audience will be resistant, will prefer not to be "roughly translated" (transported), as if they were colonial emigrants or disembodied ghosts forced to abandon their perceived homeland for the shores of a seemingly crude New World of possibility. But the homeland of their present life, Davies indicates, is not the Original: it is merely a "rough translation" of a reality still open to advancement in human awareness. He encourages us to face this revision of our present version of the "possibly gaudy and certainly deeply felt show" of life with the same determination, based on mutually fearful and joyful expectations, as evinced by the early immigrants to Canada.

*Murther & Walking Spirits* is, accordingly, a thinking person's book. It seeks to integrate the passivity of the reader — ideally a "patient looker-on" (as in *Fifth Business*) listening to the "deeper monologue" within the narrator's discourse — with the reader's subsequent action in life as the real *dénouement* of the book. The reader, as is well-known about Davies's work, will learn something of Jungean theory, the heritage of art, and the author's passionate commitment to personal reformation. Beyond question, there is much that is very clever in this novel. Whether its audience will appreciate every move Davies makes here will be a matter of taste, I suspect, even if his narrative is designed to demonstrate that literature is an essence, not a piquant sauce. I have no doubt, however, that Part I will strike most readers as Davies at his aesthetic best.

WILLIAM J. SCHEICK

# END OF DAY?

NIKOLAS COUPLAND, JUSTINE COUPLAND, & HOWARD GILES, *Language, Society and the Elderly: Discourse, Identity and Ageing.* Blackwell, n.p.

RICHARD WRIGHT, *Sunset Manor.* Seal Books, McClelland-Bantam, $19.95.

THE TITLE OF his novel, Richard Wright tells us in the disclaimer that precedes his text, does not refer to any actual institution. But he was stuck with a title like *Sunset Manor* because "The equating of old age with the end of day is a rhetorical commonplace, and those charged with attaching names to homes for the elderly have seldom strained after novelty." Both of the works reviewed here — the academic book that breaks new ground in applying discourse analysis to the elderly and Wright's novel — are concerned with the language of old age, with the importance of language in establishing identity, and with the tensions that exist between elderly and younger speakers. Considered together, they raise a number of interesting questions about the uniqueness ("nov-

elty") or sameness ("rhetorical commonplace") of human speech, and about the role of imaginative literature in our understanding of old age.

The authors of *Language, Society, and the Elderly* have their hearts in the right place. They clearly want to oppose ageism in society and the "deficit paradigm" — the expectation of decrement and diminished competence — that has informed too much of our gerontological research. And I have no doubt that this study of "elderspeak" will be useful; in particular, its insights into the interactive construction (and affirmation) of identity in old age are of clear practical use for individuals who work closely with the aged. The authors take on such issues as accommodation theory, showing how younger speakers can attune themselves to the needs revealed in the speech of old people. They examine the ways that old people formulate and disclose age, and how they tell their troubles. And, taking a "social constructivist" approach, they emphasize the importance of inter-generational talk.

Much of the book is devoted to a close analysis of such conversations, and especially of the strategic moves made by the participants. Particularly striking is the fact that in these conversations the old people (with the assistance of their interlocutors) are relentlessly focused on painful self-disclosure, signals of identity, and the experience of old age. This is part of the problem I have with the book. Such conversations are, I know, very common — and unquestionably they serve a pressing need. Moreover, they address the themes of the study, so that to ask (as I do) for an analysis of talk on other subjects may seem both churlish and beside the point. But I am bothered by the sameness of the talk. I find it reductive and somehow *untrue*, and I find myself yearning instead for the kind of "elderspeak" one is privy to in fiction like *Sunset Manor*.

Teachers of creative writing often remind their students that the transcription of real speech rarely leads to convincing dialogue. We need something a little stranger and more beautiful if we are to be convinced that it is true. Sometimes the actual speech of human beings will capture the play of spirit that seeks expression in our talk with one another, and often we feel that it does. But transcriptions frequently disappoint. We search in vain for the wonder we felt, which has mysteriously slipped away between the lines. Literature, it has always seemed to me, gives some of that back to us — both in the lines and between the lines, where it hovers palpably. If it shows us too how *poorly* we converse, how unattuned we often are to the needs our interloctors — and Richard Wright does this in spades — it nevertheless reminds us of what language *can* (and should) do to reveal and ease the human heart.

*Sunset Manor* is mainly the story of Kay Ormsby, a retired English teacher who moves into a retirement home after accidentally setting fire to her house. She is a valiant woman, aware certainly of the "deficit paradigm" in which she is willy-nilly caught up, but eager still to grow and share her faith that "At the heart of all this life on earth lay mystery and wonder." Miss Ormsby is not concerned with calculating her chances of an after-life: "Had the angels of the Lord foretold a miraculous birth in the hills of Palestine two thousand years ago? Did it really matter? The poetry was beautiful, and for that one was grateful. And like many things, the story was surely a cause for wonder." In Sunset Manor, though, she cannot find another person who sees life that way — or wants to talk about it. Poetry and music console her; they lift her spirits, and remind her that human beings have indeed been able to communicate to one another (and so to construct) identities and aspirations that are worth the having.

Still, what we feel most powerfully in this novel is a need we all have, a need that is far too often unacknowledged and unmet in the lives of the institutionalized elderly: the need for an inspired interlocutor, a friend with whom we may reach into and then out of ourselves, toward wonder.

Wright's novel reminds us, then, of the need for imaginative language in literature and in life. It is not, I confess, altogether a successful novel. But potentially it and similar (even better) novels, like Elizabeth Jolley's *Mr. Scobie's Riddle* or John Updike's *Poorhouse Fair*, are at least as useful as the careful, well-intentioned work of Coupland, Coupland, and Giles. The trick is to get the people who live and work with the elderly — including those novelty-spurning folk "who are charged with the responsibility for attaching names to homes for the elderly" — to read books like *Sunset Manor.*

CONSTANCE ROOKE

# CONJUNCTIONS

ANNE CAMERON, *Kick The Can.* Harbour Publishing, $14.95.

LEE MARACLE, *Sojourner's Truth and Other Stories.* Press Gang Publishers, $10.95.

NO DOUBT, bystanders to the "appropriation of voice" debate will heave a weary sigh when they see books by Anne Cameron and Lee Maracle being reviewed together, but for once this is not an issue of appropriation. Cameron is working from her own tradition, as is Maracle, and as both women are writers of prose fiction with roots in B.C., it is not unfitting that they should be considered in conjunction, if not in comparison.

Cameron's new novel, *Kick the Can*, starts out promisingly enough. A pregnant teenager arrives in a remote village on the B.C. coast, settles in for the duration, and dies in childbirth. The baby girl is called Rowan and is lovingly adopted by the community. All goes well until three years later when an officious welfare officer apprehends the child and ships her off to a series of foster homes. Rowan is eventually claimed by her grandmother, a whore with a heart of gold, and before you know it the ten year old is reading *Pilgrim's Progress* and worrying about how to pronounce "Slough of Despond."

There are two overriding images that are supposed to carry the reader through the length of this book: a string of trade beads and a town called Maklamaklata. The blue glass beads are introduced in an intense scene where loggers, clear-cutting a hillside, chop down a tree in which there is an Indian burial platform. The tree comes down tearing half the hillside with it, the men barely escape with their lives, and the necklace falls onto the shore where it is picked up by Rowan. Unfortunately, the whole scene, powerful as it is, comes from nowhere and leads nowhere. The image of the magical village of Maklamaklata, which also shows promise at the beginning of the novel, is simply introduced, dropped, and picked up again at the end in a purely mechanical fashion.

So much of what happens in this novel is unmotivated, unexplained and forcibly injected into the plot that the reader is left confused and bemused. When one of the adolescents in the book tells her mother, who works shucking oysters in a fish plant, that she wants to attend university, the mother's response is "'Just register, darling . . . we'll find the money somewhere. Who knows,' she sobbed suddenly, 'maybe we can sell applesauce.'" It's impossible to tell whether this is Cameron's idea of a joke, but on the next page the girl is in university and that's the last we hear of it. Applesauce indeed!

Cameron's prose, as we are reminded on the jacket, is "rough and tough, sweet

'n' tender" by which, presumably, we are to understand that she is of the folk, not of the literati. In *Kick the Can*, children settle into a house "like two farts in a mitt," a pregnancy is not "as smooth as duck shit on fresh cut grass," life slips by "as slick as deer guts on a doorknob" and a woman who is sick feels "like shit on a stick." People don't have buttocks or backsides, they have "butts" or "asses." An occasional character who waggles his chin and drops a good one is more than welcome, but an endless supply of such aphorisms is tiresome in the extreme.

More disturbing is the fact that because there is little to distinguish between the voice of the narrator and those of her characters, the text smacks of bigotry. When Edmonton becomes "Edmonchuck" and the parsimonious proprietor of a logging camp is "gyppo owner," it's hard to know who is speaking. Her depiction of Christians is, well, less than Christian. Furthermore, the overriding tone of smug superiority is offensive to the reader, as well as to the real "folk" who, with little or no education, struggle to express themselves in a vivid and accurate way.

Cameron's earlier reference to *Pilgrim's Progress* is not all that irrelevant as this story is presented as if it were Everywoman's journey, and the values are clearly black and white: all women are good, all men are bad, and the trip to the Celestial city simply involves rejecting both the threats and temptations held out by men until one has achieved true freedom in the arms of another woman. Cameron's denouement is simplistic by anybody's standards. The heroine simply beats up the wicked bully-boy on the last page, or as the narrator puts it "she just pole-axed the sucker." The "can" of the title turns out to be a man's ass. Or is that "butt"? It's hard to believe anyone could read this potboiler without being insulted.

Coming to Lee Maracle's *Sojourner's Truth and Other Stories* after reading *Kick the Can* is a great relief. It's impossible to ignore the irony of the juxtaposition given the criticism of Cameron by Maracle and other native writers, but if anything, these two books prove that it isn't whose voice you use that matters, but how well you use the it. *Sojourner's Truth* has its problems, but a lack of respect for the reader is not one of them.

In her preface, "You Become the Trickster," Maracle outlines her objectives; employ the reader's own imagination, cling to the principles of oratory, seek out the universal. Although she claims not to frame her narratives in the orthodox European style, a number of the stories included in the collection are fairly conventional. There are enough exceptions, however, to justify her claim that she is integrating two traditions.

Maracle's narratives, as their titles indicate, tend to focus in on specific individuals. "Bertha," "Maggie" and "Charlie" are the kind of native people most of us only read about in the newspapers; a boy abused in a residential school, a little girl who freezes to death after being kept in detention, a fish plant worker who dies while on a binge. The difference between the journalistic accounts and Maracle's more literary ones is that, when we see them through Maracle's eyes, the stories are tragic but the people are not. You end up admiring the stubbornness and strength of these characters, even when these same qualities lead inexorably to their ultimate destruction.

Many of these stories, particularly those which examine the relationship between individuals of disparate races, have a brittle tension that makes reading them feel like walking through an emotional minefield. The terribly personal nature of the brief "Worm," written at the behest of Maracle's three-year-old son, cuts like a knife. Maracle's wit softens some of the bitterness, however. "Polka Partners," about an assimilated do-good

Indian who sets up a native centre in the core of the city, makes its point while still managing to be humorous. My own favourite, "Who's Political Here?", transcends the somewhat laboured detail of daily life and becomes downright funny. In it, an overworked mother decides to leave her politically zealous husband in jail overnight. All she wants is to do the laundry and get a good night's sleep; the revolution can wait.

Some of these stories are difficult, particularly the title piece, but all of them feel as though they were carefully thought through before being committed to print. Maracle admits that she guides her readers more than traditional story-tellers guide their listeners, but she still leaves plenty to the imagination. In *Sojourner's Truth*, Maracle not only engages her readers in her own struggle with racism and cultural genocide, she does it without compromise or blame. This is a lovely, mature book that should be around for a long time.

ROBIN MCGRATH

# IMAGINATION'S LIFE

NORMAN RAVVIN, *Café des Westens*. Red Deer College Press, $24.95 (cloth).

THIS IS NORMAN Ravvin's first novel, and I began it remembering the recent plea of a reviewer in a London daily: 'If you must write a first novel, go for laughs and spare us the anguish.' Actually Ravvin offers both in this narrative which mixes farce and fantasy with social documentary, interior monologue and elegy. An entertaining and ambitious novel set in Calgary, it is the history of a city told through its old buildings and the memories of a Polish-Jewish immigrant family, the Binders — father, son, and grandmother. Whether this is a story about survivals or about losses it is difficult to determine, but it is certainly about literary heritage for *Café des Westens* is a nostalgic modernist fiction, signalled in its title and its Wallace Stevens epigraph. 'Credences of Summer' are experienced differently in a prairie city which looks like 'an unpredictable mirage supported by dust,' though Joyce's Dublin and Isherwood's Berlin come shimmering through.

Calgary manages to generate an obsession with history among young writers, possibly because, as Ian Adam remarks in his Calgary anthology *Glass Canyons*, it is a city 'under erasure.' This is precisely the point where Ravvin's narrative begins, with its sense of a depleted present and a solitary survivor:

> The Café des Westens sat beside unleased property, boarded-up property, abandoned property, its old booths and tables like lookouts on the boom-and-bust town. The cafe remained unchanged, thanks to no effort of its owner or its clientele, while the rest of the city came down and went up around it.

Ravvin stresses the historical and cultural determinants of a city's life as it is reconstructed architecturally and through memory and fantasy, so that 'what is memory and what is pure creation is unclear.' As his multiple perspectives indicate, history and fiction are intertwined, for the mind weaves its stories over the banality of the everyday, memory is mixed up with ideas of generational conflict, and inheritance may be fantasised. There is a genuine anxiety here about history and its relics (like houses and old timers, not to mention a certain café) whose significance can so easily be erased, revised, or misappropriated. The question is, who are the true inheritors? Ravvin himself might seem to be caught in the dilemma his fiction represents, between an esoteric fascination with history demonstrated by trendy youngsters with names like Sara and Bruno, and contempt for such pseudery displayed by the café owner Hiram Ostrovsky and his old friend Martin

Binder. In the end Ravvin returns to family history for reconstruction of the past; it is Max Binder, Calgary born teenage son of the Polish-Jewish immigrant Martin, who becomes 'the protector of things old and fragile.' After all, there are no reliable witnesses to Calgary's multicultural inheritance with its slippages and doubled visions. Even Ostrovsky refuses to tell either his own story or that of his café's famous neon sign (brought from Montreal in a junk lot), though its significance is finally decoded by that other trendy Montrealer, Max's girlfriend Sara. With fitting irony, the Café of the West has its glamorous European double in Weimar Germany: 'The daily meeting place for artists in Berlin was the Café des Westens.' Possibly Ostrovsky knows this; possibly he does not.

The narrative develops through a series of scenes juxtaposing the activities of Calgary's present-day inhabitants in some of its old buildings. Crucially, these are the Café des Westens and old Mrs. Binder's house, which she steadfastly refuses to sell to pushy real estate agents regarded by her as 'modern day Bolsheviks.' Hers is a story of resistance and survival which even includes some mild urban guerilla warfare; and her house is the place of reconciliation between father and son at the end. There are other old houses too: Max's girlfriend's autumnal apartment where she weaves her spells against reality, and Max's friend Bruno's house (formerly a convent), which looks to his father 'like a place that might have sheltered generations of mass murderers.' But these are fantasy scenarios against which the real life family romance is played out, with Max's story of teenage love and rebellion, Martin's story of loss and loneliness, and the Polish grandmother's story of exile. They are all imprisoned in their own pasts, caught in flickering worlds that overlap, 'never complementing each other, always at odd angles.'

There are some private resolutions, but wider social issues are left undecided. Obsessed with fragmentation and the search for a useable tradition, Ravvin chooses an oddly old-fashioned literary representation of Calgary through a modernist poetics of urban space. The novel ends with echoes and ghosts. Maybe it all comes back to this, 'the imagination's life,' echoing the quotation from Wallace Stevens with which the novel began.

CORAL ANN HOWELLS

# TONALITIES

CLAUDE BISSELL, *Ernest Buckler Remembered.* University of Toronto, $24.95.

CLAUDE BISSELL, President of the University of Toronto from 1958 to 1971, sought Ernest Buckler out shortly after the publication of *The Mountain and the Valley* and, with his wife and daughter, established a friendship that extended from 1953 to Buckler's death in 1984. *Ernest Buckler Remembered* is part memorial, part biography, and part critical study. This is not an instance of satisfying formal hybridity. The "memorial" is often pious and patronizing; the biography superficial; and the critical analysis thematic and formalist. There are, however, interesting things in this book, as well as infuriating mannerisms and tonalities, and coy silences.

What I find most interestingly revealed are Buckler's dramatic change of attitude to a rural environment, and the disparity between the introspective depth of language in *The Mountain and the Valley* and the (somewhat forced?) mix of vernaculars in Buckler's speech and informal writings. With regard to the first, it does not seem that there was anything inevitable about Buckler's rural reclusiveness; when he returned to Annapolis valley

after university, he expressed disgust with the people and institutions of his region. The development of a myth of reclusiveness and pastoralism is not all that clearly accounted for. As for the range of location, I find it hard to decide which register to deprivilege: the solemn introspectiveness of the novel's voices, or the incompletely realized "down home" vernaculars of the author's informal register. The latter would seem to represent something unrealized in the writer himself.

The letter from Sinclair Ross to Buckler reprinted here underlines the contiguity, in several ways, of the two writers. Both *As For Me and My House* and *The Mountain and the Valley* are epochal novels in the Canadian canon, for reasons it is now difficult, perhaps, to pinpoint. Both are pastoral idylls, featuring introspective main characters who suggest, but hardly articulate, a sense of painful psycho-sexual inhibition. While criticism first celebrated their thematics of the rural and the idealization of heroic male introspection, it has certainly now begun to interrogate the knottier, recessive areas of the texts.

It is here that I find Bissell's book entirely inadequate, not to say irritating. Ernest Buckler is simply summed up as a "bachelor by choice" who "had elected to devote himself to his art"; he found women attractive, but not sexually. Bissell is coy about a kind of life whose problematic is surely at the heart of *The Mountain and the Valley*. What is particularly distressing, if not offensive, is that this problematic is hinted at in Buckler's sexist and homophobic discourse which in turn is passed along quite unreflectively by Bissell. Buckler told Bissell that he had once written Noel Coward a fan letter, "congratulating him on, of all things, an obvious heterosexuality . . . which had struck 'great blows toward the divorcement of footlights and fairies.'" Bissell silently endorses a significant number of homophobic innuendos throughout the book, uncritically reports Buckler's sexist comments (in a nursing home, Buckler said that "It was nice . . . to have geisha girls put you to bed"), and, reporting on one of Buckler's several close friendships with women, assures the reader that "in that year their love . . . came to a happy climax"! Yet the most intense personal moment of the story is the very serious note Buckler wrote Bissell after the accidental death of his young friend-disciple, photographer Hans Weber, in 1978. It is clear that significant questions of emotion and sexuality are being repressed by normalization into a pious, belletristic account.

The most acute critical perception is Bissell's account, in old-fashioned terms, of how Buckler displaces psycho-sexual intensity into the nature-text of the Annapolis valley. Clearly, Buckler's only important novel is an intense project to achieve personal transcendence *within* nature, a project that has left Canadian writing some extraordinarily eloquent yet tortured prose.

Finally, I find myself irritated by the ultimately patronizing tone of *Ernest Buckler Remembered*. Bissell cannot help but emerge as something of a snob. More unfortunately, Buckler emerges as an intriguing figure diminished by a curious form of memorial appropriation.

PATRICK HOLLAND

# INCORRIGIBLE HEROES

LYN COOK, *The Bells on Finland Street.* Scholastic, $7.95.

LYN COOK, *Samantha's Secret Room.* Scholastic, $7.95.

DOROTHY JOAN HARRIS, *Don't Call Me Sugarbaby.* Scholastic, $3.95.

DOROTHY JOAN HARRIS, *Even if It Kills Me.* Scholastic, $3.95.

GORDON KORMAN, *Gordon Korman Collection.* Boxed set. (Includes *This Can't Be happening at MacDonald Hall, Go Jump in The Pool!, Beware The Fish, The War with Mr. Wizzle* and *The Zucchini Warriors.*) Scholastic, $17.95.

IAN WALLACE, *Mr. Kneebone's New Digs.* Groundwood, $14.95

WITH SO MANY wonderful books coming out in Canada for pre-adolescents and young adults, it is a pity that a recent sampling of books from Scholastic publishers is not a little better. It is not that the books are trashy. But with Canadian authors who write for young people today such as Vancouverites and recent award winners Sarah Ellis and Kit Pearson, and other strong writers such as Janet Lunn, Welwyn Wilton Katz and Monica Hughes, it is a pity that not all books for young people can meet the same high standards. However, in a realistic world, of course, such things do not happen.

Of the books listed above, Harris's "problem" novels *Don't Call Me Sugarbaby* and *Even if It Kills Me* are no doubt as needed as they are topical. The first is about a pre-teen girl who is diagnosed as diabetic, and how she adjusts to her illness mentally and emotionally, as well as physically. The second is about a young teen who becomes anorexic as she tries to become someone "special." Both are well written, and include lots of subplot action with disruptive siblings, disrupted families or boy problems. However both remain strictly "problem" books, and while the protagonists are real enough, neither are particularly engaging. These are not books that young people will read more than once, if they read them at all.

Lyn Cook's novels for pre-teens, *Samantha's Secret Room* and *The Bells on Finland Street,* are new releases of old favorites. However, while these books have a great deal more weight and depth to them than Harris's books, they are quite poorly written and definitely dated. While it is nice to see children's books supporting good values and showing strong family units functioning happily and well, Elin's raptures over the beauty of the glowing slag heaps from the nickel mines of Sudbury, Ontario, are likely to make even young environmentally informed readers most uncomfortable. Also the books get rather syrupy at times, and the characters are a little too good to be true, which makes them rather dull as characters. However, the biggest problem lies with the frequent and clearly artificial coincidences of the plots and the lack of coherent rationale for some of the things that happen in the books. One day Elin is longing for a friend and the next, by following her mother's advice to do something nice for the girl (who just happens to be the most popular girl in the class), they are the best of friends, an instant friendship that immediately overcomes barriers of both race and class. Equally improbable is the new friend Kim who turns up for Samantha just as her old one moves away, the finding of the secret room just as her archaeologist cousin Josh is about to leave for Egypt, and Kim's arrival in a sailing boat the day after Elin misses her first, longed-for chance to ride on a boat. To be fair, *The Bells on Finland Street,* Cook's first novel (written in 1950) is a much stronger book both in character and in writing that the more recent *Samantha's Secret Room,* but both books would have been better for some substantial reworking in places before their re-release last year.

The new Korman collection, however, is a pleasant surprise. After Korman's dismal recent book, *Losing Joe's Place*, these early books are quite delightful. The first Korman ever wrote, *This Can't Be Happening at MacDonald Hall*, is a slim book which will charm boys from the ages of eight through twelve, and should appeal to many girls as well. The stories are coherent, packed with non-stop action as the heroes, Boots and Bruno, whirl through one mind-boggling adventure after another, adventures that are quite convincing under the circumstances and given the characters, who are strongly alive. Even some of the secondary characters are nicely developed. The book is hilariously funny and surprisingly well written. The same can be said for most if not all the books in the five book collection, with new secondary characters coming to life in each book, and old ones gaining new dimensions. For example, the headmaster of the boys' school, Mr. Sturgeon, is quite central to the novel *Go Jump in The Pool!*, but is a more human and sympathetic character than he was in the earlier *This Can't Be Happening at MacDonald Hall*. Korman's tendency to stereotype his female characters, which so badly damaged *Losing Joe's Place*, is evident in this series, but despite the fact that the girls and women spend much of their time screaming and/or fainting, they do get up to some hilarious hijinks of their own, as well as aiding and abetting the incorrigible heroes in a variety of ways, not all of them stereotypical. Overall, these books are thoroughly entertaining, even if they have no depth or real substance.

Another new book which is of interest but has some surprising ambiguities is Ian Wallace's recent picture book, *Mr. Kneebone's New Digs*. This book is about a woman, April Moth, and her dog, Mr. Kneebone, who need a home. Unable to find anywhere to stay that is either desirable or affordable, April, with her one trundle-load of possessions, finally houses them in a cave in the city park. The plot, therefore, is strangely bitter-sweet for a children's picture book. But the question is, would children find it so? More likely children will find April's wandering through town looking for a home and stealing fruit when she and Mr. Kneebone are hungry quite exciting, and certainly her solution of living in a cave will entrance most children. However, for many adult readers, this book will be unsettling and uncomfortable. April's strong spirit is almost over-matched by her poverty, and the obvious exploitation the poor face in inner city slums is vividly portrayed. Her solution at the end is anything but satisfactory for the adult who is aware of the need for sanitation, warmth in winter, a source of clean, running water and so on. Wallace's wonderful pastel pictures throughout help make the book come alive, which will add to the enjoyment of children. However, the muted colours are likely to add a sense of melancholy for adult readers.

LYNN WYTENBROEK

# COMING TO MATURITY

KIT PEARSON, *The Sky Is Falling*, Penguin, $19.95.

KIT PEARSON, *Looking at the Moon*, Penguin, $17.99.

THESE TWO VOLUMES form the first two parts of a planned trilogy that centers on the young life and times of an English child, Norah Stoakes, who, together with her brother Gavin, is sent over as a "War Guest" to Canada to escape the dangers in her homeland in World War II.

In the first book, we trace the steps of ten-year-old Norah, stubborn, proud, and homesick, and five-year-old Gavin, as they

try to come to terms with being sent from their parents and the village they know as home to the wealthy Ogilvie family in Rosedale, where they will stay for the duration of the war. Kit Pearson gives her readers a realistic and sensitive portrayal of the anxieties and the comforts of these children, and she does an excellent job of engaging the reader in their lives. In Norah, we have an honest depiction of a ten-year-old, sometimes callously neglecting her brother, sometimes turning away all the rather awkward and occasionally selfish attempts of her Canadian friends to love her. This is the stuff that *Anne of Green Gables* is made of — a rather odd, at first unloved, child who finds a way to make peace with the world around her.

Pearson manages all this without sacrificing or unduly romanticizing the war years, either in England or in Canada. In fact, she draws quite a satisfying account of the effect of a large scale historical event on a small life. She truthfully enough includes details about the rationing of food and the censorship of letters. She does not withhold information about the trauma of schools, including even a child of German heritage taunted by his schoolmates and not accepted even by Norah's elders. To give us a sense of Norah's life, both in school and at home, Pearson takes us through an entire year, which is, for Norah at least, complete with unwanted public attention and sometimes unfelt patriotic cheer. Pearson includes Norah's irritation at having to sing "There'll Always Be an England" and at having to send officially worded prepared telegrams like "Now in School and Liking It" even when she most assuredly is not liking it.

The private realities of the book are equally well recorded. While the readers are sympathetic to Norah's feelings and made to understand them, we see her shortcomings too, and we come to appreciate "Aunt Florence" as Norah finally comes to call her, in spite of her ineptitude with the children and her longing for her own son, long dead in World War I. All the characters are skillfully and engagingly drawn, and Pearson's narrative takes us through the fears and humiliations of a ten-year-old separated from her home to a settled and relatively comforting Christmas tide in the conclusion.

In the sequel, *Looking at the Moon*, Pearson is somewhat less successful, if only because the action is at some remove from the drama and the dangers of the war since the Ogilvie family is spending the summer in Muskoka. Norah in this novel comes of age, and the focus of the book is less on the public life of the "War Guest" and more on the private life of a thirteen-year-old girl who has just started to menstruate, to her consternation, and who is surrounded by older girls in the extended family, all of whom are "mooning about" in love with Frank Sinatra or any number of young boys, overseas or not yet, as the case may be. Perhaps because it is one of the oldest stories in the world, the plot of *Looking at the Moon* is less interesting than that of the previous book. Still, this is a tale of first love that kindles a lot of the early feeling of romance and keeps its head and its perspective. Pearson admirably treats first love with respect and once again with a realistic touch. Norah may fall in love with nineteen-year-old Andrew, but he does not return the favour, though he is a decent fellow. And Pearson catches Andrew up in the clamour of the events of the war, revealing to Norah and the readers (but to no one else) that Andrew is reluctant to join the forces despite the plans his family has for him. Nevertheless, he does so, becoming not a romanticized war hero, nor a romanticized peace-maker, but instead a young man caught up in the force of overwhelming events. Kit Pearson is to be commended for keeping so faithfully here to her sense of the temper of the

times. Nor is it a story that is offensive to the temper of our times, since romantic love and its fulfillment in marriage are not presented as the ultimate goal of a young girl's life. Norah is left to muse upon the fact that her "Aunt Mary" has turned down not one marriage proposal, but two, because she considers herself happy and sees no need to change her life. This view of life exists side by side with the young Norah's own feeling that her love of Andrew will last forever, even if she is unable to articulate it. Pearson does not here sacrifice either the younger person's or the older person's perspective. The novel, despite the necessity of dealing with all the cliches of young love, still manages to do so with dignity, with sensitivity, and with a genuine complexity that does not find the children always wiser than their elders or vice versa.

In these two novels, Pearson has created believable characters taking their parts in the larger backdrop of events, without diminishing either their individual importance nor the reality of the forces beyond them. This interplay of history and the individual's story is the mainstay of many great children's books. I look forward to the final work of the trilogy and to the end of the war as Norah and Gavin have witnessed it. These two works of Kit Pearson's promise to culminate in a great re-union of parents and children in the final volume. Together they form a mature treatment of one young girl's coming to maturity.

JOANNE BUCKLEY

# PICTURE BOOKS

SHERYL MCFARLANE. RON LIGHTBURN (Ill.), *Waiting for The Whales.* Orca, $16.95.

DOROTHY JOAN HARRIS. SYLVIE DAIGNEAULT (Ill.), *No Dinosaurs in The Park.* Scholastic, $4.95.

LINDA GHAN. ELISE BENOIT (Ill.), *Muhla, The Fair One.* Nuage, $14.95.

BEN BROOKS. BILL SLAVIN (Ill.), *Lemonade Parade.* Kids Can, $11.95.

RACHNA GILMORE. CHUM MCLEOD (Ill.), *Aunt Fred Is A Witch.* Second Story, $5.95.

JEAN LITTLE. JANET WILSON (Ill.), *Jess Was The Brave One.* Viking, $18.99.

ROBERT MUNSCH. MICHAEL MARTCHENKO (Ill.), *Show-and-Tell.* Annick, $14.95.

LAST YEAR WAS a superb year for Canadian picture books. A seemingly endless stream of interesting, beautiful, thought-provoking picture books were produced. Amongst them were two animal books, very different in nature, which are quite delightful. The first, *Waiting for the Whales,* is a book about an old man whose greatest love is the orcas who visit his cove every summer. When his daughter and infant granddaughter come to live with him, he instills in the growing child the same love he has for the whales. The book is a gentle encouragement to the reader, young and older alike, to take the time to enjoy the natural beauty of the sea and the land, with a strong focus on the playful whales that bring such joy to the old man and the young girl. The book also presents a strong vision of the vibrancy of lives lived in harmony with nature. Finally the book presents the idea of the cycles of life, beginning with the child first as a baby, slowly growing into a young girl, and ending with the death of the old man. Yet within the context of this natural environment, his death seems natural too and is handled sensitively by the author. The illustrations are simple but evocative, and richly enhance the

story. A delicate and beautifully executed book, *Waiting for The Whales* is amongst the best produced in 1991.

The next animal book is *No Dinosaurs in The Park*, a story about the imaginative adventure of a young girl and her grandfather, as they search the local park for dinosaurs, and through their imaginations, find them everywhere. A simple book aimed at very young readers, this book encourages children to explore the world through their imagination, showing what a place of wonder even the local park can be. The alliance between the old man and the child is beautifully depicted. The illustrations are quite realistic, full of vivid colours, and show both the "real" objects and the dinasaurs consequently produced from those objects by the characters, which allows the reader to enter into the imaginative game.

Another book which stresses the importance of the imagination is Little's *Jess Was The Brave One*, about two sisters, the younger of whom seems quite fearless, the older more timid. Of course, these initial impressions are reversed as the story proceeds, both for the reader and for the characters. In encouraging the use of the imagination, the book shows that, at times of real crisis, children with strong imaginations can think their way out of the crisis in a way their more pragmatic fellows may not be able to. It shows that imagination can be a tool, not just something a child can develop for "fun." Now that children are faced with an increasingly difficult world, this book is most timely, as well as being thoroughly delightful. The illustrations by Wilson are superb, showing clearly every nuance of thought or emotion through the characters' facial expressions and body posture, which makes the characters and their experiences really come alive, even to the sneer on the nasty boy's lips. The intense realism of the pictures adds significantly to the effectiveness of this book.

Fears of yet another kind are dealt with in Gilmore's amusing story, *Aunt Fred Is a Witch*. Leila, who has to stay with her mysterious Aunt Fred for a weekend, is deadly frightened of her as she has been told the old woman is a witch. She spends so much time worrying about being hexed that she cannot enjoy herself as Aunt Fred whirls her from one exciting event after another. By the end of the book, Leila finds out that Aunt Fred is not a witch at all, only a very individual old lady who refuses to "act her age," and is therefore dismissed by others as eccentric, and worse. Thus Leila overcomes her fears, and learns that fear is often based on ignorance, and can spoil relationships that otherwise would be positive. She also learns a lesson about stereotyping, although no word that big appears in the swiftly-moving, exciting story. The pictures in this book are a bit of a let-down, as the figures are poorly delineated. However, both the suspicion and the excitement of the story are well translated by the artist, and this book should be very engaging for young readers.

*Muhla, The Fair One* is an African-based "myth," that deals with real supernatural powers. Depicting the realities of life somewhere in rural Africa, it shows a clever child outwitting a mischievous spirit who tries to destroy her life after she prevents him from devouring her younger sister. The story concentrates on how her basic goodness of both action and intent not only saves her sister and herself while destroying the spirit, but wins her the right kind of husband, a man who is both good and kind. Most interestingly for young readers, this short, illustrated book shows the realities of life of another culture. For example, Muhla is only thirteen when she has to consider marrying and starting a home of her own. The pictures, which include both vivid colour and black and white, show clearly this very different way of life, while helping

make it comprehendible for the reader.

Two books that are tremendous fun are Brooks's *Lemonade Parade* and Munsch's *Show and Tell.* Both stories are quite absurd, which adds greatly to the humour in each. In *Lemonade Parade,* the story revolves simply around a series of weird but delightful people who turn up to buy lemonade from three children who are running a lemonade stall with little success. The pictures fully enhance the text, bringing in an element of mystery as one of the children stares with increasingly pointed curiosity at the shoes of each customer, shoes which are always the same. The pictures also greatly enhance the humour of *Show and Tell,* a story about a boy who decides to take his baby sister to school for Show and Tell. The efforts of first the teacher, then the principal and finally a doctor to quiet the screaming baby are related in a deadpan voice, but the pictures show the absurdity of their efforts, and the combination makes the book quite hilarious. This is the first of Munsch's books in a while that is not the least controversial, and, like *Lemonade Parade,* for sheer fun and nonsense it is not to be missed.

LYNN WYTENBROEK

# LIVING SILENCE

JACK ZIPES, *Don't Bet on the Prince: Contemporary Feminist Fairy Tales in North America and England.* Routledge, $25.00/12.95.

JACK ZIPES, *The Brothers Grimm: From Enchanted Forests to the Modern World.* Routledge, $29.50/13.95.

THE LIVING SILENCE which characterizes the wolfish forest in Tanith Lee's remarkable revision of Red Riding Hood, and forests in general, are nodes around which collect the issues and ideas generated in these two volumes. Living silence typifies the dialogic interchange between literary and oral folklore, the mutual shaping and reshaping which Zipes explores in *The Brothers Grimm.* It typifies as well the re-claiming of female voice in fairy tales to which he gives a forum in *Don't Bet on the Prince.* This collection attempts to redress a critical "under-hearing" by bringing together a variety of feminist responses to and re-writings of fairy tale traditions. Writing out of an overtly Marxist and avowedly feminist position ("it is impossible today to be a critic without being a feminist"), Zipes provides a valuable and insightful introduction to the essays, stories and poems he has collected. He negotiates, in a general way, some of the trends in feminist and folkloric criticism and establishes a useful context for the selections which follow.

Women have long been silent partners, part of the landscape of fairy tales as appropriated and articulated by patriarchal traditions, and they are disenchanted with this role — such is one of this volume's central premises. When silence is alive, as a forest is with sounds other than those of *man*kind, what is spoken is not necessarily what is anticipated. Certainly the authors in this volume, most of them women, speak subversively and consequently infuse new energy into an old tradition. Zipes presents a delightful array of retellings, including fairy tales for children and adults, by writers both new and familiar. Judith Viorst, Jay Williams, Angela Carter and Jane Yolen are included among the writers for children; Anne Sexton, Margaret Atwood and Olga Broumas among those for adults. In both sections there are some marvellous discoveries: Jeanne Desy's "The Princess Who Stood On Her Own Two Feet," about a princess who suffers from being taller than her prince, and Tanith Lee's "Wolfland" were undoubtedly the gems of the volume for me. Zipes' own creative offering, "A Fairy Tale for Our Time," is regrettably the weakest in the volume;

despite metafictive twists, didacticism makes it more contemporary with the stodgier tales of Victorian times than with the enigmatic and witty tales he so tastefully chose.

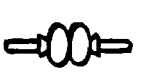
Zipes' "A Second Gaze at Little Red Riding Hood's Trials and Tribulations," an essay which picks up where his book *The Trials and Tribulations of Little Red Riding Hood* left off, is infinitely more successful. Perhaps his strong views sit more easily in criticism. Certainly his other works, like *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion* and *Breaking the Magic Spell*, balance quite successfully a strong theoretical orientation with fairness to the folkloric text which is too often run over rough-shod, as in Bettelheim's rather appalling analyses. The three other essays in *Don't Bet on the Prince* — by Marcia K. Lieberman, Sandra M. Gilbert and Karen E. Rowe — offer insightful critiques from a range of perspectives or feminisms, although only Lieberman's is new for the volume.

And the forest? In *Don't Bet on the Prince*, it's reclaimed for women, but in *The Brothers Grimm* it has a different significance. Zipes begins one essay in this more recent book: "[i]nevitably they find their way into the forest." He leaves the antecedent to his pronoun ambiguous, making it more inclusive; "they" are the protagonists of fairy tales, the tales themselves, and the Grimm brothers. Zipes argues that the Grimms may not have ventured into the countryside and forests to collect tales from the *volk* whose Germanic roots such tales purport to reflect, but they "cultivated" their own "'enchanted forest,' a forest in which they were seeking to capture and contain essential truths that were expressive and representative of the German people." This effort symbolizes for him the Grimms' bourgeois and nationalistic ideology, socio-literary programme, and psychological need for familial stability. Coming as it does quite early in the *Grimm* volume, this suggestion creates a landscape — mental and literary — within which to read the entire book.

The volume, compiling nine papers most of which Zipes presented at conferences over the course of the 1985-86 centenary of the births of Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, could stand some thinning. The essays deal with a variety of topics — the Grimms' lives, the implications of changes made to the tales, the German obsession with fairy tales, various critical approaches to their works, and the institutionalization (mythologizing) of fairy tales. In an effort to tie these essays together, Zipes interweaves aspects from one into another. The weaving is seamless, but nevertheless unseemly. The problem with enchanted forests, of course, is that they not only herald dramatic change for the intrepid traveller, but — being dense and labyrinthine — often describe rather circular journeys. In Zipes' book, most of the trees look far too familiar; one keeps coming back to the same old place. Neither his fine mind, nor this potentially fascinating volume, is well-served by redundancy.

The volume ends on a strong note, however, with two essays which show Zipes dealing with a subject upon which he is always eloquent — the power structures inherent in the tales and the way in which the institutionalization of fairy tales promotes those structures. These two essays go some way towards redeeming the whole. Not that the volume is without merit, or that it makes no contribution to Grimms scholarship, but rather, especially in the context of Zipes' other work, it leaves me feeling a little less than enchanted.

MARNI PARSONS



# THEATRE & SOCIETY

ROD LANGLEY, *The Dunsmuirs: Alone at the Edge*. Talonbooks, n.p.

DON DRUICK, *Where is Kabuki?* Playwrights Canada, n.p.

THE FIRST PLAY in a three-part chronicle, *The Dunsmuirs: Alone at the Edge* traces the journey of Robbie Dunsmuir and his wife Joan from their exile from Scotland to their settlement in the coal fields of Nanaimo where Robbie has been bonded for seven years as an indenture laborer for the Hudson Bay Company. An incurable dreamer, Robbie is from the outset obsessed with the idea of succeeding "greatly," so much so that his promise to build Joan "a castle . . . a fairy tale castle" that is "finer than those on any loch in Scotland" becomes a dream that eventually makes the family one of Canada's wealthiest and most feared. The Dunsmuirs' success through wild ambition and the betrayal and exploitation of fellow-miners and friends explodes the myth of fresh beginnings in the new world, as well as the stereotype of the immigrant laborer whose hard work and sacrifices are supposed to secure a respectable place in the status hierarchy. It is not Robbie's and his sons' back-breaking labor in the coal fields of a Company that "own[s] you body and soul" that brings the family the wealth and esteem they have craved; rather, it is only after Robbie becomes a "scab" that the Company grants him an independent prospector's licence. His subsequent discovery of a rich coal seam initiates the family's ruthless climb to success.

The play is compelling in the way Langley evokes the barrenness and despair of a Canadian turn-of-the-century mining town, with "its rundown school house, and its hopeless children," and its confining atmosphere which is "as claustrophobic as any mine shaft" — in essence "a place where all meaning's long gone." The political message, however, is cast in a melodramatic plot that too neatly traces the Dunsmuirs' rise from laborers to capitalists. Act one highlights Robbie's drive to overcome the squalor and degradation that are part of the miners' daily life, while Act two focuses on the alienation from the community that accompanies the family's success. The action is quickly paced and the dialogue is crisp, but the socio-political theme overshadows character development. Joan Dunsmuir's shift, for example, from a deep trust in a Calvinist universe, in which the family's indigence is "God's will," to her capitulation to a ruthless capitalist ethic which teaches that "Our fate is in our hands!" is too abrupt, the playwright having shown too little psychological interest in her. Similarly, the outcome of Robbie's dream of castle-building is thoroughly predictable and climaxes in the tearful final scene in which the couple is dancing, wistfully longing for an imaginary future, the director having the option of adding to the vignette "the exterior of the castle magically appear[ing] in the distance."

*Where is Kabuki?*, Montreal playwright Don Druick's fifth play, has had two productions, both widely acclaimed: its 1989 première by the Buddies in Bad Times Theatre in Toronto, which won the Dora Mavor Moore Award nomination for outstanding new play; and Vancouver's Touchstone Theatre's production in the same year. Like much contemporary Canadian drama, *Where is Kabuki?* is about social change, in this case the changes involving the impact on theatre of business interests and the popular taste for sensationalism. The plot, as Druick notes in his preface, revolves around "the stormy love affair between art and box office — ever the contemporary theme." The action is set in the playwrights' room backstage at the Kabuki-za Theatre in Tokyo on a sultry sum-

mer day in 1888. The all-male cast — including a Master, an Apprentice, and a Visiting Playwright — has gathered to choose the Kabuki-za's next production. Whereas in the past the Master Playwright's text would have been the indisputable choice, the Manager, now "heavily in debt to the Backer," chooses instead a potential blockbuster — a melodrama by the Visiting Playwright from the South.

The Master Playwright's text, like Druick's play, is in the style of traditional Kabuki theatre, which depends on a strongly stylized and ritualized dramaturgy. Its province, observes the Chief Actor, is the "slender margin that exists between the real and the unreal." Although Kabuki's formal, sensuous, and fantastic textures are most striking in performance, readers can nevertheless appreciate Druick's intricate adaptation of Kabuki's lyricism and emotional subtlety. *Where is Kabuki?* challenges the audience to break out of cultural boundaries. At the same time, Druick recognizes that the world of Kabuki "will always elude" him. To reinforce this point, the codified gestures and dialogue of the Japanese theatre are counterbalanced by modern English colloquialisms and theatrical cant. There are also moments of heightened feeling, in the tradition of western tragedy; a case in point is the Master Playwright's unsettling prophecy of the demise of a vibrant artistic form: "A Kabuki play is the human body. Our body dies here with us. The bones, our plot, broken. The skin, our dialogue, pocked and scarred." At a time when Canada's cultural institutions are threatened by its own southern neighbor, the play sounds an ominous note in the Kabuki-za's tragic capitulation to "a silly piece of fluff" certain to keep audiences "sitting on the edge of their seats" while the Manager happily pays the creditors and the rent.

VIVIANA COMENSOLI

# REPEATED THEME

FRANCE THÉORET, *The Man Who Painted Stalin*. Trans. Luise Von Flotow. The Mercury Press, n.p.

ROSEMARY SULLIVAN, *Blue Panic*. Black Moss Press, n.p.

"FEMALE DESPAIR is never abstract"; indeed, as France Théoret's characters experience it, female despair is all too painfully concrete. Like a millstone round their necks, it weighs them down, keeps them from moving and growing, both physically and emotionally. But as Evelyn, the protagonist in "Fascination" notes, this resultant female stasis, particularly in the context of traditional heterosexual relationships within a patriarchal culture, "has its reason for being":

> Everyone else, all those who don't know how to fly, are made responsible for daily maintenance, or rather, indefinite upkeep. For one person to take off in flight, the other has to watch over him.

The use of the masculine pronoun here is no accident; in Théoret's stories it is always the man who is in the process of doing something (painting, writing), of "taking off," and the woman who is literally ground in and by conventions of feminine behaviour. As a result, we see the same scenario repeatedly: male productivity and privilege fostered by female passivity and restriction.

In the title story, for example, we watch as Louise Aubert, who initially declares that she will invent her own life and "be sufficient to herself alone," is introduced to a young artist, Mathieu, and learns that "although there is a revolution to be started and forbidden delights to be tasted, people still come back to the good old *boy meets girl*." As they slip into a permanent relationship, Louise accepts as a given that she cannot make any of the moves, because "the privilege of deciding on happiness was

reserved for the man." And when they marry, Louise has "a moment of absolute despair" for "getting married seemed to be stripping her of what she was and reducing her to common femininity." The protagonist of "English Tweed" has been reduced beyond "common femininity" to common motherhood. Indeed, throughout the story she is referred to as either "the mother" or "she." We discover that this woman daydreams because "she wants to lose her attachment to the daily trap" and that "she conjugates verbs in the conditional tense, not one is convincing in the present indicative." Having been "wounded in the heart" by her sole responsibility for the children, her loveless marriage, and her unattained desires, she too "belongs to the category of married women" — a category that spells certain despair and paralysis.

Across the volume, the stories detail similar scenarios in which women sink under the weight of their own unhappiness, made heavier by the ties that bind them to husbands, lovers, children, and families. This strategy of repetition, along with Théoret's extensive use of commas to draw out sentences, creates an overall tone of entrapment, even claustrophobia, in the collection. Readers who persevere through these depressing revelations, however, will come away with a keener awareness of what one character describes as "the hell of female subjectivity."

Rosemary Sullivan's *Blue Panic* is also united by a repeated theme — the human desire to locate a narrative thread that would allow us to make sense of our lives. The volume, which contains two sections of poems separated by a prose piece, is rife with references to syntax, stories, fiction, writing, invention, and interpretation.

In the first section, "The Universe is as Close as the Veins in Your Neck," the poems focus on memory; here words are the sometimes dangerous, sometimes painful link between past and present. For Aunt Mary, for example, words "never stay where you put them. / They're loose"; she tries "to keep them safe in the family." For the nameless man who "believed his text, / not knowing the true story is always / beneath story," words, and the tales they tell, are an illusion:

> His pain is only a past
> rewritten — not what he took it to be.
> How tell him he never was
> in control. There are no safe versions.

This subjective nature of life stories, our own and the ones we create about others, is central to the prose section entitled "A Dozen Ways to Use the Heart." Here the first-person narrator asserts: "I have invented everything and all depends on my interpretation." What she invents is the history of her lover, "A man for whom the only strategy left to fill the ego was the bodies of women laid end to end like a path going nowhere." He, in turn, has his "own version." "Can I ever find your text, unclouded by my own collusive interpretation?" she asks, knowing instinctively that she cannot. And although the narrator chooses to continue her illusory narrative," she realizes finally that "in this narrative of myself it is only I who am the ending."

The final section of poems, "Life Sentence: A Chilean Sequence," documents Sullivan's trip with her partner to his country of origin, which "like family, /... always pulls you back." Here are tales of torture, escape, and exile, where "the sentry with the machine gun" is "part of the landscape" and an 80-year-old woman has narrowed her world "to a tolerable slice." As the volume closes, the narrator brings us back once again to the conjunction between life and story, declaring "I'm the / homecoming in the epic they've written / you into." By this time, however, the theme itself has come to seem ancient and stale.

SUE SCHENK

# VUES ANIMÉES

MICHEL TREMBLAY, *"Les Vues animées" suivi de "Les Loups se mangent entre eux."* Leméac, n.p.

MICHEL TREMBLAY, *Le Train.* Leméac, n.p.

ON THE DAY he finished writing *Les Vues animées*, Michel Tremblay found the following message in a Chinese fortune cookie: "Life is a tragedy for those who feel and a comedy for those who think." This bit or oriental wisdom appears as a fitting epigraph to Tremblay's wonderfully readable work, infused with the tragicomic vision so characteristic of his plays. With this charming collection of short, autobiographical narratives, Tremblay affirms his double debt to the cinema as spiritual mother of his creative awakening and catalyst of the initiatory phases of his early years. The retrospective vignettes are thus a journey into a creative universe in the making. In the best Tremblay tradition, the descriptive passages are so vivid, the verbal exchanges between characters so theatrically crafted, that one is tempted to read these sketches aloud.

The significance of the title extends far beyond its popular québécois acceptation (*movies*) to suggest a series of lively glimpses at growing up in the *Plateau Mont-Royal* district during the fifties and sixties. As in all of Tremblay's works, the sense of time and place is artfully rendered. The mere mention of a piece of furniture, the *chaise du téléphone* for instance, conjures up memories which capture the essence of daily existence on Fabre Street ("un vieux fauteuil au velours décati dans lequel toutes les femmes de la maison passaient des heures, un coke chaud posé sur la plancher, le journal ou une revue sur les genoux, l'appareil vissé à l'oreille") while a reference to an all-male Friday night movie audience permits an allusion to the taboos by which women's lives were bound ("Une femme qui se respectait ne fumait pas dans la rue et n'entrait pas au cinéma Princess le vendredi soir, pas plus qu'à la taverne"). Treks across Montreal to various movie houses become reflections of the city's geographic and linguistic solitudes. During one such escapade to see the anxiously awaited *Cinderella*, Michel and his histrionic mother attempt to locate the *Cinéma Outrement* in what seemed to them to be the farthest reaches of some forbidden territory "oùsque les gens comme nous autres font le ménage." While the Disney film's unabashed dispensation with reality was to have profound and lasting effects on Michel ("J'étais un dessin animé en Technicolor et j'allais le rester"), his mother's recollection of the Outremont experience was somewhat less sublime: ". . . elle se plaisait à raconter à qui voulait l'entendre qu'elle y avait passé un après-midi complet à sécher en regardant des rats coudre une robe de bal." In another foray, Michel and his Our Gang-like cohorts venture north of Laurier Street, on this occasion sans Mme Tremblay, to that "*terra incognita* qui appartenait aux étrangers mais pas aux Anglais, aux autres, les Italiens" to get their first peek at silver screen sexuality.

Each of the dozen chapters (with the exception of the tenth) bears the title of a movie which holds strong emotional associations for Tremblay. By artfully blending these key movies with events surrounding his viewing of them, Tremblay succeeds in creating the kind of enchantment he says he felt during his early encounter with Carné's surrealistic *Orphée*. Always the consumate storyteller, Tremblay has a field day with these reel to real clips, casting himself as central *dramatis persona*. Time and again, the power of the cinematic event and the small pleasures of childhood (the magical combination of a bag of Maple Leaf

chips, a large Coke and a low-budget science flick) are evoked with disarming veracity. Likewise, the painful uncertainties of adolescence are invariably linked to encounters with the seventh art: watching a seemingly innocuous Laurel and Hardy version of *Babes in Toyland*, Michel begins to comprehend, and initially deny, his own sexual identity when Tom-Tom, the handsome tight-clad lead, kisses Little Bo Peep: ". . . j'aurais voulu être à sa place à elle!" This celluloid interlude triggers an anguished yet fortuitous meeting with fate wherein the cathartic attributes of dramaturgy become apparent to Tremblay: "... je commencerais à écrire pour me soulager, me confesser, me purger d'un secret trop grand pour moi et que je mettrais encore plus tard dans la bouche de mes personplus tard dans la bouche de mes personnages de théâtre pour exprimer l'impuissance."

*Les Vues animées* ends, as it began, with a chapter devoted to a Carné film, this time *Les visiteurs du soir*. Tremblay tells of the monumental impact this motion picture had on his artistic career, presenting it as the decisive moment which transformed his vague yearnings to write into a true artistic calling. The day after viewing *Les Visiteurs du soir*, Tremblay, then sixteen, began writing *Les Loups se mangent entre eux*, a novella which is presented in this edition, immediately following *Les Vues animées*. It is printed, as the editor explains, "dans sa version intégrale, avec ses naïvetés et ses audaces de fond et ses 'imperfections' de forme." In this pristine state *Les loups* allows for a rare look at what Tremblay calls "mes premiers vrais pas."

*Les loups* explores the dynamics of jealousy, hypocrisy and guilt among the jaded rich during a Christmas eve party. The atmosphere is one of gluttony and false revelry. Set largely against the decor of a mansion eclectically decorated with gaudy Louis XV furniture and tasteless modern art, the affected conversations of this pack of backbiting social wolves are the antithesis of the banter of Fabre Street. The story centers on the young Jocelyn whose confused relationship with his mother, the beautiful and world-weary Christine Déjazet, is prologue to the revelation of Jocelyn's nascent homosexuality. In the midst of the evening's strained bacchanalia, Jocelyn meets Eric Koestler, a quiet, melancholy youth. The effect is overwhelming: simultaneously ecstatic and confused by the discovery of a soul mate, Jocelyn immediately senses the mocking gaze of the other guests. After the party, when Christine speculates accusingly on her son's feelings for Eric, Jocelyn imagines that the walls of the apartment slide apart like a theatre curtain. A lone, naked character, he is subjected to the audience's ridicule before concluding that he is not even free to kill himself.

Contemporary to *Les Loups se mangent entre eux, Le Train* represents Tremblay's first attempt as a playwright. In this play, which took first prize in the 1964 Radio Canada *Concours des jeunes auteurs* and which was subsequently televised, the sole characters, *X* and *Z*, are thrown by destiny into the Sartrean vacuum of a train compartment whose winlows have stuck shut. Together, or perhaps separately, the two passengers, in themselves studies in incommunicability, act out the perpetual discordance of humanity through the ritualistic syncopation of their verbal exchanges. *X*, the self-proclaimed *puer eternis* who ironically has just fathered a child, cannot come to grips with the apathy and existential absurdity of life. He perceives the distracted, paper-reading *Z* as the incarnation of everything he abhors and, it could be argued, as the flip side of his own misunderstood persona. The violent de-

nouement, both a symbolic gesture of repression and a castigation of middle-class values, conveys the solitude and revulsion which Tremblay says motivated his conception of this metaphoric journey.

Like *Les Loups . . .*, *Le Train* is a work of youth and as such affords a look into the groping beginnings of a major writer. Their publication in the present editions, complemented by *Les Vues animées*, represents an important contribution to understanding Tremblay's mature works.

CONSTANTINA MITCHELL

# CLOSE CALLS

RITA DONOVAN, *Daisy Circus*. Cormorant, $14.95.

PATRICIA STONE, *Close Calls: short stories*. Cormorant, $14.95.

DAISY CIRCUS (professional name of Nick Albright's daughter) is a Montreal nightclub performer struggling to keep her act alive after her colleague Elsie pulls out of their duo and dumps her. Daisy left home in the Quebec countryside during her teens to find work in the Big City, following the pattern of her mother Gail. In 1953 Gail had left Cape Breton and her mother Morag for Montreal and her untraceable Uncle Jemmie; and readers of the author's first novel, *Dark Jewels*, will soon discover that the eleven-year-old Morag in 1925 is by 1980 the arthritic grandmother still living in Cape Breton.

Uncle Jemmie had disappeared into Montreal, but this time the generations keep in usually distant touch. The poetic faculty in Daisy passes to her from Morag, omitting Gail. Not understood by her parents, the hyperimaginative Daisy adopts the poet E. E. Cummings as her makebelieve friend; but she and her crippled brother Drake are also very close. After the family splits up and Drake goes to Alberta with his father he communicates more with Morag than with Gail, and at the end of his struggle with cancer Daisy rejoins him in Edmonton.

The growing of Daisy through childhood and her parents' separation and Drake's death is a strange and haunting story. Daisy is a loner. Already in early youth she faces "the stirred-up dustbowl of her life." It is all so random: "Luck sometimes isn't." She learns that "People get hurt, no matter what," and that "Sometimes we hurt people and we don't want to," and that "We get caught in the chinks of time and we don't always realize it until the ones we want to hold the most are gone." Her refuge of the imagination, her country of the mind, is with Cummings, whose world-outlook and expression of it are a present hold in her outer world of turmoil and stress.

Daisy's inner life is far more real to her than the world of mundane existence, except when she is on stage performing. She comes to believe that *mostpeople* (to use the Cummings contraction) don't have "a world inside." She is always her own ringmistress creating her private worlds. When Drake dies she enshrines him and Cummings on the sacred island of her imagination, which has also material solidity on the Rideau river. "They will be fine together." Daisy cannot explain such feelings to other people; her dreams break through language and escape, but Cummings can express them with an understanding impossible to those around her in the everyday world.

In the Edmonton tornado of 1987 Daisy discovers a kind of tragic fanfare sounding farewell to her brother, "a choir of ten billion humming bees, a chorus of bench saws whirring through wood. . . ." At that moment overwhelming reality proposes some kind of answer to the trauma of desolation she is confronting. A wild and free imagination such as Rita Donovan confers upon Daisy may suggest

for the reader some hope for humanity on an evolutionary path; some idea of a linkage better than random in the structure of the world; some meaningful survival through the community of the imaginative.

*Daisy Circus*, then, is ultimately a joyous book. In *Close Calls* Patricia Stone takes us into an often similar but even more danger-laden world of young girls growing up amidst the limitations of adult sympathy that they have to adjust to, but that often — like Daisy — they rebel against. These daydreaming children turn to each other with the secrets all adolescent closefriends must guard from parental knowledge and censure. Of course, they make mistakes, and some fine studies in suspense show us how. There are formidable might-have-been situations. In this respect *Close Calls* itself is a most powerful cautionary tale, perhaps the more persuasive for not ending in total disaster.

The prevailing mood of these stories is an often tense anxiety. Admittedly there are tranquil days. To Claire, in *Left To Be Desired*, "These summer days were like rooms in a spacious castle. . . . There were minutes for observing details — the pattern of pine trees in the woods, the way the creek sidled out narrowly from the shadows and then took on a small swallowing sound." Of course, Claire's mother warns her against drinking any water from a brook, outlining the risk of finding "snakes growing live in her stomach" if she does. Claire still has a sense of the "magical in everything. It seemed that adults went seeing without looking." But disenchantment happens. The farm will be built over; her hero thrashes a horse. Then she deliberately drinks from the creek.

Adults are insensitive. Childhood was long ago: "down they forgot as up they grew." So Cummings explains it; but Patricia Stone's adults have their own problems to lock themselves into or deal with incompetently. Mac, the divorced policeman in *A Trip For One*, seeks help through his emotional troubles from Eleanor, at fifteen much too young to cope. In *The Candystriper* Jill steals from the hospital giftshop, fantasizes about a pathologist until she sees him arranging a cadaver in the morgue, and has dated Cliff (in Grade 13) "for several years." She "has to cajole him to make love — usually by selecting unlikely places." Jill's mother "has threatened for years that if Jill ever becomes pregnant before getting married, she will jump off the harbour into Lake Ontario with Jill tied to her." Other parental advice seems to have been omitted, so that of all the ten heroine-victims Jill seems to be in the worst mess. But the lone woman-heroine already in her thirties, Meryl, may be less fortunate still. Meryl, in *Living With The Dark*, stays for the night in locked department store; she "has merely stepped outside of things to take a breather and consider," but finds herself not so alone there after all.

Anxiety and joylessness afflict these lives; but deeper down lies a dismaying idea of the unhappy prospects for all humanity. A civilization is rapidly disintegrating at much the same pace as its technological improvement. Humanity will need all its too often stultified imagination and intuition to be able to swerve away from the imminent perils lurking among us.

MICHAEL MASON

# LOOK. WAIT. BELIEVE

ROCH CARRIER, *Prayers of a Very Wise Child*. Trans. Sheila Fischman. Viking, $19.99.

CARRIER'S STORIES often trace the confrontation of an old, traditional world with a new and modern society in which

elements of farce and elegy are combined. The violence and bleakness of many of his novels are not conveyed through life-like or complex characters. Rather the use of the tall-tale, of caricature, and of the potent folkloric mixture of innocence and violence has become Carrier's hallmark as a writer. There is sometimes despair in his fiction, but dominating all else is the energy and dynamism of his language. The stories that seem most representative of his work — *La guerre, yes sir!*, *The Garden of Delights*, and *Heartbreaks Along the Road* — are characterized by an awareness that nothing is safe from change or questioning. His fiction reflects the momentous period in Quebec history that he has experienced directly.

Carrier's most famous story in English Canada, *The Hockey Sweater*, particularly in its illustrated Tundra edition, is a memorable treatment of how the external world impinges on the child's sense of identity. This preoccupation has been further developed in the "child" narrative of *Prayers of a Very Wise Child*, a series of monologues addressed to God by a six-year-old. Covering every subject from birth to death, and from suffering to hope, Carrier makes effective use of the "wise innocent" narrator. There is always the chance that such a narrator is by turns too cloyingly wise or innocent, and this happens in a few instances. On the whole, however, it's a well-balanced sequence with reflections on both the flesh and the spirit.

Apart from some stories in *The Hockey Sweater and Other Stories*, this collection seems to be in parts the closest to autobiography that Carrier has yet come. The narrator-protagonist is close to, if not the same age, as Carrier and the external events of the period — World War II and the advent of the nuclear bomb — are all situated in the quiet and uncluttered rural Quebec of the Duplessis era. The attention to detail seems rooted in the lived facts of rural Quebec and there is an affection for detail that does not seem to spring only from the writer's imagination. Some of the childish obsessions with breasts, bums, and death are universal. Other details, like the two-year-old's wild sleigh trip down the village's icy main street seem too vivid merely to have been the product solely of invention, although I stand to be corrected. And while in their lack of complexity Carrier's adults remain children, his child-narrator in *Prayers* is the most mature of his protagonists. Through him, Carrier is able to capture the beauty of an early summer moon, the suffering of a contemporary Job, and the poignancy of enduring love.

Carrier is skilled at underlining the characteristics of human community and in using the child to illustrate the potential and limitations of human understanding. The monologue is addressed to a God who may or may not exist; the significance of the child's prayers rests in their value as communicative acts. Carrier's humour, as usual, is an intrinsic part of the telling although there is also darkness in this collection and a questioning of divine justice. I am reminded of A. M. Kein's "Reb Levi Yitschok Talks to God," the small voice talking and asking, and the great voice silent. Or Maillet's La Sagouine, another "wise innocent," speaking to the silence, but no less eloquent for that.

Once again the long-standing association of Carrier and Sheila Fischman has resulted in an English translation which is fluent and evocative. Particularly memorable is the consistent use of the first person plural — "our mother," "our father," "our brother," "our uncle" — instead of the more usual English first person singular. The child's world is shared and not simply possessed within the broader context of community and, by extension, of communication. Faith, which seems so much in doubt in this

series of prayers, is more a gesture of communication than an expectation of response. In fact, no response is possible. As the mother tells her fidgeting and querulous little son in church: "Look. Wait. Believe."

JOHN LENNOX

# TALK ABOUT IT!

ROZENA MAART, *Talk About It!* Williams-Wallace, $12.95.

ANNE CAMERON, *Bright's Crossing.* Harbour, $12.95.

REVIEWING TOGETHER two such disparate volumes, both the product of feminist concerns, the one by a writer B.C. born and bred, the other by a South African now based in Toronto, cannot but prove a thought-provoking exercise for a male reader living in Europe and interested in both Canada and South Africa. Cameron's collection of short stories is entertaining, witty and full of wisdom, and her consummate skill as a story-teller is everywhere apparent; Maart's poetry and prose exemplify the pain of a people torn asunder by racism, dispossession and cultural imperialism, yet her defiant and aggressive stance alienates me almost as much as it appears to do those white feminists whose well-meant sympathy for her cause she so abruptly dismisses.

*Talk About It!* is Maart's first published collection. She explains her reluctance to publish her poetry in terms of her suspicion of the written medium itself, which she regards as alien to the African tradition, white, "colonized." Emphasizing that "my words are spoken, with voice, with tone, with me-ness," she seeks to retain something of the interaction between speaker and listener inherent in African oral performance by supplementing the written text with an audio-tape on which she has spoken a generous selection of her texts. Since the volume also includes a number of prose texts in which she protests the suppression of black culture, articulates her feminist concerns and voices her commitment to her African heritage, the reader certainly is provided with a comprehensive perspective on her work.

Central to that work is the question of her own identity ("Blessed is she who knows her name / blessed is he who keeps his identity in flame"), which she describes as her "reality as Black, female, South African and a feminist." Maart comes from District Six, the inner-city area of Cape Town whose population was, in terms of South African race legislation, largely classified "coloured" and which, in the late 1960s, was proclaimed a "white group area," its people being forcibly removed to characterless, racially segregated townships far from their original homes. After demolition, the district remained a wasteland, a memorial to a crime which epitomises like few others the way in which apartheid destroyed communities, their culture and their history. In opting to define herself as "black" rather than "coloured," Maart is at once rejecting the racist terminology of apartheid, aligning herself with the oppressed majority and espousing the ideology of Black Consciousness. In its concern to restore what has been lost or suppressed, Maart's writing is informed throughout by themes common to writers from the tradition of Black Consciousness which played a dominating role in the political developments of the 1970s: the assertion of the pride of black people of the dignity of the self ("my roots were planted in black soil,"); the claim to the land of which blacks have been dispossessed ("our bodies are ready to fight / we've come to claim / without no shame / because the land / We know / is / Black,"); the statement of the need to "regain" the "oral history of Blackness," to "rename"

black experience; the celebration of the African heritage after centuries of colonization ("Africanhood, our right to the experience of our continent; to the enjoyment of our culture; to the celebration of our continued survival and to the togetherness of our people ...").

The form of Black Consciousness to which Maart subscribes is a fairly extreme one; it finds expression in frequent outbursts of strident anti-white sentiment ("I wanna talk about your demise"). Rejecting the determination of her experience by "white settler-colonialism," she regards whiteness as "tainted," castigates "a mode of intellect diseased with whiteness," dismisses white culture as "rotten white trash." No whites at all are spared her strictures: feminists, liberals, radicals, she damns them all. Not for her the philosophy of non-racialism pursued by the ANC, not for her Canadian multiculturalism.

That Maart sees herself as giving "voice to the passion and power of Black African femaleness," is apparent not least in her choice of theme. Here are poems on female sexuality, on sexual violence against women, on the political oppression of women. Powerful women people these pages: the "mamma / our story teller" of "The Clitoral Nature of Colonialism," a veritable repository of the oral tradition, who recounts the story of colonization in terms of the sexual exploitation of African women and sees liberation as the time when women shall rule their own sexual destinies; the young woman of "A Dame of the Night and Day," who thwarts a rapist, leaving him "Disappointed at his display / of his manhood / of his learned power of violence / unskilled by his victim / a girl / who knew to expect him / and learnt how to deal with him."

The South African dimension of Maart's work, apart that is from her commitment to Black Consciousness, lies in the Cape Town setting of her work. In "District Six: Our Heart Our Hope" Maart depicts the destruction of her home and history as an allegorical encounter between a young boy Moegamat and a Boer appropriately named Pretorius, holding out hope of the rebirth of the district. A poem entitled "In Downtown White Observatory" — a "grey" area of Cape Town noted for its alternative lifestyles — lambastes what she perceives as the hypocrisy of radical whites' identification with the black struggle ("Yes, in the fertile land / of Observatory / a happy Black woman is a nice Black woman / a dressy Black woman's clothes is an ethnic spice / for white decadence and vice"). In "Women's Oppression, The Struggle *Still* Continues" she recalls the heady days of student political organisation, criticising male activists' blindness to gender questions. The volume concludes with a helpful listing of African words and Cape slang, but why, one wonders, is there no explanation of place names (not even of District Six!)? It is a pity too that having usefully decided to include two poems written in the rich dialect of the Western Cape which demonstrate the linguistic variety and complexity of South Africa like nothing else in this collection — "The Struggle Against All Forces of Oppression" and "Wat Weetee Jy Da" — Maart then provides no linguistic assistance to the reader who has to guess his way through lines such as:

> Moegamat van die seven steps het 'n
> merchant geword
> die police het sy huis afgebrand
> hy het die comrades geld gegee.
> vir 'n pamphlet

And what an opportunity was missed in not including them on the tape!

Maart's views on feminism are stated most forthrightly in the poem "Not Your Feminist White World" and in the prose text "Speaking Up, Speaking Out." The poem constitutes her angry response to

what she sees as the inability of white feminists in South Afirca to transcend their own world of economic and social privilege and achieve genuine rapport with the concerns of blacks: "We say / what you talk about / ... /applies to your white world / your glamourised white world / ... your racially configured white world / your many maids in the kitchen, white world," and so on. Maart's experience leads her to transpose these strictures to the Canadian context in "Speaking Up, Speaking Out," her frank account of her involvement in Canada. While it is not for this reviewer to question the validity of such experience — the substance of her criticism is that she is expected to accommodate to the concerns of white feminists, is being asked to define herself "at the backdrop of their white experience," being "de-Africanized" — it is nonetheless to be feared that the abrasive and somewhat self-congratulatory tone of her account (she *enjoys* the discomfiture which her "conscious contradictory method" causes her white counterparts, seems to relish the disruption her presence and behaviour generate) will prove just as offensive to readers as it did to the feminists whose negative reactions she so assiduously reports.

Cameron's collection, preoccupied with many of the same concerns but in how different a manner, is set in the fictional community of Bright's Crossing on Vancouver Island and tells the stories of eleven very different women, all of whom are faced with the need to redefine their lives, to stake out independent existences. The causes for this need vary: they may be the victims of male violence or sexual exploitation; they may have left a man they found cheating on them or been abandoned when pregnant; they may have been deprived of their livelihoods through industrial pollution or the untimely death of their man in an accident; they may have suffered a near-fatal stroke. Cameron's interest lies in showing how they make out; how they abandon broken relationships and set up on their own; how they deny men's sexual expectations; how they cope with separation from their children; how they get themselves retrained, learn new trades, restore a sense of self through work, "fill in the holes in their lives." How, she asks, do they overcome the fear that male violence has produced? What kind of political commitment do they evolve? What philosophy of life do hardship, separation and independence lead to?

If, like the Pat of the first story, who escapes a violent husband, moves to Bright's Crossing, and finds herself having to hold together the family of an equally inadequate son, the women are in their different ways "together women," what of the men in their lives? The picture Cameron paints is bleak. Her men subscribe to antiquated notions of the role of women in society ("A wife's place is in the home.") They regard their women's bodies as their personal property to do with as they please. They are given to physical and mental violence. They relish sexist jokes. They seek the solutions to the problems they have themselves created in alcohol, drugs, and sex with younger women and prove incapable of measuring up to their responsibilities, whether to family or pregnant girlfriend. Most also prove hypocritical, especially those who are into counterculture lifestyles and claim to be feminist themselves!

Much of the interest of the collection lies in the manner in which Cameron has incorporated her own political concerns — with women's issues, with ecology, with the Indians of the North-West Coast — into the narrative. Thus, in "Doreen" a successful woman lawyer, herself the daughter of a former inmate of a concentration camp, takes on native land rights cases and finally translates political

commitment into personal action by taking custody of an abandoned child. Thus, in "Frances," an older woman recovers unexpectedly from a stroke and persists in surviving, largely in an effort to prevent her son selling off her farm land to property developers. Thus, in "Betty" a woman's livelihood setting traps for crabs is destroyed by industrial pollution from pulp mills.

Unlike most of the stories in this collection, neither "Frances" nor "Betty" is realistic. Both start from a serious ecological issue and achieve their effect by playfully transposing it into the realm of fantasy. Both stories are hilarious, particularly "Betty" which is the kind of feminist re-write or reversal of themes from myths and fairy tales familiar from the work of Sara Maitland and Angela Carter. Betty hooks a seawoman on her line, laughingly accepts a Faustian pact to give her the son she does not have since she is not even married if she will restore her catch and then mysteriously proceeds to bear three sons and a daughter without male agency! The sons, married in succession to the same beautiful maiden, are taken by the seawoman, only to be rescued by Betty's daughter who after this triumph over evil promptly sits down "to plan her next move against those who would ruin life for the rest of us." Cameron's story-telling talent and, I suspect, her skill in oral performance, expressed here in the delight with which she plays with audience expectations, are nowhere so apparent as here.

If the political agenda of Maart's collection seemed to me somewhat undermined by its aggressive stance and its call for change unfocussed, Cameron's stories seem to succeed by portraying credible characters who, forced into change, stake out realistic aims they have some hope of achieving. With their strong sense of community, their political and ecological concerns, their witty use of colloquialisms and the sheer wisdom of their call to be "up and doing," as Margaret Laurence would have put it, these stories are life-enhancing. With a bit of luck the reader's blood will smile too.

GEOFFREY V. DAVIS

# KNOWLEDGE REVEALED

CAROL MALYON, *The Edge of the World*. The Mercury Press, $11.95.

DON DICKINSON, *Blue Husbands*. The Porcupine's Quill, $10.95.

IN A RECENTLY anthologised essay, Brian Fawcett expresses worries about the disproportionately wide reputation of Alice Munro, given the smallness of her 'almost perfectly structured and crafted' stories. He should read some of Carol Malyon's. They are tiny. They are not 'almost perfectly structured and crafted' either. But then Malyon does not seem to be attempting to write, in this collection of twenty-two stories on just 120 pages, those complete, intricate half-novels that are Munro's forte, and which have become the benchmark of the Canadian short-story genre. This collection has more in common with Bronwen Wallace's final prose poems than with Munro's holistic enterprises.

Malyon's women narrators are introverted. Their internal worlds are brought to the page through their fantasies, their sharp observations, and their obsessions with these observations. The women worry about a detail and fetishize it. 'Catalpa,' the first story of the collection, sets out what becomes a familiar structure in those that follow. An italicized, private narrative is juxtaposed with one which observes, and distinguishes itself, from the worlds of others. The woman looks at her neighbours' mundane existences and is 'unable to understand the fiction of their

lives.' A piece of storm-glass, collected from the beach, is moistened by the woman's body fluids so that it retains and changes its colour. She lavishes attention on this one detail and knows that she does not need 'to gather more pieces of glass as she had planned . . . She realizes it will take her a lifetime to understand this one.' But Malyon goes on presenting us with differently eroded, shaped and coloured fragments of women's internal and etxernal lives to pick up, examine, and discard as another turns up, fragments that we can moisten ourselves and hold up to the light to look at again.

Some of the women's mundane lives take on elements of the fantastic as they watch out of their windows. They see people disappear off the edge of the world. They worry about marauding elephants loose and jumping up and down on the streets of 'Benningtonvermont.' Women metamorphose unexpectedly into blue herons in restaurants, flapping their arms like wings and standing on one leg as a way of trying to make the world appear simple.

Angela, the narrator of the final story, like that of the first, looks out on the street and tries to make sense of others' lives. Angela's position in the apartment block (like the place of this piece in the collection) has some twenty stories above it. From this privileged place she can see anything she wants, and she briefly narrates the settling of families around her, their progress through furnishing and decorating, childbearing, divorces and affairs. The progress of these concise biographies seems arbitrary, but Angela asserts her control. She knows what the lives of these people are like, and thinks that 'as long as she watches, nothing bad will happen.' She wonders how long she can stay awake, preventing another road accident from occurring, preventing another woman's life from being as desolate as her own.

In 'Friday Chicken,' the fantasy lives of women make way for a precisely observed account of habitual family life. Gillian, a woman whose name and viewpoint has been transformed from the less serious Jilly with the loss of her partner, revisits a fast-food joint that used to be a regular haunt for her and her lover. What she witnesses is another couple's ritual outing, accompanied by their two kids, which also includes a display of ritualised oppression familiar to many a dinner table. Although the barely-sketched frame of the piece is less convincing, it is this excruciating, immaculately described fragment from a woman's life that I take away from Malyon's story collection, like an imperfect piece of blue storm-glass with a rough edge that cuts my palm as I hold it in my pocket.

Don Dickinson's stories are more conventionally finished, with all the rough edges smoothed down, and as such, they are likely to provide fewer jabbing reminders of their presence than Malyon's. The stories seem to resemble the sculpture by Tony Urquhart that illustrates the front cover of Dickinson's collection, in which polished white bones have been haphazardly gathered and framed in an elaborate case and set on a pedestal. It's difficult to be sure which is more significant, the skeletal remains or their ornate encasement.

Like Malyon's, these stories include flashes of the bizarre, quirky or the fantastic. A lonely widower's casual encounter with a nude woman on a beach is orchestrated by an unpleasant pimp of a fiddler crab. In 'The Accident Business,' two old folks plan their escape from the restrictions of an institution, which denies them the physical comfort they seek with each other as consolation for their aching bones. The depressed, deranged Dashwood dangles from the hands of Grissom, a gym instructor, off the edge of the Tenth Street train trestle, behaving for

all the world like a reincarnation of a character from an Ondaatje novel, as he hurls lines of poetry instead of abuse at his rescuer from midair.

However, the somewhat distanced narrative perspective that inhibits involvement with many of the other stories is shed in 'The Sample Case,' in which a man's infidelity, and his illegitimate son, are revealed to his wife after his death. Wilbur Findlay organizes a journey of disclosure for her and for his grandson, according to his sales routes. As the winter comes in, David explains how his and his grandmother's worlds are transformed by the knowledge revealed by the dead man's cowardly way of confessing. It is here that the bare bones of pain are scraped clean for the reader, beautifully set nonetheless.

JILL LEBIHAN

# DROIT D'AUTEUR(E)

J. GAGNON, *Les Murs de brique*. Québec/Amérique, n.p.

MICHÈLE MAILHOT, *Le Passé composé*. Boréal, $18.95.

MA LECTURE DE *Murs de brique* a peut-être été influencée par *Ecrire dans la maison du père*, dans lequel Patricia Smart décrit le cadavre féminin enseveli sous les fondations de l'institution patriarcale. Voilà pourquoi j'ai sursauté quand j'ai lu, presqu'au début du roman de J. Gagnon,

> Elle monta dans les échafaudages ... Elle s'aperçut qu'il avait mis ses bottes de caoutchouc du mauvais pied. Mais elle n'eut pas le temps de s'apercevoir qu'elle tendait ses deux mains vers lui: elle tombait déjà ... [Ferdinand] regarda en bas.
>
> — Le corps de sa mère gisait sur un tas de briques.

La perfection qui existe jusqu'ici n'est pas de ce monde; cette maman parfaite doit donc mourir. Ferdinand a quatre ans, amoureux des briques, et veut devenir maçon. Il le fait. L'histoire, si elle était réelle, finirait là: "Il était maçon. Il était lui-même." Mais Ferdinand effleure l'archétype: maçon magique, comme s'il s'agissait plutôt de la francmaçonnerie. "Légende ou réalité ... Ferdinand atteignait la perfection ... Le métier n'avait aucun secret pour lui." En bon apprenti, il travaille sans arrêt, apprend l'alchimie du mortier lentement, et refuse les avances charnelles. Les briques adorées rappellent sa mère jusqu'au moment où il bande pour la première fois: "... il aimait ça, il pensait à son père ... l'image de sa mère disparaissait ... C'était inévitable que l'image de sa mère se détache de son rêve d'être maçon."

Débarassé du cadavre maternel, Ferdinand est capable de tomber en amour: "c'était plutôt d'un paradis à un autre: cette jeune fille, un ange en robe légère." Tout va amoureusement bien, jusqu'au moment où Angèle devient enceinte et il se sent obligé de se débarasser d'une mère. "Depuis les naissances, la réalité lui tâpait sur le crâne à grands coups de masse." La mère, c'est comme la réalite, et les hommes ne peuvent pas vivre avec ça. D'où le pouvoir mythique des surhommes ...

La réalité, le réel fictif et la métafiction se mêlent parfaitement et allégrément dans *Le Passé composé* de Michèle Mailhot. Judith est en train d'écrire: cahier bleu pour le journal intime du quotidien, cahier vert pour la poésie, cahier rouge pour le roman qu'elle essaie d'écrire. Cette technique convient admirablement au texte. Elle permet de commentaires éditoriaux comme "Je voudrais ne plus écrire dans le carnet rouge de fiction. Je vais plutôt m'attacher à vivre d'abord, sans arrière-pensée littéraire affligeante," et puis, le lendemain, "Il me semble que j'ai démissionné un peu vite. Alors, la longue, la très longue patience de l'écrivain?"

Cet emploi du masculin n'est pas (bien sûr) gratuit, car c'est justement cela l'angoisse: la narratrice fait tout, mais tout pour devenir *auteur*. Sa relation féminine à l'écriture, elle, l'amène à l'impasse d'un rapport d'autorité:

> Voilà l'impasse où j'ai été amenée par un mot. Mon idée, avant ce "hélas" de malheur, était de montrer une Pauline vieillie et fatiguée, mais encore capable d'enthousiasme et d'espoir. Et la voilà qui dit hélas, cette abrutie.
>
> Elle a parlé spontanément, sans que j'y sois pour quelque chose. Les écrivains disent toujours que leurs personnages les emportent au-delà du texte . . . mais ici Pauline m'a échappé *dès la première page*. comment n'a-t-elle pas compris que Pauline, c'est moi?

Composer le passé, c'est bien sûr lui donner un sens, mais pour le faire Judith n'a ses bagages intertextuels, les mots que les autres lui ont donnés. La narratrice ne semble pas destinée d'être auteur. Rédactrice littéraire de métier, c'était elle qui permettait aux autres d'écrire, qui redisait, dans une maison où les auteurs (dont son amant, qui est décrit avec tant de finesse que l'aurais souhaité que Judith nous révèle son nom) et son patron sont rois. Le roman est rempli de tout ce que les autres ont dit, de citations littéraires et inventées, et cette plénitude l'encombre plus qu'elle ne la libère. Elle n'ose pas trop révéler sa présence dans cet univers discursif: c'est pour cela qu'elle décide au début qu'elle va "établir une convention selon laquelle tous les auteurs auxquels je me réfère seraient identifiés par les lettres M.M." Jeu de mots très utile, cette technique "facile" est pourtant révélatrice de l'angoisse dans laquelle l'écriture la plonge: qui a le droit d'auteur? Certainement pas les auteures.

Dans l'impossibilité d'être, la narratrice décide d'ouvrir un nouveau cahier, le cahier jaune. En tête du cahier elle colle l'annonce de son entrée en fonction à l'Association des écrivains du Québec, où "je vais faire oeuvre d'historienne, de mémorialiste, ce sera ma petite histoire des grands écrivains prise sur le vif." Présentée comme solution idéale, car elle aura maintenant du temps et de la sécurité fiancière "pour mener à bien mon projet. Mon oeuvre," cette décision ressemble quand même à un abandon. Dans le cahier jaune (pour la peur?) elle prendra "plus que des notes: une vraie compilation des faits et gestes des écrivains que je rencontrerai . . ." et on soupçonne bien qu'il s'agisse d'*écrivains*. Faits? Historienne? Réalité? Mais sa (méta)fiction était tellement belle . . .

Tout ce roman découle d'une focalisation féminine très fluide. Comme Judith, Michèle Mailhot suit l'écriture plus qu'elle la mène, mais elle ne semble pas avoir peur de se déplacer. Cette angoisse reliée à l'accès à une position autoritative, subjective, prive Judith de la jouissance créative:

> Quel piège, l'écriture! [Ce mot] ne correspond pas du tout à ce que je voulais dire. Ce curieux phénomène de détournement s'est déjà produit dans ce journal, mais jamais dans le cahier rouge où je croyais dominer, posséder mon sujet. Ce mot m'a échappé et je ne l'assume pas.

Il s'agit de bien plus qu'un mot.

Si *Les Murs de brique* enferme le cadavre maternel dans une mythologie masculine, le roman de Michèle Mailhot nous apprend beaucoup sur la difficulté de s'en sortir, de devenir celle qui parle plutôt que celle dont on parle. Sa narratrice refuse de se taire, d'abandonner, de mourir. Cependant, elle ne peut prendre la parole qu'à de petites bouchées bien féminines.

JO-ANNE ELDER

# ENTRE DEUX PÔLES

DENIS MONETTE, *Adèle et Amélie*. Editions de Mortagne, n.p.

AVEC *Adèle et Amélie*, Denis Monette, journaliste de carrière, nous offre son premier roman. Cette histoire de 447 pages est inspirée par une bonne intention: rendre leur dignité à deux très vieilles femmes en retraçant leur vie.

Le roman est organisé avec adresse, sinon originalité, le long de deux axes. Dans le présent, cinq chapitres suivent, du 5 février au 4 septembre 1989, les derniers jours des héroïnes dans une maison de repos. Treize chapitres racontent le passé des deux soeurs, remontant, au-delà de leur naissance, jusqu'à la jeunesse et la rencontre de leurs parents. L'avant-dernier chapitre fait la jointure entre ces deux axes, c'est le moment où le passé rattrape le présent avec l'entrée d'Adèle et d'Amélie, devenues séniles, à la Résidence des Lilas. Le roman est donc, dans son ensemble, une vaste analepse interne, présentée par un narrateur omniscient comme un rapport de journaliste, une date ou une indication temporelle étant donnée au début de chaque chapitre ou section de chapitre. De nombreuses analepses secondaires sont organisées dans le déroulement chronologique du récit. Cette structure a fait ses preuves entre les mains de maîtres comme André Gide. Dans *Adèle et Amélie*, elle apporte aussi au lecteur l'avantage de deux perspectives et, ici, de découvrir ce qui, des événements de leur vie passée ensemble, demeure dans leur esprit touché par la sénilité. On constate ainsi, sans surprise il est vrai, que l'affectivité, opérant sans le contrôle de la raison sur la mémoire, déforme complètement les faits passées. Le roman présente deux défauts irritants. Les multiples analepses secondaires noient le lecteur dans une minutie de détails sans intérêt. A tout cela s'ajoutent des analepses externes qui rappellent des événements historiques ou culturels et qui, amenées soudainement dans le texte et n'ayant aucune résonance sur la vie affective des personnages, ont un caractère totalement artificiel.

L'intrigue oscille entre deux pôles: d'une part les attachements que forment les deux soeurs, d'autre part les liens qu'elles développent entre elles. L'amour tient une large part dans *Adèle et Amélie* qui semble s'inspirer des ces romans de Delly et de Magali, lectures favorites d'Amélie. Mais au contraire de cette littérature sentimentale et populaire, les aventures amoureuses, dans l'oeuvre de Monette, sont caractérisées soit par la médiocrité du partenaire, soit par la malchance et l'échec. Ayant repoussé un bellâtre, Adèle prolonge pendant plusieurs années des fréquentations platoniques avec un homosexuel dont elle attend, naïvement, une offre de mariage. Elle n'a pas plus de chance en amitié puisqu'elle s'attache étroitement à une collègue dont elle ne comprendra les intentions amoureuses qu'après de longs mois de contacts fréquents. On peut se demander si la malchance d'Adèle réside dans le destin qui s'obstine à mettre des homosexuels sur sa route ou dans son propre aveuglement! Amélie est destinée à souffrir aussi, bien sûr: l'homme dont elle tombe passionnément amoureuse, Nick, "le mâle incarné par excellence" et dont elle a un petit garçon, finit par l'abandonner sans l'épouser après la mort du bébé.

Les rapports entre les deux soeurs constituent l'autre pôle de l'intrigue. Dès l'enfance, ils sont marqués par des querelles constantes alimentées par la jalousie et la méchanceté d'Adèle et acceptées avec douceur par Amélie. Dans cette relation sado-masochiste, chaque protagoniste semble jouer un rôle prédéterminé. Amélie, après un effort pour se libérer de la domination de sa soeur, fait preuve, à son égard, d'une patience et d'une résí-

gnation qui dépassent les bornes de la vraisemblance. Adèle, "femme sans entrailles avec un coeur de pierre," prend toutes dispositions nécessaires pour rendre sa soeur dépendante d'elle. Durant leur vieillesse, Adèle devenue "diabolique" isole Amélie, puis lui brouille les idées jusqu'à la rendre sénile pour se l'attacher plus étroitement.

Pourtant, à deux reprises dans sa vie, et sans transition, Adèle devient bonne, même douce et aimante. Ces épisodes de générosité sont sans doute nécessaires pour appuyer la thèse psychologique du roman:

> Adèle Berthier n'était pas née pour être celle qu'elle avait été. La vie s'était chargée d'en faire celle qu'elle était devenue. . . . Amélie avait aimé . . . La vie n'avait plus de secrets pour elle, tandis qu'elle, Adèle, était restée ignare (*sic*) de la joie d'être femme. . . . Voilà ce qui avait fait d'elle la bête qui avait peu à peu détruit la belle.

Le lecteur ne peut que contester la vraisemblance de la motivation d'une haine aussi durable. De plus, il est ennuyé par des personnages aussi schématiques et superficiels.

L'intrigue, essentiellement binaire, comprend quelques éléments secondaires dont la vie professionnelle des soeurs. C'est ici que Monette cherche à défendre sa thèse sociologique, à savoir l'ingratitude de la société pour les mérites de ses membres âgés: "Celle qui, jadis, donnait des concerts . . . n'était plus au présent qu'un emmerdement au sein d'un monde nouveau." D'où la nécessité pour des écrivains bien intentionnés comme Monette de raconter leur vie pour "récupérer" leur dignité. Pour convaincre son lecteur de la valeur de ses héroïnes, l'auteur lui annonce d'emblée leur passé glorieux: "Adèle avait été toute sa vie un éminent professeur dans des écoles privées tandis qu'Amélie avait à son actif plusieurs trophées à titre de musicienne." En fait, pris semble-t-il par un misérabilisme psychologique, le romancier montre les soeurs vivant de petites existences médiocres et pauvres, Adèle "enseignante dans une petite école privée, faute de mieux," haïssant, lâchant, reprenant son métier d'institutrice, Amélie poursuivant négligemment une vocation de musicienne, malgré des dons superbes, donnant quelques leçons de piano et trouvant "un emploi comme vendeuse dans un magasin de pianos d'occasion."

Ce roman, médiocre dans son intrigue et sa technique de caractérisation, lassant par ses détails triviaux, inconsistant quant à ses intentions, plonge le lecteur dans un abîme de désolation par son style. On pourrait faire un catalogue assez épais des fautes de vocabulaire, de grammaire, de mauvais goût, des métaphores incohérentes, des mélanges de registres, des nonsens et autres absurdités. On en aura remarqué quelques-uns dans les passages cités ici. Il faudrait ajouter au catalogue les erreurs de faits (l'auteur n'est pas même consistant sur la date de la naissance d'Adèle!), les citations incorrectes, les *non sequitur*, etc. Finalement, ce qui enveloppe, pénètre le roman et en rend la lecture difficilement supportable, c'est le ton du narrateur, ton où se mêlent la prétention, la platitude et la vulgarité. Le seul mérite de ce roman, à notre avis, est qu'il fait apprécier la difficulté de bien écrire.

MONIQUE CROCHET

# HISTOIRE

MAURICE LEMIRE, *La Vie littéraire au Québec, I – 1764-1805*. Universite Laval, n.p.

APRÈS D'IMPORTANTS ouvrages surtout consacrés aux auteurs et aux oeuvres: *Histoire de la littérature française au Québec* (1967-1969), dirigée par Pierre de Grandpré, *La Littérature canadienne-français* de Gérard Tougas [(1960) 1974] et le toujours utile ouvrage *Le Québécois*

*et sa littérature* dirigé par René Dionne (1984), voici que paraît le premier tome de *La Vie littéraire au Québec*, sous la direction de Maurice Lemire, voué d'abord à l'institution littéraire. Des recherches s'étaient poursuivies et se poursuivaient plus intenses durant les dernières années dans ce domaine. Il était temps de faire le point. Pour la courte période de 1764 à 1805, l'ouvrage compte 500 pages.

Comme l'indique le titre du premier volume de la série: *La Vie littéraire au Québec*, il s'agit d'une histoire qui "tente de cerner le fait littéraire non seulement grâce à l'examen des textes eux-mêmes, mais aussi par l'analyse du processus de leur production et de leur réception," selon les orientations historiographiques les plus récentes.

Cet ouvrage apporte une réponse informée à des histoires qui, comme celle d'Auguste Viatte, *Histoire littéraire de l'Amérique française, des origines à 1950* (1954) et celle de Madeleine Ducrocq-Poirier, *Le Roman canadien de langue française de 1860 à 1958* (1978), soulignent fréquemment le décalage entre la production française de France et celle du Québec, comme s'il y avait une continuité nécessaire entre la littérature-mère et celle de la fille à la coupure du lien colonial. Le présent ouvrage nous présente les conditions difficiles d'émergence d'une jeune littérature qui non seulement est coupée de la mère-patrie, mais tombe sous l'influence d'un nouveau maître.

Après un premier chapitre sur l'héritage, le paradigme littéraire du XVIIIe siècle et les écrits de la Nouvelle-France, l'ouvrage, au chapitre deux, établit les conditions générales au Canada touchant la population, son organisation avant 1760 et ses élites après la Conquête. Les chapitres trois à sept couvrent le circuit de production et de consommation, la prose d'idées et les textes d'imagination, encore peu abondants dans cette période de mutation et d'adaptation. Les différents sujets sont fort bien fouillés, reposant sur des recherches historiques détaillées. On expose le rôle important joué par les immigrants français et britanniques. L'apport plurivalent de Fleury Mesplet entraîne certains redoublements dans le texte, mais, sans doute, était-il difficile de les éviter. Comme la conclusion le signale: "le XVIIIe siècle apparaît comme un laboratoire ou s'expérimentent diverses protiques qui donneront ses fondements à une littérature nationale naissante."

Une chronologie du Canada et du monde, une abondante bibliographie et un index des noms de personnes, des oeuvres et des périodiques complètent le tout et font de cette publication un lieu de référence essentiel.

Souhaitons que les autres ouvrages suivront rapidement. Maurice Lemire conduit bien ses projets à terme. Il faut espérer aussi que le projet de Laurent Mailhot sur l'histoire littéraire du Québec verra aussi bientôt le jour. Elle devrait apporter une approche complémentaire qui pourrait être aussi fort féconde.

ANTOINE SIROIS

*** R. J. STEVENS, *Feathers on the Water*. Illus. Gordon Snyder. Alberta PastArt Publica- n.p. The author's confidence that "Of this day, I remember exactly how I felt" guides this memoir of a prairie childhood in and around Wainright, Alberta. In eighteen short sketches the writer recalls the Rexall drugstore (the family business), the Wednesday half-day closings, cloak rooms and Eaton's catalogues that signal growing up in the 1920s and 1930s. But it is, especially, a girl's and women's world of folk dancing lessons, afternoon teas, hair-dos and shopping for the right bra. Stevens' language is rural Alberta demotic: the little finger is a "pinky," problems are "a royal pain," double and triple modifiers are the norm; even the strained bookishness of "attired" for dressed, and "utilized" for used fits the mood.

L.R.

opinions and notes

# THE CONFLICT OF IDEAL AND HUMAN LOVE IN CHARLES SANGSTER'S "THE ST. LAWRENCE AND THE SAGUENAY"

CHARLES SANGSTER'S LONG poem *The St. Lawrence and the Saguenay* (1856) fascinates by its curious and sometimes unwieldy mixture of forms, but its ambiguities especially continue to invite critical reappraisal. The poem is a travelogue of the narrator's journey along the St. Lawrence and Saguenay rivers with an unidentified Maiden, who may be present in spirit only. The journey ends with the speaker's spiritual revelation at Trinity Rock, when the Maiden departs the boat and, depending upon which reading of the poem one credits, is redundant once she has led him to "Truth," is immortalized in "Art," or is transformed spiritually into his wife.

The poem owes much in form and content to Byron's *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, but the most interesting correspondence is that Byron's hero journeys with a companion in an attempt to come to terms with an impossible love. Sangster's narrator, apparently because his love is not pure enough, is also unable to be united with his beloved. Like Byron's hero, he seeks to either effect that union or dispel the desire to do so. His love interest is typically thought to be the Maiden, who is transformed at the close of the journey to make his union with her possible or unnecessary. The rhetoric and imagery of the poem, however, indicate that the love interest is another character in the poem, the Montreal girl, the love left behind, as in Byron's poem.

The narrator desires to return to his boyhood love, but first must reconcile the contending claims of God and Nature — associated with Spiritual Love — and desire and human nature — Profane Love. The Maiden, a figure of Ideal Love, is not the object of the narrator's desire — although he often wishes to evade the spiritual peril of human love by loving only her — but his guide, as Gordon Johnson has suggested (xvii). The Maiden is typically addressed as "love"; when she sings, the songs come from Love's lips; she is love itself, "true love at the helm" (LV, 3), guiding the boat. The journey does not culminate in a spiritual transformation of the Maiden but with the narrator's finding God's truth and accepting human love as his lot. The narrator seeks to partake of divine love on earth by remaining with the Maiden, but the truth made manifest at Trinity Rock is that man must share love with a woman, not an incorporeal ideal.

Most of the poem's earliest critics lavished virtually unqualified praise upon Sangster, primarily as a poet of the Canadian landscape, a "Canadian Wordsworth" (Bourinot 11). Critical attention in this century has been less favourable. The intermittent love story among the passages of description and the lyric songs is seen by later critics as a source of confusion, but, to some, of central importance. W. D. Hamilton is typical in his perception of the poem as substantially flawed, the meaning obscured because Sangster lacks the ability to make his theme clear: "Why does Sangster fail so dismally to project his meaning?" (58). It seems clear that Sangster fails to project his meaning because Hamilton almost wilfully refuses to recognize the centrality of

the love relationship. He insists, "The mystical companion, even if she is considered to exist on the literal level, does not add interest to the poem" (61). He merely identifies the "sweetheart of his boyhood days" (61). To Hamilton, the journey is that of a poet seeking the source of poetic inspiration; at the poem's end the lover abandons the spirit of love for the spirit of nature, now a nature poet (58).

More recently, critics have accepted the centrality of the theme of love. Frank Tierney has suggested in his 1984 edition of the poem that it concerns "love and spiritual growth beginning with the speaker's alienation from his beloved Maiden through to their union at Trinity Rock" (24). The subject of the poem is the creation of the poem, so this "union" is the finished poem. The other "earnest being" (CVI, 6) who replaces the Maiden at the poem's close is the muse of Poetry. It seems unlikely, though, that the rapture the speaker expresses at the creation of "a new life" (CX, 8) is occasioned by the writing of the poem, given the emphasis on love throughout. Tierney contends also that the two lovers part at the end so that a purely spiritual union can be effected (290); this supposition is clearly contradicted by the celebration of *human* love at the poem's close.

David Latham's brief but sensible analysis is roughly contemporary with Tierney's. He claims the speaker's rapture at the poem's close reflects the desired reconciliation of spiritual and natural love in Human Love:

> when God becomes as important as the maiden, [the speaker] acknowledges the integrity of each. The poem's final affirmation then is not a pious rejection of the maiden for God but a thanksgiving to God for ... mature 'Human Love.' ... (44)

According to D. M. R. Bentley, in "Through Endless Landscapes: Notes on Charles Sangster's *The St. Lawrence and the Saguenay*," the narrator can share only human love with the Maiden in his boat until they reach Trinity Rock, when the Maiden, having shared the speaker's revelation, is transformed into "*another* woman by means of a spiritual conversion" (15). She ascends to a higher spiritual plane and so makes a religiously sanctioned union between them possible. One of the difficulties with this reading is that this transformation takes place *after* the narrator and Maiden have parted: "Already thou art gone, with one last look / From those exalted eyes of thine" (CVI, 1-2). Bentley reads the parting metaphorically as her transformation: she has "changed in character but not in substance" (15). But, among other reasons which I will discusss, the simple gap of time between the parting and the sudden appearance of "another earnest being at my side" (CVI, 6) make replacement rather than transformation likely. That the companion is transformed into one more suited to marriage is argued against also by her designation as "Maiden," suggesting one already so suited.

For Bentley, the narrator's "wistful memory of boyhood love for a Montreal girl that is apparently impossible" (8) serves only as a test of the firmness of his love for the Maiden. To Tierney, the Maiden *is* the mature Montreal girl (n247). I argue, however, that the narrator wishes to share his human love with the Montreal girl, prevented only by the fear that human passion will lure him from spirituality and God's will, adumbrated by Nature's majesty. At Trinity Rock, she replaces the Maiden; wholly spiritual love is rejected, supplanted by Human Love.

The ambiguity of the love story is exacerbated by the confusion over which woman is being addressed at any point. Although whether the Maiden is physically present on the voyage is finally immaterial, Tierney bases much of his argu-

ment for her absence on the mode of the narrator's speech to her. He addresses her in the opening stanza as though she were absent. When he addresses her directly in the second stanza, Tierney contends (despite later similar shifts in address), the speaker begins an internal monologue and the Maiden is now present in his imagination. A simpler, more likely explanation is that two different women are addressed:

> There is but one to whom my hopes are clinging
> As clings the bee unto the morning flower,
> There is but one to whom my thoughts are winging
> Their dove-like passage through each silent hour:
> One who has made my heart her summer bower.
> Feeling and passion there forever bloom
> For her, who, by her love's mysterious power,
> Dispels the languor of my spirit's gloom,
> And lifts my dead heart up, like Lazarus from the tomb.
>
> Maiden! from whose large, intellectual eyes
> My soul first drank love's immortality,
> Plume my weak spirit for its chosen skies,
> 'T would falter in its mission without thee.
> Conduct its flight; and if its musings be
> Oft'ner of earth than heaven, bear awhile
> With what is native to mortality:
> It dare not err exulting in thy smile:
> Look on it with thine eye, and keep it free from guile.

The images and characteristics associated with the one addressed suggests two women, not one. The first stanza's images are of birds and bees, of fruitful bowers in which feeling and passion bloom. The second contains instead the "intellectual eyes" of the maiden, an emphasis on soul, spirit, and Love's immortality. The woman in the first stanza is linked with human love, with passion and mortality, while the woman in the second stanza is linked with Ideal Love, with intellect and immortality. The narrator apologizes in the second stanza for dwelling on mortal matters in the Maiden's presence, but makes no apologies in the effusive first stanza. In the first stanza, the narrator is addressing his human love, the Montreal girl. His thoughts are winging to her; she is the goal of the journey. At the beginning of the second stanza, the exclamatory "Maiden!" clearly marks the shift in address: he is now asking the muse of Love to guide him in that journey, helping him avoid uncurbed human passion and find Human Love.

The central tension in the poem's narrative between spiritual and natural love finds its emblem in the imagery of the river journey. The man is tempted both by the static pools of purely spiritual love he shares with the Maiden and by the raging torrent of unbridled passion he associates with his boyhood love. The first is represented by still water and sylvan splendor, the second by the rocks and rapids (this symbolic division seems also borrowed from Byron). Stanza VII contains the first scene of stasis. Passing a lovely island, the narrator muses,

> . . . surely here
> The wild enthusiast might live, and dream
> His life away. No Nymphic trains appear,
> To charm the pale Ideal Worshipper
> Of Beauty. (VII, 2-5)

The speaker desires to escape the mortal world of passion, so idyllic Nature is a constant temptation. Aspects of Nature are "all alike — each one a Spirit-Mars, / Guarding my Victor-Soul above Earth's prison bars" (VIII, 8-9). Worshipping at the altar of Nature, avoiding love for a woman, his soul is safely directed toward Heaven. Immediately after this passage from stanza VIII, the speaker speaks of another "Maiden," the daughter of the "Brigand Chief." She is celebrated as having great "worth and moral dignity" primarily because her love remains pure "daughter's love" (IX-X). She remains a Maiden, and thus fit for the speaker's admiration.

At the time of his journey, passionate Spring has been supplanted by static Summer (XII), the season suiting the

speaker's inclinations. Even in Summer, however, the "passionate" glare of the sun (III, 8) is too harsh — the Maiden and the type of love she represents cannot stand the light of day — and most of the journey takes place in the dream-like world of twilight and night. Only as evening falls can he convince himself of the permanence of his ethereal union with Ideal Love. In "The Twilight Hymn" following stanza XXVII, night is likened to death and the after-life, and the joy with which the narrator anticipates both of these recalls Sangster's "Uncurbed Passion," in which unrestrained passion is a "human Niagra" (1), and the speaker desires marriage in heaven, not on earth.

After night has fallen and the river brings them to Montreal, the narrator speaks of the Montreal girl as "one, who, in my boyhood days, / I loved with a deep passion" (XL, 1-2). He is frightened by the "human Niagra" she threatens to unleash. Even here, though, "deep passion" suggests a salutary melding of the deepness of the pools of ideal love and the passion of the shallow rapids. The speaker loves the Montreal girl still: "my Boy-love has stood the test of time, / And ripened like her beauty" (XL, 6-7). In contrast to the dark Intellectual eyes of the Maiden, the Montreal girl's eyes suggest joy and sunlight:

> There was a joyousness within her eyes,
> Like the sun's light illuminating the blue
> Of heaven, making earth a paradise.
> (XLI, 1-3)

The last line suggests that with the Montreal girl it is possible to find a spiritual love *on* earth, while with the Maiden, he and she must "seek beyond the veil what here can never be!" (LXX, 9).

The narrator vacillates between his desire to reach his destination and his desire to languish in idyllic stasis, never to move from ideal love to human love. As the night deepens, hastening the return of the Sun of Love, he is increasingly aware that he cannot stay with the Maiden. In "The Parting Song," following Stanza LIX, he speaks despairingly of the "iron tongue" that has decreed that they must part. Despite his vaunting and desperate claims to the contrary, he realizes that this pure but pale love cannot survive the rising of the sun, the nearness of which prompts the song's words, "our hope in hope is broken."

As they approach Eternity Rock with dawn about to break, the narrator tries to reconcile Woman, Nature, and Love:

> Love lures me evermore to Woman's arms,
> But here I kneel at Nature's feet!
> Love fills my being with calm, replete,
> But regal Nature sets my spirit free
> With grateful praises to God's Mercy seat.
> Yet nature binds me closer, love, to thee.
> (C, 3-8)

While the speaker can remain in this "divine retreat" (C, 2) and appreciate the sublimity of Eternity Rock, he is content, and so the contemplation of Nature appears to be the perfect complement to his union with "love." However, "love" is not itself an end, but a means to an end, a guide to lead him to a human love. Here love "lures" him to seek a human heart, thus disturbing his calm contemplation. Even the majesty of Nature is not an end in itself, but is evidence of the rightness of God's design (XCVII), which dictates that man's love should seek a human heart.

As Bentley notes of this stanza, the narrator seeks to reconcile "profane love," which leads to the arms of woman, and "sacred love," which leads to God through Nature (12). He appears to find that reconciliation in his relationship with the Maiden. The narrator rhapsodizes over this newfound peace and joy in the following four stanzas, but his rhapsody is abruptly halted in CV. The apparent solution is false, as were the idyllic moments of contemplation under the cover of night, and will not bear the weight of

perceived truth at Trinity Rock. The "Dream of Love" is exploded by "the first swift dart / Shot by young Phoebus . . ." (CV, 7-8). The reconciliation of sacred and profane love cannot be accomplished through his love of the Maiden, but only in the living heart of a woman.

In the face of the majestic Trinity Rock, "like Truth made manifest" (CIV, 9), he resignedly tells the Maiden,

> Let us return, love, for the goal is won.
> Here, by this rock, 'tis doomed that we must part,
> And part forever; for the glorious Sun
> Of Love that quickeneth my earnest heart
> Shines not for thee, alone. (CV, 1-5)

The passionate Sun of Love cannot shine for her *alone*, but only as she is mediated through a human heart. A crucial shift takes place, the reverse of the shift that occurred between the first two stanzas of the poem. The loss of his "Dream of Love" leaves the narrator saddened, feeling he has lost Love forever, since only profane love remains. The Maiden leaves the boat ("Already thou art gone" (CVI, 1)) but she is suddenly and surprisingly replaced by the Montreal girl, whose presence is introduced in negative terms, as if the narrator were in a state of incredulity, unable to believe his good fortune:

> Another earnest being at my side! —
> Not her whose Girlhood's dreamy love was mine;
> Not her whose heart Affliction's fire has tried;
> Not her of the Artistic soul, and stately pride,
>
> Who shook by being as the autumn winds
> Shake down the timid leaves. (CVI-CVII)

This negative invocation of his boyhood love may occasion doubt as to the identity of "Another earnest being," but the shift from the Maiden to the Montreal girl here is signalled also by the change of address. As noted, the Maiden has typically been referred to either as "Maiden" or "love," but the Montreal girl, in whose human heart his love now finds a home, is "Loved-one!" (CVII, 3). The negative description indicates that the Montreal girl no longer causes his being to shake with passion as she did when they first loved. There is a transformation, but it is a transformation of the speaker's response to the girl rather than of the girl herself. He sees her now not in terms of youthful passions, but of spiritual love mediated through her human heart. In the passage following that cited above, the new situation is announced by the "iron tongue" that had doomed the narrator and the Maiden in "Parting Song":

> Loved-one! I hear
> The voice within syllabl'ing words that bind
> Our souls, and blend them for a nobler sphere
> Of usefulness and action — year by year
> Ascending in the scale of being, far
> Above the trifling mind's obscure career,
> And mouting to Perfection, like a star
> For whose triumphant flight heaven's crystalline gates unbar. (CVII, 2-9)

The "syllabl'ing words" are the poem to Tierney (n290), but as Bentley notes, they are more likely wedding vows. The narrator embraces human love without succumbing to uncurbed passion.

The arrival at this new state is paralleled and adumbrated in the symbology of the river — the rocks, rapids, and still pools — which make the final arrival of the narrator at a human but pure love evident. When the narrator first describes his love for the Montreal girl to the Maiden, his passionate frustration is couched in terms of the river's natural strength:

> Know, Maiden, that my love is as deep and strong
> As yonder Rapid, and as serpentine,
> Rock after rock it strikes, seeking a joy divine. (XLII, 7-9)

At the end, the image of his love contrasts the earlier one:

> My love is as strong as yon enduring rock!
> Deep as the thoughtful water at its feet! (CVIII, 1-2)

Rather than striking the rocks, his love has the strength and stability of rock (associated also with the will of God), and has the depth of the still pools, not the relatively shallow rapids.

In each description, the narrator's love is "deep and strong," characteristics associated with Human Love:

> . . . let my strong heart ope
> Its founts of love, that the wild ecstasy
> That quickens every pulse, and makes me free
> As a God's wishes, may serenely move
> Thy inmost being with the mystery
> Of the new life that has just dawned, and prove
> How unutterably deep and strong is Human Love. (CX, 3-9)

The strong but shallow rapids are associated with ungoverned passion, the deep but still waters with spiritual love, and both, for the opposite reasons, are incomplete, lacking the spirituality *and* passion of human love.

After the narrator has his revelation of truth at Trinity Rock, the strength of the rapids is joined with the calm of the pool in the final stanza to provide an image of human love that is passionate but not governed by passion: "let my strong heart ope / Its founts of love, that the wild ecstasy / . . . may serenely move / Thy inmost being" (CX, 3-6). There is a "wild ecstasy" but it will move her inmost being "serenely."

While he cannot hope to be relieved of the burden of human passion while on earth, the speaker can seek to love passionately with God's curbing influence. His revelation at Trinity Rock has convinced him of the futility of questioning God's design, and of seeking divine love on earth, thereby making human love possible. It has also made human love desirable, though, by making clear the spiritual possibilities afforded by a union on earth.

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# MAINTENANCE & MUSIC: THE POETRY OF ROBYN SARAH

> Sarah: There is nothing new.
> Robyn: Oh?
>
> or
>
> Robyn: There is nothing new.
> Sarah: Oh?

A DECADE AGO Robyn Sarah was a rumour within the Babel of new names of writers coming out of Montreal. Her first book, *Shadowplay* (Fiddlehead, 1978), had not caught my attention, and I had made no effort to get hold of her next two books, *The Space Between Sleep and Waking* (Villeneuve, 1984) and *Anyone Skating on That Middle Ground* (Véhicule, 1984). It was only when *Ellipse* published a memorial issue to the Québec poet, Michel Beaulieu, focussing partly on Beaulieu's translations of English-Canadian poets,

that I discovered Sarah's "Fugue" and several other poems — and was led to pick up her next book, *Becoming Light* (Cormorant, 1987) when it first appeared. Beaulieu had been ahead of me in recognizing a distinctive and very appealing voice. So had Dennis Lee in Toronto; he had included Sarah in his McClelland & Stewart anthology, *The New Canadian Poets (1970-1985)*. Gary Geddes would second these judgments by including her even more substantially in his Oxford anthology, *15 Canadian Poets X2* (1988). (Sarah has since published *The Touchstone: Poems New and Selected* [Anansi, 1992].) In modest Canadian terms Robyn Sarah became part of the contemporary canon, not a rumour but a trans-continental sound.

There are reasons. She joins the choir of women writers, prominent in Canada in both languages and part of a central change in world culture. She is oddly very English-Canadian — I have in mind here her domestic relation to space and time, her documentary eye and ear, her delight in catalogue, her sense of the gravity of the ephemeral and the eternity of the quotidian. She trusts her eyes, ears, nose, fingers and feet. And she knows something about music, how it translates into verbal patterns — she knows something about the language, how to integrate two or more kinds of discourse and keep it in touch with sensation: "words / set to go off, like birds on a clothesline, / at the first touch of the reel."[1] By a happy accident of English, at the touch of the "real."

Unreal as it may seem in an imperial age, much nineteenth-century poetry in English celebrates a domestic economy, intimate relationships with the particulars of one's region, neighbourhood, homestead. The hero is the husbandman, the husband, his whole domestic space centered on a feminine figure, Flora or Constance or Kate. She, however, seldom speaks; the feminine centre tends to be silent. Even Isabella Valancy Crawford, in *Malcolm's Katie* (1884), does not take us into that domestic space; she leaves us with a family photo of husband and wife, grandson and grandfather on the doorstep of the newly built cabin — the threshold to paradise. Two things have happened in the twentieth century. Imperial economies have shattered this dream, pushed the family and its domestic space, at best, into suburbs, made the feminine peripheral. And women have begun to speak of that intimate space — which often turns out to be, not the bedroom, but the kitchen, not an epiphany of connubial bliss, but of what Sarah calls "maintenance":

> Sometimes the best I can do
> is homemade soup, or a patch on the knee
> of baby's overalls.
> Things you couldn't call poems.
> Things that spread in the head,
> that swallow
> whole afternoons, weigh down the week
> till the elastic's gone right out of it —
> so gone
> it doesn't even snap when it breaks.[2]

If you like, this is literally "une poésie de cuisine" — of the bathroom and the bedroom and the cellar stairs. Decade by decade, from Dorothy Livesay and P. K. Page, through Phyllis Webb and Margaret Atwood to Daphne Marlatt and Erin Mouré, Lorna Crozier and Bronwen Wallace, the women (not to mention Al Purdy) have opened up this domestic space, adding a whole new lexicon to the world of "poetry." Sarah's "Maintenance" catalogues the eggplant sweating on the bread board, socks drying on the radiator, toys on the floor under the bed, washing machine spewing suds into the toilet, the sink full of dishes, the stairs, shelves, entry full of boxes, cans, garbage. This is not the world of pastoral romance, or even gothic romance, but of realism; this is not "Earth's Lyric" but the housewife's complaint. The domestic centre is dysphoric, closer to the inferno than the

paradiso, and the precious binaries of the Symbolic Code suffer a witty reduction:

> the best I can do
> is maintenance: the eaten
> replaced by the soon-to-be-eaten, the raw
> by the cooked, the spilled-on
> by the washed and dried, the ripped
> by the mended

This is the feminine version of the Sisyphus story, which is echoed equally by a Québécoise, Madeleine Gagnon, who says in *Retailles*:

> A force de produire du travail invisible, à force de fabriquer des choses qui n'ont pas l'air de produits, j'ai l'impression ... de grignoter indéfiniment et invariablement des parcelles de vie qui se consument et se devorent d'elles mêmes.[3]

The Québécoise poet may make the same point, but seldom with Sarah's telling particularity.

"Maintenance" is an ironic hymn to dust, the personification of entropy (and in the older religious discourse, the vanity of the world). "The dust!" says the speaker:

> what I could tell you about
> the dust. How it eats things —
> pencils, caps from ballpoint pens,
> plastic sheep, alphabet blocks.
> How it spins cocoons
> around them, clumps up and
> smothers whatever strays into
> its reaches — buttons,
> pennies, marbles — and then
> how it lifts, all of a piece,
> dust-pelts
> thick as the best velvet
> on the bottom of the mop.

The text ends with the dust between the typewriter keys, the dust that swallows the letters of the alphabet, obliterates difference, which, in semiotic terms, is the end of discourse, the end of signification.

There is no poetry in it, in housework, "maintenance," says the speaker. Yet the text signifies, is articulate, and a poem. It surprises by its wit, by its unexpected discovery of metaphor, of an overarching figure, in the quotidian debris. Sarah does not, so far, cultivate the unreadable. She retains a traditional sense of grammar and syntax and the formal satisfactions of "poetry": cadence, a nice enjambment, assonance and consonance, balance and closure. These, she appears to say, do not prevent her from speaking in the feminine. These, along with the irregular rhymes and half-rhymes, knitting together the long sentences of the early poem "Cat's Cradle," are the delight, I presume, of the writer as well as the reader.

> When women together sit sipping
> cold tea and tugging at the
> threads of memory, thoughtfully
> pulling at this
> or that bit or loop, or slipping
> this loop over that finger till
> warp and weft of past lives begin
> crazily to unwind, when women sit
> smoking and talking, the talk
> making smoke in the air, when they shake
> shreds of tobacco out of a crumpled pack
> and keep drinking the same weak tea
> from the same broken pot, something clicks
> in the springs of the clock
> and it's yesterday again,
> and the sprung yarn rolls down loose
> from the spool of the moon.[4]

The poem embodies a number of contemporary themes, some particularly central to women's writing: the emphasis on the text as texture, textile, weaving; on unravelling the apparently seamless linear text to replace it with a more patently patchwork, quilted, or mosaic text, a cyclical or spiral form; on the value of gossip, tea parties, gabfests as a form of discourse more adequate to the representation of some kinds of experience than the average scholastic argument, objective report, five-year plan; on the lunar as opposed to solar rhythms and "logic." One may be reminded of Nicole Brossard's statement:

> The spiral pattern opens out onto the unwritten. And the unwritten circulates, round and round, producing emanations like those at the door to an initiatory pathway.[5]

But Sarah's text is more approachable,

does not distance itself with the kind of meta-linguistic discourse that characterizes so much of Brossard's writing, and ends on a less apocalyptic note. The women's talk gathers things that matter and things that don't matter, their relations to children, parents, husbands or lovers, their anxieties and desires and their preferred tisane, much of it valuable if not always practical: "The rice sticks to the bottom of the pan / and things get left out in the rain."

In a poem like "Fugue" we recognize that, while sympathetic to many of the concerns of women or "the women's movement," Sarah yet retains a measure of distance, a capacity for irony, for humour. In this text the women are on their way to the new country, yes. They are leaving the men, yes. They are leaving "it all" behind, yes. They are also taking "it all" with them, cats, plants children. Children outgrow their clothes and shed them for smaller children, yes. The women too shed clothes and "put on each other's / cats, plants children." Yet, not infrequently, the moon may make them forget the way to the new country. Even so, even so, they are on their way to paradise, the original garden of eternal summer. New ideologies may become as absurd as the old.

Sarah distances herself with "art." And a central artifice, in these early poems especially, is repetition. Sheer repetition, as Wallace Stevens' "Man on the Dump" observes, is the death of art — produces the trite, the cliché, garbage. But Stevens also spoke with more real fascination of "he that of repetition is most master." Robyn Sarah — and the moon again, which "keeps cranking / its long line down," which, together with the women "sipping cold tea and sawing on the strings of memory," create an "old tune." Repetition with variation is central to language, art, and life. And Sarah is something of a master. Three poems in *Anyone Skating on That Middle Ground* (1984), namely "On My Son's Birthday," "Meridian," and "Black Walnut," are sestinas, which require that the end words of each of the first six lines must reappear, though in a different order, as end words in each of five more six-line stanzas and be recapitulated in a final three-line stanza. It is a relatively rare form, and in most cases the pattern hits you over the head and is likely to seem laboured. In the case of Sarah's "On My Son's Birthday," it was only at the end that I suddenly recognized the set form. It serves to concentrate, amplify, and play variations on the recurring and yet individual themes of seed and vine, mother and child, climbing and falling — of plant, person, sun — in a countable, but cyclical, diurnal and annual, and generational rhythm.

Sarah's first training was in music, which leaves its trace in the titles of various poems: "Fugue," "Nocturne," "Intermezzo in a Minor Key," "Little Prelude," "C Major Scale, Ascending," "Madrigal." So, too, her relative scepticism with regard to any intimation of immortality, or the "higher uncertainties," is figured in musical terms:

> soft pedalling the *da capo*,
> the soul's progress
> *diminuendo*[6]

Her training in music may also have reinforced her sense of the possibility of repetition as structuring device in poetry. A line in "On My Son's Birthday" relates the months of the year to the twelvetone scale. Another poem, "Tone Row," is composed like a piece of music in what I think is called serial composition. It consists of 24 lines that play variations on the words in the first line — except for a kind of joker or extra word introduced in the fourth line, "surprise." The first verse reads:

> We are calmly waiting for something to
> happen.
> Sometimes less than calmly, sometimes more
> than waiting.

Mostly we are calm. We are so calm
it surprises us. It is a calm surprise
that has surprised us calmly
into more or less waiting.

It is, if you like, a formal game. Can you continue the development through another eighteen lines? More to the point, can you arrive at a concluding line that appears to touch on the game of living? The text ends:

Sometimes we know that waiting calmly for
this thing
to surprise us is more or less what we need.[7]

Take a slightly different row, or series of elements, like hydrogen, oxygen, carbon, sulphur and any one or two others you would like to include. What are the possible combinations?

Feminist readers might particularly enjoy "Pardon Me," from the same volume. Except that it takes the form of three "prose" paragraphs, it plays similar variations on the opening sentence: "The rip in the sleeve of your jacket, and the fact that I do not have to mend it, are conjoined in a way that you do not understand."[8] It unfolds with something of the obsessive quality of Ravel's *Bolero,* though happily shorter — a game, if you like, but also pointed enough in the context of contemporary male-female relationships. And, in terms of literary allusion, perhaps an amusing sign of the times. I presume here that T. S. Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" is an intertext for the concluding line, where the lady — well, the speaker, says that he — well, the person with the rip in the jacket, might be led to think, if the speaker mentioned it, that she had some desire also to mend it, whereupon she adds: "That is not what I meant at all; that is not it, at all." (Maybe, however, the woman who rebuffed Prufrock — or whose rebuff Prufrock anticipated, back in 1910 or thereabouts, was more contemporary than we think, recognizing in any proposal Prufrock might make the suggestion that, among other things, she might be expected to mend a rip in the sleeve of some jacket.)

If Robyn is suspicious of the conventional forms of high seriousness, the axioms of Women's Lib., the claims of Poetry, the pious proposition of man's — humankind's — spiritual destiny (the "higher uncertainties"), and likes to play musical chairs with these propositions, Sarah holds onto the referent: the ripped sleeve, the burned rice, the leaf patterns moving across a sunlit wall, the connubial silences across which these propositions play — the gravity of the immediate and of some sense of the wonder of life and the difficulty of defining the significance of the individual, the particular, within it. Robyn complains about the seemingly desultory world of maintenance, opposing it to the production of "finished" arrangements, objects, art. But even in the process Sarah puts pressure on the language to get the details of the disorderly, the imperfect "reality" right. She wants to record the creak of an old gate at the approach of winter, the weight of the last green tomatoes harvested in her skirt. A life is singular, a matter of moments and particulars, precisely perceived — and yet also, perhaps, part of a meaningful pattern, a significant process — not like a picture so much as an unfolding of strange music. Sarah is attentive to the sound of time. So we read that the

screens tick in their metal
frames, mesh hazy with
last summer's dust, they ping
where a late fly, all buzz
and bluster, hurls himself
again and again.[9]

Despite the attraction of formal patterning, of the ideal, there is the counter-attraction of the actual, concrete, and more or less idiosyncratic — which privileges the referential and descriptive, filling up texts like "Maintenance," "Study in Latex Semi-Gloss," or "To Fill a Life,"

with a multitude of specific and seemingly banal but clearly precious details — which values an order in which one can entertain a "domestic" relation with the everyday particular of one's environment, of what the American poet Gary Snyder called Earth Household. Compared to Québec poetry, or that of the Symbolists or the High Romantics, it may appear pedestrian and it leads to the modest, rather English-Canadian conclusion of "Walking a Dog in the Rain" — even if the vision of civil order, urban pastoral, may represent the ideal of an ex-husband or an earlier self:

> a gentle city, generous
> in its leaves, the porch lights
> burn late there, the double doors
> stand open, even now, letting in
> fragrance of linden, flowers
> litter the stoop where rain drips
> from the eaves, wind blows through the
> empty rooms, finally
> this will always
> be enough[10]

The "Study in Latex Semi-Gloss" has none of this *aisance*. It speaks, in a fairly contemporary vein, of a domestic separation; the children camp out somewhere in the city with the father; the speaker spends her day and night repainting the walls of a new apartment, her mind filled with the topography of the walls she has painted, the brushes or rollers she's cleaned, the state of the clothes she's removed, the body she's washed. These are the immediate particulars. Yet they also serve to figure the larger relationship. If there is to be a future relationship, it will be like that between the newly painted rooms and the old, the new paint nonetheless registering the surface, the cracks, the weak spots in the old walls. One can repaint a room, but it will not entirely eliminate the past; one knows too, that the new paint job will eventually dull, chip, peel, betraying the old stresses. The text begins with a generalization, a large question: "There is nothing new. Does that Matter?" — which seems to be forgotten as the speaker proceeds to describe a host of particular details; but then it returns to the point:

> There is nothing new. Even what could bloom between you, if you let it, if she let it, goes on as the paint goes on, over old seams, old sutures. Weathers as the paint will weather, flaking along old stress lines. This matters.[11]

Women writers and critics talk a good deal about the body, about writing the body. Yet I'm sometimes impressed by how little of the concrete variety of the world gets into their texts. The Québécois poet especially has to resist a long-standing emphasis on the general and universal, on *l'essence* and *l'idéal*, the pursuit of *la poésie pure*, which effectively banned the prosaic, the descriptive, the anecdotal from serious poetry. English-Canadian poetry, by contrast, has cultivated the opposite bias, and much of it has seemed to the québécois writer to be pedestrian in the extreme. Working within that tradition Sarah can deal more easily with a mundane physical reality, with the pedestrian eventfulness of "Walking a Dog in the Rain," or in "End to End" the sensuous and anecdotal biography of her feet, which she addresses like Alice in Wonderland, astonished at their distance in the bathtub. Even in English-Canadian terms, however, "To Fill a Life" is a rather extraordinary catalogue of the sensuous variety of thing-events which make up the texture of a life in time. To live is to absorb a palpable "reality," to take on the patina of time, weather as the world weathers. Though one of the images here is that of the picture, filling with detail, it is not just a question of spectacle but of dynamic involvement: "To fill one's shoes, and walk in them till the plies of the soles begin to separate, till the heels are rubbed away, till the toes turn up and the lettering inside has all flaked off."[12] Even here, however, there is a counter-emphasis on

the frame, the more or less arbitrary pictorial, narrative, or, say, musical framing device. It serves, as she says, not to contain, but to provoke movement — even, perhaps, as the intense focus of the artist on the formal possibilities of combining a given set of elements is generative.

One of the poems is called "Meditation Between Claims," another is called "Pivot," another "Convection," which speaks of that point "Where hot meets cold / at the window."[13] One can also mention the title poem of *Anyone Skating on That Middle Ground*. This is a poetry that will not privilege Sarah over Robyn, "life" over "art," matriarchy over patriarchy, concepts over percepts, et cetera. It speaks from and for the dynamic middle ground, the point of change, without which there would be no "surprise," without which one could not write:

> so expecting
> the unexpected becomes a way of saying
> yes again, this is the thing
> we refuse to go on without,
> the delicate engineering of a life
> to allow for the coincidence of paths,
> take it from there[14]

One could relate this suggestion of a vital "order" that is yet not wholly predictable, that is open to "surprise," to Deleuze and Guattari's praise of the rhizome over the tree, their sense of strata forming and reforming. More certain, however, is the Taoist view of a world that we make sense of by discriminating opposites, the Yin and the Yang, but where every Yin is in the process of becoming a Yang and vice versa. I note that Sarah, or Robyn, reads the *I Ching*. I note that "To Fill a Life" concludes with people in a park performing large graceful movements of Tai Chi. To participate in change without violence, to enjoy the changes. . . . In her own way Robyn Sarah appears to echo Wallace Stevens, who once wrote that the greatest tragedy is not to live in a physical world and whose "Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction" divides into three parts: "It Must Be Abstract," "It Must Change," "It Must Give Pleasure." Robyn Sarah can be elegant and formal; she can also be very close to popular song. I recommend "Scratch," the last poem in *Becoming Light*, which begins:

> The tinder words, where are they
> the ones that
> jump-start the heart.

There is a piece of pop-music where the lover asks his love for a kick-start, but it is a noisy affair, without the nice play between tinder and tender: "O tender and sunny love," says Sarah, "what, are you gone so far away?" Robyn Sarah, like much poetry, archaizes for formal reasons, only, I think, to intensify the immediate "feeling":

> Come home to me now, my
> brightness. Make a small glow.
> Make it to move
> the heart, that has sat down
> in the road
>
> and waits for something
> to turn it over . . .
>
> The roomy heart,
> willing to be surprised.[15]

NOTES

1 "Sun Left One Random Line," *Anyone Skating on That Middle Ground* (Montreal: Véhicule Press, 1984): 21.

2 "Maintenance," *The Space Between Sleeping and Waking*, 7-9.

3 Quoted in Caroline Bayard, *The New Poetics in Canada and Quebec* (Toronto: U Toronto P, 1989): 94.

4 *The Space Between Sleep and Waking*, 12-13.

5 *Surfaces of Sense*, tr. Fiona Strachan (Toronto: Coach House, 1989): 14.

6 "The Cyclist Recovers His Cadence," *The Space Between Sleeping and Waking*, 30.

7 *Anyone Skating on that Middle Ground*, 47.

8 *Anyone Skating on that Middle Ground*, 17.

9 "The Thread," *Becoming Light* (Dunvegan, Ont.: Cormorant Books, 1987): 16.

[10] *Becoming Light*, 11-12.

[11] *Anyone Skating on That Middle Ground*, 39-40.

[12] *Becoming Light*, 21.

[13] *Becoming Light*, 5.

[14] "Sounding an Old Chord in October," *Anyone Skating on That Middle Ground*, 11.

[15] *Becoming Light*, 40.

D. G. JONES

# LAST PAGE

THE EDITORS OF *Canadian Literature* divide on whether or not gardening is an enjoyable activity. I happen myself to like it, which is a cautionary preface to the following notes. For I also enjoy reading *about* gardening, and even though I do recognize the Great Gap between my patch of parsley and, say, Sissinghurst, there are moments — both digging and reading (not an inappropriate pair) — when the difference seems merely one of degree.

"Illusion," of course, as a half dozen recent books in one way or another observe, is one of the effects and intentions of gardens, whether the operating principle is to exercise control, spell out an allegory of faith or economics, reaffirm the cycles of Nature, contrive a sense of order, or, paradoxically, aesthetically arrange the appearance of disorder. In *Reading the French Garden: story and history* (MIT, $24.95), translated by Jessice Levine, Denise Le Dantec and J-P. Le Dantec emphasize how changing garden designs call upon different theories of interpretation. They open with one of the basic metaphors of Christendom: the definition of "forest" as "ignorance" and of "garden" as "civilization" — a civilization which by further definition was deemed to be "enclosed." The "retelling" of the garden "story" (to use their terms) led to a series not of redefinitions in France, however, but of extensions of the basic definition. The dream of the perfect world, the desire to manage fields, the impulse to push space to the horizon: all of these retained the notion of authority that was lodged in the image of an "enclosed civilization." If civilization was "us" (and "us" referred to a select power group in France), then the eyes of power were not conditioned to see others as lesser beings (savage and ignorant); all nature seemed to confirm this established position, even though it was a position they had carefully designed themselves.

Peter Martin's *The Pleasure Gardens of Virginia: from Jamestown to Jefferson* (Princeton, $29.95) takes the reader through a different history, but one with clearly related expectations of "perfection" and the controlled delimitation of authority. Less a history of design codes than a landscape architect's guide to plans, this book traces changes from the 17th century through Williamsburg to the plantations, emphasizing the working patterns of particular gardens. Gardening is perceived here as draftsmanship; moreover, as prospects were arranged in nature, they were taken to confirm economic and political precedence in society — a semiotic slippage which served institutional power. Hence the architectural drawings can, in retrospect, be seen as a metaphor for the political system (the hierarchical, wealth-based "democracy") that was America-in-the-making.

The plates in Martin's work are clearer than those in Le Dantec's, but the 2-column print is unpleasant to read; much better all round is the visual design of David R. Coffin's *Gardens and Gardening in Papal Rome* (Princeton, $59.50). Coffin's concern is with categories of function within papal gardens, and therefore (quite openly) with the garden as metaphor. Statuary, waterworks, furnishings, garden *use* (as a place for devotion or entertainment, for example), flowers, shrubs, and even the gardeners themselves perform a symbolic role in worship as well as an empirical function in state design. The book addresses especially well the iconography of organization — the fountain, the fishpool, the formal cascade. The flowers of the *hortus conclusus*, for example (the idea of civilization being restricted, in this case, by belief), were associated with virginity, and as the sexuality of the Song of Solomon was subliminated into the ideal of the Church, the arranged order of the garden (the idea of *proportion*, designed once again by those in authority) came to be argued as a universal model of moral behaviour. The implicit quarrel between nature and order served a hierarchical religious paradigm, which in turn (though not universally) served the expansionist agencies of exploitation.

I looked for more political contextualizing from G. E. Mingay's *A Social History of the English Countryside* (Routledge, $62.50), and found a substantial amount of data on the common-field system, the relation between lord and peasant, the impact of disease and famine, the effects of the introduction of the plough, the cycle of want and plenty, income, bills, the

size of dinners, and the manufactured idea of "rural" in a society that connected social power with the possession of land. Defoe, Cobbett, and other writers provide some of the information assembled here. It remains, however, a resource book; only the most determined of readers will not nod off at the style (*It is / There was / It has been / There may be seen / It was of vital importance / We cannot be sure*).

Stephen J. Pyne's *Burning Bush: A Fire History of Australia* (Holt, $27.95) shifts both territorial ground and stylistic form; nature and words here act dynamically ("*Fire forced, fire stressed, fire quickened*"; fire is *tool, thread, promise, grief*). Referring to aboriginal tales, literary history, and historical record, Pyne tells not only how fire came to Australia but also how it transformed the landscape and in so doing changed the way people comprehend the world. Fire, simply, was an agent of a "biotic revolution." Pyne goes on, then, to interpret this change as the sign of a psychopolitical alteration. Not only did the transformation of the landscape produce its own icon, the bushman, it created a figure whose "bush" disintegrated at his touch. What message, Pyne asks, does this figure send? Destabilization is his answer: destabilization of the European identity (the old "enclosed garden," perhaps), but also of the substitute "Australian" identity that had been declared in social hope and political ambition. "Fire," consequently, is the idiom of reconfiguration, without the phoenix to assert that consumption does not fundamentally mean change.

In "The Transposition of Clermont" — a moving poem in *Dog Fox Field* (Carcanet, n.p.), about time, memory, and the signs in space that determine the limits of recognition — Les Murray meditates on precisely this process: "My generation's memories are intricately transposed: / ... / butcher occluding dance music, the police / eclipsed by opportunity, brothels sashaying royally / and ... / Excited, we would meet on streets that stayed immutable / sometimes for weeks / ... / What was town, what was country stayed elusive / as we saw it always does, in the bush, / what is waste, what is space, what is land."

Several other works probe the literary implications of such basic perceptual symbolism, from Bruce Bennett's reflections on Australian place, region, and community (the discourses of direction, expatriation, proximity, and home) in *An Australian Compass* (Fremantle Arts Centre, n.p.), to Pamela Regis's *Describing Early America* (N. Illinois UP, n.p.). Regis's book analyzes the *rhetoric* of natural history, asking how the literature of place develops out of botanical taxonomies. William Bartram's commentaries on the *usefulness* of place, Jefferson's habit of labelling, and Crèvecoeur's reflections on the "happiness" of the *woods* (as opposed to the "gilded palaces" of the Grand Tour): all affirm the presence of an Almighty Hand in Nature, all place the Native Peoples in the Great Chain of Being, and all become the basis for Thoreau's *Walden* — which is an American icon, Regis argues, because it epitomizes an American way of *symbolically* reading the world. Her book's signal contribution lies in the way it exposes the teleology that underlies this symbolism, a set of assumptions now largely unexamined because assumed to be "natural." John M. MacKenzie's *Imperialism and the Natural World* (Manchester UP, $59.95) adds further reflections on this process of "naturalizing" social priorities; his series of essays looks at such subjects as the relation between ecology and land use, the role of scientific societies in establishing normative assumptions about nature, the relation between scientific publication and the aims of economic exploitation, the "idea of tropic" in "temperate zone" discourse, and what he calls the "imperialism of geology" (or the scientific endeavour to explain and organize the past in terms acceptable to such current values as *development* or *profit*).

These books are obviously investigating more than the simple walled garden; they concern faith, works, economic aspirations, and many kinds of power, and in the long run they call for the political and philosophical deconstruction of metaphor — in particular, the serious examination of the naturalized metaphors of horticultural order. They don't all openly call for changes in social behaviour, but for the person who has read them, even a parsley patch no longer looks quite the same.

W.N.

# ON A GREY DAY LIKE TODAY

*Tony Cosier*

On a grey day like today, we think of bettering ourselves.
You point to cows specked like dots on a hill, quiet as stones.
I tell you the green of the mullein tuft is like the green of the clover
clouded with a puff of breath.
Your wheatear from a poplar jumbles down the scale
Fragments splendid as my red-winged blackbird screes.

Milled we are and getting purer.
Ground on a dull grey rock, swirled with cloud,
We dance in word and thought.

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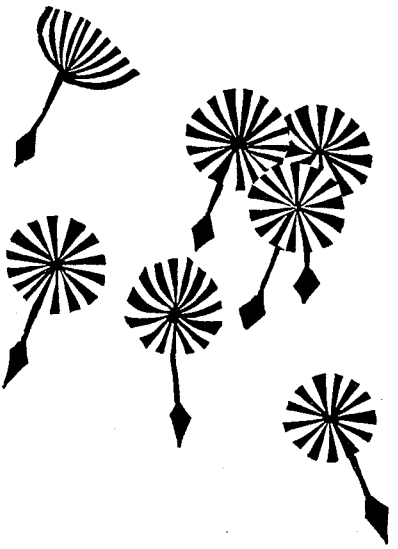

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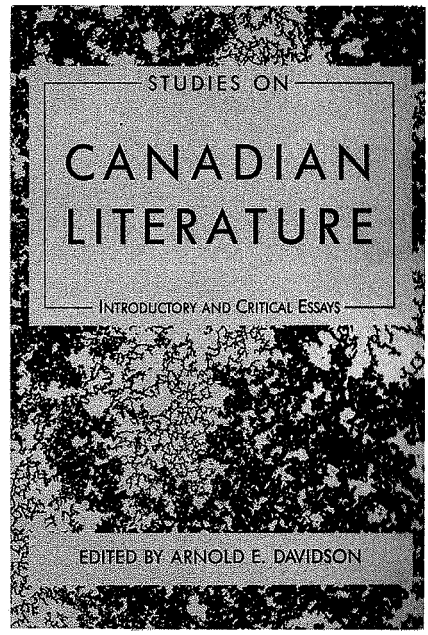


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