

## Book Reviews

W. J. Keith, *Epic Fiction: The Art of Rudy Wiebe*. Edmonton: The University of Alberta Press, 1981. pp. xi, 158. \$10.00 pb.

W. J. Keith (ed.), *A Voice in the Land: Essays By and About Rudy Wiebe*. Edmonton: NeWest Press, 1981. pp. 256. \$8.95 pb.

In a 1982 *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* symposium on the work of Rudy Wiebe, Andrew Gurr began an article on *The Blue Mountains of China* with a reference to Wiebe winning Canada its first Nobel Prize for Literature in the year 2002. Yet *The Annotated Bibliography of Canada's Major Authors* does not include Wiebe among its chosen fifty writers. Such disparity of opinion is typical of the critical response to his work and no case of a prophet not being honoured in his own country. Indeed Wiebe's reputation is, despite his having a number of admirers among academic critics elsewhere, an almost exclusively Canadian one. The variety of response to his novels would seem rather to be an index of the unusualness of such fiction in the contemporary period.

Wiebe's writing deals with minorities. Yet for the most part his minorities are not fashionable. In one of his articles, included in *A Voice in the Land*, he records how early on in his career a New York publisher told him he would be a best-seller if he "were writing as well about Jews as about Mennonites." The Métis must rank only slightly higher than Mennonites in a league table of marketable minorities and even Wiebe's Indians have failed to minister to the tastes of popular mythology — Sitting Bull is a minor character in *The Temptations of Big Bear* and the eponymous hero was comparatively little known prior to publication of the novel.

More generally there is the problem that Wiebe's West is one which stubbornly refuses to conform to received archetypes of the region, whether they be the anti-Indian orthodoxies of the pre-sixties era or the revised mythologies popular since the New Sociology of that decade inverted traditionally accepted roles. If super-

ficially it seems to fit the latter model, in that it is a West seen through the eyes of Indians, Mennonites, and Métis, it is also a West mediated by a Christian vision, characterized by a moral earnestness which some readers find anachronistic today. Yet, far from being old fashioned, Wiebe's novels essay daring technical innovations, which have the effect not only of deconstructing inherited versions of history, but also of questioning the modes of narrative discourse in which such accounts have been constituted. And the problems do not stop here with the "difficulty" of Wiebe's fiction. Even among those who take the view that his concerns necessitate new structures and justify the demands which he makes on his readers, there is debate as to whether the work itself succeeds and some critics feel that the ponderousness of his style is, quite simply, bad writing.

All in all, then, the interpretation and evaluation of Wiebe's fiction is a far from straightforward matter. In the hands of writers like Wiebe, Robert Kroetsch, and a younger generation of post-modernist authors writing under their influence — particularly that of Kroetsch — Western Canadian fiction has come a long way from the social realism and Depression themes which seemed to typify the genre. Critical commentary is much needed and W. J. Keith's two books represent important contributions, which will play a part in helping to illuminate and assess the nature of Wiebe's achievement.

*Epic Fiction* is a critical introduction to Wiebe's novels and stories up to *The Scorched-Wood People*. Its central concerns are to illustrate the "epic" or "giant" qualities of Wiebe's fiction from *The Blue Mountains of China* onwards and to examine the "literary problems" generated by his approach to structure and genre. It approaches the issue of Wiebe's difficulty by locating it within a Modernist context and arguing that he expects of his readers the same kind of attention as is demanded by a Joyce or Faulkner. The implied cultural thesis, that the regional writer has the problem of his audience's expectations with regard to form being parochial, is an interesting one. When, however, Keith suggests in his Preface, albeit tentatively, that Wiebe is the first Canadian novelist to make such unequivocal demands on his readers, one begins to have slight doubts as to the framework to be applied.

Such doubts prove to be founded as one reads the ensuing chapters, though this does not prevent the study from being a very useful introduction to Wiebe's fiction. Keith provides workmanlike accounts of each of the novels, does a fine job of giving some idea of their critical reception and of tracing Wiebe's movement from the comparatively conventional narrative mode of his first two novels to the daring experimentation of his "epic fiction," beginning

with *The Blue Mountains of China*. He gives an interesting summary of the Mennonite controversy over *Peace Shall Destroy Many* and helps to rehabilitate Wiebe's most neglected novel, *First and Vital Candle*, by providing a discriminating account of the novel's strengths as spiritual allegory and its weaknesses of excessive schematism and didacticism. In discussing each of the later novels he ranges widely, among other things examining the charges brought against Wiebe — and also levelling a few of his own — and generally arriving at a reasoned conclusion which makes the case for Wiebe. Thus, the issue of the alleged clumsiness of Wiebe's language is directly confronted and justified, not unreasonably, on the grounds that one of his concerns is to unsettle his readers' habitual perceptions and that such language has a "creative boldness" about it. And Keith's final estimate is along the same lines: the scope and ambitiousness of Wiebe's work are seen to outweigh any linguistic inelegancies; the passion of his moral vision is viewed as more important than the formal qualities of his work.

Up to a point this may be justified by reference to Wiebe's Puritan contempt for what he sees as moral trivia, his belief that "Words . . . are too important for sheer entertainment" and his adherence to a theory of literary decorum which insists on "a hierarchy of standards," especially since such an approach makes the categorization of Wiebe as a writer of epic, traditionally the loftiest of genres, particularly apposite. Keith incorporates Wiebe's comments on all these subjects. The problem is, however, that Wiebe is taken far too much on his own terms. Moreover, the criteria for praising him are distinctly impressionistic and the case for his major stature needs to be argued more strongly on the basis of the manner in which his technique realizes his moral vision. Otherwise one is left in danger of endorsing such remarks as Wiebe's deprecating reference to those who "write about the kinds of petty bedroom-bathroom problems small people have." If the spiritual quality of a work's content is to be a primary criterion of its value and such spiritual concern is narrowly defined, then one might have to deny serious consideration, not only to a major Western writer like Robert Kroetsch, but also to the Rudy Wiebe who has more recently written *My Lovely Enemy*. Content can only be accorded this level of prominence in critical evaluation, when one is considering the achieved content of art, not the raw content of moral vision and it is a pity that Keith's otherwise excellent introduction fails to argue for Wiebe on the basis of the technical innovation which enables him to discover his content.

*A Voice in the Land* blends articles by Wiebe with interviews and critical pieces to produce a collection which speaks with as many voices as *The Temptations of Big Bear*. Most of the selections

are reprints, but some have been specially written for this collection, while others, including some interesting examples of Wiebe's early writing for Mennonite periodicals, have hitherto been virtually unavailable. Like NeWest Press's *Labyrinths of Voice: Conversations with Robert Kroetsch*, this is a volume which employs a form ideally suited to the approach of the author concerned. *Labyrinths of Voice* aims to deconstruct the traditional adversary situation of the interview (in which the subject is interrogated by a single interviewer) by replacing it with a three-handed conversation and the same approach is adopted in an interview which concludes *A Voice in the Land*, in which Wiebe converses with Kroetsch and Shirley Neuman. More generally, *A Voice in the Land* is, like Wiebe's own novels, especially *The Blue Mountains of China*, a work which achieves a cumulative effect from the juxtaposition of a number of autonomous sections. It is a tribute to Keith's editorship that both the overall conception of the volume and the choice of particular extracts enable it to work in this way and finally it is a much more satisfying book than *Epic Fiction*.

The Wiebe essays provide a good deal of interesting background to the novels. "Moros and Mennonites in the Chacos of Paraguay," an article written during Wiebe's seven-month stay in Paraguay, casts light on sections of *The Blue Mountains*; two essays on Big Bear chart Wiebe's quest to unearth the historical material for his fourth novel; "Riel: A Possible Film Treatment," which Wiebe produced for a projected C.B.C. documentary prior to writing *The Scorched-Wood People*, illuminates his treatment of the Métis hero in the novel. And the interviews, despite some repeated information, never fail to bring alive Wiebe's moral passion and his devotion to excavating the neglected half of Canadian history.

Also among the volume's high spots are fine critical essays by Ina Ferris on *The Blue Mountains of China* and by David Jeffrey, mainly on *The Scorched-Wood People*. In both cases Wiebe seems to have found critics who do justice to the formal complexity of his work. Ferris argues that he overcomes the difficulty of conveying religious experience in the secular genre of the novel by making narrative itself the problem and examines the procedures he employs to disorient the reader's expectations. Jeffrey also discusses Wiebe's technique as a form of religious discourse by arguing that his employment of what Bakhtin terms "non-dialogic" speech represents a departure from normal novelistic procedure, in which the anti-genre of the novel "breaks from canonical conventions." In other words, both critics provide stimulating accounts of the formal aspects of Wiebe's novels without indulging in the kind of formalism in which medium is divorced from message. By identifying the rela-

tionship of his language to Biblical speech, they offer formal analyses which are consonant with Wiebe's own vision.

It would not be difficult to find fault with *A Voice in the Land* on the grounds that the choice of material appears rather haphazard. In some instances background material proliferates; in others critical discussion of the novels themselves. However, such a complaint would be of the same order as taking Wiebe to task for the multi-optic method of his fiction. All in all, this is a valuable collection which opens up numerous perspectives on Wiebe's writing. Perhaps the most interesting emerge in the final piece, the three-way conversation with Robert Kroetsch and Shirley Neuman. This helps to show the extent to which Wiebe's exploratory mode is a natural enough product of his Prairie background, while at the same time, with Kroetsch championing the importance of the word rather than the Word, indicating other directions in which a post-modernist Plains sensibility might move.

After reading *Epic Fiction* one feels that the case for Wiebe has been fairly comprehensively made and yet one remains not fully convinced. After reading *A Voice in the Land* one feels that there has been less attempt to evaluate his achievement, but that the range and diversity of the contributions have established the individuality and interestingness of his work beyond doubt.

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Hena Maes-Jelinek, *Wilson Harris*. Boston: G. K. Hall & Co. (Twayne World Authors Series), 1982. pp. 191. \$17.95.

Wilson Harris has, for some time, been considered as one of the most original and profound writers of this century. His opus includes fifteen novels, two volumes of short fiction, several collections of poems, and essays on art and the imagination. He has been the topic of many critical examinations throughout the world. Many readers find him "difficult," mostly because he refuses to simplify complex issues for the sake of clarity. He requires the same kind of attention and insight from his public as he himself applies to his craft. In 1975 M. Gilkes published *Wilson Harris and the Caribbean Novel* (Longman), the first book examining the works of Harris up to *Black Marsden*. Gilkes's approach is inspired by Jungian theories and convincingly takes up the alchemic process as a representation of artistic work. Hena Maes-Jelinek's study is the result of many years' familiarity with the author's fictional world and theories. She has already published extensively on Harris and is an authority on Modern British, American, and Commonwealth Fiction. Her *Enigma of Values* (Dangaroo Press, University of Aarhus,

Denmark, 1976) was a landmark in the assessment of Harris's first novel, *Palace of the Peacock*. She has also edited *Explorations* (Dangaroo Press, 1981), the author's recent collection of essays. Hena Maes-Jelinek's *Wilson Harris* demonstrates the critic's deep knowledge of her subject and sensitive approach to complex issues. She follows the meanders of the texts with meticulous attention and with much respect for the subtleties of the writer's vision. She immerses herself in the networks of images and in the concepts fashioned by the novelist, with a desire to avoid reductionist interpretations.

The preface underlines the basic issues such as Harris's desire to regenerate the imagination and to reconcile contraries through evanescent moments of vision which lead to constantly evolving patterns of separation and reunion. Subsequently Professor Maes-Jelinek divides Harris's works into three periods: the first includes *Palace of the Peacock* (1960), *The Far Journey of Oudin* (1961), *The Whole Armour* (1962), *The Secret Ladder* (1963), and *Heartland* (1964). In this initial phase, each novel is examined separately. Such problems as the ambiguities of conquest, of authority, and of guilt constitute essential questions. These early works are also shown to contain the seeds of most later developments, both in character-treatment and in images. The second period is explored in detail and Hena Maes-Jelinek's approach is most successful when she studies such dense novels as *The Eye of the Scarecrow* (1965), *The Waiting Room* (1967), *Tumatumari* (1968), or *Ascent to Omai* (1970), which she rightly rates among the most daring experiments in Harris's corpus. The deliberate break in linear progression is linked with a dislocation of conventional time. Fiction and meta-fiction are combined in a masterful attempt to revitalize such concepts as history and character. Harris's heroes become "agents of sensibility" whose separate existences fade as they take part in reversible roles. The setting of the novel becomes the stage of a vast "drama of consciousness," the seat of specific functions and the functions themselves. Hena Maes-Jelinek points out the various styles used, discursive passages as well as moments of illumination, dialogues, and wholly poetic passages whose logic becomes mostly metaphoric.

In a more synthetic final chapter, the critic takes up Harris's image of the novel as painting and shows how much the theme of resurrection depends on successful vision. This is followed through *The Sleepers of Roraima* (1970), *The Age of the Rainmakers* (1971), *Black Marsden* (1972), *Companions of the Day and Night* (1975), *Da Silva . . .* and *Genesis of the Clowns* (1977), and *The Tree of the Sun* (1978). With a move to different settings (Mexico, Edinburgh, London . . .), Harris's themes are enriched by new

layers of experience. The novellas in particular show an opposition between a conception of history based on a given authoritarian consensus of opinion and fables or myths as carriers of renewal. Correspondences through time are pursued as the various heroes "fall into" the past. Creation, for Wilson Harris, requires such radical revisions of premises. Hena Maes-Jelinek's book closes on a very complete primary and secondary bibliography with brief notes of contents for each critical essay mentioned. This volume is the best introduction to Harris's works because of the author's constant concern to explain most of the difficult aspects of the novelist's art. It is also invaluable for the more advanced reader since, within the limited volume of pages available, Professor Maes-Jelinek has provided so much detailed analysis.

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E. D. Blodgett. *Configuration: Essays on the Canadian Literatures*. Downsview, Ont.: ECW Press, 1982. pp. 223. \$9.95.

On the book cover, Philip Stratford praises the breadth of scope of E. D. Blodgett's study and his international perspective with references ranging from Ovid and the *Chansons de geste* to Lacan. This is indeed the strength of *Configuration*, an essay in comparative Canadian literatures, which aims to escape the binarism of English/French language comparisons, by shifting the focus to include minority literatures, notably German. But it is also the book's main weakness. Many of these allusions appear gratuitous, as for example, one made to e.e. cummings, whose word-plays on "death," "dying," and "dead," we are told, we do not need to know in order to understand W. O. Mitchell. Unnecessary, the allusion appears to be motivated by the rhetorical strategies of the academic essay, where quotation from wide-ranging sources, an appeal to authority, grounds the truth of the essayist.

In fact, Blodgett has already forestalled this objection in his epigraph from Robert Vignault, who describes the existential nature of the writing in the essay, which is an opening up of questions. The essays we are to read, he thus concedes, are not the final word on the issue, but an exploration. We are then led through seven essays, from a theoretical discussion of comparative study, on to discussions of specific texts, as in "Intertextual Designs in MacLennan's *The Watch That Ends the Night*," and studies of the *oeuvre* of authors as varied as Hébert, Munro, and Grove, into a series of essays on the prairie in fiction — "Fictions of Ethnicity in Prairie Writing," "Cold Pastorals," and "Gone West to Geometry's Country" — in what proves to be a "long journey . . . of self-reflections, of finding

one's self lost." In its own design, *Configuration* exhibits the self-cancelling structures, the dualities that render the comic character of a novel problematic, "the technology that contradicts, and finally destroys, the past-world it claimed to create," that it uncovers in the western novel written in English. Despite all this, *Configuration* is not a deconstructive approach to Canadian literatures, but one grounded in certain structuralist practices.

In raising this issue of critical methodology, I am exposing another paradox within *Configuration*. This involves two distinct questions, one being the method of textual analysis, and the other the issue of comparison. In both cases, there is a gap between theoretical presuppositions and actual practice, a common feature these days when critical praxis lags behind for many of us. To a certain extent, this is not surprising, given the history of this text. The essays were written and published individually before being collected together. As the introduction informs us, they have been rewritten for the present occasion. This revision, however, frequently takes the form of a postscript. That on MacLennan, for instance, includes correspondence between the author and MacLennan which reveals that the latter was not familiar with Rilke's use of Orpheus, and thus the allusion on which Blodgett's study is based is not really an allusion. This sends the reader west into the country that blows the mind. The writer, however, has not gone there himself to rewrite the essay from the new perspective, or even to offer a self-reflective comment on the way in which intertextual design is reader-activated. Similarly, "Prisms and Arcs: Structures in Hébert and Munro," a study in which Blodgett explores the different figure of the house in the two writers, metonymical in Hébert, metaphorical doubling in Munro, is extended into a discussion of Lacan's description of the stasis of metonymy, metaphor being active condensation effecting signification, and a spatialization of the subject. Leaving aside Lacan's identification of the subject and the phallus within the symbolic order, which might have led him back into the novels in pursuit of the absent female desire, since she is "the other thing," — an appropriate reading of two female authors — Blodgett sets off on a way he himself terms "excessive," to make an analogy between Lacan's "subject" and the house. In fact, this proves to be an aside, for the analysis reverts to the original discussion of figures, identifying in the metaphorical mode of Munro openings onto another scene outside of language, in gesture. This same distinction between writing in French and in English might have been arrived at through an exploration of the different theories of language operating in the two groups, and/or the subsequent variations between post-modernist and modernist poetics, by way of definitions by David Lodge. In fact, the addition of Lacan does nothing to



alter the fine textual analysis of the two writers, for which the essay is most memorable. Incidentally, trying to track down all the allusions to Lacan made by Blodgett was most frustrating. In the absence of an index, comparing references to seek out consistencies and divergences in their application is like hunting for a feather in a haystack.

Despite such allusions to post-structuralist theorists, *Configuration* is firmly grounded in earlier theories. The influence of Gerard Genette's structural analysis of figures is clear in "Prisms and Arcs." Northrop Frye's spirit breathes through the volume, especially in the prairie essays. Through subtle textual analysis, they develop that metropolis/hinterland, culture/nature split which has been a characteristic of the much castigated "thematic criticism" that has followed upon Frye's description of the "garrison mentality." Thematic criticism is often misunderstood, as Blodgett points out in his post-script. (He takes up its defence in a forthcoming essay.) In *Configuration*, he goes to the Frye of the *Anatomy of Criticism* and applies the theory of genres to Canadian literature, as Frye did not, showing us how theme becomes rhetorical gesture, a figure of the imagination in a formal and modal act. Consequently, Blodgett analyses ethnicity as a fiction, something produced in art in which a semantic and ideological code is transformed, the ethnic "other" being moved closer to the position of subject. This he sees happening in the shift in emphasis from patriarchal giant in the anglophone novel to adolescent girl in the ethnic novel by writers such as Martha Ostenso and Vera Lysenko. (The potentials for a feminist analysis are ignored.) The other two essays explore writing about the prairie in English and French, establishing generic distinctions between them, the closed space of the past in francophone texts becoming the "unreality" of myth, while the optative, repetitive future in anglophone texts gives rise to the timeless world of "pseudo-reality," romance, pastoral, and comedy, self-reflexively turned back on themselves by novelists such as Ross, Wiebe, and Kroetsch. Although the themes of false-fronts, ambiguity, abstraction, are familiar to readers of Ricou and Harrison's studies of prairie writing, and R. E. Watters long ago noticed a Canadian predilection for romance (against Australian naturalism), the attention to their rhetorical figuration in *Configuration* continually makes us aware of their *literariness*, their word-boundedness.

As has often been remarked, Frye himself changed hats when he came to talk about Canadian literature, leaving behind his structuralist typologies to wade into the waters of cultural history. The importance of Blodgett's study is to show that Canadian literature is not second rate, but can stand up to rigorous analysis of its structures. In fact, as Blodgett concludes, this literature easily lends itself

to a structuralist approach. That character calls out for an approach which views it as figure, as abstraction, tells us much about the distinctiveness of Canadian literature. Nonetheless, this tendency to see character as idea, and not as psychology, may lie in the eye of the critic as he constructs the object of his study. Certainly, Blodgett avoids discussion of Laurence and Richler. But then, Hagar and Duddy are the exceptions critics often hold up to this rule to prove that Canadians can create "believable character."

*Configuration* also makes a major contribution to the theory of comparative literature in Canada. "The Canadian Literatures as a Literary Problem," gives an overview of the theoretical history of the field, exploring the implications of comparison where there is no border, and hence no figure for contiguity. Consequently, as he points out, in the search for national identity, the metonymy of Frontier has turned into metaphor, or emblem of identity: mainstream, parallel lines, staircase of Chambord. For Blodgett, all these figures are marred by their tendency towards symmetrization or homogenization. They ignore difference and the complexities of a multilingual situation in Canada. The binary pairing of anglophone/francophone, the usual approach of Canadian comparatists, conceals the hegemonic position of English, which has made the Québécois into the implied audience of a translator. In reply to this, Blodgett invites us to consider the ideological implications of our methodology. He himself opts for a pluralist position using, as model, the lattice or grid which has the advantage of challenging the notion that culture and the state are inevitably linked. Literature and language choose their own frontiers, Quebec and English Canada often meeting through a third culture, that of Latin America or the American South. While this is a most accurate picture of the relationships between the two literatures, the grid may not be the best model for conveying it (*pace* Foucault). Indeed Fredric Jameson uses this figure to express a homogenizing, unifying element in culture. When he posits connections in the realm of the literary, from which all sexual and political difference has been excluded, Blodgett introduces the principle of identity and unity. Indeed, *Configuration*, like Frye's *Anatomy*, could be attacked by both feminists and nationalists for its championing of universals.

And here is where Blodgett's theory and practice diverge once again. While his model and method tend to the universal rather than the local or particular, to deep structures and not surfaces, both the shape of his book and his literary analysis are based in the discrete, the local. Presented as a collage of fragments with no two essays (except the prairie ones) following the same mode of relating texts, so that binary contrast, study of a single *oeuvre* produced in two languages ("*Alias* Grove: Variations in disguise"), or explora-

tion of a group of books in varying languages are juxtaposed, the book defies the tight unity and homogeneity of the usual academic study. Similarly, by focusing on prairie writing, on work in German related to Canada, Blodgett shifts away from the usual political Quebec/Ontario tug-of-war to take a place on the margins. However, within the focus of his analysis, this decentring has not been taken far enough. Most of the fiction Blodgett refers to was written by immigrants in English. And most of it is available in reprint editions as part of the established national canon in English. Here, there is no exploration of the wealth of Mennonite writing of both Ontario and the prairies in German. This is not a multicultural history of Canadian writing, a group project currently underway.

In fact, *Configuration* points out the limits of all literary endeavours, that they bear the shape of the mind conceiving them. This book is written by a Germanicist and mediaevalist, who has brought his particular interests to bear on the writing of the region where he settled. That Blodgett's is a lively, intelligent, *literary* mind, means that the textual analysis in *Configuration* is among the most sophisticated studies of Canadian literature yet to be published. For this, as well as for its synthesis of the theoretical problems of comparative literature in this country, *Configuration* commands our attention.

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Jars Balan, ed. *Identifications: Ethnicity and the Writer in Canada*.  
Edmonton: The Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies, 1982.  
pp. 158. Unpriced.

*Identifications* presents selected material from a conference on "Ethnicity and the Writer in Canada" which took place in Edmonton, Alberta in September of 1979. Although Jars Balan's introductory statement that "ethnicity has historically been and continues to be an important and dynamic element in the evolution of Canadian culture" is a truism, this volume fails to identify. It fails to identify exactly what ethnicity is and it fails to identify ethnicity's impact on our literature. Certainly, the impulse to "challenge the perception of anglophone Canada as a cultural monolith" is an admirable one, but this volume and the conference it represents seem to have gone around and around the monolith of the Canadian identity question instead.

The problem that these proceedings make most apparent is that ethnicity is a catch-all, ill-defined term that is misused more widely all the time. Apparently, ethnicity covers racial, national, political, religious, and linguistic boundaries without differentiation or defini-

tion. Mennonites, Indians, Icelanders, and German-speaking people may all be considered "ethnic" but these groups have very different parameters and lumping them together does not make them similar. Our romantic "Canadian mosaic" encourages us to fit together the most disparate fragments but that diffusion is what destroys some of the intelligent questions raised in this volume.

Papers by Yar Slavutych, George Bisztray, David Arnason, Danylo Struk, Judy Young, and Seymour Levitan provide omnibus lists of Ukrainian, Hungarian, Icelandic, Ukrainian Emigré, and Yiddish writers who deserve recognition in Canada. The information is undoubtedly useful but the approach uninspired. The transcripts of the panel discussions with participants Rudy Wiebe, Maria Campbell, Pier Giorgio di Cicco, Andrew Suknaski, Maara Haas, Myrna Kostash, George Ryga, and Yar Slavutych are more interesting, mostly because their fierce disagreements raise some inevitable questions about ethnicity. Unfortunately, the "Literary Passport" panel disintegrates into concerted whining about the writers' works being misunderstood or badly treated because of their "ethnic" content. The panel discussion on "Hyphenated Canadians" is heated and hilarious; it identifies most of the problems only too evident in the rest of the text.

One of the major problems is that what is confronted here is not the literature itself so much as the identity of the writer. The fundamental critical premise that the writer and his work should not be confused has been freely ignored. Jars Balan's forced analogy between George Ryga's work and his personal past underscores the futility of such criticism; it provides us with no new insights into George Ryga's novels and plays. Indeed, the text is used to gloss the author's life, a reversal that would only be appropriate in a post-modern novel.

The ethnic posture as a parody or a fixation on the exotic and picturesque is a question that is too quickly dismissed. After all, as Danylo Struk points out, "emigré literature is always a dying literature, dying with the very people who produce it." To embrace that unique position on a continuing basis as an "ethnic" writer enhances the danger of parody. The attendant difficulties of distinguishing nostalgic or sentimental folklore from literature are also evident. Ethnicity as the basis of literary criticism is not valid; its limitation calls into question the nature of such a literary category at all.

The papers and discussions represented here do not place enough emphasis on the linguistic influences of ethnicity on language. This seems to me the interesting critical question; what effect do various languages and peoples have on the way language is used in art? Does the ethnic element affect cadence, rhythm, tonality, connota-

tion, and how does that affect the art that results? Of this entire volume, Henry Kreisel's essay, "The 'Ethnic' Writer in Canada," is most satisfying because he talks about language and the writer's relationship to it, how an artist must appropriate a language for his art at the same time as the artist must be adopted by the language that he uses. The essential intimacy of language and the question of how to maintain the vitality of a language or a particular (ethnic) experience come closest to touching the real issues at stake here. Without Kreisel's essay, this volume would be as fragmented and disparate as the enormous number of ethnic groups in Canada.

What is finally evident is that further definition is needed. Ethnicity does not lead to a literary genre, nor should it be the basis for literary criticism. Our zeal for multiculturalism as a policy threatens to invade good literary judgment. Let us attempt to define the ethnic further before we use it as a tool. It can as quickly ghettoize good literature as it can praise bad.

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## Books Received

- BREYTENBACH, BREYTEN, *Mouvoir/Mirrornotes*. London: Faber, 1984. pp. 257. £8.50.
- BUDICK, SANFORD, *The Dividing Muse: Images of Sacred Disjunction in Milton's Poetry*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985. pp. x, 213. \$18.00.
- BUTTERFIELD, R. W. (ed.), *Modern American Poetry*. London: Vision Press (Critical Studies Series), 1984. pp. 239. £15.95.
- DANCE, DARYL C., *Folklore from Contemporary Jamaicans*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1985. pp. xlii, 230. Unpriced.
- MCSWEENEY, KERRY, *Four Contemporary Novelists: Angus Wilson, Brian Moore, John Fowles, V. S. Naipaul*. Toronto: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1983. pp. 217. \$24.95.
- MERRETT, ROBERT JAMES (ed.), *Man and Nature: Proceedings of the Canadian Society for Eighteenth Century Studies* (Vol. 3). Edmonton: Academic Printing and Publishing, 1984. pp. xii, 162. \$26.95; \$16.95 pb.
- MILLER, JUDITH (ed.), *The Art of Alice Munro: Saying the Unsayable*. Waterloo, Ont.: University of Waterloo Press, 1984. pp. viii, 135. Unpriced pb.
- PARKER, HERSHEL, *Flawed Texts and Verbal Icons: Literary Authority in American Fiction*. Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1984. pp. xx, 249. \$19.95.
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- THOMPSON, DENYS (ed.), *The Leavises: Recollections and Impressions*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984. pp. viii, 207. \$34.50.
- VASEY, LINDETH (ed.), *D. H. Lawrence: Mr. Noon*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (The Cambridge Edition of the Works of D. H. Lawrence), 1984. pp. xlvi, 370. \$24.95.