

Even after the "slump" of the romance market after 1984, there are still between fifty to seventy romances published monthly in North America, ranging from the tame Harlequin *Romances* to the more erotic and modern *Silhouette Desire*, *Silhouette Intimate Moments*, or Bantam's *Loveswept*. How many romances ought one read before one can generalize about them? Frenier seems to feel that reading a "crop" of them, which, according to the bibliography is a little more than one hundred published between 1979 and 1984, is enough for her to be an expert. In comparison to what is available on the market, which is approximately 3,600 to 4,000 in that same period, one hundred romances is only three percent of the books. To be able to believe with confidence a statement such as "generally, 1987 heroines were less independent than those of 1984 and 1985 ... their sexuality was confined to marriage and their careers were less important to them," I would certainly expect my source to have read more than a small percentage of them.

Methodology aside, the book makes some worthwhile and interesting observations about the "changing heroes, heroines, roles, and values" in category romances, as its subtitle suggests. It is a relief to find out that the "power relationship between protagonists has shifted in recent category romances," where "the hero has become not only more nurturant but also less macho, and the heroine has turned sexually lusty and less passive in general." While the changes have been positive for women, there are dangers associated with them. Frenier hints at these in her conclusion, where she notes that "these newly sensitive heroes who were obsessed by thoughts of love for their heroines were not like real American men who remained job and ego-oriented, rather than relationship-oriented." In fact, what contemporary romances have done is to have substituted one form of escape for another. The romances of the late 1980s, as Frenier points out, are still "escapist fantasies pushing unrealizable relationships involving men the likes of whom are rare in real life."

Eleanor Ty
McMaster University

The Corrigan Women. M.T. Dohaney, *Charlottetown, PEI: Ragweed Press, 1988, Pp. 192.*

The Corrigan Women, M.T. Dohaney's first novel, not only foregrounds the survival of three generations of Newfoundland women, thus capturing the essence of their language and lifestyle, but also demonstrates how the past is contained in the present and constantly plays upon it. By beginning and ending the stories of these women at the same time and place, Carmel's funeral, Dohaney creates the feeling that we have not left the grave site. But we have. We have travelled through the humorous and painful lives of a matriarchal lineage, from grandmother to granddaughter, over an historical palimpsest of world wars and Confederation debates. Like the inescapability of the character Carmel's annulled marriage (*void ab initio* — from the beginning it never was), we learn that the past can be annulled, but never forgotten.

After the initial scene at Carmel's grave site, Dohaney splits her novel into three sections: Bertha's Story, Carmel's Story and Tessie's Story. Bertha Ryan (Birth-a?) of Bertha's Story is the quintessential matriarch as she is the female head of her father's household due to her mother's untimely death, and, by going into service with the Corrigan's in the Cove, she ultimately becomes the head of that household, "if she was so only because the real heads were fools" (72). Mrs. Selena, aging head of the Corrigan household, has trouble staying in the present, "time having worn smooth the sharp corners of her memories" (188); therefore, sixteen-year-old Bertha moves in and develops an affection for Mrs. Selena's responsible youngest son, Ned. Unfortunately, the older son, Vince, who has "an intellect problem" (12), sexually pesters Bertha, as he has all the servant girls in the past. He constantly attempts to grab at her breasts and buttocks, culminating in his rape of her.

Bertha had never heard the word *rape* but she knew there had to be a special word for such a horrible act. ... She called Vince's foul deed an *outrage* and although the word never once left her lips, it was as familiar to her as if she recited it every day.

Her outrage gave her a reference point from which all other events could be calculated. From that day onwards, every occurrence was pinpointed in time as having taken place either before, after or around the time of her outrage. (42)

Shortly thereafter, World War I breaks out and the two Corrigan men, against their mother's wishes, enlist. Bertha, realizing she is pregnant from her "outrage," does not want to stay in the Cove, but Ned, desperate to escape his dependent mother and seeing Bertha as his only means of achieving this end, convinces her to remain. While the Corrigan men are at war, Bertha gives birth to Carmel Elizabeth and names Ned as the father. The true father, Vince, dies in battle. Ned returns, but with incurable "rips and tears in his mind" (71). After Mrs. Selena dies, Bertha and Ned marry, have a child, Martin, and remain in the Corrigan's big house. "Shellshocked Ned" becomes a spectacle, a casualty of war, in the small Newfoundland town.

Carmel's Story begins when Carmel is a young child, embarrassed by her "father's" bizarre and inappropriate behaviour. In the small Cove, one family's oddities cannot escape the public eye or children's tauntings. Ned, always thirsty for alcohol to soothe his troubled mind, begs drinks from his neighbours if he cannot get enough at home. Eventually, he commits suicide and is buried outside of the cemetery fence. Carmel, a developing perfectionist, longs desperately to leave the Cove for the wonders of the United States. Preparing for immigration, she goes for a mandatory chest X-ray and tricks the coughing Martin into having his chest X-rayed as well. The doctors discover that he has tuberculosis, so Carmel puts off going to the States to help care for him. With World War II raging in the background, Carmel decides to work at the newly erected American base outside the Cove. Here, she meets the man of her dreams — an American military construction worker. They marry but, after five months of wedded bliss, he is suddenly called Stateside. His American wife is pressing charges of bigamy. Carmel's priest works quickly to get the marriage annulled but it is too late: Carmel has a constant reminder of her "husband," as she is pregnant from their short marriage. Martin tries to bully Carmel out of her depressed stupor:

"Jest because some arsehole Yank made a fool of ye is no reason to go around the house looking like the Mother of Sorrows."

He would survey her unkept hair and the slip that straggled into sight no matter what length dress she wore. "Jest look at yerself. Ye looks like something that got washed ashore off Cape St. Mary's." (138)

She gives birth to Theresa Elizabeth — Tessie — and insists upon giving the child the surname Corrigan instead of Strominski, the father's name. After several empty years in the Cove and much indecision, Carmel realizes her dream of moving to the States but leaves Tessie behind until she can afford to pay for her immigration as well. The move proves to be as unfulfilling as her marriage; she does menial labour in a boot factory and only saves enough money to come home for a visit each summer.

Tessie's Story, then, deals with young Tessie growing up in the Cove with her grandmother and her uncle Martin. Her mother has become a mere shadow in the background, a summer visitor. Tessie is not aware that her father was a bigamist and braves the other children's tauntings with ignorance:

*Tessie Corrigan is no good,
Cut her up for fire wood.
Spoons, forks, cups, and knives,
HER YANKEE FATHER HAD TWO WIVES.* (154)

She wrongly infers from this chant that her strictly Catholic mother left her father because he had been divorced. While wrestling with the secrecy surrounding her father, Tessie uncharacteristically decides that she will become a nun. More in character, she often fights with other children to defend Martin's active stance for Newfoundland joining the Canadian Confederation. Shortly after Confederation, Martin enters the tuberculosis sanatorium and dies several months later. With her mother's constant summer departures and Martin's death, Tessie is becoming emotionally hardened; yet she finds herself in love with Dennis, a young man who is on his way to the priesthood. Their relationship ends rather painfully:

Pictures flashed before Tessie's eyes that had nothing to do with Dennis. She saw her mother getting into Martin's car to go away to the States. She could see the way her brown suit coat strained over her waist as she reached to put the suitcase in the back seat. And she saw the emptiness of the dining room after Martin went to the sanatorium.

However, Tessie grows more determined to become a nun, romanticizing convent life in her mind. Her time in the regimented convent proves short, but not short enough. Her grandmother dies on the day Tessie packs her bags. She leaves the convent and the Cove for Montreal and a successful career in a travel agency.

Shortly after her mother retires back to the Cove and the big Corrigan home, Tessie receives a phone call from the Corrigan's next door neighbour: her mother has died. Tessie heads back to the Cove for the funeral, opens a letter from her mother to learn finally about her mother's marriage and her grandmother's rape. Tessie had planned to sell the Corrigan house, but "in her letter, Carmel had suggested she keep the house because as she put it, 'everyone needs a place to come back to'" (192). She proceeds up to the cemetery for the funeral, and we return to the beginning of the novel.

If Dohaney's writing style often borders on simplicity, this style works in the overall context of these straightforward women's lives. Dohaney employs metaphors and descriptions which evoke the raw environment of Newfoundland life and illuminate the courage and stamina of the Newfoundland people. For example, Dohaney begins her novel with this image:

Millie Morrissey and Tessie Corrigan perched at the edge of the grave like two gulls on a rock: heads tucked in out of the cold, legs stiff and unsteady from the biting wind. Powder-fine snow snaked around the gravestones and funnelled into the tops of their boots. It even curled up their coat sleeves, numbing their wrists. (7)

With these bold strokes of harsh realism and her effective dialogues in Newfoundland dialect, Dohaney colours her novel with moments of humour and sobriety, always avoiding sentimentality.

One of the most striking elements in these women's lives is the ineffectual presence of men. Vince is an adult-sized child who rapes without thought. Ned, once somewhat responsible, turns to alcohol to hide from the terrors of the war in his mind. Ed Strominski, Carmel's never-husband, is a bigamist. Dennis Walsh, Tessie's boyfriend, dominated by his mother, leaves Tessie for the priesthood. Even Martin, the most comically solid male presence, shows a deficiency in the form of tuberculosis. At one point, Bertha, rationalizing selling her meadows to buy Martin a car, explains that with the men away at war, "the women can't look after everything" (110). But in *The Corrigan Women*, we see that they must.

From the Latin *corrigo*, meaning correct, we get *corrigen-dum* or corrigible. Both mean things which must be corrected. Incurable means incurable,

something that cannot be corrected. By a fluke, the Corrigan women — grandmother, mother and daughter — all manage to keep their name, property and pride. They are a matriarchal peculiarity in a patriarchal world. However, they are not protected from the patriarchal world as outside forces penetrate their lives and alter their circumstances: the world wars, the issue of Confederation, the men that they marry and with whom they interact. Because they are a matriarchal line due to a series of male errors, these women are both correct and incorrect, correcting and corrigible. They are not victims in their harsh circumstances. They choose to survive. Tessie reflects on her mother and her grandmother as she walks through the old Corrigan house and realizes that she will keep their memory alive for her children:

She would tell them about Bertha and Carmel and Martin and the rest of the short-tailed Corrigan family that had withered down to her, Carmel's Tessie — and to them — the children of Carmel's Tessie. (192)

A triumphant story of matriarchal survival and courage in a patriarchal world, *The Corrigan Women* shows how the incorrigible past burns constantly in the present. Northrop Frye explains that the essence of tragedy is the sense of being in time: that once every action occurs, it carries with it inescapable consequences.¹ From Bertha's early morning departure from her father's house, to her rape, to World War I, to Carmel's birth, to her marriage to Ed Strominski, and right up to Carmel's Tessie, we see how each and every event, whether positive or negative, has not only created but also constantly effects the present.

Laura M. Robinson
University of Manitoba

NOTE

1. Northrop Frye. *Fools of Time: Studies in Shakespearean Tragedy*. (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1967) 3.

Women Directors: The Emergence of a New Cinema. Barbara Koenig Quart, *Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1988, Pp. 288.*

Very few studies have been conducted on women feature filmmakers and yet, particularly since the 1970s, their works have been appreciated by the public,