

ing style and her systematic analysis make this book a prime choice for undergraduate courses in women's studies and international development.

Jo-Anne Fiske
Mount Saint Vincent University

The Book of Fears. Susan Kerslake. *Ragweed Press, Charlottetown, 1984, Pp. 128.*

Susan Kerslake's collected short stories *The Book of Fears*, published by Ragweed Press, brings together some haunting tales of the vulnerabilities of human beings in a world of concrete and machinery. Frail human beings face chaos; they feel lost and out of place in a fast-moving world: "She hated the way people pushed and walked at her on the street three abreast so she had to step or stumble off onto the grass. Kids on bikes whizzed by, endangering her. Toys, scooters, wagons, skateboards clogged the cement. Radios blaring from cars, stereos blasting from houses." (p. 90). Friendless women ("Push-Me Pull-You", "choices", "Trust", "Mirror, Mirror", "Sweet Grass", "Did you Ever", "The Rules") and men ("Billy", "The Wrong Story", and "Skye") look for comfort or meaning in their lives through television programmes, office routine, and memories in a disordered world where nature and humanity are as hostile as the machine, and where alienation rips holes in the psyche of those who would seek their spiritual selves.

The Indian boy on a dreamfast is mocked by echoes: "... Wistfully, his eyes reach after it, 'But I didn't have a chance to know you; what are you, my spirit? Let me look once, just once...' 'let meee,' howls the echo." (p. 125). Ultimately he is ridiculed by death:

Chants the fortunes, "ho ho, he-ye, ho ho he-ya, he he he he he..."

Softly to himself. The cave whispers back because no one else is there.

"He-ye, he-ye, he-ye"

He listens; he cannot hear the echo.

"he he he he he"

The cave is silent. (p. 125)

Frequently images of cameras, camera lenses, television screens, windows and mirrors express loss of self and lack of spiritual awareness. These cold, unfeeling, flat reflections seem, magically but ironically, to catch and hold dreams, like this deadly illusion in a mental hospital: "A window. The outside. I am afraid to look. He might see me look. They might put me in a room without windows. 'Do you dream?' The dream world is not here but out that window, shivering in its glistening, high gloss frame." (p. 27). Kerslake's imagerly, though recurrent, is not repetitive, for her situations are varied and her personae varied.

The Book of Fears was nominated for the Canada Council Award for Short Fiction in 1985. It deserves the nomination for its controlled writing and memorable imagery: "Old settled on her face slowly, silt from within. Her body was a dead, heavy think discouraging the quick spirit, muddying the colours under her wings." (p. 91). It is only occasionally flawed by too sudden a transition, as in "Sweet Grass", or by images that don't quite work, as in "Push-Me Pull-You".

From small runs by enterprising publishers like Ragweed good things like this book can come. Look at the success of New Zealand's Keri Hulme. Her novel *The Bone People* (1984), published first by the feminist Spiral Collective, is now internationally published and was nominated for the Booker Prize. Hulme's concerns, like Kerslake's, are for the outcasts and outsiders who are searching for a spiritual home in an alien world. Though not a unified narrative group of stories like Sandra Birdsell's *The Night Travellers* (Touchstone), *The Book of Fears* is gripping and absorbing, in its deadly observations of modern life and of the women trapped in it.