

book. All in all, *Found Goddesses: Asphalta to Viscera* is a work that gives the lie to all who say that feminists have no sense of humour. It shows, furthermore, that feminists can and do laugh at themselves and, what is more, that laughter is an important survival mechanism. "Hail, Hilaria, do your bit,/Bring us laughter, soul of Wit!"

Johanna H. Stuckey
York University

Seismographs: Selected Essays and Reviews. Liliane Welch, *Charlottetown: Ragweed Press, 1988, Pp.120 paperback.*

My childhood was so painful I seldom speak of it. Consequently, it was with some surprise that I read an account by Liliane Welch which was almost identical to my own. The odyssey for the ethnic writer, moving from old culture to new, from country to country, begins with family memory and folk past. According to the editors of *Ethnicity and Canadian Literature*, it is the "golden age" of childhood which shapes the whole and contributes to the ideal of country and nation. Various writers, both in English and French Canada are responding, however unconsciously, to this national vision, with retrospective fictions (very often viewed through the eyes of a child) of regional and ethnic cultures, writers who are, in effect, in a sociological sense, reinventing the Canadian past to multicultural ends.¹

So it is that this collection of prose by a poet and professor of French literature at Mount Allison University begins with a quotation about how childhood memories are recreated in later years. However, there was no "golden age" for the would-be émigrée who defines self not through social structures and the cultural milieu but without them. She rejected the patriarchal sexual and social order of class society in Europe, phallographic, dominated by the Law/Catechism which her father/priest embodies. In this context, she must also discard the role models of lady/barbarian, Eve/Madonna, woman as uneducated, subservient to men, subordinate to the household.

The last words of her maternal grandmother, "Your father was not your friend. You speak like me," (p. 33) are true in part. The author exchanges the Roman Catholic religion for a belief system based on a passionate aestheticism. Furthermore, she adopts a belated mother tongue, English. Nevertheless, the implied comparison between rural and urban values, enacted in generational conflicts,

reveals a family epic as forbidden, incomprehensible and ritualistic as a wilderness area (p. 20).

Richard Lemm observed in his introduction that Montana has not yet surfaced in Welch's poetry or prose despite the fact it was where she first attended university and read the works of Melville, Whitman, Faulkner, Steinbeck and Hemingway. He sounds puzzled by her patent disregard for the landscape of the Northwest. He fails to comprehend that the land patterns and myths of the United States exclude women authors and women's literary work. For the frontier, by definition, is the place which is far enough away to leave women behind.² This is possibly why the Tantramar region of New Brunswick, in which the pseudo-wilderness and its attendant freedoms are connected to the civilized, has been so agreeable for Welch, and not necessarily because of her European background. Also noteworthy is the fact that she annually returns to Europe, following a path similar to her grandfather (nomadic/outsider/urban) and grandmother (rooted/solitary/rural).

That she pursues, albeit unconsciously, a well-established pattern is interesting for two reasons. Her initial enthusiasm for the wilderness/freedom arose when she read the German author Karl May, who wrote romantic adventures about the American West, and *Globi's Adventures in America*. When she established the motivating and mediating ground in New Brunswick she was free to create an authentic fiction of her own. And, secondly, her art is based on place but a place recreated "where we stand, helping us to dwell poetically there" (p. 69).

Anne Ricard-Burke
University of Calgary

NOTES

1. Robert Kroetsch, Tamara J. Palmer, and Beverly J. Rasporich, *Canadian Ethnic Studies*, 14, No. 1 (1981), pp. 3-4.
2. Heather Murray, "Women in the Wilderness," in *Amazing Space: Writing Canadian/Women Writing*, Shirley Neuman and Smaro Kamboureli (eds.), Edmonton: Longspoon Press/NeWest Press, 1986, p. 77.

Carry on Bumping. John Metcalf (ed.), *ECW Press, 1988.*

Celebrated chauvanist John Metcalf's naively arrogant attempt to include women in *Carry on Bumping* is lightly energizing to skeptical feminist scholars. However, this ECW Press collection of literary essays has an ambitious market — third and fourth year English undergraduates. That means that more than fifty percent of its readers will

be women and that makes it doubly important that the book be used cautiously, if at all, by feminist scholars.

In my opinion, three factors, as ECW Press's chief editor Robert Lecker must sense, coalesce around this handy book of essays to make its use almost difficult to resist for many male academics. First, both middle-aged men and young academics can take pleasure in watching John Metcalf being rehabilitated for post structuralism, thus re/tool/ed for the '90s — middle-aged men nostalgically, with pain; young academics, with some self-righteousness. Second, Metcalf, the occasionally interesting polemicist, allows Lawrence Mathews into this collection to take a delicious, finely disgusted swipe at post moderns Cooley and Scobie, while Walter Pache nags deconstructively at W.J. Keith for his *Canadian Literature in English*. Finally, feminism is absent from this collection except as serious etiquette. (The Right Stuff?) And there is a cosy connection between core culture British-Canadian polemicist/short story anthologist John Metcalf and ECW/McGill bibliographer and post modern Robert Lecker.

Lecker, one may remember, disingenuously claimed Metcalf, the short story writer, for post modernism in 1982, by slowly and casually characterizing Metcalf's work as a real hybrid of a flattering crafty realism and post modern sensibility.

...Metcalf refuses to be ornate — his prose is so chaste, so uncompromisingly direct that exegesis often seems to be redundant. Yet to accept Metcalf's stories at face value is to ignore the extraordinary narrative compression which multiplies the weight of every word.... (*On the Line*¹, p. 59)

The comfort level is too efficient to bear. Ponder the recent photograph of Metcalf on the jacket of his conventional, worth-a-quick-read *What is a Canadian Literature* (1988), in which he looks earnest, imploring, professorial. Comfortably, Robert Lecker historically diffused Metcalf's polemics and short story writing as predominantly attractive domains for/by university-based intellectuals (unlike Lecker on aristocrat post modern Professor Kroetsch). "While plots crumble and characters die Metcalf keeps working..." (*On the Line*, p. 97). Now, see ECW enticing readers for this standard, more sophisticated book of essays by promotionally featuring its two anti-feminist essays. A launched little game? Someone's a hobble-de-hoy?

So there's *Carry on Bumping* and its insane nice guyness.

It is not that there are no interesting articles in this book, nor that the collection lacks heart (Lawrence Mathews), sensibility (W.J. Keith), or even sensitivity (Brian Fawcett). What *Carry on Bumping* lacks is feeling. Too many cracked academic ambitions are flippantly papered over here and the non-academics often entertain/inform with hard, drool-edged grins. Ray Smith's rambling, "ballys" (?) reader's article on post critical theory containing "Bullshit" and "Eighties" in the title should have been dropped for its willfully dilapidated male chumminess. Philosopher-writer Hugh Hood's easy sneer at local popular culture ("Getting Funding") mainly depresses. Writer/teacher Brian Fawcett demands that we empathize with his slightly risky decision to criticize polemically the short stories of Borgés-inspired Scottish-Canadian Professor Eric McCormack as covertly reactionary and hyper-efficiently clever. "Culturally, Canada is a very small country" (p. 149). Golly yes, pal, but the lengthily introduced anger drains an otherwise acute article of energy and concerned readers.

Poet and pre-bohemian outlaw lover of women, Irving Layton, hangs around this "Bumper" book and the first as patron saint. (Okay — hmmm.) But William Hutt biographer Keith Garebian risks little by not trying a necessarily flawed re-evaluation of Layton's poetry, choosing instead to inflate his subject's poetry through sharp criticisms of Elspeth Cameron's feminist biography of Layton. "If only the writing was as vigorous and as colourful as Layton panting or de-panted" (p. 181). Gosh.

There are obvious problems for any sort of standard biography of Layton or for criticism of his poetry, especially given his messy foraging in the arena of late sixties and seventies public milieux. A more experimental feminist biography than Cameron's might have a sensitive consideration of how the book's women rebels (after 1950s' artist Betty Sutherland) cannot be placed quite so easily in liberal feminism. Too, Cameron's conscientious "real" recognition of her Jewish-Canadian subject's ethnic difference is an occasionally poignant, standardly naive representational problem given her own marginal status. (Garebian implies that Cameron should be working as a *Chatelaine* magazine writer, or a faculty wife or cocktail waitress, not a tenured academic.)

The other anti-feminist article in *Carry on Bumping* is poet and journalist Maggie Helwig's "Women's Poetry." Women undergraduates may want to be on their political toes if a "nice-guy" professor selects this essay for "lively" class discussion. Either you generally agree with Helwig, like you are expected to, or cite her article for such undis-

criminating ignorance that you make your professor's assignment openly shabby and suspect. If Helwig had scaled down her ambitions and used a map of developments in feminist and psychoanalytic theory, she might have produced a very good critical article about an awful group of Jello-cultural feminist poems by Jan Conn, Susan Glickman and Rosemary Sullivan in the 1984 Mary di Michele edited collection *Anything is Possible*. However, Helwig quotes from these poems and others to try to convince that all feminist poetry is "weak" (ideological), and that feminist poets are afraid of "strong" sexual imagery. Given the essay's endnote references to the work of poets Daphne Marlatt and Lola Lemire Tostevin, and critic Barbara Godard, Helwig cannot be innocent of *jouissance* or *l'écriture féminine*. Rather, she chooses to ignore brilliant explorations of subjective sexualization and women's bodies for the conservative ideological category "sexuality" (panting, de-panted Irving Layton).

Marco LoVerso's antidotal Bakhtin/formalist reading of the intelligent, powerfully public works of Margaret Atwood also suffers palpably from his editor's weirdly sensitive/insensitive blindspot to feminism. LoVerso's inclusion of *The Handmaid's Tale* in his discussion of Atwood's art is quite problematic given the novel's serious jab at the masculinist genre of science fiction from a conscious, ironic place beside a small tradition of feminist utopias. *The Handmaid's Tale* is obviously the least serious of Atwood's creations and the edgiest, most despairing of her works, predicated as it is on a huge nuclear-ecological disaster that not only stops but weirdly mocks essential liberal change in patriarchal power relations. Here, LoVerso's precious reminder that Atwood has not created a "living evil character" is misdirected given the horribly bent complacency in the discourses within this strangely formulatic tale.

How did ECW come to publish this weird, usual selection of contemporary academic essays? Some roundabout comments.

I think there is a "nice," orderly, superficially political notion of progress in ECW Press editor Robert Lecker's post modern criticism. I cannot link this feeling to anything more concrete than Professor Lecker's silent ease in *On the Line*, with the slovenly sense of fun found in so many of John Metcalf's otherwise conventional short stories, next to his delicate, abstract admiration of the tragic troping fun of a "nice" extensive Robert Kroetsch. Too, Professor Lecker and John Metcalf might agree that fiction and its criticism are primarily safe from very useful,

less textual, factual connections that strongly appropriate or deviate.

But just consider *The Literary History of Canada* or *What is a Canadian Literature?* It would contain the writers who are read and were read in this country — the women. And it would use the tools of sociology, anthropology, philosophy and history, sometimes in a feminist Foucaultish way, together with feminist literary and psychoanalytic theory, autobiographical writing, biography and emotionally considered Derridean strategies. Such a book would be plainly ruptured at times and dotted with brilliant canny insights. (What riches Canada has for late twentieth-century cultural criticism in its women writers!)

Canadian literary neo-conservatives cannot seem to feel how amazingly forward such a modest intellectual territory is. We are supposed to find *Carry on Bumping* a very interesting or a very useful game and for everyone. Golly.

Anne Hicks
Waterloo, Ontario

NOTES

1. Robert Lecker, *On the Line: Readings in the Short Fiction of Clark Blaise, John Metcalf and Hugh Hood*, Downsview, Ontario: ECW Press, 1982.

The Stairway. Alice A. Chown with an introduction by Diana Chown, *Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988, Pp. 273 paperback.*

The Stairway is a reprint of an important Canadian feminist classic. It was published originally in Boston as the diary of Alice Chown, covering the years from 1906 to 1919. Although many of the entries were written for the publication, several years after the events happened, this does not detract from the piece. Alice Chown published her diary not so much for its merits as an autobiography, but in the hope that it "might give individuals faith in themselves" (p. 4). If her thoughts on feminism, pacifism and socialism were as challenging for her contemporaries as they are for the modern-day reader, she was truly successful in her goals. This edition includes a lengthy essay written by her great-great niece, Diana Chown, chronicling Alice's life right up to her death in 1949. Throughout the book and the introductory essay, Alice's implicit belief in the goodness of humankind comes through and Diana's essay places Alice's thought and activities in the context of Canadian reform history.