

the "lange Straße"), that he will one day succeed; but the four novels which he has written so far all indicate that freeing himself from the people and the problems he knows best might not be an easy venture.

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ANDRÉ LANGEVIN

Dust Over the City

Translated from the French by J. Latrobe and R. Gottlieb
Toronto: McLelland and Stewart,
1974. Pp. 215. \$2.50.

André Langevin's second book *Poussière sur la ville* was originally published in 1953. His other books are *Évadé de la nuit* (1951), *Le temps des hommes* (1956), and *L'Élan d'Amérique* (1972). He has received literary prizes for three of these works (*Le temps des hommes* is the exception), and *Poussière sur la ville* was actually chosen by *Le Grand Jury des Lettres* as the best book to have appeared in Canada between the years 1945 and 1960.

It would be presumptuous to attempt to do justice in a brief review to a novel that has been studied by some of the best critics of French-Canadian literature (e.g. Marcotte, Bessette, and Major). However, the recent publication of this novel, in an English translation, by the publishing house of McLelland and Stewart (in their New Canadian Library series), means that the novel will be made available to a much wider, non-French reading public. Consequently, it would be as well to introduce the translation to that public, in the hopes that they will be moved, one day, to read the book in the original French.

In *Dust Over the City*, Doctor Alain Dubois, who practices medicine in the small mining town of Macklin (Thetford Mines), brings his recently acquired wife (Madeleine), to live with him. The marriage is a rough one from the start, the partners being completely incompatible. Madeleine, a girl who has been elevated from the lower working class by her

marriage, soon finds a truck driver (Richard Hétu), who is more suited to her sexual and emotional capacities. Alain, not wishing to hurt or condemn her, forces himself, with the aid of a regular supply of alcohol, into a complacent attitude. Eventually, the lovers meet regularly in the doctor's home under the watchful, jealous eyes of the doctor himself. Alain may be capable of tolerating this situation, but the town is not. Richard Hétu is guided by the local priest into a marriage with a former girl friend, and, when Madeleine hears of this, she takes a taxi to Richard's home. There she wounds him with a pistol shot, and, immediately afterwards, takes her own life. Alain is advised to move, but he decides to remain in Macklin and to dedicate himself to the medical needs of the town in order to force the townfolk to eventually accept him.

A basic retelling of the story does not reveal the complex themes which abound. These include the problem of suffering (both mental and physical), solitude, death, infant mortality, justice, and what has been called "la bonté de Dieu." There seems to be some influence of the French Existentialist writers, and in particular, of Camus. As in *La Peste*, by Camus, the town is very much a world apart. In fact, in *Dust Over the City*, Macklin becomes one of the main protagonists and is personified to such an extent that the narrator speaks of it in the following terms: "Every Sunday the inhabitants of Macklin dined as well as their priest and doctor did. Then they digested. It looks funny, a town digesting. With a slightly better attuned ear, one might hear a low belching everywhere" (p. 97).

It is very rare that a translator is able to follow his original in every detail. In this case, the translators have attempted to avoid some of the major difficulties by employing a skillful yet technically inaccurate paraphrase. This is seen quite readily when the original is compared with the translation.

Une grosse femme, l'oeil mi-clos dans la neige, me dévisage froide-ment. Je la regarde moi aussi, sans la voir vraiment, comme si mon regard la transperçait et portait plus loin, très loin derrière elle. Je la reconnais vaguement. Une mère de plusieurs enfants qui habite dans le voisinage. Cela dure une

demi-minute au moins, j'en jurerais. (*Poussière sur la ville*, Montréal: Le cercle du livre de France, 1953, p. 11).

The stout woman, her eyes half-closed against the snow's glare, looked me over coldly. I returned her stare without really seeing her at all, as if my glance went right through her and rested on something far, far away. Yet, I recognized her vaguely—the mother of several children, who lived nearby. This silent exchange of glances lasted for a full half-minute, I am certain. (*Dust Over the City*, p. 11).

Translation is always a major problem. *Dust Over the City* has been competently translated, yet the translation, consistent and readable as it is, is unable to reproduce the style of the original. Let us hope, however, that it will persuade the reader that the book is worth rereading in its French original.

Roger Moore

HAROLD R. ISAACS, ED.

Straw Sandals: Chinese Short Stories 1918-1933

Foreword by Lu Hsün
Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1974.
Pp. 444. \$10.00.

Modern narrative forms as known in the Western world are late comers to Chinese literature. Great European storytellers like Dostoevsky, Chekov, Balzac, and Goethe were read and admired by young Chinese intellectuals, but it was not before 1915—the year in which Ch'en Tu-hsiu founded his revolutionary journal *New Youth*—that young Chinese writers started to try their hands at the newly imported genres and especially the short story. When Lu Hsün published his story "Diary of a Madman" in *New Youth* in 1918 it was regarded by historians as the first modern short story in Chinese (see p. xix).

Soon after that a group of revolutionary writers started to follow suit and to experiment with new forms and styles, and to deal narratively with daring and politically relevant subject matter. The turbulent years between 1918 and 1933 gave the younger generation all the reasons they needed to justify their insistence on a literary and political revolution: Chiang Kai-shek's attack on his communist allies in 1927, the founding of the League of Leftist Writers in 1930, the execution of five young writers in 1931, and the Japanese invasion of China in the same year.

In the midst of this turmoil and confusion Harold R. Isaacs founded in Shanghai his short-lived journal *China Forum* (1932-1934), in order to protest against the cruel and unjust methods of the Kuomintang authorities; it also served as an organ for young and revolutionary writers. It was in 1934 that Harold R. Isaacs, guided by Lu Hsün, assembled the stories included in *Straw Sandals* in order to "trace, through examples, the passage of the new literary movement in China from the humanistic or romantic concerns of its beginning to the intensely political and ideological cast it took on under the pressure of the great events that swept the country" (p. xi) in the years between 1918 and 1933. But, unfortunately, this collection had to wait forty years before it found a publisher. In the meantime most of the stories included in it were translated and introduced to Western readers.

The first story in this collection is Lu Hsün's parabolic narrative "Diary of a Madman" which condemns the "man-eaters" of his nation and cries for change and reform: "'You can change all this!' I cried. 'You can change from the depth of your hearts! You must know that man-eaters will have no place in the world of the future! You will devour yourselves if you don't change. Even if you can still multiply, you'll be extinguished by the real human beings just like wolves by hunters! Like vermin!'" (p. 11).

One of the shortest and most poignant stories of this collection is "Hassan" by Chiang Kuang-Tz'u (an author whom Lu Hsün held in low esteem). It is about a simple and ignorant man who suddenly refuses to support his oppressors; as a result he is called a "Bolshevik," a word he is unable even to understand.