Piercy's Utopian society, presented to us by a visitor from "our" society, and a mental patient, is seen confusedly, from an outsider's point of view. Piercy's choice of events presented at Mattapoisett is anthropological: the visitor comes to a feast, a funeral, a birth, an adolescent's rite of passage, a civic conference. The society can never come completely into focus because the reader does not observe it functioning at normal times—the plot is somewhere else, in our world (as it is in Joanna Russ's *The Female Man).* This might save the author the trouble of working out every detail of the society, but also requires clumsy plot devices (the trances that preceed the visits to Mattapoisett, the retrospection in *The Female Man).*

Piercy's real achievement is also the greatest fault of the novel. She exposes the hypocrisy of society's institutions for the mad, and the immorality of brain control, by examining one of these institutions from the inside. She emphasizes the relative advancement of the future society by demonstrating how little of it one of our brainwashed inhabitants can understand. But because Piercy fights so many fights at once (against insanity, sexism, racism, war and violence), the narration drags as she explains society's ills through her protagonist's experiences. The culmination of the plot in murder reflects the only use to which the "madwoman" Connie can put her understanding of Mattapoisett's philosophy. In our world, such values are destructive. Connie is the destroyer who might start the process of change to the new world, but can never successfully complete that transition herself. Piercy is a writer for whom Utopia itself remains a vision, glimpsed perhaps but never clearly perceived or examined. *Woman on the Edge of Time* is caught between the action novel and the essentially descriptive moral tract.

Elizabeth Fifer

EFRAIM SEVELA
Truth is for Strangers: A Novel About a Soviet Poet
Translated from the Russian by Antonina W. Bouis
Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1976. Pp. 209.

In an era of increasing interest in Soviet affairs and especially in the question of intellectual dissidence in the USSR, the appearance of Efraim Sevela's novel *Truth is for Strangers* should prove to be a most timely event. The author, who has previously published a collection of short stories entitled *Legends from Invalid Street* (1974), explores through the peripeties of his hero two of the most agonizing problems of Soviet life: the crisis of conscience among the intelligentsia and the struggle of ethnic minorities for survival. The hero, Algirdas Požera, is a poet who has won national fame and acquired all the perquisites accorded to the artistic elite by toadying to party officials and glorifying an ideology with which he has made a comfortable and cynical accommodation. But he is more than a poet. He is a Lithuanian poet, and therein lies the conflict. Though trusted and even coddled by the authorities, he harbors bitter memories of persecutions in his native land, memories that come to the surface when he meets a group of Lithuanian-American tourists on a train leaving Moscow for Vilnius. His conversations with them and especially with an attractive young graduate student in literature lead to a series of flashbacks that reveal the horror of the period immediately following the Russian annexation of Lithuania, when Stalin's genocidal policies very nearly destroyed that Baltic state. Since Western readers know very little about this doleful episode in East-European history, Sevela's forceful and often deeply affecting portrayals of heroic Lithuanian patriots will elicit surprise and admiration even as the frustration of their heroic efforts will provoke sorrow and outrage. His vignettes of personal courage in the face of impossible odds are, in fact, the artistic highlight of the novel.

Požera's sense of alienation from the society he himself has helped to fashion reaches its climax when he meets Sigita, a seventeen-year old girl who is being taken to Kaunas to be tried on a charge of larceny. Realizing that in taking the money

she had merely succumbed to the temptation of gratifying an adolescent wanderlust, he decides to intercede on her behalf by going to Kaunas and pleading her cause. In a long dream sequence (revealed as such only at the end of the novel) he and Sigita run away together, fly to the Crimea, and settle in a mountain cottage perched so high that no one can disturb them. Their idyllic existence comes to an abrupt end, however, when the police become suspicious and make the arrest. But when Požera wakes up from his beautiful dream, he finds that he has lost all interest in the girl's plight. Eager to avoid an unnecessary confrontation with the authorities, he gets off the train in Vilnius and returns to his accustomed life of private compromise and public pretense.

The novel is admirably structured. The main narrative line is developed almost exclusively in train stations and on the Vilnius-bound train itself. Both the flashbacks detailing the martyrdom of Lithuania and Požera's dream of escape are occasioned by people he meets on the train. This unity of place (and of time) provides a solid framework for the mélange of reminiscences and associations and a poignant symbolic setting for the poet's interior drama.

The translation generally flows smoothly, though a few Russian expressions have been rendered too literally. "Promised her mountains of gold" (p. 35) should be "Promised her the moon" or "Promised her everything." "Don't try to crawl into my soul" (p. 108) would perhaps sound more natural if translated as "Don't try to get on my good side." There are, moreover, a number of curious mistakes in the spelling of Lithuanian proper nouns. Thus, *Mažoji Litueva* (p. 36) should be *Mažoji Lietuva*. And the port mentioned on p. 87 is not *Kleipede* but *Klaipėda*.

Aesthetically, *Truth is for Strangers* is an auspicious beginning for a new novelist. From a historical point of view, it is bound to be a revelation to the Western reader. As a sociological document it is a very disturbing work, for, although it expresses the justifiable discontent of many Soviet citizens, it also reflects all too vividly their even greater cynicism. Little hope is offered for substantial change in Soviet life. Algirdas gains a degree of self-respect only on the inaccessible mountain top of his dream. At the end of the novel, as he returns to his every-day life in Vilnius, he carries his luggage down the path leading into town and notices that the slope is becoming "steeper and easier" (p. 209). The ideal may be on the mountain, but reality is down the hill. One is reminded of the Sibyl's words in the *Aeneid*: ". . . facilis descensus Averno;/noctes atque dies patet atri ianua Ditis;/sed revocare gradum superasque evadere ad auras,/hoc opus, hic labor est . . ."

David Matual

SHARON RIIS
The True Story of Ida Johnson
Toronto: The Women's Press, 1976. Pp. 111.

This thin volume is written in the modish experimental manner or irregularly shaped chapters and much blank space. If the novel is interesting in form, it is contrived and disappointing in content. Three separate narratives are used to tell the life story of the protagonist, Ida Johnson, and the divergent tale of her childhood friend, Lucy George, and to present multiple versions of the significance of their lives. Despite these innovative attempts the novel remains an exercise in form lacking in characterization and compelling drama.

The novel begins with a single line on a blank page which points to the irony of the title: "The Truth of the matter is: there is none" (p. 6). On the opposite page is a dialogue written after the manner of Nathalie Sarraute with no external identification of speakers or orientating narrative. On the third page a conventional narrative begins with normal paragraphing and punctuation. This omniscient narrative frames the novel and provides intermittent reminders of the truckstop scene of Ida's telling of her life story and the presence of her lone listener, Luke,

The situation of Ida's narration itself is artificial. A young male hitchhiker chooses to remain in a truckstop and asks a waitress there, Ida, to tell him her life story. In spite of the interludes of interior monologue of the two characters which indicate a mutual subconscious recognition of