

reader that she cannot possibly fulfill. She is a brisk, skilled craftsman with a sharp eye for detail and a gift for the telling phrase. The ideas on which her novels are based are familiar, but they are ideas that need to be asserted frequently and persuasively. Charleen learns that we must take responsibility for our lives, for the consequences of our actions. We must come to terms with our relationships with others however painful because we cannot survive alone without becoming sick with bitterness or mad. As yet another novel about the awakening of a mixed-up middle aged woman it is distinguished by its refusal to slip into the usual clichés of the form. Charleen is not dedicated to the idea that the mists of confusion will clear if only she can decide which man or combination of men she can blame for her disordered life. She analyzes a range of forces in her life and realizes eventually that an obsession with finding scapegoats is simply a way of refusing to grow up. If the quest into our past strengthens its grip over us instead of releasing us from it then we are doomed. Shields's novel is a pleasant affirmation of the need to accept winning out over the compulsion to blame.

Anthony S. Brennan

MARY SODERSTROM
The Descent of Andrew McPherson
Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson,
1976. Pp. 225.

Mary Soderstrom's *The Descent of Andrew McPherson* spans two countries, five generations, at least four wars, and more than a half century in time. Set in 1959, the novel focuses on the lives and memories of Andrew McPherson and his descendants, and their relationships with one another. At 79, Andrew owns a successful auto dealership in Green River, Idaho, where he lives in his own house on a tree-lined street with his son Howard and Howard's family. Twice-widowed, Andrew is retired, with only two surviving children: Elizabeth, who refused to move to his house, and Howard, who agreed.

Similar to Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying* in form, the novel is divided into twenty-seven sections, varying from two to forty-two pages in length, each of which has as its title the name of the character with whom it is primarily concerned. *The Descent*, however, is not a stream-of-consciousness novel. Unlike Faulkner, Soderstrom uses little symbolism and makes no attempt to portray preverbal levels of consciousness, limiting her field to her characters' present activities and conversations, and their memories of past events. Each section is presented in large part, but not entirely, from the point of view of the character whose name it bears. The story is told in the third person by an author who must be considered omniscient.

Ten sections are devoted to Andrew, and five each to Howard, Howard's wife Francine, and their daughter Alice Marie. One section is given to Elizabeth, and one to Franklin, Howard's and Francine's only other child. As one would expect, the earliest series of events are told when they occur in Andrew's memory. The greater part of Andrew's sections, in fact, are devoted to what he remembers: his childhood in Montreal; his marriages there, to Helen in 1899 and to Annie in 1901; the years spent in Winnipeg, on a farm in Saskatchewan, and in Dry Creek, Montana, before the move to Idaho; the birth of his four children, and the death of two.

Howard and Francine live more in the present, but also have their memories. Howard remembers unhappy times in his childhood, and, with more contentment, the early years of his marriage. Francine remembers her home in Glen Falls, New York, and her parents—French-speaking Catholics who had come from Trois-Rivières, geographically a mere seventy-five miles down the St. Lawrence from Andrew's home in Montreal, but a distance that Andrew and his Scotch Presbyterian family could not traverse.

Alice Marie is only eighteen in 1959; her memory rarely extends more than a year into the past. She lives mainly in the present, solely concerned with her own life. The events of her life as they unfold form the central action of the novel in the present, not only for her, but for her parents, and for her grandfather. The only female grandchild of Andrew McPherson, she is more like him than any of his other descendants have been.

The novel seems to be intended as a study of the recurrence of similar personalities, events, and relationships from generation to generation. Andrew's father, Duncan McPherson, thought himself a good father and was "proud he never beat his children in the heat of anger" (p. 14). Once, nevertheless, in anger, Duncan whipped Andrew around the neck with a razor strap, an act for which his son never forgave him. In his own judgement Andrew is a patriarch who has devoted himself to his family. The judgement of his descendants, gradually revealed as the novel progresses, is less complimentary.

The reader is left free to judge Andrew as his descendants do, or according to his own view of himself. Only Soderstrom's dedication of the *Descent* to two men "who were nicer than Andrew" suggests her own negative judgement of her character, a judgement which perhaps she intends the reader to share. The emphasis on the similarities in personalities and events in succeeding generations is not accompanied by a consideration of the causes of these similarities—genetic factors, or the uncomfortable family environment that repeats itself from generation to generation. A more philosophical exploration of this question, and increased authorial control over the reader's judgement of the characters, would have added depth to this novel whose strength lies in the development of its characters.

Nevertheless, Soderstrom does create characters who are real and living people, and the novel is an interesting one. The *Descent* presents a panorama of events in a variety of places and times, and can offer its readers a good evening's entertainment.

Emma Kafalenos

DON JUAN MANUEL

The Book of Count Lucanor and Patronio. A Translation of Don Juan Manuel's El Conde Lucanor.

Trans. and Intro. John E. Keller and L. Clark Keating.

Lexington: The University of Kentucky Press, 1977. Pp. 201.

The Book of Count Lucanor and Patronio, Don Juan Manuel's masterpiece, is a delightful collection of some fifty tales. It was finished in all probability around 1335. This version, in a modern, lucid style, is, with rare exceptions, a model of what should comprise a good translation. There is a long introduction (pp. 1-33) in which sources are outlined, background information is given, and a brief biography is set out. There are historical notes at the end of each tale and there is also a brief bibliographical essay (pp. 198-99) which details the major editions of *El Conde Lucanor* and provides a short list of "books and articles pertinent to the study of Don Juan Manuel" (pp. 200-01). It is worth mentioning, perhaps, that the two previous English translations of this important work seem to have come from the French version of Puybusque rather than from the original Spanish.

Many of the tales which appear in *El Conde Lucanor* form part of the long medieval tradition of *exempla*. Several tales have become famous in other contexts; for example, "What Happened to a Fox and a Crow Who Had a Piece of Cheese in His Beak" (pp. 57-59) is probably of Aesopic origin and is possibly better known from the fable of LaFontaine. The story of Doña Truhana (pp. 61-62) can be related to that of the milkmaid and her pot of milk. "What Happened to the King and the Tricksters Who Made Cloth" (pp. 130-33) is an early Hispanic version of the fairy tale of the Emperor's new clothes. Finally, the tale of "What Happened to a Young Man Who Married a Strong and Ill-tempered Woman" (pp. 137-41) is an early version of Shakespeare's more famous play *The Taming of the Shrew*.

Although medievalists in general seem primarily interested in sources, it is Don Juan Manuel's style and manner of storytelling which makes this collection relevant (even in translation) to the modern reader. Perhaps the most renowned and the most