

A remarkably concise study of *Degré's* constitutes the fourth chapter. McWilliams sees this novel as a broader historical portraiture wherein a pedagogue-hero seeks to reinterpret modern culture from the vantage point of Rabelais's Renaissance. Vernier is thought to flounder in his gigantic task due to the confusions inherent in our civilization. In Chapter V dealing with *Description de San Marco* and *Portrait d'artiste en jeune singe*, Butor himself is seen as journeying to a Bavaria beset by medieval and alchemical reminiscences, and haunted by contemporary nazi atrocities. In chapter VI, devoted to *Mobile*, the critic unveils Butor's motives as he transports his audience to a New-World setting. America for him is heir to Europe. It is presented as repressing with hysterical but vain efforts its natural past by denying all non-white influences. There is however hope for a utopian future which would liberate America's dark forces. This specific theme is expanded in the next chapter devoted to Butor's pilgrimage to Niagara Falls and eventually to the Southwest where the Zuni Indians embody for him the perfect relationship between man and nature. This descent into the past cannot be final, however. Primitive history must be studied so it may be understood and transcended.

In the ninth chapter devoted to *Intervalle*, Mr. McWilliams explains the paradox of a travel book in which no one moves. Although the evasion theme is restated, the only possible transformation is of one's consciousness. Butor is seen as subtly denouncing once again the religious and police restraints which gag our modern world. His orientation is towards the future. He considers literature (especially Fourier's) as a tool which can liberate us from latent Christian and capitalistic chains. Butor would even free us from Cartesian rationalism as he envisions literary happenings which are to unite all mankind in "superstacies" adorned with global poetry and pointing toward a utopic future. In his conclusion the critic announces a book yet to be published by Butor: *Boomerang*, which is set in yet another sector: Australia and the Pacific. Time is to become a function of space as Butor's view of the past is expressed in modernistic experiments which include temporal experiences, mythical resonances, and historical depth.

Although there is an ever growing volume of critical studies of the Butorian

oeuvre, Professor McWilliams's work stands unsurpassed because of its clarity, depth, and readable style. Here we indeed find the Ariadne thread to the entire opus of an author which can now be viewed as a well-organized poetic microcosm. The untutored reader or student puzzled by the often labyrinthine nature of structuralistic literature would gain instant enlightenment by reading this definitive interpretation of Butor's work.

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JEANNETTE URBAS

From Thirty Acres to Modern Times: The Story of French-Canadian Literature

Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1976. Pp. 158.

Fashioned as an aid for the teaching and study of French-Canadian literature in translation, this reader's guide endeavors to trace the chronological development of central and representative themes in major prose works. As an outline in five parts ("Rural Myths and Fidelity to the Soil," "Urban Social Problems," "The Individual and Society," "Forms of Alienation," and "Modern Times: Keynote for Change"), *From Thirty Acres to Modern Times* performs a service of some value, providing a broad and coherent context for the study of many works of Canadian fiction composed in French. Beyond this general outline, however, the book does not offer much to the reader.

Professor Urbas's reading of novels rarely goes beyond stating what is already obvious to those who have read the works; she traffics in the facile. For example: of Lorenzo Surprenant in *Maria Chapdelaine*, we read that his name suggests surprises, then we are directed to a footnote informing us of the meaning of "surprenant" (p. 10); and of *Windflower*, that it is "a novel of social criticism. . . . In it Gabrielle Roy probes the significance of technological advances and considers the validity of modern life" (p. 57). While it is certain that a teacher should not make a

virtue of being elliptic or laconic, it is equally certain that a teacher should avoid the appearance of encouraging sloth or banality.

Also, the book is marked by a lack of proportion. Gabrielle Roy and Marie-Claire Blais undoubtedly deserve the 18 and 12 pages they are granted, respectively; but Hubert Aquin, an undisputed major figure of contemporary world literature, is handled in just more than 2 pages, and Réjean Ducharme, in 1 paragraph! The brevity of the latter's treatment is particularly mystifying in view of Urbas's apparent aversion to compression elsewhere (her comments on Claire Martin, for example) and of her own admission that Ducharme is "acknowledged both at home and in France to be one of the significant writers of his generation" (p. 119). A mischievous reader might infer that the difficulties in discerning the highly philosophical, learned, ironic, and allusive Ducharme's *sententia* and plot line make it inappropriate material for literary surveys or undergraduate reading, and, therefore, for an understanding of "the story of French-Canadian literature."

There is yet a more serious objection to Professor Urbas's guide: its lack of intellectual discrimination. This is revealed most obviously in some of the research topics appended to each chapter. I offer but two examples: referring to *The Outlander*, she asks the student to comment on the statement that "Germaine Guèvremont reveals an intimate understanding of nature, the seasons, and the countryside around Sorel" (p. 31); and, again, she invites students to discuss the view of critics who "have tended to see in *A Season in the Life of Emmanuel* a microcosm of Québec society" (p. 121). Students in St. John's, Inuvik, Edmonton, Port Hardy, Saint Boniface, Antigonish, and Vancouver unfamiliar with either Québec society or Sorel may be somewhat hard pressed to comment with any precision or integrity. They may respond to the implied cultural and geographical solecism of their guide by assuming that novelists tell no lies. More distressing, because it is not quite as overt, is Professor Urbas's mime (whether or not meretricious) of the moral indignation manifested by some of the authors she examines: "*Thirty Acres* shows that the peasant's support of religion is basically a surface manifestation" (p. 23). One is tempted to ask: of what?

Reflecting on modern Québécois fiction in the preface to the book, Professor Urbas observes that it is essentially optimistic and progressive, "the basic thrust is outward and upward" (p. viii). Released from an ecclesiastical dungeon, the French-Canadian novelist now has open before him the endless vistas of modern doctrines of change and progress. *From Thirty Acres to Modern Times* concludes on a similar note with a comparison of the modern franco-phone artist in Canada and Saint-Denis Garneau's child, "for his eyes are open to take everything" ("The Game"). But, for the reader of Réjean Ducharme, for example, who has contributed so significantly to our understanding of the Québécois "temper" and whose fiction mirrors the inward and downward way of life in the modern world (the myths of Narcissus, Satan, and Faust, and Dante's "Inferno" provide the essential imagery), the evocation of a child's eyes may seem sinister, when the egotistical outlook of nine-year old Bérénice, ambiguously revolting against the traditional theological values of Québec in *L'Avalée des avalés*, is remembered: "Les hommes qui s'achètent des lunettes pour mieux voir sont des imbéciles. Plus une illusion est clairement perçue, plus elle a l'air d'une réalité" (Editions du Belier, p. 124). As one resolved to know everything, to explore all unknowns, she wills to be as free as Satan in hell: "pour être libre: tout détruire" (p. 192). It is perhaps the traditional rather than the modern way which leads "outward and upward." *From Thirty Acres to Modern Times*, like many other literary guidebooks provides too many revelations of half-untruths.

C. R. La Bossière

RICHARD BRODHEAD
Hawthorne, Melville, and the Novel
Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976. Pp. 216. \$4.50.

The thesis of Richard Brodhead's *Hawthorne, Melville, and the Novel* is that Hawthorne's and Melville's "work is characterized by a powerful tension between their visions and the nature of the genre they choose to work in," and he describes their relation of author to genre