

F. Odoevsky, is no isolated phenomenon, nor a surprising one in view of the existence and widespread influence of the Serapion Brotherhood in the 1920s.

Professor Natov's book is a solid contribution, doing an excellent job of giving the reader a maximum of useful information which will serve as a reliable basis for further reading and study of Bulgakov's works.

E.D. Blodgett

CONFIGURATION: ESSAYS ON THE CANADIAN LITERATURES.

Downsview, Ontario: ECW Press, 1982. Pp. 224. \$9.95

Reviewed by Camille R. LaBossière

This book is literally grand. Ranging from Homer and Ovid, through the Chansons de geste and Dante, to contemporary South-American literature, E. D. Blodgett quests after a figural mode of reading justly adapted to the underlying nature of the interchanges and silences between various writers and literatures in Canada and authors from beyond her borders. The guiding figure for an understanding of that mode is pictured live in a conversation, an address of the Self to the Other. Itself a sequence of *essais* reflecting on each other, the volume does as it says. In a sense, it is like a symbolist novel or a good poem.

Comparative literature is "a metonymical art" (p. 14), Blodgett argues in the initial essay, "The Canadian Literatures as a Literary Problem." It is not a metaphorical art of the kind practised by Northrop Frye's theory of universal forms, for example, which enjoins a thorough unification and is therefore "fatal for the study of the Canadian literatures" (p. 14). Differences are set aside in Frye's theory, a limitation it shares with Ronald Sutherland's method of defining a mainstream of Canadian literature by thematic convergence. Blodgett argues otherwise, suggesting "frontier" as the kind of figure to permit and encourage the making of "a co-operative separatism" (p. 34). Without frontiers, there can be no genuine comparison, no dialogue respectful of the Other, only monologue, as he so rightly points out. In the end, Blodgett comes to propose the figure of a "threshold" as the place "where comparatists ought to be" (p. 35). It is there that Aquin and Borges meet, and where Ondaatje converses freely with Márquez. This, of course, is not to exclude other forms of a *tertium comparationis*, wherein authors from different Canadian literatures can speak to each other without going abroad, as the third essay, on Hébert and Munro, eloquently testifies.

Ancillary to Blodgett's purpose is his tentative articulation of "the role that German writing has played in the formation of Canadian literature" (p. 8). Faithful to his conception of comparison by metonymy, he sets German works in the midst of a commonwealth of others in "Fictions of Ethnicity in Prairie Writing," which is followed by a study of MacLennan's and Rilke's treatment of the Orpheus myth and a masterful demonstration of the *Neuromantik* in Grove.

Commentary on Grove's *Master of the Mill* launches the sixth essay, "Cold Pastorals." Since the pastoral is "one of the dominant patterns of the Canadian novel" (p. 154), as Blodgett reckons, its study can take the reader far along toward an understanding of what it means to be "Canadian." The sweep across a range of novels leads to the observation that, in the Canadian novel, "pastoral is only a fiction" in the sense that it "moves through landscapes of abstraction to reach solutions that are only in appearance more concrete" (p. 180). Scrutiny of this mode extends into the final essay, "Gone West to Geometry's Country," where the traveler in Canadian fiction is said to come to the experience "of finding one's self lost" (p. 215), a conclusion as paradoxical as it is illuminating.

The "Postscript" proposes that "the Canadian literatures elaborate a profoundly idealistic attitude" (p. 222). The literatures, then, are reflections of an ongoing search for an ever-elusive country in the mind. There are no categorical validities for thinking nor stationary points of reference to chart a course by in that endless journey to an ideal end. What is certain and palpable is that *Configuration* sets a new and high standard for the comparative studies of the Canadian literatures that will follow.