

cisely in order to upset the status quo (80). Robert Hamblin counters Matthews's and Moreland's insistence on social context by underlining that Faulkner turns to his own "postage stamp of native soil" only to "sublimat [e] the actual into apocryphal" (168).

In a less classifiable but interesting essay, Beth Dyer Biron points out how French translations of Faulkner often fail to capture Southern culture and miss metaphysical implications. She faults the translations, mainly by Coindreau, for losing biblical allusions by not using equivalents in French Bibles, for smoothing out Faulkner's innovative syntactical patterns, for turning concrete language abstract, and for varying Faulkner's purposeful repetition. Benjy's pasture, for example, becomes "prairie" ("meadow") and "pré" ("mead"), when the French word "pâturage" would have better preserved biblical associations with Hebrew scapegoat and New Testament lamb.

The only unsuccessful essay for me was "Faulkner's Patriotic Failure," where William Meyer, Jr. insists that America, particularly the North, has had a "Religion of Vision" and that Faulkner feels guilty for having to choose between this "hypervisual" ideal and the South's "hyperverbal," aural, lyrical "thunder of hooves" (105-07). This rigid dichotomizing of sight and sound leads Meyers to some outrageous allegorizing: the "fallen sister" whom Jason repudiates is the "hyperverbal South" and the incest which Quentin fears is the coupling of northern "America the Beautiful" with "Old World South" (111-13).

Margaret Drabble

A NATURAL CURIOSITY

Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1989. Pp. 309. \$24.95

Reviewed by Nora Foster Stovel

Margaret Drabble's latest novel, *A Natural Curiosity* (1989), forms a sequel to its predecessor, *The Radiant Way* (1987). *The Radiant Way* featured three female friends—Liz Headleand, psychiatrist, Alix Bowen, social worker, and Esther Breuer, art historian—and traced their multiple lives in contemporary London, culminating in the capture of a mass murderer, Paul Whitmore, "The Horror of Harrow Road," a specialist in severed heads. As Drabble explains in her Author's Note, "*A Natural Curiosity* is a sequel to *The Radiant Way*, and picks up some of the characters and stories, while adding others." In *A Natural Curiosity*, Drabble pursues Alix Bowen and Liz Headleand's sister, housewife Shirley Harper, to Yorkshire, while abandoning Esther Breuer in Italy. Drabble explained that she felt certain that Alix would be curious to visit the murderer in his Yorkshire prison. Moreover, many readers complained that Shirley Harper was neglected in *The Radiant Way*. So Drabble remedies that omission in *A Natural Curiosity* by following Alix and Shirley to Northam—the setting for her 1965 novel *Jerusalem the Golden*, based on Drabble's own home town of Sheffield—in a narrative that picks up where the previous one left off—*The Radiant Way* 2 ?

Drabble's habit of recycling characters has caused critics to accuse her of writing "soap operas." But Drabble, like Virginia Woolf, wants to convey the web of human relations. And her recent narratives, with their multiplicity of

characters and viewpoints connected by montage, captures that network skillfully. Fascinated by fate and the mystery of coincidence, Drabble has natural phenomena connecting characters, as many of the novel's dramatis personae witness Liz Headleand discussing child abuse and infantile sexuality on a television talk show. This method of multiplicity and montage crescendoes in the grand finale of a party (de rigueur for Drabble novels) attended by all the members of the cast who have not actually been killed off in the course of the narrative (one character dramatically bites the dust in the middle of the party).

Drabble emphasizes the arbitrary nature of the narrative through multiple authorial intrusions in which the narrator addresses the reader with postmodern playfulness, apologizing for telling some characters' stories, while omitting others. Dismissing Alex's views on "How Britain Votes," the narrator reassures the reader, "you may be spared her occasional reflections on these themes, for this is not a political novel. No, not a political novel. More a pathological novel. A psychotic novel. Sorry about that. It won't happen again. Sorry" (193-94).

Drabble observed that one inspiration for her recent State of the Nation novels is the daily news. And indeed her narrative does resemble a newsbreak at points. Sections of the narrative offer newsy lists of "atrocious stories," both actual and literary. The gratuitous grotesquerie of some of Drabble's reported vignettes makes their literary analogues, like Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* or Lucan's *Pharsalia*, seem like a children's birthday party by comparison.

Drabble is, however, probing the possibility of human evil, beginning with the monstrous murders of bland, banal Paul Whitmore. Charles Headland, converted to responsible patriarchy by a hotel room Gideon Bible, agrees with the Gospel according to Mark that this is "an adulterous and sinful generation" (177). Multiple precedents for contemporary evil are found in Roman Britain, which forms a grisly backdrop for the novel, punctuating its pages with severed heads.

But Drabble's central characters, social worker Alix Bowen and Freudian psychiatrist Liz Headleand, do not believe in absolute evil. Alix's obsession with Paul Whitmore stems from her need to find a natural psychological cause for his monstrosity. And she does, in the form of a mad abusive mother. "All evil is error, some believe. Nobody knowingly chooses evil" (192), Drabble concludes.

Liz also discovers hidden secrets in the past. In *The Radiant Way*, Liz discovered that her father was a pedophile who abused her sexually as an infant and exposed himself publicly, leading to eventual disgrace and suicide. In *A Natural Curiosity*, Liz discovers her mother's secret life through the appearance of another uninvited guest who materializes at the final, fatal part, introducing herself as Liz's half-sister—a "sister *ex machina*" (291). Liz realizes that she has somehow intuited but repressed this knowledge: "What we do not know is what we most know. We pursue the known unknown, on and on, beyond the limits of the known world" (212). Curiosity is natural, although it can also prove fatal: "The fatal curiosity? When we see the Gorgon face to face, we die" (212), Drabble warns.

Drabble concludes this novel as she did her previous one, with a reunion of the three female friends in a rural idyll--this time in Italy, where Liz and Alex have gone to visit the estranged Esther Breuer, who has just decided to refuse Robert Oxenholme's proposal of marriage, leave the lesbian Elena Volpe, and return to London. From this vantage point, they reconsider England and conclude: "England's not a bad country. It's just a mean, cold, ugly, divided, tired, clapped-out post-imperial slag-heap covered in polystyrene hamburger cartons. It's not a bad country at all. I love it" (308). The three friends expect an audience with the Queen of Navarra, who awaits the meeting "with pleasurable anticipation" (309)--setting us up for the next novel in the sequence?

Drabble's "Author's Note" concludes, "I intend to write a third but very different volume, which will follow the adventures of Stephen Cox in Kampuchea"--*The Radiant Way*? Although *A Natural Curiosity* may disappoint some readers through the lack of independent narrative structure inherent in the sequel concept, Drabble still seduces the reader with heart-stopping moments and breath-taking phrases that compel us to anticipate her next novel with a natural curiosity.

Kamal A. Rostom, Ed.

*ARAB-CANADIAN WRITING; STORIES, MEMOIRS,
AND REMINISCENCES*

Fredericton, N.B.: York Press, 1989. Pp. 72. \$9.95

Reviewed by Janeen Werner-King

The Arab-Canadian stories, memoirs, and reminiscences that Kamal Rostom has selected to draw to the attention of English-speaking readers evoke Arab-Canadian culture and immigrant experiences vividly. These writings convey political and social insights, but the best pieces in the anthology involve the reader in human frustration, concern, hope, and understanding.

The first story, "Choices" by Salwa Said, makes us aware of individual and universal experiences immediately. There are Nadia's recollections of her desire to emigrate from Egypt to Canada, her struggles against unemployment and racism, her accomplishments, and her nostalgia for the land she chose to leave in her youth. Her memories are triggered by an upcoming move from Toronto to St. John's and her daughters' reactions to this news.

The psychological effects of unemployment are examined fully in Kamal Rostom's "The Dishes Are Still in the Sink" and in Nadia Ghalem's "The Fresh Start." These are not simplistic presentations of a social problem, but are complex explorations of personal struggles behind the issue. In contrast, strong family ties assist the narrator of "Homesteading in Southern Saskatchewan" in joining mainstream Canadian society without being swallowed by it. The pride of Habeeb Salloum's narrator is clear as he recounts how his parents relied on their background as Syrian peasants to withstand the drought of the 1930s by cultivating vegetables like broad beans and lentils "which had flourished in the