

overcome. It would not do to disclose how the story ends; suffice it to say that it does so with both narrative and stylistic success.

*Madonna Maleva* is not about itself, nor is it about its creator, except in the most conventional and conventionally disguised way. It is *about* its characters on a narrative level designed to engage and hold a reader's attention in ways that the works of a great many serious modern and postmodern writers simply are not. It provides, in other words, a bit of the psychological pay-off that most of us look for when we read. It is designed for intelligent humans rather than for Vulcans. It is a story that leads us, but does not lull us, into Gardner's "fictive dream." It is an imaginative utterance with hand-holds and belaying pins, not a perpendicular slate face on the north wall, too difficult for even an advanced amateur to climb, and offering for most of us only a free fall into the abyss of another intellect. Good mechanics, good results.

Jane Urquhart

*Away*

Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1995. Pp. 356. \$18.99

Reviewed by Nora Foster Stovel

*Away* lays claim to be considered a contender for The Great Canadian Novel Award on several counts. First, its historical and geographical scope range from the Irish Famine of 1845 to the Confederation of Canada via the coffin ships of the great wave of immigration. Second, its imagery is inspired and informed by both the Celtic and Canadian myths of nostalgia and progress. Third, the family saga intertwines generations of colorful fictional characters with vivid factual personalities like D'Arcy McGee. And finally, the lyric swell of style and language raises the novel to the level of folk art: like her own character, Urquhart is "cursed with the gift of eloquence" (6).

Urquhart employs a folkloric framework, as octogenarian Esther O'Malley Robertson, the last of the long line of women, recounts to herself a tale that was told to her as a child by her newly revealed grandmother: "Everything began in 1842, she remembers her grandmother Eileen telling her, on the island of Rathlin which lies off the most northern coast of Ireland ..." (4). The reader is seduced into reverie by Urquhart's mesmerizing storytelling.

An Irish triad provides the epigraph to *Away*: "The three most short-lived traces: the trace of a bird on a branch, the trace of a fish on a pool, and the trace of a man on a woman" (no page). These three images provide the title for each of the novel's three parts. Part I, "A Fish on a Pool," is appropriately titled, as the narrative begins with the shipwreck of the *Moira* off the coast of Antrim on its way from Belfast to Halifax. The fruits of the sea include cabbages, silver teapots,

and barrels of whiskey, as well as a beautiful drowned sailor who rechristens Mary *Moir*a before expiring. When he dies, he takes Mary *away* with him, for, when she is discovered, lying on the strand in the arms of "her faery-daemon lover," the people knew that "Mary was away" (13).

Five generations of women are "destined to live out the actuality of Ovid's intention *Of bodies changed to other forms I tell*" (8). Their Protean personalities inspire fatal passions. Mary's metamorphosis makes all the men of the island fall in love with her. Brian O'Malley, the teacher, marries Mary, but her being *away* is a trial to the marriage.

Urquhart plays on the title *Away*, for the story recounts many forms of travel, both psychic and actual. While Mary is *away*, she sings songs that punctuate the prose chronicle with poetry. Mary's wide-ranging poetic vision is prophetic, for a voyage is foreseen when the local youth celebrate a village wedding by forming the shape of a ship more appropriate for a wake. Waving a sheet for a sail, they shout, "Away, boys, away" (112). Emigration becomes essential when the potatoes give way to stones, and the people of Ireland starve to death.

The narrative of "A Fish on a Pool" alternates between Mary and the bizarre Sedgewick bachelor brothers—Osbert, amateur biologist, and Granville, would-be poet and chronicler of Eire, who believes he has "given a *voice* to the sorrows of Ireland" (103). Anglo-Irish landlords inhabiting Bunnamaige Friary by Ballycastle, both brothers have been seduced by the charm of their adopted land, collecting specimens of local flora and fauna until the cabinets of Puffin Court are filled to bursting. Osbert is so enchanted by Mary that he surrenders his scientific study of tide pools in favor of mere admiration of the beauties of County Antrim's Glen Taisie. Determining that Mary must not perish, he arranges the family's emigration on a ship called *The New Land*.

"A Bird on a Branch" takes us to the new country of Canada, where the coffin ships decant into the fever sheds. As they sail through the Great Lakes, Mary and Brian O'Malley's son Liam sees the lake reflected in the windows of a white house like a revelation. The family travels north to Macon to farm, where Eileen is born. Mary, learning that there is a nearby lake named *Moir*a, foresees her fate and, forsaking her infant, follows the route of the river to the lake where she worships the spirit of her love. Years later, her guardian Exodus Crow brings her home, frozen, and buries her. He leaves, but not before indoctrinating her daughter Eileen, who is also *away*. Long after, one black feather is all that remains of Eileen's spiritual companion's counsel. Realizing that their farm will never grow potatoes but only stones, Liam treks back with Eileen and a cow called Moon to Port Hope, where he saw his vision, but not before Osbert Sedgewick hunts them down and discovers gold on their land.

The third and final segment of the narrative, "The Trace of a Man on a Woman" (237), follows Eileen's love for Irish patriot and dancer Aidan Lanighan from Loughbreeze Beach farm on the shores of Lake Ontario, to Montreal's Griffintown in flood, to the Parliament in Ottawa, where Aidan's fate is intertwined with Irish leader and Fenian betrayer D'Arcy McGee's. But the last part of the Irish triad is belied, for a man can leave a trace on a woman in the form of a child. Deirdre, named for the Irish Deirdre of the Sorrows, is the eldest of Liam and wife Molly's five children. Only her daughter Esther learns that Deirdre's true mother is really her Aunt Eileen.

Thus, the narrative framework brings the saga full circle, as the aged Esther retells the story on her last night in the old house before the encroaching cement company destroys the fossilized past in the quarry and the ship *The New Dominion* appears on the horizon to fill its hold with rock. The narrative ends, all too soon, but, like the fossils embedded in rock, the image of a floating house, the memory of a man who charms skunks, and the relic of a bone hairpin twined with red-gold hair and the emblem of a single black feather remain imprinted in the reader's mind.

Lewis A. Lawson and Elzbieta H. Oleksy, eds.  
*Walker Percy's Feminine Characters*  
Troy, New York: Whitston. 1995. Pp. 141. \$18.50  
Reviewed by Axel Knoenagel

Walker Percy is one of the most highly regarded authors the American South has produced. A central concern of the critical discussion surrounding his oeuvre has been his indebtedness to the literary and cultural traditions of his region. While Percy has repeatedly distanced himself from attempts to categorize him as a "Southern" writer—in the tradition of Faulkner—critics continue to demonstrate the presence of significant elements of the Southern cultural tradition in his writing.

In particular, Percy's descriptions of women seem to owe much to that male perspective which is so typical of that tradition. He has been criticized for creating female characters who never develop beyond the level of cliché and who only serve a function with regard to the male protagonists. *Walker Percy's Feminine Characters* is designed to provide a more coherent perspective on this issue than could be found so far: "The problem must be viewed in light of earlier issues that have been raised in the criticism of Percy's work, such as his 'southernness' or his cultural conservatism, even as it must be aligned with newer forms of scrutiny, such as gender studies, various forms of psychological analysis, and language studies" (4).