

making-meaningful can no longer (or, not so easily) be captured and contained, policed and paroled by Mr. Language himself.

Taking the two thematic universal claims together we have some famous instrumentalisms: a 'romantic politics and art' that *succeeds* can be redefined as 'not really' romantic in the first place; a post-modernism that is *oppositional* turns out to be not 'truly' a post-modernism. What is it about 'romanticism' and/or 'post-modernism' that produces this snort of disgust, this cackle of derision? Do we detect written under each work, Utopianism? In other words, I am arguing that under the guise of a certain, measured affirmation there is, in fact, more trashing at work here. Like forgotten customs officers in some anachronistic border post such policemen wait, tidying their rubber stamps, affirming their hearty unitary selves, being suspicious of fun, pleasure, desire, sentimentality, the body — singing dull threnodies called 'That's a sixties thing...' over their intercommunicating throat mikes. There's a real danger — that a one-sided optimism/adventurism/voluntarism will be replaced by a one-sided pessimism/opportunism/objectivism. This is clear in Régis Debray's tenth anniversary 'Remarks' trashing 'les evenements de mai 1968' firmed-up by the Secretary General of the Socialist Party of France in May 1983. Such currents can work both to vivify anti-marxism *and* (as in Jameson's last pages) argue for making 'traditional' marxism 'true again'. A curious idealism this, since I thought marxism was a

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theory generalized from historical experiences, a theory capable of learning!

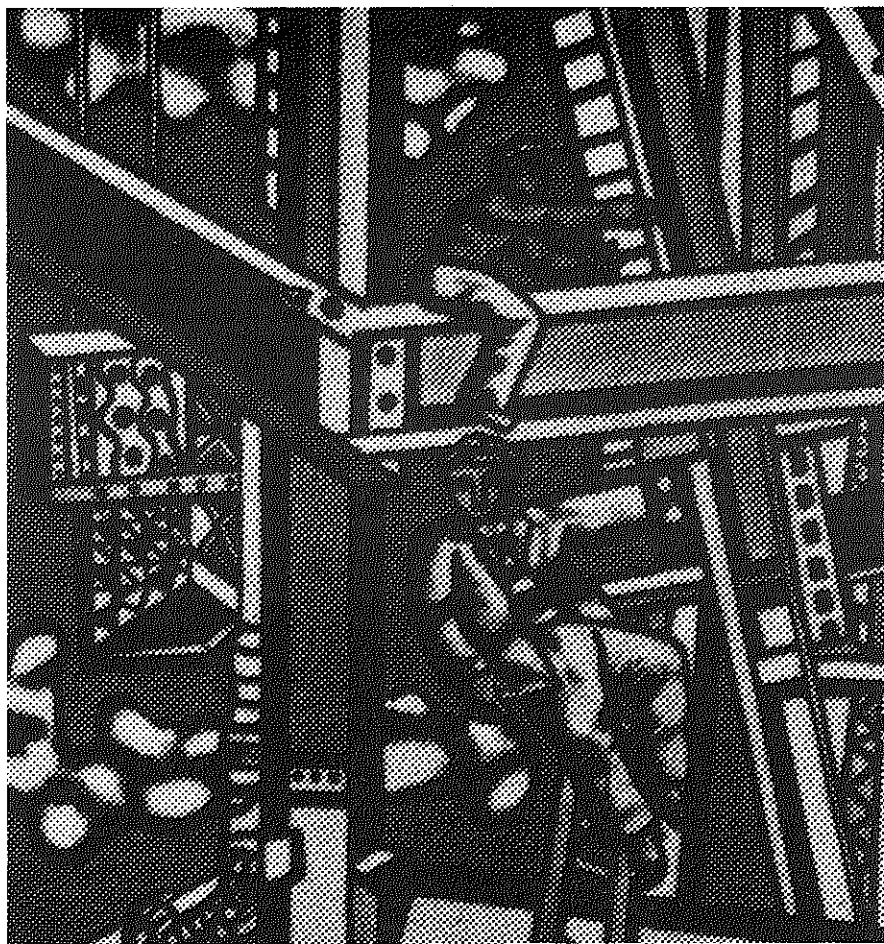
Of course, as Ronald Sukenick ('Up from the Garret', *New York Times Book Review*, 27 January 1985) argues, the 60s did redefine 'much in American culture, including middle class aesthetic standards, but at the same time eroded the mystique by which artists had resisted the pressures of the market place' (p. 1 — an excellent article throughout). *But that is not all*. Transforming his sexist 'men' we can recall Morris here:

Human beings fight and lose the battle, and the thing they fought for comes about in spite of their defeat, and when it comes, turns out not to be what they meant, and other human beings have to fight for what they meant under another name.

(W. Morris' *Dream of John Ball*, quoted in the very relevant article by Peter Linebaugh, 'All the Atlantic Mountains Shook', *Labour/Le Travail*, Autumn 1982, p. 92.)

Contradictions within and between, for example, culture as a set of regulated expressive forms *and* culture as different ways of life; or politics as official institutional rituals and routines *and* the politics of the so-called private, personal and profane... create spaces, establish frissons, make ideologies hearable. Capitalism (does it still have to be said?) is no way of life at all for the majority, it is a differential series of ways of death, founded and foundering upon contradiction which are both universal and multiple and, in its own drives, unsolvable. The 60s re-arranged different possible ways of saying, seeing, showing and sharing, its romanticism was re-arranged by realities (not erased, not dismissable). If post-modernism is firmly at the heart of hegemony, it is causative of heartburn and heartache there also! The 60s were both... and... but differently. The 60s undid a certain knot (which was also a Not of fatherly negation). There are no more purely economic, political or cultural revolutions because there will be no more singular-totalizing (in the old sense) revolutions. So what's new? A period of hope, emancipation, easiness and caring gets in part trashed and in part encashed into commodified forms. We have to learn that living historically means we both, as Pasolini puts it, affirm in the making of our selves and we abjure what powers *and* knowledges do with what we have become. But mainly now, sentimentally, I affirm.

Philip Corrigan's book with Derek Sayer, *The Great Arch: English State Formation as Cultural Revolution*, will be published by Blackwell in July 1985.



CAPITAL TALES

by Brian Fawcett

(Vancouver, Talonbooks, 1984)

While occasionally evocative of the free-floating sense of dread which accompanies Raymond Carver's banal worlds, Brian Fawcett's latest book, *Capital Tales*, is also reminiscent of early Springsteen lyrics: tableaux governed by random violence, chance and a vague displacement of absence at the heart of working class experience.

However, the BC logging towns, 4x4 trucks and the edgy desperation or curiosity of Fawcett's characters are really only the *realist* tip of the much larger question his prose introduces: what is the relation between the world of the imagination and our lived experience; in what ways are the conventions of fiction inadequate as expressions of the realities of our everyday lives?

Though these are by no means new questions, Fawcett's treatment of them in this collection of short stories manages to do a number of things well. A process of subversion, an undermining of our responses as readers, is begun midway through the stories and actually challenges the relation between text and reader as it occurs, as we attempt to 'consume' literature and distance ourselves from the very real contradictions of the world around us. Fawcett, without the usual didacticism, examines the role of literature and of any fictive convention under capitalism, its assumptions about our lives and the expectations we ourselves bring to a fictional treatment of our world.

At the same time that our attention is slowly being drawn towards the process of interpretation we are involved in, Fawcett conveys concise, accurate portrayals of characters bound by class structures, structures whose hidden character only gains articulation in the seemingly unconnected actions, gestures and frustrations of those characters' lives. In this sense Fawcett manages to deal with work experience, a world defined by labour and social relations of production, without slipping into a neo-'socialist-realism' which would ensure that all the ideological 't's and 'i's are crossed and dotted (usually painfully so)

for a supposedly hapless and unintelligent collective reader. Here Fawcett gives his readers the benefit of their, and his, experience as the basis for interpretation.

Interestingly, throughout the stories, especially 'Balance of Nature', 'The Ghost' and 'The Brotherhood of Men', the world of men and manhood, the narrow limits of male identity within a system in which even personal life is bound to consumerism and commodity fetishism, continues to assert itself. Rather than serving up trite lessons on male chauvinism, Fawcett gives us a complex social and psychological view of the role of ideology in orchestrating social practice and in shaping male identity which leads to obsessive, violent and defensive behaviour. For Fawcett the boundaries of this male world are seldom free from the larger economic and social realities which define this world in the first place.

In this we come to one of the most entertaining and unifying elements in Fawcett's collection: the deliberate friction between the worlds his text brings into play. This perhaps is illustrated most clearly in one of the final stories, 'The Life of Robert Oomer'. Here the world of Fawcett's imagination, the real world of his experience and the world of dreams and the unconscious collide and interact in a way which ultimately reinforces each as the legitimate source of the story. In the transition from history to fiction, from the worlds of literature and the imagination to that of daily survival, Fawcett moves effortlessly, only foregrounding the tension between these different worlds (often with wry authorial cheek) to raise us above the narrative for an observation of the act of reading itself. This reflexivity reaches its height in 'A Personal Memoir of Thomas Carlyle' where the 'slippage' between worlds reveals not only the tensions in our expectations of literature, but wonderfully exposes the creativity and eclectic freedom of Fawcett's prose; the multiple voices, influences and codes serving as the framework of a text as busy confronting itself as it is the collective reader. Or perhaps, as Fawcett would no doubt suggest, to confront the one is always in fact to confront the other. For a critical, conscious, capricious and absorbing read, Fawcett's collection of stories is a discovery work making.

Dennis Corcoran