Review Articles & Reviews/*Une Revue de critiques et de comptes rendus*

RITES OF PASSAGE

Come from away, Joseph Green. Oberon Press, 1981. 200 pp. $7.95 paper. ISBN 088750-388-8; $15.95 cloth. ISBN 0-88750-386-1. ***The tinderbox,*** Marianne Brandis. Engravings by G. Brander à Brandis. The Porcupine's Quill, 1982. 155 pp. $8.95 paper. ISBN 0-88984-064-4; $20.00 cloth. ISBN 0-88984-076-8.

Emma Anderson in *The tinderbox* is thirteen years old; Paul Russell in *Come from away* has just graduated from high school. Both stretch painfully towards maturity; both experience the rite of passage that brings adolescence from confusion to the hope of clarity. In short, the two books are examples of the "adolescent novel," distinguished examples since each book creates a world more complete than we often see in this type of novel. Here is writing with character, sharpness, and style.

Come from away depicts Paul Russell's world, a fishing village on an island somewhere off the east coast of Canada. The time is the 1950s and the ambience is small town; rumours abound in a community where everyone thinks he knows the business of his neighbours. In this world a new story is power. Paul is a sensitive lad who finds his home town inhibiting; he vows to go away to the mainland. In the mean time, he inhabits a fantasy world created from Max Brand western novels, from youthful rebelliousness, and from late adolescent sexual desires. Western romance colours his self-image, rebelliousness turns him against his parents and adults in general, and sexual energy finds its main object in Carol Lismer the girl who has "come from away," from the United States.

The story of Paul's growing up is rich in local colour. Life in the fishing village is felt in all its aspects: social life, work, political activity, and of course private politics, the politics of experience. The sense of community is strong: the group of young lads who live for driving, drinking, and flirting; the group of men who gather on the wharf to trade stories about work and sex; the group of ladies who meet at the general store and gossip — all this is fully realized. The community's desire for stability and continuity is strong and the book effectively depicts this in scenes set at local dances, on board the fishing boats, at the ball field, and in the town factory. The language is earthy — sometimes raw — and particular: such localisms as "spleeny," "scooch," "sticktights,"

"sours," "sharooked" dot the text. The language is primitive and links the people to their place; something ghostly connects the people to the land. Paul senses this:

> He began running across the grassy depression where people said Leazar was buried. "I don't care if he rises right up," Paul said aloud, and stamped the ground harder against dead Leazar, dead Jonah, dead Duncan of Duncan's Hump, dead Benedict of Benedict's Hill, the half-dead Esther Seguin, the should-be-dead Bud Hardy, and all the rest who would keep him here and laugh at him and watch him until he died.

In short, Paul feels adolescent paranoia deepened by his bashfulness and his "evil virginity." But the book's attitude to island life is nicely ambivalent. The author, Green, puts it this way: "On the island there was a top layer of friendliness that belied the deeper layer of spite, suspected plots and inbred politics that made hard-core Liberals boycott Emily's store and rank Conservatives boycott Burt's. The woman from away would soon learn the pettiness. But then there was a deeper layer she might never see . . . the judgment and quick generosity that when something really bad happened made everybody on the island like your brother and sister." By the end one is not sure if Paul understands this. He does manage to leave home, but he sees himself returning with "some long lie ready to tell people." In a world in which story is power, Paul has grown enough to tell his own tales.

At the center of *Come from away* is Paul's relationship with Carol and his initiation into the mysteries of sex. Sexual awakening is also a theme in *The tinderbox,* but here it is not at the center. Instead, it is a metonymy for the difficult world into which Emma Anderson is cast when a fire kills her parents and leaves her and her brother John homeless. She learns that a man's eyes can be bold and greedy and that she is right to fear this look. She also learns that marriage with all that it entails is something she must consider since it can offer security and affection. Emma realizes she must make choices and her independence comes in choosing wisely, choosing, in effect, the lesser of evils in a world where no choice can be completely happy.

Because of the emphasis on choice, *The tinderbox* is perhaps more satisfying than *Come from away.* The problems that confront Emma are greater than those Paul faces. This is not only because Emma is an orphan, but also because her world is more restrictive than Paul's. Emma lives in rural southern Ontario in the 1830s, a time when girls, especially, could expect little freedom if, like Emma, they came from farming families. After the death of her parents, Emma has two futures: either she will marry Isaac Bates and labour with him on a wilderness farm or she will go to York with her Aunt McPhail where she will work as maid in her aunt's hotel. She has no other option. The story of how she decides which future to accept is simple, yet absorbing. Although this is a historical novel, history does not intrude. The reader need not know — as he does in James Reaney's *The boy with an R in his hand* — who William Lyon

MacKenzie is. The emphasis is on Emma and her mental life.

Emma's passage from childhood to maturity is more clearly accomplished than is Paul's in *Come from away.* The journey to Dundas works as a rite of passage: "It was as though the events of the last few days had pushed her abruptly from childhood to adulthood. In the course of the journey to Dundas she had learned more than she had ever thought possible." What she learns is the marvellous paradox of a contrary world in which worst things have some good and the best can go awry. This is something she implicitly knew the morning after the fire when she found the tinderbox in the black ruins of her home. The tinderbox caused the fire that killed her parents and Emma's first "impulse was to smash it or bury it beyond recovery." But then she recalls the warmth it brings, and she sees that it is a link with her past. Like all things, the tinderbox can create warmth or it can produce destruction. Emma decides, late in the book, that her thoughts are "tindery," but by then she has matured so that the sparks that set the tinder aflame will not start a fire beyond her control.

Both of these "young adult" novels are generous. Unlike many books of this sort, *Come from away* and *The tinderbox* give us characters — both adult and child — who are fully realized. Joseph Green deftly presents the townspeople in *Come from away* — except when they are having fun with American tourists; and Marianne Brandis overcomes the temptation to make stock characters such as Mrs. McPhail and Granny Wilbur one-dimensional. Brandis moves perilously close to stereotype, but she succeeds in characterization just when stylization appears to have the upper hand. These two novels deserve serious attention and strong praise.

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LA PSYCHOLOGIE DE L'ADOLESCENCE

Pas encore seize ans, Paule Daveluy. Montréal, Editions Paulines, 1982, 125 p. 3,95$. broché. ISBN 2-89039-872-2. ***Un coq, un mur, deux garçons,*** Paule Daveluy. Illustré par Suzanne Duranceau. Montréal, Pierre Tisseyre, 1983. 104 p. broché. ISBN 2-89051-075-1.

L'intérêt particulier des livres de Paule Daveluy relève surtout de l'authenticité de ses représentations de la vie intérieure, secrète et troublée de l'adolescence. Textes psychologiques par excellence, *Un coq, un mur, deux garçons* et *Pas encore seize ans* témoignent, comme d'habitude chez cet écrivain, de la finesse de ses observations ainsi que de la vivacité de son style, de ses descriptions, de ses dialogues.

Les quinze courtes nouvelles — que l'auteur qualifie plus volontiers de "por-