

BOOK REVIEWS

Jane Austen's 'Outlandish Cousin': The Life and Letters of Eliza de Feuillide.
By Deirdre Le Faye. London: British Library, 2002. 192 pages. \$35.00 US.

Eliza de Feuillide owes her continuing reputation and small degree of fame to the fact that she was Jane Austen's cousin. Not to the fact that she was a lively letter-writer, a flirt, a beauty, or the fact that she was the wife and then widow of the guillotined Comte de Feuillide, and later the wife of Henry Austen, Captain in the British army, banker, and then clergyman. Eliza's own life was much more eventful than her cousin Jane's. It was more eventful than her cousin and regular correspondent Phylly Walter's life. Elizabeth Hancock de Feuillide Austen had, altogether, "a racketing life," as one of the chapter titles of this book has it (quoting her), and Deirdre Le Faye has given Austen scholars and enthusiasts a wonderful gift in her eloquent retelling and reconstruction of the story of that life.

Eliza's mother, Philadelphia Austen, was the elder sister of Jane's father George, and when the two of them were orphaned in 1737, they were brought up by separate sets of relatives, after which George Austen went up to St. John's College, Oxford, became a clergyman, and married Cassandra Leigh in 1764. The seventh of their eight children was Jane, born in 1775. Philadelphia, after serving five years as an apprentice milliner, sailed to India in 1752. The following year, possibly at her uncle Francis Austen's suggestion or arrangement, she married Tysoe Saul Hancock, the official surgeon at Fort St. David near Madras. Eight years later, they had one child, Elizabeth, whose godfather Warren Hastings, the future Governor General of India, gave her the name of his own daughter who had died at three weeks. Rumour later linked Philadelphia with Hastings, and insisted that Eliza was Hastings's child rather than Hancock's, but Le Faye refutes this story, which has continued to be repeated by a number of Austen biographers. She makes the point that there is "not the slightest hint in Hastings's diaries and other private papers that would corroborate such a claim" (20). There is only one reference to the rumour in a letter from Robert Clive, Governor of Bengal, who warns his wife not to keep company with Mrs. Hancock. Le Faye is probably right to dismiss the rumour, defending Hastings as generous to all his many god-children, yet her careful refutation of the rumour is undermined by the fact that when she cites a friend of Hastings on the topic of his "blamable generosity," she does not give the name of the friend or the source of the quotation (20).

This occasional lack of specific citation is the only serious fault of the book. Le Faye is elsewhere careful with scholarly details, providing a thorough description of the provenance of Eliza's letters, a bibliography of pub-

lished and unpublished sources, and charts of the Austen and Hampson family pedigrees (Rebecca Hampson and her first husband, William Walter, were the grandparents of Phylly Walter; this same Rebecca Hampson and her second husband, William Austen, were the grandparents of Eliza de Feuillide and Jane Austen), but from time to time she quotes passages from other people's letters or diaries without citation. This must be because she intends the book to be readable, accessible rather than drily scholarly, and yet the effect is to produce mild frustration at finding gaps in an otherwise detailed and eloquent narrative.

The story of Eliza's life is told through a series of letters she wrote, mainly to cousin Phylly, along with some letters by Phylly and others, and "some further miscellaneous documentary references." Le Faye writes that the collection of letters makes it possible to construct "a short biography ... almost in the form of one of the epistolary novels that were then so popular" (7). It is an excellent idea, and reading Eliza's letters is very much like reading an epistolary novel.

Philadelphia and her husband and daughter left India in 1765 and returned to England; after three years Hancock returned to India to make money to support his family. One of the most moving sections of the book is the collection of Hancock's letters to his wife and daughter: because letters took at least six months to travel in each direction between India and England, news was, as Le Faye says, "stale by the time it arrived and might already have been overtaken by events" (22). It is touching to read Hancock writing to his daughter on the 20th of December 1770 that he has received her letter "of the 12th December with very great Joy to know of your being in good Health" (26). It takes a moment to register the fact that he means he has received the letter she wrote in December 1769. In the same letter, Hancock chides his daughter gently that "You forget to tell me your Fox Dog's Name" (26). It will be at least another year before he finds out—what a contrast with our current ability to send this information as a quick e-mail or text message to fill in the detail left out of the letter or phone conversation. The delay in communication is most heart-wrenching when it comes to news of health. Imagine receiving a letter from a loved one saying that he or she was in perfect health exactly a year ago, and not having any way of knowing whether the same was still true. Hancock died in 1775, and it was of course several months before news of his death reached England; he had implored his wife to keep his daughter's "Recollection of me alive I fear she will only remember me by the Name of a Father" (31).

After her husband's death, Philadelphia discovered that it was too expensive to live in London, so she left for the continent. Eliza's first surviving letter to Phylly dates from Paris in May 1780: she describes the French court and French fashion, including the fashion that required her to have her hair "cut to half its length," although "it was with reluctance, I conformed to the mode in this article." In a turn of phrase that sounds much like the future rhetoric of her cousin Jane she concludes, "but what will not All powerful

Fashion effect & so much for the modes let us now speak of something more interesting" (46). Before too many more sentences, she is speaking of romance, but urging her cousin to maintain her liberty: "All badinage apart I hope you will long preserve it & to tell you the Truth I don't think either You or I very likely to lose either our gaiety or peace of mind for any male *creature breathing*" (47). Eliza preserved her liberty for a little while, but by December 1781 she was married to Jean-Francois Capot de Feuillide. It wasn't until Phylly's mother had died at the age of 95 that Phylly, aged 50, was at liberty to marry in 1811 her faithful admirer George Whitaker.

Eliza's letters are neither so satirical nor so fast-moving as Jane Austen's, but they are entertaining, fascinating, and sometimes horrifying to read, as she relates news of social life, balls, travel, her mother's illness, her young son Hastings's health problems, and then her husband's death in 1794. He was guillotined after he attempted to defend an elderly friend, the Marquise de Marboeuf, from accusations that she was keeping provisions for the Austrians and Prussians. For the next couple of years there is a gap in the records of what Eliza was doing, but by September 1796 she was on holiday at Tunbridge Wells, "as cheerful and flirtatious as ever" (Le Faye 123).

She writes to Phylly that she consented to go to the Coronation Ball "because I always find that the most effectual mode of getting rid of temptation is to give way to it" (123). She urges Phylly to join her, insisting on "the real benefit which your Health is likely to receive from Sea bathing—I am convinced that it will set you up for the whole winter" (124). Here she sounds like Lydia Bennet of *Pride and Prejudice*, who feels she must go to Brighton because "a little sea-bathing would set me up forever"—and yet one of the things Le Faye scrupulously avoids doing in her history of Eliza is creating speculative links between the events of real life and the events in Jane Austen's fiction. It has been all too easy for readers and biographers to attempt a reconstruction of Jane Austen's life through the material of her fiction; it is admirable that Le Faye does not do this with her reconstruction of Eliza's life. *Jane Austen's 'Outlandish Cousin'* is a real-life epistolary history, not an elaboration of the life using the parallels with Jane Austen's novels.

In 1797 Eliza married Jane's brother Henry Austen, after rumours that Jane's brother James had also wanted to marry her. As Le Faye points out, after her marriage to Henry, Eliza settled down to a relatively ordinary and frail middle age. Her son Hastings, who had never been well, died in 1801. Her mother Philadelphia had died of breast cancer in 1792. Eliza herself may have suffered from the same disease, although there is no explicit mention in the family correspondence of what afflicted her. She died in April 1813 and was buried at Hampstead. Henry remarried a few years later, and this second marriage lasted for 30 more years, until he died in 1850.

Although Eliza's writing is lively—her assessment of theatre in France is that "It is still the fashion to translate or rather murder, Shakespear" (62); her feeling on a cold night is that "Dancing was the only effectual method of rendering one's existence less uncomfortable" (62)—it is still the bare facts of

her biography that are most stunning. In contrast to Jane Austen, who never married, lived at home with her mother and sisters, and never travelled out of England, Eliza was born in India, moved to England, travelled in Europe, married a Frenchman, lost him to the French Revolution, engaged in several flirtations afterwards before marrying Henry, and entertained the idea of flirtation after she married Henry—she writes of “my Colonel Lord Charles Spencer” that “He is a most charming creature so mild, so well bred, so good, but Alas he is married as well as myself and what is worse he is absent and will not return to us in less than a Month” (154).

The letters are entertaining in both style and content, and Le Faye has assembled an excellent epistolary history. There is unfortunately very little reference to Jane herself in the letters, and relatively little correspondence between the two cousins, who were fourteen years apart in age. Jane's letters are referred to but only cited at length on two occasions, when she describes to Cassandra a party given by Eliza and Henry, and when she describes to her brother Frank Henry's state of mind after Eliza's death. It is commendable that Le Faye has resisted the temptation to elaborate on the links between Eliza's life and Jane's fiction, and yet Eliza's story and reputation can't quite stand on their own. The story of Eliza's life is told without excessive reliance on her relation to Jane's fame, but the fact that *The Life and Letters of Eliza de Feuillide* is the subtitle of a book on *Jane Austen's 'Outlandish Cousin'* indicates just how important Jane Austen is to this story. Eliza led an exciting life of extremes, but her “little niche in literary history” (7) will remain dependent on the fact that she happens to have been the cousin of a famous novelist.

Sarah Emsley

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Essayes in Divinity: Being Several Disquisitions Interwoven with Meditations and Prayers. By John Donne, edited by Anthony Raspa. Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's UP, 2001. lxxx, 216 pages. \$75.00.

John Donne's *Essayes in Divinity* consists essentially of Donne's exegetical treatment of two Biblical verses, Genesis 1:1 (“In the Beginning God created Heaven and Earth”) and Exodus 1:1 (“Now these are the Names of the Children of Israel which came into Egypt”). However, in Donne's hands, ‘exegesis’ takes on a very broad meaning as he uses the individual words of his texts as a basis for wide-ranging reflections on the nature and difficulties of scriptural interpretation and of his own role as interpreter, and he includes prefatory discussions “Of the Bible,” “Of Moses,” “Of Genesis” and “Of Exodus.” He concludes his actual expositions of both Genesis 1:1 and Exodus 1:1 with prayers.

Essayes in Divinity has received remarkably little critical attention. Anthony Raspa's new edition is only the third edition of this short work

produced since it was published posthumously by Donne's son in 1651. The other two editions—those of Augustus Jessopp and Evelyn Simpson—appeared in 1855 and 1952 respectively. Further, *Essayes* has rarely received critical treatment as a work in its own right; often it is seen as providing a series of interesting verbal parallels with Donne's other works, both prose and poetry, or as a supplement to (or precursor of) ideas and themes found in the later *Sermons*. And certainly the *Essayes* are not themselves sermons: their sense of audience is not strong, and only seldom are there flashes of the rhetorical brilliance which characterizes so much of Donne's preaching. Nor is *Essayes* a meditative work like the later *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions* (1623). Even the title of this work does not reveal much about what it is, for *Essayes in Divinity* are hardly 'essays' in the sense of Montaigne or Bacon. Raspa argues that the work's title was in fact not Donne's at all, but was supplied by his son at the time of publication. Donne's son may have further complicated our approach to the *Essayes* by including a brief note "To the Reader," which explains that his father wrote this work to reflect "many debates betwixt God and himself, whether he were worthy, and competently learned to enter into Holy Orders" (5). Certainly the *Essayes* were written during the period in Donne's life when he was contemplating entering the Anglican priesthood: he was ordained in 1615, and, according to Raspa, *Essayes* was completed in 1614. But the *Essayes* are in no way transparently biographical, and do not refer directly to Donne's decision to enter the priesthood.

Yet there is a sense in which *Essayes in Divinity* may be seen as 'essays,' as trials or attempts, and even as having biographical interest—but in order to understand this sense, one must grasp the very thing which for Professor Raspa explains scholarship's neglect of *Essayes*: its difficulty. *Essayes*, for Raspa, is a humanist document which "straddles bravely the entire heritage of the Ancients and the so-called new learning of the physical universe" (xiv)—and it is Donne's assumption of this mass of knowledge that creates the difficulty for contemporary readers, to whom many of these sources seem now merely obscure or curious.

What Raspa does in this new edition of *Essayes in Divinity* is to clear the way for contemporary readers, making accessible both the heritage of the ancients and the Renaissance new learning. As in his other editions of Donne's works (*Devotions* in 1987 and *Pseudo-Martyr* in 1993), the text of *Essayes in Divinity* is clearly and attractively laid out, with Donne's notes and citations in the margins and Raspa's editorial notes at the foot of the page. There is a detailed and useful index, as well as very helpful introductory material on the cultural context of *Essayes in Divinity*, its argument, and various editorial and textual matters concerning the 1653 copies of the work. But it is the extensive (perhaps over-extensive) commentary at the back of the text that is the great strength of this edition. In this commentary—which is at least as long as the text itself—Raspa traces Donne's references, identifies his sources and explains their relevance, and provides background to the philosophical debates

which Donne is entering. This commentary embodies Raspa's central argument about the work, that *Essayes in Divinity* is directly in the tradition of a biblical humanism in which biblical exegesis is extended into philosophical speculation (xxii), and that display of learning is typical of this genre. By giving his readers such detailed access to this tradition as it appears in *Essayes in Divinity*, Raspa has made this work available to twenty-first-century readers in a new way.

Clearly, to fail to recognize and understand the significance of the mass of references to Donne's continental authorities and to Neoplatonic and other philosophical currents in *Essayes* is to fail to grasp the work itself. Yet at the same time, those humanist authorities and sources are not themselves the substance of Donne's work. He writes that "men which seek God by reason, and naturall strength, (though we do not deny common notions and generall impressions of a soveraign power) are like Mariners which voyaged before the invention of the Compass": without a compass, the mariners are lost, and can never find "a new world richer then the old" (24). Donne engages in countless intellectual debates in these *Essayes*: what is "the beginning?" how old is the world? what is Nothing—and what does it mean to be created out of Nothing? how does one understand an apparent contradiction in Scripture? which authorities are to be preferred over others? Again and again, Donne shows himself to be a master of this kind of intellectual game, invoking learned opinions and countering with others equally learned.

Yet this same Donne writes that "all acquired knowledg is by degrees, and successive; but God is impartible, and only faith which can receive it all at once, can comprehend him" (24–25). Here is the heart of *Essayes in Divinity*: it is about faith and reason—or, as Raspa says, it reflects "a confrontation between the believing self and the speculative self" (xxxv). Donne had to try—to 'essay'—to bring his secular, Renaissance learning together with religion, to understand the relation between his learning, his capacity for reason and clever argument, and his faith. This is the Donne who is moving toward taking holy orders, working out how (or whether) his secular learning can be transformed into divine learning. And here is the central, and conscious, irony of the *Essayes*: Donne both relies upon his learning and, at the same time, dismisses it. He invokes countless sources, reprises intellectual debates, sorts through authorities and arguments—only to conclude that all of this is, of itself, nothing. There is, then, a secondary irony, in Raspa's project of producing such a detailed and learned commentary, and in the reader's desire for such a commentary. For even as Donne displays his great learning and skills of argument, he himself would not want his readers to be distracted by mere "Holy Curiosities."

This is the familiar Donne, in whom so often "contraries meet in one," and for whom the resolution of reason and faith, speculation and divinity, profane and sacred love, is to be found in paradox. At the end of *Essayes in Divinity*, Donne prays:

Vanities and disguises have covered us, and thereby we are naked; licentiousness hath inflam'd us, and thereby we are frozen; voluptuousness hath fed us, and thereby we are sterved, the fancies and traditions of men have taught and instructed us, and thereby we are ignorant. These distempers, thou only, O God, who art true, and perfect harmonie, canst tune, and rectify, and set in order again. (106)

Donne does not discard his humanism and his learning in order to be faithful: instead, he turns his reason, his authorities and his learning, toward God who alone can “set them in order again.” Professor Raspa’s great contribution in this edition of *Essayes in Divinity* is that, by uncovering and explaining Donne’s extraordinary array of sources (“the fancies and traditions of men”), he has removed major obstacles to reading this work, thus freeing the contemporary reader to see beyond what seems only esoteric and obscure, to Donne’s larger argument—and thereby to understand the place of *Essayes in Divinity* in Donne’s life and work as a whole.

Patricia Robertson

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Religious Studies in Atlantic Canada: A State-of-the-Art Review. By Paul W.R. Bowlby with Tom Faulkner. Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier UP, 2001. xii, 208 pages. \$34.95 paper.

In this final instalment of state-of-the-art reviews of religious studies in Canada, Paul Bowlby (St. Mary’s University) and Tom Faulkner (Dalhousie University) have admirably fulfilled the stated objective of the series: “to provide valuable information” concerning religious studies in Canada for “students, counsellors and educators in both public and private institutions.” The need for this kind of information is aptly captured by the inscription (a quotation from Ray L. Hart) to the Introduction: “The cry is all but universal across the types of institutions and regions of the country: colleagues (outside the field) and administrators ‘do not understand what we actually do ... their image of the academic study of religion is wrong or inaccurate.’” Together with a basic lack of understanding concerning the nature of religious studies, is the acute sense of crisis that scholars in the field experience in the face of “diminishing university budgets, increasing enrolments and faculty cutbacks” (ix). No wonder that the prevalent mood of the study is sombre (x). If religious studies is going to survive and flourish in the region, it is mandatory that this study become discussed and pondered by our colleagues, students, university administrators and government officials.

The reader is introduced to the history, programs, curriculum and faculty of twelve Departments of Religious Studies and one program in Atlantic Canada. The departments are located at Memorial University of Newfoundland, the University of Prince Edward Island, Mount Allison University, St. Thomas University, Université de Moncton, Atlantic Baptist University, Dalhousie University, Mount St. Vincent University, St. Francis Xavier University, and Acadia University; the program is at University College of Cape Breton. The authors crafted their review with the aid of several studies that endeavour to demarcate the field in relation to other closely related and sometimes overlapping fields (like theology and sociology), histories of religion, churches and universities in Atlantic Canada, previous reviews of religion in North America (including C. Anderson's *Guide to Religious Studies in Canada*, 1972), histories of the discipline itself (like Walter Capp's *Religious Studies: The Making of a Discipline*, 1995), a questionnaire distributed to religious studies faculty in the region (Appendix 2), and finally, documents provided by individual departments (ranging from reports of external reviewers to minutes of senate meetings).

The interpretive framework by which the data is described is announced early on. Religious studies, Bowlby tells us, must be defined "both by the history and culture of the universities and by the continuing evolution of the field" (14). Thus, four factors affect the study. They are the "founding heritage" of the institutional "home" for departments or programs, the fate of that heritage in the wake of public funding and the impact of this development on religious studies, the location of religious studies in relation to the university's degree requirements, and last, how departments are related to the field of religious studies at national and international levels (14–15). Bowlby provides an illuminating overview of the history and rationale of the discipline (Chapter 1) which, together with Tom Faulkner's nuanced look at the "religious roots" of Atlantic Canada's universities (Chapter 2 and Appendix 1), contextualizes the subsequent analysis of data. Bowlby frames his description of the curriculum within the twelve Departments of Religious Studies and one program with a comparison between the findings of Anderson in 1972 and his own findings of 1994. His hypothesis is stated as follows: "If the early 1970s marked the beginning of the transformation of religious studies in Canada from a predominantly Christian discipline to the more multi-religious and methodologically diverse field of study it is now, there ought to be evidence of that change in the curricula of departments by the mid-1990s" (91). This is a fair hypothesis given the overall interpretive framework for this study—to define religious studies in the region in a way that does justice to the "history and culture of the universities" themselves, as well as "by the continuing evolution of the field of religious studies" (14).

Bowlby's analysis of the demographical data (i.e., 41 full-time faculty in 1994, six of whom were women), number of earned doctorates and area of specialization, distribution of faculty by rank, retirement patterns, areas of teaching and research, and ranking by professors of priorities (teaching, re-

search, university service, and public service) appears under the heading, "Recommendations" (153–57). Citing Martha Nussbaum's identification of the central task of the modern university to educate men and women "for citizenship in a multicultural setting" (*Cultivating Humanity*, 1997), Bowlby recommends that future hirings be based on what he calls the most "powerful rationale for our field of study." Religious studies, he argues, belongs at the front and centre of the university's task of educating citizens "for life in a multicultural, multi-religious democratic society" (174). Given the "preponderance of faculty trained in Christianity and biblical studies" (148), it is essential to the health of the discipline, Bowlby demonstrates, that openings and replacements of retirees "bring an ever greater diversity of religious studies specialists into the small departments of the region" (153–54).

In profiling one region within the global matrix in which religious studies is situated, practitioners are inspired with fresh insights concerning the discipline as a whole. By demonstrating to administrators, our students, colleagues, and government officials that religious studies is ideally situated to fulfill Nussbaum's vision of the task of the modern university—the cultivation of global citizens—the field of religious studies will do much more than survive. It will grow as it shares its knowledge and resources with those who seek a humane, just world.

Annette Ahern

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Twenty-Six. By Leo McKay, Jr. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 2003. 388 pages. \$32.99.

Twenty-Six is Giller-nominated Leo McKay Jr.'s fictionalized account of the Westray disaster, a keening exploration of the devastation it wreaks on a family, and of the hope it leaves behind. Only the names change: Westray becomes Eastyard, Stellarton reverts to a previous appellation, Albion Mines. Some of the characters are thinly disguised versions of the actual people involved, the fictional company just as cartoonishly evil as it appears in the Westray Inquiry report.

It is always winter in Albion Mines. Bare trees stand repeatedly for a permanent economic winter in a place scattered with factories "large enough to house a workforce of thousands, in which mere dozens [are] now employed." Eastyard offers a bright respite from the cold, and from the "economic table scraps" of irregular work. Men are drawn to the shiny promise of it, their financial troubles "ended overnight." Danger is a common price for prosperity in Nova Scotia, where many rural families know of someone lost on the job, and where the miners' memorial has more names on it than the war memorial.

Twenty-Six centres on the men of the Burrows family: Ziv, an “intellectual ruffian bum” and university dropout; his older brother Arvel, a father of two whose frequent unemployment and taste for alcohol have his marriage on the rocks, and Ennis, their foul-tempered, hard-drinking father, a former union organizer.

When Arvel raises the possibility of jobs at the new mine to his brother, Ziv is incredulous. “Coal mining? In 1987? That’s like deciding to be a cave-man. Do you have any idea how many people have been killed mining coal in this country?” Ziv’s reluctance to take a mine job has another worker equally incredulous: “Are you out of your fucking tree? ... You’re working at fucking Zellers.” Ennis bursts with pride when both his sons accept jobs at the mine: “Boys,” he says, “I’m proud of ye’s.”

Ennis’s wife, Dunya, bitterly opposes their decision. She accuses Ziv: “They’re offering you a free ticket on the *Titanic*, and you’re taking it.” Arvel’s wife Jackie supports his work in the mine but cannot live with her husband’s drinking. Her bags are packed to move to Halifax without him, their memories in a gray plastic storage bin, a guilty note to her husband scratched into a scribbler. Ziv’s sexually ambiguous former girlfriend, Meta, has fled Albion Mines for Japan, where she teaches English.

The massive explosion that all of them expected nonetheless catches them by surprise, and in an instant, twenty-six miners—the whole underground shift—are dead, the survivors left to cope with their guilt as best they can. Everyone knew that the work was inherently dangerous—the miners most of all, since it was they who defied safety regulations in the pit on orders from their superiors, who made it clear: “Get the Jesus down there and get producing coal or you’re all Jesus fired.”

The central question in the novel is: why did the doomed miners continue to work when they all knew how dangerous it was? McKay’s answer involves a disturbing meditation on self-destructiveness. In the novel, the miners’ deaths are bracketed by two suicides. Meta becomes an unwilling confidante to Yuka, an abused Japanese woman who repeatedly returns to the boyfriend who beats her. In a powerful passage, Meta hears Yuka screaming and rushes into her apartment, only to find Yuka having sex with her boyfriend. Yuka notices Meta and begins to scream in English: “*Yes! Yes! Yes!*”

Any parallels between Yuka and the doomed miners are left for the reader to draw. Both are tied to a violent partner who administers pleasure and pain. Doesn’t the world ask the same question of the miners as of battered women: why did they stay? From outside the terrible relationship, it seems to make no sense. But the reasons they stay are the same: pride, love, family, and economic necessity.

Twenty-Six is shot through with truth like marbled fat in a side of beef. Readers may not like the truths McKay ponders, yet he doesn’t shirk from his responsibility to bear witness to this town, this time, these people. His portrait of Nova Scotia is one that anyone growing up in the seventies and eighties would recognize, a place lubricated with Tim Horton’s coffee

and black rum. McKay himself grew up in the “Red Row” area of Stellarton and now teaches high school in Truro.

Albion Mines is populated with men who drink too much and have long-suffering wives, two of whom exact bloody physical revenge on their husbands with kitchenware. This is one of the few aspects of the book that doesn't ring true: in Albion Mines, it's the sober wives that beat their drunken husbands, not the other way round. The other quibble is common in Maritime literature. *Twenty-Six* is self-consciously Nova Scotian, peppered with references to Frenchy's, “unemployment enjoyment,” tea with sugar and tinned milk, and cigarette smoke “thick as Bay of Fundy fog.”

Fiction fits McKay like a pair of comfortable jeans—*Twenty-Six* is a page-turner. McKay's deft touch propels the story forward, even though the outcome is certain from the beginning. The narrative skips between before and after, between Ziv, Arvel, Ennis, Dunya, Jackie and Meta, between Nova Scotia and Japan, life and death. Like Westray's silos, *Twenty-Six* is “a symbol of all that's wrong with Nova Scotia's political and economic life.” Unlike the silos, which eventually came down, *Twenty-Six* can stand forever.

Cynthia L. Chewter

Halifax, Nova Scotia

She Let Herself Go. By Thea E. Smith. Bangor, ME: Thorndike Press, 2002. 365 pages. \$25.95 US.

She Let Herself Go is the story of one woman's evolution from dependency and self-effacement to independence and self-determination. Ruth Gardener's comfortable life pivots around her relationship with her husband and her daily routine. This formula suits her, and any “small” irritations are usually due to her husband's lack of satisfaction with some detail, either at work or at home, which Ruth salves as best she can or simply retreats into silence until his mood improves. Some of this will be familiar ground to readers of “Ruth's Problem,” an earlier version of the novel's first chapter, which was published as a short story on this journal (80.1: 93–116).

Beginning with the onset of menopause, Ruth's life suddenly changes. Her satisfaction turns to discomfort, making it clear how much she has adjusted her needs and desires to her husband's agenda. He, Richard, compounds the confusion and unsettledness that Ruth feels by indirectly letting her find out that he regrets having no children, just as she has to face incontrovertible evidence that she is too old to conceive. She feels that he blames her for this non-occurrence, even though he let the years pass by just as easily as she did.

The story evolves with Ruth becoming ever more happy with her own space and friends. As Richard leaves to work on a project in another state, Ruth is surprised by her own ambivalence at his departure. This ambivalence

rapidly turns to outright satisfaction. She finds she can stretch herself in new ways, at work and in her relationships with her friends. Richard is not pleased when she decides not to accompany him, but leaves anyway, and rapidly becomes involved with his work. Ruth agrees to visit him, and at first this tactic works. The blush wears off quickly, however, as Ruth catches herself sliding into old patterns. Richard's inability to discuss or even acknowledge that things have changed leaves her wanting to be home, very much without him.

This first novel will resonate with anyone who has had to deal with the upheaval of body changes or lifestyle rearrangements. Juxtaposed are the classic maid, matron, and crone stages of a woman's life. It took longer than it should have to become engaged in the storyline and characters, likely due to the overabundance of small daily life details, physical descriptions and emotional themes. But once Ruth's character had been well established, I found myself cheering for her, and wishing that she would have a happy life, if not so comfortable as previously. Ruth discovers, to the reader's delight, that there is humour and joy inherent in the process of "letting herself go," so as to trust what she feels in her heart.

Pam Sampson

Brooklyn, Nova Scotia

Going Home and Other Cape Breton Stories. By Jess Bond. Belleville: Epic Press, 2002. 167 pages. \$16.95 paper.

A Kingston retiree returns to Cape Breton to visit her dying father, and recounts the circumstances that led her to move to Ontario and leave her first love behind. A woman recalls being molested as a child, and reflects on her own married lover and house full of secrets. An elderly woman remembers the excitement and restriction of post-war Halifax before her marriage. The common themes throughout these stories are memory and distance, both temporal and geographical. This is not unexpected: in this and in Bond's previous collection, *Oatcakes and Other Cape Breton Stories*, the stories are set in a Glace Bay that corresponds with the author's own childhood, before her departure westward.

Together, the stories are a portrait of a community, a celebration of its culture, including the recollection of its particular vices and oddities. In fact, Bond thoroughly surveys the stock ingredients of the particular sub-genre of historical Cape Breton fiction: teenage pregnancies, overcrowded houses, predatory men of the cloth, and town gossips. We read much of the conflict between Catholics and Protestants and the class conflict that often accompanied it; the tangled webs of family deceptions; the solace of a cup of tea.

There is a harsh term for this kind of celebration of the past, of course: nostalgia. In all fairness, Bond's stories do not pretend to avoid nostalgia;

rather, they race for it with goodwill. The black-and-white photographs which intersperse the stories give the reader additional warning that recalling the sometimes rough beauty of days past is the author's primary intent.

Bond's stories are at their best when they demonstrate the simplicity and directness of the oral tradition from which they derive, capturing the rhythms of local speech and the atmosphere of much-told family legends. Dialogue-driven stories such as "The Quilt" flow easily, and Bond's use of the Glace Bay idiom is unforced and engaging. Like family legends, too, the stories are often interconnected, resulting in a warm familiarity on the reader's part which suits the intent of the collection.

Despite these strengths, the stories frequently fall flat. Bond's writing is marred by didacticism: we are informed of the characters' personalities and motivations before we can discover them through the narrative. This can lead to shallow characters, such as the scheming wives of "Sorry For Your Trouble." Further, Bond often feels the need to moralize or to sum up. For instance, at the close of "Miss Newsome of Henry Street," the now-elderly woman comments "Tom and I had forty marvellous years together.... I will always cherish the memory of the evening we waltzed around my third-floor bed sitting room on Henry Street" (106). These unnecessary lines obscure the image of the young lovers themselves, dancing—an image which would have ended the vignette with more strength. *Going Home* does not attempt the linguistic beauty, narrative subtlety, or thematic complexity of the fictions of numerous other authors who describe Cape Breton and its culture in their work. However, if "going home" via literature is a particular pleasure of yours, by all means—and make a good cup of tea.

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