Moreover she was beginning to face the fact that her marriage was effectively over, though she and Jack had tried repeatedly to bridge their separation. Jack Laurence had been understanding and encouraging when her writing remained her avocation, but he could neither accept nor understand her total professional commitment to it and the inevitability of its demands. In Purdy she had found a friend who had himself made a total commitment to his work despite decades of poverty and a hand-to-mouth existence. He was a veteran of years of squeezing in poetry along with the heavy demands of manual labour, and was just beginning to enjoy a somewhat less precarious life, for his work was beginning to consistently command notice and respect, and the burgeoning nationalism of the sixties was producing numbers of freelance writing and editing project that he undertook.

Laurence and Purdy each found in the other's voice and interests exactly the tonic necessary at that time and for long after. In Margaret, Purdy found a close and sensitive poetry reader, one whom he came to acknowledge as the best reader he had, far and away above the critics he was used to; in Al, Margaret found a supportive male voice, as widely read as herself, at least as indefatigable a traveler and, most important, a stubbornly "grass-roots and proud of it" fellow Canadian. Ever since *The Stone Angel* she had been firmly committed to writing of her own place and had known that Manawaka contained at least three more novels. As for Al, through lean years and good ones, he was stubbornly the same, restlessly traveling to where, for him, the poems waited to be sensed and brought forth, but always returning to Ameliasburgh, Ontario, his home. From the very beginning they wrote to each other as if they had been friends for a lifetime. Purdy is a superb, naturally gifted letter-writer, and Margaret, her quick empathy fully in play, matched him from the first.

It would not be an exaggeration to subtitle this book "The Repatriating of Margaret Laurence." After Africa she had lived in Vancouver for five years but she had increasingly felt out of place there, and since moving to England she had become somewhat anglicized, speaking with a noticeably English diction and inflection and, as evidenced in the CBC interview with Barry Callaghan used briefly in the "First Lady of Manawaka" film, with more than a trace of an English accent. She loved and idealized Elm Cottage with its spacious country surroundings, overgrown garden and many rooms and so did her children who were flourishing in English schools. True, she had not found in London the lively literary society she had imagined would await her there, but she did have good friends, and more and more, her home was becoming a focus for Canadians of all ages. When she began the correspondence with Al, the thought of returning to Canada permanently was hardly on her horizon at all, though she recognized that because she would henceforth be writing about Manawaka the matter of a Canadian "voice" was of essential importance to her work. As she often said, she felt that she had reclaimed her grandparents' voices and idioms in *The Stone Angel* and she knew very well that her ability to inscribe a uniquely Canadian voice in her fiction was her most crucial asset.

For his part, Al's voice and idiom in poetry as in his letters was uncompromisingly and earthily Canadian. His terms of reference were the same as Margaret's, their senses of humour were the same, and from the beginning, Al promoted her return to Canada. Particularly after he and Eurithe, his wife, visited Margaret at Elmcot in the spring of 1968, the England-Canada decision was a recurrent theme, and Al teased her unremittingly about returning home, even calling England a "desert" without seriously disturbing the easy flow of their communication. From being a decision a long way into the future, her move to Canada came closer and closer—without Purdy's fairly constant needling, it might well have been put off much longer.

We are quite unlikely to be presented with a more engagingly candid friendship than these Laurence-Purdy letters show forth—the illusion of hearing their voices in the next room is very strong. Together, their letters create for their readers, as they did for their writers, an enclosed little world where they found in each other sounding-boards for moods from deepest gloom to highest hilarity, and where the immediacy of their responses to each other energizes every page of this handsome and impeccably edited collection.

SALVAGE

Daphne Marlatt. Red Deer: Red Deer College Press, 1991.

THE WAY TO COME HOME

Caroline Smart. London, ON: Brick Books, 1992.

POEMS FOR MEN WHO DREAM OF LOLITA

Kim Morrissey. Regina: Coteau Books, 1992.

By Deborah Jurdjevic

So much of women's poetry, Richard Howard said at a poetry conference here several years ago, seems to be about their bodies and the weather. At first glance Howard's descriptive summary appears reductive and incomplete. One thinks of the line running through Bishop and Moore and back to Dickinson, the three poets writing a poetry in which landscape is the exponent of human emotion and the body is transparent. At second glance, however, we recognize with Howard that the weather, the body, and nature are interrelated, and that nature has ever offered an alternative to a man-made culture.

Contemporary women's poetry may indeed write the body as text, and in exploring the relationship between the female body and the natural world, poets may discover a space for poems which is independent of tradition. This seems to be Daphne Marlatt's intention in *Salvage*, her recent book of poems. She returns to poems written twenty years ago to rewrite them in the light of her experience with feminism and feminist literary theory. Her central metaphor links water with language, and the majority of her poems explore the elemental nature of one or the other of these two forces.

Her exploration is not without risks. The endless play of language which yields the joke, the pun, the deliberately misplaced modifier, the stream-of-consciousness monologue where thought and image appear to reflect upon one another at random,

may also yield tedium and invoke impatience. It is to Marlatt's considerable credit that she redeems her poems against a demonstrated deconstructive urge in language.

In "Salvage, ii" she sets the scene for much of what follows. Her central character is poet as redeemer; her object is a woman, anonymous and apparently agoraphobic. The first stanza gives us a third person view of the woman's world:

> fear of the marketplace, of going out-
> doors. fear
> of public places, crowds, of leaving
> home. "the
> phobia of every day."

The poet, speaking in the second person in an equally prosaic second stanza, offers to this lost figure imagination. Imagine, she challenges, "opening your front door...imagine walking down the path...imagine opening the gate...."

The voice of the therapist/poet opens the way, and her final line "imagine opening the gate...," like so many lines in this volume, is heavily freighted. The floodgates of the imagination open the way for desire and recall at the same time a traditional gated heaven. The woman's response "i want to imagine being in my element" articulates her desire for a unified world, a heaven where subject and object, the speaker and the spoken to, partake of the same nature. To claim it, woman/poet needs to enter in to language, a potentially treacherous undertaking, for language has been appropriated by man. The poet confesses in a summary line in section iv that "she doesn't have the power to alter his definition of her." *Salvage* in its entirety is the story of her acquisition of that power.

The title points to the method. "Salvage" is both that which is saved and the act of saving, and it shares its Latin root with 'salvation.' Marlatt interrogates language, makes of it a game, takes on the male world and its values and in so doing makes a language of her own from tag lines, bits of dialogue, children's games, popular songs. Consider, for example, "Seeing Your World from the Outside," in the section "Passage Ways."

The 'you' in 'your world' is male, and the poet, like Tiresias, can see from either male or female perspective. In the second stanza, Marlatt writes

> standing inside your world is full of
> holes floating doors:
> "a scream is an appraisal." you
> apprised of what we
> see are messages off walls

Holes, from the male point of view, are sexual and represent a way out of isolation, as floating doors represent safety to the ship-wrecked. But the poet voices a taunt: "your world is full of holes." You who believe a scream to be an appraisal are nothing other than a message on a wall which poets and women read for what it is.

Marlatt's poem is punctuated by the imperative as the female voice gains in power: "Do Not phone./Do Not move on to Go./Stop." The woman's commands invoke and alter the children's monopoly game; she knows the game is rigged, and the poem as a whole argues that this one way communication between the sexes is no game.

In the penultimate stanza Marlatt uses setting to explore the coded aspect of language. I quote it in full.

> the night is full of losers and empty
> buses, palisades of
> light adrift, nosed in to the curb, some
> slight collision,
> lights still on, sits under neon, noth-
> ing left to lose, black
> are the scrawls of want on the walls
> that do not see us
> ("annie was here") to be lost ("take
> me home") in want, o
> baby, will you still feed me/will you
> still need me?

Her vision reveals a language stereotyped, broken, fragmented. The bus with nowhere to go lights up a dreary urbanscape as the language lights up in parody tag lines from popular songs: "freedom's just another word for nothing left to lose," "black is the colour of my true love's hair," "country road, take me home," the Beatles's' "Will you still need me?"

The poem, particularly in the internal rhyme of the fourth line, "the scrawls of want on the walls" establishes its own rhythm as it incorporates easily recognized lines. In the last stanza, women appear neither as lost nor as figures whose role is to succour men, but as writers. The handwriting on the wall is their graffiti; the women's message is that the night belongs to us.

Marlatt tells us in the introduction that the last two sections, "Mauve," and "Booking Passage," were generated "out of a growing sense of community with women writers/readers drawn by currents of desire in language for contact through time, over space and across cultures." There is an unmistakable note of triumph in these last poems as they reveal woman at one with her world, celebrating herself and her lover in the natural element of song.

Like Marlatt's longing agoraphobic, the woman in Carolyn Smart's *The Way to Come Home* understands that she is displaced, and like Marlatt, Smart makes consistent use of the female body and the weather. The differences, however, signify. In Smart's poems the body and the weather are often subject matter rather than metaphor. Smart's woman is displaced because she actually is a foreign presence in South Africa or in Costa Rica. One sympathizes with her repugnance for apartheid and her dismay over the division between those who have and those who have not, but many of these poems read simply as journal entries. In "Poem for a Solitary Baboon," for example, the subject is the vulnerability of the human female body. Smart concludes what seems to be more a prose paragraph than a stanza with an address to the baboon. "How I covet your ugly malice, your body, that naked asylum." Political sentiment is not necessarily poetry, and one misses both the rhythm which has traditionally signaled that responses other than or in addition to the common-sensical are being sought, and the power of image which is the power of poetry itself.

It is not as though Smart herself does not recognize the power of the image. In "For my mother, who loved Southern Africa, although she never went there," she incorporates a phrase attributed to a woman who "told me that years ago she was lonely for her small son far away." The phrase "my hands missed him" haunts the listener with possibilities permanently lost; one cannot miss the political implications.

Smart is at her best in lyric poems like "Bluegums," which seem to come straight out of the imagist tradition. In these her subject matter (in this case the weather, a rainstorm) is treated as metaphor. Like

Williams's "This is Just to Say" or "A Sort of Song," "Bluegums" celebrates a spare natural beauty with sensual delicacy. I quote the second stanza in full:

> In the smoky hills
> where coffee grows
> the air smells of bluegum,
> vibrates with shrill cicadas
> On the red earth littered
> by torn, bright leaves
> we find hoofprints small
> as kisses, trail of a duiker
> browsing in puddled shade

With that single similie "small as kisses" Smart brings the natural world into a human focus.

The lyric poems written for the poet, Bronwen Wallace, are arguably the finest in the volume. As Wallace dies of cancer, her friend, Smart, attends her in spirit, body, and in verse. It may be that language is inadequate to experience, that words cannot be made to tell the truth about suffering, grief, love, but in poems like these we find out as much as words can tell us. Smart calls the five-poem sequence "The Sound of Birds" and she begins with an un-numbered poem, an invocation to the whip-poor-will. The song of the whip-poor-will breaks off in the middle—

> Each night I listened for your call,
> each night and every night
> when your call stopped
> I held my breath, suspended,
> for fear of an end to this,
> this intimate acquaintance,
> a quickening of breath itself

—as the singing voice of the poet is broken off in mid-life.

The poems which follow take place in a summer of "Cimmerian darkness," reflecting Smart's despair. Anyone who has cared for a terminal cancer patient recognizes the quality of this darkness, this knowing that the day which dawns will be a little worse than the day you just lived through. In Smart's poems the sound of birds (rather than bird song) punctuates the darkness. The several species, predatory and harmless, domestic and free, point up both the cruelty and the beauty of the natural world. The whip-poor-will turns up at the close of the final poem "Cockatiel;" now silenced, he (she?) bequeaths his negative to the still attentive poet. This last stanza registers a lasting absence:

> the stillness is a room I've moved
> into,
> like the clothes I will wear
> to ward off colder weather,
> a cape of loneliness,
> the dark heart of a night without song

A triple anapest in the final line does its own singing, and although these poems are about suffering and death, they are about love and endurance. Like Shakespeare's, Smart's love "bears it out/even to the edge of doom."

The body in Kim Morrissey's *poems For Men who Dream of Lolita* is that of a sexually abused child. Nobokov's novel provides the plot and the literary background for Morrissey's series of poems, and one understands her intentions noticing the uncapitalized letters in her title. Morrissey powerfully rewrites the male text, altering the genre and articulating the rape which Nabokov had offered as seduction. These are painful poems perfectly realized.

Painful as they are, there is nothing of the journal entry, the diarist, the undigested confessional about them. Morrissey establishes artistic distance from her subject matter in the first poem. Borrowing Renaissance conventions, she makes her first speaker the book itself:

> I am the Book of Dolores B. Haze
> otherwise known as Dolly
> (sometimes as Lo) age twelve
> and almost a quarter
>
> I come with a curse
>
> and my pages
> are private
>
> if you read me, be warned
>
> I am the Book of Dolores
> beware:
>
> put me back in my box
> and be happy

Dolores is the lady of pain; the curse is general; the body (my pages are private) is the text.

Dolores's story falls into three sections. In the first, Morrissey allows the twelve-year old child to tell the incidents leading up to her rape. The poetry balances nursery rhymes and the diction available to a child against the more sinister voice of Humbert Humbert. In "Secrets: 2," Dolores speaks with an adolescent bravado, dreaming of rebellion against her mother. The language of the poem, however, undercuts her strength, and we hear the child, not the woman:

> mummy doesn't approve
>
> but when I'm sixteen
> and can do what I like
> I'm going, I'll go, I'll be gone
>
> don't tell mother

The second section belongs to the teenager who continues, in one guise or another, to be a sexual victim. Morrissey avoids pathos and her skill in this is extraordinary. In "with snooker it is all in the breaks" Dolores's tone is cool, toughened, superior so that one momentarily forgets the running sequence of dates and that this street wisdom comes from a fourteen-year old.

The final section traces the vicissitudes of marriage and ends extraordinarily with a love poem, as though the painful telling in poem after poem of humiliation and suffering has won her her freedom. "I want to write poems to the back of your neck," she begins and concludes:

> I want
> you only you only you
> and to know this dark silent singing
> will be heard

In a postscript we are reminded by John Ray, Jr.'s forward to *Lolita* that Lolita, Mrs. Richard F. Schiller, died in childbed, giving birth to a stillborn girl. "No ghosts walk," he writes. Morrissey's poem has given flesh and blood, and most importantly voice, to this walking ghost. We hear her "dark silent singing."