

Larry "has flown the coop," leaving a black rabbit ("Satan") and "one measly shirt" to remind Lureen of him. Lureen has no interest in acting on anything she has learned; she wants her Larry back, and she dreams about him, waits for him, and reconstructs conversations with him until Larry finally reappears in the middle of the night, and they go off and make love in the park.

This is the only story of its kind in *Double Bond*, but it is one of the stories which depends very much on its prairie setting for metaphor and dialogue, almost as much as Merna Summers does in the already much acclaimed "Threshing Time" (1982). "Threshing Time", winner of the Katherine Anne Porter Prize for its year, is wrenching in its detail of a threshing job, gripping in its presentation of ranching men and, in particular, of Max Staunton's subtle and entirely controlling molestation of little Estelle while a father paralysed by his sense of powerlessness watches on.

Joan Clark's "God's Country" is also very much tied to the land, but it's not the prairies. Set in an East Coast mining town, Clark's hero simultaneously confronts her home town and her first love. Sharon Butala's Meredith (a feminist chemistry professor in Central Canada) relinquishes her troublesome daughter to her roots – her father's prairie ranch. But the story ("O What Venerable and Reverend Creatures") closes with a touching passage in which Meredith remembers her "beautiful baby," reminding us of Brenda Riches' tender, 8-part vignette, "Snow Flurries," through which every mother will weep.

Butala and Riches focus on the experience of mothers with daughters, while Beverley Harris and Gertrude Story weave slightly eerie plots around daughters and their memories of their fathers. Story's moving "Das Engelein Kommt (The Little Angel Cometh)" is written from the point of view of "the angel's" sympathetic sister, who in imperfect English witnesses how the father crushed his daughter(s). Harris' narrator, however, is reverent of a father who "took

to his bed" the day that she was born – "November 7, the anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution." Harris' "The Soma Building" is the most philosophical, polysemous of the realistic stories. In the end the narrator becomes the creative writer about whom Harris writes, and the father's wisdom initiates her own revelation, her unfinished fiction, in her office in the Soma Building. Harris' narrative voice is complex, but nowhere is voice as self-consciously intricate as it is in Sharon Butala's first novel, *Country of the Heart*.

Shattering reader expectations in terms of both its moral vision and its narrative conventions, *Country of the Heart* is at the same time a most conventional novel. Short on action, Butala concentrates on the story which emerges when told simultaneously from at least three different points of view. She does this not so much to show incongruities as to illustrate both the shared experiences of intimates, and the separate and secret lives of individuals who are intimate.

One character dominates the triangle – Lannie, a university student whose mother died when she was a child, and whose father abandoned her. She returns "home" to her Aunt Iris' and Uncle Barney's when university term ends. During her stay with them, she surmounts obstacles rarely elevated to plot material, among them dysmenorrhea and abortion. Though imperfect, Lannie's point of view is sometimes corroborated and sometimes confused by the points of view of her guardians, Iris and Barney, both of whom have skeletons in their closets – where they remain. Separate narrative threads do develop and intersect, but there is always some slippage, giving Lannie enough room to set things right for herself.

Lannie's quest for intimacy is also her passive mourning after it, and in this respect, Lannie very much resembles Lois Simmie's meek and lonely night watchman in her wondrous short story in *Double Bond*. Almost too quickly Lannie resolves to act, and sets out to find her lost father, her sister and her brother. Lannie is one of

a growing number of fictional daughters who is – now that women are writing more of the scripts – mis-fathered or fatherless. It is not an entirely satisfying ending because Lannie leaves too many stones unturned: we wonder what ever came of her university lover, the "boy" Tim, or her childhood friend, Angela – the only person in whom she confides. And we also expect there to be a more profound reason for getting to know Barney and Iris from the inside, but none comes.

Not as tendentious as last year's *Baker's Dozen* (Toronto, Women's Press), the stories in *Double Bond* are just as radical. Although we don't know why the editor, Caroline Heath, has settled on this title (in spite of the fact that there are some brief notes on the back jacket that try to explain), we do know that it has some meaning for her, for Fifth House, and presumably for the writers in the collection. And we also know that the bond has something to do with women and, in most cases, the land. But something else struck me about the "double bond." That woman's bond with her past (with traditions, with convention, family, and the land) is as revolutionizing as the bond she makes with her present (with experiment and change, with new morés, sexual love, society, and the city). The tremendous variety of fiction in *Double Bond* covers a literary spectrum that would stretch from one kind of bond to the other, and from one kind of literary tradition to its radical antidote.

It is primarily for this reason that *Double Bond* is radical – it has defied our expectations without making us too uncomfortable, without judging us or our sisters, even our brothers ("the night watchman," the novel's Barney, Bonnie Burnard's as yet unmentioned Allen in "Crush") too harshly, and without dismissing the ordinariness of women who have immigrants' blood, rural families, family wounds, jobs and ambitions, and illicit longings and secrets. And this is also true of *Country of the Heart* which, if condensed and filmed, would give us a graphic picture of the double bond of which we are all a part.

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