

publishing record (four books to his zero). They meet, in fact, under circumstances which must have been difficult for his male ego: Michael is a student in her creative writing seminar. But Michael is a Henry Miller fan, a sexual romantic who knows how to make ladies bloom, flower, etc.

Complicating these sexual politics is the fact that Michael is married to Hester, whom he plays off against Rachel with a self-indulgent pretense of tenderness towards both women. Michael occupies the favoured position in this triangle, warmed alternatively on both sides and we wait in vain for the reversal which would have the women take comfort (erotically or otherwise) in one another. It's a fantasy the novel entertains, however — a comic threat hovering somewhere in the background and never put to rest. There are also signs (ominous for Michael) that Hester has gained strength in solitude, a more genuine interest in her own work. Thus, the relationship of Rachel and Hester echoes that of the author and her readers: sisterhood and the pleasures of creative labour are alternatives to absorption in the male, and the Michaels of the world had better watch their step.

The emphasis on setting in *Latakia* makes it also a kind of travel book, and this dimension of the novel works easily with the rest because it shows Rachel in her role as artist-observer. The beauties of Greece are the heroine's consolation prize, both in themselves and because she can write about them. Some of this feels a bit like ostentatious display, I confess. Yet because of the competition with Michael, there is a special poignancy in that display which is perhaps intentional. Their relationship, like the scenery, is grist to the mill: 'And Michael, think on this, dear, you have given me so much material!' That comment is barbed, for the lovers in *Latakia* are as narrowly possessive of their material as Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald ever were. In the midst of the most harrowing personal crisis, Rachel can store away potentially usable details of

the scene. The question of which is more important, the experience itself or the possibility of capitalizing upon it in fiction, is close to the heart of the novel. I'm not sure what the answer is, or what Thomas would like the answer to be. But I'm uncomfortable when Michael tells Rachel that her books are 'absolutely self-centred,' when she admits that, and claims 'the point is, I can write about other people, I just don't choose to.' For now, it seems, Rachel (and presumably Audrey Thomas) will remain 'self-centred'; certainly *Latakia* is a novel of that kind, a novel concerned primarily with the support of the self in a troubled time. But Michael is wrong, I believe, in thinking that to be the best kind of strength a novel can have.

All three players verge on caricature; all three are created by Audrey Thomas in full awareness (or so it seems to me) of their roles in an extra-literary farce. These people may be absurd, the author implies — I'm certain she wants us to laugh at them. But the pain of the novel is also real. The problems of Rachel are the problems of Audrey Thomas, and may be ours as well.

**Crossings**, by Betty Lambert, Pulp Press, 1979, pp. 284, paperback, \$5.95.

Frances Beer

The opening of *Crossings* is not promising: an over-civilized woman ('packing, neatly, like a lady') is headed North ('a shriek of freedom in my head') to a New Life on an Island with her Neanderthal Lover ('Mik's hands were weapons'). Oh, no, you think, Bear Re-Surfacing. In fact, Betty Lambert's novel is much better than that — for one thing she has a great sense of humour — and you have to wonder why she starts here, since it is neither the end nor the beginning of the story of Mik and Victoria.

The setting is the West Coast in what seems to be the early '60s (abortions are back street affairs, diaphragms the progressive form of birth control). Vicky tells the story — she is the writer, a successful playwright — and it has to do with her attempt to find escape, feeling, death, salvation, annihilation and

fulfilment through her affair with the ex-con, Mik. Should you wonder why she wants to find all these things, and in this peculiar, violent way, she goes into some scathing detail about her younger years of marriage with Ben, the would-be artist, full of high and fashionable '60s ideals. (Vietnam, jealousy and children are all bad; self-actualization is good.) 'We should simply pledge ourselves to each other at the top of a mountain,' says Ben. The wedding has cost \$40 and he is put out about this.' He is a phony, a cheapskate, a parasite, a coward. He lies, he exploits, and he *clings*. It is hardly surprising that Vicky wants a change.

But there are other reasons, more subterranean, why she is drawn to Mik. He is raw energy and a great lover, but in him she also sees a killer. 'I'm gonna get you alone,' he says, "and fuck you to death"; the pattern of their affair is one of increasing violence. After their first round in bed, they 'lie there like two barbarians who have killed each other on the field. . . . Blood was coming down my thighs. . . . I could hardly walk.' Mik brings her a present (shoes with rhinestones in the heels) at which she turns up her nose ('they're vulgar': she likes a good fight, this girl). And so round two: they wreck the house, Mik pulls the phone out of its socket, tears the door off its hinges. He is a bull and she goads him. He goes on a binge, she hunts him down and brings him home. At strip poker he cuts off her pubic hair; 'he laughs, . . . throws my clothes at me like a guard at Auschwitz.'

It's a fight to the finish, but it's not clear whose finish it will be. Mik boasts to Vicky from the start that he can't be hurt: 'I've been destroyed by experts.' But he buys her a ring, takes her to meet his family, wants to marry her, wants to give her a baby. She, who desperately wanted a child with Ben, refuses to have Mik's. She maintains her middle-class literary-intellectual connections (to whom Mik is like 'a trained ape at Buckingham Palace'). She gives her Siamese kittens

clever names like Lolita and Humbert. She has sporadic fits of madness, but her social position and her friends ensure that she will always be looked after. And when she is with them, she denies Mik. He drags her around by the hair, tears the door off its hinges again. But things start to look worse and worse for Mik. He plays Russian roulette and takes an overdose.

Through all this, Vicky visits her therapist, the Nut Lady, and eventually they uncover her trauma. When she was a child her father drowned himself and his lover, Jason. 'Then it comes, in a long howl. "He died. I loved him and he died." It is the first time I have cried.' The Nut Lady argues that if Vicky can get Mik to kill her, this will prove that her father loved her. (If she can destroy Mik, will that prove she loves *him*?)

Vicky's emotional violence and ambivalence are exhausting. She doesn't want Mik, but she won't let him go. Finally she and her prissy aunt call the police and arrange to have Mik committed. (As far as we can tell he is still in there.)

The sexual politics of *Crossings* are obscure. For an early '60s woman, Vicky is independent and successful, but she's not what we'd call liberated now: though a productive author, she shows little respect for her own work; in her relations with men she is abused — psychologically by Ben, physically by Mik; she has friendships with women, but they are not strong; men and sex, not women and work, are the focus of her energy; she tolerates her living mother, but she adores her dead father. You may shake a feminist finger at her but with the other hand you have to take your hat off to her honesty. She's tough and zany, a real scrapper, and a royal bitch, this Victoria; and her story, alarming as it is, deserves reading because it feels like the truth.

**Coast of Many Faces**, by Ulli Steltzer and Catherine Kerr, Douglas & McIntyre, 1979, pp. 212, hardcover

Ingrid Klassen

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evidence that the people and places of the West Coast exist and are real. The collection presents faces of the Indian people, settlers, entrepreneurs, missionaries, government agents and labourers who live on the many shores and in the remote communities of the mainland, Vancouver Island and the Queen Charlotte Islands. The intent of the book, it seems, was to bring together functional, documentary style images of these people within their geographical settings. The collection represents a several-year search to capture the real life of the faces and communities of the coast.

Knowing the remoteness and isolation of most of the places that appear in this book, I wonder how the photographer gained the assent and complicity of her subjects. Many of the communities are only accessible by fishingboat or floatplane. Most have fewer than 400 inhabitants; several consist of just a few families. Half of these communities do not have hydro-electricity, their source of power being a diesel generator. It is interesting to note what a potential intruder was allowed to see of the physical and social aspects of the subjects' lives, and what she chose to capture on film. The photos probably present these people as they would like to be seen. The majority show them labouring at some task or other — fishing, logging, mining, weaving, gathering and preparing food — surviving by the work of their hands.

The book's format is about 9 × 11, with photographs of various sizes up to 8 × 9. The book contains over 200 black and white duotones. The design is pleasing enough; however, the publisher's choice of printing methods takes much away from the quality of Ulli Steltzer's photographs. Though most of the photography is ordinary and surface, there are pages where the images have a difference, and in these the quality of her work and way of seeing do not come off the page the way they might.

Most of the visuals are accompanied by the transcribed words of the people being photographed.

The book uses transcribed speech to get us beneath the surface of the visuals. This text varies in length from one to five paragraphs. The transcribing and editing of these narratives, explanations and personal commentaries are the work of co-author and co-interviewer Catherine Kerr. What time and questions did it take to get beyond the surface to the subjects' physical and social environment? Their words pick up on their concerns, hardships and memories. Where the photos are studies the words are not needed; in the ordinary shots, the words often give a lot more information.

The book could be viewed as photography, geography and sociology, as an assignment to capture the remote landscape and people as visuals and accessible social documents. The pictures rarely show the unusual or unexpected. There is no distortion of image. We do not see experimentation with the possibilities of black and white; there is little work with shape, pattern, lines, light or texture. The judgment of what is good and what is better seems to have been set by the desire to make available to the market, photographs and words of remote places at levels that vary from 'let's get acquainted' to 'let's get serious.' The sequence of the book, and thus, the ordering of the photographs, is a geographical journey from place to place. It is a coast of many places: the northern mainland heading south, Vancouver Island, and the Queen Charlottes.

***Wheat & Woman*, by Georgina Binnie-Clark, University of Toronto Press, 1979, pp. 313, hardcover \$20.00, paperback \$7.50.**

Apolonja Kojder  
Georgina Binnie-Clark's *Wheat & Woman*, in many respects, brings to mind Susanna Moodie's *Roughing it in the Bush*, although it is set in the prairies, several decades later. The elements of immigrant literature are found in rather frequent references contrasting the Canadian and English ways of life and in an undercurrent of nostalgia for the home country, but there are no real defeats, only minor

setbacks.

Although stylistically the book can at times be tortuous, the reader is amply rewarded in the final analysis. Georgina, as an established English journalist, was influenced by the emigrant guides that sought to educate the British reader about life in the colonies. Thus, the book's constant aim of informing the reader can become tedious. Autobiographical in nature, the book gives a wealth of detail about breaking the land, seeding, harvesting and coping with seasonal farm labour. Its point of view is that of a newcomer, a 'greenhorn,' and — more significantly — an English gentlewoman. The book is certainly invaluable and undeniably precious, considering the few written records that pioneer prairie farm women have left behind. But its significance does not lie simply in its detailed account of the survival of an individual in southern Saskatchewan in the period 1905–08. The story also points out the feasibility of farming in the prairies (where virgin land was still available) as a route towards financial and personal independence for single women.

It must be kept in mind that the very articulate Georgina was a gentlewoman, and that *Wheat & Woman* is written from that privileged point of view. When Georgina 'waxes poetic' over the beauties of nature in the Qu'Appelle Valley, or lies daydreaming on the bank of a slough, she is describing the experiences of a woman who can afford the luxury of leisure. Georgina at various points discusses the chivalry, or lack of it, of the males she encounters. Again, this was a luxury that most pioneer women were not in a position to consider, let alone demand, in a life that meant labour which often strained the endurance of both men and women. A more earthy, less flowery style of writing would perhaps have reflected more effectively the harsh realities of rural prairie life for women who had no family or capital to fall back on as a last resort.

However, it must be acknowledged that Georgina could not help but be acutely aware of her rather privileged position. To some extent, the

tone of the book changes as the author herself lives through hardships — no longer disdainful of milking cows and clearing out manure. Independence and survival meant being able to do everything on the farm.

From her own personal experiences Georgina concluded that sufficient capital was essential for a woman to establish a successful farming operation — both for initial expenditures on land, machinery, and labour, and for emergencies. Realizing that most women did not possess sufficient capital, Georgina writes at the conclusion of her book about the injustice of homesteading rights in Canada which did not allow women to obtain land free from the government. Unfortunately, the movement for the extension of homestead rights to women (which involved such prairie notables as Cora Hind) proved unsuccessful, and by 1930 the scheme for giving homesteads away was abandoned in Saskatchewan since most of the land had been disposed of by then. Nevertheless, when Georgina wrote her book homestead rights for women seemed at least possible, with such prairie women as Violet McNaughton, Emily Murphy, and Nellie McClung, among others, to articulate and fight for the rights of women less privileged than themselves.

It is worthy of note that as late as the 1920s women from eastern Europe were immigrating in large numbers to the prairie provinces. These young women were often single and arrived either with their families or by themselves. Central Saskatchewan still had land to be broken and farmed. Consequently, there was a need for farm labour and these destitute young women took up back-breaking jobs as farm hands. Although most of these women had been exposed to agricultural work as seasonal labour on the 'pan's' estate, making essential contributions to the family's economy, they were not prepared for what they found on the prairies — the harshness of climate, the unending physical labour of breaking the land, and isolation from their compatriots. There was no family for these women to turn