gate us to some ceremonial corner.

To do her justice, she is also willing to smash the icon which she herself threatens to become. I remember a magazine article she wrote about Dennis Lee, remarking that she first met him at a University of Toronto frosh dance when they were both wearing initiation beanies. The visual of Margaret Atwood and Dennis Lee enduring a clammy frosh dance, *and* the indignity of beanies, boggles the mind.

Her latest novel, *Life Before Man,* is if possible even more chilling in its destruction of cherished myths than were her previous works and it is also far better executed. She has jelled as a novelist with this book and she has captured more expertly than ever the essence of a small space and moment in time. The novel takes place between 1976 and 1978, with integrated flashback material, and it is located at the corner of Bloor Street and University Avenue in Toronto, with movements to such close-by spots as the Bloor Viaduct and the Selby Hotel, but always circling back to the corner which encompasses the Museum, the Planetarium, Murray's Restaurant and looks easily towards Queen's Park where Nate, the male character, jogs.

This pin-pointing of time and place reinforces the rather depressing theme that the flailings of man are nothing more than a small dot in the huge cosmos which is represented by the Museum and the Planetarium. The two women characters, in fact, work at the Museum and one of them, Lesje, is an expert on dinosaurs, immersing herself like a child in imaginings of antiquity until she is wrenched into adulthood by the living male, Nate.

The prose is clinically clear but it is not evocative. While we understand that the characters suffer, we do not suffer with them. Descriptions of food do not make us feel surfeited or hungry as do, for instance, Audrey Thomas's lavish lists of eatables. Copulation is described meticulously but we feel no yearnings as we read. And yet it is not a dead book—far from it. The dynamics that make it work lie in this paradox: while the people are infinitesimal in cosmic history, still, they are intensely important.

At least they are important to us, for they are Canadian to a fingernail. Innocents, good people who mean no ill. True, they harm each other constantly, but not on purpose. There is no indication of massive corruption such as one finds in contemporary American fiction (Joseph Heller's *Good as Gold*). Corruption surrounds them, for this is the late Seventies culture, terrifying with pollution, energy shortages, carcinogenic foods, but the people are victims, not willing creators of monstrosities. They struggle as best they can, with bewilderment and helplessness and that, too, seems very Canadian.

As a caught image of its time, *Life Before Man* is like Pandora's box, spewing forth all the evils with which we are familiar: broken marriages, Xenophobia, loneliness, pointlessness. Of course there is also hope, but hope in Atwood's hands is treated skeptically, to say the least. The final paradox of the book is that it is this highly suspect hope which gives the people their vitality and their importance. Having taken away the God in man, Atwood has left us with three characters in search of a miracle.

Single Father's Handbook, by Richard H. Gatley and David Koulak, Doubleday/ Anchor Press, 1979, pp. 196, paperback $6.50.

René Souery

As the Doctor Spock generation comes of age we find ourselves confronting a late twentieth-century phenomenon. Never before have there been such large numbers of single fathers—men faced with the problem (and it is a problem at first) of participating in bringing up their children. In traditional circles men have bowed out of the childrearing process, which they are socialized into regarding as woman's domain. However, after separation even the most chauvinistic male must make amends; he has to learn how to rear his children. In addition to the pain and guilt of separation comes the confusion over seemingly abandoning the children. 'Well, you left the wife but you forgot about the children.' What do I do now? When do I see the kids? How do I care for them? To help sort out this mess Drs. Gatley and Koulak have produced a very readable and sensible handbook for single fathers.

The book is based on their experiences both as single fathers and as psychologists who have helped many single dads deal with these problems. It begins with two basic assumptions: that the mother has custody, and that separated fathers love their kids. The first part of the book deals with the process of becoming a separated father. Gatley and Koulak suggest that 'because the underlying focus is usually on the marital relationship rather than on the family, fathers who cope with problems in the marriage by turning to people and pursuits outside the family seldom realize that in the process of doing so *they have already begun to separate themselves from the children as well as from their wives!*' This statement is followed by a multitude of advice, which, I might add, resembles a military operation. Separation must be planned in advance so we can get help, let others know, talk to the kids, our parents and friends and even to a lawyer. Most of the authors' advice for this stage focusses on maintaining reasonably good communications between spouses; and if the communication 'stinks,' making it good through a third party. The unfortunate problem is that there is a galaxy between the 'is' and the 'ought.' In most instances the 'is' is war, while the 'ought' is the sensible approach put forward by Gatley and Koulak. In the death throes of a marriage this is a little unrealistic. However, before you throw the book at someone, read on, because starting with the chapter entitled 'Toward a New Way of Being a Father,' the book really becomes useful.

First the father must take stock; does he or doesn't he want to be a dad? In fact separation/divorce gives dad a bonus regarding his children. He is in a position where he must spend time with them. This handbook is a great resource for the fumbler and let's face it, with the little experience most dads have, we fumble.

There is a good discussion on visitation which includes a model schedule, a frank discussion on the dangers of short, irregular visits and a suggestion that rather than a *visit* the children should feel at home with their dad. By spending blocks of time with dad they will discover a different role model as dad ceases to be the stereotypic male. He has to learn to do all the jobs he used to consider woman's work. He has to wash, cook and nurture. There is practical advice in all these areas, and the handbook even contains a mini cookbook. Gatley and Koulak presuppose a father's total ignorance on behalf of children and the home and I am sure they are correct in their assumptions.

From the home we move into the social context of separate fathering. Again the authors give us a useful discussion on dad's relationships with friends, relatives, inlaws and colleagues. Some of the most useful advice concerns understanding the problems the mother must face and the authors offer directions on how to develop some kind of rapport with her. But perhaps the most important role the book can play in the life of the single father is that through it dads can focus on themselves and their children and know that in their own way they will develop that special relationship called fathering.