

makes a “wholesale subordination of the African-American discourse of slavery to a truly postmodern fiction of speech without presence and history without meaning” (182) is excessive. Atwood’s reference to the “Femaleroad” is clearly based on the Underground Railway that transported escaping slaves north (here Lauret concedes that Atwood might be making an ironic comment about Canada); but Lauret also claims public hangings, the use of the masters’ name for the enslaved, and the academics’ discussion in the Historical Notes as further evidence of the appropriation of African American history. This ignores the range of sources upon which Atwood drew and the other sites of oppression, enslavement, and tyranny the world has to offer. By treating Atwood as an American writer, Lauret herself performs an appropriation that offends me as a Canadian, and uses a righteous tone that offends me as a feminist.

Lauret’s conclusion asserts that a feminist book cannot end on a dystopian note. It seems fair, then, not to end a feminist review on one either. This book has reminded me of how important feminist fiction has been in my own work and life, how many possibilities of rereading remain, and even that feminism can be cultural and personal without abandoning its political heart.

JEANNE PERREAULT



Keath Fraser. *As for Me and My Body: A Memoir of Sinclair Ross*. Toronto: ECW, 1997. Pp. 96. \$12.95 pb.

Asked to name a few memorable Canadian lives, most of us would probably not place that of Sinclair Ross at the top of our lists. He is generally—and justifiably—better known for his originally neglected but later much celebrated novel, *As For Me and My House*. The details of his life—birth on a prairie homestead, a father who left when the boy was still young, a subsequently sheltered upbringing by his mother, a long career as a bank clerk interrupted by a few years of military service in World War II, retirement to Greece and Spain, the onset of Parkinson’s disease, and eventual confinement to a Vancouver nursing home until his death in 1996—have, at least until now, not been conducive to extended emphasis, although Ross has received bio-critical attention from, among others, Lorraine McMullen (*Sinclair Ross*, Twayne, 1979) and Morton L. Ross (*Sinclair Ross*, ECW, 1990), and an extended biography by David Stouck and John O’Connor is apparently in the works.

Will the revelations of Keath Fraser’s *As for Me and My Body: A Memoir of Sinclair Ross* greatly affect the commonly held perception of Ross as a rather ordinary and solitary man, who just happened to produce one of the definitive classics of Canadian literature? Time will tell, but for the present, this is a book that will be difficult to ignore by anyone familiar with the conventional “life” of James Sinclair Ross (Fraser refers

to his longtime friend throughout this memoir almost always as "Jim"). Essentially, what Fraser reveals to us are Ross's promiscuous homosexuality, his paedophilic tendencies—in fantasy if not necessarily in practice—dark hints of abuse of the young Ross by his father before being thrown out by Mrs. Ross, the onset of Parkinson's disease, and a failed suicide attempt in 1982, all tied in to a casually psychoanalytical reading of his literary works. Yet as disturbing as all this may be, it is counterbalanced throughout by images of a man who in spite of all his troubles managed to retain his mirthful eyes, ready wit, self-deprecating humour, and even a kind of stubborn—one might say self-deceptive—pride for a life he knew was lacking in some essentials. The reader may well wonder whether many of these things need to be told; whether, if they are all true, they would perhaps not be better buried alone, with Ross. But if they are to be told—and there is some indication throughout the memoir that this is in fact what Ross wanted—then Fraser is an appropriate teller of the tales.

Fraser and Ross were friends since they met in Athens in 1970. The memoir covers essentially the years between 1982 and 1996, the period during which Ross, suffering from Parkinson's disease, moved to Vancouver and lived out his final years. Shortly after he arrived in Vancouver, he attempted suicide and was discovered wounded and wandering by Fraser, who took him to the hospital. It was not until many years later that Ross revealed to Fraser that his wound was caused by more than an accidental fall. Similarly, it was not until after many years of circumspect conversation that he began to reveal the secrets behind the false front of his sexual life.

The tone of the memoir is conversational, frank, sometimes vulgar, anything but "academic": as Fraser confesses at one point, "a memoir's no place to parade one's ignorance of French theoretical fashion" (65). Anyone expecting a fully detailed, well-documented scholarly account of the last 14 years of Ross's life will be frustrated by this book. It is a personal account, one that sometimes seems to reveal as much about its author as its subject. Fraser is both literary critic and novelist, and it is the novelist that dominates this memoir. Ross's reticent revelations of events in his life are paralleled by Fraser's novelistic techniques of gradually, sometimes coyly and slyly by turns, revealing these events to the readers. Given the kinds of subjects that are broached in this memoir, the use of such circuitousness is not too surprising. Fraser is well aware of the dual-edged nature of what Ross began to divulge with greater and greater freedom in his final years: "He often told me he didn't care what people said about him after his own death, though he showed he did care by co-operating with his biographers, and by sometimes worrying over how long his widely studied novel would 'be around'" (28). Fraser at times questions the credibility of many of Ross's revelations and speculates about the extent to which Ross may have been using him to tell the secrets Ross himself was understand-

ably reluctant to reveal directly to anyone else. He even wonders if Ross might just have been "making . . . up" these "revelations" and using him "to discredit his past, to shed scurrilous light on him posthumously—so that the future might judge him less a Puritan than it might otherwise be inclined to" (39), although as the memoir progresses that appears to be less and less a likely possibility. If Ross did fabricate these things, then his own autobiography would stand as an even greater fiction than his first novel. Indeed, as Fraser demonstrates, life and literature are knit together more closely in Ross's case than might previously have been suspected.

False fronts are no surprise to those familiar with Ross's fiction, and Fraser fashions some telling parallels between Ross's front and that of one of his most famous characters: he declares that the most significant false front of *As For Me and My House* is in fact that which covers Philip Bentley's homosexuality, the one front that Mrs. Bentley cannot admit directly to her diary, although subtle and not so subtle clues abound throughout the novel. Philip's fiercely protective love for Steve, the young boy the Bentleys adopt for a time and his strong attachment to the son they adopt from Judith at the end of the novel sound some ominous overtones not generally acknowledged by a "herd of critics" (55) more bent on proving Mrs. Bentley's unreliability as narrator than on seeing her as a convenient disguise and distraction enabling Ross to write himself into his own novelistic fantasy through the carefully crafted persona of Philip Bentley. Through references not just to *As For Me and My House* but to several of Ross's other published and unpublished fictional works, Fraser traces a pattern of his subject's concealed sexual identity furtively expressed through recurring character types.

Through Fraser's analysis of Ross's fiction and his life, what finally emerges is a disturbing yet sympathetic portrait of a man who had never really known love and who unfortunately sought it in loveless encounters in New York Turkish baths, along the Chicago lakeshore, in a Spanish cinema, and in a variety of similar settings, managing to maintain his false sexual front through those many years, while archly expressing the truth through fictional personae. It is an intriguing account, but one whose relevance is, ironically, nevertheless based on the necessity of our accepting Ross's reliability as the narrator of the tale of himself and his body.

NEIL QUERENGESSER



John C. Hawley, ed. *Cross-Addressing: Resistance, Literature and Cultural Borders*. New York: State U of New York P, 1996. Pp. x, 309. \$21.95.

Is the "postcolonial subject" an adequate way to describe the position in which the oppressed find themselves *after* colonialism but during global imperialism? Indeed, to whom does "postcolonial" refer? How