

**Alan Dawe.**

**COPYRIGHT CANADA: A PROSE RHETORIC AND SAMPLER.**

**Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1978.**

**243 pp. \$5.95.**

“Since feeling is first  
who pays any attention  
to the syntax of things. . .” (E. E. Cummings)

If one considers this work solely in the light of the assumptions from which it is obviously derived one must credit Alan Dawe with having achieved a great deal. He has put together a readable textbook which respects the intelligence of his intended audience without overestimating it. The book is refreshingly free of the jargon (with one or two notable exceptions), the patronizing tone, and the pompous rectitude commonly associated with rhetoric textbooks since Scottish divines began writing them some two hundred years ago. So astute and sensitive has been his selection of authors that one would be hard pressed not to enjoy most of the articles and stories for their own sake.

The book also includes many useful features: a section on the “mechanics of scholarship”, which deals succinctly with troublesome things like footnoting and bibliographic entries; a “Glossary of Rhetorical Terms and Principles,” which might serve well the student struggling to interpret his teacher’s marginal comments; an interesting section on “The Literary Insight Paper” (defined by the author as “an essay in which the writer conveys one clear, significant, and supportable claim about some piece of literature”), which includes some valuable rubrics about such practical matters as how to refer to authors’ names, how to use titles, and what point of view and what tense to adopt when writing a paper.

In this latter section it is the author’s intention to encourage students in the writing of disciplined personal responses to literary works, as distinguished from the formal term paper, and he includes for this purpose six Canadian short stories, all of them of some merit. One is tempted to take some exception to the author’s suggestion that the student consider how the stories “involve archetypal and mythic themes,” an approach, which to be effective, presupposes that students have more than a nodding acquaintance with Grimm, the Bible, and Classical mythology, and that the teacher has enough common sense to avoid the temptation to play silly Jungian parlour games with his students.

Mr. Dawe’s subtitle reveals the book’s intellectual and pedagogical ancestry, and much in both its organization and content is faithful to its roots. He belongs to a well-established tradition in the teaching of discourse that dates back to the 18th century. Rhetoricians and grammarians of the likes of Blair and

Campbell shared in the confident assertion of that optimistic age that all forms of knowledge and human experience were reducible to universal laws and principles. It was perhaps inevitable that these methodical Scots would discover that “all the ends of speaking (and writing) are reducible to four,” which in their modern reincarnation turn out to be Narration, Description, Exposition, and Persuasion. With almost as much confidence as their predecessors, the modern disciples of rhetoric continue to enunciate precepts as to how discourse must be ordered according to the principles and categories of rhetoric and the established canons of usage and grammar. Dawe is highly selective in his treatment of the subject, confining himself to a range of categories and principles encompassing the kinds of writing tasks and problems commonly encountered by college students.

Unfortunately, rhetoric seems to have little to do with the *process* of writing, and even less with *learning* how to write. As a recent study commissioned by the British Schools Council suggests, its categories are “supposedly based on the purpose or intention of a given piece of writing, (but) are seen only in terms of the intended effect upon an audience; they deny the probability that a writer might use one mode in order to fulfil the functions of another.” (Is a student’s account of a lab experiment a narration, description, or exposition? Does it matter?) At best, the rhetorical approach, as commonly understood, pays only token attention to the real and potential uses of writing to the writer himself, and to the activities in which he engages from the moment he confronts his task to that moment of triumph and release when it is finished. The true emphasis of rhetoric is on ends rather than means; all too often, in practice, it requires that a student perform a difficult, if not intellectually dishonest task, and that is to write something with seeming conviction and sincerity outside of any real context. It ignores, as well, the fact that the process of writing itself should be an integral part of the means a student uses to get to know his subject, any subject, and not only a means of revealing how much he may know or have discovered about it.

The validity of the concerns of the Rhetoricians for clarity of expression and rigour of thought is unchallenged. The quality of student writing is not of such a high order that we need not worry about such things; but if bad writing is as endemic in schools and colleges as many believe it to be, the cure will not be found in composition courses and textbooks on rhetoric. The malaise is not a purely pedagogical one.

*Copyright Canada* works best in those sections which acknowledge the demands for context, such as the one dealing with the Literary Insight Paper. It is rather less successful as a textbook on writing when it attempts to prescribe basic structures and to engage students in writing according to some sort of predetermined organizational formula. It contains much that is of potential use to the student writer, not the least of which are the wide margins, tempting

blank spaces for the engaged reader. As a source and reference book it has obvious merit. Unless it is used imaginatively by both teacher and student, I am less certain of its value as the basis for a course in composition.

**Cran Bockus**  
*McGill University*

**Don Gutteridge.**  
**MOUNTAIN AND PLAIN.**  
**Ian Underhill.**  
**FAMILY PORTRAITS.**  
**Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1978.**  
**Each: 95pp. \$3.75.**

*Mountain and Plain* and *Family Portraits* are the first two titles in a new series entitled "Casebooks in Canadian Literature." Three more titles are to follow, presumably using the same format, which consists in grouping a selection of short stories, excerpts from novels, and poems around a theme. That these are textbooks destined for a high school readership is made clear in the Preface reproduced in each book: "It is not the purpose of this series to presume to tell high school teachers how to proceed with literary analysis, but *to bring together the cultural and critical resources that have not been available in one volume in the past*" (p. 6., emphasis added). A high school audience is implied as well in the structural arrangement of each book, divided not in chapters but in 'units': five units to be precise. Unit one refers to the selected texts; units two and three are excerpts from critical works, chosen so as to provoke discussion on the texts, followed by questions meant to provide a framework for the discussion; unit four suggests further reading of three novels whose themes continue in expanded form the concerns addressed in unit one; finally, unit five outlines topics for extended projects (seminars, assignments, etc.) which the previous units lead to in evolving fashion.

The pedagogical structure is a sound one. The choice of critical comments, the questions raised by the editors, and the outlining of areas for research reflect a meticulous care, an attention to detailed analysis, and an underlying consideration for the high school reading audience which are commendable. No less praiseworthy is the avowed design to make Canadian literature accessible, readable, and relevant. Yet, if this series aims at precluding the writing of