

geographical and ethnic origins of Canadian-born subscribers, that the Canadian mosaic emerges. Adding colour to it are those who have come to join the Canadian ranks.

The expressed purpose of the work is to familiarize the reading public of Canada with information on who is writing, what they are writing, and why they are writing. The nature of the information it contains could also motivate those who have a secret urge to set pen to paper and share their ideas with a reading audience. In Don Bradley's words, "I think everybody is a storyteller. . ."

The main achievement of the Writers' Union has been, and is, to keep writers in touch with each other and to provide guidance through the maze of procedures for those about to enter the writing-publishing arena in Canada. The book reveals the talent and experience of the team who will provide support. It could also inspire those who want to be seen in the Canadian scene to join "The Union." It is a useful handbook for writers.

For the reading public it provides a wealth of intimate detail that can add to the appreciation of the works of a familiar author. The same information can for the unfamiliar author be the calling card that invites the reader to scan the bookshelves in search of his work.

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Joyce Carol Oates.

WOMEN WHOSE LIVES ARE FOOD, MEN WHOSE LIVES ARE MONEY (Poems).

Baton Rouge, Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press, 1978.

80 pp. \$7.95.

The title of this recent book of poems by Joyce Carol Oates is provocative; it is also misleading. Apart from the title poem which depicts a stereotype housewife in carpet slippers, sipping coffee, briefly mentions absent husbands,

Men whose lives are money
time-and-a-half Saturdays
the lunch bag folded with care and brought back home
unfolded Monday morning,

and flashes back nostalgically to youthful hope now gone, we are offered little

that has to do with ordinary human relationships. Each poem tends to be a catalogue of disparate images without a centre: the same could be said of the book as a whole.

The poems arise, so to speak, from death: a journalistic interest in accidental, suicidal, and occasionally natural death, from all of which there is no miraculous rebirth, though Oates is fond of the word 'miracle'. Resurrection is possible, she hints, for wrecked automobiles but not for people, who "disappear/into each other." The dead, we are told, wish to return to this world ("The Resurrection of the Dead") and lovers deliberately risk dying or actively court death:

Taking the curve of the road too fast
the car swerves, tires hit gravel,
fence posts never seen before lurch crazily
then are righted again.
A miracle.
Our pulses now race in a single spasm:
other curves lie ahead.
If we die today we die together.
("Love Poem")

In all the work the debt to Sylvia Plath is glaringly obvious, but Oates lacks the terrifying honesty of experience present in *Ariel*. In "The Resurrection of the Dead" a crowding together of fragmented corpses, "hands missing fingers" as "the dead join the frolic of logs" in the flooded Childwold cemetery, just will not do. Spooky details are piled one on top of another as in a gothic novel. Her poetry does not burst up from a vital core and she never truly inhabits her metaphor. Like Elizabeth Hansell's illustrations, the images are too literal, and the poet's attempt to grasp them never quite works. We are offered exterior landscapes, biblical and modern sociological backgrounds, rather than a personal country. Poetry rightly belongs to an interior life. Even in the poems dealing with relationships Oates is an observer taking notes, not a fully involved participant:

locked in love they are immortal
they are writhing in pain
.....
Mere death would canonize them
it is not mere death they fear
("The Lovers")

Next to 'miracle' Oates is particularly fond of 'bed': "you wake from the grave of bedsheets:/a miracle" and, in "Rumpled Bed," a tighter poem, worn sheets become the ocean: "waves washing eternal/a planet's slumbrous play." The bed, at least for this reader, is not strong enough to carry the weight of the

world and the life-span of Man; but it suffices as “a beginning and a probable end / a bassinet a death-bed.”

Clever and cerebral, Oates’s poems fail to wound the reader. Literary, ponderous and dark, they are neither a cry from the heart nor do they offer hope. There is no vision which informs the work, and its lack makes the references null and void. Words become impotent. Oates tells us (she does not show) how bad things are. But without showing us how good things might be there is nothing to measure by; therefore bad turns out not bad at all but wishy-washy or unintentionally funny. In spite of her declaration “It seems that all are chosen,” I get the feeling that, while many abler poets are merely called, Oates is chosen on the strength of her popularity as a competent writer of fiction. Sadly, she has not moved on since the shocking sixties.

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