

# Novel recalls turbulent 'seventies

Gail Scott  
HEROINE

By MARK MOSS

Quebec, October 1985, the 10th anniversary of the October crisis. From her bathtub in The Wakiki Tourist Rooms a woman writer surveys the past 10 years of her life; her ill-fated lover, the misguided politics dominating her thoughts. She is looking for a new female character to write about, and to become. One who, in this time and this decade, won't fail in love or politics.

In her new novel, *Heroine*, Gail Scott recalls the turbulent '70s that she witnessed and participated in as a journalist. Containing pseudo-autobiographical elements, *Heroine* is the skillful blending of past and present through vignette-like passages; a constant fading in and out of the decades. Accentuating this blending of time is the juxtaposition of rock-and-roll lyrics, always chosen, if not tailored specifically, to fit the moods of the protagonist, 'Gail,' and an assortment of her acquaintances.

As an Anglophile in Montreal, Gail tries

to fit in with the French left-wing movement, its splinter groups and their disciples. However, she is not accepted because she is an anglophile and a journalist. Gail is also jilted in love by a man she is powerless to capture. She becomes disillusioned with the politics of the era—its ready paradoxes, rampant hypocrisy, and futile gestures.

Scott's portrayal of Montreal, both in the '70s and the '80s, is well-seasoned, with an accurate eye for the smallest detail. The reader is taken by the hand and introduced to a varied assortment of characters—some pathetic, most tragic. She leads us from coffee shops on the Main frequented by left-wing intellectuals and prostitutes, to endless bars, to a shelter for battered women, to meetings, marches, and demonstrations.

As she tries desperately to gain control of her own life, which is largely dominated by the past, Gail re-evaluates the feminist movement in an effort to come to grips with the '80s. "I mean a woman just has to walk the tense line between the sadness (past) and the beauty (future), the better to live now," she writes. For Gail Scott, for her character, Gail, and for the feminist movement of the '80s, one can only remain hopelessly optimistic.

REVIEW

# Anderson poems offer little Hope

Hope Anderson  
SLIPS FROM GRACE

By KEVIN CONNOLLY

One of the biggest problems with Hope Anderson's first full-length book of poetry, *Slips from Grace*, is that there are simply not enough images in it. But, then again, this seems to be a trend these days—chatty, monologue-style poems which have enough going on at the structural level to distinguish their language from simple prose, but without any of the traditional constraints on image and rhythm we've become accustomed to. It's a type of writing that is unlikely to satisfy purists, but it seems to be here to stay.

The problems with Anderson's poems run deeper, however. We are told in the notes on the author that Anderson was born "during a hurricane" in Kingston, Jamaica in 1950. And while the intention, I guess, was to explain Anderson's dark, sometimes sardonic visions, one could counter by suggesting that the hurricane might just as well have been the cause of his seemingly irreparable syntax problems. There is a poorly-conceived and distracting syntactical ambiguity in these poems that one could overlook—or even applaud—if it opened up new levels of understanding. Most frequently, however, the wordplay leaves the reader with an unclear or vague impression, or yet another all too familiar meditation on text or language.

And Anderson has an annoying propensity for the 'unfortunate phrase.' Phrases like: "enter the distant, unmeasured wilderness"; "jungle of emotion"; "lost in the dance"; "alone and never alone"; and (aargh!) "I have always been enchanted/by the syntax/ of your immaculate sleeves" are pitfalls Anderson's good lines must try to

overcome. No doubt some of the blame must go to Anderson's editor on this one, but with lines like these it's hard to be wholeheartedly enthusiastic about a book which also contains at least a half dozen excellent pieces. Anderson's tribute, "Tongues in memory of Bob Marley," is a case in point, as is his "making of the rogue or lumpen rising," dedicated to "language-poet" bpNichol.

But there are also some complete disasters. Anderson works from a limited repertoire of images: darkness, music, electricity, stars, the military, to which he adds a sprinkling of pop culture references, and the odd (clumsy) literary allusion. The aptly named "notes for a poem," "this is masked poetry," "Resignation or is it?" and "War measures," are left either with no recognizable topic, or an obvious one.

Anderson is fond of taking politically popular shots at Ronald Reagan or the United States; and while the references serve to get the reader on his side, they are a poor substitute for genuine insight:

it is said if your neptune squares uranus like the white house's screwball actor, your chickens will come home to roost.

or

deposit the idiotic movies of American bliss and violence hammocked in the archipelagos into the accommodating arms of the chase manhattan baron de rothschild

Anderson spends a lot of time complaining about contemporary political reality, but little time adding the human dimension—the emotional reality politics creates for the poet. Instead, we are left with the feeling of being preached to, distanced by the poet's apparent belief in his moral superiority. "Although a prodigal son, I have made my peace with the planet," the speaker says in one of the poems. It is disappointing that Anderson, in *Slips from Grace*, has been unable to document that personal journey.

# Bumpy world of small mags

cont'd from front page

publishing, the concept of the "woman writer," biases by publishers and reviewers, etc. Scheier's prescriptive edge is impressive, but it's a shame she doesn't apply her own advice to her own poetry. One of PCR's weaknesses is its 'Canadianness,' outside of which it will not step except in the context of specialized columns; the next issue's Robert Bly interview seems to be a step in the right direction.

As an antidote to the predictable conservatism of the above three mags (which are easily available at any half-decent bookstore), here are a few other literary publications you might want to try out:

**B City** is one of my favourite American magazines, up there with *Lost & Found Times*, *Barney: The Stone-Age Magazine*, and *Oink!* Connie Deanovich's once-a-year publication has real personality and consistently great covers. Its contributors include a stable of regulars and lots of new writers each issue. Issue 4 (Spring '87) has exciting, readable poems by Maxine Chernoff, the always wonderful Jerome Sala, Richard Huttel, editor Deanovich, and Bill Berkson. There may be some weak works, but you can just ignore them, and immerse yourself in the intelligent humour and enthusiasm running through this mag. (\$5 U.S. from B-City Press, Inc., 619 West Surf St., Chicago, IL 60657)

**J.D.s** isn't so much a litzine as a gritty, photocopied gay 'porn' zine, but its fiction, 'comic-strip novel' and artwork give me an excuse to include it here. The original fiction in issue three is sloppily typed and sometimes a little short on craft, but the characters are more real than those you'll

find in most chunky, glossy literary mags. Bryan Bruce's continuing adventures of 'me and Butch' are especially good. There's also lots of 'found' material from other mags and local newspapers, and the regular 'J.D.s Homo-Core Top Twenty.' (Available at This Ain't The Rosedale Library, or try sending about \$3 cash to Bruce LaBruce, c/o J.D.s, 2154 Dundas St. W., #401, Toronto M6R 1X3)

**Lucky Star** is a twice-yearly poetry mag from the U.S. Editor Henry Kranz puts out a punchy, enjoyable litzine that is totally and refreshingly unpretentious. Volume 3/#2 starts off well with great cover art, and goes on to present 50-odd neatly- and modestly-typed pages of poems by poets we've never heard of, with the exceptions of Andrew Savage (yay) and Lyn Lifshin (boo). There's very interesting work by Pamela Miller, James Gawron (on watching *Vertigo* on video), and Bill Hall. There's some pretty mediocre stuff, and a couple of outright awful pieces, but *Lucky Star* evokes a spirit of abolition. (\$3.50 U.S. or 1-year sub for \$7.77 U.S. from The Erie Street Press, 221 S. Clinton Ave., Oak Park, Illinois 60302-3113)

Meanwhile back at the ranch, here's a quick, (and probably irresponsible) campus mag update: *Yak's* 50-page, back-to-back double issue (Vol. 2 Nos. 1A/B, edited by Sarah Cooper & Michael Redhill) is nice-looking and fairly accessible, but the division into two issues seems pointless. There is a lot of strong prose here, promising good things from Janet Broomhead, Stephen Mitchell, Gwen Hyman and Joel Riggins-Giroux. The poems are weaker. Robert Casto's "Ode" suffers, on the page, from

arbitrary mid-word line-breaks; it worked far better at the recent *Yak* reading, where Casto, in his perfect, acidic delivery, read it with natural line-breaks. *Existere* (Vol. 8 No. 2, edited by Janet L. Broomhead, njk, Dave Lomax) looks far too precious. Each page is printed in two colours (unacceptable waste of money) on fancy paper stock, with the mag's name and volume and some thick bars pompously and possessively framing each page, and thus, each writer. A bit more attention to the contents is in order. Mark Silverberg's story, "Landscape with Oysters, God, and a Rented Tuxedo," is the only thing that really stands out. The other good thing about *Existere* is its size—20 pages; most litmags that stretch much beyond 24 bog themselves down in boring, mediocre stuff. Far less pretentious is *Eat Me, Literally* (Vol. 2, No. 2, edited by G. Richard Gustafson, Tim Archer, John Barbisan & pmdsherdan), this time presented as individual slips of paper in a brown envelope. I love the mag's spirit and approach more than its extremely uneven content, but there's some interesting stuff by cyndicated press, Randall Brock, Lise Lafond (all poems), and Glen Richard Gustafson (fiction). The good thing about this loose-leaf format is that you can just crumple up all the lousy stuff into little balls and whip 'em at your cat. And whereas the other two campus mags' editors blab on in print about what great jobs they're doing, *EM, L* editor pmdsherdan offers a useful cry-for-action against the Tory government's idiotic Bill C-54, complete with phone numbers for Brian Mulroney and the Ministry of Justice. (The above York mags are available at the York Bookstore, and they're all very reasonably priced).

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