

Lecker, Robert Allan. *Time and Form in the Contemporary Canadian Novel*. Thesis (PhD [English]), York University. Ann Arbor: ProQuest/UMI, 1980. (Publication No. NK44501)

Abstract

The development of Canadian literature has traditionally been discussed in the context of man's relation to his environment. In concentrating on this environmental dimension, however, critics have often ignored the temporal aspects of Canadian writers' views of time. The need to redress this situation becomes particularly apparent when one examines contemporary Canadian fiction, for in that fiction it is possible to observe an overriding preoccupation with man's existence in time, and with various methods of representing that existence through structure, form, and style.

The handling of time in the contemporary Canadian novel is discussed in relation to seven novels which are generally recognized to be among the most challenging works of Canadian fiction produced to date: Hugh Hood's *The Swing in the Garden* (Chapter One), Rudy Wiebe's *The Temptations of Big Bear* (Chapter Two), Matt Cohen's *The Disinherited* (Chapter Three), Jack Hodgins' *The Invention of the World* (Chapter Four), Robert Kroetsch's *The Studhorse Man* (Chapter Five), Dave Godfrey's *The New Ancestors* (Chapter Six), and Hubert Aquin's *Trou de memoire* (Chapter Seven). While the seven chapters treat each of these works individually, the analysis also involves a comparison of these writers' views of time, and a discussion about how they share those views with contemporary novelists outside Canada.

The dissertation demonstrates that these writers voice a common rejection of nineteenth-century realistic notions of time, and a common readiness to adopt discontinuous narrative modes which reflect the non-linear and frequently irrational experience of twentieth-century life. In its organization the dissertation also suggests that the wide-ranging approach to time in the contemporary Canadian novel can be seen in terms of a spectrum. At one end of the spectrum is *The Swing in the Garden*, a work which articulates Hood's belief that man must use art and religion to relocate a sense of continuum and community. The antithesis of this view is found in *Trou de memoire*, in which we find a conscious attempt to destroy both continuity and the Canadian community at large. Between these two poles, we discover a group of novelists whose views of time reveal an increasing scepticism about man's ability to order time, and about the need to order time at all.