

***Saving Graces: Images of Women in European Cemeteries.* By David Robinson. Introduction, Joyce Carol Oates. (New York: Norton, 1995. 128 p., bibliography, technical notes, \$19.99, ISBN 0-393-03794-0 cloth, 0-393-31333-6 pbk.)**

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connect them thematically and conceptually, and add that extra layer of association which any compilation of previously published articles needs.

Small quibbles perhaps. But no review should be too laudatory. *Wise Words* is an excellent survey of current proverb scholarship, and we all await the next compendium thirteen years hence.

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The beauty of this volume is its simplicity. Neatly sandwiched between two short, concise pieces of text are fifty-two extraordinary images of women carved in stone. Despite the innate lack of embellishment, there is nothing halfway here. Even the use of glossy paper to present the text and photographs only serves to enhance the beauty and power of the pictures.

Robinson's photography is skillful and his presentation more so. As Oates said in the introduction, the images themselves function as a narrative (p. 1) and Robinson is wise enough to let them. Outside of a small notation as to each location, he does not interfere.

Nor does he attempt to equal or surpass the power of his photographs with elaborate, mind-numbing prose. Instead he gives a clear, concise rundown of how he came to the project, of erotica and death and what the images may mean — to others as well as himself. While I disagreed with certain of his conclusions — i.e., equating the overt sensuality of the Graces with being “sexy” (p. 119) — that is more on a subjective level than any reflection on his work.

In his text, Robinson does a neat job of summarizing some of the history that led the *Saving Graces* to their positions of mourning on the tombstones of nineteenth-century men from Hungary to England. He did not footnote, however, and his synopsis left me with a desire for a more in-depth study of the annals of cemetery sculpture and of these women in particular. In short, *Saving Graces* was meant as a visual exhibition and not a comprehensive investigation of the genre.

The photos themselves are extraordinary. By using black and white photography to clearly delineate the shadings of the stone, Robinson succeeded wholly in an effort to maximize the images and minimize any detracting surroundings. He has removed every possible piece of extraneous detail even — wherever possible — names and dates, and left us alone with the women. Background is only present insofar as it cannot be dismissed or furthers the visual impact, such as the woman on page 56, who waits on the tomb even when she is dusted with winter snow.

The presentation of the fruits of his two years of work in black and white makes the impression even more stark and beautiful. The shades call to mind stone, whereas colour might have detracted from the solemnity of the stone. Robinson's skillful combination of shading and unadorned text gives us the closest possible approximation to walking through a quiet, empty cemetery, coming upon the women much as he must have the first time.

Possibly deriving from medieval images of Death as a leering, sexual figure (Brusendorff and Henningsen 1963: 174, 248), the *Graces* are the very epitome of the romantic death — one's living and dying must have been worth something if beautiful women weep on one's grave for all eternity. Some swoon in varying degrees of dishabille, others — including my personal favourite on page 48, who is neither erotic, nor transcendental, only collapsed in wracking, incapacitating grief — are literally, shrouded. Others seem to be fading into the tombstone, their devotion to the deceased so complete they will follow him anywhere. They, at one and the same time, romanticize and deny death by defying that inexorable lover to shake them from the tombs, defiantly staying young and beautiful in the face of decay.

On the whole, this is a fine, powerful, uncomplicated yet extremely skillful look at the beautiful women who adorn European cemeteries. Whatever its minor shortcomings from the scholarly perspective, I do not see how anyone could fail to be moved, and educated by it. I recommend it without reservation.

Reference Cited

Brusendorff, Ove, and Paul Henningsen. 1963. *The Canadian History of Eroticism*. Copenhagen: Thaning and Appels.

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The Shipping News. By E. Annie Proulx. (New York: Scribner's, 1993. 337 p., \$25.50, ISBN 0-684-19337-X.)

The Bird Artist. By Howard Norman. (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1994. 289 p.)

George Bernard Shaw is reputed to have written *Arms and the Man* leaving blanks where the location would be mentioned. Only after completing the play did he set about finding an appropriate location and period. Place, as such an afterthought, is not something commonly associated with fiction, and certainly Joyce's Dublin, Laurence's Manawaka, or even Gibson's Cyberspace could bear witness. The suggestion, however, draws attention to the rhetorical means authors employ to convince a reader of their fiction's realism.

Fictional representations of place interest folklorists because they demonstrate the common currency of folklore and provide sites for the identification and collection of folk practice, free from the discomfort and muddle of fieldwork. *The Shipping News* and *The Bird Artist* are distinctive in their display of Newfoundland folklore, yet to appreciate them solely as bearers of folk traditions naturalizes the rhetorical labour of fiction. These novels also raise issues about the politics of representing culture.

What first attracts a reader in *The Shipping News* is E. Annie Proulx's use of language: not just English, but Newfoundland English. The damp is "roky", a dark look is "gledgy" and of course, mud is "duckety". Characters knit "thumbies", catch "guffies" or tap a "dottle" of ash from a pipe. It came as no surprise to hear Proulx confess in an interview with Peter Gzowski that while writing the novel, she "slept" with the *Dictionary of Newfoundland English*. Every page of the novel reveals her promiscuity but Proulx's affair does not end here. The strength of her other occupation — a travel writer — is