

MARIAN ENGELS "BEAR"

Donald S. Hair

MARIAN ENGEL'S *Bear* has received a good deal of popular attention, part of it from readers who are attracted to the sort of thing promised by the blurb on the cover of the paperback edition: "The shocking, erotic novel of a woman in love." The promise, one notes, is, for the most part, kept, but the novel is likely to be of interest for a good deal longer than most books of this sort because it is much more than the story of a woman in love with a bear. In fact, the novel can be read on several levels, and there is much in it to delight the academic critic as well as the casual reader.

One starting place for the academic critic is the classification of a work, the attempt to see it in relation to other works. If we start in this way with *Bear*, we must say that it is a romance, and that the conventional action of romance — the quest in search of treasure which is guarded by a monster — lies behind the action of this novel. "I don't suppose you found any buried treasure," Joe King says to Lou, and Lou herself is aware of the pattern when she thinks of the word "Treasure" in going through the trunks in the basement. Here we have a realistic version of that romance action: a journey undertaken by an archivist to catalogue the contents of a house, material which may be valuable for historical or literary reasons; the only inhabitant of the estate is a bear. But this external action is not the novelist's main concern. Indeed, Lou finds little of lasting value in the house, and, contrary to expectations when the chief setting is an old and mysterious house, there are no surprises to be discovered. At the end, the house is "empty" and "enormous": "She had not found its secrets. It was a fine building, but it had no secrets."

More important than outer events is the inner action. The story is an account of the renewal of Lou herself, a rebirth, or (in psychological terms) the achievement of an integrated personality. At the beginning of the novel, Lou is a fragmented individual, with dried-up feelings and a barren intellect; at the end, she is healed and whole, and she feels "strong and pure." We are alerted to this pattern, perhaps too obviously, by Lou's first postcard to the director: "'I have an odd sense . . . of being reborn.'" But if the reference to the nature of the action is obtrusive, the patterns by which it is worked out are satisfyingly subtle and complex.

Some of the patterns are familiar and central to Canadian literature. One

notes, to begin with, that Lou's journey is from south to north, and that its nature can be defined by the baseland-hinterland distinction which, W. L. Morton argues, runs through every Canadian psyche.¹ The south is an urban waste land, associated with winter, decay, fragmentation, and the colours brown, yellow, and gray. The north is a bush garden, associated with spring, a lost childhood, fertility, and the colour green. The specific scene of Lou's renewal is an island in the District of Algoma, and one thinks of similar scenes of rebirth, like the island in Shakespeare's *The Tempest* or in Atwood's *Surfacing*. There is nothing unusual in Engel's use of these patterns and images. It is with the house, rather, that the novel begins to take on a special character.

The fact that the house is central may perhaps be traced back to Engel's first concept of the book. It was, she told an interviewer in the *Toronto Star*, to be a short story for an erotic anthology to be published by the Writers' Union of Canada:

'I thought, "All pornography takes place in an isolated palace," so I built my isolated palace — the white octagonal house — then in walked a bear. I don't know where he came from, just from somewhere in my psyche.

'Well, it was no good as a pornographic story, but the idea was too good to waste, so it became a novel.'²

The "isolated palace" in pornography represents the fulfilment of sexual desires, its isolation providing the freedom to act out such desires without the usual social or moral restrictions. The "white octagonal house" retains the character of its pornographic predecessor, but goes considerably beyond it to suggest the fulfilment of desires that are wider in scope and more admirable in character.

The house, Lou tells us, is "a classic Fowler's octagon." Fowler was an American, a phrenologist (a fact of some relevance to this novel, as we shall see), and an amateur architect, who championed the building of octagonal houses. The title of his book on domestic architecture (first published in 1848, revised in 1852, and reprinted several times after that) indicates that his was to be a house for the people: *A Home for All or a New, Cheap, Convenient, and Superior Mode of Building*.³ And indeed his book became the source of a popular movement in American architecture. There are Canadian examples of octagonal houses and barns in Ontario and Nova Scotia and, probably, in other provinces as well. Fowler argues, largely in practical terms, for the superiority of the octagonal over the square or rectangular house: there is a better and more economical use of space, there is better lighting, and there is a better relationship among the rooms. Clearly, in Fowler's view, the octagon represents a more advanced state of civilization than the square or rectangle. (Hence it is significant, I think, that the bear in Engel's novel occupies the original log house, which is square or rectangular, and hence primitive.) But at the same time Fowler argues that the octagon is more natural than the square, since "Nature's forms are mostly

SPHERICAL," and since "the octagon, by approximating to the circle, incloses more space for its wall than the square. . . ."⁴

Lying behind Fowler's argument — and behind the octagonal house in this book — are the ancient symbols of the square and the circle, and their union or synthesis in the octagon. The square has long been associated with earth, and the circle with heaven, the old alchemical problem of squaring the circle being an attempt to bring about the marriage of these opposites. While the problem could never be solved, its solution could be approximated in the octagon, the intermediary form between the other two. Hence the octagon was a symbol of unity and perfection (though it was not perfection itself), and was thought of as showing the way toward the integration of all things.⁵ With these facts in mind, we begin to understand Lou's early response to the "incredible house": "She could hardly believe its perfection."

Its perfection, we gradually realize, is to become hers (since the house represents the wholeness and the regeneration that she is seeking), and again, Fowler gives us the key to this pattern. In the first chapter of *A Home for All*, he sets out, as a basic principle of house-building, the correspondence between the design of the house and the characteristics of its inhabitants: "The better a man's mentality, the better mansion will he construct, and the characteristics of the house will be as those of its builder or occupant."⁶ This identification of house and inhabitant is an interesting one, especially for a phrenologist, and Lou's throw-away remark about the octagon, that "its phrenological designer thought it good for the brain," is to be taken more seriously than she realizes. For the structure of the house will come to symbolize the makeup of her character. We note, in passing, that the estate is called Pennarth, and that the name means "bear's head." These two phrenological allusions link the house and bear as the central factors in Lou's experience, and it is her exploration of the two that will bring about her renewal. The transformation is indicated, much later, when she turns around to look at the house, and finds it "no longer a symbol, but an entity."

As Lou explores the house, we begin to realize how closely it corresponds to the makeup of a human being. The first floor is associated with ordinary waking life; here the parlour, the kitchen, and the bedroom are located, and here the basic needs of the body are met: shelter and warmth, food, sleep, and sex. The second floor is associated with the intellect. The library, representing "a sharp and perhaps typical early nineteenth-century mind," takes up most of this floor, and here Lou finds the brass and leather telescope and the celestial and terrestrial globes, symbols of a wide-ranging understanding. The basement has links with the subconscious and memory: it contains trunks with blankets from the First World War, and dresses from the 1920's and 1930's. At the very centre of the house is the staircase; it is the axis of the building and, because its foundations are in the basement and its top under the lantern, it links all the levels. One notes

that ascending and descending this staircase are constant actions in the novel, and one begins to sense that these movements symbolize the movements by which Lou integrates the various parts of her character. The counterpointing of ascents and descents has its focus in two recurring movements, opposite in direction but similar in that they both suggest integration: the bear ascending the staircase from below, and the sunlight flooding down from the lantern above.

In this context, the epigraph, from Kenneth Clark's *Landscape into Art*, begins to make sense: "Facts become art through love, which unifies them and lifts them to a higher plane of reality; and in landscape, this all-embracing love is expressed by light." Facts are scattered and isolated things, and correspond to the fragments of Lou's life. Art unifies, integrates, and raises such facts to the highest human level, which is symbolized by the lantern of the octagonal house. Light pervading the whole structure effects such integration.

The epigraph draws the reader's attention to one main agent of integration in the novel; the title introduces the other, and more obvious, one. For the bear operates at each level represented by the house. Lou must renew her memory, her body, and her mind, and each must be brought into a proper relation with all the others. The bear is central to this process.

Let's start with the intellect or understanding, since this is the faculty that Lou must use in her job. As an archivist, she must catalogue the books, and make an inventory of the contents of the house. Her task is "to card and classify," and her working life is filled with "things to be counted" and "things to be edited." But catalogues and lists have inherent limitations; their order is a mechanical order, and the connections and patterns that are crucial for a full understanding may be scarcely apparent. Lou recognizes the deficiencies of her usual activities, and looks forward to insights of a better sort: "As far as books went, she was concerned with their externals only. Here, she would have time to read." But when new feelings, emotions, and insights force themselves upon her, she falls back on her old intellectual habits: "She tried to concentrate on externals, on her cards, on her notes"; "she always attempted to be orderly, to catalogue her thoughts and feelings. . . ." But at last she asks the crucial question:

What was the use of all these cards and details and orderings? In the beginning they had seemed beautiful, capable of making an order of their own, capable of being in the end filed and sorted so that she could find a structure, plumb a secret. Now, they filled her with guilt; she felt there would never, ever, be anything as revealing and vivid as Homer's story, or as relevant. They were a heresy against the real truth.

I shall return to Homer's story, and try to explain why it is "the real truth," but we must first try to define the part that the bear plays in Lou's growing understanding.

THE RENEWAL OF LOU'S MIND might, one would think, involve the recovery of the animal stories she has read, and the ordering of Colonel Cary's notes on bears. But in fact the renewal is symbolized in more concrete ways, by the bear's ascent of the stairs, by his standing upright like a man, and by his grinning. The upright posture is a popular symbol of intelligence — it is "that posture that leads the bear to be compared to the man" — and so is the bear's sense of humour. After Lou has followed Lucy's advice ("Shit with the bear"), she laughs, and "He looked as if he was laughing too." Lou laughs again when they are both battling mosquitoes: "'Oh bear,' she laughed. 'We're a funny pair.' He turned around and quite definitely grinned." If there were to be a Canadian bestiary, the laughing bear, standing or sitting upright, would have a central place in it. One remembers the bear totem, "every bit of him . . . merry," that Emily Carr discovered at Gittex;⁷ and one remembers, too, Roberts' repeated assertions that the bear is the most human of all the animals, his intelligence being symbolized by his sense of humour, and by his grinning when he has tricked man whose senses are less keen than his.⁸ In the bear, then, body and mind are thoroughly integrated, and he is, therefore, an appropriate creature to preside over Lou's renewal.

If the bear's ascent of the stairs leads to the revitalizing of Lou's intellectual life, his entry into the bedroom leads to the revitalizing of her physical life. Like Lou's carding and classifying, her sex life has no connections with anything else. She has picked up a man on the street; she has had a lover who made her have an abortion; and she has weekly sex — "but no love" — with the director, on a desktop spread with old maps. One notes that Lou wants "human contact," and hence it seems strange that she should fall so deeply in love with the bear, and that the orgasm to which he brings her should be so powerful. But it is precisely this experience which leads to the renewal of her fully human self, a process which can be seen clearly in the breaking and re-establishing of the taboo of bestiality. The breaking of the taboo is crucial since, when a barrier as strong as that is broken, all barriers begin to fall, and a new unity can begin forming itself. But the re-establishing of the taboo is equally crucial. The barrier begins to reappear when Lou becomes aware of the fact that she has broken it. Instinctively she turns to human contact, and tries, unsuccessfully, to find release with Homer. The climactic moment is Lou's attempt to have intercourse with the bear: "He reached out one great paw and ripped the skin on her back." In terms of the realism of the novel, the bear is simply proving to be the wild creature that Homer has regularly warned Lou about. But in symbolic terms, the bear releases Lou into her full human identity by marking the limits of kinship, and finally separating animal from human. The pain and the blood suggest a birth, and certainly Lou feels that she has been reborn: "she was different. She seemed to

have the body of a much younger woman.” Lying with the bear beside the fire, “she was a babe, a child, an innocent.”

What had passed to her from him she did not know. Certainly it was not the seed of heroes, or magic, or an astounding virtue, for she continued to be herself. But for one strange, sharp moment she could feel in her pores and the taste of her own mouth that she knew what the world was for. She felt not that she was at last human, but that she was at last clean. Clean and simple and proud.

To know “what the world was for” is to sense the relations of all things, and to understand one’s place in that complex pattern. The wound, her birth-mark (“I shall keep that, she thought”), is the emblem of that position: “she remembered the claw that had healed guilt. She felt strong and pure.”

This integration of body and mind sometimes suggests an order of being that is more than either. This order is symbolized by the lantern at the top of the house, and manifests itself, in the early stages of Lou’s life on the island, in all those things which, to her orderly mind, seem to go beyond reason. Chief among these are Colonel Cary’s notes on bears. They are not filed or organized in any way, but are stuck at random in various books, and Lou finds them by chance. Finding slips of paper in this way is exasperating for Lou — “She wanted to pick up each of his books and shake them till the spines fell off” — but she responds, as she always does initially, by being the archivist: “she carefully filed and dated his note, marking its envelope with the name of the book it fell from.” One notes that there is no logical connection between the books and the slips of paper, and hence it seems curious that Lou should file the note in this way. “Perhaps when she was very old she would return and make a mystical acrostic out of the dates and titles of these books and believe she had found the elixir of life.” The tone suggests that Lou habitually rejects, or makes fun of, anything that goes beyond reason, but she continues to date the notes, and even to record the time when she finds each of them. “She wondered, as she did it, why she was doing it; if she were trying to construct a kind of *I Ching* for herself. No: she did not believe in non-rational processes, she was a bibliographer, she told herself. She simply wanted the record to be accurate.”

The “non-rational processes” to which Lou, in spite of her protestations, is instinctively attracted are those of the imagination, particularly as it embodies itself in myth. The materials in Colonel Cary’s notes are often drawn from myths, legends, and folk tales, and to each of the notes Lou responds in ways that connect the bears of the human imagination with her bear. This making of connections between the imagination and actual experience is as crucial as the linking of mind and body, and the notes, seemingly so unconnected, do in fact fall into a pattern that Lou gradually comes to realize. That pattern is the circle. To begin with, Lou’s recording of the time and date suggests an attempt to link the notes with the cycles of the day and the year. There are twelve such notes (one

is repeated, so that anyone counting the number of passages in italics will find thirteen), and twelve is the number of cosmic order. Like the Zodiac, which divides the circle or wheel of the heavens into twelve subdivisions, these twelve notes suggest a cycle which embodies the whole of human experience, that whole usually imaged as a move away from primal unity, and a return to it. When this movement is embodied in a story, we have the myth of the birth, life, and death of the hero. Colonel Cary's notes give us fragments of this myth, with the bear as hero. There is a miraculous birth: "The offspring of a woman and a bear is a hero"; there is a descent into the ordinary world, where the physical characteristics of bears are listed and classified, where bears are kept as pets or hunted and baited, and where the bone in the bear's penis is used as a coathook; and there is a sacrificial death, and a return to a land of "peace and plenty," "milk and honey."

With this myth in mind, we can now begin to see clearly how the bear operates on all levels in the book. There is the actual bear, who occupies the square or rectangular loghouse, which represents the earth and physical existence. There is the bear of myth, who is associated with the circle, which in turn represents heaven and the imagination. And there is a middle level, when the bear ascends the stairs in the octagonal house, and stands upright. The bear thus connects or unifies all levels, and it is Lou's task to realize that unity herself. One can trace this process by looking at the conjunction of square and circle, and the eventual resolution of these opposing designs into one pattern.

The struggle is particularly acute in chapters *xvii* and *xviii*. When Lou is irritable and out-of-sorts, she is conscious of squares:

She did not like the parlour. It was full of wrong-angled, unlivable corners, the weakness of the octagon. The furniture was squared and sat ill and off-centred. Every time she went into the room, it imprinted on her the conventional rectangle and nagged.

But when she begins to make connections, circles appear. For instance, she invites Homer to stay for a drink, "Because the wheels were going around in her head, bells were ringing, she was understanding things." On her radio, she picks up music coming from around the globe — another great circle — and the music leads her to dance with the bear. The dance is a conventional symbol of a dynamic unity, but what makes it interesting here is the fact that the music which brings them together is a song about parting. Two movements, coming together and growing apart, are thus contained within a single pattern, and suddenly we realize that Lou is acting out the new wholeness which is hers. Hence the separation at the end of the novel is not the collapse of that wholeness, but the affirmation of it. The emphasis falls on cycles which are being completed, like the turning of the seasons:

Something was gone between them, though: the high, whistling communion that had bound them during the summer. Where she looked out the window, the birch trees were yellowing, the leaves were already thin.

Moreover, Lou returns to Toronto, "taking the long, overland route," and thus completes a cycle of her own life. The unity is now within her, and it is symbolized by the constellation — the Great Bear and his thirty-seven thousand virgins — that she sees overhead, and that itself views all the cycles below.

I HAVE BEEN DEALING WITH the movement of the novel largely in terms of geometrical patterns, but there are other patterns which encourage us to come at this same movement in different ways. One of these is conventional in romance: the double or *Doppelgänger*. This convention has a basis in psychology, in the individual who is at war with himself. In this novel, Lou becomes aware of an "awful, anarchic inner voice":

she could not understand why the period of redefinition had to be accompanied by depression, an existential screaming inside herself, and a raucous interior voice that questioned not the project she was working on, but her own self. 'What am I doing here?' she would ask herself, and the interior voice would echo, 'Who the hell do you think you are, having the nerve to be here?'

The two voices suggest that the central character is in fact two characters, and the division of one by two is conventional enough in numerology. One is, of course, the symbol for the unity of all things; two is the symbol of division, of the separation of all things into two opposing forces: light and dark, good and evil, life and death, male and female. The conflict can be hostile and destructive, or it can be the dynamic relation of two complementary forces. Another way of describing Lou's renewal is to say that, in the course of her summer on the island, two opposing forces are brought into a dynamic relationship.

Those two opposing forces, in this romance, are male and female. Again, the bear is central, his role being understood best if we go back to medieval bestiaries.⁹ There we discover that the bear is remembered in myth and legend for both his male and female parts, and since the bear in this book plays both roles, he is a symbol of the dynamic union of opposing forces that Lou is trying to achieve. As a symbol of male sexuality, the bear is associated with lust, fornication, and sensual pleasure, and has a reputation as a good lover. Lou reacts strongly to him in this role; sight and smell are acutely conscious of him as masculine: "she got a large whiff of shit and musk. [The bear] was indubitably male, she saw. . . ." She is frightened, and then excited, by his size and his strength, and she has an absorbing interest in the exact characteristics of his genitals. He becomes, for her, the ideal lover, who brings her to orgasm as no

man has been able to. These masculine aspects of the bear are obvious enough. But, as we read through the novel, we note that the bear is, on occasion, described as a woman. Indeed, that is Lou's first impression of him. He has "a scruff like a widow's hump," and he seems "not a creature of the wild, but a middle-aged woman defeated to the point of being daft. . . ." And at the end, when Joe King takes the bear away in his boat, the bear is like "a fat dignified old woman with his nose to the wind in the bow of the boat." These images seem casual enough, but they tip us off to the bear's female role, as described in the bestiaries. There the bear is not just male lust, but the nurturing mother. It is an old idea that bear cubs are blind and formless at birth, and are shaped by the she-bear, who in this way becomes the symbol of the artist or creator. What is crucial to this novel is the way in which the bear shapes her cubs. She does so, according to tradition, by licking them. Hence, all that licking of Lou is not just a near-pornographic description of cunnilingus, but a symbol of the shaping of Lou, of the creation of her new self. It is significant that, in spite of Lou's living "intensely and entirely for the bear," she fails to have intercourse with him. What gives her new life is the bear's tongue — the female aspects of him — and she becomes a child protected by the great mother: "She realized he was watching over her"; "That night, lying clothed and tenderly beside him by the fire, she was a babe, a child, an innocent."

In the bear, then, there is a dynamic union of two forces, male and female, and the bear's wholeness is a wholeness that Lou must realize in herself. It is for this reason that Homer's story of the Cary family has such a profound effect on Lou, and embodies a truth far more comprehensive than any she has been able to obtain through cataloguing and filing. The story is a story of male and female fused at last in a single figure. The first Colonel Cary was a man separated from his wife, who chose to remain behind in Toronto; the last Colonel Cary was a woman who, though unmistakably female, combined the characteristics of man and woman, and thus made up for the division in her grandfather's life. Homer places considerable emphasis, in his narrative, on the union of these opposing forces in Colonel Jocelyn Cary. There is the story of her name: she could not buy a commission in the army, like her father, so she was christened Colonel so she could inherit the estate. "She was a fine woman," Homer assures Lou, but he goes on to tell about her drinking beer like a man, and hunting and trapping like a man: "She was the first woman to wear pants up here"; "She had big hands like a man. . . ." In uniting the male and female roles, Colonel Jocelyn Cary thus becomes a model for Lou. Lou has already felt herself to be the heir of the Carys, and now she is able to define her inheritance more precisely.

The union of opposing forces in her comes about by a process which is conventional in romance: metamorphosis. The idea appears in the only one of Colonel Cary's notes which is repeated, and the repetition seems to be designed

to draw special attention to it. In this note, we are told that Norwegians describe the bear as “the old man with the fur cloak.” The phrase suggests the metamorphosis of bear into man, and of man into bear. We have already seen the bear becoming man when he stands upright and grins; and, in a parallel transformation, man — or, in this case, woman — becomes bear by putting on his “fur cloak.” One remembers the number of times that Lou buries her hands or her feet in the bear’s fur, “finding it had depths and depths, layers and layers,” and once she begs explicitly, “Give me your skin.” She does take on his musk: “You stink of bear,” Homer tells her. When she looks at herself in the female colonel’s pierglass, she sees a creature with brown skin and wild eyes and hair. And when bear and woman lie by the fire, they are “both in their pelts.”

Though Lou does, in these ways, begin to seem like a bear, the transformation does not take place in the way she expects. She imagines a magic change, of the sort one would find in fairy tales:

It struck her when she opened the door to him that she always expected it to be someone else. She wondered if he, like herself, visualized transformations, waking every morning expecting to be a prince, disappointed still to be a bear.

The change which actually takes place is not of this sort; rather, it is the kind of transformation which is conventional in romance, and which involves the pairs or doubles that I have already explored. When two figures who represent opposing forces are reacting to each other, it frequently happens that one grows and develops as the other declines. This rhythm of waxing and waning is clear in the kind of medieval romance where a pair of jousting knights is associated with day and night; it is also clear in vampire stories, where the vampire grows stronger as his victim grows weaker. Here, as Lou is healed and becomes whole, the bear is gradually fragmented, his wholeness being divided into its various parts. At the beginning of the novel, when Lou feels that she has fallen apart, she sees the bear as an entity, and talks about him in a way that suggests that he is the Idea of a bear:

Everyone has once in his life to decide whether he is a Platonist or not, she thought. I am a woman sitting on a stoop eating bread and bacon. That is a bear. Not a toy bear, not a Pooh bear, not an airlines Koala bear. A real bear.

At the end, the bear is many things: “lover, God or Friend. Dog too, for when she put her hand out he licked and nuzzled it.” He is the fat creature sitting solidly in Joe King’s boat, and he is the Great Bear with his thirty-seven thousand virgins. But Lou at this point is whole. “Clean and simple and proud” are the adjectives she uses to describe herself, and it is the second in particular which is important in this context. “Simple” has both Greek and Latin roots, the first element in both being (as the *Oxford English Dictionary* tells us) *sem*, meaning *one*.

In myth and ritual, transformations are usually brought about by a sacrificial death and by the ritual eating of the flesh of the slain animal. Colonel Cary's notes make two references to this pattern: one describes the Eskimos' "taboos and propitiatory ceremonies" for the killing of the bear and "the consumption of the flesh"; the other describes a Japanese ceremony, in which a bear is sacrificed and its flesh eaten. Lou vows that this will never happen to her bear, but, nonetheless, eating has an important symbolic role in the novel. The consumption of flesh is, after all, the ultimate metamorphosis, and this act, rather than the putting on of fur, is the best indication of Lou's change. As often happens in this novel, its basis is the eroticism of the earliest idea of the story. Eating is slang for cunnilingus, and Lou's plea to the bear, "'Eat me,'" is the sort of thing one might find in pornography. But here it is part of a far more comprehensive pattern. We remember the number of times Lou eats with the bear, and once, when a spark falls in his fur, she licks it out. The key to this pattern is one of her dreams:

She fell asleep on the grass, and dreamt that Grinty and Greedy were rolling down the hill in a butter churn towards her.

'We'll eat her,' Grinty said. 'We'll eat her breasts off.'

'You watch,' said Greedy. 'You watch. She'll eat us first. Let's run.'

I do not know what fairy tale is being referred to here, but the patterns are clear enough. Here we have a pair, perhaps twin imps or dwarfs, and their names are associated with eating and appetite (to grint is to gnash one's teeth). They threaten to eat Lou, but immediately recognize that "'She'll eat us first.'" That is, she will take the two of them and, by consuming them, make them one. Lou's eating with the bear has the same symbolic significance. When one recognizes this pattern, it comes as no surprise to discover that, when Lou becomes whole, she feels it "in her pores and the taste of her own mouth."

Bear is an unusually good novel. The patterns, which I have been making stand out, are woven together in a subtle and complex way. We have no sense that actions are forced or details thrust upon us. Everything is carefully observed and fully realized. If, as Margaret Avison has said, the devil is etc., there is no devil in this book. We live "sweetly and intensely" with Lou and her bear, exploring, like her, the infinite richness of simplicity.

NOTES

My reading of the novel owes a great deal to conversations with two of my colleagues, Catherine Ross and Richard Stingle.

¹ "The Relevance of Canadian History," in *Contexts of Canadian Criticism*, ed. Eli Mandel (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1971), pp. 52-53.

² Quoted by Roy MacSkimming, "A writer's gutsy imagination sets up a hard act to follow," *Toronto Star* (15 May 1976), p. H3.

- ³ There is a modern reprint of the 1853 edition, entitled *The Octagon House: A Home for All*, with an introduction by Madeline B. Stern (New York: Dover, 1973).
- ⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 82.
- ⁵ In this paragraph I am deeply indebted to J. E. Cirlot's *A Dictionary of Symbols*, trans. Jack Sage (New York: Philosophical Library, 1962), especially to the articles on "Circle," "Numbers," "Square," and "Squaring the Circle."
- ⁶ Fowler, p. 12.
- ⁷ *Klee Wyck* (Toronto: Clarke, Irwin, 1971), p. 53.
- ⁸ See, for instance, *The Heart of the Ancient Wood* (New Canadian Library # 110; Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1974), p. 12; or, better still, a passage in "The Trailers" in *Thirteen Bears*, ed. Ethel Hume Bennett (Toronto: Ryerson, 1947), p. 101.
- ⁹ For the information on bestiaries which follows, I am indebted to Beryl Rowland, *Animals with Human Faces: A Guide to Animal Symbolism* (Knoxville: Univ. of Tennessee Press, 1973), pp. 31-35.

ROAD ENDING

M. Travis Lane

At the end of the road a hunter's hut
 boarded all summer, the fraying bush
 backing against it, a ragged fringe
 of beggars' ticks, rust tassels, thorns,
 and boulders pushed to the water's edge
 where the graders turned.
 There was no one home.

And no one in the water. Overhead
 the white thread spidered from a jet
 drifted across where the evening star
 was not yet shining.

What were the words I could not use,
 the thoughts I could not think to say?
 The white lake shook in the early dusk.

Something was lost we were waiting for,
 summer, perhaps, or snow.

Marian Ruth Engel, OC, (née Passmore; May 24, 1933 – February 16, 1985) was a Canadian novelist and a founding member of the Writers' Union of Canada. Her most famous and controversial novel was *Bear* (1976), a tale of erotic love between a librarian and a bear. Born May 24, 1933 in Toronto, Ontario, Engel lived the first years of her life in foster care before being adopted by Frederick Searle and Mary Elizabeth (Fletcher) Passmore.:17 Her father taught auto mechanics, taking on positions at schools –Midsummer Madness: Marian Engel’s *Bear*. *Journal of Canadian Fiction* 2 (1977–78): 83–94. –27–. Sexual Gothic. Cowan, S.A. –Return to Heart of Darkness: Echoes of Conrad in Marian Engel’s *Bear*, *Ariel: A Review of International English Literature* 12, 4 (1981): 73–91. Day, William Patrick. Engel, Marian. *Bear*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1977. Fee, Margery. –Articulating the Female Subject: The Example of Marian Engel’s *Bear*. *Atlantis* 14, 1 (1988): 20–26. Ferrier, Elizabeth.