

time organizer and later head of the UFAWU, he picked up the tools of his trade and returned to fishing. Nor did he have a large nest egg, for as union president, he drew a salary that was usually less than the average seasonal return of the fishermen he represented.

A member of the Communist Party of Canada, Stevens also is living refutation of the view that labour leaders are always more conservative than rank and file. As often as not, the membership acts as a brake on a more militant leadership. But trade unionism is the art of the possible, and even left-wing leaders must eventually settle and come to terms with the employer. Unlike more conservative labour leaders, however, Stevens was keenly aware of the contradiction between what was possible and what was ultimately desirable. He was also aware of the tension arising from the need to push union members further while representing them accurately and responsibly. In his reflections on his career and times, Stevens gives us a considered appraisal of radical politics and reformism in the labour movement.

This biography is also useful for its description of the fishing work process. The hardships and the rewards are carefully, sometimes poetically, detailed. Stevens's childhood memories of growing up in a small Fraser River community are often compelling, and many of the details put a human face on impersonal historical trends, such as the consolidation of the canning industry and the development of monopoly.

The book would benefit from an index, and from a map of the many villages and towns that the text refers to. It would also benefit from a detailed discussion of the Communist Party of Canada. Throughout the book, Stevens makes reference to the Party and the role it played in his life and career. But we learn very little about the CPC and its activities in the province. Despite criticism, however, *A Life in Fishing* is an important book for historians of labour and of British Columbia.

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The Letters of Conrad Aiken and Malcom Lowry, 1929-1954, edited by Cynthia C. Sugars. Toronto: ECW Press, 1992. xxxiv, 350 pp. Illus. \$25.00 paper.

Theoretically, a collection of letters that constitutes an ongoing exchange between two correspondents will give us insights into the

characters of these people that a biography or critical work might miss. Such a collection is not modified by time or by shifting critical opinion, for it retains an immediacy and even a kind of dramatic power, no matter how many years have elapsed since the letters were written. This is especially true if the collection contains a representative number of precise exchanges between the correspondents, for then we can judge both the shifting relationship between the writers and their attitudes towards the various issues of their times.

This collection of letters, written during a twenty-five year period, by and large meets these criteria, and reveals much more about the Lowry-Aiken relationship than did the 1965 *Selected Letters of Malcolm Lowry*, edited by Lowry's widow and Harvey Breit, or Joseph Killorin's 1978 edition, *Selected Letters of Conrad Aiken*. Breit's collection contains only five of the fifty-eight Lowry letters that Sugars has discovered for her collection, while Killorin's fares better, containing seventeen of the thirty-one Aiken letters. The major gap in all three of these collections lies in the absence of any letters from Aiken to Lowry in the first ten years of their relationship, so we have to speculate, from the evidence in the sixteen letters that Lowry wrote to Aiken during this period, how Aiken really felt about him. But there is some evidence in Killorin's edition about how Aiken felt about Lowry at the time of their meeting, for Aiken talked about this in some of his letters to other correspondents. He mentions Lowry for the first time in a letter he wrote to his three children in July of 1929: "I look forward to his arrival with great curiosity," and a couple of days later, to a friend, "my young genius arrives this week." Three weeks later, he records to another correspondent that "Lowry is a nice chap, but incredibly dirty and sloppy and helpless [but] writes exceedingly well, and undoubtedly should do something." But a year later, to another friend, he shows some impatience: "am eager for Malcolm (much as I like and enjoy him) to be gone." And Aiken's second wife, Clarissa Lorenz, also showed impatience at the behaviour of the young Lowry, who must clearly have caused some domestic distress while he was living with them. "How much longer will Conrad put up with this madman?" she wondered.

Sugars makes note of most of these comments in her useful "Introduction" to this collection, and describes convincingly how the relationship between Aiken and Lowry changed over the years. The father/son, tutor/student situation at the outset, that Aiken seemed to view with a certain irony and amused detachment, changed to one near the end that was characterized by a kind of mutual distrust and

jealousy, especially after the 1947 publication of Lowry's masterpiece, *Under the Volcano*. The salutations of Aiken's letters reflect this changing attitude: his first letters address Lowry in whimsical ways, like "My beloved Judas-Malc," "My beloved misguided misfortunate chaos-loving Malc," or "My poor old bewildered, explanatory protestant Malc," but these soon give way to more simple addresses, like "My dear old Malc," or "Dear old Malc" which seem to reflect a bit of impatience on the part of Aiken. After Lowry and his second wife, Margerie Bonner, moved to their Dollarton shack in the summer of 1940, Lowry imposed himself quite regularly upon Aiken to help him get out of Canada, but all to no avail, and one wonders if Aiken remembered with some misgivings how this persistent guest had imposed himself upon his household some ten years earlier.

I have a minor quibble over the way that Sugars has divided the letters in this collection. With the first group, 1929-1938, there is no problem, for these are all by Lowry, and relate to the times and places he shared with Aiken, in Europe and Mexico. But I wonder about the other two groups, 1939-41 and 1942-54, for I would think that 1944 would mark a more logical dividing point. It was in June of that year that Lowry's shack burned down, at which time he and Margerie went to Niagara-on-the-Lake to live with the Noxons, when he completed his revisions of *Volcano*. I see no such reason for the division between 1941 and 1942. One other minor point, while I'm at it: Sugars' footnote on page 28, where she states that the correct Norwegian word for "gaar" is "går." In fact, when Grieg's novel was published in 1924 as *Skibet Gaar Videre*, "gaar" was the correct form, and it wasn't until the late 1930's that the spelling was changed to "går", though to this day both forms are correct.

The collection concludes with two letters from Margerie Lowry to Mary Aiken, written in January of 1940, a "woman to woman" description of the Lowry plight that helps us understand the urgency of Malcolm's requests to Aiken. Reading these, we realize what a source of strength Margerie must have been to Malcolm in those desperate years, and incidentally, what a fine writer she herself was.

The sixty pages of textual notes that conclude this Collection are probably useful in a certain kind of scholarship or research, but I experienced bewilderment more than enlightenment as I tried to work my way through them. It is the letters themselves, and Sugars' excellent Introduction and footnotes, that make this Collection a significant addition to the ongoing Lowry scholarship.