The purpose of this paper is not to discuss the many points at which the writer comes into contact with the mass media, but rather to suggest in what direction the structure and function of these relationships are changing. First, I want to indicate the position of the mass media in relation to other institutions — the university and the social movement — which impinge upon the writer; second, to suggest that the distinction between “highbrow” and “lowbrow” culture has never been entirely applicable to writing in Canada, while the distinction customarily found in the sciences between pure and applied science is closer to the facts of the situation; third, to trace the effects on the writer as the mass media change, with greater emphasis on “communication” than on “adult education” or “entertainment”.

It says a great deal about how far we have travelled since the 1920s to discuss the mass media in national terms. For, if there was ever a grand Utopian promise which mushroomed over the new media of the twenties, radio and motion pictures, it was that the boundaries of class and literacy, region and nation could be broken down. Social and economic, domestic and international, sectional and ethnic misunderstandings could be mediated when the parties held a common frame of reference, a standardized set of meanings.

Hardly anyone follows this line nowadays. We are so in the grip of a renascent nationalism, so convinced that any pluralism is better than no pluralism, that when the mass media do achieve a lingua franca they are accused of committing
a crime against culture, of destroying the vitality of language, regimenting the artist; above all, of denying citizens their inalienable right to a sense of national identity.

This phenomenon is not peculiarly Canadian. Similar criticisms of popular culture and the mass media are heard in the United States, England, and elsewhere. They are part of a new intellectual idiom which cannot come to terms with the ambiguities of social structure and finds it easier to cast Madison Avenue in the role of the villain; an idiom which talks about “roots” versus “alienation” and would rather have social ghettos on its conscience than the suicides of marginal men. Nor are Canadians alone in their obsession with a national identity. National identity is a chronic concern of the modern world, among old countries as well as the new, where consensus is necessary, but difficult to achieve, politically dangerous and easily shattered.

In literature the quest for a national identity has a long and honourable tradition. The pendulum which sent writers abroad in the 1920s swung back in the next decade, when it was a mark of esteem to stay at home and discover or re-discover our own “grass roots” culture. American writers employed on W.P.A. projects saw themselves as the avant garde, marching against the Establishment (Mandarin culture) and the Bourgeois irresponsibility (commercial culture) represented by drawing-room comedy. The late Clifford Odets was among the writers who emerged during this period to form a new elite and who eventually went to the mass media via Hollywood. John Grierson and Andrew Allan inspired the same “Honey, stay in your own backyard” sentiment. Although the Depression and left wing movements gave this crusade a new impetus, it was part of an older populist tradition which has been a constant in the North American experience, and can still be found supporting “regionalism” and regional literature, however contrived they may be. So, add to the long list of grievances about the mass media that they centralize cultural activity in Toronto or New York at the expense of local cultures, “the prairies” or Canada.

Serious intellectuals have never been entirely comfortable in this atmosphere. Many of them are by temperament and education too cosmopolitan for its restrictions. Professionally, they are committed to disciplines which have no provincial basis and do not elicit local loyalties. In science as well as in art, work is ultimately judged by insights and standards that transcend temporal, national or political interests. Whatever “made” Norman Levine, it was not the totality of Canada, but only that fraction of Canadian experience which bound him to a literary tradition that was stateless.1
Nevertheless, Canadian writers and other intellectuals have been amongst the most articulate in insisting that national institutions be created and maintained at public expense to allow Canadian writers and scientists to undertake their work and make it available. Indeed, for people who champion the “free spirit” so loudly, writers can be as hard-boiled and opportunistic where their own vested interests are concerned as the Canadian Association of Manufacturers. Wisely or unwisely, Canadian intellectuals are peculiarly indifferent to the totalitarian models where subsidized science and subsidized art serve national goals. For cold shivers down the spine, try reading the Massey Report through the eyes of an Arthur Koestler.

If Canadian writers are aware of the dangers, they have not said so. Instead they have adopted, in some version or other, a national ideology aimed at keeping institutions like the Canada Council, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation and the National Film Board alive. Considering how little writers have to gain from the C.B.C. or the N.F.B., both of which use writers but are not writers’ media, it would seem that their enthusiasm for these institutions rests on the recognition that they are important symbols, representing a legitimate claim on public moneys and public attention for cultural activity. The longer such institutions survive, the stronger the sanction. Hence serious writers, many of whom have never made a nickel out of the C.B.C. or N.F.B., automatically and instinctively support these and similar government institutions. No serious Canadian poet or novelist wants to see them abandoned. Least of all young writers.

Young writers in Canada are young people. They have an aptitude for creative writing, the ambition to make writing a lifelong vocation, and enough confidence in themselves to believe that they can overcome the obstacles in their way. Unlike their counterparts in painting or music, they are expected to develop their craft by themselves through trial and error. Except for the occasional college creative writing course or summer workshop, there is almost nothing that corresponds to the training which artists and musicians get through art or music schools. Instead of going to London to study with Eliot, as a young composer might go to Paris to study with Boulanger, the fledgling writer is left on his own, and he is apt to drift towards San Francisco or New York, wherever the avant-garde are nesting at the moment. What he acquires is a self-image, a style of life, membership in a sympathetic in-group, and a sense of solidarity, all of which add to his assurance but not necessarily to his skill as a writer. Indeed, if his defects as a writer happen to be shared by the group, they may be reinforced through repetition and approval. At least, says Archibald MacLeish, in a University with its library, there
is a wider range of literary models for the young writer to examine. Still the idea persists, not just in Canada, that writers are born, not made. The public believes this Wunderkind myth, writers cherish it, and critics sustain it.

As long as young writers find themselves in what amounts to an institutional vacuum, as long as they are not, like medical students, conscious of becoming a part of a professional group, as long as there is no systematic training that goes with a career line, they are drawn in varying degrees toward institutions that are related but not identical with their interests. Three, in particular, impinge upon the young writer: the University, the social movement, and the mass media. One way of comparing the position of young writers in different countries is to examine the relative strengths of these institutions and the different ways in which they compete for the writer. The social movement, for example, does not have the significance it did during the 1930s in Canada or elsewhere; as an alternative then it is not weighted as strongly as the other two. At the same time in Canada where universities, generally, and graduate schools in particular, are not as extensive as in the United States, the gravitational pull of the university may be less than that of the mass media. In any case, the university, the social movement, and the mass media are three patterns towards which the young writer is drawn; each has its own organization and own system of notation.

As a consumer, he is familiar with them all. The choices they represent may, by the time he is an adult, be so internalized as to make for a genuine psychological conflict, a fact which only complicates his life further. To be a writer-scholar, like Lionel Trilling; a writer-essayist, like James Baldwin; a writer-reporter, like John Hersey — to be these and at the same time a writers' writer like Proust, Pound or Joyce and, closer to home, Malcolm Lowry or Ethel Wilson, is a fantasy that would paralyze almost anyone. Yet it is one which the young writer in our society can scarcely avoid.

Apart from the psychological pressures which these non-literary institutions present, they also present different modes of creative expression. Each has its own definition of reality, its own manual of style, its own linguistic conventions, and its own standards for measuring achievement. Although there are important functional differences among them, they are alike in the sense that none is primarily an art form, and all are, at some point, hostile to art. From this point of view, Time magazine and Henry Luce are no different from Harvard and the chairmen of English departments, or the N.A.A.C.P. and Martin Luther King, the difference being only a matter of prestige or moral grandeur.

The mass media, then, form one of several non-literary alternatives available
to the writer and especially attractive to young writers at the beginning of their careers. Once this point is grasped, it becomes clear that dichotomies between “highbrow” and “lowbrow” culture or other distinctions of a similar nature, distinctions which implicitly assume that the major choice a writer must make is between fidelity to himself as a writer and “selling out” to the mass media, are both misleading and mischievous. Such distinctions obscure the fact that the writer must choose among many reference groups, between the literary culture and the cultures of scholarship, social action and journalism.

What are these alternatives, and how do they operate with respect to literature and the writer? Briefly, the University is the atmosphere conducive to specialized and analytic treatment of subject matter whether it is in the sciences or the humanities. Its language and literature are the learned article in the learned journal intended for learned audiences but adapted sometimes for wider consumption, the textbook, and still wider, the scholarly book on the open market, published by a university or a commercial press. When scholars talk about editors and publishers, they sound just like poets, and the young poet turned academic may find his publication problems just as acute as they were before. American scholars are perhaps slightly better off in this respect than Canadians but not necessarily better off than American poets, and their cri de coeur is the same. Yet, despite this situation, the university offers a steady income from teaching, and the fascination of research.

In contrast with the campus and its analytic didactic bias, the social movement brings the young writer face-to-face with the realities of social injustice, the camaraderie of political actors, and the engaged excitement of social action. If the specialization of scholarship offers young people a sense of authority of which they are otherwise deprived, the ideology and ethos of the social movement offer them a sense of purpose. There is even a certain celebrity and fame attached to Aldermaston and Washington marches. And it is not necessary for a writer to belong to a social movement to identify with it.

Here, too, there is an ancient and well-regarded literary form: the social essay with its analysis and criticism of the status quo which may extend toward academia in the social analyses of literature. In the heydeys of the thirties and forties, its learned journals were the “little mags” where writers were not so much “discovered” as “enlisted”, a distinction which is apt to be blurred when art and politics are part of the same revolutionary force (as they were in the thirties) but becomes clearer in retrospect and is especially vivid when one compares the
current crop of off-beat "little mags". *Dissent* is not interested in discovering writers; *Tamarack Review* is not interested in enlisting them.

The third orientation is journalism represented institutionally by the mass media. Journalism is a term writers don't like any more than they like the terms "scholarship" and "social tract". But it is a distinct type of literature which emphasizes immediacy, information, and interpretation. It overlaps a literary tradition of naturalism, but is as different from it as Walter Lippman is from the professor of Modern American History. Like any other literary form, journalism is a discipline; its trials are rarely compensated for by the legendary salaries paid to Hollywood and TV writers or the narcissistic thrill of a large audience. When it is well done, it is its own reward. A Pulitzer Prize, a Nieman Fellowship have the same meaning to a journalist as a Governor-General's Award or a Nobel Prize do to a novelist or poet, scientist or historian.

Later I want to come back to the mass media in Canada, but here there are a number of points I want to bring out. First, in the absence of any systematic training for young writers and in the absence of any established or stable literary community, there is almost no way for a young writer to develop into a writers' writer. The mass media cannot be blamed for this situation or for exploiting it. If the media are blamed, then the university or social movement is equally guilty.

Second, the major impact of the mass media on writers is like that of the University and the social movement, to draw off from the large pool of creative talent many who, for one reason or another might have or should have, turned elsewhere anyway. Writers refuse to believe this. Too often the picture they carry in their minds is the one Norman Levine draws when, more in sorrow than in anger, he tells of meeting up with an old friend and former classmate. "He had joined the C.B.C., had put on weight, married, three children, a small house in a suburb... I asked him about his poetry. He had written free-verse poems as an undergraduate which were published in the university's literary magazine. 'I don't even read poetry today,' he said quietly." The impression given is that this was (a) an involuntary choice and (b) a loss to modern poetry. Yet it could equally well have been a voluntary choice, having more to do with self-discovery than with mortgages, hunger, and dependents. If so, he is not the first nor will he be the last undergraduate writer of free verse who found the C.B.C. more compatible with his talents than the coast of Cornwall.

No screening process is perfect. And some are more imperfect than others. Economic stratification operates selectively in a way that never has and never will correspond to the distribution of writing talent in the population which,
until proved otherwise, we assume to be random. In addition to an economic variable, there is a motivational one that will always make for some discrepancy between those who could be writers and those who become writers. Here, too, the mass media may pick up some and lose others; that is, people who simply "like (or dislike) the life" in the mass media more than life in the milieu of belles lettres. And this process works in the same way for the other institutions.

In contrasting the three orientations — university, social movement, mass media — their particular properties are revealed. More in theory than reality, for in reality they overlap, changing in response to the larger environment and in response to each other. Historically, however, the unification was much greater in the nineteenth century than it is today where the three have become more compartmentalized.

The trend toward functional specialization is not historically inevitable, nor is it necessarily "progress". It can be looked upon as a lateral development or a regressive one. But it is a change, a shift that one sees throughout modern social structure. In Canada it is not advanced as far as in the United States and it may never go that far. Writers, however, have been slow to recognize its implications for themselves.

Broadly speaking, literature has become a specialization; the writer is relieved of the necessity of combining literature with something else, and he is further, enjoined from doing so. He is freer than ever before to experiment with literary forms without being made to feel he is abusing good education, intelligence, talent and sensitivity for nothing more significant than playing with words. Thus the modern writer has a freedom. It may turn out to be an empty one. In some ways the modern writer is like the modern parent who is told by school authorities, "Don't teach your child to read; that is our job for which we are professionally trained. Yours is to provide the child with psychological security." — as if psychological security was not inextricably bound up with the growth of such key skills as reading! And the writer, like the modern parent, may feel that he is being pushed out to left field. Nevertheless, the writer now has the freedom to be a writers' writer, to do what he is uniquely qualified to do, to go wherever his sensibilities lead him. Conversely, he is required to define his role functionally.
As a start we can look at the writer in occupational terms. What does he tell the census enumerator? Some writers do nothing else but write. If writing is not the main source of their income, it is the main demand on their time. At the other extreme are writers like Frank Scott in this country or the late William Carlos Williams in the United States, who combine two highly exacting professions in a way that makes it impossible to differentiate vocation from avocation. Many writers are forced by economic necessity to lead a double life, but few thrive on it, and there is a hard core who argue that it is the lesser of two evils to sell shoes for a living than to write for the mass media.

All of these differences are interesting, but like the endless debates over whether or not a writer should marry, they do not advance the cause of theory. A more serious problem is the tendency for writers to gloss over their occupational differences under the term "amateur". Whatever meaning the term "amateur" had in the nineteenth century, it has come to mean in the twentieth century something close to a " dilettante" or a "quack", engaged either in innocent dabbling or malpractice. (Even among doctors and lawyers it is customary to differentiate between a licensed professional who engages in unethical practices and the layman who practices medicine or law without the requisite training and qualifying examinations). It seems, therefore, distressing to find A. J. M. Smith at the 1955 Writers' Conference at Queens University talking about the poet as "amateur".

Smith meant no disrespect to his colleagues; no one knows better than he how hard poets work and how dedicated they are to perfection. But I suspect he was thinking of the poet as a counterforce to the depersonalization of specialization, much as one thinks of the general practitioner or family doctor as contrasted with the impersonal specialist. I think he had in mind, also, the fact that it is in one's least self-conscious moments that the creative sparks catch. These are problems confronting any professional group, but they are not resolved by avoiding the term professional.

Specialization has another meaning. When a complex process is broken down into simple operations and a worker devotes his time to only one of these operations, as in assembly-line production, he is acting as a specialist. Whatever other skills he has are extraneous, and he has little or no responsibility. He does not initiate anything, plan anything, and the product or that part of it which he produces does not bear his personal imprint. These are working conditions which nourish a deep and bitter resentment, not to mention escapist and delinquent
fantasies, whether it is among automobile workers in Detroit or among writers in Hollywood.

Canada is neither Hollywood nor Detroit. For reasons which I shall indicate later, the mass media here are not organized along the lines of mass production. Some of the elements of mass production are present. What, then, is the distinction between the writers' writer and the media writer?

In the sciences a distinction is made between the pure and applied scientist. Crude, unsatisfactory and sometimes misleading, it nevertheless provides a basis for analyzing writers along a continuum and analyzing literature in terms of function. A further distinction in the sciences is between the creative scientist — pure or applied — and the technician whose work is necessary but highly routinized and built around "means" rather than any active participation in or critical evaluation of "ends". Using this model, the media writer can be compared to the applied scientist working close to reality, reconstructing it imaginatively, collaborating with other scientists while at the same time prick ing the rigidities and abstractions of the pure scientist. Within this framework, he may be a "hack" or he may achieve a creative distinction. But the literary process, like the scientific one, requires that the pure and applied scientist act as each other's conscience, both of them periodically brought to task by the clever technician who, not infrequently, rescues them both and has the last laugh.

As writing becomes a professional specialization some of the pressure to serve as an art form or a forum for the arts will be taken off the mass media. Everyone agrees that the media have a responsibility to literature; no one has ever defined it clearly. What policies the media have are erratic, arbitrary, expedient, ad hoc. One season there will be a big run on reviews and literary criticism; then it is gossip about writers, interviews with writers, discussions of the writing process; at still other times the emphasis is on the presentation of works: "original", "controversial", "folk", "classical", anything the editors think will "go".

Whatever the responsibility of the media may be, it is no greater to the arts than to science, no greater to science than to social and political analysis. In the past these varied demands competed against each other with the not too surprising result that harassed executives seized on any device that would give them a
rational basis for decision. Audience research — Nielsen ratings, readership surveys, polls or other measures of audience response and interest — have served this need. There is scarcely any difference here between public and private ownership or between the Canadian media and the mass media in the United States. As in all modern bureaucracies, rationalized procedures for making decisions replace hunch, prejudice, and intuition. Until it is recognized that the function of the media is to provide a coherent integration of the insights coming from various specialized disciplines, this situation is not likely to alter.6

Who owns and controls the media is not entirely irrelevant. In the case of public ownership, the policy of the media with respect to literature has been to lean toward a concept of “adult education”, using this term broadly to include both formal instruction and other treatments of literature intended to raise cultural levels, encourage writers, and stimulate critical discussion. In the case of private ownership the policy has been toward “entertainment”, ranging from the most trivial kind of escapism to highly sophisticated drama, fiction, or poetry. Neither education nor entertainment, however, are necessarily communication. At best, these terms conceal the lack of sustained rational planning; at worst, they justify the transfer of control to groups outside of the media, advertising agencies, teachers’ organizations, or other similar lobbies. The media serve as brokers, technical advisers, adapters, with everyone dissatisfied. Efforts by Marshall McLuhan and others to study the way in which the technology of the media structures perception put the cart before the horse, but they reflect the growing awareness that communication is a different process from learning. It is not the technology of the media that is so radical; rather, it is the transformation of our social structure from rural to urban, sacred to secular, class to mass, changes which tend to isolate the individual and fragment experience. These and other changes have created a need for communication, but the media cannot pursue this objective if they are continually saddled by criteria appropriate to art or other symbolic systems.

FORM FOLLOWS FUNCTION, as they say in architecture. Where the media are geared to “entertainment”, providing consumer goods for a consumer society, the system of production tends to be a form of mass production, as in most consumer goods industries. Where the media are geared to adult edu-
cation, they have, like our schools, followed the organizational patterns of a craft industry, resting on a base of semi-skilled or skilled workers most of whom can, like the custom tailor, perform many functions. The uniqueness of the Canadian media lies in the fact that their volume of output is low. Even then we have, as the O'Leary report demonstrated, a hard time making it pay. So, despite the fact that we have more private than public ownership in the media, the ethos is that of public ownership, developed most fully in the C.B.C.; the typical writer-media relationship is a craft relationship.

More specifically, the free-lance writer in Canada is neither a small businessman-entrepreneur nor a sub-contractor in a large mass production operation. He is not a writer-owner nor is he the anonymous wage-earner who carries on the comic strip after the original writer has departed or the film script after the original writer has been fired. There are some Canadian media writers who are entrepreneurs or sub-contractors, and like such writers in the United States their contract negotiations with the media are primarily concerned with the price, economic risk, profit and other aspects of the economics of the relationship. Their autonomy as writers is not what is at stake.

For better or for worse, for richer or for poorer, the Canadian free-lance writer (or the staff writer) maintains an autonomy and is paid for a service. On the one hand, we do not have the spectacle of distinguished writers writing for "girlie" magazines, and, in effect, permitting their names and personalities to be used by these marginal periodicals to get around postal regulations. On the other hand, we do not have the phenomenon of writers whose identity merges with that of the medium — "the New Yorker writer", "the New York Times book reviewer". Readers may prefer the indiscriminate combination of pornography and an article by Mailer; they may prefer to subscribe to a paper or magazine where there is a familiar style that is the same throughout the year. Nor is there any simple or direct relationship between the quality of the product and the status of the writer. Not all hand-made Swiss watches run well.

Looking at the content of the media, Canadian or American, one sees that only a small part of it is fiction. And what fiction does appear is of the mass produced type. Stories and plays often have a Canadian setting, but this is simply different packaging of a standardized product. The bulk of media content is a fictionalized presentation of non-fiction material, ranging from the documentary or feature piece to the news sob story based on "real" case histories. Fiction writers are used on these non-fiction assignments.

Two recent examples of media writing by creative writers come to mind. The
first are the articles Mordecai Richler did for Maclean's on Israel. Richler's trip to Israel was, I assume, inspired by James Baldwin's tour of Africa. Both Baldwin and Richler are fiction writers; both are members of minority groups with a history of persecution and discrimination; both were returning to a "homeland"; and both were looking at new countries where their own ethnic group was at the centre of power. Baldwin apparently found this experience such a challenge to his ambivalences as an American Negro that he was not able to write anything. Richler turned out another chapter in The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz, an entertaining tour de force, more interesting to people interested in Richler than to people interested in Israel.

The second example is Morley Callaghan's That Summer in Paris which was not written on assignment but which was serialized by Maclean's and read on the C.B.C's afternoon show, "Trans-Canada Matinee". On the surface, the book is part of a writer's autobiography, an important document to anyone connected with modern literature. But it was also a story of a Canadian who brought to Europe those qualities of innocence, candour, and humility (but nobody's fool) that are Canadian. Still more, it was the archetypal nightmare of all young men: to wake up and find yourself in a land of giants and forced through a terrible set of misunderstandings to fight one of them. Any one of these themes by itself would have been soap opera. In combination, however, they gave the story a richness and truth which any housewife who heard it broadcast, any businessman who read it in his doctor's office or any intellectual who bought the book instantly recognized.

Both examples are media writing, though one was assigned and the other was undertaken independently. Their success owes as much to a tradition of media writing as it does to an older literary tradition of "naturalism"; it owes more to the tradition of media writing, with all its abuses, than it does to the newer literary traditions, such as the French anti-novel. And both suggest that the limitation of using creative writers of the stature of Richler or Callaghan is that they inevitably turn out something highly personal.

Writers like Richler or Callaghan are a luxury for the media. They do not write often enough, they are unreliable as far as deadlines are concerned and they are expensive. Thus the fictionalized treatment of non-fictional material is largely in the hands of run-of-the mill craftsmen. The weakness here is of another sort. They cannot meet either a large diffuse demand or a small prestige demand. With regard to the latter, nothing is more irritating than the writer (or interviewer) who does not know enough about the subject to ask pertinent
questions or to summarize the material; nothing more infuriating than when this writer adds insult to injury by offering his own opinion or his own evaluation of the material. Despite the good intentions of the writer, what emerges is an earnest but naïve or facetious undergraduate essay.

In short, the limitations of the craft tradition are produced by the increasing subtlety and complexity of knowledge which the craft writer who is not an expert cannot grasp, and the exhaustion or redundancy of themes which the craft writer could handle.

One can only speculate on the future. Will the Canadian media continue as a system of craft production, establishing craft relations with writers who make themselves available? Will Canadian writers continue a “naturalist” tradition of writing which lends itself to the media? Based on the analysis suggested here, the answer is negative. Our more ambitious writers will be exploring new literary forms which, if nothing else, will set them apart. They may call themselves “amateurs”, but they are going to probe the atmosphere just as surely as any scientist, for the same reasons, and with as little concern as any scientist over whether the public understands their jargon. They may discover nothing new about human experience that they could not have found in the more conventional forms. Eventually, they may return to literature which combines art with knowledge, art with social judgment, art with journalism. But the young writers are not likely to ignore the freedom available to them due largely to the specialization of other disciplines.

As for the media, they are beginning to re-evaluate their function, whether it was education or entertainment. In moving toward a concept of “communication” they will feel less and less obligation to writers, individually or as a group, and more and more to literature. It will provide one source of insight to be placed beside those of other intellectual disciplines. This approach will call for a much greater degree of depth, knowledge, education and sophistication than editors have needed in the past. Nothing less is required than the ability to grasp thematic uniformities and differences among the various specializations, the ability to see these in a still larger historical perspective, and the imaginative skill to transform the pattern into units, print or audio-visual, that are readily understood. The media will become conceptually oriented rather than person or event oriented as journalism was in the past. To the extent that themes are not rooted in any particular locale or to the extent that they are wider than any one nation, the nationalism of the media will become subordinate. Writers will still be needed by the media, but their competence will be not in their craft as writers but in
their intelligence, their ability to programme the computers and read the dials, to relate local experience to broader generalizations. Thus “reporting” becomes part of a critical as well as a more broadly creative experience.