

COLLOQUIAL STYLE AND THE TORY MODE

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The modern mind insists on having the process of standardization (in 'prestige forms' of speech) take the form of a democratic rather than an aristocratic process. — EDWARD SAPIR

IN CANADA, AS IN THE UNITED STATES, writers have had to reconcile the claims of inherited European tradition and North American experience. In both countries the earliest attempts at fiction imitated modes popular in the parent country, and either totally ignored the native setting or unsatisfactorily tried to fit North American materials within existing European literary conventions. Gradually, through successive stages of historical romance, local colour fiction, and fiction with a social purpose, the North American scene was rendered habitable for the literary artist. In the process, one of the most striking accomplishments of American fiction was the development of a tone, based on the rhythms of vernacular speech, which was recognizably different from the dominant tone of British fiction.

Until quite recently, this tone has appeared with relative infrequency in Canadian fiction. Instead of wholeheartedly following the American example, Canada has developed a linguistic split personality, which Stephen Leacock described in 1944 by saying that Canadians "use English for literature, Scots for sermons, and American for conversation."¹ Morley Callaghan, and the few other aggressively colloquial Canadian writers — Hugh Garner, for example, and more recently Mordecai Richler — have always been stylistic odd-men-out in Canadian letters. The stylistic norm in Canadian fiction has been closer to the manner which has been called the "Tory mode."² This term designates a style marked by a high incidence of slightly old-fashioned syntactic habits. Its tone is formal and dignified, touched occasionally by pedantry or stuffiness.

On strictly linguistic grounds, the stylistic conservatism of Canadian fiction is somewhat unexpected. A considerable body of linguistic research confirms the strong resemblance we would expect to find between the English spoken in Canada and that spoken in the northern United States. In *Speaking Canadian English*, Mark M. Orkin points out:

the greater part of English-speaking Canada east of the Great Lakes was not in the first instance settled by Englishmen at all, but by Americans. The United Empire Loyalists were our Founding Fathers, and the language which they brought with them was that of the inhabitants of eighteenth-century New York and Pennsylvania, many of whose distinctive words may to this day be found embedded in our daily speech.³

Moreover, as Orkin adds: "The pronounced 'American' cast of much of the English spoken in Western Canada is attributable to the fact that the English-speaking West was settled almost entirely from Eastern Canada and the United States."⁴

However, Canadian literary style has not simply followed the country's prevalent speech pattern. Although at the popular level Canada is dominated by American influences, Canada's educated culture has often deliberately turned away from the United States and instead looked towards Britain. Through the deliberate policies of its educational institutions and through the example of the CBC, Canada has long resisted standardizing the "prestige forms" of speech in the direction of the language of the masses. Orkin is able to assert: "That part of Canadian education which concerns itself with syntax, grammar, and spelling has for a hundred years and more been based exclusively on British models."⁵

A story told by Morley Callaghan helps to illustrate the antagonism of the Canadian educational system to the colloquial style. The story dates from Callaghan's days as a student at the University of Toronto, when he was just starting his career as a writer:

By this time I had become aware that the language in which I wanted to write, a North American language which I lived by, had rhythms and nuances and twists and turns quite alien to English speech. When I showed some of my first stories to academic men highly trained in English literature, I could see them turning up their noses. "A failure of language," one said to me; and feeling encouraged I said, "No, a failure on your part to understand the language." I had decided that language of feeling and perception, and even direct observation had to be the language of the people I wrote about, who did not belong in an English social structure at all.⁶

The professor equates literary language with a cultivated and genteel style; for him, literature proclaims its superiority to everyday life through its contrived style. On the other hand, in Callaghan's lexicon "literature" is used as a pejorative term; he insists, "I wanted to set it down so directly that it wouldn't feel or look like literature."⁷ We might say that the professor has an aristocratic conception of style; whereas Callaghan sets himself the populist goal of transcribing the life around him in everyday language.

The rise of the colloquial style in American fiction is sensitively chronicled by Richard Bridgman in *The Colloquial Style in America*. Bridgman describes how the style of modern American fiction has been shaped by such varied influences

as dialect humour, newspaper style, and the experiments of Gertrude Stein. Throughout most of the nineteenth century, vernacular speech was confined to the periphery of literature, to the speech of lower class characters and juveniles. Starting from this limited power base, however, vernacular speech gradually took over the whole of the narrative, as it does in *Huckleberry Finn*. In the years immediately following World War One, many writers collaborated in the process which made the colloquial style a supple and precise instrument for literary expression. Bridgman particularly singles out the work of Ernest Hemingway as the culmination of this process:

If one asks once more how Hemingway's prose and the prose of the twentieth century differs from that of Hawthorne and his century, the briefest answer would argue the greater verbal simplicity of the modern style. Long words are eliminated or infrequently used, and then as deliberate contrasts. The sentences themselves are shorter. What was hinged and stapled by semicolons in the earlier prose is broken up into a series of declarative sentences in the later. Fewer details are provided, and those offered are precise and concrete. References to a cultural and historical past are stripped away, and the haze of emotive words is dispelled. Primary colors are accented. The immediate material world claims all the reader's attention. The result is a sharp, hard focus. Hemingway's prose is not the ultimate prose by any means, but its lean, artful sufficiency based upon a vernacular diction and a colloquial manner had to be achieved before it could effloresce into more intricate structures.⁸

Bridgman's account of American fiction does not fit the development of fiction in Canada, where the conservative temperament has found an outlet even at the level of prose style. According to Bridgman, the three main factors shaping the colloquial style in American fiction were "romantic individualism, nationalistic pride, and practical necessity."⁹ None of these forces has been a dominant influence in shaping Canadian literature. For much of its history, Canada was made up of very small settlements surrounded by very large tracts of wilderness. This situation encouraged a conservative, inward-looking attitude, which Northrop Frye has dubbed the "garrison mentality."¹⁰ Moreover, the Canadian West was opened to settlement much later than the American West, and its development was to a considerable extent managed by the government. As a result, the mythic paradigm for Canadian westward expansion is the collective national enterprise celebrated in E. J. Pratt's *Towards the Last Spike*, not a version of the frontier individualism in, say, Cooper's *Leatherstocking* novels. Canada's ambiguous political status — although conceiving of itself as a nation, Canada was technically a colony until well into the twentieth century — did not encourage nationalistic boasting. Certainly Canadians have never been noted for the "ring-tailed roaring" found in so much of the American folk humour which forms one of the main tributary streams of the colloquial style. And American pragmatism has never received official sanction from most Canadian arbiters of intellectual

probity and artistic taste. Ineed, from time to time certain Canadians have even thought of themselves as custodians of a higher standard of political morality and cultural purity than that prevalent in the United States: a Tory leavening in the democratic lump of North American society.

TO ILLUSTRATE MY ARGUMENT I can adduce the work done by a group of writers who came to maturity during the period between the two Great Wars: Morley Callaghan, Hugh MacLennan, Ernest Buckler, Sinclair Ross, Robertson Davies, and W. O. Mitchell. This generation of Canadian authors grew up in a country that was more and more coming to be dominated by urban centres and their values. Increasing urbanization also meant greater Americanization, for the urban centres to which Canadians were attracted resembled American rather than European cities. We might well expect this generation of writers to be noticeably influenced by the colloquial style which was coming to dominate American writing. Actually, it is surprising how seldom the American influence took hold.

In the first place, by the time it became the dominant mode in American fiction, the colloquial style was basically an urban rather than a rural style. It reflected the ragged, speeded-up, materialistic life of the city. Its slang was no longer the creation of an advancing western frontier, but the expression of an urban ethos. This urban coloration may explain why Buckler, Ross, and Mitchell — who locate their stories primarily within rural settings — do not adopt the colloquial style as their primary vehicle. Instead they employ a controlled and cultured language, which conspicuously marks them as educated men. Thus, although Buckler, Ross, and Mitchell often create characters who speak in an uneducated manner, none of these writers habitually commits his own entirely to vernacular rhythms. Buckler's prose is noted — if not notorious — for its highly wrought syntax and imagery. Ross's *As for Me and My House* possesses a bleak eloquence; Mrs. Bentley's diary is filled with prose counterparts to the Wasteland imagery dominating much early Modernist poetry. In the humorous stories of *Jake and the Kid* W. O. Mitchell does give over the narration to a colloquial speaker. But *Jake and the Kid* falls within the special province of humour, where vernacular idiom has long been a recognized device. In his manifestly "serious" novels Mitchell embeds the informal speech of his characters in a matrix of his own more conventionally literary prose:

Here was the least common denominator of nature, the skeleton requirements simply, of land and sky — Saskatchewan prairie. It lay wide around the town, stretching tan to the far line of the sky, shimmering under the June sun and waiting for the unfailing visitation of wind, gentle at first, barely stroking the

long grasses and giving them life; later, a long hot gusting that would lift the black topsoil and pile it in barrow pits along the roads, or in deep banks against the fences.

Over the prairie, cattle stood listless beside the dried-up slough beds which held no water for them. Where the snow-white of alkali edged the course of the river, a thin trickle of water made its way toward the town low upon the horizon. Silver willow, heavy with dust, grew along the riverbanks, perfuming the air with its honey smell.

Callaghan, MacLennan, and Davies are best-known as chroniclers of life in middle-sized or large urban centres. The colloquial style might therefore seem to be their natural medium. However, only in Callaghan's fiction does the colloquial style pervade the narration as well as the dialogue. In discussions of Callaghan's style, Ernest Hemingway is traditionally a central figure. This emphasis is somewhat misleading. Callaghan's debt to Hemingway has been stressed to such an extent that his indebtedness to other American writers, such as Sherwood Anderson, has never been adequately explored. Nonetheless, Hemingway is inevitably a touchstone in any discussion of modern prose style. In fact, it is useful to examine MacLennan's and Davies's conceptions of style in relation to the famous Hemingway manner. The key issue, however, is not the extent to which MacLennan and Davies have been influenced by the Hemingway style, but rather the reasons why they have both rejected Hemingway's idiom as a suitable model for their own fiction.

The pronounced resistance to the vernacular evident in the fiction of MacLennan and Davies is entirely consistent with attitudes these men have expressed elsewhere. In contrast to Callaghan, who has acknowledged the influence of American writers and American speech on his style, MacLennan and Davies have repeatedly announced their preference for British rather than American literary models. Both men were strongly marked by sojourns in England pursuing post-graduate education. Davies, especially, has shown himself to be much more familiar with, and sympathetic to, British writing than American writing. Thus, adherence to the Tory mode is part of a consistent literary ideology, a coherent set of ideas concerning the nature of the novel and the function of style in literature. In fact, the comments on style that have been offered by MacLennan and Davies constitute the most complete apology yet written for the Tory mode in Canadian fiction.

MacLennan's attitude to the Hemingway style is expressed in an essay titled "Homage to Hemingway."¹¹ MacLennan's central argument is that Hemingway's gifts were those of a stylist rather than a story-teller: "As a prose writer he is superb; as a novelist he must be regarded as little better than second-rate." Hemingway's prose has the "ability to move us and expand our perceptions." Yet the style also has severe limitations.

[Hemingway] dare not use characters who are thoughtful men, for if he did they would ruin the bare perfection of his style by speaking in a dialogue full of abstract words and by abstaining from doing many of the things a Hemingway character must do in order to give the Hemingway style its full magical effect.

Therefore, MacLennan argues, Hemingway cannot create self-consciously reflective and introspective characters: he cannot cast an intellectual as a major protagonist:

Rational men discuss their own neuroses, they are interested in science, they become involved in a multitude of activities for which the Hemingway style lacks an adequate vocabulary. . . . In short, their minds, their ambitions, their awareness of themselves as coherent, complex personalities involved in a mundane existence make them entirely unsuitable as catalysts for Hemingway.

And MacLennan adds, clearly intending to identify a serious omission in Hemingway's outlook: "Such men are even apt to wonder at times how they can save their souls."

This is not the place to discuss MacLennan's misreading of Hemingway, whose male protagonists are, almost to a man, seeking some form of personal salvation. For my purposes, what is important is MacLennan's attitude to the Hemingway style. MacLennan draws an analogy between the earlier overhauling of English prose style during the Restoration and Hemingway's stylistic revolution. Hemingway

understood that between him and his reality lay a mountain-range of hackneyed words and phrases which had crushed the evocative powers of the English language. He sought by trial and error for a means of setting down with truth and vividness what his five senses told him, knowing that what they told him was much subtler than anything his predecessors had been able to communicate. And he found it.

However, Hemingway has applied his purified style to a purpose of which MacLennan cannot entirely approve:

What Hemingway has done has been to restore order and clarity to our use of the English language. But unlike the followers of Dryden, who insisted on clarity as a means to accurate thinking, he has used this classic criterion of style to represent accurate feeling. The style of the eighteenth century produced intellectualism: the style of Hemingway has made sensationalism an end in itself.

MacLennan's objection to the Hemingway style is, in the last analysis, a moral one. The Hemingway style is exquisitely crafted, but socially irresponsible.

As a contrasting example of the responsible use of style, MacLennan cites the eighteenth century's creation of "a kind of universal prose style which almost any educated man could acquire." He explains:

It was the clarity and order of this universal style that made possible the political documents of Locke and Jefferson, the literary ease with which Berkeley and Hume

discussed metaphysics, the urbanity brought to journalism by Steele and Addison. . . . This rational approach did more than produce clear writing; it also changed the history of the world, because for a time it eliminated misunderstandings between educated men. It is no accident that the development of stable government in England coincided with the period in which clarity of prose expression reached its apogee, just as it is also no accident that Germans in our century, whose prose is often as formless and confused as Milton's, were unable to protect their minds against the incantations of Adolph Hitler.

In MacLennan's eyes, then, prose style and politics are inseparable. The proper use of prose is as a means for communicating rational and responsible thought.

In presenting his theory of the novel MacLennan also stresses social responsibility. In an address titled "The Future of the Novel as an Art Form," MacLennan proposes psychological and sociological truth-to-life as the novel's primary virtues.¹² And he elsewhere makes a statement which implies that he puts aesthetic merit a distant second when it comes to judging the worth of a work of fiction:

John Galsworthy is no longer popular with the critics and I suppose he is unfamiliar to most readers under forty. Yet I have never been able to believe that any Englishman in the past twenty years has written a novel as true and important as *The Forsyte Saga*. It may be old hat now, but it was good in its time, and if it is not valuable as a work of art, it is indispensable for anyone who wants to know what England was like at the end of the nineteenth century.¹³

MacLennan's praise for Galsworthy is very different from the attitude expressed by Callaghan:

Back in 1929 [sic], just when I was coming out of college, the big name writers in English letters were Wells, Galsworthy, Shaw and Bennett. For Galsworthy I had a complete blind spot. He didn't mean anything to me.¹⁴

THE ATTITUDE TOWARDS STYLE held by Robertson Davies is similar in many respects to MacLennan's outlook. In *A Voice from the Attic* Davies has written at length on books and reading, and it is here that his conception of style can most readily be studied.¹⁵ *A Voice from the Attic* offers a spirited apologia for the educated, genteel style that Davies favours, and himself employs. This style is very much a modern version of the eighteenth-century style MacLennan admires. It is a classical "middle" style, the style of the gifted personal essayist — and Davies and MacLennan both excel in this genre. In other words, stylistically both Davies and MacLennan are committed to an old-fashioned picture of the author as an educated gentleman. Both men want to lead their readers to the intellectual high ground of rational argument and timeless values.

Davies eschews the colloquial style because it is intrinsically modern, aggressively up-to-date. Using such a colloquial style would imply a commitment to

immediate experience in the ever-moving present. But in *A Voice from the Attic* — a book which is specifically intended to offer American readers an alternative perspective on the world of books — Davies imperiously warns against placing too great an emphasis on today's standards:

to do that would be to commit ourselves to what is merely contemporaneous, which is a pitiful slavery, unworthy of anyone who pretends to taste in literature, however humble, or understanding of life, however small.

As this attempt to browbeat his readers shows, Davies is committed not only to traditional values but to explicitness and didacticism in his prose. He believes in a hierarchy of ideas, which it is his duty to promulgate. And there is a corresponding hierarchy of styles, which he likewise must endorse through both precept and practice.

Davies nowhere in *A Voice from the Attic* comments directly on the Hemingway style; but he does refer scathingly to other recent American writers. Paraphrasing the conclusions reached in Edmund Fuller's *Man in Modern Fiction*, Davies disparages

a body of American novelists of whom James Jones and Norman Mailer are but two, who have exalted what he [Fuller] calls "the Yahoo-hero" — a coarse-fibred vulgarian, grotesque in his way of thinking, and immature in his attitude towards life, who lives for the kicks he can get out of it.

Davies decries the picture of the human condition which these writers present; they hold "a notion (concept is too definite a word) of man as a derelict and irresponsible creature existing in a world where no moral values apply." He comments with asperity on the sexual activities of their characters:

It is significant that many of these books are war books, or books about groups of men under stress, in which we find that there is exaggerated sexual activity with women who are described in terms of the uttermost contempt, whereas true sentiment, the real love, is reserved for the "buddy," and is plainly homosexual.

These comments make it plain that the writers about whom Davies is talking belong in the Hemingway tradition.

With few exceptions, modern American fiction is not to Davies's taste. However, the worst sin which American writers have committed is not their treatment of sex but their anti-intellectualism:

Their chief defect seems to be that they are desperately badly educated; potentially powerful intelligences have been given nothing to feed on, and they operate in a society where most people are as deprived as themselves. They and their readers have intellectual and spiritual rickets.

Where MacLennan rebukes Hemingway for mere sensualism, Davies rebukes Hemingway's followers for carrying romantic attitudes to excess: "well-educated

people could not think or write so sentimentally. Sentimentalism is the philosophy of books." Davies is much more approving towards modern British writing. Indeed, he draws the explicit comparison in favour of British fiction. In British fiction, he argues,

there is a tradition of classicism . . . which has never been entirely submerged, and, perhaps more important and significant for the writing of fiction, a classical restraint in the expression of romantic feeling.

For "classicism" in this passage we could equally well read "education"; and Davies would have that education worn on the writer's sleeve.

The stylistic preferences I have examined are not simply theories held in isolation. These ideas find their most important expression in the fiction produced by both men. A close look at a few passages will illustrate the correspondence of theory and practice. For instance, here is how Robertson Davies opens *Fifth Business*:

My lifelong involvement with Mrs Dempster began at 5.58 o'clock p.m. on 27 December 1908, at which time I was ten years and seven months old.

I am able to date the occasion with complete certainty because that afternoon I had been sledding with my lifelong friend and enemy Percy Boy Staunton, and we had quarrelled, because his fine new Christmas sled would not go as fast as my old one. Snow was never heavy in our part of the world, but this Christmas it had been plentiful enough almost to cover the tallest spears of dried grass in the fields; in such snow his sled with its tall runners and foolish steering apparatus was clumsy and apt to stick, whereas my low-slung old affair would almost have slid on grass without snow.

Dunstan is a precise and confident speaker. His diction and syntax mark him as educated, as does the way he generalizes and uses abstractions. For example, he speaks of his "complete certainty" and talks about being "able to date the occasion," when a colloquial speaker would say something like: "I know for certain when it happened."

Just a few pages into the novel we find this account of Dunstan's home village, which is the setting for the early part of the story:

Village life has been so extensively explored by movies and television during recent years that you may shrink from hearing more about it. I shall be as brief as I can, for it is not by piling up detail that I hope to achieve my picture, but by putting the emphasis where I think it belongs.

Once it was the fashion to represent villages as places inhabited by laughable, lovable simpletons, unspotted by the worldliness of city life, though occasionally shrewd in rural concerns. Later it was the popular thing to show villages as rotten with vice, and especially such sexual vice as Krafft-Ebing might have been surprised to uncover in Vienna; incest, sodomy, bestiality, sadism, and masochism were supposed to rage behind the lace curtains and in haylofts, while a rigid piety was professed in the streets. Our village never seemed to me to be like that. It was more varied in what it offered to the observer than people from bigger and

more sophisticated places generally think, and if it had sins and follies and roughnesses, it also had much to show of virtue, dignity, and even of nobility.

Dunstan's education is again evident, both through the reference to Krafft-Ebing and in the catalogue of abstractions which concludes the passage. Dunstan cannot resist generalizing his opinions into universal truths. He deliberately organizes the passage to highlight a thesis: his village offered a wide variety of experience. He is aware of writing on what traditional rhetoric terms a *topos*, a conventional topic previously treated by many other writers. Dunstan is aware of what is new and what is old in his account of village life. He also is open about his intention to instruct his readers. This is not language impersonating lived experience, but language as the medium for an informal lecture. Dunstan the schoolmaster is clearly evident.

A didactic purpose also animates George Stewart, as he introduces himself early in Hugh MacLennan's *The Watch that Ends the Night*:

I have never felt safe. Who of my age could, unless he was stupid? Quite a few people thought me successful, but in my own eyes I was no more successful than the old Greek who pushed boulders up the hill knowing they would tumble down the moment they reached the top. Some people thought me calm, but inside I knew I was not. I have often heard myself described as a "mature" commentator, but I have never seemed mature to myself. The young seem more so because they know nothing of the 1930s. The young have the necessary self-confidence and ignorance to feel mature, and that is why I like them so much better than I like my own generation. Was there ever a crowd like ours? Was there ever a time when so many tried, so pathetically, to feel responsible for all mankind? Was there ever a generation which yearned to belong, so unsuccessfully, to something larger than themselves?

George not only delivers generalizations about society, as Dunstan does; he also turns himself into a generalization: he presents himself as the embodiment of an entire generation. The diction of the passage stresses abstractions; there is a classical reference, which awkwardly tries to appear informal by avoiding the direct naming of Sisyphus. The passage is organized by the skillful management of antithesis. The first half of the paragraph contains three consecutive statements of the contrast between George's "mature" external appearance and his internal insecurity. Thus, George begins by giving us three antitheses which stress his own uncertainty; then he provides the antithesis to himself, when he contrasts his insecurity with the apparent self-assurance of the younger generation. The passage concludes with a series of three rhetorical questions; and throughout there is an effective use of parallel constructions.

Plainly, the colloquial style would be an inappropriate vehicle for the fiction of moral and intellectual instruction which Davies and MacLennan intend to write. The colloquial style is a no-nonsense, pragmatic manner, tending towards informality and even chattiness. It is suited to convey transitory emotions, imme-

diate physical sensations, and spontaneous thoughts. In contrast, the Tory mode is a vehicle for considered reflections. Its tone is formal, educated, and precise. It specializes in elaborated descriptions, rational synthesis, and qualified generalizations. The Tory mode does not capture the mind in motion, but presents the carefully arranged results of prolonged cogitation.

Davies does not feel that a writer should attempt to ingratiate himself with his readers by aping the bumbling verbal ineptitude of the common or the less-than-common man. He strongly disapproves of the efforts made by many well-educated American writers to keep their education from showing in their fiction. Users of the colloquial style frequently give us the mind in undress. Even protagonists with pretensions to the title "intellectual" — think of Bellow's Moses Herzog and Mailer's Stephen Rojack — present themselves as erratic and driven men, not as careful, analytical reasoners. On the other hand, *A Voice from the Attic* is devoted to urging educated readers to cease hiding their intellects under a basket. The intelligent readers whom Davies likes to call the "clerisy" should assert their right to determine standards of good taste. Davies surely believes that writers, too, should cease being ashamed of their intellectual propensities. As he puts it, borrowing a phrasing usually employed in quite another context: "If you are an intellectual, your best course is to relax and enjoy it."

For a writer to hide his intelligence and education leads to a style which is a needless act of linguistic desperation. Davies laments that "Virtuosity, so much admired in some of the other arts, is at present unfashionable in literature." In his most explicit comment on the colloquial style, he scornfully remarks:

Many authors, on the North American continent, write as if they were apprentice blacksmiths making their first horseshoe; the clank of the anvil, the stench of the scorched leather apron, the sparks and the cursing are palpable, and this appeals to those who equate sincerity with sweating ineptitude.

Davies considers such deliberate bluntness a "fake sincerity which springs from clumsy craftsmanship and a shared loutishness between writer and reader."

YET THE COLLOQUIAL STYLE is far from being the limited medium Davies portrays. As a counter-example, here is the opening paragraph of Morley Callaghan's first published story, "A Girl with Ambition":

After leaving public school when she was sixteen Mary Ross worked for two weeks with a cheap chorus at the old La Plaza, quitting when her stepmother heard the girls were a lot of toughs. Mary was a neat clean girl with short fair curls and blue eyes, looking more than her age because she had very good legs, and knew it. She got another job as cashier in the shoe department of Eaton's store, after a row with her father and a slap on the ear from her stepmother.

Certainly the passage is marked by colloquial diction: the chorus girls are "cheap" and are "a lot of toughs"; Mary has a "row" with her father rather than a quarrel; and by way of discipline she receives a distinctly unrefined "slap on the ear." But these phrases are crucial to the passage's effectiveness. In typical colloquial fashion, the passage works by implication. Readers are assumed to share the cultural and linguistic norms of the narrator and his society, so that much can be inferred from Mary's decision to leave school at the minimum age and from her dubious choice of employment. We also draw conclusions from the vulgar level on which family discussions are apparently conducted.

To further illustrate the subtlety of Callaghan's method, let me consider just one sentence:

Mary was a neat clean girl with short fair curls and blue eyes, looking more than her age because she had very good legs, and knew it.

The first half of the sentence is primarily a vehicle for applying five monosyllabic adjectives to Mary. These words present Mary as she appears to others. Considered one at a time, the five adjectives simply describe Mary's physical appearance as conventionally pleasing. But collectively they carry a connotation of innocence. For example, the double adjective "neat clean" — either word alone might have carried the literal meaning — suggests an appearance of careful grooming. Mary is "fair" and has "blue" eyes, both details suggesting innocence. Her "short" hair implies practicality — not the sensual freedom which would be implied by long, loosely-flowing hair. "Girl" in the phrase "neat clean girl" is essentially redundant, for femininity is implicit in Mary's name. The word's function is not semantic but rhythmic; the phrases "neat clean girl" and "short fair curls" are rhythmically parallel, in deliberate contrast with the concluding member of the series, the shorter phrase "blue eyes."

The first half of Callaghan's sentence, then, seems to describe a sensible, wholesome, no-nonsense young lady. However, the second half of the sentence creates quite another impression. Mary's "very good legs" give her a sophistication and even sensuality which alters the reader's assessment. Moreover, the sentence's last three words make it clear that Mary is well aware of the impression she creates; and in all likelihood she deliberately exploits her appearance. The sentence starts with a physical description, dispassionately offered; but it concludes with the narrator quietly reproving Mary's vulgarity and hypocrisy. Mary starts as the girl next door, but she ends as a flirt or worse — perhaps as someone willing to exploit her body to influence men in her favour. The passage gives us a glimpse inside Mary's materialistic, calculating mind, but without describing her thoughts directly. As usual, the colloquial style does its work by indirection and implication.

As a further example of the colloquial style in operation, here is Mordecai Richler's narrator talking, early in *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz*:

To a middle-class stranger, it's true, one street would have seemed as squalid as the next. On each corner a cigar store, a grocery, and a fruit man. Outside staircases everywhere. Winding ones, wooden ones, rusty and risky ones. Here a prized plot of grass splendidly barbered, there a spitefully weedy patch. An endless repetition of precious peeling balconies and waste lots making the occasional gap here and there. But, as the boys knew, each street between St Dominique and Park Avenue represented subtle differences in income. No two cold-water flats were alike. Here was the house where the fabulous Jerry Dingleman was born. A few doors away lived Duddy Ash, who ran for alderman each election on a one-plank platform: provincial speedcops were anti-semites. No two stores were the same, either. Best Fruit gyped on the scales, but Smiley's didn't give credit.

Some of the most obvious surface characteristics of colloquial style are prominent here: contractions and sentence fragments. But the passage's omissions are perhaps as significant as what is actually said. The narrator catalogues physical details of the neighbourhood, but offers a minimum of interpretive comment. The most important general statement is that each street "represented subtle differences in income." However, the narrator does not give a sociological explanation of the gradations in social status that these differences imply. Instead, the reader is left to make inferences for himself. Actually, the thesis underlying the passage is very similar to the thesis underlying Dunstan's account of his village: life in the Jewish ghetto offers more variety than a casual observer would expect. But this thesis is never explicitly stated. As in Callaghan's writing, great reliance is placed on the reader's ability to hear the proper tone and make the correct evaluations.

If the colloquial style can be a rich and subtle literary medium, why do Davies and MacLennan reject it? Part of the answer is implicit in the Richler passage just quoted. Strictly speaking, Richler's narrator is omniscient; but in practice he is not. His viewpoint is limited to the perspective of a ghetto resident. He is an authority on the facts he enumerates, but these facts fall within a limited range of experience. On the other hand, the Tory mode is authoritative and self-confident; it aspires to omniscience. The colloquial style implies a limited viewpoint. Often, the colloquial voice belongs to a first person narrator, speaking within the limitations imposed by human subjectivity. Even when the colloquial style is used in third person narration, the language of everyday life encourages a limitation of thought and experience to the commonplace. But Davies, in particular, does not agree with "the convention (so dear to one school of modern criticism) which demands that a writer should conceal himself, should pretend that he does not exist." The pedagogue in him does not wish to be misunderstood. He is unwilling to allow the scope for private interpretation which characterizes the colloquial style.

Davies and Callaghan are not the whole of Canadian fiction, as the very different practice of Callaghan and Richler demonstrates. But until recently the Tory mode epitomized by Davies and MacLennan has dominated Canadian

fiction. In consequence, modern Canadian fiction has exhibited a dearth of those protagonists Walker Gibson aptly terms "tough talkers."¹⁶ Instead, at least until quite recently, the most memorable characters have been cultivated, reflective, and polished talkers like George Stewart and Dunstan Ramsay.

Today, the state of Canadian fiction has greatly altered from what it was only twenty years ago. A majority of younger writers have adopted some version of the colloquial style. In addition to Richler, obvious examples are Margaret Laurence, Robert Kroetsch, Alice Munro, and Margaret Atwood. Despite the critical industry which is growing up around Robertson Davies's Deptford trilogy, the Tory mode is on the wane. Perhaps, then, it is time to ask whether adherence to the Tory mode has helped or hindered the development of Canadian fiction. Have Canadian writers harmed their work by turning away from one of the primary sources of much of the best imaginative literature produced in North America: vernacular speech?

Certainly, to cavil at the specific accomplishments of the Tory mode would be churlish and illogical. In *Fifth Business* and *The Watch that Ends the Night* the Tory mode splendidly justifies itself. Yet a suspicion may linger that figures such as George Stewart and Dunstan Ramsay, however entertaining they may be, are anachronisms in twentieth-century North American writing. A literature which turns its back on the present is, in the long run, doomed to become overly introverted and precious; eventually, it must become irrelevant. Have Canadian writers barricaded themselves within a kind of garrison style, long after such a course of action was necessary?

Actually, this way of posing the question is too simple. Novels such as *Fifth Business* and *The Watch that Ends the Night* do not simply retreat from the present; rather, they offer critiques of the materialism prevailing in modern society. As used by MacLennan and Davies, the Tory mode is not merely an isolated stylistic quirk, but is a deliberately cultivated alternative to the colloquial style. The Tory mode is the stylistic reflection of a larger ideological commitment to conservative values. The persistence of the Tory mode, not only in MacLennan and Davies but in many other Canadian writers, is part of a continuing effort, on the part of many writers and thinkers, to keep alive in North America a way of life that differs from that pursued by our southern neighbours.

NOTES

- ¹ Stephen Leacock, *How to Write* (London: Bodley Head, 1951; first published 1944), p. 108.
- ² Robert Cluett, "Robertson Davies: The Tory Mode," *Journal of Canadian Studies*, 12, no. 1 (February 1977), 41-46.
- ³ Mark M. Orkin, *Speaking Canadian English: An Informal Account of the English Language in Canada* (Toronto: General, 1970), p. 48.

- ⁴ Orkin, p. 58.
- ⁵ Orkin, p. 42.
- ⁶ Morley Callaghan, "An Ocean Away," in Brandon Conron, ed., *Morley Callaghan* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1976), p. 17. Reprinted from *Times Literary Supplement*, June 4, 1964, 493.
- ⁷ Morley Callaghan, *That Summer in Paris* (London: MacGibbon and Kee, 1963), p. 16.
- ⁸ Richard Bridgman, *The Colloquial Style in America* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1966), pp. 12-13.
- ⁹ Bridgman, p. 41.
- ¹⁰ Northrop Frye, "Conclusion" to Carl F. Klinck, ed., *Literary History of Canada: Canadian Literature in English* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1965), p. 830.
- ¹¹ Hugh MacLennan, "Homage to Hemingway," in *Thirty and Three* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1954), pp. 85-96. All quotations by MacLennan not otherwise identified are from this source.
- ¹² Hugh MacLennan, "The Future of the Novel as an Art Form," in *Scotchman's Return and Other Essays* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1960), pp. 142-58.
- ¹³ Hugh MacLennan, "Youth and the Modern Literature," in *Scotchman's Return*, p. 244.
- ¹⁴ Callaghan, "An Ocean Away," in Conron, p. 19. The date is surely an error. Callaghan graduated from St. Michael's College, University of Toronto, in 1925.
- ¹⁵ Robertson Davies, *A Voice from the Attic* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1960). All quotations by Davies not otherwise identified are from this source, chapters 1, 3, 6, and 8.
- ¹⁶ Walker Gibson, *Tough, Sweet, and Stuffy* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1960).

PASTORALE

Kim Maltman

With a lurch as if from long disuse
 the huge machinery of night starts up again.
 Out of the ground, between the thick black rows of
 shadow soil, the shadow plants
 crawl and beneath their shade the shadow animals,
 the shadow seige of ruts and holes
 overflowing, swarming through the fields
 like great soft beetles.
 What could move the branches of that willow so?
 The wind,
 only the wind.