

MACLENNAN AND YEATS

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HUGH MACLENNAN'S SPHINX evokes images of bewilderment, anarchy, and terror associated with its Classical archetype. Its more recent predecessor is, of course, the "rough beast" of W. B. Yeats's "The Second Coming." MacLennan criticism has explored the Oedipal and ignored the Yeatsian overtones in *Return of the Sphinx*, despite the fact that Gabriel Fleury, an 'oracular' character, quite early in the novel compares Alan Ainslie, MacLennan's protagonist, to the great Irish nationalist. " 'Political nationalism is the last thing he'd ever go out for. He has a curious mystique about the country. He really loves it. If this makes any sense to you, he reminds me of William Butler Yeats.' "

The values espoused by Alan Ainslie, Gabriel Fleury, and to a lesser extent Marielle Jeanotte, Joe Lacombe, and a sadder but wiser Herbert Tarnley — all various *personae* for the author himself — are in fact the very values upon which Yeats based his nationalism. Not only is MacLennan's nationalism very similar to Yeats's, but his articulation of it depends significantly upon his presentation of a socio-political *milieu* roughly similar to that which Yeats knew, and upon his manipulation of 'types' and myths and antitheses that are remarkably Yeatsian.

Despite his flirtation with political agitators and fanatics, Yeats's nationalism was a sane one. It derived from the pithy sayings of and the courage and dignity exemplified in the old Fenian leader, John O'Leary.¹ Its basis was the traditional values of leadership, good breeding, and good sense — all symbolized for Yeats in the aristocracy — and his convictions were intensified by the tragic events of Irish politics over more than half a century. *Return of the Sphinx* makes it quite clear that responsible leadership, good breeding, and good sense are central to MacLennan's nationalism, too; and that he in our own time, as was Yeats in his, is fearful of the anarchy and horror which result when, in a direct echo of Yeats, "the centre cannot hold." MacLennan's motives and methods are likewise similar to Yeats's; a conversation between Tarnley and Fleury illustrates this.

[F:] "If you want the real reason why Alan Ainslie's in politics, I can tell you. He's terrified that unless English Canada wakes up pretty soon, things in this country will drift into civil war."

.....

[T:] "Tell me — am I right in believing that he's trying to use French-Canadian nationalism as a lever to make English Canada do something before it's too late?"

[F:] "Yes, I think that's about right."

MacLennan had, of course, treated national unity and the problem of two cultures before, most notably in *Two Solitudes*, of which he was later to write:

Its genesis came in a dream in which I saw a tall, angular blond man arguing noisily with a stocky, darker man. They were shouting at each other in fury and a voice in the dream said to me, "Don't you see it? They're both deaf."²

The symbolism in a Canadian context is obvious. And so is the problem: how to make both sides act sensibly to effect political unity without civil war and without sacrificing the dignity of minority groups? The answer is that national unity is possible only when two peoples put aside their prejudices (or "race-legends" as MacLennan calls them in *Two Solitudes*) and cherish and promote the best of each culture; when, symbolically, they are distinct individuals while at the same time members of the same family who "protect and touch and greet each other."³ This is the message of *Two Solitudes*, and this is the message that MacLennan would have us hear amidst the darkness of his later novels.

MacLennan attempts to objectify this message in various debates in the novel. For example, Joe Lacombe, R.C.M.P. officer and a representative of what may well be the majority of French Canadians — the "psychological" separatists who genuinely yearn for greater self-determination but within the federation⁴ — puts the issue squarely before his long-time friend, Alan Ainslie:

"suppose we want to work in our own *milieu* — what then? . . . Why can't we be free and clean and proud of ourselves? *Why can't we succeed as French Canadians* and not as imitations of the English and Americans? Why should they be the ones to judge whether we're any good or not? Why can't we judge that ourselves?"

and,

"We want a *patrie*, and for most of us Canada will do fine if the rest of you will ever get around to letting it become a *patrie* for all of us and not just for *les Anglais*. What have we got now? Is it a *patrie* when we can't speak our own language and be understood in it even by the boss?"

As Federal Minister of Cultural Affairs, Ainslie attempts to get Moses Bulstrode, acting Prime Minister, to take remedial and exemplary measures. "If we insist on bilingualism on the recruitment level of the federal civil service, it will be taken as a touchstone in Quebec and everywhere else that we accept that Canada is the home of two cultures and that the majority wishes the minority culture to survive and prosper. If this happens, we will have one of the happiest and most stable nations in the world. It's that, or disintegration." Ainslie reasserts this conviction in a Parliamentary debate: "[Canada] is, and must remain, a single

country . . . it can remain a single country only on this condition — that it be universally accepted that this single country is the home of two different cultures.” MacLennan may have had Yeats’s Senate speeches in mind, or the similarity might be a case of coincidental good sense. In any event, Yeats, speaking in the Irish Senate, on October 17, 1924, had stressed the necessity of tolerance and justice in the effecting of national unity.

“I have no hope of seeing Ireland united in my time, or of seeing Ulster won in my time; but I believe it will be won in the end, and not because we fight it, but because we govern this country well. We can do that . . . by creating a system of culture which will represent the whole of this country and will draw the imagination of the young towards it.”⁵

On June 11 of the next year, during a debate on divorce, Yeats again cautioned:

“If you show that this country, Southern Ireland, is going to be governed by Catholic ideas and by Catholic ideas alone, you will never get the North. . . . You will not get the North if you impose on the minority what the minority considers to be oppressive legislation.”⁶

And for both Yeats and MacLennan the local is but a symptom of the universal. Yeats wrote to John Quin that the Easter Rising “has been a great grief. We have lost the ablest and most fine-natured of our young men. A world seems to have been swept away.”⁷ And in 1936 he confided to Ethel Mannin that he had intended “The Second Coming” to be a warning, and that “every nerve trembles with horror at what is happening in Europe, ‘the ceremony of innocence is drowned.’”⁸ In *Return of the Sphinx*, Ainslie regards Canada as “the psychic centre of the world”; Fleury senses that events in Quebec are a result of “the mysterious emotion” which is “sweeping the world”; and the riot which young Daniel Ainslie participated in is described by Tarnley as “an explosion of mass emotion.” Fleury’s metaphor is akin to Yeats’s more powerful images of anarchy: “the blood-dimmed tide” of “The Second Coming” and “the irrational streams of blood [that] are staining earth” in “The Gyres.” The hysteria Tarnley refers to appears to be the mass mania or collective *hysterica passio*⁹ which Yeats so dreaded. Both the images of violence and the frustrations behind the violence meet in Daniel Ainslie, Alan’s son. His methods are not condonable, but his desire to image what he sees in the streets of Montreal at night comes closest perhaps to epitomizing the universal oppression and political injustice behind the impending anarchy. “The people speaking in broken sentences. Their expressions when you catch them with the truth on their faces.”

HIS AWARENESS OF THE NEED for good government, tolerance, and justice notwithstanding, Alan Ainslie seems curiously naive in his beliefs that the problem in Quebec is not economic but psychological, that

Quebec nationalism can be explained as “a surrogate religion,” and “that all revolutions have neurotic roots.” These apparent over-simplifications gain in merit if we keep in mind two things: first, that they refer to spiritual dissatisfaction and unrest of the kind that Joe Lacombe had mentioned and which engender what Ronald Sutherland terms “psychological Separatism” or “the fourth Separatism”; second, that by “revolutions” MacLennan has in mind disruptions in the evolution of the human psyche. “The only revolutions that matter,” MacLennan has said, “are psychic, somewhere in the human soul,” and that what happened in the 1960’s was “a fantastic break in the human psyche.”¹⁰

During the Parliamentary debate, Ainslie claims that the “world crisis,” of which events in Quebec are but local symptoms, “came when humanity lost faith in man’s ability to improve his own nature. . . .” He continues: “When people no longer can believe in personal immortality, when society at large has abandoned philosophy, many grow mad without knowing why. They crack up. . . .” He maintains that people crave recognition and immortality and that when they no longer believe in good they seek these things in evil. “A senseless crime can be one way of passing into the only kind of immortality this sick epoch understands, and so can the leadership of a senseless revolt — it can go into the records and into the archives.”

Yeats likewise believed that the problem of modern times began with a retreat of humanism. “The mischief began at the end of the seventeenth century when man became passive before a mechanized nature. . . .”¹¹ MacLennan, however, gives a later date: the modern world, he has said, began “at the end of 1914.”¹² In *Return of the Sphinx*, Herbert Tarnley claims “it all started” with World War I; and Gabriel Fleury, reflecting upon the suffering of his wounded father and the impact which that suffering had upon his own psyche, comments: “That was when it all started.” He muses that “What had started then was surely the rebirth of a kind of man who had perished two thousand years ago, a man who knew there was no escape from his own nature into religion or politics or science or even into his own skill.” Fleury’s reference to an epoch which ended “two thousand years ago” points to the end of the Pre-Christian era which Yeats characterized by coldness and objectivity and symbolized by the Sphinx. Fleury’s musing about an unfortunate “rebirth” is clearly reminiscent of Yeats’s prophecy in “The Second Coming” that the “twenty centuries of stony sleep” which had been “vex’d to nightmare by a rocking cradle” were about to come round again.

MacLennan symbolizes this dehumanized, mechanized world in various ways: in Daniel’s affectionate patting of the hood of his powerful car, and in his reckless driving; and in the senseless killing of Alan’s wife, Constance, by a runaway truck. Events in his family, his province, his country, cause Alan to despair:

The time he was living in was too fantastic for anyone to look at squarely in the eye. . . . All the ideas that had guided and inspired [his] life — socialism, educa-

tion, the faith that science and prosperity would improve man's life, even the new psychology which everyone so glibly talked — the best he could say now of any of these hopes was that they had foundered in the ancient ocean of human nature.

In another context MacLennan has written: "For me the Sixties were exhausting, because every cause I valued seemed in retreat."¹³ Yeats, too, had known despair:

this much at any rate is certain — the dream of my early manhood, that a modern nation can return to Unity of Culture, is false; though it may be we can achieve it for some small circle of men and women, and there leave it till the moon bring round its century.¹⁴

But total and permanent despair is alien to Yeats's vision — and to MacLennan's. Like Yeats, MacLennan puts his trust in traditional institutions to preserve and nurture those humanistic instincts which will repel the Beast. For Yeats there was Coole Park, the Swedish court, and Urbino; Alan Ainslie believes in good government; and a chastened Tarnley puts his trust in liberal education. Near the end of the novel we learn that Tarnley's son has committed suicide. In a letter that is distinctly Yeatsian in its comments on modern education and political democracy, Tarnley attributes his son's death to the youth's inability to cope with modern mechanized society. He offers to make Alan warden of a liberal arts college which he hopes to establish as "a refuge [for] dedicated men" who will preserve "at least the seeds of cultivation."

T

HE SIMILARITIES ARE NOT exclusively conceptual. Parallels with Yeats's mythology are evident in the symbolic patterns of MacLennan's novel. George Woodcock has noted that "*Return of the Sphinx* is almost obsessively involved, not merely in the fathers-and-sons pattern of antagonisms, but also in a cross-generational pattern of sexual conjunctions," and has suggested that, in *Daniel*, these patterns symbolize national and generational revolt.¹⁵ Alec Lucas, speculating on the *raison d'être* of MacLennan's love-scenes, states that the Daniel-Marielle affair "sums up on a psychological basis a plot in which a son, measuring swords with his father politically, asserts his deeper and Oedipal antagonism towards him through what both accept as symbolically incestuous when he, Daniel, sleeps with Marielle, a mother surrogate, in his father's bed."¹⁶ Robert Cockburn notes that these "romantic interludes . . . are helpful . . . in giving weight to the thematic context of the novel" even though they do impede the narrative flow. He continues, following Woodcock's lead, to point out Gabriel's role in bridging "with Chantal, through love, the generation gap," and symbolizing "an uprooted and perishing civilization of culture and manners."¹⁷

Accurate as these statements are within their respective contexts, they do not adequately account for the contrasts that exist between the Daniel-Marielle affair

and the love of Chantal and Gabriel. Yet it is precisely in the contrasts which attend these relationships that MacLennan dramatizes and emphasizes a myth which he has repeatedly objectified through the diversity in age, experience, and ethnic origins of his fictional families: namely, that youth and vigour and desire must be tempered with wisdom and discipline and love. This myth figures in all of MacLennan's novels, and a remark by Marcia, in *The Precipice* —

“Father was crude, but . . . I guess his energy was no more use to the Massachusetts blood of Mother's family than a truck running downhill with no brakes”¹⁸

— is clearly seminal to symbols of uncontrolled power in *Return of the Sphinx*. In yet another instance MacLennan has written: “As there is power, so must there be love. Unless civilization achieves this union, there will be no civilization. Unless art is able to record it, there will be no art.”¹⁹ Yeats, too, knew that power without wisdom is bound to be destructive. He objectified this knowledge in “Leda and the Swan,” and issued an emphatic warning in the poem's rhetorical conclusion: “Did she put on his knowledge with his power?”

Contrasts in age, ethnic origin, experience, and emotional response are significant in the “sexual conjunctions” of this novel. Constance, later Ainslie's wife, had given herself at the age of fourteen to a man considerably older than herself. But this did not adversely affect her either psychologically or morally. In fact, she later became “the governor of [Ainslie's] life's engine,” and he, the impulsive, cultured man,²⁰ had been “perfectly safe so long as she was alive.” Constance's youthful experience provides a precedent for the more thematically and dramatically important relationship of Chantal and Gabriel. And the quietude, tenderness, and affection which they share after their love-making, together with Alan's blessing of their impending marriage, suggests a love-relationship which symbolizes energy directed into constructive ways, and which stands in marked contrast to the Daniel-Marielle affair.

Marielle, like Gabriel, represents Old World experience and knowledge. She had been “‘a carefully-reared girl in a cultivated family.’” Her wartime experiences had taught her that there are no moral absolutes. In her, passion is balanced by compassion; and her abhorrence of “‘self-willed ignorance’” is akin to Yeats's abhorrence of “‘intellectual hatred’” in “A Prayer for My Daughter.”

Marielle's seduction of Daniel is no facile escapism sanctioned by some make-love-not-war cliché. Rather, it is her earnest attempt to rid him of his Jansenist inhibitions and to direct his youthful energy and vitality into constructive ways: “‘you are afraid of loving a woman, and if a man fears that, then it is very natural for him to talk and dream about bombs and war.’” She points out to him that in every century there have been those who ruin their lives for political ideas; and, through the story of her father's death and the ‘liberation’ of her countrymen to “candy bars and Coca-Cola,” she cautions him of what Yeats knew only

too well: that political autonomy without culture is valueless, and often vicious.

They make love, and she seems temporarily to have checked his violent impulses. But in a few paragraphs, made the more effective by their juxtaposition with Chantal's tender after-thoughts, Daniel reflects with guilt and horror upon his affair with Marielle. He soon reverts to his "self-willed ignorance," to his belief that revolution is a modern phenomenon and that problems can be solved by violent methods. He had not "put on [her] knowledge with [her] power."

The lessons which Marielle had hoped to teach Daniel confront him again when he searches through old newspapers for information about middle-weight boxer Archie MacNeil, his real grandfather. So fascinated is Daniel with the glimpses of an earlier age which these papers provide that he forgets his original purpose.

There were stories about strikes and lockouts, about Irish Home Rule, about anarchists' bombs, about gun-running into Ulster, and the impact of all this gave him a very strange sensation. It was all dead news and the people looked ridiculous in the clothes they wore, but what was going on then seemed just the same as what was going on now. They all seemed crazy and most of them seemed wicked, and he thought of French Canada during those years when his father was a child, French Canada living quiet and eternal with her faith and her land exiled from all this insanity that had led to the war. . . .

At last he turns to the sports pages. He sees a close resemblance of himself in the photographs of his grandfather, and reads of the tragic failure of that man who had tried to overcome socio-economic disadvantages by physical violence.

The tragedy of his grandfather's life together with the political fanaticism and foolish martyrdom — "all [the] insanity" — of half a century ago fills him with a sense of *déjà vu*. Daniel is shaken. Marielle might have been his salvation:

Marielle — suddenly he craved her. More, he needed to be with her because she would understand how he felt now. She understood how everyone felt. She knew what he needed and incredulously he said aloud, "I think I've fallen in love with her. I don't think I can live without her. She will love me and that will save me."

But before he can go to her, the telephone rings: he lifts the receiver and hears his father's voice rebuking him for his association with Latendresse, a fanatical separatist. The old antagonism flares again: desperate fear gives place to anger, and tenderness towards Marielle gives place to Daniel's need for 'conquest': "I want a woman. I've got to have a woman" — Marielle, Sandra, any woman. It is in this mood of guilt and violence and self-indulgence that he accuses Chantal of indecency with Gabriel. Not even Joe Lacombe's faith in Daniel, whom he arrests, can lessen the antithesis which MacLennan has created and symbolized in Alan Ainslie's children. It is a dramatization of the human condition which parallels, consciously or unconsciously, Yeats's comment on the brood of Leda: "from one of her eggs came Love and from the other War."²¹

ANOTHER MYTH WHICH Yeats and MacLennan seem to share is the belief in cyclical history. Yeats believed, or pretended to believe, that history comes round in two-thousand-year cycles, and that each historical reversal is accompanied by violence. In "The Second Coming" he anticipates a reversal of the "gyres" and records his horror at the prospect. "While Yeats is not fond of Christianity, and regards its suppression of individual personality as having led to the present anarchy, yet at the end of the poem he envisions something far worse."²²

In the first two pages of *Return of the Sphinx*, Gabriel Fleury alludes to "another cold cycle," and to "violent changes." It may well be that MacLennan is merely establishing meteorological conditions as symbolic of the political unrest and explosiveness of Montreal in the Sixties. But references elsewhere in the novel, and indeed in other MacLennan novels, suggest that he does subscribe to the largely deterministic view of cyclical history. Gabriel's references to "a rebirth of a kind of man who had perished two thousand years ago" has been mentioned above; and, at another point, Alan Ainslie reflects that "some, like himself, had been driven to do irrevocable things not out of any fate created by their characters . . . but because such things had come with the rations of the epoch into which they had been born." However, against such apparent determinism, each author has his own peculiar faith: Yeats in the Irish peasantry, the aristocracy, art, and, ostensibly, in the *Mask* and the enigmatic Thirteenth Cone; MacLennan, in "the evolution of the human soul," in the land and its people. "The country existed didn't it? The rain of contributions made to it by millions of people for so long a time were infinitely more important than the gossamer ideas the clever ones invented to understand the meanings of countries."

But dreams or myths, or "shadows," as Gabriel calls them, sometimes betray us, and near the end of the novel Alan's dejection seems complete: his political career has been ruined, his son is in prison, and Canada is still on the brink. The cause of this collapse is implicit in a repudiation MacLennan had earlier made of political "isms":

Nationalism, Fascism and Communism . . . are aberrations because their dogmas are founded on hatred not on love, and it is this quality of hatred which makes their hideous creations so destructive and dangerous that they will bring about the extermination of the human race unless their growth is stopped.²³

Yeats, despairing of his "fool-driven land," and of the inability of political systems to cope with events in Europe, had written: "Communist, Fascist, nationalist, clerical, anti-clerical, are all responsible according to the number of their victims."²⁴

But man, thoughtful and sensitive man especially, needs the dream if only to

make bearable the reality. So it is that Yeats advises metaphorically, "When the rivers are poisoned, take to the mountain well."²⁵ Similarly, in the Epilogue, MacLennan has his protagonist journey across this vast land — "Too vast even for fools to ruin all of it" — observe unspoiled nature, and meet with simple, ordinary people "who knew all about one another and liked each other in spite of this." Gradually Alan's faith is restored: "One step more would have freed us all, but the sphinx returned,"²⁶ he muses. And then: "The sphinx has returned to the world before, after all."

Such a faith in Canadian unity may not be consistent with the tone of the novel or with those actions which take place in its urban environs, but it is thematically consistent with other MacLennan novels. And it is quite characteristic of a man who admits that his feelings in this respect are more important than his deliberations.²⁷ It is all a part of the MacLennan mythology. His belief in cyclical history, and his myth of the land combine in the Epilogue as he asserts once again his cautious faith that Canadian unity — and civilization itself — though threatened, will endure. This faith is implicit in the final paragraph of *Two Solitudes*:

even as the two race-legends woke again remembering ancient enmities, there woke this time also the *felt* knowledge that together [Canadians] had fought and survived one great war they had never made and that now they had entered another . . . that even if the legends were like oil and alcohol in the same bottle the bottle had not been broken yet. (Italics mine.)

and in the special interpretation which the Rev. Martell used to give to his text in *The Watch That Ends the Night*: "It comes — to pass."

Through his choice of title, MacLennan clearly alludes to ancient anarchy and to Oedipus's answer to the riddle of the Sphinx. But the real immediacy of MacLennan's message comes from his concept of nationalism, and from a horror that the prophecy of "The Second Coming" might indeed become the reality. *Return of the Sphinx* is a political and social novel where, despite its occasional lapses from psychological realism and some impediments to the narrative flow, "life is greater than the cause"²⁸; or, as both Yeats and MacLennan might rephrase it, "life *is* the cause." Fiction, MacLennan maintains, depends in no small way "on its power to use the symbols of its trade to mediate between men and the corrosive forces of their undefined emotions."²⁹ Through his symbols, in both title and text, MacLennan is desperately cautioning mankind against impending tragedy. It is in no way reductive of his genius that he reshapes Classical and Yeatsian mythic structures to articulate the nature of these "forces" and the dimensions of the tragedy.

NOTES

¹ Yeats quotes O'Leary as saying "There are things a man must not do to save a nation," and "There was never cause so bad that it has not been defended by good

- men for what seemed to them good reasons" ("Poetry and Tradition," *Essays and Introductions*, London: Macmillan, 1961, p. 247).
- ² "Two Solitudes that Meet and Greet in Hope and Hate," *Maclean's*, 84, no. 8 (August 1971), 20.
- ³ The lines from Rainer Maria Rilke, which MacLennan used as an epigram to *Two Solitudes*, he later described as "Surely the best practical definition of love ever uttered, whether applied to individuals or to two nations sharing a single state" (*ibid.*).
- ⁴ Ronald Sutherland, "The Fourth Separatism," *Canadian Literature*, no. 45 (Summer 1970). See especially pp. 7-9 and 15-22.
- ⁵ *The Senate Speeches of W. B. Yeats*, ed. Donald R. Pearse (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1960), p. 87.
- ⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 92.
- ⁷ *The Letters of W. B. Yeats*, ed. Allan Wade (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1954), p. 614.
- ⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 851.
- ⁹ *Letters on Poetry from W. B. Yeats to Dorothy Wellesley*, ed. Dorothy Wellesley (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1940), p. 94.
- ¹⁰ "Hugh MacLennan: The Tennis Racket Is an Antelope Bone," in Donald Cameron, *Conversations with Canadian Novelists* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1973), Part One, pp. 135, 132.
- ¹¹ *The Oxford Book of Modern Verse*, ed. W. B. Yeats (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1936), Intro., p. xxvii.
- ¹² *Conversations*, p. 134.
- ¹³ *Maclean's*, 84, August 1971, 50.
- ¹⁴ *Autobiographies* (London: Macmillan, 1955), p. 295.
- ¹⁵ *Hugh MacLennan* (Toronto: Copp Clark, 1969), p. 115.
- ¹⁶ *Hugh MacLennan* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1970), p. 24.
- ¹⁷ *The Novels of Hugh MacLennan* (Montreal: Harvest House, 1969), pp. 128, 130.
- ¹⁸ *The Precipice* (Toronto: Collins, 1948), p. 214.
- ¹⁹ "The Present World as Seen in Its Literature," Founders' Day Address, Univ. of New Brunswick, February 18, 1952, p. 12.
- ²⁰ Impulsiveness, intensity, and accomplishment are epitomized in the recurring airman-figure in MacLennan's fiction. They seem to represent a twentieth-century counterpart of the Renaissance man. (Cf. Yeats's poems about Major Robert Gregory, also an airman.)
- ²¹ *A Vision* (1925; London: Macmillan, 2nd ed., 1937), p. 268.
- ²² Richard Ellman, *The Identity of Yeats* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1964), p. 260.
- ²³ "Help Thou Mine Unbelief," *Cross-Country* (Edmonton: Hurtig, 1972), p. 141. This article was first published as "Are We a Godless People?," *Maclean's*, March 15, 1949.
- ²⁴ *Letters*, p. 850.
- ²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 881.
- ²⁶ MacLennan apparently had Expo '67 in mind here as proof of Canadian unity.

"When Expo '67 was such a success, I almost thought we had won through and that Canada's future was safe." *Maclean's*, 84, no. 8 (August 1971), 50.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

²⁸ W. B. Yeats, "Poetry and Tradition," *Essays and Introductions*, p. 260.

²⁹ "The Present World . . .," p. 5.

LAMENT

Kim Maltman

I turn the corner. Under the blue sky, under the white glare
of light caught in the oaks, under the buildings
suddenly awkward at the sight of such trees,
under the clouds which are like huge stars in the day sky,
I see the girl, who has come early (the girl
who comes at night to sit by the well).
Why so early, girl? I want to say,
the sun is still high, the wind is asleep,
sometimes it stretches out in the leaves,
but it is asleep nonetheless, what do you want here?
But instead I duck into a doorway.
From my hiding place I watch and try to think.
The light turns away and in the shadows
she is dark and beautiful, the oaks stand guard,
they keep the light away,
but it stays nearby, like a fragrance
you might come across and recognize
but not identify. Such sadness in her face.
She leans against the stone, the water of the well is cool
and sweet, but she will have none of it,
the bucket is drowning there.
Why is she sad? I want to know. I touch the door
and it is soft as wax.
Nothing holds together, nothing,
there are two parts of me and I want to know
Which can I give her?
Which might she take?
I want to go to the well, to sit beside her, drink from it,
but how, when the centre is nowhere,
or comfort, and what is left to say?
If I love her.
If her eyes will not see.