

# ISLAND WRITERS

*Frances M. Frazer*

**N**ONE, to my knowledge, talks of the literature of Burnaby or the literature of Mississauga, and if population alone were considered, "the literature of Prince Edward Island" would be an equally improbable topic. But in the Island's case, history and geography also have a bearing. By Canadian standards P.E.I. has a lot of eventful history. And its natural isolation has given its people a strong feeling of communal identity and a desire, if not the means, for independence. When storms shut down air and ferry services, these late and reluctant converts to Confederation say, "The mainland is cut off again," with only half a smile.

History and geography have combined to encourage literary endeavours on the Island throughout the past one hundred and twenty-five years. Most of these endeavours probably deserved the obscurity they swiftly found everywhere except in fond family circles, but a few merited more attention than they have ever received from "the mainland". And in addition to giving pleasure in themselves, they might have modified and thus helped to reconcile the heterogeneous impressions made by P.E.I.'s strange trio of fictional successes — the three legendary Island figures known off as well as on their native soil — Bud the Spud, Glooscap the demigod, and Anne of Green Gables. Viewed without a common backdrop, these three look as incongruous as shoes and ships and sealing-wax. But in fact each of them is a valid development of one of the three dominant strains co-existing in Island literature: rowdy parochialism, folklore, and romance.

Of the three, romance has fared best beyond P.E.I.'s shores simply because Lucy Maud Montgomery was and continues to be the most solidly-talented prolific writer the Island has produced. Her books are virtually synonymous with the province's literature to non-Islanders, and the impression she tends to leave, despite all the realistic qualifications a rereading of her books must reveal, is of a romantic garden province peopled chiefly by the conservative descendants of old-country clans, steeped in caste, class, and family traditions and proprieties. Stompin' Tom Connors of Skinner's Pond, with his rake-cum-rustic air and his raucous, rhythmic ballads, is an egregious figure against her gentle orchard and garden landscapes, though he is an authentic and popular son of the country-

music-loving Island, as was his predecessor, the composer folk-singer Larry Gorman. Nor does Avonlea seem a likely evolutionary development from Minegoo (the Island), the primeval paradise of Micmac folklore, the last and best creation of the Great Spirit and a favourite haunt of Glooscap even after its decline from Eden-like tranquillity. Historically, the Micmacs got their tales told first, of course, but they were little known to white men, except missionaries and anthropologists, until the Islander Cyrus MacMillan made them accessible in *Canadian Wonder Tales* (1918) and *Canadian Fairy Tales* (1922). By that time, the Prince Edward Island of Montgomery's first *Anne* books was firmly entrenched in the popular imagination.

This is not to say that any one of the three disparate legends seriously misrepresents P.E.I. The northeastern parts of North America, where Algonquin tribes like the Micmacs once roamed and struggled to survive, still include some rugged terrain — inhospitable woodlands and harsh, rocky shores where it is easy to picture forlorn Indians squatting around capricious fires and dreaming of a semi-divine chieftain who would do unequal battle for them with the invading ice giant, King Winter. On the wilder shores of Prince Edward Island and in its thornier thickets, it is more natural to imagine Glooscap's moccasin prints than the traces of Montgomery's dreamy super-civilized lovers out for an evening stroll. A country walker in the Island's November or April gales is more likely to envision the coldly mischievous Micmac Badger than pensive, beautiful Kilmeny of the Orchard as he fights a north wind over treacherous red mud. Jacques Cartier waxed poetic when he came upon the Island coast in July 1534: "Al the said land is lowe and plaine and the fairest that may possibly be scene, full of goodly meadows and trees" (Hakluyt's translation). But he did not linger, and the gifts he left for a shy Micmac he saw pelting away from the beach were perceptively practical — a woollen scarf and a knife.

For all their comparative sophistication, the Island's folk songs and country songs are perhaps closer to the Micmac tradition than they are to Montgomery's novel-chronicles, because they too reflect hard lives sustained by brute effort in a physically and morally demanding clime. Bud the Spud's "good red mud" can produce superior potatoes, but it takes its toll of potato-growers, as do the middlemen of "Upper Canada". Until very recently, the Island's population was pre-eminently a population of fishermen and farmers. Wrestling a living from soil and sea was not conducive of delicate niceties, literary or otherwise. Before the advent of cars and TV, foot-stomping barn dances and marathon drinking sprees were the favoured relaxations from drudgery of hard-working men. They also liked pungent stories — "true" stories about their neighbours, other communities' celebrities, and the more colourful figures and episodes of the Island's past — and tales of sheer fantasy boldly asserted, about spectrally guarded pirate treasures and vengeful ghosts of the murdered. Many of these tales are extant in the battered

remnants of limited editions — editions of memoirs and reminiscences, collections of reprinted newspaper features, community histories of particular locales. A few are allusively treated in Milton Acorn's most recent book of verse, *The Island Means Minago: Poems from Prince Edward Island* (1975). And a large number are gaining new currency in Square Deal Publications paperbacks published by an indefatigable writer, publisher, and professor of political science, Reshard Gool, assisted by his artist wife, Hilda Woolnough. Square Deal books such as Christopher Gledhill's *Folk Songs of Prince Edward Island* (1973; revised edition 1975), Sterling Ramsay's *Folklore Prince Edward Island* (1973), and ex-Premier Walter Shaw's *Tell Me the Tales* (1975) are among the new repositories of Island history, folklore, and folk humour. None of the current crop is likely to make waves beyond the Northumberland Straits, but their popularity at home indicates that they make palpable hits on Island memories and sensibilities.

**B**UT LUCY MAUD MONTGOMERY'S vision of the Island also has validity. The huge handsome old frame houses of Charlottetown, Summerside, Georgetown, and Montague are imposing memorials to the large middle-class families of the nineteenth century that she depicts so effectively in scenes of ritual clan gatherings. The wildfire rumours whose paths she traces through the gossip-filled air are still credible while P.E.I.'s population remains sufficiently small and stable for everyone to know, if not everyone else, at least everyone else's brother or aunt. Despite the recently fashionable complaints about anonymity in P.E.I.'s large new district schools, modern replacements of the old one-room schools that Montgomery's characters attended, there are still grounds for the saying that if you sneeze in Tignish someone in Souris will send you a handkerchief.

Moreover, Montgomery's novels are studded with vignettes and anecdotes from actual domestic histories of the Island. Though her publishing years began with this century, her typical ambience is the late nineteenth century, and many of the tales within her tales evoke earlier, more rigorous Island times. In *Emily of New Moon*, for instance, a novel that probably reflects more of young Lucy Maud than any of the *Anne* books, Emily is bequeathed with two of Montgomery's own ancestresses. The "Mary Murray" of the book is Montgomery's great-great-grandmother, Mrs. Hugh Montgomery. En route to Quebec with her husband in 1769, Mrs. Montgomery was acutely seasick and gratefully accepted the opportunity to visit dry land when the ship paused at P.E.I. for fresh water. According to the Montgomery family,

... when she felt that blessed dry land under her feet once more, she told her husband that she meant to stay there. Never again would she set foot in any vessel. Expostulation, entreaty, argument, all availed nothing. There the poor lady was

resolved to stay, and there, perforce, her husband had to stay with her. So the Montgomerys came to Prince Edward Island.

(L. M. Montgomery, *The Alpine Path*)

The only fictional embellishment upon this story in *Emily of New Moon* is the captive husband's wry revenge. When, after a long and useful life, his stubborn lady died, he had her tombstone inscribed "Here I Stay", thus innocently rousing neighbourhood doubts about his belief in the Resurrection or his wife's state of grace.

On her mother's side of the family, L. M. Montgomery had another strong-willed antecedent (also given to Emily), Eliza Townshend, who came to P.E.I. as a bride in 1775 to settle on land granted her husband's family by George III. Mrs. Townshend took one horrified look at colonial life on the Island and demanded to be taken home. Her demand was repeated for weeks before she conceded defeat and at last deigned to take off her hat.

While Eliza Townshend was pacing the floor of her despised new home with her bonnet on, the oldest piece of Island writing now extant was being composed. Benjamin Chappell, a close friend and disciple of John Wesley, emigrated to Prince Edward Island in 1774. Soon after his arrival he began to keep a diary which, though it has no literary pretensions, has proved very valuable as a reliable day-to-day account of pioneer life and a topical record of events during an exciting period of Island history. (A dramatized version written by Harry Baglole and Ron Irving for the Charlottetown Confederation Centre Theatre Company was produced successfully in Charlottetown and on a provincial tour in 1974, but has not yet been printed.)

When Chappell began to keep his journal, the population of the Island was almost entirely new, all but a handful of the original Acadian settlers having been deported by the British after the fall of Louisbourg in July 1758. In 1763 George III demonstrated his control over Ile St. Jean (thence the island of St. John until 1799, when its present name was assigned) by annexing it to Nova Scotia. Soon thereafter the Island was surveyed by Captain Samuel Holland and divided into sixty-seven townships of 20,000 acres each. In 1767 these townships or "lots" (a term still current on the Island) were distributed by lottery among the King and his approved petitioners for land grants. Grantees undertook to pay quitrents on their lots for the Island's administrative needs, to encourage the establishment of fisheries, and to settle their land within ten years with at least one European Protestant to every two hundred acres. These commitments were more honoured in the breach than in the observance. A few proprietors actively promoted Island settlement, but most were content to do nothing but collect trans-Atlantic rents. By May of 1774, there were still only 1,215 residents, according to Governor Walter Patterson's estimate. And this tiny population was soon to face a serious

menace from the south as the American Revolution gathered momentum. In the event, apart from occasional shore raids by privateers, the only serious incident occurred on November 17, 1775, when two American schooners, flouting General Washington's explicit orders not to molest Canadians uninvolved in the war, invaded Charlottetown Harbour. Led by the two captains, a landing party looted storehouses, offices, and private residences and carried off the Island's acting Governor and the Surveyor-General. In the chronicles of war it was a small episode, but it added real terror of foreign invasion to the Islanders' substantial concern about economics, concern augmented by the arrival of needy Loyalist fugitives from the American states.

All things considered, in the late eighteenth century the Island had too few people, and those people had too much on their hands, for artistic composition with any staying power to be likely. And in fact, except for newspaper ephemera (some thirty newspapers were published on the Island for varying periods between 1787 and 1867), there does not seem to have been much writing for publication until the mid-nineteenth century, when the major influxes of Loyalist and Old Country immigrants were settled and the population had stabilized.

THE FIRST ISLAND AUTHORS, most of them immigrants, whose works survive tended to be rather self-conscious about celebrating their indisputably beautiful but — certainly by European standards — raw new home. They were inclined to use its natural attractions chiefly as springboards for expressions of religious or philosophical truisms. The Reverend Louis C. Jenkins, for instance (like Mrs. Hugh Montgomery an inadvertent settler), describes the Indian summer scenes along "Fair Hillsborough's flood" — the Hillsborough is actually a modestly proportioned arm of the sea — to introduce the reflection —

But ah! how fleeting is the scene I view,  
 How like the sum of man's existence, too!  
 Soon will the dark and rolling clouds arise,  
 And howling storms obscure the sunny skies.  
 The short-lived honours of these faded trees  
 Must soon be scatter'd by the wintry breeze,  
 The placid flood by tempests wildly tost,  
 Wail o'er its transient beauties marr'd and lost!  
 'Tis thus with Man, his glories pass away  
 Like the short triumph of a summer's day;  
 The autumn of his life, serene yet brief,  
 Recals the image of the fading leaf,  
 The wintry clouds involve him in the gloom  
 That shrouds his entrance to the lonely tomb:—

Yet faith in Christ shall triumph o'er decay,  
And radiant Hope point out a brighter day. . . .

(“An Indian Summer’s Day in Abegweit” — published 1878)

Elizabeth Newell Lockerby, a first-generation Islander, uses dramatic events from local history in a similar way. In “George and Amanda”, a long narrative poem in her first published book, *The Wild Brier; or Lays of an Untaught Minstrel* (1866), she gives a powerful description of the “Yankee Gale” of October 3 and 4, 1851, an abrupt, catastrophic storm that struck the north shore of P.E.I. destroying more than seventy vessels of a New England fishing fleet and taking an estimated 150 lives. The poet’s heart is obviously in her detailed, evocative description of the storm and the ghastly shoreline scenes it left, so that it comes as something of a shock when she trundles out her trite, pious conclusion:

But as the day advanced, the storm decreased,  
The wind lulled down, the sea abated, for  
Its awful work of retribution was  
Completed; vengeance was appeased, and  
Sabbath profanity fearfully  
Chastised; for that proud fleet no Sabbath knew,  
But, on the day of sacred rest, pursued  
Their daily round of toil, and hastened to  
Be rich: and thus temptation and a snare  
Beset, and swift destruction smote them down.

Of the Island’s universalizing nineteenth-century poets whose work is extant, John Hunter-Duvar was the most gifted. After an active public career in the army and as P.E.I.’s Dominion Inspector of Fisheries, he settled into comparative retirement at “Hernewood”, his Mill River estate on the Island. An erudite, witty, elegantly whimsical writer, Hunter-Duvar long had the distinction of being one of the few Canadian writers frequently included in American school anthologies and about the only Prince Edward Island poet known to Canadian anthologists. Among his works are the novel *Melioran* (1893); a collection of satirical essays, *Annals of the Court of Oberon* (1895); an historical drama in verse, *De Roberval* (1888); and a mock-epic fantasy, *The Emigration of the Fairies* (1888); about a supposed emigration of fairies from Britain to Epaygooyat (Prince Edward Island under its Indian name, which is usually spelled Abegweit). The fairies’ voyage is an arduous one:

Not knowing contrary, they feared that ever  
Their raft might wallow on the restless breast  
Of cruel ocean, and that never, never  
With life remaining could they be at rest  
Despair came, as to tourists in the Channel,  
Who call for death, and brandy and hot flannel.

But at last they sight land:

A long low line of beach, with crest of trees,  
 With openings of rich verdure, emerald hued,  
 And as the string o' the tide and landward breeze  
 Wafted them nearer in a thankful mood  
 They blessed the land and beach of ruddy brown,  
 And off the shore lay bobbing up and down.  
 Now this fair land was EPAYGOOYAT called,  
 An isle of golden grain and healthful clime,  
 With vast fish-teeming waters, ocean-walled,  
 The smallest Province of the Martime.  
 Up on the beach the Fairies' Raft was cast,  
 And on Canadian land stuck hard and fast.

The fairies have reached Hernewood and an unselfconsciously Canadian poet-landlord who "charges them no rent".

Then there was the Reverend Maurice Swabey, a poet of smaller, less flexible talent than Hunter-Duvar, but one who could also proclaim the Island's attractions without apparent diffidence in such outpourings as "A Silver Thaw in Abegweet":

... Look forth to-day! and in your ravish'd breast,  
 Bee all her claims to loveliness confess'd!  
 Look forth to-day! the "silver age", again,  
 Hath surely dawned upon the haunts of men.  
 Or, we have pass'd since evening's shadows fell  
 To fabled isles where fairies only dwell!

(*Voices from Abegweet, or The Home on the Wave*, 1878)

In the same period, Charles W. Hall, son of a Charlottetown-Boston trader, was writing lively, uninhibited prose and verse about dramatic episodes of Maritimes history. His works include *Legends of the Gulf* (1970), narrative poems illustrated by Robert Harris (an Island artist now best known for his painting "The Fathers of Confederation"); *Twice Taken: An Historical Romance of the Maritime Provinces* (1867), a story about the fortress of Louisbourg; and *Adrift in the Ice Fields* (1877), a fantasy about a group of people floating around P.E.I. on an iceberg.

But on the whole, the more serious Island poets of the time tended to be coy and shamefast about their small rustic island home — or to ignore it altogether. Among the successful ignorers was the Reverend Cornelius O'Brien, a native of New Glasgow, P.E.I., who became the fourth Roman Catholic Archbishop of Halifax. His *Aminta — A Modern Life Drama* (1890), a pathetic tale of "a soul / Proud, passionless, with self-control, / But cankered by Agnostic blight" expresses new-world conservative pieties in old-world settings. Except for the Holy City, Archbishop O'Brien has small use for Europe, birthplace of the scientific

spirit, where his wretched male protagonist Coroman searches for a creed. For example —

With Hegel, Fichte, and all that crew  
 Next sought he truth that should be clear;  
 But German lore, like German beer,  
 Is stomached only by the few;  
 It bears the froth of pompous phrase,  
 No ray of reason clews its ways,  
 To mind and sense a dreary view.

O'Brien's contemporary the Methodist Reverend Archibald Ross was similarly non-parochial in his poetry, though perhaps something of the Island's atmosphere crept into his celebrations of the virtues of fresh air in *Duty and Other Poems* (1901). Once, the Reverend Ross assures his slightly incredulous reader, a doctor declared him almost dead, whereupon he jumped from his bed and ran for miles in the cold night air, achieving a complete cure. Thereafter —

When chill or asthma came in sight,  
 And threatened to renew the fight,  
 Deep breathing in the cold, clear air  
 And vigorous travel soon would stare  
 Then out of countenance in a time  
 Far speedier than this sullen rhyme.

(“Fifty-four”)

Generally speaking, then, there was some reason for John Lepage, the nineteenth-century “Poet Laureate of P.E.I.,” to complain that he found the instrument of Island poesy hanging dusty from disuse. And Lepage himself was most at ease in light-verse accounts of comic local episodes, though he also tried to do the Island serious poetic justice:

My native Isle! fit subject for the lays  
 Of sweeter minstrel, still the prompting power  
 Which led me simply to attempt thy praise  
 Shall sweetly prompt me to my latest hour;  
 For bound to thee by nature's tender ties,  
 To thee I feel my warmest wish must flow.  
 Thy verdant fields, thy placid summer skies,  
 Thy loaded autumns, and thy winter's snow —  
 All nearest to my thought, if reason reigns,  
 Must ever prompt the song, while love of song remains.

(*The Island Minstrel*, 1860)

Lucy Maud Montgomery also felt the “prompting power” and succumbed to it in the contents of *The Watchman and Other Poems* (1916), a volume that proves how right she was to specialize in prose.

Few of the early Island writers attempted substantial prose fiction. Apart from



Montgomery's, the only Island novel now easily accessible is Elizabeth Stuart MacLeod's loose collection of barely motivated melodramatic unlikelihoods misleadingly entitled *Donalda, a Scottish-Canadian Story* (1905). The heroine, pursuing her riches-to-rags-to-riches career in Scotland and, fleetingly, in Canada, barely pauses in Prince Edward Island to try simple bucolic pleasures before plunging into the more congenial delights of Ottawa's high life. Her happy ending is in Scotland. There she is last seen reading a letter from her mother, once a beautiful irresponsible adulteress, then the unrecognized nurse of her wounded son, and finally a penitent and saintly ministrant to ailing Micmacs. Since the entire production is almost completely arbitrary, there is a perverse consistency in the peroration to P.E.I. near its conclusion:

... from that speck upon the ocean, that smallest of all the provinces of Canada, some have gone forth to sacrifice young life in upholding the Empire's glory; while such as the sublime philosopher and soulful poet-archbishop O'Brien; the scholarly university president, Schurman; the gifted statesman, Sir L. H. Davies: the upright-minded ex-Governor Laird, and others, have made their mark, amid the world's ablest competitors, afar beyond the island of their birth.

**L**. M. MONTGOMERY has perhaps one rival for top honours as P.E.I.'s most successful writer of fiction in an expatriate novelist, the Reverend Basil King (it used to be said that the Island's principal exports were potatoes, professors, and politicians — to which list might be added preachers). A native of Charlottetown, King left the Maritimes in early manhood to become rector of Christ Church, Cambridge, Massachusetts. Except for a ten-year interlude in Europe, he spent the rest of his life in Massachusetts, and the numerous novels among his thirty-two books are Dreiser-like portrayals of American urban life in the early twentieth century. They include *Let Not Man Put Asunder* (1901), *The Inner Shrine* (1908), *The Side of the Angels* (1916), *The Lifted Veil* (1917), *The City of Comrades* (1919), *The Empty Sack* (1921), *The Dust Flower* (1922), *The Happy Isles* (1923), and *The High Forfeit* (1925).

Whether or not P.E.I. could legitimately claim him as an "Island author", or would want to, King was an interesting and not inconsiderable novelist. A strict yet subtle and compassionate moralist, he was both attracted and repelled by glamorous, sophisticated sinners of wealth sufficient to preclude economic excuses for their departures from grace. His typical hero is a kind but uncompromising Puritan, cast among socialites gone luxuriantly astray, and tempted to a point at which his moral victories over himself are hard-won and uncomplacent. But for all his three-dimensional credibility and his often strong, compelling plots, King's work has dated as pervasively as Gerald DuMaurier's and Warwick Deeping's, both of which it resembles — dated as Montgomery's less pretentious fiction has

not. Canadian or American, he is largely forgotten, though he enjoyed notable popularity in his day.

In the early twentieth century three multiply-talented Islanders, Robert Harris (born in Wales but an Islander from the age of seven), Sir Andrew MacPhail, and Edgar W. McInnis, made some noteworthy contributions to literature. The artist Harris wrote slight but engaging occasional verse which was collected and published by his family under the title *Verses by the Way* in 1920, the year after his death. His prose anecdote "A Surveying Experience in Prince Edward Island", relating an uncomfortable encounter with squatters armed to stop a landowner's survey, is a lively bit of storytelling as well as a vivid record of a typical nineteenth-century Island episode. ("A Surveying Experience", first told to members of the Montreal Pen and Pencil Club, is reprinted in Allan Graham's *Island Prose and Poetry: An Anthology* (1973) and in Moncrieff Williamson's *Robert Harris 1849-1919: An Unconventional Biography* (1970).) Sir Andrew MacPhail, O.B.E., physician, surgeon, and teacher as well as writer, received the 1930 Lorne Pierce medal for service to Canadian literature. His non-fiction works include *Essays in Puritanism* (1905), *Essays in Politics* (1909), *Essays in Fallacy* (1912), and *The Bible in Scotland* (1931). In 1916 he published *The Book of Sorrow*, a collection of his own hymns and poems on death, and in 1921 he completed an English translation of *Maria Chapdelaine*. But he is probably best known to readers for *The Master's Wife* (1939), a realistic portrayal of rural life in P.E.I. in the late nineteenth century, based on the experiences of his mother, Catherine Moore Smith MacPhail. Edgar McInnis, Rhodes Scholar, professor of history at the University of Toronto and later at York University (where he received a D.Lit. in 1972), began his writing career with two volumes of poetry, *Poems from the Front* (1918) and *The Road to Arras* (1920). Subsequently he was awarded two Governor General's Awards for academic non-fiction for his *The Unguarded Frontier* (1942) and *The War* (1940-46), a six-volume history of World War II.

Apart from L. M. Montgomery's continuing stream of fiction (the last of her books published in her lifetime appeared in 1939), little creative literature seems to have been written by Islanders from 1920 until very recent times. Cyrus MacMillan did his adaptations of Micmac tales at the beginning of the period. They have since been collected and reprinted in a handsome volume, *Glooskap's Country and Other Indian Tales* (1967) by Oxford University Press. Another expatriate Island ecclesiastic, the Roman Catholic Bishop Francis Clement Kelley, wrote some fourteen books of religious philosophy, autobiography, and fiction (for example the novel *Pack Rat: A Metaphoric Fantasy* (1942)), but like Basil King's, his fiction is set in his adopted homeland. His younger sister, Lucy Gertrude (Kelley) Clarkin, wrote conventional but lucid and touching verse, some of which is extant in her privately published *Way of Dreams* (1920) and in Reshard Gool's *Three Women Poets of P.E.I.* (1973).

What poetry there was tended toward sombreness and even gloom. McInnis wrote of war, MacPhail wrote of mortality, and Mrs. Clarkin was understandably preoccupied by the early deaths of three of her children. But P.E.I. also had its own Edgar Guest in the person of John Lamont-Campbell, the self-styled "John of the Lilacs", author of *Golden Moments Coined in the Mint of Time* (1947). A relentlessly rhythmic celebrant of such safe ideals as beauty, duty, home and country, and mother love, he does not provide much deliberate humour. His closest approach to the uncelestial is his prose dictum, "Very few, if any, will suffer from housemaid's knee through praying to the Almighty God." But he can be inadvertently funny:

Crowned by that God above,  
With glory in her hair  
Genetic wonder of His choice —  
O woman! wondrous fair.

And for all his lyrical unction, Lamont-Campbell had a worldly streak that is evident in one of his "Gems of Thought": "There are many ways of acquiring wealth: the most beautiful is by turning an inkwell into a gold mine." He did not achieve the metamorphosis, but he did make his name in P.E.I. by the simple but arduous method of hawking his book at almost every Island door.

More recently, two centenaries — of the Confederation Convention in 1864 and P.E.I.'s entry into Confederation in 1873 — sparked a new explosion of Island writing. Histories of the Island appeared in rapid succession: Lorne C. Callbeck's *The Cradle of Confederation* (1964), J. Henri Blanchard's *The Acadians of Prince Edward Island* (1964), Francis W. P. Bolger's *Prince Edward Island and Confederation, 1863-1873* (1964) and his historical anthology *Canada's Smallest Province* (1973). (Dr. Bolger has also written a well-documented edition of L. M. Montgomery's girlhood letters, *The Years Before "Anne"* [1974], published by the P.E.I. Heritage Foundation.) Moncrieff Williamson's highly readable biography of Robert Harris (McClelland and Stewart, 1970) was a timely addition to this historical group.

Besides *Canada's Smallest Province*, the Prince Edward Island 1973 Centennial Committee has sponsored some publications of creative writing, including *Variations on a Gulf Breeze* (1973), a collection of contemporary P.E.I. verse and short prose pieces, and Allan Graham's *Island Prose and Poetry*, an anthology in which many of the writers mentioned here are represented, as well as a handful of Island writers in Gaelic and French who are not dealt with in this article.

In the meantime, the Island-born poet Milton Acorn has been winning national recognition with his gift for a telling phrase and his bent toward truculent political punditry. *I've Tasted My Blood* (1969), his sixth book, made him known across the country, and *The Island Means Minago* has now securely identified his Island roots.

And then there are the continuous activities of Square Deal Publications, already mentioned. Almost from his arrival on the Island in 1969, Reshard Gool has been encouraging, bullying, and cajoling books out of people for his imprint. Ironically, in view of the number of Islanders who have found their literary voices abroad, his best contemporary authors to date tend to be “from away”, in the vernacular. He himself belongs to this group by virtue of a promising first novel, *The Price of Admission* (1973) and a collection of vivid, sensuous, emotional poems, *In Medusa's Eye* (1972). So does ex-Ontarian John Smith, whose poetry in *Winter in Paradise* (Square Deal, 1972) testifies to the high standard that talent honed during a hard self-imposed apprenticeship can achieve. And so does Tom Gallant, a native of New Brunswick, who touched down on the Island for a few years and there wrote a stark, strained but powerful drama, *Amadée Doucette & Son* (Square Deal, 1972).

To be fair, a few of Professor Gool's Islander protégés wield persuasive pens — for instance, such poets as Frank Ledwell and Jim Hornby. But a fair number appear to have rushed into print, given a kindly and optimistic publisher. Whether or not any of them will mature and blossom after such early hot-house forcing remains to be seen. For the moment, Lucy Maud Montgomery, veteran of rigorous self-training and a barrage of rejection slips, continues to dominate the field among Island authors past and present.

## IN THE IDEAL WORLD

*Christopher Levenson*

of architects  
 we are surrounded by  
 corners and corridors, spaces  
 that 'lead the eye'  
 astray, where wood creates  
 'intimacy' and under ceilings  
 whose every stress is plotted  
 'students and faculty naturally converge'  
 on a human scale  
 or saunter, informal, scarved,  
 under the blueprint trees  
 at the edge of vistas that extend,  
 landscaped, into infinities  
 where we must learn to live  
 in all our humane chaos.