

MAN IN THE MAZE

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THE RECENT reprinting of Douglas Le Pan's only novel, *The Deserter*, in the New Canadian Library should serve to remind readers both of the author's considerable technical ability and, at the same time, of how slender a body of writing his reputation rests upon. In what follows, I shall trace Le Pan's central theme of the search for individual dignity and the meaning of life as he develops it through the "maze" and "entrapment" imagery of his two volumes of poetry and his novel.¹ At first glance, he appears to move chronologically from pre-war to demobilization but, in the end, he leads us full circle. We are left with the conclusion after reading any one of his books, and more so after reading them all, that such a quest is a continuous one. Circumstances may alter but man, as Le Pan sees him, is always a kind of princely Theseus groping in the labyrinth without the assurance of Ariadne's thread.

This assurance, once believed in, never did exist Le Pan tells us in "Image of Silenus," the last poem of *The Wounded Prince*.² Opening with a picture of the great blue heron rising from the reeds, the poem presents us with an image of our unfulfilled desires which would at first limp then soar to some better place which we can, at best, but dimly imagine. Sandwiched between the ascent and possible coming to rest of the bird is the Silenus figure, the image of faith, and those who do it homage. Faith, "not so bright now / As when it left the hands of the makers," seldom shows its treasures, but when it does, they, Dionysius, St. Christopher, St. Francis, Apollo, and the rest, seem toys, mere "shrunken figures of desire" that are "fashioned out of desperation." It provokes the tortured song of the ill-assorted choir whose home is the labyrinthine slum described in the closing stanzas of the poem and who plead to know, "where is the land of promised good." Although the Silenus may give brief glimpses of its treasures, they are just enough to keep them wondering if the bird does, after all, know of "the misted land where time goes slow." Man cannot follow the bird, however, and he will never know whether the heron ever achieves its destination or not.

Because they lack any clearly defined purpose or destination, the figures in

The Wounded Prince are appropriately pictured as lost, trapped, or lonely. In "Twelve of the Clock," for instance, the lonely individual hearing the clock strike at midnight is likened to a ship in the icebound mid-Atlantic. His "harried heart" beats slow as the turbines; he must pick his way through the "labyrinthine city of the sea." For some, in a situation such as this, death, the poet suggests in the thirteenth stanza, is a temptation. Others escape into fantasy, but in each case they behave as they do because they can't stand being alone. This problem is also considered in the title poem, "The Wounded Prince", which takes for its subject the sorry condition of the sensitive personality humiliated equally by pity on the one hand and disappointment on the other. Hurt sensibilities, Le Pan suggests, result in withdrawal to one's inner life and are betrayed by the wounded expression in the eye which he compares with a bird impaled within a thicket, presumably the eyebrows.

A similar case obtains in "A Fallen Prophet" as we trace a first-hand observer's brief faith in Christ. It began with the walking on the water and ended with the crucifixion. Images of net and maze are few, but the poem, as a whole, seems a prelude to "Image of Silenus" which was discussed earlier because I believe it crucial to an understanding of Le Pan's ideas and attitudes. In this poem, Christ is the heron and the observer is analogous to the slum dweller who dreams of finding a way out of his metropolitan maze. He was "baffled by lights, humiliated / By mad machines, by schedules," and believed the man who walked the waters could lead him to a better place. This dream, however, like the dream of following the heron, was illusory. But Christ too is presented as a type of wounded prince; He was trapped by crucifixion, here presented as a kind of drowning, yet His death and its nobility remain a potent legacy. As we shall see, the "wounded prince-fallen prophet" motif is transformed in later works to comprehend the plight of the sensitive and knightly modern soldier.

Isolation of a different sort is the problem explored in "Coureurs de Bois". Here, the "you" of the poem is trapped by time; he was born too late to channel his need for a sense of purpose into anything as obvious and physical as the search for the North-west Passage. His idealism is even more incongruous in the contemporary world than were the brocaded coats the Coureurs de Bois packed among their rations of pemmican against the day when they would reach the courts of China. For the modern man, new Easts are only to be found, "through the desperate wilderness behind your eyes." In his search for honour, he must explore himself and wander the maze of his own personality. The man who can do this is a hero of a different stamp but a hero nevertheless. To some extent, at

least, this new type of search, carried on in the modern wilderness of the self, foreshadows Rusty's desperate hunt for honour and perfection in *The Deserter*.

"A Country Without a Mythology" and "Canoe Trip" present Canada as another type of labyrinth. Her wilderness is real enough, and its very presence is responsible for and suggestive of the cultural wilderness that often makes the sensitive Canadian feel trapped. The former offers a completely negative view of the country while "Canoe Trip", using the same journey motif hints that if the land cannot provide direct inspiration, at least its vastness and unspoiled character can impress one with a feeling of awe. In "Finale" Le Pan repeats his challenge to make something worthwhile out of the world we must live in. Whereas the journey through the maze in "Canoe Trip" was a healthful experience which prepared one to face the task with renewed vigour, the maze in this poem leads only to escapism via the paths of selfishness and crime. People who follow this route are like the "dropouts" in "Twelve of the Clock" who could not stand up to loneliness but succumbed to suicide and fantasy. By repeating the phrase, "Always the path leads back," Le Pan suggests that escape is not really possible. Like a man lost in the bush who keeps coming back to where he started, the person who seeks to escape the normal world, whether through crime or love, must always return to it. Compared to the fantasy world it may seem harsh and vulgar but it poses a challenge which must be met.

THUS FAR what we have seen in *The Wounded Prince* is a brilliantly played set of variations around the theme of the personality which feels itself trapped in a world uncongenial to its sensibilities. Instinctively it shrinks away from the source of irritation, and so experiences loneliness in the conviction, sometimes only half realized, that it is living at the wrong time and in the wrong place. Some people are able to face their loneliness and learn to live with it proudly and defiantly. Others cannot, and a number of the poems point out how struggling to escape one trap can lead to another. The other trap is the dream that somewhere there is a better place, a happier life to be led. Such an objective is but dimly perceived and may be approached through a variety of paths such as religion, crime, love, abnormality, idealism, or just plain day-dreaming. All paths, however, turn out to be mazes which lead the would-be travellers back to the real world they came from. Some return hopeless misfits; others are inspired to begin the difficult job of making over this world in the image of their hearts' desires. With "Image of Silenus", I feel Le Pan draws all

his variations together and, to push the music analogy a little farther, closes on an elaborate and tragic chord.

Considering the quality of Canadian poetry in 1948, one might have predicted a brilliant future for the author of *The Wounded Prince*. Even to-day the book stands up well against those of practitioners with a similar temperament such as Jay MacPherson, James Reaney, and P. K. Page. We might have been inclined to raise our eyebrows a little at C. Day Lewis' statement in the introduction that, "there is a certain bluntness and dependability about the surface of his poems," but his enthusiasm for a poet "in whom the New and Old World have met" would have seemed justified. Every poem was not loaded with Canadianisms but Le Pan's achievement seemed to be that when they did appear, and it was not infrequently, they did not sound awkward or provincial. Herons could share a poem with a Silenus statue and coureurs de bois could be utilized without turning the poem into an adventure narrative. Virtuosity, not slick technique but an ability to look at a subject or treat a theme from a multiplicity of angles, marks Le Pan's first volume. Although the common denominator of much of his imagery may be regarded as that of the trap or maze, the actual variety of visual impression he achieves is remarkable. When Lewis said that Le Pan's poetry conveys "the feeling of assurance and satisfaction that comes from the right word set unobtrusively in the right place," he came close to describing the great promise that this poet held in his first works. Whether this promise was fulfilled as a poet or not rests on an assessment of *The Net and the Sword*, published five years later.

Two other poems in *The Wounded Prince* deserve comment. "One of the Regiment" was reprinted in the second volume and I shall deal briefly with it there. The other, "A Vision", will serve as an introduction to *The Net and the Sword*. Composed in seven quatrains of iambic tetrameter, the poem has the quality of hurrying the reader relentlessly towards its last four lines. Le Pan's vision was of the coming war and he concludes that the gods care nothing for man's suffering; it is a pleasant fiction just as the little deities in the Silenus image were nothing more than "shrunken figures of desire." This is the way man transmutes his brief:

Imagination grew the tree
To mock the way weak men have bled.
Evasion turned to heraldry
The living, sweet, imperfect red.

Heraldry, as we shall see, is one means Le Pan employs to distance his readers from the horrors of war in *The Net and the Sword*.

WARTIME ITALY is the setting for *The Net and the Sword* but even a first reading makes it abundantly clear that it is not war which primarily concerns Le Pan. This is not to deny him the quality of pity but rather to remove him from the ranks of those whose subject is blood, sweat, tears, and the hell of war. His theme remains the struggle of the individual caught in the maze of life, and he reworks the informing ideas of *The Wounded Prince*. Here, to find one's way successfully through the maze's various tensions, attractions, and dead-ends is to achieve some kind of vision, while to get lost is to die in an elaborate trap. The trap is more obviously physical but its implications are the same. It forces the individual to face his crisis alone and brings out in the truly noble personality, the wounded prince, a hitherto unsuspected dignity.

The title poem makes the basic metaphor of the collection clear and emphasizes the nature of the first kind of trap, which is the net-like paraphernalia of modern war:

In this sandy arena, littered
 And looped with telephone wires, tank-traps, mine-fields,
 Twining about the embittered
 Debris of history, the people whom he shields
 Would quail before a stranger if they could see
 His smooth as silk ferocity.

Where billowing skies suspend
 Smoke-latticed rumours, enmeshed hypotheses
 And mad transmitters send
 Impossible orders on crossed frequencies,
 His eyes thrust concentrated and austere.
 Behind his lids, the skies are clear.

Against such odds the princely personality can only pit its pride. Most of the poems contain some vocabulary of the "net" or "maze" variety but some deal more precisely with the second kind of trap: Italy, which seems to ensnare and, at times, even digest the invader. In "An Incident", the soldier's body dissolves or melts right into the landscape while in "Elegy in Romagna" we have imagery which is shifting and murky, leading the reader to see with the tired eyes of the writer a cellar which takes on the qualities of a dungeon or a spider's web. The

victims, in reality soldiers resting after a day of battle, occasionally remind one of flies stuck in jam:

One of the sleepers moving in his sleep
 Is tangled in a mess of gear, and groans;
 One shows his back as brown as a tobacco leaf;
 One sighs, one lies as though his neck were broken.

So much for the net except to say that it has a beauty of its own, especially when it is shorn by Le Pan of most of the real horror and agony of actual warfare.

The character of the gladiator is also the product of Le Pan's poetics rather than of reporting. In the toils of the net, he struggles to keep up the belief that he is fighting for some high cause, like a knight of old. Preserving this belief, however, is not always easy. Fear and the mere havoc of war make it difficult to keep up one's illusions and, surveying a field after a battle, in "Meditation after an Engagement", he can find little solace even in having survived.

In his review of *The Net and the Sword*, Northrop Frye pointed out that in gladiatorial contests "generally the netman won."³ Such is the case here too, though there is no doubt that the man with the sword is the hero. The method of portraying him is frequently as stylized as the battle scenes which are deliberately heraldic in their effect. Le Pan's hero is frequently a strangely impersonal youth, tight-lipped, bare-headed, possessed of a "smooth as silk ferocity", who often dissolves into a crusader or Florentine gallant as he does in "One of the Regiment", but whose memories are of "Skating at Scarborough, summer at the island." This same motif of the young crusader intoxicated by battle runs through several of the poems, but is the entire subject of "Reconnaissance in Early Light". Looking more like a picture on a Hitler Jugend poster than a kid from cabbage town, he goes into battle with every hair in place:

His gaze alone is unperplexed.
 He sips from this thin air some sacred word.
 Through all his veins the sacrament of danger,
 Discovering secret fires, runs riot. His hard
 Eyes gleam with cunning pressed from some smouldering hunger;
 His coat burns sleek and lillied as a leopard's.

Again, in the title poem, although the hero succumbs, Le Pan tries to convey a magnificence to him. The imagery of the poem shifts nicely between the combat of the ancient and that of the modern gladiator but it invests the action with a kind of greatness reminiscent of the ritual struggle and death of the bullfight.

This distancing of the reader from the real messiness of war is at once an advantage and disadvantage. It keeps the reader aware that the struggle of the soldier caught in the toils of war is representative of something greater than itself and does not call forth the personal emotional expenditure, genuine or maudlin, of conventional war poetry. It also makes it possible for Le Pan, eight years after the event, to make the struggle still seem relevant. The disadvantage is that these poems with their almost rococo use of language often leave the reader with the feeling that he has been looking at a bejewelled reliquary which, however calm and beautiful it may be, conceals something whose story is one of cruelty and pain. A subdued yet typical instance of this may be found in the poem, "An Incident", where a boy who in peacetime might have been looking for an overgrown portage in his own province now scans a map and waits in the face of the enemy for relief. His death seems not only ill-timed and accidental but, as Le Pan relates it, unreal. A similar feeling is created in "An Effect of an Illumination". During a night bombardment men are frightened, blinded, and killed. Here more than in the other poems Le Pan succeeds in making us feel for a time some of the genuine emotion which the occasion must have prompted:

The sphinctered sky seals off a livid bell-jar
 On humiliated animals lost in holes. . . .
 O mother! mother! cord to the mothering earth!
 Our hearts run dry; our blood sucked downward
 Through a straight, stretched tube, dangerously thin
 And twanging breaks . . . breaks . . . how can it hold?
 Pluck close this nested bird with brittle bones
 A little longer. Receive it. Give it suck.
 Exhausted vacuum below pulsating ribs,
 Easy to crush as wrens' bones or a blown
 Bird's egg, protect with vascular affection;
 Protect, great mother, your exhausted sons.
 And slowly through parched veins blood creeps again.

Desmond Pacey argues that, "the elaborate, ornate language and imagery is very effective in just that sense of voluptuous luxury which affords the desired contrast for the sudden brutal ferocity of the raid."⁴ I would agree with him about the contrast but feel it is weakened because the horror is transmuted by the language. Not only is the passage here quoted preceded but also followed by lines whose imagery and vocabulary tend to erase the shock from the reader's mind.

None of this is bad in itself, but it does raise the question as to whether all subjects are equally appropriate to a lyric and elegiac talent. There is no denying

a strong continuity of theme exists between *The Wounded Prince* and *The Net and the Sword*. If his first volume offers a wide range of "man in the maze" situations, it is fair to say that his second is an examination in detail of one of them — man in the maze of war.⁵ The youthful Canadian soldier, far from home and caught in the toils of death and danger, is indeed one type of wounded prince. But war is only one of many traps a man can find himself in and so Le Pan is obliged to utilize its imagery while not letting it run away with his reader's attention. To avoid this, he tries to turn our minds away from the pain and horror that all of us know, if only vicariously, are the very stuff of war. His technique has been to turn raw life into art, or as he called it in the closing lines of "A Vision", "Evasion turned to heraldry". As a solution to an artistic problem it is perfectly legitimate and commendable. Whether it works or not is another matter. Layton's "Archibald Lampman of the battlefield" remark, Pacey's repeating of the "Peacock Le Pan" nickname, and even Frye's rather defensive reminder that, "Besides, the poems are not battle pieces but elegies, meditations on war recollected in tranquillity,"⁶ all suggest that there is an unresolved tension between the technique and the material. Like it or not, war is a subject with built-in responses that are hard to muffle. For Le Pan, the problem of utilizing war imagery while divesting it of the accustomed emotional responses may have been too great. In any event, it is part of the artist's task not to avoid challenges but to seek solutions to them and Le Pan should not be faulted for his daring.

In the last paragraph, I intimated that the poet bit off more than he could chew. One wonders, however, how he might have fared if he had kept his "heraldic" tendencies under tighter rein. Richness of technique was certainly called for if war imagery was to be abstracted from the emotions that normally go with it, but there is a line between art and artificiality over which Le Pan trespasses in *The Net and the Sword*. His first volume is superior in this respect. C. Day Lewis' statement about the right word in the right place was no small compliment, nor was it unearned.⁷ The language of *The Wounded Prince* is rich but not gaudy and some of the stanza patterns such as that of "Rider on the Sands" are intricate, but functional and unobtrusive. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said for much of *The Net and the Sword*. Passages of great beauty are there too, but so are phrases like "eyelids that fleur-de-lis the dark," "the white caesura that stripped down longing," and "systole of sky" which merely jar the reader. Likewise, his use of "trumpet-tell" is common enough to be classed as a mannerism.

Similarly, the elaborate stanza structures generally fail in *The Net and the*

Sword because they constantly remind the reader of the anatomy of the poem. Up to a point, Le Pan's technique does succeed in making the difficult look easy, but his efforts are seldom unobtrusive. Tours de force such as: "The Net and the Sword" — ababcc; "One of the Regiment" — couplets; "The Peacock" — abca; "The Nimbus" — abcbbac; "Meditation After an Engagement" — abbcaddc and "The Lost Crusader" — abcadcdbc, are just too dexterous to pass unnoticed. Only less self-conscious poems like "The New Vintage", "The Nimbus", "Interval with Halcyons", or "Idyll" could have led him to a wider range of imagery and mythic forms. Instead, however, Le Pan chose in 1964 to explore again the "man in the maze" theme — this time in prose.

DURING THE SAME YEAR that *The Deserter* was published, its author wrote an article in which he undertook to outline some of the difficulties confronting a Canadian writer.⁸ Not the least of these is the simple matter of being a Canadian. The home market is pitifully small and to write specifically for a wider audience involves the choice of whether or not to abandon any material that refers directly to the homeland. After considering those who opt not to suppress Canadian references, he turns to those who do:

If the risks of such an undertaking are obvious, so are the advantages: it can produce a result of almost universal luminosity which can be understood everywhere. A strategy of this kind may also commend itself to some writers because of seeming to be congruent with contemporary critical views of myth and symbol.⁹

One of the writers to whom this "strategy" appealed was Le Pan, himself. The scene of *The Deserter's* action is never mentioned by name, though it is most certainly London, particularly Soho and the dock area, and the hero, Rusty, is English.¹⁰ With the disguise as transparent as it is, the reader can only wonder whether he failed in his attempt at anonymity or simply had his eye fixed on a wider audience and was prepared to make the usual concessions to get it. A more charitable way of looking at the novel is to view it through its use of myth and symbol. Seen from this angle, *The Deserter* does possess universality. Its informing myth is the Theseus story and its dominant image, the maze or labyrinth.

The hero of the novel bears a marked resemblance to some of the "wounded princes" who appeared earlier in the volumes of poetry. He is possessed of a dignity that sets him apart from his comrades; he has had a glimpse of perfection which makes everyday reality almost an affront to his sensibilities. That perfection was symbolized by Althea, a one-night pick-up, who not only provided physical

ecstasy but awoke in him the dormant yearnings for a nobler, more idealized existence. Sleeping with her was like being able to follow the blue heron of "Image of Silenus" to its home, but like the vision offered by the bird, the bliss offered by Althea was only transitory and tantalizing.¹¹ In a different but analogous way the precision, esprit de corps, and discipline of the army in war-time also offered the seventeen year-old who lied about his age a kind of ideal.

As the novel opens, the old ways of honour are rusting as surely as is the barbed wire around the camp; the old life is crumbling like the unrepaired air-raid shelter. It is disillusionment, not cowardice, which drives him to desert. From the "atmosphere of a swamp" in the camp, he enters the labyrinth of the city in search of a renewed sense of honour and purpose. By the time that search is done, Rusty will have learned the wisdom contained in "Finale" that, "Always the path leads back."

Once out of the camp, Le Pan's hero is not in one maze but two. There is the obvious one, the physical labyrinth of London in which Rusty wanders, first in Soho and later in the dockland, in hopes of evading the military police and afterwards, in addition, the gang he had refused to join. The other is an intellectual one through which he twists and turns in hopes of finding or at least defining the perfection which his night with Althea only hinted at. For Rusty, the two mazes seem connected. As he would see it, it was necessary to desert, and hence be on the run, in order to conduct his search. What is apparent to the reader after a short time, however, is that the two mazes lead in opposite directions. The physical maze of escape leads to isolation, a narrowing of horizons, and ultimately to the fantasy world of anti-social behaviour. Again, we are seeing the ideas of "Finale" being worked out in narrative form. Opposed to this, the intellectual maze leads Rusty, reluctantly at first, towards the normal world of love, responsibility, and even the paying of bills, the very things, in fact, he balked at even when he thought of Althea. His change of attitude, which leads him simultaneously out of both mazes, is not brought about by any one climactic action. Rather, it is the result of his ability to learn from what he has seen of others caught in similar traps.

Not much time elapses before Rusty discovers that the physical maze into which he projected himself by the act of desertion is a crowded one indeed. He is only one of thousands of deserters in London and, in Soho where he first settles, they are so numerous that he is scarcely noticed. Desertion does not trouble his conscience, although fear of detection forces him to adopt the surreptitious habits of his neighbours. It is not long before the glamour of the place wears off and,

especially after being taken by a barman as the type who would welcome an opportunity to join a robbery, Rusy begins to feel that he is not in a haven but a jungle-like maze:

In the silence he was reminded of an explorer whom he had read about as a boy who had travelled thousands of miles down a great river only to find himself at the end in the middle of endless swamps and creeks and savannas with no outlet to the sea; . . . The foliage on the peeling wall-paper, grey-green and faded, was like snake-infested vines or creepers and sometimes as he sat in the stillness, smoking, they seemed to be hemming him in. Before long they might close in and coil round and crush him.¹²

Shortly after this, the police net around Soho tightens. Although Rusty slips through, many others don't and, particularly in the case of the young pickpocket who falls to his death, he sees how dangerous the life of a fugitive can be. Only by turning himself in can he escape feeling like a hunted animal, but he is not yet ready for this. As a result, he moves to the dock area and soon finds that he has merely exchanged one labyrinth for another. After a brief spell of employment, Rusty and another deserter, Dragon, are forced to run off in the face of a band of irate dock workers who imagine their jobs threatened. Their escape through the yards piled high with goods and timber, their retreat to the warren which Dragon calls home, are all replete with "maze" imagery. Indeed, almost every movement he makes seems twisted and circular rather than straightforward. Even when Rusty takes stock of the situation, Le Pan repeats the motif to emphasize the directionless and lost quality of his hero's life:

He would resume his calling as a wanderer; threading his way from one street to another; circling a basin that was choked with freighters, tugs, barges, and going on to one that was almost empty, with a few boards floating on the slightly oily swell; picking up the estuary at one point, losing it, and then coming on it again.¹³

The friendship with Dragon continues and mainly serves to introduce Rusty and the reader to other deserters who have adopted a way of life that could in time become Rusty's too. Brandy's warped and perverse sense of honour is honour nevertheless and, after all, not so very different from his own. Yet, in the end, Rusty realizes that the lives Brandy and Dragon lead, though in some ways attractive, are not for him. By clever use of 'heraldic' imagery Le Pan is able to present this as a conclusion Rusty arrived at slowly, and at the same time thread the various incidents of his novel together. Early in the book, Rusty says to Mark, "Sometimes I think I'm an animal from a coat of arms, a bear or a stag, who wants to leave his post and go back to the woods." Much later, during a

marvellously described drunken orgy that takes place at Dragon's, the bear and stag images are re-introduced. Some time afterwards Mark reminds Rusty about his original remark about wanting to wander off like a stag or bear and asks if he still feels that way. His friend now replies, "Some men can live happily as animals. I can't." But even at this point he is not prepared to come back to the normal world. Before he does return, he is forced through another maze as he tries desperately to escape the gunmen of the gang who think he has informed on them.

Although he is no criminal, Rusty becomes caught in a net of circumstances which brings gangland vengeance upon himself and the totally uninvolved Stefan. Their flight through the foggy streets of the London dock area is pictured by Le Pan in the twisting, turning imagery of the maze, of which at one point he is able to say, "They were tracing out a labyrinth that seemed to serpentine endlessly." Even Stefan's death is mentioned in the newspapers as the "Cul-de-sac Murder". With the closing of this incident and his subsequent recovery from his bullet wound, Rusty deliberately emerges from his maze by turning himself in. He might have done this at any time, but he was not prepared to until he had found the perfection which led him to desert in the first place. Only during his convalescence is he able to piece together the meaning and implications of everything that has happened to him since he left the camp.

Modern parlance which might refer to Rusty as "a crazy mixed-up kid" would aptly describe the way Le Pan has envisioned him. Being "mixed-up" puts him in a kind of intellectual maze which the author is at some pains to outline and also indicates that Rusty has only a vague idea of the honour or perfection he is looking for. From the beginning, Mark insists that whatever it is, it is only to be found as a productive member of society. Against this Rusty argues he must seek his goal as a "roving picket". He refuses to accept Mark's position that the outcast or self-exile becomes progressively divorced from reality and strays ever further into the half-world of selfishness and/or crime. That Mark was right is shown by the fact that only a series of incidents, significant in themselves and cumulative in their effect, prevent Rusty from following this path.

Early in the story he begins to learn that everybody feels trapped in one way or another. The situation with the fugitives he encounters is obvious enough, but even people with exciting lives like Mark are caught. Mark's story of the man who dived into the blue grotto at Capri and came up with a piece of used toilet paper stuck to his head is illustrative. The point of the story, reminiscent of "Image of Silenus", is not wasted on his friend but its effect is delayed. Only a

short time afterwards Rusty is confronted by more fundamental problems which he cannot satisfactorily answer. After being questioned about his motives for desertion, he can only ask himself, "Who am I? . . . What am I looking for? One question succeeded another like the streets turning and flowing into one another."

It may seem to Rusty that he is seeking honour, but he is affronted several times to discover how others think of him. Once at a late night coffee stall he listens to two guardsmen-cum-male prostitutes and two second-storey men swapping stories about the night's adventures. What was told lightheartedly by one burglar turns out to be a vicious assault on an old woman as the papers tell it. He is upset when he recalls, "they had accepted him as one of themselves" and even more distressed the next day when a barman simply takes it for granted that he would be interested in joining a smash-and-grab job. A similar misunderstanding leads to his wounding and Stefan's murder while he is living in the dock area. Between these two events occurs the party at Dragon's with the bear and stag imagery mentioned earlier. What really sets Rusty apart from them, in spite of the empathy he feels, is a difference in attitude. During the conversation, Brandy and Dragon claim they have never experienced guilt. Rusty, on the contrary, tries to formulate it but falls asleep, drunk, first.

Finally, the influence of Stefan and Anne leads him back to the normal world, the world of responsibilities that Mark talked of. Each is weaker than Rusty and each has his or her own maze to contend with. Their very weakness, paradoxically, is their strength, because they instinctively reach out to others whereas Rusty is strong enough to live on his own. Now feeling emotionally drained Rusty concludes his honour has left him. Even the will to suicide is gone but from this nadir of anguish, he rises to the almost visionary experience described in the last two and a half pages of the book. It is the "deep ultimate animal courage", he realizes, that is the root of honour. In people like Brandy and Dragon it was diverted into a dead-end, but, without it, there can be "neither love nor justice nor a city, without which there could be no meaning nor anything but a spreading tundra and despair."

Reviews of *The Deserter* generally centred on the "poetic" qualities of the novel and saw them, on the whole, as detrimental.¹⁴ In particular, they complained of the inappropriate literary quality of speech placed in the mouths of people who presumably had not been exposed to a great deal of formal education. Such a charge is valid if one assumes that Le Pan has attempted a realistic novel in which he merely failed to distinguish the voice of the narrator from those of the characters. By the same token, the complaint that some of the incidents in

the plot are time-worn is equally valid. But all this assumes that *The Deserter* was intended as a realistic novel, and there is an argument to be made that this was not Le Pan's aim at all. Certainly the episodic plot structure beginning in questioning and ending in revelation seems hardly designed for an "action" story. In fact, with its similar emphasis on maze imagery, it is more reminiscent of a "quest" story like *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* than of a psychological thriller in the manner of Graham Greene. Although I have ignored most of the symbolism not related to the subject of this paper, it should be noted that there is a great deal of it — too much, indeed, to do anything but clog the works of a realistic novel. The Maze, the animals, the crystal sundial, the Plaza-Ministry opposition, etc. all give *The Deserter* the quality of a fable or a loosely constructed allegory. If the novel has faults, I suggest they lie in the other direction: that Le Pan has not eliminated enough realism from his story to allow the poetic to take over completely. His setting and hero are not anonymous enough to achieve that "universal luminosity" he spoke of in his article. What was needed, perhaps, was something closer in technique to that of Alain Robbe-Grillet. It need only be noted in conclusion that Le Pan has shown a remarkable consistency, even tenacity, in his use of imagery involving the maze and the personality trapped in it. All works of a true artist, it has been said, only prepare the way for the next one. Bearing this in mind, it is only fair to say that Le Pan's works, though not always individual successes, have been artistic in the best sense of the word.

NOTES

- ¹ Douglas Le Pan, *The Wounded Prince and Other Poems* (Chatto and Windus: London, 1948); *The Net and the Sword* (Clarke, Irwin, Toronto, 1953); *The Deserter* (McClelland and Stewart: Toronto, 1964; rpt. 1973).
- ² In all cases, titles of books will appear in italics and titles of individual poems in quotation marks.
- ³ Northrop Frye, "Letters in Canada: 1953-Poetry," *UTQ*, 23 (1954), 256-58.
- ⁴ Desmond Pacey, *Creative Writing in Canada* (Ryerson Press: Toronto, 2nd, ed. 1961), p. 183.
- ⁵ The precise topic of war appears in "One of the Regiment" printed first in *The Wounded Prince and Other Poems*.
- ⁶ Frye, *op. cit.*, p. 257.
- ⁷ cf. E. K. Brown, "Letters in Canada: 1948-Poetry," *UTQ*, 18 (1949), 257-58.
- ⁸ Douglas Le Pan, "The Dilemma of the Canadian Author," *Atlantic Monthly* (November 1964), 160-64.
- ⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 164.
- ¹⁰ The review in *Canadian Literature*, No. 24 (Spring, 1965) 70, 72-73, suggests he is Canadian but this seems highly improbable from the details of the novel. Rusty

and Mark saw service in the same unit and Mark has returned to his old job in the Ministry in London — which one we are not told, but presumably a British one. Neither the location of Canada House, nor the duties of the High Commissioner or the secretaries, fit the description of the Ministry or the duties which Mark performs or the official contacts Mark possesses to help Stefan. Moreover, we are told of Rusty's mother, "She had died in the middle of the war when in many parts of the country the sky was boisterous with nightly raids." p. 10.

¹¹ cf. *The Deserter*, p. 33.

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 90-91.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 117.

¹⁴ cf. *Saturday Night*, 79 (November 1964), *Montrealer*, 39 (January 1965), *Canadian Author and Bookman*, 40 (Spring 1965), *Canadian Literature*, No. 24 (Spring 1965), *Canadian Forum*, 45 (May 1965), *UTQ*, 34 (July 1965), *Queens Quarterly*, 72 (Autumn 1965), *Tamarack Review*, 34 (Winter 1965).

MANIFESTO

Dorothy Livesay

Why we drink.

Why we sleep.

Why we dream.

The constant gnawing
undergrowth desire
to escape into
the irrational

Why we murder.

Parents
struggle
never to step over
that line

Children try to see
how far they can put a foot in
and out, fast
and not be seen

Music exists
to take us there
without guilt.