

# REPRINTS AND THE READING PUBLIC

*George Woodcock*

I DON'T THINK Jack McClelland has ever quite forgiven me for a review I wrote and published in *Canadian Literature* thirteen years ago, in the summer issue of 1960. I was discussing the third batch of four titles in the New Canadian Library. (The Library and *Canadian Literature* are close contemporaries, as students of our cultural history might profitably note). I had been greatly encouraged by the series as an idea, and on the whole with the first eight selections which Malcolm Ross, the General Editor, had made. They included — the record by now has become literary history — such basic Canadian books as *As for Me and My House*, *Over Prairie Trails*, *Barometer Rising* and *The Tin Flute*; my own assessment of the eight was six bullseyes and two misses, and since I revised my view of *Such is my Beloved* shortly afterwards, my scoreboard for those first eight titles would now be seven palpable hits, though I still confess to being quite unable to appreciate Charles G. D. Roberts' *The Last Barrier*, perhaps because it was imposed on me with excessive enthusiasm at the age of ten by a Canadophil father in England.

Given such a fine beginning, the third quartet of the New Canadian Library was no less than terrifyingly bathetic. A second Leacock (in the first twelve titles), dull volumes by Raddall and Drummond, and a collection of Confederation poets with too much Carman and too little Scott! The real disappointment was that there was nothing here to represent the vital trends in Canadian writing that had been emerging since the later thirties; one feared — at least I did — that the series might be taking a downturn into conventionality, that it would end up with Service and Grey Owl, and in my review, perhaps provocatively entitled "Venture on the Verge", I expressed my apprehensions that the fate of such a laudable venture as the New Canadian Library might be — if care were not

taken — to “perpetuate in the minds of ourselves and others the feeling that writing in Canada is a pretty dull business after all.” I ended, more pompously than I would today:

I wish the New Canadian Library well, since I realize what it might be, but unless something more daring appears under its covers than the four volumes now presented, I fear my wishes will not be of much avail.

Looking back over those years, I cannot be surprised that at a party in Vancouver shortly afterwards (the first and one of the few times we have met) Jack McClelland should have complained with considerable vehemence. I still believe that what I said had at that particular time in our literary history to be said — though perhaps not quite as I had phrased it — but I can understand the exasperation of a publisher who has sunk money and confidence into the task of giving his country back its literature and then is sharply criticized by an editor who in some ways should be his natural ally.

That is a long time ago and in the interval since 1960 there have been gestures of mutual confidence. I submitted a book of my critical essays — *Odysseus Ever Returning* — to the New Canadian Library; Malcolm Ross accepted it and Jack McClelland published it. But the implied is never quite the same as the explicit, and this occasion, when I discuss one of the most interesting phenomena in recent Canadian publishing, the proliferation of reprints, is perhaps the appropriate time to say one or two things directly. I am happy to have learnt that my apprehensions of 1960 were not justified, and to underline this remark with the further observation that, when one talks in 1973 of Canadian reprints, it is automatically of the New Canadian Library that one first thinks. The achievement has been notable; more than that, invaluable.

In the history of the New Canadian Library one sees much of our cultural pilgrimage over the past decade and a half recapitulated. Sales in the late fifties and the early sixties were not spectacular, and it needed more than a modicum of confidence for the publisher and the editor to continue. Their subsequent success has been partly due to changes in the academic ambience. Courses in Canadian Literature have proliferated to an extent unexpected in 1960, and it is likely that a fair proportion of the hundreds of thousands of copies of these books now sold every year will never be opened again by their owners once their courses are ended. That is the fate of all college texts, but in the meantime the academic demand has kept titles in print and brought others to the press that otherwise would not have been available to the public outside the universities and the

schools, and this voluntary public — the most important public — for Canadian books has clearly been increasing steadily over precisely the same period as the New Canadian Library has been in existence.

I propose to dabble in no occult questions of cause and effect; the fact is that the emergence of the right reprint series coincided with the movement of interest that made it a success, and if that makes Jack McClelland a perceptive publisher — as for my money it does — he must be given the credit. I am not saying that every title included in the 93 reprinted volumes and the 8 special anthologies which to date form the series has excited me. In the pile of recent titles that lie on my desk I find a familiar unevenness of quality. Three — *The Edible Woman*, *The Fire-Dwellers* and D. C. Scott's collection of stories, *In the Village of Viger* — are so obviously excellent by any critical standards that their inclusion was almost mandatory. Historical reasons justified the inclusion of Rosanna Leprohon's early Victorian *Antoinette de Mirecourt*, though it is hard and at times absurd reading. But no amount of delight in Douglas Le Pan's poetry can for me be metamorphosed into pleasure in his novel, *The Deserter*, and I found Hubert Evans' *Mist on the River* not quite worthy of the fine background introduction with which my friend and colleague W. H. New has provided it. But the point by this stage is not that the New Canadian Library sometimes brings out books not to the taste of all readers; it is rather that it has always kept enough superb titles moving through its list to allow us a rambling personal choice among the other more marginal books — those products of talent never taking the plunge into genius — which form so large a proportion of our literature and which make it seem at times so tense a gamble.

An interesting chapter in any book on literature and the reading public might be written on the role of reprint libraries in explosions of literary awareness. There is no doubt that the Everyman Library, bringing out its hundreds of classics and of nineteenth and early twentieth century masterpieces at a shilling — and then two shillings — apiece, was one of the key influences in the great spread of literary interest that came in Britain after the universalization of education during the late Victorian era. Penguins, dramatically ending a publishing deadlock during the depression of the 1930s with their sixpenny paperbacks, accompanied and partly caused a similar breakthrough — at a time when economic factors were changing social values — into a wider popular consciousness of modern literature, its aims and methods, as well as of many aspects of contemporary scholarship that hitherto had achieved little currency.

Both the Everymans and the Penguins, even if they were pioneers, quickly

became merely the leaders in larger movements, as reprint ventures proliferated, and similarly, though the New Canadian Library has in our country been the most dramatic success in terms of sales and popular acceptance, it is only part of a very widespread development in contemporary Canadian publishing.

THE REASONS for the great upsurge of reprinting are fairly obvious. The public for books of all kinds — to the discomfiture of the sometime prophet Marshall McLuhan — has increased immensely; the libraries have also become so numerous that an expensive hardcover edition is sure of selling its two or three thousand, and then the book, if it has any kind of popular appeal, can go into a paperback edition. Though there are exceptions — New Press and M. G. Hurtig come immediately to mind — the great mass of Canadian reprint editions (both soft and hard covered) have been undertaken by the large established publishing firms, who have both capital and backlists of contracts; this alone must modify any assumption that recent changes in the aspect of Canadian publishing are entirely or in every respect the result of an invasion of new personalities and new philosophies of book production and distribution. The new publishing houses that have appeared during the past decade have widened the field of publication in the sense of giving greater scope for the experimental in prose and verse, yet — even though some of the smaller presses have managed extraordinary press runs for books that standard publishers would have considered unsaleable — the largest share of the increased market has gone to the older publishers — and particularly the largest share of the reprint market. In this development, of course, new printing processes have played their part.

The reprints, of which many scores now appear in Canada each year, can be divided into two categories, which rather arbitrarily I term *fortuitous* and *systematic*. By *fortuitous*, I mean the reprint that does not fit the pattern of a particular series; by *systematic* I mean one that is part of a series and in many cases is there because of a special aim or philosophy behind the series. Most publishers are inclined nowadays, when a hardcover book sells out quickly, to follow with a paperback edition rather than going through the succession of progressively cheaper hardcover reprints that was customary in the past until, after some years or even decades, the books would reach some widely popular level like Everyman or Penguin. Thus McClelland & Stewart, Macmillan and Oxford reprint many books outside the regular series they may maintain. Good recent examples are Oxford's paperback reprint of John Glassco's *Memoirs of Montparnasse* and

McGraw Hill-Ryerson's reprints of Klein's *The Rocking Chair* and of Alice Munro's *Dance of the Happy Shades*. I was interested to observe, in a recent McClelland & Stewart blurb for their paperback reprints, that 15 were individual titles of this kind, as against 16 which were appearing in their various reprint series.

One aspect of this individual reprint phenomenon is the extraordinary telescoping that has taken place in terms of time. Now a paperback edition of a book will often appear in the next season to the original book; in fact, some publishers — McClelland & Stewart, Oxford, Anansi — have found it advantageous, especially with poetry, to eliminate the intermediate stage, and to publish the paperback edition (which would normally have been the reprint) simultaneously with the hardcover edition, a procedure which has obvious benefits in view of the fact that most poetry-buyers today are likely to be young people unable to afford normal hardcover prices.

The reprint series themselves vary a great deal in character and intent. Some, like Macmillan's Laurentian Library (which has recently been bringing out the less familiar early novels of Morley Callaghan) and Clarke Irwin's Canadian Paperbacks (notable for their reprints of Emily Carr and Robertson Davies), while they are both oriented towards Canadian writing, seem still mainly intended to keep in print the more interesting writers these houses have published over the years. The same is true of Toronto's excellent Canadian University Paperback series, which has now passed its 130th title. Though the Canadian University Paperbacks are concerned mainly with Canadian themes and publish mostly the works of Canadian authors, in neither case are they exclusive; the list in fact presents a fine, broad selection from the past publishing record of one of the continent's best academic printing houses. From its earlier titles, which included key works as varied as McLuhan's *The Gutenberg Galaxy* and McNaught's *A Prophet in Politics*, down to such recent titles as Jones' *Butterfly on Rock*, it maintains an extraordinary list of books that are basic to the understanding of Canadian society and Canadian culture.

The New Canadian Library is perhaps — to date — the most important of the schematic series. Looking back over the long list of titles, one realizes how carefully Malcolm Ross has arranged his choices in such a way that an interest in contemporary Canadian books would lead to an interest in the more neglected classics of our literature, and vice versa. Of course, the series would not have been so successful as it actually is if it were not for the nationalistic trends that have created a deeper interest in Canadiana of every kind and have encouraged

the phenomenal proliferation of studies of Canadian books in universities and schools. Still, a touch of special insight was needed to anticipate a development of this kind; indeed, there is no doubt at all that the New Canadian Library contributed a great deal towards the very situation from which it has benefitted.

Other reprint libraries were encouraged by a related phenomenon — the interest in the Canadian past that came into being through a whole series of centennial celebrations beginning with the B.C. festival of 1958 and carrying on through the 1960s. M. G. Hurtig, in Edmonton, apart from the interesting regional Albertan titles which he has produced as part of his regular publishing programme, has also experimented in the reprint of Canadian literary classics; he has brought out new hardcover editions of Callaghan's early *Strange Fugitive* and of Hugh MacLennan's volume of essays, *Cross Country*, the latter with a curious new preface by the author. But the most important of Hurtig's ventures to date is undoubtedly the Canadiana Reprint Series, a handsomely bound line of facsimile reproductions which concentrates mainly on travel literature, including Butler's *The Great Lone Land*, Franklin's two narratives, Hearne's *Journey to the Northern Ocean*, Ballantyne's *Hudson's Bay* and the accounts which Alexander Mackenzie, Paul Kane and Alexander Henry left of their journeys; it varies in price from John Palliser's *Solitary Rambles* at \$5.95 to George Heriot's *Travels through the Canadas* at \$23.00 and Henry Youle Hind's *Narrative of the Canadian Red River Exploring Expedition* at \$25.00.

Coles Canadiana Collections — of which 47 titles appeared in the most recent list with apparently a dozen more to come shortly — tends to overlap the Canadiana Reprints. There is even one work in common — George Heriot's *Travels through the Canadas*, and in the Coles Collection it costs only \$7.95, but it is paperbound, and it lacks the background introduction which is a feature of each Hurtig reprint. (I gather that in this respect the Coles policy may shortly change and introductions may be commissioned.) Coles Canadiana tends to be less concerned with the explorers than with the pioneers, and it includes a variety of forgotten titles that are intriguing documents of social history (such as *The Canadian Handbook and Tourist's Guide*, 1867, *Canadian Folk-life and Folk-lore* by William Parker Greenough, 1897, and *The Canadian Home Cookbook*, 1877), together with nineteenth century travel narratives, mainly of the prairies (e.g. *My Canadian Journal* by the Marchioness of Dufferin, *Ocean to Ocean* by George M. Grant, and Milton & Cheadle's *The North-west Passage by Land*) and, finally, a small group of Canadian literary classics — Anna Jameson's *Winter Studies and Summer Rambles* and Catharine Parr Traill's *The Back-*

*woods of Canada* and *Canadian Wild Flowers*. As will be evident, the stylistic level of the series is uneven; the documentary level is uniformly high, and all one misses is the kind of scholarly notation that sets the work in its context.

One is aware of the same deficiency in the new Ryerson Archive series, and there it is even less justifiable, since the reprints are expensive at \$12.50: three times as dear as many of the Coles reprints and almost twice as dear as many of the Hurtig reprints, which also are bound and which do have introductions. One finds it hard to determine what public outside libraries is envisaged for the Ryerson Archive reprints.

**A**N ESPECIALLY GOOD SERIES is the oddly titled *Social History of Canada*, published by the University of Toronto Press under Michael Bliss's editorship, and consisting of a variety of books — published mainly between 1860 and 1930 — that recall the social debates and struggles of our formative era. Goldwin Smith's *Canada and the Canadian Question* is there; so are J. S. Woodsworth's *My Neighbour*, Nellie McClung's *In Times like These* and Alan Sullivan's strange social novel, *The Rapids*, while Ralph Connor's *The Foreigner* and Stephen Leacock's *The Unsolved Riddle of Social Justice* are announced. Each of these volumes has its own special documentary interest, but the most striking feature of the series is the high quality of the introductions. Carl Berger's opening essay to *Canada and the Canadian Question* is in its own rights a classic study of Smith and his significance for his times, while Richard Allen's introduction to Salem Bland's *The New Christianity*, the most recently published title, is not only better written than the book it prefaces, but also a much more lucid — because more concise — exposition of the Social Gospel than Allen's own book, *The Social Passion*. This is a series to be watched with special interest.

Another reprint series — on the indeterminate verges of history and sociology — which has turned out to contain a great deal of material peripherally interesting both to the historian and to the literary critic, is the Carleton Library, published by McClelland & Stewart but originated as a project of the Institute of Canadian Studies at Carleton University. Under the general editorship of Michael Gnarowski, the series now includes 70 titles. Some are special complications of essays previously printed in periodicals — like Bruce Cox's recent *Cultural Ecology* — which under its laconic and unpromising title conceals a group of

very useful studies of Canadian Indian life and its basis in the environment. Others, like the first volume, *Lord Durham's Report*, are crucial Canadian constitutional documents, and yet others, like Peter Newman's *Renegade in Power* among the recent reprints, are classic examples of good Canadian journalism. George Grant's *Lament for a Nation*, André Siegfried's *The Race Question in Canada*, O. D. Skelton's *Life and Letters of Sir Wilfrid Laurier*, Mason Wade's *The French Canadian Outlook* and J. B. Brebner's *North Atlantic Triangle* are among the notable works that up to now have appeared in the Carleton Library. One pleasing aspect of the series is that the editors have not confined their choice of reprints to books originally available through the ordinary channels of publishing and book distribution. Of the latest batch of titles one — Ronald Liversedge's *Recollections of the On to Ottawa Trek* — is the reporting of a narrative originally made available more than a decade ago in a mimeographed form, while a second, H. Blair Neatby's *Laurier and a Liberal Quebec*, is an edited version of the thesis Neatby submitted for his doctorate in 1956; both are excellent finds. Finally, among reprints in the field of history, McClelland & Stewart have begun to reissue in paperback form the early titles of the Canadian Centenary Series, beginning with McNutt's *The Atlantic Provinces*, Careless's *The Union of the Canadas* and Craig's *Upper Canada*.

FINALLY, some very useful reprinting is being done in a field which I suppose one can best describe as literary antiquarianism — the republication of those writers who have long been names in the literary histories but for many years have been readily available only in anthologized fragments. The New Canadian Library, of course, has done its bit for this cause, but mainly in the field of prose (such novels as *The History of Emily Montague*, *The Golden Dog* and *Wacousta*), though David Sinclair's *Nineteenth-Century Narrative Poems* is an example in the field of verse. However, the major contribution in this field is being planned by the University of Toronto Press, which has two series in hand — *Literature of Canada*, published in both paper and cloth, and a more expensive series of cloth-bound books, entitled the *Toronto Reprint Library of Canadian Prose and Poetry* and designed mainly for "public circulation". Both series are edited by Douglas Lochhead, and the 38 titles already announced for them promise a valuable extension in our stock of available Canadiana.

The first four volumes of *Literature in Canada* are now off the press — fat



books, well printed, with scholarly introductions and, considering their bulk, reasonably priced in paperback between \$3.95 and \$4.50. One tends to approach them on divided paths: the literary antiquary delighted, the literary critic cautious and somewhat apprehensive — a tone by no means absent from some of the introductions.

There is of course no doubting the quality of Isabella Valancy Crawford's *Collected Poems*, though one wishes James Reaney's introduction had been a little less playfully oblique in its approach and had tackled frontally the question of Garvin's manipulative editing of the original, which is here reproduced in facsimile as printed, with no attempt to show, by annotation, the evident divergences between Crawford's intent and what after her death appeared in print.

To the other volumes one's reactions are mixed in a rather different way. It is not the scholarly apparatus that leaves the literary antiquary unsatisfied so much as the basic material which leaves the critic in doubt. It is doubtless "a good thing" to have Charles Sangster available in extenso — both *The St. Lawrence and the Saguenay* and *Hesperus* in one volume — but one soon realizes why Gordon Johnston is so defensive in his introduction. "So the best advice (unfortunately vague) is that we not expect too much of him, and at the same time we not under-estimate him. We should be ready to be delighted." Indeed, there are *moments* of delight, harmonious passages, occasional lambent images, but the journey one takes to earn these rewards leads one through vast sloughs of boredom, through echoing defiles of empty eloquence. A. J. M. Smith with great discrimination picked for his *Book of Canadian Poetry* most of the passages from Sangster the general reader is likely to need. But for the literary historian such a reprint as the present is still invaluable.

There is an even deeper sinking of the critical heart as one wades one's grumbling way through the Victorian ineptitudes that fill most pages of Edward Hartley Dewart's *Selections from Canadian Poets*, originally published in 1864; except for a few pieces — and here Charles Heavyside impresses with a kind of preposterous power — the actual contents of the anthology have far less interest than Dewart's introduction, which is well argued and well written, quite apart from its special interest as one of the earliest manifestoes of Canadian literary nationalism, one of the first essays to suggest that there might be a local source of inspiration, different from European sources in its essential character.

I have remarked elsewhere that Canadians developed a power of functionally eloquent exposition while they were still unsure of the imaginative forms that would be appropriate to their experience, and this observation, I feel, is sup-

ported not only by Dewart's Introductory Essay on Canadian Poetry, but also by the three early critical works that Clara Thomas collects and introduces in the last of the first four titles in *Literature of Canada*. These are John George Bourinot's *Our Intellectual Strength and Weakness*, Thomas Guthrie Marquis's "English-Canadian Literature" and Camille Roy's "French-Canadian Literature", all of them pioneer critical documents which helped to shape our cultural consciousness during the years that followed their publication. To have these works available, with Dr. Thomas's excellent historical introduction, will be most useful to the reader who seeks to trace the development of a Canadian critical tradition. By the time Marquis and Roy wrote in 1913, there was already a body of literature that — whatever its unashamed derivations — could be accepted as distinctively Canadian besides containing some works good by any standards in the English-writing world. This, of course, makes all the more surprising the accuracy of prophetic insight with which, having such dubious material from which to judge in 1864, Dewart so clearly envisaged the future of our literary development, short on history and drawing its strength from an immediate apprehension of "external Nature" and a deep questioning immersion in "human nature".

In reviving the pre-modern literature of Canada, at least one of the little presses is playing an interesting role. The Golden Dog in Ottawa has begun to issue a series of finely printed pamphlet-sized reprints of single works that have acquired a classic standing in Canadian literary esteem. The first three titles are Charles Heavyside's impressive little narrative poem, *Jezebel*, his *Dark Huntsman*, in two variant versions, and Archibald Lampman's *The City of the End of Things*, published as Lampman evidently intended it and not as D. C. Scott thought proper to rearrange it for inclusion in the posthumously published *Collected Poems*.

One might argue that the current upsurge of reprinting in Canada is merely part of the general paperback revolution, which has kept in circulation or brought back to the bookshops an amazing variety of titles from the world's literatures. Yet I think there is a specially intentional character in what has been done here which is quite distinctive. The reprinting of saleable books merely to keep them in print has been less important in Canada during the past decade and a half than the deliberate reassembling of the materials for a cultural tradition. Our reprint publishers and editors are not only giving us back our past but also sustaining the vitality of our contemporary movement by keeping its works in productive circulation.