

## AWARDS AND INITIATIVES

THIS YEAR the jury for the Governor-General's Awards has departed in two directions from past practice. It was not new for them to grant no award for fiction in English; the infrequency with which good Canadian novels appear forced such abstention on at least one past jury. But it was new to take advantage of this lack and to give two poetry prizes instead to books between which the judges found it hard to choose — Eli Mandel's *An Idiot Joy* and Alden Nowlan's *Bread, Wine and Salt*. Everything is to be gained from such flexibility, which, if persisted in, would remove what has been one of the standing objections to annual literary awards — that in lean years undeserving books are rewarded, while in fat years good books go unacknowledged.

The other departure — as I assure myself from a list which forms an appendix to the book in question — has been to issue the non-fiction award for the first time to a work of reference — Norah Story's *The Oxford Companion to Canadian History and Literature*. While in 1967 there appeared other excellent non-fiction books which have gone unrewarded as a result of this decision, one cannot dispute that such a monumental work as *The Oxford Companion* deserved special recognition. It has faults — of omission more than commission — but these are matters for a close review rather than for an editorial comment. At the same time, like the *Literary History of Canada*, it is the kind of work of pioneer research which will be permanently valuable to Canadian literary scholarship and whose very shortcomings will stimulate others to compensate for them.

Yet one still wonders whether it should be rewarded under a category manifestly meant for books that make original statements on their subjects rather than for source books. Surely this is a case which reinforces an argument we have often made: that there should be awards that acknowledge *services to literature*, which may take the form of reference works like *The Oxford Companion*, success-

ful and creative editing, or the efforts of those tireless middlemen who still use radio and television for the fostering of Canadian writing and the maintenance of Canadian writers. We are far from grudging Miss Story the recognition she has received; we applaud and echo it. But we also believe this might have been the appropriate occasion for the Canada Council to widen its system of awards so that all kinds of services to literature may come within their scope. We would like, to give only one example, to see Robert Weaver receive some handsome and resounding acknowledgment for the long, dedicated and varied services he has performed for writing in this country by his work as anthologist, as critic, as editor of *Tamarack Review* and as one of the most tireless workers to sustain a standard of excellence in the literary programmes of the CBC.

This brings us, by a devious route, back to *The Oxford Companion*, and to the two important fields of Canadian literary information which it barely touches. One — where Miss Story regretfully admits the limitations imposed by lack of space — is that of literary magazines, which, except for a few very minor and capricious entries, are dealt with in a single summary article. The time has come, surely, for a thorough history-cum-reference book, with decennial supplements, to cover the past history of the literature magazine in Canada and to keep us informed of what is happening in a field which in recent years has shown interesting new departures. We recommend this to the Canada Council as a project worth financing and — if necessary — organizing.

We also recommend a somewhat different approach to another field barely covered by the *Oxford Companion* — the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation in its role as the most important single promoter of Canadian writing and patron of Canadian writers over the past generation. A vast task of research and publication is here required. There is a whole history of the CBC in literature to be written. Thousands of valuable radio talks — including important critical statements, occasional essays, fragments of autobiography and biography — have gone unpublished because the CBC has never produced a regular journal like the BBC's *Listener*. And there is a whole genre of radio drama of which only a minute proportion has ever gone beyond the one, two or at most three performances given on the air. At present the CBC has a small publications department which prints selected series of radio lectures. This work should be extended — if necessary with special government aid offered through the Canada Council — so that at least the best of the now buried works of literature which the CBC commissioned and performed may be available in a more permanent shape. It may be objected that the CBC is still faced with an enormous task in presenting

the actualities of the day, without imposing on it a major extra burden of resurrecting and assessing its past. But it could throw open its vast files to controlled research in co-operation with the Universities. What subjects for hungry thesis writers must lie concealed there!

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WE WELCOME a new series of paperbacks, the Laurentian Library, published by Macmillan. Although for several years Macmillan have in fact been releasing paperback editions of many of their books, they have been the only major Canadian house to delay the initiation of an actual series. The Laurentian Library, starting with books by Hugh MacLennan, Morley Callaghan, Ethel Wilson and other leading Macmillan authors, makes a good beginning in terms of quality, and, given the record of excellent books for which Macmillan holds the copyright, one can expect much of the series.

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NEW UNIVERSITY JOURNALS are emerging at such a pace in Canada that it is difficult to give them more attention than mere bibliographical notation. In some cases that is all they deserve; the pressure to publish for survival alone among academics is equalled by the pressure to publish for prestige alone among academics, and many journals now appearing on the North American continent have no other evident reason for existence than the ambition of their initiators. *Mosaic*, whose first number was published in October last year by the University of Manitoba, under the editorship of Kenneth McRobbie, may well be one of the exceptions, for it begins with a definite and attractive purpose. It is a journal "for the Comparative Study of Literature and Ideas", and it has established an ambitious plan of issues, each devoted to a specific theme connected with comparative literature. The opening issue is concerned with "Literature and history", and includes contributions from, among others, C. V. Wedgwood (in condescending mood), Robin Skelton and Michael Hamburger. It is a magazine worth following.