editorial

PAPERBACKS AND RESPECTABLE PICKPOCKETS

UNASSUMINGLY, BUT SURELY, the softcover movement has been working its way into Canadian publishing. It is true that in the paperback cellars of our bookshops there are long shelves packed densely with American and British publications, and small corners thinly filled with Canadian. But this is due largely to the fact that all the broad fields of general interest are encompassed much more economically by the mammoth and well-established publishing houses of the larger countries. Who would sell the paperback rights for a book on, say, Carthage or the Lost Land of Mu or the rackety life of Mrs. Aphra Behn to a Canadian publisher, when Penguin Books or, even more profitable, Signet is there, with Meridian in the background for the esoterica and Evergreen for the erotica? The Canadian paperback trade is, generally speaking, a trade in Canadiana, literary or historical, and this is what makes its survival and its growth such interesting phenomena. Obviously there are enough readers now not merely to make it profitable to publish the regular hundred or two hardcover books of "Canadian interest" that appear with native publishers every year, but there is also — which there was not a decade ago — an increasing middlebrow and middle-income public ready to buy cheap editions of books by Canadian authors. Admittedly, libraries buy up a large proportion of the hardcover copies, and students are often captive customers for paperbacks in Canadian history and literature. But neither of these concentrations of customers is in itself enough to sustain not merely the ordinary book trade along traditional lines but also, parallel with it, a whole variety of paperback series and projects.

The most vigorous of all the Canadian paperback publishing houses is McClelland & Stewart. They run, to begin, two of the four real paperback series in

Canada. The New Canadian Library, devoted to nineteenth and twentieth century literary classics, with a few anthologies of criticism and verse, now has 59 titles. The most recent batch of six includes, almost predictably, an inferior Stephen Leacock (there are already seven others in the series), but also two modern novels of the richest excellence, Sheila Watson's *The Double Hook* and Mordecai Richler's *Son of A Smaller Hero*, together with one work of The Ham-handed Master, Frederick Philip Grove, *Settlers of the Marsh*, which makes one wonder, as always with Grove, how a novelist with so much sensibility and so much power could write so uncouthly. The other McClelland & Stewart series, the Carleton Library, run in collaboration with Carleton University and subsidized by the Canada Council, has a solid look and is designed with a rather deceptive dulness; it is mostly devoted to reprinting works of Canadian historical, economic or sociological scholarship with, once again, a few anthologies thrown in, and it has now reached its 29th volume. Some of the books are excessively specialized; some, like O. D. Skelton's *Life and Times of Sir Alexander Tilloch Galt*, are merely bad — in this case the model anti-biography. But the series must not be dismissed as all academic dryness; some of the books it includes are sparkling examples of their own type of scholarly or repertorial writing. I, for one, am grateful that the six most recent volumes include André Siegfried's brilliant study from a continental French viewpoint of *The Race Question in Canada*, John Bartlet Brebner's *North Atlantic Triangle*, a massively impressive study of Canadian-British-American relations over the past two centuries, and Tom McFeat's *Indians of the North Pacific Coast*, an ably done anthology of normally inaccessible writings on the most fascinating of all Indian cultures, from part of John R. Jewitt's story of his imprisonment by the Nootka, through the classic accounts by Franz Boas of Kwakiutl ceremonials, to the records of mid-twentieth century anthropologists.

McClelland & Stewart have notably furthered the paperback movement in Canada not only by such series, but also by adopting a very considerable programme of simultaneous hardcover and paperback publication. This has been done with topical books like *The Comfortable Pew* and *The Case of Steven Truscott*, which by this means have run into what in Canadian terms are enormous editions, but also with less rapidly selling items like books of new poetry, so that it has been possible for readers to buy the works of our most vital contemporary poets immediately on publication at ordinary paperback rates; this, no doubt, has contributed greatly to the relative popularization of modern Canadian verse among the students, whose predecessors ten years ago were almost com-

pletely ignorant of what was being written or what had been written in this country.

I confess I have not gone deeply enough into the question to say who in Canada originated this custom of publishing expensive and inexpensive editions of a book simultaneously, but it is spreading quickly and other publishers than McClelland & Stewart are taking it up. Some of them — often small new houses — are using the technique to attract readers to quite experimental work. An example is John Robert Colombo's *The Mackenzie Poems*, published by the Swan Publishing Company; the paperback editions costs only 75¢. These are what Colombo calls "found poems". The idea arouses among those of us who lived through the Surrealist age the same feeling of nostalgic *déjà vu* as did the neo-dadaist constructions which were the fashion among young painters two or three seasons ago. The surrealists were always looking out for "objets trouvés", and Mr. Colombo is doing precisely the same, "finding" poetry in unlikely places, in this case in the speeches of William Lyon Mackenzie, reproduced with even their commas intact, but rearranged into verse patterns on the page so that their rhythms and relationships are more evident. A game no doubt, but an intelligently played one. Perhaps before long we shall go all the way back to the telephone directory poems.

To return to the generalities of paperback publishing, most established houses are now, in a rather sporadic way, bringing out in soft covers the Canadian classics for which they still hold copyright, and there are at least two notable series in addition to those I have already noted. The Clarke Irwin paperbacks started off encouragingly, as pleasantly designed books with a varied list of titles; the last batch we received included Emily Carr's *Klee Wyck*, Robertson Davies' *Tempest-Tost* and Bruce Hutchison's well-researched but desperately over-written *The Fraser*. Recently no more books in this series have been reaching us; we hope it has not come to an end. Certainly Toronto's Canadian University Paperbacks is very much alive, reaching up to a total of 50 titles. The virtues of this series, unexpected in a venture by a University press, are its variety and unpredictability, and particularly the inclination of its editors to turn up just the kind of half-forgotten works which interest an omnivorously voracious reader. The series includes such memorable works as *The Gutenberg Galaxy* and George Stanley's *The Birth of Western Canada*, and at least one of this age's most unreadable books, Innis' *The Bias of Communication*, but every now and again there appears one of those modest works crammed with the kind of information which sustains the inveterately curious mind; the most recent of these is Edwin C. Guillet's *Pioneer Travel in Upper Canada*.

The paperback revolution seems to have dug into permanence, and one can only welcome its survival. It benefits publishers; otherwise they would not continue to follow it. It benefits readers, and in some ways it benefits writers, who earn a little extra out of their paperback royalities and are doubtless helped, mentally as well as materially, by the atmosphere of heightened interest in literature and in books as objects-to-be-possessed, that it arouses.

So much for what in general we must regard as a positive trend in the world of literature. Now, from the writer's point of view, for a just complaint. Last year, when artists and entrepreneurs of the arts laboured together at Seminar 65 under the genial eye of Mr. Maurice Lamontagne to produce a group of resolutions intended to foster the arts in Canada and to better the situation of artists, the literary sub-committee drew the government's attention to the fact that, under present Canadian laws, libraries can pick the pockets of authors with impunity. A book is sold, let us say, for $5.00, and the author earns, under normal contracts, 50¢ in royalties. He expects that the purchaser and perhaps only one or two friends or members of his family will have the use of this copy of his book, at least until it passes into the second-hand market. But libraries make nonsense of such calculations, and it is always a matter of chagrin for a writer wandering along the stacks to pull out one of his books, to find that thirty or forty people have taken it out, which means that fifty people have probably read it, and that he has earned only the same 50¢, just about 1¢ per reader. The publishers do nothing to curb this imposition on their authors, since they themselves are not losing and the libraries are good customers. The only solution lies with the government. Sweden has passed a law obliging all libraries to compensate authors for the royalties they lose through the circulation of their books, and has worked out a satisfactory way of collecting and distributing the dues. I gathered when I was last in West Germany that a similar scheme is going into operation there. So far the Canadian government has done nothing to correct this injustice to authors, which might be remedied either by legalizing a levy on libraries, or by making the matter a public charge and allowing authors special deductions for tax purposes from their book royalty income.