

LOST EURYDICE

The Novels of Callaghan

George Woodcock

MORLEY CALLAGHAN'S best book for a quarter of a century is that which he probably wrote with the least effort and the least intent of producing a masterpiece. It is not one of the three ambitious but imperfect novels he has published since the last war; it is the volume of autobiography, *That Summer in Paris*.

That Summer in Paris describes the months in 1929, just before the great stock market crash, when Montparnasse was enjoying its last fling as an international literary centre and when Morley Callaghan, a young man from Toronto, mingled closely with several of the great figures of the Lost Generation. It is self-revealing to an extraordinary degree, honest and, despite some curious vanities, more modest than a first reading immediately suggests, for it is a naïve wonder that really comes through when he tells how Sinclair Lewis said "Flaubert would have loved your work" and Hemingway remarked that "Tolstoy couldn't have done my 'Wedding Dress' story better." In a rare feat of reminiscent concentration, Callaghan really does bring back the spirit of Paris a generation ago and he offers some extraordinarily interesting insights into the personalities of Hemingway, Fitzgerald and even Joyce; he also recreates very convincingly his own personality of those far-off days. He not merely recollects his past self; he seems to rebecome it, and the achievement affects even his writing. The tone is that of *They Shall Inherit the Earth* rather than that of *A Passion in Rome*. The flabbiness of prose and thought that have characterized his most recent novels is absent; everything is crisp, clear, unpretentious. Callaghan writes with the air of a man knowing the limitations of his powers and then using them to the full, as he did in the three novels of his middle period which are still unexcelled among

his longer works of fiction — *Such is My Beloved, They Shall Inherit the Earth and More Joy in Heaven*.

That Summer in Paris is more than a satisfying book for the reader interested in literary personages. It is in its own way a fascinating handbook to Callaghan's own other writing. For example, we come across incidents and characters which we recognize from his fiction, and so we begin to get some insight into his methods of building up a book. Callaghan's realistic theories — even if they have never really dominated his essentially moralistic novels — have justified him in appropriating anything that life happened to offer which was suitable to his purposes of the moment. Like many better novelists, Callaghan is less inventive than imaginative. He is always ready to use a good character or a good situation time and again under various guises, so that the priest whom he portrays in real life in *That Summer in Paris* (the priest who loved drink too well and has walked with sixteen men to the death chamber) appears, variously transformed, in both his early novel, *It's Never Over*, and his middle-period novel, *More Joy in Heaven*.

But even more interesting than the buds of character and situation which Callaghan has more or less successfully transplanted into his novels from the life portrayed in *That Summer in Paris* are the statements of his literary principles which are scattered through the pages of his Paris memoirs. Like Samuel Butler, George Orwell and Ernest Hemingway, Callaghan came in his own way (which he does not very clearly reveal to us) to the conclusion that — in our age at least — writing must be uncomplicated and direct. It should present the object — not seek to transform it into something it is not or use something else to suggest or describe it.

I remember deciding that the root of the trouble with writing was that poets and storywriters used language to evade, to skip away from the object, because they could never bear to face the thing freshly and see it freshly for what it was in itself.

Hence metaphor must be avoided. At this point in the argument it is ironical to find Callaghan picking for the special target of his attack the man who wrote in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* that the language of poetry should be “a selection of the language really spoken by men.”

Those lines, *A primrose by the river's brim a yellow primrose was to him, and it was nothing more*, often troubled me, aroused my anger. What the hell else

did Wordsworth want it to be? An orange? A sunset? I would ask myself, Why does one thing have to remind you of something else?

It goes against the grain to defend Wordsworth at his most inane, but there is a certain obtuseness about Callaghan's argument which suggests that he did not even attempt to consider the uses of metaphor; at least, however, he makes quite clear the practice he intends to follow in his own work.

He follows this first statement with hostile references to "arty writers" and uses "too literary" as a regular term of condemnation. He remarks that "it was part of my writing creed to distrust calculated charm in prose," and he shows a hostility towards critics and "writers about writers" which — even if his later actions have shown it to be rather suspect — can be interpreted as part of his general reaction against literary self-consciousness. Elsewhere he talks of aiming at a writing "as transparent as glass", and in what is probably his most significant statement he tells us this:

But I knew what I was seeking in my Paris street walks, and in the typing hours — with Loretto waiting to retype a chapter. It was this: strip the language, and make the style, the method, all the psychological ramifications, the ambience of the relationships, all the one thing, so the reader couldn't make separations. Cézanne's apples. The appleness of apples. Yet just apples.

Wandering around Paris I would find myself thinking of the way Matisse looked at the world around him and find myself growing enchanted. A pumpkin, a fence, a girl, a pineapple on a tablecloth — the thing seen freshly in a pattern that was a gay celebration of things as they were. Why couldn't all people have the eyes and the heart that would give them this happy acceptance of reality? The word made flesh. The terrible vanity of the artist who wanted the word without the flesh. I can see now that I was busy rejecting even then that arrogance of the spirit, that fantasy running through modern letters and thought that man was alien in this universe. From Pascal to Henry Miller they are the children of St. Paul.

The philosophy is clear and, as Callaghan expresses it, consistent. Writing is concerned with, in the old Godwinian phrase, things as they are. Its purpose is statement. It should be simple — so "transparent" as to be self-effacing. The style and the content should become one, indivisible. Writing should not detach itself from the visible world which, for Callaghan as for Gautier, exists. Callaghan shared his attitude, as I have remarked, with many writers of his time; it was part of the great reaction against the reign of Symbolism. At the same time, he did not reject entirely those who followed other directions. We find him admiring Joyce, that most deliberately "literary" of all writers, and Fitzgerald, though he also says of him:

And what could be left for Scott when the glamorous wandering was over? When 'a primrose by a river's brim, a yellow primrose was to him, and it was nothing more.' My old theme. Nothing more; the wonder of the thing in itself. Right for me. But not for Scott.

THE THEORY of writing Callaghan puts forward in *That Summer in Paris* is rational enough, but literature is not produced by logical consistency. Carried to extremes, such a theory would result in a total atrophy of feeling, but no real writer works by theory, and Callaghan as often deserts his ideal of stark, direct statement as Zola does his vaunted scientific realism. Every Callaghan novel deals with man as a moral being, and hence it is led into realms where the statement cannot be direct; here, even when metaphor is not used obviously, it enters in the larger symbolic sense. A whole essay could be written on the significance of the cathedrals which appear at crucial points in every novel that Callaghan wrote, from the Canadian cathedral in his first novel, *Strange Fugitive*, of which he says, "You can't get away from it. It's right in the centre of things", to the universal cathedral, St. Peters, in *Passion in Rome*, where the ceremonies connected with the death of the Pope proclaim the endurance of universal verities which reflect on the morally tortured life of the novel's characters.

Strange Fugitive is probably nearer than any other Callaghan novel to being a textbook example of his writing theory carried into practice. The narrative style is simple and for the most part decorated only by a frequent use of vernacular. At times the tone is that of a rather naïve person laconically telling a tale.

The practice was over, he went into the dressing-room and talked with some of the players. He watched a fellow stretched out on his belly getting a rub down. He smelled the liniment, and thought maybe the fellow had a charlie horse. Most players undressed slowly, singing and telling stories. They talked loudly and happily. Harry picked up a fellow's ball-shoes and whacked them on the floor, knocking the mud out of the spikes.

There is no need to seek far among the companions of Callaghan's youth to find something very similar. In the passage I have quoted, Callaghan was speaking as author; here Hemingway speaks through the mouth of one of his characters.

Walcott had been just hitting him for a long time. It was like a baseball player pulls a ball and takes some of the shock off. From now on Walcott commenced

to land solid. He certainly was a socking-machine. Jack was trying to block everything now. It didn't show what an awful beating he was taking. In between the rounds I worked on his legs. The muscles would flutter under my hands all the time I was working them. He was as sick as hell.

Of the two passages Callaghan's is perhaps the better, but the similarity shows that, in their duller moments, both Callaghan and Hemingway slipped into an almost anonymous period style. Because it contains so much writing of this kind, *Strange Fugitive* is the most dated and the least individual of Callaghan's early works.

In content, *Strange Fugitive* is already typical Callaghan, a novel of consequences. The very first sentence strikes the note.

Harry Trotter, who had a good job as foreman in Pape's lumberyard, was determined everybody should understand he loved his wife.

What follows is Harry's fall from this respectable niche because of his failure to control his passions. His predilection for violence loses him the good job in the timber yard. The attractions of an easy-going divorcée lead him away from his wife; here, incidentally, we find a situation that recurs constantly in Callaghan's work — the conflict between sacred and profane love, between the slender, somewhat frigid wife figure and the abundantly fleshed amoral mistress, the Jocasta figure of men who, like Harry Trotter, loved their mothers too well. Infidelity and careless violence lead to lawlessness and deliberate violence. Harry becomes a bootlegger, kills the boss of a rival gang, and dies under the sawn-off shotguns of his enemies. It is a fate that rolls on with massive inevitability, like a Buddhist Karma; in fact the very symbol of Karma fills Harry's eyes as he lies dying. "He saw the wheels of the car going round and round, and the car got bigger. The wheels went round slowly and he was dead."

Strange Fugitive is a Canadian Rake's Progress. At first sight its inexorable and highly formalized pattern of retribution seems at variance with Callaghan's expressed aim of direct and natural writing. Is this really, one wonders, Cézanne's apples? But the inconsistency is only apparent. For the aim of stripping the language, of seeing things as they are and using writing to make statements about them is as much a moral as an aesthetic aim; it is part of the puritanical or Jansenist revolt against luxury in art and thought as well as in life. The great moralist writers have always sought for a renewed directness of language, from Bunyan and Swift to Orwell and Gide. But in none of them is this simplification

of style an expression of fictional realism; in fact it tends to remove such writers from the true business of the realist novel, that objective exploration of character which, as Flaubert and Tolstoy knew, requires all the subtlety, all the mutability and all the richness of suggestion of which language is capable. *Pilgrim's Progress* and *Gulliver's Travels* are neither novels nor realistic, and even the typical works of the later moralists, like *Strait is the Gate* and *1984*, deliberately abandon plausibility to achieve the highly formal and artificial pattern of the moral parable. Callaghan belongs in this company; his view of style is essentially moralistic, and every one of his works fails or succeeds according to the success with which he manipulates the element of parable within it.

This is the underlying motivation of Callaghan's desire to "strip down" which, as his art grows, he carries forward into such larger elements as action and character. It is the essence of the parable-novel to keep attention focussed closely on the moral question which the author is posing to the reader. Hence the multiplication of sub-plots is to be avoided, the leading characters must be few and well-defined, the minor characters must be used at crucial points to perform actions or make statements that help to illuminate the theme. Gide and Camus found in the peculiarly French *récit* the ideal form and volume for the moral parable, and Orwell's best work in this vein was his slightest and least complicated, *Animal Farm*.

Similarly, in Callaghan, we see a progression in his earlier novels toward the simplification of structure. At the same time there is compensating enrichment of the language which reveals an inevitable relaxation of the rules Callaghan had set himself as an apprentice writer. It is true that his characters continue to speak in that peculiar rough patois which is his personal version — a kind of Basic Vernacular — of the impoverished language of contemporary North American man; in fact the dialogue becomes more laconic from novel to novel, but when it is well done the very sparseness provides an effective contrast to the fuller narrative style.

Callaghan, even at this point, rarely resorts to obvious metaphor. But there are ways of being metaphorical without seeming so. The Imagists discovered one of them, for the objects they presented with such clear delineation were so evocative as to acquire metaphorical status. When an orthodox Imagist like H. D. says:

In my garden
even the wind-flowers lie flat
broken by the wind at last . . .

those wind-flowers are a great deal more than botanical specimens. The very absence of specific links, like those which are made in a simile, make images of this kind productive of a rich overgrowth of association. That objects have their own ambiguity and mean more in the mind than facts has been well understood by a later generation of writers, like Robbe-Grillet and Butor.

It is to this quasi-metaphorical use of imagery that Callaghan turns abundantly in his second novel, *It's Never Over*. This is a novel of the everlasting return; it begins and ends with a street car journey; it concerns three people who are close to a man hanged for murder and who find themselves drawn into an inescapable circle of emotions which arouse unadmitted hatreds and loves and which lead the hero — the dead man's friend — to the edge of a second murder. At one point the hero and the sister of the hanged man sit on the back porch of the house where he had lived.

"Practically all the flowers are gone now," Isabelle said.

Stems of flowers were still standing in the garden earth; withered flowers with broken stems; a few asters and zinnias still in bloom but fading in the daytime sun; tall stalks of flowers lying dry and dead against the fence. The leaves were still thick on the grape-vine.

"I hate to see the last of them go," she said. "I worked with them all summer."

The fading of the flowers is clearly linked with Isabelle's appearance on that day.

Since she had become so much thinner her nose now was almost too large for her face, and her forehead and chin were too prominent . . . She had on a black crepe dress, a collar high on her neck. The dress was a little too large, there was no movement under it, the cloth folds were unnaturally still.

Everything in this passage, even if Callaghan does not present it as metaphor, in fact means something more than itself. The withering of the flowers suggests the withering of Isabelle's hopes of life, the ending of summer is linked with the winter of death that hangs over the minds of the characters throughout the novel, and Isabelle's black dress, with no movement beneath it and its "unnaturally still" cloth folds, brings to one's mind the idea of a mort-cloth and recalls the funeral of the hanged man that had taken place earlier in the day. In fact, as we see, Callaghan's primrose is no longer "nothing more". He is using, like other writers, the traditional devices of literature.

This becomes increasingly evident in his third novel, *A Broken Journey*, written at the beginning of the thirties. This is a very undisciplined novel, in which the characters are far less clearly realized than the central trio in *It's Never*

Over. It is also a longer book than either of its predecessors, and it anticipates such later long novels as *The Many Colored Coat* and *Passion in Rome* in its failure to focus clearly on significant action, in its limping pace and in the author's inability to provide a structure that will discipline the volume of material.

A Broken Journey deals with such themes as love and infidelity, the aspects of innocence, and the contrast between the indifferent natural world and the ideals by which we try to approach it. In their own ways, all the characters suffer tragedy because of the distortions of love which their own natures conspire with external circumstances to force upon them. Peter Gould, temporarily paralyzed after being pushed downstairs by a rejected mistress, and thus rendered incapable of becoming the lover of Marion Gibbons on the trip they take into the wilderness, represents on a physical level the deprivation of the other characters. Marion loses her prized virginity to the boatman, Steve, a man of the wilderness, and feels only disappointment and "a strange impersonal tenderness". She departs, defeated, and leaves Peter to the closeness of his clearly symbolic "small white room". Indeed, *A Broken Journey* is packed with symbolic objects — the roses that stand for doomed innocence, the threatening waterweeds that clog the river in the wilderness, the white unattainable mountain peak "that looked like an immense, crude rugged cathedral of rock . . ." Furthermore, in this novel Callaghan introduces long stretches of landscape description which is intended partly to evoke the impersonal power of the natural world and partly to deepen the shadows of mood in the depiction of a series of doomed relationships.

I N THE TWO YEARS — 1932 to 1934 — that separate *A Broken Journey* from *Such is My Beloved*, the leap forward is extraordinary. *A Broken Journey* might have been the product of a young promise disintegrating; *Such is My Beloved* is the work of a writer who has — at least for a period — found his true direction. Since this and Callaghan's other novels of the 1930's form a closely related group it may be well to start by indicating some of their common characteristics. All of them are novels of their time, in which the writer shows a deep consciousness of existing social ills; it is depression conditions that originally drive Ronnie to prostitution in *Such is My Beloved* and scar Michael Aikenhead's young manhood with unemployment in *They Shall Inherit the Earth*. At the same time there is no suggestion — at least in Callaghan's own

attitude — of the political messianism that spoilt so many novels in the thirties; he is well enough aware of the arguments of those who call themselves the socially conscious, as the harangues of Bill Johnson show in *They Shall Inherit the Earth*, but he passes no Marxist judgment and the effects of a depression environment on his characters are observed objectively. But, while at times Callaghan appears to present a realistic picture of the social landscape of his decade, and skilfully reinforces the illusion by an effectively controlled description of the physical setting in which his characters move, these are no more novels of social analysis than they are of political propaganda.

They are essentially, as their biblical titles suggest, novels of moral predicament. Each asks its question. What are the bounds of Christian love? How far can a man be free when all his acts affect the lives of others? Can the prodigal ever return to the world against which he has risen in rebellion? Can the individual assert and maintain his human dignity in an acquisitive society? Each novel asks its questions; none provides the glib and easy answer.

It is these moral questions that dominate and shape the novels of Callaghan's middle period to the virtual exclusion of other considerations. While the apparent plausibility of background and of minor action may at first deceive the reader, neither the characters nor the structures of action in these novels are in any sense realistic. Considered as probable human beings, Father Dowling and Kip Caley are absurd; considered as the God's Fools of moral allegory they at once assume authenticity. Similarly the two Aikenheads, Michael and his father Andrew in *They Shall Inherit the Earth*, are radically simplified individuals who live fully only in terms of their essential moral predicament; everything else about them — their relationships with people outside the circle affected by the death of Dave Choat, their naïve loves and ambitions — is roughly sketched. As in a picture by Tintoretto, the almost slurred vagueness of detail has the effect of concentrating our attention on the central pattern, the moral heart of the work.

The patterns of action are equally simplified, and, as in Callaghan's first novel and in all the novels of the classic moralist tradition, the chain of consequences works out inexorably. Kip is not allowed to become merely disillusioned with the society to which he returns; he has to be physically as well as morally destroyed. Andrew Aikenhead is only reprieved after he has endured all the bitter stages of a moral crucifixion. The actions of the characters themselves are as unrealistic as the destinies that rule them. Father Dowling's haunting of the prostitutes he decides to befriend is plausible only as a manifestation of neurotic obsession; but, despite the priest's eventual mental breakdown — another blow

of relentless fate — it is obvious that Callaghan is not wasting his time on a clinical picture of mental aberration. Father Dowling's actions, like his character, assume meaning — even in merely aesthetic terms — only if we regard them as contributing to the symbolic structure of a moral statement. Kip Caley's gross naiveté, his optimism, his extraordinary blindness to the implications of anything outside the almost messianic mission that inspires him — all of these characteristics and all of the actions that stem from them would seem improbably childish if we did not apply in reading *More Joy in Heaven* similar standards to those we apply in reading *Don Quixote*. Kip Caley is not a likely human being, nor does he seem intended to be one, in spite of the fact that the record of a real-life criminal provided the hints on which Callaghan worked in writing the novel.

It is in fact within a clearly established moral spectrum that all the characters and their actions in Callaghan's three central novels are to be observed. They range from the innocent full circle to innocence's parody, the amoral. The innocence of Julie in *More Joy in Heaven*, an innocence which experience cannot soil, is doubled by the frightening cynicism of the fur-thief Foley who leads Kip to his doom. In *They Shall Inherit the Earth* the joyful natural innocence of Anna saves Michael morally and brings him to the final reconciliation with his father and his own conscience, but Anna herself is for one perilous evening endangered by the ophidian lust of the amoral Huck Farr, every man's comrade and every woman's enemy. The amoral characters in these novels always appear as tempters; it is another of them, Lou, who holds the prostitute Ronnie in *Such is My Beloved* to her path of degradation and profits by it. Hence the ultimates of the spectrum must be regarded as the innocent and the diabolical, and in the gulf between them the central characters wage their struggles not merely within their own hearts, but also externally, with the great amorphous being of a conscienceless society represented by the chorus of minor characters, the indifferent, the cowardly, the proud and the corrupt.

Callaghan's rebels, as he presents them, are not anarchistic rebels; it is essential to the drama of Kip Caley that he should return to society repenting just such a rebellion. The actual martyr figures in all three novels suffer acutely because normal society misunderstands and rejects them. It is the knowledge that his fellow citizens are wrongly accusing him of the murder of his stepson that breaks Andrew Aikenhead's spirit; Father Dowling's calvary begins when he discovers that a devout Catholic family, famous for its charitable works, will not accept as human beings the prostitutes he befriends; Kip Caley's catastrophe comes when he realizes that the people who appeared full of enthusiastic admiration

for his desire to live by good works have been merely enjoying the thrill of associating with a notorious and reformed ex-criminal and have never understood the moral urge that burnt within him. Not merely do such characters seek reconciliation with the society that rejects them; they also try to bring about the reconciliation of other rejected ones who have sought refuge in the sub-societies of prostitution and crime. The sinister unresponsiveness of society, and the moral insensitiveness of its symbolic figures — judges, bishops, politicians — suggests that Callaghan is posing the classic opposition between moral man and immoral society, between the actions urged by conscience and the actions dictated by custom and institution. The ambiguous symbolism of the Cathedral, particularly in *Such is My Beloved*, extends this dichotomy into the world of religion, into the difference between acts spurred by Christian compassion and acts necessary for the institutional stability of the church on earth.

In writing these novels Callaghan used effectively the limited resources of a talent which his own statements on his early aims in writing have defined. Like the French writers of the *récits*, he chose a simple moral theme and gave it flesh and substance through the lives of his characters. Economy of structure and action, simplicity of language and imagery, a bold use of a few key symbolic settings in each novel, such as the hotel room in *More Joy In Heaven*, the lake and the rooming house in *They Shall Inherit the Earth*; these elements provide an appropriate form for the kind of parable Callaghan set out to write at this period. The novels are not flawless. At times the feeling softens into sentimentality; at times the clear writing muddies into dullness; at times the characters are not plausible even within their own allegorical framework. But as a group these three novels, all published between 1934 and 1937, represent Callaghan's best work outside some of his short stories, and one of the real achievements in Canadian writing.

FOURTEEN YEARS passed before Callaghan's next novel, *The Loved and The Lost*, appeared in 1951, and another nine years before *The Many Colored Coat* was published in 1960, to be followed by *A Passion in Rome* in 1961. I do not know the reason for the long interval between the novels of the 1930's and *The Loved and the Lost* (with its curious Fitzgeraldish title) in the 1950's. But for the purposes of this essay the biographical details are un-

important. What is important is that since the last war Callaghan has been trying a somewhat different kind of novel, which has brought him on a long and not entirely successful journey away from his early aims in writing. Abandoning the *récit*-like form of his best period, he has sought the complexity of the classic realistic novel. *A Passion in Rome* is described twice on the dust jacket as "A Major Novel", and, while the publisher may have been responsible for this so patently inaccurate description, there is no doubt that ever since the war Callaghan has been seeking to produce a successful work of greater dimensions than anything he had written before.

Unfortunately his three most recent novels have been large in size but not in texture. Even the monolithic grandeur of moral tragedy that lingers in the mind after reading *Such is My Beloved* or *More Joy in Heaven* is totally absent from one's recollection of *The Loved and the Lost* or either of its successors.

On reading *The Loved and the Lost* one immediately perceives an absence of the unity of conception that marked its predecessors. There is a moral theme of a kind, rather indistinctly embodied in former Professor McAlpine's inner conflict over his infatuation for the ambiguous Peggy Sanderson and his neglect of the cold, career-ensuring Junior Leaguer, Catherine Carver. But in the main Callaghan is seeking other goals, and *The Loved and the Lost* becomes a curious grafting together of the social novel and the romance. The overworld of the Carvers and their quasi-patrician "society" set is opposed by the underworld of the negro cabarets where Peggy Sanderson, even if she rejects conventional society, vainly seeks acceptance by its unconventional substitute. Peggy herself becomes in Jim's sentimental vision a kind of *princesse lointaine*, accompanied by symbolical devices — the carved leopard and the church which the hero can never again discover — that belong in the tradition of courtly romance. Jim's desire for Peggy never seems much more real than its object, and their relationship enters a further stage of romantic mistiness as the novel assumes the form of an Orpheus myth, with Jim going into the underworld to rescue his Eurydice and losing her to death when gaining her seems most assured. The world of the Carvers is hardly more convincing or consistent than that of Peggy Sanderson; one cannot take seriously either Catherine Carver's combination of gentility and vulgarity or McAlpine's odd values when in her company, values which make a scholar of history imagine that he has really found his vocation when he is allowed to become a columnist for the Carver newspaper with its dubious aims.

In some respects *The Many Colored Coat* is nearer the earlier novels. The moral question of the nature of innocence is elaborately posed. A respectable

bank manager, Scotty Bowman, is fascinated by the personality and the company of a free-spending, good-natured publicity man, Harry Lane. The glamour of Harry's world and the easy charms of one of the tarts who move within it arouse in Scotty a longing for the kind of extravagant living he has never allowed himself. He offers Harry a bank loan to buy speculative stocks; he makes a false statement to his head office, and then the stocks crash. Scotty is arrested for embezzlement, and at the trial Harry is shown in a dubious light by a doggedly loyal but rather thick-witted friend of Scotty, the boxer turned tailor Mike Cohn. Scotty commits suicide in prison. The hatred between Harry and Mike grows, and it excites the mocking laughter of the Montreal bar-flies when Harry starts to wear, in and out of season, a shoddy jacket Mike had made for him. In the end, provoked beyond endurance by Harry's clowning, Mike knocks him down a flight of stairs, and Harry is paralyzed temporarily (an echo of Peter Gould's misfortune in *A Broken Journey*). At the trial which follows, Harry, who has suddenly seen the relationship between himself and Scotty in another focus, does not appear; Mike seems triumphant, only to abdicate at that moment the right of judgment he has previously exercised. The moral of the novel — and there seems no description quite so adequate as that old-fashioned term — is summed up in the question Harry asks himself, "if innocence is like a two-edged sword without a handle, and if you gripped it and used it, it cut you so painfully you had to lash out blindly, seeking vengeance on someone for the bleeding."

This is a theme of the same order as those which inspired Callaghan's novels of the thirties, but it is not served by the same simplicity and economy of writing. Rather like Hemingway in *The Old Man and the Sea*, Callaghan drags out to tedium an idea that could have been admirably treated in half the 318 pages to which *The Many Colored Coat* actually runs. The looseness of construction is paralleled in the characterization, which hovers uneasily between the sharpness of caricature and the flabbiness of sentimental pseudo-realism. The women characters are the most ill-drawn. Like most Canadian male authors, Callaghan has always had difficulty in portraying women except as types — the cold, proud pseudo-saint and the easy-hearted, loose-legged floozie; the leading women in *The Many Colored Coat* represent these types at their worst, Mollie an insufferable prig and Annie a kind of soft-centred candy doll.

A Passion in Rome is Callaghan's most recent, most ambitious and least successful novel. Unlike his earlier novels, in all of which the characters were seeking justification and acceptance in their own worlds, *A Passion in Rome* concerns two lonelinesses meeting in an alien setting. From the very moment when Sam

Raymond reaches Rome, feeling scared and alone, the emphasis is on the need, not to find one's world, so much as to find oneself. Sam, an unsuccessful painter turned news-photographer, is another latter-day Orpheus who discovers his particular Eurydice in Anna, a television singer ruined by drink. Each of the two seeks some new accepting world; Sam wonders "if there couldn't still be some one place in the world where a man's life might take on meaning," and Anna, with Italian blood in her veins, lives in a displaced American's fantasy of being "a Roman woman". Both learn that one cannot fly through space away from oneself. The only Rome they can find is the false Rome of tourists, pilgrims, newsmen; the real Rome of the little dark Romans is always closed and hostile, and they are forced to face each other in the closeness of a symbolic single room, where Sam searches into the darkness, draws Anna into the light and then loses this Eurydice whom he is too anxious to keep. In the moment of loss he finds himself, and so the two part heroically to face their individual futures; the novel ends, if not happily, at least triumphantly, as Callaghan tells us in an excruciating last sentence. "He felt all at once fiercely exultant."

A Passion in Rome is clumsily constructed and so verbose that one wonders what has happened to the old vows to achieve a writing "as transparent as glass". The set pieces of the Pope's funeral and the election of his successor project a background of stuccoish unreality against which the human drama never emerges into authenticity. Sam is the kind of improbable romantic fool who in Callaghan's earlier phase might have been raised to something approaching allegorical grandeur. But *A Passion in Rome* has all the signs of being intended as a realistic novel, and in a setting described with such crowded detail a hero of this kind is out of place. Anna comes into the novel fighting, interesting in her sulky perversity, and one expects much of her; but Sam's devotion irons out her individuality to a self-abnegating silliness which the author himself seems to have found unendurable, since at this point he quickly draws the novel to an end.

As characters Sam and Anna are too mechanically exemplary to have any place in a novel in the realist tradition, but at the same time insufficiently distilled to form the core of an effective moral parable. Ultimately the test of characters lies in what they say and how they speak. Callaghan's earlier characters are often laconic in their peculiar Callaghanese way of speaking; but they are usually idiosyncratic enough to be acceptable. The language in which Sam and Anna converse is undifferentiated substandard North American. One opens the book at random and is faced, usually, by something like this:

“Do you really have to go singing there, Carla?” he asked, surprised.

“He’ll pay me, Sam. I’ll be getting some money. Singing and getting some money.”

“You just said he wouldn’t pay you much.”

“Look, Sam. You’re the boss. Don’t you want me to sing there?”

“I don’t care,” he said, laughing awkwardly. “I mean the thing was to have you see you could sing anywhere. There’s nothing to stop you doing anything you want. It’s settled now, and you’re free in your mind about it.”

“It means some money for just being myself, Sam. It’s easy.”

“How much?”

“A couple of hours a night. See that you get ten thousand lire a night out of him, Sam.”

“About a hundred a week, eh?”

Such passages proliferate, filling up pages but achieving very little else. Thus the search for transparency in writing has ended in a kind of dialogue so dull that its effect is one of complete opacity.

Has another Eurydice vanished into the darkness? Certainly *A Passion in Rome* demonstrates more convincingly than ever that Callaghan is never likely to be a good novelist in the grand manner; the moralist allegories of the thirties remain his best works of longer fiction. Yet perhaps it is not too late to expect a turn in that devious path which Callaghan’s inspiration has followed. The freshness and honesty and directness of *That Summer in Paris*, springing up unexpectedly between two such laborious works as *The Many Colored Coat* and *A Passion in Rome*, showed that Callaghan has not yet lost the qualities which — however he may have recently neglected them — have made him a Canadian writer who cannot be overlooked.

