

THE DODO AND THE CRUISING AUK

Class in Canadian Literature

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THIS IS A PAPER about our society and our literature, and it assumes a correlation between the kind of society which has evolved in this country and the kind of literature it has produced. It is substantially the paper which I gave almost a year ago to an interdisciplinary seminar sponsored by the Institute of Canadian Studies at Carleton University for the purpose of examining the question of "Class in Canada". Since the paper then took its place in a context of studies made of the same subject by my colleagues in other disciplines, I must reactivate enough of that context now to make clear my point of departure. Before I do this, however, I should like to say that the intervening federal election of April last has shown very plainly the extrapolation of the argument you are about to hear into the field of politics. I was and am concerned, as many were to become concerned in the period leading up to the election, with the negative image presented by many aspects of the life of our nation. Mr. Pearson has offered the electorate his "Sixty Days of Decision" as the way out of the wasteland of Canadian political inertia. My interests for present purposes are literary: I have examined the deficiencies of the literary imagination in Canada and have asked by what means a Dodo can become at least a Cruising Auk.

My point of departure is supplied chiefly by the work of Professor John Porter of our Department of Sociology at Carleton, who has written extensively about social class in Canada and who will publish soon an important book on the power

élite in Canadian society. Professor Porter is not happy about our society, and I must now tell you briefly about some of the features of the Canadian social profile which he brings to my notice that are at once unusual and unattractive. At the level of the distribution of economic wealth, for example, he shows me not a pyramid (which, he tells me, is what I should see) but something which, like a space-capsule, is narrow in the up-ended neck and dumpy at the base. The design, good for space travel, does not in this context reflect a free flow of economic opportunity. Other inhibitors darken the picture. The powerful groups are subtly but adamantly exclusive in terms of the training of their members, their ethnic origin, even the religious faith they profess. So subtle are they that they spend a good deal of their time hiding their true colours and are therefore, despite their power, a dull lot. Too few bright birds hatched in other and lower orders of society get in from the outside to liven things up; too many bright birds stay more or less where they are put, and in doing so fail to realize the creative potential that is in them. What is worse, they seem content to stay put; indeed the entire community congratulates itself daily on the superiority of its social arrangements over those made by neighbouring communities. This much, oversimplified, from Professor Porter. His message seems plain: Canadian society is moribund and doesn't know it; it is a flightless bird that preens its vestigial wings.

Now I have asked myself what our literature, and especially our fiction (since fiction is the form of literature most directly concerned with the image of man in society) has to say about this message. And I must tell you immediately, with mixed sadness and elation, that it seems to me to say that the message is true. Professor Porter and I differ on many points, and we are of course looking at different bodies of evidence; but as far as that part of his thesis I have just examined is concerned, we see eye to eye. I shall ask you to detect in our literature a climate of thought and feeling that is frigid and constrained. The air is cold; hostile forces threaten; hope is deferred. In this environment, man's stance is static, his mood introverted, his virtues stoic. More directly, I shall ask you to conclude that our literature shows what can only be described as an abnormal absence of feeling for class and of concern for what the class structure can do in a developing society to make or mar the life of the individual. I shall ask you to regard its silence on the question of class as ominous. I shall say that it is due partly to the existence within our culture of inhibitions so strong as to all but rule out the possibility of a dynamic theory of social mobility, and partly to the fact that most Canadian writers belong to a single social group identifiable with a university-based Establishment.

I have begun to speak metaphorically because metaphor is the language of literature. In my examination of the social implications of our literature, I have thought it wise to avoid the use of direct comments which our writers have made in fiction or in poetry about Canadian society. I could offer you a collection of such comments quite easily. Navel-gazing on a national scale is something our writers do very well. But I believe, as you must, that when writers are being most self-consciously sociological they are being most marginally literary. I see no point in asking our writers to testify as amateur sociologists. Fortunately, poets and novelists have another manner of speaking which is truly their own and which involves the use of language to create a work of art rather than, primarily, a social document. As it happens, since the way in which their imaginations characteristically work within the books or poems they write are themselves social facts, we can listen to them when they speak the language of literature and still remain within a sociological frame of reference.

I have said that metaphor is the language of literature. I mean by this that men and woman who write novels or poems discover in doing so what R. W. B. Lewis in *The American Adam* has described as the "representative images" and "stories" for the ideas and attitudes of the society in which they live. Taking a long and broad look at American literature, Mr. Lewis has concluded that "a century ago, the image contrived to embody the most fruitful contemporary ideas was that of the authentic American figure of heroic innocence and vast potentialities, poised at the start of a new history." Hawthorne's description, in a fantasy of 1844 called "Earth's Holocaust", of a huge bonfire built on the western prairies, "upon which was piled all the world's 'outworn' trumpery," becomes in this context the complement of Thoreau's representative image of the "busk", a New England custom which entailed the replacing of old things with new in village homes and the ritual burning of the past on the village green. Such images and stories, says Mr. Lewis, considered in relation to the anti-types which inevitably develop from them, help to define the characteristic debate or dialectic of American society. My only departure from this form of inquiry into the basic metaphor of a body of literature is to insist (in company with Miss Bodkin in her *Archetypal Patterns in Poetry* and Wilson Knight in his Shakespearian criticism) that as much, perhaps even more, validity attaches to the representative image produced by the writer when he is unaware of the implications of what he is doing as to the representative image he produces as a "conscious" literary artist.

As we might expect, neither the subsuming form of the representative image or "story" nor the debate or dialectic which is the sign of its vitality is as apparent

this side of the border as it is to the south. No simple myth or ideology is available within whose field the separate symbols can find their orientation. The Americans took over the only ones truly appropriate to this continent some centuries ago: the Adamite myth and the ideology of democratic egalitarianism. Urged partly by our history and partly by sheer perversity, we have been looking fruitlessly for alternatives ever since. Nevertheless, a pattern exists here, even though, as we shall see, its organizing principle is negative.

I_N 1946, Northrop Frye contributed to the periodical *Gants du Ciel* an article entitled (the piece was translated from the English) "La Tradition Narrative dans la Poésie Canadienne-Anglaise". In this article he pointed out that the Canadian poet, though he might be younger than Eliot or Yeats, wrote in an environment for which it would be difficult to find a counterpart in England without going back to a period prior to the age of Chaucer. Our poets, he said, shared with the authors of *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer* a certain attitude or feeling:

a feeling [he said] of melancholy inspired by a sparsely settled and northern country, a feeling of the terrible loneliness of the creative spirit in such a country, a feeling of resignation to misery and isolation as the only means of achieving, if not serenity, at least a sort of stoic calm.

He noted a family resemblance between on the one hand the defeat of the English at Maldon and the heroism of the French at Roncesvalles, and, on the other, the archetypes of our national history: the martyrdom of the Jesuits in Huronia; Dollard's stand against the Iroquois at the Long Sault; the desperate courage of the Indians who died beside Tecumseh and Riel; the stirring yet abortive winter of our discontent in 1837; the hopeless struggle against gas at Saint-Julien in World War I; the sacrificial raid on Dieppe in World War II. The images and "stories" of the literature which emerges from this environment, Professor Frye goes on to say, reflect a consistent view of the human situation: man is a beautiful but frail creature encompassed by forces beyond his ability to control which strike out repeatedly and blindly to destroy him. Max, the hero of Isabella Valancy Crawford's *Malcolm's Katie*, at the very moment when he is defending the march of civilization and an idealistic view of human nature, is struck down by a falling

tree. In Lampman's *At the Long Sault*, as the image of the defeat of Dollard's band merges with the image of the magnificent bull-moose attacked and destroyed by a pack of wolves, we see the ritual destruction of the higher forms of life by the lower.

Professor Frye's feeling for this part of our literature seems to me so absolutely right (his accounting for what he finds is another matter, for I think he is misleading when he says that the northern environment is the cause) that I have only to go on from where he leaves off. Within the field of the description he has provided lie, and lie all one way, the central themes, certainly the mood and spirit, of the main part of our poetry and fiction. E. J. Pratt is in many ways our most vigorous and affirmative poet. Yet the dominant linear image of Pratt's poetry is the image of the parabola, of the line moving obliquely and curving back upon itself. In his "Come Away, Death", after the obliterating blast of the bomb, "human speech curved back upon itself/Through Druid runways and Piltown scarps,/Beyond the stammers of the Java caves." Evolution and reversion are two functions of the same graph. More obviously, the central image of Pratt's long poem on the sinking of the *Titanic* is that of an iceberg whose colossal strength, two-thirds hidden beneath the surface, rips through the bowels of the ship that is man's pride and joy. In D. C. Scott's poetry, which E. K. Brown has called a poetry of "restrained intensity", there is the image of the Indian crone who had once baited her hook with her own flesh to catch fish for her child, but who now, cast off by her tribe to die in the wilderness, sits mantled with snow, her breath a thin meerschaum of vapour in the white silence. Jay MacPherson's Adam is the fallen Adam barred from re-entry into Eden by the Cherubim's flaming sword until the second Adam come. Even the titles of collections of poems are emblematic: Margaret Avison's *Winter Sun*; Patrick Anderson's *The White Centre*; A. M. Klein's *The Rocking Chair* ("symbol of this static folk"); James Reaney's *A Suit of Nettles*.

Turn to our fiction, which is perhaps more telling in its evidences because it is more dependent in its form on a total human situation, and we find images and "stories" consistent with those of the poetry. The representative figure of Canadian fiction is not the innocent Adam, nor yet the Adam of the fortunate fall who is triumphant even in defeat at the hands of the alien tribe — as, for example, are Melville's Billy Budd or the Joads in Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*. Nor is he, like Dorothea Brooke in George Eliot's *Middlemarch*, the figure made strong and capable of extended life by voluntary renunciation. These are positive; our archetype is negative. Grove's heroes inhabit the world of the dark tragedies, the world

of *Lear* and *Othello*. Morley Callaghan's protracted study of the nature of innocence in a fallen world ends with the identification, in Harry Lane of *The Many Coloured Coat*, of innocence with presumption and guilt. His Father Dowling, in *Such Is My Beloved*, unable to see a solution either in conventionally Christian or in Marxist terms to the problem posed by the two prostitutes he has befriended, steps back over the lintel and the door closes on the dark room of his insanity. In Hugh MacLennan's *Two Solitudes*, two race legends touch but do not join, and Athanase Tallard, at the point of the novel's real climax, dies an immolation to unappeasable gods. Tallard's son Paul, ostensibly the man in whom the two worlds become one, does *not* rise Phoenix-like from the ashes, and we are to be consoled with the image of oil and alcohol in a bottle which, we are told, "had not broken yet." The real hero of MacLennan's earlier novel, *Barometer Rising*, is the chance explosion of 3000 tons of T.N.T. in Halifax harbour which removes from the scene, in addition to 6000 Haligonians, Neil MacRae's enemy, Colonel Wain. In Sinclair Ross's *As For Me and My House*, Philip Bentley withdraws so repeatedly behind the slammed door of his study that the image becomes an organizing principle of the action; and, in the same novel, the Puritan-ridden town of Horizon, from which, we feel, the railway lines run out only to other and quite as empty Horizons, is a frontier town which has known no youth but only old age. Milton Wilson, reviewing a recent collection of Canadian short stories, writes: "In the end, when the long line of dead birds, animals, and children, of frozen, inarticulate sons and lovers, of crucified hired men and farm boys has filed past, one is both appalled and impressed"; it is a world, he concludes, of "sacrificial chilliness" in which man's responses are "passive and inarticulate".

Can one escape conclusion? This is a negative rather than a positive literature. I was on the point of saying that it is a literature of the Everlasting Nay, but the Everlasting Nay, as Carlyle and Melville testify, is deeply affirmative. In our literature, heroic action remains possible but becomes so deeply tinged with futility that withdrawal becomes a more characteristic response than commitment. The representative images are those of denial and defeat rather than fulfilment and victory.

In the presence of these images it seems superfluous to ask whether our literature embodies a dynamic view of our social arrangements or supports a vigorous debate on the problem of freedom of movement for the individual within the mosaic of the class structure. Still, to round out my argument, the question may be put and an answer given. I shall confine my attention to the fiction.

One has the impression, in reading our fiction, that the social environment is in sharp focus. I presume it was this fact which led M. Falardeau, in the *Plaunt* lectures for 1960, to attempt a distinction between English-Canadian and French-Canadian literature.

If one compares the English and French literatures of Canada, one discovers that the former expresses itself along an axis which I would see as horizontal while the latter has a more vertical axis . . . For most English-Canadian novelists, the novel as artistic expression is more the description and analysis of a social situation than a plunging into the depths of an individual soul. . . . In the French-Canadian novel, with Langevin, Elie, or Charbonneau, the characteristic tension is one between man and himself. More exactly, it is a tension between the individual and his destiny.

I think M. Falardeau is right up to a point: the English-Canadian novel, less lyric and "romantic" than its French-Canadian counterpart, belongs to a tradition of realism in which the horizontal dimension is clearly displayed as part of the requirement for what Henry James called "solidity of specification". Moreover, as I suggested at the beginning of my paper, it is a novel notable for the at least superficial evidence it gives of social awareness. Hugh MacLennan, for example, is most accurately aware of Professor Porter's tight little circle of corporate élite. Huntley McQueen, in *Two Solitudes*, is a modest member of the pack which daily rides the elevator of the Bank Building in Saint James Street:

The elevator continued with McQueen to the top floor. The thought crossed his mind that if an accident had occurred between the first and second floors, half a million men would at that instant have lost their masters. It was an alarming thought. It was also ironic, for these individuals were so remote from the beings they governed, they operated with such cantilevered indirections, that they could all die at once without even ruffling the sleep of the remote employees on the distant end of the chain of cause and effect. The structure of interlocking directorates which governed the nation's finances, subject to an exceptionally discreet parliament, seemed to McQueen so delicate that a puff of breath could make the whole edifice quiver. But no, McQueen smiled at his own thoughts, the structure was quite strong enough. The men who had ridden together in the elevator this morning were so sound they seldom told even their wives what they thought or did or hoped to do. Indeed, Sir Rupert Irons was so careful he had no wife at all. They were Presbyterians to a man, they went to church regularly, and Irons was known to believe quite literally in predestination.

Similarly, it would be possible to derive from English-Canadian fiction the material for a demographic map which would show plainly the difference, let us say, be-

tween the social environment of Mort, in *The Equations of Love*, who lives on Powell Street in Vancouver, and that of Mr. H. Y. Dunkerley, the lumber magnate, who lives in the British Properties in West Vancouver; or between the social environment of the Carvers, in *The Loved and the Lost*, who live on the Mountain in Montreal, and that of Peggy Sanderson, who frequents the St. Antoine district of the city, just north of the tracks. Is this not to say that M. Falardeau is right, then? And is this not to say that English-Canadian fiction does indeed present a dynamic view of class in Canada?

THE FACT IS that class is not a central issue in any significant part of our fiction. The social awareness of which I have spoken remains almost everywhere a social awareness marginal to the purposes of the novel. Characteristically, it is the awareness of a detached observer who says what he has to say about a social problem in a sequence of mildly ironic comments which leave him, as the device of irony permits, uncommitted. Irony is of course an excellent literary device. But the use of it on a national scale, and the use on a national scale of that particular form of it which conceals position rather than reveals it, seems to me to have disturbing implications. Some years ago, Malcolm Ross was astute enough to identify irony as the Canadian way of doing things in literature. The difference between us is simply that Professor Ross thinks the ironic mode a good basis for a sense of identity while I do not.

I must answer M. Falardeau further by saying that even where the question of class appears to be a central issue in our fiction, in the end almost invariably it is not. Morley Callaghan, for example, who is on the surface a novelist preeminently concerned with the social structure in Canada, on closer examination turns out to be a novelist preeminently concerned with personal values and "in-scape". In *They Shall Inherit the Earth*, published in 1935, the conclusion which Michael Aikenhead, on a hunting trip, draws from the spectacle of the apparently wanton slaughter of deer by a pack of wolves virtually kills the debate on social justice which the novel has sponsored. The lesson which nature supplies is ambiguous, it would seem, and in the face of this ambiguity we must, for the sake of unity, suspend judgement on the question of justice in society. It is a defensible position. It is nevertheless a peculiarly static and negative position in the context of the thirties. The effect in the novel is to drive the emphasis squarely back upon

what has been its central issue from the beginning, the personal relation between Michael and his father; and this issue is then cautiously resolved in terms of the cautious conclusion of the book's social debate. And *They Shall Inherit the Earth* is perhaps the most "horizontal" of Callaghan's novels. Elsewhere, and especially in the more recent novels such as *The Loved and the Lost* and *The Many Coloured Coat*, the "vertical" is unquestionably the main dimension of the work.

Callaghan is of course not the English-Canadian novel, but since my time is limited I must ask you to believe that what we find and do not find in him is representative of a wide spectrum of Canadian fiction. Ernest Buckler's *The Mountain and the Valley* (1952) is a novel locked in space and time, its theme one of containment, its mood retrospective, its emphasis, as Dr. Bissell has pointed out, "not so much on movement forward as on exploration below." Hugh MacLennan's *The Watch That Ends the Night* (1959), despite its brilliant reconstruction of the ferment of the thirties in Montreal and the presence in it of the rather unrepresentative Life-Force figure of Jerome Martell, is a spiritual odyssey of the search for the meaning of pain and life and death in which the action folds progressively inward upon the private worlds of the narrator and his invalid wife. Consistently, in Sinclair Ross as in such unlikely quarters as Robertson Davies and Mazo de la Roche, the "horizontal" tilts to the "vertical". English-Canadian writers have more in common with French-Canadian writers than M. Falardeau would lead us to believe.

And as the private worlds enlarge, of course, the worlds of social relationship diminish. Nature and puritanism and the illiberal mind are forces to be reckoned with here, and any combination of these can act in a social context to frustrate the individual and nourish his self-doubt. But the class structure itself is not, apparently, a challenge. There are exceptions. I believe some of our minority-group writers, as they might be called, have had (and for obvious reasons) a genuine feeling for the problem of social mobility — John Marlyn, for example, in *Under the Ribs of Death*, and Mordecai Richler in *Son of a Smaller Hero*. I think also of Ethel Wilson's "Lilly's Story", though Ethel Wilson writing "Lilly's Story" is Jane Austen writing *Sister Carrie*. But the exceptions are too few to be significant.

Indeed it is quite simply the monolithic uniformity of the picture that disturbs me. I concede that Morley Callaghan has done well in his inquiry into the problem of faith and guilt in a fallen world, and I can tell you that I was his champion long before Edmund Wilson took him up, and still am. I concede that any novelist worthy of his calling will see any individual as being in a sense in a class by him-

self, that all good novels are concerned with the inner life, and that the probing of man's consciousness and conscience at the expense of external social reference has been increasingly the mark of fiction in the western world over the past fifty years. But where in our literature, early or late, do we find the infusion of that bold concern for placing the individual's problems in significant relation to the structure of his society which is so clearly to be seen in the literatures of England and the United States? Dickens knew about class in a society well advanced towards industrialization, and Dickens wrote about class in *Hard Times* and *Bleak House* and *Great Expectations*. George Eliot knew the class structure of a town like Middlemarch as well as she knew the palm of her hand and could use this knowledge to illuminate the action and discourse of her characters. Henry James thought the principle of exclusiveness so important to the art of fiction that he went to Europe where he could observe it in its purest form and where he then proceeded to write novel after novel in which (with no sacrifice of inwardness, be it noted) he juxtaposed New World ideas about class with those of the Old. Within a few years of James's departure, the American novelist W. D. Howells had satisfied his own Jamesian concern for the principle of exclusiveness by writing, in *The Rise of Silas Lapham*, a full-length and artistically satisfying study of the issue of class that had arisen with the pressure of the new economic élite of industrial America upon the Brahmin class of Boston society. Theodore Dreiser in *Sister Carrie* and Horatio Alger in *Struggling Upward* made a literary image out of the sociological concept of upward mobility. Lady Chatterley's lover is a gamekeeper, and this simple fact stands close to the heart of what Lawrence is trying to say in that novel. Steinbeck in *The Grapes of Wrath* sees the class issue with the hard clarity of a Marxist.

Here in Canada we seem to have had no feel for this sort of thing — or, if we had a feel for it once, we have lost it. Susanna Moodie looked with a shrewd eye on what she called the "mixed society" growing up along the "front" of the St. Lawrence River in the 1840's and was well aware of the implications of the new kind of class structure she saw taking shape in the new environment. Later, Sara Jeanette Duncan was able, in *The Imperialist*, to do with excellent insight for the small Ontario town of Elgin (her Brantford) what George Eliot had done for Middlemarch. But thereafter the record diminishes. It is true that the thirties produced a spate of socially directed poetry in this country, and I have no wish to question the sincerity of the convictions which led F. R. Scott and Earle Birney and others to write it. But the voice of the poetry of these years is ambiguous, as a glance at the volume *New Provinces* (published in 1936) will show. Above all,

I see in it little evidence of what I should call a genuine feeling for class. It is academic. One has the impression that it is a poetry written neither by Brahmins nor by proles. And if we turn to the fiction of the depression years, the essential lack remains. Irene Baird's *Waste Heritage*, whose setting is hobodom in Vancouver during the riots and sitdown strikes of the thirties, is a genuinely proletarian novel, and it is a piece of work that has a good deal of the quality of gusto and authenticity of approach to the social scene that I am looking for. But it is the only one of its kind. In the post-war years, evidence of the feel for class in our literature all but disappears.

The record, I repeat, has been different elsewhere. Scott Fitzgerald hated the privileges of the high "with the smouldering hatred of a peasant", while at the same time coveting the freedom and beauty which, it seemed to him, only wealth provided. "Gatsby", we read in Fitzgerald's famous novel of the twenties, "was overwhelmingly aware of the youth and mystery that wealth imprisons and preserves, of the freshness of many clothes, and of Daisy, gleaming like silver, safe and proud above the hot struggles of the poor." Waiving the question of which of our novelists can write like that, which of them gives us any reason to believe that he can *feel* like that about the ceremonies and attributes of class? None, to my knowledge. And if you think (wrongly, as I would believe) that the social conditions which sparked Fitzgerald in the twenties have no counterpart in Canada today, which of our novelists can answer in kind to the energetic vision of class and of individual problem seen in relation to the class structure which is embodied in Alan Sillitoe's *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* and John Braine's *Room at the Top*? Again none, to my knowledge.

I do not propose to explore the reasons for this gap in our literature. The reasons are our history and where and how that history has evolved, and if you really want to linger lovingly over how difficult it has all been you can do no better than to take a Great Books course of reading in the Reports of our Royal Commissions of Inquiry. There is, however, one probable reason for the gap which seems to me worth looking into for a moment before I close because it involves the kind of evidence that my friend Professor Porter likes to use in his analysis of Canadian society. It has to do with the question of recruitment to the ranks of authors in this country.

I HAVE SAID THAT our poetry of the thirties gives one the feeling of having been written neither by Brahmins nor by prols. I have said that it has an academic flavour. The same observation can be made of poetry written before and after the decade of the thirties and of almost the entire run of Canadian fiction. Had I had time, I might have prepared for you a set of statistics to show that the representative hero of Canadian fiction has a university degree or its equivalent, and that the representative setting for Canadian fiction is one which links the action directly or indirectly to an institution of higher learning. What I have been able to do is to gather a few biographical facts about our authors.

Observe the common denominators in family background and education. Hugh MacLennan, the son of a surgeon, was educated first at Halifax Academy, then at Dalhousie University where he was winner of the Governor-General's Gold Medal and where he took his B.A. in 1929. As a Rhodes Scholar he attended Oriel College, Oxford, where he took his M.A. in 1932. He went next to Princeton, where he became M.A. squared and where he took his Ph.D. in 1935. He was a Guggenheim Fellow in 1943-44 and is currently a Professor of English at McGill University and an Associate Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada. Morley Callaghan took his B.A. at St. Michael's College, Toronto, in 1925 and later attended Law School at Osgoode Hall. E. J. Pratt, the son of a clergyman, is E. J. Pratt, C.M.G., M.A., PH.D., D.LITT., D.C.L., LL.D., F.R.S.C., and Professor Emeritus at Victoria University, Toronto. F. R. Scott, the son of Archdeacon F. G. Scott and the grandson of Professor Scott who for forty years taught anatomy at McGill University, is F. R. Scott, LL.D., B.A., B.LITT., B.C.L., F.R.S.C. He too was a Rhodes Scholar and attended Magdalen College, Oxford. He has been a High School teacher and a teacher at Bishop's and at Lower Canada College. He is currently Macdonald Professor of Law and Dean, McGill University. Robertson Davies, the son of Senator William Rupert Davies, was educated at Upper Canada College, Queen's University, and Balliol College, Oxford, where he took his B.Litt. He is to be the first Master of Massey House, the new graduate centre at the University of Toronto. Earl Birney, PH.D., F.R.S.C., pursued higher education at the universities of British Columbia, Toronto, California and London, and has been a scholar and teacher all the days of his working life. Dorothy Livesay, journalist and social worker, attended Glen Mawr school in Toronto and took her B.A. at Trinity College, Toronto, in 1931. She took her Diplôme d'études supérieures at the Sorbonne in 1932 and then returned to the University of

Toronto to complete her studies in the social sciences in 1934. She is currently a lecturer in creative writing on the staff of the Department of Extension at the University of British Columbia. A. M. Klein took his B.A. at McGill University in 1930, studied for a time to become a rabbi, then took a degree in law at the Université de Montréal in 1933. A. J. M. Smith, M.A., PH.D., D.LITT., has been for many years Professor of English at Michigan State College. I note that besides being a poet, Professor Smith is our foremost anthologist and therefore in a sense the custodian of our poetic tradition. James Reaney holds an M.A. degree from the University of Toronto and has been a university professor all the days of his working life. Mazo de la Roche, the descendant of United Empire Loyalist stock and the daughter of a professor of classics and letters at Baltimore University, was educated at Parkdale Collegiate Institute and at the University of Toronto. Ethel Wilson was educated at private schools in England and Vancouver and attended the provincial Normal School in that city. She was a teacher for some years prior to her marriage in 1920 to Dr. Wilson. There is more of the same, but I think the pattern is plain.

There is no law which says that a university man cannot have, as a writer, a feeling for class. Scott Fitzgerald and many of his fellow writers of the twenties were graduates of one or other of the Ivy League universities. Yet surely there is something unusual and, I think, even alarming in the overwhelming uniformity of the picture I have presented. In most cases the formative years, to say nothing of entire lives, have been spent in academic circles. T. S. Eliot, in his introduction to the Cresset Press edition of *Huckleberry Finn*, has this to say about Mark Twain's grip upon his subject:

There are, perhaps, only two ways in which a writer can acquire the understanding of environment which he can later turn to account: by having spent his childhood in that environment — that is, living in it at a period of life in which one experiences much more than one is aware of; and by having had to struggle for a livelihood in that environment — a livelihood bearing no direct relation to any intention of writing about it, of *using* it as literary material.

I believe this to be true. For the great bulk of Canadian writers the environments of childhood and of "the struggle for a living" are uniform in kind; professional, relatively well-to-do, "genteel", above all, academic. Is one to expect from these closed, circumspect and intellectually sophisticated ranks a dynamic view of society? It is not surprising that our literature lies all one way, and it is not surprising that within this literature the concepts of class are dim and the response to the problem of individual freedom within the social structure negligible.

If it is not surprising, it is, for me at least, deeply disturbing. The dead cold air, the uniformity of assumptions, the lack of commitment are oppressive. I am not here concerned specifically with the way out of the wasteland, but in so far as the way out is implicit in all that I have said you will see that the path I look to is a different path from the one favoured by radical sociologists like Professor Porter. I am not interested in what the sociologists call "class abatement"; we shall always have classes in the broad sense in which I have understood the term, and I am content that this should be so. I think the heart of the matter is the question of individual liberty and of the vital relation which the principle of individual liberty must always bear to the life of a democratic nation. It is not the reinforcing of the class struggle that is wanted, not the triumph of the proletariat nor of John Birch societies, for this would simply be to substitute one form of fixed response for another. It is rather turbulence that is needed — the kind of turbulence that encompasses the whole of the social mosaic and in the end makes possible within it that freedom of choice and of movement for the individual which, from a secular point of view, is the best means open to us of enabling him to realize the creative potential within him. The station to which it has pleased God to call us is not always the station to which it has pleased man to call us. We have an obligation to debate perpetually the credentials of the social plan.

I doubt whether the opening up of the routes to higher education, as we at present conceive of higher education, is the panacea. Professor Porter seems to think it is. Ezra Pound, rallying American writers of the twenties to take a stand against the political and social platitudes of the Old Gang in this period of low ebb in the nation's life, diagnosed the difficulty in plain terms: "Anemia of guts on the one hand," he said, "and anemia of education on the other." I mistrust our universities. I mistrust, from the point of view of literary criticism, the mob they house of gentlemen who write with ease, who are cosmopolitan and urbane to the last drop of sherry that flows in their veins. I mistrust, from the student's point of view, the levelling and debilitating effects of our universities. In their growing role as a fifth estate of the realm, they seem to me to be creating a new and pernicious dimension to the problem of the class structure. I mistrust their hold upon writers and writing in this country. The fault is not of course in the nature of the institutions themselves, but in how we conceive of them. I merely think that aspiring writers, for the time being at least, would be well advised to stay away from them. The present state of our society considered, I think a portion at any rate of those who intend to write in Canada would do better to learn

elsewhere what they need to know about life, and, in their spare time, as Whitman demanded, “go freely with powerful uneducated persons.”

I shall end as I began, with metaphor. About a year ago I saw a television play based on the death of the Avro-Arrow project, and the title of the play was *The Day of the Dodo*. The Americans have their eagle; our emblem may well be the wingless, flightless Dodo. We, and especially our writers since it is theirs to make as much as it is to reflect the national will, must get off the ground. And the beauty of it is that the kind of wings we need are made at the sole cost of the mind and heart. Energy and a positive thrust to the imagination can accomplish all. We can become at least a cruising auk, the cruising auk that George Johnston’s Mr. Murple saw: “ a splendid auk/Flying across the sky.” Can you not see him?

Surely his eye belittles our despair,
Our unheroic mornings, afternoons
Disconsolate in the echo-laden air —
Echoes of trumpet noises, horses’ hooves.

Splendid, however, we can
Rejoice in him, cruising there:
He is our uncle and lo,
O Mr. Murple, O beloved friends,
Airborne!

