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POETS PAST AND PRESENT

Articles
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Chronicle
BY NAIM KATTAN

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contributors

GEORGE WOODCOCK's new book of travel impressions, *Asia, Gods and Cities* has just been published in England by Faber & Faber, and his study of George Orwell, *The Crystal Spirit*, will be published in the fall by Little Brown.

PETER STEVENS, who has already contributed articles on poets and poetry to *Canadian Literature*, is a regular contributor to *Canadian Forum* and other magazines.

JEAN LE MOYNE, who works for the National Film Board, is a well-known French-Canadian critic. The study of Saint-Denys-Garneau which he publishes in this issue will shortly be appearing as one of a volume of essays, *Convergence*, to be released shortly by the Ryerson Press. His translator, PHILIP STRATFORD, teaches at the University of Western Ontario and is a regular contributor to Canadian literary and scholarly periodicals.

F. R. SCOTT, besides being one of Canada's leading constitutional lawyers and former Dean of the Faculty of Law at McGill, is also one of the leading members of the school of poets which centred around McGill in the Twenties and Thirties. His *Selected Poems* are due to be published this season by the Oxford University Press.

NAIM KATTAN, our regular correspondent from Montreal, contributes to many French language periodicals and is a member of the Editorial Board of *Tamarack Review*. He is editor of the recent collection of essays, *Les Juifs et la Communaté Française*.

GEORGE JONAS, like the author on whom he writes, was born in Hungary, and came to Canada ten years ago. He is now a script editor for the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, and has contributed to its drama and variety programmes. He has contributed to *Tamarack Review* and other magazines.

B. RAJAN is one of the most distinguished Indian writers in English. He has published two novels, *Too Long in the West* and *The Dark Dancer*, as well as books on Milton, T. S. Eliot and W. B. Yeats. His most recent book is *W. B. Yeats, a critical introduction.*

editorial

BIOGRAPHICAL FIRST FRUITS

As THE FIRST FRUITS of what is probably the most massive literary task ever attempted in Canada, Volume I of the *Dictionary of Canadian Biography* has at last appeared under the imprint of the University of Toronto Press. Under the General Editorship of George W. Brown, with Marcel Trudeau as his Associate, the years of preparation since 1959 have already assembled a uniquely monumental archive of Canadian biographical information, and the section of the Dictionary which now appears is an earnest that the final work, when its eighteen or twenty volumes have brought it up to date somewhere in the 1970's, will be a fitting monument to the late James Nicholson, whose original visionary bequest made it possible to start work on this project so important to Canadian historical and literary scholars.

Inevitably, the editors of the *Dictionary of Canadian Biography* have learnt from the experience and the errors of their predecessors who produced the *Dictionary of National Biography* in Britain and the *Dictionary of American Biography*, and also that pioneer in our own country which actually bore the title of *Dictionary of Canadian Biography* when it appeared in 1926 and which, by an act of unusual courtesy and co-operation among publishers, now appears as *The Macmillan Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, and still serves an excellent purpose as a concise basic reference book.

The first volume of the new *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*[1] appears under auspices which emphasize the national character of the project. It is published by the presses of the Universities of Toronto and Laval; the original Nicholson

[1] *Dictionary of Canadian Biography, Volume I, 1000 A.D. - 1700 A.D.* University of Toronto Press. $15.00.

bequest has been supplemented by grants from the Canada Council; and the contributors are drawn from seven Canadian provinces, as well as from the United States, Britain, France and Italy.

Wisely, the editors have avoided the problem of out-dating involved in a general alphabetical arrangement by giving a period frame to each volume. The present initial volume thus includes the biographies of six hundred people who played a significant part in Canadian history during the centuries from 1000 to 1700 A.D. The beginning date is important, since it represents a kind of final admission on the part of Canadian scholars in general of the claims of the Norsemen; the names of Bjarni Herjolfsson and Leif Erickson appear as an acknowledgment — perhaps convenient in these days of bicultural controversy — that it was neither Cabot nor Cartier who first penetrated from the European world to the land that later became known as Canada. A further feature which will please those who like to remember that Canadian history is not all French and English is the fact that 65 of the biographies, more than 10%, are of Indians who played an important part in the early days of Canadian history.

The entries are usually sufficient, and often substantial, varying from brief 300-word notes for a few very minor figures, to biographical essays like that on Champlain, which runs to well over 10,000 words. The contributors do not merely inform; they also take a critical stance towards their subjects and, in many cases, give useful evaluations of past accounts or of available evidence on controversial points. In addition to the actual entries, which cover every aspect of Canadian life during these vital centuries of exploration and tentative settlement, Volume I of the biography contains a whole series of useful adjuncts, including background essays on the Indians of Canada, on voyages to the North, on early settlement in the Atlantic region and New France, as well as a very useful list of the Indian tribes at the time of first contact with Europeans, and an adequate general bibliography.

In other words, Volume I of the *Dictionary of Canadian Biography* must be saluted as a thorough, imaginative and wholly satisfying beginning to a great scholarly task whose unfolding we shall watch with interest, admiration and gratitude.

A GRAB AT PROTEUS

Notes on Irving Layton

George Woodcock

MANY WRITERS ARE BEST read out of their own settings. This is so especially in Canada, where the literary world is small and inbred, and where the self-dramatizing activities of authors are often unnecessarily forced on one's attention by the publicity manoeuvres of publishers. To strike the point of this essay, Irving Layton is a poet whom one reads at his best with delight, and at his worst with a puzzled wonder that so good a poet could write and — even more astonishing — could publish such wretched verse; he is also a rather boring showman, and one wishes often that his public self could be shut off like television so that one might have the silence to listen for his real voice. The only way to begin to appreciate such a poet without distraction is to get away from his immediate presence — even when "immediate" means three thousand miles across Canada, to escape from the antics of poetry readings and the shadow boxing of literary feuds, and to read his poetry where nothing else reminds one of his less attractive masks.

It was by chance rather than deliberation that I took Layton's *Collected Poems*[1] on a journey which led me far from the stamping grounds of the Canadian literati. I carried the fat little gilt-covered volume, with its portrait of the author looking tough, half across Asia. I read Layton in the sweating humidity of the Malabar Coast, in the archaically English clubhouses of tea planters in the Western Ghats, and among Jesuit missionaries in the jungles of the Wynad Hills, with the tribal women howling outside like jackals as they danced to the tapping of monkey-skin drums. I dipped again, reading and re-reading the poems that pleased me, in Delhi, Isfahan, Shiraz, Byblos, Tyre, Sidon, Baalbek, Rome and in the final village in the South Tirol where I at last settled down to outline this

[1] Irving Layton, *Collected Poems*. McClelland & Stewart. $6.50.

essay. The result was a revelation to me of the extent to which involvement — however remote — in an author's world can limit one's reactions; my dislike of the arrogance with which Layton tries to bully his readers into acceptance had provoked a resistance which I only shed when I was able to perceive, away from the aura of his public personality, the extent and character of his private achievement as a poet.

"To have written even one poem that speaks with rhythmic authority about matters that are enduringly important is something to be immensely, reverently thankful for — and I am intoxicated enough to think I have written more than one." So claims Layton in the Foreword to his *Collected Poems*, and for once he is modest. After my several readings, I made a list of the poems which still seemed to me complete and moving achievements; there were thirty-five of them. The whole volume contains 385 poems, and thus one poem in every eleven aroused either my delight or my extreme admiration; this left Layton with a better score than most of the poets now writing in either North America or Britain.

The poems which have been selected for the retrospective collection are, of course, those which Layton now, at the beginning of his fifties, has decided are worth retaining; like all such volumes, it is a reckoning with time, a summation of achievement, a placing before the poet's contemporaries — and, by implication, before posterity — of the works by which he feels he should be remembered. Many a shoddy piece of doggerel which astonished one in an earlier volume is left out; many writers who were the subjects of personal attacks will feel half-relieved and half-disappointed that Mr. Layton has chosen to withdraw their certificates of vicarious immortality. The mass of poems which will please those who critically admire Layton as a poet forms an impressive achievement; many more than half the 385 pieces are sufficiently interesting and craftsmanly to be worth preserving, even if they are not among the thirty-odd first-rate poems. At the same time, there are still enough injudiciously chosen fragments to provoke those Layton-baiters whose comments will in turn provoke the poet into delighted reprisals. For all his flamboyance of manner, Layton is capable of some extraordinary lapses into mere triteness and triviality:

> To guard her virtue
> this woman
> resorts
> to needless stratagems
> and evasions.

She doesn't
realize
her face
is ample
defence.

He can also perpetuate, with a coy archness that seems out of character, some of the weakest jokes that can ever have been given the shape of verse:

He lifted up the hem
  of her dress
but being intellectual
  and something of a painter
he quickly let it fall
again, saying
with an abruptness
  that dismayed her:
    I never did care
for Van Dycks.

It is, of course, something that Layton should have practiced a modicum of self-criticism by making a selection at all, but his editing is perfunctory and eccentric. He is one of those half-fortunate writers who have a way with words and phrases, an almost fatal ability to make a statement on any subject in a heightened rhetorical manner, without necessarily producing more than a chunk of coloured prose chopped into lines or a doggerel jingle; when he cannot write a poem on a theme that stirs his emotions, he produces one of these hybrid verse compositions. With the curious purblindness that afflicts people possessed of such facile gifts, he seems unable to realize that his good poems are something quite different from his bad verse, and defends both with equal vigour.

By a convincing exhibition of his ferocity as a ring-tailed roarer in the little zoo of Canadian letters, Layton has in fact successfully embarrassed most of the critics into a kind of numbed evasiveness. In the seven years since I have been editing *Canadian Literature*, while two or three reviewers have made brief forays with bows-and-arrows into the fringes of Layton territory, no critic has submitted a complete and satisfactory study of Layton as poet, mainly because no critic has so far relished the task of considering a body of work by a notoriously irascible writer which varies so remarkably from the atrocious to the excellent, and which shows a failure of self-evaluation as monstrous as that displayed by D. H. Lawrence, who in so many ways resembled, anticipated and influenced

Layton. To grasp Layton is rather like trying to grasp Proteus. But Proteus was grasped, and so must Layton be, for behind the many disguises an exceptionally fine poet lurks in hiding.

To BEGIN, one has to re-unite the poet and the public figure whom I found myself dividing from each other in my oriental journey through Layton's *Collected Poems*. When a writer so undoubtedly good in his better manifestations as Layton takes a certain view of himself, and develops a life style in accordance with it, one ignores the fact in the last analysis at peril to one's criticism's completeness. "It's all in the manner," as Layton says:

> Manner redeemeth everything:
> redeemeth
> man, sets him among,
> over, the other worms, puts
> a crown on him, yes, the size of a
> mountain lake,
> dazzling more dazzling!
> than a slice of sun

From the beginning, Layton shows a romantic absorption with the poet as personality as well as with the poetry he produces. He sees himself as the vehicle of the divine frenzy of inspiration.

> I wait
> for the good lines
> to come . . .
>
> When the gods
> begin
> to batter me
> I shall howl
> like a taken
> virgin.

And the writing of poetry involves for him not only a kind of inspirational possession, but also other elements of the magical vocation of the shaman; particularly joy and power:

And me happiest when I compose poems.
  Love, power, the huzza of battle
  are something, are much;
yet a poem includes them like a pool
  water and reflection.

Possession, indeed, gives the poet a special, privileged status; he is different from other men, and his powers bring responsibilities that go beyond the mere production of good poems. He is the prophet, the philosopher, the leader of thought, and Shelley's unacknowledged legislators of the world are never far from one's mind when one reads Layton talking in this vein, as he does in the Foreword to the *Collected Poems*. The poet, he tells us, has a "prophetic vocation to lead his fellow men towards sanity and light." But it is precisely this vocation which turns the poet into the misunderstood and persecuted rebel-martyr with whom Layton identifies himself.

> A poet is someone who has a strong sense of self and feels his life to be meaningful. By insisting on that self and refusing to become the socialized article that bureaucrats, priests, rabbis and so-called educators approve of, the poet offends the brainwashed millions who are the majority in any country. His words, his free manner of living, are a constant irritation to the repressed, the fearful, the self-satisfied, and the incurious. His refusing to wear the hand-me-down clothes of outworn philosophies and creeds; his resolve to see the world afresh and to see it from his own personal angle; his wry, unsleeping awareness of the ambiguities, the dark subtleties that plague the human soul; these will always make him suspect to the conformist taxpayer and his pitchmen in the universities and the churches.

I applaud Layton's desire to flout conformity and attack its supporters, and if this were all I would gladly stand shouting beside him. But I cannot see any necessary connection between rebellion of this kind and the vocation of the poet. That vocation, surely, is no more than to write poetry, and a good poet can even stand for insanity and darkness, as Yeats sometimes did, can even retreat into the darkness of literal insanity, and still continue his vocation. The social and moral rebel is something different, though the two may be and often are united. Layton takes it for granted that they *must* be united; this, to be necessarily paradoxical, is the classic romantic stance, and Layton, in upholding it, is a traditional wild man according to conventions laid down early in the nineteenth century. His essential neo-romanticism crops up in many other ways: in his "anti-literary" stance when his poems are as crammed with literary and classical tags and allusions as the prose of any despised man-of-letters; in his "anti-academic" attitude

when, unlike many of his fellow writers in Canada, he is a university graduate who — as his poems about lectures and students show — has been lurking for years in the underbrush of the academic groves. It manifests itself also in the archaic images and phrases which embellish even Layton's most recent poems with an undeniable tinge of antique poeticism. In the final pages of the *Collected Poems* one finds him talking of

> The shadowy swaying of trees
> Like graceful nuns in a forbidden dance;
> The yearning stillness of an ended night . . . ;

telling us of his meeting with a faun (predictably conceived to point up the evils of a conformist world); and ending the volume with lines that are heavy with nostalgic echoes from the past of English romanticism:

> Meanwhile the green snake *crept upon the sky*
> Huge, his *mailed coat glittering with stars that made*
> *The night bright,* and blowing *thin wreaths of cloud*
> *Athwart the moon*; and as *the weary man*
> Stood up, coiled above his head, *transforming all.*

There is, of course, nothing intrinsically wrong in using again the phrases and images I have italicized; they belong to the accumulated stock-in-trade of poets in the same way as Shakespeare and Sheridan belong to the accumulated stock-in-trade of actors, and the way they are used is what matters most. But the fact that Layton not only acts but often writes as a latter-day romantic becomes important when we grapple with the relation between the two levels of his poetic activity.

The concept of the romantic poet provides, to begin, a justification for Layton's Saint Sebastian attitude. In fact, it is nothing more than a logical extension of the illogical idea of the poet as prophet; if the poet is really inspired, if it is really the gods (whatever they represent) who make him howl, then he is one of the chosen, against whom criticism or even competition is not merely an act of presumption but also something very near to religious persecution. Such an attitude cannot simply be waved away. Layton is talking with conviction and passion when he says that if the poet "offers his hand in friendship and love, he must expect someone will try to chop it off at the shoulder." He feels his isolation as a poet and a man deeply, so deeply that it has inspired not only such malicious attacks on his fellow poets as figure in the "Prologue to the Long Pea-Shooter"[2]

[2] "But if you have the gifts of Reaney/ You may help your verse by being zany,/ Or write as bleakly at a pinch/ As Livesay, Smith, and Robert Finch;/ And be admired for a brand-new pot/ If you're as empty as Marriott;/ I'll say nothing about Dudek:/ The rhyme's too easy — speck or wreck . . ."

but also such a powerful vision of the fate of the rebel in the world of conformity as "The Cage". More than that, this feeling plays its ultimate part in the compassionate self-identification with the destroyed innocents of the animal and human worlds which inspires those of his poems that touch nearest to greatness and which pleads pardon for his arrogance towards his peers.

But there is another side to the idea of poetic inspiration. If it is blasphemous for others to criticize what the poet has written in the fine fury of possession, may it not also be an act of *hubris* for the poet himself to reject or diminish the godly gift? The whole vision of the poet as prophet denies not only the function of the critic; more seriously, it deprives the poet of the self-critical faculty which in all artistic activity is the necessary and natural balance to the irrational forces of the creative impulse. Once a poet sees himself as a vehicle for anything outside him, whether he calls it God or the Muse or Truth or, in Layton's words, "sanity and light", he abdicates the power of rational choice, and it is only logical that he should cease to discriminate between his best and his worst works, that he should seriously publish, in the same retrospective collection, a poem like *The Predator*, where pity and anger magnificently coalesce in the final verses:

> Ghost of small fox,
> hear me, if you're hovering close
> and watching this slow red trickle of your blood:
>
> Man sets even
> more terrible traps for his own kind.
> Be at peace; your gnawed leg will be well-revenged . . .

and a joking jingle, like *Diversion*, of a kind which any versifier might whip up at two for a dollar.

> Whenever I'm angry with her
> or hold up my hand to slap or hit,
> my darling recites some lines I've writ.
>
> The crafty puss! She thinks that she
> diverts my anger by vanity,
> when it's her heaving breasts that does it.

If the lines she recites are anything like these, the breasts of Mr. Layton's darling must put on a very spectacular exhibition!

BUT NOTHING IS SO SIMPLE where Proteus is involved. The problem of Layton's switchback career as a poet, which makes one's reactions to his *Collected Poems* take the form of a wildly dipping and climbing seismograph, cannot be solved merely by suggesting that he is deliberately unselective or incapable of selection. That might be argued for a poet whose successes, when they came, were obviously the product of deep irrational urges which rarely and unexpectedly broke into the dull cycle of an undistinguished existence and produced a masterpiece that astonished its creator; there have, very occasionally, been such writers, but Layton is not one of them. On the contrary, on reading the *Collected Poems*, one is left with the impression of having been in the company of a trained and versatile craftsman liable to sudden fits of contempt for his public, in which he tries to palm off on them fragments of worn-out fustian instead of lengths of silk.

Perhaps the matter can be made clearer by bringing in an illustration from another field of art, and comparing Layton with Picasso. There is a verse at the end of his poem, "Joseph K", which suggests that he will not find the comparison offensive.

> Then let him rise like a hawk.
> Fiercely. A blazing chorus
> Be, or like a painting by Picasso
> Drawing energy from its own contours.

Picasso, to my mind, connotes enormous energy, and a flexible craftsmanship which has enabled him to paint and draw in many styles, and to select and use ruthlessly from past forms of art anything that might suit his purposes. No modern painter has spread such magnificent confusion, by the display of his talents, among those academic critics who originally damned the post-impressionists with the argument that they knew neither how to draw nor to paint. At the same time, as the collection of second-line material enshrined in the museum at Antibes has shown, Picasso's very energy has led him to produce a great many minor works which a more fastidious artist would have discarded or kept as mere exercises. Finally, there has always been a touch of the clown about Picasso, as became very evident in at least one of the films in which he performed as the impresario of his own art. He enjoys mystifying his more naïve admirers, and many of his works must be regarded as mere *jeux d'esprit* carried out to amuse himself or fox his public. But it would be foolish to assume that because of this Picasso is nothing more than a mountebank.

In one sense at least Irving Layton cannot be compared with Picasso. Picasso

was the moving spirit in a trend that revolutionized our views of art, and it is hard now to imagine what painting would have been like anywhere in the world if he had not lived. So far there is no evidence of any real revolution that Layton had led in poetry; his work at its best has its own originality, but it breaks into no really new territory, and his followers among the younger Canadian poets have so far shown neither the vigour nor the talents of their master. In other respects, however, the resemblances between Layton and Picasso are striking. Layton, too, is an artist of great energy — in terms of quantity alone a formidable producer. And, like Picasso, he combines the ability to work in a variety of styles and to borrow freely from the past with a craftsmanship which at its best is so good that one cannot possibly attribute his worst productions to the mere inability to do better. A different explanation has to be found.

Let us hold the comparison at this point for the moment so as to consider the versatility which, from the earliest examples published in the *Collected Poems*, characterizes Layton's art. He is adept at the lyrically descriptive vignette:

> The afternoon foreclosing, see
> The swimmer plunges from his raft,
> Opening the spray corollas by his act of war —
> The snake heads strike
> Quickly and are silent.

He can make a compassionate statement in well-turned verse of almost Marvellian grace and graciousness, as in "Mrs. Fornheim, Refugee", his small elegy for a former language student who died of cancer.

> I taught you Shakespeare's tongue, not knowing
> The time and manner of your going;
> Certainly if with ghosts to dwell,
> German would have served as well.
> Voyaging lady, I wish for you
> An Englishwoman to talk to,
> An unruffled listener,
> And green words to say to her.

He presents, on occasion, mordant examples of epigrammatic wit, quite different from the snickering jokes of some of his later poems; "Lady Enfield", for example:

> Be reckless in your loving,
> Her grace makes no one poor
> For only bullets issue
> From such an iron whore.

And he shows a fine adeptness in that admirable practice game of the young poet, the parody.

> Although I have written
> of venery
> (and of men's hates, too, my masters!)
> and of the sun, the best thing in the cosmos,
> for it warms my bones
> now I am old and no woman
> will lie with me
> seeing how wrinkled
> my hams are, and my bones decrepit . . .

In this early Layton the craftsmanship is usually careful and deliberate: at times, even, almost excessively precise and mannered:

> The passive motion of sand
> Is fluid geometry. Fir needles
> Are the cool, select thoughts
> Of madmen; and
> Like a beggar the wind wheedles
> Pine cones from the pines.

Here Layton appears as a young man trying very hard and often very successfully to write well in an idiom derived largely from the English Twenties and Thirties. Later, as he turned away from this source of influence and began to feel his place within an American rather than a British tradition (in so far as his militant individualism allowed him to feel part of any tradition), he expressed his dislike of Auden and presented Eliot as something of an anti-poet ("a zeal for poetry without zest,/ without marrow juices;/ at best, a single hair/ from the beard of Dostoevsky"). But, though there are obvious temperamental reasons why he should in the long run have reacted against both Auden and Eliot, the lingering — if diminishing — echoes of their styles which sound throughout the *Collected Poems* make it clear that Layton, whose eclecticism is — though he might resent the suggestion — one of his virtues as a writer, learnt all he could from them before he rejected them. Without such predecessors, he would hardly have written lines like these:

> Your face
> tilts towards the gay edifice
> through whose casements
> birds might go in and out;

and your elbow is,
to be sure,
a gesture that makes known
your will — yet hardly more;
the flexures of your breast and skirt
turn like an appetite also there.

Evident from the beginning, among the experimental styles and often borrowed manners of the earlier poems, is an unfailing vitality and inventiveness. When Layton forgets to argue, when he lets his fancy go, and then holds it to its course with the reins of careful technique, we get his best work. It can be as luminously coloured and dreamlike as a painting by Chagall.

To the movement then of dark and light
A Byzantine angel slid down from the smoky wall
Hovering over me with his wings outstretched —
But I saw the shape where the flat tiles were not —
Before I could make a salt out of my astonishment
There was a meadow of surf in the bay at my elbow
And while the hungry robins picked at the air
White blossoms fell on their sad faces
Held in a frame of grass and ground for sentimental poets
Who weep when they are told of such things.

And at another time it can combine those two strong Laytonian elements, the pastoral and the apocalyptic, in a vision of the natural world as concentrated and intense as "Halos at Lac Marie Louise".

Presently I heard a stir
    Of flying crows that came
And spread themselves against the sky
    Like a black plume.

One like a detached feather,
    Falling westward, stranded
On the topmost prong of a tree.
    The tree was dead.

It was a white skeleton
    Of a tree ominously gnarled;
And around the singular crow
    The stark crows whirled.

The heaven split, the dark rain
    Fell on the circling hills;
The thick gouts dropped beside the oars
    Like melting skulls.

The boat fell with the waves
    Into a still opening;
The halo of green hills became
    A black pronged ring.

With the growing assurance of Layton's later phases comes a limbering of the rather stiff rhythms which mar some of the earlier poems, and this change is one of the liberating elements in his more interesting works, in the sparkling fluency of that extraordinary erotic fantasia, "The Day Aviva Came to Paris", and, on a completely different level, in the questioning sombreness of "Fornalutx", a ballad of disappointment with a Spanish town.

Who thought of the heat-stained cobblestones?
The damned who shuffled on the street?
And cheeks made pallid by a vile sun,
And rotting matter under one's feet.

Even in "Fornalutx" one sees, at least to a degree, the negative aspect of the greater assurance with which Layton has written as the years have gone by. The verse is inclined to be loose rather than limber, careless rather than carefree. A little more work, one feels, and it could have been a much more concentrated and more effective poem. But "Fornalutx" has still, within its limitations, something to say. Many of the other poems which Layton has written in recent years are not merely slipshod; they are also pointless — superficial versicles, empty jests, malicious, misfiring jibes. Layton recently expressed his annoyance with a critic who had accused him of favouring "a loose, slapdash style of writing". Perhaps he does not deliberately *favour* such a style, but he undoubtedly uses it on occasion. How else can one describe some of the bad poems I have already quoted?

Here one returns to the central comparison with Picasso. If we dismiss the Philistine explanations, that the poet cannot write any better, or does not know the difference between good and bad writing, how are we to explain the fact that Layton persists in publishing verses which he knows the critics will condemn, and often condemn with justification? As in the case of Picasso, I think the explanation is to be found in the relationship between Peter and Petrushka, between the poet-prophet and the romantic clown. In a fine poem which greatly illu-

minates his attitude towards his own role, he begins with the title statement, "Whatever else poetry is freedom", and, having thus taken license, presents himself as the clown of such freedom.

> . . . And now I balance on wooden stilts and dance
> And thereby sing to the loftiest casements.
> See how with polish I bow from the waist.
> Space for these stilts! More space or I fail!
>
> And a crown I say for my buffoon's head . . .
>
> And I know myself undone who am a clown
> And wear a wreath of mist for a crown . . .

THE ROMANTIC IDEA OF POETRY as "freedom" suggests that the poet should be liberated from any limits his own conscious craftsmanship or the requirements of the critics may impose (thus bringing us back in a disguised circle to the idea of the poet as the vehicle of an inspiration which it is blasphemous to criticize) and it establishes the reign of Saturn in which the respectable, the acknowledged, the established shall all be brought down, and all standards of behaviour (poetic in this case) shall be disregarded. The clown becomes the king in this Saturnalia; there is a curious fantasy poem in which Layton imagines two poets entering Toronto at the end of a Christmas parade and thinking the cheers and the civic welcome are for them.

> But the acclaiming thunders
> Were all for a clown . . .

It is unnecessary to identify the clown-hero; Layton does it in those poems in which he deliberately exaggerates what he imagines other people say or think of him, and in the process presents the figure of the traditional comic ugly man.

> Who is this butcher, you ask,
> with his nose
> broken and twisted
> like a boxer's?
>
> Look, you exclaim,
> at the mat of hair
> that covers his neck
> and his heavy gait
> like that of a startled bruin's (*sic*) . . .

In romantic tradition the clown represents rebellion against human conventions; he suffers from his fellows, but he has also the privilege of flouting and playing tricks on them, and it is under this mask that Layton presents those of his poems which, according to any recognizable criterion of quality must be rejected, but which he demands should be heard in the name of the poet's sacred freedom.

The figure of the clown is related to two other of Layton's *personae*, the lover and the misanthrope. Layton's erotic poems — which do not compose so large a proportion of his work as he and his detractors have conspired to make us believe — must be taken seriously, but not solemnly. For Layton sex is a matter of comedy, of joy and zest and sometimes of laughter as loud as that of Apuleius or Rabelais. He recognizes the paradox of its glory and its absurdity, that the gods have so made man

> . . . that when he sighs
> In ecstacy between a woman's thighs
> He goes up and down, a bicycle pump . . .

Today it is our older, or at least our middle-aged poets who in Canada write best about sex — Layton, Purdy, Birney. They lack the lugubrious solemnity with which the younger writers cloddishly trample with rough cries in the obsessive dance of Venus.

This is not to say that Layton's erotic poems — any more than his other works — are uniformly successful. Some are shockers, though Layton has much less of a predilection for four-letter words than his legend suggests; some are boastful . . .

> Hell, my back's sunburnt
> from so much love-making
> in the open air.

But others, like "Song for a Late Hour", have a marvellous singing lyricism:

> No one told me
> to beware your bracelets,
> the winds I could expect
> from your small breasts.
> No one told me
> the tumult of your hair.
> When a lock touched me
> I knew the sensations
> of shattering glass.

And some of the best are those in which the eroticism is not obvious, but which in tender sadness explore the complexity of human relationships that spring from the early raptures of love. "Berry Picking" is a particularly good example. The poet watches his wife picking berries, and reflects on the changes marriage has brought in her attitude; now he can only "vex and perplex" her.

> So I envy the berries she puts in her mouth,
> The red and succulent juice that stains her lips;
> I shall never taste that good to her, nor will they
> Displease her with a thousand barbarous jests.
>
> Now they lie easily for her to take,
> Part of the unoffending world that is hers;
> Here beyond complexity she stands and stares
> And leans her marvellous head as if for answers.
>
> No more the easy soul my childish craft deceives
> Nor the simpler one for whom yes is always yes;
> No, now her voice comes to me from a far way off
> Though her lips are redder than the raspberries.

In poems like this the comic view of sex is suffused with darkness, and the mood merges into the tragic view which Layton, clown and prophet alike, takes of Man, the creature whose own flaws destroy him. Here moralist and misanthrope come together in Layton as they did in Swift; the suffering poet, victim and thus exemplar of human perfidy, joins them. Beginning with the old radical ideals of brotherhood and, to use his own words, "sanity and love", Layton suffers the radical's disillusionment. Man, as he is now, has damned himself by his rejection of life. The poet, who still stands for life, must retreat into solitude.

> Enter this tragic forest where the trees
> Uprear as if for the graves of men,
> All function and desire to offend
> With themselves finally done;
> And mark the dark pines farther on,
> The sun's fires touching them at will,
> Motionless like silent khans
> Mourning serene and terrible
> Their Lord entombed in the blazing hill.

At its height, as in "The Improved Binoculars", Layton's rejection of humanity in his time and world reaches the level of apocalyptic vision, where he sees a city

in flames and all its inhabitants seeking not merely to save themselves but also to profit from the delightful fact that their fellows are suffering.

> And the rest of the populace, their mouths
> distorted by an unusual gladness, bawled thanks
> to this comely and ravaging ally, asking
>
> Only for more light with which to see
> their neighbour's destruction.

In this world of apocalypse, the poet appears as victim, slaughtered by the well-bred and cultured killer in a scene of Kafkaesque politeness and malice ("The Executioner").

Here he becomes identified with all those victims of man, and particularly those innocents of the animal world, for whom his compassion issues in a series of remarkable poems, "The Bull Calf"; "Cat Dying in Autumn", "The Predator". To my mind, "The Bull Calf" is not only one of Layton's best poems; it is also one of the most moving poems of our generation. The calf, only just born, yet shapely, full of pride and "the promise of sovereignty", must be slaughtered because, as the farmer says, there is "No money in bull calves". A clergyman sighs, and the murder follows.

> Struck,
> the bull calf drew in his thin forelegs
> as if gathering strength for a mad rush . . .
> tottered . . . raised his darkening eyes to us,
> and I saw we were at the far end
> of his frightened look, growing smaller and smaller
> till we were only the ponderous mallet
> that flicked his bleeding ear
> and pushed him over on his side, stiffly,
> like a block of wood.
>
> Below the hill's crest
> the river snuffled on the improvised beach.
> We dug a deep pit and threw the dead calf into it.
> It made a wet sound, a sepulchral gurgle,
> as the warm sides bulged and flattened.
> Settled, the bull calf lay as if asleep,
> one foreleg over the other,
> bereft of pride and so beautiful now,
> without movement, perfectly still in the cool pit,
> I turned away and wept.

It is not only the animal world in its suffering that Layton celebrates with such eloquent compassion. He dedicates it also to those men and women who in some way show, in misfortune, qualities of dignity and feeling that place them outside the herd of hostile humanity: to the idiot who shames him by showing a pitiful understanding of a dog's suffering ("The Imbecile"); to an old crippled man defying his fate as "Death's frail, quixotic antagonist" ("Ballad of the Old Spaniard"); and, in one of his most complexly haunting poems ("Das Wahre Ich"), as a Jew to a woman who was once a Nazi.

> The terrible stillness holds us both
> and stops our breath
> while I wonder, a thrill stabbing into my mind:
> "At this moment, does she see my crumpled form against
> the wall,
> blood on my still compassionate eyes and mouth?"

In fine, Layton is a poet in the old romantic sense, *a Dichter*, flamboyant, rowdy, angry, tortured, tender, versatile, voluble, ready for the occasion as well as the inspiration, keeping his hand constantly in, and mingling personal griefs and joys with the themes and visions of human destiny. Lately a somewhat negative element seems to have entered his poems; he is conscious of time beginning to sap the sources of life, he adjusts reluctantly to his own aging, he dwells on the unhappier aspects of sex, suspicious of the infidelity of women, of the untrustworthiness of friends. He is obviously at a point of transition, but his vigour will carry him over this and other weirs. Whatever happens, we shall have to take Layton as he comes and wishes, the good and the bad together; but that is better than not having him at all. For my last feeling, after journeying through Asia with Layton in the form of his *Collected Poems*, was that of having been in the disturbing company of one of the men of my generation who will not be forgotten.

IN THE RAW

The Poetry of A. W. Purdy

Peter Stevens

"TWO POETRIES are now competing, a cooked and a raw.... There is poetry that can only be studied, and a poetry that can only be declaimed, a poetry of pedantry, and a poetry of scandal." So said Robert Lowell of the state of American poetry in 1960 and these remarks might also apply to the state of Canadian poetry, except that sometimes the raw poets become too involved in dogma and theory, justifying their poetic outbursts ("the raw, huge blood-dripping gobbets of unseasoned experience" as Lowell puts it) by sweeping critical judgments and discursive accounts of the ways in which they control their spantaneity, implying that their kind of spontaneity is the only and best way to write poetry. It is as if they want to show us that their raw poetry is really cooked as well; in fact, all we get is often half-baked poetry.

One of the best of our raw poets is Alfred Purdy, and he, at least, does not justify his poetry in long articles. There is a fresh no-nonsense approach to poetry in most of what Purdy has written recently and his latest volume, *The Cariboo Horses*, is one of the best collections of Canadian poetry for some time. It is the result of a long struggle on Purdy's part to hammer out for himself a poetic idiom, which is used in his latest volume with telling effect.

It has not always been so. There has been steady development in Purdy's work over the last ten years, and now is the time to assess it. His career falls into three main stages: a beginning and exploratory stage (*Pressed on Sand*, 1955, *Emu, Remember*, 1957, *The Crafte So Long To Lerne*, 1959 — I shall deal only with the first and last volumes to show the beginning and early tentative stages of the exploration), a central poetic upheaval still retaining some unresolved uncertainties (*Poems for all The Annettes*, 1962 and *The Blur In Between*, 1962), and the emergence of a truly individual poet (*The Cariboo Horses*, 1965). I realize there is a very early volume *The Enchanted Echo*, published in 1944, but I have been

unable to trace a copy. In any case, I believe the poet wishes this volume to remain forgotten.

Pressed on Sand was published in 1955. At first reading there does not seem much connection between the poet of this volume and the poet in 1965. This is particularly true of the technique; most of the poems are written in fairly regular stanzas with rhyme or half-rhyme. The themes in this volume, however, are the ones Purdy develops throughout his career and so it is particularly relevant to study some of the poems in order to see how Purdy has developed his methods over the years in dealing with his basic themes.

The title poem is concerned with the transitory nature of human life. Individual man may be temporary, but the past may give some permanence. Man has a place, however small, in the universe and he must try to see himself in relation to the past. But as the poet remarks in "Chiaroscuro", the past does not seem very relevant to life: "the past is a dark country of statues". Art and the artist try to grasp meaning, and we see Purdy wrestling in many poems with the problems of his own art of poetry: "it becomes a bright danger/To search among the statues." An attempt must be made but it is painful and very often doomed to failure:

> And words are trapped like odd, dead animals
> Where dusty villages stand

The theme of permanence and art's relation to it, then, is a main theme in this volume, and it is a theme Purdy returns to time and again in his poetry. He places it against love, "Lovers in the Park", and this becomes an increasing preoccupation with him. There is a constant reference to older civilization and particularly their faded glories; for instance, the Indian civilization in "Onomatopoeic People". This theme enables Purdy to indulge his romantic nature, in such poems as "Far Traveller" and "Mary The Allan", but there is evidence in this last poem that he is going to set this romanticism against the realism of the modern world. He will set the "giant axmen in scarlet cloaks" against "the scientific men in smoky hotel rooms."

It is the balancing of these opposing forces of romanticism and realism that governs Purdy's development as a poet. In the early volumes the emphasis is on the romantic; from *Poems for all the Annettes* Purdy the realist tends to be to the fore. There is a just equilibrium in *The Cariboo Horses.*

In *Pressed on Sand* Purdy was obviously aware that traditional metres would swamp him, would commit him, perhaps, too whole-heartedly to a romantic view,

so that, although many of the poems are written in regular metre and stanza, they tend to break down. Exact rhyme gives way to half-rhyme and even when rhyme is used, its unifying force is pushed aside by enjambement ("Seasonal Malady", "Barriers"). This conflict gives a rather artificial air to some of the poems which, in fact, emphasizes the contrast between romanticism and realism.

There is some imagery from this period, particularly that of the stars, the sun and moon, which remains a part of Purdy's poetic equipment. Some individual phrases are reminiscent of Dylan Thomas (this kind of thing is to turn up again in *The Cariboo Horses*): "weed-forged letter," "no men in the tide-walking town of time", "the cupped pooled reservoir of their blood", "that spend/Gusto like a miser's purse", "boomerang-sure in the dusk/Of our fate," "all the delicate, shining, dark-vowelled designations."

One poem in *Pressed On Sand*, "Meander", is highly personal and discusses Purdy's ideas about what he would like to do in his poetry. "Meander" uses rhyme, but the movement of the poem is more colloquial than that of most of the poems in the book. The poet suggests he wants to write about small things truthfully to show their importance ("The minutiae and trivia that people think/ So unimportant") and he gives us a portrait of the artist as

> a dirty, unkempt, old man,
> Creating a drunken row
> For no good reason, and chuckling now
> And then beneath a greasy coat of tan.

He gives us another poetic manifesto, "Villanelle (plus 1)", in *The Crafte So Long To Lerne*. It is a statement about being a realist; the traditional form is broken down, again emphasizing Purdy's fight to break away from the constraints of tradition and accepted modes. However, the poem is spoilt by the apparent contradiction between theory and practice. The poem begins:

> Embrace, my verse, the language of the age

but continues with words which do not really fit in with the sentiment expressed in the opening line:

> Coeval sewers of speech that make a poem
> Live argot for the vermifuge of rage.

The same problem of balancing romanticism and realism runs through this volume, but I think it is more fully realized here and sometimes tempered by a note of humour which is to become more important later in Purdy's development. We find romanticism versus realism and some humour in "On The Decipherment of Linear B" and "Olympic Room (Toronto Hotel)" and humour on its own in "Canadian New Year Resolutions".

But the problems are still there. Some poems are too romantic and become somewhat obscure:

> Outside, the slow rain
> Which I transmute
> Variously, open with its blade
> Correlatives, equivalents, vaults. . . .

There is an admirable conciseness and directness in some of the poems ("From the Chin P'ing Mei") and some excruciating puns: "Oedi-puss", "any whore-weary Ulysses", "men or pause". The poems about love seem to come off best, particularly "Where The Moment Is", for here the poet equates love in a sense with one side of his poetic temperament:

> Your climate is the mood
> Of living, the hinge of now,
> In time the present tense.

This volume, then, repeats some of Purdy's concerns but it is still in general written in regular forms with some rhyme. The discrepancy between theme and manner is probably best illustrated by the poem, "Short History of X County". In one sense, this is a poem similar to later Purdy poems, a laconic narrative full of realistic detail, but here it is fatally flawed by a failure of language because it is governed too rigidly by rhyme and structure. It contains some puns ("men or pause", "pollen and polling") and suddenly there is an archaic word, "yclept". It is not used for shock effect but for the sake of rhyme, but I wonder why Purdy felt the necessity for rhyme here. "Yclept" is on the fifth line of the stanza and it rhymes with the second line. Here are the other second and fifth line endings: middle-puddle, Toronto-long, there-air, land-that, 96-fixed, agreeably-flees, guilty-I. This shows, I think, the intrinsic disadvantage of the method for a poet like Purdy and he obviously felt dissatisfied himself, for his next volume, *Poems For All The Annettes* (1962) shows a major break with the method, even though the themes remain basically the same.

Love is a dominant theme in this collection and it is very often linked with

poetry. Love is temporary, just as other experiences in life are. Can poetry fix it or any other experience? As Phyllis Webb pointed out in a review, the poem, "Archaelogy of Snow", "appears on first reading an incredibly clumsy, even redundant, work. Closer study produced my present opinion that it is the central poem in the collection." Purdy is not yet in full control of his method and some of the poems are indeed redundant and clumsy. "Poem for One of the Annettes" makes its point in spite of, not because of its technique. The poem is a clutter of fragments not fully realized. The lining is generally arbitrary. Too many prepositions dangle at the ends of lines, but it is full of a language alive with kicking, not deadened by rigid structure.

There are some good poems in this manner beside the two already mentioned: "Collecting the Square Root of Minus One", "O Recruiting Sergeants", "The Widower", "Remains of an Indian Village" and "Rural Henhouse". Some others are unbalanced by throw-away lines or dead-pan humour, as if Purdy is afraid to allow his lyric impulse free rein. It seems as if he is trying to consign his lyricism to the shorter, more orthodox poems in the book, and it is true some of these poems work well — "Hokusai at Roblin Lake", "Jade Stag", "Elegy" and "Mind Process Re A Faucet".

One could not expect that all the poems would be successful, and there are faults in *Poems For All The Annettes*. Some of the anecdotes gain nothing from being put into poetic form. Humour and words for shock effect too often become a double-headed sledge-hammer destroying some of the delicacy of the observation. Such a poem as "Cantos" is a strange mixture of the new method clinging to some regularity and half-rhyme and injected with archaic language. As a result, there is too much going on in the poem.

Nonetheless, generally speaking, the language is dynamic and an individual voice is beginning to emerge. These poems are Purdy's first real attempt to catch the here-and-now of life and place it in some context of permanence. They are his re-definitions of what things are and what they were previously thought to be. He sees the relation of *now* to *then*. This obviously means that his romanticism (things as they ought to be or as they might be) plays no significant part:

> the form is HERE
> has to be
> must be
> As if we were all immortal
> in some way I've not fathomed
> as if all we are

co-exists in so many forms
we encounter the entire race
of men just by being
alive here
Ourselves amorous
ourselves surly
ourselves smiling
and immortal as hell

The poems written immediately after *Poems For All The Annettes* and collected in *The Blur In Between* are somewhat disappointing, for the exuberance of structure is replaced by much more staid forms. Only in one or two poems do the language and structure have the vitality towards which Purdy had been working in the years from 1955 to 1962. But Purdy dates the poems in *The Blur In Between* as 1960-61. Were these poems, then, written at the same time as *Poems For All The Annettes*? Did Purdy see where his poetic strength lay and deliberately exclude them from *Poems For All The Annettes*? There is still variety in the tone and attitudes of the *Blur* poems but there is not the free-wheeling rambunctious mixture of moods Purdy achieves in the *Annettes* volume. In this volume we can read poems of self-deprecation, humour and coolly austere objectivity; the best poems are those that most nearly approach the forms and mixtures of moods of the *Annettes* volume: "Biography", "Twin-Heads", and "Bullfrogs".

The poems in this volume seem to me generally uncertain. They contain most of the elements of Purdy's individuality, but there is something lacking. The liveliness of his previous volume is in some way buried, threatening to break out every now and then, yet lying too coolly within itself except for occasional spurts. But his poetic energies leap to life in his latest volume, *The Cariboo Horses*.

The Cariboo Horses contains poetry that is open in form but rigorously controlled. Purdy has won his way to a medium which will include both realism and romanticism, so that the poet's oscillation comes across not as a wavering indecisive attitude but as a consistent though varied voice, illustrating his personal concerns and his individuality. It is a volume which holds and synthesises opposites and variants. It is poetry that makes:

a jewelled baldric from a sweat shirt
and simmering flesh imperishable as grass roots
and a silver bugle from a jalopy's horn.

Purdy shows all his dissatisfaction with what poetry can and cannot do, and yet he still indulges in "this madman's frenzy/ that wants to make pretty patterns".

This creates the tension in his poetry, and *The Cariboo Horses* is the most mature handling and balancing for these elements that Purdy has ever achieved. Take the title poem, for instance. Here are the first three lines:

> At 100 Mile House the cowboys ride in rolling
> stagey cigarettes with one hand reining
> restive equine rebels on a morning grey as stone . . .

These lines seem to me to be a dynamic beginning to a poem. Notice how "rolling" is placed at the end of a line, so that it gives a sense of the riding movement of the cowboys in the first line and then adds the second action of rolling cigarettes to it in the second. "With one hand" becomes important, emphasizing their nonchalant treatment of both the horses and the skill of cigarette-making, thus throwing weight on their control of the horses in the word "reining". But their nonchalence is dramatic; their rolling of cigarettes is "stagey". Nonetheless, their control of the horses is firm; they are reining them with one hand even though the horses are not simply quiet; they are "restive equine rebels". With these straightforward elements placed significantly Purdy has managed to show opposites held in tension: nonchalence with drama, and control with underlying rebellion. He has set them against "a morning grey as stone". Notice how that short simile fits the whole context of tension and control — the unbroken greyness of the day against which the horses act in their restlessness and the control of the cowboys over them, firm as stone.

In the same poem the horses and cowboys are seen against a natural background, "clopping in silence under the toy mountains" in contrast to the "jeeps and fords and chevvys" in the familiar land of "the safe known roads of the ranchers". The reader then expects the horses to be seen in a romantic landscape — even the horses' dung is described as "golden orange" — and indeed there is a section giving a romantic view of horses:

> Only horses
> no stopwatch memories or palace ancestors
> not Kiangs hauling undressed stone in the Nile Valley
> and having stubborn Egyptian tantrums or
> Onagers racing thru Hither Asia.

But it is a rejection of that romantic and nostalgic view that we get, for instance, in the two poems about horses by Larkin and Hughes quoted by Alvarez in his introduction to *The New Poetry* (Penguin, 1962). Although Purdy's horses are related to these different horses of the past, they are "real" horses:

arriving here at chilly noon
in the gasoline smell of the
dust and waiting 15 minutes
at the grocer's —

Even this ending, at first seemingly over-prosaic, gathers the tension together. The horses are "here" and actual; there is a continuation of the grey morning "at chilly noon". They are in the familiar world of "the gasoline smell" belonging to "jeeps and fords and chevvys" and "the grocer's". But they are not quite of this world; they are kept waiting.

I have dealt with this poem in some detail to show that, although it has the deceptive surface of rather conversational prose, it is a poem firmly rooted in Purdy's poetic technique. There are other poems that yield this kind of meaning and pleasure on close scrutiny. "Old Alex" seems a realistic portrayal of an old man using tough language. But its meaning is gathered up in a very apt simile at the end:

Well, who remembers a small purple and yellow bruise long?
But when he was here he was a sunset.

Sometimes the tension topples because of an indulgence in fantasy, sentiment or toughness for their own sakes. This is true of a few poems, but generally the poems are not disastrously harmed.

THERE IS a tremendous variety here — humour, tenderness, social comment, personal reminiscence, and descriptions of nature and people. There is variation in the actual forms of the poems, even though the technique and attitude remain generally the same. For instance, there is a series of poems about Roblin Lake and Roblin Mills which for the most part use no punctuation (this is true of most of the poems) to give subtle connections between various ideas, enabling the poet to emphasize simultaneity of experience and time. This is particularly effective in "Late Rising at Roblin Lake". The poem deals with the different ways a day can begin for a sleeper waking at different times:

at dawn with bird cries
streaking light to sound to song
to coloured silence wake with
sun stream shuttle threading thru
curtains

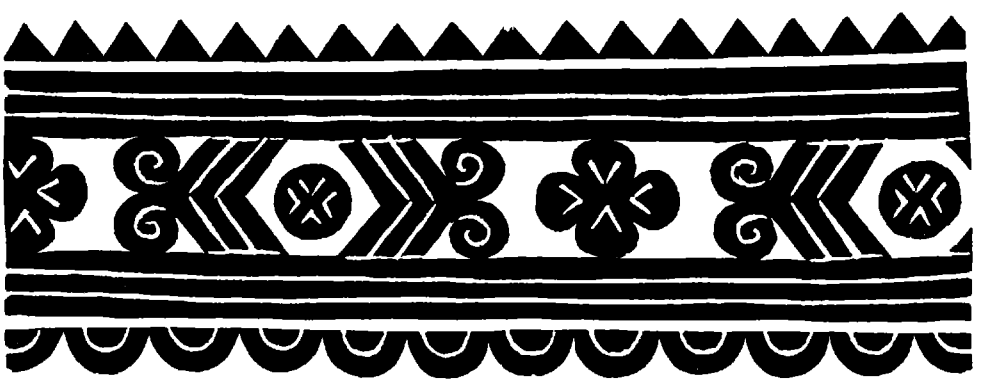
and so on. The poem closes

> one August afternoon once why
> stumbling yawning nude to front
> window there on the dock
> in noon fog lit
> with his own slow self-strangeness
> stood a tall blue heron
> and the day began with him —

Purdy has reached a poetic maturity in this volume after a long and deliberate struggle to find a method for his own poetic purposes. It owes something to Williams and his followers, but it is distinctively his own. It is mature and controlled and yet shows that it can be developed further. In the poem, "Mice in the House", Purdy describes a meeting between man and mouse:

> I have the feeling watching that
> representatives of two powerful races
> are meeting here calmly as equals —
> But the mouse will not be damn fool enough
> to go away and write a poem

We should be grateful that Purdy has been damn fool enough to go away and write poetry. Let us hope he continues.



SAINT-DENYS-GARNEAU'S TESTIMONY TO HIS TIMES

Jean Le Moyne

I CANNOT SPEAK of Saint-Denys-Garneau without anger. Because they killed him. His death was an assassination prepared over a long time. I will not call it premeditated because I refuse to credit those who choked his life with so fine a thing as conscience. Who were in fact, his closest enemies? The half-dead, victims themselves, diminished and sick with a miserable fear which, unluckily, was only strong in its power of contagion. One cannot get angry with mindless creatures, though one cannot help resenting the spirit that animates mindlessness.

On February 12, 1935, in one of the first pages of his *Journal,* Saint-Denys-Garneau wrote this magnificent and moving passage:

> How dangerous happiness is, and all power, all intoxication! It takes a self-mastery acquired through a long discipline of submissiveness and love to resist the danger of happiness. When the child thinks he is strong enough to act by himself, how joyfully he escapes from his mother's watchful gaze and guiding hand to plunge into danger; And for us, so often beaten down and torn by misfortune, how completely, even at the instant of emerging from our abasement, do we forget all that experience of misery, how blinded we are once again by this intoxication of being! You would return, my heart, as to a festival, to the same fire: and what you knew yesterday, what was so bitterly learned, you know it no longer. To be, to love, to glow with the youth which paints your cheeks like a sunrise, to embrace all things, obey all impulse, scatter around you the efflorescence bursting within you! Ah, you soon forget God when God no longer keeps you crushed. You thought you *knew,* like a grown man — and see, you are the child who would seize everything, possess everything, and who, once those toys are given him, tires of them so quickly and then finds himself saddened and more avid than before. Learn to cast even your human joy on God, and devote it all to drawing nearer to him.[1]

[1] From John Glassco's translation of *The Journal of Saint-Denys-Garneau,* (McClelland & Stewart, 1962).

The style of the passage is that of the great classical French moralists. Its special austerity is that of the French school of spirituality with its clearly recognizable touch of Augustine. What we have here is a direct continuation of our highest tradition of humanist and Christian thought, and we find ourselves completely at home in it. So much so that before we fully realize it something in us assents to this captivating wisdom. Well, that assent, whether complete or partial, or even if it is only the memory of assent, is a false step taken into the trap of alienation. During his lifetime Saint-Denys-Garneau had no more business than any of the rest of us with the kind of clumsy crass stupidity, incarnate in a Père Ubu with his hook for raking noble living creatures into his pit. That would have been far too simple! Ubu is such a showy villain that we forget the danger of having his little switch stuck in our ears or his trampling on toes. And when one pertinently knows, because it is so advertised, that disembraining is carried on every Sunday in Rue de l'Echaudé, why, one simply makes a detour.

But change the setting. When the decor is severely plain, of a most generous and familiar simplicity, when everything shines with the polish of age and experience, and when you have contributed no little yourself to the wear, or so you believe, by your frequent comings and goings, you step out onto the stage with a fine bold gravity. But the planks are not worn, they are covered with a treacherous wax and your confident stride threatens to turn into a neck-breaking skid. And what you thought you had to say is whispered at you from the wings and from the cracks in the floor.

In this theatre the severely plain is really emptiness and experience is really illusion, for the prompters as well as for the actor. True experience and severity would have said that if happiness, power and intoxication are dangerous, unhappiness, impotence and abstinence are even more so. They would have said, right off, that happiness is difficult and desirable, that power is indispensable, and that to feel intoxication you only have to have thirst and a stomach. They would have said that it is better, even in your use of images, to shake off supervision, maternal or other, in order to run the risk of desire and to expose yourself to dictates of joy. That after one feast it is well to prepare the next. That fatigue is not necessarily an initiation to annihiliation. That to share in the flowering of the world and to feel the youth of the universe is not necessarily to lose sight of God. That the man who is utterly crushed is not more conscious of God than anyone else.

Does this amount to saying that Saint-Denys-Garneau's striking passage is radically untrue? That depends on your point of view. If you read it according to the letter it is unacceptable. According to the spirit it is blurred and incomplete.

If I make such a point of this, it is to show up what was lacking in the poet's thought. And what was lacking was not so much something that Saint-Denys-Garneau had not yet acquired, but a possession — a whole part of reality, capacity and possibility — that he had been deprived of, without his knowing it. He was robbed of his faculty for happiness by being led to associate the fact of being happy with a sense of an unpardonable guilt.

Two kinds of guilt are involved. The first is subjective and has to do with that inevitable and normal difficulty of gradually assimilating, as we grow older and more mature, our own potential for life. From powerless and weak we must become powerful and strong before those awesome persons who seem so enviably favoured: our parents, our teachers and other adults, real or symbolic. Nor is it enough to receive certain rights recognized by authority, or even to take possession by force of rights which authority has refused or denied. One must, in a sense, draw one's rights out of oneself. It is not enough to act because such and such an action is permitted or because right to it has been won, legitimately or not, but only because to do so fulfils a personal imperative. Once the act is seen and accomplished in this light, there is no need for concern if it clashes with the irreducible core of the world with which it must come to terms. We can rest assured that such a coming to terms, such a compromise, will be as original as the first springs of the action itself. The ability to act is not acquired without discomfort, for it is dangerous to seize the necessary power to act, and mortal not to seize it. This discomfort easily turns to anguish which the psyche experiences as remorse or a sense of guilt. As long as the difficulty and its attendant anguish are not insurmountable, the guilt remains healthy, and, as one element in the struggle of life, it contributes to the formation of character.

The other kind of guilt is objective. It remains subordinate to moral considerations. It is healthy by definition and subsides before a higher purpose, human or supernatural. Though the two kinds of guilt can only be likened by analogy, they have several extremely dangerous similarities: both are experienced through similar mechanisms; both tend to breed a hatred of action, projected or undertaken.

When, so to speak, the climate is favourable, as it is in our French-Canadian milieu, the two guilts coincide, sharing motives, exchanging symbols and references, profiting one another, mutually perverting each other, widening their range until finally they form, in the eyes of the distracted conscience, a single monstrous guilt, which is, at the same time, paralysing and endowed with an irresistible vigour of invention.

I HAVE REDUCED this extremely complex reality to a sketchy outline, but there is scarcely a sector of French-Canadian life to which it does not apply, and it explains, at least partially, the most basic peculiarities of our society. But let us restrict ourselves to the literary domain. I maintain that if this sense of double guilt that I have outlined does not explain our constant failure in literature or, at the most our very fractional successes, why then our writers must be nothing more than a congregation of dreary little jokers. And if that is the case, they must have passed the word along for centuries, from the solemn innocents of our literary origins to the angry young malcontents of the present day. One can imagine a sort of plot running through the limbo of French-Canadian imagination from Laura Conan to Marie-Claire Blais. For that old-fashioned old maid and this new girl-novelist are really sisters, similar even to the point of sharing the sisterly characteristic of choosing the common theme of disfiguration.

But it is nonsense to speak of a plot between the living and the dead. The truth is that the author of *Angéline de Montbrun* and the author of *La Belle Bête* share the same psychological heredity.

In their works we encounter, with a maximum of explicitness, certain constants in Quebec literature which can be summarized as follows: it is forbidden to love and be happy because — guess why — because it is sin. Any means are valid to insure that this edict is respected: sicknesses of various sorts, especially TB, noble sacrifice, ingenious family tortures, circumstances said to be uncontrollable, murder by firearm or by runaway horse, or simple suicide. All of which makes these books of the Laurentian library considerably less droll than Rabelais catalogue of titles in the Saint Victor Library.

When I say love, I mean, first of all, the most difficult kind, the love of self, and after that the love of others and love of things. For the first principle of all love, of all possession, of all gift of self is this difficult love of oneself. In fact, these distinctions describe only different moments of love, for love moves within us and around us in a single and uninterrupted motion.

If, then, we see the critics, in even the most positive cases, taking so many precautions, stewing over our literature, considering a work now from the point of view of form, now of content; if they praise exclusively its introspective power or its spiritual life or the truth of its portraiture or the liveliness of the story or the interest of the subject; if they continually bog down in secondary considerations and hardly ever come to the point of dealing with the work's internal necessity,

it is because the essential element of human experience is missing. Since they are never possessed by love, our literary works cannot be creations that adequately match being, which is to say, they cannot be forever nourishing, habitable and fundamentally beyond question. They can be instructive, or interesting, can mark an advance or a decline from what has gone before, can stir strong or weak emotions, or stimulate hope, but they are incapable of awakening in us that love that always lies in wait, and whose true contact is never tiring but refreshes us perpetually for new encounters.

Take an example from another literature, Julien Sorel, for instance. He gets his throat cut. But that doesn't leave me downcast, because he has really lived his life, and his love. He took what he wanted and what he loved, and that fulfilled him, and it fulfils the reader, too. As a result Julien Sorel is immortal. The same is true for Madame Bovary. As miserable and distraught as she is, she is fully present in every event in her life, and when she abandons herself, I am fully convinced. It is the same for Constant's Adolphe. Things go badly for him, but they go badly so beautifully that we feel a lasting satisfaction. And if Frédéric in Flaubert's *l'Education Sentimentale* fails, I do not feel frustrated any more than by the death of Tristan and Isolde or by the fate of Claudel's Mésa and Ysé. One feels like congratulating such lives, lived out in the natural evolution of an initial mastery over oneself and the world, because the consequences which impinge upon them do not arise from anything exterior to themselves. In such lives deception, bereavement or joy, hardening of character, conversion, happiness, unhappiness, or death have only one source. It is freedom to love, morally or not, illicitly or not, for such evaluations have nothing whatever to do with the heart of the matter. That is why to deprive us of these creatures of Constant, Stendhal, Flaubert, Wagner and Claudel would be like severing us from our souls or our vital parts. Whereas the loss of all our Angélines would mean no more than the disappearance of a few pale images that only stick in the memory because they are cemented there by a few odd theses and a little literary research. And the main reason for the insubstantial quality of these characters is that they owe nothing to what they basically are, that they are not, in any significant sense, in any real contact with themselves.

Alienation of this kind strikes so deep into French-Canadian life that Saint-Denys-Garneau died of it after giving it its highest expression. If it is objected that the novel does not fairly represent this alienation, add poetry, add criticism, and if that is not enough, investigate the pastoral. There is no shortage of witnesses there, and there are plenty more, among them our thinkers who have only

their poor silence to put forward as recriminating evidence.

Long before he began his *Journal* in 1935, Saint-Denys-Garneau began to feel uncomfortable about the ambiguity and alienation that I have tried to define in outlining the two kinds of guilt and that I have attempted to verify by analysing the lamentable failure of our fictional characters.

I go back in memory to the first years of our friendship. Those were the days when he was one of the group who, in 1934, were to found the review *La Rèleve*. The preoccupations of the group were such that, when their first essays were published, certain of us were taken to be members of the priesthood. As for Saint-Denys-Garneau, since his death and the appearance of his *Poésies Complètes* and his *Journal*, he has been surrounded by an aura of tragic gravity. But we were never a chapter meeting or a committee. We were just friends around a table whose only programme and intention was a quest for the absolute, solidly motivated despite the incoherency of our enthusiasm. There was no order of the day, only the disorder of the evening meetings, especially on Sunday evenings when we exchanged heated and tumbling accounts of what we had done during the week, during those weeks so full of discoveries and excitement, shot through with ecstatic perspectives and darkened with anguish. Among these friends Saint-Denys-Garneau was one of those who was most fully present, one of the most gifted, one of the gayest. And he was the subtlest and the wittiest. His liveliness was that of one who is intoxicated with life and who could expect a liberal and exquisite share of it, generously divided between love, art and thought. When I now hear, clear in my memory, through the murmur of those distant conversations, a phrase thrown out by one of us with a kind of anxious conviction, something like: "Gentlemen, it is absolutely essential to restore to sin its proper grandeur and dignity," I tremble for him in retrospect. Not for the others; for them it was a password to salvation. Such a statement was an obscure but valuable claim to an indispensible autonomy. It was a refusal to accept that the question should be raised in a spirit of fear or that judgment should be passed under the rule of any illusion. It was a key for the liberation that was to come. And, as far as the other members of those reunions are concerned, they are all still alive. But as for him, it was already too late. I shudder, in retrospect, at the thought that already he did not dare assert his instinctive hold on life, that already he was on the verge of committing the irreparable error of mistaking his healthy uncertainty for the sign of an interdiction, an interdiction that was to be studded with false crosses. And I firmly believe that this confusion was the cause of his death, and that it has killed others before and after him, and that it goes on

killing today. I assert that it paralyses and sterilizes and prevents and misguides many, and that this poisonous confusion is the most damnable of our official impositions.

I could almost recapture the moment when the balance of forces in Saint-Denys-Garneau began to swing over towards absence and death. A long scandal and one which wounded me deeply began when, with Robert Elie, I undertook to publish his *Poésies Complètes* and his *Journal.* I have never been able entirely to get over this scandal, and I understand now that if I were ever to bury it I would become an accomplice of the enemies of life. It is precious and I want to make it public as a humble but necessary piece of evidence in this case.

Why death for him, why life for the others? The question of relative merits has, of course, no bearing. Psychologically his disorder was in no way exceptional. The same degree of morbidity is quite common with us. Not to admit that is to understand nothing of our society: a certain neurotic quality is part of our cultural heritage. Saint-Denys-Garneau had then, as they say, problems. Moreover he was gifted with an extreme delicacy of conscience and was possessed by a need to be fully present in whatever he did, which prevented him from paying himself out in mixed doses, from compensating, as many do, for hindrance in one direction by increased activity in another, for uneasiness in one matter by a carefree attitude in others. In other words, the Christian humanist in him could accept no local solution. He was made for total presence.

Physically, his constitution was rather weak, and he certainly lacked that brute energy which might have been, despite himself, his saving grace. He did not have the strength that would have let him disobey those imperatives, true and false, which were then so inextricably intermingled in him. He lacked the strength that might have let him override them, roughshod, that sly and ruthless perseverance of an animal fighting for life. His body was thin, his heart weak, his walk faltering. But from time to time he would get his teeth into something and tear it to pieces without a second thought. And occasionally he would surprise us by getting hold of something big and, whether it resisted or not, would devour it with a savagery that was absolved by his hunger.

So much for the natural man. Spiritually there is the question of a vocation and in this respect we will see later that everything changes value. But before this it was important for him to have tasted a life free from restraints accepted for God or for men.

Saint-Denys-Garneau was the first to disappear from our reunions. At that time we could not tell how significant his absence was, or how prophetic. We

were ready to accept the general scattering of friends during the summer, but we always regretted that he spent his holidays in his family home at Sainte-Catherine-de-Portneuf. To begin with, he would prolong his Christian visit or leave us earlier in the summer. Then he would stay on there into the autumn, and so on. Finally he was absent almost half the year, held by this country which was the nest of his childhood and death.

It would be wrong to picture our friend coming back to us sad and lifeless. Until his final retirement I don't believe we ever saw each other without falling into ecstacies of laughter. His gift for fantasy had reached an extraordinary height and subtlety. With a gesture, an intonation, a raised eyebrow, or the inspired use of colloquialism, he could shake the foundations of reality. And in his daily life, especially when he was alone in the country, he was a bohemian of the first water. He awarded himself the temporary distinction of a beard many times. And as far as outlandish accoutrements were concerned, or disconcerting attitudes and all like rebellious baggage, he could have taught our little beatniks a thing or two. He clearly surpassed them in versatility, for the same hairy peasant that he so readily became in the country could easily have been the most elegant young aristocrat at a fashionable ball two weeks earlier.

But in the midst of this picturesque behaviour, so often carried to doubtful extremes, his laughter frequently struck a false note and he would lapse into a sudden gravity, would fall silent, would stare intensely like a cat attentive to some reality in the walls or outside them.

If we go back to the year 1935, we find Saint-Denys-Garneau working on the poems that were to make up the collection *Regards et jeux*, published two years later. It is also in 1935 that he began his *Journal*. This is the period when he began his decisive self-interrogation and his definitive life's work. For us it marks the start of an irrefutable testimony.

His solitude as a poet was complete. It is scarcely necessary for me to say that he took our Canadian rhymesters for what they are: exactly nothing. As far as his own poetic genesis was concerned, his parentage was purely French. Verlaine and Baudelaire were his breviary: he used them constantly, absorbed them and passed beyond. Though he was very fond of Pierre Jean Jouve, Reverdy and Nerval, they left no discernable mark on his work. He admired Claudel but was on his guard against the overpowering old man. Super-

vielle perhaps helped him to develop certain formal elements. But on the whole *Regards et jeux* stands out in our literature as the first product of an authentic necessity. It is the first work to come from so pure, personal and highly aware a source.

In evaluating the substance and the amount of concentration and effort required to produce *Regards et jeux* one should not forget the ghastly cultural vacuum of Montreal in the early thirties. Today one can contract heavy debts of humanity in this city, dispersed throughout a society that is relatively rich and diversified, but in those days it was inconceivable to owe anything to more than a few friends. Strictly speaking Saint-Denys-Garneau's intellectual and religious milieu was made up of four or five intimate friends.

"I will feed these musings on my own marrow", he wrote. This is the ultimate material of every artist, and studying his use of it one can only have admiration to express if he succeeds, and nothing at all to say if he fails.

The incredible poverty of his milieu forced Saint-Denys-Garneau to draw doubly on his own resources to nourish his work. If only he had been free to spend his gifts without keeping track of how much he had exhausted. But such was not his case. He had to compensate for what he called a loss in volume. Working against the clock he had to make up for a permanent leaking away of life and energy. It is this feeling of ineluctable loss, of ever increasing deficit, that he expresses in the extraordinary parable of the beggar who carried all his possessions in a sack with a hole in it, and by the terrifying image of the corpse that becomes his double:

> There is certainly someone dying
> I have decided to take no heed
> and to let the corpse drop by the way
> But now I have lost my start
> and I am myself
> The dying man adjusting himself to me.

Elsewhere, the fatal wasting away is felt as a dispossession in time and space:

> The future makes us late
> Tomorrow is like yesterday one cannot touch it
> Life lies before one like an iron ball at one's heels
> The wind at our back crushes the forehead against the air.

The irreparable loss of inner content, the rupture of temporal ties, the invasion of the living being by its own death, these are some of the most common and

original themes. There is another that he has not treated explicitly in his work but which was the subject of countless discussions among us, the theme of general misunderstanding.

By the idea that sin had been deprived of its grandeur and dignity, I think we expressed, without knowing it, the depths of our alienation. Not entirely aware of this, we conscientiously sought to assume a just degree of responsibility. The unlimited extension of guilt revolted us but, on the other hand, the only logical and effective absolution — total self denial — seemed inhuman to us, despite the seductions of the cloth. Seriously afflicted by this sickness, the part of us that remained healthy protested that there was a total misunderstanding. How we struggled with those exhausting and ridiculous anxieties! But in as much as our protests were real, our anxiety bore fruit and became fruitful question. And obscurely a decision was taken in favour of life at any cost.

It was then that I had the feeling that our friend was separating himself from us. Not because of any loss of contact, but because he accepted the equivocal terms at the heart of this misunderstanding as the expression of an ultimate reality. There was some immediate proof of this, and two years later, in 1937, I had come to the heart-rending certainty that we were losing him, that he was lost to life. That does not mean that as early as 1935 the debate was closed in his mind, but that, badly begun, it had taken a fatal turning, as illustrated by that seductive page on the danger of happiness that I quoted at the opening of this essay.

Many times Saint-Denys-Garneau had an intuition that there was something wrong at the centre of his self:

> Identity
> Always broken
>
> The knot begins to feel
> The turns of the cord that makes it up.

Labouring under the terrible suspicion that he had been robbed of it, he brooded over his lost joy:

> Now when did we eat up our joy
> All other questions for the moment have
> closed their mouths on their thirst
> And one only hears that one that remains
> persistent and painful
> Like a distant memory that tears the heart even now.

That promise and, as it were, interview with
the promised one
And now that we have torn a furrow this far
As far as we are
This question catches up with us
And fills us with its voice of despair
Where did we eat up our joy
Who ate up our joy
Because there is certainly a traitor among us
Who sat down at our table when we did sit however many we are
However many we were.

In his desolation he saw himself blocked off from any avenue to the outside and questioned where and when the roads had been cut or had run astray:

In my hand
The broken end of all the roads

When was it that the lines were cast off
How is it that all the roads are lost
The bridges broken
The roads cut
The beginning of all presence
The first step of every companionship
Lies broken in my hand.

Then, faced with the scandalous and all-pervading menace, he began a meticulous examination, making an inventory of his limbs and articulations, of all his energies and faculties:

We are going to detach our limbs
and put them in a row to make an inventory
To see what is missing
To find the joint that doesn't fit
For it is impossible to sit quietly and receive
this growing death.

But he could not find the defective, the missing part, and in his *Journal* the theme of the inventory ended up as the mutilation of the poor, as reduction to the very lowest terms, to the vertebral column, symbol of the last vital obstinacy, symbol of the last evidence of being, of a man from whom everything had been taken, everything stolen, to the point where he judged, in all sincerity, that nothing

good had ever belonged to him, and accused himself of having been one of the unworthy poor.

Nonetheless, in a flash of anger the poet identified his immediate enemies — who are also ours — and called down a terrible accusation on them:

It is they who killed me
Fell on my back with their weapons, killed me
Fell on my heart with their hate, killed me
Fell on my nerves with their shouts, killed me
It is they in an avalanche who crushed me
Broke me into splinters like wood

Broke my nerves like a steel cable
That breaks clean and all the wires, a mad bouquet
Shoot up and bend back, naked points

Crumbled my defenses like a dry crust
Picked apart my heart like white bread
Spattered everything into the night

They trod everything underfoot without seeming to
Without knowing it, wanting it, without being able to
Without thinking, without heeding
By their one, terrible, strange mystery
Because they did not come forward to embrace me

One can recognize those who killed this living man as the same ones who had whispered to him their insinuations about the danger of happiness. In the name of that warm and abundant life that he had locked up in the self-denial of misunderstanding, in the name of that life which suddenly invigorated him with its pure power, he judged them in the level light of scorn:

There are some who didn't want to leave
Who wanted not to leave, but to stay

One looks at them one doesn't know
We are not of the same kind.

They woke up as animals penned there
Who spend their soulless ardours in the brothels
And come back to sleep without knowing it
They woke up as book-keepers, as busybodies
As neighbour-eaters, as sin-classifiers

As tax-collectors, as assassins by small dose
Soul-gnawers, the satisfied, the prudent
Ass-kissers, boot-lickers, bowers-and-scrapers
They abdicate long-windedly without knowing it
Having nothing to abdicate

It's a country of little bugs that one steps on
One doesn't see them because they are dead
But one would like to kick their rears
And see them sink underground for the beauty of uninhabited space

As for the others, we are wild, we are all alone
We have only one idea in mind, to embrace
We have only one taste, as pressing as hunger, to leave
We are already no longer where we are
We have nothing to do here
We have nothing to say and we can't hear the voice of a comrade.

When there was coincidence between his servitude and his own springs of life, Saint-Denys-Garneau grasped reality with great lucidity and judged it with an impeccable objectivity. The same internal juxtaposition of forces which allowed him suddenly, and with such energy, to name his enemies led him to attribute French-Canadian lack of good taste to the absence of any positive tastes whatsoever, and by going on to show that taste is a matter of being and loving, he uncovered one of the major features of our alienation. The same clearsightedness illumines his reflections on nationalism, which he denounced as a usurper of first things. It is true that human factors take precedence over national ones, and that these fortuitous and secondary national interests become nothing but tools of alienation if they claim the right to prevent us from risking our essential humanity. Nationalism has been a favourite tool of the forces of alienation in this country and, despite various corruptions of that fact, we are not ready to forget it. One could find many other moments of similar ease and assurance in Saint-Denys-Garneau's thought, but unfortunately they are only moments and his analysis never goes to the root cause of the alienation. Instead, his powers of penetration tended to turn inward, to work against him, to attack him on all sides, to strip him of everything. His analytical drive led him to undervalue the worth of his own talent and work, to accuse himself of being an imposter, to sentence himself morally and spiritually with extreme severity, even to deny the presence of desire in himself and, the supreme error, led him to the conclusion that he lacked existence, that his own identity was too weak to justify its external reality. His thought

seems to me to be the most perfect expression of the deadly equivocation of the two guilts.

SO WE BEGIN to see in what way Saint-Denys-Garneau is a witness for his time and his society. He is so by merit of the crucifying scope of his suffering and because he gave such an exhaustive account of it, transposing it into poetry, into critical reflection, into the dialogue of his correspondence and the self-examination of his *Journal.* Better than anyone before or since he described all that had been done to him and what, at the same time, threatens all of us. But he did not explain it. His mind did not dominate it. And, paradoxically, it is due to this deficiency that his testimony is so complete, so indisputable. By laying himself bare in this unjust fashion, until the tragic twistings of his thought finally led him back to bear against his own identity, he warns us of the dangerous reach of the alienation that is our constant menace. Saint-Denys-Garneau became exemplary through self-negation.

I do not doubt that this destiny was accompanied by grace, or question that this progressive impoverishment may have revealed itself as a vocation in the desert. I fully believe that in the depths of a misery visited by Christ Saint-Denys-Garneau truly realized the gift of himself that he aspired to. On this level his spirit does take on a dominant dimension, for in God's secret kingdom he triumphs over his enemies. I am certain of all that. But I want to confine myself to the strictly human aspects of life, to remain in the human element — which usually goes so cheap in this country. And I will not give up my scandal. To let that go would be to run the risk of somehow granting absolution to complicity in guise of Grace. Everything is Grace, yes, including the bad boss and starvation wages as well as union agitation. Everything is Grace but there is no humanly discernable reason in heaven or on earth that makes it permissible, before or after the fact, to justify the filthy, dismembering, paralysing, killing work of fear.

When salvation and sanctity are obliged to fulfil themselves in the limbless trunk of a man, or in a man poisoned and ravaged to the point of not being able to go on living, the only reference one can decently make to God is to the very time he had in Gethsemane, is to the loving responsibility of love contracted by Christ, the creative and incarnate Word. We have not been removed from the world and the world is our business. And our worldly duty is to fight the misery-makers of this world — for example, to prevent any other man so richly

foliaged with genius, so full of creative sap, so made for fruitful fulfilment, from being so mutilated limb for limb.

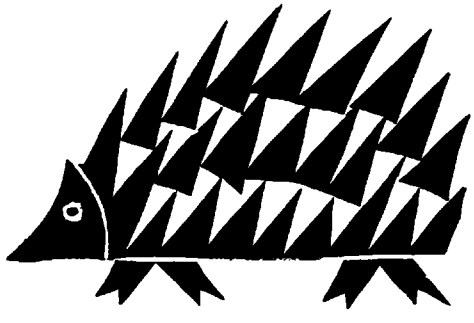
But how can we do this? It is already an enormous help to know, as we do today, that hateful and authoritarian fear — of the world, of matter, of the flesh, of sex and, by extension, by way of association, the scornful fear of all liberty — comes from the same source: from the most ancient, the subtlest, the richest and most stubborn of all heresies, that of dualism. It is this dualism which brings about the alienating confusion between the two guilts, making the moral guilt degenerate into neurosis and giving neurotic guilt the rigid structure of a code. In this way dualism imposes an impossible purity, and in this way it succeeds in preventing all fulfilment by enclosing everything in a false sinfulness to serve the ends of a fallacious spiritual reality.

To know that much, instinctively or otherwise, is an immense step towards liberation. Those of my generation ignored it who desperately strained after remedies which only aggravated the evil. This side of Saint-Denys-Garneau's drama is particularly painful to me. All the references that he had, and all the ones we gave him were, of course, bad references and he came back after having tried them a little more confirmed in his error and that much more troubled and discouraged. When we finally discovered that the solution to the misunderstanding lay in the domain of psychological techniques rather than in religious asceticism, he spurned our opinions, judging that an explanation by sickness was insufficient, or so he wrote, which showed how far his way of thinking had been conditioned. We certainly failed to understand it well enough to be convincing, for in those days Freudian concepts were not current mental equipment as they are today. Due to the fact that since then they have become commonly accepted in many milieus, and are available as a perfectly natural critical approach in others, young people today do not exhaust themselves over questions of guilt and authority as much as their elders did. But how many of those writing today are left untouched by this characteristic French-Canadian anguish? How many recent works have been written out of an authentic inner necessity? How many newly created characters really determine their own actions and the events of their own lives? Rare indeed are those authors who do not exhibit at least some of the grave symptoms of our French-Canadian alienation, rare and extremely discreet. It is not enough then, that the principle of liberation be in the air and in our minds; the ferment of perversion must also be held in check. It should never be forgotten that it is still actively at work, well protected behind the screen of intellectual evolution, and that, as always, it attacks whatever it touches. Moreover the trans-

mission of the poison is so linked to the organization of our little, probably too little, society that it works in a vicious circle. In fact, as free as you may be, nothing guarantees the freedom of your children. They are in hands you have no right to choose.

Well then? Well, the only immediate measure to take, the only near means to get out of this situation, is to break the vicious circle at the link of education. Unfortunately, one can scarcely say that any progress has been made in this sector. And nothing is in the offing, since the forces of liberty are neither aware enough or strong enough on the one hand, and on the other find themselves solicited — perhaps even compromised — by the permanence of our history. Nonetheless something must be done, for if not we will see the general spread of a solution that has become more and more current: a total disaffection towards the faith with which the system claims to identify itself. It is a deplorable solution, certainly, but one which no half-measure will delay, and it is one which no one here has the right to condemn, because the first need of art, thought, truth, the gift of oneself and sanctity is the free possession of life, because without life those things are nothing but illusion. We cannot tolerate that a single person, in the name of any one or any thing whatsoever, should be cast out into the desert like Saint-Denys-Garneau in order to fulfil and surpass himself. A society whose internal dynamics are so warped that it makes such extreme demands deserves nothing better than to be evacuated. By the scandalous cruelty of his vocation Saint-Denys-Garneau has already brought down a judgment on such a society.

(Translated by Philip Stratford)



AUGUST 1606

Farewell to the Frenchmen returning from New France to Gallic France

Marc Lescarbot

Marc Lescarbot, author of *Les Muses de la Nouvelle France, Histoire de la Nouvelle France,* and other works, accompanied Poutrincourt on his second voyage to Port Royal, on what is now the Annapolis Basin, in 1606, and spent the winter there. This poem was a farewell to the men under Dupont returning to France in August 1606. Lescarbot's verses are probably the earliest poems written in America north of the Spanish Empire. The text used here comes from the pamphlet printed in France in 1606 or 1607, and published in the Harvard Library Bulletin XI (1957) pp. 21-39. I am indebted to Peter Dale Scott for this reference, and to John Glassco for suggestions in the translation. — F.R.S.

Go then, set sail, O goodly company
Whose noble hearts withstood courageously
The dreadful fury of both wind and wave
The cruel blows the many seasons gave
To plant among us France's glorious name
And 'mid such hazards to preserve her fame.
Go then, set sail, and soon may each attain
The home fires of his Ithaca again:
And may we also, yet another year
See this same company returning here.

Worn with fatigue you leave us, and we share
With you an equal weight of mutual care;

You, that no dread diseases bring their doles
To make to Pluto offering of our souls:
We, that no fitful wave or hidden rock
Strike your frail craft with unexpected shock.
But here resemblance fails, the likeness ends,
'Tis you who go to see congenial friends
In language, habits, customs and religion
And all the lovely scenes of your own nation,
While we among the savages are lost
And dwell bewildered on this clammy coast
Deprived of due content and pleasures bright
Which you at once enjoy when France you sight.

What nonsense! I am wrong! in this lone land
All his soul needs the just man may command
And will God's power and graciousness revere
If he will contemplate the beauty here.
For should one travel all the earth around
And test the worth of every plot of ground
No place so fair, so perfect will he find
That our Port Royal will not leave far behind.
Perhaps you would on open country gaze?
These sloping banks are washed by numerous bays.
One hundred hills as well would please your eye?
Below one hundred all these waters lie.
Do you then seek the pleasure of the chase?
On every side great forests it embrace.
Are gamey birds desired for your meat?
Each season does its ordered flocks repeat.
Have you a longing for a varied dish?
The bounteous sea will gratify each wish.
Love you the gentle prattling of the rills?
They flow profusely from th'enlacing hills.
Would you enjoy the sight of islands green?
Two city-size within this port are seen.
Do you admire loquacious Echo's rhymes?
Here Echo can reply full thirty times,

For when the cannon's thunder outward sounds
Full thirty times the reverberant boom rebounds
As loud as that which Megæra might reverse
To overthrow this mighty universe.
Would you survey deep rivers in their course?
Three here pay tribute with their wavy force,
Of which the Eel, that sweeps the most terrain,
Bears down the proudest billow to the main,
And almost deafens with her boisterous pace
Not the Catadupes, but this wild race.
Would you, in brief, your enemies withstand?
No fear is here save from heaven's wrathful hand,
For with two bulwarks nature fortified
Our entrance road so well, the countryside
From every threat kept safe, can rest in peace
And season after season live at ease.

Corn still is lacking, and no grapes are found
To make thy name through all the world renowned,
But should Almighty God our labours bless
Thou soon shalt feel celestial plenteousness
Pour down upon thee like the early dew
That, softly falling, doth parch'd earth renew
In midsummer. And though we do not wrest
The richness of the gold mine from thy breast,
Bronze, silver, iron, that thy thickset woods
Guard as in trust, these too are richest goods
For a beginning; someday may be found
The gold that waits its turn beneath the ground.
But now we are content thou may'st supply
Both corn and wine, then afterward may'st try
A more ambitious flight (the grass that girds
Thy waters could supply a thousand herds)
And build the cities, strongholds, settlements,
To give retreat to pioneers from France
And bring conversion to this savage nation
That has no God, no laws and no religion.

O thrice Almighty God whom I adore,
Whose sun upon this countryside doth pour
His dawn, I pray thee, do not longer wait,
Have pity on this people's poor estate,
Who languish, hoping Thy more perfect light
Too long, alas! withholden from their sight.

DUPONT, whose name is graven on the sky
For having stood with matchless bravery
Against a thousand ills, a thousand pains,
Enough to crush the spirit in your veins,
When you were left here with the governance
Of those who, in this country of New France,
Sustained with ardour equal to your own
The long and bitter absence from their home —
As soon as you shall come to greet your King
Remind him of those days of crusading
When his forefathers fought to Palestine
For love of Christian law, and held the line
'Gainst furious Saracen and all his host
Offering their lives along the Memphis' coast
To whim of wind and wave in that dread land
To dripping scimitar in sudden hand:
Tell him that here with little cost or blood
With which strong arms can taint the murderous sword
He may surround himself with equal glory
And add a greater grandeur to his story.

Go then, set sail, O Frenchmen of stout heart,
While now our sails are calling us to start
Toward the Armouchiquois, past Malebarre,
To find another port to serve as bar
To threatening foe, or as a post to tend
A sheltered welcome to th'incoming friend
And there discover if New France's soil
Will justify our faith-inspired toil.

Neptune, if e'er thou hast thy favour cast
On those whose lives upon thy waves are passed,
Good Neptune, grant us what we most desire,
Safe berth in friendly port, so thine Empire
May thereupon be known in countless regions
And soon be visited by all the nations.

(trans. by F. R. Scott)

NOTE: Catadupes: people living beside one of the Nile's cataracts.
The Eel river: now the Annapolis river.

Joseph Schull is the 1965 winner of the University of British Columbia Medal for Popular Biography for his book *Laurier* published by Macmillan of Canada. *Laurier* is a noteworthy volume. It is the first full-length treatment in over forty years of the man who was the first French-Canadian prime minister, and who stands third in years of service in Canada's chief political position. As such, it fills a long-standing need about which Canadian historians have frequently complained but, on the whole, done little. Mr. Schull demonstrates a wise use of the extensive and available manuscript materials, particularly the Laurier Papers which are almost overwhelming in both their scope and quantity. Although it is not written by one who would classify himself as an academic, *Laurier* is a scholarly work. The grace and succinctness of Schull's prose casually covers the painstaking research which has obviously gone into this book. It is sure in event and positive with character. The Selection Committee was C. W. Humphries, of the Department of History, W. H. New and D. G. Stephens of the Department of English, University of British Columbia.

chronicle

LETTRE DE MONTREAL

Une saison abondante

Naim Kattan

LE JURY QUI VIENT DE CHOISIR le lauréat du Grand Prix de la ville de Montréal avait l'embarras du choix. Les années se suivent et ne se ressemblent pas. Quand on a décerné ce prix de $3,000 pour la première fois l'an dernier, on a beaucoup hésité avant de décider de proclamer Réal Benoit comme gagnant. Certains membres du jury n'étaient pas convaincus que son petit roman méritait une si haute récompense. Mais il eût été absurde de lancer le prix et d'avouer qu'on ne pouvait l'accorder faute de lauréat.

Cette année, par contre, la moisson fut riche. On avait à choisir entre un poète, Roland Giguère, et deux romanciers, Hubert Aquin et Marie-Claire Blais. Claire Martin était également dans la course avec ses mémoires. C'est Roland Giguère qui l'a emporté.

Son recueil, *L'âge de la parole* comprend ses poèmes de 1949 à 1960. Giguère est l'un des poètes les plus marquants de sa génération. Son œuvre est considérable mais très peu connue. Peintre, dessinateur, imprimeur, Giguère a vécu pendant de longues années à Paris. Il faisait paraître des plaquettes en édition de luxe. Il en était lui-même l'éditeur et l'imprimeur. Ses lecteurs formaient un cercle restreint qui l'entouraient d'estime et d'admiration. Pour beaucoup de ceux qui connaissaient Roland Giguère de nom et qui avaient lu quelques-uns de ses poèmes dispersés dans les anthologies, ce livre fut la grande révélation de l'année. A le lire, on a l'impression que Giguère possède un pouvoir de divination. Malgré son exil volontaire et momentané, il est resté un poète d'ici et c'est l'homme d'ici qui le préoccupait. Cependant, le Canada, point de départ essentiel, lui permettait de rejoindre l'universel. C'est à travers le Québec et non au-delà du Québec qu'il

s'ouvre au monde. Et c'est pour cela que le drame de l'homme québecois, les ambiguités de sa vie, ses déchirements, sa recherche d'identité lui inspirent ses plus beaux poèmes.

Giguère n'est pas un poète social. Ce qui importe pour lui, c'est le poids des forces écrasantes qui accablent l'homme d'ici et l'énergie dont il fait preuve pour s'en libérer:

Un vent ancien arrache nos tréteaux
dans une plaine ajourée renaissent les aurochs
la vie sacrée reprend ses ornements de fer
ses armes blanches ses lames d'or
pour des combats loyaux

le silex dans le roc patiente
et nous n'avons plus de mots
pour nommer ces soleils sanglants

on mangera demain la tête du serpent
le dard et le venin avalés
quel chant nouveau viendra nous charmer?

Giguère est sans doute parmi les poètes canadiens celui dont le chant atteint un lyrisme déployé, exempt de sentimentalité. Certes, on perçoit ici et là des influences: celle d'Eluard et celle d'Aragon. Sa voix n'en demeure pas moins personnelle. Sa poésie est celle de l'espoir et de l'attente:

Plus tard le ciel déchiré de cris
plus tard les enfants nus
plus tard les bruits légers des belles rencontres
plus tard les poignets cernés par l'amour
plus tard la pitié des affamés
plus tard le livre comme un oiseau blanc
plus tard le culte des innocents

Giguère est aussi le poète de l'énergie. Il croit en les forces de l'homme et il croit en les forces de la nature. De l'union de l'homme et de la nature surgit la vie qui se fait chant:

et où sont les champs de blé avec leurs épis bien droits
debout comme des drapeaux?
les blés couleur de nos bras
les blés couleur d'homme

sans nuage de corbeaux
sans ruisseau de couleuvres
rien que les blés couleur d'un regard
sur un corps sans blessure.

C'est avec un plaisir toujours renouvelé qu'on relit le poème le plus connu sans doute de Giguère, "Roses et ronces":

rosace les ronces
ce printemps de glace dans les artères
ce printemps n'en est pas un
et quelle couleur aura donc le court visage de l'été?

Le paysage que vit et que décrit Giguère, au-delà de l'exil et de l'oubli, est celui de son enfance, celui de sa terre natale. Dans cet exil, il retrouve le sens des "plus obscures paroles". Loin du Canada, à l'ombre même des désirs, on revit les chemins de neige et c'est à ce moment-là que Giguère découvre son adhésion à la vie qui devient réalité:

nous appartenons à tous les futurs
puisque ta réalité est possible
puisque tu es réelle
au coeur des neiges éternelles

PAR LES VOIES LES PLUS INDIRECTES et les plus insoupçonnées, Marie-Claire Blais rejoint Giguère dans son roman *Une saison dans la vie d'Emmanuel.* Livre insoutenable et d'une puissance poétique rarement atteinte dans la littérature canadienne. Dans ses précédents romans, Marie-Claire Blais nous faisait pénétrer dans un monde de rêves tourmentés, d'angoissants personnages et d'images infernales. Ici, elle atteint le bout du tunnel. Son cauchemar revêt une force telle qu'il se confond avec la réalité, qu'il se transmue en une réalité transfigurée par une douleur inguérissable. Il est un grand malheur: celui de naître pauvre parmi des êtres qui vivent aux confins de l'humain. Il est dur ce monde où les enfants tentent, dans l'épuisement de plaisirs sordides, de reculer le moment où ils seront envahis par un monde de dégradation. Pour Marie-Clair Blais, les adultes sont frappés d'une humiliation telle que même le souvenir d'une dignité passée leur est interdit. Ce livre est aussi un livre d'attente, un livre annonciateur. Ses personnages sont dans les limbes. L'homme d'ici naît et ce sont les poètes qui le proclament. On va au-delà d'une simple quête d'identité.

Et c'est une telle quête que nous évoque Hubert Aquin dans *Prochain épisode.*

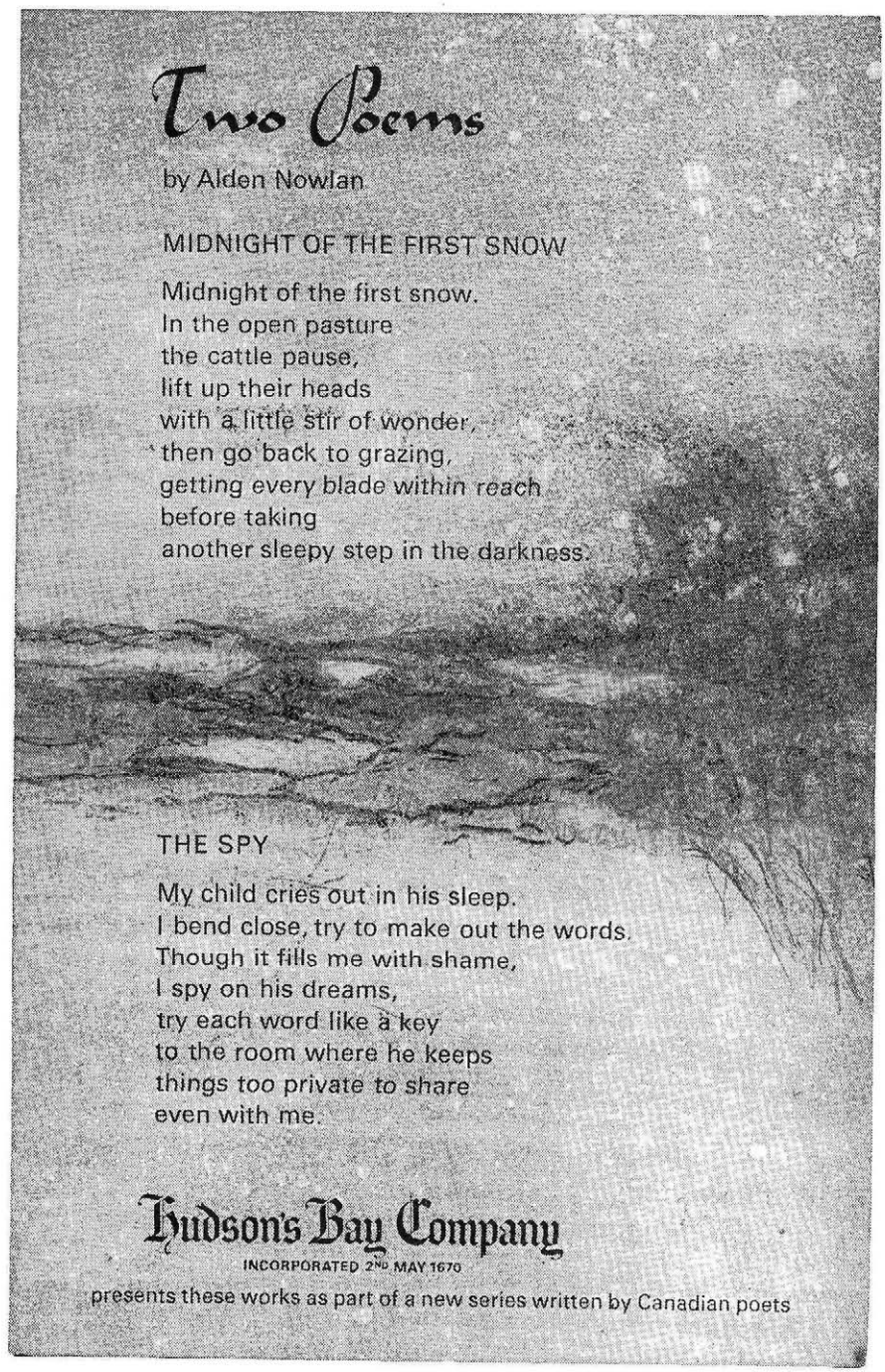
C'est un roman dans un roman et ce n'est pas sans rappeler le *Feu pâle* de Nabokov. Un Canadien-français revit la révolution manquée. Pour la comprendre, il la refait en imagination. Aquin nous entraîne dans une invraisemblable histoire d'espionnage qui se déroule en Suisse. "Après deux siècles de mélancolie et trente-quatre ans d'impuissance, je me dépersonnalise".

Pour retrouver son identité, ce Canadien-français dépersonnalisé doit surmonter les assauts de l'ennemi qui gît en lui. Car l'espion mystérieux qui se nomme. H. de Heutz est un frère siamois du Québecois en révolte. Une histoire d'amour s'imbrique dans ce rêve philosophique. Les deux ennemis ont la même amante. Chez ce Canadien-français, la femme et la patrie se confondent dans une même image. Ce livre contient des pages émouvantes où l'auteur laisse percer les sentiments d'amour pour la femme et pour la patrie. C'est un roman d'une extrême habileté. L'individu est confondu avec la collectivité. La réalité n'est pas encore créée puisque le Canadien-Français est en perte d'identité. Le roman ne peut donc que s'annuller puisque les personnages ne montent à la surface que pour être assassinés. C'est une œuvre d'élucidation. Il prend son départ du point atteint par Marie-Claire Blais. Chez elle, la nébulosité fait place à la vie; chez Aquin, la vie est condamnée car elle est jugée nébuleuse.

C'EST UNE SEMBLABLE quête d'identité qui forme la trame du premier roman d'André Laurendeau. Nous assistons ici à la mort d'une société. Tous les espoirs sont désormais permis puisqu'une nouvelle société va naître. *Une vie d'enfer* est l'histoire d'une chute. Le héros est un journaliste rongé par un mal indéfinissable, une sorte de vide, une attente, un manque. Il croirait au bonheur si la vie ne lui apparaissait pas comme un mirage. Ce n'est pas un personnage tourmenté qui se pose des questions. C'est un homme qui se détruit, qui est habité par la mort parce qu'il a peur de vivre. Il cherche à vaincre son inaptitude à accueillir les dons de la nature et les joies des rapports humains. L'amour c'est le dernier rempart que la vie élève devant lui pour le protéger.

Ce romain est violent mais d'une violence silencieuse que se fait chant, qui se fait musique, et c'est pour cela qu'il laisse percer l'espoir, la promesse des lendemains.

La littérature canadienne-française n'en est plus au stade des regrets et des lamentations. Dans ses négations, dans ses refus de ce qui fut et de ce qui est, on décèle les germes d'une affirmation. Malgré les apparences, c'est une littérature qui annonce l'avenir, qui l'accueille, qui le prépare.


Two Poems
by Alden Nowlan
MIDNIGHT OF THE FIRST SNOW
Midnight of the first snow.
In the open pasture
the cattle pause,
lift up their heads
with a little stir of wonder,
then go back to grazing,
getting every blade within reach
before taking
another sleepy step in the darkness.
THE SPY
My child cries out in his sleep.
I bend close, try to make out the words.
Though it fills me with shame,
I spy on his dreams,
try each word like a key
to the room where he keeps
things too private to share
even with me.
Hudson's Bay Company
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review articles

EXPERIENCE AND INNOCENCE

George Jonas

STEPHEN VIZINCZEY, *In Praise of Older Women.* Contemporary Canada Press. $4.95.

SEX IS FUN. It does not lie in nature either as a biological or as a social phenomenon to give us dissatisfaction, complexes or pain. It is not a necessary evil, a social or religious duty (as some Communists and many Christians see it) nor is it a compromise we have to make with our animal nature.

Not only is there nothing "wrong" with sex in any of its normal and many of its abnormal manifestations, but the question should — and would — not even arise if owing to our backwardness, superstitution and plain unsophistication we did not artificially create psychological, legal and social blocks that prevent us, individually and collectively, from the simple enjoyment of this uncomplicated and unequivocally pleasurable thing. All the problems about sex are man-made and need not be. Indulgence in sex on any emotional or physical level is no more harmful than indulgence in fresh air; and any of the rituals we surround it with, any of the conditions we set up for it, any of the taboos with which we restrict it, serve only to assuage some atavistic, inexplicable fear we have of pleasure. If we did not fear the revenge of the envious and malicious gods, if we could only believe that we have a right to the enjoyment of our existence, if we did not think that we have to purchase each ounce of bliss with a pound of suffering from a Supreme Power that has a monopoly on both, we could live happily and make love freely in as frequent and varied a way as we and our partners have a mind to.

I should hasten to mention that none of these things are explicitly stated and none of these terms are used to describe human relationships in Stephen Vizinczey's novel *In Praise of Older Women.* It is, however, as good a description as I could render of the thoughts it evoked in me. And the opening sentence — sex is fun — is a direct statement of Vizinczey's although it does not appear in this book.

What appears in the book is the view that the blind should not lead the blind, the teacher should have more knowledge, maturity and experience than the pupil,

and consequently young men should learn both sex and love from older women. This view is put forth in a totally straightforward and unpretentious way, within the framework of the openly autobiographical story. The story itself is that of a young man whom we meet in Hungary at the age of about 12 and leave in Canada at the age of about 32. What happens in between is an anecdotal and first person account of some of the older and younger women he knew and made, or tried to make, love to. The details are presented clearly, factually and at times clinically. The tone is matter-of-fact, mature, and, when the occasion demands it, satirical. Although the reader is *not* left to draw his own conclusions, he is not specifically urged to adopt the conclusions of the writer.

The reader would, indeed, find it difficult to adopt all of the writer's conclusions since one of the main points Vizinczey makes is that each should find in sex what pleases him or her most, insofar as this is possible without hurting others. That is why universal precepts of morality and general standards of behaviour are both meaningless and unenforceable. The dual ideas of people as possessions and sex as a conceptual part of morality in and of itself create all the problems there are. If we did not think that we can own and be owned in love, and if we did not arbitrarily attribute a moral significance to the fulfilment of one of our normal emotional and physical functions, much of the pain, confusion and suffering presently associated with the unavoidable exercise of our biological and social role as men and women would disappear.

This argument is not particularly novel. Whether we agree with it or not — personally I find it difficult not to agree with it at least in part — *In Praise of Older Women* could not be called a major contribution to the subject, or to Canadian letters in general, if it did not go beyond re-stating and illustrating this view. However, Vizinczey — or rather his hero, Andras Vajda, student, later professor of philosophy — does go beyond it. He goes beyond it by several steps and in several directions.

First, this novel is an argument for maturity. It is, insofar as I have been able to discover, the first non-nostalgic literary reaction against that cult of youth that characterizes our century. The key word here is "non-nostalgic" as Vizinczey does not take issue with "today's youth" or even with youth in general from an older generation's point of view, but simply presents a case for values the prerequisites of which are an understanding and maturity that can only come of age — or of experience, which is its equivalent. If we take it into account that the writer is no older than his hero — 32 — and that he writes at a time when novelists above the mass magazine level are simply not known to contrast age favourably with youth, tradition with change, experience with enthusiasm, and maturity with sincerity, the importance of this novel, I think, immediately stands out in sharper relief.

Secondly, Vizinczey argues, in what to me is a very convincing way, that the complexities of life and even the essential incompatibility of human beings need not fill us with horror or sadness. The facts of life, just as the fact of death, can be accepted if we have sufficient knowledge, freedom and courage to use those safety devices and analgesics with which we come physically and emotion-

ally equipped. In sexual relationships this means first education, and then experimentation.

Vizinczey defies anyone to show what is there to be ashamed of, or feel guilty about, in love or sex. (He does not, in fact, allow for a separation of two in most cases.) He defies anyone to show the virtue of self-denial. The method he employs in doing this is as cunning as it is effective: he shows himself, his friends, his contemporaries both male and female at the most immature stage of their development trembling at the thought or sight of things that the adult reader (the adjective, of course, is not purely chronological) would accept as natural. However, almost at the same time, he tells about other things that even the most sophisticated of us cannot quite hear without at least a fleeting sense of shock — yet he shows his characters indulging in these things as matter-of-factly as we would in a glass of wine with our dinner. As a result, we cannot help experiencing the relativity and arbitrariness of all the codes we choose to live or choose not to live by.

It is not too surprising that Vizinczey's novel has been both praised and condemned for what I believe to be the wrong reasons. First, there came the praise and condemnation of those who look for pornography in everything — whether because they enjoy it or because they don't — and who, according to this preference, classified the book either as trash or as a great work of art. One can-

not really quarrel with that; those who wish to look for pornography in Vizinczey's novel can certainly find it. Pornography in the strictest sense means material that treats of harlotry and its various manifestations, and it is undeniable that *In Praise of Older Women* deals, at least in part, with such matters. So does, of course, the poetry of Villon, the prose of Rabelais, the stage of Brecht — to mention only some of the most obvious examples. But the approval and disapproval of those who approve or disapprove of the subject matter need hardly concern us.

Next came the approval of those who saw in Stephen Vizinczey a new and effective champion of what is fondly called in their circles "the sexual revolution". The fact that *In Praise of Older Women* makes it abundantly clear on every page that its author is much more of an aristocrat than a rebel did not for a moment bother these sexual democrats, and is not likely to bother them in the future.

Unlike the adherents of the sexual revolution, Andras Vajda, the hero of Vizinczey's novel, does not look for any scientific or philosophical justification for his thoughts or actions. He does not seek a mandate from the people, from the times, or from the ideas and spirit of liberalism. He argues from a position of power: he loves by the grace of God. He does not seek an affirmation of his right to sexual fulfilment — or his right to talk about it — because it does not occur to him that such rights could be granted or denied. Least of all does he plead for a social change in what he believes to be a purely personal matter. Society's relative lenience or harshness simply does not enter into the problems he has to face.

No, his problems are individual; they concern the process of growing up individually and of finding fulfilment individually. "I was," Andras Vajda tells us, "a good student of the women I loved, and I'll try to recall those happy and unhappy experiences which, I believe, made a man out of me." And, he adds, "... it is (the reader's) curiosity about himself that I hope to stimulate." This to me seems to sum up adequately the *social* scope and aim of *In Praise of Older Women.*

Still, Andras Vajda is a contemporary man, and at least psychologically, he cannot help being affected by his society's way of dealing with matters he has to deal with on a personal level. The analysis he offers in connection with this is as shrewd as it is accurate. "I'm like most of my sceptical contemporaries," he says. "When it comes to love, we reject the distinction between moral and immoral for the distinction between 'genuine' and 'superficial'. We're too understanding to condemn our actions; we condemn our motives instead. Having freed ourselves from a code of behaviour, we submit to a code of motivation to achieve the sense of shame and anxiety that our elders acquired by less sophisticated means."

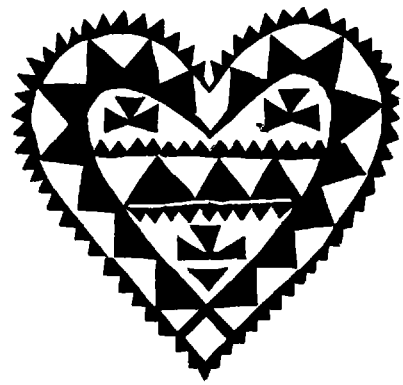
But why are we so much afraid of pleasure, of beauty, of love that we strive by fair means or foul, by new methods or old ones, continually to restrict our actions and put the stamp of ugliness on our most natural and joyful thoughts and desires? Perhaps because "... It's less painful to think 'I'm shallow', 'She is self-centred,' 'We couldn't communicate,' 'It was all just physical,' than to accept the simple fact that love is a passing sensation, for reasons beyond our control and even beyond our personalities ... No

argument can fill the void of a dead feeling — that reminder of the ultimate void, our final inconstancy. We're untrue even to life."

In Praise of Older Women is Stephen Vizinczey's first novel. Vizinczey himself is a Hungarian who came to Canada after the Hungarian revolution of 1956. He was about 23 when he came; 26 when one of the documentaries he wrote for the National Film Board won an Ohio award; 28 when he brought out *Exchange* in Montreal. When that magazine failed — dying with more of a bang than a whimper, which in itself is fairly unusual — he came to Toronto to produce radio documentaries for Harry J. Boyle's *Project* series. He began writing his novel at the age of 30, by which time his English was getting to be fairly fluent. When he finished, not quite two years later, his book put him, in Kildare Dobbs' words, "among the masters of plain English prose."

The publishers to whom he submitted his manuscript, first in Toronto and then in England, did not quite see it this way. According to Vizinczey, the best offer he received was from McClelland & Stewart in Toronto — an advance against royalties in the amount of $250. Offended and surprised, ("a rejection would not have bothered me nearly as much . . .") Vizinczey decided to incorporate himself as Contemporary Canada Press and publish his book himself. The venture was successful: *In Praise of Older Women* made the best seller list in both Toronto and Montreal within two weeks of its publication. (Today it is in its second printing and still going strong.) Offers from the United States began to arrive for the American hardcover and paperback rights, with the highest bidder turning out to be Ian Ballantine. The book went to him finally for an advance of $40,000. Three weeks later, Vizinczey, his wife and two children left for Italy.

To the experts, whose opinion I fully share in this case, Vizinczey's story seems to prove his utter innocence rather than his business acumen. "This thing simply cannot be done," says Robert Weaver, editor of *Tamarack Review*, "and that is why more people don't do it. If more people did it it would not be news, and if it would not be news Vizinczey could not have got the publicity and exposure he did get from various people, even if the quality of his work would otherwise justify it." And Ivon Owen, manager of Oxford University Press, sums it up this way: "Publishing is the riskiest business there is, or just about. Stephen Vizinczey did a very effective job of local promotion, which always helps. However, I believe that the book's short term success, and the long run success it may very well have, will be the result of its own excellence."



EN COULEUR DE ROSE

George Woodcock

JOSEPH SCHULL, *Laurier*. Macmillan. $8.50.

THE BIOGRAPHER of a political leader approaches his task, if he is wise, with a consciousness of particular difficulties imposed by the nature of his subject. First, the life of a politician is in a special way historical; he has lived in the main stream of events in his time and has largely helped to shape them. This involves the writer in a temptation to work as a historian using a biographical pattern, and to subordinate the essential core of his subject's personal life to what should really be the secondary layers of external happenings.

The second difficulty arises out of the kind of myths which, even in their lifetimes, are woven around political leaders by party publicists anxious to present them attractively, by newspaper men anxious to present them picturesquely, and, in our own day, by television producers anxious to present them with that candour which, by concentrating only on certain aspects of the real man, creates its own special type of falsehood. The composite images which — as a result of these various influences — float in the minds of the average man when he thinks of contemporary politicians like Diefenbaker and W. C. Bennett, and even comparatively colourless personalities like Lester Pearson, are only the public masks of the private men whose real features the biographer should be seeking. Mere debunking, even on so relatively sophisticated a level as that attempted by Peter Newman in his recent exposé of Diefenbaker, is not sufficient, nor, if we are seeking something more profound than a polished and ironical essay in the disparity between men and their pretensions, is the approach of Lytton Strachey. The role of the biographer of a public man is, indeed, rather like that of an archæologist removing the detritus of succeeding cultures to recover the relics of a vanished city and by this means reconstitute its life. Since almost every aspect of the myth contains its fragment of truth, the falsehoods have to be brushed away with care before the shape of the real man can finally be reconstructed. There are certain Canadian biographers, particularly those concerned with that amiable self-dramatizer, Sir John A. Macdonald, who in the process of reconstruction have succeeded only in creating myths of their own. It is another temptation to be resisted by the political biographer.

Joseph Schull, in his Life of Macdonald's successor and rival, has not resisted this last temptation, and has only partially succeeded in dealing with the other difficulties I have sketched out. Sir Wilfred Laurier was one of the most important and one of the more sympathetic public figures of the first century of Canadian history; as a politician and as a man he has been somewhat unfairly obscured in recent years by the attention

devoted to the "Fathers of Confederation", and for this reason it was high time a new and searching biography of him appeared — a work as close to the definitive as possible in its presentation of details, yet at the same time imaginative enough in its insights to create a real and living understanding between reader and subject. Mr. Schull's book is so near to being completely successful that one can only regret its inadequacies.

One can, to begin, find relatively little fault with Schull's handling of the interplay of the personal and the political in Laurier's life. One compares his treatment with that of Macdonald by a professional historian like Donald Creighton, and one has to admit that here Schull has come nearer to the ideal of biographical balance. He has studied and grasped adequately the political issues of Laurier's time, and the reader who knows little of the Reciprocity controversy or of the battles over a Canadian navy and over conscription in the First World War will not be left feeling that he has been led blindfolded into unknown territory; at the same time every one of these issues is presented to show its clear bearing on Laurier's life and career, and one never feels that the backdrops are constructed on so large a scale as to dwarf the hero. In biography of this kind a convention rather like that of hieratic scaling in religious art has to be observed, and Mr. Schull does observe it; his central figure always seems larger and more immediately present than either the setting or the attendant characters.

At the same time, Laurier is enlarged

on one's view not merely for the legitimate reason that most attention is being paid to him, and that Mr. Schull supplies us with many more relevant facts than the earlier biographers; he is also artificially distended by a process which, whatever Mr. Schull's original intentions, does amount to myth-making.

Like Disraeli, Laurier was a combination — not infrequent among Victorian politicians — of the idealistic romantic and the adept intriquer according to the political morality of his time. He was a dandy of a type comparatively rare in the Canadian nineteenth century, and his Anglophile inclinations — appropriate in a French Canadian named after Scott's Anglo-Saxon hero — combined with a rather sentimental nostalgia for the past in a tendency towards rosily poetic visions which make him appear at first sight a rather improbable figure to have presided so effectively over one of the great eras of Canadian expansion; but there was a hard core of shrewdness in Laurier (after all, if he was a romantic, he was a romantic *lawyer,* and his record of patronage alone would have toppled a modern Canadian government), and the combination of the two elements helps to explain the charismatic appeal which, over a long period, enabled him to hold together and to deploy effectively the uncomfortably disparate elements out of which the Liberal Party in Canada has always been formed.

The charismatic appeal has lingered strongly enough to have influenced Mr. Schull into a favourability towards his subject that goes rather beyond the sympathy necessary in a good biographer. Where Laurier might often have been criticized legitimately for weakness or for some especially calculating manoeuvre, Mr. Schull tends always to be indulgent, and if Conservative critics brand this a Liberal biography, they will not be entirely without justification. Moreover, Schull is always intent on catching the heart-touching nuances; in his descriptions of Laurier's childhood, of his marriage, of his young manhood in Athabaska, of his declining years as a politician out of office, the vision often blurs out of objective focus into sentimentality. Laurier appears too frequently as a Canadian Galahad, and Galahads, it is well known, do not survive for decades as political leaders.

If there is a tendency on Mr. Schull's part to accept and embellish a party myth of Laurier, he is also ready to create a new myth; one has only to read his sub-title — *The First Canadian* — to realize what it is. Throughout his book there is a harping on what he sees as a constant effort on Laurier's part, unique in its time, to weld the English and the French elements in his upbringing and his nation into the Canadian hybrid. The sense of a Canadian nationality, so far as it even now exists, has developed so precariously and so obscurely that to label any one man "the First Canadian" is biographically and historically misleading.

The inclination to replace insight by myth is only one aspect of the essentially journalistic flavour that permeates *Laurier.* The book began in radio documentaries and articles for *Weekend Magazine,* and the marks of its origin lie upon it and can be seen in many ways. The prose structure, for example, has the monotonous and colourless "simplicity" demanded by popular magazines; in one paragraph of 22 lines which I picked at random there were 13 sen-

tences, and this pattern continues throughout. Mr. Schull, moreover, can rarely resist the journalist's temptation to caricature his minor characters, particularly if they have interfered with Laurier's career, or to damn them in the beginning with hostile labels; the complex and tragic Louis Riel is introduced as "that shabby figure", and such he is made to seem in all his subsequent appearances. Such a method of treating Laurier's contemporaries, if it is intended to enhance our appreciation of the central figure, is notably unsuccessful.

Laurier, then, is a book of many faults. Yet I read it with constant interest and often with pleasure, for it presents much that is new; it is the most informative biography of Laurier that has yet been written, and will long be, for this reason alone, indispensable to those who are interested in the political history of Canada.

TREPIDATION AND EXCITEMENT

B. Rajan

NORTHROP FRYE, *The Return of Eden*. University of Toronto Press. $4.95.

Paradise Lost is a work which is large enough, archetypal enough and some would argue, blurred enough, to invite eager attention by mythological critics. Actually only two substantial studies in this vein have been published — Werblowsky's *Lucifer and Prometheus* and a temperate book by McCaffrey, bred out of Jung and Cassirer. Northrop Frye is undoubtedly *the* shaman among myth-twirlers and a book by him on *Paradise Lost* is an event to be faced with trepidation and excitement. Since Frye is incapable of dullness only one of these expectations is satisfied. Frye may use words like "topocosm" where the uninstructed mind would simply say "world-picture"; but basically, he is telling us what critics of the poem have been telling us for several years: that *Paradise Lost* is a vast statement of order, of the entry and perverting (Frye would say "parodic") energy of disorder and of the terms on which order can once again be restored. Even the language of the statement is familiar; it is the chain of being, degree, the hierarchic principle and the macro-microcosmic coupling that we are invited to contemplate in different garments.

When mythologists, historicists and structuralists come together in their descriptions of a poem, their agreement is refreshing evidence that we are looking at the same art-object and that the object is sufficiently formed to permit only a limited range of hesitancy about its nature. (The rising generation of numerologists is a different brood whose assessments have yet to be assayed). Frye however, is traditional not only in his descriptions but in more than one of his judge-

ments. When he classifies Milton as a "radical or revolutionary artist" he is building on a distinction made by Coleridge, though ironically, he is applying it in such a way as to make Eliot into a model of twentieth-century radicalism. When he looks repeatedly at the difference between what he calls the conceptual and dramatic aspects of the poem he is contemplating a road that leads from Blake to Waldock and which virtually every English Miltonist has taken. Frye himself does not quite take this road and his hesitations regarding it (which will be looked at later) are among the most interesting aspects of his book.

"All revolutionary myths are sleeping-beauty myths" Frye observes in a comment that suggests his own qualities as a radical critic. His is moreover a generic as well as a mythological approach and if myth is a disclosure of experience, the genre adds to that disclosure a weight of stylization and ornament, an accumulated history of response, that becomes organically a part of the inherited complex that is offered to a writer. It is neither easy nor profitable to separate the intrinsic insights which a myth makes available from those insights which are won from it or drawn into it by usage; the history of a form is also its substance and the critic has no option but to bring his sense of history to bear on his estimate of creative accomplishment.

Because neither Frye's approach nor the quality of his perceptiveness excludes historical understanding, it is saddening to find him castigating something which he chooses to describe as the "Great Historical Bromide". No responsible historical critic would blankly concur in the assertion that the problem of Milton's God "would not exist for the seventeenth-century reader, who could not possibly have felt such resentment for a character clearly labelled 'God' and talking like a seventeenth-century clergyman." Equally, no historical critic is entitled to suggest that escape routes into the seventeenth century exempt us from the responsibility of coming to terms with the poem in our own time. The historical method does not seek to eliminate the distance between assertion and performance by putting forward hypotheses designed, justly or unconsciously, to annul the difference; it does seek to persuade us that much that is dismissed as assertion may in reality qualify as performance. The structural propositions about *Paradise Lost* that are advanced with such confidence and are so widely endorsed today, were not self-evident until scholarship taught us to look for them. The historical method also does not suggest that the seventeenth-century response is any substitute for our own; but unless it is impossible to learn from the past, to move through that response is significantly to alter the manner in which the poem lives in us.

The difficulty with Milton's God is that he enters the epic as an absolute. His point of view commands the poem and is not enveloped by it as are those of lesser agents. Our acceptance of him therefore maybe somewhat beyond the acceptance normal to poetry. Yet it is easy to make too much of this further demand. A certain tension between the intellectual knowledge of what we should be and the instinctive pull of what we are, is part of the divided nature of man; it can be said to be expressed in the discrepancy between the poem's conceptual and dramatic aspects, and operates as much in the temptation scene (where

Frye does not seem to find the tension destructive) as in the values expressed at the summit of the ascent to light. If this is conceded it is not necessarily the poet's function to eliminate the discrepancy, though, to the extent that we grow into the poem, we may succeed in altering its impact. Nevertheless a discrepancy will remain; it can be evidence that we are involved in the poem and that its moral concerns are real to us and to that degree disturbing. The education of Adam must proceed and it is no accident that nearly half the poem is concerned with formal instruction by archangels, leaving aside the less tactful teachings of experience. Even the point where the poem starts has its relevance. To hasten into the midst of things is an epic convention; but if we begin in a certain place it is also because all of us begin there.

It is good to see Frye's admirable essay on the typology of *Paradise Regained* reprinted, though exception should be taken to its lurid rechristening as "Revolt in the Desert". Its inclusion in the book enables Frye to pursue further his argument that the paradise within is a natural stage in the evolution of the Paradise myth. This is a better explanation than the view that Milton retreated into quietism because the revolution had betrayed him, not unfortunately, because there is more evidence for it, but because it seeks to ground itself on æsthetic fact rather than personal frustration.

The contrast between the dramatic and conceptual is particularly disconcerting in *Paradise Regained.* Frye voices the exasperations of many when he says that dramatically "Christ becomes an increasingly unsympathetic figure, a pusillanimous quietist in the temptation of Parthia, an inhuman snob in the rejection of Rome, a peevish obscurantist in the rejection of Athens." Frye however goes on to recognize that "All of us are, like Christ, in the world, and unlike him, partly of it. Whatever in us is of the world is bound to condemn Christ's rejection of the world at some point or other." The discrepancy in other words, is not without a function; and because Christ is Christ and not John Milton (a fact too often forgotten in reading the temptation of Athens) a moral recognition can be pushed to an extreme of clarity. If the clarity is too harsh there are grounds for falling short of it. This, or something like it, is the right frame for understanding though it may be that in using literature for the denial of literature, Milton was involving his readers in a paradox that is too large even for poetry.

books in review

EXISTENTIAL MORALITY?

BRIAN MOORE, *The Emperor of Ice Cream.* McClelland & Stewart. $5.95.

THE CENTRAL CHARACTER of Brian Moore's latest novel is not merely another lonely misfit. He is Everyman, or at least Everyoungman who struggles to define himself in relation to an alien world with which he is inextricably involved.

For Gavin Burke that world is the Belfast of the nineteen-forties. It is a middle-class world as stultifying as Joyce's Dublin, a narrow, Lilliputian world whose citizens, in the words of the King of Brobdingnag, "have their titles and distinctions of honour; . . . they love, they fight, they dispute, they cheat, they betray." And in all they think, and say, and do, they demonstrate their bondage to a dead past, to a morality (Catholic or Protestant) which stifles not only sexual love but all natural affection, to a system of education in which learning is always a means and never an end, to political attitudes unchanged in the twenty years since "the Troubles." Between desperate and guilt-multiplying attempts to escape into sex and fighting and drink they serve the great god Respectability and are at ease in Zion. Destruction may drop from the heavens upon the Sodom and Gomorah of Liverpool and London but "*never* on Belfast". This is no country for young men.

Gavin Burke is not only young, he is also sensitive and imaginative. In Belfastian terms he is predestined to be a failure, and at seventeen he knows it. If he should succeed, however briefly, in forgetting his inadequacies he is reminded of them by a sacred statue which sees him in all his nakedness — the Divine Infant of Prague, "eleven inches tall yet heavy enough to break someone's toes if he fell off the dresser." In addition to the statue, Gavin is endowed with the standard Morality Play equipment:

> He had two guardian angels. The White Angel sat on his right shoulder and advised the decent thing. The Black Angel sat on his left shoulder and pleased the devil's cause. The White Angel was the official angel: everybody had one. . . . Yet, the trouble was, the Black Angel seemed more intelligent, was more his sort.

Gavin's search for himself is conducted in an anguish of ambivalence — he longs equally for escape from his world and for acceptance by it. Knowledge is not the last, but the first of his props to fall away — he has failed his Schools Leaving Certificate examinations and has enlisted in an Air-Raid Precautions corps largely in order to get out of repeating his year. It is the A.R.P. Post which serves as the microcosm of the microcosm of Belfast.

The rigours of experience divest the job of the aura of potential heroism in which Gavin's fantasy had clothed it, but he clings to it nonetheless, day after bleak and cheerless day, for the sake of the independence conferred by three pound-ten a week. He clings also to poetry, and especially to four quotations from *The Faber Book of Modern Verse.* These "touchstones", from poems of Auden, MacNeice, Yeats, and Wallace Stevens, respectively, also signpost the novel's plot. They are:

You cannot be away, then, no
Not though you pack to leave within an hour,
Escaping, humming down arterial roads . . .

We shall go down like paleolithic man
Before some new Ice Age or Genghiz Khan.

Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world . . .

and

Let be be finale of seem.
The only emperor is the emperor of ice-cream.

The anti-hero's isolation is thus well established when the novel begins, but it progresses inexorably towards its predestined absolute. Family, fiancée, friends, religion, alcohol, sex, all external values are tested and found wanting in Gavin's faltering pilgrimage towards the meeting with Death which liberates him into life. On the night when anarchy is loosed upon Belfast, nature outworks fancy, reality rings down the curtain on seeming, and the emperor of ice cream finds himself sufficient to stand though free to fall.

Yet for all its Morality theme and structure the predominating tone of the novel is comic. It is less tragic in its tragicomedy than *The Luck of Ginger Coffey*, less bitterly satiric than *The Feast of Lupercal*, less despairing than *Judith Hearne*. In total effect, it has less strength than these earlier novels, though precisely why this should be so is not easy to determine. In *The Emperor of Ice Cream* Brian Moore once again demonstrates his ability to get inside his characters and take his readers with him while doubling, at the same time, in the role of detached observer. The narrative point of view is that of Gavin Burke, augmented by occasional brief excursions into the consciousness of minor characters, which serve to demonstrate that Gavin's confusions are not unique but are an element of the human condition. The petty shifts of petty man are exposed, but the pen that strips away pretenses flows with understanding and humour as well as satire, as in the hilarious dénouement of the Princess Royal's visit of inspection. This is only one of what the dust-jacket justly describes as "a succession of brilliant scenes, in which Mr. Moore's talents for high and low comedy are displayed." Fully displayed also is Mr. Moore's gift for creating vivid and convincing dialogue. But in spite of the delights along the way, Gavin Burke's pilgrimage leaves the reader vaguely unsatisfied.

This is, then, an enjoyable novel but not a particularly impressive one — perhaps because it tries too hard to impress and falls, in its final pages, into overstatement. The author seems to trust neither himself nor his readers; he must tell all, leave nothing implied. We are shown that Gavin has learned to do without both his guardian angels during the bombing of Belfast; we do not need to be told:

> He could forgive them all, his father, his city, these people, this city, for, after tonight, nothing they could say or do would hurt him again. Then and there . . . he vowed to deliver himself from . . . the pretenses and compromises which had helped keep him becalmed in indecision between adolescent and adult life. Tonight, he felt, at last that he had grown up, escaped. . . .

Nor, once Gavin has noticed that the iron railings in front of his parents' bomb-shattered house have been removed, do we need the subsequent confrontation with his father. That a new and, hopefully, a better world will arise from the ashes of the old world of war, feuds, and

unnatural death from which Gavin, like Romeo, "awoke and was an emperor", is a satisfactory if somewhat sanguine resolution of the hero's conflicts, but there is rather too much sounding of trumpets for him on the other side.

MARION B. SMITH

BLUE TITMOUSE

JOAN FINNIGAN, *A Dream of Lilies.* Fiddlehead Books. $1.50.

PREVIOUS BOOKS published by Fiddlehead Magazine have ranged from mediocre to just plain dreadful. This one is a pleasant surprise. Joan Finnigan colours the housewifely spectrum vivid, makes living seem genuine. At least part of the time she endows her creations with conceptual vertebrae and rib-cages, gives the poems coherence and a kind of extempore form.

Particularly notable is one called "I Do Not Wish To Be A Canadian Poet". The passage quoted below is placed two thirds of the way through the poem:

> In the American Psychiatric Journal
> (which I read for inspiration!)
> Julian Huxley records how a genius of the species
> Blue Titmouse learned how to open milk-bottles
> of the English housewives as the quarts sat
> in the dawn on the doorsteps;
>
> Not only this but the genius —
> the momentous number is always one —
> taught any other interested Blue Titmouse
> to drink well in a new way
>
> and the British housewife
> from London to Liverpool
> was plagued with half-empty milk-bottles
> before her half-opened eyes
> in the half-awake mornings

Take that excerpt as a conceptual backbone. It leaves loose and flabby wordflesh wobbling on top because of its position so late in the poem. Yet the structure does not collapse. Here's the ending:

> We are at the perilous moment
> of Lamarckian break-through
> or annihilation,
> of choosing between the fate of the dinosaurs
> or the painful change
>
> Do I make myself clear?
> I DO NOT WISH TO BE A CANADIAN POET
> I wish to be a Blue Titmouse

The poem is a fair example of Finnigan's method. It escapes failure only very narrowly and wonderfully. And comes so close to failure perhaps because she had the "Blue Titmouse" idea only when the poem was nearly finished. And then, instead of re-writing it, trimming away the flabby excess wordage, centring Blue Titmouse so that it joined smoothly with the preceding "I do not wish to be a Canadian Poet" proposition, she left it right where it was, muscular but boneless. And yet still very effective.

Other Finnigan poems exhibit the same weakness and strength. I find it maddening, and want to re-write many of them myself. To which I hear the poet respond: You keep your sticky hands off my poems! And she's right.

Just the same, ma'm, I can't help being an interested busybody. *A Dream of Lilies* is such a short distance away from being a very fine book. In fact it's so good I want to say: I beg your pardon for finding fault.

Of course not all the poems elicit this sort of nit-picking. Many are good without reservations. The author is an old pro hockey player's daughter (and naturally she has a poem about that). I remember pictures of her father, "Fearless Frankie Finnigan" in the sports pages

years ago, so homely he was lovely. And she talks of his grandchildren:

> who yet must learn,
> in smaller forums and with less limelight,
> how heroes are really made.

Now "Fearless Frankie's" grandchildren are coming home from school at noon hour:

> 'Look, mummy!
> We had Civil Defense today!
> They showed us how to do this —
> Isn't it funny?'
>
> And they go into Arab positions
> of prayer on the floor,
> the little snow-flakes
> of their hands,
> clasped tight behind their heads,
> elbows tucked in about their ears,
> bottoms in the air
> 'You should get near a wall.'
> 'This is to protect the jugular veins.'

Congratulations to Fred Cogswell. And Dear Blue Titmouse: go ahead and be.

A. W. PURDY

HALIFAX HISTORY

THOMAS H. RADDALL, *Halifax, Warden of the North*. Doubleday.

THIS BOOK is a re-issue, brought up-to-date and published in the United States, of a book originally published in Canada in 1948. It is an admirable production, combining thorough and careful historical research with the best qualities which Thomas H. Raddall possesses as a novelist: the gift of concrete visualization and the ability to communicate that vision in English prose that is crisp and readable; a sense that the primary importance of any time and place lies in human beings and their responses to human challenges that have come their way; and, finally, an overall sense of proportion that unobtrusively shapes the work into an artistic whole.

Halifax, Warden of the North is by far the most readable history of a Canadian city that has yet been produced, and it points to a gap in our English-language historiography. Halifax has had a long, and often picturesque history. The same may be said of such cities as Quebec, Montreal, St. John, Kingston, Toronto, and perhaps even Vancouver; yet no work comparable to Raddal's has been produced about any of these places to date.

Out of my own knowledge of nineteenth-century Nova Scotia, I am disappointed by the emphasis, or rather lack of emphasis given by Raddall to two factors. It is quite true that Halifax from the time of Henry Alline onward was relatively unmoved by the evangelicism which was, sociologically speaking, about the most important single factor in Nova Scotian life throughout most of the nineteenth century. All the same, the conversion of Crawley and the Grenville Street Anglicans to the Baptist faith led directly to the foundation of Horton Academy and the development of a kind of intellectualism that distinguished the Baptist church in the Maritimes from most of its evangelical rivals. Moreover, from 1820 to 1880, from an examination of book titles of local works of poetry and fiction, it is quite clear that Halifax must have been the principal centre of original book publishing in British North America and that as such it possessed a small but determined group of writers and readers determined to uphold a perhaps too precious and unreal banner of "culture" in the midst of an essentially philistine community.

FRED COGSWELL

SKELETAL NOVEL

ROBERT HARLOW, *A Gift of Echoes*. Macmillan. $4.50.

"A BIZARRE, SKELETAL COMEDY." These words describing a burnt-out house in the opening pages of *A Gift of Echoes* indicate, I think, what Mr. Harlow intended to fashion — a novel about the tenuousness, the whimsy, the eccentricity of life, or lives, whose only depth is an echo. The nature of the echo is early made clear in the laughter of a loon. Certainly there are bizarre details: there's a trick that is rather more specialized than Tessie the Tassle Twirler's, there is an unusual incident in a graveyard. There is some light comedy, some horseplay, some entertaining language from an

Irish remittance man, some pretty heavy irony. And the work is skeletal.

Such an intention may account for the curious quality of the places in which action occurs. The general setting is the interior of British Columbia, around and including that of Mr. Harlow's other novel, *Royal Murdoch*, and the mountains form a backdrop. There are a lumber mill, a teacherage, a couple of farms, a village, and farther off, a town. In the town are Mrs. Grandy's second-floor apartment, the barroom of a hotel, and a hospital. Though people move from one to another of these places, the places themselves are disparate, and when they are not the immediate focus of attention, they seem not to exist. They have neither depth nor texture. They are like sets on a stage, to be taken off into the wings and dismantled until the next performance.

Through these places, in the spring of a year shortly after World War II, moves a group of tenuously connected people who have one thing in common: they are in hiding or in retirement from "the chaos that is life." There are the mill-owners from the East — Father Acton, his son Nairn and his wife Cora, who are constantly bitching at each other, and their daughter Jenny. There is Max, a maimed and befuddled ex-prize fighter, a giant of a man, now turned lumberjack; there is Velma, the village Aphrodite, and there are the Grandys — Mrs. Grandy and her son John, who has returned from the war and Paris to seek tranquillity.

John Grandy seems to be the main subject of the book. He is one of those people who, whether or not they ever really existed, have been examined rather thoroughly of recent years. They are the would-be spectators, the witnesses of life, who do not want to become involved. Of course, they always come a cropper and so does John Grandy, who is perhaps a little more naïve and stupid than most of them. We are told that "The structure of his history was dismembered"; he complains that, while things have happened around him, nothing has ever really happened to him. He is without echoes.

In the last fifty-odd pages of the book, which contain most of the action, that lack is taken care of. In the graveyard, at her mother's burial, Velma spills all about her relations with Nairn Acton. As a result, Father Acton evicts Nairn and Cora from paradise, Cora sets the fire that destroys the mill, and then she tries to put the blame on the witless Max. Max attacks Nairn. To save Nairn, John Grandy grabs an angle-iron, hits Max on the head and kills him. Mrs. Grandy comforts her son by saying, "If you hadn't happened along, someone else would have had to kill Max." Spectator Grandy is now involved and he foresees himself "living among the echoes." Oh the irony of it all.

Apart from the matter of involvement, there is a host of other popular themes. There is, of course, existentialism (Grandy spent some time in Paris), but there is also good and evil greying to right and wrong, positive sin becoming depravity, aloneness, the search for identity, hero and anti-hero, endurance and self-pity, innocence and experience, and so on. There are enough themes to fill several books, and any one of them deserves more than the desultory treatment that they get here.

If the themes are jumbled, so is the writing. This is a matter not just of the

ambiguous pronoun reference that the reader has to puzzle through. It is the purposeless detail. John Grandy goes out for the evening: "At the bathroom he handed her in the towel and told her he was going for a walk. He took his jacket from the recess by the apartment door and went down the stairs to the street." It is also the strained similes. In the first few pages there is a set piece on the coming of spring, and the reader is faced with this assortment: "like a woman who has preened for hours at her mirror, it sweeps in, full of surprise that it has kept anyone waiting . . . the sun rises as golden and nourishing and warm as new bread . . . But spring is savage, real." The conflicts of images, tone and connotation here are characteristic of the general muddle. But most disheartening of all are the long expository passages. Instead of bringing his material to life, Mr. Harlow writes about it and about it. We are given the histories and genealogies of almost all the characters, we are told about what they are thinking, and we are told about what they are doing. Even the crucial graveyard scene is not realized. Instead, the scene is reported — reported at length and twice over. In effect, this novel is yet to be written; what now exists is a detailed description of a novel with some of the scenes filled in. It is indeed skeletal.

A Gift Of Echoes seems to me to be a less mature work than *Royal Murdoch*, which Mr. Harlow published three years ago.

MARGARET STOBIE

PRE-RAPHAELITISM DEFINED

WILLIAM E. FREDEMAN, *Pre-Raphaelitism: A Bibliocritical Study.* Harvard University Press. $10.00.

IT IS REFRESHING at any time to encounter a bibliography that suggests familiarity with the material beyond the tables of contents of the books catalogued. When the particular subject explored is Pre-Raphaelitism there is even more cause for rejoicing; although recognized as one of the most important developments in nineteenth-century æsthetics, this movement has long caused considerable discomfort and confusion. William E. Fredeman's *Pre-Raphaelitism: A Bibliocritical Study* provides the most comprehensive bibliography of the movement yet available and in addition attempts to define and illustrate the various stages of that movement from the foundation of the Pre-Raphaelite group of seven, through the ensuing Pre-Raphaelite "school", to the final stage of development, Pre-Raphaelitism as a genre. The volume contains almost forty pages of preliminary commentary and an impressive bibliography of over one hundred sections, divided into four major parts: sources for bibliography and provenance, bibliography of individual figures, bibliography of the Pre-Raphaelite Movement, and bibliography of Pre-Raphaelite illustrations. There is a great deal of cross-referencing and a very thorough index.

Any bibliography involving categories and assessment of influences implies a certain amount of criticism and synthesis. Professor Fredeman has extended his responsibilities further still by introducing even more aspects of a bibliographical

and critical nature. He has included descriptions of the major repositories of Pre-Raphaelite materials and listed catalogues of notable exhibitions and sales. In addition to this lengthy introduction defining Pre-Raphaelitism and surveying Pre-Raphaelite scholarship, he has evaluated the individual artists, with critical comments on many secondary materials. With this tripartite method of definition, criticism, and cataloguing he makes an original and valuable contribution to nineteenth-century studies. The critical distinctions are clearly stated and readable; the comprehensive bibliography, recognizing the close relationship between poetry and painting and the impact of Pre-Raphaelite æsthetics on later theories, is of immense value to both scholar and collector; the evaluation of secondary sources will be a special boon to the student. Inevitably, however, such a method depends for unity of tone and achievement on the personal biases of the "bibliocritic". Occasionally Professor Fredeman is guilty of an auctioneering tone as subjective as the sensational scholarship he deplores; at times, as with William Morris, his own personal evaluation of the artist suggests an unevenness in the selections noted. Some of the minor categories are of value not so much for the items now listed as for their indications of further scholarship which might profitably be done. As Professor Fredeman points out, bibliocritical study can only be selective, again implying the use of value judgments on more than one level, and here too the amount of spadework involved is staggering. However, considering the extent of cross-referencing, it seems odd that the unique Pre-Raphaelite collection of Peterhouse College should not be included in the description of Cambridge University holdings. There appear also to be some occasional inconsistencies in bibliographical data; some revised editions are noted in full, others, just as significant for their additional material, are not.

But these are minor criticisms when one considers the extent of Professor Fredeman's research and knowledge of both arts and letters of the period. In addition, as befits such a memorial to those artists who were concerned with "an appropriateness" and "scrupulous fidelity", the book is almost entirely free of misprints and is in itself a beautifully designed object with apt illustrations. As the author states in his opening Commentary, much basic scholarship remains to be done on all phases of Pre-Raphaelitism. Certainly this study is an indication of the importance of the movement and a promise of the treasure-house yet to be explored.

ANN SADDLEMYER

SURFACES AND HEARTS

RONA MURRAY, *The Enchanted Adder*. Klanak Press. $

IN ONE POEM in *The Enchanted Adder*, Rona Murray writes of the person who

> with rage for order in his blood
> hoops words about bright images
> and polishes their surfaces
> until kaleidoscopic mirrors
> reveal his heart

In a sense, these poems are comparably polished words, revealing both a search for order and a personal core of meaning. Occasionally that polish manifests itself as an imaginative precision, and this transforms the words into moments of lyric perception, but such precision is unfortunately not sustained. Three difficulties, here, come between the reader and the poet's mind: the central images, the structures, and, in some cases at least, a sort of private meaning, related to the experience that motivated the writing, which the poem does not entirely allow to be shared.

There is a difference — tangible, but not always easy to apprehend — between unity and a sense of sameness. Both result from repetition, but the one will develop a three-dimensional structure, whereas the other allows only a recurrent two-dimensional one. The vulnerable lady in white who figures in the first poem does develop, of course; she can be related to the white sacrificial birds (xxviii) and to Eve losing Eden (xxx), and her problem is the central one of seeking order, of finding exorcism "against disorders of the mind" (iv). Related to this are the situations involving disturbed geometrical figures (v), pattern intersecting with fire (vi), the inability to contend with fire (xvi), the desire to combine form with form (xvii). The problem is both physical and intellectual:

> if now
> the wound in the thigh
> will not heal
> if tongue cannot find the right question
> mind the right answer
> mark the occasion

Ultimately resolution is found in the last poem:

> The fragments in her shaking hand
> drove the lady on
> until the fierce wound dropped away
> and herself and self were one. . . .
>
> the lady drew her tattered gown
> about her in the sun.

But the reader is never really involved in the lady's predicament, perhaps partly because the central images used to convey it — the adder, the darkness, the wood — are so well-worn. Though their connotative richness is attested to by their appearance in centuries of English poetry, this very recurrence serves to inhibit their effectiveness here. Sometimes, too, the poetic structure becomes merely a linguistic trick — "the crotch of shame" (xxvii), for example — and the effect is again lost. But all this emphasizes only one aspect of *The Enchanted Adder*.

The other side is the enchantment which many of the words do work upon the reader. Rona Murray has drawn from three sources for the poems in this book: dream; personal experience with skiing, skindiving, beekeeping, and Vancouver life; and poetic theory. The influence of the Black Mountain poets can be seen in some of the verse, but traditional stanzaic forms, such as the ballad, are also used. The latter is employed in the finest poem in this collection, "The

child she sang her morning song", which beautifully evokes the innocence of childhood and tells the end of that innocence when it comes into contact with a ruthless but well-meaning world. "We have been into the water, we two" also suggests a moment of life, and its sensitive bright surfaces once again reveal a heart.

Except on the index page, the typography, designed by Charles Morriss, adds to the pleasure with which one can read this work; the type itself and the two-colour print present an attractive page. Most of the poems are sombre in tone, but the book is not without wit. The poetry itself demonstrates a conscious awareness of the techniques of the craft, some linguistic facility, and, particularly in those poems about childhood, an imaginative lyric talent.

WILLIAM H. NEW

ROMANTIC OF ROMANTICS

C. H. DICKINSON, *Lorne Pierce, A Profile.* Ryerson Press. $3.00.

THIS BRIEF BIOGRAPHICAL STUDY of the late Dr. Lorne Pierce, for forty years editor of the Ryerson Press, is modestly and accurately called "a profile" by its author. It is not a formal biography, and makes no claim to be definitive. It is best on Pierce's family background, boyhood, and youth — the very things about which most of us knew least. In dealing with his years of maturity, it is scrappy, sometimes confusing in chronology, and often a mere catalogue of names, titles, degrees, societies and so on. None of it is written with any particular flair or imaginative insight, but it is honest, unpretentious, and affectionate.

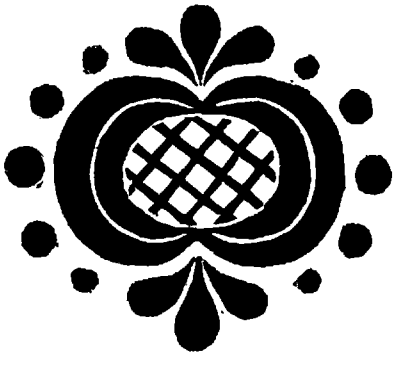
It is to be hoped that someone someday will write a definitive biography of Pierce, for he was a most interesting and influential man. It might indeed be argued that he was the most influential man of letters in Canada between, say, 1925 and 1950: his anthologies were used in practically all the high schools of the country, and had an incalculable influence on the literary tastes of Canadian youth; his publishing house was publishing more and better Canadian books than any other house; he "discovered" or at least gave early encouragement to a plethora of Canadian writers, including Marjorie Pickthall, E. J. Pratt, Wilson MacDonald, Frederick Philip Grove, Philip Child, Evelyn Richardson, E. A. McCourt, Raymond Souster, Dorothy Livesay, Earle Birney, Louis Dudek, John Sutherland and P. K. Page; he established such series as the Ryerson Poetry Chap Books, the Makers of Canadian Literature, the Canadian History Readers, the Canada Books of Prose and Verse, the Picture Gallery of Canadian History, the Canadian Art Series; he gathered the invaluable Edith and Lorne Pierce Collection of Canadian Literature at Queen's University and was instrumental in securing the Hathaway Collection of Canadian Literature for the University of New Brunswick; he founded or helped to found a number of important organizations, including the Canadian Authors' Association, the Canadian Bibliographical Society, and the Canadian Writers' Foundation; he donated the Lorne Pierce Gold Medal to the Royal Society of Canada and set up the Ryerson Fiction Award. In addition to all these activities, and his editorial duties at the Press, he found time to write several books himself, including *A Cana-*

dian People and *A Canadian Nation*, his biographies of William Kirby and Marjorie Pickthall, and his selected edition of the poetry of Bliss Carman.

The above incomplete list would constitute a remarkable life's work for any man, but when we realize that Pierce was plagued with delicate health all through his life, and that in particular he was almost totally deaf and the victim of severe attacks of angina, his achievement becomes almost miraculous. What impelled him, the son of an Ontario village tinsmith and hardware merchant, to take up so zealously the cause of Canadian culture in general and of Canadian literature in particular? Mr. Dickinson does not really attempt to answer this or other similar questions, being content to suggest that the interest in Canadian literature came from hearing Dean Cappon of Queen's, in a lecture in 1912, dismiss it as not worth a damn. The more complete answer would have to be sought in psychology and sociology, in the nature of Ontario village life in the early years of this century, in the nature of Canadian Methodism, the rise of cultural and political nationalism in Canada during and after World War I, in the effect of Irish ancestry and Irish traditions — and even then Pierce would remain something of an enigma.

Mr. Dickinson makes no value judgments about Pierce, or at least does nothing except praise him. Praiseworthy he was, above all for the sympathy and enthusiastic encouragement he gave to aspiring writers. He was a romantic of romantics, who always assumed the best of people and gave them a sense of their unlimited capacity. I have many letters from him — and so I am sure have a host of writers — which I should be embarrassed to publish, so extravagantly did he praise me and assure me that "all the honours" (he liked that kind of phrase) awaited me. In this respect, Pierce's romanticism was good, because encouragement was what I and other Canadian writers needed; but insofar as this romanticism expressed itself in published literary criticism, it limited his usefulness. Sometimes his criticism was so rhapsodic as to become laughable: he was not sufficiently discriminating. He was in one sense a manifestation of that boosterism which marked Canadian cultural life in the nineteen-twenties, of that tendency to cry up everything Canadian because it *was* Canadian. But he never succumbed entirely to that spirit: in his concern for Canada there was something subtler and finer than boastful nationalism. For Lorne Pierce was a very complex figure. He was a Canadian nationalist but also a Hebrew prophet; a Methodist preacher but also a deep admirer of Russian literature; a moral idealist but also an Irish wit. There is no doubt that he was a great editor and a great Canadian.

DESMOND PACEY



SUN, SEASONS, CITY

RAYMOND SOUSTER, *Ten Elephants on Yonge Street*. Ryerson. $3.95.

THIS NEW SOUSTER VOLUME follows swiftly on the winged heels of the author's *Collected Poems* of last year, and adds eighty-six poems to the immense production of one of our best poets.

The opening title poem ends with the elephants emptying their bowels on one of Toronto's main thoroughfares, with men following with shovels, and already we know that these will be Souster poems, not the metrical artichokes of academy. Souster poems show a great sureness of the poet's measure, along with an eye's view that seems to be growing steadily more wry.

There is still the obsession with dead and dying animals, and with the sun, the seasons, the poor on the changing streets of Canada's main city, the young in one another's arms and bodies on the ground, and the visions of machines ripping out trees and making room for macadam and cement, only to have these smashed by yet further machines:

> The wrecking-ball
> of Greenspan
> of Temperman
> reverberates
> on King Street,
> toppling steel,
> smashing brick and stone
> to a levelled-out
> stretch of waste,
> on which the sun
> uneasily shivers.

Through all, Souster refuses to bow to sophisticated readers (including other poets) who tell him not to write poems about birds with broken wings. If (a) every object of emotion can become *per se* a sentimental concern, and (b) poets should not write about sentimental concerns, then where will the poets (and the rest of us) be? Souster's feelings for injured and dead animals is an honest one, and a good one. More important, he never slacks his measure in responding to the things he writes about.

Another common objection to Souster says something about his subjects being too localized, and the poems too short. He takes that objection into account in his short preface on the dust jacket of this book. He replies that here the objectors can read poems that take place thousands of miles from Toronto, and poems that cover two pages. But Souster knows that that is not the real answer. He has quoted the real answer in the first pages of his earlier book, *A Local Pride*, in which he reminds his readers of what Williams said about universality and the local.

In this book the tiny imagist poems are punctuation marks between the larger ones that tell of the poet's stand in the dying world around him, a world always dying, filled with life. The larger poems treat that concern, and in them the author goes far beyond the incidental very well, more than he has ever done before.

Some day, for the benefit of those casual readers who think that Souster's kind of poem is simply a jotting down of experience, someone should do a formal study of the poetry. One short stanza:

> Bond Street at noon hour: kids
> in the St. Michael's school yard
> break the mood the Cathedral
> starts toward heaven aspiring.

is packed with rhyme (noon hour: school yard) and functional pun (aspiring) and devices for which the pigeon-holers

haven't yet, I hope, made up names (what happens with "kids" placed at the end of that first line. See Yeats' line, "This is no country for old men. The young").

Those casual readers might find that Souster is more than what he calls himself:

> just the crazy poet
> well-hooked on the past,
> a sucker for memories.

GEORGE BOWERING

SHIFTS IN THE LINE

H. GORDON SKILLING, *Communism National and International: Eastern Europe after Stalin.* University of Toronto Press. $4.95.

THIS COLLECTION of essays originally published in learned journals is devoted to various facets of what is popularly known as "national Communism". The need for a comparative study of Communist dictatorships has been strongly felt ever since Stalin's successors failed to maintain the unity of the Communist bloc. The successes of Communist regimes in gaining some freedom of action vis-à-vis the U.S.S.R., and the introduction of less crude techniques of government, created somewhat differing situations in the various countries. Today, as distinct from the early 1950's, variety rather than uniformity is the rule.

The changes that have taken place are analysed sympathetically by Professor Skilling of Toronto University. He belongs to that very small band of Communist area specialists whose acumen is matched by a limpid prose. The general reader will find in his book one of the clearest accounts of what happened in Eastern Europe in recent years, while fellow-experts will want to pursue research along the lines traced by him, testing at the same time some of his more controversial statements. All in all, his book represents a valuable addition to the literature on East European politics, a field in which until recently Canadian academics were more conspicuous by their absence than by the light they were able to cast on their subject. Professor Skilling's work is a clear indication that things are changing in that area too, and that Canadian scholars are capable of making notable contributions.

IVAN AVAKUMOVIC

ROBERTS IN PRINT

SIR:

In my article "The Precious Speck of Life", I made a statement to the effect that of Charles G. D. Roberts' short stories, only the anthology *The Last Barrier* is in print. This is quite erroneous. There are several volumes in print and I wish to apologize to the publishers and editors of Roberts who must have been justifiably astonished by this error. My statement should have suggested that, as far as I can discover, no collection of Roberts' stories has been added to the list of books in print since 1958 and that most of his animal stories remain unavailable. I hope this statement, at least, is justifiable.

JOSEPH GOLD

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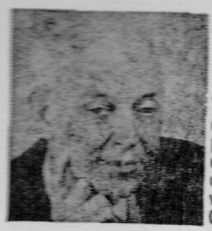

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