per copy $1.00

CANADIAN LITERATURE No. 2

Autumn, 1959

A QUARTERLY OF
CRITICISM AND REVIEW

editorial

AREOPAGITICA RE-WRITTEN

> We should be wary therefore what persecution we raise against the living labours of public men, how we spill that seasoned life of man preserved and stored up in books; since we see a kind of homicide may thus be committed, sometimes a martyrdom, and if it extend to the whole impression, a kind of massacre, whereof the execution ends not in the slaying of an elemental life, but strikes at that ethereal and fifth essence, the breath of reason itself, slays an immortality rather than a life . . .
>
> Banish all objects of lust, shut up all youth into the severest discipline that can be exercised in any heritage, ye cannot make them chaste that came not thither so: such great care and wisdom is required to the right managing of this point. Suppose we could expel sin by this means; look how much we thus expel of sin, so much we expel of virtue: for the matter of them both is the same; remove that, and ye remove them both alike.
>
> JOHN MILTON, *Areopagitica.*

THE DEBATE on the censorship of literature is a perennial one, and each generation and each country must, it seems, produce its own good or bad re-writing of *Areopagitica.* This year in both Canada and England the legislators have been at work changing the laws that govern the banning of books. Parliament in England has passed the *Obscene Publications Act, 1959,* which marks a clear advance in the safeguarding of literature and the defining of obscenity, and on which, as the *Times Literary Supplement* remarked recently, "authors, publishers, and those interested in serious literature may congratulate them-

selves". Parliament in Canada has passed Bill C.58, amending the provisions of the Criminal Code in regard to obscene publications; this legislation marks no advance at all in the safeguarding of literature and, in fact, introduces new perils and uncertainties into the process of publication. It has been received with almost universal concern by publishers, book-sellers, librarians and writers, a concern well expressed in the book trade journal, *Quill & Quire*, which remarks in a recent editorial headed "A Thoroughly Dangerous Law" that the amendments "threaten to limit the freedom to read and the freedom of expression very considerably in Canada".

It is this writer's personal opinion that censorship of any kind is morally unjustified and practically self-defeating. It places a premium on obscurantism and intolerance, it lowers the climate of social relations by encouraging the sneak and the informer, and it places works of literature at the mercy of policemen, Customs officers, magistrates and judges whose training does not often include the inculcation of artistic discrimination. Let us remember — even discounting such extreme cases as the celebrated Irish list of banned books — how many works now acknowledged to be of high literary standing have from time to time been attacked in the courts or confiscated by the Customs of even the most democratic countries; they include *Madame Bovary, Les Fleurs du Mal, La Terre, An American Tragedy, Salome, Ulysses, Lady Chatterley's Lover, The Rainbow, The Naked and the Dead, The Woman of Rome,* and *The Psychology of Sex.* Finally, there is no evidence to suggest that a country which imposes a rigorous and unimaginative censorship in fact maintains a high degree of conventional sexual morality; *Les Fleurs du Mal,* for example, was prosecuted in that France of the Second Empire when the great courtesans of Paris prospered with impunity and wielded enormous social power.

However, given a situation in which large groups of the population insist on the continuation of censorship and the majority of the people tacitly agree, it is clear that we have to reckon with some degree of governmental interference in the freedom of publication. And if we accept this interference even temporarily and reluctantly, as for practical purposes we must, the question becomes how best to frame laws which, while satisfying the demand to "protect the young", will also safeguard works of literary, artistic and scientific merit from persecution. It is

doubtful if these two requirements can ever be completely reconciled, but at least a search should be made for the best compromise. It would seem, from a comparison of the laws they have produced this year, that Parliament in England has sought carefully for a good solution and has come very near to attaining the best, while Parliament in Canada has done neither.

Let us take the English law first, and note its improvements. First, it re-defines obscenity by liberalising the old definition put forward in the Hicklin case of 1868, which for the past ninety years has been the standard test in both English and Canadian courts. The Hicklin definition reads as follows: "I think the test of obscenity is this, whether the tendency of the matter charged as obscenity is to deprave and corrupt those whose minds are open to such immoral influences and into whose hands a publication of this sort may fall." The definition in the new *Obscene Publications Act, 1959,* states that "for the purposes of this Act an article shall be deemed to be obscene if its effect or (where the article comprises two or more distinct items) the effect of any one of its items is, *if taken as a whole,* such as tend to deprave and corrupt *persons who are likely, having regard to all relevant circumstances, to read, see or hear the matter contained or embodied in it.*" I have italicised the passages which seem clear improvements on the Hicklin definition; an item must be corrupting or depraving *as a whole,* and not merely show *a tendency,* while there must be a fair likelihood of corruptible persons reading it; this should effectively thwart any hypothetical arguments about isolated passages of works like *Ulysses* or *The Psychology of Sex* depraving children who may happen to chance upon them.

The second very important provision of the English Act (which incidentally is described as "An Act to amend the law relating to the publication of obscene matter; *to provide for the protection of literature;* and to strengthen the law concerning pornography") is that which relates to works of literary, scholarly or artistic merit. This falls into two parts. The first states specifically that neither a conviction nor an order for forfeiture shall be made "if it is proved that publication of the article in question is justified as being for the public good on the ground that it is in the interests of science, literature, art or learning, or of other objects of general concern". The second provides — and this also is a major victory for the cause of intellectual and artistic freedom — that "the opinion of experts

as to the literary, artistic, scientific or other merits of an article may be admitted in any proceedings under this Act". No longer need we see what happened on several scandalous occasions in the past — English court rooms filled with distinguished critics who had come to give evidence on behalf of a work of literature and were not even allowed to take the witness stand.

In addition to these major advances in the English legislation, it is worth noting three important minor provisions. *Bona fide* ignorance of the contents of a prosecuted work is to be accepted as a defence. Publishers and authors are allowed to appear in court to defend a work in the event of the prosecution of a bookseller for selling it. Finally, the eagerness of informers should be somewhat blunted by a provision that "if as respects any articles brought before it the court does not order forfeiture, the court may if it thinks fit order the person on whose information the warrant for the seizure of the articles was issued to pay such costs as the court thinks reasonable to any person who has appeared before the court to show cause why those articles should not be forfeited." One hopes that English magistrates will apply this clause with the fullest rigour.

Now let us turn to the changes in the Canadian law. These also include a new definition, but they do not include anything resembling the safeguards for serious literature which make the English Act so notable. "For the purposes of this Act," reads the new Canadian definition, "any publication a dominant characteristic of which is the undue exploitation of sex, or of sex and any one of the following subjects, namely crime, horror, cruelty and violence, shall be deemed to be obscene." Here, indeed, is a radical departure from the Hicklin definition, since the nature of the work — and not its possible effect — is made the criterion by which it shall be judged obscene. At first sight this might seem an advantage, since at least theoretically it takes the argument out of the hands of the sentimental defenders of youthful innocence hypothetically threatened. However, an examination of the clause soon reveals a dangerous vagueness in the choice of words which seems to place the prosecuted work virtually at the mercy of the judge's opinions. How are we to identify the *dominant* characteristic of any work? How are we to decide whether sex is *unduly* exploited? Such questions test the ingenuity even of professional critics. They can only be answered subjectively.

Furthermore, compared with the new English definition, ours is unsatisfactory since it contemplates the condemnation of a work not because *as a whole* it is likely to deprave or corrupt, but merely because *a* single dominant characteristic may be objectionable; the significant rejection by the Minister of an opposition amendment that this be changed to "*the* dominant characteristic" leaves it open to prosecutors or magistrates to argue that a work may have several equally dominant characteristics and that if an emphasis on sex is merely one of them then the work must be condemned. Certainly, as it stands this definition is unclear enough to allow many works now sold freely in Canada to be condemned by prudish judges.

It is true that the Minister has said that the new definition is intended to apply to "a certain type of objectionable material that now appears on the news-stands of Canada and is being sold to the young people of our country with impunity", and that works which have serious literary pretensions will continue to be dealt with under the Hicklin definition (the original definition and not the advantageously amended one in the English Act). But no provision is made in the legislation for such separate treatment, and therefore we have no guarantee that the new definition will not be used indiscriminately in dealing with books of any kind. Mr. Fulton may speak in good faith; he cannot speak for the good faith of his successors or even for that of the police authorities who will presumably bring prosecutions under the Act.

Again, the Minister has made a great deal of the fact that provision is now being made under the new law for a publication to be prosecuted quite apart from its vendor, so that a forfeiture may be ordered without the conviction of any person. However, the law does not specifically guarantee that the vendor shall not be prosecuted, and here the matter is left to the discretion of provincial attorney generals, so that the danger of a bookseller incurring a heavy fine or imprisonment may be lessened, but it is certainly not removed.

As to provisions for the defence of literature such as distinguish the English Act, it is in these that the Canadian legislation is totally deficient. A small group of opposition members supported an amendment providing for the new definition to be applied only to a publication "which is without literary or scientific merit". The amendment was rejected by the Minister and his reason for doing so, as expressed during the discus-

sion in committee, must strike anyone who takes seriously the issue of artistic freedom as both frivolous and obstructionist. "It seems to me," he remarked, "that the insertion of those particular words ('and which is without literary or scientific merit') would impose definitely on a person who intended to publish an obscene book the necessity merely to put in one chapter, or indeed one paragraph, with literary or scientific merit, and then he would argue that his book did contain some passages of literary or scientific merit. Therefore, he would say, this book should not be found to be obscene." It would not, one imagines, have been difficult for a government genuinely concerned for the public good in matters of literature and art to have formulated a clause that would have protected *bona fide* examples of serious writing while excepting those curious products of ministerial fantasy, books which perform the extraordinary feat of being bad throughout except for the single good paragraph that shines out like a diamond in the mire.

As for expert evidence, that got very short shrift from Mr. Fulton. "It is my view," he said, "that this type of definition does not lend itself to the giving of opinion evidence by experts." And Mr. Fulton's view unfortunately prevailed.

The lack of space prevents me from dealing with the clauses in the Canadian act which provide for enforcement; I have concentrated on the issues which most immediately concern authors. And these aspects alone reveal that our legislators have imposed on us an equivocal, hasty and dangerous law which can only bring a new element of insecurity into literary life.

But before leaving the subject one cannot avoid recording one's impression of the difference of atmosphere surrounding the passing of the two Acts. Once they had taken the plunge, the English Members of Parliament seem to have been inspired by the sense that they were carrying out an historic reform, and the speech with which the noted British jurist, Lord Birkett, introduced the Act into the House of Lords had what the *Times Literary Supplement* called "a Miltonic ring" as he spoke of the freedom of writing in clear tones which make one return with embarrassment to the timidity or—worse—the indifference that prevented all but four of our Members of Parliament from voting for the protection of literature.

The English have re-written *Areopagitica* for their own generation,

and re-written it well. We have allowed our legislators to re-write it very badly, and it becomes our duty, as men and women interested in serious literature, to remind them unequivocally that Milton belongs to our tradition as well, and to make sure that all the victories do not go to the pressure groups which would like to undermine the freedoms of expression he so convincingly defended.

THE NEXT ISSUE of *Canadian Literature* will be devoted largely to current Canadian books. It will include the annual Bibliography of books and literary articles in English and French, and also an extensive review section with articles by, among others, **Herbert Read, Peter Quennell, Margaret Ormsby, Jean-Guy Pilon** and **R. E. Watters.** The longer features of the issue will include *The Story of a Novel* by **Hugh MacLennan** and a study of the literature of the Klondike Gold Rush by **Pierre Berton,** a long satirical poem on literary trends by **Wilfred Watson** and articles by **Hugo McPherson** on the novels of Robertson Davies and by **James Reaney** on the work of Jay Macpherson and other younger poets.

Other articles to appear in Nos. 3 and 4 will include studies of Canadian anthologies by **Robert Weaver,** of the immigrant in Canadian literature by **Ruth McKenzie,** and of the CBC Critically Speaking programme by **Tony Emery,** some reflections on the rôle of the dramatist by **Lister Sinclair,** and essays on Anne Hébert's poems by **Jeanne Lapointe** and on the plays of Gratien Gélinas by **Marguerite Primeau,** together with a feature on Eskimo poetry by **Edmund Carpenter,** including translations of poems and Eskimo drawings. Early issues will also contain previously unpublished drawings by B. C. Binning, Jack Shadbolt, Molly Bobak and Gordon Smith.

A CAT AMONG THE FALCONS

Ethel Wilson

REFLECTIONS ON THE WRITER'S CRAFT

Let FAME, that all hunt after in their lives,
Live registred upon our brazen Tombes,
And then grace us in the disgrace of death:
when spight of cormorant devouring Time,
Th' endevour of this present breath may buy
That honour which shall bate his scythes keen edge,
And make us heyres of all eternitie.

So WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, the worthy Friend and Fellow of his chroniclers Henry Condell and John Heminge—worthy Friends and Fellows too—takes up his pen and tears into yet another play, and in the rush of the very first words of the play we hear all the winds of heaven blowing through. No one taught him how to do this. There was no need, for he knew. This was one of God's spies, who wrote of the ungentlemanly goings-on of the dog Crab, thrusting "himselfe into the company of three or foure gentleman-like dogges under the Dukes table", yet this was the man who set down the five terrible words, "never, never, never, never, never". His own mark is upon the words he wrote, and the endeavour of his present breath did buy that honour which made him heir of all eternity. This, I think, translated into ordinary talk about writing in our country and about its future, is my theme.

It is about fourteen years since I first put 50,000 or so words down on paper and began, later, to think about the inner workings of a person who

writes even an ephemeral book. The writing part was not done in secrecy but in privacy and, as far as I am concerned, conditions of privacy are the only conditions under which writing can be done. I am sure that the business of writing is one of the four or five most private things in the world, excluding the planning of international treaties or crime.

The under-educated person, appearing in a learned journal, has a slight attack of the shivers and is at a disadvantage in educated company, but one soon resumes the pleasures of ordinary conversation. Of conversation, that practical man Henry Fielding said that one of the natural and essential parts of a novelist's equipment is conversation—talking in the daytime, talking far into the night, and with all kinds of people. Conversation is a book of knowledge concerning people. It can be electrically surprising—or not; and there are moments when it is one of the most charming and rewarding of human joys. So is silence.

I will tell you why I have placed at the beginning of this article the noble words with which Shakespeare opens one of his comedies.

To begin with, the words are written by the hand of glory, and that is enough. Further, they were written for a generation of men who loved glory and fame, not coefficients of expansion or statistics. Further, I think of Shakespeare himself and of the great endeavour of his present breath that made him heir of all eternity, and of lesser men than he, whose poetry and prose have made them at least heirs of time. And then I think of our own future, here, in which we seem to take a hand.

When much time has been spent in summoning and examining invisible images, in excitement, progress, recoil, and probable destruction, and at last a point is reached at which the inner note of completion is struck and the manuscript is reluctantly or eagerly passed into the publishing hand—a writer of novels, great or small, has been through a curious private experience. The emotions and thoughts among which he has lived (it may be for months or for years, depending on his own character, powers, and object) have provided a second life which is apart from the life he leads with people, sorrow, amusement, love, breakfast, death, motor cars, illness, satiety and change, and yet it pervades them all. I cannot think that at any point during this immersion in work the majority of writers seriously contemplate the idea of Fame or, as we say, fame. Perhaps these generations are less ardent. Keats, with his tragic fore-knowledge upon him, was a great and touching exception.

But if the writer has some merit, much merit, or astounding merit in which a rich and powerful quality is manifest, if indeed he has the Gift, then, like a thunderclap or like the strong slow movement of waters or glaciers, comes fame. He may by that time be dead. The thunderclap may be a misfortune, its effects transitory, and its sound superseded by other sounds, soon forgotten. Young Colin Wilson received such a thunderclap and his fame was perhaps his misfortune but he still has time, an active acquisitive mind, and possibly little judgment.

MY HOPE is that with the help of initially sound and natural individual processes we may in Canadian letters attain that honour which shall make us at least heirs of time.

I say "initially sound" because the chances of our literary fame are joined delicately and strongly to the conditions and progress of our early education at the present time and place. These conditions are so self-evident that we tend not to see them. Before the young student leaves school, he should be early familiar with the function and construction of a sentence (the sentence is a bridge, or it rests), and the paragraph. He should be familiar in a simple way with précis work, which trains thought and manipulation of language. He should begin to recognize that the sentence is something in itself which can be expanded and sometimes reduced in a variety of ways. His spoken and written language should be flexible and fairly easy through the medium of conversation, answers to questions ("True or False" will not help), and through frequent simple well-corrected exercises in the form of tales or essays. Then he can say what he has to say in the way he wants to say it. This is a great deal but not too much, and it can be assimilated, and should be and often is not, before a student leaves school, whether or no he proposes to enter a university. If the student proposes to enter a university he then finds the ordinary use of written language no barrier, but an approach. And if he is the story-teller, here are his tools to his hand.

Early education in the arts of reading and writing, and now a later habit of wide and very varied reading (wide and varied enough to enlarge the faculties and prevent derivative writing) sharpen the self-criticism of

the person I am considering—the potential writer. But the Gift is the crown, and the lack of the Gift is the lack of a crown.

Assuming that a potential writer of fiction has also the power of observation, that he has something that needs to be said or told, and a sort of osmosis, writing is an art very much to be learned by doing. Not even the judicious commentaries of E. M. Forster (*Aspects of the Novel*), Percy Lubbock (*The Craft of Fiction*), Elizabeth Bowen (*Notes on Writing a Novel*), the contributions to discussion in *Writers at Work* (Malcolm Cowley), or the studies of Lionel Trilling can teach a potential writer *how* to write, whatever provocative pleasures such books may give to either a potential or a practising writer. As Lubbock says, "It is pedantry to force rules upon a novel. We know of novels which everybody admits to be badly constructed, but which are so full of life that it does not appear to matter."

And so, the course known as "Creative Writing" renders me uneasy and year by year I am apprehensive lest the results in our country may be marked by a current mode or—contrariwise—a straining after difference, and lest our writing may become derivative and undistinguished. These courses can stimulate and give pleasure, and that is great gain; but the odds are there. It is a branch of study not indigenous here, I believe, but it is sporadic on this continent and will increase, whether I like it or not. I first recognized, unforgettably and years ago, the echoes of a Thomas Wolfe manqué in productions from our neighbour's house, and I have since heard other echoing sounds.

Of twelve Canadian novelists whom I have in mind, I will mention four dissimilar names—Gabrielle Roy, Morley Callaghan, Robertson Davies, Colin McDougall. I do not know the writing processes, early or later, of any of my twelve writers but I am impelled to think that most of them—equipped with their natural and varied gifts and their early acquired processes of language—travelled their own legendary way. I cannot avoid the conviction that a writer who can already handle his tools and write, is thereafter self-taught by writing (how the view opens out), and thus a literature is made. I am well aware of being what E. M. Forster calls a pseudo-scholar, and I have scholarly friends who disagree with me on this whole subject. It is possible that a preference for early and thorough familiarity with language, for privacy of intention, and the individual road in the matter of "creative writing" (I borrow the term, it is not mine), is

a personal idiosyncrasy only; but as I look over the wide reaches of writing and at the highly personal art and act of writing, I don't think so.

Something puzzles me — what is the boundary between creation and non-creation? One man writes about Peru and Peruvians; he writes what is undistinguished and true. The Editor of this Review writes about Peru and its people and there is manifest truth, and creation from manifest truth, the outward eye and the inward eye. One man writes about a river, but Roderick Haig-Brown writes about a river that never sleeps; there is truth and there is creation, the outward eye and the inward eye. Here is one of the mysteries that make literature.

With no thought of becoming a writer, I left school to enter life as I found it to be, which included earning a living. Following a hard-working and happy schooling in a spartan boarding school my education became unorthodox, eclectic, spotty, and ceaselessly interesting. The joys of a little learning are very great. My own discovery of John Donne almost before he had again entered the recognized Re-Establishment, dazzled me. My roaming discovery of the First Folio was as intoxicating to me as to the first readers of it (Shakespeare should be read in Folio). The great blank spaces in my map are too great and I may be trapped there, but I cannot grieve very much. These discoveries of one's own are strong and sweet and lively. A university education is uniquely valuable and to be desired, different in kind from these vagrant discoveries smelling of sage-brush. The record in the U.B.C. Alumni Chronicle, alone, indicates the impressive contribution that graduate students make to our world, nationally and internationally. But here, I think, we are conversing about writers and how they come about and where they go. The absence of an enriching university education does not prevent the practice of the art of writing. A shoddy early education may prevent it and probably will unless one is a natural, like Samuel Hearne.

If we examine a great novel which attains and keeps a measure of fame, we are aware of the flavour of the writer's personality in that work, as a peach tastes like a peach, caviare like caviare, an onion like an onion. Although we rarely find in great works an over-awareness of the writer's self, narcissism, a deliberate self-consciouness, the mark of personality endures. If Henry James had been advised and convinced that *The Wings of a Dove* is "oh so beautifully" and nigglingly constructed and that conversations beat about the bush (which may or may not be true), he might

have faltered in his intricate mode of writing and the pervading continuing essence of Henry James would have departed. If Henry Fielding with his knowledge of life's dark places and his shrewd unpretentious gaiety had been advised that it is against the rules to stop by the roadside and laugh at the customers, he would have smiled his long-nosed smile and continued to make his pertinent and impertinent observations, for that is Henry Fielding. The individuality of a great original writer, set into action by who knows what deep springs and events, produces James Joyce who produces *Ulysses* which William Faulkner does not produce, because he is William Faulkner. The strange man Marcel Proust — not Balzac, whose voice is different—writes *A la Recherche du Temps Perdu.* The unique and inspired idiocy (oh frabjus day) of Lewis Carroll, and no one else, gave us the "Anglo-Saxon attitude", without method but with meaning. I do not enjoy Sir Herbert Read's novel *The Green Child;* but does that really matter? The artist's personal vision and expression are there in his strange story. The unknowable Ivy Compton-Burnett, not the wise and knowable E. M. Forster, exposes *A Father and His Fate.* All these people are different, immensely expert, original, unteachable. I think that is literature. I have shot my arrows very high at these names, because we are thinking of fame, and of some of the constituents of literary fame.

Some of the people that I've been talking about sit upon Olympus. Somerset Maugham does not pretend to sit upon Olympus, but I wonder if there is any novelist anywhere in the English-speaking world today who can write a straightforward story like *Cakes and Ale,* full of humanity and dexterous exposure. He is a master of the involuntary revelations of conversation. Henry Fielding would approve.

I wish to talk about Ivy Compton-Burnett because she is an extreme example of the explosion of personality in truly original writing. Some people lay her books down. I read her with almost painful pleasure and incredulous admiration. One had better not read two of her novels in a row, that is too many; a few pages, read with cold chills, will suffice, and then some more. Metaphysical, metaphorical, and real doors open and shut. She plays tricks with time and place. There are sinister reverberations of thought in a closed room. Not a sentence may be missed, for it hooks into a sentence past or to come or it strays into the universal air and the meaning hangs there. There is no landscape. The currents of a mind

rise for one moment to the visible surface, taking their place in the story as violently as a railway disaster, scattering the injured. The demons are phoniness and domestic cruelty. Threads of moral beauty appear, vanish, re-appear in the sombre fabric of the tale from time to time, establishing (but elusively) the ultimate facts of good and evil. All this is done with ease, certainty, and a sardonic wit. Who could have taught her these curious powers? No one. No one knew all this before, although the words lay here and there for anyone to use. Let us not have another Ivy Compton-Burnett. One is enough. If this accomplished writer of fiction, who knows so much more than we do, should offer to instruct us (but she would not), should we accept? No, she is too much herself, and rightly.

There is a moment, I think, within a novelist of any originality, whatever his country or his scope, when some sort of synthesis takes place over which he has only partial control. There is an incandescence, and from it meaning emerges, words appear, they take shape in their order, a fusion occurs. A minor writer, whose gift is small and canvas limited, stands away at last if he can and regards what he has done, without indulgence. This is a counsel of perfection which I myself am not able to take with skill, but I must try to take it. I am sure that the very best writing in our country will result from such an incandescence which takes place in a prepared mind where forces meet. (A writer's mind seems to be situated partly in the solar plexus and partly in the head.) We do not look to an earnest mediocrity amongst us but to this personal incandescence in a lighted mind in whatever manner it shows itself. I think it was shown here, lately, by Sheila Watson in the small book *The Double Hook*. Such work as that is individual, an emergence from within, not to be copied. We can recognize this phenomonon, great or in miniature, wherever we see it.

DURING THE YEARS before the war, 1937-38, I began to write. I did not contemplate a future in this occupation—life as it was seemed already full—yet now, for the first time, I found it imperative to write. In my childhood we had stood, in Vancouver, on a sort of subsoil of a culture which, as the forests came down, had been vaguely prepared by our forebears in the haste of building and earning. They had arrived

at the water's edge with their violins and pianos, some books, some pictures, ideas, undoubted aspirations, opinions—or nothing whatever. Many had memories, no money and a dubious future. Suddenly a small public library was housed. Here was this subsoil of theirs and this was where we stood when I was a child.

When, all these years later, it seemed imperative to me that I should write, I knew of no outlet for "my kind of thing" nor for an individual in Vancouver who was so looney as to think of writing, then. I sent some pieces to the *New Statesman* in London and they were published. Then the war closed down on us all. The distinguished, sarcastic, and admired Head of the Department of English at the University of British Columbia said to me during the war, "You are a damfool not to write". I was pleased by the compliment but disregarded the advice as I had other things to do, and one must go one's own way. Life took another direction.

After the war I immediately wrote an innocent novella which was published in Canada and in England and I then became aware of literary criticism in our country. I had long been addicted to the reading of literary criticism with great respect and liking.

When my husband and I were married in 1921, an impecunious cousin sent us the most valuable present of our lives. It cost him ten shillings, sale price — or was it five? This was a six months' subscription to the *New Statesman* with which were later incorporated the *Nation* and the *Weekend Review*. This weekly publication was execrated in all its works by the Right, venerated by the Left, and early banned by Hitler. That was my first introduction to literary and artistic criticism and political polemics. I soon read in all directions, regardless of politics and schools. What would have happened in my own mental life in a geographical area that was then still a periphery, not a centre, if this very fortuitous influence had not arrived and at that time, I don't quite know. Something else, more or less, because of a child's rigorous education and curiosity, for I had become one of Condell and Heminge's "Great Variety of Readers".

Hard years came when literary magazines died — Middleton Murry's *Adelphi*, Cyril Connolly's *Horizon*, *Orion* in London. Here I wish to pay affectionate and admiring tribute to my friend Alan Crawley and *Contemporary Verse*, to brave John Sutherland and *Northern Review*, and to *Here and Now* whose life was too short; these have taken their permanent place in the record of Canadian letters.

In those years immediately following the war, most (but not all) literary criticism in our country was insipid and uninformed. Now, in that scene, there is divination in Canada. The falcons cruise high above and search the literary plain where the game becomes more plentiful. Looking about us, we see and hear in many places and ways that the art of criticism is in a healthy state. Without that, those of us who attempt to write would be poorer. But with the increasing popularity of this art, there is also a fringe of prentice comment which goes by the name of criticism. It is one of my favourite indoor games—this game of opinion—but I know that it does not qualify as the art of criticism.

Critics of novels, some unkind people say, are disappointed novelists. That is not true. The critic has probably no desire to write a novel, though some have done so, failed, taken the bitter medicine, and they then know more about the peculiar difficulties and vagaries of the task the novelist sets himself. The finely acid or wise or benevolent and instructed pen of a superlatively good critic is the pen of a writer. Whether that critic is writing about a recent novel, a history of Crete, or a reprint of the life of the ant, he has a quality that makes him a tingling pleasure to the reader who may not even care about ants. The written and the deliberately spoken reviews of V. S. Pritchett stay in the memory.

A wry reflection that decades of reading expert criticism cannot make a writer out of a knowledgeable reader, does not detract from the value of good criticism. Neither does it damn the reader. The reader reads for stimulation, pleasure, and even for information, and by that form of osmosis which true readers share with writers, he acquires perhaps discrimination, perhaps a catholic and adventurous taste, and the gates of perception are held open to him. But however much those years of reading and criticism may enrich his life, they will not of themselves teach him to be a writer any more than years of knowledgeably watching first class tennis will teach him to be a tennis champion. The Gift is imponderable and unpredictable, and there is no satisfactory substitute.

If eminent critics disagree, that makes expert criticism peculiarly interesting and sometimes amusing. Opposite opinions of the unusual Australian novel *Voss* by Patrick White and of James Gould Cozzen's wordy novel *By Love Possessed* point to human fallibility on the part of people who are supposed to know everything. That is reassuring for those of us who indulge in non-conformity of opinion or who are early inclined to-

wards scepticism. Wit can be a delight in a serious critic, but not solemnity, the voice of the prophet or the Great Panjandrum. Dullness is a misdemeanour.

I find that in talking about novelists, their lasting or passing fame, and their critics (who are an undetermined factor in fame), I am thinking first and always as one of "the Great Variety of Readers"; in a small but definite degree as a writer; but not at all as a qualified critic. I am not a cat among the pigeons. I am a country cat among my friends the falcons who are handsome, formidable and trained birds, equipped to detect and pounce upon error. It will be better, now, to take my convictions safely indoors and sit looking out of the window at what I can see, and at the sky which is so beautiful.

WOOD ENGRAVING BY BRUNO BOBAK

A COLONIAL ROMANTIC

MAJOR JOHN RICHARDSON, SOLDIER AND NOVELIST

Desmond Pacey

PART I: THE EARLY YEARS

MAJOR JOHN RICHARDSON was the first Canadian novelist to achieve an international reputation; his best novel, *Wacousta*, has appeared in some twelve editions and was in print for over a century; he was the first Upper Canadian poet to have a volume of verse published in Great Britain; as a soldier he distinguished himself for gallantry before he was seventeen years old; as a journalist he played a significant role in the 1837 Rebellions. He was undoubtedly the most colourful figure in our colonial literature, and as certainly the most obnoxious. Excitable, belligerent, haughty, and quick to take offence, his life was a succession of quarrels, controversies, and duels. Yet no full-length biography of this colonial romantic has ever been written,[1] and the facts of his birth, marriage, literary and military career, and death are still in doubt. The purpose of this article is to shed some new light on these obscure facts.

Various dates have been suggested for Richardson's birth, but there seems to be no doubt that the correct date is October 4, 1796. His birthplace was the village of Queenston, near Niagara Falls. His father, Dr. Robert Richardson, was a Scottish surgeon attached to Simcoe's Queen's Rangers, and the scion of a Jacobite family. His mother was Madelaine Askin, second daughter of the prominent Detroit merchant, Colonel John

[1] The nearest approaches to a full biography of Richardson are to be found in A. C. Casselman's introduction to his edition of *The War of* 1812 (Toronto, 1902) and W. R. Riddell's *John Richardson* (Toronto, 1923).

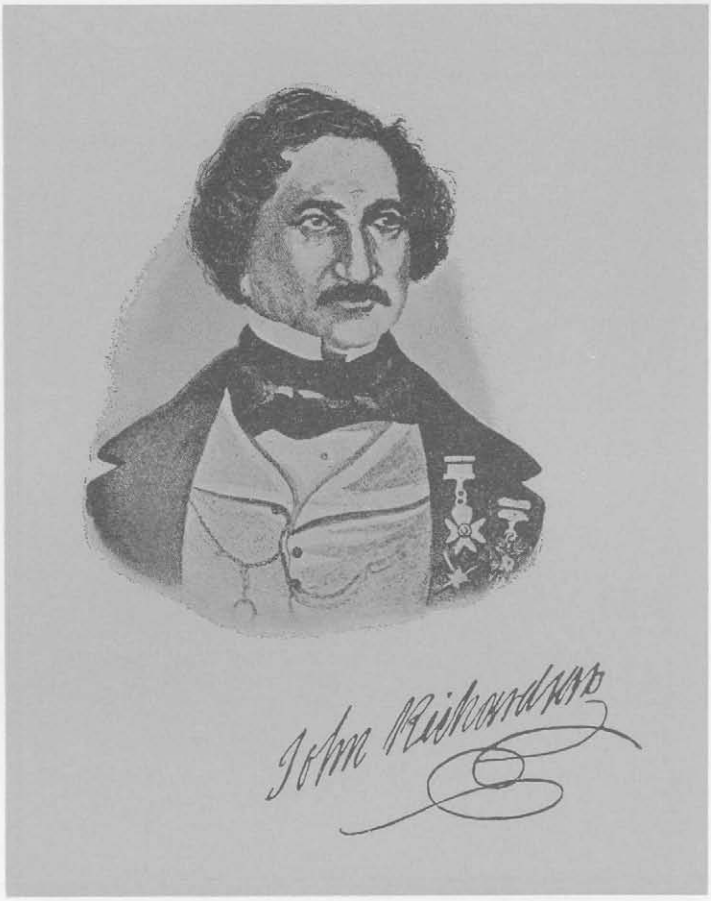
Askin. The biographies of Richardson all state that his maternal grandmother, the first wife of John Askin, was a French lady. *The John Askin Papers*,[2] however, which fully document that merchant's career, make it clear that the novelist's grandmother was an Indian: "Askin was the father of a numerous family of children. The three elder children, John Jr., Catherine, and Madelaine, were by an Indian mother, concerning whom we have no certain knowledge." This Indian blood in Richardson helps to explain the great interest in and admiration for the Indian which is revealed in all his work: his long narrative poem, *Tecumseh*, is a tribute to the bravery of that famous Indian Warrior; *Wacousta* is a tale of Indian warfare; and Indian characters appear, usually in a very favourable light, in almost all his novels.

The *John Askin Papers* shed other new light on the parentage and early life of John Richardson. There are a number of letters from Richardson's mother to his grandfather both before and after her marriage to Dr. Richardson, and there are also letters from Richardson's father. Some of these letters include direct references to the future novelist. For example, on February 18, 1798, Madelaine wrote in part as follows: "The children are well. John walks everywhere and is as fat as ever. He is very fond of sleigh riding for he loves a horse." Already, before he was two years old, Richardson was revealing the love of fast horses that was to be one of the constant passions of his life! On August 6, 1801 Dr. Richardson wrote to Colonel Askin from St. Joseph's as follows:

> I hope John is a good boy and attentive to his Grandpapa. Madelaine frets a little sometimes about him, but I am perfectly easy myself as I am certain he is with his best friends, next to ourselves.

This letter reflects the fact that, since Dr. Richardson's duties compelled him to move about a good deal from station to station, John spent a large part of his boyhood with his grandparents in Detroit. His grandfather filled the boy's mind with stories of colonial warfare and of trading expeditions into the wilderness, and his grandmother told him of her own experiences during the siege of Detroit in Pontiac's Rebellion. Many of these reminiscences he was later to incorporate into his novels.

[2] *The John Askin Papers*, Vol. 1: 1747-1795, edited by Milo M. Quaife, Secretary-Editor, The Burton Historical Collection. Published by the Detroit Library Commission, 1928.


John Richardson

Thus fired with dreams of heroic combat, young John Richardson did not hesitate when the United States declared war on Great Britain in June, 1812. Although he was only fifteen, he immediately enlisted as a gentleman volunteer and during the next sixteen months fought in every engagement in which his regiment—the 41st—was involved. On August 3, 1813, Richardson was commissioned as an ensign, and it is interesting to note that in his *Eight Years in Canada* Richardson declares that it was his friend Sir Isaac Brock who secured his commission for him: thus early was born another of Richardson's life-long habits, that of relying upon personal influence for advancement. However, Richardson was taken prisoner in October of 1813 at the disastrous battle of Moraviantown, and spent the following year as a prisoner-of-war in Kentucky. His harrowing experiences as a prisoner are vividly described in his first novel, *Ecarté.*

His sufferings in captivity in no wise cooled Richardson's martial ardour. Once released on exchange, he joined the 2nd Battalion of the 8th King's Regiment as a lieutenant, and sailed for Europe in June, 1815 to take part in the war against Napoleon. He reached Europe to find that the Battle of Waterloo had been fought during his ocean passage and, along with many other junior officers, was almost immediately placed on half-pay. By pulling strings, he managed to win a return to active status on May 25, 1816, and sailed with his regiment for the West Indies. During this voyage, made in November, 1816, Richardson's haughty temper had an opportunity to display itself; he was disgusted by the pranks played when the ship crossed the Equator, and refused to submit himself to shaving and other indignities.[3] His spirits were, however, restored by his first glimpse of the beauty of Barbados—his description of which provides a sample of his romantic enthusiasm:

> Nothing could exceed the beauty of this island which, as we approached sufficiently near to distinguish trees and plantations, appeared to rise like a bed of emerald from the deep bosom of the waters. Much of that beauty moreover arose from the association of idea, for having left England at a moment when the bleak winds of autumn had robbed the fields of their green and the trees of their foliage, to be thus, as it were, transported suddenly into a new and luxurious season, excited a sentiment of delight. . . . Alas! how few reflected that in that island so fair to the

[3] For this and other information relating to Richardson's experiences in the West Indies, see his *Recollections of the West Indies, New Era,* March 2, 1842 et seq.

> eye, lurked the seeds of death, and that in the light atmosphere which crowned its ever-green summits played those exhalations which are fraught with subtlest poison to the health of the European.

Richardson is referring in that last sentence, of course, to the yellow fever which at this period of history made the West Indies a graveyard for British soldiers. Within ten days of his arrival, Richardson himself fell victim to the disease, and although he temporarily recovered sufficiently to undertake military duties, he was eventually invalided home. He remained long enough in Barbados, however, to form strong feelings of disgust for the moral laxity, the caste-snobbery, and the slave-system of the island. Richardson's impassioned but well-reasoned attack on slavery, in his *Recollections of the West Indies*, is one of his most attractive passages.

By October 1818, Richardson was again back in England, and on the half-pay list. Almost nothing is known of his activities during the next ten or twelve years. It is assumed, largely from the internal evidence of his first novel, *Ecarté*, that he alternated between London and Paris, leading the life of a young man-about-town and of a minor journalist. He is supposed to have contributed articles to English newspapers and magazines describing life in Canada and the West Indies, but no one has ever documented this statement, and I have been unable to trace any of his periodical writings. We do know that in 1828 he published his narrative poem *Tecumseh*, in 1829 his novel *Ecarté*, and in 1832 *Wacousta*. Another certain glimpse of Richardson during this period is provided by a War Office Return of Services for 1828.[4] Under the heading "The officer is here required to state, whether he is desirous of service". Richardson has written in his flowing, impatient script: "Desirous, and anxious for Service—Repeated applications having been made and replied to on the subject by his late Royal Highness the Duke of York." It is a characteristic glimpse: Richardson eager and impatient, and furiously pulling strings.

But the chief significance of this Return of Services is that it allows us to clear up, at least to some degree, the mystery of Richardson's marriage. Previous biographers have agreed that "about 1830", Richardson married "an Essex lady", whose first names are always given as Maria Carol-

[4] Public Record Office. War Office Return of Services etc. (WO 25), Vol. 772, p. 130.

inc and her last name either not at all or as Wrayson. The Return of Service, however, gives the date of his marriage as August 9, 1825, and the place the British Embassy in Paris. This lead made it possible to trace Richardson's marriage certificate among the Miscellaneous Foreign Records in the General Register Office, Somerset House, London.[5] The certificate reads as follows:

Marriages solemnized in the House of H. B. M.'s Ambassador in Paris in the Year 1825

John Richardson, of the Parish of St. George in the County of Middlesex, Bachelor, and Jane Marsh of Leamington in the County of Warwick, Spinster, were married in this House this Twelfth Day of August in the Year One Thousand eight hundred and Twenty five by me George Lefevre for Ed. Forster, Chaplain.

This marriage was solemnized between us John Richardson

Jane Marsh

In the presence of E. Bloque

J. F. Lemaire

Thus is established beyond all doubt the date of Richardson's marriage and the name of his bride. But, as so often happens, to solve one problem is only to create others. Previous biographers have felt confident in giving Maria Caroline as the first names of Richardson's wife because there is a tombstone in the Butler Burial Ground at Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario, reading as follows:

Here reposes Maria Caroline, the generous-hearted, high-souled, talented and deeply lamented wife of Major Richardson, to the everlasting grief of her faithfully attached husband. After a few days' illness at St. Catharine's on the 16*th of August,* 1845.

One must assume, therefore, that Maria Caroline was Richardson's second wife, that Jane Marsh died between 1825 and 1837, and that

[5] Since I have not been to the United Kingdom since this research was instituted, I am indebted to various of my students and friends for locating these documents. I express my gratitude here to Messrs. Hugh Peacock, Allan Donaldson, F. Algar, Dr. W. K. Lamb, Col. C. P. Stacey, and Major Bateman.

Richardson's second marriage occurred during this same period. I base the assumption about the dates on the facts that Richardson brought a wife with him to Canada early in 1838, and that we have such a full knowledge of his life in Canada after 1838 that we should be sure to know about the death of Jane and the re-marriage to Maria Caroline had these events occurred in Canada. Diligent search on the part on many people has, however, failed to unearth any record of either the death of Jane or the marriage to Maria Caroline. The only missing part of the jigsaw puzzle that has come to light is the identity of Maria Caroline. Her obituary in the *Gentleman's Magazine* reads as follows:

> On August 16, at the residence of the Rev. Mr. McDonough at St. Catherine's, Maria Caroline, wife of Major Richardson, Superintendent of Police on the Welland Canal, the second daughter of William Drayson, Esq., of Brompton, near Chatham, Kent.[6]

We know, then, that Richardson was twice married, in August of 1825 to Jane Marsh of Leamington, Warwickshire, and later to Maria Caroline Drayson of Brompton, Kent, and that his second wife died at St. Catherine's on August 16, 1845; but we do not know when his first wife died, or when he married for the second time.

Apart from his marriage to Jane Marsh, the only exact knowledge we have of Richardson between 1818 and 1835 is that he published three books and one pamphlet. The first book, *Tecumseh*, is a verse narrative of Indian warfare in the manner of Byron's *Childe Harold*. If he had hoped to emulate Byron in waking up to find himself famous, he must have been gravely disappointed. The only review of *Tecumseh* which I have succeeded in tracing states curtly: "We can only say that the feeling which prompted it is better than the execution. The notes are exceedingly interesting."[7] Whether the author of this brief review was being serious or sarcastic, the fact is that the notes to *Tecumseh* are more interesting than the poem itself. Some of them give us glimpses of Richardson's boyhood, and one of them is an early example of his penchant for the sensational:

> To the propensity of this tribe for human food the Author can personally attest. Strolling through the Indian encampment an evening or two after the action of the Miami on the 5th of May, 1813, he, in company with another officer, suddenly

[6] *Op. cit.*, New Series, XXIV: 665 (July-December, 1845).

[7] *Literary Gazette*, No. 604, p. 519 (August 16, 1828).

> found himself among a party of Minouminies who were seated round a large fire above which was suspended their untempting meal. At the surface of the boiling water appeared an offensive scum, and each warrior had his own particular portion attached to a small string, one end of which hung over the edge of the vessel immediately opposite. They stated with evident satisfaction, that it was an American, and extended their invitation to the Author and his companion, who to conceal their loathing, while declining the honour, were prudent enough to dress their countenances in a forced smile, which but ill-accorded with the state of their feelings. It would have been unwise to have manifested disgust.

That the Indians may have been joking seems never to have occurred to Richardson: he was never distinguished by his sense of humour. And the subject of cannibalism had a peculiar fascination for him; he often alluded to it, most nauseatingly in *The Monk Knight of Saint John.*

Richardson's literary ambitions were not easily daunted. If he could not succeed in verse, he would try prose; if British readers were not interested in tales of Indian bravery, they might be intrigued by revelations of French vice. Accordingly, he set to work on a novel of fashionable dissipation in the French capital—*Ecarté*, or the Salons of Paris. This book certainly brought him notoriety, if not fame. Its anticipated revelations were heralded before publication in *The Athenaeum* of February 25, 1829; it was praised by some reviewers as an instrument of virtue, and damned by others as an instrument of vice; it served as the text for a long and earnest sermon in the *Westminster Review* on the evils of gambling. *The Literary Gazette*, which had so curtly dismissed *Tecumseh*, could damn but not dismiss the book; in typical self-righteous style, it fulminated:

> This is another of those detestable publications whose only tendency can be to deprave the mind of even the most superficial and thoughtless readers. It is not easy for us to describe it, certainly not to expose it, without polluting our pages with obscene extracts. . . . Unfit to be seen beyond the precincts of the stews, the profligate manners of which it describes, *Ecarté* is merely less pernicious in consequence of the contemptible talent of its would-be libertine and licentious author. . .[8]

This hostile review, which Richardson explains as the consequence of a threat by William Jerdan, publisher of the Gazette, to damn the next book published by Henry Colburn, served Richardson as the occasion for one of his many quarrels. Here is his own version of the affair, as given in a footnote to *Eight Years in Canada*:

[8] *Op. cit.*, March 28, 1829, p. 208.

> On the very next day after the ill-natured and threatened critique had gone forth to the public, there was an evening reunion of literary people at Mr. Redding's—the author of the 'Beckford Papers' etc—at which were present Harrison Ainsworth, Thomas Campbell, Silk Buckingham the author of 'Tremaine', Charles Ollier, and a number of other distinguished writers of the day. . . . Late in the evening. . . . Jerdan made his appearance. . . . After conversing a short time with those who were most intimate with him, he came up to me, a personal stranger, and said "he should be very happy to have the pleasure of taking wine with me." . . . I rose from a tabouret on which I had been sitting near the feet of the mistress of the house, and exchanging a significant glance with her, observed that Mr. Jerdan did the author of *Ecarté* too much honour in inviting him to drink wine with him, but that nevertheless I should be most happy to accept his proposal. Jerdan stared, drew up his eyebrows, seemed for the first time conscious of a *mal entendu*, bowed stiffly, sipped his wine, and then turned to converse with somebody else.

Such personal feuds were the stuff of life to Richardson; from this time forward there was scarcely a moment when he was not involved in a controversy with somebody. Some of his enemies he attempted to wound in his next publication, published like *Ecarté* anonymously — *Kensington Gardens in* 1830, Canto I of a projected satirical narrative poem modelled on Byron's *Don Juan* and brought out as a pamphlet by Marsh and Miller in 1830.

A measure of fame, as distinct from notoriety, came to Richardson in 1832 with the publication of his most ambitious novel, *Wacousta*. Reviewers on both sides of the Atlantic were almost uniformly favourable to the book. The London *Satirist* stated, "The perusal of this novel has afforded us more satisfaction than anything of the kind which has fallen within the range of our reading in many a long day",[9] and the *Athenaeum* concluded a three and a half column review with this measured judgment:

> The merits of this novel consist in the spirit of its historical pictures, which possess, at least, the consistency of truth. The writer displays no ordinary share of graphic power, and has the rare talent of 'rendering a fearful battle in music'. His descriptions of scenery are well executed, but unfortunately they are rare. The story itself is not very consistent or very probable, but it maintains its interest to the end.[10]

American reviewers, while criticizing some improbabilities in the plot, also wrote at length of Richardson's gift for vigorous narration, powerful

[9] This review is quoted in H. J. Morgan's *Bibliotheca Canadiensis*; I have been unable to trace the magazine itself.

[10] *Op. cit.*, Dec. 29, 1832.

scenes, and vivid descriptions. And the novel was apparently popular with the general public, for six editions were published within the first eight years, and subsequent editions in 1851, 1868, 1888, 1906 and 1923.

After such a success, Richardson might have been expected to settle down to the life of a popular novelist. But his restless temperament could not long remain content with any one kind of life. Literary fame was not enough; he still yearned for martial glory. For sixteen years he had been vainly longing for active service; in 1834 an opportunity offered and he seized it eagerly.

Civil war broke out in Spain between the legitimate monarch, Queen Isabella, and the pretender to the throne, Don Carlos. The British Government, while remaining officially neutral, sanctioned the recruitment of a British Auxiliary Legion. Richardson enlisted, was promoted to a captaincy, and later to a majority at the storming of San Sebastian, and created a Knight of Saint Ferdinand by the Queen of Spain. Since he also wrote no less than four books about the campaign, it would appear at first glance that Richardson had finally found a full measure of satisfaction for his soaring ambition. Unfortunately his own haughtiness and pugnacity again betrayed him. While convalescing in London from his wound, and shortly after issuing his *Journal of the Movements of the British Legion* (1836) in which he defended the Legion and its commander, General Sir De Lacy Evans, against the hostile criticism of the Tories in the House of Commons, Richardson heard that he had been passed over by General Evans in a list of promotions and decorations. He promptly added a section to the book bitterly attacking Evans as a cowardly and incompetent commander, and reissued it in 1837 as *Movements of the British Legion with Strictures on the Course of Conduct Pursued by Lieutenant-General Evans.* Never one to drop a quarrel lightly, Richardson followed this up with a second attack, *The Personal Memoirs of Major Richardson as connected with the singular oppression of that officer while in Spain by Lieutenant-General Sir De Lacy Evans,* published in Montreal in 1838 after Richardson had returned to Canada. The final assault was made in a satirical novel in which Evans is the thinly-disguised villian—*Jack Brag in Spain,* never published in book form but published serially in the early eighteen-forties in Richardson's Brockville newspaper, *The New Era.*

The ramifications of this quarrel and its aftermath are too complex to detail here. In retrospect, the whole affair has a comic opera air. When

Richardson returned to Spain in 1837 a military Court of Inquiry was held to "investigate and report upon the conduct of Captain Richardson, 6th Regt., for having while in England thrown out imputations in print, and in letters addressed to the Military Secretary, calculated to cast discredit on the conduct of the Legion in the glorious action of the 5th of May". Richardson managed to shift the subject of the inquiry from the nature of his remarks to the nature of his conduct in battle, and as there never was any doubt about his personal bravery he managed to win a favourable verdict—but at the cost of whatever vestiges of popularity he retained with his fellow officers. Back in London, the affair was brought up several times in debates in the House of Commons, where the government's Spanish policy was a subject of intense controversy. Some members favoured direct participation on the side of the legitimate Queen; others felt that even to allow the volunteer Legion to participate was a dangerous precedent. Since the first edition of Richardson's journal of the campaign defended the Legion, and the second edition tended to discredit it, he found himself quoted by both sides, and there was much confusion as to which book was being quoted. In the debate of April 17, 1837, for example, we find Mr. O'Connell trying to clarify the issue as follows:

> The gallant officer opposite, in the course of his speech, had talked disparagingly of the 10th Regiment, upon the authority of one Richardson, whose book was really two books; the one written when he was in favour with General Evans, and therefore all in his praise, the other written after he had been dismissed the service, and, of course, all against him.[11]

When the "gallant officer" referred to, Sir Henry Hardinge, interjected that Richardson had nothing but praise for Colonel O'Connell, the latter said "he should be sorry to receive praise from such a quarter as Mr. Richardson. If he was not mistaken, all the officers of his regiment refused to speak to him." The debate dragged on intermittently for months, and as late as March 13, 1838, after Richardson had left for Canada, Sir Henry Hardinge was still trying to make clear which edition of Richardson's chronicle he was quoting.[12]

Embroiled in such fruitless controversies, Richardson must have welcomed the news of the 1837 Rebellions in Upper and Lower Canada. His

[11] *Parliamentary Debates,* 3rd series, Vol. xxxvii, p. 1385.

[12] *Ibid,* Vol. xli, p. 847.

resolution to return to his native land is expressed with Miltonic gravity: "Canada being the land of my birth which, while a mere youth, I had left with my regiment in 1815, I naturally felt some solicitude for its welfare, and as the news which reached England by every packet was of a nature to induce the belief that my services might be available in her defence, I resolved to embark forthwith."[13] He embarked at the London Docks on February 18, 1838.

[13] *Eight Years in Canada* (Montreal. 1848) p. 6.

A SECOND ARTICLE BY DESMOND PACEY CONCERNING THE LATER LIFE OF MAJOR RICHARDSON WILL APPEAR IN OUR NEXT ISSUE.

LINO-CUT BY BEN LIM

UNE POESIE D'EXIL

Gilles Marcotte

LE LECTEUR FRANCAIS n'éprouvera généralement, devant la poésie canadienne-française d'aujourd'hui, aucune impression de dépaysement. Il peut lire un recueil d'Anne Hébert, par example, ou d'Alain Grandbois, sans même soupçonner qu'il a paru outre-Atlantique, c'est-à-dire dans un climat physique et spirituel fort différent du sien. Entre la poésie qui s'écrit à Paris et celle qui s'écrit à Montréal, il n'existe assurément pas de cloison étanche. Les mêmes influences littéraires s'y retrouvent, et si l'on peut définir, quant à la France, une aventure poétique commune, cette aventure est partagée par les poètes du Canada français.

On peut donc se demander s'il est permis—et si oui, dans quel sens—de parler d'une poésie canadienne-française. Au début du siècle, encore, plusieurs de nos poètes se distinguaient aisément: par un bric-à-brac de thèmes patriotiques et régionalistes, insérés avec plus ou moins de bonheur dans des formes passe-partout. Ces signes tout extérieurs sont aujourd'hui révoqués, et l'on convient qu'avec Saint-Denys Garneau la poésie canadienne-française s'est résolument tournée vers l'homme, vers l'universel. De là à dire qu'elle n'a plus rien de canadien, il n'y a qu'un pas. Mais, pour le faire, il faudrait ignorer les liens très étroits que gardent entre elles les oeuvres les plus significatives d'aujourd'hui; entre elles, et avec ce qu'avait donné de plus vrai la poésie canadienne-française du siècle précédent. Notre poésie n'est plus enfermée dans ses frontières; mais cette liberté même qu'elle a conquise l'a conduite à explorer avec plus de conscience et de rigueur un paysage spirituel qui lui appartient en

propre. En ce sens, elle révèle, au-delà des différences de formes et de filiations littéraires, une très profonde unité. Dans la mesure même où elle échappe aux facilités du pittoresque local, la poésie canadienne-française rejoint une interrogation fondamentale, qui est celle de son enracinement, de sa réussite humaine dans un *lieu donné*.

CETTE INTERROGATION, on l'entend déjà chez l'ancêtre Crémazie, qui écrivait, aux environs de 1850, des poèmes effroyablement lourds, enchifrenés, soumis à des influences étouffantes. Mais les vers de sa *Promenade de trois morts*, si maladroits soient-ils, disent avec sincérité une difficulté de vivre, qu'on aurait trop vite expliquée par le tempérament personnel et quelques circonstances pénibles. La première voix poétique qui s'élève au Canada parle de la mort; de la mort, non pas comme un repos, une paix, un au-delà, mais de celle qui pourrit de l'intérieur tout espoir d'enracinement. Une interdiction de vivre ice. Le témoignage de Crémazie, d'ailleurs, sera bientôt corroboré. Son contemporain Alfred Garneau avoue la même hantise des cimetières, la même désaffection à l'égard de l'existence. Quelques années plus tard, Albert Lozeau:

Je sens en moi grandir une âme d'étranger.

Quand la poésie de cette époque renonce à ses alibis patriotiques, sentimentaux ou religieux, c'est cela qui reste: un sentiment d'étrangeté à la vie, d'exil radical. Ses paroles les plus justes sont paroles d'effroi, de regret, de désespoir, et elle s'abandonne, sous divers prétextes de fiction littéraire, à d'étranges malédictions.

On peut s'en étonner; voire, s'en scandaliser. Il ne semble pas normal que les premiers chants d'un peuple jeune, réputé jovial et sain, engagé dans une rude aventure de survivance, soeint autres qu'héroiques. Mais c'est là se faire une idée un peu simple de la réalité canadienne-française. Nos premiers poètes n'avaient rien de primitifs; c'étaient des Européens déracinés. Par toute leur culture, par les fibres essentielles de leur être moral, ils continuaient d'appartenir à la France. Ils n'étaient plus totalement français, pourtant. Un autre style de vie, d'autres appartenances, un autre sol les requéraient. Un autre "paysage", qu'ils n'avaient pas encore

reconnu, et dans lequel ils ne s'étaient pas encore reconnus. Le Canada ne pouvait être, pour ces poètes, un lieu humain parfaitement *suffisant*. Faire un pays, ce n'est pas seulement défricher, bâtir des villes, édicter des lois, c'est aussi—et surtout—réinventer l'homme, dans un réseau de coordonnées nouvelles. L'Américain n'y est pas encore arrivé: Alfred Kazin a pu parler dans son récent essai sur les lettres américaines, d'une "impression de dépaysement ressentie sur notre propre sol". Si l'Américain souffre, aujourd'hui, d'un tel dépaysement, qu'en sera-t-il du Canadien français, affronté à la même tâche d'humanisation, mais replié sur lui-même, isolé en Amérique par sa langue même, privé des secours qu'offrent le nombre et la richesse à ses voisins du sud?

Et comment, dès lors, s'étonner que notre poésie s'interroge, avec une constance et une angoisse toutes particulières, sur sa condition d'exil?

Non pas qu'elle en évoque fréquemment la figure extérieure, qu'elle se retourne avec nostalgie vers ce qu'hier encore on appelait, au Canada français, la "mère-patrie". Elle ne peut recevoir son humanité d'ailleurs—et la France, dans un certain sens, lui est un ailleurs. L'exil que subit la poésie canadienne-française est celui, sans forme ni visage, qui se loge au coeur, et nourrit la tentation de l'absence. Absence à la réalité extérieure, à la réalité sociale: à mesure qu'elle se dégage des clichés patriotiques et régionalistes, cette poésie se découvre sans voix devant les hommes, devant les paysages qui devraient être siens. Très rares, parmi nos poètes, sont ceux qui ont affronté les grands espaces américains; et ils n'en ont tiré qu'un avec de néant, ce "silence des neiges aux épousailles sèches de vide", qu'évoque la poésie d'Yves Préfontaine. Mais le plus souvent, les paysages, les choses, sont à peine évoqués. On se tient à l'écart, dans une intimité douloureuse, où l'extérieur n'est admis qu'après avoir perdu sa qualité d'*autre*. Ce qu'on a coutume d'appeler le réel devient ici un jeu d'images pures, sans autre appui, sans autre titre à l'existence, que leur résonance intérieure. A l'extrême, voyez *Le Tombeau des rois,* d'Anne Hébert: on y parle de fontaines, d'oiseaux, d'arbres, de maisons, de villes, mais les images évoquées par ces mots sont privées de coloration individuelle. Le particulier n'existe pas pour cette poésie. Elle ne *nomme*, elle ne possède que le plus général, ce qui commence tout

juste d'exister. Elle naît en même temps qu'un monde; ou plutôt, elle renaît, dans le sentiment que tout lui a été enlevé, interdit, et qu'il faut tout réapprendre à partir des éléments.

Tout réapprendre, et soi-même d'abord. Car si la possession des choses paraît menacée, le poète n'éprouve pas moins de difficulté à se posséder lui-même, à réaliser sa propre unité. La figure définitive de l'absence, nous la trouverons ici: dans une aliénation intérieure, dont la poésie canadienne française n'a jamais cessé de porter le témoignage. On pense au vers de Saint-Denys-Garneau:

Je marche à côté d'une joie
D'une joie qui n'est pas à moi . . .

C'est pour avoir fait éclater en pleine lumière, pour avoir vécu et exprimé, avec une sincérité bouleversante, cette aliénation, que Saint-Denys-Garneau a exercé une influence décisive sur la récente évolution de la poésie canadienne-française. Avant lui, beaucoup de choses avaient été dites, mais par échappées seulement, avec des réticences, des hésitations; et aussi, il faut l'avouer, dans des formes poétiques surannées, peu propres à libérer l'expression. Chez Saint-Denys-Garneau, libération de la forme et libération de la parole vont de pair. Désormais, il sera de plus en plus difficile d'éviter quelque dur affrontement. La poésie canadienne-française a trouvé son centre: avant toutes choses, elle confesse une division intérieure, un profond malaise à vivre. D'Anne Hébert à Alain Grandbois, de Jean-Guy Pilon à Roland Giguère, il n'est pas aujourd'hui, au Canada français, de poésie digne de mention, qui ne se mesure d'abord au péril de l'absence. C'est dans ce combat qu'elle affirme, de plus en plus largement, son humanité, et qu'elle rejoint les poésies contemporaines les plus significatives.

On ne manquera pas, en effet, de remarquer que plusieurs des caractères attribués à la poésie canadienne-française pourraient, tout aussi bien, s'appliquer à plusieurs poètes français de l'après-guerre. Une différence subsiste, cependant, qui fait que les mêmes mots, en France et au Canada, ont mêmes sens . . . et ne l'ont pas. Le poète

français est *armé* comme le canadien ne l'est pas. Il *possède* un langage—quelque difficulté qu'il éprouve à le recréer; une culture—quelques dures secousses qu'elle ait subies. Il habite une maison, même menacée de ruine, où il se reconnaît aussitôt, où les moindres objets lui offrent un sens immédiatement recevable. Le poète canadien-français commence plus bas, dans une pauvreté plus nue. Ses pessimismes—ou ce qu'on désigne souvent de ce nom—ne sont pas les pessimismes européens. Il en est encore à reconnaître sa demeure, à conquérir son droit à la vie, ses libertés avec lui-même et avec les choses. La poésie canadienne-française est une poésie des premières démarches.

LINO-CUT BY KEITH BRANSCOMBE

A TWENTIETH CENTURY PENTATEUCH

A. M. KLEIN'S *The Second Scrall*

M. W. Steinberg

SINCE ITS PUBLICATION in 1951, A. M. Klein's *The Second Scroll* has been recognised by discerning critics as an outstanding novel and yet—surprisingly in view of the author's considerable reputation as a poet—it has received scant attention. It is, indeed, a story of complicated form, in which, on the simple framework of a nephew's search for a long-lost uncle, Klein weaves a moving pattern of contemporary Jewish history seen as the fulfilment of age-old religious and national aspirations. The return of the Jewish people to the Holy Land, regarded as a miracle manifested by God, establishes in part the religious theme of the novel. Concurrent with the development of this theme and bearing on it is the question of faith in God and the acceptance of His ways.

The historical context in which the story takes place is the period between 1917, when pogroms in Russia terrorized the Jewish population, and 1949, a year following the establishment of the state in Israel. It contains, therefore, an account of the sufferings of the Jews in exile, the exodus from Europe, the land of their enslavement, and the return to the Promised Land. It parallels in this respect the *first scroll,* the Old Testament, as the history of the Jewish people. The parallel, which is obviously indicated by the title of the book and by the chapter headings, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, is carried further as Klein sees in contemporary events, in the achievements of the Jewish people, the working out of their destiny—a working out that is for him explicable only in religious terms. And further, just as the Torah comprises not

merely the Bible, but also the commentaries on it—the Talmud, for example—which expand upon the events in the Five Books and explain them, completing the message, so too in Klein's *The Second Scroll* there are five glosses which elaborate upon or which help us interpret events in the story. The parallel so obviously indicated in the structure suggests more than actually obtains in the material. There is little or no direct connection, for instance, between the Book of Leviticus and the chapter Leviticus in the novel, or between the rabbinical discussions in the Talmud and Klein's glosses. The pentateuchal form of *The Second Scroll* with the Biblical labels, may be justified, however, by the major thematic parallels of the two scrolls.

The central theme of the story is established at the outset. Melech Davidson, a pious scholar, appalled by the atrocities which he witnessed in Russia in 1917, renounced his faith and sundered himself from his people because he could not reconcile his belief in a loving and just God with the unspeakable depravities which He permitted. No longer able to depend on God for justice, he joined the Communist Party to help bring it about, and he devoted his zeal and dialectical skill, acquired in the study of the Talmud, to the service of his new master. The German-Soviet pact of 1939, which resulted in the handing over of three and a half million Jews in eastern Europe to the Nazis, made him believe that his Marxist ideology had been "a saying of grace before poison" and he abandoned this faith too.

Thus spiritually isolated and bewildered he existed until rounded up with the rest of the Jews of Kamenets for extermination. Finding himself, by accident or miracle, the sole survivor of the massacre at Kamenets, he felt the need to identify himself completely with the martyred Jews and to express their lives through his own. In a letter which his nephew received just before his departure for Israel, Uncle Melech wrote, "At times I feel—so bewildered and burdened is my gratitude—that the numbered dead run through my veins their plasma, that I must live their unexpired six million circuits, and that my body must be the bed of each of their nightmares".

His re-affiliation with the Jewish people was advanced by his intellectual and spiritual experience on viewing the magnificent figures by Michelangelo in the Sistine Chapel. He was directed to the art treasures by Monsignor Piersanti, a subtle fisher for souls in troubled waters (typi-

cal of those who hovered in and around Displaced Persons' Camps in Europe shortly after the war) who hoped to win a Jewish convert to Roman Catholicism by impressing the sensitive faith-seeker with the glories of Christian art. But Uncle Melech's interpretation of Michelangelo's pictorial sermon had an opposite effect. The panels exalting the human form, glorifying the flesh, reminded him of the wracked and wrecked bodies in the Nazi slaughter-camps; the panels depicting Biblical scenes establishing the kinship of God and man made him aware that human slaughter is also deicide. The interpretation of Christian art by Christian history for Uncle Melech led not only to a rejection of Christianity but to its indictment. Some of the frescoes, particularly "The Separation of Light from Darkness", were positive in their assertions prophesying for him life, not destruction. In a long circular sentence in which, says the narrator, he distinguished between commas, in parentheses, all the thirteen credos of Maimonides, Uncle Melech climaxed and completed this spiritual experience. Thus the paintings of the Sistine Chapel led the uncle to a re-affirmation of Judaism.

Through incident and symbol, Klein goes on to suggest that more than an individual re-affirmation is involved. Uncle Melech, we learn, delayed his departure for Israel. Like his Biblical forebears who, according to the commentaries, had to wander for forty years in the desert to be cleansed of their slave mentality, to be welded into one and to be purified before ascending into the Promised Land, he, too, who had "not yet got the 'galuth' [exile] out of his system", had to purge himself of his ambivalent attitude towards his former life, his loving and hating it at the same time. For this he had to experience the suffering of the "galuth" to the full, "to feel in his own person", as his friend Krongold said, "and upon his own neck the full weight of the yoke of exile", and in so doing achieve a sense of oneness with all, even the most wretched. With this in mind Uncle Melech, the European Jew, went off to Casablanca where he mingled and merged with the humblest of all Jews, the inhabitants of the *mellah*. There, though he soon made himself *persona non grata* with the authorities, he persisted in denouncing violently the filth, the humiliation and submissiveness characteristic of life in the *mellah*. In a symbolic gesture that proved he was not an "outsider" philanthropically aiding rather remote alien fellow-religionists, but rather was one with "his Sephardic brothers", he led a procession of lame and blind beggars to free

their imprisoned fellows. At this point Klein indicates the changing role of Uncle Melech through the symbol of a photograph. When the nephew, who has not yet seen the face of his uncle or its photographic image, is shown Uncle Melech's picture in Casablanca, he discovers it to be "a double, a multiple exposure". He describes his flight over the Mediterranean to Israel as "an ascension, a going forward in which I was drawn on and on by the multiple-imaged appearing and disappearing figure of Uncle Melech". Then in Israel, where the nephew traces Uncle Melech, the identification of the Uncle with all Jewry is complete, for wherever the nephew looks, the stances, the faces, even the names of people, all evoke in him possibilities of his Uncle. When the process of the Uncle's merging into the people of Israel is complete, the individual disappears from the scene, murdered by Arab marauders. It is clear that Uncle Melech is to be taken as *the* Jew in exile, and his experiences, his divagations from the faith—his enticement to other ways and beliefs—are those of his people, as are his sufferings, the burden of the "galuth", and his eternal quest for truth and justice, and his final ascendance to the Promised Land.

As THE ROLE of the Uncle undergoes change, the meaning of the nephew's search, its purpose, becomes clearer. The thread of narrative is the journey of a Jewish-Canadian journalist to the new state of Israel to discover for his publishers the poetry of the re-born people. A second and more important strand of narrative grows out of this as the nephew determines to track down his uncle while in Europe, a search that takes him to three continents. The subtly suggested shift from the literal to the symbolic in the presentation of Uncle Melech shapes and gives new levels of meaning to the external framework. The young Canadian Jew, it is suggested, separated from his European relations, is not sufficiently involved in their fate. Though his concern with their tragedy and their future in Israel is real, one feels that it is also somewhat remote, belonging to the realm of dreams, of abstract fancyings. His life, he said, "was, and is bound to the country of my father's choice, to Canada". Uncle Melech reminds him in the letter that, "we

were all in that burning world, even you who were separated from it by the Atlantic—that futile bucket". His experiences in America, however, differed so greatly from those of his Uncle in Europe that communication between them ceased. Not having seen even a photograph of his Uncle, as we are told at the beginning of the story, he had no steady conception of the reality, and he comments, "as the years went by and I myself changed from year to year, the image of Uncle Melech . . . also suffered its transformations". His decision to visit his Uncle, described as "a deflecting compulsion", stemmed from his sense of family obligation, and it is his feeling of family pride that determined his continuing the search when he learned of his Uncle's possible conversion to Roman Catholicism. Following his Uncle's trail through Europe, North Africa and Israel, led him, however, to an understanding of his Uncle's life, past, present and future; for the Uncle, during the course of the search, had become the symbol of the Jewish people. With this understanding came a sense of belonging, of kinship with all Jews. His journey and search for the Uncle became a search for identification. Now that he was in rapport with the spirit of his people he was able to fulfil his original mission, which was to find and evaluate the poetry of the re-born people. He discovered it not so much in the formal writings of the poets, in the sentimental pastoral lyrics of the kibbutz-dwellers, the stirring songs of the nationalists, the nostalgic, plaintive hymns of the religious, or the cryptic utterances of the mystics, but rather in the poetic imagination of the people as a whole, which was most clearly revealed for him in their actions and in the process of vocabulary-building necessary for the resurrection of the Hebrew language as a medium of daily intercourse.

Klein develops his theme further, still in accord with Jewish tradition. In the restrained speeches at the funeral of Uncle Melech, the Israeli mention not only "how he had become a kind of mirror, an *aspaklaria,* of the events of our time", but also "how he had through the sheer force of his existence again in our life naturalized the miracle". At the same time that Uncle Melech was becoming increasingly the symbol of the Jewish people he symbolized the Messiah concept. He literally rose from the dead in the mass grave at Kamenets, and taking on himself the burden of his people, he figuratively brought the dead to life through his own life, actions traditionally ascribed to the Messiah who is to come. The symbolic gesture at Casablanca, where Uncle Melech joined the lame and

blind beggars may well have been suggested by a story in the Talmud concerning the Messiah. Rabbi Joshua ben Levi in his search for the Messiah was directed by Elijah the Prophet to the market-place in Rome, where the Messiah would be sitting among the blind beggars and cripples, attending to their wounds. Furthermore, Uncle Melech's name clearly establishes his Messianic role: Melech (King) Davidson (David's son) is none other than Messiah, who is commonly referred to as Messiah ben David (David's son) or simply as "Son of David". There is no contradiction or confusion in the fact that Uncle Melech seems to act in a dual symbolic capacity suggesting to the reader both the Jewish people and the Messiah. A traditional Jewish view, set forth by Maimonides, tends to identify Messiah with the people in a purified state, in what might be termed a Messianic condition. The people contain within themselves the Messiah idea. To this extent and in this way is the miracle naturalized.

Though the naturalizing of the miracle through Uncle Melech is a sound literary device and a not unsound Judaic doctrine, the author is not content with a simply secular explanation of the miracle; rather, he makes explicit the intervention of the divine. Not only does Uncle Melech say, "I bless the Heavenly One for my rescue," but the nephew too, in seeking an explanation of the historical events, the exodus and the return, rejects the theories of a companion on the flight to Tel-Aviv, though intrigued intellectually by them. At the end of their discussion he asks, "And what rôle does Providence play in your scheme? You have forgotten, in your thesis, to place God."[1] And later in his sojournings in Israel the nephew becomes fully convinced of God's part in the redemption of the Jewish people. "And now in Israel," he remarks, "the phenomenon was being made everywhere explicit. The fixed epithet wherewith I might designate Israel's poetry, the poetry of the recaptured time, was now evident. The password was heard everywhere—the miracle! I had found the key image."

[1] The companion, an American journalist, is described as a member of an assimilated Jewish family. Though he is now a Zionist, his background has provided him with a very scant knowledge of Judaism, and his theories are presented in obviously unJudaic terms. The nephew's rejection of these theories is perhaps intended to suggest his rejection of the assimilationist's explanation of Jewish history. If this is so, then the Canadian Jew's rejection of the assimilationist position parallels and completes the European Jew's rejection of Communism and Christianity in his search that leads him back to his own faith.

THIS RELIGIOUS interpretation of events raises a more profound religious question, one that runs through the entire novel and constitutes its central and most moving motif: the question of good and evil, a question which involves the nature of the relation between God and man.

At the beginning of the story, Uncle Melech, the devout Talmudic scholar, appalled by the inexplicable evil acts perpetrated during the Russian pogroms, raised the outcry not infrequently heard in the course of a long history of persecution: "Wherefore doth the way of the wicked prosper?" But in the past such questioning was less of a challenge to God's authority than an agonized plea for understanding. Uncle Melech, the modern Jew, finding no answer, unable to reconcile the prevalence of evil with belief in an all-loving and omnipotent God, forsook his religion. The act of evil, regarded as an isolated event, was not understood and could not be justified; only if one can see the whole, Klein suggests, can one judge the part. But this full vision, this God's-eye view, is not vouchsafed to man, who nonetheless feels compelled to judge, and in judging, too frequently errs. Because his view is limited or because he is overwhelmed by the immediate tragedy, he fails to see that out of evil can come good, out of death, life. For such an awareness, faith in the rightness of God's acts is essential. The centrality of this theme in the novel is indicated by an extract from John Milton's *Areopagitica* which Klein inserted in the title page of *The Second Scroll*:

> And ask a Talmudist what ails the modesty of his marginal Keri that Moses and all the prophets cannot persuade him to pronounce the textual Chetiv.

Milton, in the passage from which this extract is taken, criticizes those who would change words in the oral reading of the Torah in accordance with the Talmudic precept "that all words which in the law are written obscenely, must be changed to more civil words". This injunction, invoked for modesty's sake, angered Milton, as he remarked, "fools, who would teach men to read more decently than God thought fit to write". Klein finds this remark a fitting prelude to his story, saying in effect that those who presume to judge the rightness of God's acts are guilty of folly. He reinforces this theme, the need for accepting God's will, by adding a second prefatory comment in the form of an extract from Rabbi Levi

Yitschak's song in praise of God's all-encompassing love.[2]

Through meaningful Biblical allusions and symbols in the text of the novel, Klein suggests the reconciliation of good and evil, necessary for the acceptance of God. At the end of chapter Genesis in *The Second Scroll* Klein writes that the great smoke that billowed over the Jews of Europe for the six years following Hitler's invasion of Poland, the smoke of war and from the gas chambers and funeral pyres, became their cloud by day, their pillar of fire by night. This allusion to the instruments by which God guided and protected the Jews while in the desert following the exodus from Egypt, suggests symbolically, in Klein's seemingly ironic use of it, the theme of good out of evil. Again, at the end of Exodus in *The Second Scroll*, immediately after the horrifying description of the massacre at Kamenets, comes the lyric outburst of the note of hope, symbolised by the Israeli ships come to collect the remnant for a new life. The startling juxtaposition of the events and their moods clearly suggests a close relationship, a kinship of good and evil. Uncle Melech at this moment ponders the miracle of redemption, the messianic nature of the events. And he concludes:

> When the years were ripened, and the years fulfilled, then was there fashioned Aught from Naught. Out of the furnace there issued smoke, out of the smoke a people descended. The desert swirled, the capitals hissed: Sambation raged, but Sambation was crossed.[3]

Later in Israel the nephew finds the answer to the question that he put to his companion on the airplane, "And what rôle does Providence play in your scheme? You have forgotten, in your thesis, to place God." The obsessive theme of the discovered poetry is the miraculous, and the key image necessary to explain the remarkable vitality, the rebirth evidenced in every aspect of life, is the miracle. With this increasing awareness, the nephew realized suddenly the significance of his own experience earlier

[2] Rabbi Levi Yitschak, the Berditchiver Rabbi, one of the most noted of the post-Biblical Rabbis, is famous for his having summoned God to judgment to account for the evil He can prevent but does not. Klein's poem on this subject, "Rabbi Levi Yitschak Talks To God" (in *Hath Not a Jew*), parallels *The Second Scroll* in that in both a religious man challenges the justice of God's acts only to accept ultimately on faith His will.

[3] The Sambation is a legendary river beyond which the lost tribes of Israel are to be found.

at the Arch of Titus in Rome.[4] His sense of humiliation was transformed to triumph and the stone of the Arch disappeared at the moment he recalled his Uncle's words, which express the essence of faith: "When the years were ripened, and the years fulfilled, then was there fashioned Aught from Naught." And the fifth gloss, the final statement in the entire book, restates in exalted tones this theme.

This awareness of the element of the miraculous, of the manifestation of God's will, led the nephew immediately after to an act of piety which, he said, "spoke well for me before the *Rebono Shel Olam* (Master of the Universe)." He went in memory of his mother to Rachel's Tomb to say Kaddish, the mourner's prayer, and there at the nearby synagogue of Rabbi Yitchok Luria, the sixteenth century Jewish mystic, he saw, he tells us, a symbol, an old man, bearded like antiquity, teaching a young boy the Talmud, "forever unaging in the study of Torah, which is Life". The scene and the discussion with the old sage strengthen the nephew's growing conviction of the miraculous nature of the historical events. "They affirmed it for me," he comments, "the young boy prodigy and the old man who looked like Elijah: Israel had not only returned back into Time; it still belonged to eternity."[5] Here at last he learns of his Uncle's abode, but he fails to see him, since Uncle Melech was just murdered. But with the new conception of evil and death, which is rooted deep in the Jewish religion, he is not overwhelmed by a sense of tragedy. Evil and death are not things in themselves; they have their place in God's scheme and therefore are not to be vilified or unduly lamented. The novel ends with the recital by the nephew of the Kaddish, the mourner's prayer, which, significantly enough, does not even mention death once. It is not a lament, but, on the contrary, a Magnificat, an exalting of God and an acceptance of His ways.

It is not my intention here to get involved in this ancient and continuing question, the dilemma confronting all who seek meaning and purpose in life. Klein's answer in *The Second Scroll* to the question of evil adds nothing new. The objections to his answer, which are also long-standing,

[4] The Arch of Titus was built in commemorate the victory over the Jews in 70 A.D. by Titus, the destroyer of Jerusalem and the Holy Temple.

[5] It might be pointed out that according to traditional belief the second coming of Elijah the Prophet will immediately anticipate and accompany the coming of the Messiah.

are not invalidated, but neither do they offer the final word. The problem remains unresolved, for it is essentially unresolvable. One takes up a position, knowing its vulnerability, and orders one's life accordingly. And Klein, in this novel, accepts the traditional Jewish position, an optimistic view which does not regard reason or will as fixed and final, but as a dynamic force capable of expansion to the point where man, by his efforts, aided by Divine Law and the occasional intervention of a loving God, approaches a Messianic condition. Klein's novel is based on this assumption, and so despite the cataloguing of horrors, it ends on an exultant note.

The Second Scroll is then not simply, as some critics suggest, a neo-Zionist novel. Even if one were to regard Zionism as an expression of religious faith and yearning and not merely as an expression of nationalism—for Zionism, historically, was conceived and maintained in a category of holiness—such a view of Klein's intent is too narrow. The novel is concerned fundamentally with religious themes, in that contemporary Jewish history is interpreted in terms of religion as the coming together again of God, the Jewish people and the Holy Land. The events, seen as miraculous, reveal the involvement of God's will. *The Second Scroll,* however, is a religious novel in an even more fundamental and universal sense. The universality of Klein's religious theme is made evident by his indicating the essential oneness of the three major western religions, Judaism, Christianity and Mohammedanism. In the third parable of Gloss David, he insists that it is immaterial whether the agent of the lamp manufacturer (the light creator) is Mahmad or Ibn Amram (Moses) or Ibn Yousuf (Jesus); what matters is the quality of the light itself. And just as the Bible tells not only the history of the Jews, but, more important, recounts the unfolding of man's awareness of God largely through God's revelation of Himself through deeds, so too A. M. Klein here develops as his central theme the drama of man losing and finding God. This religious theme is, of course, in this story inseparable from the national theme, for the miraculous return to Israel is seen as part of God's plan, and is the happy fulfilment that furnishes the optimism basic to a renewed faith that alone enables him to resolve the old dilemma faced by religious thinkers, the problem of evil and its bearing on God's relation to man.

THE POETRY OF MARGARET AVISON

Milton Wilson

FOR MOST READERS of Canadian poetry, Margaret Avison seems to be less a poet than a kind of negative legend. One of the first critics to mention her in print simply regretted her absence from an anthology; one of the last wondered ironically if she had ever published anything but "The Butterfly". This negative emphasis can be misleading. Miss Avison has published about forty-five poems in the last twenty years, and over half of them have been in Canadian publications. Her total output may be scattered, but it is sizable enough, and certainly substantial.[1]

We hear her called a very intellectual poet, but she begins (and often ends) with the perceiving eye. That eye seems to have been educated on the prairies, even when it looks at the city or the East. Where so much space flows between object and object or between foreground and background, the nature of the picture depends on the focus (long-sighted or short-sighted). The eye may even refuse to separate near from far, and either flatten the grain-elevator against the sky or pull the horizon with all its infinity to the front of the stage. Miss Avison likes to stretch and contract and revise our vision, as we watch "the hill and the hoof-pocked dark between / evening star and mushroom". We are whirled into space, struck by distant boulders, cut by sharp buildings, and crushed under "leafless tons of sky". In "Perspective" she contrasts the idea of infinity as the point at the end of a diminishing vista with infinity as "sturdy everlasting foregrounds". Perhaps the first stanza of "Rigor Viris" gives

one the sense of Miss Avison's outdoor eye in operation as well as any other brief quotation:

> One bland elipse in cornflower blue
> Fans out beyond the gunneysack.
> The profiles of Egyptian smiles
> Confuse the clues these chimneystacks
> Suggest of smoking miles,
> Wed sun to smoke instead,
> And blazon that parade
> Of all intolerables in flowing frieze
> Against a pink brick wall in a dun autumn.

These problems of focus or perspective are at their crudest in the early poems. In "I Saw One Walking" the speaker loses the proportion of the near by watching a man "as he made his way / Up the slow slope of evening". She returns to the safety of a closer dark, but the return is incomplete, "Turn where I may in dread of the wide air". No doubt the problem concerns more than the eye. But for the moment it is enough to notice in Miss Avison's poetry an interplay of fuzz and focus, of windy space and solid structure, of "startled design" against "the larger iridescence of unstrung dark".

In front of the foreground of Miss Avison's landscapes, on this side of the windowframe (so to speak), are her interiors: offices, warehouses, furnished rooms. The structure informing space becomes the room squared out of space. In "New Year's Poem" the centre of gravity is the repeated "windowledge", but the poem ends:

> Gentle and just pleasure
> It is, being human, to have won from space
> This chill habitable interior.

She likes to dwell on the shape and furniture of rooms, their inner order or disorder, their outside pressed on glass. "Hiatus" is about the gap between room-no-longer-inhabited and room-not-yet-inhabitable: in short, about moving, or, better still, about the suspense of a "mover unmoved". But the interior may be oppressive and seemingly windowless. The eye may become trapped in its own foreground, as in the last stanza of "The Party":

80-watt stars in crystal cups
Keep all perspectives squat and square.
No alien unthought breath corrupts
This decorously airless air.

Pure foreground vision is a dead interior; the passive eye must break free and redesign in space. "The optic heart must venture: a jail-break / And re-creation." The square must seek the circle. And even the circle must spring free.

If the front of the foreground stifles us, the back of the background leaves us gasping. Just beyond Miss Avison's immediate horizon is the total perspective of the earth itself. In "The Agnes Cleves Papers" she keeps stretching space and time out to unimagined corners and then snapping them back to the West. The poem ends at nearly full stretch with the speaker equidistant from Moscow on one side and Lima on the other. In the last lines of "Rich Boy's Birthday Through a Window" the horizon suddenly loops (as on a high-frequency wave) from a tourist resort where "the peaks saw-tooth the Alberta noon" to the "Ionic shore, at Marathon". But Miss Avison's "optic heart" can be more venturesome and less earthbound than this. Whereas in "New Year's Poem" we follow

. . . the long loop of winter wind
Smoothing its arc from dark Arcturus down
To the bricked corner of the drifted courtyard,
And the still windowledge,

in many poems we find ourselves moving the other way, "swept / In some siderial curve", or plumbing "The skies and skies and skies beyond, the terrible / Layers of magnitude". The foreground is a kind of Pandora's box; when we open it out, we unsquare the circle or unfocus its contours. At the end of "Rigor Viris" Miss Avison tries to have the box somehow open and shut at the same time:

Now, Child Pandora, lift the lid again
And let the clamoring mysteries be dumb.
In this clear twilight contour must contain
Its source, and distances with contours come
Opening peacock vistas that can no man entomb.

A good many of her poems (however different in other respects) leave us at the end trying to grasp a visual structure of this geometric and paradoxical kind, like the "liquid Euclids in foolscaps of air" in the last line of "Tennis". This is obviously true of the desperate attempt to stab an angle into a curve which concludes "The Butterfly", but even a quite objective and undiscursive piece like "Stray Dog Near Ecully" exists in terms of similar patterns. Here a "dog called Sesame" escapes from a Roman amphitheatre when the gate is opened to let a bicycle in; he gazes beyond the "Rouault hoop" of the landscape, and, as they search for him in the courtyard, the poem dies away to the echo of his name. "The Agnes Cleves Papers" ends, not merely between Moscow and Lima, but also between the images of children playing hop-scotch and a ship sailing out beyond the gap. The far-off event towards which all this seems to be moving, Miss Avison's optical millennium of reconciled curves and straight lines, is "Meeting Together of Poles and Latitudes: in Prospect".

So far I have been anxious to keep prospects literally prospects. The idea of Miss Avison as a "metaphysical" poet, passionately concerned with contemporary science and theology and assimilating difficult chunks of them in her poems, has only a little to be said for it. She is sensitive to what is in the air and no doubt reads widely, but, compared to a Donne or even a Tennyson, she needs very few footnotes. One might call her a kind of Northern Wallace Stevens, but a less conceptualized kind. Yet the poems published from 1943 to 1947 do show some eagerness to move from perception to conception; and, if ever Miss Avison's specutions turn theoretical, it is here. "Perspective" is a success, perhaps because the theory builds directly on the eye, but "Geometaphysics" must have sounded like ancient science-fiction even in that pre-Sputnik time. A more interesting failure is "Neverness, or The One Ship Beached on One Far Distant Shore", where the equation of space and time begins with the heavy-handed title itself. The argument of the poem sees the historical process from Alpha to Omega as the endless surface of a sphere. What holds together this future-past is the pivot Adam, or the primordial cell, or the nascent thought, or the single outline, or whatever you want to

call the non-historical thing which the whole cycle spreads from and turns on. But Adam, being non-historical, is more than the pivot Adam, clasped by the serpent circumference; he is the core of the dream "that history is done".

> Then must the pivot Adam be denied
> And the whole cycle ravelled and flung loose.
> Is this the Epoch when the age-old Serpent
> Must writhe and loosen, slacking out
> To a new pool of Time's eternal sun?
> O Adam, will your single outline blur
> At this long last when slow mist wells
> Fuming from all the valleys of the earth?
> Or will our unfixed vision rather blind
> Through agony to the last gelid stare
> And none be left to witness the blank mist?

The passage is weakly phrased, but Miss Avison's dream is worth sharing. To begin with, now that the cycle has been flung loose, we can see beyond it to a multiple universe in which the odd apocalyptic explosion here and there seems just a matter of course. And, although one of the serpents of Time has been scotched, he'll close again elsewhere under "Time's eternal sun". As for our denied and released Adam, his outline blurs and the contours of the hill on which he stands dissolve in mist. Or, to put it another way, the dreamer's eyes unfix and turn to ice. At the end of the poem, a blank eye faces a blank image.

What Miss Avison does with sight (and to some extent with sound, as in the supersonic conclusion of "The Valiant Vacationist"), we hardly expect her to do with taste and smell, which seem less capable of projection. But, although the eye dominates her poems, it does not exclude the more intimate senses. Even in "Neverness", infinity is smelled as well as seen. And, as we return from "outer utter darkness" back to "the palaces of sense", we find a good many scents and flavours lingering about the porches and gardens and courtyards, intensifying in the dark. Old houses are the structures of decaying sense, "patchy after years of hopeless upkeep", and Miss Avison likes to explore these thresholds of memory and history. Indeed, her later poetry is much less concerned with tracing an orbit than with "the Sticks-&-Stones, this City". A lot of space and time

may be just around the paradoxical corner, but, for all that, no Canadian poet is better able to depict the clutter and savour of the urban or semi-urban here and now, as in poems like "Factoring" or "All Fools' Eve".

Her most memorable houses are labyrinthine and in need of repair, ripe for inner dialogues between Youth and Age, South and North. Nobody who has read "The Agnes Cleves Papers" is likely to forget the "circular apartment" with "too many doors", or even the pale mother yearning for

> A rocking-chair and her childhood by the stove
> The day the postman failed to come
> And chickens froze on the roosts.

In "Excerpt from Work in Progress . . ." a young girl remembers her dead grandmother's house and contrasts the out-of-door "spherical" world of her childhood with the glassed porch (like an anteroom to the palace of the dead owner), where Auntie Jean sat out the March afternoons

> On the torn cotton swing
> Its rusty coils faintly complaining. . . ,
> Folded in her thin coat,
> Mute behind her mourning glasses,
> Deaf to the icewater day's mowing and mumming
> Beyond the paint-flaked window-frames. . . .

In Miss Avison's poetry you can't seem to escape those windowframes and windowledges, where "all but the lovers' ghostly windows close". Even her "valiant vacationist", climbing an endless spiral of steps and sending back fainter and fainter waves of communication, finds "a dirty windowpane" as well as an uncompanionable fly on "a half-way landing". The "Excerpt" itself ends: "Strangers moved into grandmother's house / And kept a stepladder in the porch. It broke one pane."

Miss Avison's literary sources (like her personal ones) are usually either concealed and transformed or (when obvious) insignificant. I leave it to others to speculate on such things as the doubtful relation of the last section of "Neverness" to "Sunday Morning", or "The Butterfly" to Emily Dickinson, or "The Agnes Cleves Papers" to

assorted Russians. She may never have cast her eye into Blake's *Milton* or traced the ragged margins of Marianne Moore. Miss Avison's poems originate in one another more clearly than in their predecessors. Some remarks on her internal stylistic development are at least possible, although we can never be sure if the order of publication comes very close to the order of composition.

Among the early poems, a fairly distinctive group is formed by the six in rhymed quatrains, which consist of "Gatineau", "Optional", "Maria Minor", "Old Adam", "Song But Oblique to '47" and "The Party", all published between 1939 and 1947. Miss Avison normally has little patience with rigid, recurrent stanza forms and her use of rhyme is spotty and eccentric. The fact that the only end-rhyme of "The Butterfly" is between "Eternity" and "Galilee" may be significant, but, if so, the technique is certainly not characteristic, as you can discover by trying to fix the scattered rhymes of "Perspective". Nor is there usually any neat arrangement about the sectional divisions of her poems. Their apparently designed, stanzaic shape on the page is often in striking contrast to their fluctuating movement in time. At first glance some of them manage to look like Herbert or Vaughan, but they act more like Cummings or Williams. The quatrain poems are exceptional and (outside of the remotely analogous "Stray Dog") 1947 sees the last of them.

Most of these six poems are ingrown; they end shut, rather than open; and in this lies the appropriateness of their form. "The Party" is a boxed interior; "Old Adam" leaves us with "the heart imprisoned in a circumference", like the more oblique "Song". "Maria Minor" is about the pre-Adamic Lilith giving birth to Adamic form. Her occupation gone, she recedes West to the flux and the forest.

> The East is far and weary.
> The thrush's young are fed.
> I go down among the leaf mold
> To mash my head.

This may be the *rigor mortis* of the shadow, not of the shape, but the stanza gives it a similar finality, like the suicidal end of "Gatineau". That Miss Avison associates rhyme with reduced dimensions is clear in her only intricately rhymed piece, "Rigor Viris", and the off-rhyme with which the poem ends has just the balance that the argument requires. But even

in "Rigor Viris" the interweaving of rhymes is resolutely arbitrary and asymmetrical, and the stanzas pretend to no more than a kind of sketchy regularity, a tentative rigidity of form: ". . . distances with contours come / Opening peacock vistas that can no man entomb". Miss Avison's poems are likely to zig-zag pretty freely at the margins, as though the typewriter had a mind of its own, and her most characteristic endings are not shut, but open, or at least ajar: "It broke one pane," or "Past beaky statue-shadows. . . ."

If the later poems seem, on the whole, more tentative and fluctuating, it is partly because they are richer and more enterprising. Indeed, the period since 1956 is already the most brilliant and productive of her whole career. Some excellent poems may have appeared in the forties ("The Butterfly", "Perspective", The Iconoclasts", perhaps "Maria Minor" and —to my taste at least—"The Valiant Vacationist"), but the decade ended with inferior contributions to *Contemporary Verse* and *Here and Now*. The period from 1949 to 1956 (the year in which Miss Avison was awarded a Guggenheim fellowship) was a kind of hiatus, with just one published poem, even if a good one. To many observers of the time, the early fifties seemed like rather grim days for Canadian poetry in general, with the decline of *Northern Review* only the most obvious symbol of the whole process. Miss Avison never contributed to John Sutherland's magazine, and the appearance of general decline turned out to be (in part at least) an illusion, but in 1955 it might have been tempting to see her as a remarkable talent which had petered out, another of Canada's prodigies without staying power. The temptation has by now ceased to exist.

One obvious virtue of the late poems is the increased variety and freshness of the stuff they are made on. In the lesser work of the first decade, one soon gets weary of the "far-borne aching echoes" or "this crude angle / Splayed through the dreamer's prairie": those predictable moments when Miss Avison yet again plumbs the infinite spaces with her *esprit de géometrie*. By the end of her twenties the vision has worn thin and its substance needs renewal. In a stanza of "Geometaphysics" (1947), space is pushed until it rolls over; up and down, water and air interchange; space explorers become deepsea divers. In "Civility a Bogey", or "Two Centuries of Canadian Cities" (1959), the same image is much more successfully developed in terms of the aquarium-like boardroom at the top of a skyscraper (presumably the Imperial Oil Building in Toron-

to). And here the image is only part of a subtle and detailed comedy of Canadian Space and Time, Superstition and Civilization. In "Factoring" (also 1959) the "Vision on the iris" is Sunday by a bakery. The poem ends with evening and the metaphorical rise of a new week:

> And the bath
> of light goes tepid, the delicate froth
> of light scums down. An iron-hoofed
> evangelist howls two blocks south
> to idling drifters. . . .
> The slow-working
> yeast of weariness has belched
> its gases in the social dough. The clock
> sparks ovens for the clank
> of a new week.

The prairie eye has come to terms not merely with the metropolitan skyline (that is an old story), but with the city's material refuse and richness as well. A. J. M. Smith speaks of Miss Avison's attempt "to interpret, as in 'Neverness', the mutations of time in terms of something significant in the lives of the human beings who throng Yonge Street at the noon rush hour". But in "Neverness" (1943) the apocalyptic world and the stenographic world just touch and no more. In a late poem like "Our Working Day May Be Menaced", the fantasy and the factory are one. This tropical factory is a futuristic "orange-pippery" where oranges are forced to disgorge their seed without losing their juice. The technique by which they are sterilized but not turned inside out "is of course secret". The management provides a perfect setting for the process, with walls of wattle and "parakeets on the p. a. system". The incident around which the poem revolves concerns Madeleine, a rather flighty worker on the assembly line, who decides to leave at the end of the day not by the usual elevator cage but along "the extension bridge (windy at sunset)". The speaker who observes and records the incident is a kind of reluctant apocalyptic voice, bearing uneasy witness to the first sign that their factory or universe has become obsolete.

A person has a nature.
I note hers only that I may bear witness.
Her silhouette high on the span
Focused us then, for the quick—
Occurrence? A hard designation. It was
As if a spoke of the final sky
Snagged her suddenly.
    For what seemed only one
    Queer moment, she was swept
    In some siderial swerve,
    Blotted sheer out of time; then spurned
    Back to the pebbles of the path
    (After the footbridge), where
    Heartstain of sun
    Still blurred the airfloor dark.

An evening delegation called; concluded
She is not schooled to cope. . . .
Some of us, privately piqued, privately speculate.

. . . A calling from our calling?
In the œconomy of the clairvoyant,
Or some high pillared parliament
We gave election, in an elated moment
Too rare for conscious purpose,
Can it have come to light that
The thirst for perfect fruit abroad
Has now been superseded, or subsumed
Under a new, more radical, craving?
Can they have appointed
A locus elsewhere for us?
Our mocha faces are too bland for trouble.
Yet may we, when the morning steam-cocks open
For our new day aloft
Find there is come about a universal
Swallowing-up
(proceedings against Madeleine alone
clearly being absurd)
with only the racks and vats,
the lifts and cages left, uncrated and forgotten,
and the pipes steaming thinly
under a fading crescent?

Although such a poem is unmistakably by the author of "The Butterfly" or "Another Christmas", its implications (social, economic, political, religious) range farther afield. To become progressively less austere is something of an anomaly for a Canadian poet of Miss Avison's generation. She began to publish her poems during the war. On the pages of the *Canadian Forum* they appear side by side with those of P. K. Page, James Wreford and Patrick Anderson. If her poems had any social implications, they certainly remained unnoticed in that company. By now she seems to have passed her contemporaries going the other way.

But I do not wish to attribute to Miss Avison's poems any belated contemporaneity, which would be a dubious virtue at best. In any case, "Gatineau", which announces the beginning of her poetic career, is really no less a "sign" of the times than "Our Working Day May Be Menaced" or the recent "Voluptuaries and Others", one of the most brilliant and ironic of her prophecies. "Signs are taken for wonders," mutters the aged Gerontion, who ought to be one of Miss Avison's heroes. But her ultimate future never looks much like "fractured atoms". The awful truth is not the give and take of chaos, but total comprehension:

> . . . the other kind of lighting-up
> That shows the terrain comprehended, as also its containing space,
> And wipes out adjectives, and all shadows
> (or perhaps, all but shadows).

[1] The following is a list of the poems I have seen: GATINEAU, *Canadian Poetry Magazine* (December, 1939); BREAK OF DAY, I SAW ONE WALKING, *Canadian Forum* (November, 1942); OPTIONAL, *Canadian Forum* (January, 1943); NEVERNESS, OR THE ONE SHIP BEACHED ON ONE FAR DISTANT SHORE, MARIA MINOR, OLD ADAM (later retitled THE SIMPLE HORIZONTAL), THE BUTTERFLY, *The Book of Canadian Poetry*, edited by A. J. M. Smith (1943); THE PAST AND THE BREAK, THIS IS THE SEASON, *Manitoba Arts Review* (Fall, 1943); MUTABLE HEARTS, *Canadian Forum* (October, 1943); THE VALIANT VACATIONIST, *Canadian Forum* (December, 1944); GEOMETAPHYSICS, THE ICONOCLASTS, PERSPECTIVE, SONG BUT OBLIQUE TO '47, THE PARTY, *Poetry* (September, 1947); CHRISTMAS, THE ROAD, ANOTHER CHRISTMAS, *Contemporary Verse* (Fall, 1948); OMEN, THE COWARD, *Here and Now* (January, 1949);

HIATUS, *Poetry* (April, 1952); FROM A PROVINCIAL, THE APEX ANIMAL, NEW YEAR'S POEM, KNOWLEDGE OF AGE, *Kenyon Review* (Spring, 1956); THE AGNES CLEVES PAPERS, *Origin* (Winter, 1957); RIGOR VIRIS, VOLUPTUARIES AND OTHERS, *The Book of Canadian Poetry,* edited by A. J. M. Smith (1957); ALL FOOLS' EVE, STRAY DOG, NEAR ECULLY, RICH BOY'S BIRTHDAY THROUGH A WINDOW, *Poetry* (December, 1957); EXCERPT FROM WORK IN PROGRESS . . . , OUR WORKING DAY MAY BE MENACED, TENNIS, NOT THE SWEET CICELY OF GERARDES HERBALL, *Folkways Records,* Album FL 9806 (1958); ODE TO BARTOK (from the Hungarian of Gyula Illyés) *The New Reasoner* (Summer, 1958); SNOW, MEETING TOGETHER OF POLES AND LATITUDES: IN PROSPECT, *The Penguin Book of Canadian Verse,* edited by Ralph Gustafson (1958); JUNE AS CHRISTMAS, *Combustion* (November, 1958); PRELUDE, *Poetry* (March, 1959); CIVILITY A BOGEY OR TWO CENTURIES OF CANADIAN CITIES, *Queen's Quarterly* (Summer, 1959); FACTORING, *Canadian Forum* (August, 1959). The list includes only the first place of publication.

LINO-CUT BY BEN LIM

DRAMA ON THE AIR

George Robertson

THE FIRST TIME I saw a script for a radio play, it seemed like a wonderful, special language, as unique as a poem, more direct, more immediate than a story. I suppose I was at university then. A year or two later, in a class of "creative writing", we listened to the news that the CBC would pay $75 for a half-hour radio play. Here was the ideal: to be able to say what you wanted, create characters you believed in, and to get paid for it. Assured that the technicalities of the medium were not really formidable, we listened at home on Sunday nights, and wrote. I adapted a story by Elizabeth Bowen which was turned down, kindly, because it was not really the kind of story that made "good radio", and later I wrote a play of my own which was "better radio" but not, I think, much better, and got paid for it. I think I have never viewed writing with such innocence, joy, and desire as then. My mind teemed with characters (many of them my friends slightly disguised) and situations (invented) and I took pleasure in seeing the words they spoke to each other separated, double-space, on the page, like some relentless mathematical equation, fascinatingly alive, that was summing up the meaning and mystery of the world. Radio, it seemed, was *the* way, *my* way, of imposing my imagination upon the startling world around me.

Since then, radio itself has got in the way. A novel, a story, even a play for the stage, can be bent and twisted and shaped according to the passion of the artist and to the need of the subject. I think a developing writer — and a good writer is always developing — has to feel the tension and conflict of himself against the medium. With radio, and even more with

TV, it is always the medium that wins any such battle. Eventually I retired in confusion from the lists, and became instead a producer of radio plays. *Now* I believed in the radio play as an article of faith: it *must* be possible to write good plays, unique plays, for radio, otherwise I couldn't believe in my job. But I recognized that most writers, like myself, felt defeated and frustrated by the medium; regarding it quizzically, as one would an unexpected cat that bites when you stroke it: until television came along, causing writers to transfer their fascination and horror to that still more exacting (and financially rewarding) medium.

What has gone wrong? In theory, radio and television ought to be engaging the most experimental minds of our time. Could they have predicted the rise, thirty years ago, of two forms of communication that were also (let us be charitable) art-forms, vehicles for dramatic thought that would speak with the language of the time and address themselves to millions of listeners and watchers, would not the writers of that day have hailed the future as a kind of author's Utopia?

One does, in fact, still hear professions of this faith. It need not take the form of enthusiasm for reaching a large audience; it is sometimes couched in the form of a recognition of the artist's need to engage whatever materials come to hand, in short, of keeping up with the times. Thus, Henry Green in the *Paris Review* wonders now whether novels will continue to be written at all; and he shows no alarm at the prospect of their demise, for, as he says, we must all be on the lookout for new forms of communication. We have also heard people, usually producers of radio or television programmes, speak of the exciting challenge of the limitations of their medium. Both "exciting" and "challenge" are good CBC words, and they probably have their counterparts in New York and London as well.

Now it is all very well for the producer to talk of the limitations of the medium: but it is rather useless to ask writers to be "excited" by the formal and technical demands of radio and television. To recognize them, yes, but not to revere them; one should encourage the writer, if possible, to destroy them. The best radio is always on the borderline of not being "good radio". But there is a sort of morality espoused by producers and executives in the broadcasting arts, a belief that writers have for too long been slopping around in the loose and permissive garments of the novel, the short story, the play, or verse; that they are being somehow reaction-

ary in not engaging themselves with the new media. In fact it is radio and television that are, by their nature, reactionary. Nothing wrong with that: they fill a need, and that is to emit signals night after night to fill the darkness with comfort, forgetfulness, reiteration of the accepted mores of the Establishment, and — lest it seem as if I were condemning them absolutely and out of hand — to entertain, and at times (unpredictable) to stimulate. Perhaps the void they fill was not there before they came: but that is another and far graver subject. The fact is, they are with us, and it is better to have good radio than bad radio. So producers, as I did, will continue to propagandize for their art, and continue to attempt to seduce writers from more conventional pursuits. Writers have never been more in demand, more respectable, better rewarded. Why is it then that among the most successful of those who have elected to write for radio and television, the feeling persists that they are not really *writing* at all?

An immediate answer is that neither radio nor television give to the writer that feeling, so necessary and terrible to his ego, that he is wrestling alone with his subject; that if the victory is his, it is his alone. For some writers, I think this is the highest "excitement". Whereas the radio or television writer, however lonely he may be at the moment of pitting himself against the blank paper at the beginning of a script, knows that in time the battlefield will soon swarm with friends; all of them tilting, it will seem, in different directions. When his work is done, he can really only wait or watch fearfully while the *important* people (it must seem at this stage), the director, the actors, the technicians, transform his cold pages into a living entity spewed out into the general air.

The broadcasting arts, like the cinema, are not really writer's media at all. The work of shaping and refining, in which lies so much of the pleasure and creative satisfaction, falls finally to the director. It is he who must have almost a plastic apprehension of his craft, without which any good script or acting performance can be made ludicrous. Writers who have had experience of radio and television instinctively recognize this: they either treat their writing as the result of a good day's work (if it sells) and are only interested in the result insofar as it reflects on their prestige, and their ability to sell the next script — or else, in the case of a few enlightened people who have not yet lost interest in writing as a universal pursuit, and are therefore still engaged with novels or verse or

whatever, they treat broadcasting as an occasional occupation: they are the knowledgeable amateurs. I assume a measure of skill in either case. But I would rather have radio plays by this sort of "amateur" than the other sort of "professional", and would rather be that sort of writer myself.

But I believe that only a very cunning person can be that sort of writer, for radio and television have produced their own mystique, and exact, as well as a knowledge of the techniques involved, a sympathy for the few kinds of dramatic statement that can be made. It is the understanding of this small but fertile landscape, seen through the jungle of electronics, and not the tidy do's and don'ts of the writers' handbooks, that will continue to keep drama on the air alive. It is ironic that so few of the people producing both radio and television appear to understand the difference. For instance, much is made of radio's ability to be everywhere and anywhere, to vault oceans in a second, and to supply the perfect, because imaginary, backdrop for every setting. Granted that this freedom from the visible and tangible has its certain uses; but it is so often either too much used, or not at all. The flexibility of radio must not be used as an excuse for failing to write scenes that are really *related,* that follow inevitably and yet (for such is the paradox of good dramatic writing) unpredictably. Too often the transparency of radio is made simply to cover a failure of the writer's imagination. How do I get out of here? I know, FADE OUT. FADE IN, ONE DAY LATER. Or else this transparency, which in the degree of extravagance with time and space which it permits has positively poetic qualities, is hardly used at all. One scene follows another, inevitably perhaps, but all too predictably, and one feels that radio somehow might have been used to juxtapose and create tension between situations that are instead left hanging side by side, like beads on a string.

But among the writers who place too great a strain on the flexibility of radio there are those who feel it should be used in the service of "action", constant movement and event, interspersed with necessary plotting dialogue; and they ignore what is really to me radio's chief asset, its ability to convey and conduct a line of argument. Words speak to us directly, free of distractions; the stronger if they clothe an idea, embody a humour. Yet how often words are made to act like lumbering trucks, dumping a thought now and then at our feet, a thought which could be seen coming minutes away. How seldom are words alive of themselves;

how seldom do they have fire and substance; and how, when we rarely hear them, do they carry us on, exultant, in a new wonder at the power of radio. But this requires of a writer, intelligence; or better a power of thought married to style. We have to adapt Shakespeare, the Jacobeans, and a few others, to hear that.

Similarly in television, the first lesson we are taught is the need to "be visual". Yet a conversation of moment between two people on television is often far more *visually* interesting than many purely visual actions, including, perhaps, a fistfight. I admit this is an extreme opinion, and obviously not always true. But it is necessary to state it because for a long time anything as static as a conversation had to be decked out with movement: if not the foreground, then the background was busy. In this case, producers were asking the eye to rob the mind, not to serve it. In truth, the "visual" quality of television is hardly more important than another which television shares with radio: its intensity, the degree to which it forces itself, in conditions more or less private, on our attention, and the degree to which it can then select detail, however minute, for our inspection. Television is, or ought to be, superb at conveying certain kinds of intellectual and emotional stress: again, it is the substance of what is happening between people at their most intimate and revealing level which is of paramount importance, and it is this that television, well-used, can so triumphantly achieve. Argument (and by argument I mean the movement of ideas and feelings, not just of words) is both limited and heightened by being seen. It is limited by being restricted to corporeal and reasonably real beings, and thus some forms of drama are better served on radio. Socrates could well enough be photographed in his cell, but I would prefer not to see him fleshed except in my imagination; there are certain identities that we degrade by making corporeal, and radio offers a nice compromise: the voice but not the body. The production of *Oedipus Rex* by the Stratford Players, both on stage and on television, in masks, was an attempt to solve the problem, and in this respect at least, I think successful. A mask, like the voice alone, imposes a stylization on the personality behind it, one which we recognize to be valid if the intellectual content of the drama is sufficiently pure and intense.

But argument is also heightened in television, in a way which no other medium can command except the film (with its intensity and selective-

ness) and then in a more calculated way, and comes from the infinitely varied possibilities of the human face and body, creatively used. The best of scripts can go so far, and then must stop at the wild and uncertain territory of the actor's and director's interpretation. If they are in sympathy with the play (assuming it is a good play) they can only add to it. The actor makes the word more-than-alive. This is television's famous sense of immediacy, and not to be scorned.

Does this emphasis on the primacy of the word seem to be a radio producer's view of television? Perhaps. But surely both radio and television plays are, must be, before everything else, drama. And drama is impossible without both communication and tension between human beings, or between human beings and ideas. And does not one person abstract ideas from another: ideas to hate, admire, love, or envy? A fight between cowboys — even cowboys — is always more than an instinctive aversion to each other's person: each has abstracted from the other an idea, or group of ideas, to hate, or fear; and these ideas, whether spoken or not, are given words. A play, however visually evocative and revealing, cannot be built without this foundation of meaning.

What has happened is that many writers are content to make the same tired patterns in the sand; radio and television drama has become an imitation of an imitation of an imitation of life — you can take it to any power you like. And we are back to one of the functions of the broadcast arts, to lull us to sleep with the old nursery rhymes. If drama is to be more than this, it will come not from writers who are more and more skilled in the intricacies of production methods (which can only teach the writer to fear real experiment, not to attempt it) but from writers who have an original view of the world and pursue the consequences of that view to the top and bottom of the souls of their characters. With this clearly seen, there is argument enough for any play, of any kind. Of skill, it takes only an intuitive understanding of the self-evident features of the media themselves: for radio, its transparency, its ability to superimpose word and music and sound, its freedom from space and time, and its directness of utterance; for television, its lack of magnitude but its intensity, its selectivity of detail, its power to render nuance, to juxtapose; and first of all, to show in large completeness the human face. If this much is perceived, most of the rest follows. There remains the dramatic instinct, the ability to quicken the experience of life into form and shape, without

which even an interest in radio and television drama is a waste of time. This is all.

And yet the monumental appetites of the broadcast arts can be sated only by a steady diet of the mediocre; the mediocre served up with great professional skill. Small wonder that writers are inhibited from venturing into art-forms so conscious of their own complexity. More than cunning, a sort of insane disregard for logic will keep a few people still trying to write well for radio and television. We can only hope that such Quixotry will some day bear fruit.

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review articles

STORIES BY CALLAGHAN

Robert Weaver

MORLEY CALLAGHAN. *Morley Callaghan's Stories.* Macmillan. $4.95.

MORLEY CALLAGHAN is the most important novelist and short story writer in English Canada, and he is the only prose writer of an older generation who might have much influence on the young writers of today. Yet his reputation in his own country has been a curiously fugitive one, and although his stories have been published in all sorts of anthologies and most of the influential magazines of our time, the bulk of them seem now to be surprisingly little known. Two early collections of the stories, *A Native Argosy* and *Now That April's Here*, have been out of print for many years, and recent essays about Callaghan's work by Canadian critics—Malcolm Ross, Hugo McPherson—have dealt with the novels, which lend themselves more readily than the stories to an intellectual framework.

Callaghan's stories *are* hard to write about: their odd, wistful, lyric quality keeps escaping definition; they require from the reader a kind of quiet, unhurried sympathy that most of us are too impatient to give. And I want to write an appreciation of them—a difficult thing for any critic to do. But the occasion for some kind of appreciation is certainly here in this new collection, *Morley Callaghan's Stories.* It's a fine, impressive book, and its publisher ought to share some of the credit for being willing to risk a big and nearly comprehensive collection when volumes of short stories are notoriously difficult to sell in hard covers.

One test of a writer is whether he has the ability to create a complete fictional world, and in the fifty-odd stories in this book Morley Callaghan shows us a whole world. It isn't a wide, wide world. It's the narrow, stifling world of a few small towns in Southern Ontario and one section of Toronto—the old, downtown area of the city spreading a couple of miles east and west of Yonge Street and ending a few blocks south of St. Clair Avenue. One of the incidental virtues of *Morley Callaghan's Stories* is that it captures forever the spirit of much of this crowded and lonely heart of the city before the wreckers moved in.

The people who live in Callaghan's part of the city inhabit some shadowy boundary line between social classes: they are not solidly middle class but they do

not consciously belong to the working class. I suppose that a sociologist might define them pretty clearly, but I once described them as marginal people, and I still can't discover a better way of identifying them. They are the students, the landladies, the waitresses, the young clerks and their wives, the slightly failed and faded older couples, who belong to the rooming houses and furnished flats of the aging residential streets downtown. (The people in the stories about the small towns aren't much different in status and expectations.) In many of the stories we meet the old, tired priests and the eager, young priests of the city parishes. There are no really wealthy people in this world, and Callaghan has a wry comment about that in a brief introductory note he has written for the book. On summer nights Callaghan's people are likely to be out wandering through the streets, and in the cold weather they hurry to the restaurants and bars and other amusements of a city that has always had its own, very strong texture but (until lately) no sharp and decisive character. They are city people, yet they are uneasy, alien, not really settled in to the city; you sense that the city frightens them, that they feel vulnerable — and they are indeed vulnerable.

For one characteristic of Callaghan's world is that it stifles or wears away the people who inhabit it. The atmosphere of his stories often reminds me of the atmosphere of the Italian neo-realistic movies (especially De Sica); it isn't surprising that many of the stories have been translated and published in Italy since the war. Most of Callaghan's people are caught, sooner or later, in one of those small tragedies that are so appalling simply because they are never over. Or they attempt a tiny rebellion against the restrictions of life. But even the rebellions are subdued and fumbled a little from the beginning. Yet I don't want to give the impression that there is nothing but tragedy and sorrow in this world, and Callaghan does not subscribe to that Catholic heresy that gives the work of Mauriac and Graham Greene its joyless and obsessive quality. There is a great deal of sweetness and innocence and love, an eager, yearning, uncertain reaching out for life, in all these stories. Again I am reminded of De Sica.

The first story in the book is called "All the Years of Her Life". It has been given the place of honour, and it establishes at once one of Callaghan's favourite themes. A boy, Alfred Higgins, has been working in a drugstore, and one night the owner stops him with the evidence on his person of the petty thievery that has been going on ever since he began to work there. The owner calls the boy's mother, and when she arrives at the store, Mrs. Higgins, with her quiet pleading and painful composure, persuades the owner not to call the police. Alfred is fired, and the mother and son go home together. Alfred swears that it will never happen again, but it has happened many times before, and it will happen so many times in the future. There is nothing for Mrs. Higgins to do when they arrive home but to drink a cup of hot tea and try to compose herself to face all the years of her life.

In the story called "A Wedding-Dress" there is rebellion: a tiny, only half-conscious rebellion of the spirit against drabness and restriction. Miss Lena Schwartz lives in a boarding house on Wellesley Street in Toronto (almost the exact centre of the area of the city I described earlier as Callaghan's special preserve).

She has been waiting for fifteen years to marry Sam Hilton; now she was "thirty-two, her hair was straight, her nose turned up a little and she was thin". But at last she is going to be married, and she quits her job to spend the day shopping before going to Windsor for the wedding. Her spirit, so meek and drab, has come alive on this day, but she hasn't much money, and the dresses she can afford to buy dampen her fine feeling. She looks at some French dresses; they are beautiful and far too expensive, and she has a dream of men watching her on the street as she walks with Sam in one of these fine dresses. And in her dream, almost unaware, she slips a dress from its hanger and into the wide sleeve of her coat.

The next morning Lena Schwartz is in court, in the dress which does not fit her thin figure, charged with shoplifting. Sam has come from Windsor, and there are the lawyers and the magistrate, who find Miss Schwartz pitiful and a little amusing. Sam agrees to pay for the dress, and she is released to leave the city and be married. And where is the dream of the sly glances of men as she goes walking in her fine, French dress?

There are more dramatic stories such as the well-known "Two Fishermen" about the hangman come to do his job in a small Ontario town. But most of the fifty stories in this book quietly explore some common happening in the life of the city or one of the Ontario towns. A young priest tries unsuccessfully to bring solace to an unhappy, hysterical and important woman member of the parish ("The Young Priest"). A father and son discover themselves through a lost baseball cap ("A Cap for Steve"). Two Eng-

lish boys trace out their little tragedy as misfits on a Toronto newspaper ("Last Spring They Came Over"). A whole way of life in an Ontario town comes painfully alive in "Ancient Lineage". The Depression wears away at young couples with too little money and older men insecure in their jobs. Young people make a try at love, and there are other small rebellions like that of Miss Lena Schwartz that somehow just flicker out.

These stories are North American, but they don't connect Callaghan with Ernest Hemingway as many people would like to do. They are quieter, more human, and less optimistic than most American fiction. If Callaghan's stories are good evidence (and I think they are), we Canadians are far less hopeful than Americans about altering circumstances. There is a sweetness and an eagerness for life (and a failure to make connection) in much of Callaghan's work that has a good deal in common with the stories of Sherwood Anderson. But there is an acceptance of life that seems more European than North American, and that may help to account for the interest in Europe in Callaghan's work in recent years. This book has an odd and appealing quality of seeming at once to come from another time and to be perfectly contemporary. It is the best we have in the tough *genre* of the short story, and it is very good indeed.

LAZY NOVELS

Margaret Stobie

NAN SHIPLEY. *The Scarlet Lily.* Ryerson. $4.50.
JEANN BEATTIE. *Behold the Hour.* Ryerson. $4.50.
JOHN CORNISH. *Olga.* Macmillan. $3.50.

GOOD THINGS are stirring for Canadian writers these days, what with four new literary journals under way, two in British Columbia, one in Manitoba, one in Quebec; the Canada Council giving awards to novelists and poets for work in progress; a Canadian Book Club starting in Toronto; two new programs of short stories on CBC; publishers' prizes, magazine prizes — even a sorority's prize — for novels; local and provincial competitions for shorter works; and publishing possibilities in various reviews and quarterlies or even, more modestly, in newspapers and trade journals.

I have always felt that we could not expect a flowering of Canadian writing until we had an atmosphere that encouraged it. The atmosphere seems to be developing. And not only the atmosphere. Over the past year, we had, not just a single commendable work, but several good novels — by Colin McDougall, Hugh MacLellan, Ronald Hambleton, Sheila Watson — novels of great diversity, it is true, but all of them showing creative vitality. Even the less ambitious books by Ralph Allen and by C. T. Ritchie had engaging qualities of simplicity or clarity or liveliness or good story-telling. There was, of course, the

usual number of other novels that had none of these qualities, but still, while it was not a flowering, perhaps, the year did seem to show the swelling of a bud.

With such excitement and anticipation in the air, I looked forward to the parcel of books for review. It contained three pieces of Canadian fiction which had all been published. One of them had won a prize. Those two facts say much for the zeal of Canadian publishers in presenting work written in this country, and suggest that there are more money awards available than there are good writers.

There is another side to this, of course. Books like these three pay a penalty for being Canadian. By that I mean that, while we pick only the best of the writing of other countries for serious attention, we are desperately earnest in our care to examine everything that comes out of Canadian publishing houses. In that sense, we are unfair to the third-rate, which exists anywhere, but which normally would be greeted by a brief notice in the daily papers and then allowed to disappear quietly.

But in addition to our usual conscientiousness, there is the problem of the editors of the increasing number of journals and reviews. If an editor wants to run a fiction review in each issue, what is he to do? Even the good work of the past year would not be enough to fill a regular column. The result is that we turn a critical spotlight on writers who probably do not want it, and who certainly do not deserve it.

BUT NOW, what are the books? One is a harmless piece of historical fiction which ranges from the foothills to Ottawa, touches on the Indian Treaties, the Riel Rebellion, the founding of the Mounties, Sir John A. Macdonald, and the Canadian Pacific scandal, and by means of a highly improbable love story stitches together bits of research about Indian customs and fashionable ladies' attire.

The quality of the writing can be seen in the opening paragraph:

> As Ellen scraped the mud from her silver-buckled shoes she overheard a male voice inquire curiously of another passenger, "Who is that girl in the green cloak with hair like fire spilling out of her bonnet?"

Here is lesson one in Writing Popular Fiction: catch the reader's attention by colour (silver, green, red); establish time (buckled shoes, cloak, bonnet — time past); and create a bit of mystery (who is she? where are they? why is she there?). Unfortunately, the one line of dialogue shows that the writer didn't get as far as lesson two.

The others are better than that, and they have the merit of at least starting with an idea. One of them started out to be an exposé of the Canadian TV-advertising world — a fruitful field for an exposé — and the opening pages are promising. But Love enters in no time at all, and from then on everything goes to pieces. There is a crazy mixed-up boy who is talent and a crazy mixed-up girl who is advertising. But that isn't all. The man is an alcoholic. By this time we have a concoction of *What Makes Sammy Run?* and *The Lost Week-End*. But that isn't all. The girl has a career, and so of course outside she's cold, but inside she's shy and lonely. (She belongs with the poor rich man and the prostitute with the heart of gold.) Anyway, what this

girl really wants is someone strong, someone to protect her, someone to cling to, and finally (the alcoholic having committed suicide) she finds HIM — guess where? In a CBC producer she had thought she hated, but of course that deep down feeling she had about him all along was really love, only she didn't know it. The book is as trite as that — or at least the main character is.

In spite of this nonsense, however, every once in a while there is a glimmer of something better. There is one outstanding scene in the TV studio before the first show, which catches the confusion, the excitement, and the tension superbly. The other glimpses are mainly of what the book might have been. It might have been a competent study of the TV advertising world. It might have been, if it hadn't been cluttered up, a study in artistic frustration. It might have been a novel of strange ironies, for though several characters profess ideals of various kinds, when the show-down comes it is only the sceptic, who never believed in any of it, who acts by the principles which the others profess and walks out. The book might have been any number of interesting things. What it is, is hash served with corn syrup.

THE THIRD BOOK is possibly the best of the three. At any rate, it depends less on clichés. This time, the girl pursues the boy with infinite patience and gets him. But while that is the main action of the book, the main idea is something else.

It is a lively new perspective on the riotous mixture of peoples in this country — in this case, in the interior of British Columbia. The nature of the perspective is suggested through references to Trollope's *Barchester Towers* and Dostoievski's *The Idiot*. It is exemplified in the ludicrous conjunction of seedy English gentility and brooding Russian peasantry set down together in a lush orchard valley with the background lit up by occasional explosions and fires contributed by the Sons of Freedom. The absurd mélange, and the prospect of the boy (English) and the girl (Russian) studying each other with some apprehension over the pages of Dostoievski and Trollope respectively, have wonderfully funny possibilities. The approach certainly is a great relief from our usual solemn treatment of racial backgrounds.

With such an excellent idea contained in it, the book as it stands is the more disappointing. The manuscript should have been turned back to the author with stern instructions to write the novel that is here.

The very elementary nature of what is wrong with the writing can be seen in this description of the girl and her grandmother getting into a car (the italics are mine):

> Olga pushed her grandmother ahead, scurried in herself and slammed the door. *Then she wriggled adroitly across to the front seat beside Madge.*

What sort of car is this? The same complete lack of visual imagination is in comments about the town. At one point it seems to be the usual one-street village, but a few pages later it seems to be a considerable centre where shoppers take time "to look at hats at the modiste's". A book of this sort needs sharp clarity, but here the reader gets only blurred confusion. The same thing is true of the characters. For instance, the first thing

that we learn about the sister of the English boy is that she has gone to Girton. But it soon turns out that this is not the famous English college, but some sort of girls' school. She talks like a thirteen-year-old, but presently we learn that she is the same age as the heroine. Her school-girl prattle does not suggest Lesbianism, but that is what the author is trying to convey. In short, what is wrong with this book is sheer laziness.

That perhaps is the one quality that all of these books have in common — laziness; laziness of thinking, laziness of imagination, laziness of craftsmanship. No development in Canadian writing or any other kind of writing will come out of that.

A LINGUISTIC THEORY OF CRITICISM

R. J. Baker

J.-P. VINAY and J. DARBELNET, *Stylistique comparée du français et de l'anglais,* Paris, Didier, (Montréal, Beauchemin), 1958.

As CANADIAN literary criticism develops, we hope to see more comparative study of our two main literatures. A book which systematically compares the stylistics of French and English should obviously be noted in this journal, even though detailed reviews belong elsewhere.

Style — of an author, genre, dialect, language — is that which is characteristic, that which differentiates the work under consideration from other works. Whereas linguistics deals with what is typical, stylistics deals with what is individual. But the two studies are closely related. The individual can be recognized only if the typical is known. Stylistic description, in other words, must begin where linguistic description ends. It must be built on a foundation of linguistic description. A theory of stylistics necessarily implies a theory of language.

In *Stylistique comparée du français et de l'anglais,* the first volume of *La bibliothèque de stylistique comparée,* J.-P. Vinay and J. Darbelnet give us a book of far more interest than their sub-title, *Méthode de traduction,* indicates. They begin with a brief description of the main features of Ferdinand de Saussure's theory of language. They accept his dichotomies of *langue* and *parole,*[1] *signifié* and *signifiant, signification* and *valeur,* and they develop suitable and parallel dichotomies for the study of translation. Of *servitude* and *option,* they say:

[1] In spite of the attempts of such writers as Sir Alan Gardiner to establish standard translations of these technical terms, I think that it is premature to assume that *language* and *speech,* for example, will be understood in their Saussurian senses. Consequently I have left the key terms untranslated. An unhappy procedure, perhaps, when dealing with such an excellent account of translation, but a safe one.

> Dans la mesure où la langue nous est donnée, elle est un ensemble de *servitudes* auxquelles nous sommes contraints de nous soumettre. Par example, le genre des mots, la conjugaison des verbes, l'accord des mots entre eux. Dans ces limites il est possible de choisir entre les ressources existantes, et c'est cette liberté qui crée la parole. C'est un fait de langue que l'existence de l'imparfait du subjonctif. Ce n'est plus aujourd'hui une servitude et son emploi, devenu facultatif, représente donc une *option*. (p. 31).

Building on de Saussure's linguistics and Bally and Malblanc's stylistics, they explore categories of comparative stylistics based on procedures of translation.

It is by looking from the outside, as it were, from the point of view of the translator, that one discovers particular features of one's own language. The implication is that translation can be a form of literary criticism, or at least the basis of a kind of criticism.

With a wealth of examples, they systematize the differences between English and French vocabulary *(le lexique)*, order *(l'agencement)* and what they call *le message*, "l'ensemble des significations de l'énoncé, reposant essentiellement sur une realité extra-linguistique, la situation." That their summary of typical examples, given opposite, is the barest skeleton of the system is apparent from the fact that they spend over two hundred pages putting flesh on it. And,

Tableau Général des Procédés de Traduction

	LEXIQUE	AGENCEMENT	MESSAGE
1 Emprunt	F. Bulldozer A. Fuselage	F. Science-fiction A. (Pie) à la mode	F. Five o'Clock Tea A. Bon voyage
2 Calque	F. Economiquement faible A. Normal School	F. Lutétia Palace A. Governor General	F. Compliments de la Saison A. Take it or leave it
3 Traduction littérale	F. ink A. encre	F. L'encre est sur la table A. The ink is on the table	F. Quelle heure est-il? A. What time is it?
4 Transposition	F. Expéditeur A. From:	F. Depuis la revalorisation du bois A. As timber becomes more valuable	F. Défense de fumer A. No smoking
5 Modulation	F. Peu profond A. Shallow	F. Donnez un peu de votre sang A. Give a pint of your blood	F. Complet A. No Vacancies
6 Equivalence	F. (Milit.) La soupe A. Br. (Milit.) Tea	F. Comme un chien dans un jeu de quilles A. Like a bull in a china shop	F. Château de Cartes A. Hollow Triumph
7 Adaptation	F. Tour de France A. Br. cricket A. U.S. baseball	F. En un clin d'oeil A. Before you could say Jack Robinson	F. Bon appétit! A. U.S. Hi!

Ordre de Difficulté Croissante ↓

if I dare continue the metaphor, there is no fat.

Since the book is primarily intended for students of language, translators, and linguists, of what use is it to literary critics, as critics? I suggest two things, at least, one particular and one general. If the authors are right (and they cite numerous examples to prove their case) that English is inherently better at depicting the concrete and the particular whereas French is better at depicting the abstract and the general, the critic of English literature has a linguistic justification for certain romantic theories of poetic diction as against those, say, of the English neo-classicists.

Secondly, many critics may find that the dualistic, somewhat metaphysical linguistic system of the Saussurian school will provide them with a congenial general theory of language. When the study of literature meant the detailed study of at least one foreign literature, criticism and linguistics went hand in hand. Since English criticism has become more and more monolingual and self-contained, it has too often been divorced from linguistic study. Some of the meetings of the Association of Canadian University Teachers of English in Saskatoon this year showed that some of the younger critics lack any knowledge of either contemporary or traditional language studies. Sounds and spellings, speech and writing, *langue* and *parole* are persistently confused, and as Northrop Frye has pointed out, many critics persist in an impossibly atomistic treatment of meaning, word by word.

Linguists in North America, on the other hand, have too often pursued a rigidly behavioristic study of language that is as repugnant to critics as it is successful in constructing scripts and grammars. Unless we want to see the study of literature permanently separated from the study of language, with critics in departments of English and linguists in departments of anthropology, we must work towards some common theory of language that both studies can use. It is easy to overwork the view that Canada is the natural mediator between the U.S.A. and Europe, but it is nevertheless true that we are fortunate to have in Quebec the only substantial group of linguists on this continent who are working within the Saussurian tradition.

books in review

TWO ANCIENTS AMONG THE MODERNS

GEORGE WALTON. *The Wayward Queen.* Contact Press, 28 Mayfield Avenue, Toronto. $1.50.

FRED COGSWELL. *Descent From Eden.* Ryerson Press. $2.50.

THE CATEGORY "minor poet" should not really exist in criticism, though perhaps that would make it more difficult to evaluate poets like Fred Cogswell and George Walton. Light verse exists, and versifiers function as entertainers — advertisers, joke artists on TV, and writers of Song Hit "lyrics" — but these have very little to do with literature. Austin Dobson is a limited poet, i.e. a bad poet, not a special category of poet who excels in his own right. In other words, there are *the* critical criteria, and no writer can get under the ropes by bypassing the usual tests. No man — certainly no poet — has a right to refrain from being fully human.

George Walton's *The Wayward Queen* contains much of that kind of versified wit that saves one from betraying either emotion or suffering, and acts as an armour of immunity for the adult intelligence. Perhaps poetry demands a certain callowness and innocence to the end — vide Yeats in old age, a foolish man — or perhaps we have not yet learned in civilized life how to be fully adult yet passionate, serious, vulnerable, aggressive, and capable of love.

Well, obviously Dr. Walton is not one of our adolescent poets, and he is somewhat stiff in the joints; but he retains a freedom of mind and an unconventionality that make him the poet he is. Some of the poems go back to earlier times, as far back as 1926. The test at any rate is how far this release reaches into experience on the occasion when it does become poetry.

The piece beginning "Maidens are timorous, / shy of experiment, / but with experience / appetent, ardent . . ." proceeds with a deftness that begs for the title "good minor poetry"; but I am willing to praise it as just good poetry, for its happy craftsmanship—the rhythmic shift to marked trochees in the final verse — and also for the way it makes the angels of sexual insight, interest, refinement, wisdom, all dance together on the point of a needle.

There are several poems here of equal merit. And there is the much-quoted detail etched in acid, of the war hero who came back "to walk a dog a dirty night / and guard it from the muddy ditch / and lead it home again and see / it cuddled by a scolding bitch." Many of the others are expendable, occasional poems, notes to old friends, echo rhymes in an outworn fashion. We might exempt the poems of recollection and nostalgia — e.g. "Varley's Fairley"—which have a universal appeal as variants of an ancient theme (*"Ubi sunt", "Où sont les neiges",* etc.). Dr. Walton's book, like L. A. Mackay's some years back, is a garnering of poetry and verse from three decades, a brief review of an entire period, and a bid in the light of prolific poetry publishing in Canada

since 1940 to refurbish and renew the claim of some written before and after this date by older hands. The voice of seasoned experience, especially when it is so boyish in its charm, is always welcome at the banquet table of the poets.

Fred Cogswell's book is at once more ambitious and less natural. His rather embarrassing statement printed on the jacket makes this clear: "My experience with reviewers in the past has convinced me that none of them has caught the full implications contained in the poems of mine they have reviewed." Hardly the way to file such a complaint! Also, Mr. Cogswell should know, as an editor of *Fiddlehead,* that reviewers are a fairly conscientious lot. There's no point for them in distorting or depreciating — it's hard enough to tell the truth as one sees it: a good book will always find its champions. However, he asks for closer scrutiny, and he should get it.

The "full implications" of his poems have to do with the romantic and religious ideas implicit in them: the fall of man from primal innocence, his present immersion in evil, the conflict between innocent ideals and shocking facts, the occasional vision of lost purity, the resurrection or travail through suffering and Christian faith. I would not dismiss any of this as insignificant or trivial; it is the grand old familiar story, but there is little in Mr. Cogswell's method to make it new.

> Strange-scented birds and song flowers grow
> In the garden where I cannot go . . .

was echoed at least more crisply by A. J. M. Smith in his

> . . . wild and innocent wildwood
> Of our lost innocence, our ghostly childhood.

The title poem "Descent From Eden", equating innocence with the ape-stage of man's history and his fallen state of cruelty and blood-lust with reversion to "cold, ancestral seas", restates a theme that Pratt has already flattened to a fine plate on his terrific anvil. Even in Canada we have heard all this before!

Other poems are even older and more obvious echoes in form and matter: ballad poems of the nineties period, such as Duncan Campbell Scott might have written; character poems in a prosy, bitter, disillusioned-romantic manner, such as E. A. Robinson did write; lyrics in the soporific quatrain form, where every nuance of rhythm and rhyme is "familiar as an old mistake, and futile as regret". Only in Fredericton perhaps, lovingly attached to Carman, Roberts and Sherman, could such poetry have been written. Mr. Cogswell obviously believes that no poetic manner or technique ever goes out of date; the tragic result of this conviction appears on every page of his book.

The difference between Cogswell and Walton in this respect is that the latter quite naturally writes out of an older way of feeling in poetry, a tradition to which he belongs, and has enough humour to drive his old Ford car with flair on the new modern highway; Cogswell, however, pretends to be racing the latest 8-cylinder fins with puritanical faith in the superiority of old models.

To be fair to him, the last section of the book, titled "Lyrics", contains some poems in a different vein, free of rocking chair rhythms and also of sober-faced romantic irony. The idea inherent in "The Top of Keirstead Mountain" stands obviously in contradiction to the business of Faith, the Fall, and the Cross:

> What will it matter
> Days when the brooding sun clutches hereafter
> Others under the shell of an eyeless sky?

This is clearly a later and more austere way of thinking; the poetry somehow gains in force and vitality. In the same vein, the best poem in the book is a very short one, "Snake Shadow", eleven lines that condense momentary tension, vision and desire, in a single "instant of time" — a true imagist success. Pound was right: "It is better to write one Image in a lifetime than to produce voluminous works."

LOUIS DUDEK

NOVEL AS MYTH

CHARLES BRUCE. *The Township of Time, A Chronicle.* Macmillan. $3.75.

The Township of Time is a tantalizing book. Perhaps because the overall intention of its author, Charles Bruce, is working at cross purposes with his skills as a creative artist, the reader repeatedly finds that a promised feast has been snatched away before it can be more than tasted.

This book is not a novel, though it is more, and less, than a collection of short stories. The author terms it a chronicle, but its tone and emphasis are those of fiction rather than history. It is, perhaps, a mythology, an imaginative rendering of the half-remembered legends of a particular tribe inhabiting a particular region.

The region is the "Channel Shore" of Nova Scotia, the tribe the descendents

of the first three settlers, John Cameron, Richard McKee, and Colin Forrester. Their marriages and home-makings introduce a casually chronological series of tales extending in time from 1786 to 1950. In each, a member of one or another of the three families passes through a moment of insight or of decision. But Mr. Bruce is not concerned solely with the individual and regional implications of his material. His "township" is a microcosm. His plots focus upon crises which are significant for individuals but are mere eddies in the eternal flux of time. His characters reveal themselves almost exclusively in terms of their attitudes to time—to what is past, or passing, or to come.

This might have been a more satisfying book had its characters been less insistently presented as a succession of ships passing downstream in the tide of Heraclitus' ever-changing river. Where nothing is fixed there can be no completeness, and, for the reader, no point of rest or satisfactory resolution. He responds to the author's skillful creation of setting, his subtle evocation of mood, his effective simplicity of style. He identifies readily with his characters, numerous and varied though they are. But at the close of each episode he is left hanging over the cliff's edge with no hope of rescue. Was there a scandal because Naomi Neill was snowbound at the schoolhouse with Mr. Harvey? Did Mel Sommers succeed in dragging Cam Sinclair across the ice to safety? And why did Saul go off in that mysterious way, never to return? If he wants any more he must sing it himself. That is the way of myths. They are ". . . somewhere in memory, forgotten or only casually brushed in thought for seventy years", like the tale referred to, but never told, by Young Richard McKee. But as fiction none of the stories is fully realized.

The dialectic of time shapes the structure of the book also, giving it a dying fall. The pioneers are absorbed in the present, in the daily struggle to ensure that there shall be a future. The next two generations look forward into the promise of an expanding community, of a province growing steadily in wealth and culture, of a world dedicated to "progress". But after 1870 a twilight of the gods sets in on the channel shore. Its children move out into the greener pastures of New England or the West, from which only the old and defeated return. For the others, the township is the sea-mark to which they look back with a nostalgic longing.

It is a pity that the merits of *The Township of Time* should be negated by its failure to reconcile conflicting though praiseworthy ambitions. Canadian literature needs a mythology. It needs writing which deals with universal themes while remaining distinctively Canadian. But this book tries too hard to do too much with too many stories, with the result that God's plenty is transmuted into the Devil's own frustration.

MARION B. SMITH

NEW STORIES

Klanak Islands: a collection of short stories. Klanak Press. $2.50.

KLANAK ISLANDS is the second publication of the Klanak Press, a new venture promoted by Vancouver lawyer, William McConnell, and specialising in fine typography. The technical production—design, type and original illustrations by local artists — is excellent; the stories, achieving near-professional competence in technique, fail in intellectual and emotional impact.

A certain freshness of approach, a meaningful distortion manifested in the oblique theme or the quickened word, might be expected from such an experimental offering. The symbolism employed, the characters displayed, and the themes chosen are, however, the already accepted ones, recognisable and readily classified. Here is the jazz musician endowed with the improbable, magical qualities of the piper of mediaeval Hamelin town; the modern "wandering Jew", past persecution and past hope; the adolescents with their self-conscious revolt and retreat into a world more fearful, more ritualistic and formalistic than the adult one they flee; and the precocious children — observers, philosophers and moralists — acceptable as children only by a convention of fiction. The themes are the familiar problems of personal relationships complicated by the discordance of modern life, and both themes and characters are expressed in the current idiom.

This is not to suggest that these stories are entirely trite. They are not, but they are confined within narrow limits of execution. The experimental is lacking and, consequently, the invigorating and enlivening. When the unexpected is attempted as in the sudden, murderous denouement in *The Sound of a Horn,* it appears more melodrama than the natural outcome and resolution of the situation.

But despite its questionable ending, this story by Robert Harlow is one of the most successful of the collection in its creation of the twilight state of the prostitute and sexual deviate, the jazz player and the beatnik. The other story that achieves the same impact of atmosphere but with greater economy of incident and a resultant tightening of emotion is Henry Kreisel's *Homecoming.* The dispossessed Jew returns to the parallel destruction of physical home and spiritual hope. Among the ruins of one lies sorrow, in the ruins of the other lies tragedy. It is part of Kreisel's competence that he brings this inescapable distinction to a subtle conclusion.

JOAN SELBY

A HOUSE FOR CRITICISM

INGLIS F. BELL and DONALD BAIRD. *The English Novel, 1578-1956. A Checklist of Twentieth Century Criticisms.* Alan Swallow. $3.00.

THE ACCELERATION of critical interest in fiction during the last ten years is recognized in this checklist of criticism on the English novel, edited by two Canadians, published in the United States. In the face of such an international venture, the question naturally arises who is supposed to buy such a book. Scholars, to begin with the most likely group, should be warned that they will not find here a

substitute for the various yearly periodical bibliographies or for the thorough bibliographies in book form which already exist for many important novelists. In 141 pages, with an average of eleven citations to the page, the book has fewer than 1,700 entries.

The publisher seems to think it will attract today's common reader. On the contrary, it seems to me, it will appeal to today's uncommon reader, the university student taking English courses. And it will also prove useful to that instigator of uncommon reading, the young English instructor, who is usually happy to find a quick and easy guide to the chief articles and books on the novel he has to teach next week. Such is *The English Novel,* 1578-1956, and as such it does not quite fulfill the publisher's claim to give us "the first important guide to the critical writing of our time" on the novel. Nor does the book aid "the effort to codify critical methods", as the last paragraph of Mr. Bell's otherwise commendable introduction would lead us to expect. For it does not give a full indication of the variety of approaches to the novel which makes modern criticism valuable. Granted that the checklist could not be complete, its compilers should have been more definite about what it included and what it excluded. On p. ix, for instance, Mr. Bell tries to limit the new critical approach to a concentration on technique. He omits mention of the fruitful influence of such non-literary approaches as anthropology and psychology (though they are represented in the checklist). Nor does he give credit to the applications of such important traditional approaches as comparative studies, source hunting, and the history of ideas. The latter are among the unmentioned omissions and are more important than the announced exclusions, the obvious "expositions of plot and eulogizing commentaries" denounced in the preface.

In fact failure to tell the reader what he is and is not getting constitutes the greatest fault of the book. He is not told that introductions to novels are excluded unless they have been printed elsewhere. He is not told why Henry James does not appear, though Mr. Bell makes James the keystone of his introduction, where he refers to him as an "English critic and novelist". Finally the reader is not told the terminal date for including criticism. One book published in 1958 appears, yet the book coverage for 1957 and the periodical coverage for 1956 are both somewhat spotty.

But to make these qualifications about *The English Novel,* 1578-1956 is not to deny its importance as a convenient bibliography or its timeliness in appearing when there is so much critical interest in fiction.

ELLIOTT GOSE

SCHOLASTIC PERSONS

JOHN MANNING. *Dickens on Education.* University of Toronto. $5.50.

IN THE PREFACE to his study, *Dickens on Education,* Professor Manning quotes the opinion of G. R. Gissing that "a review of all the scholastic persons in Dickens' novels would be very interesting and of definite historical value". This speculation—for when Gissing advanced it, in 1925, it was nothing more — is one of the plausible kind that so many investigators find attractive. One need

only light upon a minor theme in the works of some novelist more or less well-known, and the thing is done. The minor theme is supposed to borrow a kind of weight or substance from the author's general reputation and gain a significance in itself.

One might safely guess that the Dickensian gallery of "scholastic persons" could scarcely fail of being wholly interesting. Professor Manning has enriched it by the addition of Fagin, whom he includes in Appendix A under the heading *A Reference List of Schoolmasters, Schoolmistresses, Ushers, Tutors, and Governesses found in the Works of Dickens.* At first, this suggests a rather broad-minded view of pedagogy, but one need not quarrel with it. Professor Manning makes his point elsewhere. At Page 204, he tells us that, excepting the lessons taught by five persons, one of whom is Fagin, Dickens never supplied his reader with a "demonstration of sound teaching method in a good school". In a strictly professional sense, Fagin's might indeed be called a good school; but in the same breath, Professor Manning tempers his praise, and condemns all the excepted lessons as "inadequate". He does not enlarge — but as far as Fagin's instruction is concerned, one remembers that the Artful Dodger was caught out in the end.

Professor Manning is quite clearly aware of the capital difficulty in making any attempt to turn fiction upside down and sift out its content of fact — to weigh its "definite historical value". At Page 180, he says "There is always the

possibility that the views expressed in a writer's fiction may not be those that the writer himself holds." Against the possibility of being thus misled, he has supplied us with a chapter setting forth Dickens' private views on education as expressed in his letters. This is a necessary safeguard, especially with an author so highly coloured as Dickens. "As the mediaeval sculptors skilfully fashioned fantastic gargoyles for the cathedrals", says Professor Manning while remarking that one does not find a "really satisfying" schoolmaster anywhere in the novels, "in like manner Dickens fashioned many of his schoolmasters as fantastic and grotesque devils." The question is, and always will remain, what definite historical value may the reader find in Dickens' invention, the repulsive Squeers? There is no good in saying that Squeers is founded on fact and therefore must have some such value. The question is not to be evaded — how far in his delineation of Squeers did Dickens depart from fact? So it is with Dickens' actual views on education—when the statement of them is made to serve the ends of fiction, what weight are we to allow them in themselves?

It seems unprofitable to consult Dickens on so specialized and demanding a topic as education. Professor Manning points out that he has found "no closely reasoned presentation of educational philosophy" and says that "perhaps one could hardly expect it in Dickens". That is surely the nub of the matter. Without Professor Manning's industrious investigation, which is laudably restrained in its statement of discovery, and despite Gissing's hopeful suggestion, one could hardly expect much from Dickens on this topic. His interest and his intentions, his whole constitution, were against the kind of cool and systematic treatment that the subject demands.

He was merely the leader of the school of "sensation" novelists, writing to a formula, feeding, as Professor Manning reminds us, the heart rather than the head. He gave a brother novelist his whole recipe and told him how to deal with readers. "Make 'em laugh," he said, "make 'em cry — make 'em wait." His ideal story was, in his own words, "wild, yet domestic". As the Fat Boy intimated, the idea was to make your flesh creep. Thus when educational theory or the ideal of the schoolmaster got in amongst the Quilps and the Cheerybles and the fantastic half-world where all of Dickens' characters live, strange things were likely to overtake both.

Professor Manning comes to the conclusion, which can hardly be questioned, that Dickens' principal value was indirect. His "preposterous teachers, his caricatures of men like Squeers and Creakle, depicted with such realistic detail, first magnetized the English public, then rocked it with hilarious laughter . . . and because the line between joy

and sorrow is so thin, the public was often moved to tears as well — moved to the point where it was ready to support far-reaching educational reforms." Certainly, that is as much credit as can be allowed to Dickens in this matter — and it is not a little.

E. MORRISON

TRAVELLERS' MASKS

GEORGE WOODCOCK. *Incas and other Men.* British Book Centre. $5.75.

WILLIAM STEVENSON. *The Yellow Wind.* British Book Centre. $7.00

CANADIANS nowadays travel abroad almost as much as Americans but they are no great readers of travel books. It was only to be expected then that native writers should have neglected this branch of literature. It remains for an immigrant man of letters like George Woodcock, or a foreign correspondent like William Stevenson, to cultivate it. They are able to do so only because there is an audience for their work in the British Isles, where there are enough people with enough curiosity about exotic places to support them.

I wonder how long the present obsession of Canadian readers with *echt*-Canuck topics will last? Sooner or later we're sure to get bored with contemplating our own navels and start contemplating someone else's.

Travel-writing is like autobiography in that it forces the writer to invent a character for himself, a mask or *persona* which will reveal only so much of his true self as he is willing to show. William Stevenson's book about Red China, more tract than travel, suffers because the character in which he chooses to appear is that of a know-it-all Cassandra. He is forever arguing with his Chinese subjects, and even when he lets them have the last word he manages to make it appear that he has won the argument. His newspaper articles for the *Toronto Star* and his broadcasts for the CBC have always been striking and informative. But when they're worked into a book like this their effect is wearisome. After a chapter or two the Cold War polemic gets on our nerves.

Mr. Stevenson sets out to make our flesh creep by comparing Mao's techniques of persuasion with the famous experiments on Pavlov's dog. The horror we supposedly feel at vivisection — especially *Russian* vivisection — is by a blatant trick of debate transposed to the process of communist indoctrination. We know what to think of people who are nasty to dogs. Very well then, we know what to think of the Chinese communists.

The most honest thing about *The Yellow Wind* is its illustrations — 15 pages of human faces, competently photographed.

The figure Mr. Woodcock cuts in his book on Peru is very different. Gently curious, he is always a fair-minded traveller, not looking for anything in particular — except perhaps art objects — but open to impressions of people, of landscape or of architecture. Anything that might engage the notice of a cultivated and sympathetic mind he records, along with the more humdrum detail of travel, so that we seem to travel with him and share not only his expert appreciation

but his daily routine as well.

He takes the liberty that travel books afford (and fiction, perhaps, no longer affords) to get off some fine set-pieces of description, archaeological discursions, character studies; and he is good at making the sort of *non*-odious comparisons and cross-references that illuminate both the culture he describes and our own as well. The image, however, which his book leaves in the mind is of a harsh country inhabited by an ignorant peasantry, doped with *coca* and drink, and kept down by a corrupt alien oligarchy. In spite of Mr. Woodcock's tact and understanding he makes us feel that Peru is one of those countries like Australia which we could cheerfully die without seeing.

This may be partly because George and Inge Woodcock spent so much time on the road, travelling in rather primitive conditions. Dilapidated buses, crowded trains, non-pressurized aircraft—they are bound to be depressing. But there is another reason why the name of Peru now takes on a faintly sad aura.

The thoroughly admirable person Mr. Woodcock chooses to be sees persons and places without the sharp glance of prejudice or the spleen of a good hater, but also without the intensity and passion of a lover. His picture is therefore somewhat level in tone: like a photograph taken on a day when the sky is overcast it makes no striking overall effect, its excellences are all in detail. But—as the Swahili proverb has it—"a little and a little fills the measure"; the detail *is* rich and rewarding, and the mind that brings it to life distinguished.

KILDARE DOBBS

NATIONAL PERIPATETIC

VINCENT MASSEY. *Speaking of Canada.* Macmillan. $5.00.

FRESH from his brilliant success as chairman of the Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters and Sciences, the Right Honourable Vincent Massey became the Governor-General of Canada in 1952. During the seven years that he held this high office he travelled with quiet constancy from coast to coast and into the far northern regions beyond the Arctic Circle. He was always on the move, always observing, and, through his speeches and personal contacts, always encouraging his fellow-Canadians to achieve high standards in their daily thinking and doing. *Speaking of Canada* is a selection of the speeches he made to various clubs, societies and academic gatherings during this period.

Mr. Massey was well qualified to assume the role of a national peripatetic. He was already widely known throughout Canada, and for long had shown a glowing faith in Canada as a nation. He was a fine writer and an excellent speaker, who could move with skill and grace into the language of French-Canada when the occasion was appropriate. He was at home in the classics of Greece and Rome, could draw with quiet assurance on the

Bible for ideas, illustrations and inspiration, and had ranged with admiration through the wide fields of English literature. He had pondered deeply on many of our national problems and he could draw on his rich background of experience to offer solutions and indicate paths to be followed if we were to attain those higher reaches of living he so thoroughly believed in.

It should not be surprising, then, that this volume makes good reading. Each speech shows the marks of long and careful preparation; each gives evidence of an eager desire to be fresh, entertaining and provocative. In talking to university groups Mr. Massey shows a wide knowledge of educational institutions and a genuine interest in students. When he addresses the Royal Society of Canada he is steeped in the history of the original Royal Society, chartered by that witty and foolish monarch, Charles II. At a Press Club dinner in Ottawa he surprises his sophisticated and tough-fibred audience by delivering his whole address in rather neatly turned couplets, somewhat reminiscent of Butler's *Hudibras*.

His provocative remarks (and of these there are many) are rooted in his own beliefs. He is best described, I think, as a Christian humanist, with an abundant faith in the Christian tradition and an unflagging interest and belief in human nature. While recognising the values of the sciences, he boldly affirms the deeper values to be found in the classics. For him universities should exist ". . . to preserve and promote all truly useful knowledge . . ." and ". . . the most useful knowledge which any of us can acquire, or try to acquire, is a knowledge of the

nature and meaning of life." How is this knowledge acquired? The mind that has examined the great writings of Greece and Rome ". . . with attention and understanding is a mind disciplined, experienced and mature. It is a mind stored with truly useful knowledge and understanding; knowledge and understanding of human nature and of human destiny in the light of human experience."

On language, too, he lays great stress — on our own, everyday language — for ". . . the pursuit of pure knowledge is only made possible by a careful and reverent use of one of the most precious parts of our civilised heritage — language." He would also have all Canadians, from childhood up, read good books: "Children who have been able to see what is good will know what is cheap and inferior." And he asks adult Canadians ". . . to support journals which devote themselves to serious and informed discussion on matters which should be of general interest." But how many are prepared to support such journals? His answer is timely. "Ask those unhappy souls who try to launch them and keep them afloat."

I conclude with one suggestion: go to the book and read it. It is a rich gift to the nation from one who was a remarkable Governor-General and is a very great Canadian.

S. E. READ

A FIGHTING GOVERNOR

FRED SWAYZE. *Frontenac and the Iroquois.* Macmillan. $2.00.

FRONTENAC AND THE IROQUOIS is the nineteenth in the Macmillan historical series for children, the *Great Stories of Canada.* The series in general is excellent, particularly *The Map-Maker, The Great Chief, Raiders of the Mohawk, The Golden Trail* and *The Man from St. Malo.*

Governor Frontenac, unfortunately, did not provide a writer of biography for children with clearly heroic subject matter. He was jealous, vain, irritable and autocratic, and continuously quarrelling, throughout his two administrations, with the Jesuits, the Bishop, the Governor of Montreal, the Intendant and the Sovereign Council. (Mr. Swayze in his subtitle calls him the fighting governor of New France and this will not be disputed.) The extent to which he was unheroic is documented in detail in W. J. Eccles' new biography *Frontenac: The Courtier Governor.* Eccles portrays him as not only insatiably quarrelsome and vain, but as a procrastinating military leader only finally forced into a full-scale assault upon the Iroquois by the defection of his Indian allies, pressures exerted by his subordinates and specific orders from France.

Mr. Swayze presents a quite different picture based on the — until now — generally accepted, over-sympathetic, Parkman estimate. For the reader interested in historical accuracy the flaws in Frontenac's character are glossed over too lightly, and ideas, ideals and objec-

tives are attributed to him which he clearly never had.

The story makes good reading nevertheless for those willing to regard it as fictional biography. Mr. Swayze selected his material well and gave it humour, action and excitement. For the young reader interested in adventure and a well told story this is enough. The discriminating parent can purchase, and keep for the future, a copy of Eccles' *The Courtier Governor.*

INGLIS BELL

FACE OF A RIVER

WILLIAM TOYE. *The St. Lawrence.* Oxford. $4.50.

MR. TOYE, we are told by his publishers, set out to write a history of the St. Lawrence designed for young people whose normal text books he felt did not pay enough attention to certain social aspects of the Canadian past. But in the process of gathering his material, he apparently found the nature of his book changing and its appeal broadening.

The result is an unusually congenial piece of history writing. It will probably appeal to a few intelligent children; it will certainly appeal to adults who like a fresh taste in the mind after reading history.

Mr. Toye, skipping rather perfunctorily over the geological and archaeological past, takes the history of the St. Lawrence in hand with the arrival of Cartier, and guides us down to the present day. He is clearly very much more interested in social than in political history, in the lives of common and nameless people than in those of generals and governors. And so he tends to reproduce somewhat too uncritically the accepted views about men like Frontenac and Carleton and then to shuffle them out of the way as quickly as possible. His real heroes are the *habitants* and the *voyageurs*, the emigrants and the lumberjacks, and on their lives he becomes expansive, drawing on unfamiliar materials and using them in ways that present quite new insights into aspects of Canadian social history one had imagined drained of all possible freshness.

Like the river of which he writes, Mr. Toye's narrative becomes stronger as it flows on. In the earlier chapters on Cartier and Champlain he is doing little more than competently re-stating what every student knows. Even his chapter on the social life of the riverside in the mid-eighteenth century is frankly a paraphrase of the fairly well-known account of Peter Kalm. But in dealing with the period after the British conquest he opens unexploited sources of information, and

handles the *faits divers* of early and mid-nineteenth century Quebec and Montreal with an ably selective hand. His description of the voyages of the timber rafts, his account of the practices of crimpers on the Quebec waterfront, and his brief story of the more curious aspects of early Canadian railways, are all good examples of that power of condensation which is the most necessary gift of any social historian dealing with the age of the daily newspaper.

Apart from its merits as a well constructed and clearly written piece of social history, *The St. Lawrence* is one of the most attractively produced books I have seen for a long time from a Canadian publishing house, and for this also Mr. Toye, who is a book designer as well as a writer, must get the credit. Finally, the spirit of the narrative is well rendered in the drawings by Leo Rampen, of which one was reproduced in the first issue of *Canadian Literature*.

GEORGE WOODCOCK

CANADIANS AND SLAVS

G.S.N. LUCKYJ, (Ed.), *Canadian Slavonic Papers*, vol. III. Published for the Canadian Association of Slavists by the University of Toronto Press in co-operation with the University of British Columbia. $3.00.

THIS VOLUME OF *Canadian Slavonic Papers* follows the same pattern as the two previous ones. The contributors are mostly New Canadians engaged in university teaching. The ten contributions range from phonology to international relations, though literary themes predominate.

The essays on the Russian novelists Tolstoy and Merezhkovsky, the Polish journalist Wyslouchowa, and the Ukrainian poet Sosyura illustrate the tribulations of writers in the Slav world, as well as their attempts to influence their colleagues and the population at large. Professor Novak publishes a manuscript entitled "Leo Tolstoy: His Art; His Personality"; this was written by the well-known revolutionary Peter Kropotkin, who was also an authority on Russian literature. Though several of Kropotkin's interpretations are bound to evoke controversy, they are, as Professor Novak points out, "of special interest as a study of one famous Russian by another". Professor Bedford's well-documented account of "Dmitry Merezhkovsky, the Intelligentsia, and the Revolution of 1905" deals with a once fashionable novelist who was disappointed by the course of events in Russia and the failure of his own brand of Messianism to gain ground in intellectual circles. The article on Maria Wyslouchowa describes her efforts to "raise the cultural levels of the peasant masses" in what was known as Austrian Galicia, Professor Luckyj's study of Sosyura and Professor Bromke's "Background of the Polish October Revolution" deal, in passing, with the problem of those intellectuals who for a variety of reasons were prepared to accept at one stage a compromise between Communism and nationalism in the Ukraine and Poland.

The specialized nature of most contributions to this volume will confine its appeal to a fairly limited audience. In spite of this *Canadian Slavonic Papers* serves as a useful reminder of the rapid and valuable progress made in Slavic studies, which has been greatly encouraged by the creation of Departments of Slavic Studies, with their emphasis on language and literature, at a number of Canadian universities.

IVAN AVAKUMOVIC

opinions and notes

UNE NOUVELLE REVUE:

Liberté 59

Kurt Weinberg

Liberté 59 paraît depuis le mois de janvier aux Éditions de l'Hexagone (Montréal). Indépendante aux points de vue politique, social et religieux, cette revue bimestrielle de langue française se présente comme l'organe d'une équipe de jeunes écrivains—pour la plupart frisant la trentaine—qui se groupent autour du poéte Jean-Guy Pilon. Le comité de rédaction compte parmi ses membres André Belleau, Jean Filiatraut, Jacques Godbout, Fernand Ouellette, André Guérin et Claude Asselin; tous des auteurs dont au moins un recueil (sauf erreur) est destiné à loger, ou loge déjà à l'enseigne de la maison éditrice.

Sans être bilingue, cette revue veut s'assurer, dans un but de rapprochement culturel, "la collaboration des intellectuels canadiens, qu'ils soient de Montréal, de Winnipeg ou de Vancouver". Tâche ambitieuse autant que louable dont on ne peut que souhaiter la réussite. Pour l'instant, cependant, le nombre des collaborateurs de langue anglaise laisse encore à désirer. Ce n'est, en effet, qu'au troisième numéro de *Liberté* 59 qu'on découvre le premier (et, pour le moment, l'unique) morceau traduit de l'anglais; encore s'agit-il là d'une nouvelle de H. W. R. Morrison dont la version originale avait déjà paru auparavant dans *Queens Quarterly*. On peut espérer qu'à l'avenir, une collaboration plus active des auteurs de langue anglaise contribuera à ce climat de dialogue que favorisent les rédacteurs du périodique.

Liberté 59 se propose de servir la nouvelle littérature, de discuter sans ambages les problèmes culturels du Canada et de suivre au jour le jour l'évolution de la pensée contemporaine. Par la variété même de ce programme, *Liberté* 59 écarte donc le danger que constitue la cultivation exclusive d'une seule catégorie littéraire (poésie, critique, sociologie, etc.)—une sorte de spécialisation qui caractérise bien des revues au titre millésimé, telles qu'elles fleurissent un peu dans tous les pays civilisés depuis la guerre. Cependant, à beaucoup d'égards, *Liberté* 59 reste dans le sillon de ce genre de périodique. C'est ainsi, par exemple, que prédomine ici cet esprit d'engagement qui est le propre de toute revue d'équipe. Aussi trouve-t-on dans ces pages des articles de fond

lucides et souvent intransigeants, exprimant avec fraîcheur des opinions parfois impopulaires. Mentionnons surtout, à cet égard, l'excellente étude si courageuse où l'éminent sociologue Jean-C. Falardeau examine de près les difficultés qui confrontent, tout particulièrement dans la Province de Québec, le professeur de carrière et tout l'enseignement supérieur ("Les Chaînes de Prométhée", No. 2, pp. 69-78). Il nous manque l'espace pour discuter dans le détail, ce qui ne se révèle au fond que comme un aspect secondaire de cette revue. Car, comme de juste, la poésie, la critique, le conte — en somme, les belles-lettres — occupent dans *Liberté* 59 ce premier plan que ne sauraient obscurcir les questions auxquelles la rédaction consacre, à l'occasion, des numéros spéciaux (tel le cahier 3, de mai-juin, qui pose plutôt qu'il ne résout le problème épineux d'une "Synthèse des arts").

C'est dans leur poésie et leur critique littéraire que nos confrères de *Liberté* 59 atteignent quelquefois à une sorte d'universalité qui transcende le cadre de la vie au Canada Français. Le poète qui, parfois avec une maladresse émouvante, transpose sur un plan universel ses angoisses de Canadien Français; le critique dont la formule, souvent gauche mais sincère, cherche à transformer des idées venues d'outremer—voilà les écrivains qui dépassent un régionalisme étroit dont les effets, si souvent salutaires au roman canadien français, menacent pourtant d'étouffer dans la petitesse provinciale toute aspiration littéraire un peu plus vaste.

En poésie, d'ailleurs, comme en critique, *Liberté* 59 — à l'exemple d'autres revues au titre millésimé—fait profession de non-conformité sans, pour cela, s'enrôler dans l'avant-garde. Nous voulons dire par là que le dépaysement qu'affectionnent ces poèmes nous conduit presque invariablement vers un paysage, une ambiance déjà connus; que ce soit (costumés à la canadienne) la luxuriance verbale d'un Walt Whitman ou d'un Pierre Emmanuel (dont pourraient se réclamer Paul-Marie Lapointe et, à un moindre degré, Françoise Bujold), ou la "nuit" d'un Cocteau que "creuse" Michel Garneau, une poésie d'amour qui rappelle Eluard ("Navacelles" de Jean-Guy Pilon), ou encore ces tours de force dont nous amuse le spirituel Jacques Godbout et qui évoquent en même temps Prévert, Queneau et les exercices à la "grands rhétoriqueurs" où se plaisait, vers 1940, Aragon. C'est à dessein que nous insistons sur cette double tradition américaine et française qu'on retrouve partout chez les jeunes poètes du Québec, et qui fournit si souvent une forme à cette sensibilité toute nue et vibrante qui chante dans la poésie du Canada Français. Il n'y a dans cette constatation rien de dépréciateur. Car s'il y a ici influence, elle ne se manifeste pas par des emprunts mais par ce principe de l'imitation des meilleurs auteurs qui, depuis l'antiquité romaine, fait partie de toute tradition classique, permettant au poète de chercher ses maîtres où bon lui semble.

Quant à la critique, il serait injuste d'oublier ce que doit à Apollinaire, Breton, Paulhan, Sartre et Blanchot un critique comme Michel van Schendel. De sa prose, qui ne résiste pas toujours à la tentation du jargon philosophique, il se dégage, face à l'absurdité existentielle, un esprit fraternel qu'on dirait catholique s'il ne frappait d'anathèmes l'adversaire — que ce soit l'infortunée Fernande Saint-Martin, hérétique "bretonisante", ou Guy Sylvestre, accusé d'avoir par dédain exclus de son anthologie les poètes Claude

Fournier, Claude Gauvreau, Yves Préfontaine et Paul-Marie Lapointe.

Pour ce qui est de la prose l'imagination, là où elle touche à la perfection (comme dans le conte de Claire Martin, "Toute la Vie", No. 1, pp. 31-32), elle reste plus près du petit poème en prose (genre *Le Spleen de Paris*) qu'elle ne se rapproche, par exemple, du roman d'avant-garde (Sarraute, Robbe-Grillet, Butor). Pour tout dire, et ceci n'est pas un reproche, cette prose remarquablement économique, rapide, à la fois tendre et violente ne se débarrasse jamais tout à fait de cette "marquise" qui "sortait à 5 heures", et qui empêchait Valéry de lire des romans.

Contes, poèmes, critique, chroniques, articles de fond: en somme, tout ce que nous avons pu lire dans *Liberté* 59 porte la marque de la sincérité, d'une honnêteté incorruptible, du talent et d'une fraîcheur qui augurent bien pour l'avenir des belles-lettres au Canada Français. Pénétrés d'un sens de responsabilité sociale, ces jeunes auteurs s'efforcent très sérieusement, dans le domaine du style, d'acquérir cette difficulté qui (pour parler avec Joubert), s'ajoutant à une facilité innée d'écrire, fait la condition même du métier d'écrivain. Tant de qualités n'existent cependant pas sans imperfections. Certaines réserves, en effet, s'imposent. Le temps est venu où l'on peut souhaiter que les jeunes poètes dépassent l'esprit français d'entre-les-deux-guerres et des années 40. De même, ayant appris les leçons de Mauriac, Bernanos, l'existentialisme, et de l'héritage surréaliste, la critique devrait se mettre à la recherche de son propre visage, à la découverte d'une identité authentique telle qu'elle ne pourra surgir que de la

réalité de l'esprit canadien français. Excellentes que soient, dans cette nouvelle revue, prose et poésie, il leur manque un peu de ce grand souffle épique qui habite les paysages à peine explorés du Canada. Peut-être aussi faut-il, pour que se manifeste dans la littérature ce grand souffle, que les jeunes écrivains en quête d'une écriture plus personnelle approfondissent et mûrissent dans leur for intérieur les mythes et les arché-types d'une âme nationale encore par trop timide. En attendant, nous saluons en *Liberté* 59 une revue pleine de promesse et d'intégrité, affranchie d'académisme et de toute tutelle.

LET'S START A MAGAZINE

PRISM, Vol. 1, no. 1. $1.00.

IT IS DIFFICULT not to pre-judge a publication from its prospectus, which, like a letter from a stranger, seems under scrutiny to reveal something of the personality that launched it. *Prism's* little letter of introduction, resembling as it did the literature wrapped round a new pharmaceutical product, augured ill for the appearances of the new magazine.

Then there was the name, which in my mind evokes Canon Chasuble and the colours of the rainbow—and prunes. Perhaps it was a fear of being thought Victorian that prompted the editorial promise that *Prism* "would make no concessions to Mrs. Grundy". Immediately one recalled the words of e. e. cummings:

> let's start a magazine
> to hell with literature
> we want something redblooded
> lousy with pure
> reeking with stark
> and fearlessly obscene . . .

In fact, the magazine on arrival proved to be less strenuously Lawrencian than its harbinger had suggested. The contents were unexceptionable — if unexciting. The design, alas, was every bit as disastrous as the prospectus had threatened.

At first sight *Prism* resembles nothing so much as the Optometrists' Journal. It is unfortunate for Mr. Norman Pearson, who is accused on the title page of being responsible, that the last three or four years in B.C. have seen the emergence of a belated interest in book production and magazine design. His mixture of parish-magazine layout jazzed up with a few raccoon-coat-and-hip-flask effects, such as a different type-face for every title, and cute lower-case initials for the contributors' names, would have passed unnoticed a couple of years ago, but now Reid and Tanabe have set a standard that must not be allowed to sag.

The typographical enormities are too numerous to catalogue: there is hardly a page that does not pour vitriol on the sensitive eyeball. Who can gaze unmoved on pages forty-two and forty-three, to give one searing instance? This sort of thing is unfair to writer and reader alike.

Of the stories, Mr. Henry Kreisel's unfolds with a humorous Middle European irony reminiscent of Svevo; Mrs. Laurence's subject-matter and style invite a comparison with Joyce Cary which she is not yet ready to withstand. Mr. Hall's sample chapter persuades one that his book will be no less worthy of

publication than the fifty almost identical novels with which it will be easily confused; and Miss Luckhurst's offering is surely the "something authentic and delirious" foretold in cummings' poem.

The poetry is pretty much what one would have expected: competence from the professionals, mountainous travail and ridiculous mice from the beginners. Mr. Birney's gay and rhythmic holiday piece, "Bangkok Boy", with its bright surface pattern and new, exotic words like Wat and klong and impet, shows a sure touch; Mr. Wilfred Watson offers some amusingly satirical lines, but arouses the suspicion that Layton and Dudek are targets for the rapier rather than the blunt instrument that has been laboriously fashioned here. Miss Livesay, after an uncertain start which might have been better omitted, produces in her second stanza the best thing in the magazine, and some of the best poetry I have seen recently, before tailing off into a rather obvious conclusion.

Mr. Richard Watson, in naming his verses "Five Songs of a Fool", is too hard on himself: he is no fool, but I doubt if he is a poet either. Mr. Souster is flippantly amusing in an undergraduate way; Mr. Sowton is probably a born prose-writer, and Mr. Bluestone is obviously an academic. Mr. Susac can't make up his mind which he admires most, Empson or Spender; but Mr. Nowlan, especially in the poem "Beginning", gives promise of writing good poetry sometime, and is clearly a name to watch. Joseph Capozio's pen and wash drawing is one of the most satisfying things in the issue.

The total impression left by this first

issue can perhaps best be summed up in the words of Johnson: "This was a good dinner enough, to be sure; but it was not a dinner to *ask* a man to." Four years ago, speakers at a writers' conference held on the U.B.C. campus were deploring the dearth of "outlets" (I think that was the Kinseyan term employed) for the beginning writer. Looking at the current crop of literary magazines one wonders whether perhaps we have not too many outlets chasing too few writers; reading some of the verse that finds its way into print, one has to stifle the ignoble question: Is it possible to write verse so bad that it could not find an editor, somewhere in Canada, willing to print it? TONY EMERY