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CANADIAN LITERATURE N^o. 4

Spring, 1960

PAUL WEST:

Ethos and Epic

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Robertson Davies

JOHN W. BILSLAND *on*

Wilfred Watson

PIERRE BERTON *on*

Gold Rush Writing

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ON THE CULTIVATION OF LAURELS

IN CERTAIN COUNTRIES literary prizes are major events in the world of letters and in the lives of individual writers. The Prix Goncourt, for instance, carries such prestige among the middlebrow reading public in France that it can multiply many times the sales of a winning book. The effect of this situation on literary manners had not always been edifying. Some writers stand proudly aside; the best are among them. Others are swept into the currents of competition and intrigue that swirl each year around the awarding of the major French prizes. Whatever else the Prix Goncourt and its rivals may have done for literature in France, they have not encouraged dignity among writers.

In Canada we have our own literary prizes — and they are surprisingly numerous when one comes to investigate them — but up to now we have been saved, perhaps by public indifference, the worse hazards of the French system. The winning of a Governor-General's Award makes comparatively little difference to the sales of a Canadian book, and, so far at least as our better prizes are concerned, their most negative result seems to have been a little mild envy among authors.

Of course, there is a good case to be made against any kind of annual literary award. For the best of juries are all too fallible, particularly in short-run judgments of this kind. Two years ago a Monaco bookseller showed me a complete set of books that had won the Prix Goncourt. To look at the titles was a salutary experience; the number of honoured and justly forgotten books was only less impressive than the number of un-honoured masterpieces written during the same period. And France, manifestly, is not the only country where such errors of judgment can occur.

Yet, with all their faults, literary prizes have existed since those distant days when Sophocles and Euripides competed for the Athenian dramatic laurels, and their incessant proliferation makes it seem likely that they will be with us as long as nuclear fission permits. In these circumstances the best we can do is to make sure that they become as effective a means as is humanly devisable of recognising good work.

The recent revision of the system of Governor-General's Awards represents at least a move in that direction, though there is much to criticize both in the changes that have been made and in the manner of their making. Let us first consider the latter question.

The Awards were started during John Buchan's term of office at the suggestion of the Canadian Authors' Association. At first the Association administered the awards; later it tactfully handed over the selection of the winning books to a virtually autonomous Awards Board, though it continued to pay for the medals — unaccompanied by cash prizes — which were given to the winners. Some time ago the Awards Board, apparently without formally notifying the Canadian Authors' Association, approached the Canada Council for assistance in reorganising the system of awards and in providing cash prizes to accompany them. There was no suggestion, it should be emphasised, that the Canada Council itself might actually "take over" or administer the Awards; at the same time, the Council clearly had a considerable say in the changes in procedure and in the reorganisation of the Awards Board. During the negotiations, it appears, the Canadian Authors' Association was not consulted; an editorial in the February issue of its magazine, *The Canadian Author and Bookman*, states categorically that "neither the Awards Board nor the Council people bothered to let the CAA know what was being discussed or contemplated." One does not have to be a partisan of the CAA to be perturbed by the lack of courtesy and tact shown in this instance towards the organisation which, whatever its merits in other respects, first suggested the Governor-General's awards and then had the good sense to set up a virtually independent Awards Board.

The Awards themselves have been changed radically under the new dispensation. The number of categories has been reduced, and separate prizes are now granted within each category for both English and French works. There is no longer an obligation on the Board to make awards unless books of sufficiently high quality are submitted to them. And, finally,

a cash prize of \$1,000 is now a part of each Award.

All these changes, while they do not create an ideal system, are improvements. At first I had doubts about the abandonment of the five past categories of fiction, poetry, creative non-fiction, academic non-fiction and juvenile literature in favour of three new categories described as "poetry and drama, fiction and drama, and non-fiction". A review of the awards over a sample decade (1948 to 1957) convinced me of the wisdom of this change. The poetry awards had indeed stood up very well; only one out of ten went to a book which now appears worthy of little attention. Of the fiction prizes, at least five were given to books which still seem of more than ephemeral importance. But, with few exceptions, the thirty books honoured in the other three categories now present an intimidating array of earnest second-rateness. In other words, perhaps twenty good books were granted awards in ten years, and thirty books received awards they did not deserve just because the prizes had to be given. Yet, at the same time, a number of good authors and good books went without recognition by the Awards Board during this decade.

The new arrangement at least ensures that second-rate books will not be honoured merely because there is nothing better, and the prestige of the Awards should rise accordingly. But there is still no guarantee that the judges will be any more adept at spotting real talent than their predecessors have been, and what seems lacking in the programme is a provision for recognizing the author who has produced work of acknowledged excellence over a number of years, yet has never been granted an Award.

The addition of cash awards is certainly to be welcomed. If one presents laurels, there is everything to be said for gilding them. What surprises one in this case is the thinness of the gilt. It is true that the \$1,000 presented by the Council should prevent a recurrence of those past occasions when impecunious authors could not afford the journey to receive their cashless awards. But, as Sally Creighton insisted in a CBC discussion a year or so ago, a cash prize should be substantial enough to help the writer *as a writer* — in other words to give him time to write or ruminate peacefully upon his craft. \$1,000 pays for little writing or rumination, and Mrs. Creighton argued very reasonably when, on the same occasion, she suggested \$5,000 as an amount that would give a writer not merely money, but that much more valuable commodity, leisure — a period of

freedom from the teaching or radio or TV or whatever other way of earning a living keeps the writer in question, like almost all Canadian writers, from concentrating on the books he really wants to write.

One result of the new arrangement for the Governor-General's Awards has been a temporary banishment to the wilderness of a number of other awards sponsored independently but presented at the same time as the major prizes; no place has been found for them within the new scheme. They include the Leacock Medal for Humour, the Beta Sigma Phi award for the best first novel of the year, the University of Western Ontario's medals for articles, short stories and poems published in periodicals, and the UBC Medal for Popular Biography. As I write in late March the future policies of the sponsors for these awards still appear undecided. There is, of course, no reason why they should not continue independently, and perhaps do more individual good by moving away from the shadow of the Governor-General's Awards. If this happens, their judges might with profit adopt the procedure of withholding prizes when no first-rate book or article appears; most of these prizes have on occasion been given to works which could not possibly have been honoured except on the basis of a better-than-nothing attitude.

Not all awards, of course, are given for published work. There are others, which may be the most useful, connected with contests that aim at encouraging the production of specific kinds of writing. One of the more interesting is the play-writing contest started by the Stratford Foundation last year. The results of the first competition have been encouraging, particularly since so far in Canada dramatic writers have tended, through lack of theatres, to work mostly for radio and television. Eighty plays were submitted. Ten were worthy of serious consideration, and the judges had no misgivings in awarding the three prizes.

These are our Canadian laurels. They are growing, considering the climate, into a respectable little shrubbery, but they still need trimming and training before they become as handsome as they might be. Let us hope, however, that they never become so handsome as to make us forget that no award of a year's end is more than a provisional token of excellence, and that no official accolade replaces the long testing in the minds of readers and writers by which a book is finally crowned with the laurels that do not wither.

ETHOS AND EPIC

Paul West

ASPECTS OF CONTEMPORARY
CANADIAN POETRY

AN OUTSIDER who has read no Canadian poets might justifiably expect them to supply something rather American: the frontier rather than the sophisticated, the blunt rather than the subtle, the heroic rather than the maisonette, the didactic rather than the oblique. He might add something about the unlikeliness, for a long time, of aestheticism and preciousness; and there he stops. Not all that is distinctly Canadian bears upon poetry written by Canadians. Much that is American does. The outsider deserves some sympathy, as well as licence to get as personal as he likes. For (and here I must judge by my own experience) there are many subtle differences from the European and American traditions. With those I cannot be concerned here. But I do want to examine three aspects which seem reasonably obvious: the first two go together — the sharply visual quality of much Canadian poetry, and the unpoeticised bluntness of tone; the third is a potentiality which I hope will come to something like an epic of heterogeneous daily life.

Canadian poets writing now seem to have at their disposal most of the European modes. The Parnassian keeps pace with the Whitmanish when one might have expected the latter to dominate the scene with barbaric yawp, rambling exposition and asymmetrical shape. There is a strong tradition of it in the United States, sustained in varying ways by William Carlos Williams, Robinson Jeffers, E. E. Cummings and such poems as Allan Ginsberg's *Howl*. It is the sort of thing produced when the picaresque sensibility tries to write poems; it is far from the lapidary, but it does not seem to predominate in Canada any more than it does in America.

At one extreme we have something like Louis Dudek's *Europe*; at the other, the Parnassian (Robert Graves-like) poems of Jay Macpherson. It would be idle to propose a dichotomy: obviously, at times, the two modes mingle; obviously most poets attempt both modes of expression, although they usually manage one end of the formal spectrum better than the other — Dudek and Raymond Souster the Whitmanish, Miss Macpherson and R. A. D. Ford the Parnassian.

But having proposed the extremes as points of reference at least, let me allude to them at once by saying that I think the Whitmanish mode more suited to what I find the essentially Canadian manner of utterance. There is a brusqueness, a visual punchiness about this utterance which might seem to evoke, say, Carl Sandburg or Carlos Williams, but which is in fact less literary and less overlaid with allusions. Take Irving Layton's magnificent poem, *The Bull Calf*, for instance:

Struck,
 the bull calf drew in his thin forelegs
 as if gathering strength for a mad rush . . .
 tottered . . . raised his darkening eyes to us,
 and I saw we were at the far end
 of his frightened look, growing smaller and smaller
 till we were only the ponderous mallet
 that flicked his bleeding ear
 and pushed him over on his side, stiffly,
 like a block of wood.

This is the mallet rather than the lyre — for good reasons: the poem has to suggest the brutality of a necessary indifference. But, just as in this instance it is particularly true, so it is true generally that the thumping, emphatic and non-iambic quality of Canadian poetry lingers in the ear and prodigiously enriches its moments of tenderness. (Norman Levine's reading of this poem on the BBC Third Programme made this even more evident: Mr. Levine's deadpan voice, which Canada made, seemed to fit the poem extremely well. An Englishman reading the same poem would sound stagey and would probably force upon the lines rhythms of the wrong kind.) The curt context has no sound of the literarised, and that explains why an etiolated and almost hackneyed word like 'beautiful' is restored to an astonishing, pre-Tennysonian power:

Settled, the bull calf lay as if asleep,
 one foreleg over the other,
 bereft of pride and so beautiful now,
 without movement, perfectly still in the cool pit,
 I turned away and wept.

In that, the poem's conclusion, 'bereft' comes to us from an archaic world of 'poesy'; but instead of sticking out like a sore muse, it is subsumed by the regenerated word 'beautiful'. Regeneration in poetry is always an art of context. That is why the sudden self-exposure of the last line escapes the trite; we can think of other lines which might have preceded it and would have degraded it into a conventional trope. For example:

I strayed through the midst of the city
 On, through the lovely Archipelago;
 That night I felt the winter in my veins;
 Was it a year or lives ago
 I turned away and wept?

That doesn't quite make sense: the first line is Lampman, the second Charles Sangster, the third Wilfred Campbell and the fourth Bliss Carman. But the lines' connotations might evoke, say, James Thomson's *The City of Dreadful Night* or certain parts of *In Memoriam*. The traditionally poetic voice, with its usual images, terms of grief and approbation, rhythms, rhymes and calls to attention, renders certain words impotent and creates a monotony of tone. It is the singular asset of the Canadian voice that it can manage potent contrasts by giving its utterances a dishevelled, unsystematic look: there is little concern with attracting the reader's eye to the maintenance of form. Life and meditation are presented in a manner no more symmetrical or homogeneous than that of a newspaper page. But this manner can make the trivial arresting, make us look thoroughly at things over-familiar. Here is an example of this typically haphazard, disjointed way of writing; the excerpt is from Jean Arsenault's *Canada Canto*, published in *Delta* Number Eight:

And poor suckers bring
 their pennies to upstairs
 office, "bring coppers on time",
 shouts Joe

far (in Pound himself, as well as in its Canadian practitioners) released a torrent of self-conscious flippancy. But perhaps this only indicates that such a method, so close to rubbish, so apparently undisciplined, must operate by means of irony — its principal device being that of ironic juxtaposition in order to convey the exact impact of a kaleidoscopic world. Only time will show; and we should not expect from this method an absolute of any kind, whether of lyricism or starkness, whether of reportage or fantasy. The synoptic, which is its aim, is a genre apart. And there are not likely to be any rules.

THE PREREQUISITES for such a method are principally two: a robust, matter-of-fact tone (which I think many modern Canadian poets already have) and a complete view — of worlds pastoral, industrial, urban and commercial — which most of them seem to lack. What of the tone? It appears in the following, from Raymond Knister's *The Plowman*, as a rural factualness:

For Danny whistling slowly
 'Down in Tennessee'
 A fat white shoat by the trough
 Lifts his snout a moment to hear,
 Among the guzzling and slaving comrades,
 Squeezing and forcing

It turns up in this: *Train Window* by Robert Finch. The ostentatiously impassive sensibility retails the prosaic:

The truck holds eleven cakes of ice,
 each cake a different size and shape.
 Some look as though a weight had hit them.
 One, solid glass, has a core of sugar.

Finch's poem is every bit as 'poetic' as the world it depicts: the point is, if you are sufficiently attentive to the world, a straight account will suffice. What is poetic is not in the technique, but in the object contemplated. Finch seeks to intensify a deeply felt perception; so does Raymond Souster's *Drunk: On Crutches*, which is boozily lyrical in its hardboiled vernacular:

Simply being drunk makes it
 Tough enough to get around,
 But a guy hobbling on crutches —
 How does he figure it at all?

There is in the Canadian voice, in this un-English voice that I am noticing, a matter-of-factness which is vocally what imagism is visually. There is a reluctance to make the conventionally poetic sounds and lilt: this is it, says the poet, take it or don't. He isn't going to beguile us with euphony, with rhythms that guide us like banisters, with images that make the new familiar. Here, he seems to say, is a specimen — like a chunk of newspaper fitted into a collage. And from the nature of the presented object, the "form" and the tone proceed. W. W. E. Ross's *The saws were shrieking* shows this:

From the revolving
 of the saw
 came slices of clear wood,
 newly sawn,
 white pine and red,
 or spruce and hemlock,
 the sweet spruce,
 and the sweet hemlock.

Wallace Stevens would have turned this into a frenzied baroque on the lines of his *Bantams in Pinewoods*. But Ross's lines could have come from Carlos Williams, with his creed of "No ideas but in things". Take this:

so much depends
 upon
 a red wheel
 barrow
 glazed with rain
 water
 beside the white
 chickens

That is Williams — the child's innocent and undifferentiating eye, one stage before the elated wonder of Cummings. What we are given, by both Ross and Williams, is an ideogram which celebrates. This is the raw material chopped up into assimilable pieces, each of which is a cause for wonder and a good reason for lingering longer than usual. It is a *sans*

culotte mode, seeking to restore us to a sense of primal, unelaborated things. There is a perfectly justified (although perhaps naive) attitude which says: if you want to present unmanipulated specimens, you are more likely to get away with it if you write in the Whitmanish mode; that is, if you compile a collection rather than design a device. And, for me, what is distinctive in modern Canadian poetry is the mode in which the poets equal their French and Modern Greek counterparts, in which they do differently from the Americans (for even Carlos Williams and Pound build their ideograms into a larger fabric), and which is just not attempted in England: the mode of spiritual geography in terms of emblems. The whole process tends towards an attempt at modern epic.

This is why I find nothing specifically different about Jay Macpherson's poems, nothing specifically Canadian; she is a transatlantic Elizabeth Jennings, composing hermetic paradigms that don't really make poetry out of the modern scene. I don't think that is true of Ronald Bates, Fred Cogswell, John Glassco, George Johnston, Alden Nowlan and James Reaney. Miss Macpherson seems nearer to European sophistication and sophistry, and is therefore in greater danger of composing cerebral riddles in the manner of the English "Movement". Her little paradigms are nearer to ballad than to Whitman: she is at once more traditional and more avant-garde than her contemporaries. Their stand is quite often rawness, the unfancy, the unpoeticised. Take, for example, Fred Cogswell's poem about Lefty:

There was Lefty and there was the hen.
 He had her hung up with a cord
 round her neck too tight for a squawk,
 and he was sawing off her legs
 with a dull jack-knife. Sawing and whistling . . .

He heard me as I walked in
 and turned, standing there,
 and you could almost have heard
 the blood dripping off the end
 of the knife-blade for a minute.
 'You son of a whore', I said.
 'You son of a whore'.
 And Lefty broke and cried like a girl,
 And I left.

The logical outcome of this is raw vision in raw form for subtle reasons. But mere use of the speech of everyday cannot ensure the achievement of an illustrious vernacular: only the old tricks of word-juggling can effect that. The poet is a reporter, yes; he is also a verbal artist. And where the sheer magic of the object contemplated fails to enliven the words, the result is likely to be an ordinariness that only verbal magic can redeem. The laconic tone is not enough in itself: it has to be subtly interwoven with other tones and other techniques — as it is in Pound's *Cantos*, James Reaney's *A Suit of Nettles* and Dudek's *Europe*.

AFTER TONE, the complete view. Few Canadian poets seem rounded enough. The new industrial landscape doesn't seem to have caught at the poets' imaginations, whereas the pastoral in its literal and literary senses seems ineluctable. Milton Wilson, writing in *The Canadian Forum* (June, 1959), puts some pertinent questions apropos of John Glassco's *The Deficit Made Flesh*:

What are (he asks) the typical images and attitudes of the typical Canadian poem? Ralph Gustafson provides us with a list in the introduction to his new Penguin anthology. Among the things included are the primal sea, a good deal of diving, green out of the white of winter, antagonistic hills, and symbolic eyes and fishes. It's a good list. It fits a few poets from a few parts of Canada, and what more can we ask? But there are plenty of alternatives. What about a vision of the collapsed mine or barn, the soiled and discarded virgin, the ghost town, grey snow, roads that peter out or lead to a dead structure, fruit gone soft before it ripens, parricide before puberty?

I can't really say how pertinent Mr. Wilson's answers are — they do seem Audenish, and tempt me to think up an eclecticism of my own which includes the national prurience, the seedy schoolroom on the Indian reservation, Old British Fish and Chips, sleazy beer-parlours, desolate plains, blue lakes, "plaid" shirts, the cult of virility and Scottishness,, picture-windows, gaudy and finny cars, galoshes, "homes" rather than houses, dead moose and pure cold. A slightly fey list, yes; but a list that one should be able to compile from Mr. Gustafson's anthology. One can't, however, because many Canadian poets see their country as idealised pastoral. For every George Johnston, with his *Cruising Auk*, the publishers provide a dozen vaguer visions.

But there are signs of epic method, as a careful reader of the Gustafson and Smith anthologies can see: Pratt's broad historical vision; Ross's imagistic pungency; blunt Knister and the Scott of the satirical reportage; Finch's matter-of-factness; Birney's own Perse-like vision of history and exploration (as in *Pacific Door*); Layton's concern for the delicious, tart variety of life; Anne Marriott's feeling for prairie and Le Pan's invigorating piece-of-an-epic, *Canoe-trip*:

What of this fabulous country
 Now that we have reduced it to a few hot hours
 And sunburn on our backs?
 On this south side the countless archipelagos,
 The slipway where titans sent splashing the last great glaciers;
 And then up to foot of the blue pole star
 A wilderness

One would like to see something such as Neruda has done for Chile. My own guess is that it will have to be done in the Whitmanish, capacious, untidy mode; in the Canadian voice and in visual terms. Life's quality will have to be transferred to poems. Perhaps Canada is the country where young poets might find some use for Eliot, who has had next to no following in England and has exerted most of his influence in Greece, India and France. His method of the disjointed epic is perhaps just what is needed: something comprehensive without the sheer bulk of Pound's *Cantos*. After all, in a country that is more of a myth than of a conurbation, the epic writer is the man most likely to succeed. When history's magic and the modern scene have been brought subtly, grandly and colloquially together, the epic of a "fabulous country" will be a dignified reality, and not — what it may seem at present — another figment of right-minded, chauvinistic humbug.

One young Canadian poet who seems to have epic intentions or an embryonically epic mind is Ronald Bates, whose first volume, *The Wandering World*, appeared recently. Mr. Bates is a conventionally serious poet, examining his world in terms of histories, myths, interiors and landscapes. There are really two poets in him: one is rhetorical, requiring a good deal of elbow-room and long fluent lines; the other seems to arrive by way of Yeats and Auden: a little cramped, a little too self-conscious and rather too dispassionate. But in his rhetorical rôle Mr. Bates is out-

standing: he creates a massiveness of colloquial flux in which everything appears relevant. He thinks in large units — in fact, units which seem appropriate to the wandering world of his title. These units, or deep poetical breaths, are just right for his celebration of the Canadian continent, of the vast hinterland of his own memory, for the flight of gull or goose, the leap of salmon or even of the enthralled watcher's heart. Surely the following is magnificent without being in any way magniloquent:

And so spring comes, it may be after
 One year, or two, or five,
 But Spring must come at last, and one must hear
 Above the sounds of traffic in a sun-drowsed square,
 The crack of spring-ice breaking on a thousand lakes,
 While, in the blue, behind a Gothic spire,
 A wild goose arrowhead spears north.
 And the pull of the outbound tide at last
 Goes with the sun.

That suggests great things to come. But when Mr. Bates attends to the paraphernalia of the modern scene, he seems to be forcing himself: he gets off-hand and takes all kinds of clichés on trust; many of his combinations are wilful and cerebral. For instance: "We cannot escape. Blood is thicker than / Transmission oil or octane gasoline." Yes, it is; but my assent to that is not assent to a-truth-turned-into-poetry. Or take this stanza from *Overheard in the Garden*:

Don't let him in. Your last clue:
 Avoid the garden; shun the dark;
 Shadow the suspect in the park.
 You may find out that he is you.

Most of Mr. Bates's suspenseful paradoxes evoke the glibbest and emptiest stunts of Auden — which is a pity, for the attempt to cope with detectives, Palm Beach suits, cocktail bars and high heels is laudable. It seems to me that Mr. Bates makes this attempt in much the same spirit as he might take a cold bath; he keeps slipping back into the elegiac mode. In that mode he is astonishingly good. What he needs now is a texture that will carry all kinds of mixtures. Somehow, I feel, he hasn't yet found out how to fuse the trappings of industrial society with the lyricism of the great outdoors.

But he is certainly either a signpost or a weathercock. He encourages us to believe that Canadian poetry may yet handle a national theme robustly, subtly, vividly and above all in modern terms. If poets such as Mr. Bates keep on looking with their own eyes instead of those of their predecessors, we might not have to wait long. It is a measure of Canadian poetry's promise that the best of the younger English poets — Elizabeth Jennings, Ted Hughes, Dom Moraes — suggest quite different and less exciting maturities. Confronted with, involved with Canada, the coy colossus, poets will have to be ambitious and bold. It is hard to see how one or two of them, already on the right lines, can fail to make an epic about a country already (and still) mythologised.

INDEX. As articles and reviews appearing in *Canadian Literature* are regularly listed in the *Canadian Index to Periodicals and Documentary Films*, we have decided to print our own index once every twelve issues instead of once a year. The first index will therefore be sent out to those readers who request it between the Spring and Summer issues of 1962.

PLANS AND PROJECTS. In shortly forthcoming issues will appear a symposium on aspects of Canadian literature by **Ethel Wilson**, **Eric Nicol** and **George Woodcock**, and a long two-part study of isolation in the Canadian novel by **Warren Tallman**. **R. E. Watters** will discuss the Canadian character of Leacock's humour, **Chester Duncan** will assess the radio programme Anthology, **Robert Fulford** will analyse the approaches of popular Canadian periodicals and **Ruth McKenzie** will discuss the immigrant in Canadian literature. There will be individual studies of Mordecai Richler by **Nathan Cohen**, of Irving Layton by **Robert Weaver**, of A. M. Klein's poetry by **Milton Wilson**. **Hugo McPherson**, **Jean-Guy Pilon**, **Louis Dudek**, and **Philip Stratford** will contribute articles discussing aspects of the contemporary literary scene in Canada. Finally, in the Autumn will appear the first of a series of articles assessing achievements in Canadian writing for children.

THE MASK OF SATIRE:

*Character and Symbolic Pattern in
Robertson Davies' Fiction*

Hugo McPherson

VERY WELL, if you wish it, I shall talk to someone else," says Samuel Marchbanks to one of his many vacuous dinner partners. "I do not believe in wasting good talk on people who are plainly unable to appreciate it." This testy, Johnsonian pronouncement might stand as the key signature of Robertson Davies' writing. In the past dozen years he has produced fifteen volumes of drama, fiction and discussion of the theatre. Many of them are very good talk indeed, yet Davies' reviewers — like Marchbanks' dinner partners — have generally failed to grasp the full import of his astringent and irreverent statement. They praise his wit, ribaldry and invective, and even join in his laughter at Canadian conformity and stodginess; but in the end they label him as a clown — ubiquitous and erudite to be sure, but scarcely a serious thinker.

Unquestionably Davies is the *enfant terrible* of Canadian letters, but behind the puckered mask of the satirist lives a serious writer of romance. His novels study in symbolic fashion a problem that has concerned Canadian writers since Susanna Moodie: the plight of the imagination in this chilly cultural climate. This central theme in his work has generally gone unrecognized because the genre of satirical romance is unfamiliar to Canadians (Davies is its only native practitioner), and because, having come to the novel from drama and the essay, he has had difficulty creating characters who live *on the page*. As a result he has been judged upon the most prominent features of his work—his explicit ideas and his burlesques of Canadian manners. In this essay, therefore, I propose to redress the

balance by going back to the beginning of his fiction — to the irascible Samuel Marchbanks — and examining the symbolic structure and statement of his novels, and the problems of characterization which, until *A Mixture of Frailties*, have plagued him.

ROBERTSON DAVIES had been writing plays, studying the theatre and writing for newspapers since Neville Chamberlain's great umbrella-waving year, 1939, but he did not publish a volume of fiction until 1947; and even then his approach was oblique. A few years earlier he had created in the columns of *The Peterborough Examiner* a dyspeptic gentleman called Samuel Marchbanks — a disaffected Canadian whose attacks on contemporary manners borrowed heavily on the capital of Pepys, Addison, Swift, Samuel Butler, Shaw and, in desperate moments, H. L. Mencken and Sinclair Lewis. Marchbanks was at once the apostle of intelligence, the champion of live-and-let-live eccentricity and the defender of the principle that ideas, like mothers-in-law, are to be entertained rather than maintained. So voluble was his talk that it finally overflowed the *Examiner* and filled two book-length volumes—*The Diary of Samuel Marchbanks* (1947), and *The Table Talk of Samuel Marchbanks* (1949).

These informal essays or "confessions" gave Davies most of the advantages of the novelist with almost none of the responsibilities. He could disregard plot; a simple day-to-day chronology sufficed. He had no need of consistently-developed characters; the persons of the diary are clever caricatures who perform their antics on the stage of Samuel Marchbanks' observation. As in Davies' models, the ruling principle is the play of idea and opinion; nothing is sacred, and Marchbanks wastes no opportunity, trivial or profound, of whacking the provincial backsides of his Canadian and American compatriots. By turn self-pitying, ironic, antic, savage or sweetly reasonable, he applies his lash impartially to Hollywood films ("the apotheosis of the Yahoo"), to pious politicians and salesladies, to medical fads, and to chocolate-stuffed children who allow balloons to "disembarrass themselves of their wind" in adults' faces. But above all, Marchbanks fights the glum sobriety of Calvinism, the morality which calls any bovine female a Lady so long as she is "Good", and the mentality

of “young fogies . . . fellows who, at thirty, are well content with beaten paths and reach-me-down opinions; [whose] very conservatism is second-hand, [because] they don’t know what they are conserving.”

Mixed in with all this is a dash of ribaldry. In parodying the synopsis of a French play, for example, Marchbanks gives the characters such names as Alphamet, Feenaminte, Flanalette, Clitore, Merde and Vespasienne. This particular example is unfortunately juvenile; nevertheless Davies uses crude humor deliberately, for he will not indulge readers who would like to think Marchbanks “proper”. To *l’homme moyen sensuel*, everything is proper — in its place. Marchbanks’ all-encompassing complaint, then, is the narrowness of Canadian thinking and the reflection of this narrowness in Canadian manners.

Marchbanks’ talk is very good medicine. Canadians, who “don’t like to be kidded or mimicked, though they are extremely fond of kidding and mimicking others”, might take a course of the tonic every spring and fall. And yet the impact of the Marchbanks chronicles is not nearly as great as it might be. It is tempting to argue that their weakness is a malady to which even the best journalism is prone. The newspaper columnist, constantly under pressure to say something bright or challenging, almost inevitably descends to well-worn formulas or wit or impudence, to the superficial glance at people, or to controversy for its own sake. However, Robertson Davies seldom falls into these traps. His problem is that Samuel Marchbanks, for all his energy, never really comes alive as a character. Davies knows that:

Every man and woman is a mystery, built like those Chinese puzzles which consist of one box inside another, so that ten or twelve boxes have to be opened before the final solution is found.

Yet he shows us little more than the bows, the gaudy seals and the tissue of ideas that conceal the deepest reaches of Marchbanks’ character. Hence, far from emerging as a mordant critic in the vein of Swift, Johnson or Shaw, Marchbanks appears as an essentially theatrical creation who strikes attitudes instead of expressing convictions; who screens identity instead of revealing it. And the reader, lacking some glimpse of the “final solution” to his character, sees him as a pastiche of earlier and more assured diarists. Thus, even before Robertson Davies began writing novels, characterization became the *bête noire* of his art.

IN TURNING to this problem of character creation I am not abandoning my original intention of examining the statement and structure of Davies' novels, for both their content and form are contingent upon his conception of character. From what we have seen of Samuel Marchbanks it is clear that his temper is neo-classical rather than romantic; he is confident that he can take care of his own soul, and his prime demand is the freedom to enjoy his own private labyrinth without the pious intrusions of do-gooders and well-meaning acquaintances. But he will not attain this freedom and privacy until his community has achieved a measure of urbanity and sophistication. The aim of Marchbanks' talk, then, is to reveal the deformity or atrophy, the folly or self-deception of individuals as they present themselves in society.

Unquestionably Robertson Davies shares this general view of character. Unlike Hugh MacLennan, who has sought to discover *what* our national character is, and *why* it is, Davies rejects altogether the introspective search for identity. The last thing he wants is to delve into the recesses of Calvinist or Catholic hearts; in their Canadian habiliments they are too pinched and regimented to warrant close attention. On the assumption, then, that everybody *has* an identity, however mean, he focuses his attention on the conflict of ideas and on the spectacle of manners in the community. Character, in short, is a private affair (its privacy guaranteed—or violated—by the manners of others); and it is properly studied through its public manifestations.

Now this conception of character works very well in the theatre, where we watch an action from the outside, or in the essay, where we are concerned with ideas and opinions, but it raises serious problems in the novel. If the characters are to be observed from the outside, then we must have a narrator like the author-impresario in *Tom Jones* whose judgment we know and trust; or alternatively, as in Hemingway, we must be left entirely free to judge the facts on their own merits. In his first novel, *Tempest-Tost* (1951), Davies, still very much the playwright and essayist, was unable to adopt either of these narrative methods. Precisely because of his unwillingness to create anything but "public" characters, he gives us no counterpart of Fielding's intimate narrator to direct our responses, yet he will not, like Hemingway, withdraw entirely from the scene. Instead he gives us a group of externally observed characters and a narrator who,

like Alice's Cheshire cat, has disappeared, leaving only a savage Marchbanksian grin and a disembodied voice that makes acidulous, intrusive comments on the action.

In consequence *Tempest-Tost* is rather like an elaborate puppet show with interminable stage directions describing the setting, and the appearance, background, and motives of the characters; at the same time, an offstage M.C. urges us to see the stupidity of the performance. The story presents for our inspection the kind of people who organize Shakespearean productions in the Little Theatres of provincial Canadian cities — in this case Salterton (or Kingston) Ontario. Almost everybody concerned is so hopelessly second-rate that we are not sorry to see their pretensions exposed. But because the characters are never more than caricatures we are not inclined to look for any meaning beyond their surface absurdities. *Tempest-Tost*, we decide, is a frequently trivial and generally heavy-handed jibe at the parochialism of Canadian Little Theatre.

Having reached such a comforting conclusion we might, like Marchbanks' dinner partner, turn indifferently away from Mr. Davies' talk. But one nagging thought deters us: surely it is inconceivable that a man of Davies' talent and experience in the theatre could produce so banal an account of a Shakespearean production. The play itself, moreover, is not discussed at all. Why not? Surely Davies regards it as a great work of literature? It is when we ask this question about *The Tempest* and its meaning that the whole strategy of Davies' novel suddenly flashes upon us. Its action — so slight when viewed as a topical satire — is really an ironic off-stage re-enactment of Shakespeare's allegory, with a cast of Canadian characters. Robertson Davies not only understands the full import of Shakespeare's play, but he has looked about in a long-established Canadian community for the nearest equivalents he can find to the characters of the ageless romance. The result is a series of chilling ironies.

The Tempest, we recall, dramatizes the conflict between the humane powers of Duke Prospero and the grasping materialism of the King of Naples. Prospero lost his power because he neglected the practical needs of his state for the delights of his library. On the desert island to which he was banished, however, he learned to control the forces of imagination and intellect (Ariel) and the physical forces of the body and of nature (Caliban). And because Prospero mastered the "magic" of these forces, the play ends in a happy marriage between Ferdinand and Miranda — a

creative union of the imaginative and materialistic forces or "families" which had so long been in opposition. In sum, *The Tempest* is Shakespeare's sweetest affirmation of faith in the imagination and its power to make man a genuinely humane and enlightened creature.

In the jejune and complacent community of Salterton, however, it is almost impossible to find people who might be appropriately cast in the various roles of *The Tempest*. Everybody agrees that the production is a daring enterprise; it could not be undertaken at all without the aid of an American-trained director, Valentine Rich (Davies' names are often symbolic), and a despised composer and organist of the Church of England, Humphrey Cobbler. Nevertheless the casting does take place, with piercingly ironic results. The person who is determined to play Prospero, the learned nobleman and loving father, is Professor Vambrace, an egotistical and cloistered pedant from the classics department of Waverley University. Naturally the Salterton Miranda is Vambrace's daughter Pearl, who, unlike Shakespeare's heroine, has had a narrow and ignoble upbringing, and who — though potentially beautiful — can only be described as glum and repressed. Ferdinand, the gentle prince who loves Miranda at sight, is an egocentric young officer from Salterton's military college who prides himself on a long list of seductions.

But if the leading characters of the Salterton "Tempst" suffer a sea-change into something gauche and strange, the transformation of the secondary characters is even more ludicrous. The wise old councillor Gonzalo becomes Hector Mackilwraith, a Salterton mathematics teacher and son of an ineffectual Presbyterian minister; Hector's greatest wisdom is thrift, orderliness, and a slavish reliance on the Puritan logic of *Pro* and *Contra*. Salterton's Caliban, not unexpectedly, is a crude practical joker who works in the local store of the Liquor Control Board of Ontario.

The greatest casting problem, of course, is Ariel, the ubiquitous spirit of intellect, imagination and beauty. (For Davies, as for Shakespeare, music is the symbol of these qualities.) After great deliberation, the Salterton thespians award this role to Griselda Webster, a pretty girl whose singing voice and I.Q. are acceptable though not exceptional. The *real* reason for their decision is that Ariel's father is the richest man in town; moreover, he will lend his garden to the Little Theatre for its *Tempest*. Thus the community's unacknowledged but slavish worship of wealth as the "highest good" is revealed in the casting of Ariel.

From this point on, the ironies of *Tempest-Tost* multiply and proliferate. In Salterton nobody but Valentine Rich (the Canadian artist who must make her living abroad) recognizes the potential of Pearl Vambrace, the Canadian Miranda. Instead, the three bachelors of the story yearn foolishly after Ariel, the affluent "impatient Griselda": Lieutenant Tasset (Prince Ferdinand) covets the physical pleasures which she promises; Hector Mackilwraith (Gonzalo) worships her as a pure and chaste ideal; and Solly Bridgetower, an indecisive young English professor at Waverley (who is the best assistant-director that Valentine Rich can find in Salterton) moons after her weakly. None succeeds in his suit, however, for this shrewd Canadian Ariel is aloof to them all.

In Salterton's eyes, of course, the whole production of *The Tempest* is a frivolous affair. Mrs. Caesar Augustus Conquerwood, the leading patron, departs in the middle of the first performance. What Salterton society really values is revealed in two long episodes which at first appear extraneous to the theme of the novel: the great ball at the military college, and the distribution of the library collected by Valentine Rich's father. The military ball is an overpoweringly stuffy affair, replete with major-generals, MPP's, civic officials, ageing representatives of Loyalist families, Waverley dignitaries, and whoever else can procure tickets (from whatever source). In Salterton people must be cajoled into seeing a play, but everybody wants to be seen at the ball and to have his status confirmed in the social columns of the *Evening Bellman*. The ball, with all its gold braid and medals, is an anti-masque within the Salterton "tempest".

The episode of Valentine Rich's inherited library is more complex. The will of the late Adam Savage, Valentine's father, bequeaths his library to the clergy of Salterton; they may choose from it what will be useful to them. On the morning when the books are made available there is a near riot at the Savage home; more than two hundred black-clad gentlemen invade the library and strip it like a horde of army ants. In the confusion, rabbis find themselves with commentaries on the New Testament, and a shovel-hatted priest ends up with ten volumes of a Scottish metaphysician. Even for Canada's second estate, books are impressive *per se*, whatever their contents. But there is a final irony: Professor Savage willed to Valentine a wrapped bundle of books which inadvertently fall into the auctioneer's hands and are sold to a New York dealer for the astounding sum (in Salterton commerce) of fifty dollars. As collectors' items the books

are worth several thousands; they are the main asset of the Professor's estate. But Valentine — intent on the riches of art rather than the market — has failed to discover their dollar value. The Canadian heritage, it would appear, is chiefly valuable as a collection of marketable antiques; Professor Savage's legacy of *ideas* is exactly nil. Salterton's best hope is that people like Valentine may kindle the cold Canadian imagination.

Robertson Davies is clearly not optimistic about Salterton's cultural future. As the novel ends, Canada's Puritan Gonzalo, Hector Mackilwraith, attempts suicide, believing that he has lost his gilt-edged Ariel to the lustful Ferdinand. Ariel's younger sister (Shakespeare's messenger Iris) attributes Hector's despair to the oppressive influence of "cheap religion", and proceeds with her youthful project of brewing champagne in Canada. Cobbler, the musical director, warns her that it cannot be champagne — "Just good cider with ideas above its station". And the badly-shaken Hector-Gonzalo decides (God help us!) to accept a job in the Ontario Department of Education, a decision which Ariel rewards with a formal kiss.

THE FOREGOING, I believe, is the essential statement of *Tempest-Tost*. Beneath the surface satire, Robertson Davies has developed a major theme; but his external handling of character and his failure to get beyond the dramatist's impersonal method has so muffled his statement that the book must be accounted a failure. In the Preface to his drama *At My Heart's Core* (1950), Davies recognized that a play loses a great deal on the printed page. "The playwright's work", he says,

. . . is completed by the actor; the reader is not often so imaginative as to be able to discover in the text of the play . . . the qualities which would be revealed in it by a group of capable actors and an able director who had worked on it for a month.

In *Tempest-Tost* he lacked the aid of a "group of capable actors" but had not yet reconciled himself to the novelist's need for some means of revealing more than the outer layer of the Chinese puzzle of character.

Leaven of Malice (1954), a tightly plotted satirical romance, is a much better work. It is not surprising to learn that Mr. Davies has already adapted it as a play which Tyrone Guthrie will produce in New York, for

the hand of the dramatist, carefully building up scenes and climaxes, still dominates. There is as yet no genuinely living character, but the citizens of Salterton are more sharply observed, and the satire has the therapeutic bite of a mustard plaster. (An academic party, replete with games, vile punch, and an overweening sociology instructor as host, is one of the most uproarious chapters in Canadian fiction.) The author-playwright has now withdrawn almost entirely into the wings and distributed his ideas among Humphrey Cobbler, Gloster Ridley, editor of the *Evening Bellman*, and Dean Jevon Knapp of St. Nicholas' Cathedral. And finally, the action reveals more clearly than in *Tempest-Tost* the complementary elements of surface satire and symbolic implication.

Regarded as a waspish satire with a healing moral, *Leaven of Malice* tells of a crude practical joke. A false announcement that Pearl Vambrace is engaged to Solly Bridgetower sets aflame a ready-laid fire of animosities in Salterton. Ultimately the culprit is unmasked, but not until his false charge has led Pearl and Solly into each others' arms, and allowed Dean Knapp to point a moral. Malice, he says,

. . . works like a leaven; it stirs, and swells, and changes all that surrounds it. . . . It may cause the greatest misery and distress in many unexpected quarters. I have even known it to have quite unforeseen good results. But those things which it invades will never be quite the same again.

But exactly what *are* the things that malice has invaded, and how has it changed them? If we look again at the persons of Robertson Davies' story and consider them as representative of various "forces" at work in Salterton society rather than mere satirical butts, we see that the author is once more talking about the failure of Canada's imagination; in contrast to *Tempest-Tost*, however, this action ends in a "marriage" which may portend a new era.

Gloster Ridley, though not the hero of the romance, is its main character. A self-educated intellectual who takes himself a few degrees too seriously, he has nevertheless transformed the *Evening Bellman* from an unprofitable and provincial curiosity to an alert and thriving newspaper which serves all segments of the community intelligently. But in achieving this revolution he has antagonized Salterton's "old guard"—the smug, sentimentally Anglophile, tradition-bound antiques who regard themselves as the community's social and intellectual arbiters. This group, which in-

cludes granddaughters of Brigadiers, widows of Waverley Deans, and persons claiming distant kinship with British nobility, would not demean themselves to fight Ridley openly, but all are privately delighted when the spurious engagement announcement exposes Ridley, Pearl and Solly to ridicule. Nor is it surprising that the person who secretly performed this malicious act is a toady to the "old guard". He is Bevill Higgin, a maddeningly genteel old country "artist" whose writing, acting, singing and piano-playing epitomize the "old Guard's" worst failings in taste and education.

But Higgin's essential shoddiness does not pass undetected everywhere: a girl whom he imagines to be Pearl Vambrace refuses him university library privileges; Solly Bridgetower rejects his impudent offer to recite Shakespeare to students; and Ridley refuses to print his precious essays in the *Bellman*. Higgin's spiteful hoax wounds the three victims, but it also drives them to self-assessment and positive action. For example, Pearl's father (the egotistical Prospero of *Tempest-Tost*) regards the hoax as an attack on his personal honor, and in the family rows that ensue Pearl is freed from the tyranny and coldness of her home. She even adopts a new name—Veronica. Solly, whose department head has advised him to "jump right into Amcan" and publish a work on the great Canadian dramatist Charles Heavysege, recognizes that he wants to *create* some Canadian literature rather than study its relics. And Ridley, who had hoped for an honorary degree from Waverley as visible proof of his achievement, realizes that he needs no such external reassurances.

As is usual in romance, the maligned parties are aided by benign and intelligent friends—particularly Dean Knapp and Humphrey Cobbler, who represent the genuine humanity and taste of the British tradition as opposed to Higgin's pseudo-culture. Since music is equated with imagination in Davies, it is the happy Cobbler who counsels Solly to defy his "old guard" Mother, marry his Pearl-Veronica, and begin to create. Finally, then, through the working of malice, the creative intelligence of Salterton finds its independence, or at least seems about to find it.

THE STATEMENT OF *Leaven of Malice* is hopeful, but despite the great ingenuity of its action and the sharpness of its observation it is not a warm book. In Gloster Ridley we meet a character who is highly lifelike, yet not entirely alive. Robertson Davies has not yet penetrated

beyond the second or third box of the Chinese puzzle. His point of view is still the "public", wide-angled perspective of the dramatist, and though we watch *Leaven of Malice* with pleasure, we do not live in it.

In *A Mixture of Frailties*, however, Davies finally takes the step—so alien to the Marchbanksian side of his sensibility—which makes him a novelist, as distinct from a playwright. Here for the first time in his fiction he creates a protagonist whom we know fully and through whose eyes we see the action unfold. Now, instead of looking across the footlights, we are on stage and at the center of the action. The career of Monica Gall—a Canadian Cinderella who becomes a great singer—is *our* career; we suffer and learn with her. Because Davies is not entirely at home with this technique of characterization, there are many awkwardly-handled moments in Monica's story, but the access of warmth and intimacy which the method makes possible far outweighs these defects. There is no doubt now that the author intends much more than a topical satire of Canadian provinciality.

Davies' symbolic theme is still the struggle of the Canadian imagination to free itself from second-rateness, parochialism and dulness, but it moves beyond the situation of *Leaven of Malice*. He has explored the prospects of the educated Canadian intellectual, Solly Bridgetower, as far as he is able. Solly will "produce" if he can. The question now is: What happens when a gifted but completely untutored Canadian is exposed to the best that Europe can offer? The story of Monica Gall is Davies' answer.

The machinery which sets Monica's story in motion is farcical though not, as a sequel to *Leaven of Malice*, improbable. The first year of Solly Bridgetower's marriage is blighted by the shadow of his "old guard" mother. The newlyweds live in her forbidding Victorian house, and even her death does not release them from the "Dead Hand" of her tradition. They will inherit her fortune only when they produce a male heir—a new Solomon. Until then a board of trustees is to spend the income from the estate on the artistic education of some talented young woman from Salterton. Monica Gall, Humphrey Cobbler's candidate, becomes the beneficiary.

As Monica's experience unfolds, we become aware that Davies' characters, while still as much the targets of satire as the caricatures of the earlier novels, now have a new relevance. Such persons as Monica's colleagues in the Heart and Hope Gospel Quartet, her callow, materialistic lover at the Glue Works, her wistful confidante Aunt Ellen, lost in a never-

never world of music—these people reveal to us dramatically, existentially, what Monica *is*. Chief among them is Ma Gall, an image of the repressed Canadian imagination—of what Monica might have been:

Ma, when she told tall stories, when she rasped her family with rough, sardonic jokes, when she rebelled against the circumstances of her life in coarse abuse, and when she cut through a fog of nonsense with the beam of her insight, was an artist—a spoiled artist, one who had never made anything, who was unaware of the nature or genesis of her own discontent, but who nevertheless possessed the artist's temperament; in her that temperament, misunderstood, denied and gone sour, had become a poison which had turned against the very sources of life itself. Nevertheless [Monica] was like Ma, and she must not go astray as Ma—not wholly through her own fault—had gone.

In the same way, Monica's training in England is at once a highly absorbing narrative, full of humor, action and brilliant talk, and a symbolic study of the forces which the artist must recognize and learn to control if he is to become a genuine creator. Monica's director is Sir Benedict Domdaniel, a great British conductor. He sends her first to Murtagh Molloy, a voice coach who teaches her technique—the control of her physical resources—and then to Giles Revelstoke, a composer who initiates her into the mysteries of passion and joy which are the sources of art. The tension between these two aspects of her art, between technique and content, are worked out dramatically—even melodramatically. Monica soon falls slavishly in love with Revelstoke who, as befits the representative of the bardic spirit, comes from a primitive part of Wales, wears a signet ring bearing the image of Orpheus, and publishes a little magazine called *Lantern*. But as we might expect, though Revelstoke takes Monica as his mistress, he cannot be harnessed in marriage, nor can he be mothered; true to his nature, he is an isolated, brilliant, absolutely candid, and easily exacerbated force. But if Monica cannot *possess* the creative spirit whom she loves, she will not become the mistress of technique. At a costume ball her voice coach, Molloy, attempts to seduce her and is rebuffed. "He can't resist a good pupil," says Mrs. Molloy; "wants to run away with 'em all."

Finally, after a violent quarrel, Revelstoke and Monica separate, and when she returns to him in the belief that she must accept his weaknesses along with his strengths, she finds him dead. On the surface level of the narrative this chapter is complex and awkwardly-contrived melodrama; but Revelstoke's death, seen as a final step in Monica's artistic develop-

ment, is inevitable. The artist cannot remain indefinitely in servitude to an undisciplined creative spirit. Yet Monica's love for Revelstoke does not die; though she is freed from his domination, she inherits the files of his *Lantern*, and his talismanic Orpheus ring. Now her education is complete: she can return to Canada a free, self-determining individual. But the voices of Revelstoke and Ma Gall, though no longer dominating, will always counsel her; she will be "as one that hath a familiar spirit."

This account of the structure of *A Mixture of Frailties* does no justice to the subtlety and richness of its execution, but that is the subject of another essay. In typical fashion, the romance closes with a rite. Davies gives us a daringly executed fugal chapter in which fragments of a sermon on the Magi are interwoven with Monica's thoughts and with passages of a letter in which Sir Benedict Domdaniel asks Monica to marry him. It is St. Nicholas' Day, the second anniversary of the Bridgetower Trust, and just before the memorial service begins we learn that Solly's wife has given birth to a healthy male heir. At last the "Dead Hand" of the Victorian past has relaxed its grip. The promise extended at the conclusion of *Leaven of Malice* has been fulfilled. As the congregation leaves the church, the irrepressible Cobbler plays "For unto us a child is born". Monica, we suspect, will accept Sir Benedict's proposal, but this is a matter of small concern, for Monica — a symbol of the Canadian imagination reaching its maturity — is now a citizen of the world.

Robertson Davies, I think, will yet write even better novels than *A Mixture of Frailties*, for he has learned that though the novelist may not lay bare the contents of the Chinese box, he must at least find a means of suggesting its contents. He may never abandon his role as Peterborough's Bad Boy (indeed I hope that he does not) but his most important achievement is his imaginative insight into the problems and the prospects of his culture. That insight, combined with his unfailing wit, bespeaks a gift that is all too rare in Canadian letters.

GRATIEN GELINAS

ET LE THEATRE POPULAIRE AU CANADA FRANCAIS

Marguerite A. Primeau

EN 1914 PARAISSAIT le premier roman d'inspiration canadienne destiné à enlever les suffrages du public, et son auteur, Louis Hémon, prenait sa place de chef de file dans la littérature du Canada français. La critique a reproché à *Maria Chapdelaine* un pessimisme de circonstance et certaines exagérations qui semblent doter le pionnier canadien d'un esprit plutôt simpliste; il n'en est pas moins vrai que par sa formule romanesque, cette œuvre marque le jaillissement d'une nouvelle source d'inspiration, source nettement canadienne qui se nourrit de la substance même du peuple canadien-français. L'impulsion donnée, tous les aspects de la vie au Canada deviennent dès lors exploitables comme sujet de roman.

Trente-quatre ans plus tard, l'apparition de *Tit-Coq* sur la scène marque à son tour les débuts d'un théâtre national au Canada français.

Une comparaison s'impose entre Gratien Gélinas et Louis Hémon, car l'un et l'autre se sont abreuvés à la même source. Pour l'auteur dramatique québécois comme pour le romancier français, c'est l'âme populaire qui est le principe fondamental de toute nation; c'est l'homme du peuple qu'il convient d'abord d'étudier. Roman psychologique et populaire, théâtre psychologique et populaire: telle est en effet la formule romanesque de Louis Hémon et la formule théâtrale de Gratien Gélinas.

L'auteur de *Tit-Coq* a emprunté sa formule à une pièce de Claudel. Dans la première version de *L'Echange*, l'actrice Lechy Elbernon explique ce que c'est que le théâtre:

LECHY ELBERNON:

Il y a la scène et la salle. Tout étant clos, les gens viennent là le soir, et ils sont

assis par rangées les uns derrière les autres, regardant.

Que regardent-ils?

LECHY ELBERNON :

Ils regardent le rideau de la scène. Et ce qu'il y a derrière quand il est levé.
Et il arrive quelque chose sur la scène comme si c'était vrai.

Pourquoi viennent-ils?

LECHY ELBERNON :

L'homme s'ennuie, et l'ignorance lui est attachée depuis sa naissance.
Et ne sachant de rien comment cela commence ou finit, c'est pour cela qu'il va au théâtre.
Et il se regarde lui-même, les mains posées sur les genoux.
Et il pleure et il rit, et il n'a point envie de s'en aller.¹

Selon Gratien Gélinas, le nœud du problème est tout entier dans ces paroles de Claudel: "Il se regarde lui-même . . . et il pleure et il rit . . ." Si, dans le genre dramatique, c'est le grand public qui en dernière analyse donne à l'écrivain sa place dans la littérature, il doit pouvoir se reconnaître dans les personnages qui évoluent sous ses yeux. La forme dramatique la plus pure sera donc, ainsi que l'a décrite Gélinas lui-même, celle qui exprime aussi intimement que possible l'âme du public auquel ce théâtre s'adresse. Voici comment il expliquait dans *La Nouvelle Revue* de décembre 1947 cette conception du drame :

Le théâtre, comme le mariage, est l'union de deux éléments essentiels, l'acteur et le public. Sans l'acteur, il ne saurait y avoir de théâtre; sans d'auditeur non plus. Vous pouvez seul dans votre salon, jouer du piano pendant deux heures et vous dire ensuite: j'ai fait de la Musique, avec un M majuscule. Mais cinquante acteurs sans public, peuvent répéter, même dans un théâtre, une pièce pendant six mois, sans avoir fait plus que de se préparer à faire du théâtre. Pour qu'il y ait théâtre, il faut deux parties, l'acteur et le public.

En 1952 Louis Jovet déclarait que :

Le théâtre n'existe que dans l'acte du théâtre, à ce moment unique où les éléments, les participants — acteurs, spectateurs, auteurs — entraînés, dépossédés d'eux-mêmes, dessaisis de leur caractère et de leur choix, restitués à une sensibilité neuve, à une intelligence souveraine, se fondent et se dissolvent peu à peu les uns dans les autres, à ce moment où ils perdent leur personnalité, où toute faculté consciente et raisonnée ne résiste plus à la chaleur de l'acte même.²

¹ PAUL CLAUDEL, *Oeuvres complètes*, Librairie Gallimard (Paris, 1954), VIII, p. 29.

² LOUIS JOVET, *Témoignages sur le théâtre*, Flammarion (Paris, 1952), p. 192.

C'est afin d'obtenir cette communion totale entre acteur et public, et qui est l'essence de l'art dramatique, que Gélinas se met en quête d'une sorte de dénominateur commun pour aboutir avec *Tit-Coq* à un personnage appartenant non seulement au même milieu que la majorité des spectateurs, mais issu de ce qui pourrait s'appeler "la moëlle du peuple".

Ils m'écoutent et ils pensent ce que je dis; ils me regardent et j'entre dans leur âme comme dans une maison vide . . . Et quand je crie, j'entends toute la salle gémir.³

Pour Gratien Gélinas, le cri qui soulève l'auditoire est d'autant plus sincère que la création littéraire se rapproche du peuple.

Le succès extraordinaire obtenu par *Tit-Coq* (300 représentations en français, et plus de 200 en anglais), justifie ce raisonnement. Au Canada, le grand public aime se reconnaître sur la scène; il aime se regarder lui-même, et après avoir ri et pleuré avec *Tit-Coq*, son sosie, il n'a plus du tout "envie de s'en aller".

Qui est donc ce *Tit-Coq* qui a su vaincre ce qu'on s'est plu à appeler l'indifférence du peuple canadien en face du théâtre? Enfant illégitime sans famille et sans amis, gavroche tour à tour gouailleur et emporté, d'où le nom de *Tit-Coq*, ce jeune homme ressent dans sa chair la honte d'avoir été rejeté par ses parents. Il traîne avec lui comme une défroque lamentable l'héritage du péché; l'humiliation d'être venu au monde à la Miséricorde, parmi des étrangers, est toujours présente à son esprit; il n'oublie pas un instant ce qu'il est ni d'où il vient. L'enfance sans tendresse qu'il avait reçue en partage a fait place aux amours vénales et sans lendemain d'une jeunesse sans idéal: il est soldat parce que l'armée représente un gîte et une solde. Il n'y a pas là de quoi être fier, et cependant, ce *Tit-Coq* qui crâne pour cacher le vide de son existence, a le don d'émouvoir les spectateurs. Son extérieur médiocre cache un coeur humain, et ses aspirations, si ordinaires soient-elles, rejoignent les espoirs des hommes de tout temps et lui confèrent un caractère universel.

GRATIEN GELINAS disait récemment que, pour combattre la grande popularité du cinéma et de la télévision, les auteurs dramatiques doivent de nouveau faire appel aux sentiments. C'est le but

³ PAUL CLAUDEL, *ouv. cit.* p. 30.

qu'il s'est proposé d'atteindre avec *Tit-Coq*. Il nous semble inutile d'insister sur le fait qu'il a réussi au-delà de ses espérances. Ayant admis ce point de vue, il est tout naturel que Gélinas ait recours à la passion, au rire, au suspense et au pathétique pour faire de son personnage un héros populaire. Il fait donc connaître à Tit-Coq un amour total et exclusif qui pourrait à lui seul balayer tout le passé. Le jeune homme sans attaches saura ce que c'est qu'un foyer, pauvre peut-être au point de vue matériel, mais riche en affection et en joies simples, et qu'une famille, mi-paysanne mi-bourgeoise, empruntée aux petites gens des villes et villages canadiens. De plus, le désir de pureté qui le tourmente deviendra réalité le jour où il épousera celle qu'il appelle "Mam'zelle Toute-Neuve", car il n'y aura plus alors de situations irrégulières, ou comme il le dit lui-même dans son langage pittoresque: "Le bâtard tout seul dans la vie, ni vu ni connu!" C'est après avoir entrevu un bonheur qui peut nous sembler modeste mais qui suffit amplement à l'enfant abandonné d'autrefois, qu'il connaît la désillusion. Plus grand aura été le bonheur anticipé, plus profond sera le désespoir de Tit-Coq. Attendri par le dénouement sombre d'un drame dont les assises sont à la fois la vie contemporaine et les moeurs du peuple canadien-français, le public est forcé de reconnaître que le malheur de Tit-Coq aurait bien pu être le sien, et que le problème religieux posé par le divorce est bien un peu son problème tout comme l'est aussi celui des enfant illégitimes.

A l'exemple de Louis Hémon, Gratién Gélinas a fait de *Tit-Coq* l'étude psychologique d'un type populaire profondément humain; l'élément principal est le personnage, l'intrigue ne sert qu'à l'éclairer. Mais alors que le conflit psychologique chez Maria Chapdelaine consiste à choisir entre la fidélité à la terre canadienne représentée par les voix de la patrie, et l'exil volontaire aux États-Unis, le combat entre la chair et l'esprit qui déchire le personnage de Gélinas est beaucoup plus vaste et bien plus fertile en conséquences. Tit-Coq et Marie-Ange doivent choisir ou de rester fidèles à leur amour malgré la tare qu'ils transmettront à leurs enfants, ou d'accepter comme un fait accompli, irrémédiablement et pour toujours, le mariage de Marie-Ange avec un autre.

Tit-Coq rappelle aussi par certains côtés les héros de Mauriac. Comme eux jeune et vulnérable, et obsédé par un désir de pureté qui semble à certains moments presque pathologique, il constate l'effrayant héritage transmis à l'homme par le péché. Il en souffre comme d'une infirmité;

le péché, c'est une malpropreté repoussante dans laquelle on s'enlise. ("Quand on se sent crotté," dit-il, et encore: "quand on veut sortir de sa crasse".) Chose digne de remarque, c'est que son premier mouvement après avoir appris l'infidélité de Marie-Ange sera de chercher sa revanche dans l'alcool et le péché, comme s'il pouvait étouffer par là son désir de renaissance morale.

Cependant, si le drame de Tit-Coq est en premier lieu sa répulsion physique à l'égard du péché, il est basé aussi sur son sentiment très vif d'avoir été lésé dans sa dignité d'homme par la faute de ses parents. Parce qu'on aura oublié de lui accorder en naissant sa part de dignité humaine, il se voit condamné à être dédaigné et rebuté par la société à laquelle il voudrait s'identifier. Tout être humain a droit à la tendresse et à l'appui d'une famille; tout enfant a droit à un père et à une mère, se dit Tit-Coq. L'absence de liens fait de lui une épave flottant ça et là au gré de sa destinée.

Il dira au Padre :

Je ne connaissais pas mieux, alors j'étais tranquille, tout seul dans mon coin. Comme ce clou-là, tenez: il rouille en paix au fond de son trou, sans se douter qu'il pourrait être une belle vis en cuivre.

Et plus tard sur le bateau qui l'emporte :

Ce qui est triste, je m'en rends compte, c'est de (ne) pas s'ennuyer . . . et (de n'avoir) personne qui s'ennuie de toi. Si je ne l'avais pas rencontrée, elle, (Marie-Ange) je partirais aujourd'hui de la même façon, probablement sur le même bateau. Je prendrais le large, ni triste ni gai, comme un animal, sans savoir ce que j'aurais pu perdre.

Désir d'être reçu sur un pied d'égalité avec les autres, d'être jugé selon les règles, désir enfin de dignité humaine, et espoir de recommencer à zéro, de devenir un homme nouveau, sans tache, voilà donc les mobiles de Tit-Coq. Que ses actions le conduisent à l'impasse où il lui faudra choisir entre un amour charnel, sans issue pour lui, pour Marie-Ange et pour les enfants qu'ils auront, et le renoncement au bonheur de se voir comme Monsieur Tout le Monde en tramway un dimanche soir, son petit dans les bras et sa femme à ses côtés, rend son dilemme encore plus pathétique. S'il avait voulu, il aurait pu épouser avant son départ celle que dans sa soif de pureté il appelle "Mam-zelle Toute-Neuve"; il ne l'a pas fait, parce qu'il ne veut pas qu'un enfant à lui naisse pendant qu'il est au loin.

Epouser une fille, pour qu'elle ait un petit de moi pendant que je serais au diable vert? Jamais en cent ans! Si mon père était loin de ma mère quand je suis venu au monde, à la Miséricorde ou ailleurs, ça le regardait. Mais moi, quand mon petit arrivera, je serai là, à côté de ma femme . . . Cet enfant-là, il saura, lui, aussitôt l'œil ouvert, qui est-ce qui est son père . . . J'ai manqué la première partie de ma vie, tant pis, on n'en parle plus! Mais la deuxième, j'y goûterai d'un bout à l'autre, par exemple!

Ce désir d'en finir une fois pour toutes avec le péché et cet espoir d'être un jour un père de famille comme les autres, font de Tit-Coq un personnage avec lequel le grand public sympathise facilement, surtout au Canada français. Demeuré profondément attaché aux valeurs familiales et à sa religion en dépit des tourmentes du vingtième siècle, le peuple canadien ne peut s'empêcher d'être ému à la vue du jeune homme qui, comme dans un miroir, lui renvoie sa propre image. Et il faut reconnaître que, grâce à ses dons d'écrivain et de comédien, puisque c'est lui-même qui jouait le rôle de Tit-Coq, Gratién Gélinas a su projeter sa création dramatique jusque dans l'âme de ses spectateurs. Ces derniers se retrouvent sous les traits de Tit-Coq; ils comprennent son dilemme et ils souffrent avec lui.

Les personnages secondaires incarnent à leur tour la mentalité de leur milieu. Gens peu instruits — ils parlent cru et dru comme Tit-Coq — pas “supérieurement intelligents” au dire du père lui-même, leur vie est une suite de jours tous pareils qui paraîtraient sûrement monotones n'était-ce le grand attachement qu'ils ont l'un pour l'autre, et qui pourrait faire envie. Si leur bonheur est simple et leurs aspirations plutôt médiocres, ils n'en sont pas moins un exemple de stabilité dans un monde changeant. Doués à la fois d'un bon sens pratique et de sentiments sans complications, ils peuvent fort bien rappeler au citadin canadien d'aujourd'hui l'existence paisible d'un temps à jamais révolu. Là aussi se révèle le talent de Gélinas, car cette famille d'ouvriers qui vit au fond d'un petit village où tous les jours se ressemblent, suffit à jeter le trouble dans d'âme passive de Tit-Coq. Père, mère, frère et sœur, sont les rouages du mécanisme qui déclenche l'action.

Le personnage secondaire le plus important est Marie-Ange. Jeune fille élevée au sein d'une famille affectueuse et “parmi des parents pris les uns dans les autres comme des morceaux de puzzle”, selon Tit-Coq, elle représente tout ce qui jusque-là a été refusé à ce dernier. Elle est à

la fois un “petit mouchoir de fantaisie”, qu’il faut prendre garde de salir, et “Mam’zelle Toute-Neuve” qui réussira à transformer le jeune homme. Ce sera elle la dépositaire de toute la tendresse accumulée au cours des années solitaires, et c’est en elle que se réaliseront le rêve de pureté de Tit-Coq et son espoir de dignité humaine. Il explique ainsi cette transformation :

La fille que j’aimerai au point de lui glisser un jonc dans le doigt, je lui serai fidèle de la tête aux pieds et d’un dimanche à l’autre, laissez-moi vous le dire! Encore une fois, faudrait pas me prendre pour un buveur d’eau bénite; mais les situations irrégulières, moi, j’en ai plein le dos, étant donné que je suis venu au monde les fesses dedans!

Et plus loin :

Moi, je ne m’imagine pas sénateur dans le parlement, plus tard, ou ben millionnaire dans un château. Non! Moi, quand je rêve, je me vois en tramway, un dimanche soir, vers sept heures et quart, avec mon petit dans les bras, et, accrochée après moi, ma femme . . . Dans le tram, il y aurait un homme comme les autres, ben ordinaire avec son chapeau gris, son foulard blanc, sa femme et son petit. Juste comme tout le monde. Pas plus, mais pas moins! Pour un autre, ce serait peut-être un ben petit avenir, mais moi, avec ça, je serais sur le pignon du monde!

L’amour de Marie-Ange est un amour sincère et réaliste. Elle accepte son fiancé tel qu’il est, sans nom, sans famille, et sans autre situation que la présente, celle de soldat de Sa Majesté. C’est peu de garanties pour toute une vie, mais la jeune fille, pratique comme le sont d’ordinaire les gens du peuple, fait aussi preuve d’une certaine sensibilité en comprenant l’importance du contexte familial pour Tit-Coq. C’est sur cet atout qu’elle compte établir leur mariage.

. . . mon mari à moi, tout l’amour qu’il aura dans sa vie, c’est à moi qu’il le devra; à moi, Marie-Ange Desilets, et à la parenté que je lui donnerai! Si une femme est heureuse de se sentir indispensable à un homme, je serai loin de m’embêter en ménage!

Sûre de lui, Marie-Ange laisse donc partir son fiancé. Mais elle a compté sans sa propre faiblesse, car si son amour est sincère, il lui manque la profondeur des sentiments de Tit-Coq. D’un caractère plus frivole, adorant la danse et les sorties, elle se lasse de la fidélité jurée à l’absent et, encouragée par ses parents qui aiment bien le jeune soldat mais qui préféreraient un meilleur parti pour leur fille, elle épouse pour son malheur le prétendant jadis éconduit.

Si Tit-Coq se rapproche du peuple par son attitude de gavroche comique et pathétique, Marie-Ange représente les joies de la famille et son attachement aux us et coutumes. Son erreur peut être imputée en partie à son milieu. Le raisonnement qui la pousse à épouser l'homme riche et respecté au lieu d'attendre le soldat sans nom et sans situation qu'est Tit-Coq, est ici le défaut de sa classe sociale. Reconnue pour son bon sens et son esprit pratique, celle-ci, en général, manque d'imagination. Il faut admettre, cependant, que ce même sens des réalités aidera Marie-Ange à comprendre à la fin que leur amour est condamné, qu'il n'a pas d'autre issue que de donner la vie à un second Tit-Coq, taré comme son père.

MARIE-ANGE :

Le jour où tu te débattrais contre la tentation d'aller chercher ailleurs ce que tu voulais, ce que tu voudras toujours, qu'est-ce que j'aurais, moi, pour te retenir? . . . Qu'est-ce qui resterait de notre bonheur, ce jour-là?

TIT-COQ, *désespéré* :

Il resterait l'enfant . . . l'enfant que tu peux me donner!

MARIE-ANGE, *se cachant la figure* :

Non! Pas ça, pas ça! (Instinctivement, elle s'est éloignée de lui.) Tu n'en voudrais pas, de cet enfant-là . . . parce qu'il serait, comme toi, un . . . par ma faute.

Grâce aux canadianismes et aux expressions non-académiques que Gélinas n'hésite pas à mettre dans la bouche de ses personnages, leur langue est non moins pittoresque qu'authentique. D'origine paysanne — on pense en effet aux paysans de *Maria Chapdelaine*— ce langage populaire, touchant par sa naïveté et en même temps d'une drôlerie irrésistible, possède une grande puissance évocatrice. Si l'on tient compte des images précises qui abondent, il est impossible de ne pas accepter *Tit-Coq* comme une tranche de vie émouvante et véridique, créée de toutes pièces, mais basée sur de solides qualités d'observation. La vulgarité du vocabulaire est peut-être parfois à déplorer, pourtant, en plaçant le personnage dans son cadre, elle ajoute encore à la vérité de la création.

Quelle conclusion reste-t-il à tirer de *Tit-Coq*? Tout d'abord, que son apparition sur la scène canadienne a inauguré un champ d'action nouveau en ce qui concerne le théâtre au Québec. A la suite de Gélinas, d'autres écrivains dramatiques dont Marcel Dubé avec *Le Temps des lilas* et *Zone*, ont fait du peuple canadien leur source d'inspiration. Il est encore trop tôt pour juger de l'ampleur du mouvement ou de son mérite,

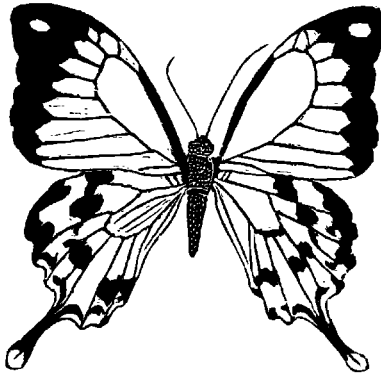
mais si l'on considère les pièces de théâtre des dernières années ainsi que la création de nouvelles troupes telles que la Comédie Canadienne — fondée et dirigée par Gélinais lui-même et qui joue surtout des pièces d'inspiration canadienne — et le Théâtre du Nouveau Monde, l'art dramatique est en renouveau au Canada français. Et il suffit de voir une pièce comme *Bousille et les justes* de Gélinais (qui a déjà à son actif plus de 110 représentations), tenir l'affiche pendant des semaines, pour constater que le théâtre populaire est réellement installé parmi le grand public.

Pour ce qui est de Gratien Gélinais, il faut lire son credo professionnel si l'on veut comprendre comment cet homme qui est à la fois auteur dramatique, directeur, acteur et metteur en scène, obtient aujourd'hui avec *Bousille et les justes* le même succès qu'il y a douze ans avec *Tit-Coq*.

Travaille pour les tiens, tu n'auras pas perdu ta vie. Ecris pour l'homme de ton pays, de ta ville, de ta rue. Si tu écris pour lui, il viendra cet homme oublié de ta rue, s'asseoir devant ton œuvre . . . Et, les mains posées sur les genoux, il rira et pleurera. Et il n'aura point envie de s'en aller, car — comme jamais jusque-là — il se verra lui-même et pas un autre en toi.⁴

Il faut espérer que ce théâtre national naissant, s'il reste populaire pour le moment, verra d'autres œuvres durables, et que l'exemple de Gratien Gélinais stimulera chez les jeunes auteurs canadiens l'enthousiasme créateur indispensable à leur réalisation.

⁴ *La Presse*, Montréal, 13 avril 1959.



VISION OF CLARITY

THE POETRY OF WILFRED WATSON

John W. Bilsland

WILFRED WATSON is a person of highly developed sensibilities. One cannot listen to him talk for any length of time without being struck by the keenness and intensity of his response to the world around him. Whether he speaks of French lettuce, spring sunrises in Edmonton, the funeral of Utrillo, Mozart's *Requiem*, or the shape of an automobile, he constantly reveals himself as one vividly aware of his sense experiences. Of all these experiences — if one can judge from his poetry — those which affect him most deeply and lastingly are those which he knows visually: with notable frequency the imagery of his poems is drawn from effects of colour, form, light, and darkness. It is not surprising, therefore, to learn that Watson has at various times tried his hand as a painter, nor is it surprising to find among his poems a number of pieces reflecting his interest in painters and their work. In the course of these he makes some profoundly perceptive comments not only on the particular effects of individual paintings, but also on the nature of art in general, and on the strength of these comments one can move towards some understanding of Watson's essential nature as a poet.

The central claim which Watson makes for great painting is that it illuminates. In the lines on Emily Carr, in *Friday's Child*, he writes of the painter:

. . . down the valley you looked and saw
All wilderness become transparent vapour,
A ghostly underneath a fleshly stroke,
And every bush an apocalypse of leaf

And in an unpublished poem on a still life by Stanley Cosgrove he declares that in the formal balance of the finished painting the beholder finds

The palpable
Claritas
 Till the difficult mind sees
 Clear^t

The artist is one who initially sees deeply and clearly into the nature of things, and who then has the capacity to reveal his insight to others.

Nowhere does Watson demonstrate more fully his faith in the illuminating power of great art than in his meditation on Rembrandt's *Bathsheba*.² Through this painting of Hendrickje Stoffels as Bathsheba, Watson's own response to the biblical subject has been both enriched and clarified, and therefore heightened. By a complex emotional, intellectual, and imaginative process the poet has moved to a grasp of all that is caught in Rembrandt's curiously suggestive treatment of Bathsheba as she waits, proud yet saddened, for the royal David: Hendrickje's fleshly beauty exerts its strong sexual attraction, and in so doing brings a new sympathetic understanding of David's lust for similar beauty in Bathsheba; the attractiveness of the painted figure gives rise to the idea that Hendrickje, impressed by her own beauty as revealed by the painter, must have felt a pride in her loveliness akin to the pride of Bathsheba in hers; this idea in turn gives way to the thought that perhaps Hendrickje also knew something of the sorrow of Bathsheba when as a result of her own beauty Bathsheba learned the frailty of kings; and this thought leads to the tragic foreshadowing implicit in Bathsheba's sorrowful expression and in the surrounding darkness which ominously closes in upon the magnificent central figure:

This canvas darkens
 Upon the terrible poetry of our clay;
 But I forget Rembrandt and his Hendrickje,
 And only see King David's Bathsheba,

 Who knew her husband done unto the death;
 Who bore that dead son from King David's loins;
 And then bore to the king at length forgiven
 The wise and sorrowful man, Solomon.

Watson's conception of the function and value of painting is essentially religious—the painter, like the prophet, reveals things which have hitherto been hidden to men of limited vision — and when one turns to his actual practice as an artist in another medium, verse, one is not surprised to find that he implicitly conceives of poetry as having much the same function and value. The poet, too, perceives and reveals. The only significant difference between the painter and the poet is one of means.

THE WORLD which Watson the poet tries to reveal is for him both simple and complex. There is an almost primitive simplicity in his concern with the natural processes of copulation, birth, and death; in his recurring interest in the contrast between the cruel violence of human behaviour and the perfect peace of total love; and in his sad recognition that man often seems determined to pervert, and even deny, the greatest values of life — beauty, light, mercy, pity, and love. But in his treatments of these matters Watson is sharply conscious of the complexity of the world in which they play a part: ours is a world both beautiful and terrible, full and empty, brave and fearful; a world in which birth implies death, love engenders hate, blessing leads to curse; a world where time itself is but a misleading, though useful, illusion. And so it is that when, in the “Love Song for Friday's Child”, Watson turns to the moment of the first human act of love, he offers a passage like this, simple in its essential matter, but highly complex in its handling — its clarification — of that matter:

Then nor
 Any day nor
 Any moment neither
 But now — ever and ever
 It was, and the Garden of Eden was
 The day before. The first
 Love of the world, the curst
 First marriage poured
 Into my veins its heaven.
 And centuries of birds sang laughter
 Into my heart of rafters
 Till the tomb egg broken
 A bell rang and swung its thought

White in the pulse and stanch
Of my black blood's branch

Life is itself simple, but the living of life is an infinitely complex experience.

In that experience — if it is to be full and satisfying — Watson insists that man must recognize the fundamental importance of two forces, both centered in the individual being. One is the will; the other, love. With great frequency Watson stresses his belief in the need for a positive exercise of the will if human endeavour is to prove fruitful. Ours is a world grown tired and sick, and in our world-sickness we have lost the capacity for thoughtfully determined action:

Our shrouds are sea-rotten; and our keels
Are rust and weeds; broken is our limb;
Our winded oar is master of our wills.³

When we act we do so on impulse, often with tragic results. Like the Ancient Mariner we destroy what we cannot understand, and we do so not with any particular end in view, but because we are baffled and hence disturbed:

And what was the use, now you've shot the bird dead?
There was no use at all
To shoot the bird dead.
Now get me a drink, for I shot the bird dead.⁴

As Marlowe's Faustus knew not what to do with the powers he gained, and frittered them away in trivialities, so the twentieth-century Faustus wastes the capacities of his civilization and knows no greater happiness, no greater sense of fulfilment, than did his predecessor:

Drift we and sift we
Into the flourcloth sourcloth cities, silent
Or mumbling dumb.⁵

So highly does Watson value the conscious will as essential to the human spirit, that when he offers up a hymn of praise to *God's mankind* he takes as the particular object of his praise an old woman who has nothing left but her will. Stripped though she is of almost all bodily blessings, she still burns with the fire of her own determination, the fire of her *will-full* nature, and although it is true that this may reveal itself in

“the flash and strife” of hatred, and that it may lead her into the parched deserts of sinfulness, so long as it blazes within her she is one of *God’s mankind* and deserving of praise:

I praise God’s mankind in an old woman:
 I hear him rattle the body of an old wife
 Dry and brown, and bitter as bracken,
 Her stalk womb-cancelled, sere with seedgone;
 With shrivel fingers clutching upon her life,
 Wrestling for the empty pod and the dry leaf.
 But still in her mildewed eyes moist’s last token —
 But oh, ever in her eyes the flash and strife,
 Husk edge, cruel and sharp as any knife
 Which not God’s death itself can unsharpen.⁶

The will alone, however, is not sufficient in itself. If man is to achieve his highest fulfilment he must subject his will to the power of love. The first poem in *Friday’s Child*, the “Invocation”, makes clear the importance Watson attaches to this power:

O love, teach us to love you, that we may
 Through burning Carthage take our way.

And in the course of the poems which follow the “Invocation” the values and the demands of love are constantly held before us. Watson is obviously deeply aware of himself as a member of a social whole: the *I* is always seen as part of a larger *We* to whom he extends his words of consolation, and for whom he offers up his prayers.

The title of *Friday’s Child* gives, of course, a clear indication of the emphasis Watson places on love: “Friday’s Child”, in the words of the nursery rhyme, “is loving and giving”, and this collection of poems can be read as a set of variations on the theme of love. Some of these variations consist of re-workings of traditional romantic material — Aeneas’ desertion of Dido, Orpheus’ fatal glance at Eurydice — but Watson’s concern is not primarily with the raptures and sorrows of romantic love. This love is to him chiefly important in so far as it becomes part of a universal love-force. Love is both the source of life and the law of living. The Creation itself was an act of divine love in which love decreed all:

. . . love which sang, the first light commanded,
 The waters divided, the earth parcelled out

For flowers, beasts and creeping things,
 The air given for birds,
 The sun made round and warm,
 The moon mild as milk⁷

And although man has long since lost the primal joy of Eden, his great hope for its restoration lies in yet another act of divine love:

. . . the singing
 Rose sang in the lap of Mary. Darkness
 Sang to the light and the kiss of love was peace.⁸

Only when man accepts his place in the divine scheme of love, however, and recognizes that this scheme demands that he love all other beings, can he know the full blessings of life:

Do not begin loving
 To dumb now
 Your prayer but pray now even
 For the old woman of the waters
 The gull galls, and the heron,
 For the old woman crossing
 And breeding all creatures
 In the weathers
 Of her waspnest brow

So may the Lord bless
 Your loving
 And have all mercy upon your soul
 And wrap it in the white lamb's wool
 And bind
 It white to the world's end.⁹

In the "Love Song for Friday's Child" Watson offers his fullest consideration of the nature of love and its place in the divine plan. The poem takes the form of a series of seven meditations, and in these Watson imaginatively suggests some of the various forms of love, their attributes and their values. Here one finds the love of man and woman in its bridal rapture, the love of mother for child, and the innate love of man for what is good. And all these — like all varieties of love — are one in essence. All find their source in the love of God, that love first made manifest in the Creation, and later reaffirmed in the Incarnation:

O Mother of Sorrows, standing
By your Son hanging,
The love that began again
Ask for us, and again and again
World without end

(V, 13-17)

Watson's concern with love as the great power in life has persisted in his work since *Friday's Child*. One finds clear evidence of it in such a passage as this from an unpublished poem, "The Harrow of Love":

Forgive us the flesh of fires, the city
Fleshed with fire, our sin undone
That our flesh must breed burn and bleed
To break this heart to pity.
Forgive the nail re-driven.
Forgive the harrow of women.
Forgive this hand because this hand cannot bind
In peace the peace this hand in war must find
Forgive this blood's spill
Of blood till all
Our blood is pity, this harrow
Of love, till all our love is sorrow

But perhaps the most striking evidence of it is to be found in a quite remarkable short story, also unpublished, "The Lice". In this the central character, a bishop, performs a sublime act of love, taking upon himself the sins of his flock. The all-embracing nature of this love, its fusion of the human and the divine, is revealed at the moment of the bishop's deepest agony when, rising above the suffering of the flesh, he calls out, "My God I love thee".

As a result of his belief in the all-importance of love Watson is a poet very conscious of "the pity of things". Running through his work is a warm humanity which keeps him constantly aware of the suffering, the tragedy, of human existence. The death of an aged prostitute moves him to comment:

The worth of better people
Teaches them how to die
But we must bring a candle
And on our knees must pray
For her on Judgment Day¹⁰

He sees a woman in a graveyard, and despite his conviction that even in death love offers the great hope of the world he still is deeply moved by man's pathetic inability to accept the brute fact of death:

O mother grieving
 The grief that is common and human
 O woman wonderful
 In your small miracle
 Of faith and loving —
 Quiet you, that another miracle
 Must come and the wind blow
 Into the troubles of the sky
 The dust you place
 On the upraised hand
 Of this high cliff¹¹

And even in his satiric moments — and they are frequent — his attitude is never entirely devoid of pity. In the "Ballad of Faustus" he comments sharply on the emptiness of a number of persons' lives, but sharp though his comments are he cannot conceal his pity for the human beings doomed to live those lives. A lone spinster whose virtue is entirely negative sits smugly thinking of her goodness while a dripping tap makes its suggestive comment, both cruel and pitying:

Day after day adds up, she thought
 To a clear and perfect chrysolite
 And she folded her hands in her lap —
 Perhaps, said the tap, drip drip
 (V. 1-4)

The very audibility of the small sound in the room is more than enough to suggest the bleak emptiness of her life.

FROM WATSON'S WORK emerges, then, a vision of life governed by responsibility and love. The tragedy of human existence has resulted from man's failure to accept these as the basis of living. Only when he restrains his impulse to kill the white bird, and acts as love directs him can man hope for happiness.

Quite evidently this is an almost sublimely simple intellectual basis for living. But, as I have already suggested, despite the simplicity of Watson's

themes his poetry reflects a very realistic appreciation of the complex nature of the moment of human existence. In the poetry, therefore, Watson establishes a certain tension between the simple idea on the one hand, and the packed image on the other, the image which conveys with sometimes startling vividness the mingled experience in which the idea is revealed.

In his imagery Watson gives clear evidence of his strongly sensuous nature. Some of the most striking passages in his work are those in which he conveys a particularly vivid sense experience. In the brief lyric "For Anne, Who Brought Tulips" he recreates the effect which the sight of full-blown tulips has had upon him:

Let these trumpets tongued with dust blow their magnificent
 Brief music; not for the exigent
 Last moment, when the creature at last comes home
 To reason, order, proportion, doom;
 But in a period of disordered haste
 Let them blow their blast
 To mark the ceremony of season
 When all the weather is unreason.

Similarly, in "Ghosts", he evokes the mood into which he passed when struck by the beauty of hyacinths:

Purple and red hyacinths
 Before their fading
 Are bells tolling
 The sleeper to the apparition
 Of beauty, the angel in the room
 Which like a ghost
 Comes and departs
 Leaving a wonder and a horror
 In our unspeakable hearts

But Watson's imagery here, as elsewhere, seeks to do more than simply call up corresponding sensory responses in his reader. To speak of tulips as "trumpets tongued with dust" is to suggest directly and vividly the physical nature of the flowers, but to move on to suggest that those trumpets may even sound is to introduce something beyond the simple sense impression. And then to declare further that they will not, however, sound at the Last Judgment, announcing the completion of the divine

plan, is to introduce something yet once again removed. But all these elements fuse into an imaginative entity when in the last four lines the poet establishes his central contrast between the graceful stateliness of the tulip — itself the very symbol of “reason, order, proportion” — and the tumult of the unsettled spring weather in which it blooms. And, in much the same way, in “Ghosts” the hyacinths are seen first as “bells” — a simple visual image — but then these bells are described as calling the sleeping soul into the presence of beauty which comes and goes like a ghost, leaving “a wonder and a horror” behind.

Watson almost never presents a simple sense impression for its own sake. He recognizes that in the actual moment of sensory excitement a multitude of feelings and thoughts, like a complicated counterpoint, play around and condition the central response, and in his poetry he tries to suggest this mingled richness. Even in such a simple poem as “The Juniper Tree” one can recognize the poet’s concern with this mingling. Here two lovers arrange to meet beneath the juniper tree, but when the time of meeting arrives the man finds his beloved white as death, and when he seeks to claim a kiss,

O never you will, said she
O never you will, said she

The interest of the poem lies in the development of a mood of heavy foreboding into which the maiden’s almost flippant reply cuts like a sharp knife. To suggest this mood Watson makes considerable use of colours, establishing in the course of the narrative a most suggestive tonal pattern. When the lover first comes to the juniper tree the juniper cone burns *blue*: all is soft and tender. But as he waits, “the *black* minutes go by”, and an ominous foreshadowing is suggested. He hears a “*red* fox cough”, and the first hint of blood appears, a hint which is to be left fearfully ambiguous at the end of the poem. Always “the *black* minutes go by”, and when rain comes the ominousness deepens for the rain falls in a “*black* wet sleet”. And then, when the maiden appears and stands before her love in the blackness,

As white as death was she
As white as death was she

And now the mood is established for the climactic question and answer :

Then why are you so long my love, my love
 As I waited at the juniper tree?
 But now I will kiss your mouth, he said
 O never you will, said she
 O never you will, said she

Much more, of course than the little narrative and the colour sequence enters into the total experience of "The Juniper Tree" — a cow laments the loss of its calf; an owl flies low through the juniper branches; and the wind blows rattling seeds in the dead weeds — but all that plays a part has this in common with the narrative and the colour sequence: it bears in some way on the central experience, and at the same time it realistically enriches the experience. And the more of Watson's poetry one reads, the more one appreciates his ability to reveal comprehensible form in a moment of life without stripping that moment of its richness.

Probably the most striking examples of this ability are to be found in some of Watson's briefest images. In the "Love Song for Friday's Child", considering the first act of love between man and woman, he speaks of "the tomb egg broken", and in so doing rouses a great complex of feelings, images, and ideas, all relevant and illuminating. (In the egg life normally develops, but in this egg — although life will come — death is also to develop; birth comes now for men who must die; from the moment of conception, in life we are in death; this act will lead ultimately to two tombs — that of mortal man, but also that of Christ — and from the entrance to the second tomb the stone shall be pushed aside.) In such an image as this, clear and strong in its immediate effect, yet inexhaustibly suggestive in its implications, one finds the medium in which Watson, at his best, speaks. Here in his own poetry is the equivalent of what he so highly values in painting:

The palpable
Claritas
 Till the difficult mind sees
 Clear

In vividly sensuous terms he offers his own clear vision of life, and lets that vision affect us by becoming part of our own experience.

When Northrop Frye reviewed *Friday's Child* he concluded his review with these words:

How posterity will sort out and rank the poets of today I do not know, nor much care; but in such poems as "In the Cemetery of the Sun," the "Canticle of Darkness" and perhaps the title poem, one may catch a glimpse of the reasons why, in the course of time, what the poet has to say about his culture becomes so important and what everyone else has to say becomes so much less so.¹²

What Wilfred Watson offers in his particular vision of life is almost child-like in its essential simplicity, but the vision of the child is not to be undervalued: it often has a directness and a courage beyond the command of the knowing adult. And at its most searching it has the *claritas* which Watson so highly values.

NOTES

¹ "The Simple Cup: Lines on a Still Life by Stanley Cosgrove". For permission to use this and other unpublished material, and for generous assistance given in long conversations, I gratefully acknowledge my indebtedness to Dr. Watson.

² "Of Hendrickje as Bathsheba".

³ "Invocation", 4-6.

⁴ "The White Bird", 18-21.

⁵ "Ballad of Faustus", VII, 5-7. (In *Delta*, July 1958, 1-5.)

⁶ "Lines: I Praise God's Mankind in an Old Woman", 1-10.

⁷ "Canticle of Darkness". 13-18.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 59-61.

⁹ "A Valediction for the End of the Year", 48-62.

¹⁰ "Queen of Tarts", 30-34.

¹¹ "Graveyard on a Cliff of White Sand", 14-24.

¹² "Letters in Canada, 1955", *University of Toronto Quarterly*, XXV, 1956, 294.

PIONEER ENTERTAINMENT

Michael R. Booth

THEATRICAL TASTE IN THE
EARLY CANADIAN WEST

THE PIONEERS who began slowly to encroach upon the vast, unsettled regions of the American West brought with them a hunger for theatrical entertainment. Primitive theatres or "opera houses" sprang up everywhere in the new mining towns of the Pacific Coast and the Rocky Mountains. The need for drama and theatrical diversion was no less evident in the Canadian pioneer to the north, where in British Columbia theatrical activity followed immediately upon settlement. Of original drama there was virtually no trace (for reasons which will be apparent later), but theatres multiplied. The first Canadian theatres west of Ontario were built in Victoria, New Westminster, and Barkerville in the 1860's, and well before British Columbia joined Confederation in 1871 it had a flourishing theatrical life.

Victoria's first theatre, the Colonial, was opened in 1860, although professional and amateur performances had been given previously in converted halls and on board naval vessels in the harbour. By 1865, four theatres had catered at various times (often competing) to a regular population of about 5,000. Victoria could not accurately be called a frontier town. In some respect it was, especially with its large floating population of miners; theatrical activity increased greatly during the winters of the Cariboo gold rush, when thousands of restless miners waited in Victoria for the coming of the spring thaw which would permit them to rush northward and work their claims. However, the core of the community was a sophisticated and conservative circle of British settlers: civil servants, Hudson's Bay Company men, naval and military personnel. Their tastes were plainly reflected in the plays they went to see.

Not surprisingly, then, the most popular dramatist in Victoria was Shakespeare, although the 49 performances of his plays form only a small part of the repertory of 1860-65. *Hamlet* (11), *Macbeth* (8), *Othello* (6), *Richard III*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, and *Romeo and Juliet* (5 each) were the most often acted. There were scattered performances of *I Henry IV*, *Henry VIII*, *Richard II*, *King Lear*, *The Merchant of Venice*, and *As You Like It*. The only other Elizabethan play was *A New Way to Pay Old Debts*, which owed its nineteenth-century revival to Edmund Kean's powerful Sir Giles Overreach.

The *Daily British Colonist's* attitude to Shakespeare was one of awful respect and reverence, and can best be summed up in its description of Hamlet as "the sublimest production of the pen of the immortal Bard of Avon". However, it censured a performance of *As You Like It* for the retention of "several objectionable passages which have long since been discarded as ill suited to the present age of refinement". Doubtless it was relieved by an *Othello* "pruned of certain passages and phrases offensive to the modern ear".

Shakespeare did not always receive the most competent acting or production. Victoria depended on San Francisco for dramatic troupes. Their usual professional circuit was San Francisco-Portland-Victoria, with tours in Washington and Oregon and the odd side-trip to New Westminster, where a theatre had been opened in 1860. However, the length of the journey by sail or steam from San Francisco certainly kept companies away from Victoria, and sometimes it went without actors at all. Those who did make the trip were often mediocre, a truth attested by one witness who has left an eloquent account of a *Macbeth* in the Victoria Theatre, a "commodious and elegant temple of Thespis", as the *Colonist* called it.

The curtain rose on a cotton plantation set, which had done service for *Octoroon*, backed by a door and parlour windows draped with claret curtains, "a preposterously free rendering of the 'blasted heath'". The company laboured under a poverty of actors and acting talent. The murdered Duncan kept reappearing, first as a supplementary witch and then as the queen's physician. One of the witches, a bearded six-footer with a glass screwed into one eye, sang his part from the score in his hand as he leaned against a tropical tree. (This was still Davenant's semi-operatic *Macbeth* with Locke's music). The cotton plantation gave way to "much

tattered and very extraordinary mountains and water”, but the parlour and curtains remained, now changed into wings. The banquet tables were totally bare, and the four actors at each table remained motionless during the banquet scene, except for one who peeled an apple while Macbeth was distracted by Banquo’s ghost. Macbeth and his queen were enthroned on shabby horsehair chairs placed on a large packing-case which bore in large letters the name of the ship that brought it. The climax came in the conjuration scene, where there were only three actors to represent the line of eight kings. Each could be perceived, after one appearance, crawling hastily under the back scene to join the procession from behind, each king “enveloped from head to foot in a sheet”. Unfortunately, one of the sheets caught on a nail, and the actor’s struggles to free himself could easily be seen through the dilapidated back-cloth. No kings came forth; the performance stopped. At last the breathless actor appeared in tatters, the lower half of his sheet torn away to reveal tweed coat and trousers. The audience “broke into a perfect shout of uncontrollable laughter”.¹

Not all Shakespeare was performed like this in Victoria. One of the high points of its theatrical history was the visit of Charles and Ellen Kean in 1864. The Keans presented *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, *Othello*, *King Lear*,² *Richard II*, *Henry VIII*, and *The Merchant of Venice*, all rapturously received by both the *Colonist* and crowded houses. In his farewell speech, Kean said that it was gratifying “to find in this remote part of the world while efforts were put forth to develop the natural resources of the country . . . Shakespeare and the poets could find a response”.

The staple dramatic fare, aside from Shakespeare, was nineteenth century melodrama, comedy, and farce.³ As almost every evening’s entertainment consisted of a double bill concluding with a farce, farce was easily the most popular of these categories. Eighteenth century comedy, out of fashion in the Victorian age, was represented by only the occasional per-

¹ N. de Bertrand Lugin, *Pioneer Women of Vancouver Island*, 1928, pp. 219-222.

² In which Ellen Kean, portly and 58, played the Fool. The *Colonist* called her “no less successful . . . than in her female characters”.

³ Opera did not come to Victoria until 1867, when the Bianchi Company from San Francisco presented *Il Trovatore*, *Norma*, *L’Elisir d’Amore*, and *Lucia di Lammermoor*.

formance of Colman's *The Jealous Wife*, Moore's *The Gamester*, and Centlivre's *The Wonder*. The most commonly performed plays were the dramas of Boucicault (including eight performances each of *The Colleen Bawn* and *The Octoroon*), the farces of Buckstone and J. M. Morton, and the comedies of Tom Taylor. Bulwer-Lytton's dramas, *The Lady of Lyons* (12) and *Richelieu* (6), Jerrold's nautical play, *Black-Eyed Susan* (11), and Tobin's comedy, *The Honeymoon* (10), were also standard repertory pieces. Eighteenth century tragedy was confined to Sheridan's *Pizarro* and an English adaptation of Schiller's *The Robbers*.

The more sensational melodramas were also popular. From 1860 to 1865, Victoria saw several moral treatments of drink and crime: *The Drunkard*, *Ten Nights in a Bar-Room*, *The Drunkard's Progress* (in eight tableaux, and *The Six Degrees of Crime*, wherein "a young man starting out in life with a large fortune at his command, squanders the same on wine, women, and gaming, and becomes a thief and a murderer, and finally dies by the hands of the public executioner". Other melodramas included *The Spectre Bridegroom*, *The Somnambulist*, *The Floating Beacon, or The Norwegian Wreckers*, and *The Sea of Ice*, in which a mother and her baby are shipwrecked in the Arctic, the mother murdered, and the baby, brought up by savages, reappears in the last act as a Parisian lady with a savage and untamed spirit beneath her superficial refinement.

Entertainments lighter than the legitimate drama also formed a part of Victoria's theatrical life. In 1861, the San Francisco Minstrels and Buckley's Minstrels visited the Colonial and Moore's Music Hall, and later several semi-professional minstrel troupes were formed. The "delineation of Ethiopian eccentricities" was popular; one theatre, the Lyceum, was largely given over to minstrel shows. The Orrin family, a group of acrobats and gymnasts, played at the Victoria Theatre, which earlier had featured Miss Ella Cadez in a "Terrific Ascension on a Single Wire from the Stage to the Gallery!"

THE CONDITIONS OF theatrical activity in Barkerville were quite different from those in Victoria. Barkerville was very much a pioneer town, a frontier community. Gold had been discovered on Wil-

liams Creek in 1861, and two years later Barkerville was a crudely and hastily constructed boom town, the centre of the great Cariboo gold rush. Its population fluctuated, but at the height of the boom has been estimated at between 5,000 and 10,000.⁴

The Theatre Royal opened in May, 1868, and burned down four months later in the fire that destroyed Barkerville. A new building was erected to serve both as a theatre and a fire-hall for the newly-formed Williams Creek Fire Brigade. The combination is probably unique in theatrical history. The new theatre opened in January, 1869. Records of the Barkerville theatre are available until 1875, when the *Cariboo Sentinel* ceased publication.

Three main factors determined the dramatic life of Barkerville. The first was the nature of the audience. Miners and storekeepers formed the town's population; there was nothing of the sophisticated elite to be found in Victoria. As a result, entertainment was much lighter in character. It may also have been lighter because of Barkerville's dependence on amateurs, who are not always capable of serious drama. Furthermore, the theatre's physical resources were very limited, even for the staging of the more spectacular melodramas seen in Victoria. Barkerville was a long way from the regular professional circuit, and five hundred miles by river and road from New Westminster. There were no other large audiences on the way to make the return journey profitable. In the seven years from 1868 to 1875, only three professional groups visited the town. Thus entertainment was largely in the hands of the Cariboo Amateur Dramatic Association, formed in 1865.

The third factor affecting the Barkerville stage was the fluctuating economic prosperity of the area. The theatre was built at the height of the boom; the following years constituted a period of steady economic decline. Businesses were advertised for sale, and miners and merchants left town in increasing numbers. Leading amateurs in the C.A.D.A. were among them, and performances had to be cancelled for the lack of a cast. The amateurs were always in financial difficulties, and reports of poor attendance at the theatre were frequent. By 1873, the Theatre Royal was in a state of disrepair, and performances had virtually ceased.

Barkerville's repertory was much the same as the lighter side of Vic-

⁴ Gordon Elliott, *Quesnel*, 1958, p. 26.

torial; farces by Buckstone, Morton, Craven, Oxenford, and Charles Mathews formed the greatest part of it. The amateurs tried nothing more serious than Taylor's comedies, *Still Waters Run Deep* and *The Ticket-of-Leave Man*. The professionals exhibited farces and minstrel shows. There was no Shakespeare, and nothing earlier than Charles Dibdin's ballad opera, *The Waterman* (1774). Even straight melodrama was rarely performed. No professionals visited Barkerville after 1871, and the doldrums of the Theatre Royal were enlivened only by an evening of Chinese theatricals whose strange conventions greatly bewildered the *Sentinel* reporter.

One play of local origin was *A Trip to Peace River, or, The Road Agents Abroad*, "a new melo-drama, written for the occasion by Augustus Frederick Funghoid, Esq.," its *dramatis personae* comprising Clem Johnson, a road agent; Steve Simmons, a hungry traveller; Jefferson Washington, landlord of Buckley House; and two Chinese travellers. Acted only once in 1869, *A Trip to Peace River* does not survive, but it appears to have been a good example of the immediately topical play. On the very day it was performed parties of miners were racing northward to the Peace River area in search of new, reputedly rich gold fields. There had been much rivalry and secrecy along the route, and the event had already stirred Barkerville. "Augustus Frederick Funghoid" was probably James Anderson, a Scottish miner and author of *Sawney's Letters*, a collection of poetical epistles describing a miner's life. The *Sentinel* called him "foremost in the rank of Cariboo poets", and he wrote songs to be sung at dramatic performances as well as the prologue read on the opening night of the second Barkerville theatre, which told the audience:

And here tonight, within this spacious hall
 Built by kind labour volunteered by all,
 We meet again — and by your beaming eyes
 You're pleas'd once more to see the curtain rise.

It concluded elegantly:

Be you the laughing brooks 'mid sunny beams,
 And we the fountains that supply the streams;
 And may the current, bright, unsullied, flow
 In rills of pleasure to the house below.

A COMPARISON of the theatrical life of Victoria and Barkerville reveals definite patterns of theatre-going. Firstly, the character and circumstances of each town determined the nature of its entertainment. Victoria, a logical terminus for San Francisco touring companies, depended almost entirely on professionals; Barkerville, far removed from the regular circuit, on amateurs. The differences between the sort of plays produced were in part created by the differences between the audiences who saw them. In both places light entertainment was popular, but only in Victoria existed a certain degree of sophistication which enabled regular support to be given to Shakespeare. The theatres in both towns were physically limited, but Victoria was at least able to reproduce the stage effects necessary for the success of sensational melodrama, whereas this was impossible on the tiny Barkerville stage. Finally, it was economic prosperity and an expanding population that enabled both towns to have a theatrical life at all, but in Barkerville the end of the gold rush meant the end of the theatre. Victoria's theatre survived in spite of the economic decline because the town was not completely reliant on gold for its existence.

When we come to examine the kinds of drama popular in the early West, we quickly realize that there was really no difference between Victoria's repertory and, say, that of any small British provincial theatre of the period. Native drama could not exist in a community dominated by elements so close to Britain in ancestry, time, taste, and cultural outlook. In the case of Barkerville—a real frontier town—there is a single example of a local piece produced; in Victoria, none. The distinctive character of the early Canadian theatre comes from its local environment, not from its repertory; it is a character all the more marked in a community, which, like Barkerville, was closer than a more sophisticated town like Victoria to the pioneer spirit of the West.

GOLD RUSH WRITING

Pierre Berton

THE LITERATURE OF THE KLONDIKE

WHEN I FIRST BEGAN seriously to study the available literature dealing with the Klondike gold rush in all its ramifications, I was struck by two things: first, the astonishing number of books — well over a hundred — that had already been written on the subject (not to mention several hundred magazine articles); and, secondly, the dearth of books viewing the phenomenon as a whole.

This should not have been surprising. The great stampede, especially in its latter stages, was one of the best-covered news events of the nineteenth century, coming as it did in the first fine careless rapture of a popular and personal journalism that had just been dubbed “yellow”. There must have been several score of newspapermen in Dawson City at the height of the gold rush. The *New York Times*, naturally, had a man there and so did all the papers in New York, Chicago, Minneapolis, San Francisco and Seattle. The *Globe* of Toronto had a girl reporter on the scene and so did the *Times* of London. (She later became a Lady.) The *Manchester Guardian* had a correspondent who was to emerge as one of the great tycoons of Klondike gold mining. (He had been a don at Oxford.) Hearst’s shrill *New York Journal* sent a platoon of five men to the Klondike, including the aging Poet of the Sierras, Joaquin Miller. All the leading magazines, such as *Harper’s*, *Scribners*, *The Century* and so on, had their own men on the spot. Many of these later committed their experiences to hard covers.

The Klondike was to make some literary reputations. Jack London, who was in Dawson City only briefly but who certainly took a leading role in the rush (he piloted boats on the Whitehorse Rapids in 1897),

made his name several years later with a *Saturday Evening Post* serial titled *Call of the Wild*. Rex Beach was also part of the stampede, though he never actually reached the Klondike. He wrote about Nome, Alaska, but is thought of as a "Klondike" novelist. Robert Service, who did not go near the Klondike until ten years after the rush and who wrote his first book before he actually got there, extracted more gold from the region than 99 per cent. of those who made the trek in '98.

Yet none of these people saw the Klondike whole. I do not wonder, since this would have been a physical impossibility in the days before the airplane. The stampede sprawled over an area as large as India and half as big again; the stampeders, one hundred thousand strong, were scattered over a wilderness region a million and a half square miles in size. It was like a war, with a dozen campaigns going on simultaneously. And thus, in the hundred-odd books that deal directly with this glittering moment in history there was (until I wrote *Klondike*) only one that attempted to assess the full phenomenon. This was Kathryn Winslow's *Big Pan-Out*¹, and even it did not try to detail several of the minor campaigns.

If I were to recommend only two eye-witness books about the gold rush I should have no hesitation in naming William Haskell's *Two Years in the Klondike and Alaska Goldfields*² and Teppan Adney's *The Klondike Stampede of 1897-98*³, which meet the tests of readability and authenticity.

The first is by a miner who was on the ground before George Washington Carmack's famous strike changed the face of the North. It is written with clarity and perception. Adney's book, written by the correspondent for *Harper's Illustrated Weekly*, takes up where Haskell leaves off. Adney, a quite remarkable figure not only in the Klondike but also, later, in his adopted New Brunswick, was one of the first reporters to reach the goldfields after the news of the strike reached the outside world. Any reporter who covered the stampede had to be more than a mere casual observer; he became part of the rush itself. To reach Dawson Adney had to trundle his ton of supplies over the passes, construct a bateau on Lake Bennett, shoot Miles Canyon and the Whitehorse Rapids, and navigate 400 miles of unknown river. On arrival he had to build himself a log cabin. He writes of the stampede, therefore, not as an onlooker but as a participant. He took his own photographs, made his own sketches and interviewed many of the original sourdoughs. As a result, his is one of the

few authentic accounts we have of the Klondike Odyssey in its first phase. Adney did not publish his book until 1899; by this time the literary marketplace was glutted with volumes about the stampede, many of them hastily contrived. The public appetite was sated — indeed the very word “Klondike” had taken on a certain tarnish — and so the book was poorly received. It has since come into its own.

There are a few other books that stand apart from the run-of-the-mine reminiscences. Near the peak stands William Ogilvie's *Early Days on the Yukon*⁴, in whose pages we sense the instincts of a born raconteur at odds with the tight-lipped traditions of the civil servant. Ogilvie was a government surveyor who witnessed many of the memorable events of 1896. He was one of the few men on the spot who realized that history had been made that August evening on Rabbit Creek (shortly to be re-named “Bonanza”). He took affidavits from the four participants in the ironic drama of discovery: from Robert Henderson, the proud and touchy prospector, from Carmack the squaw-man, from Skookum Jim and Tagish Charley, the Indians. He questioned them separately and together, not once but twice, with an interval between to see if the stories had changed. As a result we have a clear picture of what occurred. In addition we have Adney's research plus an interview that Henderson gave to Mrs. William Campbell Loudon of the *Alaska-Yukon Magazine* (Summer, 1908), together with Carmack's own memories, posthumously published in a pamphlet by his widow⁵. This is a florid account, highly colored, for Carmack was a romantic and a poseur. For all that, it bears the stamp of the man who was there. It was Carmack, after all, who found the gold and his description of his own emotions on that memorable day, which was to change the lives of one hundred thousand men, cannot be duplicated.

There are three other books that might be described as coming straight from the horses' mouths. Colonel Samuel Benton Steele's autobiography⁶ contains a thick section on the stampede, and as Steele was the Mountie who ran the stampede on the Canadian side, keeping the casualty rate surprisingly low, it is of more than casual interest. Arthur Treadwell Walden's *A Dogpuncher in the Yukon*⁷ is a fascinating story told (with a ghostwriter's help, I suspect) by the most mobile man on the scene. Walden was in the country before, during, and after the stampede, and his mail beat took him from Circle City, Alaska, to Dyea on the seacoast, a distance of more than one thousand miles. There are exaggerations in

his story, but then a dog driver ought to be forgiven an exaggeration or two. The third book of quality is Frederick Palmer's *In the Yukon*⁸, a general account of the stampede with a particularly good picture of Dawson in the summer of 1898 by a special correspondent of *Scribner's*.

THE REMAINDER of the scores of books on the subject fall into three general categories. There are, first, what I call the "curiosities". There are, second, the biographies of the great figures of the stampede — the saints, villains, heroes, rogues and comic personalities who put flesh on the Klondike saga. There are, third, the personal accounts of several dozen men and women who survived the great trek north and in later years were persuaded to set down their memories on paper.

Among the curiosities you will find some dozen or so books rushed into print a few months after the first news of the strike burst upon the world. These were published in the fall of 1897, or early in 1898. They are rather like scrap books, filled with warmed-over newspaper accounts of those who have struck it rich, crammed with geographical background, peppered with anecdotes, full of advice for would-be gold seekers. They are studded with inaccuracies, fabrications, exaggerations and enthusiasms. Reading them today, one basks briefly in the reflected glow of a period when almost everybody believed the streets of Dawson to be paved with gold, and men talked of nuggets big as hen's eggs strewn about the Klondike valley waiting to be picked up.

The most entertaining of these volumes, from a curiosity-seeker's point of view, are *The Chicago Record's Book for Gold Seekers*⁹ and Charles S. Bramble's *Klondike: A Manual for Goldseekers*¹⁰. The most accurate is A. E. Ironmonger Sola's *Klondyke: Truth and Facts of the New Eldorado*¹¹.

Mrs. Iola Beebe's little book *The True Life Story of Swiftwater Bill Gates*¹² is a curiosity of a different kind. How much of it is strictly true one cannot tell, but as Mrs. Beebe was Swiftwater's mother-in-law for a year or so, we must accept her eyewitness accounts of her erstwhile son-in-law's adventures, both marital and financial. It makes lively reading. Mrs. Beebe is often horrified at the carryings-on of her teen-age daugh-

ter's strange husband but she is never horrified enough to ignore his blandishments or to beware his perpetual requests for money. Reading between the lines, one cannot escape the conclusion that Mrs. Beebe, like so many other women, was herself in love with the engaging Swiftwater Bill.

Louella Day's *The Tragedy of the Klondike*¹³ is remarkable only in one sense — that it should have been published at all. Miss Day was a lady doctor who visited the goldfields and labored under the firm conviction that the Canadian authorities, under the personal direction of Clifford Sifton, were attempting to poison her to death. She sets out this odd thesis in this very odd book.

I find C. H. Hamlin's *Old Times in the Yukon*¹⁴ curiously engaging, perhaps because he so obviously wrote it under his own steam without aid from the ubiquitous ghost writer who has clouded so many Klondike memoirs with the murky varnish of professionalism. This is a pre-Klondike book about Fortymile, the strange gold town that existed on the banks of the Yukon long before Dawson City. A similar book of scattered anecdotes, many of them quite amusing, is W. S. Dill's *The Long Day*¹⁵. These, too, are footnotes to the main tale, but interesting ones.

But the cream of the curiosa is Mary E. Hitchcock's *Two Women in the Klondike*¹⁶. Mrs. Hitchcock was the widow of a U.S. admiral; her companion, Miss Edith Van Buren, was the niece of a former president. They were wealthy tourists who each year struck out for foreign climes: Bath, Shanghai, Paris. In 1898 they chose Dawson City; they felt, vaguely, that it was the place to go. The fact that they were the only bona fide tourists in the Klondike that summer bothered them not at all; they carried on as they might at Biarritz, and when they returned they wrote a book about it. The writer peruses it with a growing sense of frustration and awe: frustration because of the author's nineteenth century habit of disguising names with initials (Big Alex McDonald, the King of the Klondike, is simply M- - - - - in this book); awe, because of the bizarre circumstances of their visit. While others lugged beans, bacon and axes into Dawson the ladies arrived with a variety of luggage which contained two Great Danes, an ice cream freezer, a parrot and several canaries, two cages full of pigeons, a gramophone, a music box, a zither, a coal oil stove, a portable bowling alley, a motion picture projector (newly invented), a mandolin, several air mattresses, the largest marquee tent ever

pitched on the banks of the Yukon and several hundred pounds of rare foods, ranging from *paté de foie gras* to mock turtle soup. Their tale, besides being amusing, is quite useful to Klondike researchers.

THE BIOGRAPHIES of Klondike personalities are many. Joseph Whiteside Boyle¹⁷ and Arthur Newton Christian Treadgold¹⁸, the two great Klondike dredging tycoons, each had a book to himself. Bishop Bompas, the pioneer Church of England prelate¹⁹, and his wife²⁰, both have had their stories told. So has Father Judge, the Roman Catholic "Saint of Dawson"²¹ and Jefferson Randolph "Soapy" Smith, the devil of Skagway²². (The Skagway section in the latter's biography is, in my opinion, incomplete and not too accurate). The personal stories of the brothers Mizner have twice been chronicled by third parties²³ while Addison Mizner (he later became architect of the great Florida land boom) has written his own account of their trek over the Chilkoot²⁴. Tex Rickard's biography has appeared²⁵ and so has Klondike Mike Mahoney's²⁶. Capt. William Moore, discoverer of the White Pass and founder of Skagway, has had his biographer²⁷ and so has Eugene Allen, the colorful editor and publisher of the famous *Klondyke Nugget*²⁸. There are several biographies of Jack London²⁹, though none devotes much space to his Klondike period, perhaps because it was such a short segment in a crowded life. Rex Beach has written his autobiography³⁰ and it contains a good account of his days on the Yukon river.

Several of the giant figures of the stampede, alas, have not had their stories committed to hard covers, and it is doubtful now that this will happen. There ought to have been a book on Robert Henderson, the original explorer of the Klondike watershed, and another, certainly, on Big Alex McDonald, the richest man in Dawson. Belinda Mulroney, the famous Klondike inn-keeper, deserves a book to herself and so does Clarence Berry, one of the few Eldorado millionaires to hang on to his gold. These familiar faces, and many others (Nellie the Pig, Diamond Tooth Gertie, One-Eyed Riley, the Oregon Mayor, Silent Sam Bonni-field, Nigger Jim Dougherty, Gussie Lamore, the Otaley Sisters, Big-

Hearted Tom Chisholm, to name a few) all stride through the pages of the various personal accounts which have contributed to the folk lore of the period.

Space does not allow me to detail all the bona fide personal accounts here, though each holds its own fascination for the Klondike buff. The most harrowing of all is the grisly tale set down by Arthur Arnold Dietz³¹ — the story of the few men who survived the foolhardy attempt to reach the goldfields by crossing the Malaspina — the largest piedmont glacier in North America. Another harrowing saga, lightened by periods of high comedy, is Walter Russell Curtin's *Yukon Voyage*³², which tells the story of the famous steamboat *Yukoner* and the only mutiny on the Yukon river. Thomas Weidemann's *Cheechako Into Sourdough*, is the third Odyssey in this trilogy of hardship; it tells the almost unbelievable tale of the ill-fated *Eliza Anderson* expedition to the Yukon by way of Bering Sea.

Oddly enough, the great stampede, for all its literary by-products, produced no really great work of fiction. It is true that Jack London's *Call of the Wild*³³ is a classic of sorts. I read it as a boy, while still in Dawson, and was thrilled by it; yet it seems curiously naive and sentimental today. Certainly Robert Service's reputation does not rest on his one novel of the Klondike, *The Trail of Ninety-Eight*³⁴; it's hard to believe now that his publishers tried to make him water it down because they thought it was too "raw".

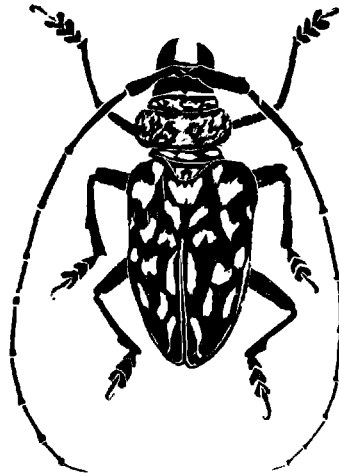
Most Klondike fiction has been of the potboiler type and the most interesting stories seem to me to be those based on fact. The best tales in Jack London's *Smoke Bellew* collection³⁵ are simply true anecdotes masquerading under the guise of fiction. The most interesting novel I know from this period is W. H. P. Jarvis's *The Great Gold Rush*³⁶ which gives the details of a plot to overthrow the Yukon government and form a "Republic of the Midnight Sun". It, too, is based on an actual though little-known incident and its hero is simply a thinly disguised portrayal of the great Sam Steele.

It does not really surprise me that there should be such a paucity of good fiction about the Klondike, for here, if ever, was a classic case where the truth was far stranger. The facts themselves are gaudy enough for the wildest melodrama or the most compelling Odyssey. It is foolish to try to improve upon them, and he who attempts it does so at his peril.

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"CRITICALLY SPEAKING" CRITICIZED

Tony Emery

MOST CANADIANS of my acquaintance are loyal to their national institutions, some to the point of chauvinism, but there is one institution which seems to rouse mild and gentle stevedores, taxidivers, journalists and garagemen to unreasonable fury: I mean the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. For many ordinary Canadians the CBC stands for all that is tedious and pretentious and stuffy; they cannot bear to think that they are forced to contribute to its upkeep.

Perhaps this animosity is confined to Western Canada. I personally hope that this is the case, since it seems to me that the CBC is defensible on several grounds; it is the only cultural link between the provinces; the only regular patron of music and drama; the only national institution which encourages people to criticize it. It not only encourages criticism; it provides a regular weekly opportunity for critics to plunge their harpoons into the monopolistic leviathan, and it pays them a fee for doing so.

For eleven years a programme called *Critically Speaking*, organized nationally by Robert Weaver, has been a regular Sunday feature on CBC radio. The half-

hour programme usually incorporates three separate critical contributions, on films, books and radio - tv respectively; and one of these items — Clyde Gilmour on the movies — is constant. The programme originates from one of half a dozen different centres each week, (Toronto, Montreal, Winnipeg, Vancouver, occasionally Ottawa or Halifax) partly to provide variety for the listener, and partly to ease the burden on any one production centre.

Weaver has recently handed over the programme to Robert McCormack, but the format is unlikely to change, since it appears to be ideally suited to the task it was created to perform. Like any regular weekly programme, it has good days and bad, but the one rarely varying element is the consistent and reasonable tone of Clyde Gilmour's movie criticism.

Gilmour, doubtless, is not the most sensitive and intelligent man alive, but he seems to me to answer the needs of this programme in a manner that is almost beyond criticism. He approaches the movie under review in an adult and sophisticated way, but his judgments have a blunt and sensible downrightness that makes short work of the chi-chi on the

one hand, and the trashy, on the other. He makes his points, which are usually based on a sound knowledge of the possibilities of the medium, with a simple lucidity that is an object lesson to all who use the microphone for the expression of ideas. For me Gilmour stands as a symbol of that intelligent and educated middle-class audience that is our chief lack in Canada today. We could do with two million like him.

Turning to the book reviews, I note that in the last six months of 1959 some 70 books were reviewed, of which 30 were Canadian and 40 or so American and British. The reviews, to judge by the scripts I have in front of me are extremely uneven. With certain exceptions those of Canadian works seem to be motherly and protective and dull, and those of British and American works tend to be neutral, grey, obtuse and dull. A partial excuse can be found in the fact that frequently the reviewer has been asked to deal with more books than can conveniently be discussed inside eight and a half or nine minutes. On one occasion, I see, a gallant lady set what must surely be an all-time record: 12 books in eight minutes and forty seconds. Small wonder, then, if nothing very memorable emerges.

But there were, as I mentioned earlier, exceptions that relieved the monotony. On occasion there were reviews that rose above the level of mere "noticing" to achieve the status of criticism: Blair Fraser's perceptive treatment of Miriam Chapin's *Contemporary Canada*, for instance; Hugo McPherson's sharp and acute criticism of Edmund Carpenter's *Eskimo*; John Peter's comparison of two books on Africa; George Woodcock's penetrating analysis of the weaknesses

and strengths of Koestler's *The Sleepwalkers*.

On the whole, the liveliest moments on *Critically Speaking* come from the weekly reviews of programmes on television and radio. I think this is because none of the reviewers takes the media or himself ("herself" in several bright instances) too seriously. For most listeners, too, there is more relevance in the radio/TV reviews since they are dealing with matters on which they have views of their own, however inchoate or unformulated.

Since *Critically Speaking* is a national programme, the reviews tend to deal only with the shows that go out to the whole nation, and this is a limitation to the critic, who may spend much of his time listening and watching shows that originate from his home production centre. Of the national shows several are hardy perennials, and there is a limit to the number of times one can discuss *Close-Up* and *Fighting Words*, *Rawhide* and *Front Page Challenge*. There appears to be a disproportionate amount of time devoted to dramatic features compared to the infrequent comment on the music which is one of the chief glories of the CBC for the excellent reason that, while everybody feels qualified to carve up actors and producers and dramatists, only Chester Duncan knows anything about music.

I drew attention earlier to the protective attitude towards Canadian literature adopted by book reviewers (Is this because writers and reviewers are frequently academics, and so solidarity, affection for old students, and fear-of-hurting-X's-feelings-because-he-may-be-reviewing-your-book-next-month all play their part?) and I must point out now that the radio/TV reviews are entirely

free from this inhibiting emotion. The reviewers lay about them with a will, and do not scruple to draw comparisons between American, British and Canadian programmes. This gives a liveliness to utterances that is all too often missing from the prim, grey, heavily-qualified book reviews.

The need for regular and responsible criticism of music and the plastic arts is one which might well be met by an occasional review on *Critically Speaking*. Chester Duncan, it is true, pays attention to the musical component of radio and tv programmes, but he is the only one who does out of a dozen or so fairly regular critics. All who heard Alan Rich's broadcasts on the musical offerings of the Vancouver Festival would surely agree that they were rewarding, even if one had not attended the concert under review.

Similarly, a notice, from time to time,

of art exhibitions across Canada would provide an opportunity for those interested in painting and sculpture, whether domestic or foreign, to compare opinions. At the moment, the only vehicle for this sort of evaluation on a national scale is provided by *Canadian Art*, which reaches only 7,000 subscribers. I don't know how large the audience for *Critically Speaking* is — Robert Weaver describes it as "small but loyal" — but I would guess that it must be many times as large as the circulation of *Canadian Art*.

Yet, in summing up, I would affirm that *Critically Speaking*, even as it now functions, helps to fill a void in our national life. Outspoken criticism is all too rare on this continent, and to find it sponsored by the institution which is itself under attack is a shining example to all who are concerned with freedom of the intellect.

TRADITIONS REJOINED: RECENT FRENCH CANADIAN POETRY

G. V. Downes

ALAIN GRANDBOIS, *L'Etoile Pourpre*. ALAIN MARCEAU, *A la Pointe des Yeux*. OLIVIER MARCHAND, *Crier que Je Vis*. FERNAND OUELLETTE, *Séquences de l'Aile*. JEAN-GUY PILON, *L'Homme et le Jour*. PIERRE TROTTIER, *Poèmes de Russie*. MICHEL VAN SCHENDEL, *Poèmes de l'Amérique Étrangère. La Poésie et Nous* (collection). All published by Les Editions de l'Hexagone, Montréal, at \$1.00 each.

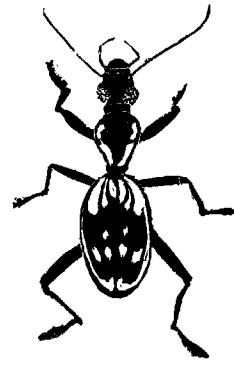
ONE OF the strangest phenomena in the history of the arts is the time-lag. I do not mean the time which so often elapses between the creation of a work of art and its public acceptance (which can be tragic enough for the

artist as everyone knows) but something just as unfortunate. I mean the gap which, through geography or ignorance or a barrier in language, may separate individual artists, or whole generations of writers, from the very works in which

they should find their sustenance. The adventures of others in one's natural world, the record of experiments in one's own medium, are all vital to artistic maturity, even if they only provide a point of reference.

I can remember during the war, nearly twenty years ago, how surprised I was to find that modern French poets whose work I took for granted seemed to have had no effect at all on the French-Canadian verse I was reading. There were honest romantic renderings of Lamartine, solid, pedestrian, and full of admirable sentiments. There were, transposed into French, the patriotic themes of the Canadian Authors' Association, and though it is impossible to write French poetry which is as bad as really bad English poetry, I felt (having come to these poets after Baudelaire and Valéry and the Kra Anthology) that they ran the maple-leaf and sunset school a pretty close second. By an ironic twist in the loop of time, it seemed to be their English-speaking contemporaries who were profiting, though at second-hand through Pound, Eliot, and the Imagists, from the richly experimental nineteenth century in France.

Let me say at once that the situation has changed; and not only changed, but reversed itself to the point where I should like to see *La Poésie et Nous*, a collection of talks on poetry given at a conference in Quebec in September, 1957, made required reading for everyone submitting English verse to any of the little magazines. For these are the voices I expected to hear twenty years ago, and they are saying what they want to say both in poetry and in prose with a maturity and a dignity which would be hard to match in English-speaking Canada without bringing in academic critics a generation



older than themselves.

Because there is no language barrier between these young French-speaking Canadians and Lautréamont, Valéry, St. Jean-Perse, Aragon, Eluard and Rimbaud, they have been able to drink at the source, to take, both in critical thought and in poetry, everything from Baudelaire to the Surrealists straight, and to interpret their personal experiences in fresh and vivid works which are not copies of French originals, but whose language could not possibly be what it is without the experience of reading those originals. The first thing one notices about the speeches in *La Poésie et Nous* and the poems in the accompanying chap-books is the acceptance and understanding of the fact that poetry is the conscious use of language, that language is a vital part of the psyche's experience, and that even the surrealist looking for new juxtapositions of images must recognize that he is working in a medium whose possibilities must be understood and respected. The word, the creative, created, creating word, is all-important:

"Car la poésie ne peut agir sur autre chose que sur le langage; et quelque soit le pouvoir du verbe à produire les

résultats que désire la conscience poétique, ce pouvoir n'existe qu'à l'intérieur du chant." (Michel van Schendel).

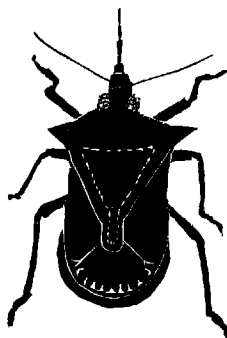
"Le monde du langage fait partie aussi du monde réel, et les créations de l'analogie peuvent devenir, deviennent en fait les objets poétiques réels, tout comme la pierre taillée et sculptée s'intègre au monde des humains." (Gilles Henault).

Modern poetry in English has become international in its scope and styles. The same is true of a good many poems in these chap-books, which could have been (and possibly were) written in Paris. But the French-Canadian poet is acutely aware that, strong though the linguistic ties are which bind him to France, he is not himself part of France. "Nous voyons surgir devant nous ces étranges floraisons sans participer réellement à l'esprit qui les fait naître." (Gilles Henault). He is not French, but Canadian. He has struggled to free himself from a narrow parochial milieu, to find what? Isolation in a materialistic environment where even the intellectuals would hesitate, most of them, to describe themselves as bi-lingual? The word "isolement" has, it seems, a special meaning for him; it is a constant refrain in the discussions.

Diversified though their tones and styles are, these poets manage to speak with a certain *dignity*, an impersonal artistic seriousness which, no matter how personal the material, disciplines raw experience into art. Alain Grandbois, for example, handles his cosmic imagery with the skill and joy of St. Jean Perse. Jean-Guy Pilon, editor of the series, uses to excellent effect that mixture of abstract and concrete terms which is so effective in French, and yet so impossible to translate into English. Pierre Trottier's images, rhythms, and refrains, reminiscent of old

songs yet modern, bring so many analogies to mind that one is baffled by the conflicting cross-currents. For example, the poem "Ce bois de mystère" with its changing echo "Oh les os de ma mère", "Oh la peur de ma mère", seems to me an emotional counterpart of Wilfred Watson's "Ballad of Mother and Son" where a similar pattern, repeated throughout the varying stanzas, has the same cumulative emotional effect.

Judging the quality of poetry in another language is always a tricky business, because the thousand echoes which are awakened in the subconscious mind (as one reads) by the words, and combinations of words, are either not there at all, or quite different from those of the poet. One can recognize the deliberate use, for example, of Baudelaire and Valéry quotations, but how much is one missing? However, with this reservation, I should like to record my conviction that these young French-Canadian poets are writing verse of consistently high quality, that their mature consideration of aesthetic problems has enriched their poetic practice, and that the cultural life of the country will undoubtedly be the better for their efforts.



MOUNTAINS WITH LEGENDS

Inglis F. Bell

WILMA PITCHFORD HAYS. *Drummer Boy for Montcalm*. Macmillan. \$2.75.

MARION GREENE. *Canal Boy*. Macmillan. \$2.75.

JOHN CRAIG. *The Long Return*. McClelland & Stewart. \$3.50.

FRANCES FRAZER. *The Bear Who Stole the Chinook, and Other Stories*. Macmillan. \$2.50.

IT IS NOT perhaps widely enough realised that an increasing number of excellent children's books has been published during recent years in this country, particularly since the 1940's, when an important event in this field was the commencement by Macmillans of their fine series, *Great Stories of Canada*.

Discussing some of these books in a recent review, Sally Creighton said: "To write a juvenile which can people any part of our magnificent emptiness with an unforgettable story and characters who go on living after the book is closed is a rare and difficult feat." Nevertheless, many of our present children's writers are doing just that. Our landscape seems no longer so empty as it appeared when Rupert Brooke commented on our "mountains without legends". Parents, and indeed all Canadians, should be grateful to the storytellers who are calling back out of the mountain mists, dark forests and lonely prairies the great chiefs, trailmakers, fur traders, rebels, raiders and settlers. Indeed, the point I wish to make is that the wild lands that stretch across a continent were not empty at all, but were rather a kind of North American Valhalla waiting for the twentieth century scop to call its heroes up. And now — I am sure — the children who

read such books as *Raiders of the Mohawk*, *Trailmaker*, *The Great Chief*, *Bay of the North*, *The Rover* and *Revolt in the West* are as enthralled as those who in the past read the stories of Robin Hood, King Arthur and Siegfried.

The most recently published historical novel for young people is Wilma Pitchford Hays' *Drummer Boy for Montcalm*. It is quite unlike others since the struggle is seen from the viewpoint of the harassed and ultimately defeated defenders in the 1759 battle for Quebec and through the eyes of the drummer boy Peter Demo. Peter, at the opening of the story a twelve-year old stowaway on a ship bringing recruits to Montcalm's forces at Quebec, was in real life the great-great-great-grandfather of the author and actually served under Montcalm during the siege and battle. Miss Hays spent several years in research and in the writing of the book, and she does, as she states on the dust cover, follow closely the true incidents of the battle.

And here is what is becoming a consistent mark of Canadian historical fiction for young people. The storytellers do not rewrite history *à la* "swamp-fox" as do many children's writers in the United States. Nor do their historical characters bear any resemblance to the unbelievably inflated and distorted Dis-

ney-like creations — the Davy Crocketts, Kit Carsons and Buffalo Bill Codys — so familiar across the border. For this let us be grateful. Writers here may indeed choose as source material the kinder of two interpretations, and occasionally even bend slightly back, but never so far as to lose balance and never for long. No other liberties are allowed, and I strongly suspect that this is not due to an unshakeable devotion to historical accuracy but to the native propensity to deprecate all things Canadian. Perhaps this is just as well. Since we live in a land so recently wrested from the Indians perhaps our heroes, like their gods, should be invested with defects as well as virtues.

Miss Hays' historical characters are in this tradition. Montcalm bears his full share of the blame for the loss of Quebec as do Bougainville and Vaudreuil and, of course, Bigot and Cadet. Wolfe if anything escapes too easily, but Miss Hays' book was no doubt completed before C. P. Stacey's recent *Quebec 1759: The Siege and the Battle* removed some of the gilding from this romantic figure.

Indeed, the characters in *Drummer Boy for Montcalm* are, in the main, ably portrayed. Peter Demo is a well-realized boy of twelve, and his friends Philippe and Bomazeen are presented convincingly. The book's only major shortcoming, for younger children at least, is the diminishing of excitement as the siege draws towards its conclusion. Events overshadow the hero, and he becomes primarily a narrator. However, even if at that point the younger reader's interest may flag somewhat, I do not think he will wish to put the book aside.

For precisely the opposite reason, the readers of Marion Greene's *Canal Boy*

will not leave the book unfinished. The story is swift-paced and exciting. Seon O'Dare, a sixteen-year old boy, is one of the labourers helping, in 1828, to cut the Rideau Canal through the wilderness in order to give gunboats, in the event of renewed hostilities with the United States, a protected route from Lake Ontario at Kingston through the Canal and the Ottawa River to Montreal.

The story concerns Seon O'Dare's attempt to exonerate himself from a false charge of stealing two pistols and includes a chase from Ottawa to Kingston and Montreal after the vital evidence needed to bring the true thief to justice and to clear Seon. The action evolves against a colourful background of the times which gives what seems to be an accurate historical picture of Canada in the 1820's.

On these counts I would give *Canal Boy* full marks. Unfortunately, an otherwise good story is weakened by awkward and strained dialogue, and by characters etched so deeply in blacks and whites that they come very close to being mere stereotypes. Indeed, the dust jacket describes two of them as "the despicable Sergeant Grassly and the villainous man Sailor". If blurbs could be accepted as frank and open appraisals one could only commend so honest an assessment; when one considers that whoever wrote these words felt he was bestowing praise it is cause for alarm.

John Craig, author of *The Long Return*, navigates easily and confidently through the rapids which threaten at times to swamp *Drummer Boy for Montcalm* and *Canal Boy*. The material he has chosen to mold into a story is a rich and satisfying substance for the young reader. Thad Cameron, a twelve year old pio-

neer boy, living with his parents on Upper Canada's western frontier in 1807, is waylaid and taken captive by a party of Ojibway Indians. He is taken hundreds of miles over the Great Lakes to the country of the Ojibway and adopted by Kiniwa Sipi, an Ojibway chief who has no son of his own. Thad has one clear resolution; he is determined, no matter how long he must wait, that he will escape.

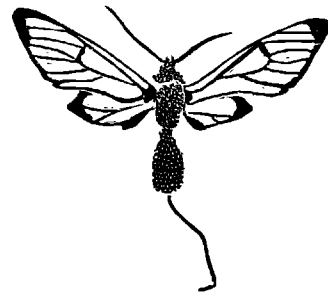
The author now has his raw material and his plot. How successfully does he exploit them? Here I can be unqualified in praising such a truly excellent children's novel. Thad's is a colourful and convincing story and he is a real, flesh and blood character. During his two years in the Ojibway camp Thad develops and matures. When he had first arrived, he had made a foolish and unsuccessful attempt to escape. He accepts his defeat for the present and with courage and resolution sets out to become an apt and determined student of Indian woodcraft, fishing and hunting. In the process he develops a real affection for his Ojibway foster parents. By the time he decides that he is prepared for a second attempt to escape across the wilderness and makes his successful flight he has developed into as real a character as one can meet in a story and the reader's identification with him is complete.

Thad's adventures, too, and his life in the Ojibway camp will keep the young reader spellbound. He participates fully in the life of his captors, receives the same education as the Indian boys, goes on hunting parties and even, finally, on a counter raid against the Sioux. But the action is credible, Thad's is a reasonably proportioned heroism, and the

author is obviously competent in his knowledge of woodcraft and the details of Indian life. It is a good book.

The Bear Who Stole the Chinook is a collection of fifteen Indian myths told by the "author-raconteur" Frances Frazer. Among others in the collection are Blackfoot versions of aetiological myths, such as the title story, which explains why the owl has big eyes, and of the humourous trickster myths telling how Na-pe, the Old Man, tricked the deer into jumping over a cliff and the ducks into closing their eyes so he could wring their necks. The tales will be all the more enjoyed by children because of the air of authentic Indian atmosphere Miss Frazer, who speaks Blackfoot, has been able to capture and maintain. An imaginative introduction sets the stage for the tales and forms a link between the Indian of today and his ancestors of long ago.

The Bear Who Stole the Chinook is quite unlike the other three books but, in the context of this review, more related than is first apparent. It is one of several collections of Indian myths which, together with our historical novels, fiction heroes, and the extraordinary myth cycles of Catherine Anthony Clark, are creating for Canadian children mountains with legends.



DYING CULTURES

FARLEY MOWAT. *The Desperate People*. Little, Brown. \$5.00.

Anerca. ed. EDMUND CARPENTER. Dent. Hard cover \$2.75: soft cover \$2.00.

The Desperate People is an account of the decline of a primitive culture; it is the story of adversity wearing away at the surviving remnants of the inland Eskimos, and behind this human tragedy lies the equal tragedy of the destruction of the great caribou herds, on which the Eskimos fed, by man's unthinking dislocation of Nature's balance in the Barren Grounds of the North.

Farley Mowat, whose *The People of the Deer* described the culture of the inland Eskimos as he found it surviving in the mid-1940's, re-tells the story in a less personal narrative, in which he traces the history of these neolithic hunters, once the most prosperous people of the North, and follows their decline, through white men's diseases, through the destruction of the caribou herds, through official neglect, until in 1958 a few dozen survivors left their ancestral hunting grounds and started a new life in the Keewatin Rehabilitation Centre on Rankin Inlet.

Mr. Mowat's *The People of the Deer* had, despite its detractors, the ring of truth, and later events in the Barren Grounds have proved him essentially

right. In the same way the facts he brings forward in *The Desperate People* speak loudly for themselves—or would if Mr. Mowat let them. But he has not the art which allows the starkness of telling to reveal the starkness of tragedy. He strives constantly to strengthen his point by artifice; he embellishes, he poeticises, he coyly circumlocutes. The outbreak of an epidemic he describes thus:

It was in the year 1912 that the defences which the land had built about its people were suddenly and ruthlessly pierced by an enemy that could not be denied. The assailant was brought into the land hidden within a man of the people who was returning from a trading trip to Reindeer Lake. When it reached the heart of the plains, it burst out of him and ran an untrammelled course along the river routes. It leapt from camp to camp with an appalling swiftness, and, as it passed, the camps stood desolate and still. It had no name, this unseen nemesis, for it was a stranger.

In the end we learn that what has been described variously as an enemy, an assailant, a nemesis, a stranger and—by implication—a runner, is really an epidemic which may have been influenza. Later Mr. Mowat spends a whole page on an “unexpected gift”, “an unseen gift”, which in the end turns out to be the polio epidemic that struck the Eskimos in 1949. Such contrived writing is out of place anywhere, but most of all in a tragic narrative.

Yet one may forgive Mr. Mowat his style and take his facts to heart. The story they tell is the old and terrible one of what happens to a happy primitive culture when the frontier of modern civilisation impinges on it. The inland Eskimos are only the last of the long parade of victims whose memory should haunt us with the recollection of how much has been destroyed that our way of life—

such as it is—may flourish.

The conditions of other Eskimo groups have changed in ways less catastrophic than those that reduced the people of the Barren Grounds to a tiny remnant. But everywhere their ancient culture is disappearing, later than that of the Indians because of a longer isolation, but, now that the North is opening, no less surely. For a little while we shall doubtless still be able to obtain their beautiful stone artifacts, but as the Eskimos become more and more absorbed by the exploitation of Arctic Canada they will—again like the Indians—become steadily more detached from the culture that originally encouraged such work.

A keepsake of the Eskimo past is provided by *Anerca*, a little anthology edited by the anthropologist Edmund Carpenter and containing a selection of examples of Eskimo poetry (translated by various hands) and a group of pleasant rather than extraordinary drawings done for Robert Flaherty more than forty years ago by a Baffin Island Eskimo, Enoosweetok.

Some of the poems convey very movingly the sense of the running together of joy and sorrow, of fear and exaltation in that hard life of the cold but sometimes abundant North. It is the joy and exaltation, the sense of small men defying a great wilderness and realising the glory of the struggle, that are really predominant. "Glorious it is / When wandering time is come," sings one hunter, and the women chant in another song, "Joyfully/ Greet we those/Who brought us plenty!" "I will go towards the day," says a traveller, a dying man cries to the hound of death, "Away! Or I will harness you to my team," and a dead man rejoices:

Here joy fills me

When daylight breaks
And the sun
Glides silently forward.

There are, indeed, other poems which lament the pitiful inadequacy of man and the poverty of his land, but these—at least in this collection—are in the minority, and the prevalent impression one gains is that of a people who found happiness in the hardest things this side of starvation.

My main criticism of the collection as a whole is its lack of informative material. A brief introduction on the character of Eskimo poetry would have been helpful; certainly there should have been notes on the places and tribes among which the various songs originated and some indication of their ritual function where such existed. There is room, in fact, for a good modern anthology of Eskimo poetry, provided with all the necessary background facts, and I hope Professor Carpenter will eventually give us such a volume. *Anerca* is a pleasant appetiser, but it makes one anxious for a more abundant main course.

GEORGE WOODCOCK

TALES OUTSIDE TIME

MARIUS BARBEAU. *The Golden Phoenix*. Retold by Michael Hornyansky. Oxford. \$3.00.

JAMES MCNEILL. *The Sunken City*. Oxford. \$3.00.

THE FAIRY TALE belongs, of course, to the bright world of comedy where the impossible is only a matter of fact, where "all the best kings have three lovely daughters," where the ogre takes a pratfall, and where Jack is always the hero. Its delight is clear in these two small

collections, *The Golden Phoenix* and *The Sunken City*.

Delight is clear too in the illustrations to the stories. Theo Dimson of Toronto, who did the illustrations for *The Sunken City*, and Arthur Price of Ottawa, who did those for *The Golden Phoenix*, have not only caught the spirit of the fairy tales, but they have also added to the fun. Each artist has a different style — Mr. Dimson's is vaguely Byzantine, while Mr. Price has based his on medieval illuminations — but in the suggestion of an indefinite past, and in the combination of simplicity and artifice, of vistas and flat planes, both men bring to our sight the "once upon a time" — or Chaucer's "whilom" — of the world of Romance that never did exist but which is always present.

Both the timelessness and the pervasiveness of Romance are evident in the backgrounds of the stories, for they reach into the antiquities of Egypt and China, and they range in space from Iceland to India. Yet their immediate expression comes from this country. The eight stories of *The Golden Phoenix*, here retold by Michael Hornyansky, are from the collection of tales that Marius Barbeau made along the lower St. Lawrence, while the beginning of James McNeill's *The Sunken City* came from stories that he told his children.

Not surprisingly, the stories in the two books have many things in common. The same plots crop up, though from different places. The same details appear, as in the fife or bugle that can call up a sudden army, or as in the singular disfigurement of the long nose. Most remarkable, though, is the humour of the fairy tales that keeps them—or Romance —from being sentimental and that gives

light and shade to their brilliant colour. And it is here in great variety. It may be in the handsome nonchalance of a sentence like this from *The Sunken City*: "He travelled so fast that he came to the sea in a minute and made himself a boat from his cap and a sail from his shirt and reached the eastern world in five hours." Or, as in *The Golden Phoenix*, it may be in the resignation of a prince who has failed at his job — "Oh, well, there goes the crown" — or in the plaintive query of the hero who has just bested a lion, "May I pass, or must I do it again?"

The basic formula of the tales, of course, is the triad, which has been the formula of comedy from Dante's three eternities to the latest comedian's build-up for his punch line. In the tales, it appears as three fairies, or three magic gifts, or three questions and answers, or three trials. The other basic device is that of incongruity, or the upside-down of surprise, and this element centres on Jack himself. Whether he is a prince or a peasant, and whether his name is Jack, Jacques, Petit Jean, or Ivan, he begins humbly. As one mother puts it, "All people are people, but you, Ivan, are a fool."

The difference between the two books comes from the quality of the prose in which each is written, and the difference is considerable.

There are many good things in *The Sunken City*, but while Mr. McNeill shows that he enjoys the wit of the fairy tale, and that he can savour a good phrase, too often his own writing is ponderous. In the title story, for instance, he commits the grave sin of adding a moral tag. Now while fairy tales *are* highly moral — the good people always

win, and the bad ones are made uncomfortable — like any other form of art, they do not use the moral as a bludgeon. They trust the reader — or the listener — to get the point. The ending of another story sounds as though an agricultural economist had wandered in: “. . . their black-and-white descendants [of sea-cows] are valued all over the world for the quality of their milk.” The awkwardness is not only in the endings, unfortunately; it permeates the writing. People never say things; they suggest them. They don’t agree; they are “content with this arrangement”. They don’t welcome someone; they “give him the hospitality of their roof”. There’s a real doozer in the description of a ruined castle: “when the last assault of time had laid its ramparts low.” Such rather silly solemnity has no place in good writing anywhere, but especially not in fairy tales.

There is no such cloudiness in the writing of Michael Hornyansky. The prose of *The Golden Phoenix* has the good taste and the skill of fine art. It has a lambent quality that reminded me of the music of the harpsichord, clear, deft, and complete. It can be lyrical: “. . . and above their heads the Golden Phoenix sang in the jasmine tree.” It can be daringly simple; “An old, old woman looked out at him.” The imagery is light — “It was as smooth as ivory, and cool as the night”—and the laughter bubbles close to the surface. Here is a supple prose that is gay and firm.

Marius Barbeau says in his note to *The Golden Phoenix*: “Mr. Hornyansky and I aimed at achieving in our own way a literary uplifting similar to that of Grimm, Andersen, and Perrault in the tales of their people.” They have succeeded.

MARGARET STOBIE

POLITICS AND THE PRESS

J. M. S. CARELESS, *Brown of the Globe*, vol. 1,
The Voice of Upper Canada, 1818-1859.
Toronto. \$6.00.

TO STUDENTS of Canadian history the name of George Brown is thoroughly familiar. And rightly so. Was he not one of the country’s really great Liberals, the founder of the influential *Toronto Globe*, a thunderous writer of editorials, and a Father of Confederation? Yet Canadian histories tell us little about the man himself. We see him fleetingly on this page as a Clear Grit politician, on that as a supporter of “rep. by pop.”, and on another as one of the architects of the federal structure now known as Canada. But was he, as Leacock once wrote, “. . . as straight as a figure in Euclid and about as attractive”?

To date there has been no satisfactory answer to that ambiguous question. Little has been written about him, and the one biography available — John Lewis’s *George Brown*, in the *Makers of Canada* series (1909) — was, at the best, a superficial survey of Brown’s life, written without brilliance, and — if the style reflects the author — without feeling.

Professor Careless, Chairman of the Department of History at the University of Toronto, was fully aware of this neglect when he started work on a new life of Brown ten years ago. *The Voice of Upper Canada, 1818-1859* is the first volume of a projected two-volume biography, the second of which will follow Brown’s career through the anxious days immediately preceding Confederation to his tragic death in 1880, when he was killed by a discharged employee of the

Globe. Will the completed portrait show Brown as a convincingly human being, standing firm and alive in the new light of modern research, or will the mists of the past still cover the real features of the man whose voice was heard with such clarity in the Canada of a hundred years ago?

It is perhaps unfair to prejudge an incomplete work; yet a review of this volume cannot be delayed until the second appears. Its importance demands comment, though comment tempered by the reminder that the canvas has not yet been filled. What then can be said?

To begin with, it can be said, and with good reason, that this is a work of the first magnitude in the realm of Canadian scholarship. With the true and persevering patience of a research specialist, Professor Careless has not only examined works well known to earlier historians, but he has uncovered new primary material, including a "trunkful" of private papers hitherto unexamined. His trail of study has taken him to Canadian archives and university libraries, as well as to the home of some of Brown's descendants, now living in Scotland. Moreover, he has marshalled his facts with great skill, and presented them in a style that is clear and controlled, though at times slightly arid.

The present volume opens with the arrival of the Browns — Peter the father and George the son — as Scottish immigrants in New York in 1837. It closes in 1859, by which time George Brown had so grown in stature and in fame that he overshadowed most of his Canadian contemporaries, with the notable exception of his old foe and nemesis, the mercurial John A. Macdonald. The six New York years are disposed of quickly and lightly;

but with the year 1844, when Brown, then twenty-six, founded the Toronto *Globe* as a Reform paper, the pace of the narrative changes. What follows is a minute and detailed political history of the many — and at times stirring — events that occurred during the next sixteen years in party caucuses, in government assemblies, and on the hustings. Brown, of course, is the central figure, but around him swirl hundreds of other figures — Conservatives, Reformers, Clear Grits, "Bleus," and "Rouges." At times, he seems lost in the whirlpools of politics, but he always comes to the surface, growing steadily in prestige and power, and surviving even that tragicomical day when he climbed to the peak of power only to be violently tripped by the astute "double-shuffle" of the wily Macdonald and his backers.

But the figure that Professor Careless gives us is nearly always that of George Brown, politician. We hear his political speeches, in essence at least; we learn much about the causes for which he fought; and we are given many extracts from the blistering editorials that appeared in the *Globe*. Yet, somehow, we don't get inside the buildings that housed the *Globe*. We smell no ink; we hear no compositors at work; we get little impression of the paper as a *newspaper*; and we rarely see Brown at his desk. And as for meeting George Brown *en pantoufles* — we don't, except for a few artificially contrived moments, such as are found in the book's closing pages when we are permitted a brief glimpse inside ". . . the warm parlour . . . where the lamplight and the firelight softly contended on the ceiling, where George Brown sat as ever, hands in pockets, legs thrust straight out before him — talking,

as ever, in happy contentment with his father, his family and good friends."

In brief, Careless, the historian, has so far pushed his alter ego, the biographer, well to one side. Though he has treated Brown, the politician, fully and most sympathetically, he has left Brown, the man, lurking in the shadows. Perhaps volume two will change the picture.

S. E. READ

A WOMAN SUBMERGED

MARGARET STEWART AND DORIS FRENCH. *Ask No Quarter: The Story of Agnes Macphail*. Longmans, Green. \$4.50.

THE EYES of the public were on Agnes Macphail, first of her sex to sit in Canada's Parliament, during much of her nineteen years in the House of Commons and her briefer career afterwards in the Ontario Legislature. It is not surprising that a gulf should have continued to widen, until her death in 1954, between her public and private selves: raw farmer's daughter and great lady; quick-witted, sarcastic and aggressive in debate, yielding to tears of mortification in private; feared as a politician and sometimes wooed as a woman by members of parliament whose politics she despised. In *Ask No Quarter* Margaret Stewart and Doris French have recreated the vitality and complexity of their colourful subject, but perhaps understandably they have found it a difficult task to bring into clear focus either or both of "The Two Lives of Agnes Macphail" (their alternative title).

Agnes Macphail would not have approved of any more personal interpretation of her life than *Ask No Quarter*

provides; she would have wielded her parliamentary knife: "Cut out the cant". A mere ornament to the short-lived Progressive Party in 1921, she put down roots and thrived in her new-found element, becoming in time a truly effective independent member, a strength to the Ginger Group, a disconcerting but valued ally of the C.C.F. Personal suitors and political seducers continued to attend her, but she had married the public good. Look for the fruits of the marriage in that "new kind of society, based on the concept of public responsibility for private misfortune" for which she laboured, and which is still to be born.

Important as her contribution to Canadian public life was, however—her homely, irascible, independent monologue on behalf of humanity and social justice in general and farmers' rights and prison reform in particular—Agnes Macphail was not a great stateswoman. It is not by accident that her biographers so often court tedium and repetitious disorder in their narrative of her political life. The "real Agnes" emerges now as an early type of the "modern woman", whose problems are still with us, though like the brave ladies of Ibsen she herself may seem a little archaic. I am not forgetting her determined efforts to ignore and have others ignore the fact that she was a woman. She "asked no quarter" on that account, as her biographers proudly verify. At the same time her whole public life was a piquant, sometimes ridiculous, sometimes charming, sometimes courageous display of femininity and its ways. (The contemporary account of her holding hands with R. B. Bennett were based, we discover, on no mere political metaphor.) Her real shortcomings stemmed from the fact that she never overcame the

intellectual provinciality which the oddity of her position entailed. She did not want to be odd or eccentric (though she enjoyed and even demanded the limelight). She wanted, in fact, a larger "normality" than women were and perhaps are allowed. "It was a deep sorrow to me that I couldn't do all that I expect women to do; to be a wife and mother, but also *an untrammelled active person* finding outlet for her ability in the fields of learning, agriculture, industry, business, the arts or government". Here surely is the key to Agnes Macphail's story. What were the costs (to both) when the woman was submerged in the politician? Her biographers give us only hints of the answer, though their lively portrait is drawn with frankness and honesty as well as with warmth, colour and enthusiasm.

F. W. WATT

PHILOSOPHER IN THE GRAND MANNER

GEORGE P. GRANT. *Philosophy in the Mass Age*. Copp Clark. \$3.00.

IN AN AGE of minute philosophers Professor Grant cogitates in the grand manner. His book is a true miracle of loaves and fishes; its 112 pages include discussion of the myth of the "eternal return", the Judeo-Christian idea of history, the natural law theory of morality, the concept of progress, Marx and the Marxists, and pragmatism as the last phase of American Protestantism — all this interspersed with obiter dicta on modern education, Hegel, the novels (*sic*) of J. D. Salinger, the Holy Trinity, the Stratford Festival, the systematic elusiveness of the

"I". Many of the opinions expressed are highly implausible, but all are asserted with breath-taking self-assurance. When one sets aside the erudition with which Professor Grant has ballasted his thought, however, it can be seen that his central concern in all of this is a moral one; in his own words: "Are we truly and finally responsible for shaping what happens in the world, or do we live in an order for which we are not ultimately responsible, so that the purpose of our lives is to discover and serve that order?" The enormous vistas which occupy so much of the book are called up to give content to this question.

Human history, we are told, divides into two great epochs: that of modern man on the one hand and that of the traditional religious cultures on the other. "The main distinction is between modern scientific culture and all societies which existed before the age of progress." Ancient history can be further subdivided into a "mythic" stage and a more advanced religious stage. In the mythic stage men regarded themselves as puppets acting out, in endless repetition, a drama pre-ordained by the Gods; "They saw events as the pale shadows of divine realities, the temporal as the mere image of the eternal." This vision of history has received its clearest statement in the philosophy of Plato but, if Grant is to be believed, it was subscribed to more or less unconsciously by Ancient Man in general.

In the second phase of pre-scientific culture the puppet theatre is replaced by the law court—man is free to go the way of his own choosing, but the way he must go, if he is to be a man rather than a beast, has been laid out for him in the eternal statutes of the natural law. Men are reasonable creatures and through

reason are capable of knowing right from wrong; knowing our duties we are still free to obey or disobey, but it is only through obedience to a moral order which we did not create that we can bring meaning and rational purpose into our lives.

The crucial transition now takes place, in Grant's account, from man trying to conform to a superhuman order to man regarding himself as maker of history and measure of all things. Somewhat surprisingly Grant attributes this change to the Judaic idea of history, at work within Christendom. But although the Jews may well have been, as Grant claims, the first people to have had a sense of history this does not appear to have had much to do with the concept of man-made progress. In the Judeo-Christian view God makes history and man is merely expected to hold the line. The idea of progress originated, in the West at least, in the scientific revolution of the 16th century; it is then, in the writings of the proto-scientists and their admirers, that belief is first expressed in the possibility of endless progress through the co-operative accumulation of useful knowledge. Had Greek science lived to produce the kind of technological revolution that was evident in the 16th century, the ancient Greeks would presumably have engendered the idea of progress themselves.

The idea of progress permeates both Marxism, in which form it has been carried to the ends of the earth, and the pragmatism which characterizes American civilization. Grant's account of Marxism does not encourage confidence in him as a historian; in keeping with a current fashion he locates Marx's profoundest thought in his Hegelian juvenilia and then, by exaggerating and mis-

interpreting the concern with religion in these writings, displays Marxism as a latter day version of the Judeo-Christian concept of history. Marx the revolutionary socialist is swallowed up by Marx the prophet of Judah; one can only attempt to imagine the towering invective with which Marx himself would have greeted this revelation.

Marxism is a philosophy of progress but, as Grant points out, it is not a philosophy which adequately acknowledges the freedom of the human spirit. Only pragmatism fully expresses the conception of man as the maker of history. Here no limit is placed on man's freedom; progress is all, and what is to count as progress is itself established by man. "The right is only the expedient in the way of our acting."

In spite of the many original opinions vigorously expressed throughout this book it is only in its final chapters that it begins to come to life; here at last Grant has a serious philosophical purpose. Briefly, he believes that certain moral principles are absolutely true whatever men may think about them; if so, then man is not the measure of all things and there is a limit to his authority, and any philosophy which, like pragmatism, implies the contrary is false and iniquitous. But what account can be given which acknowledges both man's moral obligations and his freedom — which, while recognizing the existence of absolute obligations, does not reduce them to some species of coercion, natural or supernatural?

The problem is a real one, but unfortunately Grant contributes nothing to its solution. He is aware that neither traditional theology nor traditional natural law theory meet the case and that any

moral law compatible with human freedom must be in some sense self-legislated. But all this has been said, and said better, long ago. And beyond this, in spite of much huffing and puffing, he makes no advance.

This is the kind of book that is likely to be hailed as a profound and rewarding contribution to something or other. Regrettably, notwithstanding the moral earnestness and all too evident learning of the author, it is nothing of the kind.

PETER REMNANT

CRAFTSMEN AND OTHERS

ALFRED PURDY. *The Crafts so Longe to Lerne*. Ryerson. \$1.00.

R. E. RASHLEY. *Moon Lake and Other Poems*. Ryerson. \$1.00.

THERESA E. & DON. W. THOMSON. *River and Realm*. Ryerson. \$1.00.

IN "Villanelle (plus 1)", one of the better poems in his volume, *The Crafts so Longe to Lerne*, Mr. Purdy states his intention of employing in his verse "the language of the age":

Of matched mechanic's tools include the
spade,

The crowbar words, the sputnik slang . . .

A worthy intention but, as borne out by the deliberate archaism of the collection's title, and the contradictory content of other of his poems, one which he is unable to consistently realise. If, as in "Driftwood Logs", his tone is of his time, one of quiet, ironic understatement, his language is a long way off "sputnik slang"; while when, as in "Love Song", he does use a spade to dig up his words, he at the same time buries poetry:

But I can be two men if I have to,
Unlike the man delivering beer from Por-
lock's Grocery
(When you sniff the acoustics of your nose
are delightful).

He is more successful in other poems; particularly in "Waiting for an Old Woman to Die", in which such lines as "I can only be sure that I lack / All filial feeling about the wet / Eyed old person of dubious gender", are contemporary enough to have been written by Jimmy Porter.

There are phrases which bubble to the surface of a writer's mind and heave and splutter there, threatening each moment to explode; the only way to deal with them is to trap them in the pipette of a poem. Discrimination comes later; when the mind's marsh is quiet again, each captive image may be weighed and found worthy or wanting. Mr. Purdy's unconscious eructs admirably, but he has not the necessary judgment to prevent inferior imagery condensing in his work, which is of a consequence spotted with such non-poetry as:

"Nouns that ache on human skin",

"Vaguely sink",

"Live argot for the vermifuge of rage".

Punning in poetry can be most effective, since it is an economical device for obtaining two or more meanings at once. But, misused, it will reduce the poem to a comedian's script; and Mr. Purdy misuses it.

small holders . . .

Opening themselves in fertile air
To celebrate no men or pause —

and, from "At Roblin Lake", describing the post-inseminatory movements of fish: "non-judicial separation".

Nor is the technical standard of these poems well-sustained. "Villanelle (plus

1)”, apart from the fault, implicit in the title, of a stanza too many, fails to rhyme each middle line; in addition, the rhythm of the second line is clumsy. Poor metre spoils “Where the Moment Is” and “Olympic Room”, and, in most other poems, rhythm is remarkable for its absence. In “For Oedi-Puss” (first punned, surely, by Malcolm Lowry?) occurs an inexcusable abbreviation, “From the Med. Sea and the Red / Sea”; in “Short History of X County” one finds “96” for “ninety-six”, and, in at least one instance, an awkward inversion, “No flicker over the featureless message runs”.

If Mr. Purdy would or could tighten and tidy his verse up, he might produce more poems of the quality of “waiting for an Old Woman to Die” and “If Birds Look In”, more lines as good as “the dusty Cretan sibilants / Rustling delightedly on scholar tongues”. Unfortunately, one leaves his book less conscious of his minor triumphs than of his many failures, of a certain wooliness of thought and expression best seen, perhaps, in “About Pablum, Teachers and Malcolm Lowry”:

Aching to believe
In a felt and almost experienced
Meaning, somehow untrue,

which leaves one feeling (and almost experiencing) the resigned despair of one who sinks in quicksand.

The boggy imagery finds further application in Mr. Rashley’s “Moon Lake”. “It is too late to run like children after the muskrats / Into the sucking mud”, cries the poet, and one briskly agrees, “Thank God!” This is a prime example of the kind of line mature judgment should keep out of print. He does it again in “Harvest”, but in muted manner, and luckily at the poem’s end:

An Indian queries,
“What is man?
The breath of the buffalo hangs for a
moment
White in the frosty air
And is gone.”

Mr. Rashley’s verse is not uniformly damned by ringing emptiness and Canadian culture coyness. “Marianne”, possibly the best of the bunch, contains delicate observation and insight:

It was difficult enough without the bird,
Difficult enough to conform . . .
“Marianne”, one might imagine oneself to
say,
“Marianne” — beginning —
But there was the bird fluttering,
And Marianne turned away.

“Insomnia”, “Snowfall”, and “Spring” are all mildly attractive series of images, few, it is true, original, but all harmless.

Not so harmless is the work of Theresa and Don Thomson. *River and Realm* consists of seven poems, all paeans of propaganda to perpetuate the Lie of History and praise the Crimes of Commerce. This indigestible mess of jingoism is served up to a jingling metre on the chipped china of outworn imagery. One had thought that verse as unrealistic as this no longer found the light of day, even through the dormer of a Ryerson chapbook. But one, obviously, had been mistaken:

in clear Elizabethan tones
a comely monarch dedicates
an epic dream, a lustrous age.

DAVID BROMIGE



FRONTIER SONGS

MARGARET ARNETT MACLEOD. *Songs of Old Manitoba*. Ryerson Press. \$2.50.

THE EXPLICITLY stated purpose of this unpretentious, pleasantly executed little volume is to make some contribution to the cultural history of Canada in general and of Manitoba in particular. This is an activity which holds an important place in Canada to-day, and perhaps criticism of the intrinsic merit and historical importance of the collection would be ill-timed. The volume is the work of a dedicated amateur in the field, but her acknowledgments testify to assistance by a formidable band of historians, poets and musicians, so that it is reasonable to conclude that the quality of the text and music are fundamental to the material.

There has been no shaping or polishing into beauty by a poetically endowed editor.

"The author's object" says Dr. Morton in a preface, "came to be to show what songs a society, which almost to the end lived side by side with savagery, could produce, and to reveal each phase of Manitoba's history by a song with a commentary as setting." This is a most laudable aim, and to devoted Manitobans Mrs. MacLeod has succeeded. She has given the music and French originals of the words, and English versions, occasionally contributed by a poet, but regretably sometimes by others who were not poets. The French songs by Pierre Falcon generally have a fine rollicking lilt and rhythm, and "The Marching Song", a parody of "Johnny Cope" admirably captures the spirit of the Scots original,

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particularly in the chorus:

O Hey, Riel, are ye wakin yet,
Or are yer drums a-beatin yet?
If y're nae wakin we'll nae wait,
For we'll take the fort this mornin.

The English songs at the end of the book composed by ardent lovers of Manitoba show the devotion which the prairies can inspire.

M. L. MACKENZIE

CANADIANA CATALOGUED

A Bibliography of Canadiana — First Supplement. Ed. Gertrude M. Boyle, assisted by Marjorie Colbeck, with intro. by Henry C. Campbell. Toronto Public Library.

IN 1934 the Toronto Public Library made known its holdings on Canada from 1534 to 1867 by publishing, in chronological arrangement, *A Bibliography of Canadiana*, under the editorship of Staton and Tremaine. Now, with assistance from the Canada Council, its *First Supplement*, "which the present Board hopes may be the first of many", has been printed by the University of Toronto Press.

As in the original compilation of 4,646 entries, the supplement contains works generally written contemporaneously with the events they record, many by the actors on the historical stage themselves. But the supplement, with 1,640 entries, goes further. Apart from adding books omitted previously through space limitations and, as in the case of the Clergy Reserve documents, those acquired later, it also introduces classifications like verse, school readers and sermons. However, because the Toronto Public has relinquished its lofty pre-

eminence in the field of Canadiana since the growth of other collections in Canada and elsewhere, newly acquired material is more local, with the emphasis on imprints from York, Toronto, Upper Canada and Canada West. On the other hand, holdings on Newfoundland are here included, and properly so now that the old colony has become a Province. Moreover, more effective use may be made of the supplement as a result of an improved index which, besides showing titles and subjects, lists proper names appearing on title pages of imprints.

Although more clearly divided chronologically, this new work is identical in format with the original bibliography. As before, the books, pamphlets, broadsides, sermons and governments' publications are described generally; like its "parent", too, it is illustrated with facsimiles of title pages, of a proclamation and of an entertainment broadside. On the whole, this *First Supplement* should be welcomed by students who found the old "Staton and Tremaine" so useful and, indeed, by anyone interested in a portable card catalogue of Canadiana.

GORDON R. ELLIOTT

CANDLE FLAME

PETER C. NEWMAN. *Flame of Power.* Longmans, Green. \$4.95.

IN THE GREAT age of the muckrakers, Gustavus Myers wrote a massive and in some ways fascinating *History of the Great American Fortunes*. Now, in *Flame of Power*, Mr. Peter Newman has attempted something like the same task for the men in control of wealth who, in his

opinion, have played the greatest part in changing Canada's economic destiny. He claims, in his prologue, that he is undertaking "an examination in depth of the compulsive drive for business success that has been a major shaping force in Canadian history", and one expects from such a promise two things at least — an examination of the psychological motivations of individual capitalists and a mature study of the economic structure they represent. On both counts one is disappointed. Mr. Newman's plane is that of provocative journalism; he presents a series of profiles in which the lives and personal idiosyncracies of his subjects are considered on a tantalisingly superficial level; rarely does he descend very far into the real depths of the Balzacian obsessions he records.

Perhaps some of the disappointing flat-

ness of the book's general impression is due to the drabness of the subjects. Myers in his book presented a range of financial rascals who rivalled in their own field the Renaissance *condottieri*; Canada has had few of such colourful Great Captains, and the most dramatic energumen of them all — William Van Horne of the Canadian Pacific — was reared among the Titans south of the border. It seems almost as though, from a combination of French Jansenism and Scottish Calvinism, there has issued a strain of puritanism in our national makeup which makes the joyous display of wealth an uneasy matter for Canadians. I am sure this is a very good thing, but it makes the lives of our financiers pretty dull reading unless the hidden demons of motivation are revealed.

LOUIS CORNELIUS

COMING SOON

WINTER SUN

"We hear her called a very intellectual poet, but she begins (and often ends) with the perceiving eye . . ." Milton Wilson in *Canadian Literature*.

Here is the first volume of Miss Avison's poems to be published although some of the selections have appeared previously in periodicals. The poems for this volume were selected by Miss Avison from a much larger collection, some published and some unpublished. 96 pages 5½ x 8¾. \$2.50.

MARGARET AVISON

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO PRESS
TORONTO 5, ONTARIO.

SHORT NOTICES

On Understanding Russia by F. Cyril James (University of Toronto Press, \$2.95) is a brief, rather journalistic account of an economist's month in Russia; its details are interesting, its conclusions sketchy.

* * *

In *Civil Liberties and Canadian Federalism* (University of Toronto Press, \$2.00) F. R. Scott examines the relationship between our civil liberties and the development of the Canadian constitution. Originally given as a Plaunt Memorial Lecture, it is discursive in form, but often penetrating in insight.

* * *

Perhaps all that one need say of *Songs from Kawartha* by Flornie Baxter Young

(Vantage Press, \$4.25) is that quotation is here sufficient criticism. *The Mournful Frog* is typical of the poems Mrs. Young presents, literally by the hundred:

A frog sat on a lily pad
All alone and very sad,
He thought, I should have stayed a tad,
And then life wouldn't seem so bad.

* * *

The title of *Some Letters of Duncan Campbell Scott, Archibald Lampman and Others* explains the scope of this small volume edited and published by Arthur S. Bourinot (158, Carleton Road, Rockcliffe, Ottawa, \$3.50). It contains a miscellany of hitherto unpublished correspondence which will interest those concerned with the Canadian poets of the earlier years of this century.

* * *

The Waterloo Review

A semi-annual published by faculty members at Waterloo University College and McMaster University. Send subscriptions and contributions to J. A. S. Evans,

Waterloo University College, Waterloo, Ontario. CONTENTS OF FORTHCOMING ISSUE. A Symposium on the future of liberalism in Canada, with articles by Ernest Watkins, Jack Pickersgill and Douglas Fisher. *Ageing and Memory*, a study in gerontology, by D. C. Fraser. *The Fifties, an Ottawa Retrospect*, by Michael Barkway. *When He Arrived Home*, a short story

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Covering the same period is *Tributes through the Years* (Ryerson Press, \$1.00), a pamphlet gathered by Elsie M. Pomeroy to celebrate the centenary of the birth of Sir Charles G. D. Roberts. It is a garland of faded compliments from which criticism had been carefully excluded in the cause of adulation and which leaves one with about as much sense of the living man as a wreath of everlastings in a cemetery.

* * *

These are the Maritimes by Will. R. Bird (Ryerson, \$4.50), though written in the form of a travel narrative, is really a disguised guide book. It has a depressing repetitiveness; in all too many places the author arrives, meets a suitably garrulous inhabitant who tells him a potted history of the locale, and then traipses around the recognised tourist traps, which he describes with a breathless interest whose tone varies little whether he is telling of a chocolate factory, a potter's establishment, a workshop for hooked rugs or a scrappy smalltown museum. In a negative way this book emphasises that guide books should be concise and easy to follow; Baedeker reigned so long by fulfilling these requirements.

* * *

Church and State in Canadian Education by C. B. Sissons (Ryerson, \$6.50) is an interesting study of a problem that has assumed acute forms at various times in Canadian history. It is exhaustive and, though without any literary pretensions, clearly enough written to hold the attention of those who have some initial interest in the history of education in Canada.

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WHO IS PROVINCIAL?

TWO FELLOW-AMERICANS have objected to my complaints about provincialism in Canadian magazines on the grounds that I wrote for "a provincially-titled and provincially-directed magazine called *The New Yorker*." Without going into the quality of *The New Yorker*, may I say (a) that my objection to the Canadian magazines I reviewed was not that their interest was local but that it was provincial, i.e. that Canadian culture, on their own evidence, is not wide enough or rich enough to sustain such concentrated attention; and (b) that I find it hard to think of New York as a provin-

cial city. Like London or Paris, New York seems to me to be a centre of world culture, and, indeed, I must confess that it is precisely the rest of this country that strikes me as provincial compared to New York. I say this with no exultation, for although I have always lived here, I have never much liked the place. Furthermore, I think the concentration of cultural activity in one city deplorable; it would be much better to have half a dozen rivals of comparable importance in each country. But the brute fact is there aren't. Paris, London and New York are the overwhelmingly dominant centres and so the adjective "provincial" can hardly be attached to them, and the name *New Yorker*, while it may be objected to as a bit snobbish, cannot really be called provincial.

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