$1.00 per copy

CANADIAN LITERATURE No. 5

Summer, 1960

A QUARTERLY OF
CRITICISM AND REVIEW

PUBLISHED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA, VANCOUVER 8

CANADIAN LITERATURE

LITTERATURE CANADIENNE

NUMBER 5 — SUMMER, 1960

A Quarterly of Criticism and Review

Edited by George Woodcock

BUSINESS MANAGER: Inglis F. Bell
CIRCULATION MGR.: Basil Stuart-Stubbs
TYPOGRAPHER: Robert R. Reid
EDITORIAL ASST.: Donald Stephens

PRINTED IN CANADA BY MORRISS PRINTING COMPANY LTD., VICTORIA

Indexed in the *Canadian Index to Periodicals and Documentary Films.*

Authorized as second-class mail, Post Office Department, Ottawa

Address subscriptions to Basil Stuart-Stubbs, the University of British Columbia Library, Vancouver 8, Canada.

SUBSCRIPTIONS $3.00 A YEAR

contents

DECORATIONS IN THIS ISSUE ARE BY GEORGE KUTHAN.

contributors

WARREN TALLMAN, whose essay on Jack Kerouac has been published in *The Tamarack Review* and *Evergreen Review,* is now working on a study of Alan Ginsberg and his poetry.

R. E. WATTERS is Professor of English at the University of British Columbia and editor of a number of Canadian anthologies as well as of the recently published *Check List of Canadian Literature,* 1628-1950.

F. W. WATT, whose essay on Ralph Connor appeared in *Canadian Literature I,* is Assistant Professor of English at University College, Toronto. He has contributed articles and reviews to *The University of Toronto Quarterly* and other journals, and is contributing a section to the *Literary History of Canada* now in preparation.

ETHEL WILSON, who has also contributed to an earlier issue of *Canadian Literature,* is well-known as one of the more important novelists writing in Canada at the present time.

NORMAN LEVINE, who now lives in Cornwall, is author of the controversial *Canada Made Me,* a travel book that is also part autobiography. He is also a novelist, a poet and a literary critic.

JEAN-GUY PILON, who is one of the leading younger French Canadian poets, is editor of *Liberté 60* and active in the poetry publishing house, Editions de l'Hexagone.

JACK LUDWIG, whose work will already be familiar to readers of *Tamarack Review,* was born in Winnipeg and now teaches at the University of Minnesota. He is one of the editors of the new American literary magazine, *The Noble Savage.*

RODERICK HAIG-BROWN'S most recent book, *Fisherman's Summer,* was reviewed in *Canadian Literature 3.* He is himself the author of a book on Captain Vancouver.

GERALD NEWMAN is a Producer of Drama for the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, and has directed many plays on such programmes as Wednesday Night and CBC Stage.

editorial

SUMMER THOUGHTS

Instead of an Editorial

I HAVE ALWAYS THOUGHT that an editor approaching the summer issue of his magazine should be allowed some license, some freedom to leave topicalities aside and pass into speculation and the daydreams appropriate to an August afternoon. Even the cloak of the prophet, cautiously assumed, may not be out of place, and so I use this summer opportunity of putting into print some speculations of the present and future of writing in Canada which have long floated in my mind. For once I am picking the highlights and ignoring the shadows. There will be autumn and winter issues, after all.

Let me begin by saying that it seems to me that any literature, before it can produce major writing, must have first attained a minimum degree of complexity and self-consciousness. Any idea of a Golden Age when men composed great works of literature with simple naturalness is at best a delightful myth. As any classicist knows, the attainment of the kind of simplicity and directness which we really value in literature—as distinct from bucolic idiocy—depends on the prior acquisition of a high degree of sophistication and on the establishment of a tradition of experience that comes from the long living into an environment. Colonists do not produce fine literature, though explorers, returning to write in the lands they left, often do.

As an example of what I mean by the simplicity and directness we value, let us take the writing of Hemingway, whose qualities often lead to his being opposed in the minds of critics to obviously complex writers like Joyce and Proust. But in fact Hemingway's starkness comes at the

end of generations of very self-conscious thinking about writing in an American environment, and one can hazard the proposition that American literature had to go through the dark mazes of Melville and the parenthetical exercises of James in order to stand in the clean, well-lighted place of the Hemingways—a clean, well-lighted place which is nevertheless liable to lend itself to the Mithraic darknesses of the *corrida.*

It seems to me that literature in Canada, after a time lag owing to the country's later development, is now reaching a stage not unlike that of literature in America at about the time when James began to make his historic analyses of the nature of fictional process. To begin, as a pioneer country where people were concerned with the problems of making a new life and a new society, Canada tended either to produce work that did little more than echo English, American and French patterns, or to produce direct reportage and fairly direct satire like that of Haliburton. The pushing out to the frontier tended to perpetuate the pattern by its insistence on the value of raw rather than rendered expression.

During the past two decades, however, there has been what I see as a mutation in Canadian writing, a quite astonishing advance in complexity of feeling and also technique. We can see this particularly in poetry, in the poetry of Jay Macpherson and James Reaney, of P. K. Page and A. J. M. Smith and Douglas Le Pan; we can see that even Irving Layton, who shouts like a primitive, is really a sophisticate capable of handling his chosen forms with great deliberation, and that behind the massive facades which E. J. Pratt raises like Cyclopean masonry there is a cunning architect directing the strokes of the apparently rustic workman. I would certainly be willing to match the work of the poets I have mentioned, and of others as well, against the kind of poetry I have seen coming from England during the 1950's. Recently, it is true, one has heard complaints that the past few years have seen a diminution of the Canadian poetic urge of the 1940's; perhaps they have—I am not at all sure of this—but when we see it all in the perspective of time I still think that these twenty years between 1940 and 1960 will appear to us as a crucial stage in the development of a mature native poetry.

To a less extent, the advance in complexity applies to other forms of literature. In fiction, for instance, there is a quickened urge towards experimentation, towards forging more complex instruments for deline-

ating human predicaments. Ten years ago Malcolm Lowry seemed a rare and magnificent bird to roost in the western Canadian woodlands. Now, with writers like Richler and Sheila Watson and Brian Moore at work, I do not think this would still be the case. We can see even a basically conventional novelist like Hugh MacLennan, despite a naiveté which still astounds one, working with a growing complexity of craftsmanship and a growing assurance of mastery.

In fact, literature in this country is producing an ever-growing variety of responses to Canadian existence, and it seems to me that the maturity which such versatility suggests is confirmed by the emergence at the present time of an increasing interest in criticism as a form of writing which has a necessary part to play in our literary pattern. In this direction, of course, Northrop Frye has been our great pioneer, presenting a nobly wide view of the critic's function, and one need hardly stress either the international recognition he has gained or the influence he has wielded over a whole school of younger Canadian critics and even younger Canadian poets. In another way, the support which *Canadian Literature* itself has received during its first year provides a suggestive indication of the position which criticism, as a form of writing, is beginning to take in our literary world. I do not rejoice, of course, over the presence of criticism as such; as Oscar Wilde warned us long ago, it can be a very barren process unless it is sympathetically linked with the currents of creativity. But I believe that criticism does have a creative function when it becomes part of that process of exploration, of thinking about literary forms, which results in experimentation, and I hope criticism in Canada will develop along such creatively exploratory lines.

It would be unwise to make any emphatic prophesies about what may emerge from these signs of movement and growth in Canadian writing. No movement in the arts can either be planned or foreseen in detail. On the other hand, one may be justifiably tempted in a summer season to a little frank daydreaming, and one may find some food for daydreams in the fact that on occasion important changes in the general literary climate have begun in minor traditions. It was, after all, in Norway that Ibsen initiated a change that affected the whole look of European drama, and in the petty and powerless kingdom of Provence that the character of post-mediaeval lyric poetry was established. Perhaps it is not too much to hazard a wild hope that in some country like Canada

we might see—for example—a sudden move towards a break in what critics the world over are calling *the crisis in the novel,* the stagnation in fictional forms that has been hardening over the past two decades.

Daydreams apart, let us draw satisfaction from the fact that literature in Canada is a growing art. It is constantly receiving new writers from abroad and sending out its native writers to explore the world beyond—as James and Turgenev did so importantly in the formative stages of other literatures. It is a literature which as it grows becomes less and less content with itself, which is full of tentative variety, and which is not easy to define. We may indeed recognize at last that—as a minimum—present-day writing in Canada is something more than the product of the remittance men of European traditions, something more than the shadow of literature in America. What that something more is we find it harder to say, and I am not sure we should pursue it beyond rather tentative general thoughts. After all, it is the individual books and the individual writers, each secure in his autonomy as an artist, that should first concern us. Later, when we have considered, criticized and appreciated such works and such writers, it will be time for the literary historian to come and draw his conclusions. To fire the melting pot here and now, to attempt anything more than the provisional establishment of common denominators of contemporary Canadian writing, to see in it features that are easily and patriotically identifiable, may do some obscure service to political nationalism. It can only do disservice to literature itself.

Yet, in the meantime, one can at least consider the possibilities. And if here I have emphasized what is encouraging in them, there will be plenty of time for winter thoughts on what is wanting in Canadian writers and writing.

WOLF IN THE SNOW

PART ONE

Four Windows on to Landscapes

Warren Tallman

In the essay commenced below Warren Tallman bases a study of modern Canadian Fiction on five books which he considers particularly significant as examples of literary attitudes in this country. They are *As For Me and My House* by Sinclair Ross, *Who Has Seen the Wind* by W. O. Mitchell, *Each Man's Son* by Hugh MacLennan, *The Mountain and the Valley* by Ernest Buckler, and *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz* by Mordecai Richler. In this first part of the essay Mr. Tallman presents a consideration of the first four novels in their setting of Canadian life.

TO ENTER the fictional house these novels form is to take up place in rooms where windows open out upon scenes in Saskatchewan, Quebec and Nova Scotia: two prairie towns, one farm, a small seacoast city and St. Urbain Street in Montreal. In order to prevent view from jostling view it is convenient to single out the characters Philip Bentley (*As For Me And My House*), Brian O'Connal (*Who Has Seen The Wind*), David Canaan (*The Mountain And The Valley*), Alan MacNeil (*Each Man's Son*) and Duddy Kravitz (*The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz*), letting their lives suggest the details which make up the study. Since these five form into a handful, it is best to enter the fictional house at once and move across rooms to where the windows open out.

From whichever window one chooses to look, at whichever person, the initial impression gained is that of his isolation. Superficially, this isolation traces to the ways in which each is alienated from the natural child-

hood country of ordinary family life. In *As For Me And My House,* Philip Bentley has this comfort stolen from him even before it is provided when his unmarried father, a divinity student, turned atheist, turned artist, dies before Philip is born. That the son is cast by this deprivation into the limbo of an uncreated childhood becomes evident when he emerges into adult life also a divinity student, turned atheist, turned artist, struggling without success to discover the father he did not know while married to a woman who is all too obviously more a mother to him than she is a wife. In *The Mountain And the Valley,* David Canaan is gifted with yet cursed by reactions far too intense ever to mesh except occasionally with the more ordinary responses of his brother, sister, parents and grandmother. When he fails in a school play, his family has no resources with which to meet the violence of humiliation which fairly explodes within him. His childhood and youth are a long succession of such intensities leading to such explosions. Each time the pieces settle back together, he finds himself inched unwillingly away from others onto a precarious plane of solitary being from which he can communicate his extravagant reactions only by other extravagances which further emphasize his growing isolation.

If David's is the most painful face turned toward us, Brian O'Connal's is the most deceptive. Even as *Who Has Seen The Wind* opens, he is shown growing away from his family in order to follow impulses which bring his struggling consciousness into contact with what are described in the preface as "the realities of birth, hunger, satiety, eternity, death." But if Brian appears to discern a deeper than familial ordering of experience in and around the Saskatchewan town where he grows up, the persons and personifications which illustrate his discernment tell, I think, quite another story. They tell of a sensitive boy's attempts to reconcile himself to the human viciousness and natural desolation which characterize the town and the prairie. Of this conflict, more in place. Unlike Philip, David and Brian, Alan MacNeil in *Each Man's Son* is less an individualized child and more simply the naive witness to a stylized pattern of adult conflict. Thus he is the puppet son to each of three disparate fathers: Doctor Ainslee, the type of inhibited intellect; Archie MacNeil, the type of unthinking animal force; and the Gallic Louis Camire, the type of passionate spontaneity. Because the larger human pattern of which these men are parts has been broken, each partial man

struggles toward a different solution to his incompletion, one which excludes the others. When their longings for wholeness draw them to Alan and his mother, the pattern will no longer knit. Alan's role as each man's son is to witness the gradual forcing together of these disastrously alienated men.

The kinds of alienation which I have sketched point to a common problem. When the hazards of life reach out to disrupt families and isolate children it is almost certain that such children will respond with attempts to create a self strong enough to endure the added stress and more extreme fluctuations of experience. Yet the very disturbances which create a need for such strength frequently conspire to take away the opportunity. Prematurely conscious of weakness in the face of experience, the timid self stands back from contention. And much of the isolation is in the standing back. Yet to lose out in this way is to gain in another. For so persistent and powerful are the mysterious forces which drive self on its journeys toward some measure of fulfillment that when the journey is interrupted self will either struggle to make the island upon which it finds itself habitable, or—if particularly hard-pressed—may strike out for new islands of its own making. To know experience or novels even cursorily is to realize that such attempts are among the decisive gestures of human experience. The more vital the attempt, the more interesting the discoveries, the more illuminating the journeys. But to say all this and then turn to Philip, David, Brian and Alan is to encounter difficulties.

First Brian. Throughout *Who Has Seen The Wind* we are shown his growing consciousness of the grim passive cruelty of the prairie and of the only somewhat less grim active cruelties of the community. The prairie doesn't care and the townspeople care too much, but in all of the wrong ways. Mitchell would have us understand that Brian attains insight into deep permanent forces of man and nature and so becomes reconciled to the problems of his existence. But if the winds and gods of the prairie and the town are shown ministering to the evolution of a troubled boy's consciousness, there are many reasons to question the nature of their influence. For what Brian actually discovers and enters into is somewhat uneasy communication with a hierarchy of odd and withdrawn persons, most of them caught up as he is in attempting to resolve the dilemma of their alienation from the community. At the head

of this hierarchy are several disaffected persons whose professional standing gives them precarious half-footing in the community: Hislop, the enlightened minister who is forced to leave; Doctor Svarich, Miss Thompson, the school teacher with whom he has had an unsuccessful love affair elsewhere, and Digby, the school principal. Because these humane persons are only half accepted by a community which they in turn only half accept, they lead incomplete, almost inert lives.

Brian's more active education begins where their influence leaves off: with his uncle Sean, whose intelligent efforts to cope with the drouth are met by a human inertia so perverse that he is reduced to random cursing; with Milt Palmer, the shoe and harness maker, who eases his discontent with the jug he keeps under the counter in his shop and the copy of Berkeley's philosophy he reads and discusses with Digby, presumably to get at the nature of existence, actually to escape the pointlessness of the existence he leads; with Ben, the town ne'er-do-well, who makes his still and his gifts as a raconteur the basis for contact with a community that otherwise despises him; with the son, young Ben, who responds to his father's disgrace by a withdrawal so marked that his human impulses only glimmer at depths of his remote eyes; and with old Sammy, the town idiot, who lives almost totally withdrawn in a self-built insane asylum at the outskirts of town, his intelligence—that light which keeps the human psyche habitable—lost in the nightmare clutter which existence becomes when the light flickers out.

It is all but impossible to accept Mitchell's inference that contact with these persons serves to reconcile Brian's consciousness to the "realities of birth, hunger, satiety, eternity, death." What he learns, if anything, is that the kinds of suffering which afflict those who are completely alienated from the community are far more damaging than the kinds of suffering which afflict those who are only partly alienated. It isn't surprising that the two most vivid portraits in the novel are those of young Ben and old Sammy, the two most severely withdrawn of all the persons represented. Young Ben appears to Brian in unexpected places and at unpredictable moments with all of the suddenness of a hallucination projected from Brian's unconscious. To be Brian in the kind of community Mitchell represents is to be not far from young Ben. And what is old Sammy in his age and insanity but young Ben later on and farther out on the road leading away from contact with other human beings. What

but negative lessons can Brian learn from such dissociated beings—so grim a school of lives!

Nor is it possible to accept the protective, but not very protective, screen of humour with which Mitchell has softened and attempted to humanize the world Brian experiences. Here contrast is helpful. The mordant western humour of Mark Twain, Ambrose Bierce and Bret Harte derives the tensions which make it effective from these writers' awareness of the overt savagery of the settlement years. In Brian's world the savagery is still there—the gratuitous cruelty of the community drives the Chinese restaurant owner to despair and suicide—but it has become socially organized, hence acceptable. Mrs. Abercrombie, the town assassin, is also the town social leader. However, the intended humour of the scenes in which her control over the school board is finally broken is without animation because it is without true animosity. The firing of the enlightened minister, the exclusion of the Chinese children from the community, the suicide of their father, the sadistic persecution of Young Ben, as well as the constant badgering of the school teachers, provide cause enough for any amount of enmity. But far from being a gesture of delight at the downfall of a despicable person, the humour is simply a droll and softening pretense that she never was actually dangerous.

The need for this pretense is not far to seek or at least to suspect. If the town is presided over by Mrs. Abercrombie, an incarnation of community enmity toward personality—let them be citizens instead—the prairie is presided over by old Sammy, an incarnation of the disintegration which is likely to overtake all but the most resourceful personalities when the individual self wanders beyond sphere of human community. These two represent the actual, the most powerful of the gods who preside over Brian's attempt to establish contact with human and natural forces which will sustain his precocious selfhood. And despite her overt hatred of the diversity and freedom that are essential for self-nurture, Mrs. Abercrombie is less fearsome than is old Sammy who presides with his mad, mumbled incantations over psychic chaos and old night. Or let us say that the open emptiness of the prairie is humanly more frightening than the huddled pettiness of the town. Because this is so, the town must be sugar coated with humour so that the lacklustre perversity of the place will seem merely droll, hence bearable. But readers who find

it impossible to swallow Mrs. Abercrombie under any circumstances at all will feel that the failure of the humour reflects a failure of the novel to confront the actuality which it suggests. As a place for Brian to discover a community which will foster self-growth, the town in its resourcelessness more nearly resembles the prairie. The humour is scarcely a compensation for such desolation.

To turn to the more severe isolation from which David Canaan suffers in *The Mountain and The Valley* is to encounter a more intense but scarcely a more successful attempt to discover new ground upon which the withdrawn self might stand in its efforts to move into presence. During his childhood and youth David's vivid impulses fascinate his family and friends. Mutual responsiveness brings on that gradual blur of familiarity which can cause us to notice least those persons we know best; but when responsiveness is somehow short-circuited the one who stands apart becomes impressive in his otherness. Throughout childhood and early youth David moves among others with the aura about him of the chosen person, the mysterious Nazarite who is motioned toward an unknowable destiny by unseen gods. But what is an advantage during his early years becomes a disadvantage later when the appealing mystery of his loneliness becomes the oppressive ordeal of his unbreakable solitude. More devastating still, at no point in his life is he capable of actions which might rescue him from the limbo in which he dwells.

He carries on a correspondence and later a friendship with the Halifax boy, Toby, but makes no attempt to visit Toby and explore possibilities for new experience in the city. He is conscious of talents which might open experience out for him so that his self could follow into presence. But he turns his back upon these talents and remains on the farm even though aware that it is his prison rather than his promised land. He quarrels with his parents but seems unable to move past the evident incest barriers which bind him to them even as they shut him away from them. That the male mountain and the female valley of the title loom up so prominently in the novel is surely a sign, here as with Wordsworth, that natural objects have been endowed with all the seem-

ing numenousness of their inaccessible human equivalents. Conversely, other persons in the novel are invested with a deceptive glamour. The breath of life fans the nucleus of David's impulses into a glow, but because these impulses are checked they never achieve the release of communication, much less communion. Unable to know his family in their ordinariness, he must create his own knowledge in the image of his arrested, his childish and childlike psychic life. Consequently his parents are perceived as mythical, almost biblical beings and this appearance is sustained as long as David's response is intense enough, the glow white hot. Such intensities are as much the hallmark of the novel as a markedly devitalized humour is the hallmark of Mitchell's. But like Mitchell's humour, the intensity is badly flawed.

For David is trying to sustain an illusion. Whenever the hot impulse cools the glow goes out of the novel and we see David's family and friends for what they are, very unbiblical, unmythical, ordinary human beings. At no time does his friend Toby demonstrate those distinguished qualities with which David invests him. His sister Anna is represented as soul of David's soul, but it is only possible for David to sustain this sublimated conception by overlooking the almost overtly incestuous basis for their relationship. Only the looming mountain can provide adequate expression for the childlike awe with which he regards his father. In his relations with others David is much like one inside a house which he cannot leave looking out at persons he has never known because he has never actually moved among them. As one by one these persons depart, he begins to notice the emptiness, room leading silently to room. The novel is an account of David's attempt to ward off such knowledge. But fathers and mothers die, and brothers, friends and sisters—soul of his soul—depart. Until only the grandmother is left, calling out "Where is that child?", even as the child, unable to endure both an outer and an inner emptiness, goes at last up the snow covered mountain into the final dimension of his solitude. The emptiness, the silence and the snow into which he sinks down at the end of the novel figure forth the constant nothingness against which his bright intensities had beat, thinking it the high shores of this actual world. His life would be pathetic if it were not heroic.

The heroism is in his effort, in the extreme tenacity with which David clings to the sources of his suffering, and it is in the novel, in the record

of that suffering. The very intensity which creates those illusions with which David tries to live also creates a distinctive lyric exaltation. Because perception is so consistently at fever pitch, the descriptive surfaces of the novel are exceptionally fine-grained, the communion with nature, with appearances, with actions, so close that many passages read like lyric poems. But paradoxes are endless, and if the unreleased intensity which is a tragedy for David becomes an advantage for the novelist it in turn becomes another kind of disadvantage for the reader. For Buckler has no compositional key except maximum intensity. Sentence after sentence is forced to a descriptive pitch which makes the novel exceptionally wearing to read.

ONE TURNS with something like relief from the kind of illusions with which Brian O'Connal and David Canaan seek to escape isolation to the blunt but subtle absence of such illusions in *As For Me And My House*. The bleak assumption of this beautiful novel is that Philip Bentley has no ground whatsoever upon which he might stand, no communion at all through which he might discover saving dimensions of self. The overwhelming desolation which rims Horizon around—the hostile wind, the suffocating dust and sand and the even more suffocating and claustrophobic heat—recurs on the pages of Mrs. Bentley's diary as outward manifestation of the inner desolation felt by her husband. All that Philip can claim or cling to is his maddeningly inarticulate impulse to create. The novel is less like a story than it is like a cumulative picture in which Ross, by a remarkable, almost *tour de force* repetition of detail, grains a central scene upon the reader's consciousness so that all other details and even the action of the novel achieve meaningful focus in relation to the one scene at the center, repeated some thirty times. It is of course that in which Philip is shown retreating to his study where he will sit interminable evening superimposed upon interminable evening, drawing or fiddling at drawing, or staring with baffllled intensity at drawings he has in some other time and place tried to draw. Yet, "Even though the drawings are only torn up or put away to fill more boxes when we move, even though no one ever

gets a glimpse of them . . . still they're for him the only part of life that's real or genuine." The novel is a projection through the medium of Mrs. Bentley's remarkably responsive consciousness of the despair in which her husband is caught, "some twisted, stumbling power locked up within him . . . so blind and helpless it can't find outlet, so clenched with urgency it can't release itself." And the town itself, with the dust "reeling in the streets", the heat "dry and deadly like a drill" and the wind "like something solid pressed against the face", is simply a place name for the limbo in which Bentley lives, "a wilderness outside of night and sky and prairie with this one little spot of Horizon hung up lost in its immensity" beneath which "he's as lost and alone."

Philip's need to escape from this isolation drives him to art. But just as he can find no terms under which he may act as a self so he can find no terms under which he may act as an artist. His most characteristic drawing is a receding perspective in which a looming false-front building gives way to a diminished next building, and a next, and a next, an endless progression which provides a portrait of the monotony of his own being. The novel is a study of a frustrated artist—actually, a non-artist—one unable to discover a subject which will release him from his oppressive incapacity to create. The excellence of the study traces to the remarkable resourcefulness with which Ross brings into place the day-to-day nuances of Mrs. Bentley's struggling consciouness as he builds up her account of an artist who cannot create because he cannot possess himself and who cannot possess himself because there is no self to possess. Certainly there are more deep-reaching portraits of the artist, for in this novel all is muffled within Philip's inarticulation, but none that I know represents with so steady a pressure of felt truth the pervasive undermining of all vital energies which occurs when the would-be artist's creativity is thwarted. No momentary exuberance survives. The flowers won't grow. The adopted boy, for whom Philip tries to provide that childhood he did not have himself, cannot be kept. Neither can his horse. Neither can his dog. Nothing can drive away the "faint old smell of other lives" from the house. No one and nothing can intercede to shut out the wind, prevent the dust, lessen the heat in which the Bentley's are "imbedded . . . like insects in a fluid that has congealed." Not once in the novel does Philip break through the torment of his constraint to utter a free sentence. Even when his wife confronts him with knowledge of his

covert love affair with Judith West his response, beyond the endurance of even an Arthur Dimmesdale, is silence. But if the beauty is in the detailing, it does not trace to the dreariness which is portrayed. It traces to the constant presence in Mrs. Bentley's consciousness of an exuberance which flares up like matches in the wind and struggles to survive, a counter-impulse within her by which life attempts to defeat the defeat. This bravery loses out to the dreariness—the flowers *won't* grow—but in the process of struggling it animates the novel.

However, there is no mistaking the meaning which events bring into place during the last distraught days which the diary records when Judith West dies and even the wind rebels, blowing the false-front town flat. When creative power is thwarted, destructive power emerges. "It's hard," Mrs. Bentley tells us, "to stand back watching a whole life go to waste." But the diary is an inch by inch representation along the walls of her resisting consciousness of the relentless crumbling under destructive pressure of her husband's life and hence her own as the undertow of bitter silence about which the portrait is built drags these prairie swimmers under wind, under dust, under heat, to that ocean floor of inner death upon which such silence rests, strongest swimmers most deeply drowned.

There is a superb scene in which the Bentleys walk during an April snow storm to the outskirts of town:

> The snow spun round us thick and slow like feathers till it seemed we were walking on and through a cloud. The little town loomed up and fell away. On the outskirts we took the railroad track, where the telegraph poles and double line of fence looked like a drawing from which all the horizontal strokes had been erased. The spongy flakes kept melting and trickling down our cheeks, and we took off our gloves sometimes to feel their coolness on our hands. We were silent most of the way. There was a hush in the snow like a finger raised.
>
> We came at last to a sudden deep ravine. There was a hoarse little torrent at the bottom, with a shaggy, tumbling swiftness that we listened to a while, then went down the slippery bank to watch. We brushed off a stone and sat with our backs against the trestle of the railway bridge. The flakes came whirling out of the whiteness, spun against the stream a moment, vanished at its touch. On our shoulders and knees and hats again they piled up little drifts of silence.
>
> Then the bridge over us picked up the coming of a train. It was there even while the silence was still intact. At last we heard a distant whistle-blade, then a single point of sound, like one drop of water in a whole sky. It dilated, spread. The sky and silence began imperceptibly to fill with it. We steeled ourselves a little,

> feeling the pounding onrush in the trestle of the bridge. It quickened, gathered, shook the earth, then swept in an iron roar above us, thundering and dark.
>
> We emerged from it slowly, while the trestle a moment or two sustained the clang and din. I glanced at Philip, then quickly back to the water. A train still makes him wince sometimes. At night, when the whistle's loneliest, he'll toss a moment, then lie still and tense. In the daytime I've seen his eyes take on a quick half eager look, just for a second or two, and then sink flat and cold again.

The hushed, almost sealed, inner silence which is the price Philip Bentley pays for his failure to summon self into presence is not broken but poured momentarily full of the "iron roar . . . thundering and dark" which in times past had signalled to him an escape from the desolation of his childhood. Even on this forsaken April day it echoes into lost realms of self to those times when his eyes took on a "quick half-eager look" until the weight of silence reasserts itself and they turn "flat and cold" like the day. When an artist in fact discovers that close correspondence to life which he is always seeking, life takes over and the details of representation become inexhaustibly suggestive. D. H. Lawrence's unhappy lovers have wandered through Sherwood Forest to just such sudden "deep ravines" and have half glimpsed the "shaggy tumbling swiftness" which they, like the Bentleys, have lost from their lives. And James Joyce's depressed Dubliners have had the same universal angel of silence shake snow into drifts upon "shoulders and knees and hats" as the pounding onrush of the train, thunder in the blood, dwindles and disappears, leaving the scene, "distorted, intensified, alive with thin, cold bitter life". It is not surprising that the departing train draws Mrs. Bentley's thoughts—it is one pathos of the novel that we never learn her first name—back in the longest retrospective passage of the diary to her husband's childhood in search of the bitterness, constantly emphasized, which gradually seals him in, seals her out. Nor is it surprising that later when she becomes aware of the force of mute passion with which Judith West breaks through Philip's constraint she is at once reminded of the April day she and her husband "sat in the snowstorm watching the water rush through the stones"—the silence, the snow, the water and the stones—the story of their lives in a profound moment, a magnificent scene.

If knowledge of Philip Bentley's uncreated childhood comes mostly through the indirection of his adult life, our knowledge of Alan MacNeil's isolation and insecurity comes through the indirection of the adult conflicts he witnesses. And most of the adults in *Each Man's Son* can be known only through the additional indirection of the assigned part each plays in the general scheme of conflict which MacLennan has devised. They are like those persons in actual life whose roles become masks concealing self from access. Such arrangements are as unsatisfactory in novels as they are in actuality. Self is the centre of being, the source of our most vital impulses, and when those fictional persons who enact the artist's vision of life are not directly related to the artist's self, they will inevitably speak and act mechanically, without true animation. This is so decidedly the case in *Each Man's Son*—as in MacLennan's fiction as a whole—that any attempt to understand Alan MacNeil's plight must be an attempt to move past the masks MacLennan has created in order to reach what is vital, the source rather than the surfaces of his vision.

The mask in *Each Man's Son*—as, again, in all of MacLennan's novels—is made up of the pseudo-sophistication, the surface civilization in terms of which the portrait of Doctor Ainslee is built. MacLennan never wearies of extolling his surgical prowess and yet his human *savoir faire* and yet his intellectual probity. He is the fastest man in North America with an appendectomy and other doctors stand by, not to help, but to hold the watch on his performance, noting afterward with knowing glances that Ainslee has done it again. If I seem to be suggesting that Doctor Ainslee is Walter Mitty played straight, this is less an accusation than it is an identification. For it is not, as MacLennan would have us believe, residual effects of Calvinistic sin which constantly unsettle the doctor's composure. It is the all but impossible facade he seeks to maintain, so false that MacLennan is incapable of animating it because it has so little to do with the profound naïveté and relative crudity of response in which MacLennan's true force as an artist is rooted.

If all the world were true there would be no place in fiction for falsity. But, notoriously, the world is far from true, and Doctor Ainslee's cultural veneer is all too accurate in its patent falsity—true of Ainslee, true of a good half of MacLennan's protaganists, true—above all—of most North

Americans, who also adopt European disguises having little or nothing to do with the self beneath, the source of vital energy. Constant anxiety is the price Ainslee pays in order to maintain his facade. But if MacLennan would have us believe that the reason for the anxiety is the Calvinism, a more apt explanation for both the anxiety and the mask comes to us from the other, the vital side of the novel.

The night that Ainslee operates upon Alan he flees to the harbourside from the strain of both a professional and a personal involvement—cutting the child he hopes to adopt—and experiences a partial breakdown in which "his mind was pounding with its own rhythms and his body was out of control." To escape the panic that grips him, he runs up the wharf.

> Before he realized that his feet had caught in something soft he plunged forward, an explosion of light burst in his head and his right temple hit the boards. For a moment he lay half stunned, trying to understand what had happened. He rolled to get up, and as he did so, the hair on the nape of his neck prickled. He had stumbled over something alive, and now this living thing was rising beside him. He could smell, feel and hear it, and as he jerked his head around he saw the outline of a broken-peaked cap appear against the residual light from the sea. It rose on a pair of huge shoulders and stood over Ainslee like a tower.

The tower is Red Willie MacIsaac, and Ainslee in his fear, repugnance and anger shouts out, "You drunken swine, MacIsaac—don't you know who I am?" This outcry under these circumstances does much to illuminate the novel.

For the drunken swine, Red Willie, is one of the group of incredibly naive and endlessly quarrelsome displaced Highlanders whose portraits in their really superb clarity and exuberance make up much the most vital part of the novel. These Highlanders, doomed to wear their vitality away in the dreary Cape Breton Island mines, rebel like the profound children they are by recourse to the only political action of which they are capable, their endless evening brawls. The sum of their whimsical and powerful impulses is crystalized into the portrait of their downfallen hero, Archie MacNeil, the finest single portrait in MacLennan's novels.

Now the main use to which Doctor Ainslee's mask—his civilized facade—is put is to hold these impulses in check. A word from him and the miners back away, chagrined. When he cries out, Red Willie becomes contrite. But the identification is surely much closer. When the

rhythms of Ainslee's mind and body become separated and he trips over and becomes mingled with Red Willie there is reason to believe that "this living thing . . . beside him" is simply the self behind the mask, the vital, violent being held in check by the civilized surface. That Ainslee can and does check Red Willie is an obvious victory for Ainslee and it is a tragedy for Alan's actual father, Archie. For Ainslee stumbles over Red Willie immediately after Archie has been ruinously defeated in Trenton. And the voice that emerges when he lies tangled with Red Willie mutters, "There was dirty tricks in the States last Friday and by chesus I am going to kick them up your ass." The blame is, if dubiously aimed, properly assigned. The conflict at the heart of the novel is between the civilized facade maintained by Ainslee and the naive violence of the place represented by Archie MacNeil.

Alan is caught between the violent needs which drive his father away on the forlorn prize fighter's Odyssey in which his one-time physical magnificence becomes the dupe of unscrupulous promoters and the counter needs which drive Ainslee to fill in the chinks of his cultural facade by inching his way through the alien Greek of the classical Odyssey. Both men want to save Alan from the mines, those holes in the ground which give nothing and take everything away, but each tries to do so in ways which rule out the other. At the conclusion of the novel, when Archie prevails and smashes down his wife and her lover and he and Ainslee confront each other, it is the civilized surface confronting the violent self among the ruins created by their tragic alienation.

(The second part of this essay, in which the four novels are related to the urban fiction of Mordecai Richler, will be published in the next issue of *Canadian Literature*.)

A SPECIAL TANG:

Stephen Leacock's Canadian Humour

R. E. Watters

A WELL-KNOWN ODDITY of Canadian literature is the fact that, out of all our authors, the two who have achieved the greatest reputations in the English-speaking world have been humorists. We ourselves have tirelessly repeated that the best of our literature is our poetry, but that world has paid our poets little attention on either the popular or critical levels. Abroad, even our fiction has made greater impact than our poetry. Our humorists are fewer than either our poets or novelists, yet two of them have caught the ear of the world. Thomas Chandler Haliburton was in his day this continent's best-known author on both sides of the Atlantic; and in the present century Stephen Leacock is read almost everywhere. To explain all this as simply the "mystery of genius" or perhaps an "accident of international preference" may be nothing more than obscurantism. Perhaps one should ask whether or not there is something in the soil or environment of Canada especially favourable to humour, something that perhaps imparts a special "tang" to it, a flavour obtainable from no other source and therefore valued abroad for its uniqueness, detectable even if undefined. A close examination of some of Leacock's humour may reveal some characteristics which produce whatever special "tang" or flavour it has, and at the same time may suggest how this unique quality is related to Canadian life.

"Canadianness" is not something which I believe either increases or lessens the literary merit of a work. Although a literary evaluation of Leacock's humour is outside the direct concern of this paper, the point of view taken must be explained. As everyone knows, national qualities

in a work of literature—especially when they are Canadian—have been praised by some as a strength, denounced by others as a weakness, and disregarded by many as irrelevant. The first attitude is usually considered the most objectionable, but in my view all three are equally wrong. The third attitude ("irrelevance") is, in criticism, particularly mischievous because superficially it seems so impeccable. Nevertheless it is seriously wrong, because it fails to discriminate between the processes of understanding a work and of judging its excellence, and whenever the understanding is incomplete the judgement will be unsound. Precisely because the "content" of a work is really inseparable from its "form" or "expression" no aspect of that "content" can be irrelevant to the complete critical process. National differences are readily acknowledged and even carefully analyzed in an author's language; even when his language is English, attention is paid to idiomatic variations between, let us say, usage in Great Britain, the United States, and Australia. But little or no attention has been given to national differences in less tangible but more significant matters such as general outlook, unspoken assumptions about motivation and behaviour, and attitudes towards certain issues of human existence. While the facts of life may be much the same everywhere, their interpretation may differ in extremely significant ways.

My conviction is that Leacock wrote Canadian humour, that our national characteristics shaped it, and that they are, in turn, revealed by it. Just as American humour can be distinguished from English, so can Leacock's be distinguished from both. Since Leacock himself was interested in the national characteristics of humour he cannot be numbered among those who consider the "national" quality of a work of literature as either regrettable or irrelevant. Of course, he readily admitted that humour everywhere has a common basis and warned that national distinctions could be overdrawn. Nevertheless, he firmly believed that "the various circumstances of environment, of national character, and of language, at least emphasize and make salient certain aspects of national humour."[1] Repeatedly he addressed himself to the challenge of distinguishing between English and American humour. In 1914 he saw in the jokes of the two countries a "divergence of national taste" which he considered "really fundamental": "The Englishman loves what is literal . . . . The American . . . tries to convey the same

[1] His article on "Humour" in *Encyclopedia Britannica* (1945), 11:885.

idea by exaggeration."[2] His remarks here were followed over the years by many more, too many for me to summarize. For instance, he is reported to have once told Cyril Clemens that "English humour is always based on fact, whereas American humour often deals with what really could never have happened except in the imagination."[3] He has an entire chapter on "National Characteristics" in his *Humour, Its Theory and Technique* (1935), and he had further comments to make a couple of years later in *Humour and Humanity* (1937). In this book he goes into social history to explain the greater popularity of the pun in English humour than in American, and to explain why the humour of bad spelling, once so prevalent in the United States, never caught on in England.[4] He analyzes typical English and American jokes to demonstrate the national differences. "There is," he says, "a broad distinction to be made between jokes that proceed by telling the truth and thus landing us in a sort of impossibility, and jokes that proceed to state an impossibility and land us in a truth. These contrasted types correspond very much to the *formal* aspect (not the inner) of typical British and American jokes."[5]

Unfortunately, Leacock seldom talked directly about the characteristics of his own humour, and said even less about Canadian humour generally. It is certain, however, that he never grouped himself with English humorists. Instead, he spoke of himself as an "American" humorist, though he used the word in its continental rather than national sense. The fact that he often contrasted the humour of Britain with that of the United States, but never (so far as I know) made Canada a partner in any contrast, suggests to me nothing more than his awareness of what would most interest his international public. As for his national public, Canadian interest must have seemed negligible, if he took as a sign the amount of attention given to discussion of Canadian humour in our periodicals.

Critics and reviewers in England seem more perceptive than those in the United States of certain differences in Leacock's humour from both

2 "American Humour", *Nineteenth Century*, 76:455-456 (Aug. 1914).

3 CYRIL CLEMENS, "An Evening with Stephen Leacock," *Catholic World* 159:240 (June 1940).

4 *Humour and Humanity* (London, Butterworth, 1937), pp. 42-49.

5 *Ibid.*, p. 219.

British and American. As with Canadian speech, the "American" characteristics in things Canadian are plainly evident to Englishmen. But British characteristics were also readily found in the humour, perhaps because English readers wished to have some claim on the man (after all, his first six years were lived in England!). The Americans felt no such need to discriminate, to look for differences; unlike the English they had nothing to gain, and had no need to placate their neighbour to the north. Canada had never asserted her rights in any aggressive manner; some Canadians, indeed, still think of Leacock as an Englishman in exile.

But the perceptiveness of English critics, with one notable exception, had more width than depth. Leacock was regarded as something like a literary mason, skilfully applying English craftsmanship to American materials. No thought was given to the possibility that he might have quarried some of his own stone, invented some of his own methods, originated some of the final design. Sir Owen Seaman (of *Punch*) once spoke of Leacock's humour as being "British by heredity" with "something of the spirit of American humour by force of association."[6] Another English critic described Canada as "a sort of half-way house in letters between U.K. and U.S.A.", and therefore found no surprise in Leacock's having discovered "the hilarious mean between American and English humour":

> His fantastical ideas are often in the nature of American hyperbole—but they are developed in English fashion as a rule, in a quiet and close-knit narrative which has none of the exuberance of the typical American humorist.[7]

The notable exception is J. B. Priestley, who finds specific and positive Canadian qualities in Leacock's "outlook, manner, and style", which, he says, not only "belong to the man but . . . to the nation":

> Very adroitly he aimed at both British and American audiences, but he never identified himself with either; always, at least when he is at his best, he remains a Canadian . . . .
>
> The best of Leacock exists somewhere between—though at a slight angle from—the amiable nonsense of characteristic British humour (e.g. Wodehouse) and the

[6] Quoted by Ralph L. Curry, *Stephen Leacock, Humorist and Humanist* (Garden City, N.Y., Doubleday, 1959), p. 152.

[7] *The Living Age*, 311:353 (Nov. 1921). [An anonymous article reprinted in *The Living Age* from *The Morning Post* of Sept. 29, 1921.]

> hard cutting wit and almost vindictive satire of much American humour . . . .
>
> It is in fact the satirical humour of a very shrewd but essentially good-natured and eupeptic man, anything but an angry reformer. And two sorts of readers may find it unsatisfactory; namely, those who prefer humour to be the nonsense of dreamland, in the Wodehouse manner, and those who regard humour as a weapon with which to attack the world.[8]

Beside these words we might place an extract from Lister Sinclair's essay entitled "The Canadian Idiom":

> We are beginning to realize our position in the world, and it is precarious. We lie between the greatest and grimmest of the Grim Great Powers . . . and in the middle of the night we sometimes dream of hot breath quietly playing on the backs of our necks . . . . We are very small in population . . . [yet] we wish to be influential; we have a small voice, but we wish to make it heard.[9]

Mr. Sinclair also refers to what he calls the "calculated diffidence" of Canadians as being a kind of "protective colouration", and goes on to assert that the characteristic Canadian method of making our small voice heard is the use of irony, "the jiu-jitsu of literature . . . the weapon of Socrates . . . the principle of letting the giants destroy one another by their strength."[10]

Not only in the mid-twentieth century but throughout our history Canada's position has been "precarious". With inner tensions between our bi-racial cultures and provincial sectionalisms; with geographic, economic, and military forces pulling vertically within the continent, and with historical, nostalgic, and institutional ones pulling horizontally across the Atlantic; with our vast territory and strenuous climate dwarfing and threatening our numbers and our energies; with all the complexities, in short, which we fully recognize but cannot wholly command, the outlook of Canadians on the world and on human relations is far from identical with that of Englishmen or Americans. We have never known the easy national security and laurelled self-confidence out of which may issue the "amiable nonsense" of a Wodehouse, nor have we ever had the wealth and strength which can both provoke and withstand the iconoclastic satire of a Sinclair Lewis. While one's home is being shaken by violent winds, one neither blows bubbles nor batters another member of the household.

8 *The Bodley Head Leacock,* Edited and Introduced by J. B. Priestley (London, The Bodley Head, 1957), pp. 10-12.

9 MALCOLM ROSS (ed.), *Our Sense of Identity* (Toronto, Ryerson, 1954), pp. 236-237.

10 *Ibid.,* p. 240.

As a people bent on self-preservation, Canadians have had to forego two luxuries: that of forgetting themselves in gay abandon and that of losing their tempers in righteous wrath. Yet there is a kind of humour that combines full understanding of the contending forces with a wry recognition of one's ineffectiveness in controlling them —a humour in which one sees himself as others see him but without any admission that this outer man is a truer portrait than the inner—a humour based on the incongruity between the real and the ideal, in which the ideal is repeatedly thwarted by the real but never quite annihilated. Such humour is Canadian.

What Lister Sinclair calls our "calculated diffidence" would never draw attention to itself in humour by exuberant slapstick or by linguistic pranks in the form of explosive wisecracks—and there is little of either in Leacock. The Socratic irony of letting the giants destroy themselves by their own utterances is a standard device of Leacock—witness, for example, the self-destruction so wrought amongst university administrators and professors, high financiers, clean-government reformers, and church boardmen in his *Arcadian Adventures With the Idle Rich*. Here Leacock may be, in Priestley's phrase, "anything but an angry reformer", yet a reformer he unmistakably is. So also with the *Sunshine Sketches*. Both these books display neither the "amiable nonsense" of a Wodehouse nor the "hard cutting wit and almost vindictive satire of much American humour." Good-tempered restraint is less easy to detect than slashing attack, and is perhaps less colourful to watch, but it has its own unique value. Given Canada's "precarious" situation of inner and outer relationships, self-restraint means self-preservation. We cannot enforce change or reform with a scourge or bludgeon, because the tightrope we walk is no place for flailing arms. The Canadian satirical weapon is, of necessity, the scalpel of the cool surgeon or the quick flip of the judo expert.

In his recent biography of Leacock, Ralph L. Curry frequently refers to Leacock's "favorite character, the little man in the society too complex for him", who preserves "his dignity by continuing, in his ignorance, to act like a man".[11] Wearing his American spectacles, Mr. Curry has

[11] *Op. cit.*, p. 242 *et al.*

misread Leacock, for the "little man" he describes is portrayed by various American humorists but not by Leacock. In the light of his own description, it is rather surprising that Mr. Curry cites "My Financial Career" as a good portrait of Leacock's "little man". The protagonist of this most famous of all Leacock's sketches is certainly not an innocent overwhelmed by an environment too complex for his understanding.

The truth is very simple: Leacock's "favorite character" was indeed a "little man" but he was a Canadian type, not an American; and "My Financial Career" *is* a good portrait of him but only when its Canadian subject is properly identified and described. In this sketch Leacock introduces us to a somewhat diffident young man who, he tells us, knows "beforehand" what is likely to happen but who nevertheless enters the bank undeterred by this knowledge. The young man has formed an ideal of saving his money and he considers the bank the best place to accomplish his purpose. He understands the essentials of banking, if not the details; he understands how he appears to others (confused, incompetent, helpless, etc.) and also *why* he appears so; he understands what he does wrong while he does it; and above all he understands himself thoroughly, past and present, both his inner self and his outer appearance. Far from preserving any "dignity" by "continuing in his ignorance, to act like a man", he is acutely handicapped by the very completeness of his knowledge. It is true that he cannot control his nervous reactions any more than he can change the atmosphere of the bank—the humour lies in just this ineffectiveness.

Throughout the sketch the humour sparkles from the changing facets of the young man's "identity", how others see him and how he sees himself, the incongruities between appearance and reality. Besides his own true identity there is mistaken identity, assumed identity, and apparent identity. For instance, the bankers mistake him at first for "one of Pinkerton's men", and then for "a son of Baron Rothschild or a young Gould"; later he himself tries to act or look like an insulted despositor or an irascible curmudgeon; and at the end he appears to the bankers as an utter fool. All the while his essential nature remains intact and unchanged, despite all the environmental entanglements. Unable to adjust his inner self to an environment too powerful for him, he retreats under a barrage of laughter. But consider the ending of the story. Following the description of the roar of laughter he hears as the bank doors close

behind him come two concluding sentences:

> Since then I bank no more. I keep my money in cash in my trousers pocket and my savings in silver dollars in a sock.

In short, this diffident young Canadian's initial intention of saving his money has been quite unaffected by what has happened to him in the bank. Wryly recognizing *once more* his inability to cope with the overpowering atmosphere of the banking world, he changes his method of money-saving to one which is free from external pressures and is entirely within his own control. In his own way this "little man" has solved his problem—a richly humorous one for the reader, to be sure, because of the incongruity between the ideal of his intention and the reality of his sock.

I have laboured the analysis of this story not because I think that Leacock while writing it intended consciously anything like a commentary on the Canadian national character, but because I believe that we have here a prime example of how an author's outlook on life, including his interpretation of the ridiculous or amusing, is coloured by the social environment and the people he knows best. And for Leacock these were not English, not American, but Canadian. That last sentence of "My Financial Career" is pure Canadian.

The little Canadian of this sketch is encountered elsewhere in Leacock. Take, for example, "The Awful Fate of Melpomenus Jones". Here the protagonist again finds himself caught in an environment not of his own making—the social context of expected "white lies"—for which he is again morally and emotionally unconstituted. Jones is introduced as "a curate—such a dear young man, and only twenty-three", whose problem was that he "simply couldn't get away from people". As Leacock brilliantly explains the difficulty, "He was too modest to tell a lie and too religious to wish to appear rude." Here is the scalpel stroke, laying bare the twisted values in modern society—the reversal of sanctions between the ideal and the real, where the white lies of social politeness demand and receive the homage due only to religious truths. The dilemma is funny to us because of the incongruity between the momentousness of the ideal principle and the apparent triviality of the real predicament. But consider the significance of this little Canadian's "exit line":

> . . . he sat up in bed with a beautiful smile of confidence playing upon his face, and said, "Well—the angels are calling me; I'm afraid I really must go now. Good afternoon."

In that beatific "Good afternoon" the little curate finally departs *on his own terms*: truth and politeness here at last coincide. Though he must die to be true to himself, he has solved his problem to his perfect satisfaction! And again there is the ironic incongruity between the ideal of his simple intention and the reality of his drastic method.

Again and again in Leacock's humour—particularly in the writings of his best years, between 1910 and the early 1920's—we encounter this same "little man" exposed to pressures of various kinds from our complex society, yet maintaining both his dignity and his identity. He is not baffled by the complex world, though he may be frustrated by its overwhelming powers; he is sustained not by ignorance but by his integral understanding of his own nature and position within the world he inhabits. It is of course not a world peculiar to Canadians, as Leacock's wide popularity attests, but perhaps from longer experience Canadians have learned how to treat it humorously.

The diffidence of Leacock's little Canadian must not be misinterpreted as an unreadiness to set forth his own clear convictions. Take, for example, "Are the Rich Happy?" Here the little man reports faithfully the answers given by the rich themselves to his inquiries, but he is not for a moment taken in by the sob stories he hears. He is merely allowing the giants of wealth to destroy themselves with their own tongues, just as they had in another sketch entitled "Self-Made Men". The observant little inquirer in "Are the Rich Happy?" delightedly helps in the rout, indeed, by quietly loosing such barbed shafts as these:

> My judgement is that the rich undergo cruel trials and bitter tragedies of which the poor know nothing . . . .
>
> The rich are troubled by money all the time . . . .
>
> I have seen Spugg put aside his glass of champagne—or his glass after he had drunk his champagne—with an expression of something like contempt . . . .
>
> Yet one must not draw a picture of the rich in colours altogether gloomy.

And then comes the ending of the report, which shows the little man's full ironic understanding. The rich Overjoy family, he is told, is now "absolutely cleaned out—not a cent left." On closer inquiry, however,

he finds that the Overjoys haven't sold their mansion—"they were too much attached to it"—nor given up their box at the opera—they were "too musical" for that. Nevertheless by general report they are "absolutely ruined . . . . You could buy Overjoy—so I am informed—for ten dollars." Then he shifts from his ironic reporting to a final direct comment of his own: "But I observe that he still wears a seal-lined coat worth at least five hundred."

In "We Have With Us Tonight" the little man is a travelling lecturer subjected night after night to the bumbling rudenesses and absurdities of pompous chairmen. The world of the lecture circuit bothers but does not baffle him. Though he cannot evade the institutionalized rules and procedures, he can analyze and classify them. He can even extract from them a wry amusement at his occasional discomfitures as well as his petty triumphs. In "The Man in Asbestos" he refuses to yield to persuasion or example that a future Utopian society free from toil and risk and tension is preferable to our own; whatever the stresses and strains of our present world he has no desire to escape to a brand new one. In "Homer and Humbug" he is again resisting the pressure of organized opinion—the demand on him to admire as supreme genius what in his personal judgement is nothing but "primitive literature". In "Roughing It in the Bush" he is opposing such conventional patterns as that physical discomfort is a requisite for proper moose-hunting; he has been quite content for ten years with his own pattern of high living in the wilderness. And for a final example consider "The Transit of Venus," a short story about a professor of astronomy in love with a student. This "little man"—Leacock's own term for Lancelot Kitter—is inexperienced in the ways of love rather than ignorant of them; he lacks knowledge of women but not of his own state of mind. When he is inept in a situation he knows he has "failed again". He is fully aware of what he should do, of what is expected of him; he just cannot do it. The story has the conventional happy ending, not because he is forced or manœuvred into something he does not want, but only because an opportunity comes along with no distracting cross-currents to prevent his grasping it. No doubt the girl makes it easy for him—but again the ending is significant. This little professor of astronomy does not weakly join the girl's orbit; instead, she is swung into his to become indistinguishable from "any other professor's wife".

All these "little men" know their environment, know themselves, know what is expected of them; sometimes they cannot conform, sometimes they will not, but invariably they draw their strength from within themselves. The world they choose to live in is a huge one, just as the clothes Stephen Leacock chose to wear were always several sizes too big for him. Yet the essential size and identity of the man inside is unaffected by the bigness outside, even though to outsiders the appearance may seem ridiculously dwarfing.

Leacock's Canadian archetype is therefore radically different in outlook from such a character as Benchley's befuddled little man in an incomprehensible world, or Thurber's Walter Mitty, who can live only by escaping into a fantasy of his own making. To Leacock's "little man" the world is not incomprehensible, nor does he want to escape into fantasy. He wants to continue living in this complex world, preferably by making changes in it to suit himself, but if this is impossible—as it usually is— then to live in this world somehow without sacrificing his self-respect, his principles, or his continuing identity. In an ideal world one should be able to reconcile, through knowledge of both, the outer pressures and the inner desires. But in the real world the actual power to shape and achieve may be lacking. Incongruity between the real and the ideal is everywhere a basis of humour—but which aspect of the real and which aspect of the ideal are not everywhere given the same emphasis. As Leacock said: "The various circumstances of environment, of national character, and of language, at least emphasize and make salient certain aspects of national humour."[12] If my analysis of some pieces of Leacock's work is valid, then certain salient characteristics of his humour are unmistakably national. In our precarious and complicated circumstances, and given our national character, Canadians must either cry with frustration or laugh with Leacock.

All through our history, the favourite intellectual game of Canadians has been to measure ourselves against the British on the one hand and the Americans on the other. We have tended to define what we are almost exclusively by detecting our differences from both. Consequently, if any people anywhere should be especially skilled in the comparative study of human beings considered as groups or types rather than as individuals, it should be us. And we should also be equipped to tell the world

[12] See footnote [1], *supra.*

whatever insights into general human nature such processes provide. Now consider what Leacock says:

> Comparison is the very soul of humour . . . . It is the discovery of resemblance and the lack of it that builds up the contrasts, discrepancies and incongruities on which . . . humour depends.

As Leacock well knew, poetic imagery also springs from the perception of similarities and differences; but humour, not poetry, builds upon the resultant discrepancies and incongruities, particularly as applied to types of human nature and typical human behaviour. For generations, then, Canadians have cultivated the soil from which humour springs, and we therefore should not be surprised that out of Canada have come two great humorists to whom the world has given its approval. Men everywhere can detect and savour a special "tang" without caring about its special ingredients or even its origins.

It is noteworthy that Haliburton's humour is almost entirely the result of scrutinizing the differences between Americans, Nova Scotians, and Englishmen. The neglect into which Haliburton's humour has fallen is usually attributed to the lost appeal of dialect humour. A better reason may be that he concocted his Canadian humour for too restricted a contemporary market—for the provincial societies of England, the Eastern United States, and Nova Scotia; his "tang" is too crude for general modern taste. Leacock's blending is much subtler—he left out almost entirely such a strong ingredient as dialectal differences—and thereby he provided a refined seasoning for the humorous feasts of the entire western world, not merely for the Atlantic fringe. Canada has other humorists besides Haliburton and Leacock; they are lesser men, perhaps, but some day the world may discover them too.

CRITIC OR ENTERTAINER?

Stephen Leacock and The Growth of Materialism

F. W. Watt

> The social scientist and especially the student of political economy is compelled to make his peace with satire or humour. The callous vulgarity which characterizes the humour of the medical profession is paralleled by cynicism in the social scientist. H. A. INNIS.
> *Stephen Butler Leacock (1869-1944).*

AT THE TURN OF THE CENTURY Canadian society was undergoing changes so drastic as to constitute a social revolution. The agrarian and industrial "boom" following the opening of the West brought the Canadian economy its first great period of material expansion, returned the social order to a state of flux, stimulated the speculative spirit and the accumulation of wealth, and encouraged a mood of political and commercial optimism. It was an era to which Canadian writers for the first time applied the term "materialistic". This is the era that gave birth to Stephen Leacock, Professor of Political Economy and Humorist, and, to an extent scarcely yet realized, stamped his work with its imprint.

It is the *Arcadian Adventures,* with its destructive satirical portrayal of a rampant plutocracy, that marks an extreme of social consciousness and the closest approach to sustained social criticism in Leacock's work. Nowhere else is it quite so simple a matter to see the objects of his condemnation and his standards of judgment; and nowhere else, at the same time, is the element of kindliness (which, as we shall see, he considered a necessary part of the highest form of humour) spread so thinly. Leacock's portrayal of the ethos of the plutocracy centres on the Mausoleum

Club: "The Mausoleum Club stands on the quietest corner of the best residential street in the City. It is a Grecian building of white stone. About it are great elm trees with birds—the most expensive kind of birds—singing in the branches." The conjunction of childlike pastoral purity and simplicity and the artificial powers and splendours of the wealthy is an incongruity Leacock allows mainly to speak for itself:

> The sunlight flickers through the elm trees, illuminating expensive nursemaids wheeling valuable children in little perambulators . . . . Here you may see a little toddling princess in a rabbit suit who owns fifty distilleries in her own right. There, in a lacquered perambulator, sails past a little hooded head that controls from its cradle an entire New Jersey corporation. The United States is suing her as she sits, in a vain attempt to make her dissolve herself into constituent companies . . . . You may meet in the flickered sunlight any number of little princes and princesses far more real than the poor survivals of Europe. Incalculable infants wave their fifty dollar ivory rattles in an inarticulate greeting to one another . . . . And through it all the sunlight falls through the elm-trees, and the birds sing and motors hum, so that the whole world seen from the boulevard of Plutoria Avenue is the very pleasantest place imaginable.

The princes of the Old World and those of the New, the hum of the motors and the singing of the birds, small innocent children and giant soul-less capital enterprises, fifty dollar ivory rattles and elm-trees in the sunlight, all together in the same idyllic scene form an active complex of incongruities. In the next paragraph the complexity gives way momentarily to a direct and harsh contrast:

> If you were to mount to the roof of the Mausoleum Club itself on Plutoria Avenue you could almost see the slums from there. But why should you? And on the other hand, if you never went up on the roof, but only dined inside among the palm-trees, you would never know that the slums existed—which is much better.

It is significant that Leacock was typically less concerned with such overt contrasts between the palaces of the rich and the hovels of the poor than with incongruities within the life of the wealthy. He sought to explode that life's myths and belittle its attractions, rather than to attack its villainies. The wealthy exploiter in Leacock's portrayal attains none of the grandeur of evil. Thus, that "wizard of finance", Mr. Tomlinson, emerges from the darkness of his backwoods farm into the highest circles of plutocratic achievement despite his earnest attempts to avoid the greatness thrust upon him. Mere ignorance of the mysteries of

finance fails him, and even his most determined violations of common sense business practice cannot make him the poor man he involuntarily left behind him. The cult of money-making is debased to the level of its newest idol, a simple, ignorant farmer whose allegedly gold-bearing farm has transformed him into *"Monsieur Tomlison, nouveau capitaine de la haute finance en Amerique"*, as Paris called him, an unhappy man whose fortune grows no matter how he tries to lose it. The qualifications of the members of the Mausoleum Club appear in a changed light in their mistaken admiration for Mr. Tomlinson; they remain neither admirable, dangerous or evil, but merely objects of scepticism and ridicule.

In similar fashion when the spectre of labour unrest appears in Leacock's Arcadia, it is merely an opportunity for the wealthy to display their ludicrous self-centredness and inconsistency. "Just imagine, my dear," says one rich lady to another, "my chauffeur, when I was in Colorado, actually threatened to leave me merely because I wanted to reduce his wages. I think it's these wretched labour unions." The "wretched labour unions" threatened the very heart of Arcadia, the Mausoleum Club, by a strike of the catering staff at a moment which proved embarrassing for Mr. Fyshe, the successful financier: "Luxury!" he was exclaiming at the beginning of the sumptuous dinner scene set to trap the (non-existent) fortunes of the Duke of Dulham, "Luxury! . . . . It is the curse of the age. The appalling growth of luxury, the piling up of money, the ease with which huge fortunes are made . . . these are the things that are going to ruin us." Mr. Fyshe's propensity for social revolutionary doctrine, however, did not survive the test:

> "Eh? What?" said Mr. Fyshe.
> The head waiter, his features stricken with inward agony, whispered again.
> "The infernal, damn scoundrels!" said Mr. Fyshe, starting back in his chair. "On strike! In this Club! It's an outrage!"

BUT THE *Arcadian Adventures,* even though its thesis is modest and uncontentious, makes Stephen Leacock appear more of a socially purposeful satirist than he really was. His work as a whole is not contained within the level of that severe, obvious and well deserved criticism of the vices and follies of the over-privileged which is characteristic of the *Arcadian Adventures.* Nor is there more justification else-

where for an attempt to define Leacock as a writer with serious interests in radical reform. On the contrary, Leacock looked upon himself as a humorist (that being for him the term of wider range) rather than a satirist, and freely confessed himself to be a Tory in politics. Like Lucullus Fyshe, Leacock could have claimed himself to be, on the basis of the *Arcadian Adventures,* something of a "revolutionary socialist". But in *The Unsolved Riddle of Social Justice* (1920), his most elaborate and explicit discussion of the politics and economics of contemporary society, he denied himself this possibility once and for all: the book is primarily a critique of radical idealism, an attack on the socialist answer to the "riddle of social justice". In 1907 Thorstein Veblen, whom Leacock had known during their post-graduate days at the University of Chicago, indicated his awareness of the fact that socialism for many serious exponents of radical ideas had passed out of the Utopian phase. "The socialism that inspires hope and fears today," Veblen wrote, "is the school of Marx. No one is seriously apprehensive of any other so-called socialistic movement, and no one is seriously concerned to criticise or refute the doctrines set forth by any other school of socialists."[1] Leacock himself ostensibly did not agree with or did not know this argument of his brilliant acquaintance. *The Unsolved Riddle* is concerned with refuting socialism as it is described in Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward;* and in the fact that it repeats the task undertaken in Canada by Goldwin Smith a generation before, it suggests the course of thought (or lack of it) on such matters undergone by certain portions of the Canadian intelligentsia during these years. "The scheme of society outlined in *'Looking Backward',"* Leacock asserted, without alluding to other socialist writings, "may be examined as the most attractive and the most consistent outline of a socialist state that has, within the knowledge of the present writer, been put forward . . . No better starting point for the criticism of collectivist theories can be found than in a view of the basis on which is supposed to rest the halcyon life of Mr. Bellamy's charming commonwealth." "Nor was ever," he claimed, "a better presentation made of the essential program of socialism." Without undue difficulty Leacock succeeded in knocking down this idealist of a former era. Socialism, he concluded his analysis, would function admirably in a community of saints, but for ordinary human beings it would be unworkable. "With

[1] I. Kipnis. *The American Socialist Movement,* p. 4.

perfect citizens any government is good," he argued (apparently he was no more aware than the theorist he was criticizing that the public and private virtues, the motives of the individual and the organization of social relations, are never in a simple causal relationship). "In a population of angels a socialistic commonwealth would work to perfection. But until we have the angels we must keep the commonwealth waiting." The movement towards socialism, he warned, using the apocalyptic image that runs through the book, will lead "over the edge of the abyss beyond which is chaos."

Not only did Stephen Leacock differ with socialism, as he saw it, in regard to solving the problem of social justice, but, as one would expect, he differed in his analysis of the conditions which gave rise to socialism. He saw the same kind of inequalities and incongruities in the materialistic society of 1920 as did the radicals:

> Few persons can attain adult life without being profoundly impressed by the appalling inequalities of our human lot. Riches and poverty jostle one another upon our streets. The tattered outcast dozes on his bench while the chariot of the wealthy is drawn by. The palace is the neighbour of the slum. We are, in modern life, so used to this that we no longer see it.

But Leacock's emphasis was different. While socialists were crying out against the suffering of the underprivileged, Leacock counselled against what he assured the reader was a kind of sentimentality which might lead to unfortunate social consequences:

> An acquired indifference to the ills of others is the price at which we live. A certain dole of sympathy, a casual mite of personal relief is the mere drop that any one of us alone can cast into the vast ocean of human misery. Beyond that we must harden ourselves lest we too perish.
>
> We make fast the doors of our lighted houses against the indigent and the hungry. What else can we do? If we shelter *one* what is that? And if we try to shelter all, we ourselves are shelterless.

For Leacock the root of social evils lay not at all in the nature of the political or economic system, but entirely in the nature of man. Thus, the war of 1914-18 for Leacock was a demoralizing force because it gave cause for an outbreak of the old Adam: "A world that has known five years of fighting has lost its taste for the honest drudgery of work. Cincinnatus will not go back to his plow, or, at the best, stands sullenly between his plow-handles arguing for a higher wage." But Leacock's most

important difference with the socialists was in regard to the concept of freedom. Leacock, in the tradition of nineteenth century Liberalism, maintained that in his society the individual, whatever his hardships, was a free agent; the socialists were arguing that political freedom was meaningless in the face of economic slavery. Leacock wrote:

> Yet all [men in our society] are free. This is the distinguishing mark of them as children of our era. They may work or stop. There is no compulsion from without. No man is a slave. Each has his 'natural liberty', and each in his degree, great or small, receives his allotted reward.

But although Leacock was conservative in his rejection of the blueprint state, and in his refusal to "sentimentalize" the lower levels of society, his awareness of the vices of modern industrial civilization did not allow him easily to become an uncritical spokesman for reactionary Toryism. In the *Unsolved Riddle,* while condemning socialism, he also condemned the nineteenth century doctrine of laissez-faire individualism. Fifteen years later in the midst of the Great Depression, his was a somewhat chastened and reformed individualism: "I believe," he wrote, "that the only possible basis for organized society is that of every man for himself—for himself and those near and dear to him. But on this basis must be put in operation a much more efficient and much more just social mechanism."

There was something remarkably anachronistic about Leacock's failure (though himself an economist) to understand those economic factors of the modern world which were making freedom and individualism in any simple sense impossible. In 1936 he complained:

> I cannot bear to think that the old independent farming is to go: that the breezy call of incense breathing morn is to be replaced by the time-clock of a regimented, socialized, super-mechanized land-factory. We must keep the farmers. If they cannot regulate the 'how much' of their production, let them, as they used to, raise all they damn can, and then fire it around everywhere—pelt one another with new-mown hay and sugar beets. But don't lets lose them.

If such gaiety and gusto seem a little remote from the actual conditions of farming and marketing in the mid-thirties, on the other hand Leacock had no illusions about rural life as such, despite such parables of its virtues triumphing over the decadence of the city as that of Mr. Tomlinson, "wizard of finance". Having been raised on an Ontario farm "during the hard times of Canadian farming", Leacock could claim as

he did in the Preface to *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town* that he had seen "enough of farming to speak exuberantly in political addresses of the joy of early rising and the deep sleep, both of body and intellect, that is induced by honest toil."

Leacock has been described (by Desmond Pacey) as a "country squire" upholding the "eighteenth century values: common sense, benevolence, moderation, good taste",[2] but he apparently believed there was nothing in his own age which approximated or even partially embodied these values. The mild eighteenth century satire of Addison and Steele, certainly, was based on the kind of positive faith in man and in society which Leacock frequently and explicitly renounced. Leacock's attitude was more akin to that of cynicism, the cynicism of Diogenes, for example, of whom it has been said:

> He would deface all the coinage current in the world. Every conventional stamp was false. The men stamped as generals and kings; the things stamped as honour and wisdom and happiness and riches; all were base metal with lying superscription.

Leacock's extensive dissertation, *Humor, Its Theory and Technique* (1935), reveals more about the author than perhaps any other of his works. Especially it throws light on the basic attitudes which led Leacock to squander his talents in a mass of books turned out for the Christmas book-trade, to use his humour sparingly as a weapon or a tool of criticism, and by and large to accept the social *status quo* despite his criticism of it, rather than to try to alter it. In that work there is, indeed, praise for the two "greatest" humorists, Charles Dickens and Mark Twain, because each in his own way "sought as a part of his work to uplift the world with laughter." There is also condemnation for those modern writers who merely aimed at pleasing the masses, the "ten-cent crowd":

> Please the public! That's the trouble today . . . with everything that is written to be printed or acted, everything drawn, sung, or depicted. Nothing can appear unless there is money in it . . . It is the ten-cent crowd that are needed if profits are to be made, not the plutocrats. Hence has been set up in our time an unconscious tyranny of the lower class. The snobbishness of the term may pass without apology in view of the truth of the fact . . . It is the wishes and likings of the mass which largely dictate what the rest of us shall see and hear.

[2] *Creative Writing in Canada.* p. 101.

But these remarks cannot be taken as support for a kind of humour which is devoted to immediate social or moral purposes. On the contrary, Leacock has just as little use for that type: "Much of our humour now—dare one say, especially in America?—is over-rapid, snarling, and ill-tempered. It is used to 'show things up', a vehicle of denunciation, not of pleasure." The satirical aspect of humour must always mind itself lest it become simply "mockery, a thing debased and degraded from what it might have been." Somewhere in the course of history, "mere vindictiveness parted company with humor, and became its hideous counterpart, mockery", but still "too much of the humor of all ages, and far too much of our own, partakes of it."

The highest humour, then, is such that it will uplift the world but nevertheless avoid denunciation and mockery. Leacock apparently sees this type in the portrayal of Mr. Pickwick, for example, who "walks through life conveying with him the contrast between life as it might be and life as it is." Humour of this kind depends on a clearly understood and firmly held pattern of values, manners, and presuppositions. The difficulty arises when one attempts to infer such a pattern from Leacock's own works. *Sunshine Sketches* holds out the best promise of such a pattern, and readers have professed to find it there. Leacock's Preface offered the lead, touching as it does at its conclusion tenderly on the "land of hope and sunshine where little towns spread their square streets and their trim maple trees beside placid lakes almost within echo of the primeval forest," and asserting the "affection" at the basis of its portrayal. Mariposa, the most peaceful and the most foolish of small towns, stands as an unconscious critique of the big city ways it tries to ape. Yet Mariposa itself does not contain a pattern or even hints of the good life, unless we choose to pitch our understanding at the level of the beguiling narrator. There is nothing admirable, nothing fine, nothing dignified, nothing sacred in Leacock's portrayal of the little town: all its coinage is defaced. The only virtues are its sunshine and its littleness, its failure to achieve the larger vices of modern industrial urbanism, hard as it tries to do so.

ONE IS TEMPTED to say that Mariposa's curiously nostalgic appeal lies not in its positive attractions but in its success in transforming great evils into small, its rendering innocuous if not innocent the worst aspects of our modern world. Much of Leacock's writing answers to the same formula. "In retrospect," Leacock claimed in his book on humour, "all our little activities are but as nothing, all that we do has in it a touch of the pathetic, and even our sins and wickedness and crime are easily pardoned in the realization of their futility." It is by this perspective that *Sunshine Sketches* charms the reader, by making the "real" pleasantly innocent, not by comparing it with the "ideal", the "might have been". We are perhaps to understand that humour "uplifts" the reader by bringing him to this Olympian height of contemplation. In Leacock's philosophy the ideal is illusory. On occasion he himself may have looked back longingly at "the wholesome days of the eighties or nineties," or at the simple life of the farmer, but at other times he repudiated such attempts to escape the present:

> Each age sees the ones that preceded it through a mellow haze of retrospect; each looks back to the good old days of our fore-fathers . . . Each of us in life is a prisoner. We are set and bound in our confined lot. Outside, somewhere, is infinity. We seek to reach into it and the pictured past seems to afford us an outlet of escape.

But in the end, "Escape is barred."

Humour as Leacock conceived it lay at the heart of his philosophy, in fact *was* his philosophy:

> . . . humor in its highest meaning and its furthest reach . . . does not depend on verbal incongruities, or on tricks of sight and hearing. It finds its basis in the incongruity of life itself, the contrast between the fretting cares and the petty sorrows of the day and the long mystery of the tomorrow. Here laughter and tears become one, and humor becomes the contemplation and interpretation of our life. In this aspect the thought of the nineteenth century far excelled all that had preceded it. The very wistfulness of its new ignorance—contrasted with the barren certainty of bygone dogma—lends it something pathetic.

The allusion to nineteenth century agnosticism is by no means irrelevant. It is the doubt about man's ultimate significance that provides the basis for humour at its highest, for the universe itself is a kind of "joke"

in which the trivial and futile aspirations of mankind are the crowning incongruity. Humour

> . . . represents an outlook upon life, a retrospect as it were, in which the fever and the fret of our earthly lot is contrasted with its shortcomings, its lost illusions and its inevitable end. The fiercest anger cools; the bitterest of hate sleeps in the churchyard and over it all there spread Time's ivy and Time's roses, preserving nothing but what is fair to look upon.

Presumably the best joke of all, conducive to the most tears and the most laughter combined, will be the apocalypse as Leacock describes it:

> Thus does life, if we look at it from sufficient distance, dissolve itself into 'humor'. Seen through an indefinite vista it ends in a smile. In this, if what the scientist tells us is true, it only offers a parallel to what must ultimately happen to the physical universe in which it exists . . . . At some inconceivable distance in time . . . the universe ends, finishes; there is nothing left of it but nothingness. With it goes out in extinction all that was thought of as matter, and with that all the framework of time and space that held it, and the conscious life that matched it. All ends with a cancellation of forces and comes to nothing; and our universe ends thus with one vast, silent unappreciated joke.

For Stephen Leacock as cynic there was no "might have been" except in a wistful and illusory nostalgia, and even here his sense of the follies and shortcomings of men would not allow him to be blinded. It was easier for him, with his belief in the futility of man's petty actions to take his role of artist lightly, to observe the evils of his society without bitterness or indignation, accepting and defending the world as he found it, and to turn his irreverent humour on every aspect of experience and upon all manner of people and things. But perhaps after all he was less like Diogenes, who also credited the world with no virtue, yet who asked its princes nothing in return but that they "stand a little out of his light", than like that other cynic, Teles, who taught the docrine of self-love and received money from the hands of rich patrons with words like these: "You give liberally and I take valiantly from you, neither grovelling nor demeaning myself basely nor grumbling." For Stephen Leacock was a part of the prospering materialistic civilization of which he wrote; he was sometimes its critic, but always its entertainer.

THE BRIDGE OR THE STOKEHOLD?

Views of the Novelist's Art

Ethel Wilson

These remarks on the novelist's attitude formed the substance of a talk which Ethel Wilson delivered as part of a symposium sponsored by the Humanities Association in Vancouver in January, 1960.

OUR SUBJECT is Canadian Literature, and you will be justified in saying, "She did not talk about Canadian Literature." And I shall be justified in saying, "Oh, yes, I did, really. I talked about an approach to making it."

These remarks should, I believe, have a bearing on Canadian novels. It would be easier to talk about Samuel Hearne's journeys, or Donald Creighton's life of Sir John A. Macdonald, or Miss Neatby's fine formidable book on education, or Margaret Ormsby's *History of British Columbia,* or Charles Camsell's *Son of the North,* or Roderick Haig-Brown's books about waters, and fly-fishing, or R. M. Patterson's *Dangerous River,* or Wallison's *Place Names of British Columbia,* or James Gillis's naively solemn and funny *Cape Breton Giant,* and others, with pleasure and detachment.

But in the matter of Canadian novels I have to choose between two positions—detachment and involvement. They are separate and different. Detachment is the easier position (that is, to some extent, your position), but I have to choose involvement.

Turning to my private addiction, writing, I am not consciously aware in my personal act of writing (how could one be?) of "the Canadian novel" or "the English novel" or "the American novel", as the critic or the critical reader must be aware, and as I am aware when I transfer

to the position of the critical reader. When I think of the universal yet private and, I hope, critical approach as a working writer to this novel itself, the happier I am—free, and devoid of personal or national self-consciousness, which is the way I like it. Self-consciousness is a triple curse. But in retrospect I see my Canadianness, for example, in that my locale in a sustained piece of writing (that is, in a book) has to be British Columbia. There are other places in the world that I know and love, but none that I know, and feel, and love in the same way. But I did not choose it. It chose. It is very strong.

If one moves over from the place of the person engaged in this particular act of writing to the place of the person on the bridge looking at the view and interested in "the" Canadian—or any other—novel, I assure you that your view from the bridge (which I also enjoy enormously when I am there) differs from the view in the stokehold where the stoking goes on. I should like to talk, a little, from the stokehold. Let us consider one childishly simple yet eternally complex question—from what place do people in a work of fiction (the "characters") arise, swarming like moths from the dark into the area of light, illuminated by that novel? The question is at once universal and particular, whether one is a West Indian or a Canadian.

Character and plot are a kind of chicken and the egg, depending on the writer. Happily, the material and structure and population of a novel lie within a writer's ambience and choice, unlike history where the question of technique and approach would always baffle some of us; but this private piece of work, when finished, may take a place in a national literature as a Canadian novel, if the natural infusion is strong enough, and if it is good enough, or bad enough. It is a sort of distillation of the writer. I shall try to present, briefly, considerations of origins of "characters" that seem valid to myself. The first examples come from two great writers outside our time and place, and none the less valid for a Canadian writer.

In the second introduction to the novel *Victory,* Joseph Conrad states with simplicity the natural way in which he first comes to know his characters (which then take shape in a world which is both his inner world and an outside world), and it is a way that I understand and believe in. A novelist is, no doubt, a born watcher. He may not be as planned and deliberate as a bird watcher, yet he cannot help watching.

The great writer Conrad, a small man of sombre mien, walks along the quayside or sits down at a café table, and he watches. That watching, passive as it is, is also an actively functioning part of anyone who in some degree becomes a novelist. Conrad observes a man, a woman (never to be seen by him, perhaps), and that man, that woman, is his. There may not be a studied imitation, but there is a sort of active principle at work, a union. He sees a look and perhaps only a look—yet what is more powerful than a look?—or the abstraction in a look, even; and the woman who looks will live and breathe and feel and speak and take her part in some future story (in *Victory,* it may be) and become a person who affects him, and us, deeply. Her actions will be implicit in that look and will somehow derive from the same source, whatever that same source may be. Even her death will derive from it. That look lights a slow fire in the writer Conrad who—observe—is a Pole but writes as an Englishman.

Further, much further, went Marcel Proust. Towards midnight Proust, a very sick man, muffled up, arrives at the house of old friends whom he has not seen for a long time—M. and Mme. de Caillavet who have a young daughter Simone. I quote from Maurois' *Life of Proust*:

> "Madame, what I ask of you now is that I should be permitted to see Mlle. Simone tonight."
>
> "But Marcel, she has been in bed for ages!"
>
> "I implore you, Madame . . ."
>
> Simone was brought downstairs . . . What was it he hoped to find in her? The impressions that he needed in order to paint the portrait of Mlle. de Saint-Loup, the daughter of the woman whom the Narrator had once loved.

You and I can see those large dark eyes mournfully exploring the face and demeanour of the young girl. We see him returning in haste to his room. But Proust sometimes blended many persons. In his own notes he says: "(Félice—a certain Marie—another old servant from the Illiers days—Françoise)."

Proust is not wholly in fashion now, although book succeeds book about this enigmatic man. Perhaps too much has been said. His reputed colossal faults do not concern me at all. His achievements do, very deeply. What has he to do with Canadian Literature? He has to do with our universal master and servant Time, and with people moving in Time.

A novelist may be exposed to the temptation of portraying some tantalizing intimately known person. If the novelist yields to this temptation and turns this person loose into his book, he may produce a better book than he could otherwise have done, but at the high cost of peace of mind. Not so, naturally, if the work is planned as a commemoration of love, or an explanatory or affectionate commentary. There is a temptation which I can only describe as excruciating; for truth is far far stranger than fiction or may be much more interesting, and who knows the temptations? I do.

My own experience, which is not great but varied enough for reference, indicates to me the curiously wide spread or narrow concentration of influence in the origins of stories and characters. A novel of mine, or its main character, grew directly from a few words dropped almost at random in a previous book. The words were, ". . . formed other connections." What connections? I had never seen and did not know the girl in question. She did not exist in my knowledge any more than a fly in the next room, but I considered certain aspects and likelihoods, and wrote a book called *Lilly's Story*. On the way, characters multiplied, their outlines at first dim, later clear. I cannot imagine willingly employing even a marginal character without knowing his outside appearance so well that he could be identified in the street by myself and for my own purposes.

Speaking still of people in a book, there comes the influence of light, which may change everything. There was, lately, a freighter which, surprisingly, came to anchor very close to shore and just below our study windows. It caused me intense and daily pleasure. On a grey evening, the ship was a lovely ghost. On a fine morning the freighter was dazzling white where the sunshine fell and the silver gulls flew over. The light faded, and the ship became a dirty tub. The ship was the same ship; the light was different; its effect was perhaps false. Upon us all, light falls, and we seem to the beholder to change; and upon the impending work of the novelist, light falls, and changes a scene and the people in a room. In the book *Victory,* a false light falls upon the man Heyst and its effect is lethal.

Somewhere, I think, the person in a story must touch not only the constructive imagination, but also the earth (that is to say, the writer's own experience) in the course of the struggle, and receive life and strength

from that earth.

There is a skilful writer who seldom presents visual characters. They present themselves through the medium of conversation. Yet a character occasionally rises into view, like the body of a seal showing through a breaking wave. Here is Bullivant: "Bullivant relaxed his bearing and turned towards Horace almost with a smile, being adept at suggesting a facial movement without executing it." That is not much; but we see plainly that below the wave, where the writer's mind exists, there is Bullivant and his unsmiled smile.

It seems to me that the problems of the stoker (or the craftsman, or the artist) are universal, for people who are writers are first writers, and then they are Canadian writers, Polish, French, Russian, English writers. I understand so well what the Canadian novelist Mordecai Richler said when he was asked, "Are you a Jewish writer or a Canadian writer?"

He answered, "Neither. I am a writer." Yet he is a Canadian writer, and so am I.

Early Canadian Printing

The probable author of the verses reproduced on the following page is William Brown, founder, printer and editor of the *Quebec Gazette,* a bilingual weekly newspaper that appeared first on June 21, 1764. Broadsides such as this appeared some years in French, some in English, and were distributed annually to the hundred or so subscribers within Quebec City.

NEW-YEAR's VERSES

Of the PRINTER's LAD *who carries about the* QUEBEC GAZETTE

TO THE CUSTOMERS.

JANUARY 1, 1785.

MY worthy good maſters, whether warriors or civil,
In verſe comes to tempt you, a poor printer's devil.
Tho' a tempter and devil, not to ſin he inclines you,
But better to leave you, he hopes, than he finds you:
Unlike to old Satan, he points out the means,
By the uſe of *one virtue*, to cover all ſins.
The hint's rather broad, but he prays you'll excuſe it,
Whatever your goodneſs, he ne'er will abuſe it.
It may be aſk'd with great juſtice, wherein lies my merit?
From *Cadmus* of old, the black-art I inherit:
The thoughts of all people, with eaſe I make known,
And ſecrets moſt deep, by my art are full ſhewn.
When *Incubus*-like, on the preſs my weight lies,
As ſoon it conceives and in labour loud cries;
Then to my own offspring as midwife I ſtand,
Full form'd the young bantling comes forth at command;
A bantling moſt learned in both french and engliſh,
As all true grammarians very ſoon may diſtinguiſh.
So wondrous intelligent, it tells all the news,
Of *Nabobs* and *Rajahs* and both the *Tippoos*.
With the *Ruſſias* and *Porte* it very familiar is,
But almoſt forgets what a doing in *England* is.
Of our ever lov'd mother it ſays very little,
Tho' what concerns her, ſhould be known to a tittle.
Of news more domeſtic, what's worſe, 'tis quite dry,
Unleſs when ſome great man bids us good-bye.
Theſe faults it gives hopes, at a future day, mending,
If on its fair words there be any depending.
But to make ſome amends now, it oft leads you a dance,
Borne high in balloon through the æther of France:
Whence hopes you may form, in proceſs of time,
In a carriole, with *Roberts*, the galaxy to climb:
Or, failing of that, in *Blanchard's* batteau,
To heaven, without the prieſt's fee, you may go.
It ſhews, too, when the moon's at full or at change,
At the foot of Parnaſſus, how wits wildly range:
Where attempting ſome flowers poetic to pluck,
By Canada froſts they find them all ſtruck.
And ſometimes by chance, tells a wonderful tale,
Of erring-ſaints, hurricanes, or a ſtrong gale.
With bankrupts by ſcores, and falſe ribs ran away,—
Whilſt lawyers and auctioneers are in full pay.
Then goods new imported, of ſeven years long ſtanding,
With ſhop-duſt ingrain'd, and worn thread-bare by handling.
Theſe, Sirs, are its merits, no great things 'tis true;
By your kindneſs encourag'd, it greater may do.
For what of your bounty may fall to my ſhare,
I wiſh you many many an happy NEW-YEAR.

WHY I AM AN EXPATRIATE

Norman Levine

ON A HOT JUNE DAY in 1949 I sailed from Montreal. I stood by the rails on the deck of the British freighter that was taking me to Newcastle. From the first mate's cabin a record was playing *Bye, Bye, Blackbird.* I remember watching the Mountain, the Sun Life Building, the Jacques Cartier bridge, and wondering when I would see all this again.

I had left Canada once before, in 1944, on a troopship. Then I took it for granted that I would come back. This time I was far less certain.

I was leaving for a stay in England of at least two years. For I had just received a five thousand dollar fellowship with which to continue postgraduate work at London University on my proposed thesis: "The Decay of Absolute Values in Modern Society". But I knew, even then, that I had no great interest in the academic. It was, mainly, just the means of getting me over. And I wanted to get over because of the English girl who sat beside me at McGill and took the same courses as I did and who was returning home, to London, after graduation; and also, because I had in my Gladstone bag the manuscript of my first novel. The publisher in Toronto had read it and said I would have to get it published in New York or London; then he would look after the Canadian market.

These were, as I remember them, my immediate reasons for sailing up the St. Lawrence on the freighter. But why I stayed on in England and became an expatriate goes back much further, and may account for the mixed sentiments I had leaving Canada on that hot June day.

It began, I imagine, when I was five; when my mother took me one morning from the house on St. Joseph in Ottawa, crossed St. Patrick and walked to York Street, and left me at the public school to begin my first day. I could not speak a word of English.

I was brought up in an orthodox Jewish home. My parents, and those

who came to visit them, spoke only Yiddish with a few Polish or Russian words thrown in. Everyone else in that street, and those surrounding it, was French Canadian. The hostility and indifference of this neighbourhood, and the close-knit set-up of the small Jewish community, tended to keep us children fairly immune from any contact with Canadian society, except for going to school—but that was close to home, and remained Lower Town.

It wasn't until I went to High School that I began to leave Lower Town. (Although there had been the odd sortie: like going for blotters to the stores on Rideau, Sparks, and Bank—selling exhibition tickets opposite Zeller's on Saturdays—or once, when I was around nine or ten, running away from home by hitch-hiking with a friend to what is Uplands Airport today but what used to be farmland, and being brought back by the police).

The best thing about High School was getting there—riding in the early mornings, especially in the fall along the Driveway, by the Canal, on the blue CCM bicycle with the handlebars turned inside out, until you came to the Avenues, on the opposite side of the city. Otherwise it had little attraction. We went to that particular High School because our parents couldn't afford to send us to university. And we remained there until, legally, one was free to leave; then we would go and work in the government.

For the two and a half years that I went there I spent my time doing shorthand, bookkeeping, filing, typing, and writing business letters. In spare hours we had some English, very bitty; some geography, and Canadian history. We were also taught penmanship and everyone came out of there with that easy-to-read mass-produced commercial style. (I rebelled against this to such an extent that I can hardly read my writing today). Then we had salesmanship. We had to go in front of the class and pretend we were selling something—a car, a house, or life-insurance —to a classmate, while our teacher criticized our technique.

Although I wasn't getting much of a formal education at High School I did get one from a different source. I became a member of a left-wing Zionist youth movement. Originally it consisted of my friends who now lived in the neighbourhood, around Murray Street. We had built a ping-pong table together and used to go out skiing in the Laurentians or swimming at Britannia and Hog's Back. Then someone older came from Mon-

treal and invited us to join the youth movement. We wore grey-blue shirts with green kerchiefs at the neck, just like Boy Scouts. But our immediate aim was to end up in Palestine and live and work on one of the *kibbutzim*.

We rented a clubhouse—a bare room above a shoe-store on Rideau Street—and we would come here at nights, on weekends, whenever we were free. We drew up schedules, and read Marx, Adam Smith, Dos Passos, Steinbeck, Hemingway, Veblen, and gave lectures in front of each other. We pooled our spending money. We ate pork on the Sabbath. We sang Ballad for Americans. And we argued about religion, free love, capitalism and communism, Hedy Lamarr, The Book of The Month Club selections, Gloomy Sunday, and girls.

As soon as I could, at sixteen, I left High School, and worked in the government as an office boy until I was eighteen. The year was 1942. So I joined up as aircrew with the RCAF, and after training out west graduated as a pilot officer and eventually ended up with 429 Squadron at Leeming, Yorkshire.

The kind of life I suddenly found myself leading in England was completely different from what I had known in Canada. All the time in Ottawa I was conscious of living on Murray Street, Lower Town, but that one didn't belong; the appeal of the left-wing Zionist youth movement was that it recognized the fact that to be Jewish here in Canada meant that you were excluded from feeling that you belonged to what was going on in the country. In England I found myself being attended to by a series of batmen, all old enough to be my father. We ate in a fine mess. A string quartet played for us while we had our Sunday dinner. And on the wall above us was the *Rokeby Venus*. We lived well. We had lots of money to spend. The uniform gave us admission to all sorts of places. And perhaps because one was twenty, I suddenly found myself absorbed in "living", where before it seemed one was just hanging around, marking time.

Occasionally I would be made to realize the distance that had grown between myself and my background. My father, though he was able by this time to speak a hesitant English—was unable to read or write it. And by the time I went overseas, though I could with difficulty make myself understood in Yiddish—I was unable to read or write it. Consequently we were unable to communicate and had to keep silent.

I REMEMBER not long after the war was over going to see a film, "The Best Years of Our Lives". I don't remember it as a particularly good film. But it did touch on that feeling that one had when returning to Lower Town—to the banner on the wooden verandah saying WELCOME HOME SON; the peddlers' horses and wagons parked on both sides on the street; the eyes of middle-aged women staring from behind lace curtains—that one could not go back to this past. Whatever issues the war had been fought over, I now found myself fighting a personal battle as well.

At first this took strange forms. I found myself pretending that I didn't live in Lower Town. I would get off the street car on Laurier in order to walk through Sandy Hill, rather than take one to let me off on St. Patrick, which was only a block away from home. I began to live in a fantasy world: pretending that I wasn't Jewish, giving myself fictitious parents. And I started to write, a novel, set in Austria. (Needless to say I had never been to Austria—but had read the week before a book about Vienna that was lying around the house). The clubhouse, politics, going to Palestine, didn't interest me. The rift the war had opened up was too violent for me to pretend to forget that other way of living which seemed so much freer and less provincial. The price I had to pay, I could not have realized at the time.

But the war was over, and something had to be done. I decided to go to university—mainly to postpone the decision of what to do. I did not want to return to work in the government. I decided on McGill partly because I have always liked Montreal: for us from Ottawa it meant 'the big time'. And I remembered as a child fruit-peddling with my father, crossing over the small bridge by Lansdowne Park and seeing—when the wagon came up to the rise—the Redmen playing rugby in the stadium. It was only a glimpse, but long enough to decide me on McGill.

At university I was in my element—mainly because I could not take it seriously. I graduated with two degrees, first class honours, various prizes, a scholarship, and the five thousand dollar fellowship. Even at the end, I was unable to take any of this seriously because I considered all along that my presence there was something in the nature of a fraud.

The only reason I was able to be there in the first place was because of the Veteran's Act; fifty per cent of my flying class was killed. And on top

of that, on my first day I was asked to fill in a registration card. They wanted to know my entrance qualifications—Junior Matric. Not having it, I filled in the first figures that came into my head. Had anyone bothered to check up, that presumably would have ended that. But they didn't. Since then I have always nourished a soft spot for the academic when it deals with human nature.

At McGill I continued to play out this fantasy. It was, on the whole, very pleasant. I found myself going to magnificent houses with clinging vines, sloping lawns, flower beds and rock gardens. From their windows I could see the city below with its churches and bridges and factory chimneys. Occasionally I did make a gesture. I took a room in an old cellar on Dorchester Street, next to the boiler. The slot of a window faced the railway lines. The room was narrow, dingy, and there was always a film of grit on the walls and my face when I woke up. My friends would come here in their fathers' cars, have a good look—they put this down to some perversity on my part—then we would leave and drive comfortably away to the cottage with the period furniture; the top flat with the butler; or cocktails at the Berkeley. But throughout this, and the dinner-dances, the nice people, the lectures, the talk, and the all night balls: "There was," as Sir Thomas Browne has said, "another man within me that's angry with me."

By the time I left McGill I was pretty confused. Things seemed so far to have fallen in my lap, as long as I continued to play this game—which was, for me, just a series of pretenses. The postponement of any decision, which I got by going to university, was now up. The choice I had to make was either to continue the way I had, and it seemed all too easy and attractive to do so—or else try to come to terms. I didn't think I could do this by living in Canada, where I would always feel a sense of betrayal.

I had by this time also realized that all I wanted to do was write. And I knew that this would be easier, at the beginning, away from home. Writing, in the immediate circle of relatives and friends, was resented; even though they paid lip service to it. Mainly because I did not follow their own ways of existence. It shocked them that I should try to 'make a living' from something so precarious as writing poems, stories, or novels. They would have said nothing against me if I had gone door to door selling life insurance.

So I came over to England.

But postwar England came, at first, as something of a surprise. Wartime England meant for me a life of abundance, care-free good times, new experiences. Now, it meant sharing with another Canadian a peeling flat that was falling to bits; queueing up once a week for the cube of butter, the small Polish egg, the bit of cheese, the few rashers of streaky bacon, the ten cigarettes under the counter. And also, perhaps for the first time in my life, I began to accept my past, and to understand myself; by some irony, the closer I came to that, the closer I began understanding my fellow-man.

Now, I like going back to Montreal, Ottawa, Lower Town. After I have lived in England for a few years, I feel it necessary for this reminder; it somehow puts certain things right for me; and I enjoy being back. Whether I live in Canada or not, that doesn't seem so terribly important at present. I find it exciting whenever I return, while I don't find that about England. I guess I could live in England another ten years without feeling any compulsion to write about it. But I find it a good place to live and work—I feel pleasantly anonymous. What happens when I have run dry of my Canadian things? I don't know. That is the price one has paid for living away. But it doesn't concern me as yet, and in any case one always falls back on the personal. A British novelist who read *Canada Made Me* said, "You know I think what you really would like to have been was an orthodox Jew." Perhaps. But that is impossible in the world I know. And, although my parents could not have known it, it all began with the sound of a schoolbell on that first morning when I was five. What followed was inevitable.

LA VIE LITTERAIRE AU CANADA FRANCAIS:

Essai de Bilan pour l'Année 1959-1960

Jean-Guy Pilon

REVOIR, après quelques mois, les événements marquants d'une année littéraire, c'est s'exposer, à coup sûr, à des oublis graves qu'un lecteur pointilleux serait en droit de relever. C'est pourquoi je m'engage dans ce bilan avec une certaine crainte et en prenant, au point de départ, la précaution d'avertir ceux qui me feraient l'honneur de me lire, que cette synthèse n'est sûrement pas complète; malgré toute l'objectivité que je voudrais lui assurer, elle demeurera quand même personnelle, c'est-à-dire que certains événements ont pu prendre à mes yeux une dimension que d'autres observateurs peuvent fort bien ne pas leur accorder, et vice-versa. Qu'on le veuille ou non, des événements en apparence minimes ont parfois une importance qui les rend plus nécessaires et significatifs que des machines considérables.

Ainsi en est-il de la troisième rencontre des écrivains canadiens qui eut lieu dans les Laurentides, à quelques milles de Montréal, du 16 au 18 octobre 1959.

Pour en bien saisir le sens et la portée, il faut d'abord en esquisser l'historique. C'est à l'été 1957 que les Editions de l'Hexagone ont lancé l'idée d'une rencontre annuelle des poètes canadiens. J'avais déjà, pour ma part, en assistant aux Biennales Internationales de Poésie, en Belgique, pris conscience de la nécessité de réunir les poètes, moins peut-être pour faire une lumière définitive sur les notions de poésie et de langage, que pour les obliger à un dialogue qu'il n'est plus possible de refuser. Cette initiative nouvelle avait suscité assez d'enthousiasme pour que nous décidions d'en publier les textes (c'est l'origine du livre *La Poésie et*

nous) et pour que nous prenions la décision de tenir une rencontre semblable chaque année, en l'ouvrant de plus en plus aux autres écrivains. Ainsi, le deuxième année, nous avions invité les poètes canadiens de langue anglaise et les critiques. Ces nouveaux contacts furent extrêmement enrichissants. La troisième rencontre fut donc une rencontre des poètes, romanciers et dramaturges, c'est-à-dire une rencontre d'écrivains de toutes disciplines. Encore là, nos confrères de langue anglaise ont voulu s'associer au mouvement.

La rencontre de 1959, organisée par Fernande St-Martin et Michèle Lalonde, avait comme thème *Création et langage*. Dans une remarquable conférence, Mme. St-Martin précisait dès le début, toutes les résonances du thème choisi:

> Les problèmes les plus fondamentaux qui peuvent s'offrir à la pensée sont ceux du langage, car de la façon dont le language s'élabore "spontanément" en nous . . . c'est-à-dire sous les influences concertées et tyranniques de notre culture et des sociétés qui nous entourent, dépendra la structure de nos émotions, la qualité de nos relations aux choses et aux êtres, la nature de nos recherches, de notre activité et de notre volonté de création.
>
> L'on sait maintenant que toute expression humaine, toute symbolisation: gestuelle, sonore, plastique, scientifique ou verbale, est une forme de langage. Si nos débats nous conduisent à examiner le langage verbal, c'est-à-dire celui qui utilise les mots écrits ou parlés, il faut malgré tout garder constamment présent à l'esprit le fait que ce langage verbal n'est que l'un des langages possibles à l'homme, que l'une des formes ou méthodes qu'il a élaborées, pour s'exprimer lui-même et ses relations avec le monde.
>
> Ce langage verbal a-t-il pour fonction d'exprimer les mêmes réalités humaines que le langage plastique ou scientifique ou musical? Il semble essentiel que des écrivains se posent la question et y répondent.
>
> Le langage verbal peut-il ou doit-il se référer aux mêmes émotions, aux mêmes perceptions du réel, aux mêmes réalités internes et externes que celles auxquelles se réfèrent les autres langages humains?
>
> Le langage est-il création? A quel moment le devient-il? S'il n'est pas création d'un monde abstrait, purement humain, quelle est exactement sa fonction chez l'homme? Une œuvre peut-elle encore être dite "de création" lorsqu'elle ne fait que mimer le langage quotidien, les dialogue et les habitudes verbales de ceux qui ne sont pas écrivains? A quelles conditions? Le langage conserve-t-il la même fonction quand il est utilisé par l'homme moyen, l'homme de la rue et quand il est récupéré par le travail de l'écrivain? En un mot, la fonction d'écrire exige-t-elle un certain maniement des mots différents du simple exercice spontané de la parole?

Robert Elie, qui devait traiter plus particulièrement de "Langage et roman", déclarait, dans un exposé qu'il convient de relire:

> Le roman n'est pas description, mais, comme le poème ou la tragédie, le tableau ou la symphonie, il est création. Il ne s'agit pas d'un retour vers le passé, aucunement d'un exercice de mémoire. Proust n'est pas aussitôt parti à la recherche du temps perdu que c'est un monde nouveau qu'il édifie, où ses modèles ne peuvent se reconnaître, ni lui-même sous les traits de Marcel. Et Vermeer, quand il peint la vue de Delft, se croit fidèle à ce qu'il voit, et pourtant aucune photographie ne ressemblerait à son tableau. Proust, plus encore que Vermeer, nous propose une image vivante de son monde intérieur qui s'ouvre à plus grand que lui-même....
>
> On comprend que je n'aie aucune sympathie pour ce langage qui se veut personnel et à la portée de tous le monde.Qu'un romancier traite cavalièrement le dictionnaire et la grammaire m'importe assez peu s'il a le sens de l'image, si d'une image il fait un monde et refait le monde.
>
> Est-il nécessaire de dire que je ne connais pas d'illusion plus dangereuse en art que le réalisme, la recherche de la vraisemblance, la crainte des situations extrêmes, la soumission aux conventions, à la tyrannie du bon sens et du bon goût, qui peuvent s'allier à la sottise.

Jacques Languirand, en abordant le même thème sous un éclairage semblable, mais en dramaturge cette fois, allait soulever de vives discussions. La dernière demi-journée était réservée à un échange de vues entre les écrivains de langue française et les écrivains de langue anglaise.

L'une des questions qui allait revenir le plus souvent au cours des débats et qui devait également donner lieu à une interrogation collective, fut celle de la réalité canadienne, c'est-à-dire est-ce que les écrivains canadiens reflètent, consciemment ou non, une réalité canadienne et d'autre part, quelle est cette réalité canadienne. La question est vaste et extrêmement difficile à démêler; elle souleva cependant assez d'intérêt pour que l'assemblée suggère d'en faire le thème de la prochaine rencontre qui doit avoir lieu à l'automne 1960 et que Michèle Lalonde et Jacques Godbout ont accepté d'organiser.

QUELQUES semaines auparavant, les prix littéraires de la Province de Québec, cette fois en poésie, avaient été attribués. Le premier prix était accordé à Pierre Trottier pour son recueil *Poèmes de Russie* (Editions de l'Hexagone) et pour un manuscript qui doit être publié au cours de l'année: *Les belles au bois dormant*. Les deux autres prix allaient à Ronald Després (*Silences à nourrir de sang*) et à Jacques

Godbout (*Les pavés secs* et un manuscrit à paraître en 1960). Pierre Trottier, diplomate de carrière, séjourne présentement à Londres. Jacques Godbout, réalisateur à l'Office National du Film, est directeur-adjoint de la revue LIBERTE 60. En plus d'être un des jeunes écrivains les plus actifs, il mène une carriére de peintre avec autant de succès.

C'EST François Moreau, un autre jeune écrivain canadien qui vit momentanément à Londres, qui avait remporté le prix du concours annuel de pièces de théâtre organisé par le Théâtre du Nouveau-Monde. Sa pièce *Les Taupes,* publiée par la suite dans *Les Ecrits du Canada français,* est impitoyable pour une certaine bourgeoisie qui cache ses tares sous un vernis apparent. On assiste à la dégringolade d'une famille "bien" qui, jusque là, avait porté un masque. Mais tous les masques tombent, les uns après les autres, dans un climat de haine qui s'aggrave sans cesse. La pièce de François Moreau a suscité diverses réactions qui ne l'ont pas empêché, au contraire, de demeurer à l'affiche plusieurs semaines. François Moreau possède de belles qualités de dramaturge et il sait écrire une langue nette et belle, ce qui n'est pas toujours le fait de ses confrères dramaturges plus connus.

VERS la même époque—la rentrée comporte toujours quantité de manifestations—une des joies des intellectuels du Québec a été d'apprendre le lancement de *Canadian Literature,* à l'Université de B.C., revue qui sent le besoin de publier des textes écrits en français. Dans cet immense pays où les distances empêchent souvent tout contact humain, l'apparition d'une revue comme celle-là est de nature à permettre des échanges de vues qui n'auraient jamais été possibles autrement. Le rôle qu'ont à jouer les revues dans la vie intellectuelle d'un pays est un rôle de premier plan. Non seulement la revue tient compte de la littérature qui se fait, mais elle est en mesure de provoquer des œuvres, de donner un public à des écrivains. *Canadian Literature* a ce mérite d'apporter aux lecteurs de l'Ouest du pays certaines données sur la vie littéraire canadienne de langue française et de faire connaître aux intellectuels de langue française ce qui peut se faire chez nos confrères de langue anglaise. Cette préoccupation est nécessaire dans un pays comme le Canada où le rôle de la littérature et de l'écrivain n'a jamais été éxagéré par qui que ce soit. L'action entreprise par *Canadian Literature*

est d'autant plus intéressante qu'elle est susceptible d'unir les provinces extrêmes du pays.

DEPUIS une dizaine d'années, l'un des principaux éditeurs de Montréal—Le Cercle du Livre de France—organise un concours annuel de romans. Le jury, choisi parmi les critiques les plus compétents, détermine le gagnant d'après les manuscrits présentés au concours. Plusieurs de nos meilleurs romanciers ont ainsi, soit au début de leur carrière, soit un peu plus tard, obtenu ce prix. En 1959, c'est Pierre Gélinas qui était couronné pour son premier roman *Les vivants les morts et les autres*. Ce livre raconte l'expérience politique d'un homme qui, après certains événements internationaux, cesse de croire en la mystique du parti et en quitte les rangs. Si le livre est intéressant à plusieurs points de vue comme document, il ne s'impose pas comme un roman de première force. La part du reportage y est trop importante pour permettre à l'auteur une construction de roman, la dimension d'une œuvre d'art. Il n'empêche que tel quel, le livre est passionant, et sa signification est à retenir pour notre milieu qui fomente souvent des révoltes sans les pousser à bout. Pierre Gélinas est un écrivain qui continuera d'écrire, voilà qui est rassurant.

EN JANVIER, la revue *Cité Libre* a fait peau neuve. Publiée irrégulièrement, trois ou quatre fois par année depuis 1950, *Cité Libre* a été, je crois, à l'origine d'une certaine évolution de notre milieu. Ses prises de position sur les problèmes sociaux et politiques ne sont jamais passées inaperçues. Se définissant comme une revue catholique de gauche, *Cité Libre* n'a jamais hésité à s'opposer nettement à la hiérarchie, lorsque le besoin s'en faisait sentir. Cette revue a été un des pôles de résistance au cours de la dernière décade. Elle aura contribué, je crois, à créer un peu plus de liberté dans notre milieu, ne serait-ce qu'en démasquant des influences occultes.

Après 10 ans, un choix s'imposait aux animateurs de *Cité Libre*: ou cesser de paraître ou réorganiser l'équipe et relancer la revue sous une forme nouvelle. Cette dernière solution, heureusement, s'imposa.

Cité Libre paraît maintenant tous les mois et sa diffusion a été considérablement agrandie. Le format a été changé et tient maintenant du magazine. Les collaborateurs sont plus nombreux et si l'on a voulu con-

server à la revue des articles bien documentés et très fouillés, on a également fait un effort particulier pour y introduire des articles plus courts qui se rattachent nécessairement à des événements moins éloignés et susceptibles d'intéresser un public moins restreint. *Cité Libre* est la seule revue du genre au Canada, et le prestige personnel de ses directeurs constitue la meilleure recommandation.

C'EST à la fin de janvier également que l'affaire *Time* a soulevé l'intérêt de toute la population de Montréal. Rappelons brièvement les faits. Un des numéros du *Time* consacré au problème mondial du surpeuplement a été saisi par la police. Le chef de l'escouade de la moralité a ordonné cette saisie jugeant que l'image de la couverture de la revue—une noire donnant le sein à son enfant—était obscène et préjudiciable à la santé morale de la population. On voit dès maintenant quel degré d'imbécilité une décision semblable atteignait. Il va sans dire que je n'aurais pas mentionné cette saisie n'eûssent été les conséquences, et l'une d'entre elles est particulièrement révélatrice. Deux jours plus tard, le quotidien *La Presse* publiait les protestations de vingt-sept écrivains, artistes et professeurs contre cetté saisie et contre toute forme de censure policière. A ma connaissance, c'est la première fois que les intellectuels réagissaient aussi rapidement, et les protestations individuelles s'ajoutant les unes aux autres, ont donné lieu à une protestation collective dont on a peu d'exemples ici. Ayant participé de très près à l'organisation de cette protestation, je constate que les intellectuels joueraient de plus en plus leur rôle dans la société si on leur en fournissait l'occasion. Individuellement, ils s'intéressent à tous ces problèmes mais prennent rarement position en public. Leur influence ne s'exerce que si tout est organisé ou canalisé par une association quelconque. Les associations ne semblent pas se préoccuper de cet aspect de la vie ni du rôle de l'intellectuel dans la société; c'est pourquoi il devient urgent que quelque chose soit fait en ce sens. La création d'un centre français du P.E.N. Club à Montréal est probablement de nature à faciliter ce rôle des intellectuels et des écrivains.

IL CONVIENT également de souligner que Radio-Canada a diffusé, sur son réseau français, à compter du mois d'avril une série de dix émissions intitulées "Anthologie sonore de la poésie canadienne".

Les poètes les plus représentatifs ont été invités à choisir eux-mêmes quelques-uns de leurs poèmes et à les enregistrer pour cette anthologie sonore. Les documents ainsi accumulés par Radio-Canada sont évidemment très précieux. C'est Fernand Ouellette et Gilles Marcotte qui étaient chargés de rédiger les textes de présentation de chaque poète.

En avril également, liberte 60, la seule revue littéraire du Canada français, a publié des traductions de six poètes canadiens de langue anglaise: Jay Macpherson, Louis Dudek, Anne Marriott, P. K. Page, Irving Layton et Raymond Souster. Ces traductions remarquables, effectuées par Georges Cartier, ont été publiées en regard du texte original. Un tel geste qui s'ajoute à d'autres, peut amener des contracts plus étroits et un enrichissement de part et d'autre.

Ces douze mois de vie littéraire, s'ils ont été fertiles en événements de toutes sortes, n'auront pas vu paraître d'œuvres importantes, à l'exception des deux livres de Paul Toupin: *Souvenirs pour demain* et *Le Mensonge*. Je crois en effet qu'une année littéraire qui ne voit pas paraître des ouvrages d'André Langevin, de Gabrielle Roy, d'Alain Grandbois, de Robert Elie, de Jean Simard, de Fernand Ouellette, de Jean Filiatrault, pour ne mentionner que ceux-là, est une année médiocre. L'année 59-60 le fut, à ce strict point de vue, même si elle vaut pas d'autres aspects que je me suis efforcé de résumer.

Sans jouer au prophète, il m'est permis d'annoncer que les prochains mois nous apporteront, autant en poésie que du côté du roman, des œuvres importantes. Et c'est peut-être la seule considération encourageante qui se dégage de l'énumération que j'ai tenté de faire.

opinions and notes

CLOTHES IN SEARCH OF AN EMPEROR

Jack Ludwig

ONCE UPON A TIME a guild of dedicated tailors turned out a robe so magnificent word got round it was made for an emperor. So an emperor's progress was announced through the land. Everyone bowed before the clothes which were so magnificent they naturally walked by themselves. But a child untutored by tailors cried out:

"Look, look, the clothes are without an emperor!"

To my parable I hopefully add *yet.*

We Canadians have just begun to write.

I'm delighted to see a magazine called *Canadian Literature;* I applaud the appearance of a Canadian Literature section at the annual meeting of the Modern Language Association; I hope for much — that the Canada Council's aid will give Canadian writers time to do the things they haven't yet done, that the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation's interest, encouragement, and high standards will bring to a large public a literature serious and complex, that a vigorous publishing industry will push the sale of work of high quality. But let's distinguish between the attitudes and audience helpful to the writing of significant literary works, and the writing of those works themselves. To parody what Gertrude Stein said to Hemingway: "Hopes, Canada, is not literature": "Grants, Canada, is not literature": "*Indigenuity,* Canada, is not literature."

We are not *yet* an emperor.

Our best so far is not so hot. Touchy stances will not make it better. The job we must do is encourage (but not falsify) hope for a Shakespeare, but not treat what is available *as* Shakespeare. We think we know what we are *not* — we are not American, nor are we British, but we also should know that these two particular negatives do not make a positive. Writing is never aprioristic. The writer who sets out to *sound* Canadian will probably end up like the young Southern belle of Randall Jarrell's tale, who came up to New York and was told so often, "honey, whatever you do don't ever lose that charming southern accent," that in time she began to sound like something right out of "Amos and Andy".

Just how significant is it to *be* or *sound* Canadian anyway? Is it only Russia that we pick up from *Crime and Punishment* and *The Brothers?* Do we really go for the nonsense about hearing the sound of

Nova Scotia's waves in the poetry of this writer, or the sweep of the bleak prairies in that of another? And where does the Canadian ocean or prairie end and the American begin? And what happens to Americans who tune their ears in Nova Scotia or Canadians who do the same in upper Maine?

The problem, again as I see it, is to have a literature that doesn't *apologize* for the fact that significant acts and actions go on in Nova Scotia, or Toronto, or Vancouver; but the creation of significant action and meaning is a private, almost hermetic act, and not really subject to prescription from even the most friendly of sources. The point hasn't been made often enough: we clearly understand the power of the enemies of literature to *thwart* it, but we mustn't think that substituting friends for enemies will *produce* it. Build the finest theatre, prepare the most tutored audience, and you may still not come up with Shakespeare. Canada is anxious for a significant literature, a significant music, a significant sculpture and painting: let the friends of the arts not press too hard, nor make fake though friendly claims for what has been done up to this point. If we are liberated from colonial status and parochial attitudes we won't mind admitting that our best this-or-that isn't really very good at all.

A colleague of mine attended an intercultural conference sponsored by the University of British Columbia's Extension Division in Vancouver last summer: she swears (if she weren't a she I might not believe her) that a prairie university professor put the Canadian situation before the conference in these magnificent words:

"How do we *establish* an indigenous culture?"

In the question one can hear the gentleman's obvious answers: first a Royal Commission on The Establishing of an Indigenous Canadian Culture, then a few grants here and there, a fine assortment of cultural carrots and cultural sticks, and Canada's in business!

Do we have so much *un*-indigenous culture in Canada that we can turn our attention to being different from the rest of Western Civilization? What does this attitude do but shut out the larger world and time to which any culture must ultimately belong? In our fear of — if you will excuse the social science expression— replicating Britain or America, we tempt a greater danger — setting up strictly Canadian hierarchies of the here and now which mistake clothes for emperors, which pretend the pillow on Falstaff's head *is* a crown, and he a true king. A fake hierarchy of the here and now is necessarily absurd; no amount of defensiveness can stop the outside world from *eventually* fitting the Canadian hierarchy into the larger hierarchy of Western Civilization in its complete scope of space and time. Let's not set up attitudes and scales of judgment which, of necessity, prove absurd when what we have is measured by what Western Civilization not only has now but has in its rich past. Sealing our self off to *establish* an indigenous culture assumes that, in our desire to be major league, we will, possibly, treat *our* best philosopher as if he were Plato, *our* poet as Shakespeare, *our* Prime Minister — say — as a combination of Solon and Pericles. Ranked in the family's hierarchy, father may seem a great wit, but in the town he's just another bore; in the town's hierarchy the local poet is a nightingale Keats, to the

nation but one more dull thrasher. I make the point too harshly, perhaps, and too frequently, doubtless; but what I fear most in Canada is a parochial defence against charges of being parochial.

Let's knock off this nonsense about an indigenous culture and let a little outside air blow into our Canadian world. Give people like Dwight MacDonald and other cultural commissars and foundation heelers the opportunity to look at us and pass opinions. If our world is flimsy as a pack of cards that outside air *should be* allowed to blow it over. If MacDonald's roughing us up makes a difference to what's going on in the arts, then, perhaps, better it should *not* go on. Only when we let America work us over will our own working-over of America have any real meaning. Only when the false icons are cleared off our mantel will we be able to swing away with style at those cluttering the American and British display places.

But let's not take the easy way and pummel the worst America—the movies, juke boxes, Luces, TV, Madison Avenue, Edgar Hagerty and Charlie Eisenhower, sane-solid-and-being-built-up-Nixon. Take a sly peek at the music, art, and lecture announcement columns of the *New York Sunday Times* and recognize the *other* America; measure our own literary men by what goes on monthly and quarterly in twenty or thirty American journals; crass commercial payola-rigging America is an easy mark. The *other* America I refer to belongs to Western Civilization as I would like to see our arts *belong*. Because we *as yet* have no emperors, let's not deny America's: they, not we, have had a Melville, a Twain, a Whitman, a James: they, not we, have a Frost and a Faulkner.

Earlier in this century, another country full of hope and empty of power made a determined effort to *re-establish* an indigenous culture *and* language, turned wildly nationalistic, its whipping boy not America but England. What came of it? Little. Ireland's Gaelic Revival kick is over (sad it was while it lasted). Two writers emerged from the Ireland of that nasty hate-filled time — Joyce and Yeats, predictably, I submit, anti-Gaelic Revival. Two writers who looked over the heads of the establishers-of-the-indigenous, the blurb-writers, puffers, bleaters who wanted a literature on their own *un-literary* terms; two writers who realized how literature could be hemmed in by friends as well as by enemies. Literature is not culture-building. Good intentions may make mountains out of molehills, but, in the perspective that openness in time brings, a molehill will be no more than a molehill.

So much for Jeremiah.

We, as I said before, have just begun to write. We are Canadian *writers*, not *Canadian* writers. Rather than imitate Ireland in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, perhaps we should imitate the England of the sixteenth century which

(see Ascham) believed itself poor of language and tradition and therefore, instead of isolating itself from the larger European heritage, addressed itself to importing, stealing, borrowing, building out of that greater tradition a significant art in England. This was a land, remember, that had had its Chaucer and Langland, its Malory and More: it *under*estimated, not *over*estimated its past and its present, and, doing so, prepared the way for a true estimate of its magnificent Elizabethan future.

Better still I suggest we get the culture kibitzers off our shoulders where, perched like parrots, they poke their sociological beaks into our literary work, squawking "are you indigenous, indigenous, awk, indigenous?" Let the eye of imagination and compassion play freely over the world scene. Let's open that eye to Canada. Polemic won't do it for us. What's needed is the writer's eye. And right now. Before the uniqueness of Scot, Ukrainian, Jew, Pole, German, Hungarian becomes the tired, proper, correct middle-class, middlebrow, civil-servant-like Anglo-Saxon to which — sadly, sadly — all Canada seems this grey day to aspire. Give togetherness and respectability a little more time and the boys will get the indigenous culture they opt for — a faded Brotherhood of Anonymity more faceless than suburban America.

Let's attend to the country, not so much to its literary reputation. Writers should catch the beauties of human uniqueness before they fly—the Mennonites, Hutterites, Doukhobors, a banquet for Gogol — human faces, forms, stances, dreams, destinies: Quebec, Nova Scotia, Manitoba, the North, the Maritimes, the Prairies, the Coast, Toronto, Montreal, concrete stages for significant drama, as long as the writer's eye cuts through the cliché and oversimplification of our literary past, as long as his eye *sees* — joy, suffering, hate, love, fear in, possibly, the least likely of places.

May I run the risk of sounding rather brutal? If I choose to stand in a tradition why not the one to which Tolstoy and Flaubert and Dickens belong, rather than to the one that includes Leacock, de la Roche, and Buchan? Who will be of greater help to a Canadian writer who wishes to write, say, only of Canada, the writers of the first grouping, or those of the second?

Frankly I see no choice. I'm glad we have critical journals and courses to consider Canadian literature. But I address myself to writers of fiction, poetry and drama and say what I am almost sure does *not* need saying (it's that obvious). Our own literature is poor. It needs richness. We are just starting to write. We can't be hemmed in by our national borders.

We have the clothes; it's time we had an emperor.

THE NEGRO IN CANADA

I am writing a history of the Negro in Canada, in which I hope to include a chapter on how Canadian writers have viewed the Negro. I would welcome information from your readers as to those Canadian novels (other than those of Callaghan, Roy and Richler) which contain references to Negroes.

Robin W. Winks,
Department of History,
Yale University,
New Haven, Conn., U.S.A.

review articles

LESS THAN A LIFE

Roderick Haig-Brown

BERN ANDERSON. *Surveyor of the Sea: The Life and Voyages of Captain George Vancouver.* University of Toronto Press. $6.75.

NO EXPLORER is more completely and intimately associated with the Pacific Northwest, especially Washington, British Columbia and southern Alaska, than is Captain George Vancouver, and probably none has left a more complete record of his work, yet he remains a shadowy, elusive character—remote as the golden figure on the dome of the Legislature in Victoria—to most people who live in the area today.

There is good reason for this. Vancouver was by no means a showman. He was a practical, hardworking seaman and naval officer, without family or other influential connections to advance him in a fiercely competitive service, and he seems to have maintained most of the time a large-scale sense of inferiority. He had no inclination to dramatise himself or his mission, the men who served under him or the difficulties and dangers they met with. He understated almost constantly, but never with any intention of creating an effect. He simply saw risks and hardships as part of the job, important only in so far as they affected it.

The job itself was essentially undramatic, a matter of skill and care, endurance, patience and sustained courage rather than one of sudden and spectacular achievement. Only in retrospect and in the light of later developments do its dramatic values appear. Few people in Vancouver's own time were equipped even to imagine the immensity of his undertaking and achievement, and few people to-day who do not know the Northwest coastline fairly intimately can understand the measure of dedication and integrity, to say nothing of the skills of command and diversity of human adjustment, that went into the Great Survey.

In addition to these disadvantages, Vancouver's character has been still further obscured by the apparent contradictions of his irascible nature, his unfailingly humane and considerate treatment and generous assessment of all native peoples he met with, the somewhat harsh discipline he maintained in his ships, the real concern he showed for the health and welfare of his officers and men. In other words, it is not easy to make a hero of him, without reproach, nor can he be shown as a dramatic villain, the successful fate of his brother officer and contemporary, Captain Bligh.

Admiral Anderson's book faces all these difficulties and contradictions and has something to contribute on most of them. His chief concern is with Vancouver as a

surveyor and naval officer, and it is here that his contributions are greatest. Anyone reading Vancouver's own *Voyage* is made aware of the meticulous care with which the surveys were conducted, the instruments checked and the findings recorded. But to the layman the exact methods used are a little obscure, and the extraordinary detail in which the most intricate stretch of coast in the world was outlined seems little short of miraculous. Anderson explains that John Hamilton Moore's *The Practical Navigator and Seaman's Daily Assistant* was almost certainly the technical guide used for the work. He describes in convincing detail the procedures suggested for making a running survey from the ships, as was done wherever the coastline was reasonably open, and the more difficult problems of the small boat surveys which were essential in the narrow inlets and arms and among the islands. He also gives a clear idea of how Vancouver probably adapted Moore's "small harbour" techniques to fit the needs of his small boat work which covered in all an estimated ten thousand miles, mostly by rowing. No one who knows the *Voyage* or who is reading it for the first time can fail to find these explanations enlightening and satisfying.

Admiral Anderson also keeps Vancouver's function as commander of an expedition of a hundred and fifty men, through four and a half years of conditions almost constantly trying to morale, in proper perspective. He is not uncritical and his habit of constant reference to the several unpublished journals of officers serving under Vancouver throws a good deal of contemporary light on many incidents that are open to controversial interpretations; but his general conclusion is that Vancouver's discipline, except on a few occasions of uncontrolled irascibility, was sound and consistent and not unduly harsh by the standards of the times and the very real exigencies of the immediate service. This conclusion is, in fact, pretty well inescapable, since both officers and men carried out their extremely demanding duties with unfailing loyalty and efficiency throughout the voyage, and this could hardly have been possible had there been any real sense of injustice and harsh dealing.

Vancouver's fits of unreasonable anger have puzzled other authors, including his own officers and Archibald Menzies who, as surgeon-botanist, took care of him during the latter part of the voyage. There is no doubt that Vancouver was a sick man, or that his sickness was progressive, eventually causing his death in 1798 at the age of forty-two or three. Several authors have suggested that the cause was tuberculosis, a common disease among seamen of that day. Anderson feels that the hyperthyroidism of Graves's disease more closely fits the symptoms. If this is so, it seems to make Vancouver's tenacity of purpose the more remarkable, and the comparatively even tone in which his *Voyage* is written a feat of almost superhuman control.

The rather sharp differences with Menzies, who was undoubtedly a charming person, have tended to put Vancouver in an unfavourable light. Yet the two seem to have been on good terms more often than not and when the length of the voyage is considered, with the strength of character and dedication of both men and the narrow quarters of the ship, any type of progressive sickness would seem enough to put these disputes in proper proportion. The same is true of Vancou-

ver's occasional ill-tempered outbursts to his officers, which certainly did nothing for morale. But the worst disservice these things have done his memory is to confuse the Camelford affair. Anderson has examined this thoroughly, from all angles open to him, but has been able to shed little new light on it beyond showing that the matter was completely investigated by the Admiralty after the voyage and no action was taken against Vancouver. Camelford was a thoroughly spoiled young man, probably an aggressive psychopath, and there is little doubt that he earned whatever happened to him in the course of the voyage. But it would still be satisfying to know exactly what did happen and how he earned it.

Admiral Anderson has made good use of his access to the unpublished journals of Bell, Puget, Manby, Swaine, Whidbey and other officers and midshipmen of the expedition. Frequent quotations give depth and proportion to Vancouver's one-man view of things, yet they surprisingly seldom affect Vancouver's own story in any important particulars. This reader felt some regret that the Admiral did not draw more freely on his own experience of the coast, as he did in describing the difficulties of the Columbia Bar, to round out and emphasise the remarkable seamanship shown by the captains of both vessels in the expedition. Some comment on Broughton's feat in sailing the *Chatham* through rocky Chatham Channel and right to the head of Knight Inlet, for instance, would have been of real interest.

Admiral Anderson subtitles his book *The Life* of George Vancouver, as well as an account of his voyages. It is less than this. The truth is that no one has yet been able to write a Life of George Vancouver, simply because too little is known of him and too much is unresolved in what is known. Anderson has been no more successful than Godwin or Meany or Howay and it remains true that Vancouver's own account of the voyage is the richest and fullest account of himself. No one has yet been able to retell the story of Vancouver's relations with Quadra and Pomurrey and Kamehameha or the grounding of *Discovery* in Queen Charlotte Sound or the meetings and incidents with native peoples of the Coast even nearly so effectively as Vancouver himself told them.

This raises an interesting literary point. Can anyone hope to improve upon an explorer's original account of his experiences, provided the man himself was reasonably truthful and literate? Who would try to improve on David Thompson's brilliant, heavily punctuated, unorthodox narrative? Alexander MacKenzie was clear and vivid, immensely effective at his best. Even the insensitive Simon Fraser seems to rise above his capabilities in describing his journey down river. All these accounts have a quality

of immediacy, a characteristic and contemporary use of language and sense of values that no later writer can possibly achieve, and Vancouver's best is the equal of any.

In retelling the story of the voyage, Admiral Anderson often loses or detracts from Vancouver's own values. This is a pity. No one should feel that *Surveyor of the Sea* is an adequate substitute for reading Vancouver himself, though it is an excellent preparation and would add life to the reading in many places. The *Voyage* is often pedestrian and is necessarily loaded down with navigational and other specialised details, besides which it is by no means readily available. But it is still the best way of getting to know George Vancouver and to understand what kind of a man he was. A tightly edited edition with a good biographical foreword would seem a logical venture for some Canadian publisher in the near future.

GUMDROPS AND MAPLE SUGAR

Gerald Newman

Canada on Stage, edited by Stanley Richards. Clarke, Irwin. $3.50.

IF I REMEMBER correctly, I took part in my first play when I was six years old. I remember very little about it. There was a character in it, I think, named Mr. Gumdrop. I don't know if I played that part or another one. But it doesn't really matter because, besides retaining a lingering fondness for his namesake, he doesn't mean anything to me now. I didn't know who wrote the play or where it came from. I still don't know, but it doesn't bother me. I enjoyed myself.

This is the most important thing I learned from my first experience of the theatre: it is not necessary to know where good things come from.

Stanley Richards is an American. During the past few years he has taken a good deal of interest in theatrical matters in this country—holding seminars, adjudicating at play festivals, and so on. And as a result of these experiences, besides forming certain ideas about the state of Canadian drama, he has come across a sufficient number of more or less indigenous plays to make a volume of some 324 pages, which he now presents to us. Mr. Richards is quite insistent that these plays are Canadian plays. Apparently, what he learned from his first experience of the theatre was not what I learned. That is his privilege.

To be fair, Mr. Richards doesn't claim that the plays in this book are good plays He avoids any such outright evaluation but chooses, rather, to describe them the long way around:

> The Canadian one-act plays in this collection are varied in theme, style, and subject matter. They all have a tone of authenticity, and every one of them, including the lightest of comedies, contains food for

> thought. But above all, they are eminently actable.

This sounds dangerously cautious to me —almost as if the editor, when he set about his job, had said to himself: it is better to have plays such as these in print than to have no plays at all. I am tempted to believe that that is what he did say, but it is a temptation I can't give way to very easily. Mr. Richards seems to regard the present publication as part of a series of events of some historical importance:

> Canadian dramatists are now becoming as professional as their American, English and French counterparts. Perhaps they are not yet as well known internationally, nor do their efforts bring the same stampedes to the box-offices of the world's playhouses, but they are on their way. . . . Now, I believe, the rebellion against the sterility of the native Canadian theatre has finally and resolutely begun.

The implication of this statement is, I think, quite clear: we are asked to believe that the plays in this book are representative of those which have at least taken the right turning and which form, if nothing more, the rear-guard of the rebellion. I cannot accept graciously even so modest a concept of their worth.

Mr. Richards would perhaps describe these plays, if anything can be so described, as being on the verge. I used to think that this was the way I would expect a Canadian to talk about what had been done in the arts in his own country. Artistically, in my experience, Canadians regard themselves as a people continually in a state of becoming: we aren't there yet, but we soon will be. I find this attitude both depressing and inaccurate—depressing because it carries with it a strong tendency to discard those anomalies of creation which do not seem to fit into a chosen theory of becoming (but which, nonetheless, may be the most valuable products of our work) and inaccurate because it also carries with it the temptation to consider as an interim development that which has already gone as far as it can go. I must suggest, therefore, that Mr. Richards, during his visits to Canada, has managed to acquire this particular aspect of our thinking in full measure. I cannot see that the plays he has chosen are indicative of any significant change in our national writing habits. They do not differ markedly from plays I remember reading fifteen years ago.

Mr. Richards tells us that Canadian playwrights are becoming as professional as those of other countries. I don't believe it. What he really means, I think, is that Canadian playwrights are becoming as professional in their way as those elsewhere are in theirs. But even if this is what he does mean, I am afraid I really can't agree. Canadian playwrights have been quite professional for a considerable length of time—professional, that is, in the only sense of the word which has any meaning in our theatre: proficient in doing well what has been done before. I have very little to argue about with the authors included in Mr. Richards' book concerning the way they handle their methods of communication. Quite simply, regarded as possibly significant contributions to theatrical literature, I don't think that those methods of communication are, at this date, worth repeating. Ultimately then, I must say that I do not find either that these plays have a tone of authenticity or that they are eminently actable.

This review is, strangely enough, not an attack on a number of conscientious playwrights who have no way of answer-

ing what must seem to be a considerable amount of gross injustice. Indeed, I must confess that, if the plays are considered separately and not in the context of this book, there is injustice in the review: generalization has forced me into being distinctly unjust to two of the authors and somewhat less so to several others. Retribution will come when all the plays, in spite of what I have said, are produced and thoroughly enjoyed. That is as it should be.

The true source of my indignation is the editor. I feel very strongly that he has put a burden of responsibility on his authors which they had never thought of bearing and should not be expected to bear. Mr. Richards has undertaken a misguided crusade for which I cannot thank him. He should have realized before he began that, if he wanted to compile a book of important dramatic writing, he would have to draw from other media in addition to the stage. Such writings do exist in this country. And he should have realized that the fact of Canadian authorship can bring about a sense of national pride only after a play has been read.

I should like to end by quoting a short scene from one of the plays Mr. Richards considers suitable to his argument. The scene is the home of Miss Betsey Barony. Working for her, but not present, is a Hungarian refugee named Zanorin. With her at the moment is her grandniece Liz and her servant Dan Loomy, who has a great aversion to all foreigners and, therefore, to Zanorin. Miss Barony has a secret vice: she is devoted to horse-racing (significantly, her nickname is Bets). Dan shares her predilection. As the scene opens, Bets has just successfully wagered for herself and Dan on a horse called Maple Sugar:

DAN: ... *I* siy as 'ow bettin' on an 'orse nimed Miple Sugar is the same as puttin' your money in Gov'mint bonds, sort of.

LIZ: A most unique viewpoint on gambling.

DAN: *Investin'* is the word, miss. Investin' in a good Canidian stock.

BETS: Livestock. (ALL *laugh.*)

LIZ: Dan! I've never known you to laugh before. And — you've got a dimple! Tut-t-t. You look like a couple of canaries who've swallowed the cat.

DAN: Ain't we told to promote goods mide at 'ome? Wot's more 'ome-mide than Miple Sugar?

BETS: Dan, I'm afraid I've got a shock for you.

DAN: Wot? Didn't Miple Sugar win?

BETS: He won all right. But it's about that "home-made" business.

DAN: Miple Sugar's mide right 'ere.

BETS: Not this Miple—*Maple* Sugar.

DAN: 'Ow do you mean?

BETS: You know how we both believe in blood lines? Well, this Maple Sugar was foaled in Canada, right enough—*but*—his dam was already bred before she was imported from France. An immigrant! With another little immigrant—very imminent!

DAN: Naow! But 'is sire was h'English, wasn't 'e? Wasn't 'e, mum?

BETS, *shakes head*: His sire was a stud from—Budapest.

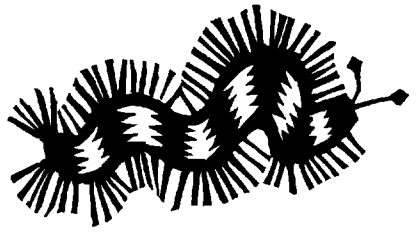
(*Dan is stunned.*)

LIZ, *to Bets*: Well! For a respectable spinster, you certainly know your biological details!

BETS: My dear Liz, I've raised goats and guppies! Dan, while you're still speechless, let me point out that you've won nearly two hundred bucks on a colt whose pappy came from the same home town as Zanorin. Blood will tell, you always say.

Zanorin turns out to be a famous Hungarian violinist, long thought dead, and presumably lives happily ever after.

There is, in the book, nothing worse than this.



VENTURE ON THE VERGE

George Woodcock

THOMAS H. RADDALL. *At the Tide's Turn and Other Stories.* New Canadian Library. McClelland & Stewart. $1.00.
STEPHEN B. LEACOCK. *Arcadian Adventures with the Idle Rich.* New Canadian Library. McClelland & Stewart. $1.00.
WILLIAM HENRY DRUMMOND. *Habitant Poems.* New Canadian Library. McClelland & Stewart. $1.00.
Poets of the Confederation, edited by Malcolm Ross. New Canadian Library. McClelland & Stewart. $1.50.

WHEN Malcolm Ross began to edit the New Canadian Library series of paperbacks for McClelland & Stewart, there were plenty of reasons to watch the venture with much more than ordinary interest. Many minor—and some major—Canadian classics were—and still are—out of print. Many good books with an experimental flavour deserved a wider public than they could find in $4 or $5 hard cover editions. And it was evident that, for various reasons, Canadian books rarely found their way into world-circulated standard collections like Everyman's Library and World's Classics. There seemed an excellent scope for an enterprising publisher to start a series of inexpensive books that would make available to a wide public the best books by Canadians and interpreting Canadian life. With daring, such a series might completely change the nature of Canadian publishing, and also give a considerable stimulus to writing itself.

With the addition of four new volumes this summer, the New Canadian Library now has twelve titles to offer, and this is enough to justify at least a first estimate on the value of the series as it now appears.

I would begin by saying that I have not yet been stimulated to enthusiasm. Indeed, I am disappointed by the hesitant and conservative impression which the selection so far evokes. There are some good safe works on the list, but no good dangerous books, and one is conscious too often of being in the presence of the worthy second-best. That feeling is not at all dispelled by the efforts of some of the writers contributing introductions to persuade us that manifestly minor writers—even in Canadian terms—are in the big leagues of world literature. When Arthur Phelps, for instance, solemnly states that William Henry Drummond's verse "is an achievement within the tradition of Chaucer, Burns and Wordsworth," what can we do but laugh? And it is time critics in Canada gave up raising laughs for the wrong reasons.

When the first eight volumes of the series appeared there was, indeed, enough to give mild encouragement to one's anticipations. They included one novel excellent by any standards—Sinclair Ross's *As for Me and My House*; a volume by Grove—*Over Prairie Trails*—which I read for the first time and found very fresh and interesting; a good MacLennan novel—*Barometer Rising*; one of the best French Canadian novels—Gab-

rielle Roy's *The Tin Flute*. These formed a sound and solid quartet, and—though neither book has ever appealed to me greatly—I can accept the literary-historical justifications for including Leacock's *Literary Lapses* and Haliburton's *The Clockmaker*. Two out of the eight early titles, admittedly, weakened the impact of this first group. Morley Callaghan's *Such is my Beloved* is a poor keeper; its flaws of feeling and psychology become more evident with age, and re-reading it impressed one more than ever with the conviction that Callaghan is a good short story writer but a poor novelist. The last of the eight volumes, Charles D. Roberts' *The Last Barrier*, was a series of fictionalised natural history pieces based on outdated biological concepts, and one wondered by what literary claims such ponderous over-writing might offset Roberts' dubiously scientific view of the animal world.

However, here were six reasonably sound selections against two fairly obvious duds. Admittedly, only Sinclair Ross's novel shone with the indefinable luminosity of a real master-work, and there was a striking lack of the fresh and experimental. But, one felt justified in hoping, after laying down its foundations of good safe works, the series might begin to build with more daring.

This is one of the reasons why the present group of four volumes is so disappointing; it is more, not less conservative. And the general level of quality is considerably lower than in the original eight.

Admittedly, there is Leacock's astringent *Arcadian Adventures with the Idle Rich*, one of the best of his books. But what balance is there in a selection that includes two Leacocks in its first twelve titles?

If there seems little justification for two Leacocks among the early volumes of the New Canadian Library, it is hard to find any justification at all for including Thomas H. Raddall's *At the Tide's Turn*. In his introduction to this volume of stories, Allan Bevan begins by telling us that Raddall is "one of the relatively small group of Canadian authors who earn their living by the pen". One wonders what this may have to do with his excellence as a writer—did not Elinor Glyn and Edgar Wallace make excellent livings without literary pretensions of any kind?—until one has read the stories selected to represent him. Then one realizes that, apart from their money-earning possibilities, there is very little to be said for them. Mr. Raddall presents a series of imaginary incidents, most of them set in the Maritimes during the later eighteenth century. He is a good historical researcher, and his stories contain some pleasingly authentic detail. But they interest one as the cases in a rural museum might, and they are not much more alive than the contents of such cases. Trite little situations—*historically* probable situations—are created and acted out by characters sketched so shallowly that one cannot even begin to judge the psychological plausibility of their actions. Mr. Raddall's stories, indeed, are written for people who like to take their history in pre-digested form, not for those who have a mature interest in fiction, and it is strange to find them in a series that purports to be ruled by literary rather than antiquarian values.

A similar objection is provoked by Drummond's *Habitant Poems*. These are interesting literary curiosa; they tell us much about popular Canadian taste in those happily past days when the public

recitation of bad verse was a recognised form of entertainment. But to treat Drummond seriously as more than an outdated popular versifier, or to suggest that his grossly sentimental fake-dialect "poems" tell us anything penetrating about French Canadian life, is just about as absurd as to uphold *Uncle Tom's Cabin* as good American writing or a really authentic picture of American society. In fact, this volume raises very sharply the question whether the literary historian in Dr. Malcolm Ross may not have triumphed over his critical *alter ego* in determining his selections for the New Canadian Library.

The last volume, *Poets of the Confederation*, is curiously labelled as a New Canadian Library Original; in fact it contains only poems published long ago. It is a selection of work by Roberts, Carman, Lampman and Duncan Campbell Scott, and for those who want an adequate and handy selection of the work of these turn-of-the-century Canadian poets it is well prepared. But it is a volume with a curious and enlightening imbalance. For, brought together in large representative groups of their poems, these four writers take on a quite striking hierarchy of quality, and one is impressed by the fact that, while Roberts and Lampman and Carman still seem—in the general perspective of English-speaking literature—rather unexceptional inhabitants of the late Victorian undergrowth, Scott speaks out, despite his exasperatingly romanticist affectations, in a fragiley but undeniably individual voice, a voice combined with a quite original poetic apprehension of the Canadian scene. Such aspects of Scott, of course, have been well discussed by A. J. M. Smith, but this particular arrangement of poems makes them remarkably evident.

But, if we have the poets of the turn-of-the-century fairly represented in the New Canadian Library, where are the poets of this century? And why, except for Mr. Raddall's antiquarian fiction, have the most recent selections all been devoted to writers fairly well away in the past? During the last thirty years or so, far more works of good literary quality have been written in Canada than in the two pioneer centuries before, yet only five out of twelve titles so far published in the New Canadian Library belong to this vital period, and only one—Mr. Raddall of all people!—out of the four volumes now presented. This emphasis on earlier writing—and not always the best of it—is laid at a time when many excellent recent volumes of verse, fiction and criticism by Canadian writers go quickly out of print and become difficult to find because their publishers will not risk further hardcover editions. It is time Canadian publishers and editors learnt the lesson of the quality paperback revolution in the United States; surely the New Canadian Library might be better used to put that lesson into practice, to publish our more vital books inexpensively, than to perpetuate in the minds of ourselves and others the feeling that writing in Canada is a pretty dull business after all.

I wish the New Canadian Library well, since I realize what it might be, but unless something more daring appears under its covers than the four volumes now presented, I fear my wishes will not be of much avail.

books in review

THE DRAMATIST AS MECHANIC

ARTHUR HAILEY. *Close-up: On Writing for Television.* Doubleday. $4.50.

CANADIAN television drama production—with the exception of CBC Folio productions, the Canadian contributions to Ford Startime and one out of ten plays on GM Theatre—has in general the amateurish air of good stage repertory. It suffers of course from the same handicaps as does repertory theatre. There is a very limited pool of actors. There is a lack (outside Toronto) of adequate studio facilities and money. Some of the actors, directors, script editors and playwrights involved are not thoroughly at home in their medium; while others regard it as no more than a way station to what they regard as better media, the movies or the stage.

While most of the plays Mr. Hailey includes in *Close-up,* with their crowded scenes and violent action, suggest that he writes with his eyes on Cinemascope rather than a 21" television screen, one could certainly not include him in the class of amateur. He is all too much of the professional. His preface would be perfectly in place in a magazine like *Writer's Digest* with its ancient formulae for slick magazine success.

"The most important ingredient for any successful television play is a strong story line.... I... devise a story plot using this simple three-part formula as an aid to thinking:

1. Set a situation.
2. Create a problem.
3. Resolve (though not necessarily solve) the problem.... Let humor in. Occasional laughs provide a leavening warmth in any drama, no matter how serious," etc. etc.

Mr. Hailey moreover has a method: the "researching" method. And every play in his book shows how well he has followed it. *Flight to Danger* shows us the inner workings of an Air Traffic Control centre; *Diary of a Nurse* the inner workings of a hospital; *Course for Collision* the inner workings of the North American Radar Defense System. All have a great air of authenticity; but none of them shows us the inner workings of human beings.

Mr. Hailey remarks at one point in his preface that "any diligent mechanic could piece a play together with research and nothing more" without "a feeling for effective drama, plot and characterisation." It is unfortunate that all his plays appear to be the work of such a mechanic (an excellent one), who can manufacture with skill one kind of rather crude machine, designed always from the same blueprint. A professional (in one case a bank vault expert, in another a nurse) extricates some innocent non-professional (a little boy, a sick lawyer) from some horrifying predicament. Time is usually of the essence in the extrication. In one minute the V2 rocket will explode. In one minute the supersonic jet-planes will collide. The inexperienced pilot must bring in the airliner the first time round for there are passengers aboard at the point of death. *Adventure Time* at the "adult" level.

As this suggests, Mr. Hailey is an expert at the kind of mechanical suspense that can operate effectively only if the characters are sufficiently stereotyped and the dialogue uninspired so that the viewer's attention is in no way diverted from the efficient running of the machine.

On the television screen Mr. Hailey's plays bear the same relation to those, for example, of Paddy Chayevsky, as the detective stories of Erle Stanley Gardner do to the novels of Hugh MacLennan. In print they lose even their entertainment value, and lacking the kind of perceptive and technically informative commentary with which Paddy Chayevsky accompanied his *Collected Plays* they offer the would-be television dramatist the worst kind of example. Moreover they remind one of another quality Canadian television shares with repertory: a timid fondness for plays that make no great demands on anyone, participator or audience. What is most disturbing about this is the lack of exploitation of the resources of the medium, particularly of its subtlety and intimacy, to which all pay lip-service. One remembers original television plays (*Twelve Angry Men, Marty,* for example) that have exploited these resources, and realises that none was Canadian. One further remembers that all the best Canadian productions have not been of original plays but of adaptations from other media. One can only hope that all those involved, especially Mr. Hailey and his fellow playwrights, will turn away from the stage and the movie screen and fix their whole serious attention on the medium in which they work, a medium ideally suited to show us the truth that moves under the deceptively bland surface of Canadian culture.

WILLIAM HALL

THE ELEMENTS OF NATURE, THE ATOMS OF SOCIETY

FRED BODSWORTH. *The Strange One.* Dodd Mead. $5.50.

ROBERT HOMAN. *Dust Before the Wind.* Clarke, Irwin. $3.25.

THE MAIN ACTION in both these novels takes place in northern Canada. *Dust before the Wind* focusses on six members of a work gang in Labrador; *The Strange One* concerns a man and a barnacle goose, both originally from the Hebrides, and an Indian girl who has spent most of her life among whites. The three find love, danger and reconciliation in the lower Hudson's Bay region. Not to give the impression that this is a *ménage à trois,* I should mention that the barnacle goose mates with a Canada goose and that the progress of their romance is made almost rigidly parallel to that of the human beings. The author's knowledge of birds and of the north gives him the material for his main conflicts, between mating and migrating instincts in the goose, and between different cultures (and different goals within one culture) in the people. Unfortunately, like the hero of his novel, Mr. Bodsworth is torn between a romantic and a realistic view of life. As a romantic, he gives us the consciousness of the goose in anthropomorphic abundance: "He had been flying about three hours when he began to fear he had made a choice he could not carry out." But as a realist he has a tendency to drop into scientific commentary about nature. To take a glaring instance, Chapter 49 begins:

> Another dawn came and the barnacle was still flying over empty sea, and now the rigors of the flight were beginning to leave their imprint. He had started with a body fattened so that it was twenty-five per cent heavier than normal. To maintain his powerful forty-mile-an-hour flight his body was converting fat into energy at the rate of about one per cent of body weight per hour.

Fortunately this tendency is less present in the main (or human) part of the book. But even there the realist-romantic split is evident. Mr. Bodsworth gives to an ambitious white man the conflict of whether to marry an Indian girl or to pursue status in the civilized world. The problem is suitably complicated by the girl's own conflict over whether to live with her tribe, whose ways are no longer natural to her, or to try to make a go of it in the white man's world, where she can seemingly be accepted only as a prostitute or a waitress. But isn't the situation falsified by the author's giving the girl superior intelligence and striking beauty, by white standards? These attributes are fit trappings for romance but not for creating "real" problems, as the author seems to wish to do. To give Mr. Bodsworth credit, however, he does put the girl in many realistic situations, most of them having to do with her relation to the tribe and its environment (the conflicts in civilization of both protagonists tend to be oversimplified and melodramatic).

To sum up, this novel is not for the sophisticated reader. Its lack of psychological subtlety is matched by an appropriate style. The writing is clear and straightforward throughout, with the virtues of expositional prose, but the vices of overemphasis and oversimplification, not to mention triteness in the face of emotion.

In contrast to Mr. Bodsworth's schematized plot and conventional writing, Mr. Homan in *Dust before the Wind* has a distinctive manner which is an important key to his attempt and its failure. He uses the present tense almost throughout, a device quite appropriate to his style which has the virtue of being concentratedly active, tense and graphic, but which frequently succumbs to the vice of being sordid, brutal or merely rhetorical. The pitch of his writing goes well with his aim, which seems to be to render the state of lost souls with no future and a past each wants to cancel. The fact that the novel contains many discrete actions but little plot might be seen as contributing to the same end—portrayal of a stratum of society which has been displaced or has dispossessed itself.

But having followed Mr. Homan this far, your reviewer can only stagger back with the dread words "imitative fallacy" on his lips. Novels may portray social chaos, but they must show a pattern behind it; they cannot be successful if they themselves are chaotic. Of the six characters on whom the author focusses, only one comes to any sort of end in the novel. Why it should be he rather than any of the other five, we cannot discover in the six flashbacks (all eleven to fifteen pages long and all in the present tense, for the most part).

Mr. Homan is obviously an Englishman who, equally obviously, has been in a Labrador work camp. He would seem to have found in the elemental bleakness of the north a fitting objective correlative for the lack of human purpose in his character's lives which allowed them to go there. In fact, the author seems as

much interested in the cosmic scene as in the social one. In one evocation of the north, he falls into the second person.

> Silence you can hear, cold that burns you quicker than fire. Then again the wind comes out of the north. The trees tremble, eddies of sand spurt upwards, little twisters roam along, spinning and whirling to sink again. A loveless land, a killer where the cat and mouse ice lurks, ready to pounce back. The green-eyed hag, whose eyes are an ice waste where red rivers flow.

Like better authors before him, Mr. Homan has been embraced by La Belle Dame Sans Merci. We can sympathize with the despair which informs his novel; for all his image-filled language, however, he renders not the active shape of life but its body sucked dry of spirit.

ELLIOTT GOSE

SHALLOW SEA CHANGES

NICHOLAS MONSARRAT. *The Ship that Died of Shame and Other Stories.* British Book Service. $3.50.

IN A POSTSCRIPT, Mr. Monsarrat explains the origin of *The Ship that Died of Shame,* the title story of this collection. He himself was once offered a job, smuggling, by a man he had served with during the war. Mr. Monsarrat became a civil servant instead, but Bill Randall, who tells his own story in *The Ship that Died of Shame,* accepts the offer, suffers the loss of his self-respect and finally the consequences of his choice. The weakness of the story can be traced to its origin; for Bill Randall, though he continually and self-consciously admits, "It would be wrong to say I hesitated for very long; or even at all," maintains a moral view unbelievable in even the most reluctant smuggler. Bill Randall is obviously a misplaced civil servant.

Seven of the ten stories in the collection are written in the first person, and many of them are based on the same kinds of personal experience, which have suffered too shallow a sea change to be successful. In *Up the Garden Path* Mr. Monsarrat himself is the narrator, even more self-conscious than Bill Randall in admitting his own limitations. He is an established writer who has been approached by a young man for money to finish a novel. The young man borrows excessively not only from the narrator but also from other writers, lives excessively, and shows none of the qualities that might make him a good writer; but in the end his novel is a great success, and he pays his debts. Mr. Monsarrat admits that the story came out of a personal experience of a less happy kind. The character of the young man retains too much of its original model to be convincing in the improved moral climate.

Licenced to Kill is perhaps the most serious of Mr. Monsarrat's failures of imagination. The narrator of this story, while on his honeymoon years after the war, meets a man he trained to kill. "Murderer" Martin has not adjusted to

peace but continues to practice his old skill. The narrator feels that Martin is somehow his own creation and therefore takes the responsibility of tracking him down and killing him. The emotional identification both men feel could have made as interesting and profound a story as Conrad's *Secret Sharer*. Instead Mr. Monsarrat relies on an ethic that makes Martin a monster, the narrator a clean-living, clean-killing hero: "But then I shot straight. It was the least I could do, for the man who had twice saved my life."

If Mr. Monsarrat wrote to entertain without posing serious human problems, neither his lack of perception nor his narrow piety would be so evident. But he is sincere. In his occasional piece about Dunkirk, *I Was There* (though Mr. Monsarrat was not there), his sincerity is a virtue that carries the story. But there is no Prose Laureate. In short stories, patriotism and nostalgia are not often adequate substitutes for insight and judgment.

JANE RULE

THE PLAIN UNTRUTH

JAMES MCNAMEE. *Florencia Bay*. McClelland & Stewart. $3.50.

PATRICK CROGAN, the protagonist of Mr. McNamee's novel, arrives on the west coast of Vancouver Island to pan for sea-gold. Encamped, he draws the *Voyage of the Beagle* from his suitcase, and reflects.

> A book was a packaged comrade, and had its own conceits, its genialities, and it coloured the truth or spoke it plain.

There is certainly plenty of plain speech in this novel, for Mr. McNamee has chosen to write in the tough style. Sometimes this is effective, and sometimes it reads like a parody of Hemingway:

> "Camping out?"
> "For a while."
> "Just get here?"
> "Just."
> "Where do you come from?"
> "Originally, or where do I come from this time?"
> "This time."
> "Vancouver."
> "Where do you come from originally?"
> "Alberta."
> "That's a big province."
> "Quebec, Ontario and B.C. are bigger."

It is not plain speaking, however, but the colouring of the truth, which wrecks this novel. For the whole plot is based on a false premise: that Indian tribal law dictates that a chief's eldest child shall be married before any of the younger siblings. In the novel, Crogan is befriended by an Indian chief, Charlie Jack, who forces him to marry *his* eldest child, Monica, so that her younger brothers may be released from official celibacy. But, as I am assured by the anthropologist, Dr. Wayne Suttles, of the University of British Columbia, no record of such a custom exists among the North-west Indians.

And how does Charlie Jack force Crogan to marry Monica? By employing his many Indian "cousins", who appear as so many Mafia-like henchmen, willing to murder with no more motivation than a nod and a wink from Charlie. (And, it should be added, extended credit, for Charlie has made a fortune fishing and bootlegging). Even if we grant Mr. McNamee his fictional premise, the unheard-of tribal law, we still have to swallow his situation which suggests that, in 1948, a prospector of European descent, free, and thirty-three, can be forced at gun-point into a marriage with a convent-educated bitch of a Vancouver Island chief's daughter without even having been to

bed with her! The mind boggles.

The more we read, the more it boggles. We note, in passing, the introduction of the extremely sympathetic Hope Wiston, an English divorcee with soft contours and a warm and understanding manner, who, the author suggests, is attracted to and attractive to Crogan. She is the complete antithesis of Monica. We may feel Hope is too good for Crogan, who has already shown himself to be that unattractive type of personality, a mixture of the stubborn and the weak, but if the author says "the heart has reasons", we are willing enough to hear him out. And then, at three-quarter mark, we finally lose Hope.

But it is the conclusion that really destroys the novel. Mr. McNamee's *deus ex machina* is a seedy old prospector, Saul Finlay, who "lays hands on" the pert Miss Jack. Her family is up in arms within the hour. The old lecher must have Indian justice meted out to him! Who prevents the crime? Why, Pat Crogan, of course. He finds the old miner's odour, appearance and very presence objectionable, as indeed anyone might, but "no man is an island", after all. So he steps out of character and bargains Saul's life for his, by promising to marry Monica, the girl he hates, the girl we all hate, if the Jacks will let Finlay go free. Any sane person, and we are led to believe Crogan has his feet on the ground, would realise the lesser evil would be to let Saul take his chances. Mr. McNamee, if one for a moment ignores his apparent blind spot in sketching sympathetic Indians, shows a certain ability in the delineation of character. Does he really think Crogan would have volte-face'd in such an impossibly idealistic manner? Surely not.

DAVID BROMIGE

DECEPTIVE SIMPLICITY

Public Servant, The Memoirs of Sir Joseph Pope, edited and completed by MAURICE POPE. Oxford, $4.50.

READING Sir Joseph Pope's *Memoirs* is like taking a brief motor tour of his native Prince Edward Island: there is a deceptive serenity and simplicity about it all. One feels when it is over that there must be so much more there than meets the eye.

The man does not emerge, is barely glimpsed within these pages. True, one sees some sort of man—but he is a stereotype of the nineteenth century "Ready, aye ready!" British colonial. Of course, it may be argued that Sir Joseph was this man; but he was obviously much more besides. He was a convert to Catholicism, an old-fashioned man of "virtue", the friend and confidant of both Macdonald and Laurier, the respected dean of federal civil servants, a diplomatic negotiator of sufficient skill to impress Bryce and Spring-Rice, an adviser on much more than protocol to Governors-General, and a warm-hearted loyal friend to many. But, beyond a realization of his loyalty and discretion, one does not emerge with a satisfying picture of the man: good, dependable old "Joe". The memoirs are well titled *Public Servant*: the unofficial man is missing, and one feels cheated.

There is no easy judgment on the value of this book. It will be useful as a document on the history of certain government departments and administrators. The diplomatic and political historian will be interested in what it reveals of men like Sir Wilfrid and Lord Grey, but it adds nothing to what Pope had already

written of Macdonald. The social historian and the general reader will find some good stories, a sympathetic picture of the problems of the French Canadian, a delightful glimpse of riding the cowcatcher on a C.P.R. locomotive through the Rockies (with Lady Macdonald!), a cool reception from that wily Japanese Foreign Minister, Tadasu Hayashi, a warm loyalty to friends such as the ill-fated General Maude of Mesopotamia, and a rather tedious description of Canada's negotiations over pelagic sealing in the Pacific, to suggest a few plums at random. It is a potpourri, as memoirs often are, but its limitations will seem too narrow to many readers. Pope's public life and recorded reflections were so centered on politics, protocol, and probity that one hardly senses his Canada beyond its official and political life. Moreover, the Pope *Memoirs* also suffer from certain fatal defects as a literary achievement.

The book is divided into two parts: an autobiography covering Sir Joseph's early and middle years from his birth in 1854 to 1907, and a biographical memoir written over thirty years ago by his son, Lieutenant-General Maurice Pope, completing the story to Sir Joseph's death in 1925. The biography covers later years of great importance in Sir Joseph's public life—the negotiations with Japan over Oriental immigration, his part in the founding of Canada's Department of External Affairs, the Sealing Conference of 1911, the fall of the Laurier Government, World War I, and the founding of the federal Civil Service Commission.

It is regrettable that Sir Joseph did not complete his autobiography. Although General Pope had access to his father's pre-arranged papers and to his "copious

diaries", the biography is disappointing. In the first two-thirds of the book, Sir Joseph's narrative flows, although his writing suggests frequently that the hand that framed countless official addresses of welcome and parliamentary addresses to the Crown, was ill at ease when it took up the litterateur's pen. His son, however, shows no literary skill whatever, and has obviously been swamped by his material. The occasional warmth and humour of Sir Joseph's reminiscences are lacking entirely in the biography. We are wrenched from one theme to another, with little continuity or balance, and less insight. Indeed, the pleasure in reading a memoir lies in the writer's assumptions or judgments as to what will later be considered significant. This virtue is lost in the second part of *Public Servant*. Where an attempt is made to suggest the setting of Sir Joseph's later career we have lost the spirit of memoirs, are not in the realm of good biography, and find the pedestrian style of a poor textbook on incidents in the Canadian past.

The index is excellent, the format ad-

mirable, the illustrations in keeping with the spirit of the autobiography. That spirit is Sir Joseph's, of which we have tantalizing glimpses: above all, of the attachment to England through the old Empire. One suspects that the epilogue, which touches on this theme, is a later product of General Pope's hand. It is in marked contrast with the bulk of the biography—imaginative, fitting, and a well-turned assessment of a great public servant of colonial Canada.

ALAN WILSON

EAT WELL, OR NOTHING WILL COME OF IT!

Sverdrup's Arctic Adventures. Ed. T. C. Fairley. Longmans. $6.00.

WHAT IS IT LIKE to spend four years in the Arctic, three of them out of touch with all other groups of men, even the most northern of the Eskimo? One answer is to be found in *Sverdrup's Arctic Adventures*, the explorer's own story of his expedition north and west of Baffin Land in 1898-1902. Previously, Otto Sverdrup had been the captain of Nansen's *Fram* on the famous Norwegian drift voyage across the polar sea (1893-96). Then, in 1898, in command of his own expedition of 15 men, he again headed the *Fram* into the Arctic ice. He hoped to penetrate beyond Baffin Bay and explore the region north of Greenland. On the first attempt the ice in Smith's Sound proved impassable, and the *Fram* wintered on the east coast of Ellesmere Island. Here, in Sverdrup's words, is the terror of the Arctic night and the spirit in which Sverdrup and his men faced it:

> The light died away across the mountains, and slowly vanished, while over us crept the great shades of the polar night, the night that kills all life . . . . For a few days longer we were able to see a faint light on the highest mountains at noon—a suspicion of dawn in the south which told us that there was life still to be found somewhere in the world . . . . Here came Franklin, with 129 men. The polar night stopped them; not one returned. Here came Greely, with twenty-five men; six returned . . . . And yet, in spite of all that had happened, in spite of all the horrors that had been experienced, we felt on the whole secure. For science has triumphed—cold and scurvy and hunger need no longer tyrannize over us.

During the winter Sverdrup crossed Ellesmere Island to Bay Fjord, beyond which he saw unknown land. His account of the sighting of Bay Fjord brings to mind the strong pull of the writings of earlier explorers on the poetic imagination. Indeed, it sounds like raw material for Keats' lines on the discovery of the Pacific and Coleridge's description of Antarctic ice:

> Such a surprise was it, and so grand the panorama which opened out to view, that we both burst into a cheer. Directly below us lay the fjord, broad and shining, without so much as a flake of snow on it—only ice, nothing but ice, crystal clear, like a huge fairy mirror. And on the other side of the fjord was a huge chain of mountains, several thousand feet in height, with snow-filled clefts and black abysses.

Yet even in the moment of triumph, the characteristic practical humour of Sverdrup is present:

> A confounded blast was blowing up there, right through all the poetry, and yet we stayed, spellbound. Had we been warm and less hungry, there is no knowing what we might not have done—stood on our heads, written verses, or some other mad-

> ness. The situation, at any rate, taught me one thing, and I had had experience of it before: if you are confronted with a great sensation, or a difficult choice, eat first, and eat well, or nothing will come of it.

When the channel to the north was still blocked with ice the following summer, Sverdrup sailed west into Jones Sound, north of Devon Island and south of Ellesmere. Here the *Fram* spent the next three winters, while her crew made dog sled expeditions into the surrounding seas and islands. Altogether they mapped 100,000 square miles, totally uninhabited and previously unexplored, including the Sverdrup Islands, the largest island being oil-rich Axel Heiberg, the land sighted from Ellesmere the first winter.

Sverdrup told the story of his expedition in *New Land,* published in Norwegian, English and other languages in 1904. It is a pleasure long overdue to read a new edition, called *Sverdrup's Arctic Adventures.* T. C. Fairley, the editor, has cut the original two volumes to something less than one-third their former length, and judiciously revised the original translation. From the story slowly emerges a humane modern Viking of science: modest, determined, objective, concerned always for the welfare of his men. These, with a touch of drollery, are the qualities that allowed him to lead without violence or dramatics fifteen men cut off from the world for four years. Sverdrup's carefully controlled imagination reveals itself in his sense for scenery, animal life, and the *Fram.*

To Sverdrup's narrative, Mr. Fairley has added a valuable epilogue, covering Sverdrup's later life and the diplomatic dispute between Norway and Canada over his discoveries, in the course of which Canada evolved her ingenious sector theory of Arctic sovereignty. In the end Norway yielded her claim to Sverdrup's islands, mainly because she was unwilling to effectively occupy them. One hopes that the all too obvious lesson has not been lost on the Canadian government, since Canada too could lose her Arctic islands by failing to be the leader in settling them.

V. G. HOPWOOD

STRUGGLE AND FLIGHT

MARTIN ROHER. *Days of Living.* Toronto, Ryerson. $4.25.

LOVAT DICKSON. *The Ante-Room.* Toronto. Macmillan. $4.25.

AS EXAMPLES of Canadian autobiographical writing, these two books are as far apart as Cape Race and Nootka Sound. The one is an intimate journal, something very like a sixteenth century commonplace book; the other is almost a novel.

Martin Roher's is one of those books which it is almost impossible to review with complete objectivity. Only the superhuman critic could read it without finding his judgment involved, one way or the other, with his emotions, for *Days of Living* is an account of the author's

struggle to live, as intensely as he can, his days of dying.

Discharged from an R.C.A.F. hospital at the age of twenty-two, suffering from an incurable kidney condition, he stretched, by what seems to have been sheer force of desire, the six weeks predicted for him into almost ten years, most of which he spent in bed. His book is a series of impressions, ranging from mere jottings to brief informal essays, of the lives of others around him, of spring and hope and love, of his desire to write, of his growing faith, and finally, but briefly, of his approaching death. It is simply and for the most part sensitively written, with a tenderness which never quite slips over the edge of sentimentality. Its intensity of personal feeling and vividness of expression go far to outweigh the unevenness and occasional banality of its style. An honest, realistic and unsophisticated account of the observations and introspections of a young man who would not lose, though full of pain, this intellectual being, *Days of Living*, if not in the strict literary sense a "good" book, is certainly a moving, though at times a painful one.

The title of Lovat Dickson's *The Ante-Room* has a double significance. Not only does this account of the author's early life stop short at the threshold of his career as editor and publisher; it develops the theme of the individual who longs to belong but stops short of committing himself fully to any experience.

The son of a Canadian mining engineer with more charm than judgment and more taste than responsibility, Lovat Dickson sees his childhood as a series of migrations—from Australia to Rhodesia, to England, to Canada and back to Europe. Each move brings its own adventures, its new interests, but each involves the tearing up of roots, the severing of bonds. By the time this perennial expatriate reaches his teens he has formed the habit of not loving too well that which he must leave ere long.

The habit of detachment is as evident in his point of view as in his story, for this is less an autobiography than an intimate but highly objective biography written in the first person. Its hero experiences the extremes of good and ill fortune as he progresses from the wilderness of the outback to the gracious living of a privileged class, from the genteel shabbiness of a London suburb to poverty in Ottawa, from the depths of despair in a mine-pit to an intellectual awakening at the University of Alberta. He is quick to take advantage of such opportunities as come his way, but the fatal pattern persists. In no activity, in no relationship does he allow himself to become fully engaged. Always the inexorable logic of self-determination drives him to close the door on a friend or a cause in order to open another which leads to a new and more promising anteroom.

This story of the development of an engaging if not always admirable personality is told without extenuation and without self-dramatization. Its techniques are those of the competent novelist propounding and fully illustrating his theme —even to the syntactical carelessness which Professor Broadus complained of in the essays of that over-confident but likeable as well as promising first-year student, Lovat Dickson.

MARION B. SMITH

LETTERS FROM AVONLEA

WILFRID EGGLESTON (ed.). *The Green Gables Letters: From L. M. Montgomery to Ephraim Weber, 1905-1909.* Ryerson. $4.00.

THE FIFTEEN letters in this book were written to a homesteader in Alberta who had literary aspirations. They cover the years before and after the publication of *Anne of Green Gables* and reveal the friendly and cheerful spirit of a hard-working woman who faced success with the same tempered good humour as she had earlier faced many a frustration.

Although Ephraim Weber dreamed of a literary career, he seems to have been one of those persons with more desire to be a writer than to write. Yet we can all be grateful to him for eliciting and preserving these letters, and for asking the questions whose answers we are glad to have—questions about how and where Miss Montgomery got her ideas, about her literary markets and financial returns, about her interests and friends. She freely responded with news about herself and her writing, her thoughts on such things as religion and mental telepathy, and her suggestions of possible subjects for his pen. (There is little sign that he ever seriously worked on her suggestions; he eventually became a high school teacher, apparently a good one.)

By 1905 Miss Montgomery was thirty-one, had been freelancing for more than a decade, and had survived years of "icy rejection slips". As she said, "Whatever gifts the gods had denied me they had at least dowered me with stick-to-it-iveness." Her earnings in 1905 she reports as $591.85. The next year brought over $800. Her steady productiveness, however, can only be appreciated by learning the rates of payment: poems averaging perhaps five or six dollars, short stories bringing anywhere between five dollars and a rare forty dollars, with "a good price" being twenty-five dollars. Because Canadian magazines paid even less than American, she sent them only what she could not sell in the United States.

In her letter of May 2, 1907 she writes:

> I must simply tell you my *great news* right off! . . . I am blatantly pleased and proud and happy . . . .
>
> Well, last fall and winter I went to work and wrote a *book*. I didn't squeak a word to anyone about it because I feared desperately I wouldn't find a publisher for it. When I got it finished and typewritten I sent it to the L. C. Page Co. of Boston and a fortnight ago, after two months of suspense I got a letter from them accepting my book and offering to publish it on the 10-per cent royalty basis! . . .
>
> Its title is *Anne of Green Gables* and the publishers seem to think it will succeed as they want me to go right to work on a sequel . . . .

This passage runs directly counter to the widespread notion that *Anne* first appeared as a serial in a Sunday School weekly and that its popular success surprised everyone. In the same letter the author describes her book as "a juvenilish story, ostensibly for girls; [but] . . . I am not without hope that grown-ups may like it a little."

Published in the spring of 1908, *Anne* went through six editions before the end of the year and the author had a file of a hundred reviews, almost all "kind and flattering beyond my highest expectations." A flood of letters to her showed that grown-ups had indeed liked it—such men as Mark Twain, Bliss Carman, and Sir Louis Davies. Twain's remark is well known: "the dearest and most lovable child in fiction since the immortal Alice";

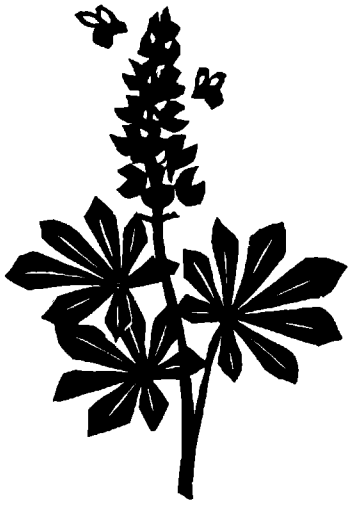
but Miss Montgomery also quotes for her correspondent part of a New York *Times* review: "A mawkish, tiresome impossible heroine, combining the sentimentality of an Alfred Austin with the vocabulary of a George Bernard Shaw. Anne is a bore."

She reports the royalties from *Anne* for 1908 as $1,730.00—nine cents per copy out of the wholesale price of ninety cents. Something over 19,200 copies had been sold in less than nine months.

Before the end of 1908, however, there were moments when the author, burdened with correspondence, avowed herself as "horribly tired" of "that detestable *Anne*." Yet she never lost sight of what to her was the cardinal point: the book's success would free her from "hack work" and enable her "to write up only ideas which would appeal to me . . . write solely to please myself. . . . I wrote *Anne* that way. . . . But of course a writer who is struggling up can seldom afford to do this at first. I've served a long and hard apprenticeship—how hard no one knows but myself. The world . . . *doesn't* hear of all my early buffets and repulses."

Thanks to Ephraim Weber and Wildrid Eggleston, the world now knows more than it did before of both the struggle and the success.

R. E. WATTERS



A SHORT NOTICE

A recent addition to The Reference Shelf, a series published by the H. W. Wilson Company, is *Canada,* edited by Gladys Engel Lang ($2.50). It is a kind of anthology, intended to inform Americans, and consisting mostly of condensations of newspaper and magazine articles and of official informational literature. It contains some thirteen pages on various aspects of Canadian culture, almost half of which consists of a piece from an American quarterly on why Canadian culture must be absorbed by American. As information this section is almost worthless. Vague "controversial topics" have been chosen, but there is no specific discussion of literary or artistic trends in Canada, and the only writer or artist mentioned is Lister Sinclair, who is introduced merely to be refuted. In a bibliography of further reading for the American aspiring to a knowledge of Canada the only books that can be regarded as illustrating Canadian literature are five novels; one is by Gabrielle Roy, and of the remaining four, two are by Thomas B. Costain and the others by John Mantley and Bart Spicer. Can one wonder that so many earnest people below the border doubt that literature exists in Canada?