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CANADIAN LITERATURE No. 10

Autumn, 1961

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editorial

THE MUSE OF POLITICS

DURING THE 1940's George Orwell touched in several essays on the deleterious effects which political propaganda could have — and seemed to him to be having at that time — on English language and literature. Contemporary politics, he suggested, deliberately debases the coinage of words, deliberately blurs meaning, deliberately restricts the spontaneity of the imagination — and "unless spontaneity enters at some point or another, literary creation is impossible, and language itself becomes ossified." On another occasion he claimed that: "Political language — and with variations this is true of all political parties, from Conservatives to Anarchists — is designed to make lies sound truthful and murder respectable, and to give an appearance of solidity to pure wind."

Canadian Literature is not a journal of politics, but as a literary magazine it is bound to be interested in the literature of politics as distinct from mere political writing. It is political writing that Orwell attacks; his attack belongs to the literature of politics. If Orwell had been a Canadian, or if some latter-day Milton were to speak out of the prairies in Areopagitican tones on some such subject as the absurdities of the Canadian obscenity laws, we would find what they had to say within our province.

But we have no Orwell and no Milton, and during *Canadian Literature's* two-and-a-half years of existence only one book has come in for review that seemed clearly to belong to the literature of politics. It is Frank H. Underhill's *In Search of Canadian Liberalism* (Macmillan, $5.00), a collection of essays — some of them remarkable — concerning many aspects of the political past and present in our country.

The poverty of Canadian political writing is one of Professor Underhill's own favourite themes:

> Where (he asks) are the classics of our political literature which embody our Canadian version of liberalism and democracy? Our party struggles have never been raised to the higher intellectual plane in which they become of universal interest by the presence of a Canadian Jefferson and a Canadian Hamilton in opposing parties. We have had no Canadian Burke or Mill to perform the social function of the political philosopher in action. We have had no Canadian Carlyle or Ruskin or Arnold to ask searching questions about the ultimate values embodied in our political or economic practice. We lack a Canadian Walt Whitman or Mark Twain to give literary expression to the democratic way of life. The student in search of illustrative material on the growth of Canadian political ideas during the great century of liberalism and democracy has to content himself mainly with a collection of extracts from more or less forgotten speeches and pamphlets and newspaper editorials. Whatever urge may have, at any time, possessed any Canadian to philosophize upon politics did not lead to much writing whose intrinsic worth helped to preserve it in our memory.

Professor Underhill's comment is all too evidently just. It is true that in French Canada the struggle for national identity produced a few writers and a few works that remain in the memory of French-reading people. Bourassa lingers as something more than a mere politician, the Abbé Groulx as something more than a separatist prophet. But in English-speaking Canada, once we have paid customary homage to the melancholy spirit of Goldwin Smith, who is there to acknowledge? What political idealist in English Canada has written a speech or a treatise that can stir the imagination a generation — or even a decade — or even a year — afterwards? We have some excellent biographies of political leaders, but it is the biographies and not the utterances of their subjects that belong to our literature.

Even in a field that has at times been so fruitful in England and France — that of political writing by the engaged novelist or dramatist — Canada has produced nothing outstanding. We have had no Shaw or Huxley or Wells, no Malraux or Camus, or even any writer approaching them in the power to give viable literary form to political ideas. Canadian novelists and poets, writing on politics, become as dull as the experts.

In recent months the advent of the New Democratic Party produced a small freshet of books and pamphlets celebrating the venture. There has been *The New Party* by Stanley Knowles (McClelland & Stewart, $2.50); there has been *Justice through Power* by Thomas Boyle (Longmans, Green, $4.50), which approaches

the Party from a trade unionist point of view; there has been *Social Purpose in Canada* (University of Toronto Press, $4.95), an ambitious symposium by left-of-centre academics who seek a basis of argument and fact on which to found the economic, social and political thinking of a new social-democratic movement in Canada.

Rarely in these books does one find the inspired touch that characterised, for example, the literature which accompanied the early social movement in England during the 1880's and 1890's. There is none of the golden eloquence that comes from passion and artistry combined. One chews disconsolately at sentences like these:

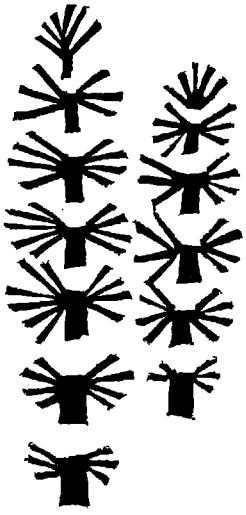
> Even at a time when it is accepted that change is the order of the day, Canadians hold fast not only to their belief in democracy, but to the conviction that in and through the workings of our parliamentary system we can build a society that will preserve freedom, achieve a high level of economic development, establish security, and provide for the educational, social, and cultural development of our people.
>
> (Stanley Knowles in *The New Party.*)

> The dynamic force that seems to be the main source of the creative and constructive changes that are manifesting themselves in these emerging countries is nationalism.
>
> (H. Scott Gordon in *Social Purpose for Canada.*)

The mental palate is clogged, and not only with the suetty texture of the prose. There is an almost obsessive tendency in almost all these writers to deal in abstractions to such an extent that one completely loses sight of the individual men to whom all this good is to be done and of the concrete earth on which they live.

In this respect Mr. Boyle's *Justice through Power* is somewhat better than the other books. Mr. Boyle has been both a teacher and a worker on the bench; he has the kind of abundant general knowledge which suggests an old-fashioned education through copious reading, and he can alternate reminiscences of factory life with apt quotations from Cicero and Rabelais. He sees the world a little romantically, and indulges in Sorelian panegyrics on perpetual conflict as the desirable state for society; he is not afraid of his own prejudices and frequently gives them their head. The result of all this is that he not only presents an idea, which we can accept or reject; he also projects the temperamental image of a man who holds that idea with a great deal of feeling because he has reached it through thought tempered by much experience.

Mr. Boyle may not have produced the best of political literature, for individual talent in the end determines quality, and he may not make many converts for the New Party. But he writes on the right track; he talks about men and not about stereotypes. And here, perhaps, is at least one of the qualities that mark off the literature of politics from mere political writing. The best political prose writer is as conscious as a novelist that he is dealing with people in a real and tangible world, and he never gets far away from that vision. Thomas More, William Morris, John Ruskin, Shelley, Shaw — how anxious they were to keep before their mental eyes the image of life going on in a believable landscape — and how rarely they fell into the trap of relying solely on the abstractions of political theory, of thinking of Man instead of men. Some of their kind might imbue our political life with the vision that is necessary if Canada is to accept the moral responsibilities the age now offers, and offers no one knows how briefly.



A NATION'S ODYSSEY

The Novels of Hugh MacLennan

George Woodcock

HUGH MACLENNAN'S FIRST NOVEL, *Barometer Rising,* appeared in 1941. During the two decades since then he has reached a position of uneasy prominence in Canadian letters. Other Canadian writers, like Stephen Leacock, Mazo de la Roche and Morley Callaghan, have established wider international reputations; others again, like Thomas B. Costain and the ineffable Ralph Connor, have gained more of the ambiguous popularity of the best seller. And during the past twenty years a number of novels have been written in Canada which are recognized as individually superior to the best of MacLennan; Malcolm Lowry's *Under the Volcano,* Sinclair Ross's *As for Me and My House,* Brian Moore's *Judith Hearne* and Ethel Wilson's *Equations of Love* come at once to mind. Yet many Canadian critics, if they were asked what novelist—in terms of total achievement—seemed to them most significant in Canada today, would probably name MacLennan, and would agree with Professor Hugo McPherson's statement in a recent essay that "*Barometer Rising* marks a major advance in Canadian fiction."

The reason for MacLennan's reputation, and for his undoubted importance as a novelist, are to be found in the original way in which he has interpreted the Canadian scene to his fellow countrymen rather than in any originality of approach to the art of the novel itself. Indeed, if we are concerned with fictional technique, one of the most striking characteristics of *Barometer Rising* and MacLennan's four later novels is their relative conservatism. They are unashamedly didactic; they rely heavily on environmental atmosphere and local colour; their characterisation is over-simplified and moralistic in tone; their language is des-

criptive rather than evocative; and their action tends to be shaped externally by a Hardyesque use of circumstance and coincidence. What does distinguish them is MacLennan's combination of theme and symbol—his development of the problems of individuals in an emerging nation by means of action built on a simple but powerful foundation of universal myth.

The myth is that of Odysseus translated into terms of modern living; the *Odyssey* itself was the product of a people in the process of becoming aware of itself, and, appropriately, the theme which MacLennan uses it to illuminate is the growth of a Canadian national consciousness. Indeed, the most striking—and in some ways the most jarring—feature of MacLennan's books is the degree to which the national theme in its various aspects forms an imposed pattern within which the lives of the characters tend to be worked out rather than working themselves out. In *Barometer Rising* it is the leap into a sense of national identity which MacLennan sees emerging among Canadians during the first World War; in *Two Solitudes* (1945) it is the clash of English and French traditions; in *The Precipice* (1948) it is the impact of American social mores on the Canadian consciousness; in *Each Man's Son* (1951) it is the lingering power in Canada of the Calvinist conscience; in *The Watch that Ends the Night* (1959), MacLennan's most recent and massive novel, it is the dual influence—destructive and creative at once—of the social idealism of the Thirties. This predominance of the national theme is a factor that must be taken into account in any attempt to understand MacLennan's work, since it bears a close relationship to his most evident weaknesses as a novelist, and also since its progressive assimilation into a fictionally viable form runs parallel to his growth towards maturity as a writer.

The expression of the theme in terms of the constant mythical structure is evident already in MacLennan's first novel. The setting of *Barometer Rising* is Halifax during the first World War. The novel opens as a young man returns secretly to the Nova Scotian capital. As the action progresses, it is revealed that he is an officer, Neil MacRae, whom his uncle Geoffrey Wain, also the colonel of his battalion in France, had attempted to blame for the failure of an attack. By chance MacRae was bombed on the night before his court martial, given up for dead, but found by a relieving battalion and patched up without his real identity being discovered. Now he returns home, risking execution for cowardice, in the hope of collecting the evidence that will clear his name. Meanwhile, there still lives in Halifax the cousin, Penelope Wain, with whom he was in love before he went away to the wars; she, besides being a capable ship designer, is the daughter of Neil's enemy.

Wain and Penelope both learn of MacRae's presence in Halifax and, while the Colonel—who has been sent home in disgrace because of the unsuccessful attack—sets out to frustrate Neil's efforts and to get rid of him as quietly as possible, Penelope and a drunken but good-hearted M.O., Angus Murray, do their best to see that MacRae vindicates himself. But the situation reaches its climax, not through the efforts of the two parties, but through the great Halifax explosion of 1917, which overshadows the latter part of the novel. MacRae and Murray recover their self-respect by superhuman feats of endurance in relieving the victims, while Colonel Wain is providentially among the dead. Meanwhile, Alec MacKenzie, a primitive giant of a Cape Breton fisherman, gives on his death bed the evidence that will clear Neil MacRae and enable him to marry Penelope and assume parenthood of the child which, unknown to Neil, she had born him while he was away in France.

The deliberate adaptation of the *Odyssey,* if it were not otherwise evident, is admitted by MacLennan not only in the name of his heroine, but also in MacRae's remark in the final chapter: "Wise Penelope! That's what Odysseus said to his wife when he got home. I don't think he ever told her he loved her. He probably knew the words would sound too small." But MacLennan not merely establishes in *Barometer Rising* a Homeric plot of the wanderer returning to a mysteriously changed homeland. He also uses for the first time a group of symbolic characters which will recur in various permutations in his later novels; the returning wanderer, the waiting woman, the fatherless child, the wise doctor—sometimes transformed into the wise old man, and the primitive, violent, but essentially good giant. If we wish to seek a Homeric parallel, the quintet of Odysseus, Penelope, Telemachus, Mentor and Eumæus seems obvious, though MacLennan is too good a writer to follow the pattern slavishly, and we shall see the relationships of these five basic characters changing from novel to novel until, in *The Watch that Ends the Night,* the wanderer, the wise doctor and the primitive giant are finally united in that super-Odysseus, Jerome Martell.

There are some satisfying things in *Barometer Rising.* The atmosphere—the very physical feeling—of Halifax four decades ago is admirably recreated, and the action moves with the right momentum towards the grand climax of the explosion. And this event is celebrated in a passage of fine reconstructive reporting which establishes at the outset the power of describing action in which MacLennan has always excelled. The later chapters narrating the rescue work are maintained at a level of sustained vigour, and the diminuendo from catastrophe to the saddened realisation of human happiness when Neil and Penelope

are finally and fully reunited gives the appropriate last touch to the novel's balance.

But these virtues, which make *Barometer Rising* a constantly interesting book, are balanced by defects which are due partly to deficiencies in technique and partly to MacLennan's view of life and the world. For example, the relationship between the lovers is the least convincing of all the relationships in the novel because of a curiously embarrassed clumsiness which makes MacLennan incapable of dealing with any aspect of sex except in high-mindedly sentimental terms. It would be hard to find anything more self-conscious, in an otherwise naturally written book, than these paragraphs with which it draws to an end:

> Suddenly Penny required his tenderness so greatly that it was though all her life she had been starving for it. She wanted him to take her in his arms and hold her as he had done that unbelievable night in Montreal when nothing had existed but sounds in the darkness and the sense that each of them had been born for that moment. All this she wanted, but the habit of restraint, the cold control she had trained herself to acquire, was still unbreakable.
>
> Neil made no effort to move up the road. He stood watching her, then came closer and his fingers touched her hair where it escaped over her temples. He gave a sudden smile, and all strain vanished from his face . . .
>
> Tears welled up in her eyes and receded without overflowing. And her fingers closed over his. He looked over her head to the patch of moonlight that broke and shivered in the centre of the Basin, and heard in the branches of the forest behind him the slight tremor of a rising wind.

This does not strike one as felt emotion; it is too obviously cobbled in the mind of an embarrassed author out of the stock clichés of romanticist fiction—tears, moonlight, sudden smiles, fingers touching temples and wind rising in the forest. Here, at any rate, MacLennan learnt little from Homer.

More serious, because it seems to spring from a philosophic fatalism perennial in MacLennan's attitude, is the mechanical impetus that at times— and particularly during the explosion—takes the action wholly out of the hands of the characters. MacLennan was a Classical scholar before he became a novelist, and a Calvinist before he became a Classicist, and the inexorable pattern of Greek tragedy still broods over his writing. Beyond a certain point, Penelope and Neil and Angus can no longer shape their fates, and it is not so much through the actions of the characters that the plot is finally worked out as through the apparent accident of the explosion, which takes on life and power to such an extent that Neil is really released from danger, not by proving his innocence, but

because of the fortuitous justice of Geoffrey Wain, a man whose life was one extended *hubris,* being killed in a falling house.

The final flaw of *Barometer Rising* comes from the too articulate concern of the major characters with the destiny of Canada. There are times when this theme assumes a crude and abstract form which tears like a jagged spur into the unity of both feeling and style. When, for instance, Neil and Penelope are leaving the devastated city, at a time when we might expect the warmly personal thoughts of two young people united after so many vicissitudes, we are all at once faced with this passage in Neil's thoughts.

> Why was he glad to be back? It was so much more than a man could ever put into words. It was more than the idea that he was young enough to see a great country move into its destiny. It was what he felt inside himself, as a Canadian who had lived both in the United States and England. Canada at present was called a nation only because a few laws had been passed and a railway line sent from one coast to the other. In returning home he knew that he was doing more than coming back to familiar surroundings. For better or worse he was entering the future, he was identifying himself with the still-hidden forces that were doomed to shape humanity as certainly as the tiny states of Europe had shaped the past. Canada was still hesitant . . . But if there were enough Canadians like himself, half-American and half-English, then the day was inevitable when the halves would join and his country would become the central arch which united the new order.

Perhaps these are worthy sentiments of an awakening patriotism, but their expression at this particular point of fulfilment in Neil's emotional life makes him seem an inhumanly and improbably cold lover.

MACLENNAN'S SECOND AND THIRD NOVELS, *Two Solitudes* and *The Precipice,* are even more dominated than *Barometer Rising* by the effort to create the arch of Canadian unity, and, because everything else in them is eventually subordinated to the elaboration of the national theme, they are the least successful of MacLennan's novels, in human understanding and formal cohesion alike.

Two Solitudes begins in a little Quebec village dominated partly by the priest, Father Beaubien, and partly by the seigneur, Athanase Tallard. Tallard is a politician with anti-clerical leanings who would like to see the material progress of

western Canada spreading into Quebec. The latent conflict between him and the anti-English priest, a man of massive figure and obstinate mind, only becomes acute when Tallard is the means, first of bringing wise old Captain Yardley to one of the local farms, and then of interesting English Canadian financiers in the possibility of starting a mill in the village. The conflict is complicated by Tallard's relationship with his elder son, a French Canadian nationalist who is arrested as a deserter during the 1914-18 war and helps to arouse local hostility to his father. Finally, goaded by Father Beaubien's inflexible prejudices, Tallard renounces his Catholicism; he is boycotted by his neighbours, his old friends, even his employees, and his English industrial partners desert him when they see that his unpopularity will harm their financial interests. Bankrupt and worn out with grief, he dies in Montreal; on his deathbed he returns to the Church—and his neighbours accept him again when he returns, a failed Odysseus, to lie in their midst.

This first part of *Two Solitudes* has a close unity; it is bound together by the common anxieties of war and by the virtual identity of the larger problem of racial conflict with the actual lives and relationships of the characters. The problem seems to grow with the story rather than the story being fabricated to suit the problem, and the characters, Father Beaubien, Captain Yardley, the financier Huntly McQueen, Athanase himself, are up to this point well-knit and self-consistent. If *Two Solitudes* had ended with Tallard's death, it would have been a moving and cohesive book. But up to this point it merely presents the problem of racial relations; it does not have the logical completeness of presenting a solution, and this MacLennan seeks, at the expense of his novel, in its later chapters.

After Tallard's death the central character becomes his second son, Paul, a Telemachus fated to complete his father's unfinished Odyssey. Paul was sent to an English school when his father broke with the Church; as he points out, he can speak English without a French accent and French without an English accent, and so personifies racial reconciliation. Later, as a merchant seaman, Paul wanders far from Canada, but he returns, on the eve of the second World War, to marry his childhood friend, Captain Yardley's grand-daughter Heather. Finally, to show his hard-won sense of Canada as a united country, he defies his nationalist brother and volunteers.

MacLennan is so anxious to make his point that he is not content merely to show Paul as the obvious human symbol of two traditions united; at the end of the novel he actually steps out of the novelist's garment and assumes that of the social historian to deliver a final chapter of authorial reflection, not on the fate

of his characters, but on the destiny of the Canada they represent.

The conclusion of *Two Solitudes* is in fact contrived to fit a nationalist message, and this divides it so sharply from the earlier chapters that, while the story of Athanase seems written by a novelist acutely sensitive to concrete human predicaments, the story of Paul reads as if it were written by a man in whom this very kind of sensitiveness had been wholly submerged under the abstractions of a destiny-ridden view of history.

The same rather startling dichotomy is evident in *The Precipice,* MacLennan's worst novel. In *The Precipice* the life of a sleepy and narrow-minded Ontario town, intended to represent Canada between the wars, is shown in opposition to the "precipice" of New York, which attracts so many innocent Canadians to moral destruction. This is the only novel in which MacLennan's principal character is a woman, and his inability to penetrate the feminine with any profundity (an inability that may well be linked with Calvinist inhibitions he later analyses so well in *Each Man's Son*) is undoubtedly one of the principal reasons for its failure. The heroine, Lucy Cameron, is a mousy Jane Austenish young woman, caught in the narrow interests of her community and apparently destined to a perpetual spinsterhood in the company of her two sisters. But she meets a visiting American business man, Stephen Lassiter, and under his influence she blossoms astonishingly—for plainness changing under stimulation into breathtaking beauty is a predictable attribute of the MacLennan heroine. Eventually she runs away from her disapproving elder sister and marries Stephen in New York. They continue to live in that dangerous city, where Stephen becomes involved in the advertising world, until—despite Lucy's efforts to counter the baleful influence of urban life—the marriage breaks up. Lucy retires to Ontario with her children, while Stephen sets off on his miserable Odyssey, succumbing to over-educated sirens, running on to the rocks of business failure, until his nerve breaks and he is reunited with Lucy in a happy ending of excruciating banality.

Like *Two Solitudes, The Precipice* begins well; the early chapters on the small town life of the three sisters are alive, self-consistent and perceptive. But in New York, among the brassy glitter of familiar clichés on city life, the sense of an original world disappears, and the novel slumps into a stock romance in which Lucy, now a smug and irritating paragon, loyally supports Stephen, changed into a comic caricature of the ulcered adman, and finally, after many betrayals, nobly forgives all and consoles him in his downfall. As a tract it is doubtless admirable; as fiction it is extremely dull.

Again, the fault lies in the attempt to force a lesson, and one notices in *The*

Precipice, as in *Two Solitudes,* how far the effort to work out a social problem in logical terms tends to weaken the mythical structure that MacLennan brings forward from *Barometer Rising.* In each of these intermediate novels we encounter again the Odyssean pattern of journey and return, and also, at least in part, the Homeric group of characters. But both plot and characters lose strength when the author seeks to state explicitly what should be suggested figuratively. And so the return of Paul Tallard and Stephen Lassiter are less moving and less convincing than the return of Neil MacRae because they contain no element of mystery; nothing can grow from them because we know far too clearly what the author wishes them to mean.

In contrast to the novels that preceded it, *Each Man's Son* is a tensely constructed and well-unified book, in which the balance of theme and mythical structure is re-established. Central to the novel is the tragedy of the failing boxer, Archie MacNeil, and in the portrayal of Archie's world of prize fights and shabby gymnasia MacLennan writes with an extraordinary descriptive power. But Archie's fate, the fate of a basically good primitive in an environment of cynical exploitation, does not suggest the only theme of the novel; there is also the even stronger theme of Calvinist guilt, which afflicts Archie and all the other people of the little Cape Breton mining town from which he comes, but which appears most dramatically in the conflicts that plague Dr. Ainslie, the brilliant local surgeon whom conscience prevents from ever fulfilling his promise as a doctor and a man.

The structure within which MacLennan develops these two themes differs considerably from that used in *Two Solitudes* and *The Precipice.* There he allowed the statement of a problem to be followed in chronological sequence by its solution, and the result was a linear pattern whose lack of inner tension undoubtedly contributed to the anti-climax into which both books eventually fell. In *Each Man's Son* MacLennan returns emphatically to the counterpointed pattern of the Odyssey. Life in the Cape Breton village, where Archie's wife Mollie and his son Alan await his return, alternates with Archie's own wandering adventures just as life on Ithaca alternates with the distant adventures of Odysseus. Mollie, like Penelope, is subject to many temptations. On one side there is Dr. Ainslie, whose mental agony is complicated by an emotional conflict with his wife, arising largely from their lack of children. He meets young Alan MacNeil and, realising

his exceptional gifts, begins to take an interest in him, to educate him, until the child assumes in his mind the position of the son his wife cannot bear. Eventually, fearing Ainslie's influence will alienate Alan from her, Mollie opposes a continuation of the education plan, and listens to her other tempter, Camire, a glib little Frenchman who has settled in the village.

But the night Mollie gives herself to Camire is also the night on which the two paths of the novel run together, and the wanderer returns, a wrecked man going blind, but not too blind to see what is going on when he opens the cottage door. So the slaughter in the great hall of Ithaca is repeated in miniature. Archie kills Camire, mortally wounds Mollie, and falls in a stroke from which he quickly dies. Alan, the terrified witness of it all, is left completely alone, and, now that all the intervening characters have so providentially been swept away, Ainslie can at last claim the boy as his own.

The tragedy is almost grotesquely inevitable. As in his earlier works, MacLennan cannot avoid seeing life running in the lines of Greek tragedy, and the mechanics of a classical destiny grind their pattern all too heavily and harshly on the human weakness of his characters. Yet this incorporation of destiny, with its corresponding weakening of the sense of human freedom, is not entirely inappropriate in a novel so permeated with the ambient darkness of Calvinist guilt. For the people MacLennan creates, destiny is an inner reality, and so for once the novelist's own fatalism accords with his subject. MacLennan suggests with powerful effectiveness the fear that always seems to overtop hope in the hearts of his Cape Bretoners, and he portrays equally effectively the relationships of classes and persons in a little society bound together by a common faith in its own damnation. MacLennan himself comes from Cape Breton, and it is likely that the immediacy one feels in this novel, the tension that unites structure and theme and myth, and makes the characters convincingly human even when they are most the slaves of circumstance, stems from its closeness to his own experience.

WHEN WE COME TO *The Watch that Ends the Night,* MacLennan's largest and most ambitious novel, we are reminded immediately of *Barometer Rising,* for here again a *revenant* comes back from the battles of life and the shadow of death to the haunts of his youth. But, once beyond this common starting-point, MacLennan's first and his most recent novel diverge on their separate errands. In *Barometer Rising* the action really centres around the efforts

of Neil MacRae to claim his rightful place among the living. But Jerome Martell in *The Watch that Ends the Night* comes home from the Nazi torture chambers —by way of a long pilgrimage through Russia and China—only, like the original Odysseus, to renew his wanderings. His return, in fact, is important most of all for its effect on his former wife Catherine, and on George Stewart, the lover from childhood whom she married after hearing the false reports of Martell's death. For years Catherine and George have lived in the quiet campus security of a present which seems sealed off from the more destructive acids of memory. And then George rings up a number which the college porter has given him and—as he hears Jerome's forgotten voice—finds himself in the echoing tunnel that leads towards a past he had thought done with for ever.

By this means *The Watch that Ends the Night* becomes a novel constructed in receding vistas of time, and in handling the leaps of memory MacLennan's craftsmanship is unobstrusively sure. We retreat with George—who in his role of narrator acts as a sensitive intermediary recording the effects of Jerome's return on others as well as himself—first into the childhood in which, by regarding Catherine as a girl rather than an invalid, he gives her the confidence of her own femininity. Time surges forward to the Thirties, the Depression and Spain and the Leftist Dream, and Jerome appears with them, an idealistic surgeon, deft with a scalpel and crushing with an argument, a figure larger than life who bursts dramatically into George's memory in the middle of that fateful telephone conversation.

> He was right in front of me now, Jerome Martell in the mid-Thirties, ugly-handsome with muscular cheeks, a nose flattened by an old break, hair cropped short because it defied a brush, a bulldog jaw, nostrils ardent like those of a horse, mouth strongly wide and sensual, but the eyes young, hungry and vulnerable, quick to shame as a boy's, charming with children and the weak, quarrelsome with the strong. There he was, that oddly pure sensualist so many experimenting women had desired, the man so many of us had thought of as wonderful in those depression years when we were all outcasts.

Jerome, though not technically the hero of *The Watch that Ends the Night,* is a figure in the heroic mould, the wanderer and the giant and the medicine man all in one, an energumen in the thirties, a man of sorrows and saintly wisdom in the fifties, who seems for most of the novel too far above common clay to be either true or tolerable unless we accept him as myth incarnate. Yet there is one point at which even Jerome becomes authentically human; that is when another tunnel of time opens up and takes us back into the New Brunswick woods, to the child-

hood of a boy born of an illiterate Central European immigrant and brought up in the primitive turn-of-the-century logging camps where his mother works as cook. The mother is murdered by one of her lovers; the boy escapes downriver and is adopted by a simple-minded pastor who finds him starving on a railway station. This part of the book is written as admirably as MacLennan has ever written of primitive action; the woods of New Brunswick take shape in one's mind as a distinct physical presence, different from any other woods one has ever read of or walked in, and the night scene in the sleeping camp when the boy escapes from the murderer is powerfully thrilling.

At the end of *The Watch that Ends the Night* Jerome dispenses his wisdom and departs for the west. The shock of his return has shortened Catherine's life so that she is now an obviously dying woman, but Jerome has enabled her and George to find themselves, to face their pasts, and to wait tranquilly in a world of gathering shadows for death. In fact, in a sense he has passed them through death, and so the three main characters become united at that key point of the Odysseus myth, the descent into the underworld that precedes rebirth into the sunlight.

There is a flavour of pietistic smugness about this ending which is hard to accept; there is also, throughout *The Watch that Ends the Night,* a suave mawkishness in talking about sex which amounts almost to diplomatic evasion. MacLennan still suffers from his Calvinist background. But, granting such shortcomings, granting also the difficulty one experiences in really believing in Jerome, *The Watch that Ends the Night* is still a novel that impresses one for a number of reasons—its craftsmanly construction, its descriptive power, its ambitious grasp of the variety of Canadian social situations, from the primitive logging camp to the set of fellow-travelling academics, from the Halifax manse to the Anglophile boarding school and the C.B.C. and the Ministry of External Affairs.

In mid-career, MacLennan is still clearly developing as a novelist. His didacticism, which will probably never leave him, is at least presented now with a discreet indirection; his fatalism has largely acquired meaning in terms of the content of his novels—it is a fatalism proceeding rather from within his characters than from the world outside. He has, in other words, largely neutralised some of his most evident defects as a writer of fiction. It is true that his handling of any kind of sexual relationship remains almost as clumsily romanticist as ever it was; indeed, in this respect *The Watch that Ends the Night* is a regression from *Each Man's Son.* On the other hand, in his three successful novels, *Barometer Rising, Each Man's Son* and *The Watch that Ends the Night,* he has steadily widened

and varied his portrayal of the character of Canadian life. Ultimately, perhaps, he is best as a social novelist, using his central myth to demonstrate the underlying universality of the personal and national experience he re-creates. And doubtless it is this function that really explains the consideration we accord him. Few Canadian critics, even among those who praise him, would seriously claim him as a great writer adept at exploring the intricacies of the human heart and mind; most accept him as the best example of a kind of novelist that may be necessary in Canada today, the kind of novelist who interprets a rapidly maturing society to its own people in the same way as Dickens and Balzac interpreted the society of the industrial revolution to the English and the French a hundred years ago. MacLennan may not have the variety or the abounding vigour or the sheer greatness of texture shared by these imperfect giants, yet in his way he is of their kind and no writer has yet come nearer than he to writing a Canadian *Comédie Humaine*.

TOO LONG TO THE COURTLY MUSES

Hugh MacLennan as a Contemporary Writer

Paul Goetsch

CRITICAL STATEMENTS about Canadian writers tend to fall into three categories. Literary nationalists hasten to root the writer to a Canadian tradition. Self-conscious cosmopolitan critics see the colonial time-lag at work. And a few sober academics rest satisfied with a thorough analysis, after the modern fashion, of the author's achievement, and suggest his place in literary history only incidentally.

In the case of Hugh MacLennan such diverging approaches have led to some confusion. Do his first three novels "sum up nicely the main stream of Canadian fiction in its first century"?[1] Or is a work like *Barometer Rising* "a remarkably fresh and stimulating book to read" only because the attitudes and techniques of the Georgian writers are applied "to a new environment and historical situation"?[2] Or is it true that "one need only consider the widely contrasted works of Virginia Woolf and Franz Kafka to visualize the diverse areas which Mr. MacLennan is now [in *Each Man's Son*] attempting to synthesize"?[3]

We must admit that all these judgements have some foundation in fact. MacLennan's treatment of nationalism, for instance, bears a resemblance, even if superficial, to the Confederation novel, and a number of the devices he employs — the omniscient point of view, the explicit commentary on action, and the labelling characterization — derive from an older tradition. To arrive at a truly balanced historical estimate, however, we have to describe the characteristic blend of contemporary and traditional elements rather than pick out, and pigeonhole, single aspects of the writer's work.

MacLennan's first novel, *Barometer Rising,* appearing in 1941, was surprisingly late as a work on the First World War. But, besides offering a fresh interpretation of the Canadian experience from a nationalistic point of view, it gives a new aspect to the war novel. MacLennan starts out from the premises which many major Anglo-Saxon writers accepted in the twenties and thirties. To Hemingway, Dos Passos and others, the war meant the end of the old social order, an initiation into violence that isolated the soldier from the civilian, made him regard traditional values as a mockery, and deprived him of any impulse to cope with the future. For a while this seems to apply to MacLennan's hero Neil Macrae. He returns to Halifax, disillusioned, lonely, vainly trying to observe in the town the same changes the war has caused in himself. "He might as well be dead as the way he was, since the chief loss in death was the ability to communicate." But on his solitary walks through Halifax he gradually finds himself. Even before the climax of the novel is reached, he dismisses, as self-hatred, the idea of avenging himself on his uncle, who betrayed him in France and still threatens to have him tried for desertion. And when the explosion of an ammunition boat destroys part of Halifax, he participates in the rescue work, without thinking about securing his position legally. In his conscience he feels that the young generation need not justify itself; the colonial society has been blown wide apart, and Canadians may now concentrate on the tasks of the future:

> . . . if there were enough Canadians like himself, half-American and half-English, then the day was inevitable when the halves would join and this country would become the central arch which united the new order.

Here MacLennan manipulates the clichés of Canadian nationalism to motivate Neil Macrae's final, positive reaction toward the war. Neil is set free from his disillusion at the moment he is forced, by the explosion, to re-live and view his oversea combat experience within a Canadian context. He realizes that:

> [Canadians] were not living out the sociological results of their own lives when they crawled through the trenches of France.

Questionable as the sociological theory that Canada came of age in the First World War may be, it becomes almost credible in the novel because there it is largely conceived in terms of character and action; so much so that nationalism remains a secondary motive, which serves to localize a story of universal implications. While the explosion images the fact of war, the ensuing rescue work, which is carried out by members of both the old and young generations, suggests that, in

the face of chaos, a new group spirit asserts itself. Throughout the novel, the process of self-discovery and rebirth is further objectified by a technique of mystification loosely patterned on the account of Ulysses' return to Ithaca. Like Ulysses, Neil remains anonymous for some time and has to prove himself through action before he may mention his name again and rejoin Penelope Wain.

Fusing the motives of war and homecoming by means of a highly contrived, parabolic plot, MacLennan manages in *Barometer Rising* to bring the personal problems of his typical characters to a satisfying resolution and also to convey, through them, a sense of the social questions involved. In his second and third novels this technique breaks down as social documentation and nationalistic considerations take precedence over character and action.

The earlier part of *Two Solitudes* seems at first to reproduce the trappings of the social world presented in the English regional novel before and about the turn of the century. As in Hardy's *Jude the Obscure,* the principles of a closed society, as upheld by typed and slightly satirized characters, are challenged by a few individuals, who, in turn, are ostracized by the society and suffer a fate near to tragedy. At a second glance, however, it becomes clear that the social reality MacLennan depicts is more complex and more modern. The values of the French-Canadian village are not only questioned by its well-meaning *seignieur,* Athanase Tallard, but also by a rival social edifice, as rigid and as prejudiced — the Anglo-Canadian community. MacLennan's point of departure is, then, a society at war with itself, on the verge of fragmentation.

His theme, the union of the two halves of Canada, is developed in three steps. Athanase Tallard, unlike the Anglo-Canadian Captain Yardley, tries to make the adjustment a political and social, rather than a human, one. He loses his friends and finally himself when, as a result of his quarrel with the Catholic church, he chooses to become a Presbyterian. His death-bed return to his ancestral faith is, as Claude Bissell puts it,

> . . . a dramatic way of saying that with nations, as with individuals, there are deep instinctive urges that cannot be forced into a common mould.[4]

Tallard's son, Paul, is better prepared to resist the pull of the two "race legends" since his education at English schools has rid him of the prejudices of his group. But the economic depression alienates him entirely from society and disenchants him as the war had disenchanted Neil Macrae. Only after a long stay abroad does Paul realize what it means to be a Canadian. His marriage to

Heather Methuen, an Anglo-Canadian, is meant to indicate the only kind of union possible for Canada, a unity in diversity:

> Now as she [Heather] watched him sleeping she knew that in spite of loving her he had never lost the sense of himself. She was not jealous of the part she could not touch. What she did have was a hundred images of him engraved on her mind, all different.

If to be a Canadian means, however, that the French-Canadian has to be bilingual, cut off from his own group, and a member, in turn, of the Catholic and Presbyterian churches, the marriage is not a union of equal partners. MacLennan's novel of symbolic reconciliation in this respect resembles the best-selling minority novels in which the dice are always loaded against the minority. His failure to come to a clear conception is paralleled by an uneven execution of the three movements of his theme, a fact which Hugo McPherson, to whose discussions of MacLennan this essay is much indebted, has well described.

If *Two Solitudes* is partly redeemed by the importance of its theme and the imaginative, though contrived and non-realistic account of the clash of opposing group values in its earlier part, MacLennan's third work of fiction, *The Precipice,* is the least successful of his novels. As a study in the contrasting sensibilities of two peoples, of Americans and Canadians, it recalls those novels of W. D. Howells and Henry James in which the international theme is interwoven with the question of the Puritan's inhibition, innocence, and experience. But while Howells and James introduce us to sharply individualized people and *imply* national characteristics and differences, MacLennan is not able to translate, into an original story, the generalizations he has drawn in his essays on American-Canadian relations.

When, in 1938, the American engineer, Steve Lassiter, comes to Grenville, one of many Victorian small towns in Canada, he is confronted by society still adhering to the Calvinistic code of belief and behaviour. He himself is plagued by a sense of guilt. In contrast to Jane Cameron, who may be said to represent the collective conscience of Grenville, he no longer believes in the possibility of becoming one of the "elect."

> Because Stephen had always feared his father, he thought of him as infallible, like God. Therefore it was inevitable that he thought of the depression as a sort of cosmic accident.

Lassiter tries to forget his own difficulties and marries Jane's younger sister, Lucy, who is glad to escape from her crippling environment. Up to this point, *The Precipice* resembles *The Old Wives' Tale* both in its plot-line and in the detached treatment of a small-town background, though not of course, in motivation, for the resolution of the novel is not at all anti-romantic. It is true that Lucy, like Sophia Scales, is left by her husband and returns disillusioned to her home town. But there she is released entirely from her Puritan heritage, recognizes the importance of love and forgiveness, and rejoins her husband at a time he most needs her. Lucy's reaction seems to mirror the therapy which the author prescribes for nations as well as individuals on the basis of an unconvincing diagnosis. According to MacLennan, the differences between the two North-American nations are to be explained by Canada's retarded development and, more especially, by the continuing influence of Puritanism. Yet, since the Canadians have not turned their backs on religion altogether, they are, it seems, in a position to help their American neighbours, who have been driven, by their pursuit of material values, to the edge of a precipice.

The odd mixture of nationalistic and religious considerations, and the cliché-ridden action, are equally responsible for the novel's failure, and mark it a transitional piece. For *The Precipice* is at least indicative of MacLennan's growing awareness that certain personal problems — those of Steve and Lucy (and of Athanase in the previous novel) — cannot be solved in terms of society but demand a private, that is, religious solution. In *Each Man's Son* the necessary shift in emphasis takes place. Puritanism is still dominant and carries social implications; but in spite of the author's unhappy "Prologue", it is no longer a sociological abstraction. It stands rather for a religious attitude, for a faith subjected to critical examination and found wanting.

The main strand of action is concerned with Dr. Ainslie's spiritual crisis. Brought up a strict Calvinist, Ainslie considers himself and the people on Cape Breton haunted by an ancient curse, by

> . . . the belief that man has inherited from Adam a nature so sinful there is no hope for him and that furthermore, he lives and dies under the wrath of an arbitrary God who will forgive only a handful of His elect on the Day of Judgment.

Since his abilities are thwarted on the island, Ainslie feels guilty and lonely. Un-

like the miners, he cannot identify himself with the boxer Archie MacNeil, whose fights in the United States make up the second strand of action. But perhaps, he thinks, he may be able to find a new meaning in life by centering his hopes and ambitions on the prizefighter's son, Alan. This attempt fails. Trying to win the boy for himself, he erects a barrier between him and his mother and drives her into the arms of the Frenchman Camire. Ainslie has yet to learn that one must not love selfishly. He has to learn also that he, himself, is searching not for a son but, as McKenzie tells him, for a God. When he realizes that his fear of the ancient curse has caused him to fear love itself, his spiritual evolution is complete. And by mere chance he may now even prove himself a truer "father" to Alan than Archie MacNeil ever was; for the boy is left an orphan when Archie returns home, slays his wife and her lover, and dies of a brain-hæmorrhage.

Critics have been quick to question the unity of *Each Man's Son* and to charge MacLennan with failing to relate Ainslie's reflections to the action. On a closer reading, however, we discover that the author has projected a second, more objective point of view which enlarges the narrow rationalizations of Dr. Ainslie and his friend McKenzie. It is the point of view of the eight-year-old Alan MacNeil. Alan serves MacLennan as the pivotal character about whom the two parts of the plot revolve. To the boy, who has no knowledge of Puritanism, or even of the meaning of sin, the events appear as a struggle between two kinds of father figure — between the boxer, who is the "strongest man" in the world but indifferent to his son, and Dr. Ainslie, who "know everything" and can explain the nature of the stars. Alan keeps comparing the two. He recognizes Ainslie's love without knowing anything about his Puritan scruples, and hopes that one day the boxer will return and chase his mother's lover away, so that Dr. Ainslie will become their friend again. Horribly enough, his wish comes true. He flees from Archie MacNeil and, in due course, will accept Ainslie as his "father". If we see Alan as the focus of the action, the novel assumes something of the quality of legend and mirrors structurally Dr. Ainslie's development. In fact, Ainslie, for a moment, thinks he *is* Alan and then realizes that his inner conflict is one between two different kinds of God images:

> The theologians, not Jesus, have tried to convince us that God, out of His infinite loving-kindness and tender mercy, out of His all-wise justice, has decided that nearly all human beings are worthless and must be scourged in the hope that a few of them, through a lifetime of punishment, might become worth saving. Now he had something specific to be angry about, and Ainslie let his rage build upon itself.

It seems that Dr. Ainslie does not so much have to emancipate himself from his Puritan environment as to find his true self. When doing his work in the hospital, he has always demonstrated unselfish love and self-sacrifice; and hence it is small wonder that he has, for Alan, embodied the principle of love all the while.

If the two points of view do not quite coalesce to make the novel a fully integrated whole, this is due to the fact that, as in *Barometer Rising,* the technique of the omniscient narrator does not go well with a parabolic plot. What the action suggests has to be commented on *ad nauseam* by the characters to show they have come to the same conclusions as the reader. MacLennan needs an narrator who can both act and interpret the action. His fifth novel, where "the story-teller and the self-explorer are one"[5] is, therefore, a major advance.

In *The Watch That Ends the Night* MacLennan gives us a study of the character of George Stewart, but beyond it he creates a symbolic structure akin to allegory. On the first level, the novel deals with various phases of Stewart's development, phases which, thanks to his wide range of interests and many contacts with other persons, come to serve as pegs for an account of the major social experiences of people living in our time. The miraculous return from the dead of Jerome Martell in 1951 releases in the narrator a flood of memories presented in a series of carefully worked-out regressions, and juxtaposed to, and thus indirectly interpreted by, Stewart's opinions and actions at the time of the Korean War. From this re-assessment of both past and present emerge two pictures unlike each other in outline. As Stewart demonstrates by stressing the prevailing passions at the expense of naturalistic detail, life during the Great Depression was quite different from life in the post-war world.

It is Jerome Martell who seems to represent the pre-war period. Jerome, on whom childhood experiences in the New Brunswick woods and the shock of the First World War have left their mark, is forever restless, reacting violently on the spur of a moment, unbelieving but searching for a belief; he leaves his wife Catherine and goes to participate in the Spanish War because he thinks a man must belong to something larger than himself and commit himself even to a lost cause. George, on the other hand, views himself as a typical representative of the time after the war. He has married Catherine, his boyhood sweetheart, has got a well-paid job as a radio commentator, is cautious, if not complacent, distrusts

passionate emotions, and, above all, longs to keep his hard-won economic and social security. He thinks he has come to terms with life.

After Martell's return, George realizes how insecure, in a spiritual sense, his position really is; for there is one point after all in which past and present meet. If the depression has meant living in the face of an imminent war, life in the fifties means living in the shadow of the atomic bomb. This idea is effectively presented in terms of Catherine's two marriages. In reaction to the threat of a diseased heart, Catherine has from her childhood chosen to affirm life in extremity; she has the strength to do so even when Jerome Martell's return reminds her how little time remains. The wisdom she has always possessed, which Jerome has acquired in the European concentration camps, "and which George tries to understand and share is the book's religious core."[6]

If the spiritual problems underlying two different phases in history and a solution couched in the form of a message were all MacLennan intended to point out, we should, indeed, fail to understand why he regarded his novel as an experiment.[7] But MacLennan also uses his version of the flashback technique to convey thematically and structurally the fact of George Stewart's religious initiation; except for the Everyman passages toward the end of the novel, the whole statement is rendered through imagery and action.

Since the passages above referred to paraphrase and even mention major concepts of Jung's psychology, it is convenient to interpret the novel, on its second level of meaning, as analogous to Jung's analytic technique — as an individuation process, in which the contents of the unconscious is assimilated with the conscious to effect a harmonization of the psyche. When George are lost in himself, given up to his memories, two persons he knows in actuality loom larger than life and take on the character of archetypal figures. Catherine seems a "queen," "a rock," "a saint," "a spiritual force". Hers is the beauty of an "angel". Her "strength," her "essence," and her "mystery" have attracted George so much that, occasionally, he has "almost drowned" in her "spirit". But at the same time, she has kept eluding him. Catherine resembles what Jung would call the anima archetype. Jerome, for his part, is called "a force of nature," "a martyr," and George's "spiritual father". He is the *geist* figure which, as Jung says with reference to the old man in the fairy-tale, appears whenever the hero is in a dilemma and needs guidance. Thus, Jerome has strengthened Catherine's will to live, has helped George to get a job, and has miraculously come back before Catherine's death to force Stewart to adopt a new attitude toward life (and cure Harry Blackwell of his obsession with Norah). Jerome's flight by boat from the

murderer of his mother is made to equate Stewart's perilous situation:

> Then a man discovers in dismay that what he believed to be his identity is no more than a tiny canoe at the mercy of an ocean.

And his return from the bottom of the ocean, as it were, his dying into life after dreadful years in concentration camps, externalizes George's mystical experience that culminates in the recognition of "the last harmony."

In a way, the structure of the novel is paradoxical. What on the factual level appears to be the worst time of Stewart's life — the depression — is, in his self-analysis, a place of danger, and yet of regeneration. Correspondingly, Catherine, the woman George loves, is also the woman he hates for the power she has over him. And if Jerome's departure for Spain seems a bad decision in 1938, it ultimately leads to his salvation. All this suggests not only that many facets of life resist logical analysis, but also that MacLennan is attempting in a work of fiction what, according to George, "the musicians alone seem able to record":

> One musical idea uttered in the minor in a certain tempo is surrender, despair and suicide. The same idea restated in the major with horns and woods becomes an exultant call to life.

If this interpretation is just, the success of *The Watch That Ends the Night* as a work of art obviously stands and falls on the credibility of its narrator, George Stewart. One reviewer has said of him that "his mania for handing out crashing complacencies on almost every imaginable major consideration in life . . . is in curious contrast to his other mania for emphasizing his many insufficiencies."[8] This is putting a basically correct observation in negative terms. George belongs to the stock type of the naive narrator. Like the high school teacher Serenus Zeitblom in Thomas Mann's *Dr. Faustus,* he is in everyday life a shrewd but not exceptional observer of events political and social. But, as he knows very well, not everything can be interpreted in his usual manner. Again like Serenus Zeitblom, he is a newcomer to the emotional and irrational part of life; it is in keeping with his character when he depreciates himself in talking of Catherine or Jerome, persons he cannot fully understand. Although he is an intellectual, he has "the grace to wonder".[9] His self-devaluation reveals his humility.

By choosing this narrator, MacLennan seems to have made a virtue of what used to be glaring faults in his previous novels. A man like George will like to generalize glibly about major issues and offer explanations of what makes people

tick. But MacLennan achieves distance between himself and his story-teller by showing how Stewart's rash judgments are corrected by the passage of time or rendered relative by his new religious insights. In the final part of the novel, however, MacLennan seems to identify himself so much with the narrator that many readers will find Stewart's remarks, rhetorical and painfully emotional as they are, hard to accept.

As Hermann Boeschenstein has recently pointed out, Hugh MacLennan is a highly versatile writer, conversant with a host of psychological problems and sociological questions, commanding a variety of devices and techniques.[10] Yet, there is a family resemblance between his novels, and if *The Watch That Ends The Night* seems an epitome of its predecessors, this is due to the limited number of motives in which MacLennan's artistic vision crystallizes. The return of a man believed dead is the mainspring of action in *Barometer Rising* and *The Watch That Ends The Night.* Adultery is made the vehicle of protest against a narrow-minded environment in *Two Solitudes,* and is an escape from personal difficulties in all the other novels. Leading characters either tend to drop the burdens of civilization and go off by themselves, or, in the manner of Thomas Wolfe's figures, have to go abroad before they recognize what their home-country means to them.

There is, however, one recurring cluster of motives that, more than any other, gives expression to the triadic structure of MacLennan's vision and lends itself to historical interpretation. The starting-point for MacLennan's novels is incomplete man and his stifled, unduly restricted life. Man, at this stage, is seen to be determined by his environment or by a traumatic shock suffered in early youth or during the war. In his best works MacLennan telescopes this fact, which has been treated at length in the modern novel, into the brief moment of a sudden catastrophe and views man as a child running away in fright. Thus, ten-year-old Roddie Wain flees from the scene of disaster; Alan MacNeil hides from his father; Jerome Martell escapes in his canoe from the lumber camp; and Marius Tallard is shocked into becoming an enemy of his father when he watches him commit adultery. The second stage of development is characterized by the "farewell-to-arms" mood (Hemingway's work is mentioned and discussed in three novels). Released from the pressures of his environment and having gone

through an ordeal, man is lonely, disheartened, and homeless. This period is likewise dealt with as briefly as possible. George Stewart's five-year stay at Waterloo is, for instance, glossed over in a couple of pages. And in *The Precipice* it is not Steve Lassiter, whose disillusion is growing from day to day, but Lucy Cameron who is in the centre of attention. For what MacLennan is, above all, interested in is how man reaches the third stage where he accepts life as it is and is able to make a quiet affirmation. As Stewart says about the political situation in the thirties:

> . . . why waste time explaining the pattern? It is obvious now, and dozens of books have been written about it. Less obvious have been some of the attendant passions that went along with this neo-religious faith. Passion has a way of spilling over into all aspects of the human mind and feelings.

Early in his career, MacLennan took issue with the notion that historical processes are rigidly determined.[11] In his literary criticism, he has charged such writers as Joyce, Faulkner, and Hemingway with reacting "in extreme and private fashion against the change in mental climate which differentiates our time from the past."[12] The mature man is to MacLennan one who faces violence or a narrow environment squarely and does not permit himself to be defeated or cramped by it. In contrast to the children, Neil Macrae and the adult Jerome Martell testify to the capacity of grown-up human beings to pass through an ordeal and assume their responsibility to themselves and to society, whereas Dr. Ainslie learns how to integrate even terrible accidents and catastrophes with a belief in love and God.

MacLennan, then, does not take a tradition for granted. Though the body of experience incorporated in the so-called modern novel is not denied but is partly accepted as valid, MacLennan, as a contemporary writer, wrestles for a positive solution. In this respect, all of his novels are experiments, for few modern writers have dared to encompass, in one work, the movement from violence to such a full affirmation as made in Dr. Ainslie's statement:

> Life was never so vivid as when it was in danger, nor was a human being ever so vitally himself as when he had passed through pain and emerged on the other side of it.

To see MacLennan's achievement in proper perspective, we have to admit, however, that he has benefited from his quarrels with the American novelists. First of all, his frontal assault on the complex of violence, by means of a stylized

story, aligns him with the major American writers. Secondly, MacLennan has fallen back, in method, on the major American tradition. It is the romance, with its air of probability in the midst of improbability and its proximity to mythic and allegoric forms of order, which enables him to blend catastrophe and affirmation successfully. Thirdly, MacLennan is close to the American writers when he deals with the third stage. His affimation in *Barometer Rising* and *Two Solitudes* seems to be a nationalistic variant of the collective humanism typical of many novels of the thirties, such as, for example Hemingway's *For Who the Bell Tolls.*

Yet even when MacLennan seems consciously to echo Hemingway, he is characteristically different. Both he and Hemingway (*In Our Time*) see the effects of the First World War anticipated by Jerome's and Nick Adams' childhood experiences in the New Brunswick and Michigan woods, respectively. But while Nick retreats behind the Hemingway code of "You got to be tough", Jerome responds more fully as a human being of his age would: he is truly afraid of the murderer of his mother and flees.

I suggest, then, that MacLennan's successful works of fiction are influenced by, and a reaction against, the American tradition of novel writing. This conclusion is borne out by MacLennan's own statements, for in 1946 he said:

> . . . is it natural for Canadians to adhere to the decaying Renaissance culture of Europe, or to the American branch cycle? There can only be one answer. Canadians must write for the American market because it is the cultural pattern to which they naturally belong. It is their only avenue to a world audience. And yet by doing so, they must compete on equal terms with American writers.[12]

Since he believed, however, that the American writers were aping the decadent experiments of European novelists, he demanded that "American literary critics should cease looking to Europe as a model,"[13] and thus repeated Emerson's famous thesis, "We have listened too long to the courtly muses of Europe."

NOTES

[1] W. H. Magee, *Trends in the English Canadian Novel in the Twentieth Century,* PhD thesis, Toronto, 1950, p. 303.

[2] G. Woodcock, "Hugh MacLennan," *Northern Review,* Apr.-May 1950, p. 5.

[3] H. McPherson, "The Novels of Hugh MacLennan," *Queen's Quarterly,* LX, 1953, p. 198.

[4] *Two Solitudes,* ed. by C. T. Bissell, Toronto, 1951, p. xviii.

[5] R. Davies, "MacLennan's Rising Sun," *Saturday Night,* LXXIII, March 28, 1959, p. 30.

[6] F. W. Watt, "Fiction," *University of Toronto Quarterly,* July, 1960, p. 462.

[7] H. MacLennan, "The Story of a Novel," *Canadian Literature,* 3, Winter 1960, pp. 35-9.

[8] W. Tallman, "An After-Glance at MacLennan," *Canadian Literature,* 1, Summer 1959, p. 81.

[9] W. O'Hearn, "A Sense of Wonder Preserved and Shared," *The New York Times Book Review,* Feb. 25, 1959, p. 5.

[10] H. Boeschenstein, "Hugh MacLennan, ein kanadischer Romancier," *Zeitschrift für Anglistik und Amerikanistik,* VIII, 1960, p. 117.

[11] "Roman History and To-Day," *Dalhousie Review,* XV, 1936, pp. 67-78.

[12] "Changing Values in Fiction," *The Canadian Author and Bookman,* XXV, 1949 p. 14.

[13] "Canada Between Covers," *The Saturday Review of Literature,* XXIX, Sept 7, 1946, p. 6.

A READING OF ANNE WILKINSON

A. J. M. Smith

WHEN I HEARD last spring of the death of Anne Wilkinson I read once again, and at a single sitting, all the poems she had written — her first small collection *Counterpoint to Sleep* published just ten years ago, the volume of 1955 *The Hangman Ties the Holly,* her three lyric sequences in *The Tamarack Review* numbers 5 and 18, and an as yet unpublished typescript of pieces written mostly in the last year of her life.

I seemed to be reading them for the first time. And I read with a newly sharpened awareness of small, immensely significant details of imagery, music, language, and emotion. There is a stanza of Emily Dickinson which describes the strange clarification brought about by death, and it kept running in my head as a sort of counterpoint to what I was reading:

> We noticed smallest things,
> Things overlooked before,
> By this great light upon our minds
> Italicized, as it 'twere.

I could not help thinking how well these lines applied not only to my own state of mind but to one of the special qualities and peculiar virtues of Anne Wilkinson's poems — their being saturated, as it were, with light, a radiance of the mind, cast often on small, familiar things, or things overlooked before, and reflected back into the mind and heart.

"The poet's eye is crystal," she noted in one of the few poems[1] that state an

[1] "Lens," *The Hangman Ties the Holly,* 5

explicit *æsthetique,* and her "long duty" and "daily chore" is to keep and cherish her good lens. The crystal eye, the craftsman's lens, the light that animates them, and the green world on which it falls: these are the instruments and materials, and the colours and lights that flash through her verse. She never knew the tragedy of not living in a sensual world. It is a sensuousness of the eye that most vividly brings her world to life, but the æther through which this light vibrates is a tremor of the mind and the vision of her green world is made fruitful by love.

In the first lines of the first poem in *The Hangman Ties the Holly* she announces one of the two main themes of her book:

> Who has the cunning to apprehend
> Even everyday easy things
> Like air and wind and a fool
> Or the structure and colour of a simple soul?
>
> New laid lovers sometimes see
> In a passion of light . . .

Light is everywhere here a symbol of truth, reality, and, above all, life. *Green* signifies Nature, sensation, happiness, grace, and again life. If these aspects of her sensibility make one think of Vaughan or Traherne in the one case and of Andrew Marvell in the other, the newness, freshness, and uniqueness of her vision are not diminished but enhanced.

A traditional background is a help, not a hindrance, when it is entered into with all one's wits about one and purified by the senses. Earth, air, fire, and water have an immediate sensational significance in the poetry of Anne Wilkinson — as well as a medieval and metaphysical one. In a poem that develops out of an aphorism by Empedocles — *I was born a boy, and a maiden, a plant and a bird, and a darting fish in the sea*[2] — she enters, through the twin gates of sensation and wit, into the phenomenal world and becomes a part of its life:

> Yet always I huff out the flame with breath
> as live
> And green as Irish grass, recalling the gills
> Of my youth when I was a miner
> Deep in the hills of the sea.

The union of the four elements and her own identification with them is every-

[2] *The Hangman,* 2

where assumed, but occasionally it is explicitly, concretely, and dynamically *stated,* as in the *fiat* of the last stanza of "Poem in Three Parts":[3]

> The stone in my hand
> IS my hand
> And stamped with tracings of
> A once greenblooded frond,
> Is here, is gone, will come,
> Was fire, and green, and water,
> Will be wind.

This is as close perhaps as this poet has come to a religious statement — or at least to a religious statement untouched by irony — but hers is the classic religion of Empedocles, Heracleitus, and Lucretius. What it celebrates is a metamorphosis. Over and over again she descends into the earth like Flora or Eurydice or merges white flesh, red blood, into the leafy green of a tree like Daphne:

> Let the world go limp, put it to rest,
> Give it a soft wet day and while it sleeps
> Touch a drenched leaf; . . .
>
> Before you turn
> Uncurl prehensile fingers from the tree,
> Cut your name on bark, search
> The letters for your lost identity.[4]

A complete poem, though not a very long one, must be quoted as perhaps the easiest and most striking illustration of the theme of metamorphosis. It is entitled "The Red and the Green",[5] and it will serve as a kind of epitome of qualities defining Anne Wilkinson's special and indeed unique poetic sensibility:

> Here, where summer slips
> Its sovereigns through my fingers
> I put on my body and go forth
> To seek my blood.

[3] *The Hangman,* 52
[4] *The Hangman,* 32
[5] *The Hangman,* 23

I walk the hollow subway
Of the ear; its tunnel
Clean of blare
Echoes the lost red syllable.

Free from cramp and chap of winter
Skin is minstrel, sings
Tall tales and shady
Of the kings of Nemi Wood.

I walk an ancient path
Wearing my warmth and singing
The notes of a Druid song
In the ear of Jack-in-the-Green.

But the quest turns round, the goal,
My human red centre
Goes whey in the wind,
Mislaid in the curd and why of memory.

Confused, I gather rosemary
And stitch the leaves
To green hearts on my sleeve;
My new green arteries

Fly streamers from the maypole of my arms,
From head to toe
My blood sings green
From every heart a green amnesia rings.

My blood sings green: this is one aspect of her poetry — its intimate sensuous identification with life as a growth out of the earth; and it implies a Pan-ic or Lawrencian forgetfulness of the non-living dry and essentially irrelevant intellection of much of our routine living. But knowledge, intellect, and the motions of thought are by no means absent from these lines. They are seen of course in the buried literary allusions and the puns. The former are perhaps not essential, but they are not merely ornamental or snobbish either — they italicise and connect rather than make an initial or final assertion — and it's good to find confirmation of one's feelings in Sir James Frazer, Mother Goose, Shakespeare, and the

author of "Greensleeves." The puns, as elsewhere in this poetry,[6] not only give an impression of liveliness, sharpness, and wit, but convey with greater precision and intensity, and immensely greater compactness, a relationship that might take clauses and sentences instead of a single word to get across. *The curd and why of memory,* for instance, presents the mental gropings after something forgotten with an almost physiological suggestion of the tremblings of the membrane of nerves and brain.

This poetry of green thoughts in a green shade is connected also with the red of the earth and of blood. The identification of the poet with nature is sensuous and emotional. It is achieved in love, and it is achieved in death. These two themes — and a union of them both in a sort of love-hate relationship with death — are found in some of the earliest of the poems as well as in some truly terror-inspiring poems which give a sombre intensity to *The Hangman Ties the Holly.* They are found too, as might have been expected, in the last, uncollected, poems.

LOVE, IN THE POETRY of Anne Wilkinson, is sometimes, as in "Strangers,"[7] a game of wit, but it is always also a senuous involvement, not a twining of bodies and minds only but a mingling with the green sap of Nature in a wholly holy communion. This is the significance of the delightful and lovely poem beginning "In June and gentle oven . . ."[8]

> In June and gentle oven
> Summer kingdoms simmer
> As they come
> And flower and leaf and love
> Release
> Their sweetest juice . . .

The music is impeccable. Presently there is one faintly sinister image, which soon we realize is intended to hint at the necessary serpent in every Eden,—

> An adder of a stream
> Parts the daisies.

[6] *The Hangman*: "new laid lover," 1; "mother tongue" 2; "the warm gulf seam of love" 11; "happily lived ever waterward" 11; — to cite only a few.

[7] *The Hangman,* 8

[8] *The Hangman,* 17

But lovers are protected by Nature, instinct, and joy, and are "saved":

> And where, in curve of meadow,
> Lovers, touching, lie,
> A church of grass stands up
> And walls them, holy, in.

The closing stanza of this poem is one of the most beautiful expressions in the whole field of modern poetry of the divinity of love achieved in the sensuous community of the green world:

> Then two in one the lovers lie
> And peel the skin of summer
> With their teeth
> And suck its marrow from a kiss
> So charged with grace
> The tongue, all knowing
> Holds the sap of June
> Aloof from seasons, flowing.

Something of this fertile richness is found in a later love poem — the sequence of five lyrics entitled "Variations on a Theme" in *The Tamarack Review,* No. 5. Here, however, the pure and innocent religion of love and nature has been clouded by an intense awareness, amounting almost to a foreknowledge, of death, and there is an air of faint desperation in the spells and magic rituals that (I cannot feel successfully) are tried as exorcisms.

The poem is a series of variations on a sentence of Thoreau: "A man needs only to be turned around once with his eyes shut to be lost in this world." The key words are *turned* and *lost*. Each of the five lyrics explores one of the ways of being lost. Thoreau thought of losing the world in the Christian sense of a spiritual achievement, but there are many ways of being lost — some are a kind of ecstasy and all are bewildering. In the first of the variations it is childhood's "first flinging of the blood about in circles", a recollection of games in the green meadow when the child spins round and round in dizzying circles until the world and its own name are lost. The second and fourth lyrics are visions of horror — the second of death, the fourth of madness.

> From arteries in graves, columns
> Rose to soil the sky; and down
> Their fluted sides the overflow
> Slid to earth, unrolled and spread
> On stalk and stone its plushy red.

The elegance of the writing enhances the horror of this second section, but the intensity increases still more in the nightmare-like fourth:

> where above me one black crow
> Had cawed my spring, two dirty doves
> Sang daintily. I stoned the birds
> But no stone hit, for of white gloves
> My hands were made; I stole a stick
> To break the sky; it did not crack;
> I could not curse — though I was lost,
> Had trespassed on some stranger's dream . . .

The third section, like the first, is a happy one. It deals with the magical transformation of being 'lost' in love. Significantly, it is the only poem in the sequence in which the protagonist is *we* not *I*. It is a very beautiful poem, and short enough to quote in full:

> We shut our eyes and turned once round
> And were up borne by our down fall.
> Such life was in us on the ground
> That while we moved, earth ceased to roll,
> And oceans lagged, and all the flames
> Except our fire, and we were lost
> In province that no settler names.

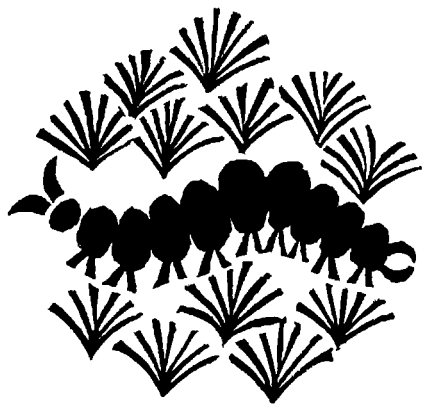
The fifth poem rises almost directly out of this one and develops the theme of death more simply and traditionally than it had been treated in the second and fourth:

> Death turned me first, will twirl me last
> And throw me down beneath the grass
> And strip me of this stuff, this dress
> I am, although its form be lost.

IF THE GREEN, light-riddled poetry in which Anne Wilkinson celebrated life and the love of life makes one think of Marvell and Vaughan, she is also, like Webster (and not in her last poems only) much possessed by death. I mentioned earlier the love-hate relationship with death that seems almost in-

herent in her sensibility and that animates in a truly terror-inspiring way a few of her most powerful poems, "The Pressure of Night,"[9] "Strangers,"[10] "Topsoil to the Wind,"[11] as well as the recent deceptively light and witty "Notes on Robert Burton's *The Anatomy of Melancholy*"[12] and the brilliant *"A Cautionary Tale."*[13] These place Anne Wilkinson among the small group of women poets who have written of love and death with a peculiarly feminine intuition, an accuracy, and an elegance that does not hide but enhance the intensity of the emotion — Emily Dickinson, Christina Rossetti, Elinor Wylie, and Leonie Adams. Her work as a whole puts her, certainly, in the forefront of contemporary Canadian poets. Like Reaney and Macpherson and Avison she has helped us to be a little more aware and hence a little more civilized. Her poems are a legacy whose value can never be diminished.

[9] *The Hangman,* 4
[10] *The Hangman,* 8
[11] *The Hangman,* 31
[12] *The Tamarack Review,* No. 18, 36-40
[13] *The Oxford Book of Canadian Verse,* no. 211



EMILE NELLIGAN

Poete de l'Inquietude

Paul Wyczynski

IL EST SUPERFLU de rappeler que la littérature canadienne-française est jeune, qu'elle a produit, vers 1850, avec Garneau et Crémazie, ses premieres œuvres de qualité. Mais ce qu'on n'accentue peut-être pas assez, c'est que vers la fin du XIXe siècle, elle a déjà pu se vanter d'un poète qui, brûlant les étapes, se fit valoir par son expérience poétique et l'art de ses vers. Emile Nelligan (1879-1941) prend place parmi les meilleurs poètes canadiens. Dans l'espace de trois ans il a découvert un monde poétique qui allait devenir celui de Saint-Denys Garneau, d'Alain Grandbois et d'Anne Hébert.

En 1899, à l'âge de dix-neuf ans, Nelligan a "sombré dans l'abîme du rêve". Cet euphémisme fut inventé par le poète lui-même: c'est la chute de son "Vaisseau d'or" sonnet qui résume la dernière étape de sa déstinée tragique. L'expression a fait fortune depuis le moment où Dantin lá fit employer, dans un article en 1902, pour rendre moins cruelle la réclusion de son jeune ami, terrassé par la démence. Destinée tragique, certes, mais pas moins féconde en rêves et expériences. Charles Gill a très bien remarqué que cet enfant fut touché par l'amour des muses dès le berceau et que rien ne put le ramener à la vie ordinaire d'un citadin moyen. Quelques vacances passées à Cacouna, un voyage à Liverpool, une année d'études manquées au Collège Sainte-Marie, quelque moments de satisfaction au sein de l'Ecole Littéraire de Montréal, voilà les faits saillants correspondant à l'âge de sa lucidité. Ce serait un procédé peu heureux que de chercher dans la biographie du poète le meilleur de son message: on le trouvera annoncé dans ses cent-soixante poèmes où la solitude et la souffrance, le rêve et l'inquiétude font gonfler mots et images.

Nous voulons aujourd'hui sonder cette œuvre douloureusement tronquée par le destin, afin d'y saisir quelques moments d'une âme tourmentée. Ceux qui ne s'éloignent pas des préceptes de Boileau reprochent à Nelligan d'avoir écrit une "œuvre morbide", "sans idées". Etrange objection qui ne pourrait être réfutée que par une autre, à savoir: reprocher à un tailleur de ne pas être cordonnier. Il faudrait dire plutôt que sans être un traité de philosophie ou de morale, la poésie de Nelligan se fait surtout valoir par ses qualités de témoignage. Ce jeune auteur ne nous éblouit pas par ses idées, mais plutôt par sa présence; cette chaleur ajoutée au mot, cette vibration qui anime les images. N'est-ce pas Nelligan lui-même qui a défini sa manière de sentir et de voir: "Ma pensée est couleur de lunes d'or lointaines"? Ainsi, l'esprit de Nelligan n'est pas absent dans son œuvre, mais il a sa propre façon d'exister dans le flou des fièvres, des rêves et des inquiétudes: il voltige comme un papillon, égaré dans la prairie de sa riche sensibilité.

Ce qu'on doit surtout découvrir dans les poèmes de Nelligan ce sont les invisibles antènes qui captent et transfigurent les pleurs étouffés du cœur et les cris de l'âme inquiète. La poésie ne s'infiltre dans les mots que par le van d'une sensibilité surexcitée. Et la parole et le trope ne s'expliquent autrement qu'au-dessus d'un dénominateur de durée subjective. A quelques exceptions près, le monde poétique de Nelligan ne pourrait donc subir d'autres mesures que celles qui permettent d'apprécier la complexité psychologique d'un homme qui souffre.

L'inquiétude de Nelligan est l'un des principaux stimulants de son processus créateur. Elle est née de sa curiosité d'enfant, de cette observation innocente de l'écoulement du temps, du changement continuel des choses. Cette prise de conscience, qui a marqué en profondeur la poésie romantique, est propre à tout homme avide de scruter le mystère de son existence. Mais l'inquiétude de Nelligan est, dès le début, plus dynamique et plus féconde. Elle assure à son rêve une sorte de magnétisme qui unit en un même délire sens, cœur et esprit. La vision de notre poète s'élance ainsi vers cette vaste perspective dont il ne retient que deux motifs: berceau et cercueil. Le temporel baigne dans une tristesse sans cause: la vie qui s'inscrit dans les fleurs qui se fanent, dans les feuilles qui jaunissent, dans les rayons qui s'estompent, offre au jeune artiste la meilleure illustration de la condition humaine. Alors, la craintes et l'espérance se heurtent, l'une contre l'autre, comme des chauves-souris auxquelles l'ombre n'a pu procurer assez d'espace pour exister.

L'itinéraire des inquiétudes de Nelligan se compose de nombreuses attitudes où le poète voudrait retrouver sa place dans l'univers, et devant l'invisible. Il se

cherche aussi dans le monde des apparences, à jamais triste. Ecoutons cette musique de soupirs et de larmes, déjà si bien nuancée dans son devoir de classe; Nelligan l'a écrit le 8 mars 1896, alors qu'il n'était âgé que de seize ans:

> . . . Les feuilles tombent, tombent toujours, le sol est jonché de ces présages à la fois tristes et lugubres. . . . La jeunesse, hélas! du jeune malade s'est évanouie comme la fleur des champs qui se meurt, faute de pluie, sous les ardents rayons d'un soleil lumineux. Que la nature, le bois, les arbres, la vallée paraissent tristes ce jour-là, car c'était l'automne . . . et les feuilles tombaient toujours.

Rien de plus facile que de reconnaître dans le texte les accents élégiaques de Millevoye et de Lamartine. Mais, dans ces réminiscences s'abrite déjà l'âme de Nelligan, âme effrayée par la fuite du temps.

Thème romantique, soit! Mais il appartient, par la force d'une nécessité intime à tous les grands poètes du monde. Les distances entre l'aube et le couchant, le printemps et l'automne, entre le bourgeon et la fleur ne ressemblent-elles pas, en effet, à la durée qui unit le berceau au cercueil? Nelligan a réussi ce rapprochement dans un de ses poèmes, intitulé "Devant mon berceau":

> Avec l'obsession d'un sanglot étouffant
> Combien ma souvenance eut d'amertume en elle,
> Lorsque, remémorant la douceur maternelle,
> Hier, j'étais penché sur ma couche d'enfant!
>
> Quand je n'étais qu'au seuil de ce monde mauvais,
> Berceau, que n'as-tu fait pour moi de tes draps funèbres?
> Ma vie est un blason sur des murs de ténèbres,
> Et mes pas sont fautifs où maintenant je vais.

Cette confidence embrasse à la fois le passé, le présent et l'avenir. L'assimilation et la métaphore du septième vers convergent vers une rotation douloureuse de sentiments; le souvenir et la méditation s'appuieront désormais sur des objets tangibles pour renforcer ainsi la perspicacité du regard introspectif.

L'emprise de ce sentiment se fait sentir dans bien des poèmes: il est comme l'écume des vers, musical ornement des mouvements rythmiques:

> Et bien loin, par les soirs révolus et latents,
> Suivons là-bas, devers les idéales côtes,
> La fuite de l'Enfance au Vaisseau de Vingt ans.

Au contact du passé le rêve de Nelligan se fait fécond. Sa vision y trouve une cohésion organique. C'est aussi là que réside le nerf vital de son oeuvre. Dans le regard pensif de Nelligan, dans son soupir nourri de tristesse, nous devinons

déjà un engagement "aux seules frontières de son être", expression qui est celle d'Alain Grandbois mais qui rend justice à l'expérience de son prédécesseur.

La chanson qui convient à l'âge juvénile, exerce sur Nelligan peu d'influence. Le poète cherche dans les mots une musique qui ferait plutôt penser à Chopin, une musique intermédiaire entre les "Mazurkas" et la "Marche funèbre". Son "Jardin d'antan" traduit à merveille toutes les métamorphoses que subissent les souvenirs dans l'enceinte de l'esprit inquiet:

Rien n'est plus doux aussi que de s'en revenir
Comme après de longs ans d'absence,
Que de s'en revenir
Par le chemin du souvenir
Fleuri de lys d'innocence,
Au jardin de l'Enfance.

Au jardin clos, scellé, dans le jardin muet
D'où s'enfuirent les gaietés franches,
Notre jardin muet
Et la danse du menuet
Qu'autrefois menaient sous branches
Nos cœurs en robes blanches. . . .

Mais rien n'est plus amer que de penser aussi
A tant de choses ruinées!
Ah! de penser aussi
Lorsque nous revenons ainsi
Par des sentes de fleurs fanées,
A nos jeunes années.

Lorsque nous nous sentons névrosés et vieillis,
Froissés, maltraités et sans armes,
Moroses et vieillis,
Et que, surnageant aux oublis,
S'éternise avec ses charmes
Notre jeunesse en larmes!

Le "Jardin d'antan" vaut surtout par son contour musical: fluctuations des rappels, magie des images ambivalentes, effets incantatoires des rythmes. Nelligan vient d'effectuer un audacieux enjambement englobant le temps et le cœur: la tristesse n'est pas séparation, mais un puissant trait d'union. Le lecteur ne peut que se laisser emporter par cette musicalité admirable, conséquence immédiate du rayonnement symbolique.

TOUJOURS AU TOURNANT des rêves, Nelligan ouvrira à son inquiétude une avenue nouvelle: la mort. Louis-Joseph De La Durantaye a très bien remarqué qu'il ne s'agit pas là d'une idée de la mort, mais d'un sentiment "ce qu'il [Nelligan] appelait: la fuite de l'enfance, la jeunesse en larmes, le regret de vivre, l'effroi de mourir, le frisson sinistre des choses". Ceci se résume dans un quatrain que le poète a conçu à l'âge de dix-sept ans:

> . . . Rêvant à l'avenir,
> Je songe à mon printemps qui tombe,
> Mon passé n'est qu'un souvenir,
> Mais hélas! il sera ma tombe.

Le sentiment de la mort se fera encore plus puissant à mesure que sa rêverie connaîtra des expériences dans la solitude qui, d'après Yves Thériault, est le bien unique de l'homme.

> Ma jeunesse est pareille à la pauvre passante:
> Beaucoup la croisent ici-bas dans la sente
> Où la vie à la tombe âprement nous conduit;
>
> Tous la verront passer, feuille sèche à la brise
> Qui tourbillonne, tombe et se fane en la nuit;
> Mais nul ne l'aimera, nul ne l'aura comprise.

S'échappant par toutes les fissures du cœur, la tristesse suscite un rapprochement avec celle de Nietzsche. Celui-ci distinguait deux sortes de solitude: "Verlassenheit" et "Einsamheit". La première naît d'un conflit de l'artiste avec son milieu; la deuxième est le résultat d'une inclination qui implique un repliement de l'homme sur lui-même. Au sein de sa famille, à l'école, Nelligan ne fut jamais compris à sa juste valeur; parmi les membres de l'Ecole Littéraire, il attirait l'attention par ses apparences bien plus que par les qualités de son don poétique. Il ne lui restait qu'à se faire conduire par les lectures et les rêves, à repenser le triste sort de Chatterton. Dans de telles circonstances, il est facile de prévoir une rapide fusion de la tristesse et de la solitude: il en naîtra une inquiétude plus douloureuse, plus obsédante qu'on devrait appeler angoisse. Bientôt, un étrange tumulte remplira le cerveau; toute sensation, à son tour, provoquera une poussée sans mesure de sang et de fièvre. Déjà l'âme n'est plus assujettie au recueillement ni au silence. Inondée de visions, elle se communique par le truchement des images qu'elle engendre en conséquence:

Ecoute! ô ce grand soir, empourpré de colères,
Qui, galopant, vainqueur de batailles solaires,
Arbore l'Etendard triomphal des Octobres!

La perspective toute en mouvement possède ici l'ampleur de certaines toiles de Van Gogh. La blancheur d'aube, l'harmonie de couchant n'existent plus: le pourpre les remplace auquel le noir du soir ajoute une note plus aiguë.

Scruter l'angoisse est, au dire de Barrès, vouloir descendre au plus profond des hommes, suivre les cheminements d'un esprit qui se sent menacé. Selon les *Mémoires intérieurs* de Mauriac, l'angoisse est comme "les yeux grands ouverts dans la chambre sans lumière". Guitton, enfin, ne la voit dangereuse qu'au moment où elle dépasse la mesure. Celle de Nelligan a dépassé, en 1898, la mesure de sa résistance physique.

Avant de toucher à l'hallucination, nous voyons la nécessité de consacrer un peu de place à l'inquiétude religieuse de Nelligan. L'auteur est catholique par ses origines et par ses convictions. L'espoir et la prière ne seront jamais délogés de son âme:

D'avoir une âme douce et mystiquement tendre,
Et cependant, toujours, de tous les maux souffrir,
Dans le regret de vivre et l'effroi de mourir,
Et d'espérer, de croire . . . et de toujours attendre!

Miracle de confidence directe et sincère! L'âme du poète voudrait s'immobiliser dans un bonheur sans ombre. Ceci reste, cependant, au niveau du désir. Une fois ajustée aux notions du présent et de l'avenir, la voix intérieure tremble comme les feuilles que le vent agite.

Devrait-on rappeler—et Charles Péguy l'avait si bien souligné!—que le pécheur et le saint font partie intégrante du système de chrétiente? Que le cœur soit secoué par la crainte, que la conscience subisse le vertige du péché, ceci est inscrit dans le grand livre de la condition humaine. Souvent l'inquiétude religieuse ressuscite les âmes mortes, réveille les âmes tièdes ou froides. Nelligan, lui aussi, a connu les horreurs du péché et de la tentation:

Prêtre, je suis hanté, c'est la nuit dans la ville,
Mon âme est le donjon des mortels péchés noirs,
Il pleut une tristesse horrible aux promenoirs
Et personne ne vient de la plèbe servile.

Tout est calme et tout dort. La solitaire ville
S'aggrave de l'horreur vaste des vieux manoirs.

Prêtre, je suis hanté, c'est la nuit dans la ville;
Mon âme est le donjon des mortels péchés noirs!

On se croirait dans la rue solitaire où Nerval va à la mort. Nelligan n'atténue point sa crainte bien que les paroles et les images suggèrent à peine l'étendue du drame.

Sa crise religieuse évoluera en s'aggravant. Elle portera l'empreinte de ses trajets imaginaires et de ses lectures hâtives. Bien différente de l'inquiétude de Gide, celle de Nelligan n'exclue nullement la possibilité du retour. Le jeune poète, malade et sensible, faible certes, accepte les épreuvres en pensant à la victoire. Ainsi, au delà de la "chapelle ruinée", du "vitrail brisé", la "croix en décombres", nous découvrirons plus souvent un homme qui lutte qu'un homme qui succombe.

D'autre part, il serait exagéré de chercher dans l'inquiétude religieuse de Nelligan des preuves d'authentique mysticisme. De nos jours, on est trop porté à voir dans ce mot le synonyme d'une rêverie intense, prolongée. On n'y trouvera pas, non plus, cette idée forte, nourrie d'une longue méditation, qui s'accroche au dogme ou à la métaphysique. L'état d'âme vaut ici plutôt par sa sincérité d'enfant, par la hantise de garder en soi ce qui est pur, beau, harmonieux.

Ainsi voit-on progresser l'inquiétude du poète vers le monde où chaque chose devient l'emblème du noir. Jean-Pierre Richard remarque, dans *Poésie et Profondeur,* que la fusion complète de la pensée et du rêve ne peut qu'amener "l'infinie fécondité du gouffre". Que dire de Nelligan chez qui la sombre réalité, sous l'influence d'une maladie incurable, décèle à profusion les phénomènes étranges, substance de l'hallucination et du cauchemar! Son engouement pour Edgar Poe et Rollinat ne pouvait qu'aggraver ce désarroi. Alors la solitude se veut complète:

J'ai toujours adoré, plein de silence, à vivre
En des appartements solennellement clos,
Où mon âme sonnant des cloches de sanglots,
Et plongeant dans l'horreur, se donne à suivre,
Triste comme un son mort, close comme un vieux livre,
Ces musiques vibrant comme un éveil de flots.

Ainsi seul, dans la chambre obscure qui lui procure les frissons d'angoisse, Nelligan vit ses étranges visions.

Impossible d'expliquer le mystère d'une intelligence qui sombre. Que la poésie de Nelligan nous en fasse plutôt deviner la nature:

. . . Mon œil aux soirs dantesquement embrasse
Quelque feu fantastique errant aux alentours,

Alors que je revois la lugubre terrasse
Où d'un château hanté se hérissent les tours.

Nul retour possible! Des cris se multiplient sans recours:

Pitié! quels monstrueux vampires
Vous suçant mon coeur qui s'offusque!
O je veux être fou ne fût-ce que
Pour narguer mes Détresses pires!

La vie?—Voici le portrait de cette "vierge noire":

Elle a les yeux pareils à d'étranges flambeaux
Et ces cheveux d'or faux sur ses maigres épaules,
Dans des subtils frissons de feuillages de saules,
L'habillent comme font les cyprès des tombeaux.

Elle porte toujours ses robes par lambeaux
Elle est noire et méchante.

Hors de tout contrôle, le rêve cède à l'hallucination:

Or, j'ai la vision d'ombres sanguinolentes
Et de chevaux fougueux piaffants,
Et c'est comme des cris de gueux, hoquets d'enfants,
Râles d'expirations lentes.

L'emprise du noir dicte à l'esprit la loi du tragique abandon:

Je plaque lentement les doigts de mes névroses,
Chargés des anneaux noirs de mes dégoûts mondains
Sur le sombre clavier de la vie et des choses.

L'aboutissement à l'hallucination est chez Nelligan la dernière conséquence du rêve qui se voulait plus puissant que sa nature émotive. L'été de 1899 marque pour le poète la fin de ses espoirs. Près d'un demi-siècle se sera écoulé avant que la mort le délivre de la triste vie d'hôpital.

Le naufrage de l'intelligence a été pressenti et annoncé par le poète lui-même. Il s'y voyait dès 1898, comme dans un miroir sans reflets, comme dans un château abandonné et rempli de spectres. Il accepta d'avance ce dénouement fatal. Qu'on ne s'y trompe pas, cependant, en prêtant au sort de

Nelligan une interprétation facile. Son âme fut tentée par l'idéal et toute son expérience intérieure fut orientée vers la conquête du Beau suprême. Son malheur, s'il en est, est plutôt celui d'un alpiniste qui, attiré par la vertigineuse hauteur de la cime, glisse du versant vers l'abîme, faute d'appui et de forces. La "Romance du vin" et le "Vaisseau d'or" nous en diront davantage.

La "Romance du vin" a été composée au printemps de 1899 avec ce désir de donner poétiquement une réponse à un critique malveillant. Elle a été lue par le poète lui-même, au cours de la quatrième séance publique de l'Ecole Littéraire de Montréal, le 26 mai de la même année. La récitation terminée, le public accorda au jeune poète de chaleureux applaudissements. Mais a-t-on réellement compris la signification profonde du poème? A-t-on saisi le sens caché dans les images polyvalentes?—Non. L'auditoire fut charmé par la sonorité de la voix du poète, par ses attitudes prestigieuses, l'incantation des rythmes . . . L'inquiétude atroce qui coule comme un torrent souterrain dans les stances demeura le bien exclusif de Nelligan.

Bien située dans le contexte biographique, "La Romance du vin" est surtout un défi lancé à la société qui méprise l'effort artistique. L'auteur a conçu un cadre attrayant pour faire mieux exploser son cœur. La verdure de mai n'est qu'un rideau factice qu'un souffle intérieur balance au rythme des sanglots et de la rage. C'est ainsi que le thème de la solitude peut cheminer librement dans les stances en frayant au coeur incompris un nouvel espace pour exister. La croisée ouverte pourrait donc se définir comme une invitation à l'évasion, un élan du rêve, une tentative de dépassement.

L'hantise de l'inconnu trouvera sa meilleure traduction dans le "Vaisseau d'Or". Comme celui de Rimbaud, l'esprit de Nelligan voudrait s'enivrer de l'immensité de la mer sous un soleil éclatant. Avec la fierté des anciens conquérants Vaisseau-Nelligan fera sa dernière expérience: celle du gouffre.

> Ce fut un grand Vaisseau taillé dans l'or massif:
> Ses mâts touchaient l'azur, sur des mers inconnues;
> La Cyprine d'amour, cheveux épars, chairs nues,
> S'étalait à sa proue, au soleil excessif.
>
> Mais il vint une nuit frapper le grand écueil
> Dans l'océan trompeur où chantait la Sirène,
> Et le naufrage horrible inclina sa crène
> Aux profondeurs du Gouffre, immuable cercueil.

Ce fut un Vaisseau d'Or, dont les flancs diaphanes
Révélaient des trésors que les marins profanes,
Dégoût, Haine et Névrose, entre eux ont disputés.

Que reste-t-il de lui dans la tempête brève?
Q'est devenu mon coeur, navire déserté?
Hélas! Il a sombré dans l'abîme du Rêve!

A nous s'adressent les interrogations et les exclamations du dernier tercet. Le treizième vers donne à l'allégorie les dimensions du symbole. Voilà réunis dans un sonnet expressif l'inquiétude déchirante et le pressentiment de sa condition future.

Quoi qu'on puisse dire de cette expérience poétique, il reste qu'elle affiche une très forte adhésion au monde du mystère. La poésie de Nelligan, puissant crescendo de la tristesse et de l'inquiétude, accentue à tout moment la présence de l'être. Et entendons bien qu'elle se refuse de jaillir comme idée ou concept tout fait: elle est plutôt un brasier de sentiments, un enchevêtrement d'états d'âme, sang et fièvre refondus dans les mots. Ceux-ci, pour mieux souligner la valeur subjective, devraient être appelés "les paroles". Car le mot communique une vérité générale, sémantiquement définie et circonscrite, tandis que la parole poétique décèle une vérité intime qui se communique musicalement.

On ne pourrait rendre justice à l'effort de Nelligan qu'en cherchant dans son œuvre un témoignage direct sur le mystère et le temps. Ces deux termes constituent la doublure de ses vers. A ce point de vue l'effort de l'auteur du "Vaisseau d'or" est particulièrement révélateur.

Ce jeune poète a saisi, en effet, la portée subjective de la durée tout en dépouillant son esprit du fatras qui définit l'homme historique. La vie qui se reflète dans ses poèmes n'a aucun intérêt si on veut la mesurer horizontalement, c'est-à-dire à l'aide de dates, d'événements, de contacts. Elle sera toute autre dans sa dimension verticale! Là, le moment devient un élan d'intensité toute bergsonienne, la vérité de souffrir devient le coefficient de l'être, l'état d'âme se libère du cœur et de la conscience en pulsations précipitées. Là, toujours dans la profondeur, s'éffectue le contact avec l'invisible. Et la durée subjective se multiplie—quasiment à l'infini!—par une éternité mystérieuse, si lointaine et si proche à la fois. L'intuition est plus forte que le raisonnement. L'homme malade déchiffre souvent mieux le mystère que celui qui fait sa sieste dans un fauteuil confortable.

Jugée de la hauteur de notre temps, l'œuvre de Nelligan ne pourrait que gagner en actualité. Nous dirons avec le père Angers que la critique moderne doit "dilater

ses horizons, étendre son effort de réflexion au domaine de la vie intérieure". Nous sommes un peu égarés dans le bruit d'un siècle où l'on construit souvent dans le vide. Et pourtant, si on applique une étude attentive à la "sainteté sans Dieu" de Camus, au "temps perdu" de Proust, aux "nausées" de Sartre on regagne vite, par une voie de détour, la hiérarchie des valeurs fondamentales. Et la condition humaine, malgré les nouvelles formules factices de la liberté, se heurte indubitablement aux éternelles notions du mystère et du temps. Nelligan en a fait une expérience profonde, maladroit parfois dans l'état de surexcitation, mais toujours sincère dans ses confidences. A ce point de vue, il est peut-être supérieur à Saint-Denys Garneau chez qui l'effort de l'analyse extrême gâche, par moments, l'authenticité du témoignage immédiat. En tout cas, l'expérience de Nelligan toujours en communion avec l'inquiétude universelle, laisse dans ses poèmes bien des vestiges qui donnent à réfléchir.

THE AGONIZING SOLITUDE

The Poetry of Anne Hébert

Patricia Purcell

THE WRITING OF Anne Hébert records an intense interior drama of poetic and spiritual evolution, though in volume her poetic output has been quite small: *Les Songes en Equilibre* (1942), *Le Tombeau des Rois* (1953) and *Poèmes* (1960).

Miss Hébert's first volume of poetry, *Les Songes en Equilibre,* reveals to us a young girl in the first stages of physical, artistic and spiritual evolution. The style likewise is as yet unformed; on the whole it is thin and frail, but occasionally it gives a foretaste of the clearcut, unadorned style of Miss Hébert's more mature poetry.

The girl evoked in the pages of *Les Songes en Equilibre* is one who, like Saint-Denys-Garneau, deeply loves the natural joys of life, but who, like him, feels that her salvation and her inspiration lie in renouncing these joys and embracing the anguish of solitude. She has been capable of suspending herself in the present moment, of experiencing a joy not overcast by the awareness of eternity, a joy in

> Un enfant
> Qui chante,
> Un homme qui passe;
> Tout le tendre
> Et doux matin . . .
> Cette grâce
> Posée
> Dans l'instant. ("Instant")

With the stirrings of maturity, however, comes the realization of poetic and spiritual duty. She wonders at her audacity in believing that the things of the

world existed to amuse her; suddenly natural joys fade at the arrival of a calm figure which usurps their place:

C'est mon cœur triste
Qui prend toute la place,
En premier plan.
Toute la féerie
Devenue figurante
A l'air triste aussi,
Derrière mon cœur. ("Le Miroir")

Still, however, she has enough of the child in her to rebel at the frightening prospect of maturity:

Délivrez mon âme
Des paysages lunaires
Que le soleil n'atteint plus! ("Terre")

In a series of unequal poems Miss Hébert traces the gradual growth within her of the sorrow of the adult, the poet, and the saint:

Que ne puis-je la faire sortir!
Mais qui remplirait
Alors de vide de sa présence
Dedans moi?
Le plaisir y serait mal à l'aise,
Et moi aussi avec lui
Depuis le temps qu'on se connaît
Ma douleur et moi . . . ("Minuit")

At this stage at least, the spiritual and poetic development of the poet are parallel. The final departure of the fairies of childhood is painted vividly in a poem entitled "Mort":

Une à une
A la file,
Mes fées
M'ont quittée,
Et je suis restée seule
Avec un grand Christ
Entre les bras.

The evocation of the spiritual in such concrete terms comes as a shock to the reader, who has been prepared for it, if at all, only in the most veiled of allusions.

But from this point on in *Les Songes en Equilibre,* spirituality assumes a role of prime importance in the poetry. The poetic mission is seen as a *spiritual* mission, and the poet prays to become as a pencil in the hand of God:

> Mon Dieu, j'ai peur,
> J'ai peur d'écrire . . .
> Guidez ma main,
> Soyez la main elle-même,
> Moi, je veux bien être le crayon. ("Communion")

Certain key images are employed in *Les Songes en Equilibre,* images which will become symbols of profound meaning in *Le Tombeau des Rois.* In one of the earliest poems, "Les Deux Mains", Miss Hébert introduces the image of the outstretched hands, representing self-oblation. At this stage of her development, the giving of self is incomplete and only one hand is extended:

> Ces deux mains qu'on a . . .
> Celle qu'on donne
> Et celle qu'on garde . . .
> Cette main d'enfant,
> Cette main de femme . . .
> Ah! qui me rendra
> Mes deux mains unies? ("Les Deux Mains")

The tree image, so prominent yet so obscure in *Le Tombeau des Rois,* is clarified by *Les Songes en Equilibre,* and takes on a spiritual connotation by being identified with the cross:

> Il me faut apprendre
> Toute la Croix,
> Pied à pied, pouce à pouce;
> Y grimper
> Comme à un arbre difficile. ("Devant le Crucifix")

The last poem of the volume, "L'Oiseau du Poète", introduces the bird symbol of the later volume. The bird is the poet, as well as the poem produced:

> Alors le ciel n'a pas été assez grand
> Pour le premier vol
> De cet oiseau triomphant,
> Sorti de l'argile et du mystère
> D'un poète en état de grâce.

The choice of this last line to close the volume is ample indication of Miss

Hébert's identification of the poetic and spiritual vocation at the time of *Les Songes en Equilibre.*

A READER OF *Les Songes en Equilibre* who opens *Le Tombeau des Rois* interested to see the fruits of the intervening eleven years will probably notice first of all a radical tightening of style. In his introduction to the volume, Pierre Emmanuel describes it thus:

> Un verbe austère et sec, rompu, soigneusement exclu de la musique; des poèmes comme tracés dans l'os par la pointe d'un poignard . . . Aucun adjectif, aucune image flamboyante ou simplement ornementale, aucune arabesque sonore, aucun développement lyrique, aucun thème intellectuel: partout la discontinuité apparente d'un symbolisme épars.

Les Songes en Equilibre has traced the path of the poet into solitude; the poems of *Le Tombeau des Rois* are songs of this solitude — its sweet sadness and its unbearable anguish.

Anne Hébert's isolation is invariably likened to that of Saint-Denys-Garneau. There is, however, a basic difference. Their development can be paralleled up to a certain point: both delight in the joys of the world but are drawn to reject them and enter into the suffering of solitude. Both are attracted to mystical experience, which is attained only by the denial of all that we commonly call experience. And it is at this point that their paths diverge.

It seems to me that there is here a basic problem to be treated — that of the relationship of mysticism and art. Certainly there can be no real dichotomy between the two, for both aspire to union with the Absolute Good. But there is an important difference, in that the mystic reaches a point where his experience becomes incommunicable; only union with God matters. For the artist, however, the need to communicate his experience to men never ceases to be a driving force; if he isolates himself completely he finds the springs of inspiration drying up. Saint-Denys-Garneau's mystical experience progressed up to the point where he no longer felt the need or possessed the ability to communicate it. That is why it was necessary for him to cease writing: he had made his choice between mysticism and art.

Anne Hébert in *Le Tombeau des Rois* portrays the agonizing experience of the artist who must live in solitude in order to comprehend fully her vision of reality, and who in her isolation from the world suffers artistic dryness. In the first poem the poet visualizes the solitude she is entering as a calm, clear body of water stretching before her, concealing she knows not what:

> Sur l'eau égale
> S'étend
> La surface plane
> Pure à perte de vue
> D'une eau inconnue. ("Eveil au Seuil d'une Fontaine")

The second poem, "Sous la Pluie", communicates the peace and protection of solitude; but already in the third poem we detect traces of a nascent bitterness at the drying up of poetic inspiration — the days and the trees around this fountain of solitude form no reflection in its clear surface. Still, however, the poet's isolation is a "consecrated marine vocation", and her interior tears are accompanied by patience.

In this context, the obscure symbolism of "Les Pêcheurs d'Eau" takes on a profound significance. The fishermen (Christ, religion, spirituality) have caught the bird who is poetry in their nets. The tree still resounds with connotations of the cross from the preceding volume, and the striking image of the woman at the foot of the tree now becomes clear:

> Cette femme qui coud
> Au pied de l'arbre
> Sous le coup de midi
>
> Cette femme assise
> Refait, point à point,
> L'humilité du monde,
> Rien qu'avec la douce patience
> De ses deux mains brûlées.

The recurring image of the outstretched hands representing the giving of self is a pivotal one at this stage of Miss Hébert's development:

> Elle ne les referme jamais
> Et les tend toujours . . .
> D'elle pour nous
> Nul lieu d'acceuil et d'amour

Sans cette offrande impitoyable
Des mains de douleurs parées
Ouvertes au soleil. ("Les Mains")

The poet, then, has felt called to isolation, and while realizing it is a vocation of sorrow, has embraced it as her mission. From the beginning, however, there are indications that her salvation lies not purely in the mystical but in the artistic sphere. She does not seek her inspiration in spiritual experience as did John of the Cross; nor does she cease to attempt communication, as did Saint-Denys-Garneau. Instead she seeks to perpetuate her inspiration by recalling memories of her childhood (or the period she spent in communication with the world). As these memories gradually fade, she begins to despair.

Her despair at first is only a *"petit désespoir"* — more accurately, it is a feeling of profound sorrow. It is not despair, for the poet, while she can no longer rejoice in the pleasures of the moment:

Mon cœur est rompu
L'instant ne le porte plus, ("Petit Désespoir")

still has an awareness of the *purpose* in her sorrow. She can still feel the consolation that comes from giving herself and therefore she desires the darkness of her solitude to continue:

A chaque éclat de lumière
Je ferme les yeux
Pour la continuité de la nuit
La perpétuité du silence
Où je sombre. ("Nuit")

The poems that follow this one portray an ever increasing torment. Isolation becomes stifling, and a new symbol is introduced, one that will be vital to Anne Hébert's thought — the closed chamber. The poet is surrounded by a wall, which she could jump over or remove without effort, except that she feels imprisoned by her own fidelity to her present state:

Un mur à peine
Un signe de mur
Posé en couronne
Autour de moi.
Je pourrais bouger,
Sauter la haie de rosiers, . . .

Seule ma fidélité me lie
O liens durs
Que j'ai noués
En je ne sais quelle nuit secrète
Avec la mort! ("Un Mur à Peine")

Someone has led her to this closed room where she sits with arms outstretched in the form of a cross ("La Chambre fermée"), and she will be capable of surviving there as long as she can retain the memories of her childhood and of the world outside ("La Chambre de Bois"). Miss Hébert occasionally achieves heights of startling power in describing the agony of her state:

Midi brûle aux carreaux d'argent
La place du monde flambe comme une forge
L'angoisse me fait de l'ombre
Je suis nue et toute noire sous un arbre amer.
("La Chambre de Bois")

The atmosphere in the closed rooms becomes less and less bearable in each successive poem until we reach "Nos Mains au Jardin". Again Miss Hébert has used the hands symbol to mark a significant stage in her evolution. The poet conceives the idea of planting her hands in the garden, in the hope that they will produce fruit. However after waiting a whole day and seeing no results she realizes that

Pour une seule fleur
Une seule minuscule étoile de couleur
Un seul vol d'aile calme
Pour une seule note pure
Répétée trois fois

Il faudra la saison prochaine
Et nos mains fondues comme l'eau.

Here again a poem of obscure symbolism is clarified by referring it to the symbolism of Christianity. Is this not a poetic echo of John XII.24?

> Believe me when I tell you this: a grain of wheat must fall into the ground and die, or else it remains nothing more than a grain of wheat; but if it dies, then it yields rich fruit.

A period of self-annihiliation, of spiritual and poetic dryness, a dark night of the soul, is necessary before any fruit can be produced. And this period is what the poet now enters into, and what she calls *"l'envers du monde"*. Now there is real dryness — the imagery becomes that of salt, of blindness and groping, of death in life:

> Il y a certainement quelqu'un
> Qui m'a tuée
> Puis s'en est allé . . .
> A oublié d'effacer la beauté du monde
> Autour de moi
> A oublié de fermer mes yeux avides
> Et permis leur passion perdue. ("Il y a certainement quelqu'un")

The poem entitled "L'Envers du Monde" is a powerful cry of pain from the abyss in which the poet is foundering. She recalls the early consolations of her solitude:

> Hier
> Nous avons mangé les plus tendres feuilles du sommeil
> Les songes nous ont couchées
> Au sommet de l'arbre de nuit

However, the consolations do not last:

> Notre fatigue n'a pas dormi . . .

and the only hope of survival now for the poet is in drawing inspiration from memory:

> La voix de l'oiseau
> Hors de son cœur et de ses ailes rangées ailleurs
> Cherche éperdument la porte de la mémoire
> Pour vivre encore un petit souffle de temps.

The combined spiritual and poetic dark night is evoked by the combination of spiritual and poetic symbols in the phrase *"arbre de parole"*:

> Aucun arbre de parole n'y pousse ses racines silencieuses
> Au cœur noir de la nuit.
> C'est ici l'envers du monde
> Qui donc nous a chassées de ce côté?

The depths of despair are reached in "Paysage", where love and giving have completely dried up, the memory of childhood has become meaningless, and the cry of the bird once so vitally alive now seems only imaginary:

L'amour changé en sel
Et les mains à jamais perdues.

Sur les deux rives fume mon enfance
Sable et marais mémoire fade
Que hante le cri rauque
D'oiseaux imaginaires châtiés par le vent.

"Un Bruit de Soie", the last poem in the section entitled *L'Envers du Monde,* is dominated by an image of the merciless heat and blinding light of noon which is reminiscent of Camus' *L'Etranger.* The poet is groping blindly, arms outstretched, unable to see the person for whom she is searching because the sun is so bright. The closing lines of the poem reveal that the dark night has ended — the shadow of the tree-cross at last brings merciful relief, and the poet, now able to see, realizes that her hands have produced fruit:

Mes mains écartent le jour comme un rideau
L'ombre d'un seul arbre étale la nuit à nos pieds
Et découvre cette calme immobile distance
Entre tes doigts de sable et mes paumes toutes fleuries.

The final poem in the volume, "Le Tombeau des Rois", sums up metaphorically the whole course of experience traced in the book, as a horrible but fruitful dream of patient tragedy and self-oblation. The poet on waking has freed herself, has cast out of her the dead who have had possession of her. The blind bird, having recovered his sight, looks hopefully toward the dawn:

Livide et repue de songe horrible
Les membres dénoués
Et les morts hors de moi, assassinés,
Quel reflet d'aube s'égare ici?
D'où vient donc que cet oiseau frémit
Et tourne vers le matin
Ses prunelles crevées?

LATE IN 1960 Anne Hébert published her *Poèmes,* which contains the whole of *Le Tombeau des Rois* plus a collection of new poems, most of which appeared in periodicals between 1953 and 1960. In the preface to these

later poems, Miss Hébert describes the function of poetry as a breaking of solitude. This provides a clue to the difference between *Le Tombeau des Rois* and the poems that follow it. The period of solitude necessary for poetic and spiritual formation has been broken by the act of poetic creation, and now the poet is united in a real way with all men.

Thus the main difference between the poems of *Le Tombeau des Rois* and the later poems is that the latter are written on a much broader scale. They express not only the anguish of the poet but that of entire cities and countries. In the later poems Miss Hébert participates in French-Canadian literature's growing revolt against long-standing restriction.

In "La Ville tuée" she evokes a city stifling under authority. The bird of poetry is held captive, and all emotion, passion and imagination are banished, and replaced by dogma and morality:

> On étancha le marais, l'oiseau de proie fut capturé, toutes ailes déployées, le plus doux d'entre nous assura qu'il le ferait dormir en croix sur la porte . . .

However, poetry not only breaks solitude but brings joy, and the liberation promised in the closing lines of *Le Tombeau des Rois* has proved a reality. The oppressed refuse to submit to the stagnation imposed on them. Their tunic of unhappiness becomes so tight that overnight it splits from top to bottom, and they awaken naked and alone, exposed to the beauty of the day ("Trop à l'Etroit").

The images in these poems are those of the earlier volumes — the bird, the salt, the brilliant sunlight and dark night, the sea, the closed room, the house and the doorstep — but all appear in new and significant contexts, singing of boldness and hope and a new joy:

> Voici que la saison des eaux se retire; la ville se sèche comme une grève, lèche ses malheurs au goût d'iode
>
> Le printemps brûle le long des façades grises, et les lèpres de pierre au soleil ont l'éclat splendide des dieux pelés et victorieux.
>
> ("Printemps sur la Ville")

This triumphant liberation in thought brings a change in style. Gone is the short clipped line of hard anguish; lines are long, flowing, confident. Colours interplay boldly and vividly. All the senses of the reader are brought into play, and disparate elements are juxtaposed in violent and startling image:

> O toi qui trembles dans le vent, ayant hissé la beauté de ton visage au mât des quatre saisons . . . ("Alchimie du Jour")
> La joie se mit à crier, jeune accouchée à l'odeur sauvagine sous les joncs . . . ("Mystère de la Parole")

In these poems, poetic and spiritual experience are still as closely related as in *Les Songes en Equilibre* and *Le Tombeau des Rois*. Now Miss Hébert, like Claudel, sees the poet as spokesman between men and God. To the poets of the ages, intensely loving and sensitive, has been entrusted the "passion of the world". Theirs is a Christlike mission, working with Him toward the world's redemption:

> Ah nous sommes vivants, et le jour recommence à l'horizon! Dieu peut naître à son tour, enfant blême, au bord des saisons mis en croix; notre œuvre est déjà levée, colorée et poignante d'odeur!
> ("Naissance du Pain")

The poets speak for the multitude of men who experience the joys and sorrows of created beings, but cannot express them:

> Fronts bouclés où croupit le silence en toisons musquées, toutes grimaces, vieilles têtes, joues d'enfants, amours, rides, joies, deuils, créatures, créatures, langues de feu au solstice de la terre
>
> O mes frères les plus noirs, toutes fêtes gravées en secret; poitrines humaines, calebasses musiciennes où s'exaspèrent des voix captives
>
> Que celui qui a reçu fonction de la parole vous prenne en charge comme un cœur ténébreux de surcroît, et n'ait de cesse que soient justifiés les vivants et les morts en un seul chant parmi l'aube et les herbes
> ("Mystère de la Parole")

The three volumes of Anne Hébert's poems, then, record her evolution from carefree childhood through an agonizing solitude of poetic and spiritual formation to a freedom in which she embraces her French-Canadian people and all humanity — a triumphant development of thought through poetry.

chronicle

THE PRESS AND LITERATURE

Canadian Book Pages

Donald Stainsby

NOT VERY LONG AGO a major Canadian newspaper devoted three-quarters of a column on its book page to reviewing a volume on the raising of mushrooms. More recently, another newspaper of equal standing wasted half a column on a book about rock gardens. And a third paper, whose book editor has four tabloid pages at his disposal, gave pride of place in a recent issue to an unsparkling review of an uninteresting collection of talks with prominent Americans by the British journalist Henry Brandon, while it found space only on the fourth page for a bright, intelligent review of a new book about Louis Riel.

These are random examples of the fault I chiefly criticise in Canadian newspaper book pages; that they lack even the most elementary editing. No good publication just happens. Excellence is the result of skill, devotion and plain worry on the part of an editor. This is as true of a newspaper book section as it is of any other publication, and the lack of these three essentials is apparent in the review pages of many otherwise excellent newspapers.

The book pages of most Canadian newspapers fall into one of two categories. First, a class to be described, condemned, and dismissed, are the papers which run syndicated reviews. These are available from several sources, often very cheaply, and the quality of their reviewing is usually reflected in the price. Newspapers which run them confine their book pages automatically to American books, for there is, perhaps fortunately, no Canadian syndicate which deals in

book reviews. The newspapers which subscribe to the syndicates do little service to their subscribers and positive harm to Canadian writers by entirely ignoring them.

The other considerable group of Canadian book pages includes those produced by publishers' secretaries, by semi-retired deskmen, and by magazine editors in their odd moments. These are little better than the syndicated pages, since they are almost invariably passive, unselective productions. Any book — every book indeed — which is submitted by a publisher "must be reviewed", regardless of its merit or interest. The reviews in such pages are distinguished by phrases like "this modern novel" (whatever that may mean) and "this book will be of interest to all those interested in the sea, the mountains, history, fine food and adultery." Typically, they display the inadequacy of their reviewers by avoiding all expression of opinion.

The job of the newspaper book page editor (significantly, there are no "literary editors" on Canadian newspapers) is to present information and comment on as wide a range as possible of books of fairly wide interest as soon as possible after publication. Fiction, biography, memoirs, current events, history, are his fare; mushroom culture and such similarly unliterary subjects as boating, cooking and fashions belong on the gardening or other appropriate pages. Yet, since the newspaper is a mass medium, there is little justification for discussion of the more technical aspects of literature; this has its place in magazines like *Canadian Literature*.

To carry out its functions satisfactorily, the newspaper book page needs more continuity of interest than is provided by reviews themselves, yet there are few Canadian papers which have regular columnists presenting comments on writers, publishers, and literary topics in a general way. Even Robertson Davies' syndicated column does not come within this class, since it is becoming more and more a general column which at times revels in the oddities of literature but has little to say about current writers. This is unfortunate, since the regular column commenting on matters of current literary interest performs a useful service to the world of letters by providing its only mass forum in print. At the same time, the regular column should not be the only means by which the scope of a book page is extended beyond the routine tasks of reviewing current books. To give examples from my own practice when I acted as a book page editor, I gathered such items as a report from Russia on Canadian literature as it is known in the Soviet Union, reports from the P.E.N. international meeting in Rio de Janeiro, and regular correspondence from French Canada. Information of this kind helps

readers to see the books which are reviewed in a much wider context. But few newspapers provide it.

WHAT CAN ONE SAY of Canadian book pages as they exist? I do not see all of them all the time, but I do see most of them a good deal of the time, and there are certain comments which it may be useful to make.

The *Montreal Star* seems the only English-language newspaper in Canada that is willing to give more than token space to the reviewing of new books. The use of the space it does give is generally good; though one regrets the absence of a column about local writers and writing, the *Star* must be given credit for Goodridge MacDonald's London Letters. It also carries Robertson Davies regularly, and maintains a continuity among its reviewers which helps the readers to compare and assess reviews. The *Gazette* of Montreal presents a review section where books have to compete with notices of the fine arts; the appearance of the page is conservative, and so are the contents, which tend to be so carefully balanced in their comments as to lose meaning; this is a widespread fault in Canadian book pages.

The *Toronto Star* now prints Robert Fulford's valuable daily column, but this innovation has led to the virtual elimination of the *Star's* weekly book section, which is now confined mainly to Robertson Davies' column and frequent contributions by Robert Weaver. The *Toronto Globe and Mail,* on the other hand, is looking more likely than in the past. It still carries W. A. Deacon's Flyleaf and occasionally a review with bite in it. More than most other newspapers in this country, it acknowledges Canadian topicality in selecting its leading reviews. Its book page suffers mostly from a tendency to equate length with excellence, authority with readability.

At the opposite pole lies the *Toronto Telegram,* which has fallen a prey to the cult of readability, the fallacy that newspaper items must be kept extremely simple and extremely short. The result is a series of snippets, opinionated and meaningless blurbs, a hodgepodge of untidy headlines.

The *Hamilton Spectator* produces a better than average review page, and it is to be commended for A. M. Hunter's weekly column, and for its willingness to print features about books as well as reviews. Ottawa, on the other hand, fares badly. The *Journal's* page is lacklustre, and mingles its own reviews with others acquired from the *Manchester Guardian,* calling them "Journal-Guardian" re-

views. Where, in all this, is Mr. Grattan O'Leary with his concern for "Canadian opinion"? The *Ottawa Citizen* allots less than two tabloid pages to books, and much of that space is taken up with lists of acquisitions in the public library and of bestsellers from an American syndicate, a typical space-filling device of the unenterprising book page editor.

Among the papers of the West, the *Winnipeg Free Press* has the merit of paying close heed to books of Canadian interest, though it often declines to criticise them sufficiently when they are bad, and its reviews tend to be somewhat verbose. The *Vancouver Sun* has built up in recent years a good group of reviewers, most of them from outside its own staff. On the other hand, the space it devotes to books is severely limited, and much of this is taken up by borrowing from other— usually British or American — journals. For some years it carried a locally written column on literary events, but this has recently been dropped. Finally, to cover a possible gap in my own knowledge, I should say that I have received good reports of the book page in the *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, though I have not yet been able to investigate it.

This list — short as it is — covers all the review sections in Canadian newspapers that have any claim to serious consideration. Most of the remaining papers carry syndicated reviews, presented execrably, or no reviews at all.

It makes up to a depressing survey. Canadian newspapers clearly play little serious part in the literary life of the country. But at least some of the blame for their failure lies with the people who believe literature is important but who do not protest the inadequacies of the Canadian as compared with the better British and American press with enough vigour to convince the newspapers of a public interest that might justify an attempt to achieve an adequate standard of literary editing.

review articles

RIEL RECONSIDERED

Alan Wilson

E. B. OSLER. *The Man who Had to Hang: Louis Riel.* Longmans Green. $5.00.

THE CHALLENGES of land settlement, of adjustment of an older wilderness to a new frontier, of replacing "squatter" with "settler" have been among Canada's most serious, continuing problems. Adjustment of the Eskimo to a new cultural and economic atmosphere is only the latest example. *Coureurs de bois,* Selkirk settlers, P.E.I. tenants, and homesteaders have all offered fresh enigmas to Canadian administrations. One of the most comprehensive and explosive of these conflicts was that over the absorption of the Metis 'nation' of the old North West into the territorial empire of Canada during the second half of the nineteenth century. Louis Riel, the central figure in that dispute, was fired by the dream of safeguarding "the ancient rights of the Metis nation".

Unfortunately, in this latest biography of Riel, we are given only the most cursory introduction to Riel's early life, to the influence of his father, and to the "ancient traditions" of the Metis with their sense of independence from both American and Canadian forms of western imperialism. Indeed, "imperialism" seems a dirty word in Mr. Osler's vocabulary. One must say 'seems', for by employing the dramatic devices of interpolated fictional dialogue and of frequent soliloquies, Mr. Osler has at many points left us in serious doubt as to whether he or Riel is speaking.

Macaulay, in his *Essay on History,* remarks that "a perfect historian must possess an imagination sufficiently powerful to make his narrative affecting and picturesque". But Macaulay was talking about the imagination producing ornamentation in style and narrative.

There is another sort of historical imagination — structural rather than ornamental, as Collingwood observes — and it is used to work inferentially from certain fixed points already marked by fairly clear evidence. It may be used to reconstruct undocumented events in a continuum lying between two known events in a subject's life; or, as in the present work, it may be called upon to provide a picture of the working of the subject's mind, of the ambitions and dreams that may have lain behind Riel's acknowledged actions. Such a reconstruction has become a legitimate part

of the historian's craft, and as the understanding of the human mind and one's personal experience are enlarged and matured, such imagination plays a useful role in the process of reconstructing the past.

But here the necessary lines between historian and novelist must not be allowed to become blurred. It becomes more important than ever to acknowledge authorities and evidence in order to avoid any kind of ambiguity. And here Mr. Osler has done us no good by dismissing entirely the device of footnotes as a mere academic rite. Academics do abuse this device very fregently, but the fault lies with the individual scholar not with the practice itself. Perhaps no one will impute motives of bad faith or dishonesty to Mr. Osler, and to other recent non-academic writers of history in Canada who have dispensed with the apparatus of footnotes and critical bibliographies. But what is ignored here is the vital need of stating the kind of evidence on which the narrative is based so that the critical reader can judge for himself the value of the author's statements and of these imaginative reconstructions of conversations and musings. What might be accepted readily in Mr. Osler's account is thus left in the realm of baseless assertion. And in the present work these remarks apply only to those areas in which we suspect Mr. Osler to be right. But what a lot he ignores!

There has always been a question in the mind of the professional historian whether biography should be considered history at all. But individuals are the agents, often the prime movers, of history, and cannot be ignored. Collectively, the biographies of many individuals concerned in a single historical period or movement can offer insight and illumination into the leadership, membership, or opposition to that movement. The great danger, of course, lies in the tendency to make of one's subject a hero and to write of "his times" as if they were "the times". Mr. Osler has set out "frankly" to achieve this.

Broad economic forces, powerful springs of Canadian nationalism, American annexationism, a tragic coincidence of political and ecclesiastical weakness in the Red River colony, and chance all contributed to the success of the Metis uprising of 1869-70. Yet some of these factors are neglected or misrepresented here. American annexationist pressures reached even to the councils of the Hudson's Bay Company in London, yet they are only mentioned as personal idiosyncracies of William O'Donoghue. The absence of Bishop Taché on a legitimate ecclesiastical mission to Rome and the weakness of the ailing Governor Mactavish are made to seem parts of a sinister Canadian plot. Indeed, in his account of the 1870 uprising, Mr. Osler gives us a 'Western' in familiar style: the numerous "bad guys" include John A. Macdonald (contemptuously described as "the great man"), William McDougall, Thomas Scott, Donald Smith, Colonel Dennis, Captain Boulton, Charles Mair, and Dr. Schulz; the "good guys" include the whole of the Metis "nation", English-speaking moderates like A. G. B. Bannatyne, the courageous Governor Archibald, and pre-eminently, of course, Riel himself. It is good theatrics, but is it good history?

In his account of the 1885 Rebellion, Mr. Osler no longer divides his principals into Angels of Light and Demons

of Darkness. He is certainly more persuasive here. Yet he seriously suggests that the newest troubles arose "for almost indentical [sic.] reasons" to those at Red River. He ignores the fact that much of Riel's support came from persons who had long since received and dissipated their land grants under the Manitoba Act, and that Riel's own claims were forfeited at the time of his banishment. Riel showed a tragic insensitivity to the realities of the new political and economic situation in 1885, but we are given an equivocal account of his responsibility for the senseless and monstrous tactic of arousing the Indians. For this, Gabriel Dumont is made to bear much of the blame. One of the most remarkable claims is that concerning Riel's demands in 1885. Included among these was one calling for new land grants to Metis descendants every eighteen years and a perpetual subsidy to the West's native inhabitants based on an evaluation of the territory's total acreage, the proceeds to be distributed in the curiously inverted proportion of twenty-five cents an acre to the half-breeds, and fifteen to the Indians. Yet Mr. Osler omits these details, describing Riel's extortions as "sensible demands". Some of them were, but not even the Loyalist grants were as ridiculous as this proposal.

Canadian historical studies have already come some way from the period and atmosphere of what D. G. Creighton once called "the authorized version of Canadian History". Whether that version was too Liberal or too shortsighted, it is being replaced by revisionist works of varying degrees of usefulness and pre-

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judice. Mr. Osler's contribution seems to lie in the second category. If it is, as its dust-jacket claims it to be, "the first frankly sympathetic biography of Louis Riel by an English Canadian", it has been more fully, more competently, and more "frankly" preceded by several "sympathetic" American studies of Riel, all of them available in Canada. Mr. Osler has probably written the best short narrative of some of the publicly important stages of Riel's career, but he has neither written a full-scale biography nor a comprehensive, analytic study of Riel's place in these two Western uprisings. Certainly, in one's sympathy for Riel, one may feel that his opponents were unjust and that historians have been misguided. But to ignore whatever reason and justice lay in that opposition is surely to try to right a wrong by committing the same error one's self. This is not good revisionist history but vigilante justice.

Moreover, the book falls far short of being classed as literature. The narrative often has force and flow, but it is marred by tiresome cliches, slang, and awkward constructions. It is written in a conversational style without art or careful editing. Further, the absence of any map of the North West is a serious flaw, particularly since the book is obviously designed for the general reader. He will be stirred by this book, but it should be only a beginning.

THE MEANING AND PURPOSE OF MAN

Roderick Haig-Brown

ERNEST S. DODGE. *Northwest by Sea.* Oxford $6.50.

EVEN THE MOST CASUAL STUDENT of history is aware that the search for a northwest passage to the Orient played a very large part in the exploration of the northern hemisphere. Pacific Coast historians are particularly aware of the efforts of Vitus Bering, James Cook and George Vancouver (all of whom sailed under orders to look for the western entrance to the passage) since their journeys led in the end to a full examination of the whole intricate north Pacific coastline. Most Canadians recognise such names as Frobisher, Hudson, Ross, Parry, Franklin, Amundsen and others as geographical features of the Canadian Arctic associated with famous explorers; but perhaps few people remember today that all these explorers were primarily in search of the northwest passage.

It is difficult for a modern individual, however romantically inclined, to realize fully the power with which this search gripped the imagination of men — not merely explorers, but the general public as well — through several centuries. At first it was a search for wealth and trade, a short sea-way to the riches of the Orient; the shoreline of North America

was simply an obstacle in this, a monstrous unyielding stretch of land, whose extent no one then dreamed of, inconveniently planted between Europe and Asia.

The search, supported by dreams, hopes, misinformation, faulty calculations and the varied personalities of the searchers, persisted through three centuries. By the end of the eighteenth century, Cook's and Vancouver's work had made it certain that no passage could exist anywhere below the high arctic, and the efforts of those who had made their difficult ways into the eastern approaches of the polar seas had made it equally clear that any passage that did exist could not be commercially useful. But the challenge was only increased and the nineteenth century was the period of greatest endeavour. Expedition after expedition, most of them well planned, well equipped and under the auspices of the British Admiralty, were sent forward to push farther and farther into the ice-choked channels and narrow seas beyond the mouth of Hudson Bay. Even though no one succeeded in forcing it, it became clear that a sea passage did exist and actual confirmation was provided by the land and sea parties that searched for the lost Franklin Expedition of 1845. It remained for Roald Amundsen to complete the first passage in four seasons, from 1903 to 1906, and for Henry Larsen with the RCMP vessel *St. Roch,* forty years later, to make it look almost simple by completing the first west to east passage in three seasons, returning from east to west in a single season.

Ernest S. Dodge's book is an astonishingly complete catalogue of these voyages, from Cabot's first in 1497 to that of the United States nuclear-powered submarine *Seadragon* in 1960. He skilfully extracts from journals, letters and other accounts to bring each voyage to life and fit it into the account of his real hero, the Northwest Passage itself. The result is swift, generally easy and quite fascinating reading, as well as a sharp impression of the courage and persistence of man in the face of incredible hardships and difficulties. No voyage of the hundred or more listed in the book was a direct commercial success, though many won honour and glory for their leaders and participants. Many ended in disaster. Not a few left leaders discredited in spite of prodigies performed. Yet there were always new leaders, new seamen, new adventurers willing to take up the challenge and, perhaps more surprisingly, new supporters willing to assume the financial risk.

The stories of the discredited leaders are especially touching and, somehow, typical of the enormous gulf between action and administration. Baffin, who was inadvertently betrayed by Purchas, Foxe who satisfied himself there was no passage westward out of Hudson Bay and was not believed, Middleton whom Dobbs mistrusted, Ross who saw non-existent mountains across Lancaster Sound, all these and many others achieved greatly in the field yet were easily discounted by theorists at home. No allowance was made for the tensions and responsibilities and problems of command, or for the enormous difficulties of judging unmapped land, uncharted seas and constantly shifting ice masses. Rose, whose mistake was the most obvious, had to wait fifteen years for another command and the chance to

prove himself not merely one of the greatest leaders but possibly the most advanced and constructive thinker of them all and a man of immeasurable bravery and determination.

Though the author has been extremely skilful in selecting the details that distinguished each voyage from those that came before it and after it and though he has woven these into a story with its own excitements and suspense, most readers wil experience a recurring sense of disappointment as the principal figures succeed each other. One has scarcely become familiar with a new hero, Barents or Bering, Frobisher or Davis, Hudson or Baffin, Ross or Parry before his brief chapter is over and it is time to settle in for a few pages with another. The remedy is obvious, of course: one need only turn to Dodge's excellent eight-page bibliography, select the proper source and go to it for deeper involvement. The rewards can be considerable, for many of the explorers wrote competently and the material they had at hand was full of the most intense qualities of excitement and adventure, which hold their values even to-day.

Essentially *Northwest by Sea* is the story of high human success repeated again and again within the limits of practical failure. Quite clearly, the earlier voyages had no possible chance of success. Just as clearly the later voyages were able to advance as far as they did only because of knowledge and experience gained in previous failures. But one is left wondering at the end whether the passage has ever been a possibility for a square-rigged sailing vessel and yet again whether it has become progressively easier through the ice retreat during the four and a half centuries since it was first attempted.

Even to-day, with all the technological resources of the second half of the twentieth century, there is no commercially useful Northwest Passage. Trading and supply vessels make formidable incursions from each end, as they have for many years; the RCN ice-breaker *Labrador* has made it clear that she can pass more or less at will by the sheer power of her 6500 tons. The U.S. nuclear submarines have shown that ways can be found under the ice, though even these are not without their difficulties and dangers. But there is little doubt that the search for ways to use the passage will continue. This simple and straightforward history of its past should be of interest to all Canadians. As a story of the meaning and purpose of man, or at least one of his many meanings, this book provides more material for reflection than many philosophical studies.

PERIOD PIECES

Marion Smith

SARA JEANETTE DUNCAN, *The Imperialist*; FREDERICK PHILIP GROVE, *The Master of the Mill;* MARTHA OSTENSO, *Wild Geese,* McClelland and Stewart, New Canadian Library, $1.25.

THE REPUBLICATION of such titles as the three recently added to McClelland and Stewart's New Canadian Library Series brings up once again all the hoary old questions about the nature and status of Canadian Literature. That these questions have been chewed over for years without receiving any satisfactory answers does not make them less relevant to those who hope that the current boom will not turn out to be a bubble. A lively awareness of literary tradition is an important element in a cultural climate favourable to the growth of a national literature. Why, then, the widespread uneasiness about the multiplication of courses in Canadian Literature in our universities? about publications such as the New Canadian Library paperbacks? even about such periodicals as *Canadian Literature?* Is it all to be dismissed as a reflection of the national inferiority complex or of academic old-fogeyism?

The problem is essentially one of critical attitudes. Is a book to be read, studied, written about for its literary qualities or for its Canadian-ness? Is it to be evaluated in terms of other works of its own time and type or of Canadian works of its own time and type? If both, how much of which? Of a given author, which is the more significant — a superior work which is not distinctively Canadian or an inferior one which is? Where is the line to be drawn by the critic who is striving to see literature steadily and see it whole?

The Imperialist, Wild Geese, and *The Master of the Mill* are novels which, for one reason or another, are of some interest to the student of Canadian Literature. Although their original publication dates come close to spanning the first half of this century, all three are alike in being in some sense regional novels, in being pioneers in different types of realism, and in being noticeably "dated".

Of the three, the processes of weathering have dealt most kindly with not the best nor the one which is technically the most interesting, but with the earliest. Sara Jeanette Duncan's *The Imperialist,* though published more than a dozen years after the author had left Canada to become the wife of an Indian civil servant, is firmly anchored in the Canadian scene. Elgin, its citizens, and its social, ethical and political conflicts, constitute a microcosm the significance of which is not confined to turn-of-the-century Brantford. Nor has the dialectic of the relationships between that microcosm and the Empire-Commonwealth microcosm entirely lost its relevance for the present-day reader, however much the physical nature of both worlds may

have changed.

It is in capturing the great Canadian ambivalence of sentimental attachment to Britain and touchy defensiveness of national identity that *The Imperialist* is most successful. It is least successful when its insistence on this theme gets in the way of the novel. When it does, the hero becomes less a political prophet than a precocious prig, and the reader's interest shifts to the secondary characters, not merely because they are very well drawn but because they do not talk at such inordinately Jamesian length. But, except for one long, dull stretch in the middle of the book, such occasions are mercifully rare.

Though for the most part the author maintains the scrupulous detachment appropriate to a disciple of the Howells school of realistic fiction, she displays a certain ambivalence towards her characters, a mingling of tenderness and critical examination. Several of them serve as vehicles of mild satire directed towards small-town pettiness, self-importance, and snobbery, but even the main characters give the impression that their author does not take them nearly so seriously as they take themselves. Sometimes, indeed, she comes perilously close to shattering a carefully built-up mood by inviting us to laugh at their most serious perplexities.

In view of her avowed scorn of the pat happy ending, it is perhaps this propensity to levity which leads her to use an almost literal *deus ex machina,* in the person of the Presbyterian minister, to unravel plot complications of the highest

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ethical importance to the parties involved. When Dr. Drummond decides to take a supernumerary fiancee off young Mr. Finlay's hands, one can only echo Quiller Couch's comment on the marriage of the Duke and Isabella at the end of *Measure for Measure*: "We know very well what the author is up to, and a scandalous proceeding it is."

But Sara Jeanette Duncan demonstrates her negative capability by eschewing any such easy out for her hero. At the conclusion of the novel Lorne Murchison is a failure both in love and in the war of politics, but since this is no tragedy he is not so much disillusioned as enlightened. He has learned a good deal about shallowness and self-seeking in both areas, and next time his judgements will be less credulous, his devotion less easily exploited.

The self-consciousness evident in incongruity of tone and attitude is reflected in the style, which is sometimes succinct and vivid, sometimes easy, sometimes coy, sometimes derivative, sometimes clumsy, but never involved. On a single page one can find such disparities as the following:

> The best of it was there [in the market place], the enduring heart of the new country already old in acquiescence. It was the deep root of the race in the land, twisted and unlovely, but holding the promise of all.

and a few lines later:

> "Hello, Lorne," he said. He had smiled all the way, anticipating the encounter. He was obviously in clothes that he did not put on every day, but the seriousness of this was counteracted by his hard felt hat, which he wore at an angle that disregarded convention.

Like the country which in her theme, Sara Jeanette Duncan in *The Imperialist* is feeling her way towards an identity. It is not her best novel and one might wish the editors had chosen her later and more skilful treatment of a similar subject in *Cousin Cinderella, or A Canadian Girl in London,* though to do so would have been to sacrifice the element which chiefly gives interest to *The Imperialist,* its remarkably lively evocation of one aspect of Canadian life.

As Professor Carlyle King's excellent introduction reminds us, Martha Ostenso's *Wild Geese* is truly a pioneer among novels about pioneers. Winner of the first prize in their jointly-sponsored first-novel competition, it was published serially in *Pictorial Review* and subsequently by Dodd, Mead and Company in 1925. Among realistic treatments of the Man-against-the-land theme, it is contemporaneous with Ellen Glasgow's *Barren Ground* and antedates by two years Ole Rolvaag's classic, *Giants in the Earth.* Certainly its earliest readers found *Wild Geese* pretty strong meat, although *Pictorial Review* was a woman's magazine of some literary pretensions, publishing Edith Wharton and other writers of similar quality. To the present writer, reading it surreptitiously after a juvenile romp through Zane Grey, it was not only a shatterer of illusions about the romantic West but a haunter of nightmares, in which its land-lust obsessed patriarch assumed the all-too-recognizable features of tyrannical grandfather.

Subsequent developments, historical and fictional, have robbed the book of much of its impact and made its weaknesses more apparent. Accidental illegitimacy no longer seems sufficient motivation for the servitude and suffering endured by Caleb Gare's wife and chil-

dren. Caleb himself, in comparison with any number of concentration camp commanders for example, seems not so much an emanation of primal evil as a bush-league bully hoist with his own petard. The brooding atmosphere of frustration and death so effectively evoked and consistently maintained suffers, in the absence of adequate and clearly-defined motivation, from a melodramatic aura of soap-opera before soap-opera. Why, one wonders, should a great, strapping, rebellious girl like Judith have waited so long before heaving a hatchet at this pocket Holofernes?

Yet, in spite of its awkward shifts of point of view, its imperfectly realized characters, and the excessively poetic justice of its denouement, Miss Ostenso's first novel keeps the reader's interest throughout. Her central character is no mere ogre but an understandable human being of tragic stature, however warped by his twin lusts for land and for power. Her style is at its best in sketching the setting, as in the school-teacher's first view of the farm:

> The cattle sheds and shelters for other animals were all of grey logs, the low roofs sodded and showing faintly green now, though it was still cold and raw. The ruts of the cow pen, since there had been no rain or snow for weeks, were hard as cement, and reminded Lind of the relief maps children made at school. The deep tracks of the cattle were almost indistinguishable from the human tracks intermingled with them. The cold of winter had fixed them there and only the rains of spring would wash them away.

There, in little, is the whole theme of *Wild Geese.*

Frederick Philip Grove's *The Master of the Mill* is interesting as a technical experiment. Published in 1944, but written in large part fifteen to twenty years earlier, this treatment of the theme of industrial expansion is seen through the eyes of one of the three owners of the flour mill as, in a combination of reverie, conscious recall and fugitive association, he casts up the accounts of his days and years in the last few weeks of his life.

The story begins with Senator Sam Clark regarding from his window the vast, completely mechanized mill of 1938, seventeen storeys of floodlit concrete towering over the darkness of the lake and town below. A few days later, a second view of the structure lashed by a rain-squall carries his mind back fifty years to his father's first expansion of the pioneer enterprise his own father had founded. Grove's interest does not lie in the successive expansions of this industrial colossus, in spite of their obvious social symbolism, but in their effects upon those who worked at the mill and lived by it, and especially upon the three owners who controlled and were controlled by it. He does not, therefore, progress chronologically from 1888 to 1938 but interrupts his time-sequence, moving in one direction by means of flashbacks and in the other by revealing plans and hopes and visions, until the

still shrewd but half-senile old man has completed his assessment of the meaning of the mill.

This seemingly single point of view nevertheless carries with it its own duality, for, unlike his father and his son, Sam Clark has been associated with the development of the family business rather than identified with it. He is both a participant in and an observer of the story of the mill. To old Rudyard the mill had been a means of personal aggrandisement, to young Edmund it was an instrument for gaining power over others, but Sam, who had a vision of the mill as the source of a better life for the townspeople, was never in a position to implement his dreams. Though his father pre-empted and put into effect without acknowledgement young Sam's plans for increasing the mill's efficiency, he never took him into his confidence nor gave him any responsibility in the management of the mill's affairs. Soon after Rudyard Clark's death, Sam's son Edmund managed to manœuvre him out of his controlling interest in the company. When Sam resumed control after his son's death he found it too late to alter the course which the other two had set and time and change had fixed. Not only the operation of the mill but its pattern of growth had become wholly automatic and totally soulless. He had become master of the mill at last only to find it grown beyond his mastery.

The other side of Sam's life is represented by three women — his wife, his secretary, and his daughter-in-law. Each

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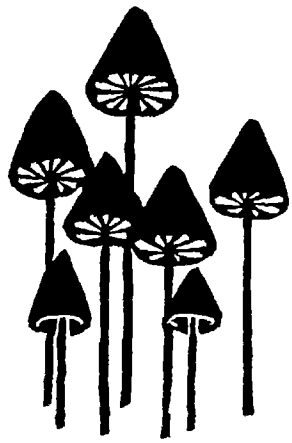
is the mirror of a particular stage in his emotional development and each is named Maude. Together, the three might have made one interesting and satisfying heroine; apart, they exist only as symbols. Neither this nor the other narrative devices of the novel are particularly successful. The management of time, while logical and credible seen as an old man's searching of his experience for the meaning of life, is made needlessly clumsy and cumbersome. Many of the interruptions seem arbitrary and even whimsical, motivated not so much by a conscious narrative purpose as by the desire to reproduce the woolgatherings of senility.

As a whole, the novel gives the impression of being out of its period. Its theme, its characters, and its society belong to the trust-busting era associated with the novels of Frank Norris. Its characters do not talk, act or think like Canadians, and they live with a formality more likely to have been found on an upper-middle-class country estate in Sweden at the turn of the century than anywhere between the Lakehead and Kenora during the twenties. Is this an example of Northern Ontario opulence?

> Clark House, with its thirty guest rooms as well as the Palace Hotel was filled to overflowing; some fifty local guests, a hundred from distant centres, were invited, with their wives. Even in the large ballroom of Clark House, in the four drawing rooms, and in the great hall, there was a crush.

We have here, then, three mildly interesting novels which were once well worth publishing. Whether, except as period pieces, they are worth republishing is the question which gave rise to the doubts expressed at the beginning of this review. Perhaps they are, but perhaps this is the cream-line and it might be wise, in adding future titles to this series, not to dip any farther into the milk. Perhaps also, McClelland and Stewart might consider publishing in their New Canadian Library, moderately good Canadian novels which are new rather than moderately good ones which are old.



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books in review

VIOLENT SEASON

ROBERT GOULET. *The Violent Season.* S. J. Reginald Saunders. $4.50.

ROBERT GOULET (no kin to Sir Lancelot of *Camelot*) is a French Canadian from Trois Rivières. At 36 he has lived and worked in Canada, England, France and the U.S.A., where he now teaches at a prep. school in Connecticut; but it is obvious from this, his first novel, that though he has abandoned his country and his first language, his native soil still clings to his boots, and in trying to knock it off he has kicked a few shins. The Church Spiritual, the Church Temporal, the Church Psychotic and Neurotic are on view; the French Canadian village female with (if we are to believe Goulet) her narrowness, her lust for flesh, power, heaven and hell, and her inability to rise above the venality of the village or look beyond it because of the all-embracing Church, is here to see; and the smalltown Canadian, henpecked, henchased, drunk, disorderly, fearful of the female and her mentor the Church, affords motivation and most of the comic relief. Yet this book is not nasty for evil's sake, nor brutal just to be sensational — nor is it funny only to provide comedy. Goulet has a hold on something here that *is* brutal, evil, twisted and even comic, if his vision is clear and true — and nowhere in the book could I hear a false note struck by any of the people or by the life they led. He even made, for me, that old wheeze, the whorehouse versus the Church and its Women's Auxiliary, carry the weight of serious fiction.

The story takes place in and around La Buche, a village on the edge of the forest and beside the river down which logs float on their way to Trois Rivières. There is a factory in town, with girls to work in it; there are the loggers in the forest who come twice a year on their way to Montreal. The girls are seduced; they have babies; the babies are sent to Trois Rivières to the orphanage; and the numbers being sent there are increasing yearly. Monsieur Le Curè, criticized by the Archbishop and in danger of losing his parish, allows a brothel to open in town under the guise of a rosary factory in order to try to stem this tide of illegitimacy. Les Dames de la Grace, led by the ambitious Madame Dupré, find out what's going on in "the red house" and raise a lot of hell in God's name. In the end they catapult themselves into a Charivari. In Quebec Charivaris are, says author Goulet, "raised by women and the purpose is righteous", and the result is blood. This is the violent season. The men of the town, the loggers, and Monsieur Le Curé fight it, but they lose terribly.

Meanwhile, Madame Gautier, whose husband died years ago in another brothel fire set by another Charivari, resigns her presidency of Les Dames de la Grace, watches over her tubercular and dying son and is trapped by the Church Psychotic into thinking him a saint. Father Boulanger, of the local seminary, dreams of the young man's Beatification, his being raised to Sainthood, and the building of a shrine on the hill overlooking La Buche that will rival that of

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Ste. Anne de Beaupré. Each day he visits Claude, appraises his delirium and finds him more saintly. Daily he preaches to the women at Mass about "the little saint," and when, during the time the women are shouting for Charivari, Claude seems to predict the time of his own death, Father Boulanger quiets them by telling them that a great event is going to happen. They wait for it, half-appeased by this and the promise by Monsieur Le Curé that the brothel keeper will pay Les Dames $200 and leave town. Then Claude's brother, a logger just out of the woods (and a character too flat because he is used by the author as a mouthpiece), finds that his brother could perhaps be cured by an operation. He tells the nearly resigned Claude about this, and Claude staggers out into the crowded street to find his girl (he does not know she is from "the red house"); at the same moment some of the children of the town chase and stone the madam of the brothel and her body falls into the river. With blood already spilled and their miracle not happening, the women of the town raise their Charivari spontaneously. The brothel is burned with its inmates as the crowd stands horrified while Claude rushes into the flames to find his beloved. They do not see his brother bring him out. After the fire they find a charred body of a Jewish logger who they think is Claude and he is borne back to the Church with great reverance. Thus they have burned the devil out of the town and found themselves a saint. God is in his Heaven, all's right with the world.

This outline is perhaps unfair to the novel. It seems melodrama; and yet it is not. There are excesses in the book —

some comic sequences are too hackneyed, and occasionally the writing is moralistic and declamatory — but the anger that propels the author to his work is controlled, pointed and unabashed. There is no hint here of the narrowness and caution now fashionable in fiction. Goulet is not sensitive, style-ridden, introspective or *aware*. He is individual and he is his own man. He particularises, generalises and symbolises with the kind of abandon that is infectious. The reader — this one at any rate — is dragged, pushed and bounced around his landscape and among his people so that after the book's few days are past The Violent Season has been lived and is closer to experience than memory. This is a good novel that should be read by a good many Canadians, and a lot of would-be Canadian authors.

ROBERT HARLOW

AN UNSKILLED SKATER

ADAM GILLON. *The Eternal Solitary: A Study of Joseph Conrad.* Bookman Associates. $4.95.

SINCE IT IS DIFFICULT to find anything to praise in this book, I shall not try. Its author received a Ph.D. from Columbia University in 1954 for the thesis from which it has been formed. The subject, a study of "isolation as a dominant *motif* in the life and works of Joseph Conrad", has received quite a bit of attention in the recent flood of books on Conrad. Mr. Gillon has added practically nothing to the subject; it is therefore to his credit that he has cut his thesis down before having it published. Some scar tissue has resulted, however: two paragraphs on pp 61-62 reappear without change on pp. 96-97. There are other evidences of surgical untidiness. How else explain the way on p. 69 Winnie Verloc, the wife of the Secret Agent has been carelessly placed in *Under Western Eyes?*

More prosaically, on p. 83 an ostensible quotation begins with almost a full line that is actually a paraphrase by Mr. Gillon. Conversely and more irritatingly he constantly paraphrases Conrad without warning the reader (cf. pp. 20, 22, 80, 84, 137, 149). For instance, speaking of Mr. and Mrs. Hervey in "The Return," he says "they have skimmed over the surface of life, ignoring its dark, hidden stream." Conrad wrote of "two skilful skaters cutting figures on thick ice for the admiration of the beholders, and disdainfully ignoring the hidden stream, the stream restless and dark; the stream of life, profound and unfrozen." In a like manner, Mr. Gillon has not seen much (and has communicated none) of the depth, the power and excitement of Conrad's novels. Partly this may follow from his determination not to skate in any of the patterns that other critics have made. As a result he is frequently forced to pretend to ignore them, or in the case of Thomas Moser to argue minor matters as if they were major. In his treatment of Moser's book *Joseph Conrad, Achievement and Decline,* Mr. Gillon's penchant for over-simplifying results in frequent distortions. The irony is that Moser has dealt with a potentially sensational subject in an informed and reasonable manner, and with clarity. The essentially fuzzy quality of Mr. Gillon's writing is well indicated in his attempted dismissal of Moser's thesis. "Perhaps it is true that Conrad fails in his presentation of sexual

love between man and woman, but this does not mean an artistic failure of the novelist."

It might have been the saving grace of the book that the author knows and refers to Polish literature. But his references take him away from his ostensible topic, his summaries are too slight to have intrinsic interest, and he does not relate them thoroughly enough to Conrad. Still, he has the virtue, as some consider it, of not being a new critic (his references to symbols are few and crude, cf. pp. 64, 102). But whatever else may be said of textual analysis, it at least increases the critic's chances of making contact with the material. This book never stays on any one topic long enough to become engaged. But like a slick sophomore's essay, it is careful to end with a paternal and affirmative statement which moves noticeably beyond the scope of the study: "The discerning student, however, will regard his best novels and tales as the work of a great tragic writer."

E. B. GOSE

PAST OR PERMANENT

THOMAS MCCULLOCH. *The Stepsure Letters.* McClelland & Stewart. $1.00.

H. NORTHROP FRYE, in his Introduction to this latest addition to the New Canadian Library Series, reflects that a study of such things as *The Stepsure Letters* "helps to distinguish for us what is past from what is permanent". He goes on to say that the society McCulloch depicts is gone, even in the Maritimes. It is gone in such places as Halifax and Saint John; but, and perhaps fortunately, it remains in places like Melanson in Nova Scotia, and Hatfield Point in New Brunswick. The people still gather in the local country store, with cracker barrels and salted fish in the corner, lawn and muslin in bolts on that table in the corner, and talk about the 'govment', and how since things are slack they will have to cunge next winter. These things are not affected as they often are in New England; rather, it is a part of life which does continue in the same way in places where many things have not changed because the old is easier and more comfortable than the new. In this case what is permanent is also past. It has been Thomas Chandler Haliburton's historical position in Canadian literature to be the recorder of life in Nova Scotia, and often he is acknowledged as the leader of Canadian humour. The writings of McCulloch show how shaky this reputation really is; this new book in the New Canadian Library disturbs one reputation and affirms another.

The Stepsure Letters is a collection of letters written by McCulloch under the name of Mephibosheth Stepsure, first published in 1821 in the *Acadian Recorder*. It is a series of letters about local problems and ideas, firmly spiced with a quiet humour whose tone has been culminated in the works of Stephen Leacock. Stepsure has a remarkable personality, and the letters are filled with his ideals, beliefs, and desires. Stepsure drifts along with what happens in his community, and is sometimes inconvenienced by the after effects of the enterprises there. But the ease is there, though occasionally there are moments of formal and stilted prose.

It is a great achievement on McCulloch's part to keep up one's interest in the ordinary happenings of ordinary people in an ordinary town, and there is nothing but admiration for the skill with which he does it. Mephibosheth's awareness to what is happening around him, his ease in retelling the battle of Captain Shootem and the pigs, his use of far-from-coarse language in the account of Hodge, all add to the final impression of the book. McCulloch has made the reader interested in all facets of the book, the action, the dialogue, and the narrator. Often it is only the action which attracts. McCulloch seems to ask his readers to be like the spectators at a football game and to attach their support to the ball as well as to the teams.

Though the book seems to be constructed firstly by chronology, it is more often done by topic, and is exceedingly well written. The "Leisure of tone" (as Frye calls it) is the book's most remarkable feature, along with the undetached reporting about conditions and happenings that have good general applicability. The most memorable episodes in the letters are the ones that are filled with slapstick, a kind of humour that mellows and grows — the humour of Leacock.

But what the book does do is show how pale the tales of Haliburton really are. They are a part of a past that has gone, but McCulloch has dealt both in story and theme with things that last. Sam Slick is too slick; Haliburton is always too obvious, even to the point of using italics if he thinks something is particularly good. But McCulloch eases along and tells his stories slowly and surely. The New Canadian Library acknowledged Haliburton with an edition of *The Clockmaker* some time ago. But they have also brought McCulloch out from his hiding place, and the new position should make most readers realize that here are the beginnings of a distinct Canadian humour that has survived along with the cracker barrels and the salt herring in little places like Hatfield Point. *The Stepsure Letters* creates nostalgia for the past in its readers (as it did for Frye, as seen in the Introduction); the most remarkable thing, however, is that the life depicted by McCulloch still exists in the Martimes.

DONALD STEPHENS

AN INDIAN TRAGEDY

YVES THERIAULT. *Ashini.* Fides (Montreal).

M. THERIAULT harps again on an old grim theme, the casual destruction of traditional pride by civilized inability to feel back in time. The victims in this tragedy are the North American Indians, represented in the person of an unredeemed Montagnais.

Ashini tells his own story: how his family one by one were taken from him by the cruelty of nature or the cruelty of the white men, alike devoid of personal malice yet devastatingly destructive; how he refused the degrading comforts of the reservation, though the presence of white men had driven the few remaining animals into the northern wilderness; of his vision of freedom for his people, his attempt to parley with the Great White Chief from Ottawa, his pathetic failure and his death.

The author shows the shortcomings of

the civilized, even those fundamentally sympathetic to the Indians; and damns with faint praise that paternalism which condemns great hunters to the spiritless dragging out of a pensionary existence. Ashini is doomed because his point of view is so far removed that there can be no common meeting-place. The ultimate irony comes when, home at last in the happy hunting ground, he learns that his messages in blood were never forwarded to the Great White Chief. His ritual death has earned him a few lines on the official death certificate: Ashini, Montagnais, 63 years, committed suicide while temporarily mentally deranged.

Like all of Theriault's work, this novel is written in clear and straightforward French, and says what it has to say with disarming simplicity. It is less effective than either *Aaron* or *Agaguk,* partly because of a conscious exaggeration of the author's usual forthright style. The publisher's blurb claims that the result is poetic, but if so it is a clipped, bare poesy somewhere halfway between Hemingway and the Authorised Version. The style is not unpleasant, but it is affected and occasionally monotonous.

Judged as a novel, the book is inferior to the earlier works mentioned; at any rate if one agrees that a novel should tell a good story against an interesting background. There are fine moments in *Ashini,* but too many pages are taken up with the musings of the central character. Though it is not quite fair to say that none of the minor characters have life, they are certainly fewer and less alive than one might have expected from an author with Theriault's talents. The book, containing just 173 pages of large (and attractive) type, gives an impression of having been spread a little, so as to give it reasonable bulk. It might have been more satisfying if the author had written in the third person, leaving out some of the philosophy, and putting in more of the nature lore which added so much to the interest of *Agaguk.*

Theriault, however, has made a point of trying to avoid repetition in his technique. He had displayed a good deal of versatility between *Le Dompteur d'Ours* and *Agaguk,* and was doubtless eager to carry on the tradition. The attempt does not quite succeed in this case, yet it is to be hoped that the criticism offered will not discourage potential readers.

GILBERT FARTHING

VIEWS OF A DAILY LIVING

DOROTHY ROBERTS. *Twice to Flame.* Ryerson. $3.50.

THE POEMS IN Dorothy Roberts' *Twice to Flame* present views of a daily living. Their tone is quiet, their material ordinary, so that we may read them, at first, in the light of one of our strangest assumptions, that we know what daily living is. With curious ease we can accept juxtapositions of cars and cicadas, housing developments and space, the intermingling of discordant past and present. And because of this acceptance, the peculiar daily event can persist in our awareness, like a name said over and over, until it moves out of familiarity, through utter strangeness, to idiosyncracy.

Some occurences and recurrences may both threaten and bear meaning, especially for a woman. Many of the

poems in *Twice to Flame* are concerned with generation and decay, possibly meaningless patterns, possibly significant chaos, and the dominance of the mere thing. In "Early Morning", for instance, "The tool that is a stiff extension of the hand, / The light that comes slowly over the land / . . . find me in the morning . . ." and the sense of them is "I do not know how else to have a day / That brings me out of the night and the uncertainty / And sets me up among things where I live / . . . . I live in these hard things and the way they look . . . ." "First Spring" and "The Tombstone I" are other poems which arise from deliberate acceptance of peculiar daily experience, whose apparent disparities move to "That is my vision and there is no use / To try to make it otherwise. We live."

The restrictions of both subject matter and tone are devices for shaping a particular view. Many of these poems show extraordinary imaginative reach and generosity. In one of the several poems about the strict, devout grandparents, there is room for the early awed subjection of the child, for her later "quite proper" growing away, and for the adult's present looking back to "see them grow / Bigger and bigger with their Book aglow." The poem is short, and made precisely of this arc of view. Again, in the sequence called "The Setting", the terrible, dark, cold passion of the grandparents is a way, not an obstacle, to apprehending their vision. In the poems called "Sisters", "The Apple", "Two Children", "Veranda Spinsters" there is an interaction of detachment and tenderness which seems to have come from a refusal to limit conscious experience by calling it unimportant or bizarre, ironic or non-existent.

The techniques of repetition and the simple statement of wonder in fact which give these poems their strength occasionally fail, and then the poems are weakened by sentimentality. A line like "Up, up, up, up" in "Dazzle" is hard to pull off, as is the frequent use of the exclamatory "oh". But the view which seems to require these devices is the same view which shapes "A pattern sits, a pattern says it's ready, / A pattern perambulates among its outposts / And colors all its doings with the fixed centre."

H. W. SONTHOFF

THE LEAN AND THE LUSCIOUS

LEONARD COHEN. *The Spice-Box of Earth.* McClelland & Stewart. Cloth $3.00. Paper $1.50.

THIS BOOK CONTAINS some fifty poems on various aspects of sexual love. One of the most successful of them is called simply "For Anne".

With Annie gone,
whose eyes to compare
with the morning sun?

Not that I did compare,
But I do compare
Now that she's gone.

There is here none of the delight in language for its euphonic sake alone which enhances and mars the companion pieces; there is only a clear, rueful statement of a widely-felt truth. But so clear is the statement that it gives rise to doubts concerning the authenticity of the other poems. The poet declares that he is not in the habit of appreciating the greenness of his own fields — a common failing. Yet most of the book consists of the expression of such appreciation. Here may be a clue to the impression of artificiality one gathers from *The Spice-Box of Earth.* One suspects that at times the ornateness of the language obscures a paucity — not of feeling — but of communicative maturity. The emotion is there, but the emotive thought has not crystallised; it lies dispersed in abstract nouns and adjectives.

A poet, if he wishes to keep his poems alive, must watch closely for those words whose meanings have decayed, and drive them away from his work. These are words like "heart", ruined by bad poets and successful song-writers; like "lovely" and "splendid", destroyed by advertising media. Leonard Cohen is obviously aware of the obsolescence of "heart", for it can be no accident that it does not appear once. But other ruined words — "beauty", "golden", and "glory", for example — frequently recur. And when a poet as perceptive as Leonard Cohen uses these words and others of like ambiguity, there are grounds for belief in his partial lack of creating consciousness. But only partial.

For in every poem that repeats the hard simplicity of "For Anne" he is successful. In poems of the other, luscious mode, he is less often so. After "For Anne", the terse ballad, "I Long to Hold Some Lady" is the best:

I long to hold some lady
For my love is far away,
And will not come tomorrow
And was not here today.

There is no flesh so perfect
As on my lover's bone,
And yet it seems so distant
When I am all alone . . . .

But I long to hold some lady,
For flesh is warm and sweet.
Cold skeletons go marching
Each night beside my feet.

On the other hand, "When I Uncovered Your Body" seems to mean very little:

. . . I thought I could bestow beauty
like a benediction . . .
. . . the real and violent proportions of your body
made obsolete old treaties of excellence,
measures and poems,
and clamoured with a single challenge of personal beauty,
which cannot be interpreted or praised:
it must be met.

This is an argument-poem; the poet is

arguing with his misapprehensions. It is doubtful, however, whether the dialectic, depending on words as amorphous as "beauty", "real", "excellence", and on Audenesque turns of speech as hollow as "treaties of excellence", can sustain so strong an ending. In fact, the intended largeness of "it must be met" assumes the characteristics, after much inflation, of a barrage-balloon which floats away, lost to understanding.

There are poets, passionate men by definition, who can never communicate — in their poetry — sexual passion. I do not believe Leonard Cohen is among them. "Beneath my Hands", "Celebration", and "The Priest Says Goodbye", speak of his possibilties. But for these to become actual, he will probably have to write less about love, and think about it longer.

Cohen's poetic nerve cannot, in the end, be competely hidden by the flesh of words. His fine perception is apparent in "Before the Story", "As the Mist Leaves no Scar", and "Summer Haiku" —"Silence / and a deeper silence / when the crickets / hesitate". When his sensual insight escapes petrification by lack of thought, or by the alchemy of golden words, he produces, "When he puts his mouth against her shoulder / she is uncertain whether her shoulder / has given or received the kiss." Above all, he brings the impression of good health to his poetry. The afflictions mentioned here are curable, and once Cohen has freed his sensibility from what West called "the thick glove of words" he will be able to sing as few of his contemporaries can.

DAVID BROMIGE

TEARS FOR A GOLDEN AGE

JOHN RICHMOND: *A Tearful Tour of Toronto's Riviera of Yesteryear.* Macmillan. $7.50.

TORONTO'S RIVIERA of Yesteryear is for the most part its Island, and this extremely charming picture book shows you the Golden Age past in ravishing old photos taken about the turn of the century; the Mildew Age present appears in Lorraine Surcouf's egg tempera visions of chalky white Colonel's cottages all deserted, old willows whose leaves are egg yolk and other pleasure domes crumbling sweetly away. The photos are by William James, an early Canadian photographer of genius, and what with a text that lets itself go, this is altogether a most unusual book and must not be missed.

The camera pictures here reveal not a world of fake nostalgia but a world that was a genuine Golden Age. Toronto was a happier place then than now, just pastoral enough, just urban enough. My favorite pictures are the old ladies on the Tug of War team, the egg and spoon race, and the boy wandering about a rushy foreshore. By some magic or other William James was able to give his pictures a depth of suggestion: you can feel the summer breeze, imagine the tug of war ladies back in their Brunswick St. hideouts and see the green of those bulrushes.

John Richmond's text is engagingly enthusiastic and a complete contrast to the usual text for a Canadian picture book. You know: "Here is the largest slag pile in the British Empire just outside of Sudbury." His arrangement and editing of the pictures gives the reader a

complete day at the Island in 1908: early morning, cool; hot afternoon and then waiting at the pier for the ferry with Toronto in industrial sunset splendour across the bay. Incidentally Toronto looks much better without the Royal York and the Bank of Commerce.

JAMES REANEY

PALATABLE HISTORY

ERIC KOCH AND VINCENT TOVELL, WITH JOHN T. SAYWELL. *Success of a Mission.* Clarke, Irwin. $1.25.

THE TITLE of this television play applies not merely to the contents of the drama, the achievement of Lord Durham, but to the play itself, if we regard the intention of the playwrights to be primarily educational rather than entertaining, informative rather than dramatically moving.

The authors, Eric Koch, Vincent Tovell and John T. Saywell, have managed to compress a great deal of historically accurate information about the personality and character of Lord Durham and the complexities and the significance of the issues confronting him in British North America during the crises of the late 1830's. They present these facts in a series of loosely-knit scenes linked by many expository passages — largely comments by a narrator, or interviews carried on by him of leading figures on the political scene. Though the presentation is lucid and the historical moment dramatic and significant, the play for the most part cannot be considered dramatic literature: the events narrated do not constitute a plot, nor is there any vital development of character through confrontation with inner dilemmas or external circumstances.

This criticism is not intended to suggest that the play fails to achieve its purpose. Indeed, the authors frankly state in the preface that their intention was to "present Durham and his achievement to a wider public than that found in the confines of the classroom and lecture hall." This they have managed to do in a kind of imaginatively conceived "documentary", for which television lends itself admirably. In view of the proved competence of the authors, however, it seems unfortunate that they did not attempt more than the mission of presenting history in a palatable form.

M. W. STEINBERG

WHERE SOLITUDES JOIN

Canadian Dualism: La Dualité Canadienne, edited by Mason Wade, University of Toronto Press, $8.50.

Canadian Dualism, which is sub-titled *Studies in French-English Relations* and bears both title and sub-title in our two languages, is an ambitious symposium jointly published by Laval University and the University of Toronto; the central idea of a wide and varied study of biculturalism was developed by a Committee of the Social Science Research Council of Canada, under the chairmanship of Jean-C. Falardeau, and the editing was entrusted to Mason Wade of the University of Rochester, one of the most knowledgeable American authorities on things Canadian; finally, the component essays were written by a group of one

Franco-American and twenty Canadian scholars, divided with rough equality between those who write French and those who write English.

Canadian Dualism is on the whole successful, though I am not sure its success is of the kind originally aimed at. The initiators of the project sought "to reveal the nature of biculturalism in Canada and to ascertain the various social techniques which the Canadian people have worked out for the resolution or containment of the inner tensions of their country." Many aspects of biculturalism —its manifestations in education and the arts, for instance—were deliberately ignored in the hope (which I echo) that there would be a call for a second volume, and the studies presented in *Canadian Dualism* concern social, religious and philosophical attitudes, population and economic factors, forms of social organisation and—in a fascinating group of five final essays—the situation of French Canadians outside Quebec.

Generally speaking, one cannot complain of the quality of the essays. Perhaps a quarter of them are too stiffly academic in tone or too obsessively statistical in content to appeal to the averagely enterprising reader. But that is a respectably small proportion in a collection of this kind, particularly in Canada, and the rest range from acceptable clarity and informativeness to the kind of vital provocation of interest which one feels on reading George Stanley's "French and English in Western Canada", George F. Theriault's "The Franco-Americans in Western Canada", Pierre Elliott Trudeau's "Some Obstacles to Democracy in Quebec" and Jean-C. Falardeau's "Les Canadiens français et leur idéologie".

Yet *Canadian Dualism,* interesting as it is, does not really fulfil its original intent, for little attention is paid to the Anglo-Canadian side of the dualistic pattern. Almost every essay—as the titles I have quoted suggest—is focussed mainly on French rather than English Canada. This seems to indicate that in the minds of cultured Canadians it is French Canada's relationship to the rest of the country that presents the more intricate, the more insistent and—in the last resort— the more interesting problem. The problem of the English Canadian attitude to French Canada is all too often the dull problem of indifference, which nobody finds it easy to write about. One can only hope that books like *Canadian Dualism* will help to dispel the mists.

GEORGE WOODCOCK

opinions and notes

PROTECTION OF MEDIOCRITY

The Royal Commission on Publications

Donald Stephens

CONTINUING A TRADITION usual with Royal Commissions, the controversial O'Leary Commission of Publications has added little but vague recommendations and trite observations to the problem of the survival of magazines in Canada. The Government apparently thinks this is so, for it has indicated that it is in no hurry to use the sweeping proposals aimed at the restriction of American magazines in Canada. The Commission urges that periodical publishing in Canada should be Canadian, competitive and healthy. Ideal statements such as this have a value, but publishing in Canada should be Canadian only if the best is Canadian. And if better writing, better thinking, and better magazines come from elsewhere, surely the reader in Canada has the right to make the choice.

The point that this recent Royal Commission has overlooked is that magazines in Canada continue a Canadian trend to be imitative and derivative, based on the feeling that the best in magazines comes from outside Canada. Indeed, the magazines in Canada are inferior. And putting restrictions on American magazines, encouraging the advertiser to use Canadian publications, ensuring some economic security to magazines through these channels, does not automatically mean that Canadian magazines will then become the best that can be found. Economic encouragement does not in fact mean that "our periodical press" will add to "the richness and variety of Canadian life" and that this must "be considered if 'the culture and unity of Canada' are to be preserved and extended." This kind of statement recurs throughout the Commission's report, and makes it read more like an endorsement for something "truly Canadian" (which the commissioners admit cannot be defined) than an attempt to bring the best into the world of Canadian periodicals.

Recommendations such as the Commission does make can hardly strengthen the position of the Canadian magazine either economically or artistically. On the other hand, some obviously practical suggestions have not been taken up. A simple economic device of free mailing service (or mailing at two cents a pound) for the promotion of Canadian periodicals brought to Canadian homes would help many magazines to survive if only one per cent of the letters distributed brought in subscriptions. If the Federal Government, in its wish to "spread information about Canada" or to ensure that "people in other countries should be given a chance to see Canada through Canadian eyes", would buy copies of Canadian magazines to be sent to all embassies and consulates abroad (as recommended by the brief sent in by *Canadian Literature*), the security of the smaller magazines with deliberately limited appeals could be increased.

Canadian publications of a popular

type do not enjoy large audiences, and this is not because of the lack of advertising in them. Admittedly money is made with advertising, and more money would make it possible to send out more reminders of the presence of some magazines. But new taxes on advertisers are not going to improve the situation. The Commission's recommendations on this point are a kind of punishment for the business man who naturally wants to use the magazine which promises the best return for his product. The obvious thing for Canadian popular publications who want larger circulations is to improve their quality. Improvement in quality would bring the larger audiences which are needed for magazines of this kind to survive. But there can be no justification for the protection of mediocrity.

The improvement in the quality of the magazines will come when Canadian writers and publishers remember that they are men as well as Canadians. The world is too small for Canadians to be interested only in finding a "national identity", one relating (as the Commission calls it) the "Canadian experience". Surely, when the adolescent search for finding oneself is developed into an international consciousness, Canadian magazines will produce writing of a quality that will be read throughout the English-speaking world, in opposition to the American magazines of which the Commission seems particularly afraid—*Time* and *The Reader's Digest*! Surely somewhere and some time — and soon — the quality of Canadian magazines will go beyond the "quality" of these!

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