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Articles

BY JEAN-CHARLES FALARDEAU, WILLIAM SOLLY, DESMOND PACEY, JOAN SELBY, GERARD TOUGAS, ROBERT MCCORMACK

Reviews

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contributors

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editorial

REMOTE REFLECTIONS

THIS EDITORIAL, written far from Canada, begins with a subject — Rabindranath Tagore — which may well seem remote from the normal preoccupations of *Canadian Literature*. Chance led me to attend during November in New Delhi some of the sessions of the literary seminar held to celebrate the centenary of Tagore, who, like Gandhi, has become the centre of one of those reverential cults which flourish in independent India.

On the whole what was said at the seminar confirmed my own impression of Tagore as a great literary — and more than literary — personality rather than a great writer. Like A. E., the poet of the Irish Renaissance whom he resembled in so many respects, Tagore came at a crucial time in the revival of his country's culture, and, with his multiform interests in poetry and drama, in painting and music, in education and philosophy and Indian nationalism, he served a catalytic rather than a creative purpose. Perhaps the most relevant of all the suggestions made about him at the seminar was that, by commanding world-wide respect, he brought about "the restoration of the self-respect of the Indian intellectual." For, while Tagore's writings may raise doubts in the minds of critical readers, Tagore as a symbolic figure, standing for the revival of Indian culture after the long submersion that followed the decay of the Moghul empire, occupies a permanently important place in the literary history of his country. He does so largely because he was so much more than a writer, because he was one of the few men in our age to approach the great Renaissance ideal of the many-sided man, because he saw literature never in isolation but always in the context of the general culture of his time, because his loyalty to India and his loyalty to the world were equal yet never conflicted. In this respect it is not inappropriate to compare him

with men like Goethe and Pushkin, who changed the intellectual life of Germany and Russia, not merely by what they wrote, but also by their personification of the many-sided urges towards cultural identity to which their times gave birth.

As I have suggested, all this may appear to have very little to do with literature in Canada. Yet there are similarities between the literary worlds of India and Canada. In both countries native writers are adapting the English language and English literary forms to the lives they live in a world away from England. In both countries the limitations of publishing facilities make writing more often a labour of dedication than a profession by which the author can hope to attain economic independence. In both countries writers are divided by sheer distance, which makes the links between Bombay and Calcutta or Mysore and Delhi as remote as those between Vancouver and Toronto, and equally by linguistic differences, for while Canada has two major literary languages, India has at least nine.

Yet there is a certain unity in Indian literary culture, multilingual as it is, which unfortunately we have not yet attained in Canada. There are common traditions, a common body of myth and belief, and, closer in time, a shared experience of the liberation movement and of the extraordinary, magnetic personality of Gandhi. Canada's progression towards national autonomy did not produce, and perhaps did not need, a figure of Gandhi's moral power; it produced instead the infinitely more prosaic figure of Sir John A. Macdonald. Similarly, it did not produce a literary personality of the stature of Tagore. We have had writers whose work has been as good as Tagore's, and even better, but we have had none so far who has so clearly and admirably in his own life related the aims of literature to the realities of his country and of the world beyond, to the external demands of history and to the unhistorical urges of the man within.

It is perhaps pointless to regret the lack, since catalytic personalities can no more be produced to order than creative artists. Yet there is a point in remembering, in our North American world, the values for which Tagore stood. In a time when specialization has narrowed down literary criticism to a technique of analysis and had led to the snobbish cultivation of "creative" as distinct from other forms of writing, it is well to recollect those writers who realised that the arts will atrophy if they are separated too deeply from each other or from the wider world in which all artists live. Men like Tagore have lessons for other lands beside their own.

RECHERCHE D'UNE VOIX

Le Canada français par sa littérature

Jean-Charles Falardeau

Toute interpretation d'une littérature, comme le rappelle Albert Thibaudet à la suite de Montaigne, est une sorte de discours. Et tout discours de ce genre est arbitraire. "Parler des lettres, c'est . . . les dire en y mettant un ordre." Or, l'histoire d'une littérature ne comporte, de soi, aucun ordre absolument évident. On a le choix entre plusieurs systèmes. Grouper les écrivains d'un pays par époques, par constellations, par écoles, est une opération sélective qui s'accomplit à l'aide de fils conducteurs que l'historien ou le critique choisit lui-même au départ. Ces fils seront d'autant plus efficaces qu'on en aura trouvé la suggestion dans la réalité littéraire elle-même, voire dans la totalité de la réalité intellectuelle et sociale dont celle-ci a été le miroir.

Il faut éviter, du moins dans un premier regard, de trop comparer la littérature du Canada français à d'autres littératures qui lui sont apparentées soit culturellement, comme la littérature française, soit géographiquement, comme les littératures canadienne, anglaise ou américaine. Elle n'est pas une littérature comme les autres. Elle est même beaucoup moins une littérature que ne le sont plusieurs littératures "nationales". On s'est longtemps demandé si elle existait vraiment. Reconnaissons que oui, elle existe. Reconnaissons aussitôt que la critique qui s'est complue à l'analyser est généralement demeurée en deçà des évaluations proprement esthétiques. La critique canadienne-française a été essentiellement une critique morale, ou théologique, ou sociologique, ou psychologique. Il en est ainsi parce que l'ensemble de la littérature canadienne est surtout intéressante dans ces perspectives-là. Rares sont les très grandes œuvres poétiques ou romanesques qui s'imposent par leur éclat ou par leur grandeur. La littérature a été avant tout un

instrument de combat social ou politique, un refuge, une soupape de sûreté. Rendre compte de la littérature canadienne-française c'est, dans une large mesure, récapituler l'aventure de la collectivité humaine dont elle a été un cri ou un reflet. "Nous sommes en présence," écrit le critique Gilles Marcotte, "à la fois d'un milieu et d'une littérature qui se font. Et nous venons à peine d'apercevoir les lignes de force qui commandent l'évolution de l'un et de l'autre."[1]

L'image que les Canadiens français se font de leur histoire est condensée dans un double souvenir: celui de l' "âge d'or" du régime français; celui de la dépossession du régime anglais. Ces deux souvenirs sont distincts l'un de l'autre. Ils sont la cause d'un profond déchirement. La rupture de l'association avec la France, en 1760, a pris rétrospectivement surtout depuis l'historien F.-X Garneau au milieu de XIXe siècle, le caractère d'un traumatisme. Les générations de Canadiens ont vu leur histoire scindée en deux tronçons. Ils se sont vus eux-mêmes comme des exilés. Jusqu'à une époque récente, leur société a été une sorte d'Irlande: culturellement insulaire dans un continent anglophone, politiquement minoritaire, baignant dans une atmosphère de constant "état de siège", repliée sur elle-même, frustrée. Au surplus, cette société est maintenant passée de l'état traditionnel et rural au stade industriel et urbain. D'homogène, elle est devenue culturellement hétérogène. Les classes sociales se sont diversifiées. Les attitudes, les modes de vie, les comportements se sont altérés. L'univers social canadien-français, depuis la première guerre mondiale, est passé de l'âge de *Maria Chapdelaine* à celui de *Babitt.* A l'éclatement des structures sociales traditionnelles a correspondu une réjuvénation de la création littéraire et artistique. Le Canada français contemporain offre l'image d'une société en quête d'une nouvelle définition d'elle-même et d'un sens nouveau à donner à sa culture.

QUELLES SONT, dans l'histoire sociale canadienne, les phases distinctives, et, par rapport à celles-ci, les époques marquantes de l'histoire littéraire? Peut-on, avec l'écrivain Roger Lemelin, discerner trois étapes de l'évolution sociale: la vie rurale, la vie urbaine, la vie nord-américaine, auxquelles correspondraient trois registres d'expression littéraire: pastoral, urbain, psychologique?[2] C'est beaucoup simplifier. Ou doit-on, comme le fait Gérard Tougas, reconnaître cinq générations littéraires caractéristiques: les débuts; l'âge de Garneau (1845-1865); un âge de transition (1865-1899); l'époque moderne (1900-1939) et l'époque comtemporaine?[3] Ce schéma se justifie par plusieurs critères

valables mais il manque le fait que deux genres importants au moins, le roman et la poésie, ont connu des tempos d'évolution fort différents l'un de l'autre. Ce qu'il faut surtout demander à l'histoire, c'est l'indication des conditions qui ont favorisé certains climats intellectuels, certains genres d'expression littéraire, certains thèmes ou certaines obsessions. La littérature canadienne recèle quelques archétypes tenaces. Plus que toute autre source, elle permet d'identifier certains grands mythes qui, de façon inconsciente ou consciente, ont polarisé les ambitions, les illusions ou les frustrations de la collectivité.

Notre littérature fut d'abord une rhétorique. Cette rhétorique était nourrie des encyclopédistes du XVIIIe siècle et du romantisme politique. Mais après la révolte manquée de 1837, le lyrisme qu'avaient provoqué la parole et la personnalité de Papineau se trouva vidé de son ambition. A partir de cette époque, comme le note Victor Barbeau, la notion même de patrie sera devenue, pour les écrivains canadiens, une abstraction.[4] Les lenteurs et les incertitudes initiales de la littérature reflétèrent cette immense déception. Ses premiers dévoloppements furent assez semblables à ceux de la littérature américaine de l'époque. Elle commença à se dépolitiser par l'histoire et par la poésie. L'intérêt historique suscité par Garneau fut à l'origine de la première grande aventure poétique, celle de l'*Ecole* patriotique de Québec, de 1860. Crémazie, Fréchette, embouchent la trompette de *La Légende des siècles.* Leurs grandiloquentes envolées orchestrent ausi le sentiment d'un exil, d'une séparation d'avec la vie. Le leur côté, les premiers romans ont un intérêt purement documentaire. Le *Charles Guérin* de Chauveau décrit les culs-de-sac de la société, la pathétique trilogie des seules professions — prêtrise, droit, médecine — offertes au jeune Canadien français, l'affolante distance qui sépare ceux qui s'adonnent à ces professions du reste de la société. Gérin-Lajoie propose à l'admiration et à l'imitation de ses compatriotes un héros, *Jean Rivard,* dont la raison de vivre est formulée par un traité d'économie politique et agricole.

Cette littérature est déjà abstraite. L'écrivain canadien-français, intellectualisé, moralisant, construit des thèses et des modèles à imiter. On sent que, tout en simulant de s'adresser à l'ensemble de ses compatroites, il n'écrit, en fait, que pour l'élite restreinte qui partage sa formation et son mode de pensée. Son inspiration est coupée de la littérature populaire et du folklore. Seul, Philippe-Aubert de Gaspé, dans *Les Anciens Canadiens,* tente de reconstituer des scènes de vie populaire dans un milieu connu, encore que celui-ci soit un manoir seigneurial. La littérature orale du Canada français était pourtant d'une inépuisable richesse. Cycles de contes, légendes, chansons, apportés d'Europe ou inventés sur place,

avaient été propagés par les voyageurs, les coureurs des bois, les hommes de peine et les gens de métier. Ils se perpétuaient dans la campagne canadienne, animant la vie de famille et de voisinage dont ils constituaient la mythologie familière et les occasions d'enchantement. Or, sauf de très rares exceptions, les œuvres littéraires sont demeurées étrangères à ces formes traditionnelles d'invention artistique, à leurs héros, à leurs thèmes, à leur style. Il existe, entre la littérature écrite et la littérature orale, un divorce complet.

On retrouve un divorce identique entre la littérature et la géographie. La nature canadienne, est-il besoin de le rappeler, est tour à tour exaltante et brutale. L'immensité de ses espaces, la désolante monotonie de ses forêts, la rigueur de ses interminables hivers, lui donnent un caractère souvent hostile. Elle ne se conquiert pas aisément. Elle est infiniment lente à humaniser. Elle crée la solitude. Elle provoque l'opiniâtreté ou le désespoir. Elle engendre difficilement la sérénité. L'homme canadien l'a cependant possédée au prix de titanesques efforts. Il s'est épuisé à la dominer, à la harnacher, à se l'assujettir.

En conséquence, l'écrivain canadien a aussi traité cette nature comme la protagoniste d'un incessant duel plutôt que comme un être auquel on cherche à s'accorder ou dont on ambitionne de comprendre la physionomie particulière. Les œuvres descriptives, certes, ne manquent pas, mais elles demeurent, en général, prisonnières d'un facile lyrisme régionaliste qui s'exprime en formules stéréotypées. A l'exception de quelques œuvres récentes de Ringuet, de Félix-Antoine Savard, de Robert Choquette, les rares ouvrages dans lesquels la nature joue un rôle important, tels *Un homme se penche sur son passé* de Constantin-Weyer ou *Maria Chapdelaine* de Louis Hémon, sont d'écrivains français ayant séjourné au Canada. Pour l'écrivain canadien, la nature se ramène à la "terre", c'est-à-dire une œuvre à accomplir et des vertus à pratiquer. La "terre" de la littérature canadienne-française s'oppose à la ville, laquelle est le lieu de l'illusion, de l'oisiveté, des déchéances. La terre est le lieu de la pratique des vertus fortes grâce auxquelles la nation a dû de survivre et devra son salut à venir. Mais cette terre est davantage la terre à conquérir et à défricher que la terre conquise et possédée. Elle est un appel vers un agrandissement constant, c'est-à-dire vers la pénétration de ce qui l'entoure immédiatement, de ce qui l'empêche d'être complètement elle-même, de ce dont l'homme tire déjà une partie de sa fruste subsistance: la forêt. Les qualités et les attributs du héros de romans terriens au Canada sont, en fait, les qualités et les attributs de l'homme de la forêt sous ses multiples avatars: chasseur, trappeur, bûcheron, voyageur. Le vrai mythe n'est pas tant celui de la terre que celui des grands espaces qui attendent l'homme

dans "les pays d'en-haut". Le "nord" des romans canadiens, tel que recréé par l'imagination, est plus qu'un espace géographique. C'est un symbole magique dont les significations ambiguës s'entremêlent et se confondent. Ce "nord" est à la fois l'âpre territoire où il faut aller enfoncer la charrue; il est l'appel vers l'inconnu; il est éminemment le lieu de l'évasion, de la fuite de la société, de la poursuite des aventures et des chimères. Ce besoin d'évasion vers le nord se retrouve, soit camouflé, soit exprimé avec une douloureuse ironie, même dans de toutes récentes œuvres inspirées par la vie urbaine canadienne, tel le *Alexandre Chênevert* de Gabrielle Roy. L'écrivain canadien-français a décrit la terre comme lieu d'enracinement obstiné: il l'a célébrée pour des raisons morales ou politiques; il a perçu sa valeur de refuge. Dans tous les cas, elle est objet d'une dechirante option plutôt que d'une fécondante communion.

Comment expliquer ce double divorce? Par le formalisme d'un enseignement centré sur la rhétorique et sur une philosophie exsangue? Par le formalisme d'une religion d'allure manichéenne? Quoi qu'il en soit, ce divorce est lui-même grandement responsable d'une faiblesse radicale de la littérature canadienne: la pauvreté d'expression. Inutile de reprendre ici ce procès ni l'inventaire des causes qu'on a attribuées à ce phénomène. Il est indéniable que l'une des plus importantes parmi ces causes a été l'éloignement de la France et le caractère sporadique de l'osmose canadienne avec cette source nécessaire. Au fait, la réalité n'a pas été tout à fait aussi simple. Il y a eu, selon les époques et les écoles de pensée, soit une volonté délibérée de se soumettre à l'influence fécondante de la France, soit une volonté également catégorique de se soustraire à cette tutelle et de s'en tenir aux seules inspirations locales. La vie littéraire canadienne a été faite d'une alternance entre ces deux ambitions. On pourrait écrire une histoire de cette littérature en suivant les mouvements de son oscillation entre ces deux pôles.

Un des moments fascinants de cette dialectique a été celui de l'*Ecole littéraire* de Montréal, au tournant du siècle. Cette Ecole, qui en fut à peine une, favorisa la rencontre des écrivains les plus résolus qu'ait produits le Canada français. Poètes ou prosateurs, tous esthètes, ils rivalisèrent de talent pour affranchir les lettres canadiennes. *Les Soirées du Château Ramezay,* la revue *Le Nigog,* témoignent de cette renaissance. Sans renier l'inspiration nationale, ils proclamaient la nécessité pour l'écrivain de "la liberté des sujets" et de "la communion de nos lettres à la civilisation française"[5]. Le plus remarquable de leurs porte-parole fut Emile Nelligan, un poète d'ascendance irlandaise. Se réclamant du Parnasse ou du symbolisme, les poètes de cette génération abandonnent les thèmes patriotiques et les préoccupations purement indigènes pour dire la beauté des choses ou la

variété de leurs émotions souvent raffinées. Après eux, des courants pourtant issus de la même source dériveront en sens contraire pour se complaire de nouveau dans le régionalisme. La poésie canadienne, après un moment d'éclat, allait se rétracter dans les simples satisfactions du terroir.

LE ROMAN QUI, durant cette période, était demeuré un genre peu ou mal cultivé devait passer à son tour par de rapides phases d'évolution. Il se rapprocha davantage de la réalité, une réalité qui pendant un long moment demeura celle de la vie des ancêtres (Robert de Roquebrune) ou de la vie terrienne (Ringuet, Grigon, Guèvremont). Mais déjà, les stéréotypes sentimentaux de jadis ont fait place à une observation plus aiguë. Le romancier est sensible à la misère humaine. La littérature atteint un stade sociologique et, avec Gabrielle Roy et Roger Lemelin, annexera soudain à son champ de vision, dans les années 1940, les drames et les péripéties de la vie urbaine. Quelques autres romanciers s'étaient engagés dans le récit psychologique (Harvey, Desmarchais). Bientôt celui-ci sera la grande avenue du roman (Charbonneau, Elie, Giroux). La littérature qui, jusque-là, était une prise de conscience de la société deviendra une plongée en profondeur dans le dramatique univers intérieur des individus.

J'ai comparé le Canada français à l'Irlande. Ce parallèle vaut aussi pour les littératures des deux sociétés, mais d'une façon partielle. Beaucoup d'écrivains irlandais, Joyce en fut le cas le plus fulgurant, ont dû s'exiler de leur milieu pour créer leurs œuvres artistiques, transportant au plus profond d'eux-mêmes, où qu'ils fussent, la totalité de leur *Irishness.* Les écrivains canadiens-français, en général, n'ont pas eu à quitter leur milieu. Jusqu'à ces derniers temps cependant, celui-ci les a gardés semblables à lui-même, paralysant leurs moyens d'expression.

Dans une pénétrante thèse présentée à la Faculté des Lettres de Montréal, en 1953, une jeune critique, Monique Bosco, affirmait que le grand thème du roman canadien est celui de l'isolement.[6] L'auteur parlait de l'isolement de l'écrivain dans son milieu mais surtout de l'isolement des personnages de roman. On peut dire des héros de romans canadiens-français, adolescents ou adultes, hommes ou femmes, ce qu'on a dit des *Gens de Dublin* de Joyce: ce sont des êtres traqués. Ils vivent de sentiments de culpabilité, de remords, d'angoisses. Leur psychologie est une psychologie de confessional. Leur existence est une tentative de libération, généralement infructueuse, et leur échec s'exprime par l'invective ou la condamnation. Ce dont ils cherchent à s'évader, c'est une société dont le réseau de rela-

tions sociales, de tabous et de sanctions est si serré que l'individu s'y sent pris au piège. Beaucoup des héros de ces romans sont désabusés avant d'avoir vécu. Leurs actes sont des actes manqués. Leur vie sera manquée. Prisonniers de la lettre des prescriptions morales sans être religieux, ils n'ont que les incertitudes du doute sans les joies de l'espérance. Incapables d'assumer leur condition humaine avec ses grandeurs et ses misères, ils vivent repliés sur eux-mêmes. Ils se révèlent inaptes à communiquer avec autrui. Les plus belles pages de certains romans récents, tel *La Fin des Songes* de Robert Elie, sont des pages de journal. Effaré ou impuissant devant le silence des autres et le sien, le héros canadien-français de roman ne peut réellement communiquer qu'avec lui-même. L'introspection du journal intime est le substitut de l'impossible échange avec autrui. Ce n'est pas par hasard qu'une des œuvres les plus impressionnantes de notre littérature soit le *Journal* de Saint-Denys Garneau. Par ce biais, le roman canadien-français illustre à sa façon un trait général de la littérature contemporaine: l'importance accordée au monologue intérieur dramatise l'échec de la communion entre les hommes.

Inutile de préciser que très peu d'œuvres reflètent l'amour de la vie. Une des rares exceptions est celle de Roger Lemelin chez les personnages duquel triomphent l'action, le besoin de vivre, l'ambition conquérante, le désir du succès. Ses héros tiennent à la fois d'un Rastignac et d'un Julien Sorel que l'on aurait transplantés dans l'univers nord-américain naïf et dynamique où se mouvaient, au début du siècle, les personnages d'Horatio Algier. Un écrivain-clown comme François Hertel ne nous laisse pas dupes: ses dialogues humoristiques, ses acrobaties verbales et ses scolaires ambitions de scandale ne traduisent, en définitive, que l'impuissance à assumer un risque autre que celui de l'adolescence. Non seulement l'amour de la vie est absent des romans et du théâtre, mais l'amour lui-même. "Il n'y a pas," affirmait Monique Bosco, "de vrais romans d'amour au Canada; il n'y a que des romans où l'on voudrait aimer." L'homme est moins apte à communiquer avec la femme qu'avec quiconque. Il éprouve devant elle vénération ou respect. Elle est littéralement l'objet d'un culte. Elle est inaccessible et, en définitive, elle est objet de crainte. La littérature canadienne a maternisé l'image de la femme. Qu'il s'agisse des romans de Gabrielle Roy ou de Lemelin lui-même, la présence enveloppante par rapport à laquelle les êtres définissent leur idéal, leurs normes de vie, leur sécurité, est celle de la mère. A travers elle, la famille prend sons sens. Elle incarne les souvenirs d'enfance, la nostalgie d'une béatitude, la saturation de tous les rêves. Elle est l'idole — à travers laquelle on pense aussi la religion et la patrie — qui continue à fasciner l'adolescent et à troubler l'homme adulte. Les autres femmes, à côté d'elle, ne pourront être que

dangereuses. Le jeune homme idéal est l'enfant qui répondra aux voeux de sa mère. L'adolescent modèle sera un être féminisé.

Cette importance-clef de l'image maternelle dans le symbolisme des écrivains éclate d'une autre façon. L'action de plusieurs œuvres, au théâtre ou dans le roman, se passe à l'hôpital, à la crèche ou à l'orphelinat. Ce sont là, bien sûr, des lieux de caractère pathétique, propres à servir de cadres à de douloureuses aventures humaines. Mais en élisant si fréquemment ces institutions, les écrivains n'y ont-ils pas vu avec une troublante intuition des lieux représentatifs de l'ensemble de leur société? C'est-à-dire, un milieu humain où, comme à la crèche et à l'orphelinat, l'individu est entouré d'une providence enveloppante et inflexible; où, comme à l'hopital, il doit abdiquer, entre les mains de techniciens-magiciens, les décisions dont dépend l'orientation de son destin. Dans les trois cas, l'individu est entouré et pris en main par les autres. Dans les trois cas, il est vécu plutôt qu'il ne vit. La rançon de la surprotection et de l'inquiétante sécurité dont il jouit est l'aliénation de sa propre liberté. L'homme n'est sauvé que s'il consent à être soumis.

On est en plein cercle vicieux. Mais au fur et à mesure que la société canadienne-française se diversifie et se pluralise et que le climat humain des villes devient anonyme et anomique, la littérature commence à refléter le relâchement du réseau des contraintes qui retenaient les individus. Dans quelques romans d'il y a quinze ou vingt ans, des personnages avaient eu l'intention ou le désir du suicide. Pour la première fois, celui-ci est effectivement commis dans *L'Evadé de la nuit* d'André Langevin, qui est de 1954. Le tissu moral n'a plus la résistance suffisante pour maintenir l'individu dans l'axe de ses relations traditionnelles avec l'au-delà, avec la vie, avec la sociétè. Le *Jean Chertefje* de Langevin nous est témoin que dorénavant, l'homme canadien-français formule le drame de son existence dans ses termes personnels, en deçà ou au-delà des normes anciennes.

Cette quête individuelle de valeurs nouvelles, on la trouve surtout formulée dans l'œuvre des poètes. Depuis plus de vingt ans, avec Alain Grandbois, Saint-Denys Garneau et, maintenant, une constellation de jeunes écrivains de grand talent, la poésie au Canada français a atteint une authenticité en même temps qu'une qualité de forme qui l'apparentent aux grands courants universels contemporains. Le poète canadien s'est évadé, une fois pour toutes, de l'arsenal des thèmes régionalistes et patriotiques. Il s'est tourné vers lui-même en tant qu' homme. Cet homme cherche et s'interroge, s'inquiète et s'insurge. Comme Lazare, il est ressuscité, il veut marcher, mais on le sent encore dépaysé: dépaysé devant le

monde et la vie, obsédé par les interdits, hésitant à se réconcilier avec l'existence et à unifier son être. Pour citer de nouveau Gilles Marcotte, "la poésie canadienne-française est une poésie des premières démarches".[7]

IL EST impossible de prévoir ce que deviendra cette littérature. Pour l'instant, elle est à un stade d'affranchissement définitif. C'est ce qui importe. L'écrivain canadien s'affranchit lui-même de la réserve, de la timidité, de la maladresse, qui ont caractérisé ses devanciers. Il affranchit ses personnages des impératifs et des conformismes de leur milieu. Peut-être, ayant reconnu son identité propre et celle des êtres qu'il doit recréer, sera-t-il bientôt prêt à animer ceux-ci d'une vie qui sera *leur* vie et sans l'évocation de laquelle il n'y a pas de grande littérature.

[1] *Le Devoir,* Montréal, samedi, 30 octobre 1954.

[2] *Les Nouvelles Littéraires,* 11 mars 1954.

[3] *Histoire de la Littérature canadienne- française,* Presses Universitaires de France, 1960.

[4] "La danse autour de l'érable", *Cahiers de l'Académie canadienne-française, Essais critiques,* Montréal, 1958, 21.

[5] *Cahiers de l'Académie canadienne-française,* p. 28.

[6] *L'isolement dans le roman canadien-français,* Thèse manuscrite, Faculté des Lettres, Université de Montréal, 1953.

[7] *Mercure de France,* mai 1958, p. 7.

NOTHING SACRED

Humour in Canadian drama in English

William Solly

It may well be that the drama is the most difficult literary form to master, but in Canada it is certainly not for this reason alone that one finds it to be the least practised of all the arts. Plays do not exist without productions and audiences to watch them, and though it is by now a well-worn excuse for the anæmic state of our theatre to say that our audiences have been lured elsewhere, it is nevertheless quite true that prolonged exposure to the skills of Broadway and American films has given rise to a widespread conviction on the part of Canadians that their drama will not only be inferior but, worse, amateur. There are other reasons, of course: the size of the country, the scarcity of theatres, and the high costs of production make it next to impossible for any theatrical venture to tour Canada; in more recent years there is the blow that television has dealt the theatre — crippling enough everywhere else, but in Canada all but mortal (except in so far as it has encouraged playwrights of its own); and, finally, can we not with justification blame the very temper of the country? — is there not a certain national lack of self-confidence, pride, and romance which has refused to allow our drama to develop?

Whatever the reasons, Canadian playwrights are in a difficult situation. Serious drama is barely tolerated, and hence usually not written. One comes with surprise upon something like Merrill Denison's *Marsh Hay,* which is a quite reputable play admirably sustaining tense drama for four acts — but one is not too surprised never to have heard of its being produced. As if aware of this situation, Lister Sinclair's *Return to Colonus,* a relatively esoteric drama, never had any commercial aspirations to begin with. The same author's *The Blood is Strong* might at

first appear to be the exception: it is a moving story about early settlers in Cape Breton Island which has enjoyed a considerable success on stage, radio and television. But integral to its success and what no doubt first helped to attract its Canadian audiences is the fact that it contains a good deal of humour. Humour occupies an important place in Canadian drama in English and most of our plays — and nearly all of our best plays — rely heavily upon it. Our best dramatist, for instance — Robertson Davies — works exclusively in comedy. Whatever the reason behind this preoccupation with the comic — whether it is that our audiences are especially prone to laughter, or that the Canadian situation is such an absurd one that our treatments of it cannot be wholly serious — its results are of a sufficient quality (and quantity) to bear examination, and they might even be expected to throw on the Canadian character their own special share of light.

According to the various ways that humour is employed in them, our plays may be roughly divided into three groups. The first is chiefly a satirical one where plays invariably deal with distinctly Canadian subject matter: it is popular, often commercially successful and generally too busy making fun of national problems to prescribe remedies for them. At the opposite end of the humour spectrum there lies another kind of satirical drama, which will be considered last here: its subject matter is again invariably Canadian but the humourous treatment differs, frequently taking the form of skilled sugar-coating for a didactic and often bitter pill. (Surprisingly enough, however, this dubious technique usually results in the best drama that Canada produces.) Between these two comic frontiers lies a middle area, a proportionately vast field of relatively gentle comedy, most of which is so dull and undistinguished as truly to merit this prairie description. Characters, themes, and settings for these plays are, in contrast to the above, frequently of an ambiguous nationality, and the entire field may be said to owe its existence to the number of one-act play festivals and competitions which dot the Dominion and which explain why so much Canadian drama in general is cast in the one-act play form.

WITHOUT DOUBT the most consistently rewarding period of Canadian playwriting took place some years ago during the heyday of C.B.C. Radio when Canada had a radio drama of unique excellence and a whole roster of impressive playwrights: Lister Sinclair, Len Peterson, Tommy Tweed, Andrew Allan, Mavor Moore, Bernard Braden, Joseph Schull and Fletcher Markle, to

name only a few. It is to these that we must look for some of the best of all three types of comedy outlined above, but especially for that of the first type, the rollicking irreverent satire which may be good-natured but is not in the least interested in being constructive. Unfortunately, few of these radio plays have yet been published, nor are copies of them available to me, and memory alone cannot hope to indicate the way so many of them employed this kind of humour (the way it was used, for example, in Tommy Tweed's *The Man from Number 10* — a satire on Canada's apathy and lack of allure as seen through the eyes of a Newfoundlander whose country has newly joined the Dominion). Of the few radio plays of this type which have been published, however, one at least is a splendid specimen and it will serve to give a closer look here at the nature of this first kind of humour: it is Lister Sinclair's *We All Hate Toronto*:

> NARRATOR: Once upon a time there lived a young man called Charlie. Most of the time, he was a very ordinary young man who did very ordinary things, but one day he made a dreadful decision:
> CHARLIE: I am the master of my fate; I am the captain of my soul.
> NARRATOR: He called for his poor, old, leather-faced father:
> CHARLIE: Father, dear father, I have something to tell you.
> NARRATOR: And he sent for his poor, old, wire-haired mother:
> CHARLIE: Dearest mamma, I have something to tell *you,* too.
> NARRATOR: And he told them both his dreadful decision:
> CHARLIE: I have decided to go to Toronto.
> MOTHER AND FATHER: (*A dreadful shriek apiece*) ! ! ! ![1]

The innocent is informed that everybody hates Toronto, especially those who have never been there. When he is fitted out for the journey and for the Toronto weather ("Many are cold but few are frozen"), he is also told about the people who actually do live there:

> As is well-known, few indeed are the people who are true-blue, copper-bottomed, aged-in-wood, natives of Toronto. There are six hundred thousand people living there, but they're all from out of town.

Charlie persists, however, and arrives in Toronto on a Sunday; his voice echoes in the vast deserted canyons of Union Station, and when he ventures outside, turning "up Yonge Street, stretching away straight as an arrow (and about as wide) all the way up to Hudson Bay, the Arctic Circle and North York", he meets a girl:

[1] *A Play on Words and other Radio Plays* (Toronto, Dent, 1948) contains all the Sinclair radio plays quoted from in this article.

> There she was sitting on the curb in King Street with the tallest building in the British Empire right behind her, and the largest hotel in the British Empire a couple of blocks away, and the dullest Sunday in the British Empire going on all around her.

The girl tells him that there are thousands of pairs of eyes watching them from behind closed blinds:

> CHARLIE: I thought people only did that in small towns.
> JULIA: Toronto is the largest small town in the British Empire.

Finally, after a number of depressing experiences, Charlie meets a tramp in Queen's Park who sets his mind at rest:

> MAN: Toronto is the greatest unifying influence in this country today . . .
> CHARLIE: But we all hate Toronto.
> MAN: That's just it. We *all* hate Toronto! It's the only thing everybody's got in common. You hear a dreadful quarrel start up between English, Canadians, and French Canadians, or Maritimers and Manitobans, or some such thing. Just when they're going to cut each others' throats, somebody mentions Toronto. And what happens? . . . As soon as anybody mentions Toronto, all enmity is forgotten, all scars are healed, all thoughts of violence and discord are swallowed up in warm brotherly love, and united at last in friendship, the erstwhile rival disputants can weep joyfully on one another's shoulders, as in a sublime chorus they lift up their voices in abominable vilification of Toronto, the Queen City! Long may she continue to rot!

I have quoted at such length from Sinclair's play because it draws attention to a number of features typical of this first class of dramatic humour whose free-wheeling spirit has confronted the indifference of the Canadian public, proved irresistible and earned itself a popular success. The first and most obvious feature is the Canadian institution or presumably sacred cow under fire. Another is the innocent hero or heroine through whose eyes the satire is experienced: our play-wrights seem especially fond of this device of introducing Canada to this inter-ested and usually virtuous novice. It might also be worth noting here that the innocent does not attempt to escape: no matter how disillusioning the revelations afforded him about Canada may be, he invariably manages to extract some value from them and remain.

In Sinclair's play two other typical features are noticeable by their absence. One of these is a distressing one and his play is well-rid of it: this is that curious partiality for imitation which lends a hybrid and hence not very original quality to a good deal of this kind of satire. As early as 1874 it appears in such a work as William H. Fuller's *The Unspecific Scandal,* a political spoof whose humour

relies largely (and shakily) upon reworkings of well-known lines from Shakespeare and in new lyrics for such old songs as "Scots Wha Hae", "After the Ball", and "Yankee Doodle Dandy". Later the same author presented *H.M.S. Parliament* (1880), a rather amateurish reworking of Gilbert and Sullivan's *H.M.S. Pinafore* which, in its labour to recast Gilbert's lyrics and libretto in a Canadian political setting, all but loses whatever satirical intentions it originally had of its own. Affection for this kind of imitation in the drama is still (and lamentably) very much with us today.

The other feature of Sinclair's play which may not be typical of the class in which I place it is the fact that its satirical barbs, bold though they may seem to be, are not nearly outrageous enough. His satire here is, in essence, double-edged: that is, while it joins with its audience to laugh at an institution made to look ridiculous, at the same time it laughs also at the very people with whom it seems to side. This may well make it a superior piece of satire but such a technique is not, I think, typical of its class — which is usually so disrespectful that Sinclair's play seems timid by comparison.

I am speaking largely of revue, a dramatic institution which flourishes in Canada, and which is also a fairly recent phenomenon. Thirty-five years ago, in fact, Vincent Massey noted a total absence of such farce in Canadian theatre: "Is this by accident," he asked, "or are we, after all, a serious — even a solemn folk?" But today we have the unbridled, even at times sensational, revue satire of Toronto's annual *Spring Thaw,* Montreal's intimate club shows, sketches by writers like Eric Nicol, Pierre Berton and Mavor Moore, and even some of the comedy of Wayne and Schuster on the C.B.C. Although once again unpublished — perhaps because much of it is only topical for its time and dates quickly — this kind of writing nevertheless displays extraordinary range and vitality, and seems to consider nothing too sacred to be laughed at.

At its best this kind of Canadian comedy has about it a self-consciously wicked quality that one might well term undergraduate, albeit a kind of undergraduate humour displaying unusual strength. And so it is not surprising that the most successful comedy of this type should have been a college show, McGill's Red and White Revue of 1957, *My Fur Lady.* Here we may find embodied once again all the features outlined above. To begin with, there is the innocent to whom Canada is introduced — an Eskimo princess who must seek a Canadian husband in order that her Arctic nation will not be annexed. And, like the other innocents in *The Man from Number 10, We All Hate Toronto* and countless revue sketches, she remains in Canada; in fact, she marries the Governor-General (the first

Canadian one, that is; the character, "G.G.", was a thinly-disguised caricature of Massey), and her action is a splendid example of the outrageousness of this kind of humour. Elsewhere in this musical plot is dismissed completely while just about every Canadian institution is made fun of: the cultural exhortations of the Massey Report, pretensions of regional poetry, National Defence, Ottawa debutantes, Canadian history and politics, and, especially, the galling problem of a Canadian flag. The latter is debated to music in a scene in the House of Commons where each member demands his own particular emblem:

Saskatchewan wants shocks of wheat!
The Maritimes want ships!
The West wants mountains topped with snow!
P.E.I.'s for potato chips!

Calgary wants a head of steer!
Niagara wants the falls!
(Ottawa needs a mayor!
You can have Montreal's!)

The Yukon wants a polar bear!
Keewatin wants a moose!
Baffin Island wants a seal!
Gander wants a goose!

The affection for imitation mentioned above with regard to Fuller also appears in *My Fur Lady* but, happily, it does not go much further than the spoof in the title. Finally, there is also present here perhaps the most significant feature of this type of comedy and one which has not so far been mentioned. This is the humorous putting-into-words of a common national problem which usually gives rise to enormous feelings of recognition and relief in the laughter reaction. A good example of this is the speech justifying the national hate of Toronto in the Sinclair play quoted above. In another Sinclair play, *The New Canada,* it takes the form of an airing of a common Canadian dilemma:

NARRATOR: Canada, as you can plainly see, is large . . . It is, in fact, larger all round than the United States. That's why we get a little hurt at this sort of thing:
AMERICAN: So you're a Canadian, eh?
CANADIAN: That's right.
AMERICAN: Come from Canada, eh?
CANADIAN: That's the idea.
AMERICAN: What part of Canada do you come from?

CANADIAN: I'm from Halifax.

AMERICAN: Halifax, eh? Hmm! I know a fellow from Canada; expect you've run into him.

CANADIAN: (*Smiling*) Well, you never know.

AMERICAN: Oh, sure you'll know him, both of you being Canadians. He lives in Vancouver.

CANADIAN: (*Protesting*) Yes, but you see . . .

AMERICAN: Fellow by the name of Ted Richmond.

CANADIAN: (*Astounded*) Ted Richmond! Ted Rich . . . Well, of all the coincidences! As a matter of fact, I *do* happen to know Ted Richmond! Isn't that fantastic?

AMERICAN: (*Unconcerned*) I don't see why you're so surprised. You're both Canadian, aren't you?

In *My Fur Lady* there is a line of this sort which never failed in performance to elicit laughter and applause from its Canadian audiences; it had to do with the familiar problem of Canadian identity and was delivered with a happy helpless shrug:

> The trouble with Canadians is they spend half their time convincing the Americans they're not British, and the other half convincing the British they're not Americans — which leaves them no time to be themselves.

Rough and undisciplined though it frequently may be, this first kind of comedy is important here because its typical features are basic to the Canadian approach to dramatic humour (it is possible, for example, to recognize the characteristics of our more serious comedy as simply refined variations of these basic features); but it is especially important because of the popular audience response it is usually able to provoke. The latter indicates that the Canadian temperament is not at all disapproving of satire: one would almost think that, having forgotten the fact of their nationality, Canadians are so pleased to be reminded of it in a theatre that they do not care how much the reminder may be at their own expense. Certain subjects — even for such mischievous satire as this — are still taboo, it is true: we shall have to look to a more serious work like Robertson Davies' *Hope Deferred* for any attempt to deal humorously with the Church, for example. But the scope of the less serious kind of satire is a wide one. If *My Fur Lady* can make even a French-Canadian audience laugh at the literary imbecilities of a prairie poet, the form in which the satire is cast is surely not to be ignored or underestimated.

We move now for the moment out of the realm of Canada's satire and into the hinterland of its gentle comedy — which is well-published and frequently performed by amateur groups. There is an abundance of plays here in one act, and one might quite understandably wonder if this is not the particular dramatic form in which Canadians excel. Due to the scarcity of three-act plays, however, and the inferior quality of so many of these shorter ones, one is sadly forced to conclude that what might at first look like this country's plethora is just any other country's quota and not nearly so good. Indeed, when one also considers how it is short revue sketches which predominate in the category just dealt with, it would seem that we are simply not fond of doing things in a big way. But is it our audiences — or our writers — who cannot sustain the greater length?

Many of these plays do not deal with settings or even characters Canadian, their milieu and dramatic style instead ranging anywhere from British to Chinese. They do not concern me here — for I am only interested in the way Canada is reflected in our dramatic writing, however obliquely, and in this respect these exiles reflect only bewilderment (when the plays are incompetent) or flat rejection (when they are not); nor do they illuminate any Canadian attitudes toward other countries since they merely absorb and imitate the conventions of those countries and make no comments from without. Nevertheless, towards the turning out of a good play this approach is not at all unrewarding for some, and indeed success along this line is often outstanding enough to be disturbing. In passing, I would note particularly the one-act plays of Norman Williams, collected in *Worlds Apart* (1956), worthy of attention in any context, but especially striking examples here of the flat rejection of native material paying off most handsomely.

Certainly the most difficult problem facing the Canadian playwright is how to write about the people and the places he knows and understands when these do not come to him equipped with any vividly recognizable trappings of race and tradition. If he chooses not to grapple with this problem, his local references, for example, no matter how casually dropped, only seem embarrassingly self-conscious, and it is a sad truth that his play will be much better off with a setting in the United States. Hence a number of Canadian playwrights take advantage of the ambiguously North American environment at the disposal of their American colleagues and make their own dramatic milieu an anonymous one, dispensing altogether with nationality and any reference to actual place names. But,

unfortunately, this technique can hardly be said to be successful: the results, usually mild drawing-room comedies with stock themes and the kind of unrealistic treatment found in inferior magazine stories, are uninteresting and quite devoid of any dramatic strength. And where the writing is insipid, of course, the humour is insignificant.

The majority of Canadian comedies of this second type, however, do deal with Canadian material, and, happily, the native approach usually seems to be a more rewarding one, resulting in a fair amount of dramatic success. But, curiously enough, that success is frequently achieved here only within a distinctly limited point of view, and over a narrow range of subject-matter. Note, for instance, the extreme popularity of old people as protagonists for these plays, or at least as the characters with whom the playwrights' sympathies are most actively engaged. There would seem to be a genuine, even an instinctive, predilection in our drama for the problems of the aged, for the spectacle of crusty, sometimes cantankerous souls, dogged by frustration and inactivity, and, accordingly, for plots which focus on such things as domestic stagnation, garrulous gossips, hen-pecked husbands, peacefully smouldering feuds, wrangles over inheritances etc. To say the atmosphere is Chekhavian is not really an exaggeration: these are lives of quiet desperation, and even when the characters are forced to act, when there is held out some bright hope of release (the device of the sudden unexpected windfall of money is extraordinarily popular with these plays), some way to reject or avoid the escape hatch is invariably found. And beneath this determined evasiveness, by the way, it is often possible to find the same dogged sense of responsibility (to Canada?) already noticed in some of our frivolous satires. There is not space here to go into one of these plays in detail (although Robertson Davies' *Overlaid,* a good example, will be examined below), but it is tempting to speculate why so many should choose this limited point of view, this concentration upon the twilight of age. Perhaps it is only because the juxtaposition of the new and the old (the one in setting, the other in characters) is æsthetically pleasing; but, more probably, it is because the juxtaposition is a necessary dramatic balance, that the only way many of our playwrights can cope with the spectacle of a young fresh land is by peopling it with the tired and the senile.

But even should less mature characters dominate the scene, the field of dramatic exploration is limited here a second time by a general reluctance to deal with any kind of sophistication. When these plays choose to depict a community, for example, the preferred setting is usually a small town, not a big city — presumably because life in the latter cannot easily be distinguished from the same

thing below the border. But most often, and no doubt in search of an environment more distinctively Canadian, settings are strictly rural — the bush, the prairie, the North. Characters inhabiting these wastes are similarly homely, and the only urban types who might venture upon this rustic scene are painfully at a disadvantage, like the tourists in the work of Merrill Denison.[2] Indeed, the homely heroes of the latter's plays, in their ceaseless contests with these tourists, seem to belong to an "essential" Canadian type — the same stock Canadian, in fact, who has been idealized in so many other literatures. Here, at home, where the literary regard is more candid, he is slow-moving, slow-witted and illiterate, yet endowed with a kind of frank simplicity that is most impressive in an argument and which, when exploited humorously by a writer, can be irresistibly funny. Syd, one of the backwoodsmen in Denison's *Brothers in Arms,* is a good specimen. He has at his mercy a Toronto couple, the Brownes, stranded in a log cabin at the end of their vacation and desperately in need of a lift to the train station. But Syd is not easily persuaded to co-operate in this matter, nor even to supply information about his taxi-driving colleague:

> BROWNE: It's been dark half an hour. How long would it take him to get back?
> SYD: I figure it'd take him about half an hour if he had a boat.
> BROWNE: Half an hour, eh? Should be here, then, soon. (*thinks*) Did he have a boat?
> SYD: No . . . . He didn't have no boat.

It is one of the points of the play that, in contrast to the supposedly civilized but bellicose ex-officer Browne, his "brother-in-arms" Syd could see no point in the discipline of the army and was consequently discharged as useless. Syd is typical of his kind which simply cannot be bothered with tradition or organized society and prefers instead to live apart as a hunter in the bush. Although he is frequently depicted as both young and attractive and may well have an instinctive appreciation for the beautiful in nature (the plainspoken Barney in Sinclair's *The Blood is Strong* is a good example, a slightly more heroic version of the type), nevertheless he is usually both unimaginative and shrewd, sometimes living just outside the law, operating a still or engaged in petty thievery. Whether or not this frequently ignoble savage can be said to be particularly Canadian (there might well be justification for considering him as indistinguishable from the American hillbilly), the fact is that the best of our gentle comedy, whose business is character,

[2] Denison is no doubt the best native playwright to have dealt with this kind of gentle comedy; most of his plays are collected in *The Unheroic North* (Toronto, McClelland and Stewart, 1923).

works most successfully when dealing with unsophisticated people of this type.

Apart from speculation on why they should be so fond of certain subjects, it is impossible to extract from plays like these any kind of expressed attitude, toward Canada or anything else. Of course this is partly because so many of them lack any dramatic strength to begin with. But even those which have been neatly made remain curiously timid and mute: having carefully eschewed any provocative subjects, they are equally careful not to comment on anything which might smack of importance. Intended for a family audience, perhaps the plays must be puritan and comfortable, but their diffidence becomes extraordinary, unparalleled in other cultures: even such "comfortable" American comedies as Gore Vidal's *The Best Man* and F. Hugh Herbert's *The Moon is Blue,* for example, still make their respective comments on American politics and sex. Our gentle comedy is more like some particularly innocuous Hollywood films, anxious to offend no one, cautious and flat, mortally afflicted by a misguided gentility. Indeed the only really interesting thing about these plays is why they should turn to the mood of comedy in the first place, turn to it so instinctively, as if it were the only grease that could make the dramatic machinery function. But is this to their credit — or does it merely follow, from their general inability to consider any serious subject, that they simply cannot consider any subject seriously?

> OH SWINISH and contemptible men of Delphi! I have laboured for forty years to lighten your ignorance, diminish your selfishness and increase your happiness! And I have failed — not for lack of wisdom or struggle but because you are beyond the power of wisdom to cure. The curse of baffled and wretched Aesop be upon you! O Apollo, let me die, for my life is bitterness!

A great teacher's life work has been rejected and persecuted and the mob is howling for his blood. Torn by frustration and despair, he at last loses his temper and delivers this stirring denunciation. The words quoted are those of the hero of Robertson Davies' *A Masque of Aesop* (1952),[3] but the significance of the dilemma for Canada is obvious and they could well also be the words of any of our baffled — and best — playwrights.

The stern didactic tone underlying serious satire and comedy in Canada is unmistakable, but, strangely enough, rarely makes them pompous or detracts

[3] Dates following play titles are those of publication, not necessarily of first performance; Davies' publisher is Clarke-Irwin of Toronto.

from their entertaining qualities. In short, the humour used is really more than a mere sugar-coating, and we can truthfully be said to be skilled in satire.[4] Usually this satire is directed against ourselves and is both reproving and corrective. Canada's response, however, is nothing so electric as Aesop's Delphi and, unlike Aesop as well, our Canadian satirists have no Apollo who will come along and proclaim the nobility of the prophet to the populace; and so the result is that the apathy, dull-wittedness and indifference of the country inevitably become the chief targets for the satire.

We are attacked for our intolerance, hostility and distrust — of beauty, wit, grace and poetic wisdom — and for our inability to appreciate the wonderful. Just as the theme of the curious innocent is a favourite device of our more frivolous satire, so to make the point here there is a tendency to employ some kind of Christ figure who is misunderstood, abused, destroyed or, worse, merely refused admittance by our aloof suspicious land. Jack Gray's *Ride a Pink Horse,* performed in Toronto in 1959, featured a centaur who was crushed to death by an intolerant mob. Lister Sinclair's *All About Emily* is an instructive radio fable which names no proper names, but it is obvious for whom its message is intended. Here the extraordinary visitor is Emily, the proverbial goose who lays the golden eggs. Emily's beneficiaries make quite a fuss over her: after they have soothed their feelings, outraged by Emily's daring to be different, they promptly put her owners in jail and proceed to wrangle over her gold, even forming a corporation to exploit it. Never once, however, do they express a jot of wonder, admiration or gratitude for her generous talents. Eventually, because of the threat she causes international finance, she is murdered and a perfectly ordinary goose is substituted in her place. But the Phœnix note is gloriously sounded when it is announced that the new goose has laid "in quick succession no fewer than *three* golden eggs, each studded with diamonds!"

Robertson Davies' martyrs are less fantastic, and consequently, like his Aesop, more poignant. In *Hope Deferred* (1949) the Governor of New France has created something truly wonderful: he has had a native Indian girl educated in Paris to perform Molière in the classic style of the Comédie Française. He is doomed to be disappointed, however, and is informed by two of his bishops that

[4] And bold as well — even when the target lies outside our national boundaries. Ruben Schip's *The Investigator,* for instance, first presented on the C.B.C. in 1954, caused a small sensation: it was a thinly-disguised attack on the late Senator McCarthy, and a recording made from the programme had a considerable black market sale in the United States.

such a performance will only serve to corrupt the morals of the Canadian French and confuse the Indians. The Governor argues for the goodness and greatness of art but he is up against a state of mind that is unswervable:

> The innocent native arts of basketry and beadwork are given reasonable encouragement, [says one of the bishops] and I am told that the squaws at Catarqui are preparing a set of altar frontals made wholly from dyed porcupine quills. These pursuits are innocent enough; even the most abandoned spirit is incapable of expressing contumacity or salaciousness in beads and quills. I tell you frankly, I am glad that much of that nonsense called art is far away in the old world . . . A new land has not time for amusements which may be destructive.

In *Fortune, My Foe* (1949) the figure in whom art is embodied is a dedicated Czech puppetmaster who is minus a working permit and in danger of being shipped back to Europe. A group of intellectuals who are thrilled by his delicate skill attempt to find an audience for him in Canada. They fail, of course, but the play ends hopefully with the artist determined to remain in Canada, despite everything. Nicholas, the hero, tells him:

> If you can stay in Canada, I can, too. Everybody says Canada is a hard country to govern, but nobody mentions that for some people it is also a hard country to live in. Still, if we all run away it will never be any better. So let the geniuses of easy virtue go southward; I know what they feel too well to blame them. But for some of us there is no choice; let Canada do what she will with us, we must stay.

Except for *A Jig for the Gypsy* (1954), all of Davies' plays feature variations on some of the problems involved in this decision, and they are consequently well worth examination here. But I shall concentrate only on one of them — *Overlaid* (1949), perhaps Davies' best play, and one especially useful for my purpose since it manages to contain within its short one-act length a remarkable number of the characteristics of Canadian humorous drama to which I have attempted to draw attention.

The story of the comedy is straightforward and simple. An old farmer lives in a dull rural community with his widowed daughter. Both the community and the daughter attempt to suppress his strong appetite for such "things that make life worth livin' " as the Saturday afternoon radio broadcasts from the Metropolitan Opera in New York. An unexpected windfall of money from his insurance policy suddenly gives him the chance to go to New York and enjoy all the exciting things he has so sorely missed. His nagging unimaginative daughter is outraged and accuses him of being selfish, and when he forces her to tell him what she

most wants in the world, a granite tombstone for the family plot, he gives the money to her. The humour of the play deals superbly with the daughter's narrow mentality and her pathetic dream, makes an endearing figure of the old man, and supplies enormous sympathy for his plight:

> There's always a gol-danged necessity to get in the way whenever you want somethin' purty . . . I want what's warm an' — kind of mysterious; somethin' to make you laugh an' talk big, an' — oh, you wouldn't know. You just sit there, lookin' like a meat-axe, an' won't even try to see what I'm drivin' at. Say listen, Ethel: what d'you get out o' life anyways?

There are a number of familiar features here: we have already noticed the affection Canadian playwrights display for the problems of older people, the rural setting, and the theme of the sudden windfall.[5] Further, the old man may be regarded as a slightly refined variation of the above-mentioned "essential" Canadian. The sacred cow under fire is Canadian life itself, with its determined dullness. And just as our other kind of satire is able to put into pithy words a galling national problem, here it is the desperate position of the Canadian fighting to possess the beautiful that is so vividly delineated — and brilliantly rendered in the opening scene of the play where the old man, dressed in a battered "op'ry" hat and wearing white cotton workman's gloves, joins in with the applause of the Metropolitan audience coming to him over his antique radio. And finally, there is the dilemma of whether or not it is possible to "stick" Canada, whether to give in to the temptation to escape or, instead, to remain — in a country where one must inevitably be "overlaid" by ignorance and tedium. The old man is forced to make the choice — between the excitements of New York and the depressing dream of his daughter — and of course it is the ties of kin that win. To live in Canada, then, presumably requires a dogged sense of responsibility, even dedication — for to succumb involves sacrifice. Thus *Overlaid* ends sadly, with the old man giving up his beloved opera broadcasts:

> Naw. Turn it off. [he says] Don't want it now. I been overlaid and I got to get myself back in shape. Maybe I been emotionally overstimulated. But I ain't overlaid for good, Ethel, an' that stone'll rest lighter on me than it will on you.

[5] This latter feature may not be particularly significant (it is a popular kind of *deus ex machina* in drama anywhere and is usually regarded as a hackneyed one too), but, as a device forcing a reassessment of values, it does intrude rather frequently upon the Canadian dramatic scene — along with the innocent who provides perspective, the martyr who upsets the routine, and all other visitors and intrusions which foment the action of our plays.

FREDERICK PHILIP GROVE

A group of letters

Desmond Pacey

I HAVE IN MY possession two sets of letters from Frederick Philip Grove (1871-1948). One set consists of the letters he wrote to me in the last seven years of his life, when I was writing various critical studies of his work; the other set consists of letters written by Grove to Dr. Watson Kirkconnell over a period of some twenty-five years. Dr. Kirkconnell was good enough, some five years ago, to entrust his letters to me for safe-keeping. At some date in the future I hope to publish in book-form a complete collection of Grove's letters. In the meantime, and with the permission of Mrs. Grove, I present the letters which Grove wrote to me in the hope that they will be of interest to readers and students of Grove's work.

My first letter to Grove was written on January 15, 1941. As part of a series of radio broadcasts presented by members of the faculty of Brandon College, I had been asked to give a talk on "Manitoba in Fiction". Having read Grove's novels in my undergraduate days at Toronto, I decided to make his work the staple of my talk, and I wrote to Grove asking him a number of questions about his life, the influences to which he had been subjected, his aims as a writer, and so on. This is his reply, written from his farm at R.R. 4, Simcoe, Ontario, on January 20, 1941:

> In reply to your letter of the 15th inst. I beg to say that I shall be glad to assist you. Would you care to read parts of that MS. which I originally meant to introduce by the chapter which Woodhouse and E. K. Brown printed as a separate article in the U. of T. Quarterly? I might look out a few relevant chapters. To answer your questions in a letter would take almost as long as writing that book.

A few of the specific questions you ask I might briefly answer here.

Among my Parisian friends of 1889 to 1891 were Mallarmé, Verlaine, Hérédia, Henri de Regnier, Jules Renard, André Gide. Since some of them are still living, I should, however, prefer to leave them in twilight. Among the Germans stands first Stefan George whom I consider the greatest poet of the last 60 years.

I don't think that any novelist has ever influenced me. My published novels — few of those I have written are published — are mere jottings of what I have seen and felt. But among those whom I admire most stand foremost the Russians, above all Tolstoi.

Neither do I think I have any very definite aims in writing. I try to put down what I see. I have, for two years, been working on a panoramic novel which will require another two years to finish. In it, I aim at replacing the time sequence by an extension in space, giving a whole countryside, with its towns, farms, etc., within the compass of a single year. I call it "The Seasons". If I live to finish it; and if, living, I shall find the leisure to work it out as I see it, it will be an enormous book, of course; I mean a book of probably over 1000 pages.

If you care to read parts of that unpublished autobiography of mine, I shall try to pick out some chapters which throw light on my methods; there are two or three chapters dealing with the growth of FRUITS OF THE EARTH which extends over forty years between conception of the central figure and publication.

On the other hand, an opportunity might offer to publish the LIFE OF A WRITER IN CANADA; and I should have to ask you to return the MS sections shortly; I have only one copy.

I must then have asked him to send me parts of his autobiography (unfortunately I did not keep copies of my letters, and must rely on my memory), enquired whether he regarded *The Seasons* as his *magnum opus,* and asked whether the naturalistic novels of De Maupassant and Zola had had any influence upon him as a youth in Paris. On February 2, 1941 he replied to me as follows:

When I received your letter, I tried at once to do what I had said I'd do; but I found it an almost impossible task. I don't know just what would interest you. So, having to go to town yesterday, I despatched the whole of the MS. as far as it has been typed out. I don't know that it is in shape for publication as it stands; and, of course, since it was typed out over a year ago, it is already slightly out-of-date. However, I thought the best thing would be to let you browse about in it.

Now there is one thing I should not like to see done, namely to see large sections quoted. I don't object to the material being used; but please bear in mind that it is an unpublished book which may be radically altered before I publish it if I ever have a chance to do so.

As for "The Seasons" — yes, as far as fiction is conerned, I have the deliberate purpose in mind of making it my *magnum opus,* by which I mean that I shall put into it (and have already largely put into it) as much as I can of what I

have seen and thought about, not of course in the form of philosophical expatiation, but brought to life in fictional form, in the thoughts or the fates of the several scores of characters and the hundreds of background figures. It is an undertaking of the scope of a novel like "War and Peace" — though I do not mean to compare my gifts with those of Tolstoi.

Concerning the Paris episode in my life, I might perhaps add that, though both Maupassant and Zola were still living at the time, I had no contact with them except, perhaps, a social one; I don't remember. The figures that stand out in my memory were the poets. Fiction I all but despised as a half way house to journalism. I myself was dabbling in poetry at the time, now in one language, now in another. The reason why I never amounted to anything, at the time, is probably precisely the fact that I had no language of my own. In everyday life I changed over, with the greatest facility, from French to Italian, from German to English, and even from Spanish to Portuguese. But none of these languages was I rooted in. My native Swedish I had almost completely forgotten even then. The reasons for that you may run across in that manuscript.

If you go to Caledonia in summer, yes, do not hestitate calling, preferably after having given us notice so we shall be at home. We have a large house. If you are married, bring your wife; if you have children, bring them as well; we have put up as many as five grown-ups at a time; and we have all sorts of make-shift ways of putting up youngsters (acrobatic mats make a good improvised bed for young bones), and we have a 10 yr. old boy ourselves. Our house is always open to friends, especially in summer; and occasionally the company is quite international and interesting. Though, since the war, less so, of course. We are poor; but we like to share what we have.

I returned the manuscript of his autobiography (subsequently published, of course, as *In Search of Myself*), and he acknowledged its safe arrival on March 11, 1941:

The MS. arrived safely a few days ago. I have been very ill for a month or so and unable to look after anything, so I have not missed it.

If I can find the time, I hope to re-read it slowly, with a view to determining whether I think it fit for publication.

Yes, if you wish it, I shall be glad to read the script.

Meanwhile I have used the last few days to re-read the first part of my new novel "The Seasons" — the part entitled "Summer". I am not so sure that I really like it — but, I believe, it is by far the best thing I have done, as it is certainly the most ambitious. That first part is in itself the length of a full-sized novel (ca. 80,000 words) ; and it contains scores of characters; what the completed work will be like, in length and compass, it staggers me to think of. But it is most unlikely that it will ever be finished, though about half of the remainder is written or sketched.

Meanwhile, I had prepared the script of my radio talk, and sent him a copy for his approval. He acknowledged its receipt on April 2, 1941, and went on to make some interesting comments on his novel *Fruits of the Earth*:

> I received your script; and, though I do not agree with every statement, far be it from me to interfere. The mere fact that you mention nobody else seems undeserved honour.
>
> I regret that you could not read SETTLERS OF THE MARSH. I should gladly have loaned it to you, though I believe I have only a single copy. I consider it the most important of my prairie novels.
>
> I am not sure that I know what dial-number taps CKX or CKY, is it 990? At any rate, I shall try to get the broadcast. Reception is rarely good from the west, I am sorry to say.
>
> May I say that FRUITS OF THE EARTH was never intended to figure as a novel? I meant it to be taken as a piece of pioneer history. Its original title was CHRONICLES OF SPALDING DISTRICT. What I wished to bring out in the book is the slow decay of a great potentiality. The cards are stacked against Spalding, of course. He is slowly being bent into taking the 'slings and arrows' personally. See his reflections on the decay of man's work: the brick dust from his house, etc. However, it is your perfect right to dislike it or to find fault with it. Recently somebody, in discussing with me some of my books, suddenly exclaimed, "Ah, but FRUITS OF THE EARTH! There is a book which will begin to live 100 years from now." I merely smiled. Let's wait and see.
>
> At any rate, many thanks.

THERE WAS then an interval of almost two years in our correspondence. Early in 1943 I was asked by the editors of the *Manitoba Arts Review* to write an article for that magazine, and I decided to expand the radio script on Grove for that purpose. I sent the biographical section of the article to Grove in order that he might check its accuracy, asked him if he was doing any new writing, and recommended that he read Sinclair Ross's *As For Me and My House* (1941), a prairie novel which I felt sure he would greatly enjoy. This was his brief reply, dated February 16, 1943:

> I think the biographical sketch is all right — I have added one name.
>
> I shall look forward to seeing the complete article.
>
> No, I have not been doing much. It seems all so futile.
>
> I read your short story "The Hired Man", if I remember the title correctly. I liked it very much. It is very true indeed.

Please excuse my brevity. I am hunting the dollars to keep the wolf from the door.

P.S. No, I have not come across "As For Me & My House."

When, that May, I sent Grove the *Manitoba Arts Review* containing my article, it provoked from him a most interesting letter about his novels. Dated June 1, 1943, the letter reads as follows:

> Thank you very much for sending me the essay in the *Manitoba Arts Review* which I enjoyed reading. Not, of course, that I agreed with everything. How could that be? But I feel in it a sincere attempt to come to grips with matters, which I appreciate very much indeed.
>
> May I point out some one or two trifles?
>
> (1) Page 34, the quotation from *Settlers*. Now the intention of that passage was to convey the intoxicating speed of things. I myself when I read it, involuntarily fall into a chant. Any word added could, to me, break that chant.
>
> It was, by the way, Settlers which was so ruthlessly cut down, from 3 long volumes to one short one. Hence the dots.
>
> (2) Re *Fruits of the Earth*. This book did end with a tragic climax when first written. I remember talking to a publisher who particularly admired and liked that ending; and it occurred to me *during* that conversation that, considering the conditions in the West, this ending was not true. I told the publisher of my thought. He exclaimed. "No," I said, "Abe Spalding, hero though he is in one way, *lies down* under that blow. I shall have to rewrite the ending." The publisher told me right then and there, "If you do, you will have to count me out." "All right," I said. "Let the book lie." It waited five years; but I assert that the ending is true.
>
> However, page 36, bottom: that is a bad sentence, very bad indeed.
>
> It is a disadvantage to let books lie through years and years; one gets used to one's own mannerisms; one does not even notice them in proof-reading.
>
> Does not "a trap" (pge 39) presuppose a trapper? I know of none.
>
> It goes without saying that I did not know Dreiser's *American Tragedy* when I wrote *The Yoke of Life*. The end was suggested by the actual sight of the chattering rocks in Lake Winnipegosis. But the meaning of that ending is, of course, that Len wants something so much that all else falls away (education, etc.); that he will pay *any* price to get it. There is no intention of pessimism there.
>
> However, those are trifles; and I appreciate the intention of the article.

On December 29, 1943 I sent a copy of the *Manitoba Arts Review* article to Dr. Lorne Pierce, then editor-in-chief of Ryerson Press, suggesting that the article might be expanded into a book on Grove. After some hesitation, Dr. Pierce eventually commissioned me to write the book, and it was published in 1945. Meanwhile, at about the same time that I first wrote to Dr. Pierce, I had written

to Grove to ask him whether he would approve of such a book being undertaken. His reply, mistakenly dated January 18, 1943 (I am sure the correct date was 1944), indicates that Grove had more modesty than he is usually given credit for, and that he was ready to help a young and quite unknown author:

> I received your enquiry yesterday and will answer at once.
>
> I believe, on the one hand, that such a book would be timely and fear, on the other, that there is not enough of my work published to warrant it. It is perhaps natural that the writer should always consider his later work as the more important; and to me it sometimes seems that nothing of any great importance has yet been published. Our purveyors of printed matter are too timid; and not one of them is willing to invest in a future.
>
> However, I am willing to assist you in any way I can; and I shall, therefore, first of all try to find the MS. of that autobiography. This was not meant to be published till after my death; there are things in it which might hurt people still living. I trust that you will not touch on them.
>
> As for my magazine publications, I have no list; but, apart from early work — before 1928 or 1929 — I can, I believe, put together such a list and shall try to do so.
>
> Miss English[1] I do not remember except as a little girl whom I started on her study of French. But Ernest Birkinshaw[2] — I still call him Ernest — is very vivid in my memory. I have sometimes wished that an opportunity should come my way to go west once more, to lecture or something. I should like to meet him again. Naturally, I often meet former pupils of mine; and a fine lot of young men and women they are.
>
> I am sorry to say that my physical condition is not too good; and my economic condition is wretched.

When, in late January of 1944, I asked Grove to give me a list of his contributions to the periodical press, he replied on February 3 as follows:

> I have been laid up with the flu; so please excuse the delay in sending you the list of my magazine contributeions as far as I can [lay] my hand on them.

U. of T. Quarterly:	Jan.	1932	A Writer's Classification of Writers.
	July	1932	Thomas Hardy
	July	1938	The Plight of Canadian Fiction
	Oct.	1940	In Search of Myself
	July	1943	Democracy & Education
Dalhousie Review	July	1931	The Flat Prairie

[1] Mary Ann English, who had moved with her father, Colonel S. S. English, from Simcoe to Brandon, where she was a student of mine at Brandon College.

[2] Professor E. H. Birkinshaw of Brandon College, who had been a pupil of Grove's at Rapid City, Manitoba.

Queen's Quarterly Feb. 1932 Snow
Aug. 1941 The Desert
Autumn 1942 Postscript to A Search for America.

I seem to have overestimated the number. But there were occasional contributions to Macleans (1928), The Winnipeg Tribune (1926 or 1927), Saturday Night (1932?), The London Free Press. That's all I can think of; and I seem to have none of the latter group.

Shortly afterwards I became confused, on reading Grove's manuscript autobiography, about the date of his birth. This date had always been given as 1872, but the chronology of events recorded in the autobiography suggested that it must have been 1871. I wrote to ask him about this matter, and this is his reply, dated February 8, 1944:

> You can readily imagine that, in a life in which over 20 years are, as it were, taken out and thrown away, chronology gets confused. I am not even sure any longer that I know in what year I was born. The only thing I have to go by is that my mother said to me, in a conversation I remember very distinctly, that the great event happened a year after the Franco-Prussian war. But whether she meant by that 1870 or 1871, I can't tell. I have given my age as if I were born anywhere between 1871 and 1873. I believe that the sequence of events as given in my "Life" is essentially correct; but . . .? For nearly 22 years no birthday was ever celebrated (1892 or 1893 to 1914 when I married); from then on the years are as it were certified; before that everything is guess work.
>
> So, if you will kindly try to bring some order into the sequences, I will promise to accept it and to govern myself accordingly from now on.
>
> I might add that I am going to Toronto tomorrow, to try to get some arrangement made to publish THE MASTER OF THE MILL which I consider as the most important book I have written. I shall try to have it followed by what I call the ANT book. There are some 4 or 5 volumes awaiting publication; probably the last I shall finish, at least if the state of my health is any indication.

THERE FOLLOWED an interval of almost a year, during which Grove was very ill. Mrs. Grove wrote to me on June 4, 1944 to say that her husband "had a stroke on April 14 and had had quite a trying time though he is able to walk by now. But his right hand remains paralyzed." The next letter from Grove himself was not written until January 4, 1945, and was a reply to my enquiry about the expected appearance of *The Master of the Mill*:

> Work on THE MASTER OF THE MILL started on Feb. 8, 1944, and the printing was finished in August, after many intolerable delays, due to government interference

(priorities). Then started the fight for binding cloth which, I have just heard, has at last been won. I believe the book will be out inside of a week.

You, too, will have to be patient.

May I say that W. J. Alexander, in one of his last discussions of my work (with Carleton Stanley, Pres. of Dalhousie U.) called the book "ultimate and enduring", as Stanley wrote my wife. Since I thought the world of Alexander, I was proud of that verdict.

I have half a dozen books in the stocks, but my health is improving so very slowly that I am quite despondent. My doctor says it may take five years to get back to something like normal.

I can type about 1/3 of a page a day; nothing when I write a letter.

His next letter, dated January 20, 1945, invited me to read the manuscript of what he then called The Ant-book (it was published as *Consider Her Ways* in 1947), an invitation which I was happy to accept:

I trust that by this time you will have received the copy of THE MASTER. I had to leave the distribution to Macmillans, being unable to do anything myself.

I am getting ready for the long rest and looking over my shelves of mss. Most of them I discard and use for fuel. But I had, 40 years ago, 3 mss. which I wished to finish. One is THE MASTER. Another, which I have just reread, cancelling the 23-page preface, is the Ant-book; and I am much impressed. It was finished in 1920, and I found only one word which I wished other. I am planning to bring it out. Would you care to read the typescript? If so, I should try to ship it to you as soon as I can. I should like you to answer one question: is it interesting? Otherwise I shall discard it, too. Please let me know as soon as possible.

In his letter of January 30, 1945, he had more to say of the novels which were still in manuscript form. Having in the autumn of 1944 moved to the University of New Brunswick, which has in the Hathaway Collection a fine group of Canadian books and manuscripts, I had suggested to him that his manuscripts might be added to the collection. His reply to that suggestion again reveals his modesty.

I have yours of Jan. 24 and shall, therefore, at the first opportunity, when someone goes to town, send a ms. of the Ant-book along. It is a carbon copy; but a good one, and the only one which still contains the preface. I hope you'll enjoy its "envergure".

As for other mss., my boy and I weighed what there is: 135 lbs., without duplications. I have reread three complete novels: one which my wife hates . . . ; no. 2, one which struck me as important, Art vs. Life. with art conquering; decades ago I put it aside because a friend, the only person who has read the ms. called it "cocoon spinning", but I think it good; no. 3, another prairie novel, not bad, but unimportant. Years ago, the U. of Toronto made me the same offer that you (Hathaway Collection) make now. I can't make up my mind. Certain things, no

doubt, are so weak, though I haven't met with them yet, that I'd rather see them done away with. Hardly any bear a date. But, in fifty years, one is bound to produce a lot of piffle. The Ant-book, however, was, after 20 yrs. of study, written in 1920.[3]

Grove went on re-reading his unpublished manuscripts through the month of February, writing me on February 28, 1945 as follows:

> I have the ms. of the ant-book (which is hardly a title, is it?), still unopened, but . . .
>
> I shall make an attempt to place it. Macmillans are afraid of it.
>
> I have now reread some 50 or 60 essays and short stories, condemning some, putting the others back into their drawers. Also 8 novels, of which I have fed 4 into the fire, leaving
>
> THE CANYON
>
> JANE ATKINSON (western stories)
>
> TWO LIVES (Ontario, good in the skeleton, doubtful in the flesh)
>
> FELIX POWEL'S CAREER (college youth; ms. belonging to my wife, to do with as she pleases; the extreme of sex)
>
> apart from the ant-book, and autobiography which I may destroy, at least partly, for I don't think anybody would be interested in the European part; I am not.
>
> There are still two drawers unexplored, in my desk. Since you are my biographer, apart from Eaton's THESIS, I thought it well to let you know these facts. The above novels I do not intend to offer.
>
> Re ant-book: do you think I should leave the introduction (24 pages) or start with Wawa-quee's narrative? There is also 4-vol. novel: THE SEASONS (Ontario) which I have not yet run across.

A brief note on March 18 merely gave me the particulars about Charles E. Eaton's thesis on Grove. Then followed an interval of several months, during which Grove suffered a second stroke. When he wrote on August 26, 1945, it was to acknowledge the receipt of my book on him:

> I had recently a second stroke which, for the time being, deprived me of my speech and generally set me back.
>
> I know my wife wrote to you, but don't know what. She is not at home just now; so I can't ask her. I should like to say a few things; so I struggle with the typewriter.
>
> Suppose I had had your criticisms while writing my books and had adopted them all; then my books would have been your books, not mine. I therefore welcome your criticisms, with some of which I agree; with others, not. Occasionally I feel that out of my strength you have made my weakness; but that does not

[3] I should say that, for reasons of discretion, I have omitted two passages of this letter of January 30, 1945. All the other letters are printed in their entirety.

matter. On the whole I feel rather flattered that you should have felt the books to be of sufficient importance to discuss them, for I feel somehow that your book is very honest; though I also feel occasionally that you over-estimate my importance, flatteringly. But I wish to thank you. I hope the book will find many readers. I hear that something is being translated into French (GANTS DU CIEL). My wife, feels 'bucked'. Poor girl. I shall likely have to give up my fellowship in the Royal Society, for I can't afford the fees. However . . . Will you be in our neighbourhood? It is over a year since I have seen any visitor. The last one, strange, was a Swede; the last but one, a German Professor of English (1938) who told me that all my works were in the libraries of Berlin and Munich. No Canadian has come since W. J. Alexander (1932).

This was the last letter of any length that Grove wrote me. His health quickly deteriorated and after 1945 all communications were through his wife. There were however three brief notes from Grove himself in the late months of 1945. The first, dated September 3, 1945, reads:

Just a word in answer to yours of Aug. 29. THE MASTER sold out within two months, in 1000 copies; that was all Macmillans would risk. I had a limited edition of 400 copies most of which remain on my hands. As usual, to me the book is a loss. Perhaps it is lucky that I have nothing that can be taken from me.

What they are translating into French, I don't know, except that they asked me, through Ed Collin, for FRUITS OF THE EARTH.

"Who is there?" Well, there is E. J. Pratt.

As for the Ant book, I intend to offer it to Reg Saunders. Macmillans don't want it.

Sorry, that's all I can write.

The second note, dated November 24, makes apparent the exhausted state of his health:

Thanks for the off-print.

I am getting worse. I don't believe any longer that I'll recover. But . . . .

I've been wanting to tell you that Carleton Stanley applauds your book, though he disagrees with your criticism. He (as did W. J. Alexander) places THE YOKE OF LIFE first, as a novel and calls it "great". As for the philosophy, he says, "When will North-Americans begin to catch up with the thought of F. P. Grove?" I believe he would like to write another book; he announces his prospective visit. Since I am fond of him, I look forward to it (probably in Jan.)

I am sorry; this exhausts me,

The last note was dated December 14, 1945, and is a moving combination of hope and apprehension:

We cannot afford Christmas cards, So here are our best wishes of the season.

No, I am not aware of a new printing of the MASTER. As for FRUITS OF THE EARTH. Ryersons bought the remainder in 1938. I get nothing out of it. Someone sent me the *Saturday Night* of Nov. 24. Stanley is reviewing your book in the Jan. *Dalhousie Review,* so he writes me. My total royalty on the MASTER was $109 for 14 yrs. work. But I have sold the ANTS. That's something. Macmillans want the autobiography. I don't know.

However . . .

I had yesterday the most painful day since my illness: hands and mouth. Horrible. Do you know that my boy won a scholarship for a year at St. Andrew's. I expect him home next Wednesday. First in Latin, French, and Greek, so far.

Frederick Philip Grove died on August 19, 1948. There are still some who belittle him; most Canadians ignore him; but I believe that his work will endure.

THE CREATION OF FANTASY

The fiction of Catherine Anthony Clark

Joan Selby

MODERN FANTASY for children is the culmination of a long literary tradition. Time and setting may be as new as today, but themes and creatures are those of the stories told to answer old, unanswerable questions. What is Good? Why is Darkness? Who am I? The imaginative tale appears in an intellectual climate already ripened by a developed mythology. Its protagonist takes on the same giant proportions as does the hero of the myth and legend. He dares to enter the Underworld; he faces and slays dragons; he seeks and, in the finding, he vanquishes the very forces of Evil. These are the dimensions of both the traditional myth and the modern imaginative tale and it is impossible to conceive of the second without the example of the first.

The difficulties of writing fantasy for Canadian children are obvious, for Canada lacks a homogenous mythology. There are two heritages, the Indian and the European, but, while each of these has its riches, neither wholly belongs to the Canada of today. The Indian legends are from an alien and forgotten culture and children find them difficult. Powerful as they are, they speak of unknown ways of the imagination, of the questionings of a primitive people, and they lack immediacy for children whose inheritance is more surely drawn from European lands where folk literature has gained a greater degree of sophistication. The Indian tales have a starkness at variance with the softer, subtler story more familiar to children in this country. Consider the fairy stories. The versions best known to Canadian children (as to most English-speaking children) are drawn from Perrault. Reflecting the age in which they were written, that of Louis XIV, they are, essentially, stories of courtly manners. Although told with Gallic simplicity, they still display the over-elaborate refinement of taste that marked

France's great age. Whatever elements these tales contain from a ruder age (and they do contain some), they still remain opposed to the instinctive, primitive Indian legend.

Owing to the lack of a developed and indigenous folk literature, Canadian writing for children had not been rich in fantasy. Among the few writers who have attempted the imaginative tale for children in this country, Mrs. Catherine Anthony Clark is the only one who has attained a measure of real achievement.

Mrs. Clark has not only attempted the integration of the two cultures; she has also drawn on differing forms of folk lore. She writes fantasy that attempts the heroic dimensions of legend, the high adventure of fairy tale, and the deep, moral implications of mythology. She synthesizes rather than creates. She takes the essence of each form and puts it to appropriate use within her framework of plot and situation. From the myths she has taken their central and dominant theme, the conflict between Good and Evil, and each of her books is concerned with the triumph of Light over Darkness. From the legends she has taken the hero figures, the larger-than-life proportions; from the fairy tales the climate of credulity and belief that lends suspense; and from the folk tales, those earthy and endearing men and women who inadvertently touch off the magic by unthinking word or action. These gleanings from ancient sources are used throughout her four books, *The Golden Pine Cone, The Sun Horse, The One-Winged Dragon* and *The Silver Man.*

Much of the synthesis that Mrs. Clark achieves between the European and the Indian tales is necessary because she is attempting fantasy in a Canadian background. The mountainous, lake-filled Kootenays which are the settings for her stories are not, obviously, the natural habitat of the rarefied and delicate fairies of Europe. Her fairies must be less of gossamer and more of buckskin. Mrs. Clark uses the wild, unrestrained beings of the Indian myths — Wild Woman, Thunderbird, the ominous figure of the Hunter — as the prime movers in her books. Yet, Mrs. Clark's creatures are seldom wholly from one or other of the two cultures, but, rather, are hybrids of both. Princess Onamara of *The Golden Pine Cone,* for example, is derived both from that familiar of the Indian tales, the magic woman who dwells apart, and from that of the European tales, the heartless princess imprisoned in the friendless world of self. Such minglings give added dimensions by writing the two traditions which form the Canadian heritage and pointing to similarities rather than differences.

The strongest single element, however, is the Indian. Indian life and ways are always a dominant ingredient and the central episodes of Mrs. Clark's books take

place in a long-forgotten land inhabited by a lost tribe. This land does not contain the smoke-filled villages of reality, but, in keeping with the magic themes, it is a land that knows only the ceremonial side of Indian life. Rites and ceremonies, the seeking of the Good, the propitiation of the gods, are the daily observances by which its inhabitants live. Mrs. Clark is quite capable of realism in this area when it suits her purpose, for she is aware as all writers of imaginative tales must be, of the necessary interplay between reality and fantasy. The sea hunt for the killer whale in *The One-Winged Dragon* is a good example of her handling of actual, taut adventure within the boundaries of the fantastic.

In each of her four books the boy and girl leave the Outer World and enter the supernatural land in search of a relative or friend who is bewitched by the powers of Evil. With the aid of the Indians and the magic instilled in them by possession of an Other World charm, the children prevail and fulfil their quest. This simple plot lends itself readily both to the recreation of the myth and to the pursuit, capture and escape of the adventure tale.

LITTLE HAS been said of Mrs. Clark's "borrowing" from the folk tales. It is these tales rather than the others that supply the human element. The human beings in folk lore may be perverse, or roguish, or foolish; they have individuality and flavour. Mrs. Clark's human beings are strong, vocal and decided, and stand in direct contrast to the more ethereal, magical beings. She has followed tradition in making these characters national types, fully and unmistakably of the country from which the tales spring. Her men and women are authentic Canadians and as such they bring a further richness to the "Canadianism" of her books. The Flame-Lighter Woman of *The Sun Horse* is undeniably a witch, but she is also a sharp-edged pioneer. "I am not one to let fruit go to waste. There was no waste in my Ontario home. I had raspberries in the wagon in sealers. Put them up driving through the foothills . . . ." Here indeed speaks the woman who dared the prairies in the covered wagon, her vast courage equalled only by her fearful busyness. In *The Golden Pine Cone* we have the legendary trapper and man of the northern lands, Bill Buffer, whose sound "horse sense and no nonsense" brings a relieving, everyday realism into the never-never land. Uncle Barker of *The Silver Man* and Kwong Hu of *The One-Winged Dragon* are authentic Canadiana; the one in the character part of the old pros-

pector turned homely mentor, the other, with his quiet acceptance of suffering, a true and touching portrait of the Orient-born Canadian. Indeed, Kwong Hu is a daring character to create for children, for his depths are outside a child's experience, and a full realization of his character must depend on a child's sympathetic response to quietness and dignity and sorrow. Not only do these characters deepen and authenticate the Canadian settings of the stories; they are also true inventions in themselves.

The transitions from the Real to the Unreal World are difficult to handle in the writing of fantasy. They must be smooth and unforced and able to bear the weight of credulity. Mrs. Clark has introduced an interesting device to make these transitions effective and psychologically sound. At least one of the two children in each book is in some measure at variance and at "outs" with the actual world. He or she hovers already on the edge of the Other World which is also the World of Wishes where unhappiness dissolves in magic. Mark of *The Sun Horse* has but recently lost both parents and must somehow reconcile himself to the narrower, more circumscribed life that is all his aunt can offer. ". . . . I was half dreaming . . ." says Giselle, Mark's companion, and indeed she is, for she is one of those children whose gaze is forever inward and whose search — no matter what the immediate object — is always for the inverse of reality. *The One-Winged Dragon* gains considerably in insight because of the interplay between Jenni whose fear of being unloved has made her over quick to quarrel and Michael to whom the same fear has brought too great a caution and too old a patience. Fringa of *The Silver Man* is actually bewitched and lives eerily and inconclusively between the two worlds. Mrs. Clark allows no morbidity (a taboo in books written for children) in this depiction of some slight maladjustment, for it is but lightly touched upon and serves only to heighten the poignancy and strengthen the plausibility of the transition and entry into the Other World. Confronted with problems of their own, these children are at once more real and take a more convincing part in the essential action and main concern of the myth, the never-ending war between Good and Evil. Mrs. Clark's stories gain immeasurably here by the intertwining of the human and superhuman themes. In the larger, more exciting tale, she does not forget her concern for the children, nor *their* concern with the Outer World. In each book the childrens' problems are resolved both in relation to the Outside and in accord with the ultimate values that prevail in the Inner World. This double resolution brings the two levels of her stories, the mythical and the real, into close and believable harmony. The one is but the reverse side of the other, and both together make the whole.

Success depends upon so many diverse elements in the spinning of the imaginative tale. Writers must know the appropriate limits of fantasy so that no false note shatters the subtlety, the rightness and brightness of the story. That true balance between the real and the unreal which forms the distincive characterisic of fantasy must be maintained. There must be a certain suspense and tautness of action; a fey, but not unbelievable mood; a richness, but a disciplined richness, of language, concept and symbol. That Mrs. Clark is not without fault, but that she is evolving a real competence in mastery of her difficult task is clearly demonstrated by a quick review of her four published books.

In *The Golden Pine Cone,* the earliest of her books, there is a certain awkwardness of style and lack of integration. The opening sentence "Not very long ago and not very far away . . ." is rather too self-conscious an attempt to capture the spirit of the traditional opening. The magic element in the story never seems quite real, nor the real quite able to sustain the magic. The half-human, half-fairy creatures such as the dog, Ooshka, are not entirely, nor believably, realized. On the other hand, the wholly fairy creatures such as the Lake Snake with its "belly-scales . . . thin and soft as fungus" are satisfyingly eerie and invocative of an ageless past. In this first attempt, however, Mrs. Clark does demonstrate her feeling for the symbolism of myth and fairy tale, for the needed impetus of the adventure tale. She shows an ability to make her own such traditional themes as that of the giant-killer, the bewitched prisoner, and the lost children. These become the stock-in-trade of her latest stories, and it is no small tribute to her skill that she makes this rather small, closed circle of motifs appear fresh and vigorous in each repetition. Their very timelessness is, of course, a factor in her favour.

The second book, *The Sun Horse,* shows greater depth of perception, more rounded characterization and easier presentation. There is little left of the hesitant and rather disjointed style of the first book; the flow of the narrative is smoother; the magical happenings are motivated more effortlessly. The human beings are more appealing and in the Flame-Lighter Woman — as I have already suggested — Mrs. Clark creates a particularly well-delineated character of considerable dimensions. It is in this book, also, that Mrs. Clark introduces her device of placing her children already upon the edge of the Dream World. Nowhere is her innate restraint more apparent than in this delicate and technically difficult situation.

Mrs. Clark's excesses are those of language rather than of sentiment. This

lesser fault is attributable to an ardour not yet trained to the acceptance of disciplined craft. There is a tendency to purple passages, which is particularly marked in descriptions of the supernatural; Mrs. Clark is much more controlled in writing of the natural and the everyday. The Shrine of the Love Magnet, the magic thing the children seek to save their Indian friends from the Thunderbird, is hymned in technicoloured terms of rose quartz, black agate and crystal swans. In the same book, however, she writes: "A phœbe sang; wild ducks flew. From the wooded hill, two ravens came slowly sailing like sheets of burnt paper . . ." The simile used is, perhaps, not very original, but the three sentences together show a restraint and an understanding of the necessary balance in style.

The One-Winged Dragon illustrates another problem that Mrs. Clark faces in her attempt to integrate basically differing mythologies. Here it is the Chinese and the Canadian Indian. The challenge of welding together the flavour of Chinese literature with its delicacy, urbanity and wit, with the more savage, less sophisticated Indian legend is manifestly a formidable task. As might be expected, Mrs. Clark does not manage this integration without some distortion of both. Of all her magical beasts, the Chinese dragon is the least believable and weakest in delineation. He is a somewhat sorry and alien creature, crippled by more than his damaged wing.

In Mrs. Clark's first three books there is a tendency towards over-writing, a lack of true integration, and, perhaps, a certain misdirection, so that the action arising from the magical circumstances appears to take over the story and the author's control sometimes appears lost. In her latest book, *The Silver Man,* Mrs. Clark has brought her art a step nearer total achievement. Here she does not attempt to weld together so many story forms, but gives full rein to an imaginative adventure myth in which the magic lies as much in its pace and tautness as it does in its supernatural elements. She develops the fey Franga, half human, half Other-World, and sets her against the steadfast Kawitha so that there is contrast and subsequently more texture in this story. The central theme and its symbolism — that of the young chief whose blood is slowly congealing to silver so that he will be forever lost to the world of human warmth — is more expertly and authoritatively handled than a similar subject in *The Sun Horse.* Artistically *The Silver Man* is the truest in concept and intent, for here the half-suggested but never fully realized conflict of the other books between the Real and the Dream World for the loyalties of the characters becomes clearer. Indeed, this subtle and adult concept (and no less adult because of the necessary simplification of its

presentation) is the backdrop against which the myth and the magic flash this way and that and play themselves out.

It is still too early and the body of her work is too slight to decide whether Mrs. Clark has succeeded wholly or only in part in creating a mythology for Canadian children in the guise of modern fantasy. That this is her ambitious design is apparent in the decisive manner in which she attempts the integration of the two differing heritages, and in the bold use she makes of the forms and basic ingredients of the fairy tale, folk tale and legend.

UNE EPOQUE DE SYNTHESE

Quelques aspects des rapports Littéraires entre la France, la suisse romande et le Canada Français

Gérard Tougas

Nous vivons, dans cette seconde partie du vingtième siècle, une époque de synthèse. La traduction dans les principales langues de l'occident des chefs-d'œuvre des pays asiatiques, traduction entreprise par l'Unesco, est à cet égard un signe des temps.

Il n'est donc pas surprenant que l'étude de la littérature canadienne-française conduise à la Suisse romande. Si, comme l'a démontré Roger Caillois, dans son *Trésor de la poésie universelle* (1958), toutes les poésies se ressemblent, combien à plus forte raison, deux petites littératures ayant le français comme langue véhiculaire, ne doivent-elles pas posséder de traits communs!

Je distingueria, parmi ces traits communs, trois problèmes importants, devant lesquels Canadiens et Suisses sont contraints de prendre position dans leurs rapports avec la France. Il s'agira d'abord de l'emploi de la langue française, ensuite de la situation de l'édition nationale, et enfin de l'influence de la critique littéraire.

Mais avant d'en arriver à ces considérations, il est indispensable d'expliquer ce que j'entends par "littérature romande" et "littérature canadienne-française".

En Suisse romande, de bons esprits se sont demandé: "La littérature romande existe-t-elle?" Jusqu'à une époque récente, la même question s'est posée au Canada concernant la littérature canadienne. Or, dégager la notion de littérature romande ou de littérature canadienne constitue en soi un exercice de littérature comparée. Si riche en renseignements que soit la recherche d'une définition de ces deux petites littératures, cette recherche aurait l'inconvénient de nous éloigner des trois problèmes auxquels il vient d'être fait allusion. C'est pourquoi j'ai préféré m'en tenir à une position théorique qui exclut toute polémique. L'on voudra bien admettre que depuis de nombreux siècles, il s'est trouvé, en Suisse romande, des écrivains, et qu'au Canada français, les générations littéraires se succèdent depuis la première moitié du dix-neuvième siècle. Ces écrivains, qu'ils soient suisses ou canadiens, ont réagi devant des problèmes linguistiques qui se ressemblent; ils ont dû compter avec l'édition et aussi avec la critique littéraire

de leur pays. Dans tous les cas, la France, par l'intermédiaire de sa littérature, de sa langue et de sa culture, s'est trouvée au centre même de leurs préoccupations littéraires. C'est dans ce sens très large que je propose d'étudier quelques aspects des rapports littéraires entre la Suisse romande, le Canada français et la France.

La première étude d'envergure qui ait été consacrée au développement parallèle des petites littératures de langue française est celle d'Auguste Viatte. Dans son *Histoire littéraire de l'Amérique française,* publiée en 1954, Viatte a tracé l'évolution des petites littératures d'Haïti, des Antilles, de la Louisiane, de la Nouvelle-Angleterre et du Canada. Jusqu'ici, aucune étude importante n'a paru sur les rapports littéraires entre la Suisse romande et le Canada français.

A première vue, l'établissement de rapports étroits entre la Suisse française et le Canada, séparés comme ils le sont par la géographie et l'histoire, peut sembler hasardeux. Pourtant, un examen, même superficiel de leur littérature, conduit à de fructueuses découvertes.

La Suisse romande partage, avec le Canada français — bien qu'à un moindre degré — le même sentiment d'infériorité linguistique. Il peut paraître curieux qu'un pays qui ne fait qu'un, linguistiquement parlant, avec la France, se sente désavantagé dans l'emploi de la langue commune. L'histoire littéraire nous explique comment les Suisses, ou du moins certains d'entre eux, ont pu se croire défavorisés à cet égard.

Si l'on remonte au moyen âge, on s'aperçoit qu'à l'encontre de la Champagne, de la Bourgogne, de la Picardie, de l'Angleterre même, qui devaient toutes, comme on le sait, produire des littératures écrites en divers dialectes apparentés à celui qui devait triompher — le français — la Romandie, elle, ne devait jamais ennoblir par une littérature écrite ses patois, qui ont été largement parlés jusqu'au 19e siècle. Le premier poète important issu de la Suisse romande est sans doute Othon de Grandson, dont l'œuvre appartient au 14e siècle. Chaucer aurait traduit une de ses complaintes, aujourd'hui perdue, en qualifiant le poète de "fleur des poètes de France".[1] Ainsi, les premiers écrivains de la Suisse française ont délaissé leur patois pour s'évertuer à s'exprimer comme les meilleurs écrivains de France. Réaction parfaitement compréhensible si l'on songe que la Suisse française ne comptera pas de ville importante, c'est-à-dire de centre culturel international avant la Genève de Calvin. Les écrivains, se sentant isolés, chercheront instinctivement un auditoire au delà de leurs frontières nationales.

Pour des raisons toutes semblables, les écrivains canadiens, qui, de nos jours

[1] Virgile Rossel, *Histoire littéraire de la Suisse romande, des origines à nos jours.* Genève, 1889-1890, p. 47.

seulement, commencent à trouver chez eux un public relativement nombreux, ont tourné leurs yeux vers Paris. Cette nécessité n'a pas peu contribué à la querelle linguistique, qui a naturellement été beaucoup plus âpre au Canada qu'en Suisse.

Au canada, les défenseurs des vocables et expressions autochtones ont toujours été nombreux, ainsi que les esprits conservateurs, qui ont prêché la soumission totale devant l'Académie. En Suisse, la querelle, plus feutrée, s'est traduite par le mépris de certains lettrés devant la pauvreté du vocabulaire romand.

Edmond Gilliard est un de ceux-là. Pour Gilliard, la langue française que l'on apprend dans les écoles de Suisse est une langue artificielle, tout juste bonne à être enseignée aux étrangers qui fréquentent les cours d'été des universités de Genève, de Lausanne et de Neuchâtel. C'est pourquoi Gilliard a élu domicile à Paris, au cœur du monde français. Avant lui, nombreux sont les Suisses romands qui ont senti la nécessité de prendre le chemin de la capitale française afin d'asseoir sur des bases plus solides leur connaissance de la langue. Ramuz nous a raconté comment le jeune vaudois qu'il était, dès son arrivée à Paris, a soudain compris qu'il parlait une langue de province, assez terne et appauvrie. N'est-ce pas une constatation semblable que vient de faire à Montréal, M. Victor Barbeau, dans un numéro du *Devoir,* consacré précisément à cette question? Selon Barbeau, la langue parlée par la plupart des Canadiens-français rend difficile à l'écrivain le maniement du français, car entre la langue écrite et la langue parlée, l'écart est trop grand.

Est-il besoin d'ajouter que je ne fais qu'effleurer ici un problème linguistique qui est d'une grande complexité? Il va sans dire qu'on peut trouver des Suisses et des Canadiens qui estiment qu'un long séjour à Paris n'est nullement nécessaire et peut même devenir préjudiciable à l'épanouissement de l'écrivain. Il est clair, toutefois, qu'en raison des énormes pressions qu'exerce le monde anglo-saxon sur le Canada français, l'écrivain canadien profitera davantage que son confrère suisse d'un voyage en France.

Intimement associé au problème de la langue est celui de l'édition et de la critique. Selon que l'écrivain choisit de se faire publier chez lui ou à Paris, ses chances de succès peuvent lui sembler différentes.

L'écrivain canadien ou suisse qui prend délibérément la décision de rester dans son pays, et de courir ses risques à Montréal ou à Genève, perd-il grand-chose à

ne pas succomber aux tentations de Paris? Il faut distinguer ici deux situations, qui, tout en étant défavorables, ne le sont pas au même degré.

Au Canada, écrire a été jusqu'à ces temps derniers, une gageure. En 1804, un poète désenchanté versifiait ainsi:

> Pour nous, dans ce pays ingrat,
> Où l'esprit est plus froid que le climat,
> Nos talents sont perdus pour le siècle où nous sommes.[2]

Depuis lors, une amélioration sensible a eu lieu. Les meilleurs écrivains bénéficient aujourd'hui d'un appui qui s'étend, dans certains cas, bien au delà d'une élite dont les bases ne font que s'élargir. Fait très significatif aussi: grâce à la radio et à la télévision nationales, il devient loisible à un nombre considérable d'écrivains d'assurer leur indépendance économique sans trop s'éloigner de leurs préoccupations littéraires. S'il est incontestable que la télévision risque parfois d'engloutir les talents, elle offre à l'écrivain conscient du danger, la possibilité de ne la servir que le temps qu'il faut, quitte à consacrer ses loisirs considérables à l'édification de son œuvre. C'est une formule qui n'aurait pas déplu à Balzac, contraint qu'il était, à une époque critique de sa carrière, de bâcler des romans qu'il ne consentit jamais à signer. Le nombre de textes soumis à la radio et à la télévision canadiennes par des auteurs français, belges et suisses, indique que les cachets de Radio-Canada correspondent à un genre de mécenat.

Moins brillante est la situation de l'édition. Le public que l'écrivain peut espérer toucher ne dépasse guère les quelque cinq millions de Canadiens-français. La romancière Gabrielle Roy publie ses œuvres à environ dix mille exemplaires. Le plus fort tirage qu'on ait jamais connu s'est produit l'an dernier avec la publication des *Insolences du frère Untel.* Au mois de juin 1961, l'éditeur avait écoulé la plus grande partie des cent vingt et un mille exemplaires de cette analyse humoristique des insuffisances intellectuelles du Canada français. Cette réussite doit se comparer au modeste tirage de trois mille exemplaires, qui est une norme au Canada français, pour le roman. Cette norme représente elle-meme un idéal, puisque dans la plupart des cas, les invendus produiront un déficit.

LA SUISSE, avec son unique million de francophones, se trouve dans l'impossibilité absolue de faire vivre ses écrivains. Tous les ouvrages d'auteurs suisses publiés par les Editions de la Baconnière ont été déficitaires. Les

[2] J. Huston, *Le répertoire national* (Montréal, Valois et Cie, 1893, tome ler) p. 82.

Editions Mermod à Lausanne, où ont été publiées les œuvres complètes de Ramuz, sont dirigées par un industriel éclairé, M. Henry-Louis Mermod. Depuis une trentaine d'années, M. Mermod lance, avec un discernement digne de tous les éloges, les meilleurs poètes de la Suisse romande, dans des éditions luxueuses, prometteuses de pertes financières. Ne publiant que ce qui lui plaît, la signature d'Henry-Louis Mermod devient une garantie de qualité. Mais interrogez les poètes qu'il a fait connaître à Lausanne et à Genève. Plusiers vous feront remarquer, ne comprenant pas toujours que Lausanne n'est pas le tremplin qu'est Paris, que leurs œuvres ne circulent pas en France. La maison Payot, enfin, se consacre depuis pres d'un demi-siècle à l'édition scolaire et scientifique. Lorsque, il y a moins d'un an, elle a inauguré une série des poètes romands en faisant paraître deux plaquettes, l'une du poète valaisan, Maurice Chappaz, et l'autre d'Anne Perrier, cette initiative ressemblait fort à une petite révolution dans le monde de l'édition suisse.

Quant à la radio et à la télévision, celles-ci n'offrent pas les mêmes débouchés qu'au Canada. Par conséquent, les meilleurs écrivains du pays n'y jouent pas le même rôle et lorsqu'on les y trouve, c'est pour constater que leur servitude est plus grande.

La situation matérielle de l'écrivain canadien étant précaire et celle de son homologue suisse désastreuse, les rapports entre critiques et écrivains — partout mauvais — atteignent une virulence fort caractéristiques des petites littératures. C'est une tentation à laquelle l'écrivain suisse ou canadien succombe facilement que de croire que la critique de son pays l'empêche, par sa médiocrité, de connaître une gloire nationale, ou même internationale. De son côté, le critique s'impatiente rapidement devant la pauvreté, véritable ou imaginaire, de la production littéraire courante et se tourne plus volontiers vers Paris, où ses talents, croit-il, trouveraient un meilleur emploi.

Depuis des siècles, Paris exerce une irrésistible attraction sur la province française. Pour l'écrivain ambitieux établi dans une capitale régionale, le problème posé par un éventuel déménagement n'est pas terrible. Il reste toujours la solution intermédiaire, qui permet de fréquentes navettes entre Paris et le domicile provincial, solution devenue courante, grâce au train rapide et à l'avion.

Du moment que cet écrivain est de formation suisse, le problème se complique. La solution parisienne reste, bien entendu, possible. Blaise Cendrars — comme, dans un tout autre domaine, Le Corbusier — sont des noms qui sont si intimement associés à la culture française, que leur origine suisse ne se présente pas immédiatement à l'esprit. Mais le Suisse romand a été trop fortement marqué

par la Réforme et une vie politique autonome pour ne pas réagir, lorsqu'il se trouve en France, en étranger. La plupart feront comme Ramuz, qui, après s'être culturellement complété par un long séjour en France, est retourné sur les bords du Léman, où l'attendait sa véritable inspiration.

Mais c'est là que commence le drame. Ramuz a connu une célébrité internationale. Ce n'est pas Lausanne ni Genève qui lui ont conféré la gloire, mais Paris. Les Suisses, très modestes lorsqu'il s'agit de leurs écrivains, ont été parmi les derniers à s'incliner devant les qualités exceptionnelles de l'auteur de *La grande peur dans la montagne*. Du reste, Gonzague de Reynold n'avait-il pas expliqué, dans son livre sur *Le doyen Bridel et les origines de la littérature suisse romande* qu'il était rigoureusement impossible d'être à la fois vaudois et écrivain de génie?

Pour peu que l'écrivain suisse réfléchisse à son sort, il s'apercevra du dilemne devant lequel il se trouve. Rester chez lui, c'est, à coup sûr, renoncer à être connu en dehors d'un cercle restreint de lecteurs suisses. Tenter l'aventure parisienne, c'est risquer, à peu d'exception près, de se couper de sa source d'inspiration, la terre helvétique, qui seule peut fournir la matière de son œuvre. Sans doute, le choix ne se présente pas d'une façon aussi simple. Beacoup tâteront de la vie littéraire parisienne qui retourneront plus tard en Suisse, ayant compris qu'avant tout passe l'authenticité. D'autres, qui seront restés dans le pays natal, se demanderont s'ils n'auraient pas mieux fait de partir, pendant qu'il en était temps encore. Ces sentiments, qu'on retrouve dans tous les pays, ont ceci de particulier chez le Suisse, qu'ils réflètent sa double nature: culturellement influencé par Paris et politiquement associé à la Confédération, ce débat intérieur définit un aspect essentiel de sa spiritualité.

Au canada, la caution de Paris reste précieuse, mais tend à devenir moins indispensable qu'autrefois. Au dix-neuvième siècle, le poète Louis Fréchette, après avoir obtenu un prix de l'Académie Française, rentra chez lui en héros. De nos jours, une préface signée par un auteur français connu confère au romancier ou au poète canadien un prestige immédiat et lui permet parfois de savourer la petite revanche qu'il obtient ainsi aux dépens de la critique montréalaise. Mais Montréal, avec ses quelque deux millions d'habitants, est devenu une des grandes villes de l'Occident. De plus en plus, la capitale littéraire du Canada français créera ses propres mythes, et les auteurs canadiens trouveront

des satisfactions grandissantes d'amour-propre à la courtiser.

L'avenir des littératures canadienne-française et romande peut être assez clairement dessiné si on s'en tient uniquement à leur degré d'autonomie par rapport à Paris.

La Suisse romande me paraît destinée à rester sous la dépendance culturelle de la France. En dépit du fait que les cantons de langue française représentent un merveilleux capital humain, dont l'équivalent ne se trouve nulle part ailleurs dans les pays de langue française, ces cantons, soudés géographiquement à la France, ne peuvent que recevoir des influences de cette dernière, sans autre espoir littéraire que de voir de temps à autre un de leurs fils s'imposer à l'attention du monde français par l'entremise de Paris. Chaque génération produira ses écrivains du cru, dont les efforts, plus ou moins inconnus de l'étranger, constitueront la tradition littéraire romande. Les éditeurs et les critiques continueront à se débattre dans les mêmes difficultés, parce que celles-ci sont commandées par la faiblesse numérique, économique et politique de la Suisse romande.

Quant à la littérature canadienne-française, elle est appelée, sans nul doute, à s'individualiser de plus en plus. La géographie à elle seule commanderait cette évolution. Il serait anormal qu'un peuple en pleine croissance restât dans l'imitation. Toutefois, il n'est pas à prévoir que Montréal affirme son indépendance vis-à-vis de Paris comme New York l'a fait depuis longtemps le Londres. Le Canada français, par son élite, loin de vouloir refuser le concours de la France et des autres pays de langue française, le cherche d'instinct. Isolés en Amérique, les Canadiens-français ne se sentent vraiment libres qu'au sein du monde d'expression française. Pour cette raison, un double mouvement est à prévoir. Au fur et à mesure que les écrivains canadiens exprimeront avec une assurance et une pénétration grandissantes la signification de leur aventure française et américaine, les liens qu'ils forgeront avec l'Europe de langue française se ressereront. Nombreux sont les auteurs canadiens qui se font maintenant éditer simultanément à Paris et à Montréal.

Il semble qu'au delà de toutes les difficultés d'ordre psychologique, économique ou autre, qu'éprouvent Suisses romands et Canadiens dans leur commun effort pour s'exprimer littérairement, il se forge, par une logique qui est propre à notre temps, une solidarité entre les hommes. Dans cette perspective, les mots *dépendance* et *indépendance* n'ont peut-être pas tout le poids qu'on leur assigne normalement. Manifestement, c'est vers une interdépendance que nous marchons. Les Canadiens et les Suisses, pour la première fois, font la découverte mutuelle de leurs écrivains. Dans ce processus, la France n'est pas absente.

LETTER FROM TORONTO

Robert McCormack

Overheard on a bus (One very well-dressed young lady discussing the latest literary sensation with an older but equally well-dressed companion): "It was a paperback in New York but George wouldn't let me . . . I mean he said they'd just take it away at the border anyway. Is it really . . . ? I read in Horizon, *you know this very highbrow exotic magazine, it said the style was . . . you know, like* Ulysses — *you can hardly understand it it's so obtuse."*

THIS IS THE SORT of incident writers report to one another with a sardonic smile and a sad shake of the head, and no doubt that is all it is worth. Poor old Henry Miller, poor old everybody. If I have been brooding about it occasionally in the two or three days since it happened, it is only because it reminded me of some earlier brooding I was propelled into by last May's Canadian Conference of the Arts. I am thinking of the audience at this landmark in our cultural history, an audience which was, or seemed to be, very largely composed of my bus-companion and her friends. There they were with their mink stoles, knock-'em-dead hats and reluctant husbands, drifting sluggishly through and about the lavish new O'Keefe Centre, gaping and poking at the exhibition of painting and sculpture in the lobby and registering various combinations of anxiety, bewilderment and boredom as they sat through the concerts, speeches and panel discussions. There were others in the crowd too, of course — artists, critics, collectors, publishers, C.B.C. officials and the inevitable little old ladies in sneakers. But it was young Mrs. Malaprop and her associates who set the dominant tone. And, as you will have noticed long ago, it was a tone which

caused the greatest outbreak of sardonic smiles and headshakings in years. Yet the two things that most impressed me about these people were neither especially comic nor altogether pathetic. In the first place, prominent in the incredible mixture of motives that had brought them there was an obvious and honest hope of enlightenment. In the second, there was the tolerant and self-critical patience with which they bore the abuse. For they were abused. Elegant young painters sneered at them, witty young professors berated them, angry young novelists denounced them, handsome young poets read them verse of such unabashed sexuality as to turn them to stone on the spot, and, finally, the American culture expert Russell Lynes told his whole audience that they should abolish themselves forthwith.

It would be idle to deny that there was something satisfying about this performance of "The Triumph of Ariel, or The Artist's Revenge." Knocking the bourgeoisie about has been excellent sport these three hundred years and it still pleases. But there semed to me something a little extravagant about the drama at the O'Keefe, even a bit silly. It was Mr. Lynes' thesis that if those he called the "tastemakers" and the "culturettes" would only stop bothering the artist, would just quietly vanish and leave him alone, the artist would then be free to create a new, more intelligible art for a broader, less fashion-ridden public. But surely this is simply a variation on the familiar theory that somewhere out there in vast America, beyond the critics and the ladies' committees, there exists a larger, more genuine public of ten million honest working-men ready to snap up modern art by the warehouseful if only it could be properly presented to them. This is pure fantasy. By and large, the audience for contemporary painting, music and writing was pretty exactly represented by the audience at the Conference. These are the people who are interested in art, who have the leisure to pursue it, and the money to pay for it. Certainly they are an audience which could stand a great deal of improvement, but this is hardly a reason for wishing they would drop dead. On the contrary, more and better "tastemakers" and "culturettes" would seem to be precisely what we need, and especially is this true in the case of literature.

ONE OF THE many things that used to enrage Ezra Pound in the days when he was European editor of *Poetry* was the sentence from Whitman which Harriet Monroe insisted on keeping as the magazine's motto: "To

have great poets there must be great audiences too." Considering what Pound was up to at the time, his reaction is understandable. And there is a perfectly valid sense in which, to a writer actually engaged in writing, the audience (any audience) is simply irrelevant. Nevertheless, Miss Monroe was probably right to cling to her somewhat tattered motto. There can be no prescription for genius, but the production of a generally high level of writing (which makes the appearance of genius considerably more likely) does seem to require a community of author and audience in which there is a real and useful interchange between them. When there is no such community, when there is no agreement about values or standards, no intelligible communication on the one hand and no meaningful feedback on the other, there is only a chaos equally damaging to writer and reader. In short, there is the situation we have here at the moment.

It is a situation — to take a minor example — in which three of the local reviews of Morley Callaghan's latest novel, *A Passion in Rome,* differed so wildly in approach and interpretation that they might very easily have been about three different books. No reasonable reader would expect three critics to agree entirely, and I suppose it might even be argued that violently conflicting notices are really a tribute to the complexity of the work in question. I am afraid, however, that what we have here is simply the kind of reviewing long ago described by Henry James as "an unprecented invention for darkening counsel". It confounds the reader and it would be surprising if it did not make the writer cynical about all criticism whatever. No doubt Mr. Callaghan can look after himself by this time. But the rest of us are left inhabiting a literary desert where it is only too likely that both author and audience will either rush panting after every fashionable mirage or else collapse limply into the few small, dusty oases.

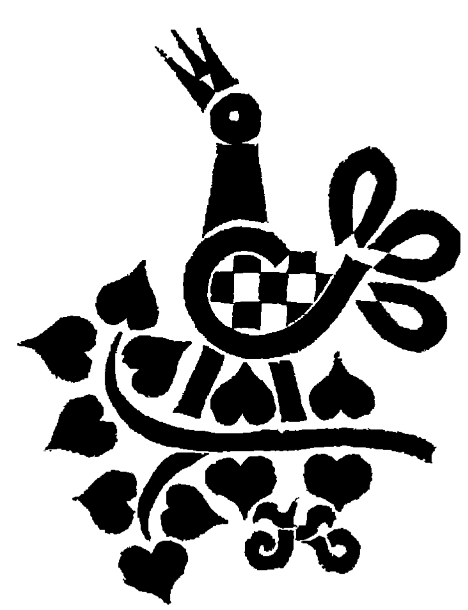
One of these is, of course, the university. But the University of Toronto (York University is too new to have made any distinct impression) has never had the tradition of a community service or involvement which characterizes certain American state universities and municipal colleges. Its lineage is undeviatingly aristocratic and its goal remains the self-enclosed "community of scholars." To an outsider, it sometimes seems to be full of young instructors who refuse to buy television sets "on principle," and experts in American literature to whom one has to explain who Saul Bellow is. This is not a criticism; it is conceivable that some acquaintance with contemporary life and literature might be useful to a scholar but it is not a necessity. It is not even strictly true, for one has no sooner set it down than one thinks of Northrop Frye, or Marshall McLuhan, or the editor of *The Canadian Forum,* Milton Wilson. Still, I think it is fair to say that

the University as such is not much of a force in literary affairs. It is significant that the "Letters in Canada" section of the *University of Toronto Quarterly,* which contains some of the best criticism of our writing to appear anywhere, comes out too rarely and has too limited a circulation to have much influence.

IT IS PERHAPS also significant that the University seems to have so little effect on its recent graduates, or even on its undergraduates. One of the former — a shining new B.A. in "Eng. Lang. & Lit." — remarked to me the other day that his whole aim in college had been to get the degree and get out so he could at last "learn how to write". It did not seem to occur to him that he might possibly have learned something about it from his courses. ("Symbols," he said, "they were always talking about symbols. You know, I don't think George Eliot knew a damn thing about symbols.") These people huddle around a few coffee-houses, the Isaacs Gallery (where there are regular poetry readings) and various ephemeral publications. In general, their writing is characterized by withdrawal from or rejection of the society around them — lyrical evocation of the Never-Never or sluggish nightmares of violence. In a city where a department store displays *Franny and Zooey* among the children's books, and where guests at an apparently somewhat bohemian party are dragged off to jail and the men are sprayed with delousing fluid while the girls are subjected to vaginal examinations, such reactions are understandable. But they are, of course, social, not literary, reactions. Artistically, there is nothing solid enough for *les jeunes* to react to or rebel against. The result is a constant danger of relapse into tired experiments in Kerouackery or Ginsbergese. This tendency the more or less *avant-garde* magazine *Evidence* (which has, incidentally, under the editorship of Alan Bevan, produced a third issue much superior to the first two numbers) has felt it necessary to condemn in an oddly old-fashioned editorial: "Attacking decadence in forms which themselves constitute a decay or corruption of language and thought, and are therefore equally as deplorable as the things they attack, is the surest way to commit artistic suicide."

There remains only a kind of "shadow-establishment" which probably is the centre (except it is not a centre) of whatever literary life there is here. The names of this scattering (it is certainly not a group) of writers, critics and editors — Robert Fulford of the *Toronto Star* (surely the best book columnist on the continent), the editors of *Tamarack Review,* Kildare Dobbs of *Saturday Night,* etc. —

appear with such regularity in so many places that it would not take a very advanced case of paranoia to believe they formed some kind of literary cabal. Unfortunately, this is not the case. The real charge to be made against them is that they remain too divided and weak to establish any consistent standards or to give any real sense of direction. Readers are left to their own confused resources, and, lost among the squares, writers are only too likely to become quite literally "obtuse".



review articles

MONSTER CHARACTERS

Barrie Hale

Ten for Wednesday Night, ed. Robert Weaver. McClelland & Stewart Ltd.

Ten for Wednesday Night is an anthology of Canadian short stories. That is, the authors of them live here, or were born here, or came here to live for a while, and all the stories have been read on C.B.C. Wednesday Night. Aside from these near-accidents, they are unified by no specific "Canadianism". There is, however, a curious unity of another sort presented by most of the *Ten;* a unity of structure.

There are many structural possibilities for the short story; only one of them is that which evolves when one character, or a characterized circumstance, is felt with such preternatural potency as to sweep aside all other characters present — mere mean human beings. In one way or another, all but one of the *Ten* are built around this sort of Monster Character — infinitely and inexplicably greater than the sum of its causation or motivation; the major exception is Brian Moore's "Off the Track", a story of situation.

Jack Ludwig's "Requiem for Bibul" creates perhaps the largest character in the anthology; Bibul is of pre-war Winnipeg, and for a while the sprawling, conglomerate city and the slum-gutter future Rabbi are giants sufficiently large to be mutually sympathetic. But the Requiem never really makes up its mind to cry for Winnipeg past or Bibul dead; it tries ultimately to make Siamese the pair and cry for both, but Bibul's enormously scornful "Aaaa" has already swept aside Old Winnipeg and his departure from it. Bibul's "Aaaa" has even swept aside his own gratuitous death; Ludwig's final lament for gone city and dead citizen leaves one wanting a final goatily-negative "Aaaa", for Bibul the World-disdainer is finally a character too large for materialist Winnipeg, and even extravagant Ludwig.

Mordecai Richler's "The Summer My Grandmother Was Supposed to Die" is certainly as good a story, but flawed in the same way; there is a great sense of loss present, but "what exactly is lost?" and "how is the loss felt?" are questions which occus to one at the end of the narrative. As a narrative, the setting-out of the process of adolescent guilt, the story is chillingly effective; at the same time, it is curiously unsatisfactory as a resolution of its two major ingredients:

past Hebraic magnificence, and the mordant Yiddish present. In the present, there is the Rabbi who asks, "Well boys, what do you want to be when you grow up?" before his mother is cold, and in the past a Jewishness so proud that Catholic priests attended its funerals. Between the great past of Grandmother and the poor present of her adolescent grandson there is neither communication nor continuity; against the magnificent and unknowable past that Grandmother represents, there is only the poor blind present of Process. "Did you know that when they hang a man," says the older brother of the narrator, "the last thing that happens is that he has an orgasm?"

Within the framework imposed by the preternatural protagonist, Ludwig and Richler are certainly the *most* successful (though certainly not *entirely* successful) of the *Ten* in creating a satisfying short structure. There is one story represented here that is completely satisfactory, structurally: Brian Moore's "Off the Track", a "situation story", and, as such, the maverick of the anthology. Two emancipated Toronto suburbanites go to Haiti to discover the *real,* untouristy people; they do, and discover as well that the real people are not at all interested in them, their emancipation, or their reactions to their unexpected discoveries. They are left searching their imaginations for future superficial anecdotes to balance their past superficial expectations, and so is the reader; as if the future anecdote were in fact the present narrative, the style is weirdly shallow and bloodless, failing entirely to exploit the possibilities of the situation. And, to a greater or less extent, this is the fault of the remaining seven of *Ten for Wednesday Night*. Though, unlike *Off the Track,* they deal with giant protagonists, like it they are unable to match adequate theme with adequate style; they are consequently structurally inadequate.

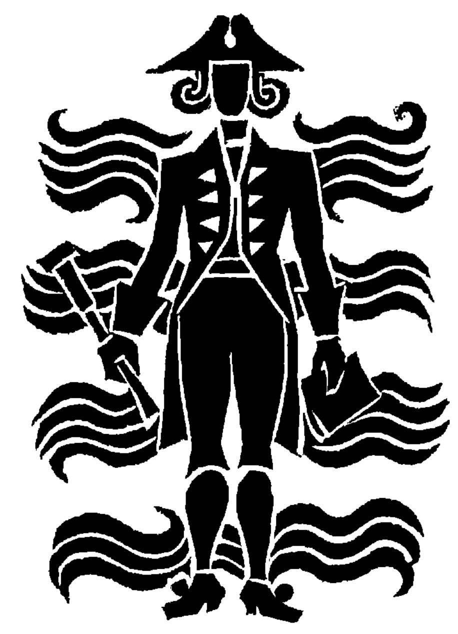
Perhaps the most indicative of this inadequacy is Gabrielle Roy's "Grandmother and the Doll" (published here in translation). It is not a story at all, but a character study; the narrative of the doll construction does not produce story progression but simply character encrustation. Because Grandmother is seen against no background but that of her present, she even diminishes from character to type; in the face of something as immutable as Type the narrator is able only to say. "Isn't she wonderful?" in endless and helplessly saccharine variations. The Grandmother in Alice Monro's "The Trip to the Coast" lives a powerful life as a character by way of contrast, but is featured by the same defining characteristics — a rigid hold on a present that is composed of equal parts of nostalgia for the past and incomprehensible dreams of the future. But what makes Character of Alice Monro's Grandmother, as distinct from Gabrielle Roy's Type, is that she child through whose eyes we see her is a character in her own right, albeit completely dominated by Grandmother. This domination is ultimately what destroys the story, for when Grandmother dies, so does her unaccountable dream of the future "Trip to the Coast," so does her ineffable past; we are left with a child out of whose life the present has gone. In Mordecai Richler's account of a similar death we were at least left with some sort of present to go on with, a present from which the past might at least be seen, if not known.

Two curious stories from Vancouver Island represent what might be phrased

as the coming together of circumstances, which possess awfully vital but essentially unknowable personalities, within the lives of a group of human beings, who possess no personalities other than the negative ones of reaction-to-circumstances. Ethel Wilson's "From Flores" brings together three unknowable personalities — Rock, Sky, Sea — and six human cyphers — a pompous-but-likable white, his similar wife, a brutish white, a pitiable white, a doomed-to-death Indian child, and his doomed-to-despair father. The human characters are neat and pat, but there is nothing neat and pat about Rock, Sky and Sea; when the three combine as storm, humanity is helpless and is destroyed, simply and completely. But such completeness is flat; perhaps it would have been less so had humanity been sketched a little less simply, and with at least as many rough edges as Rock, Sky and Sea. Similarly, in Gordon Woodward's "Tiger! Tiger!" the human characters begin as familiar, if minute, human beings — the self-repressed spinsters whose parent's past looms far larger than their present, the retarded adolescent whose child's mind fails to cope with his adult drives, the bizarre and mysterious visitor. All are quickly transfigured by an orgasm of blood-lust, blood-greed, blood-hate; the catalyst turns out to be the central and most potent character of all — the stranger's side-show tiger. It is as powerfully sensual a story as "From Flores", and poses the same conundrum: if the central character in a short story of character is essentially unknowable by nature, how may such a story be written satisfactorily?

Perhaps the most disappointing story of the *Ten* is Morley Callaghan's "The Doctor's Son"; it appears to be a portrait of that familiar figure from the world of larger-than-life, the smalltown doctor who, Godlike, is all things to all men, especially to the young, who have not yet lost their capacity to belief. The disappointment occurs quickly as small town takes over from Doctor God — Morton loses the faith of his only begotten son less through the stresses of Omnipotence and Benevolence than through a series of personal and social misadjustments so elementary that we are unable to believe that he could ever have legitimately attained to the eminence we are assured he possessed.

This agonizing state of affairs unfortunately characterizes *Ten for Wednesday Night;* scarce fountainhead erupts that does not turn arid before reaching the sea.



THICKNESS OF SILENCE

S. E. Read

JEAN-C. FALARDEAU, *Roots and Values in Canadian Lives.* University of Toronto Press, in co-operation with Carleton University, 1961.

W. L. MORTON, *The Canadian Identity.* University of Toronto Press; University of Wisconsin Press, 1961.

The Price of Being Canadian, ed. D. L. B. Hamlin. University of Toronto Press, 1961.

THESE THREE slim volumes do not belong to the realms of creative or imaginative literature or of literary history or criticism. Basically, they fall within those other realms — sociology, history, politics, and economics. Yet each, in varying degrees, comments on certain aspects of Canadian culture and each tries to give some body to that vague, floating, spiritual substance — the Canadian. As such, these volumes are of interest to those of us who would like to know who we are and where we are going.

After a first quick reading of the text I could find no more appropriate comment than these three lines from the wisdom of Omar Khayyam. I had

> . . . heard great argument
> About it and about; but evermore
> Came out by the same door where in I went.

My mood was prompted, in part, by my own inability to define "Canadian" and, in part, by the nature of the three books. Though now encased in covers, each volume was originally conceived as a series of public lectures or conference addresses. All, as a result, though at times stimulating and provocative, stay close to the troubled surface of the matter in hand. None fully develops an argument or a theme; none plunges into any unexplored depths.

Of the three works Professor Falardeau's is the most invigorating and the most refreshing. Originally given as two of the Plaunt Memorial Lectures at Carleton University in Ottawa in March 1960, the book is slight in bulk but rich in ideas. Born and reared a French-Canadian and trained as a sociologist, M. Falardeau moves with sure step across the whole Canadian scene. He is that rare Canadian — one who understands and appreciates the duality of Canadian culture, with all its many faceted complexities. But he arrived at his present happy position only after a slow and at times a painful journey. In a frank and a patently honest autobiographical sketch he traces the principal stages of that journey — from his birth in Quebec City down to the day in 1948 when he first read the marvellous letters of Frank Pickersgill.

As a young child in Canada's most historic city he was unaware of the English-speaking "self-segregated minority". For him they had no existence. His first "blurred recollection of reference to *les Anglais* can be traced to a lesson in Canadian history in the parochial school." The English were to be hated for the *déportation des Acadiens.* Not until he moved to Montreal as an adolescent did he begin to feel the impact of English Canada; but even then the ". . . 'English-Canadians' were the descendants of those who had crushed the Papineau rebellion, had hanged Riel,

had approved the Canadian participation in the Boer War, and had imposed conscription in 1917."

Later, as an undergraduate, he began to meet students from McGill, Toronto, Manitoba; began, too, to read English books — one of which, *The Pickersgill Letters,* brought to him a sense of union with the "other" Canadians he had never before felt. Through the reading of these letters that the indomitable Pickersgill left as a precious gift to all Canadians "I discovered . . . that the philosophical and moral questions which were almost the obsession of my French-Canadian friends had also tormented, without our knowing it, some of our English-speaking compatriots of the same generation." *Without our knowing* it — this was, and perhaps still is, the tragedy inherent in the duality of Canadian life. The Falardeaus did not *know* the Pickersgills, nor the Pickersgills the Falardeaus — "such was the thickness of silence, such was the psychological distance between us, English and French-speaking Canadians."

With a particular personal sorrow, I can feel the undertones of sadness in M. Falardeau's testament of youth. For I, too, was born and raised in Quebec — the province, not the city. My childhood town was Sherbrooke — an active industrial centre in the eastern townships. As a family we belonged to the "self-segregated minority". As such, we lived in isolation in the North Ward, where few French-Canadians were even to be seen in those days. The school to which I went came under the Protestant School Board, and the history of Canada we studied (and study it we did — dates and all in great detail) was written from

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the English point of view — though I do not recall that it encouraged us to despise the French-Canadians for any insurrections or rebellions. We read the English-language paper, the *Sherbrooke Record;* we shopped in stores owned by English-speaking Canadians; and we were brought up in the Protestant tradition. In brief, though we did not dislike the French-Canadians and though we were not unaware of their existence, we never got to know them. I cannot recall now that there was any conscious hostility between us, except during the conscription crisis of 1917, when, on one memorable evening a violent riot erupted on Wellington Street — but even this riot ended in a somewhat amicable way, with the English-speaking Canadians singing "God Save the King" with great fervour at one end of the street, and the French-Canadians giving a full-hearted rendition of "O Canada" at the other. But like M. Falardeau, I, too, lived in the "thickness of silence". Because of this, I am less Canadian than I might have been if I had passed my Quebec youth in the atmosphere of congenial understanding that M. Falardeau envisions as a possibility.

The rapprochement, he says, is at the moment "particularly visible in the academic world". Though Canadian intellectuals are becoming ". . . more aware of their respective spiritual heritages," they are also seeing more clearly than ever before that behind the duality of Canadian culture is a common source — classical humanism. To re-examine, then, the roots of humanism, and ". . . to ascertain some of its subsequent acquisitions may be one of the most fruitful ways of finding our common denominator."

But this re-examination of humanism and its subsequent acquisitions will be by no means a simple task. Only within the universities can it be undertaken with any hope of success. The avenues of approach must be intellectual rather than political, and "the creative potentialities of classical humanism" must be "rejuvenated by the broad perspectives of the social sciences" if we are to achieve any solid "fusion" of our "dual cultural heritages." Here, I believe, M. Falardeau runs head on into semantic difficulties, for by "fusion" he does not mean a melting or a blending of the two cultures into one. On this point he is adamant. The two cultures may enrich each other, but neither culture must absorb or even radically alter the other. "Whatever the *rapprochement* may be, it will have to rest, it will be all the stronger if it rests, on the recognition of duality . . . *Un-hyphenated canadianism is a fiction.*" This is a bi-cultural country. We are twins; and if we are to make our way successfully in this complex world we must recognize this twinship.

I might add that M. Falardeau, to make assurance doubly sure, states firmly that he is in no sense of the word a separatist. Though a French-Canadian (and as such a "charter member" of Canada), he pleads with all his fellow Canadians "to accept Canada in its wholeness . . . as an act of reason." And he would have a strong and a unified Canada stand before all the nations of the world as an example of what can be done through understanding, tolerance, and co-operation.

> We should now give to ourselves, and to others, the image of a people whose ambition is not so much to reach the moon, as

> to transcend our psychological space in order to reach the nations around us, closer at hand, but also better worth loving.

* * *

Professor Morton's *The Canadian Identity,* like M. Falardeau's work, is based upon a series of public addresses — the first three given at the University of Wisconsin in 1959-60, the fourth, before the Canadian Historical Association at Queen's University in June, 1960. Of the first three lectures I can say little here. Each is a polished historical essay — condensed, well filled with facts, dates, and names, with a sprinkling of speculation and reflection to add savour to the dish. The chapter titles indicate the contents: "Canada in America"; "Canada in the Commonwealth"; "Canada and the United States." Only in the last lecture, "The Relevance of Canadian History," does Mr. Morton touch directly upon some aspects of the arts in Canada. Here we are told that in Canadian art and literature are certain "distinctive qualities engendered by the experience of northern life" — tendencies to "the heroic and the epic, to the art which deals with violence" — to which may be added the satiric, "for northern life is moral or puritanical, being so harsh that life can allow little laxity in convention." And "the moral affords the substance and creates the disposition for satire." But surely such statements were intended to be provocative rather than informative. They add nothing to our understanding of the Canadian arts at large, nor do they bear close examination when looked at in the light of world literature.

* * *

The Price of Being a Canadian is a conference report and suffers from all the shortcomings of its kind. As a refresher book for those who were fortunate enough to attend the Seventh Winter Conference of the Canadian Institute on Public Affairs it undoubtedly has its real values, but for the general reader the offering is slight. Of most interest to the readers of *Canadian Literature* will be the few pages on Canadian culture contributed by Hugh MacLennan. Closely allied to M. Falardeau in outlook and in feeling (if not in professional activity), Mr. MacLennan sees Canada whole — with its harshness, its neuroses, its racial complexities — and, while recognizing the limiting factors around him, would not change his lot.

> I believe it real and accurate to say that we can contribute a very great deal to the world *if Canada remains Canadian.* Culturally we can contribute, and politically we can contribute. If two centuries have produced such a nation as ours, now is not the time to give it up, for it was never really needed before now.

Have I really come out by the same door where in I went? Perhaps not. True, none of these books gives a clear definition of the word "Canadian", but each one, in its own way, is an affirmation of faith in Canada. It may be wiser to make no attempt to define the word. For being a Canadian may mean simply the feeling of belonging in and to Canada, of believing in the whole Canada, with its basic duality of cultures and a multitude of other cultures within the basic two. Not all of us can understand all of its complexities and neuroses. But at least we can profit from the words of all the Falardeaus and the MacLennans who are struggling to dissipate the thickness of silence and to bridge the psychological distance that too often keep us apart — one from the other.

books in review

A POETRY OF CELEBRATION

Beyond the High Hills: A Book of Eskimo Poems. Translated by Knud Rasmussen. Photographs by Guy Mary-Rousselière. Nelson Foster and Scott. $4.75.

KNUD RASMUSSEN, the Danish explorer, collected these poems among the Iglulik Eskimos of the Hudson Bay region and the Musk Ox people of the Copper Country. A prefatory note tells us this and the photographs supply atmosphere, fact and 'feel' in the most rapid, vivid way. A girl with white bone bracelets in her hair kneels on shingle, slicing orange-and-silver fillets from an unrecognisable carcass. A young caribou lies dead on a confetti of tiny vermilion flowers which have prodded up from the moss; its underbelly is mauve and its rear legs resemble two rifles with velvet stocks. An old man and an old woman sitting side by side outstare the camera: faces striated as old rocks, dark eyes slotted deeply and safely under the brow, hair like wire, hands immobile and scarred. White scarps of ice bulge against a purple sky like bed-sheets hung out to dry. A weatherworn child kisses a puppy. Other children toy with yellow pencils and simper. Four men haul a dead, cream-furred bear across the ice. In a violent-looking, violet mineral world two girls rub noses; a plump bird tilts over slightly, away from its mate; and a dead walrus's tusks suggest the opened beak of some pachyderm, obese bird. Nearly everyone grins and squints.

These are the details which the poems vaguely evoke and which, of course, the Eskimo can supply for himself. Without such details we ourselves could squeeze little from or into

> Glorious it is
> To see the long-haired winter caribou
> Returning to the forests

or respond fully to such a question as

> Know you the smell
> Of pots on the boil?
> And lumps of blubber
> Slapped down by the sidebench?

There are no colours in these poems, few explanations of the natural world's texture and few visual images. Essentially, Eskimo poetry is terse, narrative-exclamatory and ingenuously direct:

> Joyfully
> Greet we those
> Who brought us plenty!

It is only rarely that the poets amplify by saying, for example, that a walrus "set its flippers angrily Like elbows on the surface of the water" or that a bear "came running towards me gladly, So eager it was to eat me up on the spot". Oral tradition has produced here a strict shorthand, an unfancy texture, so that the occasional vivid but merely denotative image gains an extraordinary power:

> But else I choke with fear
> At greedy maggot throngs;
> They eat their way in
> At the bottom of my collarbone
> And in my eyes.

As Knud Rasmussen pointed out, the Eskimo language has no word for 'inspiration' but uses a simple phrase meaning 'to feel emotion'. So all are poets; the poetry is exoteric and communal. These poems have no one author, parade no idiosyncrasy but, instead, distill ethnic experience into explicit little outbursts

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which have both the naivety of nursery-rhyme and the sophisticated economy of *haiku.* The Eskimo poem does not so much attempt revelations as celebrate whatever is at hand:

> I will walk with leg muscles
> which are strong
> as the sinews of the shins of the little caribou calf.
> I will walk with leg muscles
> which are strong
> as the sinews of the shins of the little hare.

The point here is oneness with nature, not truth through apt comparisons. It is an unintellectual approach and a bracing change. Read alongside the photographs, the poems prove again and again that moving poetry does not have to be metaphorical or figurative, that a community's habitual ways are always allegorical and that poetry is an art of context. For instance, when a girl in the snow-wastes says,

> Bring hither your wooden ornament,
> I will deck myself with it,
> To make me look like a real woman

her setting gives the utterance enormous power. I just wish the book included many more poems so that one could try getting a sense of the Eskimo world from the poems' insistences alone, and not from photographs. But then, whatever way we adopt, to encounter that world is an extension of our own living.

I wish too that Eskimo poetry amplified for us the fine discrimination which creates different Eskimo words for different kinds of snow and for the successive stages of a bear's growth. This close look is missing from the poems. Fine discrimination, for them, is a pragmatic matter; for us, art and casuistry. When they celebrate they cerebrate least; when we celebrate we split hairs. But their poems are sung and danced and acted re-

peatedly during long nights which would drive our own poets into endless, desperate phantasmagoria.

This book confronts us, then, with the difference between the sung and the spoken, the oral and the written and, above all, 'dance-house' and poet's tower. It is good to meet a poetry treasured equally by all who inherit the original language. But surely this is a mere sample, and there is much more to come. I hope it will come soon, even if we have to have it without colour photographs of the kind which dominate this elegant, thin volume. PAUL WEST

SIPPED AND SAVOURED

ETHEL WILSON. *Mrs. Golightly and other stories.* Macmillan Company of Canada. $3.50.

THE TITLE OF Ethel Wilson's latest publication is misleading, since the book includes essays, vignettes, and reminiscences, as well as "Mrs. Golightly . . ." and other stories. Its quality is as varied as its forms — sometimes subtle, sometimes sharp, sometimes so flat as to be almost banal, but nevertheless strongly personal and characteristically Wilsonian. For all its unevenness, there is in it, as was said of one of Mrs. Wilson's favourite authors, "even more to be praised than to be pardoned".

First of all there is the incomparable Mrs. Golightly herself, whose "first convention" has won her so many friends that they might well consider holding an annual convention of their own. This engagingly simple-hearted matron is supported by a goodly company of female characters almost equally engaging if not all equally simple-hearted. Foremost among these is Mrs. Forrester, whose uncontrollable impulse to play ducks and drakes with truth adds gaiety to the political allegory, "We have to sit opposite", and seriousness to the light satire of "Truth and Mrs. Forrester." "It is strange", comments Mrs. Forrester to her niece, "how in the presence of Cousin Max, or Miss Riley, or Lee Lorimer Smith — all of them nice people — in order to preserve one's integrity — that is, truth — one proceeds to act, which is to lie." Mrs. Forrester makes her first appearance in "Haply the soul of my grandmother", a story which, like "Mrs. Golightly and the first convention", has become familiar through frequent appearances in anthologies. But the new Mrs. Forrester has added the quality of impish defensiveness to the original character's powers of empathic perception, and is the better for it.

Like Mrs. Forrester, Mrs. Gormley, of "A drink with Adolphus", is a keen observer of social gambits and a devastating debunker of social pretences, though perhaps a more detached one, since her isolation in the midst of a cocktail-party world is a physical rather than a psychological one. But it would be wrong to give the impression that the tone of *Mrs. Golightly and other stories* is predominantly sophisticated and satirical. Mrs. Wilson's characteristic depth of sentiment is abundantly present; indeed, in such stories as "From Flores" and "The Window" the flood tide threatens to carry the reader beyond his depth. Elsewhere, the delicate balance of sentiment and realism notable in *Lily's Story* and *Swamp Angel* is successfully maintained, often with the timely aid of skilfully managed irony.

Mrs. Wilson is at her best in the evocation of mood and atmosphere — the supernatural ambience of "Mr. Sleepwalker", for example, though here she comes close to destroying her effect, perhaps deliberately, in the ironic twist of the story's conclusion. Her vivid presentation of the essential detail of setting is, as usual, masterly, whether the scene be Dollarton and the North Shore mountains, the marshes of the Fraser Delta, or a corner store in Vancouver's east end.

Less successful are the shorter pieces, such as "God help the young fishman", and such first-person stories as, "I just love dogs" and "Till Death us do part". It is something of a paradox that Mrs. Wilson, one of the most personal of Canadian writers, does not, even in her personal reminiscences, write at her best in the first person. The "I" seems to bring with it a certain self-conscious awkwardness. The awkwardness is especially apparent when she assumes the persona of a well-intentioned shop-girl or simpleminded stenographer and writes not in her own charming and highly-individual style, but like an educated woman trying to write the way a shop-girl might be expected to talk.

It is an indication of its virtues rather than its weaknesses to say that *Mrs. Golightly and other stories* makes the best of bed-books, for this sort of writing is meant for leisurely reading. It is less simple than it seems, and there is a strength underlying its delicacy. It is a book not to be merely tasted, nor to be chewed, nor to be swallowed whole, but rather, like the best Chinese tea, to be sipped and savoured.

MARION B. SMITH

A CANADIAN CLASSIC?

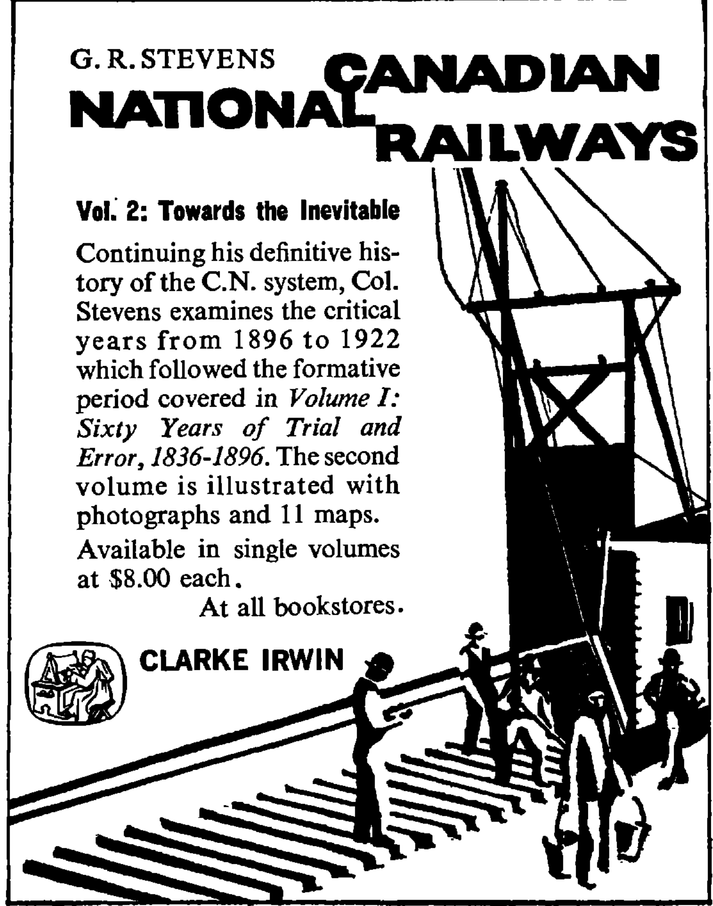
W. O. MITCHELL. *Jake and the Kid.* Macmillan. 184 pp.

W. O. MITCHELL's stories about Jake and the kid began appearing in *Maclean's* during the war. A great many Canadians must have found them then, as I did, extremely appealing. In the first place, the kid's father was overseas with the South Saskatchewans, and the kid, his mother and Jake, the elderly and loquacious hired man, were keeping the home fires burning. In the second place, these stories were among the first that many of us who lived on the prairies had ever read concerning our own people, our own place and our own time. When grain elevators, gophers, or the sloughs and bluffs of the "bald-headed prairie" were mentioned, there was a certain thrill of recognition. The same applied to the characters who inhabited Crocus. A prevalent feeling on the subject was, as I recall—*that's us; he's writing about us.*

Quite a few years have gone by. The image of the prairie people presented by Mitchell now seems like some blurred recollection of childhood, partially appealing because of its over-simplification, partially repellent for the same reason. I can no longer be convinced that even the genuinely ludicrous aspect of people anywhere was ever as unreservedly warm hearted as the author of *Jake and the Kid* would have us believe. Here is comedy with no bite of acid to cut the sweet taste. No good person ever comes to harm in Crocus, and the overwhelming majority of citizens are unquestionably good. The few villains such as Sam Bottom and Doc Toovey are truly vil-

lainous and are always defeated. Old Man Gatenby embarrasses his daughter by telling his tall tales in front of her young man, but the embarrassment is only temporary. When the young man, a collector of folk lore, spins the tallest tale of all, everything is smooth once more. No one really meant to be mean to anyone.

The emotions expressed in these stories, especially in the wartime ones, now appear to contain a large measure of sentimentality. *A Voice for Christmas*, a lump-in-the-throat tale which relates how the kid nearly misses hearing his father's voice over the radio from England, almost seems to belong with such tear-jerkers of the past as *The White Cliffs* or *Mrs. Miniver*. Similarly, in *You Gotta Teeter*, when the kid bravely overcomes his grief at having lost his dog and manages to go through with his speech on behalf of the refugee children, the heart of at least one reader was not quite as touched as it may have been in days of yore. The argument — a refugee kid is just like a lost dog — no longer seems entirely adequate. One tends to feel that a pertinent fact about refugees is that they are *not* just like lost



dogs. Even in the post-war stories, which are generally better, sentimentality sometimes obscures the truer quality of the humour. The eulogies to the prairie are cloying—"she's a blonde—straw blonde my blonde—".

A good deal of humour, however, comes across as freshly as ever. Jake is still inimitable as the man who made Looie Riel say uncle three times, in English, French and Cree. His version of history is a delight (the secret of Wilf Laurier's success, says Jake, was that he always teetered when he make a speech). Miss Henchbaw and her pupils provide some fine moments — the Christmas concert, for example, when the odour of skunk overpowers the "frankincents an' meer". I also like the occasion when ex-Indian Moses Lefthand decides that his kid Lazarus, although only a Grade One, should present the bouquet to the Princess when the royal train stops at Crocus. The description of the auction in *Auction Fever* is first-rate.

Had Mitchell been content with unvarnished humour, his characters, however simple-minded or unequivocally well-intentioned, might still have emerged victorious, or at any rate emerged. But in addition to the thick coating of emotionalism, each tale has yet another layer in the form of a clearly indicated moral. Be kind to those less fortunate than yourself. Treat animals with care and affection and they will not let you down. Cheaters never prosper. School-teachers sometimes have hearts of gold. Stick up for your family and friends. Such maxims may be perfectly worthy, as far as they go, but they can hardly be said to go far enough.

In one sense, I feel like a traitor in carping about these stories, because I am really fond of them. I cannot dismiss them, for they are a part of my life. But I can no longer read them. I can only conclude that they require a younger audience. I am not speaking facetiously. Many books originally written for adults have been subsequently taken over by children. I can see *Jake and the Kid*, as a book for children, becoming a Canadian classic.

MARGARET LAURENCE

PROVINCIAL HARVEST

Saskatchewan Writing 1960. Saskatchewan Arts Board, Regina.

Saskatchewan Writing 1960 is a collection of the prize-winning short stories, poems and play submitted to the Saskatchewan Arts Board literary competitions in 1959. The one-act play, *Like It or Not*, by Anne B. Flavell, concerns Henry VIII and his six wives spending eternity together in a dank castle where they bicker in blank verse. Into this hellish household, as a result of a Satanic error in judgment, comes a twentieth-century gun moll, a slick chick from New York, who before long has Henry and his Queen's whirling gaily in a square dance. The verse form is unhappy; the action lacks suspense; the pace is languid. There are, at best, moments that might well turn into good stage fun.

Terry Fenton's story, "October Morning", outhemingways Hemingway to the point of boredom. Three-fourths of the text is irrelevant detail delivered in staccato bursts punctuated by the frequent lighting of cigarettes. There is sensitivity, psychological penetration and compassion in James A. MacNeil's "No

Time for Jerry", but the materials of this story are trite (the mother, step-father, new baby, neglected youngster, sympathetic grandpa routine), and the story is unfolded with annoying overtness. A third story, "Dangerous Mission", by David G. Hawkins, had some ironic humour and satire, but neither finesse nor breadth.

The poetry is in fact the most impressive contribution to *Saskatchewan Writing 1960*. Luetta D. Trehas' "Burden of Sleeping" digs into the sensibilities and has some felicitous phrases. But by far the most promising material comes from Stan Thomas in a group of original and truly contemporary poems. His "Dialogue for a Mixed-up Kid" and "On the World Past of which we are so Fond" are the outstanding pieces in the collection.

J. DE BRUYN

RESOURCES AND HUMAN HAPPINESS

RODERICK HAIG-BROWN. *The Living Land.* Macmillan. $7.50.

SUBTITLED "An account of the natural resources of British Columbia", *The Living Land* by Roderick Haig-Brown was produced by the British Columbia Natural Resources Conference, which published its atlas in 1956. This new production is no doubt intended to complement the earlier one, but readers will find the "Account" of far greater value than the atlas.

Mr. Haig-Brown has divided his material into ten parts. The first is the most important for any reader because it gives the "frame of the land"; it describes in words the physical features of the province, indicates that the author knows his history, to which he gives often a geographical interpretation, and mercifully, defines conservation, "as much an act of faith as an intellectual exercise". Basing his study on the historical use of the resources, on their geographical distribution, on faith and on intellect, Mr. Haig-Brown writes of forests, of energy, of mines, of fish, of recreation and of agriculture. But he considers the greatest resource to be the people, who must use their intellect to bring about the end product of all resources — "human happiness". He concludes that the proper use of resources must be achieved through an educational system which can teach people that no man has a right to "damage or destroy the face of the earth for short-term gain". Mr. Haig-Brown is a humanist.

This philosophic approach to a living land is written in a language that will appeal to the ordinary concerned citizen by whom this book was surely meant to be read. The author has imposed his ideas on his statistics, and has interpreted the resources of British Columbia in a down-to-earth, decidedly frank, and at times close-to-revolutionary manner. Through kindness, humour, and experience, but with firmness, he slashes at inflexibility whether in government circles, among business men or among private citizens. With a frankness which is telling but not brutal, and therefore not useless, he displays the effects of indifference to the exploitation of physical resources, and in his own way lays the blame squarely on restrictive taxes, greed, stinginess, and lack of education. The brilliant writing is therefore both informative and critical; it states a case forcefully, but the style precludes the

irritating attributes of a hammering tract.

As may be expected of Mr. Haig-Brown, time and time again he returns to the themes of fish, of parklands, of recreation lands, and always and finally to the effects of resources and their destruction or conservation on the people. As he takes a reader through the methods of extracting ore, catching salmon, or administering forest lands, through the maze of statistics which never frighten — mainly because they are in words rather than in numbers and therefore do not pockmark the page — he somehow leaves the impression that in this province of trees, of insects, of fish and fowl and big game, of flowing rivers and non-static mountains, in this land so full of life, the people, the human resources, are the most valuable, and that without them the other resources would have no meaning. Mr. Haig-Brown is also, therefore, a humanitarian.

The Living Land is designed by Robert R. Reid, who has illustrated the work profusely with sketches by British Columbia artists, with colour plates, graphs, half-tones, charts, maps, and old engravings; the presentation is handsome and well-conceived to enhance Robert Haig-Brown's text.

GORDON R. ELLIOTT

CREATION BEYOND PERCEPTION

A. M. KLEIN. *The Second Scroll.* McClelland & Stewart. New Canadian Library. $1.00.

THERE ALWAYS should be a close relation between a writer's perceptions of life and his creation, since the latter is his realization of the former. Thus, there is much to be said for writers like Sinclair Ross, Brian Moore and Mordecai Richler who maintain a close relationship between what they perceive and what they create. And there is much to say against writers like W. O. Mitchell, Hugh MacLennan and A. M. Klein because their creations carry them out of contact with their perceptions. When this happens they begin to do just what anyone does when carried beyond range of his perceptions: they pontificate, they preach, they become pretentious.

The Second Scroll is deliberately, intensively, portentously Jewish. Conceptually and stylistically it reaches back to the powerful legend of the chosen people, the exodus, the exile, the sufferings of the exile, the return to the promised land, and attempts to relate the sufferings of the Jew in modern times (1917-49) to this great messianic archetype. The significance of the sufferings is that they become the way in which the strange hand of God lets man come round to fulfilment of the covenant. Similarly, W. O. Mitchell in *Who Has Seen The Wind* takes up an interplay of what he calls "the realities of birth, hunger, satiety, eternity, death" and attempts to relate a prairie boy's life to these whoppers. Similarly, Hugh MacLennan has sought to relate all of his novels to the larger question of a Canadian Identity.

The Second Scroll is even more ambitious, making Mitchell's prairie world and MacLennan's Canada seem very small potatoes indeed. More, Klein is aware of his difficulty and his central attempt in the novel is to make a stylistic adjustment, responding to the magni-

tude of his subject by a kind of ironic opulence in the style. But it seems to me that he becomes caught in this stylistic magnification and is carried far out of touch with his perceptions. In his excellent introduction, Professor M. W. Steinberg mentions Klein's "love of words, their sounds and associations, and his mastery over them . . . as he daringly twists and shapes them to serve his purposes." There can be no doubt of the skill, but there is much reason to feel in the often pointless and cloying language-play a serious discrepancy between the artist's perceptions and his creation. At one point the narrator chooses to bait an overbearing acquaintance and so,

> expatiated upon the beauty of the Coca-Cola bottle, curved and dusky like some Gauguin painting of a South Sea maiden, upon the purity of its contents, its ubiquity in space, its symbolic evocations — a little torchless Statue of Liberty. I had wantonly poetized thereon, rhapsodized; and the more lyrical I became . . .

But this deliberate overplay comes dangerously close to parody of the novel — "purity . . . ubiquity . . . symbolic evocations . . . wantonly poetized . . . rhapsodized . . . lyrical." So it all is, and, just as a coke bottle is too inconsequential to merit such a style, so the style becomes an evocative substitute for perceptions because the author has set himself a scene, an action and an aspect of human history so imposingly large that no man's capacity for perception can cope. One is left admiring Klein's courage and seriousness.

WARREN TALLMAN

MOUNTAIN COUNTRY

R. M. PATTERSON. *The Buffalo Head.* Toronto: The Macmillan Company of Canada Limited. 1961. $5.00.

R. M. PATTERSON'*s* newest book, *The Buffalo Head,* sustains the impression he gave us so modestly in *Dangerous River.* He is, indeed, a man of great courage and sensitivity, endowed with imagination. With unusual capacity he conveys his deep feeling for the land of Canada. It is neither uncommon nor a sign of our cultural immaturity that English-born Canadians should still do this effectively. While our most successful naturalist-artists were once native Canadians — Roberts, Seton (a Canadian from his sixth year), and Grove — more recently, Canadian-born artists and writer have been drawn to the social and cultural scene. The best naturalist-artists are now frequently drawn from outside the country: Roderick Haig-Brown, Arthur Lismer, and Marjorie Pigott, for example. Patterson, indeed, betrays little interest in the Canadian scene beyond his powerful evocation of the spirit of the Rockies and the North-west.

On the other hand, he now tells us more explicitly something of himself. In *Dangerous River* we were as intrigued by his diffidence as by his descriptions of nature and adventure. Now, we have a chance to know him better. Patterson spent his earliest years in Ireland, where his father was editor of "a strongly pro-English Dublin newspaper". United in their adventurous spirits, the two were divided by the father's decision to don khaki in South Africa. They met again briefly twenty-three years later, years during which Patterson lived in Northern

England scanning "the Distant Hills" and reading of the Canada of Champlain, Frontenac, and of Jack London. Leaving school in 1917, Patterson soon became an active artillery officer and was almost immediately captured and confined in Silesia, where once more the hills beckoned to an adventurous spirit. The bonds of this imprisonment were hardly burst when, after climbing the mountains of the Continent and "skimming the cream off Oxford" for a good second, he was entered as a probationer in the Bank of England. Within months, Patterson had fled this new "desert of stone", striking out for Canada and the Peace River country.

Yet, despite his success in homesteading, hunting, and trapping, Patterson was not finally at peace (he was never at rest) until he returned to the mountains. In the foothills of the Rockies, west of High River, Alberta, on the eastern slope of the Continental Divide, he purchased the Buffalo Head ranch, his home from the early thirties until after World War II. The account of his life as a rancher is witty, filled with interesting details and colour drawn from a close observation of men and of animals. But this is not enough to give the book its special value.

The Buffalo was not a ranch alone: it was an advance base for grand adventure and discovery in a wild and beautiful mountain country. Perhaps no one since Frank Smythe (of whom Patterson is obviously an admirer) has succeeded so well in describing the peculiar attraction of the mountains. Even the names of his new surroundings were poetic and seductive: the Valley of the Elk, Misty Mountain, the Pass in the Clouds, the mountain meadow of Nyahé-ya-nibi, the Warship.

> Those distant mountains had a way of beckoning to you, and it was so easy just to saddle a couple of horses and hit the trail . . .

On the trail, Patterson takes you to the heart of the mountains and into an adventure of the spirit as well as of the body. Stories of drama, courage, peril, resourcefulness are there to stir the heart. But the intriguing quality of the book lies in the contrast between such raw tales and the extraordinarily vivid and sensitive description of sylvan and pastoral scenes — in the mountain meadows with their carpets of alpine flowers and in gazing down the long vistas of an untouched mountain world.

Patterson reminds one of another Canadian romanticist and adventurer: Captain Joshua Slocum, the writer of that little classic, *Sailing Alone Around the World*. They share a gift for courageous discovery, for blunt virile narrative, and for poetic description. Like Slocum's, Patterson's style in uneven, sometimes awkward, but at its best it is precise, graphic and moving. With Slocum, too, Patterson can impart the force of his preoccupation with the lonely places and with an independent spirit.

> I had found, close to home, the true untouched wilderness of the wild hills. That, in times of stress, was what held me there on the Buffalo Head. That was what made a settled life possible for one whose conception of the perfect home was a camp.

The tragic climax of Patterson's story of his love for these mountains was the Phillips fire of 1936, which engulfed much of his wild retreat. The drama and pathos in his description of this wholesale destruction might have made a bitter ending to his saga. Instead, the book ends on a note of hope, great courage, and adventure with a tale of their

final departure from their beloved foothills country. One October day in the forties, Patterson and his wife, with five horses, began a daring journey across the snow-filled passes of the Rockies and the Continental Divide to the Columbia Valley in British Columbia. Although their trail did not end there, it was a typical outing for Patterson, climaxed characteristically by a cup of tea in the hotel at Radium Hot Springs.

ALAN WILSON

CANADIAN REALPOLITIK

JAMES EAYRS: *Northern Approaches: Canada and the Search for Peace.* Macmillan. $4.25.

CANADA'S EXTREME poverty in "the literature of politics" is the lament of the editorial in *Canadian Literature,* Autumn, 1961; with few exceptions (Goldwin Smith, Henri Bourassa, the Abbé Groulx, and F. H. Underhill are cited) writers on politics in this country have been distinguished for "the suetty texture" of their prose and their "almost obsessive tendency . . . to deal in abstractions. . . ." Who can deny that these strictures are well-founded? But here is another exception. Professor Eayrs' discussion of Canada's relations with other political entities of varying degrees of solidity — the U.N., N.A.T.O., the Commonwealth — belongs to the literature of politics. His prose is anything but "suetty" and he abjures abstractions in a grim determination to look unflinchingly at the horrors of the nuclear age.

Some of the material in this volume has been published before or presented in public addresses between the autumn of 1957 and the spring of 1960, but much of it is new. In the latter category there is an interesting essay on Canadian-Soviet relations in the 1920's, based largely on the Mackenzie King papers, which historians will probably find the most permanently valuable part of the book. The attention of current readers will be focussed on the chapters dealing with Canada's role in a world distressingly different from the familiar one in which Canadians, often erroneously, saw their country as the reconciler of Anglo-American interests, and the worst nightmare for our minister of external affairs was one "wherein hinges broke, linch pins snaped, and bridges fell into the sea". One of the merits of this book is that it makes so abundantly clear the irrelevance of the clichés of that older era in the uncharted world of the balance of terror.

Professor Eayrs rejects any policy of disengagement, and Canadian unilateral disarmers and neutralists will find here a forceful presentation of the arguments they must answer if they are to win Canadians to their cause. In Professor Eayrs' view the devil in most Canadian discussion of defence policy is a pre-occupation with Canadian-American relations which obscures the fact that it is the Soviet Union, not the United States, which is our chief problem; and the primary fact about Soviet policy, he contends, is that it is aimed at the domination of the world, by force if necessary. Add to this Canada's unique geographical position on the northern approaches from Russia to the United States, plus the conviction that the Great Deterrent really deters, and our course is clear: we have no alternative but to do everything

in our power to strengthen the defence system centred in the United States. In practical terms this means that Canada must open her territory and territorial waters to American retaliatory missiles and anti-missile defences and must take civil defence seriously. Yet armed might is not our sole weapon; improved political communication with the Communist world must be seen as part of the policy of deterrence. Thus Professor Eayrs argues convincingly for Canadian recognition of Communist China and against American policy in Cuba.

One question is passed over rather lightly: is it obvious, as Professor Eayrs suggests, that there is no practical possibility of limiting the "nuclear club" and that the rejection of nuclear weapons by Canada would be of no effect whatever? Perhaps the logic of *realpolitik* has some limitations?

MARGARET PRANG

DOUBLE FACES OF KINGS

DARYL HINE. *The Devil's Picture Book.* Abelard-Schuman.

EVEN THE TITLE IMAGE of *The Devil's Picture Book,* by Daryl Hine, is multiple and extending. An old name for playing cards, it recalls the double faces of kings, queen, knaves — all mirrored, all right side up and upside down, no matter how they are held. It recalls the older names for cards — the King's Book, *le livre des quatre rois* — and the reproving mockery, in this Presbyterian variant, which we now mock. The title suggests, then, duality, diversion and moral judgment, all commented on by contemporary detachment and also by the continuity of human memory. More obviously, *The Devil's Picture Book* is a demonic primer. Its poems are short, short-lined, rhymed, strongly related in theme. In a tight, closely worked book about the darkness out of and into which man is led, even pictures of terrible division or cancellation are wry, ordered, intelligent.

The title poem (which is put at the end) makes a connection between "poetry's demonic tongue" and wit. In that poem "the Old Instructor tries / To teach a patient girl to name / The sentimental verities." She will not learn. "She does not see, she says, what life / Sharpness has apart from knife, / Nor why departure spells return." While these two, in stale and endless argument, dispute "the terror of the verb To Be," all around them the objects from which one might begin to learn "loom / Crude with incredulity." It is because of the failure of "our common education" that we have been "stung / By poetry's demonic tongue: / Where faith was feeling, wit prevailed."

In this comment on faith as nothing but feeling, on wit as stronger than such a faith but also thin, also partial, there is a recollection of the first poems in the book. "The Suitor" mocks not only the "ill-controlled", "unashamed", "absurd" passion of his rival but also his own "facile and articulate" song. "The Double-Goer" (image of death in life) is "so split and halved and twain" in every part that he is confused in object and in aim; nevertheless, this is man's real condition. The one-sailed ship is bound to be "wrecked and lost away", since the sea on which it tosses is a divided sea.

Some of the richest images of duality

in this Devil's Picture Book are its kings and queens: Osiris, Orpheus, Dionysus, Proserpina, Circe — figures of dismemberment and the dark journey. Torn, silenced, exiled, they are also reborn, singing, sown like seed, and in these poems stand fully paradoxical. The descent into the underworlds serves the purposes of life; the dismembered god is the god of fertility; but the torn body always bleeds and the queen of darkness is "far fallen from the natural air / And possibility of spring." There are two poems of Osiris: "Osiris Dismembered" and "Osiris Remembered." The first one ends, "Can you tell me, with your torn-out tongue, / Is it light you look for under the horizon?" and the second begins, "The form of myth is like the life of dream, / Nothing occurs save with significance." Departure does spell return, but the return, "begemmed and thunderous", is "Fatal with the wheels' empurpled noise."

These are intelligent and passionate poems, often wry, sometimes gay and elegant, sometimes, as in "The Destruction of Sodom", informed by wit. ("All love deserves the epitaph 'Perversion', / Being unnaturally concerned, like physics, with foreign bodies, / Inseparable from their uses and abuses.") They are difficult. There are some uncertainties of tone or rhythm. But the intensity and power of the book are remarkable. This is an important work.

H. W. SONTHOFF

ESSENCE OF CITY

Written and edited by Pierre Berton; photographed by Henri Rossier. *The New City.* Macmillan. $7.50.

THIS "NO-BOOK" (*Time Magazine's* word for reprints, anthologies, picture books, and other publisher's pap) misses the point of every big city in general, and Toronto in particular. The pictures seem to say that everything that happens in Toronto happens at the C.N.E., the race track and in the darker crevices of Jarvis Street's sin strip. And what is it that happens there? Nothing very interesting. Nevertheless, the poor photography notwithstanding, if the eight essays which make up the text (a total of no more than fifty normal pages), together with a few of the better photographs, had been published in eight separate installments of a national Sunday supplement, the series might have won some distinction; since, as a journalistic record of a contemporary event — the metamorphosis of a big city — it has a certain value. Like the briefcases and electric razors which Berton predicts will be studied by the future archæologists of Don Mills, this book will be a must for lecturers speaking to twenty-first century ladies' clubs. The present-day historian, sociologist and city planner will find little to help him understand any better the complex organism of the new city, but he might be moved to consult the author further about some of his intriguing undocumented references and half-told anecdotes.

The information that is offered is strictly for the non-discriminating reader. For instance, in the section called "The Gilded Ghetto," we read: "But, only in Forest Hill, could you have a Jewish

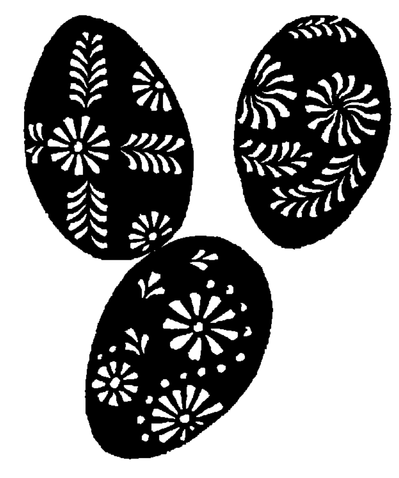
high school student write an article for the school paper on Jewish anti-Gentilism and have it rejected by a Gentile teacher." This ambiguous morass of dubious human motivation, hopelessly entangled, is thus deftly leapt over with a grin which looks something like a sneer, but we can't tell which.

The author chides the Old Torontonian as a crusty, snobbish, but faintly superior person, who frets about the immigrants, the rise of apartment house living and good restaurants, with all that this implies in terms of instability and the *declassé* activity of "eating out". He tells us that the new immigrants are the ones who are not only facing the new city, but encouraging its growth, making something of it, and loving it in a way that no Old Torontonian ever did.

Yet, neither the writer nor the illustrator discover for us the essence of big city Toronto, the vitality of its shopping streets, its elegant if not beautiful newer and older architecture, such as its picturesque Romanesque Revival (not "Gothic") City Hall, its urbane row houses on tree-lined streets, shabby but dignified, or the coldly aristocratic Neo-Classic façades of its financial district. Berton tells us how many art galleries and museums we can find there, but gives no hint of the kind of cosmopolitanism that this could imply. The university is hardly mentioned, let alone its life and influence.

One suspects that, in spite of protests to the contrary, both writer and photographer still find Toronto, as the writer admits he found it some years ago, "unutterably dull."

ABRAHAM ROGATNICK



SHORT REVIEW

TWO NEW BOOKS dealing with special periods of Canadian history add to the growing list of interpretations of our past. In *From Sea to Sea* (Doubleday, $6.00), Professor W. G. Hardy gives a frankly popular account of the forging of a united Canada between 1850 and 1910; it is a lively, pleasantly opinionated book, full of the kind of curious detail that makes history readable to the layman, but judicious also in its broader judgments. In *The Founding of Canada* (Progress Books, paper $3.00, cloth $5.00), Stanley B. Ryerson presents "a Marxist interpretation of Canadian history", taking us from the days of the trilobites to 1815. The viewpoint follows the line for the 1960's; and the accepted authorities are well quoted. Lenin appears in the index as often as Frontenac and Marx more often than Mackenzie.

CANADIAN LITERATURE - 1961

A CHECKLIST EDITED BY INGLIS F. BELL

ENGLISH-CANADIAN LITERATURE

compiled by Inglis F. Bell

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compiled by Earle Birney

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123. [Reprint of C10]. C117:65.
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125. The Wounded Bat. C117:66. "On a summer's afternoon, hot." Dollarton. Cp. *Hear Us* 149.
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12. Attack on public school snobs. *The Leys Fortnightly* 51:109-110, 16 Dec. 1926. Signed CAMEL.
13. Original of E5. *Canadian Literature* 8: 39-42, Spring 1961.
14. Original (complete) of letter of which E9 is translated extract. E13 p. 42-46.

G: UNPUBLISHED MATERIAL

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20. "China." Short story. TS carbon 8 p. Set in a Chinese river port.
21. "Ghostkeeper." Short story. TS 15 p, labelled "first draft, with notes." Set in Vancouver, 1952.
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23. "Nocturnal Genius." Short story or novella outline. TS 11 p and MS notes. Set in Vancouver, 1952.
24. "The Ordeal of Sigbjorn Wilderness." Novel. TS carbon 160 p. Set in Dollarton, 1949.
25. "Shadow." Short story notes. 2000 w. Set in Vancouver.
26. "Tramps." Short story. TS carbon 8 p. Conversation piece between two sailors. Probably *Ultramarine* period.
27. "We're all Good Ducks Here." Short story. 2 drafts MS and TS, and further notes. Written on back of pages from draft of *Elephant & Colosseum.* Set in interior of British Columbia.

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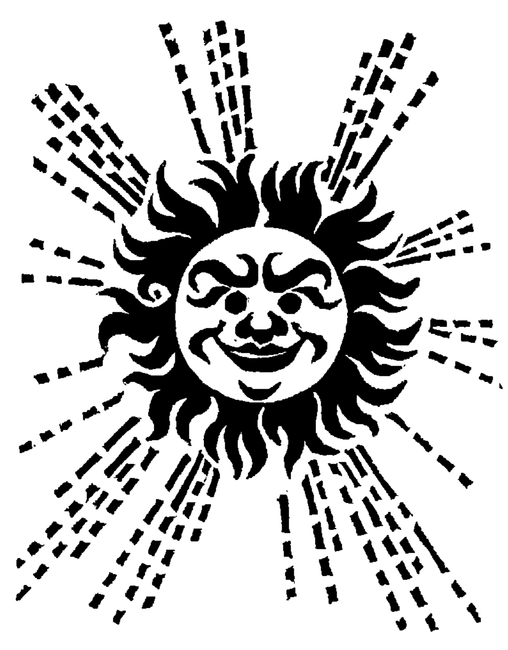

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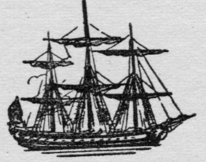

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