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CANADIAN LITERATURE

No. 12

Spring, 1962

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BY JAMES REANEY, ROBERT MCCORMACK, JOHN BILSLAND

Other Articles

BY ROY DANIELLS, LOUIS DUDEK, F. W. WATT

Reviews

BY PHYLLIS WEBB, GEORGE WOODCOCK, E. B. GOSE, JEAN-GUY PILON, JOHN PETER, T. C. FAIRLEY, AND OTHERS

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editorial

REFLECTIONS IN THE CHARTROOM

THERE IS NO customary time for a periodical's coming of age; perhaps an adequate vitality at any time between birth and dotage is sufficient evidence of maturity. Yet in Canada the infant mortality of even lively magazines has been the rule rather than the exception, and that is why we still feel a certain satisfaction in being able to point out that with this issue *Canadian Literature* comes to the end of its third year of publication. No editor should be surprised at success; he would not begin work if he did not expect it. But he can still be allowed a legitimate pleasure — even a certain relief — at the absence of failure.

Canadian Literature has not pleased everybody; that would have been the worst of failures. But it has created a place for itself, as a distinctively Canadian critical magazine, in a literary world where no such periodical had previously existed; it has published at one time or another a high proportion of the best Canadian writers, young and not so young; it has gained and kept a steadily increasing list of subscribers. Finally, a recent sign of the seriousness with which it has been taken from the beginning was given when A. J. M. Smith, in selecting the essays to include in his anthology of criticism, *Masks of Fiction,* picked exactly half his titles from the first ten issues of *Canadian Literature. Canadian Literature,* we feel, has justified its own existence, and in the process has shown that an informed criticism is becoming an increasingly necessary process as writing in Canada broadens in volume and in variety.

In other directions also the study of Canadian writers and writing progresses. We learn that the massive, many-handed history of Canadian literature which is being prepared under the editorship of Professor Carl F. Klinck is now within measurable distance of completion, and we look forward to its appearance because — no matter what we may eventually think of the finished publication — it cannot fail to present an imposing compendium of views on what has been achieved up to the mid-century. It will also present, by its inevitable gaps, a kind

of history in negative of what has been lacking so far in our writing and our discussion of it.

Meanwhile, in the same field, we welcome the re-issue in revised and enlarged form of Desmond Pacey's literary history, *Creative Writing in Canada* (Ryerson, $5.00), first published a decade ago. Dr. Pacey has worked over his old charts, and has mapped out as well the decade of the Fifties which had hardly begun when the original edition of his history appeared. His book is a study in extent rather than in depth, a guidebook rather than a detailed geography, and not everyone will accept its critical judgments as easily as its facts and its able sketch-maps of relationships, but it remains an extremely useful work in its delineation of the main currents of writing in Canada.

THOSE WHO AGREE with us in deploring the series of recent attacks on the freedom of literature in Canada will rejoice — but with due caution — over the Supreme Court decision which reverses the condemnation of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* as an obscene book and allows its return to the bookstores. The general importance of such a victory cannot be stressed too much, but it would be unwise to forget how precarious it was. A bare majority of the judges — five against four — voted in favour of the decision, and the attitude of the prosecuting counsel, who can be regarded as representing the views of the Government in this instance, was disturbing in the extreme. The Obscene Publications Act was passed with the most emphatic undertakings on the part of the Minister of Justice that it would be used only against news-stand semi-pornography and not against serious works of literature. The very prosecution of a work of standing like *Lady Chatterley's Lover,* and the persistence in that prosecution even after the book had been cleared by British and American courts, suggests that the Minister's undertaking was given principally to disarm criticism at the time. Certainly it has had no perceptible effect on practice, and the recent interference with the liberty of Canadians to read works by Henry Miller, published under the somewhat freer conditions that exist — in this field at least — in the United States, makes one fear that the attempt to impose puritanical standards is only at its beginning.

Even if one does not accept Miller's work or *Lady Chatterley's Lover* as great writing — and we do not — there is no possible doubt that they are entitled to be considered as serious works of literature. There is also no doubt that the machinery set up for dealing with literature or sub-literature of any kind under

the Act is primitive and ambiguous. As we pointed out in 1959, the definition of obscenity in the Act is dangerously vague, and events have proved us right; it is a happy hunting ground for moral bigots. Moreover, the fact that the Act, unlike the British Act, gives no special standing to expert witnesses — critics and writers — leaves a perilous amount of power in the hands of enforcement officers, prosecutors and magistrates who may not merely be unexpert in literature, but even positively ignorant.

The Supreme Court decision on *Lady Chatterley's Lover* is a battle won, not a campaign ended, and it does not lessen the need to obtain the revision of a law whose vagueness makes it a constant threat to the freedom of readers and writers.

THE DEATH OF Lorne Pierce last winter is regretted by all who remember the long decades in which he put into practice as far as he could his belief that Canadian writers should have the chance to publish their books in their own country. One may not approve of everything that Dr. Pierce did as chief editor of the Ryerson Press, for he had a strain of often misplaced generosity that led him to publish some of the worst as well as some of the best of Canadian books. One may not agree with his personal theories on the links between literature and national — even nationalistic — spirit. But his dedication to literature provides its own monument in the fact that it was through his efforts that so many of our best poets, from E. J. Pratt to Earle Birney and Dorothy Livesay, published their first books. It would be hard to think of any man who individually did more for the dissemination of Canadian writing in Canada.

THE LONG-ENDURING SPRING

Roy Daniells

CRITICS OF CANADIAN LITERATURE seldom produce epigrams or *obiter dicta* and this fact makes all the more memorable a phrase provided by Frank Scott. To the plea voiced in the *Forum* of 1928, "Wanted — Canadian Criticism", Scott replied, "As well hope to hasten the harvest by assembling the harvesters in May." From that time on, it must be admitted, our ears have accustomed themselves to the continuous whetting of scythes.

The most cautious and systematic effort at distinguishing the growing wheat from the tares has been made by the *University of Toronto Quarterly*. A quarter of a century has passed since the first of its annual reports came out and the long unbroken series now invites our grateful review.

A. S. P. Woodhouse's introduction to "Letters in Canada" of April 1936 plunges us immediately into the Canadian cultural problem. In spite of "excellent quarterly bibliographies of Canadian history, economics and government", and the annual lists of the Toronto Public Library, there has existed up to 1936 "no annual publication devoted to the cultural and literary life of the Dominion; no bibliography of books and articles on that subject, and no account of the work done in Canada in a given year, in the different departments of writing, creative and critical." The very existence of a Canadian literature as anything distinctive, or even distinct, appears in 1936 to be still in doubt. "It will not be denied that letters in Canada is a legitimate and important subject of inquiry, and one in which many Canadian readers, and some outside Canada, are interested. The survey approaches the subject in the spirit of exploration. It eschews every element of propaganda, and it deliberately avoids the premature question, '*Is* there a

homogeneous and significant Canadian literature?' If there is, the year's contribution to it will be found noted (along with much else) in the pages that follow." Woodhouse concludes by promising "a conspectus, not merely of literature in the narrowest sense, but of that culture of which it forms a part and by which it is (or ought to be) nourished."

The survey of our 1935 crop of poetry is the work of the late E. K. Brown (of grateful memory to more than one generation of Canadian students). He begins with that muted note of hopeful disappointment which all consumers of Canadian criticism have learned to anticipate: "At the outset it should be admitted that 1935 has not been a decisive year for Canadian poetry. . . . A number of our best poets have published new works during 1935; in none of their volumes is there a marked lapse from their best previous achievements: but in none of them is there a marked success in striking out along new paths, or an evident power to do better what they have done well already." Brown's evasion of the dilemma of the surveyor with little to survey is both adroit and honest. He makes every effort to elicit the poet's intentions and to balance a spirit of generous encouragement, at the level of reviewing, with some just discriminations on the level of criticism. Characteristically, he regards *The Titanic* as no advance on Pratt's previous poetic performance but as showing skills in the use of rhythm, imagery and technical terminology not previously recognized. Then, from the modest plateau of his consideration of this poem and *The Green Cloister* of D. C. Scott (a delayed effort of the post-confederation world) he picks his way down the declivity on the other side: "Only a few of the books listed . . . have been mentioned. Of the remainder a shockingly large number are worthless or, at best, have so little worth that mercy bids one avert his eyes and pass by." In passing he throws a stone at *My Kitchen Window*. Edna Jacques' "verses are an expression of the ordinary self of the Canadian middle class, that is to say, of the immense majority of Canadians." He closes with the customary and ritual cadence of restrained optimism: "To scan the future with a hopeful eye is a national characteristic: it is pleasant to note the excellence of much of the verse which has appeared in undergraduate periodicals during the year."

Fiction is next and falls to E. K. Broadus, who finds Grey Owl's *Sajo and Her Beaver People* "the best work of the creative imagination in the field of fiction, produced in Canada in 1935". He harbours assorted doubts about Morley Callaghan's *They Shall Inherit the Earth*; Mr. Callaghan's style is uneven, his characters never become quite real, his meaning remains uncertain, his plot contains improbabilities. The note of doubt continues to sound. *Father Abraham* is

crudely vigorous, but if Mr. Hardy is encouraged by his success "his characteristic qualities may make him a bull in a china shop." Humphrey Cobb's *Paths of Glory* has the force of Greek tragedy but unhappily Mr. Cobb does not classify as a Canadian. *Young Renny* reveals that the Jalna vein is worked out and that Mazo de la Roche's characterization is not as good as Mr. Broadus used to think it was. Mrs. McClung, Mr. Niven, Mr. Sullivan have all written books about the West, none of them more than mediocre. "Of some remaining books — none very significant — brief notice will suffice." Mr. Broadus lays down his pen, looks out upon the stubborn snows of Edmonton and sees no sign of an approaching summer.

A section on Canadian drama follows, but none of the plays named with the exception of *Moon over Mulberry Street* is likely to be recalled now.

The final section, "Remaining Material", is by the editor, with assistance from Alexander Brady in biography, history and the social sciences. Essays, together with descriptive and narrative pieces, are soon disposed of and we move on toward properly academic criticism. There is a noticeable quickening of pace and change of tone, as though a pair of army officers sent out to investigate a programme of civilian public works had returned to the mess, to the proper conventions and the familiar faces. The reason is not far to seek; here precedent and the assurance of tradition may be found. In this world of serious scholarship, even a partial or flawed work contributes something to the grand and evergrowing design. Criticism shows what this useful and permanent contribution is. "Rien n'est perdu." Here is none of the uneasiness that the critic must experience in adjudicating upon a flawed poem or a partial realization of fictional character. Biographies of public figures are commented on with gratitude. Historical analyses of national or regional significance, economic studies of the Canadian background, useful bibliographical lists: all are welcomed. Then, in unhappy return to the main concern of the literary output, there is a glance at some unsatisfactory comments on our prose and verse, eliciting the cry, "When will an adequate historian of Canadian letters appear?" The final pages proceed to more stable contributions, the work of scholars in fields other than Canadian — Herbert Davis' edition of Swift's *Drapier's Letters,* E. K. Brown's book on Edith Wharton, and so on. Impossible to resist the conclusion that they order these matters better in France, in England, in America. But, as always, the final upturn of hope, a hook to engage the future. It may be that the *Quarterly* "will become more definitely *a journal for the humanities in Canada.*" (Italics not mine.)

THE SECOND ANNUAL SURVEY was improved and expanded, to the extent that reviews of French-Canadian works had to appear as a separate section in the July issue. The editor's summary of policy once more makes clear that lists of publications are "the foundation of the scheme, a solid foundation of indisputable fact"; that the reviewers are offering a "guide among the materials there collected, and a tentative judgment of value"; that the whole survey is intended to place the creative effort "in its true setting" of the historical and cultural background and of "writings on education and religion and the fine arts, and of Canadian scholarship and criticism, both in the humanities proper and in the social sciences." This hesitation in conceding any sort of autonomy to literature or to criticism is natural and inevitable in the circumstances. There was in 1937 no corpus either of literature or of criticism out of which a new growth of forms or ideas could spring. Canadian writing, it seemed, had to emerge from the facts of Canadian existence or not at all. It was impossible to imagine a kingdom of the imagination or to expect minds like those of Blake or Poe or Mallarmé.

The poetry section is again the work of E. K. Brown and he is able to welcome the New Provinces group: Finch, Kennedy, Klein, Pratt, Scott and Smith. Even so, the soil is thin and the quotations in support of favourable judgments often fail to perform their expected function. A double standard is never lost sight of; "a poor thing but mine own". But Brown's care for Canadian taste is always apparent: of some feeble productions he remarks that "they will probably have a small circulation; but what effect they have upon Canadian taste will be a weakening effect."

In this second issue James MacGillivray begins his long run as a reviewer of fiction. Our first impression is of an unobstrusive academic person drafted into the reception line and bravely holding out his aching hand to the long file of unknown guests. But soon the polite, necessary remarks are interspersed with comment that stays in the memory, low-pitched, mordant, filled with commonsense. When L. M. Montgomery has her Anne writing a letter — "And it will be moonlight in Lover's Lane and on the Lake of Shining Waters and the old Haunted Wood and Violet Vale. There should be fairy dances on the hills tonight" — MacGillivray opines that "with such an imagination Anne should be a great Canadian poetess." After much effort to do justice to the fiction of the year, he concludes, "The idea that the writing of fiction is an art involving the imposition of æsthetic form upon the raw material of life and the derivation of significance from the welter of events, has not seriously affected our sturdy belief

that a novel is a series of incidents which hold our attention by making us wonder what will happen next."

It has been worth while to look carefully at the first two issues of "Letters in Canada" because they so clearly present a pattern of all that has followed. The pattern is one of consistency rather than progression. Editorial support for this feature of the *Quarterly* has never wavered, even during the regime of Douglas Grant, from whom innovations were expected. Most of the reviewers of poetry and fiction have given continuous service for runs of between ten and fifteen years and the contributions of Alexander Brady and Watson Kirkconnell extend in unbroken order back to the beginnings of the enterprise.

The succession of works reviewed has also shown unexpected consistency. Brown's remark in 1943 that "our poetry has circulated within a national wall, and American as well as English readers have not cared to know what was going on inside" may be taken as broadly applicable to the whole period. MacGillivray's remark in the same issue that few of the creditable and interesting novels at hand "will be much read ten years from now, or even five" is of similar wide relevance. And the exceptions have done little more than prove the rule. *Barometer Rising, As for Me and My House, Brébeuf, The Loved and the Lost, Trial of a City, The Double Hook* (to name without invidiousness the first half-dozen that come to mind) are works of substantial and enduring merit which are not permitted by the nature of our national culture to point on to anything beyond themselves. It is extraordinary to see young Canadian poets looking to Black Mountain for their models, in general disregard of our native tradition. It is strange to detect a widespread intuition that our painfully and beautifully developed domestic expository novel (our equivalent of *The Mill on the Floss* and *Middlemarch*) has no future, no possibility of further fruitful extension.

Among the elements of consistency several are salient. The Jewish contribution to Canadian literature continues to be out of all proportion to the size of the Jewish element in our population. Klein, Kreisel, Richler, Wiseman, Mandel, Layton, Cohen are among the first names to come to mind. More mysterious and perhaps more significant is the number of works at a high level of significance of which both the material content and the informing sensibility are derived from extra-Canadian sources. During the past year, we have been presented with two books of poems by Robert Finch, each having as its starting point an English scene or event and each exhibiting the refinement of artifice which their author owes to his immersion in the culture of France. At the same time, Malcolm Lowry's *Hear Us O' Lord* has been posthumously published, to remind us that his

origins and sensibility were, in respect to the Canadian tradition, quite atypical. A final consistency, and an unhappy one, is the continuing inability of good writers to produce more than one memorable book. *As for Me and My House* and *The Mountain and the Valley* should not stand alone as they do.

It is true that the volume of reputable writing in Canada has increased, but that is only to be expected, along with increased population, increased educational opportunities, and increased public interest. Every year we have a shelf full of books of interest and value. Each year there is likely to be one book with some new promise. But the breakthrough never occurs, or if it has occurred has remained disguised. We have come through the Red Sea but we have not yet passed through Jordan. The true crisis of the Canadian psyche, with its incalculable promise for our creative life, is yet to appear.

In any assessment of twenty-five issues of "Letters in Canada" we are bound to be unfair to certain of the reviewers, especially to those who with real devotion committed themselves to objectives which the war and other national circumstances rendered impossible of attainment. W. S. Milne and V. Tovell were faced not only with the perennial lack of stage facilities and audiences in most parts of Canada but also with the deprivations of the years from 1939 to 1945. Reviews of French-Canadian letters in an English-language journal suffer from the bald fact that few of those who read them have any effective command of the French language. Not all the long devotion of W. E. Collin could make the review of *poésie canadienne* seem other than from the outside looking in. No reviewer could have induced a resonance between his materials for review and his readers, because there has not been during the past twenty-five years any wholeness of sensibility in the Canadian public to which he could address himself. The intellectual membrane between the two languages has permitted only a kind of slow osmosis. It remains to be seen, now that this section of "Letters in Canada" has been taken over by a team of French reviewers, whether they can deploy their manifest skills to develop across a period of years something other than voices from the inside speaking out. All who care for our Canadian unity-in-duality must wish them well. The section which began in 1939 as "New-Canadian Letters", now significantly changed to "Publications in Other Languages" has been throughout the work of Watson Kirkconnell. It is impossible to guess what will be the ultimate effect upon the Canadian tradition of the writings, mainly in northern and eastern European languages, produced by immigrant groups with strong cultural roots of their own. In the meantime we may note with gratitude that everything one man could do to achieve liaison and understanding of the

problem has been done. The bibliographical section, once the announced base of the whole enterprise, has now had its main function taken over by organized services connected with the national library system. It continues, however, to perform such useful functions as supplying the substratum of special features; for example the very acute critiques on education written by Robin Harris. It is important to the success of this kind of effort that Canada is still small enough for a bird's eye view of a year's work in a single field to be within the field of vision of the unspecialized reader.

There remains the curious problem (which perhaps baffles nobody but the present writer) of the "Remaining Material", much of which was reclassified after 1947 as "Social Sciences". Here we owe a great debt to the tactics of Alexander Brady, who operated as a reviewer on the borderland between creative and critical writing. From one point of view this operation may be regarded as a valiant attempt to carry out on a smaller scale the functions of other journals such as the *Canadian Historical Review.* From another point of view Brady had the ungrateful task of conducting across the back of the stage a choral procession composed of characters from another play. At all events, Woodhouse's apparently reasonable expectation, that reviews of social studies would reveal the matrix from which the poetry and creative fiction came, was not destined to be fulfilled, or perhaps to be fulfilled only in some cumulative sense. It is now perhaps possible, reading over the whole twenty-five issues of "Letters in Canada", to see that all the writings of Earle Birney relate to the social and political history of this country, possible to guess that Pratt's preoccupation with the gigantic corresponds to the montrousness of the Canadian terrain, possible to believe that Callaghan and MacLennan are searching for the same Canadian sense of identity as has hitherto eluded the historians and sociologists.

ONLY THE SECTIONS dealing with poetry and fiction seem to have developed as entities. They were at the outset intended as the principal foci. They have offered an increasingly clear conspectus, which is not to say that their methods have altered in any fundamental way or that the materials at their disposal have become different in kind.

What is this complex of sensibility developed by the poetry and fiction sections of "Letters in Canada"? First, the sense of writing for a real public, chiefly be-

cause here (and particularly in the poetry reviews) the writer, the reviewer-critic and the reader come close to being the same person. A high proportion of the best-known Canadian poets (Pratt, Watson, Birney, Finch, Reaney, Mandel and Macpherson come to one's mind) have not merely academic associations but also make their living in universities. Even Layton's contempt for professors has not prevented him from belonging to their ranks. Among writers of fiction, MacLennan, Hardy, Kreisel, Birney, Sheila Watson, McCourt, Pacey and others have an academic background. A large number of reviewers and critics are in the same position. In a country as newly developed as Canada, it could hardly be otherwise. And in spite of (let us face it) the highly factitious elements of the situation, some consistency does accrue. An ideal, homogeneous and reliable audience is dramatized, corresponding fairly closely in character, though one hopes not in extent, to the real audience the poet, in particular, is likely to achieve.

As an indication, and a valuable one, as to how reviewers have seen their own task we have Frye's farewell summation as he closed a decade of poetry reviews. After recalling with gratitude work by a range of poets from Pratt to Margaret Avison, he returns to the old problem of responsibility to his readers: "I have spent a great deal of my space in trying to explain as clearly as I can what the poet is saying, and what is characteristic about the handwriting, so to speak, in imagery and rhythm. I have felt that it is well worth insulting the intelligence of some readers if one can do anything to breach the barriers of panic and prejudice in others. . . . I have for the most part discussed Canadian poets as though no other contemporary poetry were available for Canadian readers. . . . And every genuine poet is entitled to be read with the maximum sympathy and concentration." Frye's final phrases are predictable, teleological, inevitable: "The critic to whom falls the enviable task of studying Canadian poetry in the sixties will, I trust, be dealing with a fully matured culture, no longer preoccupied with the empty unpoetics of Canadianism, but with the genuine tasks of creative power."

The fiction review, now in the capable hands of Frank Watt, after classic runs of more than a decade each by MacGillivray and Bissell, shows a slightly less clear image than the review of poetry but only because fiction as a genre is more diffuse. Bissell, near the end of his term as a reviewer, struck the note of disillusioned cheerful expectation with exactness: "Despite the solid achievement of writers like Ethel Wilson and Morley Callaghan, and others, too, one feels at times that the novelist has not yet learned to be completely at home in Canada, and that he has difficulty in seeing this country as a human society. That is the reason why so much of our fiction splinters into dramatized sociology, or earnest parable, or

private narrative. But that is the reason, too, why the writing of fiction in this country should be a quest and may ultimately be a discovery."

So Canadian literature, as Pelham Edgar always maintained, is just coming. No critic can think or believe otherwise, even if on some evenings he awakes like Lamb to hear the receding voices of dream children. The bridges built by the critics of "Letters in Canada" have seemed to be from writer to reader, from culture to culture, from criticism to creation, but all this is child's play to the real fabrication, that of a bridge into the future. They have maintained a constant alert for developing trends, for hopeful prognostics, for unifying themes. They have been eager to mediate and explain, loath to judge or condemn. They have felt with Arnold "it is by communicating fresh knowledge, and letting his own judgment pass along with it" that the critic serves his readers. The reviewers have performed many incidental and ancillary services, works of supererogation from which we benefit. They have saved us from heresies that haunt the temple of the arts, from the notion that good writing is no more than the correct application of techniques, from the opposite error that good poetry is no more than free self-expression. They have been patient, unfailingly competent, frequently brilliant in their bursts of penetration and in their inducement of synthesis. They have turned their dreariest assignments into labours of love. In fact, the retrospective reader of "Letters in Canada" is likely to feel a stronger bond of sympathy with the reviewers than with the writers themselves. By dramatizing an ideal public, they have gone a long way toward creating a real one.

Their most serious lapse has been the failure to project an image, like Whitman's American Poet, of the ideal Canadian creative writer, in not evoking his recognizable likeness from the mists of our cultural drift, in not insisting upon the autonomy of the imagination and the primacy of the world which, being not seen, is eternal. And yet — how much has been done of a cumulative kind. Impossible for the present writer to end on any but a hopeful note or to refrain from joining the ritual dance of the harvesters in Maytime. After such sacrifices, such processions and long marching about the fields, such symbolic inseminations of the furrows, such regard for all the rites of fertility, the gods must act, the Muse descend and Urania show her divine shape. The powers themselves, seeming indifferent through our long-enduring spring, can they now withhold their gifts, the cornucopia of a full and abundant harvest long delayed?

CLIMATE OF UNREST

Periodicals in the Twenties and Thirties

F. W. Watt

THE SPIRIT OF PATRIOTISM which arose in Canada during the "boom" era of the earlier 1900's and culminated in the wartime jingoism of the 1914-18 struggle, still flourished in various forms during the 1920's. The Canadian Authors' Association, founded in 1921, drew together many who had contributed to the development of a national literature, and who were eager to equal in the cultural sphere what had been accomplished in terms of political and economic nationalism. But after 1920 patriotism was as often as not likely to be a more critical, and more demanding attitude. Not, "we must have a strong, prosperous, cultivated nation from sea to sea" but "what really are the conditions in this country, what are its shortcomings and its evils?"

Some writers for whom the less smiling aspects of Canadian nationhood were not essential but accidental, or whose sympathies were with the past rather than the future, found a spiritual home during the 1920's in *Willison's Monthly.* That magazine carried on many of the late Victorian Canadian attitudes as they had found form in *The Week* (in the 1880's) and, more especially, in the *Canadian Magazine,* which had joined forces with the "new" to the extent of enthusiastically supporting the advance of free enterprise business and commerce in the early twentieth century. *Willison's Monthly* was a patriotic journal (devoted, as one contributor put it, to "the upbuilding of Canada"), and it spoke on behalf of the main features of John A. Macdonald's National Policy of 1879 as it was interpreted in the twentieth century: encouragement of immigration, tariff protection, provincial unity, Buy Canadian Goods, and lower taxes on capital. At

the same time the magazine displayed the well-developed Canadian Victorian capacity for conservative compromise by becoming in the realm of culture virtually the epitome of the "genteel" tradition. The most decorous and refined writers of the 1880's and 1890's would readily have appreciated the tone and atmosphere of *Willison's Monthly*: its nostalgic glances at the (supposed) calm and order of the Victorian Age, its aversion to the crass materialism of industrial civilization, its concern for "beautiful" art, its consistently elevated manner — the slightly formalized expression and the avoidance of petty details and slang vocabulary. In an article appearing in 1927, "Matter of Taste", C. F. Lloyd expressed with great eloquence the personal and social idealism of the *Willison's Monthly* milieu:

> To be able to appreciate keenly and with a sureness of instinct, akin to the homing instinct of birds, all the finest and grandest production of human genius in every department or in one or two, and at the same time to be able on all occasions, the most trying as well as the commonest, to act and speak with the dignity and delicacy expected of a courtier in the presence of his sovereign is to tickle the palate with the finest flavor of life, to enjoy the fragrance and beauty of a rose that does not fade but rather grows sweeter with the wearing.

Repose, conservatism, and stability are what the world desires, wrote the editor in the first number of *Willison's Monthly* in 1925. But the pages of the journal bear witness to the presence of disruptive forces everywhere: democracy, Bolshevism ("Too much pressure cannot be exerted to stamp out Communist activities in the Dominion"), "Jazz Psychology" and the "pathological jottings" of modern literature, and most of the other features of twentieth-century industrial urban life. Truly, wrote a *Willison's Monthly* contributor, "the happiest time for a man to have lived" was in the days of "chop-whiskers and crinolines", between the years 1810 and 1880; and the solid virtues of that era were fast disappearing. The intellectual milieu of *Willison's Monthly* unquestionably looked backwards in time. The air of nostalgia, the valetudinarian tone, the shrinking from modern ugliness, the despairing defence of the Ancients in literature and in social customs, manners, and conditions against the barbarous encroachments of the Moderns — all this clearly marks off the "old" attitudes from the "new". Already, before the end of the war the "new" had begun to throw out its challenges. In 1917 the University of Toronto magazine, *The Rebel* — though the title itself is its strongest defiance — had dedicated itself to "an honest criticism of things as they are. . . ." The decade which followed brought an increasing pressure in this direction until the balance of mind of the intelligentsia of the 1920's seemed to swing towards a critical temper.

The quality of the patriotic spirit underwent a change in such public manifestations of it as we see in the *Canadian Forum.* In the first issue of that periodical in October, 1920, the editors announced: " 'The Canadian Forum' had its origin in a desire to secure a freer and more informed discussion of public questions and, behind the strife of parties, to trace and value those developments of art and letters which are distinctly Canadian." But this assertion, not so very different from what Goldwin Smith, for example, might have made a generation earlier, is accompanied by sharp critical hits at traditional nationalism: "Real independence is not the product of tariffs and treaties. It is a spiritual thing. No country has reached its full stature, which makes its goods at home, but not its faith and its philosophy." By the mid-1920's the *Canadian Forum* had clearly taken on the temper of criticism. It was hopeful rather than cynical or negative, however, and could scarcely be confused with the wave of cynicism and pessimism which swept over other countries following the war. The key term is "progressive", a word which the editorial board of the 1920's applied to itself not in any specialized political sense, but as a way of suggesting the spirit of evolutionary optimism. "The majority of us," said one editorial in 1924, "hold in common a belief in the mutability of human nature, which is the fundamental characteristic that distinguishes the progressive from the conservative." The vagueness of the *Canadian Forum's* self-attribution "progressive" arose from the fact that in 1924 the editorial committee experienced the embarrassment of being unable to agree upon a "Platform" which would express their political and social philosophy. In the end the eighteen members of the committee were obliged to make a virtue of necessity, to fall back on the concept of "Forum". In the public statement "Forum *Versus* Platform" their confession was made, and the periodical was committed to the principle displayed in its name — in effect, to the critical temper, rather than to any specific ideology.

The *Canadian Forum* in the 1920's reflected a critical "revolt" which was to begin with moral and æsthetic in motivation, and which found political associations only later. The sense of the repressive bonds and inhibitions of the existing social order and the desire to shake them off found expression in many forms. Margaret Fairley put the attitude at its most general in her *Canadian Forum* article "Creative Evolution", written in 1921: "If man is to rise above himself, the cramping influences of wealth as well as poverty, of arbitrary custom, and of the audacious tyranny of each generation upon the next must be removed" — lest, she went on to say, "Originality and virtue are destroyed by the fear of being a freak or prig, and everywhere initiative is repressed by the too rigid bonds of

social life." In a lighter vein, Douglas Bush was attacking some of the same enemies when in the *Canadian Forum* in April, 1922, he entered his "Plea for Original Sin", and argued that Canadian literature was "anæmic" because "Canada is too moral." Some of the most vigorous creative writing of the 1920's shows a similar critical spirit at work. It would be well, perhaps, to see the early poetry of E. J. Pratt in this light, especially that whimsical and extravagant *Witches' Brew* (1925), which shatters with comic vitality the conventional pieties of a religion and morality too narrowly conceived. Pratt's *Newfoundland Verses* two years earlier had found favour in the eyes of the *Canadian Forum* as a happy departure from the Canadian tradition of romantic sensibility. Similarly Merrill Denison's witty and caustic portrayals of the Ontario north country in the 1920's were, in their own way, critical exposés of regional idyllic sentimentality.

The revolt became explicit and self-conscious in the vigorous challenge "Wanted — Canadian Criticism", flung down by that young champion of the "new" in Canadian culture, A. J. M. Smith, in the *Canadian Forum* in April, 1928. Smith's thesis was essentially that Canadian culture was lacking in the critical intelligence (and in particular Canadian culture as envisaged and perpetrated by the Canadian Author's Association, upon whom Smith heaped his scorn). "One looks in vain through Canadian books and journals for that critical enquiry into first principles which directs a new literature as tradition guides an old one." Part of the critical task as Smith envisaged it was to shatter the unholy bonds between commercialism and art ("Buy Canadian Goods" applied to literature) allegedly established by the C.A.A. The critic must help the Canadian writer in his fight against social pressures which make him use the methods of low-level Canadianism endorsed by the "Maple Leaf" school, and in his struggle for "freedom in the choice and treatment of his subject." The inhibitions in regard to realism, irony, cynicism and so on require overthrowing. Above all the need is for intelligence: "Modernity and tradition alike demand that the contemporary artist who survives adolescence shall be an intellectual. Sensibility is no longer enough, intelligence is also required. Even in Canada."

TOWARD THE END of the twenties a new periodical appeared in which contributors and editors declared themselves even more emphatically for emancipation and the free critical spirit. The first number of *The Canadian*

Mercury (December, 1928) dedicated itself to "the emancipation of Canadian literature from the state of amiable mediocrity and insipidity in which it now languishes," and asserted its independence: "We have no affiliation whatsoever: we owe no allegiance to the Canadian Author's Association, the Canadian Manufacturers Association, the Young Communist League of Canada, the I.O.D.E., the Y.M.C.A., the U.F. of A. or the C.P.R." The editors were youthful but unashamed of the fact: "the editors are all well under thirty and intend to remain so. We seek to ally ourselves with all those whose literary schooling has survived the Confederation, and whose thought and verse is not afraid of being called free." One of the *Canadian Mercury's* first tasks was to attempt to destroy that quintessence of the old tradition, "respectability", and on the front cover the opening challenge was hurled by the nearly naked, corpulent Mercury in the magazine's colophon, thumbing his nose defiantly at all those to his right. At one point in its short existence, the *Canadian Mercury* entrusted to Marcus Adeney the task of an outright and explicit confronting of "respectability". In "The Respectability Myth", published in 1929, Adeney began with a cursory generalization about the Victorian Age in Canada: "there was no real social criticism and no real quest of human values." The effort to carve out a way of life in a new country made this unlikely, and Canadians tended merely to "transplant" Victorian England as best they could. "Unreflective men and women fitted easily into the carried-over institutions of more civilized lands and no truly radical changes occurred until a twentieth-century industrial orgy threatened to absorb not only our natural resources, our institutions, but our homes and our lives as well." The effect was not very salutary, however, "for the respectability of good-natured ignorance was giving way only to the respectability of money power." Here, then, is the object of Adeney's attack, as he himself sums it up:

> These two forms of respectability we have with us to-day; . . . they govern our thoughts, our feelings, our manners and customs, our newspapers and our 'literature', with a rod of iron. The newer form gradually supplants the old. . . . The effect remains the same: obstruction, hypocrisy, self-deception, ignorance, cant, the organized suppression of all effectual criticism and its counterpart, vital creative work.

The tenor of *Canadian Mercury* contributions and editorials accorded with Adeney's eloquent diatribe, and the magazine was therefore assured of its place in the critical revolt of the 1920's.

But the *Canadian Mercury* was committed no more than the *Canadian Forum* to any political or social ideology. The real nature of this detachment is perhaps

best expressed by Howe Martyn in "Wanted — a Gospel", an article in the *Canadian Mercury* in 1928 which points directly to the change in political climate the thirties were to bring with them. In the most general terms Martyn complained that "We in Canada are not a nation, because we are incoherent." What was lacking was a unity of vision, for everywhere Canadians "are searching and wavering, losing one ideal after another, waiting vainly for the stimulus which would be provided by initiation into some combination of writers, poets, and all people with the vision of a socially progressive Canada." Their desire and need is still vague and scarcely understood, according to Martyn. "We have groups of very progressive people in Vancouver, and again in Montreal, and there are isolated individuals scattered all over the country. But that contact by which one mind, like steel on flint, strikes the spark of new thought from another mind, is for the most part impossible." Everywhere, Martyn claimed, writing in this year of 1929, people are listening "for a new gospel, a gospel which will send old men out seeking young converts, which will link them all by the completeness and beauty of its vision of the future of Canada in a passionate and consuming love for her." A gospel was soon found — in the radicalism of the 1930's — and we will turn in a moment to see how it was received. The æsthetic and moral revolt of certain intellectuals in the 1920's became, with the depression of the 1930's, political. The critical tools of Marxism were seized upon as answering a great need. The calamity of the Great Depression made palatable, even desirable, social and economic theories which were once only of interest to a small minority at the lower levels of society. In the 1930's that minority swelled in numbers and in power and it became, for the first time, of major literary and cultural significance in Canada.

The emergence of political radicalism in the 1930's in the wake of the Great Depression was not so sudden as it is sometimes thought. It had familiar precedents in the disturbances and dislocations of the post-war decade which will now be reviewed briefly, but its roots also go back into the first years of the century and earlier. The continuity is readily seen in the far West, where political radicalism had early successes and where some of its individual champions remained in the public eye during the greater advances of the thirties. But elsewhere, too, it may be inferred, modern and extreme radicals alike in more recent years have sown and reaped the better for the reason that the soil was assiduously cultivated in advance by the almost forgotten left wing active in the earlier days of nation building and national expansion. At any rate, whatever its origins and causes, the leftward movement of Canadian intellectuals and the dialectic it en-

tailed make a striking contrast to the conciliatory, conservative inclination of the cultivated milieu of late Victorian Canada. Conciliation had given way to angry debate, patriotic aspirations to the cry for social justice, defence of moral, social and spiritual absolutes to radical probings especially of the existing social order and its justification. If this was what it meant to have achieved nationhood, the Victorian founding fathers might well have felt themselves fortunate not to have seen the working out of this phase in their great project.

The political shift to radicalism was only of major significance after the Depression, but in the 1920's there had been forecasts, hints and prophecies of what was to come. Labour and agrarian unrest had grown during the 1914-1918 period of international war when for many Canada was emerging for the first time in the eyes of the world as a fully-fledged adult nation. The price and market dislocations which the latter part of the war and its conclusion brought with it were the immediate blows felt by farmers and urban workers, and their response was a series of strikes and protest movements culminating in the Winnipeg disorders of 1919 and the emergence of the party of progressive farmers as a federal power in 1920.

For a time there was a considerable rise in political tension. "All eyes in Canada are turned to the new third party," the *Canadian Forum* announced in 1921, referring to T. A. Crerar's farmers' party. J. S. Woodsworth in the same year expressed his trust that the interest and activity were not only agrarian: "The old leadership rejected, the workers of the West are rapidly accepting the Socialist analysis of society. In the present distress, they believe they are experiencing the birth pangs of a new social order." The political potency of the farmers' party was quickly exhausted but the conjunction of agrarian and urban discontent was significant for two reasons. First, it was a sign that that traditional safety-valve for dissatisfaction, the Western frontier, by the twenties had virtually closed. "Go West, young man" was no longer a feasible answer to dissenters and malcontents. Second, the unrest of both Labour and Farmer was in the next decade to throw these habitual enemies into doubtful but efficacious league with one another in the Coöperative Commonwealth Federation Party, and to make the concept of the Third Force more meaningful than ever before in the political arena. The Winnipeg Strike of 1919, which for many (not without some justification) was associated with the recent Russian Revolution, was dealt with vigorously by civic and federal governments, so much so that a public reaction in the electoral campaigns in the years following carried left wing candidates to unexpected success. However, the most significant effect was perhaps that clear

differentiation that took place during the twenties between revolutionary and gradualist elements among the radicals. The stream of gradualism moved towards the moderate C.C.F. of the thirties with its close ties with the Fabians and the British Labour Party, while the stream of revolutionary fervour went on to the formation of the Communist Party, the dedication to forceful means of achieving its ends, the prolonged martyrdom of Tim Buck, and the closer alignment with Soviet philosophy and precedent.

DURING THE 1920's most of the intellectuals, while often ready and eager to be critical of the *status quo,* were not prepared to join forces with the advocates of a revolutionary social change. They remained apart from radical commitments until the cataclysm of the Depression brought home to members of every class of society a sense of deep-rooted shortcomings in the existing order, the necessity for action of some kind, and the potentialities of the socialist and communist economic arguments as expressed by the Fabian-like League for Social Reconstruction and the Coöperative Commonwealth Federation of 1933, or as pressed with greater ruthlessness by the Communist Party. The dimensions of the Depression are still memorable enough not to require reviewing, but it is worthwhile to emphasize the extent to which the middle and upper strata of society were drawn toward the lower by its pressure. A writer in the *Canadian Forum* in 1932 commented upon the impact of the depression in these terms:

> There is at least one feature of the present depression in Canada which sharply distinguishes it from all previous economic crises, and that is the manner in which the professional and intellectual classes are losing faith in the fundamental features of our existing social system, and are becoming more and more critical of our respectable and well-established institutions. This sudden swing towards radical ideas has so far found little organized expression, it is not clearly reflected in the daily press, but any clear-sighted observer will find evidence that it is surging and bubbling throughout the whole of middle-class society.

A sociological article by S. D. Clark in the *Canadian Forum* in 1933 — "The Proletarian Intelligentsia" — is significant independent evidence supporting this description. "The large number of university graduates in the ranks of the unemployed today is a phenomenon which has no parallel in any depression since

the beginning of modern capitalism." Clark goes on to discuss the potentialities of the leadership he feels his group will offer the proletariat.

The same change could, of course, be interpreted in a number of ways, and it is useful to compare the translation into Marxist terminology by the B.C. *Clarion*, the voice of the Socialist Party of Canada:

> With the proletariat, even as Marx predicted, are aligned the masses of the shop-keeping, professional classes, the ranks of the lower middle class thrown into the fight against Capitalism by economic distress. These 'white-collar' additions to our ranks are welcome allies. We need them and we can show them the way to complete emancipation and freedom from oppression.

The Socialist Party of Canada in British Columbia looked upon itself as the cornerstone of the C.C.F. with which it joined in 1933, a truly socialist cornerstone which would keep the party loyal to socialist ideals. The S.P. of C. had its roots in the left wing movement at the turn of the century, and hence could claim that it carried over into the thirties the traditions of an earlier radicalism. The claim is of course far too extreme, but it does help to place the "discovery" of Marx, socialism and communism by Canadian intellectuals in the thirties in a truer light — that is, as in part the emergence of an old, minor and previously ignored tradition of radicalism in Canada. While English and American literary and political movements served as a model and stimulus, the presence of certain necessary factors in Canada made the literary and political turn to the left here possible: an organized trade union movement as a source of power; a degree of class consciousness and radicalism among the lower orders; highly active though small socialist groups well versed in radical doctrines. The radical culture of the thirties, if the term may be used, is consciously or otherwise plainly indebted to these three conditions.

The *Canadian Forum* in the 1930's became a ready vehicle for articles upon and news about the Third Force. During 1930 and 1931 the activities of the League for Social Reconstruction, the first significant organization of Canadian radical intellectuals, were reported fully. The movement was charted which culminated in the formal debut of the political party best embodying that force: J. S. Woodsworth's introduction in the House of Commons in 1933 of a resolution that "the Government should immediately take measures looking to the setting up of a coöperative commonwealth in which all natural resources and the socially necessary machinery of production will be used in the interests of the people and not for the benefit of the few." The parliamentary début of the

C.C.F. was important not only because that party threatened, by its endeavour to unite Farmer and Labour interests, to become a major political power, but also because it gave form and expression to the spirit of moderate radicalism and assured it of a lawful political existence. While it tried to live up to its name, the *Canadian Forum* tended to be a critical but sympathetic supporter of a position not often far from that of the C.C.F. The relationship became closest for a short period during the early thirties when members of the League for Social Reconstruction assumed financial control temporarily. But even at this stage, the *Canadian Forum* succeeded in keeping its pages open to a range of opinion and points of view which generously reflects the ideological and intellectual dialectic of the time. It may still have been true in 1931, as T. W. L. MacDermot complained, that "the freedom to venture new theories, to re-question old ones, is suspect if it is exercised in any but the most intensely respectable form." But it was becoming much less so than before, and many were ready to agree with MacDermot on the need for "Radical Thinking in Canada":

> Everything is changing at an enormous pace. The body of working prejudices and assumptions upon which the 19th century proceeded with relative equanimity has been assiduously undermined by the events of the last quarter of a century. Queen Victoria is at last dead. We are now compelled to work up new prejudices and assumptions, and in this work the practical man will have to play a new listening role. Whether he likes it or not radical things are happening and will go on happening.

So, for example, in the *Canadian Forum* in 1932 Howe Martyn, little pleased with the new gospel of radicalism being propagated, ventured a general exposition and critique of "Marxism" in terms which — though simple enough to show his relative innocence in regard to the history of left wing controversy — suggested that the theory was one of general pressing concern. Martyn's attack on Marxist theory was met early in the following year by Leo Warshaw in "Marxism — a Reply", and so the debate continued. Though the internecine quarrels of the extreme left did not warrant extensive space, the *Canadian Forum* was generous in airing a wide variety of opinion throughout the mid-thirties, and social, political and æsthetic battles were fought with unprecedented vigour.

For some, however, the *Canadian Forum* was too moderate and disinterested in its attitude towards the contemporary scene, endeavouring as it did to maintain its character as a "forum" for all views and opinions. New periodicals emerged in the thirties which took an angrier and more aggressive view of the times. "The new day when the workers of Canada will pass from defence to counter-attack is slowly approaching", the Marxist monthly *Masses* proclaimed in 1932. "In this, and not in the reformist belly-crawling tactics, lies the salvation of the Canadian working class." *Masses,* organ of the Progressive Arts Club, looked upon itself as spokesman and leader of the revolutionary proletariat, and it continued for the two years of its existence to carry on this belligerent role with all the vitality it could muster. Its Marxist successor, *New Frontier* (begun in 1936), was somewhat milder and more cultivated in its manners, but it was equally distinguishable in its views from the moderate *Canadian Forum. Masses* had made it a duty to abuse the *Canadian Forum* continually and to correct in robust proletarian language its bourgeois socialist heresies whenever space and time permitted, and *New Frontier* took on the burden. "Characteristically enough," wrote a contributor in the first number of *New Frontier* in 1936, "the depression-born Canadian social-democratic party with its professional brain-trusters is a rather genteel sprig clipped from the suburban hedge of British Fabianism."

New Frontier, while less inclined to a narrow dogmatism than *Masses,* was from the outset completely engaged: "*New Frontier* is founded on the conviction that the Canadian middle class is awakening to certain unbearable features of our present social system — and willing to provide an audience for those writers, artists and intellectuals who have something relevant to say about the troubled times we live in." It was therefore typical of the magazine's policy that it should, in December, 1936, have published its *Special Issue on Spain* which included the replies of a number of well-known Canadians to the problem, "Where I stand on Spain". The answers, which ranged from W. A. Deacon's "we should cut clear of the Empire and the whole continent of Europe" to E. J. Pratt's "My sympathies in the Spanish situation are wholly with the Popular Front", give a lively indication of the extent to which Canadian society was divided by the international debate between left and right wing ideas and attitudes, the more so because the Spanish Civil War may be used as a kind of convenient touchstone to show up political ideologies, degrees of social commitment, and concern for international situations, events and ideas.

Disappointment and disillusion following the collapse of the Spanish Loyalists was felt by liberal Canadians as by liberals elsewhere. The great moment of world social revolution desired by some and feared by many had not come, and hopes of any dramatic advance faded as the decade drew to a troubled close. With the signing of the Non-Aggression Pact between Soviet Russia and Germany in 1939, communism suffered its most serious reaction. "Dialectical Contortionism" was too much, as one "Ex Fellow-Traveller" announced in the *Canadian Forum*: "Our fellow-traveller had come to the parting of the ways. No longer could he make excuses for Soviet Russia. The hurt was too deep. . . . He was now free, he was no longer a fellow-traveller." In due course the Second World War arrived to unravel in its own effective way the tangled social problems of the country which the dialectic of ideas had left unsolved.

A remarkable change had taken place in the temper of Canadian thought from the years following Confederation to the years of the great Depression. In those earlier days any serious social concerns of the intellectual were likely to be associated with nationalism in one of its possible forms. Differences in social ideals were relatively slight, or if they were not, the pressures were all towards decorously making them appear so. The conservative tradition had its work of nation building to do, and it would not encourage, scarcely even tolerate, radical questioning except of the most modest kind. Conciliation and compromise were the key notes of public discussion and basic principles were assumed rather than considered. But in the 1920's and 1930's, however troubled by economic disasters or critical deprecations, the nation existed securely as a social, political and economic entity. Within that entity and partly perhaps as a consequence, a range and a violence of opinion seemed possible to a degree not imagined before. Conflicting positions, points of view, philosophies of art and of life were thrust forward and argued with urgency and vehemence. It can scarcely be said that the intellectual tempests of the thirties produced any great social theorists or thinkers in Canada, or for that matter that the issues of the day were aired and clarified with impressive success. A critic was even able to assert with respect to the most "principled" and political party in the mid-thirties: "This is the basic weakness of the C.C.F. — inaction due to the fact that it has no theories to nourish it. No vital discussions are carried on in the party."

Much of the ideological debate of the thirties echoed the language and ideas of other countries. Nevertheless, the immediate significance and the urgency of many far-reaching issues was seen and felt by Canadians in ways quite different from the responses of late Victorian Canadians. Foreign ideologies and debates on

general principles were not referred to in a detached way as the noise of battles far off or long ago, but were seized upon for their relevance to the immediate situation. The effect on Canadian literature was, naturally enough, very marked, though today a generation later it has still to be fully measured.

UNSPEAKABLE VERSE

Robert McCormack

WHATEVER YOU MAY make of it, I think you have to admit that one of the more astonishing features of the literary scene in the last ten or fifteen years has been the revival of spoken poetry. Across the country — and up and down the continent — the poets have been coming out of their lairs to read their works in all kinds of likely and unlikely places. University lecture halls, libraries, art galleries, coffee houses and night clubs have all seen them reciting their verses to sizable crowds. They have even invaded the mass media. It would be a wild exaggeration to say that contemporary poetry occupies a large place in broadcasting. But increasingly it does occupy a place. And that statement is not just a plug for CBC programmes such as *Anthology* which for the past seven years has offered Canadian poets an audience at least ten times larger than they could hope to get through publication in a literary magazine or a book. I am also thinking of the educational radio and television stations in the United States — whose audiences may be small in terms of broadcasting but are far from negligible in terms of poetry — and of strictly commercial enterprises like the Caedmon company which specialize in recordings of the spoken word. *Time* magazine reports that 50,000 records of Robert Frost reading his poems have been sold in the U.S. alone, and 400,000 of Dylan Thomas.

These are pretty startling figures and they should certainly be heartening to poets and their friends. But even when they are not taking advantage of modern technology and are simply reading in art galleries or clubs to audiences that range from, perhaps, twenty-five to one or two hundred, poets may reasonably feel that they are reaching many people who would not ordinarily encounter modern verse. It is easy to understand why Irving Layton recently "exulted," as according to *The Canada Council Bulletin* he did: "This sort of thing would have been incon-

ceivable 15 years ago. When I first started writing in 1942 people wrote poetry as if it was a secret vice. . . . This takes the poem out of the classroom and into the market place." It is a long time since poets have been in the market place. No wonder they exult.

But exultation should not, I think, be confined to the fact that poetry is reaching a new and wider audience. Surely it is of some importance that it is reaching this audience in a new way, a way that offers distinct advantages over the blurrily mimeographed magazine or the very limited edition laboriously handset by a friend.

In the case of readings which the public attends as they attend a movie or a play, there is an authority and an intimacy in the presentation which is absent from the poem on the page. Most people are, or think they are, rather bafflled by modern poetry. And most people think, rightly or wrongly, that the writer is the final authority on what he writes. How satisfying, then, to have him actually there reading the lines as they were meant to be read. But if in this sense the experience is more authoritarian, more directed or "structured" than the experience of reading a book of poems, in another sense it is much freer. Read by the author to attentive listeners poetry becomes a flexible, fluid, personal experience quite different from the "literature" of the classroom. There is, or can be, something of that emotional interaction which characterizes the theatre. The poet can alter his tone, his intepretation, even his material to suit what he senses to be the mood of his audience. And they participate in the poem at a level of interest beyond even the most careful book reader.

In the case of broadcast or recorded readings, some of this intimacy may be lost. But much of the authority remains. And to compensate for the loss, there is, as I have indicated, an enormous expansion of audience. The poet on the air may not reach people with quite the same personal note as he does face-to-face, but he reaches far more of them. I suspect there is something else. Is it too fanciful to suggest that there is a kind of glamour about these performances, a sort of twentieth-century magic? They seem, incredibly, to combine myth and mass production, the oldest idea of the Poet and the most avant-garde. On the one hand, they remind us of the origins of all literature, of the poet as minstrel, bard, scop, sacred vates chanting to a spell-bound audience the great epics which were at once the history, the science, and the religion of his people. On the other, they are themselves part of the evidence for those very contemporary theories which announce the replacement of a tired "book culture" by a new "audio-visual culture" of the future. As we listen, we think, perhaps, of Homer's Demodocos

who sang the stories of the gods to the court of Alcinoös and concerning whom we are told "in every nation upon the earth the minstrels have honour and respect." But we think, too, of those 400,000 records of Dylan Thomas. Is it possible that the tape-recorder and the hi-fi set — not to mention the picture tube — are restoring the minstrel to us, and to the minstrel some of that ancient honour and respect? Modern engineering seems, for a moment, to open for us a way back to the very well-springs of poetry. Through the double glass of the recording studio Irving Layton bears a shadowy resemblance to Demodocos. The centuries come full circle and we return to the work of art made magically, in the words of W. B. Yeats, "out of a mouthful of air."

Possibly this is pushing things a bit far. But if I exaggerate a little, it is only to emphasize a point many others have also made — that seldom have the opportunities open to poets and to poetry been so many and so various. Certainly the prospect is an exciting one and I want to return to it later on. But before I get lost in these somewhat heady visions, I have a feeling I should back-track a little and take a closer look at the phenomenon. There are, after all, limitations to spoken poetry, as there is to any form of art; and its revival today, especially in the new ways offered by the mass media, raises a number of difficult questions. I am afraid that the limitations are not always recognized, and the questions, although they have been asked by a number of perspicacious critics (and even by some poets), do not always get the attention they deserve.

TO BEGIN WITH what seems to me the most obvious limitation, there is a fairly large body of the poetry of our time which was not intended to be read or recited aloud and which can only be damaged by such presentation. It is, literally, unspeakable verse. As I say, you might think this obvious. But it is surprising how many poets refuse to recognize it or react to the suggestion as if it were an outrageous attack on Poetry itself. They appeal, as I appealed a moment ago, to its origins. But poetry is a long way from its origins, and no magic, not even of the electronic variety, will take us back to them. It is true enough that poetry began as an oral medium and that even as late as the end of the fourteenth century Chaucer was still making his reputation by reading or reciting *The Canterbury Tales* to a court audience. But Gutenberg's revolution did finally arrive. If people encounter *The Canterbury Tales* today it is not usually with

their ears. The tradition that poetry is a performing art, something essentially done with the voice, has never died, but it has been considerably attenuated. Poets have continued to pay it lip-service, writing of their "songs" and invoking a *bel canto* Muse, with or without musical accompaniment, at the drop of a hemistich. But when, for example, in the eighteenth century, Pope writes of "singing" *The Rape of the Lock* we recognize the ironic use of a convention. The villa at Twickenham was bought not with fees from recitals but with subscriptions to a book — a translation of the bardic Homer into the polite conventions of the printed page.

Needless to say, I am not denying that there remains a strong oral or auditory element in all poetry even today. No one doubts that a poet in composing "hears" the lines in his head, even when he does not say them aloud as many poets do. No one doubts that a strong and subtle sense of rhythm and an acute ear for the sounds of his language are as important to a contemporary poet as they were to Homer. Many modern poets have written eminently recitable and even singable verse, and many have had more than a casual interest in the musical affiliations of their art. There is a story that Yeats composed his poems to an old Irish "chune" he had picked up somewhere as a boy. There is the fact of his experiments with Florence Farr and Arnold Dolmetsch in speaking poetry to the "psaltery." It is perhaps merely unkind to add that there is also a story that Yeats was tone deaf. Unkind or not, it is irrelevant. On the evidence of his work he possessed, and in the highest degree, that sensitivity to the rhythmical and harmonic qualities of language without which a man is simply not a poet. I do not question this *sine qua non.* But I do claim that three or four hundred years of writing for the printer's devil have inevitably had an effect on poetry.

Exactly when this effect began to show itself is difficult to say. Marshall McLuhan has suggested it was some time in the first half of the seventeenth century, when "there occurred that strange mixture of sight and sound later known as 'metaphysical poetry' which has so much in common with modern poetry." Certainly by the time of Pope a tradition of verse intended primarily for the eye was well established. In any case, Professor McLuhan's phrase "a strange mixture of sight and sound" seems a fair description of the present situation when the revival of spoken poetry is again tipping the balance. There is plenty of poetry today which sings, or occasionally howls, itself off the page so that one is practically forced to read it aloud. But there is also a great deal of poetry in which sound is subordinated to sight. This is poetry meant to be read silently and alone as one reads a novel or the report of a Royal Commission.

It can suffer heavily from oral presentation.

Sight is not necessarily superior to sound. The eye may have no general advantage over the ear. But it is a different instrument. Its element is space more than time. On the printed page it moves at its own pace, not the author's. It can stop and absorb, as the ear cannot. It can flick back and re-examine or compare, as the ear cannot. It can appreciate form and pattern, can distinguish and combine images, in ways denied the ear. For all these reasons, seeing is generally a more intellectual and analytical experience than hearing..

It is not hard to find evidence for these contentions. Most obvious is that kind of poetry (traceable perhaps, as Professor McLuhan's remark indicates, to poems like George Herbert's "Easter Wings") which depends so heavily on typographical arrangement in the space of the page that it loses most of its form and much of its force when read aloud. The work of E. E. Cummings provides many contemporary examples. There is also a kind of poetry—much of William Empson's, for instance — characterized by literary allusion, multiple meaning and word play which is largely lost on a listener. The linguist Mario Pei says, "It is fairly well established that in a normal conversation the hearer really hears only about fifty per cent of the sounds produced by the speaker, and supplies the rest out of his sense of the context." Even if we suppose the percentage to be higher in the case of an attentive listener at a reading, this seems a pretty formidable fact for the poet to contend with. It is easy enough to imagine what happens if the context is new and strange, as with poetry it frequently is. I wonder, too, if this filtering out or altering of sounds between speaker and listener has something to do with the curious way in which the rhythmic effects of, say, William Carlos Williams, which often seem delicate and original on the page, tend to be flattened out and made prosaic by the voice? Unheard melodies may be not only sweeter but more subtle than those heard. Finally, there is a cinematographic kind of poetry where the effect, as in film montage, depends on the close juxtaposition of images. Passages in Ezra Pound's *Cantos* would exemplify this. Read aloud, there is considerable danger that these images merely become a confused blur.

Of course, these are examples chosen to make a point. Sight and sound are frequently more closely mixed within the same poem than they suggest. I would have to agree on the basis of my own experience with *Anthology* that it is often difficult to predict from reading a poem in typescript whether it will read well aloud or not. The only test is the empirical one of having it read. There is some of Dylan Thomas's poetry which does not look like very good material for a poetry reading, but, once again, we remember those 400,000 records. Perhaps it

should be pointed out, however, that Thomas seldom read from his earlier and more surrealistic work with its tough knots and violent explosions of imagery. And then he was, of course, a magnificent performer. There is little doubt that his triumphant tours of the North American college circuit in the late 1940's and early 1950's had a great deal to do with the current renaissance of spoken poetry. Listening to him now on records, one sometimes suspects that he could have made the telephone directory sound like an epic. Is it merely cynical to wonder how many of the several hundred thousand people who have presumably heard him read, say "In the White Giant's Thigh" really have any clear notion of what it is all about?

BUT THERE ARE very few Dylan Thomases, a fact which leads directly to another limitation on spoken verse and into some of those questions I mentioned earlier. Most contemporary poets are, to put it bluntly, bad readers of their own or anybody else's work. This is not their fault. It is also a product of the split tradition to which I have referred. In the time of Homer, or even of the Provencal troubadours, one simply did not become a poet without the voice and the histrionic talents to present one's work orally. But "book culture" introduced the division of labour into poetry and it is relatively rare these days to find a poet who is also a good performer. In the case of public readings to small audiences, this may not matter very much. Something will come through, and the defects of the performance may be made up for by the presence of the author as a person and by the authority and intimacy I have described. If the reading is very bad, especially if the poet has chosen to read "unspeakable verse," we may sometimes wonder what, if anything, has been gained. But then probably not very much has been lost. It is in the case of the poet's attempting to reach the wider audience available through recordings and radio and television that the real problems and difficulties arise.

There is a fairly widespread notion that the mass media simply record reality and "bring it into our living-rooms." This is sometimes true, but, generally speaking, it is a considerable oversimplification. And for good reasons. It is, of course, possible simply to record or photograph a poet reading his work as one records or photographs a hockey game. In fact, this is the course sometimes followed by "educational broadcasters." But while one must admire their restraint and the

purity of their intentions, it is difficult to admire the results. Deprived of the social occasion, of the human intimacy and immediacy of the public reading, reduced to a nervous disembodied voice or to a twitching shadow a foot and a half high, the poet loses nearly every advantage he gains by reading and his defects are savagely magnified. Most professional broadcasters would feel, I think rightly, that this is what comes of "ignoring the medium," that what is needed is to adapt the performance to the art of broadcasting, to make it, in short, more of a performance. Unfortunately, this process can be even more perilous than the first. The results, at best, often have very little to do with the original aim. At the worst, as with Charleton Heston reading the Bible on "The Ed Sullivan Show," they have, as the saying goes, "to be seen to be disbelieved."

In justice, I must quickly add that catastrophes of this kind do not come about because the people involved in broadcasting are black-hearted villains with a psychopathic hatred of art, or even because they are abnormally stupid, though there is obviously greater chance of that. They occur because of the very nature of the medium, which is just that — that it is a *medium,* that it comes *between* the writer and the receiver of what he writes. Faced with the problem of presenting poetry on the air and with a poet who is not a good reader, the broadcaster's first thought is to hire an actor. Many actors are excellent readers of verse, but inevitably they introduce between the poet and his audience another voice and another personality, often a very high-powered one. With the best will in the world, there are bound to be differences between what reaches the listener and what the author had in mind.

But of course the situation is considerably more dangerous than this. I have never seen it formulated, but I suspect that there must be a kind of First Law of Communications to the effect that a message retains its original meaning in inverse ratio to the complexity of the medium which carries it. And broadcasting is a very complex medium, more like theatre than poetry and more like an assembly line than either. It not only involves many people — from five or six in the case of a radio recording to perhaps twenty-odd in the case of a television programme — each of whom has some effect on the result, and a quantity of machines each with its own limitations and demands, but it is also aimed, even in the case of a so-called "minority-audience programme," at very large numbers of people who must be induced to give up whatever they may be doing in their homes and watch the programme through to the end. In these circumstances, it is surely understandable if the original material, the "message," sometimes undergoes a considerable change before it emerges from loudspeaker and picture tube.

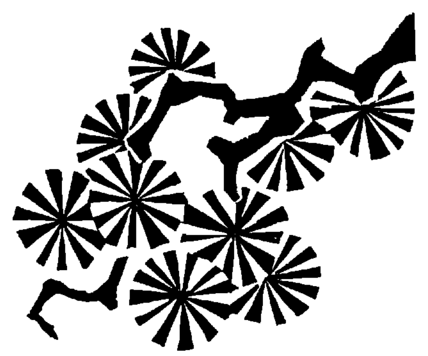
Especially if the material is not well suited to the medium in the first place, the producers will be tempted to compensate by using all their resources of presentation and adding what are usually called "production values." When this happens, it is fatally easy for the final product, or "package," to be so smoothed down and slicked up, so tucked in and decked out, that any resemblance between it and the original purpose, or idea, or hope, is purely coincidental.

It is, of course, precisely this kind of result which has led a number of critics to question whether the mass media should attempt to deal with the arts at all. Do they not inevitably warp and debase them, turning painting and poetry and high drama into mere "consumer goods" and reducing the artist to the level of the mere entertainer? Do they not by their nature tend to make *Hamlet* the cultural equivalent of *My Fair Lady?* The American critic Louis Kronenberger recently observed, "Culture . . . is being dispensed to more and more people in more and more hybrid forms, with more and more synthetic flavors, with more and more doubtful effect. . . ."

I am afraid there is some truth in this observation. I am afraid, too, that I do not have handy answers for the questions I have cited. But this does not mean there are no answers. The observation is only a warning and the questions strike me as far too pessimistic. The limits they suggest for what the arts can do are much too narrow. Behind these somewhat querulous voices I detect faintly another voice — that of the minstrel lamenting the invention of moveable type with all it meant in loss of spontaneity and warmth and in the enormous expansion of audience to include those unappreciative of the old arts. The mixture of art and mass production raises many problems, but I believe they can be solved if the artists will give thought to them.

THIS IS THE CONCLUSION I draw, then, from this somewhat sketchy account of the revival of spoken verse — that it is in some sense an obligation on poets to study more consciously than many of them have done so far the opportunities it opens up for them. I hope that more often than they have up to now they will write "for the medium", for the ear and even for the eye that watches moving images on a screen. Something along these lines has already been done in radio. One thinks of John Reeves' play *A Beach of Strangers* and of the two programmes — "Message to Winnipeg" and "Message to Stratford" —

which James Reaney has contributed to "CBC Wednesday Night". But these are only a beginning and they remain curiously isolated. I confess I am somewhat surprised that poets, especially younger poets, are content to be so conventional and old-fashioned in the forms they employ. I do not mean they should abandon them. But surely they should begin to explore and exploit the new media, just as three hundred years ago their ancestors began to explore and exploit the printed page. There is nothing magical about these media. They have their limitations as I have tried to show. But they also offer all kinds of opportunities and, in the end, it is these I want to emphasize. There is no way back to the minstrel singing "the tale of the tribe", but there may well be a way forward to forms of poetry as vital and as important to their audience. The prospect *is* exciting, and the future of poetry seems to me, as Matthew Arnold said it was long ago, "immense".



AN EVENING WITH BABBLE AND DOODLE

Presentations of poetry

James Reaney

We may call them, if the terms are thought dignified enough, babble and doodle.
—Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism.*

MORE THAN A YEAR AGO a première took place in Toronto at Hart House Theatre with which I was intimately involved in many ways. The première was that of John Beckwith's chamber opera *Night Blooming Cereus* for those libretto I am responsible, and it was also the first time my *One Man Masque* had been produced. From my own point of view, the evening certainly contained revelations as to writing poetry for music (babble) and writing poetry for a masque or a spectacle (doodle). Perhaps the best way to go about this is simply to tell the story, as they say, of *it all.*

It must be ten or more years ago that John Beckwith asked me to write him the libretto for a short chamber opera, one hour in length. He had set my "Great Lakes Suite" and was rash enough to invite another experiment. Immediately, having just got home from another winter on the prairies, I sat down beneath a large elm tree and wrote out a libretto. Up to that moment opera had meant Saturday afternoons as a boy scrubbing the kitchen floor (my Cinderella phase) and listening to the blast from the DeForrest Crisley as Wagner or Verdi came in from New York. I also knew that if an opera was sung in English you never understood the words. But all of this did not deter a very rapid start.

My first thought was double-yolked — to write something that would match what I thought I heard at the heart of John Beckwith's music; also (sneaking in) to write something that I thought I heard in myself. Since I can remember John suggesting I might do a satirical libretto on Penelope and her suitors I used to

feel rather guilty about this. My greedy eyes were fixed on *Night Blooming Cereus.* Now a librettist has awesome responsibilities, since the musical setting of his words demands a great deal of sheer hard slugging on the part of the composer. All of that work may go down the drain if the librettist has not laid down a framework that an audience will accept or rather can accept. Baroque opera suffers from libretto trouble which no amount of ravishing music can ever quite save. The librettist can sterilize the composer; in the case of Wagner this might have been a good thing if you are one of those who regard his operas as being too long and fertile.

What was the "Night Blooming Cereus" idea? From childhood I can remember reading now and again in the local newspaper that last night in the village of Blankville neighbours gathered to watch Mrs. So & So's Night Blooming Cereus come out, which only blooms once a century and then only after midnight. In reality, of course, the Cereus plant blossoms every year and in Hawaii they're so big and ordinary that they're used for fence posts. But operas don't thrive on fence posts. Imagine too — and this is important — the kind of world in which the blooming of a flower is important enough to get into the newspaper. So what I was really presenting to the composer was a pastoral village world in which people sing hymns while they're washing dishes, hear Sam Slick Connecticut clocks strike the hour, listen for the train whistling as it goes down to Toronto and from time to time rock rhythmically in rocking-chairs.

What was the plot line to be that led up to the blossoming of the flower? To some of our opening night critics who were fond of *Pagliacci* or *Cavalliera Rusticana* our plot line seemed rather dull and tiny. But we don't live in Italy. The North American story equivalent to *Pagliacci* is Lizzie Borden, and the verbal problems surrounding the key words "Lizzie" and "axe" are too much for this librettist. To me the plot that came naturally out of the rather quiet North American musical landscape (hymns, rocking-chairs and clocks) was something deliberately untense and unpassionate. From high school memories I took an austere old woman out sickling dandelions in front of her weather-beaten cottage. She owns the flower. Long ago her daughter quarrelled with her and ran away. The very night the Cereus blooms her daughter seems to return. But Mrs. Brown thinks she's a ghost and will have nothing to do with her. At the end of the opera the old lady dares to accept her visitor's reality and is rewarded with a mixture of grief and joy; the visitor turns out to be Mrs. Brown's grand-daughter come with the news that the runaway girl has just died. Throughout half of the opera the grand-daughter Alice stands in the shadows waiting for Mrs. Brown to accept

her, to touch her. As she waits, other visitors come in, sing and wait around for the flower. So when the girl eventually presents herself to her grandmother and is accepted the image is that this resembles the flower blossoming. For the most part all of the event here is interior mental event. Since it is so rich a storehouse of mental patterns and variously coloured moods, music should be particularly good at illustrating this kind of story. It does seem to me that there has to be a logical reason for inviting music to complete a story's effect. The libretto's inwardness was here that justification. And if the reader will start counting on his fingers the number of anywhere near successful North American operas he may also begin to realize that there is some mysterious problem here concerning libretto and native musical landscape. At any rate only more opera will make the problem less mysterious.

THERE WERE STILL other difficulties to be overcome in the libretto after one had disposed of main image and plot line. Who were the villagers to be who came to Mrs. Brown's cottage to see the flower come out? This problem was solved by a sort of literary trigonometry. There is a rule in literature which says that to any tea party, or gathering of any sort, the Four Living Creatures of Ezekiel's vision attend. Actually at this time one of the few sentences of literary symbolism that had sunk through to me was Carl Jung's division of the human soul into four parts represented by an old woman, an old man, a young man and a young girl. The old woman is shadowy and terrifying, the old man is wise and helpful; the young man seeks the young woman but cannot find her until he has come to terms with the older pair. From real village life I plucked a telephone operator (not very shadowy she, but if one pays attention to her role she is always saying that the flower doesn't mean anything), the village orphan — a changeling girl, the storekeeper's discontented young son and, last of all, an old wise nursery man who brought a small tree with him. All four of these have to arrive and thoroughly express themselves before old Mrs. Brown will recognize Alice or the flower bloom. One of the benefits this procedure conferred was an organized variety among the characters which the composer could grab hold of and do something with. There is a tendency in opera (particularly some of the C.B.C. commissioned radio operas I have heard) for the music to swallow everything. Perhaps it's the librettist's duty to give the musical boa con-

strictor a rabbit that has angles to swallow. There are difficulties you should not put in his way, which I'll touch on later, but you surely are hired to give the composer a work out — a chance to write black music, red music, purple music and green music. *The Magic Flute*'s libretto is ideal in this regard: you have the terrifying older woman, the austere old wizard, and not only a sweet young girl but two kinds of young men: one plays a glockenspiel and the other plays a flute.

As a story, what I have so far told you needed an introduction; at this stage I was so ignorant as not to know that this is called an exposition scene. My solution was a preliminary scene before the curtain where Alice the grand-daughter gets off the train and asks the way to Mrs. Brown's place from two village hoydens who tell her all the village knows about Mrs. Brown. This solution was criticized on the ground that the exposition could have been dovetailed into the later scenes. However, granted my solution was primitive, perhaps that can be seen as part of the whole piece's simplicity.

After the exposition scene snow begins to fall (stage snow is an obsession of mine) and a vision of the Night Blooming Cereus appears in the sky (John's idea to balance its later appearance). As Alice walks off the curtain rises to reveal Mrs. Brown in her cottage.

The next scene is simply Mrs. Brown washing dishes, sweeping floors, rocking and sewing. This made fierce demands on both singer and composer but it was worth the risk. If Wagner can show you giants and dragons who make sense in music you ought to be able to manage the other extreme, the simple world of the kitchen where the Rhinemaidens become dishes in a dishpan.

At the very beginning I was so incredibly stupid as to write the libretto all in prose with the lyrics in some rather wobbly versification. Since my poetic affairs were in a very muddled state at that time I hadn't a very firm grasp of technique or of what constituted a technical problem. John Beckwith, after coping with yardfuls of words in the exposition, demanded something more rhythmic and I was galvanized into, at the time and for me, incredible labours of counting syllables, making parallel lines exactly the same length and finding good clean, clear and sonorous rhymes. From those Manitoba fall nights spent in a fantastic house that had mushrooms growing down from its ceiling I date my birth as a craftsman in words. And once you have learnt how to build up verbal structures, each one of whose sounds has been weighed and patterned, you're never quite the same for other people's poetry again. I'm still constantly amazed at poets who expect you to read something they themselves have not read twice.

Metaphors become a problem in writing poetry for music, and in rewriting I

tried to take some profitable line. Stravinsky told Dylan Thomas not to have too many conceits in the libretto for their opera, alas never finished. Since the librettist is supposed to write something which the music completes and extends, the lines have to be cleaned and scraped until there is nothing to stop the music flowing around them. At first Mrs. Brown's second hymn was a jungle of private symbols. They had to go until one well-tended public symbol remained. Gradually the whole libretto became a pattern of sounds, some of them repeated many times, an arranged stream of babble ready for the composer to use in his mill; a stream in which banal words were tucked away, or were supposed to be, in the centres of lines safe from sopranos singing in High C about rats; a stream in which there were occasional feminine rhymes, a good variety of long and short lines and always rhythmic differences that would head off monotony. Consonants, so far as I can see, are never really sung; it is the vowels which the singer really sings; consequently the libretto becomes a chain of vowels outlined by a consonantal murmur and hiss. My rhymes were straight out of Moody-and-Sankey's hymn book; good old foursquare monosyllables. And accordingly, if I had ever felt any attraction to writing involved, complex intellectual lyrics, I absolutely forgot about it. As a librettist you can't be what you want; you must be what he (the composer) wants and what *it* wants.

What can I say of John Beckwith's music except that it furthers and matches all the images I have been talking about? During rehearsals I was continually amazed at how the music picked up a word, even a whole character, and made it soar, made it seem gigantic. I guess this is what opera is all about. Opera takes grubby Nibelungs, fat tenors, Spanish satyrs, maniacs and shambling Wozzecks, it takes them and floats them like kites, kites blowing in the winds of harmony and counterpoint. All of reality — this old woman — suddenly shows itself as being acquainted with things we thought only the angels of symphonies knew.

SINCE THE OPERA was to last only an hour John suggested that I read some poems to raise the curtain. I decided that something more than just a reading was called for, and now we come to the doodle part of this story, since I ended up writing another libretto for a masque — masque in the sense of a series of tableaux and spectacles, or stage images. I had been working on a series of poems that presented a subject in various keys: you start out with Dwarf,

modulate to a poem about a Baby, proceed to one about a Dauphin (baby Prince) and eventually fly from it all with that baby among the birds — the humming-bird. This suggested a stage picture that started out with a cradle, proceeded through chair, table, bed, rocking-chair to coffin, turned back again through the purgatorial world with rain barrel, hall tree, dresser and mirror, tree branch, ladder and cardboard box. At the beginning of the recital you could put the cradle beside the coffin and at the end of it you could, as the dead child was reborn, take the cradle back again. The poems could be read at different points of this big circle since they too moved in a circle through Life, into the world of Death, coasting perilously near Eternity, then back into the world of Death and so into Life again. I had always observed in poetry readings that the great difficulty was the spaces between poems. If there were no spaces at all the listeners tended to suffer from over intake of image. Moving about from prop to prop would help here but I decided also to write a series of comic and macabre monologues to be performed in between the poems. These ranged from children talking to themselves to an old scavenger who collected bottles for his living. The old scavenger found a skull in the coffin which he put in the battered-up old baby carriage with which he collected his bottles. Eventually the old man fell into the coffin to reappear as a man with dark glasses carrying a blue flashlight. The man in dark glasses spoke through a megaphone and recited blood curdling poems about ghosts and the executioner of Mary Stuart. Eventually the baby's cradle was found and Life started again.

Just in listing the props, I've shown you the doodles or designs that accompanied the poems. There was the added problem here of how to perform all this. One does not go usually to poetry readings to hear poems well read or well acted; what one must often be satisfied with is the personality of the poet and the fact that his intonations no matter how inaudible or squeaky can help a great deal in clarifying his poetry since he does *know* what it means. So the actual performances were going to show, I hoped, not necessarily the best performance but the most authoritative performance. Of course I wasn't an actor. If I had been I'd never have written *One Man Masque*. Since I was playing myself, any fluffs or mistakes could be built into the performance. Even if I forgot everything, with the help of the visual props I could improvise it all over again for the audience. Originally I had wanted mannequins on stage with me who would float up on wires at the end of everything, because they were enlightened I guess. This couldn't be managed, so I carried a garbage can lid of lighted candles at the very end and put it on top of my head.

Since I can never quote anything, and have a recurring nightmare in which, after filling in unsuccessfully for a sick actor, I'm pursued by a lion back to a dressing room which can only be entered by a ladder and a very small scuttle, opening night was not the calmest evening I've lived through by any means. The masque turned out to be ten minutes too long, so I dropped some poems by the way. Getting into the coffin, putting on dark glasses and getting out happened all right. At rehearsal I'd got stuck. And the candles didn't set me ablaze. I particularly enjoyed directly attacking an audience with my poetry rather than getting at them privately and secretly in a book.

Naturally we've embarked on another opera, this time a percussion opera called *Shivaree*. It starts off with a church bell ringing and we'll have an actual band of rustic serenaders with their noisemakers on stage. As to more masques, I'd like to do something with acres of gold paper and / or huge newspaper dolls that the poet converses with. But no matter how thrilling the first night of *Shivaree* is, if and when, it can never quite match the excitement of that other night when so many experiments with babble and doodle, sound and sight, were tested. I can remember leaving for the theatre that evening and seeing on Pamela Terry's directorial desk the small slide on which the Cereus blossom was drawn. It would be projected twice during the evening by magic lantern. There it all was.

THE TWO TRADITIONS

Literature and the ferment in Quebec

Louis Dudek

A POWERFUL MOVEMENT is stirring in Québec for secession from the Confederation. A recent questionnaire by the Montreal newspaper *La Presse* revealed that some fifty per cent of the sampled population are already in favour of Québec's separation from the rest of Canada. Yves Thériault the novelist, after a tour of Québec colleges, reported that among the student population the idea of secession or separatism is widespread. It only awaits a Québec political party of secession to raise a storm of major proportions.

This ferment in Québec is largely a concern of literature, because the literary men are deeply involved in the new social unrest. The present nationalistic resentments in Québec present themselves as "interesting" to an intellectual minority which is at the same time carrying out a revolt against the static culture and religious tradition of the Province. This progressive movement, which would seem to be everything that critics of Québec have always hoped for, as the much-needed reform movement here, is capable at the same time of showing a nationalistic will to autonomy and a hostility to English Canada that may be hard to understand. But this is the inevitable result of the failure of English-speaking Canada — and I am thinking of the most literate and conscious part of it — to come to terms with French culture or to create a truly bilingual nation.

Our inability, after one hundred years of Confederation, to create a minimum literacy in two languages throughout Canada — a simple requirement of elementary education — is in fact the first cause of our cultural division and antagonism. What could be the source of untold cultural wealth and enrichment on both sides of the language barrier is considered instead to be an obstacle and a handicap in the work of building a nation.

In the city of Montreal for example, the choice residential area of Westmount, on the slopes of Mount Royal, is occupied exclusively by English-speaking people, while the French occupy the dull tenement flatlands of the east end, Ville Emard, and Verdun. Westmounters do not bother to learn French or to insist on a really effective programme of teaching French in their schools. They do not bother to read French newspapers or French books. They simple ignore their French compatriots.

How long can we expect the French to take this treatment in their own Province and in Canada as a whole? How long will they be satisfied to remain second-class citizens in their own country? (They constitute one-third of the people of Canada, but in our cultural life they are treated as a foreign element, restricted to their Québec reservation.) It is little wonder that many of them now want to take their Province into their own hands, as French-speaking colonies have done in other parts of the world. There is in fact an organized movement for the establishment of a Laurentian Republic, with offices in Montreal on St. Denis Street (east of the barricades of Main Street), where hotheaded nationalists already hold their conclaves and manufacture propaganda. According to Jean-Charles Harvey of *Le Petit Journal,* one part of this movement is of an extreme rightist, or "fascist", character; another part is of the extreme left.

This is of course a complex problem involving the economic interests, religion and customs of a whole people, as well as their language. But language as the organ of communication contains everything else, and our main failure, symptomatic of our refusal, has been in the sphere of language and literature. A basic French-English literacy should long ago have been our national objective. In literature we should by now have a unified literature with two great branches in two languages. There should be interpenetration and exchange between the two languages, shared influences, the transfer of French mother-country traditions and English literary traditions, to create a rich bilingual literary climate. Obviously, scholars and writers cannot be coerced, and should not even be organized to do these things. They should see the opportunity and take it. But English-speaking writers and critics in Canada have for the most part turned a deaf ear to French language requirements; they have too often failed to learn the language — there are authors and scholars among us who "cannot read French"! — and they have simply not read the books of their French contemporaries. The result is estrangement, politeness, and concealed animosity. While the majority of French Canadians remained themselves semi-literate, under the tutelage of a regressive clergy (though, mind you, not all the Church is in reaction, for there

are churchmen in the new movement of reform), the chauvinist English attitude could continue under a mere shadow of resentment; but a true cultural awakening means an awakening also to the failures and condescensions of English Canada toward the realities and potentialities of the French heritage. It is the French Canadian literati who are asking our literati the unpleasant questions. And the answers had better be carefully phrased.

THE FRENCH INTELLECTUAL is asking what French culture might have been, and might still be, in Canada. He suspects that he has been frustrated by English indifference and lack of sympathy for these potentialities. As an adventuresome Frenchman he finds little in the English mind of the sense of adventure; he wants the French spirit to realize a complete awakening here.

So I think the root of the problem of French-English relations in Canada goes deeper than the matter of conquest and political differences. It has to do with the relation of French and English literatures and cultures over the centuries and the translation of these attitudes to this continent. The problem of breaking down a deeply inbred cultural habit brought over from England, and also from France, is one that has never yet been considered by our critics. But it is this transplanted rigidity of attitude and behaviour that explains our Two Solitudes and continues behind the present cultural-political crisis brewing in Québec.

Chaucer, who lived at a time when Europe was one civilization and the modern language divisions were just beginning, had his "French Period" and more; like all Middle English writing, he was soaked in French influence, since France was then actually the "mother country" of writing men and singers in England. We have never got over the benefit. The jogging, repetitive iambic, replacing Anglo-Saxon pattern and flux, has been the bane of minor English poetry ever since, some think its very signature; whereas it is not in fact native to the language at all, and is contrary to its true spirit. (English is by nature irregular, and trochaic.) However, with the growth of nationalism and the coming of the Reformation, we can see England separating itself off from the Continent and becoming loggy with insularity. Roger Ascham's scorn for "Italianate" Englishmen already has the pride of wholesome home-grown culture in it. And it is doubtful if Shakespeare knew much French: the plays come out of English sources and translations, a few out of Italian, but none directly out of a French

source. Insularity has been the English characteristic ever since.

The exile of Charles II in France, and then the Restoration, brought French Neo-Classicism as we know into England. But the rationalistic dissociation of thought and imagination was already a mental disease by that time, so that the tinkling heroic couplet, the dry satire, the descent to society and manners, have ever since seemed un-English and un-poetical. However, France made possible English prose, and it helped sweep away the gloom of English Puritanism.

But the main retreat of English culture, one which has lasted until the present and which is contemporary with the history of Canada, begins with the end of Neo-Classicism and the rise of Romanticism. At this point, Germany to some extent replaced France as the land of foreign wonders; but even this was minimal. English Romanticism became a home-grown hothouse plant. The French, since they were the prime exponents of witty eighteenth-century verse and prose, and since their Romanticism was delayed a half-century by the Revolution — a Revolution that England greatly feared — came to be avoided by the English with marked prejudice. The French were unromantic, anti-sentimental, and dangerous. The home of Voltaire was antithetical to English romantic feeling. (Hence the English Romantic poets "did not know enough," as Arnold later discovered, about French literature.) And when Romanticism decayed into sentimentality and rank idealism, this repulsion further took the form of resistance to "French immorality".

The rapprochement was further delayed (though a few intrepid souls, like Swinburne and Arthur Symons, broke the sound-barrier) when the Damned Poets, following Baudelaire, cut away from foetid Romanticism and began those antics that we recognize as Modern Poetry. England merely recoiled from such a display of bad taste, and it never produced its own Baudelaire or Rimbaud — at least until the twentieth century. It was only in 1910 that the work of Laforgue, Corbière, and Rimbaud became the springboard for the American-English poets Eliot and Pound. In fact, the pure starch did not come out of English poetry, despite Edith Sitwell, until Dylan Thomas hit it off in 1934. Efforts since then to Millerize and Surrealize, with the help of D. H. Lawrence and French Existentialism, only reveal how deep-rooted are the cultural habits of Imperial conservatism. To join with the French mind is to be enlightened and to be free, something very difficult, perhaps impossible, for the educated gentlemen of England.

To come back to Canada, the literature of this country begins in rotten romanticism, and rotten romanticism is a benighted anti-French movement. Neither Carman nor Lampman knew anything about the dark currents then

surging in French and European literature. Thus Cappon could write —

> For the poetry of Roberts at this period, like Canadian poetry in general, still holds by the old ethical traditions of the great English and American schools of the previous generation. It is virtually unstirred by the subtle reactions of thought which belong to our latest modern schools of verse, by the love of ethical paradox and the neurotic delicacy of sensibility which, for example, characterize the French Verlaines and Mallarmés of the time.[1]

Since then, Canada has developed a form of English genteel culture, patterned on that of England, which is immune to intellectual aliveness, to speculative ideas, to experimental living, or to exploratory writing. Our best English culture has been conservative, cautious, dead-set on traditional values and the advantages of prestige. In short, it has been all-square, or as the Beats say, real cube.

On the other hand, we cannot blame the French *habitant,* illiterate, on the land, cut off from the Revolution by the clergy, cut off from France by the English, for falling into a backwater and for refusing to be enlightened by English culture. He preferred to refuse all culture — but his own wonderful folk spirit, of laughter and farce — for about a century and a half. And it is the English who are to blame, for not opening the door to a true French enlightenment.

We may leave the politicians, the industrialists, and even the people, out of the picture. The educated minority in Canada are the ones who need to become aware of an historic opportunity that has always been lying before them, waiting to be taken up. It is simply the possibility of bringing the great French and the great English traditions of literature face to face, not in the work of some one complex writer, but in an entire culture.

This can be done. It does not mean the assimilation of cultures one to another. It does not mean that the French must lose their character and integrity. They must deepen their character and integrity as they are now doing, in *Liberté* and *Cité Libre,* and in the small publishing houses of Editions du Jour, Editions de l'Homme, Hexagone, and Editions Quartz, where they become more thoroughly themselves by close contact with the new literature from France. French-Canadian culture does not consist of pea-soup, black soutane, or raquetteur's sweater; it consists of *la dolce France* reborn and forever living in French Québec.

> Dans nos gaietés, dans nos souffrances,
> Dans nos chansons, on rest' Français.
> Et quand on prie l'Dieu d'nos croyances,

[1] James Cappon, *Robert and the Influences of his Time,* Toronto, 1905, p. 62.

C'est p't-être en mots mal prononcés;
C'est en vieux mots qui vienn'nt de France
Et qu'les aïeux nous ont laissés.
Et quand on entend: "Viv' la France"
Nos cœurs de gueux sont boul'versés.[2]

But to build our literature, the literati must work to become thoroughly versed both in the mother-literature of the other language and in the current literature of both parts of contemporary Canada. Is it asking too much? It is merely the minimum, if we want to survive very long as a nation.

CANADIAN LITERATURE, if we understand it, becomes the whole literature of France and the whole literature of England standing behind the literature of French Canada and the literature of English Canada. We must conceive of it in this large, dramatic frame, if we are to escape from provincialism and if we are to create a new complex civilization in the north. This, and nothing less, must be our aim.

To make a fair beginning, it should be a requirement of every college teacher of the humanities that he be bilingual and bilingually educated. This should be a permanent criterion for employment and for promotion. (Such a test might help eliminate the pressure on publishing papers and books that nobody reads. It would put the pressure instead on reading.) The same criterion should be applied to English and history teachers in the high schools. (At present not even the French teachers can speak French.) The teaching of French should be reformed in our schools, at whatever cost, on the pattern of language-teaching in the armed forces, where a speaking fluency has been achieved in a very short time. The objective should be speaking and reading ability, not the passing of grammatical examinations. If a large national programme of this kind were undertaken the results would be immediate and permanently beneficial.

The reason why we should emphasize the learning of French and familiarity with French and French-Canadian literature is that the French intellectuals already know English. The pressure to learn English in French Canada is already strong, and it already presents a sufficient educational and economic advantage.

[2] Jean Narrache, *J'Parle tout seul,* Les Éditions de l'Homme, Montreal, 1961.

Only a freshening-up of the educational system is needed to make the efficient teaching of English a natural result. The English, on the other hand, need to know the advantage, or rather the necessity, of learning French. They must learn now, or never.

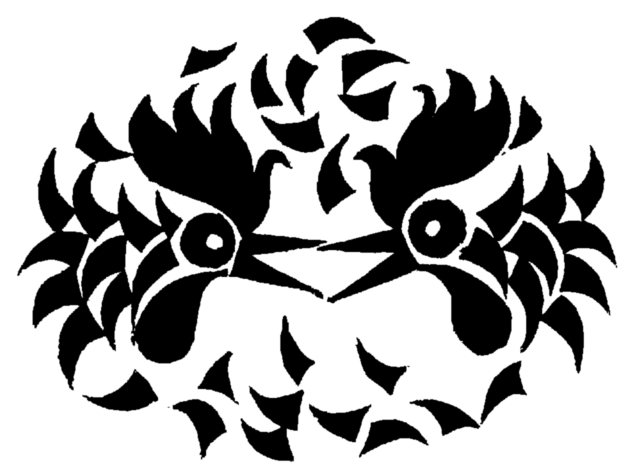
The crisis in Québec is one in which an intellectual minority is carrying out a revolt against the static traditionalism of their own people. These reformers want a separation of Church and State; they want schools independent of the Catholic Church or of any church; they want democracy and justice for minority groups; they want a diversity of opinions, honest journalism, complex art; they want equal taxation, not based on religious affiliation and church membership; they want civil marriages to be legalized; they want the legal oath to be available to the agnostic and non-believer, as it is not at present; they want legal adoption to be free of religious trammels, so that a Protestant mother can adopt a child born illegitimately to a Catholic girl; they want specific and general reforms in education, in the law, in journalism, in literature, in the life of French Canada.

The programmes and directions of this movement are to be found in such books as the satirical best-seller *Frère Untel*; in the brilliant work of satire by Carl Dubuc, *Les Doléances du Notaire Poupart*; in the periodical *Liberté,* edited by Jacques Godbout, and in *Cité Libre;* in the newspaper *Le Devoir* (or even at times in *La Presse, La Patrie,* or the newly-founded *Nouveau Journal*); in the volumes of essays titled *Ecrits du Canada Français;* in the publications of Editions de l'Homme, and of Editions du Jour, under Jacques Hébert, notably the collection of essays in *L'Ecole Laique,* edited by Robert Elie; and in the poetry and prose writing of young French Canada. There is powerful writing, exciting reading here, not of the concocted controversial kind common to English Canadianism (cf. *Maclean's* "For the Sake of Argument"), but passionate debate and persuasion, for the sake of justice, for the sake of truth.

This constructive and progressive intellectual ferment in French Canada is a precious and admirable movement of liberation and betterment. It has only one danger. In its prickly aggressiveness and self-assertion, it has shown that it can turn against the old English strawman-chauvinist as much as against the real forces of reaction at home. And the attack on English Canada as the source of all troubles can bring a possible derailing of all these fine energies, since that is an old escape-valve with all the ignorant passions still behind it. The massive majority of Québec have the necessary prejudices, and the rebellious *élite* have the spark that can set off the proverbial powder keg again.

If that should happen, the bright new movement of enlightenment and libera-

tion would be swallowed up in darkness and returning chaos. For one thing, English Canada would perforce be thrown on the side of extreme reaction, in the necessity to join with the moneyed powers and the politicos, against secession. Perhaps the young separatists do not realize that they are playing with fire; perhaps they do. It is possible that they are trying to get a rise out of us: they are so tired of snobbery, indifference, and apathy. Before it is too late, I hope we can help them and join with them in a more promising course — the way to a greater Canada that is literary in two languages and has a literature in two languages. It is the only way to a true originality for both these literatures, and it is also the way to an endless, unexhausted future of creative effort.



FIRST NIGHT IN EDMONTON

John W. Bilsland

No reader of *Friday's Child* is likely to be surprised by the theme of Wilfred Watson's new play *Cockcrow and the Gulls.* Given its first public performance in Edmonton on March 29, 1962, the work clearly reveals the persistence of Watson's concern with the condition of the human spirit. The mysterious process by which man's fallen nature can achieve a state of grace remains for Watson the essential — and imaginatively the most exciting — experience of life.

In *Friday's Child* the human predicament — the soul in darkness blindly aspiring for the light of grace — was presented in a succession of bewildering, yet pregnant, paradoxes. Running through these was an intense awareness of the intimacy of corruption and purity, of goodness and evil:

> Think you of the pearl.
> Its whiteness is all
> I sing. And out
> Of the murders of the incrusted heart
> Would distil
> And give you to know
> The white pity of the pearl.

And even as "the white pity of the pearl" could emerge from "the murders of the incrusted heart", so, too, in some mysterious fashion could the salvation of man emerge from man's evil. In the *Canticle of Darkness* we were told:

> It was
> The Friday of roses. And there was a rose

Singing the red song of your blossom.
When I came to the rose, there was
Gethsemane. When I came to Gethsemane
There was the rose. Stand gentle in my words
It was the Friday of Golgotha, the place
Of skull. O cross of petals —
O crossed petals —
Stand gentle in my words. For I thought
It was the rose of crucifixion, till I knew
It was the rose of resurrection. Stand
Gentle in my words.

In *Cockcrow and the Gulls* Watson has continued his probing of what he termed in his *Love Song for Friday's Child,* "the flesh corrupted" and

. . . the ceremony of love
Beyond the joining of hands, entire. . . .

In the first act of the play, laid in Nanaimo, one is confronted with man in his corrupted flesh. Here the three focal figures are Cockcrow, a university teacher; O'Reilly, a defrocked priest; and Higgins, a socialist with aspirations far beyond his achieving. Each of these three in some way suggests the futility or viciousness of man's worldly state: for daring to speak the truth as he sees it, Cockcrow has been notified of his dismissal from the university; cast off by the Church, O'Reilly has found himself a believer without belief, a spirit without moorings; and hopeful of raising man's worldly state — making every man a king — Higgins is held down by his hopelessly middle-class wife who can see no further than the joys of some day owning a cosy motel at a "beauty spot". Compositely the three present us with the ideals of truth, faith, and brotherhood, and all these ideals have been darkened or frustrated. Seeking escape from the harsh truth, the three characters come to a brothel, but there they find not escape, only a fleeting delusion of it: in the brothel, as in the world outside, the tormenting sins — pride, wrath, sloth, envy, and lechery — still pester them. There is no earthly release.

At the end of the first act all three of the central figures are dead, as are certain of the prostitutes and Higgins' son, Cyril. The second act is laid in an unidentified region where the spirits of the dead pass through a purgatorial cleansing. They are tried and judged by their own sins, and all but Higgins, the most rational, are led to a re-enactment of the Crucifixion, the victim now being a scarecrow symbolizing God. This ultimate sacrilege is no sooner ended than the full horror of their deed strikes all of them (all but Higgins who *rationally* has now gone to

enjoy the pleasures of this purgatorial state). In total despair they wander lost. But then a mysterious shepherd gives to Alice, one of the prostitutes, a pearl of great price. At first Alice does not know what to do with the pearl, but at last, in the words of the *Love Song for Friday's Child,*

> . . . the thinking heart
> Untied its loving thought.

Alice gives the pearl to one of the others, and each in turn passes it on. Now loving-kindness, vouchsafed first by the Christ-shepherd, rules in place of pride, wrath, sloth, envy, and lechery. Their sins defeated, their hearts contrite, the pilgrims take up the chant of the *Agnus Dei,* and begin the final ascent to the loving presence of God. The state of nature has given way to the state of grace.

It is relatively easy to summarize the central matter of *Cockcrow and the Gulls.* It is not, however, easy to assess the value of the work as a play. The performance given in Edmonton was staged by Studio Theatre, the training ground of the University of Alberta's Drama Division. The cast was remarkably good, the sets by Norman Yates (of the University Fine Arts Department) were both functional and beautiful, and the direction by Gordon Peacock was sensitive and strong.

But the play itself is a curious business. There are exciting moments in it. Watson obviously has gifts as a writer of effective dramatic episodes. The quarrel between Higgins and his wife in the first act is fine comedy, vital, direct, and swift. The tormented relationship between Alice and O'Reilly, both in the brothel and in the after-world, is suggested in a series of painfully vivid episodes. The abrupt intrusions of an elegant James Boswell — cool, urbane, rational — into the spiritual agonies of the piece are moments of contrast as startling as any I can recall ever having seen on the stage. And throughout the play the dialogue has constantly the ring of living speech: even in its most imaginative, allusive passages the text is never academically sterile.

When, however, one has recognized these strengths — and in a first play they are great and promising — one must also recognize that the play has in the theatre two major flaws. The more evident of these is Watson's failure to give flesh and blood to most of the characters who move through his allegory. They endure agonies, and they speak vividly, but they remain distant, symbolic figures, lacking the distinctive qualities necessary if an audience is to find any meaning in the statement, "I am Cockcrow", or "I am Alice". Only one character takes

on a unique vitality, and that is Mrs. Higgins who — limited though she is as a human being — is at least a creature with life.

And there is a weakness which I can describe only as a lack of focus in the play. In a note on the printed programme Gordon Peacock provides the comment, "Wilfred Watson is a poet, and it is not the function of the poet to clarify." I do not know whether or not Watson would support this comment — *Friday's Child* certainly does not bear it out — but I believe his play misfires in the theatre partly because it does *not* clarify the experience it treats. It *is* one of the functions of the poet — whether in or out of the theatre — to clarify experience. *Clarification* does not here imply the reduction of all elements to a basic simplicity, but it does imply that an experience be brought into focus, that it be shaped, that it reveal what Coleridge calls "unity in multeity". *Cockcrow and the Gulls* does not reveal this focus. It is easy in the aftermath to establish the allegorical pattern of the piece, but in the theatre I was constantly plagued with a feeling of bits and pieces. There was a fine hostility between Higgins and his wife, there was a frighteningly dangerous innocence in young Cyril Higgins, there was a potentially tragic love between Alice and O'Reilly, there was a conflict of principle between Cockcrow and his university, there was the love of the shepherd for the lost souls — there was all this and much more, but the total effect for me was chaotic. Had the play succeeded in suggesting that life itself is chaotic the effect could, of course, have been quite legitimate, but there is a wide gulf between the work of art which suggests the chaos of life, and the work which is itself chaotic. For all its riches, for all its promise, I cannot avoid the feeling that *Cockcrow and the Gulls* is chaotic as a work of art.

The Edmonton performance of Wilfred Watson's play was an important event. I do not believe the work is a total success, and I doubt that it will attract much attention beyond Canadian literary circles. But I am convinced that it heralded the appearance of a very considerable dramatic talent: any author who in his first play could write a *Cockcrow and the Gulls* is potentially a great dramatist.

review articles

GUESTS AND NATIVES

Phyllis Webb

JOHN REEVES. *A Beach of Strangers*. Oxford University Press. $2.75.
D. G. JONES. *The Sun Is Axeman*. University of Toronto Press. $3.00.

I SUPPOSE John Reeves' *A Beach of Strangers,* a play for radio in verse and prose, deserved to be published: it won the Italia Prize in 1959, it has been translated into many languages and it has been given a stage production. The play will strike an innocent ear as brilliantly original. However, it is difficult for one familiar with Dylan Thomas' poetic technique and his "play for voices," *Under Milk Wood,* to read *A Beach of Strangers* without feeling a jealous loyalty for Thomas' achievement and a sense that eclectic guests (no matter how bright and witty and talented) must not be seated as hosts.

Under Milk Wood begins at night and with dreams, opens into morning, lulls into afternoon, and, while Polly Garter makes absent-minded love in Milk Wood, drowns dusk in dark. *A Beach of Strangers* also takes as its basic unit a day, a night and dreams, but triplicates and complicates it into a musical structure. A microcosmic world gathers on this beach, drawn by the returning tide, for "water is man's first womb."

Here is a beach. Down from the dunes
In the emerald air of summer a hundred
Strangers scramble, in whose sundered
Vision there are a hundred versions

Of the beach and of each other, all
unreconciled. . . .

We do not find exactly a hundred strangers but a goodly pack: the nymphs and gnomes of the libido, the dwarfs and fairies of the ego, the witches and giants of the superego. Freud would be pleased with Mr. Reeves.

The first of the triple views of the day introduces us to a medley of malmated pairs who are, on the whole, "in their habit of disharmony wholly content": the MacAndrews, Uncle Alice and Aunt Henry, Mr. and Mrs. Pycroft, the Reverend Bunyon Tredwells. There are others, including a talking dog named Albert and an Eliotic crab ("I should have been a pair of ragged paws"). Mrs. MacAndrew, who is "neat as a new-laid pin, houseproud and death on germs" and Uncle Alice, with her "manacling régime of swims and constitutionals" for her unrealized homo husband, together combine into a simulacrum of Thomas' famous Mrs. Ogmore-Pritchard. But all these strangers who come to this primal beach for the sub-

versive encounter with their primal selves remain strangers to themselves and to each other, though their tentacles feast on an air of small messages of need, of irritation, or of love. Reeves succeeds in producing the virile fantasy lives of his characters mainly through a technique (also used by Thomas) by which the characters narrate about themselves. It is a technique particularly suited to radio, and there is no doubt that Reeves is a sure craftsman in his medium. The rapid shifts in viewpoint and time are achieved gracefully and effectively.

The second view of the day focuses on Charlie Minto, "ten next birthday and old in the mystery of grown-up sloth," but innocent in his love for Miss Ogilvie, until Giant Bunyon Tredwell's reverence for sin strips down this Beach of Eden to smoking serpent and rotted apples. The unhinging of Charlie is concluded by the incredible scene in which the bosom of Miss Ogilvie is accidentally bared to the ten-year eyes, a scene so incredible I suppose it really could happen. Charlie releases fully the theme of lost innocence and the entry into human separateness so that by the end of the day he is a fully-fledged member of this beach of strangers.

With the third view, new characters enter their broken psyches and their lambent needs, and previously introduced characters count their points in the incremental day. Like *Under Milk Wood,* this play ends with pure sex in the pure night, with a Jack and a Jill (like Polly Garter) content in their mortality.

These three views of the day are introduced by verse spoken by disembodied

THE GUTENBERG GALAXY:

The Making of Typographic Man

by Marshall McLuhan

A book to cause argument and make men think, this challenging interpretation of Western culture shows the changes in the nature of man and society since the coming of alphabetic communication, and suggests that the translation of tribal man into his Western form has occurred by the agency of phonetic literacy alone. 300 pages, $5.95.

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO PRESS

female and male voices which, chorus-like, set scene, evoke mood, philosophize long-windedly on man's estate, and work as very practical transitional servants. Verse which has such a multiplicity of jobs to do can, and does here, fail as poetry. Paradoxically, Reeves' prose is far more poetic in its brightness, concreteness, invention, and rhythm, though this achievement is in method so close to Thomas as to be embarrassing. We find the tranferred epithets, the wrenching of nouns out of their normal syntactic function (a good enlivener if not overdone), puns with their jostling levels of meaning, and parody of stock phrases: "his wedded knife," "holy padlock," (cf. Thomas, "his awful wedded wife"). That Reeves often rises to the level of his master is cause for both hope and despair. A verbal trick that is almost a verbal tic takes as its model Thomas' "When all my five and country senses see" to register in such phrases as, "five and mortal senses," "two and private hearts," "new and Spanish castle," "first and fancy name," etc. The concluding lines of Thomas' "Ballad of the Long-legged Bait," "He stands alone at the door of his home, / With his long-legged heart in his hand" is echoed in Reeves' ". . . and as they trail homeward, if the truth be known, it is her heart that hangs by a strap from her elbow. . . ." Though Thomas is the major shaping ghost in this play, Eliot, Auden, and Cummings also spirit around. The problem is, I suppose, one of identity, which is lost in more than the invading influences. English, American, and Canadian vocabularies and phrasing smack against each other in a disconcerting way, ignoring the truth that allegorical writing usually ascends more quickly to symbol the more precisely its reality is defined. Though the reader is occasionally invited to concur in an act of symbolic faith, *A Beach of Strangers* frequently suceeds as a sentimental allegory of the human isolate reaching out for love at the edge of the water.

Both *A Beach of Strangers* and *The Sun Is Axeman,* by D. G. Jones, are handsomely produced books, a pleasure to hand and eye. The poems in Jones' book depend delicately from the top of the page, reminding me of that excellent poem which opened his first book, *Frost on the Sun,* with the question, "Do poems too have backbones?" In that book, D. G. Jones explained that his poems were

> . . . attempts to apprehend and understand fragments of experience . . . to capture and suggest the sense that the universe is a vast pool, globe, or continuum of energy — mysterious and potent — in which the individual thing or creature participates, changes, or dies.

The dominant sun of his poetry symbolizes that continuum of energy, with its creative and destructive potential. The sun *is* axeman, "it crashes in the alders," but it also produces dazzling protective revelations:

> So extensive is the clarity of this world
> the bones of animals are luminous and dry —
> ("Death of a Hornet")
>
> . . . and all my envy melts like snow before the vast
> rhetoric of the sun, to which the earth
> listens in silence
> and responds.
> ("Standing in the April Noon")

The sun and weather, birds and girls are centring images in this carefully crafted work. The clarity, control, and music of these poems reveal the benevolent influences of W. C. Williams and

Pound, influences which have been absorbed and used towards a personal utterance:

> The birds
> Nest
> Among the flowers and stone.
>
> They have tiny claws.
>
> And when they light upon the bushes
> They are weightless stone —
> Bursts of rough stone.

The poem from which these lines are taken, "Snow Buntings", is one of the best in the book. These birds, followed through the seasons of the sun, are imaged successively as "snow", as "earth", as "flowers", as "stones", as "wood", as "wood and stone becoming something else," as "little skeletons", as "mouths, mouths", as "feathered seeds", and finally as snow again, as "blizzards". The poem is played out evenly, carefully, to the proper depth for the catch, and then hauled back in a triumphant arc. The patient fisherman can also be found at work in "Sketches for a Portrait of F.R.S.", in the complex "Soliloquy for Absent Friends" — a poem "rich in loneliness" — and in "Les Masques de l'âme", where the hook is not so sharp nor so alluringly baited. For a poet whose imaginative range is somewhat limited, Jones appears remarkably at home in these longer poems. The reasons for this security are not hard to find, for his poetic aims are as lucid as his poetic line:

> So let my mind
> be, like this river,
> thin as glass
> that thunder, dark clouds, rain,
> the violent winds, may pass
> and leave no lasting darkness in their wake. . . .
> ("The River: North of Guelph")

Occasionally the fear of leaving a "lasting darkness" results in a dodge into coyness. "Clotheslines", for instance, which begins with a tone I can describe only as a normal nobility, promising Williamsesque truths from common things, drops down into coy self-consciousness. The same kind of thing happens in "Olympus in the Afternoon" which, for me, is troubled by a too gentle wit. The poetic direction suggested in the first part of "Clotheslines," is fulfilled in Jones' poem "On the 24th of May", in "Beautiful Creatures Brief as These" and many others. The overall achievement of *The Sun Is Axeman* results in a distinctive voice, a poetry of lovely assonances, syllabic grace, of insights glancing from a landscape "in which the birds or trees / Find all their palpable relations with the earth."

THE CALLAGHAN CASE

George Woodcock

MORLEY CALLAGHAN. *A Passion in Rome*. Macmillan. $4.95.

DURING THE PAST year or so we have been witnessing a minor tragedy of the literary world which contains so many object lessons for writers that it might be called The Callaghan Case. Until about a year ago Morley Callaghan was proceeding on the even way of a moderately successful writer. He had picked up a certain celebrity as a radio and television "personality"— the Author as Plain Man — which did no good to his literary reputation, though it may have brought other rewards. In the sparsely populated upper level of Canadian writing he enjoyed an eminence that came partly from scarcity of competition and partly from his real achievements as a novelist and a short story writer. He had even a modest standing abroad dating from the distant days of the twenties when he had contributed to highbrow international magazines, and he wore like a medal the repute of having been a friend of Hemingway in the good old days of the Lost Generation. A few critics placed him high in his particular setting. "Morley Callaghan," said Robert Weaver in an early issue of *Canadian Literature*, "is the most important novelist and short story writer in English Canada, and he is the only prose writer of an older generation who might have much influence on the young writers of today." Others declared him a good short story writer who had not enough sense of literary architecture to be a satisfying novelist, and yet others found him a dull and pedestrian sentimentalist with occasional moments of fine craftsmanship or sure insight. But nobody, to my knowledge, suggested that one of the world's great writers, fit to be compared with the finest talents of the past, dwelt among us in the modest obscurity of Toronto.

It was left to an American critic, the eloquent and eclectic Edmund Wilson, to make this astonishing discovery. Callaghan, Wilson claimed, was an author fit to be classed with Turgenev and Chekhov. It is not clear why he chose these two particular writers for comparison, since there is as little in common between the urban misfits of whom Callaghan writes and the intellectual outcasts whose predicaments Turgenev delineates with such sophisticated pessimism as there is between Callaghan's "coarse-grained, serviceable, burlap style" (as Milton Wilson has called it) and the subtle and evocative manner, rich in suggestive imagery, with which Chekhov presents the frail agonies of a dying society. But the occasional irresponsibilities of critical mandarins are liable to have disconcerting effects in a literary world excessively concerned with the semblances of prestige. Callaghan's fame

rose like a great insubstantial balloon; it was quickly brought to earth, and by Callaghan himself, who published the novel — *A Passion in Rome* — which not even his most devoted admirer could compare with the masterpieces of the Russian Golden Age.

If ever an author learnt the bitter rewards of an unjustified elevation, it was Callaghan on this occasion. The hunt was on, the reviewers a pack in full cry, and the incident reached its deplorable climax when the author, run to earth in a *Fighting Words* programme, turned on his critics with all the petulance of a bitterly disappointed man. One can have little sympathy with Callaghan's performance on this occasion. In publishing his work, a writer automatically places it before the world for judgment, and, with as much dignity and detachment as he can muster, he should accept both the blame and the praise. In the long run, an honest adverse critic is a better friend to an author than a critic who out of some error of judgment or some mistaken impulse of good will finds in him the seeds of a greatness he does not really possess.

But when all is said, the false fame created by Edmund Wilson's indiscretion and the reaction that followed so inevitably are only incidents in the kind of ephemeral public career that runs parallel to an author's real career — that exemplified in his actual works. We have to forget what was said in the *New Yorker* and on *Fighting Words*, and to judge Callaghan's works for themselves. Is *A Passion in Rome* a good and convincing novel? And what relation does it bear to Callaghan's other writing? These

Robert Gibbings: *A Bibliography by Mary Kirkus and Patience Empson*

For forty years Robert Gibbings was an outstanding figure in the world of books, as he fulfilled the functions of typographer, artist, writer and book designer. He will always be remembered as a leader in the revival of wood-engraving in the twenties, and as director for nine years of the Golden Cockerel Press. Robert Gibbings set his seal upon his period, and a record of his tremendous energy and creative output is contained in these pages, which list over 1,500 of his engravings.
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are the questions a critic must ask, and particularly when — as seems to me the case with Callaghan — the author has reached a turning point in his development.

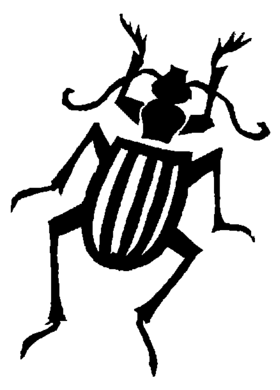
A Passion in Rome differs from Callaghan's earlier novels in one obvious and important respect. In the past he dealt with his own country, and with people who were for some reason at variance with the societies from which they sprang and in which they had remained. There was an inevitable dialectical process; the rejection that innocence or oddity encountered was itself a deprivation that intensified the desire for acceptance and deepened the tragedy of alienation. Harry Lane, in *The Many-Coloured Coat,* strives to establish his blamelessness in the eyes of society; Kip Caley, in *More Joy in Heaven,* lives in an euphoric illusion of public acceptance until he realizes the hollowness of his fool's paradise and is slaughtered by the agents of the society he sought to please and serve; even Peggy Sanderson in *The Loved and the Lost* merely contracts out of one section of her society to seek her place in another — that of the Negroes of Montreal, and her real tragedy is not her gruesome death at the hands of a sex murderer, but the rejection by her chosen people that just precedes it during the night-club riot. Even Father Dowling in *Such is my Beloved* never rebels against the Church that condemns him; he merely tries to put into practice according to his own lights its most sacred injunctions, and the misunderstanding of his efforts brings about his mental breakdown. There is no escape, nor is there a real longing for escape; each misfit plays out his tragedy within a society that breeds him, rejects him and then destroys him.

In *A Passion in Rome* the sequence is at last broken. From the very beginning when the photographer Sam Raymond feels scared and alone in a city he had never seen before, the emphasis is on the contrast between the environment and the main characters, Sam and Anna Connel, whose love affair runs its course in the magnificent but alien surroundings of antique and papal Rome. Both of them were failures at home — Sam an unsuccessful painter turned newspaper photographer and Anna a singer ruined by drink — but both escape from their North American world — the own world that had destroyed the earlier heroes and heroines — and seek new places to find themselves again. Sam, who had felt "alone" in his own country, wonders as he drives into Rome from the airport "if there couldn't still be some one place in the world where a man's life might take on meaning"; Anna, who has Italian blood in her veins, creates the fantasy that she is a "Roman woman", when she in fact never anything more than a displaced and disoriented American. Inevitably, both Sam and Anna fail to find a world which will submerge them in either acceptance or destruction; their Rome is always the false Rome of tourists and pilgrims, the grand façade behind which the little dark Romans live out their inscrutable lives beyond the reach of transient aliens. They are forced to face each other, to work out their agonies and problems in the closeness of a symbolic single room rather than in the forest of society, and at last, regenerated, they are able to part heroically and face the future with the exultance bred of self-discovery. Home will no longer have the power to destroy

them. For once Callaghan has written a novel which ends, if not exactly happily, at least triumphantly, without the death or moral destruction of the leading characters. It is a departure from an established pattern, and any departure by a mature author stirs one's interest.

Such an interest is ill-rewarded by *A Passion in Rome*. It is clumsy, prolix and dull. The structure is ramshackle, the characters do not convince, the prose is Callaghan's worst. Let us begin with his people.

There are two kinds of literary plausibility — that which comes from creating a naturalistic illusion of life, and that which comes from creating a symbolic pattern so self-consistent that the reader will accept it apart from any thought of ordinary realism. Callaghan, though he probably sees himself as a naturalistic writer, had never been strong on plausibility in this sense. His details are slipshod, and his characters often behave with the kind of inconsistency that springs from poor co-ordination rather than from a Dostoevskian sense of the supreme illogicality of human nature. The fine and well-poised lady, Catherine Carver, in *The Loved and the Lost,* screams like a fishwife at a hockey game, and we feel embarrassed, not because Catherine's actions do not fit *logically* together, but because there is none of that strange appropriateness which the outrageous acts of Svidrigailoff and Stavrogin assume once they have been committed. The only characters of Callaghan that really succeed are those who are simple even in their eventual ambivalence, whose actions are consistent no matter how equivocal their final implications may be. We pause in our judgment of Peggy Sanderson in *The Loved and the Lost,* but we never feel there is a failure of appropriateness in her actions once we have become aware of her predicament. Nevertheless, it is impossible to accept even the best characters in Callaghan's novels as plausible in a realistic manner; their very simplicity gives them a curiously obsessional quality, and they only become plausible if we regard them — as we regard the characters of Balzac — as symbolic figures within the structure of moral parables. For Callaghan is, essentially, a moralist; he uses his works to make certain clear statements about the problems that afflict man once he becomes aware of himself as an individual, which usually implies the discovery that he is in opposition to society. In such terms, and in such terms alone, his best earlier novels, like *Such is My Beloved* and *More Joy in Heaven,* are acceptable.



In *A Passion in Rome* even this kind of plausibility falls apart. In Rome, the eternal city which suggests the cyclic recurrence of every human problem and at the same time the perennial power of man to endure and to triumph, the Pope dies and the great drama is enacted of

the widowhood of the Church and her re-marriage at the moment the new Pope is elected. Parallel with this public drama runs the private drama of Sam and Anna, both bereaved beings in the lower depths of spiritual deprivation, who come together and save each other through the trials of love. Such mutual salvations do happen, even in real life, but Callaghan does not make that of Sam and Anna fictionally credible. His gift is not fitted for the task of describing exotic events and grandiose backgrounds, and his characters, wandering in the stucco sets of a film-maker's Rome, are the intrinsically lifeless puppets of a deterministic viewpoint. Callaghan has never dared to present, in his novels at least, a character as he merely *is*; the way he has become so in the victimising past is always abundantly presented, but never has the *curriculum vitae* been so uglily obstrusive as in the cases of Sam and Anna. Their triumphant recovery is a projection of every psycho-analyst's dream, but it is the least believable event in the whole novel and it is shuffled off so summarily — in comparison with the spreading laxness of the rest of the book — that one feels the author himself did not find it very convincing.

The mechanically exemplary nature of Sam and Anna make them unsuccessful either as straight realistic characters or as the types of effective parable; their failure is most clearly revealed in the way they speak. Callaghan's characters have always talked in a Callaghanese patois, unlike anything one is likely to hear in the streets, but usually idiosyncratic enough to be acceptable in its pebbly laconism. Sam and Anna talk out their passion with a prosy dullness.

> "Well, that's that," she said flatly.
> "What do you mean?"
> "I don't get to sing, do I?"
> "Sing where?"
> "Well, in one of the spots around here. What was I supposed to be getting ready for all this time?"
> "Sing around here?"
> "What's the matter? I'm at home here."

And so they go on. The passage is taken out of context, but it would be wrong in any context.

Some of the faults of *A Passion in Rome* may have come from hasty writing; a feeling of exhaustion pervades the novel from end to end. But in a larger sense it seems to prove what I have always suspected; that Callaghan's is a gift best used in portraying those moments of revelation which result in good short stories, and that as he proceeds to more ambitious works it thins out and becomes inadequate for the complexities of large structures and sustained characterization. The publishers call this a "major novel", and that is clearly what Callaghan has attempted to write; it is as if a proficient lapidary had tried to carve a sculpture in the manner of Michelangelo.

INNER OR OUTER FLAW?

E. B. Gose

GERARD BESSETTE. *Not For Every Eye.* Macmillan $3.00.

MARIE-CLAIRE BLAIS. *Tête-Blanche.* McClelland and Stewart, Cloth, $3.50. Paper $2.35.

WHEN THE tight world of feudalism began breaking up during the Renaissance, a new literary form emerged: the novel, in the form of the picaresque tale. Its rogue hero existed by virtue of his opposition to outworn moral and social codes. If French-Canada can be seen as another tight world, held rigidly to the past by its parochial structure, then *Not for Every Eye* may herald another breakup. Unlike the traditional picaresque tale, Mr. Bessette's novella does not have a series of adventures (although the central action is carefully framed by the journeys to and from the provincial Quebec town in which it takes place). Nor is the hero a conventional rogue. Rather he is that twentieth-century favourite, the disengaged hero, the intellectual who would rather drink by himself than fight physical or social battles. But like the picaresque hero, M. Jodoin has so much pressure put on him by the social system and the selfish people who have accommodated themselves to it that he is finally moved to action, to an immoral coup which gulls the guller (his former boss).

The bleak world which Mr. Bessette purposefully creates to characterize provincial life and the first-person hero who is caught by it is broken only once, when M. Jodoin is about to be forced to act. The hero's reaction brings to the surface the principle at work in this low-pressure novel.

> Once outside, I perceived that the weather was fine. I was surprised: ordinarily I pay no attention to the temperature unless it is extreme and uncomfortable. Even then it is purely a sensory impression which does not penetrate my consciousness. But no matter. That particular morning the sun had caught the street on the flank and inflamed the shop windows. Perhaps it was this dazzling reflection that brought me out of my shell and allowed me to take in the intense blue of the sky, which was soft as silk and dotted with tiny round clouds like puffs of pipe smoke. The sensation was so new, so powerful, that I paused a moment in admiration. Those who are frequently touched by such a feeling are fortunate. At least, I suppose they are. But then ugliness must distress them, too, so perhaps the whole thing balances up. But no matter.

Picaresque novels run the risk of losing the reader's interest because of their artless surface. And, being a reaction to society, they often reveal too little of the author's sensibility to excite the reader. Miss Blais' new novel is therefore a welcome antidote to Mr. Bessette's. Treating the same ingrown society, she has written a poetic novel concerned mainly with the individual and the cosmos. If the texture of *Tête Blanche* is less dense than that of her first novel, *La Belle Bête* (*Mad Shadows*), it still has many virtues.

Like *La Belle Bête, Tête Blanche* por-

trays the evolution of a young sensibility. Hate and first love are central to both, as are the protagonists' ambiguous feelings toward their mothers. In making a boy, instead of a young woman, the centre of her new novel, Miss Blais has taken a step away from subjectivity, as is also indicated by the form (three sets of letters and a dairy, as well as three sections of direct narration). The effort is not entirely successful, although the mixture of conventions is as easy for the reader to accept in practice as is the diary convention of *Not for Every Eye*. Because of her poetic temperament, Miss Blais finds it natural to be universal but has difficulty being merely objective. Consequently the reader finds the coming of womanhood in Emilie more immediate than most of the experience of her lover, Tête Blanche, the central figure. Since Miss Blais has chosen to focus on the childhood and adolescence of her protagonist, the novel is also weakened by a certain precociousness and sentimentality. But as was even more true of her first novel, Miss Blais is able to rise above these defects. The rigour of her imagination transcends stock emotion. Capable of sensitive feeling, her imagination yet looks beyond weakness to find the strength to connect with the outside world, to communicate.

In fact, the theme of the necessity of communication helps to justify the varied form of this novel. Part One is in the third person, showing the thoughts of a five-year-old Tête Blanche who is tempted to harm a sick school chum, which he does without detection. Part Two switches to letters to his mother, ending with her death. Part Three re-

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verts to the interior with a diary of the boy's reaction to death and his meeting with Emilie, "a spring, a resurrection?" Part Four, love letters exchanged between Tête Blanche and Emilie, constitutes another attempt at communication, culminating in his going to spend some of the summer with her family (fatherless, as Miss Blais' families usually are). Part Five is third person narrative, giving the thoughts of both lovers. It concludes with Emilie pulling away from Tête Blanche. "He knew that he would not find Emilie again until later, that she would be transformed and as remote as a woman." Part Six re-establishes communication with another set of letters, this time between Tête Blanche and his former schoolmaster, M. Brenner, who emerges as both human and tough.

> I am strict with the children because I cannot be gentle. These little fellows are growing up amid all sorts of privations; I know that when they leave the school, they will be hard put to it to develop into well-balanced men; but I cannot repair all the wrongs done by parents, living or lost. . . . I love these children; that is all I can do; and I think I love them cruelly.

Against the will of Tête Blanche, who would like to retain a cloistered and "mournful sense of security," M. Brenner forces him to stop living in school and to move to the town, admonishing, "How guilty you will feel, later on, for having preferred night and a spurious peace to the sun of your fifteen years, which should be the sun of beauty." In his last letter, Tête Blanche doubts his ability to break out of his solitary pride into love (communication). In a short Epilogue, we see him on a street, struggling in a compelling phantasmagoria of pursuit and loss.

Those who feel that the novel ought to deal with society will appreciate Mr. Bessette's uninspired irony and satire more than Miss Blais' emotional struggles. Self-deprecating though he is, Mr. Bessette's hero is finally content to take his direction from the holes left in the social framework. Miss Blais insists on what seems to me a finer truth for North America, that the important problems which face the individual must be taken as given and internal, not blamed on the system.

MONTREAL IN FICTION

WILLIAM WEINTRAUB. *Why Rock the Boat?* Little, Brown. $4.75.

ABRAHAM STILLMAN. *Mariette.* Burns & McEachern.

ONE READS *Mariette* uttering exclamations out loud. They give the reader a little traction with which to keep going on the slippery surface of this narrative. *Mon Dieu, quel cliché*! The book is set in Montreal and concerns the very rich Allard family watched over by an even richer Grandfather Paradis, and the very rich Levy family. *Les Enfants du Paradis* become tangled up with the Levy spawn when Chance flings Mariette Allard into the arms of Eric Levy and the two help the author spin out a "poignant story of young love versus devotion to one's family", as the blurb-writer, neatly falling in with the author's style, puts it.

The trouble is, both the author and the blurb-writer are serious. Were this a Harlequin Romance, it could probably be ignored and good luck to it, but its tone and presentation forbid the reviewer any other attitude but that of the author. The temptation is to sit down and write the man a long letter and say, look here, to begin with novels are supposed to have characters in them and when they're faced with situations that gravely threaten their very survival as the people they think themselves to be, then they have to react. Because you say they have shaken hands it does not mean they have met, or because you make them throw themselves across a bed to cry it does not signify that they are suffering. You should not be afraid to create them so that they rebel a little when you try to shove them around. Like God Himself, you can only go so far with creation and then your people are on their own. After that the best you can do is force them to prove themselves. Do this and perhaps your use of the language will improve too because, instead of writing a bookful of statements which are as tired as any plot quite naturally is, you will find that you are writing in a way that will be governed by your characters and, in the end, your characters will *be* the plot. If a real French-Canadian Catholic Mariette met a real Jewish-Canadian Eric, both of them from old and rich bastion families in their separate cults, then all hell should break loose. Instead you have created a couple of cultural wetbacks, cut from cardboard, and placed at the mercy of a plot that could easily have been fashioned by a sub-committee formed at the annual meeting of the Canadian Authors' Association. Sorry to be so harsh, and probably patronizing too, but I think you've got something to say about the clash of religion and society in your favourite city. As a reader I'd like to feel it and live it, rather than hear about.

Let's cut to camera two. The scene is still Montreal, but the picture is clearer. *Why Rock the Boat* is about a cub reporter on the Montreal *Daily Witness*; his adventures are intended to be funny, and for the most part they are. The book is written smoothly and with com-

mand. The point here is that the village pumps we call newspapers in this country are exactly that. This incontrovertible truth is large enough to support Mr. Weintraub's satire without strain of any kind, and Harry Barnes, the cub, is a large enough character to sustain the hyperbole around him. A small-town boy who has come to the city with stars in his eyes about big-time journalism, he finds his paper is interested only in Names and reporting service club luncheon speeches in order to gain circulation and not offend anyone, especially an advertiser. You would expect him to rebel. Not Harry. He isn't going to rock the boat. Harry, in short, is every yellow-blooded Canadian boy, and his turning of Montreal's newspaper world upside down comes more from his backing away from its problems than from facing up to them. What happens is that he falls in love, and we all know what an uncontrollable emotion that is. And he falls in love with a girl rebel on another newspaper. Hence the conflict: he must talk like a rebel while in her company and act like a typical "*Witness* man" around the paper. Eventually the strain is too much. He does rebel, and with the help of a lot of plot machinery he brings ruin to the *Witness,* gets a better job on the rival paper and probably gets the girl too.

There are a lot of old newspaper jokes in this book, a lot of stereotype situations and characters, but it moves along swiftly and it is genuinely amusing. Mr. Weintraub does not have the coy or high-school-annual approach to humour that so many of our would-be comics have. He even has a pretty grown-up attitude toward sex. Occasionally he gets off a memorable line, and always his parodies of after-dinner speeches, edi-

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torials and the tribal customs of clubs and convention-holders of all kinds are satisfyingly vicious. I must say I began the book with the bored and cynical approach of a "*Witness* man" scanning the head table at a Rotary luncheon, but it was not long before I was feeling genuine delight. And after I had finished the book I was ready to hope that Mr. Weintraub would not try to do this sort of thing again but would go on and use his genuine talent to dig deeper and more surely among the roots of Canadian life. He might even find that truly comic hero: the man who knows something, who has discovered a positive truth about the world in which he lives. I have a feeling Harry Barnes was leaning in that direction.

ROBERT HARLOW

ORDINARY PEOPLE

NORMAN LEVINE. *One Way Ticket.* McClelland & Stewart. $3.50.

CANADIAN FICTION needs more writers like Norman Levine who will lift the short story from its secondary place in Canadian letters to a position of prominence. Callaghan has given some good short stories, and now there is Levine who has consciously shaped his stories into compact pieces of construction, economy, and apt characterization. In them manner and matter are closely linked, and are an end in themselves. Levine's stories are not associated to a larger scheme as are those of many short story writers (Katherine Mansfield's New Zealand stories are an example of this). Rather, when his stories are finished, he has said all that he feels is necessary. Finely wrought, carefully explained, Levine's stories are complete; the reader does not wonder what happened before the action began, or what will occur in the future. There is never a vagueness about the stories; never is the reader left in obvious doubt. This certainty, or lucidity, in his work, is his most compelling quality, the factor which makes Levine a distinguished writer among the many new Canadian writers. He is a sincere and simple teller of tales; in an age which boasts of being astute and knowing in experience, Levine's unsophisticated stories appeal, if only because they are always readily understood and unequivocal.

Levine does not experiment with the story form, as a novelist frequently does. Nor does he develop and strengthen the theme as the story progresses; it is completely thought out before he begins. In *One Way Ticket* there are eight short stories and one long one, each dealing with a number of journeys. The long story is the poorest, where the focus is more on character and the episodes are selected to display the character's personality. In the others, however, the character is selected to point out a significant episode. It is hoped that Levine will stay with the story form, for this collection indicates that if he were to write a novel the quality of sustainment would be lacking, as it is in this book in "The Playground".

The title of the book is misleading. The publisher tells us, on the jacket blurb, that these are stories where the narrator holds a return ticket; it is the other people who have to remain where they are, who have only 'one way tickets'

that the book is about. But even the narrator at times has a 'one way ticket'. He seems to want to leave what he finds, but he never does; he finds similar things each time.

There is, however, a diversified picture of life in Levine's stories; he moves from one extreme to another in attitude and is careful not to merge these into an ineffectual medium. On one level his stories are complete with strong realism, ordinary simplicity of common men, and graphic actual description. On the other level there are the fantasy and psychological studies, as in "Ringa Ringa Rosie", interspersed with lyrical passages and subtleties which are interesting in themselves.

Levine is a sincere author who writes stories showing a unique ability to tell a complete tale. Showing does not necessarily mean displaying. Levine's stories, indeed, make little obvious display at all. That, perhaps is why many people would prefer the stories of a Lawrence or a Huxley. Levine's work is free from affectation. His full appeal is not immediate. The reward with the stories of Norman Levine lies not merely in the number of separate examples of fine stories in this volume, but in the way that they go so well together to produce a wonderfully rich and varied picture of ordinary people.

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HERO WITHOUT A FACE

ROBERT D. FERGUSON. *Fur Trader: The Story of Alexander Henry.* Macmillan. $2.50.

Fur Trader, most recent of Macmillan's Great Stories of Canada, is the second tale Robert Ferguson has written for the series. His first contribution, *Man from St. Malo,* set a high standard both for himself and for other contributors. *Fur Trader,* though a passably interesting story, fails by a long portage to live up to the promise of his first book and dismally fails to take advantage of his source material, Henry's *Travels and Adventures in Canada and the Indian Territories Between the Years 1760 and 1776.*

Mr. Ferguson states in his foreword that Henry's *Travels and Adventures* is "one of the best books ever written about a trader's experiences". It is all of that and more. One of the first traders, after the fall of New France, to travel into the Indian Territories, Henry was courageous, shrewd, perceptive, humorous and intellectually curious as well as a

writer of considerable talent. It is difficult to believe that anyone reading Henry's narrative could fail to perceive these qualities in the man. But in *Fur Trader: the Story of Alexander Henry,* the hero is a man without a face.

Mr. Ferguson's failure to flesh the body and delineate the features appears to be due to lack of sympathy for his subject and / or to a failure of perception and to an inability to organize his material into a strong narrative centred around Henry. An obvious example of Mr. Ferguson's failure of perception occurs in his narration from Henry's *Travels and Adventures* of a revealing and humorous incident which took place when Henry, after being captured by the Indians, was adopted by an Indian family and spent a winter with them in the wilderness. From some close observations Henry made one day, while out hunting, he believed a bear was hibernating in a hole near the top of a huge tree. Henry and the Indian family cut the tree down and Henry shot the bear. Mr. Ferguson quotes from Henry's narrative that when the Indians reached the dead bear they "took its head in their hands, stroking and kissing it several times; begging a thousand pardons for taking away her life; calling her their relation and grandmother; and requesting her not to lay the fault upon them, since it was truly an Englishman that had put her to death". So far this is fine but Mr. Ferguson, not perceiving Henry's dry humour, misses and omits the climax at the beginning of the next paragraph: "This ceremony was not of long duration and if it was I that killed their grandmother they were not themselves behind in what remained to be performed." This is only one of innumerable lost opportunities to fill in the features of the face with its ironic eyes and behind them the shrewd and perceptive mind.

Lack of sympathy with the subject (or a deadline which did not provide sufficient time) provides the most likely reason, too, for an episodic and poorly organized narrative. Henry is left standing, faceless and forgotten in the wilderness for over twenty pages while historical background, much of it unnecessary, is sketched in, and in only thirty-eight pages the narrative hurries through the last two-thirds of his travels and adventures.

Nevertheless, Mr. Ferguson has written, as I said at the beginning of this review, a passably interesting story. If he has been able to do this, in spite of all the sins of error and omission mentioned here, we can look optimistically towards the publication of his third book.

INGLIS F. BELL

NO TRUE LIFE

ROBERT FINCH. *Dover Beach Revisited.* Macmillan. $3.00

PARTICULARLY in a young country, which must cling to its illusions, having as yet a limited number of achievements to substitute for them, accuracy and candour will often be taken for malevolence. In a radio programme years ago, when Douglas Grant deplored the fact that there were two kinds of book reviewing in Canada, a specially indulgent standard being reserved for Canadian books, Miss P. K. Page in turn deplored his acceptance of this situation, observing that such dishonesty was bound to foster in-

feriority, and no doubt inferiority-feelings too. That Miss Page was far in advance of her fellow-writers (even, according to Edmund Wilson, the Chekhovs among them) a recent performance by Morley Callaghan in *Fighting Words* will have made painfully clear. You may also remember the hysterical protests of certain Montreal poets against the criticisms candidly levelled at their work by Chester Duncan. With the atmosphere as hair-trigger touchy as this it may seem difficult to agree with Miss Page, but agree with her one surely must. Mutual admiration societies don't foster poets; they destroy them. Candid criticism destroys only poetasters, of whom we have already more than our share.

Mr. Finch's new volume of verse has prefixed to it the text of Matthew Arnold's "Dover Beach". It would be a slight exaggeration, no more, to say that this is the only poem in the book. If you accept the not wholly singular premise that a poem is a representation, in language with a distinctive and personal force, of a distinctively personal experience, mood, or idea, you will find yourself reading this book, as I have, with a mounting sense of outrage and sadness. The response will not be confined to the versified (?) reportage of its second section, 'The Place Revisited', which attempts to deal ('Planes machine-gunning boat-loads of nurses and wounded') with Dunkirk; nor to the many distracting Swinburnisms in Mr. Finch's diction ('To worry and weary the lotus of creation', 'Piling and riling the beaches'), the insistent alliterations (*passim*), or the rhythmic debility of many lines:

> It is the voice of law
> Without flaw,
> An alleluia, pure . . . .

To account for it one need invoke neither the author's threat, 'Never believe a metaphor is dead / Or moribund', nor the thoroughness with which his clichés have conformed to it: here, inevitably, the cancer 'gnaws', peace is inennarable, and the heart, re-encountering 'one once loved so much', 'Refeels the pulling of a chain and ball'. Though they offer their own local witness to it, the weakness in Mr. Finch's work lies deeper than these things. The truth is that his poems have no real inner urgency, no true life, and that in consequence they have clothed themselves, not in the inevitability of their utterance, but in pastiche. I am not at the moment concerned with the specific dependence of eleven of them on Arnold's fine poem, a dependence which often entails quotation and, when it does, a cruel kind of contrast. I mean that the sentiments throughout are derivative, sometimes doing homage even to the worst of the Georgians ('The Garden') and the worst kind of religiosity ('Both'), and that the language is therefore equally derivative, applied from outside with the falsity of a cosmetic. To substantiate this judgment further in a short review seems unnecesary. If after reading *Dover Beach Revisited* you find it unjust, further examples will not convince you. If just, the evidence for it will have crowded upon you from every page. A reviewer has perhaps an obligation to the author of a book he condemns to suggest some directions in which his work could profitably move, but in the present case that is an obligation which I despair of fulfilling. Mr. Finch seems to me at his limited best when he is

writing epigrammatically or tersely ('The Gulf'), but as short lines are also an undeniable hazard to him—

> The roaring waves draw back,
> Then fling and, after the slack,
> Again begin. You found
> In their sound
> A thought.

—it is hard to tell him where to go. 'Away' perhaps gets it. JOHN PETER

SHAKESPEARIAN VIEWPOINTS

DAVID GALLOWAY, *Shakespeare, Seven Talks for C.B.C. Radio.* C.B.C. Publications Branch, Paper Cover $1.00. Hard Cover $1.75.

Stratford Papers on Shakespeare, 1960. Gage. $2.50.

C. J. SISSON. *Shakespeare's Tragic Justice.* Gage. $2.50.

BEFORE THE C.B.C. began giving to the talks in its University of the Air Series the dignity of publication, only financially desperate academics could afford to expend the time and energy required for serious radio talks in return for what the public purse could afford to pay for them. (There is a rumour that one such scholar conscientiously acknowledged his indebtedness by pasting "Courtesy of C.B.C." labels inside the doors of his new kitchen cabinets.) Publication, however, is both a recognition of and an incentive to such thorough preparation as lies behind David Galloway's *Shakespeare.* By the nature of the circumstances its approach is general and its tone semi-popular, but the author assumes an intelligent and interested audience and never makes the mistake of talking down to it. He does not hesitate, however, to lighten and frequently to illuminate his academic material with personal reminiscence. Wisely, he begins with Shakespeare in the theatre, and discusses the conditions of both Elizabethan and modern stage presentation. Sections on Comedy, Tragedy, History, textual problems, and the universality of Shakespeare follow, and while in all this there is not much that is new, there is much that is sound. The chapter on "The Printers and the Text" is a triumph of simplification without distortion, and the comments on the Comedies, in particular, demonstrate perceptiveness as well as the thorough knowledge which is evident throughout this volume.

It is gratifying that Canadian publishers seem at last to be losing their reluctance to publish, independently of simultaneous publication in Britain or the United States, anything other than textbooks. W. J. Gage pioneered in this development, insofar as academic writing is concerned, with the publication of the first Stratford Shakespeare Seminar Papers. The Stratford series is especially pleasing in its outstanding readable type on good paper generously margined and in the absence of any impression of niggardliness in matters of format. The volumes possess dignity without dullness. For example, the stiff-paper covers of a subdued, mottled grey prove, on closer examination, to be a photostat of an ancient rough-cast wall "with lime and hair" visibly "knit up" in it.

The volume includes an account of the origins of the first Shakespeare Seminar by Berners W. Jackson, and five papers, two by Professor C. J. Sisson and one each by John Cook, R. A. Huber and Roberton Davies. Of these, the carefully scientific analysis of Shake-

speare's secretary hand by Mr. Huber, Director of the R.C.M.P. Crime Detection Laboratory, is the most interesting, as Robertson Davies' plea for "Shakespeare with gusto" in "Shakespeare Over the Port" is the most delightful. John Cook, who is supervising the music for two of the plays during the current Stratford season, makes a plea for contemporary music for contemporary Shakespeare productions in "Shakespeare and Music", and has some good things to say about the importance of music for a "sense of occasion" in the theatre. The tone of Professor Sisson's "*King John,* A History Play for Elizabethans" occasionally seems to be levelled at a backward Secondary Modern class, but is redeemed by such bits of truly Shakespearean wordplay as, ". . . they sacked the houses and money of all Jews." "Shakespeare the Writer", on the other hand, is more general but more scholarly in approach, and makes an interesting case for an earlier date for the early plays.

Professor Sisson is also the author of the second Gage publication on Shakespeare, *Shakespeare's Tragic Justice,* which comprises essays on public justice in *Macbeth,* private justice in *Othello,* the dilemma of *Hamlet,* and the quandary of *King Lear.* The author sees *Macbeth* as a tragedy of deep damnation in which pity suffuses terror, and sets the problem of supernatural solicitation in the context of Jacobean politics. The Spanish names in *Othello* suggest to him a connection with the expulsion of the Moors in 1598, while contemporary parallels are adduced to demonstrate that Lear's division of his kingdom was closer to the realities of life than to fairy-tale ritual. Professor Sisson's arguments present some remarkably keen insights and some equally remarkable blind spots. He denies, for example, the possibility of irony in the description of Macbeth in Act I Sc. ii, and completely ignores the charges of unnaturalness against Desdemona in his vehement insistence that considerations of race play no part in the problems of Othello. On the other hand, his analysis of Hamlet's dilemma makes sense according to the whole play, as too few such discussions do. In all, *Shakespeare's Tragic Justice* contains as much thought-provoking material in a hundred pages of personal interpretation as many over-documented works of scholarship do in five hundred.

MARION B. SMITH

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LE TALENT DE FRECHETTE

LOUIS FRECHETTE. *Mémoires intimes.* Editions Fides, Collection du Nénuphar. $2.00.

IL EST ASSEZ étrange de constater que nos célèbres poètes du siècle dernier valent beaucoup plus par leurs textes de prose que par leurs ronflants poèmes qui n'étaient la plupart du temps que grandiloquents discours rimés. Mais il faut, pour cela, considérer l'ensemble de leur œuvre et de leurs travaux et, bien souvent, dépouiller les journaux et revues de l'époque.

Songeons un instant à Crémazie: sa correspondance, ses pages de critique et son *Journal du siège de Paris,* sont d'un bon écrivain. Ils présentent certainement beaucoup plus d'intérêt que ses poèmes prétentieux. Ainsi en est-il de Louis Fréchette. Ses drames en vers sont heureusement oubliés, et *La légende d'un peuple* que nous lisions, la larme à l'œil quand nous avions dix ans, nous paraît aujourd'hui étonnamment ridicule. Par contre, ses *Memoirs Intimes* (dont le ton et le sujet n'est pas sans rappeler la série de contes du même auteur groupés sous le titre *Originaux et Détraqués*) nous apportent des récits d'un autre âge, des souvenirs d'enfance d'un homme qui a vécu une période fort intéressante de notre historie.

Dans ces récits qui sont d'un écrivain qui sait raconter, Louis Fréchette trace des portraits d'une grande saveur; des petites gens: bûcherons, mendiants, artisans, représentants des petits métiers d'antan; des hommes célèbres: Chiniquy et Papineau; des héros légendaires: Jos Montferrand.

Fréchette sait donner vie à ses personnages et il nous les montre comme il les voyait quand il était enfant. Il raconte ses premières années à l'école avec humour, en accumulant les détails, en forçant peut-être le tableau, mais qu'importe après-tout.

Ces *Memoires Intimes,* publiées en 1900 dans *Le Monde illustré* nous permettront de mieux apprécier le talent de Fréchette, mais surtout de l'apprécier à sa juste mesure; d'oublier ses mauvais poèmes et de découvrir l'excellent prosateur qu'il fut.

Nous avons ainsi besoin de temps à autre de secouer nos vieilles légendes pour mieux voir de quoi il retourne; tout le monde gagne à ce jeu. Ceci me paraît être, sur le plan de l'histoire littéraire, un des avantages de la publication de ce livre.

JEAN-GUY PILON

A RIVER'S CENTURY

WILLIAM E. GREENING. *The Ottawa.* McClelland & Stewart.

The Ottawa begins well enough. A foreword by Merrill Denison and an introduction by the author suggest some of the age, sweep and historical importance of the great river. Unfortunately, unless most casual readers are different from me, they will skip both foreword and introduction and plunge right into Chapter I, The First Settlers and the Coming of the Missionaries. And very likely they will stop right there. This would be a pity, since the middle section of the book, particularly Chapters Four

to Eight, are genuinely enlightening as well as entertaining.

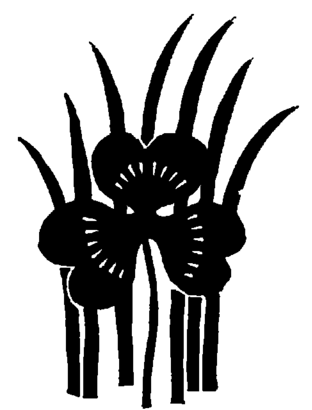
I don't know, of course, the circumstances leading to the writing of *The Ottawa*. Presumably someone at McClelland and Stewart commissioned the book. And someone, either author or editor, must have decided that a brief history of the French adventures on the river was required. As I say, I don't know where to fix the responsibility. And I don't care. But I do care that this whole section is executed with such a minimum of stylistic grace and such a maximum of speed. In all these chapters dealing with the French period of our history I found nothing that would not be old hat to an average graduate of an average primary school. Not lightened by the revealing anecdote, and rendered almost incomprehensible by a mad piling up of data upon data, these opening chapters not only fail to do justice to their subject; they are dull, dull, dull.

While in this carping mood, and before moving on to some more positive areas, I should like to criticize the inadequacy of the index and the total uselessness of the maps. As for the woodcuts by Laurence Hyde, the correct descriptive adjective escapes me. Perhaps "appalling" will do.

But, reader, persevere to Chapter Four, Settlement Life and Birth of the Lumber Industry. If you do a surprise is waiting. Suddenly the book comes alive. The pace of the writing has a decent air of leisure. Little-known but brilliantly perceptive first-hand observations are quoted. One feels the presence of an author who understands and loves his subject.

Geographical regions, like larger civilizations, seem to have a rise and fall. If this is so, then the nineteenth century was the great historical period for the Ottawa Valley. It saw the early permanent settlements, the fantastic rise of the lumber barons and the beginnings of decline as the century came to its conclusion. Outside of the National Capital, which is a special case, how little growth there has been in the past sixty years! Commerce now swirls around Montreal and the huge manufacturing complex of south-western Ontario. If the concluding chapters of Mr. Greening's book are anti-climactic he is surely to be excused. The history of this region is equally so.

But what a century the Valley did have! Here was the clash of race — Scottish, Irish and French, with the corresponding religious antipathies, Methodist against Presbyterian; Protestant against Roman Catholic; the dreadful rigours of Eastern Ontario winters in a land only partly suited to cultivation. And over the whole the shadow of a great commodity — lumber. As Mr. Greening rightly points out, it is difficult when one looks at the staid small towns of today to imagine the boisterous, drunken days of the loggers and the saw-



mills and of the famous lumber barons like Booth and Edwards.

It is immensely to the author's credit that he has captured all this so perfectly. One could wish only that the nineteenth-century Valley had been the subject of the entire book and that Mr. Greening had not felt constrained to attempt an upbeat ending.

One might just as well expect optimism from William Faulkner. And I believe that the comparison is apt. The Ottawa Valley had a longer and more genuine period of affluence than the American Deep South, but like Mississippi or Alabama, its greatness exists now primarily in memory. The quiet little towns along the Ottawa and its tributaries had their moment, and now lie waiting for their personal Faulkner. When that man arrives I am certain he will be grateful to Mr. Greening for his pioneering research.

BOB PATCHELL

ARCTIC HISTORY

PAUL FENIMORE COOPER. *Island of the Lost.* Longmans. $4.95.

THE AUTHOR lives in Cooperstown, New York, founded by his great-great-grandfather and famous later as the home of his great-grandfather, the "leather-stocking" novelist. Early in his life this legacy of concern with history and the native inhabitants of North America was directed northwards by the books of Nansen, Peary, and others. Paul Fenimore Cooper dreamed of being an explorer, and eventually succeeded, at least to the extent of creating opportunities in adulthood to fly over the Arctic and alight here and there on hallowed sites which he was able to identify from his reading of polar narratives; on the jacket, as evidence of this, there is a fine colour photograph by the author, showing Crozier's landing-place on the north-west coast of King William Island — the "Island of the Lost" which is the hero of this book.

Somewhere along the way Paul Fenimore Cooper, who evidently loves to tell a story and has an engagingly simple and direct way of doing so, recognized in King William Island a subject that suited him. Shunning the easier path which has been thoroughly trodden in recent years — that of summarizing a phase of arctic exploration with the help of the travellers' narratives and little else — he set out instead to tell the story of a single island of the archipelago, from the beginning to the present day, and to carry out arduous, many-sided research that a regional project of this kind requires. The concept is well-suited to his object, which is to work off some of the burden of fascination and wonder for the North that he has been carrying around for a great many years. The resulting book is a useful one, especially for Canadian readers, even though it draws heavily on many of the same polar narratives that are fully dealt with in other current arctic books.

The secret lay in scrapping the tedious game of hide-and-seek among the islands that has been played by so many writers, as though the story of its exploration by Europeans were the only history the Arctic possessed. Instead, Mr. Cooper takes his cue from the well-known fact many of the Arctic islands have been continuously inhabited for hundreds, perhaps thousands, of years by

successive generations of the same people. Little as we may ever know about the history of the ancestors of those who today make up the bulk of the two hundred-odd population of King William Island, there is no denying that it, and not the story of the European travellers who came there from time to time — is the central, vital story of this island.

Mr. Cooper sees this clearly. He starts us out with an all-too-short chapter describing the geological birth of the island, and its "settlement" by a legendary race of strong but stupid giants who, some hundreds of years before the first Europeans came, were driven out by another breed who more than made up in cunning what they lacked in stature — the ancestors of our Eskimo voters of today. Mr. Cooper's picture of these people, the Kikerktarmiut, in their natural state, is strong and affecting. It haunts us through the rest of the book which inevitably deals lengthily with the various groups of European travellers in the region. But in the explorers' narratives it is always references to contacts with the Eskimos that interest the author most. He exploits these references skilfully. From the first chapter, we have been with the Kikerktarmiut in spirit, waiting for further glimpses of them. These glimpses are not as frequent as we would like them to be, or as clearly focused — for we are getting only whatever the explorers chose to write down, — but they are enough with the brief outline of very recent events on King William Island at the end of the book to give us what amounts to a valuable addition to our library of regional territory.

Island of the Lost should be read widely in Canada, but above all by the King William Islanders themselves who, like the rest of us, will be happier citizens the clearer they see themselves in history.

T. C. FAIRLEY

THOREAU'S CANADA

HENRY D. THOREAU. *A Yankee in Canada.* Harvest House. $1.65.

THE JOURNEY of which *A Yankee in Canada* is the record was made by Thoreau and his friend William Ellery Channing in September 1850. It lasted ten days, and cost, as Thoreau meticulously noted, twelve dollars and seventy-five cents (including the price of two guide books and a map). Thoreau and Channing, travelling light, "Knights of the Umbrella and the Bundle" as they styled themselves, visited Montreal, Quebec City and several neighbouring points of interest. What Channing thought of the things they saw cannot be even guessed; tilting at several windmills, both Canadian and universal, Thoreau is throughout, as always, his egocentric self, Don Quixote and Sancho Panza both, acknowledging his fellow-traveller's existence only by the use of the first person plural.

It would be absurd to claim too much for this book; it is in fact the weakest of all Thoreau's "Excursions". Too often padded with lifeless information culled from the two guide books with which the travellers had carefully provided themselves, it reveals in what is left Thoreau's main flaws as an artist: his inability to organize his often brilliant single perceptions into any large pattern, and his

essential lack of interest in other human beings. The temptation is to extract from it, as has been done so assiduously from his journals, the pithy phrase, the striking image, the sometimes subtle meditation, and to dismiss the rest as clumsy setting for the occasional jewel. However the setting has some interest: scarcely at all as a picture of French-Canada in the eighteen-fifties, but as a record of the reaction provoked in an eccentric, sardonic stranger who finds any kind of constriction, mental or physical, intolerable, by a culture that strikes him as "like a man cased in the heavy armor of antiquity, with a horse-load of broadswords and small arms slung to him, endeavouring to go about his business."

Thoreau's reaction reminds one a good deal of the time, rather oddly, of that of Twain's Connecticut Yankee to King Arthur's England. It is, that is to say, a comic reaction: the comedy based on a nineteenth-century American's contact with a medieval culture (French-Canada appeared to Thoreau "as old as Normandy itself"). This remains one's chief impression despite Thoreau's serious discussion of such questions as why Canada "wild and unsettled as it is . . . should impress us as an older country than the States" or why "French-Canadians . . . should be gradually disappearing in what is called the Saxon current." From the first sentence: "I fear that I have not got much to say about Canada, not having seen much; what I got by going to Canada was a cold", this comic tone largely prevails, abandoned only in occasional descriptions of nature, such as the description of the Falls of Ste. Anne, and in outbursts of what Horace Greeley called Thoreau's "flagrant heresies" as in the passages inspired by the church of Notre Dame in Montreal.

One's final impression is that the comic tone is indicative of Thoreau's attitude to Canada. As a civilization, a culture relevant to his century and himself, he just does not take it seriously. It does not strike him as real in the same sense as does the New England to which he returned with such relief, yearning no doubt, as he noted in his journal, "for one of those old, meandering, dry uninhabited roads, which lead away from towns . . . where you may forget in what country you are travelling . . . where the guide board is fallen, and now the hand points to heaven significantly — to a Sudbury and Marlborough in the skies. That's the road I can travel, that's the particular Sudbury I am bound for . . ."

WILLIAM HALL

OFF THE BULLSEYE

ERIC NICOL & PETER WHALLEY. *Say, Uncle. A Completely Uncalled for History of the U.S.* Ryerson. $2.75.

ALL RIGHT! UNCLE! I'll say it as many times as you like, only, please, no more of these aMAIZing jokes! Peace at any *price*!

It ought to be possible to find something favourable to say about a book which has as its *raison d'être* the spoofing of the Eagle's history. Plucking Eagle feathers is as Canadian as maple leaves, ice hockey, or the Calgary Stampede, and when it is done with surety and finesse even the Eagle is tickled; clumsily done, it's as bad as any other story in

which the raconteur has forgotten the punch-line.

The authors begin this volume with an apology to Sellar and Yeatman, the 1066-ers who launched this genre originally, and "to anybody else who feels bad about it." Well, I feel bad about it, but not for the reasons implied in their apologetic dedication. The primary fault of this volume is not that it is "Uncalled-for" — a well-aimed pin can do wonders for the starred and striped balloon — but simply that it isn't funny. And it isn't funny for very precise reasons. In the first place, there are no jokes in the volume; plenty of laughs, all right, but these are the exclusive property of the author who snickers self-consciously to himself in every chapter, delighted by the acuteness of his wit. But the fact is that apart from TV audiences, few of us laugh on cue, because the reflex of surprise is stifled as soon as we are warned that we are going to be tickled. The result is not infrequently painful.

An equally grievous fault in this grab-bag of American schoolboy humour is the total lack of originality. Puns on John Alden, Paul Revere, Abe Lincoln, General Custer, and the Shakers are as proverbial as the cradle slats which they cause to be kicked out. Even when the jokes in this book are not old hat in fact, they are pressed on the same block and belong to the "Adam-and-Eve-raised-Cain-after-the-death-of-Abel" variety that used to be rewarded with an over-ripe tomato before entertainment came in cans. Maybe the scope of American history precludes the kind of original pun that sprinkled the pages of *1066 and All That* — there certainly isn't a funny here to equal "the invisible Armada" of that volume — but it rather surprises me to find American history quite so facetiously unfecund as the jibes in this volume would seem to indicate. A belly-laugh can indeed turn into a belly-ache, but when the belly-ache is the first symptom, one begins to feel that it might have been more effective, and more humane, to use a petrified shillelagh than a funny bone to get the message across.

The above observation leads to my third point, for the authors of this volume have flubbed a glorious opportunity for satirizing their subject. To my mind, Eric Nicol would have proved more facile in that area than in the realm of the jejune. His syndicated articles frequently border on that subtle combination of humour and criticism which slices through the social veneer and exposes the secretive roots of hypocrisy, pride, or arogance, of which the surface flower is merely the decoy. Unfortunately, Nicol seldom gives free rein to his satiric muse. In *Say, Uncle* he steers so clear of controversial issues, or even of pointed or directed humour, that the results are often insipid. No John Birches are birched in this volume, and the nearest thing to trenchancy is a stale reference to old Ike's golfing, which by late 1961 was already antediluvian.

But all is not lost in *Say, Uncle*. Peter Whalley's cartoons are unquestionably the best thing in the book. Most of them are refreshingly direct, gaining (as the text does not) by gainsaying the trite and obvious. "Lincoln at Gettysburg" is one of the best of the singles, and the gallery of "America Today" at the end poignantly satirizes the clichés at the heart of the American dream.

W. E. FREDEMAN

LIFE IN THE WILDS

FRANKLIN RUSSELL. *Watchers at the Pond.* McClelland & Stewart. $5.00.

DURING THE nineteenth century natural history was not merely a branch of science; it was also, in the hands of its best exponents, a branch of literature. Darwin's *Voyage of the Beagle* and H. W. Bates' *Naturalist on the Amazons* are still classics of descriptive writing, and the amateur field naturalists of England produced a series of masterpieces of fine observation and telling description that stretched from Gilbert White's *Selborne* in the late eighteenth century to W. H. Hudson's essays on the wild life of the Argentine pampas and the chalkhills of southern England during the Georgian era.

I have been talking as if the days of good writing on natural history were gone, and it is true that there has been a tendency for biologists to retreat behind their barriers of specialist jargon and detach themselves from the world of general readers. But, though we may have had nothing in recent years to compare with the best works of the nineteenth-century writer naturalists, a considerable number of estimable and readable accounts of animal life have appeared, such as Derek Wragge Morley's *The Ant World,* Gerald Durrell's whimsically pleasant accounts of the adventures of a collector for zoos, and, in Canada, Roderick Haig-Brown's essays on the wild life of British Columbia.

Franklin Russell's *Watchers at the Pond* is the most recent Canadian addition to this field of writing. Russell takes a pond in the northern forest as the scene for his account of the cycle of animal and plant life, and the seasons of the year as his temporal frame. Within it he describes the life cycle of many forms of life, from the unicellular organisms of the pond's depths to the raccoons and ravens who form its aristocracy of intelligence. His observation is acute and his knowledge wide; he has many interesting and curious things to reveal. But he does not make the best of his subject. He writes monotonously, on a single level, so that the extraordinarily dramatic quality of his material is never fully realized. And he has a curious tendency to seek wonder in the accumulation of statistics and lists rather than through the power of selective description.

> About forty toads had congregated . . . during the early evening, their calls screeching out monotonously. On this night, the toads collectively ate more than one thousand pond creatures — sow bugs, beetles, leaf hoppers, May flies, caddis flies, midges, and caterpillars.
>
> A pair of wrens caught three thousand small insects during the next day, to feed a nestful of youngsters. Two other pairs of wrens, also nesting at the pond, tripled this mortality rate so that more than sixty thousand insects were lost in the wrens every seven days.

A little of this kind of writing goes a long way even in an article; repeated constantly in a book it dulls rather than stimulating the imagination, so that one's reading of *Watchers at the Pond* becomes a plodding progress in search of the occasional passage which springs vividly into life. Mr. Russell tries to tell us too much and in doing so he makes us experience too little.

L. T. CORNELIUS

OLD CANADIANS RENEWED

THE MOST WELCOME of the new titles in McClelland & Stewart's New Canadian Library is the *Masks of Fiction* ($1.50), a collection of essays by and about Canadian writers edited by A. J. M. Smith. These essays have been published in various magazines — half of them in *Canadian Literature* — and to have them under one cover is valuable to a student of Canadian criticism. It is good, too, to see some fine translations of French-Canadian writing in *Where Nests The Water Hen* ($1.00) by Gabrielle Roy, her second work to appear in this series, and *The Town Below* ($1.25) by Roger Lemelin. The latter recreates interest in Lemelin's work particularly now that he has returned to writing fiction after spending some time on writing for television.

Two books are particularly notable in this new group. Ernest Buckler's *The Mountain and the Valley* ($1.25), first published in 1952, continues to appeal because of its contemporary psychological interest; the introduction by Claude Bissell is one of the best statements about Buckler's work. The other is Henry Kreisel's *The Rich Man* ($1.25), a book which revealed a refreshing Canadian talent in 1948. It indicates a novelist of authority who will, it is hoped, be publishing another novel soon.

The other book to be mentioned here is Stephen Leacock's *My Discovery of England* ($1.00), his fourth appearance in the series. It is not Leacock at his best, though there is more irony in this book than in his others. Perhaps the series would be better to have a more representative collection of authors and to choose either works of Richler, Moore, or Wisemen, than to appear tied to loyalties and present Leacock for the fourth time in twenty-eight titles. The series is, however, a welcome addition to publishing in Canada, and some of the introductory essays are particularly valuable.

D. S.

VARIOUS HISTORIES

THE FIELD of Canadian history is being ploughed and re-ploughed like prairie wheatland. One of the more ambitious ventures has been the five-volume Canadian History series, edited by Thomas B. Costain, whose very presence suggests the popular slanting of the volumes. The standard has been unsteady; the final volume — *Ordeal by Fire: Canada 1910-1945* by Ralph Allen (Doubleday, $6.00) — is perhaps the best. Mr. Allen has tackled the most difficult period of all, with none of the romance of New France or the Gold Rushes, with no characters to compete with Frontenac or Sir John A. Macdonald. Moreover, the near past is always the hardest age on which to write. Mr. Allen's rather lively combination of the journalist and the historian hits the right mood. He gives us good interim history.

* * *

Peter Stursberg's *Agreement in Principle* (Longmans, $5.50) combines autobiography — the story of post-war assignments as a foreign correspondent — and sharp journalistic hindsight on inter-

national political events since the United Nations was formed. It is a shrewd, vivid book, conceited, opinionated, but at times so startlingly right that one regrets Canadian journalism has so few Stursbergs.

* * *

D. J. Goodspeed's *The Conspirators: A Study of the Coup d'Etat* (Macmillan, $5.00) is a historical curiosity that will interest those with a taste for political drama and dramatics. Major Goodspeed takes six attempts to seize power, some successful, others not, narrates their histories, and analyses the reasons for their outcome. Finally, he discusses the art of the *coup d'état* in general. Some of his narrations are lively and interesting; others, like that of the Bolshevik coup of 1917, have been told better before; his general analysis is neither sufficiently detailed nor sufficiently profound. One expects more from so dynamic a title.

* * *

White Men Came to the St. Lawrence (McGill, $2.25) is a series of three lectures recently delivered at McGill by Morris Bishop. They are urbane, charmingly anecdotal, but too slight to give more than a slanting glimpse of a great river's record.

G. W.

A MIXED BAG

EVERY YEAR a great many words and ideas are released in the air over Canadian university towns where the Learned Societies hold their annual gatherings. In *Thought, 1960* (Gage, $5.00), an attempt has been made to trap the best of a year's flight and to present it as an annual sampling of Canadian scholarship. The intention is good; the result a hopelessly mixed bag, with no possible unity except the fact that all the lecturers were in the same place at the same time. No single person will have the desire, knowledge or staying power to read everything in this volume from "A Study of Freeze-up and Break-up at Fort Good Hope, N.W.T." to "Little Dorrit: Experience and Design". It would have been better by far to have let all these papers take their chances in their proper journals, where many of them have in fact been published.

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