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CANADIAN LITERATURE No. 16

Spring, 1963

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ALVIN LEE, ROBERT MCCORMACK

Reviews

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editorial

SALT AND SAVOUR

PERHAPS IT IS a little far-fetched to make analogies between cultivation and culture, but there are good and bad harvests among books just as there are among farmers' crops. Last year, when *Canadian Literature* undertook for the first time the awarding of the University of British Columbia's Medal for Popular Biography, the judges discovered that 1961 had been such a lean year that there seemed no book worthy of an award; none, accordingly, was given. On the other hand, 1962 was a relatively good year for biography in Canada, and the panel of judges, consisting of Arnold Edinborough, S. E. Read and George Woodcock, found that the choice lay between a fair number of books which for various reasons were eminently worth consideration.

Inevitably, there was the usual underbrush of dull lives of worthy citizens and inept memoirs by public figures who would better have remained content with the merits of whatever action their lives contained. But a group of good, competent biographical works remained. They included *McGillivray, Lord of the Northwest* by Marjorie Wilkins Campbell; F. A. McGregor's interesting study of a politician out of office, *The Rise and Fall of Mackenzie King: 1911-1919*; Margaret Wade Labarge's scholarly *Simon de Montfort*; George Whalley's study of one of Canada's incredible wanderers, *The Legend of John Hornby*. All of these were works which contributed something new to their particular fields, and which presented serious research and original conclusions. There was also that delightful maverick among autobiographies, Kildare Dobbs' *Running to Paradise* which, with a rather appropriate whimsicality, the jury for the Governor-General's Awards decided to regard as a work of fiction. All these books have been or will be reviewed in *Canadian Literature*.

In the end, the book that seemed most appropriate to the judges for an award, under the definition of "Popular Biography" that accompanies the University of British Columbia's medal, was *The Tiger of Canada West* by W. H. Graham, a Life of William Dunlop, one of the most eccentric but also one of the most important pioneers in the development of Upper Canada. *The Tiger of Canada West* is an accurate, well-researched book, based on contemporary records, and written with the kind of verve that Dunlop himself would have appreciated. It presents a man who is important in relation to his age and country, but also fascinating in his personal oddity; it records the wayward vigour of Dunlop's character, but it also portrays in vivid detail the frontier society in which he flourished; it shows his triumphs with admiration and illuminates with sympathy the tragedy of his last days, lived out in a world whose rapid changes had left no place for men of his kind. Mr. Graham competently reconstructs a personality and its age; more than that, he breathes life into them. His book will be valuable to scholars; it will be eminently readable to those who make no scholarly pretensions.

In accordance with a past custom that has associated the Canadian Authors' Association with the University of British Columbia's Medal, the presentation will take place at the Association's annual meeting this summer.

PLAYWRIGHTS IN A VACUUM

English-Canadian Drama in the Nineteenth Century

Michael Tait

OF ALL THE BRANCHES of Canadian literature, nineteenth-century drama has received least attention for reasons that are entirely understandable. Formlessness, ineffective characterization, pretentious moral attitudes, lack of stylistic distinction, stupefying prolixity, together with other unfortunate qualities vitiate most of the serious attempts at drama in Canada between 1860 and 1914. A variety of factors account for this conspicuous absence of merit, but perhaps the most decisive was the separation of the nineteenth-century Canadian playwright from the active theatre of his time. From about 1920 to the present we have witnessed sporadic efforts, first by amateurs and more recently by professional companies, to bridge the gap. If none of these attempts has had sustained success, they have been evidence of an awareness of the issue. In the nineteenth century the gulf was absolute. This early period offers the anomalous spectacle of Canadian dramatists writing in total isolation from the most energetic popular theatre Canada has ever enjoyed. Of course, as most of the players and almost all the plays were imports, this vitality was, in a sense, specious. For want of even a minority demand for the performance of native plays, these would-be dramatists were compelled willy-nilly to write for the closet rather than the stage. Denied a vitalizing contact with the coarse realities of stage presentation, they produced works at once petrified and undisciplined.

However, if none of these plays qualifies for close analysis as an autonomous work of art, they nevertheless hold a measure of interest. For one thing, although unsuccessful in their entirety, a few of them show a degree of skill, poetic if not dramatic, in isolated sections. For another they reflect, in an oblique and singular way, the temper of the period.

Any account of nineteenth-century Canadian drama must begin with Charles Heavysege whose uncertain claim on the attention of posterity is based chiefly upon *Saul*, a formidable dramatization in three parts and some ten thousand lines of the biblical narrative. There is considerable pathos in the fate of *Saul*. It was this work which received, after its first edition in 1857, such extravagant praise from Coventry Patmore whose account of it appeared in the *North British Review*. Patmore found it "exceedingly artistic, akin to Shakespeare in its characterization and scope". Emerson in a letter referred to its "high merits"; Longfellow is reported to have called Heavysege the "greatest dramatist since Shakespeare". The critics were reinforced by the politicians. Sir John A. MacDonald wrote to the author in 1865: "I read 'Saul' when it first appeared with equal pride and pleasure . . . and as a Canadian I felt proud of our first drama." The level of his contemporary reputation may be gauged by a scene from Mr. Robertson Davies' *Leaven of Malice* in which it is suggested a study of the collected works of Heavysege represents the last ludicrous infirmity of the academic mind.

There is pathos too in the personal history of Heavysege himself. He was born in 1816 in Huddersfield, England, into a puritan working class family who regarded his literary interests with suspicion. His formal schooling came to an end at the age of nine when he was apprenticed to a trade. In 1853 he emigrated with his family to Montreal where he earned his way first as a cabinetmaker and then as a staff reporter on the Montreal *Witness*. In a letter written in 1860 he remarks that throughout his life "he has been obliged to work on the average twelve or thirteen hours a day". His literary endeavours then were confined to brief intervals of leisure or to the occasions when he found it possible to compose in his head while working at his carpenter's bench. The impression he gave his contemporaries was of an aloof, self-reliant figure. John Reade, one-time literary editor of the Montreal *Gazette* and a contemporary of Heavysege's, wrote of him, "His reading was not discursive. The Bible and Shakespeare were his two books. He had a high opinion of his own work and was obstinate about having anything cut out by his friends. Being a man without general culture he could not distinguish in his own work between what was good and what was bad. He never willingly consented to sacrifice a line that he had once penned." *Saul* offers evidence of these limitations. His rage for inclusion prolongs the work interminably. The manipulation of his great mass of material into an artistic shape is quite beyond Heavysege's powers. In fact, considerations of form either in the whole or in the part appear never to have occurred to him. As a result the impact of potentially effective speeches is consistently dissipated in an avalanche of words.

The formal inadequacies of *Saul* are more than matched by stylistic ones. It is Heavysege's use of language that most immediately betrays his lack of education and narrow literary experience. The flaws are many and various. At the simplest level his grammar is shaky and his understanding of the meaning of words imperfect. But it is his attempt to approximate the high style that gives rise to the most apparent weaknesses. He contorts his verse with inversions ("clenched his fists" — "austere he looked") and with archaic forms (neath, e'en, methinks, etc.) In most instances the result is stilted and inelegant. Moreover his diction frequently betrays a faith in the power of complicated words, and an astounding vocabulary is put into the mouths of most unlikely figures:

SECOND HEBREW: But did you not make stipulations or propose abatement of those said prerogatives?

However, the echoes of Shakespeare and Milton that reverberate through *Saul* are the chief device by which the author tries to infuse his style with grandeur. Macbeth is most often discernible in the background. Saul at one point addresses himself to

> Ye punishing ministers
> Ye dark invisible demons that do fly
> And do heaven's judgements

and later bids a physician

> Look deeper than the skin
> Then find me amongst thy compounds or thy simples
> An anodyne for undeserved distress.

Heavysege has a particular fondness for the heroic simile and the "even . . . as" construction. Milton is usually the immediate model. "Lo!" exclaims Saul

> As when October strews the land with leaves
> So hath our fury larded it with dead.

On occasions he goes directly to Homer. His literary innocence is sufficiently intact to enable him to set down

> Lo, the rosy-fingered morn . . .

with no hint of quotation marks. His derivative diction has the inevitable consequences. Instead of investing the verse with greater scope and power, these overtones drain it of vitality, and invite disastrous comparisons between *Saul* and the masterpieces it feeds upon. Moreover, because an elevated style is not a natural

mode of expression, for Heavysege, he is liable to abrupt descents to colloquial idioms and bathos. ("Are all wives of such a kidney?" "Bravo, boy"). Occasionally Heavysege manages a line which has an authoritative ring to it:

> Swift and silent as the streaming wind
> . . . Sweeps down from Carmel on the dusky sea.

But his most striking and individual verse is of another and more eccentric kind. Heavysege clearly enjoys and is rather good at describing scenes of corruption and gore. Viewing the remains of Agag whom Saul has slaughtered, a soldier is made to say

> Listen how
> The ground, after the soaking draught of blood,
> Smacks its brown lips. It seems to like royal wine
> Beyond small beer leaking from beggar's veins.
> So were he living he might wear two crowns
> His face is cloven like a pomegranate.

This is the authentic Heavysege: vigorous, macabre, indecorous, an improbable mixture of Miltonic echoes and Edgar Allan Poe.

It is generally agreed that Heavysege is typical of the immigrant author whose work bears no organic relation to the new society in which he finds himself, and as a consequence, is of little value as a measure of that society. From one standpoint this is obviously true. Neither the subject nor the idiom of *Saul*, *Count Filippo*, or *Jephtha's Daughter*, Heavysege's principal works, owes anything directly to a Canadian environment. Even in *The Advocate*, his one impossible novel which is set in Montreal, none of the realities of life in mid-nineteenth-century Canada are touched upon. In contrast with such a figure as Sangster who during this period was groping towards a language which would adequately describe the Canadian scene, Heavysege, in his plays at any rate, coped with his surroundings by ignoring them.

However, the reasons for his isolation are to be found not only in Heavysege's origins and limitations as an artist. It would be difficult to conceive a milieu less conducive to the development of native dramatists than pre-Confederation Canada. L. J. Burpee, in 1901 in a monograph on Heavysege, understates the case when he writes, "Our people even in these days of imperial growth are not too sympathetic in their treatment of Canadian men of letters and Canadian books." Widespread indifference to the arts generally and a puritan hostility to the stage in particular, the lack of discerning critics, the lack of public recognition,

personal financial losses on unsold volumes — these familiar conditions afflicted Heavysege to the end. The absence of any facilities in Canada for the production of native plays once induced him to try his luck in the United States. At the time of his brief fame in America he prepared with great labour a condensed stage version of *Saul* which a New York manager undertook to present. However, the author's habitual misfortune overtook him; the leading actress suddenly died and the production was shelved.

Heavysege bore his fate with exemplary stoicism; it did not occur to him to protest or rebel. He simply endured, secure in his conviction that every word he committed to paper was the fruit of inspiration. He had about him something of the eccentric evangelist whose inner illumination fortifies him in the teeth of the world's disdain. If the light Heavysege followed was three parts false, to some incalculable extent the reason was the darkness of the society about him.

UNLIKE HEAVYSEGE, Charles Mair was a native Canadian. Born in 1838 at Lanark, Ontario, he spent the greater part of his life in the service of the federal government helping to open and develop the Canadian West. As an associate of the Canada First Group, he shared in the post-Confederation quickening of national sentiment and the aspirations toward "Canadian Independence", that ambiguous ideal which provided the first impetus for the movement but ultimately brought about its dissolution.

Mair was among those who stressed the importance of literature in fostering a sense of national identity, in particular of imaginative works based on incidents out of Canadian history. In the preface to his long chronicle play, *Tecumseh*, he writes:

> Our romantic Canadian story is a mine of character and incident for the poet and novelist . . . and the Canadian author who seeks inspiration there is helping to create for a young people that decisive test of its intellectual faculties, and original and distinctive literature . . . springing in large measure from the soil and 'tasting of the wood'.

Tecumseh is Mair's most ambitious attempt to write according to these specifications. Unfortunately most of the characteristic weaknesses of nineteenth-century closet drama are evident in Mair's brave undertaking. The gravest fault is the

utter lack of unity of action. Three main conflicts are introduced: (the Indians vs. the Americans; the Americans vs. the British; Tecumseh vs. his brother) together with a variety of satirical and romantic episodes. None of these elements is properly integrated with the others, and the result is a lively chaos. In his eagerness to translate a maximum volume of Canadian history into Canadian literature, Mair simply ignores the problem of form. *Tecumseh* is also defeated by its idiom. Like Heavysege, Mair is imprisoned by the linguistic conventions of nineteenth-century verse drama and his handling of them is, if anything, even more insecure. Evident throughout is an uncomfortable tension between Mair's essentially practical cast of mind and the specious elevation of his style. A further source of incongruity is the subject itself. In contrast with Heavysege, Mair is writing about Canada, and specifically the world of the North American Indian whose natural mode of speech is at some distance from the Elizabethan. Place names present a particular problem. Even Shakespeare's infinitely accommodating measure cannot stand the strain of "Kalapoosa", "Hurricanaw" and "Kickapoo".

On another level, Mair's militant Canadianism betrays him into a good deal of tub-thumping and some naïve anti-American propaganda. The vehicle for the latter is a remarkable quartet of characters called Slaugh, Bloat, Twang and Gerkin, who, although redeemed in part by their names, are dramatically expendable. On the other hand, Mair's bias is not indiscriminate and he includes a favourable portrait of Harrison, the American General and President.

In spite of its limitations of theme and style, its formlessness and flat characterization, certain aspects of *Tecumseh* are interesting and even curiously impressive. The tiresome flag-waving is only the surface of a more genuine patriotism. Canada for Mair was no political abstraction but a concrete and exhilarating reality. As a result of extensive explorations his knowledge of the Canadian West was intimate and his feeling for it intense. Although life on the frontier was harsh, it is evident that in Mair's imagination this wild territory held the qualities of an earthly paradise. In his poem *Kanata*, for example, the region is described as a bright new world where Europe's jaded millions may escape their corrupt societies. In *Tecumseh* itself, Mair invents the figure of Lefroy, a somewhat implausible prairie bohemian, to express his delight in the virgin wilderness.

> The hoary pines — those ancients of the earth
> Brim full of legends of the early world,
> Stood thick on their own mountains unsubdued,
> And all things else illumined by the sun . . . had rest . . .

> The prairie realm — vast ocean's paraphrase
> Rich in wild grasses numberless and flowers
> Unnamed save in mute Nature's inventory,
> No civilized barbarian trenched for gain
> And all that flowed was sweet and uncorrupt.

Mair further suggests (drawing more from Rousseau perhaps than from his own first-hand observations) that the Indian was the blameless inhabitant of this unfallen world:

> — The sunburnt savage free —
> Free and untainted by the greed of gain
> Great Nature's man content with Nature's food.

A large measure of Mair's animus towards the United States, "that braggart nation", was owing to America's destruction of the redskin and his innocent wilderness in a pursuit, as Mair believed, of land and riches. In the war of 1812 Mair's cherished Canadian paradise was menaced with a similar sordid invasion. The memory of this threat explains the violence of so many passages in the play.

Some of the purely descriptive sections of *Tecumseh* are interesting for a different reason. It is a commonplace that Confederation obliged the Canadian writer to assume the role of nation builder, to define and communicate an image of Canada which would help make this country hospitable to the mind as well as habitable by the body. An important part of this task was the humanization of an alien landscape which not only represented physical danger but continued to threaten the psychological security of the community long after the more obvious menace of wolves and Indians had been eliminated. One of the chief mental hazards of the Canadian scene was, and to an extent still is, its land mass, stretching arbitrarily for inconceivable distances in almost every direction. In *Tecumseh* for perhaps the first time much of this great space begins to be organized in the mind and made familiar .

Lefroy describes to Brock his journey into the interior:

> We left
> The silent forest, and day after day
> Great plains swept beyond our aching sight
> Into the measureless West; uncharted realms,
> Voiceless and calm, save when tempestuous wind
> Rolled the rank herbage into billows vast,
> And rushing tides which never found a shore.

This is not great verse; however such passages, illuminated as they are by Mair's private vision of this vast terrain, represent a first step in bringing the Canadian West under imaginative control.

WILFRED CAMPBELL was in a sense the most ambitious and self-conscious dramatist Canada produced during this period. Unlike Mair he was not primarily concerned with the celebration of national heroes and the creation of a distinctive Canadian literature. His were loftier objectives. In the preface to his *Poetical Tragedies* (1908) he remarks that although the four plays of the volume have very different subjects, they all nevertheless deal "with those eternal problems of the human soul which all the world's thinkers have had at heart." In matters of form Campbell is equally uncompromising. Shakespeare is the only acceptable model. He continues: "The author makes no apologies for the form of these plays. Like other writers he has his own literary ideals and with the great mass of the sane British peoples, believes that Shakespeare is still the great dramatic poet of the modern world." In conclusion, he announces his intention to compose like his great predecessor further collections of histories and comedies if "these plays in spite of their imperfections receive a kindly welcome."

One cannot regret that Campbell allowed this grandiose project to wither. His dramas, in some respects better, certainly no worse than other Canadian verse plays of his time, are still uniquely exasperating. Campbell's personality is not attractive. The modern reader is repelled by his lack of humour, his provincialism, pretentiousness and purblind Anglophilia. It is perhaps because he seems the spokesman for so many negative influences in Canadian art and life which persist into the twentieth century that one leafs through these plays with such boredom and distaste.

A passage or two from *Mordred*, a work based on Mallory's version of the Arthurian legend, will perhaps illustrate the quality of Campbell's dramatic imagination. This scene depicts the first meeting of Lancelot and Guinevere. The latter, having glimpsed Lancelot from her castle window, mistakes him for Arthur and is instantaneously consumed with passion. She disguises herself with a veil and manages to encounter Lancelot at sunset in a convenient rose garden. The scene in outline proceeds thus:

Enter Lancelot.

L: This is a sunset bower for lovers made.
The air seems faint with pale and ruddy bloom.
The red for rosy dreams, the white for pure
And holy maiden thoughts all unexpressed.
. . . . . .

Enter Guinevere, veiled.

G: My lord, forgive this meeting in this place
(*aside*) O, if he like it not!

L: Would'st ask mine aid?

G: Yea; would'st thou aid a maiden in distress?

L: Lady, all maidens command a true knight's help.
. . . . . .

G: Would'st fight for one like me? (*throwing aside her veil*)

L: (*starts and stands as one in a dream*)
Fair lady!
(*aside*) Wondrous heaven, what be this?
In all my dreams I never saw such beauty . . . . . .

G: My lord, hast lost thy tongue?
(*aside*) I had not dreamed this.

L: Fair lady forgive my sudden lack of speech . . .
There's some fatality that draws me to thee
Like I had known thee somewhere long ago.

G: My lord, . . .
(*aside*) Sweet heaven this be too blessed! . . .

L: It seems that we were never strangers
(*folds her in his arms and kisses her*)

G: All life hath been but shaping up to this.

L: O! could this sunset be but gold forever!

G: My lord Arthur!

L: (*starts back*) Great God!

G: Kiss me. Why Great God?

L: Why callest thou me Arthur?

G: And art thou not?

L: O who art thou that callest Arthur lord?

G: As thou art Arthur, I am Guinevere.
(*Lancelot starts back in horror*)

L: Guinevere! Make thick your murky curtains!
Day wake no more! Stars shrink your eyehole lights,
And let this damned earth shrivel!

G: (*clutching his arm*) And art thou not great Arthur?
Who art thou?

L: Not Arthur, no! But that foul Lancelot
Who 'twixt his hell and Arthur's heaven hath got.
G: Then I am a doomed maid. (*swoons*)
L: Black murky fiend of hell! Come in thy form . . .
And I will clang with thee and all thy imps . . .
G: (*rising up*) O mercy! Damned or not I love thee still!
L: Why does not nature crack and groan?

This is a representative passage. Its flaws are almost too numerous and evident for exposition. Most obvious is the immense discrepancy between intention and performance. The attempt is to portray a moment of high passion in a rich Elizabethan idiom. Artificial diction, insecure grammar, grotesque rhythms — all contribute to the final absurdity. Although the author bewailed the sensationalism of the popular stage, this scene like so many of Campbell's is itself nothing but rudimentary melodrama with mistaken identities, swoons, asides, mechanical manipulation of emotions and the rest.

This excerpt points to a more fundamental flaw at the core not only of Campbell's plays but of virtually all nineteenth-century English literary drama. The fault is rooted in an insuperable linguistic difficulty. The prevailing source of inspiration for this drama was of course Shakespeare, whose language these nineteenth-century playwrights attempted to duplicate. Imitations are invariably weak, but to explain why Shakespeare's nineteenth-century disciples produced such unlikely disasters one may conveniently borrow a little of Professor Northrop Frye's critical terminology. The Shakespearean style is the natural accompaniment to a drama conceived instinctively in the high mimetic mode. The speech of heroes who still have about them something of the radiance of gods is necessarily eloquent. It is through language that the common man recognizes the stature of the hero. When we turn to mid-nineteenth-century poetic drama it is clear what has happened. The playwright is still attempting to cast his work in the high mimetic mode which for reasons of cultural history is no longer available to him. At first glance his characters appear to talk like demi-gods, but they quickly betray themselves as creatures of their authors' own Victorian middle class sensibility; (". . . white for pure and maiden thoughts all unexpressed"). Singular incongruities result. In Campbell's play, Lancelot thrashes about like Pip in the armour of Mark Antony.

In "Shakespeare and the Latter Day Drama", his most extended piece of dramatic criticism, Campbell states his case with querulous dogmatism. He denounces Ibsen as "immoral", Shaw as "a mere cynic", and both with Goethe as

"unBritish in ideals". He further protests that any plays which are not founded on "sublimity, beauty and reason" should not be tolerated. Although this article appeared in 1907 when Ibsen and Shaw were gaining a measure of European acceptance, it stirred no controversy in Canada.

Quite clearly Campbell's quarrel is not simply with the new drama, but with the modern age in general which he assails for its "love of pleasure", "lack of reverence", and most deplorable of all, its "falling off in ideal". The conflict between orthodox Victorian and "modern" values forms the basis for his play *Morning*. In his preface Campbell underlines the gravity of the issue. "This play has no historical foundation . . . but its theme is plainly modern and deals with the tremendous problems of modern society. The belief in God and a larger hope, as vitally affecting man's whole life, actions and ideals here, is the central problem of the play. The question, 'Is the worldly cynic right or wrong in his summing up of human nature?' is destined finally to settle the fate of our whole modern civilization . . . Which ideal is to prevail in society, that of the cynic, or that of faith and hope?" In *Morning* the question is dramatized through the struggle for the mythical city of Avos between Leonatus "A noble minded citizen" and Volpinus "A clever and scheming citizen . . . envious of Leonatus." There is of course nothing intrinsically wrong with Campbell's theme. Ibsen has already demonstrated the dramatic possibilities in the conflicting claims of visionary idealism and pragmatic worldliness. Certainly the matter had real urgency for a Victorian society beginning with Ibsen to pay the piper for its long worship of moral abstractions. What defeats Campbell's play aside from the stylistic factors touched on previously is the jejeune treatment of this complex issue. The author never for a moment doubts that Leonatus, beneath whose classical robe lives a windy Victorian parson, is altogether virtuous, and Volpinus wholly evil. Campbell aims at tragedy but the crudity of his moral categories is reflected on the level of dramatic action in stark melodrama ("Caught, thou fox at last!") and lifeless characterization.

The other two plays in this volume are *Daulac* and *Hildebrand*. *Daulac* is an absurd historical piece which endeavours, as Campbell puts it, "to depict the ultimate triumph of the fate of unsuspecting innocence over the wiles and plots of a clever and scheming malice." It is Campbell's one attempt to dramatize Canadian material, but any truth, imaginative or historical, is dissipated once again in the shoddy conventions of romantic melodrama.

The action of *Hildebrand* centres around Pope Gregory's decision to create a celibate clergy. The consequences of the Pope's inflexible stand are brought

home to him when he encounters his long-lost daughter (presumably Campbell would argue that Shakespeare also took liberties with history) wandering deranged by the loss of her priest-husband. The play is negligible except insofar as it too suggests a thematic parallel with Ibsen. Both *Morning* and *Hildebrand* have as their potential subject the price in suffering exacted by the uncompromising idealist, a very Ibsenesque preoccupation. To this extent at least Campbell was willy-nilly a child of the modern age he so deplored.

A number of factors beside lack of native gifts explain Campbell's total failure as a dramatist. He chose to embrace a bankrupt dramatic tradition, consciously repudiating the new developments which had begun to revitalize the stage. That he did so was not, however, entirely his private failure. It was difficult for a nineteenth-century Canadian writer to be anything but conventional and insular in his literary attitudes. Canada was geographically remote from the creative centres of civilization and as a nation the product of deep-rooted conservative impulses. In the field of literature this was reflected in an acceptance of those canons of taste shared uncritically by polite English society. Shaw and Ibsen were, after all, formidable revolutionaries. Canada was born of a temperamental resistance to revolution. Campbell's rigid conservatism, however, had dire consequences for his work as a playwright. Drama like other arts derives its vitality from its dynamic relation with the age in which it is written. Campbell was the spokesman for a dying era, his mind informed by a collection of concepts and a moral vocabulary that were rapidly losing their force. As a result he remained in his imagination at several removes from the immediacies of human experience and his plays accordingly emerged still-born.

In brief, then, the aspiring playwright of this era was defeated in the main by three interrelated factors. In the first instance, he accepted the English literary drama, at best a mediocre genre, as his model. Its worst features — characterization in terms of the crude operation of a ruling passion, conspicuous didacticism, artificial diction — all, as we have seen, he assiduously preserved. In the second place he capitulated to certain social pressures which were inimical to the free exercise of what rudimentary dramatic talents he possessed. In most Canadian communities of the time an antique suspicion of the stage was still strong. It is instructive, for example, to read in a 1908 issue of the

Canadian Magazine how stern fathers "tore the theatrical pages from the foreign magazines and burned them lest they should reach the eyes of the children of the house". This anxiety did not have altogether obvious repercussions. During the last quarter of the century innumerable theatres flourished; the larger centres had as a rule several imposing establishments and almost every small town had its opera house. However, the non-conformist conscience of the community subtly dictated the Canadian dramatist's selection and treatment of his subject. To neutralize any offence he might give by writing in a suspect medium he was disposed to choose "safe" themes either from history or the Bible, and his handling of them was correspondingly solemn. In cases where character and plot were his own inventions an impeccable moral scheme was invariably observed. The virtuous triumph in this world or the next, the vicious are confounded and sinners repent. Such an excess of propriety does not always make for entertainment and it is clear most of the nineteenth-century dramatists were aware of it. *Saul*, *Tecumseh*, and *Hildebrand*, among others, contain episodes and characters calculated to provide comic relief. Unfortunately the detachment and irony indispensable for the success of such scenes were not qualities these dramatists could cultivate without jeopardizing their respectability. Thus these comic characters, suffocated at birth by their creators' inhibition, are uniformly grotesque and tedious. As one might expect, the few attempts at political and social satire in dramatic form are similarly feeble. Sara Curzon's *The Sweet Girl Graduate*, Nicholas Davin's *The Fair Grit* and W. H. Fuller's *HMS Parliament* (to name three) all suffer from their authors' inability to cut sufficiently free from the confines of gentility and public decorum.

I suggested at the outset that of all the circumstances which undermined the nineteenth-century Canadian dramatist his lack of contact with the hurly-burly of the practical theatre was the most injurious. The writers themselves seem to have been aware of the fact of their deprivation although not of its extent. There is evidence that a number of these figures did not write closet drama by choice and most resisted the realization that they had accomplished nothing better. The stage directions in *Tecumseh* for example, suggest that Mair had a performance half in mind, and Campbell was distinctly aggrieved over Irving's refusal to produce *Mordred*. It is unlikely of course that had an indigenous theatre been available to these early dramatists, this alone would have transformed their work. The weakness of the dramatic conventions they accepted were too fundamental. However, the exigencies of the stage might at the least have encouraged considerations of economy and dramatic relevance.

This unhappy divorce of writer and theatre in Canada invites certain generalizations. Drama is nothing if not a staging of conflicts. Two of the major conditions of a strong popular drama would appear to be: first, a persuasive social awareness of the existence of important conflicts; secondly, a widespread impulse within a society to have these conflicts played out in its presence. Nineteenth-century closet drama was a compromise based on only one of these conditions. The exertions of these authors suggest a sincere attempt to formulate in dramatic terms the tensions of their world in the absence of audiences to witness them.

A discussion of recent dramatic developments lies outside the scope of this account. It is clear, however, that the playwright in the present century, although enjoying certain advantages denied his predecessors, has suffered from the same lack of a supporting and controlling interest in his work, the kind of popular involvement which in other countries has given rise to a recognizable dramatic tradition. In consequence, the conflicts in much contemporary drama strike one as those of a single mind capable of being honest with itself, rather than those of the community at large. Although no modern Canadian playwright has produced anything comparable to the astonishing curiosities of the previous age, the conditions under which he writes have, in some cases, encouraged him to give free rein to eccentricity. It may be argued, I think, that the vacuum which surrounded the nineteenth-century Canadian dramatist, pulling his work into such a variety of bizarre shapes, still afflicts his contemporary counterpart and presents an equally complex challenge.

CANADIAN ATTITUDES

Pastoral with Ostriches and Mocking-birds

Paul West

THE FOLLOWING REMARKS neither derive from nor imply any feeling of self-exemption. I am addressing myself to what I have to label as "Canadian attitudes", and especially attitudes of Canadian intellectuals. I suspect that what I say will only exemplify still further the grounds of my complaints: an intellectual complaining about intellectuals makes the complaint seem, to the outside world, not so much a series of reasoned objections as a chronic disease. All the same, I think there is a place for at least some criticism of this kind; and I petition safe conduct by advancing the following thesis: Just as some ideas, and discussion of them, create power — financial, political and technological, so also does the arrival and discussion of other ideas remain a form of self-adjustment bordering on self-consolation. The intellectual, presumably, aims at the pragmatic; he also likes to think for the sake and pleasure of thinking. No wonder, then, that there develops an æstheticism of ideas: a mind-game in which educated people make pragmatic-seeming moves with ineffectual pieces.

It is perhaps unfair to offer French examples to start with, as the French are particularly addicted to mind-games; but at this point I want to clarify rather than be fair. Albert Camus, to name one example, advanced some arguments about Algeria which were intended to promote reforms in the world of practical affairs; perhaps they had some effect at the time. It is hard to tell now. Camus also made a great deal of play with such concepts as "justice", "*mesure*" and "sunlit thought"; and it is not too cynical to say that he gained as much solace from shuffling these concepts as, say, Keats did from brooding on the Grecian Urn. So what I say about Canadian thinking — and Canadian thinking about Canadian thinking — has to be set against a background of similar mind-games in other countries. Wherever we look, intellectuals are talking away their feelings

of impotence, creating a substitute world of ideas and images, and initiating one another into one another's private mythologies.

There is nothing wrong with this. What worries me is the difference between the self-consolation that keeps on looking outwards — towards the region of probable defeat and unlikely victory, and the self-consolation that attends only to itself. Because we have so little of the former and so much of the latter, and so much of the latter which pretends it is the former, a C. P. Snow has been able to set himself up as intellectual lawgiver asking for a simplified and unstylish businessman's literature, and university teachers of the humanities have gradually developed the odd habit of assuming that literature was created for the express purpose of assisting them to create something of their own: something which can be used for training young people to be good citizens. In other words, to be blunt, I am objecting to the woolly thinking that lets a Snow assume the role of the all-round chap speaking sanely on behalf of decent society, and the humanists' cowardice when confronted with technology. To push things further, I think there is nonsense being talked about what is socially suitable and nonsense being practised on the quiet by academics. The truth is that literature comes into being not to be useful to society; it may *become* useful because it entertains and consoles, but we must not be priggish about that. The intellectual is powerful only so long as he seeks his own kind of power. He doesn't try to fit in. At the same time, because he does not fit in, he must be as honest as he can: he must recognize when he is talking merely to keep alive a needed attitude, when he is talking just for the fun of it, and when he is really trying to get something done. In all these instances he must stick to his own terms and not try to win victories by pretending to be a scientist of letters.

I am asking for, and judging by, two main assumptions. The non-scientific intellectual ought to look outwards without trying to disguise himself by, for example, turning literature into a "respectable" technology and, when he is playing inward games, ought not to flirt with the terminology of activities he has shrunk from. In other words, the non-scientific intellectual must not pose in order to accommodate himself either outwardly or inwardly. In Canada, however, he does both. In the growing universities the study of literature is tending to be increasingly the bestowal of plasma-units and adoption of pedantic jargon. There are the joiners and the stallers. Both groups turn literature into formulae, sever it from life — from modern life especially although not from modern cant, and are thus damaging the minds and sensibilities of the young. Literature, we too often forget, is not there to be systematized or embalmed; it is there to stimulate

us; and the only excuse for presuming to "teach" it is that it may quicken sensibilities.

I have argued elsewhere[1] that North America is rapidly becoming the wonderland of logology, which is the pseudo-science of turning any lively activity into curriculum. Too many dons are afraid of a living literature; they lament the unfortunate chance that makes poems come out of heads that are morbid, untidy and neurotic. A planned and efficient society would get its literature written by machines; the poems would come out hygienically wrapped with instructions printed on the back: "To be taken once an hour, with one chapter of Northrop Frye". We could do worse: not everyone shares Mr. Frye's concern with categories, but he does at least care about new literature and brings to his apprehension of it a lively, civilized and mordant spirit. When we consider the necessarily limited extent to which the academic can participate in a growing literature — because, it seems, there *have* to be syllabuses and examinations — Mr. Frye emerges a rare specimen. Not every university teacher can be expected to write poems or novels, or even to teach modern literature, any more than teachers of history can be expected to perform most of the assassinations or sign most of the treaties. And it is a fallacy to think that the study of, say, Johnson or Swift is in any sense less relevant to today than is the study of, say, Orwell or Snow. But if we are going to study things at all, in universities, in any kind of organized way, in order to set young minds and sensibilities humming, then a responsive teacher will feel obliged to make the ancient modern.

That is the ideal. In practice, however, the study of literature or of history or of politics can quickly degenerate into pattern-making, so that literary study in particular turns into precis-making, trend-spotting, jargon-applying, and so on. Daily, into my mail-box, there come advertisements from American publishers' Canadian agents: so-called case-books, telling what the critics have said, and explaining not so much how to enjoy a poem as how to "make like" a critic; primers on how to get up poetry for examinations; vast volumes of snippets masquerading as "surveys". Now there is no harm in information until it begins to lie dead in the attic of a young mind. There is no danger in criticism and interpretation until the young mind becomes confused: that is, loses its own individual response in the blather consequent on the fact that the literary critic is always haunted by the likelihood of his having himself created the poem he praises or claims to understand and of having failed to create the poem he condemns or

[1] "The Fear of Possibility", *Chicago Review*, Summer, 1960.

finds obscure. At one extreme we have the gullible young, anxious to pass; at the other the professional casuists who either dote on information for its own sake or put theories between the poem and their own inadequacy. We live in a world of increasing professionalism in which the PhD man is respected as being qualified, whereas the amateur who responds acutely to literature is a suspicious, carping misfit. Obviously I am simplifying (I have to in order to keep the discussion within a few pages); there are lively PhD men just as there are dull and incompetent amateurs.

But I cannot help feeling that the attempt to turn English or literary studies into the basic discipline is doing damage. For curricular and examination purposes the work of art as it stands is being made more systematic, more parrotable, more a collection of clear ideas than a complex of gesturing half-truths. Style and enjoyment are being gently shunted aside in the quest for disciplines approved by society. It is refreshing when an Irving Layton or a Harold Town gets up and says Damn society and the fuddie-duddies and the dons and the lit-critters and the committee-men and the Junior Chamber of Wombats. It is refreshing because such abuse not only rebuffs a recipe-minded society but also reminds us that paintings and poems come out of the heads of the living. We find the creative man speaking in his own right, in his own language and with no syllabus in mind. There is no professional parasite getting in between us and the work, between us and the artist. Between Snow's extreme demands for social realism and, say, the Chicago Aristotelians' extreme insistence on categories, the self-respecting artist has little enough chance of being seen plain. He, after all, is the misfit in the world of planned living in which everyone is a professional and everything is explicable by experts. The professionals — including such new professionals as the accountant, have power; and even the professionals of intellect pretend to power: at least, they speak the language of it. It is a sad pretension.

In fact, Canada's academic intellectuals as distinguished from her intellectuals at large have yet to discover their powerlessness except to betray their academic trust. We have only to read, for instance, M. Jean-C. Falardeau's Plaunt Memorial Lectures delivered at Carleton University in 1960.[2] M. Falardeau intelligently and urbanely argues against the notion of an integrated Canada only waiting to be equipped with a national flag, anthem and holiday;

[2] *Roots and Values in Canadian Lives*, Toronto University Press, 1961.

but he goes on to identify national diversity with national open-mindedness. He rightly points out that "the dominating trend on our continent towards automation and conformism means that our lives are being taken away from us. We are becoming fossils in a land of plenty which is also a moral vacuum." What he does not seem to realize is the comparative ineffectuality of intellectual protest. No matter how populous the universities may become, no matter how thorough their response to medieval and Renaissance traditions, Canadian pride in material benefits remains loud and gaudy.

It is therefore weird and rather depressing to find M. Falardeau, who is justly sceptical about "the mere evangelical use" of such concepts as "democratic spirit", extolling the concept of *Magister* ("a seeker after truth and a lover of wisdom") and deploring "the forces which would make our universities mere factories" in terms of "dialogue between masters and students" and scholars who are "inner-directed" or "tradition-directed" persons. Such ideas are themselves too prescriptive to defeat prescription. M. Falardeau's mixture of high-flown idealism and hopeful recipe smack of the mind-game, and his dream of bringing forth, "with imagination and conviction, the creative potentialities of classical humanism, rejuvenated by the broad perspectives of the social sciences" sounds as far-fetched as sinister. We all know what the social sciences can do for humanism: suffocate it with prescriptive waffle.

"Classical humanism" will continue to exist in enclaves: the French-speaking universities especially and the learned societies. The average but of course decent guy will always rail at it — just as, in a CBC television series on painting, the lecturer invited along some of his university colleagues to represent the philistine, no-nonsense point of view. According to M. Falardeau's dream, the lecturer, who was good when not oversimplifying and apologizing for things commonplace since 1910, should have been unable to do this. But then, M. Falardeau, chairman of Laval University's sociology department, is really playing a word-game all of his own: "They would also," he says at one point, "bring to the fore the factors which are more potent towards facilitating non-equivocal understanding." Confronted with such wool, it is hard to tell whether the thinking is woolly or not. Canada, he says, is not a datum but a construct; perhaps so; but its only unity is the datum of material prosperity.

His conclusion is odd. He attributes "Canada's growing international prestige" to "lack of biases and prejudices in our dealings with others." Canada, he contends, is prudent but insufficiently dynamic. This is true. But he should have gone on to say that the average Canadian is prudent through indifference and

dynamic because acquisitive. The first elations of materialism have not worn off, but M. Falardeau is already saying "We must de-Westernize our concept of civilization":

> How much would we not benefit from re-discovering the sense of harmony and the noble prescriptions of such systems of ethics as those of Confucius, Ashoka, or Buddha which, more than many Western ethnical systems, have insisted on the demands of human dignity!

Try selling that to a commercial sponsor or to a Board of Regents. Ethnics pre-empt ethics. You cannot wean a child from his newly-begun lollipop by offering him Confucius's carrot. It is true that three Canadian universities have Institutes of Asian Studies, but it is hard to see what impact they can have on the community at large or even on the academic mentality which mistrusts the Elizabethan specialist who suddenly writes a book about Balzac or Oscar Wilde. M. Falardeau sets great store by *paideia*, comparative studies, the polymath, and so on; but these ideals have been cheapened into loose talk about the Two Cultures. It is not subtle synthesis that is recommended, but a jargonizing of the humanities.

M. Falardeau's last sentence soars grandly, and away from humanism: "We should now give to ourselves, and to others, the image of a people whose ambition is not so much to reach the moon, as to transcend our psychological space in order to reach the nations around us, closer at hand, but also better worth loving." Those who prescribe for these loveable people should lower their sights a little: Canada will happen, is happening; an accurate image is safer than a desirable one. Meanwhile, those who shove rebelliously forward according to no sociologist's recipe, will become the real *magistri*, alone among a comfortable pseudo-nation which is waiting to be told how best to be that hypothetical thing: "itself". It is not, alas, even bothering to disagree with such as M. Falardeau.

I CAN BRING my various threads together by referring to Mr. Frye's *By Liberal Things*.[3] Mr. Frye touches on most of the themes I have suggested: idea-savouring; the humanists' capitulation to the technologists; the fact that literature is not fodder for dons or civics or (as it has often been regarded in England) gentleman's relish. Above all, if I understand him rightly, he wants

[3] Clarke, Irwin, 1959.

awareness: awareness of tradition, of community, of modern banality and (in its proper place) of the delights to be gained from exercising the mind and the imagination. He names culprits, singling out for special mention the least mentioned: North American self-satisfaction and "life-adjustment programmes"; and the only remedy is "a readiness to examine and if necessary reconstruct . . . assumptions, an exposing of oneself to new experience in all its irrational force". The awakened, alert mind, as he says, is a dangerous organ; but the intelligent young ought to be able to, ought to want to, live dangerously in that way. Education of the best kind is a leading-out, a teasing-out, and is bound to produce some degree of maladjustment. Most of all, Mr. Frye argues, nothing can take the place of the humanities; there's nothing like leather. "A little learning of science often breeds the notion", he says, "that there are equally assured facts in every area of knowledge . . . But in the humanities there is no final appeal except to humanity itself." Science, on the other hand, avoids controversy, dotes on certainties.

Here is a wisdom we can supply by stopping the humanities from becoming mere crossword puzzles. The new priggishness, which wants education to include more science as well as be more scientifically suited to society, has almost won the day. North Americans have listened to Snow with reverential ignorance based on fear. But surely, if they and their children have to live in a world dominated by science and its reckless exploitation by politicians, then surely the mental and spiritual adjustment they have to make will be better founded on critical intelligence, on a full view of human possibility, than on extra physics lessons. We do not come to terms with human foolishness the better for knowing how bombs explode; and if we want to rebuke and vilify the politicians who drive the scientists, as well as the profiteers who sponsor TV rubbish, then a lively apprehension of mankind — "of mature man as distinct from the childishness immersed in the dissolving present or the senility immersed in the past", as Mr. Frye says, is an essential training. Only our universities can provide it; and the pity is that they are allowing the liveliest objects of study to be tailored by scholiasts and drears. And the young student, discovering that he is human, finds less and less in his studies to engage his own emotions, temperament, dreams and hopes.

We must get more imagination into the teaching (so-called) of the humanities; it is not method we need, or matter: God knows, we already have a surfeit of both. The trouble is that professors of English have a strongly developed economic interest in the writing of literary textbooks. It is high time to let the poets and the painters loose in the universities, even if — by the old curricular standards —

all the students fail. I think it is much more important (and even that word is more earnest, more pompous than I mean to sound) that the students should enjoy their reading; should experience intense streams of irrelevant emotions; should be driven half-mad by what they cannot understand; should become bad citizens because they have understood only too well. None of this will come about as long as the neo-Alexandrians have their cold hands on literature. You have only to go where the Modern Language Association meets: there you will see phalanxes of suited, short-haired literature executives, trading wrinkles about course-phasing and theme-grading and all that highly essential committee-work which keeps the literary industry growing. There they are, skating or hoping to skate on the surface: contriving terms and fallacies and methodologies and dichotomies and footnotes. Few of them would countenance the notion that literature's vital operation is to stain the fingers like nicotine or work mysteriously on the metabolism like radium. Literature cannot be guaranteed to make us feel comfortable or public-spirited; in some cases, if it gets through, it will blast and sicken, undermine and pervert. And yet I would rather have that happen, at that second-hand, and know that it happened to a living someone who could heal himself at the same source than see students, especially at the freshman level, parroting dryasdusts' answers to dryasdusts' questions.

Finally I must try to explain an attitude I call recipe-mindedness. It reminds me of the way in which the Renaissance cult of the classics has for centuries been allowed to stunt and impede the study of literature in English. The difference is that now it is the cult of the scientific which gets in the way. Tabulation of images at ponderous length ousts the general comment based on an attentive, uncounting reading. If it is not Pope's syntax it is Byron's rhyme-patterns. Computer-criticism looms. The two main approaches to literature are sociological and scholarly, and few scholars seem to know why anything is any good. The student quails at this efficient society in which everyone knows what everything is *for*, and he surrenders. No-one tells him about the Softly Softly Catchee Monkey game which is going on. Technology and organizing power and all kinds of other human ingenuities are complicating our daily lives and increasing society's pressure on us. Nobody is a private person now. It is not surprising that for some time creative people have been discarding and perverting such esteemed human inventions as logic, coherence, regular form, clarity, syntax and system. As the organ grinds ever more complicatedly on, the monkey jumps off; but he is shadowed by dons anxious to rewrite his work for him according to these inventions. I am not damning the discussion and comparison of responses; I am just intrigued and disturbed

by the boom in the mind-game. All very well to try putting society right, but there are some things we have to leave to chance and informality. Men can no more implement all their prescriptions than monkeys can play Beethoven.

There is no little vanity in man's pretensions to controlling his world: he not only talks importantly of impracticable theories but by so talking creates new problems for those whose job it is to sustain, at its best, thinking for thinking's sake. Above all, the young student must be told that literature is its own best representative, resists being codified, is no branch of the Civil Service, is not technology and will always betray those who try to twist it into being a descriptive science. Its power is immense; but private, not institutional; and it is only those intellectuals who are themselves out of touch with the raw and teeming life of the continent who have mistaken literature. M. Falardeau on "classical humanism" is flirting with actuality, marrying theory. He neglects the country's lowest Common Denominators. Mr. Frye sees the imagination's indiscipline, is willing to let things get out of hand. M. Falardeau is really undervaluing the humanities, exaggerating what they cannot do by minimizing what they can do. Mr. Frye is asking us to let the humanities remain the humanities: the eloquences of man in his private wondering. More than this they cannot be, and they will only be less when we have ceased to respect them for their endearing vices. We cannot predict what will happen in Canada. But here is a new country, imitating a powerful and experienced neighbour already deft in recipe-mindedness. The temptation to organize even our most private activities, and especially those of the young, is enormous: it becomes easier to compile reports, to explain to politicians, to document for employers. I just hope that the humanists will not go on capitulating. I feel that the study of literature can give the young person private resources unlikely to make him a good salesman, bureaucrat or lawyer; but only so long as it is allowed to *happen to* him rather than be fed into him in measured tablets. In other words there is no room for pseudo-science, for ostriches, for "safe" syllabuses. Or rather, if there is, then only the quiet, clandestine mind-game remains for those who care: those who know that they and their fellows have wasted the only power they ever had; and that is the power of captivating beyond and within the academic timetable by means of an inward operation on the adolescent spirit.

FOLK SONGS IN ONTARIO

Edith Fowke

WHEN CANADIAN FOLK SONGS are mentioned, most people think first of French Canada, and then of our Maritime provinces, particularly Nova Scotia and Newfoundland. These are the areas where collecting has been concentrated, and until recently little was known of the folk songs of Ontario. In fact, it was generally assumed that we had few folk songs and that it was too late to find the ones that might have existed earlier now that Ontario has become so highly industrialized. However, when I got a tape recorder in the fall of 1956, I decided to do a little scouting, and soon uncovered enough traditional material to indicate that the only reason so few Ontario songs were known was that no particular effort had been made to find them. During the last six years I have recorded nearly a thousand traditional songs in somewhat sporadic trips to various parts of the province, and that number could easily be increased if I devoted more time to collecting.

From the time when they first began to take an interest in folk songs, collectors have been lamenting that traditional singers are a disappearing breed. Back in 1855 when the Society of Antiquaries of Newcastle-upon-Tyne started to collect Northumbrian ballads, they noted that so far as the words were concerned they were half a century too late, and in 1907 Cecil Sharp wrote that "The English ballad is moribund; its account is well-nigh closed." Similarly, when Dr. Roy Mackenzie started his pioneer collecting in Nova Scotia in 1909, he bemoaned "the mournful truth that the oral propagation of ballads has in our day and generation almost ceased."

In the fifty-odd years since then we have learned that the folksinger is a much hardier breed than anyone gave him credit for being, but even so I have been

amazed to find how well the tradition has been preserved in a province formerly regarded as barren. It has been very satisfying to record today many ballads which Dr. Mackenzie first noted half a century ago, and which he then feared were disappearing.

When I started collecting, I was lucky enough to begin in the Peterborough region, some ninety miles north-east of Toronto. Although I have since sampled various other areas of the province, I have found no other region so rich in songs. In this province the Irish settlers seem to have preserved their songs and the habit of singing them much better than people of Scottish or English descent. Peterborough is a particularly fruitful field because it is far enough from the main industrial areas to have developed slowly, and many of the people living there today are descendants of the original settlers Peter Robinson brought out from Ireland in 1825. Also, as the only sizable centre within fifty miles, it has become the home of many farm folk who have moved in from the surrounding country. In the little villages around it: Lakefield, Ennismore, Douro, Downer's Corners, live many people whose forefathers carved farms out of the wilderness early in the nineteenth century.

Another reason why Peterborough has proved a particularly rich source of songs is that during the nineteenth century it was a great lumbering centre, and even when the lumber camps moved farther north, many Peterborough men followed them. Until recent times it was the custom for farmers to work their fields in the summer and spend the winter in the woods, coming back each spring with their winter's wages and a fresh batch of songs.

Most of the folk songs that can still be found in Ontario owe their survival to the lumber camps. With remarkably few exceptions, the songs I have recorded have come either from men who worked in the woods in their youth or from people who learned the songs from fathers, uncles, or grandfathers who had gone shantying. Indeed, I soon learned that the best way to get traditional songs was to ask not for folk songs or old-time songs but for shanty songs.

In the long winter nights in the shanties the men took turns in singing all the songs they could remember: old British ballads, music-hall ditties, love songs, songs of the sea and of the lumber camps, and popular songs of the day. Thus the shantyboys preserved and spread folk songs of many types, with the result that songs which might originally have been known only in one family became part of the repertoire of traditional singers across the province.

Individually those traditional singers are quite varied, ranging in education from illiterates to university graduates, in age from seven to ninety-seven, and

in status from unemployed laborers to a controller of the city of Toronto. Generally, however, most of them have a rural background, having spent at least part of their lives on a farm; and the largest number are now in their seventies and eighties. Folksinging can no longer be considered a living tradition, for most of the singers are recalling songs they have not sung for twenty, forty, or sixty years. Nevertheless, a surprising number can reproduce lengthy ballads without hesitation. Every collector is tantalized by fragments of songs once known and now forgotten, but on the whole the Ontario singers manage to provide complete and well-rounded versions.

The finest traditional singer I have come across was an old gentleman named O. J. Abbott who died in 1962 in his ninetieth year. He sang some hundred and twenty songs for me, including some unusual Irish ballads and Canadian lumber-camp songs. Born in England, he came to Canada as a boy, and for about fifteen years lived and worked on farms in the Ottawa valley. It was an Irish community, and he learned most of his songs from the farmers and their sons, and from the men he met in the lumber camps where he worked for several winters. As he said, "All I had to do was hear a song once and I could sing it." After 1900 he worked in Hull where he had little opportunity to learn new songs. When he was recording, he would repeatedly remark, "Why, I haven't sung that song for sixty years."

Except for the fact that he remembered more songs than most, Mr. Abbott is fairly typical of the Ontario traditional singers. Most of them learned the songs in their youth and rarely sing them today. There are a few in their thirties or forties who still remember some of the songs they heard their fathers or mothers sing, and occasionally a farm boy or girl picks up a few songs from an older member of the family, but on the whole the younger generation are now learning their songs from radio and television.

TRADITIONAL ONTARIO SONGS can be divided into those that originated in Britain and those that were composed in North America. The songs that collectors prize most highly are the Child ballads: those that Francis James Child collected and classified in his monumental five-volume work: *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, which has become a folklorists' Bible. My collecting to date indicates that Ontario singers have not preserved as many of these as have

been found in Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, and the eastern states, but nevertheless some interesting samples have turned up. Versions of such widespread favourites as "Lord Randall", "Barbara Allen", "Mary Hamilton", "Our Goodman", "The House Carpenter", "The Wife Wrapt in Wetherskin", "The Farmer's Curst Wife", and "The Golden Vanity" are common here as elsewhere in North America. A very complete version of "Lady Isabel and the Elf Knight" has survived under the somewhat misleading title of "The Dapherd (Dappled) Gray", with its tale of the elopement, the drowning of the false lover, and the final conversation with the lady's little cock. "Katharine Jaffray" (which the singer identified as "There Was a Lord in Edinburgh") gives the story of the marriage interrupted by the true lover who carries his girl off in the best Lochinvar style. An unusual version of "The Gray Cock" has eliminated the supernatural element found in the old-country versions and become simply an account of a night visit. The bloody tale of "Little Musgrave and Lord Barnard" has survived as "Lord Banner's Wife", complete with the cuckolding leading to double murder and suicide. Rarer is the version of "Hind Horn" which retains the magic ring that grows pale when the wandering lord's sweatheart gives him up and agrees to marry another, thus warning him in time to return and interrupt the wedding dressed as an old beggarman. Also unusual is the version of "The Lass of Roch Royal": this ballad is remembered in America chiefly for the lyric verses that begin: "Who will shoe your pretty little foot?" but the Ontario version tells of Lord Gregory's mother turning away his sweetheart, and of Lord Gregory finding her dead body "in Lochland lane". A somewhat light-hearted form of "The Gypsy Laddie" is common on this continent, but an Ontario version is the first reported in North America that preserves the tragic ending in which the band of gypsies is hanged "for the stealing of Lord Castle's lady O". Another rare item is "The Dowie Dens of Yarrow": almost unknown in North America, it has survived among the Scots of Glengarry county as "The Dewy Dells of Yarrow".

While such Child ballads have survived in Ontario, they are vastly outnumbered by the later broadside ballads. This is consistent with the province's history, for while the first settlers in the eastern part of the continent came out from Britain in the seventeenth century, most of the Ontario pioneers came out in the nineteenth. By that time the older Child ballads were being submerged by the great tide flowing from the broadside presses, and these, naturally enough, made up the major part of the repertoire of the emigrants who sailed from the British Isles in last century's "Great Migration". Also, as the Irish tradition was predominant in the lumber camps, the later broadsides or "come-all-ye's" tended to get wider

circulation than the older English and Scottish ballads.

Almost half of the two hundred and fifty titles Dr. Malcolm Laws catalogued in his bibliographical guide, *American Balladry from British Broadsides*, have turned up in Ontario, and in addition nearly a hundred others not previously reported in North America. An impression of the remarkably varied types may be given by mentioning a few from each of the eight subject headings Laws uses to classify such ballads.

Under "War Ballads" come "The Bonny Bunch of Roses O" from the Napoleonic Wars, "The Heights of Alma" from the Crimean War, "The Croppy Boy", "Kelly the Fenian Boy", and "Kevin Barry" from the Irish rebellions, the Jacobite "Johnny Cope", and laments of the Irish who fought in England's wars, like "The Kerry Recruit", "Patrick Sheehan", and "Old Erin Far Away".

For an inland province, Ontario has preserved a surprising number of "Ballads of Sailors and the Sea": some of these were brought here by east-coast sailors who came to work in the northern lumberwoods. Particularly notable are the pirate tales of "The Flying Cloud", "Kelly the Pirate", "Captain Colstein", and "The Ocean Bee".

"Ballads of Crime and Criminals" recall England's Dick Turpin in "Bonny Black Bess", Ireland's "Brennan on the Moor", and Australia's "Bold Jack Donahue" and "The Wild Colonial Boy". The most unusual murder ballad to turn up here recounts the sad fate of "Dr. Pritchard" who was hanged in Edinburgh in 1865 for poisoning his wife and mother-in-law.

"Ballads of Family Opposition to Lovers" usually and tragically, like "The Constant Farmer's Son" who is killed by his sweetheart's brothers, or "Edwin in the Lowlands Low" who is murdered by his girl's parents. Occasionally the tide is turned as in "The Bold Soldier" where the girl's father and brothers are beaten in battle, or "The Banks of Dundee" where the girl shoots her interfering uncle.

"Ballads of Lovers' Disguises and Tricks" fall largely into two groups: those in which the girl disguises herself and goes to sea or to war with or in pursuit of her lover, as in "The Female Warrior", "The Lady Leroy", "The Banks of the Nile", or "Pretty Polly Oliver"; and those in which the lover returns in disguise after a prolonged absence to test his sweetheart's faithfulness, as in "The Dark-Eyed Sailor", "The Mantle So Green", "MacDonald's Return to Glencoe", or "The Pretty Fair Maid in Her Father's Garden".

"Ballads of Faithful Lovers" tell of noblemen who marry maidens of low degree, as in "The Lass of Glenshee" or "When W'll Ye Gang Awa', James?"

of pastoral romance as in "Branded Lambs" or "The Brown Girl", and of tragedy as in "Molly Bawn" whose lover shot her because he took her for a swan, or "The Sheffield Apprentice" whose mistress caused him to be arrested and hanged because he preferred her chambermaid to her.

"Ballads of Unfaithful Lovers" include many ballads of wayside seduction like "The Nightingale" or "The Dawning of the Day", tragic tales of girls forsaken and dying like "Mary of the Wild Moor" or "The Butcher Boy", and of girls murdered by their sweethearts like "The Wexford Girl" or "The Cruel Ship's Carpenter".

"Humorous and Miscellaneous Ballads" include all those not easily classified: the tale of "The Old Woman of Slapsadam" who sought to kill her husband by making him eat eggs and marrowbones, Irish music-hall ditties like "Finnegan's Wake" and "Doran's Ass", the tale of the famous Irish race horse, "Skewball", and of the lost "Children in the Wood".

Not only the narrative ballads but many lyric songs came to this province with the early immigrants from the British Isles. Many old-country love songs have been preserved here: for example, Mr. O. J. Abbott sang a fine version of the Irish street song, "Limerick Is Beautiful", or "The Colleen Bawn", which concludes with these verses:

> Oh if I were made the emperor all Russia to command,
> Julius Caesar, or the Lord Lieutenant of the land,
> I'd give the crown down off my head, my people on their knees,
> Likewise a fleet of sailing ships out on the briny seas,
>
> I'd give the crown down off my head, my people on their knees,
> Likewise a fleet of sailing ships out on the briny seas,
> A beggar I would go to bed and happy rise at dawn
> If by my side all for a bride I'd find the Colleen Bawn.

More surprising was the discovery of the Irish folk song from which Yeats fashioned his "Down By the Sally Gardens". When working in the lumberwoods during the First World War, a now elderly Lakefield farmer had learned this love lament which he called "Down By Sally's Garden":

> Come you rambling boys of pleasure, give ear to those few lines I write,
> Although I'm a rover and in roving I take great delight,
> I set my mind on a handsome girl who at all times did me slight,
> But my mind was never easy till my darling were in my sight.

It was down by Sally's garden one evening late I took my way,
'Twas there I spied this pretty little girl and those words to me sure she did say,
She advised me to take love easy as the leaves grew on the tree,
But I was young and foolish, with my darling could not agree.

The very next time I met my love, sure I thought her heart was mine,
But as the weather changes, my true love she changed her mind.
Cursed gold is the root of evil, oh it shines with a glittering blue,
Causes many the lad and lass to part, let their hearts and minds be ever so true.

Sure I wish I was in Dublin town, and my true love along with me,
With money to support us and keep us in good company,
With lots of liquor plentiful, flowing bowls on every side.
Let fortune never daunt you, my love, we're both young and the world is wide.

But there's one thing more that grieves me sore is to be called a runaway,
And to leave the spot I was born in, oh Cupid cannot set me free,
And to leave that darling girl I love, oh, alas, what will I do?
Will I become a rover, sleep with the girl I never knew?

The British influence is also evident in a number of bawdy ballads that survive in Ontario. For example, a young Peterborough man sang a ditty he called "Derby Town" which had changed but little in the two and a half centuries since it was printed in D'Urfey's *Pills to Purge Melancholy* as "A Tottenham Frolick". Another ballad which is at least as old but has not previously appeared in print dates from the time before the industrial revolution when travelling weavers had a reputation more recently associated with travelling salesmen:

Oh as I roved out one moonlight night,
The stars were shining and all things bright.
I spied a pretty maid by the light of the moon
And under her apron she carried a loom,

REFRAIN: To me right whack fal the do a di do day
Right whack fal the do a di do day,
Toora loora loora lay,
To me right whack fal the do a di do day.

She says, "Young man, what trade do you bear?"
Says I, "I'm a weaver I do declare.
I am a weaver brisk and free."
"Would you weave upon my loom, kind sir?" said she.

There was Nancy Right and Nancy Rill,
For them I wove the Diamond Twill.
Nancy Blue and Nancy Brown,
For them I wove the Rose and the Crown.

So I laid her down upon the grass,
I braced her loom both tight and fast,
And for to finish it with a joke,
I topped it off with double stroke.

IN ADDITION to the large body of songs brought to Ontario from the British Isles, a considerable number of native American ballads drifted north from the United States. Most of these reached Ontario by way of the lumber camps: either through American shantyboys who came to work in Ontario camps, or Canadians who crossed the border to work in the woods of Michigan.

Strangely enough, many cowboy and western pioneer songs are known here. "The Texas Rangers" is probably the most common of these: I have recorded it five times in different parts of the province. The Canadian versions differ little from American texts except for one which included these lines:

When at the age of sixteen years I joined a royal band,
We marched to San Francisco and then the Rio Grande.

The "royal band" is a fairly evident sign of British influence — the Rangers would have been surprised to know they had enlisted under our Queen, and perhaps gratified to have their territory extended to San Francisco.

Other western songs frequently found in Ontario are the ubiquitous "Cowboy's Lament" about the lad who died in the streets of Laredo, and the tale of the western desperado, "Cole Younger". These are widely known, but one unusual song that circulated in the Ontario woods has not been reported elsewhere: a cowboy version of "The Broken Ring" which is interesting because it closely parallels the original story of "Hind Horn".

The California gold rush also produced several echoes in Ontario. In one ballad about "A Dying Californian", the singer laments that he is dying far from his home and sends messages to his family and friends. Another, "My California Boys", said to have been written by an Ontario woman in the early 1850's, takes the form of a letter from a Canadian parent to two boys who joined in the gold rush. It can hardly be said to possess poetic merit, but it does convey the strict moral tone of rural Ontario:

> Although you are far away from here, I always hope and pray
> That you do walk in innocence and mind the Sabbath Day.
> Never gamble, drink nor swear, which happiness destroys,
> And don't you fear, should death appear, my California Boys.

The ancestors of several common cowboy songs are also to be found here: for example, "Michigan-I-O", the forerunner of "The Buffalo Skinners"; the Irish version of "The Girl I Left Behind", and "Early, Early in the Spring", on which "The Trail to Mexico" was based. I have also taped a local song to the tune of "I'm Going to Leave Old Texas Now", a song called "Jogging Along" to the tune of "Jerry Go and Ile That Car", and a little river-driver's song that obviously has the same ancestry as "Whisky, Rye Whisky":

> I'll eat when I'm hungry and drink when I'm dry,
> If the river don't drown me, I'll live till I die,
> If the river don't drown me while over it I roam,
> For I am a river driver and far away from home.

Of course the largest group of native North American ballads found here are those that have to do with lumbering. While the shantyboys sang songs of all kinds, their favourites were those that told of life in the woods or of the adventures of other shantyboys. Many of these were common to lumber camps on both sides of the border: whether they originated in Maine or New Brunswick, Michigan or Ontario, they were sung and passed on in the Ontario camps.

The lumberjack songs fall into three main groups. The first describes life and work in the woods, often taking the form of an account of a winter in a particular camp, as in "Turner's Camp" or "Hogan's Lake":

> 'Twas up on the Black River at a place called Hogan's Lake
> Those able-bodied fellows went square timber for to make.
> The echo of their axes rung from shore to shore,
> The lofty pine they fell so fast, like cannons they did roar.

The second group tells of tragic accidents in the woods or on the river: like "The Jam on Gerry's Rocks", "The Hanging Limb", or "Johnny Doyle":

> Bad luck was with Johnny that morning,
> His foot it got caught in the jam,
> And you know how those waters go howling
> From the flood of the reservoir dam.

The third group tells of the lively times the shantyboys had in the spring when they headed for the bright lights of the cities with their winter's pay in their pockets:

> The winter is all over and the hard work is all done,
> We'll all go down to Saginaw and have a little fun.
> Some will go on Stanley's coach and others take the train,
> But if you get there before me, you can whoop 'er up, Liza Jane.

Taken together, they create a vivid picture of the early days of lumbering and of the conditions that promoted the spread of folk songs:

> If you were in the shanty when they came in at night,
> To see them dance, to hear them sing, it would your heart delight.
> Some asked for patriotic songs, some for love songs did call;
> Fitzsimmons sang about the girl that wore the waterfall.

A smaller number of songs came from the sailors on the Great Lakes. These also include ballads from both sides of the border, the most popular being two lengthy ditties describing "The Cruise of the *Bigler*" and "The Cruise of the *E. C. Roberts*". The first is a humorous account of a flat-bottomed scow hauling timber from Buffalo to Milwaukee, a boat so slow that she "could have passed the whole darn fleet if they'd hove to and wait"; and the second tells of the hardships suffered by a crew engaged in hauling red iron ore from Escanaba to Cleveland. Apart from these, most of the Great Lakes' songs are dismal tales of ships lost in storms: "The Loss of the *Persia*" is well known in both Canada and the States, while other Canadian ballads chronicle the loss of the *Asia*, the *Maggie Hunter*, the *Belle Sheridan*, and the *Antelope*. Most of them are so pedestrian and lugubrious that they create an unintentionally humorous effect; occasionally, however, the anonymous chroniclers produce an effective image:

> Oh it's all around the Presqu'isle buoys the lake gulls flit and skim,
> They all join in the chorus of the *Persian*'s funeral hymn.
> They skim along the water's edge and then aloft they soar
> In memory of the *Persian*'s crew drowned on Lake Huron's shore.

Another group of Ontario songs reflects outstanding events in Canada's history. The Battle of the Plains of Abraham inspired two ballads that have survived in oral tradition down to the present: one of these, usually identified as "Brave Wolfe", was widely known in the New England states and the Canadian Maritimes; the other, "General Wolfe", has been recorded from oral tradition in Britain but was unreported in North America until an old lady of eighty sang it for me some five years ago. Originally published as a broadside ballad, it has preserved through two centuries a fairly accurate picture of the famous battle.

The American Revolution is recalled in "Revolutionary Tea", a ballad brought to Canada by the United Empire Loyalists, which describes the Revolution as a squabble between a mother and daughter. The siege of Quebec in 1775 probably inspired a little play-party game that begins:

> We're marching down to old Quebec
> And the fifes and the drums are a-beating,
> For the British boys have gained the day
> And the Yankees are retreating.

Incidentally, the same ditty is sung in the States with the roles reversed.

The Battle of Detroit at the beginning of the War of 1812 produced a lively song beginning "Come All You Bold Canadians", and in "The Battle of the Windmill" set to the tune of "The Girl I Left Behind Me" the Prescott Volunteers boast of their victory over Mackenzie's supporters who crossed the St. Lawrence to take possession of a huge stone windmill near Cornwall in 1838. The Fenian raids of 1866 produced several songs: one little ditty passed on by an Irish sailor on the Great Lakes recalls the humiliating defeat of the Queen's Own Rifles in their clash with the Fenians at Lime Ridge, and in an "Anti-Fenian Song" set to the Civil War tune of "Tramp, Tramp, Tramp, the Boys Are Marching", the Ontario boys boasted that "Beneath the Union Jack we will drive the Fenians back and be happy in our own Canadian home."

Other events of less historical importance have also been preserved in song. For example, a typical gallows ballad spread across Ontario shortly after Reginald Birchall was hanged in Woodstock jail in 1890 for killing an English lad named Frederick Benwell. Its opening, "My name is J. R. Birchall, that name I'll never deny", indicates its debt to a similar American ballad, "Charles Guiteau", describing the assassination of President Garfield in 1881, which in its turn had been patterned on an earlier ballad entitled "My Name Is John T. Williams".

A less famous murder case, in which Michael Lee killed his sweetheart, Maggie

Howie, in Napanee in 1882, also inspired a ballad that included such deathless lines as:

> She wrung her hands in anguish and wept most bitterly,
> Saying, 'Michael, do have mercy and do not murder me.'
> But I was deaf to all her cries, no mercy could I show,
> And in my hands I took the axe and struck that fatal blow.

More light-hearted are the accounts of men who have spent some time as guests of the government in various Ontario institutions. Toronto's Don jail is saluted in a ditty beginning:

> On the banks of the Don there's a dear little spot,
> A boarding house proper where you get your meals hot.
> You get fine bread and water, and you won't pay a cent,
> Your taxes are paid for, your board and your rent,

and the same theme is expanded in an ode to "Johnson's Hotel" in Peterborough, the jail that stands "on the banks of the Ottonabee". Another ditty describes the fate of a group of Americans who came up to Ontario, ran afoul of the law, and spent some time in "Sault St. Mary's Jail".

THE STRONG IRISH FLAVOUR of many Ontario songs is often emphasized by an accent so marked that you would swear the singer had landed from Cork last week, even when his great grandparents came here well over a century ago. Such Irishisms as "arrums" for "arms" and "merned" for "mourned" are almost standard usage in Ontario ballads, and most of the old shanty singers finish off their songs by speaking the last word or phrase; a characteristic of the traditional Irish come-all-ye style.

The outstanding example of the Irish influence is a typical come-all-ye commemorating a riot that took place in Montreal in 1877. Its flavour is that of the innumerable nationalist ballads composed about the various battles and rebellions of Ireland's stormy history, complete to the perennial complaint about "what King Billy and Cromwell did"; the event that inspired it happened on the Twelfth of July back in 1877 when antagonism between Catholics and Protestants in Montreal was at fever heat:

> Come all you gallant Irishmen who love your church and creed,
> I hope you'll pay attention to the few lines that you read,

Concerning your church and countrymen, your brothers one and all,
It's how we licked the Yellowbacks in the city of Montreal.

It was on the twelfth of last July the Orangemen did draw nigh,
And to insult the Catholics they waved their colors high;
To insult the Catholics it was their one design,
And they played the tunes King Billy played on the day he crossed the Boyne.

They marched from Vyve and Circle down to Victoria Square,
It's there that they halted for the Union boys were there.
Then Fawcett drew a revolver and he let go with a ball,
And swore he'd kill every Papist dog in the city of Montreal.

So Hackett followed after him and fired just once again,
And he received a fatal ball which entered in his brain.
He cast his eyes around him as downward he did fall,
And he bid adieu to that Orange crew in the city of Montreal.

So come all you true-bred Catholics who love your church and creed,
I hope you'll pay attention to what King Billy and Cromwell did.
They tore down Catholic churches from Lewis to Donegal,
But they can't come across with no games like that in the city of Montreal.

The young Peterborough man who sang that for me had learned it from his father, and he knew nothing of the events that inspired it.

While that has the style of the Irish rebel ballads, it was obviously composed in Canada. Other Ontario songs show an even closer relationship to older British songs. For example, "The Roving Journeyman" has been transformed into "Ye Maidens of Ontario", and the old Irish song called "The Bonny Laboring Boy" has been adapted to the Ontario scene as "The Jolly Shanty Boy" or "The Railroad Boy":

If I had all the riches that's in my father's store,
Oh freely I would share it with the boy that I adore.
We'll fill our glasses to the brim, let the toast go merrily round,
And we'll drink to the health of the railroad boy, from Ottawa to Owen Sound.

It is easy to see how such songs were adapted from older models, but occasionally I come across one which is less easily identified. For example, a Glengarry

woman sang a little ode to "The Jolly Raftsman O" which has all the charm of the older British love songs but seems to be a fresh creation:

I am sixteen, I do confess,
I'm sure I am no older, O.
I place my mind, it never shall move,
It's on a jolly raftsman O.

REFRAIN: To hew and score it is his plan,
And handle a broad-axe neatly O.
It's lay the line and mark the pine
And do it most completely O.

Oh she is daily scolding me
To marry some freeholder O.
I place my mind, it never shall move,
It's on a jolly raftsman O.

My love is marching through the pine
As brave as Alexander O,
And none can I find to please my mind
As well as the jolly raftsman O.

Less poetic but more widely known was the lament of "The Poor Little Girls of Ontario" who were left behind when their fellows headed westward:

I'll sing you a song of the lone pest,
It goes by the name of the great north-west.
I cannot have a beau at all,
They all skip out there in the fall.

CHORUS: One by one they all clear out,
Thinking to better themselves no doubt,
Caring little how far they go
From the poor little girls of Ontario.

This little ditty circulated in Ontario between 1890 and 1910, taking slightly different forms depending upon the regions that were currently attracting the boys. In the 1890's it contained verses mentioning Thunder Bay and Keewatin; later it referred to "Manitobay", Saskatchewan, and the Cariboo.

A few more recent songs have also passed into oral tradition, notably some from the great depression of the 'thirties. Typical is a ditty that was sung by men

working on a highway being built as a relief project which contained this somewhat bitter topical reference:

> It's hailing, it's raining, but during the day
> The Lord works with Bennett to keep clouds away.
> Now if I had Bennett where Bennett's got me,
> The very first morning he'd be weak at the knees.

NOTE

A survey like this can indicate only in fairly general terms the various types of folk songs still to be found in Ontario, and, of course, can give no idea of the tunes to which they were sung. Those who would like to hear some of the Ontario songs sung by traditional singers will find samples on the following records:

"Folk Songs of Ontario": Folkways FM 4005; "Irish and British Songs from the Ottawa Valley" sung by O. J. Abbot: Folkways FM 4051; "Lumbering Songs from the Ontario Shanties": Folkways FM 4052; "Songs of the Great Lakes": Folkways FM 4053; "Ontario Ballads and Folksongs": Prestige International 25014; "Songs of Tom Brandon, Peterborough, Ontario": Folk Legacy FSC 9.

A TURN TO THE STAGE

Reaney's Dramatic Verse: Part II

Alvin Lee

ANYONE PRESENT at the opening of Mr. Reaney's first comedy, *The Killdeer*, will not easily forget the excitement it engendered in the Coach House Theatre where it was being staged by the University Alumnae players, under the direction of Pamela Terry. Through a dazzling array of poetic language, excellent acting parts, and bizarre psychological unravellings one soon realized that *The Red Heart*, that intensely private book of problems stated but not resolved, had come to the stage. The destructive Sundogs, with their laying waste of nature, had combined with the English orphan — and also with Jezebel, with the Whore of Babylon, and with Mallory's Morgan la Fay — to create Madam Fay, a cosmetic saleswoman. There was also the emerging boy poet, afraid to leave behind his toys and childhood games, because of the horror of the adult world, and wishing, "If only we could choose our fathers and mothers". There were enough dominating parental figures to keep small boys running down leafless lanes of fear forever. But other elements had combined with *The Red Heart*, and resolutions had been worked out.

There was a suspicion among some of the audience that even in the midst of its verbal brilliance *The Killdeer*, especially in its plot and in the widely varying moods evoked from the audience, showed too many signs of obvious manipulation by the playwright. One critic instructed the writer that this was a good example of what a lyric poet does when he dares put a work on the stage without having sufficiently learned the craft of the playwright. Mr. Mavor Moore, writing in the *The Toronto Daily Star*, had this verdict:

> For when the history of the Canadian theatre comes to be written, I should not be at all surprised to find *The Killdeer* listed as the first Canadian play of real consequence, and the first demonstration of genius among us. . . . . The great

thing is that the words Mr. Reaney has written for Miss Terry and her actors soar, spin, whirl and flash like nothing ever heard on our stage before. And he rips us open as people with a sort of jolly whimsy which may forever mark the end of the myth of the stolid, sober, inarticulate Canadian.

The first act of *The Killdeer* sets the theme, the necessity of the young freeing themselves of slavery to their parents, if they are to mature, and the extreme reluctance of the parent to let this happen. The protagonist is Harry Gardner, a very unpromising looking young man with acne, dominated by his fussy, pious, bossy mother. Her refrain is "I feel I don't know my boy's heart any longer", to which he replies, "When I'm asleep/Why don't you take off the top of my head/And put your hand in?/What could I show you/Mother, except yourself?" He believes that if he could only get married, he'd be all right, and the girl who is obviously the one for him, the egg-girl Rebecca from near the Huckleberry Marsh, does appear shortly. But certain complex matters make this union unlikely, at least for the present, and Act I ends with both Harry and Rebecca going to marry someone else. Act II shows the fatal consequences, and Act III restores sanity to what has by then been revealed as a very sick world.

The situation in the Gardner cottage is far from ideal, but Harry is well aware of his problem and is showing clear signs of rebellion. He resents bitterly his mother's reading his letters and diaries and bank book, and her examining his dirty linen. He has gone to a doctor about his acne without telling her, and as a result has learned he'll have to refuse his mother's cooking. He hasn't let her see him naked since he was sixteen. He has even gone to the prostitute, Mrs. Sow, but couldn't knock on the door, because he kept thinking of his mother with her white apron. Above all, Harry loathes Mrs. Gardner's parlour, the perfect image of her mind:

> Oh Gosh! This room! This front parlour of yours!
> I think I'll go mad if I don't get one day
> Of my life when I don't come home to this.
> Why don't I run away? Because I'm afraid
> Afraid of the look on a face I'd never see.
> Dear old mother's face! This room, This room!
> These brown velvet curtains trimmed with
> One thousand balls of fur! Fifteen kewpie dolls!
> Five little glossy china dogs on a Welsh dresser!
> Six glossy Irish beleek cats and seven glass
> Green pigs and eight blue glass top hats and

Five crystal balls filled with snow falling down
On R.C.M.P. Constables. Two little boys on chamber
Pots: Billy Can and Tommy Can't. That stove —
Cast iron writhing and tortured curlicues!

Harry's situation is bad, but it is ideal compared with Rebecca's. It is Madam Fay, in the first scene of the play, who briefs Mrs. Gardner and the audience on Rebecca's background and on her own at the same time. This is so lurid that Mrs. Gardner, who has never used cosmetics in her life, buys several, just to keep the painted lady in the cottage and talking. The visitor reveals that she has a son, Eli, who is nineteen and hates her; she has left his upbringing to the hired man, Clifford, who, we learn later, has exercised a sinister hold over the boy ever since Eli's childhood. Years ago Madam Fay, married to Eli's father and having tried "to virgin up a bit before her marriage", ran away to Buffalo for a weekend with her sister's husband, Lorimer. As a result her husband shot Lorimer's family, all except a girl (we learn later that this is Rebecca) who since then has run the farm alone. The murderer of Rebecca's family is in the mental hospital at London, taking his bed apart and putting it together again, a suitable enough fate for the man married to the Whore of Babylon. Madam Fay travels the country roads in a pink Baby Austin with purple plush insides, selling Beauty, with the story of her past for bait when sales are poor.

When Rebecca arrives, later in Act I, to deliver Mrs. Gardner's eggs, she announces that she is to be married the next day to Eli Fay, this having been arranged by Clifford. By this time Harry, who is a clerk in the local Royal Bank of Canada, has been needed to fill an empty chair at the banker's dinner party. While there he got rather drunk, never before having been "tempted by alcohol", as his mother puts it, and in the rather confused events which follow he is proposed to by the banker's daughter, Vernelle. On returning home he hears of Rebecca's plans, realizes that he has lost her, having learned only that her favourite bird is the killdeer. Under his mother's prodding he returns to tell Vernelle that he will marry her.

Now all this sounds fictional in the extreme, and probably melodramatic as well, and it would be dull theatre fare if it were not set forth in some of the most exuberant, image-filled language an audience could ask for. The characters, stereotyped in abstract, have all the life that vital use of words can give them. To a high degree they are metaphorically conceived. As Harry, for example, changes and develops, there are several "I am you" equations: first he *is* his

mother, then Vernelle, and finally Rebecca. Similarly, Eli moves from Clifford to Harry, and eventually starts to break free of both.

In *A Suit of Nettles* the characters are birds with human natures, as in the traditional bestiary or as in the beast fable. In *The Killdeer* the characters are human with bird or beast characteristics. Clifford, an orphan like Madame Fay, is described as the cowbird which lays its egg in another's nest. His victim Eli is a bunny or lamb, and so on. There are dozens of such images. Mrs. Gardner, and her friend Mrs. Budge who has come to revel in the Fay story with her neighbour, are old hens, crows, and witches successively. Before Rebecca's arrival they try, with the help of elderblossom wine, to piece together the whole macabre tale read years ago in the newspaper. They dart about the stage — shrieking, cawing crows circling over bits of carrion:

> Mrs. Budge: Is it a still-born calf down there by the ditch?
> No, my dear, we had that last Sunday, nor is it —
> Would to heaven it were, to end this thirsty
> Curiosity — but it isn't. And still
> The delicious unsavory rotting stink
> Drives me on with my old black wings.

When Rebecca goes away, she leaves behind her two brown paper silhouettes of Eli and Clifford, the groom-to-be and the best man; she has taken these to town as measurements for the wedding suits. Almost struck silent by Rebecca's disclosure that she is marrying the son of the man who killed her mother and two brothers, the son of the woman who committed adultery with her father, Mrs. Gardner and Mrs. Budge drain their glasses of wine, seize the papermen, cry out that their partners are stark naked, and dance.

With Act II the tone and structure of *The Killdeer* change drastically. As the curtain rises, to the sound of a killdeer cry, Rebecca is being sentenced to hang for the murder and mutilation of Clifford. Several years have passed and the exuberant farce of Act I is far in the distance. The play moves into something close to dark conceit or allegory. Rebecca emerges as a sacrificial victim (Madam Fay calls her "a female Jesus"), having confessed to a crime she thought was Eli's. Harry, now a graduate of Osgoode Hall and married to Vernelle, a hard-bitten Mercedes Macambridge type, has returned to his home village to practise law. He is quickly involved in an attempt to rescue Rebecca from the consequences of her actions. To do so he manages to persuade the Jailer's wife, a Mrs. Soper, to let him into Rebecca's cell. There, in the erotic climax of the play, a child is conceived, and as Harry has planned, a stay of execution is granted until

after the birth of the baby, by which time a new trial has been arranged.

Act III is given over mainly to this trial, at which a sudden revelation of facts hitherto unknown by almost everyone exonerates Rebecca. The play ends with Eli making the first steps towards adulthood after many years of infantile regression. The two necessary divorces will be arranged, so that Rebecca and Harry can be married, and since it is they who have enabled Eli reluctantly to give up his toys, they are to be his foster parents.

Once again it is the poetry which carries through the structure to its conventionally arbitrary ending. The play is held together by a carefully worked out pattern of interlocking images. As with *The Red Heart*, *A Suit of Nettles*, and *Night-Blooming Cereus*, the central unifying symbol is in the title. Rebecca is the killdeer, the bird which cries out over towns just before a storm, the bird which will attract an enemy to itself to lead it away from the young ones in the nest. Eli is several times described as a bird who has not yet learned to fly. Through Harry's years of marriage to the vulture Vernelle, among the vultures of Osgoode Hall, he carries in his wallet a killdeer feather. As a child Madam Fay once killed the killdeer of her foster sister, Rebecca's mother, in an attempt to evoke hatred at least, since she felt unloved; hence Madam Fay's attempt at revenge, by stealing her sister's husband. Eli too, as a boy, found a dead killdeer in the pasture and was knocked down, kicked, and cursed by his mother when he showed it to her. As Harry slowly pieces together all this information, he is led to conclude that a dead killdeer, showed suddenly to Madam Fay in court, may break her to the point of telling what she knows of Clifford's death. And this is how it turns out, although what Harry and the court learn is not what they expect.

The killdeer bird has its symbolic opposite. In a semi-allegorical scene in Act II Harry fights for the life of the woman "sentenced on a Friday, to be hanged in September". Rebecca has seen her marriage to Eli as "love's solution to the puzzle of hatred", but like Branwell in *A Suit of Nettles*, Harry is convinced only slowly that hate does not win. To get to Rebecca, who will teach him this truth, he must defeat a Mr. Manatee, the hangman and the descendent of all the sterile destroying figures in Mr. Reaney's earlier works. Mr. Manatee craves the luxury of annihilating life and performs abortions on the soul by hanging his victims. His name *manatee* denotes marine animal, indicating that in the poet's iconography Mr. Manatee is the traditional image of the destroying sea-monster from bestiary tradition. He is also the brother of Death, and has a farm in a land of darkness:

> Mr. Manatee: My farm was in the County of Night and grew nothing
> But fields of nightshade and bladder campion,

Gardens of burdocks. Mandrakes in the haymows.
I fed my cattle on such fare as made their udders
Run black blood and their wombs bear free martens.
I raised weasels in my henhouses and I
Set traps for barley but bred rats who
Ate the little pigs as they lay sucking the sow.

The hangman rejoices that the little bird, Rebecca, will swing into his noose without effort, "Like a pet bird with a broken wing that knows/You're going to help it."

Here the theme of sterility, part of the larger theme of growth and maturity, emerges most strongly. Against Mr. Manatee, Harry resolves to pit his phallic powers, believing that only a new life can serve as an adequate human weapon against the death principle. This is the core of meaning in *The Killdeer*. The tangle of perverted sexual patterns — oedipal attachments, adultery, murder, homosexuality, mutilation, and others — all come together in the figure of Mr. Manatee. In the context of the fertility theme these perversions *are* all death, annihilation, or the refusal to do battle against the evil which haunts the world like a destroying monster.

The Sun and the Moon and *The Easter Egg* have several by now familiar characters. The Effie-Rebecca figure returns, with her vision of a better world, and is especially important in redeeming the youthful male protagonist in *The Easter Egg*. There is a sensitive æsthetic youth in each play, reluctant or unable until the end to give up his childish fantasies and embrace the ambiguities of the adult world. And Madam Fay is back, changed but recognizable, as the woman deprived in her childhood of the necessary love to grow up and turned into a sadist preying on the weak.

As with *The Killdeer*, nine-tenths of the meaning of *The Sun and the Moon* and *The Easter Egg* lies in the poetic imagery. Any plot summary, then, is most unfair and I shall not mishandle these plays in that way, since they have not yet reached a live audience as fully produced works.[3] The fundamental conflict of *The Sun and the Moon* is between Christ and Antichrist, these being the deliberately planted connotations of the protagonist, the Reverend Kingbird, and his opponent, a Mrs. Shade. The action extends from Friday to Sunday and even includes a grisly but hilarious parody of the Resurrection, rather like something out of *Huckleberry Finn*. This is staged by a Mrs. Shade to convince a gullible congregation of her divine powers. On the most obvious level of meaning Mrs. Shade is just a disreputable itinerant come from Toronto, where she is an abor-

tionist, to Millbank, Ontario. On the metaphorical level she is a power of darkness, whose nightmarish proportions have to be dissipated by the end of the play so that the reality of a life beneath the sun can be revealed to a much chastened community. By this point Mrs. Shade's very existence is in doubt and she disappears, with a true Reaney flourish, on a raft across a swollen river. She has been a shadowy spectre from Reverend Kingbird's past, and like all shadows she has disappeared when the light of truth began to shine directly above her.

The Easter Egg purports to be, at least in part, a reworking of the Cinderella story, from the viewpoint of a stepmother, Bethel, who has a rather special interpretation:

> Bethel: Oh I'd like to rewrite Cinderella.
> THE TRUE STORY OF CINDERELLA BY ME!
> Once upon a time, Kenny, there was a
> Very decent lady with two pretty daughters.
> She met this widower who had a little girl,
> Ella was her name I believe. Ella had a rash
> Which only a daily bath in ashes would cure.
> The decent lady made her take this ash bath,
> But did Ella thank her? Oh God no!
> She let on she was terribly misused.
> So, Kenny, the King gives a terrific ball.
> Everyone was invited, but the decent lady said
> No. No! Ella can't go because of this rash.
> We don't want the court to catch this rash.
> Ella carried on something frightful and
> Of course managed to get to the ball.
> Wearing her stepmother's shoes. She wore
> A beautiful veil too, danced with the prince
> And he caught the rash! So his father says,
> "Whoever this shoe fits she shall be hanged!"
> Well, the shoe belonged to the poor stepmother.
> They strung up her daughters for good measure too and
> Cinderella went off to the forest and became an awfully
> Clever spotted old witch.

The basic structure of *The Easter Egg* is the same as that of *The Sun and The Moon*, a conflict between enlightenment, symbolized by the sun, and tyranny and ignorance, symbolized by the shadows in which Bethel would keep her victim Kenneth. The latter's escape from being "an attic child" is associated with entry into a green pastoral world of innocence where God is revealed. At the end, as

at the end of *Night-Blooming Cereus*, the clock which ticks towards inevitable death in all Mr. Reaney's writings, is at least momentarily defeated by Kenneth's new awareness of himself and the world. When he leaves forever the house of his captivity, to become a man instead of a shadow, he stops the clock, puts it face down, intending that it shall never go again.

The tendency of comedy is to include, to take into the newer and happier situation developing at its close as many as possible of the dissidents in the action. Mr. Reaney's comedies are no exception to this rule of literature. *The Killdeer* ends with a community in possession of all the facts necessary to live intelligently and happily, in contrast to what might have been, had these facts not emerged. Even Madam Fay gets, many years later, the psychological release she has longed for; when Rebecca sees what it is that went wrong in Madame Fay's childhood, she realizes instinctively what is necessary; she takes the woman's hands in hers and whirls her about in one of the happy childhood games the trouble-maker never played, because her mind was not filled

> with a child's remembered and pleasant skies
> But with blood, pus, horror, death, stepmothers, and lies.

On one level she has seemed like a self-motivated principle of evil; on another she is the dramatist's way of keeping a good play going. In her own undeveloped mind she is simply playing an elaborate joke on the whole world. At the end of the play she is still spinning like a top, darting in and out of windows, but now she is as harmless as a top, because she has been revealed for what she is, a frustrated child.

Mr. Reaney's comedies demand of their audience, at least temporarily, a capacity to believe that the weapons of human consciousness — religion, art, thought, and love — can defeat all destructive powers. His plays are not for cynics, nor for those too sophisticated to let themselves play games if necessary to exorcise the black enchantments laid on them in childhood. The measure in which we feel these resolutions silly, or too far-fetched, is the measure of our own Malvolio-like nature. If the art of the comedy has done its work — and Mr. Reaney's plays have this art in abundant measure — our emotions of sympathy and ridicule have been raised and cast out, so that we should be able to say with Miranda, who knew only one of these emotions,

> O wonder!
> How many goodly creatures are there here!

How beauteous mankind is! O brave new world,
That has such people in't!

FOOTNOTES

[1] With the exception of *The Easter Egg* these works are being published this fall by MacMillan of Canada. *The Easter Egg* is to be the first production of The University Alumnae players in their third Coach House Theatre in Toronto.

[2] Pamela Terry, director of *The Killdeer*, has pointed out that it was "the extremely workable *aural* readability of *A Suit of Nettles*" that alerted her to Mr. Reaney's theatrical potential.

[3] Mr. Michael Langham has read *The Sun and The Moon*, finding it "wayward, cruel, and beautiful". His hope that it be given an early production so far has seen no results.

chronicle

LETTER FROM TORONTO

Robert McCormack

THE RATHER NERVOUS anti-Americanism which is a feature of the Federal election campaign in progress as I write must surely present Toronto in a new and contradictory role to the rest of the country. Not that it is entirely unbelievable that Bay Street may indeed be closely tied to those American "big interests" we have been hearing so much about, or even — as British travellers have been telling us for some years — that Toronto is in general tone "the most American" of Canadian cities (as distinct, presumably, from Calgary which is merely the most Texan). But can this be Tory Toronto, bastion of Empire, home of the Family Compact, the UELs, the IODE, the Loyal True Blue and Orange Order and "Anglo-Saxon Street"?

Well, yes, as a matter of fact it can. Toronto has always been more American than its traditional reputation suggests. Even in the 1812 period York and its hinterland was settled not only by British colonists and Loyalists but by a considerable number of Americans who had simply drifted up from New England, New York and Pennsylvania looking for land. A few of them brought their republican principles and all of them brought family ties stretching south of the border. The British authorities regarded them with deep suspicion and eventually felt it advisable to hang one or two. But the American strain persisted, contributing, as historians have recently been pointing out, to the somewhat feeble radicalism of 1837 and after.

Of course the American Toronto was very much an underground city until well into this century. When I was in elementary school in the early 1930's the official and accepted line was still very much "One Flag, One Fleet, One Throne." We saluted the Union Jack (not the Red Ensign) and sang "God Save the King"

(our National Anthem) every morning, with "Land of Hope and Glory" as a special treat on assembly days. But there was always something a bit forced and factitious about it. Just whose "bounds" were going to be set "wider still and wider", and at whose expense?

It is hard to know precisely how much the situation has changed. The official line is still there but I get the impression from my own children that it is now much less emphasized. "Land of Hope and Glory" seems to have faded naturally away. And I doubt if there are many citizens left who feel, as my mother did, that one should really stand at attention during the broadcast of the monarch's Christmas Message. It would still be a rash politician who dismissed loyalty to Queen and Commonwealth as merely ritualistic, and the slightest breath of criticism from the south sends people instantly back to prepared positions. But in terms of daily life there is little question that it is now colonial Toronto which is largely submerged.

I apologize for these random reflections, but they do have some bearing on the literary scene. They may help explain, for one thing, the apparently irresistible urge felt by critics to divide our writers neatly into opposing groups — "cosmopolitan" versus "native," "British colonial" versus "American colonial," or even "Redcoat" versus "Leatherstocking." Applied in a general way such categories can be useful. They draw attention, for example, to a development which might easily become dangerous for young writers. This is a tendency for the categories themselves to become institutionalized. By and large, our universities tend to remain oriented toward Britain while the student Bohemia that inhabits them tends to take its direction from the United States. I have never made the test but it is my impression that a survey of local English faculties would discover two readers of Anthony Powell and Phillip Larkin for every one reader of Herbert Gold or Robert Lowell. In the coffee-houses, on the other hand, one hears a great deal about Charles Olson and Allen Ginsberg but nothing at all about D. J. Enright or Thom Gunn. To some extent this is inevitable, and there is no harm in it as long as the groups remain complementary.

But if this way of thinking about writing can occasionally be useful, it is surprising, given the social situation, how often it is not. The closer one looks at the work of any particular writer the less relevant the critic's dichotomies seem. Take this year's winners of the Governor-General's Awards in fiction and poetry. At first glance, they seem to present a perfect paradigm of southern Ontario schizophrenia: Kildare Dobbs versus James Reaney. But Mr. Dobbs makes an unconvincing Redcoat. He is, for heaven's sake, an Irishman. True enough, he has

by his own account consorted with bishops and even been a colonial administrator in Africa. True also, he writes a prose which no one would mistake for a native product. The stylistic elegance, the prevailing urbanity of *Running to Paradise* are as foreign to the old Toronto as they would be to the "Venice, Ontario" it so perceptively caricatures. But that is the point, of course. They are *not* foreign to the new city which clearly has a place for them as it has for everything else. As for Mr. Reaney, *Twelve Letters to a Small Town* and *The Killdeer* reveal him as indisputably native but no Leatherstocking. The world he creates — "Venice, Ontario" seen from the inside — is local enough but the whole history of English prosody is behind the presentation. Possibly he is more like an American poet than like an English one, but he is more like himself than like either. And if Dobbs and Reaney give us trouble, where are we going to place a poet like Margaret Avison?

No, the category game cannot really be played here, and perhaps it is time we became a bit suspicious of the whole attempt to define ourselves in borrowed terms. Even to describe the city in terms of its "British" past and "American" present is probably a distortion. The truth is that it has simply become a metropolis in the age of industrial mass society, a development which spreads a kind of pseudo-American glaze over everything from Kharkov to Kitimat whether or not Americans have anything to do with it. The real quality of life in such places is something its writers will eventually define. As long as they are true to their experience and their craft they will succeed, as they have already done in part, in making a random collection of streets and buildings and amorphous crowds available to the imagination. And in the process they will define themselves as well.

review articles

A GOLDEN YEAR

Robert Weaver

MORLEY CALLAGHAN. *That Summer in Paris.* Macmillan. $5.00.

ON DIFFERENT OCCASIONS Morley Callaghan has described Paris in the twenties as a village or a small town. His most recent book, *That Summer in Paris*, is a fond remembrance of life in that village, and of friendships with Ernest Hemingway, Scott Fitzgerald, and other writers. Of course Paris in 1929 was a unique village, where you could sit with your glass of wine in the sun and wait for most of the new generation of American, English and French writers to stop by your table for a conversation. But it was still a small, familiar and abrasive society.

Mr. Callaghan's memoir begins with him as a young man in Toronto playing baseball (he was a pitcher), studying to become a lawyer (he graduated but didn't practice), and in his Irish fashion arguing his way into a summer job with the Toronto *Star*. Apparently he was a good reporter, but he must sometimes have been an odd one. "In the hotels," he writes, "I sat talking far too long with opera singers or visiting senators." And already his head was buzzing with the stories he wanted to write.

At that time the *Star* was a newspaper far less respectable than it has become. It was good, rough training ground for some young talents, among them Ernest Hemingway. Its city editor was Harry Hindmarsh; Callaghan describes him as "the grand antagonist", but to Hemingway he was a bitter antagonist indeed. The two young men became friendly, and one afternoon Callaghan sat reading the proofs of the first edition of *In Our Time*, while Hemingway read one of the Canadian's short stories. (It is the kind of thing that has happened many times before and since with young writers, but the pleasure and ease with which Morley Callaghan recalls the incident create a sense of wonderful discovery.).

Soon afterwards Hemingway left for Paris, and Morley Callaghan became an established young writer as his stories were published by the Paris "little magazines" and his books by Scribners in New York. He married, and with his wife Loretta made a literary pilgrimage to New York, where they met Sherwood Anderson (the father of the new generation), a playful Sinclair Lewis, and the

legendary editor Maxwell Perkins (whose "truly aristocratic ethic" Callaghan admired).

All this is merely a prelude to the visit the Callaghans made to Paris in 1929, and with this visit *That Summer in Paris* exposes itself to other complications of judgment. A great deal has been written about the American, English and Irish expatriates who were living in the city at that time. Morley Callaghan spent only a few months there, and then decided to return not merely to North America but to the provincial North American city of Toronto. In effect, he cut himself off from many of his contemporaries for thirty years. The temptation now either to inflate his own role or to condescend to Hemingway, Fitzgerald, and the others must have been considerable. But *That Summer in Paris* is a reminiscence notable for its quiet tone, its modesty, its essential sweetness. It will astonish those who thought that Mr. Callaghan was merely the Irish terrier of Canadian radio and television.

Towards the beginning of *That Summer in Paris* Morley Callaghan recalls that when he was a young reporter he lectured a pleasant, middle-aged English author on what writing ought to be. "I (told) him firmly that writing had to do with the right relationship between the words and the thing or person being described: the words should be as transparent as glass, and every time a writer used a brilliant phrase to prove himself witty or clever he merely took the mind of the reader away from the object and directed it to himself; he became simply a performer." It isn't a remarkable statement: it might have been made by Sherwood Anderson or William Carlos Williams, or years later, and in England, by George Orwell. But it is perhaps Callaghan's thirty years of fidelity to that principle that keeps *That Summer in Paris* from becoming a book in which the author enlarges his ego at the expense of his generation.

In Paris the Callaghans tried to adapt themselves to the mores of the village. Sylvia Beach, a dragon in her bookshop, protected Hemingway and James Joyce against the world; so the Callaghans had to write a letter to Hemingway to arrange a meeting, and Morley Callaghan is Irish enough to write with some aspersity about Miss Beach. Scott Fitzgerald tried drunkenly to stand on his head to make a (seemingly legitimate) point against Callaghan. James Joyce entertained his guests with a recording by Aimée Semple McPherson. Hemingway and Callaghan boxed, and finally they had the match, for which Fitzgerald acted as time-keeper, that is the book's climax and became the occasion for bitterness and misunderstanding among all concerned.

That Summer in Paris is an exploration, sometimes explicitly, more often by inference, of the loyalties, friendships, and petty but wounding quarrels that were the ways of the generation of writers who made modern literature. It was a joyous time, and there was never to be so much joy again. Morley Callaghan's memoir ends with a tribute to Hemingway (whom he had not seen for many years before his death) that is as warm and as eager as though it had been written more than thirty years ago when the young writers were discovering each other in a few moments stolen from the Toronto *Star*.

The memoir also ends with Morley

Callaghan in 1929. That year was near the end of the first of his three lives. For a new life began about 1932 with the publication of the novel *Such is My Beloved*, and still another life with the postwar explosion of his talents beginning with the publication of *The Loved and the Lost*. *That Summer in Paris* is a partial autobiography, and it seems to me that Morley Callaghan owes us another memoir about the bright days and the dark days of his stubborn, solitary and faithful literary career in the years since Paris was a hopeful, noisy village in that summer of 1929.

LES JUGEMENTS DE MARCOTTE

Gilles Archambault

GILLES MARCOTTE. *Une Littérature qui se fait*. Collection "Constantes". Editions HMH.

ON NE PEUT DOUTER que Gilles Marcotte compte parmi les critiques littéraires les plus en vue actuellement au Canada français. Depuis une dizaine d'années, il a fait paraître au *Devoir*, tout d'abord, à *La Presse*, ensuite, des chroniques hebdomadaires qui lui ont assuré une réputation assez solide. Il a été un des rares au Québec à faire profession continue dans un domaine où s'aventurent souvent des combattants de fortune.

M. Marcotte a la distinction de porter sur les œuvres qu'il analyse un regard sérieux, pénétrant. Il pratique son métier avec toute la conscience que l'on pourrait souhaiter, et les jugements à l'emporte-pièce, dictés par des caprices aussi passagers qu'inquiétants, ne sont pas son fort. Un livre vient de paraître qui nous permet de vérifier sa conception de la critique. Disons tout de suite que l'ouvrage nous est présenté sous un titre trompeur. *Une Littérature qui se fait*, voilà qui pourrait nous faire penser à une série d'études sur la littérature canadienne contemporaine. Nous restons sur notre faim. Car ce livre est en majeure partie constitué d'essais consacrés à des poètes aussi peu "actuels" que Saint-Denys-Garneau, Alfred Desrochers, Emile Nelligan, voire Alfred Garneau et Octave Crémazie. Les écrivains les plus récents étant Roland Giguère, Anne Hébert, Alain Grandbois et André Langevin. Comme il fallait s'y attendre, un tiers du volume porte sur les écrits de Saint-Denys-Garneau. L'on sait qu'avec Jean Le Moyne et Robert Elie, M. Marcotte s'est donné pour mission de propager l'œuvre de l'auteur des *Solitudes et Jeux dans l'espace*.

Des 293 pages que contient ce livre, que l'on serait en droit de considérer comme un panorama de la littérature d'aujourd'-hui, 50 à peine sont consacrées au roman. Tout le reste porte sur la poésie. Il nous semble que l'auteur aurait dû

réserver son timide essai sur le roman pour une publication à venir et grouper ses études sous la seule bannière de la poésie. Remarquons qu'il se justifie en avançant bien témérairement que le roman canadien "*n'a pas son Saint-Denys-Garneau, ou son Alain Grandbois.*" Ce qui pour lui signifie que "*le roman canadien-français ne compte pas encore d'œuvres finies.*"

Il serait déplacé de parler dans le cas de M. Marcotte d'une méthode critique vraiment autonome. Il n'y prétend d'ailleurs pas. Notre homme a été fortement influencé par la littérature dite de l'engagement qui a connu ses beaux jours aux alentours de 1945. Dans cette optique, il s'ingénue à découvrir des résonnances humaines, à chercher dans les textes une correspondance qui se rende plus loin que la valeur strictement littéraire. Il voit l'homme avant l'écrivain, aux prises avec son interprétation du monde plutôt qu'avec ses problèmes d'ordre esthétique. Il aime à expliquer la signification intime des écrits par des considérations sociologiques sur le milieu canadien-français, à ramener leur sens à des thèmes qui lui sont chers et qui ont nom: exil, solitude, quête du salut, etc. Cette méthode est fort courageuse, fort généreuse aussi. Car elle suppose de celui qui la pratique une concentration hors de la portée du premier polygraphe venu. Elle a aussi des insuffisances. Appliquée à Saint-Denys-Garneau ou à Anne Hébert, elle a des mérites certains, mais dans le cas de cas d'écrivains moins doués pour le misérabilisme contemporain, elle risque d'être fort injuste.

M. Marcotte s'applique fort rarement à déceler les valeurs esthétiques de la littérature. On dirait que pour lui le mot plaisir n'existe pas. Pour peu on croirait qu'il cherche excuse à se délecter d'une phrase qui ne serait que belle, comme si la forme d'une œuvre n'était pas à la fin ce qui importe le plus. Il veut constamment vérifier la valeur de témoignage des œuvres qu'il étudie, la profondeur de leurs interrogations métaphysiques. Réduit à ces normes, la plus riche des littératures serait vite appauvrie.

La littérature canadienne-française n'offre pas beaucoup de prise à ce genre d'interprétation, aussi M. Marcotte doit-il parfois donner un coup de pouce à ses jugements pour trouver des interrogations profondes, des angoisses métaphysiques où elles n'existent à la vérité que fort timidement. Homme fort sérieux, pour qui la littérature est un acte de foi — c'est lui qui le dit dans le court avertissement de son livre — il a une propension non dissimulée au langage philosophique. Il emploie avec un prédilection constante les expressions "message", "prise de conscience", "sublimation", "quête", "salute". Cette dialectique, pour parler comme l'autre, suppose un éclairage spécial, un certain choix d'auteurs. Il faudra résister, croyons-nous, à la tentation de voir dans ces jugements sur la poésie ou le roman canadiens une valeur trop strictement objective. Nous sommes plutôt en plein subjectif, mais à la remorque d'un critique qui n'avance rien qu'il ne prouve ou tente de prouver, qu'on n'aime ou pas la façon un peu rigide, un peu sectaire qu'il emprunte pour le faire.

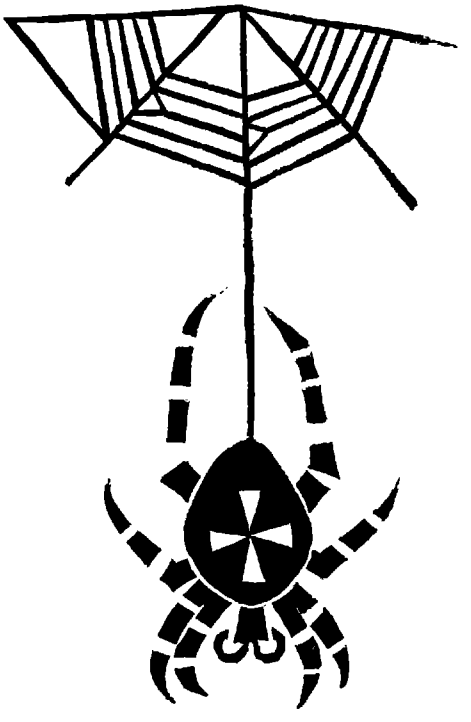
Mais occupons-nous plutôt de cette "*Brève Histoire du roman canadien-français*" que l'on trouve aux premières pages du livre. J'aurais pour ma part préférer un titre moins ambitieux. Il ne s'agit tout au plus que d'un survol. M. Marcotte passe fort rapidement sur les

années du début, et nous le comprenons aisément, la matière n'étant pas bien séduisante. Il faut évidemment une bonne dose de courage pour lire d'aussi piètres amateurs que Marmette ou Gérin-Lajoie. Les jugements forcément hâtifs que livre notre critique sont à peu de choses près conformes à ceux que l'on porte depuis une trentaine d'années. Peut-être cède-t-il un peu trop aisément à la tentation de voir en Laure Conan un auteur angoissé de cette sorte d'angoisse qui ne deviendra matière littéraire que plusieurs années plus tard. Mais l'optique est en général assez juste. Quant à moi, j'applaudirais sans réserve à ce panorama s'il ne comportait des verdicts un peu surprenants sur Savard et Lemelin. Autant l'affectation du premier que le populisme de l'autre me paraissant détestables et peu conformes à l'idée que je me fais d'œuvres importantes. Mais cela, j'imagine, est question de goût, comme on le dit en société.

M. Marcotte explique la pauvreté du genre romanesque au Canada par la méfiance exercée par les auteurs eux-mêmes au siècle dernier vis-à-vis du l'amour, de l'adultère, qui forment presque invariablement le thème des romans. Cette explication ne me semble que partiellement valable, et je ne me risquerais pas à la pousser bien à fond. Cette méfiance face au roman n'avait pas que des causes d'ordre moral. Je crois qu'un Gérin-Lajoie écrivant "*Jean Rivard, le défricheur*" aurait trouvé négligeable de se contenter d'écrire de la fiction, de faire œuvre d'art; il voulait livrer à ses compatriotes un enseignement. Attitude qu'on ne peut manquer de rapprocher de celle de Balzac se défendant d'écrire des romans, trouvant plus honorable d'être l'auteur d'études de moeurs. Dans l'esprit

de Balzac, un roman n'était qu'un amusement, et il prétendait être plus qu'un créateur de fiction, comme l'avaient été, par exemple, Crébillon fils ou Duclos.

Il ne faut pas non plus trop se hâter de conclure que la poésie de cette époque ait été tellement supérieure au roman. Que Crémazie soit bien préférable à Napoléon Bourassa, cela ne fait pas l'ombre d'un doute, mais il faut dire que dans les deux cas nous sommes en présence d'œuvres très mineures. M. Marcotte lui-même lorsqu'il analyse ces poètes du siècle dernier manque de conviction. On sent l'application, le sérieux de l'historien de la littérature qui veut tirer des conclusions générales qui satisfassent tout le monde. Ces auteurs qu'il serait réconfortant de trouver respectables sont à la vérité prodigieusement ennuyeux. Notons toutefois que les pages d'*Une Littérature qui se fait* qui leur sont consacrées auront au moins l'avantage de permettre aux lecteurs de se faire une opinion, de vérifier en tout cas celle qu'ils n'ont pas remise en doute depuis leurs études secondaires. Cela, n'en doutons pas, les portera à lancer plus loin d'eux l'insignifiant catalogue de Camille Roy.



J'ai parlé au début de cet article peut-être irrévérencieusement de Saint-Denys-Garneau. Je le regrette un peu. Car c'est indiscutablement un de nos meilleurs poètes. La réaction cependant est celle de beaucoup de Canadiens à qui on a trop tenté de vendre le talent de ce poète qui a eu la chance de mourir très jeune et à une période où on avait besoin d'un héros littéraire. On ressent malgré soi au simple énoncé de ce nom un agacement qui ressemble à celui que produit sur soi n'importe quelle valeur littéraire sur laquelle on a trop renchéri, trop insisté: je pense au Rimbaud de Claudel, au Péguy réinventé par les catholiques, etc. Rien pourtant ne peut nuire aussi sûrement à la survie d'une œuvre que d'en exagérer la signification, la portée. M. Marcotte consacre les meilleurs pages de son livre à Saint-Denys-Garneau. Il a vraiment saisi l'essentiel de la vision poétique de l'auteur et l'interprétation qu'il donne des poèmes est valable. Mais lorsqu'il veut trouver dans les pages du *Journal* des résonnances, des interrogations essentielles, il ne nous convainc pas que les documents rassemblés sous ce titre ne soient pas au font bien banals, déniés de toute originalité de pensée.

Malgré ces réserves, nous sommes d'avis que le projet de réunir en volume les critiques de M. Marcotte est excellent. Trop longtemps, les études sur la littérature canadienne-française ont été vouées à l'oubli, éparpillées dans les

revues et les journaux. En les publiant, on donne une chance inestimable aux étudiants de notre littérature. Et aux critiques aussi à qui on accorde la possibilité de construire une œuvre. La pauvreté de la critique littéraire chez-nous peut s'expliquer partiellement par le caractère de strict immédiat qui en a été trop longtemps la marque. Plus que tout autre probablement, M. Marcotte méritait cette distinction de voir ses analyses échapper à l'oubli.

POETRY AND LEGEND

J. R. Colombo

MALCOLM LOWRY, *Selected Poems*. Edited by Earle Birney, with the Assistance of Margerie Lowry. City Lights Books. $1.50.

MALCOLM LOWRY'S POETRY is published by Lawrence Ferlinghetti, the most successful promoter of contemporary poetry in the English-speaking world. Ferlinghetti's "Pocket Poets Series" is widely read, informal, inexpensive and usually devoted to controversial personalities (Allen Ginsberg, author of *Howl and Other Poems*, being the most controversial). Appropriately, Ferlinghetti has published Malcolm Lowry.

Lowry, who died in England in 1957, was as unacademic in his life and writing as are Ginsberg, Gregory Corso, Jack Kerouac, Kenneth Rexroth and William Carlos Williams, all of whom Ferlinghetti publishes. Lowry's writing is currently undergoing a posthumous evaluation: one could call it a re-evaluation except it was never evaluated before. *Under the Volcano* is now available in hard- and cloth-covered editions; his first novel *Ultramarine* has been issued for the first time in the United States; and *Hear Us O Lord from Heaven Thy Dwelling Place*, has attracted a wide and favourable press.

More Lowry works are promised — a novel and a novelette, not to mention the collected poems, *The Lighthouse Invites the Storm*. In addition, the poems in the *Selected Poems* have been appearing during the last few years (often with editorial notes by Earle Birney) in at least twenty-seven magazines in the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom. A press agent couldn't have done better.

In short, there is a favourable Lowry "climate," and this, rather than a close examination of the poetry, probably persuaded Ferlinghetti to publish the *Selected Poems*. In many ways a genuine literary interest in Lowry's poetry is as hollow as the 1962 Governor-General's Award for Fiction, which was given for *Hear Us O Lord*. The novel got the award, yes, but not the $1,000 prize, which the Canada Council reserves for *living* authors.

The *Selected Poems* will enhance the Lowry legend without advancing the cause of his poetry. This edition features two photographs of the author: one shows him grinning over a book and a bottle of Bols; the other, in swimming shorts, shows him hugging his chest triumphantly. Earle Birney's Introduc-

tion points out that Lowry was a "doomed" man and that nothing "could save him from his destructive element" — except his art, presumably.

Lowry's view of life was as pessimistic as Housman's, but there is nothing sweet or serious to it. Lowry was inclined to sympathize with himself and then laugh it off, giving his poetry a half-hearted seriousness. He was usually too drawn to man as a silly spectacle to take the plight of man seriously, in the poetry in any case. Occasionally he would catch himself in a line: "And pray that his prove no titanic case," but he would either end the poem there or lose himself again. His lack of taste and tact is unfortunate, because Lowry was sensitive and intelligent:

> Tenderness
> Was here, in this very room, in this
> Place, its form seen, cries heard, by you.

He strikes this note in "Delirium in Vera Cruz" but not in many other poems.

The *Selected Poems* is a medley of moods, genuine poetry, ragged verse, doggerel, stances, statements — everything from the showy to the shoddy. Full of echoes, Lowry is made to resemble the Ahab he writes about "whose rhetoric's however not his own." But Lowry has his own individuality. He is one of the few modern poets who can write convincingly about animals, birds and fish, and he handles images of ships and sea with a freshness not with the savour of the usual salt.

His poetic measures are straightforward and traditional, but his lines always sound as if they were in the middle of their second draft, which in fact they might have been. In fact, much of the pleasure in reading these poems comes from one's willingness to appreciate fragments: verse experiments and poetic exercises. His longer poems he seemed to rush through, and where his poems are of any length they are seldom integrated. In turn, Lowry can be seen joining wit with intelligence and wit with mood. "For the Love of Dying":

> If death can fly, just for the love of flying,
> What might not life do, for the love of dying?

"He Liked the Dead":

> The grass was not green nor even grass to him;
> nor was sun, sun; rose, rose; smoke, smoke; limb, limb.

As with all "doomed" poets, we end up with a choice of half - a - dozen hastily scribbled epitaphs and self-parodies, like "The Pilgrim":

> Teach me to navigate the fjords of chance
> Winding through my abyssal ignorance.

But there is seldom a complete poem which rings true. A number, however — poems like "Without the Nighted Wyvern," "A Poem of God's Mercy" and "For *Under the Volcano*" — are individual and satisfying, often for entirely different reasons.

If Lowry had taken his poetry as seriously as his editors, he might have developed into a popular poet. He had all the ingredients: the iambic line, unexpected rhyme, the obsession with self and personal death. He has a touch of the Villon to him ("Men With Goats Thrashing"), a quick bit of Zen ("The Comedian") and an appreciation of nature ("Nocturne"). He could write a Tennyson-like musing ("No Still Path") and a Whitman-esque fantasy ("The Volcano"). In addition, he possessed that single indispensible ingredient, the romantic outlook. This is shown in the Bliss Carman and school-book simplicity of

"The Flowering Past," as well as in the excruciatingly romantic ending of "The Days Like Smitten Cymbals":

> When I returned I boasted of typhoons
> Conrad would not have recognized.
> But to have possessed a unique anguish
> has been some solace through the years.

Earle Birney remarks in the Introduction that Lowry's poetry is "without disguise" and "innocent of defenses." With a man of Lowry's unpredictable nature, this is a doubtful virtue at best. A bit more attention to statement and form might have sharpened the sentimentalizing and barbed the language.

Apparently the seventy-one poems in *Selected Poems* total one-quarter of the publishable poetry left by Lowry. If these are his best, the reader might shudder to think what the others are like. But in *The Oxford Book of Canadian Verse*, A. J. M. Smith made use of four fine Lowry poems, only one of which Earle Birney included in the *Selected Poems*. Perhaps when the full collection *The Lighthouse Invites the Storm* appears, the reader will be in a position to assess just how "controversial" this first selection was, and how much the "legend" of the man was exploited.

WHITEMUD REVISITED

Robert Harlow

WALLACE STEGNER, *Wolf Willow*. Macmillan. $6.95.

MR. WALLACE STEGNER, now head of the Creative Writing Centre at Stanford University, lived from his sixth to his twelfth year in a place called Whitemud, Saskatchewan. His family lived in the village during the winter and in the summer engaged in what he calls, aptly, "wheat-mining" on a 320 acre homestead that straddled the Saskatchewan-Montana border, perhaps forty miles southwest of the town. He left with his family in the spring of 1920 and didn't see Whitemud again until he visited it four decades later. His return to his old home settlement was an experience that yanked at the roots of his memory and chopped through to the heartwood of his emotional and intellectual being. The result is a unique book whose whole cloth is made up of the warp of memory and the woof of history, colored by the sociologist's approach and fashioned with the craft of a very good writer indeed.

Wolf Willow concerns itself first of all with ". . . that block of country between the Milk River and the main line of the Canadian Pacific, and between approximately the Saskatchewan-Alberta line and Wood Mountain. . . ." Second, it is a memory of Mr. Stegner's growing years, his Tom Sawyer years, in the town of Whitemud. Third, it is a study of "the place where the plains, as an ecology, as a native Indian culture, and as a process of white settlement, came to their climax and their end." Fourth, it is a special look at Canadian history with the above three concerns in mind. And fifth, it aims at searching out some of the

thousands of reasons for Whitemud as a last frontier, as an escape, as a state of mind, as a victim and as a miracle. To gain his objectives, Mr. Stegner uses any and every resource he has discovered out of his long years as a writer, teacher, researcher.

For those of us who have lived in one of the hundreds of Whitemuds scattered throughout the west and the near-north, this book will have a special meaning. I know I read it with a real sense of relief. What I thought I had remembered, Mr. Stegner went back and found to be true. He confirms my suspicion that, while history was made in Whitemud, the place existed, and still exists, with no sense of it at all. In Whitemud— all of them — between the turn of the century and the Second World War, there was a mindlessness akin to the calm at the eye of a hurricane, while the physical struggle simply to exist shut out twenty-five centuries of civilized achievement. The word that occurs to me which describes Whitemud the best is Exposed. Are not all small frontier towns too hot, too cold, too dusty and dry, and too near a flooding river? The men who live in Whitemud — are they not exposed too? Nobody is born in Whitemud; he comes there, for whatever reason, and I have often wondered if each man didn't look at his neighbour and hold him a little in contempt for having made such a foolish decision. In my own personal Whitemud, we had a doctor who scaled logs in a local mill, a sergeant-major from the Household Guards who was my father's chief clerk, a scion of one of England's first families who delivered milk, and an extremely literate Irishman who dug our ditches by choice. What were any of them doing there? What, indeed, were the professional men doing there — the doctor, the lawyer, the teachers, the accountants? And so on down the line to the cheerful, often alcoholic drifter who happily played bedrock to the single thin stratum of society above him.

Things were not different in Mr. Stegner's Whitemud. He remembers it well; that it was wild, cruel, elemental, terrifying, unfettered, warping, grasping, unlettered, unbearably cold, hot, dry, flyblown, wet. As a society it was a cultural desert, laughably optimistic (this perhaps above all else: Whitemud lives on dreams of financial glory), insufferably prudish, tell-taleably licentious, soul-shrivelling, and, oddly enough, a good place for a boy to grow up in and to have come from because — well, because life is sometimes one or the other or all of these things, and certainly is as unsheltered as Whitemud, and perhaps learning early to run the gauntlet is not a bad thing.

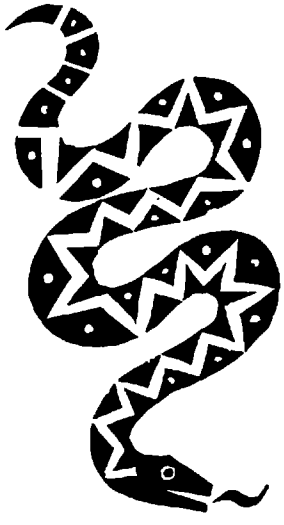
Yet, to go back to Whitemud is painful, and for a writer it is extremely dangerous. Nostalgia is a fact. He cannot escape it. Walk down the main street and see where the poolhall was — above which, in a single, barren, stuffy room he first went to school. Walk by the river and see the dam that burst in 1917, remember the swimming and fishing holes. This kind of activity can lead to sentimentality of the worst order. Then seek out the few old-timers left who can remember with him his stay in Whitemud and listen to the stories they tell. Melodrama. The floods, the storms, the dust drifting, the hopes and fears of a whole town, the winter of 1906-07 that destroyed, in one long incredible killing, the cattle economy of the area and forced it toward the constant disaster of trying

to farm the thin land and make wheat the *raison d'être* for Whitemud's continued existence. What does a man who wants to write a book about the place and its people do to ward off this triple threat? Like a hardy neo-Confucian who faces rape, he remembers to relax and enjoy it. In *Wolf Willow* you will find nostalgia, some sentimentality, and melodrama, but they serve a purpose.

The book is divided into four parts and an epilogue. In the first section we remember with Mr. Stegner as he tours Whitemud after forty years away from it, and almost at once the reader begins to realize that *Wolf Willow* is not going to be simply an historian's *aide-memoire.* Clots of total recall begin to coagulate under the influence of the dust-dry air of reality. Here now is Whitemud, softer, greener, neater, but really only an echo that has refused to stop; and somehow, too, we sense at once the tragedy of the place: that it was born, lived briefly, died and became fossilized beneath the weight of the prairie sun without ever knowing why. "Our education . . . did not perform its proper function of giving us distance and understanding by focusing on our life from outside. Instead, it focused on outside from inside . . ." Thus, "The one aspect of Whitemud's history, and only one, and a fragmentary one, we knew: the town dump." Only a story-teller with a trained eye could see the implications. "The town dump was our poetry and our history," he says . . . "For a community may well be judged by what it throws away — what it has to throw away and what it chooses to — as by any other evidence. For whole civilizations we sometimes have no more

of the poetry and little more of the history than this. It is all *we* had for the civilization we grew up in."

In the following three sections and the epilogue, Mr. Stegner tells of the "why" of the birth, life and death of Whitemud. He begins with the early explorers who did no more than pass the place by, and later who did not come within several hundred miles of Whitemud — Kelsey, Verendrye — until we find that "as late as 1860 . . . the Cypress Hills and the little river they mothered were still lost in an unmapped West as wide as ocean, being saved, perhaps, after all the rehearsals on other frontiers for the staging of one last drama of white settlement." From the Indians, to the Metis, to the Company of Adventurers, to the coming of the R.N.W.M.P. and finally to Whitemud, "the capital of an unremembered past," we follow the mainstream of Canadian history, seeing always with the eyes of the boy who has become a man, a story-teller and a disciplined thinker. It is probably more meaningful history about our frontier west than you can read in any other book.



Once we know why Whitemud was born, we must know why it died. It died in the winter of 1906-07, when the cattle industry was wiped out. Mr. Stegner tells the story through the eyes of fiction. For a hundred pages we leave off remembrance and history and watch while the spirit and the edge of a frontier are blunted by the hard facts of the climate of the region. It is a good story; it stands well within the bounds of the author's plan for the book. It is meant to loom larger than its telling, and it does. We know from it why men of tremendous strength and purpose gave up and left, and we know, too, a little of why some stayed and turned on the land and plowed it to dust and lived on to watch it blow away.

The final section brings us again, full circle, to the Whitemud that Mr. Stegner knew and left as a boy. Here, the historian turns sociologist as he quietly brings us up to date on Whitemud, whose keynote is now struck in a phrase from Sinclair Lewis' *Main Street*: ". . . the humdrum inevitable tragedy of struggle against inertia." This is the final "why" of Whitemud. "It emphasized the predictability and repetitiousness of the frontier curve from hope to habit, from optimism to a country rut . . ."

Wallace Stegner could have settled for writing another *Main Street* or a *Winesberg Ohio*. Perhaps he could have reaped a kind of *Patterns of Culture* from his notes. I doubt if he thought of writing a straight historical account. But, in fact, there are elements of all three of these approaches, and the result is certainly history as it may very effectively be written.

books in review

IRONIC PILGRIMAGE

ROY DANIELLS. *The Chequered Shade.* McClelland & Stewart.

ROY DANIELLS' POETRY is not only difficult; it is also poetry that suffers from certain archaic qualities of style and form — the use of the sonnet, of traditional soporific rhythms, and antiquarian imagery. Yet oddly enough *The Chequered Shade* is a restful, readable book. Unlike much of current Canadian and American poetry, which is tortured with unresolved emotions and shattered by realities not yet transmuted into poetry (perhaps they never can be) — Roy Daniells' work is civilized, restrained, and brought to artistic form. It makes comforting poetry to read, like the rebecks' sound and the "dancing in the chequered shade" of Milton's "L'Allegro", from which the title is taken.

The book is divided into three sections, each printed on quality tinted paper, covering three different kinds of subject matter. The first section contains travel poetry, written in Europe. Most of the sonnets here are named after places — "Florence", "Livorno", the "Low Countries", "London" — and they record personal experience.

The second section is philosophical and religious in nature. The sonnets in this part are named after numbered Psalms, or books of the Bible, by verse and chapter, or after representative religious men.

Section three brings us home to Canada and deals at times quite explicitly with this country; but like the other sections, it is thoughtful and philosophical.

In effect, the book gives the impression of a single long poem, a voyage to Europe, reflections on the religious meanings implicit in life, and thoughts about practical living and the work of recreating civilization on Canadian soil.

It is a wise and deeply sincere book. It is also not incapable of self-revelation and of genuine emotion, as in the sonnet beginning:

> Cypresses and the worn sandstone hide
> My foolish tears. . . .

But to get at the heart of this poetry I would like to look at the nature of its irony, the deliberate method of mixing triviality with elevation that runs through the book from beginning to end. It is a method most readers find very difficult to follow, so it is worth some discussion.

In the sixth sonnet of the middle section, entitled Psalm 23, we have a kind of contemporary interpretation of the famous prayer "The Lord is my Shepherd." In the original, you may remember the line "Thou preparest a table for me in the presence of mine enemies." This is how the psalm is translated into a modern poem by Roy Daniells:

> My enemies were certain I was starving,
> It must have given them a fearful shock
> Through the binoculars to see me carving
> A roast of beef up on the barren rock.
> And when I moved upon them down a byway,
> Bathed and anointed, sweet with oil of rose,
> They blanched for they had left me on the highway
> Covered with blood and with a broken nose.
> The landlord, in the arbour where I'm seated,

Has brimmed the bowl with wine, the bubbles wink.
It's time my gasping enemies were treated,
Do tell them to come in and have a drink.
And any day they like they may appear;
Thanks to the landlord, I'll be living here.

Clearly "a roast of beef" stands in violent contrast to the words of the original Psalm, "thou preparest a table for me". But the method is familiar in English poetry. In the seventeenth century, "conceits" of this kind, realistic or apparently irreverent images, were combined with subjects of a genuine religious kind. In our own time, the revival of John Donne's poetry, and the shock-techniques of T. S. Eliot, have made the method even more familiar — in fact central to some modern poetry. Daniells' use of it is in fact conservative; it puts him very much in the company of poets like Edwin Muir, John Crowe Ransom, and Robert Graves.

The irony in this kind of poetry, today, turns on the conflict between romantic sensibility and modern realism. In the case of Roy Daniells we find a good deal of unacknowledged romanticism of attitude and a good deal of reticent belief lurking behind the comic mode of the language and the imagery.

For instance in the Psalm 23, the comic elements of "roast of beef" and "telescope" and "a broken nose" are really protective armour concealing the serious theme of the poem. The poet is no less serious about his confidence in God in the face of his enemies than was the Psalmist. But in our age of little faith he dramatizes himself as a lucky gangster who has the landlord on his side.

The danger of this kind of irony, of serious meaning concealed in a language of triviality, is that the core of inner emotions must be very strong. Otherwise the poem lapses into Neo-Classical light verse. Eliot had great intensity; but even he was for a long time misunderstood and accused of lacking emotion. We can see the lapse into Neo-Classicism in some of the poetry of Auden, of Karl Shapiro, and of others following in Eliot's line.

Roy Daniells doesn't often slip into the Neo-Classical mode, because his seriousness is indeed great. The poems spring from deep emotion and real thought. But occasionally he does slip, as in poem "Photographic Exhibition" in Section 3:

Please, I implore you! no more nudes on dunes;
And no more smiles where four front teeth are missing
Senile or infantile; no lips for kissing
Painted and poised and posed; no stones with runes;
No brass bands booming out inaudible tunes;
No Pisan fountains innocently pissing
No study shelves with unread works by Gissing . . .

This is clever; but it shows at once the danger.

Many Canadian poets in the last two decades have made their pilgrimage to Europe and have written poetry about it. (I've counted some half a dozen on my fingers.) All of them have brought back significant reflections, critical thoughts about our European traditions and about our Canadian problems.

This is one of these books. It is one of the better Canadian books I have read this year, and one of the most searching and thoughtful about things that really matter.

LOUIS DUDEK

OBSERVING AND ENTERTAINING

KILDARE DOBBS. *Running to Paradise.* Oxford. $3.50.

IN HIS PREFACE, Kildare Dobbs describes this book as "a sequence of lies or reminiscences set in various places on the earth's surface," and goes on to say that though names and places have been changed "to avoid what might otherwise be unpleasant affronts to privacy, the stories are about myselves and may be presumed true to fact." In one respect I think this is inaccurate. The stories are never *about* himself: they are about what has happened to him, an attempt to define the qualities of his experience. The self, the connecting tissue between the Dobbs who grew up in Ireland, who went to sea, who worked as a teacher and a District Officer in Tanganyika, and who came to Canada, remains obstinately hidden.

Criticism is disarmed by the author's declaration that the book is not meant to be a true autobiography, but rather a collection of pieces originally written for broadcasting or magazines. An autobiography, he says, would give rise to the question: "Who is this fellow? Or worse still, who does he think he is? Good questions, both of them. It just happens that I'm not ready to answer them yet."

The trouble is, a book (as against a collection) makes its own demands, and this one, perceptive and charming and conveying everywhere the warmth of its author's personality, none the less poses exactly the question: who is Kildare Dobbs? The form of the book, with the pieces collected in groupings corresponding to the phases of his life ("Imperial Bureaucrat", "Landed Immigrant", etc.) suggests a progress through life that is more than geographical or chronological, a progress which, in the closing essay, "Running to Paradise", is hinted as being forever elusive of definition: "a destination as yet unimagined". But if this is indeed the thread that binds these reminiscences together, we need to sense more of the man to whom they happened.

In lieu of the book that Kildare Dobbs must now write, we have these emblems of various stages along the way: anecdotes, but more than anecdotes. They are deceptively easy. The best of them are conversational, elliptical, arriving suddenly at an unexpected end, having conveyed not a "point" but the essence of an experience. They are full of anticlimax, suggesting that the writer is not so much concerned with what happened, as *what it was like*. His perceptions of other people are acute, humorous, and tolerant. Tolerance, even generosity, is the most characteristic note. An early piece, "Prelude", comes off less well, seeming too much *written* and conscious, and "A Christmas Story", a description

of a storm at sea, is an attempt to catch the idiom of the experience, colloquial and declarative, and clashes with the sensibility lurking underneath.

Which leaves me very little space to talk of some of the memorable portraits here—especially of Africans, seen directly and without condescension, and the superb feeling of the African bush; and the dour, God-fearing Ontario town where the writer taught school for a year, those good townsfolk festering in endless suspicion of each other. These are among the very good things in a book full of observation. It is also a book of entertainments, but of a sort to suggest that the writer has much more to say.

GEORGE ROBERTSON

A CLOSE SHAVE

BRIAN MOORE. *An Answer from Limbo.* Little, Brown. $6.00.

MORE THAN MOST LITERARY TRADITIONS, that of Canada has been distinguished by its migrants. They come winging in from the British Isles, settle for a decade or so of brilliant writing in Montreal or Toronto or Vancouver, and then move on again, to live in England like Patrick Anderson or die there like Malcolm Lowry, or to roost in the literary rookeries of New York and Europe, as Brian Moore has done these past three years. Whether Moore will return to Canada only he knows. Certainly his most recent novel has abandoned the Canadian scene of *The Luck of Ginger Coffey,* and from reading it one would hardly imagine that Moore had ever lived anywhere but Ireland and New York, so little trace appears of that decade north of the frontier.

Moore, who in *The Lonely Passion of Judith Hearne* produced a novel of almost Joycean penetration about lodging-house existence in Belfast, and in *The Luck of Ginger Coffey* presented with compassionate laughter the peregrinations of an Irish bounder turned New Canadian, has now, in *An Answer from Limbo,* turned to that most unpromising of all soils for novelists, the New York world of writers and their parasites, a soil tilled by a thousand scribblers, browsed over by a thousand literary botanists, until one would have thought it as exhausted as the earth of an abandoned stump farm. Another novel about a writer writing a book in the purlieus of Greenwich Village! It arouses the same kind of shudder as the thought of another novel about the Great American Campus.

It is the final proof of Moore's vigour as a stylist and of the obstinacy with which he maintains his idiosyncracies of outlook, that he produces a presentable novel out of this arid material. I confess that I do not like *An Answer from Limbo* as I liked *Judith Hearne* or *Ginger Coffey,* partly because I find less and less in new novels about novelists; this kind of literary Narcissism, which served its purpose admirably in the hands of Proust and Joyce and Thomas Mann, seems by now to be pretty well played out. But it is, after all, the test of a good man of letters that he should be able to take an unpleasant or overworked subject and make something out of it, as Gide did out of the worn-out myths of Oedipus and Theseus, by the elusive power of style combined with those shifts of perspective through which an alert mind can sometimes give us new looks at

familiar faces. *An Answer from Limbo* almost does this.

The plot of his novel has a kind of severe banality which makes one imagine Moore whipping himself through the work, rather like Flaubert gasping through *Madame Bovary,* in spurts of dutiful energy interspersed by vast stretches of yawning ennui produced by the impossible story he has wished upon himself. But *An Answer from Limbo* is, thank goodness, a great deal more than a tedious plot about a kind of Irish Lucky Jim selfishly writing a novel at the expense of the wife and kids and the aged parent brought from Ireland as a glorified baby-sitter; it is more even than a panorama of the parties and pretenders who exasperate one in the New York of fiction as much as they do in the New York of reality. The sheer words of the novel are put together with Moore's peculiar combination of apparent simplicity with the devious, looping rhythm which is a product of Irish speech. And even the plot is partly saved because much of it is really set in Moore's own personal landscape rather than in New York. Such characteristic Moore themes as the hate-love between Ireland and the New World, and the tendency of obsessional fantasies to become unpleasant realities, are used again with success. The most convincing and sympathetic character is not Brendan Tierney with his tedious book, but his old mother, trying and failing to live down her Irish past in the New York where she had thought that by joining her son she would recover it. The funniest and at

the same time the most horrifying scenes are those in which Brendan's wife, Jane, having long harboured daydreams of being violated by potent, hairy Latins, finally becomes the appalled mistress of a sexual acrobat named Vito Italiano. Mrs. Tierney, Jane, and Vito Italiano, one of the most superb cads I have encountered in modern fiction, combine with Moore's prose style to save *An Answer from Limbo* from sinking under the millstone of Brendan Tierney's literary career.

But it has been a close shave, and I would prefer to regard *An Answer from Limbo* as an interim exercise, showing its author succeeding in a difficult task, but not *the real thing* of which a writer as good as Moore is capable.

GEORGE WOODCOCK

MEMORY TRANSFIGURED

HUGH HOOD. *Flying A Red Kite*. Ryerson. $4.95.

HUGH HOOD, now in his early thirties, has been supported by the academy in the difficult years of learning his craft of writing. But it's evident from the stories in his first book, *Flying A Red Kite*, that he has knocked about a good deal in the world outside the universities. For some time before the publication of this book the stories of which it consists were appearing in magazines like *The Tamarack Review*, *Prism*, *Queen's Quarterly*. One of them, "After the Sirens", not the best of the stories but certainly a rigorously imagined and professionally executed vision of nuclear war, made it in the big league of *Esquire*. It is a tribute to the genuineness of Hood's talent that his work appealed just as much to ordinary educated people as to fellow academics and to more self-consciously literary readers. One of them, with a Toronto setting, even provoked an enthusiastic column in the Toronto *Daily Star*. The patient accumulation of sensuous detail induces recognition of place as well as of people. Toronto is here ("Recollections of the Works Department"), Montreal is here ("Flying a Red Kite"), and in the magnificent "Three Halves of a House", set on the Canadian shore of the St. Lawrence near Gananoque, there's a continental feeling, a sense of the whole of Canada. It is this aspect of the stories that patriotic reviewers are apt to seize on, rightly feeling that our own lives are that much more real for being brought into a context of art and imagination, that our country is the more unquestionably present for having been seen by a real writer and set down forever in print. But Hood isn't writing advertising copy for the Canadian Way. His stories are about life and death and eternity: ". . . and dark in the twilight on the darkening water I am going to starboard under the stars on the current down the river down east past the Plains of Abraham, farther, to where the river yawns its mouth eleven miles wide, invisibly wide, bearing me away at last to the darkness, the sleety impossible impassable Gulf." Doesn't it recall in its charged suggestiveness (that "Plains of Abraham", e.g., which brings to mind not only the war of French and English but the place of our father Abraham) that other river of life, Anna Livia? "And her muddied name," wrote Joyce, "was Missisliffi," evoking yet another stream — Mark Twain's. In echoing *Fin-*

negan's Wake, it seems to me that Hood knows very well what he is about. He uses the literary past as he uses his own, consciously and cunningly.

He writes as confidently in the third person as in the first and with as much inwardness about women as about men. In form, his stories follow the shape of a meditation rather than a plot, and he has taken pains, as he hints in one story, to master the English sentence. In this he resembles American writers like Updike rather than any Canadian predecessor.

Only one story, "O Happy Melodist", leaves me unconvinced. The heroine, an assistant fiction editor of a New York magazine called *Signorina*, seems to me not placed. Only a greater worldly sophistication than the kind she's supposed to embody could see her clearly — or else a great simplicity. Here there seems a false sophistication in the narrator. To put it another way, it's meant to be a New York story but the feel of it is Torontonian and Maclean-Hunterish. Alexandra looks sceptically at the gifts brought her by an academic admirer: "She was looking at the label on a bottle of Margaux; there was a vineyard scene in three off-register colours, very badly executed, on the paper." In context, this is supposed to make us think the worse of the admirer. But in fact it only makes us impatient with Alexandra: never mind the label — what about the wine? But the story in question is the only one in which there are false notes.

Flying A Red Kite is a subtle and generous book.

KILDARE DOBBS

THE STORMS OF CHANGE

RUDY WIEBE. *Peace Shall Destroy Many.* McClelland & Stewart. $4.95.

Peace Shall Destroy Many is thoughtfully conceived, well written, and at times deeply moving; though in the final analysis it is not a genuinely great book (great books are rarely written), it has elements of greatness embedded in it.

Rudy Wiebe, the author, is a Mennonite, trained in theology at the Brethren Bible College in Winnipeg. He has the power of observation; and he has also the ability to understand human emotions, to grasp and interpret conflicting forces that dwell deep within the minds of outwardly calm and reticent people.

The time span of the story is short — from spring to winter in 1944. The space setting is narrow — a Mennonite community named Wapiti, in the northern reaches of Saskatchewan. The principal characters are relatively few: the quiet Parson Lepp and his equally quiet daughter, Annamarie; the crude and sensual

Herb Unger, a poor farmer and a worse Mennonite; Louis Moosomin, a decadent, sickly half-breed; Razia Tantamount, the new school teacher — an outsider, clever, lovely, seductive, who "stretched as sensuously as an alley-cat"; Deacon Block, prosperous, astute, and bigoted, but blindly devoted to his indecisive son Peter; Peter's sister Elizabeth, a crushed and aging spinster; Joseph Dueck, teacher and philosopher, who acts as mentor to the young giant, Thomas Wiens, around whom the action unfolds.

The action, in its broadest form, is rooted in the problems confronting an isolated religious community resolved to maintain a traditional pattern of existence. But as all societies are composed of people, the real sources of the story are found in the tortured inner recesses of individuals. The Mennonites in the novel profess to follow the basic tenets of the faith as taught by Menno Simons, their sixteenth-century spiritual leader. In their dependence on the Bible they are fundamentalists. They preach belief in universal love and peace towards all men. And, with a few exceptions, they reject military service. In Wapiti, they also cling to German, the language of their distant forebears, as their means of communication — High German "when speaking of religious matters", and a Low German dialect "in the mundane matters of everyday living". At the time of their migration from Russia in the 1920's they sought out an isolated area where they live apart from the world, and by buying out the farmers around them — the discouraged English and the poverty-stricken Indians — they try to build ever higher barriers to protect their cherished heritage.

But English has already crept in as the language of education and has become the language of the young. Radios bring the news of the warring, outside world. And thoughtful, reflective men like Joseph and Thom begin to question the traditions of their elders.

As the novel opens, cracks in the structure are already making their appearance. In the months that spread through the four seasons the cracks split wide, and the fabric crumbles. Its sand foundations could not resist the storms that lashed them — the impact of war, the growing scepticism of the young, and the inherent weaknesses found even among the group's leaders, weaknesses spawned of self-love, greed, hate, and bigotry.

As I have already indicated, most of the action is centred on young Thom Wiens. Named after the Biblical Thomas "whose eyes were open but could not see," he is at first confused and uncertain, especially when he tries to clarify his own attitude towards military service. His inadequacy is all too apparent when he withers under the questioning of the young, but rebellious Annamarie. If "the majority, the non-believers, die so that the minority, the believers, may live [who] then is the martyr for the faith? . . . Can a Christian cast off responsibility by mere refusal — by mere avoidance?"

In the days that follow, disillusionment mounts steadily and the torments in his mind increase. He sees the greed of prosperous farmers who become even more prosperous as the result of war. He becomes conscious of the intolerance of the elders of the flock who despise and reject the local natives while they take inordinate pride in belonging to the

smallest Mennonite community to support a missionary in India. Above all, he gains an understanding of the cruelty, bigotry, and self-interest that exist below the smooth surface of the domineering Deacon Block, the dynamic leader who had guided the group in its migration from Russia to Canada.

Block is the most fully developed character in the novel. He is prideful, arrogant, astute. He firmly believes that he has the welfare of his family and of his community close to his heart. Yet he is capable of physical and mental brutality.. He had, in his anger, killed a man before he had left Russia. He had forbidden his daughter to marry a fellow Mennonite because the man was a bastard. In so doing he eventually drives the pathetic Elizabeth, who like the daughter of Jephtha bewails her virginity, into an illicit love affair with his drunken farm hand, Louis, the result of which is Elizabeth's death in premature childbirth. And he loses, spiritually, his son whom he had done all in his mighty power to protect from the evils of the world. In the end, he, like the community, is broken and desolate — a symbol of the results that spring from the ways of thinking and living he had striven to perpetuate.

In the final pages Thom's open eyes have become seeing eyes. He is ready to leave the community, not to forsake his belief in Christ and in the values of true peace and genuine love, but willing to enter the greater community of the nation, and hopeful that at last he will be able to move in "harmony with all the world."

The physical settings for the action are

superbly handled. Mr. Wiebe's descriptions of farm life are skilful and telling, as is his handling of the ever changing seasons. But the backgrounds are not merely bits of splendid decoration. They serve to reveal the characters of the principal protagonists; and are often used symbolically to emphasize the changing moods of the novel. The opening movement, superficially innocent and with only slight dissonances jarring against pastoral harmony, takes place in the spring; but the end is played out against the cruel beauty of winter, when in a cold, lamplit barn, angry, passionate men fight for the possession of the hysterical Razia, as the old Deacon, bowing "his scarred head to his hands . . . . bereft and broken", sinks beneath waves of uncontrollable anguish.

It would be folly to pretend that the novel does not have serious flaws. It does. The dialogue, for example, too often lapses into long passages on conscription, the place of conscientious objectors, or the validity of points of theology, that pass beyond the borders of plausibility. Some characters, too, are very lightly sketched, and some, among them Razia, are not entirely convincing.

Yet the virtues of this work far outweigh its flaws. The central theme holds the interest; the landscape settings, with their many rural activities, are seen through the eyes of a poet; old Block is monumental; and the chapters devoted to the death and burial of Elizabeth are unforgettable.

S. E. READ

PURITANS AND DISBELIEVERS

ALDEN NOWLAN. *The Things Which Are.* Contact Press. $2.00.

PETER MILLER. *A Shifting Pattern.* Contact Press. $2.00.

MR. DAVID WATMOUGH, recently discussing the Canadian novel on the C.B.C., made the comment that the Canadian novelist seemed insufficiently engaged with the intransigent Calvinist ethos of this country. Where the Canadian novelist may have been remiss, I believe Canadian poets have been less neglectful. The poetry of Mr. Irving Layton could be described as one long diatribe against Canadian Calvinism, and even the graceful mythology of Miss Jay Macpherson is clouded by a sense of sin at the root of the universe. It is in the poetry of Alden Nowlan, however, that we see the strongest and most deeply felt response to this tradition.

Alden Nowlan describes with demonic intensity one aspect of the Puritan-Calvinist dilemma, that of both loving and hating what one is, one's intrinsic human nature. Here is a poetry fiercely aware of the pain of human passion without much hope or trust in the possibility of joy equally inherent in this experience.

Mr. Nowlan's new book, *The Things Which Are* reveals a vision haunted by the brute facts of horror and violence,

dominated by a sense of evil lurking under a thin facade of apathy rather than respectability. Nowlan is never far from the awesome doctrine of the "damned" and the "elect" — "the same nightmares/instruct the evil, as inform the good". His "explanation", which is as much about the nature of spiritual reality as it is about the genesis of poetic inspiration, comments — "the reports of people/who've seen the Cherubim/differ, but all agree/they're terrible beasts: part ox, part eagle, part lion." This is a wry, awed appraisal of fallen human nature.

I would like to point out that Puritanism is not necessarily prudery, although some Puritans may be prudes. The two terms are often colloquially confused. The Puritan attitude, like Mr. Nowlan's, is acutely aware of the relentless duality of flesh and spirit: thus "Party At Bannon Brooks" — "my circular arm/stroking the soft fat/of her belly not because I love her/but because I am afraid."

In brief anecdotal poems the horror-haunted Northern mind is caught and a world macabre as well as weirdly humorous is presented. Nowlan's sense of horror is so acute that it can only find ultimate expression in the supernaturally macabre. This is apparent in "Black Thread" where, "my sister sewed her hand,/the soft flesh of her palm,/black thread under the skin."

There is fewer of this kind of poem than in previous volumes, and there is a strong new note of compassion. In "Drunk Falling", the drunk is given a "terrible dignity", "Saul dying,/Achilles to Lycaon". Nevertheless, the dominant image of the book is an obsessively vivid evocation of the rotting fester of mortality lurking hideously beneath the brief bloom of the flesh. This is focused in a cruel, repellant image of "blood and pus", the epitome of the doomed human condition, where a cat is seen with "one eye bright, the other/a hideous crust of blood and pus", and horseflies are "at such in moist yellow sores". A kind of apotheosis of this is achieved in "Novelty Booth" when a glass flower picked apart reveals a thimble-like cup full of pus and blood.

The Things Which Are does include a number of purely lyrical poems that have delicacy and tenderness of observation: poems where fruit is, "white as the flesh/of the thrice-risen Lord" and dahlias grieve like flowers in a fairy tale, where "like a long-married man/the sun will rest his hand upon/this flesh habitually," but where that same flesh is "as vulnerable as snow".

What Alden Nowlan has to say is always compelling; how he says it is often not. His poetry suffers on occasion from an overdose of the dreary colloquial voice, a legacy no doubt of Ezra Pound via Raymond Souster. Nor does the vigour of Nowlan's imagination compensate entirely for the frequent flatness of diction, the lack of inventiveness or experimentation in his form. But in the end these seem mere technical limitations in a poet who is everywhere redeemed by the intensity of his vision, uncompromisingly apprehended and passionately stated.

Whereas Mr. Alden Nowlan grapples with the human condition under the severe aegis of the Protestant-Calvinist ethos, Mr. Peter Miller in his third collection of verse, *A Shifting Pattern*, gives us the pained and weary despair of disbelief. "To look forward to nothing, to eschew the impossible joy" is the opening line of his title poem and the final word

of the same poem is "nothing".

Alden Nowlan and Peter Miller both respond to landscape, the exterior landscape of the eye as well as the interior landscape of the human heart. Alden Nowlan's terrain is wholly Canadian, rural New Brunswick, Miller's widely cosmopolitan. Where Alden Nowlan evokes a narrow, rigid, sometimes grimly Gothic climate, Peter Miller leads us into the quiet pastoral reaches of the Ontario countryside and diverts us with the exoticisms of Mexico and India, not to mention the civilized felicities of Italy and Greece.

Mr. Miller the man emerges as a civilized, cultivated, intelligent one whose themes are apparently equally civilized, subtle and complex. Mr. Miller, the poet, unfortunately emerges too often as a rather pallid rhetorician. This is not to say that Mr. Miller does not produce some telling and effective poems; he does, but although these are good in themselves they are none of them startling.

Possibly Mr. Miller suffers from overfacility. All his poems exhibit considerable surface dexterity in which exactness of observation and description almost make the poem but not quite. The poems are impeded, not to say defeated finally, by triteness of feeling. The poems in "Part II - Abroad", with a few exceptions, read like limp, self-conscious travelogues. There is little incisiveness of language and even less individuality of insight. Some poems are at best tasteful and eclectic, at worst uninspired and diffuse. Lines like "as you watch your fountains foaming white/under the lamps that raise bright fingers" from "Fountains of Trevi" and "with friends I have here sipped night/wet our tongues with starlit laughter" are sadly less than startling, yet this same poet can write in "Othello in Tuscany" — "it is the line, it is the line,/my soul, and it is the form/ show cause and design/in all that's mode." It is indeed the line and one could only wish Mr. Miller took it more to heart.

One cannot, nevertheless, dismiss Peter Miller quite so easily or so cavalierly. There are moving poems among the travelogues. There is "Notes from Uxmal" which deftly balances a complex of responses. This is a sharp and poignant poem. Against the ruins of Yucatan, ultimate questions of human values are posed. The sense of man, mortal, single and solitary, moving in a stream of continuity against time and death is strong. Solitariness is redeemed by the many facets of love into affirmation, "this drop of love that I have spilt/under the bridge with the milky span/of light —". There is also "Matins" where, "From the domed ceiling, distant and austere/as befits a lord whose line is Byzantine,/towards the monks intoning their discipline/the Saviour leans to lend a critic's ear."

Mr. Miller's muse appears at its best in such observations and in its quiet reflective guises. It is a muse, "where men and shadows make of time/a quiet clock whose wheels elude/the myth of movement." It is also a muse that can look resolutely and darkly at the human situation and report in a terse, powerful final poem,

> But a wooden skin, a plaster mask,
> has fronted our head of bone.
> And a second face, is little to ask,
> that we may die alone.

This is too real a sensibility to waste on poetic travelogue. MARYA FIAMENGO

TIGER TAMED

W. H. GRAHAM. *The Tiger of Canada West.* Clarke, Irwin. $6.00.

DR. WILLIAM "TIGER" DUNLOP (1792-1848), a celebrated eccentric among the pioneers of Ontario, is an excellent subject for popular treatment. "In the course of my reading, I discovered William Dunlop," Mr. Graham says on the jacket of his book. The discovery, of course, was a personal experience, for Dunlop has long been known to readers who have treasured *In the Days of the Canada Company, 1825-1850,* published in 1896 by Robina and Kathleen M. Lizars. The deplorable lack of a reprint of this book has made it feasible for Mr. Graham to tell the Dunlop story in a freely modernized version, which is more orderly, coherent and scholarly than the original.

As his title suggests, Mr. Graham is concerned almost entirely with the Canadian phase of Dunlop's career, in the period from 1826 to 1848. The sources for this phase, which Mr. Graham has chosen, include the Lizars sisters' *Humours of '37* (1897), as well as *In the Days of the Canada Company.* Mr. Graham has also had access to the rare, and relatively unknown, *Dunlop Papers,* edited and privately printed in England by Mr. J. G. Dunlop; there are three such volumes, *The Autobiography of John Dunlop, The Dunlops of Dunlop,* and *Letters and Journals 1663-1889.* In addition to these, Mr. Graham searched Canada Company records in public archives, and files of Toronto and Montreal newspapers. The result is a rare mixture of fact and legend, as indeed it should be, for history supports the literary image of Dunlop.

As a consequence of his reasonable desire to reduce the Lizars' account to historical regularity, Mr. Graham found himself obliged to comment upon many related topics which the sisters left delightfully confused. The Lizars were concerned with vignettes of people, not explanations of events; they were writing sympathetic, impressionistic biography, not history. Their manuscripts, now in the Library of the University of Western Ontario, show how carefully they gathered their material, and how loosely they put it together. Mr. Graham, by his own choice, had to make summary judgments and explanations concerning John Galt, the Canada Company after Galt's departure, the earliest settlers and conditions of Canada West, and politics of the province before 1850.

It is a large order to satisfy modern experts on these controversial matters, for each topic deserves specialist study; and Mr. Graham's moral theme, the disintegration of the early pioneer with the passing of the frontier, may be too rigorously applied. Mr. Graham should be commended for taking a stand, conscious of some prejudices and fighting

them, although there will always be readers who prefer the gay romancing of the Lizars and their eloquence, to which Mr. Graham sometimes happily surrenders. The legend of the "Tiger" — a title Dunlop gained less through big game hunting than through literary baptism into the *Blackwood*'s group — has lost nothing and should gain in popular acceptance because of Mr. Graham's conscientious study. CARL F. KLINCK

A CONFUSION OF WITCHES

ELLIOTT ROSE. *A Razor for a Goat: Problems in the History of Witchcraft and Diabolism.* University of Toronto Press. $4.95.

The Times Literary Supplement of May 25, 1962, reviewed three books on witchcraft and witches. With Mr. Rose's we have at least four on the subject in recent months — quite a flurry of interest in so hoary a topic.

Mr. Rose's book is marked by rather unpleasant mannerisms. His priggishness must be illustrated to be believed: "My qualifications [for writing this book] are that I am a historian of sorts, not wholly unfamiliar with the background; I have had, for other purposes, to give some attention to the appropriate countries and period; I can read Latin, and possess the ordinary layman's knowledge of anthropology and kindred subjects. . . . I am if anything a Thomist." Throughout the book there are pretentious references to literature, religion, and politics, which cannot help but annoy anyone familiar with any of the given subjects. (See, for instance, his reference to Doukhobors on page 120). There is also a strained belletrism which will undoubtedly strike some as brilliant and witty, but which I found sophomoric and above all soporific.

The book is about medieval and Reformation witchcraft, but it deals much less with the subject than with a certain literature on this topic. It is an essay on historiography rather than on history. In particular, Mr. Rose is occupied with refuting two hypotheses: one by Professor Margaret Murray, according to whom witchcraft was (or is) a completely intact survival of a pre-Christian European religion; the other hypothesis is attributed to persons Mr. Rose terms "Anti-Sadducees," according to whom witches do their work at the actual inspiration of an actual Devil. Going by Mr. Rose's presentation of these views, it would seem that he is fighting opinions so extreme that most of us would not bother giving them serious consideration.

I am willing to grant the possibility, though by no means the likelihood, that I would have taken a kinder view of this work if I were a professional historian instead of sociologist. In any case, a reader of this review would do well to postpone a decision on whether to read the book at least until he can check the reviewers in the historical journals. In the meantime, I would like to state briefly why I found the book so singularly unsatisfactory from a sociological point of view.

The problem of witchcraft would seem to involve the social relationship between orthodox and heterodox in the period under question. Mr. Rose concedes this by touching upon some of the heresies, but he does so most inadequately. He generally claims an absence of original sources, though Norman Cohn, in his

1957 work on *The Pursuit of the Millenium*, has reported in some detail on the kind of source Mr. Rose assumes is non-existent. (I refer here in particular to the heresy of the Free Spirit). The questions which Mr. Rose leaves so frustratingly unanswered concern the relationship between witchcraft and heresy, the social-class influences upon witchcraft, and, in general, the social conflicts related to the conflicts around witches. For one who expects answers to questions like these, the book is intellectually very thin. WERNER COHN

MESSAGE FROM OLYMPUS

IRVING LAYTON. *Balls for a One-Armed Juggler*. McClelland & Stewart. Cloth $4.50; Paper $2.65.

QUESTION: Is it possible to situate Layton anywhere in the general "tradition" of Canadian poetry?

ANSWER: I don't think so, in spite of the fact that he's here. There has never been anyone quite like Layton — for good or bad — in Canadian poetry. He's the sport and anomaly of tradition.

Q.: Layton has been called an innovator and a meticulous craftsman. Is this true?

A.: He is not an innovator — unless you consider that his subject matter and language are innovation. Which in a sense I do. But given the tradition of preaching Christ-like sensualists and moralists such as Nietzsche, Lawrence and Shaw — then Layton is a fine craftsman. And this *is* relevant in an odd way. It allows Layton to swing expertly and acrobatically around the fixed trapeze of his own and other men's certainties.

Q.: To what poets or group of present-day writers has he most affinity?

A.: Leaving out the dead men for whom Layton professes admiration, one has to point to the Americans whom Layton affects to despise, such as Ginsberg, Kerouac, etc. — the beats. But Layton has a singing magnificence in his earlier work which I find absent from theirs.

Q.: There is a preoccupation with physical violence and cruelty in many Layton poems. What does this indicate?

A.: That he is a moralist. The reader may generally draw a conclusion or point a moral with Layton's poems of animal death and human violence.

Q.: How good is he?

A.: The best in the country.

There is much to be said for the idea that Layton is his own mythology. He stalks through most of the poems in *Balls for a One-Armed Juggler* much larger than life-size, far more angry than it's possible to sustain in the living flesh and bone of the human mind. So that his poems are frozen anger, solidified passion — set rigidly into forms which do not allow this anger to dissipate away into sleep or lessen into human anti-climax.

Of course there are modulations and degrees of printed emotion. There are also rare flashes of the characteristic early lyricicm, which now seems to be fading away in the poet's impassioned middle age. Label this excerpt pity:

> —for I loved you from the first
> who know what they do not know,
> seeing in your death a tragic portent
> for all of us who crawl and die
> under the wheeling disappearing stars
> ("Elegy for Marilyn Monroe")

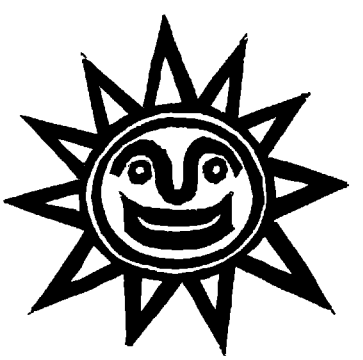
Humour in Layton is liable to be savage as an executioner laughing at his

victims. The philosophic moments are hardly ever calm, but generally vital:

> Yet vitality proves nothing except that something is alive
> So is a pole-cat; so is a water-rat.

I don't think I've ever met a human being with such impressive qualities of being right all the time as Irving Layton. And in this regard man and poems are inseparable. In a sense that's admirable. I admire the passion and bluster and candour it gives to the poems. In another sense I don't like anybody to be so right all the time. For it is not a very human quality; it withdraws its possessor from participation in the storms and passions of the actual world, makes him a mere angry supreme court spectator. It turns a man into a megalomaniac god. I think some readers share this dislike of the absolute, and certainly the tendency of a few is to rebel against it.

However, that is ungrateful. God pities the dead little fox in "Predator". God explains "Why I Can't Sleep Nights" in the poem of that title. God condemns and castigates the sinful individual in "Epigram for Roy Daniells". And God has written parables for his worshippers — "Butterfly on a Rock" and "A Tall Man Executes a Jig" (of which Irving said to me once, "Al, in ten years you'll be able to understand this poem. In twenty you might be able to write one as good." I was moved to a great humbleness by this statement.)



But I'm not one of Layton's detractors. *Balls* is an excellent book of poems. It deserves to be read by all — especially those to whom Layton addresses the poems specifically. And I notice that even those who dislike Layton always read him — if only to rush indignantly to their typewriters. For perhaps I'm wrong about this god-idea, and the anger of some of Layton's critics is the only indication they are alive.

A. W. PURDY

RECENT REPRINTS

CANADA ALREADY HAS its first distinguished series of paperbacks in McClelland & Stewart's New Canadian Library. Now two other series are appearing. The first titles are already announced of the Carleton Library, to be published in collaboration by McClelland & Stewart and Carleton University, while the initial series of eight reprints has just appeared to launch Canadian University Paperbacks under the imprint of the University of Toronto Press. Among them are four titles which are likely to be of interest to readers of *Canadian Literature*. Two of these are basically literary — *The Renaissance and English Humanism* by Douglas Bush ($1.50) and the first series of *Our Living Tradition*, ($1.75) edited by C. T. Bissell and including lectures on — among other important figures — Lampman, Grove, Leacock and Goldwin Smith. The other two are historical — *The Canadian Identity* by W. L. Morton ($1.75) and *The Fur Trade in Canada* by Harold A. Innis ($1.95).

opinions and notes

A HAUNTING ECHO

SIR:

Rereading Emily Dickinson recently I was struck by certain remembered echoes. How like this is to the poetry of Sarah Binks, the Sweet Songstress of Saskatchewan. A comparison of the lives of these two poets shows interesting points in common. Neither married; each had similar schooling, with some emphasis on the science of geology; each left her home briefly in pursuit of a man. In their works we find so much similarity that the question arises: did Sarah's art stem from Emily's?

Similarities are particularly evident in the rhyme-schemes. Each of these poets seems to be free of the trammels of ordinary rhyme; each uses what Emily's early editor, Mabel Loomis Todd, called "thought-rhymes". Examples are sown thick in their works. Emily's

> A print of a vermilion *foot*,
> A purple finger on the *slope*.

or

> And he — he followed close behind.
> I felt his silver *heel*
> Upon my ankle — then my shoes
> Would overflow with *pearl*.

have their parallel in Sarah's

> The hand that *wrote*
> Must grasp the *spoke*,

and the bolder

> Barley in the heater, salt pork in the *pantry*
> How nice that you never feel cold in this *country*.

Geological motifs figure frequently in the work of each, with regional differences, as might be expected, and the usual effects of temperamental differences. Sarah, the farm girl, living on the prairies, Devonian land not far removed from our dominant Precambrian Shield, wrote of jasper, quartz, micaceous, schist, chert, pterodactyls and trilobites; Emily, more delicate and urban, doted on chrysoprase, emerald, beryl, onyx, topaz, agate, chrysolite, amber and amethyst. Yet, the New England poetess was unable to ignore the presence of the nearby Appalachians; sometimes she could be brutal and elemental too, extending her imagery to adamant, quartz—or marble:

> Though drifted deep in *Parian*
> The village lies today.

Carl Van Doren, in his introduction to an edition of Emily's poetry, wrote, "There are few subjects which she does not touch with intimate, surprising words." This is obvious in

> A cheek is always redder
> Just where the *hectic* springs.

But the same sort of thing can be seen in Sarah's work, for instance where she calls a farm goose

> A loathsome brute to toil *among*.

Emily likes to use general terms in a particular sense:

> Here a most and there a mist,
> Afterwards — day!

or

> And then he drank a *dew*
> From a convenient *grass*.

Sarah practices this too:

A onion, a lettuce, a handful of maize.

Each used the poet's privilege of finding new uses for old words, or coining new ones. Emily, with adjectives, was positive:

To fight aloud is very brave
But *gallanter*, I know,
Who charge within the bosom
The cavalry of woe,

and in a lighter vein

The dust replaced in hoisted roads
The birds *jocoser* sung;

Sarah's adjectival inventions were darker in mood:

Comes the Poet —
Sylph-like,
Gaunt-like,

or

. . . in *stentorious* sleep.

As to finding new nouns or new uses for them, Emily was weak:

With half a smile and half a *spurn*

or

The thunder crumbled like a *stuff* —

Sarah was more resourceful. Witness:

With brazen wings and blatant *snoof*

and

He looks not the rock and the *riplet*

Each dared to use verbs boldly. Emily made her railway train ". . . a quarry pare" and mystically observed that

Not all pianos in the woods
Had power to *mangle* me.

On the other hand, Sarah tended toward the onomatopoeic:

Today as I an apple *mulched*

or, more musically,

I'll take no cow that fails to sing
Or *throstle* with its horn.

Each poet's imagery was intimately bound up with her own environment. Emily, the town-dweller, noted

The trampled steel that springs

(most likely a rake, left teeth upward on an Amherst lawn), while Sarah, a daughter of the great outdoors, wrote in lonely Willows

The mainfore gallant sail spilt like a tent.

In the realm of the psychological the girl poets show kinship. Sarah's *Me and My Love and Me* is directly descended from Emily's piece on the dichotomous personality,

Me from myself to banish
Had I art . . .
But since myself assault me
. . . Me — or me?

There is no question about it; there is a relationship. Paul Hiebert, Sarah's biographer, can throw no light on the question. There the matter must rest until some energetic scholar comes forward to make a thorough examination of the matter that I have adumbrated here.

C. C. J. BOND
Ottawa.

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