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CANADIAN LITERATURE No. 19

Winter, 1964

SALUTE TO E. J. PRATT

Articles

BY PAUL WEST, FRED COGSWELL, VINCENT SHARMAN, ETHEL WILSON, MICHAEL TAIT

Reviews

BY ROBERT HARLOW, GILLES ARCHAMBAULT, MARGARET PRANG, ROBERT MCCORMACK, JOAN SELBY, JAN DE BRUYN, DAVID BROMIGE AND OTHERS

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ETHEL WILSON has received wide acclaim for her novels and short stories; she is often called "Canada's best woman writer of fiction".

editorial

TITANIC, BUT NOT OLYMPIAN

THIS ISSUE OF *Canadian Literature* is devoted largely to new studies of E. J. Pratt, the poet who over a generation has become the dean of Canadian letters. There has not yet been a satisfactory and complete critical study of Pratt, and we may have to wait some time before his individual achievement and his position in the tradition of Canadian literature are adequately assessed. Appearing at a time when writing in this country was emerging from colonial dependence, he seemed something of a giant in isolation, and still, like that other figure of imperfect grandeur, Frederick Philip Grove, he stands apart from the rest of Canadian writers, distinguished by his largeness of texture as well as by his talent for giving new life to traditional forms, as Spenser and Keats variously did in their own times and places. When one reviews his career, the subject and title of what is perhaps his finest poem does not seem accidental; he is a titanic rather than an olympian figure. It is hoped that the studies we publish in this issue will contribute to a more complete and genuinely critical understanding of his achievement.

* * *

The visual arts lie outside our field and within the province of our distinguished contemporary, *Canadian Art.* We cannot, however, pass without mention a volume which reveals the scope and excellence of our most comprehensive art collection — that of the Royal Ontario Museum. *Art Treasures of the Royal Ontario Museum* is prepared and edited by Theodore A. Heinrich, the Museum's director. It is published by McClelland & Stewart and is technically one of the

best art books that has ever appeared from a Canadian house; it is significant of the limitations of our book-producing industry that the forty-one excellent colour plates were printed in Holland, and the rest of the book, including the hundred and twenty odd monochrome illustrations, was produced in England. The illustrations demonstrate the comprehensive nature of the Royal Ontario Museum, dedicated as it is to "The Arts of Man through all the Years". Ancient Greece and Peru and Mexico are admirably represented; so are the primitive arts of Africa and the Pacific. At the same time, the desire to be comprehensive has resulted in an inadequate representation of the R.O.M's chief glory, its great collection of Chinese ceramic art. One may also deplore the scantiness of the accompanying commentary. Yet, when all is said, this volume leaves little doubt that Toronto contains one of the best North American art museums outside the financially charmed circle of New York.

* * *

We hear a great deal about Canadian anthologies of Canadian poetry. Other anthologies produced in this country are often less well-known outside their particular field of reference. Yet there is at least one excellent production in this field which has been going through revisions and reprintings for the last thirty years, and now appears in a completely revised third edition. This is *Representative Poetry*, published in three volumes by the University of Toronto Press (Volumes I and III cost $6.00 each and Volume II, $9.50). *Representative Poetry* is in fact a college textbook, designed to cover three years at the University of Toronto; it is prepared by the people who actually teach English there and who prefer their own selection to those which emanate from the College Divisions of New York publishers. The 1,500-odd pages contain an ample and well-balanced introductory selection of Modern English verse from Wyatt to Swinburne. The notes and critical apparatus are reduced to a minimum, so that both professor and student, not to mention the general reader who may profitably use such a volume as a basic introduction, are virtually left without that elaborate mediation, beloved of American scholarly publishing, which so often in college texts turns into a barrier rather than an aid to understanding. The lazy temptation to create a course of isolated "greats" is avoided; *Representative Poetry* finds room for the curious and the little-read, and for a surprising amount of work by those pleasing minor figures who give a literary age its own flavour. Of course, every teacher of English should dream of making his own anthology, containing the works which he can most fervently expound; in defaut of that unattainable ideal, one wishes

that more Departments of English would follow the University of Toronto in preparing their own anthologies to give scope for variation of preference and at the same time express the collective taste of a group of practising teachers. At the very least it would save professors of English from many tedious committees designed to select the poor best of a group of unsatisfactory texts produced by hack scholars in another land for the benefit of that profitable branch of big American business, commercial college text production.

E. J. PRATT'S LITERARY REPUTATION

Fred Cogswell

DURING THE NINETEEN FORTIES and fifties, E. J. Pratt was given a position of pre-eminence in Canadian literary circles similar to that which Bliss Carman enjoyed among poets in still earlier decades of this century. Whether Pratt's poetic reputation will prove more durable than Carman's is a question to which most Canadian literary critics would today deliver a ringing affirmative. "Carman," they say, "is an interesting minor poet possessed of a thin vein of talent and during his lifetime he was very much over-rated. Pratt, however, is Canada's leading poet, the most original and the greatest in theme and execution that this country has ever had. All his work, it is true, is not of equal merit, but his best poems represent an original contribution to the poetry of the English-speaking world. He ought to be better known outside of Canada." And yet, there are curious analogies between the work of Carman and Pratt which lead me to speculate on whether Pratt's conjectured final position in the world of letters will ultimately be radically different from that of Bliss Carman after all.

Both Carman and Pratt acquired their reputation, for the most part, by creating a large bulk of work of a high degree of technical competence upon a limited range of themes which were meaningful to their immediate contemporaries. Carman's idealism — a non-rigorous paradise into which a whole generation beleaguered by Darwinism was glad to escape — was parallelled by Pratt's outdoor world of elemental conflict on a physical level — a world of uninhibited

violence into which a whole generation of frustrated academics were equally glad to escape. Today the academics yawn over "Vestigia" and "Lord of my Heart's Elation", but is there any guarantee that future academics will not also yawn over the even longer and more pointlessly involved "The Great Feud", "The Witches' Brew", and "Towards the Last Spike"?

Technical competence in general, and the mastery of haunting phrase and delicate rhythm in particular, have not saved Carman from the stigma of "minor poet", although even his most severe critics admit his mastery over these attributes. More than any other quality, form in verse is subject to the vagaries of fashion. Today the academic critic finds the colloquial rhythms and hard-hitting bluntness of an Irving Layton or a Raymond Souster more exciting than Carman's most suggestive nuance of sound and image. Such a critic's reaction is honest and natural, but it should not be mistaken for universal critical judgment. There was in England for almost a century a period when the forms, the rhythms, and the narrative techniques employed by E. J. Pratt flourished, but after Wordsworth and his contemporaries launched the "new" poetry of romanticism, where then were Pope and Dryden and Butler and Swift and the techniques which they had devised and used so brilliantly? If James Reaney, for instance, were to succeed within the next two decades in imposing a mythopoeic surrealism as the language of Canadian poets, where then will be the excitement and the glamour of the language of scientific description and the techniques of narrative verse displayed in Pratt's metrical lines?

Carman was a shy, sensitive, harmless man whom most people liked and few wished to hurt. Canadian literary criticism is the kindest in the world — kindest perhaps because Canadian critics are also writers and would be done by as they do. An attractive personality softened the force of the fall of Carman's reputation and possibly postponed it until after his death. Pratt has been gifted with an even more attractive personal character than Carman, and he has for at least thirty years had intimate and influential contact with those who have the greatest means and prestige at their disposal for the raising of a literary reputation. Few critics in Canada today, even if they felt like doing so, would directly attack the poetry of E. J. Pratt. In the first place, such an attack would impugn the judgment of Canada's leading critics, men who have acclaimed Pratt as our one major poet; at the same time, such an attack might cause pain to a man whose integrity and warmth of character have made him a living legend. Pratt need therefore fear no direct attack during his lifetime upon his position as Canada's leading poet. Yet by the shifting of their grounds for praise of his work in recent

years, such critics as Sutherland and Dudek and, to a lesser extent, Frye and Pacey have shown not so much insight as their desire to supply in Pratt's poetry what currently seems necessary to be found in great poetry. The attempt to make the underlying symbols in Pratt's work — often fortuitous in their occurrence — its major ingredients marks the beginning of the pressure of changing problems, attitudes, and tastes upon an idol of a succeeding generation. The new faith first takes over the old idol and attempts to reshape it to its needs. Should it find the work of reshaping overly difficult, it will in time discard the idol altogether and regard it as a block of dead wood standing in the way of the true poetry. So it was with Carman. How will it be with Pratt? Despite the work of his recent admirers, Pratt does not seem to me to wear gracefully the robe of the Christian humanist scattering those mythopoeic symbols which prove the unifying vision that is at one and the same time the justification of poetry and the proof of the cleverness of the critic who first perceives them. My own feeling is that as soon as a genuine mythopoeic poet of stature emerges, efforts to make one of Pratt will cease, and much of his work will then, as Carman's is today, be consigned to the stony limbo of that which was not for all time but for an age.

IN VIEW OF some of the opinions expressed concerning the relative modernity of Carman and Pratt, it is a curious paradox that as an individual in relation to his age and as an artist in relation to his art, Carman is modern and Pratt is an anachronism, a mid-Victorian with an eighteenth-century practicality as a writer.

Modern poetry is *par excellence* the production of an internal proletariat, who axiomatically assume the superiority of the ideals of the individual (non-conformity) over the ideals of the crowd (conformity), and who put forward the thesis that the primary role of art and literature is to express personal experience rather than to put into more effective words socially accepted truths. In his attitude to poetry and to society, as far as the clarity of his expression and the depth of his experience allowed, Carman was typical of the internal proletariat. He missed greatness not by abandoning the struggle between personal and mass vision, between expressionism and functionalism in poetry, but by too easily assuming that he had won it. Neither the schizophrenia of "In the House of Idie-

daily" nor the sublimation of personal grief into the landscape were to prove a sufficiently firm and lasting bond between the poet and his readers.

From even the most cursory reading of Pratt's work, it becomes clear that he is the poet of all those in recoil from isolation — the poet of crowds over solitudes, of action over contemplation, of mass action over individual action, and that he accepts as basic and good a whole nexus of activities — instinctive and traditional — that are shared by men and animals as members of a species rather than possessed in isolation as individuals. It becomes equally clear that Pratt considers the writing of poetry to be functional craft in which the timeliness of topics, the consulting of monographs for accurate information, even the choice of metrical form, are affected by the classical function of providing pleasure and instruction to a co-operative audience. Out of this intelligent use of the details of craftsmanship and this careful consideration of his audience, Pratt in fact has achieved a technical success which had eluded English poets for upwards of two centuries. He successfully adapted the epic narrative to the deeds of modern man. Since this achievement is the only one by Pratt which is not equalized by the work of Carman or some other Canadian poet, it must be the rock upon which Pratt's greatness must ultimately rest. It therefore deserves more detailed scrutiny.

As early as the mid-seventeenth century, such writers as Sprat and Cowley had speculated concerning the possibility of turning man's material and commercial conquests over nature to poetical use. During the ensuing century a host of versifiers (of whom Armstrong, Young, Thomson, Grainger, and Dyer were most conspicuous) attempted the sagas of commerce and knowledge in Miltonic blank verse. They failed, partly through lack of imagination and partly through failure to cast their living subject matter into living language. Relying upon the intrinsic interest of their theme, these poets for the most part introduced human beings and their conflicts only cursorily into their poems glorifying modern materialism; hence the most essential elements of narrative poetry — human involvement and suspence — were lacking from their work. In style, they relied too heavily upon Latinized pseudonyms which had not yet become sufficiently absorbed into the fabric of the English language to be vital. At the same time, their use of epic imagery and machinery was too patently artificial and derivative to be effective. Moreover, Miltonic blank verse was too tortuous and languid a form to fit matter so positive as that of the new age. The dreary failure of these eighteenth-century poets was sufficient to discourage those who came after them, although both Wordsworth and Walt Whitman were to advocate strenuously the use of contemporary science and commerce as themes for great poetry. It was E. J. Pratt

who first showed the way for the effective employment in verse of modern commercial and scientific material and vocabulary.

Pratt succeeded where his predecessors had failed because he never lost sight of the human elements of suspense and conflict and accordingly made his matter of information not paramount in itself but subsidiary to the struggles which engrossed his readers' interest. Secondly, he substituted the language of scientific description (by this time a standard part of prose read by the educated) for the poetically outworn language of physical description. Thirdly, by a study of such good narrative poets as Dryden, Scott, and Byron, Pratt found a grammatical syntax and a metrical rhythm that suited the pace of his own age. As a result, Pratt's narrative poems restored for the first time since the eighteenth century the classic position of the poet as one who could express in verse with greater ease, lucidity, and grace, anything that fell within the providence of prose. Pratt's best work, therefore, is a superb achievement of technical genius, ranking with that of Dryden, whom among the English poets he most resembles. For no other Canadian poet can such a claim be made.

TECHNICAL PRE-EMINENCE is all the greatness that can be assigned to Pratt. Despite his topicality, and the care and attention which he gave to historical and scientific accuracy in the treatment of his themes, Pratt is, compared to a major English poet like Dryden, disappointingly limited. Here one feels that, like Jack London and Ernest Hemingway, he is the unwitting victim of obsessions born of his North American environment. North Americans have preserved and continued the Christian and classical traditions of European civilization; at the same time, most genuine and most deeply rooted in their behaviour are often attitudes of which they are seldom consciously aware — attitudes engendered by the realities of a recent (in Pratt's case, contemporary) frontier existence. The result of the interplay of European civilization with the influences of the frontier is the development of a psyche which unconsciously differs as greatly from its ostensible pattern as the Christianity of Saint Olaf differed from that of Jesus Christ and Saint Paul. Underlying Pratt's Christian ethics, his mid-Victorian code of honour, and his Wundtian psychology, and often rising up unconsciously and dominating his work, were the four great American obsessions: materialism, derived from generations of life-and-death

struggle with matter; hedonism, the assignment of value to matter; giantism, the measurement of matter; and infantilism, the arrested emotional development of man through a too engrossing concern with matter. Given these four primary obsessions, it is not surprising that any manifestation of the agency that manipulates matter, power, should appeal to Pratt's imagination like the presence of a god. To Pratt, a clash of power, whether between an iceberg and a ship or between great prehistoric monsters, has all the terror and delight of a *gotterdammerung*. In the Newfoundlander, Pratt, the last-born literary child of frontier America, the values of the primitive epic found unconsciously a belated second home.

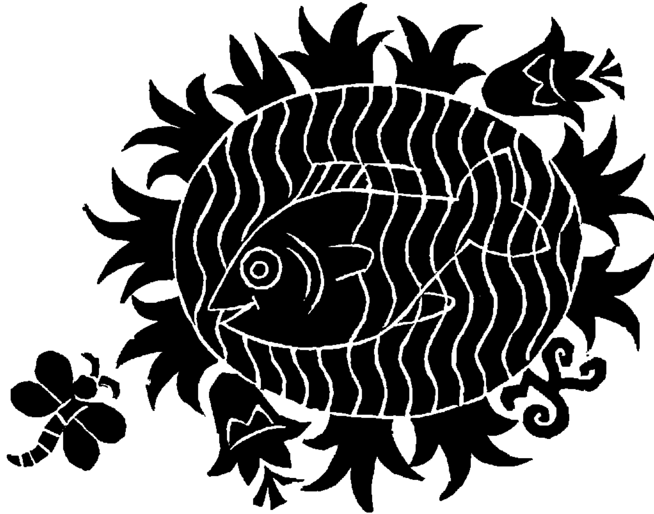
The best test of the truth of the foregoing hypothesis can be seen in the climax of "Brébeuf and his Brethren". Few passages in civilized literature can match it for unrelieved amoral savagery and animalism. Brébeuf gives the Indians "roar for roar" like the ferocious and wounded animal he has become. They drink his blood and eat his heart, hoping by sympathetic magic therefore to imbibe his strength; he in turn gets superior strength, not from the symbols of civilization and religion, "lilies" and "words", but from the hallucinatory sound which the Indians cannot hear:

> . . . invisible trumpets blowing
> Around two slabs of board, right-angled, hammered
> By Roman nails and hung on a Jewish hill.

The "invisibility" of the trumpets, the sole spiritual note, is hardly sufficient here in itself to differentiate the Christ who presumably hung upon the Cross from the *geas* which primitive minds identify with lodestone iron and certain positions in which in magic ceremonies matter may be set up.

Pratt, then, combines a sophisticated and masterly poetic technique, a wealth of erudition, and a timeliness in choice of themes with an obsessive poetic vision that is almost incredibly primitive. Sometimes the blend succeeds; sometimes it fails. When it fails, one is left with a product essentially rococo — the senseless murders of "The Great Feud" or the academic whimsy of "The Witches' Brew" for example. When it succeeds, Pratt creates such masterpieces of narrative as "The Roosevelt and the Antinoë", "The Submarine", and "Behind the Log" — narratives in which the epic primitivism of the poet harnessed to his skill in the suspenseful depiction of action imposes Pratt's excitement upon many North Americans almost in spite of themselves. Pratt's work will never be popular in Europe. Whether it will maintain its popularity upon this continent as society

moves further and further in time and living conditions from its frontier origins is unlikely. My own feeling is that the curve of his literary reputation will be seen one hundred years from now to have curiously paralleled that of his predecessor, Bliss Carman.



E. J. PRATT'S FOUR-TON GULLIVER

Paul West

DEEP IN TORONTO a rebellious, gifted Newfoundlander sits eternally at the head of a table, a large cooked bird before him, congenial men around him and a promise of gradually warming, not essentially literary, talk to come. Once he addressed a book of his poems to "the boys of the stag-parties" almost as if, in evoking all those virile synods, he were amassing some counterweight to a bicepped image of his own in *The Cachalot*:

> Out on the ocean tracts, his mamma
> Had, in a North Saghalien gale,
> Launched him, a four-ton healthy male,
> Between Hong Kong and Yokohama.

I resort to jocular vignette because Newfoundlanders, addicted to jocose tall stories and the convivial, still vehemently list Edwin John Pratt as the best of their several hundred outstanding poets. His main local competition comes, I think, from another master of the convivial whom I met in an outport: a poet of soil and soul who had one leg only, no wife, several children, a few animals, baked his own bread, cut the children's hair and when I last saw him was enlisting their aid to rear the walls of a new frame house. This game widower, very much a talking man, could give Pratt a run for his money as well as a new variant

of the healthy, several-ton male. Pratt's renowned conviviality implies this other man's view: a masculine, massive humanism fit to give any Newfoundland Methodist a spiritual embolism and yet epitomizing the earthiness and vitality for which Newfoundlanders are known and, in some cases, loved.

Born in a fishing village in 1883, the son of a Methodist clergyman, Pratt has made his life and career in Toronto but only after student preaching and elementary teaching in such settlements as Moreton's Harbour. He reached the University of Toronto in 1907 to study philosophy and psychology, was ordained in the Methodist ministry, and eventually in 1917 presented a doctoral thesis entitled *Studies in Pauline Eschatology*, a work he refuses to list among his publications (it was "done to a formula"). The poet did not emerge until 1925 in the characteristically titled collection, *Titans*. Methodism and academicism had to go; so also had the pedestrian tropes of the Newfoundland narrative poem, *Rachel*, the dusty truisms of his unpublished lyric drama, *Clay*, and the picturesque cutenesses of *A Book of Newfoundland Verse*. Once the inherited and acquired mental clutter had gone, he could cope with the story of the amphibian *tyrannosaurus rex* and the cachalot whale. He was reliving the days when he used to row out and watch the dead whales being moored belly-up at Moreton's Harbour. Much of the feeling in *The Cachalot*, as E. K. Brown pointed out, is "in the best sense, juvenile." It is also atavistic and exuberant, and Pratt's poetry in general has the same childlike quality, the same obsession with force, grandeur and immensity as boys' adventure stories. In Pratt's epics especially, we are alone in an empty room with God; or rather, God is alone with man because, for Pratt, good, godliness and gods have their only being in the human heart. To read his epics attentively, trying to respond to all those whales, icebergs, dinosaurs, giants and storms, is to attempt one's own studies in Prattian Eschatology: for these are *his* last things, far from those of St. Paul or of Newfoundland Methodism. And the *first* thing we have to get used to is Pratt's entranced addiction to spectacle, to conflicts in which the primitive defeats the civilized and force ingenuity. A certain huffing and puffing in his poems, as well as an absence of overt tenderness or clearly realized characters, produces an effect of impersonal olympianism. Call it allegory writ large or demiurge-dabbling, it is like Hardy crossed with Robinson Jeffers. And it is redeemed, as it has to be if we are not to feel alienated and irrelevant among his colossal icons, by two things: his humour, essentially that of Newfoundland plus immersion in literature, and the absence of terror. We can belly-laugh in the company of his icons and there is little need to whistle in his darkness. For his cosmology is weirdly genial; his universe isn't

mechanical so much as triumphant, and Pratt the preacher is still there, celebrating personally without regarding personal faces:

> Silent, composed, ringed by its icy broods,
> The grey shape with the palaeolithic face
> Was still the master of the longtitudes.

Take it or leave it, that's what happened; where is the *Titanic* now? Pratt's relish for the defeat of human presumption has in it something perverse and oddly in conflict with his convivial streak.

The answer, I feel, has to do with disgust — not the sort of disgust we find in Penn Warren and Sartre (eructation and vomit; inevitable defeat, inevitable choice) but cosmic disgust at man's grandiose incapacity. Pratt displays an almost Jewish complicity with cosmic forces, and that image of the festive board with Pratt presiding — well, it's just a bit dynastic and Arthurian. Isn't it the humanist retort to the President of the Immortals, the obverse of Pratt's comic enthusiasm? To him, man is not big enough, not near enough to four tons; and the race itself strikes him as puny. This is why he seems at times, for all the muscle and weight of his language, a metaphysical flirt determined to be on the winning side and to celebrate men only when they are surpassing themselves on the verge of destruction. Of the many-faceted, teeming surface of civilization Pratt says little; he is addicted to apocalypse and titans. Even in his brilliant poem, "Come Away, Death", in which the words are granite-firm, there is more symbolism and analogue than circumstantial detail. But there *is* this, just the sort of thing the epics lack:

> One night we heard his footfall — one September night —
> In the outskirts of a village near the sea.
> There was a moment when the storm
> Delayed its fist, when the surf fell
> Like velvet on the rocks — a moment only....

There follows the typical Pratt expansion of the theme into maximum references:

> What followed was a bolt
> Outside the range and target of the thunder,
> And human speech curved back upon itself
> Through Druid runways and the Piltdown scarps,
> Beyond the stammers of the Java caves,

> To find its origins in hieroglyphs
> On mouths and eyes and cheeks
> Etched by a foreign stylus never used
> On the outmoded page of the Apocalypse.

These grand properties can be tiring, not in a poem of sixty-odd lines like this, but when they recur like elephantine tapestries in the epics. (Pratt plays with archaeology and pre-history in much the same way as André Malraux does in his art books.)

IT MAY BE THAT PRATT, heir to a tradition of inbred, poor landscape poetry, has determined not to be Canadian: to sink the national in the prehistoric, the regional in the cosmic. His eschatology dwarfs and plunders his at-hand. His whale, unlike Melville's, is the incarnation of laudable natural strength. Pratt is less interested in depicting *mores* and human enterprises than in showing their futility. His iceberg thrills him more than the *Titanic*'s passengers do (almost twenty are named in the poem). It is not the heroism that excites him so much as the spectacle of destruction: the consciously created, the man-made, wrecked by the unconscious cliff of ice. I find this excitement somewhat twisted although I sympathize with his underlying view of an impersonal universe surviving through a prearranged calculation of favourable chances. Most people were not on the *Titanic* anyway, and Life, numerically speaking, won over Death. It is as if Pratt, in Pleistocene *persona*, counted himself among the stalking ante-diluvians and cosmic colossi. Succumbing to such imaginative ambition, he prevents himself from doing what he claims to do: "to bring in with the more severe elemental qualities the human idiosyncrasies." It is not people that emerge, but simian mothers (as in *The Great Feud*) and impersonal bestiaries like Jeffers out of Frost:

> But goats, like men, have never found
> Much standing room on neutral ground.

After 1939 even, it is the *idea* of heroism rather than the feat of any individual that compels him to admire. And his admiration is, as it literally should be, full of sad wonderment. He has always been slow to glorify violent heroism, readier to

extol the passivity in stoicism, preferring always the impersonal violences of Nature. In *Dunkirk* no one fires at the enemy: all endure the process, as in "The Convict Holocaust" and *Brébeuf*. The net result is a tough surrender which resembles tough stalemate. In "The Truant" man puts God straight:

> . . . we concede
> To you no pain nor joy nor love nor hate,
> No final tableau of desire,
> No causes won or lost, no free
> Adventure at the outposts. . . .

The lyric "Old Age" takes things a step further, expressing the *vita minima* in images like those of Yeats and Samuel Beckett: an old man, "so poor again, with all that plunder taken," has only "the round of a wheel chair and four dull walls." Yet the old man thinks he hears "silver horns blowing" up on the hills. For Pratt, man is doomed but, in accepting doom bravely, can be commensurable with Nature and God (who have no pain nor joy nor love nor hate) and even colossal, once we see things clearly. Man has consciously to undergo what plants and minerals undergo without consciousness. And beside man the cosmos is

> A series of concentric waves which any fool
> Might make by dropping stones within a pool.

The poker-game in *The Titanic* and the kaleidoscopic recipe in *The Witches' Brew* are cleverer then, both conceptually and verbally, than any cosmos. Or so it seems. Actually this is a bit of perverse pawnbroking. We have only to read something like Maurice Maeterlinck's *Life of the Bee* to discount Pratt's disparagement of the ordered universe. Pratt says we can do anything better than the cosmos can; but this is to shunt off the cosmos as sour grapes. Better to shunt it off as too well organized to be tolerated. Because he feels this way — contemptuously envious, he feels no terror at either the vast spaces or their silence. And this is surely an inadequate response eloquent of some confusion in Pratt: after all, he who is fellow-traveller to titans ought not to disparage their route and footprints. E. K. Brown said that the reader never feels small in Pratt's world: "his pictures of strength release one from the petty round and make one feel the ally, not the victim . . . of universal power." The alliance flatters but, unless you accept Pratt's cosmography hook, line and sinker, turns us against ourselves, making *thanatos* out of *eros*.

Or does he mean, as Karl Menninger has suggested, that Man has an extraordinary propensity for self-destruction and rationalizes this by allying himself with destructive Nature? As Menninger asks, "Why does the wish to live *ever*, even temporarily, triumph over the wish to die?" In Pratt's poems, there is a colossal game going on of identification: Nature is both destructive and creative; if Man allies himself with Nature, then he is both too. But, in fact, Man is separate from Nature, and his own destructions and creations cannot chime exactly with those of Nature. Man bombs beautiful cities and massacres thousands in the process: if he claims Nature as an ally in this, he is trying to shift the blame. If he takes the blame and acknowledges he is a conscious being, then surely he is more vicious than Nature ever is. To wish to be as impersonal and inscrutable as Nature is to will our humanity away. And if Pratt means that we are indeed so wretched that we prefer not to be human, then his point has some force. But he would never celebrate its force; and what he does celebrate is something else. The kind of cosmic social-climbing he revels in means that Nature is powerless to inflict its worst without Man and Man, therefore indispensable, can work the arrangement in reverse by inventing spiritualities of his own: charity, courage, honour, love, congeniality over dinner. . . .

HERE WE MUST STOP. The Man-Nature argument is like that about the chicken and the egg, and it is jejune to debate their mutual inextricability until we regard it as an alliance. For the human mind is free to conceive of alliance or not; it can propound it or deny it. The question is open. Man is a conscious participant in a process from which he cannot divide himself, and all his interpretations, like the omega-point or whatever it is that Creation moves towards, are guesswork. But even guesswork is human, is brave; it's more inventive than being a vegetable. And Pratt's notion of martyrdom, covering what both Nature and Man do to men, begins with the decision to accept and develops with the impulse to justify. All this must, and does, provoke wry laughter of sorts: Man

> Yoked Leo, Taurus and your team of Bears
> To pull his kiddy cars of inverse squares.

Pratt's humour is the safety-valve. Asserting Man against the cosmos, allying him

with the cosmos—this is work of supererogation and entails taking things seriously. Pratt, realizing this, as well as the futility of regimen and system, works human ingenuity against itself through polysyllabic, comic overtones:

> You oldest of the hierarchs
> Composed of electronic sparks. . . .

His poetry is conceptual, allegorical and masculine. His lyricism is generic, not personal:

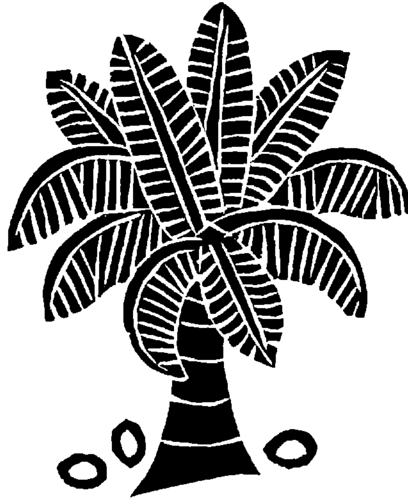
> . . . and at the equinoxes
> Under the gold and green of the auroras
> Wild geese drove wedges through the zodiac.

It is the process of life — diurnal, chthonic, solar and chemical that obsesses him, and the only moral drama that attracts him is that of enduring until demolition. We must not look for people, not even such composites as we find in *The Waste Land*, because his whole tendency is generic — very much in the tradition of Pope's *Essay on Man* and Arnold's *Empedocles on Etna*. All he declares is the power of the spirit and his conviction of spirit's constant availability.

He is the bleakest Canadian poet ever as well as the one with the fewest samples of contemporary society. Apocalyptic and full of sinew, he has virtually no foppery at all except that of titan-collecting. If he can be faulted for magniloquence and grandiosity he must be praised for making both qualities part of his protest against the forces that win so often he is tempted to side with them until Man measures up to the monolithic titan which merges iceberg, whale, dinosaur and ocean. Brébeuf the martyr is so huge that Indians are reluctant to let him into their canoes. Pratt, too, is a little monstrous, but our mental canoes get too many lightweights, and he must be received.

His mechanical-biological paraphernalia has enormous dignity within the confines of his hearty vision of the incongruous. The rare feat is to have sustained his own mythology without seeming to force the traditionally "poetic" into futile roles. He has demonstrated the fusing and modifying power of a vision, a vision not of streetfuls or trainfuls or housefuls, but pared and bleak, never squeamish or quixotic, always confidently nailed down and offered almost arrogantly. I think anti-Methodism has led him too far into cosmic solecisms and anti-philosophy has made him a bit of a simplifier; but he is after all the master of the Stonehenge style and the robustest apostate of all. The sea moans round him

too, with one voice only, and he stared at it for many of his formative years. It would be undiscerning, then, not to remark a Newfoundland tenacity and toughness, as well as the sense of maritime disaster, pervading his work. For his is essentially primitive verse written across the full sweep of an erudite man's vocabulary and the harshest tensions of an agile, dogmatic mind. He has been there, staring at the sea from Toronto for almost sixty years; and it is still, as his poetry tells us, staring densely back. The momentum of the tragic vision has sustained him as it has sustained few Canadian writers, and that in the long run is why Pratt has to be compared with, contrasted with, such as Milton and Verga. He is not quite of their measure, but he *is* comparable, and there has been no poet in Canada remotely as profound.



ILLUSION AND AN ATONEMENT

E. J. Pratt and Christianity

Vincent Sharman

NORTHROP FRYE, Desmond Pacey, and John Sutherland, three important Canadian critics, suggest in their comments on E. J. Pratt that Christianity forms the basis of his work: "His religious [i.e. Christian] views organize his poetry"[1]; "Christ's self-sacrificing death on the Cross forms ... the chief symbolic centre" of the poetry.[2] These interpretations seem, unfortunately, to be based more on the assumption that, because Pratt's doctoral dissertation was entitled *Pauline Eschatology*, his poetry is Christian, rather than on a thorough analysis of Pratt's poems. A Christian interpretation of Pratt's work is, I believe, erroneous; but even if such interpretation could be reasonably upheld it would be too limiting to the intent of his poetry; only ten of a total of ninety-eight poems in *The Collected Poems of E. J. Pratt* can in any way be construed as being Christian. Of the long, major poems, only *Brébeuf and His Brethren* is, surely and only through careless reading, open to pro-Christian interpretation.

As I have suggested, too little reasonable and thorough analysis has gone into most Pratt criticism.[3] The most fantastic comments on Pratt are in John Sutherland's *The Poetry of E. J. Pratt: A New Interpretation*. Two examples should suffice. Sutherland sees the whale in *The Cachalot* as the "piscine symbol" of Christ, as the fulfilment in Christ of the "Messianic prophecy" in Ezra:[4]

> ... thou didst see a man coming up from
> the heart of the sea....

This in spite of the fact that the whale is described in the poem as the greatest killer in all the oceans. He says of Tyrannosauros Rex, in *The Great Feud*, that he, too, is a symbol of Christ, because he "Rises above the petty allegiances of the other animals" and because he "voluntarily accepts the fact of his death: he appears to sacrifice himself to a higher principle."[5] The conventional image of Christ is hardly compatible with a creature who on the morning of the pleiocene Armageddon is

> . . . bloated, angry and unsound
> Of wind and reeling down the height
> For flesh, his object of the fight.

Pacey comes near to fantasy. He dubs Pratt a Christian humanist because, in part, his poetry reveals that "Man glorifies God by seeking to emulate the sacrificial life of Christ."[6] It is strange that Pratt should expect men to glorify the God who, throughout his poetry, is completely without care for men; who is, indeed, amoral; and who is more like a Great Machine than anything else.

I hope that the following analyses of some of Pratt's important poems will help to suggest a broader and more accurate view of what Pratt's poetry is about.

SINCE "The Toll of the Bells" (1923), in which the poet's faith is "raked up . . . and burned like a pile of driftwood", E. J. Pratt has viewed as illusionists those who look with hope to God and to a divine, miraculous Christ, and with pride to systems that condone self-destruction for non-humanitarian ideals. Men, Pratt says, look in the wrong direction, away to the Deity, to systems, to Nature, rather than into themselves, to the defiant[7] heart.

Pratt views Christ not as divine, but as the perfection of natural evolution in man ("The Highway"). Christ is no more sacrificing than the men of *Behind the Log* who die oil-anointed in the Arctic Ocean, and no more loving than those exemplary men of "Newfoundland Seamen" whose "master passion" is

> Of giving shelter and of sharing bread,
> Of answering the rocket signals in the fashion
> Of losing life to save it.

Christ is the symbol of man eternally sorrowing, of man betrayed into death by other men, of man extending his greatest charity — his life for others.

Surrounded by death in the amoral universe, men are pathetically frail and small. Their spirit, however, rises above their physical insignificance when charity and defiance of death for the sake of life on earth find expression. In charity and defiance is immortality; there is no Heavenly immortality for men in Pratt: there is nothing beyond the death-sea.

The Iron Door (An Ode), published in 1927, is Pratt's earliest, most complete expression of a sense of the illusion of belief in Christian Afterlife. In the poem, the poet dreams that he sees an iron door in a cliff by the sea. Clouds of fog surround it, admitting occasional gleams of light. The door is in the shape of a cross, and on its lintel is "the crest/ Of death". Before the door stand the souls of the dead, most of whom question the purpose of life. Eventually, the door opens, but only widely enough for the poet to see that the petitioners pass through it. He sees nothing beyond the door, although he catches the "sense" of light, life, and space beyond. The poet awakens from his dream, profoundly affected by its meaning.

Pratt's description of the door and its surroundings, at the beginning of the poem, indicates the direction that the poem will take. The door has been made by a "giant hand" which brought it from "some Plutonian cave". These suggestions of myth are intensified by the presence of "death's crest" placed over the door in "ironic jest", as if death were teasing those before the door with the suggestion that there is something beyond it.

The door has no latch, and it will open only once for the poet:

> It seemed the smith designed it to be swung
> But once, then closed forever more.

The air surrounding the desolate area is filled with the music of the sorrows of mankind, and is associated with a human desire for belief that death is not the end of life. The music suggests that in crises and "drab hours" does the need for belief arise — a need that gives birth to dreams that are more glorious than heaven could be. The door is, finally, a mirror of the faces before it; that is, it is constituted of men's despair.

Those whose faces materialize before the door are men and women whom the poet has known. Some have given up their lives for others; a sea-captain enquires after the status of honour and courage in the land of death; a child mourns the

death of his dog; the poet's mother (apparently) is there, calm and without doubt that further life ensues; a cynic, whose need is apparent in his dejection, is prepared to accept that the "whole cosmic lie [is] pre-disposed".

At the "darkest moment" the door opens for the petitioners. The poet does not know what causes it to open and presents several possible forces: some talisman, a "wish thrice-spoken", a magic name, or unreasoning faith. There is no apparent logic to the door's opening, and faith and magic are equally effective. The logic is, of course, that the door opens because those who create it can do with it as they wish: the door is the petitioners' own illusion, and their further illusion will see it opened.

The poet, however, cannot participate in the revelation of the Afterlife. He can only "sense" the vision beyond the door; he can participate only to the extent of appreciating what the dead believe they are going to. He cannot see beyond the threshold. The souls pass through, the door slams shut, and although the desolate clouds of death return to him, as potent as ever, the poet, *in spite of death*, clings to the meaning of the dream: for his Afterlife is illusion.

The poem concludes with a reversal of the conclusion of Milton's sonnet, "Methought I Saw . . ." Pratt's conclusion is:

> . . . I was left alone, aware
> Of blindness falling with terrestrial day
> On sight enfeebled by the solar glare.

Milton's awakening returns him to a literal condition of blindness in which the return of day only temporarily impairs his dream-sight. Pratt's awakening completes a figurative process begun before the dream began (his dream-sight has already been "enfeebled"). The coming of day renders him permanently blind to apprehending Christian Immortality. The door, as suggested at the beginning of the poem, will open no more for him. The unpitying glare of reason will not permit him the solace of unreasoned belief.

Pratt's rejection of the belief in the Afterlife is related to his rejection of the concept of the moral universe: God is unheeding of man; it is His winds that in "The Ground Swell" feed the hungering death-sea with men, and it is His ears in *The Iron Door* that are "unhearing" of the pleas of suffering and confused humanity existing in a world dominated by death. God is defined in "The Truant" as the mechanical force of the universe, the Great Panjandrum who is scarcely aware of mankind. Yet it is man who has made this disinterested force into a deity, an attestation of man's superiority over God:

Boast not about your harmony,
Your perfect curves, your rings
Of *pure and endless light* — 'Twas we
Who pinned upon your Seraphim their wings,
And when your brassy heavens rang
With joy that morning while the planets sang
Their choruses of archangelic lore,
'Twas we who ordered the notes upon their score
Out of our winds and strings.

The Roosevelt and the Antinoë, which is the climax of Pratt's poetry of the conflict of man and nature, embodies the illusory nature of the benevolent God and the miraculous, divine Christ. During the storm in which the crew of the wrecked *Antinoë* is rescued by the *Roosevelt* two men are drowned. The crew of the *Roosevelt* gather on the deck to acknowledge, through religious service, the heroism of the drowned men. Their bandages and slings proclaiming their efforts against the snow, wind and sea, they hear the hymn which in the howls of the wind is only partially audible. It is obscured at other times by the voice of the amoral universe, of God, that laughs "down the ventilating shaft". The hymn that the mourning sailors hear, however, informs them that it is God who commands the seas, which obey Him. He is, further, a "*father to the fatherless*", and the "*God of all comfort*". But God, in fact, is no comfort, for he has brought the two sailors to the "bellies" of the waves, the fanged "creatures of a fabled past", and the men lie not with God the Father, but in "the sea's stern foster-lap". The crew are deluded. Their father and comfort is the one who will have them destroyed. They are blind to the irony of their worship.

The futility of the illusion of the beneficent God is focused not only in the crew and the hymn, but also in the Roman Catholic priest who raises his crucifix to the sea, giving absolution to the dead men, and who prays for God's help. That which the priest begs is a "crumb/ Of favour" from the storehouse of God's goodness, which is a "cupboard" that still has much in it despite the many demands that have been made on it: a *reductio ad absurdum* of the Omnipotent. That the priest is sincere is not in doubt, but his gesture is impotent: the eventual rescue is the result of chance and men's willingness to respond with emotion and reason to the needs of other, to respond with "the heart's assent unto the hand". God has nothing to do with the success of the venture: the ray of sunlight, after the rescue has been made, breaks through the clouds and defies the rescuers; "As

if a god might thus salute the deed" repudiates God as the source of the praise. The mission was accomplished in spite of Him.

The image of the priest with his crucifix upraised to the raging Atlantic is balanced by an image of Christ quietening Galilee. The comparison between the two bodies of water reveals that the Atlantic is "no Gennesaret of Galilee" which had been quietened by "conjuring", by a "word's magic". The denigration of Christ's miracle as illusion — and, consequently, His divinity — reveals the Catholic priest's symbolic acts as futile and pathetic. The terrible frailty of man, and his need to find sustenance against death, are thus dramatically underlined.

PRATT'S GREAT EPIC, *Brébeuf and His Brethren*, expresses the theme of illusion through the misguided efforts of the Jesuit priests in seventeenth-century Canada. The Jesuits teach abstractions that bring nothing to vast majority of Indians: it is illogical to desire a Paradise in which there will be starvation because there can be no hunting; in which friends and enemies will exist side by side; in which there will not be the comforts of tobacco and feasts. The Jesuits' response to the Indians' lack of response is to impress on them another abstraction, Eternal Torment, the threat of the torture-fires which place the priests' persuasive techniques in an infinitely worse category than the Indians'. The priests are so concerned with the "will of God", with Paradise and Hell, with the welfare of souls, and with the attainment of martyrdom, that the charity and kindness — expressions of human feeling — with which they initially approached the Indians take second place. Ironically, the priests' flaming zeal brings forth not warmth from the Indians, but the cold of death from burning pitch, blazing forts, and fires at the stake.

The Jesuits in the poem must subject "*Desire and sense . . . to the reason*" and must "trample the body under". Reason, not the heart, will lead them to their goal, the attainment of "Loyola's mountains. . . ./ Sublime at their summits". Their mutilated bodies are only indications to them of the nearness of their goals of martyrdom; they are manifestations of their self-centred devotion to the Code, to which their humanity is subjugated. They are machines of Reason, and in their pursuit of martyrdom, are unwitting agents of death, victims of the illusion that their system has value to man.

In Brébeuf himself the tragedy of the Jesuits is most apparent. He is a poten-

tially great human being who has gentleness, kindness, nobility of character and background, courage, and strength, who gives his life for his ideal, God, through the auspices of the Jesuit Order. He seeks martyrdom, death, for an ideal and through a system that deny the humanity of men. The proper business of men, in Pratt, is the pursuit of life, not death. Brébeuf dies in ignorance of the futility of his ideal.

The well-known image of the cross which climaxes Brébeuf's illusion is a magnificent statement by Pratt of the tragedy of illusion. The Indians search for the source of Brébeuf's strength. They tear out his heart, but it is not there. It is

> ... in the sound of invisible trumpets blowing
> Around two slabs of board, right-angled, hammered
> By Roman nails and hung on a Jewish hill.

Brébeuf's strength is in the "sound of trumpets", which may be heavenly, but which has nothing of humanity in it. Nor have the "two slabs of board" around which the trumpets blow. The music, the trumpets, the boards, and the "Roman nails" are cold. As the mystical nature of Brébeuf's mission is removed from humanity, and as the logic of his Christian direction is cold, so is his martyrdom. The source of Brébeuf's strength is in the self-glorification signified by the sound of the trumpets, which like the seraphim in "The Truant" and the land of light in *The Iron Door* are created by men themselves.

The ideals for which the Jesuits strive require the subjection of their humanity to Reason and religious spirit. Brébeuf would, for example, react emotionally to the lack of privacy among the Indians with whom he lived — and to all the annoyances of Huronia — but he hides his human reaction and transforms "hoary Gallic oaths/ Into the *Benedicte*". At the climax of the poem, he does assert himself, momentarily in his agony, when he rebels against the Indians' torture which will bring about his end. He gives them

> ... roar for roar.
> Was it because the chancel became the arena,
> Brébeuf a lion at bay, not a lamb on the altar ... ?

But he subsides again into the passive rôle of the martyr. When he roars out, Brébeuf acts in the manner that Pratt describes in "Silences", by which the first step to salvation is through communication of emotion, "for who would not prefer to be lustily damned than to be half-heartedly blessed?" The torture by fire and boiling water are the fulfilment of his conscious wish to die "*per ignem*

et per aquam" and to take his place in "the line of martyrs". The Indians are vehicles for the attainment of "Loyola's summits".

The virtues of the Indians, which are eventually forgotten in their desire to rid the country of the Jesuits, are epitomized in two converts, Eustache and Onnonhoaraton, whose actions are contrasted to those scarcely human Jesuits, Joques and Goupil. Eustache, at the Iroquois stake, pleads with his friends

... to let no thought of vengeance
Arising from his anguish at the stake
Injure the French hopes for an Iroquois peace....

Onnonhoaraton offers himself as a sacrifice in place of Joques. The concern of these two Indians is with life through peace and the charity of self-sacrifice so that others may live. The Jesuit Joques, at the same "festival of torture", uses his last energies to baptize two prisoners "with the dew from leaves of Turkish corn", and to give them the sign of the "last absolution". Goupil is killed (by a sorcerer) when he tries to place the sign of the cross on a child's forehead. The concern of the priests is with the acceptance of death; their symbolic actions are vapid in comparison with those of the two Indians, which affirm life.

In the epilogue, "The Martyr's Shrine", Pratt switches the setting to twentieth-century Canada, and indicts contemporary Canadians on three counts of illusion. Pratt begins the epilogue with a reiteration of the phrase "the winds of God" with which the poem begins. The seventeenth-century winds brought men from the safety and quietude of uninvolved lives in religious institutions in France to the wilderness of Canada to face the ravages of weather and the violence of "prejudiced minds", to build forts, and to scale the heights of "Loyola's mountains". Twentieth-century Canadian winds can only rouse men to provide a shrine on a hilltop approached by highways, near Midland, Ontario. The indictment is bitter: those who provide the shrine are pallid beside those they honour: the French Jesuits may have been misguided, but they had the strength of determination to accept a great challenge. The shrine is a valueless thing because it commemorates the wrong thing — the self-pride of the Jesuits functioning under the illusion of the values of Reason and self-destruction, rather than the tremendous determination of which human beings are capable.

Men do not recognize the follies of the past. The illusions of the seventeenth century arise for the "ashes of St. Ignace", which are "glowing afresh". The candles in the shrine are lit "from the torch of Ragueneau's ruins". But candle

flames are only pale imitations of the zealous, ancient flames. Burned St. Ignace is still only ashes; the ashes glow but will never burn. The forest trails over which the priests travelled are now modern highways, the dubious blooms of "fern/ And brier and fungus". The final two lines of the poem,

> The shrines and altars are built anew; the *Aves*
> And the prayers ascend, and the Holy Bread is broken,

are a last, almost wearied, comment on the illusion of those responsible for the shrine and on the illusion which the shrine perpetuates.

BESIDES WRITING of religious illusion, Pratt deals with men's illusions of Nature and of their own capabilities, especially as manifested in their machines. The chief poem which deals with these themes is *The Titanic*, but "The Sea Cathedral" and "The Mirage", two short poems, provide a basis for Pratt's concept that beauty in Nature is deceptive in its suggestions of spiritual significance. Beauty in Nature must, because it is not of man, pass meaninglessly away. The iceberg in "The Sea Cathedral", although "fairer than a Phidian dream", is doomed to be drawn down by the "inveterate sea" into nothingness, because it is not a product of man. Its beauty is only "immaculate". It is a show piece of nature that is temple-like but is

> Without one chastening fire made to start
> From altars built around its polar heart.

Similar imagery of the illusion of Nature as an expression of beatitude is present in "The Mirage". A cloud structure there is described as religious imagery that suggests that the cloud has religious significance. In the light of the poet's intellect, however, the cloud loses its value. It is only a thing of Nature; it has no "lineage of toil"; it has no contact with man.

The iceberg in *The Titanic* presents the illusion of moral significance in Nature, of having transcendent value (and John Sutherland was one critic who suffered from the illusion).[8] There are two aspects to the imagery of the iceberg, its empty beauty and its ugliness, which are conveyed in images of a religious and a somewhat scientific nature, respectively. The religious images are in the pattern of those in "The Sea Cathedral" and "The Mirage". The iceberg of *The Titanic* has

> . . . façade and columns with their hint
> Of inward altars and of steepled bells
> Ringing the passage of the parallels.

As the iceberg melts, it loses "the last temple touch of grace". Underlying the appearance of the temple is ice of the "consistency of flint" that has been pressed by "glacial time". The "paleolithic face", into which the temple deteriorates and "shambles like a plantigrade", is no different, basically, from the beautiful iceberg. Both appearances are accidents of climate; there is no opposition between the "façade and columns" and the "paleolithic face". Both are merely aspects of amoral nature. The iceberg is the same thing both before and after the sun has changed its appearance: underlying its superficial beauty is its destructive potential.

The ship, the *Titanic,* is itself a mechanical universe of illusion. It has its own stars; its lights turn night into day; its machinery is, in effect, self-running; it has its own deities, the first-class gods whose materialism creates commercial wonders. But there is nothing attractive about the ship. It is grotesque, and man has let himself be displaced by it. He has made himself a god in his creation of the ship and will not demean himself with running her: there is scarcely anyone "behind the log". To the passengers, the ship has the safety of land. On the decks there is light from a "thousand lamps as on a city street"; palm trees line an avenue "With all the vista of a boulevard". The ship is a crag, a Gibraltar. This vulgar bauble is men's universe, and faith in her is absolute: "Even the judgment stood in little need/ Of reason".

Specifically, the lights of the ship symbolize man's vanity and the illusion of his greatness. Even after the collision with the iceberg, many passengers cannot realize their danger. As the lifeboats lower into the water, those in them find the necessity of the descent unreal. For them the ship is still secure; the lights burn invitingly — they are the stars of the universe that man has created; they have superseded the stars of the natural universe. The lights illumine and are a part of many of those pretentious aspects of the *Titanic* that make her great in men's eyes: the boulevards, the palm trees, the saloons in Regency and the taste of the "Louis dynasty". The lights illumine her gigantic size, "From gudgeon to stem nine hundred feet". Even the light from cigarettes gives confidence, as the men stand, elegantly dressed, against the glow of the ship after the iceberg has ripped a three-hundred foot gash in her:

> . . . the silhouettes
> Of men in dinner jackets staging an act
> In which delusion passed, deriding fact
> Behind the cupped flare of the cigarettes.

Dramatically the listing *Titanic* glows on the ocean, a pathetic creation, contrasting to the stars, but to the last turning night into day. But it is light that "cheats" and "beguiles". Safety on the big ship is an illusion which many passengers choose in preference to the safety of the lifeboats; the light is an irony of security:

> Inside the recreation rooms the gold
> From Arab lamps shone on the burnished tile.
> What hindered the return to shelter while
> The ship clothed in that irony of light
> Offered her berths and cabins as a fold?

When the stern of the ship lifts "Against the horizon stars in silhouette", the eternal and the temporary and illusory are posed against each other. The ship's lights flash off and then on, and the terrible reality of destruction strikes. Without her lights, the *Titanic* becomes a part of the night that she had vainly tried to displace, a part of the Void, that "jet expanse of water", her black grave.

But not all of the passengers on the *Titanic* remain under the illusion that men's strength can displace the universe. In the face of death, realizing the predicament of the ship, many of the first-class passengers perform a deliberate ritual of self-sacrifice. The half-empty lifeboats going down without the gods are symbols that man's illusion has been atoned for. These men and women have *chosen* to let the boats go unfilled. They have rejected any desire for survival; they have accepted death. Theirs is a conscious decision to be sacrificed to atone for "That ancient *hubris* in the dreams of men". And Man thereby is redeemed. But Pratt is too realistic to say that because Man is redeemed from the illusion of his strength all men are: hundreds who believe in the efficacy of the ship's lights go down, but their screams are unheard in the roar of great machines tearing loose below decks as the ship's stern rises to a 45° angle.

But if, in the lifeboats surrounding the vacancy where once floated the *Titanic*, men are implied as rising from the desolation of their illusion, so in the image of the "icy broods" ringing the remaining iceberg is implied the continuation of vast power of the amoral universe.

For Pratt, what men must understand is that their salvation lies in themselves,

not in Nature, God, systems, or in ignorant pride in machines. To maintain life should be the end of men's actions, the accomplishment of which, in times of conflict, is dependent on defiance, determination, and Reason under the control of the heart. But illusions persist: men kill men, die for ideals which embrace death, and delude themselves with hopeful prayers addressed to the "unhearing ears of God". Imperfect men must make direct their feelings for other men for the sake of life. For life is, finally, all that men have, and only men can care at all whether men live or die.

Notes

[1] Northrop Frye, "Editor's Introduction", *The Collected Poems of E. J. Pratt*, 2nd. ed. (Toronto, 1958), xxiii.

[2] Desmond Pacey, *Ten Canadian Poets* (Toronto, 1958), p. 175. Here Pacey is agreeing with Sutherland's thesis, presented throughout *The Poetry of E. J. Pratt: A New Interpretation* (Toronto, 1956).

[3] The notable exception is Earle Birney's "E. J. Pratt and His Critics", in *Masks of Poetry* (Toronto, 1962), pp. 72-95.

[4] p. 69.

[5] p. 103.

[6] *Ten Canadian Poets*, p. 175.

[7] *Defiance* is Earle Birney's designation of the most significant of human values in Pratt's poetry: "E. J. Pratt and His Critics", *Masks of Fiction* (Toronto, 1962), p. 90.

[8] In *The Poetry of E. J. Pratt: A New Interpretation.*

OF ALAN CRAWLEY

Ethel Wilson

In 1941, a small quarterly publication of poetry, *Contemporary Verse*, appeared in British Columbia. The editor was Alan Crawley. The magazine spanned and served a difficult decade.

Contemporary Verse appeared at a time when many young writers, novices, wrote alone in Canada, whether they were poets or writers of prose, unknown to each other and usually ignorant of any vehicle of publication — should they wish for publication. There was, before and — for a time — after the years 1937 and 1938 a sort of anonymity, a vacuum in the land in the area of new poetry and prose and its publication, as far as the new writer was concerned. The war, intervening dreadfully, became both a nightmare inspiration and a barrier.

It was during these years in Canada that poets, individually, became aware that the needs of the poet (and of his potential reading public) might be met to a surprising degree in the small quarterly publication — *Contemporary Verse* — issuing from the west of Canada, open at first to poets anywhere and then limited to Canadian poets everywhere. The needs of the prose writer in Canada (and his potential reading public) were being met by another small publication — *Northern Review* — published in Montreal and edited by John Sutherland who also welcomed poets. John Sutherland was, to me, a splendid and tragic young figure. There was pathos and defeat and victory in his life, his dedication to Canadian letters, and his early death. During a few arduous and combative years

he offered an opportunity to yet unestablished Canadian writers (I was one of them) wherever they might be. Alan Crawley and John Sutherland, working independently and three thousand miles apart, provided for us, it seemed, a door in the west and a door in the east. These doors were opened to us, poets or writers of prose, by these two men, and if we would, and could, we passed through the doors into the open air of speech and communication. At intervals other little magazines came and went, among them the elegant and too short-lived *Here and Now* — but to my initial ignorance and subsequent knowledge *Contemporary Verse* and *Northern Review* alone seemed to have a sort of temporary permanence, then.

In the third issue of *The Tamarack Review* (Spring 1957) there is an excellent brief history of the origin and life of *Contemporary Verse*, by Floris McLaren. While Alan Crawley in Vancouver edited the contents of his small, courageous publication, Mrs. McLaren in Victoria was the business manager and saw to the simple but financially difficult production. Over an unusually complex period of eleven years, this labour was a continued offering to living verse. The poets were encouraged, advised, criticized, rejected or made known, and not paid. Neither were the editor and his associates. From all over Canada submissions came in, testifying to the need for contact. I must tell you, and beg you to believe and remember, that the editor of *Contemporary Verse* was blind.

Alan Crawley came of an English family which for several hundred years had lived close to the Forest of Dean in Gloucestershire; the life lines of that family ran through the Church, the Army, the Navy, and Law. In 1875 Alan's father, then a young man, and three companions sailed for New York and, after adventuring in the west, turned to Manitoba where the hunting was alleged to be good. Young Crawley and two of his friends each took up a homestead in an unsettled area southwest of Winnipeg. Some time later he returned to England. There he married and—no longer the young hunter and homesteader—returned to Manitoba, and, in the little village of Holland, opened a private bank and insurance office. There the small family remained, settled settlers who had made their first journey across the prairie by oxcart, and there Alan spent his boyhood, with his younger brother who lived to die in the war of 1914-1918.

Alan says: "As I recall, the rooms were over-flowing with books and with newspapers and magazines which came continuously from relatives in England. There always seemed to be one of the family reading out of doors in the summertime, or reading aloud to the rest of the family in the long dark of the prairie winter evenings." He remembers no poetry among the many books — beyond a

collection of Percy's *Reliques* and the poems of Edward Lear, a curious combination that points to the future eclecticism of Alan's mind. The boy became interested in the history of English words and names and was soon a natural student of etymology. This was the product of the abundance of books at home, not of his schooling, for he attended the little village school.

Later, he was sent to St. John's College School in Winnipeg. Many of the boys in this unique institution were the sons of Hudson's Bay factors in the far north who came to Winnipeg in the old Hudson's Bay Company river boats and stayed each school year at St. John's from August of one year until July of the next. Alan's education was entirely Canadian and of the middle west, supplemented by the books and reading habits of his family in the village of Holland.

There was not, at that time, a law school in the University of Manitoba so, after matriculation, Alan was articled for the study of law to a member of a prominent firm in Winnipeg. In 1912 he was admitted as a barrister and solicitor to the Bar of Manitoba.

At about that time the Russian actress Nazimova came to Winnipeg and appeared in Ibsen's plays. Alan had been reading Ibsen with fascination, and met the great Nazimova. In a talk with her, she awoke his lively interest in the theatre and also in the Russian writers. He at once began to read Tolstoy, Chekhov and Dostoievsky.

In 1913 he married Jean Horn of Winnipeg. Shortly afterwards he, his wife and a friend H. A. V. Green organized a group of amateur players under the name of The Community Players of Winnipeg. For more than ten years the players produced and acted, first of all in a rented theatre and then for several years in a theatre of their own with a permanent and paid director. Alan's first productive period in the arts had begun.

It seemed peculiarly true that the arts lay latent in him and only an incident was required to awaken them into activity. The next incident occurred in England. On a hot Saturday afternoon in London when the streets seemed strangely deserted, Alan stopped in front of a small shop window in which were books of poetry, books about poetry, and some unusual Poetry Sheets. He went in. It was the Poetry Book Shop, famous in England before and in the twenties, but unknown to Alan Crawley. There, and on subsequent visits, he met Harold Monro the owner and himself a poet, Walter de la Mare, Ralph Hodgson, Davies and others. For the first time Alan heard of the Georgian poets and the young war poets. From this chance visit the interest and passion grew that led to the influence of Alan Crawley among the young poets of Canada. He returned home

with volumes of poetry and to a new found land.

He became a collector and student of contemporary verse and formed the habit of reading a poem each day, regarding it critically, and memorizing most of them. He read all available criticism of poetry, particularly modern poetry. His interest at that time lay in the work of the young English poets. This was his first introduction to new and living verse and — like many other Canadians — he did not know, then, whether Canadian poets or Canadian poetry existed. That came later. Before long he began to speak over the air on the subject of contemporary poetry.

In 1934 Alan suffered a serious illness which was followed by the sudden and complete loss of his sight. He retired from the practice of law and with his wife and their two young sons moved from Winnipeg to Victoria in British Columbia. In every changing scene of Alan's life, his wife has accompanied him and — speaking diffidently about a subject of great delicacy — I am sure that she with her taste, her sound sense, her wit, her instant apprehension of things physical and of the mind, her gift of communication, has carried a mutual light, always. Jean has a gay casual-seeming way, but she has a clairvoyance of life that has enabled her to do that which, daily, she does, beyond our understanding. So when the shock and disaster of total blindness came upon Alan, his wife advanced with him, both of them in good heart, to meet every new adjustment. The accommodation of life to circumstance now included, of course, the learning of braille.

I ventured to ask Alan once, whether the mastery of braille drew, almost beyond coping, upon his powers of concentration and determination. He told me that he was helped by a phenomenal memory — and so his teacher had said — and probably an unusual visual memory. He would need that, I thought, as I passed my finger over his copy of the *Bhagavad Gita*. I looked at those multiple faceless dots and tried to visualize the substitution of an unfamiliar new delicate faculty of touch for the lost familiar faculty of sight.

IN 1934 AND 1935 the Crawleys lived in Victoria. As soon as he arrived Alan became aware of a living growing interest in Canadian poetry. He formed new and lasting friendships, bound by this strong common interest. In 1938 he met Dorothy Livesay Macnair and her husband Duncan Macnair who furthered his knowledge of Canadian poetry and made him familiar with the work of Canadian poets throughout the country.

The Crawleys had now moved to Caulfeild in West Vancouver, accompanied by their younger son, Michael, and there Alan's association with Canadian poetry and makers of poetry increased. He resumed speaking over the air. He spoke of contemporary poetry to various groups — in University extension courses, to C.C.F. gatherings, to Normal School students, in meetings arranged by the Vancouver Library. During those years Alan became immersed in the enlarging world which he had entered. His trained legal and critical mind helped him to be a severe yet inspiring critic of contemporary writing and his judgment was often described as impeccable, both in eastern and western Canada.

There was now a stirring among the few western poets and a feeling of urgency that some opportunity should be made for voices to be heard. Following many conversations with Mrs. McLaren, Doris Ferne, Anne Marriott, Dorothy Livesay Macnair and her husband, Alan considered assuming the responsibility of editing the new poetry magazine, should such a magazine be published. Before making his final decision he consulted A. J. M. Smith and P. K. Page in Montreal, Earle Birney in Toronto, Kay Smith and Leo Kennedy, who responded with their advice and opinions and sent manuscripts.

Alan decided, and wrote in 1941: "In spite of the distress of the times and the prospect of disquiet and unsettled days to come, I feel that the publication of Canadian verse is a worth while and reasonable venture that could do much to help modern Canadian writers, for I know of no magazine now that is giving this help. I am willing and enthusiastic to do what I can for it." In 1941 the first issue of *Contemporary Verse* appeared.

During eleven anxious years of war and peace through which *C V* continued to be produced, Alan's phenomenal memory served him well, as it does today. As each submission arrived from a young or mature poet, his wife read the poem slowly to him, in its form, and he typed it in braille, in its form. He then "saw", contemplated, memorized the poem, and arrived at his conclusions. He wrote to the poet in full and his comments are still memorable to those who received them. He never returned a poem with a polite rejection only. His memory held the words for the time required and, when no longer needed, the words melted away. Jean then turned to the next communication. This faculty of his, or combination of faculties, together with the unfailing presence of his wife, and the constant but distant assistance of Floris McLaren in Victoria, helped to achieve the quarterly miracle of *C V*. Mrs. McLaren has kindly permitted me to refer to her article in *The Tamarack Review*. These references illuminate the times, and I am very grateful to her.

Among Canadian writers who have become well known and whose early poems were published in *C V* are Louis Dudek, Daryl Hine, Jay Macpherson, P. K. Page, James Reaney, Raymond Souster, Wilfred Watson, James Wreford, Miriam Waddington. All of these writers appeared many times in *C V* and their names are an indication of the intuition and critical perception of the editor. Among contributing poets whose verse was already published and well known were Earle Birney, Roy Daniells, Robert Finch, Ralph Gustafson, Ronald Hambleton, A. M. Klein, Dorothy Livesay, L. A. MacKay, F. R. Scott, and A. J. M. Smith, whose support has always been most generous, constant, and very much valued by Alan. Poems of Margaret Avison, Irving Layton, Norman Levine, Malcolm Lowry, Anne Marriott, Phyllis Webb, Anne Wilkinson and many others appeared — a whole new galaxy in the northern sky. In the first issue of *C V* Alan wrote, "Truth and beauty is not all told . . ." and he continued in the telling. John Sutherland wrote to him, "I envy you your knack of catching all the promising young poets." E. J. Pratt showed constant interest in the work and sent a poem for an anniversary number of *C V*. Two of Alan's young poets, men of great promise, were lost in the war. Bertram Warre (1917-1943), R.A.F., was killed in action over the western front, and J. K. Keith was killed fighting in Korea.

During these years about twenty of Anne Wilkinson's strange, sensitive poems appeared. In the summer issue of *C V*, 1947, was the first printing of "Five Poems" by Malcolm Lowry, the first of which was "Salmon Drowns Eagle". One issue consisted entirely of Dorothy Livesay's long poem "Call My People Home". Another was made up of the work of three poets — Louis Dudek, James Reaney and Raymond Souster. Alan's arrangements were original and unpredictable and *C V* was prophetic in records of fulfilment and further promise.

In September 1949 a brief was submitted to the Massey Commission by *Contemporary Verse* on behalf of poetry and the writers of poetry in Canada. In the introduction to this brief, Mr. Crawley said: "The boundaries of appeal have been widened and . . . there is a growing realization that the pressures, tensions and relationships of our complex industrial society can often be best comprehended through the poet's uncanny eye . . . Poetry is sterile without communication. It is in distribution and publication by the spoken and written word that communication is given to poetry and an intimacy is established."

Later in the brief Earle Birney wrote: ". . . It (*C V*) is the only Canadian verse magazine which has constantly maintained high editorial standards. It has introduced a number of important young Canadian writers to the public and

encouraged them to continue writing. What space it has been able to give to criticism has been intelligently used . . ."

The early days of Alan Crawley and the occasions both slight and catastrophic which preceded his knowledge and advocacy of work by contemporary Canadian poets and their fulfilment, testify to the innate gifts and selflessness of the man who — under manifest and unseen difficulties — became the editor of the most influential small poetry magazine of a chancy and critical time for literature in our country.

My best means of presenting the results of his work in Canada is to quote from some of the letters of the poets themselves, both then and now, and I am grateful for permissions. One friend speaks today of the remarkable ambience created by both Alan and Jean, and its effect upon the poet. Another says: "Among those who have helped in the revival of writing of poetry in Canada, Alan Crawley's name will always stand out . . . it is as though his no-sight increased his insight . . ."

Jay Macpherson in a letter received today says: "What meant most to me ten or fifteen years ago was Alan's affection and forebearance and generous understanding of one's work. I'm much more aware now how practical all his kindness has been . . . Alan talked me into a more professional attitude and that was a turning point for me. I've passed his remarks on since then to numbers of student writers . . . he got one out of the trap of one's own egotism . . . how rare was his kind of loyalty."

And from another young — now well-known — poet to his editor: "I want to thank you for all the encouragement and assistance I got from you and *C V* . . . the best verse quarterly in Canada. It is particularly valuable in that it is not afraid to take chances with young unknown poets to whom publication can mean so much. This policy is of course the result of the editor's deep understanding . . . Take *C V* out of the Canadian literary scene and you have nothing left east of longitude 85°"

Further letters during the years '41 to '53, include these. From Frank Scott:

Dear Alan:

At a time when many Canadians are considering the place of art and literature in their national life, I thought I would send you a few words of appreciation for the fine contribution you have made to Canadian poetry through your editorship of *Contemporary Verse*.

The "Little Magazine" has an important function to fulfil. It must act as a focal point for younger writers, giving them not only an early recognition of their merit

but also a sense of being welcomed and received by a larger circle. It is to the author what exhibition in a gallery is to a painter . . . an essential part of his self-expression. To more established writers it offers not only an additional opportunity for publication, but also that stimulating challenge to traditional styles and tastes which creative work always presents. This function *Contemporary Verse* has admirably performed under your guidance during the nine years of its life . . . Your contributors have included, I believe, all the poets who have made Canadian poetry the living part of our culture which it is now recognized as being . . .

Montreal, 1953

. . . I hear that you are giving up C V at last . . . nothing can quite take its place . . . Through it you have become part of the literary history of Canada, and you have the gratitude of a whole generation of poets.

I have only recently returned from my year with the U N in Burma. I have some unpublished poems to send somewhere; now where can I send them?

Frank Scott

From P. K. Page, 1949:

Dear Alan:

I have been thinking about writing in Canada a great deal lately . . . largely, I suppose, in connection with the Massey Commission, and naturally I have been thinking about you and C V . . .

Little magazines are essential in Canada if the movement — dare one call it that? — which has begun is to continue. But they are not the entire answer. Your policy has always been one in which you were as much concerned with the development of your contributors as you were with the standards of your magazine. Other magazines may be just as concerned but they do less about it . . .

Your criticism, encouragement, and even chastisement, have been enormously helpful to me, as they have, I know, to other writers . . . and (so has) the part played by you in being so much more than an editor.

From Louis Dudek on hearing of the possible ending of the life of *C V*, a long and interesting letter, hot off the fire. Fascinating, but too long to quote freely:

. . . that telegram (from ten poets) from F. R. Scott's house came with or went with a true concern for C V . . . A few hundred readers? Say it were ten. Ten may be a node of life in the midst of an organism.

From Anne Wilkinson, Toronto, 1947:

> . . . how much I enjoyed your broadcasts. Enjoy is too tame a word . . . Canada is very lucky to have you. Poetry is alive when even one person feels as you do about it.

From J. G. McClelland, McClelland & Stewart, Toronto, 1953:

> . . . it was a shock and a disappointment to hear (on my return) that *Contemporary Verse* is no longer to be published. I can think of no one who has made a greater contribution to Canadian letters than you have through the publication of this magazine.

I marvel at the amount of correspondence which Alan carried on by means of his braille typewriter for the personal benefit of the young poets — regardless of difficulty, all for choice and all for love of poetry and of the poetry makers, wherever he detected a true light.

By 1951 a kind of lassitude had settled upon Canadian poetry, noted by F. R. Scott as "this apathy, everywhere, thick and heavy like a fog." The vigour and stress and shock of war were now in the past and it may be that the muscles of the people relaxed in fatigue. Alan indicated an inclination to close the book. As Robert Weaver said: "When Mr. Crawley feels uncertain of himself and of his magazine at the present time, it seems to me that he is simply reflecting the uncertainties of Canadian poetry in a period of change." In the Autumn issue, 1952, Alan wrote: "We have a strong belief that the work of a little magazine under the same editor's direction declines in time from the peak of its usefulness. In this conviction we close our files . . ."

AFTER A FEW YEARS spent in the Okanagan Valley where Michael was fruit ranching, Alan and Jean and Michael returned to Victoria where they still live. Through his various media Alan continues to read widely. Yesterday came this letter from him which indicates something of the scope of his continued reading:

> This day, Thursday, with a sweet breeze coming through the open window bringing just the wished-for heat and an unusual quietness in the street below, is the choicest time for me to write to *mes amis* and send some of the words I, We, have held for you until this letter . . .

I have tried several times to get the Sybille Bedford book (*The Faces of Justice*) from the lending library and failed, so I am very happy to have it from you, and hope there is no deadline for return, as at the moment we are partly through *A Passage to India* again — I was lucky to get it on Talking Books (but more of that later on), a *Tamarack Review* yet unopened, *The Paris Review* only nibbled at, the lately published reminiscences of Lampedusa, The Leopard, of whom we are very fond and admiring just arrived from London, a gift of a discerning and dear friend and, of course, *The New Statesman* and *The New Yorker* taking their expected precedence, so . . . there's glory for you and some smack of spoiling . . ."

Alan has a quick sense of humour; his face breaks into laughter; he plays a formidable game of bridge; he marks the blessed funninesses of the day; his humour defeats entirely what might have been his melancholy.

Every springtime my husband and I meet Jean and Alan for a few days in the sun and the shade in a quiet and beautiful spot by the sea, on Vancouver Island. A great deal is said, a great deal is laughed at, much is asked, some things are answered. When, last time we were there, Alan said, "This morning when I was reading . . .", he meant on that sunny dream-like day that he has been reading, very early, the *Bhagavad Gita*, the Lord's Song, translated by Annie Besant. In the dark, in the light, he reads. In cold weather he reads at night with his hands warm under the bedclothes and Jean — before she sleeps — hears the rustle of the turning of pages, like a mouse in the dark.

I asked Alan once, when we were alone, about his Theosophical and Christian faiths, and because I am not a student and have very little knowledge beyond the knowledge of faith, I cannot immediately understand. But Alan has studied very much and I think he goes unafraid into all faith and faiths and speculation. He explores in the continuous dark with his delicate finger-tips and his adventurous and honest mind the invisible yet illuminated areas of faith. I have not liked to question him deeply, but I think that his faith is in Theosophy, and in the living Christ in man, and in human friendship.

Alan's friends are very many, from east to west of the country, both literary and un-literary, both men and women. From them he takes their essence as they take his, and they are richer, through this remarkable and courageous man who has contributed to the literacy of his country and to the opportunity of his fellow countrymen.

THE LIMITS OF INNOCENCE

James Reaney's Theatre

Michael Tait

THE OCCASION of the following reflections was Mr. Alvin Lee's interesting two-part essay "A Turn to the Stage: Reaney's Dramatic Verse" in *Canadian Literature* nos. 15 and 16. In the first half of this study Mr. Lee discussed Reaney's characteristic themes and imagery and convincingly demonstrated the links between the early poems and the more recent plays. The second part dealt more directly with the plays themselves, and it was at this point that I found myself quarrelling with Mr. Lee's analysis. The assumption seemed to be that Reaney's plays, as plays, were on a par with the best of his lyric verse. Having seen, like Mr. Lee, stage productions of both *The Killdeer* and *The Easter Egg* I find this view inscrutable. The question surely is why, when Reaney's poetry — in particular *The Red Heart* — is so compelling, the verse plays should be so unsatisfactory. But here we have a difficulty, for Mr. Lee has identified any playgoer who resists Reaney's style of drama as a latter day Malvolio, whose reservations are a measure only of his own narrow spirit and stunted imagination. Well, I don't believe it, and at the risk of a wholesale denial of cakes and ale will attempt to assess Reaney's dramas from a somewhat different perspective.

Reaney has written a variety of works for the stage but only three plays in the strict sense: *The Killdeer*, *The Easter Egg* and *The Sun and the Moon*. To my knowledge only the first two of these have been performed and I shall confine my remarks in the main to them.

Unquestionably *The Killdeer* has real strengths. Reaney conveys with considerable power his vision of life in rural Ontario, its strange, often sinister enchantment, the desolate eccentricities of its inhabitants and their sudden acts of violence. At the centre of this world which is recreated with variations in both *The Easter Egg* and earlier in *The Red Heart* is, as Mr. Lee points out, the figure of a child, or child-man, threatened by the knowledge of evil, vehemently and ineffectually protesting his passage from innocence to experience. *The Killdeer* suggests a private, intense preoccupation with this transition. The depravity Reaney depicts in this play seems to serve as a powerful emblem for the dark side of adult life which all morally immaculate children must ultimately confront. In so far then as the action concerns Eli, the youth who plays with children's toys, *The Killdeer* revolves about its true centre. Moreover Mr. Lee's claim that "the play is held together by a carefully worked out pattern of interlocking images" is no doubt partly valid. Certain images of possession, demonic or benign, are clearly useful in extending the implications of the theme. (One thread of such imagery, the possession of son by mother, is dramatically most effective. There are no fewer than three "terrible mothers" in *The Killdeer* who by their hostility or the deviousness of tainted love damage their male offspring.)

However as certain Jacobean dramas illustrate most clearly (*The Killdeer* with its macabre violence and intermingled richness and confusion invites the comparison) a pattern of striking imagery, in the absence of plausible characterization and coherent action, is not enough to hold any play together. Structurally, in terms of plot line, *The Killdeer* is anarchic. Apparently Reaney has left unanswered in his mind such questions as whom the play is really about and what story it is he wants to tell. Crude matters, but audiences demand to be satisfied on them and quickly lose interest if they are not. In the absence of such elementary decisions the materials for three or four plays jostle and compete within the indeterminate confines of one large theme. Attention shifts, arbitrarily it seems, from Mrs. Gardner to Mrs. Budge, from Harry to Rebecca, from Eli to Madame Fay, each one of whom clamours for a play of his own. *The Killdeer*'s lack of coherence becomes increasingly marked as its various strands, elaborated and developed, diverge. This centrifugal momentum culminates in a disastrous last scene in which contrary to Reaney's intention, which seems to be to present us with a decisive epiphany, the fragments of the action fly irretrievably apart and the playwright, having lost control, takes refuge in a kind of coy whimsy.

His complex story line faces Reaney with a number of subsidiary difficulties. Complicated plots as a rule entail complicated expositions and Reaney is too

inexperienced a playwright to present the mass of necessary information economically and dramatically. There are as a consequence long relatively static expository passages at the beginning of each act, and even the last scene of the play, during which a number of new characters appear unannounced, is not entirely free of them. This defect is related to the practice of giving us the word for the deed, of telling us in extended dialogue about events and motives rather than presenting them in the immediacy of dramatic action. ("I didn't realize what Clifford was/Until I had married Eli and lived out there./For five years I've lived in what you'd call a house/But it was an inferno —"). Since the dramatist does not always calculate precisely enough what scenes from his sensational story will best hold the attention of an audience, one too often has the sense that the true centre of dramatic gravity is somewhere off-stage.

The characterization in *The Killdeer* betrays a comparable uncertainty of purpose. The characters for the most part move on two levels. Having conceived them in the context of the bizarre fantasy which pervades the piece, Reaney then attempts in a number of instances to demonstrate their truth to nature and invest them with the authority of humanity. This combination of fantasy and verisimilitude is precarious. It succeeds perhaps in the case of Mrs. Gardner and Harry; it fails with Madame Fay. In so far as this character exhibits the demonic artificiality of a sorceress from some latter day fairyland, she entertains; when, however, her "motivations", Dostoyevskian in their complexity, are dissected (as in the last scene) she is an embarrassment.

The Killdeer then is a curious blend of inspiration and ineptitude. One underlying source of trouble is Reaney's reluctance, or inability, to undertake the dramatist's paradoxical obligation to be at once totally aloof from, yet totally committed to the characters and world he creates. Unfiltered prejudices obtrude, for instance, in the portrait of Vernelle whom the author despises, and in that of Rebecca whom he too clearly adores. More serious, however, are the subtle sins of detachment most in evidence in *The Easter Egg*.

The plot of this second play once again concerns the efforts of the false mother, Bethel, to hold her stepson, Kenneth, in bondage and obstruct his development. The latter is another of Reaney's wise innocents, apparently retarded and helpless in the adult world but in fact possessing secret reserves of power. As in *The Killdeer* we are presented with a wholly benevolent and beautiful girl, in this case one Pollex Henry, who undertakes to protect this figure of innocence and introduce him as gently as possible to the realities of the fallen world. Two other characters complete the cast: Ira Hill, a doctor, and George Sloan, a clergyman. Their

courtships of Bethel and Pollex respectively provide a tenuous addition to the plot.

ALTHOUGH STRUCTURALLY *The Easter Egg* is much superior to *The Killdeer*, in other important respects it is a lesser work. In the course of its disorganized and leisurely progress *The Killdeer* offers moments of theatrical magic absent for the most part from *The Easter Egg* and for which a neat structure is no compensation. Only two scenes come alive on stage. In the first Pollex makes an effort to instruct Kenneth's mind and heart by a vocabulary lesson and by telling him the story of Anna Karenina whose death, to Kenneth's sudden horror, she attempts to illustrate with a toy train. In another strong scene, George Sloan, the ineffectual young cleric, tries to ask Bethel for the hand of her stepdaughter but, intimidated by Bethel's calculated misunderstanding and her sinister power, eventually proposes to her instead. The scene generates the mood of macabre farce which marks so much of Reaney's most effective work.

Aside from these episodes *The Easter Egg* is a dramatic fiasco. The exposition is exceptionally clumsy and the style of the dialogue is frequently laborious and uncertain. The characters by and large are a more self-consciously cultured group than in *The Killdeer* and Reaney seems at a loss to know what language to have them speak. As a consequence the accents of colloquial conversation mingle and collide with more formal verse rhythms. Another unfortunate feature of Reaney's dialogue in both plays is its lack of economy. As yet his sense of the precise moment to expand, or alternately to prune and condense, is very insecure. Most often he dissipates the impact of potentially powerful scenes by unnecessary elaboration. A case in point is the important interchange between Rebecca and Harry in the second act of *The Killdeer* which is marred because the crucial speeches are too diffuse, and opaque, to be effective in performance. In *The Easter Egg* there are passages which appear simply self-indulgence on the part of the playwright: for example Bethel's recital of the true story of Cinderella in the first act, and her interminable tale about a cow in a ditch in the second. In theory these speeches may be justified; in performance they come across as entirely expendable.

In this second work, as in *The Killdeer*, the various levels of action, naturalistic, fantastic, symbolic, fail to coincide. The confusion is most noticeable in those scenes which point up the portentous significance of the object (the body of a

dead killdeer, a glass egg) from which the plays take their titles. When these objects are finally exhibited, a central character in each case undergoes a profound and violent transformation. The recalcitrant Madame Fay suddenly confesses all and the simple Kenneth collapses on the floor only to be resurrected after a few moments full of adult understanding. Although these sudden reversals clearly serve exigencies of plot and theme, from the standpoint of realistic motivation they are incredible. Too easily Reaney, having assumed this standpoint, sacrifices recognizable human psychology to a preconceived and somewhat facile pattern of symbolic gesture.

But the cardinal weakness of *The Easter Egg*, as I intimated earlier, is in the playwright's relation to his material. If on occasion Reaney approaches too close to his imaginative creation, more damaging is his manner of remaining aloof from it. As Mr. Lee has emphasized, the character who attempts to elude the human predicament by clinging to a child's universe occupies an important place in Reaney's work. This figure is presumably a creature of that facet of the author's imagination which also stands bewildered and appalled by the manifold corruption of the adult world, ("blood, pus, horror, death, stepmothers, and lies"), which resists involvement in it and hence declines seriously to scrutinize it. There is a great deal of sensational violence in Reaney's plays but one is hard put to believe in any of it; not because of anything akin to the alchemy of the great dramatist who converts horror into pleasure, but because these murderous acts seem unreal, devoid of emotional resonance. At intervals, particularly in *The Easter Egg* one seems to detect behind Reaney's scenes of blood and death, the cold, half gleeful fascination of the child, insulated from shock by incomprehension. That is to say, there is nothing of authentic evil in these dramas, only the artifice of Grand Guignol. The spectator winces or laughs (laughter is, of course, the common alleviating response to this puerile genre) but remains untouched. This has repercussions on the immediate level of theatrical effectiveness Since these plays tend to deny the reality of the evil acts they dramatize, the characters who suffer from such acts or attempts to combat them fail to command our interest or sympathy. Further, the vantage point of premeditated innocence from which these plays are conceived accounts, I think, both for their frequent lack of emotional continuity (in *The Easter Egg* the playwright repeatedly sabotages each mood as he establishes it) and for their periodic skittishness.

Mr. Lee dismisses an anonymous critic who suggested that Reaney was a lyric poet who had not learned the craft of the playwright. However, I suspect that

Reaney himself would agree that he lacks as yet some of the reflexes of the seasoned dramatist: a ruthless evaluation of dialogue for its stage effectiveness; the nice calculation of the point at which the interest of a potential audience may begin to flag and what to do about it; a sense of what actors may fairly be required to do. Reaney is certainly capable of writing good acting parts but too often his demands are scandalous. For instance, in each of his three stage pieces some unfortunate performer is obliged to fall on his face and grovel on the boards, centre stage. Sir Laurence Olivier in a superbly written scene from Anouilh's *Becket*, in a moment of transcendent fury, once almost brought it off.

One of the most important attributes of the dramatist is something I can only identify as the killer instinct; the perception of the point at which a scene must reach its climax and of the one thing to do when it does. ("Soft you, a word or two before you go . . ."; "I'm not a dime a dozen! I'm Willy Loman . . ."; *Enter Jack slowly from the back of the garden. He is dressed in deepest mourning.*) As yet I miss this unpredictable inevitability in Reaney's work and no appeal to the "rules of literature" which Mr. Lee makes on his behalf will satisfy in its absence.

Many scenes in Reaney's dramas have poignancy and charm and I agree with much that Mr. Lee has written in praise of them. But Canada hasn't many playwrights and we can't afford to bewilder those we have with indifference or contempt, or even panegyrics. I will concede, however, that of all Canadian dramatists, Reaney is the most difficult to evaluate justly. No one else has his capacity to write for the stage at once so badly and so well.

review articles

PERFORMERS AND ENTERTAINERS

Warren Tallman

JACK LUDWIG. *Confusions.* McClelland & Stewart. $5.50.
MORDECAI RICHLER. *The Incomparable Atuk.* McClelland & Stewart. $3.95.

LET ME SAY why I don't much care for either of these novels by means of a distinction between the entertainer and the performer. The entertainer's eye is on his audience. If their mood be saccharine he will come on sweet. If sweet doesn't take he may try sour, or sweet and sour, or bittersweet. Whatever the variation, his talents are always in strict fee to his audience, to the willy-nilly absolute that they must be entertained. The performer suffers no such limitation. His eye is on his performance and his chief need is to do it well, give it everything he has. If the audience follows along he is lucky. If they fall away, they fall away. Bitter as the latter experience may be, it is better to perform well and lose the audience than to play the entertainer in order to hold them. It is important to add that in our time individual qualities and abilities are likely to be so much superior to community qualities and abilities that the writer who does perform well is all but certain to lose the great majority of the reading audience.

Confusions is a satire on academic life. Jack Ludwig's protagonist, Joseph Gillis, né Joseph Galsky, is by reason of the implied split in identity a schizy young Ivy League professor who has been picked up for prestige purposes by a California sunshine college managed by a hopelessly venal and inept president, staffed by some veteran professors who carry on all-consuming social and academic vendettas, some rookie professors who are filled with that kind of zeal which knows no end, except perhaps the bosses', and some other rookie professors who have been driven all but dotty by the fatuousness, viciousness and frustration of it all. Gillis/Galsky belongs mostly, though not entirely, with the latter group.

This combination of a semi-lunatic protagonist and a completely lunatic world would seem to offer a writer the chance to take off his skin and dance around on the bones of all his enemies, hooting out wild peals of loon laughter as he nails them to the wall, the cross, the floor, the door, the mast, the mat, the stake. That is, the occasion Ludwig has created cries out for an amok writ-

ing performance, some sort of swirling scherzo, as Gillis deals his tormentors their just deserts. No such luck. The writing performance is minimized to a steady stream of facetious wit that is light, and light again, and light again, ad tedium.

The reason for the boredom is not far to seek. A man's writing, like his speech, cannot take on colour, variety, intensity, vitality, unless he is actually engaged with his subject. I can't believe that Ludwig is horrified, fascinated, indignant, contemptuous, angry, or even amused by his chamber of academic horrors, Gillis/Galsky included. One sure sign of his disengagement is his handling of the exploitation by the college of a genuinely schizophrenic student whose father happens to be the school's Mr. Money-Bags. Loon Gillis — it takes one to know one — detects Dev's sickness; loon Gillis combats professors, department chairman, reluctant deans and an even more reluctant president in order that the dark secret be acknowledged; loon Gillis joins forces with a good dean (there's always a good dean) and a good doctor (ditto) to see that poor Dev is transferred from the debilitating college atmosphere to a more congenial madhouse; and at the last good dean, good doctor and good, good Gillis all go, more or less arm in arm, to pat poor Dev on the shoulder a fond farewell as he departs with vacant grin and they ALL FEEL, like, AWFUL! As well they and Ludwig might, drowned as everyone is in the soap of such an operation. Ludwig's need to dream up this lugubrious scandal and to make it the main course of the novel is in default of his ability to relate to the total scandal he has set before us. The high percentage of facetiousness in his wit when dealing with the total scandal — the college — points to the boredom he feels. Like writer, like reader. I conclude that he never was interested to take on his academic horrors and write them into the limelight and oblivion of mocking laughter they deserve. I conclude that he decided to write a "funny" novel about academic life — an entertainment. And I conclude that he decided to do this because he concluded that there was a going audience for such a book. As, in conclusion, I'm sure there is.

Despite surface similarities (another satire) Mordecai Richler's *The Incomparable Atuk* is a different matter. His protagonist, Atuk, the Eskimo poet, is out to con a motley collection of Toronto magazine, newspaper, advertising and television columnists, critics, performers, impresarios and publicity freaks. One of this collection, Seymour Bone, conducts a TV show, *Crossed Swords,* to which viewers send quotations that a panel of experts identify and discuss; since Nathan Cohen is obviously the model for this particular figure, it seems likely that some of the others also have real-life counterparts. Any who recall Cohen's crude 1957 *Tamarack Review* attack on Richler might well conclude that the latter is settling an old score; maybe several. If so, the novel should have a brisk sale in Toronto.

But for readers elsewhere there are problems. With *The Apprenticeship Of Duddy Kravitz* Richler demonstrated that he is not simply a good but an exceptionally gifted writer. The proof in *Duddy Kravitz* is in the writing, which is memorable, an impressive performance in just the way that some actors' performances are unforgettable. *The Incom-*

parable Atuk is a brilliantly conceived novel, a little masterpiece of interlocking relationships so arranged that all of his bad pennies can be called into play at will. But the writing is unimpressive, flat, a perfunctory performance which provides only glimpses of Richler's gift. It is as though an excellent comic play were made ordinary for want of an adequate performance. The comedy is there, most of it with superb potential, but the magic is gone. There is nothing particularly impressive, for instance, in his demolition of Seymour Bone. Just here, perhaps, the difficulty can be located. Richler has bent his writing to the task of demolishing Bone when he should have made Bone an occasion on which to demonstrate how well he can write. More generally, he bends all of the writing in the novel to the service of the satire, when he should have used the satire to show Toronto, and any other interested parties, that he is head and shoulders better than any other writers around. Like every other art, writing needs to be liberated over and over, a fact which goes double in Canada where it has scarcely been liberated at all. But this will never be accomplished by satiric attacks on the Bones and drones who hold sway in Toronto. It will be liberated only by writing performances in which some sense of mystery and beauty and power comes to life in among the words — the very things that Richler has demonstrated he can catch into his writing. Not, however, this time out.

THE CRITIC'S CRITIC

F. W. Watt

NORTHROP FRYE. *T. S. Eliot.* Writers and Critics Series, Oliver & Boyd. $1.25.

THE FIRST THING that must be said about Mr. Frye's book is that for all its brevity it is a penetrating and abundantly rewarding study. Such quality is expected and taken for granted in a critic who now looms like a ghostly colossus over the whole world of modern academic literary criticism. But the second thing to be said is that this is not one of his best books. Not only is the modest scope of the Writers and Critics Series inhibiting for a critic of Mr. Frye's originality, but there is something curiously unsatisfying in the relation between the critic and his subject. It is not, as some readers have felt, a matter of antipathy, but the opposite: Mr. Frye's witty severity, disciplined understatement and acidulous irony, so bracing in other brews, here mix with a substance (call it Eliot's "impersonality") with which they have too much in common. The result is something extraordinary we feel we ought to enjoy as well as admire, but don't entirely, a martini too dry for mere human taste.

This short paperback is not the "morphology of literary symbolism," the companion volume "concerned with practical criticism" which, Mr. Frye remarks in the preface to *Anatomy of Criticism*, is needed to complement that earlier work of "pure critical theory." It is, however, a large enough sample to show the kind of thing to be expected from Mr. Frye's fully developed critical approach directly applied by himself to a major author. As such it cannot but be of great interest, not only to students of T. S. Eliot, but to admirers and critics of Mr. Frye's vastly influential twentieth-century poetics. Nevertheless, for many readers of the Writers and Critics Series this book will be baffling if not dismaying. It is not a work of what Mr. Frye has deprecated as "public criticism." It does not provide a simplified exposition of Eliot's life and works for beginners. It does not try to capture and communicate the feeling of special poetic moments, to nourish the uninitiated reader and guide him to the "living Eliot." It does not concern itself with evaluations or those mid-century revaluations this most monumental of modern classics is now provoking. The reader who expects these things will be left in the cold by this book's intellectual rigour and academic composure. He will look in vain for much that will obviously stir his pulses and raise his ardour. Or if he finds a chance rhetorical flourish — *The Waste Land*, "where loveliness peeps fitfully through squalor and an invisible divine presence haunts the misery of Europe" — wide-eyed at so untypical a Very light illuminating a whole continent of art and experience he will cry "*This* is criticism" and abandon the dense, intricate pages all about in which Eliot's "morphology of symbolism" is carefully charted. Such a reader will probably not have got beyond the first chapter, however, where in language no doubt deliberately parodying the university calendar it is announced that "a thorough knowledge of Eliot is compulsory for anyone interested in contemporary literature," and where it is asserted that "whether he is liked or disliked is of no importance, but he must be read." This is the academic principle at best and worst. The demand is for impersonality, for a reach outside one's "natural" range of sensibility and interest, and there is faith in a supra-personal ground on which all civilized minds can meet. The opposite approach is to say that it is all-important whether you like Eliot, and that you must *not* read him if you dislike him. That is dangerous and uncivilized, but it has its attractions too — though none that can be indulged, of course, by specialists in English literature.

Mr. Frye deals with Eliot as critic and as poet. The first task he sets himself is to separate Eliot's genuine literary criticism from his "literary polemic," to explain in effect how Eliot on the one hand has brilliantly articulated some of the central literary theories of our time, and on the other has voiced a good number of social and literary judgments which seem eccentric, perverse, and narrowly dogmatic. The reason is that the genuine criticism springs from the study and practice of literature, whereas the polemic which keeps intruding is based on a "historical myth" which Eliot accepted, the myth of the "going-down" kind in which the modern world represents the "disintegration of Christianity, the decay of a common belief and a common culture." The decline is not

merely an accomplished historical fact, for the ideal in a sense remains alive "to condemn and challenge the contemporary world," and the possibilities of degeneration or regeneration are omnipresent. Eliot's criticism is therefore not always based on detached and dispassionate induction, but is at times part of a continuing Civil War in which sides must be taken up: for or against the Protestant, Romantic and liberal tendencies of the English tradition, for or against Milton, Shelley, D. H. Lawrence and so on. Criticism, in Mr. Frye's view, must be a great deal more like science than like warfare. He is primarily interested, then, not in Eliot's polemic, however important that may have seemed to Eliot, but in his contribution to the science of criticism. It is of course true that the very determination, in Mr. Frye's criticism, to do without polemic becomes in itself a sort of polemic — a fact for which the rude antagonisms and passionate loyalties stirred up by his revolutionary criticism are ample evidence.

The basic principles of the science of criticism are to be found in Eliot: the idea that all poems take their place in a literary continuum which has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order, the idea that any individual talent is to a considerable degree inspired and formed by past literature, the idea that by adding to the order of poems, every new poem in some degree modifies that order. What Eliot does not do is to make clear precisely how the tradition has its effect on the individual talent. Here is the large area Mr. Frye has himself opened up, by categorizing

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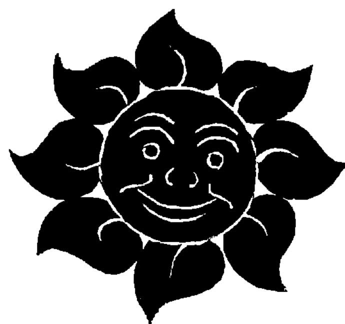
the conventions, genres and mythical structures in which the literary tradition is embodied, and by demonstrating ways in which these "in turn exert a defining power on the poet's mind."

Turning to the poetry, Mr. Frye explains that the "historical myth," with all its contemporary applications, which lies behind Eliot's polemic also appears in the poetry. Here, however, Mr. Frye is not concerned to extract the poet's "philosophy" or to discuss the relation of the "poetry" and the "ideas": the only way to avoid an illegitimate and misleading separation of this kind is "by studying the conceptual implications of the structure of his images." What Mr. Frye attempts to do, then, is to establish the geography of Eliot's total imaginative world: its polarities of heaven and hell, its corresponding humane hemispheres of innocence and experience, its cyclical movements through the seasons and the diurnal round. He is so steeped in the poetry and plays that he can suggest the peculiar clusters and massing of Eliot's imagery with examples from the whole corpus — an electric flow of associations exciting for the initiate, but a little stunning for the layman. Mr. Frye examines the earlier poetry, mainly satiric in kind, and presenting a "world without laughter, love or children"; he goes on to the later poems and to the plays, which belong to Eliot's " 'purgatorial' vision." With severe limitations on space, sacrifices were inevitable. There is little about change, development, growth. But the treatment of Eliot's poetry (and his criticism) as a completed unity is more than a convenient device: Eliot is that kind of writer. A study of Yeats would perhaps have required an extra dimension. Mr. Frye's reading moves persistently from individual poems outward to the whole *œuvre*: the approach works smoothly with a major poet of such consistent quality. Poets more uneven than Eliot might require, and reward, a greater respect for the boundaries and uniqueness of poems.

The range of reference within and beyond Eliot's work, the deftness, the incisiveness, and the remarkable economy of expression make this little book something of a *tour de force*. To call it as Mr. Frye modestly does "an elementary handbook, claiming no originality beyond that of arrangement" is to pretend to both more and less than is justified. It is not an elementary handbook; it is a critic's manual, an outline of a creed, a declaration of principles and a demonstration of their practice, a pyrotechnical display of acquired reading skills, a tactical manoeuvre or rather a foray in that most civil of wars, our contemporary conversation about the meaning and value of literature.



WITHOUT CAMOUFLAGE

William Hall

Hugh Garner's Best Stories. Ryerson Press. $4.95.

THE FIRST IMPRESSION that struck me on reading Mr. Garner's short stories was that they had an air that was curiously out-of-date. The style is drab and often ungainly, unrelieved for the most part even by metaphor; the kind of style that one associates with the so-called proletarian writers of the 1930s. Many of the stories (particularly "E equals MC squared" and "Hunky") reflect the same kind of angry frustrated hatred for the boss and the foreman, the same savage disillusionment with the promises of left-wing action that reduced so much of the fiction of the 1930s to the level of ammunition in the "war between the classes."

My second impression was that the world of Mr. Garner's fiction is not only out of date but also strangely derivative. The label *A Canadian Hemingway* attached itself to "A Couple of Quiet Young Guys" and "No More Songs about the Suwannee"; *A Canadian Steinbeck* (with suggestions of Erskine Caldwell) to "The Conversion of Willie Heaps" and "One-Two-Three Little Indians"; *A Canadian James T. Farrell* to "Make Mine Vanilla" and "The Father." The world of Mr. Garner, then, is a dated world, a derivative world, a world empty of humour, a world as ugly and depressing as the style in which it is presented.

My third impression was as disheartening as the first two. Mr. Garner's style is not only ungainly, but at times downright bad. In "Our Neighbours the Nuns" the third paragraph ends: "The leading pair [of nuns] were always two very old Sisters, one of them with a plump kind face above her moustache, the other with a visage like a dried-up quince." The next paragraph begins: "Being Protestant children, they [i.e the nuns] had a mystery about them that inspired us to pester our parents with questions as to their mode of life, and their reasons for living as they did." One hardly expects to come across such faults (and this is not the only example) in a volume of an author's best stories. A good deal of the dialogue, too, despite its ring of truth, seems unnecessary, as does much of the mass of detail, which obscures where it is meant to enlighten. Idiosyncracies of behaviour, that noted once would have illuminated characters as individuals, by repetition reduce the individuals to faded pale automata. In almost every story ("Tea with Miss Mayberry" is a prime example) everything is stated, nothing suggested. If Mr. Garner has ever read Chekov, Joyce, Katherine Mansfield or for that matter Hemingway he seems to have absorbed little or nothing of their craftsmanship or to have deliberately refused to learn.

At this point I wondered if, under the circumstances, the time spent in reading

this book had not been time wasted. For a moment, wrapped in the ineffable, if spurious, superiority of the academic, secure in his certainty of what the best examples are and what a modern short story is and ought to be, I was tempted to think that it was. But then I remembered that certain of Mr. Garner's stories: "The Yellow Sweater," "The Magnet," "A Manly Heart" (despite the fact that its theme is rammed home with the subtlety of a rivet gun), "Some are so Lucky," "Lucy," "The Father," "Hunky," and one or two more had impressed me, for all the objections I could bring against them, as having certain qualities not often found these days in short story writers. Mr. Garner certainly lacks, on the evidence of this collection, the kind of technical virtuosity, even at times the kind of technical competence, that the most inexpert apprentice now knows is expected of him. But he possesses a certain quality, I think, the lack of which renders the work of a great many of his more highly skilled contemporaries as beautiful, but as dead, as a Salvador Dali landscape.

It is difficult to describe this quality accurately. Energy defines part of it, will another part, honesty more than both the others. That which expresses it most clearly is perhaps the overpowering sense, gathered from all of the stories, of a limited but powerful, sensitive but brutal moral personality projecting itself and its vision without concealment or camouflage.

It seems to me a reflection of this quality and, though it may sound paradoxical to say so, a positive virtue that Mr. Garner makes, at his best, no attempt to be compassionate. He is too honest to feign a virtue when he has it not, even though compassion is the most fashionable and rewarding of all virtues in literary circles these days. A good many of the stories I found successful are first person narratives and in all of them the narrator emerges (as a boy in Toronto, a youth in Spain, a middleaged man "at large") as essentially the same personality. He is prickly and suspicious, aware, as an adult, quite without self-pity, of his own limitations and past mistakes. He is intensely curious about other people but with no sympathy for them if they are his contemporaries; a personality driven by the energy of hate rather than by that of love. Only the young, the helpless, the outcast and the trapped rouse any feeling in him at all and then it's an impotent feeling incapable of action. There is at times a kind of wistful yearning towards love but it either turns sour (as in "The Yellow Sweater") or cools (as in "The Nun in Nylon Stockings") under the glare of curiosity, or, at its worst, congeals (as in "A Trip for Mrs. Taylor") into sentimentality. In one story, one of his best ("The Magnet"), it threatens to grow towards fulfillment as love, but is quite brutally (though not at all melodramatically) frustrated. This feeling never grows to any kind of freely moving healthy emotion. In fact if Mr. Garner might be said to have a theme common to all these stories, despite their varied backgrounds and situations, it would I think be just this: that joy, emotional freedom in all its forms — a romantic memory, love, a boy's aimless drifting afternoon in a park — is hardly real at all and is anyway inevitably going to be crippled, choked or frustrated at the moment of birth. If a man survives the crushing out of all his own possibility for

joy then he will do so, if he is a primitive like Big Tom in "One-Two-Three Little Indians": "all the anguish and frustration drained from him, so that there was nothing left to carry him into another day." The "average middleaged man," like the man in "The Yellow Sweater," will survive to see himself as "the staring face of a fat frightened old man." No one grows, no one advances.

In fact my final impression was, quite seriously, almost one of relief that Mr. Garner's work is marred by the flaws I noted earlier. They prevented me, at least, from ever falling too completely under the spell of his honest but bleak and despairing view of life.

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books in review

SOUND AND FURY

ERNEST BUCKLER. *The Cruelest Month.* McClelland & Stewart. $6.50.

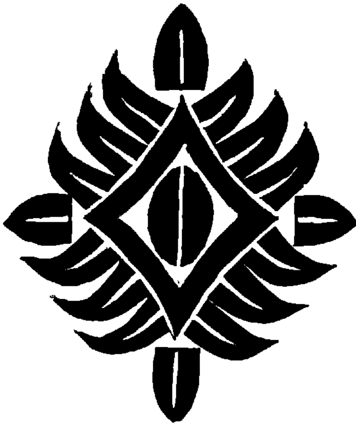
IN 1952, Ernest Buckler published *The Mountain and the Valley*, a novel which attracted a good deal of attention here and abroad. It established Buckler as an author of some potentiality and reputation. Now, eleven years later, he has brought forth *The Cruelest Month.* It is a retrograde step, and will more than likely cause the critics to make all of the classic remarks usually said about second novels. It is not a good book; in fact, it is so bad that it is difficult, if not impossible, to take seriously.

Once inside this book you may feel like a gambler in a strange town running about and crying plaintively, "Where's the action?" About two thirds of it is talk. All of a Henry Green book is talk— talk such as you've never heard before. Mr. Buckler's book is talk which you've heard many times before — not from the mouths of human beings, but from the pens of bad writers who think they are depicting sophisticated people saying sophisticated things. Huxley managed it, I suppose, and Norman Douglas in *South Wind*; Ronald Firbank could do it and make it seem very real in an oddly rococo way. But Mr. Buckler's talkers are very unreal because they only talk about themselves, or more impossibly, about something that interests the author. They not only talk themselves, but they try to get each other to talk. The central third of the novel is comprised of chapters where a half-dozen characters are paired off and each breaks down the other's reserve and reticence and makes him talk. A forty-year-old spinster and a fifty-year-old thrice-wed Robert Ruark-type novelist talk themselves into marriage; a medical student and a young New York matron talk themselves into listening to the wild sexual call of their autonomic nervous systems; and in the end, Paul, the hero, one supposes, talks himself into falling in love with Letty, the illiterate housekeeper widow who opines that "all the readin' and writin' that was ever done" (at Paul's place) "wouldn't amount to a fart on the plains of Arabia." It is difficult not to like her. She speaks eloquently for the reader.

Paul runs a kind of hotel, which is a haven for intellectuals, called Endlaw, which is twenty miles from Granfort, which is a fair day's drive from Halifax, which is a naval base on the Atlantic seaboard of Canada. Besides Paul, who has learned that if you jolly people along and look mysterious you will in fact *be* mysterious, there is Letty, grotesque because the author thinks of her as such, and Kate, who really loves Paul but who becomes engaged to Morse who is a novelist who begins to write a novel about the characters at Endlaw Mr. Buckler is writing about, and Sheila who is rich and married to Rex who is tense about his lowly background and his spotty war record, and finally Bruce who is nurturing guilt because he was the instrument that killed his son and wife in a car accident. At the end of the book there is a forest ranger named Leander Farquharson who interrupts a forest fire

which is the best thing in the book by far. The reason, I think, is that it is very active and doesn't have a word to say about how to write a novel, or about Life or Love or Relationships that Must Be. Another thing about the forest fire is that it is unpredictable. Without a word it jumps the creek everybody says it couldn't. It also gets Letty's skirt off her, gives Paul a heart attack, separates all of the sexual sheep from their intellectual wolves' clothing, and does it by just going about its real business, which is to ignite and burn down as much timber as it possibly can before it gets rained on. I wonder if there isn't a lesson in that for novelists like Mr. Buckler.

What he has done — with more sweat and toil than I care to think about — is to write 298 pages of notes on what could be a story of more than a little interest. They are the kind of notes that are perhaps necessary to a good novel, but once written down they should be abandoned and used as the memory of actual experience is sometimes used to colour our speculation about experiences yet to come. It is enough for the author to remember that Paul is the kind of selfish-little-boy-god who would find a mate in Letty. It is too much for the story to have him actually do it. It is enough for Mr. Buckler to know that Morse would subject a group of people to a game of Truth. It is embarrassing to have him do it. Actually, the most successful character in the book is Rex. He is object rather than subject. He is simply viewed by the others and he acts from real tensions that he does not understand. He is consistent in his gratuitousness from birth to the moment of his triumph when he has his wife Sheila trapped and he flips away the cigarette butt that starts the forest fire. After I had closed the book I wondered about Rex. The others I was simply glad to be done with.



Mr. Buckler can use language well. Many times in the book you will be dragged into a paragraph and pushed out again with your imagination tingling with the rightness of his image or his way with words. But he suspends animation. This book is a still-life with sound track.

ROBERT HARLOW

LA VIE D'UNE ECOLE

ADRIEN THERIO. *Le Printemps Qui Pleure.* Les Editions de l'Homme.

Le Printemps Qui Pleure est un roman dont l'action se déroule à la campagne. On sait qu'au Canada français le genre champêtre a longtemps été un fourre-tout sentimental, un prétexte à lyrisme facile. Les paysans, les villageois défendaient la thèse du retour à la terre avec une ardeur toute farouche, sans pour autant oublier d'employer une langue dénuée de la vraisemblance la plus élémentaire. Cette vision des choses est bien périmée. Le roman de M. Thério nous le prouverait si besoin il y avait.

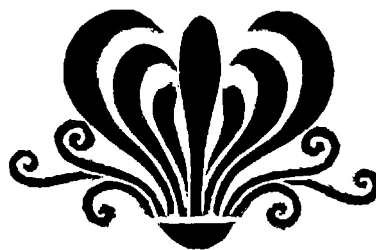
Dédaignant les modèles trop idylliques du passé, M. Thério a décrit, dans un style qui rappelle à la fois Maupassant et Erskine Caldwell, la vie d'une école de village. Les personnages qu'il invente sont à vrai dire bien inquiétants. L'amour, ils le pratiquent très libéralement et aiment aussi à en parler de façon fort vulgaire. Ils sont voyeurs, sadiques, tortionnaires. Tous, ou à peu prés, ont des aventures libidineuses, et le narrateur lui-même a une imagination pour le moins précoce.

Voici en quelques lignes l'intrigue du roman. Un adolescent — le narrateur — s'éprend de Yolande, compagne de classe qui se montre plutôt distante. Brimé dans ses désirs, le garçon ne recule devant rien pour discréditer Eddy, le petit ami que la jeune fille s'est choisi. Cela n'exclut ni la mouchardise, ni la dissimulation, ni la fausse représentation. En compagnie d'un camarade de nom de Jean-Luc, il est accusé par Yolande même d'avoir lâchement attaqué Eddy. Par mesure de représailles, les adolescents s'emparent de la jeune fille, lui enlèvent ses vêtements et la forcent à se plonger dans l'eau froide. Yolande meurt des suites d'une pleurésie causée par cette immersion. Le narrateur n'a plus qu'à déplorer sa participation à l'affaire, sa goujaterie.

Bien qu'opposé à la sensiblerie qui a trop longtemps fait loi dans le genre, nous estimons la crudité de ce livre plutôt factice, presque puérile. La peinture à laquelle s'est livré l'auteur dépasse le réalisme pour atteindre au procédé. Nous ne croyons pas vraisemblable le déferlement de passion primitive qui assaille les adolescents de cette école, leurs institutrices. Il aurait fallu nuancer davantage, opposer, par exemple, à la brutalité abusive une innocence plus convaincante, plus conforme à la réalité.

L'écriture, il faut bien l'avouer, paraît hâtive. On ne retrouve pas le souci de correction décelable dans *Mes Beaux Meurtres*, plutôt une certaine impression de négligence. Espérons que les prochains mois nous permettront de lire un roman de M. Thério qui surpassera le succès appréciable du receuil de nouvelles dont nous avons rendu compte plus haut.

GILLES ARCHAMBAULT



TRANSMUTATION OF HISTORY

NORMAN NEWTON. *The One True Man.* McClelland & Stewart. $4.50.

CHARLES E. ISRAEL. *Who Was Then the Gentleman?* Macmillan. $4.95.

THERE IS LITTLE to link these two novels in a single review except the fact that both deal with the past. Apart from this historical stance, the novels provide nothing but contrasts. *The One True Man* is not truly historical; it constructs a milieu based upon the conjectured Phoenician colonization of South America in 427 B.C. Charles Israel's novel, *Who Was Then the Gentleman?* as the title suggests, reconstructs the actual Peasants' Revolt of 1381 in its total social, economic and political context.

Mr. Newton's book suffers from the disability of one of his characters, the priest Baalyaton, of whom he writes: "In his exposition of truth, he was not like a man speaking forcefully from inner knowledge, but like one reading from a book which has convinced him." The narrative, ploddingly unexciting, concerns one Suniaton who arrives in the Punic colonial city of New Gades to find considerable tension in the relations between his people and the native Ulmeca. Eventually he attempts (after the inevitable but irrelevant sexual adventures and misadventures), quite ineptly, to avoid bloodshed by making a gesture of peace; the plan fails, results in the death of the Ulmeca princess he loves and in the destruction of New Gades and its cruel Phoenicians. Suniaton retires to a mountain hermitage with the head of his beloved tucked underneath his arm. "And he would say, as he looked at the skull, It was not this I loved!"

This book is badly written (and overwritten). Mr. Newton tends to write long turgid sentences so syntactically gnarled that essences are frequently lost. Even shorter sentences are chopped into bits, so that we have islands of words swimming in a sea of commas. Faulty grammar sometimes leaps from the page with distracting force: "with all due deference to he who occupies..." Frequent detailed descriptions and expositions, instead of assisting comprehension and moving the novel forward, impede both understanding and progress. Twentieth-century colloquialisms crop up in the formal speech of New Gades' Administrators to distort the tone: "Right here beneath our feet there are deposits of stone oil which make those near Cartage look pretty sick." Imagery, highly favoured in Mr. Newton's style, is designed more to impress the reader with the author's ingenuity and perceptiveness than to do the novel a good turn. Frequently it is strained to the breaking point; sometimes, ludicrously inappropriate: "The moonlight was a strong yellow-orange, like the urine of horses."

No character comes to life; no identification with even the hero's condition and behavior is possible. No sense of time and place is communicated. The obvious didacticism of the book and the naïve circumstances of the plot inhibit sympathetic response.

Who Was Then the Gentleman? is at once a more subtle and more skilful novel. It engages the reader immediately by introducing him in the opening pages to the fugitive priest, John Ball, who,

though filled with fear and weariness, conquers both to proclaim vigorously to the scattered populace of the English countryside his ideal of freedom. The work moves forward steadily through the half year from January to July, 1381, providing a thoroughgoing development of the organization of the revolt, the economic and physical repressions that fired it, the characters of those chiefly responsible for the insurrection as well as of those charged with the duty of quelling it. Wat Tyler and John Ball, as the dominant principals in the revolt, are sympathetically drawn and given vivid individuality by the contrasts in their characters which bring them into frequent conflict. Ball, sensitive, peace-loving, idealistic, self-sacrificing, is frequently at odds with his devoted friend, Tyler, a man of fiery passions, urgent burning hates and loves, who regards bloodshed as a hideous necessity. There is an interesting interplay between the contrasts these two provide and those offered by the King's councillors who oppose them: Salisbury and Walworth. The one is introspective, cultivated, capable of compassion, tolerance, understanding; the other is ruthless, arrogant, full of anger and bloodthirst. All four are developed not only as public figures but as private men. Israel gives fullness to the verisimilitude of the fictional construction of their private lives by a sensitive portrayal of these men, their wives and their loves.

In order to provide variations in tone, and a full social context for the narrative, the author focuses attention from time to time upon a group of typical peasants who find their way into the forces of revolt: Abel Threder, Roger atte Well, Old Elias Roper, Robert Ogden. These characters are lively Chaucerian types and provide horseplay, earthy fabliau scenes, rollicking and pathetic simplicity. They are frankly "stock" figures, but are made to play their parts with gusto and feeling and are consequently well integrated into the fabric of the book.

The scenes of action are vividly staged; the medieval atmosphere constantly pervades the narrative; interest is never permitted to falter. *Who Was Then the Gentleman?* is an exciting reconstruction of a momentous event, presented with clarity, vitality and compassion.

J. DE BRUYN

A HEROIC AGE

GUSTAVE LANCTOT. *A History of Canada. Volume I: From its Origins to the Royal Regime, 1663*. Translated by Josephine Hambleton. Clarke, Irwin. $6.75.

THIS TRANSLATION of the first volume of Gustave Lanctot's *Histoire du Canada*, originally published in Montreal in 1959, is the best account available in English of "the heroic age" in New France. Dr. Lanctot's knowledge of the sources for this period, from the founding of the settlements on the St. Lawrence and in Acadia until the French crown took over direct responsibility for their affairs, is unequalled. Unfortunately, the English version suffers at times from a somewhat wooden translation.

The struggles of the French outposts in North America to maintain themselves against the Iroquois, the climate, the isolation of the wilderness, and the indifference of the home authorities made "la survivance" a driving force in French Canada from the earliest days, and, in the author's view, had produced by 1663 among the 2,500 settlers on the banks of the St. Lawrence a recognizable Canadian nationalism. Great credit for the persistence of the French enterprise in North America is rightly given to the Jesuits, but the subtleties of the relationship between the interests of the fur trading companies and those of the missionaries are not fully developed. This is not to imply that Dr. Lanctot belongs to the filio-pietistic school of French-Canadian historians; he has done battle with Canon Groulx and his supporters for many years, notably over the motives of Dollard des Ormeaux and the heroes of the Long Sault, and this volume makes plain that the early settlers were in the new world primarily to improve their economic lot and not as conscious bearers of French Catholic civilization. However, he is at some pains to defend the moral character of the settlers and traders against charges that there were among them many of doubtful virtue, and concludes that the evidence shows that "the people who came to Canada were healthy, hardworking and staunchly Catholic"; the most remarkable, but perhaps deceptive, statistic provided in support of this claim is that in the forty years before 1661 only one illegitimate birth was recorded in the colony.

The last two chapters are analytical and are the most interesting and valuable part of the book. Here the author discusses the failure of seventeenth-century Frenchmen to emigrate in larger numbers, the disastrous economic consequences of the persistent Iroquois wars, and the negligible success of the policy of the Frenchification of the Indian population. The publishers of this translation are to be congratulated for bringing Dr. Lanctot's book before English readers.

MARGARET PRANG

FAMOUS CANADIANS

The Macmillan Dictionary of Canadian Biography, edited by W. Stewart Wallace. Macmillan. $12.50.

THE PREPARATION at the University of Toronto of the massive *Dictionary of Canadian Biography* is proceeding at the

leisurely pace that is inevitable in such multi-volume works by many hands. As its instalments begin to appear, we shall at last have a reference work, compiled and written by historians, and presenting critical as well as informative studies of the leading figures of Canadian history, as well as factual notes on a vast number of minor celebrities. But the *Dictionary of Canadian Biography,* even when it appears, will inevitably be the kind of book that only a few scholars will be able to buy for their own collections; most of us will consult it in the libraries that can afford to purchase such expensive works. For those who need a reference book close to hand one can recommend *The Macmillan Dictionary of Canadian Biography,* which has just been republished in a revised and enlarged form under the editorship of Dr. W. Stewart Wallace.

It is a substantial volume — 822 pages in double column — and it contains some six thousand entries concerning Canadians who have died up to 1961; wisely, it avoids the living. The coverage is good. I made a list of twenty miscellaneous figures of relatively minor importance in politics, science and the arts, and found only one of them missing; this was an unfortunate omission, the novelist Louis Hémon. Thus the net has not swept in quite every man and woman worthy of inclusion — though the missing names of any significance are admittedly few — and in the same way it has occasionally allowed exactitude to slip through its meshes. Of Malcolm Lowry, for instance, we are told that "he lived in Canada ... for twenty-five years, from 1939 to 1954"; mere editorial vigilance should have trapped that error. But it is one of a very few that have sprung to my eye in a first extensive sampling of the volume; the general standard of accuracy is high.

The very difficulty of including 6,000 entries in a single volume has made it impossible for Dr. Wallace to include long or in any way critical studies in his *Dictionary.* Information takes the place of opinion in these brief studies, few of which are more than a single page column in length. But in almost every case there is an adequate selective bibliography to tell one where to go in case the skeleton of life facts presented is not sufficient. *The Macmillan Dictionary of Canadian Biography* in its enlarged form maintains its usefulness to the scholar, the writer or the journalist who needs at his desk's head a comprehensive reference book to the important Canadians of the distant and the recent past.

GEORGE WOODCOCK

C.B.C. AND OTHERS

ALBERT A. SHEA. *Broadcasting the Canadian Way.* Harvest House. $2.00.

THIS IS A USEFUL HANDBOOK. It is a pity it is not more. Chapters on "The Basic Issue," "The BBG," "The CBC," "Radio Canada" (which Mr. Shea sensibly treats as a separate organization), "CTV," "The Undefended Border," "The People, The Press and Parliament," and the past and future of broadcasting in Canada provide a handy summary of the present situation and how it grew. As these headings indicate, Mr. Shea's survey is comprehensive and, as far as I have been able to check, it is also accurate. Occasionally, condensation results

in a slight blurring of the facts (e.g., *CBC News* did not develop its own domestic reportorial staff until later than is suggested on p. 108, and in the "Preview Commentary" affair of 1959 the National Office of CBC Public Affairs and most of the Toronto producers did not "follow [the] example" of their leaders but resigned simultaneously with them). But these are minor matters. In general, Mr. Shea has produced a good introduction to the complexities of the broadcasting industry in this country, including clear explanations of such muddles as the Grey Cup controversy and of the basic debate over "single system" versus "dual system".

Given this, it is unfortunate that he manages to put off potential readers by a format that is sometimes agonizingly repetitious and a style which is at its best pedestrian and at its worst produces such sentences as: "For him [i.e., the private broadcaster] the license is a valuable asset for which he pulled many strings and may even have gambled some of his own cash, to obtain."

Even more unfortunate, it seems to me, is the absence of any theoretical approach to mass communications or of any original ideas about their role in contemporary society. Despite some evidence on p. 96 of a brief flirtation with Marshall McLuhan, Mr. Shea's general ideas about broadcasting tend to be the conventional pieties about the enormous power of the electronic media. It is understandable that he pleads for "a communications research institute."

To the extent that Mr. Shea has a bias, it is strongly pro-CBC. And so say all of us, though perhaps we may sometimes regret that criticism of the Corporation continues to come mainly either from those with an obvious interest in its emasculation or those whose commitment to it in principle inevitably causes them to pull their punches.

ROBERT MCCORMACK

THE FRONTIER OF WONDER

Nunny Bag 2; stories for six- to nine-year-olds. W. J. Gage.

Rubaboo 2; stories for boys and girls from ten to twelve. W. J. Gage.

OF THE TWO COLLECTIONS of stories, poems, and plays reviewed here, *Rubaboo 2* is the more successful; its greater success may well be due to the fact that its age group is somewhat easier to touch. Before the age of ten children thrive on fantasy — by far the most difficult writing to achieve — and stories that embody it and give it meaning are their first choice. Their wonder has not lost its edge. For them there never was a yesterday, there is no tomorrow, and the "never-never" world of the imagination impinges on the real so closely and so directly that the line between is indistinguishable. But after ten, they acquire memories, they know nostalgia, they are aware that there is a future and suspect that, after all, time is real. They now have a capacity to enjoy consciously stories that create mood or make social comments. The boundaries of their imaginations may be curtailed, but their ability to enjoy on an intellectual plane has increased. They are easier to write for since their demand for fantasy has lessened and their interests have broadened.

It is not surprising, then, to find that the realistic stories in *Rubaboo 2* are more numerous and of a consistently higher quality than those of fantasy in the same collection. Such examples of fantasy as there are — "The Golden Dragon" or "The Tailor and the Cat" — are too whimsical and precious, or ape the mannered telling of the traditional fairy tale without containing style and substance of their own. Among the happier of the realistic stories are the nostalgic remembrances of childhood passed, such as Vicki Branden's "The Pay was Ten Cents" which recreates the pleasures of life in a small town half a century ago. Other pieces in the collection contain social comment. This is particularly strong and plain in "Alley at the back of Things", a play by Les Wagar. Centered on the trifling incident of a butterfly captive in a bottle, this becomes, for children, an uncompromising look at life in a modern slum.

Nunny Bag 2 is decidedly weaker in both content and style than *Rubaboo 2*. Most of the writers have tended to "write down" to the children in their use of language and in the emotions they express. There is no story that touches sincerely or any deep feeling. Here again, the fantasy (such an important element with this age group) is not successful. "The Little Brown Fox", for example, in which a fur piece turns into a real fox, is too mundane in language and in approach to sustain any truly magic moment. The same plodding quality spoils Beulah Swayze's "The Big Adventure" which details a few hours in the life of a turtle and is an attempt at understated simplicity, but lacks the intensity that would have quickened it.

Some of the better things in the book are the poems. Paul Holliday's "Late, late in October" has just that mixture of humour and "spookiness" that children treasure. But such poems and other "better things" are disappointingly rare.

JOAN SELBY

INDIAN TRADER

D. GENEVA LENT. *West of the Mountains. James Sinclair and the Hudson's Bay Company.* University of Washington Press. $6.75.

BORN AT NORWAY HOUSE about 1806, son of a Hudson's Bay Company officer and a native-born mother, James Sinclair was educated in the Orkneys and at Edinburgh. On his return to the Northwest he soon established himself as an important member of the Red River community. Governor Simpson recognized his outstanding qualities of leadership when he chose him to conduct two parties of settlers from the Red River to the Oregon, one in 1841 and one in 1856, both by passes through the Rockies previously unknown except to the Indians. Sinclair was a prominent figure at the Sayer trial of 1849, the crisis of the struggle for free trade in the Northwest, when his calm restraint helped to turn an incipient revolt of the *Métis* into a peaceful victory over the Hudson's Bay Company. He was killed in an Indian raid in the blood-stained Oregon of 1856.

As the fur trade settled down under the overwhelming personality of George Simpson, many natives of the British Northwest had difficulty in finding an outlet for their abilities. An arresting

figure among them, James Sinclair eminently deserves a biography. Miss Lent has covered a wealth of source material in an effort to explore his relations with the Hudson's Bay Company and particularly with Governor Simpson. The reader's sympathies can hardly fail to be with Sinclair, but if the responsibility for the disastrous waste of his talents lies with Simpson and the Company, the case against them is inconclusively argued.

Biography is admittedly one of the most difficult forms of writing but the author's style scarcely does justice to her subject. In this sense, *West of the Mountains* is a surprising production to come from a university press. Surely the importance of the subject and the devotion of the author deserved more attention from its editorial staff.

L. G. THOMAS

BISHOPS AND BOOTS

T. C. B. BOON. *The Anglican Church from the Bay to the Rockies.* Ryerson Press.

MR. BOON IS AN ARCHIVIST of great knowledge and resourcefulness. He here recounts the history of his own communion, the Anglican Church in Canada, from its earliest beginnings to the present day. Coterminous with the development of European settlement in the territory of the Hudson's Bay Company, the Church of England (as it was for almost all its history) in western Canada has had to share the many trials and difficulties of the pioneer communities. Inevitably Mr. Boon's book becomes something of a chronicle of men and the places they ministered to. But he can draw on journals and memoirs to illustrate such remarkable characters as Bishop Bompas, who served in the Northwest for a generation, returning to Winnipeg only once in eighteen years, or Bishop Stringer of the Yukon, who achieved fame as the Bishop who ate his boots while struggling to reach a habitation after an overland trek to an Indian settlement in the Arctic winter.

Mr. Boon pays particular attention to the ministry to the Indians and the Eskimos. We are forever in the debt of the early missionaries for their skill in translating and transliterating the natives' languages. He has sadly to acknowledge that with the withdrawal of the English missionary societies' interest in these peoples, there has not been a corresponding growth and recognition of their significance among the Canadian Church.

There is no discussion here of theological trends, and virtually nothing about the activities of other church bodies. But for an accurate chronicle of the life and witness of these men and their families who contributed so much to the formation of western Canada, this is a valuable source of reference.

JOHN S. CONWAY

HOW LONG, O LAIRDS, HOW LONG?

A Canadian Anthology, edited by Fred Cogswell. The Bliss Carman Poetry Society, Fredericton. $1.00.

IT'S LONG BEEN BRUITED about that Fred Cogswell, through some policy of hyperdemocracy, prints as many non-poems as poems in *The Fiddlehead*; and here comes confirmation of that rumor, in an

anthology that certainly can't claim to be even The Best of *The Fiddlehead*, but a very accurate cross-section of that magazine's verse over the last fifteen years. For every Alden Nowlan, find a Muriel E. Newton-White ("Ah, Land of Whirring Wings"), for each Henry Moscovitch, an Elizabeth Brewster ("The Loneliness that Wrapped Her Round").

There is not even a precise one-for-one balance, because a third group intrudes, composed of those who have clambered into the Canadian literary establishment, that windy loft, by no visible means of ascent. Here is Daryl Hine, playing with his shiny old technique in one corner; here is Wilfred Watson, eulogizing Dylan Thomas while imitating him; here is Alfred Purdy, probably the most-published-in-Canada poet, casting further shadow on the enigma of How Has He Done It?; here too are Eli Mandel, Robert Finch, and A. J. M. Smith.

There are, it's true, in addition to Nowlan's poems, two (out of three) good poems by Layton; one by Gustafson; one by M. Morris (that sure ironic tone!); and one of Milton Acorn's — "Charlottetown Harbor" — seems worthy of anthologizing. But one wonders if these few examples will suffice to set all the dylantantes, maiden aunties, schoolteachers and pseudo-philosophers on the right track — which in many instances may involve their resignation from the pursuit of poetry-writing.

DAVID BROMIGE

LOVE AND LOSS

LEONARD COHEN. *The Favourite Game*. British Book Service. $4.00.

THE MONTREAL POET Leonard Cohen has written a novel about a Montreal poet called Lawrence Breavman. The author's description of himself on the back of the jacket is the key to his style and really, whether he intended it or not, sequel to the life of Lawrence Breavman: "... lived in London as a Lord, pursuing the fair, my accent opening the tightest Georgian palaces where I flourished dark and magnificent as Othello. In Oslo where I existed in a Nazi poster ..." The note of antic hyperbole, hints of a rich, funny, and tragic sex life, are all extensions of the narcissistic posture of Lawrence Breavman, of whom it can at least be said that he is a new character in Canadian fiction: where before have we had such cheerfully hedonistic accounts of sexual experience?

The Favourite Game, then, is love, and it is also the occasion of an intriguing and ambiguous image at the close of the book, a childhood game in which jumping children leave queer, flower-shaped patterns on the snow. The image is beautifully set, told in context with a stabbing carelessness (a hastily scribbled note in the poet's journal) and, in having us consider a picture of childish innocence and beauty at the end of this story of youthful betrayals and leave-takings, is plainly designed to emphasize what Breavman has lost. (Loss is love's counter-theme, Breavman's name presumably a pun on bereavement.) But the snow image, for all the author's care, is still a sentimental one, and the book strikes, with its bravado, its sexual pining, its claspings and partings against a backdrop of upper-class Montreal and graduate student New York, the tough-sentimental note of a thirties film into which, unaccountably, a few modern-day characters have been dropped.

I say this because Breavman is very much a hero of today: his emotion is seldom externalized, it is compressed inwards in a way that suggests the acting style of the James Dean era. His gabbiness is a way of deflecting emotion rather than expressing it. Yet there is a tide of feeling running through the novel, and it is Cohen's success that for much of its length he is able to make it real. When he fails it is because the ironies of Breavman become indistinguishable from the author's.

Having obscurely traced my own disappointment (and obscurely expressed it, I fear) I then wondered why I had liked the book so much. First of all, it is unmanufactured: whatever its affinities, it is clearly the work of an individual mind. It is extremely good on growing up, a child's sexual and social curiosity, the upper-class Jewish milieu of Montreal ("We are Victorian gentlemen of Hebraic persuasion",) and the growing apart of two boyhood friends. Breavman's is I think one of the best growings-up in Canadian writing, true and funny and very much of a time and place. In the central episode, the novelettish element obtrudes: careful never to utter the word "love" to his girls, he finally meets *the* girl. Characteristically, he sees her in a New York cafeteria with another man, walks trembling up to her table, and makes a declaration of her beauty ("You're beautiful, I think,") before her doomed companion, and walks out. He

thereafter courts her, wins her, hoards her past and present in his literary hands and then, for want of sense and courage, fearing permanent entrapment, he leaves her. The story moves into a uniquely unconvincing episode in which Breavman, irresponsible in all his adult encounters, assumes a protectiveness towards a half-mad child at a summer camp. The child dies, crushed by a bulldozer. Breavman, already into a new affair, talks to his old love on the telephone from Montreal, trying to keep alive a dialogue every word of which is now a knife in the girl's stomach. The novel does not escape the synthetic nature of all this unspoken suffering. The image of a lost innocence remains purely a literary device.

GEORGE ROBERTSON

DIVERS HISTORIES

A PRODUCT OF THE PAPERBACK REVOLUTION, in its spread to Canada, has been the sudden availability of important historical texts that have long been difficult to obtain outside the libraries. The *aficionados* of history — representative of a growing class of readers in present-day Canada — can begin to fill the gaps in their libraries through such new series of reprints as the Carleton Library (McClelland & Stewart) and the Canadian University Paperbacks (University of Toronto Press). Among the recent Carleton books are *Lord Durham's Mission to Canada* ($2.35), which comprises the Canadian chapters of Chester New's definitive biography of Radical Jack, and Aileen Dunham's *Political Unrest in Upper Canada, 1815-1832* ($2.35), the original publication of which marked something of an epoch in studies of the development of the idea of responsible government through the actual cut-and-thrust of Canadian proto-politics in the first third of the nineteenth century. A volume of selected passages from the Jesuit Relations, edited by S. R. Mealing ($1.95), resurrects the flavour of the frontier fringes of New France during the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries through the eyes of the Jesuit missionaries; against the background of an often brilliantly evoked primitive Indian culture, the baroque spirit of the counter-revolution stands out in all its courage and its eccentric pietism. In the Canadian University Paperbacks the most important volume bearing on Canadian history to appear recently is Kenneth MacNaught's sensitive and sensible biography of J. S. Woodsworth, *A Prophet in Politics* ($2.25).

G.W.

CANADIAN LITERATURE - 1963

A CHECKLIST EDITED BY INGLIS F. BELL

ENGLISH-CANADIAN LITERATURE

compiled by Inglis F. Bell

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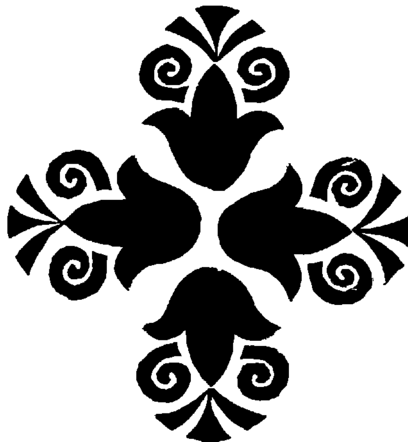

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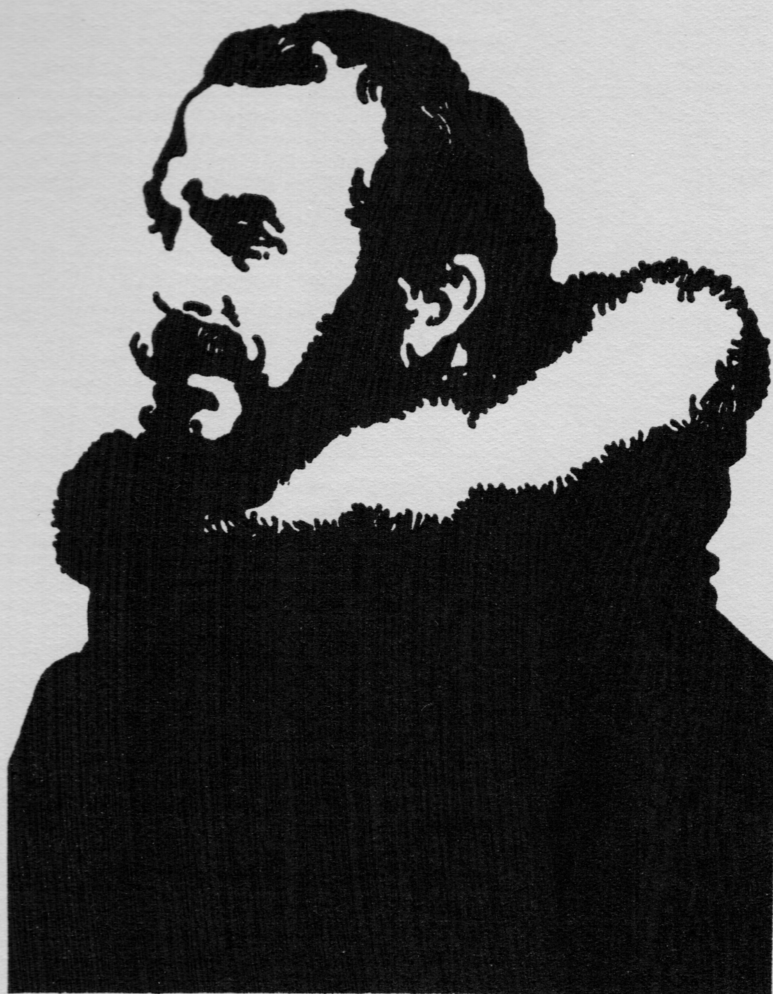

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