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CANADIAN LITERATURE No. 24

Spring, 1965

LITERARY HISTORY IN CANADA

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contributors

A. J. M. SMITH was one of the most active of the new group of Canadian poets who appeared during the 1930's. His Collected Poems were the subject of a special issue of *Canadian Literature*. He is editor of the *Oxford Book of Canadian Verse* and other important anthologies.

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editorial

CANADIAN BIOGRAPHY

WE ARE PLEASED TO ANNOUNCE that the British Columbia Medal for Popular Biography, which is administered by *Canadian Literature*, has been awarded to Phyllis Grosskurth for her *John Addington Symonds: A Biography*, which the judges unanimously regarded as by far the best biography published in 1964 by a Canadian writer. Mrs. Grosskurth's book is a lucid and penetrating study of her subject. She considers carefully and delicately the tensions that afflicted Symonds as an upper-middle-class Victorian who spent half his life resisting and the other half guiltily accepting his homosexual inclinations; she suggests with appropriate obliqueness the reasons for the great gap between Symonds' evident promise as a writer and his actual literary achievement; above all, the architecture of her book is beautifully balanced, and the writing admirably sensitive and clear. *John Addington Symonds*, published in Canada by Longmans, stands so far above any other biographical work published by a Canadian during 1964 that there was no moment of doubt that it deserved the award.

This is the first time in many years that the U.B.C. Medal for Popular Biography has been awarded for a work on a non-Canadian subject. This does not mean that the judges in the past were unduly chauvinistic. During the years following the end of the last war there was a great burst of biographical activity directed at Canadian figures of historical importance, for the simple reason that few good Lives of the fathers of Canada actually existed. Now that the major part of this task is done, it is perhaps a sign of cultural maturity that Canadian scholars are showing an increasing tendency to look for subjects beyond our boundaries and in this way to re-assert continuity with the common Anglo-Saxon tradition.

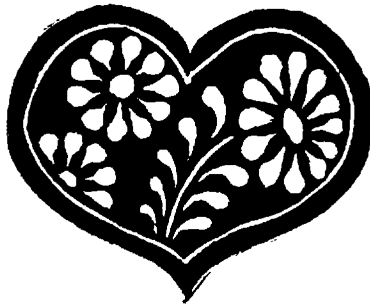
"I FEEL, LIKE MOST OTHER VERSE WRITERS of my generation, that I do not know how much of my mind he invented, let alone how much of it is a reaction against him or indeed a consequence of misreading him. He had a very penetrating influence, perhaps not unlike an east wind."

So, seventeen years ago, William Empson wrote of T. S. Eliot. In this year of Eliot's death the same might be said, and not only by verse writers, wherever English is used as a literary language. Even the youngest generation of writers belongs, by inheritance or derivation, to the revolution in creative and critical attitudes which Eliot and Pound, Joyce and Wyndham Lewis, Hulme and Ford, set going in the years between 1914 and 1922.

Revolutions usually develop in ways which surprise their originators, and there are many younger writers, in reaction against all preceding generations, who would deny Eliot's poetics as fervently as most modern writers deny those manifestations of religious and political conservatism which — in Eliot's case — illustrate how carefully we must avoid being influenced by a writer's opinions when we set out to judge him as a literary artist. But the fact remains that poetry and criticism in English, and to a less extent even drama, are different from what they might have been — in Canada and India as much as in Britain and the United States — because of that extraordinarily penetrative influence which Eliot began to wield in the crucial year of 1917, when he published both *Prufrock* and his first critical writings on Pound, and which persists even after his death.

Within the wider tradition of writing in English, the common elements are more important than those that mark the individuality of national or regional strains. Eliot, like James, stands as a symbol of the fact that, no matter how far writing in North America may become differentiated from that in Britain, impassable gulfs are never created, and influences that are vital still flow from land to land on the sea of a common language. What unites is as precious as what sets apart, and so we join in the tribute to T. S. Eliot, whose ultimate influence is perhaps incalculable, but without whom few of us — in Canada as well as elsewhere — would have written quite as we have done. Leaving to posterity the judgment of comparative greatness, it can still be said that Eliot, like Shakespeare and Wordsworth, like Dante and Gogol, was one of those artists who erect weirs across the stream of literature, making of what goes before them a past to which we cannot return, and forcing writers who follow them to choose the forms of expression that are proper to their times and places as well as to their own natures.

CONTINUING THE COMMON STRAIN, we may welcome, as an event of interest to anyone concerned with the circumstances under which writers work, the appearance of a fascinating study, *The Profession of Letters* (Toronto, $5.75), by J. W. Saunders of the University of Leeds. Mr. Saunders is concerned with the development of a profession of writing in Britain from the time of Chaucer up to the present day. In the strict sense, professional writing for publication is no older even in England than the earlier part of the eighteenth century, and it appeared in Canada little more than a century afterwards. However, Canadian professional writers have relied very largely on publication in Britain and the United States, and it is only in comparatively recent years that the kind of responsible publishing which might be the foundation for a real local profession of letters has begun to appear in Canada. In the sense that every Canadian writer still hopes for London publication, both to make his royalties worthwhile and also to gain something more than a local accolade, what Mr. Saunders has to say is very much our business. Moreover, as Canadian publishing and a Canadian profession of letters develop and interact, there will undoubtedly be a great deal to learn from the experience of Britain, where the back lane to Parnassus is called Grub Street.



A REJECTED PREFACE

A. J. M. Smith

In 1936 appeared the historic anthology, New Provinces, *which has always been regarded as one of the most important events in the history of English poetry. A. J. M. Smith was one of the six contributors, together with Finch, Klein, Kennedy, Pratt and Scott. Smith wrote the original preface to* New Provinces. *E. J. Pratt objected to its contents and it was withdrawn in favour of a preface written by F. R. Scott. Now, almost thirty years later, we print that original preface for the first time.*

THE BULK OF CANADIAN VERSE is romantic in conception and conventional in form. Its two great themes are Nature and Love — nature humanized, endowed with feeling, and made sentimental; love idealized, sanctified, and inflated. Its characteristic type is the lyric. Its rhythms are definite, mechanically correct, and obvious; its rhymes are commonplace.

The exigencies of rhyme and rhythm are allowed to determine the choice of a word so often that a sensible reader is compelled to conclude that the plain sense of the matter is of only minor importance. It is the arbitrarily chosen verse pattern that counts. One has the uncomfortable feeling in reading such an anthology as W. W. Campbell's *The Oxford Book of Canadian Verse* or J. W. Garvin's *Canadian Poets* that the writers included are not interested in saying anything in particular; they merely wish to show that they are capable of turning out a number of regular stanzas in which statements are made about the writer's emotions, say "In Winter", or "At Montmorenci Falls", or "In A Birch Bark

Canoe". Other exercises are concerned with pine trees, the open road, God, snowshoes or Pan. The most popular experience is to be pained, hurt, stabbed or seared by Beauty — preferably by the yellow flame of a crocus in the spring or the red flame of a maple leaf in autumn.

There would be less objection to these poems if the observation were accurate and its expression vivid, or if we could feel that the emotion was a genuine and intense one. We could then go on to ask if it were a valuable one. But, with a negligible number of exceptions, the observation is general in these poems and the descriptions are vague. The poet's emotions are unbounded, and are consequently lacking in the intensity which results from discipline and compression; his thinking is of a transcendental or theosophical sort that has to be taken on faith. The fundamental criticism that must be brought against Canadian poetry as a whole is that it ignores the intelligence. And as a result it is dead.

Our grievance, however, against the great dead body of poetry laid out in the mortuary of the *Oxford Book* or interred under Garvin's florid epitaphs is not so much that it is dead but that its sponsors in Canada pretend that it is alive. Yet it should be obvious to any person of taste that this poetry cannot now, and in most cases never could, give the impression of being vitally concerned with real experience. The Canadian poet, if this kind of thing truly represents his feelings and his thoughts, is a half-baked, hyper-sensitive, poorly adjusted, and frequently neurotic individual that no one in his senses would trust to drive a car or light a furnace. He is the victim of his feelings and fancies, or of what he fancies his feelings ought to be, and his emotional aberrations are out of all proportion to the experience that brings them into being. He has a soft heart and a soft soul; and a soft head. No wonder nobody respects him, and few show even the most casual interest in his poetry. A few patriotic professors, one or two hack journalist critics, and a handful of earnest anthologists — these have tried to put the idea across that there exists a healthy national Canadian poetry which expresses the vigorous hope of this young Dominion in a characteristically Canadian style, etc., etc., but the idea is so demonstrably false that no one but the interested parties has been taken in.

We do not pretend that this volume contains any verse that might not have been written in the United States or in Great Britain. There is certainly nothing specially Canadian about more than one or two poems. Why should there be? Poetry today is written for the most part by people whose emotional and intellectual heritage is not a national one; it is either cosmopolitan or provincial, and, for good or evil, the forces of civilization are rapidly making the latter scarce.

A large number of the verses in this book were written at a time when the contributors were inclined to dwell too exclusively on the fact that the chief thing wrong with Canadian poetry was its conventional and insensitive technique. Consequently, we sometimes thought we had produced a good poem when all we had done in reality was not produce a conventional one. In Canada this is a deed of some merit.

In attempting to get rid of the facile word, the stereotyped phrase and the mechanical rhythm, and in seeking, as the poet today must, to combine colloquialism and rhetoric, we were of course only following in the path of the more significant poets in England and the United States. And it led, for a time, to the creation of what, for the sake of brevity, I will call "pure poetry."

A theory of pure poetry might be constructed on the assumption that a poem exists as a thing in itself. It is not a copy of anything or an expression of anything, but is an individuality as unique as a flower, an elephant or a man on a flying trapeze. Archibald MacLeish expressed the idea in *Ars Poetica* when he wrote,

> A poem should not mean, but be.

Such poetry is objective, impersonal, and in a sense timeless and absolute. It stands by itself, unconcerned with anything save its own existence.

Not unconnected with the disinterested motives that produce "pure" poetry are those which give rise to imagist poetry. The imagist seeks with perfect objectivity and impersonality to recreate a thing or arrest an experience as precisely and vividly and simply as possible. Mr. Kennedy's *Shore*, Mr. Scott's *trees in ice,* my own *Creek* are examples of the simpler kind of imagist verse; Mr. Finch's *Teacher*, tiny as it is, of the more complex. In *Shore* and *Creek* the reader may notice that the development of the poem depends upon metrical devices as much as on images; the music is harsh and the rhythm difficult.

Most of the verses in this book are not, however, so unconcerned with thought as those mentioned. In poems like *Epithalamium*, *the Five Kine*, *Words for a Resurrection* and *Like An Old Proud King* an attempt has been made to fuse thought and feeling. Such a fusion is characteristic of the kind of poetry usually called metaphysical. Good metaphysical verse is not, it must be understood, concerned with the communication of ideas. It is far removed from didactic poetry. What it is concerned with is the emotional effect of ideas that have entered so deeply into the blood as never to be questioned. Such poetry is primarily lyrical; it should seem spontaneous. Something of the quality I am suggesting is to be found in such lines as

> The wall was there, oh perilous blade of glass

or

> This Man of April walks again

In the poems just mentioned thought is the root, but it flowers in the feeling. They are essentially poems of the sensibility, a little bit melancholy, perhaps a little too musical. A healthier robustness is found in satirical verse, such as Mr. Scott's much needed counterblast against the Canadian Authors Association, or in the anti-romanticism of Mr. Klein's

> And my true love,
> She combs and combs,
> The lice from off
> My children's domes.

The appearance of satire, and also of didactic poetry that does not depend upon wit, would be a healthy sign in Canadian poetry. For it would indicate that our poets are realizing, even if in an elementary way, that poetry is more concerned with expressing exact ideas than wishy-washy "dreams." It would indicate, too, that the poet's lofty isolation from events that are of vital significance to everybody was coming to an end.

Detachment, indeed, or self-absorption is (for a time only, I hope) becoming impossible. The era of individual liberty is in eclipse. Capitalism can hardly be expected to survive the cataclysm its most interested adherents are blindly steering towards, and the artist who is concerned with the most intense of experiences must be concerned with the world situation in which, whether he likes it or not, he finds himself. For the moment at least he has something more important to do than to record his private emotions. He must try to perfect a technique that will combine power with simplicity and sympathy with intelligence so that he may play his part in developing mental and emotional attitudes that will facilitate the creation of a more practical social system.

Of poetry such as this, there is here only the faintest foreshadowing — a fact that is not unconnected with the backwardness politically and economically of Canada — but that Canadian poetry in the future must become increasingly aware of its duty to take cognizance of what is going on in the world of affairs we are sure.

That the poet is not a dreamer, but a man of sense; that poetry is a discipline because it is an art; and that it is further a useful art; these are propositions which it is intended this volume shall suggest. We are not deceiving ourselves that it has proved them.

1. Its Modest Successes

Donald Stephens

Our literature is not yet one of the world's great literatures, and may never be; but it is our own, and it has its modest successes as well as its dismal failures. Our literary history may not be glorious, but it is ours and we should be aware of it — even if only to learn from our own mistakes.

SO ENDS DESMOND PACEY'S *Creative Writing in Canada*, and so is stated the reason why he wrote it. Apparently, too, this is the reason for the *Literary History of Canada*, a massive work which will prove an indispensable reference book to students of Canadian literature in Canada, and around the world. This collection of essays on the whole growth of Canadian literature is of major importance. It answers countless questions, and will be extremely useful to authors, teachers, and general readers. Desmond Pacey did a great service to Canadian letters by compiling his book; Carl Klinck and his editors have extended the whole direction and brought forth a commendable work.

Up to now there has been little real criticism of Canadian literature available to the student in comprehensive form. There is a plethora of short essays, articles, and monographs on specific authors, numerous in number but restricted in subject matter. There is the rare book dealing with a specific author. But until the last ten years, books focusing on the history and criticism of Canadian literature have been uninspiring.

There were few studies done before the First World War, but major criticism came after it, thriving on the new nationalism that was a product of the war. Vigorous as the nationalism may have been, the identity of Canadian literature was left somewhat vague. Logan and French's *Highways of Canadian Literature*,

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published in 1924, seemed to apologize for its existence, for "however insignificant, from the point of view of world literature, Canadian literature may be, it is *important to Canadians themselves*." The book was focused on new nationalism and was strongly didactic in style and tone. It was directed to people who were only semi-aware that a Canadian literature in itself did exist. The criteria for admitting the existence of Canadian literature was:

> That verse and prose rise to the dignity of literature when they express and promote existence ideally — by delighting the æsthetic senses, by consoling the heart, by inspiring the moral imagination, by exalting or transporting the spirit.

With these aims and ideas, and a large dose of flagrant exaggeration, Logan and French were often capable of insipid moralizing and pompous grandiloquence. They considered Canadian literature to start with John Richardson; for them Frances Brooke was an incidental visitor. For them, the birthright was important in determining the Canadianness of the product they were selling. Kirby's *The Golden Dog* belonged to emigré literature; Sir Gilbert Parker is the best that Canada has produced because of his Canadian spirit.

The next historical study was Lorne Pierce's *Outline of Canadian Literature*, published in 1927, and here Kirby takes his place as part of the country, but

Frances Brooke is still an outsider. But Pierce is not sure of the quality of Canadian literature, and concludes that "by every token we surely have at hand the elements out of which *may* evolve a great people and a splendid literature". A biographical sketch of an author, a list of books, and short comments on the author's major works, make up in each case his history and criticism. And in 1927, Pierce, the friend of Carman, the man bred in the strictures of Victorianism, can say about Gilbert Parker that "there are many elevated moral passages in his book, as well as a fine use of the Scriptures. Parker is also free from morbidity, sombre psychology and sex; he is wholesome and yet virile". This is not good criticism, but Pierce is very certain of his authority and his opinions seem not to ask for either doubt or criticism.

Pierce set the method and plan that were to follow in much Canadian criticism after his time. V. B. Rhodenizer's *Handbook of Canadian Literature*, published in 1930, shows the Pierce influence of short biographical sketches, lists of books and short criticism, but with detailed studies of Kirby and Parker; Kirby's *The Golden Dog* he considered to be the best work produced in Canada, with Grove closely following. But Rhodenizer was moved by the spirit of his time and could question the "vicious prudery" of Grove's *Settlers of the Marsh*. His criticism seems more reasonable and contemporary in spirit, though he is not sure "whether there is a Canadian national sentiment of which Canadian men and women of letters are the voice". There followed for almost twenty years a repetition of Pierce's direction: the sketches of individual authors.

Pacey's *Creative Writing in Canada*, first published in 1952, revised in 1961, is unquestionably the best and most definitive work of criticism concerning the whole of Canadian writing until the *Literary History of Canada*. He still qualifies his statements when he feels that Callaghan, Moore, and Richler are the best writers that Canada has produced, yet they are "at the most charitable estimate, secondary figures on the world literary stage". But if Pacey's critical statements may be questioned, his pattern study of Canadian literature cannot. His book sets the patterns of Canadian prose: the historical romance and the regional idyll of the old past, the prairie realism of the near past, and the urban realism of the present. He explains the causes for these trends cogently and clearly in his conclusion. He argues that Canadian fiction has been held back by the slow and unspectacular growth of our society, by the complexity of that society which has forced authors back into the past or into romanticism and by "our distrust of abstract thought and our lingering puritanism". His thought and writing throughout the book are quick moving and perceptive. Admittedly he glosses over many

things, but his is a great, if not the greatest, contribution to Canadian criticism. He unlocked a door. The editors of the *Literary History of Canada* have opened it.

CANADIAN LITERATURE is definitely in a state of spirited movement, particularly in poetry. With this new literature will come a new criticism, for criticism needs a vital source if it is to be vibrant itself. It is surprising that the most vigorous decades of Canadian literature, the last thirty years, are the most poorly treated in this new volume. Before that, however, the writers in this volume have done an excellent job. Many gaps have been filled; there are the studies of the animal stories, the travel works, of minor novelists in the last part of the nineteenth century. When the writers feel that they should stress the work of a certain author they do so with little or no apology. There is a wonderful kind of astringency to most of the writing that invigorates, but does not overpraise the literature being discussed. The writing for the most part is extremely interesting and lively. No writer of any quality is ignored; Frances Brooke is included, as are Brian Moore and Malcolm Lowry, the famous visitors.

This book serves a great need of the student of Canadian letters; it is often well written, and shows some amazing perceptions. The conclusion is brilliant, as one could expect from Northrop Frye. The work of the editors, Alfred G. Bailey, Claude Bissell, Roy Daniells, Northrop Frye, Desmond Pacey, is extremely good. The index is precise and clear, yet the book is more than a mere catalogue of the historical growth of English literature in Canada. Carl Klinck has put together a series of essays which notably present an historical but also a critical examination of writing in Canada. The book is far too expensive for a general reader, however, and, because of its size and poor binding, easily falls apart — something one does not expect from a book priced at $18. There are some interesting omissions; Evelyn Richardson and Lord Beaverbrook (his biography of R. B. Bennett, surely, should be included here) for instance, but these are bound to happen and the care with which others are included shows that the editors were not often forgetful.

Canadian literature has needed a book like this for over a hundred years. It is easy to disregard it because it is often necessarily superfluous, and some of the criticism makes one wonder if the specific works mentioned were read with any care. But these surely, are minor points. Most important, I think, the *Literary History of Canada* establishes once and for all that there is good writing in our

country, not writing that has to be praised because of nationalism, or writing that reveals the author as the last champion of the individual mind and sensibility against an intrusive society, but writing that is here, and has been here, and continues to be here. The book is long, but it is never completely dull, and often the perception revealed by established critics shows a refinement of taste and attitude, and supports Frye's vision that "the writers featured in this book have identified the habits and attitudes of the country, . . . they have also left an imaginative legacy of dignity and of high courage."

2. *The Long Day's Task*

George Woodcock

SIX YEARS AGO, when *Canadian Literature* came into being, work had already started on the *Literary History of Canada.* Now the long-expected work has at last appeared, a massive volume of 945 pages, written and edited by a team of thirty-three Canadian scholars. A vast common labour of so many hands cannot be considered lightly; the very activity which the preparation of the work had generated marks a stage in the development of Canadian studies, and the finished work will inevitably influence our views of Canadian literature and sub-literature for long in the future.

Before considering how far the *Literary History of Canada* has succeeded, one must consider the objective which the editors set themselves. Wisely, and apparently deliberately, the title of *A History of Canadian Literature* was not chosen. The word *literature* carries a qualitative connotation, and if we take this seriously, the proportion of books published in Canada or by Canadians which it might cover is slight indeed. To give only one example, the first 188 pages of the *Literary History* deal with the period up to 1880, and mention several hundred titles; it is doubtful whether — apart from the narrations of explorers and travellers which Dr. Victor Hopwood describes so ably — there are more than a score of books from this period which would pass muster either as notable examples of good writing or even as acceptable entertainment for the common reader.

The editors of the *Literary History* have in some degree anticipated this objection in the introduction which Professor Carl Klinck has written on their behalf; this tells us that they have chosen the title of *A Literary History of Canada*, rather than calling their volume "a history of literature" because:

> ... the latter carries too limited a suggestion of a review of books. Each term indicates that temporal sequence is not to be neglected; but the latter would not have conveyed fully the purpose of noting whatever germinates, grows, continues, recurs, or becomes distinctive, perhaps unique. This volume represents a positive attempt to give a history of Canada in terms of writings which deserve more or less attention because of significant thought, form and use of language. It also aims to contribute to criticism by offering reasons for singling out those works regarded as best.

This statement justifies one aspect of the *Literary History* — the comprehensiveness that brings in not only the works of poetry, fiction, criticism, drama, etc., which one would normally expect in a history of literature, but also philosophic, scientific, religious and theological writings with neither literary intent nor literary merit.

At the same time, the editors, according to Professor Klinck's introduction, at least began with the intention of seeking out whatever deserved "more or less attention because of significant thought, form and use of language" and of making some selective and critical judgments on the works which were mentioned in the *Literary History.* Presumably this intention was transmitted to the contributors, and their work can therefore be judged fairly on this basis.

It is difficult, in fact, to make a comprehensive judgment of the *Literary History* since there is much variety of approach, and an equal variety of quality, between the various chapters. Critics of the project as it was originally presented pointed out the dangers of committing a work of this nature to so many different hands — some of them untried — and in the event these doubts have been largely justified. One of the principal faults of the *Literary History* is the evident division among its authors between those who consider that they are writing sections of a mere reference book, and who painstakingly list every publication within their period, and those who consider that their function is a more selective and critical one — to show the spirit of a period as revealed in its best or most typical books.

Since the output of Canadian writers has inevitably grown more prolific from decade to decade over the past two centuries, there is a tendency for this division of approach to be complicated by the actual period with which a contributor is dealing. Fred Cogswell and Carl Klinck, discussing the eighteenth and early

nineteenth centuries, have little difficulty in naming almost all the works with literary pretensions that appeared during their period; they even comment on many of them individually. By the end of the nineteenth century the flood of publications had become too great for this kind of treatment to be feasible. Gordon Roper, for example, found that Canadian writers between 1880 and 1920 published 1,400 volumes of fiction, and in his chapter, "New Forces: New Fiction" he claims the unenviable achievement of having read "only about two-thirds of the volumes published in those years, all that is at the moment available in Canadian and American libraries." Though Professor Roper's discussion of the novelists of this period assumes at times the aspect of a catalogue, with names of books flowing out in virtually meaningless sequence, he still does not succeed in mentioning, let alone commenting on, all the 900 or so novels which he actually read.

All this, of course, does not mean that reference books, catalogues and bibliographies are not necessary tools of literary scholarship. But we have to be extremely careful how far the scholarly mechanic is allowed to usurp the functions of the perceptive critic; there is no doubt that the proportion of uncritical listing of titles in *A Literary History of Canada* detracts from its value as a work based on writings distinguished by "significant thought, form and use of language". Obviously only a small proportion of the works whose names are mentioned and then passed by in various chapters of the *Literary History* have the smallest pretensions to lasting significance.

Some contributors, it is true, have not only written good literary history, drawing out the meaningful trends of the times they discuss, but have also criticized and evaluated judiciously. I have already remarked on the excellence of the two early chapters by Victor G. Hopwood on "Explorers by Land (to 1860)" and "Explorers by Sea: The West Coast". Not only does Dr. Hopwood admirably re-create the spirit of the narratives he discusses; he also makes good critical appraisals, and his defence of his admiration for David Thompson is in itself admirable.

Fred Cogswell on the early writers of the Maritimes shows a curiously divided attitude which sometimes has its rewards. He is constantly warning us not to make too much of the works he discusses. The writing of this time and place, he tells us, "is more significant when considered as history and sociology than it is when considered as literature." It adopts forms "already out of date in England"; it is "exclusively the province of the amateur"; it is "the vicarious fulfilment of frustrated hopes". Yet, having made these reservations, he can often

enter into the spirit of the times he discusses to such an extent that he praises for their charm such works as Cartwright's *Labrador*:

> So cutting cold, so blust'ring Boreas blows,
> None can with naked Face, his blasts oppose.
> But well wrapp'd up, we travel out secure,
> And find Health's blessings, in an Air so pure.

Occasionally, as in his brief section on Henry Alline, he even transmits to us some of the sympathy which he himself has developed towards these deservedly half-forgotten authors. But Cogswell, unlike most of the contributors to the *Literary History*, is a practicing writer, a poet, and this has enabled him to reach a kind of understanding which accepts the author he discusses — no matter how inferior — as a human being reacting as best he can to his situation and perhaps showing some grain of originality or mental courage in doing so. This is one of the ways of dealing interestingly with work which one knows would crumble like a mummy before the first breath of a direct critical judgment.

Carl F. Klinck, who also, in discussing the earlier writers of the Canadas, has to deal with material equally vulnerable to criticism, contrives often to arouse interest in work whose merits hardly deserve it by his sheer enthusiasm for the peculiar, out-of-the-way or hidden fact. His style reflects his enthusiasm, and he delights in sentences crammed to bursting point with descriptive phrases.

> ... The term "Canadian" was equivalent to "*canadien*", that is North American French, and the image of Canada was made up of seigneurs, habitants, black-clothed clergy, advocates, *coureurs de bois*, *voyageurs*, French Hurons at Lorette, Gallic gaiety, rides in *caleches* or sleighs, folk singing, farm labour, lumbering, church-going, and villages scattered along the banks of the St. Lawrence. The English image, significant of power but also picturesque, included vice-regal display, military colour and bustle, polite sport, harbours full of transatlantic ships, vast stores for continental trade and development, political quarrelling, and high social life.

So it goes on, the portmanteau sentences exuberantly spilling their miscellaneous contents one beside the other. Dr. Klinck is nothing if not devoted to his subject, and at times — for example in his advocacy of the claims to "priority among the poets of the Canada" of the Montreal versifier Levi Adams — he takes one up in the quest rather as a detective story writer might do. We remain unconvinced of the literary worth of anything Levi Adams ever wrote, but for the time being his defender's zeal has made the question of Who First? seem worth following to a solution.

WHILE WRITERS LIKE Cogswell and Klinck can sometimes succeed — by their sympathetically understanding or scholarly enthusiastic approaches — in giving a certain bloom of interest to works which are intrinsically dull, concentrating on men and facts where the works themselves will not bear close examination, it is disappointing to find that the contributors to the *Literary History* who have at their command the much richer fields of Canadian writing in the present century are so often unable to win, let alone hold our attention.

This failure to produce a really adequate critical as well as informational survey of modern Canadian literature is emphasised by the presence of an excellent bridge between the proto-literature before 1880 and the literature after 1920 in the form of the three chapters by Roy Daniells on the so-called Confederation poets and their contemporaries. I do not think anyone has stated more clearly or with a closer, more searching insight than Dr. Daniells the limitations and the real achievements of Lampman, Carman, Roberts and Duncan Campbell Scott. He is at once critical and appreciative; he presents the most convincing case I have yet read for the serious consideration of these writers within the context of a developing Canadian literature. Here at least the avowed intent of the *Literary History* is admirably fulfilled, as it is in a number of the more peripheral essays, such as Jay Macpherson's short but sensitive chapter on Autobiography and F. W. Watt's fine survey of the Literature of Protest considered in the context of a rapidly changing Canadian society.

It is, unfortunately, a downward slope to the six chapters which deal with the most fruitful period of Canadian writing — most fruitful in qualitative achievement as well as in the actual amount of literary production. Desmond Pacey describes fiction from 1920 to 1940 and Hugo McPherson from 1940 to 1960. In the four succeeding chapters Munro Beattie discusses Poetry from 1920 to 1935, E. J. Pratt, Poetry from 1935 to 1950, and Poetry from 1950 to 1960.

Dr. Pacey, who has always been a literary historian rather than a literary critic, tends, as ever, towards a much too level plane of appreciation, which makes him devote excessive attention to minor and justifiably dated figures. He gives, for example, twice as much space to the short stories of Jessie G. Sime as to those which Morley Callaghan wrote during his best period. It is true that Pacey devotes much more attention to Callaghan's novels, but here, though one must agree with his final judgment of this author — that "he most fully succeeded . . . in the three novels of the mid-thirties" — he does not penetrate very deeply into the complexities behind the apparent simplicity of Callaghan's fiction. Similarly,

while the section on Frederick Philip Grove is probably the best part of Pacey's chapter, it does much less than full justice to that impressive failure, *The Master of the Mill,* and so avoids the real problem of Grove — the problem of why a writer so large in texture, so gigantic in his fumblings, never wrote a book that seemed completely to fulfil his possibilities. At times Pacey shows an astounding failure to grasp what is essential and what is completely inessential in the study of literature. For example, in discussing Mazo de la Roche, he breaks off all at once to remark that, "One of the most dramatic events in the literary history of Canada between the wars was the 1927 award of the *Atlantic Monthly*'s $10,000 prize to Miss de la Roche's *Jalna* as the best novel submitted for its contest." He then goes on to devote a whole page, out of the three and a half pages he spends on discussing this writer, to a description, culled from a periodical of the time, of the civic celebrations by which Toronto welcomed the award. Two sentences suffice to show the nature of this document of literary history.

> In addition to the tea service from the City, Miss de la Roche received a beautiful basket of flowers from the Canadian Literature Club of Toronto.
>
> During the evening music was provided by Cassar George Finn, pianist, and Mrs. Fenton Box, soloist, accompanied by Mr. D'Alton McLaughlin.

I would like to think Dr. Pacey included this item with tongue in cheek; I have, alas, no reason for so believing.

Hugo McPherson moves on a higher level of sensibility in his study of the fiction published between 1940 and 1960. He refuses resolutely to pay undue attention to what he calls "the verbose and deciduous many", and generally speaking his judgments are shrewd and good. Yet this chapter is not McPherson at his best. I have read much more capable individual studies by him of some of the writers he deals with here, such as Robertson Davies and Gabrielle Roy, and I feel that he excels in the discursive critical examination and does not take very well to the condensed form of the historical survey. He wisely stresses the importance of visiting and immigrant novelists in the recent broadening of the scope of Canadian fiction, but he feels constrained to allow only brief consideration to writers of such importance — for their influence as well as for their actual works — as Malcolm Lowry and Brian Moore, and thus he fails to convey the range and complexity of the achievement of these novelists who have produced some of the best and most sophisticated fiction written in Canada. Yet McPherson's chapter, for its general sense of what the critical historian should seek in literature and for its occasional penetrating and pleasingly expressed insights, is by far the best of the six chapters on the contemporary period.

One is at a loss to explain why, after deciding to produce a work by many hands, the editors of the *Literary History of Canada* should have taken the risk of allotting all the four chapters dealing with Canadian poetry since 1920 — the crucial chapters in the whole book — to a writer whose only previous publication in the field of Canadian literature was — if one can judge from the Notes on Contributors at the end of the volume — a single article on Lampman. This is a field in which there is no shortage of able young critics, many of them practicing poets, and one would have thought an excellent team of three or four writers could have been assembled who would have dealt brilliantly and sensitively with the various aspects and trends of contemporary Canadian poetry.

Professor Beattie's remarks on modern Canadian poets are rarely brilliant and not often sensitive. His dark horse, no Pegasus, is at best a plodding and serviceable ambler. It is not that Professor Beattie is lacking in knowledge, at least of the scholastic kind. He has obviously read the poets he discusses; he is familiar with their biographies and with the background out of which they emerge and in which they work. He talks with professorial gusto about movements and trends. Yet his approach lacks imagination as his writing lacks the proper clarity of a critic dealing with poetry — the clarity of the lens that looks into a poem and reveals its layers of inner meaning.

There are in fact no revelations and no surprises in what Professor Beattie has to tell us about Canadian poets; we know everything already. He recites facts, often with little sense of their relevance, and he presents documents; three pages at one point are devoted to a paraphrase of a forgotten series of articles in the *Canadian Forum* to make a point that needed a mere paragraph of direct statement. But, above all, Professor Beattie *describes*, and the character of his description can be seen from this typical paragraph taken from his discussion of the poetry of Earle Birney.

> "Trial of a City" (originally a radio drama entitled "The Damnation of Vancouver") is a fantasy-drama in mingled verse and prose of both present and future idiom. The situation is a hearing to determine whether Vancouver should be annihilated. Witnesses are materialized from among the dead: Captain George Vancouver, the headman of the Indian nation that formerly occupied the site, Gassy Jack Deighton, and the author of *Piers Plowman*. Living witnesses are a professor of geology and a Vancouver housewife. There is much excellent fooling, a great deal of good sense, and a thorough treatment of two of Birney's principal themes: the squalor of contemporary urban life and the need for hopeful decisiveness about the next stage of human history. His versatility as a prosodist is strikingly demonstrated. The professor couches his geological erudition in a bleak

> four-stress rhythm with deep caesuras and emphatic alliteration; the housewife speaks in lyric stanzas; and Langland utters his condemnation in a version of a fourteenth-century alliterative poetry. The superb achievement of "Trial of a City" is the sequence of passages spoken by the Salish chief summoned to describe for the officials "a way of life that died for yours to live". These sturdy and shapely lines, abounding in vividly realized details, are as splendid as any of Birney's.

We are told the subject of Birney's poem, the characters are named, and something is said of the mechanics of the verse. But at no point are we given an inkling of the special nature of "Trial of a City", of what makes it a unique and personal work, of its poetic essence, nor is there any suggestive insight expressed that is likely to send us to the bookshelf for another reading. For the reader who does not know Birney's work, Professor Beattie might be describing a closet drama of some modern Heavysege, and Birney is far from that.

The Literary History is saved from an ending of grand bathos by the efforts of Northrop Frye, whose Conclusion magnificently lifts the tone as it draws in all the trends that have emerged in the preceding chapters and establishes in the reader's mind a synthesis of the Canadian literary arts, united by a series of striking generalizations on Canadian myths and heroes, on the Canadian intellectual's attitude towards nature, and on the foreshortening of Canadian history, with its possible effects on Canadian culture — "its fixation with its own past, its penchant for old-fashioned literary techniques, its preoccupation with the theme of strangled articulateness". But perhaps the most important point that Frye makes, almost in passing, is an admission of the need for something more than the present *Literary History* — for "another book: *A Literary Criticism of Canada*, let us say."

ONE OF THE VIRTUES of the *Literary History* is that it has cleared the air for a real work of literary criticism blended with literary history. At least the present work has done all the listing, all the cataloguing and most of the general charting of the terrain that are likely to be needed for a long time ahead. Students will use the *Literary History* as a reference book, and if all they are seeking is information on a primary level, they will find their needs well met. Some few chapters, and a handful of assessments of individual writers will take their due place in our critical literature, but on the whole it cannot be said that the *Literary History* advances notably this particular field of Canadian writing.

On the other hand, by getting out of the way so many of the basic tasks, and by showing the fields still to be explored, its appearance may well have a fecundating effect on Canadian literary studies in general. One can see it as the starting point for many a notable monograph. Few such massive efforts in fact pass without leaving their permanent effect on the world of letters and scholarship, and few of them are faultless. We complain of their imperfections but we accept them, much as Johnson's contemporaries accepted his Dictionary, because, as yet, there is nothing else of their kind.

POET IN PROGRESS

Notes on Frank Davey

Warren Tallman

BACK OF WHATEVER SKILLS a poet acquires stands the flesh and blood man, and all the skill in the world cannot eventuate in a distinctive poetry unless the man is himself distinctive — perhaps by reason of superior nerve in the face of experience, a superior capacity for perception, or some personal quality which makes for inner magic. I believe that Frank Davey is one of the few obviously distinctive young Canadian poets and that in his second volume of poems, *City of the Gulls and Sea* (Morriss Printing Company, Victoria) he demonstrates an equally obvious increase in the skill necessary to handle the inner push of the distinction as it struggles to find place, by way of the writing, on the essentially cold because complacent shores of the Canadian world.

Certain men are like Stendhal's mirror dawdling down a road. Whatever is perceived registers and is retained in the mind even after the mirror has dawdled on. In his first, 1962 volume *D-Day and After*, Davey speaks of some dishes and wonders,

who

    can let me hurl them
toast crumbs and tea
at that face which makes the air

fetters

        around me?

And there is small doubt but that the dishes, toast crumbs, tea, and face of the girl with whom he was in love are heavily tangible to him as he writes. The poems in that book are markedly disturbed, a man gyrating through violences. But more important still, the gyrations are in terms of an exceptionally high frequency of tangible perceptions, instances in which his thoughts all but collide with the objects of thought because the object is so heavily present. I stress this tangibility as one source of Davey's distinction and promise as a poet. Writers who feel that they are about to be run down by the truck they are thinking of, or the girl, are prompted to more energetic efforts to cope and consequently to create.

In *City of the Gulls and Sea* the disturbance has disappeared to be replaced by a strong sense of isolation. The people around him in Victoria are more informationally than substantially present and his perceptions drift with a different set of tangibles: the wind, rain, sea, coastline — all of which ring out the ways in which Victoria is for him a lonesome old town. His efforts to cope lead him to searching about for original facts, events, persons, places, which search culminates in the seven-page "Victoria V", one of the finest poems Davey has written — very beautiful, I think. He seeks an original city beneath the tourist overlay because he must, because the tangibles get at him, and no man wants to be always walking in the rain, looking at the sea, knowing that in the heart of the city he is out of town. And he writes because Davey has at least intermittent knowledge of the high importance of articulation, knows that if Victoria is to be a weave of something more than just the elements the weaving will depend upon the man of words.

But at this stage of Davey's progress there is less need to inquire into what he *makes* of Victoria — or of his own life — more need to take note of his increasing skill as word spinner. Fortunately, through his association with *Tish*, which he edited through its first twenty issues, two stages are discernible. The first, the one that made his poetry possible, began with the February 1961 visit to Vancouver of the San Francisco poet and word-alchemist, Robert Duncan. Most of the young poets in Vancouver were present when Duncan read and discussed his poetry at the University of British Columbia Festival of Contemporary Arts. Some twenty of them, led by Davey, Fred Wah, George Bowering, Jamie Reid and Dave Dawson (who were to become the editors of *Tish*) invited Duncan to Vancouver that summer of 1961 to give, as it turned out, three three-hour "lectures" on contemporary American poetry. Duncan, a walking and talking university of verse lore, filled the air with his most influential predecessors (Ezra

Pound, William Carlos Williams, H. D.) and his closest contemporaries (Charles Olson, Robert Creeley, Larry Eigner, Denise Levertov). The gain for Davey and the others was not simply in the names but in the keys, clues and comments on the art of articulation. Tone leading, rhyme, sound resemblances and dis-resemblances, the musical phrase, composition by field and correspondences, as well as linguistic, musical, dramatic and choreographic analogies to writing — all these began to buzz about like bees. From which hive *Tish* was immediately born and for the next twenty months and issues kept up a steady hum.

IT IS HERE Davey's nerve is important. Given their previous ignorance of the writing world Duncan introduced, the *Tish* poets were very much like the fools who rush in where more cautious men fear to tread. And did rush in, managing to create a wonderfully garbled, goofy, and in many ways ludicrous Vancouver version of the poetics Duncan had turned loose. But great energy and liveliness were exerted, interesting poems were written, and talent had a favourable milieu in which to gain footing and grow. They all jumped in and the water was fine. Certainly, free movement of the articulation — a kind of open form dance of the words — was a major emphasis. When this hither and thither movement of the line is dominant the capacity to carry and cadence — to start the line up, keep it going, bring it to rest — becomes central. In Davey's *D-Day and After*, the opening passage of "The Guitar-Girls" reveals natural talent with its quick but light-footed and delicate movement that falls away (with "flowers" occurring as both a word and a period) before the last line quoted picks up the more subdued next movement of the poem:

> Little grown up girl
> — with quick singing voice —
> bouncing on your precise
> velvet-pointed
>   arching
> high-spirited doll shoes,
> was it yesterday you shone your tiny guitar
> and flashed your high-strung eyes
> unintentionally

into my presence
or was it months ago
among spring flowers?

was it dim teen years back . . .

However, the *D-Day* poems are mostly on the beginner's side of the word-dance floor. Carry and cadence Davey obviously can, but what is carried along and put to rest is often sentimental, semi-satiric, flattened out, with his mind taking up objects that defeat the potential of the movement. When you can dance well and feel like dancing it is a mistake to choose a wrong partner.

The next phase in the development of the *Tish* poets generally and of Davey particularly began in the summer of 1962 when Robert Creeley arrived to teach (for the next year) at the University of British Columbia.[1] A long-time friend of Duncan, Creeley is temperamentally an opposite writer, indwelling where Duncan is outgoing and compact where Duncan is expansive. More, a New England strictness causes Creeley to resist sham and sloppiness in all forms. The buzzing of the bees became noticeably more subdued. Davey, who had been in the thick of the writing and talking, began to move toward the edge. His interest in *Tish* diminished markedly, as did his interest in discussions, as did the flow of poems. Of the *Tish* poets he was the only one who passed up the University of British Columbia poetry seminar conducted in the summer of 1963 by Margaret Avison, Creeley, Duncan, Allan Ginsberg, Denise Levertov and Charles Olson, although he did attend their evening readings. Throughout the year he talked mostly about getting out of town; as, in September, he did.

That this withdrawal was a going underground rather than a running away becomes plain in *City of the Gulls and Sea* in the form of indwelling, margin-hugging line he practices throughout. Formerly he permitted his carry and cadence talent free rein to move out into open, almost marginless space with a consequent loss of potential — the sin that Charles Olson calls "sprawling." Now he confines himself most often to three, four and five word movements out before turning, returning to the margin, always close to home. This certainly inhibits the earlier, romantic reaching "away away in search of deeper blues." But it forces increased concentration and accuracy as well as fuller use of the potential that is at hand. Creeley's great point was full use of the potential of the given writing moment. Note, in this passage from "Victoria V," how, by holding on to "man", "has" and "her" Davey gains a fuller use of both the movement and the potential on hand:

man the transformer,
man born old
and man born bitter
and man
born shielding his face
with spade and spear,
has been here:
has sailed across the sea
in a running
battle with the waves

has sailed across the sea
to turn Camosun's trees
into one
reproducing house,
her fish into the rattle
of silver for the hand,
her forest grasses
into pavement

Realizing that the margin is simply the point of concentration, it is clear that Davey is holding each object of thought more closely and longer than he was capable of formerly.

Yet I would guess that this stay-at-home movement is only temporary. Temperamentally Davey is nearer to an outreaching Duncan than to an indwelling Creeley, his intelligence of things being essentially meteoric, devil-may-care, even show-off. Confidence in his ability to move at close quarters is likely to carry him back to more open-spaced poems in order to accommodate a penchant for reaching out.

[1] Louis Dudek conducted a poetry course at the University of British Columbia the same summer and provided important encouragement with the subsequent Vancouver issue of *Delta,* for which Davey provided the introduction, and with the more recent publication of George Bowering's *Points on the Grid.*

PHILIP CHILD

A Re-appraisal

William H. Magee

STRONG THOUGH THE COMPETITION MAY BE, the most neglected of good Canadian authors is probably Philip Child. Desmond Pacey devotes three pages of *Creative Writing in Canada* to this "man of good will, of considerable learning and of a fine sense of common humanity" (Toronto, 1961, p. 217), but no study or other short sketch of him exists. The reason for this neglect is simple enough; it is unfortunate timing. Like E. J. Pratt, Frederick Philip Grove, and Morley Callaghan, Child began publishing between the Wars, when serious writers were not in demand in Canada. All interest among readers and most critical attention was going to surviving writers in older modes: to storytellers like Ralph Connor, L. M. Montgomery and Mazo de la Roche, and poetesses like Marjorie Pickthall. Stephen Leacock was a more justifiable pride of the twenties and thirties, but even he was not prized as superior to the traditionalists. Ignoring the older styles of current Canadians, Philip Child strove like Pratt, Grove and Callaghan to make Canadian literature modern. Unlike them he also strove to make it cosmopolitan. Unlike them he aligned himself with no regional outlook in subject matter or closely borrowed technique.

Although Child's work shows his familiarity with the more advanced British novels of the times, from the first it was as original as Pratt's was to become. In those days, originality doomed Canadians to oblivion. Unfortunately for his popularity abroad, his first novel came out at the height of the Depression, when

even well-established writers like Leacock lost ground. Unfortunately for his reputation at home, he published in England, and quietly. His first and best book, the historical novel *The Village of Souls* (1933), received no critical attention in Canada when it appeared. By the time of his second book, *God's Sparrows* (1937) the "Letters in Canada" chronicle had begun in the *University of Toronto Quarterly*, and in it Dr. J. R. MacGillivray briefly hailed the novel. Canadians at large scarcely heard of these novels, but it is on them that Child's fame must ultimately rest.

The Village of Souls succeeds remarkably often in the difficult task of externalizing three separate spiritual struggles, all of them struggles with loneliness and love. Yet the plot which provides the framework for this spiritual drama is trite, and even melodramatic. A seventeenth-century voyageur, Bertrand Jornay, is beset by savage and treacherous Indians and half-breeds in the course of his efforts first to protect his white bride, a *fille du roi* named Lys, and later to accept an Indian wife, Anne, who is really a lost white girl. All three are thwarted by the treachery of the villainous Titange, Bertrand's half-breed companion. The adventures include Anne's slaughter of an Iroquois prisoner and Titange's firing of a hut with the women inside. As handled, however, scenes like these are not melodramatic in effect; nor, on the other hand, are they particularly memorable. Much more vivid are the lonely canoe trips through the primeval forest, which open and close the novel. On the opening trip, up river towards Lake Ontario, Bertrand forces himself to expose his loneliness and longing to Lys. Then after they have been separated for most of the novel, she comes to terms with herself as they paddle through a burnt-out wilderness west of Lake Superior. Child brings out well the relief from degradation which both Bertrand and Lys feel after this escape from miserable upbringings in Paris. As each in turn gains spiritual dignity for the first time in his life, each successively realizes a loneliness as intense as the primeval countryside, though by then Lys is hopelessly separated from Bertrand. Anne goes through a similar struggle to break through to Bertrand's love while retaining her inner dignity. In the course of her struggle, Anne becomes the more dynamic woman, as she broods over her vision of her hopes fulfilled, as she thinks about Christianity in a Quebec convent, as she confronts Bertrand at a western mission after his violent seduction of her. Scenes like these show Child's unusual talent for dramatizing emotions. They are the most distinctive and the most successful in his novels.

God's Sparrows achieves — though much less often — a similar success in dramatizing mental turbulence. It also contains the most effective scenes of the

First World War in Canadian fiction. The War becomes the test for the intellectual conflict which opposes two family groups to each other. The Thatchers from New England question the moral implications of everything they do, whereas the Burnets of Southern Ontario look for immediate action, and pleasure. Penuel Thatcher has married a Burnet and is living in the old Burnet mansion with two sons who are similarly at odds with one another. The First World War provides the test supreme for the intellectual opposition. When war breaks out, Pen refuses to pay taxes to support it, at least until he has thought out whether or not it is just, which he never finishes doing. In contrast Uncle Charles Burnet rushes off to the excitement of the front line, and so does Pen's son Alistair. His other son, Dan, agonizes with his doubts just as his father does, but eventually he joins up and fights at the front. His cousin Quentin Thatcher, though fighting bravely at first, continues in a similar mental agony and becomes a conscientious objector in revulsion against the brutality at the front. The scenes which dramatize these spiritual dilemmas are memorable: Pen's refusal to pay taxes, Quentin's humiliation, and Dan's final vision of judgment as to who were right. With the notable exception of descriptions of the front line, the scenes which are not based on the inner torment of the Thatchers seem ephemeral. None of the Burnets on the other hand, is a solid character, and their adventures with the War and with women do nothing to strengthen them. Nor are the scenes in the Burnet mansion vivid, as they should be in a family novel, although in a later narrative poem Child was to visualize well the life of a great house. The slight falling off in Child's second novel is the result of the comparative failure to visualize one of the two families solidly enough in the process of externalizing the central conflict of ideas.

LIKE PRATT, Grove and Callaghan, Philip Child continued publishing in the 1940's, and later too, but unlike them he made no effort to adjust to the literary times in Canada, and he remained cosmopolitan in themes and techniques. His two novels of the decade, *Day of Wrath* (1945) and *Mr. Ames Against Time* (1949), won the two most deserved Ryerson Awards in Fiction, but they both look a little pallid in intensity beside Grove's *The Master of the Mill* or Callaghan's later novels. And although *The Village of Souls* was reissued in 1948 in a Canadian edition and reviewed by Malcolm Ross in "Letters in Canada", it was out of the spirit of the times. It seemed a little remote, like a

message from a strange generation. Philip Child once described the feeling exactly in a lyric of Quentin's in *God's Sparrows*:

> The clouds are vanishing, to form
> Some other way,
> But it was thus I painted
> In my day.

Child's collected poetry, *Victorian House and Other Poems* (1951), which is his last publication to date, was hailed by Northrop Frye as one of the few volumes to give new merit to Canadian poetry in the fifties,[1] but it too was not in either of the chief vogues of the times, the sensuous or the visionary. Since the Second World War, Child has made no attempt to follow the new custom among Canadian writers of adopting recent British or American techniques, as Grove for example did in *The Master of the Mill.* He showed no interest in coming to grips with social issues in a recognizably Canadian society as Callaghan was to do in the fifties. And he ignored the renewed interest in Canadian nationalism which has directed so much attention to Pratt's later poetry.

Neither of Child's novels of the forties resembles in type either of the earlier ones. One is a story of racial discrimination, the other an unusual mystery story. Both develop a theme of love, but on a more ethereal level than *The Village of Souls*; this larger theme recurs in the *Victorian House* poems. *Day of Wrath*, the first of the forties' novels, develops the conflict in a Jew of Hitler's Germany between principled devotion to Love and the sore temptation to hate. After losing both wife and daughter to the brutal regime, Simon Froben faces first the chance of killing the Nazi stormtrooper responsible, and later the challenge of rescuing a German orphan. *Mr. Ames Against Time* describes the struggle of a very common man, devoted to Love, against organized evil in the modern city. By practicing and reiterating this Love, Mr. Ames sets out to save his falsely condemned son by unmasking a gang murderer and persuading him to confess.

Both novels exploit Child's distinctive ability to externalize spiritual problems. In the crises noted in *Day of Wrath*, Simon Froben learns what true Love means, what he must and must not do. In *Mr. Ames Against Time*, the cowardly old Mr. Avery shows the depths of spiritual despondence both in his memory of having surrendered military secrets in the First World War and in his quavering fright at Mr. Ames' investigations. The themes are more uncommon than those in the earlier novel, but the scenes that portray them are less credible.

Victorian House, the main piece in Child's collected poems, is a narrative

developed in reverie rather than dramatically. A modern man comes to long for the security of the last generation as he sees an estate agent evaluating in baldly materialistic terms what is in his own view a spiritual treasure. A secondary theme examines once again abstract Love, which, the poem notes, must be large enough to encompass even a Judas. The poem as a whole is melancholy and static rather than optimistic and energetic, as the novels are. The melancholy also dominates the lyrics which conclude the volume of poetry. Most of them are reflections on death, the last one returning to the theme of a Love large enough to forgive Judas.

With such an emphasis on introspection, the characters who linger in the readers' memory are those who ruminate. In *The Village of Souls*, lengthy loneliness has left Bertrand Jornay in a turmoil of conflicting urges. On the one hand he has gained human dignity by himself in the forests, and so for him hell is absence of inner privacy. On the other hand the ambition of his love is the meeting of two souls, his and his woman's and so he also feels that hell is something inescapable within himself. Because Anne's ideas closely resemble these, although she feels rather than formulates them, she emerges more forcefully than does the would-be light-hearted Lys. Both Bertrand and Anne look appealingly human through their sensitivity about revelations even to persons they love, and so does Quentin Thatcher in *God's Sparrows*. Possessive friendship gives Quentin the vigour necessary for the dramatization of his ideas. The moral struggle between right and wrong is convincing in Child's novels, particularly at a personal level. Bertrand's remorse over his violation of Anne, Simon Froben's strangling of his Nazi enemy, Mr. Ames' testimony against his son, provide the memorable moments, when ideas and characters come to life together.

Child's success is limited, however, even in the most memorable characters, and the minor characters succeed even less completely. Although his sombre thinkers can be vivid in static scenes, they show no convincing development. Lys' love is said to become more and more spiritual during her progress through *The Village of Souls*, but in the process her character fades. Nor are Child's personages necessarily made more remarkable by the peculiar traits which the author stresses. Bertrand is repeatedly said to be motivated by pride in his ancestry, but this attitude affects neither his actions nor the plot. Pen Thatcher's idiosyncracies lack credibility because Child finds it difficult to make convincing the larger moral issues with which they are linked. In fact, the considerations of right and wrong stemming from the First World War in *God's Sparrows* never emerge from abstraction. A similar degree of abstraction, without a compensating vigour in

the presentation of the heroes, may explain the comparative failures of Child's two most recent novels. Among his heroines, Anne alone rivals the men as an individual made vivid by inner problems. Most of the minor characters likewise suffer somewhat from a lack of introspection, or from lack of space to develop their ideas, although there are exceptions. The bizarre Russian Dolughoff for instance, who stands naked between the front lines in *God's Sparrows*, dramatizes the thematic opposition of human dignity to war. In *Mr. Ames Against Time*, the frightened old Mr. Avery, with his bitter memory of cowardice in the War, shows the abject servility against which Mr. Ames is fighting in his battle for love among men.

As WITH CHARACTERS, so with plot; Child can create vivid scenes of static interplay between brooding men and women. Individual vignettes are often haunting. The day-long canoe trip through burnt-out forest in *The Village of Souls*, as Jornay watches Lys die, crystallizes admirably their spiritual crisis. The dead land has the atmosphere of another-world, the jealous Anne threatens the hope for harmony in the canoe, and the prospect of a much-needed cache at the end of the burnt stretch suggests a faint hope. *God's Sparrows* shows the horror of the First World War in the vivid descriptions of the "raped landscape" at the front:

> Men had gone to earth there, earth to mud, and trees to splintered stumps. The only living things visible were the guns scattered everywhere, barely discernible in the conquering monotony, and inhabiting the waste like lost spirits in hell. The landscape was significant of nothing, and the significance of mere emptiness was appalling.

Scenes like these are necessary to dramatize the inner agony of thinkers like Dan and Quentin, and the indignity of life in wartime. In contrast, the larger challenge of building a conflict and an atmosphere which would serve a whole novel always baffled Child. Even in his best novels the plots lack at times credibility. The trite discovery of Anne's white ancestry makes *The Village of Souls* seem fantastic; so does the vision of judgment at the end of the generally realistic *God's Sparrows*. Nor is Child always successful even in scenes of smaller scope. Crowd scenes are often vague, like the celebration for a V.C. in *God's Sparrows*,

in which Dan and his crippled sister are caught, or the court room scene in *Mr. Ames Against Time*. The memorable moments in these novels, and they are many, come in scenes with a few characters thinking in isolation from society — in a canoe, a clearing, a room.

A rare objectivity, which always dominates Child's point of view, helps to crystallize these scenes of small scope. It provides a *realism* which contrasts sharply with some of the fantastic general plotting. Because the burning of Mohawks in Montreal is not told melodramatically, it is as helpful to the historical atmosphere as the hard pioneering of *habitant* farmers out in the neighbouring forest. Another result is that evil seems real in these novels. Child draws convincing bad men, from the treacherous Titange of the first novel to the Nazi stormtrooper and the young gangsters of the last novels. Hate is real too. The reader accepts Titange's hate for Bertrand, Anne's hate for Lys, because the reasons for these feelings are so clear.

The control of emotions which this objectivity produces also characterizes the style in both the novels and the poems. Cool rather than impassioned, it provides a useful perspective for the scenes of brooding characters. It runs smoothly enough for storytelling, although it lacks the customary loose flow of easy narration. For moments of emotional intensity, however, it adds little to the mood. Perhaps for this reason Child's lyric poems seem somewhat pallid. Only emotions demanding understatement really benefit from the style, like the reaction to the battlefront in *God's Sparrows.* It is rather a style which lends itself to epigram and humour.

The unity in outlook is provided not so much by the objective point-of-view or by the style, however, as by themes. Ideals are what interest the central characters, and the struggle to understand and preserve ideals consumes most of their energy. Loneliness and the search for love are the motivating urges for both Bertrand and Anne in *The Village of Souls*, and under Bertrand's direction they become Lys' as well. *God's Sparrows*, which stands a little apart from the rest in theme, stresses the moral issues of heroism in war and in doubt about war, particularly when theories are carried to extremes. The resultant attitudes towards war make the novel tighter in structure than most war novels are, or most family novels. Child's last two novels return to the theme of love. In them a larger, more ethereal love than Bertrand's provides a closer unity, although a more abstract one. Extravagance of theme, not disunity, is their difficulty. And in *Victorian House* the recurring idea of a love to encompass even Judas provides the one distinction in the overriding nostalgia of the poem.

Child tells us that only love breaks down the hell of individual isolation and

so makes the individual truly human. The extreme isolation of Bertrand, Lys, and Anne as they paddle through the primeval forest reinforces the even more thorough isolation of each of their souls. Love is the only humanizing outlet. Although Lys rejects this view at first, calling life a jest and longing for the city life of Paris, she recognizes the truth before she dies. Even if "humans are always alone",[2] love is an expanding and creative force. Privacy, night and self are the most unbearable things in life, and love is the one alternative, a love that is built on faith. And so faith is described as the prerequisite for membership in the human race.[3] In this perspective, the Nazi treatment of Jews in *Day of Wrath* becomes a study in inhumanity due to lack of love, and Simon Froben's near tragedy is that he will be corrupted too. Mr. Ames is presumably irresistible in the long run because his lifelong love has made him ideally human. In these last two novels, however, the plight of the hero battling for Love is partly submerged in the welter of city society, which Child does not find easily malleable for story-telling. In contrast the utter loneliness of men, and the union possible through love, are unforgettably set off in *The Village of Souls* as Bertrand, Lys, and Anne pursue their spiritual loves against the atmosphere of disease-ridden villages and the fire-destroyed forest west of Lake Superior.

In all the novels the plot brings about a triumph for the theme, but the mood is never joyous. Melancholy pervades the view of life which Child presents. The happy endings come as hard-earned rewards only to a struggling few. No one, not even Charles Burnet, is convincingly gay. Pathetic minor characters appear in every novel, from Bertrand's tribeless Indian follower, a man with no hope of anyone to love him, to the cowardly Mr. Avery. A cause that contributes to the melancholy mood is materialism which to Child, as to Grove and others, apparently goes with North American civilization. "We are pioneers still, really; and that means materialists", he declares of twentieth-century Ontario.[4] When the fighting optimism of the novels is lacking, in *Victorian House*, the materialism seems to overwhelm every hope for spiritual comfort. The result is a haunting despair with the modern world, and a less haunting nostalgia for the good old days.

When vitality is missing, Child's weaknesses are the most obvious, and the scenes involving large scope or rapid movement, usually lack vitality. As a result there is neither a continuous awareness of the historic period in *The Village of Souls* nor a convincing recreation of city life in the last two novels. Adventure too seldom moves easily in these novels. This lack of movement applies to characters too, particularly the women; they seldom come fully to life. Child has an

extraordinary grasp of the types and techniques of modern fiction, as the extreme variety in his novels shows. He understands all the conventions and knows how to use them unconventionally. He not only wrote a pseudonymous mystery novel,[5] but also used the convention with intriguing originality in *Mr. Ames Against Time*. Yet the ambitious themes and large scopes seem to defeat him and rarely achieve credibility. His characters, like his novels and poems, seem to belong to no recognizable culture.

Both as novelist and poet Philip Child is hard to fit into Canadian literature as it is customarily viewed. Other writers of his generation with no more talent have grown out of regional or foreign themes and traditions to become distinctly Canadian since the Second World War. Child has not tried to do so, and in retrospect his novels have that air of being foreign to modern Canada which Hugh MacLennan attributes to his dynamic Canadian hero of the thirties, Jerome Martel, in *The Watch That Ends the Night*. Child's cosmopolitanism has marred both the general and the critical reception of his novels in Canada, but it has no bearing on their ultimate worth. As an historical novelist he saw first and exploited before Pratt the drama of the *Jesuit Relations*. From twentieth-century Canada he has produced the one noteworthy novel of the First World War. Whether dealing with past or present, he sought — like Pratt — to isolate and praise examples of human dignity in a world of materialism which so many other modern writers have called spiritually hopeless.

NOTES

1 "Poetry", "Letters in Canada 1959", *University of Toronto Quarterly*, XXIX (July 1960), 458. (*Cf.* the corresponding article for 1951 for Northrop Frye's full review of the volume, in XXI (April 1952), 252).

2 p. 157.

3 pp. 47-48.

4 *God's Sparrows*, London, 1937, p. 181.

5 *Blow Wind — Come Wrack*, London, 1945 (published under the pseudonym of "John Wentworth").

FOLK LANGUAGE IN HALIBURTON'S HUMOUR

L. A. A. Harding

A GREAT DEAL OF THE FRESHNESS of Haliburton's comic view of life comes from his turn of phrase and imagery describing the world of Sam Slick, as the latter sees it, in earthy, colloquial language which comes from the farm, the workshops, the kitchens and the wharves. It *smells* of the farm, the workshops, the kitchens and the wharves, and provides much of the reason for the enormous Sam Slick vogue, which made Haliburton a notable rival of Dickens. It is no longer the imagery of today, which may explain why few read Sam Slick now. It is the common language of not-so-ordinary men; men who had had to struggle with the unpromising soil in an unpromising climate and who enjoyed their own salty, free-and-easy form of conversation and words for their own sake. It is the folk language of the time, strong, apt and often beautifully bathetic. It rarely tells a round, unvarnished tale, but it often delivers a character neatly and humorously revealed. Sam's character and attitude is plain, for instance, in "... Britishers won't stay in a house, unless every feller gets a separate bed, ..." Haliburton's New Englanders and Nova Scotians had their own (very similar) idiom just as distinctively as Synge's Irishmen or Burns' Scotsmen. Consider, for instance, Sam's approach to a professor from whom he wishes a quick summary of a learned work: "... now larned men in a general way are all as stupid as owls, they keep a devil of a thinkin', but they don't talk. So I stirs up old Hieroglyphic with a long pole; for it's after dark, lights is lit, and it's time for owls to wake up and gaze."

One sees the comic force of this idiom, when Sam says to the Reverend Hopewell, who has been shocked at Sam's typically materialistic reaction on his first sight of the grandeur and majesty of Niagara Falls which to the minister represent the voice of Nature and the power of God:

> ... it does seem kinder grandlike — that 'are great big lake does seem like an everlastin' large milk-pan with a lip for pourin' at the falls, and when it does fall head over heels, all white froth and spray like Phoebe's syllabub, it does look grand, no doubt, and it's nateral for a minister to think on it as you do; but still, for all that, for them that ain't preachers, I defy most any man to see it without thinkin' of a cotton mill.

Haliburton here uses with great effect the language of the farm, the kitchen and the workshop, when he makes Sam talk of "an everlastin' large milk pan with a lip for pourin' ", "Phoebe's syllabub", and observes the obvious connection to an industrially-minded Yankee of "that voice of Nature in the wilderness", as the Reverend Hopewell had called it, with a "cotton mill". Each man thinks in terms of his character and experience. Commonsense furthermore says that a roar is a roar and that Niagara and a cotton mill have at least that in common. Haliburton knew very well the value of contrast to communicate his comic view of life, and the above example illustrates the part played in it by his use of down-to-earth folk language and imagery (in dialect of course). The total result is more than mere amusement at the unexpected comparisons of Niagara with "an everlastin' large milk-pan" and "Phoebe's syllabub", and at the idea suggested by the awe-inspiring power in front of Sam's eyes flowering into a "cotton mill". A cotton mill roaring with all its machinery going at full speed is the poetry and song of the industrialist, the practical, cynical and acquisitive man.

It is however far more comprehensive than that. The characters of the two men are also thrown into relief; the spiritual old man with a sense of beauty who sees the power of God in all Nature, and the Yankee materialist who immediately sees industry and profits. By means of such imagery one sees in a flash, in the exchange between Sam and the Reverend Hopewell, two types of humanity, both of which have had a great part in the founding and development of the United States (not to mention Canada) and without either of which it would have been a very different country. One feels that these two kinds of American had a greater effect upon the national character than any two similar representative types from the South. These are both strong and influential characters, frequently met with in the early days. One sees also that both are basically good

men, though their views and opinions and characters are widely divergent, if not opposite. One is interested in this world, the other in the next. There is in fact a thumbnail sketch here of the whole early history of the United States in the language, reactions, and characters of these two men. Furthermore there is undoubtedly a touch of satire on both humanity in general and the New England character in particular.

THE EFFECT OF THE HOMELY SIMILE, which in Sam's language often involves animals, either farm or wild, is well illustrated by Sam's indignation at Dr. Abernethy, the fashionable doctor at the court of St. James in London. The latter had been too outspoken at the expense of the Hon. Alden Gobble, the American Secretary to the Legation in London, when the latter went to the doctor for a cure for indigestion, or bolting his "vittles". One notes the skilful, humorous build-up which shows Alden Gobble as a very wide-awake Yankee diplomat, almost sharp enough to cut himself. He could "hide his trail like an Indian". Sam angrily tells the tale:

> The Hon. Alden Gobble was dyspeptic, and he suffered great oneasiness arter eatin', so he goes to Abernethy for advice. "What's the matter with you?" said the doctor, jist that way, without even passing the time o' day with him: "What's the matter with you," said he. "Why," says Alden, "I presume I have dyspepsy." "Ah!" said he, "I see; a Yankee swallered more dollars and cents than he can digest?" "I am an American citizen," says Alden, with great dignity: "I am Secretary to our Legation at the Court of St. James". "The devil you are," said Abernethy; "then you'll soon get rid of your dyspepsy." "I don't see that 'are inference," said Alden. "It don't foller from what you predicate at all — it an't a natural consequence, I guess, that a man should cease to be ill because he is called by the voice of a free and enlightened people to fill an important office." (The truth is you could no more trap Alden than you could an Indian. He could see other folks' trail, and made none himself; he was a raal diplomatist, and I believe our diplomatists are allowed to be the best in the world.) "But I tell you it does foller," said the doctor; "for in the company you'll have to keep, you'll have to eat like a Christian."

Sam's indignation at this slight to one of his fellow, free-and-enlightened citizens is expressed in the strong farm imagery of a dog and hog:

> . . . I'd a fixed his flint for him, so that he'd think twice afore he'd fire such another shot as that 'are again. I'd a made him make tracks, I guess, as quick as a dog does a hog from a potato field. He'd a found his way of the hole in the fence a plaguy sight quicker than he came in, I reckon.

This farm imagery, even though the joke is on the Hon. Alden Gobble and Sam Slick rather than on the rude and vitriolic Dr. Abernethy, nevertheless reduces the fashionable London doctor, in Sam's bruised Yankee soul at least, and to some extent in ours, to the undignified and even grotesque image of a horrified hog scuttling squealing from a forbidden potato field with the farm dog snapping at his heels. The doctor pictured as a panicking pig trying to get back out through a hole in the farmer's fence is a strong comic image. The Hon. Alden Gobble has been made to look like a loutish lumberjack and therefore Sam, in patriotic and purely imaginary revenge, makes Dr. Abernethy look like the disappearing rearend of a pig, caught in the potatoes and conscious of error.

Sam's imagery is powerful and, though his triumph is purely imaginary, his point well made; but his anger at the insolence of Abernethy inadvertently betrays his comic character when one of the much despised but secretly somewhat respected English (with regard to superficial *savoir faire* at least — they quibbled, for instance, about spitting in the sawdust and took an hour to eat a ten-minute meal) gets in a wicked thrust and an unsporting one, at an important, dignified and highly respected "free-and-enlightened citizen" of the greatest republic the sun even shone on. Sam is surprised and angry, and when we see a man surprised and angry about a small point, then there is one of the unfailing elements of comedy. As a result all three men involved, Sam, the Hon. Gobble and Dr. Abernethy, are comically transmogrified into the small boys they once were; we see them in a new light; there is something incongruous, and they become figures of fun. We look down upon them from the godlike height of comedy as three little quarrelling human beings, with their quirks and their pride and their tempers. Sam, who almost always is the master of every situation, who always scores off everybody else and gets the last laugh, is ruffled and riled, and the reader sees him for once unable to do much but nurse his damaged national dignity and invent revenges — a schoolboy again. He then adds darkly, his mind still running on pigs, that the Hon. Alden Gobble would "a 'taken the bristles off his hide as clean as the skin of a spring shote of a pig killed at Christmas", if the doctor had not slipped out of the door as he fired such a skilful Parthian shot. However, the doctor had scored his point; unsportingly perhaps, he has, with no more than his periscope showing, torpedoed the elusive Gobble. He has told him

that he is a pig, but that he is safe now that he is free of his old associates and then he makes an agile exit — chuckling.

One comic element in this exchange is undoubtedly that of the biter being bit. The famous doctor is undeniably rude (though we see Sam frequently being rude, or offensively nationalistic, or both); he is furthermore rude to a clever man who is in a high diplomatic position and, what is worse to Sam, the smartest of smart Yankees, who could "catch a weasel asleep" any day in the week; then, to add insult to injury, the doctor, slipping away betimes from fields where glory does not stay, deprives the Hon. Alden Gobble, and therefore Sam, vicariously, of the opportunity of retaliation. There is nothing so irritating as being deprived of the last word. Both these outraged Americans are open-mouthed with surprise at this rudeness coming from so unexpected, so unfair a quarter, as a fashionable society doctor, to such an elevated, dignified and wide-awake personage as the Honourable Secretary to the American Legation at the Court of St. James.

Rudeness is often funny, probably because of the unexpectedness of it in a world where we cannot afford to be rude and also where we are trained from childhood to be polite, frequently against our real feelings. Politeness, in fact, is often a necessary hypocrisy. This is well illustrated by the great success of that rather over-rated comedy, *The Man Who Came to Dinner*, where the consistent rudeness, so startling in our society, defeats itself in the end because it is so consistent that there is no surprise left. Children of course are naturally and honestly rude. "Kiss the lady, Tommy," says Mother. "No, she's prickly", replies the young citizen of the future, with a complete honesty which he will learn to hide in his next ten years. In fact in one sense a child is not rude at all, since he does not mean to be, but merely honest; however, when a full-grown man, like Sam Slick, or the Hon. Gobble, or Dr. Abernethy, acts like a child, that is funny.

Another instance of farm language used for satirical effect is seen where Sam, still smarting patriotically from the slight to the Honourable Secretary to the Legation at the Court of St. James, turns for revenge on the nearest Britishers, the lacksadaisical Bluenoses with their country ways and their contemptible horseflesh:

> ... the nasty yo'-necked, cat-hammed, heavy-headed, flat-eared, crooked-shanked, long-legged, narrow-chested, good-for-nothing brutes; they ain't worth their keep one winter. I vow I wish one of those blue-noses, with his go-to-meetin' clothes on, coat tails pinned up behind like a leather blind of a shay, an old spur on one heel, and a pipe stuck through his hat-band, mounted on one of those limber-

> timbered critters, that moves its hind legs like a hen a-scratchin' gravel, was sot down in Broadway, in New York, for a sight. Lord! I think I hear the West Point Cadets a-larfin' at him: "Who brought that 'are scarecrow out of standin' corn and stuck him here?"

The description of scrub stock in the way of horseflesh is good, cumulative invective — suggestive of Prince Hal telling Falstaff what he thinks of him or Kent giving Oswald a thumbnail sketch of himself — and, mounted contentedly on such an inferior steed, poor farmer Bluenose seems to lose caste by mere association. The man takes on the quality of the "cat-hammed", "heavy-headed" Rosinante he is riding; he after all chose it and sits contentedly on the unfortunate and dejected animal. The man appears something of a donkey. To underline this, Sam adds the reference to the coat-tails pinned up behind "like a leather blind of a shay", the old and solitary spur, the pipe in the hat-band, and the ignoble animal with the action (at least of the hind legs) of "a hen a-scratchin' gravel". This is a sufficiently graphic picture of a simple countryman in any age, at least until the nineteen-ten era of the first flivvers; but then the final rural image, of Bluenose being brought out of "standin' corn" like a scarecrow, and "sot down in Broadway", clinches it, with the additional nice contrast of Broadway and the farm, and the neat and shining West Point cadets and the shabby, happy, Bluenose farmer on his tottering Dobbin.

THE EQUINE METAPHOR is varied in the mordant description of Marm Pugwash, the bad-tempered but beautiful hostess of the inn at Amherst, who is brought to us in flesh and blood colours by means of typical Haliburton farm imagery.

Sam and the Squire reach the inn late; so late that Marm Pugwash is not at all pleased. She is irritably sweeping up the ashes and banking up the coals for the night and would just as soon not see them, or their money either. Sam, just before they get there, forewarns the Squire of the erratic service they may expect:

> ... Marm Pugwash is onsartin in her temper as a mornin' in April; it's all sunshine or all clouds with her, and if she's in one of her tantrums, she'll stretch out her neck and hiss like a goose with a flock of goslings. I wonder what on earth Pugwash was a-thinkin' on when he signed articles of partnership with that 'are woman; she's not a bad-lookin' piece of furniture, neither, ...

This kind of Medusan shock-effect is achieved by the simultaneous double image of a beautiful woman and a hissing goose. It is vivid comic imagery. One sees Sam and the Squire jumping back in alarm at this hostility from an unexpected quarter. The goose, though comparatively harmless, has a startling approach, like a snake. It is a touch which one might find in Twain but would not find in Dickens, the latter's early experience of humanity, from which he mainly wrote, being confined mostly to urban life.

Sam carries this imagery a little further in a typical, mixed comparison of the beautiful Marm Pugwash to sour apples, and a horse, or rather, in her case, a mare. The mare metaphor, like the heifer metaphor, is exactly the kind of farm imagery in Haliburton's humour which shocked our great-grandfathers, but which seems mild enough to the average reader now. Sam continues:

> Now, Marm Pugwash is like the minister's apples, very temptin' fruit to look at, but desperate sour. If Pugwash had a watery mouth when he married, I guess it's pretty puckery by this time. However if she goes for to act ugly, I give her a dose of *soft sawder*, . . . it's a pity she's such a kickin' devil, too, for she has good points — good eye, good feet, neat pastern, fine chest, a clean set of limbs, and carries a good — But here we are; now you'll see what soft sawder will do.

The missing word is of course *weight*. Perhaps this offended too.

The appropriateness of the comparison of a beautiful but bad-tempered woman to a kicking and temperamental mare is evident from the humorous point of view, and is perhaps more amusing when one remembers Sam's advice on managing a wife in just the same way as he manages a fractious horse, which needs kindness, infinite patience and a firm hand. Both are tricky "critters", though the parallel must have been both more discernible and more forceful to our horse-conscious forbears than to ourselves.

Sam's farm imagery again clearly presents a character — this time the feminine one of Marm Pugwash discontentedly ruling the small and frustrating world of an Amherst inn in uneasy harness with Mr. Pugwash, whose weaknesses she probably came to recognize early, but after marriage. One feels, in the words of the old folk saying that the grey mare was the better horse, and that she knew it. There she stands, like Browning's Duchess, looking as though she were alive; the effect is achieved by a goose, sour apples and a skittish, temperamental mare.

Another instance of farm imagery, which is masterly in its combination of humour and pathos, occurs in Sam's account of the broken heart of a New England Paul Bunyan, one Washington Banks. This W. Banks was tall, so tall

that he could spit down on the heads of British Grenadiers, or nearly wade across the Charleston river, and he was furthermore as strong as a towboat. Sam lets us know just how tall he was: "I guess he was somewhat less than a foot longer than the moral law and catechism too." He was the observed of all observers, particularly the feminine ones, who would rush to the "winders" exclaiming "bean't he lovely!" Well, poor Banks died of a broken heart, the only poor soul Sam had ever heard of who had actually succumbed to this romantic malady. Women, of whom Haliburton took a strongly unromantic view, never did:

> The female heart, as far as my experience goes, is just like a new india-rubber shoe; you may pull and pull at it until it stretches out a yard long, and then let go, and it will fly right back to its old shape. Their hearts are made of stout leather, I tell you; there is a plaguy sight of wear in 'em.

However, men have died, and worms have eaten them too, but not for love, says Sam. Nor did W. Banks die for love; he died from lifting the heaviest anchor of the *Constitution* on a bet, of all the foolish things to do, with his prospects. Sam meets this huge, long-legged, sad-eyed hero a month or two before his death, and finds him quite, quite down, in fact "teetotally defleshed":

> "I am dreadfully sorry," says I, "to see you Banks, lookin' so peecked: Why, you look like a sick turkey hen, all legs; what on airth ails you?"

Now probably the only sick, wild bird which might convey the impression of a very tall, powerful, Bunyanesque figure in his decline would be a heron, crane or stork, but the farm image of the "sick turkey hen" is far better. It combines the pathetic and ridiculous in such a way as to surprise the reader into a rueful smile at humanity, which will lightly lift frigate anchors for no very good reason.

In another typical passage Sam Slick describes conditions in the States in the 1830's, by the use of an extraordinary cluster of seven farm or animal images. (The italics are Haliburton's.)

> *The Blacks and the Whites* in the States show their teeth and snarl, they are jist ready to fall to. The *Protestants and Catholics* begin to lay back their ears, and turn tail for kickin'. The *Abolitionists* and *Planters* are at it like two bulls in a pastur'. *Mob-law* and *Lynch-law* are workin' like yeast in a barrel and frothin' at the bunghole. *Nullification* and *Tariff* are like a charcoal pit, all covered up, but burnin' inside, and sendin' out smoke at every crack enough to stifle a horse .... *Surplus Revenue* is another bone of contention; like a shin of beef thrown among a pack of dogs, it will set the whole on 'em by the ears.

These terms and this imagery are so essential to Haliburton that one wonders how he would have written without them. And if this imagery succeeds with us in making his characters and incidents and anecdotes vivid, how much more effective must it have been in his day, when the farm and the country were much closer to every man and everyone was at least familiar with the ubiquitous cab-horse? With Haliburton, as this passage shows, the animal imagery comes naturally. Men are interpreted through the animals, usually to describe disorder satirically in the supposedly ordered world of men, or at least to show conduct which falls below the rational level. If there is something amiss Sam immediately thinks of a dog or a rat or a pig, or a bull, or a heifer, or a mare, or a weasel, or a lobster, or a frog, or a sick turkey hen. His animal images come pouring out as "thick as toads arter rain".

A good example of proliferating bucolic metaphors occurs in *The Letter Bag of The Great Western*, when Sam makes his satiric point to the Squire on these eloquent Britons who were "doing" the States at high speed and once-over-lightly, and does it with a nice flow of scornful animal and farm imagery which includes a monkey, hogshead of molasses, flies, cockroaches and a "Varginey goose". He concludes with:

> I shot a wild goose at River Philip last year, with the rice of Varginey fresh in his crop; he must have cracked on near about as fast as them other geese, the British travellers. Which know'd the most of the country they passed over, do you suppose?

One last instance of rural metaphor must suffice. The fine ladies of London parading up and down the Park, clad in their silks and satins, without much to do and with no visible husbands, draw Haliburton's Victorian fire, this time through the mouth of old Slick, Sam's farmer father:

> There's a great many lazy, idle, extravagant women here, that's a fact. The Park is chock full of 'em all the time, ridin' and gallavantin' about, tricked out in silks and satins, a-doin' of nothin'. Every day in the week can't be Thanksgivin' day, nor Independence day nother.... Who the plague looks after their helps when they are off frolickin'? Who does the presarvin' or makes the pies and apple sarce and doughnuts? Who does the spinnin' and cardin', and bleachin', or mends their husband's shirts or darns their stockin's? Tell you what, old Eve fell into mischief when she had nothin' to do; and I guess some o'them flauntin' birds, if they was follered, and well watched, would be found a-scratchin' up other folks' gardens sometimes. If I had one on 'em I'd cut her wings and keep her inside her own palin', I know. Every hen ought to be kept within hearin' of her own rooster, for fear of the foxes, that's a fact.

It would be hard to find another writer who expresses his view of life with such a debt as Haliburton to the farm, the wharf, the kitchen and Noah's ark in general (though Joyce Cary is one notable modern exception — one remembers Sara Monday as the "old crawfish", and her fierce, little husband, Mr. Wilshire, the *mus ferocissimus*, and Professor Alabaster who had a walk like the front legs of a horse). Sam talks, for instance, in farm and kitchen terms of another young lady at an inn where he was staying who was "as blooming as a rose and as chipper as a canary bird," but who was also, he quickly discovered on attempting a kiss, "as smart as a fox-trap and as wicked as a meat-axe," in fending off Yankee boarders. He finds however that it is all a feminine bluff and he gets his kiss in the end, which causes him to ruminate: ". . . if you haven't turned out as rosy a rompin', larkin', light-hearted a heifer as ever I see'd afore, it's a pity."

Shakespeare, originally a country boy, sometimes uses similar feminine imagery. One thinks, for instance, of one of the supreme comic images of literature, which gives the very subjective view of an old soldier, who was not at all impressed with her, of one of history's most interesting women. Scarus, liking Antony and blaming Cleopatra for Antony's downfall, describes her flight, from the famous sea-battle where she left her navy gazing, as being like that of a "cow in June", across the meadow, thundering hooves, tail erect — with a horse-fly after her. Antony might have preferred a kinder simile, but the anti-romantic Haliburton, like Scarus, was a heifer man at heart, with a touch of the meat-axe in his nature.

chronicle

LETTRE DE MONTREAL

Une Nouvelle Litterature?

Naim Kattan

Alléluia Royal Bank pour tes colombes de Claude Néon, pour tes saintes images d'Elizabeth, vertes, roses, bleues, cananéennes; alléluia pour tes hommes de bonne volonté, ceux de Brink's, ceux-là aussi qui calculent derrière tes guichets, qui ternissent leur œil et leur propre richesse; alléluia pour la caisse de noël, pour les chômeurs toast and beans and vomissures de rage à taverne, and bonjour monsieur l'curé, and toujours pas d'travail, and c'est du sentimentalisme ton affaire, and mon vieux tu perds ton temps, and on écrit pas comme ça, and on attend pour écrire, and on attend la permission, and vous m'faites chier pis j'continue, gagne d'égossés, alléluia Royal Bank pour tes coffres-forts viragos vierges sans joie ni foi, pour ta confrérie instruite, ceux qui savent compter plus loin que 100,000, ceux qui disent moâ, ceux qui disent we, I and So what, ceux qui mettent des "S" à salaire, ceux qui mettent des "H" à amour, ceux qui ont mis la hache dedans, ceux qui m'ont fait charrier, ceux qui m'ont fait sacrer; alléluia White Christmas, en Floride avec la secrétaire she's so french, plante-la pour la plus grande gloire du Canada, de sa goderie et de nos bonyeuseries, des trusts, des vices à cinq cennes, de nos perversités à rabais; alléluia pour les indulgences salvatrices de nos frustrations d'invertis, alléluia pour la fraternité humaine in the life insurance company, and on earth peace — tu veux rire: alléluia pour nos hernies, nos conscrits, nos pendus, nos prisonniers, nos aliénés, nos curés, nos imbéciles, nos stoûles, peace. At any price, Avec la taxe, ça fait....

Ainsi se termine la description d'une nuit de réveillon à Montréal. Jacques Renaud, l'auteur de ce texte, est un écrivain de vingt ans. Il est Canadien français, il est pauvre, il veut hurler sa colère. Dans quelle langue? En français? Oui, à condition qu'on ne continue pas "à fourrer une grammaire

Grévisse ou l'ostensoire des puristes ou le tricolore des francophylitiques, entre la vie et les hommes, entre les écrivains et la vie, entre les écrivains et leur vie."

Il y a dix ans, ceux qui avaient son âge et qui voulaient dire son fait à une société ignoble, écrivaient des poèmes. Mots et images avaient pour fonction de soustraire le feu qui couve à la vigilence d'une société peu habituée à de tels hurlements et qui était suffisamment solide pour éteindre toute voix franchissant les bornes des audaces permises. Les étincelles éclataient. On les croyait éphémères. Il s'agissait, en vérité, de chuchotements, précurseurs de grands éclats.

L'un de ces poètes, Gaston Miron, raconte comment le mot "colonisé" fut la grande révélation pour lui. Quand il a découvert que l'aliénation dont il souffrait et dont souffrait tout le peuple canadien-français ne se limitait pas à la langue, il s'est rendu compte "que l'état d'une langue reflète tous les problèmes sociaux." Il fut tenté de choisir le silence total qui lui apparaissait comme la forme de protestation absolue. Ainsi il aurait signifié son refus de pactiser avec un système qui le réduisait à l'état de colonisé. Mais le silence devant la déshumanisation ne peut durer sans que le poète ne soit amené à composer avec les forces qui l'étouffent. Aussi, Miron a-t-il décidé de récupérer sa culture perdue. Dès lors, il n'était plus question de redécouvrir la langue maternelle car c'est d'une langue natale qu'il avait besoin. Il devenait urgent de publier afin de dépasser l'aliénation. Sa démarche tortueuse et douloureuse était parallèle à celle suivie par le groupe qui, voici un peu plus d'un an, décidait de fonder la revue *Parti Pris,* organe à la fois séparatiste, laïque et socialiste. *Parti Pris* portrait à la connaissance d'un public formé surtout de jeunes un cri de colère et indiquait les jalons d'une démarche originale. Ces jeunes poètes, romanciers idéologues ne se contentaient pas de leur enthousiasme et de leur refus. Ils voulaient, eux aussi, dépasser l'aliénation et la littérature était pour eux collective et engagée. Il n'y aurait rien eu là de bien nouveau si ces écrivains n'étaient pas canadiens-français, si leur instrument d'expression lui-même n'était pas miné, appauvri, affaibli par cette aliénation. Fallait-il prendre acte de la langue telle que la dénature le parler quotidien et, après tant d'autres, lancer un appel à la refrancisation? C'eut été accepter, consciemment ou inconsciemment, de se ranger dans les rangs de l'élite, parmi ceux qui vont aux collèges, aux séminaires, aux universités, ceux qui habitent de belles maisons dans de beaux quartiers et qui s'efforcent tant bien que mal de s'exprimer dans une langue correcte sinon chatiée.

Pour faire partie du peuple, pour donner une voix aux masses inexprimées, la sociologie, l'action politique, le conflit des générations se fondent dans un ensemble hétéroclite pour jeter les bases d'une nouvelle littérature.

Laurent Girouard, l'un des membres de l'équipe de *Parti Pris*, auteur d'un roman, *La vie inhumaine*, le dit sans ambages:

> Qu'on le veuille ou non une nouvelle littérature se précise. Elle n'est plus française, elle n'est plus canadienne... elle ne sera pas joual.... Ce qu'elle sera... importe peu. Nous sommes sortis du mimétisme littéraire qui n'était utile qu'aux critiques. Ca leur permettrait de porter des jugements de valeur sans risquer de se tromper. La culture impérialiste de France leur fournissait à tout coup de modèle de l'œuvre qu'ils jugeaient ici.

Les œuvres produites par les membres de ce groupe sont encore peu nombreuses pour qu'on puisse porter un jugement sur tout le mouvement, d'autant plus que les débuts littéraires de ces idéologues furent très hésitants et parfois, comme c'est le cas de Paul Chamberland, bien éloignés de leurs positions présentes.

Dans *Terre Québec*, Paul Chamberland était encore au stade du lyrisme. Mais déjà l'amour de la femme se confondait avec celui de la terre natale. Il fallait, avant de libérer cette terre, accepter d'en être, dire tout haut qu'on en fait partie. Cette première prise de position ouvrait la porte à un enracinement qui, tout en cherchant des assises et des raisons d'être, contribuait à la transformation des conditions faites aux Québecois.

Dans son roman, *La vie inhumaine*, Laurent Girouard posait un autre jalon dans cette voie de l'élaboration d'une nouvelle littérature. Son héros est un faible qui s'enfonce dans la dégradation, qui se laisse engloutir dans sa condition de colonisé. Girouard dessinait les traits du visage de l'homme actuel. Dans l'esprit de l'auteur ce visage devrait susciter tant d'horreur et de dégoût qu'il ouvrirait la voie à une révolte. Avant de surmonter l'aliénation, il fallait en prendre acte. Girouard a adopté les techniques du nouveau roman ce qui a réduit cette descente aux enfers à un simple exercice de style. La distorsion entre la forme et le contenu était telle que l'œuvre s'annihilait dans la confusion.

Jacques Renaud adopte le style qui correspond au climat qu'il cherche à évoquer. Et dans son dernier recueil, "L'afficheur hurle", Chamberland change, lui aussi, de langage, ce qui donne des poèmes comme celui-ci:

> oh Toi cède Toi big brother connard anonyme deux cents millions d'anglo-saxons hydre yankee canadian marée polymorphe imberbe à serres nickelées Standard Oil General Motors je suis cubain yankee no je suis nègre je lave les planchers dans un bordel du Texas je suis québecois je me fais manger la laine sur les dos je suis l'agneau si doux je m'endimanche du red enseign et je crève à la petite semaine je suis une flaque une bavure dans les marges de ma Bank of Montreal de Toronto.

On peut déceler dans cette profusion de noirceur et de points sombres une volonté acharnée de détruire une certaine forme de vie. Il peut y entrer une part de masochisme dans ce désir, mais le fait de l'exprimer, de le révéler à la face du monde indique une volonté de renaissance. En attendant, cette révolte qui a pour objet la transformation de la société, voire de l'homme tout entier, commence par s'en prendre à l'intellectualisme, à une certaine forme de culture raffinée transmise par la France ou dispensée dans les collèges et les séminaires. Cet acharnement contre une mère patrie tutélaire, est-ce autre chose qu'un voeu, bien qu'inexprimé, de s'affirmer comme nord-américain? En fait, l'anti-intellectualisme littéraire de *Parti Pris* correspond à un courant puissant dans la littérature américaine. Dans tout mouvement de refus et de rénovation, l'absence de tradition permet une grande liberté. Malheureusement, on a déjà vu aux Etats-Unis l'anti-intellectualisme des beatniks se résorber soit dans une sentimentalité sirupeuse, soit dans des spectacles de cabaret où les audaces puériles ont pour objet d'amuser les bourgeois apathiques.

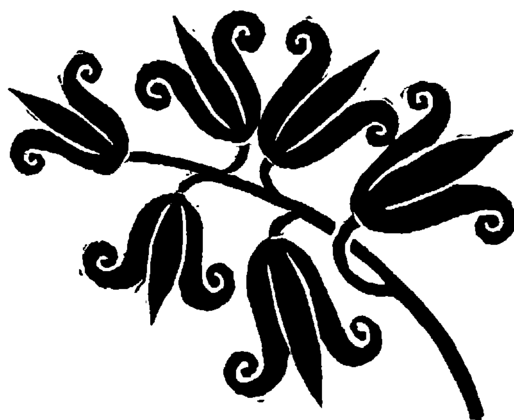
Certes, il ne faut pas pousser trop loin la comparaison. Car les adeptes de *Parti Pris* équilibrent leur refus d'une certaine forme d'intellectualisme par un bagage idéologique emprunté aux néo-marxistes et aux sociologues de la colonisation, notamment Jacques Berque. Renaud lui-même le confirme:

> Lire Trotsky jusqu'au bout. Ca donne des envies, à lire ce gars-là, de refaire le monde, oui, mais sans t'arrêter, avec un fusil, jusqu'à temps que t'en rencontre un qui vise mieux que toé. Un coup mort, tu t'en sacres.
>
> Y est surtout pas question de juger quelqu'un. Y faut fesser à bonne place. Y a des misères humaines qui tuent comme la nounounerie des artisses ou des riches. Pauvre cave d'idéaliste qu'on est des fois. Le monde y veut pas changer, le chien! C'est toi qui changes. Le monde y t'assume.

Dans une perspective révolutionnaire, cette littérature se condamne elle-même. Au lieu de se dépasser elle s'annihile. Elle est le produit et elle témoigne d'une periode qu'on voudrait transitoire.

Si les écrivains de *Parti Pris* assumaient le parler joual et en faisaient une langue révolutionnaire, leur cheminement n'aboutirait pas à l'impasse. Là n'est point leur intention. Ils exhibent cette langue honteuse, cette image de la dégradation afin de la faire disparaître. Il s'agit en quelque sorte d'une phase prélittéraire. Or, la langue française universelle existe. Elle existe même dans les journaux du Québec. Elle charrie parfois des scories, elle est entachée d'anglicismes, mais c'est un instrument qui est mis à la disposition de tous ceux qui veulent s'exprimer.

Un premier pas dans cette voie de libération n'est-ce pas d'accepter cette langue de l'élite et d'en faire la langue du peuple? Mais comment oublier qu'il s'agit aussi du cri que font retentir des jeunes encore mal dégagés de leur adolescence, qui veulent transformer la société afin que le monde les adultes soit plus acceptable. Ce monde est dominé par les élites traditionnelles, vit sous l'ombre tutélaire de la culture et de la puissance économique canadienne-anglaise. Il se dégage à peine des structures établies depuis des générations. Et puis ne sommes-nous pas à la frontière d'une Amérique dont la présence est d'autant plus inquiétante qu'elle informe la vie quotidienne, ignorant totalement les barrières géographiques et linguistiques? On comprend que ces jeunes soient impatients et qu'ils soient animés d'une volonté de transformation qui oscille entre l'action révolutionnaire et le nihilisme destructeur. Aussi cette littérature n'est-elle qu'une étape. Il en restera sans doute des bribes dans la mesure où les témoignages attestent de ce qui est durable chez cet homme canadien-français et de ce qui le rattache au mouvement universel de renouveau.



TRIBUTE TO THE PRINTER

Frank Davey

(As one way of celebrating our termination of six years of publication, we present the following tribute to Charles Morriss, our printer, whose excellent workmanship has contributed so much to the success of Canadian Literature. *While doing so we would point out that, in addition to the books mentioned in this article, two books reviewed in the present issue,* The World of W. B. Yeats *and* City of the Gulls and Sea, *both fine pieces of design and workmanship, were printed by Morriss.)*

HIS IS A PRINTSHOP two-thirds of whose work is in small commercial advertising, in handbills, receipts, cheque blanks, order forms, stationery and flyers, yet it has earned the reputation of doing the best creative printing in British Columbia. Charles Morriss, the printer of *Canadian Literature*, has made a determined attempt to raise the standards of printing in British Columbia and to influence printing throughout Canada. While other printers made money as easily as they could, Morriss amassed the equipment necessary for fine printing and began doing creative work, at little or no profit, as his only kind of advertising. Gradually he has done his share to change the Western Canadian public's opinion of fine printing, and readers of the magazines that come off his presses, *Canadian Literature*, *Prism*, and the *British Columbia Library Quarterly*, have come to expect Morriss's use of fine papers, black inks, clean design and general craftsmanship and care.

Charles Morriss has succeeded in this because he has always been concerned with the graphic possibilities of book and paper design and has gained personal satisfaction from creating fine work. As a boy, he experimented with a gelatine press, and later developed this interest through apprenticeship and private study into his life's work. His profession has taken him through positions in over two hundred printshops in the United States and Canada and to a period of study in the library of the St. Bride's Institute in London. When in 1950 he opened

his own shop in Victoria, he knew that his original handpress was not going to be adequate for all the possibilities he wished to embody in print. He began purchasing good equipment whenever he could, and in 1957 bought out another printer to get a superior building and location. But so meticulous was his choice of equipment that he sold or threw out most of that in the new shop as substandard, and slowly refurbished it with machinery which he knew he could trust. His present equipment includes over thirty type faces; he has several offset presses, one of which is equipped to do complete colour reproduction of a quality adequate to produce illustrated catalogues for local art shows, and a number of letter presses. Careful in his choice of equipment, Morriss is also careful in his selection of employees, all of whom can work without direction at their particular tasks, leaving Morriss relatively free to work at design.

The same care is reflected in the production of the many books which Morriss has added to our libraries, and which have greatly stimulated the printing arts in Western Canada. Since he started work in Victoria, the productions of British Columbia printers as a whole have shown a marked improvement in overall design and finish, while his high standards have contributed greatly to the success of the literary magazines he prints and to the development of the Klanak Press.

Morriss shows great versatility at printing multi-lingual works, for which he arranges his own proofreading. He prints annually *The Canadian Yearbook of International Law* in a bilingual French-English edition. He printed for the University of British Columbia (which now has almost all of its important printing done by Morriss) and Sopron University *Papers Commemorating One Hundred and Fifty Years of Forestry Education in Hungary*, a work in six languages. And in literature he did a most attractive collection of poems by St-Denys Garneau and Anne Hébert, with translations by F. R. Scott, for the Klanak Press; here the side-by-side originals and translations are skilfully reproduced in blue and black inks respectively.

Three of the most beautiful books in a visual sense which Morriss has produced, *The Inaugural Speech* of U.B.C. President Macdonald, *An Academic Symposium*, and Dr. Macdonald's *President's Report*, are notable for the bold use of decorative colour and large type faces, while Morriss's design of Robin Skelton's *A Valedictory Poem* grows right out of the traditional form and voice of the poem.

Two recent welcome additions to Canadiana which Morriss has printed, George Nicholson's *Vancouver Island's West Coast* and Gordon Bowes' *Peace River Chronicles*, are proving not only that fine printing is possible, but also that the public is willing to pay for it. These combine a high quality of produc-

tion, the utmost cleanness in design and marked historical interest; they are necessarily high priced (Nicholson's book, 356 pages, costs $10), and yet they are selling as fast as Morriss can reprint them.

It is the remarkable achievement of Charles Morriss that he has helped raise our tastes to the point where we are willing to pay extra for printing of good quality. It was always theoretically possible to produce such printing, with the paper, the time, and the talent, but many printers have thought and continue to think that the effort required for fine printing was not worth its reward. Content at first with only the artistic reward, Charles Morriss is now receiving the more tangible reward of watching his fine books sell. Readers of such magazines as *Canadian Literature* can be thankful that Mr. Morriss has never neglected his art.

review articles

POETIC AMBASSADOR

John Robert Colombo

EARLE BIRNEY, *Near False Creek Mouth.* McClelland & Stewart, $4.50 cloth, $2.50 paper.

LET ME START with a few sentences from the Revised Edition of Desmond Pacey's *Creative Writing in Canada.* Concerning the poetry of Earle Birney, Professor Pacey has this to say: "Next to Pratt, he is the most original poet of Canada.... Unlike most contemporary Canadian poets, Birney is not given to echoing Eliot, Auden or Dylan Thomas. He is not always successful as a poet, but he is always himself.... Birney's tendency to root his poems in the present... frequently betrays him, as it also has betrayed Pratt in recent years, into writing not only of but merely for the moment." Agreed — but since writing this, Birney broke his ten years of silence and published two totally new books two years apart.

I am certain Birney's latest, *Near False Creek Mouth,* his sixth book of poems, is his most striking, and perhaps his most accomplished collection. The way I see him, Earle Birney is neither young nor old. He seems to have discovered the fountain of youth late in life, he drank from it but broke all the rules by retaining the wisdom of his previous years. The poetry is like the man — youthful without being young, mature without being mellow, formal and fluid at the same time, neither academic nor beat, not entirely mannered yet not completely natural, neither totally ironic nor totally mythic — somehow a human (and somewhat haphazard) arrangement of workable incompatibles. The standard categories collapse at his feet. Birney is his own poet.

"His own poet" finds himself a tourist. He is knocking out travel poems for *Near False Creek Mouth* on his typewriter in South America and the Caribbean. As a rule, I don't go for travel poems, but these are not the standard picture-postcard variety. The vile phrase usually conjures up scenic views of mountains and matadors, usually expresses evocations of timeless beauty from the mouths of harried tourists, usually communicates weak liberalistic sentiments about oppression, sickness and death. Birney's travel poems are decidedly different. If anything, touristy poems are to Birney's what coloured slides are to 16 mm. colour movies. Birney's poems are not still pictures but motion pictures, in sound and colour. It is true they verge

on the picturesque and the anecdotal, but they are dramatic and often demanding of the reader. There is nothing in them of the well-heeled traveller's minimizing of danger, discomfort and dark friendships. Instead Birney is, as a tourist and writer, aggressively engaging, with an eye for action. He describes only significant scenery, and the presence of the poet only when there is a purpose behind it.

Offsetting the colour and clamour of the exotic backgrounds, Birney places himself in the foreground, for dramatic relief, somewhat seriously, as a Prufrock. Throughout the poems he catches himself in a phrase peeping over the heads of crowds, as surprised as the reader to be there. In "For George Lamming," he turns towards a mirror and is stunned to see himself among the "black tulip faces":

> like a white snail
> in the supple dark flowers.

An Alfred Hitchcock, playing cameo roles in his own films, Birney turns up as a gossiping tourist in "Machu Picchu":

> coffeeplanter from Surinam
> womanizing Rhodesian pitboss
> American missionary-doctor
> baldheaded professor (Canada).

A number of poems are the author's reactions to the sights and sounds around him. When he spies a girl on the beach, he laments his lack of speed — to chase after her ("On the Beach"). "Professor of Middle English Confronts Monster" finds him laughing at a miniature dragon the way St. George would laugh at a large lizard.

Birney's success stems from the open mind he maintains while travelling and composing. It is open to the ordinary and the extraordinary indiscriminately, but the two are impossible to separate in his successful poems. This is obvious in two linked poems "Cartagena de Indias" and "On Cartagena de Indias, His Native City." The first (sustained in free form for a hundred and sixty-odd lines) is a scenario of the senses, rich in detail, remarkable in rhythm, crammed with details from everyday life in the Columbian city of Cartagena. Humanity and history are compressed, then, as if by chance, the poet contrives to come across a concrete "shoe ... ten feet long" and beside it a plaque:

> *En homenaje de la memoria de*
> *LUIS LOPEZ*
> *se erigió este monumento*
> *a los zapatos viejos*
> *el día 10 febrero de 1957.*

Peasants inform Birney that their national poet Luis Lopez wrote lovingly, though grudgingly, of their city as a worn-out shoe. This leads Birney to end his poem:

> —and him I envy
> I who am seldom read by my townsmen
>
> Descendants of pirates grandees
> galleyslaves and cannibals
> I love the whole starved cheating
> poetry-reading lot of you
> for throwing me the shoes of deadman Luis
> to walk me back into brotherhood.

The poem that follows is a very fine translation of the Lopez poem, which in Birney's free rendering concludes:

> ... Still, full of your own familiar rancid disarray
> you manage to win, even from me, that love
> a man finds he has for his shoes when they are old.

The reader realizes at this point that the poems have ceased to be separate,

that the collection of poems is a continuum of experience, that when Birney travels going is better than getting there.

Not every day is palmy. Beneath the excitement of everyday life, there are sinister and sacred moments. The dramatic poem "Meeting of Strangers" finds the poet in Trinidad confronting an armed thief. The dark-skinned hoodlum is attracted by the poet's "frayed jacket," but by executing "a nice ... jump" into the street, the poet is able to elude the stranger. "Frayed" suggests Birney's often sleazy subject-matter, and "jump" the technical virtuosity that keeps the poet out of depths he does not want to explore.

Birney gives the impression he can do anything he wants. This is the success of style. His remarkable ability to arrange surface sensations results in a poetry occasionally overwritten, too high-key, but verse that is compulsively readable. His control of the vernacular, his choice of the exact adjective and powerful verb, keep the tone taut and muscular. Texture quickens every line: a dramatic tension (throughout the book and within individual poems) between the swirl of outward action and the "one greywhite Vancouver me" (in "Saltfish and Akee"), between the often-violent action and the amazed observer. Birney is the still point; "I will follow in a small trot only," he says in "On the Beach".

But beneath the greying (or going) hair, there is a profounder man than Prufrock, someone moved by the sacred moments, someone:

> stirred
> by quite nameless excitement.

This Birney, the "believer in myth," is the man who is moved. The phrases are

DISTINGUISHED WORKS IN PAPERBACK

The Infinite Moment
and Other Essays in Robert Browning, 2nd ed.
W. O. RAYMOND
"... long included within the main body of Browning scholarship." *Times Literary Supplement.* $2.50

The Gutenberg Galaxy
The Making of Typographic Man
MARSHALL MCLUHAN
"A wholly indispensable book." *University of Toronto Quarterly.* $2.25.

The Enemy Joy
New and Selected Poems
BEN BELITT
"Belitt is an impressionist in the best sense — warm, distinct, and original." *New Yorker.* $1.95.

The Novel and the Modern World, rev. ed.
DAVID DAICHES
"One of the most helpful introductions to the 20th century British novel." *South Atlantic Quarterly.* $1.75

University of Toronto Press

taken from a fine poem "Machu Picchu," which merges two points in history into a single psychological event — the discovery of the Machu Picchu ruins by Hiram Bingham, and their present-day rediscovery by tourists. The "quite nameless excitement" is studied more secretly in "Letters to a Cuzco Priest." A nameless padre has incited the poverty-stricken peasants to protest their lot, and some of them are murdered during their protest. Birney asks the padre to redirect his prayers:

> Do not forgive your god
> who cannot change being perfect.

Instead:

> Pray to yourself above all for men like me
> that we do not quench
> the man
> in each of us.

There should be more poems of this intensity in *Near False Creek Mouth* to replace such interminable (though entertaining) pages of conversation as "Most of a Dialogue in Cuzco." Like Hiram Bingham, the man who discovered Machu Picchu, Birney is an explorer of technique. The technique that interests him at the moment isn't so much stream-of-consciousness as it is Pop Poems. Pop Art undercuts the conventions of the framed canvas by incorporating "real" elements into the painting — road signs, Campbell's Soup labels, etc. Not being a painter, Birney takes overhead gutter conversations and incorporates them holus-bolus into some of his poems. When they function as asides, there for colour or dramatic relief, they work, but when they function as the full poem, they fail. Other poems which are meant to be heard, not read, like radio plays, are "Toronto Board of Trade Goes Abroad" and "Billboards Build Freedom of Choice."

Among the poets of Canada, Birney is unique in another way. A unique stylist, he also has a unique stance. He is close to poets like George Barker and Theodore Roethke, for he seems to have found a way of being poetic without being self-conscious about it. He has learned to write about the beautiful without blinking, without avoiding it, apologizing for it, finding subterfuges or suffering it. His eyes revel in colours, contrasts and contours. Like D. H. Lawrence, he has sudden sympathies for flowers, animals and peasants, without the aching feeling he has to justify such enthusiasm. He can write an old-fashioned poem about flowers ("Caribbean Kingdoms") and make it modern and masculine. He has written his own motto for style and sympathy in "Fine Arts":

> Beware of the poet
> who's fine-
> ly bound
>
> For the art to be lauded
> as finest see Ovid.

He maintains the novelty of experience and expression by using, in his touring poems, a hand-held camera — a moving montage, a sort of poetic-*verité*.

By contrast, the few poems with Canadian settings in *Near False Creek Mouth* are ironic and less than generous. "Advice to a Hamilton (Ont.) Lady About to Travel Again" travesties the Canadian scene delightfully, but at Canada's expense, and to the benefit of a Caribbean city. (The last line, which dissipates the effect of the poem, was added since the poem first appeared in *The Tamarack Review*.) "Arrivals," set in Nova Scotia, is effective, but it is a typical

Maritime poem with an overload of guilt. "Can. Hist." is an able companion to Birney's "Can. Lit." in *Ice Cod Bell or Stone* and a candidate for a revised *The Blasted Pine*. Finally, when he writes about that haven of poets, the Canadian academy, Birney is smug and sarcastic, as in "Candidate's Prayer before Master's Oral" and "Testimony of a Canadian Educational Leader." I wish these poems were better — at least as moving as the travel poems.

I also wish the Canadian government would appoint Earle Birney its first Poetic Ambassador at Large. Ottawa should direct him to travel to all foreign countries and order him to transcribe their fauna and flora, describe ways of life in faraway places. He might then write about Canada with the same abandon he takes to cities in South America. In any case, he would permit his countrymen to share his memorable impressions of Germany, Italy, Iceland, India, Greece. . . .

THE UNIVERSAL CONTEXT

Donald Stephens

Poetry of Mid-Century, 1940-1960, edited by Milton Wilson. New Canadian Library Original, McClelland & Stewart, $2.35.

ADDED RECENTLY to that useful and much needed series, The New Canadian Library, is an "original" volume of poetry which provides a good, though somewhat biased, introduction to the poetry written in English Canada during the past two decades. This anthology is edited by Milton Wilson, a critic whose taste and selection usually demands respect.

Mr. Wilson has chosen ten poets to represent the time between 1940 and 1960. Five of these ten he considers to be predominant poets of the two decades: Earle Birney, Irving Layton, Margaret Avison, Raymond Souster, and James Reaney. Of the five other poets, P. K. Page is chosen because she represents a dominant position in the poetry of the forties; the other four are poets of the so called "younger generation": Leonard Cohen, Jay Macpherson, Alden Nowlan, and Kenneth McRobbie.

Some readers may feel that Mr. Wilson would have done a better, and more representative, job if he had included other poets. Ten writers to represent the most active twenty years in Canadian poetry is a small number. The limitation of the number of poets reveals, instead of the general development of the twenty years, a development of the poets them-

selves. This consideration is perhaps the best thing about this small volume; the growth of the poets is obviously underlined. The changes in the twenty years are partly satisfied in the selection of the minor group; P. K. Page serves as a link between the major voices Wilson selects and the younger poets concluding the volume who began to write in the fifties and are writing today.

Of course, the anthologist can never satisfy all his readers; tastes and attitudes about Canadian poetry of the last twenty years range considerably. Perhaps A. J. M. Smith can be omitted because he belongs to an "earlier generation", but his academic refinements and precision relate him quite directly to the intellectualized stream of present-day Canadian poetry. F. R. Scott, too, should be included in this volume; his satire relates to the attack on the parochial which is another trend in modern Canadian verse. As for A. M. Klein, his poetry is a positive voice in the poetry of Canada in the forties; he represents forever the typical crying-out into which all writers in the forties dissolve. Klein, despite his disappearance from the scene in recent years, is surely one of the predominant echoes on the Canadian scene.

There are younger poets, too, who should be presented. Phyllis Webb belongs to the trends of the fifties and is a product of the forties in attitude and tone. She cannot be excluded because her better poetry is in the sixties, which perhaps is why Al Purdy is not included. And where are Daryl Hine and Douglas Le Pan? How about Eli Mandel and Wilfred Watson? Who, a reader may ask, is Kenneth McRobbie? Interesting as McRobbie's poetry may be, at least to Wilson, the inclusion of his verse is not warranted here. This volume pretends to be representative of twenty years; it is, instead, selective, and often the selection appears almost off hand.

This impression is strengthened by the skimpy introduction. Mr. Wilson explains the short selection of poets by saying that his model is an earlier volume in the New Canadian Library series, Ross's *Poets of Confederation*. But where four poets can present that era, ten poets cannot do so for the last twenty years. The whole time is different; the country has changed in texture and quality. Where four represented an age one hundred years ago, ten do not today.

A reader of Canadian literature cannot forget easily the brilliant essay Mr. Wilson wrote a few years ago, "Other Canadians and After" — a study of the poets of the forties and fifties. Frankly, I expected an introduction of this quality, and I was disappointed in the one produced here. The earlier essay might have been presented here; Mr. Wilson could have revised it for the volume, or even presented it in its original form with a note added to explain his choice, or his omissions. Instead he backs away from his position.

Yet when he gets to the individual poets, Mr. Wilson has not shrugged off his responsibility to show their work as it develops. Without exception, the selection of the poetry of the dominant five is without equal. There is the range of Birney, the paradox of Layton, the ambiquity of Avison, the variating texture of Souster, the complexities of Reaney. The guide has been a chronological arrangement, which works in every case but that of Reaney, a poet famous for unknowingly deceiving his public when it comes to publication of his work; often

a poem published is one written four, if not more, years before. (If anything, this points out Reaney's fine capacity for working over his poetry, and waiting for the right moment for its publication.)

The publication of poetry today is such that often a poet permits things to be published that he should perhaps wait over, cull into finer poetry through the objectivity given by time. Birney, Layton, Avison, and Souster are often guilty of this; there are always poems — except perhaps with Avison — which should not be published, which often seem merely to fill the pages. For this reason, Wilson's anthology presents a better, and consequently fuller, picture of the poets than one might gain from their actual volumes.

The occasional lapses into stilted forms and fragmented thought that mark minor notes in Birney's volumes are missing here. Birney's best poetry reaches great heights, as presented by this volume. "David" is Birney at his best, but is only part of a developing Birney; look at "Bushed" and "A Walk in Kyoto". Then there is the delightful aspect of Birney's mien: his humour. It has, paradoxically — a blatant irony. There is the "Mammorial Stunzas for Aimee Simple McFarcin". But the whole of Birney is caught, perhaps, in "The Bear on the Delhi Road". Here is his range, his grace in diction, his underestimated controlled theme:

It is no more joyous for them
in this hot dust to prance
out of reach of the praying claws
sharpened to paw for ants
in the shadows of deodars.
It is not easy to free
myth from reality
or rear this fellow up

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by

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to lurch, lurch with them
in the tranced dancing of men.

The volume, too, shows Layton for his best. And it is about time that the real Mr. Layton stood up! The reading public, I think, is tired of the masks which Layton puts on, if only because they are so obvious. Layton has many directions, and most of them are shown in this volume, but shown with subtle direction. "The Swimmer", "The Cold Green Element", and "Whom I Write For" are Layton at his best. But the exercises in erotics could be removed now from a collection of Layton's poetry; he is now too good for that. He is older now — though I am sure that age has only dulled slightly his sexual interest — and I, as one of his admirers, would prefer a Yeats attitude here, rather than the cry of a man who perhaps has cried too much about his "back's sunburnt/ from so much love-making/ in the open air".

But where Layton has a reputation based on his social and sexual themes, Margaret Avison demands appreciation for many things, but especially for the form of her poetry. Critics have labelled her an Imagist, and that she probably is, but the key to her poetry lies not in her control of form. She does with poetry what few other Canadian poets try to do — except for A. G. Bailey and Roy Daniells — and that is to bring a subtle consciousness of form to the organic wholeness of the poem. Admittedly, the younger poets — the Tish Group especially — are conscious of form, but only in the dimension of the rhythm associated to form. Avison carefully shakes her reader out of a lethargy about free and blank verse; she does not do this by fooling around with the appearance on the printed page, but by a subtle infusion of form into matter.

The careful chronological arrangement continues with the poetry of Souster and Reaney. Their work is well selected, their growth obvious. But I would debate their inclusion here as dominant voices, especially when P. K. Page — and others I have mentioned — is delegated to the role of a minor voice. Page's voice will forever represent the temper of the forties. Her pictures of psychological illness, the dominated child, the dreams of adolescence, belong in this pre-sixties picture. Her comment about the conformism of society will remain an outstanding example of the universal within the local, a too often obvious stumbling block to many poets in Canada. The "Stenographers" presents this quality best:

In the felt of the morning the calico minded,
sufficiently starched, insert papers, hit keys,
efficient and sure as their adding machines;
yet they weep in the vault, they are taut as net curtains
stretched upon frames. In their eyes I have seen
the pin men of madness in marathon trim
race round the track of the stadium pupil.

The other four poets in this group are interesting, and Wilson again shows his taste in his selection of their work. There is, too, a good representative quality about them in their "Canadianness" and their connection to the various streams of Canadian poetry. Cohen, who will produce amazing things, I am sure, belongs in part to the stream of Klein, but he reproduces exile themes of much Canadian poetry, and is influenced by at least one of Layton's masks. Jay Macpherson echoes the often silent stream of Imagism, and holds high a respect for form. Alden Nowlan has a hard road to

follow — he lives in the "cradle of Canadian poetry, New Brunswick" — but he has been able to discard the parochial influences of his environment, yet none of its natural habitat, its colour and clear sound. Fortunately, Wilson is not guided by local loyalties — since he has a minor poet from New Brunswick, he does not feel he has to include one from British Columbia, or the prairies — nor is he influenced by any other taste but his own.

But the most agreeable thing about *Poetry of Mid-Century* is the lack of the word "Canadian" in the title. At last, it has happened! The apology is over; the very title indicates this fact. It is poetry that is written in English, in direct association with poetry written elsewhere. Of course there is often a Canadian framework to the poems, but it usually plays a minor role. These poets are writing poetry that is universal in theme and context. At times the voice is minor. For the most part, however, it is as good as poetry being written in Britain and the United States. Even a skim reading of this anthology proves that.

THE HOUSE THAT FRYE BUILT

Robin Skelton

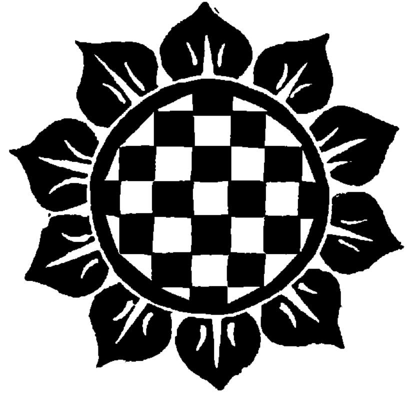
NORTHROP FRYE, *Fables of Identity: Studies in Poetic Mythology*. Harcourt, Brace & World.

NORTHROP FRYE, in this collection of his critical essays, makes use of F. H. Underhill's term "metahistory" to refer to that kind of historical study which presents a philosophical scheme, and which reaches a point where it becomes "mythical in shape, and so approaches the poetic in its structure." *Fables of Identity* could well be called "metacriticism", and it both gains and suffers from its author's desire to perceive a unifying grammar of structures underlying all literature.

Metacriticism, like metahistory, tends to deal in vast and suspect generalizations, and to present us with specious arguments which fit so neatly into the scheme that we accept them out of a desire for order, and regard their approximations as permissible because made in the service of a unifying vision. Thus we accept critical fantasy in the way in which we accept the fantasy of the poem, feeling that the process of perception which is presented is of more significance than the degree to which it is objectively

accurate. When Frye tells us that the work of Blake lacks "sentimentality and irony", he is indicating an affective, not a precise, truth, as was Blake himself when he stated that the Black Boy's skin was black but his soul white. Both statements are false, but helpful, simplifications. When Frye in his essay *Towards Defining an Age of Sensibility* states that the reason for "intensified sound patterns" is "an interest in the poetic process as distinct from the product", he is making a dangerously specious distinction, but guiding us in a rewarding direction. When he says Spenser "is not the kind of poet who depends on anything that a Romantic would call inspiration", we may be dubious, but are willing to go along with him for the ride. When he adds that "He is a professional poet, learned in rhetoric, who approaches his sublime passages with the nonchalance of a car-driver shifting into second gear", I, for one, am incredulous. I concede that Spenser's *Faerie Queene* is organized with such complexity and with such dependence upon established rhetorical manœuvres that it looks as if this is the case, but twenty-five years of writing poetry and ten years of studying the psychology of the process have led me to treat such matters with more caution. I don't know with what ease or difficulty Spenser wrote any more than Frye does, but bland assertions of the unprovable are part of the tools of the metacritical trade.

Of course, the metacritic uses words like Inspiration as metaphors rather than definitions. Even though Frye frequently attempts definition of crucial terms, his definitions always end up by being analogies or assertions of belief rather than analyses of phenomena, and significant



because of the connotations they suggest rather than the denotations they explicitly supply. The result is a combination of strategic oversimplification and brilliant suggestiveness, as in the "attempt to set forth the central patterns of the comic and tragic visions." One paragraph resulting from this attempt reads:

> In the comic vision the *vegetable* world is a garden, grove or park, or a tree of life, or a rose or lotus. The archetype of Arcadian images, such as that of Marvell's green world or of Shakespeare's forest comedies. In the tragic vision it is a sinister forest like the one in *Comus* or at the opening of the *Inferno*, or a heath or wilderness, or a tree of death.

This is both perceptive and absurd, and though Frye qualifies (and somewhat undermines) his analysis with the statement that "it is, of course, only the general comic or tragic context that determines the interpretation of any symbol", we are still left with a number of ambiguous landscapes. We are also left with the feeling that some sleight-of-hand is being practised; of course a "tree of death" is part of the tragic vision — this is, as Frye says himself, "obvious"; it is also, however, disingenuous. The

mine has been salted; unwary readers must beware of buying too many shares.

This, I suppose, points to my fundamental quarrel with Frye. He is, in this book, too concerned to create a structure which pleases his own sense of æsthetic order to worry about whether or not the structure will comfortably accommodate any intelligence other than his own. Thus he is, at times, wantonly perverse. He ignores facts. "Blake's only fictions are in his Prophetic Books" he says blandly. I'd like to know how the word "fiction" can be manipulated so as not to refer to *The Island in the Moon, The Mental Traveller*, and the early ballads. Inconsistencies abound. We are told on page 139 that Blake lacked irony, and on page 147 that *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* is "based on a sense of ironic contrast between the fallen and unfallen worlds". Both statements can only be true in the world of Metacriticism where inconsistencies can be explained by reference to the dynamic ambiguities resident in highly philosophical terminologies.

It is significant that the most valuable essay in this book is that on Wallace Stevens, for Steven's world is that of the near-solipsistic creator delighting in, and exploring, a series of ideal relationships which derive their validity from the premise that the fictive universe is the only truly ordered one, and (by a kind of Platonic gear-shift) that it therefore both explains and inheres the world of so-called reality. Frye's profound and complex description of Steven's themes is the best guide we have yet had to the "message" (if not the structural procedures) of this truly great poet. It is also the only one of these essays which adduces an adequate amount of evidence to support its argument and its conclusions. Moreover, the evidence adduced appears, for once, to have been chosen because of its relevance to Steven's work rather than to Frye's schema. This essay alone makes the book worth having.

Metacriticism, like metahistory, is always challenging, and, because its method is to arrange literature in a perspective conforming to some religious, psychological, or historical conviction, it results in powerful insights whenever the metacritic's schema chances to correspond with the all-informing vision of a particular writer under discussion. On the other hand, it also leads, like all dogma, to a good many blinkered judgments. "*The Vision of Judgement*", says Frye, "is Byron's most original poem and therefore his most conventional one." The desire for paradoxical brilliance has led to a strange use of the word "therefore" and to a very questionable assertion. The Bible, Frye tells us, "is one long folk tale from beginning to end". I have difficulty in seeing the work of Saint Paul in this light, and cannot agree about either *The Song of Songs* or *Proverbs* unless I enlarge the term "folk tale" into meaningless inclusiveness.

This is my final quarrel with Frye's metacriticism. He ends up by so altering the connotative possibilities of the terms he uses that they become words which can only be used for communicative purposes within the framework he himself supplies, and then only in an approximate manner. To attempt to live, for 260 pages, within the House that Frye has Built is, however, an invigorating experience. Nothing is quite what it appears to be at first. One emerges into the street having had a totally new and strange experience of the meaning of literature, the nature of mythology, and the func-

tion of criticism. *Fables of Identity* is a challenging, enlivening book; some of its notions are so immediately attractive as to intoxicate the enthusiastic reader to the point of disablement. If it is sometimes, as I have hinted, disingenuous and irresponsible, we must not condemn it. Northrop Frye is a metacritic, and metacritics, like poets, are licensed fabulists.

DARKNESS AND EXPERIENCE

H. W. Sonthoff

ELI MANDEL, *Black and Secret Man*. Ryerson. $3.50.

THE POEMS IN ELI MANDEL'S new book, *Black and Secret Man*, are about darkness in a human spirit and experience. It is an almost unrelieved darkness of fear and guilt. Occasionally, as in "Thief Hanging in Baptist Halls", the terror, the guilty knowledge, come into an ordinary daily experience with an effect like that of the dark lines in a Rouault painting. More often the horror swallows everything; the darkness is brutal and final. "In the Beginning" opens

> And so at last I too have come
> To where that body by the shore
> Lies in the twilight, where the sun
> Drops like a pear-shaped groan
> Into the consonantal surf.

There's an image of fallen star, "The word as blood", and the close

> Now like a mouth the opening dark.
> Now the wet, mouthing idiot, Night.

The negation in this poem comes partly from the suggestions which are cancelled out, of the dismembered god image of fruitfulness, of the creative word, of mouth and opening dark. So in the poem "On the Death of Dr. Tom Dooley" the rhythms, the slow progression, the painful accuracy and accumulating weight recall Eliot enough so that the last two lines ("in the beginning/ is the murderous end") are the more bitter.

The title poem calls on our experience of *Macbeth*. A mundane attitude given in the first lines is quickly invaded by an obscure horror of family history.

> These are the pictures that I took: you see
> The garden here outside my home. You see
> The roots which hung my father, mother's
> Tangled hedge, this runnelled creeper vine.

The stresses in line one and the effect of "you see . . . you see" prepare us somewhat for the point of view expressed in the curious sequence of roots, hedge and

vine. Through lines from *Macbeth* the speaker points out two trees in the garden, one observed innocently, one guiltily. After a passage whose tone is both cruel and requiring, other lines from *Macbeth* are used, transformed so that although they keep Macbeth's anguish and guilt, the "secret man of blood" presents a different sort of threat.

> Why, once when brains were out a man would die
> But now like maggot-pies and choughs and rooks
> A black and secret man of blood walks
> In the garden.

"I never go there now," says the speaker in a return to the tone of the opening lines. And then, in irritable mindless rhythms, the ending jerks out.

> But go there, go there, go there,
> Snaps the hanging snapshot bird.

The invasion of the rational by the irrational, of the lunatic by the ordinary is like the shifting mood of Macbeth when he sees Banquo's ghost. The poem gives very strongly both a fascination with and a fear of "the garden here outside my home".

Many of these poems work from great dark tales or implied tradition, from myths or by mythical means, by riddle,

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paradox, or an ironic inversion of experience, as at the end of "David".

> The world turns like a murderous stone
> my forehead aching with stars

There are quick flashes of a kind of language gaiety. More frequently the wit, like the inversion of experience, intensifies pain and bitterness. In Saul's poem, from "Four Songs from The Book of Samuel" The Witch of Endor "casts down her spears/ she waters my heart with ice".

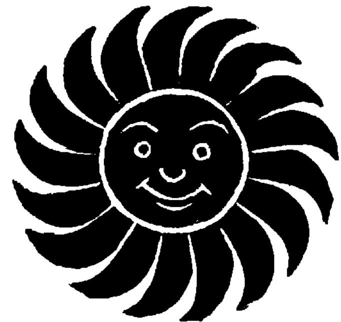
These poems make rich and interesting demands of all sorts. They call on many resources, but they don't always unite them. This is where they fail, for a reader, when they fail. Often one gets both a sense of lurking narrative and an indication that the narrative is not the point, that one shouldn't need to know it, that what is being given is only the attitude or emotion engendered by an experience or a coming together of several experiences. But when the emotion shifts or evolves without apparent cause, its power is reduced. The impression is of a mood out of control, erratic. At the end of "Secret Flower", for example, one doesn't know why the speaker lifts himself from the floor, why the door is suddenly open. Something in the poem has led us deeper and darker into a nightmare of guilt and victimization. Because of the moving power of that journey, the sudden tidying of a Sunday living room, the sudden openness of the door seem to break not only the mood but also the validity of the previous experience. In "Orpheus and Eurydice" there's a similar mood shift, though in reverse.

The movement is organized perfectly clearly in "Orpheus in the Underworld". In the first section a traditional Orpheus speaks of his difficult silent journey before he sings to death. The transition section, about the terrible required path, uses no first person pronoun, giving a sense of limbo. In the third section, the speaker is like Orpheus, but the experience now is really personal.

> I watch their faces for the gleam
> Which tells me that the end begins
> that ecstacy in which they burn my lies
> and tear from me the poems which I cannot write

The trouble with some of these poems is that even when one can understand the structure it doesn't work emotionally. One can understand the organization of mood in "Black and Secret Man", given the clear lead to *Macbeth*. But in this as in other poems, there's violence whose cause is not given; there's a fear which is suddenly cut off and one doesn't quite know why, by what power. The effect is not of powerfully conflicting emotions but of inexplicable moods.

Eli Mandel is consciously dealing, here, with unspeakable terror; many of his poems are almost as secret as they are black.



DOUKHOBOR PROBLEMS

SIMMA HOLT, *Terror in the Name of God. The Story of the Sons of Freedom Doukhobors.* McClelland & Stewart. $7.50.

MRS. HOLT'S BOOK is the latest in a series written on the Doukhobor problem since the turn of the century when that sect came to Canada from Tsarist Russia in the hope of finding a more congenial way of life. It is an attempt to bring the record up to date and in many respects resembles *Slava Bohu* by J. F. C. Wright, another journalist who developed a great interest in the Doukhobor problem a generation ago. Surprisingly enough, reference to this work has been omitted from an otherwise rather complete bibliography.

Mrs. Holt has graphically illustrated her book with a large collection of photographs from the R.C.M.P. files and many other sources. It is perhaps a measure of the changing attitude of non-Doukhobor Canadians that these pictures are now able to be published, whereas in 1950 the writer of this review, having exposed a roll of film illustrating the stripping ritual for the Doukhobor Research Committee, was unable to have it returned by the developers until authorization had been obtained from the Attorney-General's Department. In the present case the photo coverage alone should make the book a best seller.

Mrs. Holt has obviously worked most assiduously in collecting her material although, perhaps owing to her lack of background in things Russian, certain errors are apparent in her facts.

For example (p. 10), in referring to the Great Schism of the seventeenth century, she mentions: "the mass suicides of the RASKOLNIKI, followers of RASKOL". It so happens that the word "RASKOL" merely means SCHISM and is not the name of a person, while the "RASKOLNIKI" are SCHISMATICS, i.e. those who disagreed with the reformed rituals of the official Orthodox Church. Mrs. Holt is in good company here, for was it not the late David Lloyd George who thought "KHARKOV" was the name of a Russian general rather than of a Ukrainian city? Or perhaps the author had been reading about RASKOLNIKOV, the hero of Dostoevski's "Crime and Punishment"! The name "KRESTOVA", the main settlement of the Sons of Freedom, is derived from the Russian word "KREST", cross, and not from "KHRISTOS", Christ. Fred N. Davidoff makes this clear in his autobiography (p. 233). The transliteration of Russian words into the Roman script is a little baffling. For example, "VARENIKI", a kind of dumpling, comes out as "VERENYEKES", while "PIROGI", a sort of patty, is virtually unrecognizable in the form of "PEREHEE".

In this connection Mrs. Holt has admittedly been set the worst possible example by the immigration officials who admitted the Doukhobors to Canada, for no consistent transliteration system was used and the surnames of many have been hopelessly corrupted in the process.

Apart from all these points of detail one of my main criticisms would be that

Mrs. Holt at times writes as though she were composing a novel. It is hard to separate hard facts from embellishments. Despite the copious bibliography appended to the work, the author seldom quotes the sources of her individual facts and it is difficult to sort out what is documented from what is hearsay, or even the result of her own flight of imagination.

One experiences the feeling that Mrs. Holt has made up her mind in advance and that she then adduces facts and data to prove her point. When events run against the current of her own convictions, such as the dismissal by Magistrate Evans of the case against the members of the Fraternal Council charged with conspiracy, she is unable to conceal her annoyance.

The author concludes by advocating a radical solution to the problem of integrating the Sons of Freedom into the community as a whole: "There can be only one answer. That is to break the chain. The only way the chain can be broken is by removing the new links — the children."

Mrs. Holt may or may not be right. But it should be clearly understood that a temporary removal of the children, such as occurred when many adult Sons of Freedom were confined on Piers Island in the early 1930's, and their sons and daughters were cared for privately or in institutions, would do more harm than good. Many of these children of the 1930's have become the bombers of the 1950's and 1960's. Similarly the years in the New Denver School proved no solution in the case of Harry Kootnikoff and others.

On the other hand, a permanent separation of the children from their parents would belie all the basic tenets of our society and would scarcely be tolerated by many Canadians, even those outside the ranks of "the professors, the charlatans, and the skidroad drunks" (note the presence of the second comma) who, one gathers from Mrs. Holt, are the only people at present prepared to tolerate the Sons of Freedom and their way of life. Is it not, indeed, the clash of this to us outdated way of life which is the crux of the matter? "I am not here because I want to be here, but conflicts of life and my sincerity to serve God have brought me here," writes Fred Davidoff from his prison cell.

It is the same old problem, the same unwillingness to recognize change that we find among the Afrikaners and the conservative whites of the southern United States. And it would seem that no one act, however radical, could solve the problem. Only time can change the outlook and ideas of the Sons of Freedom, as it already has that of other Doukhobors, and bring with it a gradual recognition of the need to adapt themselves to the ways of the modern world.

A. W. WAINMAN

BRIGHT BUT POWDERY

DOUGLAS LEPAN, *The Deserter.* McClelland & Stewart.

IN AN ARTICLE ON "The Dilemma of the Canadian Author," (*Atlantic Monthly,* Nov. 1964), Douglas LePan contrasts the writer who works through "what is special in the Canadian scene" with the novelist who will "dive so deeply" that his vision will be of "what happens in

"Henry Kelsey came down with a good fleet of Indians; and hath travelled and endeavoured to keep the Peace among them according to my Order."

Governor George Geyer, York Fort, wrote this in 1692 of Company explorer Henry Kelsey, renowned for his expeditions to the prairie country. He was the first man of his time in Western Canada to master the difficult but essential technique of living and travelling like an Indian, to work seriously on the native languages and, most important of all, to act as peacemaker between the various tribes.

Great men — past and present — build a great Company.

Hudson's Bay Company.
INCORPORATED 2ND MAY 1670.

an anonymous setting to an anonymous, or virtually anonymous hero." This second way, which he favours, at least "for the time being," can produce an "almost universal luminosity which can be understood anywhere."

Mr. LePan is describing the conception behind his novel *The Deserter*, which is about a soldier who deserts after "the war" to take up a virtually anonymous existence in a large city which is never named. As suggested in his article, Mr. LePan uses "myth and symbol" in an attempt to give "universal luminosity" to his novel. What I take to be the central symbol is "a large crystal sphere, banded by the zodiac.... Silently marking the passage of time, it also drew together the architecture of the eye and the architecture of space, fusing them in a radiance that was bright and blue and powdery." Although the author attempts to ground some of the animal figures from the zodiac in brute reality, the novel is not a successful embodiment of the theory.

The central character, Rusty, has had a taste of the ideal world in a brief encounter with a woman. He deserts the army, hoping to recapture the ideal (not the woman), needing to have his life mean more than the kind of routine he knows he will sink into if he is discharged and goes home. The novel is about his life in the underside of London (as I take the city to be more than any other), and what he finally comes to realize. I hope this very brief summary makes the reader feel that this is a worthwhile subject for a novel to investigate. I think it is. But I also know, as Mr. LePan must, that it has been done often and in depth by the French existentialists. There are certainly hints of Camus' novels throughout this one.

But where Camus, Sartre and Genet push the questions of engagement, man's essence, society's dishonesty right through the wall, Mr. LePan does an end run. His deserter is essentially honourable, is outraged when the underworld in which he lives tries to involve him in robbery, is obliged to help a persecuted refugee get out from under Communist pressure, is finally forced to admit that his own desertion of society is egoism, and ends up Doing the Right Thing. Surely not so simple as that? No, not before the refugee is brutally slain by the underworld mob because he is a confederate of Rusty, whom they are out to get (in the very melodramatic but only exciting part of the novel.) Not before — but why continue? There is more melodrama and some sentimentality, but these qualities are the hallmark of a novelist as great as Dickens. The real problem lies elsewhere.

Why is *The Deserter* not convincing? When a writer uses a number of pat events and characters in succession, they must be highly charged in some way with his energy or the reader will lose his ability to suspend disbelief. Language is the obvious medium for conveying energy, but Mr. LePan's poetic style fails to render enough and is interspersed with abstractions. All but a tiny part of the novel is given from Rusty's point of view. He claims to be uneducated, so what are we to make of the following? "They might have been hemmed in, he fancied, by a more powerful orthodoxy and forced to defend these narrow limits against persecution." This type of intellectual analysis is in harmony neither with the poetic flights nor with the attempt to show a soldier's view of reality, complete

with four-letter words. The latter would obviously be appropriate to the kind of underworld in which the novel moves. But Mr. LePan's handling of the vernacular is not well sustained and is often forced. For instance, here is a deserter trying to define what it is about the army that still attracts him. "I mean the real tradition, the tradition that runs all the way back, the tradition you carry in your guts. What did we care whether we supported one king or another or none? It didn't matter to us so long as we got paid and fed, so long as we were kept kennelled and ready for danger wherever it came from, ready to wrestle down catastrophe. That's our tradition, to stave off judgment day." Although we may understand what the author is getting at here, and even if we remind ourselves that the speaker is drunk, I find there is too much Housman and too little common speech or thought.

In sum, I believe that the final impression left on the reader of any sophistication will be slight. Partly the nature of the central character is responsible, but mainly the author is at fault because he worked from a theoretical notion, used hackneyed plot devices and let a superficially colourful spray of language make do for the deeper insight which is asserted but not communicated to the reader.

ELLIOTT GOSE

A WORLD OF THE PROPHETS

ABRAHAM L. FEINBERG, *Storm the Gates of Jericho*. McClelland & Stewart.

THIS IS A GOOD BOOK, much in the way Isaiah, say, is a good book. And like a book of one of the Prophets, it is about being a Jew in a world where there is only the faith of one's fathers to guide and sustain, a world where false gods threaten and enemies press in, and where only occasionally is there a deliverer. Jews since the beginning have been asking "why" of their God, and in this book Rabbi Feinberg is asking "why" of the gentile. Reading him in the shadow of the Vatican's greathearted absolution of the Jews from Deicide it would seem a proper question.

Cast as a spiritual biography beginning with his roots in a tiny *shtetl* in Lithuania from which his parents emigrated and ending in Toronto where he is Rabbi Emeritus of Holy Blossom Temple, Dr. Feinberg chronicles his battles with himself, the Jewish faith and that world he never made: Christendom. In prose that can only be described as by Yahweh out of pulpit, we are exhorted to hold and read the tablets of our time—capitalism, totalitarianism, racial bestiality, growing up, living, dying, sex, the cult of the teenager, ghettoism, and the suburbs.

> 'Christ-killer Jew bastard!'
>
> The triune obscenity bubbled like a witches' cauldron on the pendulous lips of Bellaire's prize derelict—a scrofulous scarecrow who foraged a doughnut and coffee for physical sustenance, 'a cuppla' drinks to feel alive and a shred of ego-satisfaction by cursing every Jew with enough olfactory endurance to venture near him.
>
> The last noun, being a shop-worn epithet of the streets, had long before ceased to denigrate mom's virtue; the penultimate reference to my faith and people I would not deny; 'Christ-killer' stabbed my heart, though I should have been accustomed to it.

I suspect this is the centre of the book (as well as a good example of its style), because time and again Rabbi Feinberg

comes back to the charge of Deicide against the Jews. It is still central to the problem. Every spring since Peter's Rock became patron to what must be to the Jews a festival of hate, Christendom has celebrated at Easter the scabrous untruth that a whole people killed (and go on killing, evidently) God. And from this stem the still-happening forced migrations, slaughters and gas chambers, the real estate and country club rules, the petty indignities and soul-searing prejudices. If we think these things have ceased to exist, that prejudice and intolerance are on the wane, then some serious attention should be paid to this book.

But this volume is about a man too, and a quite remarkable one. He was born to poverty in an Ohio steel town. He emerged early as a debater and later as an orator. After going to Rabbinical College in Cincinnati, his first pulpit was in Niagara Falls. Almost immediately he was called to New York City where the weight of institutional bureaucracy eventually forced him out. He went to Europe to study to be an opera singer, only to wind up on NBC radio as Anthony Frome, the Poet Prince, sponsored by Pepto-Mangan. In the last days of vaudeville he played show biz's Holy of Holies, The Paramount, and topped a bill that included Lillian Roth and Pat O'Brien. A nonentity by the name of Arthur Godfrey announced his radio programmes. With the rise of Fascism he returned to the synagogue. In 1943, he was called to Toronto where he still makes his home.

If, as it seems to me, it is a Canadian trait to get into any fight that comes along, with or without an invitation, from a world war to a "peace-keeping" mission, then Rabbi Feinberg has earned his citizenship. Throughout the years he has practically lived on the K-rations of committee luncheons while fighting for and against most of the social and religious causes known to man. He has been praised and damned by his own people as well as on most editorial pages in Canada. And what has he learned? That the good citizens of Christendom speak of love: it is easier than doing anything constructive. If you are on his side, you will speak of justice. For him, this must come first. Not, perhaps, an original thought, but a practical one.

ROBERT HARLOW

CANADA OBSERVED

PETER VARLEY and KILDARE DOBBS, *Canada*. Macmillan. $12.50.

PERHAPS THIS SHOULD HAVE been called "Two Canadas: Life and Landscape." Certainly Kildare Dobbs, who writes the introduction and Peter Varley, whose photographs comprise the bulk of the book, see us with completely different eyes. Kildare Dobbs is a perspicacious outsider who shares with most Canadians the experience of urban living. Peter Varley represents the Canadian Dream. He is passionately in love with the land itself, with the grandeur of its rocky shores, mountains and overpowering prairie skies.

Kildare Dobbs is at least refreshingly unsolemn in his analysis of the myths that unite our society. Nearly everything he says is true and often amusing, his paradoxes are not strained and yet, in the end, one feels that he has been inadequate.

A case in point in his underestimation of the myth of the Frontier (stressed also by Edmund Wilson in his trilogy on Canadian culture in *The New Yorker*). The Frontier, says Dobbs, is as remote from the experience of ordinary Canadians as "from the experience of a bank-clerk in the Bronx or a Stevenage typist."

Not quite, for many Canadians have known hermits of the bush; superhighways now take us to former lonely fastnesses while books, magazines and TV flood our imagination with a constant and powerful image of the beautiful, empty wilderness. Psychologically the Frontier is always close.

Peter Varley understands this. He is, to borrow the expression coined by Ansel Adams, a true "photo-poet." Now that most of our painters have turned to the abstract idiom, he carries on our landscape tradition.

But there are no Group of Seven clichés, no pine trees in centre foreground. Instead Varley prefers an entirely open foreground, brilliantly lit and so immediate that it draws us into the picture like a good abstract. Thus we seem to be standing right *in* the field of yellow rape in Saskatchewan, or poised on the rocks of Mahone Bay, Nova Scotia, with the water lapping at our very feet.

In other arrangements Varley lets bare trees or bushes form a diagonal screen beyond which we glimpse a city on the opposite riverbank, thus escaping, for Quebec, Montreal and Edmonton, stock post-cardish views.

There are some magnificent panoramic shots taken from high buildings, like that of Horseshoe Falls at Niagara, but Varley can also focus on the exquisite detail of a fern in the rain forest of British Columbia. In the Badlands of Alberta, by enlarging an area only six feet by nine, he creates an effect as of carved Egyptian temples on the Nile near Aswan. Here his work recalls the dramatic touch of Roloff Beny.

Since he is a romantic at heart, Varley responds to the old streets of Quebec, the Gothic towers of Ottawa and the elegiac quality of a single small boat heading back towards Vancouver at dusk. But he has missed the vivacity of our most fascinating city, Montreal. Perhaps this called for some indoor scenes with people.

Notes on the plates are furnished by James W. Bacque, who ornaments his statistics with a pleasant knowledge of our novelists, poets and painters.

JOAN LOWNDES

THE SERIOUSNESS OF WIT

Penguin Modern Poets 4. Penguin Books. 65¢.

IN *Penguin Modern Poets 4* the first Canadian poet makes his appearance in this series. His name is David Wevill, and he is by no means overshadowed by the other two poets in the volume, David Holbrook and Christopher Middleton.

Wevill is a poet who is already mature. His senses are alert, and his poetry abounds in dynamic images which often mingle two senses, particularly sound and sight, as in "a quarrel of pigeons / Collapsing off the eaves, clattered into the night". There is precision of language here that reminds me of the best of Dylan Thomas, without the bluster and rambunctious posturings that too often mar Thomas' work. His linking of sense impressions is reminiscent of the "in-

scape" Hopkins was always striving to achieve in an attempt to give an impression of simultaneity.

Wevill's world, which he views with an unflinching look, contains animate and inanimate in one huge restlessness and constant activity, emphasized in his poems by a very telling use of verbs and verbals. Wevill himself seems to be looking for some quiet point, some resting place for himself in relation to this restless world and its inhabitants.

The last poem in this volume indicates a life dependent on instinctive reaction, "life at the core", not a life in which the senses are "blunt as dead tools", but a life lived in "time of blood". This might sound close to Lawrence, but in his latest poem (published in *The Observer* July 5, 1964) there is a calm and dignified acceptance of death:

> The earth is great with death
> This beginning to be quiet and alone is a preparation
> And a last dignity.

Yet Wevill has caught something of the Lawrentian vision — it can be seen in those poems dealing with birds and animals, particularly "Body of a Rook", perhaps the finest poem in the volume. Through his reaction to animals and birds he recognizes the duplicity of humanity but he is not naïve enough to exclude himself from that duplicity:

> I watched
> Those last sufferings leave her body too,
> Twitching black and rook-supple before
> I kicked my damaged violence into the wood.

He has also learned something from Auden: the use of place and landscape as the starting point of a poem. Wevill's description of these landscapes is part of his vision of the restless world, which becomes a kind of mirror to view and fix himself in that world. However, the reflection never holds: "In me / All time has its place but nothing survives". Nonetheless, he wishes to be placed firmly, but recognizes the danger of being static in the constant flux of the universe. Thus, the poet is caught adrift, continually groping for firmness, trying to grasp permanence in the changing world, his poetic world which abounds in images of change, such as water and clouds. It is as if a long hard look at the world, and an attempt to express its immediacy will somehow give the world and its inhabitants some permanence; yet at the same time Wevill seems to realize that this attempt will be doomed to failure:

> I see everything plainly because I know
> Nothing once, but it must be confirmed
> By this perpetual reappraisal. And yet
> The roots of my eyes resist. I am blind, I think.

All this might suggest that Wevill is deadly serious, but the whole tone of some poems is lightened by a certain Metaphysical wit. There is a poem, "The Poets", which starts as a strict parody of Eliot and becomes a statement about the poet's situation in the modern world.

Wevill is not already a complete poet. Sometimes the descriptions and landscapes simply do not work. In "Spiders", for instance, there is an uneasy compromise between highly wrought phrases and mundane realism. Sometimes the language is too heavily laden with image. Nonetheless, when Wevill selects an object and writes precisely his own immediate identity of mood with that object, he achieves a directness of vision and a power of expression which it is difficult to underestimate.

PETER STEVENS

opinions and notes

VOICES IN LIMBO

Limbo is a new "little magazine" edited from Vancouver by Murray Morton. Volume 1, Number 1, is a manifesto, or rather a series of manifestos. On the very first page Morton "gives notice of the coming appearance of a paraliterary journal of survivalism to be known as *Limbo* and to be published through the courtesy of the Neo-Surrealist Research Foundation." This notice is obviously intended to be funny, playful, or zany. And many of the suggestions that follow (in which Morton suggests what *Limbo* will be, what it will publish, and what it believes) are intended to be equally funny, playful or zany — as, for example, the suggestion that "Limbo intends to publish works which cultivate . . . a desire to bring the waltz tempo into literature."

But is Morton being serious (or funny, playful, or zany) when he proclaims that "Literature must not take itself too seriously" and that "criticism must not take itself seriously at all"? And if he is serious, what about his own criticism? What about the first issue of *Limbo*, which consists of nothing but his own criticism? In these, as in so many other instances, it is difficult to know what Morton intends (presuming that he himself knows); and in some instances — as, for example, when he interrupts his literary-social criticism to observe that "The world needs large undeveloped forest areas untouched even by the hand of the national park authorities", there is no possible way to discover what he has in mind. Possibly he just likes trees, or dislikes "the hand of the national park authorities." Or possibly he has inserted this and similar observations in an effort to achieve "neo-surrealist" effects.

But whatever Morton's intention there is nothing surrealist about his "neo-surrealism". It is just another way of spelling Murray Morton. And so with all the other labels or disguises he assumes (*Limbo*, Pushmi-Pullyu, etc., etc.); they are all euphemisms for "I", and non-functional euphemisms at that, since they merely serve to introduce variant expressions of the same likes and dislikes.

Under one or another of his editorial headings Morton repeatedly denounces authorianism, academicism, the avant-garde, serious fiction (unless it tells a story), all forms of systematic thought (including æsthetics), the beats, "the masses who nightly crave blood in their television viewing." At the same time, under the same headings, he repeatedly proclaims his belief in "freedom", "works which cultivate a desire to give pleasure to ordinary people, not merely æsthetes, fellow writers, scholars, etc.", a "desire to cultivate the creative, positive moods", "Love", "short stories with interesting plots", "enthusiasm for causes." Then, by way of summing up his pronouncements, Morton declares that what *Limbo* finally proposes is "a totally new approach to literature, not a technique, not a movement BUT A GENERAL OPENNESS."

"The way ahead" [to "General Openness"] Morton goes on to proclaim, "has

already been illuminated by many authors of our time, although unfortunately they have not been given proper recognition. Indeed they have too frequently been pushed to one side in favour of certain unmentionable and inferior figures referred to elsewhere in the manifesto. The reason for this is that many critics, teachers and other camp-followers like to imagine themselves to be troubled by the modern world but do not really want to face the precise truth about our times. These circuit-breakers of literature who seek out pessimistic authors whose works express a vague, general sense of futility, are disturbed by and therefore ignore, neglect and dismiss such truly perceptive writers as Aldous Huxley, Robert Musil, Ortega Y. Gasset, J. B. Priestley, Osbert Sitwell."

The name of J. B. Priestley, whatever one may think of the remaining four writers, lets the unmistakeable middlebrow cat out of Morton's neo-surrealist grab-bag of "truly perceptive writers", a grab-bag which also includes the names of Somerset Maugham, Christopher Fry, Sinclair Lewis, Upton Sinclair, and Thornton Wilder. And in later issues of *Limbo* Morton has endeavoured to make good his claims for these writers, his charges against "the unmentionables" for whom they "have been pushed to one side".

T. S. Eliot, the prime "unmentionable", he seeks to discredit (February 1964) on grounds that are, for the most part, merely foolish, although now and again, as in the following lines, his foolishness becomes a bit frightening: "Ezra Pound has mentioned that Eliot wrote *The Wasteland* while convalescing from a breakdown. Surely this information, although heightening certain impressions about the poem's reception, should limit its general significance considerably."

There can be no excuse for this sort of vilification, or for the ineptness of such statements as the following in his ten-page diatribe against Hemingway (Vol. I, Nos. 6 and 7):

> Hemingway's dialogue generally sounds like Noel Coward with webbed feet . . . Hemingway's style suggests nothing so much as that he must have had a prefrontal lobotomy at an extremely early age . . . His style is so simple a child could read it. That he is taken so seriously is significant, in that it marks the stage of our civilization in which the superficial mass mind, frightened of all profundity, began to act as arbiter of taste. Which creates a vicious circle so that to someone who has read widely, is interested in ideas and indifferent to stereotypes, Hemingway has no point, to a conventional mind Hemingway is startling. Then he begins to be studied as a modern classic and thus the lowering of educational standards and the mass mind is less able than ever to exercise good judgment.

Morton's concern for "the mass mind" might be more understandable if it were possible to figure out what, in any given instance, he means by the terms "mass mind", "superficial mass mind", "conventional mind". As it is, about all one can infer is that "the mass mind (whatever that is) has been corrupted by Hemingway's "stereotypes" (whatever they are).

One of the few passages in Hemingway's novels that Morton discusses is the stereotyped and sentimental ending of *Farewell to Arms*; and this passage, he pronounces "magnificent":

> Some things are so magnificent that even someone like Hemingway, determined as he was to be an uncouth, brash ignoramus, cannot spoil such moments when he puts his filthy literary paws on them. Thus the

> moving ending of *Farewell to Arms.* One regrets that we have lost the even more moving passage it would have been had a great and sensitive master written it.

What this means, presumably, is that the passage is great (despite Hemingway) because Murray Morton has found it "moving", although it would be greater still if, say, J. B. Priestley or Upton Sinclair had written it.

Such, in brief, are the critical consequences of "the totally new approach to literature", the "General Openness", that Morton announced in Volume I.

Nevertheless *Limbo* is not a total failure. Although Morton's own contributions must fill more than half the printed pages of the magazine (through Vol. 1, No. 9), his efforts are not all literary, or critical, and some of his social and political observations, notably in the first half of his essay on the Assassination of Kennedy, are in many respects quite perceptive. And, even more important, Morton (in his role as editor) has been willing to accept work that ignores, or denies, or contradicts his "new approach". Perhaps the most distinguished essays that have appeared in the journal are George Woodcock's "Elegy For Fur-Covered Motor Horns" (February 1964) and John Doheny's "Alex Comfort as Novelist" (Vol. 1, No. 9), and the first of these provides a quietly devastating comment (even if unintended by the author) on "Neo-Surrealism", while the second denies or contradicts Morton's "new approach" at every turn.

There are some good poems in *Limbo*, by Bonnie Parker, Ewart Milne, Joan Finnegan, Anne Lewis-Smith, Robert Bly, Roy Fuller, and others. There are also intelligent interviews with Fuller, and Herbert Read. And there are a few good stories (e.g. Emilie Glen, "Old Silents") as well as a number of interesting short pieces, some of them by well known writers like Kenneth Burke.

But it is Morton's intention to edit *Limbo*, not a magazine that might be called *Morton's Miscellany*, and these contributions do not in any sense connect up with his "new approach" — except in so far as they deny or negate it.

WAYNE BURNS

INS, OUTS AND OTHERS

Sir,

I read John Robert Colombo's Toronto letter, especially the portion of it dealing with the entertainment departments of the three newspapers, with interest, and, I think, some profit. Since to a large extent his arguments are based on the proposition that mass newspapers should be run for the benefit of subscribers to journals of opinion and quarterlies, there is no point in taking general issue with him in his judgment of the quality of these entertainment departments. Anyway, he is fairly flattering to the *Toronto Star*. And besides, I have relinquished my position as entertainment editor of that newspaper, and at the moment a debate on the subject doesn't interest me.

But may I, in the interests of accuracy, correct one of Mr. Colombo's errors? True, I am a fervent admirer of Miss Elizabeth Taylor, but not so fervent that I have ever called her a "great actress". I have said that she is an authentic

movie star, the other being Garbo (among women), and that she is a better actress than Garbo. That I certainly stand by.

I was amused to see Mr. Colombo refer querulously to an article carried as a New Year's eve special by the *Star*, dealing with people who are either "in" or "out" culturally. The feature was prepared by me in collaboration with the rest of the entertainment staff, and it seemed obvious to all of us that it was a joke. It was fascinating to me, as I said in a television interview a few weeks later, to discover how seriously it was taken by three groups of people: those who were rated as "in" (they were pleased); those who were declared "out" (they were angry, and imputed the most malign motives to myself and the newspaper); and those who were not mentioned (they were incensed).

I would like to add that I think it's a fine idea to see the inside pages of newspapers being analyzed, and I hope *Canadian Literature* will perhaps establish a regular department looking at the Canadian press. Heaven knows we need it.

NATHAN COHEN

NEW PAPERBACK SERIES

THE LATEST AMONG the growing number of Canadian paperback series has just been launched in the first ten titles of the Clarke Irwin Canadian Paperbacks. This series, unusually attractively produced, aims to present a cross-section, in subject matter and literary quality, of the successful books which Clarke Irwin have published in recent years. The most welcome of all is Robertson Davies' piquant story of provincial Ontario town life, *Leaven of Malice* ($1.25), one of the few first-rate examples of Canadian satirical fiction published in recent years. Biography is represented by William Kilbourn's *The Firebrand* ($1.90), the only satisfactory record up to the present of the life and activities of William Lyon Mackenzie, while in autobiography a particularly pleasing choice is A. Y. Jackson's *A Painter's Country* ($1.90), the simple yet profound record of the life and thoughts of one of our most influential painters. Finally, for those whose interest in the lives of the pioneers is yet unsatisfied, there is *A Gentlewoman in Upper Canada: The Journals of Ann Langton* ($1.50).

The growing list of the Canadian University Paperbacks, published by the University of Toronto Press, presents two new titles of important books by Canadian authors. One is *The Bias of Communication* ($2.50), a series of essays by Harold A. Innis on the links between techniques of communication and the character of cultures, with an introduction by Marshall McLuhan; the style of Innis, like that of McLuhan, is at times turgid and somewhat impenetrable, but his insights into the influence of changing forms of written and oral communication are often extremely valuable. *Aspects of Racinian Tragedy* ($2.25), by John C. Lapp, author of the recent important study of *Zola before the Rougon-Macquart*, is an extremely valuable discussion of the originality with which Racine used and adapted the conventions of French neo-classic dramatic theory to his own highly individual artistic aims.

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