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THE SLEEPING GIANT

Articles

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ANTHONY R. KILGALLIN

Chronicle

BY NAIM KATTAN

Reviews

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Opinion

BY PHYLLIS GOTLIEB

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H. W. SONTHOFF, who has already written in *Canadian Literature* on Phyllis Webb, Eli Mandel and other Canadian poets, teaches at the University of British Columbia, where she has been active in helping to organize the Poetry Centre and in general in assisting the oral presentation of poetry on the West Coast.

ANTHONY F. KILGALLIN's essay is his first published piece. It is based on the research he carried out for his University of Toronto thesis on the literary sources of *Under the Volcano*. Mr. Kilgallin is now teaching at Scarboro College.

MIRIAM WADDINGTON's article on A. M. Klein, "Signs on a White Field", appeared in *Canadian Literature* No. 25, together with a biographical note.

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GEORGE WOODCOCK has two books in the press, *The Greeks in India* and *Asia, Gods and Cities*, both of which will appear next spring. He is just completing a a critical study of George Orwell, and will be wintering in the Indian state of Kerala, on which Faber & Faber have commissioned him to write a book.

THE SLEEPING GIANT

Or the Uncreated Conscience of the Race

D. G. Jones

Neither capons nor pullets nor hens
Can wake the sun and the world;
Only the prophets of the Old Testament,
Huge old cocks, all speckled and barred,
Their wings like the ragged pages of sermons,
Only they from their roosts in the henhouse
Can rouse the bread from its oven sleep,
Raise the smoke from the haunted chimneys.
James Reaney, "The Horn".

MANY VOICES now agree that our chimneys are haunted. Mr. Brian Stock, writing in the *Atlantic Monthly* (Nov. 1964), argues that he cannot be accused of betraying Canada by leaving it; on the contrary, Canada has betrayed him by failing to provide him with a sense of identity, a sense of *patria*. "The trouble with you Canadians," says M. Pierre Bourgault, President of the R.I.N., "is you have no identification with your country." Earle Birney begins a poem, "Once upon a colony/ there was a land that was/ almost a real/ country called Canada." Elsewhere he tells us, "It is by our lack of ghosts we're haunted." Leonard Cohen in *The Favourite Game* brings us full circle back to Mr. Stock when he writes, "Some say that no one ever leaves Montreal, for that city, like Canada itself, is designed to preserve the past, a past that happened somewhere else." In the latest issue of *Cité Libre* (Mai-Juin 1965) André Rossinger presents

a very similar analysis of the Canadian mentality as it has developed historically, and he concludes his discussion of Canada's present situation by saying categorically, "Le Canada n'a que deux choix: ou grandir ou mourir." It must either grow up or die.

A small but growing line of criticism is concerned to comment on the haunted character of the life reflected in Canadian literature. It is represented by W. P. Wilgar's "Poetry and the Divided Mind in Canada" (1944), Warren Tallman's "Wolf in the Snow" (1960), and most recently T. E. Farley's thesis submitted at Carleton University, *Love and Death in Canadian Poetry.*

Whether they look at the poetry or the novel they uncover a picture of irresolution, of isolation and frustration, of exile. All suggest that Canadians have developed a kind of cultural schizophrenia, a division between their conscious aspirations and their unconscious convictions which undermines their lives and leads to the development of a profoundly negative outlook.

For example, Mr. Farley's reading of English-Canadian poetry presents us with a world in which the past is to be preserved while the future is to be resisted; in which intellect and will must rule over all passion and spontaneous impulse; in which, even so, human ideals, human loyalties, and love itself are constantly betrayed; in which man is burdened by a sense of guilt, and God, if he appears, becomes a God of Vengeance rather than a God of Love; in which frequent symbols of vitality and abundance, such as the sun and the sea, become more often symbols of paralysis and death, the Medusa sun, the capacious tombs of the sea. Death alone is both triumphant and final. English-Canadian poetry is a poetry of exile, increasingly negative to the point of being neurotic.

This view has been "suppressed, officially denied." So far I have not heard that Mr. Farley has been shot, "as a precautionary measure." Still, whatever the weaknesses of Mr. Farley's thesis, the point of view which he presents is not to be easily dismissed. It is an extreme development of Mr. Wilgar's earlier essay. It comprehends or confirms in the poetry what Mr. Tallman has observed in the novel. And it is supported by the comments of Mr. Stock, Mr. Rossinger, and others quite outside the literary universe.

At any rate, it is clear that a number of critics have been able to characterize Canadian literature as essentially negative, even neurotic, and that they have suggested that this negative character reflects the absence of a positive national myth or sense of identity. As Mr. Wilgar would put it, it reflects "the inability of the Canadian to decide what he is or, more dangerous, what he wants to be."

My point is not that this view is wrong, but that it is a partial view. A closer

study of Canadian literature reveals both positive and negative characteristics; more especially it reveals not only the anxiety which results from the lack of any clearly defined identity, but also, and sometimes simultaneously, a confidence that such an identity exists and is to be realized. In a moment I would like to illustrate how this duality reveals itself in a number of recurring images in Canadian literature. But first I would like to suggest a general way of looking at Canadian literature which would allow us to acknowledge the many negative characteristics and yet maintain that the literature has a basically positive character.

If we were looking for a single large or archetypal pattern in terms of which Canadian literature could be placed in perspective, the pattern of the Old Testament might suit us best. It is a pattern that would comprehend the critical view so far presented but that would also allow us to modify that view. For if the world of Canadian literature is a kind of Old Testament world, if the literature to date is a kind of Old Testament of Canadian literature, we can say that it is finally no more negative and no more neurotic than the Old Testament of the Bible. And we can suggest that the poets and novelists who produced this literature are not simply the advanced victims of a national neurosis, but also the prophets of the Old Testament who can raise the smoke from our haunted chimneys.

If the world of Canadian literature is an Old Testament world, it is a world of Adam separated from his Creator and cast out of Eden to wander in the wilderness. It is a world of the scattered tribes of Israel, in exile from the Old Kingdom and not yet restored to the New, in bondage to foreign powers, aliens in their own land, tied to the law of the fathers from which their hearts tend nonetheless continually to turn away. It is a world of angry patriarchs and rebellious children, and of the prophets of the wrath of God. It is a world in which life in all its fullness remains distinctly a promise rather than an actuality. Its prophets go into the desert to listen to the still small voice, to wrestle with the angel, or to discover the mountain of God, the Sinai, Ararat, or Eden from which a Moses, Noah, or New Adam shall bring down the word and reveal the new order of the world. It is an Old Testament world which implies, sometimes without much hope, sometimes with great confidence, its completion in the New.

That Canadian history bears some resemblance to this Old Testament archetype is, I think, self-evident. Were there time, a few specific illustrations could be given to show that the world of Canadian literature is often a world of scattered tribes and of prophets of the wrath of God. Both Mr. Farley and Mr. Tallman make clear that it is often a world of exile and isolation, of guilt and conflict,

a world in which the jealous God of the Old Testament is very much at home.

For the present, however, I would like to examine a number of images which are quite clearly related to this Old Testament archetype and which illustrate the point that Canadian literature exhibits not only a sense of exile, of alienation from a vital community, but also a sense of expectation, of restoration to a vital community. Here we find the exiled Old Adam. Here we also find the sleeping Adam or dreaming Adam, who is a somewhat different figure. He is the sleeping giant, the major man, or, if you like, the personification of a world order, lost or as yet undiscovered. If there is a Canadian identity as yet unrealized, he is it. He embodies what James Joyce called the uncreated conscience of the race. Associated with this figure are the images of the Ark and of the Mountain, also potential symbols of a world order. Basically, then, the images which I propose to examine are these three, the images of Adam, Ark and Mountain. They appear in a variety of forms throughout Canadian literature, with varying degrees of positive and negative feeling, and reveal in a purely formal or archetypal manner something of the drama of the uncreated conscience of the race.

I WOULD LIKE TO begin with an example from a fairly contemporary poem and then, with the poetry of Jay Macpherson as a guide, look at a number of variations as they appear throughout the poetry. Finally, I would like to look at two examples of this imagery as it appears in the novel.

The images of Adam, Ark, and Mountain are practically all announced, if we include the title, in Margaret Avison's poem "The One Ship Beached on One Far Distant Shore."

> We sprawl abandoned into disbelief
> And feel the pivot-picture of old Adam
> On the first hill that ever was, alone,
> And see the hard earth seeded with sharp snow
> And dream that history is done.

Here we are placed in exile. Our pivot-picture is that of Adam, once the major man at home in Eden but now cast out in the wilderness. In moments of despair (or perhaps of rational clarity) we dream that history is done, that our exile from a unified world, from a universal spiritual community in any traditional sense, is permanent. The one ship, the ark of life, is beached on some other shore,

and the first hill that ever was, the World Mountain and seat of Eden, is seeded with barren snow.

This is the negative form of the image. The same general image reappears in other contexts and, as we shall see, with only slight modification, takes on a much more positive character.

Jay Macpherson's book *The Boatman* provides us with a kind of skeleton key to the equations and permutations into which these images may enter. With "Eve in Reflection" we begin, as in Miss Avison's poem, with an image of exile. Adam and Eve have been cast out of the garden, which is here symbolized by Eve's own reflection, "the lost girl under the sea." And while Eve, "the mother of all living," lies contemplating her image locked behind the mirror of ocean, Adam wanders alone.

> The adored face is lost from sight,
> Marred in the whelming tide of blood,
> And Adam walks in the cold night,
> Wilderness, waste wood.

The image of the garden, nature unified and restored to community with God and man, becomes in the fallen world a mirror image, a world locked behind glass, frozen in ice, or drowned in the sea. Interestingly, Eve, in some sense, tends to be locked in, Adam out. The garden is either unattainable or becomes a travesty of itself as the garden of the isolated ego, the garden of the little king as opposed to the garden of God, or the big king. This is Miss Macpherson's "Garden of the Fall."

> The garden where the little king
> Contemplates his loves in stone,
> Breathless, branching in a ring,
> All for his delight alone. . . .

These negative images of exile appear elsewhere in more or less obvious form. James Reaney's "The Katzenjammer Kids" and "The School Globe" both present us with Edens from which the speaker has been locked out. Instead of the happy paper world of the school globe, he has inherited "The great sad real one/ That's filled/ Not with a child's remembered and pleasant skies/ But with blood, pus, horror, death, stepmothers and lies."

In the strange poem "Arras" by P. K. Page and in Phyllis Webb's poem "Marvell's Garden", we are presented with gardens of the fall where the speakers

have been locked in. As Miss Page says, "No one joins those figures on the arras." And of her version of Marvell's Garden Miss Webb concludes:

> And I have gone walking slowly in
> his garden of necessity
> leaving brothers, lovers, Christ
> outside my walls
> where they have wept without
> and I within.

More distant in time and in their connection with the Old Testament archetypes are certain images in the poetry of Roberts and Lampman. Roberts' poetry reveals a progressive withdrawal or deepening sense of exile, and though such poems as "The Brook in February" or "Ice" are ostensibly no more than occasional descriptive pieces, I would suggest that they are also symbolic and that here again we find the image of the frozen garden from which man has been expelled. For example, the poem "Ice":

> When Winter scourged the meadow and the hill
> And in the withered leafage worked his will,
> The waters shrank, and shuddered, and stood still, —
> Then built himself a magic house of glass,
> Wherein to sit and watch the fury pass.

In a like manner I suggest that the image of Adam and the lost garden lies behind several of the poems of Archibald Lampman. In the longer of his poems "In November" the speaker wanders through a waste wood and comes upon a circle of dead mulleins looking like hermits who have died at their prayers. In a brief moment of sunshine they revive within him a kind of spectral happiness. He is the exiled Adam who here finds intimations of the lost paradise. Other poems, such as "In October", "Winter Solitude", or the sonnet "In November", present us with related images. At the end of the sonnet the speaker says:

> Fast drives the snow, and no man comes this way;
> The hills grow wintry white, and bleak winds moan
> About the naked uplands. I alone
> Am neither sad, nor shelterless, nor grey,
> Wrapped round in thought, content to watch and dream.

We may be reminded here of the man on the hill, alone, while the hard earth is seeded with sharp snow. Yet there is a difference. There is a sense of optimism here that was lacking before. I believe that we can illuminate this image by going back to Miss Macpherson.

The lost Eden becomes a memory, an ideal, a dream in the fallen mind. It is the "lost traveller's dream under the hill", as Blake describes Satan. Thus the garden becomes identified with the dreaming Adam or, in pastoral terms, with the sleeping shepherd, which is the title of Miss Macpherson's poem.

> The gold day gone, now Lucifer
> Lights shepherds from the eastern hill.
> The air grows sharp, the grasses stir.
> One lies in slumber sunken still.
>
> Oh, wake him not until he please,
> Lest he should rise to weep:
> For flocks and birds and streams and trees
> Are golden in his silver sleep.

A related poem, "The Faithful Shepherd", identifies the sleeping figure with the ark, also a symbol of the totality of life unified and preserved from destruction.

> Cold pastoral: the shepherd under the snow
> Sleeps circled with his sheep.
> Above them though successive winters heap
> Rigours, and wailing weathers go
> Like beasts about, time only rocks their sleep,
> An ark upon a deep.
> And drowsy care, to keep a world from death,
> Maintains his steady heartbeat and warm breath.

The speaker in Lampman's poems frequently becomes just such a faithful shepherd in whose dream, as in an ark, a world is kept from death. In Miss Macpherson's "The Anagogic Man" the same figure is identified as Noah.

> Angel declare: what sways where Noah nods?
> The sun, the stars, the figures of the Gods.

We can now turn to a series of images which have been related already by Milton Wilson in his article "Klein's Drowned Poet". For as Eden becomes Ark, Adam in the snow becomes the Poet in the sea.

A vivid transition is provided by Duncan Campbell Scott's "The Piper of Arll". The piper in the little cove of Arll is a lonely shepherd. With the arrival of a mysterious ship, he hears the music of a larger life (associated in the poem with the more dynamic elements in his own little world). He strives to learn the music, but when the ship sails away without him he is heartbroken and accordingly

breaks his pipe. Yet he mends it again, and as the mysterious ship returns he sings his soul out and expires. The crew take his body to the ship, whereupon piper, crew, and all sink beneath the sea. Thanatos overcomes Eros. Negative as it may be, the conclusion remains haunting, rich and beautiful.

The ship is another ark, and the sunken ark and the piper are one, just as in the case of the dreaming shepherd in whose faithful sleep the plenitude of Eden is preserved. Here too, the ship, the shepherd, and the crew become jewelled and "golden in their silver sleep."

> Tendrils of or and azur creep,
> And globes of amber light are rolled,
> And in the gloaming of the deep
> Their eyes are starry pits of gold.
>
> And sometimes in the liquid night
> The hull is changed, a solid gem,
> That glows with a soft stony light,
> The lost prince of a diadem.
>
> And at the keel a vine is quick,
> That spreads its bines and works and weaves
> O'er all the timbers veining thick
> A plenitude of silver leaves.

The struggle between Eros and Thanatos, which is here so decisively won by Thanatos, becomes more open and violent as Scott's poetry develops. If the sleeping shepherd may be said to wake, he often does so only to rise and weep. Nevertheless, there is a deliberate attempt to recover the dynamic life which here lies sunk and to affirm what Scott calls "the beauty of terror" as well as "the beauty of peace".

A similar affirmation characterizes the poetry of E. J. Pratt, where the arks become more realistic, more mixed or ironic, but always struggle fiercely to stay afloat, as in *The Titanic* or *The Cachalot*. The Titanic is, of course, an actual ship; but it is also the symbol of a world, an ark, and in part at least a false ark. The cachalot is very like a whale, but he too is an ark, capable of containing rivers, islands, and the little boats of men, sounding the heights and depths, gold and beryl in the sun and brushed by the sea gulls with their silver wings.

The whale is capable of being related very closely to our initial image of the dreaming Adam, as the beast tells us himself in one of Miss Macpherson's poems.

I am an ark to swim the perilous flood.
With gold and spices, with candles burning sweet
In wakeful silence at his head and feet,
Vaulted in my sepulchre lies the first man.

As in the case of the garden, the whale may also appear in a negative or demonic guise. In Earle Birney's poem "Mappemounde" he becomes "Cetegrande, that sly beast who sucks in / with the whirlwind also the wanderer's pledges." In Phyllis Webb's poem "A Tall Tale, or a Moral Song", it is a fantastic fish story that brings us back to the garden of the fall or "Eve in Reflection."

The whale, improbable as lust,
carved out a cave
for the seagirl's rest;
with rest the seagirl, sweet as dust, devised
a manner for the whale to lie between her thighs.

Lying for ages under the sea, "this strangest whale aslant the seagirl's thighs", they've turned to stone. The story makes sense if we see here Eve, "the lost girl under the sea", embracing the lost order, Eden, which is equally her major man, the dreaming Adam.

The attempt to catch the world by the tail in all its manifold variety is an unlikely business. A. J. M. Smith offers a few directions in his "Plot Against Proteus", where the imagery is drawn from a different mythology and old Proteus takes the place of the whale.

There are echoes of this theme in other poems on swimmers which Milton Wilson notes in F. R. Scott, Klein, and Layton. However, it is Klein's "Portrait of the Poet as Landscape" which brings us back most directly to the image of the sleeping Adam. The shepherd or piper is now the poet. He too remains as effectively sunk beneath the sea of modern life as Scott's piper of Arll. Yet he too carries the secret within him and is, with the piper, "the lost prince of a diadem."

meanwhile he
makes of his status as zero a rich garland,
a halo of his anonymity,
and lives alone, and in his secret shines
like phosphorus. At the bottom of the sea.

His Old Testament connections are established a little earlier in the poem where we are told:

Look, he is
the nth Adam taking a green inventory
in a world but scarcely uttered, naming, praising

The poet in his formal guise is Adam, who gives names to the creation. Though he may be sunk in anonymity, he holds the key to the new Eden or "world but scarcely uttered".

Irving Layton has adopted the formal role of the nth Adam in a number of his poems, notably "The Birth of Tragedy", in which the speaker proclaims:

In me, nature's divided things —
tree, mould on tree —
have their fruition;
I am their core. Let them swap,
bandy, like a flame swerve
I am their mouth; as a mouth I serve.

Not quite drowned under the sea, in this poem the speaker says, "I lie like a slain thing/ under the green air the trees/ inhabit." And the note of expectancy is heard at the end of the poem, where we are told that all the while "someone from afar off/ blows birthday candles for the world."

In "The Cold Green Element" the drowned poet is hauled from the water and in a new incarnation returns to it as an active swimmer. At the beginning of the poem the speaker sets out from the end of his garden walk toward a mystery and finds the undertaker going in the same direction.

Hi, I tell him,
a great storm in the Pacific has blown a dead poet
out of the water,
who now hangs from the city gates.

Crowds depart daily to see it, and return
with grimaces and incomprehension;
if its limbs twitched in the air
they would sit at its feet
peeling their oranges.

The last image may suggest the crowd in the pit at a Shakespearean play, or any old-fashioned hanging. In the context of the biblical archetype, however, the hanged man is a Christ-figure; he is not really or finally dead, though that is incomprehensible to the crowd. He has, in fact, found his resurrection in the speaker. Though the undertaker has seen his heart in the grass, though he has

seen himself in the eyes of old women, "spent streams mourning his manhood," he is not dead; what they have seen or mourned was but one of his "murdered selves" which, like the poet hanging from the city gates, can be seen everywhere "hanging from ancient twigs". At the end of the poem he tells us, "I am again/ a breathless swimmer in that cold green element."

THE IMAGE of the mountain appears more fleetingly in both its positive and negative guises. It appears explicitly as Ararat in F. R. Scott's poem "Lakeshore", where the speaker becomes a kind of pessimistic Noah watching the modern rationalistic world — indeed, all exiles from the primal ocean — go down before the flood. Yet we tend to adopt the point of view of the speaker who stands safe on the world mountain and who has already allied himself as a swimmer with the underwater world.

The appearance, I suspect, of this image in two poems, one by Birney and one by Layton, would seem to confirm Birney's pessimism and Layton's optimism. In Birney's poem "Bushed" the isolated man is finally destroyed by an increasingly alien and hostile nature, which at the end of the poem takes on the form of the mountain in its darkest guise.

> Then he knew though the mountain slept, the winds
> were shaping its peak to an arrowhead
> poised
> But now he could only
> bar himself in and wait
> for the great flint to come singing into his heart.

Layton's "Mount Rolland" presents a more positive version by far. Here the mountain is opposed to a commercial and industrial society which tries to tame it. But the speaker is not an alien. Filled with pity for the trees which like monks climb the exhausted hillside, he is one of the chosen, a kind of Moses.

> While all around me, as for a favoured intruder,
> There's an immense silence made for primeval birds
> Or a thought to rise like a great cloud out of a crater,
> A silence contained by valleys,
> Gardes Civiles in green capes.

Frequently enough Layton is an angry prophet crying for destruction: he tells us of his kin when he says that from time to time he will take his hot heart to Ezekial

and Jeremiah, to stand awhile "in aching confraternity." Yet in the context of this discussion, he is the most confident prophet of a new life.

The Mountain and the Valley is a realistic novel which nonetheless brings us back to Miss Avison's image of Adam on the first hill that ever was, alone, while the hard earth is seeded with sharp snow, or perhaps more exactly to Miss Macpherson's cold pastoral: the shepherd under the snow.

Buckler tells the story of David Canaan from his childhood to his death in early middle age. As he grows up and the members of his family get married, move to the city, or die, we see him increasingly isolated on his Nova Scotia farm. His isolation is not just an individual or family matter. It reflects the disintegration of the old rural way of life and the final failure of the cultural community of the previous generations. David is aware also that a new cultural community has not developed simultaneously with the development of the cities. There is no point in simply following his sister or his brother-in-law into the towns. The people there are only superficially better off.

> The town people seemed to have only a thin personal topsoil. Nothing grew on it except a sparse crop of self-assurance. They were absolutely unresponsive to anything outside their own narrow communion.

More or less intuitively he has come to write. He keeps an old copy-book in which he chronically attempts to come to terms with his experience and give it significance within an order of words. At such moments he escapes from his isolation. When not trying to formulate his world anew in this way, he finds that even his most immediate life becomes unreal and his alienation is total.

> Even the sensations of his own flesh had become outside. The inside was nothing but one great naked eye of self-consciousness, with only its own looking to look at. The frozen landscape made no echo inside him.

If he is to escape from this growing sense of unreality, he must do no less than remake the world in his own image — in his own words. His realization of this fact is associated with the realization of another ambition.

Ever since he was a boy, David has wanted to go up the nearby mountain, but something has always prevented his going, the death of a neighbour, some division in the family. Several times he has hoped to go with his father to cut a particular tree, one that his father has marked out for a ship's keel. Interestingly, his father is killed on the mountain cutting the keel-tree. Having set off abruptly in anger against his wife, he fails to concentrate adequately on the job of felling the tree and he is struck down as it falls. What was to have been a kind of ceremonial

affair becomes no more than a tragic accident. The ark with that particular keel is never launched.

At the end of the book David finally makes it to the top of the mountain by himself. There he looks out over the whole valley, and there the urge to describe every minute thing, to express its unique intensity and find precisely the right word for its individual character, sweeps over him again. To do this, to be at all, he must be these things.

> He must *be* a tree and a stone and a shadow and a crystal of snow and a thread of moss and the veining of a leaf. He must be exactly as each of them was, everywhere and in all times; or the guilt, the exquisite parching for the taste of completion, would never be allayed at all.

So he resolves to take a green inventory of this world but scarcely uttered. It will be like the day in his youth when he composed a petition for some of the villagers: "When he read it back to them they heard the voice of their own reason speaking exactly in his." This time it will be the voice of their world, of their lives, speaking exactly in his.

Up to this point he has been intimidated by the overwhelming task of finding words for every minute detail in every light and in every season. Suddenly he sees that he need find only the core or central word.

> It wouldn't be necessary to take them one by one. That's where he'd been wrong. All he'd have to do . . . oh, it was so gloriously simple . . . was to find their single core of meaning.

The single core of meaning would be nothing less than a complete cultural identity, a central myth or fundamental conception of the world. That is what will restore him to the community of his fellow men. That is what will allow them to find their real community with each other, with the land, and with the dead as well. For the word redeems not only the present but the past.

> He caught his breath. He felt like the warm crying of acquittal again. Even my mother and father and all the others who have gone will know somehow, somewhere, that I have given an absolving voice to all the hurts they gave themselves and each other — hurts that were caused only by the misreading of what they couldn't express.

One of the things Mr. Farley noted in his study of Canadian poetry was precisely the lack of such a communion with the past, which is here to be restored only with the complete reformulation of the world in new terms.

Unfortunately, the effort of climbing the mountain has overstrained David

Canaan's already weak heart. Like Moses, he shall not enter the promised land. He dies of heart failure, and he and his vision lie like the faithful shepherd on the top of the mountain under the falling snow.

One more example should make clear the persistence with which this imagery recurs in Canadian literature. Gabrielle Roy's *The Hidden Mountain* is a more deliberately symbolic novel about the artist's role in the recreation or rediscovery of his world. The central character is an artist named simply Pierre. He too sets out to take a green inventory of the world. His isolation and solitude are concretely rendered by the setting. He journeys across the Canadian sub-arctic from the Mackenzie River to Ungava, where he too finds his mountain. It rises in the wilderness unknown to all but himself and a few Esquimaux. Fascinated by its shifting lights and iridescent beauty, he sets to work to paint it, not all at once, but aspect by aspect, for like David Canaan he cannot at first comprehend it as a whole. In his preoccupation, he paints through the short summer season and is caught in the first snows. It is then that he sees the mountain change into a demonic power. It is then also that he encounters a great buck caribou whom he must hunt down to survive. It leads him an exhausting chase through a stony landscape of hell, until he brings it down, finally, face to face, with an axe. In the night, nearly dead himself, he becomes as it were the blood brother of the great animal lying beside him. He survives.

Later a priest arranges for Pierre to go to Paris to learn to paint the mountain as it needs to be painted: so that it may speak to all men. He lives meagrely; his painting goes badly; he becomes seriously ill. Yet he paints a final self-portrait in which a friend discovers a strange and haunting power which he had caught glimpses of in Pierre's earlier work. The head, in a tangled thicket of shadows, seems to be sprouting horns, antlers. Like the great buck caribou, or like Michelangelo's Moses, he wears the horns of primitive divinity, the symbol of godhead or power. For Pierre is also a kind of Moses who has come down from the mountain bearing a vision of the godhead or universal power.

At the very end, having been given a drug to stimulate his heart, he feels prepared at last to capture the whole mountain on canvas. He sets to work, but in the midst of laying in the background colours, he too suffers a heart attack and dies.

> Forms, beloved images, dreams, the witchery, and the colours — all spun about, snowflakes in the storm, snow seen in a kaleidoscope.
>
> The lofty mountain faded away.
>
> Who, in the mists, would ever find it again?

CANADIAN LITERATURE has no priority on the imagery of the Old Testament, nor on the themes of exile and alienation, the loss of identity and the search for a new community. Nevertheless, our discussion of the images of Adam, Ark, and Mountain, or of related images, reveals a certain persistence of such imagery through a variety of authors over a fairly long stretch of time, from Confederation to the present. And the fact that these images often recur with the same peculiar constellation of details or with the same peculiar ambivalence of feeling suggests that they do reflect a peculiarly Canadian concern with the question of our cultural identity. That this should be so is not altogether surprising.

It was inevitable that for Canadians, as for Americans, "The land was ours before we were the land's". But, unlike the Americans, Canadians have had no intention of giving the gift outright, of finding "salvation through surrender". They have been colonials not simply from necessity but from choice. The early Canadians, says William Toye in his Collins' *Book of Canada*, "were not, and did not want to be, wholly independent. The cultural standards and interests they developed had little to do with Canada." He goes on, quoting from Edward Hartley Dewart in an early collection of Canadian poetry:

> "Not only are our mental wants supplied by the brains of the Mother Country, under circumstances that utterly preclude competition, but the majority of persons of taste and education in Canada are emigrants from the Old Country whose tenderest affections cling around the land they have left." Thus the colonial state of mind was succinctly explained in 1864. It was probably the most potent single enfeebling influence on the native voice and character; it prevailed long after Canada ceased to be a collection of colonies, well into the present century, and can even be detected today.

As Mr. Rossinger puts it in his article in *Cité Libre*, for the English-speaking colonists, whether they were frustrated Loyalists, frustrated Scots, or frustrated Irish, Canada was only a place in which to establish a new residence, not a place in which to develop a new way of life or build a new nation. *Des Canadiens? Non, des Européens désenchantés.*

The intention on the part of each separate group of colonists to preserve an inherited culture rather than create a new, even if the inherited culture had little to do with Canada, Mr. Farley has labelled generally "the Loyalist response", and he argues that it is this response which lies behind the cultural schizophrenia he detects in the poetry. Canadians, he contends, have ignored the implications of their actual experience to the point where their authentic identity lies stillborn

in the unconscious, at any rate in the realm of the inarticulate, so that they remain divided within and against themselves. Precisely such a state of affairs is symbolized by the images we have been looking at, the images of the drowned poet, the sleeping shepherd, the dreaming Adam under the snow. One of our examples clearly implies that we shall continue to be plagued by feelings of guilt, by "an exquisite parching for the taste of completion", until we are willing to surrender ourselves to our authentic experience, until we are willing to be the tree and the stone and the thread of moss and the crystal of snow.

What Mr. Tallman said of Maclennan's novel *Each Man's Son* represents what he said of all the novels he examined: at the heart of the novel lies a conflict between the cultural facade and the naïve violence of place. Again, these novels imply that the conflict is to be resolved only by rejecting the facade and accepting the authentic reality of the characters' everyday experience. For this reason Mr. Tallman is led, not simply to condone, but to recommend the behaviour of Duddy Kravitz in Mordecai Richler's novel. He explains:

> Duddy has ceased to care for appearances and this insouciance releases him from the nightmare. All the other people in the novel cannot possess themselves because their vital energies are devoted full-time to maintaining the false appearances in terms of which they identify themselves. These appearances — the cultural, ethical, communal pretensions to which they cling — mask over but scarcely conceal the distinctly uncultured, unethical, isolated actuality in which they participate.

Duddy Kravitz's cry of "I don't care" is the cruder, North American version of Stephen Daedalus' "*Non serviam.*" "I will not serve that in which I no longer believe, whether it calls itself my home, my fatherland, or my church." It is on the basis of this apparently negative resolution that Joyce's character sets out to encounter "the reality of experience and to forge in the smithy of [his] soul the uncreated conscience of [his] race."

Our predicament is not unique. Ortega y Gasset in an essay on Goethe says even more generally:

> However much a man searches heaven and earth, the past and the future, for his higher destiny, he remains the victim of a perennial vacillation, of an external influence which perpetually troubles him until, once and for all, he makes up his mind to declare that right is that which is in accord with him.

It is not unique; but it may have a uniquely Canadian application.

The trouble is that even though Mr. Dewart's brand of colonialism may well retire with Mr. Diefenbaker, the colonial state of mind may not. Whereas our

mental wants were long supplied by Great Britain, since the second world war they have been increasingly supplied, along with our investment capital, by the United States. So argues Mr. Rossinger, who fears that Canadians may become confirmed in the mentality of a satellite country, the mentality of a "*satellite à béquilles*," to quote his almost untranslatable phrase, the word *béquilles* meaning "crutches." Canada's leaders, he writes, "being conditioned to the mentality of a *satellite à béquilles*, a mentality which had always sustained them on a national level throughout the periods of childhood and adolescence, the transition was effected without regrets, and with the blessing of Great Britain." That is, we have simply exchanged one external influence for another. With the possible exception of the French-Canadians, who may have decided once and for all to declare that that is right which is in accord with them, we remain the victims of a perennial vacillation.

Margaret Avison protests against the world of "someone not at home. Exporters. Glutting us/ with Danish spoons." In "The Local and the Lakefront" we hear the voice of the prophet raised against the false gods of Sumer and Babylon.

> I, stevedore of the spirit,
> slog day and night, picketing
> those barges and brazen freighters with their
> Subud, Sumerian ramsgate, entrails and altars.

She frames her grievance ironically, in an image that is at once technical and symbolic.

> Who that must die but man
> can burn a bush to make a bar of soap?

She directs us to our salvation, if only by asking us to recognize that we have created nothing that is authentically ours.

> Committeeman:
> there are no ships or cargoes *there*.
> Believe me. Look. Admit it.
> Then we start clean:
> nothing earned; a nowhere to exchange
> among us few
> carefully.

However negative the situation, this is not a negative poem. To discover an illusion and to recommend the acceptance of a reality, however bleak, is a perennial theme and a positive achievement, in literature or in life.

Some of the images we looked at earlier are even more bleak; a few may be brighter; the majority are ambivalent. They too tell us of a world that has not been realized; they also tell us that it exists, inchoate. It is just this ambivalence which Al Purdy exhibits in a poem explicitly entitled "On Canadian Identity: A Sentimental Monograph for the Daughters of the Empire." The paradoxical conclusion suggests very nicely the Old Testament mood of one whose kingdom has not come but who is sure that it is there waiting for him to possess it. He says:

> The worth of life not being necessarily noise
> we kept unusual silence, and then cried out
> one word which has never yet been said.

We *have* kept unusual silence. And we have no doubt cried out in our hearts the word which we have never said with our mouths. We may even have cried out in our literature the word which has not yet been read. In fact, I suspect it may be possible to trace in the literature certain elements of a Canadian view of life, a view of man and his relationship to the universe of a fundamental kind, which is surely what we must mean by a Canadian identity if it is to be anything more than a parochial difference in accent or in the details of economic and political organization. But that is another matter.

The images of Adam wandering in the waste wood are patently images of exile. And one could emphasize the persistently negative conclusion to which all but one of our examples lead. Yet I think such an emphasis would be perverse. There is a good deal of difference between the exiled Adam in some of these images and the sleeping Adam in others — or the figures of David and Pierre pregnant with vision at the moment of death. Despite the heart-failures, despite the fragmentary success of a David or a Pierre, there is a conviction that the major man is alive, that he is, or can become, "again a breathless swimmer in that cold green element."

Just at this point, then, when many are concerned to express their doubts about the existence of a Canadian identity, when Mr. Stock and others have in fact given it up as a lost cause, it seems to me possible to detect its presence, in the conviction of certain voices if in nothing else.

Ou grandir ou mourir? In answer to this question, let me quote what I should hope is the voice of a prophet. She often speaks with an Old Testament accent. It is from the final poem in Gwen MacEwen's book *The Rising Fire*, the poem entitled "Generation Cometh."

the boy
a coy root or
bright among cities
is growing you
cannot stop him you
cannot stop him
growing.

try to
pull him out
by the roots
from your loins he
is green like a tree
planted there . . .

(This paper was originally presented at ACUTE *in Vancouver, June 1965)*

THE PRECIOUS SPECK OF LIFE

Joseph Gold

It is the function of art to illuminate the human form of nature, to present the ferocity of the weasel, the docility of the sheep, the drooping delicacy of the willow, the grim barrenness of the precipice, so that we can see the character of the weasel, the sheep, the willow and the precipice.

NORTHROP FRYE

THE AIM OF THIS ESSAY is to suggest that the animal stories of Sir Charles G. D. Roberts are literature worthy of our attention; that they constitute an important body of Canadian writing; and that they have so far been disposed of with barely a wave of the debonair critical hand. The last part of this contention is more easily demonstrated than the first.

Between 1891 and 1933, Roberts wrote and published approximately 230 stories. Since 1933, when Macmillan published *Eyes of the Wilderness*, there has been a gradual disappearance of books in print until now there remains only *The Last Barrier*, a collection published by McClelland & Stewart in the New Canadian Library, with a copyright date of 1958. Occasionally a story or two has been added to an anthology of stories for schoolboys, not, one presumes, because of their literary excellence but because they contain no obvious reference to sex, politics or religion. As for criticism, Alec Lucas' brief introduction to *The Last Barrier* seems to be the first serious attention ever given to these stories. A

line here or there is all that I can find by anyone else. Desmond Pacey's few lines in his recent book on Canadian literature are typical:

> Roberts' stories are good as long as he confines himself to portraying the lives of animals and the environment in which they move, but once he introduces human characters his touch falters and the wildest melodrama results.[1]

Whatever Professor Pacey means by "good", obviously he finds them not good enough to merit any serious critical examination or detailed illustration. Such generalized value judgments are all that one can find.

In fact, Roberts' animal stories constitute, as far as I can ascertain, the only sustained attempt to use the materials of the Canadian Wilderness for the purpose of expressing a coherent view of the world that man inhabits. Roberts has created a Canadian mythology, in which animals, rather than gods, play out a systematic drama of conflict and resolution. This is all done, of course, within the framework of an accurate survey of natural history, and it is a brave man who would casually question Roberts' knowledge of the wilderness. Nevertheless it would be as pointless to apply standards of "realism" to these stories as it would be to question the size and character of William Faulkner's bear, in any discussion of its ultimate significance. Roberts' bear, fox, moose and porcupine are distillations of certain instincts and concretizations of certain abstractions. There are no centaurs or griffins but there are many other creatures who emerge from the author's poetic imagination with equal meaning and consistency and with a similarly forceful effect. This mythology is, at its best, a carefully designed metaphor for the order and structure of nature, as in the story "In the Deep of the Silences". The title itself suggests not just a location but a dynamic force at the heart of things. In the story the elements, land, air and water are represented by a bear, an eagle and a lake trout. Each is king, or god of his domain. This almost Classic arrangement, far from being vague or accidental, is clearly intended. Not only is the story divided into four parts, one to each of the elements, and the last to the conflict between their "gods", but the descriptions themselves indicate Roberts' attitude:

> His fierce yellow eyes, unwavering, brilliant, and clear like crystal, deep set beneath straight, overhanging brows, searched the far panorama with an incredibly piercing gaze. At such a distance that the most penetrating human eye — the eye of a sailor, a plains' ranger, a backwoods' huntsman, or an enumerator of the stars — could not discern him in his soundless altitude, he could mark the fall of a leaf or the scurry of a mouse in the sedge-grass.[2]

What could be more suggestive of an invisible sky-god, who unseen himself, sees all beneath him? And when he does descend he comes like a thunderbolt:

> There was a harsh, strong hissing in the air, and a dark body fell out of the sky. Fell? Rather it seemed to have been shot downward from a catapult. No mere falling could be so swift as that sheer yet governed descent.[3]

This aura of design, pattern, structure, in a world peopled by creatures pursuing a highly dramatic and meaningful action pervades all the best Roberts' stories, and there are many of them. We will return to the question of meaning later, but for the moment let us pursue the question of the purposeful design in the stories and exactly what attitude Roberts brings to nature and why he writes of animals at all. In an interesting essay, "The Animal Story",[4] Roberts states with admirable candour that the animal story of his time, and as he writes it, is a "culmination". He surveys the history of this mode of writing from its "fabulous" origins up to Kipling and Seton and he asserts that the "psychological" animal story, in which the "personality, individuality, mentality" of an animal is pursued, has evolved fully and can go no further. Roberts clearly does not see himself as writing this kind of story at all. He believes rather that through the animal the writer can approach some larger vision of basic human drives and some understanding of the transcendent universal design to which all things contribute. He says of the animal story:

> It leads us back to the old kinship of earth, without asking us to relinquish by way of toll any part of the wisdom of the ages, any fine essential of the 'large result of time'.[5]

By this Roberts means that the artist can use animals to make sense of the world of which man is part and from which he grew, that we are given a detachment and perspective from which to examine the fundamental base on which we rest. Roberts' aim in his stories is to present his own vision of truth, a vision that, value judgments aside, reminds one first of William Wordsworth's and William Faulkner's. What could be more Faulknerian than "the old kinship of earth?" And Faulkner's "verities of the heart" are anticipated in Roberts' mythology as story after story presents the struggle of honour, dignity, courage, love, and hate symbolized in elemental struggle. Roberts ends his essay with this curious statement:

> It [the animal story] has ever the more significance, it has ever the richer gift of refreshment and renewal, the more humane the heart and spiritual the understanding which we bring to the intimacy of it.[6]

It is not unfitting that the quotation which heads this paper should be taken

from a study of William Blake. Roberts, too, speaks here of the need for the human mind to "bring" meaning to nature. The world man sees need not be a collection of disparate facts, but a world of potential significance realized and ordered by the artist's imagination. Its significance is more or less, depending on our degree of humanity. The word "humane" suggests human in a compassionate and accepting role. It is possible, says Roberts, to see in the world he presents "clear and candid life".

ROBERTS' ANIMAL WORLD amounts then to an affirmative vision in which the conditions of a wilderness struggle for survival are accepted and confirmed. It remains to show the precise terms on which such an acceptance is possible and to illustrate this affirmation from the fiction itself. Roberts was born in 1860 and inherited the full force of nineteenth-century disillusion. The period which saw a search for answers to a godless world culminate in Existentialism made it necessary for Roberts also to seek some positive confrontation with the problem of man's apparent lonely helplessness. Being an artist, not a philosopher, Roberts sought the kind of imaginative understanding that Blake and Shelley and Wordsworth had sought before him. The terms of his clerical background were not acceptable, the raw materials of a New Brunswick wilderness were to hand, and so Roberts brought his imagination to bear on nature and animals and produced his own Canadian mythology. The principal feature of this myth is that, while individual creatures constantly lose the struggle for survival, life itself persists. In the long run death itself has no sting and is ironically defeated by the uses nature makes of its processes. All things conspire to sustain life and the stories create a very strong sense of rhythmic pattern and cycle, of the seasons, of birth and death, of mating and separating, and these patterns persist no matter what the creatures, what the setting or what human interference is attempted. This may not seem like a great deal by which to celebrate some meaning to existence, but after all has man ever been honoured for doing more than living, to the best of his ability?

Roberts is, to my knowledge, the only writer who has used animals to illustrate such a vision. But the effect of his writing is frequently and strongly like that experienced with Becket's *Godot*, or Faulkner's *Dilsey*, or Brecht's *Mother Courage*. It may sound ludicrous to put, say, Red Fox in such company, but

when one has actually read about him the comparison is not nearly so laughable. Certainly it is true to say that Roberts' animals are more dignified and lead more meaningful lives than the characters in the writings of Zola and Dreiser, who were contemporaries of Roberts and whose creatures are infinitely more "animal". "Human" and "animal" are labels earned by the quality of behaviour so that a writer may humanize an animal world or animalize a human one. Roberts is after all a poet, which is to say that his imagination makes definition and his human version of the animal world dignifies and enobles that world. Roberts celebrates courage and endurance and for this reason his stories of defeat and death produce not despair but a sense of elevation, and often something akin to catharsis. His animals and birds and fishes confront overwhelming odds. Every second is a challenge to life itself. The combatants in man's conflict, when not hunger and cold, are accident and disease. For the animal, in exactly the same way, they are the innumerable enemies who see him as food and wait for him in silence. The animal who guards his life best survives longest, but there is never any guarantee that the next moment will not be the last. It is precisely because the contest is always finally lost that the struggle is meaningful. Roberts' animal world, like ours, is a fallen world and the best that can be achieved in it is a persistent denial of death, hunger and fear. Every moment wrenched from time is a major victory and every meal is a conquest over an indifferent universe. Roberts would agree with Blake that "everything that lives is holy" but he would add, I suspect, "And holy because it lives."

The techniques Roberts employs are simple and it is the retention of simplicity that is his greatest strength. There is no commentary, no moralizing, but a stark presentation of animal impulses and success or defeat. *The Last Barrier* is by no means a collection of the best of Roberts' stories, but since it is readily available we must confine ourselves to it. The title story illustrates the Roberts' theme and technique most clearly. The salmon is born, miraculously grows up and dies in the paws of a bear after a hopeless struggle to climb a waterfall. This is the archetypal pattern of the birth-death cycle for all living creatures. But Roberts conveys to the reader a clear sense of his own awe at the fact that the process takes place at all. Survival itself is a miracle and even before this, gestation and birth. The tiny egg, resting at the bottom of a fast stream with "thousands of its fellows," is unaware of the vast outside that Roberts paints for the reader:

> When the savage northern winter closed down upon the high valley of the Quahdavic it found difficulty in freezing the swift current that ran rippling over the bar; and when, at last, the frost conquered gripping and clutching through

> the long, windless nights, it was to form only a thin armour of transparent, steel-strong ice, through which, as through the mantle of snow which made haste to cover it, the light still filtered softly but radiantly at noon, with an ethereal cobalt tinge.[7]

THE STRONG SENSE of the infinite scale of size in the universe, from the minute forces of energy to the unconquerable seasons, is characteristic of Roberts' awareness. The salmon is not only born but turns into something animate, complete, perfect and volatile and for the humanizing, poetic imagination of Roberts, this is a supreme and even divine achievement:

> The deep hollow in the gravel sheltered the moving atoms, so that they were not swept away by the current streaming over them. But minute as they were, they speedily gathered a strength altogether miraculous for their size, as they absorbed the clinging sacs of egg-substance and assumed the forms of fish, almost microscopic, but perfect.

The protagonist salmon of this story follows an almost classic pattern of development and is presented as a case history. Thus a sentence like the following is not indicative of loss of control but mastery of his material:

> The egg from which he came having been one of the first to hatch, the tiny salmon mentioned in the opening paragraph was one of the first of the host to find his strength and to start the migration shoreward from the nest of the noisy bar.

One has the sense of reading the commentary of a man peering through a microscope at the astonishing activities of a new world. Certainly, if this writer may judge from his own and from his students' responses, a reading of Roberts produces a different, a more sensitive and a more aware encounter with a world that was originally taken much more for granted. It is unnecessary here to record the progress of the salmon through all its stages, from Parr to Smelt to Grilse to Salmon, or to summarize its ocean voyages and its change from a new born "speck of life" to parenthood in its turn. Roberts writes a history of one sample of myriad life that inevitably ends in defeat, and yet he writes it in such a way as to indicate, not a despairing or cynical view of the natural process, but a celebration of the struggle itself, as a careful look at his wording indicates, "the

pioneer of the shoal found all his ability taxed to guard the speck of life which he had so lately achieved."

The ending to the *The Last Barrier* is full of meaning. During one of the salmon's annual absences the falls of his stream have greatly changed by virtue of a shift in formation that makes them now insurmountable. The salmon ends itself in vain leaps and is finally injured and exhausted:

> When, at last, the salmon came blindly into the eddy and turned upon his side, the bear was but a few feet distant. She crept forward like a cat, crouched — and a great black paw shot around with a clutching sweep. Gasping and quivering, the salmon was thrown up upon the rocks. Then white teeth, savage but merciful, bit through the back of his neck; and unstruggling he was carried to a thicket above the Falls.

The use of the word "unstruggling" is curious here. More than a mechanical description is intended and the word in this context suggests acceptance, resolution, completion. When the fish can struggle no longer it is ready to give up its life, for life and struggle have become synonymous.[8] Nature fulfills itself in many ways and the writer provides a curiously ironic ending in which the fish, unable to master the falls alive is carried to their summit in death, as food in the mouth of the bear. A greater harmony, accessible only to the human imagination, is thus illustrated by the writer. The final victory is paradoxically that of life itself, and many deaths go to its making. In spite of the reiterated patterns of the stronger eating the weaker and cunning or speed eluding the dull or slow, Roberts is not interested in labouring a cliché. He goes to some pains to indicate that not even the fittest survive. The mole-shrew is a "Little Tyrant of the Burrows" and kills grubs, a mole and finally even a snake with equal efficiency, but his sleep of contentment ends in death after the chance passage of a fox discovers his retreat. Other stories show that the fox is subject to other powers, and if the strongest and bravest, the eagle, bear, moose and panther should miraculously elude their animal neighbours man himself is ready to demonstrate his fitness. Finally hunger and cold overcome everything else and these in turn die with the coming of spring. All these are carefully and systematically presented in the stories so that what we see is the survival of life and the process of cycle, of forces struggling against matter and matter itself altered by the operation of natural laws. All things are fit for some time and place. The waterfalls will be mastered one way, if not another.

It is interesting at this point to consider more precisely the basis for the in-

evitable discussion of Wordsworth's influence on Roberts.[9] To suggest the areas of similarity would require a discussion of Wordsworth beyond the scope of this paper. However the Mutability Sonnet is at the centre of Wordsworth's outlook, and it is curious that it reflects so accurately the themes illustrated everywhere in Roberts' prose,

> From low to high doth dissolution climb,
> And sink from high to low, along a scale
> Of awful notes, whose concord shall not fail . . .

"Concord shall not fail," Wordsworth says, and later he writes "Truth fails not." Concord is Truth and Truth is Concord; that is all you know on earth and perhaps all you need to know, and this hypothetical dictum might stand as well for Roberts as for Wordsworth. The animal stories also amount to a hymn to concord and harmony, and this "scale of awful notes" along which life and death and change harmoniously run is to be perceived by the imagination of a detached artist, a man possessed of heightened sensibility, who is not confused by spiritual myopia. When this "scale" is heard it produces not despair but a transcendent understanding.

> A musical but melancholy chime,
> Which they can hear who meddle not with crime
> Nor avarice, nor over-anxious care.

Roberts says of the animal story that it might, if used as he tries to use it, aid us in attaining such an awareness, "It frees us for a little from the world of shop-worn utilities, and from the mean tenement of self of which we do well to grow weary."[10] Roberts quite deliberately seeks to produce a detached awareness in his reader by creating metaphor free from discourse or commentary. The effect is to hold the reader at a kind of intellectual distance whence he may apprehend the vast process of dissolution and regeneration, even unconsciously.

A comparison of the octet of the sonnet and a passage from *The Last Barrier* will perhaps suggest that Wordsworth understands with a penetrating conscious intellect what Roberts incorporates as an integral part of his metaphor.

> Truth fails not; but her outward forms that bear
> The longest date do melt like frosty rime,
> That in the morning whitened hill and plain
> And is no more; drop like the tower sublime
> Of yesterday, which royally did wear

His crown of weeds, but could not even sustain
Some casual shouts that broke the silent air
Or the unimaginable touch of Time.

Roberts, writing about a change in the natural landscape that proves fatal to the salmon, writes this:

> At the very first of spring there had been a land-slide. The great, partly overhanging rock, seamed and split by the wedges of countless frosts, had all at once crumbled down beneath the tireless pressure of the cataract. The lower fall, thus retreating, had become one with the upper. The straight descent was now nearly five feet higher than before — a barrier which no voyager those waters ever knew could hope to overcome.

The whole scene has changed and what was once suitable for salmon is now a new world demanding a new breed to master it. I am not suggesting that the Roberts' image is a deliberate echo of Wordsworth's sonnet, though this is entirely possible. Rather it seems that everywhere Roberts is illustrating an attitude or better still a vision which is central to Wordsworth and is most perfectly distilled in the Mutability Sonnet.

To write about Roberts' animal stories when only one small volume of some sixteen stories (out of possible hundreds) is available to the reader is at best a difficult task. The writer can count on no familiarity and can make no meaningful appeal to the best work. I have confined myself, mostly, to a single story but other stories persistently present the same vision of struggle and cycle. The wild goose who cannot fly sets out to walk half a continent after its fellows and quickly ends up in the mouth of a fox,

> The struggle lasted scarcely more than two heartbeats. The wide wings pounded twice or thrice upon the ground, in fierce convulsion. Then the red fox, with a sidewise jerk of his head, flung the heavy, trailing carcass into a position for its easy carrying, and trotted off with it into the darkness of the woods.

The snake that changed its mind and went quickly underground to seek for food turns into food for insects,

> The body of the dead snake was soon a centre of teeming, hungry, busy life, toiling to remove all traces of what had happened. For Nature, though she works

> out almost all her ends by tragedy, is ceaselessly attentive to conceal the red marks of her violence.

The very process of death is a process of life too, contributing to the "scale of awful notes." Only life is constant and the endless, indomitable striving for it.

"Truth fails not" and that truth for Roberts is the endless cycle, the supremacy of life, the drama of a struggle in which all things participate, each atom playing some meaningful role in a series of events that conspire to a harmony which the poet perceives and makes into art. I have not found time here to do more than outline the archetypal patterns of Roberts' vision. It is perhaps not possible, until his work is part of an available Canadian literary heritage and education, to make detailed analyses of individual stories. Certain techniques should be part of any thorough discussion of these stories. One of the surest marks of Roberts' genius and an indication of the degree of conscious control usually employed, is his complete freedom from sentiment. Roberts' animals never become pets, the reader is never allowed to lose his detachment and there is no compromise in the recorded events with the bloody processes of universal natural law. There is too, the mastery of perspective, the ability, almost Swiftian, to construct whole worlds scaled to the size of ants as in "The Prisoners of the Pitcher-Plant" or to the world of giant moose and bear as in "The King of the Mamozekel". Nor is there space to pursue the brilliance of poetic description, always used for specific and often symbolic purposes, or to comment on the division of the whole work into groups or types that follow definable patterns. For instance, Roberts varies his stories so as to produce a strong sense of the individual animal personality, as with the King moose or with Kehonka the wild goose, or he carefully avoids any suggestion of personality and constructs the type, where this seems appropriate, as with the salmon or the ant. The former is achieved by introducing some peculiar circumstance into the individual life, the capture and clipping of Kehonka or the bear's attack on the King of the Mamozekel. These and other matters remain to be pursued elsewhere.

I know of no other Canadian writer who has left a body of work so consistently arranged about a clear idea of the order of life itself, or a writer of animal stories who has been at one and the same time so true to the characteristics of his actors and able to produce a genuine, unsentimentalized or dynamic fiction. It remains to give elsewhere the detailed workings of this outlook in other Roberts' stories and in the sustained narratives like *Red Fox* and *The Heart of the Ancient Wood*. It also remains to bring Roberts' work back into

print and restore him, or rather place him, in the forefront of Canadian letters, where he rightfully belongs.

[1] Desmond Pacey, *Creative Writing in Canada.* Revised edition. Toronto, 1961, p. 74.
[2] Charles G. D. Roberts, *The Haunters of the Silences.* Boston, 1907, p. 204.
[3] *Haunters,* p. 213.
[4] Charles G. D. Roberts, "Introductory" to *The Kindred of the Wild.* London, n.d.
[5] *Kindred,* p. 19.
[6] *Kindred,* p. 19.
[7] Charles G. D. Roberts, *The Last Barrier and Other Stories.* Toronto, 1958, p. 83.
[8] Roberts' continual use of words like "struggle" and "elemental" is worthy of the reader's attention and would well repay some critical examination.
[9] That Roberts himself knew the work of Wordsworth in detail is indicated by his critical introduction to *Poems of Wordsworth,* edited by J. E. Wetherell, Toronto, 1892.
[10] *Kindred,* p. 19.

THE NOVELS OF ETHEL WILSON

H. W. Sonthoff

THE DISTINCTIVE ELEMENT in Ethel Wilson's fiction is its tone. It seems as if the centre of each book were not a main character, or a theme, or a plot, but an attitude toward the life of the tale. The subject matter with which Ethel Wilson deals varies considerably in event, character, setting. So does the form. But the tone, though not the same in each work, has certain recognizable characteristics.

It is, for one thing, quiet. It is persistently undramatic, allowing no sustained plot interest, no profound involvement with any character. Moments of wonder or sharp delight are followed by ordinary distractions; moments of concern or intense sympathy are commented on with wry humour. The tone is often funny, urbane, curious, inclusive. And what it primarily does is to render any subject matter in such a way that the reader's journey through it is very like his journey through any natural landscape, any ordinary day of his living. Meaning, in these novels as in living, comes upon him and fades. He encounters these characters as he might people in his own life, watching their surface, their manner and acts, knowing them, drifting away, doubting, hearing again, sometimes losing sight of them entirely. Should he for a moment lose himself in a scene or a gesture or mood, he will be brought back to his role as observer; he will have restored to him a perspective that persuades him to regard this fiction with a kind of equanimity.

Gertrude Stein says, "A long complicated sentence should force itself upon you, make you know yourself knowing it. . . ." These short complicated books make a similar requirement. The reader meets people, discovers places, knows things, and he knows himself knowing them, is kept aware of the process. The sense of living given is that the way is the truth; it is the journey that matters, not the arrival

points. When one looks back, he doesn't say, "Oh, so that scene was being used to this end." He looks back over the natural landscape of the journey.

To create this tone, this meaning, Ethel Wilson does extraordinary things with point of view and with narrative line. Not so much in her first novel, *Hetty Dorval.* Yet even here there is a pushing at the edges of the controlling voice. There is, in fact, nothing in the book, no reflection, no view that the narrator, Frankie Burnaby, might not have thought or said. But she does seem to shift her point of view in time. Sometimes she speaks as if she were, in imagination, very close to the experience she is recalling; sometimes it is as if she were taking a much more distant view of a scene wider and richer than the one actually being presented to us. In one passage the boundaries of the tale are described very clearly, precisely because the narrator's untold life is to her a more important one than Hetty Dorval's. The things that are not told are not important to the story; but the knowledge that there are untold, unknown things and that other things are only guessed at informs *Hetty Dorval.*

> I should like to describe Molly and Richard . . . because they are very important to me and have meant a great deal in my life, and now they always will. But this is not a story of me, nor of them, in a way, but of the places and ways known to me in which Hetty Dorval has appeared. It is not even Hetty Dorval's whole story because to this day I do not know Hetty's whole story and she does not tell. I only knew the story of Hetty by inference and by strange chance. Circumstances sometimes make it possible to know people with sureness and therefore with joy or some other emotion, because continuous association with them make them as known and predictable as the familiar beloved contours of home, or else the place where one merely waits for the street car, or else the dentist's drill. Take your choice. But one cannot invade and discover the closed or hidden places of a person like Hetty Dorval with whom one's associations, though significant, are fragmentary, and for the added reason that Hetty does not speak — of herself. . . . Any positive efforts that one could discern on the part of Hetty were directed towards isolating herself from responsibilities to other people. . . . But . . . [she] could not island herself, because we impinge on each other, we touch, we glance, we press, we touch again, we cannot escape. "No man is an island." Who touched me? . . . And so I will write down something about Richard and Molly. . . .

There are also, in *Hetty Dorval,* scenes or events whose value seems not to depend on their relevance to this particular tale. Descriptions of the Fraser and the Thompson River, of the desolate hills around Lytton, of the English sky, comments on the genius of place, the story Marcella Martin told: such passages seem to have an absolute value, a vivid life outside the main line of the story. Each

one could have seemed, to the narrator, relevant; she could have justified them, as in the passage quoted above. But there is in them some force barely contained by the narrative.

THAT FORCE IS RELAXED in *The Innocent Traveller*, an episodic book about a life which ". . . inscribes no sweeping curves upon the moving curtain of time . . . no significant design. Just small bright dots of colour, sparkling dabs of life." Here scenes occur or recur as if by chance, as if this event or that landscape had simply snagged the attention or the memory. They are arranged in a roughly chronological order from the time in the 1840's when Topaz Edgeworth was a very little girl to the time in the 1940's when she died. But even so simple an order is interrupted almost at once.

> If Father had ever faltered in his faith, how deep would have been the crack, the fissure, the ultimate chasm into which he would have fallen. You and I, who pick our way unsurely amongst the appalling wreckage of our time, patching the crack here, avoiding the split there, anticipating the unsure footing, rejoicing in a bit of solid ground and going ahead again until we trip and fall on our noses — we can take our troubles much more easily than Father could have done. But Father never tumbled down.

The reader's attention is drawn away from then into now, from there to here, from small chaos to large, increasingly often as the book goes on.

There is a similar shifting round of point of view from one generation to another, from one member of this large family to another. The reader stays with no one view long enough to become ultimately acquainted with it. The effect is kaleidoscopic. There are relationships and patterns, but they seem temporary, transitory, as if made by chance.

In the early part of the book, the actual physical point of view is near, although it is not really in, the young Topaz. Much of what we see and hear is determined by what she saw and heard. We know little if anything of her unspoken thoughts. She is given as a person who had none, who said everything and "was congenitally lacking in any private or inner life and did not seem to miss or need it." She is a woman of great gusto, determined and able to take pleasure in small things, and "quite unaware of the realities of the lives of the people whom she met day by

day." Any tale she tells, therefore, is fairly superficial, no matter how lively and amusing the surface. But as the book progresses, as Topaz the youngest daughter, the youngest sister, becomes aunt, great aunt and great great aunt, the point of view moves further from her. Comments on her life and the life of the family in Vancouver have a growing distance. The point of view which is established finally as the view of the book comes from no character in it. It is an author voice, whose tone, not at all omniscient, is tentative, detached, reflective. It arises out of the minor and major events, the tangential and direct relationships of these hundred years.

Two chapters of *The Innocent Traveller* were published separately. Others could be, having a kind of enclosed life. But the tone of wonder, of mingled admiration and despair, grows only gradually through the whole book, through one episode simply "coming in beside" another in a grouping as accidental, a sequence as casual as any natural order. Topaz, who delights in coincidence and is interested in accident, asks for no meaning or purpose. She takes each event as it comes, with relish; she makes nothing happen. "... if the book of her life had been shut up bang at an early age, history would have gone on just the same." One young relative, half listening to her ancient great aunt, wonders if there is a connection between her "unquenched vitality" and her lack of human awareness. In chapters that shorten and shift to the present tense as Topaz gets to be ninety years old and then a hundred, the author voice muses on time and history of which Topaz has had both much and little.

> In the evening while the seagulls fly westward with lazy, purposeful flight, and great and terrible events are massed by Time and Plan upon the slow-moving curtain, Aunt Topaz gathers the rattling newspaper together and with her embroidery scissors cuts out a picture of the King and Queen, an account of a wedding, or an advertisement for garlic pearls because they sound so odd. She may send for these pearls some day. She puts the newspaper cuttings into a large overfull box with a red plush cover on which some seashells still remain. She is very old. She will soon be a hundred.

The tone Ethel Wilson has created in *The Innocent Traveller* seems natural for a family tale. The combination of apparently exact and detailed accounts with frankly fanciful reconstructions implies a point of view like that of some younger member or friend of the family. The quiet, companionable voice which shares amusement, raises questions, and occasionally makes a fragmentary judgment precludes any final judgment. No pattern, no ultimate meaning in the life

of Topaz Edgeworth could emerge from an author view which encompasses the many points of view of the family.

Tuesday and Wednesday, a novella published three years after *The Innocent Traveller*, is entirely concerned with the number of meanings that do not add up to one, the number of impulses and motives which are not links in a chain of purpose. Will and intention play some part in the lives of these characters, but not so much as accident and coincidence. The arrangement of episodes is loose, so that one becomes aware only gradually of a pairing which holds all things in balance: the intention acted upon and the intention deflected; the coincidence that alters a mood and the coincidence that doesn't; the accident that ends a life and the accident that is scarcely noticed.

The tone of this book, both more detached and more comic than that of *The Innocent Traveller*, is also more controlling. Each event and each character is made to seem as ordinary as can be. On Tuesday and again on Wednesday, Mort and Myrt Johnson get up in the morning, dress, eat, go off to work — or not. The course of each day is determined partly by habit, partly by character, and partly by so casual a circumstance as the fact that the woman across the aisle in the bus is wearing alligator shoes. Even when the apparently irrelevant assumes relevance, affecting mood and action, the tone of the passage makes the shift seem perfectly ordinary.

> Of all people, Myrtle loved herself in whatever guise she saw herself. If her parents had been alive, she might have loved them, too. If she had had children she might have loved them too, since they would have been her children. She had Mort, and . . . she really loved him in her own way. She reserved the license to dislike him, to hate him even. For very irrational reasons she would end the day disliking Mort, even when she hadn't seen him all day; because, perhaps, the butcher had said that so upstanding a man as Mort deserved the best steak in the shop, or because Aunty Emblem in her luscious fashion had said that *there* was a man, if you like! Or even because his socks had gone at the toe, or because he was darn lazy, which he was, or for no reason at all. Then she knew herself wasted on this louse. But let her friend Irma Flask who lived three blocks away ask how many jobs it was Mort had had since Christmas, and say she pitied Myrtle she certainly did, and whether that was that souse Hansen she seen him with on Thursday, and what a wonderful provider her sister Ruby's husband was — then Myrtle displayed Mort as the perfect husband, hers and none other, and let them that couldn't keep their own husbands lay off of hers, whatever she had said about him fifteen minutes before.

Mood and motive shift about, on these ordinary days, not only for the Johnsons but also for "Aunty Emblem in her luscious fashion" and Vicky Tritt in her spare fashion, for the top-rigger Eddie, "that souse Hansen", and for the journalist Wolfenden whose "troubles [were] the wrong women and the wrong drinks and himself." Like the balance of episodes, the balance of characters (not at first noticeable) makes it seem the oddest chance that two very different people should find themselves in similar or echoing circumstances. The effect one character has on another seems also accidental. One encounter may be a direct hit; another, a glancing blow; a third, abortive, so that neither character is really aware of the other at all. A missed connection is made to seem as fortuitous as a meeting which alters the course of a life. It is by a chance encounter that Mort is drowned early Wednesday evening. For good reason, but, as it happens, wrongly, the police believe and tell Myrt that her husband was drunk. By chance, Myrt's cousin Vicky has seen Mort just before his death and is able to tell Myrt that he was cold sober. All this, and the fact that Myrt is not at all pleased by Vicky's information, the reader takes with amused detachment. But something is building up to the moment of Vicky's lie.

> As she hurried along the dark wet pavements, life and time continued as usual everywhere under heaven with practised ease their ceaseless fluid manipulations and arrangements of circumstance and influence and spiked chance and decision among members of the human family — such arrangements as had caused Victoria May to be what she was; and had caused her that night to see Mort sober and Eddie drunk; and had caused her to force her small will upon Myrtle Johnson; and had caused her in one instant by means of a lie to turn Myrtle aside from her fury, and had thus enabled Myrtle to become the widow of a hero, not of a louse, and so had enabled Myrtle to remember Mort with half grudging tenderness and with her best and sleazy love; and had caused her (Victoria May) to do Mort a great service by so establishing him in general reputation and in memory; and had caused Myrtle to esteem herself a woman not preferred — for one fatal moment — to that souse Eddie Hansen, thereby adding to the power of her eyelids by being a wife widowed and deeply injured by this non-preference; and thus had caused Myrtle to continue to dominate Mrs. H. X. Lemoyne and Victoria May and even Irma Flask — more than ever before — and sometimes by virtue of her cruel loss to dominate Mrs. Emblem; and still to be very lonely.

In its quiet way, this novella is technically brilliant. The author voice, established in the opening paragraph, is sometimes omniscient, to show both the irrational connections and the many missed connections. It is sometimes an observing and commenting "I" who addresses the reader as "you". This device, moving

toward conversation, makes observations seem natural, and thereby opens the small particular experiences of a few people into the daily life of anyone.

> So the two friends got up, and took their time and walked together along Hastings Street and took the street car and changed twice and got off at a very chic building which was large and spreading and of white stucco with window boxes, and a grass plot all around; the kind of building that caused tourists driving in from Bellingham to say "Oh let's stop here, Momma. This looks a nice kind of place!" You cannot blame these tourists because it does indeed look like a nice kind of place to stay, but it is not, it is not, it finally and inescapably is not. It is a mortician's place, it is a funeral parlour, it is a funeral home, it is the undertaker's and people who approach meditatively and a bit early for the funeral wonder how on earth did we manage in the old days! Back east when Grampa died it doesn't seem to me we had anything swell like this. We just had the funeral right in the house and old Miss Foster came in to help.

The conversational author voice also allows the point of view to flow smoothly into one or another of the characters, whose experiences and responses are given largely through characteristic speech patterns. These speech rhythms, with their repetitions and formulas, their emotional connections and distractions, are like the rhythms of the narrative itself. The rolling under rhythm is established when Tuesday morning, noon and night are followed by Wednesday morning, noon and night. Within this on-going, comic movement, there are all the extraordinary transitions, juxtapositions, repetitions, variations and irrelevance of ordinary daily life.

This novella is one of two published together, in a volume called *The Equations of Love*. The love Myrt and Mort have for each other is an extension of a self-love that is strong and inaccurate. What they and other characters in the story really love are the many images of themselves. In the second novella, *Lilly's Story*, Lilly's motivating love is also — in a way — self-love, but it turns very quickly from self-protection to the protection of her child. Her refrain, "A girl's gotta right to live," becomes "My kid's gotta right to have a chance."

THE SHARPEST CONTRAST BETWEEN *Lilly's Story* and *Tuesday and Wednesday*, is that Lilly's is a story of single-minded purpose and ruthless perseverance. The story angles in by way of Yow, Lilly's lover for a time who was

caught stealing, and then by a second chapter about Lilly's childhood, the period when she "took things as they came, living where she could, on whom she could, and with whom she could, working only when she had to, protecting herself by lies or by truth. . . ." But it settles into the mould of Lilly's purpose from the time she found herself pregnant. As months and years came, Lilly discovers more and more what to lie about, how to make a lie make a world, how to use gesture or silence to build and maintain a new identity. To teach herself and to guard her child, she must be always alert, always aware. To give herself time and the safeguard of space, she must be distant, reserved. In this story, therefore, no event is unused; nothing is unrelated to Lilly's life plan. Each episode and each sentence, economical and scrupulously attentive to detail, moves steadily, as if in single file: this *and* that, this *so* that, this *but* that. The choice is restricted. The point of view shifts less than in any other of Ethel Wilson's novels. The reader either sees what Lilly sees or, more often, watches her, a determined, shrewd and terribly lonely figure in a vague landscape.

There is something unnatural in this rigidly purposeful life. It is not that Lilly is presented as overcautious. ". . . about and behind her spread always her intangible and invisible Then, solid as steel, inescapable as past birth or death to come, making her Now always insecure and always scrupulous — for Eleanor. . . . (But a girl's gotta right to live, hasn't she? Sure she's got a right. No, said Lilly's austerity, she had no rights at all. None.)" The unnaturalness comes about because Lilly's single-mindedness has made her so cautious, so isolated that she is not much affected by chance. She can't risk it. ". . . You see, there's always somebody sees everything. There's never any freedom . . . not for me. Things don't stop, either. They go on and on and on."

Lilly's Story, like many of Ethel Wilson's tales, is about a triumph of the human spirit. This triumph comes not only through Lilly's long endeavour but also through her final release, because of the coincidence of Yow's reappearance, from her prison-haven into the ridiculous world of chance meetings and frivolous adaptations.

In *Swamp Angel* there is also a working out of a plan, but in a manner that is much more flexible. The narrative of this novel spreads out, flowing one way for a while, then bending round to follow another path, another character. The woman who carries out her plan, Maggie Lloyd, is as determined as Lilly, but where Lilly is slight, narrow, rigid with purpose, Maggie is ample, easy in her movements, intuitive. She too is reserved, not from fear but because she "did not require to talk, to divulge, to compare, to elicit. . . . Maggie, brought up from

childhood by a man, with men, had never learned the peculiarly but not wholly feminine joys of communication, the déshabille of conversation, of the midnight confidence, the revelation. . . ." What she does, she does "serenely and alone". She is, however, not merely self-reliant. She relies on the land itself, the life of woods and lakes and rivers to which she has returned. Here she can relax, encounter and move with the unexpected.

Maggie's are not the only meaningful experiences in *Swamp Angel.* Another character almost as important is old Mrs. Severance, as strong and self-sufficient as Maggie, more curious and articulate, less active. The lives of these two friends diverge. The lives of Maggie and a Chinese boy from Vancouver converge. There is a working out in the narrative of what Mrs. Severance calls "the miraculous interweaving of creation. . . . We are all in it together," she says. Even Eddie Vardoe, the husband Maggie left, is "in it". Between chapters that flow like Maggie's rivers or Mrs. Severance's memories are comic two- or three-sentence chapters which give the mean, wiry life of Eddie and his blondes. But there is no real plot or theme connection between these characters. When they meet, they meet by coincidence or by some sort of accident.

The accidental or arbitrary encounter or event or vision in *Swamp Angel* is different from the accidental encounters of *Tuesday and Wednesday.* Maggie and Mrs. Severance have an awareness, a deliberateness that indicates some relationship between caprice and will, between the passive and the active. None of them is given as controlling his fate; each of them is in some way aware of it and consents to it.

> "Coincidence," said Mrs. Severance, "seems to me to be what a Japanese friend of mine used to call 'a series of combination of events' which meet at a certain point of time or perhaps place. It is not as uncommon as people think, and the older I grew the more I believed in the fantastic likelihood — whether relevant or irrelevant — of coincidence . . ."

The fantastic likelihood of coincidence does not function as strongly in *Swamp Angel* as in *Tuesday and Wednesday. Swamp Angel* is a more fluid work altogether, covering more ground. The movement of point of view and narrative line establishes an attitude or consciousness hard to define but pervasive enough so that no combination of motives and acts turns into an imposed pattern, a plot. Casual or symbolic connections do appear but are made to shift and finally dissolve.

In *Love and Salt Water,* the reader's attitude toward the life of the story is

less clearly controlled. There is, on the one hand, some real power of plot in this novel. Whereas in *Swamp Angel*, Maggie's key decision has been made before the book opens so that her movements were those of relaxation and a natural return to her strongest self, in *Love and Salt Water* young Ellen Cuppy moves toward important decision. Her growth, over a period of fifteen years, gives a sense of motion toward some act, some knowledge or understanding. She is given a natural urgency and restless drive. On the other hand, there are the counter motions of such a passage as this:

> She did not at that moment think that there was somewhere some parallel of light and darkness, of illumination and blotting-out, and perhaps our whole existence, one with another, is a trick of light. That may be somewhere near the truth, which is often hard to determine because of the presence of the lights and shadows of look, word, thought which touch, glide, pass or remain.

In *Love and Salt Water*, there are not only comments in the distinctive author's voice but also divisions in the narrative, and several points of view. However, Ellen Cuppy's hesitations and actions, blunders and discoveries pull so strongly toward plot and character development that the counter weights cannot balance them. As soon as the balance tips, as soon as one hears the questions "Why does she do this?" "What does that mean?" one realizes how strongly Ethel Wilson has held, in many books, a difficult view. To see life as accidental, "a trick of light", "a series of combination of events", and to present it so with humour implies some balancing source of strength, some framework. In *Love and Salt Water*, the framework doesn't seem to hold. But in other works, especially in *Tuesday and Wednesday*, the balance is so fine that one gets the kind of impression one gets from a mobile: it moves of itself, by accident, by design.

FAUST AND UNDER THE VOLCANO

Anthony R. Kilgallin

THE BEST INTRODUCTION to any critical study of *Under the Volcano* is Lowry's "Preface to a Novel", as presented in *Canadian Literature* No. 9, in which he analyzes "... that long first chapter which establishes the themes and counter-themes of the book, which sets the tone, which harmonizes the symbolism." The uppermost of these themes is that of Faust: "It is as if I heard a clock sounding midnight for Faust," writes Lowry in justifying his use of twelve chapters. The Consul Geoffrey Firmin, God-free and infirm, is a man fallen from Grace, in the Christian or Catholic sense, and a black magician on another plane. The entire novel is built upon the ramifications of his fall:

> This novel, to use a phrase of Edmund Wilson, has for its subject the forces that dwell within man and lead him to look upon himself with terror. Its subject is also the fall of man, his remorse, his incessant struggle towards the light under the weight of the past, which is his destiny... Throughout the twelve chapters, the destiny of my hero can be considered in its relationship to the destiny of humanity.

The third epigraph to the novel is a quotation from Goethe's *Faust*: "Whosoever unceasingly strives upward... him can we save." Goethe himself set these lines in inverted commas in his masterpiece to emphasize them as a fundamental pronouncement. In his eighty-second year he spoke vital words to Eckermann about this passage:

> In these lines the key to Faust's salvation is contained: in Faust himself there is an activity mounting ever higher and purer to the end, and from above eternal love which helps him in his need. All this is completely in harmony with our

> religious conceptions, according to which we enter into bliss not by our own strength alone, but by the divine grace vouchsafed to us.

In terms of the Consul these lines are to be profoundly ironic.

The narrative of *Under the Volcano* opens on a "gigantic red evening, whose reflection bled away in the deserted swimming pools scattered everywhere like so many mirages". The metaphor is reminiscent of the famous line of Marlowe's Faustus: "See, see, where Christ's blood streams in the firmament!", as Faustus pleads for one drop of blood to save his soul. Geoffrey is first identified with Faustus through a related simile:

> What had happened just a year ago today seemed already to belong in a different age. One would have thought the horrors of the present would have swallowed it up like a drop of water. It was not so. Though tragedy was in the process of becoming unreal and meaningless, it seemed one was still permitted to remember the days when an individual life held some value and was not a mere misprint in a communiqué.

Almost the last of Faustus' pleas was, "O soul, be changed into little waterdrops,/ And fall into the ocean, ne'er be found!" In vain does Faustus seek an escape through anonymity. His tragedy, in fact, still serves as the best known archetype of its kind; likewise, the tragedy of the Consul's death is unforgettable.

Chapter One of the novel is presented through the consciousness of Jacques Laruelle, acquaintance since childhood of Geoffrey, and sometime movie-producer who has been considering "making in France a modern film version of the Faustus story with some such character as Trotsky for its protagonist". Unrecognized by Laruelle, Geoffrey's life has been this very story; it is purposefully ironic that ten months later Trotsky is murdered in Mexico City, an exile with a short pointed beard like the Consul who, on the night of his death, is to be called "Trotsky". To prepare for his movie, Laruelle has borrowed a volume of Elizabethan plays from Geoffrey himself, among which is Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*. Opening the book at random he reads, "then will I headlong fly into the earth: / Earth, gape! it will not harbour me". He sits "oblivious of his surroundings, gazing at the words that seemed to have the power of carrying his own mind downward into a gulf, as in fulfilment on his own spirit of the threat Marlowe's Faustus had cast at his despair". Looking closer at the passage, he realizes he has misread the word "fly" for the actual word "run". This simple slip is intensified when, several pages later, we hear the line, "where I come from they don't run". The speaker is Weber, a witness to Geoffrey's murder, which, in Geoffrey's own way, was a literally physical attempt to enact Marlowe's quotation on his last night of life. The word "fly"

calls to mind the inscription on Faustus' arm, "*Homo fuge*: whither should I fly".

Playing the game of "sortes Shakespeareanae" Laruelle turns again coincidentally to a quotation from *Doctor Faustus*:

> Cut is the branch that might have grown full straight,
> And burned is Apollo's laurel bough,
> That sometimes grew within this learned man,
> Faustus is gone; regard his hellish fall —

Geoffrey had "gone" exactly one year ago; the play's next line, "Whose fiendful fortune may exhort the wise", is a potential warning to Laruelle and to the reader to observe, and profit from, the example of Geoffrey the damned soul who supposedly had once considered writing an occult volume to be entitled "Secret Knowledge".

Inside the book of plays Laruelle finds an unsent letter of Geoffrey to Yvonne, his divorced wife, imploring her to return to him "if only for a day". That the Consul could not bring himself to send the letter, a plea for salvation, indicates partially his inability to communicate this desire. He writes, "But this is what it is to live in hell. I could not, cannot ask you. I could not, cannot send a telegram". Despite the Good Angel, Faustus is also unable to communicate his desire for deliverance. To confirm this parallel situation Lowry subtly compares another reference to Faustus' predicament with the Consul's former plight. Faustus exclaims, "How! bell, book, and candle — candle, book, and bell, —/ Forward and backward, to curse Faustus to hell". Bell, book, and candle is the old ceremony of major excommunication. The bell announced this to all; the book represented authority; while the candle was believed to symbolize the possibility that the ban might be lifted by the repentance and amendment of its victim for, just as the candle was used and extinguished, so the excommunication itself might be. *Twelve* priests and a bishop all held lighted candles; the bishop recited the formula which ended:

> We separate him, together with his accomplices and abettors, from the precious body and blood of the Lord and from the society of all Christians; we exclude him from our holy mother, the Church in heaven and on earth; we declare him excommunicate and anathema; we judge him damned, with the Devil and his angels and all the reprobate, to eternal fire until he shall recover himself from the toils of the Devil and return to amendment and to penitence.

Those present answered, "So be it!" The candles were extinguished by being dashed on the ground. The ceremony ended. Laruelle's misquotation of "fly"

for "run" is due to the "elusive flickering candlelight"; finishing the letter he holds it into the candle flame until it is extinguished. Then, "suddenly from outside, a bell spoke out, then ceased abruptly: *dolente . . . dolore*!" Again the ceremony has ended.

Geoffrey's affliction is drunkenness in its most compulsive and irremediable state. In the "Preface to a Novel" Lowry wrote, "on one level, the drunkenness of the Consul may be regarded as symbolizing the universal drunkenness of war, of the period that precedes war, no matter when." In his letter Geoffrey writes, "this is how I drink too, as if I were taking an eternal sacrament". It is essential to recall Faustus celebrating the sacrament of the Black Mass. Lowry certifies this intended analogy in the "Preface": "William James . . . might be in agreement with me when I affirm that the agonies of the drunkard find a very close parallel in the agonies of the mystic who has abused his powers." Indeed, in *The Varieties of Religious Experience,* James concludes a passage on this very subject with the statement that "The drunken consciousness is one bit of the mystic consciousness. . . ." Since Lowry also conceived of the drunken Consul as a universal symbol, the Faust theme expands to wide-ranging socio-political implications. In *The Decline of the West* Oswald Spengler characterized the spirit of modern Europe and America as Faustian, a condition which pictured man as ageing and wasted, but still hoping to comprehend and achieve everything, including the impossible. Nevertheless, western man, having become civilized, is effete, *infirm,* and defenceless, and therefore must perish. Visible then in the fall of Geoffrey is the fall of our Faustian civilization. Spengler, quoted by Hugh Firmin, Geoffrey's half-brother, is an important functional reference throughout *Under the Volcano.*

The symbolic importance of the frequent cinema advertisements for *Las Manos de Orlac* is due partially to the Faustian allusions in Maurice Renard's book, *The Hands of Orlac,* from which the film was adapted. Resine, the blonde wife of the pianist Stephen Orlac who, in an operation to save his hands, is given the hands of a supposed murderer, is haunted by a devil's head — a Mephisto — a Fantomo. Indeed, Yvonne refers to Geoffrey as a "phantom". For the Yvonne-like Rosine ". . . it was a partial and chance resemblance, inspired by the character in Faust." Stephen's studio, where he retrains his hands for the piano, becomes "the Temple of Hands. Here were installed the two electric machines, the practise keyboard, and all the physical and chemical apparatus with which he had provided himself. And there were also some special books in a pile. The place soon looked like Dr. Faust's den." Like Faustus, who "surfeits upon cursed necromancy", Stephen also becomes interested in the subject: he observes that ". . . necromants or necro-

maticians make it a practice to evoke the dead so as to obtain by their aid some light upon the future." Lowry's entire technique of literary allusion has particularly this same purpose. Apart from common references to Baudelaire and to secret and occult books, two motifs of *The Hands of Orlac* also run through *Under the Volcano*: "... from day to day he was slipping down into an abyss", and "The dead are coming back to life."

Into the third chapter Lowry introduces a pair of Faustian familiars who battle to direct Geoffrey's conscience. By definition, a familiar is a spirit supposed to attend and obey a sorcerer; also, in naming them "guardian angels" Lowry makes his allusion to Faustus' Good and Evil Angels obvious. The opening paragraph of this chapter includes a Faustus paraphrase: "Look up at that niche in the wall over there on the house where Christ is still, suffering, who would help you if you asked him: you cannot ask him". Faustus observes and does ask momentarily, "Ay, Christ, my Saviour,/ Seek to save distressed Faustus' soul!" The latter lines significantly follow the last pleas of both angels in the play. Likewise, Geoffrey's familiars do not finally abandon him until an hour before his end. The Evil Angel strikes first, urging the Consul to drink rather than think of Yvonne: "... the voice he recognized of a pleasant and impertinent familiar, perhaps horned, prodigal of disguise, a specialist in casuistry." The Good Angel angrily retorts: "Neither do I believe in the strychnine, you'll make me cry again, you bloody fool Geoffrey Firmin, I'll kick your face in, O idiot!" The "first familiar" wins this round as Geoffrey downs half the strychnine. The Good Angel threatens Geoffrey again, unsuccessfully. Both reappear before temporarily leaving the Consul, their battleground. The final reference to *Doctor Faustus* in this chapter comes when Geoffrey interjects, "please remind me to get back my Elizabethan plays".

Faust, as distinct from Dr. Faustus, is alluded to in this third chapter as Geoffrey thinks uneasily of "Goethe's famous church bell in pursuit of the child truant from church". Lowry has cleverly summarized Faust's soliloquy in which bells and voices in the Eastern Dawn prevent him from taking his life. Geoffrey and Faust are ironically juxtaposed; the former poisons his soul with each drink, while the latter is persuaded by a choir of angels, all Good, against self-destruction by poison. As a boy, Faust strayed in fields and forests but was always entranced by the sabbath bells. Their sounds now help prevent him from committing suicide. Geoffrey, however, is hardened against such precautions: "Goethe's church bell was looking him straight between the eyes; fortunately, he was prepared for it". Before conquering his despair Faust had cried, "I hear, but lack the faith, am

dispossessed." Similarly, Geoffrey has been referred to as a "poor, lonely dispossessed trembling soul". Both men recognize the soul's life-giving source, but only Faust aspires to seek it. Both men thirst after knowledge, but Geoffrey's unquenchable alcoholic thirst takes precedence in his case. At one time he had hoped to write a book on Atlantis, the main part of which was to be "the chapters on the alchemists". On this topic he refers to "the old alchemists of Prague . . . living among the cohabitations of Faust himself".

In chapter four, Bernal Diaz, William Blackstone, Geoffrey and Faustus are all employed to illustrate precisely a viewpoint noted by Spengler in *The Decline of the West*: "Dramas like that of the emigration to America — man by man, each on his own account, driven by deep promptings to loneliness, — or the Spanish Conquest, or the Californian gold-rush, dramas of uncontrollable longings for freedom, solitude, immense independence . . . these dramas are Faustian and only Faustian." Limitless space is the prime symbol of the Faustian soul. Thus, Geoffrey's paraphrase of Diaz, the author of *The Discovery and Conquest of Mexico 1517-1521*, and his wish to escape like Blackstone are understandable. To quote Spengler again: "To fly, to free one's self from earth, to lose one's self in the expanse of the universe — is not this ambition Faustian in the highest degree?" Unfortunately, Mexico has been plagued by exploiters ever since Cortez and Diaz. Hugh remembers once hearing the potential solution: "For man, every man, Juan seemed to be telling him, even as Mexico, must ceaselessly struggle upward", a paraphrase of the novel's epigraph from *Faust*. This quotation is part of the song of the angels who bear the immortal remains of Faust to heaven. Man and the world must follow Juan's advice to achieve a final salvation similar to Faust's. Geoffrey, however, sleeps throughout the chapter, but retains his Faustian identity in the minds of Hugh and Yvonne. Hugh asks, "How much does he really know about all this alchemy and cabbala business? How much does it mean to him?", and even jokes, "Maybe he's a black magician!"

The Faustian familiars reappear in Chapter Five as Geoffrey awakens from his Indic dream with "demons gnattering in his ears". The evil one advises him to ". . . just take one drink, just the necessary, the therapeutic drink: perhaps two drinks", but before he does so another voice retorts, "Put that bottle down, Geoffrey Firmin, what are you doing to yourself?" "The emptiness in the air after filled with whispers: alas, alas. Wings it really meant." Geoffrey's last hours are literally flying away as, at the chapter's end the good familiar cries out in desperation, "Stop it, for God's sake, you fool. Watch your step. We can't help you any more."

The role of Geoffrey as a Faustian magician is strengthened by a quotation from Shelley's *Alastor*: "Twelve o'clock, and the Consul said to the doctor: 'Ah, that the dream of the dark magician in his visioned cave, even while his hand — that's the bit I like — shakes in its last decay, were the true end of this so lovely world." Lines 681-6 of *Alastor* read as follows:

> O, that the dream
> Of dark magician in his visioned cave,
> Raking the cinders of a crucible
> For life and power, even when his feeble hand
> Shakes in its last decay, were the true law
> Of this so lovely world!

The misquotation of "end" for "law" is a noteworthy Freudian slip since Geoffrey is inadvertently comparing the magician's last stages with his own and the world's, whereas Shelley does not imply that the death of the magician causes the world's end. He puns on the word "Katabasis" but the application of the term underlines the present predicament. This *is* a descent into the nether world, into an inferno. Indeed, the attempt to insert a katabasis into the second part of *Faust*, first as a descent to the Mothers, and then as the Classical Walpurgis Night, was evidently one of the most baffling structural problems of that work, as well as being one of the most crucial sections of the play.

The familiars are mentioned by Geoffrey next in Chapter Seven: "As for the demons, they were inside him as well as outside; quiet at the moment — taking their siesta perhaps — he was none the less surrounded by them and occupied; they were in possession." In *Doctor Faustus* the evil demons appear as the Seven Deadly Sins. Faustus' line, "O, I'll leap up to my God! — Who pulls me down?" seems to be applicable to a momentarily penitent Geoffrey when "the weight of a great hand seemed to be pressing his head down." Jacques disparagingly compares Marlowe's sense of perspective to Geoffrey's: "Christopher Marlowe, your Faust man, saw the Carthaginians fighting on his big toe-nail. That's the kind of clear seeing you indulge in. Everything seems perfectly clear, in terms of the toe-nail." Ironically, the analogy gives great compliment to Geoffrey's powers of vision. He remarks, "It was already the longest day in his entire experience, a lifetime" when a few lines earlier the pun *Dies Faustus* had appeared. Marlowe's Faustus loved knowledge and power more than he did Christ, while Goethe's Faust would have reached the same tragic end were it not for the love of Margareta who brings him salvation. Geoffrey's fate fluctuates between these two poles. His potential saviour,

Yvonne, first dreamed of making a new start with Geoffrey in British Columbia on Lake Pineaus where he owned an island. Coincidental or not, in *Faust: Part Two* the lower Peneus is a similar lotusland Eden.

In Chapter Ten the personal and the political are two main frames of reference. Spengler's observation on this point is helpful: "There are two sorts of Destiny, two sorts of war, two sorts of tragedy — public and private. Nothing can eliminate this duality from the world." As a private individual and as a public representative, the Consul symbolically portrays an ambivalent character; a Faust figure and an Everyman figure simultaneously. He uses one of Marlowe's most famous lines as a point of departure. Looking at Cervantes' prize-fighting cock he asks, "Was this the face that launched five hundred ships, and betrayed Christ into being in the Western Hemisphere?" In Conrad Aiken's *Blue Voyage*, an important literary source for parts of *Under the Volcano*, the main character, Demarest, had used this same line for his own comic points of departure: "Is this the face that scuttled a thousand ships?" Chapter Ten concludes with Geoffrey voicing a Faustus-like frustration. Into the oncoming storm he cries out, "I love hell. I can't wait to get back there. In fact I'm *running*. I'm almost back there already." Faustus' soul was divided between a desire for mastery and a sense of guilt. Geoffrey despairingly envisions a comparable dichotomy: "What is man but a little soul holding up a corpse?" Like Faustus, he is tragic because he recognizes this dilemma as real. As Faustus boasts that his soul is his own to dispose of as he will, he hears the fearful echoes thundering in his ears. Similarly, as Geoffrey proclaims his love of hell there is also a contradictory emendation, for, "the queer thing was, he wasn't quite serious." Nature forewarns Geoffrey, just as it did Faustus: "Before him the volcanoes, precipitous, seemed to have drawn nearer. They towered up over the jungle, into the lowering sky — massive interests moving up in the background."

A letter from Lowry to his American editor, Albert Erskine, July 15, 1946 shows Lowry's concern with *Faust* in Chapter Eleven. Remembering Julian Green's note in his *Diary* to end a book with the image of the heroine rising to heaven, Lowry added to this idea one contained in the opera *Faust* when Margareta rises to heaven while Faust descends to hell. Thus, the simultaneous actions of Yvonne and Geoffrey in Chapters Eleven and Twelve parallel the splitting of the path as two roads diverge into the Mexican wood to two opposing destinies.

Geoffrey's last hour commences when he sees "a clock pointing to six". The Faustian parallel of the last hour permits an ironic contrast. After the clock strikes eleven, Faustus, aware of impending damnation, exclaims, "Now hast thou but

one bare hour to live./ And then thou must be damn'd perpetually!" Through an almost fatalistic determinism, Geoffrey's approaching death is similarly inevitable. He, however, apathetically accepts the end, totally lacking Faustus' frantic longing for life. Yet Geoffrey's death is fully in accord with Spengler's theory of the determinism of inevitable decline for the Faustian spirit of Western man in the twentieth century, the death of modern man, as Jung put it, in search of his soul. Asking "What is a lost soul?" Geoffrey, in answering himself, describes himself: "It is one that has turned from its true path and is groping in the darkness of remembered ways."

Time ticks on: "the ticking of his watch, his heart, his conscience, a clock somewhere." In vain Faustus ordered, "Stand still, you ever-moving spheres of heaven,/ That time may cease, and midnight never come." Geoffrey makes no such plea, but only notes and recalls while his familiars make their last supplications. He hears them argue, and then "the voices ceased". They return as "daemonic orchestras" and "insolent archfiends", and lastly come to him as he lies with Maria, the prostitute, "hissing and shrieking and yammering at him: 'Now you've done it, Geoffrey Firmin!' Even we can help you no longer . . . Just the same you might as well make the most of it now, the night's still young." Young it is, but for Geoffrey it is almost over. Even Maria is part of the Faustian tradition, for in ancient Coptic manuscripts the magician and the prostitute played an equal role to that of the magician and the virgin, Yvonne in this case. Now, at six-thirty, "A bell clanged frantically in the distance" just as for Faustus the clock strikes the half-hour. Spengler wrote that, "Besides the clock, the bell itself is a Western 'symbol'." As such it is a Faustian symbol as well.

The crag of the Malebolge reminds Geoffrey of Shelley's *The Cenci*, Coleridge's *Kubla Klan*, and Calderon. The last reference is probably to Calderon de la Barca's play *The Wonder-Working Magician*, to whose Faust theme Goethe was indebted. The play opens in a wood where Cyprian and a Demon argue about the unity of God. Cyprian later sells his soul for Justina, his beloved. The two die on the scaffold and ascend to heaven. The following lines from Calderon's play depict imagery visible also in the Malebodge: "Though from that proud height you fall/ Headlong down a dark abyss"; "Abyss of hell, prepare,/ Yourself the region of your own despair!" and especially the following lines:

> This mountain's brow is bound
> With curling mist, like streaming hair
> Spread out below, and all the horizon round
> Is one volcanic pyre!

Geoffrey describes the sunset as "A mercurochrome agony down the west". The suggestion of a blood-red crucifixion is comparable to the description by Faustus: "See, see, where Christ's blood streams in the firmament!/ One drop would save my soul, half a drop," a parallel that occurs elsewhere as I have already indicated, one year later, as a "gigantic red evening, whose reflection bled away in the deserted swimming pools". Faustus' futile plea for even half a drop is paralleled in Geoffrey's thirst: "the thirst that was not thirst, but itself heartbreak, and lust, was death, death, and death again". He remembers once carrying a carafe of water in the hotel *El Infierno* but unable to put it to his lips he hears a voice saying "you cannot drink of it", and believes "it must have been Jesus who sent me this". The comparable line in *Doctor Faustus* is "Ah, rend not my heart for naming of my Christ!" Meanwhile we hear "the clock ticking forward" with Geoffrey abandoning "The hope of any new life together, even were it miraculously offered again".

Reflecting on "that extraordinary picture on Laruelle's wall, *Los Borrachones*," Geoffrey applies the book's epigraph from *Faust* to himself:

> When he had striven upwards as at the beginning with Yvonne, had not the "features" of life seemed to grow more clear, more animated, friends and enemies more identifiable, special problems, scenes, and with them the sense of his own reality, more *separate* from himself? And had it not turned out that the farther down he sank, the more those features had tended to dissemble, to cloy and clutter, to become finally little better than ghastly caricatures of his dissimulating inner and outer self, or of his struggle, if struggle there were still?

In his descent, his katabasis, Geoffrey becomes a corporate and composite character, incorporating all damned souls, just as with successive masks he has been all of the literary models alluded to, a timeless Everyman. He joins the "downward flight" of souls beyond salvation, just as Yvonne has already joined the ascending flight, à la Margareta, although her death follows Geoffrey's.

Time moves on, "One, two, three, four, five, twelve, six, seven". Geoffrey's last twelve hours conclude in this twelfth chapter at seven o'clock. "The clock outside quickly chimed seven times." As the clock for Faustus strikes twelve, thunder and lightning ensue. Similarly, "Thunderclaps crashed on the mountains and then at hand," and "Lightning flashed like an inch-worm going down the sky". "A bell spoke out: *dolente . . . dolore*!" Faust and Dante are again echoed in this tolling, just as they are combined one year later for Jacques. It is Geoffrey's passing bell, his funeral bell, but it also tolls for everyman.

Even the horse who, escaping from the clutching hands of Geoffrey, gallops uncontrollably through the forest to kill Yvonne, is ironically anticipated by Faustus' line, itself a quotation from Ovid's *Amores*, "*O lente, lente currite, noctis equi*," but time and the horse wait for no man. Just as Faustus cries "O, I'll leap up to my God! — Who pulls me down?" Geoffrey experiences a similar prevention of his attempt upward: "He raised his head again; no, he was where he was, there was nowhere to *fly* to. And it was as if a black dog had settled on his back, pressing him to his seat." Similarly, Faustus has nowhere to fly to. He pleads, "Mountains and hills, come, come, and fall on me,/ And hide me from the heavy wrath of God!" Likewise, Geoffrey deliriously deludes himself that in the Himalayas, imaged by Popocatepetl, is a final resting place. Carrying "the Hotel Fausto's information" in his pocket, he mentally attempts to climb the volcano, as his father had climbed the Himalayas. Faustus had also hoped to be borne aloft to heaven in the volcano's breath:

> Now draw up Faustus, like a foggy mist,
> Into the entrails of yon labouring clouds,
> That, when you vomit forth into the air,
> My limbs may issue from your smoky mouths,
> So that my soul may but ascend to heaven!

Goethe presents a similar hell intended for Faust:

> out from the arching jaw
> A raging swill of fiery flood is spewed;
> See, in the seething fume of that dread maw,
> The town of flames eternally renewed.
> Up to the teeth, the molten red comes rushing,
> The damned swim wildly, hoping to be saved,
> Then, where the huge hyena's jaws are crushing,
> Renew their path with burning brimstone paved.

"Somebody threw a dead dog after him down the ravine." Bunyan and Faustus come instantaneously to mind. In the Bunyan epigraph to *Under the Volcano* the dog's soul is not doomed to perish in Hell as is man's, yet man must die like an animal. The pariah dog, a symbol of guilt, has followed Geoffrey throughout the book, and even earlier in this last chapter is still associated with his fate: "And it was as if a black dog had settled on his back, pressing him to his seat" as I have quoted above. As an outcast of society Geoffrey is a pariah.

Suggestions of a cyclical reincarnation are latent in Chapter One. Vigil talks of sunset when begin "all the dogs to shark". When Laruelle is in the cinema "Dark

shapes of pariah dogs prowled in and out of the stalls". Lastly, talking to Laruelle, Sr. Bustamente, the cinema manager, refers to Geoffrey as "the *bicho*, the one with the blue eyes". Certainly, Laruelle is haunted by the spiritual ghosts of Yvonne and Geoffrey, if not also by a physical embodiment of each. Faustus wished to be reincarnated to escape damnation. Finally, in lines that Bunyan might well have known and paraphrased, Faustus cries:

> Why wert thou not a creature wanting soul?
> Or why is this immortal that thou hast?
> Ah, Pythagoras' metempsychosis, were that true,
> This soul should *fly* from me and I be chang'd
> Unto some brutish beast! all beasts are happy,
> For, when they die,
> Their souls are soon dissolv'd in elements;
> But mine must live still to be plag'd in hell.

Employing the Faust archetype, Lowry has achieved the sense of ironic dissimilarity and yet of profound human continuity between the modern protagonist and his long dead exemplars; he has also locked past and present together spatially in a timeless unity by transmuting the time-world of history into the timeless world of myth, the common content of modern literature.

chronicle

LETTRE DE MONTREAL

Naim Kattan

SI LES POÈTES CANADIENS-FRANÇAIS chantent le pays et se font les porte-parole des aspirations de toute la collectivité, les romanciers, si l'on excepte ceux du groupe Parti Pris, s'attachent aux grandes passions et aux petits problèmes de l'individu. Deux thèmes qui, pendant longtemps, n'avaient pas droit de cité en littérature canadienne-française reviennent avec constance: le sexe et la religion, et surtout les rapports, plus ou moins équivoques, entre les deux. Et ce sont les romancières qui parlent avec le plus d'audace, le plus de franchise et, assurément, le plus de lucidité. C'est à elles qu'on doit les œuvres de fiction, non seulement les plus nombreuses mais les plus marquantes de l'an dernier. S'il est vrai que les mouvements de libération sont davantage le résultat de la conscience qu'on prend de sa misère et de son étouffement que de la misère et de l'étouffement eux-mêmes, on doit conclure que les Canadiennes françaises prennent conscience, et avec quel fracas, de leur condition. Certaines dressent non un bilan du passé mais une liste de revendications.

C'est le cas surtout de Michèle Mailhot dont le roman *Dis-moi que je vis* est la longue confidence d'une petite bourgeoise. Mariée à un brave homme d'affaires, tous ses besoins matériels sont satisfaits, et pourtant elle a l'impression de vivre dans une cage dorée. Elle a des aspirations culturelles et artistiques vagues. Elle veut s'exprimer. Une fade liaison ne peut pas être la réponse. Michèle Mailhot nous plonge dans la vie des banlieues de l'Amérique du Nord. Sans avoir lu Betty Friedan, elle fournit aux thèses de celle-ci une illustration concrète.

C'est une longue confidence aussi que nous offre Diane Giguère dans son deuxième roman *L'eau est profonde*. Mais ici l'aveu est indirect, les personnages complexes, le ton à la fois timide et osé. C'est l'histoire d'une adolescente amou-

reuse d'un homme plus âgé. La femme de ce dernier complète le trio et ce sont les rapports ambigus entre ces personnages que nous décrit Diane Giguère. L'héroïne, la plus jeune et la plus innocente des trois, est aussi la plus exigeante. Sa voix est en retrait contenu par une paralysante peur de se livrer. Les descriptions de la nature ne s'intègrent pas à l'action mais ouvrent la voie de l'évasion. Le livre se termine sur une rencontre avec un étranger, une sorte de sauveteur à la fois mystique et érotique.

Ambigus sont aussi les rapports entre les personnages de Louise Maheu-Forcier. L'amour de son héroïne se déroule dans une atmosphère éthérée et sordide en même temps. La musique sert de décor mais on y trouve aussi la violence, puisque la jeune fille est violée; le mensonge, car son amant la trompe avec une autre; et l'équivoque, puisque sa rivale exerce sur elle une emprise trouble. *L'île joyeuse*, c'est l'enfance, c'est la pureté et c'est l'innocence qu'ébranle l'âge adulte.

La sexualité et la religion ressortent très clairement dans le premier roman d'Hélène Ouvrard, *La fleur de peau*. Destinée par ses institutrices religieuses à une vie monacale, l'héroïne se révolte et cherche douloureusement sa voie dans les méandres des milieux pseudoartistiques. Elle est prête à se donner au premier homme qui saura la prendre dans ses bras. Elle a la malchance de tomber sur Stéphane qui est plus attiré par les hommes que par les femmes. La découverte des attraits érotiques de la femme est une sorte d'ascèse. La sexualité ouvre pour lui les portes de la maturité et lui permet de triompher de ses cauchemars et de ses obsessions.

Dans son dernier roman, *Une saison dans le vie d'Emmanuel,* Marie-Claire Blais pousse le réalisme à un point tel qu'on a l'impression de naviguer entre le cauchemar et la fantaisie. Ses personnages sont des enfants qui traduisent leur dégradation sociale et morale par leur acharnement à vilifier leur corps. Il y entre une grande part de masochisme dans ces scènes d'auto-punition. Ici, les jeux érotiques sont sordides; ils se mêlent à la maladie physique et au dénuement le plus abject. La propension de Marie-Claire Blais à décrire les maléfices et les obsessions marque le véritable objet de sa quête. Cette plongée dans la noirceur est en réalité une recherche de l'innocence perdue. Les enfants humiliés s'enfoncent dans le péché car rien ne peut les sauver. Quels détours le puritanisme ne prend-il pas? Mais il y a, dans ce livre, une telle poésie que ses personnages maudits nous semblent rachetés.

L'héroïne d'Andrée Maillet dans son roman *Les ramparts de Québec* a elle aussi bien du mal à se dégager d'une enfance protégée et des interdits religieux. Pour confirmer son indépendance, elle exhibe, avec brutalité, son affranchissement.

Elle se promène nue sur les Plaines d'Abraham, répond aux avances des hommes au cours de ses pérégrinations en Europe, mais ce qu'elle cherche en vérité c'est d'être adulte et d'être acceptée comme un être autonome. Malgré ses excès, ce personnage illustre le même appel à la libération que ne cesse de lancer la femme canadienne-française.

Dans *La dormeuse éveillée*, Yvette Naubert nous présente une femme aux prises avec elle-même. Son héroïne ne finit pas de revivre son passé. Enfance douloureuse où elle se sentait victime. Sa rencontre avec un Européen qui a connu les affres de la guerre et des camps n'allège pas ce poids oppressif. Un passé ne chasse pas l'autre. Elle est jalouse de sa soeur qui représente pour elle l'image de la femme victorieuse puisqu'elle a un mari et un enfant. Le roman se termine par une scène d'une rare violence ou l'inceste se double de lesbianisme — scène qui relève plus de la psychologie clinique que de la littérature.

Dans le roman de Yolande Chéné, *Peur et amour*, la rêvasserie de l'adolescente se mêle à la confession. On a presque l'impression qu'il s'agit d'une analyse psychiatrique et même si ce récit peut avoir des effets thérapeutiques, nous nous trouvons en marge de la littérature. Cette femme canadienne-française qui élève la voix, qui refuse une existence diminuée, qui lance un appel à la plénitude — est-elle présente dans l'univers des hommes, du moins dans celui des romanciers? Oui, mais elle revêt un autre visage.

Dans le roman de Marcel Godin, *Ce maudit soleil*, la femme est si près de la nature qu'elle est réduite à un état bestial. L'histoire se déroule dans un camp de bûcherons où le sexe est exutoire du désir comprimé et rêve d'une vie normale. La femme, partenaire érotique et image d'une pureté détruite, est violentée. Subordonnée ainsi au mâle, elle ne peut aspirer à aucune autonomie. Elle doit même payer le prix de sa participation au délire érotique, ultime refuge dans la désolation d'une nature inhumaine.

L'héroïne de *Retour à Coolbrook*, de Gilles Marcotte, s'identifie à une ville. Le personnage masculin du roman est un journaliste qui retourne à sa ville natale. Ses amours malheureuses symbolisent son inadaptation. Mais on se demande si le mal qui ronge son âme n'est pas né de sa propre timidité, qui frise la lâcheté, plutôt que de l'affrontement avec une ville et une femme.

Chez Jacques Godbout — *Le couteau sur la table* — la femme emprunte un double visage: celui de l'étrangère que le jeune Canadien français, parti à la recherche de lui-même, tente de conquérir, et celui de la Canadienne française qui satisferait chez lui la soif de paix et d'harmonie si elle n'était pas condamnée à la mort par un destin aveugle.

Dans *Le poisson péché*, Georges Cartier accumule les femmes sur la route de son héros. Elles appartiennent à toutes les classes de la société et à diverses nationalités. Le mâle canadien se définit par rapport à cette mosaïque. Il n'en apparaît pas ni moins insignifiant ni moins inconsistant.

Ainsi, les héros mâles de ces romans qui ont pour auteurs des hommes ne reconnaissent pas à la femme son autonomie. Objet de désir, sujet de rêve, instrument de recherche de soi-même, elle n'atteint pas à la plénitude de la réalité. Il est heureux que les romancières rétablissent un peu l'équilibre.

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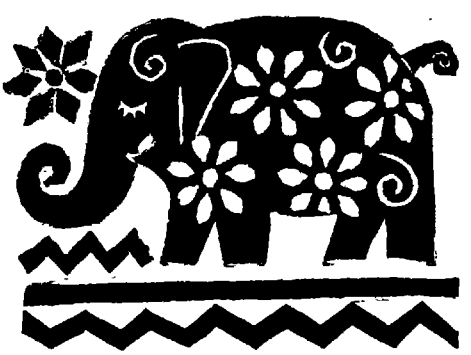


review articles

VOICES FROM EXILE

Miriam Waddington

FRANK PREWETT, *The Collected Poems of Frank Prewett.* Introduction by Robert Graves. $4.75.

DAVID WEVILL, *Birth of a Shark.* Macmillan. $3.75.

E. K. BROWN once suggested that by viewing Canadian literary works as Canadian, we often obtain insights which are not otherwise obtainable. But how are we to decide who is a Canadian writer? Brown designated as Canadian those writers born in Canada, who had spent most of their productive literary years in this country. Within this original group, Brown made a further distinction between the writers who wrote about life in Canada for native readers, and those whose work was shaped by, and addressed to "an alien audience", either British or American.

Both Wevill and Prewett are Canadian in the sense of having been born here (or, in the case of Wevill, of having come here as a young child), and both are writers who voluntarily exiled themselves to England. Frank Prewett, who died three years ago at the age of 69, left Toronto for Oxford just before the First World War, and David Wevill, who is barely thirty, departed for Cambridge in 1954.

In these days of simultaneous translation, air and space travel, not all expatriate writers are exiles; some are merely mobile, nor do they necessarily feel identified with the mother country in a way which is significant for their art. David Wevill is a poet who is not conflicted about his exile, and whose themes, landscapes and poetic attitudes seem to have been shaped by an English life for an English audience. On the occasions when he does refer to a Canadian landscape—as in "At Rideau Falls" —the country has a remote *pas encore vu* air about it. Under his pen, the Ottawa river becomes a kind of Cam, an ancient, complex river, meditatively eroded. Loggers there may be, but no menacing Iroquois shadows hover.

So Wevill, interesting as he is, does not seem to be writing out of a Canadian experience. I'm not sure by what tradition David Wevill is influenced, but French symbolism seems the most likely. Yet it is a symbolism fettered, in the English fashion, by T. S. Eliot's introspective and guilt-ridden Christianity. To me this is an utterly alien and uncongenial tradition, so I cannot say I enjoy Wevill's poetry; only that I appreciate its merits.

Whether one enjoys it or not, the impressive thing about Wevill's poetry is the contemporary flavour of its scope, and the ambitiousness of its range, for Wevill is trying to reconcile science with

religion, and his understanding of what is at issue for a man living in the modern world is fine and intellectual.

His poems employ a nervous kind of beast imagery to get his message across. There are spiders, bats, snakes, donkeys, cockroaches, dead birds and groundhogs in his *einwelt*, *umwelt*, and *mitwelt*: the hunter and the hunted. Wevill has a wonderful eye for small details, and a golden touch in embroidering his animal portraits, down to the last gruesome claw and hair. But these beasts are only metaphors for his real concerns, which centre around the matter of process. Wevill is trying, in these poems, to convey his sense of the process of life and death for man and animal in a world which is larger than cities, oceans, or individual planets. Man and beast are enmeshed in a universe which does not distinguish between beginnings and endings, and in which birth and death are one and the same.

Now it is one thing for the universe not to know the difference between life and death, but it is quite another when the poet claims not to know it. If the poet really doesn't know the difference between killing and being killed, between coming and going, we can only ascribe this lack of knowledge to a lack in feeling. In the absence of an emotional context, pushpin *is* as good as poetry — why not? — and death is as good as life, and killing is no worse than being killed.

And maybe, for Wevill, killing is a little more enjoyable. Like Webster, he is much possessed by death, and Eliot's "daffodil bulbs instead of balls" have been cleverly transplanted to Wevill's "eyesockets double as flowerpots" ("Bone-Patch"). The poet seems to be saying two things about death: first, when killing does take place, who dies — the groundhog or the hunter? Although no metaphysics will ever convince me that it's the hunter who dies, I recognize the question as being a legitimate one poetically. It is closely related to Wevill's other preoccupation — that of the shifting and interchangeable identity of people and objects.

The individual in Wevill's world can't really know his identity because he's so suspended, so sensitive, so perceptive, so able to move into the beings of others, both animal and human, and he does it with such ease. Sometimes this shift in the location of the poet's self leads to valuable insights, as in his fine and painful "My Father Sleeps", or in his very characteristic "Cockroach and Star":

> The whole night becomes that star.
> In dreams the cockroach winds its milk —
> White wound around my open mouth —
> I roar, and darkness chokes the sound.

Or, as in "Have Patience", when the poet's eye becomes ". . . a lake/Tilting its level through me". And, whether it applies to us or not, we can certainly see the sense of" . . . . We're each his own/ Night and nightmare toiling around one vine" ("Cockroach and Star").

However, just as often, this free-floating identity leads merely to a pleasurable, and in my opinion — a morally culpable — recapitulation of the violent incident, whether it is in sex ("Body of a Rook"), or in hunting ("The Groundhog"). In each case the poet recounts his violent deed, describes in detail his murder, admits his guilt, and goes on to commit more violent acts, but with full awareness. "I know my own violence too" ("Body of a Rook"), says Wevill.

My argument is that it is not enough for a poet to perceive and record his

violence. Having perceived it he must act on it poetically, and he can only do so through his use of language. Yet, at the imaginative level of language, Wevill falters, and is often confused. His images, though personal, educated, and in tragic accord with the times, "Mouth jagged as smashed plastic", don't always stand up to analysis. For example:

> Like a strip
> Of dangerous cat my frozen eyes
> Hunt, dilated.
> ("Bone-Patch")

just won't do, and "Something dextrous in the smile's wrist" ("Have Patience") just doesn't make enough sense to justify itself. And in most poems, after having played on the reader's consciousness with a series of supersensitive and exquisitely irritating images, as in "Pisces", he leaves him, not as we might expect, with the reward of a hard-earned epiphany, but with just another fragmented image:

> They are broken by this double gift,
> To break and keep, as the sea's struggle
> and fall
> Fumbles back to marble; the flux continues.
> ("Pisces")

The message, for all its elaborate disguises, when it is decoded, just turns out to be not there. To paraphrase Tolstoy: how much death does a man need?

Frank Prewett is a very different kind of writer: all his poems are acts:

> All that I have I delighted bestow
> I lay it down; I spread it with care
> At your feet: approve my show
> It is the all of all love that lies there.
> ("The Pack")

And all his poems have been hammered through the language in a way that makes him a poet's poet, and more specifically, a Canadian poet's poet. Who

else would recognize in Prewett's echoes of Hopkins and Langland the mimetic, loving, re-creation of these two great figures in our isolated landscape? For all we know, Prewett put their voices into his poems for the sake of company. Lacking an audience — for only half a dozen poems from this whole collection were ever published before Robert Graves saw to it in 1964 — Prewett simply built one into his work by summoning up his favourite dead.

The fact that Hopkins and Langland were both preachers, and passionate ones, is no accident either. If the lonely don't make converts they have to talk to themselves. So Prewett preached a little. Against the failure of love between men and women, their joinings and partings, against the northness of north and the darkness of dark, against the inevitability of death, Prewett set the inviolability of the human individual. And against death he set the sensuous immediacy of experience, both in joy and suffering, on the farm, in the war, in the marriage bed, as well as in his own tough, unsentimental "artistic durance" ("Naked Overlong"). In return for all this he asked from nature and society something that few ever get — a safe passage:

> The blue stars dance before me and behind,
> Beneath them I know the east wind is not cold.
> Do not freeze and fear me on this height,
> I seek only to pass from vale to vale of the wold.
>
> ("The Cloud Snake")

But he was aware of all the dangers, and sensitive to external threat, whether it came from nature or from man. The poem, "Hated by Stars" is a metaphor for the whole problem of difference and the enmity it arouses:

> Now a field of grass is cold
> In the first of March when daisies shine
> Like the stars, but those sky stars are bold
> And they hate me for the heat that is mine.

Prewett's attitude to language is exploratory; he is not interested in discovering novelty or in technically inventing. For a poet who presents us with old-fashioned looking, innocent-seeming lyrics, he is pretty sharp about how far multiple meanings, phonological displacements, surrogate rhymes, and connotations will take him, and us. His connotations invariably point, not to the conjunction of objects, but to the conjunction of feelings with as yet unnamed experiences. His language is so general that it allows us, as Winifred Nowottny puts it, "to supply an uncontaminated image from our own experience of the physical world", as is clearly true of the following:

> Hear with me the breeze suffuse the leaves
> Behind, below the reedy bird in her green light.
> A day and a night the bared heart joys and grieves.
> Cling to me openheart a day and a night.
>
> ("Plea for a Day and a Night")

Underneath the words is a rich, profound and unified life whose direction and meaning one feels in every phrase.

And it is a poetic life, which unlike that of Wevill, never disappoints; it always has some place to go to, some destination yet to discover. Almost every poem ends with a discovery which contains everything in the poem and something new besides. But here is the irony: what is new in Prewett is never topical, and in our age, which consumes novelty as it consumes everything else, his is the kind of poetry which is neglected.

Well, no poet has any business living out of his time. Prewett should have been

a monk in an Anglo-Saxon monastery twelve hundred years ago. There, after long exile on the ice cold seas, he could have returned and written his strange, islanded, homiletic "clear fluting" songs for us to discover on some "... brief cold fiery dusk". Perhaps he did do that. He never returned to Canada because, in the real sense, he had never departed; and for all exiles he left this to read:

> Like reedy bird in treetop tuft unseen
> They parting fade who never shall away.
> The song in the recess and thicket-screen
> Enters the heart elusive. Go, yet elusive
> stay.
> ("Plea for a Day and a Night")

THE AMBIGUOUS MIDDLE

Albert Tucker

DONALD CREIGHTON, *The Road to Confederation*, Macmillan, $7.50.
J. K. CHAPMAN, *The Career of Arthur Hamilton Gordon, First Lord Stanmore 1829-1912*. University of Toronto Press, $8.50.

C. P. SNOW'S PHRASE, "the two cultures," is now a commonplace of academic discussion. Scientists and humanists have agreed to coexist with little genuine effort at understanding. Almost equally serious, though less obvious, may be the growing divisions within the humanities themselves. Anyone attending a mixed conference of historians, philosophers, and students of literature will realize that the language and conceptions of each discipline are not easily comprehended by those of another. Of them all, history may provide the most satisfactory bridge. It remains ambiguously in the middle, based fundamentally on the study of political institutions, social groups, and public men, yet at its best coming close to a literary discipline.

Donald Creighton's biography of Macdonald and now his latest book, *The Road to Confederation*, provide proof that history and literature can be woven into a texture. The examination of character has for him involved the imitation of a life; language and form are far more than a means of communicating research. He has never hesitated to impose a style so intensely and carefully lucid as to be inseparable from the quality of his interpretation. Creighton is the nearest we have ever produced to writers like Veronica Wedgwood in England. Like her, he has come to dominate our understanding of a period, and if the English Civil War was more complex in its issues, more dramatic in its clash of personalities, yet it may be doubted if the telling of the story is any more significant for a Canadian than that of how his nation took constitutional form. Certainly Creighton has been convinced, since the writing of his section for the Rowell-Sirois Commission in 1939, that the story deserves a grand manner.

Perhaps that is also the trouble. The manner may not be all but it pervades the narrative, giving to the book a quality which leaves the impression of a forceful mind, able to grasp and to express a tale

in comprehensive form, yet also raising doubts. They are not easily articulated since they are paradoxically bound up both with the intensity and power of the writing, and with the nature of the subject.

First of all, Creighton is telling a story, a story with a plot. "It was the enthusiasm of Gordon of New Brunswick that gave the movement its real start." So the books opens, in 1863. And it ends with a magnificent prose description of what Canadian rural society may have felt and thought on that morning of July 1, 1867, when *Le Journal des Trois Rivières* said "que nous pouvions maintenant prendre place parmi les nations de la terre." The beginning and the end were a mere four years apart, and because the conclusion was so lasting, so worthy of every effort, in itself it lends to the subject a certain neatness of construction. Creighton's inclination towards organization and clarity leads him to turn this apparent order into a tightly knit composition. But the student of history may wonder if the whole was always that evident, whether the parts ran so continuously together at the time.

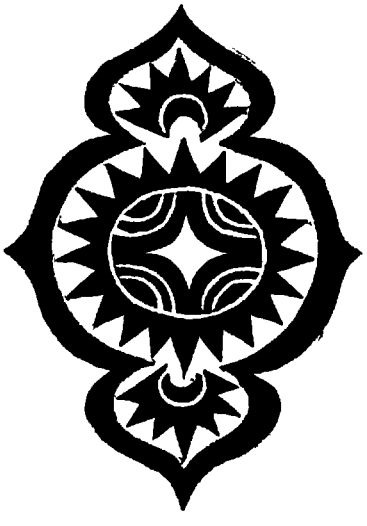
If he finds, as he is likely to, that Creighton is not imposing an artificial synthesis, that his construction only makes the events more vivid and intelligible, yet an impression of finality emerges from the book. One's curiosity is led from stage to stage, satiated rather than roused. Where Frank Underhill might prod the imagination with a few sentences, as he did in his Massey Lectures two years ago, Creighton's disciplined and sustained prose tends to leave the mind with little of that questioning, wondering, stimulated dissatisfaction which is the seedground of historical curiosity. This impression of completeness is reinforced by the research on which the book is based. Wherever private and official papers are to be found bearing on those political leaders who made Confederation — in England, the Maritimes, Quebec or Ottawa, Professor Creighton has seen them. They are complemented by his use of newspapers and of official publications. One could hardly ask, in the nature of evidence, for more authentic or exhaustive references than appear in his thirty pages of footnotes.

They add, however, little that is vitally new to the subject. The book fills out and substantiates; it does not enlarge our understanding, or turn it in new directions. Most of Creighton's story is already well known, partly through his own writing. The unique strength of this book lies in the balance that is achieved between the forces and the men working for Confederation, and the obstacles which so often in those four years made it appear a distant goal. Creighton is at his best in giving this balance dramatic form, whether he is analysing the partisan motives of George Brown, exploring the difference between legislative union and federation, or explaining the opposition of the Maritime region as a whole. Since the winning over of Nova Scotia and New Brunswick finally made Confederation possible, their political leaders are studied in detail. Those of New Brunswick emerge with an exaggerated prominence, for their province was the keystone of the arch; "... without New Brunswick confederation would not be." Its politics are therefore analysed minutely, so much so that one becomes aware of a distortion between the high purpose of the goal and the parochial local interests which so often stood in its way.

This contrast was never forgotten by Sir Arthur Gordon, Lieutenant-Governor of New Brunswick from 1861 to 1866. He was only thirty-two when he came out to his first post in the colonial service, possessed of a genuine confidence and sense of authority which one might expect of the son of a peer who believed that his most suitable and useful career would be found in rule over colonial people. Inevitably, he very soon decided that the tinkers, tailors, grocers, and lumber merchants of New Brunswick politics needed educating upward, and that the most effective method was to involve them in a larger legislative union, of British North America if possible, but if not, then of the Maritime regions alone. In the context of the confederation that was eventually achieved, Gordon's efforts were seldom constructive and this, together with his frustrated egotism, has led Professor Creighton to adopt an impatient and ironic attitude towards him. "... the main result of his widening acquaintanceship among the public men of British North America was the progressive enlargement of the scope of his disapproval."

In some measure this attitude is justified by the tone of Gordon's letters to the Colonial Office, but to judge a man wholly in a particular situation may distort his character. Gordon receives a more sympathetic and judicious understanding in the study by Professor Chapman. He takes the man far beyond his experience in New Brunswick — to the governorships of Trinidad, Mauritius, Fiji, New Zealand and Ceylon. It is a remarkably sensitive and scholarly book, ranging over fundamental problems in the government of the nineteenth-century Empire. Gordon's conceit remained with him. He had one of those unfortunate personalities which did not draw people congenially to his side, depending instead on authority and formality. In the exercise of power he sometimes revealed more energy than discretion. But Chapman makes clear that it is a narrow judgment to dismiss Gordon because he may have been frustrated within the restrictions of responsible government. It was more than authority that he wanted.

He wished also to exercise a deep sense of justice. In Trinidad and Mauritius he stood firmly for the rights of Roman Catholics against the educational privileges of the Anglican establishment; he worked for more equitable land distribution and the rights of indentured labour against planter monopolies; but above all he expressed a consistently farsighted sympathy with native peoples. In Fiji he urged the preservation of village communities and greater trust in the capacity of natives to govern by their own institutions. "The moral sense of a semicivilized race is often very unlike our own," he wrote, "but is not on that



account the less real; and . . . it is therefore of the utmost importance to seize . . . the spirit in which native institutions have been framed, and endeavour so to work them as to develop . . . the latent capacities of the people for the management of their own affairs, without exciting their suspicion or destroying their self-respect." His understanding, indeed, was sensitive and remarkably intelligent. When the police inspector in Ceylon banned those native processions so lovingly described by E. M. Forster in *A Passage to India*, Gordon reversed the order, saying: "I think a very large tolerance should be given to the amusements, habits, and familiar customs of the people . . . It is no part of the duty of the Government or of the Police, to interfere with harmless usages, simply because to Western ideas they seem foolish."

Whatever the grandiloquence and power of analysis in Creighton's book, with Chapman's study we are taken into a wider world, where the understanding is made more humane; and that, after all, should be the end of all writing, whether it is classed as history or as literature.

OUT OF THE SHELL

George Woodcock

MARGARET WADE LABARGE, *A Baronial Household of the Thirteenth Century*. Macmillan. $5.50.

D. J. GOODSPEED, *Bayonets at St. Cloud*. Macmillan. $5.75.

PHYLLIS GROSSKURTH, *John Addington Symonds*. Longmans. $10.00.

CANADIAN HISTORIANS and biographers are shifting their view from North America to the wider world. The spate of Canadiana has not yet appreciably diminished, but one suspects that at present it is kept going somewhat artificially by the activities of the Centennial Commission. On the other hand, there is nothing artificial about the interest which some of our best younger scholars are taking in English and Continental history, and if the power to move out of one's own microcosm is a sign of advancing maturity, their works are perhaps a better earnest of Canada's cultural coming of age than the literary phenomena to be associated with what are, after all, the mainly political celebrations of 1967.

Margaret Ward Labarge, whose book is in terms of period the first of the group of extra-Canadian historical studies I am now discussing, is already the author of a workmanlike study of Simon de Montfort. As a by-product of her research into de Montfort's period, she has now written a work of domestic history, *A Baronial Household in the Thirteenth Century*, using the household of Simon's Countess Eleanour as the central point of her study, but bringing in, to round the picture of aristocratic life in her period, much information gleaned

from other sources. Mrs. Labarge makes free use of surviving household rolls and other similar documents, and for those who are fascinated by the details of unfamiliar ways of life, she produces some very interesting facts about such far-reaching subjects as mediæval ways of wine-making, and the undergarments worn by thirteenth-century knights on going into battle. Her style is less original than her research, and her presentation generally rather dull, so that the reader has to work quite hard for the pleasure of adding to his store of curious information about mediæval life, but I, for one, found the labour worth while.

Major D. J. Goodspeed, who wrote, among other earlier books, an interesting study — *The Conspirators* — of the technique of *coups d'état*, dealing with a series of attempted and successful seizures of power by minority groups during the twentieth century, has now produced, in *Bayonets at St. Cloud*, an account of one of the most celebrated of earlier *coups*, Napoleon's seizure of power on the 18th Brumaire. It is a well-written narrative, derived mainly from published but not easily accessible sources, many of them contemporary to the event; Major Goodspeed has made his story brisk and dramatic.

Each of these books has its virtues, but neither is spectacular. In a quite different category, as a work of scholarship and an example of finely written biography, is Phyllis Grosskurth's *John Addington Symonds*, a life of one of those literary second-raters whose careers are often so fascinating in themselves and so symptomatic of their ages. "He is a far better and more interesting thing than any of his books," said Robert Louis Stevenson of Symonds, and Dr. Grosskurth admirably develops this theme.

There is, indeed, little reason to reread or revive the actual writings of Symonds. He was a Victorian man of letters of the best kind, intelligent, conscientious, broadminded and concerned with literary style, but in the long view his poems seem tepid and his major prose works, on Michelangelo and the Renaissance, while still eminently readable, have been superseded by other works of more careful learning. Symonds lacked the fire of creative originality that might have overleapt his defective scholarship and made him permanently interesting as a writer.

As a man, on the other hand, he presents all the features that make a good biographical subject. Physically, his life was a constant struggle against the tuberculosis that killed him in his early 50's. Philosophically he was plagued since young manhood by the doubts concerning the nature of the universe and of religious truths that assaulted the mid-Victorian mind, until in the end he reached the relative calm of a resigned rationalism. Morally he was tortured from his school days by the knowledge that he was sexually abnormal, and his marriage, if not destroyed, was certainly warped by this knowledge. Like Gide he developed, as the years went on, an almost obsessive desire to justify the homosexual to a world which turned him into an outcaste, and in his last years, in collaboration with Havelock Ellis, he did contribute to bringing this profound social problem to the attention of a by-no-means appreciative public.

In these respects Symonds was the tortured Victorian in his most extreme form. He was also an engaging personality whose letters are a great deal more at-

tractive than his formal, mannered prose, and he lived on terms of personal friendship with many of the intellectual leaders of the closely knit Victorian upper middle class. Above all, until recently large regions of his life have been deliberately shadowed by a mystery created by his relatives and friends. Symonds wrote a self-revealing autobiography which he considered his most important work, since it discussed, as frankly as his feelings would allow, the struggle of the homosexual to live honestly and completely in a Victorian setting. His literary executor, Horatio Brown, a fellow homosexual, decided, with the approval of the Symonds family, not to destroy the autobiography, but to leave it unpublished, and eventually he lodged it in the London Library with the proviso that it should not be released to the world until 1976; given the Victorian inclination to burn any documents that might throw a shadow on family honour, his action was about as liberal as one might expect. In place of the autobiography he published his own misleading two-volume biography of Symonds which used only the less compromising passages of the original.

Dr. Grosskurth has been allowed to read the Symonds autobiography and to make use of it without direct quotation; she had also spent a great deal of time tracing all the available letters from Symonds and his friends. The result is a book which not only gives us an entirely new view of Symonds himself, but in the process reveals a great deal about the manners and morals of the upper-middle-class world in which he moved. One learns for the first time how Dr. Vaughan, the disciple of Thomas Arnold, was

forced to resign the headmastership of Harrow; ironically, a morally tortured young Symonds was the instrument of his downfall. One finds prim and respectable literary figures like Edmund Gosse drawn into the tortured circle of the abnormal, and witnesses the rather astonishing connivance of Symonds's very Victorian wife in his homosexual relationships. It is an extraordinary picture of an agony-ridden and highly complex social-moral situation which came to a head only shortly after the death of Symonds in the great scandal and the equally great tragedy of Oscar Wilde's trial.

If Dr. Grosskurth sketches her background with skilful, revealing strokes, she never forgets that, from her perspective, Symonds is the central figure of the group, and her portrait of this sensitive and extremely unhappy man of taste and talent is both penetrating and sympathetic. Her approach, indeed, has minor flaws. At times a little of the condescension which is the temptation of the unadulatory biographer enters her tone. She is also too willing to condemn Symond's biographically-based Victorian criticism from the viewpoint of the passing critical fashions of today; conversely, she herself uses her subject's writings — as distinct from his letters — too sparingly as clues to the nature of the man. On a very few points of fact she appears to be inaccurate. Lord Ronald Gower was surely the original of Basil Hallward in *The Picture of Dorian Gray,* and not of Lord Henry as Dr. Grosskurth suggests. And the bookseller George Bedborough could not have been arrested, as she states, "on a charge of suspected anarchy", since "anarchy", suspected or otherwise, has never been in itself an offense in English law.

But these imperfections are a very small price to pay for a book which has the double virtue of being one of the best of recent literary biographies and also a fine study of Victorian manners.

books in review

A SPECIAL ADEQUACY

JOHN GLASSCO, *A Point of Sky*. Oxford. $4.00.

SOMETHING ABOUT the very look of John Glassco's second collection of poetry, *A Point of Sky*, whether its chaste print or its modest title plates (hinting at themes and images with an almost Victorian delicacy), suggests a deliberate, though not insistent, claim to our attention on grounds quite different from those on which we turn to, say, Cohen, Purdy, or Layton. More often than not, in its formal perfection, its decorous language, and its stately control of tonal movements, his verse demands, however politely, that we reconsider our notion of what is relevant or significant in our poetry at this moment. And once, at least, Glassco declares himself openly against "a dozen young Canadian poets":

> And all these poetics about poetics about poetics
> And the fearsome insults and fulsome accolades
> *And* your girl-friends vulva
> *And* your trip to Mexico

Not to mention "mementoes . . . of fornications" and "vignettes of . . . sensitive childhood". Well, we've heard those complaints before. Either way, whether he is pursuing his own interests or scolding his contemporaries, there is nothing startling about Glassco, except perhaps that there is no one quite like him on the immediate scene. For this reason alone, his reception is likely to be mixed and uncertain, as it was for his first book, *The Deficit Made Flesh*.

Obviously, Glassco cannot be dismissed because he scorns the merely fashionable: the slap-dash diction, disorganized syntax, stanzaic sprawl, and psychological posturing coming out of Montreal, or the Mailer-like egotism and demonic urbanism of certain West-Side-Story-poems growled out in Toronto oratories. Nor is he to be explained away as an establishment man, one of those older gentlemen cultivating odes, epigrams, and conscious elevation in the courtyards of Massey College. Glassco is of a different breed. The terms of his accomplishment, it seems to me, are of the kind that have to be looked at closely today because he succeeds in achieving what the contemporary poet, at least in this country, has long since ceased even to consider worthwhile attempting, something which Arnold once described as adequacy and which, curiously enough, he took to be the mark of a genuinely modern sensibility.

It's difficult to suppress the sneer in a word like "adequate": "You mean he's a Canadian Philip Larkin murmuring about church-going?" Nothing of the sort. But what the difficulty really points to is the bafflement and frenzy characteristic of so much contemporary poetry and experience. Reading Glassco, then, one must be prepared to encounter a poetic experience different from the mad dimensions of writers like Lowell or Roethke, and to keep in mind, as Arnold did, the distinction between excitement and comprehension. It's a distinction, by the way, which Glassco himself is not always able to keep steadily in view.

Before we get to the adequate Glassco, in fact, there are a couple of inadequate

ones to clear away. There's the rather obviously "modern" poet, who is not really modern at all, the bookish writer indulging in a garish display of classical-romantic-ironic-pessimistic Eliotesqueries, complete with Italian and German tags, the occasional straining after a semi-mystic "clear flame of longing", and brisk incongruity:

> Squeers and the Brothers Cheeryble
> Merged in a mystic pot-pourri,
> The dog-whelk counted as the whale,
> And equally near, My God, to Thee?

There's the Satanic Glassco and the Wordsworthian one ("And be once more/ As I have been before/ In another dream of infancy"). There's the dandy one and the sour one. Somewhat better, there's the Robert Frost of the Eastern Townships, bucolically metaphysical. Best of all, somewhere in the middle, there's that other poet, engaging, coherent, harmonious, intelligible, and adequate. We hear him in the voice of his Quixote waking to the death which is ordinary reality, even in the somewhat obtrusive emotion recollected in tranquillity in "Luce's Notch", or talking quietly of final things in "The Day":

> So on that day
> That final day
> Removed from time
> Dependent on nothing
> When nothing will matter,
> You will escape
> Like a mouse in the darkness
> The dream be ended
> The city forgotten
> The shadow will touch you
> Engross you wholly
> Softly, securely
> And soon, soon
> The day of others
> Freed of your sickness,
> Their own little day
> Serene, new born
> The day of their freedom
> Dawn quietly without you.

There is much of Glassco I for one could do without, but not if it meant that I could not have the peculiar delight of hearing in his best poems a language I had almost forgotten could still be spoken so well.

E. W. MANDEL

VISION OF TORONTO

ERIC ARTHUR, *Toronto: No Mean City.* University of Toronto Press. $15.00.

THE TITLE AROUSES a dissenting interior monologue before the book is opened. Surely this promising-looking volume does not set out to show that Toronto has ever had any claims to magnificence! "Mean" is a word that comes easily to mind whenever the city is thought of. The grid pattern, laid down in 1793 and adhered to ever since except in Rosedale; the narrow, infinitely stretching main streets lined for as long as one can remember with shabby shop fronts and leading into networks of more narrow streets with tight facing rows of verandahed houses; the wasted possibilities of the two broad avenues there are (University and Spadina); the ruination of a potentially beautiful waterfront; the lack of spaciousness, of vistas — in the bitter mood of a native, meanness of conception and execution in both planning and architecture seems to be everywhere. The title phrase — coined by the translators of the Acts (21:39) in a reference to Paul's Tarsus — suggests a prolonged romantic exaggeration.

But the book is not pretentious. Professor Arthur's history of Toronto's architecture to around 1900, the result of years of study, reflects on every page a

great fondness for the city and its past that only occasionally leads to romantic overstatement. The urbane text smoothly combines architectural comments with information and anecdotes of irresistible interest. Even the captions that accompany nearly 400 photographs and drawings are absorbing — so much so that irritation sets in as the eyes dart back and forth between them and the text. (Incidentally, the book would have said a good deal more than it does about changing attitudes and tastes if the year could have been given in the captions beside the word "demolished", which appears beside so many of the buildings illustrated.) Though the book is a little wanting in detailed historical discussion and detached evaluations, this seems unimportant in the face of its charm, its spirit, and the information and observations it does contain. It should be used and enjoyed for many years.

The most interesting revelation of the book for me was the appealing character of Toronto in the early 1870's, suggested in part by the photograph on the jacket. Though common sense protests, it is hard not to regret the almost complete disappearance of a city with tree-lined squares, harmoniously designed terraces of Georgian houses, a few mansions that handsomely proclaimed the attainment of wealth from humble beginnings, imposing office buildings and attractive store fronts, and prominently soaring churches in spacious green settings. This soothing Georgian atmosphere gave way to a rage of eclectic High Victorian building that created much of the uninteresting downtown district familiar to us, and it in turn led to what Professor

Arthur calls "a new and virile architecture" whose strivings for picturesqueness culminated in the City Hall (1890), a building much admired by architects.

The photographs in the book show that few truly impressive buildings arose from this activity (among the expected banks and churches are some very good houses and factories), but there were a number of interesting failures, and some curiosities, now gone, that command the attention simply because they existed. The nineteenth-century city that can be pieced together from many of these illustrations does convey, I have to admit, a glimmer of the sub-title's claim.

In the *cri du cœur* of the Epilogue, after Professor Arthur writes feelingly of the "blatant ugliness" of large parts of the city today, of Toronto's unworthiness of University Avenue ("a Valhalla for the human chief executive of Hydro"), of the gradual passage from the human to the inhuman in architectural scale, he dwells on one event that brightens the future. That is the construction of a "landmark in the architecture of the city", the new City Hall, whose design Professor Arthur had a hand in choosing. He sees it as a building that will become the "heart and head" of a more illustrious city to be. Caught up by his enthusiasm and confidence, and filled with delight by an extraordinary building in the making, a Toronto reader cannot help but be convinced and heartened by such a vision.

Will someone please write a book like this on Montreal?

WILLIAM TOYE

FOOLISHNESS IS NOT SUBLIME

SIMON GRAY, *Simple People.* Queenswood House. $5.75.

> "Well, we don't get much opportunity to talk to people about personal matters at home. People have different things to say there. They like discussing Nova Scotian politics and higher education. It's an important problem."
>
> She took the smallest of steps sideways. "The people Sam knows don't talk about things like that."
>
> "No, I noticed that." He resisted an impulse to take a step farther away from her, which was itself a matter of resisting an impulse to take a step nearer to her. "Things are definitely more personal here."
>
> "Yes." She took another little step. "We are."

THAT THINGS ARE MORE personal at Cambridge, and in England, than in Nova Scotia is one of the theses, perhaps the main one, of Simon Gray's *Simple People*, the second novel by this

Canadian writer to be published in England. His first, *Colmain*, was agreeably received in Britain and earned what must be the highest accolade an English critical establishment can bestow on a colonial writer, namely, that he has a gift for style, and the "quiet, malicious comedy of manners" — not, it must be agreed, attributes which instantly spring to mind when considering the generality of Canadian fiction. But Mr. Gray's perceptions were doubtless sharpened by some such acquaintance with Cambridge education and English life as is afforded his confused and unhappy Canadian hero in *Simple People*.

Briefly, this young man, whose name is Logan Bester, coming into a large inheritance during his academic career at a small university in Nova Scotia, decides to employ it, in part, towards completing his thesis on Wordsworth at Cambridge. He meets his uncle Lionel in London, obscurely involved in the shady side of the antique business, and in Cambridge falls in love with Joey, the young mistress of a sceptical and successful and rather vulgar novelist, Sam Field (*his* novel is called *Running Man*, by the way.) There are encounters with bitchy undergraduates of the literary establishment, very high on morality (it is, after all, Cambridge), evasive dons, an ambiguous colleague of his uncle's and a mysterious friend of theirs known as Mrs. Hodges, or Maria, or Gipsy. All these, it is plain, are openings into the real world, where things are "more personal", for the young man from Nova Scotia.

Now my own acquaintance with that province is pretty brief and superficial, so I have to take it on trust that a young graduate of a small university, with brains enough at least to begin a thesis on Wordsworth, could be quite as naïve and uninformed about worldly matters as Logan most decidely is. That there is a strong sense of moral rectitude emerging from such Maritime campuses is no surprise: after all, the Worthington of the novel could well be Wolfville, where I believe there exists a Baptist university. And among Baptists, I suspect there to be combined a heightened moral sensitivity without a corresponding imaginative sense of the richness and variety of forms which immoral behaviour may take. All this might explain the perplexing character of Logan Bester, though it does not remove the central problem of coming to grips with him as a character in fiction, which I shall put shortly, as follows:

Mr. Gray is concerned to show us the impact of a sophisticated society upon a Puritan, and his Puritan is his hero and his point-of-view. It is thus important that while we laugh at certain aspects of this encounter — and parts of this book are very funny indeed — we ought not to feel that our hero is so far beyond caring about that he forfeits any claim to reality. It is this claim to reality which establishes a kind of good faith between writer and reader, and which some of the most improbable characters in fiction do have — Don Quixote, to seize an example — but Mr. Gray's Logan Bester does not. Not that Logan is meant to exist on the scale of a Don Quixote. But after a promising beginning which establishes him as a point of intelligence, capable of irony, he slips into a type, a caricature of the North American student at Oxbridge, dogged, humourless, assiduously keeping bibliographical references of file cards "to keep my thoughts in order", and given frequent recourse to

locutions such as "I certainly see what you mean, all right," and "in point of fact". He is, in short, more of a fool than we can believe, and his foolishness is not sublime.

There is this, and his sexual naïveté. It is possible that provincial young men coming up to Oxford or Cambridge may still be embarrassed by such displays of romantic ardour as may be produced by couples clasping in the semi-darkness of an undergraduate party, although I thought Logan's reaction more appropriate to someone the age of Holden Caulfield, or younger. But nonetheless, take him as an extreme example of sexual reticence, Logan is so irritatingly not-of-this-world that some of the comedy and the anguish of his infatuation with the young mistress of the Amis-like novelist is dissipated in clouds of verbal misunderstanding. At other times, the balance between the funny and the painful is quite beautifully preserved, as in the moment of his initiation into physical love by the delectable Joey, our hero muttering, as he gropes about her unfamiliar landscape, "It's a long time since I did this."

In short, a good comic novel spoiled by a central character who is just too ambiguous. Still, there is a useful irony in its theme, and its title. Where Henry James posited that an American abroad was an innocent among the civilized and the corrupt, Mr. Gray has put his finger on one of the end-products of a Puritan society which imported its morality without also importing the civilizing and humanizing benefits of an older society: our Puritan, operating under moral imperatives, is a vastly more complicated being than the dons, calculating relatives, and uninhibited young women he meets in the old country. True or false? As Sam Field says, "We're very simple, really. Too simple, in a sense."

GEORGE ROBERTSON

GUILT FOR THE WRONG REASON

FRED BODSWORTH, *The Atonement of Ashley Morden*. Dodd, Mead. $6.95.

WHEN DR. ASHLEY MORDEN decides to devote his life to the discovery of a vaccine to counteract Lyophilized *Spiroides bangalorensis*, which causes "an obscure tropical disease," no one pays much attention. But when Morden isolates Strain M of *Spiroides* — and accidentally discovers his mutation is lethal enough to kill a man who only sniffs it — Ottawa's Institute of Defence Sciences swings into action. Overnight the research project is translated into a defence project, and peace-loving Morden finds himself employed to develop the virulence, not the vaccine.

Ashley Morden is a man of conscience, not an ordinary research scientist in the employ of the military establishment. During the Second World War, Pilot Officer Morden refused to engage in the bombing of Hamburg. He was court-martialed, sentenced to a year's imprisonment and "dismissed with disgrace." His "atonement" is his selfless and single-minded devotion to the apparently problemless *Spiroides*. When his project becomes top priority, Morden is unmoved by his fellow soldier-scientist's justification of bacteriological warfare: "Our job is to provide weapons, not decide where and how to use them." Nor, in light of

the atom bomb, does the other classic argument carry much comfort: "It will not be used. Merely having it will make it unnecessary to use it."

Morden's past and present predicament are tangled together when he crash-lands in the winter forests north of Churchill. He is about to complete the last stages of his experiments, but fate intervenes and he finds himself stranded. His life passes before him, and he begins to view his deadly discovery with some degree of moral perspective. Then Lilka Frahm, the beautiful but elusive mystery woman, rescues him, both physically and morally. Lilka, it happens, lived through the very Hamburg bombings that still bother Morden.

The plotting and writing are plausible, however, and the novel is full of new turnings. But the author, Fred Bodsworth (a naturalist and novelist, the author of *Last of the Curlews* and *The Strange One*, and a staff-writer for *Maclean's*), fails to find the main issue — that of guilt — and follow it through. Just as Canada consistently refused to face the issue of nuclear arms, Morden only makes a half-hearted moral commitment to his pacifistic principles. In the eyes of the air force he might have been guilty of traitorous behaviour over Hamburg, but certainly not in his own mind; hence his "atonement" is noble but unnecessary. But when he unwittingly unleases a new microbiological menace on the world, one would think a real "atonement" is in order: he should redress the balance of nature and spend the rest of his life searching for the now-necessary vaccine. Instead, Morden returns to the northern forests to be by Lilka's side. Fred Bodsworth has his hero guilty, but for the wrong reason. JOHN ROBERT COLOMBO

INSIGHT AND BLINDNESS

W. O. RAYMOND, *The Infinite Moment and Other Essays in Robert Browning*, 2nd edition. University of Toronto Press. $7.50.

THIS BOOK FIRST APPEARED in 1950. The second edition, containing three new essays and omitting one on Browning studies in the first half of this century, is dated 1965. It represents forty years of research and criticism and confirms both the continuity and range of Raymond's distinguished career as a Browning scholar. The essays fall into three groups: bibliocritical studies (on *The Ring and The Book*, the Thomas J. Wise forgeries, the Harriet Westbrook Shelley letters); studies of specific poems (*Fifine at the Fair*; *Paracelsus*; "The Statue and the Bust"; "Bishop Blougram," "Mr. Sludge", *Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau* and *Fifine* again, in an essay on "Browning's Casuists"); studies on more generalized aspects of Browning's work (biographical in "Our Lady of Bellosguardo", theological in "Browning and Higher Criticism," philosophical in "A Study of Browning's Imagery and Humanism").

In his introductory essay, "The Infinite Moment", Raymond undertakes to evaluate Browning's "place amongst English men of letters," promising to centre attention on the poet's "artistic worth." Though he offers "touch-stones" of Browning's poetic worth — incidentally proving himself closer as critic to Arnold than the post-Richards period — Raymond seems concerned less with Browning's "artistic quality" than with his "philosophy of life" moulded, we are told, by "two important environmental

influences": the romantic idealism he inherited from Shelley and the religious convictions "represented by Evangelical Christianity". Having devoted himself and much of his book to examining "the interplay between the transcendental and humanistic elements" in Browning's world-view, Raymond concludes (in an essay published in 1955) that the "humanism of Browning's ethics may justly be called the core of his philosophy of life."

Much critical insight and some real blindness is revealed in Raymond's attempt to reconcile Browning's Shelleyan idealism with his homespun humanism. Emphasizing Browning's insistence on the sovereignty of human love and intuition, Professor Raymond protests too much (at least forty times) against his "rational agnosticism", "intellectual nescience" and "negations of knowledge". This critical cliché, a crude over-simplification, simply ignores statements like those made in letters to Elizabeth Barrett: "all passive obedience and implicit submission of will and intellect is by far too easy . . . Chop off your legs, you will never go astray; stifle your reason altogether and you will find it difficult to reason ill."

Another cliché, "too oft expressed, but never well thought out", is the assertion that "Browning shows little interest in social progress, the evolution of the race, laws and principles which have a general bearing on humanity . . . political phenomena." Here Raymond contradicts himself, having stated earlier that some of Browning's poems "have a close relation to contemporary movements and controversial issues, artistic, religious and political." In identifying both Browning and Aprile (in *Paracelsus*) with the subjective poet as defined in the *Essay on Shelley*, Raymond assumes too much. Aprile conforms more closely to the description of the objective poet (as defined in *Sordello* and the Shelley *Essay*), while Browning cannot be assigned to either category. A past age speaks when Raymond says he is "repelled by the sordidness of *Red Cotton Night-Cap Country*"; and when "Blougram", "Sludge", *Hohenstiel-Schwangau* and *Fifine* are dismissed as "dry and tortuous reading" because "over-weighted with ratiocination", Professor Raymond must be admonished for failing to see that to Browning, as to Donne, a "thought . . . was an experience" capable of generating an emotional excitement productive of poetry well worth reading.

JOHN HULCOOP

POETRY IN PAMPHLETS

ANNE KEKES, *The Suspended Landscape.* Fiddlehead. $1.00.

DOROTHY LIVESAY, *The Colour of God's Face.* Unitarian Service Committee. 60¢.

ROBIN MATTHEWS, *Plus Ca Change.* Poetry North. 50¢.

SEYMOUR MAYNE, *Tiptoeing on the Mount.* McGill Poetry Series. $1.00.

A READING of these four pamphlets of poetry, issued during the last year or so, is likely to induce reactions varying from despair to enthusiasm in anyone sincerely interested in the immediate moment of poetic development in Canada. Thematic and stylistic dissimilarity are accompanied by remarkable differences in quality.

Although she writes about everything from the forms of poetry to the forms of love, Anne Kekes has not managed to

raise any of the poems in *The Suspended Landscape* above the level of rather dull prose. Her vision is handicapped by an inability to understand the poetic essence of the many aspects of life which she describes so thoroughly. Ideas are photographed from every possible angle, and the observations carefully recorded in verse, but the final result lacks depth and solidity. The wit is never quite witty, the dialogue — where it appears — is unconvincing, but perhaps the most distressing quality about most of these poems is the fact that they lack even a strong sense of rhythm. Only on one occasion, in "The Meeting", are rhythm and content satisfyingly unified.

If the fault of Miss Kekes is that of choosing too wide a variety of subjects and treating them all inadequately, Seymour Mayne has limited the interest of *Tiptoeing on the Mount* by stubbornly insisting on interpreting everything around him as a sexual symbol. With awesome ingenuity, fruit, vegetables, tomahawks, snow, balloons, seesaws and mothholes in his girl-friend's sweater furnish excuses for erotic statement. Within the limited range of this self-imposed monotony, Mr. Mayne has sustained a mood of witty ease which prevents the poems from slipping away into vulgarity or sentiment. Quick rhythms contribute to the lightness of the total impression and alleviate the tedium often produced by the predictability of the end of each poem once the initial image has been established. There is no intellectual obscurity whatever, and often the poems depend on simple puns for their resolution. The simplicity has its own charm, but hardly justifies the presence of so many similar poems in one collection. The title is misleading, for, despite a tiptoeing style, it is with a rather leaden determination that Mr. Mayne tramples on the mountain of love.

It is a pleasant experience to feel enthusiastic at the end of the first page of a collection of poems, and to continue reading with a growing awareness that the initial impression was well-founded. In *Plus Ca Change,* Robin Matthews begins with five completely satisfying poems "from the Pacific Suite" and moves on, through some excellent descriptive verse, to the triumph of the book, "Actualités d'Automne". Using mesmeric rhythms that blend perfectly with each theme and mood, and selecting imagery from both the world of untamed nature and the world of terraces, footmen, tea rituals and white piazzas, Mr. Matthews places man somewhere between the two, both "strange and true", and always lonely. The sea with:

> Its roving eye of honeyed adoration,
> Its salty hands that move imploringly
> Upon the gray, uncertain shore,

both compels and rejects man, who had "watched the fountains curling over stone."

The sea, with its special imagery and rhythms, is the unifying theme of "Five Poems from the Pacific Suite". The lyric poems that follow, each a cry for communion, are dominated by a sense of haunting loneliness. The culminating poem, "Actualités d'Automne", captures the autumn moment of the seasonal fertility myth, giving subtle promises of rebirth in the very fact of decay. The stanzas of this poem, with their sprung rhythm and their hint of rhyme, are carefully constructed in contrast to the free forms of the earlier poems in this volume. The fallen seed representing both death and birth is the central ambiguity

of the poem, and it is extended to the human condition until:

> The leaf contains the metaphor, and in
> The metaphor the perfect visible resides.
> Together in our ignorance we know
> The elegant enigma will not pass.

None of the other pamphlets afforded me quite the same pleasure as Dorothy Livesay's *The Colour of God's Face*. The poems in this volume were composed when Miss Livesay was teaching English in Northern Rhodesia under the auspices of UNESCO. During these years in Africa, the poetic rhythms which have always given her poetry its particular power were exposed to the magnetism of African songs and dances.

Yet Miss Livesay has not written African poetry in these verses written after her return to Canada. While her contemporaries have often turned to mythology for new imagery, Miss Livesay has successfully turned to a new environment for hers. The tree, always a central image in her poetry, is now a wild fig tree whose "dry leaves/whistle November". The poetry is a deliberate fusion of imagism and interpretation, and because this itself is experimental, it demands extreme poetic sensitivity for a unification of the aspects of the particular and the universal which is made possible by such a technique. In this, and particularly in her highly personal selection of imagery and rhythms inherent in a particular environment, lies Mrs. Livesay's originality.

HELGA HARDER

opinions and notes

KLEIN'S SOURCES

Sir,

I was particularly interested in the Klein Symposium (*Canadian Literature*, No. 25) because last January I took part along with Miriam Waddington and James Reaney in a Klein Forum put on by the Hillel Foundation at the University of Western Ontario. This dealt chiefly with *The Second Scroll*, and at that time I became aware how much the book depended for its structure on the story of Rabbi Nachman of Bratzlav's journey to Palestine. I have not previously seen this parallelism discussed and it seems to me so central and important in any consideration of the book that I think it ought not to be neglected.

There is an account of this journey by Martin Buber, included in his *Tales of Rabbi Nachman*, published by *Horizon* and translated by Maurice Friedman. Buber's work was written in German about forty years ago, and I don't know whether Klein was drawing upon this book or the earlier record of Nachman's utterances collected by his disciples (*Sefer ha-Middoth*), but he certainly must have known the story in some form, as he seems to have known most of the Jewish literature and scholarship in existence.

Rabbi Nachman of Bratzlav (1772-1810) was the great-grandson of Israel ben Eliezer, the Baal Shem Tov, founder of the Chassidic movement. Rabbi Nachman, born when Chassidism had lost its impetus and was degenerating, was suffused with a passion to revive the failing

movement. Like Melech Davidson he was at times plagued with doubt, and like Melech he left no body of work but only a few fragmentary expressions of his feelings. But these vague similarities are of little concern in an examination of *The Second Scroll.*

The similarities of Klein's book with Joyce's *Ulysses* have been remarked, but it was Klein's intention, I am sure, not to base his work on Ulysses, but like Joyce to base it on the myth of a wanderer. Joyce took his myth from the classical heritage well known to Europeans; Klein chose a Jewish story raised to the level of myth — not that of a man returning home, but that of a man travelling outward and at the same time returning, a symbol of his people, to a spiritual home.

The mystical feelings of the Jewish people throughout their history toward Palestine are too well known to need discussion here. The account of Rabbi Nachman's journey, through obstacles, to the epiphany, is a perfect crystallization of them. Rabbi Nachman's yearnings were intensified by the fact that his great-grandfather, the Baal Shem Tov, had never reached Israel, but had been obliged to turn back on the way. Apparitions, cherubim with swords, dream-warnings (everyday phenomena to mystical Chassidim) frustrated him. But the ghost of the Baal Shem Tov appears to Nachman before his departure as a sign that he may begin the journey. The ghost directs him to travel to Kamieniec (a variant spelling of Kamenets), and we begin to notice the more obvious parallels with Klein.

Of Rabbi Nachman's stay in Kamenets "it is reported that he spent the night alone in the city where Jews were forbidden to live and that thereafter the ban was lifted." Melech Davidson also spends a night in a Kamenets where Jews have been forbidden to live — after a pogrom in which they have all been killed, and he remains the last Jew alive there. Klein, with a savage ironic twist, has completed a cycle.

By spending a night in a Jewless city before setting out for Israel, Nachman has performed a symbolic action that represents Palestine in the hands of the Canaanites (Nachman's interpretation). "By sending him to Kamieniec, his great-grandfather showed him the way he was to go." But Melech has been in the hands of the Canaanites in actuality, and there is no place but Israel where he feels he can go.

The relationship between Nachman's adventures and Melech's is not a strict one-for-one concurrence. One of the most important of them is dealt out to Melech's nephew. In Haifa, Rabbi Nachman is annoyed by the affectionate attentions of a young Arab who, as it turns out after a rather angry misunderstanding, only wants to hire out horses and donkeys for the journey. Later the Rabbi speaks to his pupils of "the mysterious danger that lay behind this episode, and the pupils understood him to mean that the Arab had been Satan in person."

Klein uses this incident to present a much more explicit and complicated threat. His Satan figure, Settano, who accosts the nephew in Rome, threatens him both physically and spiritually, trying to seduce him by indirection to betray his deepest religious beliefs.

Nachman's route is roughly the one followed by Melech, and the Rabbi ends his stay in the Holy Land at Safed. From there, in spite of many obstacles he

reaches Bratzlav, and feels that his life has become transfigured and complete. But he does not die there. When he feels himself near death he moves to Uman, whose entire Jewish population has been massacred by the Cossacks thirty years before — in order that his soul, after his death, may be on hand to lift to heaven the bound and hovering spirits of those who have been slaughtered before their time. This is echoed by Melech Davidson: "At times I feel... that the numbered dead run through my veins their plasma, that I must live their unexpired six million circuits, and that my body be the bed of each of their nightmares."

Rabbi Nachman dies on the eve of the Sabbath after Tisha B'Av (the anniversary of the Destruction of the Temple, on the Ninth day of the month of Ab).

"Shortly before, he had moved into a new house, his last, where he looked out from a window on to a garden and, beyond that, the cemetery — with the graves of the thousands who have perished in the great Cossack massacre; he looked at it again and again and said how good it would be to lie among the martyrs." Nachman is ready with his death to redeem the numbered dead, to close their unexpired circuits.

Melech Davidson also dies on the Sabbath eve after Tisha B'Av. His nephew, who had gone to Mount Zion with the elders of Jerusalem on this anniversary, and listened as they wept for the shrines and tombs unredeemed in the hands of the invader, now feels that Melech's death also opens up a redemption for the lost of his race:

"The company of men now he had left and was one with the soil of Israel, but here in Israel these were not really tombs but antechambers to new life, the *mise-en-scène* for an awakening. Dramatically one speaker pointed in the direction of the tomb of the prophet Hosea, great prophet of social justice, and again toward Meron, where is the mausoleum of Rabbi Simon ben Yochai, great patriot and mystic, pronouncing them not graves but halidoms, deaths invested in life."

This is a letter, not a thesis, so I will not take time to explore many other similarities. The ones I have shown are textual points mainly: there are many more of these as well as deeper comparisons. One small item I found particularly interesting was that one of the little poems shown to Melech's nephew by the poet in Tiberias:

> Madness said the deafman watching the man
> On the podium.

is simply a condemnation of one of Nachman's parables.

On dipping, just now, into my copy of the *Hasidic Anthology* (a non-Buber collection), I have come to two conclusions. (1) Klein must have known Buber's stories very well, and (2) Buber's Nachman is largely of his own creation. I can't believe the actual man who is on record in his own *Sefer ha-Middoth* as saying: "Toothache comes to a man who has no compassion for animals," could truly have been the model for Melech Davidson, no matter how kindly and well-meaning he might have been.

I hope I have shown to some extent how deeply Klein depended on Nachman's journey (Buber's version) as a model for *The Second Scroll.* Perhaps someone with more scholarly interests than I will find this a profitable direction for research.

Yours sincerely,
PHYLLIS GOTLIEB.