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VIEWS OF LEONARD COHEN

Articles

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Chronicle

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editorial

EXPANDING VISTAS

WE ARE HAPPY to tell our readers that *Canadian Literature* has received a grant of $4,800 from the Canada Council to assist the journal in various directions. Among other things, this grant will replace the maintenance subsidy which we have received from the Koerner Foundation in Vancouver since the foundation of *Canadian Literature* in 1959, and, at the same time as we express our appreciation of the Canada Council's present support, we would record our gratitude to the Koerner Foundation for the help it gave during the vital years of commencement and early publication.

The Canada Council grant also provides for an expansion of *Canadian Literature* in both size and scope. From the last issue we have increased the size of the journal to a regular 104 pages, and this length will be maintained, allowing for a more ample review coverage of Canadian books. We are also enabled to pay writers somewhat more generously than in the past, and this in turn will allow us to experiment more widely with both contributors and contributions.

* * *

IN OUR LAST ISSUE the ways in which Canadian publishing might be strengthened were somewhat widely discussed. One way is clearly the modification of the agency system by the increased separate publication of foreign books in Canada. A good example of what can be done is the newly issued book,

Eskimo Masks: Art and Ceremony, by Dorothy Jean Ray, with photography by Alfred A. Blaker (McClelland & Stewart, $15.00). It is not in the narrow sense Canadiana, since neither the author, nor the photographer, nor the objects they deal with are Canadian; the masks described and illustrated are from an American collection and originated in Alaska. But our own concern with local Eskimo art gives this book a strong peripheral interest, and it is so admirably produced that those who are at all interested in North American native art will find it worth reading and thanks to simultaneous publication in the United States, reasonable for what it is. We could do with many more arrangements of this kind. Anything that strengthens Canadian publishing is likely to benefit writers and readers alike.

THE PHENOMENON OF LEONARD COHEN

Desmond Pacey

In naming Leonard Cohen a phenomenon, I am motivated by the quantity, quality and variety of his achievement. Still only thirty-three, Cohen has published four books of verse and two novels, and has made a national if not an international reputation by his poetry reading, folk-singing, and skill with the guitar. The best of his poems have lyrical grace and verbal inevitability; his two novels are as perceptive in content and as sophisticated in technique as any that have appeared in English since the Second World War; and his voice has a magic incantatory quality which hypnotizes his audiences, and especially teen-age audiences, into a state of bliss if not of grace.

In this paper I intend to place the major emphasis on his second novel, *Beautiful Losers* (1966), his most impressive single achievement, and in my opinion the most intricate, erudite, and fascinating Canadian novel ever written. But since *Beautiful Losers* is not an isolated achievement, but the culmination of Cohen's career to date, I shall begin by seeing how his other books lead up to and enrich our understanding of it.

The title of Cohen's first book of verse, *Let Us Compare Mythologies* (1956), might have applied almost equally well to his latest novel, which among other things is an exercise in comparative mythology. From the first Cohen has been interested in mythology and magic, in the imaginative means which men at all times and in all places have devised to give interest, order, meaning and direction to their world. In *Let Us Compare Mythologies* he was chiefly concerned with the

similarities and differences between the Hebrew mythology of his family and the Christian mythology of his environment, but by the time he wrote *Beautiful Losers* he had become much more ecumenical.

The first poem in *Let Us Compare Mythologies*, "Elegy", exhibits a number of characteristics which recur throughout his work: his almost magical control and modulation of verbal melody, his sensuous particularity, the empathetic reach of his imagination, and his fascination with situations which mingle violence and tenderness to heighten the effect of both. We also see emerge for the first time the theme of the quest — here as usually in Cohen the quest for a lost or unknown God, mysterious, elusive, but compelling. Cohen, like his racial ancestor Spinoza (to whom he frequently alludes), is a man drunk with God.

Almost as prominent in *Let Us Compare Mythologies* as the religious theme is that of sex. Indeed, in Cohen's work, as in more ancient mythologies, religion and sex are closely associated: this association reaches its culmination in *Beautiful Losers*, but it is embryonically present in this first book of verse.

These twin quests for God and for sexual fulfillment are motivated by the recognition of the individual's vulnerability, by an agonized sense of loneliness. Loneliness and the means of escaping it — sometimes tragic, sometimes pathetic, sometimes at least temporarily successful — form one of the basic and recurrent themes in *Beautiful Losers*. It is present in this first book of verse in "Summer Night".

> And the girl in my arms
> broke suddenly away, and shouted for us all,
> Help! Help! I am alone. But then all subtlety was gone
> and it was stupid to be obvious before the field and sky,
> experts in simplicity. So we fled on the highways,
> in our armoured cars, back to air-conditioned homes.

But thus to emphasize the serious and tragic aspects of *Let Us Compare Mythologies* is to ignore the wit and humour which here as in all of Cohen's work add variety and contrast to his vision. *Beautiful Losers* is, in one sense, a comic novel, a modern version of picaresque, and among the early poems are several examples of Cohen's comic gift, perhaps best of all, "The Fly".

> In his black armour
> the house-fly marched the field
> of Freia's sleeping thighs,
> undisturbed by the soft hand
> which vaguely moved
> to end his exercise.

And it ruined my day —
    this fly which never planned
to charm her or to please
should walk boldly on that ground
    I tried so hard
to lay my trembling knees.

The Spice-Box of Earth (1961) reinforces the themes of religious and sexual affirmation and their frequent identification in Cohen's work. The love play celebrated with such hypnotic tenderness in "You Have the Lovers" is compared to a ritual, and the loss of self-consciousness in the sexual union become a paradigm of a mystical epiphany. For Cohen, the state of sexual fulfillment is virtually synonymous with the state of grace: the fulfilled lover feels himself to be a part of a universal harmony. As he puts it in "Owning Everything":

Because you are close,
everything that men make, observe
or plant is close, is mine:
the gulls slowly writhing, slowly singing
on the spears of wind;
the iron gate above the river;
the bridge holding between stone fingers
her cold bright necklace of pearls.
. . .
With your body and your speaking
you have spoken for everything,
robbed me of my strangerhood,
made me one
with the root and gull and stone, . . .

(Incidentally, the image of the necklace, in line 8 above, becomes one of the thematic symbols of *Beautiful Losers.*)

The identification of religion and sex is also seen in "The Priest Says Goodbye", where the priest is the lover and lust is said to "burn like fire in a holy tree," but its most conspicuous occasion is the poem "Celebration", where the act of fellatio becomes a "ceremony" and is likened to the phallus worship of the ancient Romans, and where the man's semen becomes a "blessing." The clearly affirmative tone of this poem surely gives the lie to those critics of *Beautiful Losers* who profess to find satire and disgust in the sexual scenes. An affirmation of all forms of sexual activity, however "perverse" in conventional terms, provided that they

do not involve outright cruelty or murder, is surely an organic part of Cohen's philosophy.

But if tenderness and affirmation are present in *The Spice-Box of Earth*, so also are the darker themes of human vulnerability and loneliness and of violence and cruelty. Cohen is a romantic, but he is not the type of romantic optimist who ignores or denies the existence of evil.

Bitterness at the indignities and false guises imposed upon the Jews dominates "The Genius", and the bitterness of a betrayed lover "The Cuckold's Song." This latter poem is a good illustration of Cohen's versatility of both matter and manner. It begins in anger and modulates into wit and self-mockery; in style it substitutes, for Cohen's usual melodic grace, harsh colloquial diction and angry speech rhythms.

> If this looks like a poem
> I might as well warn you at the beginning
> that it's not meant to be one.
> I don't want to turn anything into poetry.
> I know all about her part in it
> but I'm not concerned with that right now.
> This is between you and me.
> Personally I don't give a damn who led who on:
> in fact I wonder if I give a damn at all.
> But a man's got to say something.
> Anyhow you fed her 5 MacKewan Ales,
> took her to your room, put the right records on,
> and in an hour or two it was done.
>
> . . .
>
> What really makes me sick
> is that everything goes on as it went before:
> I'm still a sort of friend,
> I'm still a sort of lover.
> But not for long:
> that's why I'm telling this to the two of you.
> The fact is I'm turning to gold, turning to gold.
> It's a long process, they say,
> it happens in stages.
> This is to inform you that I've already turned to clay.

A particular premonition of *Beautiful Losers* found in *The Spice-Box of Earth* is the mechanical mistress in "The Girl Toy", which points forward to the Danish Vibrator of the novel. This poem is also one of the first indications of Cohen's

fascination with machinery, which becomes a thematic motif in both his novels. In the poem, as in the novels, Cohen's attitude towards the machine is ambivalent: it is at once frightening and alluring. "The Girl Toy", in its allusions to Yeats' "Sailing to Byzantium" ("famous golden birds", "hammered figures"), is also premonitory of the strong Yeatsian influences present in *Beautiful Losers*.

SUCH PREMONITIONS in the early poetry, however, fade into relative insignificance when we examine Cohen's first novel, *The Favourite Game* (1963). It positively bristles with allusions, images and thematic motifs which were to be more fully developed in the second novel. *The Favourite Game*, which at first reading one is apt to dismiss as just another if somewhat superior version of the autobiographical novel of the young artist growing to maturity, in fact becomes a much more richly resonant novel when it is re-read after *Beautiful Losers*. For example, the statement that Martin Stark, the "holy idiot" of *The Favourite Game*, "stuck his index fingers in his ears for no apparent reason, squinting as if he were expecting some drum-splitting explosion" is apt to be passed over on first reading as a mere omen of disaster; in the light of the discussion of the Telephone Dance in *Beautiful Losers* it becomes a powerful symbolic allusion to man's perpetual attempts to find connection with the cosmic rhythms. When we read that Wanda's face "blurred into the face of little Lisa . . . that one dissolved into the face of Bertha" we think of the transposition not merely in terms of nostalgia for Breavman's lost loves, but also in terms of the eternal principle of femininity which in *Beautiful Losers* sees Isis, Catherine, Edith, Mary Voolnd, the Virgin Mary, Marilyn Monroe and the blonde housewife in the car blend into one essential Woman or Universal Mother. A seemingly casual statement that "We all want to be Chinese mystics living in thatched huts, but getting laid frequently" becomes much more meaningful when read in the light of the "go down on a saint" motif in *Beautiful Losers*, and that novel's more fully articulated notion of the desirability of combining spiritual vision with physical ecstasy.

The quest motif, which we have seen adumbrated in the early poems, is more fully developed in *The Favourite Game*, but still remains embryonic in contrast with the much more intricate version that occurs in *Beautiful Losers*. Breavman's prayerful invocation of God in his journal entry (see p. 199) is a first sketch for the narrator's prayers in the second novel, and Breavman's wavering between that

quest and greed for secular wealth and success is premonitory of the recurrent pattern of aspiration and rebellion through which the narrator of *Beautiful Losers* passes. Breavman also has a vision of the ultimate unity of all things which prefigures the narrator's visions of cosmic unity in the later novel:

> Mozart came loud over the PA, sewing together everything that Breavman observed. It wove, it married the two figures bending over the records, whatever the music touched, child trapped in London Bridge, mountain-top dissolving in mist, empty swing rocking like a pendulum, the row of glistening red canoes, the players clustered underneath the basket, leaping for the ball like a stroboscopic photo of a splashing drop of water — whatever it touched was frozen in an immense tapestry. He was in it, a figure by a railing.

The idea that many forms of popular culture, and especially the hit tunes of the juke-box and the radio, are pathetic but not contemptible versions of this longing for union, this quest for harmony, is also sketched in *The Favourite Game* (see, for example, pp. 222-3), and then much more fully worked out in such sections as "Gavin Gate and the Goddesses" in *Beautiful Losers*.

A rather similar link between the two novels is their mutual concern with magic and miracles, and their joint acceptance of the movie as a contemporary form of magic. The most pervasive thematic motif in *The Favourite Game* is Breavman's conception of himself as a sort of magician, miracle-worker, or hypnotist. After Bertha, Breavman's childhood girl-friend, falls from the tree, he says:

> "Krantz, there's something special about my voice."
> "No, there isn't."
> "There is so. I can make things happen."

And after his father's death, he performs a magic rite:

> The day after the funeral Breavman split open one of his father's formal bow ties and sewed in a message. He buried it in the garden, under the snow beside the fence where in summer the neighbour's lilies-of-the-valley infiltrate.

He also declares that "His father's death gave him a touch of mystery, contact with the unknown. He could speak with extra authority on God and Hell." He studies everything he can about hypnotism, and in one of the funniest scenes in the novel hypnotizes his mother's maid and causes her to make love to him. Breavman sounds very much like F. in *Beautiful Losers* when he tells the girl, Tamara, "I want to touch people like a magician, to change them or hurt them, leave my brand, make them beautiful." Again reminding us of F., and even more of the

narrator of *Beautiful Losers*, Breavman longs for a miraculous transfiguration of himself:

> In his room in the World Student House, Breavman leans elbows on the window-sill and watches the sun ignite the Hudson. It is no longer the garbage river, catch-all for safes, excrement, industrial poison, the route of strings of ponderous barges.
>
> Can something do that to his body?
>
> There must be something written on the fiery water. An affidavit from God. A detailed destiny chart. The address of his perfect wife. A message choosing him for glory or martyrdom.

When he is enjoying the love-affair with Shell, and writing the love poetry which appeared in *The Spice-Box of Earth,* Breavman feels that he is creative because he is "attached to magic." At the boys' camp, he longs to be "calm and magical," to be "the gentle hero the folk come to love, the man who talks to animals, the Baal Shem Tov who carried children piggy-back." But the closest approximation in *The Favourite Game* to the great thematic passage about magic in *Beautiful Losers* comes when Breavman watches the firefly and thinks that it is dying:

> He had given himself to the firefly's crisis. The intervals became longer and longer between the small cold flashes. It was Tinker Bell. Everybody had to believe in magic. Nobody believed in magic. He didn't believe in magic. Magic didn't believe in magic. Please don't die.
>
> It didn't. It flashed long after Wanda left. It flashed when Krantz came to borrow Ed's *Time* magazine. It flashed as he tried to sleep. It flashed as he scribbled his journal in the dark.

The firefly there is obviously a symbol of an ultimate light, a pulsing signal from the eternal rhythm, and its continued life, as time (*Time*) is carried away, bespeaks the persistence of Light. This symbolic method of writing, which only occasionally overrides the literal method in *The Favourite Game*, becomes continuous in *Beautiful Losers*, which is a powerful symbolist novel from beginning to end.

A special form of the magical theme is the emphasis Cohen places on the movies as the chief contemporary expression of the magical process. References to movies occur on almost every page of *Beautiful Losers*, but the emphasis first becomes apparent in *The Favourite Game*. Near the beginning of that first novel, Breavman watches a movie of his family in the course of which "A gardener is led shy and grateful into the sunlight to be preserved with his betters." Here, obviously the

magical quality of movies is their capacity to confer a sort of immortality. Later on, Breavman imagines himself and the girl Norma as they would appear in the camera eye:

> The camera takes them from faraway, moves through the forest, catches the glint of a raccoon's eyes, examines the water, reeds, closed water-flowers, involves itself with mist and rocks.
>
> "Lie beside me," Norma's voice, maybe Breavman's.
>
> Sudden close-up of her body part by part, lingering over the mounds of her thighs, which are presented immense and shadowed, the blue denim tight on the flesh. The fan of creases between her thighs. Camera searches her jacket for the shape of breasts. She exhumes a pack of cigarettes. Activity is studied closely. Her fingers move like tentacles. Manipulation of cigarette skilled and suggestive. Fingers are slow, violent, capable of holding anything.

Here what fascinates Cohen, as it will again in *Beautiful Losers*, is the magical capacity of the camera to transfigure reality, to intensify experience, and to suggest symbolic overtones by its searching examination of the details of fact. One source of Breavman's magical insight is that a "slow-motion movie" is "always running somewhere in his mind."

This in turn suggests another way in which *The Favourite Game* illuminates one of the themes of *Beautiful Losers*. In the later novel, F. tells the narrator (and since most of the narrative is in the first person, I shall hereafter speak of the narrator as "I") that "We've got to learn to stop bravely at the surface. We've got to learn to love appearances." On other occasions he directs "I" never to overlook the obvious, to "aim yourself at the tinkly present", and to "Connect nothing . . . Place things side by side on your arborite table, if you must, but connect nothing." Subsequently, in a passage which out of context is rather obscure, he says:

> Of all the laws which bind us to the past, the names of things are the most severe. . . . Names preserve the dignity of Appearance. . . . Science begins in coarse naming, a willingness to disregard the particular shape and destiny of each red life, and call them all Rose. To a more brutal, more active eye, *all* flowers look alike, like Negroes and Chinamen.

What the slow-motion camera does is to reveal the individuality of things, the sensuous particularity of being. Cohen's belief is that the truly magical view is not attained by looking at the world through a haze of generality, or through the still

frames of scientific categories, but by examining as closely as possible the particular streaks on the particular tulip. In this he resembles Wordsworth, who sought by close examination of the familiar to discover the element of wonder in it. (If the juxtaposition of Cohen and Wordsworth seems odd, it might be useful to recall that at least once in *Beautiful Losers* there is an obvious echo of Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey" — "Five years with the length of five years.") Hence it is that we get such passages as the following in *The Favourite Game*, passages in which the search for sensuous exactitude has been developed into a fine art:

> How many leaves have to scrape together to record the rustle of the wind? He tried to distinguish the sound of acacia from the sound of maple.
>
> "If you tape their [birds'] whistles, Shell, and slow them down, you can hear the most extraordinary things. What the naked ear hears as one note is often in reality two or three notes sung simultaneously. A bird can sing three notes at the same time."

There is another way in which the use of movies in *The Favourite Game* points forward to *Beautiful Losers*. Breavman says to his friend Krantz "we're walking into a European movie", and proceeds to imagine himself as an old army officer in such a film. This exemplifies another magical power of the cinema: its capacity to enlarge our experience, to provide us with vicarious living. To this F. alludes in *Beautiful Losers* when he writes to "I", "You know what pain looks like, that kind of pain, you've been inside newsreel Belsen."

Closely related to magic, and serving as a further link between *The Favourite Game* and *Beautiful Losers*, are the games which figure so prominently in both novels. The game is a kind of ritual which imposes order and pleasure on the minutiae of daily living, and is thus in itself a kind of micro-myth or semi-sacred rite. In *Beautiful Losers*, F. says, "Games are nature's most beautiful creation. All animals play games, and the truly Messianic vision of the brotherhood of creatures must be based on the idea of the game . . . " When F. buys the factory, he does not exploit it for commercial success, but turns it into a playground. Games play a very large part in *The Favourite Game*, as the title suggests: Breavman plays a game with Bertha which leads to her fall from the apple-tree, he plays "The Soldier and the Whore" with Lisa and wrestles with her in the snow, he visualizes Krantz as "first figure of a follow-the-leader game through the woods", he watches a baseball game at the boys' camp where he works for the summer, and at the very end of the novel he remembers "the favourite game" of his childhood:

> Jesus! I just remembered what Lisa's favourite game was. After a heavy snow we would go into a back yard with a few of our friends. The expanse of snow would be white and unbroken. Bertha was the spinner. You held her hands while she turned on her heels, you circled her until your feet left the ground. Then she let go and you flew over the snow. You remained still in whatever position you landed. When everyone had been flung in this fashion into the fresh snow, the beautiful part of the game began. You stood up carefully, taking great pains not to disturb the impression you had made. Now the comparisons. Of course you would have done your best to land in some crazy position, arms and legs sticking out. Then we walked away, leaving a lovely white field of blossom-like shapes with footprint stems.

The dust-jacket of *The Favourite Game* declares that "the favourite game itself is love". This seems to me a serious misreading of the novel. As I read it, and especially the final paragraph, the favourite game is to leave an impression on the snow, to leave behind one an interesting design, and by extension I take this to include the novel itself, which is Cohen's design of his own early life, and by further extension of all artistic creation. The game is beautiful for Cohen because it is associated with the innocence of childhood and because it is a successful attempt of the human imagination to impose order upon reality. Two of F.'s ideas in *Beautiful Losers* are relevant here. At one point he declares "Prayer is translation. A man translates himself into a child asking for all there is in a language he has barely mastered." At another, we are told that F.'s "allegiance is to the notion that he is not bound to the world as given, that he can escape from the painful arrangement of things as they are." "Escapism", so long a derogatory term in twentieth-century literary circles, is for Cohen a desirable thing: movies, games, radio hit tunes, art and prayer are desirable things because they lift us out of the ruck of routine and above the rubble of time.

There are other ways in which *The Favourite Game* is premonitory of *Beautiful Losers* — the incidental comments on Canada, on Montreal, and on Jewish life and values; the humour; the alternation between tenderness and violence; the wavering between self-glorification and self-doubt; the hostile allusions to scientific achievement; the many ambivalent references to machinery; the stress on sexual ecstasy and especially upon the oral forms of it and upon masturbation; the contempt for conventional bourgeois behaviour and attitudes; recurrent images which give to the novel a poetic resonance; the emphasis upon loneliness and nostalgia — but rather than take time to develop them I feel I must point out how this first novel *differs* from its successor. It is a much more subjective novel, and a much more self-indulgent one. Whereas *Beautiful Losers* is about a cast

of characters none of whom bear much resemblance to Cohen himself or to members of his family and his friends, *The Favourite Game* is quite obviously autobiographical. Like Joyce's *Portrait*, it is a novel in the lyrical mode, whereas *Beautiful Losers* is much closer to the dramatic mode of *Finnegan's Wake*. Much of *The Favourite Game* is taken up with family history — the death of Breavman's father, the neurotic possessiveness and ultimate psychosis of his mother, the pathetic respectability of his uncles. These scenes, and those dealing with the author's own youthful memories, are the strongest part of the book: the author is still at the stage of recording rather than dominating and transforming reality. When, in the Shell-Gordon interlude, he tries to get into the minds of a young New England woman and her husband, most of the life and particularity go out of the style.

SINCE *The Spice-Box of Earth* was also a very personal book, Cohen seems to have felt that he must break out of the prison of self and attempt a more objective art. The significance of his third book of poems, *Flowers for Hitler* (1964), at any rate in relation to *Beautiful Losers*, lies in its strenuous effort to broaden and deepen and objectify its author's interests and sympathies. In a rather too flamboyant but still basically honest note to the publisher, which is printed on the dust-jacket, Cohen declares of *Flowers for Hitler*:

> This book moves me from the world of the golden-boy poet into the dung pile of the front-line writer. I didn't plan it this way. I loved the tender notices *Spice-Box* got but they embarrassed me a little. *Hitler* won't get the same hospitality from the papers. My sounds are too new, therefore people will say: this is derivative, this is slight, his power has failed. Well, I say that there has never been a book like this, prose or poetry, written in Canada. All I ask is that you put it in the hands of my generation and it will be recognized.

I have not read carefully the reviews of *Flowers for Hitler*, so I cannot say whether Cohen's fears were justified. I do know, however, that the charge of derivativeness has been levelled at *Beautiful Losers*, and that it has been compared (very vaguely, as is the safe way) to the writing of Sartre, Gênet, Burroughs, Thomas Pyncheon, John Barth, and Allen Ginsberg. One important object of my present exercise is to show that *Beautiful Losers* can best be seen as the culmination of Cohen's own artistic development, not as the imitation of someone else.

Flowers for Hitler is not quite as different from its predecessors as Cohen's dust-jacket statement might lead us to believe. As the title suggests, there is still the juxtaposition of beauty and ugliness, tenderness and violence, which we have seen to have been a feature of his work from the beginning; there are still a number of love poems which combine wit, tenderness, and passion; there are still poems of humourous self-mockery and ironic ballads of everyday life. But the new element is there, and it predominates. It takes, largely, two forms: disgust at and revulsion from the greed, hypocrisy, and cruelty of twentieth-century politics, and a newly urgent longing for a religious transfiguration which will rid the poet of his self-absorption.

In the political poems, he expresses the idea that the horrors of our age make those of previous generations seem insignificant; that Canadian political life is sordid and dull; and that History is merely an opiate:

> History is a needle
> for putting men asleep
> anointed with the poison
> of all they want to keep

(This passage, incidentally, turns up again in *Beautiful Losers*, in slightly amended form, as "F.'s Invocation to History in the Middle Style".) Canada is "a dying animal" to which he refuses (adapting a line from Yeats) to "be fastened". Everywhere he looks he sees guilt and corruption, and he feels his own involvement in it and repulsion from it.

This part of *Flowers for Hitler* points forward to F.'s political involvement in *Beautiful Losers*; F. is a French-Canadian nationalist, a Separatist, a Member of Parliament, a revolutionary leader, and his final political gesture is to blow up the statue of Queen Victoria on Sherbrooke Street. But F. himself recognizes that the sense of involvement with other men which leads to his kind of political activity is only a stage on the way to the final break-through which he hopes "I" will achieve. "I" 's final apotheosis transcends politics: it involves transfiguration, not an improvement of time but a leap into eternity.

The final answer of *Beautiful Losers*, the loss of self in the pursuit of sainthood, is also adumbrated in *Flowers for Hitler*. The process begins in confession of guilt; in the very first poem, "What I'm Doing Here," Cohen confesses that he has lied, conspired against love, tortured, and hated, and he ends by calling upon "each one of you to confess." Confession leads to humility, as in "The Hearth" where he learns that his lust "was not so rare a masterpiece", and to self-abnegation in

which he vows to forget his personal style and surrender to the mysterious silence, become a vessel for renewing grace:

> I will forget my style
> Perhaps a mind will open in this world
> perhaps a heart will catch rain
> Nothing will heal and nothing will freeze
> but perhaps a heart will catch rain. . . .

He longs for purgation and discipline leading to a new life:

> There is a whitewashed hotel waiting for me
> somewhere, in which I will begin my fast and
> my new life.
>
> Oh to stand in the Ganges wielding a yard of
> intestine.
>
> Let me renew myself
> in the midst of all the things of the world
> which cannot be connected.

This idea is perhaps best expressed in "For Anyone Dressed in Marble", in a passage which also finds its way into *Beautiful Losers*:

> I see an orphan, lawless and serene,
> standing in a corner of the sky,
> body something like bodies that have been,
> but not the scar of naming in his eye.
> Bred close to the ovens, he's burnt inside.
> Light, wind, cold, dark — they use him like a bride.

The "saint" is a lawless orphan because he has detached himself from the claims of family and society; he stands in a corner of the sky because he has transcended earthly values; he has a body because he is still human, but he has overcome the human fault of missing the particular in the general by the use of "coarse names"; aware of human violence as expressed in the gas ovens of Nazi Germany, he has been purged by his closeness to it and has become a kind of empty vessel into which the eternal powers may pour themselves.

WITH ALL THIS AS BACKGROUND and context, *Beautiful Losers* (1966) becomes relatively easy to appreciate and understand. I say *relatively* easy, because it remains a difficult and sometimes baffling book.

First, the title. Beautiful Losers are those who achieve the beauty of "sainthood" (and it is necessary to put that word in quotes because Cohen uses it, as we shall see in a moment, in a special sense) by losing, or rather by voluntarily surrendering, their selves and the ordinary world. In the eyes of the world, they are "losers", for they are victims: Catherine dies in agony of slow starvation and self-torture; Edith is crushed by a descending elevator; Mary Voolnd is mauled by savage police dogs; F. dies in an asylum for the criminally insane; "I" is at the end of the novel a ragged, stinking, "freak of the woods." But *sub specie aeternitatis*, or in the eyes of God, these characters are not losers at all: Catherine deliberately surrenders herself to be the Bride of Christ, is canonized, and becomes a miraculous healer; Edith commits voluntary suicide to teach "I" a lesson which at first he ignores but which ultimately leads him to his apotheosis; Mary Voolnd surrenders herself to the sexual pleasure of F. when he is at his unattractive worst and brings him the good news of his recognition as first president of the republic; F. deliberately casts himself in the subordinate role of teacher and guide of "I" and shows him the way to the Promised Land; "I" achieves final apotheosis and in the last paragraph of the novel is seen playing the role of Mediator between God and Man, or of the Suffering Servant who has gone through agony to achieve compassion:

> Poor men, poor men, such as we, they've gone and fled. I will plead from electrical tower. I will plead from turret of plane. He will uncover His face. He will not leave me alone. I will spread His name in Parliament. I will welcome His silence in pain. I have come through the fire of family and love. I smoke with my darling, I sleep with my friend. We talk of the poor men, broken and fled. Alone with my radio I lift up my hands. Welcome to you who read me today. Welcome to you who put my heart down. Welcome to you, darling and friend, who miss me forever in your trip to the end.

Voluntary loss of self for some higher cause is, then, the main theme of *Beautiful Losers*, but it is developed in great complexity and intricacy against a background of mythological ecumenicity and is supplemented by a variety of secondary themes.

At a climactic moment of the novel, Edith breaks into Greek to declare "I am Isis born, of all things, both what is and what shall be, and no mortal has ever lifted my robe." We may recall here that on the first page of the novel "I" declares that he wants to "know what goes on under that rosy blanket" of Catherine Tekakwitha: so Catherine is also Isis. Indeed all the women of the novel are essentially the same woman, or the same goddess, just as Isis gradually took over

all the other goddesses in the ancient world. The greatest significance of the Isis cult, which developed in Egypt in the seventeenth century B.C. and gradually spread throughout the whole Mediterranean world, lay in her role of Universal Mother and her agency in effecting immortality of the soul and renewal of life. She included in herself the virtues of all other goddesses, and she offered to her devotees forgiveness, purgation, communion and regeneration. Her mythological role in piecing together the fragments of her husband Osiris symbolized her miraculous healing power. Once one becomes aware of Edith's role as Isis, many of the jigsaw pieces of the novel fall into significant patterns: it is in her Isis role of Universal Mother that Edith, with her phenomenally large nipples, gives herself to "I" and F., comforts the stranger on the beach at Old Orchard, Maine, and even cradles the "famous head" of the presumably forgiven Hitler against her breasts. By her voluntary suicide in the elevator shaft, Edith effects a restoration of her husband similar to Isis's restoration of Osiris. When we read the description of Edith's coating herself with "deep red greasy stuff" and saying to "I" "Let's be other people", we recall that one of Isis's roles was that of the bringer-forth of the indwelling self, of the agent of miraculous transfiguration. "I" notes that Edith's "kisses were loose, somehow unspecific, as if her mouth couldn't choose where to stay" — and this we can relate to the concept of the mouth of Isis as full of the breath of life, issuing forth to heal the soul and regenerate the dead. We recall also that Mary Voolnd, another Isis figure, is a nurse, and that Edith is several times referred to as a nurse.

The second major mythological framework of *Beautiful Losers* is that of Christianity. This is an apt juxtaposition since the cult of Isis rivalled the cult of Christ in the Mediterranean world, and sometimes blended with it. Isis herself was frequently identified with the Virgin Mary, and this identification is made anew in Cohen's novel. Catherine is the Iroquois Virgin, and models herself upon the Virgin Mary; by renouncing the ownership of her own flesh she achieves a mystic vision:

> And as she thus disclaimed the ownership of her flesh she sensed a minute knowledge of his innocence, a tiny awareness of the beauty of all the faces circled round the crackling fires of the village. Ah, the pain eased, the torn flesh she finally did not own healed in its freedom, and a new description of herself, so brutally earned, forced itself into her heart: she was Virgin.

But since Edith and Catherine are obviously one person in different guises, Edith is also the Virgin Mary: although she is not physically a virgin, she plays the

role of intercessor and comforter. So also does Mary Voolnd, although her way of expressing compassionate love may seem the very antithesis of virginity.

The men also are loosely associated with Christian figures. F. refers to himself on various occasions as Moses, who has led his friends within sight of the Promised Land but cannot take them there; at other times he speaks of his role in terms which recall John the Baptist. "I", on the other hand, develops eventually into a Christ-figure. In the final paragraph, as we have seen, he becomes the compassionate mediator, pleading from his tower. (In this connection, it is worth noting that in the poem "Suzanne" Cohen speaks of Christ being on his "wooden tower", the Cross.) Previous to that, "I" has stayed for a prolonged period in a tree-house in the woods, paralleling Christ's sojourn in the wilderness. Even the body-builder Charles Axis is linked with Christ: "Charles Axis is all compassion, he's our sacrifice!", and his name suggests that he too is an axis or link between God and man.

A number of other mythologies are worked into *Beautiful Losers*, but there is space here only to glance at them. There are, as we might expect since "I" is a folk-lorist, anthropologist, and student of the North American Indians, many references to and indeed detailed descriptions of Red Indian myths and rites — rainmaking (p. 31), mythical cosmogony (p. 85), the wrestling match between the White one and the Dark one (p. 88), Klooskap (p. 89), the Oscotarach or Head-Piercer's Hut (pp. 114, 133, 184), and the Andacwandet or Fuck-Cure (pp. 128-132). Greek mythology is represented, significantly, by Icarus (p. 212) and Prometheus (p. 237), both of whom fit the novel well since they sought to unite heaven and earth, God and man. There are apt references to Oriental Indian mythology and religious rites: to the mandala (p. 214), yoga (pp. 160, 236), Asoka's Circle, and Tantric love perfectionists. The Jewish Kabala is mentioned, as is the Chinese "holy mountain" and the wisdom of Kung.

These more or less ancient mythologies are supplemented with more recent myths and magical manifestations: the magic of Houdini (p. 38), the mythology of the comic strips and radio programmes, the magic rituals of the Masonic Order (p. 145), the myth of astrology (see, for example, the reference to the Virgo disease, p. 162), the magic of firecrackers and guns and rockets. But the contemporary mythology and magic which are most stressed are those of the movies. There are several references to the goddesses of the silver screen, Marilyn Monroe and Brigitte Bardot, and a host of references to the magic powers of the film to heighten reality, preserve the past, record the present, create imaginary worlds, expand the consciousness, enlarge the awareness, arouse the conscience,

stimulate the passions, or excite the imagination. The System Theatre becomes the contemporary temple or cathedral, into which only initiates are allowed to pass after negotiating the barrier of the ticket collector in the outer courtyard or foyer.

All of these references to mythology and magic reach their culmination in the passage which announces the secondary (some might argue that it is the primary) theme of *Beautiful Losers*: that magic and religion *not* science and politics are the real powers in the world. In what F. describes as the "sweet burden of my argument," he proclaims:

> God is alive. Magic is afoot. God is afoot. Magic is alive. Alive is a foot. Magic never died. God never sickened. Many poor men lied. Many sick men lied. Magic never weakened. Magic never hid. Magic always ruled. God is afoot. God never died. God was ruler though his funeral lengthened. Though his mourners thickened Magic never fled.... Though laws were carved in marble they could not shelter men.... Magic is afoot.... But Magic is no instrument. Magic is the end.... This I mean my mind to serve till service is but Magic moving through the world, and mind itself is Magic coursing through the flesh, and flesh itself is Magic dancing on a clock, and time itself the Magic Length of God.

As I have said, there are several subsidiary themes running through *Beautiful Losers*. Perhaps the third most important is that which announces the close association of religion and sex. One of the apparent paradoxes of this novel is that its main characters, all of whom are "heroes" in the sense that they are to some degree at least being held up to our admiration, have such divergent attitudes towards sex. Catherine renounces the flesh altogether and remains a virgin; Edith, on the other hand, is a relatively compliant wife to "I" but without compunction commits adultery with F. on six or seven occasions. F. is completely promiscuous, admits that he has chased women wherever they have led him, glories in his sexual "scores" with both sexes, and even in his dying moments has his hand up the skirt of Mary Voolnd. "I" has had homosexual relations with F., has had a rather frustrating sexual life with Edith (she is not compliant enough for him — he has rather special tastes), and spends a great deal of time in masturbation. All the sexuality in the novel, of course, comes to a climax in the orgy which F. and Edith perform with the so-called Danish Vibrator or Sex Machine. What are we to make of all this? Is Cohen upholding virginity or promiscuity, sexual abstinence or sexual orgies?

The clue to the resolution of the paradox is in Cohen's special conception of sainthood. Recalling F.'s advice to "go down on a saint", "I" speculates:

> What is a saint? A saint is someone who has achieved a remote human possibility. It is impossible to say what that possibility is. I think it has something to do with the energy of love. Contact with this energy results in the exercise of a kind of balance in the chaos of existence.

To "go down on a saint", then, is at second-hand to make contact with the energy of love, as well as to combine physical ecstasy with spiritual vision. Catherine is a saint because she has achieved the remote human possibility of making contact with the energy of love, that is God, through the renunciation of the flesh; Edith is a saint because she has made contact through her maternal role towards all men; F. is a saint because he has made contact with divine energy through sex and because he commits himself to the remote possibility of a revolution in Quebec; "I" becomes a saint at the end of the novel because by exiling himself to the wilderness he has purged himself of pride and selfishness and made of himself an empty vessel into which divine love can pour. A saint, if you like, is an extremist. For Cohen, truth is not in the mean but in the extremes. F. declares "I was never drunk enough, never poor enough, never rich enough." Catherine in the extremity of her flagellations is closer to Edith and F. in the extremity of their orgy with the Danish Vibrator than she is to a member of the bourgeoisie leading a respectable and moderate life. Is it too fanciful to suggest that in referring to the sex machine by its initials, D.V., Cohen is suggesting that the surrender to it is not so very different from the surrender to God's will?

A closely related subsidiary theme is that of what we might call pan-orgasmic sex. F. declares that "all parts of the body are erotogenic. All flesh can come!" and he maintains that almost any contact can lead us into "the nourishing anonymity of the climax." (Here, incidentally, is another of the links between religion and sex — sex leads to anonymity, into that loss of self-consciousness which is the prerequisite of religious response.)

Rather than deal further with the minor themes of the novel, I should like now to say something about its technique. In structure it resembles a symbolic poem: it is divided into the traditional three parts, and its parts are woven together by recurrent thematic motifs and thematic images or symbols. Among the motifs are references to "I" 's constipation (a symbol of the self locked in upon itself) to his masturbation (a symbol of his lonely self-absorption and self-indulgence), to games (symbols of life as free choice), to radio music and radio serials (symbols of attempts to reach contact with some outside force or message), to baptism (symbol of purification and the entry into a new life), and above all to movies, films, cinemas and film-stars (symbols, as we have seen, of contem-

porary magic and escape from this world). Among the thematic images are the blanket or veil (symbol of mystery and the hoped-for apocalypse), birch and pine trees (symbols of natural growth, beauty, and the fragrance of natural things), rivers, springs and pools (symbols of purification and divine grace), birds (symbols of the ingression of the divine upon the human), altars and temples (symbols or worship, aspiration and sacrifice), stars (associated with Isis and symbols of divine perfection and protection), the elevator (an ambivalent symbol, suggesting both the ascent to heaven and the descent into hell), mountains (symbols of contemplation and detached wisdom), machinery (another ambivalent symbol, suggesting the "eternal machinery" of cosmic process and the destructive machinery of warfare and greed), the necklace (symbol of multiplicity in unity, the many in the one), crystals, snowflakes and the rainbow pictures seen through them (symbolic of divine order, intricacy and vision), soap and especially F.'s "soap collection" (symbols of purification through suffering), rockets, firecrackers, and "fiery journeys" (symbols of the attempt to penetrate the veil of heaven), fishes (symbols of Christ and of divine grace), candy (symbol of pleasure and perhaps of God's mercy), the factory which is converted into a playground (symbol of the transfiguration of labour into play, as in the last stanza of Yeats' "Among Schoolchildren.") Each of these motifs or images recurs frequently, and in each case the symbolic suggestion is intended: the result is a novel more intricately interwoven than any Canadian novel of my experience.

An associated feature of the technique of this novel is its clever manipulation of chronology. We move back and forth from the present to the near-past to the distant-past of Catherine Tekakwitha, the seventeenth-century Iroquois virgin, and yet the transitions, though often abrupt and frequent, are never misleading or confusing. Similarly, although we shuttle back and forth between various points of view, we never get confused between the different characters: each is consistent (if only in inconsistency), distinctive, and credible.

Beautiful Losers, the riches of which I have only touched upon, is the chief accomplishment of Leonard Cohen thus far, and the culmination of all his previous work. But it is not likely to be the end of the phenomenon of Leonard Cohen.

THE SMILE ON THE FACE OF THE TIGER

A Profile of Leon Edel

Phyllis Grosskurth

AFTER BECOMING DEEPLY INVOLVED in his life of Henry James, Leon Edel made a shrewd observation about the greatest danger that threatens a biographer. "I am sure," he stated, "that if someone were to attempt to study the psychology of biographers he would discover that they are usually impelled by deeply personal reasons to the writing of a given life — reasons not always conducive to objectivity and to truth." Edel then went on to analyze the biographer's dilemma: "He must appraise the life of another by becoming that other person, and he must be scrupulously careful that in the process the other person is not refashioned in his own image."

It seems to me that the hazard of which Edel speaks is confined to the biographer who has to reconstruct a human being from documents — letters, diaries, books, and so forth. The danger is implicit in the fact that the reconstruction, no matter how firmly substantiated by paper evidence, must necessarily be the creation of the intuitive imagination. The biographer must penetrate so deeply into his subject that he virtually becomes his subject for the duration of the writing of the biography.

The biographer who writes about one whom he knew intimately is faced with no such delimma. Boswell and Froude were so keenly aware of the *otherness* of Dr. Johnson and Carlyle, of the external idiosyncrasies of their temperaments, that they were not threatened with the dangers of imaginative identification. Boswell and Froude knew and loved the Dr. Johnson who pounded his cane on the floor or the Carlyle who brooded over his pipe in the garden, but they did not know what it felt like to be Dr. Johnson impatiently pounding his cane or Carlyle puffing at his pipe.

Surprisingly enough, Edel takes a conventional and somewhat wistful view of such biographies. "Boswell, Froude, Lockhart, Forster," he says, "repose upon our shelves with vividness and mass and authority which later biographers cannot possess." It seems to me curious that at this point Edel does not recognize that his method and aims are essentially different from these writers, and every bit as valuable. Precisely because Boswell, Froude, et al, knew their subjects so intimately, they were able to capture the solid presence of a man smoking or banging his cane. They wrote of the impact their subjects made on them, and the fact that their subjects happened to be writers does not mean that Boswell or Froude produced *literary* biography. The creation of a literary biography, a study of the mind inside the man who held the pipe or the pen, is Edel's achievement. Later I shall discuss this aspect of his work in more detail.

As for his devoted labours to James, suffice it to say that Edel considers him one of the greatest of writers. It would be an impertinence to speculate on the "deeply personal reasons" which might have impelled him to devote such dedicated concentration to James. Surely admiration and sympathetic rapport for James might be the most important considerations.

Certainly there was nothing in the patern or circumstances of Edel's early life to warrant any patent self-identification. Many people have been surprised to learn of Edel's thoroughly Canadian background. Brought up in Yorkton, Saskatchewan, a prairie boy's life would bear little resemblance to the worldly James children's peregrinations back and forth across the Atlantic.

At McGill in the early 20's Edel became associated with what has since become known as the "Montreal group." He has frequently made the nostalgic observation that he could write a book about those years, and he was particularly delighted to hear Professor Northrop Frye refer to this period of his life when he introduced him as Centennial Professor at the University of Toronto last January. In his sophomore year Edel became managing editor of the *Fortnightly Review* founded by A. J. M. Smith, Frank Scott, Allan Latham, and A. P. R. Coulbourn.

Remarkably successful for an avant-garde magazine, *The Fortnightly* published the work of the young poets A. M. Klein, Leo Kennedy, E. J. Pratt, and Robert Finch. Out of this association came the volume, *New Provinces*, which was a landmark in Canadian literature in its espousal of modernity. Of this group, Edel was the only critic and non-poet.

In 1928, after receiving his M.A. for a dissertation on what was then considered a very modern subject, the stream of consciousness novel, Edel went to Paris on a scholarship. At the Sorbonne he became a close friend of E. K. Brown. Both attended the lectures of Emile Legouis and Etienne Gilson, and they lunched together almost daily in a little *crémerie* on the boulevard Saint-Michel.

He has described himself during this period of literary expatriates as "a kind of junior Left Banker," one who moved on the periphery of the James Joyce entourage. His outstanding impression of Joyce was of his total withdrawal into himself, even when surrounded by a chattering group of friends. Despite an early book he wrote on Joyce, Edel has found himself becoming increasingly antithetical towards Joyce through the years. He contends that Joyce is a far inferior artist to Henry James; that Joyce's self-absorption made it impossible for him to create character, and that *Ulysses* consists simply of a series of disembodied voices.

After receiving his degree from the Sorbonne, Edel returned to Montreal where he worked as a newspaper reporter covering the arts, as well as contributing to the *Canadian Forum* where he remembers with satisfaction that he wrote admiringly of A. M. Klein. During this period he also did some part-time teaching at Sir George Williams College. The depression had barred him from the academic life he wanted, but after returning from service overseas in psychological warfare, he went to New York University as a visiting professor in 1950 and 1951. In the spring of 1953 he gave the Christian Gauss Seminar at Princeton, and that autumn he was appointed associate professor in Washington Square College, N.Y.U., and full profesor in 1955.

Apart from his work on Henry James, Edel's books include *The Psychological Novel* and *James Joyce: The Last Journey*. In 1951 his old friend E. K. Brown died, leaving the last section of his biography of Willa Cather unfinished. Edel undertook to finish the book, a job he has described as the most difficult he ever tackled. Working from Brown's detailed notes, Edel managed to make certain changes in the completed text and to adapt his own style in the final chapters so closely to Brown's that it is almost impossible to distinguish Brown's style from Edel's. This chameleon-like capacity later proved invaluable when he came to write the biography of Henry James.

EDEL'S PROFOUND INTEREST in James extends back to the end of the war when he brought out a critical edition of James's plays. Since then he has edited *The Ghostly Tales of Henry James*, and is at present editing a twelve-volume edition of *The Complete Tales of Henry James*. He is also the editor of *The Selected Letters of Henry James* and is now at work on what he considers will be the definitive edition of the correspondence, which will not be a complete edition, but a representative selection of significant letters.

Of the James biography, so far Edel has completed *Henry James: The Untried Years* (1953), *The Conquest of London* (1962); and *The Middle Years* (1962). For these he was awarded the Pulitzer Prize and honored by the National Institute of Arts and Letters for "creative writing in biography." He has almost completed *The Master*, and although he is contemplating an even further volume, he is quick to point out that, taken together, the total volumes do not add up to excessive length. From the outset he deliberately avoided a chronological sequence in the interests of form, a system which has worked to his advantage so that he is now free to add another volume if it seems necessary.

In appearance Edel is a small, contained man with a narrow bespectacled face and an unobstrusive moustache. Widely cultured, in recent years he has confined his interests almost exclusively to Henry James. He lives quietly with his wife, a psychologist, and two enormous cats, in an apartment on Central Park West. One is immediately struck by the impersonal orderliness of his apartment. Uncluttered rooms, books arranged methodically on the many shelves lining the walls, filing cabinets, an almost bare desk. Nevertheless, Edel claims that when he is writing, his study becomes a welter of files and notes, and frequently time is forgotten as he works far into the night.

He finds it possible to live a dedicated scholarly life even in the din of Manhattan. A bus takes him directly to Washington Square (with all its James associations), where he has recently been named Henry James Professor at New York University. His classes are almost exclusively graduate seminars on James. When addressing other universities, he speaks on aspects of James or on the art of biography. When travelling abroad, the quest is always in search of additional James material.

In 1956 Edel was invited to deliver the Alexander Lectures at the University of Toronto. These were later published under the title, *Literary Biography*, from which I drew the remarks quoted at the beginning of this paper. Here was the rare case of a biographer speaking up for his art as a branch of literature which

has been unjustly neglected. Here also was a rare case of one theorizing about his own art, drawing largely on conclusions which had emerged from practical experience. A very real sense of responsibility sustains all his reflections, particularly in his analysis of the dangers, difficulties, and temptations of understanding too much and too well. Edel describes biography as "a kind of alchemy of the spirit." "To succeed," he says, "the biographer must perform the unusual — and the well-nigh impossible — act of incorporating into himself the experience of another, or shall we say becoming for a while that other person, even while remaining himself." The appraising, distancing eye must maintain a constant guard: "He must be warm, yet aloof, involved, yet uninvolved. To be cold as ice in appraisal, yet warm and human and understanding, this is the biographer's dilemma."

I stated earlier that it seemed to me next to impossible in the sort of literary biography Edel is writing to create a three-dimensional James. He makes many references to James attending dinner parties, James writing letters at a desk in his club, James riding on the Campagna, James walking about the streets of London. Nevertheless, we do not receive any concrete impression of James kinetically involved in any of these activities. We are aware of eyes seeing, of a mind responding, of the writer as observer in most of these situations. Lessing's distinction between the provinces of the various arts might almost serve as an analogy for the functions of sundry types of biography. If one is interested in a writer as a writer primarily, surely Edel's method is the only effective one. A biographer cannot have the best of both worlds; or, more precisely he cannot convey the inner and the outer man, because they are two different people. It is a problem that almost all biographers, including Edel, refuse to face. If they admit that they are concentrating on a sensibility, they are inevitably fearful that substantiality will be attenuated. Edel's biography is that of a literary sensibility, not of a man whose occupation was writing. The man Henry James has become a name on a page; but a responsive intellect continues to vibrate from Edel's pages.

Edel has spoken of the biographer's task as a "passionate quest." For a biographer who could never have known his subject, it is clear that Edel has regarded James as a quarry to be hunted down. Frequently he has spoken of the "roadblocks" that James seemed to erect to foil his pursuers. There is an undoubted triumph in Edel's remarks on the evidence that James found impossible to hide — namely, his works. If Edel could not re-invoke a Dr. Johnson or a Carlyle, he could convey a sense of the influence moulding the creative mind, of the world as it impinged on James's consciousness, and the connection between life and its transformation into art.

I have refrained from saying that James has shown us the creative mind at work. He could not do this, nor could any other biographer. One can speculate on the process, as Edel frequently does, but one can never capture the elusive mystery of another man's imagination. At times, indeed, Edel strains too hard to draw connections as in his hypothesis about the original elements of "The Turn of the Screw" (*The Conquest of London,* p. 266).

Above all else, Edel's life of James is a reconstruction of the world *as James saw it.* Edel has entered into James's mind to the degree that he has imagined how people, places, and events appeared to James's curious eye. It is my belief that he has functioned as such an effective alter ego because his responses are extraordinarily similar to those of James. Mutedly gregarious, Edel loves the atmosphere of clubs with their comfortable, unhurried conversation. Edel's understanding of why James enjoyed them so much is reflected in his evocation of the nineteenth-century London clubs to which James belonged. Again, Edel loves Washington Square and he would have been even more enchanted with it in the 1850's; hence, his appreciation captures its genius loci so vividly in *The Untried Years.*

When it comes to the deeper, more ambivalent levels of James's psyche, Edel advances various hypotheses but generally draws back from unambiguous personal committal. Edel believes firmly that the biographer is responsible for presenting all possible alternatives to his reader. The tense nature of William and Henry James's attitude to each other threads the biography, but the reader is not asked to understand the relationship any more than Henry did himself. William appears as an abrasive, providing an obsessive theme for Henry's fiction. Edel traces Henry's recurrent backache to his uneasy relationship with William. This ailment (or the "wound", a word which James offered gratuitously to hungry critics) has usually been attributed to a castration complex, a theory of which Edel seems on the one hand contemptuous, although he does not firmly shut the door on it. As far as interpreting James's sexual motivations, Edel traverses a wavering course. In *The Untried Years* he clearly associates the types of women created by the novelist with James's own uncertain feelings towards women:

> Henry James feared and worshipped them, and hesitated to express his feelings lest he be turned away. For him women could be as chaste and beautiful — and unattainable — as Diana; or else they were another kind of huntress, harsh and predatory, literally dedicated to the chase — the chase of the husband — and thus to be fled.

Leon Edel undoubtedly knows more about Henry James than any other person alive. Yet it seems to me that in this passage he is straining too hard to accommodate fiction to fact. The later volumes record deep, enduring friendships with women, and I do not recall Edel describing any encounter from which James really "fled" — at least, not to my satisfaction. In Volumes II and III James appears as pleasantly neutral in all his relationships, unstirred by the passions that disturb human beings, even artists, from time to time. I understand that Edel is going to turn to this aspect of James's life in the forthcoming volume.

In a seminar on biography held at the University of Toronto last winter, Professor Edel made the remark that knowledge of the subject's sexual life was not necessarily important for a literary biographer if it did not have any particular relevance to his books. However, as a biographer, Edel's whole underlying premise is that a writer reveals himself in his creations, that the style and content are the man. For the epigraph to *The Middle Years*, Edel selected James's statement that "the artist is present in every page of every book from which he sought so assiduously to eliminate himself." My own impression in that suppressed passion is present in a very disturbing way in James's work. Edel, usually so anxious to relate life and work, never explores this feature of James's work — or life. Has he waited until the fourth volume to discuss James's sexual drives precisely because they were so ambivalent; or because he is saving some revelation for the end?

I raised this point because it seems to me curious that so important a part of most people's lives could be disregarded through three volumes of a biography. Professor Edel would probably defend his position on the grounds of "form", a word which recurs constantly in his conversation when discussing biography. I can understand how he could compress James's experience of London clubs into a single chapter, but I do not comprehend how one is justified in handling love in this manner. However, undoubtedly Professor Edel will prove me wrong if the complete biography emerges as the work of art it promises to become.

All this brings me back to the original warning cited by Professor Edel. No human being, no matter how sympathetic, shares the same proclivities, tastes, or drives as another. One can only assume a single layer of another's skin tissue, and even then, the biographer's own attitudes cannot be stifled completely. Professor Edel has probably got as close to Henry James as anyone ever will, but I suspect that Henry James will have the last laugh on us.

Although the biography offers an embarrassment of riches, I have concentrated on only one, and perhaps a relatively unimportant, reflection that has been

forced upon me. I could have waxed enthusiastic about its grace, its elegance, its urbanity, all conveyed in a leisurely pace highly reminiscent of James himself. I am convinced that this is a biography that will someday be referred to with the same authoritative assumptions with which one links Boswell and Froude.

LEONARD COHEN

Black Romantic

Sandra Djwa

WRITING ON "The Problem of a Canadian Literature", E. K. Brown pokes fun at the genteel conservatism that characterizes Canadian writing:

> Imagination boggles at the vista of a Canadian Whitman or a Canadian Dos Passos. The prevailing literary standards demand a high degree of moral and social orthodoxy; and popular writers accept these standards without even... rueful complaint.[1]

If Brown considers a Whitman or a Dos Passos improbable, a Canadian Gênet, a Canadian Burroughs, or a Günter Grass is clearly beyond expectation. Yet it is in precisely this tradition, that of the contemporary Black Romantics as we might call them, that Leonard Cohen appears to belong.

Cohen's poetry reads like an index to the history of European romanticism; from the epigraph to *Let Us Compare Mythologies* (1956) through *The Spice-Box of Earth* (1961) to the "lady" of "garbage flowers" in *Flowers for Hitler* (1964), his progress is from Keats and Lawrence through Baudelaire to Gênet. In brief, this is a movement from a qualified acceptance of the romantic ideal as it is embodied in art ("For ever wilt thou love and she be fair") to the decadent romanticism of a *fin de siècle* æsthetic in which the ugly replaces the beautiful as the inspiration for art.

Reading through Cohen's work we become aware of an unsatisfied search for an absolute. In his world there are no fixed values, spiritual or sensual, that stand

beyond the transitory moment, and the moment itself, experience made myth, blends imperceptibly with other moments and other mythologies, so that in the shifting the values change, leaving only the value of experience made art:

> Those days were just the twilight
> And soon the poems and the songs
> Were only associations
> Edged with bitterness
> Focussed into pain
> By paintings in a minor key
> Remembered on warm nights
> When he made love to strangers
> And he would struggle through old words
> Unable to forget he once created new ones
> And fumble at their breasts with broken hands.

Cohen's dominant theme, the relationship between experience and art, and more specifically the suggestion that the value of experience is to be found in the art or "beauty" distilled from it, is a familiar motif of the late romantics. It first appears in Cohen's work as an epigraph to *Mythologies* taken from "The Bear" by William Faulkner:

> 'She cannot fade though thou hast not had thy bliss',
> McCaslin said: 'For ever wilt thou love and she be fair'.
> 'He's talking about a girl', he said.
> 'He had to talk about something', McCaslin said.

This preface to a poet's first book suggests an amused recognition of a certain attitude to experience; the rationale is that of love for art's sake. But if this attitude is familiar, the irrational neo-gothic world from which the poet takes this stance is not at all familiar, at least in Canadian poetry. Particularly in his two later books, *Flowers for Hitler* and *Beautiful Losers* (1966) Cohen would seem to be closest to the European tradition of Baudelaire, Sartre and Gênet, and to their American affiliates Henry Miller and William Burroughs.

In contrast to the later European tradition from Baudelaire to Gênet, Canadian writers have not wandered very far from first generation romanticism. Strongly influenced by Wordsworthian natural piety and reinforced by the Calvinist urge towards moral uplift, the native line in English Canadian poetry might be characterized by the straightforward statement and explicit morality of a D. C. Scott, an E. J. Pratt, or an Earle Birney. Despite Lampman's flirtation with the Sym-

bolists and Marjorie Pickthall's coy apprenticeship to Swinburne, imagistic technique was not fully recognized as such in Canadian poetry until the thirties, and the Decadent sensibility with its attendant themes of masochistic death, self-flagellation and religious inversion, is reflected only faintly in Carman's work of the nineties, recurs briefly in the thirties with Leo Kennedy's *The Shrouding*, and does not appear again until just recently in the late fifties. Notably, this Decadent sensibility is most explicit in the works of the younger writers Leonard Cohen, Daryl Hine, and Mordecai Richler, all of whom have come into contact with the European tradition.

Consequently Cohen does have some grounds for asserting, as he does on the back cover of *Flowers for Hitler*, that his "sounds" are new in Canada and possibly subject to critical misinterpretation. Admittedly, he does stress the same religious, sexual and social protest as do Klein, Layton and Dudek, and he does take the same missionary delight in the poetic vocation of the Montreal Group *pour épater le bourgeois*. But Cohen's technique is considerably more complex than that of Layton or Dudek, and the vision and sensibility which he expresses are sufficiently different from those of Klein to suggest that he has moved into a different tradition. In this connection we might compare the world view of Klein's *Hitleriad* (1944) with that of Cohen's *Flowers for Hitler* (1964). Along with the structure and style of Pope's *Dunciad*, Klein's *Hitleriad* is invoking the rational Neo-Classical world where human folly can be effectively chastised by the wit of a righteous indignation:

> Let anger take me in its grasp; let hate,
> Hatred of evil prompt me, and dictate.

Cohen, on the other hand, insists upon the relativity of evil; Hitler is "ordinary", Eichmann, "medium". In this perspective, irrational evil is accepted as a normal part of the human make-up which can even come to have a certain attractiveness:

> It happens to everyone. For those with eyes who know in their hearts that terror is mutual, then this hard community has a beauty of its own.

This reference to the strange "beauty" which can spring from a community of evil and suffering invokes Baudelaire's *Fleurs du mal*. And it is Baudelaire's flowers of evil grafted with those of Gênet which Cohen uses to provide the structural myth of *Flowers for Hitler*. In this book, the moments of beauty which the poet attempts to create, like those of his protagonist Kerensky, "when poems grew like butterflies on the garbage of his life", are moments which cannot come into

being unless evil is first admitted. Like his mentor, the T. S. Eliot of *The Waste Land*, and for that matter like Klein also, Cohen wants to bring a guilty world into recognition of itself: "I wait/for each one of you to confess." But unlike Klein, and again following Eliot, the confession that Cohen demands is one which accepts personal responsibility for evil as the natural corollary of being human. Having accepted this awareness of evil as does the protagonist of "The New Leader", the individual is then released from the negative virtue of "threading history's crushing daisy-chain with beauty after beauty" and face to face with the ugliness of self:

> Drunk at last, he hugged himself, his stomach clean, cold and drunk, the sky clean but only for him, free to shiver, free to hate, free to begin.

This would seem to be a basically post World War II position: the romantic voyaging "I", bereft of religious belief and Hegel's cosmic rationalism ("the sky clean") sets out to discover his world. And as in Sartre's *Nausea* or Heller's *Catch-22*, this involves the attempt to come to terms with existence itself. Faced with a world which he sees as irrational, evil and grotesque, an evil and an ugliness which he shares because he is human, with only a momentary hope of vision and that perhaps delusive, the modern anti-hero accepts evil as part of existence and immerses himself within it, both in terms of the external world and through the journey into self.

THIS IMMERSION in destruction, often accomplished through a combination of alcohol, drugs and sex, would seem to be meta-physical in nature in that it is an attempt to find a new answer to the human predicament by going down instead of up. In this sense it might be considered the modern romantic myth. Where Wordsworth and Coleridge attempt the transcendental leap, Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Huysmans, and the modern Gênet, Sartre and Burroughs all spend a season in hell. Experience is the distinguishing mode of the Byronic hero, the later Victorian Decadents and their twentieth-century descendants, the Black Romantics. For the past twenty years, the subject of the modern romantic has been increasingly the fascination of evil and its relationship to the process of destructive metamorphosis. Cyril Connolly, in a recent attempt to define "modernism" finds its essence in this quatrain by Baudelaire:

> Only when we drink poison are we well —
> We want, this fire so burns our brain tissue,
> To drown in the abyss — heaven or hell
> Who cares? Through the unknown we'll find the new.[2]

As this excerpt makes clear, the value of the abyss is not only the pleasure of new sensation but the possibility of a new revelation beyond the experience itself. The danger inherent in this credo would seem to be the temptation it offers to mistake catalogued sensation for new revelation.

In Cohen's work, this possibility of a new revelation is specifically associated with the myth of descent culminating in the creation of art. In his first book of poetry, *Let Us Compare Mythologies*, the structural myth is that of the death of the poet-god Orpheus and the possibility of his resurrection in art. Like Eliot's *Waste Land* the book moves through cycles of winter death followed by spring re-birth, and the poet-victim as a part of this cycle moves between the extremes of innocent and destructive love. In terms of the controlling Orpheus myth, the figure of the beloved woman suggests Eurydice while the madwoman evokes the Bacchanals. In the poem "Letter", the poet-victim, aware of his impending death, addresses the madwoman directly: "How you murdered your family/ means nothing to me/ as your mouth moves across my body". The poems of this cycle would seem to make a strong case for submission to a destructive love which, unlike the romantic escapism of such poems as "On Certain Incredible Nights", can lead to a new beauty and a new order. Consequently the poet embraces the "real", sacrifice goes on ("Hallowe'en Poem") and the poet's brain exposed, "the final clever thrill of summer lads all dead with love", becomes a "drum" to be "scratched with poetry by Kafka's machine". The rationale for this disintegrative experience is explicit in the poem "Story". Only by allowing the madwoman full sway is it possible for the poet as victim to find his place in art: "to understand one's part in a legend".

It is this myth of art which seems to provide the basic structure in Cohen's work. In his first book the myth of descent is presented primarily as the desolation of Eliot's *Waste Land*. In *The Spice-Box of Earth* this longing for the old lost ideals is re-worked in terms of a neo-Hassidic myth. No longer able to accept a despotic God, the poet as priest is forced beyond Genesis into a desolation which is "unheroic, unbiblical". Lawrence Breavman, the poet as lover, finds himself in the same position in Cohen's next book, *The Favourite Game*. Breavman's alienation grows throughout the novel until he is finally stricken with panic and loneliness; it is then that he realizes that a new experience awaits:

> He stumbled and collapsed, tasting the ground. He lay very still while his clothes soaked. Something very important was going to happen in this arena. He was very sure of that. Not in gold, not in light, but in this mud something necessary and inevitable would take place. He had to stay to watch it unfold.

The experience that waits for Breavman is a recognition of the evil and irrationality symbolized by Baudelaire's mud-flowers. In *Flowers for Hitler* this recognition is presented as a disintegrative experience which is both frightening and pleasurable. This descent into evil is savoured in much the same way as the young Breavman enjoys his adolescent satanism ("Fuck God"), yet the very process of daring the abyss is a propulsion into an irrational, frightening world. Similarly, the narrator-historian of *Beautiful Losers* is forced through the motions of Sartre's nausea in a grimy sub-basement room that gradually fills up with his own excrement.

In Cohen, as with Baudelaire and Sartre, the value of this disintegrative process is given as the creation of art. "Elegy", the first poem in *Let Us Compare Mythologies*, expresses this myth of descent in the death of the poet-god Orpheus:

> He is descending through cliffs
> Of slow green water
> And the hovering coloured fish
> Kiss his snow-bruised body
> And build their secret nests
> In his fluttering winding sheet.

From the disintegrating body of the dead god comes art; the "secret nests" of "hovering" fish. In a later poem "These Heroics", the poet explains that it is because he cannot be "fish" or "bird" that he makes dreams and poetry from love. The association of poet and bird is common to Horace, Baudelaire and Rilke, and in each case the bird symbolizes the poet's aspiration. Cohen's addition of a "fish" to this complex with primary associations of disintegration, points up his belief that the creative process is one which moves between aspiration and disintegration. Associated with the poetic, sexual and religious aspiration which forms one pole of Cohen's system is the dove, the beloved and Catherine Tekakwitha; clustered about the other pole, the process of disintegration, is the fish, the Black Mass, the Bacchanals, "F" and Edith. Through art — the "nests" of "Elegy", the "kite" of *Spice-Box*, the "butterflies" of *Flowers for Hitler* — the poet attempts to reconcile the two. For example, the exiled poet-priest of *Spice-Box* finds that neither religious belief nor physical love can fill up the void be-

tween "a ruined house of bondage and a holy promised land". This reconciliation of the spirit and the flesh is only to be found in the fairy-tale land of art:

> Out of the land of heaven
> Down comes the warm Sabbath sun
> Into the spice-box of earth

or in the artifact itself; the spice-box, one of the symbols of the Jewish Havdallah service marking the Sabbath's end, becomes a metaphor for the human form divine.

A similar conclusion is reached in Cohen's later books; Breavman learns that although love is a "creation", the favourite game is not love alone but the flesh made art:

> When everyone had been flung . . . into the fresh snow, the beautiful part of the game began. You stood up carefully, taking great care not to disturb the impression you had made. Now the comparisons.
> Of course you would have done your best to land in some crazy position, arms and legs sticking out. Then we walked away, leaving a lovely field of blossom-like shapes with footprint stems.

In *Flowers for Hitler*, Cohen takes the blackness of the human capacity for evil and from it attempts to extract the flowers of art. In this perspective, the poet emerges as recorder: "neither/ father nor child/ but one who spins/ on an eternal unimportant loom/ patterns of war and grass/ which do not last the night". Similarily, all the four main characters of *Beautiful Losers* find themselves to be both artist and pattern. Through the experience of failure, the narrator, his Indian wife Edith, his guide and lover "F" (cf. Pyncheon's "V") and the Iroquois saint, Catherine Tekakwitha, are each precipitated on a journey into self which results in the recreation of existence:

> Not the pioneer is the American dream. . . . The dream is to be immigrant sailing into the misty aerials of New York, the dream is to be Jesuit in the cities of the Iriquois, for we do not wish to destroy the past and its baggy failures, we only wish the miracles to demonstrate that the past was joyously prophetic, and that possibility occurs to us most plainly on this cargo deck of wide lapels, our kerchief sacks filled with obsolete machine guns from the last war but which will astound and conquer the Indians.

Because it is Cohen's thesis that the experience of failure is indispensable for the creation of art, the book becomes a case study of the *fleur du mal* "beauty" of such losers. Through a pop-art catalogue of sensation, the narrator proceeds to

the superior "magic" represented by Catherine Tekakwitha (1656-1680). Tekakwitha functions primarily as an artist of religion, her name is defined as meaning "she who, advancing, arranges the shadows neatly". As the narrator further explains, a saint is associated with the "energy" of love: "contact with this energy results in a kind of balance in the chaos of existence". Through her influence as it is manifested directly and through the other two characters, the narrator-historian passes through nausea (like his prototype, Sartre's Roquentin) to the point that it is suggested that the novel is produced from his experience.

DESPITE THE CONTRIVANCE of Cohen's central myth, *Spice-Box* and *The Favourite Game* are impressive well-written early books, and perhaps largely because of the glimpses they offer of realized experience. *Flowers for Hitler* and *Beautiful Losers* are less rewarding, not only because they are more dominantly written to formula, but also because of the increasingly self-conscious attitude of the poet as persona in relation to the codification of his central myth. What I miss in Cohen's later books is the sense that the writer is attempting a subjective re-interpretation of evil or failure as the case might be. Instead, Cohen's successive books offer variations on a theme within other men's myths. This technique has the advantage of structural neatness and there are few Canadian readers who have not expressed delight at Cohen's technical virtuosity, but it also has the serious disadvantage of sacrificing organic growth and original discovery to a pre-determined formula. Little can happen in *Flowers for Hitler* or *Beautiful Losers* because Cohen has already determined what will happen even before the experience takes place. Furthermore, because he is committed to a view of life and art which is essentially that of religious aspiration followed by sexual inversion, Cohen is further limited in his presentation of experience and his delineation of character. Experience and characters can only come from the Yellow Books of the 1880's and 90's. The case study of the young hero and his *saison en enfer*, the division of the romantic *femme fatale* into her opposite but complementary aspects of innocent and destroyer (cf. Catherine and Edith) are familiar features of Decadent literature as is the presentation of the satanic, often homosexual, friend and alter-ego ("F").

The limitations of this vision would seem to be the limitations of Decadent literature in general; it substitutes a narrowed, bizarre area of human experience at the expense of the ordinary human average, and it negates the dignity of ordinary human encounter to a hierarchy of art. Because this vision, although limited,

is of primary importance to the author, his characters are subordinated to it. As types, they depend on increasing doses of sensationalism to be effective. In this connection it is possible to trace the increasing sensationalism associated with the figure of the friend as he is presented from *The Favourite Game* to *Beautiful Losers*. Like the mentor of Oscar Wilde's *Portrait of Dorian Gray*, "F" is memorable for his epigrams rather than for a sense of character in depth. Part of the difficulty involved in Cohen's perception of character would seem to be related to the fact that his characters are conceived as part of an internal myth. Cohen, for example, is both poet-writer and persona and the two often merge. This can sometimes be effective as in the poem "You Have The Lovers" from *Spice-Box* where the poet-lover and poet-spectator are universalized but more often the trio of two lovers and a spectator leads to sensationalism or the plain voyeurism of the sun-bathing sequence in *Beautiful Losers*.

The sensibility which reports the sensationalism of the disintegrative experience is quite different in kind from that which we usually associate with Canadian poetry. Faced with an absurd world, Cohen is no longer able to call on Klein's humane rationalism for the redress of evil. Instead, there is some attempt to exorcise evil by filtering it through the comic mode. This Black Humour is apparent in Cohen's description of Nazi concentration camp atrocities:

> Peekaboo Miss Human Soap
> Pretend it never happened
> . . . .
> I say let sleeping ashes lie.

Here the brutal is introduced as a witty aside and the particular *frisson nouveau* of the poem seems to arise from the juxtaposition of the erotic, infantile world of Bathing Beauties, "peekaboo" and "let's pretend", with the horror of real concentration camps where soap is made from human fat and ashes. At first glance, Cohen appears to be having a nasty laugh at the expense of Jewish suffering. Alfred Purdy, in fact, describes the subject of *Flowers for Hitler* as little more than the after-dinner talk of "a good conversationalist who had to say something".[3] But on closer inspection it might be suggested that this is an attempt to come to terms with a painful experience. Through the medium of Black Humour it is possible to see the selection of a Miss Human Soap as the fun and games of an absurd world. And because Cohen has presented horror as an absurdity, there is a possibility of moving on to a new affirmation in a way that is not open to Klein in his *Hitleriad*. But at the same time (and it is this which makes Purdy's

comments relevant) the dichotomy between the epigraph to *Flowers for Hitler*, which is an excerpt from Primo Levi warning against the disintegration of personality, and the sensationalism of the book itself, leads us to question the integrity of Cohen's vision — a question which does not arise in connection with the Black Humour of Selby's *Last Exit to Brooklyn* or Grass's *The Tin Drum*.

Coming to terms with this view of experience is as tricky as the attempt to decide whether or not pop-art is a contradiction in terms. Yet it can be said that the qualities which make Cohen's work fairly easy to describe — myth as literary structure, central persona, a consistent view of life and art — are also those qualities which mitigate against further development in his later work. In general I find Cohen's poetry often too derivative to be impressive, and the mythic technique, once the key has been supplied, too simple to be suggestive in the largest sense. Cohen does play the game very well; his mythologies are clever, often witty, sometimes very moving, yet even at its best, Cohen's favourite game is still Eliot's or Baudelaire's or Sartre's. But Cohen is attempting to write of contemporary themes in a contemporary way. His concern with alienation, eroticism and madness, together with the experimental techniques of *Flowers for Hitler* and *Beautiful Losers*, unlike the dominantly early nineteenth-century romanticism of the Montreal Group, are the concerns of post World War Two writing. For Cohen, as for Heller, Burroughs, Grass and Selby, the old rules of religious rationality and romantic idealism exist to be questioned. The last twenty years has seen the codification of a new group of writers whose focus is on the disintegrative vision and it is in their footsteps that Cohen is following. Because this new vision, like that of the Decadents, is an inversion of traditional romantic "myth" and morality, and because it is often presented with the irreverent wit of the new Black Humourists, we might be justified in calling this attitude to experience, Black Romantic.

WITHIN THE WORLD of the contemporary Black Romantic, the disintegrative experience is presented not only through the journey into self but also through the form of the work. Both, in turn, are microcosms of the reductionist cycle of the larger world. The form of *Beautiful Losers* with its disjointed inner monologues interspersed with snippets of history and clippings from comic books is substantially the "cut-up" technique of William Burroughs alternating with one of the stylistic tricks from Sartre's *Nausea* which might be distinguished by the fact that Every Word Begins With A Capital. Both techniques suggest

the merging of values which cannot occur without a breakdown in the structure of the world which they represent. In *Beautiful Losers,* as in Céline's *Journey To The End Of Night,* it is the universe itself which is breaking down, proceeding gradually but inevitably through the process of entropy. Cohen illustrates this process and then attempts to reverse it when the once glorious "F" disintegrates into a smelly old man but then escapes from the novel page (and, incidentally, the human predicament) by metamorphosing himself into a movie of Ray Charles. This is a flippant example, but it is another reminder that the Black Romantic justifies his presentation of disintegration by insisting that the breakdown of the old "false" categories leaves the way open for both reader and author to create new order. In Cohen's work, this justification is more impressive in theory than in practice. Techniques such as Cohen's "pure list" or Burrough's "cut-up" are successful only when there is some direction suggested for the movement beyond recorded disintegration, and it is this larger revelation which is most absent from extended passages of *Beautiful Losers.*

For these reasons, I suspect that Leonard Cohen is more important in Canadian writing for the contemporary movement which he represents than for the intrinsic merit of his work to date. The world of the Black Romantic may not be a particularly pleasant one, but its awareness of the darker side of human consciousness is a helpful counterbalance to a literary tradition that professes an ignorance of the human animal as complete as any of the Pollyanna Glad Books. As early as 1928 we can find A. J. M. Smith insisting: "the Canadian writer must put up a fight for freedom in the choice and treatment of his subject". Suggesting that desperate conditions require desperate remedies, he concludes: "our condition will not improve until we have been thoroughly shocked by the appearance in our midst of a work of art that is both successful and obscene."[4] *Beautiful Losers,* as successful pop-art, may just provide the function Smith has in mind. At the same time, I am sorry to see Cohen join Layton in the role of public educator, because if he does have a future as a serious writer — if he wants one — it is back in the writing of *The Favourite Game* before Cohen, persona, solidified.

FOOTNOTES

[1] E. K. Brown, "The Problem of A Canadian Poetry," *Masks of Fiction.* Toronto, 1961.

[2] Cyril Connolly, *The Modern Movement.* London, 1966.

[3] Alfred Purdy, "Leonard Cohen: A Personal Look," *Canadian Literature* 23 (Winter 1965).

[4] A. J. M. Smith, "Wanted, Canadian Criticism," *Canadian Forum* 91 (April 1928).

HAPPILY EVER AFTER

Canadian Women in Fiction and Fact

Clara Thomas

"WHO CAN FIND A VIRTUOUS WOMAN? for her price is far above rubies", said Solomon, and forthwith sketched her in some detail. His definition has constituted the ideal, and divergencies in fact and fiction have been merely variations from his standards. Fictionally, the model pattern has been the representation of the modest, capable, energetic wife and mother, bearing sorrows with fortitude and earning joy in her family's devotion and the achievements of her home-making. The most familiar variation of the pattern, still well within the structure of "virtue", has been the romantic rebel, revolting against her predestined "place", but so charming, or gifted, or both, that *sometimes* an indulgent Providence has allowed her a happy ending.

In Canadian fiction, Sara Jeannette Duncan's *The Imperialist* establishes memorable portrayals of the types in Mrs. Murchison and her daughter, Advena. Mrs. Murchison is the wife of John Murchison, a benignly patriarchal, hard-working, modestly prosperous manufacturer of stoves, a pillar of the small Ontario town of Elgin. She is introduced in her kitchen disposing of the affairs of her household, her husband, and her children with entire competence and a charm that is partly rooted in our nostalgic memories of grandmothers who seemed just like that, and partly in Miss Duncan's combination of affection, acute observation and impeccable skill in her portraiture.

On such occasions as the entertaining of Dr. Drummond, the clergyman, Mrs. Murchison's pride in her housewifery finds its own triumphant manifestation:

> The chicken salad gleamed at one end of the table and the scalloped oysters smoked delicious at the other. Lorne had charge of the cold tongue and Advena was entrusted with the pickled pears. The rest of the family were expected to think about the tea biscuits and the cake, for Lobelia had never yet had a successor that was any hand with company.... It was a table to do anybody credit, with its glossy damask and the old-fashioned silver and best china that Mrs. Murchison had brought as a bride to her housekeeping — for, thank goodness, her mother had known what was what in such matters... Mrs. Murchison came of a family of noted housekeepers; where she got her charm I don't know.

And all who read must share her satisfaction, both in the sheer physical appeal of the laden table and in the more formal appreciation of a ritual occasion, the company dinner. Mrs. Murchison is cut perfectly to the proverbial pattern of virtue, with skilful adaptations to her Canadian place and time, and she is rewarded traditionally — her children and her husband "rise up and call her blessed."

Daughter Advena, however, cracks the mould. She reads when she should be cooking, retires to the roof of the house and pulls the ladder up after her in protest to taking music-lessons, cannot be counted upon to manage a day's preserving of cherries or strawberries, or indeed, for anything requiring the talents and application of the traditional housewife. A radical to the role of women, she puzzles and frustrates her mother who looks upon her enterprises with an uneasy mixture of forbearance, impatience and amazement:

> Advena, indeed, might have married and removed no prop of the family economy. Mrs. Murchison would have been "sorry for the man" — she maintained a candour toward and about those belonging to her that permitted no illusions — but she would have stood cheerfully out of the way on her own account....
>
> Advena justified her existence by taking the university course for women at Toronto, and afterward teaching the English branches to the junior forms in the Collegiate Institute, which placed her arbitrarily outside the sphere of domestic criticism. Mrs. Murchison was thankful to have her there — outside — where little more could reasonably be expected of her than that she should be down in time for breakfast.

When Providence, in the form of Dr. Drummond, arranges a happy ending for Advena and the Rev. Hugh Finlay, Mrs. Murchison can be sure that one unworldly person has been well mated with another. But, in all practicality, she must still be a little "sorry for the man."

IN THE STRICKLAND SISTERS, Catherine Parr Traill and Susanna Moodie, Canada had remarkable prototypes, in fact, for Mrs. Murchison's and Advena's fictional types. In the decade between 1830 and 1840 Mrs. Moodie and Mrs. Traill came, settled, endured and prevailed — but each in her own distinctive way. To neither was emigration in any way a radical move. The Stricklands were a solidly middle class family; when their father retired from his position as manager of the Greenland docks, in London, he bought a country house in Suffolk and devoted himself first to the education of his large family and then to the various cultivated pursuits of an educated country gentleman of the early nineteenth century. It was to perpetuate this kind of living that both the Traills and the Moodies emigrated. For Catharine Traill, the decision was a willing one:

> Canada is the land of hope; here everything is new; everything is going forward; it is scarcely possible for arts, sciences, agriculture, manufacturers to retrograde. . . .
>
> Children should be taught to appreciate the devoted love that has induced their parents to overcome the natural reluctance felt by all persons to quit forever the land of their forefathers . . . that their children may be placed in a situation in which, by industry and activity, the substantial comforts of life may be permanently obtained, and a landed property handed down to them and their children after them. (*Backwoods of Canada*)

On the contrary, Susanna Moodie rebelled at the thought of leaving England, particularly its congenial company and intellectual pursuits, for she and John Moodie were strongly disposed toward a literary life, and she describes her husband as "the poet, the author, the musician, the man of books, of refined taste and gentlemanly habits." She was dismayed and appalled at an economic situation which made emigration the only prudent course, yet she recognized that "the half-pay of a subaltern officer, managed with a most rigid economy, is too small to supply the wants of a family; and if, of good family, not enough to maintain his original standing in society." (*Roughing it in the Bush*).

To marriage and to the Canadian plans, Catharine brought all the capabilities, the calm optimism, and the common sense of a nature which was essentially and strongly practical, empiric and pragmatic in its bent. She saw their early Canadian situation as a "Robinson Crusoe" sort of life; she welcomed the challenge, accepted the situation, and adapted to it with astonishing aptitude and grace. Beyond that, she wrote — patterns for living for other Canadian women, the Mrs. Murchisons of the future. *The Backwoods of Canada*, a record of the Traill's first

three years, published in 1936 in Charles Knight's "Library of Entertaining Knowledge", is exactly what it announces itself to be: it gives "information regarding the domestic economy of a settler's life" and it affords "every possible information to the wives and daughters of emigrants of the higher class who contemplate seeking a home among our Canadian Wilds." More than a third of the book describes the Traill's long journey to their land and the rest describes the flora and fauna, the Indians, and the customs and conditions that all settlers must expect to meet. Catharine's love of nature was, from the first, an absorbing hobby and a major sustaining interest which, when she embarked on a programme of self-education, carried her finally beyond the status of an amateur enthusiast and made her something of an international authority on Canada's plants and flowers. It was typical of the outward-going nature of her interests that, in *The Backwoods*, she devoted two paragraphs only to the attack of cholera which nearly killed her on arrival in Montreal, but she required more than forty pages to describe the birds, small animals and particularly the flowers which she observed around their holding near Peterborough.

She was frankly delighted to be rid of the pretentiousness which she deplored in English society: "We bush-ladies have a wholesome disregard of what Mr. or Mrs. So-and-so thinks and says. We pride ourselves on conforming to circumstances." In her writings, she was an eminent instructress on the skills of conformity: *The Backwoods*' final appendix of thirty-five pages of useful information of all kinds, including a collection of recipes for making maple-syrup, soft-soap, candles and vinegar, processes which might be unfamiliar to an Englishwoman-settler, is only a small beginning toward her *Female Emigrant's Guide* of 1855, a complete compendium of pioneer housewifery.

Catharine Traill is the Mrs. Beeton and the Fanny Farmer of nineteenth-century Canada, but she goes beyond either of these worthy pattern-makers. The pioneer wife's knowledge and capabilities had to extend far beyond the home, the kitchen and the promotion of gracious and thrifty living — ideally, she must also be competent in the garden, the fields, with the animals, as nurse and midwife, as manufacturer of clothing and, in emergencies, she must have hands as strong and head as clear as a man's. To wear out was frightfully common for the female pioneer; only the incorrigibly slovenly could rust out.

All the sections of the *Guide* ring with the authenticity of personal experience and the conviction of one who can instruct the newcomer, because for twenty years she has herself been evolving the pattern for maximum usefulness. Beyond that, her writing style provides a large bonus of enjoyment to the reader, for when

Catharine Traill wrote of what she knew, she commanded her language with a Jane Austenish clarity, precision and, sometimes, wit. On the dangers of fire, for instance, she writes:

> Help from our neighbours we could not obtain. When we sent a messenger for one, he and all his family were battling with the fire on their own clearing; to a second, his fences were on fire — all hands were employed in saving the crops; a third, the barn was in danger; and so we were forced to rouse every energy that we could to overcome the danger. Ourselves, women and little children — all had to help; and this continued day after day.... The Autumn rains finally extinguished the fires all over the country, and the dread of their ravages was at an end for that year....
>
> In cases of emergency, it is folly to fold one's hands and sit down in abject terror; it is better to be up and doing.
>
> (*Female Emigrant's Guide*)

MANY OF THE SKETCHES for Susanna Moodie's *Roughing it in the Bush* were written contemporaneously with Catharine Traill's *Backwoods*. Though some of them had been published in Mr. Lovell's *Literary Garland*, the Montreal publication which, from 1838-1851, catered to the demands and desires of the female reader, *Roughing it* was not published as a book until 1852. In its conclusion Susanna Moodie announces an intention in direct contrast to her sister's: "If these sketches should prove the means of deterring one family from sinking their property and shipwrecking all their hopes, by going to reside in the backwoods of Canada, I shall consider myself amply repaid for revealing the secrets of the prison-house, and feel that I have not toiled and suffered in the wilderness in vain."

Susanna was, in fact, not a diarist, not a writer of calm expository prose, certainly not an instructress of prospective emigrants, but a gifted recorder of character, dialogue and incident, especially of a humourous nature. Like her sister, she had written and been published before coming to Canada, but her early life here made a great impact on her, extending talents of character-drawing and the recording of incident that she had exercised before, and releasing another that she had scarcely practised — the ability to see with a humourist's slant and to communicate, by description and dialogue, her amusement to others. She never lived comfortably with her comic vision, however, or lost her embarrassment at its incorrigible presence. She deplores her "perverse inclination to laugh in the wrong

place; for though one cannot help deriving from it a wicked enjoyment, it is a very troublesome gift, and very difficult to conceal." (*Life in the Clearings*).

In Canada, Susanna was thrust into the company of all sorts of people, few of whom were of her own social class and many of whom she found reprehensible, but almost always amusing. She could write of them without inhibition and she captured a whole gallery of them, in the very accents in which she heard them speak. From the ship's captain, through a long list — Satan, Tom Wilson, Betty Frye, John Monaghan, to the "little stumpy man", *Roughing it in the Bush* is alive with their presences. And in her sketches, no person comes as fully alive as Susanna, their authoress, for, first among our writers, she had the novelist's impulse and talent to demonstrate the changes and modifications effected by experience on personality — in this case, her own. She is recklessly self-revealing: a prejudiced, class-conscious, ill-equipped pioneer, sometimes the butt of her own stories, sometimes the heroine, passionately revolting against her circumstances, while slowly and uncomfortably adapting to them. Catharine Traill quietly states the achievement, while Susanna dramatizes the struggle with herself the storm centre, and her self-characterization has the energy and the contained variety of a successful fictional characterization.

In many ways she was, and she saw herself as, the rebel to her place and role, the Canadian ancestress of all the Advena Murchisons who step out of woman's accepted place because, temperamentally, they must, and who adapt to women's conventional place painfully, or not at all. In fact, Susanna was no less gallant than her sister: she endured primitive conditions for far longer than Catharine, because John Moodie, unlike Thomas Traill, was neither a prudently wise nor a successful settler; she bore several children while living in the bush and she won a succession of battles over fear and pride. Finally, the Englishwoman who had been the joke of her neighbours because she could not bake bread, could say with satisfaction: "I have contemplated a well-hoed ridge of potatoes on that bush farm with as much delight as in years long past I had experienced in examining a fine painting in some well-appointed drawing room." (*Roughing it in the Bush*).

In Canadian fiction, there is no more convincing descendant of the Susanna - Advena line than Penelope Wain, in Hugh MacLennan's *Barometer Rising*. Penny is doubly branded. She has moved away from society's moral standard for women by having an affair with Neil Macrae before he went to war, and she is the mother of a daughter whose birth she has kept secret from him. Socially, she has moved from her place to the man's world of the shipyards. She is a successful ship-designer and that rarest of fictional creatures, a "career woman" treated

with great insight, understanding and sensitivity by her creator. The steps in Penny's journey from the cold control that has become her armour, through the acceptance as inevitable of a renewal of her life with Neil, to finally, a tentative but grateful welcoming of his love, are told with imaginative comprehension and great delicacy of shading:

> She was tied to this man, and the realization made her shiver. She was a prisoner of his maleness because once she had wanted him and he had refused to forget it. . . .
>
> Then she knew that it was inevitable for him and Jean and herself to go on together, even if they could do nothing better than preserve themselves blindly for a future she felt to be epitomized by the events of the past few days. . . .
>
> Suddenly Penny required his tenderness so greatly that it was as though all her life she had been starving for it . . . but the habit of restraint, the cold control she had trained herself to acquire, was still unbreakable. . . .
>
> Tears welled up in her eyes and receded without overflowing, and her fingers closed over his.

THERE IS A THIRD TYPE among Canada's virtuous women abundantly foreshadowed in the nineteenth century and well characterized in the fiction of the twentieth — the woman who could not prevail over circumstances, who did not have the sympathetic attention of Providence to provide her with the rewards due to her efforts. In December of 1836, when Catharine Traill and Susanna Moodie had already served their pioneer apprenticeships and were planning soon to move to relatively civilized areas, Anna Jameson, an Irishwoman-authoress, arrived in Upper Canada. Her husband, Robert Jameson, was Upper Canada's Attorney General, soon to be appointed Vice-Chancellor; though his wife had come over with some degree of hope for mending their long-standing separation and estrangement, it must be admitted that she was more hopeful of writing a book about her observations of life in Canada, particularly women's life, and perhaps, even, more determined to do so.

Her comments range over the whole of society, from the tight little oligarchy of Toronto to Chippewa Lodges at Sault Ste Marie, for her *Winter Studies and Summer Rambles in Canada* is a journal of her entire stay, the winter of 1837 in Toronto, and a three month trip in the summer, to Sault Ste Marie and back. Anna Jameson did not meet Catharine Traill or Susanna Moodie and their achievements are triumphs in the face of her conclusions, at the same time sup-

porting her opinion that it is women of their class and of superior mind and talents who are most apt to adapt well to Canadian conditions.

> I have not often in my life met with contented and cheerful-minded women, but I never met with so many repining and discontented women as in Canada. I never met with *one* woman recently settled here, who considered herself happy in her new home and country: I *heard* of one, and doubtless there are others, but they are exceptions to the general rule. . . .
>
> I have observed that really accomplished women, accustomed to what is called the best society, have more resources here, and manage better than some women who have no pretensions of any kind.
>
> Can you imagine the position of a fretful, frivolous woman, strong neither in mind or frame, abandoned to her own resources in the wilds of Upper Canada? I do not believe you *can* imagine anything so pitiable, so ridiculous, and, to borrow the Canadian word, "so shiftless." (*Winter Studies*)

She records many sad examples of ruined families: a man designated as "C", who "must sell all off, or see his wife perish before his eyes"; "Mrs. A. and Mrs. B., who came out here, as I well remember, full of health and bloom — what are they now? premature old women, sickly, careworn, without nerve or cheerfulness." Most pathetic of all is her sketch of the young woman whose husband is helpless from drink, the "Canadian nectar", as Catharine Traill called it: "a very young, very pretty, sad-looking creature, with her first baby at her bosom, whose husband was staggering and talking drunken gibberish at her side." Susanna Moodie and Catharine Traill joined Anna Jameson in designating free-flowing "spirits" as the greatest single hazard to the growth of civilized society in Upper Canada; true to her remarkable common sense, Catharine Traill enlarges on the comparatively benign qualities of beer and offers simple recipes for its brewing.

Anna Jameson does find hope for the future, however, in such settlements as the Scottish one north of Port Talbot on Lake Erie where the "Highlanders . . . bring hither all their clannish attachments, and their thrifty, dirty habits — and also their pride and their honesty." The ragged brood of ten children, speaking only Gaelic, with whom she is surrounded at Campbell's Inn, do represent a generation which may well better itself, for these people can already be considered prosperous and fortunate in their new country: "They have a property of two hundred acres of excellent land, of which sixty are cleared, and in cultivation: five cows and forty sheep." (*Winter Studies*, II). She finds hope, indeed, in all those who were "born here, or brought here by their parents." They "seemed to me very happy, and many of them had adopted a sort of pride in their country which I liked much." (*Winter Studies*, I).

In *The Imperialist*, Mrs. Crowe, who sells vegetables in the Elgin market every week, is a type of the latter, and a vindication of Anna Jameson's hope. As she waits in her farmhouse parlour which smelled of "varnish and whatever was inside the 'suite' of which [she] occupied the sofa" for the men who are coming to supper before the political meeting in the local school-house, Sara Jeannette Duncan sees in her, and quite truly so, "the sum of a certain measure of opportunity and service, an imperial figure in her bead trimming if the truth were known." Miss Duncan has romanticized Mrs. Crowe by that last epithet, but her description is infallible in its detail and its utterly convincing realism gives Mrs. Crowe both the dignity and the pathos which is her due.

> She sat on the sofa in her best black dress with the bead trimming on neck and sleeves, a good deal pushed up and wrinkled across the bosom which had done all that would ever be required of it when it gave Elmore and Abe their start in life. Her wiry hands were crossed in her lap in the moment of waiting: you could tell by the look of them that they were not often crossed there. They were strenuous hands; the whole worn figure was strenuous, and the narrow set mouth, and the eyes which had looked after so many matters for so long, and the way the hair was drawn back into a knot in a fashion that would have given a phrenologist his opportunity.

This is the Canadian verbal parallel to Grant Wood's visual "American Gothic", both representations of enormous conviction, finely balanced between a sense of achievement and of the price it has exacted.

In *Fruits of the Earth*, Frederick Philip Grove deepened and darkened the portrait to near-tragic intensity. Abe Spalding with his wife Ruth, moved from settled Brant country, in Ontario, to take up land in Manitoba. Abe is a fine, even heroic figure, of whom many of us must say with pride, "here is an ancestor." But his drive to work the land, to make it produce and to make his community a decent and prosperous oasis in the vastness of the west, leaves him no time for marriage as partnership. To the land and its demands Ruth must be sacrificed, physically exhausted and emotionally starved by her life:

> Abe had been dimly aware of changes going on about him. . . . Slow work, the work of the farm! Every step took a year. But the last step had been taken. He could afford to look back.
>
> Yes, there in the door of the kitchen, stood Ruth. That was how she looked; not a sight to make a man's glance linger. Between her heavy bust and her wide massive hips, the last trace of a waistline had vanished. In the short, wide face, the wrinkles furrowing cheeks and forehead showed a thickness of skin such as to

> preclude any delicacy in the mouldings which increasing years were bound to bring. Her expression betrayed a sense of disappointment with life.

There are thousands of such women in Canada's history. For them, as for Grove's Ruth, no effort was enough, there were no rewards of achievement or leisure to anticipate, because the land was insatiable in its demands, and so were the men whose lives were dominated by it:

> Ruth sat down at the table. The silence was full of unexpected meanings. "Abe", she said, looking first down then straight at him. "I don't know —" And tears ran down her cheeks.
> Uncomfortably he leaned back in his chair.
> "This crop," Ruth went on: "it means a future. Why build?"
> Abe gasped. "Why build? What else?"
> "We have enough to live on. Move to town."
> "Do you mean retire?"
> "Perhaps."
> "Do you know that I am not yet fifty?"
> "Well" — Ruth moved a dish with nervous fingers. "I feel sixty."

HAGAR SHIPLEY, in Margaret Laurence's *The Stone Angel*, is the culmination of all the Ruths in our fiction. Corroded and distorted by her environment and the self-willed tragedies of her life, physically grotesque in the ugliness of old age, yet Hagar is never quite dominated. Unloving and unloveable, yet wanting above all else to be loved, she is a total, completely believable, tragically mistaken human being. And before death, through the agency of the little clergyman whom she despises, but reluctantly admires as he sings a hymn for her, she comes to her moment of truth and self-knowledge:

> This knowing comes upon me so forcefully, so shatteringly, and with such a bitterness as I have never felt before. I must always, always, have wanted that — simply to rejoice. How is it I never could? I know, I know. How long have I known? Or have I always known, in some far crevice of my heart, some cave too deeply buried, too concealed. . . .
>
> Pride was my wilderness, and the demon that led me there was fear. I was alone, never anything else, and never free, for I carried my chains within me, and they spread out and shackled all I touched.

Hagar is tragic, but above all, Hagar is real, with the energy of presence of the completely successful fictional characterization. Her reality can pierce any armour

that her reader may assemble; stunning is the recognition that, though we look to the Mrs. Murchisons of our past with complacence, the Hagars have been there all the time, desperately needing our understanding, while just as desperately repelling it.

Finally and predictably, given some knowledge of Susanna Moodie's temperament and talents, we look back to her work for the first portrait-vignette in our literature of the Mrs. Crowe — Ruth — Hagar figure, and it is with a nice sense of the fitting that we find it. In her passage from rebel to the competencies and the satisfactions of the housewife-mother, Susanna had experienced the changes that a hard life made in a woman, and her fictional talent, its limitations themselves a part of the restrictions of her life, impelled her to record them. As she leaves the bush, finally, to begin a long-desired life in the comparative civilization of the town of Belleville, she describes herself as the life has made her:

> For seven years I had lived out of the world entirely: my person had been rendered coarse by hard work and exposure to the weather, I looked double the age I really was, and my hair was already thickly sprinkled with grey. I clung to my solitude.

ISABELLA VALANCY CRAWFORD

The Canoe

John B. Ower

EVEN THE CASUAL READER of the best poetry of Isabella Valancy Crawford can hardly fail to be impressed by its boldness, vigour and orginality. In passage after passage, he will meet with an extraordinary energetic imagination which, while obviously neither uneducated nor insensitive to literary influence, has succeeded in creating an art that is as distinctively individual and "Canadian" as anything in our literature. The aim of the present limited study is not so much to praise these obvious virtues of Crawford's best work as it is to suggest, by means of a relatively detailed study of her lyric "The Canoe", that in her finest pieces we have a poetry which is not only vital and distinctive, but also rich in symbolic significance and sophisticated and subtle in technique. James Reaney, in his brilliant pioneering essay on Crawford's poetry[1] has of course outlined a symbolic myth and a "grammar of images" which seem to form the backbone of her work. However, although Reaney has certainly told us a great deal about her art as a whole, I feel that Crawford is a poet of sufficient substance to warrant a closer scrutiny of some individual pieces. It is also only through a relatively close analysis of individual poems that it is really possible to show the virtuosity of Crawford's technique.

A convenient starting point for an analysis of "The Canoe" is the fact that the poem constitutes, both in the viewpoint of its narrator, the canoe, and in her account of her "masters twain", a study in the psychology of the primitive mind. Particularly notable is Crawford's remarkable awareness of the animating and

myth-making proclivities of primitive man. That is, as is evident in some of the most striking similes and metaphors in "The Canoe", the poet is familiar with the tendency of the primitive to see everything in terms of life, and of human life in particular:

> Thin, golden nerves of sly light curl'd
> Round the dun camp, and rose faint zones,
> Half way round each grim bole knit,
> Like a shy child that would bedeck
> With its soft clasp a Brave's red neck;
>
> Sinuous, red as copper snakes,
> Sharp-headed serpents, made of light,
> Glided and hid themselves in night.

Another significant aspect of Crawford's treatment of the primitive mentality is her romantic sense of its primal and direct character. In "The Canoe", as in D. C. Scott's "At Gull Lake: August 1810", the poet evidently finds in the behaviour of the "savage" Indian a sort of psychological apocalypse of the basic forces of human nature. This is particularly evident in Crawford's lyric in the love-song of the two braves, with its frank expression of impulses and emotions which at first appear scarcely less elemental than those of the hounds who dream of "the dead stag stout and lusty":

> My masters twain sang songs that wove
> (As they burnish'd hunting blade and rifle)
> A golden thread with a cobweb trifle —
> Loud of the chase, and low of love.
>
> "O Love, art thou a silver fish?
> Shy of the line and shy of gaffing,
> Which we do follow, fierce, yet laughing,
> Casting at thee the light-winged wish.

Even if "The Canoe" were simply a poetic study in the psychology of uncivilized man, it would still do considerable credit to Crawford's powers of insight and imagination. However, as Reaney has shown, Crawford is not merely a clever poetical dilettante, but an artist with a vision of sufficient dimensions to come to grips with the great questions of human existence. It is therefore reasonable to assume that her remarkable re-creation of the primitive mind in "The Canoe" is not simply an anthropological study, but possesses a wider frame of human reference. One obvious possibility follows from the supposition that Crawford sees in the primitive the direct expression of man's primal psychic impulses. This is that

she is using the mentality of the Indian in essentially the same way as Wordsworth employs that of the peasant: to exemplify or explore in the workings of a simple and uninhibited mind certain basic principles of man's psychic activity which are normally buried, suppressed or modified in the case of the civilized person. In terms of modern psychology, Crawford might be dealing in "The Canoe" with those forces which in the European normally belong to the realm of the subconscious, but which nonetheless exert a pervasive influence upon his life. It would then of course be possible that the external world as it is seen through the myth-making and animating focus of the primitive mind becomes a symbolic projection of the psychological realities with which the poet is dealing.

An analysis of "The Canoe" along the lines just proposed may begin with the love-song of the two braves. This lyric occupies a central position in Crawford's poem, and we may divine that it is intended to stand out as a kind of climax or core, to which the preceding and following lines function essentially as a prologue and epilogue. It is accordingly significant for our line of argument that the song is concerned with a paradox involving one of the fundamental impulses of man's psychic life. The paradox, which under normal circumstances would exist only in the subconscious of civilized man, is that human love in its sexual aspect is also violence, and is destructive as well as creative, death-dealing as well as life-giving:

> O Love, art thou a silver fish?
> Shy of the line and shy of gaffing,
> Which we do follow, fierce, yet laughing,
> Casting at thee the light-wing'd wish,
> . . . . . .
>
> O Love! art thou a silver deer,
> Swift thy starr'd feet as wing of swallow,
> While we with rushing arrows follow;
> And at last shall we draw near,
> And over thy velvet neck cast thongs —
> Woven of roses, of stars, of songs?

The darker aspect of sexuality is expressed in the song of the braves in terms of the pursuits of fishing and hunting. These images of force and slaughter are of course offset in the song by what Reaney would term the "golden daffodil" images of laughter, song, lily, rose, gold, silver and gems.[2] However, the manner in which the song is introduced ironically undercuts the positive implications of these images:

My masters twain sang songs that wove
(As they burnish'd hunting blade and rifle)
A golden thread with a cobweb trifle —
Loud of the chase, and low of love.

Similarly, the predominance of "golden daffodil" symbols in the second stanza of the lyric is implicitly offset by the imagery of violence and death in the line immediately following. In the primitive or sub-conscious context of "The Canoe", the creative and life-giving aspects of sexuality are thus paradoxically accompanied, and even overshadowed, by a dark lust for destruction and death. In terms of the symbolic scheme outlined by Reaney, "The Canoe" is thus a "black daffodil" poem, in which the chase of love is still essentially the dark line of the rush to annihilation. It is only near the conclusion of Crawford's poem that we receive symbolic hints that this black line is becoming the "black circle" in which evil is ordered and redeemed.[3]

The dark vision of sexuality in the love-song of the braves is reinforced by the imagery in the passages which precede and follow it. Thus, the almost domestic tenderness of the "crotic" treatment of the canoe with which Crawford's poems open is ironically undercut by the grim references to the hunting and fishing activities of the braves, which involve numerous images of shooting, stabbing, binding and hanging. We should particularly notice in the lines preceding the love-song the description of a deer, which has been shot, bound and hung from boughs:

My masters twain the Slaughter'd deer
Hung on fork'd boughs — with thongs of leather.
Bound were his stiff, slim feet together —
His eyes like dead stars cold and drear . . .

The psychological paradox just outlined, with its emphasis on the dark aspects of human sexuality, is also reflected in the animating and myth-making images of "The Canoe", of which there are several striking examples in the lines preceding the love-song of the braves.[4] It will be noted that the relevant similes and metaphors are all images of light. The source of this light is in each case the campfire of the two braves, whose designation as a "camp-soul" indicates that it serves as a symbol of the source and centre of primitive consciousness in the psychic activity of the "savage" mind. In the images under consideration, either the light of this "camp-soul" or what is revealed by it carries sinister implications of malignity. Thus, the extended simile concerning the "faint zones" of light cast by the campfire on the trunks of pine trees (11. 12-20) expresses the frightened

paralysis of human innocence and love in the face of the dark powers of cruelty and violence that reside in man. A similar sense is conveyed by the image in which the firelight becomes a human figure who lays an "anxious" hand on the foam-flecked shoulder of a hanging deer, and peers into his dead eyes. In this strange metaphor, we evidently have a recognition of the consequences of a lust for violence and slaughter in which there is a child-like mixture of fascination and fear. The two images just mentioned thus depict an essentially naïve consciousness suddenly becoming aware of the innate capacities for evil in the human soul. However, in neither of them is the firelight itself seen as something sinister, as it is when it becomes "Thin, golden nerves of sly light", or "Sharp-headed" snakes slithering into the darkness. In both of these latter images there is a suggestion, not of the naïveté which we find elsewhere in "The Canoe", but of the subtlety of the serpent who tempted Eve.

Seen with regard to the traditional value of light as a symbol of goodness, love and life, the above images with their sinister implications apparently involve an ironic reflection of the psychological paradox which Crawford is treating elsewhere in "The Canoe". In connection with "primitive" sexuality, and perhaps the whole of man's fundamental psychic life, creativity is overshadowed by destructiveness, and love by bloodlust and violence. On a symbolic level, the light of the "camp-soul" which represents the psychic life of the primitive is thus really akin to darkness. This paradox of a light which embodies blackness is suggested symbolically by the redness of the firelight in three of the above images. This colour has of course appropriate associations with blood and burning, together with its connotations of violence, lust and death. This "demonic crimson" is in turn probably intended to be contrasted with the silver fish and the silver deer of love which we find in the song of the two braves.

The symbolic pattern which runs through the myth-making and animating imagery of the "prologue" to the love-song is of course carried on into the "epilogue" in the radical simile in which "slaughter'd" fish, reddened by the light of the campfire, are compared with scimitars stained with the blood of "new-dead" wars. However, in the final myth-making image of "The Canoe", there is a reversal of the symbolic values of the images just discussed:

> The darkness built its wigwam walls
> Close round the camp, . . .

This metaphor is of course an image of darkness rather than of light, but the darkness in this case is evidently that of the "black circle," in which the line of

evil and destruction has become the whirl from which the golden daffodil will ultimately re-emerge. This positive connotation is implicit in the reference to the weaving of a wigwam wall, which is not only an image of an upward gyration,[5] but also one of creation rather than of destruction. Thus, in symbolic opposition to a light which is really darkness, we have in the last myth-making image in "The Canoe" a darkness from which light and order are beginning to be born, just as they are in the first stages of the Creation in Genesis. The nascence of light from blackness, and of cosmos from chaos, is likewise suggested in the last two lines of the poem by the white shapes, albeit still "thin-woven and uncertain", which press at the "curtain" of shadows. In psychological terms, we presumably see in the closing images of "The Canoe" a representation of the first stages of a transformation of the dark side of man's nature into sweetness and light".

"The Canoe" thus evidently constitutes a symbolic exploration of the human psyche. However, there is another of Crawford's poems which indicates that "The Canoe" has a further dimension of symbolic significance. This is the "Epilogue" to "Gisli, the Chieftain", in which the poet evidently conceives of the universe as a whole in terms of the same inextricable union of good and evil, creation and destruction, darkness and light, which we see in the primitive mind in "The Canoe."[6] This suggests that for Crawford the psychological paradox explored in "The Canoe" is really a microcosmic reflection of a metaphysical situation, and that she therefore sees a definite analogy between the constitution of man's psyche and that of the cosmos which he inhabits. This correspondence would follow as a consequence from the origin of both man and nature in the same great cosmic flower.

Whatever its basis, such an "analogical" vision would have important implications with regard to the symbolic value of Crawford's poetry. The perception of a radical correspondence between the internal and external worlds would make it possible for her to write a "double-barrelled" poetry, in which metaphysical and psychological questions were treated in one and the same set of symbolic images. The action of a poem like "The Canoe" could in this case take place within the human mind, and yet at the same time extend to embrace the whole of the cosmos. Crawford's poetry would thus involve a double apocalypse, in which the depths of man's mind and those of the universe surrounding him were simultaneously revealed.

These presumptions about the nature of Crawford's poetry are supported in the case of "The Canoe" by the way in which certain of the images in the poem override the logical distinction between man and the world which he inhabits.

Thus, we have the similes and metaphors in which external phenomena are represented in anthropomorphic terms, together with those of the song of the braves in which human love becomes a fish and a deer, and a wish is represented as "light-wing'd". Such imagery of course implies that for Crawford man's psyche and the external world are in some manner analogous, and therefore imaginatively interchangeable. The same implication is also conveyed, although less directly, by the images in "The Canoe" which confound the extensions of man's personality in the world of art with the "untouched" realm of nature. The poet's representation of fire-lit fishes as swords and scimitars, and the play of shadows around the camp as the weaving of wigwam walls, have already been noted. Such representation of the outside world in human terms, and vice versa, point towards a poetry in which a close correspondence is seen between man's inner life and the external universe, and which could therefore deal simultaneously with both. Thus, the outlook of the primitive in "The Canoe" may very well involve not only a psychological projection, but also a metaphysical vision. It would then represent an insight into an external world which displays the same paradoxical union of good and evil, death and life, light and darkness which we have in the depths of man's mind.

If "The Canoe" really does function symbolically on two levels, what would be the significance of its dual revelation in terms of the frame of reference provided by Crawford's overall vision of man and the universe? How could the double apocalypse of the poem fit into the Biblical pattern of Creation, Fall, Redemption and Apocalypse which Reaney sees as the backbone of Crawford's poetic system?[7] To put a further question which is closely related to the first two, what message could "The Canoe" be meant to convey to the civilized European who is the poet's intended audience? On the psychological level, we have already indicated that the primitive outlook of "The Canoe" is intended to illustrate a sinister paradox in the fundamentals of human psychology, which would in turn be of basic importance for civilized man, even if in his case it were suppressed or buried below the level of his normal consciousness. In terms of the Biblical schema which Reaney sees as providing the "bigger subjects" of poetry, this inseparable union of creativity and destructiveness, good and evil, in man's basic mental activities may be seen as the psychological aspect of his fallen state, with its frightening ramifications of his life. For Crawford, this fallen condition is presumably shared by the savage and the civilized man alike. In the case of the European at least, its negative side may be repressed or sublimated through the censorship of morality, but this control is at best imperfect, and for Crawford it

will never bring humanity back to heaven. The good and evil, creation and destruction, which are so intimately linked in the depth of the human psyche are in fact complementary aspects of the "golden daffodil" unity which is man's spiritual goal, and both are necessary for its attainment. What is needed is not for man to attempt to suppress the evil side of his fallen nature, but rather to organize and transform it by means of his powers of creativity and love. In order for him to do so, it is necessary for him to plunge into its darkness, as Dante descends into the Inferno on his way to God.[8] Only by so doing will man's nature finally be redeemed, and return to its unfallen unity. The Indian braves of "The Canoe" may be seen as pointing out this dark journey which must be taken by all men, including the European, in order to achieve redemption. The emphasis in "The Canoe" falls upon the negative aspect of this process although, as we have seen, there is a symbolic suggestion at the end of the poem of the ordering and transmuting of the evil in man.

The significance of "The Canoe" on a metaphysical level can be best approached by a consideration of the wilderness landscape of the poem as it is seen by the primitive mind. In all probability, the forest whose trees become grim warriors in the light of the "camp-soul" represents for Crawford what Blake terms "Eututhon Benython": the dark wood into which the Garden of Eden has degenerated as a consequence of the Fall.[9] Nature, instead of being subordinate to man as it was in the prelapsarian world, is now an independent enormity which surrounds humanity and threatens to overwhelm it. Like the evil within his soul, this menacing Leviathan must be redeemed through a process of organization and re-creation. As Reaney points out in connection with "Malcolm's Katie", Crawford sees the task of the European in the New World as being the redemption of the dark wood by converting it into a garden once again.[10] However, in order to "save" the wilderness, he must first plunge into it like the Indian braves of "The Canoe", and temporarily experience the terrors of its darkness. This preliminary step in the process of redeeming nature is of course analogous to the psychological plunge into his own fallen soul which is an essential part of man's return to the golden daffodil. In fact, Crawford undoubtedly sees the two processes as being inseparably related in actual practise. The settling of a country like Canada would involve for her a simultaneous redemption of both the outer and inner worlds. In "The Canoe", Crawford emphasizes the essential element of evil and terror which is involved in this re-creative process, with only suggestions towards the end of the poem of the rebirth of light and order from darkness and chaos.

In the course of this analysis, it has been indicated that the poet's "myth" and imagery have in "The Canoe" both a psychological and a metaphysical reference, exploring simultaneously the spiritual secrets of man's mind and those of the universe. This symbolic richness is accompanied in "The Canoe" by a subtle sense of paradox and a skilful use of irony which make the poem seem surprisingly modern, and which might not be expected from an artist as thoroughly romantic as is Crawford. These merits of "The Canoe" should serve to indicate that at her best the poet deserves neither the apologetic tone which Reaney sometimes adopts towards her,[11] nor yet damnation with faint praises.

FOOTNOTES

[1] See James Reaney, "Isabella Valancy Crawford," in *Our Living Tradition*, ed. Robert L. McDougall (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1957).
[2] Reaney, *op. cit.*, pp. 276-279.
[3] *Ibid.*, pp. 276-277.
[4] "The Canoe," 11. 12-20, 24-26 and 31-38.
[5] Reaney, *op. cit.*, pp. 277-278.
[6] *Ibid.*, 279-280.
[7] *Ibid.*, p. 275.
[8] *Ibid.*, pp. 279-280.
[9] Northrop Frye, *Fearful Symmetry* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1947), p. 380.
[10] Reaney, *op. cit.*, pp. 286-287.
[11] *Ibid.*, pp. 270-271.

chronicle

LITERARY UNDERGROUND

Little Magazines in Canada

Wynne Francis

To AFICIONADOS it is no news that about twenty Little Magazines are now being published in Canada. Other readers less familiar with this type of periodical are likely to confuse it with several other kinds of literary magazine. For a truer appreciation of what the Little Magazine is, therefore, we may first consider what it is not.

The Little Magazine is not a small magazine hoping to become a Big Magazine. Big Magazines are commercial enterprises thriving on advertising, public sales and wide circulation. They appeal to a large segment of the general public whose opinions they tend to reflect and perhaps to mould. Their range of material is broad, with an emphasis on current affairs. Their interest in literature is minimal or peripheral, exploiting the sensational or human interest angle of the contemporary world of letters. Occasionally they include original creative pieces but these tend to be selected as bait for public controversy or because the writer is a celebrity. Today, in Canada, the most interesting Big Magazine (I am concerned only with those displaying some literary pretensions) is *Parallel*, now in its fourth issue and still trying its bright and earnest best to be really big and really good. Impressive as it may be in its own category, *Parallel* represents almost everything the Little Magazine holds in anathema.

Nor does the Little Magazine, if it is true to its calling, hanker to become a Small Magazine, though the dividing line here is sometimes wavering and faint. As distinct from the Big Magazine, the Small Magazine appeals to a more select segment of readers. These are most often college-bred with a developed taste for "the Arts" and for "Literature" in particular. The Small Magazine comprises two

types: the scholarly or critical journal which is academically oriented and the independent periodical which mingles contemporary imaginative writing of various kinds with criticism and reviews. Both types are professionally produced, the academic journal being subsidized to this end by the university, the independent journal relying heavily on grants from the Canada Council and other foundations. Neither type could subsist on advertising (which in their case is mostly of the goodwill brand) or on subscriptions.

Of these two types of Small Magazine the independent journal is closer to the Little Magazine but there are still some very basic distinctions. The independent Small Magazine is run on a business basis. Once established, it pays its contributors, it actively campaigns for subscriptions and it appears regularly as scheduled. The tone of such a magazine is mature, urbane, liberal; its policy is clear and consistent; its material is drawn from the best established contemporary writers. Though it occasionally publishes the work of an unknown it displays an uncanny ability to pick up-and-coming talents on the eve of their public success. The longer it lives the more such a magazine tends to acquire an air of wisdom, dignity and stability and the less likely it is to reflect the sensibility and aspirations of the young or the avant-garde.

Canada has several good, well-established Small Magazines. Of the academic type, *Queen's Quarterly* and *Canadian Literature* may stand as liberal examples. Among independent journals, *Tamarack Review* and *The Canadian Forum* (despite differences in format and coverage) are of undisputed superiority. Taken as a whole, however, the Small Magazine reflects the sensibility of the intelligent liberal bourgeois and as such it constitutes The Establishment — a veritable *bête noire* of the Little Magazine world.

We are now gaining a perspective in which to view the Little Magazine proper, but we must first take note of a common error which is the source of much confusion. The term "Little Magazine" is often stretched to include several kinds of periodical which in fact exist in a literary limbo between the authentic Little Magazine and the independent Small Magazine. It is actually in this limbo, suspended between two worlds, that we find most of Canada's literary journals. By limbo I mean that state in which a literary magazine is uncertain of its direction, is unsure of the nature and potential extent of its public and therefore displays a wavering, eclectic or ambivalent policy. The affluence of Canadian society may be responsible for the appearance in the last few years of a large number of such magazines, several of them quite handsome productions. And perhaps it will take an economic recession to reduce the number to one in more realistic

proportion to the actual size of the reading public. Meanwhile such periodicals remain insecure and ambivalent. Since they are professionally produced, they require money and thus find themselves in competition with each other and with the Small Magazines for subscribers, advertising and grants. On the other hand, they are sympathetic to young, new and experimental writers and their lists of contributors partially overlap those of the Little Magazine. As financial pressures increase, however, these magazines in limbo have only this choice: to perish, or to conform more strictly to Small Magazine standards — which means in effect to abandon their flirtation with the world of the Little Magazine. Examples of Canadian magazines currently existing in literary limbo are *Edge, Evidence, Cyclic, Quarry* and the new *Wascana Review* and *West Coast Review*. Several of these have demonstrable potentialities as Small Magazines — particularly *Edge* — but it hardly seems likely that Canada can support them all. None of them, except perhaps *Evidence*, should be confused with the Little Magazine.

THE LITTLE MAGAZINE is radically different from anything we have so far considered. Money — though it does require some — is the least of its concerns. It is not a business enterprise and it is characteristically run in a most unbusiness-like fashion. Frequently it is typed (and reproduced by mimeograph or some such inexpensive means) on cheap paper, its pages being roughly stapled together without a cover. The production of an issue is a labour of love on the part of the editor and the volunteers he is able to gather around him. The magazine is usually begun with intent to publish regularly but it typically lives precariously from issue to issue and is apt to be "published whenever". Little Magazines do not attract and rarely seek paid advertisements. They do rather faithfully advertise each other and the publications of Little Presses, on an exchange basis, without any money changing hands. The charge for subscriptions is minimal — hopefully enough to pay for office materials and postage. But the normal financial state of a Little Magazine is that it is in debt and the editor and his friends are broke. A few editors, fortunate enough to have rich relatives or fairy godmothers, manage to afford paper covers for their mags, and may even get them into print by way of a hand-press which they have purchased and learned to operate. Occasionally Little Mags are sent out to professional printers, though this is a costly risk. On the one hand, reputable printers and type-setters frequently refuse to print the contents of such periodicals. On the other, when a Little Magazine becomes appearance-proud, it is tempted to seek paid advertise-

ments, subscriptions and grants to meet its printer's bills. It is then on its way to limbo, gradually shedding its Little Mag character and moving towards the category of the Small Magazine.

Physical appearance is not a significant feature of the Little Magazine. Titles on the other hand, are. They are carefully chosen — sometimes with intent to signify policy — *Moment, Island, Delta, Contact, Yes, Now* — sometimes merely to avoid the obvious, the traditional, the respectable, and sometimes, with tongue in cheek to baffle and discourage the uninitiated. *Tish* sounds innocuous enough until you realize it is a scrambled word; *Blew Ointment* (deliberately misspelled) has obscurely repugnant connotations; *Civ/n* is cryptic (an Ezra Pound code word for civilization); *Intercourse* and *Up the Tub With One I Open* are titles most readers would hesitate to ask for in a library or a bookstore.

Little Mags are not, of course, usually found in bookstores and libraries, and "most readers" never come across them. Little Mags, on principle, do not seek public exposure. In fact, they are most often antipathetic to the public. Neither do they often engage in vigorous campaigns for writers or readers. Their subscribers and their contributors, often interrelated, characteristically form a private, intimate audience with a small regional cluster but extending to a thinly-scattered minority across the continent and perhaps even abroad. Moreover, it is a "given" audience, more often seeking than sought out by the magazine. The Little Magazine, in other words, has no problem identifying its audience — its readers are self-initiated members of a cult who recognize each other by certain attitudes and enthusiasms which prevail in Little Magazines circles.

In fact, the entire Little Magazine movement, including the Little Presses often associated with it, constitutes an underground literary culture which extends, by an intricate and tenuous network, throughout most of the Western World.

This literary underground had its origins in the cénacle publications which began to appear before the turn of the century in Europe. Such periodicals emerged in resistance to the debasement of literary values imposed by the popular commercial press. The function of the cénacle periodical was to ensure freedom for the creative imagination, to provide outlets for experimental writing and to foster the talents of new or unknown writers. The idea spread rapidly to the United States and such periodicals from both sides of the Atlantic were clearly responsible for the launching of the Modern movement in literature. The early careers of such masters as Eliot, Pound, Lawrence, Joyce, Stein, Williams and many another were intimately bound up with magazines like *Blast, Vortex, Criterion, Poetry* (Chicago), *Dial, Exile.*

The Little Magazine as a successor to the cénacle magazine is less attractive in appearance, less durable physically, but more ubiquitous, plentiful and powerful. It is the result of what may be called the mimeograph revolution — an inexpensive technique of reproduction which released editors from the financial onus born by the printed cénacle magazines. The subsequent increase in numbers of Little Magazines has been phenomenal. In the United States alone there are said to be between four and six hundred. Exact figures are hard to come by because of the ephemeral nature of these publications. But as the magazines multiply so do the numbers of readers and writers who discover in this genre both a means of resisting the surface culture and an opportunity to release thwarted creative energy.

The Little Magazine is essentially subversive — not in a narrow political sense but by its profound and radical aversion to prevailing cultural values. It is significant that its proliferation has been concurrent with the spread of modern urban culture — the type of society, that is, wherein commercialism, mass-production and middle-class conformity combine to corrupt and inhibit the creative imagination. Little Magazines emerge in defiant relation to such a culture wherever it is established. Their function — indeed their mission in regard to it — is at once subversive and redemptive.

It is not surprising that a literary movement with these origins and aims should be characterized by radical experiments with language. Up to the present at least, language has been the prime vehicle of culture. As a man lives so will he write — and read. Thus the Little Magazine, striking at the roots of the prevailing culture, spends some of its energy attacking the rhetoric of that culture and the rest in exploring the untapped resources of language, and the potential of other media of communication in the hope of discovering new values and new idioms in which to express them.

Such preoccupations account for the "far-out" nature of the contents of many Little Magazines. Much of the material is not offered as "literature" — a word which connotes established and conservative modes. It follows that such contents cannot often be judged by traditional literary standards. Some Little Magazines are not so radically avant-garde, of course, but all of them are alert to the need for new values and the search for fresh modes. That is their function; that is why they attract young writers, experimental and unconventional writers; and it is why they seldom seek or find readers unsympathetic to these aims. They also, unfortunately, attract a variety of malcontents, professional beatniks and middle-aged teenagers. These provide whatever notoriety accrues to Little Magazines

but they should not be mistaken for the main constituency of the genre. The Little Magazine as an international phenomenon is sustained not by clowns, fools or dilettantes but by sober and dedicated seekers after radically new premises for human worth.

Not all these generalizations apply to every Little Magazine, of course. Some Mags are frivolous; some are anarchic; some are surprisingly conservative; some are partisan; and every one naturally feels that it is unique, as well as being a link in the international network. The generalizations here offered have been intended to distinguish the Little Magazine as a genre from other literary periodicals and to prepare us thereby to view some Canadian Little Magazines in their proper perspective.

THE LITTLE MAGAZINE made its first genuine appearance in Canada in the early Forties — at a time, that is, when this country began to exhibit clearly the characteristics of a modern urban society. It was the function, then, of Little Mags like *Contemporary Verse*, *Preview*, *First Statement* and *Direction* to subvert the prevailing literary values of a lingering genteel Romanticism and to establish Modern poetry in Canada. (*Northern Review*, which emerged at the end of that decade is an example of a Little Magazine which forsook its avant-garde mission and was eventually transformed into one of Canada's important Small Magazines.)

During the Fifties another rash of Little Mags erupted — *Contact*, *Civ/n*, *Combustion*, *Moment*, *Delta*, to name a few. All of these played their role of keeping Modern literature alive in Canada, of fostering new talent, and of steering Canadian letters into the contemporary international stream. (It is perhaps worth noting that it was mainly in the pages of such magazines that the talents of Irving Layton, Raymond Souster and Alfred Purdy were fostered, but it would be a grave mistake to deduce from this that the Little Mag is a mere stepping stone to fame and fortune.)

All the magazines so far mentioned are now defunct, including *Delta*, which has been recently absorbed by *Yes*. But the Sixties have provided Canada with another bumper crop of Little Mags. Their addresses range from coast to coast with high concentrations in Ontario and British Columbia. But though they may be regional in origin, they are international in scope. No authentic Little Mag is nationalistic in purpose, though it may naturally give greater attention to writers

in its own country. (However, a very new one called *Now* may prove the exception — its advance notice has a lot to say about Canadianism.)

From eastern Canada come, curiously enough, the less radical examples. *Fiddlehead* (New Brunswick) and *Yes* (Montreal) both retain a hold on the traditional literary sensibility while welcoming fresh renditions of it. Their role lies not so much in the experimental area as in encouraging new writers and in giving attention to older writers whose work has so far been ignored or insufficiently publicized. An example is the current issue of *Yes* devoted to the work of John Glassco. It is interesting to speculate as to whether the policies of *Yes* will be modified by its absorption of *Delta* which used to be considerably more avant-garde. As they stand now, *Fiddlehead* is eclectic in policy and modest in format, while *Yes* is given to dramatic covers, experimental format and numerous illustrations. From Montreal also comes *Intercourse,* conservatively modern in a rough, tough way but with a refreshing note of humour. It views both itself and its readers ironically.

The Western magazines are much more partisan and experimental. *Tish* (Vancouver) has been largely responsible for introducing "New Wave" poetry into Canada. It is preoccupied with a radically new poetics derived from the so-called Black Mountain poets Olson, Duncan and Creeley. *Imago* (Calgary) fosters a modified version of the *Tish* æsthetic and is dedicated to the long poem or series of poems. *Island, Ganglia* and *Weed* are carrying the Black Mountain gospel to central and Eastern Canada. (*Island* has just spawned a wee one called *Is,* dedicated to the Occasional Poem.)

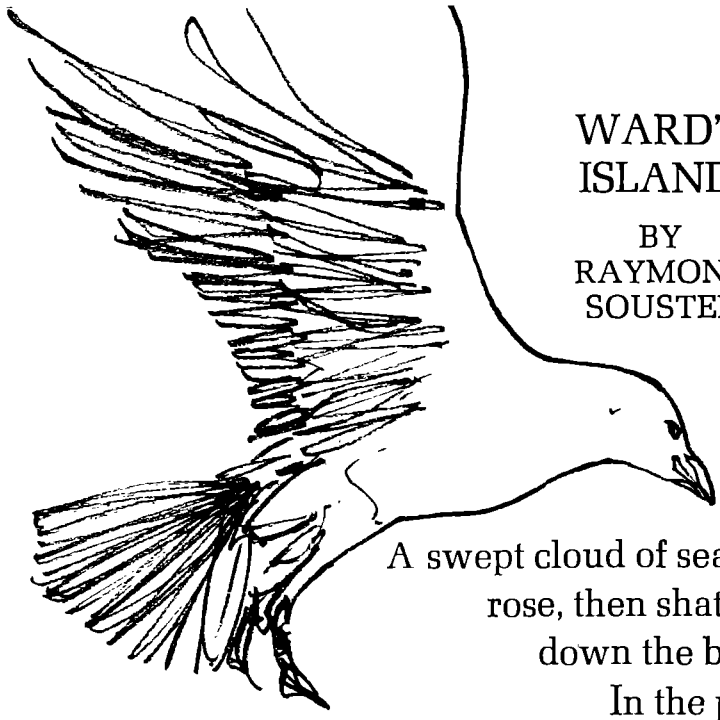
Open Letter (Victoria) is an intimate in-group mag circulated mainly among *Tish* alumni. It is designed, however, as an open forum for debate on poetry. Readers who are at ease in the Black Mountain idiom may wish to participate. The magazine is free on request.

Blew Ointment (Vancouver) is the most radically experimental of Canada's Little Mags. Neo-Dadaist in conception, it often uses the typewriter as a drawing pencil. It exhibits a typical avant-garde tendency to strain against the limits of language as we know it, and to subject it to graphic and film techniques in order to release its visual potentialities.

Perhaps the most original Little Mag in Canada is *Alphabet* (London, Ontario). Subtitled as "dedicated to the iconography of the imagination," *Alphabet* explores the mythic dimensions of literary expression and the calligraphic and ideographic potentialities of language.

The avant-garde in recent years has tended to favour forms of expression in which several arts are mingled. The affinity of Beat poetry and jazz is an example;

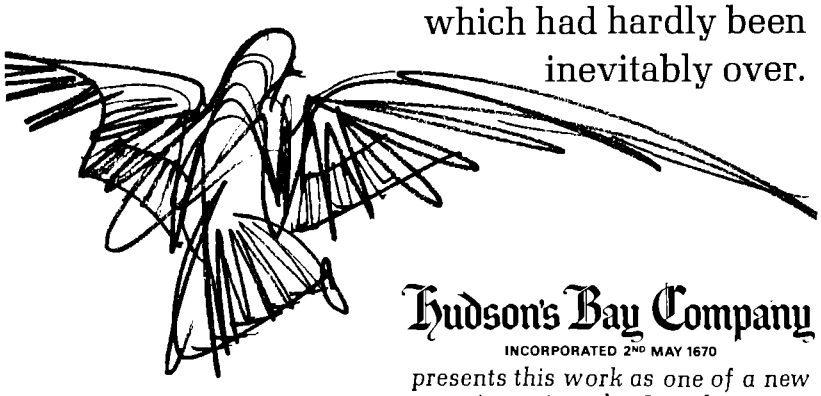
and more recently the mixing of folk-singing and poetry. The latest Little Mag in Canada seems to have something like this in mind. It combines an interest in pop art with a literary folksiness of the Bobbie Dylan variety. It is appropriately called *Pop-See-Cul.*



WARD'S ISLAND

BY
RAYMOND
SOUSTER

A swept cloud of seagulls
rose, then shattered
down the beach.
In the pause
that hung in the turbulence,
two mallards with wing-stroke
of patience, strength of all
continent-crossers, arrowed down
evening-empty sands, leaving summer
which had hardly been
inevitably over.



review articles

AVISON AND WEVILL

John Robert Colombo

MARGARET AVISON, *The Dumbfounding*. George J. McLeod. $5.75 (cloth).
DAVID WEVILL, *A Christ of the Ice-Floes*. Macmillan of Canada. $3.75.

1.1 MARGARET AVISON is sitting in a park. Her attention is caught by the newly-painted park benches and by the sparrows leaving their marks in the dust of the bird-baths. Only then does her eye catch the sight of the man in the park who is wearing a striped shirt and reading a newspaper. Avison has excellent eyesight and is able to note he is reading an account of an astronaut who feels (in the words of the newspaper) "excellent under the conditions of weightlessness." For a moment, for her, the newspaper-reader is a "newspaper-astronaut." Both read on further: "At the time of this report he / was smiling." She discerns a smile on the man's face and guesses that he too feels excellent and weightless and is smiling.

This is from "In a Season of Unemployment," one of the sixty poems in Margaret Avison's second book *The Dumbfounding*. It is an excellent poem but an unusual one in which the reader is at a loss to know what the poet is up to until he has read the last word of the last stanza. Avison takes her readers on a kind of "mystery tour" in which surprise is all. "In a Season of Unemployment" is a characteristic poem and one I want to return to.

1.2 David Wevill is prowling through a rain forest and because he carries a gun is identifiable as a hunter. When he comes upon a river, he fishes and the assumption is he is now a fisherman. He hooks a wildcat, so he concedes he might be a dreamer who would "walk, lung'd, with the wet of the rain forest." Finally he is on all fours, "a manhandled fish." Then he gasps for breath and dies and decides he is really a dead man. All manner of dying accounts for his death. Now he is but a fragment or even a figment of something else, whatever men care to call him.

This comes from "The Voice of Colonel Fawcett," one of fifty poems in *A Christ of the Ice-Floes*, David Wevill's second book. I find the idea of the poem stays with me because the search for a personal identity involves both what a man is and what others think he is, as well as what a man does, which is existential. A sense of identity is achieved through "what men come to know," but over and above this the poet tells us that the true man-for-all-seasons is an "explorer, lost in his mind" (in the poem, this is Colonel Fawcett, presumably; in real life, the poet and all other men, possibly).

2.1 What intrigues me about Margaret Avison's work is the utter selflessness of the poet — Keats' "negative capability" in action. Someone once wrote that what really excited Stéphane Mallarmé to write his poem was the sight of a blank sheet of paper. What excites Avison is particles of experience which at odd angles bombard the retinas in her eyes and in her poems are turned into atomic particles. In a typical poem they accumulate to the point of "critical mass" and explode in the reader's mind. The bits of "felt life" (in Henry James' phrase) are so microscopically minute they would be lost on most people if Avison was not there to point them out.

Generally her poetry works in a very contemporary and very American way. The reader has to do away with all prior conceptions of what a poem should be and what the world is. Then on the atomic level the world is built up again. When the poem explodes in the reader's mind, we are back again in the real world, not a world greatly different from the one we suspended disbelief in, but one with fewer shadows, and the reader, for his trouble, has acquired a periscope or two to peer around a few corners. It is a half-truth to say we enter Avison's world when what happens is that we are entered by her world. She assumes the reader's mind is a *tabula rasa*. This is American and "projectivist", but it is also Chinese and "traditional". We are always distinguishing between Occidental and Oriental ways of thinking without really realizing that art is neither Eastern nor Western but inherent in the human imagination which knows no real geography. But her work is Chinese in the sense that an ideogram is characteristically Chinese. If a word in a Western language can be defined in a deductive manner, and an ideogram's meaning derived or discovered inductively, Avison's poems are more ideogrammatic than verbal. She is very Chinese in that she places impression beside impression, and even if her poems are eight pages long (as one is in *The Dumbfounding*), she is writing in the spirit of the haiku.

2.2 The interesting thing about David Wevill's work is that by and large exactly the opposite is occurring. The reader of a Wevill poem is expected to make a hundred connections of his own, not just the surprising ones of the poet. The mind is not a *tabula rasa* at all but a booming, buzzing confusion hoping for a sense of order and achieving it in a series of kinetic connections. The traditional connections are part of the knowing process. Society and common sense are partners in his poems. Someone who hunts is, after all, a hunter; a man who fishes, an angler. The species naturally belongs to the genus — or does it? Up to a point the part subsumes the whole, and it is this point that interests Wevill, the intersection of past knowledge and the poet's knowledge. Man is more than someone with a gun or a fishing rod; man is all men, even a dead man, and the explorer's "maps" are manuals "to the mapless Atlantic roots".

Wevill's vision is not visionary but extremely traditional and even typical of the English poets from the New Apocalypse and on. He may not be in the forefront when it comes to opening up new doors of perception, but at least he has the comfort of knowing his work interacts with the poetry of the past and most of the poetry of the present, and that readers will feel at home with him, although his vision of animal, vegetable,

mineral and human life is as appalling as the apocalypse itself. His first book won an untold number of awards which suggests that the English see him as both serious and successful. He is being conspired into the role of an English Robert Lowell, but it is unlikely that his work will develop the intellectual density of the New England poet.

3.0 A too-hasty reaction to "In a Season of Unemployment" and "The Voice of Colonel Fawcett" would see them as instances of diametrically opposed poetic theories: Avison the "projectivist", Wevill the "traditionalist". With a bit of digging, a perverse reader could argue that both poets have written poems in the other camp, and that Avison's "Bestialities" is traditional and Wevill's "Love-Stones" is projective. This is as fruitless as discussions of "stance" and "technique" always are. But since both poets relate centrally to major issues, let me show how the poets differ through their relations to spiritual matters.

4.1 I keep remembering the sad poet Hart Crane when I read *The Dumbfounding,* a poet symptomatic of the failure to build a bridge out of his own craft and consciousness to span the abyss between the public world and the world of private perceptions. Crane was not unaware of the fact he was in the league of the Pontifex Maximus, the other bridge-builder, who boasted not only a map of the terrain but also a systematic way of erecting his structures. Margaret Avison has a map too but no systematic way of going about the business of bringing the spiritual to bear on the temporal. There are so many religious poems in the middle section of *The Dumbfounding* that it's hard not to read her sad but always human poems as a gloss on a set of given ideas like those in the Gospels. Many of her poems are biblical marginalia, and one even has this revealing title "A Child: Marginalia on an Epigraph" in which the source of the epigraph is the Scriptural texts in Matthew and Luke which present the child as coming to Christ. The child is "too long for the / not enough out of the light yet / to be filled, / fullness." The poem is purposely oblique and serves the poet's purpose of both suggesting the full significance of her Christian acquiescence and not suggesting it simultaneously. She has it both ways and is both secular and spiritual in the same poem.

It's safe to say Margaret Avison is the only poet (in English Canada at least) who writes like a Christian, assuming Christianity's values, willing to be consumed by them. Like Crane's failure, her failure, if it can be counted a failure, is the peculiar and feminine diffidence she brings to her religious writing. She is aware of writing a poem first and a religious poem second, unlike Donne who was always aware Christian doctrine was around the corner. With doctrine not around the corner these days, Avison's poems are Protestant rather than Catholic, Quaker rather than United Church, and quietistic rather than activistic. She eschews the power and panache of the Catholic liturgy and accepts instead a somewhat bleak view of the "suffering servant", always faced with the pain of perception but not always certain even of the hope of salvation. Avison believes and affirms, but exactly what she affirms I find it impossible to decide in light of her poems.

4.2 The sadness of Hart Crane was not lost on David Wevill either. "Thirty-three years ago today / Hart Crane thought twice, and chose the sea," the first lines of "The Sounding," with their air of *déjà vu*. I suspect Wevill is not a believing Christian; at least in his poetry he isn't, because all the affirmations there are are humanistic and imaginative. There are sacrificial acts in his poems (like the Crane suicide), but these are judged through their viewers who often, as in measurements with the atomic microscope, upset the observation. The act of perception "Makes every man a stranger to himself, / Both Christ and tempter." No matter where he turns, there is no escaping "the accumulation of alien eyes" whose gaze turns a nonentity into a celebrity, or a sacrifice into a suicide, or a selfish act into something so indescribably selfish it goes against all reason and all right.

For Wevill to be a Christian, a man must be a hermit shielded from all eyes and hearts. Otherwise "You cannot *begin* again." This is particularly bleak and is willing to find its spiritual centre in the Middle Ages (which can never be returned). When we are out of something, the past begins to smell of roses without the thorns. It's a toss-up between Christ and the tempter these days, although it might not have been so then. Wevill is out of the Christian period. He is, as they say, post-Christian. He affirms but doesn't really believe in anything.

5. The human imagination generates images of angels and demons, gods and devils, Supermen and Fu Manchus. A man without culture is a man haunted by these images; and as he is unable to control them, they control him. A poet working within a traditional order of images has all the power of that order behind him before he gets started, although he then faces the problem of doing something different with the same data. Margaret Avison toys with these possibilities; David Wevill looks back nostalgically at them and then abandons them. In the meantime, the demonic and apocalyptic imagery circles overhead like so many hawks and doves. So I am driven to the conclusion that neither poet really comes to terms with spiritual reality, although both assume a prayerful attitude — piety in the case of Avison, regret in the case of Wevill. But since both are such accomplished and fine poets, let me not define them by what they are not, but rather by what they seem to me to be.

6.1 The Chinese have perfected a skill which cures the afflictions of a patient through the use of long, shiny needles which they deliver into the patient's flesh at prescribed points. If the head hurts, there's a point in the toe where a good pinprick will take the pain away. The skill is called acupuncture, and it's either an art or a science, depending on how you view the matter. Margaret Avison practises acupuncture in her poetry, and it's always a surprise how a tiny stab in the toe will unsettle the reader in his head. Break up the habitual order of associations, and the disease is cured, the acupuncturist-Avison says.

6.2 The Germans perfected another skill which proposes to remedy the root causes of any psychical affliction through a discussion and dredging-up process. This is called psychoanalysis. Remove the roots and the tree will go away; the symptoms will take care of themselves, say the psychoanalysists. (The passage of time between the sessions helps too). David Wevill is a lay analyst who conjures up your experiences and ideals and sets them before your own disbelieving eyes. Only then are you able to disown them and thereby re-enfranchise yourself in a new way. Wevill owes much to dream psychology and its literary equivalent, surrealism.

7.0 I suppose the debased Western form of acupuncture is chiropractic, and the popular New York fascination with psychoanalysis is a symptom of abnormal behaviour all its own. Both practitioners have something of the quack in them, although their cures could form queues. Both Avison and Wevill are real and unreal as poets, but neither has made the unreal a part of his real world. Both poets are writing a beautiful, faintly troubled poetry, and I can delight in the new perceptions of *The Dumbfounding* and revel in the array of images in *A Christ of the Ice-Floes*. In fact, I can recommend both books, but as parts rather than wholes. Yet when it comes to soul-saving poetry or testaments of deeply troubled souls, neither poet is physician enough to cure the coma of the man asleep in his own body.

EPIC MISERIES

Marya Fiamengo

GEORGE RYGA, *Ballad of a Stone Picker*. Macmillan.

WHAT GEORGE RYGA'S NOVEL, *Ballad of a Stone Picker*, brings to life is the epic misery of poverty, the dreariness, the monotony, the stark tragedy. The book is both specifically Canadian in setting and universal in implication. The setting is northern Alberta; it could be Calabria, Sicily, Greece, India, wherever the land and climate is harsh, life hard, work unremitting.

What is *Ballad of a Stone Picker* about? Among other things, it is about suffering. About how to remain human in the midst of suffering. It is about

defeat and endurance, disappointment and stoic resignation. It is what its title implies — a *ballad*, a string of episodic narrative tales with a repetitive refrain and an inconclusive ending. Like many ballads, the story it tells is bleak, some of the episodes are monotonous and repetitive, but the final cumulative effect is powerful and moving.

Mr. Ryga writes with simplicity and power, and the landscape which he presents the reader is at once realistic and strongly symbolic. The tale is simple, a sequence of sketches tells the story of a Ukrainian family and their neighbours living in northern Alberta, a land of scrub willow, poplar, and ubiquitous clay soil, dusty and drought dry in summer, sticky wet and clammy in the brief rains.

> This clay the same clay you can't walk through when it gets wet won't stay down when it dries into dust.

The novel opens with a sharp evocation of the landscape and a vivid image of the soil whose clay and rock comes to stand in fact for the mortal clay of human life, the kind of life these people lead in this gaunt terrain. Against this background the inhabitants of the area emerge, make a few gestures, futile, poignant, melodramatic, occasionally comic, frequently tragic, and then disappear. The narrator is the second son, the one who stays behind to farm in order to support the bright promise of the family, Jim, the Rhodes scholar who dies a futile self-inflicted death in England.

The book which ends in a crescendo of misery depicts the defeat of human hope but not the defeat of the human spirit. The narrator sees the meagre family resources completely depleted in order to bring his brother's body home from England. He ends burying his father and being totally rejected by his mother who has taken refuge in religion. At twenty-eight he is old, the woman he loves married to someone else, the sacrifice he has made for his brother useless, his mother utterly alienated; yet there is no surrender to corrosive self pity but rather an ultimate clarity about what life, the land, and fate have done to him.

> Then it came to me — the truth I had never realized before — the truth Nancy Burla saw when she married the doctor. These arms were all I had and all that anybody had ever wanted. Anybody — my mother, those who hired stone pickers, and Nancy Burla. They were the reason for my life. Here was my strength and my food and my bed.

The truth of the narrator's existence is summed up in terms of simple human fortitude.

Mr. Ryga's final chapter redeems by a relentless intensity, an ultimate candour, and an ultimate compassion, a tendency to include material not strictly relevant to the overall structure of the book. Some of the characterization and narrative does not mesh with the central theme except as peripheral embroidery. These sketches are effective and well wrought in themselves. They display George Ryga's talent for a spare economy of narration combined with vividness of detail and telling dialogue, but they also serve as a digression which impedes rather than intensifies or amplifies the main theme.

Part of the problem here is that George Ryga's technique has a primarily visual and oral flavour. What Mr. Ryga achieves is not epic — he lacks the grandeur of the epic; nor tragic drama, although he achieves at times the compelling commentary of a Greek chorus;

but rather the heroic scope of the ballad which he combines with the naturalism of a Gorki. This is not to say that the book is in any way eclectic or self-conscious. It is one of the least self-conscious novels to appear in Canada recently. I've only to think of Leonard Cohen's *Beautiful Losers* which, for all its brilliance, is deeply self-conscious, to be reinforced in my opinion of the candid strength of this novel. Nor is *Ballad of a Stone Picker* naïve — it is a conscious and sophisticated work for all its apparent directness and simplicity. It evinces an imagination powerful, open, direct, deeply engaged with reality, and, within its own limitations, fully certain of itself.

One could quibble, of course, with what Mr. Ryga is doing to the novel form, cavil with his characterization, join those eminent journalists in the East who object to the melodramatic social realism of *The Hungry Hills*, Mr. Ryga's first novel, "a dip into the wallows of the West with proper social meaning prose." But let Mr. Ryga take heart; Webster was melodramatic, Gorki was melodramatic, Kazantzakis was melodramatic, occasionally even eminent Eastern journalists, slipping into the hyperboles of wit, become critically melodramatic.

George Ryga has moved from the gaunt intensity of *The Hungry Hills* into the spare yet more complex awareness of *Ballad of a Stone Picker*. He gives every indication of being an original and powerful talent. He may amaze us all, if he is not seduced by television forever and ever. Even for television, however, George Ryga writes with the force and impact of a poet.

THE SENSE OF THE WORD

Keith Harrison

HENRY BEISSEL, *New Wings for Icarus*. The Coach House Press.
J. MICHAEL YATES, *Hunt in an Unmapped Interior*. Golden Quill Press. $4.00.
J. MICHAEL YATES, *Canticle for Electronic Music*. Morriss Printing Company. $4.00.

MR. BEISSEL's four-part poem is a long lament for the loss of Orphic song, beauty and love in the gross actualities of the modern world. He repudiates these actualities, and wants to get back to "the ancient ceremony / of fire and earth, air and / water as it was in the beginning." The reaction is unequivocal:

> O Venus
> Even as a torso you are more complete
> Than all the perfections of this chrome
> and plastic
> Millenium. . . .

All through the poem there are echoes: Homer's "rosy-fingered dawn" (twice) and Eliot (passim):

> From where we are
> Home is invisible and though the way down
> May be as the way up we shall not know
> Where we return until we get there . . .

Rather complicated, that: in the passage that Mr. Beissel is paraphrasing here, Eliot himself was paraphrasing St. John of the Cross! And this points to a key

difference: Eliot's religious vision in *Four Quartets* is *placed* and *controlled* within the totality of his images. We know how he takes St. John, what intellectual and emotional force he is to have in the drama of the whole poem. The tone is certain. In Mr. Beissel's poem nothing is clearly in focus. Apart from the violent reactionary gestures against the modern age, it's very hard to see what the poem really *means*. The rhetoric is as vague as it is insistent:

> Black the glove, black the bull's eye,
> Black the path between — and yet
> in its brief rush the arrow catches
> the light and flashes alive in the will
> Of the archer to come to rest in motion
>
> In the enigman of design. From the
> plucked string
> Leaps music. If only we knew to sing.
> The arrow has feathers but no wing.

This is confusing, and even contradictory. In the last analysis the question asked by Mr. Beissel's own cosmic Sar'-major:

> what do you think this is —
> a fuckin' funeral parade ?

is difficult to answer.

In a poetic milieu dominated by abstractions — experimentalism, the search for identity, nationalism and God wot — how refreshing it is to find a *writer* — a person concerned with words, the feel of them. It's a quality so rare that at the risk of seeming otiose I shall try to define further what I mean. But that's difficult. Very well, then. Miss Avison has it: the sense of the word as an *object*, and the concern that when making a poem or a sentence, the *right* word matters overwhelmingly, and that the chase is what writing is all about. Mr. Yates has it also:

> I am born in a thorough Missouri of optics,
> A too, too central and divided light: . . .
>
> Part this north of writing what others live,
> Part this south — living what others
> write . . .
>
> My only ancestors are the men
> I think I may have been; . . .
> ("Spiral of Mirrors")

But the resemblance to Miss Avison, except at this level of craftsmanly concern, isn't a strong one. Mr. Yates' mentor is not so much Carlos Williams as Wallace Stevens. Put another way: he's not so much interested in *things* as in their transformations. His poems skew off actuality, taking something of its surfaces, but subsuming them and expanding them into a new and sometimes intricate design. The imagination is all; yet it does not run wild, but keeps its focus and delicate poise:

> One by one
> The heavy doors
> Of my senses
> Swing open into spring.
>
> Things I spent
> The winter naming
> Struggle free of
> Their round syllables,
> Fly into the fruit trees,
> Sing down the full throats
> Of the fattening birds. . . .
> ("Locust Spring")

The birds and trees are there, and recognizable. But they have taken on a new resonance and have become part of the voice, part of the body. Mr. Yates can also write with an engaging directness when he wants — as in *Manichaen Houses*, short enough to be quoted in full. The poem is sub-titled "On a High Ridge After Dark":

> There is no
> Way up there
> From here.

Between bright
Veranda and veranda
Is a long dark night.

Distance between them
Is the absence between stars
That appalled the Jnsenist Pascal.

It is in these shorter pieces that his talent shows at its best. They have a deft and stately assurance. Each word is beautifully set — and in many of them the effect of the whole poem is of a gentle flooding light — as of a honeycomb breaking and dissolving in the mind:

A wavering pillar of vultures
Rises like dark smoke
From a distant point on this plain.

Here, even
The rocks
Eat one another.

When my stomach lifts and plunges
In the thermal currents of steady noon,
I know the vultures are poising . . .
("Vultures")

The authority of these shorter pieces makes *Hunt in an Unmapped Interior* a fine book, especially by an author still under thirty. But I'm not so sure about the longer poem, *Canticle for Electronic Music*. For my ear it is too comfortably aphoristic, too involute — and it seems as if Mr. Yates hasn't got far enough away from his master, Wallace Stevens. Instead of driving out to a clear object, as do many of the shorter pieces, the poem marks time and ruminates, and this is frustrating. The general standard of the writing is always professional, and the variety of images and styles are almost enough to hold the poem together — but not quite.

But if this poem is a slight falling off Mr. Yates need not be overly concerned. He is trying something more difficult here — and the earlier book has shown quite clearly what he can do.

TROUNCING THE YOUNGER POETS

Louis Dudek

M. LAKSHMI GILL, *During Rain, I Plant Chrysanthemums*. The Ryerson Press. $3.00.

GEORGE BOWERING, *The Silver Wire*. The Quarry Press, Kingston. $3.00; paper, $2.00.

FRANK DAVEY, *The Scarred Hull*. Imago 6, English Department, University of Calgary. 60 cents.

BEFORE EACH of these three poets I feel like an old experienced shaman, bending a skinny eye of wisdom to their children's games—a ridiculous posture — but then these are young emerging poets, and the impression for an old decaying one like me is probably inevitable.

Lakshmi Gill is the most juvenile of the three; she has not yet quite mastered the English language, much less the technique of poetry. (Even her title strikes

me as slightly unidiomatic: rain is not a period of duration.) She is guilty of such barbarisms as —

> "we think about these people
> at their homes, laying aside their
> throats . . . "

(Not only barbarisms, but also absurdity; there is no licence to cover this.) Or again:

> "Lipoites awed with the Yangtze . . . "

—two barbarisms in a single line.

Worse still, I find it hard to accept her statement of what she feels. In a love poem she tells us "our bodies heavy with passion / succumb after the seduction" (one would think they had succumbed before, or at least during, the process), and then "your sweat pours down my cheek"; whereupon she asks, "this ultimate union / it is just a mundane repetition?" One feels that this is inadequacy, not only of expression, but also of feeling.

To change the subject, we have a poem on the Vietnam war which deplores Canada's *refusal* to back the U.S. with troops:

> And Canada Refuses To Send Troops
> because this is a holy nation
> because it doesn't want to be involved
> because it doesn't believe in force
> because the women want the men home
> to boost the needed population . . .

This is absolute nonsense. With poetry of invective and righteous indignation you have to be at least credibly righteous. This poem seems to be so badly confused in its attitudes that I cannot imagine any reader sharing the poet's feelings. I myself certainly can't.

Most of Miss Gill's book is very doubtful as poetry: "this is too coarse," as she herself says. The Buddhas, Krishnas, Kalis, etc., do not convince me at all. (Earle Birney's praise, on the jacket, strikes me as irresponsible.) Only at the end of the book, in a short extract from a longer poem, "The Eternal Season", does she redeem herself; and also in the poem just before this, "Ten Questions to Rukmini-in-the-sky". Who knows? Perhaps this may still indicate a hope for poetry.

George Bowering, again, is a poet who is much too prolific, as well as premature. He has two novels written (one published), and three books of poetry already out; the acknowledgments before his book list thirty-nine places of publication. He is certainly a young man in a hurry. It's a pity that the wares he hawks are such light and flimsy stuff that they won't last the season, not to speak of eternity.

Like Lakshmi Gill he is guilty of barbarisms, though not on the same elementary level. He invents tasteless orthographies, like "lookt", "impresst", "relaxt", etc.; and he revels in intimacies of sex that offend the reader, not on moral grounds, but for their lack of intelligent tact. (Some things belong to a honeymooner's private diary, or better, memory; such details can be left to the reader's imagination. When *nothing* is left to the reader's imagination, is there not a failure of imagination — somewhere?) Thus —

> up!
>
> it!
>
> comes!

This is merely brutal, not imaginative, or erotic, or affectionate. Physical demonstrations belong in the lunatic asylum, not in imaginative literature. It's high time that the young poets learned to

make the distinction. (Note for young poets who have just discovered sex: Literary language is highly evocative language; it does not "say things right out". Also, harsh four-letter words are not "just like any other words"; they are harsh and brutal. If you don't know this, you should not be writing poetry.)

But George Bowering is really past this elementary stage — or should be. He is really a poet of lyrical sensitivity, caught up in an unfortunate school of thought. More important for him is the question of technique. The enjambment of his poems is still, I think, often purposeless and distracting. In fact, I wonder if the poets of the Creeley school are at all conscious of the purpose of enjambment in poetry. Bowering actually says that "what is written down is a score". He may have discovered this on his own; or he may have picked it up in Vancouver in the summer of 1962 from one of Dudek's lectures (it's a long-standing principle with me). What does it mean? That the arrangement of a poem is a guide for the real or imagined voice; also (as I must have said in Vancouver) that it does not emphasize the obvious, but brings out nuances of meaning. In Bowering's poetry I find the enjambments merely disturbing, erratic and eccentric. Consider the following poem as he has laid it out:

> Here is Angela's
> hair on the side of
> my face; love as
>
> clean and soft as
> it is immediate
> to me. Two heads
>
> on a pillow faces to-
> gether eyes closed or
> open in the dark
>
> Time is on our side
> now no trick to
> scrutinize but behind

us days. Accumulating
sounds we make in
our sleep, our dreams

of one another seen.

You have to read this *despite* the notation — it's a positive obstacle. I have rearranged this poem in order of the natural phrase elements, keeping the phrases as much as possible entire. This is what results:

Here is Angela's hair
on the side of my face;
love as clean and soft
as it is immediate to me.

Two heads on a pillow
faces together eyes closed
or open
in the dark.

Time is on our side
now
no trick to scrutinize
but behind us days.

Accumulating sounds we make
in our sleep,
our dreams of one another
seen.

This is a very good little poem, but not as Bowering has laid it out. Right from his first lines, note how awkward and aimless the break-up is: why "the side of / my face"? Why "Love as / clean and soft as"? Why "faces to- / gether"? All this makes no sense. A friend here in Montreal (Glen Siebrasse) has said that this kind of poetry sounds as if the writer had a speech defect; it goes stuttering and halting from line to line like a spastic sentence, often concealing poverty of thought. Certainly this is not a musical score.

Apart from spastic speech, and too much explicit physical sex, Bowering repeats William Carlos Williams to excess. The nonchalant personality, and the mere descriptive imagism applied to trivia, become a bit of a bore; and derivativeness detracts. One must get beyond the trivial object to some kind of significance; in fact, in a few of these poems one gathers that Bowering is not incapable of doing so. I think he is a very promising poet. But at present, his general principle — "Write in whatever / form informs your moment's mood / : that is poetry" — makes neither for poetry of content nor solid art. It only produces an abundance of casual dribble. He himself says of his poems, they "live for a moment there / & flicker out / . . . poor fledgling things / without courage to fly forever." The reason is they're still apprentice work, pencil sketches; he hasn't even tried to make them permanent poetry. But why not begin? Isn't it the only thing worth trying?

Frank Davey in *The Scarred Hull*, a long poem, tells harrowing stories of shipwrecks at sea, and connects them somewhat mechanically with contemporary character studies and incidents. He is really a narrative poet of some force, though I find it hard to decide whether the effect is produced by the sensational realities described or the poet's narrative skill. The style is extremely prosaic, flat, direct; there is almost no ornament, no lyrical lift in these poems. Perhaps in narrative verse this is possible; but as poetry I find it a little too prosy.

Since his early poems, and the book *Bridge Force*, Davey has learned how to simplify and pare his material down to the bone. Many parts of this poem are readable and convincing; also, significance emerges at some points, though on the whole I miss the relation between the shipwrecks and the contemporary settings. In general, I gather that the relation is one of ironic contrast, as in this passage on Victoria, B.C.:

city of the garden
and the symphony,
the phoney
English accent
on therapist and signboard,
the museum and the millionaire
playing together under shelter
seeing and not seeing
in the city
in the sea:

seeing and not seeing
the encounters
in the misty gardens
the drownings
in the night . . .

But there must be a specific application in each set of stories and in each separate story. I think that Davey needs to make sure that his narratives justify themselves, as narrative poetry, having not only anecdotal interest but also clear significance; they must never relapse into inconclusive bits of character depiction or stray incidents. As a story-teller, he could study Chekhov; and for poetry, Edgar Lee Masters. In other words, pack a wallop with a meaning, never mumble under your whiskers.

POETS AND AUDIENCES

Dorothy Livesay

MICHAEL COLLIE, *The House*. Macmillan. $4.75.
PADRAIG O BROIN, *No Casual Trespass*. Clo Chluain Tairbh.
HEATHER SPEARS, *The Danish Portraits*. Ryerson Press. $3.95.

THERE IS GOOD REASON why a book of poetry, like a novel, should challenge the interest of the reader. To write poems so private that there is no sense of a single listener at the other end is a kind of betrayal. Younger poets in Canada today have understood this and have accepted the challenge of projecting their poetry into live audiences, where there is immediate response and feedback. Older poets unwilling to do this offer us only one side of the coin. For example, in an age when poetry is off the page and in the air, Michael Collie's collection, so neatly dressed in buff and black, lacks impact. The style is Wordsworthian, contemplative; sentences pile up, images accrue, yet nothing is said to compel attention. Contrived as a series of subdued lyrics which are meant to be steps in a narrative theme (the return of the native), there is so little immediacy of contact with things seen and felt that one has to force oneself on these waters.

Now it may well be that the poet has a right to expect "work" from the reader. But in this case the only work required is busy work, that of sifting a mass of words from the core image. These poems are boring not from lack of content, not from lack of sincerity, but because the image as a "complex of experience" fails to make us *feel*. It is stranded on the shore, a limp literary fish.

Where the man moored his boat
now ganglion tumours have crusted
the cancerous rock
mantled with a calcine of shell
from the impact of waves, the wash
of the nerveless sea.

("Hous")

This kind of language won't do any more, with its strained epithets (ganglion, cancerous, nerveless) and its chains of prepositional phrases. But happily not all of the verse in this book is so flabby. Mr. Collie can at times forget the verbiage and bring us an immediate perception. The poem "Notes on a Day's Work" has moments like these:

Swing high he thought
on the plough-handle parallel bars
of saxophone curlews and percussion rooks:
trace to the earth-weighted cha-chas
of the ancient plough
trembling to the rhythm of the arms
held low, now
pitching, jerking, dancing the furrows
of the dawn plough:
hold somehow legs, thighs, pelvis, spin
coulter
to the break of that black soil . . .

but the line ends with a simile; *like a dawn entente*, and the impact of the prime image is dissipated.

Although he is a writer of monologue turned inward on the self, Michael Collie is anything but a "confessional" poet in the modern sense. Pádraig Ó Broin attempts to be. In *No Casual Trespass* he is cheery, vigorous, knockabout — a kind of Irish Hugh MacDiarmid not truly at home on Canadian soil; and not emotionally attuned to the contemporary scene. His too-frequent failure to reach the reader seems to stem from his inability to visualize an audience, to seek the listener's ear. His "confessions" and philosophical ruminations simply do not come across. In prose written in a more objective style Mr. Ó Broin has greater appeal, for he is a balladeer of no mean skill. In the ballad series "Sweeney the Mad" he combines simplicity with wit in a strong swinging rhythm:

"The vampires come,
That are not dead" —
Sun shone out
On her golden head.

"Really?" I said,
"Have you seen one?"
Her white teeth caught
The setting sun.

Ó Broin is a punning and rhyming poet. When he sticks to the matter and feeling at hand he achieves a buoyancy that gives pleasure. But too often he indulges in a playful wordiness that bores or annoys, as in the poem "Ungulata". Today we demand things seen and felt, not verbally played with.

Very different in intention and effect is *The Danish Portraits* by Heather Spears. In Canada the past few years have been years of the woman poet "coming into her own." Between the latest work of mature women like Margaret Avison or Miriam Waddington and the youthful excitement of Gwen MacEwen or Margaret Atwood, Heather Spears holds a midway balance. Her first chapbook, *Asylum Poems* appeared during her student days at art school and the University of British Columbia. In those poems there was promise of passion and insight — a promise not wholly fulfilled.

In *The Danish Portraits* there is no mistake about the audience the poet-painter is addressing. She speaks directly to individual persons (in the manner of Browning or Pound) to the faces she has caught on canvas. She is talking intensely to each "sitter" about the inner self revealed. And because Miss Spears is passionately preoccupied with the object before her — usually a human being — the reader is caught up too. Out of a total of 26 poems "The Danish Portraits" make up 12, in a series of sonnets and lyrics loosely conventional in form, yet highly

controlled in their use of language as sound and image. Her sonnets are tight and taut, yet they move in their own pattern away from the norm:

> You're asleep the phrase unfinished your
> Mouth parted a drift of hair half over
> Your cheek your mouth your eye lashes
> ochre
> Coloured look like an unsure stroke or
> The brush just out of touch between
> two breaths
> And my tentative searching thought
> Crosses there and recrosses and you do not
> Hinder me released in the littlest of deaths

These poems achieve an objectivity, a sense of distance; yet at the same time they are obsessively personal, as we see the inner struggle of the artist-poet seeking to pull out the very soul of her subject: "The impress of my eyes / seeking a way in." Sometimes the effect is frightening, because these are poems of spiritual struggle. Furthermore, the forms into which they fall fit as a glove fits.

It would have been exciting, perhaps, if the twelve "Danish Portraits" had been illustrated by the actual paintings — and the other poems omitted. Nonetheless it is good to see that this Canadian painter has come back into writing again. It would be even better, at least for us, if she would also come back home.

books in review

AN OUTSIDE VIEW

Modern Canadian Stories. Edited by Giose Rimanelli and Roberto Ruberto. Ryerson. $6.00.

THIS IS THE BEST COLLECTION of Canadian short stories ever to be published! I do not say "Canadian" reservedly, even though the term is often used to modify the extent of praise expressed. In the case of *Modern Canadian Stories,* the term extends the praise. For this book shows the best of Canadian short story writers grasping and holding on vigorously to a genre whose variety and excellence often avoids careful and discriminating readers. There is nothing better than a good story carefully executed; conversely, there is nothing worse than a story badly written.

The majority of the writers represented in this volume follow no distinct tradition in the short story, except one that may be truly called Canadian. In fact, it appears that there is a more distinct and separate quality about the short story in Canada, whereas poetry and the novel are often extensions of traditions established in Britain and the United States. The modern British short story, developed by such writers as Katherine Mansfield and D. H. Lawrence, is primarily based on concepts established by Chekhov and du Maupassant. The modern American short story, based by Poe on European influences, is either O. Henry-oriented or becomes the *New Yorker* story. The Canadian story is a mosaic of all these forms, and can rarely be related directly to the American or British development; instead, the form seems to separate the Canadian writer into his own special category.

It develops a story which echoes the traditional introduction and close, establishes a climax, but creates instead of a frequent one-dimensional growth of character and action, a pared-down, many-dimensional heightening of the essentials in the story. The effect of the story is culminative, rather than fragmented, much more like the effect of a novel. So instead of becoming portions of some larger whole, as is often the weakness in a story, the majority of these stories are totally complete, wholes unto themselves. The collection is a collage showing the direction of Canadian writers, and fortunately the selection has obviously been done with care.

Giose Rimanelli and Roberto Ruberto have come to the Canadian scene with fresh eyes, with minds foraged in the European tradition. I think it is good that Ryerson chose these two men of developed sensibilities to make this selection. They have presented a nice range in time, and little range in quality. The choice of Duncan Campbell Scott to begin the collection is good. His reputation as a poet is admirable, and often his short stories are neglected by both critics and readers in favour of his poetry. It is hoped that the inclusion of a story by Scott in this volume will commend some Canadian publisher to bring out a collection of Scott's stories; some of the tales in *The Village of Viger* are exceptional not only in quality but also because they are almost forerunners of what A. E. Coppard did twenty years later in England. Scott's sense of observation is most compelling.

Scott begins the range, and then the editors extend it. They include Leacock and de la Roche, mainly because their stories are good, not because of their great commercial success, thought both are well known, as Rimanelli says in his Introduction, outside Canada. For mood in the naturalist tradition, Grove in included; his pictures of the prairie are almost horribly true. The best stories in the volume are by Sinclair Ross; they have all the subtlety and astringency that successful stories must have. Again, Canadian publishers take note! We need a selection of Ross's stories, too.

The least successful stories in the volume are those by Callaghan and MacLennan. Rimanelli says that it is premature to pronounce an objective judgment on their real literary worth. The stories by them in this volume, if used as a guide, would surely give them both a secondary place. Both have written much better stories, but then the form is not the best for either of them, surely, and they succeed better (though not completely) in the novel. Contrasted to them is Ethel Wilson who appears to be at home in both genres. Her stories have a natural, feminine charm, and well they should!

The person most successful with the form is obviously Hugh Garner, though I find it difficult to take him in large doses. His "The Yellow Sweater" is a story that will undoubtedly become a classic; for some reason it reminds me of "The Girls in Their Light Summer Dresses", which may reveal more about me than about Garner. His control of the rhythm of prose is astute, and he has that great capacity of a good story teller to know when to finish. Knowing when to stop does not seem to be the forte of Daphne Buckle; her story is far too long (not in the sense of Lowry's "Forest Path to the Spring" either) and I think that it is unfortunate that the editors chose it. I doubt if people would look for her work after reading this one story, yet those who know her work also know what good things she can do. George Bowering can also write better stories than that included in *Modern Canadian Stories*; and he is much better at poetry than he is at prose. The other writers are excellently represented.

These are in part comments revealing personal taste; no one can agree with a whole collection. But for the most part I like the stories, and commend the editors on their choice. The Introduction is very well done; it has the eye of a distinguished writer perusing a scene he is still getting to know, with taste and circumspection. It does not apologize for the book, as collections of Canadian writing often do, but goes to logically prove and explain the position of the anthologists. Rimanelli says that they have tried to be "only" decent; they have been much more than that. They have been careful, not overly kind, and clear. And best of all, they have been curious. Oh, yes. A word about the Foreword. Please, Mr. Birney, write more of them!

DONALD STEPHENS

LAYTON AND ISAIAH

IRVING LAYTON, *Periods of the Moon.* McClelland and Stewart. $2.50.

MR. LAYTON'S OWN INTRODUCTION to his new book of poems, *Periods of the Moon,*

contains the usual evidence of his fear and envy of all others who write. Such is to be expected. Not to be expected from Mr. Layton, however, are the rather serious declarations it makes about his basic conceptions of the poet and poetry. Poetry, it implies, is a field that should be "reserved exclusively for Isaiah, Milton, Blake, and their inspired descendants." The poem is to be "visionary experience," "musical delight," a "miraculous fusion of sound and sense," "not a tired anecdote that can just as well be said in prose," and never the fruit of "rationalizing intellect." Being somewhat in accord with Mr. Layton here, I propose that it would be more than fair to him in this review to accept his criteria without question and to employ them as a means both of judging his poetry and of determining his right to inhabit Isaiah's domains.

First, are Mr. Layton's poems "*visionary experience*"? Only if recognition of mankind's obvious love of violence ("Memo to Herbert Spencer," "The Coming of the Messiah"), of oneself's own absurdity ("North and South"), of the poor's being ignored ("Quay Scene"), or of the ephemerality of man ("Mutability," "Time's Velvet Tongue") constitute genuine mystic vision can Mr. Layton be considered a "visionary." Unfortunately, the kind of vision that Mr. Layton requires for poetry, that of Isaiah, Milton, or Blake, is based strictly on perception of divine pattern or order within the universe. And such a sense of the numinous is nowhere evident in this book. Here, his attentions are fixed firmly on things of this world, on its women, its petty insults, its pigeons, its sunbathers. And although he could be said to have a vision of a sort, it is anything but a grasp of the design of eternity: it is an inconsistent and essentially godless vision of a vulgar, collapsing, and yet somehow exhilarating world. It is a vision, we can be sure, that the authors in eternity have had nothing to do with.

Next, can Mr. Layton's poems be termed a "*miraculous fusion of sound and sense*"? Such a fusion Mr. Layton achieves often only if we so term the epigram "Crisis Theology":

> To this pass has Christianity come:
> There is no God, and Jesus is his son

This represents the usual kind of concern he has with form in his verse. He cares too often for the burden of what he is saying and for the images by which it can be illustrated — and too seldom for rhythm and sound. Far from being a Blake or a Milton, he is frequently a stuffy Augustan in his refusal to merge "sound and sense." He can rise to such a fusion (I hesitate to say "miraculous") in a few remarkable poems such as "On the Quay with my Mother's Ghost" or "Rhine Boat Trip"), but his usual poems have the dull prosiness of "Westminster Abbey."

"*Tired anecdote*": the anecdote is a common kind of Layton poem, some of them here — the poet "troubled" by his woman's breasts, the beach girl concerned with her appearance, the policeman who unthinkingly obeys laws — certainly tiring. Mr. Layton's method is generally anecdotal. For unlike Blake or Milton (since he insists on the comparison) he has developed no vision or world-view that can sustain a long poem or a sequence of inter-related poems. His universe may at times have wonder, but never order. Finding no pattern in the world except the intermittent ignorance

and cruelty of man, he is too often at the mercy of the separate moments of his sublunary experience for his poetic material. These, illuminated by only a slight inner vision and no external numen, are indeed ordinary, sometimes clichéd ("Quay Scene"), and, not surprisingly, often "tired."

Finally, does Mr. Layton avoid "*rationalizing intellect*"? Certainly his kind of poetry is intellectual: thirty-six of the eighty-four poems in this book depend mainly on irony or paradox for their effect. In others, dependence on wit ("Speculators"), invective ("For the Stinker"), and direct and prosaic discourse ("Sunbathers") also testifies to the dominantly cerebral quality of his poems. Despite Mr. Layton's pose as a pure artist besieged by scholar and bourgeois, he is much more a man of ideas than an artist. I would say that he is important to this country as an advocate of humanity, tolerance, and delight — as a Voltaire rather than a Milton. And he is indeed a rationalizer — especially of his own fear, hatreds, and scorns.

What seems apparent, then, in *Periods of the Moon* is that Irving Layton is not exactly the writer he would like to be. He is often a casual philosopher rather than an artist, an ironist rather than a verbal musician. And he is not a true "visionary"; he is far from being an "inspired descendant" of Isaiah, Milton, or Blake. He can be a valuable awakener of our humanity, surely, and at times a charming minor poet (for I would not ask us all to be great), but as a visionary he cannot even point as far as the patterns of his own verse.

FRANK DAVEY

MIGHTY NOTHING CALLED A WALL

JOHN ROBERT COLOMBO, *The Great Wall of China*. Delta. $2.00.

JOHN ROBERT COLOMBO has written a book on the Great Wall of China, finished, the blurb tells us, one year to the day the author came across a brick from the Great Wall in Dr. Sam Johnson's house at Gough Square, London. I, too, have seen Dr. Johnson's brick; but, dumb enough, passed it by as a curious thing to have in the house where the great dictionary was compiled. Not so dumb, Mr. Colombo. Out of this incident and others working on his imagination, he has manufactured, slimly but cogently, an encyclopaedic commentary on mankind, especially on our own period fallen so deeply in love with great walls.

The book is a compilation of anecdotes, proverbs, quotations, illustrations, verse made newly and prose made verse (the pun is partly intended) — pertinences and impertinences concerned with the historical fact of the Great Wall built by the Emperor Ch'in Shih Huang Ti in the 3rd century B.C., put together in a sequence of 99 sections. The compilation is not a closely-woven tapestry but not a gallimaufry either. The book is something between a compendium and a creation. "A place to wander in," as Mr. Colombo has Keats define it. "Not quite prose and not quite poetry," the author says in his footnote. The approach is defined by Section LXXXVIII: "One could be endlessly academic about the Wall, or extremely imaginative, but the Wall — mouldering away in China so far away — is immensely more significant

and suggestive than any single account of it, whether a fact or a fiction, a poem or a prose . . . This poem (sic) handles its learning lightly." And so it (ambivalently) does.

As far as I know, this is the first entry into Canada of the Great Wall of China. Its 1,250 miles are stretched into M. Levesque's Quebec. No surprise attends this; the symbolism built into the Great Wall of China is made to stretch. As if in corroboration, Mr. Colombo comes up with a pun that might or might not be better left unperpetrated: "Separatists are wall-flowers." Nevertheless, Section LXXXIV, "An Aside for René Levesque, Should He Be a Separatist," brings the Wall pertinently into La Belle Province.

"The Wall / is the image / of our time" —

> It stretches, as they say . . .
> from New York to (East) Berlin.
>
> Or from Toronto to Vancouver,
> the CPR or CBC of its day.

On native grounds, the book goes all the way, declaring flatly that Canada is one of the "Famous Walls in History." Well, not quite; first of all, we are not that famous; second of all, if so we have been a Wall, are we so now in the light of Expo? May be, M. Drapeau is corrective to M. Levesque.

At any rate, in his general upshot, Mr. Colombo is right. We *are* stupidly wall-eyed, as Robert Frost famously puts it. In support of the immense gap between Evidence and Wisdom, the various sections of the book invoke a host of sages from Kafka to Robinson Crusoe. "This mighty nothing called a wall," cries out Crusoe, like Shelley with his Ozymandias. Poor old Emperor Ch'in and his fatuity, neither here nor there!

The mind has walls of its own.

With a touch of Swiftian writing, Mr. Colombo expatiates:

> The Wall is almost linear and, as such, divides the population of the world into its supporters and its detractors, those who would stone anyone stoning it and those who would use its stones to throw at anyone praising it.

The book's sectional juxtapositions throw up ironies, sarcasms and comedies. They take the book beyond the limits of the author's definition of it as an "entertainment." But there are too many elucidations of the obvious. Ch'in and his "walled state" do not need such addenda as: "Where does this leave the People's Republic of China? It leaves it walled in"; "The fields protest / there is no space left / for children to play / in China today." Or, (reversing Mr. Colombo's penchant for making prose look like poetry, and putting his verse into found-prose): "China is as unfinished as its Great Wall is. . . ."

But from the flats one comes on the risibilities (pun). I particularly liked Mr. Colombo's lesson No. LXXIII:

> Nor has this anything to do with
> the Wall —
> another Empress, upon the death of
> the Emperor,
> so mutilated her late husband's concubine,
> that her only son went insane
> when he viewed his mother's handiwork.

RALPH GUSTAFSON

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO POP

JOHN ROBERT COLOMBO, *Abracadabra*. McClelland & Stewart. $5.00; paper, $2.50.

IN *Abracadabra* John Robert Colombo tries to place the past inside another framework. He invites the reader to ex-

tend the poems beyond what they are on the page; as the book's epigraph states, "characters, events, retrospections, shall be conveyed in gospels." Disagreeing with MacLeish's "A poem should not mean/But be", the opening poem in the book maintains that "be means do", so presumably this collection is a do-it-yourself kit for poetry. The poet states that it is useless to reconstruct history in its own context; it must be set in a modern context. But his attempts to do this with "found" poems do not succeed because, for instance, Riel's last words are full of an over-blown and long-winded phraseology which resists being placed in the reader's own context. The other long "found" poem, a James Agee letter, contains some interesting ideas and phrasing but needs a firmer organization to succeed as a poem. "From The Provinces", on the other hand, contains "found" elements and succeeds because the poet takes the trouble to set the context for us.

The "found" poems constitute only a small section of the book. There are translations from various languages, and series of poems on angels, on horror movies and novels, and on paintings. This last group seems to be central to this collection. Just as Rauschenberg erased another artist's drawing to show the pop artist's desire to change the artistic past and so question the "reality" of art, so Colombo expresses his view of art and reality by extension out of past artistic creation. However, these poems lose some immediacy precisely because they are extensions of other people's experience, even though the poet attempts to make them part of his and our experience. In order to make us see the paintings, he often describes the details in the pictures, but sometimes the poems become mere catalogues of detail. Yet in a paradoxical way the details remain somehow vague because Colombo relies in some of these poems on an alliterative metre which seems to lull him into repetition and a piling up of detail for the sake of the alliterative sound. Some of the poems are blurred, and at times the alliteration is so emphatic that it is difficult to understand what is going on in the poem, in spite of the relative simplicity of the diction. However, the alliteration works well when expressing the ambiguity of art in its relation to reality; a sculpture can be "horrible but heavenly", a painting by Picasso catches human duality:

> this way he circled us into a science
> that way he settled us into a savagery.

There are some poems about Dracula and Fu Manchu, using these figures as pop images, emotionally-charged yet designed to bring them closer as an æsthetic experience. But camp has taken over these subjects to such an extent that it becomes virtually impossible to create a serious context for them.

The most successful poems are those expressing direct personal experience ("Riverdale Lion", "Huron Street") or a poem like "There Is No Way Out", which uses the indefinable horror associated with works by Kafka and Cocteau.

Abracadabra is a bewildering book. The poetry keeps promising to reveal our world through a rehabilitation of past artifacts in terms of what the poet himself calls "documentary realism". The poetry is fashionably modern — "psychedelic" occurs in one of his definitions of poetry. Not for Colombo the romantic wonder of "On First Looking Into Chap-

man's Homer" but rather the realistic contemporaneity of "On First Looking Into A Vacuum Tube". The reader is invited into a pop world, but if "poetry's task is not making sense but remaking sense", then *Abracadabra*, apart from a few poems, does not offer the reader a firm enough sense of reality within the poetry itself to allow him to participate in this world.

PETER STEVENS

INSTRUCTIVE HORROR

KAY HILL, *Badger, the Mischief Maker.* McClelland & Stewart. $3.50.

CLARE BICE, *Hurricane Treasure.* Macmillan of Canada. $3.75.

ONE OF THE BRIGHTEST PLEASURES that children's literature can provide is freedom from the more sombre kinds of realism, like cancer and cavities and anticlimax and the fact that we all grow older. It's an embattled freedom. Once it almost disappeared under the sharp-penned onslaughts of people like Mrs. Sherwood, with her appalling Fairchilds senior and their dazed and dutiful children. Nothing, including corpses rotting on gibbets, was too terrible for the little Fairchilds to be shown in the interests of their education in life's grimmer possibilities.

Since Mrs. Sherwood's day, aside from a few subtler sadisms from softer-tongued authors, no such instructive horrors have darkened the pages of children's books. Naked ferocity is apparently gone. But its excuse for being, the assumption that children *should* see in their story kingdoms reflections of life's saddest truths and possibilities as well as its glad ones, still seem to haunt the minds of some well-meaning authors and infect their stories.

Two recent children's books set in the Maritimes show symptoms of the ailment. They are Kay Hill's *Badger, the Mischief Maker,* a sequel to her *Glooscap and His Magic* of 1963, and Clara Bice's *Hurricane Treasure,* a novel of buried pirate's gold and present-day smuggling on the Nova Scotia coast.

Miss Hill's earlier book about the Wabanaki's demi-god, Glooscap, is a collection of joyous tales involving characters impervious to time and all but minor reform. The most incorrigible is Badger, the spirit of mischief — a particular favourite of Glooscap's, we are told, for Glooscap "loves an indomitable spirit." But in the new collection of tales the passage of time and a need for social harmony are becoming effective forces in mythical Wabanaki-land, and both Glooscap and Badger change a little. These stories comprise a sort of Rogue's Progress in which Badger begins as a merry young devil, gradually grows angry and more destructive, and is at last submitted to ordeals that almost kill him. He emerges older, sadder, morally self-conscious, and vulnerable. It is as if Jupiter were to give up philandering and take Juno to a marriage counsellor. And Glooscap verges on pipe-smoking unction as he oversees Badger's metamorphosis. He still loves spirited mirth, he says, but it must be of a humane kind.

Still, Miss Hill is a first-rate storyteller with an unobtrusive, flexible style. Despite their instructive bent, the stories are such compulsive reading that her refusal to condescend to an elementary vocabulary when more "difficult" words are stylistically desirable is unlikely to

discourage a smaller reader. John Hamberger's illustrations have a raggeder vitality than Robert Frankenberg's for *Glooscap and His Magic*, but the same kind of eloquence and drama.

In Mr. Bice's *Hurricane Treasure* the blight is of a different, less forgivable kind, for it involves a failure to live up to mededramatic promises. As the book opens, young Shad Hackett and his superstitious sidekick Willie seem bound for rip-roaring adventure. There is said to be buried pirate's treasure on nearby Gulf Island. An ex-circus family, strikingly like the real, ill-fated Restall family whose quest for treasure on Nova Scotia's Oak Island ended in disaster last August, are digging for it. Enter a bizarre gentleman in cape and dark glasses, a strangely knowledgeable, inartistic artist, and a sinister pair of ruffians, Morrigan and Joe Wragg. "I'll meet you again some day, boy!" Morrigan growls to Shad as Chapter One closes. But it's a promise he barely keeps. The ensuing action is of a pretty tame, adult-supervised nature. And an anticlimactic conclusion full of banal, not-very-clear explanations suggests that whatever good may come of boyish adventure-seeking, it's unlikely to be a chest full of jewels and Spanish doubloons. Probably true but certainly dashing.

Mr. Bice is an artist as well as an author, and both his text and his illustrations accomplish what appears to be his primary purpose — a colourful portrayal of life on Nova Scotia's coast. But local colour is unlikely to console his readers for a melodrama gone flat any more than all Miss Hill's skill can prevent disappointment at Badger's reform. It is sad to see Peter Pan sprout a grey hair.

FRANCES FRAZER

IMAGINATION'S OWN WORLD

ROLOFF BENY and MILTON WILSON, *To Everything there is a Season*. Longmans. $25.00.

ROLOFF BENY's photographic response to the country, *To Everything There Is a Season*, with literary excerpts perspicaciously edited by Milton Wilson, is a centennial celebration — but of maddeningly nebulous kind. The Biblical title itself explores an ambiguity: the affirmation of fruitfulness combined with a fateful promise of an end. The photographs then present this — many of them beautifully designed, sensitively catching moments and places. But together they sometimes detract from each other, and sometimes a single photographic point is repeated too often for the unconditional success of the book as a unit in its own right. It is interesting, for example, to consider the island, man-as-island, and the ship-as-island, and these photographs put side by side illuminate as imagistic poetry does — creating an intellectual response by juxtaposing visual images. But the point can be overmade.

The book is avowedly a personal discovery of Canada, and the photographs are, with the poems and prose passages, ordered to interpret its growth. Showing first the elements and shapes of the land, the pictures are counterpointed by Layton's "Beauty buds from mire / And I, a singer in season, observe / Death is a name for beauty not in use". Then the Eskimos and Indians are shown; then wagon wheels, wheat elevators, snow fences, ships — emphasizing isolation and what once *was* in season — Peter Stevens telling us at the same time that "We

merely are intruders. / . . . / will consume / Everything — itself, the prairie, all of us. . . ." But the camera shifts to contradict this somewhat and to focus on spring thaw and flowers. Margaret Avison's "Gentle and just pleasure / It is, being human, to have won from space / This unchill, habitable interior", followed by pictures of churches, graveyards, flower offerings, and old buildings, reminds us of other seasons and other kinds of mellowness.

Pictures of industry and industrial use of the elements come next. What Gwendolyn MacEwen asks, however: "O citizen pose for this image of the city", is too little heeded in the book, which does not sufficiently show that which is Canadian in people. Part of any northern land's history involves responding to the physical environment — to distance, isolation and cold. And of course the face of the land is important — but the collective personality of a people must be merged with that of the land before a nation exists, and we do not see enough human faces here. Mr. Beny does turn to depict lines of communication and various art media, and these certainly emphasize the human landscape, but the direction of the book is shifting. To end it, Robert Hogg writes: "That which the mind holds / which the sun has let / fall / we can return to / and install: / Image out of Season". The end here, then, is in affirmation. But what it celebrates is less the Centennial than the power of the imagination to create its own world.

W. H. NEW

CATASTROPHIC ABILITIES

D. J. GOODSPEED, *Ludendorff: Genius of World War I.* $4.95.

THE REVIVAL OF INTEREST in the First World War, which the flood of books that accompanied the fiftieth anniversary of its outbreak has stimulated, still continues. A variety of men and events connected with the war have been reexamined in the perspective of a half century of rapid change. In retrospect the Great War seems ancient history, yet it still casts its shadow upon us. D. J. Goodspeed's *Ludendorff: Genius of World War I* helps to explain why it does.

The "ruthless and extreme courses" followed by General Eric Ludendorff, the most powerful man in the German Empire during the last two years of the war, helped to bring "Europe to ruin" and to create the "terrible new world" which produced Hitler and the Second World War. "Hitler might well have come to power without Ludendorff's support (although that support was an incalculable advantage to him in the early days), but Hitler could never have come to power had not Germany been so grievously strained by the war that Ludendorff had carried on too long."

Although Goodspeed believes that it was "catastrophic for Germany and the whole world that Ludendorff should have attained the power he did", he does not think that other more moderate and equally able military men could have been chosen to lead the Germany of William II. The German General Staff valued ability and intelligence and because it did it was possible for Ludendorff,

a tense, gifted, aloof, and dedicated professional soldier of bourgeois origins, whose view of war had been formed by his teacher, Schlieffen, "to be one of the most important staff officers in Germany" prior to 1914. As chief of the Second Section of the General Staff Ludendorff was in line to become Chief of Operations during a war emergency.

The fact that Ludendorff was not Moltke's Chief of Operations when war came "may well have been fateful for Germany". Ludendorff's intransigence in pushing his superiors to demand an increase in the size of the army and his willingness with that end in view to seek a political ally in Class' Pan-German League, led to his transfer to regimental duty in 1913. At the time he was warned that if he got what he wanted, "he would drive Germany to revolution."

The war provided Ludendorff with the opportunity, first in the East and then at Supreme Headquarters, to use his talents on a far greater scale. The ability to bend his superiors to his own will which his pre-war career had already revealed was manifest in his relationships with Hindenburg and the Emperor. This ability combined with his ruthless intransigence and lack of "training, or talent to cope with political problems" made it possible for him to ignore not only political realities but also military ones. Despite the cool realism of Hoffmann who opposed his ideas, Ludendorff continued to dream of "greater Fatherland and of territorial acquisitions that would compensate the German people for their sacrifices", and thereby deprived Germany of any hope for a negotiated peace. Neither his administrative skill,

and Goodspeed maintains that "he must be ranked as one of the greatest military organizers of all time", nor his unequalled "tactical brilliance" could win the war for the Empire. Ludendorff committed the already over-taxed resources of the army and the civilian economy to a final great offensive in March 1918 which failed. He lost the war and did indeed "drive Germany to revolution".

The realization that he had failed and that Germany was defeated "left him without inner resources" and Ludendorff broke under the strain. His mind never recovered from the shock of defeat, as his postwar career demonstrated. To the end of his life he still exalted war as "the highest expression of the national will to live".

Mr. Goodspeed's book makes excellent reading and should be of interest to general readers and professional historians. The role of the General Staff in the direction of the war effort is well described, as are the reasons for Germany's defeat and Ludendorff's responsibility for it. Goodspeed has a rare talent for characterization: "General Plehve was small, old, wizened, and ill, but he had the heart of a solider." Ludendorff does not emerge as a sympathetic figure, but his strengths, weaknesses, and the pathos of his nervous collapse under the pressure of the great responsibilities which he sought to fulfil are masterfully portrayed. If there is a tragic hero in the story, it is Max Hoffmann whose brilliance, realism and moderation were to no avail.

As a whole Goodspeed has done a careful, if not exhaustive job of research. He is in places somewhat careless in his documentation and large portions of his narrative and analysis of the significance of events on the Eastern Front, and decisions taken by the Supreme Command at various times during the war are virtually paraphrases of Hoffmann's Memoirs. Though Hoffmann is cogent and appealing, Goodspeed sometimes trusts him too much.

If there is a fault in the book, it is in the historical setting. More should have been said about Ludendorff's family background and its effect upon his attitudes in an officer corps still predominantly aristocratic in outlook, if not always in composition. There is too little mention of the influence of such groups as the Pan-German League upon Ludendorff's plan for a German colonial empire in the East. Not enough consideration was given to the unique place which the army occupied in the German State before 1914. The fact that Supreme Headquarters under Ludendorff's direction was able to take control of the civilian economy and to direct German foreign policy to suit its own one-sided conception of policy needs cannot be explained simply in terms of the Kaiser's weakness and the General Staff's ability to attract brilliant men whose ruthlessness and drive permitted them to take over the state during a war emergency. Ludendorff's rise to power was possible, because the army had never been properly subordinated to civilian control before the war. What happened during the war must be seen as the result of the unsolved problem of civil-military relations which plagued the Second Empire from its beginnings. The military men produced in the prewar period were capable technicians, but were not equipped to evolve a balanced grand strategy for a nation. This too was in part the product of the army's favoured position in the state. Officers

were admired and their opinions deferred to when they should not have been, while their very faults were considered by many to be virtues. These factors only reinforced the military in the opinion that they truly represented the nation and were more than capable of directing its policy. Such considerations required greater stress, for without them Goodspeed's conclusion that military men of greater vision and moderation could not have been chosen to lead Germany in the Empire of William II loses its force.

In the main, this is a stimulating book which is well worth reading.

ROBERT C. WALTON

PASSING THE HOURS

NICHOLAS MONSARRAT, *Life is a Four Letter Word. Vol. 1. Breaking In.* Longmans. $9.25.

NICHOLAS MONSARRAT has been going through a long dive of bad novels, sustained only by the curious tendency of the public to buy books by name rather than by quality. In his first volume of autobiography he begins to lift again.

The pattern he adopts is original; the book is divided into five chapters, in each of which the author stands at the vantage point of a five-year leap forward in time, so that he is seeing his life at equal intervals from the age of 6 to the age of 26. This lustral rather than linear approach avoids the sagging that is inevitable in any sequential autobiography, and dramatizes those changes in the autobiographer's nature, outlook and fortune which develop often imperceptibly, and can be seen clearly only by some method of portraying a life in broad expressionist sweeps rather than in the equally focussed detail of a pre-Raphaelite vision.

The period Monsarrat covers takes one from 1916 to 1936, from the First World War seen by a small boy in an upper middle class Liverpool household to the Spanish Civil War seen by a young writer in radical and impoverished rebellion against all the conservative preconceptions of his upbringing. In the intervening sections the spotlight falls on Monsarrat in a Cheshire prep school, as a victim of organized bullying at Winchester, and as a "double-breasted funster" at Trinity.

On the surface, *Life is a Four Letter Word* is a candid autobiography; Monsarrat even has the daring honesty, in this decade, to confess his "long preserved virginity". Yet the hesitancies which evidently prolonged that condition are still present in another way, and all the time one has the feeling of the real Monsarrat retreating behind the self-mocking persona he creates.

What gives *Life is a Four Letter Word* most appeal is rather the minute reconstruction of so many facets of English life betwen 1916 and 1936. For those unborn at the time of the Spanish Civil War it will be a document of social history; for those of us who are Monsarrat's contemporaries the book is an excellent remembrancer of time lost.

Yet there is an artificiality about even this aspect of the book. A great deal of what he tells Monsarrat really has remembered, but just as much is carefully researched, as the list of acknowledgments demonstrates. In other words, Monsarrat is partly the autobiographer looking at the past with a subjective eye, and partly the historian trying to get it all exact. Unlike Proust, who also did a

great amount of research to authenticate the details of *A la recherche,* he has not fused the two together into a harmonious continuum. The transcending gift of the high artist is not his, and never has been, so that while his work passes the hour, it also passes with it.

GEORGE WOODCOCK

MACKENZIE'S RIVER

Exploring the Northwest Territory. Sir Alexander Mackenzie's Journal of a Voyage by Bark Canoe from Lake Athabasca to the Pacific Ocean in the Summer of 1789. Edited by T. H. McDonald. Burns & MacEachern. $5.95.

A PRINTER'S ERROR in the above title calls for immediate rectification. The text contains only Mackenzie's account of his voyage to the Arctic. His subsequent journey to the Pacific is not included.

This new edition of a basic document of Canadian exploration is, for a variety of reasons, most welcome. Professor McDonald has given us a definitive text, taken from the manuscript in the British Museum; he has indicated variations between this original by Mackenzie himself and the *Voyages* published in 1801, which appear to have been compiled from Mackenzie's papers by William Combe, a professional editor. There are many small but interesting discrepancies.

Professor McDonald has actually followed Mackenzie's route in a seventeen-foot canoe propelled by paddles, the place of Mackenzie's voyageurs being filled by his wife and son. A continuous check upon the recorded distances is thus made possible, together with persuasive identification of camp sites and other points en route. Sixteen carefully chosen photographs sum up much of Mackenzie's incidental description of country and two maps are reprinted from the 1801 edition. There is a useful bibliography. A brief, densely packed introduction holds everything in place.

Rereading the familiar narrative, one gets a fresh grasp on much of the structure of our history. This classic story of deftly planned and dextrously executed exploration presents a paradigm of our recurring problems. We realize afresh that Mackenzie was, first and last, a fur trader. The fur trade, winding its way across the face of Canadian history, was a necessary evil which we need not accept uncritically. Based upon shifting trends of fashion in Europe, pursued with a rapacity that broke into intermittent violence, inseparable from the slaughter of harmless and beautiful animals, sometimes to the edge of extinction, the fur trade was inimical to the settlement of the country, to the establishment of agriculture in the West, to the development of forest and mineral resources and in general to the amenities of civilization. Its redeeming virtue was resident in the courage, steadfastness and enterprise evoked by the effort of penetrating harsh, rugged and interminable regions. In such men as La Vérendrye and Mackenzie these virtues shine supremely.

Although outstanding, Mackenzie was not atypical. Eighteenth-century Scottish upbringing commonly encouraged a nexus between a passion for achievement, power of rational planning and perfected tenacity of will. Mackenzie, Thompson, Fraser, Selkirk, McTavish exhibit this combination in Canada, as in Africa do Bruce and Mungo Park.

Four of the five voyageurs supplying the main muscle for endless paddling and portaging were French. Upon the endurance, adaptability and sheer physical strength of the voyageur fur trading was wholly dependent. That Mackenzie could make the return journey, from Fort Chipewayan to the Arctic, in ten weeks, given the terrain and the delays incident to traversing unknown country, is eloquent tribute to his men. Several Indians also accompanied him and were able, though with difficulty, to communicate with the bands he encountered as the expedition moved down river, primitive people cooking food by dropping red hot stones into water contained in basket work. They were not numerous; they knew no agriculture and had no horses; a few bits of iron to make knives or arrow heads was the sole evidence of relayed contact with the outside world. An isolated, low-keyed way of life, without history as we conceive it.

Up to the day they actually reached the delta, Mackenzie's people "were animated by the expectation that another day would bring them to the Mer d'ouest." It was the turning point between that old, vain hope of reaching "Lachine" and the realization, which Mackenzie's second expedition was to confirm, that before the seas that washed Asia could be reached a sea of mountains had to be traversed. What this first voyage did bring to light was one of the largest and still one of the least known rivers of the world. It drains an area nearly twice the size of Europe, largely uninhabited. Its potential, when fully developed by advancing technology, quite simply stuns the imagination. What Mackenzie found becomes, year by year, of more significance to us as a nation.

At this time, when we are rethinking our conscious identity, to retrace Mackenzie's journey is to survey our problems in microcosm. A vast and empty land, filled with the primaeval and the primitive; an expertise able to confront and control all this, depending upon a technology already well developed, but dependent, also, for success upon cooperation among French and English-speaking and indigenous races. The certainty of a profit motive in this attempt; the inevitability of obstructions, delays and some ingredient of frustration. But the opportunity for a full exercise and thorough testing of whatever qualities of enterprise, foresight, integrity and determination we may possess or can contrive to summon up.

ROY DANIELLS

JAPANESE IN CANADA

JESSIE L. BEATTIE, *Strength for the Bridge.* McClelland & Stewart. $5.00.

THE DUST JACKET of Jessie L. Beattie's novel, *Strength for the Bridge*, suggests that the book deals with the relocation of the Japanese from the Pacific Coast during World War II, but less than one-third of the story actually concerns this episode of our history. The narrative deals with the life of Keiichi Wakao and his family, starting with his boyhood in Japan and ending with him happily ensconced in a cottage beside Lake Ontario in 1951. Rather than a novel, the book is a chronological cataloguing of events, and suffers much from inaccuracies and a determination on the part of the author

to gloss over anything derogatory to the Japanese.

It is true that most Canadians are by no means proud of the way in which the relocation was carried out, but Miss Beattie does not strengthen her case by neglecting to mention that Japan had embarked upon an imperialistic adventure in Asia long before the attack on Pearl Harbour. The protagonist, who was apparently born about 1890, could hardly have been ignorant of the Sino-Japanese War of 1895 nor the Russo-Japanese War of 1904. Nor could he have been unaware of the so-called China incident of 1932 which led to the rape of Nanking in 1937. Yet his best friend says, "I begin to consider that we Japanese are a peaceful nation." Wakao refers to friendship between Japan and Britain, apparently unaware of the 1939 ten-year tripartite treaty between Japan, Germany and Italy. No wonder the characters in this book are surprised at the turn of events and that they even hope that Japan and the Commonwealth will be allies in World War II! To have presented all the facts, unslanted, would have resulted in a stronger story and increased the impact of the undeniable fact that our Japanese Canadians were never found to have engaged in espionage or sabotage despite the fact that every hint and rumour was exhaustively traced by the R.C.M.P.

Errors in geography when speaking about Vancouver are inexcusable in a Canadian writer, yet Miss Beattie portrays her hero standing on Powell street watching boats coming into the harbour and noticing some of them already anchored "at the mouth of the (Fraser) river." And while roses do sometimes bloom in December on the West Coast, it is highly unlikely that butterflies would be in evidence at that time of the year. Those portions dealing with Japan are likewise marred by inaccuracies, as in an episode involving a geisha which perpetuates the western misconception that equates these women with prostitutes.

Material for a reasoned and engrossing book on the Japanese Canadians certainly exists but Miss Beattie, in placing her characters too firmly on the side of the angels, has missed her boat. On the credit side, *Strength for the Bridge* does at least focus some attention on a little known part of Canadian life and history. Publication of Miss Beattie's book should not deter some more knowledgeable writer from producing a less biased work on this subject.

DOUGLAS FORRESTER

PATRIOTIC PLUNDER

ANDRZEJ BUSZA, *Conrad's Polish Literary Background*. Polish Historical Institute. N.P.

EXILE BEING A HABIT with most Canadians, who live out of cultural kitbags on which some kind of excise is due, we may be all the wiser for knowing the cost of Conrad Korzeniowski's English art. Mr. Andrzej Busza has shown a part of this (with regrettable brevity) in a useful tally of the cultural baggage which the exiled "incorrigible Quixote" brought intact through the floating commonwealth of sailors into "la grande fraternité des lettres" where English craftsmen looked askance at it by right of local practice. As for the tariff, we are shown the export-rates but are offered no answer to the questions implicit in bicultural art.

In a Canadian context Mr. Busza's news can be startling. We are made ironically aware that, if Conrad's Russian exile had ended two years sooner, his schooling at Cracow would have been done in German. Whether he would still have broken out to sea, and still refused to be nationalized in exile, cannot be said. He might have opposed, to his compatriots' almost *canadien* fusion of *race / langue / foi*, merely the deceptive "exile, silence, cunning" of Joyce's sham Icarus. But in the year of Canadian Confederation the Austrian government (which aided missions in the Prairies) conceded the school question in Poland. Conrad was spared in his toil a German growth of the idea, painfully absurd, of defining a literary *patria* and the obligations of literary exile; which idea, in our time and land, seems less needful than Taine's criteria *race, milieu, moment.*

Mr. Busza illustrates his highly useful Conrad compendium by parallels between Conrad's work ("Karain", "Amy Foster", "Prince Roman", *Victory*) and the works of other Polish authors using their mother-tongue in various lands (e.g. Mickiewicz, Slowacki, Sienkiewicz, Zeromski, Konopnicka, Dygasinski) among whom Conrad's exiled father, Apollo Korzeniowski, stands out very strong and sharp.

The most thorough Conrad critic in any language is still Ujejski, late Rector of the Jagellonian University. The present monograph, however, is distinctly an advance on Gustav Morf's valuable work on literary displacement, notorious for the bit about "Jim's jump". *Lord Jim* is not Mr. Busza's target, but looms large nonetheless; which seems a pity, but is perhaps a challenge.

Those who write of Conrad's "obsession with betrayal" forget the NARCISSUS. They overlook the number of Conrad characters prefigured in Admiral Mahan's roll of honour, *Types of Naval Officers* (1893). They forget that the false problem of Jim / Conrad's *guilt* (which Conrad nowhere admitted) is a comic conversion, for later Anglo-Saxon bookmen, of what for Conrad's generation of Poles was logically a question of *shame*: a "point of honour", as Conrad labelled a section of *The Rescue*. Tsarist officials (like Vladimir in *The Secret Agent*) might have smiled at the Conradian "spectacle" of exiles in St. Petersburg reviling an exile in London, all of them dispossessed Poles. Even a patriot could have tasted the Conradian irony beneath the frivolous polemic, whereby *Kraj* writers damned Conrad *in absentia* from the Polish Cavalry, while the prodigal (bearing deeper Russian scars than they) wrestled into alien speech his "images" of men "in attitudes of crucifixion" above "the destructive element" to form an art brooded over for thousands of hours at sea. From Conrad's letters in three languages, and from his silences, it appears that he felt the spectacular irony more deeply, with a Polish severity, than any guilt or shame divined posthumously in his art.

GERALD MORGAN

ESKIMO AUTOBIOGRAPHY

I. Nuligak, edited and translated by Maurice Metayer, illustrations by Ekootak, Peter Martin Associates. $5.00.

THE AUTHOR, a former hunter, became hospitalized and with the encouragement of Maurice Metayer reminisced about

his life from earliest times. Not only is this the first autobiography of a Canadian Eskimo, but the story represents a view of the old way of life which perhaps makes it unique. Both Diamond Jenness and Knud Rasmussen have published first-hand accounts of Eskimo life before the days of the trading post. What is different and valuable about Nuligak's story however, is his attitude towards a hunting life and the details he remembers.

At first the account appears to be merely a recital of numbers and kinds of animals killed, but gradually there emerges the constant struggle for food throughout the year. As a youngster Nuligak was orphaned and left with his grandmother. From this lowly position of hanger-on in a hunting camp, he yearned to become a good hunter. As he succeeded in this his position gradually changed until he became leader and provider for a camp of upwards of a dozen persons.

There are moments of drama and tragedy, but the story never becomes sentimentalized. When a boy he refused to abandon his grandmother on the trail. Instead in order to bury her at home he sledged her body in sub-zero weather for several days, gradually falling behind the other travellers. He describes the thrill of hunting polar bears, and does not fail to mention his terror after one hunt when he was laughed at by the children in his camp. The directness of his discussion of weather conditions for good hunting is striking. Sunny, still winter days when it was easy to travel were the worst for the hunter. The best conditions for approaching animals was just before a blizzard and this time was most hazardous for the hunter. He speaks with curiosity rather than fear at his first encounter with a school of killer whales while sealing in a kayak. Of interest too, is his comment about the variable ability to withstand cold on the part of his companions.

His sense of accomplishment as well as responsibility in providing food for a large household, to say nothing of visiting families and dog teams comes through well.

Here is evidence too of the bewilderment of smallpox and influenza epidemics, the capricious fur market which violently altered the author's annual cash income from as much as $3,000 to $70, and always, there are the challenge of the hunt the hazards of weather and the recurring shortage of food.

Nuligak's story is one of justifiable pride. But it is honest and independent. He writes neither in the stereotype of myth nor to please his white sponsors. It is an important book, and it is delightful.

R. W. DUNNING