$1.25 per copy

CANADIAN LITERATURE No. 36

Spring, 1968

BOOKS OF THE YEAR

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Annual Supplement

CANADIAN LITERATURE CHECKLIST, 1967

A QUARTERLY OF CRITICISM AND REVIEW

PUBLISHED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA, VANCOUVER 8

CANADIAN LITERATURE

LITTERATURE CANADIENNE

NUMBER 36, SPRING 1968

A Quarterly of Criticism and Review edited by George Woodcock

ASSOCIATE EDITOR: Donald Stephens
ASSISTANT EDITOR: W. H. New
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PRINTED IN CANADA BY MORRISS PRINTING COMPANY LTD., VICTORIA

Indexed in the *Canadian Periodical Index.*

Authorized as second class mail by the Post Office Department, Ottawa, and for payment of postage in cash.

Unsolicited manuscripts will not be returned unless accompanied by stamped, addressed envelopes.

Address subscriptions to Circulation Department, *Canadian Literature*, Publications Centre, University of British Columbia, Vancouver 8, B.C., Canada.

SUBSCRIPTION $3.50 A YEAR
OUTSIDE CANADA $4.00 A YEAR

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contributors

HUGH KENNER, whose article missed our special Wyndham Lewis issue owing to postal delays, is one of the leading authorities on Lewis; his *Wyndham Lewis* (1954) was the first important study of that controversial writer.

DESMOND PACEY is the author, among other books, of *Creative Writing in Canada* and *Ten Canadian Poets*, recently reissued in paper covers.

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JULIAN SYMONS was editor and founder of the epoch-making little magazine, *Twentieth Century Verse*. He has acquired international distinction as poet, biographer and mystery writer. Recently he has been reviewing poetry regularly for the *New Statesman*.

GERARD TOUGAS is the author of *French Canadian Literature*, the most important work on the subject in English.

GEORGE ROBERTSON, many of whose plays had been produced by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation on both television and radio, is at present engaged on writing a novel for which he had been given a Canada Council Fellowship.

GEORGE WOODCOCK's most recent book is his *Selected Poems*.

editorial

ABOUT BIOGRAPHIES

ONE MARK OF CANADIAN LITERATURE has always been the interest of writers in autobiography. Mrs. Brooke, in *A History of Emily Montague*, though she was writing about fictional people, was not writing of a fictional world. She was giving, quite strenuously, her own emotional and intellectual response to the Canadian scene. Other writers followed her, some in journals revealing the country and their own personalities. Still others made their own personal stories into novels, or what can loosely be termed novels. There are Mrs. Moodie and Mrs. Traill, giving their version of Canada based on personal experience. There is also Ethel Wilson, giving impressions of Vancouver in *The Innocent Traveller*.

The autobiographical element fluctuates with the biographical; stories are often more than stories, they are frequently based on legends or myths of people who had actually existed in full human form. Canadian writers, interested in their country and its landscape, move frequently into the lives of real people, or often base their fictional world on people who have actually existed. Not that this is a Canadian syndrome, by any means, but it does show that Canadian literature frequently goes to more of reality in its literature than do other literatures. Norman Bethune can be seen in MacLennan's characterization of Jerome Martell in *The Watch That Ends the Night*, and often MacLennan and other novelists have dealt with people not as well known. The interest in a kind of personal biography continues to hold sway in much Canadian fiction. But to tell the tale of a person's life, fictional or real, is always the novelist's function. It appears, however, that Canadian writers more often than not are using characters from the real world.

They do not all do it. But because of a rather misplaced Canadian consciousness, perhaps, it appears that Canadian writers seem to direct themselves toward the biographical.

Major Canadian writers, unlike American writers, work in an area where the world of a literary creation is not distinct from the real Canadian world. Canadian writers have not sought to create a universe of freedom within the field of literature itself. They do not triumph over that conditioning in society, the custom and environmental determinism that limit the action and vision of the major characters. There is not a memorable character to come out of Canadian fiction yet because the writers do not try to expand the self-meaning of those characters they describe. They continue to leave them in a world that the reader always recognizes. Some day their vision will lift them beyond completely; at the moment only a few authors point beyond, and reveal a capacity for the vision and dependence on the imagined world and its primacy over the real that will lift Canadian literature to greater international status.

* * * *

An interest in biography is reflected in the great number of books of pure biography, and autobiography, that came out in Canada in 1967. It was perhaps an auspicious year, and many biographies appeared. Some should not have appeared, but there were many that were needed, and things Canadian will be richer because of them. Three books stand out in this year of biography. Dale C. Thomson's book, *Louis St. Laurent*, has many fine qualities, though Thomson is a bit too close to his subject both in time and personal relationship for the good of the book, and as a consequence the volume lacks the perspective it demands. Michael Macklem's *God Have Mercy* is a particularly well-written book on Fisher; Macklem has exhausted all the material on Fisher, and has presented what is frequently pure Tudor political-religious history. And the other book is Father Neil McKenty's book, *Mitch Hepburn*. It is a successful political profile, lively and well written, and it is very much a life — though not as much at times as one would perhaps always want — of Mitch Hepburn. The tone is not defensive, and it examines Hepburn's policies and foibles with fair detachment. It is an admirable contribution to a Canadian history field in which there has been all too little written: biographies of provincial premiers who have given the nation's history some shape. The book is a delight to read. For that reason it has been awarded the 1967 University of British Columbia Medal for Popular Biography. *Canadian Literature* extends its congratulations to Father McKenty.

THE LAST EUROPEAN

Hugh Kenner

"I am the last American living the tragedy
of Europe." EZRA POUND, 1960

I WAS A FRESHMAN at the University of Toronto, watching black squirrels scamper beneath its elms, and settling into 73 St. George Street for my first extended stay away from home, when Wyndham Lewis was completing his first year's stock-taking of Toronto as a city of exile ("... Things have come to an awful pass here: if I don't do something to break out of the net, I shall end my days in a Toronto flophouse." ...); I was listening to C. N. Cochrane's lectures on historiography and G. S. Brett's on the continuous life of the mind and Malcolm Wallace's on Shakespearean compassion while the author of *Time and Western Man* and *The Lion and the Fox* was enduring the social chill and the central heating in a room "twenty-five feet by twelve" at the Hotel Tudor a half-hour's stroll away; at the same distance from one another we completed I my sophomore year in Toronto and he his third ("We are freezing out here slowly, in this icebox of a country. This hotel burned down six weeks ago, all but the annexe. I am living in the ruins"); but by the time the junior Eng. Lang. & Lit. curriculum had commenced to revolve past my fitful attention Roman satirists, English Augustans and French Cartesians, the author of *The Apes of God* had moved to Windsor, two hundred and twenty miles west-south-west.

The point of this synchronicity is that it has no point. I never heard the name of Lewis mentioned, and can only identify in retrospect, as a remote little space-time convolution, the two years I lived not a mile from a Titan.

There was no conspiracy to keep us undergraduates from finding out he existed. Though Toronto's, like all faculties, contained men scrupulous in their sensitivity

to the present (I know for a fact that one of them read *Partisan Review*) it seems clear that they didn't know about him either. They scanned print more promiscuously than we did, and his name would have surfaced from time to time before their ken atop, say, contributions to *Saturday Night*, but merely as a name: four blank syllables, attached to remarks about — oh, Canadian painting, a subject never deemed vital (our mentors were word men).

WHEN HE CROSSED the Atlantic he left behind what he lived on: his reputation, such as it was. Such as it was, it had gotten him portrait commissions, though never as many as fell to Augustus John. Chiefly he lived on advances for books, also obtained by pledging his reputation. Some were books he cared about, some he would not have elected to write but for necessity. Either kind drew on meditations nearly habitual with him, concerned with fame, illusion, groundless belief, and the manipulatability of these. It is no wonder he wrote so much about politics.

Painting can be a fantastically lucrative vocation, though it never was for Lewis; and if a painter have Lewis's gifts, and Lewis's lack of income, he is likely to give thought to what it is that people who buy pictures, when they do buy them, think they are paying for, reflections apt to reinforce any nascent interest his intellect may take in voids and vacua. For what can Pablo Picasso possibly be doing that is worth a gangster's ransom to anybody? The answer is, being Picasso: being the man whose name some utterly mysterious nexus joins to a public idea, an idea his skill, his luck, his dealers engendered. He is not being paid as a workman for a day's work when he overpaints a canvas; nor for the usefulness of his product in decorating a wall, which a reproduction would do quite as well. Nor, since the picture is a unique exemplum sold to one buyer once in one transaction, does some crude determination of the number of people he interests determine his remuneration, as it does a writer's. Nor, except for some such pivotal picture as a major artist will not achieve more than five or six times before he dies, is some unique concentration of human insight coming into the purchaser's keeping. No, whoever owns a Picasso owns (at great cost) just that — a Picasso: an example of his work, very like a hundred other examples, work to each example of which, by agreement, great value is affixed. The agreement will possibly one day collapse, as in the case of Millais, and the market deflate. Meanwhile the living painter, needing to eat, will hope for such an accretion of public

imponderables as will set on new examples of his work the price commanded by a reputation.

Will hope; will strive? Possibly. And if he is gifted, like Lewis, with word-skills also, he will set them to work too, in part to make himself still better known. Rossetti, an indifferent painter, did this, and Whistler, an excellent one, both profitably. And in the mind of the British picture-connoisseur (though Lewis publicly derided that species, or doubted its existence) Wyndham Lewis has a public existence, compounded, like all public existences, of rumour and noise and gallery talk and press cuttings (a delimited void, in fact, laced with tracer bullets): a less potent existence than John's or Picasso's or Klee's, but sufficient to foster the indispensable feeling that "a Lewis" on one's wall might be something more than *x* square inches of pigment: might be, in fact, a whiff of heady "reality," worth an outlay. That was partly what the books were *for*, in greater or less degree according to the book. It was also (hence their lasting interest) what they tended to be *about*: the nature of public identity, the identity of a person, a movement, an idea. All these, Lewis thought, were corrupted once they went into action, entoiled themselves with the contingent, and brought in groceries. But men of the intellect need groceries.

And in North America — in New York at first, and for three long years in Toronto — none of that fructive nothingness was at his disposal. He was simply a man who could paint pictures, if you liked the kind of pictures he painted, and could also write, with forceful and it seemed barbarous word-joinery, deploying moreover when he wrote ideas not reassuringly continuous with the other ideas that were going round in those years. So at about the age of sixty he was brought up against the full implications of a world where nobody knew who he was. "Wyndham Lewis" had ceased to exist.

The urgent problem was to stay alive: to make and cultivate contacts, to secure commissions, to solicit publishers' advances: in short to improvise "Wyndham Lewis" again, in a cold land at war. He expended disheartening efforts to little effect. Devoid of an identity, he was reduced to a nervous system. It is no wonder that everything Torontonian got on his nerves: the heat, the cold, the plumbing, the ventilation, the liquor regulations, the intellectuals.

He began his North American experience by finishing a novel — *The Vulgar Streak* — about a man who discards his identity and makes a new one, supported by a new trade, that of counterfeiter. He finished with that

experience by recreating it from a decade's distance, back in London, in a novel — *Self Condemned* — about a man who discards his identity (that of British professor) and exists in Momaco, Canada, as an exacerbated nervous system merely, until after some years he claims a new identity (that of American professor) and is free to carry on "insect-like activity" in a "Cemetery of Shells." His Canadian years, his years as a nervous system, expose him to shock and psychic reduction and tragedy. Canada, projected from the author's experience there, is the book's synecdoche for limbo, a frigid province remote from a forgotten sun.

This novel about Canada — Canada as experienced by a stranded Martian — derives its insidious power from the recognition it elicits that we all to some extent share that condition. This recognition emanates from chilling crystals embedded in the intimate texture of the prose. When you are nobody, nowhere, arrived out of nowhere, unknown, then anything at all that touches your attention does so with uncanny aggressiveness. A squirrel for instance is neither an entrancing fellow-creature, as for a child, nor a frisking detail in the continuum of things, as for the urbanite, nor a reveller on the largest mown lawns he has ever seen, as for the Varsity freshman, nor even a professional problem, as for the rodent control operator. No, it is something suddenly perceived staring "with one large popeye through the window, his head, like a neolithic axe-head, pressed against the glass, standing on his hind legs": an alarming apparition that does not recur.

These moments of hallucinatory encounter we have all experienced when we are most wholly cut off from all we normally are: in our dreams. *Self Condemned* is like an immense bad dream — the psychedelic fan would say a bad trip — implacable, engulfing, unnervingly paced, voices and blurs and acts of madness and over and over those moments of eerily heightened awareness, so randomly related to what is there to be aware of: the vertigo of a man without an identity on which he can rely. A distinguished critic not long after its publication assured the readers of an American journal that Toronto was not in fact like that at all. He wryly suggested that they consider the testimony of one who merely lived there. Quite: no place is like that if you live there.

But who, Lewis would ask (had asked repeatedly since 1910) — who really lives anywhere? No one does who lives, as Lewis did, in his mind, accumulating sharp acts of elaborated perception. The mind can always demand an order of sense to which the real is unequal. Lewis exploited this situation, one might say, all his life: it gave him reasons to be active: "Most of my books," he wrote in 1940, "are merely a protest against Anglo-Saxon civilization, which puts so many obstacles in the way of the artist." He had been some time discovering these ob-

stacles. "I started life as what is called a 'revolutionary' . . . : a man of the *tabula rasa*. I thought everything could be wiped out in a day, and rebuilt nearer to the heart's desire. I designed an entirely new London for instance." You can make these rapid changes in your mind, as fast as you can whisk your thoughts about. Outside your mind you cannot. It was not merely Anglo-Saxon civilization that was recalcitrant, not merely the sluggish inhabitants of London, glancing comfortably at the Albert Memorial. It was reality, the created actual: that against which the hand bumps, or the head.

He thought not, however; he tended to suppose every named thing, every encountered distraction, as provisional as the painter's reputation. So his fictions specialize in dismissals of reality: in voids where people like the Communists of *The Revenge for Love* are designing wholly new Londons (a capitalist hung from each lamp-post) or painting wholly new Van Goghs (since his tricks, authenticated by bought experts, will sell); or where Vincent Penhale in *The Vulgar Streak* is making for himself a new self, supported by new money, which though skilfully made in the basement is every bit as "real" as the output of the Royal Mint. And the texture of his novels, right from *Tarr* onward, was made up of details like that hallucinatory squirrel, fixed on the page with arbitrary irrelevance.

This was a habit of mind appropriate to painting, where one may elaborate a passage which the eye may choose to pause on or not, or which may lie in wait to gratify the ripe seeker after local felicities. In prose, which exacts sequential attention, it frequently ministered to clutter, a vice of style. The painter of a squirrel, his mind stocked with shapes, may well elaborate its skull's resemblance to a neolithic axe-head. The describer of a squirrel impedes attention by such a remark; it takes us away from the squirrel. The describer however of a squirrel presented by a state of semi-dream, a squirrel not part of nature's continuum but thrust against the consciousness of a man deprived of any scale of familiarity, can by invoking the axe-head and the pop-eye touch on the nearly primitive terrors of such an apparition.

And this was Lewis's feat in *Self Condemned*, to discover the use of his mannerisms: to manage with their aid that the provincial banal should menace like an apparition, and that a man should plausibly be driven mad by it. He had often patrolled the borders of madness before. His previous novels had repeatedly plunged into vertigo: the duel in *Tarr*, for instance, or the killing of the civil guard in *The Revenge for Love*. Their notation for vertigo is a sudden slowing-down of time, in which particulars follow one another at molasses speed and

with stroboscopic vividness. People are tricked into such abysses by misfortune, or by a presumptuous disregard for the rules of the communal game. The books are controlled by a theory about the communal: that it is a game, beset with savage penalties, and a rather silly game because it is controlled by silly people. The losers, like Victor Stamp in *The Revenge for Love*, have not mastered the game, as Lewis never quite mastered the painting game (he could paint, but that was only part of the game, and not the most important part).

Self Condemned, however, is not about a game. It is about the meaning of identity, amid the great convulsions that render meaningless millions of lives. And it does not contain an episode of vertigo; it is from end to end a prolonged vertigo, a slow-motion picture of very little happening, appraising the power of that very little by its very slowness to destroy René Harding implacably. When near the end he is shown his wife on a morgue slab he sees her much as the squirrel was seen: "Top-most was the bloodstained head of Hester, lying on its side. The poor hair was full of mud, which flattened it upon the skull. Her eye protruded: it was strange it should still have the strength to go on peering on in the darkness." This is a moment of appalling, disorienting shock; the nauseous intensity of its random detail (a corpse as still life) is evidently right. But in being continuous with the texture of so much else in the book it clarifies the nature of the book's less lurid passages: they document the continuous disorientation of the political prisoner, the man displaced, the survivor (there have been millions) of a community elsewhere in space or mislaid in time: a nightmare state of being no-one nowhere. Everyone alive today knows something about this. The break-up of Europe, the subsequent great privations and migrations, transposed whole peoples into a sort of life-long Momaco.

MOMACO, THE SLOW-MOTION CITY, was made out of Lewis's experience of Toronto, as later Third City in *The Human Age* was made out of his experience of post-war London. Both are places of exile constructed by the imagination out of inhabited places, as though the imagination were insisting that exile, since the war, has entered into the very stuff of human experience. And this is what we are explicitly told early in *Self Condemned*, when during the last pre-war summer René visits his friend Parkinson:

> Both of them knew that this was the last year of an epoch, and that such men as themselves could never exist on earth again.... They knew that as far as that quiet, unmolested elect life was concerned, they were both condemned to death:

> that the chronological future was, in fact, *a future life*, about which they both felt very dubious. They might survive as phantasms in a future England: or they might learn to live in some other way.

This points forward to *The Human Age*, a book about life experienced as a future life. If it also points forward to Momaco, that is because such a future, one no European can inhabit, already exists on the western side of the waters. Canadians are apt to find the Momaco details implausible — icicles for instance six feet long and as thick as a man's arm — as though the country were somehow being misrepresented. But Lewis was recreating the paranoia of exile; and one does see such icicles sometimes, even in Toronto.

John Ruskin, obsessed with the deterioration of all things, lamented once that the very Alps grew shabby, their snow-caps exiguous, their flanks grey and bare. This remark was seized on as evidence of his madness, until research disclosed that it was perfectly true. There had been a long cycle of scanty precipitation. Ruskin's emotional obsessions had not deformed his vision of the Alps, but had shown him the Alps as Lewis saw the squirrel, abstracted from habitual schemes of reference which tell men year after year that Alps are splendid or that squirrels are jaunty. A climatologist makes a similar abstraction, and notices among the Alps the same phenomena Ruskin did. But the climatologist's observations do not disturb us; Ruskin's do. We do not trust a man whose passions arm his vision. Yet we heed a man whose method replaces vision, even when he brings the same news the obsessed man does. We say the obsessed man's facts must be wrong; we say this to exorcise his obsession, which we fear is insidious.

A cold "as impossible to keep out as radium," cold that "walked through your heart, it dissolved your kidney, it flashed down your marrow and made an icicle of your coccyx"; a morning light that "seems to bang you in the face, as it glares in at the window"; a newspaper clipping about a boy's eyeball pierced by a splinter of ice; tears caught by the wind "as they came over the rim of the eyeball" and dashed against the wayfarer's shoulder: these observations, individually accurate, limn a felt hostility: the winter not indifferently *there* but actively malevolent. It was his sense of being menaced that shaped Lewis's perception, that shapes René's. And Lewis felt menaced — by the seasons as by everything else — because he *was* menaced; he was menaced by annihilation. By a mere change of state, by translation in wartime across a body of water, Wyndham Lewis, painter, satirist, pamphleteer, Enemy, had been reduced to virtual non-existence.

There would seem to have been no better demonstration of his life-long thesis that the human world, identity itself, is precarious, provisional: image that un-

sleeping intellect, that acetylene will, still blazing but rendered irrelevant, disregarded by professional custodians of the life of the mind, leafing their lecture-notes among the elms and the squirrels a mile away! So little does it take — a mere switching-off of attention — to annihilate worlds. But something of more moment was going forward than one ignored painter's privations. His troubles were an historical paradigm. Midway through his first summer in Toronto he wrote to T. Sturge Moore:

> How calm those days were before the epoch of wars and social revolution, when you used to sit on one side of your work-table and I on the other, and we would talk — with trees and creepers of the placid Hampstead domesticity beyond the windows, and you used to grunt with a philosophic despondence I greatly enjoyed. It was the last days of the Victorian world of artificial peacefulness — of the R.S.P.C.A. and London Bobbies, of "slumming" and Buzzards cakes. As at that time I had never heard of anything else, it seemed to my young mind in the order of nature. You — I suppose — knew it was all like the stunt of an illusionist. You taught me many things. But you never taught me *that*. I first discovered about it in 1914 — with growing surprise and disgust.

This rhymes with the doomed communion of René and Parkinson on the eve of a second war. The full import of the discovery Lewis recalls making in 1914 did not come home to him until 1941. For years he had seen the destruction of old illusions as opportunity for a new illusionist ("I designed an entirely new London for instance").

Between 1914 and 1945 millions of Europeans made such a discovery. The New World has never had to make it. The New World has tended to suppose that the order of nature does dominate its arrangements, that its opening arms of welcome symbolize (however scorched the earth elsewhere) access to all that man's heart can desire: mountains and fir-trees, water and wheat and sunlight. Do men need men? Do they need cities? The New World inclines to think not. Her sage is Thoreau. She feels that her cities are her problem areas; that some economic process, no doubt related to the concentrations of capital, makes them exist and metabolize thought and wealth; but that they turn cancerous.

But Europe is a place of cities, and the reliance of a Wyndham Lewis on his city is so complex that a city on a lower plane of organization than London's deprived him virtually of existence. He was not like the millions whose gratitude has confirmed the New World in its hypotheses, who deprived by war and famine of everything took life and hope from the gift of elements in an elemental continent. It was not for elements that he expressed so strident a hunger but for

community: for all that can cross neither frontiers nor oceans: the established web of relationships, indescribably fragile, that made his life as painter and writer possible. Even his enmities were such relationships.

Despite many acts of particular kindness such a life was impossible to him in New York and equally impossible in Toronto, for he had left behind what it is to be a European, and so stepped out of himself. He stepped into the kind of nightmare for which he had been all his life perfecting the notation: phenomena become apparitions, charged with random detail. Back in England (and blind) he applied that notation to the Canadian experience: *Self Condemned.* Then he generalized the case and reapplied it; he repeated the fictive experiment of cutting a man loose from Europe, but this time set him, as René Harding had not been set, in alliance with the centres of power. The centres of power were successively the Bailiff and Sammael, and the book was *The Human Age.* It showed that power was not the nutriment René's soul perished for lack of. It also opened up theological issues Lewis was still expecting to confront in 1956. In 1957 he died.

René Harding in Momaco, Pullman in Third City and Dis, are beings abstracted from accustomed spaces and times and so from identity. A people increasingly indifferent to accustomed spaces and times, increasingly migrant, increasingly disrooted, is both growing away from the experience of those books and unwittingly reliving that experience. Little symptomatic adjustments occur: the arts, for instance, turn anonymous, as we learn that the TV commercial, not the play with a known author or the painting validated by some master's signature, is the imaginative focus of our culture. The bicycle chain swings in a suburban street. An eye is gouged out. Crowds walk past death indifferently.

It was partly in such a world, familiar to us, that Lewis (prompted by his demon) lived all his life, but partly in an older Europe. When he came to Canada, the last European, he came to a future which gratified his demon but in which he was miserable. In provisional Canada, a Canadian city with its minimal communal bonds, its bleak continuities and nearly unnoticed convolutions of police-court violence, prefigured a human future into which Canada has passed with a minimum of post-war fuss. One thing we can learn from Wyndham Lewis's misery is the nature of the quiet transmutation the very assumptions of civilization have undergone, which today makes the cultural Arctic he barely survived seem normal and habitable everywhere.

THE OUTLOOK FOR CANADIAN LITERATURE

Desmond Pacey

FOR OVER A QUARTER OF A CENTURY now, I have been engaged intermittently in the task of publicly taking the pulse of Canadian literature. I am not quite so naive as to think that my activity in this regard has been of any particular help either to the patient or to the public, but it has been a source of innocent amusement for me, and at least I have the satisfaction of knowing that the patient is in rather better health than when my diagnosis began. This is a statement which not all doctors could make with equal assurance.

It was in December 1938 that I made my first and very tentative examination. I had a few months before arrived in Cambridge, England, as a Research Student in English Literature. Although I had only lived in Canada seven years, I had conceived a deep love for the country and a considerable although by no means profound admiration for its literature. I was annoyed to find that my fellow-students at Cambridge were not only ignorant of a Canadian literature, but pretended to believe that it did not exist. I therefore wrote, and published in *The Cambridge Review*, an article optimistically entitled "At Last — A Canadian Literature". There was no question mark after that title: it was an arrogant assertion, rather than a modest question, and the symptom, no doubt, of a youthful brashness which I have not even yet succeeded in eliminating from my personality.

The theme of that first article was that after a long period of derivativeness, Canadian literature was at last finding distinctive voices and distinctive modes of utterance. I based my case largely on the poetry of E. J. Pratt and the novels and stories of Morley Callaghan; both of these writers I had come to know

personally during my student days at the University of Toronto. The case was certainly not argued very cogently, for there were virtually no Canadian books available to me in Cambridge, and I had to write almost entirely from memory.

The reception of that article was not so enthusiastic as to determine me to play permanently the role, recently attributed to me by *The Times Literary Supplement*, of "the distinguished apologist for Canadian literature", and I might well have lost all interest in the subject had it not been for an incident in my early teaching career at Brandon College. The University of Manitoba at that time had a series of province-wide radio programmes known as "The University on the Air", and Brandon College had been assigned a group of these programmes with the sub-title "Manitoba Sketches". I was asked to do a fifteen-minute talk on "Manitoba in Literature", and as the only Manitoba author I had ever read was Frederick Philip Grove, I devoted the whole programme to his novels. One thing led to another: the editor of the *Manitoba Arts Review* asked me to develop the radio talk into an article; Dr. Lorne Pierce of the Ryerson Press read the article and asked me to expand it into a book; and so my career as a Canadian literary critic was launched.

When I began my study of Canadian literature, two much more distinguished men were also — quite unknown to me — making their first systematic examinations of it. I refer to the late E. K. Brown and to A. J. M. Smith, both of whom published very important books on the subject in 1943. As far as the *study* of Canadian literature is concerned, the decisive turning point in my opinion was the publication in that year of Brown's *On Canadian Poetry* and of Smith's *Book of Canadian Poetry*. Neither of these men could be charged with parochialism, narrow nationalism, or special pleading, since both, although of Canadian origin, had received their postgraduate training at great overseas universities and had taken up important posts in American universities — Brown at the University of Chicago, and Smith at Michigan State.

AT THAT TIME the study of Canadian literature was far from being academically respectable. A few universities included a small amount of Canadian writing in their literary courses, but there were no full-year undergraduate courses in the subject, still less any graduate courses, and still less any professors of English who made Canadian literature their specialty. The situation has changed radically in the past two decades, and it is changing so rapidly today

that one begins to wonder whether the pendulum may not swing too far. The number of students taking courses in Canadian literature in our universities is already large, and shows no sign of abating. There are approximately two hundred and sixty such students this year (1965-66) at U.N.B., and I am told that there are four hundred and fifty at the University of Western Ontario, well over a hundred at the University of Alberta, and over two hundred at the University of British Columbia. Even the University of Toronto, which in my day allowed us about two weeks for a hasty glimpse of Canadian literature at the end of a course rather misleadingly called "American and Canadian Literature", has recently initiated, I understand, a full undergraduate course in the subject.

Furthermore, the Americans, who have so assiduously cultivated English and American literature, are now looking for fresh fields to conquer — and many of them are looking over our border. An Institute of Canadian Studies was recently set up at the University of Vermont, and Canadian literature is being studied, usually in the larger context of the literature of the Commonwealth, at several other American universities, notably Texas and Pennsylvania. Another symptom of this growing American interest in our literature is the recent establishment of a Commonwealth Literature group in the Modern Language Association of America. This trend is sure to continue and accelerate.

There are yet other signs that the study of Canadian literature has become academically respectable. One was the foundation in 1959 at the University of British Columbia of the magazine *Canadian Literature*, which, under the distinguished editorship of George Woodcock, has maintained a high standard of literary history, criticism and scholarship. Another was the publication earlier this year of *The Literary History of Canada*, a book of almost a thousand pages issued by the University of Toronto Press under the general editorship of Professor Carl F. Klinck. This book is important in itself, as it is the first truly comprehensive study of its subject; but it is perhaps even more important for the stimulus it is sure to provide for other, more specialized studies. Now that at last we can all see how vast the field is, before very long a host of busy miners will be sinking their exploratory shafts all over it.

For although much has been accomplished in the scholarly study of Canadian literature during the past quarter of a century, much more remains to be done. There are still no definitive studies of the main genres of Canadian literature — of the Canadian novel, Canadian poetry, Canadian essays, Canadian short stories. And there are still almost no good biographical and critical studies of individual authors, of Lampman, Carman, Roberts, Scott, Pratt or Leacock.

Another virtually unexplored area is that of Canadian travel literature, which if traced in detail from its origins, would provide us with much more information about our social, economic and cultural history. Among the most exciting chapters in *The Literary History* are those by David Galloway and Victor Hopwood which deal with the literature of Canadian exploration. They have opened up for us a whole new dimension of our writing, and extended by almost two centuries the depth of our literary tradition.

One corner of this area is the study of the reactions to the Canadian scene of such distinguished literary visitors as Captain Marryat, Charles Dickens, Matthew Arnold, Oscar Wilde, Rudyard Kipling and Rupert Brooke, and more recently of English writers such as Wyndham Lewis and J. B. Priestley. A study of the records they left of their impressions of Canada would help us to understand not only this country, but the country from which they came. A little over two years ago, Mr. Geoffrey Keynes was kind enough to let me look through his collection of the manuscript letters of Rupert Brooke, and to read and make notes on those which Brooke wrote from Canada. His sardonic and often supercilious remarks undoubtedly reflect the cultural poverty of our country at that time, but even more clearly they reveal the kind of upper-class English snobbery which made Engishmen in those early years of this century so suspect among us.

Another fruitful area of research is the reception which Canadian literature enjoyed (or suffered) in Great Britain. We speak glibly of the international reputations established by Haliburton, Parker, Roberts, Carman and Leacock, but no one has yet made a close study of the precise nature and extent of their reputations. I spent the academic year 1962-63 in Cambridge making a beginning on this study, and although all the evidence is not yet available I can offer a few tentative conclusions.

Firstly, we tend to exaggerate the overseas vogue of these authors. Haliburton was widely and enthusiastically reviewed in the British press, but in this respect he was a solitary exception. Gilbert Parker was never taken seriously as a novelist, and was judged quite rightly to be an entertainer rather than a serious artist; Roberts had almost no British recognition as a poet, and only a brief and fairly perfunctory one as a writer of prose nature sketches; Bliss Carman was the only Canadian poet to have his books regularly reviewed in the best literary periodicals of England, but he was always described as a minor poet and his vogue (if that is not too strong a word) lasted only for slightly over a decade; Leacock was always reviewed, but not with any great discernment.

To illustrate the ironies that turn up in such a study, let me cite the first Eng-

lish review of a Leacock book — his *Elements of Political Science* (1906) — in the course of which the reviewer in the *Athenaeum* accused Leacock of being unable to see a joke. Or take these sentences from the *Times Literary Supplement*'s review of Leacock's *Literary Lapses* (1910):

> These are slight American humourous sketches, on a great many subjects. . . . Mr. Leacock is not a subtle wit. He must be taken in small doses and hardly bears reperusal. But a little of him in the right mood is very comforting.

Do they not catch perfectly the smug complacency of the British intelligentsia in 1910 — even to the failure, still only too prevalent in the United Kingdom, to differentiate between Canada and America? It is only fair to add, however, that by 1912, when *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town* appeared, the *TLS* had discovered Mr. Leacock's Canadianism. The reviewer went to the other extreme: from patronizing Leacock as an American he switched to embracing him as a Britisher:

> His real hard work . . . is distilling sunshine. This new book is full of it — the sunshine of humour, the thin keen sunshine of irony, the mellow evening sunshine of sentiment. Universal things like these are not intended merely to pamper the pride of Imperialism. Still, we cannot resist a secret joy in the fact that all the queer and crooked characters that flourish in maple-shaded Mariposa . . . are British-born.

Such little ironies are frequent. Early in 1929 two interesting but admittedly imperfect novels by Canadians appeared in England — Frederick Philip Grove's *Our Daily Bread* and Raymond Knister's *White Narcissus*. If they had been reviewed seriously and sympathetically in such an influential English weekly as the *New Stateman and Nation*, their authors might have been decisively encouraged and a basis might have been laid for their English reputations. Instead, it was their bad luck to fall into the hands of that supercilious and bad-tempered old Etonian, Cyril Connolly, who was given eleven novels to review *en masse* on the eve of leaving for a Spanish holiday. Blithely he dashed off a review of which these are the relevant portions:

> *Our Daily Bread* and *White Narcissus* are Canadian novels. One is soft-boiled and the other hard. The publishers are to be congratulated on starting a line in colonial fiction with 'a country which has produced remarkably few novelists of a thoughtful quality.' One is a wistful little love-story, mildly sophisticated, the other a typical family epic in the American style. The idea is refreshing; there must surely be many more colonies in which the necessary condition, quoted

> above, will apply. Meanwhile Canada is behind Jamaica, which has quite a good novelist within it, and a coloured expatriate outside.
> ... These books have finished this reviewer — more than he could do for them — and tomorrow they will be left in a hotel or dropped in the equable Adour, while he makes his way still fleeing from simple people and those who write about them, towards the mountains of Aragon.

Three years later Raymond Knister was to die, possibly by suicide, certainly in despair.

THE SECOND CONCLUSION I would draw from my study of the reception of Canadian literature in England is that our cultural image there is largely a function of our political reputation. When England was most Empire-conscious, in the period from 1890 to 1918, there were a good many favourable discussions of Canadian writers and of Canadian literature generally. As Canada gradually asserted its independence in the nineteen-twenties and thirties, the English interest in us proportionately declined. Our contribution to the Allied effort in World War II again stimulated some interest in our literature, but as we have once again asserted our independent role the interest has waned. Only recently, when there has been some revival of imperial sentiment in the terms of a Commonwealth cultural entente, has there been a revival of interest on a modest and tentative scale. But in spite of all the improved systems of communication in our time, Englishmen as a whole are still ignorant of what Canada is really like. The supreme example of this is the *Times Literary Supplement* reviewer of Robertson Davies' and Tyrone Guthrie's book about the Stratford Shakespearian Festival, *Twice have the Trumpets Sounded.* Referring to that Ontario theatrical venture, the reviewer wrote, "Mr. Guthrie did not patronize his prairie public. . . . "

But I may seem to be in danger of confining the outlook for Canadian literature to the outlook for the academic study of Canadian literature. I do not mean to imply that the health of Canadian literature depends upon the amount of academic critical scrutiny it is given, but this is nevertheless symptomatic of a wider, more general interest in what our writers produce.

When he wrote *On Canadian Poetry* in 1943, E. K. Brown began with a chapter which is a classic statement of the difficulties which had traditionally plagued Canadian literature until that time. If we consider his statement, and see to what extent conditions have improved in the twenty-odd intervening years,

I think you will agree that the outlook for Canadian literature is much more hopeful today than it was a generation ago.

Brown begins by asserting, somewhat defensively, that "there is a Canadian literature, often rising to effects of great beauty, but it has stirred little interest outside Canada. . . . Canadian books may occasionally have had a mild impact outside Canada; Canadian literature has had none." It would be idle to pretend that there has been a really radical improvement in this respect. To the authors of international reputation whom Brown mentions — Haliburton, Roberts, Parker, Connor, Montgomery, Service, Leacock, Mazo de la Roche and Morley Callaghan — we may now add the names of Ethel Wilson, Mordecai Richler, James Reaney, Norman Levine, Margaret Laurence and (somewhat dubiously, since they are not clearly Canadian) Brian Moore and Malcolm Lowry. But it is still true to say that these writers are known rather as individuals than as parts of a specifically Canadian tradition. For reasons which I have mentioned, interest in our national literature, as a distinctive part of the literature of the Commonwealth, is growing and will continue to grow, but I do not believe that the growth will be as rapid or as far-reaching as we might like it to become. Why should the British or Americans — our most likely outside readers — devote much of their attention to our literature, when they already have so much of their own? Canada is simply not yet an important enough figure on the world's stage to command that kind of interest. The United States is now so powerful that the British feel they must seek to understand her, but an understanding of Canada is not, and is not in the foreseeable future likely to be, high on their list of priorities.

To put my conclusion on this point briefly, I believe that the growth of outside interest in Canadian literature over the next generation will be measurable but not large. This means that we Canadians must scrutinize our own literature, and learn to set and apply our own standards of judgment. We have been too prone in the past to await the verdict of London or New York; our verdicts for the foreseeable future will have to be largely our own.

This brings us to Brown's next point, which is that "even within the national borders the impact of Canadian books and of Canadian literature has been relatively superficial." Here I believe there has been a demonstrable improvement in the space of a generation. For a long time Canadian writers had to find their publishers and their public outside Canada; now a Canadian book can command a large enough audience at home to make its domestic publication economically viable, even on occasion profitable. Irving Layton is a good example of a Cana-

dian writer who survives almost exclusively by virtue of his reputation within Canada, and the bulk of the sales of such accomplished writers as Ethel Wilson, Robertson Davies, Hugh MacLennan and Earle Birney are transacted in Canadian bookstores. There is a tremendous voluntary enthusiasm for Canadian books among Canadian students, and among a growing number of Canadian adults. I have some evidence that this conclusion is not merely the result of my own prejudices: Norman Levine, who is serving this year as writer in residence at the University of New Brunswick after sixteen years of voluntary exile in the United Kingdom, tells me that he finds an almost miraculous change for the better in the Canadian interest in books and writers.

Brown's third major obstacle to the development of a Canadian literature is what he calls "the colonial spirit." "A colony," he says, "lacks the spiritual energy to rise above routine" and "it lacks this energy because it does not adequately believe in itself." He goes on:

> It applies to what it has standards which are imported, and therefore artificial and distorting. It sets the great good place not in its present, nor in its past nor in its future, but somewhere outside its own borders, somewhere beyond its own possibilities. . . . It is clear that those who are content with this attitude will seek the best in jam and toffee, from beyond the ocean. That anything Canadian could be supremely good would never enter their heads. . . . Canada has no distinct flag, and no single distinct anthem although Mr. Mackenzie King paused on the very brink of asserting the latter; the relations between the Canadian Provinces and the federal government are subject to review in London; and the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council, also in London, is our highest court. But Canada has her own ministers in foreign countries, makes treaties without reference to Britain, and declares, or refuses to declare, war by the instrument of her own Parliament. Is it any wonder that Canadian thinking about Canada is confused . . . ? The average English Canadian would still like to have it both ways and is irritated, or nonplussed, by the demand that he make a resolute choice; at heart he does not know whether Canada or the Empire is his supreme political value.

Our first reaction, on re-reading those words a scant generation after they were written, is to be heartened by the progress that we have made. We do have a flag, we shall soon have an anthem, and for better or for worse we have cut almost all the imperial ties. On second thought, however, we may wonder whether we have merely replaced one dependence with another: are we not now in danger of becoming a mere appendage of the United States? Temperamentally an optimist, I do not think so. Although we have yet far to go in fully defining and valuing our Canadian identity, I believe that we are on that road, and that as

we clarify our national goals our literature will at once reflect and guide us towards those objectives. We are far more ready today than we were a generation ago to judge what we have by our own standards, to put, for example, our own *imprimatur* upon our writers rather than to await the judgment of critics beyond our borders. As *The Times Literary Supplement* noted of Canadian criticism in its recent Commonwealth issue, we are no longer on the defensive: we see our own strength and weakness and neither boast of the one nor grovel over the other. We are at least approaching that state of cultural maturity in which we are ready to see ourselves steadily and see ourselves whole.

The next obstacle to the development of good Canadian literature cited by Brown is the spirit of the frontier, or its afterglow. He explains this as follows:

> Most Canadians live at some distance from anything that could even in the loosest terms be known as a material frontier; but the standards which the frontier-life applied are still current, if disguised. Books are a luxury on the frontier; and writers are an anomaly. On the frontier a man is mainly judged by what he can do to bring his immediate environment quickly and visibly under the control of society. No nation is more practical than ours.... The uneasiness in the presence of the contemplative or aesthetic is to be ascribed to the frontier feeling that these are luxuries which should not be sought at a time when there is a tacit contract that everyone should be doing his share in the common effort to build the material structure of a nation. That a poem or a statue or a metaphysic could contribute to the fabric of a nation is not believed.

This passage now has an even more old-fashioned ring than Brown's description of our political dependence upon Britain. Theatres, art galleries, and centres for the performing arts have sprung up all over the country; poets read their works to large and enthusiastic audiences in every major city from coast to coast; our writers and artists are generously provided with fellowships, medals and travel grants by the Canada Council; resident painters, sculptors, musicians and writers are becoming a commonplace feature of our universities. We have come to realize that the quality of our lives and the prestige of our nation depend just as much on our art and culture as upon our science and technology, and we manifest an almost frantic desire to make up for our long neglect of things of the mind and the spirit. The Canada of the post-Massey Report era is no longer content to be a frontier society.

We are not content to be — but there are certain senses in which we still are, for all our frantic efforts to progress. The interest in literature in particular and the arts in general is still confined to a relatively small group of our population.

The theatres and art galleries have been built, but by the great mass of the population they are regarded as exotic growths. In many cities the theatres have trouble maintaining themselves, and the art galleries either fail to draw many visitors or draw them for the wrong reasons — for such reasons as social prestige and the desire to display one's new dress or hat. Of more direct relevance to the welfare of Canadian literature is the generally low cultural and intellectual level of our newspapers, magazines, radio and television programmes. In a country like England, a serious writer can augment his income by writing occasional reviews or essays for such newspapers as *The Observer*, *The Sunday Times*, or *The Guardian*, or for such magazines as *The New Statesman and Nation*, *The Spectator*, or *The Listener*. We have no such newspapers or magazines in this country. The book pages of even our best newspapers are naive and clumsy in comparison, and the fees they pay for reviewing are ridiculously low. Although *Saturday Night* is making a real effort to play a role in Canada similar to that of *The New Statesman* and *The Spectator*, its circulation is still so relatively small that it cannot exercise the kind of influence or command the prestige which would encourage our best writers to contribute frequently to it. And of course when we look at radio and television we realize only too keenly that we have not fully outgrown the frontier mentality. Despite all the heroic efforts of the C.B.C., the intellectual level of ninety-five percent of our television and radio programmes is moronic.

We have not yet, then, really outgrown the malign influence of the frontier spirit, although we have made some demonstrable progress. A more thoroughgoing transformation has occurred in the space of a single generation to the puritanism which Brown lists next among the obstacles to our literary development. Canadian Puritanism, says Brown, "allows to the artist no function except watering down moral ideas of an orthodox kind into a solution attractive to minds not keen enough to study the ideas in more abstract presentations." No one can deny that puritanism is still a force amongst us, but it has lost its power to control the media of communication. Books which were in trouble with the censors thirty or so years ago, such as Frederick Philip Grove's *Settlers of the Marsh* or Morley Callaghan's *Such is my Beloved*, now seem innocuous, almost naive, beside some of the poems of Irving Layton and Leonard Cohen or such recent Canadian novels as Hugh Hood's *White Figure, White Ground* and Stephen Vizinczey's *In Praise of Older Women*. There is virtually no subject that a Canadian writer cannot discuss frankly today.

The final obstacle which Brown mentions, regionalism, I have never been able

to see as an obstacle. He admits that regionalist art may have its virtues, particularly that of accuracy, but he asserts:

> In the end, however, regionalist art will fail because it stresses the superficial and the peculiar at the expense, at least, if not to the exclusion, of the fundamental and universal. The advent of regionalism may be welcomed with reservations as a stage through which it may be well for us to pass, as a discipline and a purgation. But if we are to pass through it, the coming of great books will be delayed beyond the lifetime of anyone now living.

What worries me about the logic of Brown's argument is his assumption that regional accuracy and universal validity are incompatible. Are they incompatible in the Irish poetry of Yeats, or the Wessex novels of Thomas Hardy, or the Russian plays of Chekhov? Rather than seeing the strong regional particularities of this country as an obstacle to great art, I see them as an advantage — an advantage which we only began to exploit in the poetry of Carman, Lampman, Roberts and Scott and the novels of Grove and MacLennan. A regional novel or poem may be merely a pretty idyll; and too many of ours have been only that. But it may also be a work which reveals the basic stuff of human nature by a penetrating study of the here and now, and that is what I hope much of our literature may become.

Brown summarized his account of the difficulties confronting Canadian literature in 1943 with this sad sentence: "What I have been attempting to suggest with as little heat or bitterness as possible is that in this country the plight of literature is a painful one." I do not think that any honest writer could subscribe to this verdict today. The life of the artist is always a painful one, but the pain today in this country is the inner torment caused by the effort at creation, and the anxiety generated by the apparent drift of the world towards nuclear war. The specifically Canadian environment is *not* hostile to the writer, although it may in some areas still be indifferent to him. Gradually, all our traditional excuses for inaction and lethargy are being removed.

WE HAVE TODAY a literature which is still not great by world standards, but which is lively and interesting. Poets such as Layton, Reaney, Mandel, Birney, Jones, Souster and Nowlan are as productive and as skilful as any comparable group writing in the English-speaking world, and prose writers such as MacLennan, Frye, McLuhan, Richler, Moore, Davies, Wilson, Kreisel

and Levine are for the first time in our history as plentiful and as dextrous as our poets. Every year sees the emergence of new talents, so that today, again for the first time in our history, we have productive writers in every age group. Only in drama is there still a dearth of activity. Our great distances and our scattered population have so far been almost insuperable barriers to the growth of an indigenous theatre and theatre literature, but the theatres which have been recently built in almost all our major cities are bound — since art like nature abhors a vacuum — to stimulate playwriting in the not too distant future. Already the inimitable James Reaney has made a promising start.

To return to my original metaphor, my diagnosis and prognosis must be that the patient is healthy and is likely so to continue for the foreseeable future. Canadian writers have a growingly eager audience, and the old obstacles to our literary development have virtually disappeared. Whether or not my optimism is justified will depend upon factors beyond our national control: upon the diligence and talent of writers who are born amongst us, and upon the survival of human civilization in this anxious atomic age.

WINTER AND THE NIGHT-PEOPLE

William H. New

THE FIRST SIXTY PAGES of *Return of the Sphinx* are among the worst that Hugh MacLennan has written. A blunt statement: but a book like this one, which contends even in fiction with the thorniest political problem in Canada today, is bound to arouse blunt statements. It is not paradoxical, I hope, to add that this is in many ways MacLennan's most important novel too, which makes the faults in it seem larger than under other circumstances they would. The novel emerges not only out of his earlier works and relates to them by both theme and imagery; it also demonstrates a distinct advancement. What before had been nebulous and sometimes even noncommittal in the resolution to his works has here been extended into a tragic vision — for Canada, for the characters, and for the world.

Ambitious? Yes. Worthwhile? Indeed, yes. But successful only on occasion. Briefly, the novel concerns the conflict that assails Alan Ainslie, federal Minister of Culture in a cabinet that seems to have both Diefenbaker and Pearson figures in it (a situation ripe with fictional promise in its own right, but by the way). His French-Canadian wife has been killed by a truck overturning in a freak accident; his daughter, Chantal, is in love with his best friend, an emigrant Frenchman near his own age named Gabriel Fleury; and his son, Daniel, tortured by a Jansenist schooling and by awakening sexual urges, torn between respect for his gentle father and antagonism towards all things and all people not French Canadian and of another generation, is becoming more and more involved in the Separatist cause. For Alan the problem is only partly a political one; much more so is it emotional — at a national level, where his commitment to the cause of Confederation is both deep and honest, and at a personal level, where his memory of past happiness with his wife is so strong that he has really lost contact with the world that is growing up, here and now, around him. The two are obviously

symbolically related. Alan's tragedy is that he does not recognize what is happening until it is too late, until events have taken place that divide him irrevocably from his position in government and effectively from his children. His world, at the end of the novel, is different from the one he has seen at the beginning, although in the background there still broods a hint of the ideal world which Alan has been conscious of and which MacLennan himself has been concerned with throughout all of his fiction.

We have met these characters before in MacLennan's work. Chantal, idealistic, young and therefore confident, at once sophisticated and naïve, intelligent, capable, and determined, has under different guise appeared as Penny Wain in *Barometer Rising* and Sally Martell in *The Watch that Ends the Night*. She performs much the same function here — the representative of the realization of young love — but she is less of a stick figure than the other two and so more satisfactory as a character. Daniel has developed out of Marius Tallard, the young rebel and Oedipally-motivated father-hater in *Two Solitudes*, but again he is more rounded and more credible. Whereas Marius had been shallowly drawn, a shadow figure defeated as much by his own character as by the System he was reacting against, Daniel is by contrast brimful with talent and possibilities. Tragic again is his commitment to an increasingly narrowing cause, for the mistakes he makes in judgment cease to be the excusable sins of youth when they affect the life of the nation itself.

Alan Ainslie is, of course, quite literally the boy Alan (MacNeil) Ainslie from *Each Man's Son*, now grown up — trying, as so many MacLennan characters do, to forget his origins (wandering father, murdered mother), and attempting by this means to attach himself and his family to a kind of order it has never really been his to know. We have seen this in Neil Macrae in *Barometer Rising*, in Jerome Martell, and even to some extent in Paul Tallard. In all the earlier books MacLennan has implied that the order is achievable, that the characters have conquered the major obstacles in the way of their happiness. But in fact there is always another note present as well, which, in imagery involving winter and darkness, hints of isolation and of further conflict yet to come. Neil and Penny, for example, are reunited by the end of *Barometer Rising*, and the Canadian nation they represent has severed itself successfully from the nineteenth-century control of Great Britain. But the language is not altogether joyful: "They paused on the narrow, snow-banked platform and watched the lights of the coaches disappear around the next curve and heard the dying echoes of the whistle reverberating through the forest." Similarly, *Two Solitudes* ends with Paul Tallard and

Heather Methuen together, with autumn golden, and yet things are not really stable: "Only in the far north on the tundra was the usual process of life abruptly fractured"; the nation is going into war, "knowing against her will that she was not unique but like all the others, alone with history, with science, with the future". *Each Man's Son*, moreover, ends with Ainslie adopting Alan MacNeil — which closes a novel largely about ignorance and single-mindedness, but also intimates the beginning of another phase of human conflict: Ainslie "had no sense of the distance he had walked or what time of night it was. He stood in the darkness outside his own house for a long while, hearing the sound of the broken water in the brook." And *The Watch that Ends the Night*, which closes at the end of a summer with George Stewart discovering a kind of metaphysical peace, ends also with his knowing the world about him as a shadow, knowing politics as an unreal thing in that world, and knowing light only insofar as his life is now illuminated from within himself. *Return of the Sphinx* picks up these darker threads of MacLennan's thought, in a study of the breakup of the order of a single man's family and a parallel disruption of society at large. No answers exist — only the sphinx — and this novel, too, closes with "the long snows" approaching.

THE EXTENSION OF CHARACTER into political affairs, by a kind of modified allegory, is also a feature of all of MacLennan's books — most demonstrably forced in *Two Solitudes* and *The Precipice*, where the one-to-one correspondence between character and political entity is so defined as to make any proffered solutions seem facile. The allegory is most competently handled where it seems effortless, where the technique becomes an integral part of the message. *Barometer Rising*, for example, is brilliantly structured, yet the reader is conscious less of the form than of the reality of the novel's focal situation; and *The Watch that Ends the Night* succeeds because the political allegory is implicit in the imagery rather than explicitly enunciated by the central characters. *Return of the Sphinx* wavers a little between these two groups, but ultimately, because of its overt commitment, it most closely approximates *The Precipice*, except that large parts of it are better written.

MacLennan uses here some of the same image patterns he has used before, and handles them well. Night, winter, flowers are all important strands in exploring the conflict. The story takes place in Eastern Canada as a hot, humid summer is settling down on Montreal. It is the ripe time for riots in North America. The oppressive climate and oppressive situations (real or imagined) seem to come

together then, and if causes exist in the mind of a people, they can manifest themselves in forceful, concerted, mass, and therefore often dangerous and violent ways. Some emotionally sensitive individuals, like Daniel Ainslie, will be used by the power structure that orders any political demonstration, and if this turns to riot, they are consumed. Others, like Alan, will be so committed to another ideal that they may be overwhelmed by the moment. Still others, like Gabriel Fleury, are taken out of their personal isolation during a time like this; if they discover the real meaning of love, they survive. This last situation is figured early in the novel when we are told that Gabriel "was not a good golfer — he preferred winter to summer on account of the skiing, at which he was very good — but it was the only summer game he knew and physical exercise was the one permanent security in his life." The problem is the same one presented to George Stewart in *The Watch that Ends the Night*. He has to discover that the winter snows — symbolic of an innocence that this country perhaps once knew — are no longer the only identity to be met with. He has to learn the games of summer, in effect, so that in any season he can survive, but in doing so he will learn the facts of heat and discord as well. So with Alan, whose happiness (Constance, the children, a lake and a cottage and a summer when "the daisies were like snow in the high Gaspesian meadows") lies in the past; and so with Daniel as well (whose blinding focus on the present is jolted when he discovers not only the identity of his Cape Breton grandfather — the Nova Scotia/French combination in the place name a probably unintentional added irony here — but also how alike they are).

This tension between past and present is given further development in the overtly political passages in the book, but first we must see that Gabriel's character is extended by the imagery of night and flowers. His name, for one thing, and his recurrent association with nicotianas ("they're night flowers and I'm only here at night") are a constant reminder of the possibility of flourishing and of being at peace with one's environment. His union with the younger generation, in his love for Chantal Ainslie, is a happy one for them both, and the last time we see them, though the summer is ending and the country's innocence is gone, the flowers "of late summer were in bud". For Daniel and Alan the contact between generations is more difficult, and when the book ends with winter coming on and with Alan outside the city contemplating the landscape, thinking "The vast land. Too vast even for fools to ruin all of it", we can see that symbolically the ideals of Confederation, co-operation, and stability are still held as possibilities within man's reach. But for Alan it seems more like an insistent belief in the mask than an acceptance of the night and the heat that influence the human landscape.

Daniel, like Chantal, also has the opportunity to respond to both the city and the land, and as his first sexual encounter is with a woman from the older generation, the parallel with his sister is strengthened. Chantal is learning from Gabriel as well as giving to him, however. Daniel is affected rather less by Marielle's wisdom than she is carried away by his impulsive desire for satisfaction and revenge. The "revenge" is against many things — his Jesuit schooling, his conscience, his father, his mother's death, *les anglais*, the American influence in his society and among young people, and so on. MacLennan's extension of the image patterns into the political sphere becomes obvious in Daniel's reaction to his city:

> It's fantastic, the truth you can see in this city at night. You can go for miles without seeing a single *Anglais*. They know no more about this city than the English knew about India. When I learn more about television techniques I want a program about this city after dark. About *la nation* after dark. The camera spying. The camera working as if it had a mind of its own. The camera just telling me what to do with it. The people speaking in broken sentences. That's where the truth is, in broken sentences. Their expressions when you catch them with the truth on their faces. The people are smoldering. There's not enough room for them any more. They live in the city like a huge African kraal with the forests all around them. The lights on the snow in the streets, the dirty snow in the streets. . . .

In the city, in Montreal, the mask of innocence that the land has held before itself no longer exists, but it is not a world of sophistication which by and large has replaced it. Gabriel Fleury is sophisticated, is part of the night, and he survives, but in the world Daniel recognizes only negation exists: surrender to material pleasure, decadence, bombing (ironically for the sake of a culture), and rioting simply for the sake of being divisive. Even this is a way of living to which he wants to attach himself, but he cannot. For all his activities, he remains the spectator-television interviewer, trying to escape himself and discovering only another kind of incarceration.

The political problem of *canadien* separatism is of course a particularly grave one in Canada at this time. MacLennan is right to feel that this can be the focus of a work of fiction, but when he writes a work of this kind he is creating something that seems less readily apprehensible by the Canadian imagination than by the American or English one. All those works in Canadian literature that apparently emphasize sociological phenomena, for example — *The Loved and the Lost*, *The Master of the Mill*, *Scratch One Dreamer*, *The Man from Glengarry* — are all much more obviously studies in the psychology of an individual conscience. Such a categorization is less obvious, I think, in works by C. P. Snow or

Robert Penn Warren, and the disposition of American writers towards political criticism is what perhaps lies behind Edmund Wilson's approval of both MacLennan's *The Precipice* and the novels of Morley Callaghan. In these works something of man-the-Canadian-political-animal comes closest to the surface. But *Return of the Sphinx*, political as it is, captures only some of the character of either the country or the separatist question.

CANADIANS SEEM, in other words, to be much more addicted to the onlooker-interviewer role than most are willing to admit. Daniel and Alan Ainslie are our men, that is, just as George Stewart was in *The Watch that Ends the Night* — no matter how stuffy, thwarted, or unaware any of them might appear. MacLennan is right to set up this kind of character, right to interpret much about the nation this way, and curiously wrong when for some reason he locates a different kind of character in the West. He suggests that Westerners are delighted with Quebec's threatened withdrawal from the nation, for that event would give them a wealthy independence themselves, and he is wrong. Westerners, plain and simply, are the onlookers again, goaded in this decade into calling a plague on both houses, which they locate specifically in Toronto and Montreal, whose perennial opposition is now more than just high school rivalry. It is a continuation of an historic clash of cultures, which MacLennan himself implies in his book, but never makes clear, and it is this local antagonism, misunderstood by both locales, who both erroneously consider themselves representative of half the nation, that has been grotesquely magnified into an almost insoluble problem.

Like Daniel and Alan Ainslie, each side is magnificently sure of the other side's position. In this lies inevitable tragedy, for it demonstrates a previous foreclosure on both imagination and understanding. When Daniel thinks: "Endlessly the French Canadians talked of their deprived past and what did that do except weaken their purpose to make the future theirs?", both he and MacLennan have seized on a major truth underlying the whole situation. The parallel United Empire Loyalist-Upper Canada syndrome that afflicts some English Canadians, valuing some invalid sense of historic superiority, also prevents some people from preparing adequately for the future. Together these underline the fact that not only is the conflict in the present emerging out of the past, it is also very much of the past, still based on attitudes that most of the nation's people — from whatever cultural source (many young Westerners, for example, do not regard themselves as being *English* Canadian particularly) — do not here and now share.

Daniel's immaturity is shown in that he does not trust his perception of truth; instead, he goes along with the riots and the bombs, which solve nothing. Alan's generation is by and large no better, for its members, violent in their own way, talk and talk, and again solve nothing.

It is interesting, at this point, to place the political argument of this book beside that in Peter Weiss's absurdist and terrifying play *Marat/Sade*. Part of the dialogue is apropos:

SADE: Nature herself would watch unmoved / if we destroyed the entire human race / I hate Nature / this passionless spectator this unbreakable ice-berg-face / that can bear everything / this goads us to greater and greater acts / Haven't we always beaten down those weaker than ourselves / . . . . /

MARAT: what you call the indifference of Nature / is your own lack of compassion / . . . . /

SADE: no small emotions please / Your feelings were never petty / For you just as for me / only the most extreme actions matter /

MARAT: If I am extreme I am not extreme in the same way as you / Against Nature's silence I use action / In the vast indifference I invent a meaning / I don't watch unmoved I intervene / and say that this and this are wrong / and I work to alter them and improve them / The important thing / is to pull yourself up by your own hair / to turn yourself inside out / and see the whole world with fresh eyes

(I, 12)

One of the many fascinating things about this play is that its technique of depicting plays within plays forces us all into roles both as spectators and actors: all implicated in whatever guilts, animal motives, insanities and oppressions may be represented. Towards the end, Roux, the fettered radical, is still shouting out "When will you learn to see / When will you learn to take sides" as pandemonium engulfs him. What we do see above all else is the extent to which both Marat and Sade intellectualize humanity, and therefore, though opposites, how much they are alike. The other opposites — freedom / confinement; sanity / madness — also come in a sense to be indistinguishable, for one cannot identify which is which. But we are actors as well as spectators in such a play, and so if we respond at all these are truths for own own lives as well.

MacLennan's novel bears, it seems to me, enough likeness to Weiss's theme to make this digression reasonable. In Alan and Daniel, and in the views of Canada which they represent, we have just such intellectualization coming into conflict. In the demonstrations Daniel plans, and the resultant riots which destroy Alan as a political figure, are just such unidentifiable motives as those of the re-

volution and the madmen of Charenton. Liberty? But the Québecois have liberties under federal law now that would be lost to them if they seceded. Equality? Fraternity? Yet as both Hugh MacLennan and Peter Weiss show, these desires are not necessarily distinguishable from the desire to exercise power.

The difference between the two writers is partly in technique, partly in the fact that Weiss does not draw a moral; his effect lies in his presentation and in the extent to which that alone can cause us to pull ourselves up by our own hair and see the world with fresh eyes. MacLennan, on the other hand, guides the reader to a point of view rather more deliberately, and the sadness of this is that the novel would have been more powerful had the characters and the images been capable of doing it on their own. For all the novel's political importance and for all the clarity with which the author views some political situations, no novel can absolutely succeed unless the characters come to life. With *Return of the Sphinx* we are up against a problem that has plagued MacLennan throughout his work: much of the dialogue is stilted, therefore lifeless, and the characters, who in other situations can be perfectly credible, will occasionally die. Regrettably, at those times, the novel dies with them. MacLennan can write magnificent monologues; of this there is no question, but so much of the dialogue is simply punctuated monologue that it becomes incredible. Where it is good, the formal language is inherently part of the situation being presented. Some of the arguments between Alan and Daniel, for example, and the passages of House of Commons debate are handled well. But where the conversations should be informal, even if they are not exactly relaxed, the language remains repetitive and starched:

'He's wasting his life.'
'Can you be so sure he is?'
'Oh yes, I can be sure.'

This sort of thing is so constructed as to be artificial, too formalized to seem natural, and it occurs so often that one's attention shifts from the heart of the book to its method. It is a frustrating novel, because it promises so much and wavers so much too. For MacLennan scholars it will be a key work, one which shows not only his descriptive abilities but also his consciousness of the tragic possibilities in modern life. For many more readers its topic will make it an interesting enough narrative to warrant reading. But for very few, unfortunately, in spite of its potential, will it be the impetus for seeing the world with eyes that have been made fresh.

FLIGHT FROM LIBERATION

D. J. Dooley

JAMES JACKSON'S NOVEL, *To the Edge of Morning*, did not attract a great deal of attention when it appeared in 1964. No-one seems to have suggested that it was anything more than a fairly interesting first novel; reviewers treated it with that benign condescension which they employ for novels which have not engaged their attention fully but which have the merit of being by Canadian authors. In the fiction section of "Letters in Canada: 1964," F. W. Watt paid brief attention to it. He paired it with Ralph Allen's *The High White Forest*; both of them he considered novels which "take us back into the simpler realities of war-time action," and he judged *To the Edge of Morning* the inferior of the two:

> The former is little more than a fragment, the story of a few months at a stagnant airbase in the heart of the Ceylon jungle where the airmen fight less against the Japanese than against the heat which saps strength and morals, the threat of insects and disease, drunkenness, crudity, cowardice, despair, and other fruits of inactivity and the sense of futility. There is power and drama in the descriptions of the Ceylon jungle and of the Liberator bombers in flight, but the human story of guilt and expiation is unconvincing. Ralph Allen is an experienced writer and a good deal more ambitious.[1]

I would agree that Jackson's story of guilt and expiation has unconvincing aspects; but my contention is that his novel is, if anything, too ambitious, since it tries to explore the immense problems of free will and destiny within fewer than two hundred pages. Begun in a creative writing class at the University of British Columbia while Malcolm Lowry was still alive, it is an interesting example of his influence. Like Lowry, Jackson employs a triangular situation involving two

men and one woman (though he leaves this situation shadowy and undeveloped). There are many other resemblances; Jackson deals with alcoholism, guilt and futility, and he has some of Lowry's faults, such as overwriting and overuse of symbols — it is not only that there are too many of them, but that they call too much attention to themselves. Lowry's conception of man being given a garden for his enjoyment and turning it into a rubbish heap runs all the way through Jackson's book; like Lowry again, he identifies the circle of hell in which his central character is to be found or for which he is headed — it is the one reserved for those who have wasted their gifts. In a way the theme is that which Lowry described as his own: the forces in man which cause him to be terrified of himself. But as the epigraph from Donne suggests, Jackson intends to include both evil within and evil without:

> Fire and air, water and earth are not the elements of man; inward decay and outward violence, bodily pain and sorrow of heart may rather be styled his elements, and though he be destroyed by these, yet he consists of nothing but these.

Therefore the story is something more than a plain narrative of wartime events. Ostensibly it deals with a Liberator flying a thousand miles from Ceylon to make a photographic reconnaissance of an airfield on Japanese-held Sumatra. But the main battle is not with the Japanese; it takes place in the mind of one central character, Gil Kramer. At the end of Chapter Three of *Under the Volcano*, as the Consul sips strychnine, contemplates the two volcanoes which are the image of the perfect marriage, and considers the two alternatives open to him — marriage to Yvonne and marriage to the bar or the cantina, he makes an affirmation which is of great importance in the novel:

> "The will of man is unconquerable. Even God cannot conquer it."

Lowry, of course, shows how the will of man *is* conquered; while the Liberator is in flight, flashbacks in Gil Kramer's mind explain how he lost his sense of purpose and raise the question of whether the disintegration of his will is complete. The cockpit of the airplane becomes an arena in which Lowry's problem is fought out once again.

On his arrival at the airbase nine months before, Kramer had felt himself in a nightmare world. The details of the setting are concrete and particularized enough, yet this is an outer landscape which reflects inner chaos. The rooms in the officers' billets are covered with a grey dust which makes the rubble in them seem like the leavings of an army in retreat. The impression of decay and in-

coherence is strengthened by the first man Kramer meets, who is clammy white and wrapped in a shroud:

> "You mustn't stick to the roads, you know; you mustn't stick to the roads because the roads go round in circles. After you've been here a while it won't matter; I've been here seven months and it doesn't matter to me now, but just for a time you mustn't try to stick to the roads. They don't go anywhere, any of them."

From the officer in charge of the base, Kramer might have expected a clear outline of his duties, perhaps a pep talk encouraging him to do them well; the wing commander, however, says nothing about the war effort, effectively discourages heroic action, and raises the fundamental question of whether any of man's actions can have any possible significance:

> "Don't expect anything, Kramer. Don't expect a god-damned thing. I've got nothing to tell you, do you understand? . . . You will not fly because there are no spares for our machines; you will have no recreation because no one has the energy for recreation; you will spend about a year here, doing perhaps ten operational trips, and then if the jungle or the dengue or the machine or the liquor don't get you, what is left of you will be sent home. . . . Watch out for scorpions, though they come later. Beware the sidling tarantula; he's very painful. Pass your hour with grace if not with any purpose. They maintain, the ecclesiastics, that there is a salvation."

The ambiguous use of *grace* and the vague allusion to salvation set against the pervasive hopelessness make it evident that this novel is one of the many twentieth-century parables about the human condition which owe something to *Prufrock* and *The Waste Land.* The tarantula is a real objective threat, but it may also be a spectre which the mind conjures up; the scorpion, in turn, symbolizes the only kind of vigorous response which the individuals here are likely to make to each other — spite, hate, or malice. The wing commander wants, above all, to keep his isolated community, his microcosm, in a state of harmony; he will be satisfied with keeping a little life alive, and he wants no overwhelming questions. Unlike Prufrock, however, he has responded heroically at one stage of his life: he is a veteran of the Battle of Britain. Now he is disillusioned, guilt-ridden, and obsessive, and the irony is that Kramer is unconsciously going to pattern his life after him.

Kramer's model till now has been his cousin Leowy, who is flying in more active theatres of the war; his own frustration is made more bitter by the concomitant story of Leowy's success. The other members of his crew illustrate a

number of possible kinds of adaptation to circumstance — one becomes a tourist, systematically visiting every interesting place on the island, and another takes to the study of Hindu mythology — but Kramer wants only to fly. His struggle to make his existence meaningful comes to the predictable result, when a minor accident to an aircraft brings him into conflict with the engineering officer, Gunnory, and he finds himself being reproved by the wing commander for being too energetic; he is advised to adopt a more graceful resignation to the reality of their boredom. In disgust, he follows the common course and relapses into passivity and alcoholism.

He has thus accepted conditions of existence which make life not purposeful but at least possible — though always there is the threat of spiders, scorpions, and bandits, and from time to time he hears the drone of a plane (ironically called a Liberator) taking off to be murdered by fighters or perhaps to crash just off the end of the runway. Life is bearable, therefore, but it is still troubled. Kramer is afflicted with intestinal bugs but obstinately refuses to go into hospital to get completely clear of them: "Deep in his conscience he felt it was bad enough that he had stopped striving, but to fail even to endure would be worse, would be almost complete surrender." And he cannot ignore the jungle; because it contains decaying temples and fortresses, aircraft waiting to be flown, and the burnt places where aircraft have crashed, it becomes a menacing thing to be banished by brandy: "The tentacles of fear, growing from no definable source but growing, crept into his mind and joined boredom and failure to spread their paralytic seed." When another pilot commits suicide, he realizes that lassitude is a very insecure refuge. Yet he neither sees nor wants a way out of it. He is horrified when the wing commander recommends him for the position of flight commander; the last thing he wants is to think or to make decisions: "It would be wonderful if everyone left him alone, if he could but lie in the darkened room for the rest of his time, seeing the vague half-formed visions . . ." The paralysis of his will seems complete.

Yet when Gunnory tries to convince him to take the promotion by describing the attractions of power, he succumbs to the offered temptation:

> Authority was disembodied, prescribed, official, complementary with responsibility, and neither had any attractions. But power, he saw, was personal, and thus stimulating and exciting. Power was wielded by the self, for the self's satisfaction . . . power, he saw with the sudden shock of insight, was the promise of release.

The lust for power is thus shown by Jackson as something basic and strong in man, something which continues to appeal when almost every other motive for

action is lost. He does not let his hero have his power, however, but snatches it away from him; in a perhaps predictable but certainly too neat turn of plot, Kramer's cousin Leowy arrives on the scene to take the job which has been offered. Now the scorpion in Kramer emerges:

> His thoughts moved in swift explosive rushes; his mind was full of hate, fury, and a burning need for violence. He wanted to go back into the jungle, into the teeming proliferation of dense growth and darkness . . .

He has become a creature which stings, which is an enemy to the community of mankind and at home in the jungle. This psychological state is at least partially responsible for disaster: Leowy is killed in the crash of a plane which Kramer has tested and pronounced fit to fly. Kramer is now shocked into a sense of his responsibility — perhaps even an exaggerated sense — and it is in this state that we find him when the novel opens.

The flight to Sumatra therefore comes when he is in a state of shock and indecision. At its beginning, he feels a sense of release: "he could sense the jungle falling away and diminishing behind, could feel the almost imperceptible beginnings of calm within him." But the real jungle is in his own mind:

> Whether he closed his eyes or not the light was a pervasive green, green faces and reflections a dim clutter of levers and handles against a black ground . . . the lulling rumble of the engines a huge wind at night among the trees, where the quadrant levers were the slow wavering hands of the undergrowth and the luminous tips of the myriad switches little phosphorescent worms crawling. . . .

He has brought all his obsessions with him, and he knows that the flight is neither expiation nor escape. He can temporarily avoid the jungle by thinking in concrete terms, by concentrating for example on the little luminous aircraft in the artificial horizon. But the human consciousness can never confine itself to immediate sensible reality for very long; the image of the jungle returns, and with it another image (suggested above by "little phosphorescent worms") of the cockpit as a death cell. It is probably Kramer's own death wish which has sent the plane and crew on a mission which is likely to terminate in their slaughter by Japanese fighter planes. Yet he feels curiously detached from these former comrades whose fate is bound up with his own.

The storm which ends his paralysis of will is, as F. W. Watt says, the most powerful and dramatic section of the book. It is an excellent piece of descriptive narrative, in which the reader is caught up, whirled about, and made to feel that he has escaped destruction only by the narrowest of squeaks. But along with

the factual description of what it is like for a plane to be caught in a tropical storm comes a philosophical enquiry: what is there in man which makes him fight against the forces of nature when it would be so easy for him to succumb to them? The complete rationalist might argue that no better explanation could be found than the one which Kramer quotes from the aircraft handbook: "at fifty inches of boost and 2700 revolutions per minute the Pratt and Whitney Twin Wasp Engine Type R-1830-43 develops approximately 1250 horsepower." Yet this scientific explanation of a certain amount of energy being required to keep the plane in flight when a certain force is bearing down upon it is, Kramer realizes, ultimately inadequate. In spite of his wish for death, he has worked to the limit of his strength and skill to live. Whether the most important reason was the "instinctive supplication" he had made at the crucial moment, or his feeling of kinship with the pilot of a "lone aircraft limping through the same night over the coast of Burma far to the north" whom he knew only through a distress signal, is not made clear, either to him or to us: "The burden he had assumed, the burden he had admitted to in thus surviving was not within his ability to comprehend." At any rate, he has been released from the prison-house of self; the images now applied to him are those of exhaustion, extinction of his former self, rebirth, and the promise of the dawn. He sees himself with a new objectivity and detachment; he realizes that the threats which he held in awe are not perdurable; he has arrived at a stage of affirmation and tentative meaning. If there is a "message" to the book, it at least begins with the idea that there is considerable benefit to human solidarity.

After this resolution, Jackson quickly dismisses his central character from the scene and concludes his story; the fact that the underlying rather than the surface meaning is more important to him is suggested by his not even making it clear whether or not the Liberator got back to Ceylon. (It seems likely that Kramer — "disembodied," "disinterested" — died of wounds after a Japanese fighter scored a hit on his plane.) The author's chief interest is in the infinite metamorphoses of the human personality; he is dealing with a world of external violence, but like Lowry he shows how the human mind itself fabricates the worst demons it has to face. He develops this theme on a number of levels, some of which — such as that associated with Hindu mythology — I have not even touched on. The realities of wartime action, as Jackson portrays them, are not simple; *To the Edge of Morning* possesses a much greater degree of complexity than has so far been pointed out.

[1] *University of Toronto Quarterly*, XXXIV (1964-65), 380.

WHY JAMES REANEY IS A BETTER POET

(1) than any Northrop Frye poet

(2) than he used to be

George Bowering

BY NOW IT IS APPARENT that the mainstream of today's Canadian poetry (in English) flows in the same river-system as the chief American one — that (to change figures of speech in mid-stream) nurtured first-hand or second-hand by followers of William Carlos Williams and Ezra Pound. The *Contact* people in Toronto of the fifties, and the *Tish* people in Vancouver of the sixties are in the middle of what has been happening in Canadian poetry, mid-wars.

But there is a small group of poets in Ontario who arose after World War II, and who remain outside the contemporary mainstream. They may be said to descend not from Williams and Pound, but from T. S. Eliot and Robert Graves, especially, to bring it on home, as those figures from an earlier time are reflected in the literary theory of Northrop Frye of the University of Toronto. The poetry produced by this group has not had any noticeable influence on younger Canadian poets and their magazines, possibly because it takes literary criticism as an important source; it tends to find its audience in the universities of Canada, or more precisely, of Upper Canada. To speak of something perhaps not as relevant, the work of these poets looks more British than American — one could say more bookish than American.

The poets I am writing of are Jay Macpherson, Douglas Le Pan, and James Reaney. Eli Mandel was once drafted into this tradition by some critics, but has lately opted out. James Reaney, as I will want to show, is also of late finding a separate way.

Northrop Frye has written a lot of literary theory, which is best known from his *Anatomy of Criticism*. A few years ago he chose to popularize his critical thoughts in a short series of CBC talks, published by the CBC as *The Educated Imagination*, which title suggests one main belief to be found in the poetry written by the members of the "Frye School," that they are dealing with a knowledgeable and critical rendering of discoveries made through the imagination, usually thought of in terms of archetypal mythology.

There, too, is their principal weakness and contradiction, that while they want to tap the enormous resources of the unconscious to body forth their poetry, they appear rather as super-conscious and architectural poets, making verses with too much obvious eye for critical theory. Critical theory of Frye's sort is interesting as long as it remains a game (in the philosophical sense) but when it begins to shape poetry, then it defeats its own proclaimed premises, as the unconscious becomes a thing mocked. Poets who operate this way can look like upper-middle-class adults doing teenage dances at a rock-blues dance.

But I will look at Frye's *Educated Imagination*, and some of the poems of the "mythopoeic" poets, and see whether and how Frye's pronouncements describe (or prescribe) what has been happening.

FRYE'S MAJOR CONCERNS, of course, seem dated, no matter what truth may lie in them. They are filled with nostalgia for the critical rape of the unconscious that happened in the twenties and thirties. And they are sometimes, for all Frye's talk of the imagination, quite turgidly clerical.

The first thing man notices, says Frye, is that nature is objective, apart from man's sense of himself. Then he makes or sees a series of consequent splits, between his emotions and his intellect, between the world a man lives in and the world he wants to live in. So man sets to work in this context and tries to make the world over, to create a humanized world. Frye seems to me to be calling for the maker as one who imposes his desires on the world of nature — and that is the conventional Christian/Western conception, regarding the settlement of America, for instance.

Developing his argument in a classical way, Frye then speaks of a third level of the mind, beyond the simply emotional or intellective levels — the imagination, where a man sees a vision or a model of a world beyond present accomplishments. That vision has nothing to do with time, with the future. It is nothing like the scientist's or engineer's plan, which is only a progressive improvement of the present accomplishments. Literary people, says Frye, are left in the cold by things, like science, that evolve. Artists could never run the objective world. Poets are superstitious, living by the evidence of their senses — a flat earth, for example. As in most of his pronouncements Frye is here half right, as Freud was. He agrees with Freud in associating the artistic and neurotic minds. He agrees with many other professors that the artist has to be a luddite. The "limit of the imagination is a totally human world," he says, but here he is led astray by his original opposition of human and objective, the subject-object split, which may be conceived only by the self-appointed "subject."

So he says that the poet's job "is not to describe nature, but to show you a world completely absorbed and possessed by the human mind." This is where the poets of the Frye school are outside the Canadian mainstream. A poet who would possess the world with his mind writes his poetry from the mind, the possessor. He begins by subjecting the rest of his faculties and responses to the admiral mind. Get a hold on yourself, is his advice to himself. Then reach for everything else. The ego rules, or thinks it does. As Eliot treated history, Frye's poet would treat nature, as organizer and possessor of it. Today my quatrains, tomorrow the world. This is different from the poets outside this particular myth — they would rather become possessed *by* nature, to *discover* their natures, by exploring with all their faculties, the mind as one among them. Frye speaks many times of the poet seeking identity of mind with nature. The un-Fryed, or "raw" poet, is likely to *surrender* identity (as in a psychedelic awakening) as a step toward communion with the rest of his self (see Whitman's use of that last word).

Frye tells how his poets (he tends to generalize his ideas to cover all poets) seek identity of mind and nature. Men create gods, creatures who are similar to both men and objective nature — hence the wind-god and the wolf-god. Then when men no longer believe in those creatures, they become part of literature. Poets, says Frye, do not literally believe the things they write, but rather make codes. When, as with Hemingway and his bullfights, the writer seems to believe in the truth of his rituals, Frye says that he is actually imitating previous literature. Frye would not accept that Allen Ginsberg actually saw the face of Moloch on the skyscraper wall. But Jay Macpherson, Frye's most ardent follower, obviously

agrees that the names and events in poems are myth-charactered codes of experience:

> I'm Isis of Sais,
> If you'd know what my way is,
> Come riddle my riddle-mi-ree.

Frye's point is that Aristotle's arrangements hold; there is a universe of things and a universe of ideas, and a universe of literature. To write literature, the poets draw from the universe of literature. Forms, he says, come only from earlier literature, but by forms he appears to mean ideas and events. (He says that Canadian writers imitate the models of D. H. Lawrence and W. H. Auden — and he says this on the radio in 1962! His being that far out of touch with Canadian writing helps to explain the distaste for Frye among most Canadian writers.)

I don't want to give the impression that I thoroughly disapprove of all that Frye says. I agree with many of his words. He seems to agree with Williams, for instance, by saying that "it isn't what you say but how it's said that's important," but then he moves to something I can't agree with when he speaks of poets' "*transferring* their language from direct speech to the imagination." (Italics mine.) Once again the human mind as separate from and superior to the materials of the natural universe.

Primitives feared the animals and their spirits, so they donned their skins in dance and poetry. Frye would say that we now make poetry by pretending to do the same thing, while scientists and others study primitives and animals among other things. But today we fear our own technology and not nature, because we have subdued and understood nature, or so we are told. In modern dance and poetry it is the skin of the technology we wear, including the skin of Relativity and Quantum. The poets are the unacknowledged shamans of the world. They do not get their forms from literary code alone. Literature is not myth with belief removed, though it may be written as though it were, as witness Miss Macpherson.

Frye says that the great theme of English poetry is the desire to regain paradise, and James Reaney says that is what Jay Macpherson is trying to do. The poet who wants to possess the world with his mind often writes of that desire as his subject material. The poets who want to become possessed *act* like primitives, hoping to know paradise in their poetic forms, all the faculties engaged, as in dance with music and incense. It is not what you say that's important but how you say it. The poetry of Eliot's age and mode was ironic in tone as it spoke *of* the terror in this fallen world outside paradise.

So the raw poets think of poetry's words as action, often ritual action. Frye's poet thinks of it as code of thought. In Frye's view, characters in literature are different from characters in history in that they are typical or universal manifestations, representatives, representing parts of our lives. Allegory has crept in. All images are symbols — Frye says that. Williams distrusted symbolism as an act of the overbearing intellect. To go to the extreme of this line of thinking, Frye says that knowledge of literature cannot grow without knowledge of the main stories in the Bible and classical literature. That would come as a surprise to many readers of the *Tale of Genji*. Of course Frye probably had only a Western literate in mind. That is one of the limitations of his argument.

I have said something to the effect that Frye sees the poet gathering materials of life, nature, literature, to himself and his poem, much as Eliot's persona is seen trying to do at the end of *The Waste Land*, and that the raw poets see it another way around. It is not surprising then, that Frye embraces the old favourite notion of the writer's detachment, that he favours things in literature to be removed just out of reach of action and belief. Of course we know that we are hearing about two ways of viewing poetry written, when we hear from Frye and his opposites. Frye could likely make a logical case for Blake as detached, much to the dismay of some other writers.

I think, though, that we can fault Frye especially for his generalizing on the process of writing literature. Related to that is his overstressing of literature as inspiration for literature. (Much of important new writing may be seen as attempt to provide alternative for literature.) And related to that is his confusion between the writing of lyric and the writing of its criticism. Anyone who has too much Graves and Frye on the mind might plead for myth rather than creating it, asking readers to see with the eye rather than through it. Witness Jay Macpherson, who often jams together homely observations and spooned-on myth-figures:

> My mother was taken up to heaven in a pink cloud,
> My father prophesied,
> The unicorn yielded to my sweetheart,
> The white bull ran away with my sister,
> The dove descended on my brother,
> And a mouse ran away in my wainscot.

Why, no one ever sees or mentions a "wainscot" in Canada!

BUT IN THE FRYE MIND, literature is a game. Literature, says Frye, has no moral referent (all these remarks are secularizations or diminishings of Keats' remarks about the poetical character), and so in that endless debate about the topic, he stands opposed to Pound and Williams and their followers, tenuous as that following may be. In fact he goes so far as to say that "literature has no consistent connection with ordinary life, positive or negative," though later he calls the world of literature a model to be striven after. (But the self-contradictions in Frye have been a topic of conversation in the learned journals ere now.) He carries on the closet fiction of the New Criticism, the idea that the poem is entirely self-contained, which may be a good system for criticism, but lousy for literature. As a poet, I feel it impossible to agree with Frye that my writing looks either up toward heaven or down to hell, never horizontally at life. I find that horizontal view possible as soon as my self begins to expand outside the bounds of the ego, the "subject."

But literature, says Frye, is there to refine the sensibilities, always with knowledge of the artifice foremost. That is literature as a game. Games have counters, players, rewards, all totally symbolic, with no referents save in the psyche. The reader, as well as the literary character, exists "only as a representative of humanity as a whole." So it is that Jay Macpherson may declare that her first person in the poem is Isis. I find that a reasonable stance, but shallow compared with Olson's "Maximus" or Williams' "Paterson" — and I will not accept it as the only possible way. I think Raymond Souster, for example, walks through the Toronto streets of his poems in no one's skin but his own, perceived through, not by, the literary imagination.

But, says Frye, "how dangerous the emotional response is, and how right we are to distrust it." Distrust rhetoric, his opposers would say, for he does not, and distrust reason at least more than you distrust emotion. Emotion, at least, makes for better dance, and the primitive mind is in the head of the best dancer in the world. Frye is right to say that poetry is the first primitive writing, but he wants, he says, a poetry of impersonal nexus, the poem as dance removed from the dancer. The beginning of reason, where it is not primarily intuitive, causes awkward stumbling, as seen in the poetry of Auden or Spender.

Or of Jay Macpherson, for instance. Her verses tend toward closed form, with the ever-present threat of disorder — that is fine, a creditable imitation of the primitive. But the jungle dance seeks to evoke a favourable response from nature (external or internal), not to cow it. Miss Macpherson's syntax and vocabulary

are awkwardly and deliberately "literary," poetic diction as an attempt to make magic — thus to impose her will on nature. The ordering ego hulks over Miltonic inversions:

> In the snake's embrace mortal she lies,
> Dies, but lives to renew her torment,
> Under her, rock, night on her eyes.
> In the wall around her was set by one
> Upright, staring, to watch for morning
> With bread and candle, her little son.

There is no doubt that Miss Macpherson is Frye's most faithful follower (her book is dedicated to him), especially concerning his notion that all literature is imitation of earlier literature. In reading a poem such as her "The Marriage of Earth and Heaven," one encounters metrics and philosophy copied from an earlier century.

But I don't find a real encounter with myth. Such real encounter would be a here-now fright or swoon or rapture. Myth is the imaginative base of culture, and culture is not alive if it is not being formed with the materials and shapes available to the senses. The literary mind thinks about past culture, but to copy the modes of past culture is to give oneself over to time, where gods and giants are only reported, never met. They must be met in the here and now, where their faces and limbs are seen through eternity's film. (In "The Rhymer" Miss Macpherson uses 1940 slang in the 1950's, and is false even to time.) Miss Macpherson should look to Robert Duncan, the great American Romantic, who understands these things in his poems of Osiris and Set, not as literary gentlemen but as fleshy shadows in his room's corners.

In his article[1] on Jay Macpherson's book, James Reaney says that she is trying to return to Paradise, an effort that fits into one of the major themes of English poetry. But Paradise is straight ahead, not somewhere on the trail we have made since the Fall. (Incidentally, in that article Reaney points out the most important contribution of Miss Macpherson, her attempt to make a book rather than a collection of poems. The suite of poems was a valuable artistic innovation in Canada, and Miss Macpherson and James Reaney seem to have led the way with theirs.)

Reaney also mentions Miss Macpherson's care for the "myth of things within things" — which may be a way of avoiding the horizontal view, but which may also be an illusion disguising a bookish isolation. The poet makes the choice of

either the easy acceptance of that old pattern or trying to make metaphor from contemporary discoveries and views, in his own skin.

I catch, in the poetry of Miss Macpherson, as well as in that of Le Pan and Reaney, Frye's disinterest in or distrust for science and technology. The poets in what I've called the Canadian mainstream hearken in their various imaginations, to Whitman's decree that science and art are no enemies, which extends from Blake's pronouncement that the body and the spirit are one.

Douglas Le Pan gives his view of the result of man's technology in his poem, "Image of Silenus," where in contrast to the wilds he sees the city, and calls on his reader to look at how men shrink the gods in themselves, to

> See them, the shrunken figures of desire,
> Swarming complete as when they were first here deposited,
> But not heroic, filling all the sky,
> Miniatures rather, toys in a toy shop window.

There is Eliot's detestation of his surroundings, which is finally a detestation of self, a useful Christian emotion, but poor starting view for a poet, unless he really does feel that literature looks only up or down, in this case down, where "The figures fashioned out of desperation/ . . . all throng behind the ironic mask." The pun says that our technology will not permit myth-figures anywhere but in literature. The romantic fallacy holds that the city destroys magic, a sentimental and reactionary view. I suspect that Douglas Le Pan doesn't like Marshall McLuhan's books, for the wrong reasons.

The opposition of wild nature and ugly city, and the diminishing of myth are two consistent themes in Le Pan's poetry. He seems to be resentful that the Canadian forests were not found filled with nymphs and sprites and their chroniclers. In "A Country Without a Mythology" he begins to lament that no mythology has been fashioned, as "No monuments or landmarks guide the stranger," but a reader begins later to see that it is history that's not here in (presumably) frontier Canada, that mythology dances in its wild danger, figured by a war-painted "lust-red manitou." God enough for any land. But there Le Pan is stuck, in the wilds. Canada confronts the explorer with waterfalls and tangled forests that a man must find his mind in. Le Pan seems to be trying to do what Frye suggested — to identify himself or his mind with the external world, to choose where he will pretend that he sees gods. As man separates his self and the "objects" of his sight, he here separates the areas of those "objects," into untouched nature, to which

the poets looks upward, and the city of man's technology, to which he looks down, with irony.

In falling easily to the romantic fallacy (truth and beauty and innocence in nature — all opposite in cities), Le Pan (punning on his name?) also takes refuge in literature as alternative to common life, answering another Frye description and stepping out of the mainstream, into the forest preserve.

I invite you to read these titles: *The Boatman, The Net and the Sword, The Wounded Prince, A Suit of Nettles.* They all make reference to standard literary myth, hoping to suggest universal archetypes. But any reader knows that he has to be prepared by books to know what the universalities are, before reading the poems. In so doing he knows that he has made himself a specialist. He is aware of that irony. He is so aware due to the knowledge in his conscious and civilized mind that has forever removed all possibility of stepping into the world of the child or the primitive. That is likely why Frye thinks that poetry is myth with belief removed.

JAMES REANEY was once a Fryed poet, (*A Suit of Nettles*, 1958) but has in most recent years broken loose to make myth from local materials rather than spooning it on from the golden bowl of literary materials. In the later poems and theatrical experiments he has sought a way of understanding myth and myth-making not as alternative to history and politics and commerce and city-planning, but as the register made on the emotions and unreason by all those things. He is not the reader encountering Icarus in book or painting, and observing his after-images in contemporary flights and minds. He observes the materials in Winnipeg or Stratford, and shines the infra-red light on them, revealing their own vibrations that are in the present act of producing myth. He is the man on the ground, seeing Icarus while he flies, and understanding the meaning without gloss.

The process really got under way, I believe, in *Twelve Letters to a Small Town*, and has continued, despite misunderstanding by CBC actors, in the recent radio suites, and is best apprehended in the latest forms Reaney uses — amateurs and children, the actual human materials produced by the soil, speaking the words discovered by both the poet and themselves, not simonized by the wax of literature.

Reaney begins to move beautifully away from Frye's strictures with the first quatrain in *Twelve Letters to a Small Town* (Reaney may deny all this), where

the poet tries to see under the literary name laid on the "Avon River Above Stratford, Canada":

> What did the Indians call you?
> For you do not flow
> With English accents.
> I hardly know
> What I should call you
> Because before
> I drank coffee or tea
> I drank you
> With my cupped hands
> And you did not taste English to me

I find two things important here — the *personal* pronoun and the determination to find myth with the senses, the taste of water in cupped hands, not the idea of a sacred Greek or English stream. So that when Reaney comes to say

> The rain and the snow of my mind
> Shall supply the spring of that river
> Forever

he has moved inside, he has made the world human, as Frye would say, but he has done so by finding out that what is human is in the world as surely as the stream's water is in his body, here and now. Not Noah of the book, but Reaney of the river, is the prototype of this myth's beginning (and middle, anyway).

And that river, the river running through Stratford, runs into the Canadian mainstream at last, enriching it. Not that this is final aspiration or subjective concept of good. Just a view of how it is to this horizontal sight.

NOTES

[1] James Reaney, "The Third Eye: Jay Macpherson's *The Boatman*," *Canadian Literature* No. 3:23-34 (Winter 1960).

LETTRE DE FRANCE

Echos Littéraires

Marguerite Primeau

UN MÊME PROBLÈME confronte les universitaires des côtes du Pacifique qui viennent passer quelques mois en France: celui de choisir parmi les innombrables romans, pièces de théâtre, études littéraires et revues de tous genres, les ouvrages qui leur découvriront le vrai visage de la France. S'ils tiennent surtout à travailler leur petit coin de jardin, ils risquent d'en méconnaître les aspects nouveaux. En glanant à droit et à gauche, ils courent le danger de n'en pas saisir les traits essentiels.

Nous n'avons pas résolu le problème, aussi n'offrons-nous ici qu'une opinion toute personnelle, sujette aux limites imposées à toutes les opinions personnelles.

Quels sont pour nous les traits marquants de la France littéraire actuelle, et quels rapprochements peut-on faire avec le Canada français?

Une étude du Syndicat National des Editeurs indiquait, il y a quelques mois, que la "Littérature générale" progresse à elle seule de plus de 20 millions d'exemplaires, grâce aux réimpressions de petit format. Les progrès considérables réalisés au Canada depuis quelques années dans le domaine de la diffusion du livre n'ont pas atteint l'ampleur des réalisations françaises même si l'on fait cas des conditions différentes qui déterminent le développement culturel de notre pays. L'Edition Française semble donc se bien porter malgré certains obstacles tels que l'augmentation du prix de production et les efforts de propagande nécessaires tant à l'intérieur qu'à l'extérieur du pays.

LE PHÉNOMÈNE qui restera peut-être la caractéristique essentielle de cette année est le nombre imposant de romancières qui ont fait irruption sur la scène littéraire. Tout d'abord, les lauréates des grands prix: Edmonde

Charles-Roux: *Oublier Palerme* (Prix Goncourt); Irène Monési: *Nature morte devant la fenêtre* (Prix Fémina); la jeune Canadienne, Marie-Claire Blais: *Une saison dans la vie d'Emmanuel* (Prix Médicis). A ces noms s'ajoutent ceux d'Albertine Sarrazin (*La Traversière*), de Catherine Paysan (*Les feux de la Chandeleur*), et de Solange Fasquelle (*L'Air de Venise*). Simone de Beauvoir nous offre *Les belles images* et Simone Schwarz-Bart et son mari, *Un plat de porc aux bananes vertes.*

On a écrit que sous certains aspects, par certaines observations et réflexions, le roman d'Edmonde Charles-Roux dénotait une intelligence virile, un côté honnête homme tel qu'on l'entendait au XVII[e] siècle. Aussi importante nous semble l'opposition constante entre le passé et le présent qui fait que la poésie du souvenir et la réalité brutale s'entrelacent tout au long du récit. Le roman va de l'Amérique, neuve, voyante et dure aux émigrés accourus dans l'espoir d'une vie plus facile, mais qui se cherchent et se regroupent pour vivre un peu du passé, à la Sicile pauvre, pays inoubliable où l'on a connu le grand amour de la jeunesse. Ecrivain au lyrisme prenant, Edmonde Charles-Roux a cependant tellement souligné l' "à priori" de sa thèse qu'on sent dès le début que quoi que fasse l'Amérique, la cause est déjà entendue et la sentence prononcée. Le beau rôle ayant été fixé une fois pour toutes, l'on chercherait en vain un seul personnage sympathique parmi tous ces New-Yorkais. De plus, le milieu américain — celui d'un hebdomadaire consacré aux recettes de beauté et à satisfaire les "désirs de fuite" ou les "appétits de culture" de ses lectrices, donc forcément superficiel —, se trouve aujourd-hui dans n'importe quelle grande ville, car les moyens de diffusion sont les mêmes partout et le culte de la jeunesse et du *sex appeal* est un phénomène mondial. Cette réserve ne porte nullement atteinte à la richesse du roman et à la beauté du chant d'amour pour le pays préféré.

Le titre du roman d'Irène Monési est particulièrement bien choisi pour des personnages qui sont pris au piège de leur personnalité, famille-prison où le père détaché, presque absent, n'a rien d'autre à faire que de disparaître, où la mère se réfugie contre une maternité ni voulue ni acceptée dans l'amour des chats tandis que leurs deux enfants poussent comme des plantes sauvages. Nul ne pourra échapper à l'autre (on songe à l'enfer de *Huis-Clos*). Plus grave encore, Agathe et Régis, incapables d'échapper à leur destin qui est précisément celui de leur père et mère, se calqueront malgré leur révolte sur l'image de leurs parents et revivront les mêmes actes, la même servitude, la même frustration. La narratrice, une jeune Anglaise entrée au pair chez le docteur Jarrett, émaille de ses réflexions le trajet monotone et désespéré que serait sans elle la vie de ces quatre person-

nages. Le style d'Irène Monési se prête admirablement bien à un tel récit malgré certaines longueurs: style qui coule avec ça et là des violences soudaines lorsque la frustration se traduit en révolte et qu'on veut blesser parce qu'on est soi-même profondément blessé.

Qu'y a-t-il de commun entre ces deux ouvrages et celui de Marie-Claire Blais? Tout d'abord, la trame de chacun de ces romans se dévide comme un chapelet entre les doigts d'une narratrice. Gianna fait le point entre un passé riche au coeur d'une Sicile matériellement pauvre et le faux brillant de Manhattan; la jeune Anglaise découvre le fil conducteur de la famille Jarrett et le suit dans son cercle vicieux; c'est devant l'omnipotente Grand-mère d'une narratrice jamais située que passent et repassent les membres de la famille canadienne. Si la narratrice est textuellement présente chez Edmonde Charles-Roux et Irène Monési, elle n'en est pas moins une entité vivante dans le roman de Marie-Claire Blais.

Ce roman canadien est dans le vent des idées de notre époque par son attaque violente contre le conformisme et le traditionalisme d'une société subordonnée aux règles d'une religion de lettre plutôt que d'esprit. A l'encontre d'Edmonde Charles-Roux qui a cherché la beauté et l'humain au coeur même de la pauvreté, Marie-Claire Blais a choisi de démontrer comment la misère corrompt les êtres. Une poésie s'en dégage qui brille comme un diamant noir dans les feux duquel se fondent la pureté de l'enfance et le mysticisme de la jeunesse, et qui consument enfin les uns et les autres. Sauf la Grand-mère qui continue de régner! Roman noir d'une famille comme dans *Nature morte devant une fenêtre*, avec un lyrisme plus sombre pour décrire des être damnés! Marie-Claire Blais a voulu tout détruire d'un seul coup. Voilà sans doute pourquoi quelques personnages par ailleurs sympathiques inspirent un certain malaise qui leur enlève la compassion du lecteur. En tout cas, pour Marie-Claire Blais, l'enfance n'est plus un monde d'innocence, et la jeunesse bien autre chose que l'univers fragile des rêves.

Un autre ouvrage ne marque pas moins parmi les nouveautés de l'année. Malgré l'indication contraire, *La Traversière* n'est pas un roman; c'est de l'histoire vraie. Albertine Sarrazin a vécu cette sortie de prison et les difficultés qui en résultent: solitude, tentations de l'alcoolisme, efforts pour travailler honnêtement, et rechute. Et surtout, le désir de se raconter et de se voir publier! Récit pittoresque avec son argot de prison, mais aussi fine analyse de tout ce qui l'a conduite de prison en prison pour vol et cambriolage. Le livre d'Albertine Sarrazin est à la fois pudique et authentique, d'une authenticité qui touche et qui amène le sourire et ce courant de sympathie qui manque un peu à Marie-Claire Blais. *La Traversière* aurait pu être un autre roman noir; Albertine Sarrazin échappe à la tentation

par la tendresse et par un sens de l'humour dont le plus grand mérite est de ne pas trop se prendre au sérieux. C'est une qualité remarquable.

Les feux de la Chandeleur racontent une histoire d'amour. Dans ce drame situé au sein d'une famille, Catherine Paysan s'est placée au point de vue du fils, de l'homme. C'est lui, par son refus de croire à un amour ressuscité, qui sera la cause de la tragédie. L'auteur a bien dessiné la femme de quarante-huit ans que l'on croit folle parce qu'elle n'hésite devant rien pour retrouver l'amour perdu, tout comme elle ne craint pas d'afficher ses sentiments, qu'il s'agisse de justice ou de poésie. D'autre part, on peut reprocher à Catherine Paysan une certaine sentimentalité dans les propos du fils et une sensibilité un peu trop féminine. Somme toute, le ton est assez juste pour rendre plausible et réconfortante à notre époque sceptique cette histoire d'amour entre un homme et une femme plus du tout jeunes.

Le dernier livre de Simone de Beauvoir frappe par la vigueur du style: phrases courtes et alertes qui conviennent aux réflexions de l'héroïne ou à ses pensées. C'est un style qui convient aussi aux propos banals qu'on échange au cours d'une soirée et qui en disent long sur le snobisme du petit milieu. Il faut noter ici une alternance intéressante. Laurence est tour à tour celle qui commente les actes et les faits — c'est le *Je* d'*Oublier Palerme*, de *Nature morte devant la fenêtre* — et le personnage traditionnel dont les actions sont raportées à la troisième personne par un auteur omniscient. Laurence joue donc deux rôles: celui de l'héroïne qui va et vient selon les désirs de l'auteur et celui d'un être qui prend tout à coup conscience de lui-même et qui vit alors d'une vie propre où il semble naturel de parler à la première personne. *Les belles images* traitent de l'indifférence et de l'aveuglement volontaire d'un certain milieu devant les problèmes angoissants de la vie: la misère des pauvres, le mal, la mort. La petite fille de Laurence commence à poser des questions auxquelles il faut donner une réponse ou tout au moins une explication. On a "insensibilisé" la mère, mais pour son enfant, elle refuse l'illusion qui déforme et rend la réalité impossible à accepter. Laurence ouvrira les yeux de la petite Catherine sur la misère du monde.

NON SEULEMENT IL Y A eu sur la scène littéraire en France une "arrivée en force des femmes", mais aussi une importance grandissante accordée à la femme qui n'est plus jeune comme héroïne de roman. Ce trait ne se retrouve pas chez des auteurs canadiens comme Marie-Claire Blais, Réjean

Ducharme et Jean Basile dont l'inspiration est centrée sur l'enfance et la première jeunesse.

L'air de Venise appartient à cette catégorie. L'histoire de deux femmes d'un certain âge, l'une revient à Venise pour retrouver les traces d'un ancien amour, l'autre, "vieille fille", s'offre cette première et dernière folie qu'est un voyage à Venise. Solange Fasquelle présente une série de séquences où se meut tantôt l'une tantôt l'autre jusqu'à la fin du récit alors que la pauvre Antonella, courtisée par quelqu'un qui lui conviendrait parfaitement, se laisse entraîner dans les bras d'un gigolo payé par Carla qui se venge ainsi de ses déceptions. Ce livre est cruel mais vrai en dévoilant les ravages de la vieillesse auxquels peuvent s'attendre les femmes qui ne vivent que pour être admirées ou qui ne savent pas se construire une vie libre, à leur mesure.

Avec *Un plat de porc aux bananes vertes*, le thème de la vieillesse passe au premier plan. Ici, André Schwarz-Bart et sa femme Simone nous ouvrent les yeux sur la misère des noirs. Le monde qu'ils évoquent leur est familier; Simone est créole et tous les deux connaissent bien le monde antillais. C'est là que naît la mulâtresse Solitude dont nous apercevons l'ombre dans ce premier volume de la "Geste des Noirs". Schwarz-Bart reconnaît que la misère de l'homme noir est la même que celle de l'homme juif: "Il y a le même sentiment de fatalité — le sentiment que dans cent ans, dans mille ans, un Noir sera toujours un Noir. Ce sentiment de fatalité me hantait, moi, l'enfant juif . . ." Le thème de la vieillesse l'obsède aussi depuis longtemps, "car on peut y lire, en toutes lettres, le thème de la mort; et, en filigrane, la vérité sur la civilisation occidentale qui est fondée sur l'holocauste quotidien des animaux, sur la domination de la femme, sur l'exploitation de l'homme, et sur la liquidation insidieuse des vieillards, des infirmes, des aliénés mentaux et autres laissés-pour-compte." Paroles dures que celles-là, mais André Schwarz-Bart n'aurait-il pas raison beaucoup plus qu'on ne voudrait le croire?

Une troisième caractéristique de la littérature française d'aujourd'hui est le rôle nouveau échu aux "hommes de la quarantaine". Les critiques s'accordent à croire, en général, que quatre auteurs ont consolidé leur position: Jean-Louis Curtis (*La Quarantaine*), Robert Sabatier (*Le Chinois d'Afrique*), François Nourrissier (*Une histoire française*), et José Cabanis (*La Bataille de Toulouse*).

La Bataille de Toulouse est un soliloque où l'auteur et le narrateur ne sont qu'un seul et même personnage parti en quête de lui-même. Apparaît d'abord l'homme de la quarantaine qui vient de rompre avec Gabrielle. C'est à cause de

cette séparation qu'il pénètre plus profondément dans son âme à lui et qu'il en vient à se connaître: l'homme libre, épicurien, jouisseur et lettré, puis l'adolescent sensible qu'il a été, et enfin, tout au fond de lui-même, l'enfant dont le plus grand bonheur avait été de passer un Noël à la Trappe. De cet enfant, il ne reste guère que le vague regret d'avoir perdu "une certaine présence qui chassait toute inquiétude". Les fêtes de l'enfance ne durent pas. Il se retrouve donc seul avec la perspective d'une œuvre qu'il ne réussit pas à écrire, parce qu'écrire est aussi difficile que d'essayer de pénétrer dans le Paradis Terrestre après en avoir été chassé. C'est l'histoire d'un livre qu'on n'arrive pas à écrire et d'un amour qui meurt. Le ton traduit une mélancolie faite de poésie et de nostalgie, de souvenirs et de regrets qu'illuminent parfois un rayon d'espoir.

Qu'y a-t-il à signaler dans la saison théâtrale de 1966-67?

Décevante en ce qui concerne les nouveautés, cette année est surtout marquée par quelques grandes reprises. Une exception se pose dans le premier cas avec les deux pièces de Nathalie Sarraute (*Le Silence* et *Le Mensonge*) qui ont inauguré la salle du Petit Odéon. Ecrites pour la radio, ces deux pièces ne sont pas moins du vrai théâtre sous la direction de Jean-Louis Barrault. *Le Cheval évanoui* et *L'Echarde* de Françoise Sagan n'ont pas ajouté grand-chose à la renommée de l'auteur, sinon le personnage de Lord Chesterfield qui apporte un humour nouveau.

François Périer a présenté, sous la direction d'André Barsacq, une nouvelle pièce de Félicien Marceau, *Un jour j'ai rencontré la Vérité*, qui offre un certain intérêt.

La première pièce de Françoise Dorin, écrite sous le pseudonyme de Frédéric Renaud, a obtenu de la faveur auprès du public. Pièce à rebondissements, le suspense y joue le rôle principal. Il y a des mots drôles, parfois mordants, mais peut-être y a-t-il davantage d'esprit.

Il y a eu scandale au sujet des *Paravents* de Jean Genêt et le public s'est trouvé partagé sur la valeur du spectacle. Cependant, il faut admettre que Jean Genêt sait remuer la conscience avec "une sorte de chant âcre et somptueux de révolte et de mort qui prend à la gorge et au coeur". Si le Théâtre de la Huchette a depuis dix ans à l'affiche *La Cantatrice chauve* et *La Leçon* d'Ionesco, La Comédie-Française a maintenant à son répertoire *La Soif et la Faim*, tandis que l'Athénée a remporté le plus grand succès de la saison avec *Le Roi se meurt*, des reprises, certes, mais qui prennent "à la gorge et au coeur".

On continue à jouer Beckett (*En attendant Godot, Oh! les beaux jours*),

Anouilh (*Becket*), Audiberti (*Le Cavalier seul*). Jean-Louis Barrault et Edwige Feuillère, les Mesa et Ysé de la première représentation, ont repris avec succès *Le Partage de Midi* de Claudel, et Jean-Louis Barrault et Geneviève Page, *Le Soulier de Satin.*

A la Comédie-Française, *Dom Juan* a rompu avec la mise en scène traditionnelle, geste d'Antoine Bourseiller qui a fait couler beaucoup d'encre. Jacques Charon s'est vu confier la reprise du *Voyage de Monsieur Perrichon*, et *La Reine morte* de Montherlant connaît un succès continu.

Certaines œuvres étrangères ont été particulièrement appréciées. Nous pouvons citer des auteurs bien connus comme Pirandello et Tchékov dont le prestige ne fait que grandir, le premier avec *Se Trouver*, pièce représentée pour la première fois en France, et le second avec *Les Trois Soeurs*, *Le Duel* et *La Mouette.* A ces noms s'ajoutent celui de John Saunders dont la pièce *La prochaine fois je vous chanterai* alterne au Théâtre Antoine avec celle de Pirandello, d'Ernst Toller avec *Hop-là, nous vivons*, et, naturellement, de Peter Weiss avec *Marat-Sade.* La vogue du théâtre anglais se continue, conséquence de certains succès de la saison précédente, comme *Ah Dieu!, que la guerre est jolie.*

Le poète algérien, Kateb Yacine, a remporté un premier succès au petit T.N.P. (Théâtre National Populaire) avec *Les ancêtres redoublent de férocité*, pièce qui exprime l'inquiétude de l'âme algérienne. Un second succès est assuré alors que la pièce sera représentée en Algérie, cette fois.

Que conclure d'une enquête comme celle-ci?

Tout d'abord, que le roman se porte mieux que le théâtre en ce qui concerne son renouvellement. Le rôle des femmes dans le roman contemporain, aussi bien que celui des "hommes de la quarantaine", donnent au roman une orientation particulière, celle d'une sensibilité riche qui sait mettre à profit les leçons de la vie. Certes, il ne manque pas de jeunes auteurs prêts à voler de leurs propres ailes, mais peu d'entre eux ont attiré l'attention des critiques. Il n'y a pas, en France, cette année, d'ouvrage comparable à *Une saison dans la vie d'Emmanuel* ni à *L'Avalée des Avalés.*

Le style du roman est, en général, alerte et vigoureux. Abondent la poésie et le lyrisme, et beaucoup d'images. Le narrateur y joue un rôle important, tout comme la psychanalyse et l'autobiographie. Les œuvres sont plutôt sombres avec un penchant marqué pour la solitude, la frustration, et les souffrances de la vieillesse comme thèmes. Le désir de révolte est moins souligné que dans le roman canadien actuel, ce qui s'explique par le fait que les auteurs marquants de cette année ne

sont pas de la première jeunesse. L'on sent qu'ils ont vidé leur querelle avec la vie, sauf peut-être Simone de Beauvoir et André et Simone Schwarz-Bart.

Nous pouvons remarquer une nouvelle importance accordée au roman canadien, surtout aux jeunes auteurs, même si l'on s'étonne que ce qui s'écrit maintenant au Canada français ressemble beaucoup à ce qui s'écrit en France.

Si, pour sa part, les créations du théâtre français actuel semblent plutôt statiques en regard du roman, l'action théâtrale elle-même a pris de l'envergure. La preuve en est le renouveau de vie théâtrale en province avec les Maisons de la Culture, innovation qui date de quelques années. On pourrait citer l'élan donné par la Maison de la Culture de Bourges où des pièces comme *Le Maître de Santiago* de Montherlant et *Oh!, les beaux jours* de Beckett ont été représentées par le Théâtre de France. A l'occasion d'un festival du théâtre de province qui a eu lieu dans cette ville, une pièce d'Audiberti, *Coeur à cuir*, créée à cette occasion, a été si bien reçue par la critique qu'elle prenait la route de Paris, quelques semaines plus tard.

Par contraste au roman qui bénéficie d'une grande diffusion grâce aux Livres de Poche, le théâtre a beaucoup plus de peine à trouver son statut économique. La télévision et le cinéma, pour tout dire la société industrielle d'aujourd'hui, lui portent préjudice. Peut-être n'y a-t-il pas aussi suffisamment de bon nouveau théâtre pour un public éclairé. Néanmoins, le théâtre français aura toujours ses disciples et les trois coups continueront, dans plus de 50 théâtres parisiens et, en province, dans les Maisons de la Culture, à faire se lever le rideau sur un monde disparu, mais non oublié, ou sur notre époque actuelle avec ses refus, sa frustration et sa violence.

review articles

A NATIONAL STYLE?

Julian Symons

Modern Canadian Verse. Edited by A. J. M. Smith. Oxford University Press. $6.50.

A CONFESSION FIRST of the reviewer's disqualifications, one of which is in a way a qualification, for writing about this book. I come to Canadian verse with a characteristic English ignorance of its background and nature. The only Canadian poets fully known to me are those published in this country, Douglas Le Pan, Malcolm Lowry, A. J. M. Smith, David Wevill, George Woodcock, with the addition of some poems by E. J. Pratt familiar to me from anthologies or magazines. I add in self-defence that I am probably at least as well-informed as most English critics about Canadian poetry, which is difficult to come by here. Looking on the shelves of the London Library, which has as good a collection of verse as any private library in this country, I found less than half a dozen volumes by the writers represented here.

Ignorance is never a blessing, and I can understand that admission of it may be an irritant to Canadian poets, yet it may be a good thing in a way that they should realize that their work is almost unknown in Britain, as before the war such a poet as Wallace Stevens was almost unknown. And in this case ignorance does also mean freshness. It means coming to the whole bulk of Canadian poetry without preconceptions about schools and styles, and there is I hope something to be said for such an approach.

The second disqualification is positive. Approximately a third of the anthology consists of work by poets writing in French. The existence of this separate culture and language is obviously significant, as it would be if a considerable body of Welsh poets wrote in their native language rather than in English, but I don't feel competent to judge this poetry or to comment on a situation in which "some of the younger poets writing in French consider themselves poets of Quebec, not of Canada", except to say that the high proportion of poets writing in French surprises me. But informed comment on this must come from another source.

What does Canadian verse in English look like, to a foreign eye and ear? The immediate impression is of immense confidence, a certainty of approach that is particularly marked among the older writers. There is nothing parochial, and little that is regional, about their work. It implies a confidence that few British poets have possessed in this century to

take the writing of long poems for granted, and to use without fuss variations of well-worn forms, as E. J. Pratt uses the Hudibrastic couplet in his poem about "The Cachalot" who

> Sighted a hammerhead and followed him,
> Ripped him from jaw to ventral, swallowed him;
> Pursued a shovelnose and mangled him;
> Twisted a broadbill's neck and strangled him.

In a way the tone of this is heroic, and the element of heroism, in the battle of men pitted against other men or against nature, is a constant theme, even in such recent work as Peter Miller's "The Capture of Edwin Alonzo Boyd" and Peter Dale Scott's "Argenteuil County". Human heroism as a theme for poetry belongs to a civilization still sufficiently unmechanical and certain of its own strength to feel optimism about the future. On the evidence of this anthology Canadian poets don't often write directly about their country, although there is a powerfully visual free-ranging extract from a long "Poem on Canada" by Patrick Anderson, but they are prepared to face considerable themes without hesitant self-questioning, and to say what they think in the assurance that an individual's view is of importance.

The most interesting of the older poets have the defects of these qualities. F. R. Scott and Robert Finch are good organizers of firmly rhythmic poems, but there is at times something both coarse and derivative about their forms of expression. In Finch's "The Collective Portrait" the couplets are too near to their eighteenth-century models, and also sometimes near to forcefully-expressed cliché:

> The farther back his ancestry is thrust
> The nearer he derives from Adam's dust.
>
> Though with a gun he makes his fellows skip,
> Over himself his senses wield a whip.

A tendency towards generalization, to write about Man rather than individual men, to "take the anonymity of heroism for granted" as Northrop Frye says about Pratt, is noticeable. At times the big words seem to be coming too easily, and the tackling of major themes has something mechanical about it as if the poet were saying: "This is a big country, and I've got to write a big poem about it."

After reading fifty pages another impression follows the first one of poetic confidence: that Canadian poetry has suffered greatly from the absence of a single major talent. Pratt is certainly the most important of the older poets, but although his talent is a fine one it cannot be called truly original like those of Hardy, Eliot or Vachel Lindsay. I have chosen these three disparate names deliberately to show that I am not trying to denigrate Pratt, who may have been a better poet than Lindsay but was certainly a less original one. At no time does one ever feel that Pratt or Scott was influenced by the "revolution of the word" which affected the best American and British poets in the Twenties and Thirties. They adapted existing forms with great skill, but there are times when Pratt appears a lesser Edwin Arlington Robinson, Scott an imitator working in half a dozen styles. A great poet might have ordered the tone of Canadian poetry for a generation. As it was, much Canadian verse became derivative and literary. The imitations produced are very much like the real thing, so that one exclaims: "That might almost have been written by Frost, Masters, Hart Crane" (cf. A. M. Klein on Montreal, "O city

metropole, isle riverain"). But they are not the real thing, and perhaps basically the poets know it. A few writers ducked away from the grandeur of Pratt's themes and turned to European modernism, cocking a snook at the solemnity of their contemporaries. A. J. M. Smith, in poems like "Ballade un peu banale", is one of these, John Glassco, Irving Layton with his Audenesque half-rhymes, and the much younger Daryl Hine are others. Several poets are quirkily and entertainingly original, like Margaret Avison:

> That Eureka of Archimedes out of his bath
> Is the kind of story that kills what it conveys;
> Yet the banality is right for that story, since it is not a communicable one
> But just a particular instance of
> The kind of lighting up of the terrain
> That leaves aside the whole terrain, really,
> But signalizes, and compels, an advance in it.

Miss Avison's adroit verse is distinctly modern, but she has a link with Pratt's narrative poems in her well-told conversation piece, "A Story".

I am not sure how much the conversational tone of almost all the poets is the result of the editor's personal preferences, but on the face of it Canadian poets have absorbed modern idioms easily, although it is right to stress again that this is not the same thing as originating an idiom. Nothing in the book gave me the shock of encountering something *new* in the use of language. An outsider must remain unsure also of how much the sense many poets give of having all the space and time in the world reflects the editor's choice of "verse of a certain technical distinction that expresses implicitly the special character imposed by geography, climate, history, and society upon an individual poetic temperament". History doesn't come into it much, but it is tempting to link the length of many poems with the size and comparative emptiness of the country.

There is a fairly sharp division in the book between those poets who have been influenced by their Canadian elders or by European writers, and youngers poets who owe obvious debts to the San Francisco beats and to William Carlos Williams. D. G. Jones' "Soliloquy to Absent Friends" embodies the whole of Williams's wheelbarrow poem ("So much depends upon . . .") as a quotation, and then adds the poet's own Williamsesque comment:

> or a broken basket of clothespins
> slowly filling with snow

This kind of thing seems to me wholly derivative, and so in its different way do poems like Joe Rosenblatt's "Metamorpho I":

> Lately I've become religious about atoms
> and this is how I've come to dig the element man

Of course Mr. Smith is right in saying that instantaneous communication and "the universal half-education supplied by the mass media" have largely eliminated "the distinction between a native and a cosmopolitan tradition", or as I would put it have made poets in different countries write more like each other, but too many of the poets under forty seem to be sacrificing their individuality in the desire to be briskly up to date. There are exceptions, like the remarkable autobiographical poem by Phyllis Gotlieb, or James Reaney in his poem on the Avon River, but a lot of the young poets seem to be running hard down the road to nowhere. However "universal" our art

has become there is still something distinctively British about poetry like that of Philip Larkin, distinctively American about that of Robert Lowell. There are things that Canadian poets are particularly good at — descriptive verse, stories, autobiographical snatches like Miss Gotlieb's — and this implies that there are still specifically *Canadian* lines for poetic development. This collection contains a great deal of talented verse which, as I have said, cannot be called parochial or narrowly nationalistic. The reverse may perhaps be true: that the poets who have naturally and eagerly looked outwards to Britain and America might profitably look inwards again, to see what use the experience of living in Canada can be to them. What Canadian poetry most lacks (and what Larkin, Lowell and some other writers by contrast have been able to use profitably) is a truly national style.

SOMETHING OR NOTHING

Gérard Tougas

GERARD BESSETTE, *Incubation*. Macmillan. $3.95.

WHEN *Not for Every Eye* appeared in 1962, it was clear that a most unusual literary event had taken place. Gérard Bessette's first important novel, considered by some to be a minor masterpiece, had been rendered into English not so much by a proficient translator, as by a highly gifted writer. The collaboration of two artists, each capable of embodying his vision of life in an original style, is a rare occurrence. When it was known that Bessette's *Incubation*, published by the Librairie Déom in 1965, was being translated by Glen Shortliffe, expectations, among those who had been most impressed by the first joint literary venture, naturally began to rise.

The attractive volume brought out by Macmillan's with the same title as in the original French — *Incubation* — has confirmed the verdict of 1962. Glen Shortliffe's translation, while faithful, goes much beyond proficiency and stands on its own merits as a creation in language. The proper place for mentioning the translation is therefore at the beginning of this review, instead of leaving a few congratulatory remarks for the last few lines, as is the custom when commenting on the piano accompaniment to a great singer's performance.

A brief analysis of *Incubation* will allow a glimpse of the formidable difficulties which Shortliffe had to overcome and serve the purpose at the same time of explaining why Bessette's novel constitutes one of the highest achievements of the French-Canadian novel.

Most commentaries which I have read on the style adopted by Bessette miss the point. It is not really accurate to refer to the stream-of-consciousness technique, as many critics have done, when referring to the English version. Nor are the criticisms in French more helpful, characterized as they are by too easy comparisons with the *anti-roman* of Nathalie Sarraute or Robbe-Grillet. (Besides, the last-named novelists cannot be lumped together in this way.) The pertinent questions to be asked about Bessette's style are surely: what are the reasons behind the adoption of the individualistic prose of *Incubation* and is that prose successful?

The most striking aspect of Bessette's language lies in its *rhythm*. From the first page to the last can be heard the muted but recognizable pulse of a sensitive personality. If the beat, though regular, is dulled, this is to be explained by the pervasive fumes of alcohol and the even more numbing effect of the senseless repetitions of daily life. For this, in effect, is the burden of the whole novel: we are all immersed in a futile effort to make sense out of unrelated and insignificant events, which unfortunately have the power to cause pain and death. In order to convey this thought, Bessette has created a language of his own, which, contrary to what some readers have concluded, offers no real difficulties either

of understanding or of interpretation. The fact that Bessette makes extensive use of artificial punctuation marks to replace the more traditional ones is proof that, having striven for clarity, he cannot be described as avant-garde, even though he has succeeded in being original.

The plot, if such it can be called, is of minor importance. The author has deliberately set out to *faire quelque chose de rien*. It is the working out of a very banal marital situation that matters.

During the war years in London, Gordon, a Canadian, has an affair with an English girl, Nini. He returns to Canada, marries a very proper Toronto girl, sires two children and settles in a small university town in Ontario. Ten years later, Nini arrives on the scene and becomes a library assistant in the same university where Gordon teaches English literature. Nini, realizing that the situation is hopeless, seeks refuge in the friendship of an old professor of linguistics, Weingerter, whose Jewish wife had perished years before in a German concentration camp. Nini gradually moves from despondency to despair and finally commits suicide.

With these bare elements, Bessette has woven a narrative whose distinctive quality, as has been mentioned at the outset, finds its ultimate expression in an unmistakable rhythm. One of the finest examples of this persistent throbbing effect, brought about by repetitions of thought and sentence structure, a macabre humour and refined language, occurs near the end of the book, in a passage which will no doubt appear in future anthologies of French Canadian literature:

poor us poor miserable bipeds who should never have gone vertical never have stood erect over this earth never have left this mud never have abandoned this slime with its aroma of wet dung, it had all begun in London in a blackout peopled by ghosts trampling scampering scurrying like rats, like half-crazed ants seized with the panic that overtakes them when some giant foot kicks open and crushes their ant-hill, running right and left dashing about helter-skelter in the blackness cutting across each other's paths losing each other bumping into each other again climbing over each other, all to the din of the howling sirens the spitting guns, seeking an opening looking for any orifice through which to plunge underground to disappear into the bowels of the earth with their pitiful little baggage their few shabby portable possessions, hurrying along in the night through foggy streets racing madly men and women alike overtaken by panic fleeing death and danger like ants or rats, two of them meeting bumping into each other then fleeing along together under the illusion of being engaged in processes of thought while being hauled forward driven along by instinct by fear by panic, a male a female trying to come together trying to unite imagining because they are bipeds because they stand vertical because their ancestors in the course of a biological fantasy through a practical joke of the evolutionary process little by little displaced their vertebral axes (at least during their waking hours) by ninety degrees, imagining that they think, that they are masters as they say of their fate, having deep down learned but one thing namely that they will die, meanwhile moving about on the face of the soil in a half-dream a half-sleep a man a woman trying to come together trying to give each other warmth trying hand in hand to make it together back to that horizontal posture that position they should never have abandoned that posture which their anthropoid ancestor should never have had the mad impulse to distort through that insensible catastrophic backward swing into *homo erectus mulier erecta*, the spinal column straightening bit by bit into the perpendicular, the arms becoming bit by bit too short the legs too long, then the awkward laughable gait like walking on stilts bumping back to earth at every step falling forward onto a spindly disproportionate limb, that constant cranky scissors-movement belly

> ballooning shoulders subsiding all the organs liver spleen intestines heart lungs (clinging as best they could to this off-balance capsizing structure) bulging straining sagging toward the earth they should never have left, *homo erectus* that monstrous brain that teratological excrescence dandled unsteadily on the end of a spindly turkey-neck starting in to secrete and deposit that epiphenomenal mildew called thought, *homo sapiens* men and women imagining way back in the darkness of prehistory that they could control their destiny indeed already prey to the illusion that they had mastered their fate, the facial mask, shrinking stretching flexing into wrinkles of anxiety furrows of anguish, close-coupled to that egg-shaped cranial shell hermetically stuffed wih agony and delusion

This quotation allows us to answer the question: why did Bessette choose to write in this incantatory fashion? Obviously, because the theme which *Incubation* exemplifies, namely that life is repetitious and meaningless, is well served by an outwardly somnolent style, rendered even more plausible by the state of inebriety in which the narrator and Gordon find themselves at the beginning of the novel.

Some reservations can be made concerning the typographical aids devised by Bessette to facilitate the reading of *Incubation*. Artistic unity being his purpose—the flow of language conforming to the realities described—he had no interest in making his meaning obscure or in rendering his novel difficult by leaving the reader to discover who is talking or thinking aloud. Having done away with most punctuation and to a great extent with paragraphs, Bessette has supplied reading aids of his own. These by their very nature are arbitrary and cannot be said to be an improvement on traditional punctuation. For example, when dialogue is interrupted by comments on the

speaker's appearance, Bessette shows the two levels of reality by a dash followed by a vertical stroke. At other times, a sudden change in the flow of thought is indicated by a capital letter appearing in the middle of a line.

It is significant that Shortliffe — no doubt in consultation with the author — has seen fit to disregard some of these aids and has divided the English version into a larger number of paragraphs. In the original French, Bessette's desire to do away with paragraphs (hardly a new idea if one remembers that Proust had imagined that he could write *Remembrance of Things Past* as one single paragraph spread over a few thousand pages) produced an unsatisfactory arrangement for the eye. With respect to this minor point, the English version can be considered an improvement on the original.

More important is Shortliffe's treatment of vocabulary. With a flair for which there is no equivalent in French-Canadian literature, Bessette has created a lexicon of his own. The vagaries of a cultivated mind working under the influence of alcohol lead quite naturally to the minting of words. In all cases, the new vocabulary so devised stands clear in its meaning, although it does require on the part of the reader extensive knowledge, from reference to Pascal's *ciron* to Marivaux and Rogojine. Quite rightly, Shortliffe did not aim at a comparable virtuosity in English, but has produced suitable adaptations instead. To take a single example among many, *ombilicaliser* might have produced in English a rather facetious *to umbiliculate*. Shortliffe chose instead the perfectly acceptable *umbilical link*.

It is undeniable that in the English version, Bessette's sporting with the French language does not show through. Shortliffe, who quite properly did not attempt the impossible, has achieved compensation by his masterly use of English, in an area which, to be adequately explained, would lead to abstruse considerations in comparative stylistics. Suffice it to say that the English language, not having been severely regularized as has been the French language since the seventeenth century, allows Shortliffe actually to improve on those passages in Bessette which require the vigour, the suggestiveness and poetry to which the limitless vocabulary of the English language lends itself so well. Juxtaposition of the original French and the English adaptation brings this out in the following passage:

> cette crue ce sommet ce déferlement, perdu emporté roulé, cet élan cette intensité cataclysmique qui gagnait emportait aussi Néa la tordait, cette ondulante vague charnelle océanique cosmique qui tirait d'eux une cataracte de mots incohérents de balbutiements à la fois bestiaux et surhumains puis les redéposait frémissants haletants puis détendus anéantis comme des naufragés sur la grève après le colossal roulis salin de la mer
>
> now impaled on that pitiless peak swept off on that surge of urgency that crash of cresting foam rolling relentlessly catching up Nini too whirling her writhing away on that tidal wave rising from the cosmic recesses of the flesh, ripping from their lips a torrent of stuttered syllables half bestial half celestial then casting them like empty shells shattered upon the shore shaking and gasping like shipwrecked survivors borne by the breakers of the salted sea.

No more striking example could be found of the fundamental difference between the two languages than in these few lines. Bessette's word picture, however successful, remains intellectualized, because the French language tends to give an abstract view of life. Shortliffe,

by resorting to onomatopœic and alliterative devices and by borrowing from the Anglo-Saxon storehouse of the English language, brings us closer to the scene which Bessette, no matter how inventive, makes us see and hear as if from a polite distance.

The cumulative effect brought about by the narrator's gloomy appraisal of life is a powerful one. That Bessette has written one of the outstanding novels to have come out of French Canada since the last war is clear. The First Prize (novel section) in the Concours littéraire de la Province de Québec was awarded to *Incubation* in 1965. Bessette won the Governor General's award in 1966.

The year 1966 has happened to be an exciting one for French-Canadian writers. The publicity which surrounded Marie-Claire Blais' *Une saison dans la vie d'Emmanuel*, winner of the Prix Médicis in Paris, as well as the publication there of three other novelists, all of whom attracted a considerable amount of favourable comment, point to the increasing sophistication and quality of French-Canadian writing. Marie-Claire Blais' good fortune has also been conducive to the perennial wringing of hands among critics and writers alike, all bemoaning their isolation and the stultifying effects produced on their abilities by the narrow confines of the French-Canadian reading public. One wonders how *Incubation* would have fared, had it belonged to the 1966 vintage. Probably not too well, because the Paris publisher who selected Marie-Claire Blais was acquainted with *Incubation* and did not feel that it would be favourably received in France.

This brings us face to face wtih one of the most crucial problems encountered by writers in both English and French-speaking Canada. What Canadians consider to be their best is often rejected by New York, London and Paris — when the "best" attracts their attention — and conversely, the choice made in these centres often comes as a surprise to enlightened opinion at home. It is an open secret among publishers in Montreal that if Edmund Wilson, and through his influence, the New York firm of Farrar, Straus and Giroux had not embarked on a translation of Marie-Claire Blais, Les Editions Grasset in Paris would have been less enthusiastic about *Une saison dans la vie d'Emmanuel*. Fortunately for Marie-Claire Blais, her poetic rendition

of vice in a large French-Canadian family was designed to strike the fancy of outsiders seeking a typically "Canadian" product, and could possibly have tipped the scales in her favour.

Bessette's *Incubation* reveals the contemporary anguish of man and cannot be localized as readily as Marie-Claire Blais' work. That Bessette has written a mature and compelling novel brings him into the mainstream of artistic creation in the Western World. And that simple fact tells against *Incubation*, because comparisons spring to mind. On the other hand, Marie-Claire Blais' protracted short story lies outside the experience of the average cultivated reader and hence stands a better chance of arresting his attention.

Whenever a novelist manages to escape the limits of an exclusively Canadian reading public, many factors, not all literary, come into play. *Incubation* is not likely to circulate significantly outside of Canada. This conclusion should not prevent us from according it the front rank among Canadian novels.

IF THERE'S ANYTHING I HATE IT'S POETRY

Lionel Kearns

B. P. NICOL, *Journeyings and the Returns*. Coach House Press. $3.50.
A. J. M. SMITH, *Poems, New and Collected*. Oxford University Press (Canadian Branch). $2.25.
DENNIS LEE, *Kingdom of Absence*. House of Ananse. $1.95.
FLORENCE MCNEIL, *A Silent Green Sky*. Klanak Press. $2.50.

THE NEXT TIME I am trying to dissuade one of my students from honouring in English Literature I will give him something to read out of A. J. M. Smith's *New and Collected Poems*, for Smith's work seems to typify what can happen to an art form when it is dominated by an historically oriented academic discipline. After reading this volume I have no doubt that Smith knows exactly what he is doing, that his skill at playing the versification game matches his long established reputation, and that this kind of literary competence is of very little consequence to me or the world in which I live.

For the most part Smith relies on the time-worn gimmicks of traditional rhyme and regular metre, usually heavily iambic, to give his pieces poetic unity and mark them as verse. In keeping with this conventional approach he delights in figures of speech, abstract and lofty diction, classical allusions, inverted turns of phrase, generalized emotion, and occasionally gentlemanly wit. It is true that Smith has a certain flexibility of form; his models range from the Seventeenth

Century Metaphysicals to Auden, Yeats and Eliot. The collection even contains a small section of imagistic nature poems in free verse, and these I found relatively pleasant. However, there is very little going on that is new or original. Everything is a kind of pastiche:

> Celestial strings might not surpass
> Thy morning breezes in long grass;
> The slow rain from the laden tree
> Dropping from heaven, brought to thee
> Sounds of purest harmony

Here Smith reproduces the flavour of Henry Vaughan, whom he is celebrating. It is a clever exercise, but to what end? Even Smith's themes are run-of-the-mill literary when one finally chews through the reams of metaphor that dutifully obscure them: a low-keyed concern with love, death, and creation, spattered with smug erudition and polite unenthusiastic Christianity.

Perhaps the fact that I am not tuned in on A. J. M.'s wave length colours my evaluation of these poems. I am ready to admit that others are sometimes capable of enjoying what I find inexorably dull, and I trust that persons with tastes differing from my own will find this collection more to their liking. The bad humour that it prompts in me personally stems, I believe, from the conviction that a major poet should be capable of doing a great deal more, of writing, for example, poems which are direct and "unpoetic" enough to be somehow symptomatic of human emotion. "Only the simplest words have meaning" choruses Smith in a poem on the death of E. J. Pratt, yet elsewhere in the collection he shows himself to be unconcerned with that kind of meaning. Perhaps truth is irrelevant in contexts where Smith believes poetry should operate. It depends, I suppose, on what a person thinks poetry is, and what he wants to do with it.

It is interesting to look at Dennis Lee's *Kingdom of Absence* in the light of A. J. M. Smith, for both poets have the same concept of poetic form. Lee's problem, however, lies in the fact that he has considerably less skill, subtlety, and literary background than Smith, and consequently the effect of his effort is often ludicrous:

> Heedless by the pump
> at Schultz's, weekends, from the pontiac,
> we would explode at carefree random . . .

Can you imagine that? Pow! or:

> Time slides, and the hammered glory of
> built cities
> lurches from ken. They stop mattering.

Mr. Lee is fond of that word "ken" and rarely misses an opportunity to stick it into a poem. In fact, because he tries to use the whole bag of Victorian tricks that Ezra Pound advised poets to abandon more than fifty years ago, the result is quite campish. The collection might well have made on this level, had it not been so unbearably long.

If the work of A. J. M. Smith and Dennis Lee spanned the spectrum of present day Canadian poetry — the grand old man and the aspiring newcomer — I think I would give it up myself and turn to some more significant endeavour, such as playing tiddly-winks or counting my hair. Fortunately, however, there are a few worthwhile volumes that have come out recently, one of which is *A Silent Green Sky* by Florence McNeil. It is a tastefully produced little book, designed by the artist Takao Tanabe and published in Vancouver by the Klanak Press.

Miss McNeil writes in a form that coincides with a poetic tradition that has de-

veloped in the last ten years on the Canadian West Coast. Focussing on the physical world and relating what is there without intellectual exploitation of the experience or undue interference from the ego, the sensitized and reacting individual consciousness selects those objects which at that precise moment seem relevant, giving us the poetry of personal testimony — quiet, authentic, in forms that derive not from the conventional formulae dredged up from the literary past, but from the poet's own speaking voice as it moves in rhythms and images characteristic of particular ways of feeling or states of being which are a direct response to life. Miss McNeil deals with the observed world about her and its natural extention. Note, for example, the functional consistency of the metaphors in the opening stanza of the poem "Interior August":

> The day drips hot and blue
> into the lake
> sleek as suntan oil
> the hills
> naked as buttered clams
> sweat tumbleweed into the wind
> and the beach people greased with sand

The effect of coupling item to item within a closely related semantic field is synesthesia, and for me at least, it is powerfully evocative. The value of this kind of sensuous description lies merely in the convincing articulation of what it is like to be alive. I like the poems.

When I was living in London two years ago one of the Canadian poets being talked about was B. P. Nichol, who, at the age of twenty-one was drawing attention to himself in the field of Concrete Poetry. His present collection now proves conclusively that his reputation is well deserved, and will, I am sure, bring him further international acclaim, though I am sceptical whether it will make much impact in Canada, where Concrete Poetry is very little appreciated or even understood.

Concrete poets assume that poetry is language distorted for effect, and by extending this concept in practice to its extreme limit, they end with forms whose stylistic features are so exaggerated that the component linguistic elements of the works tend to relinquish the burden of conventional meaning that language characteristically carries. As might be expected, Concrete falls into two categories: Visual Concrete, which derives from written language and sometimes takes on the aspects of graphics, pictorial art or even sculpture, and Sonic Concrete, which derives from spoken language and in some cases bears a relationship to music. Concrete really isn't new; the advertising industry has been on to it for some time. In McLuhan's terms, Concrete is cool.

In the Nicol package (it is more of a bundle than a volume) we get a tripartite treat: a recorded disc of Sonic Concrete called *Borders*, a fat envelope of Visual Concrete called *Letters Home*, and a fifty-six page book of non-concrete lyrics entitled *Journeying and the Returns*. You can listen to *Borders* on your stereo set, put up the pieces from *Letters* on your walls, and read *Journeying* for yourself, as the lyrics are eminently readable. The variety is amazing. There is even a self-destroying sculpture poem that you assemble yourself in steps and then burn, the words presumably peeling off and lighting up in their prescribed sequence. I say "presumably" because I still have not found the courage to drop a lighted match down the centre cone as specified in the instructions. Each item,

I might add, like all the work turned out by Stan Bevington's Coach House Press, is handsomely produced.

Instead of trying to describe in the space remaining the wealth of material in this collection, I think it would be more to the point to quote Nicol's own statement of intention as it appears on the back of the cover packet:

> now that we have reached the point where people have finally come to see that language means communication and that communication does not just mean language, we have come up against the problem, the actual fact, of diversification, of finding as many exits as possible from the self (language/ communication exists) in order to form as many entrances as possible for the other.
>
> the other is the loved one and the other is the key, often the reason for the need/ desire to communicate. how can the poet reach out and touch you physically as say the sculptor does by caressing you with objects you caress? only if he drops the barriers. if his need is to touch you physically he creates a poem / object for you to touch and is not a sculptor for he is still moved by the language and sculpts with words. the poet who paints or sculpts is different from the painter who writes. He comes at his art from an entirely different angle and brings to it different concerns and yet similar ones. but he is a poet always.
>
> this is not a barrier. there are no barriers in art. where there are barriers the art is made small by them. but this is to say that no matter where he moves or which "field" he chooses to work in, he is always a poet and his creations can always be looked upon as poems.
>
> there is a new humanism afoot that will one day touch the world to its core. traditional poetry is only one of the means by which to reach out and touch the other. the other is emerging as the necessary prerequisite for dialogues with the self that clarify the soul and heart and deepen the ability to love. I place myself there, with them, whoever they are, wherever they are, who seek to reach themselves and the other thru the poem by as many exits and entrances as are possible.

It would be difficult to set out a more adequate justification of one's art than this. B. P. Nicol is one of the truly contemporary poets writing in 1967, and it would restore my faith in the state of Canadian letters if he were to get the next Governor General's Award for this collection of poems.

VOICES OF POETS

George Robertson

Canadian Poets I (recorded poems by Phyllis Webb, Earle Birney, John Newlove, Alfred Purdy, Irving Layton, Leonard Cohen, George Bowering, Gwendolyn MacEwen). Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. $7.50.

THESE RECORDINGS of the work of eight Canadian poets, spoken by the poets themselves, have caused me to abandon a long-held, and I think now a faintly snobbish, prejudice against spoken verse. Although I have worked in broadcasting for most of my adult life, I have always felt that there were certain things which were not improved by the invasion of the electronic media. "Go *deep*cast, not *broad*cast," the Indian sage Vinobha Bhave admonished us when we were trying to get an interview with him. Heresy in the age of Mc-

Luhan! Vinobhaji was fighting a losing battle. Now you can buy the sounds of human beings mating (easily getting everything from foreplay to the lighting of the first cigarette on one side of an LP). Though my professional loyalty is still with the cameras and the microphones and the tape recorders, my real love is the world of books, magazines, newspapers, garbage most of it undoubtedly. Possibly a childhood fixation on the print medium was responsible for this, some early experience with the smell of a new Christmas book (even now I like to smell the shiny covers of new Penguins). And so I hope poetry will always be made to lie flat on a sheet of paper, black writing on white page, so that the eye can voluptuously scan where it will, backwards, forwards, up and down, teasing another meaning out of two separate images, calling a halt and staring at the page number when the going gets rough. I hope this because I think reading and writing are the great arts of our civilization, no matter how electronic the future becomes, and the reason, Mr. McLuhan, is this: that they allow a grave and proper repose of the senses which is necessary to the contemplation of the truth and the forming of judgment.

There is also my memory of certain poetry readings by firelight, on a beach, or in someone's home, where neither the poet nor his listeners entirely escaped the embarrassment of what seemed like a performance at odds with its environment. Many poets read badly, either weighing their words too carefully or relentlessly reading the words as they come, letting the expression fall where it may. The result would tend to set one thinking about the shape of the poet's vocal chords, or his tie, or anything but what he was driving at. Intimate occasions like that had their own horror: the silence after, the murmur of approbation or wonder, the request for a second reading, and the poet's grateful compliance, licking his lips for another go. When all the time one really wanted to get hold of the poem on paper, to study it and demolish it at leisure.

There was of course the exception of Dylan Thomas to remind us that rarely, but powerfully, a poet is such a good reader of his own verse that one can never again see his work in print without hearing those rolling periods and starchy sibilants all over again. Here, the poetry and the reading of it seemed joined in one mighty act of communication. This was art of a different level: it didn't make the poetry greater, but it acted like a great advocate, presenting the poem in its most impressive light.

And there remains the documentary argument. Though I would not choose often to hear T. S. Eliot reading from one of his "Four Quartets", I would rather hear his recording of it than the alternative version by the actor Robert Speight, who is, after all, a sensitive and honest reader of verse. One has documentary value: the interest for us, and for future generations, in hearing how Eliot heard his own lines, and is therefore a clue to the man. The other is a reading which can be supplanted by other readings, by other actors, as time goes on. Both are useful, but one has a kind of necessity and the other has not.

Notwithstanding these arguments, or perhaps because of them, I felt that any record of Canadian poets would have at best that same documentary value, and I greeted the arrival of this recording

with an agreeable, and patronizing, sense of a worthwhile Centennial project having come to fruition.

Well, it is a good deal more than that. First of all, it is entertainment, sublime and otherwise. Would you not be beguiled to have Alfred Purdy address you from your loudspeaker in the following way?

> I was justly annoyed, ten years ago in Vancouver, making beer in a crock, under the kitchen table, when this next door youngster, playing with my own kid, managed to sit down in it, and emerged with one end malted. With excessive moderation, I yodelled at him, "Keep your ass out of my beer."

Second, on the level of performance, some of these readings are better than we have a right to expect. I have heard Earle Birney read his own verse before — and have always considered him an excellent, if artful, reader — but I was quite astonished at how much his reading adds to the pleasure of his verse. Birney, along with some of the others, does in fact create a performance which one looks forward to re-hearing. A good reading, while not "necessary" to an understanding of the poem, does in fact help us to a more accurate shading of meaning, an enrichment of possibilities. Most of Birney's poems in this selection of six would pose no problems of literal meaning to a casual listener. In *Transistor*, for example, the form is loose, conversational, deceptively colloquial. Yet it is unmistakably poetry, each word in relation to its neighbours making a kind of inevitable music, and it is Birney's reading of that music that gives the poem a richness which, I feel, it would not have solely on the page.

Phyllis Webb came as another surprise to me. Again, I have heard the poet read her verse on occasion, have admired that soft, furry voice without feeling that a reading was more than a pleasant way to make the acquaintance of her poetry. But sitting before a microphone, engaging oneself with posterity, perhaps, has brought out the best in this and other poets. The reading is not without its irritations: I was especially bothered by her too-scrupulous marking of the end-of-lines, a scrupulosity that seemed unnecessarily mannered (though on later hearing, the poem which most offends in this regard, *Alex*, suits the technique since it is a dialogue between an adult and a child, the adult adopting the child's simplicity). But later in the group, whatever qualms I had were swept away by her affecting reading of what are, I think, among the most successful love poems written in this country, *Naked Poems, Suite One* and *Suite Two*. Economical, precise of image, moving and sensual at the same time, her reading of them is an experience to treasure, among the best things on these two records.

I suppose I regret that my favourite examples of Leonard Cohen's love poetry are not included in this collection, but what is here is worth study and many re-hearings. He has a seducer's voice, slow, shy, understated, a reading style that rivets attention on the play of whimsy and paradox in his lines. He is effective in all these: I like *Two went to sleep*, in which the repetition of three-beat lines matches the flat-footed progress through life of two people who dream their separate, tedious fantasies night after night till they die.

I was disappointed in Irving Layton's reading, which seemed more lightweight, less involving than some of the poetry warranted (though *The bull calf* comes

off well), but the only poet whose contribution I felt did nothing at all for his verse, and perhaps hindered its appreciation, was John Newlove. His reading tended to emphasize a didactic quality in some of the verse, and elsewhere did nothing to temper the sentimentality in *Kamsack* and *For Judith, now about ten years old*, which ends, "Do you remember the prairie town you were ruined in?" George Bowering, on the other hand, is a conscious reader. His end-of-line breaks are unnecessarily mannered, and do not, in fact, succeed in giving the rhythms of verse to what might as well be prose in the long poem *The Descent*. But *The Descent* succeeds in spite of this, a moving tribute to the link of blood and memory between father and son.

There remain Gwendolyn MacEwen and Alfred Purdy. Miss MacEwen reads well, her voice is attractive, light and musical. I cannot get inside much of what she is saying, but I am sure I would rather hear her say it than read it for myself: her voice has a hypnotic, serpent-like calm, in quality not unlike Phyllis Webb's, though lighter and thinner. "And the shadows of my sanity blacken out your burning." Miss MacEwen is not obscure, merely special and private, and if anything can bring us to a generous reception of these clever, intense and adolescent lines it is surely her winning reading of them.

Alfred Purdy is equally special, in another sense. His rough, hectoring beer-parlour voice is surely the clinching argument in favour of hearing the poet as well as reading him. There are better poems than *Homemade beer*, the one I quoted from above. The interesting thing there is that the juxtaposition of falsely literary touches ("justly annoyed", and "with excessive moderation") with stuff like "Keep your ass out of my beer" is an old trick, favoured especially by gentle, ironic newspapermen like Damon Runyon and Paul St. Pierre; and it is also a cliché. Somehow Purdy's voice makes you overlook that: the attitude is contained in the personality, and the personality is real. Effectively, that same voice does not disguise the seriousness of purpose behind the clowning.

I am proud of the CBC for having the wit to publish these recordings, and for the hope implied in the title, "Canadian Poets One". I would like to suggest to

the CBC, and to other stations in the country like Toronto's CHUM-FM, and even Vancouver's queasily middlebrow CHQM, that they find a way of using some of these poems occasionally in between the serious recordings of music that are played. Would the poets themselves object to being used as fillers between Beethoven and Haydn? I doubt it. A little Birney in the morning, a little Cohen at night, and a great deal would be well with the world. Why not on television as well for the shorter poems, with drawings of the poet or film of his birthplace, or of him shopping at the supermarket, or whatever — during those interminable one-minute breaks between programmes when the air time hasn't been sold? Instead of promos for the Centennial (we *know* about the Centennial now) or endlessly repeated warnings about road safety. Why not cast a little beauty about the world? Soon poetry would replace Muzak in elevators and shopping plazas, syllables would fall through the air like drops of dew, and young couples, remembering their courtship, might turn to each other and say: "They're playing our poem."

MOD MURDERS

George Woodcock

GEORGE BOWERING, *Mirror on the Floor*. McClelland & Stewart. $5.00.
PAUL WEST, *Alley Jaggers*. Ballantine Mod Books. 60¢.

GEORGE BOWERING and Paul West have written novels which are, without doubt, in the contemporary current. West's *Alley Jaggers*, in fact, now appears, with appropriately irrelevant blurb and cover, alongside *Quant by Quant* in the Ballantine Mod Books. But in neither this book nor in Bowering's *Mirror on the Floor* does one sense that ponderous striving after contemporary effect, that relentless and excessive ingenuity, which makes Leonard Cohen's *Beautiful Losers* — that classic of Canadian with-it-ness — a work so intriguing to begin and so boring to read to a finish. Cohen is intellectually committed to a stance, as certain modern painters are, and shapes his work to fit it; his link with Harold Town, that most cerebral of artists, who designed the cover for *Beautiful Losers*, is not accidental. Compared with him, Bowering and West speak with natural voices; the modern tone fits them because it is the tone in which they think. Neither of them has produced a conventional novel, yet neither *Mirror on the Floor* nor — for all its Rabelaisian fantasy — *Alley Jaggers* reads like a work of elaborate contrivance, and perhaps this is why they have failed to receive the praises so heavily showered on *Beautiful Losers* by critics who are impressed by the ingenious and confuse invention with real imagination. They are both, nevertheless, worth attention.

Mirror on the Floor is a novel about

a place. A decade ago in France, Alain Robbe-Grillet, Michel Butor and other *choseistes* created a small revolution in fiction by transferring attention from the character to the environment. The human beings in their novels became, as it were, membranes to receive impressions of objects in the outer world; the objects and not the people were given solidity. The *choseistes* too were over-deliberate, and it is hard now to read a novel by Robbe-Grillet as anything but an intellectual exercise. What Bowering has achieved is a humanization of the *choseiste* approach. The principal presence in *Mirror on the Floor* is undoubtedly Vancouver, a living growth like coral, in and out of whose chambers the characters move like reef fish. But, like the fish, they live on equal terms with the environment, not originating their destinies, but, as we all do, assisting in their unfolding.

Bob Small, a student, is arrested in a Skid Row cafe on a trumped-up charge of obstructing the police. Let out next morning, he encounters on the doorstep of the police station a girl just released on an equally trumped-up charge of being a common prostitute. He loses her, seeks her out, finds her in an old wooden house of the West End, living above a nest of artists in a tower room, filled by light in the day and besieged by darkness at night.

The girl, Andrea, is an almost too classic case of alienation, child of a ruined home, mother-loathing, father-obsessed, and haunted by a gloating guilt at the thought that two men who loved her have drowned. The novel develops in a structural counterpoint, the chapters of Bob's reminiscent and rather innocent narrative — the musings of an educated hick — alternating with chapters in which the author glimpses from outside the obsessions that shape Andrea's actions and build to climax in the narcissistic title chapter where, alone, she unscrews the mirror from the wall, places it on the floor, descends to meet it. The third who dies from drowning is not Bob Small, whose love is sentimental and fair-weather. It is her father, driving suicidally off the end of a pier in the fog. Andrea stabs her mother to death, and ends in a mental ward. "Things happen to the world, that's all," Bob Small reflects. "They happen to the world that is inside us, each person." Perhaps that, in a way, does sum up the philosophy behind *Mirror on the Floor*. But the persons are still persons, not mere membranes, and if Bowering implicitly rejects "the old-style novels, where a man's fate was decided on the merits of a choice he makes", he has learnt enough from them to leaven *nouvelle vague* objectivism with Old Wave humanitarianism. We respond to his characters rather than merely watching through the eyes of objects, as we do those of Robbe-Grillet. Conversely, the environment ends by becoming as thoroughly humanized as a Chinese landscape painting. No-one addicted to Vancouver can read it without appreciating the Whistlerian nuances with which this pearly-lighted *patria chica* is delineated.

Alley Jaggers, like *Mirror on the Floor*, ends with a killing that completes a pattern. Alley is a sex murderer, who breaks a girl's neck and then rapes her dead body; technically he is insane, and ends — like Andrea — in an institution, where he spins surrealistic verbal fantasies to puzzle an audience of doctors and half-baked medical students. These wordy sessions are the last phase of Alley

as an unacknowledged wonder of slums, and the novel they terminate recounts the extraordinary things that may happen when an inhibited and unlearned mind with a spark of black genius catches the intoxication of words, shapes, ideas and myths. For Alley destroys — as Bakunin once urged his followers to do — in pursuance of an urge to create.

Alley is a plasterer in a swollen village — half industrial and half tied to the dying mines — in the English Midlands from which Paul West came before he reached Canada. A half-Irish ancestry in which he glories distinguishes Alley from his fellow workers and isolates him; he is isolated by his retarded youthfulness, which does not correspond to the youthfulness of the really young; he is isolated also amid the bickering warfare of his wife and mother in the home he dare not leave. The room where he was born becomes the fortress in which he drinks and feasts secretly, masturbates to show his defiance of women (whom he hates and fears even when he uses them), and builds his model gliders. If the home is a prison as well as a fortress, class is a wider one; wars and Labour Governments have not changed the stratification of English society in which each class sustains — as Orwell long ago observed — its own culture, and when Alley is seized with a mania for creation that carries him beyond glider-making, the forces of fantasy rise up without any of the disciplines of a bourgeois education to contain them. Everything he has heard or read — bits of folklore, names of racehorses, the terminology of karate — come together in insane verbal outpourings. But these are not enough for Alley. He longs to escape from the world of shams and time-wasting in which he lives, from the covering-up which his occupation as plasterer symbolizes, to "break out, bust loose, and do something grand."

He finds his way by reversing the role of the plasterer, turning it from work of concealment to work of exposure, and creating a monstrous hermaphoditic plaster statue which he hides in his room and gives a name — Ki-ya — and an imagined personality. The statue can do everything but move, and to make up for that Alley has made an ambitious glider, twenty feet in span, which bears the same name as the statue and is its sky-storming extension. But the glider crashes, and Alley burns the fragments after stamping them to pieces in a grieving ritual dance. He accepts the consolations of a pop-singer (lower middle-class) whom he has met at a dance, and takes her off to an empty house where he has been working. When his potency deserts him, and the girl taunts, he kills and rapes her in misogyny and class hatred. Then he turns destruction into creation by covering her in plaster and making of her a companion statue to Ki-ya, an ending that will please those who see in art the static antithesis of life.

In other books Paul West has shown his ability to combine and re-combine in compelling patterns the details of English working-class life, and *Alley Jaggers*, once we flip into the frenetic mind of the protagonist, is a wholly self-consistent fantasy, grim and comic at the same time, from which Alley emerges as the quintessential anti-hero, rising from the depths, ignorant and illuminated, and combining the wise folly of a Shakespearian clown with the ferocity of a murderous folk hero. It is appropriate that, at the end, the children of the

village make out of Alley's deed a rhyming game whose lines closely resemble a jingle which in my childhood Midland boys and girls were still singing about that real life folk-hero, Jack the Ripper, Everyman's champion against the monstrous regiment of women. *Alley Jaggers* is far, in any sense, from what we used to call proletarian writing, but it makes an extraordinary use of material drawn from the popular sub-culture flourishing in that corner of the world which West knows from experience and memory.

INNOCENCE CONFUSED

H. J. Rosengarten

FRED BODSWORTH, *The Sparrow's Fall*. Doubleday. $4.95.
TIMOTHY FINDLEY, *The Last of the Crazy People*. General. $5.95.
SIMON GRAY, *Little Portia*. Queenswood House. $5.75.

THE HERO of Fred Bodsworth's novel *The Sparrow's Fall* is Jacob Atook, a Canadian Indian engaged in a desperate search for caribou during a particularly harsh winter. The hunt is complicated by several factors: Jacob's wife, Niska, is pregnant, and cannot be left without food for too long; their marriage was contracted without parental permission, since Niska had been promised to another man, and so Jacob cannot turn for help to the other members of his tribe. Most difficult of all, he has come under the influence of a visiting missionary who has told him of God's love for all creatures, and intensified his natural distaste for killing. It is this dual conflict — the struggle to survive in a hostile environment, and the inner struggle to reconcile belief and suffering — that forms the substance of this book; and the author's attempt to unify these themes meets with only partial success.

The story is conveyed largely through the consciousness of the main character; and this limited point of view gives added intensity to the mental agonies that increase as Jacob's physical strength begins to fail. Where Mr. Bodsworth is concerned with Jacob's fight to survive, he impresses the reader by his ability to render the physical impact of nature on a sensitive but unsophisticated mind; and the novel succeeds in absorbing us in the grim physical realities of the "land of the little sticks." But in an effort to give his story a deeper significance, the author has sought to make his hero a primitive philosopher, engaged in the quest for truth and understanding:

> He was a man with a curious and restless thrust of mind. He was a man who could gaze with dreaming wonder at the burnished fire of the sunset, and ponder the unknowables of life and living which seemed at that moment to be making his life a part of the sunset and the sunset a part of him.

The set-piece quality of such a description prepares us for the rather wooden nature of Jacob's musings about life, death and the Christian God. Sometimes Mr. Bodsworth conveys the abstract na-

ture of Jacob's speculations through clumsy platitudes, expressed in a vague, heavy-footed prose:

> It was all a great elemental, impersonal leviathan without heart, an interweaving of many parts, and the whole had a purpose, a reason to be, but each part was nothing. He was a jot of dust in a universe of competing matter that reached to the heaven and the stars.

The awkward and inflated style of such moralizing rings false, and emphasizes the writer's failure to adapt his ideas to the restricted workings of his character's mind.

To describe the response of the naïve or untrained mind to new areas of experience requires more than the perception of how such a response is expressed; there must be an understanding of the surrounding pressures and influences by which it is generated. The writer must present a vision of life which embraces both the naïve interpretation and the real complexity of the experience presented to the simple mind, but beyond its comprehension. This is where *The Sparrow's Fall* is at its weakest, and where *The Last of The Crazy People,* by Timothy Findley, draws its strength — though the latter does suffer from defects in other areas. Mr. Findley's plot turns on the mental breakdown of Jessica Winslow after a miscarriage, and examines the resulting strain on the other members of the family: Nicholas, her withdrawn and emotionally impotent husband; Gilbert, her frustrated and unstable elder son, who takes refuge from failure in drink and poetry; Rosetta, her

joyless, fastidious sister-in-law, disfigured in her youth by a stroke.

Mr. Findley's portrayal of this household full of emotional cripples has, only too obviously, all the earmarks of a Drama of the Deep South, despite its Canadian setting: the destruction of A Fine Old Family from within, through madness, sexual conflict and physical violence erupting in the heat of the summer. To complete the picture there is Iris, the coloured maid who is faithful to the family in all its troubles, and who sits on the back porch singing "Frankie and Johnny". The novel is saved, however, from becoming a weak echo of a Tennessee Williams' play by the character of Hooker, the Winslow's eleven-year-old son, and by the description of his shocked response to the events he witnesses. Much of the story is told from Hooker's point of view; by conveying the action through the baffled, sensitive consciousness of a child, the author heightens the dramatic effect and disguises the clichés of his plot.

The family's collapse is recorded in a series of impressions which Hooker vainly struggles to interpret: conversations half-heard and dimly understood, voices raised in anger in his mother's room, the drunken humour of his despairing brother. He is absorbed in an atmosphere of death, and through his mind run the jumbled images of his dead cats, the dead baby, the violent death of Lee Harvey Oswald seen on television. The author's terse prose and his control of understatement are well suited to suggest a tension growing in the child's mind, a tension of which Hooker himself is not always aware as he struggles to understand what is happening around him. In this way, the author prepares us for the violent resolution of Hooker's inner confusion, the murder of his parents and Rosetta; his action is dictated by love, by the belief that death is a merciful release from pain. The scene of the sacrificial murder is occasionally marred by prosy over-indulgence: "A noise, like the beating of clumsy wings, approached Jess through the lilac leaves, and she was struck, she thought, by a hand across the heart;" but on the whole it serves as a convincing and satisfying climax to the action. Despite the stereotyped nature of the situation and the adult characters, *The Last of The Crazy People* is an interesting novel because it captures the irrational logic of a child's mind, while avoiding the pitfall of treating childhood sentimentally.

Little Portia, by Simon Gray, is another study of childhood, although here the central figure is followed through adolescence into manhood, and the dominant tone is ironic. The novel describes the growth and education of Grahame Thwaite, first at schools in the South of England and then at Cambridge. From his earliest years, Grahame's ambition is to be Tops; and he quickly learns that, to be Tops, one must master the art of the correct response to every situation. "A guard against excess," intones his first governess, "is a guarantee of success"; and the same lesson is taught, for somewhat different reasons, by the sexually corrupt master at Grahame's first school: "You try too hard, Little Portia. But be a little secret. Don't spread yourself over everything as if you were a tube of paint. You're at your best when you keep a mystery back." The result is that Grahame learns to adopt whatever role he thinks will bring the success and acceptance he yearns for, whether in

his academic studies or in his personal relationships.

Mr. Gray gives a witty and withering insight into the darker sides of the English educational system. He shows the brutal and dehumanizing influence of the public school tradition, with its rejection of private value and its spurious glorification of masculinity. "It will make a man of him," says Colonel Rones, before Grahame is sent to Windhoven. It does; but not before Grahame has sacrificed his closest friend, Cranton, because their love interferes with the public image of himself as a masculine sporting hero. By the time he reaches Cambridge, Grahame is shown to have lost the capacity to make a genuine response to experience; he assumes the pose of a disillusioned intellectual in order to gain acceptance by a self-consciously superior clique, and regards his former friends with distant condescension. His need for adoring love as well as for social recognition drives him into an awkward love affair with a gauche young art student from Wimbledon; and her readiness to believe in the image that Grahame projects almost traps him into marriage, before he is restrained by his sense of her inferiority.

Mr. Gray's study of Grahame's failure to achieve his dream is a grimly comic exposure of middle-class self love, of the righteous belief in the priority of one's own needs. But the point is driven home rather too often; there is a sameness about all of Grahame's experiences and his responses to them which prevents a satisfactory development of his character and blunts the edge of the satire. The author surrounds his central figure with too many caricatures that we have met before — the hearty, cruel English schoolboy, the effete and decadent undergraduate, the lower-middle-class family living in the suburbs with its glass-topped tables, floral curtains and television set. But the sexual guilt and the moral confusion that underlie all of Grahame's poses are sympathetically presented; and the final emptiness of his emotional life is a fitting comment on the values of a society which has both inspired his ambition and rendered him helpless. The author draws an explicit parallel with *Great Expectations*, which suggests the nature of the forces that have corrupted his hero, the snobbery and hypocrisy of social convention; but, unlike Pip, there can be no revised happiness for Grahame — his simple and whole-hearted acceptance of middle-class values has deprived him of the power of spiritual regeneration. Of the three novels under discussion, *Little Portia* is perhaps the most telling in its description of inner confusion; for here the crisis achieves no dramatic resolution, its causes and effects are rooted firmly within the realm of familiar day-to-day experience, and thus its implications are more disturbing.

books in review

ODD POET OUT

RAYMOND SOUSTER, *As is*. Oxford University Press. $4.75.

RAYMOND SOUSTER is a rare bird — the antithesis of the image called up by the words "Canadian poet". Never at any time connected with a university, never a traveller for cross-country readings (indeed, never travelled further westward than Fort William), never a recorder of his poems on tapes or discs, never a reviewer, caustically or otherwise, of other poets' works — he is instead a genial, quiet, now middle-aged man concerned with everyday living and with the commonplaces of city life (in Toronto). He would like to be thought of, he remarked once, as a proletarian poet. But in Marxist terms his job as a bank official would preclude his being called anything other than petty-bourgeois. Certainly this is the outward impression he gives; but his poetry reveals more. Here he is constantly vulnerable, constantly letting himself be disturbed, by the down-and-outs of our society: the underdogs, the underbitches, the holed-up animals themselves. These are creatures taken for granted by other poets, but rarely looked at.

Souster's latest book, *As Is*, does not show any change in this respect. The very titles are similar to his titles of the forties: "Moving Day", "Jazzman", "Night Raider"— an animal, of course —

> head down in garbage, busy, steam ascending
> like a grace from its breathing coat

— a happy animal this one, unlike the creature in "The Cry" which moves the poet to respond:

> I closed the window hard
> against the unearthly scream,
> then stood hard-rooted there
> until the wail died, freeing
> blood to run on again,
> ears to re-wind quietness.

If "responsibility is response" then Souster is a committed poet. His concern has been not only to communicate through his own poems, but also to bring to the attention of the country as a whole the world of other, younger poets (as in his latest collection *New Wave Canada*). If criticism has been made against Souster it is not on the score of his being a recluse, but with regard to his style. Even if it is accepted that the poet may choose his own world and write from within its narrow content, the reader-critic sometimes yearns for greater variety of expression. True, in this new collection Souster has tried his hand at some longer poems — notably character descriptions as in "The Good Doctor" (in memory of Dr. Norman Bethune) and "John Sutherland 1919-1956" and "Boldt's Castle". These are interesting, but not dazzling or exciting. In the long run one comes back with pleasure to the "old fashioned" Souster poem, as ancient, simple, yet subtle as the Japanese Haiku. And who more in fashion now than those imagist poets who explored the Haiku back in the 1910's and 1920's — Ezra Pound, F. S. Flint, William Carlos Williams? It is that style, clear and stripped of metaphor, eliminating any marked musical effects (though strongly rhythmical) that has captured Souster's loyalty from the beginning. It has become his very own seal, stamped on every page.

Two examples will illustrate:

I Like to Imagine

I like to imagine
the tip-tap-tap
of the blind man's cave
down one side of the street.

Somehow beats the time
for the young legs racing
up the other.

A Christ on Yonge Street

The same long hair
same beard
same gentle eyes

His back to Yonge Street
he is smashing both fists
against a wall.

But not hard enough
to draw blood, so of course
no one notices.

Although the voice here is the same as in an earlier imagist poem, "The Six-Quart Basket", a subtle difference has occurred in Souster's technique. No longer merely an observer, he becomes a participant. No longer content to be, à la Williams, an "objectivist" concerned with presenting objects seen, he now brings greater selectivity to the observer data: emotions of loneliness, of self-deprecation. For these reasons it is worthwhile noting, in this collection, poems like "The Day Before Christmas" or "On the Range" or "Nobody's Told the Birds" (where a street is being demolished but "nobody's told the birds /so that the song will go on forever"). These are moments, tested against time, delicate and strong as ceramics. Put them on your shelf and they will insist on being noticed.

DOROTHY LIVESAY

NEW SHOOTS

VIOLET ANDERSON, *In The Balance*. Fiddlehead Poetry Books. Paper 50¢.

JOY KOGAWA, *The Splintered Moon*. Fiddlehead Poetry Books. Paper 50¢.

DOROTHY ROBERTS, *Extended*. Fiddlehead Poetry Books. Paper $1.50.

NEIL TRACY, *Shapes Of Clay*. Fiddlehead Poetry Books. Paper 50¢.

IN 1945 a group of New Brunswick poets started a small mimeographed magazine, *The Fiddlehead*, which circulated locally until 1953 when it opened its pages to contributors from anywhere in the world, growing from a twelve-page quarterly to its present seventy-two page size. Selection of contributors has always been made by an editorial board and although in one sense this policy has tended to make *The Fiddlehead* an eclectic publication, it has also tended to make it publish careful and straightforward poems rather than out-and-out experimental writing. Nonetheless, it has published most of the best Canadian poets of the last twenty years, some good American and English writers, and on occasions it has given a chance to younger voices and some unconventional work.

Besides its quarterly publication, *The Fiddlehead* has published several chapbooks and a few full-length books of verse. The Canadian feminine voice of poetry particularly finds an outlet through this publication: recently, Luella Booth, Joan Finnigan and Anne Kekes have all published books under *The Fiddlehead* imprint, and three of the books under review come from the distaff side.

The insistence on middle-of-the-road material, while displeasing those who wish for complete experimentation from magazines, has kept *The Fiddlehead* in existence for twenty-two years, one of the longest runs for a magazine of this nature in Canada. Nor is it fair to dismiss its efforts by cries of "unexciting and competent verse" when we remember that it encouraged two of the best poets in Canada, Al Purdy and Alden Nowlan, by publishing chapbooks of their work.

The four small books of poetry reviewed here give a fairly accurate idea of what *The Fiddlehead* represents in Canadian poetry. It finds a place for the poet using traditional forms, such as Neil Tracy, whose *Shapes Of Clay* is a collection of seventeen sonnets. The sonnet does not appeal to many modern poets, probably because poetry has been working towards a more open form for most of the twentieth century, and the sonnet with its restrictive structure and its weight of tradition has been used with freshness in modern times only by poets somehow outside the more vital experiments with form, poets such as Auden, the Southerners Ransom and Tate, and occasionally, Robert Frost. The only experimental sonneteer I know is e. e. cummings. Tracy's sonnets are formally correct but too often the form has become a straitjacket, forcing him into trite figures, rather generalized moral attitudes and descriptive catalogues. On occasions the reader senses that the poet is trying to break into a new approach: "Electra" has an interesting parallel structure that both cuts across and unifies octave and sestet, "Uncle Reuben" has a strong octave with a sense of the value of each individual line, although in other sonnets the end-stopping of lines prevents a flow of movement overemphasizing the rigidity of structure.

There are a few striking lines and phrases scattered through the sonnets, as well as one rather embarrassing attempt at cynically tough colloquial language in "Social Service". All in all, *Shapes Of Clay* insists too much on the shape of the sonnet, so that the poetry has feet of clay.

Joy Kogawa is the most formally adventurous of these poets, but I find her use of the short line monotonous even in such a slim volume as *The Splintered Moon*. Her poems generally tease out an idea by a small alteration of a line and by repetition and extension, but sometimes the poems lose themselves because there is not enough emphasis placed on significant words. At times this kind of writing seems mechanical when carried on too long, as in "I Know Who I Am", yet Miss Kogawa does succeed at length in the closing prose poem. Sometimes the teasing out of an idea goes beyond what can be really held within the poem ("Jacob — for Wes").

I find Miss Kogawa better when she speaks, as she says in one poem, "softly/ And as undramatically as possible", when, in fact, she lets the epigrammatic neatness make its own point, as she does in "Tongue-Tied" and "I think I am that fabled princess". On occasions the poems suddenly end on a new concept after a constant repetition of another idea to give the reader a shock by a kind of trick ending but too often the trick draws attention to itself rather than to the new concept ("Jacob — for Wes" again). Some very short poems are given epigrammatic weight by the use of short lines but under examination the statements seem very ordinary. But in spite of these drawbacks and the monotony of the short-line structure, this volume shows a lively if somewhat limited poetic mind with a voice of its own.

Violet Anderson's poetry is based on a general thesis about the mechanical destruction of simple nature and the snatching of moments of calm in closeness to nature. But her verse, apart from some carefully arranged descriptive details in poems like "The Thinning Air" and "Hudson River, Cold", fails to convince for the most part for a variety of reasons. When she uses a regular structure the lines are at times padded out or strained for the sake of rhyme or rhythm. Miss Anderson writes much better poems when she allows the thought to follow a natural movement ("This Rock" and "Elsewhere Than"). The parallel structure of "Unless You Tell Us" is intended to express something in simple terms but in fact it obscures the statement. Occasionally the moralizing is too pat ("Perspectives"), and a reasonable poem is spoilt by an inadequate word — "Truck drivers . . . go/galloping past". Yet in this small chapbook there are some neatly turned poems, a recognition of the value of sound in poetry, and in some poems the movement and rhythm are well suited to the theme. An uneven book, *In The Balance* offers some careful verse and one or two well-wrought poems.

Many of the faults of Miss Anderson's work recur in *Extended* but Dorothy Roberts is the strongest voice here. The one word of the title crops up in the opening poem — "the mind extended from its waking", and there is evidence of a mind reaching out to grasp consistent vision of the universe around it. I use the word "universe" advisedly, for there is a constant reference to stars in these poems, by means of which Miss Roberts expresses some sense of largeness

but at the same time she also sees the universe in terms of specific localities and landscapes. She sees the endless possibilities in nature, however unrevealed, unformed and unseen they may be. Human beings may be "less than blown leaf", but they extend outward into the landscape and into the universe. Humans grow to a sense of solidity —

> Really the young person made all over of
> what she was doing
> And set for life in the elaborate skeleton
> Of all her routes.

In the same way a road carved through the barriers of landscape survives until land and road are joined in "the great surge of movement".

Such a largeness of conception leads Miss Roberts into some artificialities — heavy-handed apostrophes, a choice of some unsuitable meters, some padding and some unnatural word order to no good effect — but there is a wholeness about *Extended* which rises above the goodness or badness of individual poems. It is this over-all consistency that perhaps the editors of *The Fiddlehead* strive for, and in *Extended* this policy may have found some kind of justification.

PETER STEVENS

STYLE AT FIRST SIGHT

ALDEN NOWLAN, *Bread, Wine and Salt.* Clark, Irwin. $3.50.

IN THE WINTER of 1962 I read *The Things Which Are.* It made a terrific impact on my imagination, and I've enjoyed Nowlan's poems ever since. It was style, not love, at first sight. Now, five years later, Alden Nowlan gives us his sixth book of poems. There are 62 of them, and they possess a puissance as frightening as cancer; once you read them you're hooked! I would not even cringe to add that Layton's poetry sounds like rehearsed rhetoric in comparison. I mean these poems don't whine, they don't implore, they simply stand under their titles and rip out. What we have in *Bread, Wine and Salt* is a rollicking irony which puts our little lives on the rocks. I think Nowlan regards people as accidents, but his sardonic allegories and rhythms occur in a human universe. If something happens, it happens, that's all. When he says in his poem, "I, Icarus": "There was a time when I could fly. I swear it." I believe him, and I'll also swear up and down, long and loud that he is absolutely right. His assertion is illogical, but its validity as an aggrandizement is extremely convincing. Nowlan's poetry persuades the reader to accept words as the motor nerve cells where meaning is juiced up by the sound of them. Each word counts; the image will always accompany the act. "The Spy" demonstrates this beautifully:

> My child cries out in his sleep.
> I bend close, try to make out the words.
> Though it fills me with shame,
> I spy on his dreams,
> try each word like a key
> to the room where he keeps
> things too private to share
> even with me.

I have quoted this particular poem in its entirety because it fills me with a sad sense of wonder. It has purpose, passion and perception, and the process it evolves is the actual core of poetry.

Many poems in this volume poke fun at history and politics. The defects inherent in slapstick parodies betray Nowlan's intentions. Can we take him seri-

ously? Or is he playing games? Perhaps such subjects are solely conducive to harlequin gestures; this seems to be the general consensus. How can a poet trust a politician? Or history for that matter? Nevertheless, Nowlan is at his best when he writes about childhood, love, loneliness and memory. And if I'm not mistaken I also detect a certain "editorial" quality in some of the poems. "In Our Time," though poignant, is sheer underground journalism. "Ancestral Memories Evoked . . ." is overloaded with personages, and they all fall flat on their faces. "Verbal Transcription" is the best of the bunch. Another point worth mentioning. Seven of his poems take their titles from books and movies. Why Nowlan used them I don't know. A lack of inventiveness? Laziness? I really don't know.

There are 21 publications in the Acknowledgments listed at the front of his book. This in itself displays Alden Nowlan's growing popularity among the literati. The last five poems belong to his hospital confinement where he underwent a severe ordeal. These poems are witty, profound, and the philosophy of human relationship has never been more subtly expressed. I'd like to quote all of them, but perhaps they'd be best appreciated by readers by reading them in his book. Lastly, six hirsute illustrations by Mary Cserepy enhance the pages of *Bread, Wine and Salt.* Nowlan's tour de force.

LEN GASPARINI

CONTROLLING THE JUNGLE

MICHAEL ONDAATJE, *The Dainty Monsters.* The Coach House Press, 1967. $3.50.

THIS, IN MY OPINION, is the finest first book of poems to appear since Margaret Avison's *Winter Sun.* Michael Ondaatje represents a healthy reaction in modern Canadian poetry. Although a completely contemporary writer, he eschews the "simple", almost barren, style of so many of the poets influenced by the Black Mountain group. He owes much of his originality to his background, I think. The exotic imagery which crowds the pages of this book appears to stem from his childhood memories of Ceylon. His poems are jungle-lush, but, unlike a jungle, they are cultivated and controlled. Their profuseness suggest a full and fertile mind always at work.

Imagery, in itself, is not enough, of course. Michael Ondaatje is also sensitive to poetic form, and he exercises a firm rhythmic control over his language. There is also, in his longer poems, his sense of plot, or story. In the poems of the second part of the book, he demonstrates a fine and subtle understanding of poetic narrative. This does not mean he longwindedly "tells the story." Rather, the story exists behind the poem, always present to focus the specific incident in a precisely imagined context. This suggestion of story context often occurs in the shorter poems, too. In "The Moving to Griffin", for example, there is a gain in density from the implied context of the poet's life story.

Ondaatje's imagery is obsessively natural: the book is a kind of modern besti-

ary, with birds, predatory and domestic animals, and the beast, man, always present, always active. Images of birds, especially, occur again and again. Yet in the poem, "Song to Alfred Hitchcock and Wilkinson", he does the unexpected, and the poem fairly leaps from the page as a result:

Flif flif flif flif very fast
is the noise the birds make
running over us.
A poet would say 'fluttering',
or
'see-sawing with sun on their wings'.
But all it is
is flif flif flif flif very fast.

Although his poems are filled with images of violence and terror, his love poems are able to stand against this vision. Life is seldom gentle in these poems, but the love lyrics salvage and savour those moments of deep gentleness which cannot last but must be accepted joyfully in their passing. "The Diverse Causes", "She Carries a 'Fat Gold Watch' ", "Christmas Poem, 1965", "Four Eyes", as well as the poems of love in the Troy Town section, all present the particular moments of communion with an intensity sufficient to command belief. We accept the validity of such moments because the poems poignantly create that validity. "The Diverse Causes" is my favourite:

Three clouds and a tree
reflect themselves on a toaster.
The kitchen window hangs scarred,
shattered by winter hunters.

We are in a cell of civilized magic.
Stravinsky roars at breakfast,
our milk is powdered.

Outside, a May god
moves his paws to alter wind
to scatter shadows of tree and cloud.
The minute birds walk confident
jostling the cold grass.
The world not yet of men.

We clean buckets of their sand
to fetch water in the morning,
reach for winter cobwebs,
sweep up moths who have forgotten to
waken.
When the children sleep, angled
behind their bottles, you can hear mice
prowl.
I turn a page
careful not to break the rhythms
of your sleeping head on my hip,
watch the moving under your eyelid
that turns like fire,
and we have love and the god outside
until ice starts to limp
in brown hidden waterfalls,
or my daughter burns the lake
by reflecting her red shoes in it.

Yet Ondaatje's poetry never dissolves into sentimentality. His sure control, and the precision of his vision won't allow that. The ironies of his animal poems, his use of tone, the mythic vision of the Troy Town poems, the sense of the power in others, of our inability to control or protect others, which comes through in " 'Lovely the Country of Peacocks' ", "The Inheritors", and "Come to the Desert", all preclude sentimentality. He is too tough-minded, too aware of the complexities of life, and his poetry offers no answers or escapes, as sentimentality always does.

"Troy Town", the second part of *The Dainty Monsters*, is concerned with myth and the creation of myth. This is a difficult term; but it should be sufficient to suggest that, in these poems, Ondaatje tells "stories" which engender responses of awe and admiration. The life of these poems is violent, for they deal with the permutations of human violence. He has used the well-known myths of Troy and Lilith for some of these poems, but he has also created new myths out of history, or, in "Peter", probably the finest poem in the collection, out of his own imagination. The poem on Egypt, and

the Elizabeth poems, where the fabled queen enters an entirely new mythical life, are fascinating for their sense of the person. These are monologues, and, especially in "Elizabeth", he has achieved a high degree of dramatic realism. I have said that he has a clear imaginative understanding of violence, yet this violence never overwhelms the poet. The poetry is not voluptuous in its violence; it is chiseled and carefully wrought. The old idea of decorum applies perfectly to these poems. This is especially true of "Peter", where the poet deals with varieties of physical and mental violence in an almost virginally pure style and manner. The result is a tremendous gain in imaginative force over most modern treatments of the theme.

This is a beautiful book. It is this in both senses of the word, as a work of poet's craft and as a work of printer's craft.

DOUGLAS BARBOUR

LEACOCK'S MASKS

DONALD CAMERON, *Faces of Leacock.* Ryerson Press. $6.50.

ANYONE WHO SETS HIMSELF to write a critical study of Stephen Leacock as a man of letters confronts immediately the question of how to organize his material effectively. Leacock's best work was done in the first few years of a long career. A graph would depict initially several high peaks, then a wide lower plateau — flat or at best hummocky — rising finally to a couple of respectable hills. A chronological treatment, therefore, would obviously invite anti-climax. Reiteration would also intrude, because as Leacock's published volumes proliferated he consciously or unconsciously repeated himself, not only in techniques and situations but in character-types, attitudes, themes, ideas, and even phraseology.

In the preface to *Faces of Leacock* Dr. Cameron carefully defines his area of concern and his approach:

> From [Leacock's] approximately forty volumes of humour, criticism, and the like, I have chosen to discuss in detail only his best. Good books matter, not bad ones. . . . I chose to call this book an appreciation because my feelings toward Leacock are warmly sympathetic. . . .

The first of Dr. Cameron's nine chapters is biographical. While none of his factual informatoon may be new, his interpretation of Leacock's character stresses its baffling complexity. A reticent man, Leacock rarely allowed into his writing any genuinely personal glimpses of himself. His many inconsistencies — *e.g.*, his love of teaching (in a university) and his loathing of teaching (in a school) his mixture of conservative and radical social ideas, his satirizing of the very things he stood for (human progress, scholarship, political economy, public lecturing, etc.) — are described by Dr. Cameron but no facile explanation is offered. Implicit throughout the book is the conviction that Leacock, "a complex man" (p. 156), remains an enigma behind a façade of his own creation, "a man walled within himself" (p. 174).

The chapters that follow discuss the different "faces" of Leacock as revealed by classification of his books: Leacock as literary critic, as theorist of humour, as essayist, traveller, satirist, ironist, and potential novelist, with a concluding chapter entitled "A Man to Thank God

For." Chronological sequence has been displaced by a graph of rising excellence.

Some of these chapters are much more rewarding than others, dependent upon Dr. Cameron's personal response to the material being discussed. For instance, in the chapter on Leacock as critic he confesses that the parodies (as in *Nonsense Novels*) have "never given me personally much joy" (p. 46), and he dismisses them in a few perfunctory paragraphs. Yet surely the parodies are important if for no other reason than to show that, whatever dislike Leacock professed for aggressive and destructive humour when the targets were human beings, he had no such qualms when the targets were impersonal literary forms. On the other hand, when a book deeply engages Dr. Cameron's interest, his comments and analyses are excellent. Almost the whole of the "Satirist" chapter is devoted to *Arcadian Adventures*, and the "Ironist" chapter to *Sunshine Sketches*; moreover, these two books are again discussed when Dr. Cameron takes up the question of "Leacock the stillborn novelist" (p. 138). Indeed, at least a third of this study is concerned with these two books, Leacock's best. Dr. Cameron's grasp and appreciation of the complexities of both books in tone, style, structure, characterization, and implications deserve the highest praise. Particularly rich in original insight is his discussion of *Sunshine Sketches*, which he calls "the pinnacle of Leacock's achievement" (p. 135). One sample comment may suggest his reason: "*Arcadian Adventures* is filled with the clash of façades, the armour we don to protect ourselves from each other. *Sunshine Sketches* goes behind the façades to reach an awareness of the real people who are, in Margaret Laurence's striking phrase, "living in there behind their eyes" (p. 135).

After arguing persuasively that Leacock "had the talent to do far greater work than he did" (p. 155), Dr. Cameron in his final chapter addresses himself to the question of why he failed to do it. He seeks for the answer mainly in Leacock's personality, but he rejects as inadequate such explanations as that Leacock hungered for money, security, and respectability. Instead:

> I would argue that Leacock shrank from exposure, that he hated the thought of self-revelation, and that his humour is both a means of self-expression and at the same time a screen behind which as far as possible he conceals the real and vulnerable Leacock. . . . The novels and plays he did not write demanded an intimacy he was afraid to show. (pp. 172, 174)

Furthermore, Dr. Cameron sees in Leacock's personality and achievement something peculiarly Canadian:

> Our humour is the expression of a community which desires values but has been unable to take possession of them, which desires and fears the knowledge and understanding of its own identity. . . . His approach to life seems to me fundamentally a Canadian one, and his failure to develop reveals weaknesses which have always dogged his nation. . . . He is afraid he will be found wanting if he reveals himself, and yet the prospect of self-revelation is fascinating . . . painful self-criticism as opposed to defensive self-depreciation has never been a very important feature of Canadian life. . . . (p. 170 ff.)

In my opinion, Dr. Cameron does not adequately document this thesis, but I have little doubt of its validity.

A number of typographical errors and clumsy sentences unfortunately mar this study. Also, a major deficiency exists, which is early admitted by the author: "the huge range of very funny material

that cannot possibly be discussed adequately even in a book . . . the isolated sketches and essays . . . all the little pieces that with surgical dexterity recreate in comic terms acutely observed behaviour" (p. 23), are here given only incidental treatment. But surely among the principal "faces" of Leacock are those of funnyman and comic profilist. Although fully detailed analyses of the sketches may have to await the development of a critical methodology for humorous writings somewhat comparable to what is available for other literary genres, even now it cannot be entirely impossible to generalize more significantly than Dr. Cameron does about the themes and situations, and especially the types of human character and human behaviour, which Leacock delineated so memorably and with such masterful brevity.

Faces of Leacock makes no claim to be either comprehensive or definitive, but it should stimulate every reader to approach our greatest humorist as "a larger but more deeply flawed figure than Leacock has usually been thought to be."

R. E. WATTERS

TRINIDAD TRAVELLER

ROBIN BRYANS, *Trinidad and Tobago: Isles of the Immortelles.* Queenswood House. $9.50.

LARGE COUNTRIES, with variety in landscape and life, produce few great world travellers and few good travel books. Characteristically, it is in the restricted lands of Europe, and particularly in Britain, that the travel book is still a flourishing and respected genre. American writers are good at surveying other countries economically and politically: they have little social instinct and rarely develop that sharp sense of the nuances of local life which is one of the good inheritances among the British from their imperial past. Consequently one rarely comes across a really interesting travel book written by an American, and, conversely, the market for travel books is much narrower in North America than in England, Germany or even Italy. The same applies to Canada. There are amazingly few good travel books written here even about our own country, and when I came across *Trinidad and Tobago* I was surprised to find that its author, Robin Bryans, lived in Canada, and by no means astonished to discover a little later that he had come originally from Ulster.

Trinidad is a small country, but the interests of Mr. Bryan are so wide that he presents it on a vast screen. He knows the rich history of the islands, he is a knowledgeable amateur in botany, conchology and ornithology, he is interested in sects and steel bands, in people and peoples. Out of his interest he creates a picture as crowded and as gaudy as the great Port of Spain carnival which, in its various stages of preparation and in its final achievement, provides a dazzling, continuous background to Mr. Bryans' dramatically described human encounters. For those who mean to visit Trinidad and Tobago it is full of indispensable incitement; for those who prefer to travel in another way it is the food of fantasy.

L. T. CORNELIUS

AFTER LEVITY

SHEILA EGOFF, *The Republic of Childhood: A Critical Guide to Canadian Children's Literature in English.* Oxford University Press. $5.00.

FOR ENGLISH-SPEAKING CHILDREN, the Age of Levity in literature — which turned out to be the age of artistry and genuinely interesting content as well — dawned in 1865 with the publication of *Alice in Wonderland.* But Lewis Carroll set a brilliant precedent, and for each artist since who has rivalled his brightness there have been platoons of earnest pedants and uninspired hacks to darken the day. The quaintly paradoxical consequence has been a handful of books and carloads of articles taking adult writers to task, often in stern, schoolmasterish tones, for misdemeanours against young readers. Some thirty-five years ago Paul Hazard took up the cudgels in his *Books, Children and Men.* In response to children's requests for books, he said, well-meaning adults are still composing textbooks in disguise: planting schoolrooms in fairy palaces and vegetables in the palace flower gardens, and introducing jovial old uncles who turn into dryasdust maths and physics teachers at the drop of a question. Since Hazard's time the good fight has been fought by such people as C. S. Lewis and Naomi Lewis in England and Lillian H. Smith (*The Unreluctant Years*) in Canada. Now Sheila Egoff has joined them with *The Republic of Childhood: A Critical Guide to Canadian Children's Literature in English,* a book commissioned as a centennial project by the Children's Recreational Reading Council of Ontario.

Although children would no doubt find an unholy glee in seeing Miss Egoff's finely balanced ferule applied to the large collection of grown-up knuckles that get rapped in it, *The Republic of Childhood* is a thoroughly adult book. Concentrating chiefly upon works published since 1950, and including a few not written expressly for children but annexed by them, Miss Egoff makes consciously rigorous assessments of the kind her Introduction promises:

> Canadian children's literature now constitutes a body of writing that deserves recognition and evaluation, and not merely from Canadians.
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> If the scope of my books is exclusively national, my standards of judgement are not so. I have endeavoured to apply, first of all, general literary standards, those that would be accepted in judging writing for adults. . . . Secondly, I have tried to judge Canadian writing in comparison with the best modern writing, particularly from Great Britain and the United States.

In her first six chapters Miss Egoff considers Indian legends, realistic animal stories, histories and biographies, historical fiction, fantasy and folk and fairy tales, and a grab-bag of miscellaneous stories. Chapter Seven deals briefly with book designs and illustrations for youthful consumers, and Chapter Eight surveys the history of children's literature in Canada. In each chapter, standards are set by the world's finest: such artists as Carroll, J. R. R. Tolkien, T. H. White, Kenneth Grahame, E. Nesbit, E. B. White, and Richard Hughes.

Not surprisingly, Canadian contenders don't win many gold medals in this tough international competition. Our teams are small and all but the most independently-minded performers are still haunted by the pioneer Puritanism that has helped delay the naturalization of fantasy in this

country. Yet we achieve some respectable marks, according to Miss Egoff — notably in outdoor adventure stories and realistic animal tales. In both of these genres, she deems Roderick Haig-Brown and Farley Mowat the outstanding modern Canadian authors. Among the "small but vigorous group of successful writers" who have re-shaped and re-told Indian legends, she singles out Kay Hill, Dorothy Reid, and Robert Ayre as the gifted successors of Cyrus Macmillan and Hilda Hooke. And if the norm in histories and biographies is a rather pedestrian one, especially in the commissioned "series" books, there are Pierre Berton's *The Golden Trail: A Story of the Klondike Gold Rush*, R. S. Lambert's *Franklin of the Arctic*, and William Toye's *The St. Lawrence* to show the way to better things. But in other classes, the Canadian child is sadly short-changed by his countrymen, says Miss Egoff dispassionately but definitely:

> By and large, Canadian historical fiction for children has been a succession of failures. Its virtues have been in the reporting of history, its failings have been literary. . . . the plots are manipulated and the characters invented and papier mâché. Even the historical personages have a rubbed-out appearance.

She finds most Canadian stories of urban life "rather drab", most career stories thinly fictionalized aids to school counsellors, and most mystery stories implausible hack jobs: "A passably good detective story or mystery story for children has yet to be written by a Canadian." But our most conspicuous national failure has been in the realm of Faerie. Miss Egoff acknowledges that this failure is understandable, since the rarified yet sophisticated kingdom of fantasy is accessible to genius alone. However, the shortage of even near-misses, like the poet Anne Wilkinson's *Swann & Daphne*, is dismaying. Miss Egoff concludes that Catherine Anthony Clark is, "in respect of purpose and volume of work, Canada's one serious writer of fantasy for children." On the whole —

> With fairy tales, myths, folk stories, and tall tales, as with legends, fantasy, and poetry, the output has been small and the achievement meagre.

Miss Egoff's own style is clear, flexible, and unaffected. She does not indulge in critic-ese, although she must sometimes have been tempted to in a work that necessitated continual reference to categories for which there are only a few standard names: plot, setting, characterization, atmosphere, etc. Nor does she despise the book whose aims, apart from the intention to entertain, are modest. She sounds like a born reader, ready to yield herself to a book as far as she can do so with intellectual and spiritual honour.

My only quibble with her as I read her book, and that was a nonrational one, concerned her high-minded insistence that children should be exposed principally, if not exclusively, to literary excellence. Having swallowed at least a peck of published slop during a catholic reading childhood, and remembering some of it with fond mirth, I wanted to argue. But I was quenched by more recent experience. From informal surveys of three large classes of young teachers and prospective teachers, I have inferred that *Alice in Wonderland* has become anathema to youngsters whose elders force it into their otherwise unrelieved diet of pap, and Miss Egoff struck home when she said:

> A child's opinion of *Alice in Wonderland*, say, will greatly depend upon his previous

reading experience. If a child has read and enjoyed the nonsense of Edward Lear, the wonders of the fairy tale, and the sophistication of Richard Hughes in *Don't Blame Me* or *The Spider's Palace*, his reaction to *Alice* is likely to be different from that of a child who has read only comic books and *The Bobbsey Twins*. Deliberately building in children an acquaintance with good books makes as much sense as taking them step by step through arithmetic.

In a year of some proper pride and much vainglory about Canada, Sheila Egoff has produced an honest report card on this country's literature for its young. It is an unostentatious, informative, topical book, describing many works in detail and covering each of its categories pretty comprehensively in the selective bibliographies at chapter ends. It is also a book that may well transcend its apparent topicality by spurring Canadian writers to try harder in the international context in which Miss Egoff has paid them the tribute of viewing them.

FRANCES FRAZER

HOW NOT TO DO IT

CHRISTIE HARRIS, *Raven's Cry*. With illustrations by Bill Reid. McClelland and Stewart. $4.50.

THERE WOULD SEEM TO BE little justification in reviewing this book in *Canadian Literature*. That is the tragedy of it.

Mrs. Harris' book is the story of the Edenshaw family, one of the noble families of the Queen Charlotte Islands, from the time of the white discovery of the islands in the 18th century to the present day. It includes the story of Charles Edenshaw (Tahayghen), who lived between 1835 and 1920, and was arguably one of Canada's greatest sculptors. It ends with a few perceptive remarks on Haida art by Bill Reid, who is related to the Edenshaw family.

I am sorry that I can only praise Mrs. Harris' intentions, not her performance. While much of her material on the Edenshaws is not new (cf. Barbeau's *Haida Carvers*), she has thoroughly researched Haida culture, she has visited the Queen Charlottes, and she has a proper respect for the pre-Christian cultures of our province. But while the facts are right on the whole, the tone is hopelessly wrong. Her book is a virtual anthology of the faults which mar most Canadian books about Indians, and its chief value is as a horrid example.

What exciting material she had to work with, after all! There is enough beauty and horror in the bare facts of the extirpation of Haida culture: they shine and glower through the dullest prose of anthropologists, sea-captains, missionaries and government men. She need only have put her story together with intelligence, taste and professional competence, and the colour would have burst forth of itself. Instead, we find ourselves in the same mythological Disneyland in which all Canada's pre-Christian history seems to be set. The Indians emerge as marvellous clean-thewed children, who tell the most super stories, and whose art is simply fab. (*Raven's Cry* is pre-fab.) We are continually being told how really wise and kind and cultured they were, but since they tend to act like Wolf Cubs on an outing, we have to accept this on faith. Mrs. Harris' style, straight out of the latest pop-up fairy-tale book, turns everything into papier-maché. Perhaps this, rather than gold, or some other archaic standard of value, is

the appropriate material for Canada's hundredth anniversary.

Bill Reid is an excellent sculptor and craftsman. But, alas, the illustrations are unsatisfactory, simply because they are illustrations. I have never yet come across a successful attempt to adapt the West Coast style to our own idiom of book illustration, with its figures set against landscapes, sea-scapes or interiors. Mr. Reid was bound to fail in this attempt, as Edenshaw himself failed in many of his drawings. It would have been much better had the book been decorated with abstract designs.

In short, *Raven's Cry* is a waste — a waste by Mrs. Harris of a valuable story and much useful research, and a waste, presumably by the publishers, of the talents of a fine artist.

NORMAN NEWTON

HOOD'S MONTREAL

HUGH HOOD, *Around the Mountain: scenes from Montreal Life.* Peter Martin Associates. $5.00.

KEEP A NOTEBOOK and one day it will keep you. Or, as Hood remarks to a friend in the Montreal Forum, "All around me; there's a story in everybody around us . . . Work for a lifetime, I said smugly. You should see my notebook. I'll never write them all." Montreal's rich canvas has enabled Hood to present here twelve seasonal "happenings" from Christmas to Christmas. It was a very Hood year since the author himself acts as observer and participant in most of the stories. Personal anecdotes, often involving just Hood and his friends, new and old, are combined with a course in Montrealogy. Narrative and exposition are juxtaposed coherently and naturally.

In the first selection Hood recounts how a fellow amateur league hockey player is ostracized for pre-game drinking, in a city where hockey is the "chief social cement". The second takes place in "the country of the ruelles" where Hood meets a shipbuilding hobbyist who is preparing, of all things, the first scientific lexicon of Romany. The roomful of models transfixes Hood so intensely that "the remembrance of the sight long after retains the capacity to direct and strengthen all my ways of feeling." Similar epiphanies occur throughout the book. The third story, "Bicultural Angela", recollects the process by which Angela Mary is metamorphosed to become Marie-Ange. But, to apply a popular blonde commercial, she is not the bi-bi she became a bi-bi to be, and gets an upsetting bye-bye from her French lover.

Scenes five and six are among Hood's best. In the former, the matter-of-fact statement that "A lease in Montreal ends on April 30th", Hood's birthday, coincidentally, is sufficient to unleash a chain of comic events, terminating with the adventure of a sink! "Fourmillante cité: bet your sweet life", writes Hood, who obviously enjoys Montreal much more than Baudelaire enjoyed Paris. Scene six follows nosy Hood as he sketches in the unusual lives of the concièrge of his apartment building and her industrious husband. By now the reader is accustomed to Hood's engaging first person travelogue point-of-view; exit Hood temporarily as a Victoria Day separatiste skirmish in Parc Lafontaine brings together a riotous automobile apprentice and a mature university girl.

He found his next pen and pencil portrait by bicycling along Sainte-Croix where old Victor Latourelle, a diminutive Goriot-Lear figure, is stripped of his land by his daughter to spend his final years isolated by "asphalt seas".

I have to quote Bennett Cerf, "I'm a dreamer, Montweall", apropos the ninth tale, "A Green Child", a twilight-zone, Antonioni-like hallucination, with all the chill of a good Spanish fantasy. Hood plays this key only once in this collection, unfortunately; he jumps to the Forum, the docks, and to Riviére des Prairies for his final three settings.

"Landscape has no special grace in itself." This paradoxical observation in the last story reminds the reader of the characters who have animated the cityscape thus far. Hood's Comédie Humaine includes himself as central citizen, ready with candid camera and notebook to record the trivia, travesty and tragedy all around him. Along with that lady at Expo who introduced herself to me as a neighbour of Mr. Hugh Hood, I look forward to his forthcoming novel, *The Camera Always Lies*, and to more Montreal memories.

TONY KILGALLIN

PYTHAGOREANS

J. A. PHILIP, *Pythagoras and the Early Pythagoreans*. University of Toronto Press. $6.50.

THE EARLY PHILOSOPHERS of Greece, who are lumped together under the common label of "pre-Socratics" in histories of philosophy, have retreated into myth and legend to a distressing extent, and none have retreated farther than Pythagoras. Most of the others have left fragments of their own works; Pythagoras wrote nothing. Aristotle had a good deal to report; indeed without him, the pre-Socratics would be hard to comprehend at all, but he picked and chose his information as it pleased him. The biographical traditions for most of the pre-Socratics end with the compendium of ancient philosophy put together by Diogenes Laertius in the third century of our era. In the case of Pythagoras, there is more: two lives, one by Porphyry and the other by his pupil Iamblichus, both products of the conflict of religions in the later Roman Empire, and hence coloured with neo-Platonism and perhaps some anti-Christian bias.

The legend of Pythagoras has devoured the man, and the process started early. Even Aristotle referred not to Pythagoras by name, but to the "Pythagoreans"; in the *Metaphysics* he introduced them as the "people who are called Pythagoreans," as if the Pythagoreans were a religious brotherhood, living according to a common rule and holding certain unique doctrines. After Aristotle, the legend emerged full-blown. Pythagoras became a religious teacher; for the neo-Platonists, he was an intellectual rival to Christ and for at least one modern, a prototype of Him. He became a pioneer in mathematics, and certainly, if he was not responsible for the Pythagorean theorem, one of his disciples was. He taught the transmigration of souls; centuries later the neo-Pythagorean Apollonius of Tyana claimed to be his reincarnation. The mathematical principles which have been fathered on him have been used to analyse ancient architecture and even literature; only a few years ago, a ranking classical scholar dissected

the structure of Virgil's *Aeneid* and claimed to discover that Virgil had used Pythagorean number theory throughout.

J. A. Philip approaches all this with scepticism. He will accept only Aristotle as a reliable source for early Pythagoreanism, and with this it is hard to disagree. This means that the evidence for Pythagoras as the founder of a religious brotherhood pretty well evaporates, although there is no reason to disbelieve that he founded a political group which ruled Croton in south Italy until a reaction against them forced them out. Rather more questionably, Philip tries to show that when Aristotle refers certain doctrines to "the Pythagoreans", these can be ascribed to Pythagoras himself. The argument here is a trifle devious. When Aristotle referred to "the Pythagoreans," he meant, as Philip has argued in an earlier article (*Phoenix*, 1963, 251-265) a nearly contemporary group of Pythagoreans who had gathered at Tarentum in south Italy around the mathematician Archytas, whose position at Tarentum paralleled that of Pericles earlier in Athens. However, we know of no great Pythagorean thinkers between the time of Pythagoras and Archytas. Therefore the Pythagoreanism which Aristotle received from his "Pythagoreans" must be the teachings of the master, more or less uncontaminated. This assumes that great intellects contaminate a tradition more than lesser ones, which may be true. On firmer ground, however, Professor Philip insists that early Pythagoreanism is still primitive thought, and he is rightly suspicious of the more sophisticated elements in the Pythagorean tradition. Professor Philip proceeds with the same caution to examine the Pythagorean view of the cosmos, and Pythagorean astronomy and number theory. The Pythagorean *symbola* (rules of conduct for the Pythagorean order) are necessarily viewed with scepticism, since Philip does not think there was an early Pythagorean religious order. In discussing the transmigration of souls, Philip draws parallels from shamanism, and rightly so; this is perhaps one of the most primitive elements in the Pythagorean tradition.

Professor Philip teaches in a college at the University of Toronto which has a tradition of careful classical scholarship, particularly in ancient philosophy, and *Pythagoras and Early Pythagoreanism* is a significant contribution in its field. However, it would be hard to say anything flattering about the technical aspects of this book's production. Misprints are too numerous to mention, and extraneous lines of type have a way of straying around the page and turning up in odd places. Fortunately, the scholarship has been careful even if the proofreading was not, and the footnotes and appendices are almost more valuable than the text.

J. A. S. EVANS

PREJUDICES AND CONVICTIONS

Salvation! O The Joyful Sound. The Selected Writing of John Carroll. Edited by John Webster Grant. Oxford University Press. $6.00 cloth; $3.25 paper.

ALTHOUGH BORN IN New Brunswick of Irish parentage, John Carroll spent most of his life in Toronto and various parts of Southern Ontario as a methodist

minister. Out of his observations emerged several books, which were published in Toronto during the latter half of the nineteenth century and which exist, no doubt, today in a forgotten state in many old libraries. John Webster Grant has delved into these reminiscences and collected (complete with an admirable introduction, bibliography, and footnotes) what he considers to be the most interesting to modern readers of what Carroll has written.

Salvation! O the Joyful Sound is a noteworthy book for three reasons. In the first place, it gave a memorable glimpse of the protestant ethical consciousness of nineteenth century Ontario, a world underlying our own and forming a curious amalgam with it. In these pages, one can see the moral map of protestant Ontario as it was before change and urbanization has blurred the lines. It is crystal clear, both in its narrow prejudices and in its complete conviction of universal truth. As one measures the beliefs of contemporary Canada, one can see that quite as much has been gained as has been lost by the changes that have taken place.

Secondly, the book provides an entertaining account of the habits of living, the topography, the means of travel and communication of Ontario (and Toronto in particular) in the old days. It is therefore of considerable antiquarian and sociological interest.

Thirdly, it is an unselfconscious tribute to the riders of the methodist circuit and to the civilizing leaven that they provided as they brought sweetness and light to a rough and crude frontier. The style of writing is as artless and transparent as the character of the author and recalls to us, when Carroll is at his best, the fictional narrator of *The Vicar of Wakefield*, Dr. Primrose.

Oxford Press and John Webster Grant are to be congratulated in this very deserving "find". What is surprising is that the book was not a project of the Ryerson Press. It is concerned with the development of the Methodist church through a long and important period of its history, the Ryersons figure very prominently in its pages, and its editor, John Webster Grant, was at one time editor-in-chief of the Ryerson Press.

FRED COGSWELL

CANDID PIONEER

JOHN HOWISON, *Sketches of Upper Canada, Domestic, Local and Characteristic.* Johnson Reprint Corporation and S. R. Publishers. $14.50.

Blackwood's, December 1821, printed an eight page review of the first edition of this work — a review probably written, according to Professor A. L. Strout, of Texas Technological College, by John Galt — which began: "We have no hesitation in saying, that this is by far the best book which has ever been written by any British traveller on the subject of North America." The reviewer was not far wrong. Between 1820 and 1830 more than thirty books of description and travel were published which included something about Upper Canada (the present Ontario). Yet if we possessed only the Howison volume and the works of Robert Fleming Gourlay, Edward Allen Talbot, Basil Hall and John Mactaggart we should not lack much information about pioneer days in the colony. The

30's saw another spate of works of this character.

The publishers, Oliver & Boyd, in a subsequent book by Howison, included two pages of extracts from reviews of *Sketches*. Naturally, only flattering extracts were included, but the *British Critic* said about as much in a few lines as any reviewer could. "The principal value of this book arises from the interior and domestic views given in it of the life of an emigrant, when once fairly set down among the woods of Upper Canada. We see here more of the manners, the occupations, the hardships, and the comforts of that class of men, than we have ever met with any where else; set forth too, in plain agreeable language, and without any perceptible bias . . ."

The reviewer might have added that Howison did not mince matters. He depicted the life of the pioneer as hard and glamourless, and as uncultured as it really was: "Indeed," he wrote, "The peasantry evince the utmost indifference about every thing that is not absolutely necessary to support existence." (p. 68). A page later he wrote "I saw every thing in a state of primitive rudeness and barbarism."

Other contemporary reviews appeared in *New Monthly Magazine*, *New Edinburgh Review*, *Monthly Magazine*, *Literary Gazette*, *Scotsman*, *Literary Chronicle*, *Examiner*, *Edinburgh Review*, *Edinburgh Magazine*, and additionally, according to Allibone, *Eclectic Review* and *Monthly Review*. The review in the *Edinburgh Review*, June 1822, ran to nineteen pages and was generally favourable.

As Howison spent two and one half years in Upper Canada, travelling from the eastern boundary to the Detroit river, he must have seen practically all the inhabited parts of the province. He left the colony in the middle of June 1820. When his book came out, it supplied a timely and useful treatise on the problems and advantages of emigration from the British Isles. It was popular enough to go through three editions (1821, 1822, 1825). The second edition was reset and the third appears to have been printed from the second edition type. These early editions have long been collectors' items.

Important as the work is, little is known of the author. No cataloguer, for example, has recorded his birth or death dates. His other descriptive volumes and short stories, of which he wrote several, give little autobiographical information. The title page of an 1834 work tells us that he was of the Honourable East India Company's Bombay service. His stories seem to show a preoccupation with the sea, the West Indies and the subject of medicine. The *Blackwood's* review says that he was a young man, when the book was published, and also suggests that he had a competence in medicine. The same review tells us, as do Professor Strout and Allibone, that John Howison was a brother of William Howison of whom Sir Walter Scott wrote: "His father luckily is a man of substance though of low penurious habits I believe so that poor Howison is secure of a competent portion of the goods of this world." The statement should apply equally well to John.

As to the family, the Scots Ancestry Research Society reports that the name Howison was common in Edinburgh at the end of the eighteenth century. Only one family, however, that of William Howison, Writer, and his spouse, Janet Boyle, had sons named William (born in 1794) and John (born in 1797). These

dates are not inconsistent with what we know of John and William Howison. No death date for John has been found.

Mr. Douglas Grant, Managing Director of Oliver & Boyd, has found some John Howison correspondence which shows that *Sketches of Upper Canada* appeared in mid-November 1821; that Howison was of an irascible nature; that the publisher had saved him from several inconsistencies; that a certain Dr. Howison was given a complimentary copy; and that John Howison was disturbed lest Blackwood should not receive a copy. The fact that Galt's (?) most favourable review appeared in the December 15 issue of *Blackwood's*, only a month after publication, suggests that Howison was a member of the Blackwood group. As Professor Strout says, John Howison is a subject "deserving future treatment."

J. J. TALMAN

ENGLISH-CANADIAN LITERATURE

Compiled by Rita Butterfield

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