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EXPLORERS AND POETS

Articles

BY V. G. HOPWOOD, ROY DANIELLS, MAURICE HODGSON, A. J. M. SMITH,
LAWRENCE M. JONES, NORMAN NEWTON

Reviews

BY DESMOND PACEY, LOUIS DUDEK, HALLVARD DAHLIE,
MEREDITH THOMPSON, PHYLLIS GROSSKURTH, RONALD SUTHERLAND,
GEORGE WOODCOCK, HELEN SONTHOFF, DONALD STEPHENS,
JANE FREDEMAN, EDWARD MCCOURT, S. E. READ

Opinion

BY LLOYD W. BROWN

A QUARTERLY OF
CRITICISM AND REVIEW



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Ivan Avakumovic*;
*TWO INNOCENTS IN
RED CHINA*, by *Jacques
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I. M. Owen; *NO PASSPORT:
A DISCOVERY OF CANADA*, by
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THE VICTORY BURLESK:*

CULTURE, POLITICS AND OTHER DIVERSIONS, by *Robert
Fulford*; *CANADIAN SHORT STORIES: SECOND SERIES*,
edited by *Robert Weaver*; and *THE WIND HAS WINGS*, an
anthology of Canadian verse for children, compiled by
Mary Alice Downie and Barbara Robertson, illustrated
by *Elizabeth Cleaver*

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In the covering letter which accompanied his criticism, LLOYD W. BROWN, who has lived in Canada, taught at Canadian universities, and is now teaching at Fairleigh Dickinson University in the United States, says, in regard to the views he disputes: "Without presuming even to suggest any right to 'equal time' I nevertheless think that some opportunity should be allowed for a viewpoint more attuned to the realities of present experience and feeling. As a black West Indian who lives with those realities and as an academic who has spent some time in a study of black literature I also think it most desirable that some of the new awareness and insights be brought to the reading of contemporary black writing — for such writing is itself the outcome of this new consciousness."

THE WORLD IN MICROCOSM

IT WOULD BE HARD to think of a Royal Commission more conscious of the historic nature of its task than that on Bilingualism and Biculturalism, which began its work in 1963 and only four years afterwards, at the end of 1967, started to publish, volume by volume, its massive report. So aware were the Commissioners of the serious division of attitudes between English and French Canadians that in 1965, before they were half way through their massive task of investigation and research, they published a preliminary report which undoubtedly played a great part in initiating the profound changes that have taken place in the English Canadian viewpoint during the past two years.

Book One — now issued — of the definitive Report is concerned with the “official languages”, and with the need for the French-speaking Canadian, even where he is in a small minority, to be able to carry on official business and gain education and justice — as the English Canadian can do in Quebec — in his own language. This, the Commissioners believe, will necessitate the extension of official bilingualism to Ontario and New Brunswick as bilingual provinces, and to the creation of bilingual districts in other provinces, wherever a tenth of the population in any appreciable area is French-speaking. Undoubtedly these measures, which may well be law by the time these words appear, will not only play their part in easing tensions between the two principal “nations” in Canada; they will also help, by encouraging local nuclei of French culture, to enrich the lives we all live.

It seems an inconsistency that only one out of ten Commissioners should have suggested that similar facilities be extended to other minorities in Canada. The demand of this Commissioner, J. B. Rudnycky, is not that any other language should be *nationally* equal to French and English, but that where a minority

reaches 10% — as Ukrainian, German and Italian minorities do in some regions of Canada — their language should be *regionally* official. No reason is given why the other Commissioners did not accept this demand, which on the surface seems in the spirit of their general approach. The Commission, after all, rather proudly claims that Canada, unlike America, has never accepted the philosophy of the “melting pot”. “With its wealth of human, linguistic, and cultural resources,” it asserts, “Canada reflects the world in microcosm.” Wonderful, but, if so, why not give these microcosmic fragments of the world formed by our lesser cultures a reasonable degree of support, at least equal to that proposed for English and French Canadians where they are minorities? It might bring considerable dividends. It is true that the less widely spoken languages have produced — if one can judge from such translations as exist — no literatures in Canada comparable to those of the French and English, but the recognition that such languages are not mere baggage to be shed in the rush for assimilation might have an unpredictably stimulating effect.

However, the consideration of arts and letters, and of the mass media, belongs to later volumes of the Commission’s Report, which apparently will not be available for some months ahead, and which we shall anticipate with the greatest interest, among other reasons because the Commissioners include men well aware of the life of the arts and the intellect, not only in both the Canadas, but in all of them.

DAVID THOMPSON

Mapmaker and Mythmaker

V. G. Hopwood

DAVID THOMPSON as a writer has not yet received the attention he deserves. However, since narrative style cannot be separated from the story told, it is appropriate to begin with a summary of his life and achievements. He was born in London of Welsh parents in 1770 and came to what is now Canada in 1784, where he lived until his death in 1857. Between the ages of fourteen and eighty, he worked as trader, surveyor, explorer, mapmaker, naturalist, and writer, first for the Hudson's Bay Company, then for the North West Company, and later for various British and Canadian governmental bodies. In more than six decades he travelled over 80,000 miles by foot, canoe, and horse, taking observations and recording events and natural and social phenomena in his journals or day books. More than 50,000 of these miles were covered in his twenty-eight years in western and northern North America. The remainder were in eastern Canada and the United States during the second half of his life.

Thompson's surveys take in a wide area on both sides of the present Canadian-American boundary from Montreal to the Pacific. His main discoveries include the Reindeer Lake and Black River route to Lake Athabasca, the upper regions of the Missouri, the source of the Mississippi, the Howse and Athabasca Passes through the Rockies, the upper Columbia River and its sources and branches, Kootenay River and Lake, and much of the interior of southern British Columbia and the American Northwest. In addition he surveyed and drew most of the maps establishing the boundary between Canada and the United States from Montreal to the Lake of the Woods. He mapped the Muskoka country between the Ottawa River and Lake Huron, and laid out the Eastern Townships in southeastern Quebec. In his last years as a surveyor he made hydrographic charts of the St. Lawrence River from Cornwall to Three Rivers.

The late J. B. Tyrrell, himself an outstanding geographer, explorer, and his-

torian, intimately familiar with Thompson's work and the area he surveyed, called him "the greatest practical land geographer who ever lived." As a layman, I can only remark that I do not know of any other land explorer whose work surpasses Thompson's in years of experience, extent of territory explored and mapped, consistent accuracy up to the limits of the instruments and methods available, perception and recording of significant natural and human detail, and ability to generalize. Canada and the world have many great land explorers, but the man I think of as Thompson's peer is Captain James Cook, the sea geographer.

Without claiming expertise, I can supplement Tyrrell's estimate from maps and documents not available to him. A series of maps drawn by Thompson, but not credited to him, were the source for seventy-five years of much new information about western North America. These include those published by Alexander Mackenzie in 1801, two maps drawn for the North West Company in 1813-14, a map published by the same in 1816, a set of two maps of the West in general and the Oregon country in particular drawn in 1826, and another similar more perfect set drawn in 1843.

The value of Thompson's journals for science and history has been gradually dawning on modern scholars. John Warkentin has found in Thompson's papers what he believes to be the first general description of the geological structure of the Canadian West. Allan H. Smith, in the Northwestern United States, has used Thompson's maps and journals to help find old Indian camp sites. The Smithsonian Institution has made use of a small part of Thompson's daily weather notes. But these instances are only placer pockets on the edges of a great unworked lode.

Late in life, about 1845, Thompson finally settled down to write the book he had long intended, the story of his travels in the West. When ill health and near blindness made further writing impossible at the age of eighty, it was unfinished. Tyrrell was responsible for the editing and publishing of the manuscript by the Champlain Society in 1915, under the title, *David Thompson's Narrative of his Explorations in Western America, 1784-1812*. Since Thompson always referred to his book as his *Travels*, I have chosen to follow his own usage. Incomplete, and in places still almost in note form, Thompson's *Travels* belongs among the world classics of travel writing, and is one of the finest works in Canadian literature. Undoubtedly much of its interest springs from its content of adventure and scientific achievement. However, and this is the main point of this paper, Thompson's *Travels* has unique qualities of style and imagination, ranging from precision of word choice to sensitivity to myth, which lift it to literary greatness.

The primary feature of Thompson's prose is directness; it is a practical style, concerned in the first place with the business of explaining the ways of life, natural and human, in the Canadian wilderness, for example the country around Hudson Bay: "Of all furs the furr of the hare is the warmest, we place pieces of it in our mittens, the skin is too thin for any other purpose." Behind this intense practicality lies a tremendous power for exact scientific observation, which for all its bareness still conveys a sense of variety and warmth, as in his description of the species of ptarmigan or white grouse:

The willow Grouse has a red stripe round the upper eyelid, is a finer bird than the rock grouse, and one fifth larger: they are both well feathered to the very toe nails; all their feathers are double, lie close on each other, two in one quill, or socket, and appear as one feather; the under side of the foot, have hard, rough, elastic feathers like bristles.

From the description of the animal, Thompson moves, characteristically, to its habits and then to its relations to men. In the passage which follows, note the concreteness, the sense of human activity, and Thompson's keen awareness of environment, particularly of weather:

After the bitter cold of December and January is passed, they congregate in large flocks. Each man now bags from thirty to forty grouse per day, but as this is a Load too heavy to hunt with, part is buried in the Snow and only taken up when going to the Tent. . . . we walk and pick up the bird, then get the powder in, and walk again, at length [get in] the shot, and the gun is loaded; it is needless to say, exposed to such bitter cold, with no shelter, we cannot fire many shots in a short day, gloves are found to be worse than useless.

Thompson then explains how, later in the winter, mainly in March, the ptarmigan are netted. He outlines the process so clearly that a reader should be able to build and work a net himself, ending with a stark description of how the birds are taken and killed and a sharply practical explanation:

. . . the net falls, we directly run and throw ourselves on the net, as the strong efforts of forty or fifty of these active birds might make an opening in the net. We have now to take the neck of each grouse between our teeth, and crack the neck bone, without breaking the skin, and drawing blood, which if done, the foxes destroy the parts of the net on which is blood and around it, which sometimes happens to our vexation, and we have to mend the net.

Perhaps the most obvious feature of Thompson's diction is its numerical, measured exactness. Indeed, the large proportion of mathematical material in Thompson's writing may have prevented many readers from seeing the intense

imagination at work within his almost infinite factuality. Thompson's mind must have been one of the most complex organic computers that ever existed. I am convinced that between the ages of twenty and eighty it counted and registered almost every step he took and its direction, but without ever missing the qualitative detail of what was around him. Other sources of Thompson's vocabulary are the Bible, seventeenth and eighteenth century prose, the literature of science and natural history, the language of the fur trade, and the translated concepts of the Indians.

In the passages quoted there is an almost complete lack of metaphor. But as Thompson moved towards the conclusion of the description of the white grouse, he expresses what is always just below the surface, his thoughtfulness about the beauty of the earth:

... no dove is more meek than the white grouse. I have often taken them from under the net, and provoked them all I could without injuring them, but all was submissive meekness, rough beings as we were, sometimes of an evening we could not help enquiring why such an angelic bird should be doomed to be the suffering prey of every carnivorous animal, the ways of Providence are unknown to us.

Meek as a dove, angelic — ordinary words and comparisons, in most writers trite — transformed in the context of Thompson's concreteness into new life. And expressive, moreover, of Thompson's character, the scientist wondering and finding out if ptarmigan could be provoked, yet marvelling and sympathetic at the same time. Thompson, a man whom nothing could make idle, whose curiosity was insatiable, who wintering on Reindeer Lake pounded frozen mercury to discover its physical properties, and, in the summer, observed, through a pocket microscope, the anatomy of the mosquitoes which were biting him.

THOMPSON'S PROSE exemplifies something of the ideals of Wordsworth's *Preface*: the compatibility of science and poetry, the expressive power of common speech, and the power of nature as a teacher. Like the naïve Wordsworth, the semi-literate David Thompson is a misconception, although Thompson had little formal education. There is evidence in his notebooks and *Travels* of extensive reading in science, philosophy, travel, and literature, and of awareness of the scientific concepts of his time. The deep religious feeling that lies behind his description of the dove, combined with much immediate observation and his knowledge of Indian thought, allowed him to stand outside and be critical of contemporary concepts and jargon. Describing the migration of the

reindeer, Thompson records the scornful words of the Indians about the idea of instinct; then he himself goes on to say: "I have sometimes thought Instinct, to be a word invented by the learned to cover their ignorance of the ways and doings of animals for their self preservation, it is a learned word and shuts up all the reasoning powers."

Sometimes, deep Christian though he is, Thompson's empathy with the Indian mind makes him write almost as though he were thinking in Indian terms, although notes of the European scientific and religious observer slip in:

The Manito of the geese, ducks, &c. has given his orders, they collect, and form flocks of, from 40 to 60, or more; and seem to have leaders. The Manito of the equatic fowl has now given his orders for their departure to milder climates, his prescience sees the setting in of winter, and the freezing of the ponds. The leaders of flock have now a deep note. The order is given, and flock after flock, in innumerable numbers, rise.¹

The above passage brings us close to one more source of stylistic strength in Thompson, his ability to catch the characteristic speech and turn of mind of others. And often the figures of speech he takes from others are anything but the commonplaces which Thompson tended to use himself.

. . . at length the rain ceased, I was standing at the door watching the breaking up of the clouds, when of a sudden the Indians gave a loud shout, and called out "Oh, there is the mark of life, we shall yet live," on looking to the eastward there was one of the widest and most splendid Rainbows I ever beheld; and joy was now in every face.

Thompson speaks of the difficulties of learning the real thoughts of the Indians, a problem fully recognized by modern anthropologists, since as Thompson says the Indians answer direct questions in the manner "best adapted to avoid other questions, and please the enquirer." What Thompson has to tell about Indian beliefs and customs is almost uniquely valuable, in part because of his decades of experience with them, again because he knew them in many cases before they had had any significant contact with white men, and also because he developed a comparative method of studying their customs, based on experience with the many tribes which he knew and never lumped together as Indians, distinguishing

¹ The quotations are transcribed directly from Thompson's manuscript. Tyrrell's editing is usually quite accurate. In this passage, however, his reading was confused by the attempts of Charles Lindsey to improve the mechanics of Thompson's style. The mechanical irregularities of Thompson's writing, obvious enough in the quotations, have probably contributed to the slowness of his recognition as a writer.

them as carefully as he did the species of the natural world. In addition he had the testimony of his half-Indian wife, whom he taught to read and write English. But above all because he shared their lives and spoke their languages. Possibly some of the mechanical problems of Thompson's style are the price that we have to pay for the fact that he began to learn Indian languages at the age of fourteen, and could learn them, because his mind was not encumbered with the linguistic fallacies of classical grammar twisted to fit English.

My knowledge has been gained when living and travelling with them in times of distress and danger in their prayers to invisible powers. . . . After a weary day's march we sat by a log fire, the bright Moon, with thousands of sparkling stars, passing before us, we could not help enquiring who lived in those bright mansions; for I frequently conversed with them as one of themselves.

Thompson then goes on, in a way which touches a problematic side of his character, one which has raised questions among hostile historians such as A. S. Morton and Richard Glover. "A Missionary has never been among them, and my knowledge of their language has not enabled me to do more than teach the unity of God, and a future state of rewards and punishments." The ego of Thompson's puritanism, combined with the conceit that he could believe he had achieved so much, is here apparent. Judged as a man of lesser achievements, it is easy to see that Thompson can be regarded as a monster of self-righteousness. Almost the same judgment can easily and has been given against Milton. But how is it possible to measure such ego against Thompson's determination, from the time he was twenty, to bring the whole of unknown Northwestern America within the range of human knowledge, and in fact to succeed?

The cells of Thompson's writing are short pithy pages of description or anecdote. This characteristic makes it hard to illustrate his writing in sentences and explains my use of rather long quotations. To confirm this point of anecdotal units, to remind you that Thompson is important as a surveyor in eastern as well as western Canada, and to indicate that Thompson's gift of characterization included whites as well as Indians, I give a condensed version of an unpublished account of how fever struck down the Canadian-American boundary survey party in the swamps of Lake Erie in 1819. Thompson had proposed that he and the chief American surveyor each make a quick survey of the marshes of his own side of the lake:

I had scarcely uttered the words when General Porter sprang up, saying, "The man that will dare to do it is dead, dead." Captain Douglass very gallantly said, "It is the cause of science; I will undertake to row round the marshes on the south

side if you will do the same on the north side." General Porter said "Gentlemen you may do as you please, but I would not give a cent for your lives."

Thompson proceeds to tell how both parties caught the fever.

With a boat's crew of six hearty men I was often reduced to two rowers. The men would fall to the bottom of the boat as if thrown down.

Then Thompson's men, after taking refuge from the swamps on an island off-shore, were rescued and taken on board an American steamer.

I requested some acid liquor, but the sickness had been so great that they had expended everything. They offered me water, I refused it, and my feverish mind looked with contempt on Lake Erie as not sufficient to allay my burning thirst. The surgeons came and enquired [of my attendant] if I were not dead. He said, "No." "Well," they replied, "He must die today" This was close to my bed. The next morning they came and enquired, "Is he not dead yet?" The answer was no. They said, "Let us go and see him." They found me without any fever but reduced to a mere skeleton.

This is an example of Thompson the recorder of history at the moment of happening: exact, detailed and immediate, filled with real people, important as a source, but perhaps even more important for the near fable form in which he catches the events, a form which lifts them to legend. Let me give another instance from unpublished Thompsoniana, this time the story of the migration of French-Canadians from the Illinois River to settle west of the Rockies in the North-western United States before either Lewis and Clark or Thompson entered the area, a story which I believe no other writer has ever set down, an unknown chapter in the history of Canadians, which will eventually be fitted into the foundation literature of both the Canadian and American West:

At first they were about 350 men, but their precarious way of life, sometimes with Indians in their wars, soon reduced them, and at the cession of the country by Spain they were only full 150 men. The United States insisted on their becoming settlers on the lands or retiring elsewhere. They chose the latter, took up their rifles; and with their few women crossed the Missouri River and hunted on its west bank, continually advancing towards the mountains, where I first met them.

The same fate still attended them, as all the natives of these fine countries are too often in a state of petty warfare. Some of these men were camping with them, and as the Indians acknowledged no neutrals, they had to fight for the party with whom they were found; as the Indians dreaded them as good marksmen, they were aimed at in battle. When I first became acquainted with them in 1809, they were then reduced to twenty-five men.

Everywhere the Indians, both friends and enemies, spoke of them as a brave race of men, whose conduct was always prudent and manly. Even these few men were reduced to only two, Michel Bordeaux and Augustin Kinville, two of my companions, brave and faithful, on whose word for life or death I could depend. In the summer of 1812 they were with the Salish Indians, when a battle was fought with the Piegans, who were defeated. Yet these two brave men were killed, and thus ended the last of these men, few of whom died a natural death.

This passage provides a natural transition to one of the main statements of this article, that David Thompson's *Travels* express and are unified by a statement of the quality of human life in societies where there is no vested authority. There are other unifying threads in the *Travels*: the journeys of exploration, the recurring characters, and above all the character of the narrator himself. I have however dealt briefly with these matters elsewhere, and I think they should be immediately apparent to the thoughtful reader. To sharpen our perception of the depth of Thompson's understanding of precivilized man, I turn now to R. M. Ballantyne's *Hudson's Bay*: a book which Thompson read while writing his own and on which he commented with acerbity. Here is an anecdote which Ballantyne says was told him by another trader:

Wisagun, peeping in between the chinks of the tent to see what the women were doing, saw his wife engaged in cutting up one of her own children, preparatory to cooking it. In a transport of passion, the Indian rushed forward and stabbed her, and also the other woman; and then fearing the wrath of the other Indians, he fled to the woods. . . . During the night Wisagun and Natappe returned stealthily to the tent, and, under cover of the darkness, murdered the whole party as they lay asleep. . . . the horrible deed [Wisagun] excused by saying that *most* of his relations had died before he ate them.

The Victorian view of the savage as utterly depraved is clearly behind this fur trader's horror story. The attitude involved is as misleading as that behind the eighteenth-century idea of the noble savage. Let us take a comparable account from Thompson, noting how he avoids both these European misconceptions, and tells his story without glossing over anything, yet with sympathy and inside perception of the exact relevant social relationships. His anecdote from the beginning involves real individuals in a particular group:

One morning a young man of about twenty two years of age on getting up, said he felt a strong inclination to eat his Sister; as he was a steady young man and a promising hunter, no notice was taken of this expression; the next morning he said the same and repeated the same several times in a day for a few days. His

Parents attempted to reason him out of this horrid inclination; he was silent and gave them no answer; his Sister and her Husband became alarmed, left the place, and went to another Camp, he became aware of it; and then said he must have human flesh to eat, and would have it; in other respects, his behaviour was cool, calm and quiet. His father and relations were much grieved; argument had no effect on him, and he made them no answer to their questions. The Camp became alarmed for it was doubtful who would be his victim.

Then Thompson precisely describes the manner in which this group dealt with an individual threatening their community.

His Father called the Men to a Council, where the state of the young man was discussed, and their decision was, that an evil Spirit had entered into him, and was in full possession of him to make him become a Man Eater (a Weetego) The father was found fault with for not having called to his assistance a Medicine Man, who by sweating and his Songs to the tambour and rattle might have driven away the evil spirit, before it was too late. Sentence of death was passed on him, which was to be done by his Father. The young man was called, and told to sit down in the middle, there was no fire, which he did, he was then informed of the resolution taken, to which he said "I am willing to die"; The unhappy Father arose, and placing a cord about his neck strangled him, to which he was quite passive . . .

Finally there is the explanation of why the execution was carried out in the way decided, indicating on Thompson's part, a deep understanding of primitive social relations.

It may be thought the Council acted a cruel part in ordering the father to put his Son to death, when they could have ordered it by the hands of another person. This was done, to prevent the law of retaliation; which had it been done by the hands of any other person, might have been made a pretext of revenge by those who were not the friends of the person who put him to death.

THOMPSON'S PROFOUND UNDERSTANDING of such an incident reveals the essentially melodramatic and shallow view of Ballantyne, reflecting a racist corruption element in the Victorian outlook. Ballantyne believed that the British were really doing non-Europeans a favour by bringing them missionaries, policemen, trade, and European concepts of property and propriety, even though the process involved killing a substantial proportion of the beneficiaries and des-

troubling their society. His views would now matter little, had his books not played a part in producing a recent fictional variant of his outlook. The relation of Ballantyne's *Coral Island* to William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*, is well known, although most commentators emphasize the differences. Actually it is far more important to realize that both authors assume the same pseudomyth: that the heart of man is desperately wicked unless saved by grace and upheld by the institutions of civilization — civilization obviously meaning the church, the law, the police, and military discipline. The difference between Ballantyne and Golding is Ballantyne blaming the violence of his heroes' actions on the ingratitude of their victims, and Golding blaming the breakdown of modern civilization on that non-existent abstraction, natural man, found in the heart of every schoolboy and adult. These are two sides of the same coin. Heads, Queen Victoria; tails, Britannia's trident, now bent.

Thompson, who worked with Indians for over twenty-eight years, was almost always able to achieve his ends by diplomacy, largely because he understood the operation of the law of tribe and family blood vengeance and the very limited power of the Indian chiefs. He tells an amusing story illustrating the above point.

The Chiefs that are acknowledged as such, have no power beyond their influence, which would immediately cease by any act of authority and they are all careful not to arrogate any superiority over others.

When out on the Plains one of these Chiefs had rendered me several services, for which I had then nothing to pay him. On my return to the house, by interpreter, I sent him a fine scarlet coat trimmed with orris lace, and a message that as I understood he was going to war, I had sent him this coat as a recompense for his services with some tobacco, but the interpreter, not thinking this homely message sufficiently pompous, on delivery of the coat, told him I had sent it to him as being a great Chief and to be his dress on going to War as a Chief. He was surprised at such a message; and the next day, by a young man, sent it with the message to the Chief at the next camp, who not liking the tenor of the message, sent both to another camp, and thus it passed to the sixth hand, who being something of a humourist, sent it to a very old chief, who was not expected to live, he kept it, telling the messenger to thank the Trader for sending him such a fine coat to be buried in

Golding and Ballantyne are chiefly aware of primitive dance as expressing and arousing frenzy and leading to war and murder. Thompson sees the wide range of quality and meaning in Indian dances. He describes, for instance, a dance of Nahathaway or Cree women to the Manito of the marten for success in trapping. Their husbands and brothers

proposed they should dance to the Manito of the Martens, to this they willingly consented, it was a fine, calm, moonlight night, the young men came with the Rattle and Tambour, about nine women formed the dance, to which they sung with their fine voices, and lively they danced hand in hand in a half circle for a long hour; it is now many years ago, yet I remember this gay hour.

The summer ritual of the Mandan Indians on the upper Missouri, who practiced very rudimentary agriculture, is probably an example of agricultural fertility rites in their most primitive form. While the puritanical Thompson was shocked by the rites, he records them exactly and sees not only the ceremonies, but how individuals adjust their own ways to communal practice.

The first day both sexes go about within and without the Village, but mostly on the outside, as if in great distress, seeking for persons they cannot find, for a few hours, then sit down and cry as if for sorrow, then retire to their houses. The next day the same is repeated, with apparent greater distress accompanied with low singing. The third day begins with both sexes crying (no tears) and eagerly searching for those they wish to find, but cannot; at length tired with this folly; the sexes separate, and the Men sit down on the ground in one line, with their elbows resting on their knees, and their heads resting on their hands as in sorrow; the Women, standing, and crying heartily, with dry eyes, form a line opposite the Men; in a few minutes, several Women advance to the Men, each of them takes the Man she chooses by the hand, he rises and goes with her to where she pleases, and they lie down together and thus until none remain, which finishes this abominable ceremony. No woman can choose her own husband; but the women who love their husbands lead away aged Men.

In all the passages I have quoted, I think the value for natural and human history is apparent. Yet the process of history turning into legend is of equal interest, and for literature, of prime importance. It can be seen in some historians, for instance, Herodotus, or some of the individual contributors to *Hakluyt's Voyages* and the *Jesuit Relations*. Thompson's own powers in this direction are intensified by his prolonged inside understanding of the natives of North America, people who lacking written literature and codified laws, necessarily relied on verbal tradition. Under such conditions the telling and retelling of stories emphasizes the mythic-poetic powers of the transmitted story. Thompson retells Indian myths with an immediate intuitive grasp of the myth, but also with a conscious sense that the myths themselves are in the process of formation. The various traditions that Thompson repeats about the coming of smallpox among the Natives all seem to catch the tremendous impact of the disease on Indian ways. An old Indian recalls the coming of the disease:

This dreadful disease broke out in our camp, and spread from one tent to another as if the Bad Spirit carried it. We had no belief that one Man could give it to another, any more than a wounded Man could give his wound to another. We did not suffer so much as those that were near the river, into which they rushed and died. We had only a little brook, about one third of us died, but in some of the other camps, there were tents in which everyone died. When at length it left us, and we moved about to find our people, it was no longer with the song and the dance; but with tears, shrieks, and howlings of despair for those who would never return to us.

Commenting on the memory of the Indians about life before the smallpox, Thompson says:

A strange Idea prevails among these Natives, and also of all the Indians to the Rocky Mountains, though unknown to each other: that when they were numerous, before they were destroyed by the Small Pox all the animals of every species were also very numerous and more so in comparison of the number of natives than at present.

Here we can see how the coming of the white man stimulated an Indian myth of a golden age.

Thompson includes a number of Cree myths, including one of the flooding and recreation of the world, involving the demon Weesarkajauk, and the Otter, the Beaver, and the Muskrat, in which the Muskrat emerges as a totemic ancestor.

He now praised the Musk Rat and promised him plenty of roots to eat, with rushes and earth to make himself a house; the Otter and the Beaver he said were fools, and lost themselves, and he would find the ground, if he went straight down. Thus encouraged he dived, and came up, but brought nothing; after reposing, he went down a second time, and staid a long time, on coming up Weesarkejauk examined his fore paws and found they had the smell of earth, and showing this to the Musk Rat, promised to make him a Wife, who should give him a great many children, and become more numerous than any other animal, and telling him to have a strong heart; and go direct down, the Musk Rat went down the third time and staid so long, that Weesarkejauk feared he was drowned. At length seeing some bubbles come up, he put down his long arm and brought up the Musk Rat, almost dead, but to his great joy with a piece of earth between his fore paws and breast, this he seized, and in a short time extended it to a little island, on which they all reposed.

Thompson's telling of this and other myths is admirable, and comparison to other written versions of the same story, indicate that it is authentic. But Thompson's insight into such traditions is deeper than recording and translating. This is shown in his treatment of the tradition that once the Beaver and Man divided the world

between them, the Beaver ruling the water and Man the land. The story reflects the coming of the white man and the pursuit of the beaver in the fur trade. When Thompson tells the story as told to him by an old Indian, we are both in the presence of history and of a myth in the hours of its making.

About two winters ago, Weesaukejauk showed to our brethren, the Nepissings and Algonquins the secret of their [the beavers'] destruction; that all of them were infatuated with the love of the Castorum of their own species; and more fond of it than we are of fire water. We are now killing the Beaver without any labor, we are now rich, but shall soon be poor, for when the Beaver are destroyed we have nothing to depend on to purchase what we want for our families, strangers now overrun our country with their iron traps, and we, and they will soon be poor.

A. J. M. Smith properly says of this section that 'it has a patriarchal simplicity and dignity, an almost Homeric freshness of vision, that is unique in our literature.' One of the reasons for this special quality is the firmness with which Thompson sees the inner dynamic of the exploration of Canada by the fur traders: the rapid extermination of the beaver and the thrust onward to exploit new beaver territories which drove the fur trade ever westward. The result in about half a century was that the continent was explored from sea to sea, and the beaver was reduced to an almost lost species.

By now, largely because of the passages from Thompson which have been exhibited, it should be possible to place Thompson among his peers. Thompson's *Travels* belongs among such master works as Cook's *Voyages*, Darwin's *Voyage of the Beagle*, Doughty's *Travels in Arabia Deserta*, Bates's *Naturalist on the River Amazons*, and Stefansson's *The Friendly Arctic*. This is the company of greatness where it is ridiculous to ask who is greater or less. Thompson belongs among them as a geographer, a scientist, an observer of nature and people, and a writer. In such a group the only purpose of comparison is to clarify the distinctive quality of each author. I find Thompson's *Travels* closest in special quality to Darwin's *Beagle*. Part of the excitement of Darwin's book is to feel him almost reaching the great generalizations of the *Origin of Species*. The special excitement of Thompson is to be with him as mapmaker and historian, feeling history almost transformed into myth. Thompson is the mapmaker of the Canadian half-continent. But he is more than that; he is the foundation mythmaker of the Canadian West. He is one of the mapmakers of the Canadian mind.



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THE LITERARY RELEVANCE OF ALEXANDER MACKENZIE

Roy Daniells

SIR ALEXANDER MACKENZIE has been given a formal welcome into the confines of Canadian Literature by Victor Hopwood, whose clear and summary chapter on western explorers, in the *Literary History of Canada* (1965) cannot fail to stimulate readers to further thought and further enquiry.

Mackenzies' two great journeys — from Lake Athabasca to the Arctic and from Fort Forks to Bella Coola — were brought to the attention of the public by the appearance in 1801, in London, of a quarto volume, with dramatic maps, entitled *Voyages from Montreal on the River St. Laurence through the Continent of North America to the Frozen and Pacific Oceans in the Years 1789 and 1793 with a Preliminary Account of the Rise, Progress, and Present State of the Fur Trade of that Country*. Mackenzie's name is on the title page but the preliminary account of the fur trade was written, it is believed, by his cousin Roderick, who loyally served under him in the Athabasca region.

The invisible editor of the *Voyages*, who rewrote Alexander's journals (and may have rewritten Roderick's account) was William Combe. Combe was a highly skilled and reputable writer, author of the immensely popular stories of "Dr. Syntax", and he had already written up the *Voyages* of John Meares, for publication in 1790. The easy assumption is that, as we peruse the 1801 quarto, we are really reading Combe, working from rough journals kept by a semi-literate explorer. The style of the book is lucid, cadenced and at times soberly eloquent. By great good luck, however, a copy bearing all the marks of a faithful rescript has survived of the journal Mackenzie kept during the 1789 trip. Even the slight incoherence of the last two days, when his joy at being almost home runs the two entries together, is faithfully preserved by the copyist. Microfilm copies and an edited edition by T. H. McDonald (University of Oklahoma Press) enable us to check the original entries against Combe's version and — *mirabile dictu!* — the

comparison is not odious; both men rise in our esteem, Combe for his faithfulness to the original, Mackenzie for the clarity and toughness of his journal style.

Combe's distortions of Mackenzie's meaning are so few and so slight they have to be searched for. As the expedition to the Arctic starts, Mackenzie says, "Mr. Leroux got his men and Indians to salute us with several Volleys to which we returned a few Shot." This nicely differentiates the party close to base, able to fire volleys, from the party already intent on the journey and unwilling to waste powder on more than a few token discharges. Combe's version loses this urgency: "We were saluted on our departure with some vollies of small arms, which we returned." It is not a very important loss. A fairer sample of Combe's editing is seen in the sentence, "The Indians complained of the perseverance with which we pushed forward, and that they were not accustomed to such severe fatigue as it occasioned." Mackenzie had written, "The Indians complain much of our hard Marching, that they are not accustomed to such hard fatigue." Frequently when Combe's phrasing sounds literary, it is Mackenzie himself who is responsible. In the *Journal*, when some Indians are encountered, "we made them smook, tho' it was evident they did not know the use of Tobacco, we likewise gave them some Grog to drink, but I believe they accepted of those Civilities more through Fear than Inclination." The literary cadence and balanced structure are there in the original. How can we account for this? It is surely the product of what Arnold called "our excellent and indispensable eighteenth century", when even a suicide note could be rationally structured.

We may fairly claim for Mackenzie a place among Canadian writers, or rather among writers who left a literary record of their engagement with Canada.

SO FAR, SO GOOD. We must now admit that this volume of *Voyages* is not in the front rank of narratives of exploration. It concerned a terrain and a type of enterprise so remote from the English reader's experience that a great chunk of preliminary explanation was needed. Furthermore, its events did not provide a dramatic structure. In 1793, Mackenzie and his men paddled, poled, portaged, ploughed through the bush, then plodded three hundred miles overland, turned about and came back; just as, in 1789, they had paddled and portaged and pushed aside the ice and plunged into the current of the Mackenzie, then, reaching the Arctic sea on Bastille Day, had turned about and come back. As for the scene, the terrain itself, this marvellous Canada of ours, let Mac-

kenzie himself speak; he is explaining why his references to flora and fauna, to Indian customs and habits, and to natural scenery must appear so scanty and inadequate. He had been obliged to pass on "with rapid steps": "I had to encounter perils by land and perils by water; to watch the savage who was our guide, or to guard against those of his tribe who might meditate our destruction. I had also the passions and fears of others to control and subdue. . . . The toil of our navigation was incessant, and oftentimes extreme."

As for the characters in the story, there is only one, Alexander Mackenzie. The voyageurs are barely named, the Indians barely numbered. At the end of its journeys the party do not encounter the princes of India or the court of Kublai Khan, only the nets and pots of some Eskimo who never show up in person, or a friendly fellow in a village who feeds them roast salmon.

The *Voyages*, however, possess very high literary values of a secondary kind, that is, values which can be elicited by a process of editing which reveals the superb, taut thread of narrative; or else by a process of extending the story to show its dramatic and epic features. We will examine these possibilities briefly, in the order mentioned.

If we follow each expedition from its point of departure, the onward linear movement is continuous; the canoe pierces all obstructions; the single will of Mackenzie drives forward. There are, in fact, no digressions, only obstacles; no delays, only pauses for brief recuperation and repairs; no hesitations of more than a few hours even when Mackenzie is most perplexed as to his best direction; and, with one small exception, there is no back-tracking. It is this simple, continuous, linear drive that gives impetus to the narrative. To take one example: on June 13th, 1793, they had just crossed the continental divide and were feeling their way toward a rumoured great river (now known as the Fraser).

They pushed off into a rapid current and at once the canoe struck and broke itself sideways on a sandbar. As they jumped out, the torrent swept them into deeper water, leaving one of the crew behind, then drove them downward into a rock which shattered the stern below the gunwales, making steering impossible. Thrown to the edge of the channel, the canoe smashed its bow. The foreman was swept out by branches of a tree he laid hold of to check their course. On went the canoe into the fury of a cascade which pounded it on rocks, ripping the bark into great holes and wrenching the thwarts so that now the wreck floated flat on the water. After several hundred yards of surging forward, in extreme peril, a small eddy enabled the exhausted crew to let the canoe's weight rest on some stones. The Indians climbed to the bank, sat down, and wept. In great pain

from the icy waters and badly bruised, Mackenzie held the smashed framework on the outside until the crew got everything ashore. Among their losses was the total spare supply of bullets.

Now, miraculously, the two lost men reappeared. A fire was built and, after a hearty meal and an allowance of rum, Mackenzie began, like Odysseus, to rebuild morale. So effective were his arguments and so persuasive was his eloquence that by nine the next morning a party went off to look for birchbark and to locate, if possible, their point of junction with the great river. In the meantime, Mackenzie, though he had come ashore from the wreck so benumbed and bruised he could scarcely stand, had found the strength to make his usual attempt at astronomical observations and had established their latitude as $54^{\circ}23'$, though not their longitude, for he could not get a sufficient horizon among the mountains to try for the satellites of Jupiter.

One could, of course, write Mackenzie's life in the manner of Lytton Strachey. Beginning with the predatory nature of the fur trade and its slaughter of animals, continuing into the violent competition of the trading companies, and concluding with Mackenzie's adumbration of the "fatal impact" of the white man, one could interpret his non-violence as no more than prudential, classify his mercantile designs as imperialistic, look sideways into the mystery of his son Andrew's unknown Indian mother, and end by making Alexander Mackenzie almost as contemptible as Lytton Strachey.

It would be a fruitless exercise. Mackenzie, at least up to the time of his conflict with Selkirk, fulfils too magnificently the requirements of the Jason figure, the adventurous far-seeker, as the Western world has conceived his image. His family is poor but they are Scottish clansmen; his father and uncle are both loyalists; he is early thrown upon the world and in his twenties has established a reputation for honesty, courage, diplomacy and enterprise. Appointed to a post in the remote wilderness, he receives maps and plans from an older, more experienced man, whom he succeeds. His first voyage, in search of a western passage, is unsuccessful, in spite of the loyalty of his Argonauts. He retires to England, to learn more of navigation and acquire better instruments. Returning to his original starting point, he sets off again, a veritable Odysseus in the skill and craft of his voyaging and his ability to endure and survive; doing better than Odysseus, in that he never lost a man, or forfeited a loyalty or harmed an Indian. Every sordid aspect of the trade withers away out of the picture; the commercial and imperial motives retire into the wings; Mackenzie's return to Athabasca is like the clasping of a necklace strung with the real and shining jewels of courage, hope, resource-

fulness and fair dealing. The *Voyages*, below their level of surface detail, possess immense narrative strength, derived directly from the energy of heroic achievement.

But let us press on, as Mackenzie did, toward our ultimate objectives. These are the dramatic and epic elements of his story.

THE DRAMA ASSERTS ITSELF after the voyages ended. It is neither comedy nor tragedy but a true history play in which interest centres upon conflict between two great figures; each backed by diplomatic, financial and armed forces; each representing a territorial interest; each desiring absolute power, under the aegis of a more remote superior sovereignty, to which both appeal. Dramatic elements abound; situations develop climactically; tragic disappointments and ironies of fate are present. The historical implications are enormous and fitly symbolized by the identification of each contender with a vast natural feature of our country — Sir Alexander Mackenzie with the great river and Lord Selkirk with a range of mountains paralleling the Pacific coast. The best account of Mackenzie is still that published in 1927, by M. S. Wade; John Gray's *Lord Selkirk of Red River* (1963) has the triple advantage of being a definitive historical account, a labour of love, and a complete apologia.

The action of the drama commences about 1808. Selkirk and Mackenzie were buying shares in the Hudson's Bay Company on joint account. Selkirk was thirty-seven years of age. He had been Thomas Douglas, the seventh son of a noble family, and by certain untimely deaths had inherited an earldom at the age of twenty-eight. He was a natural philanthropist and deeply concerned about the cotters and crofters who were being pushed out of the Highlands. Having already, in 1803, led a group of them to Prince Edward Island, to establish new homes, he was now turning his attention to the fertile prairie land of the Red River and buying up Hudson's Bay Company shares, which had fallen to three-fifths of their par value because of competition from the North-Westerns and a renewal of the Napoleonic conflict. Selkirk was advancing money to Mackenzie, who was short of liquid capital. Mackenzie, at the age of forty-four, was an experienced fur trader and renowned explorer who had retired to England but was still pursuing the interests of his company.

By 1810 the irony of the situation became apparent. The two men were hoping to get a controlling, or at least a decisive, interest in the Hudson's Bay Com-

pany for totally opposite and utterly incompatible reasons. Mackenzie wanted to secure an outlet for the fur trade through Hudson's Bay, which the old company controlled. Selkirk desired a huge grant of prairie upon which to found an agricultural settlement. The incompatibility was as old as Cain and Abel: the tiller of the soil, who encloses and guards his land, is at perpetual war with the herder or hunter on the open range.

The two men stand in dramatic contrast. Although their dates of birth are separated by only seven years, one is young, the other over the hill. Selkirk is eager and impulsive. Early in 1811 he has made his proposal to the Hudson's Bay Company. His optimism absorbs all difficulties, even the six hundred miles of wilderness between the proposed point of disembarkation for his settlers, on the shores of the Bay, and the most suitable land in the Red River valley; even the climate, with its frequent sub-zero winter temperatures.

Mackenzie, on the other hand, is a man defeated after a protracted struggle to induce the British government to form the fur trade into a single enterprise with bases (at once military, naval and commercial) on the Pacific coast. He now does all he can to defeat Selkirk's plans for settlement. There is good material here for a dramatist who could bring to life a series of related scenes: Mackenzie insisting that Selkirk's proposal be brought to a general meeting of Hudson's Bay Company stockholders; Simon McGillivray writing to his brother that "His Lordship is a designing and dangerous character — and Sir Alexander has not been sufficiently aware of him"; Mackenzie telling Miles Macdonnell, leader of the settlers, before the expedition left Britain, that the North-Westerns would not tolerate the colony and could incite the Indians against it; the deplorable set of incidents at the dockside where an official related to Mackenzie used every means to dissuade and intimidate the prospective settlers, so that the captain put to sea in haste, leaving part of his stores behind.

The rest of the drama is well known: the massacre in 1816 at Seven Oaks (not connected with Mackenzie), where Robert Semple, governor of the Red River colony, and about twenty of his men were killed by the métis, who gave no quarter to the wounded; Selkirk's arrival with a troop of disbanded soldiers, many of them Swiss, with which he restored order; arrests, action and counter-action in the Canadian courts, Selkirk being ordered to pay damages of £2,000; his return to England at the end of 1818; his death eighteen months later, at Pau, within sight of the Pyrenees, dictating during his last days his plans for an experimental farm at Red River.

During these years, Mackenzie's own health had been declining and his in-

volvement in affairs lessening. He writes to his cousin, in 1819, that events in Canada have not been as disastrous to the North West Company as was feared. "The losses sustained in the country, though severe and serious have been in a considerable degree recompensed by the high prices obtained for the furs, the sale of which was certainly managed with great judgment in London." He is to the last what he always claimed to be — a trader. "Sono mercanti", said Napoleon of the British, borrowing a phrase from Paoli. A good line to bring down a curtain. Mackenzie's death occurred in March 1820, among the mountains of Killiecrankie, scarcely a month before Selkirk's death by the Pyrenees.

At the time of their death, what each had fought to establish, through defeat after defeat, was precariously sustaining itself: the North West Company, relying on a dwindling animal population and desperately over-extended in its communications, was to be absorbed by its old rival the Hudson's Bay Company in 1821; Selkirk's settlers, clinging to the land, had many dangers ahead of them, including Riel's rebellion.

IN A CONTEXT LARGER than its dramatic possibilities, the story of Alexander Mackenzie may be seen as possessing the scope and grandeur that belong to epic tradition. Absolute powers are involved; wars hang on the horizon like thunder clouds; long, hazardous journeys are undertaken by a leader and his faithful band of followers; recuperation after disaster is a recurring pattern. Granted the gods do not intervene; or do they? Mackenzie almost nightly directs his telescope toward the moons of Jupiter or watches for the appearance of Diana, that he may receive direction and achieve orientation. When the long journeys, undertaken to extend His Majesty's territories, are accomplished, he receives in knighthood a royal reward. After the second voyage, he falls into an underworld of helplessness and disturbing visions. He writes to Roderick, "I never passed so much of my time so insignificantly — nor so uneasy — Although I am not superstitious — dreams amongst other things — caused me much annoyance I could not close my eyes without finding myself in company with the Dead."

The principal epic element in the Mackenzie story is, however, much more definite, extensive and significant. It is the old motif of the fate of nations. Harold Innis has said, "It is no more accident that the present Dominion coincides roughly with the fur-trading areas of northern North America."

If we follow the delineation of Canada's western boundaries, beginning in 1783 with the Treaty of Paris, we are surprised at the immense stretch of terri-

tory involved, more than two million square miles, and our astonishment grows as we come to realize the crucial role played by Mackenzie's two voyages in securing title to this vast empire, as large as Europe minus Russia.

It is true that the boundaries were not as extensive as Mackenzie had at first hoped. In theory, Britain was entitled by the Treaty of Paris to territory extending as far south as navigable water on the Mississippi, and from that point west to the Pacific. In practice, an ambiguity in the wording, arising out of an ignorance of the terrain, made it possible for the Americans to claim the entire Mississippi basin. In 1818, the 49th parallel was agreed on as a boundary up to the Rockies.

At the time of Mackenzie's death, in 1820, Britain still had a strong claim to the Columbia valley, but after 1838 American settlement steadily increased and in 1843 the settlers demanded union with the U.S. The Democratic party even pushed the American claim northward in the famous slogan, "Fifty-four forty, or fight." Earl Cathcart, governor of Canada and commander of the forces, made extensive preparations for defence. Finally, by a compromise settlement, the territory west of the Rockies was divided along the continuation of the 49th parallel and the Strait of Juan de Fuca.

For the Alaskan boundary there is a similar story of compromise unfavourable to Canada, but not disastrously so. In 1903 Roosevelt threatened to use force and used the old Russian claim (bought by the American government) to cut off the northern half of what is now British Columbia from the sea. Farther north, the boundary between Alaska and the Yukon was more equitably drawn, running for seven hundred miles through wild, almost uninhabited, potentially rich country. The fur traders who followed Mackenzie up the valley of the river named for him, reinforced by goldminers in the 1890's, established a firm claim.

THIS HISTORICAL SERIES of events, played against a geographic background, has great possibilities as literary material. A double irony emerges, on a scale to provoke the laughter of the gods. The impasse between the North West Company and the Red River settlement, with all its stupid and brutal elements, its harassments and murder, proved in its outcome to have held in balance the two forces necessary to the formation of Canada as a viable body politic. Without the West and access to the Pacific, Canada would have remained in

continuous danger of absorption by the United States. And without both the fur trade and the agricultural settlement, the West could never have been claimed. Had Lord Selkirk's farmers abandoned their lands, the Red River basin (if that great fertile plain can be so named) would have been filled, inevitably, by American settlers and would have gone the way of the Oregon territory. If, on the other hand, the North West Company had lost its supply routes, as seemed possible when at one time supplies were not allowed to be taken out of Red River, it would have failed to achieve the few years of frenetic expansion which gave "the lords of the lakes and forests" their place in history. A network of canoe routes, extending beyond the Rockies, and pinned down by hastily established posts, sufficed to establish a British presence right to the waters of the Pacific. But for this trading right, bought out by the Hudson's Bay Company soon after Mackenzie's death, and translated into a political claim by first the British and then the Canadian government, Canada would have established almost no mainland claims west of what is now Winnipeg. The epic quality of the story resides in the immense and decisive national issues hanging on the deeds of half a dozen paladins, among whom Mackenzie was foremost.

The second enormous irony arises from the failure of the British government to follow Mackenzie's many times urged advice, by founding bases that could dominate the Oregon territory and part of the present Alaskan coast. It is tempting, especially to the present writer, who has worked as a farm labourer among the bright orchards of Oregon, to think in terms of a lost empire, a surrendered inheritance. Such romantic regret, however, will not stand the cold scrutiny of the historian. It is ten to one, given the pace and temper of American westward expansion, that had such claims been stoutly maintained, war would in due course have broken out. In that event, Britain (and therefore Canada) stood to lose the whole Pacific slope — if anything so magnificently mountainous can be so named. The very failures and inhibitions, because of the Napoleonic threat, on the part of the British government may be reckoned providential for Canada. In the end, Mackenzie's voyages achieved their full political potential; they established our initial claim to God's plenty as we now, in the fact of Western Canada, possess it.

William Cowper, a contemporary of Mackenzie, summed up the issue in the prophecy of the Bard to Boadicea,

Regions Caesar never knew
Thy posterity shall sway;

ALEXANDER MACKENZIE

Where his eagles never flew
None invincible as they.

Some day this theme will find heroic and definitive expression, as the Canadian writer, “long choosing and beginning late”, comes at last to a sense of its epic dimension. In the meantime, as Milton put it, we have “some naked thoughts that roam about / And loudly knock to have their passage out.”

INITIATION AND QUEST

Early Canadian Journals

Maurice Hodgson

THE EARLIEST of the Canadian captives to write a narrative in English was Pierre-Esprit Radisson who was captured by the Iroquois near Trois Rivières about 1653. Idiosyncratic in style and probably imaginative in detail, Radisson's narrative set the pace for many later Captivity journals written to *épater les bourgeois* and designed to appeal to the popular notion of Indian brutality. Other Captivity journals written in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries employed the same narrative traits that Radisson had found amused the ingenuous reader: John Gyles, captive of the Maliseet Indians in New Brunswick; Alexander Henry, captive for a year near Michilimackinac; and John Tanner, thirty years a captive in the vicinity of Lake Winnipeg. But, ultimately, it is not the recording of privation and suffering which impresses the reader, but the author's attempt to integrate into a savage society, which may succeed in lifting the struggle into the realm of the heroic and the tragic. Such is the nature of John Jewett's narrative of his captivity with the Nootka Indians from 1803 to 1806.

THE COAST INDIANS who in the summer of 1803 massacred the crew of the merchant ship *Boston* had little similarity in custom to the Ojibbeway warriors who had captured John Tanner fourteen years before. The Nootka Indians, unlike the nomadic tribes described in the journals of Alexander Henry and John Tanner, were a settled population on the west coast of North America in a territory that had long had commerce with Spanish, English and American trading ships. The incident which precipitated the destruction of the *Boston* was an insult directed at a single chief, Maquina, whose power extended over fifteen hundred subjects. Few tribes in North America's interior, except perhaps the

Sioux on the plains, could muster such a population, and few leaders commanded such authority except under coalition. The journal of Jewitt, captive survivor of the massacre, thus provides a unique picture of a semi-civilized nation living in relative peace and a certain security, and the text itself escapes the destructive disunity of a journal such as Tanner's which records the day-to-day wanderings of a hunting tribe.

Only Hearne's account of his Indian mentor, Matonabee, surpasses the portrait which Jewitt creates of Maquina in his journal of three years' captivity with the Nootka Indians; and, like Matonabee, Maquina demonstrates monarchical foibles only too familiar to European journal writers. Jewitt had little intercourse with the common Indians, except for unpleasant experiences of their teasing him about his menial position in the chief's household. But there is an interdependence between the young English blacksmith who produces for his captor weapons beyond the capability of Indian craftsmen, and the chief who has constantly to guard his captive against the murderous jealousy of lesser chiefs. It was Jewitt's trade as armourer aboard the *Boston* which first caught Maquina's eye, days before he initiated the massacre, and it was his skill as blacksmith which suggested to Maquina that Jewitt would be worth preserving. The extent of his dependence upon Jewitt is manifested a short time after the massacre when Thompson, Jewitt's future fellow-captive, is discovered alive; by professing that Thompson is his father, Jewitt manages to save him. Jewitt's power over Maquina is again tested when Thompson refuses to bow to his captors and twice strikes Maquina's sons in rage, an offence normally punishable by death; only Jewitt's intervention saves his stubborn pseudo-father. As Jewitt settles down to what appears to be a lifetime of captivity, his journal gradually effaces its author, but reveals the Indian chief as an almost tragic figure, beset alternately by the desire to emulate and impress the European and by the need to maintain an image of integrity and strength for his tribe.

Throughout his journal, Jewitt professes a distaste for the savage society and a need to preserve the vestiges of Christianity amongst the heathen. His goal as captive, of course, is not to become like the savage, but to win his freedom and return to a Christian land. This he declares repeatedly in his journal, yet during his three years of captivity he achieves a fair degree of integration with the Indian world. Stubborn Thompson simply doubles his efforts to remain aloof, preferring death to servility; while Jewitt takes his first step towards integration in deciding to "adopt a conciliating conduct towards them . . . I sought to gain their goodwill by always endeavouring to assume a cheerful countenance . . . I resolved to learn

their language". From that point he vacillates: he is unable to prevent his own absorption into the tribe, and the moves he does make to maintain his identity as a civilized individual are nominal and ineffectual. First, he and Thompson try to eat as they are accustomed, but they are often unable to procure anything but Indian food and when they try to cook with salt Maquina arbitrarily forbids it. Secondly, they manage during the first part of their captivity to maintain their European dress at least until Jewitt marries and Maquina insists that they adopt the native life completely.

Our principal consolation in this gloomy state, was to go on Sundays, whenever the weather would permit, to the borders of a fresh water pond, about a mile from the village, where after bathing, and putting on clean clothes, we would seat ourselves under the shade of a beautiful pine, while I read some chapters in the Bible, and the prayers appointed by our church for the day.

It is not until after Jewitt's marriage that he and Thompson are invited to a native religious celebration, and Jewitt seems to accept without fear of jeopardizing his own religious principles.

By the end of the second year, Jewitt at last identifies himself with the Indians, and though he recognizes their faults, he is prepared to forgive them for the massacre of his shipmates:

For though they are a thievish race, yet I have no doubt that many of the melancholy disasters have principally arisen from the imprudent conduct of some of the captains and crews employed in this trade, in exasperating them by insulting, plundering, and even killing them on slight grounds.

The importance of Jewitt's sympathy becomes very apparent in the closing pages of the journal, when he pleads with the captain who rescues him to spare the natives' lives.

Jewitt's integration depended upon his good relations with Maquina's family, and it was facilitated by recognizing in Maquina characteristics above those of the common savage, and confusing his natural traits with European sophistication. This rationalization is apparent in his assessment of Maquina's favourable points:

He was much neater both in person and eating than were the others, as was likewise the queen, owing no doubt to his intercourse with foreigners, which had given him ideas of cleanliness.

His fondness for Maquina and his family he shows particularly through his at-

tention to the young prince, Sat-sas-sak-sis, whom he adopts into his household following his marriage:

I was also very careful to keep him free of vermin of every kind, washing him and combing his hair. These marks of attention were not only pleasing to the child . . . but was highly gratifying both to Maquina and his queen, who used to express much satisfaction at my care of him.

Considering the almost sacred position of the royal family, it is not likely that Maquina would allow Jewitt to have complete control over the prince unless the king realized the extent to which Jewitt accepted Indian life and thus was not liable to corrupt the child.

Two years of captivity weakened Jewitt's resolve to keep aloof from the native life, and his acceptance of Maquina's suggestion that he marry is an acknowledgment of defeat. It does not represent a sudden change in his attitude but symbolically marks a turning point in his life as a captive. The girl he chooses is a princess, by his own admission very beautiful, and light in complexion. The latter quality must have been the deciding point, as he had to justify his actions if ever he were to return to civilization. The marriage is as satisfactory as could be expected under the circumstances, and for his final winter in captivity he manages to achieve a degree of domesticity which could only be accomplished after the realization that he himself was virtually an Indian. However, a severe illness that spring gives him an excuse to send his wife back to her people, and in allowing this, Maquina starts to lose his hold, and Jewitt starts to release himself from the savage bonds as though his capitulation had only been a momentary weakness. His recollection of his parting with his wife, by the time he wrote his narrative, had become divorced from emotion and she had resumed the guise of a pathetic savage:

Though I rejoiced at her departure, I was greatly affected with the simple expressions of regard for me, and could not but feel strongly interested in this poor girl . . . after her departure, I requested Maquina, that as I had parted with my wife, he would permit me to resume my European dress.

Maquina does, and it is from this point that he seems to give up hope of retaining Jewitt; only a few months later the brig *Lydia* appears and Jewitt is released.

As in other Captivity journals, there is no attempt on Jewitt's part to systematize scientific and sociological observation; however, of all Canadian Captivity journals his is the one with the greatest literary potentialities. It presents a large

degree of dramatic unity, since he had the advantage of involvement in a settled society; it is the episodic adventures which the other captives undergo while tied to a nomadic people that from the start destroy any natural unity there might be in their journals. However, Jewitt himself seems aware of the necessity of direction, plot and suspense; and one of the few adventures prior to his capture that he recalls, the destruction of the sailor's archetypal symbol of luck, points forebodingly to the future:

After passing the Cape when the sea had become calm saw great numbers of Albatrosses, a large brown and white bird of the goose kind, one of which Captain Salter shot, whose wings measured from their extremities fifteen feet.

It is Captain Salter himself who is the direct cause of the massacre when he later insults Maquina at Nootka. Jewitt is a conscious and capable artist working with material which provides him with the necessary dramatic unity.

IN SPIRIT Jewitt is in touch with the prevailing Romantic movement, and his descriptions of the New World are not unlike those of Chateaubriand who was writing at the same time. It is the early romanticism of Rousseau, Chateaubriand and Goldsmith: a charming eighteenth-century Nature created by God for a simple, appreciative human race. There is nothing in the other Captivity journals to compare with Jewitt's description of his religious retreat by the inland pond, or of the Indians' winter bivouac on the coast north of Nootka:

Tashees is pleasantly situated and in a most secure position from the winter storms; in a small vale or hollow on the south shore, at the foot of a mountain. The spot on which it stands is level, and the soil very fine, the country and its vicinity abounding with the most romantic views, charmingly diversified, and fine streams of water falling in beautiful cascades from the mountains.

The concept of a provident and benevolent Nature, essential to the Romantic, was very much a part of Jewitt's literary philosophy, no matter how embryonic that might be. His desire to *épater les bourgeois* is obviously not meant to do so through horrific description, but rather as Chateaubriand did, with concepts novel to the reader, but pacific in nature. It is the tradition of Defoe as well. Like Defoe, Jewitt chooses to pose as the practical man, aware of providential Nature and the hand behind that nature; but the puritan Defoe speaks also for self-sufficiency, and as Crusoe survives through ingenuity so Jewitt emulates him. One of the

first tasks that Crusoe sets himself is to strip the wrecked ship of all usable items, and Jewitt follows suit. When Crusoe's ship is finally destroyed by the sea he is left to survive by his practical sense; and after a native Nootkan inadvertently burns the *Boston*, Jewitt, too, is dependent on his own devices. Thus, weeks after their capture, the illiterate Thompson insists that Jewitt keep a journal and that he, Thompson, will supply his blood for ink if necessary; Crusoe-like, Jewitt experiments and finds a solution:

On the first of June I accordingly commenced a regular diary . . . and after making a number of trials I at length succeeded in obtaining a very tolerable ink by boiling the juice of the blackberry with the mixture of finely powdered charcoal . . . as for quills I found no difficulty in procuring them . . . while a large clam furnished me with an ink stand.

Each writer of a Captivity journal certainly has the material to create a work of some drama, though most of them do not have the native ability to develop the material satisfyingly. Jewitt exhibits, with his education and his apparent sympathy with the contemporary spirit, the highest literary potentialities. Dramatically the capture and release of the captive would seem to supply the most likely material; Tanner has not the literary ability to exploit them, while Jewitt, though he creates a mediocre capture sequence, concludes with a masterful description of his final deception of the natives. The deception involves Maquina, and through Jewitt's handling of the narrative to that point, Maquina evolves as a sympathetic character. The deception, therefore, appears gross, as Maquina must run the risk of forfeiting his life in order to preserve Jewitt. The reaction of the tribe, despondent and powerless to aid its leader in the hands of the white men, is not unlike a Sophoclean chorus watching inert as the inevitable tragedy draws to a close. As Maquina is held on board the brig as a hostage, Jewitt returns to the shore to collect the *Boston's* gear, and though greeted by spears, he is certain that with their chief in the captain's hand the Indians will not harm him.

In his three years of captivity, he has become accustomed to the Indian customs and the Indian psyche, and fortunately for him, unlike captives with more volatile captors, he is not harmed. As he boards the canoe to return to the ship he is intercepted by the prince, and later he records the expression of the child's divided loyalty:

As I was going into the canoe, little Sat-sas-sak-sis, who could not bear to part with me, asked me, with an affectionate simplicity, since I was going away to leave him, if the white men would not let his father come on shore, and not kill him. I told him not to be concerned, for that no one should injure his father.

The tragedy averted, Maquina greets Jewitt as he boards the ship. Then, after the chief is given presents by the captain and prepares to return to his people, he acknowledges Jewitt's deception, but also his own cunning when he declares

that he should never take a letter of recommendation from anyone, or even trust himself on board a vessel unless I [Jewitt] was there. Then grasping both my hands, with much emotion, while the tears trickled down his cheeks, he bade me farewell, and stepped into the canoe, which immediately paddled him on shore.

To the last, Maquina acts in the style of the eighteenth-century concept of the "noble savage" and he remains to the end more European than Indian, just as the young princess is pictured with his archly civilized "affectionate simplicity". Doubtless the feeling that lingered with Jewitt as he sailed from Nootka was that of a touching parting with his foster family, but the sense of identification did not pass beyond this admirable "European" family to the natives *in toto* or to the savage way of life.

THE CAPTIVITY JOURNAL obviously comes near the genre of the novel and consequently this type of narrative — at least the better examples of it — can be examined in terms of prose fiction. However, the narratives of quest — the Exploration journals such as those of Alexander Mackenzie, David Thompson and Samuel Hearne — have a purpose in which the literary value can only be considered as secondary to the description of the quest. But, as each is a unique attempt to reach a goal, the universality of theme which this suggests — adventure, quest, initiation, suffering, privation — attests to the immediacy of these journals as much to the author's contemporaries as to the twentieth-century reader. Few Exploration journals have enjoyed so continuous and so deserved a popularity as Samuel Hearne's journal which was first published in 1795.

After the French were defeated in the Seven Years War the English once again showed some interest in expanding trade, and this took the novel form of scientific and commercial speculation over copper ore brought to the Prince of Wales Fort by some Chipewyan Indians. After two abortive attempts, Samuel Hearne reached the mouth of the Coppermine River in 1771, and Hearne's journals and maps proved him not only able to expand the trade, but also competent as a surveyor, cartographer, anthropologist and an exceptional narrative writer.

Mr. Norton was an Indian; he was born at Prince of Wales' fort, but had been in England nine years, and considering the small sum that had been expended

on his education, he had made some progress in literature. At his return to Hudson's Bay he entered into all the abominable vices of his countrymen. He kept for his own use five or six of the finest Indian girls . . . took every means in his power to prevent any European from having intercourse with the women of the country . . . and showed more respect to one of their dogs, than he ever did to his first officer.

Hearne's years as a sailor aboard the frigate *Bideford* during the Seven Years War had inured him to privation, which stood him in good stead during his trip to the Coppermine river; but it could not prepare him to endure the profligate half-breed Moses Norton, governor of Prince of Wales fort. Son of a former governor and a Southern Indian woman, of a tribe that Hearne rated as "the most debauched wretches under the sun", Norton was a certain antidote to Hearne's remaining at the fort. Although Hearne was posted at the fort specifically to undertake an expedition to the area that had yielded some interesting samples of copper, he was probably not expected to show much initiative. However, faced with a lieutenantcy under Norton, Hearne chose the uncertainty of the wilderness in preference to the certain hell of working under so notorious a superior. Without this explanation, it would be difficult to account for the alacrity of Hearne's repeated attempts to reach the Coppermine river.

Hearne's first voyage carried him only a few hundred miles west of Hudson's Bay; with the desertion of his guide he had to return to the fort with his two unhappy European comrades barely a month after his departure. Then, undaunted, or not wishing to remain with Norton, he struck out again within two months of his previous failure. The second expedition was hardly more auspicious, though he had learnt from the first and took no encumbering Europeans. Thus he had taken his first step toward integration and towards psychological captivity to the Indians. Though free of Europeans, he was not yet free of European inexperience and inappropriate equipment:

. . . what considerably increased the handicap was . . . the coarseness of our lodging . . . the tent we had with us was not only too large and unfit for barren ground service, where no poles were to be got, but we were obliged to cut it up for shoes.

On his final successful trip with the guide Matonabee, he would learn to prepare his tent poles before entering the Barren Ground, and also to concur with Matonabee's dictum that they be attended by many women who "were made for labour; one of them can carry, or haul as much as two men can do. They also pitch our tents, make and mend our clothing, keep us warm at night. . . ."

For the time being he was still at the mercy of Norton's ineffectual guides, for he did not meet the fabled Matonabee until September of 1770, as he was returning to the fort after breaking his quadrant. Then, mysteriously appearing from the uninhabited west at a point when once again Hearne was being deserted by his guides, the "stranger" Matonabee proceeded to enliven Hearne's travels by his company and his encouragement. So much so that Hearne's initial impression, "the courteous behaviour of the stranger struck me very sensibly", contains an epithet that Europeans would hardly associate with a savage. Subtly the Indian life, and specifically this Indian chief, was absorbing Hearne.

Matonabee, always free with his advice, diagnosed the reason for Hearne's repeated failure in terms that Hearne could appreciate and second, the desertion of his guides and, principally, the lack of women. The latter was antithetical to the views of governor Norton, but by this time Hearne was prepared for his third venture, and Matonabee and his ideas had gained ascendancy. Scarcely two weeks after returning to the fort from an arduous seven-month journey, Hearne commenced his third and final expedition. The trip took eighteen months, and during that time Hearne had no intercourse with a European.

From the time of departure, Hearne anticipates the dictates of a later Arctic explorer, Steffanson, by allowing himself to be directed by the natives and their experience with the country. Soon he appears to have no authority; at least he does not assert himself.

On the nineteenth, we pursued our coarse in the North West quarter; and, after leaving the above-mentioned creek, with empty bellies, till the twenty-seventh . . . it was the twenty-seventh before the meat was brought to the tents. Here the Indians proposed to continue one day, under the pretence of repairing their sledges and snow shoes; but from the little attention they paid to those repairs, I was led to think that the want of food was the chief thing that detained them, as they never ceased eating the whole day.

Thus with some humour Hearne describes his capitulation; soon afterwards he shows his complete dependence upon Matonabee's judgment when the party spends a week impounding deer before attempting the traverse over the barren ground.

The release from his responsibilities as leader allows Hearne's sensitive powers of observation to roam not only over the natural life that he encounters, but also over the Indians themselves. The Northern Indians strike him as the finest he knows, and his sympathies lie with the neglected women; he sees them in general with humour:

Ask a Northern Indian, what is beauty? he will answer, a broad flat face, small eyes, high cheek-bones, three or four broad black lines a-cross each cheek, a low forehead, a large broad chin, a clumsy hook-nose, a tawny hide, and breasts hanging down to the belt.

But individually he portrays them with much feeling:

The instant, however, the poor woman was delivered, which was not until she had suffered all the pains usually felt on those occasions for nearly fifty-two hours, the signal was made for moving when the poor creature took her infant on her back and set out with the rest of the company; and although another person had the humanity to haul the sledge for her, (for one day only) she was obliged to carry a considerable load beside her little charge, and was frequently obliged to wade knee-deep in water and wet snow.

His deepest sympathy remains with Matonabbee, whose nobility and sensitivity make him an easy mark, despite his exalted tribal position, for warriors stronger or less responsible than himself. Throughout the trip Matonabbee is dogged by problems involving his eight wives: the youngest and most comely elopes, and another is forcibly taken from him. The Indian chief is disconsolate and, strangely foretelling his final fatal action years later, Hearne notes that "he [Matonabbee] took this affront so much to heart, especially as it was offered in my presence, that he almost determined not to proceed further." Matonabbee's concern over Hearne's reactions is only outweighed by the latter's dependence upon his guide, and in a curiously European manner he appeals to Matonabbee's honour to continue the voyage. Hearne's integration into Indian life has a parallel in the Indian's adoption of European custom; he agrees to continue.

Hearne, the consummate story-teller, not only builds his narrative towards the goal of his explorations, but also parallels his quest with the aim of the Indians — the destruction of the Eskimo encampment at the mouth of the Coppermine river. As the party approaches the river its numbers increase, as does the certainty of executing its design. Hearne's reaction initially is to condemn the Indians' design, but by that point the success of his venture is so tied to the Indians that when his hesitancy to attack the Eskimos is interpreted as cowardice, his own design is jeopardized. Dramatically he acquiesces, again realizing the unique and dangerous position he holds:

I never afterwards ventured to interfere with any of their warplans. Indeed, when I came to consider seriously, I saw evidently it was the highest folly for an individual like me, and in my situation, to attempt to turn the current of a national prejudice . . .

Virtually a captive of the Indians by this time, Hearne is forced not only to condone the inevitable massacre of the Eskimos, but, like other captives, he takes an active part, if largely a defensive one, in the attack.

. . . I determined to accompany them, telling them at the same time, that I would not have any hand in the murder they were about to commit, unless I found it necessary for my own safety. The Indians were not displeased at this proposal; one of them immediately fixed me a spear, and another lent me a broad bayonet . . .

Hearne minutely describes the preparations for the attack, both the physical and superstitious, as well as his own trepidation. The actual battle, as expected, is a tragic farce. The sleeping Eskimos are quickly massacred as they flee their tents, and, though other captives and explorers recount more numerically impressive massacres, Hearne's involvement is so personal and the effect of his description so real that his writing transcends the involvement he so assiduously rejected earlier. The climax of the battle, the murder of the young Eskimo girl who seeks his protection, is a powerful symbol of Hearne's guilt over his approbation of the massacre:

. . . when the first spear was struck into her side she fell down at my feet, and twisted around my legs, so that it was with difficulty that I could disengage myself from her dying grasps . . . even at this hour I cannot reflect on the transactions of that horrid day without shedding tears.

Hearne's epilogue to this tale of the Indians' cruelty is perhaps less severe, but so pathetic and final as to maintain the level of the narrative of the earlier butchery. An old and blind Eskimo woman, oblivious to what had passed a few hundred yards away, was fishing by a waterfall; turning to greet her supposed relative, she was instead "transfixed to the ground in a few seconds, and butchered in a most savage manner."

It is doubtful if Hearne could have achieved the degree of integration that he did without the catalytic effect of Matonabee's presence. So great was the communion between these two men that when La Pérouse captured Prince of Wales fort in 1782 and Hearne, then governor, surrendered to the French commander and was carried off a prisoner, Matonabee quietly hanged himself. Whether this final act of an Indian still in the prime of his life was through sorrow or shame; Hearne notes that "he is the only Northern Indian who, that I have ever heard, put an end to his own existence". Probably no Canadian explorer depended so much upon one Indian for the success of his venture, and probably also no Indian exists in early Canadian journals with so dichotomic a nature: so split between the ideals of the Indian and the white man, and yet so dedicated to the execu-

tion of the wishes of both races. It is impossible to understand the success of Hearne's last expedition without appreciating the degree to which Hearne allowed himself to be physically and psychologically captured by the Indians, and more specifically by his attachment to, and affection for, Matonabee. Hearne's journal, as a consequence, is the product of a strong sense of purpose and an inquisitive spirit; of a unique degree of integration into a voyage and with the only people who were a real part of the territory he covered.

AS EXCEPTIONAL JOURNAL WRITERS, Jewitt and Hearne exemplify the best characteristics in the genre of travel literature; equally they demonstrate how all travel journals, whether of Initiation or Exploration, are dichotomic in their intrinsic nature — at once purposeful, direct and immediate, yet moving into realms of the archetype: the quest, self-preservation, alienation, and search for identification. Each Explorer's journal, then, starts with either a scientific, geographic, or commercial purpose, just as each Captivity journal commences with the single theme of preservation; but both, depending upon the nature of the individual, develop to some degree toward universality, toward themes essential to the human situation. Thus, every journal reflects the spirit of altercation, between immediacy and universality, between its scientific or commercial form and its artistic form. The more readable journals, those which transcend their immediate and contemporary purpose, like Jewitt's and Hearne's, unconsciously approach the genre of the novel, and thus can be judged both in their actual and their archetypal categories.

Overt heroism may be accepted, even applauded, in the literature of heroic ages, but in more sober and rationalistic periods the reader distrusts such an approach and his criticism is liable to be cynical and damning. Few Canadian journal writers could be accused of this type of self-sufficient heroism; if anything, they are only too aware of their own physical and psychological weaknesses. Their heroism, then is of the kind with which identification is possible; the essentially weak or very ordinary man forced by circumstances to endure and to exceed his own expectations. Heroism, in such conditions, becomes admirable, personal and, ultimately, real.

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THE CANADIAN POET

Part II. After Confederation

A. J. M. Smith

WHEN WE TURN from the poetry of the generations just before and just after Confederation to that of the present or the near present, we find that there is the same distinction to be drawn between the explicit and somewhat journalistic *verse* that states or discusses in explicit terms the problems which face the people living north of the U.S. border, and the *poetry*, which expresses, (indirectly and implicitly), the *spiritual reality* which makes a nation.

To speak first of what I call the explicit verse, a very sharp difference will be observed at once. The poets of the earlier time wrote, as Lighthall had pointed out, cheerfully, hopefully, eagerly. They were expressing a faith — not necessarily a very informed one, but natural and very tenaciously held, something akin to what passes for conviction and opinion in the mind of the mythical man-in-the-street and is the basis upon which democratic elections are lost or won — a faith in the common interests and common heritage of all Canadians or, at least (and this cannot be left unremarked today) of all English-speaking Canadians. Sangster, Mair, Roberts all testified to this in their patriotic and political verse. The verse of the modern poet, on the other hand, tends to be critical and satiric. It is the flaws, shortcomings, and failures that the poet now sees looming large, while the ideal and the hope somehow fails to move him deeply enough for him to make poetry out of it.

One of the most explicit of the attempts made by a modern poet to come to terms with the problem of what it means to be “Canadian” was made — ironically enough, perhaps — by a young English writer, Patrick Anderson, who lived in Montreal in the late thirties and the early forties, became a Canadian

citizen, and edited an influential little poetry magazine called *Preview*, along with F. R. Scott, P. K. Page, and others, among whom for a time were Irving Layton and John Sutherland. Anderson was a fellow-traveller, if not actually a communist, and his view of Canadian history and the future of Canada was an orthodox Marxist one: "And the land was. And the people did not take it." But in a section of the poem called "Cold Colloquy", Anderson presented us with one of the first and one of the wittiest expressions in contemporary verse of our self-conscious and confused hesitation to enter into what the poet (in this case, at least) seems to believe is a great and manifest destiny.

In the poem the spirit of Canada speaks. It is in reply to "their" question — not "my" question or "our" question I must not fail to notice —

What are you . . . ? . . . they ask, their
 mouths full of gum,
 their eyes full of the worst silence of the
 worst winter in a hundred years.
 And she replies: I am the wind that wants a flag.

(That want at least has been supplied.)

I am the mirror of your picture
 until you make me the marvel of your life.
 Yes, I am one and none, pin and pine
 snow and slow,
 America's attic, an empty room,
 a something possible, a chance, a dance
 that is not danced. A cold kingdom.

Are you a dominion of them? they ask, scurrying

 Most loyal and empirical, she says, in ice ironic . . .

And so the poem goes on, purring in puns and definitions. After "What are you?" the question is, "What is the matter then? And the answer is, "The matter is the promise that was never taken." Inevitably there comes another question:

What shall we do then . . . ? they ask, English
 and French, Ukrainians, Poles, Finns . . .

and the poet answers — and now at the end the writer ceases to be a satirist, a writer of clever verse, and becomes a patriot and an idealist — like Sangster or Roberts. Though with this difference. They thought the Fathers of Confederation

were God. They uttered their *Fiat*, and lo! Canada was; the modern poet — if a poet writing in 1945 is modern — places the creation of a true Dominion still in the future. But he answers the question in spiritual and idealistic terms, not in terms of economics or sociology or the close-reasoned reports of Royal Commissions, but in poetic terms:

Suffer no more the vowels of Canada
to speak of miraculous things with a cleft palate . . .

How apt, how true, and how contemporary this is, after more than twenty years! What a perfect illustration of Ezra Pound's definition of literature as "news that stays news!"

Two other distinguished contemporary Canadian poets have dealt with this theme, Earle Birney and Irving Layton, but in their treatment of it neither deviates very deeply into poetry. They have kept carefully on the surface of things, hewed to the line of satire, and steered religiously away from faith, hope, and patriotic enthusiasm. Birney is the wittier of the two and his destructive but very impressive analysis of our national weaknesses is salutary. It is found at its clearest in the poem is called "Canada: Case History", written in 1948. The definitions are witty and deadly, and their truth will be recognized immediately by men of all parties.

This is the case of a high-school land,
deadset in adolescence,
loud treble laughs and sudden fists,
bright cheeks, the gangling presence.
This boy is wonderful at sports
and physically quite healthy;
he's taken to church on Sunday still
and keeps his prurience stealthy.

(This one line is no longer true. We publish our prurience now, and occasionally put it on TV.)

He doesn't like books except about bears,
collects new coins and model planes
and never refuses a dare.
His Uncle spoils him with candy, of course,
yet shouts him down when he talks at table.
You will note that he has got some of his French mother's looks,
though he's not so witty and no more stable.

He's really much more like his father and yet
if you say so he'll pull a great face.
Parents unmarried and living abroad,
relatives keen to bag the estate,
schizophrenia not excluded,
will he learn to grow up before it's too late?

It's a good question, and we should thank the poet for asking it. I don't think we should expect him to answer it. It's for us to answer.

Let us consider now the Confederation ode in Irving Layton's new collection, *Periods of the Moon*. This ode is not of course a patriotic encomium like the cheerful exhortations of Mair or Roberts. It is an angry and effectively coarse satire. And it is not really about Confederation; it is about something more important than Confederation; it is about the way Canadians today think and feel (or *don't* think and feel) about Canada and Confederation and the Centennial — about what, in fact, is going to make the Confederation a reality or a sham. It is a satire on the artificially inseminated enthusiasm that government agencies, civic agencies, business organizations, and ad-men are feverishly drumming-up and which the poet feels — not without a certain grim satisfaction — will be in vain.

It is easier, no doubt, to point out weaknesses and errors, and cry "Stinking fish!" than to suggest remedies, corrections, and reformations. That is the job for the historian, the political scientist, the economist, the statistician, the member of a Royal Commission. Perhaps the poet may cheer when the good work has been accomplished, but if in the meantime he makes use of "satire, invective and disrespectful verse" — to steal a phrase from the title page of *The Blasted Pine* — to prick the bubble of our complacency and jolt us awake to a proper realization of our true position in relation to one another, to the United States, Great Britain, and the world at large, he will have performed an essential service.

WHAT THE POET as satirist and critic has been saying in verse, which when well written has the advantage of being concise and memorable, has been stated over and over again by our academic historians and political philosophers. Compare, for example, with the passage from Patrick Anderson's "Poem on Canada" I was quoting just now, these sentences by Professor John Conway, writing in the *Atlantic Monthly* for November 1964:

We Canadians have so far failed to enter fully into our legacy, and this is our one great, overreaching problem as our centennial approaches. On its solution everything else depends. We have failed to vest sovereignty where it properly belongs — in the Canadian people. Instead, we have allowed it to remain in the British monarchy, and in doing so we have divided our country and inhibited our emotional and creative development as a people.

It is significant perhaps that here too, in the essay of a professor of history writing exactly a hundred years later we have the same conviction as that which the Rev. Hartley Dewart expressed in his Introduction to our first anthology — that creative maturity in poetry and the arts is the result of true nationhood. Professor Conway continues:

When we take the long overdue step and transfer sovereignty to where it properly belongs, it will become clear that Canadians — British, French, and European alike — have been and are engaged in a common enterprise which is of far greater concern than the separate concerns of each group; and just as the United States has given classic expression in literature, philosophy, and political theory to its interpretation of the New World, so will we begin to give classic expression to ours.

One might pursue this subject farther and give illustrations of the instructive and often amusing parallels between the writings of historians or social critics and those of the poets, or at least of the satirists among them, and place beside the verses by Frank Scott entitled “W. L. M. K.” —

— He never let his on the one hand
Know what his on the other hand was doing.

and

Do nothing by halves
Which can be done by quarters —

some sentences by Professor Underhill:

His statesmanship has been a more subtly accurate, a more flexibly adjustable Gallup poll of Canadian public opinion than statisticians will ever be able to devise. He has been the representative Canadian, the essential Canadian, the ideal Canadian, the Canadian as he exists in the mind of God.

Here you will see the arts of verse and prose coming close together — prose as concise and pointed as verse, and verse as sensible as prose. But I must leave

this tempting field to the graduate student of Canadian literature who wishes to find a subject for a dissertation that may prove both useful and entertaining.

INSTEAD, I will offer some general observations about the state of poetry and the status of poets here and now.

The situation today is immensely different, not only from a hundred years ago but from the time in the middle twenties when I, along with F. R. Scott, Earle Birney, A. M. Klein, Eustace Ross, and Raymond Knister, began to write. I say "along with", but that's not quite accurate. I knew Scott and Klein, of course, but Ross and Knister and Birney were unknown to us. I followed avidly the European and American literary journals and little magazines — particularly *The Dial* in New York and *transition* and *This Quarter* in Paris. (In Canada there was only the *Canadian Forum* — and it had one fine feather in its cap: it had printed E. J. Pratt's "The Cachalot".) We were astonished and delighted to find in the pages of the avant garde magazines writing by Canadians — Morley Callaghan's first stories and poems by Raymond Knister — and when some of my poems appeared in *The Dial* I found also those of another Canadian, W. W. E. Ross — hailed recently by Raymond Souster as "the first modern Canadian poet."

These were the first stirrings of the new poetry movement in Canada. But for the most part as the twenties came to a close the picture was still pretty dismal. The maple leaf school of patriotic nature poetry under the aegis of the Canadian Authors Association and a group of genteel traditionalists among editors and publishers forced most of the new young poets to look outside Canada, knowing that acceptance by *The Dial* or *Poetry* (Chicago) or one of the Parisian experimental magazines meant that we had attained a higher standard of excellence than was demanded by any Canadian journal — always excepting the *Forum*.

The atmosphere, indeed, when I began to write, is very well summed up and expressed in Frank Scott's now famous poem "The Canadian Authors Meet." It was not until 1936 that we were able to persuade a Toronto publisher to bring out a little group anthology called *New Provinces* containing work by the Montreal poets Scott, Klein, Kennedy, and myself and the Toronto poets Finch and Pratt — the latter only being well known. The book made no impact at all — except perhaps on other still younger poets — only eight-six copies were sold, and the new poetry movement, which in Canada seemed to be limited to the books

of E. J. Pratt, had to wait until the early forties to get under way. Then, with the criticism of W. E. Collin and E. K. Brown and the first books of Birney, Klein, Scott, myself, and a little later P. K. Page, Patrick Anderson, Raymond Souster, Dorothy Livesay, Louis Dudek, and . . . but the list grows too long, and has never ceased to grow.

Today, after the amazing acceleration, starting in the forties and continuing through the fifties and sixties with an ever-increasing ferment, Canadian poetry presents at first sight a bewildering spectacle of schools and individuals busily writing, gesticulating, reading, declaiming, quarrelling, praising, lecturing, teaching, applying for grants, appearing on television, grinding out little mags on mimeograph machines, and frequently producing new and genuine poetry.

AT ONE TIME it seemed to me that Canadian poets could be roughly divided into two schools, the native and the cosmopolitan, and I think it was Northrop Frye who added the necessary corrective — that this dichotomy is not a matter of division between poets or groups of poets but a division within the mind of every poet. The division that exists today, however, between poets and groups of poets is between the traditional or academic, the cultivated poets, you might say, and the new primitives, whose tradition goes back no farther than to William Carlos Williams, Charles Olson, or his disciple Robert Creeley, and, in some cases, to Allen Ginsberg. This is an American school of (if I may be allowed a paradox) sophisticated primitives. They hail from San Francisco and Black Mountain College — Cid Corman's little magazine *Origins* was published at Black Mountain and rather surprisingly, among the Canadian writers it published were Morley Callaghan, Irving Layton, and Margaret Avison. The chief influence of these western American experimentalists has been felt in Vancouver, in the little poetry magazine *Tish*, and in the verse of such poets as John Newlove, George Bowering, Lionel Kearns, and even younger writers featured in Raymond Souster's recent anthology *New Wave: Canada*.

In Canada, however, it is not groups or broad general divisions that stand out most clearly, but individuals — men of vigorous personality, who go striding up and down the land (aided and abetted by the Canada Council, the CBC, and the universities) speaking their poetry and standing up for the poetic way of life, as opposed to the life of unimaginative acceptance in the mechanized world of ad-men, mass-communication, and pollster politics. It is their immersion in this

world they never made and don't like that makes so many of our best poets — Earle Birney, Frank Scott, Irving Layton, Leonard Cohen — satirists and ironic comedians in a surprisingly large proportion of their work and forces some of the younger poets into abstract expressionism, black humour, and the cultivation of pop art as a revolt against the conformist art of the establishment.

Of recent years also some of our best poets have realized that to be Canadian is not enough, just as to be British or American is not enough. In the thirty years that include what happened at Guernica, Belsen, Dresden, and Hiroshima, events of such stupefying horror occurred — and are still occurring in Viet Nam — that the poet is forced to realize that his responsibility rests with all mankind and that he shares the guilt of all mankind. Something of this is felt in the poems of India and the Far East of Scott and Birney, of South America and Mexico by Birney and Louis Dudek, and in the poems of Germany and Spain in Irving Layton's newest collection.

In the prefaces to his last four or five volumes — he has published five since 1961 — Layton has presented the conception of the universal moral responsibility of the poet with vigour and clarity; and while the presentation is sometimes marred by an accretion of personal "soundings-off", these do not invalidate the truth and passion of the poet's main message. "Today, poets must teach themselves to imagine the worst. . . . If the poet is to win back the praise he once enjoyed as the supreme 'interpreter of the age' he must learn again to address himself to the moral and psychological dilemmas of his time. Though satisfying verbally and technically mere blabbermouthing is out. . . ."

If this should mean discarding of about sixty per cent of Layton's own poetry, the rest would be the stronger for it. And I take it as a sign of continuous development that this element of responsibility, strength and sincerity has been increasing in proportion with every volume he has written in this decade.

As I close, I would like to set beside the prefaces of Irving Layton the preface written in 1941 by a young Canadian named Bertram Warr to a small pamphlet of his poems published by Robert Graves. Warr was a pacifist, who had tried to enlist in the Red Cross but was drafted into the Royal Air Force and was killed in action over Germany on April 3, 1943.

Ours [he wrote] is an age of renunciation. It is an age of probing and reflection, of scrutiny of tradition and dogma in the hard light of reason. And with each abandonment of the outworn things that for so long had meant security to us, we grow just a little more tight-lipped. We feel the new hardness of scepticism, and as tie after tie is cut, in manners, religion, science, the whole field of contact be-

tween man and man, there comes over us the lassitude of disillusionment. . . . We are not yet ready for this new world that has grown up from the second decade of the century. Successive shocks have proved too much for us and we have been driven into retreat, still clinging to the shreds of old things, and too untried to step forward and gaze upon the new in their true light. We have gone backward to lick our wounds and debate, somewhat morbidly, whether to carry on the fight, or to renounce with all the rest, those other bases of our being, Beauty and Love and the Search for Truth.

Many of the most serious of our younger poets have, perhaps, gone backward to lick their wounds, but one thing is clear, even in the most far-out of the Beat poets, that the search is still, if sometimes in the most unexpected places, for Beauty, Love, and Truth. The contemporaries and compatriots of the Canadian poet today may not be any longer Yeats or Eliot but rather Lorca and Brecht, Pablo Neruda, René Char, William Carlos Williams, and Mayakovsky, and the art that he must aim at is neither native nor cosmopolitan but universal.

A CORE OF BRILLIANCE

Margaret Avison's Achievement

Lawrence M. Jones

MARGARET AVISON's experimental poetry has come of age; we may now place her in the front rank of Canadian poets. This is obvious to those who have read her latest volume, *The Dumbfounding*, and more especially to those who had seen the merits of her early work, both in anthologies (such as A. J. M. Smith's of 1943) and magazines, and in her first book, *Winter Sun*. It seems clear that the elements of pattern, style and content used superbly, but often sporadically in the early poetry, have finally been fused and formed into pearls of great lyrical vitality and depth.

The key to the change in Avison's poetry may not be obvious to the casual reader. A poem such as "The Butterfly" in the 1943 anthology reveals her acute sense of vision and the verbal facility with which it is expressed; describing the insect, she says:

I remember it, glued to the grit of that rain-strewn beach
that glowered around it, swallowed its startled design
in the larger iridescence of unstrung dark.

Poems such as "To Professor X, Year Y" and "Thaw" in *Winter Sun* are framed in that historical perspective Avison often adds to the visual one; and the well-constructed "Apocalyptic?" is an exercise in metaphysical speculation about the purpose of life, re-echoed in other poems such as "The Mirrored Man" and "From a Provincial". Avison's use of all these perspectives — the visual, the historical, the metaphysical — may easily be recognized, but they still do not provide the clue to what A. J. M. Smith calls in his review of *The Dumbfounding* "an immense step forward". What is that clue?

In an article she was kind enough to send me before its publication, entitled "I wish I had known . . .", Miss Avison makes some statements which shed light

on this question. The article concerns the progress of her personal beliefs from the “will to be good” of her early days as a minister’s daughter to the present “getting to be where Christ’s suffering goes, terribly on” of the mature religious poet. She tells how the period between these points — that of church-joining and Christian service — had given her a “blurry but adequate” portrait of God and a concept of Jesus as “about the best person who ever lived”, and how the Bible became increasingly “opaque” to her as she substituted her invented Christ for the scriptural Person.

She then describes the single most important event in this progress of belief, the occasion of January fourth, 1963, when the “Jesus of resurrection power” revealed Himself to her when she was supposedly alone; says the poet:

I would not want to have missed what he gave then: the astounding delight of his making himself known at last, sovereign, forgiving, forceful of life.

Under the influence of the refocusing caused by this experience, she looks back upon her previous life and work and notes “how grievously I cut off his way by honouring the artist” and sees her past as a “long wilful detour into darkness”.

In the light of these revealing statements, much of *The Dumbfounding* is immediately illuminated. Take, for example, the poem entitled “Person”. This seems to me to be the poetic record of the liberation experience of 1963; the experience is given as a kind of “flashback”, for the initial position is one of freedom:

Sheepfold and hill lie
under the open sky.

from which we are taken back in time to discover what the original captivity, perhaps to her misconception of God, was really like:

This door that is “I AM”
seemed to seal my tomb
my ceilinged cell
(not enclosed earth, or hill)
there was no knob or hinge.

. . . Beneath
steel tiers, all walled, I lay
barred, every way.

This realization that “I lay barred, every way” is in reality the first stage of the

experience; the concept of the “I AM”, with its overtones of sovereignty and unapproachability, had kept her from a personal relationship with God.

The second stanza outlines the second stage in the liberation — the moment of realization that the door to freedom is actually a Person:

“I am.” The door
was flesh; was there.

No hinges swing, no latch
lifts. Nothing moves. But such
is love, the captive may
in blindness find the way:

In all his heaviness, he passes *through*.

Obviously, this is no forceful, door-swinging operation, but rather the acceptance of, the love-response to the one who says “I am the door of the sheep” (John 10:7).

The final stage in the experience is that of the new freedom of the sheepfold:

So drenched with Being and created new
the flock is folded close, and free
to feed — His cropping clay, His earth —

from which the glories of the Morning Star (Revelation 22:16: “I am the bright and morning star”) may be seen:

and to the wooly, willing bunt-head, forth
shining, unseen, draws near
the Morning Star.

“Person” is unquestionably central to *The Dumbfounding* in that without the experience it contains, the rest of what Smith calls in his review the “act of worship and submission” could not have been written.

The title poem falls into the category of an “act of worship” of the Christ who deigned to become human on man’s account. The first stanzas speak of the rejection of such a Christ by men:

When you walked here,
took skin, muscle, hair,
eyes, larynx, we
withheld all honour: “His house is clay,
how can he tell us of his far country?”

Your not familiar pace
 in flesh, across the waves,
 woke only our distrust.
 Twice-torn we cried "A ghost"
 and only on our planks counted you fast.

Dust wet with your spittle
 cleared mortal trouble.
 We called you a blasphemer,
 a devil-tamer.

What strikes me most forcibly in this presentation is the aptness and terseness of Avison's phraseology; men trying to dismiss God-in-flesh "withheld all honour", and in such Christ "awoke only our distrust", and juxtaposed with these phrases those describing Christ's *real* actions: "in flesh, across the waves", "cleared mortal trouble" and the ultimate and poignant "You died". The last four stanzas extend the mystery and outline Christ's reception of men, that he is "all-men's-way", that when a man turns to him he makes "new flesh" and leads constantly to Calvary where he has fathomed "dark's uttermost".

The "dumbfounding", then, is the person of Christ himself, and Avison has painted the same portrait as the prophet Isaiah of the man who was "despised and rejected of men" yet "bare the sins of many" (Isaiah 53:3, 12). The other religious lyrics which are central to *The Dumbfounding* examine other facets of the poet's newfound relationship with Christ. "The Word" deals with the problem of disciplinship, specifically as it is the subject of the statement in Luke 14:33: "whosoever he be of you that forsakest not all that he hath, cannot be my disciple". The essential comparison, skilfully used by the poet, is of the measure of our "forsaking" with that of Christ's "being forsaken", and comes to the conclusion that his death explodes preconceived notions about the image of Jesus, destroys the picture of the intellectual, physical or even spiritual benefactor — for he has crossed the line from "benefactor" to "saviour":

The line we drew, you crossed,
 and cross out, wholly forget,
 at the faintest stirring of what
 you know is love, is One
 whose name has been, and is
 and will be, the
 I AM.

“... Person, or A Hymn on and to the Holy Ghost” discovers a pattern for prayer whereby the poet’s self is “released from facelessness” and given spiritual power:

so that where you
(unseen, unguessed, liable
to grievous hurt) would go
I may show him visible.

Yet perhaps the most complicated and effective of the poems in the volume is the one entitled “Branches”. It is almost a poetic thesis on the confrontation of Christianity and the modern world; it is remarkable for the various uses to which its central ideas are put, and for the way in which the poet ties them together. Contemporary men are first compared to the branches of a dying tree:

The diseased elms are lashing
in the hollowing vaults of air.
In movie-washroom-mirrors
wan selves, echoing, stare.

In the context of “Toronto’s whistling sunset”, asks the poet, “who would hear wholeheartedness/ and make the world come true?”; this inability to apprehend the Light causes us to seek some pseudo-solace in darkness:

The cinnamon carnation
blows funeral incense here.
In darkness is a narcotic,
a last rite, silenced care.

the value of which the poet questions:

Can *this* kind of blanking
bring us to our knees?

Again, in contrast to man’s ignorance, we see the knowledge of Christ, what he accomplished for man:

But he died once only
and lives bright, holy, now
hanging the cherried heart of love
on this world’s charring bough.

In tasting this fruit of love, we can come into the joy of the knowledge of life in Christ, which in turn gives a reason for fellowship and discipleship:

Wonderingly, one by one:
 "Gather. Be glad."
 We scatter to tell what the root
 and where life is made.

It seems to me that the two symbols in this poem are cunningly interwoven, so that each imparts some meaning to the other. The overworked poetic motif of light and darkness is given a new vitality: the light of the world ("Toronto's whistling sunset") is contrasted to the "Light that blinded Saul"; the four different meanings given to the word "light" in the ninth stanza do not, because of the seriousness of what precedes and follows it, become merely an experiment with words, but the accurate summing-up of a modern attitude:

Stray selves, crowding for light
 make light of the heart's gall
 and, fly-by-night, would light on
 the Light that blinded Saul.

The tree-symbol is also put to striking use — as the tree of humanity, with its diseased roots and lashing branches, as the evidence (in a symbolically tangible form) of the fruition of David's knowledge of wholeheartedness (the lush date-palms), and as the handiwork of the Gardener who causes love to blossom on the skeletal boughs of humanity's tree.

Finally, the word "root", left for emphasis to the last stanza, is the organic connection between the two symbols — for without the action of the light to create the necessary life-energy there can be no root, and without the root there can be no tree. The action of the Light parallels this: it is only in the spiritual "photosynthesis" which Christ makes possible that "life is made".

It may be contested that the visual perspective of which I have spoken earlier as characterizing Margaret Avison's early poetry has become, in *The Dumbfounding*, a blatantly Christian one; admittedly, the "Jesus of resurrection power" has had a shaping effect upon her imagination, for he is as forceful in her work as he has become "forceful for life". But one who contests that Avison's vision has been twisted to fit her new faith must still contend with the other four-fifths of *The Dumbfounding* that is not overtly religious. Acclimatized as it has become to the city and its rushing life, Avison's vision often penetrates keenly into some feature of urban existence, as it does in "July Man":

Old, rain-wrinkled, time-soiled, city-wise, morning man . . .

In the sound of the fountain
you rest, at the cinder-rim, on your bench.

The rushing river of cars
makes you a stillness, a pivot, a heart-stopping
blurt, in the sorrow
of the last rubbydub swig, the searing, and
stone-jar solitude lost, and yet,
and still — wonder (for good now) and
trembling:

The too much none of us knows
is weight, sudden sunlight, falling
on your hands and arms, in your lap,
all, all, in time.

Here the effect of “time-soiled” at the beginning and “all, all, in time” at the end of the poem indicate its theme: the burden (“too much”) of temporality weighing down upon humanity. This penetrative power may well be a by-product of Avison’s spiritual experience, as may the increased interest in meta-physical connections rather than historical ones. “Natural/Unnatural”, for another example, gives us an insight into the nature of human hope and despair:

Hope is a dark place
that does not refuse
fear?

True, the natural light is a pressure on my ribs:
despair — to draw that in, to
deflate the skin-pouch, crunch out the
structure in one
luxuriant deep-breathed zero —
dreamed already, this is
corruption.

I fear *that*.
I refuse, fearing; in hope.

As might be expected, though, the core or pivot for which the early poetry sought, has been found in the “strange heart’s force”, the very conscious presence of a living Christ in the poet’s experience. This is what gives power to the basically simple poem “Christmas: Anticipation” where the spirit of Zacharias of the first Christmas is contrasted with the shopping-and-vacation spirit of its modern counterpart:

The patient years in the appointed place
brought Zacharias, dumb with unbelieving,
flame-touched, to front
the new sky . . .

The buyers wedge in doorways
waiting for lights, lifts, taxes,
The boy lonely in love moves with the wind
through electric bright, through fading, light.
The old man with his censer, dazed down the
centuries, rays his
dry-socketed eyes, dimming
still, till he could believe, towards,
with, joy.

This is a very different treatment of a Christian celebration than that seen in "Easter" of *Winter Sun*; there Avison approached her subject in terms of a season, here it is in terms of a Person.

Whatever else may be said about Margaret Avison's poetry, it seems to me that her "conversion" has given it a hard core of brilliance from which her meditations upon life radiate; and this of course connects her with a poet like Gerard Manley Hopkins (whose influence she has acknowledged in a letter to me) in the tradition of what T. S. Eliot liked to call "meditative verse". But their poetry is much more than that term implies; there is a keenly-felt and powerfully-expressed view in it of the relation between Christianity and modern society, between the resurrected Christ and the contemporary individual, that cannot be dismissed as pious versifying. What has been said of Hopkins in this connection (by Louis Martz in *The Poetry of Meditation*, 1954), can also be said of Margaret Avison:

. . . the self created in this poetry is one that tries to speak with full awareness of a supernatural presence, one that feels the hand of the supernatural upon himself, and upon all created things. Thus the learning, the logic, the philosophy that help to form this individual self are easily joined with perceptions of a bird, or a broom, or a love-ballad; for all these things are viewed as issuing, though sometimes once removed, from an omnipresent source of creative power. Such meditative poems, then, are composed in "current language heightened", moulded, to express the unique being of an individual who is seeking to learn, through intense mental discipline, *how to live his life in the presence of divinity*.

THE OLD AGE OF THE NEW

Norman Newton

IT WILL NO DOUBT seem unfair that I should use the receipt of review copies of eleven books of Canadian verse¹ as an excuse for writing an essay on the state of Canadian poetry. Has not each of these poets his own individuality? Is it fair, then, to think of him as an example of something? Unfortunately, while each of these poets does necessarily have his own individuality, as a human soul, he does not as a poet. There is a disconcerting sameness about most of the poems, all the more disconcerting because each poet clearly believes his statement to be intensely personal. More generally, one cannot help noting the similarities between this new Canadian verse and that produced in the United States, the United Kingdom and other English-speaking countries. It is as if all idiosyncrasies were being ironed out. There are those who would convince us that this monotony of texture is the result of that shared vision which comes at the beginning of a new and exciting era. I would put it down, rather, to the exhaustion of a style.

Since they possess so little individuality, there would be very little point in my discussing each of these books individually. Instead, I will select some passages which best illustrate the elements these books have in common.

It is true that the critics and poets together talk as if we were living in an era of literary revolution. And in a way, we are; but it is precisely the same revolution "begun" by Jarry's *Ubu Roi* (1899) or by Mallarmé's *Un Coup de Dés* (1897), a revolution which had already settled into respectability by the time T. S. Eliot came along. In short, we are living in an era of permanent revolution, which, as readers of Nazi and Communist history will know, is a peculiar kind of intellectual stasis characterized by a very rapid circular motion around the same point.

Kathleen Raine, a good poet, has recently published a fine book entitled *Defending Ancient Springs*, in which appears the following perceptive statement — “It might certainly seem that revolution for its own sake, transformation as such, an instantaneous gesture which expresses finally nothing but its own instantaneity, process as such, has become the be-all and end-all of art; process so accelerated that all images have dissolved into the flux of continuous transformation, so much so that form, in such art, can no longer be said to exist.”

Now, in the poems to be reviewed, form certainly does not exist; but then true form is rare. By form I do not mean what results from the skilled use of fixed rhyme schemes, regular metres, and the traditional repertoire of tropes. Every poet should be able to handle these, which have in themselves some kind of innate life, just as every composer should be able to write a traditional fugue and every painter paint a convincing nude. Even if the poet does not elect to use them in his mature work, the ability to handle them intelligently is indispensable evidence of an elementary but necessary seriousness about the craft aspects of his art. Yet a poet may be, like Auden, a complete master of all poetic techniques, and rarely succeed in creating work which is formally beautiful. I am referring rather to something which has the coherent, self-contained, living beauty of an apple or a new-born child: a poet without craft knowledge cannot realize such a work, but in itself it is the product of inspiration, and is unpredictable. This kind of formal beauty has been rare enough at any time in the past; it is much rarer in our century, at least in English. It is found in Eliot's *Four Quartets* but not in *The Waste Land*, in the last poems of Dylan Thomas, but not in his earlier ones, in Yeats but very rarely in Auden, in Edwin Muir and Vernon Watkins, occasionally in MacLeish, but almost never in Pound. Should we expect such a rare quality in English-Canadian poets, always provincial, but now provincial to a decadent tradition? What can we expect from those whose *masters* are such minor figures as Olson, Creeley and Ginsberg? Among Canadian poets I make an exception of Layton and Cohen, who are interesting examples of split personality: half of their verse is minor but good post-Symbolist work, dependent upon the European tradition: the other half, the ostentatiously North American half, is cheap, loud and shallow.

THE BEST FIRST; and it is depressing that the best poet in this collection should be George Bowering, because Bowering is not a major talent. His advantage is that he has a clearly defined aesthetic. It is a limited, almost a

jejune aesthetic; but it contains an idea, if not of the beautiful, of the appropriate: Bowering knows what experiences his style can cope with, and those it must leave alone. His poems are more or less innocent of truly poetic form, but they do follow, though obliquely, an "argument", and one finds, when one has finished reading them, that some kind of coherent statement has been made.

Bowering is a fairly close follower of the Black Mountain poets of the United States, Creeley, Olson and the rest, who are in turn followers of William Carlos Williams, and that eminent Sinologist and Egyptologist, Ezra Pound, or, as Bowering calls him, "Ez Pound". Their remote ancestor is Walt Whitman: not the prophetic oracular Whitman, who produced some of the most beautiful poetry of his age, but the Whitman of naturalistic snapshots, who often descended to bathos. This group, like the surrealists, neo-metaphysicals and Communists of the last generation, has a clear idea of what poetry should and should not be, and a corresponding set of political and social ideals. It also has the advantage of being at the tail end of one of the few poetic and political movements truly indigenous to Anglo-Saxon North America. Politically it springs, if one traces it back far enough, from the petit-bourgeois and frontier radicalism of the Jeffersonian and Jacksonian epochs of United States history, a kind of quirky utilitarianism which was reflected in Canada in the movement led by William Lyon Mackenzie (some of whose speeches, surely the most boring ones, have recently been versified — by somebody named Colombo, I believe). In this century, a similar impulse has expressed itself in Technocracy and Social Credit. The Black Mountain poets have a Leveller's concept of history, and an obsession with tools, whether mechanical or hand-directed. There is a hatred of "polite letters", in the old European and Bostonian sense ("poetry — PAH!" George Bowering says somewhere); but this understandable rejection of a long-dead tradition hides a deeper rejection both of finely-tuned wit and formal beauty. Even more deeply is hidden a rejection of any view of the world or poetry dependent upon non-materialist cosmologies. These poets are materialists to the core; but because they are archais-ing materialists, this fact is sometimes missed: it is clear that Olson, their master, loves flowers, old harbour-charts, sailing-ships and hand-tools, and he has at times vividly evoked 18th-century America; but things do not become spiritual by being old, and he is still utterly engrossed in the world of things. (He is also interested in astrology and the "occult", but simply as representative of a less tangible order of the material world.) Their world-view is horizontal, but has no place for the vertical. Thus, in language, there is a complete rejection of the idea that there are "high words" and "low words". One word is as good as an-

other, just as one man is as good as another, an idea Olson has attempted to justify by misquoting Dante on the use of "combed" and "shaggy" words. Words of themselves are considered to have no resonance or beauty: how can they, when events have no meanings other than those the poet gives to them? The other side of the coin is a kind of Pelagianism of vocabulary; this is sometimes mistaken for obscenity by casual readers, but is really evidence of an odd flat innocence, which assumes that the traditional associations of obscene words may be abolished by fiat. One is reminded of Gladstone among the prostitutes.

There are however, inconsistencies. Decadent Europe is rejected; but curiously enough decadent Asia is accepted. Bowering, for example, has expressed his fondness for the extremely refined, perhaps over-refined, *Tale of Genji*, in which Lady Murasaki Shikibu displays a sensibility one would have thought quite antithetical to his own. If Lady Murasaki, why not Jane Austen or Henry James? The Black Mountain poets and poetasters have inherited from Ezra Pound a fondness for "exotic" ancient and Asian cultures — archaic Greek, Egyptian, Chinese and Japanese, to which has been added, recently, an interest in ancient Mexican civilization. These cultures are used as standards, against which is set, to its disadvantage, the culture of the Christian West. Unfortunately, these cultures are superficially understood as a rule: Olson's *Mayan Letters* are, in places, ineffably silly. This superficiality seems to be a family curse, passed on from Old Ez. "I once asked Arthur Waley," Graves says in *The Crowning Privilege*, "how much Chinese Pound knew; Waley shook his head despondently."

Bowering's *Baseball: A Poem in the Magic Number Nine* is dedicated to the United States poet, Jack Spicer, who has described himself as "member of the California Republican Army which hopes by violent means to establish an independent California which will ally itself with France and China." In a very small way, Bowering is trying to make baseball, as Melville made whaling, a symbol of the cosmic process. In the first section, Bowering compares the world to a baseball thrown out into space:

In the beginning was the word, and the word was
'Play Ball!'

By references to the players whose careers he has followed, and who are now dead or retired, Bowering laments the fading of physical beauty and strength; in the eighth section he playfully fields his own lineup (left field Terpsichore, second base Polyhymnia and so on); in the ninth section the end of the game is compared to the coming on of physical age, and the deaths of civilizations.

The theme is a very traditional one. Homer, Pindar and the Elizabethan dramatic poets (if it is not ridiculous to mention such names in this context) had the ability to use games as symbols of the deep movements within the individual personality and within history. Many Amerindian games had a deeply symbolic aspect, particularly the Mexican game of *tlachtli*, to which more than one recent poet has referred. Bowering handles this old theme at a very low level of intensity. There is a certain wit here, but it rarely rises above amiable fooling:

God is the Commissioner of Baseball.
 Apollo is the president of the Heavenly League.
 The Nine Muses, his sisters
 the first all-girls baseball team.
 Archangel Michael the head umpire.
 Satan was thrown out of the game
 for arguing with the officials.

These are images one might playfully develop in conversation over a cup of coffee; they lack resonance and inevitability. The writing is “clean”, with no words wasted, but this is not quite enough to make prose poetic. Bowering often makes the fashionable mistake of confusing the conciseness of the poem with that of the telegram:

He’s still got big black moustache, shoots pool
 with his belly hanging over the rail.

The poem has, in fact, the thin neatness of the very minor poetry of the late 18th century; the images are pebbles arranged side by side, and a tone of suburban whimsy pervades even the “cosmological” parts. Bowering, in certain of his passages, might be a tone-deaf John Betjeman.

Like many contemporary poets, Bowering writes manifestos which only confuse us, because they seem intended to compensate for the defects of his verse. “What do I think about poetry?” he has written on the jacket of an earlier book, *Points on the Grid*, “Mainly that the job is a spoken art and that what is written down is a score, poetry being closer to music than any other artform. The written thing is no more the poem than the score is the symphony. Scores are written because you can’t take an orchestra or a poet to every farmhouse on the Canadian tundra. But meticulous care should be taken with notation of the poem, because you are trying to make a suggestion of the things the voice does”. And he adds, “Rhythm, I’ve always been told, is my forte.”

A somewhat ingenuous way of disarming us. What we are reading, it seems, is

not the real poem, only its "score", so we are not to judge it until we have heard Mr. Bowering speak it; a chance few of us will have. The truth is that rhythm is not Mr. Bowering's forte: his rhythms (which are prose rather than verse rhythms) are few and repetitious, and tend here towards short lines of prose dominated by a thumping and graceless ametrical beat with vaguely trochaic tendencies.

An even more obvious use of the red-herring manifesto is found in the preface to *Pilgrims of Peace*, by Bonnie Day. "Some of these verses are booby-trapped. They look innocent and old-fashioned and on the surface deceptively simple, and when you least expect it, they explode with meaning. So don't say I didn't warn you." In fact, these poems *are* innocent and old-fashioned, and it would be unkind to say any more than that about them. It is strange to read such a collection in conjunction with these others, which are so resolutely "modern" (though no less conventional); but maybe *Pilgrims of Peace* indicates one thing, that a return to regular rhyme and metrical patterns, and an avoidance of self-consciously incongruous imagery will not in itself "save" poetry.

A CONSIDERATION of these eleven books forces one to a conclusion which also arises, if with less brutal obviousness, from a consideration of the more complex and proficient work being produced in the United States, namely that the "experimental age" is over. "Free verse" has congealed into thick and sodden prose; and perhaps it is becoming clear that there never was such a thing as "free verse", but that most verse which passed under that name, if it was not versified prose, was either written in variable metres, which are as old as the Greeks, or psalmic verse, as derived from Scripture by Whitman, Claudel and others. The use of the startling image has become a nervous tic; the desire to shock the bourgeois has become either a childish amorality or a dogged and habitual obscenity; the learned evocation of the past has become a superficial exoticism; and the poetic demotic, which was to sweep away all "rhetoric" and "fine writing", has become a grotesque dialect with no relation to the speech-habits of any North American class. The "modern" techniques have been vulgarized; it is the characteristic of a vulgarized form that it becomes a universal template into whose shape the most incongruous materials are all too easily cut.

Bizarre forms of imagery, specifically developed to embody states of anguish or visionary derangement are used to express perfectly normal, indeed rather

mediocre emotions, as in the following quotation from Helene Rosenthal's "Better Housekeeping" (in *Peace is an Unknown Continent*)

In the morning
reading of race riots
I wield the vacuum
cleaner, with less than
my usual assurance.
I avoid
 the space
under the bed
where my responsibility
lives like a hamster
fed on scraps of
vegetarian pity.

(One might also note, parenthetically, a not untypical carelessness with the English language: presumably it is the hamster, not pity, which is a vegetarian.)

Jagged rhythms, whose original purpose was to realize an explosive tension, are used to express serene feelings or calm thoughts, as in the following strange tribute to the Parthenon by Ralph Gustafson (from *Mainline*) —

Proportion is all things of beauty.
Dimension, go beyond dimension.
It won't satisfy. Measure nothing,
Only in relation, the cornice balanced
Against the line, the line against
The truth, not as an existence
But as a meaning, the marble line
The respect to itself, the incumbent gods.

The specialized vocabulary of the exact sciences is used, not because the poet has a passionate love of scientific truth, but because he wishes to give his lines an air, usually spurious, of "wit" and learned precision.

Perhaps enzymatic indolence
dissolved the neuron sentries.

("No Exit", by Michael Freedman)

Love between man and woman (or in some cases a homosexual relationship) is seen exclusively and stupidly in terms of the sexual act. Indeed, in terms of the specific discharge of semen, which is usually described in language at once brutish and clinical. (There is no need to embarrass the reader by quotation.)

There is a specifically anti-Christian bias, and, in the case of some Jewish poets, an animus against both Christianity and Judaism. More generally, there is an antagonism to all religions. One does find occasional references to Eastern religions, but these are usually thrown in in order to score a point against Christianity. I see no evidence here of any serious interest in Eastern religions, even in Buddhism: most references to the East indicate no deeper knowledge than may be obtained from a few pocket books. Instead, there is an interest in magic, not as a form of supernatural philosophy (in which sense it has deeply influenced much European poetry), but as a reflection of a "higher" state of matters. Sometimes, indeed, magic is seen as simple technique, an easy way to power and knowledge. This is the world, not of Dr. Faustus, but his servant, Wagner, who now-a-days would probably take LSD, and compulsively play the *I Ching* and the Tarot cards.

I know a white magic,
a mystical magic —

Bonnie Day sings with her usual candour; but more often than not this obsession is beneath the surface.

When political ideas are expressed, they are usually nihilist or anarchist, unless they descend from the Jeffersonian radicalism I have discussed earlier. There is a hatred of authority, not because it is misused (the traditional argument of satire), but simply because it *is* authority, whether moral or coercive. Here, again, only the activists express this idea bluntly and openly; usually it is one of the unstated premises of the poem. Admittedly, such ideas do have a certain juvenile dash.

A very high proportion of these verses begin and end nowhere in particular. It is not a question, it should be noted, of implicit form, or of poems which are formed according to new principles. They are, simply, boneless. Far from attaining the formal beauty discussed earlier, most of these verses do not reach the level of craft competence. John Hulcoop, in introducing his book, *Three Ring Circus Songs*, makes a rather touching confession —

Sometimes there's everything to say and so many ways to sing it that you don't know where or how to start. Departure is also a problem when there are too many places you feel you might go to and too many earth-roads, sea-roads, air-roads you could travel by to arrive there.

I would venture to say that no true poet ever feels that way. Rather, he feels the poem has only one possible form and there is only one possible way to achieve it: the problem is finding the form and the way.

There are more ways of forestalling criticism than those discussed so far. Freedman makes the obligatory references to Dachau and Hitler, but it doesn't make his poems any better. Indeed, it is from his collection that I will select my nomination for the Worst Image of the Year —

. . . joy wells from your face
lubricating the distance.

A strong contender in the Embarrassing Self-Consciousness class is the beginning of his "Mistaken Boundaries" —

a hebrew's kiss
frightens you.

CAN ONE DETECT ANYTHING NEW at all in these poems, a "trend"? Perhaps one can detect a trend towards giving up the game entirely, towards a flattening out of the poem to the point where it becomes simple and manageable, a "poetry for everybody". The best poems in these eleven books (apart from Bowering's *Baseball*, which does show, as I have said, some art) are little descriptive pieces, "episodes from life", which might well have been paragraphs in short stories or novels. The best of them are those in which the imagery is thinnest, is either conventional or non-existent; and the reason for this is probably that a materialistic point of view, which does not recognize a higher level of events to which physical events may be compared, is not favourable to the development of effective imagery, indeed has no need for it. There are many verses in this category — Helene Rosenthal's "First Noel" and "Domestic Poetry", Dorothy Farmiloe's "Goodbye, Linda", Len Gasparini's "Union Station, Toronto" and "The Photograph of My Grandfather Reading Dante" and David McFadden's "The Flowermaster".

Every morning I look
and my dahlias are come bigger.
Every second day I water em
every third I hoe.

Soon I'll have to get out the stakes
for tying support, then
a little nitrogen, some chlorodene
just before blossom time.

Then they will blossom and I'll find out
how I'll make out at the fairs
am I first prize material this year
or second or third

and the thought sticks in my mind
leaving a weird series of afterthoughts
the thought of vandals hopping the fence
kicking all my dahlias down.

It is doubtful whether this can be called a poem, but it does make a simple unified statement. The inability to make a more complex metaphorical statement is shown by Helene Rosenthal's "Peace is an Unknown Continent". I will quote the first half of the poem. I might have chosen others just as bad by other poets: indeed, most of these poets are much worse than Helene Rosenthal, who has, at least, read a few books.

By degrees
 configuration
 of the heat-hazed land
 subsided
 at the zero
parallel.

It was a plotting time for her
a spacing time but slow . . .
pajamas didn't fit well
and she slept poorly.

 It is my seasonable job
 she said
 to navigate
 a mutinous crew.

The trouble was her dreams
which charted by old instinct,
while she held a compass
learning how to read
small, faceless digits
that shivered
ever north past alien forms
to magnet icecaps.

 Moby Dick
 makes exiles of us all

she said.
My brain is a white monster.

Sometimes the sea grew multiform
remembered shapes,
sargassos of vegetal nets
she had to cut through
to hold course.
The days kept keel
trimmed to the steel point
of the north star's gleam.

Necessity
is a good tool
she said.
Always it is contemporary.

At Cancer
she cut the tropic cord,
pulled with an even knot
to secure the cyclone latitudes
and went below.
The current warmed
a green pocket of sleep
wedged
between advancing
arctic
floes.

...
Snow logged the days.
Wind thinned the hours.

A psychological crisis of some unidentified kind (at first I thought it was the pain of giving birth, but this approach didn't work) is figured as a journey by ship into the polar regions. Apparently it is not important that we know what this crisis was, since the poet does not tell us; but we are entitled to ask that the image of the journey by sea be itself consistent, and carry us through a convincing analogue of the experience the poet wishes to embody. It is thus in *The Ancient Mariner*, and in the magnificent odes of Claudel. But genius is rare, and we are not entitled to ask any more than that the image be adequately realized within the context the poet has set himself — realized as well, perhaps, as the sea imagery of Olson's *Maximus Poems*.

If the following exegesis seems bizarre, the reader must blame my literal mind.

I take the first verse (“By degrees . . . zero parallel”) to mean that as the ship moved towards the equator, the land, as seen from the sea, became less mountainous. The voyage seems to have started below the equator; I could not guess at the coast-line referred to.

I take the next verse (“It was a plotting . . . she slept poorly”) to mean that the captain-poet coped with the boredom of the voyage by finally getting down to plotting a course. The fact that her pajamas didn’t fit well may seem trivial, but such apparently small matters become very important in the tropics.

I take the next verse (“It is my seasonable . . . a mutinous crew”) to mean that the crew is mutinous, which is not surprising, in view of the revelation in the next stanza (“the trouble . . . to magnet icecaps”) that the captain does not yet know how to read a compass. However, we are to understand that she has sailed these waters before “by old instinct”, which must have been quite a trick.

I do not know what is meant, in the next verse, by the line “Moby Dick / makes exiles of us all”; but it has a fine ring.

In the next verse, she is in the Sargasso Sea, which lies between 20° north and 35° north.

The observation in the next verse, that “Necessity is a good tool” also has a good, somewhat brassy ring, though it lacks the fine insouciant clangour of the statement about Moby Dick.

In the next verse she has reached the Tropic of Cancer (23½° North), where she performs a mysterious, but apparently efficacious operation which makes it possible for her to get some sleep. We must assume she falls asleep almost immediately, and sleeps for several days, since she awakes (no time having passed) to find herself surrounded by ice-floes.

The last two lines I translate roughly as “there was snow and wind”. I had some difficulty with the word “logged”, since in verse 6 the days have been compared to ships. A ship’s log is used to measure distance travelled, and one would assume the poet means that snow measured the distance travelled by the ship; but since the ship is itself a measurement of time this does not make sense. If the poet means that the days were remembered by how much snow they had, then the word “logged” is inappropriate, because of its very specific meaning as a nautical term. It is also difficult to understand how wind thinned the hours, since, on a sailing ship, a wind would increase activity, and thus “fill out” the hours, and lack of wind would cause them to drag.

It would be cruel to continue further. Enough has been said, I think, to indi-

cate that the imagery has neither been thought nor felt out, but is quite meaningless when read carefully, though it sounds vaguely impressive if one gallops through it. This is true of many of the poems in these books, most of which really do not merit discussion. It is true also of many more sophisticated poems written in the United States and England. Helene Rosenthal's poem, and the other poems under review, are specimens of a literary tradition in the last stage of senility.

IS POETRY DEAD? I can hardly think so. It has merely reached a very low point. There have been such nadirs before — when the mediaeval tradition degenerated into dry pedantry and abstraction, when the metaphysical image became first far-fetched, then ridiculous, when all Augustan heroic couplets began to sound the same. Something new replaced them, and something new will replace the present tradition. It will necessarily be “modern”, since this simply means poetry not written in the past. It will hardly, however, be “in the modern tradition”. If the “modern movement” really began with the publication of *Un Coup de Dés* in 1897, it probably ended with the 1929 crash. The poets of the thirties discovered little that was new; if anything, they settled territory which had already been explored. By the forties, perhaps, the land was exhausted. Since the Second World War, we in the English-speaking world have been living off our capital, and the account is now overdrawn.

¹ *Typescapes* by David Aylward (Coach House Press); *Lebanon Voices* by Bill Bissett (Weed and Flower Press); *Baseball* by George Bowering (Coach House Press); *Pilgrims of Peace and Other Poems* by Bonnie Day (Coach House Press); *Mainline*, edited by Dorothy Farmiloe (poems by Fred Cogswell, Alden Nowlan, Eugene McNamara, Dorothy Farmiloe, Algirdas Kryzanasuskas, Andrew Suknaski, Josephine Ryan, Al Pittman, Donald Polson, Len Gasparini, Rick Hornsey, Ralph Gustafson, C. H. Gervais, D. B. Kuspit, N. West Linder, Linda Wagner, George Bowering); *21 x 3* by Dorothy Farmiloe, Len Gasparini and Eugene McNamara (Gryphon Press); *Poems from Ritual* by Michael Harris and *Through the Telemeter* by Michael Freedman (privately published, Montreal); *Three-Ring Circus Songs* by John Hulcoop (Talonbooks); *The Saladmaker* by David McFadden (Imago); *Peace is an Unknown Continent* by Helène Rosenthal (Talonbooks).

AN OPEN GAP

Desmond Pacey

A Century of Canadian Literature: Un Siècle de Littérature Canadienne edited by H. Gordon Green and Guy Sylvestre, Ryerson/HMH. \$4.95.

TO REVIEW THIS BOOK is an extremely difficult and delicate task. No-one wants to knock an act of piety, or to play the cynic in response to an effusion of centennial enthusiasm. Nor does one lightly incur the inevitable charge of sour grapes, and as one who would have liked to edit such an anthology, and as an author (one of a select few) who was omitted from its pages, I am doubly vulnerable to this charge. I admit quite frankly to having approached the book with an adverse bias. I had suggested the editing of a similar centennial anthology to the Ryerson Press some ten years ago, and the late Lorne Pierce had given me his enthusiastic approval. In the meanwhile, of course, Lorne Pierce retired from the editorship of the Press, and later died, and his successors were less enthusiastic. I eventually abandoned the project on the advice of the current editor, and I was naturally a bit piqued to find that my publishers were sponsoring a similar volume under different editorship. However, I think that I am sufficiently broadminded to have swallowed this slight, to have conquered my bias, and to have given warm approval

to the book if it had been a good one. It is not.

I think one can safely maintain the proposition that books edited by committees are bad books, if bad only in their dullness. A corollary of this proposition would be that books edited by two committees are doubly bad books. This book was edited by two committees.

The anthology was planned, we are told in a publicity release, by the Canadian Authors Association and La Société des écrivains canadiens. The English portions of the book were edited by H. Gordon Green of the *Family Herald* with the assistance of a committee consisting of Fred Cogswell (poetry), John Patrick Gillese (fiction), and Earle Beattie (non-fiction). Thirteen other persons are also said to have had a part in shaping the English section of the book: John Robert Colombo, the late John Drainie, Dorothy Needles, Vernon Pope, Hugh Shaw, Craig Ballantyne, Guy Sylvestre, H. R. Percy, Phyllis Blakely, Gladys Taylor, Lynda Muir, George Bowering, and the late Fred Swayze. What a multitude of cooks for such a thin broth!

The French portions of the book were also chosen by a committee, in this case under the chairmanship of Guy Sylvestre. The French committee, however, was much more homogeneous: it consisted of fifteen eminent men of letters, all but three of them professors at leading universities, and representing between them the collective critical conscience of the French-Canadian literary world. As a result, the French items in this book give evidence of being far more carefully and consistently chosen than the English items. There are no conspicuous omissions from the list of French writers, with the exceptions of the members of the committee, who very modestly and properly omitted themselves (their English counterparts, by the way, were not equally modest: both Cogswell and Gillese are in the book, Gillese with a long and grossly didactic and sentimental short story ironically entitled "Especially Worthy".)

I am not really competent to judge the French section, but I am struck by the fact that everyone seems to be here, down to the most recent and radical of young writers such as Marie-Claire Blais and Hubert Aquin. I suspect, however, that a young French-Canadian critic might be inclined to charge that the French selections represent the views of the present French-Canadian establishment, and that the committee failed to gamble on new and relatively obscure writers. It is notable that practically all the writers in French were or are fellows of Section I of the Royal Society of Canada and/or members of the French-Canadian Academy. Another possible criticism of the French portions is that the editors have been so anxious to include everyone who counts, that they

have been forced to give very small and often virtually flavourless samples of their work. Was it really necessary to include over eighty French-Canadian writers, and thus restrict each of them to an average space of less than three pages? Would it not have been wiser to omit some of the minor writers entirely, and thus give the major writers such as Nelligan, Garneau, Hébert, and Blais more room in which to display their very distinctive talents?

Be that as it may, at least the French selections in the book are well edited: invariably they seem to represent their authors at or near their peaks of performance, and the introductory notes are concise and informative. We are told of Arthur Buies (1840-1901), for example, that "Après des études agitées au Canada, à Dublin et à Paris, il participa à la campagne de Sicile dans l'armée de Garibaldi, puis rentra au Canada, fit du journalisme, fonda *La Lanterne* (1868-9), et fut un des chefs du mouvement libéral et anti-religieux dont le siège était l'Institut canadien de Montréal. Plus tard, il travailla à la colonisation sous la direction du curé Labelle et écrivit plusieurs monographies géographiques" — which, in about seventy-five words, gives us a pretty clear idea of that gentleman's career and output.

Compare this with some of the headnotes to the English selections, and you will have some idea of how relatively sloppily the English selections have been edited. This, for example, is all we are told of Goldwin Smith: "Historian, political journalist and professor at the University of Toronto, Smith is regarded as being Canada's first essayist". Now that gives us almost no information about Smith, and a good deal of misinforma-

tion. Smith was a professor at Oxford and Cornell, but he was never a professor at Toronto and he is not regarded as Canada's first essayist (an honour, if such it be, which belongs to Joseph Howe). And who would ever guess from this headnote that Sara Jeannette Duncan spent most of her life in India, and gained her greatest fame as an interpreter of Anglo-Indian society? "This writer was born in England but grew up in Brantford where she later taught school. She frequently [sic] wrote for the *Toronto Globe*, was once on the editorial staff of the *Washington Post* and in 1888 became parliamentary correspondent for the *Montreal Star*."

In the English sections of the book, the length and fullness of the introductory notes seem to be in direct proportion

to the amount of commercial success the writers achieved. Thus on p. 194 poor Raymond Knister is described merely as follows: "Novelist, short story writer and poet, Knister grew up in southwestern Ontario and much of his work reflects the influence of the rural life he knew as a boy. His untimely death cut short a literary career that was just beginning to win recognition," whereas on the following page, 195, R. Ross Annett is given the following long encomium: "Practically all of Annett's short stories are centered around the same characters — Babe and Little Joe and their widowed father. In the days when the *Saturday Evening Post* was the richest market in the English language and a magazine of considerable literary repute as well, Annett and his Albertan characters made

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CLARKE IRWIN

TORONTO/VANCOUVER

its pages on seventy-five different occasions, a record never approached by any other Canadian writer. This is the very first story in his series and appeared in the *Post*, April 9, 1938."

The English editor seems to suffer from anti-academic bias. In the introduction he tells us that he has "included writers whose appeal has been to the millions rather than to the professors", and in the headnotes he seems to avoid, whenever possible, identifying writers as members of university staffs. The headnote on George Johnston, for example, states baldly: "Johnston has written two books of poems, *The Cruising Ark* and *Home Free*. His work has been printed in various magazines, from the *London Mercury* to the *Atlantic Monthly*"—and the fact that he is a member of the Department of English of Carleton University is entirely omitted. Similar omissions of reference to academic appointment are to be found in the headnotes for Fred Cogswell, Louis Dudek, James Reaney, Eli Mandel, and Jay Macpherson.

Anti-academic bias is also evident in the English selections. Whereas the French editors have included samples of the work of most of the academic critics and historians of French-Canada, men such as Louis Dantin, Camille Roy, Victor Barbeau, Lionel Groulx, Gustave Lanctot, Guy Frégault, Marcel Trudel and Michel Brunet, the English editors have omitted academic literary criticism and history entirely. One looks in vain, then, for examples of the work of Northrop Frye, George Woodcock, Marshall McLuhan, Malcolm Ross, and E. K. Brown, or of Donald Creighton, A. R. M. Lower, Charles Stacey, W. L. Morton, F. H. Underhill and J. M. S. Careless.

Literary criticism is represented only by a very slight piece by Lister Sinclair, a selection not at all in his best or most characteristic vein, and the "history" is supplied mainly by such journalists as William Arthur Deacon, Orlo Miller, Harry Boyle, Blair Fraser, Miriam Chapin, Leslie Roberts and Pierre Berton, or by such amateur historians as Sir Cecil Denny, P. T. Bone, and William C. Borrett.

A similar arbitrariness is apparent in the other English prose selections. There are a number of short stories in the anthology, but they are not by Duncan Campbell Scott, Frederick Philip Grove, Raymond Knister, Morley Callaghan, Sinclair Ross, Ralph Gustafson, Hugh Garner, Brian Moore, Henry Kreisel, Jack Ludwig, Mordecai Richler, Norman Levine, Margaret Laurence, Alice Munro, Douglas Spettigue, Alden Nowlan, Mavis Gallant, James Reaney, or Hugh Hood. Who on earth, then, are they by? A few of them are respectable enough choices—stories by Charles G. D. Roberts, Ernest Buckler, and Ethel Wilson—but the others are by such writers as R. Ross Annett, John Patrick Gillese, Michael Harrington, Gregory Clark and Vicki Branden.

Even in such a relatively "popular" medium as humour the choice is sadly lacking in discrimination. Stephen Leacock is missing—and so are E. W. Thomson, W. H. Drummond, Peter McArthur, Tom McInnes, B. K. Sandwell and Robertson Davies (although the latter does rate a page and a half as a serious sage—a role in which he is singularly less attractive). Again one is moved to wonder who can be there, when so many have been passed over—and again one is disheartened to find

that the substitutes for the masters are Bob Edwards (with a very bad piece from *The Eye Opener*), Don W. Thomson (with a dreadful hunk of doggerel about income tax), Paul Hiebert (isn't it about time someone said what everyone must feel, that the Sarah Binks jokes are now dead as mutton?), Eric Nicol (who can be very funny, but is terribly laboured in this piece) and Barry Mather (of whom it is said that he "has long been a favourite humorist in his home province." He should have stayed there).

An occasional bow is made towards sport, certainly an important part of the Canadian experience. But is the best sports-writing in Canada here, in the clichés of David Macdonald on hockey, as written for *The Reader's Digest*? What about Ralph Connor on Varsity versus McGill, or pieces of reportage by Jim Coleman, Elmer Ferguson or Dink Carroll?

Poetry in English is much more adequately represented than prose. Almost all the poets whom we might expect to find are here — together with a few who have no right to be. The inclusion of Louis Ginsberg is hard to justify, as is that of Don W. Thomson, especially when Earle Birney, Roy Daniells, Miriam

Waddington and Douglas Le Pan are missing. But the weakness in the poetry selection is less in the choice of poets than in the choice of poems. Presumably Cogswell was hampered by the editorial admonition "to find good writing which is not yet so widely known"; at any rate, in several cases he has avoided those poems which are generally held to be their authors' best, and has chosen more out-of-the-way pieces. If he had come up with some pleasant surprises, his method would have justified itself. As it is, unfortunately, we too often get second-rate poems by first-rate poets. For example, the poetry of C. G. D. Roberts is represented by one of his weaker sonnets, "The Herring Weir"; Bliss Carman is represented not by "Low Tide on Grand Pré" or one of the Sappho lyrics but by the doggerel of "The Juggler"; and E. J. Pratt is here not as the author of "The Truant" or "From Stone to Steel" but of "Newfoundland". The selections by the more recent poets, however, are generally made judiciously, and on the whole the poetry section is by far the most rewarding part of the English portion of the anthology.

Before leaving this matter of selection, I should like to make my own position

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clear. It is obvious that the choice of material for an anthology is to a large extent a matter of editorial taste, and that there are bound to be omissions and inclusions which will not please everybody. All one can reasonably demand is consistency, at any rate if the anthology is presented as a personal choice. Consistency is precisely what is lacking in this anthology. The French editors have obviously set about to select what the literary establishment of 1967 considers to be the very best work published in French-Canada since 1867 — and in so doing they have at least assured that their part of the volume will have historical interest. The English editors seem to have had an entirely different, and virtually incomprehensible, set of aims. An anti-academic bias has led them to omit, as we have seen, all academic history and criticism; some prejudice, or perhaps merely ignorance, has led them to omit virtually all our best writers of short stories; a misguided desire for novelty has led them to omit many of the best poems of our best poets. On the other hand, they have included work which is not literature at all — pieces of mediocre journalism such as Bob Edward's "The *Eye Opener* Race", John Archer Carter's "When Leacock Interviewed Himself", and Ed Arroll's "The Chinese Café". If the English editors had set out to produce an anti-establishment anthology, and stuck to their guns, I would have respected them: instead they have produced a *mélange* which will satisfy neither the academy nor the populace.

Moreover, this anthology is not presented as a personal choice, but as a semi-official document, "published on the occasion of the Centennial of Canadian

Confederation and subsidized by the Centennial Commission." It seems to me that the French editor chose the only possible course in response to such an official challenge: of the whole anthology, as of the French section, it should have been possible to say "Here is what the best critical minds believe to be best that has been written in Canada over the last hundred years." Try fitting that formula to the English section of the book, and you realize at once how inadequate the section is.

In view of the semi-official and subsidized nature of the volume we had the right at least to expect accuracy and good typography. Instead, the book abounds in errors. Some of the errors are presumably the editors' — the mistake about Goldwin Smith, for example, on p. 37; the inaccurate statement on p. 75 that *Orion and Other Poems* was published at Chatham; the howler on p. 427 to the effect that Ethel Wilson selected her story "From Flores" "from her book of the same title". The errors in typography, however, must be the joint responsibility of the publishers and the editors. I have never seen such a sloppily printed book issue from the hands of reputable publishers. A casual inspection, by no means exhaustive, has revealed no less than fifty typographical errors. Many page numbers are omitted (see, for example, pp. 68-73, 181-189, 194-195, 265-268, 503-504, 516-520, 525-527, 542-543), lines of type are misplaced (see the top of p. IV), Charles G. D. Roberts is called Charles C. D. Roberts on p. XIX, Sylvain Garneau is called Slyvain Garneau on p. XXX, letters are omitted (see, for example, "fre-quietly" p. 91) and the wrong type face is used (see "*dont voici*" on p. 109).

Is the hostility of this review the product of prejudice on my part? I hope not. I have tried to document my case fully in order to show that this book can be condemned on objective, empirical evidence. It would have been valu-

able to have a really representative anthology of the best Canadian writing in both languages and in all the major forms over the last hundred years, but this book, in its English section at least, leaves the gap wide open.

THE KANT OF CRITICISM

Louis Dudek

NORTHROP FRYE, *The Modern Century*. Oxford University Press, Toronto. \$3.00.

THIS LITTLE BOOK containing three lectures is perhaps the most free and liberal — at any rate, to me the most congenial — of all Dr. Frye's impressive theoretical studies in the mythology of literature.

It is also highly intriguing, since it is not concerned primarily with literature, in this case, but with the world, with social and political reality as this is related to literature and education. The *Anatomy of Criticism*, as we know, took the stand that literature is "a structure of words for its own sake" . . . an "autonomous verbal structure" . . . an "autonomous language" . . . "pure literature" . . . "useless as propositions". Here, now, we have a study of impure realities, social chaos, violence, "alienation, absurdity, anxiety, and nausea" — considered in relation to literature. One is deeply intrigued to see what will emerge from the mixture.

I am especially intrigued, since my own response to Dr. Frye's ideas has now passed through several stages and I am curious to follow our joint evolution. I used to read Northrop Frye in the *Canadian Forum* and other literary periodicals in the 1940's. He seemed at that time a rather eccentric but very amusing, intelligent critic — in general on the right side also (which in those days was of course very important). Later, when I read the *Anatomy of Criticism*, I thought him the most unbearably irritating and wrong-headed writer I had ever read. I suppose he was deliberately aggressive in that book, provoking the poet-as-thinker, the representational realist, and the poet-critic with barbed ironies and Apollonian assertions. The job was to define his own special theory, and this required a certain impatient dogmatism to quash the opposition, no doubt, within the theorist himself.

Since then, Dr. Frye has been loosening his tight bolts somewhat, and books like *The Educated Imagination* and *The Modern Century* are much more readable and congenial to my mind. Dr. Frye, of course, would hardly consider these observations as having any objective validity. "The poet speaking as critic produces, not criticism, but documents to be examined by critics." But then, Dr. Frye himself is producing documents to be examined by critics (they have recently been examined in a book published by Columbia University Press), so where do we stand?

Northrop Frye is the Kant of criticism. He has discovered that the understanding of literature is determined by certain containing forms, or "categories" of the imagination, which he calls myths. But like Kant, and Freud also, he has rushed ahead perhaps a bit prematurely to fix and define these categories specifically. The discovery of a process to be investigated is immensely valuable, but the formulations at first may be too arbitrary; and these may have to be relaxed with time.

The outstanding characteristic of Frye's criticism, I think, is a capacity to generalize imaginatively, so that disparate elements are brought into meaningful patterns and unities. In this he illustrates the operations of the metaphorical or myth-making mind, which is his special subject. Thus, when in the present book he identifies Rousseau's theory of natural order underlying the social forms with the myth of the sleeping beauty, we have a brilliant poetic metaphor, the aspects of one story being dramatically transferred to the other. Freud did the same thing with the Oedipus complex, making a single story the general abstract of its

type—a familiar poetic procedure—but Northrop Frye is a prolific poet of this kind, scattering metaphorical unities to left and right, as the forms of so-called poetic myth.

In other books he has been able to organize literature into a compact and lucid system of such mythological unities. (Although according to Dr. Frye poets are not supposed to be original thinkers, it has always seemed ironic to me that the gist of these myths is derived from the poet William Blake, so that Blake must be at least one shining exception of the poet-as-thinker.) Dr. Frye is prolific, however, and what seemed at one time too rigid a system, with a fixed empyrean of mythologies, complete and determined for all time, has now become much more flexible and "open". This, for me, is the redeeming virtue of *The Modern Century*.

The first lecture, a powerful and compact essay, describes the twentieth century as one increasingly paralyzed by mass conformities, collectivist control, indoctrination, anxiety, alienation and the like. The second deals with the relation of the arts and literature to this state of the world. At first, literature seems to be providing a counter-discipline or antidote to the tyrannies of our time, to the advertising and propaganda that corrode the individual mind. But as the lecture proceeds, we find that the arts themselves suffer from reactions of tragic excess and disorganization, and even they become helpless against the ills of the century.

The third and final lecture offers a vision of some healthier procedures, proposes a larger perspective of critical detachment, and offers some possibly more promising ways of looking at the human

situation. This is, in effect, an argument for one unifying myth in preference to another. The so-called "myth of progress" comes under severe criticism. As an alternative, we have "the world of the tiger", in which we find ourselves, and "the innocent vision", to be set off against the world's evil. So the lecture ends on a note of mild philosophical optimism.

These are brilliant lectures, in their close texture and wit, complex development, and powerful thought. But what fascinates me, particularly, is the paradox of Northrop Frye's method applied to the raw materials of life instead of to pure literature. The autonomous mental structures of mythological imagination are now the shaping forms of a real world. The thesis of a self-contained literature organized by internal patterns of myth is now faced with the inescapable dilemma that these are only metaphors to explain the real structure of reality. Life itself, history, ideas can be interpreted through the forms of myth, so that what the artist does in creating literature, can also be done to the facts of history and the course of contemporary events. Reality is the content of mythology, and the forms themselves are quite fluid.

In the *Anatomy*, Dr. Frye had already posed the question: "Is it true that the verbal structures of psychology, anthropology, theology, history, law, and everything else built out of words have been informed or constructed by the same kind of myths and metaphors that we find, in their original hypothetical form, in literature?" In these three lectures on the Modern Century, it would seem, he answers the question in the affirmative.

But if this is a mythologizing of history and of the age we live in, then a circular

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trap may be apparent. Just as Sigmund Freud and the Freudians were open to the charge of projecting their own imaginative complexes in their psychology — if they imputed this to others — so Northrop Frye, should he insist too much, might be trapped within his own self-created myths. Sir James Frazer would surely be surprised to find that of all the mythologies contained in his eleven volumes the central myth is one found in the writings of the English poet William Blake. Surely there is a certain amount of subjective arbitrariness here, so that one may imagine other temperaments deciding for other “central myths” to order their human experience. If the myths are Platonic forms, we may well ask, “Mighty myth, who made thee?” But if, as I think Dr. Frye would answer, man made them, then man can unmake them, and create afresh — and find that none are central.

Mythopoeic criticism, after all, is extremely subjective and mental. In *The Modern Century* even the truth of science is made subjectively relative to the projecting mind: “Science is a vision of nature which perceives the elements in nature that correspond to the reason and sense of structure in the scientist’s mind.” How, then, can the critic who observes mythological structures be any less the poet, or any less subjective in his visions?

The kind of vision with which Dr. Frye is himself sympathetic includes, of course, William Blake and follows the path of what he describes as “revolutionary realism”. In the second lecture, “Improved Binoculars”, we follow the development of modern art, very much in this tradition, till everything comes to an explosive mess in the final pages: “All these anti-social attitudes in modern culture are, broadly speaking, reactionary.

That is, their sense of antagonism to existing society is what is primary, and it is much clearer and more definite than any alternative social ideal.” Literature, for the modern artists, is terribly involved with actuality, under the premise that it reveals reality, or that it represents and releases creative power, so that our mythologies and our lives are fatefully entangled together. These are consequences which I do not think were foreseen in the *Anatomy of Criticism*.

The modern century is a dark century. And we are passing through what Henry Miller describes as “the time of the Hyena”. How we got there is both a question of social history and of the history of ideas, as these are outlined in Dr. Frye’s book. But I would suggest, in the light of the facts, that “revolutionary realism” itself is one of the main sources of this century’s disorders; that natural events and technologies are important (this crumb for McLuhan), but that history would be quite different without Blake, Shelley, Marx, Freud, Rimbaud, Nietzsche, Lawrence, and other such extravagant ‘makers of modern thought’.

At one point in the third lecture, where Dr. Frye considers the excesses of modern art, he observes that “Study, as distinct from direct response, is a cool medium, and even the most blatant advocacy of violence and terror may be, like Satan in the Bible, transformed into an angel of light by being regarded as a contribution to modern thought.” I believe, however, that this is much too optimistic. The time when the classroom could be considered as an insulator against the practical impact of ideas — even literary ideas — is past. I would say from experience that, for most students, to be exposed to the writings of Blake,

Nietzsche, Pound, D. H. Lawrence, or Allen Ginsberg is to transform their lives — and not always in the direction that parents and teachers would desire.

In other words, I believe that the liberal optimistic thesis which still forms the conclusion of Dr. Frye's lectures falls down because events have moved even further than he has carried them. He is pessimistic, but not pessimistic enough. Having described a world in chaos, and literature at the extreme of anarchy, he yet believes that these consequences of modern thought and of "revolutionary realism" merely show us the face of the tiger, and that we may yet seek after innocence. Humanism, he would like to believe, can absorb the nihilism of modern thought. But unfortunately, the revolutionary mythology beginning with William Blake has set its face against the real achievement of society in its concrete manifestations, from the very source, and this anti-social doctrine has now reached its practical culmination as

a democratic ethos of the most dynamic kind.

The analysis of history and of the history of ideas in *The Modern Century* is masterful. I am in accord at every point in the last lecture. But I believe that our reconstruction now must begin with a critique of the very foundations of literary thought that have brought us from Romanticism to the present. I do not think, as Dr. Frye seems to do, that we can still accept these premises and yet hope to domesticate the violent consequences of our thinking. The myth of the tiger and of innocence will not save us. The myth of progress is not the evil. (In fact, these two myths are to some extent identical, both rejecting the actual and real for some intangible possibility.) Man's relation to his society, that is, the relation between imagination and reality, must be reconstructed. It is the idea of their separation — as in the myth of absolute innocence — which may be the dram of ill.

MOORE'S NEW PERSPECTIVE

Hallvard Dahlie

BRIAN MOORE, *I am Mary Dunne*. McClelland & Stewart. \$6.95.

READERS OF Brian Moore's previous five novels will be familiar with the fictional ingredients he so skilfully handled in those books: marginal Irish characters struggling to achieve some mark of identity and status in environments which generated only loneliness,

despair, and frustration. Whether that environment was Moore's native Belfast (*Judith Hearne*, *The Feast of Lupercal*, *The Emperor of Ice-Cream*), or his adopted cities of Montreal (*The Luck of Ginger Coffey*) and New York (*An Answer From Limbo*), his characters could

rarely overcome either the limitations within themselves or the stultifying forces of their Irish inheritance to achieve even a temporary compromise, let alone any kind of triumph. Only 17-year-old Gavin Burke of *Emperor* manages to make a clean break with these forces and to achieve a meaningful triumph; speaking of that book recently, Moore said that he had achieved a new perspective on the world at the time of writing it, and suggested that any subsequent fiction might take a different tack. "I don't know whether I'll be a better writer," he remarked on that occasion, "but I'll be a different writer."

His sixth novel, *I Am Mary Dunne*, reveals clearly that Moore is both a different writer and, with some reservations, a better one. Perhaps he has never been better than he was in *Judith Hearne*; that first novel remains, even after thirteen years, somewhat of a masterpiece, and nothing he has written since carries its total impact. But what *Mary Dunne* loses in over-all effect, it gains in its more complex and sophisticated technique, and in its more profound exploration of woman's dilemma. For where Judith in a sense was a special case — an alcoholic spinster sinking into lonely oblivion — Mary Dunne is more of a representative figure; she is the twentieth-century emancipated woman who suffers not from being emancipated, but from being a woman in a world ordered for and by man.

Moore depicts one day in the life of Mary Dunne, a 32-year-old Nova Scotian living in New York with her third husband, Terence Lavery, a reasonably successful theatrical figure. On this particular Thursday nothing out of the ordinary happens to Mary: she has a hair

appointment, she is rudely propositioned on a street corner, she receives a letter from her mother, she shows her apartment to a prospective tenant, she has lunch with a former Montreal friend, she makes love to her husband, and she invites another Canadian acquaintance to dinner. But such is her mood on this day (she is suffering from pre-menstrual tension) that all these events generate a series of associations relating to the question of her identity, and so obsessed does she become with this problem and with the guilt she feels over some of her past actions that she for a moment finds herself on the point of suicide. But in the act of remembering her past, she attains the identity spelled out by the book's title: the identities she had temporarily assumed as Mary Phelan, as Mary Bell, and now as Mary Lavery, can not obscure the only unchangeable fact about her, that she is, and always will be, Mary Dunne.

Mary's problem is partly sexual (both her first two husbands were incompetent in bed) but chiefly psychological and philosophical (she recalls that as a 15-year-old student she questioned the Cartesian dictum, *cogito ergo sum*; should it not be, she asked, *memento ergo sum*?) She feels, too, that the fact of being a woman is in itself a real threat to identity; men use her, they accost her, they threaten her, and they ignore her; as Mary observes, "you can't fight male solidarity." What Moore seems to be saying is that being a woman in today's world, even such an enlightened and emancipated one as Mary Dunne, is to be a threat to the traditional concept of woman. Though she bears the same name as the archetypal symbol of chastity and faithfulness, her acquaintances

refer to her as the “un-virgin Mary,” and charge her with being promiscuous. In a very real sense her mission is sexual fulfillment, but for her the sexual act is a spiritual experience (it is not only her name that reminds one of John Donne), an act of being re-born, of attaining a real identity, and it is not primarily a manifestation of nymphomania as it was with Jane Tierney in *An Answer From Limbo*. It is the cycle of sexual intercourse and menstruation which defines woman, and it is in the fulfillment of these functions that Mary Dunne discovers who she is.

Moore handles all this material with competence and clarity, and it is a tribute to his craftsmanship that he manipulates the frequent shifts in chronology and point of view without a sense of awkwardness. Only the abruptness of the resolution, I feel, is likely to raise some questions. It is difficult to tell whether Mary’s attainment of calm results from her mother’s phone call — “You haven’t changed for me. You’re my daughter, you’ll always be the same to me” — or from the purgative effect of the Ernie Truelove episode; the direction of the book implies, of course, the latter, but in relationship to the length of this episode

(the last fifty pages of the novel), its emancipating effect doesn’t seem entirely convincing. On the whole, however, Moore suffers few lapses in technique or in structure, and this novel, like his five previous ones, reveals its creator in firm control of his material.

As a memorable character, Mary Dunne may not achieve immediately the stature of Judith Hearne, but this is due in part to the fact that her situation is neither as dramatic nor as catastrophic as Judith’s. She is, however, a more complex person, and I suspect she will grow more on subsequent readings than Judith does. Moore explores sensitively the many facets of Mary’s mind and personality, and the result is a remarkable portrait of a woman who is essentially very ordinary. The other characters in the novel are also ordinary — this has become a hallmark of Moore’s work — and because we see them only through Mary’s recollection, they tend to be somewhat shadowy and incomplete, although Moore captures the essence of even the most minor characters with a few brilliant strokes. Particularly memorable are Mary’s two Canadian acquaintances, Janice Sloane and Ernest Truelove: I suspect Canadians will not be too happy with Moore’s

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treatment of his erstwhile countrymen, for it is difficult to find two more boorish and priggish characters in Canadian fiction than these two. Ernest in particular becomes a grotesque caricature, but Moore saves him—as he earlier saved Bernard Rice and Post Officer Craig—by investing him with a convincing touch of humanity and reality.

It is interesting to note that this is Moore's first novel without either first or second-generation Irish characters. All the major figures except Terence Lavery, who is English (although his mother's

people originally came from Ireland), are indigenous North Americans. Thus the odyssey of Moore's characters is for the moment complete: from native Belfastians to immigrant North Americans to permanent North Americans, and on the whole Moore has lost none of his sensitivity and craftsmanship in the process. *I Am Mary Dunne* is a satisfying affirmation of Brian Moore's talents and should do much to establish him as one of the important contemporary North American novelists.

POET AND POLYMATH

Meredith Thompson

WATSON KIRKCONNELL, *Centennial Tales and Selected Poems* and *A Slice of Canada: Memoirs*. University of Toronto Press. \$7.95 and \$8.50.

IT IS PROBABLY more than foolhardy to attempt in this brief space anything like an appreciation and honest appraisal of the contribution of Watson Kirkconnell. Nor should it be necessary: few Canadians are better known; few have participated more diversely; few if any have written so much; few so decorated and internationally lauded in the painful periods of citation prose. Nevertheless, the two most recent of his forty-odd books (besides a hundred brochures and countless articles)—that is, *Centennial Tales and Selected Poems* (1965) and *A Slice of Canada—Memoirs* (1967)—may be his most important, and deserve further comment.

Some apology usually introduces memoirs. Says A. R. M. Lower (whose *My*

First Seventy-five Years has also just appeared): "No one who has scribbled most of his days could consider existence complete without a speech as he bows out. I do not propose to inflict on suffering readers a chapter-and-verse account of a career that has had only minor importance" (etc.). And Kirkconnell: "A microtomic slice of tissue may be quantitatively insignificant, but placed under a microscope it can add its minute quota of fact regarding the major organism from which it came" (etc.). *Canadian Literature* readers who know both these men (and many do) may find such utterances and book titles characteristic. Both offer fascinating "slices"; but there is an academic thoroughness about Kirkconnell's which makes it, not always the

lightest reading, but an extremely informative account of many important and some neglected aspects of twentieth-century Canada — as it were, independent of its author — which will make it an important source book for years to come.

Both Kirkconnell and Lower came of age professionally at Wesley (later United) College, Winnipeg; both spent approximately eighteen years there, overlapping each other; both have had highly distinguished records since they left. But now, looking back 30-40 years, Lower can still write that his time at Wesley served “in many respects, to crown” his career (p. 162), and Kirkconnell that he spent there some of “the most satisfying years of my life” (p. 136). Others have felt the same — despite the climate, ugliness, and depression wages. For this was the golden age of Wesley-United: beneath the same roof were Arthur L. Phelps, Jack Pickersgill, H. Douglas Woods — none of them such “stars” then — and various others who contributed to the humane atmosphere under J. H. Riddell and W. C. Graham. The student body, writes Lower, “had a dynamic quality . . . I have never been quite able to explain this compelling creative élan, though I am sure that it existed” (p. 166). Unfortunately but inevitably, Kirkconnell left in 1940 (to head the English department at McMaster), Lower a few years later.

Shortly after coming to Winnipeg, the first Mrs. Kirkconnell had died — in bearing their twin sons. To console himself, her husband did what only he could have done. He set to work on *A European Book of Elegy*, an anthology of poems translated by him alone from fifty different languages. His publisher was

naturally sceptical of the project; but when the work was issued (by another publisher), it brought Kirkconnell recognition all over the world. This was followed by numerous volumes, large and small, of translated poetries, notably of the Icelandic, Magyar, Polish, and Ukrainian — to a total of some six thousand pages, of which those in *Centennial Tales* (pp. 411-528) are but a small sample. Such breadth of linguistic versatility cannot have been attained by many men, if indeed any, throughout the whole of history. It has joined Kirkconnell to the literary cadres of a dozen countries and, more importantly perhaps, made him poet-laureate and often general spokesman of practically all (non-Anglo-Saxon) “new” Canadians. Of course, the latter do not need his translations — except probably for their children and certainly for their grandchildren. The real value of this stupendous, life-long endeavour lies in the rendering into English for English readers of thousands and thousands of fine poems which, in the original, they would never be able to read for themselves. At least through the translucent windows of translation, he has revealed countless virtually unknown phases of European poetry and culture, and thus immeasurably widened our view. This is the crowning achievement of his highly varied life. A parallel project — in itself a sufficient distinction for an extraordinary man — is represented by three volumes of Milton sources and analogues in translation: *The Celestial Cycle* (1952), *That Invincible Samson* (1964), and, among works yet to appear, a similar collection for *Comus*, *Lycidas* and *Paradise Regained*.

Kirkconnell’s translations — on highest authority — are accurate. Here they can

only be appraised as (perhaps the most neglected) part of his poetry. Two contrasts with his "original" verse are apparent: (1) a genuine lyric note and (2) a greater purity of style — perhaps because (in translating) the very words are less easily won. One example, from the Romaic of Lambros Porphyras, must suffice:

Without, a deep-voiced spirit of the waste
Wails round the roof-tree; while from
couch and chair
The sobbings of each corner you
have graced
Blend in one anguished outcry of despair.

Whoever does not know how much this is the art of Watson Kirkconnell has never attempted to translate verse; and yet it is most often the *ars celare artem*. But another Kirkconnell writes most of his "original" verse. This is mainly narrative: at its very best in the early, daringly imaginative, chthonically Manitoban *Flying Bull* stories; less lively when restrained by historical fact plus some hardening of his own political views in many of the recent *Centennial Tales*; least successful perhaps in his most ambitious *Eternal Quest*, where the burden of allegory must sometimes be too great for aesthetically effective concrete expression.

No final judgment of Kirkconnell's poetry can be attempted here — merely a few general comments. For instance, it is of no decisive importance that he has chosen to use traditional forms and style; but whatever some (and he?) may think, he has chosen the harder way, partly because the traditional muse may demand a surer technique (no obstacle to W.K.) and chiefly because, at this late time, every effort at resuscitation may fail to restore her to anything like vibrant life.

And it must be admitted that Kirkconnell has often not succeeded in doing so. Without listing his "faults," one regrets that many fine lines and phrases are probably lost on impatient readers, because surrounded by a somewhat faded profusion: perhaps, for example, the italicized words in

His heart seem'd free as air, *his thought*
as white
As foam or snow; there kindled in his breast
The sweet exultant ardour of an ageless
quest.

It is a brave man who attempts to fatten up hundreds of Spenserian stanzas in these lean times. But not only form-filling and traditional rhetoric, also rhythm and rhyme, ever ready and often over-obtrusive, become typical pitfalls. (The reader is asked to consider what happens to the good "tight" writing of the following — in its last three lines, here italicized.)

Hemm'd by our shores there stretches forth
That *mare nostrum* of the North,
Mediterranean but cold,
Which Manitoba's coasts enfold
And bleak Ungava, white with snow,
And tundras of Ontario,
While to the north its path is spanned
By glacier-fjords of Baffin Land —
A wan and eerie inland ocean
Of which the world has little notion,
Leaving to tracts thus far asunder
Its width and wealth and wizard wonder.

This poet needs far more editing and selection than the present volume represents. At his best, he is very good — as when he mourns a lost brother:

We who are left will slowly wither out
To tottering senescence and a drought
Of youthful dreams, though touch'd
to wistfulness
By memories of old springtime and
your face.

Watson Kirkconnell's other publications may remind some of the perfect

undergraduate who is a "brain", excelled in all subjects and winning the Governor-General's gold medal for proficiency. "But what *becomes* of such people?" we ask — to hide our envy! In Kirkconnell's case this all-round brilliance meant pursuing at least a dozen disciplines as mutually remote as botany and linguistics, to the point of original research, publication in appropriate learned journals, election to relevant learned societies, etc. For the individual chapters of *A Slice*, he lists staggering bibliographies — all his own — of which a random sampling includes: *Botanical Survey of South Victoria*, *The Palaeogeography of Ontario*, *Mendelism and the Cephalic Index*, *Canadian Toponymy and the Cultural Stratification of Canada*, *The First Authentic History of our Internment Camps, Canada, Europe and Hitler*, *Research into Canadian Rural Decay*, *Liberal Education in the Canadian Democracy*, *International Aspects of Unemployment*, *Einstein's Influence on Philosophy*, *The Twilight of Canadian Protestantism*, *The Quebec Tradition*, *Seven Pillars of Freedom*, etc., etc. Admittedly, he adds to superlative intelligence and memory a journalist's flair for rapid production, and his prose pages will need more sorting out some day. But the same man was well enough thought of to be offered university appointments in History at Queen's, in Classics at Wesley-United, in English at McMaster, etc.

Obviously, to produce so much erudition, he must be a cross between a mole and an owl? Wrong again: few men in

Canada have been more actively associated with public causes. That is why his meticulously detailed *Slice* will long be consulted on such subjects as the Prison Camps in World War I, the foundation of the John Howard Society, the Writer's War Committee, the Humanities Research Council, the Canadian Authors' Association, the federation of Canadian Baptists, etc. in each of which he played a leading role — and went on writing. From 1948-1964, as President of Acadia University, he gave a struggling institution greatly advanced intellectual status plus the necessary financial backing — and (of course) went on writing.

The reader of these two among his most intimate works will not necessarily feel that he has come to know Watson Kirkconnell. There remains a certain aloofness (rooted in unwarranted modesty?), a limited empathy perhaps and a lack of theatre. But there is also a Renaissance mind (more than a Renaissance sensibility?) and an honesty so singly-natured that proportion may yield to data, ironic or humorous opportunity to clear cold fact. Here is much remembrance of things past — more past than Kirkconnell and his generation may realize — ere versatility, prized in pioneering, was ousted by ever more centripetal expertise; ere schooling at any level that equipped a lad with at least some of Kirkconnell's knowledge was ousted by so-called orientation and superficial dissent; ere poetry lost touch with tradition and meaning, as much criticism with good sense — the dear time's waste!

A DISTURBING VITALITY

JOHN REID, *Horses With Blindfolds*. Longmans. \$5.95.

Horses With Blindfolds is a novel that deserves far more critical attention than it seems to have received. If the state of the Canadian novel is as lamentable as the professional Jeremiahs tell us, one would think that they would seize gratefully on a skilful, sophisticated work like this. *Horses With Blindfolds* meets most of the exacting requirements necessary for that enlargement of perception which a reader is entitled to demand from fiction. John Reid has a talent for establishing a viable world; his puppets are handled with compassionate understanding; and he effects that complex alchemy by which our emotions are engaged while our critical intelligence stands alertly detached.

Horses With Blindfolds is a love story. Love is a precarious subject for a writer since it necessitates an assault on most readers' initial resistance. Passion is acceptable if it takes the guise of obsession; attraction will be admitted if it is treated sceptically, mordantly, or comically. What is most difficult of all is a simple, straightforward account of love, tender, absorbing, transcending all other human concerns. It is so extraordinarily difficult to handle since most of us are embarrassed by the spectacle of sentimentality in others, yet sentimentality is an unavoid-

able aspect of love. Only the great writer, of the stature of Tolstoi perhaps, can tread the precarious line of feeling which lies between the banal and the maudlin.

John Reid has managed a fine control of tone, an achievement that makes it possible to overlook flaws in the construction of his book. His hero, Harold Windsor, is an unprepossessing, undefined cipher who expands into tragic dimension through his total commitment to love. Externally he continues to strike people as timid, unadventurous, and inhibited. Those who lecture him about guts and blood are the hollow people who have never been filled with a consuming fire.

A middle-aged widower, Harold has found himself holidaying in Spain at the insistence of his domineering daughter-in-law. Crushed by the burden of memory, he wanders apprehensively through the present. John Reid's evocation of a paunchy nonentity whose inner life is gradually revealed to the point of compelling interest is a moving piece of characterization.

Harold has grown up in the stiff-necked, Scottish-Gothic respectability of an affluent Ontario home. Most traumatic of all his memories is that of being trapped into shooting a horse which was supposed to have killed his father. This image of the blindfolded horse, bewildered and tormented by a situation which he can neither comprehend nor control, becomes the pervasive symbol of Harold's life. Pushed into an unhappy marriage with a selfish harpie, he leaves her for a young Italian immigrant. Julie, with her erratic, hysterical moods, devours his life. The long scenes of recriminations and anxious solicitude are painfully credible.

The real intensity of this love, continuing even in death, is contrasted with the stagey posturing of the bull-fights, the self-conscious artists and sharp-nosed tourists who are on the prowl for local colour and "life", whose reality, Reid suggests, can never be found in picturesque vistas and passing thrills.

Reid possesses a remarkable ear for the sound and meaning of speech, an eye for the peculiarities of manner, and an understanding of suffering in its unique and terrible aspects. He has written a book of disturbingly radiant vitality.

PHYLLIS GROSSKURTH

IT COULD HAPPEN

ELLIS PORTAL, *Killing Ground*. Peter Martin Associates. \$6.50.

FOR THE AVERAGE CANADIAN, *Killing Ground* must be a startling and bizarre combination of two things with which he is quite familiar separately — the brutal violence so commonplace in other parts of the world and the soil of Canada. The book is based upon two major hypotheses: that an independentist government can gain control of Quebec and that the majority of people harbour an innate savagery ready for release at any moment. Granting these two hypotheses, the novel becomes something more than a fantasy. It is a vivid, sobering, often horrifying spectacle of what could happen here.

Told from the point of view of a hard-rock Canadian Army officer who has just returned from a U.N. peace-keeping mission in South Africa, the story traces step by step the development of Quebec separatist assassinations into full scale civil

war. Reluctant to publicize the gravity of the situation and fearful of losing face, the federal government defers calling back regular military units from commitments to NATO, SEATO and the U.N. With available opposition thus spread thin, the separatist Provisional Government of Quebec acts quickly, blocking roads and the St. Lawrence Seaway, mobilizing hordes of youths (by poignant analogy called the "Whiteshirts"), and skilfully deploying provincial police, militia and French Canadian troops who have defected from the Canadian Army. English-speaking residents of Montreal, in desperation before the Whiteshirt-led mobs advancing from the East End, jam the highways and flood Dorval Airport. But Dorval falls into the hands of the young terrorists, hungry for blood and flesh. The more obviously luscious of Westmount women are stripped and raped in the plush V.I.P. lounge, while terrorist girls, armed to their bulging bosoms, sprawl on top of Air Canada, BOAC and other airline counters, amusing themselves with the panic-stricken crowds of men, women and children in the main lobby. When a unit of the federal forces eventually attacks Dorval, hundreds are slaughtered. Atrocities are committed by both sides, the federal troops gaining the edge in shooting the breasts off young girls and tossing prisoners out of helicopters in flight. The conflict continues with raids on Ottawa, St. Hubert and Quebec City and various private escapades, the author demonstrating an impressive knowledge of military manoeuvres, weapons of war, the geography of Quebec and the techniques of cliff-hanger suspense. The climax comes, of course, when the Americans begin to get impatient.

Killing Ground, then, is not a pleasant book to read, and obviously the author planned it that way, as a kind of warning. Only those who know nothing of history (especially the civil wars and struggles for independence) and who do not read newspapers would claim that what Portal describes, complete with detailed horrors, could not possibly occur. It could, undoubtedly. Anything is possible. And there has always been a cancerous undercurrent of racist ideas in Canada.

But as one who was born and raised in the above-mentioned East End of Montreal and has worked with young French Canadians for several years, I don't think it will occur. I don't think, for example, that brigades of fanatic youths such as Portal's Whiteshirts could ever be mobilized. There are always a few — the sadists, the misfits, the paranoiacs — but the majority of young French Canadians are too individualistic, too well informed, too accustomed now to a wealth of opportunities, to sex and to free self-expression, to be reduced to marauding bands of killers. The "mentalité de mouton" is one of the things against which the young people of Quebec have reacted most strongly. Twenty or thirty years ago, before Quebec began to move, when only a handful of élite went to college and a static culture left people oozing out their frustrations in a rocking chair while contraception demolished the ancient dream of the revenge of the cradle — then perhaps a brigade or two of Whiteshirts might have been possible. But now Quebec is culturally more dynamic than the rest of Canada; the old inferiority complex is buried with Duplessis and Lionel Groulx. There are many here who, naturally enough, would like an independent

state, but I feel sure that those who would wish to achieve it by means portrayed in *Killing Ground* are exceedingly few. Many Quebecers, in fact, have come to realize that political independence and cultural independence are not synonymous. The legitimate desire and struggle for greater autonomy in French Canada have already resulted in a veritable cultural explosion. New challenges, new horizons, a new awareness of the universal implications of ethnic co-existence are in the winds now blowing across *la belle province*.

Then, too, there is the factor of the mixed families, such as the French-speaking McCarthys who shelter the protagonist's son. Portal has one such family in *Killing Ground*, but Canada and Quebec have many thousands; and the number is increasing as old barriers break down and the influence of the Church steadily diminishes. For as Portal himself repeatedly implies, a good-looking Quebec girl can be a powerful medicine against prejudices and narrow-mindedness. Mixed families constitute a kind of ethnic cement — we may grant Portal's hypothesis about man's innate potential for savagery, but more powerful still is man's innate loyalty to his immediate circle of human beings. Canadians, it seems, are at last abandoning the old, deeply-ingrained notions, so close to the threats of nineteenth-century racists, that there can be anything factual, beneficial or commendable about so-called purity of blood. And as the number of people with bicultural backgrounds increases, the opportunity for fruitful dialogue correspondingly increases.

Killing Ground is a completely negative book. If indeed it acts as an instrument to clear the air, then perhaps it is

well that it was published. Personally, I should have preferred a counterbalance of positive elements, a protagonist something more than the stoical execution machine whose heights of compassion are mild regrets about having to chop attractive girls in two with blasts of a sten gun. But then perhaps a spell in race-torn South Africa — far removed from a country where the ingredients of mutual understanding, increasing communication and respect for the dignity of difference, are evident enough to offer limitless potential — can do that to a man.

RONALD SUTHERLAND

BORDERLAND OF TRUTH

KILDARE DOBBS, *Reading the Time*. Macmillan. \$5.95.

DAVE GODFREY, *Death Goes Better with Coca-Cola*. House of Anansi. Paper \$1.95, hardback \$4.50.

Man Deserves Man, edited by Bill McWhinney and Dave Godfrey. Paper \$3.95, cloth \$6.50.

KILDARE DOBBS begins *Reading the Time* with a preface gauged rather accurately to shock and annoy truth-loving Anglo-Saxons whose minds go round in pre-Edwardian grooves.

I often see writers praised for telling the truth, for showing the way things are. I think this praise is ill-conceived. The world around us is quite as senseless and unreadable as the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. We have to make it up as we go along. It would be more appropriate to praise writers for the beauty and consistency of their lies.

Kildare Dobbs and I have in common that we hide, under Anglo-Saxon surnames, Celtic forebears and shreds of

Celtic nature, the main difference being that while Mr. Dobbs belongs to the generous and expansive Irish stem of Celt-dom, I belong to the suspicious and secretive Welsh stem, delineated by Caradoc Evans and gloriously lied about by Dylan Thomas. My Welsh suspicions led me to the year 1889, when another Irishman (Anglo- and Church of Ireland like Mr. Dobbs), published "The Decay of Lying".

The only form of lying that is absolutely beyond reproach [said Oscar Wilde on that occasion] is lying for its own sake, and the highest development of this is . . . Lying in Art . . . Lying, the telling of beautiful untrue things, is the proper aim of Art.

I am bringing no accusation of borrowing; it would be pointless, since I believe that one of the secrets of becoming a good artist is to be not only an unashamed liar, but also an incorrigible thief. But I am placing Mr. Dobbs in a tradition, that of the free-wheeling Irish wit, entertaining the Saxon thanes and churls of England and its Canadian hinterland with beguiling re-arrangements of actuality. Wilde's elaborate patterns of entertainment of course disguised a mind more serious and beleaguered than he dared admit until 1889 had passed into 1896, and in the same way one detects in Kildare Dobbs another self which he describes in a typically Irish phrase — "a mind on the run". Not only Irish rebels went on the run; so did conscientious objectors, and much that Dobbs writes can be read as a kind of one-man resistance to the war of extermination that the facts in our world are waging against us.

There is a curious non-truth on the dust cover to *Reading the Time*. It tells us that Kildare Dobbs' previous book,

Running to Paradise, won the Governor-General's Award for "non-fiction" in 1962. An embarrassingly factual memory tells me that the book in fact won the prize for "fiction", which surprised me a little at the time, since I took it to be a collection of autobiographical essays. I afterwards recognized the essential justice of the award: autobiography is a form of fiction, a re-arrangement of actuality, and the less facts get in the way of the pattern-making fancy, the better it is likely to be. *Running to Paradise* was good, so I imagine a great deal of fiction-making really did go into it.

In another way, the same applies to *Reading the Time*. It purports to be a series of essays, on post-war fashions in literature, on styles in war throughout the ages, on travel in Canada and other odd ends of the earth. It concerns in its own way actuality, the mad world through which we canter, grabbing facts and experiences on the way. The author warns us against his opinions; he warns us against his writing — "I pretend I'm a writer." But he opinionates and writes superbly, assuming with equal amateur felicity the cloak of literary sociologist, of critic of the arts of war, of traveller on the hop, catching the flashes of reality that rebound from the resident's armour of familiarity. He explains admirably why the so-called "Angry Young Men" of the British Fifties each wrote only one good book; he shows up Marshall McLuhan as a schoolman overcome by an intolerable nostalgia for what is irretrievably past; he demonstrates how American rebellion is motivated by the same group values and group reactions as American orthodoxy: not perhaps very original points, but splendidly made. Such inspired lies — if one must accept

their author's description of them — take one further in understanding our contemporary lunacies than most men's heavy truths.

It wasn't merely the fact that Dave Godfrey's stories appeared mostly in *Saturday Night* under the editorship of Kildare Dobbs that made me pair *Death Goes Better with Coca-Cola* with *Reading the Time*. Both are criticisms of their era in the sense that all immediate writing is criticism. Both cultivate that most promising of territories, the borderland between the factual and the imagined, and if Dobbs deserves prizes for fiction, perhaps Godfrey should be a laureate of non-fiction. Certainly he uses the kind of illuminated realism and the lapidary craftsmanship that are appropriate to a fiction we can regard as contemporary in the sense of being alive to the day.

Once Edmund Wilson made the odd statement that Morley Callaghan reminded him of Turgenev. Made about Dave Godfrey (and tied up with no flummery about comparative greatness) it would not sound so odd. It isn't merely that Godfrey has taken the same kind of frame as Turgenev used at the start — the hunting story of *A Sportsman's Sketches*. He is also using his stories in the same way as Turgenev — though not at all imitatively — to express an enormous, almost Russian feeling for the surface of the earth over which he travels, and to criticize idiosyncratically the human world through which he hunts. The real sportsman who sees even a glimmer of what Godfrey is getting at when he trails us through the hemp after one-eyed pheasants will be disinclined to read on.

The third book — in its turn — is not reviewed here just because Dave God-

frey happens to be one of the editors. The link is more compelling. Here, I suppose, is something as near fact (and very meaningful fact for our times) as one can get. *Man Deserves Man* is about CUSO, the organization of Canadian volunteers who work in the colonial countries where, in other days, Kildare Dobbs was one of the last bwanas. In *Running to Paradise* Dobbs gave some extraordinary vignettes of the final days of the colonial regime in Africa. *Man Deserves Man* sketches out, in the words of volunteers, the life of a new generation of "Europeans" who seek to move among the people of the so-called underdeveloped countries as equals rather than lords. Every now and then a gust of rather stale rhetoric blows through the book; such organizations as CUSO inevitably attract a few of the Important Ernests who in other days would automatically have become rather sanctimonious curates. But their proportion is surprisingly small, and many of the narratives, letters and diaries included in *Man Deserves Man* are either good reportage, or constructive discussions of how best to serve the people of countries like India and Sarawak and Ghana without introducing the suspicion of neo-colonialism. The best contribution is a brilliant socio-political essay which Godfrey himself wrote in Ghana just before Nkrumah's downfall. *Man Deserves Man*, apart from its intrinsic interest, is highly conducive to the understanding of *Death Goes Better with Coca-Cola*; it presents the other face to the cynicism that sometimes cuts like a sharp blade out of the stories.

GEORGE WOODCOCK

ON ETHEL WILSON

DESMOND PACEY, *Ethel Wilson*. Burns McEachern. \$5.25.

TO EXPLAIN why I find *Ethel Wilson* by Desmond Pacey disappointing, I should say immediately that I am interested in how Mrs. Wilson's books go their own way, make their own way, idiosyncratic and anomalous. Too often, for my sense of them, Desmond Pacey is trying to categorize or classify them. True, he says that "it is difficult and indeed finally impossible to attach a neat label to Ethel Wilson's fiction." But he does, just the same, spend considerable time in classifying, in generalizing, in measuring by academic rule.

When Mr. Pacey settles to particular comments on the novels, especially when he shows similarities of theme or attitude or role, he talks real Ethel Wilson. "Both novellas (in *The Equations of Love*) demonstrate the ambiguity of a moral judgment." "Both . . . give us glimpses of the boredom, the horror, and the occasional glory of ordinary human life." The similarities he points to between ample, natural Maggie in *Swamp Angel* and will-pared Lilly in *Lilly's Story*, between Aunty Emblem in *Tuesday and Wednesday* and Mrs. Severance in *Swamp Angel*, are revealing in a way no study of a single work can be. They suggest other similarities (in the use of the observer, episodic structure, web and sea imagery) which might give even more sense of these novels. When Mr. Pacey quotes passages about Mrs. Severance, he calls to mind not only her role in *Swamp Angel* but roles and views characteristic of all of Ethel Wilson's work. Mrs. Severance's view is given as "both constricted and

universal," the view of an observer, past passion and uninhibited by beauty, compassionate, ironical, amused. This attitude is basic to each of Ethel Wilson's novels and many of her short stories. As Desmond Pacey shows, her interest is in observing, in both presenting and commenting on the stubborn endurance of very ordinary people in their never quite known world, their failures and their occasional "compassion, courtesy, and courage."

When he generalizes, Mr. Pacey moves away from the exact quality of Ethel Wilson's work; indeed, he often distorts it. "*Swamp Angel* . . . is really, by implication at least, a prose poem about the cosmic web of life, about time and eternity, man's relationship with God, virtually all aspects of man's relations with his fellows (parent and child, husband and wife, employer and employee, friendship and envy), the individual's struggle for survival in a universe which at least seems to be profoundly indifferent to him, and the relations of the animate creation with the inanimate." But this novel is not "a parable of the whole human condition, of indeed, the whole cosmic rhythm and web," and to call it so seems to mock it. So do all the comparisons (of *Lilly's Story* to *Moll Flanders*, of *Hetty Dorval* to the *Faerie Queene* and *Pilgrim's Progress*) and the section of the "introduction in which Mr. Pacey tries to locate Ethel Wilson's work in terms of the work of Fielding, Proust, E. M. Forster, Trollope, Compton-Burnett, Virginia Woolf and Arnold Bennett.

The mockery is surely as unintentional as the condescension in such comments as "This is not a fault, for it simply indicates that Mrs. Wilson is observing the

sound rule of writing out of her own experience," or "an important element in structure is point of view. To give a sense of unity to a short story, the single point of view is almost always preferable and Mrs. Wilson uses it in no less than twelve of her eighteen short stories."

Why should Mr. Pacey speak of rules and classes and cosmic webs? He says, finally, that Ethel Wilson "is one of the very few Canadian writers for whom one need make no apology in offering her work to the world." Here is, I think, the basis for the dissatisfaction I feel with Desmond Pacey's book; if he doesn't apologize, he does seem to scramble for big names and big phrases and safe rules to justify "offering her work to the world." But that shows a shift in interest from the work to the critic's evaluation of it. What I want, in anyone's talk about any writer, Canadian or not, is insight into the work, not a defence of the critic's taste. Mr. Pacey has seen true things in Ethel Wilson's novels. I wish he had spent more time on them.

H. W. SONTHOFF

MINI-NOVEL EXCELLENCE

AUDREY CALLAHAN THOMAS, *Ten Green Bottles*. Thomas Allen. \$6.25.

THE SHORT STORY expresses a succinct and personal reaction to some specific aspect of life that has moved the writer at a particular moment; the short story exists as a separate point on the canvas that is the writer's experience, yet it exists as a point that is linked, irrevocably, to other points within that experi-

ence. The fortunate thing about the short story is that it can be considered as a small, isolated unit, or it can be compared with other stories. The short story writer needs only to consider the form and development of a particular moment, and is consequently freed from the responsibility of expressing that moment in relation to other moments; this a reader may do if he so wishes. Rarely, if ever, does a short story writer express the freedom that is essential to the form. Rarely does a collection of short stories express this freedom.

But Audrey Callahan Thomas has caught the essence of the freedom of the form in her first collection of short stories, and caught it with something that is peculiarly her own. The variety is impressive. There is a range of subject matter — from studies of social bores and their

effect on people around them, to racial consciousness in a Negro Peace Corpsman's emotional changes, to thoughts on childbirth — that lifts this book above so many collections of short stories; the range in situation is reflected, too, in the geographical range presented by Mrs. Thomas. Her heightened awareness of some special moment that makes a short story, gives to Mrs. Thomas the predominant characteristic that in a good writer separates the short story from any other literary genre. The fluid moments which are examined in this book change and flow easily. The reader perceives the awareness behind the story, the fluidity which surrounds the particular moment. Mrs. Thomas leads on into a vast reservoir which is her interpretation of life. It is a clear, no-nonsense view; it makes sense. Her stories, alone, or in the collec-

Carnival

"*Carnival* is one of those curious novels you never finish. . . . It's there, like a fact of life, like a fable, or like a distant society out of Franz Kafka. . . . The only clue the reader needs is that the book is about a carnival of carnality. It's either a puritan's feast or a profligate's fast — it depends on you. What has to be said is that Nigel Foxell can write, and that he writes for keeps. His first novel is etched onto the page . . . and is as splendidly economical as poems used to be but aren't these days" — John Robert Colombo

Nigel Foxell has "rendered his vision with tense wit and a sureness of language rare among younger writers today . . . creating places that belong only in the imagination and characters who inhabit imagination's autonomous world. *Carnival* is a fine achievement" — George Woodcock

Carnival/a novel by Nigel Foxell/softcover/\$2.50

Oberon Press

tion, reach pinnacles that I would suggest few writers of the contemporary short story — in Canada, and elsewhere — have reached.

It is not the plots that are interesting alone, not the style, not the rhythms, but a combination of these things that make Mrs. Thomas an artist in the short story. It is, after all, her whole technique, or her technique of wholeness. It is the unique approach that she has to what happens, to the importance of the moment she is examining, to the function of language within her expression. She works in easy circles, moments of time that circulate about her past, future, and present, into a particular mosaic that lacks sequential structure. At times it is what is happening now that asserts the story; sometimes it is something that has happened, or something that will happen. But finally, it is the reaction within the now that validates the story. On one hand there is isolation within experience, and then Mrs. Thomas leads her story away from sequential occurrences and lets incident and time weave her story for her. For her characters, real life stops temporarily, and in its stopping is its essence. Character and plot define the moments — or the latter defines the former — and so it flows on.

There is no doubt that Mrs. Thomas's book is more than just a "tour de force" in technique. Everywhere in the collection are signs of a writer with a keen observation, or someone who has obviously reacted to life with an almost limitless sensibility. The language is beautiful and controlled; her choice of words is admirable without being pretentious. She is a born short story writer in an age where lucidity seems to be often lost in short stories. I recommend her book

highly. Reading it is an experience not to be missed. It is, as Kjeld Deichman used to say about his feeling on opening his kiln after a firing of many pieces of pottery, "like Christmas morning; everything becomes a surprise."

DONALD STEPHENS

PRESS PERSPECTIVE

A Century of Reporting/Un siècle de reportage, edited by L. Brault, J.-L. Gagnon, W. Kesterton, D. C. McArthur, F. Underhill, C. Young, Clarke, Irwin. \$10.00

OF ALL THE PUBLICATIONS which marked 1967, perhaps none is more interesting to the amateur Canadian historian than this centennial project of the National Press Club of Canada. The decision, doubtless taken on grounds of cost, not to provide parallel translations is unfortunate, doubly so since it leaves the unilingual English-speaking Canadian unable to appreciate not only the French selections, whose significance at least is made clear in notes by Frank Underhill, but also the *avant-propos* of Jean-Louis Gagnon wherein is ably sketched the evolution of Canadian journalism. Newspapers in 1867 were primarily, as he points out, political organs; they were changed into sources of information by the development of rapid means of communication and diffusion, and now, surpassed in speed by the electronic media, they rely on provision of critical commentary and background information for their strength. The gradual nature of these

changes is borne out by the character of the selections themselves.

Of course choices were necessary and opinions will vary on the importance of both inclusions and omissions. There are no articles which demonstrate, for example, the anti-confederation feeling in the Maritimes or the reaction to Britain's handling of the Alaska Boundary dispute, none which discuss the meaning for Canada of the appointment of the first ambassador in 1926, of the Statute of Westminster, or of Canada's role in the United Nations. Nonetheless, the *events* of the nation are admirably chronicled: the deaths of McGee, of Riel, of the statesmen Macdonald and Laurier; the disasters at London, at Halifax, at Springhill. Some were events which caught the eye of the world: the birth of the quints, the discovery of Gerda Munsinger, and Expo 67; some were essentially national: the glory of Percy Williams, the Regina "riot", the shooting of "Red" Ryan, and the Doukhobor march to Agassiz. More than a quarter of the articles deal with Canada at war — in victory at Vimy, in defeat at Dieppe, in conflict over conscription at home — and these vary in style from Rudyard Kipling's moving description of a Canadian memorial service in St. Paul's to the equally emotional eyewitness radio reports of Matthew Halton.

Beyond this brief survey of the contents, it is necessary to note the literary and political aspects of this anthology, for in both the editors have managed to evoke many faces of journalistic writing. Prose more purple than the account of Macdonald's death can scarcely be imagined:

The hand of the Death Angel had knocked for seven anxious days and seven sleepless

nights, and the door had at last been opened and the spirit of the dauntless Chieftain winged its way into eternity.

If the style in all its floridity has disappeared, the spirit remains in Perlin's farewell to Newfoundland's separate existence and, indeed, in Newman's "I came to the fair a nationalist, full of pride in Canada, I left it a humanist, full of hope for man," which concludes the book. Humour, as usual, proves itself a rare gift in Canadian writers; far better than the conscious attempts are those where it is only a part of the fabric, as in the court cases reporter on page 18 or in Charles Lynch's "To Charlotte with Love." Two articles, those by Hemingway and Sinclair, represent the journalist as free-lancer, writing what amounts more to supplement than "news". Above all, there are the varieties of political prose, fiercely partisan in slanting of news as exemplified by the contrasting editorials of the *Globe* and the *Montreal Gazette* on the Pacific Scandal or by those of *L'Événement* and *Le Soleil* on the St. Roch meeting; impassioned in a plea for votes, as in Joey Smallwood's "Mothers — Read This!"; or analytical, a style seen in its rational best in the articles by Dafoe, Laurendeau, and Gingras.

At this moment, Canada is in the midst of a major political crisis, a crisis of unity which has two closely inter-related aspects. One of these, the problems of French-English relations, is well-delineated in the anthology, but only for the reader who, equipped with French, can gain insights into the historical roots of French Canadian attitudes from the unsigned articles on the death of Riel, from those by and about Henri Bourassa, and from more recent ones by Harvey,

Laurendeau, and Léger. Where are the reasoned articles of equivalent honesty by English-speaking journalists? The other and even more immediate, perhaps inseparable, side to the present crisis is constitutional and herein lies the major fault in emphasis in this anthology. No attempt has been made to include journalism which marks the stages by which Canada has achieved sovereignty, by which the BNA Act has been modified. Most of these events were fully as important in their time as, say, the Pipeline debate or the resignation of James Coyne, which are included, and some, such as the early actions of Aberhart's Social Credit party in Alberta, involved the press itself as well as the constitution of Canada. It is hard to see why, especially with Frank Underhill on the editorial board, such an obvious consideration was overlooked. Perhaps it is ultimately necessary to accept the words of Christopher Young in the Introduction and agree that the reporter's "perspective is today's view of yesterday's event," and that that view is general rather than expert. Indeed, asking for more from this book is praising the achievement made.

JANE FREDEMAN

SPRING AND SORE FEET

BRUCE HUTCHISON, *Western Windows*. Longmans Canada. \$4.95.

THE PASTORAL MYTH has been most assiduously cultivated in Canada by newspaper men—allegedly a hard-bitten disillusioned lot, who, however, at sight of a derelict shack surrounded by a

tangle of greenery (preferably with a cow or two submersed in the greenery) lose all sense of decorum and restraint, particularly as applied to the English language and record their emotional reactions in prose as luxuriant and uncontrolled as the rural growths which inspire them.

Bruce Hutchison's *Western Windows*, a collection of fugitive newspaper bits and pieces wedged between a substantial chunk of autobiography at one end and what appears to be a recantation of sorts at the other, reduces anything written by such earlier enthusiasts for the rural retreat as Peter McArthur and David Grayson—newspaper men both—to the level of pallid understatement. Spring is Mr. Hutchison's season; he and it burst out simultaneously in embarrassing fecundity: "Here in the wilderness are great trees now gushing with the upward surge of sap; tall firs, their bark wrinkled and smiling in the March sun, their needles humming a cheerful hymn to spring; alders already dripping with the purple wine of their catkins; maples inflating their fat buds; sword ferns cautiously loosening their rough curled fronds; swallows skimming the lake; a darting brown wren in the underbrush like a shrill little exclamation mark punctuating the steady prose of the forest; the wail of a loon who owns the lake as no human ever owned it." And so on. And on. And on.

Such ecstatic carollings tend to pall after a while. Particularly when Mr. Hutchison—striving to outdo even himself in praise of all things pastoral—suggests that to a man of taste and sensibility the smell of a cleanly cow is preferable to "the city's most expensive perfume, worn by its most beautiful

woman." The heroine of one of Robert Stead's novels, a farm girl named Minnie, says to the hero, a city man, "I could write a scenario for a film, *Why Country Girls Leave Home*, and I'd use only one actor." "Who?" says the hero. "A cow," says Minnie. For those of us who have actually *milked* cows, felt the caress of a heavy tail across the face, the sticky warmth of a pailful of milk upset in the lap by a well-placed kick — Minnie is our girl. Preferably drenched — if she's been near a cow recently — in Chanel Number 5.

When Mr. Hutchison isn't on a nature binge he is often very shrewd and very funny. The chunk of autobiography is fine — in part because it has something in it besides trees and cows and crocuses. It has people. And though Mr. Hutchison is frequently repetitive, prolix and purple, he writes always with gusto. For this, much — indeed nearly all — may be forgiven him.

The recantation is a curious item. Mr. Hutchison would have us believe that all those splendid things he said about what life in the Canadian outback does for one by way of muscle, character, and soul-building aren't true. "After quarter of a century of the dream life," he reports, "I am broke, friendless, ignorant, insular, prejudiced, calloused, cantankerous and prematurely aged, and my feet hurt." Further — "I am personally responsible for dragging down countless others with me, breaking up marriages and blighting the lives of little children. This I have done by writing and selling for profit innumerable sweet and soggy articles on the joys of the country. Hundreds, perhaps thousands of contented folk have read and believed me and moved to the country and lived to curse

my name." And a new dream has replaced the old — "of a two-room flat, somewhere in a nice high concrete tower, where I can smell the perfume of automobile engines and listen . . . to the soft whisper of steam in the radiator and the click of an electric thermostat."

Of course we don't believe a word of it. Come spring and Mr. Hutchison, sore feet and all, will be heading for the woods and the woodpile.

EDWARD MC COURT

COSTIVE CRITICISM

JOHN M. STEDMOND, *The Comic Art of Laurence Sterne*. University of Toronto Press. \$5.50.

TRISTRAM SHANDY, fictional offspring of the Rev. Mr. Laurence Sterne, parish priest of Coxwold in Yorkshire, leaves his "gentle readers" in no doubt as to what prompted him to write his now immortal book, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*. It was not, he says, "wrote against predestination, or free will, or taxes — If 'tis wrote against anything — 'tis wrote, an' please your worships, against the spleen; in order, by a more frequent and more convulsive elevation and depression of the diaphragm, and the succassations of the intercostal and abdominal muscles in laughter, to drive the *gall* and other *bitter juices* from the gall-bladder, liver, and sweetbread of his majesty's subjects, with all the inimicitious passions which belong to them, down into their duodenum." For "true *Shandeism* . . . forces the blood and other vital fluids of the body to run

freely thro' its channels, and makes the wheel of life run long and cheerfully round."

Just to make assurance doubly sure, Tristram also tells us, his readers, that he dislikes "set dissertations," is repelled by "relics of learning," and despises the jargon of criticism: "Grant me patience, just heaven! — Of all the cants which are canted in this canting world, — though the cant of hypocrites may be the worst, — the cant of criticism is the most tormenting!"

Yet in spite of these warnings, or perhaps because of them, critics have hovered around the works of Sterne, like moths around a bright candle, ever since the first two books of *Tristram* came off the presses in York in December 1759. They have analyzed and dissected; praised and damned; sought sources; studied the text to establish charges of plagiarism; attempted to discover what *really* motivated Sterne to write what he wrote, as if Tristram's clear statement was not clear enough.

Professor Stedmond now seeks to grasp this Protean figure in order to find the subtle methods of his "comic art." The blurb on the jacket of his book and a prefatory statement within its covers establish Mr. Stedmond's credentials. He is a thoroughly trained scholar (Universities of Saskatchewan and Aberdeen); is a Professor at Queen's University and Chairman of Graduate Studies in English; is a member of "the newly formed Laurence Sterne Memorial Trust set up to purchase the freehold of Shandy Hall"; and has had portions of *The Comic Art* previously published in four most respectable academic journals.

Confronted by these qualifications and by the four scholarly blessings already

pronounced over large swatches of this work, I do not question its solid worth. Mr. Stedmond obviously knows his Sterne, and has, I think, a genuine affection for him.

But the affection is smothered in the highly serious, straight-faced approach to the magic of true Shandism. In the books seven chapters, Mr. Stedmond tackles context and meaning, genre and *Tristram Shandy*, style, Tristram as a satirist and as a clown, the faces of Yorick as seen in the *Sermons* and *A Sentimental Journey*, and Sterne's comic view. But the chapters are sadly unbalanced. Two are short, slightly better than extended notes; two would make respectable articles in the journals of the profession; one has respectable girth; and one, "Tristram as Clown," which is the core, the heart, or the belly of the book, is Falstaffian in size. It also reminds me of Falstaff's comment: "I have more flesh than another man, and therefore more frailty." Flesh it does have (it is much more than a third of the study), but, alas, it has its frailties too, for it is a quietly plodding examination, volume by volume, of the nine volumes of *Tristram Shandy*.

And so, gentle reader, what have we? An academic exercise, with well marshalled facts and some perceptive observations, written by a thoroughly competent scholar for the benefit of other scholars. For them it may shed some glimmering light on the more obscure corners of the art of Sterne, and it may even give good guidance and some useful quotations to earnest students faced with the task of writing term papers on the English novel in the eighteenth century.

But it will not, I fear, add one iota of pleasure to the reader who already loves the Shandy family, and the Widow Wad-

man, and Corporal Trim, and poor Yorick, nor will it encourage the uninitiated to open the pages of one of the most memorable novels in the English language.

For here we have no "succassations of the intercostal and abdominal muscles in laughter." Serious scholarship is all too frequently slightly costive.

S. E. READ

opinions and notes

AUSTIN CLARKE IN CANADIAN REVIEWS

Lloyd W. Brown

IN A RECENT RADIO INTERVIEW on the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation the American singer Odetta declared that she would never seek the services of a white psychiatrist. Her remark is a wry comment on the racial impasse in a society where interracial communication is hampered by what she regards as white incapacity or unwillingness to comprehend black experience and cultural values. It has, of course, been a well-established Canadian tradition to assume that such barriers to understanding belong elsewhere, particularly south of the border, and are hardly relevant to Canadian society. Instead, many Canadians cherish comforting notions of tolerance and understanding in a manner that is highly reminiscent of Great Britain before the Notting Hill riots or the Northern States of the pre-Watts era. Herein lies the significance of Austin Clarke's arrival on the Canadian literary scene, for the reactions of reviewers and critics to the Barbadian novelist have so far belied the Canadian tradition of flattering self-assurances. Clarke's portrayal of the

new black consciousness that has emerged over the past ten years has elicited only the hackneyed responses (and expressions of disconcerting ignorance) that have customarily replaced insight and penetration whenever black society and art are the objects of study.

Miriam Waddington's recent review (*Canadian Literature* 36) of Clarke's novel, *Meeting Point*, is typical of this failure. First, she is disturbed by the "unreasonable" and "uninteresting" hatred in the novel: "you get the feeling that the writer is taking out on the reader what his characters ought to be taking out on one another." What disconcerts the critic is the inevitable intensity engendered by the novel's theme of conflict, for conflict is the very essence of *Meeting Point* — the social and cultural confrontation between white Toronto and its black West Indian immigrants. But Miss Waddington is not the first to deplore the "unreasonable" bitterness of racial strife in black literature. In a recent survey of black fiction in *The Commonwealth* Pen A. L. McLeod rejects

the disturbing truths of conflict in favour of the "more universal" and "realistic" portrayals of black experience (by white artists of course), choosing as his ideals Conrad's pre-historic myths on the "dark continent" (*Heart of Darkness*) and Oliver Schreiner's superficial nineteenth-century irrelevancies (*The Story of an African Farm*). Another critic, Robert A. Bone, bases similar arguments on the mystifying proposition that "the color line exists not between the pages of a book but outside, in the real world" (*The Negro Novel in America, 1958*).

Miss Waddington's squeamishness on the subject of conflict is matched by the equally familiar overtones of her racial judgements. Her contrast between the "tropic nature" of the West Indian and "northern Christianity" is repugnant, not only because it ignores the novelist's very strong emphasis on the Christian values (even prudery) of the "tropical" heroine, among others, but also because it smacks of the patronizing air that so often accompanies pseudo-liberal condescension and even outright racism. Miss Waddington's thesis is hardly an unfamiliar one for it recalls the oldest of the colonial motifs: the "tropic nature" of incorrigible "natives" in conflict with the "superior" moral discipline of "northern Christianity" and European civilization.

The reviewer's judgements also suffer from the white critic's age-old ignorance of the black environment and situation upon which Clarke bases his novel. She dislikes the fact that the heroine Bernice Leach has been cast in the role of a "live-in" domestic because the "built-in humiliations" of her status supposedly contribute to the unrealistic "short-cuts" of the work. But there is nothing *artificial* or *unrealistic* about Bernice's status. Un-

til just over a year ago the *de facto* racism of Canada's immigration policies (now acknowledged by the Canadian Government) effectively excluded most black West Indians with the exception of students and domestics (including those pretending, for obvious reasons, to be domestics). The humiliations of Bernice's role have not been built in by Clarke, for the majority of domestics like herself were contractually obliged to work as live-in maids for a stipulated period after their admission to the country. Far from being an "unrealistic" short-cut, Bernice's economic position is an accurate reflection of the degrading status of many black West Indian emigrants to Canada.

Miss Waddington also argues against the facts of life when she complains that only "confusion" results from Clarke's choice of Jews as the white protagonists in the racial conflict, that it is unreasonable to "compound the problems of black-white with those of Jew-Gentile". As Bernice's employers, the Burrmanns symbolize the incontrovertible fact that Jews are the largest single group of employers of black West Indian domestics in the Toronto area. The "compounding" of the cultural problems is not an Austin Clarke fantasy, but a fact of life: the Jew is as prominent in the social and economic experience of West Indian domestics, as he is in the black American ghettos. This parallel is important, for what James Baldwin writes of ambiguous Black-Jew relationships in America is largely true of the cultural and economic conflicts between Bernice and her Jewish environment. The devout Negro compares himself with the Biblical Jews in their bondage, suffering, and eventual freedom; but, paradoxically, this imple-

ments a special bitterness, for the Jews who, it is felt, should "know better" are identified (rightly or wrongly), as tradesmen, with the hated, oppressive society (*Notes of a Native Son*, 1958).

Not surprisingly, the white reviewer's ignorance of black experience extends to the psychological realities formed by that experience. Hence Miss Waddington dismisses as "unbelievable" the psychology of the relationship between the black Henry White and his Jewish girl-friend Agatha. Henry's ferocious approach to interracial sex as a means of avenging himself on white society remains incredible only when abstracted from the "unbelievable" actualities of current social attitudes. Henry's tactics are instinctively in response to white taboos on interracial sex: hence he strikes back at the

racism that has denied his humanity, by asserting his manhood in the very area in which it has been most feared and maligned by white superstition. Grotesque? Perhaps, but then white attitudes have always imparted a touch of the bizarre to this subject — ranging from the ambivalence of a fictional Henry to the near-hysterical curiosity of white reporters and commentators ("Do you think that this is the beginning of a trend?") whenever a prominent "mixed" marriage makes the headlines.

However, Henry White's sexual relationships must also be related to another important area of the psychological and social issues of the novel. Hence his anti-white exploitation of Agatha must be contrasted with his deliberate use of the affair, together with imaginary bank ac-

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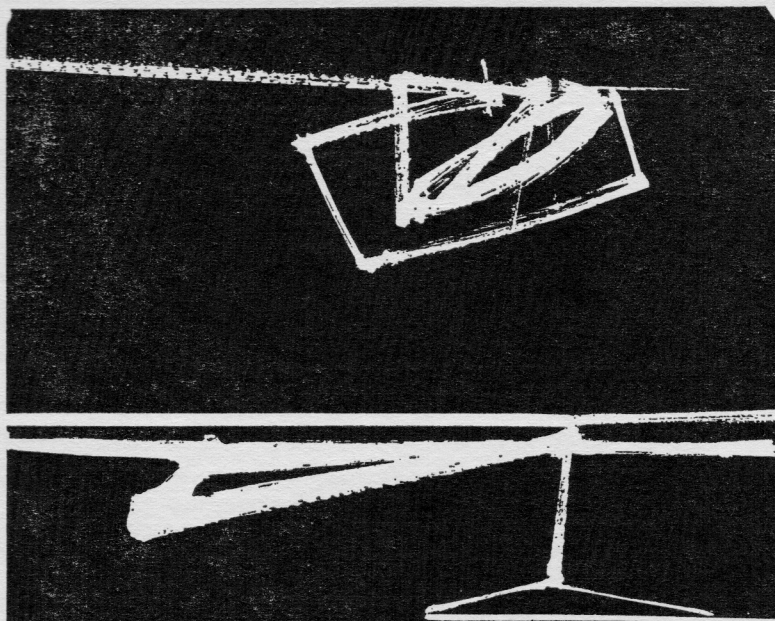
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counts and real estate holdings, as a status symbol of his "whiteness" (note the ironic suggestiveness of his surname). Henry's internal conflicts are paralleled by Bernice Leach's rapid oscillations between Black Muslim literature and complexion "lighteners". These paradoxical attitudes symbolize the tensions released by the black revolution, the conflict between the new "blackness" and the old self-depreciation. This in turn leads to the major moral and psychological issues that Miss Waddington completely misses when she complains that *Meeting Point* lacks the reconciliation implied by the title, that there is "no let up in the warfare between white and black". But "meeting point" denotes, not the harmony of reconciliation, but the conflicts that have been sparked and intensified by the black revolution — the inner tensions of the black individual and the external confrontation between black militancy and the white *status quo*. To deplore this as a theme, as the reviewer does, is to demand that the novelist sacrifice the palpable facts of experience in favour of some transcendental resolution, what Miss Waddington terms a Toronto "more real" than the one she knows.

This is really a kind of escapism that seeks refuge from the portrayal of social realities in literature (especially black literature), and is sometimes manifested in the remarkable failure of critics to detect the representation of very obvious and basic conflicts. Hence Janice Tyrwhitt finds that, with the exception of a single *isolated* incident in one work, Clarke's first two novels do not deal with racial problems but are simply on "the frailty of human relationships there [Barbados] and everywhere." (*Tamarack Review* 38). But this is hardly an adequate

summary of a novel (*Survivors of the Crossing*) that portrays the tragic conflict between a black peasant and a powerful white plantation supported by pro-white, anti-black negroes. Nor is Miss Tyrwhitt's statement applicable to *Among Thistles and Thorns*, in which a Barbadian school-boy, Milton Sobers, seeks to recapture his blackness, symbolized by faraway Harlem, in spite of a hostile environment created by (1) a white colonial power, (2) a white education system that militates against black self-awareness and pride, and (3) a society dominated by the black colonial's apathy and acquired self-hate.

Miss Tyrwhitt is not alone in minimizing or distorting the obvious. Where she fails to see racial repression and suffering, David Watmough glimpses them — and apparently finds Clarke's treatment rather amusing. Thus he speaks indeterminate of a "Negro experience" in *Survivors* that he characterizes as "humour in affliction", surely a somewhat odd description of a work that details the intense savagery of racial and economic repression, black treachery and self-hatred, and, finally, the despair that drives the hero Rufus to become a hunted outlaw (*Canadian Literature* 23). Such a description seems to be less in response to the experiences depicted by Clarke and more in keeping with hoary travel agency assumptions about happy natives perennially singing and dancing in their "tropical paradises". It is really the converse of Miss Waddington's revulsion at the unpleasant realities presented by Clarke — and both responses, like Miss Tyrwhitt's, suggest a myopic optimism that refuses to see black life and literature as they really are.



CANADIAN STANZA

I can remember even as a child crying to my mother,
"Will spring never come? Will the winter never be done?"

We have all been made ichoric by this land of wilderness
and winter and the barbarous brevity of summer. Nobody
knows better than we the importance of keeping the fires going.
So far, we have had neither the time nor the energy to make
ruins for the tourists. Our defiant faces are our monuments;
our continued existence, mythology.

It is astonishing even for us to see how much of this land
of ours is still a dark candelabra of trees.

by Joan Finnigan

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